

ERASMUS HALL HIGH SCHOOL, 899-925 Flatbush Avenue, aka 2212-2240 Bedford Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn.

Built 1905-06, 1909-11, 1924-25, 1939-40. C. B. J. Snyder, William Gompert, Eric Kebbon, Superintendents of School Buildings for the New York City Board of Education.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 5103, Lot 10.

On February 4, 2003, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Erasmus Hall High School and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were 3 speakers in favor of designation, including a representative of the Department of Education, and representatives of the Landmarks Conservancy and the Historic Districts Council. There were no speakers opposed to designation. The building had been the subject of previous public hearings on September 11, 1984 (LP-1509), and on July 10, 1990 (LP-1792).

Summary

Erasmus Hall High School, originally called Erasmus Hall Academy, a private institution of higher learning founded in 1786 by Dutch settlers in Flatbush, was the first secondary school chartered by the New York Regents. The clapboard-sided, Federal style building, constructed in 1787 on land donated by the Flatbush Dutch Reformed Church (designated a New York City Landmark in 1966), continued in use and was donated to the public school system in 1896. At the turn of the twentieth century, Brooklyn experienced a rapidly growing population, and the original small school was enlarged with the addition of several wings and the purchase of several nearby buildings. In 1904, the Board of Education began a new building campaign to house the burgeoning student population. Superintendent of School Buildings, C.B.J. Snyder designed a series of buildings to be constructed as needed, around an open quadrangle, while continuing to use the old building in the center of the courtyard. Snyder produced more than 170 school buildings during his long tenure with the school board; he was an inventive and careful designer who created safe, healthful and beautiful learning environments for New York City students. Erasmus Hall High School was one of several large high schools built in the newly-consolidated city at this time, necessitated by a large influx of immigrants as well as by new laws for compulsory secondary education. Erasmus Hall, designed in the Collegiate Gothic style that Snyder used on many of his buildings, was constructed in four sections, in 1905-06, 1909-11, 1924-25, and 1939-40, with the two later buildings supervised by William Gompert and Eric Kebbon, respectively. Its buff brick facades have limestone and terra cotta trim and feature central entrance towers with oriel windows and crenellated parapets, Tudor-arched entrances, label moldings, and large window groupings. The style of Erasmus Hall evolved over the years so that the most recent buildings are simpler, with less ornamentation, but retain the general characteristics of the earlier ones, giving a sense of unity to the entire composition.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Erasmus Hall Academy¹

Erasmus Hall High School, originally Erasmus Hall Academy, is the oldest secondary school in New York State, tracing its antecedents back to the village school of the Dutch town of Flatbush in the seventeenth century. The Academy was founded as a private school by Reverend John H. Livingston and Senator John Vanderbilt in 1786 and became the first secondary school chartered by the New York State Board of Regents.² Land was donated by the Flatbush Dutch Reformed Church for the building and contributions were collected for “an institution of higher learning,” from leading citizens such as Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton, Peter Lefferts and Robert Livingston. The wood-framed, clapboard-sided, Federal style school building, two and one-half stories tall with hipped roof, was opened in 1787 with 26 students. The Academy building, which still stands in the courtyard of the current school, served the students of Erasmus Hall for more than two centuries. Through the years, various wings were added to the Academy building and later removed. Now a designated New York City Landmark and listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the building is a museum exhibiting the school’s long and colorful history.

Erasmus Hall was named for the Dutch scholar Desiderius Erasmus. Called “the greatest Latinist since Cicero,” Erasmus translated the New Testament into Greek, and brought the “New Learning to England at the time of Henry VIII.”³ A statue of Erasmus (cast from the 1622 original in Rotterdam by Hendrick de Keiser) was given by an alumnus, Richard Young, and graces the school’s courtyard. Dedicated in 1931, the base is engraved with the words: “Desiderius Erasmus, the maintainer and restorer of the sciences and polite literature, the greatest man of his century, the excellent citizen who, through his immortal writings, acquired an everlasting fame.”

Erasmus Hall Academy began accepting female students in 1801, and in 1803 it incorporated the village school of Flatbush. Upon a severe decline in its enrollment in 1896, the Academy was donated to the public school system, with the following resolution by the Board of Trustees:

That the Board of Trustees offer the grounds of the Academy to the Board of Education of the City of Brooklyn upon the following conditions, viz: In consideration of the gift of the land the Board of Education are to erect and maintain upon said land a High School Building of the same character and grade as

other High School Buildings in the City of Brooklyn.⁴

Enrollment at the time was 150 boys and girls, up from the 105 boys who were registered in the school in 1795.⁵

Erasmus Hall High School

Following the agreement with the Erasmus Hall Board of Trustees, the Board of Education of the City of Brooklyn requested proposals for a design for a new school building. Twenty architects responded with plans, several of which were published in contemporary architectural periodicals.⁶ It soon became clear that none of these plans could be erected for less than a million dollars, and since that was considered too expensive, the project was dropped.⁷ The Brooklyn Board of Education did however, approve “temporary additions” to the school to accommodate the growing population and purchased additional property to allow more room to build a new school.⁸

With consolidation of the City of New York in 1898, the highly varied needs of schools in all the boroughs came under the purview of the New York City school board. This board had to cope with a sizable number of independently administered school districts, each with its own curricula, grade divisions, educational policies, and standards, and weld them all into a single, uniform educational system. At the same time, New York City was experiencing a huge influx of immigrants (increasing the school registers from 1900 to 1904 by 132,000 pupils),⁹ and the schools were expected to help Americanize these new students. At first, many areas of the city did not even have independent high schools, but rather included some post primary departments in existing grammar schools. New high schools were needed in all the boroughs and the Board of Education authorized large new buildings for Morris High School in the Bronx, DeWitt Clinton High School in Manhattan, Curtis High School in Staten Island, Flushing High School in Queens, and Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn.¹⁰

In the interim, before a new building for Erasmus Hall could be constructed however, the Board of Education purchased more land along Bedford Avenue near the existing building, and established classrooms in the six “cottages” that were already on the lot.¹¹ They also used classrooms in other schools, such as P.S. 977,¹² and held half-day classes¹³

On August 17, 1904, the New York City School Board's Committee on Buildings presented its plans for a new campus for Erasmus Hall High School, prepared by C. B. J. Snyder. It was designed to be constructed around the existing, centrally-located buildings, so that classes could continue to be held there until the new buildings were ready. The plan called for a full quadrangle of buildings along the perimeter of the large lot. The first buildings would be constructed along Flatbush Avenue, with others added over time, as the need became clear and funds became available.¹⁴ The Committee on Buildings described the first section, estimated to cost not more than \$300,000, this way:

It consists of an entrance tower which will be the centre of what will afterwards be the completed front on Flatbush avenue; to the left of the tower and connected therewith has been placed the building in the rear portion of which will be the auditorium, classrooms, library, etc. The building will be three and four stories in height.

The basement will contain the gymnasium, placed beneath the auditorium, lecture rooms, baths, toilet room, etc., the boiler or power room being placed beneath the driveway of the tower, one of the turrets of which is utilized for a smoke flue.

The first floor will contain the offices of the principal of the school, two classrooms and the auditorium.

The second story will contain a library 40 feet square with a gallery facing the second story of the tower, the balance of the floor being apportioned to the gallery of the auditorium, four classrooms, teacher's rooms, toilets, etc.

The third floor will contain four classrooms, demonstration room, balance room, chemical laboratory, and lecture room.

The fourth story, which is over a portion of the building, will contain four classrooms.

The completed scheme of which this is only a part contemplates the erection of a building on the northerly side of the tower for additional classrooms and laboratories, etc., as may be needed in the future.¹⁵

Snyder's 1906 Annual Report notes the purchase of a lot 57'10" X 138'9" X 359'3" X 7'3" X 493'6" "adjoining Erasmus Hall High School...to permit carrying out of the scheme for a building commanding a quadrangle, and will be built upon as soon as the

school is in need of additional accommodations."¹⁶ In a letter written to Mr. E. W. Herter at the Board of Education, Snyder explained his plans.

...A careful study of the matter convinced me that after all it was a good thing for the future of the school that the present one could not be disturbed, for therein lay the suggestion for a design unique in high schools of the country...A quadrangle enclosed by buildings devoted to various departments of school work.

Snyder continued to explain his practical solution to the problems posed by the fact that the neighborhood around the school was changing from residential to commercial use.

The buildings, therefore, have been designed as a screen across the end of the quadrangle, shutting out the noise and confusion of Flatbush Avenue traffic, the only entrance being through the large arch under the tower, which is placed on the axis of the longer dimension of the plot.

One of Snyder's first priorities was for an adequate assembly hall.

This, as designed, would be called a chapel were it part of a college, but if we may not aspire to this, yet I have thought that it might be known as 'the Hall.' As such the endeavor has been to design a harmonious, impressive room, in a style permeated with history and romance; a place which, of all others, will stand out clearly in the loving memory of the student in after years for his Alma Mater. Its walls, columns and arches should bear the trophies won in athletic and scholastic contests, there to be preserved and handed down as part of the glorious history of the school.

He regretted that a gymnasium could not be included in the first part of the building, but he had "the expectation that a proper gymnasium building will be erected in the near future as one of the new group..." He also admitted that, at that time,

There have been no designs made for this elevation (Bedford Avenue), but the aim has been to have a central tower on the same axis as that on Flatbush Avenue, through the archway in the base of which will be afforded a view of the 'quad' with its green sward, trees, shrubs and vines. What the ultimate design of the various buildings going to make

up the group may be, it is, of course, impossible to say, but in designing and planning that portion which you now see approaching completion, I have always intended that the whole should be a graphic illustration of the various phases of the so-called Gothic movement, from the Round Arch to the Flamboyant and on through its later transitional stage.¹⁷

The cornerstone for the new building was laid in January, 1905 and work was begun immediately, resulting in seating for an additional 600 students. The construction contract was initially supposed to run until October, 1905, but revisions required by the school board for laboratories and classrooms necessitated changes in the electrical and sanitation plans and delayed the work. The building was opened to students in September, 1906.¹⁸

Although the first section of the new building brought the total students accommodated in 1906 to 1,750,¹⁹ by 1907 Erasmus Hall was again overcrowded, requiring the use of an annex at P.S. 42.²⁰ In his annual report, the Superintendent of Schools declared that,

The largest growth in high schools is found in Brooklyn. This growth arises not only from the natural increase in the number of pupils entering from the Brooklyn elementary schools, but also from the number of pupils entering from the Manhattan elementary schools....The consequence is that the Brooklyn high schools are all crowded to excess.²¹

Concerned citizens of the area wrote to the Board of Education emphasizing

. . . the fact that the new building contains only twelve classrooms, accommodating only 420 pupils, whereas there are fifty-two classes, comprising 1,591 pupils, occupying classrooms in the old frame school building and cottages, all of which are utterly unfit for use.²²

The Superintendent's Annual Report for 1910 reported that 3,114 pupils were enrolled at Erasmus Hall High School and that they were accommodated in four different annex buildings in addition to the main one.²³

In 1909, the Board of Education approved Snyder's plans for the next section of the school. This group of three buildings, including one to the north of the tower facing Flatbush Avenue, and two extending east along the northern side of the lot, comprised 31 classrooms, laboratories, study hall, music, drawing,

physics, lecture and shop rooms.²⁴ When this Church Avenue addition opened in September, 1911, there was room for 1,451 more students in the main school.²⁵

The ever-growing school population continued to present challenges to the school board. In his report of May 21, 1924, on construction and maintenance, the Superintendent of Schools discussed "the stupendous building program now being carried on by the Board of Education..."²⁶ The reason for this situation was given as a backlog of not enough building over several years, as well as an increase in high school population in New York City from 20,948 students in 1904, to 109,370 in 1924. These large numbers were attributed to many factors, including the passage and enforcement of a compulsory education law and the appreciation by more parents of the advantages of higher education to their children. In April, 1924, the Board of Education approved the Bedford Avenue addition to Erasmus Hall High School. Snyder had left his position with the Board of Education shortly before construction of this section, but an elevation drawing in the collection of the Art Commission, by C. B. J. Snyder shows the building essentially as built. William Gompert had been appointed in his place and supervised the construction. Although somewhat simpler than his earlier buildings, the Bedford building has a central tower with an arched passageway into the courtyard, on axis with the tower on Flatbush Avenue.²⁷ The building contained many new classrooms, gymnasiums and a large swimming pool along the courtyard and was opened on February 2, 1925.²⁸

Lobbying began in 1929 for the construction of the final section, the building on the south side of the lot connecting the Bedford Avenue building with the auditorium near Flatbush Avenue. Money was not appropriated for this until 1937 however, and it was finally built in 1939-40.²⁹ Under the supervision of the school system's then chief architect, Eric Kebbon, the five-story building was an even more simplified version of Snyder's earlier work. It contained many classrooms, art and homemaking rooms, a girls' gym and a large library, and could accommodate 1,566 additional pupils. The new section opened in September, 1940. To construct this building, the original frame school house had to be moved and its several wings demolished. Work on the old structure was begun by the Works Progress Administration, but was halted due to the outbreak of World War II. After the war, the relocation and restoration of the old building was completed and it was used for administrative offices. In 1987, in celebration of the school's bicentennial, limited archaeological

excavations were conducted under the auspices of Brooklyn College. The archaeologists discovered that intact deposits from the 18th and 19th centuries associated with the development of the school are still in place.³⁰

The Architect: C.B.J. Snyder³¹

Charles B.J. Snyder (1860-1945), Superintendent of School Buildings, was the architect responsible for the planning, design, and construction of all new and expanded schools in the five boroughs after consolidation. Appointed to this position in 1891 (at age 31), when he oversaw only Manhattan and the annexed district of the Bronx, Snyder remained in the post until 1923. Little is known of his background beyond his birth in Stillwater, N.Y., his attendance at Cooper Union, and his architectural study with William E. Bishop. He was first listed as an architect in New York City directories in 1886 and remained in practice until around 1936. A specialist in school design, Snyder was recognized as a national leader in this regard as early as 1905 in *American Architect & Building News*:

Possibly it was not the best, probably it was not the most economical, certainly it was not the most expeditious way to have all the school-houses the city stood in such sore need of designed and built by the official architect to the Department of Education. But, since that method had to be followed, it is a matter of wonderful good fortune that the official architect chanced to be such a man as is Mr. C.B.J. Snyder, who not only at the outset showed such distinct capacity for his task, but has proved himself a man able to grow as his opportunities opened before him. Mr. Wheelwright in Boston, Mr. Ittner in St. Louis, Mr. Mundie in Chicago, have done excellent service to their respective cities in the way of building school-houses. . . but they have not had to do their work under the same sort of pressure that has been put upon Mr. Snyder, and they have not had to adapt their architectural treatment to as closely restricted sites.³²

Snyder's achievement was particularly remarkable given the scale of new school construction in New York, as cited in the same publication:

The magnitude of the undertaking and the reality of the need for these new school-houses is shown by the fact that, even after several years of active building, there are at this time seventy-seven school-houses in various stages of completeness now in charge of the architect to the Department of Education, while contracts for twenty-four more will shortly be made.³³

Snyder is credited with the design of over 140 elementary schools, ten junior high schools, and twenty high schools, as well as many additions and alterations.³⁴ Recognized for his inventiveness and widely published, he was also a member of the Society of Municipal Engineers, a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and president of the American Society of Heating and Ventilating Engineers.³⁵

Snyder's concern with health and safety issues in public schools focused on fire protection, ventilation, lighting, and classroom size. He used terra cotta blocks in floor construction to improve fireproofing, and large and numerous windows to allow more light and air into the classrooms. He also developed new methods for mechanical air circulation in school buildings.³⁶ The problem of school design in New York was compounded by the relatively constricted sites which were necessitated by the high cost of land acquisition. As a result, in 1896 Snyder introduced the efficient "H-plan" having two side courts, which provided increased light and ventilation, as well as areas between the wings for safe recreation.³⁷ The use of steel skeleton framing for buildings over four stories allowed for cheaper and faster construction as well as an increased span of window openings. Because of the need to produce so many buildings in such a short time, Snyder's office built upon the design and planning ideas of earlier schools and sometimes used the same basic design for multiple sites. This was made easier by his reorganization of the deputy superintendents so that each was responsible for a single part of the building (such as design and planning, heating and ventilating, electricity, plumbing and drainage, furniture, and inspection and records) and each reported directly to Snyder.³⁸

School Design Under Snyder

Embracing a variety of architectural styles, Snyder's schools were considered inventive, handsome, and appropriate as civic monuments. His earliest work continued the Romanesque Revival style of George W. Debevoise, his predecessor as Superintendent of School Buildings, but Snyder later moved into other idioms, such as Jacobean, Dutch Renaissance, French Renaissance, Colonial, Beaux-Arts, and Secessionist.

Snyder is credited with the introduction of the Collegiate Gothic style to New York public school architecture, a style usually associated with universities and one that he successfully used for more than twenty years.³⁹ Collegiate Gothic architecture, also called English Collegiate,⁴⁰ was inspired by, and modeled after buildings at Eton, Cambridge, and Oxford Universities. Introduced on college campuses in the United States in 1893 by architects Cope and

Stewardson at Bryn Mawr College, University of Pennsylvania, and Princeton University, the style was quickly adopted by numerous schools throughout the country. Other early major examples include: Charles C. Haight's Vanderbilt Hall at Yale (1893-94), Henry Ives Cobb's plan for the University of Chicago (1893), and Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson's designs for the campus of West Point (1902). The Collegiate Gothic style was also used for private preparatory schools such as St. Paul's and Groton, designed by Henry Vaughan in the 1890s and was often featured in the professional press.⁴¹ The style became so widespread, in fact, that by the time the City College of New York opened its new campus at Morningside Heights in 1907, an observer could state that "One might say that Collegiate Gothic is the proper and only dress for a home of learning."⁴²

Snyder's use of the Collegiate Gothic style served both cultural and practical needs. It helped with the assimilation of immigrants; associations with the great universities at Oxford and Cambridge would help indoctrinate foreigners to English standards. "Educators considered it necessary to assimilate the newcomers from southern and eastern Europe into a society based on the use of English and conditioned by English notions of behavior."⁴³ Not only was the Collegiate Gothic style replete with associations with higher education, according to some architectural writers, it also provided greater flexibility in fenestration, since windows could be as high and wide as desired, and it was also more economical than Colonial or Classic because it did not require heavy cornices, balustrades, pediments or high pitched roofs.⁴² In Snyder's buildings, distinguishing Collegiate Gothic features include Tudor-arched doorways, pointed windows filled with stone tracery, a central tower, a crenellated roofline and label moldings. Many of these motifs were carried into the interior decorative scheme as well and are evident in the stair rail design, lobby floor, and moldings of numerous schools (not included in this designation). John Beverly Robinson, writing in *The Architectural Record*, commended Snyder's design sensitivity, noting,

With all this [i.e. so much construction] the architecture of the buildings has not been neglected, for as education ceases to be conducted by factory methods it is well that the walls where education dwells should signalize the change by forsaking their factory appearance.⁴³

Although Snyder began using certain characteristic elements of Collegiate Gothic in his schools not long after this style started to appear in the architectural press, it took him several attempts before

he completely incorporated this new style. In P.S. 31 (1897-99, 425 Grand Concourse, a designated New York City Landmark) Snyder first successfully integrated numerous details into an overall Gothic composition. At P.S. 31 the focus is on the building's turreted central tower with Tudor-arched entranceway, label moldings and traceried windows. The style was further developed on Snyder's important high schools, such as Morris High School on Boston Road in the Bronx and Curtis High School on Staten Island, Flushing High School in Queens, and Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn.⁴⁴ Morris and Curtis High Schools were both constructed early in the twentieth century, using a version of Snyder's H-plan, while Erasmus and Flushing were built somewhat later and with more variety of plan, but all featured a large, central tower with turrets, arched openings, stained glass, label moldings, and other Gothic-inspired details. Snyder was able to adapt these large buildings to the requirements of their sites, while still creating picturesque and well-functioning school buildings. The dramatic and vigorous designs of these buildings, with their high towers and unique details, helped these schools serve as strong focal points for their communities.

Alumni⁴⁵

A school which has existed as long as Erasmus and has graduated as many students is bound to have many illustrious names in its roster of alumni. Some of the more well-known graduates include entertainers Barbra Streisand, Lainie Kazan, Neil Diamond, Betty Comdon, Beverly Sills, Barbara Stanwyck, Eli Wallach, and Susan Hayward; writers Bernard Malamud and Mickey Spillane; artists Frederico Castellon and Joseph Barbera; and sports figures Sid Luckman, Jerry Reinsdorf, Al Davis, William Cunningham, Bobby Fischer, and Eleanor Holm Whalen. Other graduates include Nobel Prize winner Barbara McLintock, builder Sam Lefrak, and former governor of New Jersey Jim Florio.

Description

Erasmus Hall High School is composed of a series of buildings arranged around an open quadrangle in the Flatbush area of Brooklyn. Two of the buildings face streets - Flatbush and Bedford Avenues - and each facade is highlighted by a large, central tower with polygonal corner piers, oriel windows, and a large, Tudor-arched entranceway leading to the interior courtyard. The other buildings, located near the middle of the block between Snyder and Church Avenues, face the inside of the lot and connect the two street-facing sections. They are not visible from the street. Inside the quadrangle formed by these structures (and not physically connected) is the

original wood-framed school building, constructed in 1787 and designated a New York City Landmark in 1966. A bronze statue of Erasmus is mounted on a pedestal in front of the old school building and a flagpole is behind it. The rest of the courtyard is open and landscaped with grass, trees and walkways.

All of the structures bear certain similarities, with the most recently constructed the simplest. The buildings are all faced in buff-colored brick with limestone and terra-cotta trim. The granite base is topped by two band courses that also serve as a continuous sill for the windows of the first story. Other band courses run between the first and second stories and also above the third story windows. The windows are generally grouped in twos or threes. Throughout the buildings, most of the window sash is not original, but has been replaced by small-paned, metal sash. On Bedford Avenue, several original steel sash windows with sections that open as awning windows are still in place. The windows on the ground story are mostly set within Tudor-arched openings, while those above have rectangular openings. The windows of the ground story are surrounded by quoins formed of limestone. Those of the second and third story have quoins of terra cotta, and the top story windows are also capped by terra-cotta label moldings. The roofs, where visible, are pitched and covered with slate on the earlier buildings and standing seam metal roofing on the more recent ones. The roofs are shielded by parapets which are capped by terra-cotta molding and take different shapes on each building. Many are stepped or crenellated and have finials at their highest points, creating irregular silhouettes. The parapet on the southern building is formed of rounded shapes with finials at the highest points. Several of the buildings have wall dormers which incorporate smaller windows and then follow the outlines of the roofline of that particular building.

The Flatbush Avenue facade consists of a central, four-story tower flanked by three-story wings on each side. The tower is square, with four polygonal corner piers. A large, central Tudor-arched entrance-way was designed to provide access to the courtyard, but is now gated. The area inside the archway is lined with a Guastavino brick arch, while the edge of the arch carries a wide molding, at the center of which is a bas relief of the head of Erasmus. The school seal is mounted on the metal grating just below. Above the archway is a crenellated parapet bearing the name of the school, with a two-story high oriel window rising above this. The top of the tower on all four sides and the corner piers provide an irregularly shaped and highly ornamented roofline, with band courses, panels of geometric ornament, crenellation and finials.

The courtyard facade of the Flatbush building also focuses on the large tower. Recessed sections to each

side flank the tower. To the south, the section of the building housing the auditorium extends eastward, toward the courtyard. It is two stories high with large, Tudor-arched openings edged by wide moldings. Inside these arches are two stories of stained glass windows linked by recessed spandrel panels.

The Bedford Avenue section also has a large, central projecting tower with a two-story projecting oriel window centered in the three-bay tower. A large Tudor-arched window with stone tracery fills the center bay above the oriel. The ground story has two bays, with the southern one being a passageway into the courtyard (now gated). To each side of the tower are recessed sections, all with squared window openings. In the southernmost bay is a pedestrian entrance in a one-story projection.

The courtyard side of the Bedford building is more irregular with numerous accretions. On the southern side is a low, pitched roof, brick building which houses the swimming pool. A small utilitarian addition was created next to the northern half of this section, housing service rooms for the cafeteria.

On the northern side of the courtyard, there are two adjoining buildings that have generally the same arrangements as the Flatbush building. Each has a central, projecting tower with polygonal corner piers. The building on the northeastern side has an entrance in the ground floor of the tower, while the other building does not, but rather has a two-story, projecting oriel at the second and third stories. Entrance to this building is found in the recessed area between the two buildings.

The latest building constructed, named the Snyder Building, fills in the southern side of the lot, adjoining the Bedford Building on the east and the rear of the auditorium on the west. While the facade of this section is simpler, with less ornament, the massing as well as the fenestration patterns and details all follow Snyder's earlier buildings. A large, square tower with crenellated roofline projects near the Flatbush end, providing a Tudor-arched entrance topped by an embossed panel featuring the school motto, "Fortiter Ascende" (Ascend Bravely). Leaded and stained glass windows at the top of the tower and adjacent to it indicate the location of the library. Peaked wall dormers topped by finials and incorporating small window openings add variety to the roofline. The same motifs as on the earlier buildings are seen in the large, grouped windows and band courses.

Subsequent History

In 1994, after years of poor academic scores, the huge Erasmus Hall High School was divided internally into four smaller high schools, each concentrating on a different academic area.⁴⁶ The four schools have separate administrations and faculties, and hold

classes in different sections of the large building. However, they use the common lunchroom, gymnasium, library and auditorium at separate times during the day. This division created no changes on the exterior of the building.

Report written and researched by
Virginia Kurshan
Research Department

NOTES

1. Much of the information about the original school comes from the historical reviews compiled on significant anniversaries of the school for the three issues of *The Chronicles of Erasmus Hall High School, 1906, 1906-1937, and 1937-1987* (New York: New York City Board of Education, 1906, 1937, 1987); National Register nomination form for Erasmus Hall Museum, prepared by Betty Ezequelle and Stephen Lash, 1973; and Marian Miller, "Erasmus Hall H.S. Boasts Proud History," *Kings Courier* (5/31/1976), 101, and *New York City Guide*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1970, reprint of 1939 Federal Writers Publication), 493-4.
2. B. Kimberly Taylor, "Erasmus Hall High School and Academy of the Arts," Kenneth R. Jackson, Ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 382.
3. This discussion of Desiderius Erasmus is based on information in Miller's *Kings Courier* article.
4. *Chronicles, 1906*, 21.
5. *Chronicles, 1906-37*, 18-19.
6. These included a French-inspired design for a tall, H-plan building topped by a mansard and cupola, by F. P. Dinkelberg, published in *American Architect and Building News* (2/5/1898) and two more elaborate plans for extensive campuses, one by Mowbry & Uffinger and the other by J. G. Glover and H.C. Carrel, both published in *Architecture and Building* (10/8/1898) and (4/23/1898). According to minutes of the New York City school board on April 4, 1899, (301) plans for a new high school drawn by David W. Wilson and Jacob Thinnis, Jr. had been approved by the Brooklyn Board of Education, but the architects who had submitted plans had not been paid and were threatening to sue. The school board quickly authorized \$200 to be paid to each designer.
7. C.B.J. Snyder, "Annual Report of the Superintendent of School Buildings, 1906", 299.
8. For the decision to build additions to the existing building, see *Minutes of the School Board of the Borough of Brooklyn, 1898* (June 21, 1898) 418. Plans for the addition were created by C.B.J. Snyder. Regarding the purchase of the property, see *Minutes of the School Board of the Borough of Brooklyn, 1899*, (Mar 7, 1899 and Sept. 5, 1899) 279-80 and 750, respectively.
9. *New York City School Buildings, 1806-1956* (New York: Board of Education, 1956) 28.
10. Morris High School is located in the Morris High School Historic District and Curtis and Flushing High Schools are designated New York City Landmarks.
11. *Chronicles, 1906-1937*, 39.
12. *Journal of the Board of Education*, (May 11, 1904) 819.
13. *Chronicles, 1906*, 150.
14. Snyder, "Annual Report, 1906," 299.
15. "Report of the Committee on Buildings," *Journal of the Board of Education* (August 17, 1904) 1611-12.
16. Snyder, "Annual Report, 1906," 366.
17. The quotations above are all from a letter dated March 16, 1906 from C.B.J. Snyder to E.W. Herter quoted in *Chronicles, 1906*, 174-8.
18. *Journal of the Board of Education*, (January 25, 1905) 81; (July 10, 1905) 1374-5; (September 13, 1905) 1587; (September 26, 1906) 1554.

19. Snyder, "Annual Report, 1906," 380.
20. *Annual Report of the Board of Education*, 1907, 1354.
21. *Annual Report of Superintendent of Schools Maxwell*, 1907, 77.
22. *Chronicles 1906-1937*, 40.
23. *Annual Report of the Board of Education, 1910*, 114. The annexes were located at P.S. 152, P. S. 104, P.S. 153, and P.S. 101.
24. *Journal of the Board of Education* (January 27, 1909) 96, 157; (July 13, 1910) 1245.
25. *Annual Report of the Board of Education, 1911*, 126.
26. *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools, 1924*, 2146-7.
27. *Journal of the Board of Education, 1924* (April 14, 1924) 769.
28. *Journal of the Board of Education, 1925* (Feb. 11, 1925) 236.
29. *Chronicles, 1906-1937*, 42; and *Journal of the Board of Education, 1939* (March 22, 1939) 511-4.
30. *Journal of the Board of Education, 1940* (June 29, 1940) 943, and (Aug. 28, 1940) 1426.
See also, *Chronicles 1937-87*, 13-7 In 1987, further restoration work was done and the building was converted to a museum of school history. See H. Arthur Bankoff and Frederick A. Winter, *Erasmus Hall High School; Report of the Trial Excavations Conducted by the Brooklyn College Summer Archaeological Field School* (Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn College, 1987) unpublished report in the files of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.
31. "Charles B.J. Snyder," *Who Was Who in America* 4 (Chicago: A.N. Marquis Co, 1968), 883; Snyder obit., *National Architect* 2 (Jan., 1946), 13; Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Stuyvesant High School Designation Report* (LP-1958)(New York: City of New York, 1997), prepared by Jay Shockley, *Public School 31 Designation Report* (LP-1435)(New York: City of New York, 1986), and *Public School 27 Designation Report* (LP-1895) (New York: City of New York, 1995), both prepared by Virginia Kurshan; Dennis S. Francis, *Architects in Practice, New York City 1840-1900* (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1979), 71; James Ward, *Architects in Practice, New York City 1900-1940* (N.Y.: COPAR, 1989), 73; Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and John Massengale, *New York 1900* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), 78-87; Michele Cohen, "C.B.J. Snyder, Superintendent of School Buildings, Sets the Stage for Public Art," *The Municipal Engineers Journal* (1998), 21-38.
32. "The Excellent Character of Mr. Snyder's Work," *American Architect & Building News* (July 29, 1905) 33.
33. One measure of the enormity of Snyder's job at the time was that the Board of Education granted him a six-week vacation with full pay in 1899. *Journal of the Board of Education, 1899*, 1069.
34. Cohen, 21. The following schools designed by Snyder are designated New York City Landmarks: Public School 67 (High School of the Performing Arts) (1893-94), 120 West 46th Street, Manhattan; Public School 27 (1895-97), 519 St. Ann's Avenue, the Bronx; Public School 167 (later 31) (1897-99), 425 Grand Concourse, the Bronx; Morris High School auditorium interior (1900-04), East 166th Street and Boston Road, the Bronx; Wadleigh High School for Girls (1901-02), 215 West 114th Street, Manhattan; Curtis High School (1902-04, 1922, 1925), 105 Hamilton Avenue, Staten Island; Public School 91 addition (1905), 1257 Ogden Avenue, the Bronx; Stuyvesant High School (1905-07), 345 East 15th Street, Manhattan; Boys' High School additions (c. 1905-12), 832 Marcy Avenue, Brooklyn; Westfield Township District School No. 7 addition (1906-07), 4210 Arthur Kill Road, Staten Island; Girls' High School addition (1912), 475 Nostrand Avenue, Brooklyn; Public School 72 annex (1912-13), 1674 Lexington Avenue, Manhattan; and Flushing High School (1912-15), 35-01 Union Street, Queens.
35. Cohen, 23.
36. Cohen, 24-25.
37. C.B.J. Snyder, "Public School Buildings in the City of New York" (Part 1), *American Architect & Building News* (Jan. 25, 1908) 30.
38. Cohen, 26.

39. Cohen, 29, mentions James Renwick's Free Academy of 1847, New York's first public college as another precedent.
40. C. Matlock Price, "A Study in Scholastic Architecture," *The Architectural Record* 35 (January 1914), 1.
41. LPC, *PS 31 Designation Report*, 4.
42. Engelbert Neus, "The Architecture of our New Buildings," *The City College Quarterly* 3 (December 1907), 188.
43. Cohen, 29.
42. J. C. Betell, "Architectural Styles as Applied to School Buildings," *American School Board Journal* (April, 1919) 27, 75, cited in Cohen, 29.
43. John Beverley Robinson, "The School Buildings of New York," *Architectural Record* 7 (Jan-Mar, 1898) 383.
44. LPC, *P. S. 31 Designation Report*, 4.
45. An extensive list of alumni can be found in Appendix B of the *Chronicles 1937-87*, 297-9.
46. "High School Cell Division," *New York Times* (Mar. 26, 1994).

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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

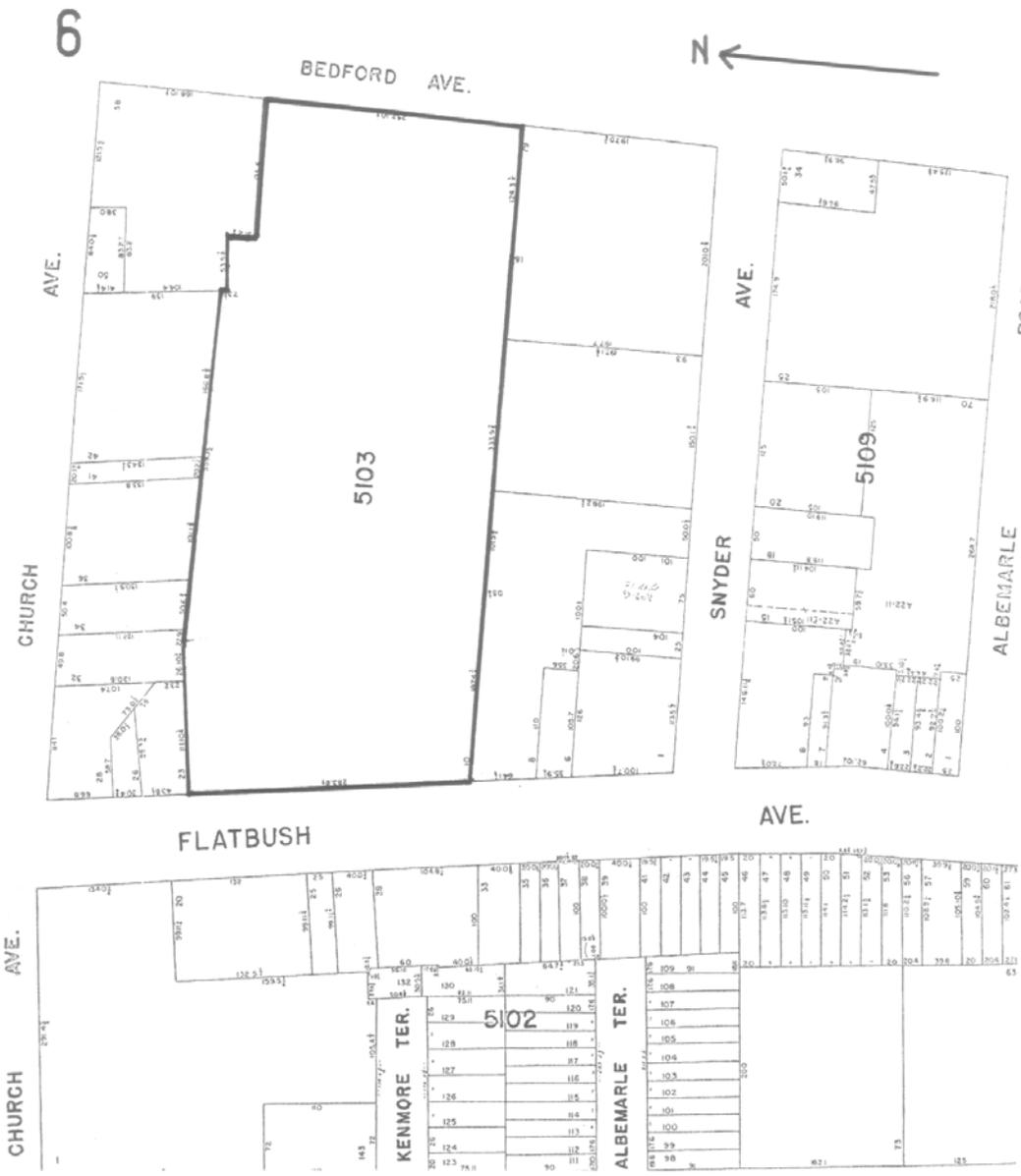
The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, Erasmus Hall High School is one of the oldest secondary schools in New York State, having been founded as Erasmus Hall Academy in 1786 and chartered by the New York State Regents; that Erasmus Hall Academy became a public high school in 1896, upon the action of its Board of Trustees, with the stipulation that a new building be constructed for the school; that the existing plan and the earliest buildings were designed by Superintendent of School Buildings C.B.J. Snyder in 1904, with the understanding that the rest of the buildings would be added as the need for more space became clear and the funds became available from the Board of Education; that the school was constructed at four different times, in 1905-06, 1909-11, 1924-25, and 1939-40, with the last two under the supervision of architects William Gompert and Eric Kebbon, succeeding Superintendents of School Buildings; that the school was a highly developed essay in the Collegiate Gothic style, a type that was introduced to the New York City public schools by Snyder during his long and productive tenure as chief architect; that the more recent buildings continued Snyder's original conception, but in a slightly simplified manner; that the school was designed around a quadrangle with an open courtyard to allow the continued use and preservation of a wood-framed school building that was constructed for the original Erasmus Hall Academy in 1787; that the larger school was built to accommodate the growing number of new residents to this area of Brooklyn, many of whom were immigrants; that, in addition to basic education, the public schools at the time were also charged with "Americanizing" these children through well-designed and evocative school buildings; that notable alumni from this school include Barbra Streisand, Beverly Sills, Bobby Fischer, Neil Diamond, Bernard Malamud, and Sid Luckman, among many others; that the building's Tudor-arches, and other Gothic-inspired details such as traceried windows, label moldings, crenellated parapets, and terra-cotta ornamental panels help create a unique building with a campus-like atmosphere that contributes to the educational efforts of Erasmus Hall students and teachers and provides an important focal point for this area of Brooklyn.

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 Erasmus Hall High School, 899-925 Flatbush Avenue, aka 2212-2240 Bedford Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn, and designates Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 5103, Lot 10 as its Landmark Site.



Erasmus Hall High School
899-925 Flatbush Avenue (aka 2212-2240 Bedford Avenue), Brooklyn.
Block 5103, Lot 10.

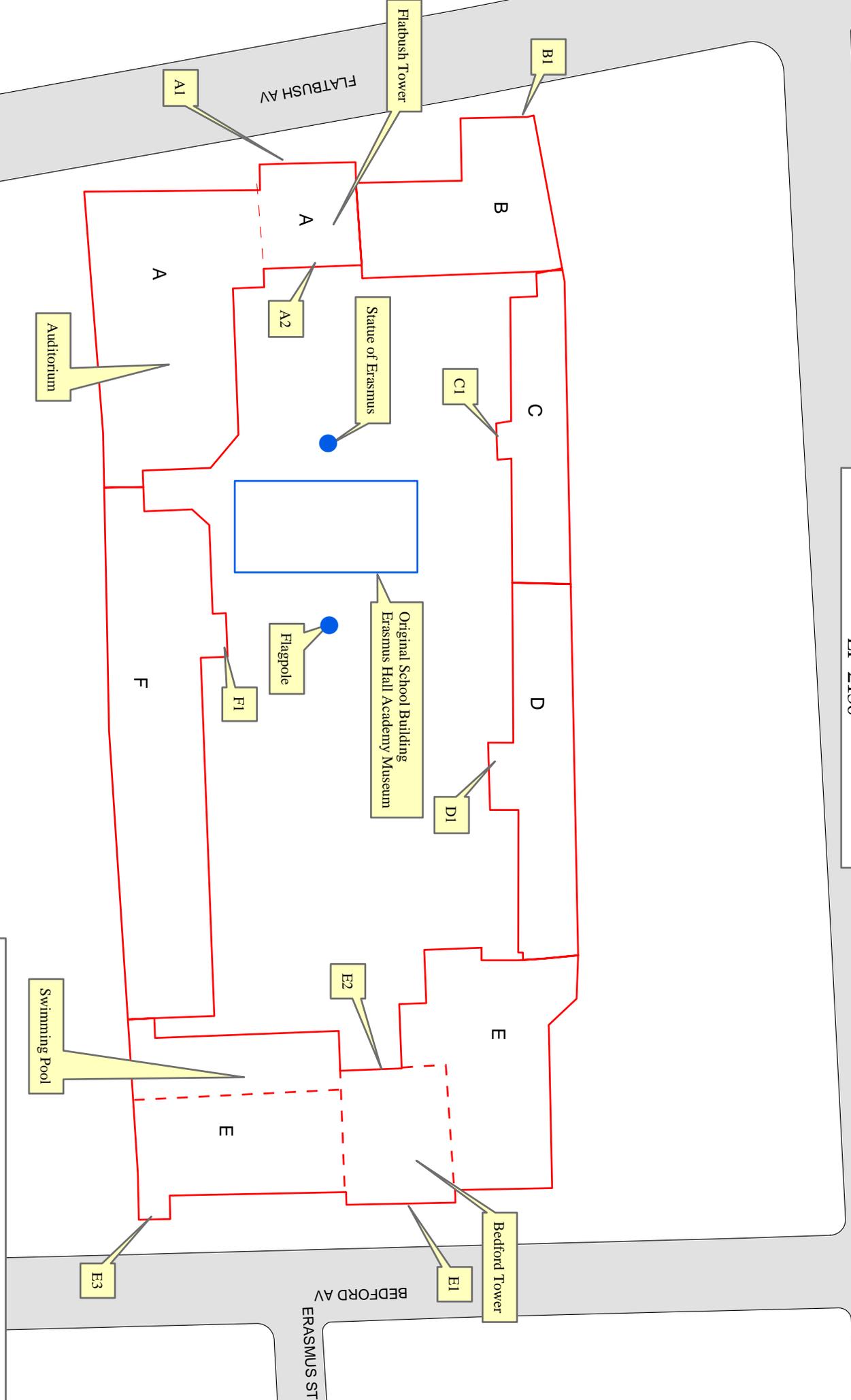
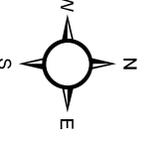
Source: Sanborn Building & Property Atlas: Brooklyn, NY (2000), vol.10., pl 6.



Erasmus Hall High School
 899-925 Flatbush Avenue (aka 2212-2240 Bedford Avenue), Brooklyn.
 Block 5103, Lot 10.
 Source: Sanborn Building & Property Atlas: Brooklyn, NY (2000), vol.10., pl 6.

Erasmus Hall High School

899-925 Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn
LP-2130



- Building A - C.B.J. Snyder, 1905-06
- Building B - C.B.J. Snyder, 1909-11
- Building C - C.B.J. Snyder, 1909-11
- Building D - C.B.J. Snyder, 1909-11
- Building E - C.B.J. Snyder/William Gompert, 1924-25
- Building F - Eric Kebron, 1939-40



Building B, section B1

Building A, tower, A1

Erasmus Hall High School
Flatbush facade, Building A and B



tower A1

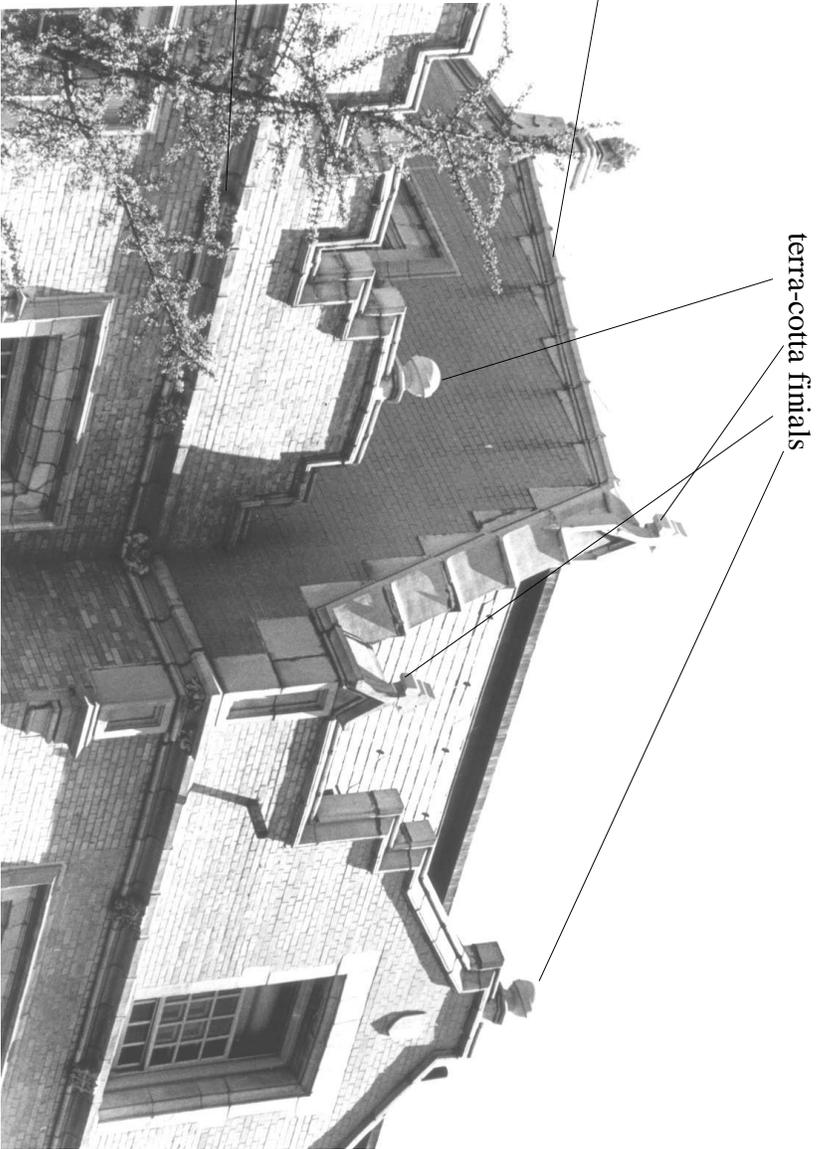
terra cotta

limestone

entrance

Flatbush Avenue

Erasmus Hall High School
Building A, south side
Flatbush Avenue facade

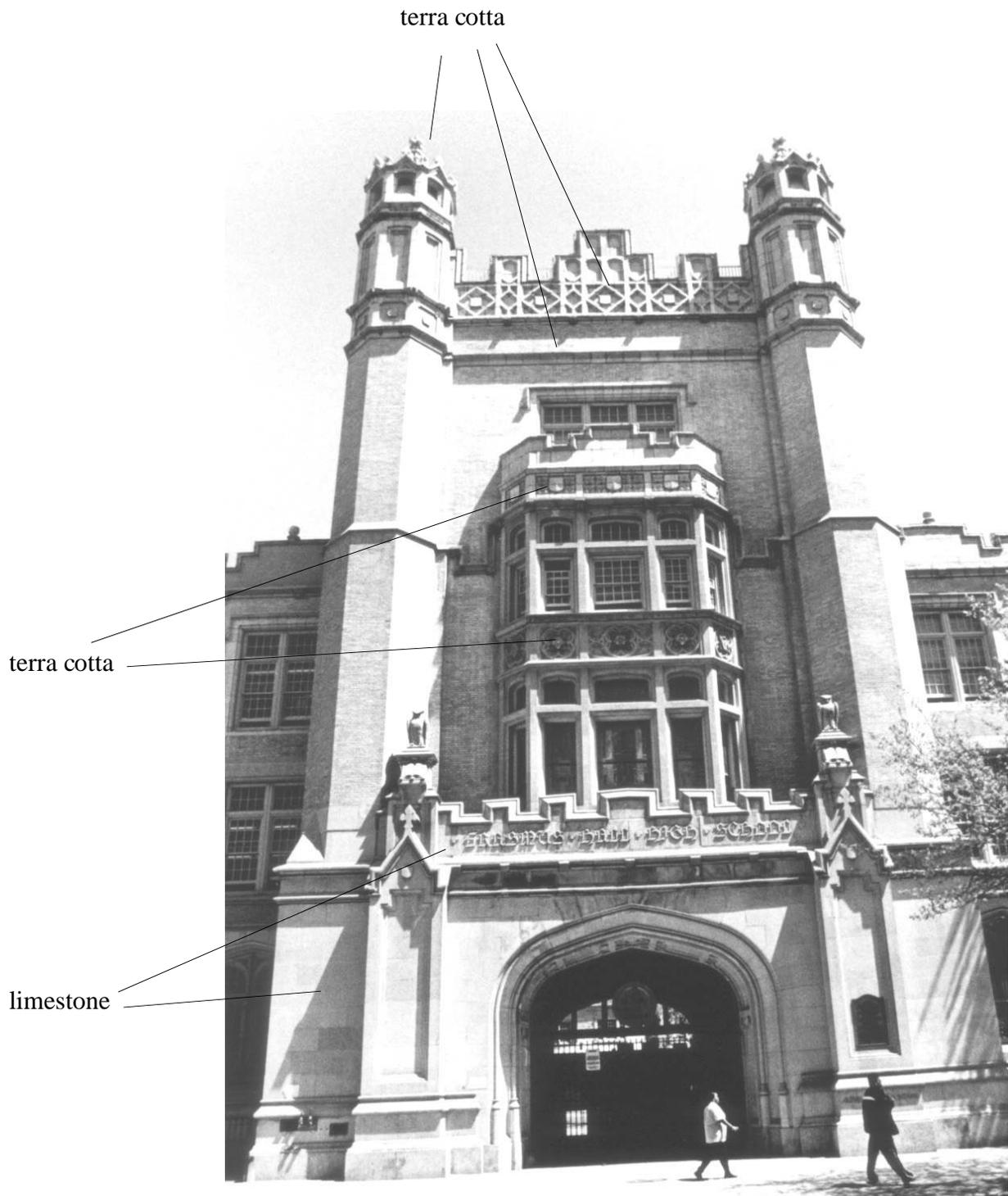


terra-cotta tiles

terra-cotta finials

terra-cotta cornice
with decorative
grotesques

Erasmus Hall High School
Building A, Flatbush Avenue facade
Roofline detail at southern end



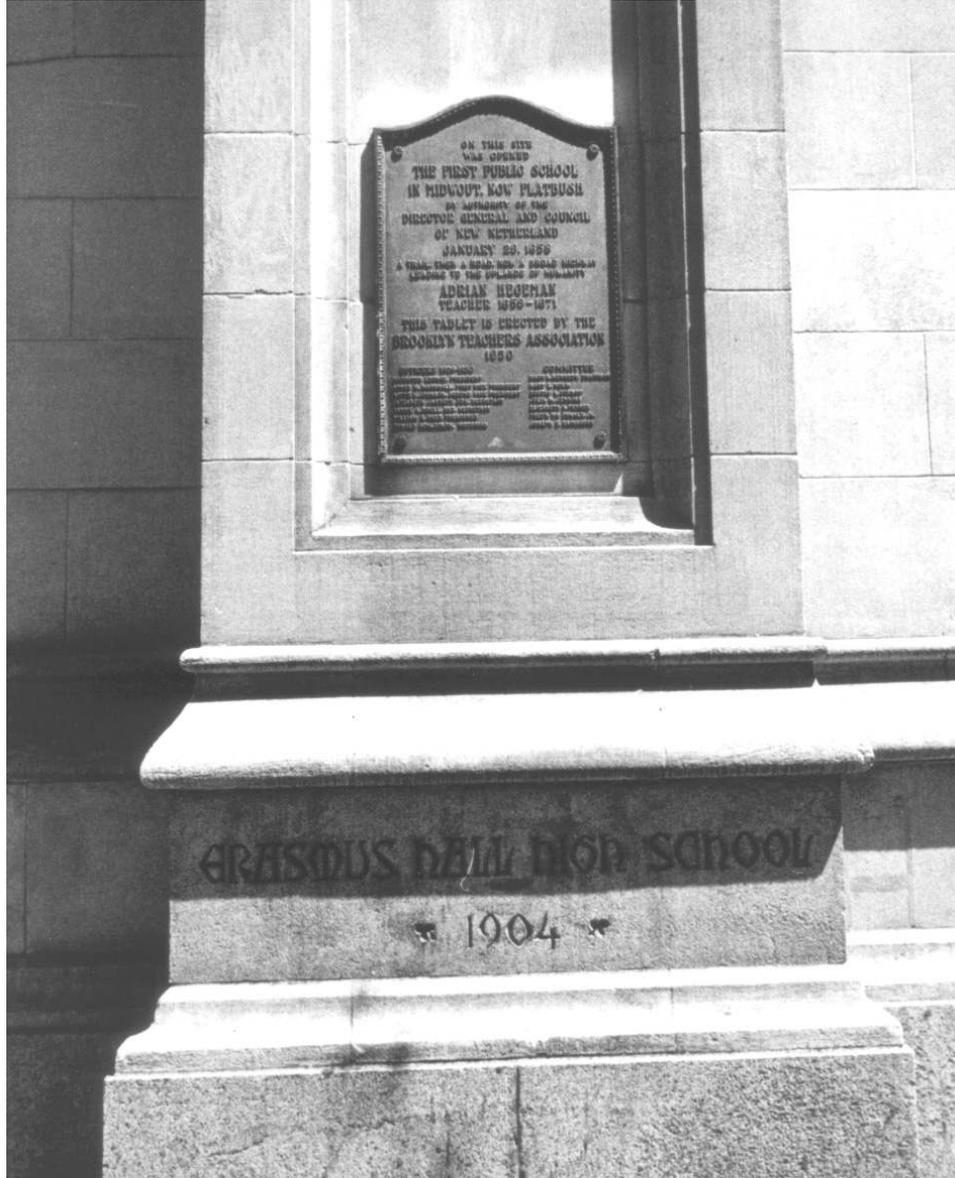
Erasmus Hall High School
Building A, Tower A1
Flatbush Avenue facade

terra cotta

limestone



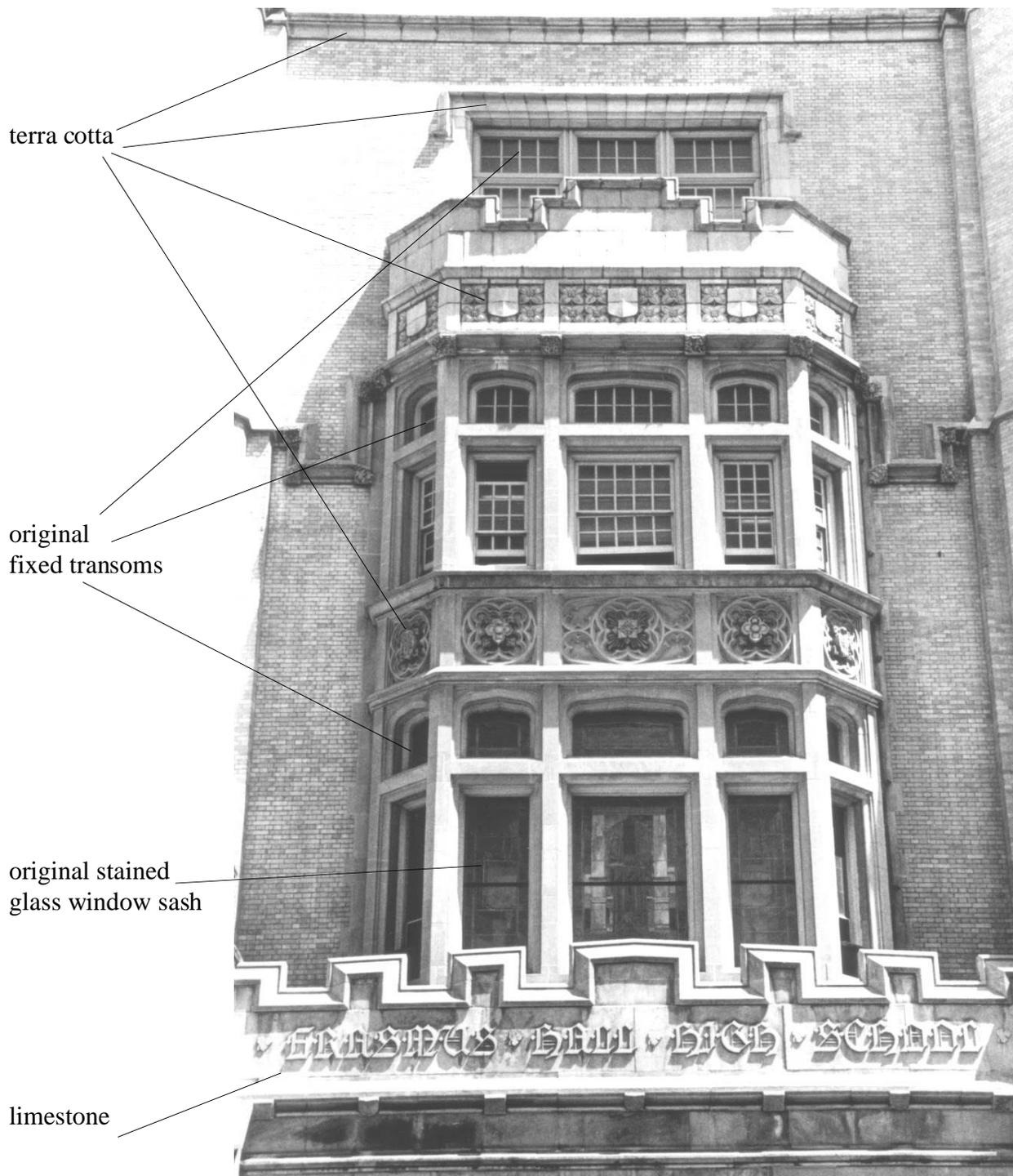
Erasmus Hall High School
Tower A1
Detail of pier



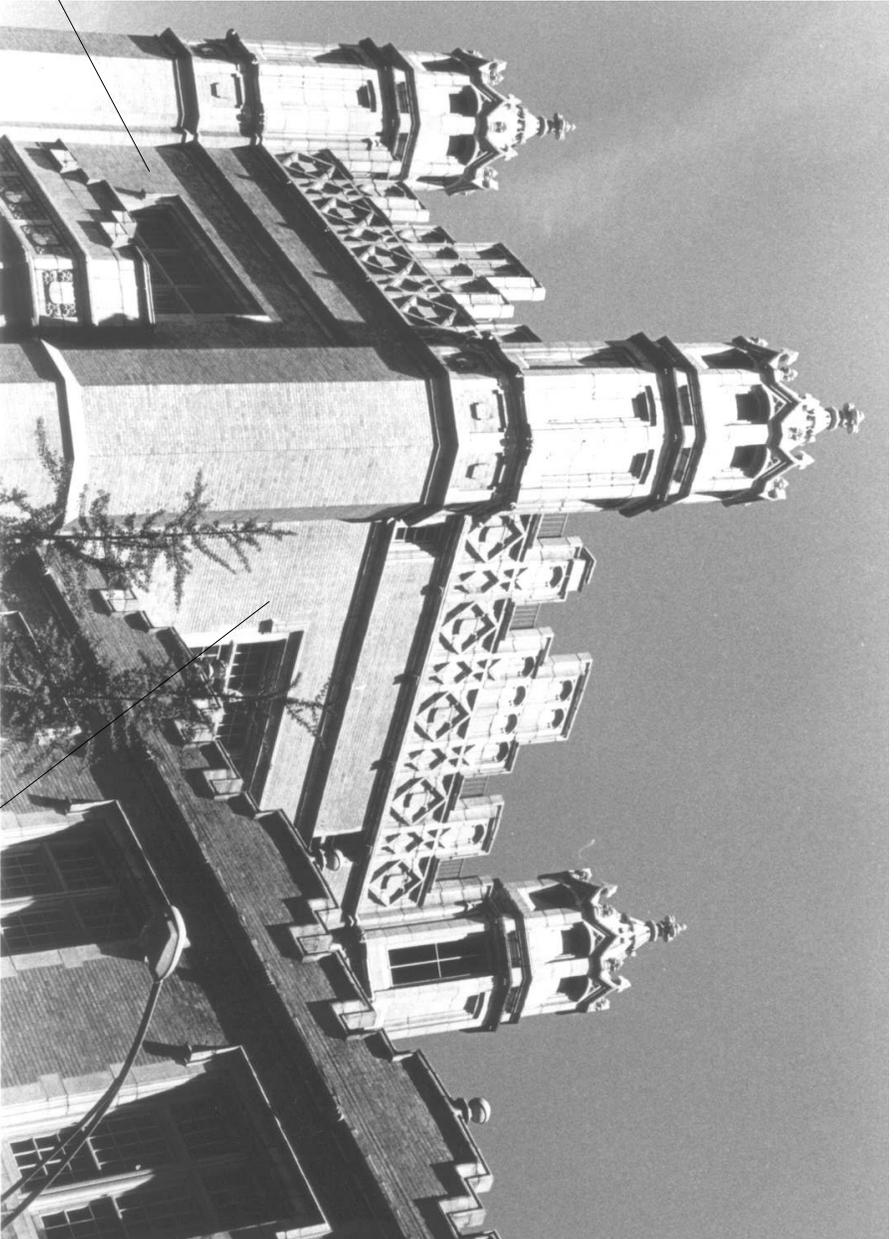
Erasmus Hall High School
Tower A1, cornerstone
Detail of plaque, noting first school on site



Erasmus Hall High School
Tower A1, arch detail
Bas relief of Erasmus,
Guastavino brick arch and school seal



Erasmus Hall High School
Tower A1, detail
Oriel window at 2nd and 3rd stories



Flatbush Avenue (west) facade

southern facade

Erasmus Hall High School
Tower A1
terra-cotta top detail



Building A

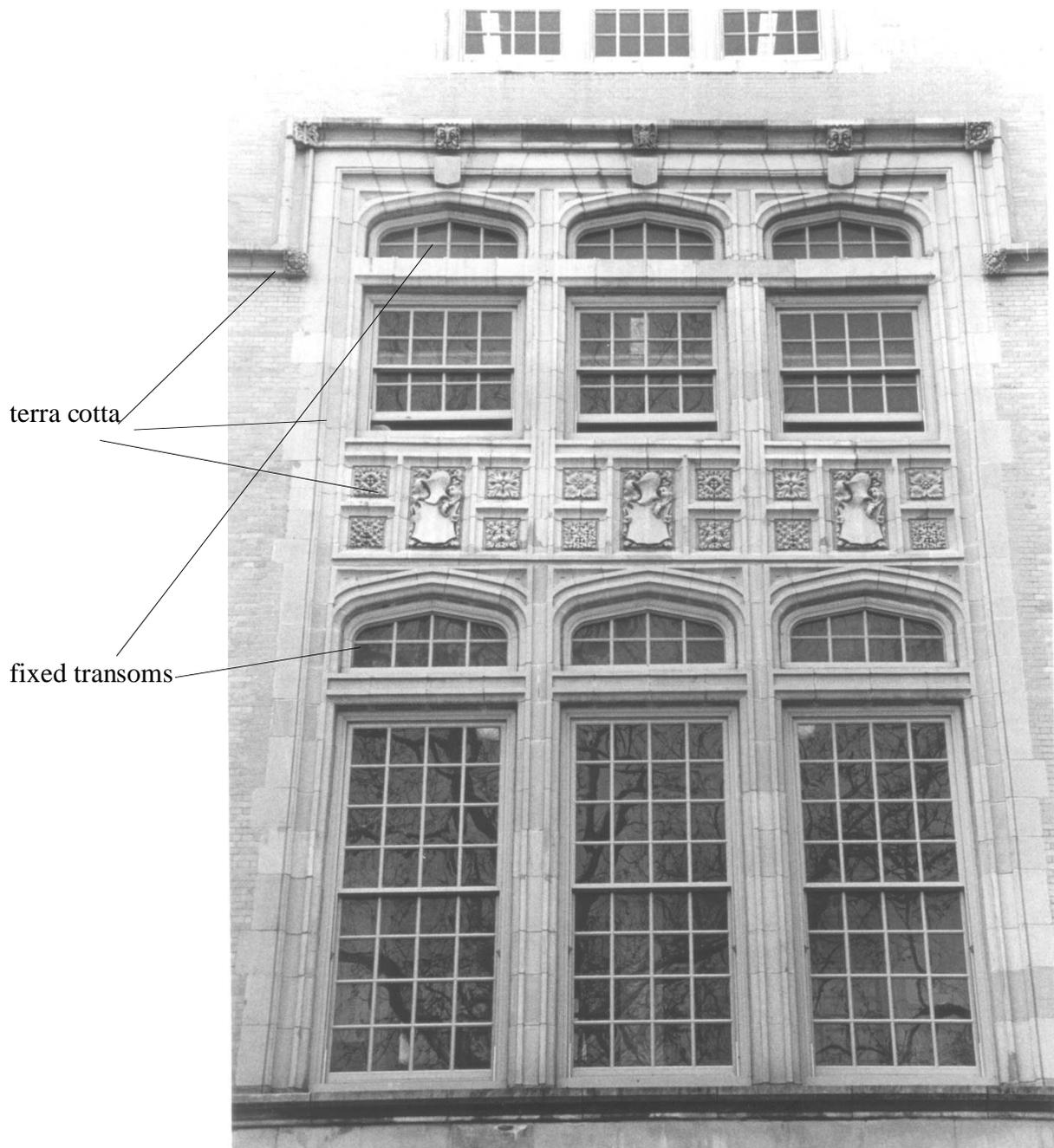
Tower A2

Building B

Erasmus hall High School
Buildings A and B
Courtyard facade



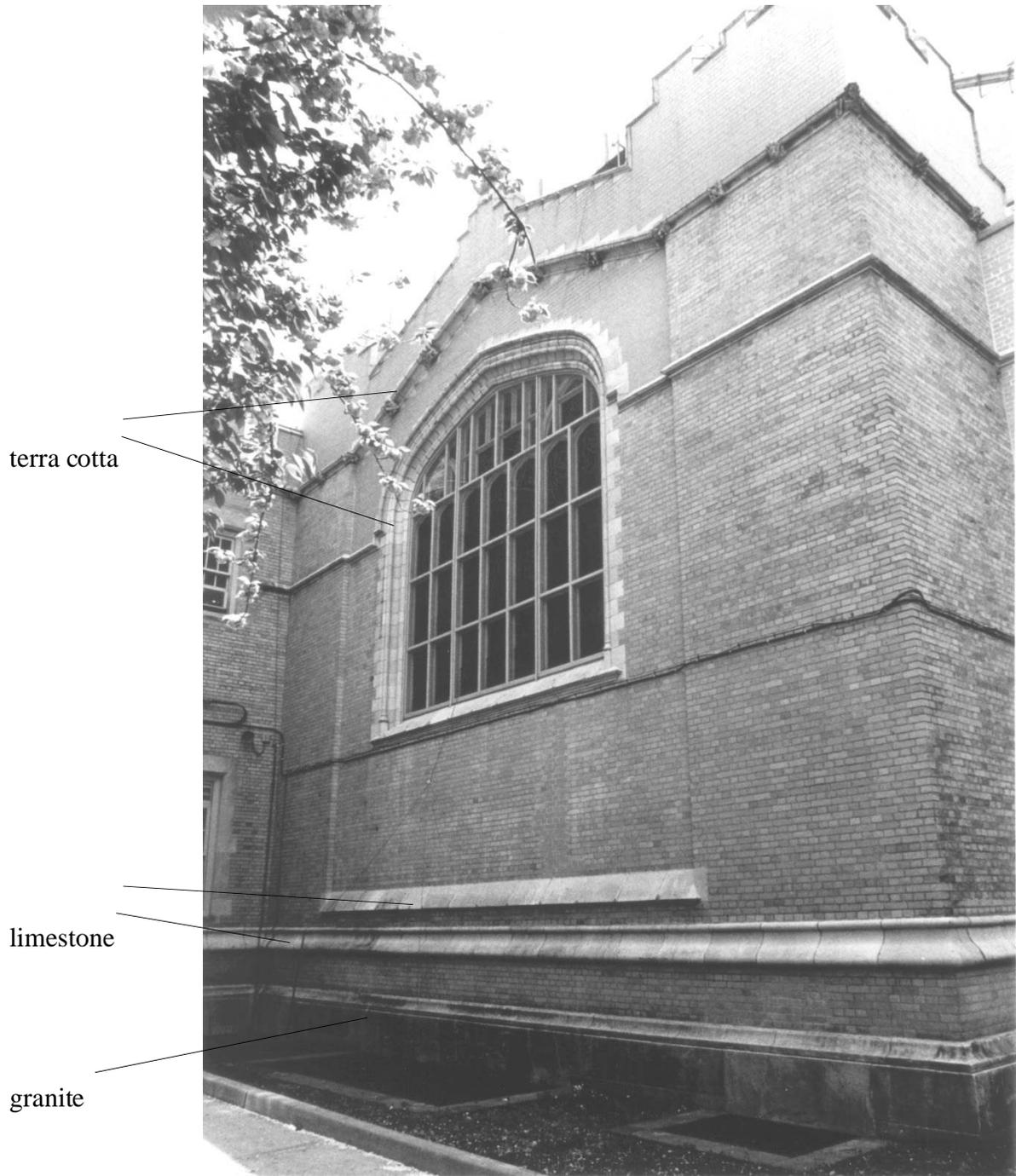
Erasmus Hall High School
Tower A2
Terra-cotta detail of top of northern pier



Erasmus Hall High School
Tower A2, courtyard facade
Detail of 2nd and 3rd story windows



Erasmus Hall High School
Auditorium, Building A
Courtyard facade



Erasmus Hall High School
Building A, auditorium
Stained glass window of Life of Erasmus



finial

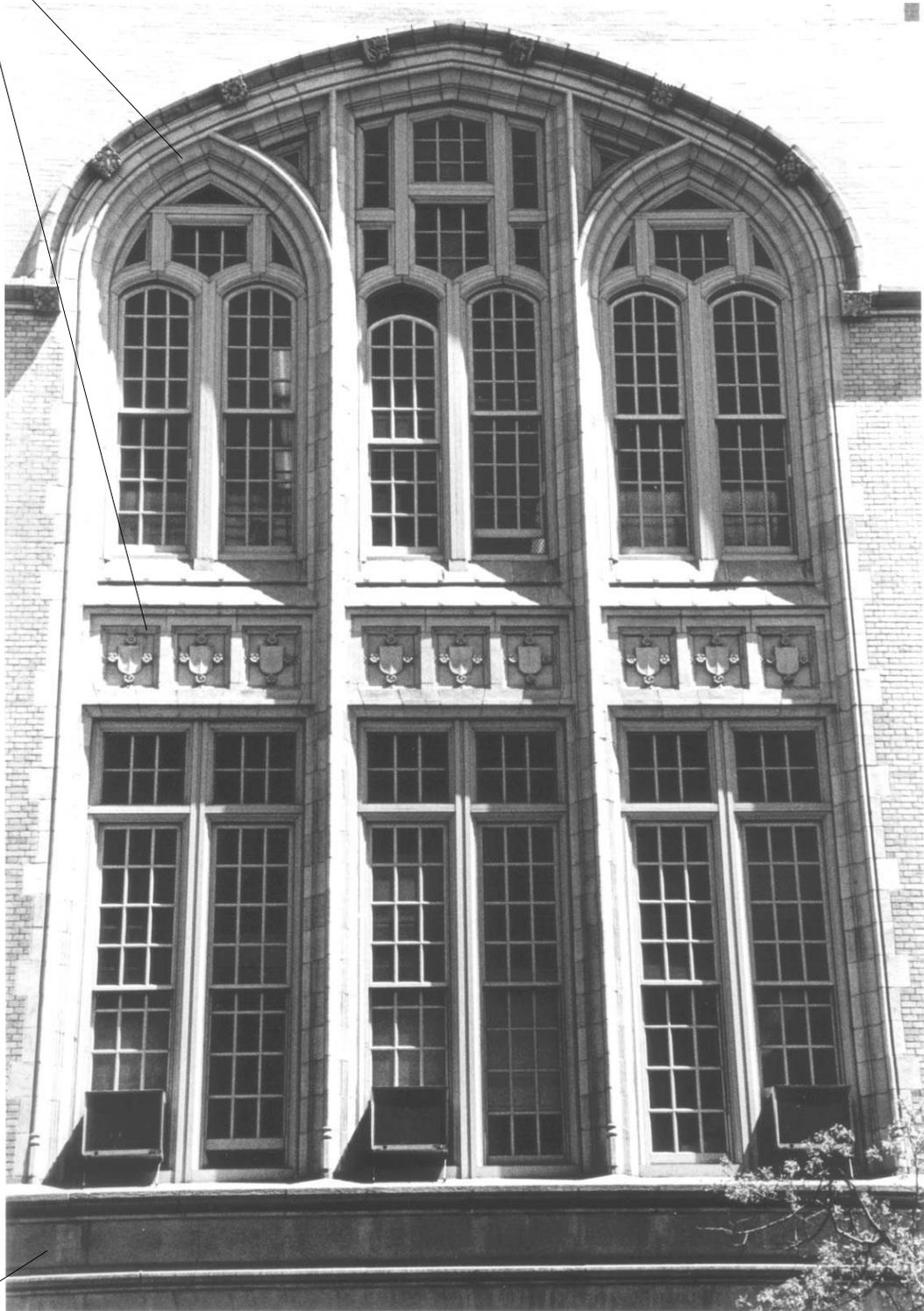
terra cotta

limestone

stone tracery

Erasmus Hall High School
B1, Flatbush Avenue facade

terra cotta



stone

Erasmus Hall High School
Window detail, Flatbush facade of section B1, Building B



Erasmus Hall High School
Top of B1, Flatbush Avenue facade
Finial detail



B1

limestone

granite

entrance

Tower A1

Erasmus Hall High School
Building B, Flatbush Avenue facade



fixed transom sash

terra cotta

limestone

granite

entrance

Building C

Erasmus Hall High School
Building B, courtyard facade

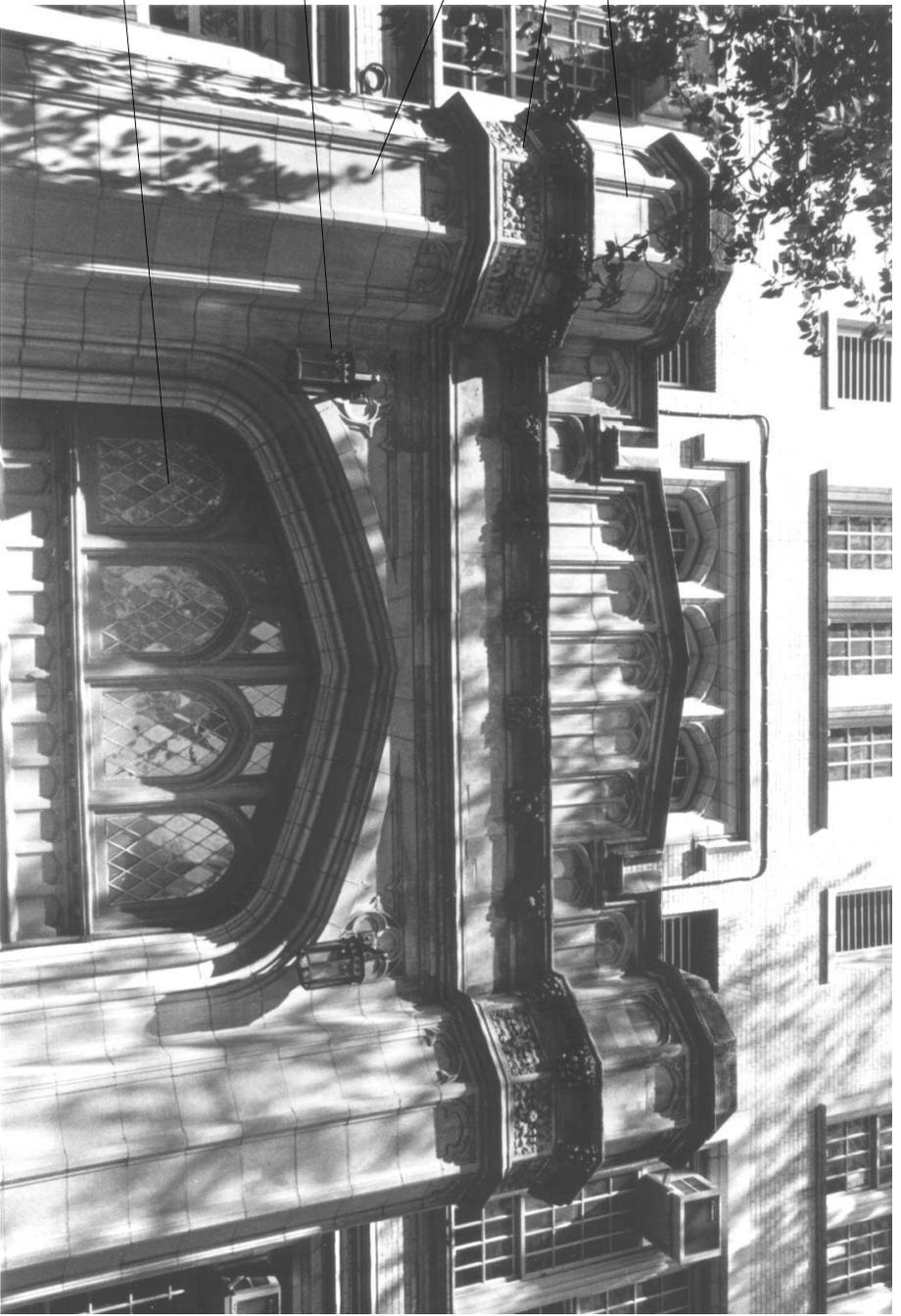


terra cotta

limestone

entrance

Erasmus Hall High School
Building C
Courtyard facade

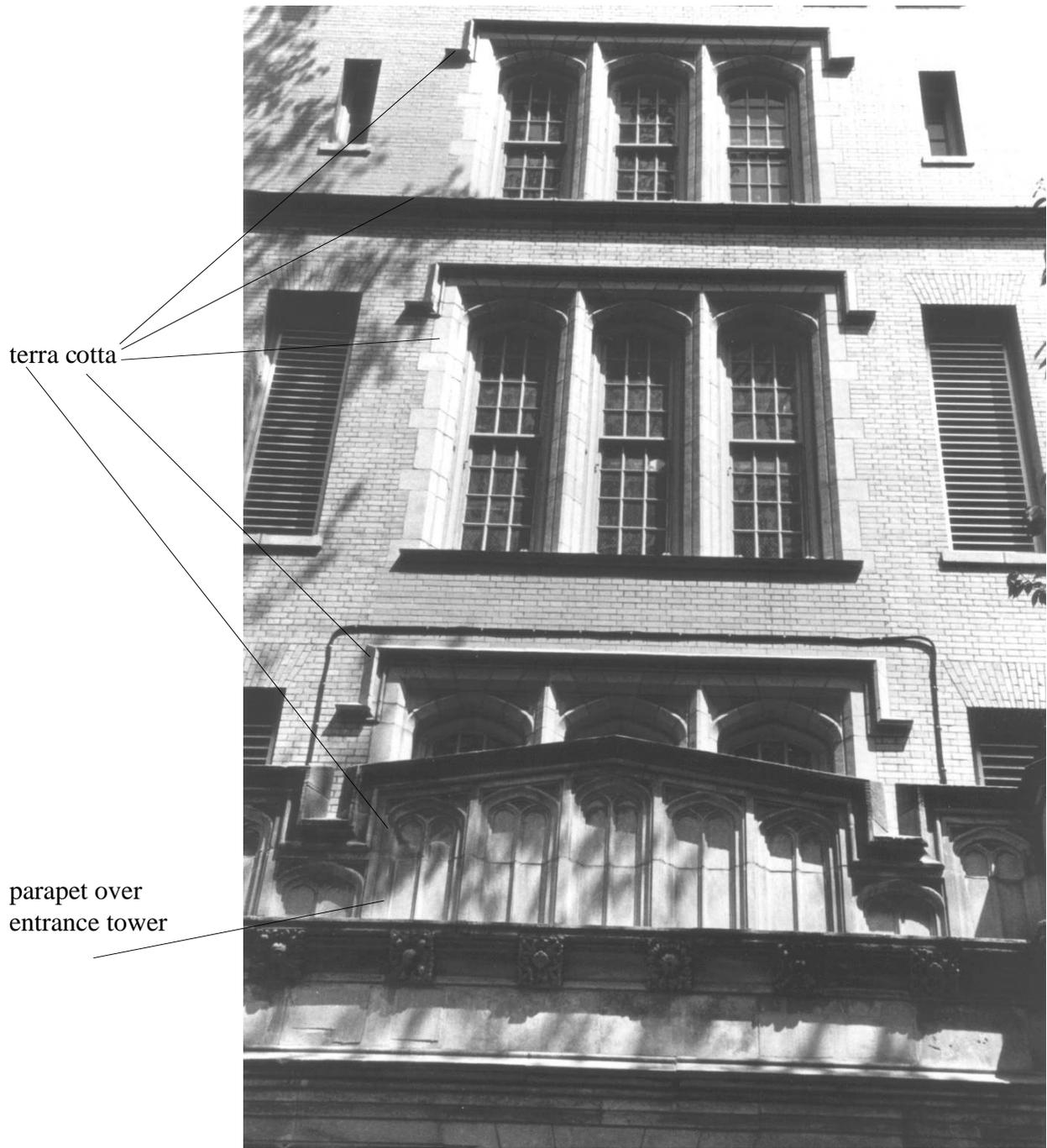


terra cotta

original light fixtures

leaded glass

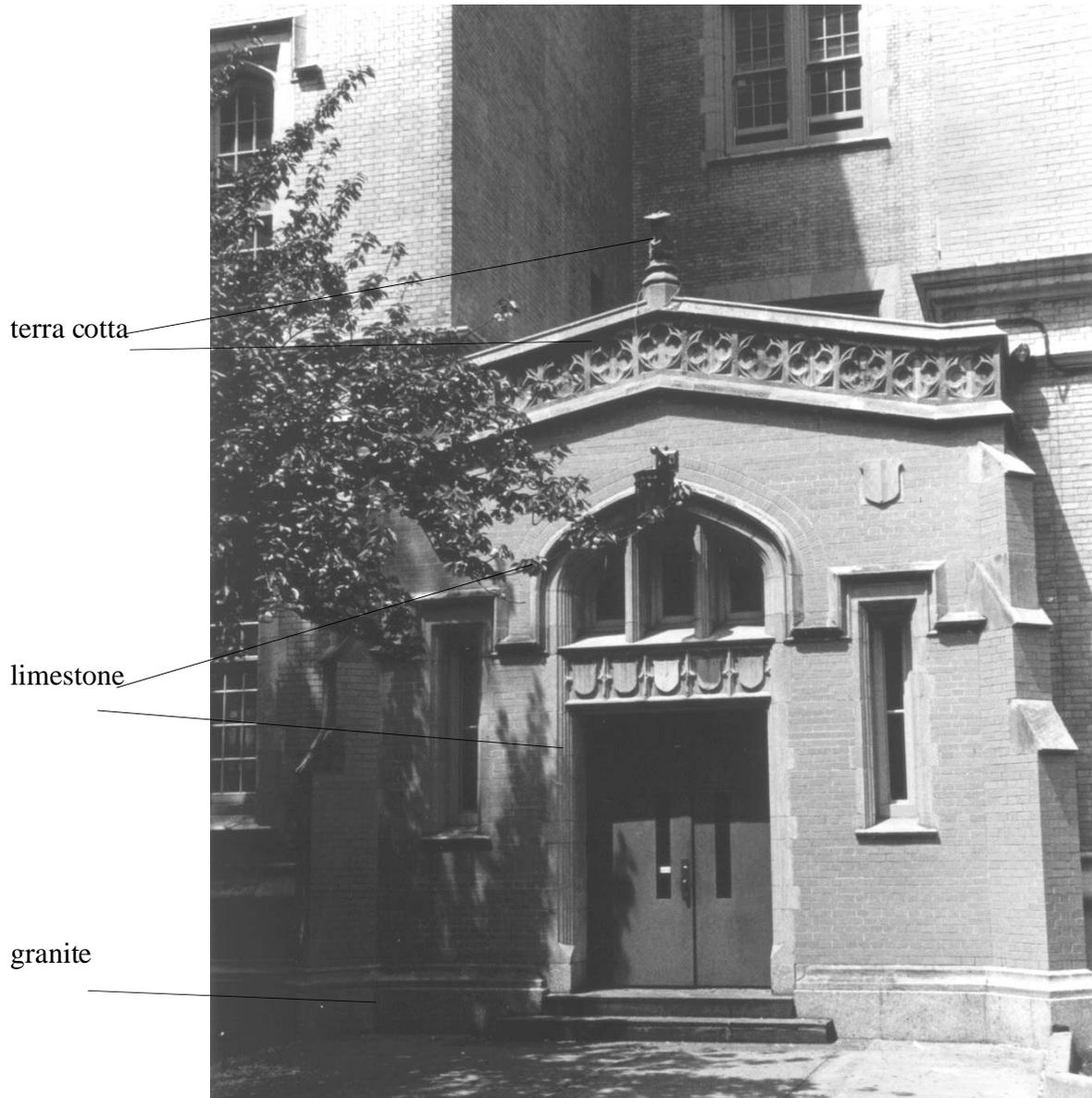
Erasmus Hall High School
Tower C1, entrance
Ground story



terra cotta

parapet over
entrance tower

Erasmus Hall High School
Building C
2nd, 3rd and 4th stories above tower C1



Erasmus Hall High School
Entrance between buildings C and D

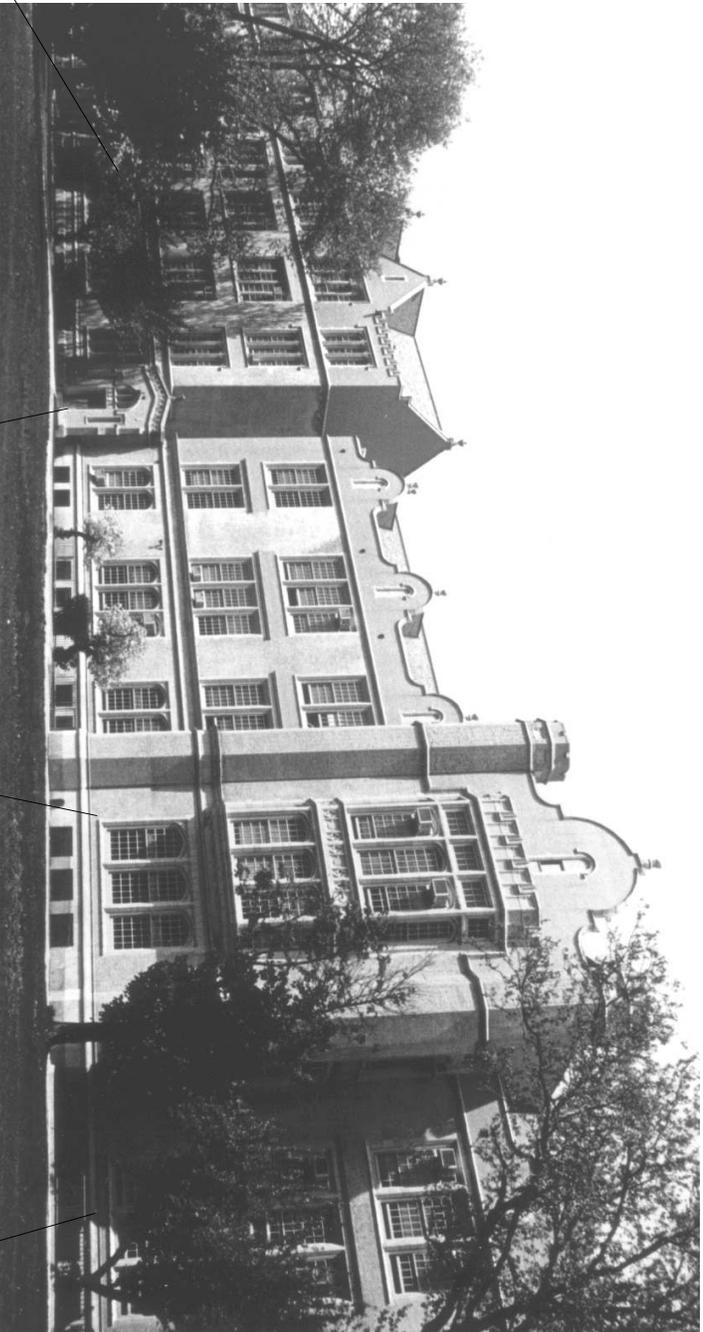
terra cotta

limestone

original fixture



Erasmus Hall High School
Entrance between buildings C and D
Detail of finial, molding and doorway



Building C

Doorway between

Tower D1

Building D

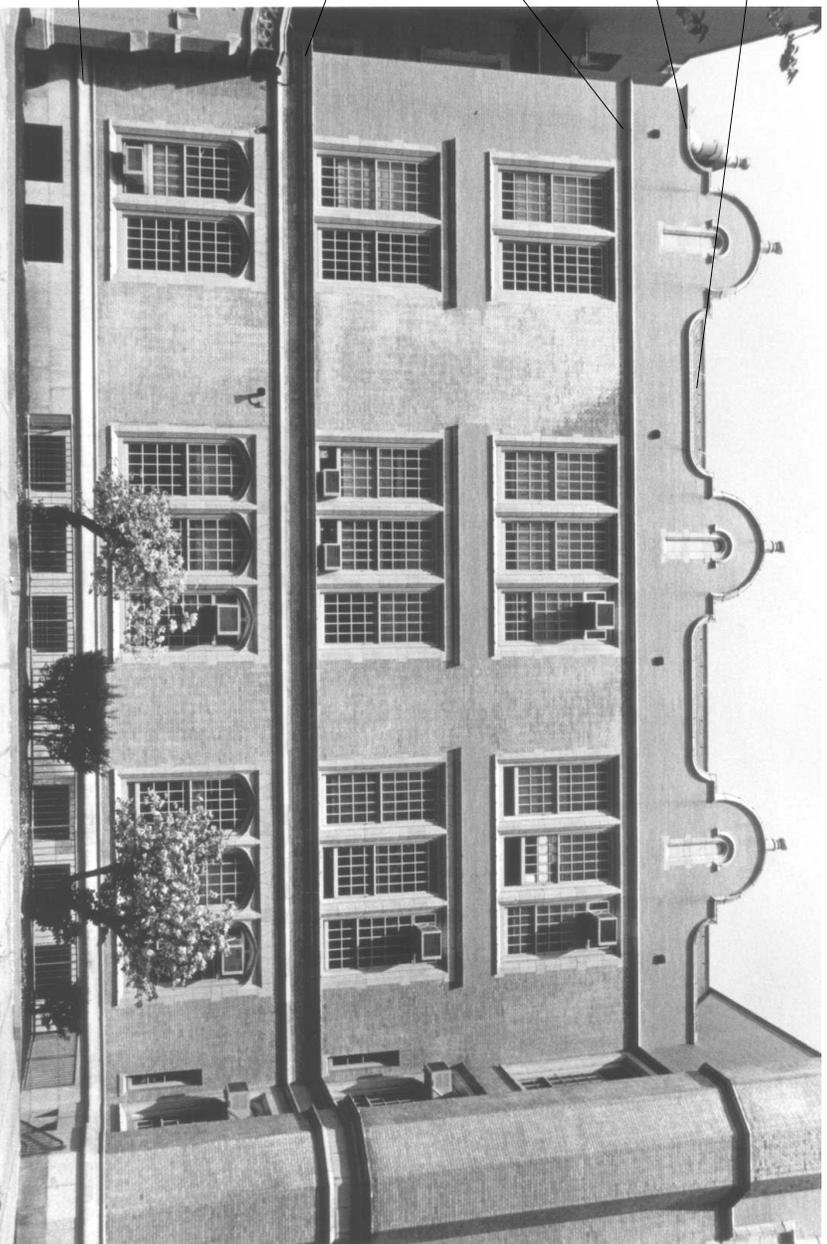
Erasmus Hall High School
Courtyard facades of Buildings C and D

pitched roof

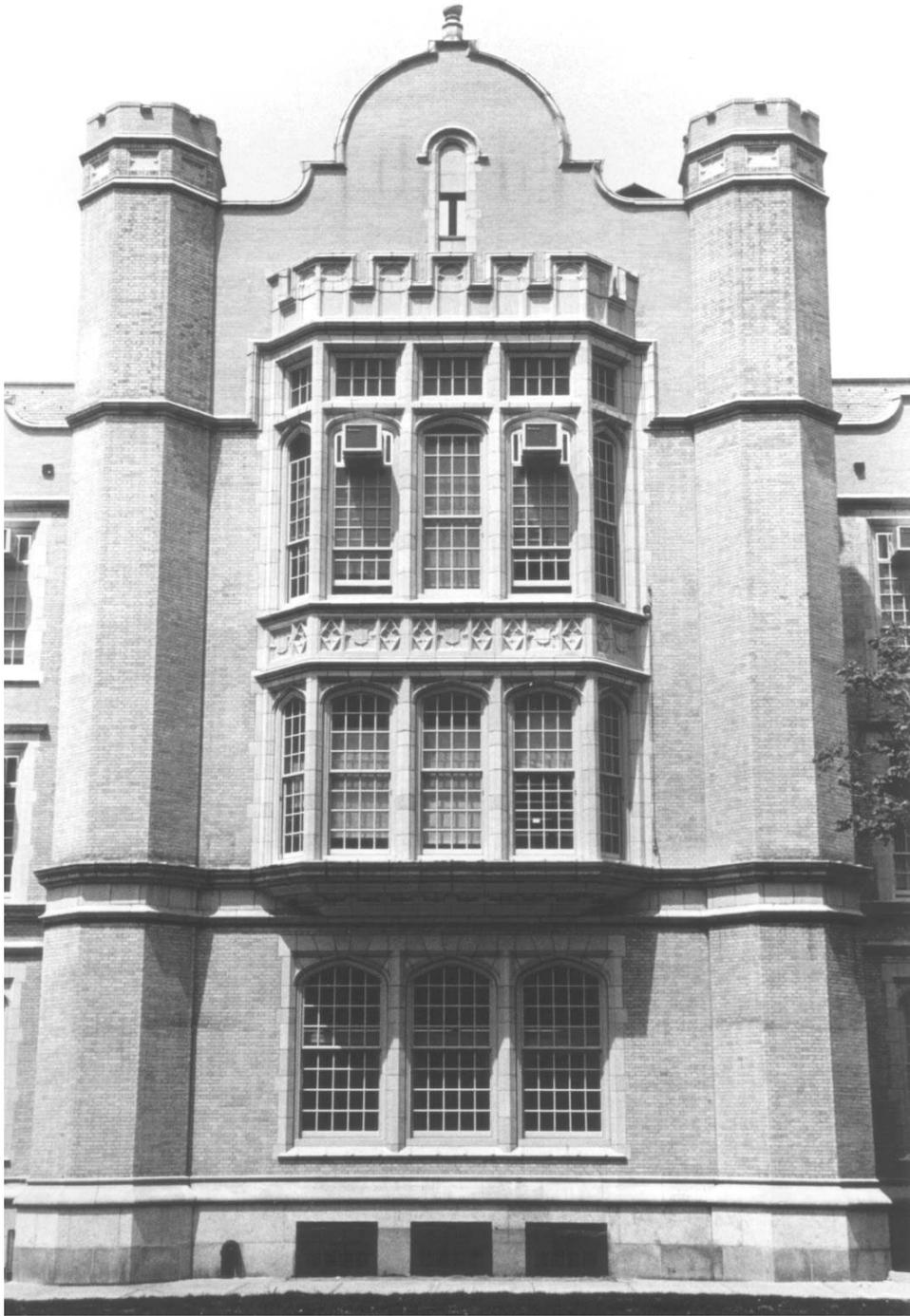
terra-cotta moldings and finials

terra-cotta string courses

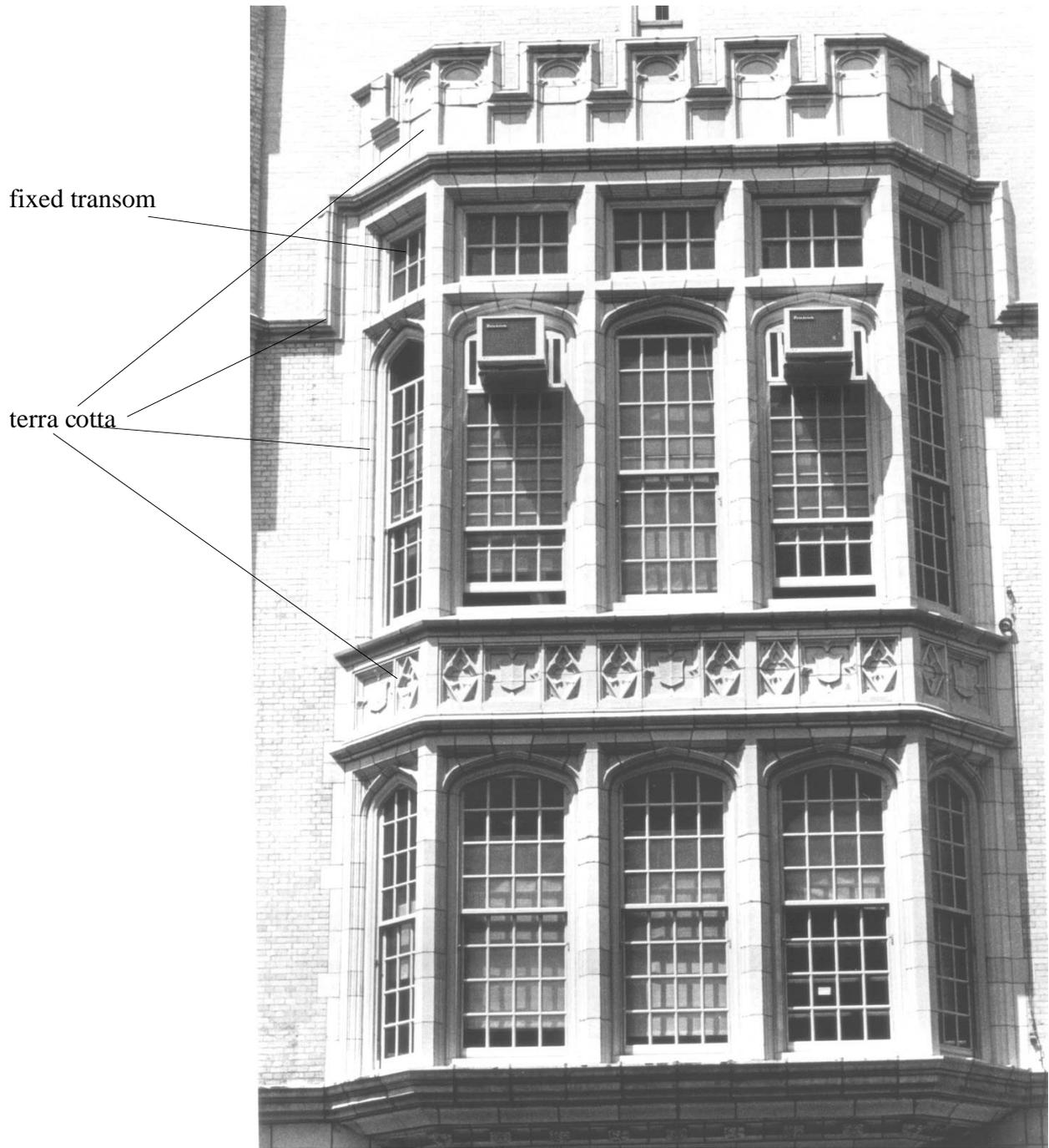
limestone



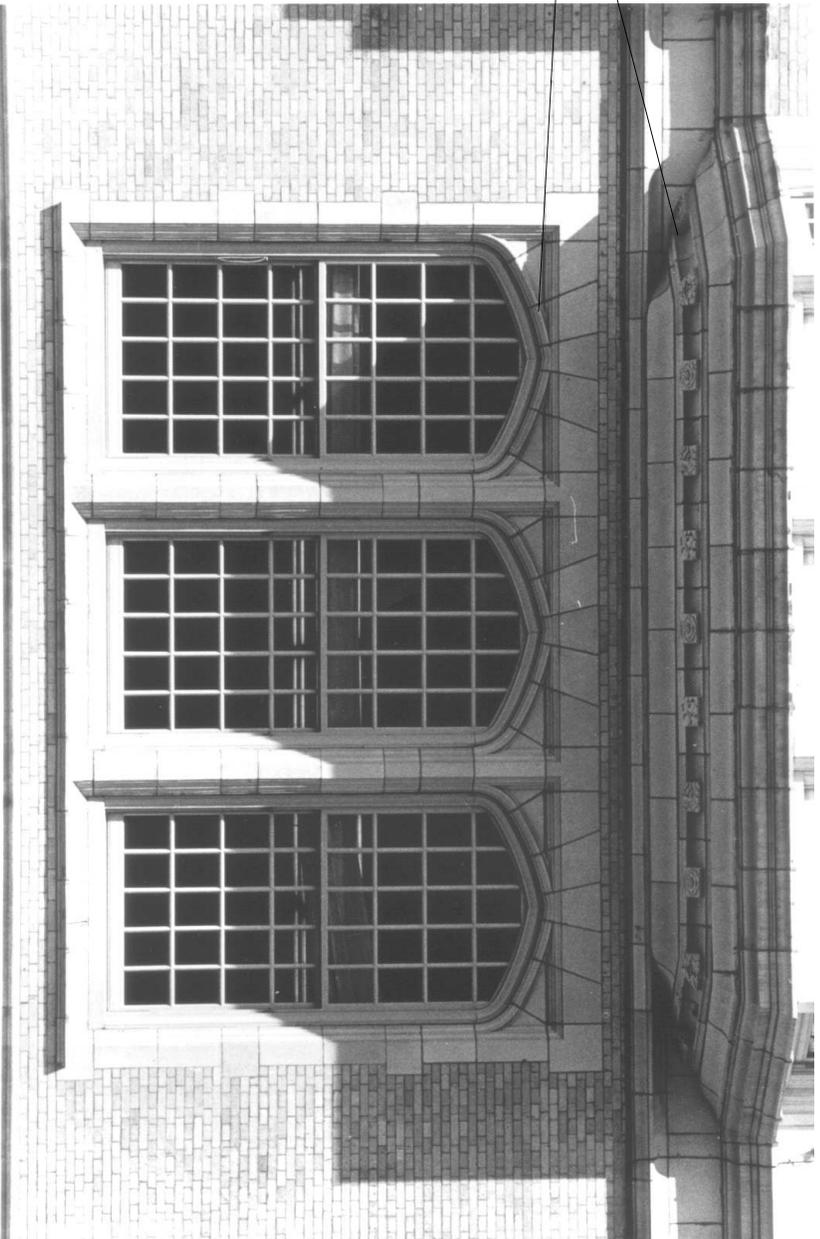
Erasmus Hall High School
West side of Building D



Erasmus Hall High School
Tower D1, courtyard facade

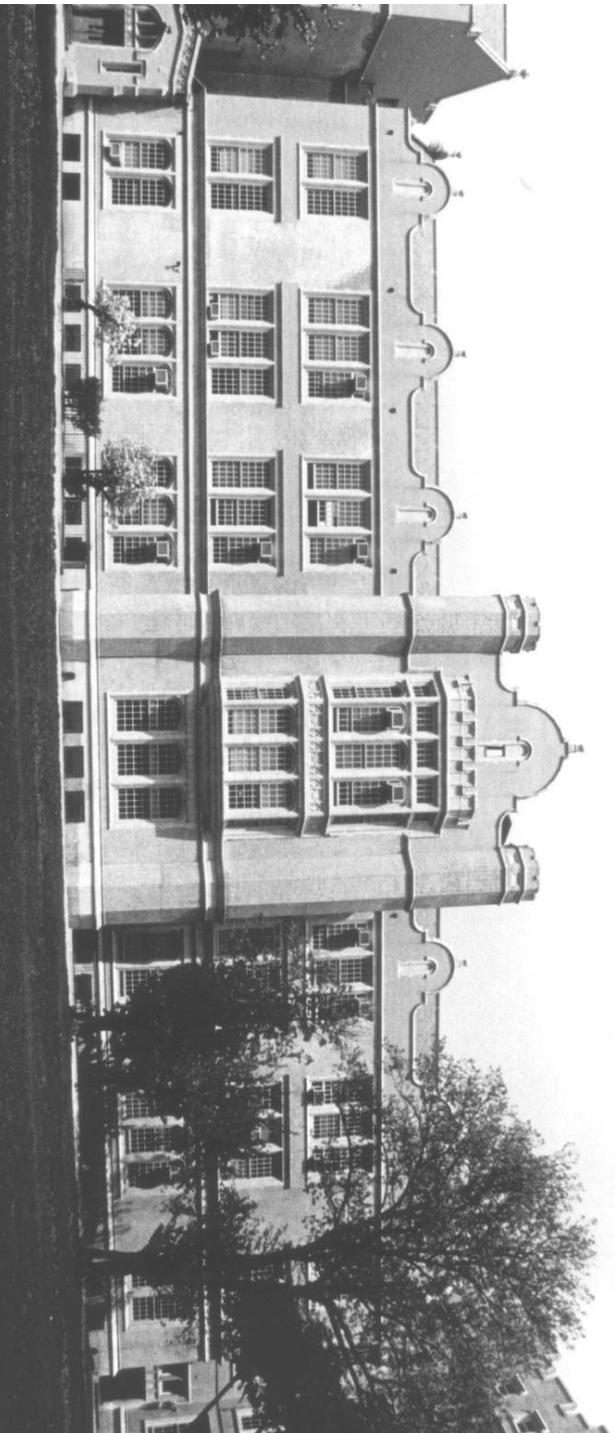


Erasmus Hall High School
Tower D1
Oriel windows, 2nd and 3rd Stories



terra cotta

Erasmus Hall High School
Tower D1
Ground story detail



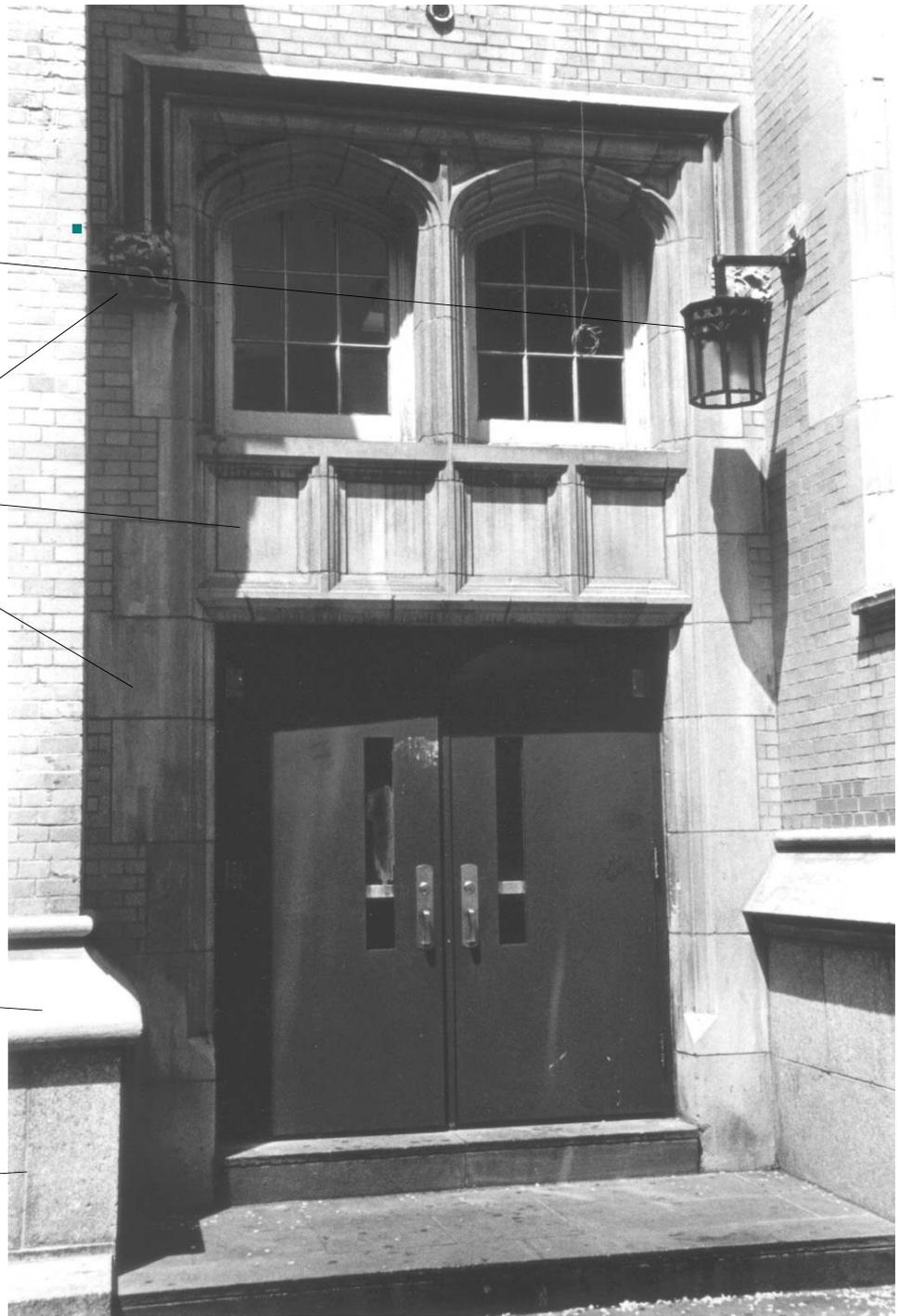
Erasmus Hall High School
Building D
Courtyard facade

original light fixture

terra cotta

limestone

granite

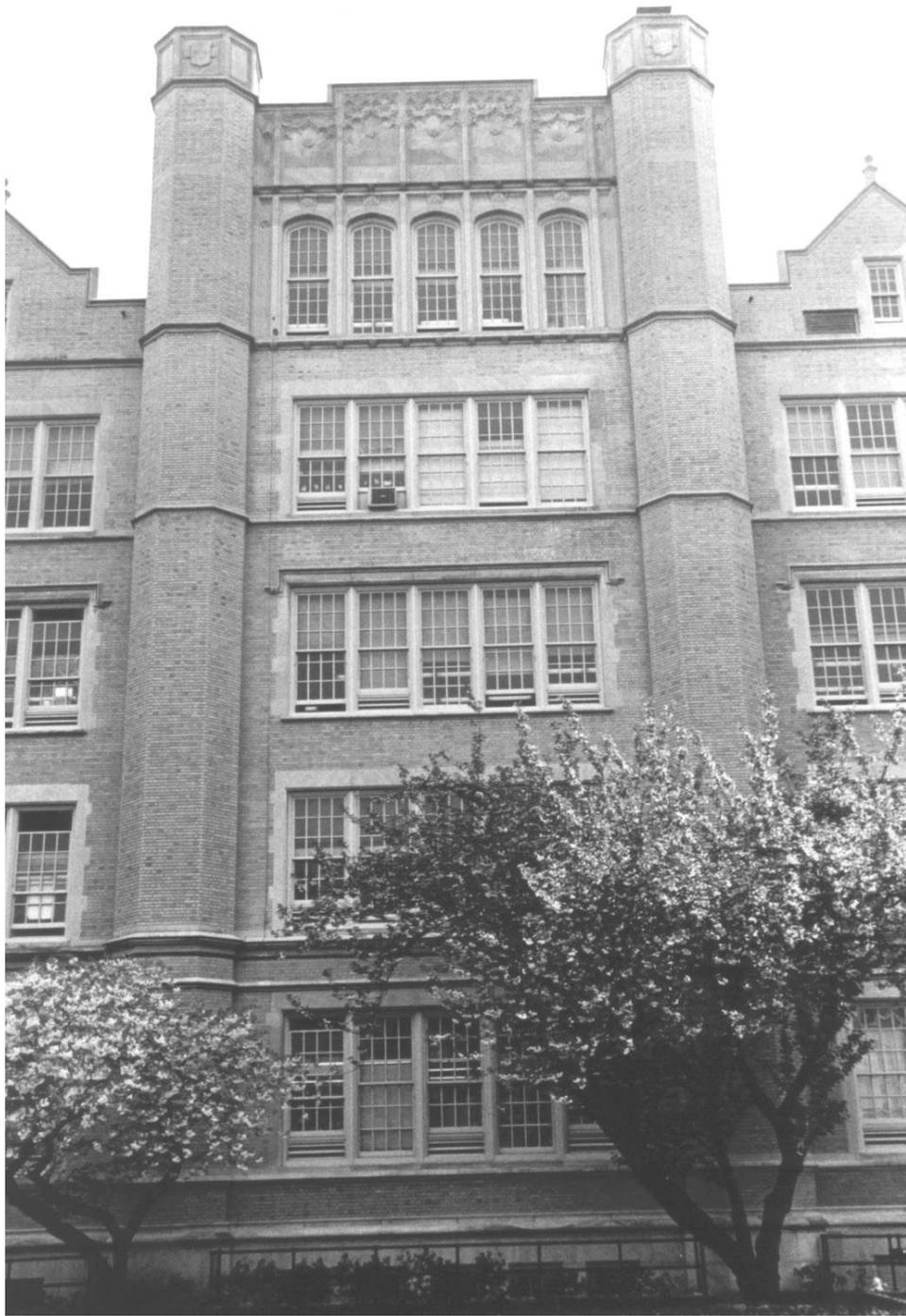


Erasmus Hall High School
Doorway between buildings D and E



Tower F1

Erasmus Hall High School
Building F



Erasmus Hall High School
Building F



Erasmus Hall High School
Building F, Tower F1
Entrance and view to the west



terra cotta

limestone

original fixtures

replacement doors

granite

Erasmus Hall High School
Building F
Tower F1 entrance

terra cotta



limestone

granite

replacement doors

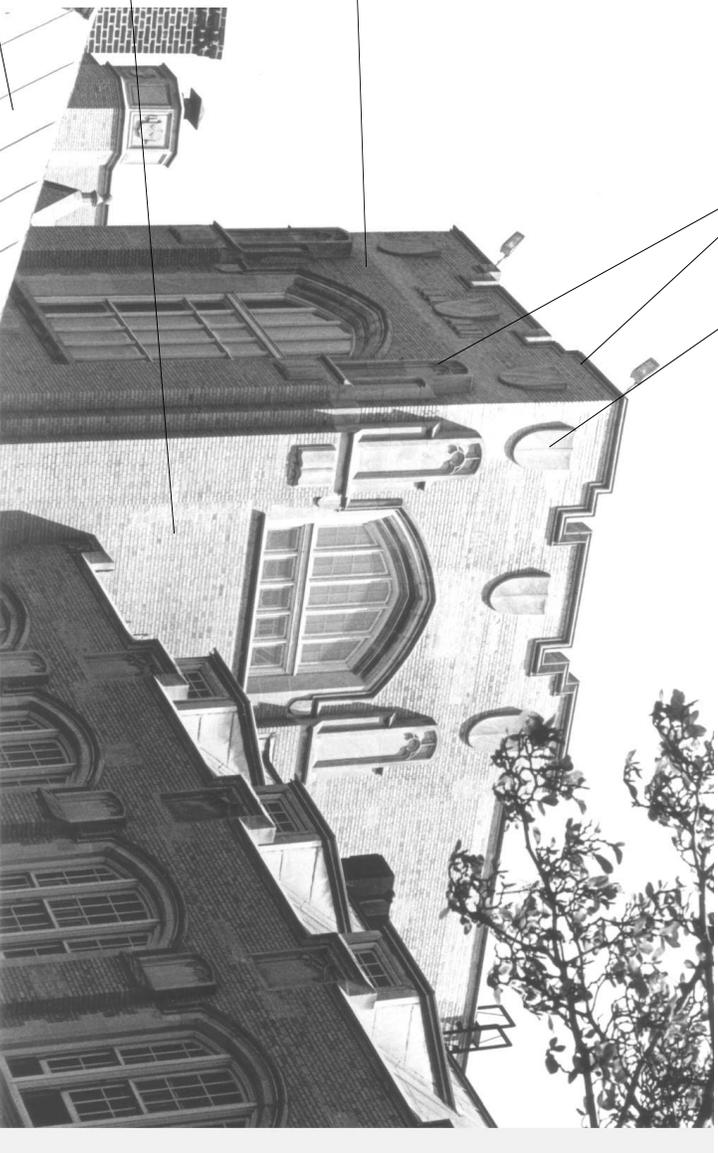
Erasmus Hall High School
Building F
Entrance between Buildings A and F

terra cotta



granite

Erasmus Hall High School
Building F
northwest corner



terra cotta

northern facade

western facade

roof of old building

Erasmus Hall High School
Tower F1, Building F