

PUBLIC SCHOOL 71K (now Beth Jacob School, part of United Talmudical Academy Torah V'yirah), 119 Heyward Street, Borough of Brooklyn. Built 1888-89; architect James W. Naughton.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map Block 2225, Lot 42.

On October 9, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Public School 71K (now Beth Jacob School, part of United Talmudical Academy Torah V'yirah) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 5). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Public School 71K is a Second Empire style building, designed by James W. Naughton and erected in 1888-89 in the Williamsburgh section of Brooklyn prior to the Incorporation of Greater New York when Brooklyn was still a separate city with its own, independent education system.¹ A prominent feature in the area, the building is an important reminder of the long history of public education in Brooklyn which dates back to the Dutch colonial period.

During the 17th century, the area of Williamsburgh was a rural, sparsely populated section of the town of Bushwick, one of the original six towns that comprise what is now Brooklyn. The town center was located near the present intersection of Bushwick Avenue, Metropolitan Avenue, North 2nd Street, Orient Avenue and Maspeth Avenue, and its first school was erected near North 2nd Street and Bushwick Avenue in 1662. This was the second school built by the Dutch in Brooklyn.²

Williamsburgh's first public school was built in 1826 on the south side of North 1st Street between Berry and Bedford Avenues, the year before the area was incorporated as a village. In 1843, three years after the state legislature passed an act separating Williamsburgh from the town of Bushwick and making the village an independent town, Williamsburgh was divided into three school districts: the first district was the area south of Grand Street and west of Union Avenue; the second was north of Grand Avenue, west of Union; and the third district consisted of the remainder of the town. In 1850, a brick school house was erected in each district. The towns of Williamsburgh and Bushwick merged in 1851-52 to form the City of Williamsburgh which was subsumed by the burgeoning City of Brooklyn in 1855, after which, public education was administered by the City of Brooklyn.³ As the population of the City began to expand, particularly after the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge, and the county developed a densely populated urban character, the school buildings which had successfully served the needs of the people of quiet villages and small towns were inadequate and were replaced by new and larger facilities such as Public School 71K.

The architect of the Public school 71K James W. Naughton (1849-98), was born in Ireland and brought to Brooklyn by his parents at the age of eight and educated in the public and private schools of that city. At the age of fifteen, Naughton went west, settling in Milwaukee where he worked as an apprentice in the architectural office of J. & A. Douglas. In 1859, having completed his apprenticeship, he entered the University of Wisconsin at Madison to study architecture. After two years, he returned to Brooklyn and continued studying architecture at the Cooper Union in Manhattan. He was active in Brooklyn politics and, for two years between 1874 and 1876, he served as Superintendent of Buildings for the City of Brooklyn. He succeeded Samuel B. Leonard as Superintendent of Buildings for the Board of Education for the City of Brooklyn in 1879 and held that position for nearly twenty years until his death in 1898.⁴ All the school buildings built in Brooklyn for the last twenty years prior to Incorporation with New York City, were designed by Naughton.

When the building market in New York began to recover from the economic effects of the Civil War, architects adopted a new French-inspired style popular in Britain and adapted it to the American environment. It was the Second Empire style created for Louis Napoleon and his redesigned Paris. The prominent characteristics of the style are pavilions which add plasticity and verticality to the facade, and mansards which elaborate on the pavilions and create bold silhouettes. Often, as popularly expressed on the streets of Brooklyn and New York, the style was a combination of the typical Italianate facade which had been introduced in the 1840s and a mansard roof. Public school 71K combines elements of both styles but Naughton was more sophisticated in the use of the styles than the architects of popular speculator-built rowhouses of the period. The 1888-89 date of the school makes the building a rather late example of the style, but there was undoubtedly a gap of several years between the time the school was designed and the time of its actual construction.

The school is a symmetrical, three-story high brick building with stone trim. The round-arched entrance is at the base of a central tower more elaborately embellished with architectural detail than the rest of the structure and crowned by a high mansard which still boasts its original iron cresting. Recessed, three-window wide sections connect the central tower to the end pavilions that are topped by pediments with raking cornices. The building is further enhanced by stone bands at sill and impost level at each floor, brick and stone quoins, grooved piers and stone or stone and brick window lintels. The side walls are made of cruder structural brick and were not intended to be fully exposed and visible from the street.

Of the many handsome school buildings which proudly stood in Brooklyn's 19th-century neighborhoods, few survive. Of those that do still remain, Public School 71K is a handsome example and, although no longer used as a public school, it has been adapted to serve the needs of the surrounding community, testifying to the fact that such a building need not be destroyed but can be successfully recycled to meet modern needs.

Report Prepared by
James T. Dillon,
Research Department

FOOTNOTES

1. Teachers College Archives, Columbia University, Notes on Brooklyn Public Schools. c. 1900 (unpublished).
2. Henry R. Stiles, ed., A History of Kings County Including the City of Brooklyn, vol. I (New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., 1884), p. 282.
3. Ibid. pp. 292-304.
4. Henry B. Howard, ed., The Eagle and Brooklyn: History of the City of Brooklyn From Its Settlement to the Present Time, (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1893), p. 726.

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 Public School 71K (now Beth Jacob School, part of United Talmudical Academy Torah V'yirah) has a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, Public School 71K is a handsome brick school building designed in the Second Empire style, that it was designed by James W. Naughton, architect of the Board of Education of the City of Brooklyn from 1879 until 1898; that it is an important reminder of the long history of public education in Brooklyn; that it is one of the few 19th-century school buildings remaining in the city; and that it has been successfully adapted to meet the current needs of the present community.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly Chapter 63) of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark Site Public School 71K (now Beth Jacob School, Part of United Talmudical Academy Torah V'yirah) 119 Heyward Street, Borough of Brooklyn and designate Tax Map Block 2225, Lot 42, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Armbruster, Eugene L. The Eastern District of Brooklyn. New York, 1912.

_____. Brooklyn's Eastern District. Brooklyn, New York
1942.

Howard, Henry B., ed. The Eagle and Brooklyn: History of the City of
Brooklyn From Its Settlement to the Present Time. Brooklyn: Brooklyn
Daily Eagle, 1893.

New York City School Buildings, 1806-1956. City of New York: Board of
Education, 1956.

Ravitch, Diane. The Great School Wars, New York City, 1805-1973, A
History of Public Schools as Battlefields of Social Change. New York:
Basic Books, Inc., 1974.

Souvenir of Our Public Schools, 1892. New York: E.J. Whitlock, 1892.

Stiles, Henry R., ed., The History of Kings County Including the City
of Brooklyn. New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., 1884

Teachers' College Archives, Columbia University, Unpublished Notes on
Brooklyn Public Schools, c. 1900.



Photo Credit:
Landmarks Preservation Commission

Public School 71K
119 Heyward Street

Architect:
James W. Naughton