

Public School 15 Annex



Public School 15 Annex

LOCATION

Borough of Brooklyn
372 Schermerhorn Street

LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

SIGNIFICANCE

Public School 15 Annex is a distinctive Romanesque Revival and Queen Anne school designed by James W. Naughton and built in 1889. From the 1920s to the 1940s, the building served as the headquarters of the influential Brooklyn Girls' Continuation School, a pioneering institution that expanded educational, economic, and social opportunities for young women.



Public School 15 Annex
c. 1940, Municipal Archives

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Public School 15 Annex

372 Schermerhorn Street, Brooklyn

Designation List 548

LP-2696

Built: 1889

Architect: James W. Naughton

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map Block 174, Lot 1201 (former lot 1 in part)

Building Identification Number (BIN): 3000600

Calendared: December 2, 2025

Public Hearing: March 10, 2026

On March 10, 2026, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Public School 15 Annex as a New York City Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. At the public hearing, two people testified in support of the proposed designation including the owner and a representative of the Historic Districts Council. In addition, the Commission received two written submissions of support for the proposed designation from the New York Landmarks Conservancy and the Boerum Hill Association.

Summary

Public School 15 Annex

The Public School 15 Annex, 372 Schermerhorn Street, represents a shift in design by James Naughton for Brooklyn public schools.¹ Located on the corner of 3rd Avenue and Schermerhorn Street at the intersection of the neighborhoods of Downtown Brooklyn and Boerum Hill, it was constructed in 1889 to serve the growing Brooklyn population. As the country's focus began to shift from child labor to child education, the annex became the home of the Girls' Continuation School, which was one of the largest continuation schools in the city.

The school building was constructed by Frank G. Kelly, a prominent contractor for Brooklyn schools, and designed by superintendent James W. Naughton. Naughton was an Irish immigrant. He apprenticed as an architect with several firms before continuing his studies at Cooper Union. He held various city positions until 1879, when he was elected superintendent of buildings for the Brooklyn Board of Education, responsible for the construction of over 100 schools.

In the summer of 1889, Public School 15 was altered, a project that included the construction of the annex building on Schermerhorn Street, making it "one of the handsomest schools in the city." The Public School 15 Annex is a three-story red-brick Romanesque Revival building with Queen Anne details featuring decorative brownstone, brick corbelling, and metalwork. The annex's ornate facade, elevated entrance, cupola, and original dormer complete with a pediment and finials faced Schermerhorn Street, just steps away from the elevated train. Constructed during a time of transition

for Naughton's designs, the annex is a unique design different from a typical Naughton school.

The annex was fully integrated into Public School 15 until the mid-1920s when the Brooklyn Girls' Continuation School took over two floors in the annex, placing its headquarters here. By 1929, the continuation school permanently took over the entire building.

Continuation schools were significant in advancing child labor laws, by providing education mandated by the state for children under the age of 18, no matter their working status, which offered opportunities for better paying jobs through advancement of skills. In the Girls' Continuation School, the girls learned garment manufacturing, nursing, home making, bookkeeping, homemaking, and beauty skills. The school later became an adult continuation school funded by the W.P.A. Both the Girls' Continuation school and the adult continuation school, which operated in the building through the 1940s, provided new opportunities for education, independence, and autonomy for young girls and women.

The handsome, well-preserved Public School 15 Annex is a unique design among James Naughton's school buildings and a significant piece of New York City's public education history. For much of its existence it was a space that provided opportunity for girls, women, and immigrants to obtain skills and independence.

Building Description

Public School 15 Annex

Description

The Public School 15 Annex is located at the corner of Schermerhorn Street and 3rd Avenue on what is now a mixed commercial and residential block of primarily new buildings. The Romanesque Revival building with Queen Anne features, as designed in 1889, features similar elevations on the North and West facades in their material and ornamentation. Since the 1940s the school has had minor alterations including door and window replacement, the loss of the decorative finials on the roof, and, more recently the removal of the two southernmost bays of the building as part of the development project on the adjacent lots.

Primary (Schermerhorn Street, North)

Facade

Resting on a brick base, the Schermerhorn Street facade is executed in brick laid in common bond and articulated by a brownstone water table, sills, and frieze. The roof is hipped with historic asphalt and features a historic copula. The central three bays project slightly with the flanking bays slightly recessed. Approached by a short stoop, the round-arched entrance is framed by a molded brownstone surround with diamond ornament and a keystone with a central rosette. Above the door is an inset brownstone (or terra-cotta) plaque that reads “Public School.” The fenestration is segmental-arched at the first and second stories and flat-headed at the third story and appears to retain the historic brick mold. Continuous dogtooth stringcourses connect the brick soldier course lintels with delicate drip molding and

brownstone end caps. The pressed-metal cornice with pelleted frieze rests on a brick corbel table with corbelled brackets. Above the cornice is an ensemble incorporating a gable dormer with pediment decorated with a sun or flower and topped by a ball finial, tripartite window framed by half-fluted pilasters, scrolls, and low, paneled parapets terminating in square piers with decorative panels and hipped caps with ball finials.

Alterations

Double-leaf door replaced with single fireproof door; transom replaced; stoop railing replaced, gates on basement windows replaced; Public School No. “15” removed from Public School terracotta tablet above door; gates on first-story windows; historic six-over-six and four-over-four sash replaced in kind at basement and upper stories; two basement windows removed; dormer windows replaced; historic plaque beside main entrance replaced; curb replaced; piers at roof corners removed; light above door replaced; newel posts on railing removed; security camera beside door; bell; flag pole removed from third story.

Primary (3rd Avenue, West) Facade

The seven-bay-wide 3rd Avenue facade is similar to the Schermerhorn Street facade in materials and decoration. While the second and third stories are recessed, the first story is level with the plane of the wall. There is a basement entrance at this facade.

Alterations

Two southernmost bays removed; historic basement door replaced; gates on basement windows replaced; gates on first story windows; historic six-over-six and four-over-four sash replaced in kind at basement and upper stories; newel posts on railing removed; curb replaced; street sign below second story removed; three basement windows removed; light fixture and conduit on basement and first story; two

iron leaders; iron railing replaced; security camera on first story.

On December 17, 2025, a Department of Buildings Permit (B01019436-I1-GC) was issued for the partial infill of the areaway at the south side of the building, and a modification of the railing.

Secondary (South) Facade

This facade has no historic ornamentation except for part of the historic cornice wrapping to the southern roofline.

Alterations

Historic facade removed as part of approved demolition.

Secondary (East) Facade

This facade has no ornamentation. The first story is a darker brick, the second and third story is a lighter brick. On the second story there is a central window opening. On the third story there is a one over one window. Between the first and second story there is an A/C through the wall towards the rear.

Alterations

On December 17, 2025, a Department of Buildings Permit (B01019436-I1-GC) was issued for a new ADA-compliant entrance on the east facade and new penetrations for HVAC equipment.

History and Significance

Public School 15 Annex

Early History and Development of the Area²

Prior to the arrival of European settlers, the area that became Boerum Hill was part of a broader area that spanned the lower Hudson to upper Delaware River valleys. This region was inhabited by Indigenous Peoples known as the Munsee. At the time of European contact, the general vicinity of modern Brooklyn near the Wallabout Bay was occupied by an indigenous group known as the Marechkawieck, and their main settlement near the Gowanus Creek was known as Mareckewich. There was also an Indigenous trail that ran along the line of what is now Atlantic Avenue.³

By the 1640s, Dutch and English settlers had taken over nearly all the land in Kings County from the Indigenous people. In 1645, the Dutch claimed three large parcels of land, under charge of General Kieft, which comprised part of what would become Brooklyn. The first three land patents claimed by the Dutch went to Jan Eversten Bout, the Gravesend Patent to Lady Deborah Moody, and Frederick Lubbersten. The village which grew up in this region between the Wallabout and Gowanus Bays was known as Breuckelen after a city in Holland which was apparently of similar topographical character as the American town. In 1660, 31 families lived in Breuckelen. In the next year, the first school in the village was set up in a church which stood near the present junction of Fulton Avenue and Bridge Street.

The site of the Public School 15 Annex was part of a farm granted by Governor Kieft in 1646 to Huyck Aertsen Van Rossum, totaling 90 morgens (or

roughly 55.6 acres.) The land was then transferred to Albert Cornelisen Wantenaer, who married the widow of Van Rossum in 1667. Around 1681, the land was transferred to Michael Hansen Bergen and stayed in the Bergen family until the early 1800s when it was conveyed to George Powers.⁴ What is now 3rd Avenue was once named Powers Street, after the family. In 1850, Mary Powers sold William B. Lloyd a large part of the farm, including the block that would later contain the Public School 15 Annex.⁵ In this sale, Mary Powers included covenants on the use of the land, prohibiting the construction or use of “dangerous, noxious, unwholesome, or offensive establishment[s].”⁶

In 1857, the City of Brooklyn purchased the southern end of what would become lot 174, from Mary Powers, and erected the original school building. Another portion of the lot was purchased by Austin and Martha Dunham. In 1874, the Brooklyn Board of Education purchased two lots on Block 174 from the Dunhams, which would subsequently house both an extension of the 1857 school building and the annex building.⁷

Downtown Brooklyn⁸

In the mid-18th century, the village of Brooklyn was a small hamlet, an outgrowth of the waterfront at what later would become the bustling Fulton Ferry Landing. The downtown area extended along today’s Fulton Street as development intensified. By the early 19th century, Brooklyn grew rapidly with the opening of the Brooklyn Navy Yard in 1801 and the introduction of steam ferry service in 1814 between Manhattan and Fulton Street in Brooklyn.

Beginning in 1825, the Erie Canal brought increased growth to Brooklyn with new warehouses along the waterfront and factories on the outskirts of the village. As a result, a thriving commercial district developed along Fulton Street.

Concurrently, the patchwork of existing

small estates and farms gradually transformed into speculative residential blocks. At first, most of the new houses were concentrated in Brooklyn Heights and in the neighborhood around the Brooklyn Navy Yard. By the late 1840s, owners of farms began to subdivide and develop their property. It was then that Mary Powers also divided and sold off her land.

As Brooklyn's downtown and waterfront near Fulton Ferry became a hub of transportation and commerce, the population grew substantially, numbering more than 24,000 when the City of Brooklyn was incorporated in 1834. By 1836, construction began on City Hall (now Brooklyn Borough Hall, a designated New York City Landmark within the Borough Hall Skyscraper Historic District), located on a triangular site at the junction of Fulton, Court, and Joralemon, streets creating the civic center of Brooklyn.

In 1836, the Brooklyn & Jamaica Railroad, which connected to the ferry, started running along Atlantic Avenue. Brooklyn's pioneering horse car company, the Brooklyn City Railroad, was founded in 1853, and it soon established four lines radiating outward from Fulton Ferry. The construction of the Brooklyn Bridge (1867- 1883, John A. Roebling and Washington A. Roebling, a designated New York City Landmark) was also underway at this time. Once it was completed and connected to rapid transit lines, travel to downtown Brooklyn and New York City from the interior of Brooklyn was greatly improved.

Streetcar travel became increasingly attractive with the conversion of horse-led cars to electric-powered trolleys, including along Flatbush and Third Avenues. In 1898, the year in which Brooklyn merged with the other four boroughs to form Greater New York City, several trolley lines inaugurated direct service over the Brooklyn Bridge to Park Row in Manhattan, and later that year, the first electrified Kings County Elevated Railway train,

traversing Fulton Street to serve developing row house neighborhoods such as Crown Heights and Bedford-Stuyvesant, crossed the Brooklyn Bridge, reinforcing Downtown Brooklyn's status as the borough's premier commercial area. Downtown and its surrounding areas contained a large residential population as well, providing pupils for the P.S. 15 Annex.

Brooklyn Public Schools⁹

During the 1850s, Brooklyn began to transform from a small, semi-suburban town into a densely populated industrialized city. As it changed, so did the architectural character of its public institutions, including public schools. Brooklyn's public schools evolved architecturally from simple, modest structures closely related to residential architecture to more prominent structures reflecting the important role education came to play in the community.¹⁰

By the end of the 1850s, particularly after 1858, when the Board of Education elected Samuel B. Leonard to be the Superintendent of Buildings and Repairs, public schools began to acquire a readily identifiable character as public institutional buildings. The style Leonard preferred at the time was the Rundbogenstil, a style related to the Romanesque Revival as expressed in contemporary German architecture.¹¹ Former Public School 34 (1867, 1870, 1887-88) in Greenpoint and Public School 111 (1867, 1888) in Prospect Heights, both designated New York City Landmarks, are two extant examples of Leonard's schools.

In the 1870s, Leonard began designing in the French-inspired Second Empire style, using projecting pavilions that added plasticity and verticality to the facades and mansard roofs that created bold silhouettes. The idea of publicly supported universal education, which had taken root in the 1840s, was now considered one of government's most important responsibilities. This

belief was reflected in the prominence of Leonard's new buildings designed in this style, such as Public School 39 (1876-77, a designated New York City Landmark) in Park Slope.

James W. Naughton¹²

The architect of the Public School 15 Annex, James W. Naughton (1840-1898), succeeded Samuel B. Leonard as the Superintendent of Buildings for the Board of Education of the City of Brooklyn, serving from 1879 until his death on February 12, 1898. During this period, he was responsible for the design and construction of over 100 schools representing over two-thirds of all public school buildings erected in the city of Brooklyn during the 19th century.

Naughton was born in Ireland and brought to America by his parents in 1848. After receiving his early education in Brooklyn, he reportedly left school in 1854 and worked at the Brooklyn dry goods firm of Sweetzer & Bro. for about a year before moving to Milwaukee, Wisconsin.¹³ While working, Naughton is reported to have studied architecture at the University of Wisconsin at Madison between 1859 and 1861 which, at that time, offered courses related to architecture in its Department of Science.¹⁴

In 1861, Naughton returned to Brooklyn and continued his architectural studies in the evenings at the Cooper Union in Manhattan while working in the building industry during the day.¹⁵ He became active in Brooklyn politics and was elected a ward supervisor in 1871. In 1874, he was appointed Superintendent of Buildings for the city for two years and then served as Superintendent of Construction and Repair for Kings County until 1879, when he was elected Superintendent of Buildings for the Board of Education.

During Naughton's tenure as Superintendent of Buildings, he designed schools in a number of styles popular in the last quarter of the 19th century. His first design was Public School 41 (1880-81,

demolished), which resembled Leonard's final designs for the Board in style and massing. Two of Naughton's most significant schools, both stylistically and for their academic importance, were Girls' High School (1885-86; 1912) and Boys' High School (1891), both of which are designated New York City Landmarks located within the Bedford Historic District. The Girls' High School integrates Victorian Gothic and Second Empire influences, while the Boys' High School is a fine example of a Richardsonian Romanesque building in New York City.

Following consolidation in 1898, C.B.J. Snyder, Superintendent of School Buildings for the Board of Education in Manhattan since 1891, took over the responsibility of designing public school buildings for the entire city. In his designs, Snyder embraced a variety of architectural styles, such as the Renaissance Revival, Queen Anne, French Renaissance, Colonial, Beaux Arts, and Collegiate Gothic.¹⁶

The Design of the Public School 15 Annex

While Naughton did follow some of the standards implemented by Samuel B. Leonard, he was openly critical of his predecessor's earlier designs. In the summer of 1889, Naughton gave an interview on school design to the Brooklyn Citizen newspaper. Of the old Public School 15 building Naughton said "the style of building erected was simplest and cheapest that could be planned. A barn roof covering a rectangular enclosure...is what the architect produced and called schoolhouses years ago." For his new designs, including the Public School 15 Annex building, Naughton said he planned to give the city "some structures of which it need not be ashamed."¹⁷

The Public School 15 Annex represented a shift for Naughton, with a unique trial of styles and architectural features compared to previous school designs. Commenting on Naughton's vision for

school design as laid out in the interview, the newspaper article continued, “Some of the new buildings which Mr. Naughton is planning are more elaborate than any yet erected...The variations from the plainness of some of the other designs gives a pleasing effect.”¹⁸

The Annex’s design is a mixture of the Romanesque Revival and Queen Anne styles. The Romanesque Revival features are exemplified through its deep door opening highlighted by a mixture of materials, and round arched windows. The variation of texture on the facade, carried out through continuous dogtooth stringcourses, brick soldier course lintels with delicate drip molding, brownstone end caps, and brick corbeling emphasizes the building’s weight. Its Queen Anne features are primarily at the roofline, where Naughton employed some playful details including the cupula, dormer with scrolls, roofline piers, and the pressed metal cornice with a pelleted frieze reflecting the varying style of cornice found in a Queen Anne building.

The Public School 15 Annex, set on a corner facing a bustling thoroughfare, abutting another building to its south, forced Naughton onto a narrow and long lot, unlike his other schools of the period which tended to be on larger lots. The front facade, narrower than other Naughton schools designated, still needed to convey the importance of a public school. Naughton articulated the elevation through varied materials and sculptural massing, employing projections and setbacks to create dimensions, and emphasizing a central vertical element that lifts the composition upward. This motif would become integral to his later work.

The Annex is one of 100 school buildings designed by Naughton twenty years prior to Brooklyn’s incorporation into Greater New York, reflecting a period in his career of experimentation and the development of a cohesive architectural

vocabulary that would come to define his school buildings.¹⁹

Builders

Frank J. Kelly was the primary builder who constructed the Public School 15 Annex. Kelly worked on other school buildings under Naughton in Brooklyn. James Harley was the plumber, Poulsen and Eger completed the iron stairs, Rutzler and Blake installed the boilers, Phillips, Doup, & Co installed the heating and ventilation, Henry S Northrop constructed the metal ceilings, D. J. Blaney poured the concrete, C. Moncrief installed the electric bells, W & H Mumford supplied the shades, D.C. Pratt hung the blackboards, and Samuel Dean and Bros installed the ornate brownstone doorway. The total cost of the school was \$67,122, far exceeding the \$43,000 reported in the newspaper, which only accounted for Frank J. Kelly’s contractor fee.²⁰

Continuation Schools²¹

In the early 19th century, as education reformers fought for children’s rights, expanding children’s education into teenage years became an important goal. During the 19th century and into the 20th, only privileged children were afforded the ability to continue their education into adolescence, while less-privileged children were forced to leave school, find a job, and contribute to their families’ earnings. This system helped keep children in a cycle of poverty, where they could only gain employment that required little education or training. These jobs generally did not pay well and offered little opportunity for social and economic advancement.

In 1894, New York City passed a law requiring school for children ages eight to 12. In 1903, the city (now including Brooklyn) raised the minimum school age to 14 and required work certificates. In 1913, the law prohibited children under 14 years old from working in factories. But

places like tenement sweatshops found loopholes and workarounds, and despite the strides the laws made, children continued leaving school after 14 to work in dangerous and low-paying jobs.²²

In 1906, the Massachusetts-based Douglass Commission investigated the toll work took on adolescents between ages 14 and 16. Its findings of “wasted years of youth” led several states to pass mandatory continuing education laws, with Wisconsin being the first followed by Pennsylvania.²³ In 1910, New York State passed a law requiring students who left school before graduation to attend evening classes, however many did not attend, and those that did often arrived to work exhausted, increasing the dangers they faced on the job. In 1913, New York State passed the Wilmot Law, which enabled local governments to pass continuing education laws for children between 14 and 16 years of age. Although New York City passed such a law, it did not mandate attendance.

In subsequent years, a cry for “more and better” schools rang out among those seeking to enhance children’s education. In 1917, the first so-called “continuation school” with compulsory attendance opened on the Lower East Side. In 1919, under Governor Alfred E. Smith, New York State “took its rightful place in the educational world” when it passed the “Children’s Charter.”²⁴ This law mandated that children not attending high school between the ages of 14 and 16 attend four hours per week of vocational and education training.

Continuation schools were regarded as being at the forefront of democracy within the public school system. According to a continuation school principal, this type of school was defined as:

A school which extends to the unprivileged children some of those advantages enjoyed by those whose parents can afford to send them through elementary and high

school...one which came into being as the result of a demand for fair play and equal opportunity for all- a school of the people, by the people, and for the people.²⁵

By 1926, 15 continuation schools were operating throughout the boroughs, with three in Brooklyn, eight in Manhattan, two in Queens, one in the Bronx, and one in Staten Island. The Brooklyn Girls’ Continuation school operated as a neighborhood school educating an estimated 30,000 girls. The continuation schools taught traditional courses such as social studies, math, and science while also offering students choices in vocational study. These programs ranged from bookkeeping, mechanics, cooking, and home economics to beauty, nursing, electric wiring, and typing courses. The newly mandated education especially offered girls and young women new opportunities for independence and self-autonomy.²⁶

For the continuation schools, girls presented a unique problem, “adolescent girls’ [problems] have been found to center about employment, or if remaining at home to help-money, person appearance, a good time and eventually homes of their own.”²⁷ In many cases girls had sick or absent mothers, were expected to care for their siblings and fathers, or generally contribute to the running of the household. The principal of the Brooklyn Girls’ Continuation School emphasized that “upon this basis the tentative curriculum was prepared,” it was both practical and aspirational, recognizing that some students would remain at home to manage household responsibilities while others would seek employment outside the home. Provisional courses were offered in homemaking, dress making, and millinery. Additional courses including cooking, nutrition, sick remedies and prevention; personal and household budgets were also part of the curriculum. Following these courses, students were permitted to choose

more advanced subjects such as stenography, business letters, office practices, and nursing, equipping them for clerical, professional, or skilled work. Throughout their courses the girls were expected to have a “good appearance including neatness, dress, [and] freedom from artificiality.”²⁸

Public School 15 Annex

In 1859, Public School 15 was constructed as a “model school of the City” on the corner of State Street and 3rd Avenue.²⁹ Within two years the school had an estimated student body of 1,320 pupils, making it one of the largest schools in Brooklyn. In 1866, it was considered “one of the most admirable institutions for educational purposes in Brooklyn.”³⁰ However, as demand increased for the school, it became overcrowded and unsanitary with poor ventilation. In 1874, the Brooklyn Board of Education purchased two lots to the north of the original school, which were used as a play yard for almost a decade. In 1889, the original Public School 15 was enlarged with the construction of the Annex at the corner of Schermerhorn Street and 3rd Avenue, an improvement that made it one of the “handsomest schools in the City.”³¹

In 1900, as the Annex functioned as an extension of Public School 15, the students were primarily first- and second-generation American, with some immigrants, representing the demographics of the surrounding neighborhood. The demographics were mostly white, with two Black female students identified in the 1900 class portrait. The other children were primarily of European descent or immigrants themselves, coming from England, Germany, and Ireland.³²

The annex of Public School 15 functioned solely as an extension of the original public school until September of 1927. In 1927, the Brooklyn Girl’s Continuation School took over two floors in the Annex and established the school’s headquarters

there. Immediately, courses in stenography, typewriting, bookkeeping and business-related courses were offered to the young women of Brooklyn.³³ The school terms were 20 weeks, with a four-week trial period allowing girls to stay in their courses or change to another. In 1928, the school enrolled 1,600 students.³⁴ By 1929, the Girls’ Continuation School took over an additional floor of the Annex.³⁵ In 1930, the three floors of the Continuation School became crowded and in 1931, the Continuation School took over the entire Annex building, making the Annex building officially the Brooklyn Girls’ Continuation School.³⁶

When the Annex became a continuation school, the entirely female student body reflected the demographics of the surrounding area. The girls were primarily first- and second-generation Americans, with immigrants hailing largely from Europe including Lithuania, Italy, Poland, Ireland and the Netherlands. The teachers, identified through graduation class announcements, were primarily Americans, of Irish and German descent. The teachers were mostly single women, some were married, and some taught alongside their sisters.³⁷

The school continued to function as the Girls’ Continuation School while the Depression spurred the development of adult programming to encourage college graduates, wives, and mothers to seek education in a skilled profession. The Depression made it necessary for some women to support themselves or their families. Some women saw this as an opportunity for independence, and other women, fortunate enough to not need work, took “personality classes” to better pass their time.³⁸

In 1931, 59 women attended a summer course on stenography in the Annex. The positive reaction from both teachers and students increased interest in a permanent adult summer school. In 1932, nearly 1,000 women attended free summer courses on commercial development, beauty culture,

power machine operating, or practical nursing. More than half of the attendees were high school or college graduates.³⁹

In its third year, 1933, the summer school became extremely popular. “Housewives untrained in anything but housewifery flocked to learn typing, stenography, or a trade to make them a wage earner.” Many women were still charged with care of their children, which did not deter them. The headmistress of the school, Miss Wallace, worked in “part office, part nursery” where she minded the children of the women who attended courses resulting in some “twenty-two tiny tots” roaming around her desk.⁴⁰

The adult program taught women of all ages, from girls “of 17, women 25, 35, 40 [to] a grandmother of 72.” At the school they took courses for dentists’ and doctors’ assistants, tea room management, arts and crafts, and English for foreigners.⁴¹

In 1937, current students and alumni advocated for the adult center to become permanent. The supporters spoke of the quality of education offered here, funded by the Works Progress Administration. One woman highlighted the significance of this school: “Years ago education was not considered essential for women” she said, but “today it is vital.”⁴² The adult school, housed in the Brooklyn Girls’ Continuation School, helped generations of women expand their knowledge, skills, and confidence. Widely valued by its students and the community, the program continued through the 1940s with financial support from the State. The Girls’ Continuation School continued to operate for those unable to attain higher education until the 1940s when the student population dwindled as teenage labor became less popular as the Depression progressed, and high school attendance became the “normal occupation” of a teenager.⁴³

Later history of Public School 15 Annex

While the Girl’s Continuation School operated in the Annex, the old building at the corner of Nevins Street and 3rd Avenue continued to function as a public school into the 1940s.⁴⁴

In 1942, after the Continuation School closed due to dwindling attendance, the Annex building was turned over to the Bureau of Child Guidance and became an outpatient clinic for child psychology. The Bureau of Child Guidance was used to integrate early forms of mental health services into schools to “further the mental health of children of school age.” The board led surveys, researching children’s mental health, the effect it has on their life, and their ability to facilitate help. The board established local Mental Health Boards across the city to help children.⁴⁵

In the 1990s the Annex became home to a specialized business high school, continuing to teach young adults vocational skills. In 2007, Khalil Gibran International Academy opened as the first English-Arabic public school in the country which offered curriculum focusing on the Arabic language and culture. The middle-school later closed, while the high school will continue to function in a new building nearby. In 2024, Alloy Development acquired the Annex as part of a larger development project named One Third Avenue.

Conclusion

Constructed in 1889 to serve the needs of Brooklyn’s growing population, the highly intact Romanesque Revival and Queen Anne-style Public School 15 Annex reflects an important transitional moment in the work of Superintendent James W. Naughton, illustrating the evolution of his architectural approach to school design for which he would later become known.

Beyond its significance as a major public school design by Naughton, the Annex also played a pivotal role in the advancement of women’s

education as the home of the Brooklyn Girls' Continuation School from the late 1920s to 1940s, and later with its adult continuation programming, at a time when educational opportunities were often limited by gender and economic circumstances. Set on a prominent corner in Downtown Brooklyn, the Public School 15 Annex remains an architecturally and culturally significant reminder of the neighborhood's institutional history, as a home to schools that expanded pathways to independence, skills, and economic mobility.

Endnotes

¹ This site was calendared on November 24, 2025, and heard on March 10, 2026, under the address 362 Schermerhorn Street. The change of address was noted at the designation vote on April 7, 2026. The archives accessed for this research, including the tax photo, Municipal Archive documents, and newspapers, refer to the school by historic address of 362 Schermerhorn. This report will use the address listed in that source for those citations.

² This section is based on Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *Boerum Hill Historic District Extension: Designation Report (LP-2599)*, (New York: City of New York, 2018).

³ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York; Oxford University Press, 1999), 5-6; AKRF “Mixed Use Development at 809 Atlantica Avenue, Phase 1A Archaeological Documentary Study, November 2019.

⁴ Henry R. Stiles, *History of the City of Brooklyn: Including the Old Town and Village of Brooklyn, The Town of Bushwick, and the Village and City of Williamsburg* (Brooklyn, NY, 1867)

⁵ Mary Powers kept part of her farm and is identified on the 1880 Hopkins farm lines map.

⁶ Office of the Register, Kings County, Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 229, p. 297 (date of conveyance and/or recording)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ This section is based on *Former Public School 15 Complex, Historic American Buildings Survey*, (AKRF, April 2024); LPC, *Brooklyn Academy of Music Historic District: Designation Report (LP-1003)*, (New York:

City of New York, 1978) LPC, *Harriet and Thomas Truesdell House: Designation Report (LP-2645)*, (New York: City of New York, 2021); and *Encyclopedia of New York City*, second edition, Kenneth T. Jackson, Lisa Keller, Nancy Flood, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁹ This section is based on: LPC, *Public School 116,*

Designation Report (LP-1975), (New York: City of New York, 2002).

¹⁰ The earliest extant public school building is former Public School 8 (1846, 1860) on Middagh Street in the Brooklyn Heights Historic District. A plain brick building rendered in a vernacular combination of the Greek Revival and the Italianate styles, its stands three stories above a high basement, is three windows wide, and is crowned by a pediment. It is quite similar to contemporary rowhouses. However, a feature which distinguishes it from its domestic neighbors is its side yards. Unencumbered open space around a school was essential to provide adequate natural light and ventilation for the interior spaces. Due to the high cost of land in urban areas, the size of the school property was restricted. Whenever possible, the Board of Education at first would acquire corner sites for its schools which allowed for two facades to face the open space created by the streets. When larger schools were necessary, entire blockfronts were acquired.

¹¹ The earliest example of the style in New York and one of the earliest examples in the country is in Brooklyn, Richard Upjohn's Church of the Pilgrims (1844-46) at Henry and Remsen Streets in the Brooklyn Heights Historic District.

¹² This section is based on the following: LPC, *Public School 116, Designation Report (LP-1975)* (New York: City of New York, 2002), and includes the following sources: James W. Naughton obituary, *New York Times*, February 13, 1898, 11:3 and *Proceedings of the Board of Education of the Borough of Brooklyn for the Year 1898* (Brooklyn, 1898), 50.

¹³ National Register of Historic Places, Prospect Avenue Mansions Historic District, U.S. Department of the Interior, Heritage, Conservation and Recreation Services.

¹⁴ *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of the Wisconsin State University*, (Wisconsin: 1860 and 1861). Naughton is not listed in the catalogues as a registered student for the years 1859 to 1861. It is possible that he audited classes and would, therefore, not appear in the catalogues.

¹⁵ Naughton is not listed in the existing catalogues of the Cooper Union Institute for the 1860s. It is possible that he audited classes or was a registered student after the 1860s.

¹⁶ LPC, *(Former) Stuyvesant High School Designation Report (LP-1958)* (New York: City of New York, 1997).

¹⁷ “School Buildings: Improvements Made Within the Last Ten Years,” *The Brooklyn Citizen*, August 1889, 3.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Naughton used the Romanesque Revival style in a number of his school designs, including the Public School 9 Annex (1887 wing) at 249 Sterling Place with a combination of Romanesque Revival and classical elements, Public School 86 (1892) at 220 Irving Avenue in the Romanesque Revival style, and Public School 108 (1895) in the Romanesque Revival style; all of these are designated New York City Individual Landmarks.

²⁰ Bureau of Reference, Research, and Statistics Building History Cards, circa 1930-1965; Box 76.2.1: Brooklyn P.S.1 to P.S.617 [original cards], Municipal Archives, 30 Chambers Street

²¹ This section is largely based on “The Evolution of the Continuation School in New York City,” *The School Review*, Vol 41, no 3 (March 1933), 193-205; and “What Democratic New York Does for Her People ‘Schools of Another Chance’,” *The National Democratic Magazine*, (April 1924), 6-8.

²² Mary Van Keeck, “Child Labor in New York City Tenements,” *Reprinted from Charities and the Commons*, Jan. 18, 1908; Education Department, New York State Education Department, New York State Archives

²³ “The Evolution of the Continuation School in New York City,” 194.

²⁴ “What Democratic New York Does for Her People,” 6.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Vocational Schools, General Recommendations on Vocational Education and Guidance in New York City, report no. 1, November 9, 1931, revised November 23, 1932 [print copy], 1932 Box 860.1, Folder 1 Series 860, Municipal Archives, Sunset Park

²⁷ “7,000 Enrolled in this Borough, Checkup Shows,” *The Brooklyn Citizen*, January 13, 1929, 11.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *Brooklyn Times Union*, 1859, 2.

³¹ “Big Additions to Schools,” *The Brooklyn Daily Times*, March 1889, 1.

³² “Stories a Photo Can Tell,” *Brooklyn Public Library*, January 2, 2023

³³ “School Happenings,” *Times Union*, January 7, 1927, 2.

³⁴ “Fair Sex Repairs Old, Learns New Trades at Brooklyn Vocational School for Women,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, January 1935, 11.

³⁵ “7,000 Enrolled in this Borough, Checkup Shows,” *The Brooklyn Citizen*, January 13, 1929, 11.

³⁶ Building Card, Municipal Archives.

³⁷ “1930 United States Federal Census, Brooklyn, Districts 501-750, District 0746,” Ancestry Library, 17; “1930 United States Federal Census, Brooklyn, Districts 751-1000, District 0865,” Ancestry Library, 22; “1920 United States Federal Census, Brooklyn Assembly District 11, District 0637,” Ancestry Library, 5; “1930 United States Federal Census, Brooklyn, Districts 1-250, District 0112,” Ancestry Library, 36; “1930 United States Federal Census, Brooklyn, District 1-250, District 0135,” Ancestry Library, 46; “1930 United States Federal Census, Brooklyn, Districts 751-1000, District 0878,” Ancestry Library, 36; 1920 United States Federal Census, Brooklyn Assembly District 11, District 0018,” Ancestry Library, 4.

³⁸ “Even Grandmothers Study to Learn of Hidden Talents,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, January 19, 1935, 5.

³⁹ “Free Training for Jobs Given to 1,000 Women,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 1932, 5.

⁴⁰ “Fair Sex Repairs Old, Learns New Trades at Brooklyn Vocational School for Women,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, January 13 1935, 11.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Permanent Adult Center Advocated,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, June 1937, 11.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “Parents Rally Tonight to Fight Closing of School,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 29, 1942, 4.; The original school building faced several threats of closure, including closing to possibly expand the Girls’ Continuation School.⁴⁴ The original school building ultimately did not become part of the Continuation School but rather became the “Hall of Languages” in the 1940s for a short time as part of a WPA program.⁴⁴

⁴⁵ *The Bureau of Child Guidance in the New York City Schools: A Survey*, (City of New York: Board of Education, 1955), 8-9.

Findings and Designation

Public School 15 Annex

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Public School 15 Annex 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, state, and the nation.

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 Public School 15 Annex and designates Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 174, Lot 1201 (formerly lot 1 in part) as its Landmark Site, as shown in the attached map.



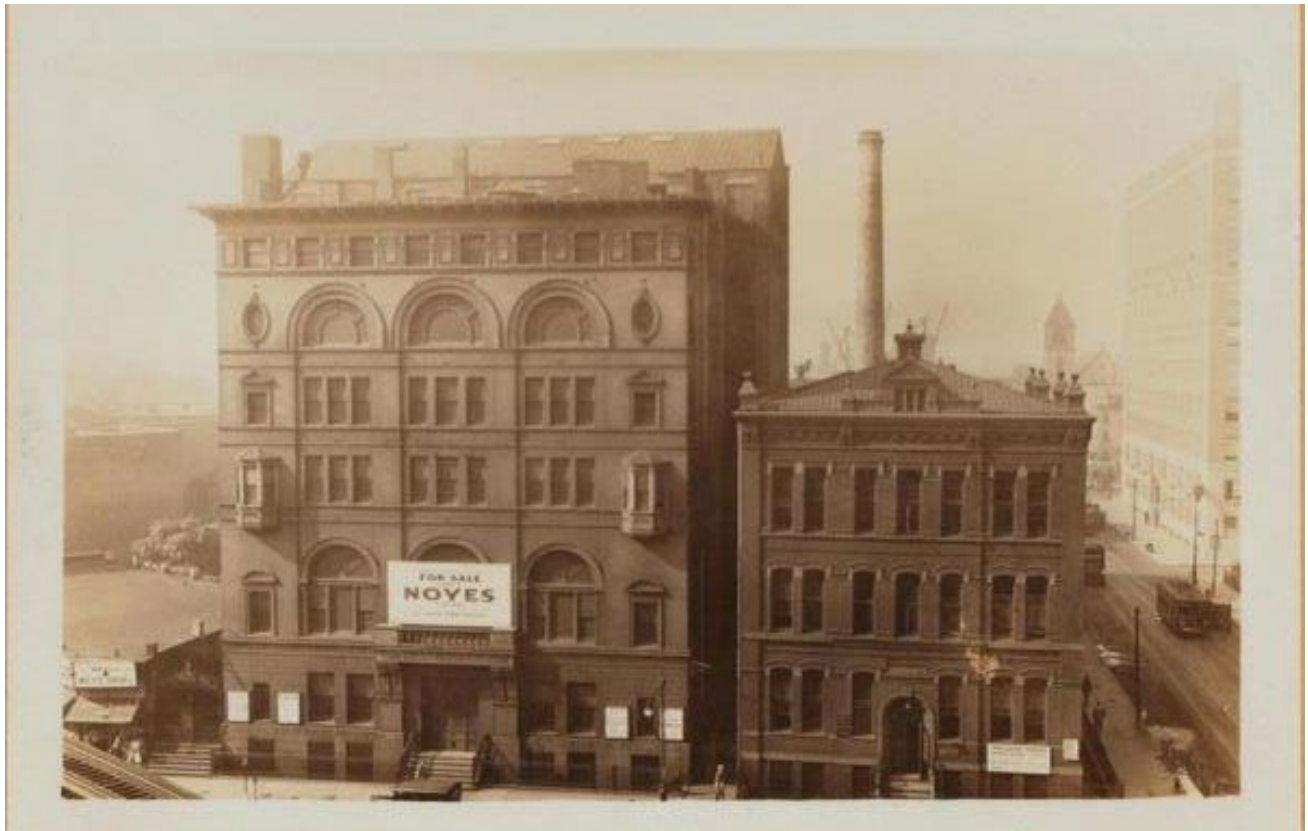
372 Schermerhorn Street
LPC, April 2026



372 Schermerhorn Street
LPC, April 2026



372 Schermerhorn Street
LPC, April 2026



Public School 15 Annex, from Elevated Train
New York Public Library, July 25, 1923

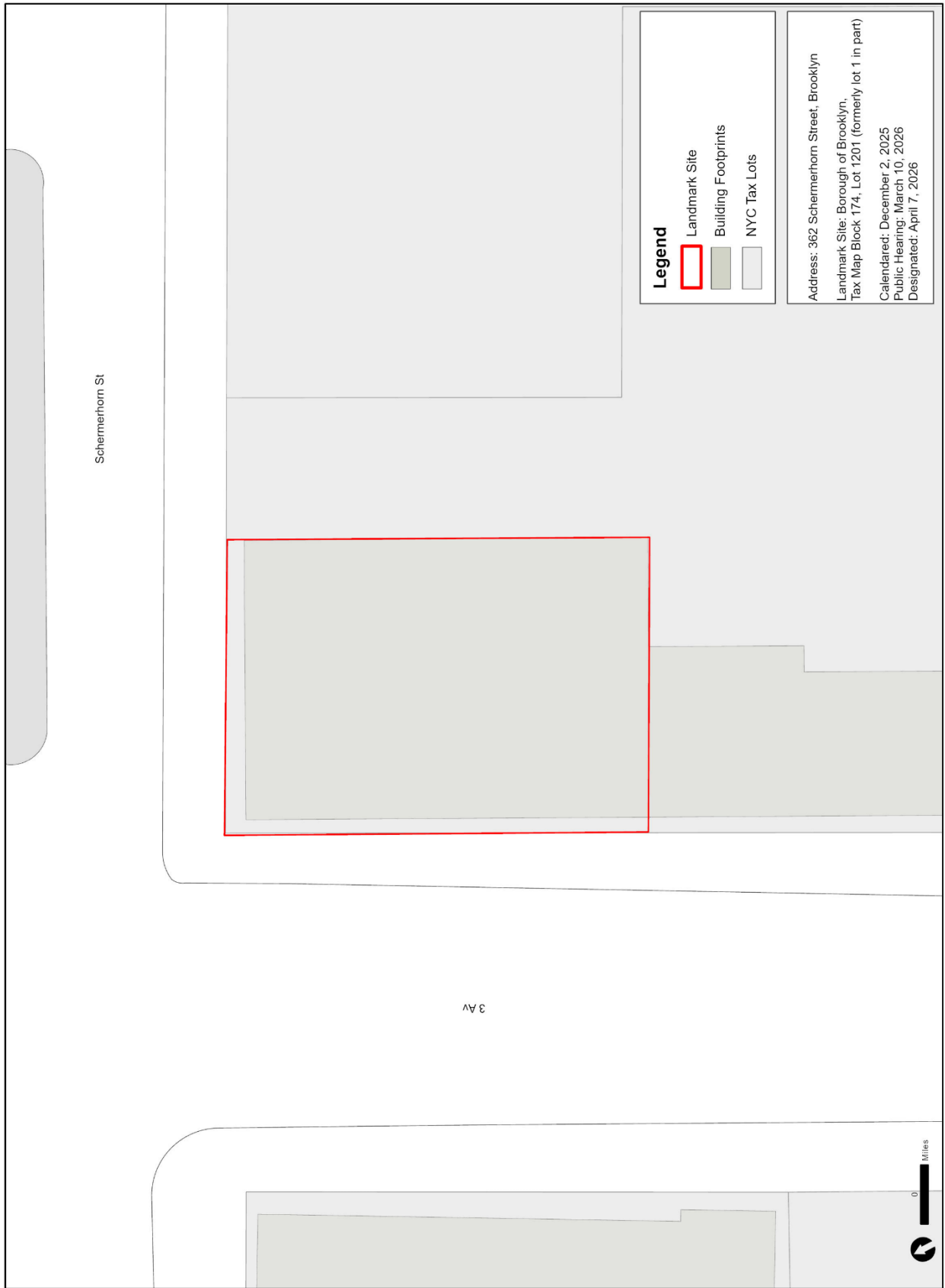
Public School 15 Annex, from Elevated Train
New York Public Library, July 25, 1923



372 Schermerhorn Street
Municipal Archives, 1940s Tax Photos



372 Schermerhorn Street
Municipal Archives, 1940s Tax Photos



Legend

- Landmark Site
- Building Footprints
- NYC Tax Lots

Address: 362 Schermerhorn Street, Brooklyn
 Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn,
 Tax Map Block 174, Lot 1201 (formerly lot 1 in part)
 Calendered: December 2, 2025
 Public Hearing: March 10, 2026
 Designated: April 7, 2026

Graphic Source: MapPLUTO, Edition 22v1, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, SE, Date: 04.07.26