

Benjamin Franklin High School

(now Manhattan Center for
Science and Mathematics)



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LOCATION

Borough of Manhattan
260 Pleasant Avenue (aka 260-300 Pleasant
Avenue, 500-528 East 116th Street)

LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

SIGNIFICANCE

A 1942 Georgian Revival school with Neoclassical elements, built to house an experimental community-centered high school started by the pioneering educator and sociologist Leonard Covello, that is representative of the social and political engagement of East Harlem in the 20th century.



Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics, 2018, LPC (above)



Benjamin Franklin High School, 1941, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Leonard Covello Collection photographs (left)

**Benjamin Franklin High School
(now Manhattan Center for Science
and Mathematics)**

260 Pleasant Avenue, Manhattan

received written statements of support from the office of Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, Lott Community Development Corporation, Landmark East Harlem, and two East Harlem residents.

**Designation List 505
LP-2596**

Built: 1940-1942

Architect: Eric Kebbon

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1713, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the portion of the lot bounded by a line beginning at the northeast corner of the northern lot line at East 116th Street and FDR Drive, continuing westerly along the northern lot line to the western lot line, continuing southerly along the western lot line to a point extending from the fence line along Thomas Jefferson Park, continuing easterly along the fence line to the eastern lot line, thence continuing northerly along the eastern lot line to the point of beginning.

On February 13, 2018, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of Benjamin Franklin High School as a New York City Landmark (Public Hearing Item No. 3). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Six people spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of CIVITAS, the Vito Marcantonio Forum, the New York City Landmarks Conservancy, Historic Districts Council, FRIENDS of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, and Landmark East Harlem and East Harlem Preservation. No one spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission also

Summary

Benjamin Franklin High School

Located on the eastern edge of East Harlem along the Harlem River, Benjamin Franklin High School represents the rich history of the social and political engagement of East Harlem in the mid-20th-century. Established as East Harlem's first high school—not a trade school or vocational school—under the leadership of the school leader, activist, urban sociologist, and East Harlem resident Leonard Covello, Benjamin Franklin High School was intended to be a citizen-centered community school that actively engaged its students and the broader community in social and political reform, and provided the educational and recreational activities that are now expected in public education. The grand two-block long brick and limestone Georgian Revival building with Neoclassical elements, is a highly visible feature of the neighborhood, and was meant to reflect a commitment to broad community service through education. It was designed by Eric Kebbon, head architect of school construction for the New York City Board of Education, and completed in 1942. The school's Georgian Revival design can be seen in its symmetrical, axial arrangement, its contrasting brick and limestone cladding, and in its use of simplified classical details. The building's monumental features include Neoclassical elements such as a dominant full-height entrance porch, which was a popular feature of Neoclassical design, particularly for civic buildings, and the inclusion of a cupola that is inspired by the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates in Athens, Greece. In New York City, a number of large high schools were constructed in the Georgian Revival style due to its strong connotations

with democratic ideals and the contemporary American identity.

Envisioned in the 1930s as a means to improve the opportunities of the Italian immigrant community through bilingual education and community engagement, Benjamin Franklin High School opened as the neighborhood began to experience significant demographic changes. The school not only became an important space to ease the increasingly tense race relations facing the community, but it also adapted its curriculum to meet the needs of Puerto Rican migrants by providing orientations in Spanish, forming a Puerto Rican cultural club, and actively engaging the new families of East Harlem. Throughout the brief life of Benjamin Franklin High School as a community-centered school, Covello and other progressive educators sought to strengthen and support their community and improve the social and economic conditions of the neighborhood. Despite the ultimate abandonment of the Benjamin Franklin High School “experiment,” the rich history of the school, from its conception to its reorganization as a standard comprehensive New York City public high school, is a revealing depiction of East Harlem during a period of significant change.

The building now houses the top-ranked Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics, and the Isaac Newton Middle School for Math and Science. Positioned between the Harlem River, Thomas Jefferson Park, and the dense neighborhood of Pleasant Village, Benjamin Franklin High School is a substantial presence in East Harlem and continues to play an important civic role in its community and within the City.

Building Description

Benjamin Franklin High School

Benjamin Franklin High School was constructed in the Georgian Revival style with Neoclassical elements from 1940 to 1942. The school is prominently sited on an irregular lot filling two city blocks, with FDR Drive and the Harlem River to the east, East 116th Street to the north, Pleasant Avenue to the west, and Thomas Jefferson Park directly to the south. The building is oriented parallel to Pleasant Avenue, with its main entrance centrally located on its west facade on axis with East 115th Street. The rear, western portion of the lot contains a parking lot and school yard with a lawn stretching to the property line along FDR Drive. The school grounds are bounded by a historic low, iron fence on the east, north, and west sides with periodic openings and gates for access. On the south side, the school grounds are separated from land used by Thomas Jefferson Park with a low brick and stone wall with a chain-link fence.

The school is a symmetrically designed, reflected E-plan, primarily three stories in height, with a four-story central section. This symmetrical arrangement creates a pattern of B, C, A, C, B across both west and east facades, where: A = central entrance porch, B = secondary entrance and pavilion, C = wing.

The steel-frame building is clad in red brick in Flemish bond with limestone trim and periodic decorative soldiered-header brick panels. The basement story is clad in limestone ashlar above grade and beige brick below-grade and is fronted by an open areaway on the north and west sides where it is partially below grade. The basement is above

grade on the east and south facades.

The primary entrances—the main entrance from Pleasant Avenue on the west facade, and the rear entrance on the east facade—feature a full-height, pedimented prostyle porch on the front (west) facade and a full-height pedimented porch in antis on the east facade.

Secondary entrances feature paired metal doors with a bronze screen over a fixed glass transom set within a simplified classical enframing with undecorated pilasters, an undecorated frieze, and a low pediment. This entrance bay contains a full-height section of paired six-over-six double hung sash and six-panel fixed windows, under a multi-paned semi-circular window, all set within a limestone enframing. These secondary entrances are centered in the single bay of both north and south pavilions along east and west facades; and in both north and south facades where they are framed by an additional one bay at each side, with all three bays capped by a pediment with a porthole window.

The wings and pavilions feature flat roofs, with additional one-story sections with hipped roofs where the wings and pavilions intersect. The central section has a hipped, standing-seam metal roof topped by a cupola on a square brick base with a limestone balustrade. The cupola, which is reminiscent of the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates, has Tuscan columns and a Greek Corinthian entablature, a denticulated cornice, and running anthemion antefixes.

While the primary facade along Pleasant Avenue and the rear (eastern) pedimented porch also feature four-over-four double-hung sash windows, the majority of the building's windows are six-over-six double-hung sash, with occasional special window types (including porthole and round-arch, multi-pane fixed-sash). Existing windows are largely, if not all, replacements, and while

substitutions of different window types have been made in some locations, the use of multi-pane double-hung windows is in keeping with the original window types and the historical appearance of the building.¹ Along the cornice line, the wings feature openwork panels set into a low brick parapet, while the pavilions have a solid brick parapet.

Main Facade (West, facing Pleasant Avenue) Historic

The projecting, full-height entry portico features six Tuscan columns with acanthus leaves and anthemion-ornamented capitals under a pediment featuring a medallion with a carved portrait of Benjamin Franklin. The main entrance is reached by a flight of granite steps with metal handrails and a granite bench is positioned at the left of the stairs behind the gate. Within the main entrance porch, three paired double doors are set under fixed transoms and three marble panels with metal seals in low relief sit under three sets of paired double-hung four-over-four sash windows. The seals represent New York City, the New York City Board of Education, and New York State, from left to right. This two-story entrance arrangement is set within a limestone post-and-lintel enframing. Secondary entrances at both north and south pavilions are one bay and reached by low stone steps. A two-story section projects from the main three-story wing along the main facade to house the school's auditorium (north wing) and gym (south wing). Fenestration consists of six bays with double-height windows in limestone surrounds, over six bays of paired basement windows. On the south wing, window sash are shorter to allow for the addition of a limestone panel at the bottom of each window bay, adding additional wall height for the gym within. A submerged concrete areaway runs along the north and south wings, with steps and access doors to basement at north and south ends of each wing.

Alterations

Addition of an ADA elevator at right of entrance portico; sign board with "Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics" covering frieze panel incised with "Benjamin Franklin High School"; window configurations changed in double-height sections (gym and auditorium windows), original nine-over-nine windows replaced with six-over-six; some four-over-four windows in entrance porch replaced with six-over-six; non-historic metal double-leaf entrance doors are paneled to resemble original doors; original paired four-paneled fixed transoms covered with bronze grilles (designed to match original grilles over transoms of secondary entrances); ramp for egress added to auditorium exit at north end of north wing; original metal lanterns removed from positions flanking secondary entrances; semi-circular windows in secondary entrances have been replaced with simulated divided-light muntins instead of original true divided lights; conduit runs along facade to lamp over access door and over areaways; cameras on facade; various pipes and conduit at left of entrance portico; metal ventilation pipes at north corner of south pavilion; painted metal railings installed along front roofline of wings; projecting lamps to light the facade installed along roofline; fire gong and alarm light on facade near entrance; limestone elements on first story of porch painted

East Facade (facing FDR Drive)

Historic

The main entrance of the east facade is a simplified version of the west facade, illustrating the hierarchy between the primary front facade and the rear facade. Instead of a prostyle porch, the east facade features a shallower porch in antis. The entrance retains the two-story limestone post-and-lintel enframing of the primary facade but features only one set of double doors (now used as an emergency exit), and

has inset limestone panels instead of decorative metal and marble panels. Granite benches sit on both sides of the entrance. Decorative copper grilles sit between the pilasters. This entrance is reached by two curved stone staircases with metal railings. The landing is placed over an arched window at the basement level. The eight bays of each wing are symmetrical and feature paired six-over-six double hung sash for the central six bays, and a single eight-over-eight double-hung sash in each outer bay. These windows are separated by stamped metal spandrel panels between the first and second stories and third-story windows sit over limestone sills on a limestone band course. Flared flat arch lintels in brick sit over second- and third-story windows. This fenestration pattern continues on the return facades of the north and south pavilions, which are only six bays deep and omit the single bays included on the wings. Secondary entrances at both north and south pavilions are one bay and reached by stone steps. On the east facade the basement projects along both wings with a terrace with original metal railings and limestone piers. Basement windows are 3-over-3 double-hung sash. Exits from the basement are located at the outer end of the north and south wings and are reached by concrete paths, steps, and a submerged landing with a metal railing. These basement entrances consist of non-historic double-doors, under paired four-paneled fixed windows. The roof of the historic greenhouse located on the roof of the south pavilion is just visible from FDR Drive.

Alterations

Non-historic double doors at entrance porch (now used as an emergency exit only); sign board with “Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics” covering frieze panel incised with “Benjamin Franklin High School”; window configurations changed in double-height sections (library windows), most original six-over-six windows replaced with narrower four-over-four double-hung sash, some

fixed four-panel windows have been replaced with 6-panel windows; security grilles added over windows of entrance porch, basement, and first-floor windows, as well as over the two-story window arrangement along the north and south sides of the projecting center pavilion; replacement arched basement window under porch does not maintain original configuration; original decorative metal grille over arched basement window has been removed and replaced with a utilitarian metal grille; handrails along stairs and porch are not original but in historic style; metal lanterns removed from under fixed bronze grilles over stairs; first story of porch painted; limestone piers along terrace have been reinforced with metal straps and lamps installed on piers to light rear facade; semi-circular window in secondary entrances have been replaced with simulated divided-light muntins instead of original true divided lights; original metal lanterns removed from positions flanking secondary entrances; projecting lamps to light the facade installed along roofline; conduit runs along facade to lamps over stairs and entrance; cameras installed on facade

North Facade (facing East 116th Street)

Historic

The north facade is a 15-bay wide pavilion with a central secondary entrance under a pediment with a limestone cornice, brick tympanum, and a porthole window contained within the projecting three bays. The six bays to the east and west of this central section are symmetrical and feature paired six-over-six double-hung sash separated by stamped metal spandrel panels between the first and second stories and third-story windows sit over limestone sills on a limestone band course. Flared flat arch lintels in brick sit over second- and third-story windows.

Alterations

Full-height window grilles over basement and first story windows; original metal lanterns removed from

secondary entrances; paired doors not historic; semi-circular window over secondary entrance has been replaced with simulated divided-light muntins instead of original true divided lights; projecting lamps to light the facade installed along roofline; non-historic lamps around entrance; conduit runs along facade to lamps; cameras installed on facade; grilles and utility hatches in cement pad in yard at right of entrance; wiring and pipes at west corner

South Facade (facing Jefferson Park)

Historic

The south facade, while nearly identical to the north facade in its arrangement, features an above-ground basement due to the change in topography along Thomas Jefferson Park. The south facade is a 15-bay wide pavilion with a secondary entrance under a pediment with a limestone cornice, brick tympanum, and a porthole window contained within the projecting center three bays. The six bays to the east and west of this central section are symmetrical and feature paired six-over-six double-hung sash separated by stamped metal spandrel panels between the first and second stories and third-story windows sit over limestone sills on a limestone band course. Flared flat arch lintels in brick sit over second- and third-story windows.

Alterations

Full-height window grilles over basement and first story windows; bronze grilles installed over fixed-glass transoms; non-historic paired replacement doors; original metal lanterns flanking secondary entrance removed; semi-circular window over secondary entrance has been replaced with simulated divided-light muntins instead of original true divided lights; upper sash of easternmost paired basement windows have been replaced with louvers; projecting lamps to light the facade installed along roofline; non-historic lamps around entrance; conduit runs along facade to lamps and security cameras

Site

School grounds are bounded by a historic low iron fence along the west, north, and east property lines with gates for access. On the north and west sides, lawns run from the fence line to an areaway where not paved for maintenance and service access. Occasional mature trees are located throughout the property. At the rear (east), concrete paths run through the lawn between the building and a paved semicircular yard arranged around a flagpole. This yard is bounded by a low brick wall with a stone top and a metal railing. Original metal street lamps line the paved yard and the adjacent non-historic parking lot. At the northeast corner of the lot (along East 116th Street and FDR Drive), the property is accessed by a gate to the street at East 116th Street. The lawn in this location extends from the paved yard and runs downhill to the fence and sidewalk along FDR Drive. A paved pedestrian path wraps around the southeast corner of the building and along the southern facade, and provides access to FDR Drive, Jefferson Park, and Pleasant Avenue. On the south side the school grounds abut land used by Thomas Jefferson Park and stairs provide direct access to the park and FDR Drive. Historic metal fences line these steps, while mature trees and chain-link fencing line a low brick and stone wall along the landmark site's southern border.

Alterations

Current parking area and north east corner (FDR Drive and East 116th Street) replaced oval lawn and its original benches removed; original benches removed from both sides of stairs to rear entrance; original semicircular yard entirely paved and its original benches along fence line removed; wrought-iron newel posts along fence originally supported lamps near entryways, all removed; utility access hatches set in concrete run through the grass near the eastern property line

Site History

Benjamin Franklin High School

Brief History of East Harlem²

The extension of the New York & Harlem Railroad along Fourth Avenue (now Park Avenue) to East Harlem in 1837 brought convenient public transportation to what had remained a rural outpost of large estates and farms since the 17th century.³ These transportation improvements brought Irish immigrants, who helped to build the railroad, and German immigrants, who were spreading northwards from Yorkville through the end of the century.⁴

By the 1870s, immigrants from Southern Italy were arriving in New York City en masse, and while Northern Italians generally settled in Lower Manhattan, a large portion of the Southern Italian population moved into East Harlem.⁵ The establishment of heavy industries along the East and Harlem Rivers created a need for labor and East Harlem quickly developed into a tenement neighborhood that became home to one of the largest concentrations of Italian immigrants in New York City and the second largest Jewish population in Manhattan (after the Lower East Side). By the end of the 1880s, with the added transportation provided by elevated rail lines along Second and Third avenues helping to drive the settlement of the neighborhood. A “Little Italy” stretched from Third Avenue to the river, the entire length of East Harlem, from East 96th Street to East 130th Street; while East Harlem west of Third Avenue was home to a substantial Eastern-European Jewish population.

By 1910, over 59,000 Italians lived in this 100-block area east of Third Avenue, nearly six times the number of Italians in lower Manhattan.⁶

Tightening immigration regulations in the 1920s caused a decline in the number of Italians and Eastern-Europeans immigrating, while already established families often chose to relocate to “better” neighborhoods or the outer boroughs as they became financially able. The Jewish population was the first to leave—relocating to the Upper West Side, Washington Heights, Brooklyn, or the Bronx—leaving only 5,000 in East Harlem by 1920.⁷ Italians remained the dominant ethnic group in East Harlem through the 1930s, but as early as the 1920s “Nostra Harlem” began to experience significant demographic change, transitioning into “El Barrio.”

The passage of the Jones Act in 1917, which recognized the rights of Puerto Ricans as American citizens, loosened restrictions on migration from Puerto Rico. After World War II, the United States took an active role in industrializing Puerto Rico through Operation Bootstrap, which disrupted the contemporary Puerto Rican economy, intensifying job scarcity and over-population.⁸ The increasing availability of cheap airfare facilitated migration through the establishment of relatively inexpensive travel between the Puerto Rican capital of San Juan and the continental United States.⁹ From 1917 to the 1940s, East Harlem became the heart of the continental Puerto Rican community.¹⁰ New York City saw an increase from 61,000 Puerto Ricans in 1940, to over 245,000 in 1950.¹¹ Within East Harlem, this increase caused the Puerto Rican population to account for 33.42% of the neighborhood by 1950, and 42.6% by 1957.¹²

Education and Civic Reform – the American Settlement Movement and Changing Educational Standards

Benjamin Franklin High School was created as an experimental approach to education in the 20th century New York City public school system. While most city schools focused on rote learning and a

strict academic program, Benjamin Franklin High School was designed to draw from the long relationship between education, social activism, and service to immigrant communities in the United States, which had been popularized by the Settlement Movement of the 1880s.

Organizations like Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago, Illinois were inspired by British models, like Toynbee Hall, which offered educational opportunities to the working poor in London's East End. However, in the United States, the Settlement Movement was more widespread than its English counterpart and expanded its mission beyond educational opportunities, directly developing a social activist agenda. Hull House activists undertook applied research to support reforming child labor laws, improving sweatshop conditions, and passing compulsory education laws. The educational reformer and psychologist John Dewey was a friend and contemporary of Jane Addams, and the activities of Hull House influenced his writings on the role of social reform in the sphere of education. Dewey's writing was ubiquitous in contemporary educational pedagogy and directed many discussions around the role of public education in shaping both the American citizen and the larger democratic system.

From the turn of the 20th century, educational theorists began to promote the idea of the school as an important "social center" which offered recreational opportunities and facilitated communication within the community.¹³ In many cases, this program remained under the purview of the informed educator and activist as a client-focused service. This top-down approach was later criticized as undemocratic, particularly as it negated many of its own arguments around the value of instilling democratic principles in schools to create the "good citizen." The outbreak of World War I only weakened the progressive educational movement as

patriotism – in the form of mobilization and support from the home front – placed progressive politics on hold. Throughout the 1920s, "social center" schools largely abandoned the pursuit of progressive social reform and focused more on providing recreational opportunities to the public, joining in the popular playground and park reform movements of the 1930s.¹⁴

A return to progressive education that stressed schools as centers of community, with unique opportunities for stabilizing democracy and creating social reform, was briefly revived in the 1930s and 1940s, but remained a minor movement. Within the academic sphere of educational policy in the 1930s, a very select minority raised issues of elitism in education and returned to earlier discussions about the role of schools in creating fundamental social change; however, these ideas were generally labeled radical and remained on the fringes of educational policy discussions until the 1960s.¹⁵ Within this climate of generally conservative educational policy, the creation and survival of a few "community schools" was all the more exceptional.¹⁶

What set apart the "community schools" of the interwar era from the earlier settlement houses and "social centers," was their approach to curriculum development and leadership. In community schools, the needs of the community drove the creation of a curriculum that would allow students to actively lead projects in their neighborhoods. This approach required changes not only to the curriculum and the resources available to the school, but also inverted the traditional educational hierarchy. Such an alternative approach to education was considered a risk, or "experiment," and the creation of Benjamin Franklin High School in 1934 was an unusual undertaking for the New York City Board of Education. It was through the leadership of Leonard Covello, both as a community

organizer and an educator, that the school was able to become a reality.

Leonard Covello (1887-1982)

Leonard Covello arrived in East Harlem with his mother and two brothers in 1896, joining his father who had come to the United States in 1890 to work, save money, and then send for his family. This arrangement was a typical immigrant experience, and when the Coviello family (Leonard changed the spelling to Americanize it in his youth) arrived in New York from Avigliano, Italy, they found themselves space in a tenement on East 112th Street where other Avigliano families, who spoke the Avigliano dialect of Italian, already lived.¹⁷

While Covello had attended school briefly in Italy, his experiences in East Harlem schools and settlement houses defined many of his opinions about education. The time he spent at the Home Garden Association, a Protestant settlement house, was particularly significant in defining his path to higher education, and instilled in him the belief that education and service to the community were intimately linked.

At Morris High School in the Bronx (the closest high school for East Harlem boys), Covello distinguished himself in his studies and was awarded a Pulitzer Scholarship that included free tuition at Columbia College. However, high school was not easy for Covello, who was painfully aware of the differences between his Italian-American friends and his American classmates. When he took a year off to help his family meet the added expenses of his mother's failing health, he found the faculty and administration of Morris High School to be largely indifferent. Later in life when Covello reflected on this time, it was often in the context of changing the school environment to eliminate this impersonal quality. In his autobiography, *The Heart is the Teacher*, he described his experience:

What stands foremost in my mind concerning this decision was the indifference and lack of guidance at the high school itself. I simply turned in my books at the school office and went away. That's all there was to it. No one spoke to me. No one asked me why I was leaving or discussed my problems with me.¹⁸

At Columbia, Covello found little connection between the realities of daily life in East Harlem and Columbia's academic coursework, despite their geographic proximity. As a man set on education as a means to allow him to serve and better his own community, the disarticulation between academic knowledge and a genuine social purpose was ultimately a disappointment.

While at college, Covello taught English to East Harlem residents at the Aguilar Library (a NYC designated landmark) and the East Harlem YMCA on East 116th Street. It was from these experiences, and the relationships that he developed within the community, that Covello began to form his own perceptions about the value of heritage and understanding one's own cultural context.¹⁹

Covello's first teaching position was at DeWitt Clinton High School in Hell's Kitchen at West 59th Street and Tenth Avenue.²⁰ At DeWitt Clinton, Covello embarked on a mission to both elevate the status of the Italian language and culture—helping Italian immigrant students to have pride in their native culture—and introduce a public service component to the curriculum that stressed service to both one's school and one's community. Covello pushed for the introduction of Italian as a language taught in the New York City school system, organized Italian families and leaders, lobbied

politicians with the help of the Italy America Society, and used Italy's status as an ally of the United States in World War I to garner support.²¹ In 1920, Covello taught the first Italian class in New York, which according to historians may have been the first Italian language class taught in an American high school.²² In addition to bringing the Italian language into parity with other "approved" languages in the New York City school system, Covello started a series of Italian clubs (Il Circolo Italiano) that prioritized public service but also engaged the Italian community through cultural events. Student members staged Italian plays in Italian, and danced to Tarantella; students' families—often recent immigrants with limited English skills—were invited to attend and participate. In addition, club members provided tutoring to younger students, while also engaging with citizen training and English-language lessons run out of institutions in areas with high concentrations of Italian immigrants.

High engagement between students and their own community and culture eased the pressure between family life that stressed the *via vecchia* or "Old Way" of Italy, with the new ways of American education and society.²³ This tension was often the strongest factor in a student's decision to drop out of school, as parents felt that their children were being lost to the strongly Americanizing education system.

Covello's driving goal through both his early educational approach, and his later focus on community-centered education, was to inform and create the next generation of leaders who, beyond using their education to better their own prospects, would be deeply committed to social justice and reform within their communities. Vito Marcantonio, who graduated from DeWitt Clinton in 1920 and was elected the Congressional representative for East Harlem seven times between 1934 and his death in 1954, became the archetype of Covello's mission, demonstrating how strong leaders from within the

community could remain devoted to the future success and empowerment of East Harlem.²⁴

Marcantonio was integral in giving East Harlem a voice in politics from the 1930s to his death in the early 1950s, and he embodied the hopes that Covello had in creating a talented cadre of young people who would retain a deep commitment to serving their community, while strategically positioning themselves to make change and inspire the community that they served.²⁵ While Marcantonio is likely the most successful and recognizable of Covello's mentees, many graduates from Covello's time at DeWitt Clinton and later at Benjamin Franklin High School remained deeply committed to the community and spoke of "Pop" Covello's role in inspiring them to dedicate themselves to public service. As one former student reminisced, "He filled a hero void for most of us, not a cowboy hero, not a blood and thunder hero, but a true hero. His dedication could show in his own quiet way ... he was a real big brother and a real father."²⁶

Covello's lasting legacy derives from how his own immigrant experience informed his creation of a more welcoming, understanding, and supportive atmosphere for immigrant children. His early activities focused on the issues that faced Italian immigrants, but as East Harlem became increasingly Puerto Rican, Covello translated much of his educational approach to be more broadly applicable, promoting a truly multicultural understanding of public education. Covello was a pioneer in education policy, in bilingual and bicultural education, and in ethnic studies and sociology. Today, many of the approaches that Covello introduced to educational administration in East Harlem's first high school are considered characteristics of a good school or a caring teacher.

Establishing East Harlem's First High School

Prior to the creation of Benjamin Franklin High

School, there was no high school on the east side of Manhattan above 14th Street or south of 166th Street in the Bronx. Most East Harlem boys were enrolled at DeWitt Clinton which had relocated from Hell's Kitchen to the North Bronx in 1929, and struggled to meet the needs of the 9,329 boys enrolled by 1931.²⁷

In order to establish Benjamin Franklin High School, Covello and other East Harlem community members initiated a grassroots campaign, citing overcrowding, extreme distance to even the nearest schools, and the high population of school-age boys in East Harlem (Benjamin Franklin High School would remain a boys' school until 1960).²⁸ Many of these issues had been compounded by the city's recent legislation banning child labor and creating the first compulsory education requirements for children under 16 years of age.²⁹ Citywide, at the end of World War I, high school enrollments were numbered at around 61,000, with only about half of all high-school-aged students attending schools; however, by 1934 (Benjamin Franklin High School's opening year) enrollments had already climbed above 200,000, with 73 percent of teens ages 14 to 17 attending schools.³⁰

Not only would Benjamin Franklin become East Harlem's first high school, better meeting the needs of local children, but, the committee argued that the school would also improve conditions across the district by working with non-profits and social agencies like Haarlem House (previously the Home Garden Settlement house, now the LaGuardia Memorial House), Union Settlement, the Jefferson Park Boys' Club, and the Hecksher Foundation.³¹ Looking back on this time Covello reminisced

What was in the back of my mind was a neighborhood school which would be the educational, civic and social center of the community. We wanted to go beyond the traditional

subject-centered and the current child-centered school to the community-centered school.³²

Contemporary studies of conditions in East Harlem provided the data to substantiate many of the social, economic, and health issues facing the district, but much of the success of this campaign is attributed to the election of the Italian-American and progressive politician Fiorello LaGuardia as Mayor of New York City in 1933. LaGuardia had represented the 20th District in the House of Representatives from 1922-1933 and his mayoral win in 1933 is often credited to the strong support of New York City's Italian population, which broke with its historic loyalty to Tammany Hall to support their "Little Flower."³³ A school for East Harlem was not a new request, and LaGuardia, in his prior role as the East Harlem District Representative, had lobbied the city for a high school in the district as early as 1931.³⁴

However, the establishment of the school was not without controversy. New York City schools suffered from institutionalized racism and de facto segregation due to the careful attention paid to building locations and attendance zone boundaries. Despite the progressive agenda of Covello and the other reform institutions that supported the school's establishment, the "East Harlem delegation was afraid that the Italians would not tolerate a large African American presence at the new high school," and the Superintendent of Schools and the broader Board of Education policies of the era not only allowed, but even encouraged, the continued segregation of schools.³⁵ This conversation was largely related to the decision to place the first Benjamin Franklin High School facilities towards the southern end of East Harlem, allowing the balance of students (not of Italian descent) to be pulled from the Jewish and German populations of Yorkville. The final decision to build the new campus on the

Pleasant Avenue site, in the heart of the Italian community, likely held similar motives and amplified later tensions around equal access, racism, and race relations.

The First Benjamin Franklin High School, 1934-1942

The construction of a new high school to serve East Harlem was central to the goals and mission of Covello and his supporters. Large-scale city building projects had largely halted after the 1929 stock market crash and it was not until 1936 that the city began building new schools; the Board of Education would not undertake a much needed building campaign for educational buildings until after World War II.³⁶ Covello established the Franklin High School community-centered program before the new building could be erected, and from 1934 until the Pleasant Avenue campus was completed in 1942, Franklin High School was run out of a main building on East 108th Street (originally built as a grammar school) and an annex at East 79th Street. Without a suitable building to comfortably accommodate the 2,000 students enrolled at Franklin, the school was divided between multiple locations with more annexes added as enrollments increased.

It was in the first phase of Covello's educational experiment, from 1934-1942, that many of his programs were most robust due to the availability of WPA-funded teachers and support staff. WPA funding not only allowed the school to maintain longer hours to keep students involved in clubs and events, but also provided staff to teach remedial English classes, adult education classes, and give consultation services for citizenship paperwork and other legal documents.³⁷

Beyond adding services for the adult population of East Harlem, Covello and the staff of Franklin High School established a number of committees and groups to integrate the students'

curriculum and extracurricular activities with the community. The Community Advisory Council, which consisted of students, local business leaders, and social welfare organizations, ran a neighborhood survey to identify and address key conditions in the neighborhood.³⁸ One of the greatest areas of community concern was the condition of East Harlem streets. The Street Units were formed as student groups to clean, improve, and beautify the streets of East Harlem. By working with property owners, students arranged to rent out empty storefronts at a nominal fee for use as much-needed extracurricular spaces. Storefronts were used for a variety of purposes, from a community-run free library, to a space for recent dropouts to discuss education and employment opportunities.³⁹ Simple beautification projects and cleaning campaigns also became an important aspect of Franklin High School outreach efforts, offering a tangible result and benefiting the broadest segment of the population. These activities would be among the first to be carried over to the new campus and would remain an important aspect of the school's service to its community.

Covello's aim in establishing a school dedicated to both educating and improving the mind of the student and providing services to the surrounding community is summarized in a speech he gave for a WNYC broadcast in 1938:

The responsibility of the school as an educational factor does not cease at the hour of dismissal in the afternoon. The child does not appear from *nowhere* in the morning nor does he vanish into *nowhere* in the afternoon hours. He comes from, and goes back into the surging life of the community in which the streets, motion pictures, dances,

gangs, social clubs, churches, settlement houses, communal codes of morals and behavior are making daily and hourly impacts upon his mind and consciousness. These impacts are either for *good* or for *bad*. It is one of the primary duties of the school to see that the constructive forces of the community are drawn solidly together in support of educational programs for the development of the child and in behalf of a more wholesome community life.⁴⁰

Covello's experience during the first years of Franklin High School illustrated the ability of his program to reach the community. The school and its annexes were active at all hours and nearby storefronts that had been turned into clubs and meeting spaces helped to spread the community program through the surrounding blocks. The value that came from this interaction influenced the discussion around the needs of the new campus, for which funding was approved in 1938.⁴¹

Eric Kebbon (1890-1964)

Benjamin Franklin High School was designed by Eric Kebbon, head architect of new school construction for the New York City Board of Education, in 1940. While it is unknown how closely Kebbon and Covello worked together on the design of the new site, conversations around the school's community focus and democratic intent determined the organization of the site and likely influenced the choice of the Georgian Revival style.

Kebbon was born in Brooklyn as Harold Eric Kebbon, and graduated from the Massachusetts Institutes of Technology (MIT) in 1912 with a Bachelor of Science in Architecture.⁴² The next year,

he began working with William Welles Bosworth, a fellow MIT alumnus. While working for Welles Bosworth, Kebbon was resident architect for MIT's new Cambridge campus.⁴³ After serving in the U.S. Army Corps of engineers in World War I, Kebbon returned to New York to work with Welles Bosworth as a junior partner until 1921, when he started an independent practice.⁴⁴

Kebbon primarily designed residences and housing developments through the 1920s.⁴⁵ From 1934 to 1936, he became a consulting architect to the Supervising Architect of the Treasury. Due to the conditions of the Great Depression and the increasing funding for the nation's "make-work" programs, the Treasury Department oversaw the construction of post offices, court houses, and schools across the United States. This opportunity allowed Kebbon to design a number of post office and courthouse buildings in Poughkeepsie, New York, Tallahassee, Florida, and Greenville, South Carolina, as well as three branch post offices in New York City, and the Far Rockaway and Bronxville post offices.⁴⁶ The majority of small New Deal-era post offices undertaken by the Department of the Treasury in the 1930s fit into the popular Colonial Revival style of the period with larger civic buildings conforming to the "Stripped Classical" or "Modern Classic" that was a hallmark of federal patronage of the period. Kebbon's buildings, overseen by Supervising Architect Louis A. Simon, follow this precedent. This early training in the Colonial Revival and simplified classical forms had a significant impact on Kebbon's later work for the New York City Board of Education. In 1938, New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia appointed Kebbon as the head architect for new school construction for the Board of Education. During his thirteen years in this position, Kebbon oversaw the design and construction of more than 100 schools and annexes throughout the city.⁴⁷ After returning to private

practice from 1952 to 1956, Kebbon worked briefly for McKim, Mead & White; retiring from architectural practice around 1960.⁴⁸ He passed away in 1964.

The Design and Construction of Benjamin Franklin High School

In the fall of 1940 a groundbreaking ceremony was held on Pleasant Avenue where the new Benjamin Franklin High School would replace what had been a coal yard and ice plant for the Standard Gaslight Company through the 1930s. The site, which had been coined the “East Riviera” by the boys of Franklin (a play on its East River frontage), was a symbol of Mayor LaGuardia’s mission to beautify New York City, as well as “a symbol of all that is fine in life and achievement” for the citizens of East Harlem.⁴⁹

Benjamin Franklin High School was designed in the Georgian Revival style, which was part of the larger trend towards the American Colonial Revival popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Particularly after the centennial celebrations of 1876, Americans began to look more closely at the heritage of the early Republic. The centennial, which coincided with enormous increases in immigration to the United States, created a new nationalism that sought to root the national identity firmly in the revolutionary past. Projects like the restoration (and rebuilding) of Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, were widely publicized in the 1930s, providing an escape from the conditions of the Great Depression, while nostalgically looking to the past for symbols of stability and national longevity.⁵⁰ The work at Williamsburg, as well as a broader interest in American Colonial architecture, led to the publication of a number of books and guides, particularly focused on the Georgian and Federal styles.

The Georgian Revival, which was seen as

uniquely American, became particularly popular for civic and institutional buildings, and was believed to play a role in educating and Americanizing recent immigrants.⁵¹ As an “American” style, the Georgian Revival provided a nostalgic touchstone that recalled the ideals of democracy and the role of the United States as a land of opportunity.

While the Georgian Revival style is based on architectural details and materials from the 18th century, the style’s translation onto large-scale buildings reflected a 20th century need for larger spaces and modern accommodations. The style is defined by its symmetrical arrangement, the use of contrasting brick with stone trim, multi-pane double-hung sash, and classical details such as columns and entrance porches. At Franklin High School, the Georgian Revival style can be seen in the symmetrical, axial arrangement of the building’s wings and pavilions, and the use of brick and limestone as facing materials.

While primarily Georgian Revival in style, the building’s monumental features include Neoclassical elements. The use of a dominant full-height entrance porch was a popular feature of Neoclassical design, particularly for civic buildings, and the inclusion of a cupola that is inspired by the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates in Athens, Greece, was a trope of many Neoclassical buildings that took design inspiration from the Greek Revival of the previous century. In the United States, well-known adaptations of the Choragic Monument as a cupola could be seen in the work of William Strickland, both in the 1832 Merchants’ Exchange Building in Philadelphia, and the 1845 Tennessee State Capitol in Nashville.⁵² The popularity of this adaptation of Greek monuments can be seen in New York City in the 1900 Soldiers and Sailors Monument on Riverside Drive in Manhattan (a NYC designated landmark) and Emery Roth’s San Remo Apartments from 1929 (a NYC designated landmark and within

the Central Park West Historic District).⁵³

As an institution that was expected to serve the broader community of East Harlem, Franklin High School needed to be a visual landmark to that community. The school's tall cupola was a clear visual cue not only to drivers on the Triborough Bridge, but also within the surrounding neighborhood.⁵⁴ Its riverfront location provided the school with high visibility and allowed it to be set apart from the crowded tenements that defined East Harlem. With the river to the east, Thomas Jefferson Park directly to the south, and the arrangement of the school's main entrance on axis with East 115th Street, Franklin High School was designed as a defining feature of the neighborhood in both scale and visual prominence.⁵⁵

Intended to act as a community center for all of East Harlem, the building's plan provided access from the street directly into the auditorium and library, allowing adults to enter the building during school hours without disrupting the educational zones set aside for students.⁵⁶ While initially the school was funded to remain open for twenty-four-hour, seven-day a week access, the ability to enter these more public spaces without going through the main entrance helped the administration to allocate personnel and prioritize use.⁵⁷ In addition to easing access between the streets of East Harlem and the school, the campus was designed with a number of "community rooms" reserved for the use of adults from the community. A speech clinic and remedial reading courses and materials were provided to students and parents alike. The *New York Times* reported that the school would also contain "unusual facilities [including] a roof playground, a science weather station and observatory, a greenhouse on the roof," as well as "a social studies laboratory, an advanced shop room, a guidance office, an auditorium, two gymnasiums, a cafeteria for 1,500, a music work room, a museum, an art weaving room, a

pottery room and a photography workshop and darkroom."⁵⁸

The school's namesake, Benjamin Franklin, was employed as a touchstone of the school's purpose and played a role in the overall styling of the school. His visual presence was created through the prominent placement of his carved portrait enclosed in a medallion on both west and east pediments. Discussions around the groundbreaking ceremony in 1940 referred to Franklin as the "Prophet of American Education," and a champion of tolerance and justice. Mayor LaGuardia, who spoke at the ceremony, was quoted in the media coverage of the day as stating that "city officials were endeavoring to live up to those principles, to recognize the rights of all, to guarantee the liberties and freedom provided in the Constitution and to translate into action the principle of equal opportunity for which this country stands."⁵⁹

Benjamin Franklin High School, 1942-1982

Despite the intention to maintain the programs started at the first location of Benjamin Franklin High School, when the new campus was completed in February of 1942 the changing context of the nation and the neighborhood forced Covello to adapt his approach. The fact that the nation had entered World War II only three months earlier with the bombing of Pearl Harbor meant that many outreach efforts were immediately redirected to the war effort. Additionally, many students chose to join the army as they became eligible, affecting attendance and retention rates, and limiting the school's ability to dedicate students to long-term projects.⁶⁰ To compensate for low enrollments, the Pleasant Avenue school became a six-year joint high school and middle school incorporating the James Otis Junior High School.⁶¹ While this increased enrollment to over 2,200 students, the school remained under its intended enrollment of 3,000.⁶²

Continuing low enrollment, with its resulting budget cuts, led to the curtailing of some of the broadest community studies and outreach work, particularly as WPA-funding disappeared, but Covello and his staff continued to work with the community on important campaigns surrounding health services, sanitation, affordable housing, and local business support. As more public housing projects displaced local business owners, the boys of Franklin High School ran a ‘Small Business Survey,’ collecting information on the location, type, and longevity of the small businesses across East Harlem. This data, which examined employment numbers and the factors of long-term closure, provided evidence for a coalition of small business owners to negotiate with city officials.⁶³

One of the constant afflictions of East Harlem in the 20th century was garbage. Inadequate sanitation services led to the accumulation of trash in empty lots, and on streets and sidewalks. The lack of recreational spaces in the neighborhood also meant that most children played on their stoops and in the streets, exposing them to unhealthy and unsafe conditions. Building on the earlier Street Unit program, Franklin High School sought to address the condition of East Harlem’s streets in a multipronged approach through a Sanitation Campaign from 1948-1950.⁶⁴ The campaign started out with four goals that were typical of many of the school’s community projects: recreation, education, taking local action, and creating political action.⁶⁵ The successful Sanitation Campaign was one of the last large-scale projects run out of Franklin High School during Covello’s tenure, and is illustrative of the broad reach of the school’s activities. Beyond a concern with the bricks and mortar of the surrounding blocks, the school tackled broader policy debates and worked to change perceptions within the community, empowering local citizens and students alike.

When Covello first proposed the high

school, the surrounding neighborhood was dominated by the Italian community; however, by 1942, East Harlem was experiencing significant demographic change as it transitioned from one of Manhattan’s Little Italys to the heart of the continental Puerto Rican community. The Board of Education described many of these newly arrived Puerto Rican migrants as suffering from the following conditions:

The double handicap of unfamiliarity with the English language and lack of previous educational experience, sometimes approaching complete illiteracy. [...] The overcrowding at home and the restlessness on the street carry over into the school in the form of nervousness, extreme shyness, near tantrums and other behavior characteristics which are the more difficult for the teacher to understand because of the language barrier.⁶⁶

To Covello, this description was typical of all immigrant experiences in education, and the methods he used to improve the conditions of Italian immigrants were equally applicable to the Puerto Rican experience.⁶⁷ Just as he established the Il Circolo Italiano at De Witt Clinton in the 1920s, the staff of Franklin High School established Club Borinquen in 1947. Club Borinquen not only studied Puerto Rican culture, but looked at ways that the school could assist this new demographic.⁶⁸

Covello worked with his staff, particularly the Spanish-language teacher Emilio Guerra, to create a more welcoming environment for Puerto Rican students. An orientation program for new students conducted entirely in Spanish was

particularly important, as students were given time to discuss their previous education and took an intelligence test that would determine their placement in the school. As an early and strong critic of I.Q. tests, Covello allowed students to take tests in their native language to more accurately measure their educational attainment. Typically, these tests were only offered in English to meet the standardized requirements of the Board of Education.⁶⁹

The neighborhood's demographic changes throughout the 1940s created increasingly tense race relations between a diminishing Italian population and increasing Puerto Rican and African American populations. While Benjamin Franklin High School generally remained a welcoming space that prioritized racial tolerance and dialogue, the school was a microcosm of the neighborhood's larger issues. The school's location along the Harlem River, in the heart of the Italian neighborhood, made it difficult for non-Italian students to attend events and even get to classes through territory claimed by Italian street gangs.⁷⁰ While racism and violence were part of the life of East Harlem, Covello and his faculty attempted to use the school's primacy in the lives of its students to change their understanding of racial conflict. The staff at Franklin High School attempted to teach their students that in an area already underserved and institutionally disempowered, fighting each other for the same scant resources was futile.

In 1942 and 1943, the administration of Franklin High School held conferences on race relations to promote an awareness of prejudice and to speak to its resolution; co-hosts and guests included the NAACP, the American Jewish League, the National Urban League, among others. These activities were planned in reaction to race riots in other cities, and as local tensions increased.

In 1945 the *New York Times* reported that a race riot broke out at Benjamin Franklin High School

and spread through the surrounding streets. Covello maintained that the events were exaggerated and embellished by the media; instead it was a relatively small disagreement in the school's gym, and while the students were African American and Italian-American, the disagreement was not racially motivated.⁷¹ The Mayor's Committee on Racial Unity and the East Harlem League for Unity led separate investigations into the incident and found little to substantiate the story in the press, stating that "the incident was not a race controversy but a dispute growing out of a fight."⁷² In order to combat negative press that threatened to diminish the achievements of the school, Covello held a number of events to demonstrate Franklin's unity to outsiders and reaffirm the school's mission for social justice and tolerance: students marched in the Columbus Day Parade; Frank Sinatra performed at a special assembly on racial tolerance; and a play was staged for students about racial prejudice. Covello worried that the incident had received

nation-wide notoriety and gave the school an ill-deserved notoriety and brought out the statement that if a race riot could happen at Franklin where an intercultural program had been attempted for so many years and apparently so successfully, then what was the use of encouraging intercultural educational programs.⁷³

Covello's retirement in 1956 was largely the end of the community school experiment at Benjamin Franklin High School. Continually declining enrollment, low attendance, and high suspension rates through the 1970s brought an end to Benjamin Franklin High School in 1982. Although the program had been at its most robust in the 1930s while WPA-funded staff augmented the faculty, community

programs had remained an important aspect of the curriculum through 1955.⁷⁴ As authors Michael C. Johanek and John L. Puckett describe in *Leonard Covello and the Making of Benjamin Franklin High School*, “Visionary, charismatic, indefatigable, Leonard Covello became East Harlem’s Lone Ranger,” and with the loss of his leadership, his vision became unsustainable.⁷⁵

The End of the Community-Centered School and Leonard Covello’s Legacy

At the time of the school’s closure in 1982, the *New York Times* claimed that it was due to “ethnic politics, shifting population and [...] ‘reputation.’”⁷⁶ Yet the *New York Times* did not differentiate between the program of the Franklin High School of Covello’s years, and that of its last years as a co-educational, comprehensive high school. Johanek and Puckett, who are primarily interested in the development of the community school, clarify the difference and some of the reasons that the approach faltered in 1956. While they allow that the increasingly tense demographic transformation of East Harlem played a role in lowering enrollments and affecting reputation, the school’s vision was primarily impacted by changing urban development patterns seen nation-wide following World War II, and a lack of financial and institutional support from the city and the Board of Education.

Covello’s vision of education was an all-encompassing one, with schools not only preparing and nurturing the student in a variety of interests and goals, but in benefitting society through cultural inclusion; an idea that was particularly forward-thinking in the 1930s. As described by David Tyneck and Elisabeth Hansot in *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980*,

As time went on, his conception of service through education broadened

and deepened, reaching beyond the Italian community. His notion of multicultural education came to include all ethnic groups. [...] He believed that New York school administrators and planners through too much “in mass terms,” on a bureaucratic citywide basis of standard units rather than in terms of the actual distinct individuals, cultures, and neighborhoods that made up the city.⁷⁷

In the words of Leonard Covello quoted by the *New York Times* in 1952,

We don't want to strip people of their heritage, for our differences are our strength. We don't want to erect any cultural monolith in this country, but rather a cultural democracy, a great symphony of cultures, with each people contributing the best elements of its traditional culture.⁷⁸

After his retirement from Benjamin Franklin High School in 1956, Covello continued to work on educational development as an educational consultant to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico’s Migration Division. There he coordinated service courses for New York City teachers on working with Puerto Rican students and their families, he spoke about his experience in trying to foster an intercultural educational environment, he coordinated a teacher exchange program, and he traveled with students chosen as ‘goodwill ambassadors’ to Puerto Rico.⁷⁹

In retirement, Covello remained active in East Harlem, volunteering for the Harlem Day Center for Older People, the East Harlem Good

Neighbor Committee, and the East Harlem Council for Community Planning. Covello left East Harlem to move to Italy in 1972, where he would work at the *Centro di Studi e Iniziative* in Sicily with the social activist and sociologist Danilo Dolci. In 1982, at the age of ninety-five, Leonard Covello passed away in Messina, Italy.

Recent History

In 1983, the school reopened as the selective Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics, a four-year high school focused on advanced placement courses and higher education attainment. A specialized science education middle school, Isaac Newton Middle School for Math and Science, was added to the building soon after.⁸⁰ Interestingly, at the time of the Manhattan Center's opening, the school administration—recalling the community program of the past—spoke of its dedication to longer hours and the integration of a community recreation center on the campus to help involve the community with the school and its activities.⁸¹ Both the Manhattan Center and Newton Middle School are known for their academic performance and specialized programs.

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Endnotes

¹ Historic images of the building from the Leonard Covello Collection photographs can be found online at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania website. Some images are stored in LPC 'Greenbooks' files and can be referenced for original window configurations. The greatest difference between original and replacement windows is how much original mullions projected in multi-story window arrangements on the west facade (for gym and auditorium windows) and the projecting central pavilion on the east facade (library windows).

² Information in this section is based on the following sources: James Riker, *Revised History of Harlem: Its Origins and Early Annals* (New York: New Harlem Publishing Co., 1904), 171-178; I. N. Phelps Stokes, *Iconography of Manhattan Island*, v. III, (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1916); Jonathan Gill, *Harlem*, (New York: Grove Press, 2011); David W. Dunlap, *From Abyssinian to Zion: A Guide to Manhattan's Houses of Worship*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *Mount Morris Bank Building (LP-1839)*, (New York: City of New York, 1993), prepared by Andrew Dolkart; LPC, *Graham Court Apartments (LP-1254)*, (New York: City of New York, October 16, 1984), prepared by Jay Shockley; LPC, *St. Paul Roman Catholic Church (LP-291)*, (New York: City of New York, June 28, 2006), prepared by Marianne Hurley.

³ During the 1830s, Third Avenue extended from lower Manhattan into East Harlem, with horse-drawn rail service by 1853. Stokes, Plate 79.

⁴ From 1830 to 1860, the population of the city quadrupled with immigrants from Europe, particularly Ireland and Germany. George J. Lankevich, *New York City: A Short History*, (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 70-71.

⁵ For more on Italian immigration to neighborhoods in Lower Manhattan see LPC, *Sullivan-Thompson Historic District (LP-2590)*, (New York: City of New York, December 16, 2016).

⁶ Gill, 139.

⁷ Gill, 168-169.

⁸ Juan Ruiz Toro, "Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap," *Modern Latin America* (web supplement for the 8th Ed.), <https://library.brown.edu/create/modernlatinamerica/chapters/chapter-12-strategies-for-economic-developmen/puerto-ricos-operation-bootstrap/>; James L. Dietz, *Puerto Rico: Negotiating Development and Change*, (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2003).

⁹ Cheap airfare was assisted by the repurposing of military planes to commercial airliners and adaptation of war-time developments in speed and comfort of air travel. Johanek, Michael C. and John L. Puckett, *Leonard Covello and the Making of Benjamin Franklin High School: Education as if Citizenship Mattered*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2007), see Chapter Seven, 206.

¹⁰ "Immigration... Puerto Rican / Cuban: Migrating to a New Land," Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/immigration/cuban3.html>

¹¹ United States Census Bureau, 1940, 1950, 1960.

¹² Cordasco, Francesco, and Rocco G. Galatioto, "Ethnic Displacement in the Interstitial Community: The East Harlem (New York City) Experience." *The Kansas Journal of Sociology*, v. 6, no. 1 (1970), 30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23255072>.

¹³ Johanek and Puckett, 23, 28

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.; for more on the development of recreational facilities in the 1930s please refer to George Butler, *Introduction to Community Recreation*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1949); for a discussion of organizations involved in providing recreational facilities and opportunities refer to 22, 37, 47.

¹⁵ David Tyneck and Elisabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980*, (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 204.

¹⁶ Other pre-WWII community schools include Arthurdale in West Virginia, Nambe in New Mexico, and the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee. For more information about early community schools see Johanek and Puckett.

¹⁷ The unification of Italy did not occur until 1871, and Italian was spoken in a number of widely varied regional dialects; therefore, Italian immigrants tended to group themselves by the region they originated from and the dialect they spoke. This led to the establishment of a number of micro-communities in East Harlem with immigrants from specific regions living on specific blocks

and even in specific tenements. For more information about these concurrent regional and linguistic variations, see Gill, 140.

¹⁸ Leonard Covello, *The Heart is the Teacher*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1958), 50-52.

¹⁹ In particular, Covello credited a poet, Leon Piatelli, for making him think about Italy's cultural and artistic accomplishments as well as the parallels between American and Italian cultural icons, discussing Abraham Lincoln alongside Dante and Giuseppe Mazzini. Johaneck and Puckett, 85.

²⁰ Except for three years (1917-1920) taken to serve World War I and to briefly work at an international advertising firm in New York, Covello would remain at DeWitt Clinton High School from 1914 to 1934.

²¹ Johaneck and Puckett, 89.

²² Tyneck and Hansot, *Managers of Virtue*, 209.

²³ Johaneck and Puckett, 59.

²⁴ Marcantonio never left East Harlem, he was born on East 112th Street and lived in a brownstone on East 116th Street next door to Leonard Covello, who remained a lifelong friend and mentor. He made himself available to his constituents by running an office out of a storefront on East 116th Street. As a polyglot who spoke fluent Italian, Spanish, and English, and some Yiddish, Marcantonio was able to communicate to his constituents in their own languages in their social venues and in their homes, but also in the political rallies he held (following LaGuardia's model) on the streets of Harlem, most famously at the proverbial "Lucky Corner" at East 116th Street and Lexington Avenue.

²⁵ Marcantonio—after making a strong impression on Fiorello LaGuardia at an event at DeWitt Clinton High School—went on to become the campaign manager for LaGuardia's congressional campaigns in the 1930s and his mayoral campaign in 1933. In 1934, Marcantonio ran to fill LaGuardia's congressional seat. While often overlooked in discussions of contemporary politics due to his communist sympathies, Marcantonio has recently been revisited as an important radical politician. Known for his skill as an orator and as a politician who "voted his conscience," Marcantonio campaigned, defended, and voted for the rights of immigrants and the working poor, opposed racially discriminatory policies like the poll tax, supported Puerto Rican independence, and favored lowering impediments to voting for all minorities to allow greater involvement in the American democratic system.

²⁶ Tyneck and Hansot, *Managers of Virtue*, 209.

²⁷ Johaneck and Puckett, 114.

²⁸ Ibid., 222.

²⁹ In the 1930s, New York introduced a number of restrictions around the use of children in the workforce, going so far as to begin a compulsory education requirement for children under the age of sixteen. This helped to limit the workforce during the Great Depression, but created an extreme increase in school enrollment numbers, which were already increasing. Johaneck and Puckett, 60.

³⁰ Johaneck and Puckett, 112-13.

³¹ Howard A. Shiebler, "A Boys Own Curriculum," *New York Times*, (September 2, 1934), XX4; Johaneck and Puckett, 115.

³² Covello, *The Heart is the Teacher*, 182.

³³ Melvin G. Holli, *The American Mayor: The Best and Worst Big-City Leaders*, (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1999), 87; Arthur Mann, *La Guardia Comes to Power*, 1933, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott Co., 1965), 18; Chris McNickle, *To Be Mayor of New York: Ethnic Politics in the City*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 34.

³⁴ Johaneck and Puckett, 117.

³⁵ Ibid., 118.

³⁶ Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), 120.

³⁷ Johaneck and Puckett, 128-31.

³⁸ Ibid., 123-25.

³⁹ Benjamin Fine, "Use Empty Stores for School Clubs: Teachers and Students of Benjamin Franklin High Renovate Eyesores," *New York Times* (March 26, 1939), 55; Johaneck and Puckett, 127.

⁴⁰ Johaneck and Puckett, 141.

⁴¹ Ibid., 194.

⁴² For Kebbon's birth and location see: New York State Census, 1910, accessed on Ancestry.com.; for his university schooling refer to: National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Passport Applications, Roll 1604, accessed on Ancestry.com, "Jane and Harold Eric Kebbon, (1921)."

⁴³ Kebbon, Eric, Membership Files, American Institute of Architects Archives, *The AIA Historic Directory of*

American Architects, s. v. “Kebbon, Eric,” (ahd 1023244), <http://public.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/Wiki%20Pages/ahd1023244.aspx>.

⁴⁴ Kebbon is believed to have worked with Welles Bosworth on the American Telephone & Telegraph Building (a designated New York City landmark) and the Western Union building at 38 Broad Street (now gone).

⁴⁵ Kebbon was a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and member of its New York Chapter. He was also a member of the Architectural League of New York and the American Society of Military Engineers.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*; National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), *U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, Greenville County, South Carolina (14000300)* (listed June 9, 2014), nomination prepared by Emma K. Young, Section 8, [p.5].; Branch Post offices Y, W, and O were renamed as Lenox Hill, Planetarium, and Old Chelsea, respectively.

⁴⁷ “Eric Kebbon, 73, School Architect,” *NYT*, April 19, 1964, 84.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ “Mayor Defends School Budget at Ceremony,” *Herald Tribune*, (April 18, 1940); Johanek and Puckett, 195.

⁵⁰ Leland M. Roth, *American Architecture: A History*, (Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), 353.; While historically referred to as a “restoration” Colonial Williamsburg has continued to be redefined by scholars and professionals as a reconstruction due to the large scale demolition of the built fabric of the town in the 1920s and 1930s and recreation of a 1770 townscape.

⁵¹ Roth, *American Architecture*, 353.

⁵² National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), *Merchants’ Exchange Building (01001047)* (listed September 30, 2000), nomination prepared by Zana C. Wolfe and Charles Tonetti.; designated a National Historic Landmark August 7, 2001.

⁵³ LPC, *Soldiers and Sailors Monument (LP-0932)*, (NYC: LPC, 1976); LPC, *San Remo Apartments(LP-1519)*, (NYC: LPC, 1987), written by Nancy Goeschel.

⁵⁴ Stern, et al., *New York 1930*, 120.

⁵⁵ The height of the cupola and the location of the main entrance brought the school into direct visual connection with the spire of the area’s most important spiritual landmark, the Catholic Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel on East 115th Street. While this could be interpreted as a competitive action, it is also described establishing a secular landmark for the broader community

(non-Catholic or non-Italian or both). See Johanek and Puckett, 63 for discussion of the school as a “secular beacon” and the role of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in solidifying Italian-American identity in East Harlem.

⁵⁶ “Beauty Stressed in New City School,” *New York Times*, (November 22, 1939), 14; “Benjamin Franklin High School to Bring School-Community Program in Harlem,” *New York Times* (Dec 21, 1941), D6.

⁵⁷ “2 New High Schools Put Into Operation,” *New York Times*, (February 3, 1942), 17.

⁵⁸ “New High School Allotted to Boys,” *New York Times*, (November 10, 1938), 29.

⁵⁹ “La Guardia Denies Dropping Teachers,” *New York Times* (April 18, 1940), 23.

⁶⁰ Johanek and Puckett, 199.

⁶¹ “Revamping Approved for 3 High Schools: Board Votes Reorganization of Commerce, Haaren, Franklin,” *New York Times*, (May 25, 1944), 17.; Johanek and Puckett, 200.

⁶² “New High School Allotted to Boys,” *New York Times* (November 10, 1938), 29.

⁶³ Johanek and Puckett, 215-218.

⁶⁴ For details of the Sanitation Campaign and the Carmine Luongo Playground see Johanek and Puckett, 212-215.

⁶⁵ These four basic steps when applied to the Sanitation Campaign included: First, recreation: providing a recreational activity to the community, in this case a parade, raised awareness and secured neighborhood involvement. Second, an educational component: running a study to gather data on local conditions provided a base line for action and dialogue. Third: a local action; running a local contest for block beautification and clean-up got the community involved and provided a tangible benefit. Fourth, a political action; running a successful political lobbying campaign made changes to the City Sanitary Code that required more frequent trash collection.

⁶⁶ New York City Board of Education, *A Program of Education for Puerto Ricans in New York City*, 1947, cited in Johanek and Puckett, 206-207.

⁶⁷ Frank M. Cordasco and Leonard Covello, “Studies of Puerto Rican Children in American Schools: A Preliminary Bibliography,” (New York: Commonwealth of Puerto Rico Migration Division, Department of Labor, 1967. In the introduction to this list of relevant sources on the Puerto Rican experience in the United States, and the educational systems of both Puerto Rico and the United

States, the authors refer to these issues as “analogous to those faced by non-English speaking children in other eras” and direct the reader to Covello’s work in *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child* (1967) which is considered important to the ethnic studies in education and sociology.

⁶⁸ A counterpart of the club specifically for parents was established early on, and proved effective in forming partnerships with Spanish-language newspapers, and assisted in planning an annual Latin American Festival.

⁶⁹ Tyneck and Hansot, *Managers of Virtue*, 208.

⁷⁰ Johanek and Puckett, 209.

⁷¹ “No Race Animosity Seen: Report Lays Franklin School Trouble to Outside Influences,” *New York Times* (October 5, 1945), 38.

⁷² “Race Issue Denied in Rows at School,” *New York Times*, (November 11, 1945), 1.

⁷³ Quoted from Leonard Covello Collection, “Community School and Race Relations,” [unpublished material] (November 19, 1945), in Johanek and Puckett, 206.

⁷⁴ The small-business survey ended in 1955. See Johanek and Puckett, 215.

⁷⁵ Johanek and Puckett, 223.

⁷⁶ Dona Kleiman, “Death of a High School,” *New York Times*, (June 15 1982), C1.

⁷⁷ Tyneck and Hansot, *Managers of Virtue*, 210.

⁷⁸ “Melting Pot Boils in this High School,” *New York Times*, (December 14, 1952), 46.

⁷⁹ Johanek and Puckett, 221.

⁸⁰ Jane Perlez, “Year of Honor in East Harlem Schools,” *New York Times* (June 27, 1987), 29.

⁸¹ “A Failed High School Preparing for Renewal,” *New York Times* (July 11, 1982), <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/07/11/nyregion/a-failed-high-school-preparing-for-renewal.html>

Findings and Designation

Benjamin Franklin High School

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

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, Benjamin Franklin High School is significant for its association with the school leader, activist, urban sociologist, and East Harlem resident Leonard Covello; that it was the site of an experimental citizen-centered community schooling approach that engaged its students and community in social and political reform; that it was the first high school in East Harlem; that the school's educational approach was inspired by the American Settlement Movement of the 1880s; that the grand two-block long brick and limestone Georgian Revival building with Neoclassical elements, is a highly visible feature of the community; that its architecture reflects a commitment to community service through education; that the 1942 building was designed by Eric Kebbon, who was head architect of school construction for the NYC Board of Education; that the school was built at a time when changing academic and social beliefs redefined the role of education in New York City; that the building's architectural style reflects the belief in the Georgian Revival style as a truly American architecture; that the Georgian Revival was used as an "Americanizing" influence in areas with high immigrant populations; that the school's history

depicts the changing demographics of East Harlem as it transitioned between a majority Italian population to a majority Puerto Rican population; that the building served as an important meeting ground for the community during a time of racial tension in the middle of the 20th century; that the building's use of Neoclassical elements were popular features of Neoclassical design, and connotations of the civic role of the building.

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 Benjamin Franklin High School (now Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics) and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1713, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the portion of the lot bounded by a line beginning at the northeast corner of the northern lot line at East 116th Street and FDR Drive, continuing westerly along the northern lot line to the western lot line, continuing southerly along the western lot line to a point extending from the fence line along Thomas Jefferson Park, continuing easterly along the fence line to the eastern lot line, thence continuing northerly along the eastern lot line to the point of beginning, as its Landmark Site.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair

Frederick Bland
Wellington Chen
Michael Devonshire
Michael Goldblum
Anne Holford-Smith
Jeanne Lutfy
Adi Shamir-Baron
Kim Vauss
Commissioners



Benjamin Franklin High School, along Pleasant Avenue (west facade)
Barrett Reiter (LPC), March 2018



Benjamin Franklin High School, from FDR Drive (east facade)
Barrett Reiter (LPC), March 2018



Benjamin Franklin High School, from Thomas Jefferson Park (south facade)
Barrett Reiter (LPC), March 2018



Benjamin Franklin High School, along East 116th Street (north facade)
Barrett Reiter (LPC), March 2018



Benjamin Franklin High School, along Pleasant Avenue (west facade)
Barrett Reiter (LPC), January 2018



**Benjamin Franklin High School site,
from FDR Drive (east facade),**
Barrett Reiter (LPC), March 2018



**Benjamin Franklin High School, pavilion,
along Pleasant Avenue (west facade)**
Barrett Reiter (LPC), March 2018



Benjamin Franklin High School, corner of East 116th Street and Pleasant Avenue
Barrett Reiter (LPC), March 2018

