

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
August 25, 1981, Designation List 147  
LP-1179

Public School 11 (Formerly Public School 91), 1257 Ogden Avenue, The Bronx  
Built 1889, architect George W. Debevoise.

Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 2529, Lot 81.

On July 8, 1980, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Public School 11 (formerly Public School 91), and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 6). The Hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There was one speaker in opposition to designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Located on Ogden Avenue between Merriam Avenue and West 169th Street in the Bronx, Public School 11 (until 1898 Public School 91), is an exceptional Romanesque Revival academic building and one of the finest examples of the style in the Bronx. Built in 1889 of brick and Harlem River stone, on the site of an 1852 school, P.S. 11 was designed by George W. Debevoise, the Superintendent of Public School Buildings for the New York City Board of Education between 1884 and 1891. The West Bronx, where the building is located, had been annexed by New York City in 1874. Consequently, the public schools were under the jurisdiction of the New York City Board of Education. Little is known of Debevoise, but during the seven years he held tenure as Superintendent, over twenty schools of his design were constructed in both the Bronx and Manhattan; all were in the Romanesque Revival or Queen Anne modes. In addition to creating handsome designs Debevoise introduced a number of structural innovations into school buildings including: the use of iron girders instead of wood, metal-lined steam pipes in classrooms, enlarged classroom space, and improvements in ventilation and heating.<sup>1</sup> However, Debevoise left the Board of Education under clouded circumstances. The architect who succeeded him, C.B.J. Snyder, and members of the Board's Buildings Committee discovered many instances of graft and malfeasance in the construction of schools during Debevoise's term of office. Debevoise's activities after he submitted his resignation in July, 1891, are unknown.

To accommodate the school children of this rapidly expanding section of the Bronx, Debevoise created this handsome school building. One of the notable architectural features of the building is the central entrance tower. The earliest known date for a school designed with a projecting central entrance tower is 1868 when Grammar School No. 56 was built in Chelsea. (The site is now occupied by Textile High School.) The grammar school was one of the first school buildings rendered in the Second Empire style, a marked departure from previous school designs which were inspired by the Italian Renaissance. One of the

characteristics of the Second Empire style is the use of pavilions and, in the design of Grammar School 56, the entrance tower was the central pavilion of the design. In the Annual Report of the Board of Education for 1868, the school's entrance tower as an innovative architectural feature was noted:

The 'squat' appearance that generally accompanies a building of the same breadth of front as this, is here avoided... the bold bringing out of the central tower, making the main entrance a prominent feature, carries the eye upward with pleasant relief.

The central projecting entrance became a standard design element for schools erected by the Boards of Education for the cities of New York and Brooklyn until World War I.

The tower, the most detailed section of Public School 11, incorporates an impressive entrance porch consisting of banded stone piers carrying a round arch with a gabled hood enhanced by corbels. The second floor is pierced by three narrow round-arched windows and the third is marked by a bull's-eye window with radiating keystones. Above the corbeled cornice is a steeply pitched pyramidal roof with peaked dormer. The tower is further enlivened by stone bands, diminutive plaques, corbeling, and light and dark brick. The sections on either side of the tower have rough-faced stone ground floors pierced by secondary entrances with segmental arches. These entrances are flanked by round-arched windows. A strong molded band course over the ground floor marks the change in materials from stone to brick. Three flat-arched windows pierce each of the upper stories and are enframed with contrasting dark brick keyed to the light brick facade. The use of a continuous cap molding to join the windows of the second floor and a continuous molded sill to join those of the third is a subtle variation that adds interest to the facade. Above the corbeled cornice is a mansard roof with square-headed tripartite dormers. An element of asymmetry is added by the two-window wide pavilion at the southern end of the facade. Its ground floor has square-headed, pedimented openings; two tiers of windows at the level of the second floor are flat and round-arched; and the windows of the top floor are round arched. The pavilion, like the entrance tower, is crowned by a steeple pitched, dormered roof. There is a narrow, functional extension set back from the street at the northern end. The use of round arches, contrasting brick, and rough-faced stone are all characteristics of the Romanesque Revival style. At the same time, the entrance tower and the mansard roof place the building within a tradition of distinctive New York City school design. In 1905, a large wing was added to the school along Ogden Avenue. Three stories high it is of red brick with stone trim above a rough-faced stone base. This addition provided not only added classroom space but was equipped with a contemporary heating system. A building housing a gymnasium auditorium was built along Merriam Avenue in 1930. Seven years later a mural of the development of the Bronx was added over the stage as part of the W.P.A arts project.

Public School 11 is one of the few surviving 19th-century school buildings in the Bronx, a major work by George W. Debevoise, and it is one of the borough's notable examples of the Romanesque Revival. It continues to add distinction and interest to this section of the city as it has since its completion nearly a century ago.

FOOTNOTES

1. National Register of Historic Places Inventory--Nomination Form, Public School 35. Form prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart, 1980.

Report prepared by  
James T. Dillon,  
Landmarks Preservationist

## FINDING 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 11 (formerly Public School 91) 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 find that, among its important qualities, the Public School 11 (formerly Public School 91) is an exceptional Romanesque Revival academic building designed by George W. Debevoise; that among its notable features are the school's impressive central entrance tower and its mansard roof; that the tower and mansard place the building within a tradition of distinctive New York City school design; that the use of round arches, contrasting brick, and rough-faced stone are all characteristics of the Romanesque Revival style; that it is one of the few surviving 19th-century school buildings in the Bronx; and the building adds great distinction and interest to this section of the city.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly 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 11 (formerly Public School 91), 1257 Ogden Avenue Borough of the Bronx and designates Tax Map Block 2529, Lot 81, Borough of the Bronx, as its Landmark Site.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- National Register of Historic Places Inventory--Nomination Form. Public School 35. Form prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart, 1980.
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- Ravitch, Diane. The Great School Wars, New York City, 1805-1973, A History of Public Schools as Battlefields of Social Change. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1974.
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- Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City and County of New York, for the year ending December 31, 1868. New York: Evening Post Steam Press, 1869.
- Wells, James L., Louis F. Gaffen and Josiah A. Briggs eds. The Bronx And Its People A History 1609-1927. New York: The Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1927.



Photo Credit:  
Andrew S. Dolkart

PUBLIC SCHOOL 11  
1257 Ogden Avenue

Architect: G.W. Debevois  
1889