

JAMAICA HIGH SCHOOL (NOW JAMAICA LEARNING CENTER), 162-02 Hillside Avenue (aka 88-20 163rd Street), Borough of Queens.
Built: 1895-6; architect: William B. Tubby

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 9768, lot 22

On May 14, 2013, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a landmark of the Jamaica High School (now Jamaica Learning Center) and the proposed designation of its Landmark Site (Item No. 3). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There was one speaker in favor of designation, a representative of the Historic Districts Council, and there were letters in favor of designation from Council Member James Gennaro and a representative of the Queens Preservation Council. There were no speakers opposed to designation.

Summary

The Dutch Revival style Jamaica High School was built in 1895-96, originally as a combined grammar and high school and named P.S. 47. The school was constructed for the growing Town of Jamaica in Queens County before Consolidation of the City of New York, but at a time when the idea of joining the different New York counties together was being considered. The building replaced a much smaller, simpler school building located close to the center of the town, and was constructed in a rapidly developing area. Its large scale and more elaborate style expressed the town's optimism about its future development. By 1909 this building had become so crowded that the grammar school department was moved elsewhere and this structure, renamed Jamaica High School, was devoted to high school education. This site served the older students in the rapidly expanding borough until the current and much larger Jamaica High School was constructed on Gothic Drive in 1927.



For the design of this building, the Jamaica Board of Education hired renowned Brooklyn architect William B. Tubby. Tubby had produced numerous well-regarded institutional buildings in New York and Brooklyn and was known for his historical revival style buildings, particularly those in the Dutch (or Flemish) Revival and Romanesque Revival styles. For this building, he faced the three stories with red and tan brick with contrasting decorative details such as splayed lintels. A large, modified stepped gable near the western side of the front features a series of tall, stepped windows grouped under a red-brick arch. The tall, hipped roof is highlighted by unusual "witch's hat" dormers and high chimneys. Stairwells were added to each end of the building in 1904, a few years after the original construction. Upon completion of the larger Jamaica High School in 1927, this building became a vocational school. It has served in several other capacities for the Board of Education since that time and is now an alternative high school called the Jamaica Learning Center. The school building continues to serve as a reminder of a much earlier period in the history of Jamaica, Queens.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Jamaica¹

One of the first established towns of Queens County, Jamaica was historically an important crossroads and center of trade for Long Island, due to its central location and extensive transportation systems. The first road in the area was established by 1809 by the Brooklyn, Jamaica and Flatbush Turnpike Company, and the first railroad (the Brooklyn and Jamaica Railroad and later the Long Island Railroad) came through the town in 1836 providing a link between Eastern Long Island and New York City. The availability of these transportation networks encouraged the development of non-agricultural business activity in Jamaica and industrial enterprises sprang up along the railroad, particularly after 1850. Following the Civil War, new modes of transportation continued to transform Jamaica by further facilitating commutation to New York City.

During the 19th century, Jamaica evolved into a retreat for urban dwellers who patronized its numerous inns and saloons on weekend excursions and built large summer homes on its open land. The permanent population of Jamaica increased steadily throughout the second half of the 19th century, and brought with it the subdivision of farms into house lots and a proliferation of new development, as well as the growth of Jamaica's downtown business center. Following the incorporation of Queens into the City of New York in 1898 the pressure for housing increased, resulting in street regularization and denser residential development. The 1901 *Atlas of the Borough of Queens* shows two- and three-story brick and frame structures built along the many new streets of the area.

The residents of Queens looked forward to the Consolidation of Greater New York in 1898 and the new development and improvements it would bring. "The days of Greater New York can now be seen not very far ahead, when Jamaica will naturally form the most eastern point to which the consolidated elevated railroad can be expected to run ... very likely before the end of this [century]." ² The actual development was perhaps even greater than anticipated. Within another ten years after Consolidation, a series of transportation improvements opened Jamaica and the entire Borough of Queens to more rapid growth and development. The Long Island Railroad was electrified in 1905-08, the Queensborough Bridge was opened in 1909, railroad tunnels were completed beneath the East River in 1910, and the elevated line was extended along Jamaica Avenue in 1918. Between 1900 and 1920, the population of Jamaica quadrupled and its commercial district became one of the busiest and most highly valued on Long Island.

High Schools in New York City³

A structure for public education in New York did not really begin until 1873 when a city-wide, truly public system was established in Manhattan.⁴ Although this public education system was greatly expanded with the annexation of the Bronx in 1874, it only covered primary school. This was sufficient because few people saw the need for higher education and anyone who did was generally accommodated by the few existing private academies. Before Consolidation of the City of New York in 1898, the existence and quality of public higher education in the local counties varied greatly. In Manhattan, the first free academy for studies above the primary grades was begun in 1849. It started as a five year program but in 1853 New York State allowed it to be called the Free College with a collegiate course of four years and a one year preparatory course. By 1866 this school had evolved into the City College of New York. In 1870, the New York

Board of Education established the Daily Female Normal and High School to train girls to become teachers. This was the start of what became the Normal College and later Hunter College (in 1871). Brooklyn organized its first public day high schools in 1878.⁵ Erasmus Hall Academy, started as a private school, received a charter from the Regents of the State of New York in 1787 and was transferred to the Brooklyn Board of Education in 1895. Queens had two high schools, the Flushing Academy, a private school founded in 1875 and one in Long Island City started in 1889. Staten Island, like several other locations, had high school departments located in some elementary schools.

Schools in Jamaica

The earliest known school in Jamaica was the private Union Hall Academy (chartered in 1791 and closed in 1873 as public schools became more prevalent). The population in Jamaica in 1845 was approximately 4,000 people and included 819 children. It also included approximately 360 African-Americans, according to the 1845 Census.⁶ In 1854, a three-story wooden public school building for the Town of Jamaica was constructed on Herriman Avenue (at 161st Street),⁷ offering primary grades only. As the population grew, other schools were added, including (in 1886) Public School No. 2, for African-American children.⁸ By 1892, the Herriman Avenue School was declared a “Union School” by the New York Board of Regents, so called because it included both grammar and high school classes.⁹ The high school students and their seven teachers held classes on the top floor of the Herriman Avenue School.¹⁰

By this time the idea of consolidation with New York City was already being studied and was very popular in Queens for the growth it promised. These hopes were realized as, after Consolidation, the population of Jamaica in the early 1900s numbered almost 6,000 people and was continuing to grow. Farms were being sold and houses were being constructed, many along 162nd (then Union Avenue) and 163rd (then Clinton Avenue) Streets northward from Jamaica Avenue toward Hillside Avenue. In August, 1895, the Board of Education spent \$14,000 to purchase a large lot on Hillside Avenue for a new school, to be called Public School 47.¹¹ This school was initially intended to replace the Herriman Avenue School (with all its grades), but the long-term plan was that it would become the area’s high school.¹²

During the fall of 1895, the Board of Education subdivided the town of Jamaica into separate school districts, so that children would attend the primary school in the district in which they lived.¹³ Subsequently, several African-American parents attempted to send their children to the closest school to their homes, rather than the one “Colored School” in Jamaica.¹⁴ They were denied entrance and in protest kept their children home. The parents were then accused of violating the compulsory education law, arrested and fined. The first case to come before the judge dealt with long-time resident Samuel Cisco and his son Jacob. Cisco stated that he was “a man of means in business here” and that “I and my father and mother have paid taxes in Jamaica for eighty years.” He claimed that the “Colored school was farther away from his home” and that it was “in a low swampy portion of the village and they are not taught as well as the children of the white schools.” This action was repeated by other parents in the spring and the following fall, with several parents being arrested.¹⁵ In spite of a decision by Justice Barnard in March, 1896, that the separation of schools was a continuation of racial prejudice left from slavery and should be discontinued, the Jamaica Board of Education appealed, while continuing its original policy of separate educational facilities. School No. 2 was lightly attended by the more than 110 African-American children in the town. In May 1896, a jury acquitted Mr. Cisco of violating the Compulsory Education Act¹⁶ but this did not affect the actions of the Board of Education. In

September, 1899, the Queens Board approved \$7,000 to create a high school division within the colored school on South Street and Sutphin Place, adding classrooms, a heating system and plumbing.

In November, 1899 Mrs. Cisco (Samuel Cisco's widow) brought suit against the Board of Education (now Borough of Queens) in an attempt to overturn this policy and to send her son to the nearest school which was P.S. 47. Her suit was denied and she appealed to the appellate division, which also found in favor of the existing school board policy (in February, 1899).¹⁷ Shortly thereafter, in March, 1900, the New York State legislature in Albany passed an emergency bill forbidding any public school in the state to exclude a child based on race or color, effectively abolishing the system of separate schools in Jamaica and elsewhere.¹⁸

Building Jamaica High School

After an initial delay caused by a lack of buyers interested in the purchase of school bonds, excavation work was finally begun in May 1895.¹⁹ In spite of additional delays caused by the financial problems of the contractor, Frank Mapes & Son, the building opened on schedule in January 1897.²⁰ The final cost was higher than anticipated,²¹ but when the building was finished the community was pleased with the result. After elaborate dedication ceremonies, the local newspaper declared "We now have a high school building which compares favorably in all its plans and appointments with any to be found elsewhere in the country..."²² For the first several years, the school continued to house grammar school classes and 80 high school students.²³ During the dedication ceremony in November 1896, the future of the school as a dedicated high school was already being discussed. By 1902, the school population had risen to 288 students and in 1909 the primary grades were moved to another location. After that, the school had 826 high school students taught by 36 teachers and the building continued to grow more crowded.²⁴ In 1904, enclosed stair halls with their own entrances were added to each narrow end of the structure, in order to adapt the building to new fire codes of the city. The scale, materials and ornament of each addition continued the same motifs of the original building.

Jamaica's population continued to soar and before long, annexes were needed to accommodate all the students in the area. In 1922, there were 1,775 students enrolled in this building. This population growth led to the need for a still larger building, and (the current) Jamaica High School (a designated New York City Landmark), not far away on Gothic Drive was constructed in 1927. When this new school opened, the old Jamaica High School served a number of different purposes for the Board of Education. It was the Jamaica Continuation School, the Jamaica Vocational High School and a vocational school for girls. Today it is an alternative high school, called the Jamaica Learning Center.

Architect²⁵

William Bunker Tubby (1858-1944) was chosen to design the new school in 1895 when the Jamaica School Board decided to build the facility. Tubby was born in Iowa and studied architecture at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn. He first worked in the office of Ebenezer L. Roberts and began his own firm in 1883. He was a prominent architect in New York, serving on the Architects' Advisory Commission for the Brooklyn Carnegie libraries and designing five of them, as well as the Renaissance Revival style library for Pratt Institute. He was also well-known for his residential designs, including city houses in Brooklyn and country estates on Long Island. Examples of his work include the grand Romanesque Revival style mansion he created in Clinton Hill for Charles Millard Pratt, the Queen Anne style row at 864-872 Carroll Street and

the Romanesque Revival style house at 234 Lincoln Place, all in Brooklyn. His Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture Meeting House on Prospect Park West (designed originally as a private residence) is a particularly fine exemplar of the neo-Jacobean style.²⁶ Being proficient in a variety of historical revival styles that were popular at the time, Tubby favored the Renaissance Revival style for institutional buildings. Tubby also designed numerous private homes, churches, bank buildings and libraries throughout the Northeast, including estates in New Canaan and Greenwich, Connecticut where he lived later in his life. While his work exhibited numerous stylistic variations, he was especially known for his Romanesque Revival and Dutch (Flemish) Revival style designs.

Design of Jamaica High School

During the late 19th century, the role of public education in the United States was being transformed into a more systematic, thorough effort. Citizens were beginning to realize the importance of higher education to create informed and active citizens and communities were beginning to enforce compulsory education laws. The buildings that housed the schools changed also, from simple, plain enclosures of space, to civic monuments. Residents and their leaders “wanted to express refinement, public spirit, and taste of that community.”²⁷ At the time of its construction, Jamaica High School was much bigger and its style was more elaborate than its predecessor on Herriman Avenue. Its construction was intended to accommodate many more students but also to express the optimism about the future felt by the residents of Jamaica. The big new school represented a large financial commitment on the part of local residents to pay for and support the new structure, but they realized that Jamaica was poised to undergo huge changes. The residents of Queens had expressed their interest in joining with the other metropolitan areas into a consolidated city and they expected that Jamaica would make large gains of population and trade in the newly expanded city. They also realized that a large, elaborate school building would show they valued the education of their young people and attract even more residents who wanted to live in such a community.²⁸

The choice of William B. Tubby as architect for the new school showed that they were interested in establishing the image of their community as one of substance. Tubby was an important and recognized architect who was well known in prominent circles in New York and Brooklyn. He commonly used popular historical revival styles of the period, styles that carried suggestions of past periods to represent ideas and values that were important to clients. One of the styles often seen in his institutional designs was the Dutch Revival style. This style was intended to remind the viewer of the earliest Dutch settlers in the region. At a time of major cultural changes, people often looked back to their past for assurance. Here Tubby suggests the old style but it is expressed in a stylized manner to show that it was produced in the current era. The references to the Dutch Revival style on this building are seen particularly in the large, stepped gable near the western side of the front façade, a feature echoed at the same place on the rear facade. This element is made more unusual by the contrasting, inset brick arches that surmount several narrow, stepped windows. To make this building even more interesting and evocative of the past, Tubby added three unusually-shaped dormer windows, each of which is capped by a pointed roof, suggestive of a pointed witch’s hat. This motif was echoed in the original bell tower at the center of the ridge line of the roof.²⁹ Tubby’s design resulted in a highly original, distinctive building that continues to remind citizens of the important role of education in the history of this country.

Description

The school building is three stories high with a raised basement, arranged in a rectangular plan with a hipped roof. The broad side faces Hillside Avenue and it is slightly raised and set back from the street. A central walkway with stair provides access from the street and continues around the building. A paved parking lot with a non-historic utility building is in the rear. A non-historic metal fence surrounds the entire property. Full-height, projecting stair halls were added on both ends in 1904. There is a central main entrance and two auxiliary entrances on each end facade. A one-story extension was added near the center of the rear facade.

Historic: Basement faced in stone, painted; open areaway shielded by iron fence; plain, rectangular window openings; ground story faced in banded red brick; paired, rectangular windows with brick lintels and stone sills; segmentally-arched main entrance with divided-light transom, flanked by narrow windows; plain painted stone cornice over three central bays of first story; second and third stories faced in tan brick with red brick lintels and keystones; most bays have window groups of three; center window of second story, central bay topped by large contrasting brick inset arch; large front-facing stepped gable near western side of facade holds four narrow, stepped windows framed in red brick and topped by inset red brick arch; denticulated cornice at top of building; three dormers in hipped roof near eastern side of facade, each with window and capped by “witch’s hat” roof; full-height stair hall extends from each narrow end, with same facade treatment; eastern stair hall has copper cornice and brick cornice on western side; each addition has two open entranceways with inset stairways, with round window above opening; single bay flanking the stair halls, on side facades of building; rear of building visible from parking lot; similar treatment to front, except no main entrance, addition of open stairs with grilles near center, and enclosed brick chimney stack.

Alterations: All windows replaced; central cupola on roof removed; central, one-story addition on rear facade with banded brick facade, small windows set on stone sill; elaborate broken pediment over main entrance removed; windows on second story over main entrance reconfigured.

Report researched and written by
Virginia Kurshan
Research Department

NOTES

¹ Information in this section was compiled from Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *Former J. Kurtz & Sons Store Building Designation Report (LP-1132)* (New York: City of New York, 1981), prepared by Virginia Kurshan, 1; LPC, *Jamaica High School Designation Report (LP-2316)* (New York: City of New York, 2009), report prepared by Virginia Kurshan; LPC, *Jamaica Chamber of Commerce Building Designation Report (LP-2386)* (New York: City of New York, 2010), report prepared by Marianne Percival; E. Belcher Hyde, *Atlas of the Borough of Queens* (Brooklyn: E. Belcher Hyde, 1901), vol. 1, pl. 10; Jon A. Peterson, ed., "A Research Guide to the History of Queens Borough and Its Neighborhoods" (typescript, Queens College Department of History, 1983); Frank Bergen Kelley, *Excursion Planned for the City History Club: Historic Queens* (New York: City History Club of New York, 1908), 5-6, 35; H. W. Munsell, *The History of Queens County, New York* (New York: H. W. Munsell & Co, 1882), 220-221; *Jamaica, Hempstead, Richmond Hill, Morris Park, and Woodhaven: Their Representative Men and Points of Interest* (New York: Mercantile Illustration Co., 1894), 17-21; Vincent F. Seyfried, *Jamaica Trolleys* (Long Island Trolley Histories, 1953), vol. 4, 1-5; and Theodore H. M. Prudon, ed., "Jamaica, Queens County, New York: Aspects of Its History" (typescript, Columbia University, Graduate Program for Restoration and Preservation of Historic Architecture, June 1975).

² *Jamaica, Hempstead, Richmond Hill, Morris Park, and Woodhaven*, 18.

³ Much of the information on the early years of higher education in New York comes from, Gary Hermalyn, *Morris High School and the Creation of the New York City Public High School System* (The Bronx, NY: The Bronx Historical Society, 1995).

⁴ Before this time, education was either provided by the church or the home.

⁵ Hermalyn, 8.

⁶ As reported in "Jamica Needed Men," in the *Long Island Daily Press*, Nov. 18, 1934.

⁷ "Old Jamaica School Strictly for Business," *Long Island Press*, Feb. 12, 1959.

⁸ "Community Chatter," unidentified clipping in files of Queens Archives, Jan. 16, 1971. Jamaica and Flushing were the only communities in Queens County to have such a school.

⁹ "Jamaica High School," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July, 1909.

¹⁰ "Jamaica High School," *Jamaica Jinjur*, July, 1909.

¹¹ Minutes of the Board of Education, Town of Jamaica, April, 1896-1898, (August 1, 1895).

¹² Newspaper articles continuously referred to it as Jamaica High School.

¹³ "Cisco and White Arrested Again," *Long Island Farmer*, Apr. 24, 1896, 1.

¹⁴ "Order from Judge Barnard on the Colored School Question," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Mar. 28, 1896, 5.

¹⁵ "Color Line in Jamaica Schools," *New York Times*, Apr. 5, 1896, 9.

¹⁶ "Cisco Acquitted by a Jury," *Long Island Farmer*, May 8, 1896, 8.

¹⁷ Cisco v. School Bd. of the Bor. Of Queens, 44 A.D. 469, 61 N.Y.S. 330 (2nd Dept 1899); aff'd, 161 NY 598, 56 NE 81 (1900).

¹⁸ *Long Island Farmer*, Mar. 30, 1899; "No School Exclusion for Negro Children," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Mar. 30, 1900, 3.

¹⁹ "Work on Jamaica High School," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 26, 1895, 8.

²⁰ "Schoolhouse Contractors Assign," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Feb. 14, 1896 and "Long Island," *New York Times*, Apr. 6, 1896, 8.

²¹ "The Unfinished School," *Long Island Farmer*, May 15, 1896, 3 discusses the need to raise extra funds to complete the building.

²² An editorial in the *Long Island Farmer*, Nov. 27, 1896, just after the official opening ceremonies.

²³ “Construction of Jamaica High School Fitting Climax to Career of Principal,” *Long Island Daily Press*, Mar. 24, 1933.

²⁴ *Jinur*, July, 1909.

²⁵ Information in this section comes from: “Tubby, William Bunker,” in *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* 33 (New York: James T. White Co., 1909) , 567; “W. B. Tubby, Architect Here for 61 Years,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1944, 19; LPC, *Dekalb Library Designation Report (LP-2054)* (New York: City of New York, 2004), report written by Virginia Kurshan; Andrew Dolkart, “William B. Tubby, 1858-1944,” in Robert B. MacKay, Anthony Baker & Carol A. Trynor, eds. *Long Island Country Houses and their Architects, 1860-1940* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), 413-15.

²⁶ Many of Tubby’s buildings are New York City Landmarks. The Ethical Culture Society Building is located within the Park Slope Historic District. The rowhouses on Carroll Street are located within the Clinton Hill Historic District and the Pratt house is an individually-designated New York City Landmark.

²⁷ Dale Allen Gyure, *The Chicago Schoolhouse: High School Architecture and Educational Reform 1856-2006* (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2011), XVI, XVII, 27-28.

²⁸ “Jamaica’s High School,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 28, 1896, 5.

²⁹ This element has been removed.

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 the Jamaica High School (now Jamaica Learning Center) has a special character and a 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 the Jamaica High School (now Jamaica Learning Center) was constructed in 1895-96 for the Town of Jamaica before Consolidation of Greater New York; that the Town of Jamaica hired prominent Brooklyn architect William B. Tubby to design a building that would show their optimism for the future growth of their community; that Tubby was known for his historical revival style designs for numerous institutional and residential buildings in New York and throughout the Northeast; that Tubby designed this building in the Dutch Revival style, referencing the earliest European settlers in the area and in a style that he used frequently on other buildings; that this school originally housed both primary and high school grades but was dedicated solely to high school use by 1909; that the Town of Jamaica (later Borough of Queens) began a tremendous population growth in the late 19th century, which continued and expanded in the early 20th century so that this building quickly became overcrowded; that this high school was replaced in 1927 by the much larger, neo-Classical style Jamaica High School on Gothic Drive (now a designated New York City Landmark) and this school then became a vocational high school; that the building has continued to be used by the Board of Education since its earliest days; that the brick-faced, Dutch Revival style building on Hillside Avenue, with its unusual contrasting brickwork, stepped gable with stepped and arched windows, and “witch’s hat” dormers provides a reminder of this period of growth and prosperity when the Town of Jamaica was soon to become part of the new Borough of Queens.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 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 the Jamaica High School (now Jamaica Learning Center) 162-02 Hillside Avenue (aka 88-20 163rd Street), Queens and designates as its Landmark Site Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 9768, lot 22.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

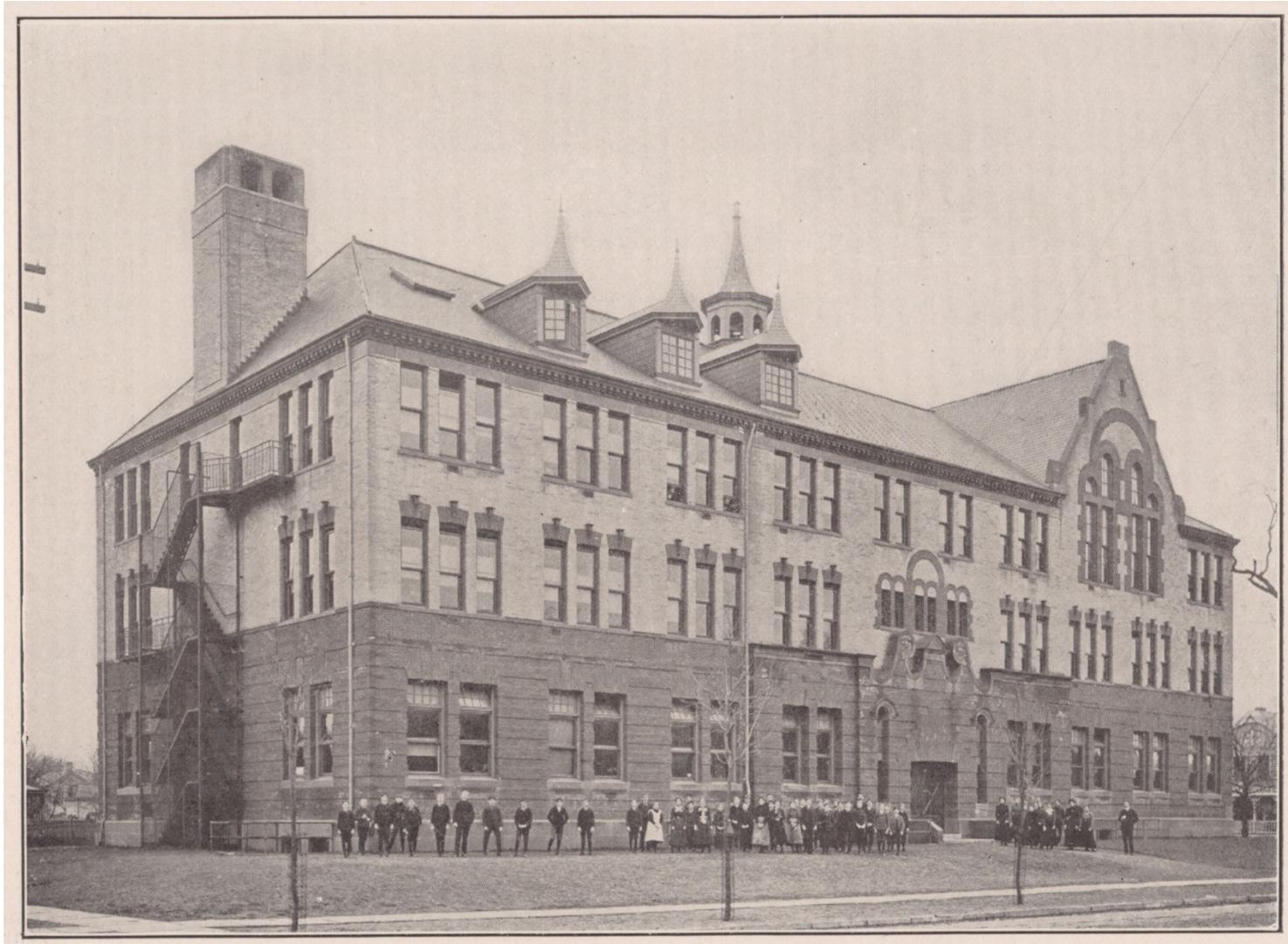
Frederick Bland, Michael Devonshire, Michael Goldblum, Christopher Moore,
Margery Perlmutter, Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



JAMAICA HIGH SCHOOL (NOW JAMAICA LEARNING CENTER)
162-02 Hillside Avenue (aka 88-20 163rd Street), Queens
Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 9768, Lot 22
Photo: Virginia Kurshan, 2013



Jamaica High School (now Jamaica Learning Center)
Fire stairs on each end of building
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2013



Photograph before 1904, courtesy of New York City Municipal Archives



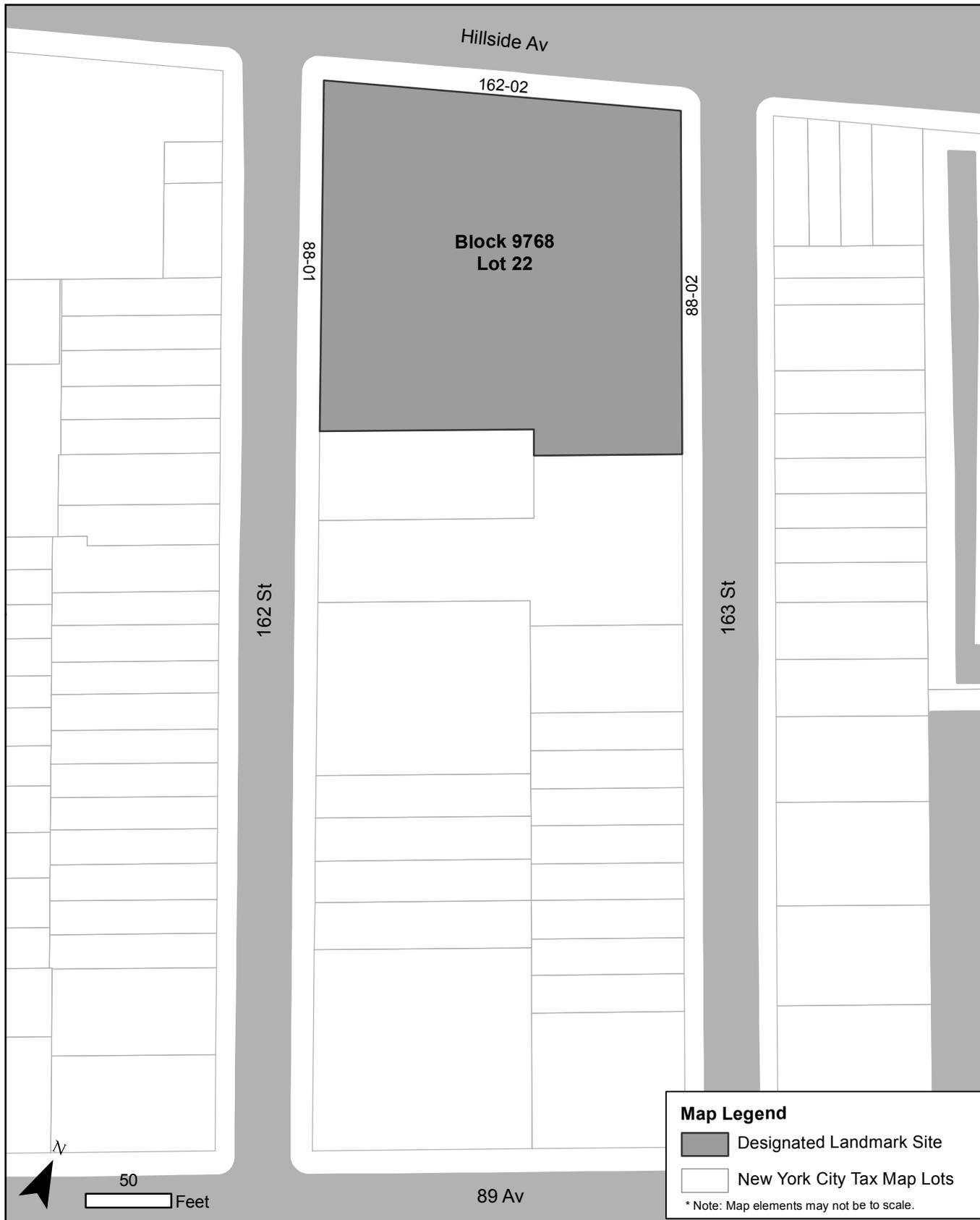
Jamaica High School (now Jamaica Learning Center)
Views of rear of building
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2013





Jamaica High School (now Jamaica Learning Center)
Views of front of building
Photos: Virginia Kurshan, 2013





JAMAICA HIGH SCHOOL (NOW JAMAICA LEARNING CENTER) (LP-2538), 162-02 Hillside Avenue (aka 88-01 162nd Street, 88-02 163rd Street). Landmark Site: Borough of Queens, Tax Map Block 9768, Lot 22

Designated: June 25, 2013