

PUBLIC SCHOOL 15, 4010 Dyre Avenue, Borough of the Bronx. Built 1877;
Designed by Simon Williams, principal of the school.

Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx, Tax Map Block 4970, Lot 10.

On November 15, 1977, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Public School 15 and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Fourteen witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no sneakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Public School 15 is a rare example in New York City of the rural, red brick schoolhouse, and it occupies a special place in the history of the area. Designed by Simon Williams, who served as principal of the school, and built in 1877 by Edward Cordial, a local builder, the school served the population of the southern part of the town of Eastchester. The town of Eastchester was established by the New York State Legislature in 1788 when all the counties within the state were divided into townships. Originally, the town extended from the Bronx River on the west to the Hutchinson River on the east, Scarsdale on the north and East 229th Street, Gunther Avenue and Black Dog Brook (which is now roughly Bruner Avenue) on the south. In 1892, Mount Vernon was incorporated as a municipality which resulted in the division of Eastchester into two non-contiguous sections. The people of the smaller southern portion, where P.S. 15 is located, voluntarily became part of New York City with the Act of Incorporation in 1898.

This part of the city is rich in American history. The earliest settler in the area was Anne Hutchinson who settled on the banks of the Hutchinson River. Because of her non-conforming religious beliefs, she had been forced to leave New England and seek refuge in the colony of the more tolerant Dutch. In 1643, she and her family were massacred by the Indians. A successful permanent settlement was established in 1664 when a group of ten families from Fairfield, Connecticut, received a land grant from Thomas Pell. The following year these ten families drew up among themselves a covenant of twenty-six articles to govern the community and built the first church on the site of St. Paul's Church on Columbus Avenue and South 3rd Street in Mt. Vernon. The present church was begun in 1763. Although religion was a prime concern among the colonists, their deeply shared belief in education was a strong one. The fourteenth article of agreement stated, "That provision be endeavored for education of children...". As early as 1683 a schoolhouse may have been erected, but there is definite record of one built in 1726 near St. Paul's Church. It was a single room frame structure and stood near the intersection of Kingsbridge Road and the old White Plains Road, now South 3rd Street, a few blocks northeast of P.S. 15. This early frame building burned during the Revolutionary War when the Bronx and lower Westchester County became a "no man's land" between the American army to the north and the English to the south in New York and Long Island. Guerilla war and constant raids by both sides caused widespread destruction in the region. Shortly after the war, in 1790, a new school was erected on the site of the old one and remained in use for eighty-five years.

By 1875, the inadequacies of the old school were apparent to the community and discussion began on where to locate a new modern structure. A road had been opened extending Fifth Avenue in Mt. Vernon to the Boston Post Road and a horse car line ran along it to the railroad station in Mt. Vernon. It was argued that the center of the town would shift, following the new transit improvements and the school should be situated where it would derive the most benefit from the new facilities. The discussions ended when Andrew George donated the southernmost acre of his property at the intersection of Fifth Avenue and Kingsbridge Road as the site for the new school which is now known as Public School 15.

With the selection of the site for the new school agreed upon, Simon Williams, head teacher at the old school drew up designs for the building. For the first two years after its completion, Williams served as the principal. Public School 15, with its main entrance facing Dyre Avenue, stands well above street level on a large grassy lot that slopes down behind the building to

Rombouts Avenue. Designed in a modified Victorian Gothic style, the building plan is in the form of the letter "H" which was typical for a 19th-century schoolhouse in the metropolitan area. The building consists of two symmetrical, gabled pavilions with steeply pitched roofs which dominate a lower recessed central section that visually carries through the pavilions and is expressed on the sides by gables. The pavilions, two stories high with the second story under the gabled roofs, stand on rough-faced stone bases. The ground floor of each pavilion is pierced by three segmental-arched windows on the front and rear facades and four identical windows on the sides. At the second story, there is a single segmental-arched window in the front and rear gable and there are bull's-eye windows in the side gables. A chimney rises through the gable of the side facade of the north pavilion, covering the bull's-eye. The windows all have stone sills and are enhanced by raised brick enframements. Band courses of brick beneath the sills and at impost level of the arches on each facade break the plain wall surfaces, and with their horizontality contrast with the vertical thrust of the gables and the bell tower. The corners of the pavilions are distinguished by brick quoins. Raking cornices, carried on paired brackets and returned slightly under the ends of the gables, crown the building. Over the central entrance is a dormer window with a gable supported on two delicate brackets: above this and crowning the central section is a picturesque bell tower with a steep pyramidal roof topped by a weather vane.

Public School 15 is not only a rare and charming example of 19th-century schoolhouse architecture, it is also a visual reminder of the community's three hundred year old concern for education.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that Public School 15 has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, that Public School 15 is a rare example in the city of the rural red brick schoolhouse, that it was designed and built by residents of the community, that it is a charming version of a modified Victorian Gothic style building, and that this schoolhouse represents a three hundred year old commitment to education by the people of the community.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark Public School 15, 4010 Dyre Avenue, Borough of the Bronx and designates Tax Map Block 4970, Lot 10, Borough of the Bronx, as its Landmark Site.