

BOYS' HIGH SCHOOL, 832 Marcy Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn, Built 1891; architect James W. Naughton.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1823, Lot 38.

On July 22, 1975, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Boys' High School and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Fourteen witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Boys' High School is a monumental example of the mature Romanesque Revival style which became popular in the United States in the last quarter of the 19th century. This mature phase of the style was greatly influenced by the "Richardson Romanesque", originated by Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-86), one of the most important and influential American architects of the 19th century. Inspired by French 12th-century Romanesque prototypes, Richardson's epochal Trinity Church in Boston, commissioned in 1872, introduced his own highly individualized version of the medieval style to this country. It was this Richardsonian Romanesque which served as a model for the architect of Boys' High.

Although Richardsonian Romanesque was an influential style in many parts of the country, it did not become common in New York until the late 1880s and early 1890s. Richardsonian Romanesque is characterized by a picturesque silhouette, the use of round-arched openings, an emphasis on the contrast of smooth and rough-faced stonework and -- above all -- by a strong, powerful massing that is often swelled with rounded bays, towers and porches -- a great contrast to the flat, angular planes of neo-Classical and Renaissance facades.

In 1891, when Boys' High School was built, the Romanesque Revival was at the height of its popularity in Brooklyn which was then still an independent city. The Main Brooklyn Post Office (1885-91), police stations, churches, hotels, banks, office buildings and other civic structures were designed in this style. The buildings of Frank Freeman--the Hotel Margaret (1889), the Herman Behr Residence on Pierrepont Street (1890), the Bushwick Democratic Club (1892), the Jay Street Firehouse (1892) -- both designated New York City Landmarks -- are considered by many to be the culmination of the Romanesque Revival in New York. The exceptionally fine houses that C.P.H. Gilbert designed along Carroll Street, Montgomery Place, Berkeley Place, Garfield Place, and Eighth Avenue in the Park Slope Historic District between 1887 and 1892 have few equals in the country. It is therefore not surprising that James W. Naughton, the architect of Boys' High and Superintendent of Buildings for the Board of Education of the City of Brooklyn, would design what was then Brooklyn's most important public academic institution in the style of the city's finest and most prominent buildings.

Boys' High School faces onto three streets with each facade having certain elements in common: round-arched windows and doors, gables, dormer windows and a wealth of terra-cotta ornament. The Marcy Avenue facade is the most impressive of the three. Each end of this facade is terminated by an imposing tower. The tower at the corner of Putnam Street is round with a conical roof, while the

Madison Street corner is dominated by a soaring four-sided tower extending well above the roof-line of the school and crowned by a pyramidal roof. This tower, the most striking feature of the building, is similar, in some respects, to the tower of Richardson's monumental Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail in Pittsburgh (1884-86). The deeply recessed, ribbed, round arch of the main entrance to the school cuts open the base of this tower, creating a dynamic tension between its rising mass and its visually slender supporting piers. The central focus of this facade is created by a projecting, four-window wide section of the first two floors from which rises a wide, three-story high, round-arched bay framing the windows of the upper floors. The spandrels of this bay and its crowning gable are decorated with terra cotta. The units on either side are identical, establishing a symmetrical composition in contrast to the picturesque asymmetry of the corner towers.

The facades on the side streets are alike, consisting of three units each. There are two gabled sections, of which, one forms a part of the corner tower, enhanced by an ornamental bartizan; the other is set well back from the street with a further recessed central section which joins the two. The basement and ground floor of these and pavilions are pierced by square-headed windows while the second and third floors are unified by four round-arched window bays each two stories high; the gable is pierced by four square-headed windows with a bull's eye above them. The central section is designed with alternating floors of square-headed and round-arched windows with three handsome arched dormer windows in the attic, crowned by ornamental gables.

Just as the soaring tower of Boys' High School dominates the skyline of this section of Brooklyn, so has its distinguished list of alumni occupied a towering place in the world of arts, letters, science and jurisprudence. It is hoped that the institution's move to new facilities will encourage the continuation of this tradition of academic excellence, and that the new educational institution which will occupy this building will have a reputation as fine as Boys' High.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

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

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities Boys' High School is a monumental example of Romanesque Revival architecture, that it has been one of Brooklyn's most important public academic institutions, that it is one of the most imposing academic buildings in the City, that it provides an important reminder of the history of Brooklyn, that the well-preserved exterior of this building contains such notable features as striking corner towers providing a picturesque silhouette against the sky and that the Boys' High School building, which has been of service to Brooklyn and to the City for over eighty years, may continue to serve as a center for academic life in the future.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Boys' High School, 832 Marcy Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 1823, Lot 38, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.