

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
January 8, 1991; Designation List 231  
LP-1798

FLUSHING HIGH SCHOOL, 35-01 Union Street, Borough of Queens. Built 1912-15; architect C.B.J. Snyder, Superintendent of School Buildings, New York City Board of Education.

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 5002, Lot 1.

On July 10, 1990, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Flushing High School, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 15). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Six witnesses, including the principal of the school, spoke in favor of designation. No witnesses spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission has received several letters in support of designation. The Commission has also received a letter from the Division of School Facilities of the Board of Education requesting that the two extensions to the school building, constructed in 1952-54 and 1970-74, respectively, be excluded from the designation.<sup>1</sup>

#### Summary

Flushing High School, the oldest public secondary school institution in New York and one of the city's architecturally distinguished educational buildings, is located in Flushing, an historically rich area of the Borough of Queens. The brick and terra-cotta building is a striking example of the Collegiate Gothic style which was introduced to public school architecture in New York by C.B.J. Snyder, the Superintendent of Buildings for the Board of Education. Erected between 1912 and 1915 in a campus-like setting, the high school with its monumental square entrance tower recalls English medieval models. It is fitting that the city's oldest public high school institution is housed in one of its most distinguished Collegiate Gothic style buildings. The symbolism implicit in the style, recalling the hallowed seats of learning of medieval England and the political unity of Greater New York, is appropriate for a public school that has educated generations of New Yorkers for over 100 years. Extensions which were added to the east of the original building in 1952-54 and in 1970-74; while these extensions are on the Landmark Site, they are not included in the Landmark designation.<sup>2</sup>

#### The Development of Flushing<sup>3</sup>

With the consolidation of Greater New York in 1898, the original county of Queens was divided into two parts: Nassau County and the current Borough

of Queens. Flushing, along with Newtown and Jamaica, were the three colonial settlements that now comprise Queens. Flushing was first settled in 1645 by a small group of Englishmen who had first emigrated to the Netherlands before coming to this country. During this early period of Flushing's history under the Dutch, it became a center for Quakerism. The religious tolerance of Flushing's early residents was marked by a formal protest against the persecution of the Quakers in December, 1657, known as the Flushing Remonstrance; this document is one of the city's first documents contributing to the establishment of the principle of freedom of worship.

During the seventeenth century, Flushing began to develop as one of the most important centers for horticulture in this country. The first impetus to this industry's growth in Flushing is said to have begun with the arrival of French Huguenots who settled in the area after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. These emigrants brought with them fruit trees not native to this country. Later, William Prince was the first to establish a profitable nursery, possibly as early as 1737. Another prominent American horticulturalist associated with Flushing was Samuel Parsons who established his nursery in 1839. The Parsons nursery introduced a number of new plants to this country including the Asiatic rhododendron, the Japanese maple, the Valencia orange, and the weeping beech. The Parsons nursery was also responsible for providing many of the trees for the city's first public parks, including Central Park and Prospect Park. Parsons's grandson, who was also a noted horticulturalist and nurseryman, served as Superintendent of Parks for New York City in 1885 and as Commissioner of Parks in 1905; he was also very active in the Flushing school system. The grounds of Flushing High School contain a number of uncommon trees and plants recalling this important part of the area's history. In fact, within a block radius of the high school are buildings spanning 300 years of Flushing's history: the John Bowne House (1661); the Quaker Meeting House (1694, 1717); the Kingsland Mansion (1775); the Flushing Town Hall (1862); the Flushing Armory (1905); and the R.K.O. Keith's Theater (1927-28). These buildings, as well as the Weeping Beech Tree, the oldest specimen in the country which dates from 1847, are all designated New York City Landmarks or Interior Landmarks with the exception of the Armory. Together with the Flushing High School, they form an exceptional collection of New York's historic, cultural, and architectural resources.

#### The Growth of Public Education in Flushing<sup>4</sup>

The present public school system, fully supported and maintained by public funds, developed slowly from the initial establishment under the Dutch of elementary schools supported and jointly controlled by both the civil authorities and the Dutch Reformed Church. Under the English, there was no system of state schools, rather private academies appeared similar to those in Britain. It was not until after the American Revolution that New York State undertook the task of creating a public education system. During the period between the first meeting of the state legislature in 1777 and 1851, nearly 1,000 pieces of legislation concerning education were passed. Among the most important acts was the University Act of 1784 which formed the Regents of the University of the State of New York. This was a

corporate body authorized by the state to charter, supervise, and control institutions of higher learning. Other important legislation established the principle of state support of schools, and the establishment of general educational standards.

Public education in Flushing began in 1848, with the passage of legislation that created the Board of Education of the Village of Flushing. Among the first members of the Board was the nurseryman, Samuel Parsons. The Board opened its first school on November 27, 1848, staffed by seven teachers and attended by 331 students; within two years, the student population had nearly doubled. Flushing also contained a number of private schools such as the Flushing Institute (1827), St. Paul's College (1836), St. Thomas Hall (1838), and others, indicating the concern for and long-standing commitment to education by the residents of Flushing.

Flushing High School was incorporated by an act of the state legislature in 1875 and recognized by the Board of Regents in 1877, making Flushing High School the oldest public high school institution in the city. The original high school building stood on Union Street at Sanford Avenue and shared facilities with a grammar school. This building was adequate for the needs of the Town of Flushing which was then a small, contained area characterized by its horticultural nurseries and out-lying truck farms. By 1891, the school-age population in the surrounding areas serviced by the high school had outgrown the facilities of the structure and a new, larger building was erected incorporating the old school. The architect of the new building was Frank A. Collins who later became Deputy Superintendent of Buildings for Queens for the Board of Education.

At the beginning of this century, local community and civic leaders in Flushing, aware of the steady growth in the area and the potential for even greater, more rapid growth due to the proposed construction of the Queensborough Bridge and the extension of the subway into Queens, began to lobby for more schools including a new high school. The Board of Education eventually agreed and construction of the present high school building began in 1912. The high school opened for classes in September, 1915, and was officially dedicated on January 14, 1916.

#### The Collegiate Gothic Style in New York<sup>5</sup>

The Gothic style enjoyed a revival in popularity in the nineteenth century both in Britain and the United States in part as a reaction to the prevailing Classical and Renaissance-inspired architectural forms. Although the style is primarily associated with religious buildings, throughout the nineteenth century in New York City an aesthetic derived from or inspired by medieval architecture was considered the appropriate mode of expression for academic buildings used for higher education.

The most influential college building in the Gothic style in New York was the original New York University by Town, Davis & Dakin (demolished), built between 1832 and 1835 on the east side of Washington Square. The design consciously evoked images of English medieval buildings and academic colleges in Oxford and Cambridge. N.Y.U.'s central entrance tower--

embellished with turrets, crenellation, and a soaring pointed-arched solar window -- when seen rising above the trees and lawns of Washington Square created a powerful impression of academicism for nineteenth-century New Yorkers. Although a public park, Washington Square served as the "campus" setting for the building. It was the city's prototypical Collegiate Gothic style building; it established the Gothic as the appropriate and proper style for institutions of higher learning in this city.<sup>6</sup>

The Collegiate Gothic style is based on English medieval colleges which were built generally between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries with restoration or rebuilding campaigns during later centuries. These English colleges are not single buildings but many structures serving different functions, erected at different periods, and are often a stylistic amalgam ranging from early Gothic to Tudor. The American Collegiate Gothic style reflects the fact that the medieval English colleges were an amalgam of four centuries of architectural expression by itself being a combination of various elements based on these earlier medieval styles.

When the city found it necessary to relocate and expand the City College of New York, the site the trustees of the college chose was on the commanding bluff of Hamilton Heights in Upper Manhattan; the style they chose was the Collegiate Gothic. The North Campus of the City College of New York (1897), designed by George B. Post, contains one of the finest collections of Collegiate Gothic style buildings in the city.

It is most probable that the plans for the North Campus prompted C.B.J. Snyder, the Superintendent of Buildings for the Board of Education from 1891 to 1923, to use the Collegiate Gothic style for the designs of the new high schools in the newly consolidated outer boroughs of Greater New York. The stylistic unity of City College in Manhattan, Morris High School (1901-04) in the Bronx, Curtis High School (1902-04) on Staten Island, Erasmus High School (1903-11) in Brooklyn, and Flushing High School (1912-15) in Queens is symbolic of the political unity newly achieved by the Act of Incorporation of Greater New York in 1898.<sup>7</sup>

#### The Architect and Flushing High School<sup>8</sup>

C.B.J. Snyder (1860-1945) had been appointed to the position of Superintendent of Buildings for the Board of Education in 1891 and remained in that position until his retirement in 1923. Little is known of his background other than that he was born in Stillwater, New York, and studied architecture with William Bishop. His architectural accomplishments focused on school buildings, and in this area he was a recognized leader. He made major contributions in the areas of school planning, fire protection, ventilation, lighting, and architectural design. A 1905 architectural periodical noted:

...it is a matter of wonderful good fortune that the official architect [of the Board of Education] chanced to be such a man as is Mr. C.B.J. Snyder, who not only at the outset showed such distinct capacity for his task, but has proved himself a man able to grow as his opportunities opened before him. Mr. Wheelwright



in Boston, Mr. Ittner in St. Louis, Mr. Mundie in Chicago...have done excellent service to their respective cities in the way of building schoolhouses...but they have not had to do their work under the same sort of pressure that has been put on Mr. Snyder, and they have not had to adopt their architectural treatment to as closely restricted sites.<sup>9</sup>

One of the main problems Snyder faced in the design of many Manhattan public schools was the accommodation of the requirements of students and teachers to small sites which were necessitated by the high cost of land acquisition. This was not a problem he faced in the designs for the high schools in the outer boroughs. All were situated on sizable pieces of property, on prominent sites, on major thoroughfares, and were conveniently located. The size of the lots on which these high schools stand was large enough to allow for landscaped, campus-like settings as opposed to the confined lots of many of the primary schools. Snyder's work was inventive, solid, and handsome. His earliest designs continued the Romanesque Revival style of the architect who was his predecessor as Superintendent of Schools Buildings, George W. Debevoise. Snyder later moved into Gothic idioms, and was credited with the introduction of the Collegiate Gothic style to New York public school architecture.

It was not long after this style began appearing in the architectural press that Snyder began using certain characteristic elements of it in his schools. It took him several attempts before he completely incorporated this new style. In an 1894 school on Edgecombe Avenue between 140th and 141st Streets the few Gothic details gave some suggestion of his future direction. P.S. 27 and P.S. 28, built in 1896 in the Bronx, are square, block-like buildings, but high gables (some pointed, some stepped) rise up at the roofline as on later works. In P.S. 31 (1897-99, a designated New York City Landmark) in the Bronx, Snyder first successfully integrated numerous details in an overall late Gothic composition. This style was more fully explored in such later, more elaborate works as Morris High School on Boston Road, Curtis High School in Staten Island, and Flushing High School.

### The Site

Located at the northeast corner of Northern Boulevard and Union Street, Flushing High School is an impressive structure of brick and terra cotta situated on a large elevated tract of land that rises gently from the southwest to the northeast. The site is slightly irregular due to the oblique intersection of 35th Avenue on the north side and Union Street on the west side of the property. The property was acquired in 1911; the adjoining parcel to the east on which the 1952-54 and 1970-74 extensions stand was acquired in 1945, forming one lot which is the Landmark Site. (While these extensions are on the Landmark Site, they are not included in the Landmark designation.) The original building is "U"-shaped in plan and set at the rear (northern end) of the site. There is a central entrance block along the property line of 35th Avenue flanked on the west by a classroom wing along the property line of Union Street and on the east by an auditorium wing, forming a three-sided court that opens on the south, facing Northern Boulevard. The building embraces the terraced court which merges

with an expanse of tree-shaded, landscaped lawn that slopes down to Northern Boulevard. The court and the lawn with its trees and shrubbery create a campus-like setting which enhances the architectural character of the building.

### Description

The most imposing and dominant feature of the school is the five-story, square entrance tower which follows in the architectural tradition for college buildings established in the city by New York University in 1832. The tower is also a feature that Flushing High School shares with Morris High School, Curtis High School, and City College's Shepard Hall and is emblematic of Snyder's Collegiate Gothic style. The square tower is one of the most evocative elements of the Collegiate Gothic, recalling the medieval colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. To either side of the tower are gabled sections that join the tower to the east and west wings. The west wing is three stories high with gabled ends and a pitched slate roof. The east wing, containing the auditorium, is a double-height single story characterized by broad, pointed-arched, traceried windows. The articulation of this wing is derived from the Perpendicular Gothic chapels associated with medieval English colleges. It is attached to the entrance tower block by a simple two-story "hyphen." Flushing High School's picturesque silhouette, asymmetrical massing, and its wealth of Gothic-inspired ornament including oriels, crenellation, drip moldings, grotesque corbels, and heraldic statues enhance its position as one of the city's important Collegiate Gothic structures.

The materials of the high school are buff-colored brick, grey speckled terra cotta, and granite used for the water table.<sup>10</sup> The tower is five stories high with full-height corner buttresses of brick enlivened by terra-cotta quoins. It is set back from the landscaped courtyard by a concrete terrace with a brick parapet. The entrance is a compound, pointed-arch doorway that is flanked by narrow windows with quoins, drip moldings, and sills. Metal-clad doors have replaced the wood originals throughout the exterior of the building. Above the entrance is a two-story, three-sided oriel of terra cotta embellished with a variety of Gothic details. Flanking the oriel at each story are square-headed windows similar to those at the first story. Above the oriel, the fourth and fifth stories have three bays; the wide central bays are filled with triple windows. The tower is crowned by terra-cotta crenellation and diminutive corner finials. The three-story gabled sections that join the tower to the wings of the building are pierced at each level by bays of windows. The window bay module for the school is square-headed, either three or four windows wide, and keyed to the brickwork by terra-cotta quoins. The windows have nine-over-nine, double-hung sash (although there are some variations) which replaces the original mulitpane sash.

The 35th Avenue (rear) facade of the tower entrance block is rendered in a straightforward fashion. Due to the topography of the site, the building is four-stories high, rising from the grade of the street as opposed to the natural grade at the front of the building where it is three stories high. The building is set back from the property line which is

demarcated by an iron paling fence which extends around the property. The facade is basically five bays long with a variation at the central bay which contains the rear entrance at street level. Above the pointed-arch entrance is a two-story high, polygonal oriel flanked at each story by double windows. At the fourth story, behind the parapet of the oriel, is a pointed-arch bay crowned by a gable; gables also top the end bays of the facade. Irregularly placed single windows characterize the fourth story except at the central and end bays. Stringcourses at lintel level extend across the facade at the first and third stories.

The west wing is three stories high and symmetrically arranged into gabled end bays bracketing three bays of four windows each. The square-headed bays have drip moldings. At the third story, there are paired windows with quoin surrounds. The sloping roof is clad with slate and has copper flashing. There is a pointed-arched entrance to this wing at the base of the northern end bay, surmounted by a terra-cotta oriel. There is another entrance to this wing at the base of the southern facade facing Northern Boulevard. It is a one-story projecting vestibule of brick with buttresses, crenellation, and a pointed-arched doorway. Above, there is a two-story oriel and crowning gable pierced by a tripartite window. The Union Street facade is similar to that facing the court. It is five bays long with gabled end bays and four stories high due to the change in grade. The northern end bay has a pointed-arched entrance surmounted by an oriel. At some point prior to 1982, work was done on the interior structural lintels of a number of bays on this facade and on the 35th Avenue facade of the entrance tower block. The original buff brick has been replaced with light yellow brick in about five courses above the bays.

The east wing is the most romantic feature of the school, recalling the medieval chapels associated with the colleges at Oxford and Cambridge. It is six bays long and three bays wide; the full-height bays have tall, wide, pointed-arched windows with tracery, separated by buttresses. The southern facade of this wing, facing Northern Boulevard, is three-sided, designed to read as the apse of a chapel. The main entrance is in the central bay of this facade and is similar to the projecting entrance of the west wing. The roofline is enlivened by crenellation and by polygonal colonnettes above each buttress that carry such fanciful heraldic statues as unicorns, griffins, and wiverns reminiscent of Hampton Court, England. The high pitched roof is slate with copper flashing.

#### Subsequent History

Development and population growth in the Flushing area necessitated the expansion of the school to alleviate overcrowding. In 1954 a new wing was completed, which was dedicated as a World War II memorial. In 1974, the adjoining gymnasium wing was completed.

Report prepared by James T. Dillon, Research Department

Report edited by Elisa Urbanelli, Research Department Editor

## NOTES

1. On September 11, 1984, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Flushing High School and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (LP-1510, Item No.4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses, including the principal of the school, spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.
2. N.Y.C., Department of Buildings, Queens. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 5002, Lot 1. NB 3662-1912; ALT 1107-1952; ALT 1087-1970.
3. This section is based on information gathered from: Benjamin Thompson, History of Long Island from its Discovery and Settlement to the Present Time, vol. 3, (1918, rpt. Port Washington, N.Y., 1962), 30-42; M.M. Graff, Central Park, Prospect Park, A New Perspective (New York, 1985), 62-68; "Prince, William," Dictionary of American Biography, vol. 8, ed. Dumas Malone (New York, 1935), 233-35.
4. This section is based on information gathered from: Elsie Garland Hobson, Educational Legislation and Administration in the State of New York From 1777 to 1850 (Chicago, c.1918), 37-51, 171-179; Frank P. Graves, "Development of the Education Law in New York," McKinney's Consolidated Laws of New York, Annotated, Book 16, Education Law, 1 to 558, XI-XXI; Andrew S. Draper, "University of State of New York," New York Times, Mar. 2, 1913, p.4; John Peter Watts, "Flushing High School," (typescript in the LPC files, n.d.), unpaginated [9]; Joel L. Friedman, "The Struggle For A New Flushing High School," (typescript in the LPC files, n.d.), 1-5; So This Is Flushing, ed. Haynes Trebor, no. 1 (Oct., 1938), 6.
5. This section is based on information gathered from: Arthur Scully, Jr., James Dakin, Architect, His Career in New York and the South Louisiana, 1973), 3-22; Sir Banister Fletcher, A History of Architecture On The Comparative Method (New York, 1931), 337-467; LPC, City College, City University of New York, North Campus Designation Report, report prepared by James Dibble (New York, 1981).
6. Following New York University's lead, most of the city's nineteenth-century colleges, academies, and institutes adopted the Gothic mode for their buildings. Some of these institutions are: the New York Institution for the Blind (1839, demolished) on Ninth Avenue between 33rd and 34th Streets which was a school for the blind, not an asylum or home; the City College of New York designed by James Renwick (1847, demolished) at Lexington Avenue and 23rd Street; Packer Institute designed by Minard Lafever (1854, extant) in Brooklyn Heights; the College of St. Francis Xavier (c.1862, extant) on West 15th Street; the Normal College (1873, demolished), later Hunter College, on Park Avenue at 69th Street; the midtown campus of Columbia College designed by

Charles Coolidge Haight (1874-84, demolished); Haight's 1883 complex for the General Theological Seminary in Chelsea (extant); the Union Theological Seminary (1884, demolished) on Park Avenue between 69th and 70th Streets; and Girls' High School designed by James W. Naughton (1885, extant) on Nostrand Avenue in Brooklyn.

7. Curtis High School is a designated New York City Landmark; Morris High School is within the Morris High School Historic District.
8. This section is based on information gathered from: LPC, Public School 31 Designation Report, report prepared by Virginia Kurshan (New York, 1986).
9. "Editorial," American Architect and Building News 88 (July 29, 1905), 33.
10. The use of the terra cotta was documented in an advertisement which featured Flushing High School, titled "Proclaiming the VALUE of EDUCATION," that was circulated by the National Terra Cotta Society in the Literary Digest and was reproduced in the Flushing Journal about 1921.



## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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

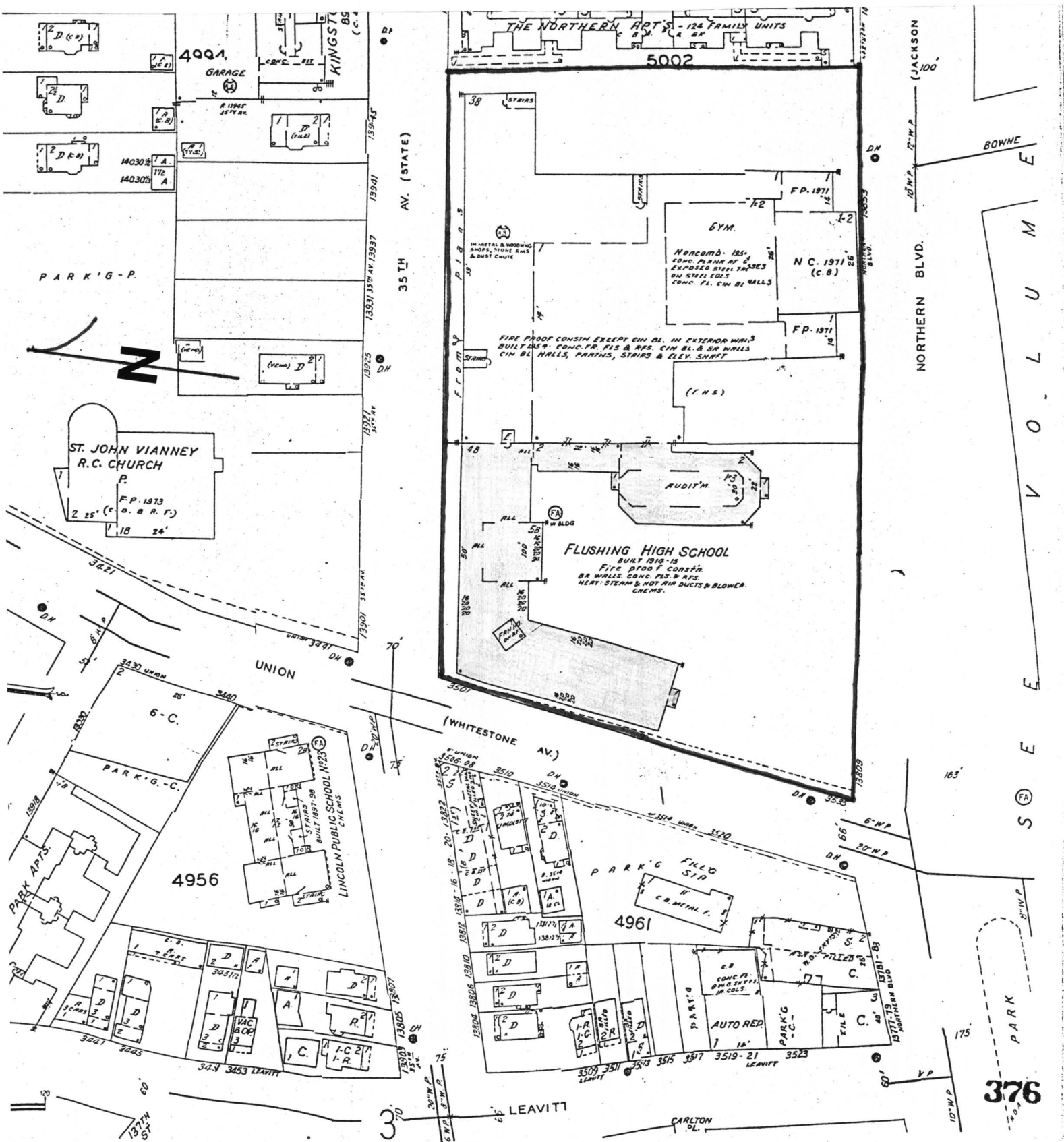
The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, Flushing High School is the oldest public high school institution in New York City, having been established by an act of the state legislature in 1875; that, built in 1912-15, the present brick and terra-cotta building is a striking example of Collegiate Gothic style architecture designed by C.B.J. Snyder, the Superintendent of Buildings for the Board of Education, who introduced this style for the city's public schools; that Flushing High School's monumental square entrance tower, picturesque auditorium wing, and Gothic-inspired ornament recall the models of English medieval colleges; that the campus-like setting of the school enhances the architectural character of the building; that Flushing High School is an important building in the legacy of architecturally distinguished school buildings created by Snyder throughout the five boroughs in the era following New York City's political consolidation; and that Flushing High School, located in an historically rich area of Queens, represents the long-standing commitment to public education by the residents of Flushing.

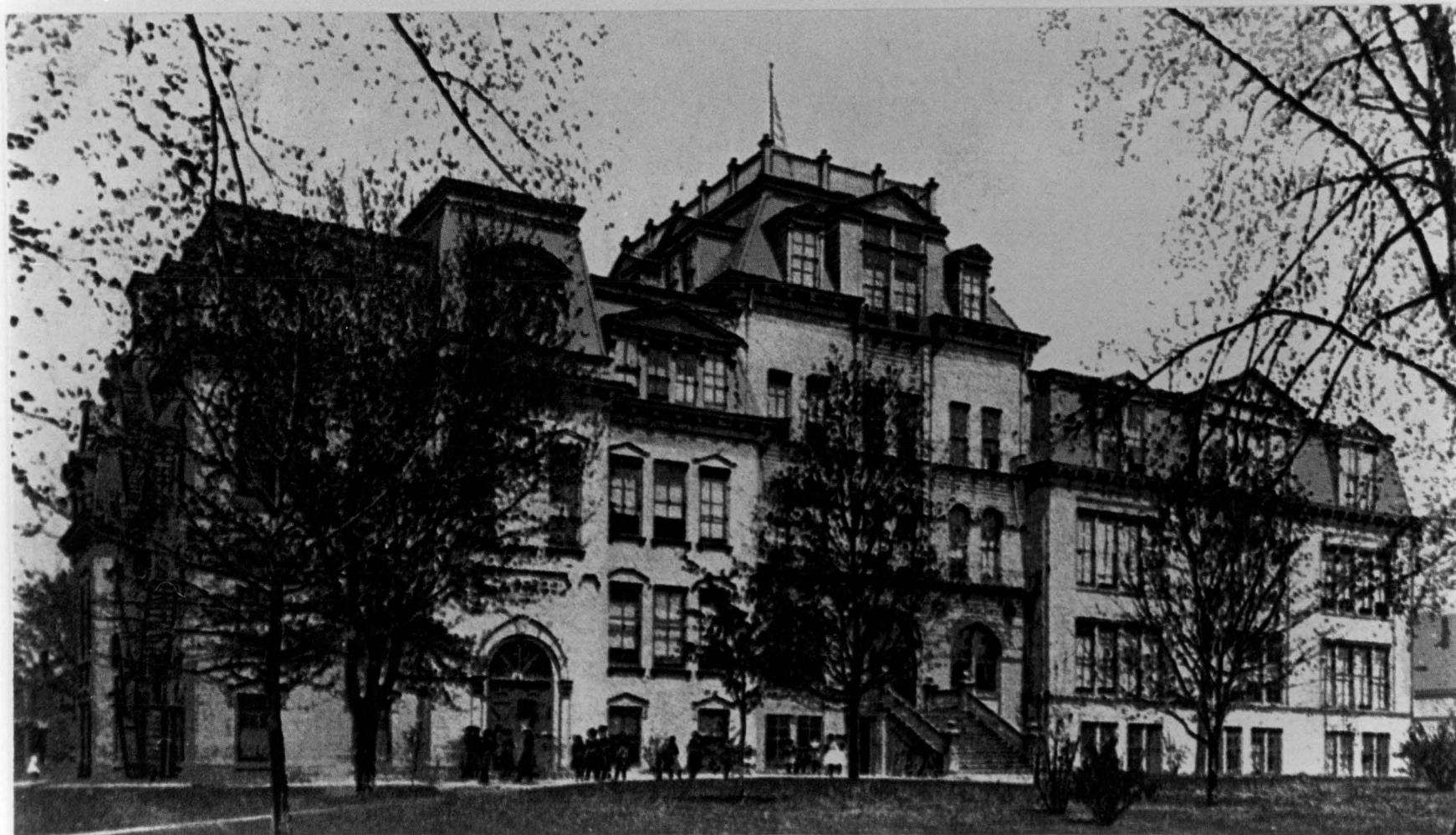
Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 (formerly Section 534 of Chapter 21), of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark Flushing High School, 35-01 Union Street, Borough of Queens, and designates Tax Map Block 5002, Lot 1, Borough of Queens, as its Landmark Site.

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1984





*The Flushing High School 1875 - 1915*

Photo Credit: LPC

FIRST FLUSHING HIGH SCHOOL  
Union St. and Sanford Ave.  
(Demolished)





Photo Credit:  
Carl Forster

ENTRANCE TOWER  
Court Facade

Architect:  
C.B.J. Snyder  
Date: 1912-15





Photo Credit:  
Carl Forster

ENTRANCE TOWER  
35th Avenue Facade

Architect:  
C.B.J. Snyder  
Date: 1912-15



Photo Credit:  
Carl Forster

WINDOW BAY MODULE

Architect:  
C.B.J. Snyder  
Date: 1912-15

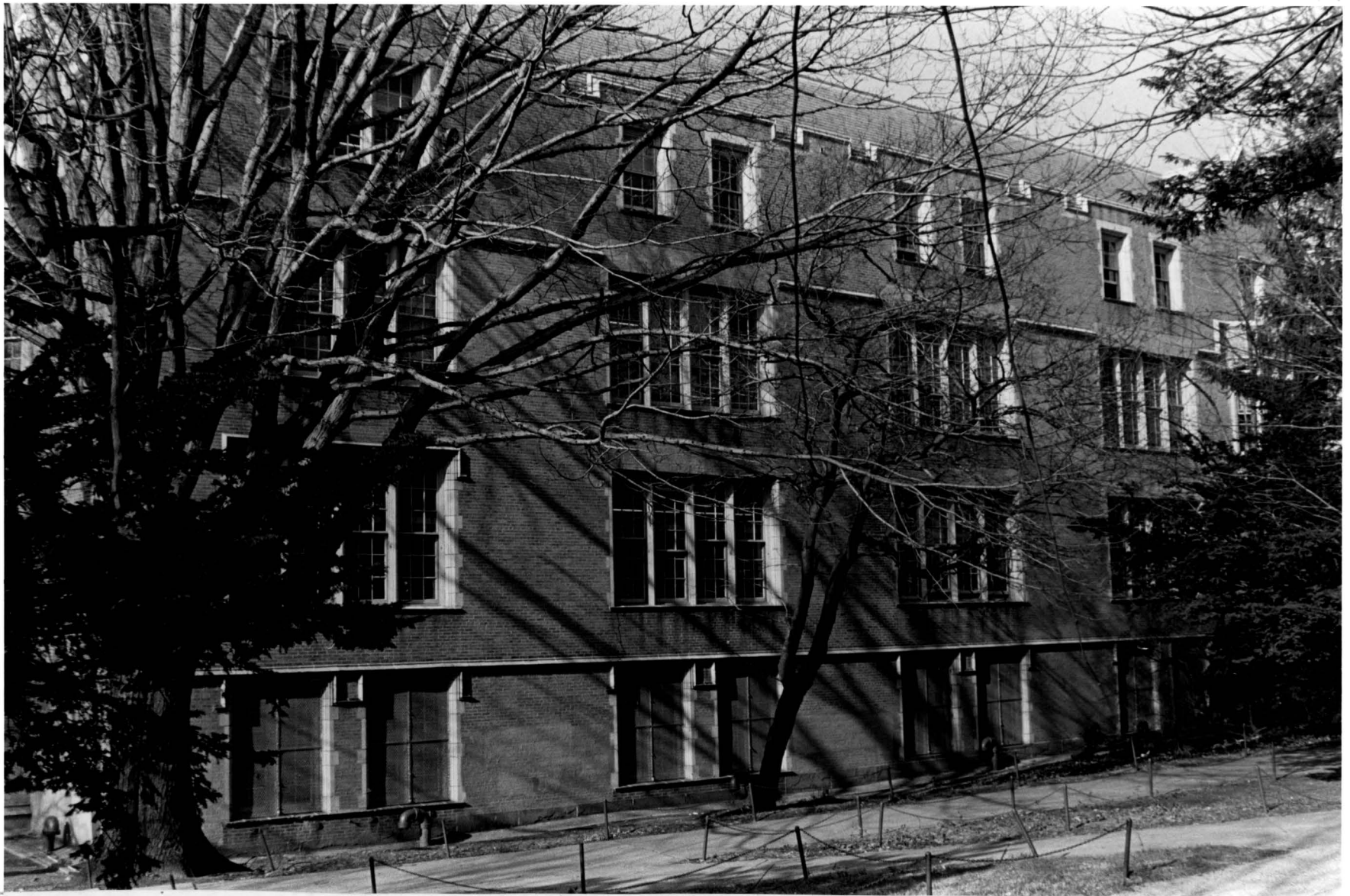


Photo Credit:  
Carl Forster

WEST WING  
Court Facade

Architect:  
C.B.J. Snyder  
Date: 1912-15





Photo Credit:  
Carl Forster

WEST WING  
North Entrance  
Court Facade

Architect:  
C.B.J. Snyder  
Date: 1912-15

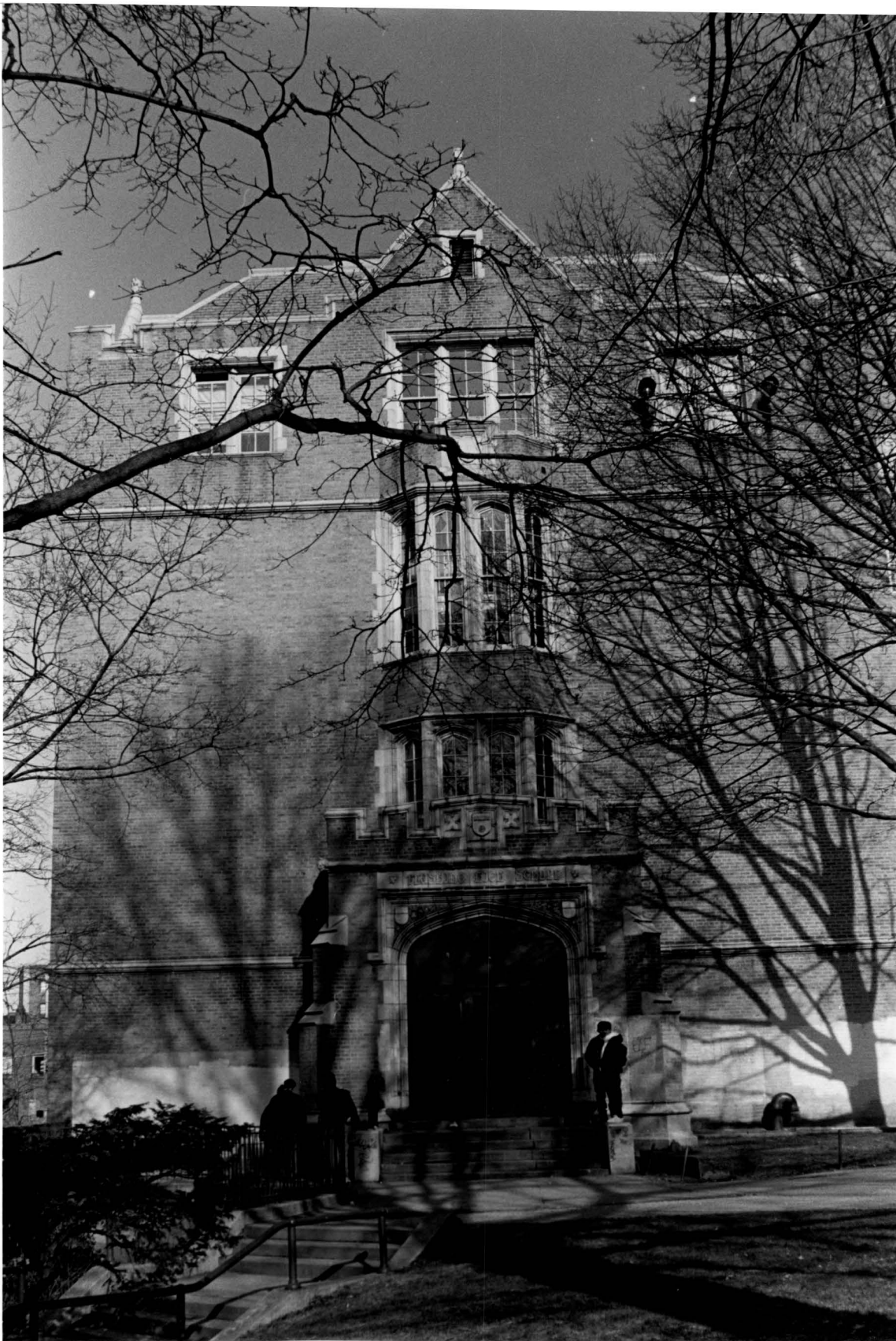


Photo Credit:  
Carl Forster

WEST WING.  
South Entrance

Architect:  
C.B.J. Snyder  
Date: 1912-15





Photo Credit:  
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WEST WING  
Union St. Facade

Architect:  
C.B.J. Snyder  
Date: 1912-15

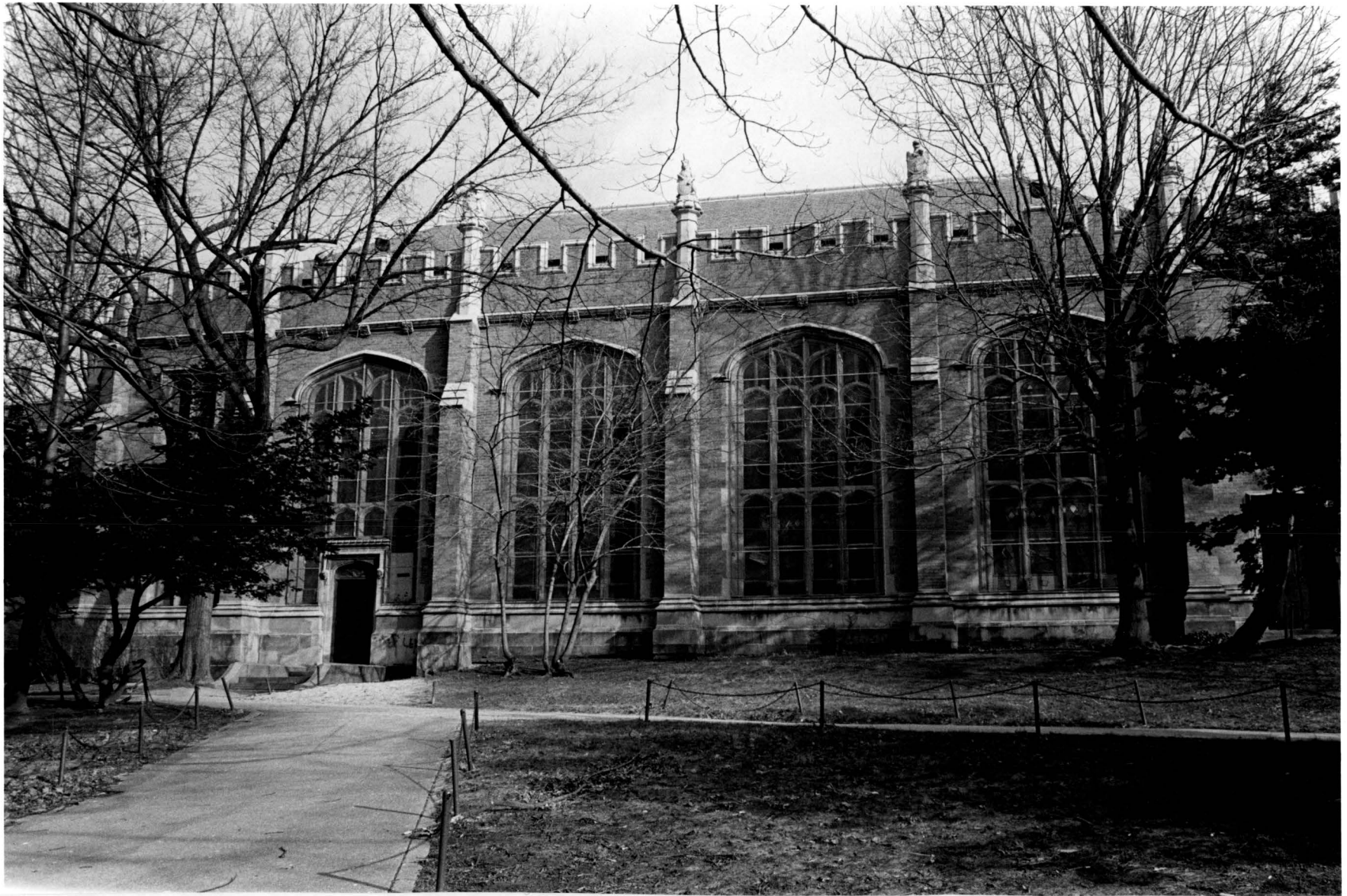


Photo Credit: Carl Forster

AUDITORIUM  
Court Facade

Architect: C.B.J. Snyder  
Date: 1912-15



Photo Credit: Carl Forster

AUDITORIUM  
South Facade  
Entrance

Architect: C.B.J. Snyder  
Date: 1912-15





Photo Credit: Carl Forster

AUDITORIUM  
Roof Details  
Heraldic Statuary

Architect:  
C.B.J. Snyder  
Date: 1912-15