

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
Designation List 171, September 11, 1984  
LP-1289

PUBLIC SCHOOL 73, 241 MacDougal Street, Borough of Brooklyn.  
Built 1888 and 1895; James W. Naughton, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map Block 1528, Lot 1.

On April 13, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Public School 73 and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 13). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of Law. One person spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Public School 73, an impressive brick and stone structure, is an excellent example of 19th-century school architecture by one of the major practitioners in that field. Built in two sections, the first, at the corner of Rockaway Avenue and MacDougal Street, begun in 1888, and the extension to the east, added in 1895, it was designed by James W. Naughton, the Superintendent of Buildings for the Board of Education of the City of Brooklyn. In its architectural vocabulary it recalls a long tradition of Brooklyn public school architecture.

Public education in New York dates back to the settlement of the area by the Dutch. The New Netherlands' first school was established in 1638 on Manhattan Island, then the center of the population, and it was supported by the Dutch West India Company.<sup>1</sup> In 1649, the people of the colony, acting independently of the governor, Peter Stuyvesant, sent a remonstrance to the States General of the Netherlands which had established the Dutch West India Company, appealing to the States General to redress certain grievances they felt concerning the governance of the New Netherlands and advocating steps to improve conditions in the colony. Among their recommendations was the creation of a "public school, provided with two good school masters." <sup>2</sup> When the small settlement in Brooklyn had grown in sufficient numbers, Stuyvesant levied a school tax of 150 guilders on Brooklyn and supplemented this amount with 50 extra guilders. <sup>3</sup> Brooklyn consisted of six separate towns throughout the colonial period and each developed a separate though similar public education system. Flatbush was the first town to have a school master in 1659, followed by Brooklyn in 1661, Bushwick in 1662, and Bedford-Stuyvesant in 1663. <sup>4</sup> It is from these early beginnings that the present public school system evolved.

Although free public schools did exist, most children received rudimentary education at home. There was a gradual growth in education during the 18th century, but much of it was provided by private schools and tutors forming an independent system of uneven quality. After Independence, in 1789, the New York State legislature set aside about 40,000 acres of public land which would be sold to provide some funds for the support of schools in the state's townships. Six years later, in 1795, the legislature again set aside funds for "encouraging and maintaining schools."<sup>5</sup> However, it was not until the beginning of the 19th century that popular education took root and began to expand. In 1816, the residents of the village of Brooklyn voted to tax themselves to raise money to provide for the organization of a public school. On May 6, 1816, the school was opened on the ground floor of a printing shop on Adams Street near Sands Streets.<sup>6</sup> From this humble beginning, Brooklyn developed one of the most comprehensive and extensive public education systems of any city in the United States during the 19th century.

Public School 73 is located near what was the 19th-century eastern boundary of the city of Brooklyn, adjoining the Town of New Lots. At that time, New Lots was undergoing a period of significant development spurred by its recent annexation by the City of Brooklyn and the extension of mass transit facilities to the area, which linked it with downtown Brooklyn and the East River ferries. In 1885, the Brooklyn Elevated Railroad Company opened service from the Brooklyn Bridge to Van Sicklen Avenue and Fulton Street in the East New York section of New Lots. In September of 1889, the Union Elevated Company opened an extension along Broadway from Gates Avenue to the Williamsburgh Ferry. And in November of the same year, the Kings County Company built an "el" from Fulton Ferry along Fulton Street to Van Sicklen Avenue.<sup>7</sup> These new facilities and the existing streetcar surface system opened the area for real estate development, which in turn led to a major increase in the school-age population. Public School 73 was erected to meet the needs of this population.

The architect of Public School 73, James W. Naughton (1840-98), was born in Ireland and brought to Brooklyn by his parents at the age of eight. After receiving his early education in the public and private schools of Brooklyn, Naughton migrated west and settled in Milwaukee where he worked as an apprentice in the architectural office of J. & A. Douglas. In 1859, having completed his apprenticeship, he entered the University of Wisconsin at Madison to study architecture. After two years he returned to Brooklyn and continued studying architecture at Cooper Union in Manhattan. Naughton was active in Brooklyn politics and, for two years between 1874 and 1876, he served as Superintendent of Buildings for the City of

Brooklyn. He succeeded Samuel B. Leonard as Superintendent of Buildings for the Board of Education in 1879 and remained in that position for nearly twenty years until his death in 1898.<sup>8</sup> All the schools built in Brooklyn during this period were designed by Naughton.

Public School 73 is an imposing 19th-century school building of red brick with stone and terra-cotta trim. Rising three stories above a high basement, the long front elevation along MacDougal Street is the most impressive element in the streetscape and a notable landmark in the area. The main section of the school, begun in 1888, is characterized by a projecting central entrance tower and flanking end pavilions. The 1895 extension, the same height as the original section and of the same materials, has a four-bay wide recessed central section and flanking end pavilions. The building contains a number of architectural references to previous styles and elements of the architectural vocabulary Naughton developed while designing schools during the previous decade. The fenestration of the school is arranged into three tiers of arched windows creating long horizontal arcades, each arcade composed of a different type of arch: round arches with terra-cotta tympana and raised extrados at the first floor; segmental arches at the second floor; and ogee arches at the third. Although the third floor is trabeated, the inset window lintels with lower edge carved into an ogee simulates an arch form. The horizontality is further enhanced by stone cornices above the first and second floors. This "layered palazzo scheme"<sup>9</sup> first became popular in New York in the 1850s after the introduction of the Italianate style and the development of cast-iron architecture. The Italianate style was based on the architecture of the Italian Renaissance and the form of this new Italianate mode or palazzo style was cubic, flat-roofed and nearly flat-surfaced. It had the practical advantage of providing a means to expand a building without destroying the aesthetic effect. Once the basic design was completed, it could be repeated as often as the owner wished, as is the case with Public School 73 which has a stylistically identical extension which was added seven years after the original building was completed.

The facades of the original building and the extension are also divided vertically by slightly projecting end pavilions and, at the original building, by a central entrance tower, features which were popularized by the French Second Empire style which was the prominent architectural mode for a decade after the Civil War. The style was based on the new buildings being erected in the Paris of Napoleon III who had embarked upon a major campaign to redesign Paris. Characteristics of the style were pavilions which added plasticity and verticality to the facade, and mansards which enhanced the pavilions and creates bold silhouettes. P.S. 73 does not have mansard roofs

but it does have end pavilions and a central entrance tower which functions as a central pavilion in the design. The use of a central entrance tower for a school first appeared in New York in 1868 with the completion of P.S. 56, a Second Empire design, in the Chelsea section of Manhattan. 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. 10

The central projecting entrance tower 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.

A number of elements within the facade are derived from other 19th-century styles. The heavy pedimented entrance and the rendering of the tower are late Romanesque Revival which was popular when the school was erected, while the brick corbeling at the roof cornice is derived from an earlier phase of the Romanesque Revival. The early Romanesque Revival style was imported to this country from Germany in the mid-1840s and introduced to New York by the architects Richard Upjohn, James Renwick, and Leopold Eidlitz. The earliest example of this style in New York and one of the first in the country is Upjohn's Church of the Pilgrims (1844-46) on the northeast corner of Henry and Remsen Streets in Brooklyn Heights. Typical features of the style are the use of brick and brownstone either singly or in combination, pilaster strips, arched corbel tables and round-arched openings. The round arch is the predominant characteristic of the style which is also called the Round Arch style or by its German name, Rundbogenstil. During the thirty years following its first appearance here, it was one of the most popular styles of architecture, used not only for churches but for schools, hospitals, charitable institutions, loft buildings, office buildings, breweries, and industrial buildings. Many of the school houses built during the 1860s in Brooklyn by Samuel B. Leonard were in this early phase of the Romanesque Revival such as Public School 111 (1867-68) on the northwest corner of Sterling Place and Vanderbilt Avenue and Public Street 34 (1867) on Norman Avenue between Eckford Street and McGuinness Boulevard, both designated New York City Landmarks.

The later phase of the Romanesque Revival or Richardsonian Romanesque was introduced by Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-86)

with his Trinity Church in Boston in 1872. This phase of the style makes use of picturesque silhouettes, round-arched openings, contrasting smooth and rough-faced stonework, and a bold, powerful massing that is often swelled with rounded bays, towers and porches. One of the best examples of the style in the City is Naughton's own Boys' High School (1891) on Marcy Avenue in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The tower treatment used on Public School 73 appears again on other Naughton schools such as Public School 76 (1888) in Cypress Hills and Public School 79 (1889) in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The brick corbeling at the roof cornice was used again by Naughton in 1889, the year following the opening of Public School 73, for his treatment of the roof cornice at Public School 15 on the southeast corner of Schermerhorn Street and Third Avenue, and on Public School 79. Other features of Public School 73 include corbeled terminal blocks with pyramidal tops at the corners of the pavilions, terra-cotta panels in the spandrels of the entrance tower, and a pyramidal roof crowning the tower.

Public School 73 remains a distinguished example of 19th century school architecture by James Naughton. By employing the architectural vocabulary of previous styles, the architect evokes a tradition of school architecture that had come to symbolize public education in Brooklyn, yet in so doing creates a contemporary design of great interest. The building is also an important link with the area's past, recalling the concern for education first shown by the Dutch settlers of New Netherlands and continued through the centuries by the people of Brooklyn.

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#### FOOTNOTES

1. I. N. Phelps Stokes, The Iconography of Manhattan Island, Vol. I, (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1915), p. 19.
2. Ibid., p. 31
3. Henry R. Stiles, ed., A History of Kings County Including the City of Brooklyn, (New York: W. W. Munsell & Company, 1884), p. 609
4. Ibid., pp. 609-611.
5. Ibid., p. 611.
6. Ibid.
7. Joseph Cunningham and Leonard DeHart, A History of the New York City Subway System, Part II, Rapid Transit in Brooklyn, (New York, 1977), p. 9-13.
8. Henry B. Howard, ed., The Eagle and Brooklyn: History of the City of Brooklyn From its Settlement to the Present Time. (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1893), p. 726.
9. Sarah Bradford Landau, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Reconsidered: Arcaded Buildings of the New York School, c. 1870-1890," In Search of Modern Architecture: A Tribute To Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Helen Searing, ed., (New York: Architectural History Foundation & M.I.T. Press, 1982), p. 156.
10. 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), p. 14.



## 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 73 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, Public School 73 is an excellent example of 19th-century school architecture by James W. Naughton, one of the major practitioners in that field; that the building displays a dynamic combination of a number of 19th-century architectural styles including early and late Romanesque Revival, Italianate, and French Second Empire, which evokes a tradition of school architecture that had come to symbolize public education in Brooklyn; that the later addition blends harmoniously with the original building; and that the school is an important link with Brooklyn's past, recalling the concern for public education shown by the people of Brooklyn since its earliest settlement.

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 73, 241 MacDougal Street, Borough of Brooklyn, and designates Tax Map Block 1528, Lot 1, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.

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Photo Credit: Carl Forster  
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Public School 73  
241 MacDougal Street  
Date: 1888 and 1895

Architect:  
James W. Naughton