

PUBLIC SCHOOL 108, 200 Linwood Street, Cypress Hills, Borough of Brooklyn. Built 1895; architect James W. Naughton.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map Block 3926, Lot 45.

On October 9, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Public School 108 and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 7). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Public School 108, in the Cypress Hills section of Brooklyn, is an imposing Romanesque Revival style building designed by James W. Naughton in 1895. The building still functions as a public school and serves as a living reminder of the long history of public education in Kings County.

Cypress Hills was originally a village in the town of New Lots which, for 200 years prior to 1852, had been part of the larger township of Flatbush. Although a school had been established in Flatbush in the 1650s, it was not until 1740 that the population of the town had increased to the point that its eastern section, the "New Lots," could be separated into an independent school district. A school house was erected near the present intersection of Schenck and New Lots Avenues and stood until 1810 when it was replaced by a larger building next to the New Lots Reformed Church. In 1847, a new second school district was established within New Lots consisting of all of East New York and Cypress Hills and a new school building for this district was built on Vermont Avenue near Fulton Street. This district was in turn divided in 1856, creating a separate district for Cypress Hills. However, it was not until 1870 that a two-story high brick building was erected as the school for the district. This building still exists as the central section of the present Public School 65 on Richmond Street. Until then, the students had been required to use the basement of a nearby Methodist Church.¹ Twenty-five years later, after Cypress Hills had been subsumed into the burgeoning City of Brooklyn, Public School 108 was built.

The architect of Public School 108, James W. Naughton (1849-98), was born in Ireland and brought to Brooklyn by his parents at the age of eight and educated in the public and private schools of the city. At the age of fifteen, Naughton went west, settling 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 the Cooper Union in Manhattan. He was active in Brooklyn politics, and, for two years between 1874 and 1876, he served as Superintendent of Buildings for the City of Brooklyn. In 1879, he succeeded Samuel B. Leonard as the Superintendent of Buildings

for the Board of Education of the City of Brooklyn and held that position for nearly twenty years until his death in 1898.² All the school buildings built in Brooklyn during the twenty years prior to the Incorporation of Greater New York in 1898 were designed by Naughton.

Public School 108, an imposing Romanesque Revival structure built of brick and Lake Superior sandstone, rises above a rough-faced stone basement for three stories and is crowned by an attic fourth floor pierced by dormer windows. An interesting feature of the school is its plan. The building is symmetrically arranged into three parts; three-bay wide end pavilions connected by recessed wings to the seven-bay wide central entrance section. The division of the school into prominent pavilions is usually associated with the Second Empire style, a style that faded in popularity 25 years before the school was built. The plan was probably retained by Naughton for esthetic reasons. The use of pavilions adds greatly to the character of a design, creating verticality, plasticity, and a dynamic play of light and shadow.

The ground floor of the pavilions and central portion are enhanced by quoins and a stone cornice runs above the first floor, visually joining the three main sections and giving a strong horizontal accent to the facade. The windows of the first and second floor are square-headed with the exception of two windows immediately above the entrance and at the second floor on the side facade of the south pavilion. The third floor windows are arched; those that pierce the recessed connecting wings are shallow, segmental arched, while those in the central and end pavilions are round-arched with ornamental impostes and molded archivolt. The modillioned roof cornice is broken by the dormer windows in the end pavilions and by the gabled dormers in the central section and at the side facades of the end pavilions. The dormers, high paneled chimney and hipped roofs also create a picturesque skyline, adding to the distinctive character of the building.

Of the many handsome school buildings which proudly stood in Brooklyn's 19th-century neighborhoods, Public School 108 is one of the few that survives and continues to serve the purpose for which it was originally built. The school is a living link with the area's past and a symbol of concern for education first shown by the Dutch and continued through the centuries by the people of Brooklyn.

Report Prepared by
James T. Dillon,
Research Department

FOOTNOTES

1. Henry R. Stiles, ed., A History of Kings County Including the City of Brooklyn, vol. I, (New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., 1884), pp. 306-318.
2. 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.

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 108 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 108 is an imposing Romanesque Revival style building of brick and sandstone, that is was designed by James W. Naughton, architect of the Board of Education of the City of Brooklyn from 1879 until 1898; that the architect has combined elements of the Second Empire style with the Romanesque Revival to create an impressive design; that it is one of the few 19th-century school buildings remaining in the city; and that it is an important reminder of the long history of public education in Brooklyn.

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 108, 200 Linwood Street, Cypress Hills, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 3926, Lot 45, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Howard, Henry B., ed. The Eagle and Brooklyn: History of the City of Brooklyn From its Settlement to the Present Time. Brooklyn: Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1893.
- New York City School Buildings, 1806-1956. City of New York: Board of Education, 1956.
- Ravitch, Diane, The Great School Wars, New York City, 1805-1973, A History of Public Schools as Battlegrounds of Social Change. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1974.
- Souvenir of Our Public Schools, 1892. New York: E.J. Whitlock, 1892.

Stiles, Henry R. The History of Kings County Including the City of Brooklyn. New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., 1884.

Teachers' College Archives, Columbia University, Unpublished Notes on Brooklyn Public Schools, c. 1900.

A handwritten signature or set of initials in the bottom right corner of the page, consisting of several loops and a long tail.

