

PRATT INSTITUTE MAIN BUILDING including attached SOUTH HALL and MEMORIAL HALL, 215 Ryerson Street, Borough of Brooklyn. Built 1885-87, 1889-91, 1926-27; Lamb & Rich, William B. Tubby, and John Mead Howells.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map Block 1920, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On October 9, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Pratt Institute Main Building including attached South Hall and Memorial Hall and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 9). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Pratt Institute Main Building including the attached South Hall and Memorial Hall is the focal point of the Pratt Institute campus, located in the Clinton Hill section of Brooklyn. Built in three stages (1885-87, 1889-91, and 1926-27), the Main Building and its two wings were designed by three architectural firms (Lamb & Rich, William B. Tubby, and John Mead Howells) in three harmonious, interrelated styles (Romanesque Revival, Renaissance Revival, and neo-Romanesque). As the heart of the Pratt campus, the Main Building with its wings is the most tangible symbol of the institution.

Pratt Institute was founded by Charles Pratt for the training of artisans, foremen, designers, draftsmen, and other technicians. The school was an outgrowth of Pratt's interest in manual training and his belief that the best way to help others was to teach them how to help themselves. The type of technical training established at Pratt was unprecedented in the United States at that time.

Charles Pratt (1830-1891) was born in Watertown, Massachusetts. In 1851 he moved to New York City and worked for the firm of Schenck & Downing, dealers in paints and oils. He joined the firm of Reynolds, Devoe & Pratt, which manufactured and sold paints and related products in 1854. In 1867, Pratt established the firm of Charles Pratt & Co. with the intention of marketing a less flammable kerosene for lighting, one that would have a flashing point of more than 100 degrees F. "Pratt's Astral Oil" gained a worldwide reputation, and the firm began to manufacture tools, cans, petroleum barrels, and similar products. The Pratt Manufacturing Co. was founded to produce sulphuric acids and other chemicals used in petroleum refining. Pratt's interests were acquired by John D. Rockefeller of Standard Oil in 1874. At that time Pratt's refineries had a capacity of 1500 barrels of oil a day and were regarded as the most successful in the country. Pratt remained with the company and quickly became a major force at Standard Oil.

Pratt, whose philanthropic interests were wide ranging, not only founded the Pratt Institute and its Free Library but also endowed the Adelphi Academy in Brooklyn, Amherst College, and the University of Rochester. He built the Astral Apartments, a model tenement development in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, near his oil refineries, and gave \$100,000 towards the construction of Clinton Hill's Emmanuel Baptist Church, a designated New York City Landmark. Pratt had moved into the Clinton Hill area in the 1870s, building his large mansion at 252 Clinton Avenue in 1875. He also bestowed houses in the neighborhood as wedding presents for his sons, and all were built on Clinton Avenue after Charles Pratt's death in 1891.

Pratt Institute opened on October 17, 1887, with a drawing class of twelve students. The drawing class led to the development of the Art Department. Other departments were the Department of Museums, the Women's Department which stressed domestic arts and science, the Department of Mechanic Arts which eventually became the School of Science and Technology, the Department of Music, the Department of Commerce, the High School which stressed manual training, the Kindergarten Department, and the Library Department which developed out of a need for trained librarians for the Free Library. The high school closed in 1905 after manual training was introduced to public high schools, and the Kindergarten Department ended in 1917 when kindergarten was made mandatory in primary education. From its modest beginnings Pratt has developed into a major technical institute. Today there are approximately 4000 students in residence and over 30,000 alumni.

The Main Building, formerly known as the Art and Industrial Building, was constructed in 1885-87. As the first campus building, it originally housed all the institute programs and courses. The architects were the New York firm of Lamb & Rich, established in 1882 by Hugh Lamb(1848-1903) and Charles A. Rich(1855-1943). Lamb, a native of Scotland, was in partnership with Lorenzo B. Wheeler between 1878 and 1882, designing many residential buildings on the Upper East Side in Manhattan. Rich, born in Beverly, Massachusetts, studied at Chandler Institute and Dartmouth College. Lamb & Rich executed many commercial and collegiate buildings including works at Barnard, Colgate, Dartmouth, Smith, Williams, and Amherst. They also enjoyed an active practice in residential architecture, designing houses in the Park Slope, Henderson Place, and Hamilton Heights Historic Districts in the Romanesque Revival, Queen Anne, and neo-Gothic styles. For Charles Pratt, they also designed the Astral Apartments, a pioneering model tenement project in Greenpoint.

The Pratt Institute Main Building was designed by Lamb & Rich in the Romanesque Revival style popular in the 1880s and often used by the firm. The red brick structure is six stories high with picturesque corner towers and a central clock tower. An impressive projecting portico with paired arched brownstone openings resting on paired brownstone colonnettes is placed in front of the entrance and is approached by a double staircase. A carved foliate bandcourse crowns the portico. A similar foliate bandcourse is placed above the fourth story. Arched windows accent the second, fifth, and sixth stories. The corner towers terminate in decorative parapets with small bartizan towers. Rising above the face of the clock at the sixth story is a one-story tower section with arched openings, crenellated cornice, and corner bartizans. The side elevations of the building are punctuated by regularly spaced arched and rectangular window openings. The sunken areaway in front of the building is enclosed by a railing.

The attached South Hall, built in 1889-91 to house the Pratt Institute High School, was designed by William B. Tubby. Tubby (1858-1944), born in Des Moines, Iowa, studied at the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute and in the office of Ebenezer L. Roberts. In 1883 he established his own practice and designed buildings throughout New York City including five Carnegie Libraries, the Brooklyn Wallabout Market building, and the 83rd Precinct Police Station, a designated New York City Landmark, in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn. Among his domestic commissions are rows of houses at 179-183 St. James Place (1892), 127-135 Cambridge Place (1894), and 864-872 Carroll Street (1887), the neo-Jacobean William H. Childs residence (1900-01) at 53 Prospect Park West, and most notably, the Romanesque Revival style Charles Millard Pratt residence (1895) at 241 Clinton Avenue.

South Hall was designed by Tubby in a Renaissance Revival style that reflects the increasing popularity of classical styles in the 1890s. In the use of material and round arches, South Hall harmonizes with the Romanesque Revival Main Building, while the decorative detail displays a closer adherence to classical forms.

Linked to the Main Building by a one-story brick section with a large arched opening and decorative brick parapet, South Hall proper is a three-story red brick building with a sunken areaway enclosed by a railing. A flight of steps approaches the entrance at the first floor. This story is faced with brick simulating rustication and is punctuated by large rectangular openings. Arched window openings outlined by brick and stone moldings accent the second floor. The third story windows are rectangular. A modillioned cornice surmounted by a balustraded parapet extends around the building at the roof line. The side and rear elevations are pierced by regularly spaced window openings.

Memorial Hall, built in 1926-27 to house an assembly hall, was designed by John Mead Howells in a neo-Romanesque style. It commemorates Mary Richardson Pratt, the second wife of Charles Pratt.

John Mead Howells (1868-1959) trained at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard, and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Between 1899 and 1917 he practiced with I.N. Phelps Stokes, designing such academic buildings as St. Paul's Chapel at Columbia University, Woodbridge Hall at Yale, and the Dudley Memorial Gateway and Music School at Harvard. With Raymond Hood he won the Chicago Tribune tower competition in 1922 and remained associated with Hood for a series of notable skyscraper designs. The neo-Romanesque style Howells chose for Memorial Hall is a revival style which enjoyed moderate popularity in the 1920s. This style and the use of forms and materials harmonizes Memorial Hall with the earlier Main Building and South Hall.

Memorial Hall, to the north of the Main Building, is linked to that building by a one-story sandstone gabled entrance section containing a recessed round-arched entrance with engaged colonnettes. A frieze beneath a modillioned cornice outlines the gable. The entrance section is joined to the main section with its central gabled portion flanked by two flat-roof wings. Faced with brown brick, the building features round-arched openings with engaged colonnettes at the first floor. The gabled portion is dominated by a large arched opening incorporating three smaller round-arched openings flanked by columns which support carved figures. Carved panels are placed near the roof line of the wings. The ridge of the gable is outlined by mosaics set beneath a dentiled roof coping. Only small portions of the brick side elevations are visible, and the peaked roof rises above them. The sunken areaway in front of Memorial Hall is enclosed by an iron fence with stone posts.

The Pratt Institute Main Building with the attached South Hall and Memorial Hall is a harmonious unit, representing the work of three notable architectural firms. A reminder of the innovative technical institute founded by Charles Pratt, these three interrelated structures still effectively serve Pratt Institute.

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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 the Pratt Institute Main Building including attached South Hall and Memorial Hall 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, the Pratt Institute Main Building with attached South Hall and Memorial Hall is the focal point of the Pratt Institute campus; that it was built in three stages and designed by three distinguished architectural firms to create a harmonious unit; that the three structures are notable examples of Romanesque Revival, Renaissance Revival, and neo-Romanesque styles; that they feature a complementary use of materials and forms which results in a unified whole; and that the Pratt Institute Main Building with attached South Hall and Memorial Hall still effectively serves Pratt Institute and is the most tangible symbol of the innovative technical school founded by Charles Pratt.

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 the Pratt Institute Main Building including attached South Hall and Memorial Hall, 215 Ryerson Street, Borough of Brooklyn, and designates Tax Map Block 1920, Lot 1 in part consisting of the land on which the described building is situated, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.

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Photo: Stanley Greenberg

PRATT INSTITUTE
MAIN BUILDING
215 RYERSON STREET, BROOKLYN

ARCHITECT: LAMB & RICH
BUILT: 1885-87



Photo: Stanley Greenberg

PRATT INSTITUTE
SOUTH HALL
215 RYERSON STREET, BROOKLYN

ARCHITECT: WILLIAM B. TUBBY
BUILT: 1889-91



Photo: LPC

PRATT INSTITUTE
MEMORIAL HALL
215 HYERSON STREET, BROOKLYN

ARCHITECT: JOHN MEAD HOWELLS
BUILT: 1926-27