

**FLATBUSH DISTRICT NO. 1 SCHOOL**, later Public School 90, 2274 Church Avenue (aka 2274-2286 Church Avenue; 2192-2210 Bedford Avenue), Borough of Brooklyn.  
Built 1878; John Y. Culyer, architect; c.1890-94 addition.

Landmark Site: Brooklyn Borough Tax Map Block 5103, Lot 58 in part, consisting of the land upon which the described building is situated.

On September 18, 2007, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Flatbush District No. 1 School and the proposed designation of its related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. One representative of the Historic Districts Council spoke in favor of designation. Seven people spoke in favor of designating the building and only that portion of the lot upon which the building is situated, including New York City Councilmember Mathieu Eugene, and representatives of Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, the New York City Economic Development Corporation, the Haitian Centers Council, and the Caribbean American Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Inc. The public hearing was then closed, and reopened to hear the testimony of Roy Hastick, the president of the Caribbean American Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Mr. Hastick spoke in favor of designating the building and only that portion of the lot upon which the building is situated. The Commission has also received correspondence from New York State Assemblyman Karim Camara in favor of designating the building and only that portion of the lot upon which the building is situated. The site was previously heard in 1989.

#### Summary<sup>1</sup>

Dating from 1878, the Flatbush District No. 1 School is an important link to the years in which Flatbush was transformed from an agricultural village into a major suburb. During this period, the town expressed its independence and growing strength through the construction of two important buildings: its new town hall (1874-75, a designated New York City Landmark) and this school, both of which were designed by John Y. Culyer. The direct descendant of the original, seventeenth-century Flatbush school, which was the earliest school on Long Island, this building is a major contributor to Flatbush's long and rich educational history.

John Y. Culyer was a locally prominent civil engineer and landscape architect who was the chief engineer and superintendent of Brooklyn's Prospect Park (designed 1865, a designated New York City Scenic Landmark) and a member, for many years, of the Brooklyn Board of Education. Culyer designed the original H-shaped portion of the District No. 1 School in the *Rundbogenstil* or round-arched style, which was then the prevailing style among the new Brooklyn schoolhouses. Flatbush continued to grow following the building's completion, and the schoolhouse soon became crowded, necessitating the construction of a harmonious southern addition, probably between 1890 and 1894. Following Flatbush's annexation by Brooklyn in 1894, it was renamed Public School No. 90. Closed as an elementary school in 1951, it served from 1954 to 1967 as the Brooklyn Branch of the Yeshiva University Boys' High School, and from 1968 into the 1990s as the Beth Rivkah Institute, a private girls' school. Currently owned by the City of New York, the building is vacant, although the Caribbean American Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Inc. has proposed restoring and reopening the building as a part of a trade center.



## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### The Town of Flatbush<sup>2</sup>

Before Europeans first made contact with Native Americans on what is now called Long Island, large portions of the island, including present-day Brooklyn, were occupied by the Lenape, or Delaware, Indians. Although no known evidence indicates that a large Lenape settlement existed in what is today known as Flatbush, the area could have held one of the group's smaller inland campsites. Certainly, the Lenape frequented the area that would become the historic core of Flatbush, as both Flatbush and Church Avenues—whose intersection marks the old town's center, one block west of the Flatbush District No. 1 School—closely follow former Native American pathways.<sup>3</sup>

By the 1630s, Dutch and English settlers were taking control, from the Lenape, of western Long Island.<sup>4</sup> The settlement of Flatbush probably began in the early 1650s; originally known as Midwout ("Middle Woods"), it was one of the six towns of Kings County that were founded under Dutch rule.<sup>5</sup> Midwout, which was centrally located among the six settlements, was chosen by Governor Peter Stuyvesant as the site for the towns' Reformed Dutch Church, constructed in 1662 at what is now the corner of Flatbush and Church Avenues.<sup>6</sup> In addition to being a religious center, Midwout served as the marketing, legal, and administrative center for Long Island's Dutch towns. In 1664, when the Dutch ceded their holdings in New Netherland to the British, Midwout was renamed Flatbush, a corruption of the Dutch *vlakke bos*, or "wooded plain."<sup>7</sup>

The early nineteenth century saw an end to slavery, a brutal component of Flatbush life since the town's earliest days. Forced black labor became entrenched in Kings County soon after the arrival of slaves there in 1660, and it was particularly widespread among Dutch families who "wanted slaves not as servants but as agricultural laborers as they sought to profit from feeding the metropolis," according to Marc Linder and Lawrence S. Zacharias.<sup>8</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century, Flatbush had 71 slaves, who accounted for 15% of its population; by 1749, there were 783 slaves in Flatbush, and in 1790, the town's 390 slaves may have outnumbered its white males. Three-quarters of the town's white households owned slaves at the end of the eighteenth century, an "extraordinary" percentage exceeding even that of South Carolina.<sup>9</sup> In 1820—just seven years before Emancipation in New York State—slaves still made up one-fifth of Flatbush's total population. The site of the Flatbush District No. 1 School is reputed to have contained a slaves' cemetery; archaeological work in the schoolyard in 2000 produced fragments of a human mandible, as well as four human teeth.<sup>10</sup>

Over the last half of the nineteenth century, Flatbush was transformed from an agricultural village into one of the major areas of suburban development in Greater New York. This change was fueled primarily by transportation enhancements that facilitated travel to Brooklyn and New York, including the extension of the Flatbush Avenue horsecar line to central Flatbush in 1860, the debut of steam-train service along the Brooklyn, Flatbush & Coney Island Railroad in 1878, and the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883. The 1860s and 1870s saw Flatbush take on new trappings of urbanism, with the formation of the Flatbush Gas Company and Flatbush Water Works Company, and the organization of a Board of Public Improvement and Board of Police Commissioners. During this period, near its center, the town constructed two substantial brick buildings—Flatbush Town Hall and the new District No. 1 School—that stood out in a village of freestanding wood structures, and answered the need for new, modern civic and educational buildings in a growing and increasingly complex community. Following a failed effort by Brooklyn to annex Flatbush and Kings County's other "country towns" in 1873, Town Hall (a designated New York City Landmark) was completed in 1875, and the new schoolhouse opened in 1878.<sup>11</sup> Both were designed by the locally prominent landscape architect and civil engineer John Y. Culyer.

The late 1870s and early 1880s witnessed the scattered development of suburban houses in Flatbush, but the first major construction of freestanding frame suburban-type houses began in 1886 when Richard Ficken, a local entrepreneur, purchased land in the center of Flatbush and began the development known as Tennis Court. Flatbush's days of independence came to an end in 1894, when Brooklyn finally succeeded in annexing it; four years later, Brooklyn itself would become part of the consolidated City of New York.

Flatbush continued to develop following its annexation. Additional transit improvements spurred the development of major suburban districts including Prospect Park South and Ditmas Park (begun 1899 and 1902, respectively, both designated New York City Historic Districts) and the separate Fiske Terrace and Midwood Park developments (begun around 1905).<sup>12</sup> Following the 1920 opening of the Brighton subway line, large apartment houses were constructed along Ocean Avenue in Flatbush, attracting, among others, thousands of Jewish residents from Brownsville, Williamsburg, and the Lower East Side. In the 1980s, large numbers of Caribbean-Americans—particularly Haitians, as well as immigrants from Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Panama, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago—began to move to the neighborhood.

Today, the former Flatbush District No. 1 School, along with designated New York City Landmarks including Erasmus Hall Academy (1786), the Flatbush Dutch Reformed Church (Thomas Fardon, 1793-98), and Flatbush Town Hall, is among a handful of important structures recalling Flatbush's days as an independent town.<sup>13</sup> Standing, like these other buildings, near the historic center of what was then a developing agricultural village, the former schoolhouse recalls Flatbush's early days of suburban development, when masonry buildings like this one were rare in the town, and when Flatbush officials constructed substantial civic and educational buildings that were reflective of its independence and new growth.<sup>14</sup>

#### Public Education in Flatbush<sup>15</sup>

The Flatbush District No. 1 School is the direct descendant of the first school in Flatbush, which was “doubtless the earliest school on Long Island.”<sup>16</sup> Flatbush is known to have had a schoolmaster by 1659—two years before Brooklyn—and possibly as early as 1653, and the original Flatbush schoolhouse was located near the southeast corner of present-day Flatbush and Church Avenues.<sup>17</sup>

In 1803, the “much dilapidated” schoolhouse was sold, disassembled, and removed, and classes were moved into Erasmus Hall Academy, the prestigious private school founded in 1786 and located just south of the old schoolhouse's site.<sup>18</sup> Maintained as a separate school within the south end of the Academy building, the village school instructed students in “only the most elementary English branches.”<sup>19</sup> In the early 1840s, following a funding dispute with the town, the trustees of the Academy resolved that the village school be removed, and “that the town be requested to build a special school-house for [its] accommodation.”<sup>20</sup> Classes were held in temporary quarters in a building at the corner of present-day Flatbush and Church, but by 1845, a “commodious two-story frame building, about 45 by 30 feet, was erected for a school-house” near what is now the southwest corner of Church and Bedford Avenues.<sup>21</sup>

Among the students attending this school were those from Windsor Terrace and Parkville—then known as Greenfield—in the western part of Flatbush. In 1855, however, a separate school district was created for Greenfield, and in 1875, a Windsor Terrace district was created. These came to be known, respectively, as Flatbush District Nos. 2 and 3.<sup>22</sup> District No. 1 remained by far the largest of the three, encompassing the entire town east of present-day Coney Island Avenue, and containing, at the time of Flatbush's annexation, “two-thirds of the territory and three-fourths of the tax list of the old town.”<sup>23</sup> But with the growth of Flatbush—and the passage of an 1874 state law requiring schooling for all children between the ages of eight and fourteen—it became clear that the old District No. 1 schoolhouse was too crowded.<sup>24</sup> In 1877, one writer to the *Eagle* newspaper complained of the provision, by Brooklyn, of “gratuitous instruction ... to the children of neighboring country towns”:

About 100 children are in [Brooklyn] Public School No. 9 who do not reside in this city, about all of whom come from the Town of Flatbush.

In this matter Brooklyn is not only allowing herself to be injured, but is aiding to perpetuate a disgraceful state of affairs in Flatbush.... [T]he ... *Gazette* states that ... of the 956 [Flatbush students] who are between the ages of eight and fourteen ... ‘about 350 of them go to no school whatever.’ So long as the Brooklyn schools are thrown open to the Flatbush children, an obstruction is placed in the way of those public-spirited men of

that town who desire to erect a suitable school building and to provide first-class means of instruction at home.

Flatbush puts our city to an additional expense of about \$2,000 per year to educate some of its own children who cannot be taught in its own school. Flatbush is a nursery of ignorance and crime, because it does not provide facilities for the education of more than one-third of its children who are running about its streets.<sup>25</sup>

In 1878, the *Kings County Rural Gazette*, which was published in Flatbush, agreed that a new school building was needed for District No. 1. Sensing that a “new era” was dawning in Flatbush with the opening of the Brooklyn, Flatbush & Coney Island Railroad, the *Gazette* felt that “Flatbush must soon, very soon, see a growth in population and material progress which it has never before witnessed.”<sup>26</sup> After John Y. Culyer submitted plans for the new District No. 1 School to the district’s trustees in February of that year, the *Gazette* argued for its construction:

The necessity for the building has been clearly shown. We believe in giving every child in the community a good common school education. We believe in common with many others that we should have school accommodations in keeping with our mode of living, and fully up to the spirit of the age. No extravagance is desirable, yet as we have a fine Town Hall, so we should have a public school building to compare with it. If we are rightly informed, the plans submitted will be of that character....<sup>27</sup>

The new building being planned by the district trustees was one that, initially, only white students would attend. At that time, the Flatbush schools, like those of Brooklyn and New York, were segregated, with Flatbush District No. 1 operating a “colored school” on Malbone Street of about twenty pupils.<sup>28</sup> With the 1894 annexation of Flatbush, the city of Brooklyn, which had made considerable progress in integrating its public schools over the previous decade, shut down the Flatbush colored school.<sup>29</sup> Public school segregation in New York State officially ended in 1900, according to Carter G. Woodson, when the state legislature under Governor Theodore Roosevelt “passed an act providing that no one should be denied admittance to any public school on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”<sup>30</sup>

#### Flatbush District No. 1 School

The Flatbush District No. 1 School appears to have been constructed in two campaigns, about 15 years apart.<sup>31</sup> Its original H-shaped portion, comprising the entire Church Avenue façade and the symmetrical, northernmost, nine first-floor bays of the Bedford Avenue façade, was designed by John Y. Culyer and built in 1878 over a period of about eight months. Approval for the new schoolhouse came in February of that year, when the trustees of Flatbush School District No. 1 approved the future sale of the “Schoonmaker lot”—the site, apparently, of the original town schoolhouse, which the district had been leasing out—to fund its construction.<sup>32</sup> Although the building’s estimated \$17,000 cost seemed expensive, and the schoolhouse itself too large, the trustees defended the expenditure, explaining that

If we take into consideration the growing educational wants of the district, and that a building sufficient in size for immediate requirements would have to be enlarged in a few years, or new buildings erected, it must be considered by every fair-minded person as a matter of economy to the taxpayers of this district to erect such a building as is suggested by [Culyer’s] plans....

[The plans] are certainly most complete and beautiful in design, and if fully carried out, our district will have a schoolhouse that in many respects will be a model, and most admirably adapted for the purpose intended. Many of the suggestions embraced are new, and so far as the trustees are aware, have never been carried out in any school building in our vicinity. The arrangement for lighting, heating, and ventilation are all that could be desired; and the trustees feel assured, that ... it will be an ornament to our town, as well as a matter for just congratulation and pride....<sup>33</sup>

Construction began on April 19, and five days later, the Schoonmaker lot was auctioned off for \$5,500. The former schoolhouse, which was adjacent to the new one, remained open during construction, although school was dismissed daily at one o'clock and recess was suspended "to prevent accidents occurring while at play in the yard."<sup>34</sup> After the school year finished, the old building was sold for \$183.00 to one Daniel O'Connell, who planned to "remove it to the vicinity of the Cemetery of the Holy Cross, and fix it up for family residence."<sup>35</sup>

Construction proceeded over the following six months, and in October, the new schoolhouse was almost finished. The *Kings County Rural Gazette* was impressed with the building, writing that

The progress of the building has been slow, but when completed the inhabitants of the District will have the satisfaction of knowing that they possess a handsome and substantial school house that will compare favorably with the more pretentious structures of ... neighboring [Brooklyn].

The school rooms are large, well-lighted and ventilated, the entire building is heated by steam, at a cost less than heating by furnaces and, at the same time, rendering an accident by fire impossible. The halls and stairways are large and airy, suitable cloak and hat rooms are provided for each class room, and every provision has been made for the comfort and convenience of the scholars and teachers."<sup>36</sup>

Much of the building's second floor was to be left unfinished under the original contract, but as construction progressed, the district's trustees decided to appropriate an additional \$3,000 to fully finish the building, arguing that such work "would be required at no very distant day and at a cost far exceeding that at which it could now be completed." Classes were soon underway, with the *Gazette* reporting at the end of November that

The public school in the new schoolhouse, under the able management of Mr. Whigam, is on the increase and finding favor among all classes of our residents. On Wednesday last the attendance was 168, and there are indications that it will be 200 ere the holidays are over. No reason now exists why any children should go from our village to the [Brooklyn] schools."<sup>37</sup>

In the following month, Principal Whigam, according to the *Gazette*, stated that "the new school house in our village is working like a charm, and the number of scholars constantly increasing.... [He] attributed [the growth] mostly to the charming school edifice and its appointments...."<sup>38</sup> Two years later, the *Brooklyn Eagle* would describe the schoolhouse as a "new and commodious brick edifice, which is not surpassed by any school of its size in the county for architectural beauty, healthy location, and sanitary arrangements."<sup>39</sup>

Originally, the school appears to have had "an assembly room and six classrooms, only four of which were occupied."<sup>40</sup> These classrooms were large, each fitting 75 students; although one district trustee argued that they were too big, Culyer responded that "his object in adapting the rooms to 75 scholars was in accordance with the most approved hygienic principles as expressed by Dr. A.N. Bell, editor of the 'Sanitarian,' who had given a great deal of special study to the matter, and whose views were adopted by the Board of Education of Brooklyn."<sup>41</sup>

Attendance soon increased to fill—and overfill—what had initially been an oversized school. Average attendance grew from 226 to 311 between 1882 and 1883, and the schoolhouse was extended to the south, probably between 1890 and 1894, with a large brick addition comprising the entire portion of the present building south of the original H-shaped structure.<sup>42</sup> With the annexation of Flatbush by Brooklyn, the school was continued as a grammar school and renamed Public School No. 90.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the name change, the addition, and the construction of additional schools throughout Flatbush, P.S. 90 remained crowded.<sup>44</sup> In 1894, 774 pupils were registered for the school, which had only 667 seats.<sup>45</sup> In the fall of 1896, the *Brooklyn Eagle* reported that "Public School No. 90 ... is terribly overcrowded. It has seating capacity for 800 scholars, but now has 923.... Fifty scholars were turned away yesterday, and many more have been turned away today. Principal [Townsend] admits these facts,

and is at his wit's end as to what to do."<sup>46</sup> Although repeated calls were made for the construction of another large addition to the schoolhouse, the situation had not improved by 1900. In that year, with Brooklyn now a part of a consolidated New York City, P.S. 90 was called "one of the most congested schools in the city"; many students were forced to attend only part-time, as the building had no more classrooms than it had had five years before. The city did, however, rent rooms in Balzer Hall, a building at the corner of Prospect and Grant Streets in an effort to relieve the crowding.<sup>47</sup> With the opening of a new, 1,500-student Public School No. 92 at Rogers Avenue and Robinson Street (now Parkside Avenue) in 1907, the city discontinued its lease of Balzer Hall, as the higher grades of P.S. 90 were moved to the new building.<sup>48</sup>

In 1916, P.S. 90 was officially designated "the Flatbush School," and it remained congested.<sup>49</sup> Six years later, it was recast as a "special opportunity school" for fifth-to-eighth-grade boys who were "at least two terms behind their classes in regular schools ... practically all of them eager to drop out of school altogether." Believed, at the time, to be a unique institution, the school was founded by John J. Winter, who was also its first principal. Winter had spent years planning the school with advice from, among others, Harvard University psychology professor Hugo Muensterberg; the school grew from its initial 25 students to 450 in 1926, and achieved considerable success in getting "misfit boys," as they were called, to go on to high school.<sup>50</sup> By the early 1930s, it appeared that the school would be closed, as parents protested "lack of proper sanitary conditions, dark and overcrowded classrooms subdivided by curtains, and classes in the basement."<sup>51</sup> But despite a 1931 newspaper report stating that the old schoolhouse was "soon to be abandoned," the school remained in use through the 1930s and '40s.<sup>52</sup> Finally, in 1951, P.S. 90 was discontinued as an elementary school and assigned to the city's Bureau of Child Guidance. In 1954, it was turned over to the Board of Estimate.<sup>53</sup>

From 1954 to 1967, the city leased the building to Yeshiva University, which operated it as the Brooklyn branch of its High School for Boys, or Brooklyn Talmudical Academy. Among the members of the class of 1955—the first to graduate from the Academy's new home—was Alan M. Dershowitz, who would go on to graduate first in his class from Yale Law School, and be the youngest full professor ever appointed at Harvard Law.<sup>54</sup> Having moved from their former school at 1060 President Street, the students were happy that, "In place of our former cramped quarters, we now have large classrooms, airy corridors, and a school yard in back. This presents an atmosphere which is in every way more conducive to clear thinking, and healthful living."<sup>55</sup> Changes were made to the building during Yeshiva's occupancy, including the installation of the iron picket fence that currently surrounds its yard and the removal of the building's original square cupola.<sup>56</sup>

In 1968, the building reopened as the Beth Rivkah Institute, a girls' school affiliated with the Chabad-Lubavitch Movement.<sup>57</sup> It continued as Beth Rivkah into the 1990s, but it was vacant by 2000, and it remains so today under the ownership of the City of New York.<sup>58</sup> The Brooklyn-based, not-for-profit Caribbean American Chamber of Commerce and Industry has announced plans to reopen the building as a Caribbean trade center and business incubator.<sup>59</sup>

### John Y. Culyer<sup>60</sup>

Landscape architect and civil engineer John Yapp Culyer was a natural choice, in 1878, to design the Flatbush District No. 1 School. In addition to his High Victorian Gothic-style Flatbush Town Hall, Culyer had completed, in 1876, the District No. 3 School, a two-and-one-half-story, gable-fronted building with modest Stick-style ornament in the Windsor Terrace section of Flatbush.<sup>61</sup> Culyer had also been employed between 1874 and 1876 by the Flatbush Board of Public Improvement, which hired him to do survey work for the opening of Lefferts Avenue, and to oversee the improvement of Franklin Avenue and Malbone Street.<sup>62</sup>

Culyer had a long, varied, and distinguished career. Born in New York City in 1839, he studied engineering and surveying at the University of the City of New York, now New York University. After spending a year in an architects' office, Culyer was hired as an assistant to William H. Grant, the Chief Engineer of Central Park (designed 1858, a designated New York City Scenic Landmark) under Frederick Law Olmsted. During this period, Culyer "developed a talent for landscape architecture, especially in road construction, surface treatment, and planting."<sup>63</sup> Following the outbreak of the Civil War, Olmsted

was named secretary of the United States Sanitary Commission, and Culyer traveled with him to Washington to help in its organization. He then entered the Army engineer corps, working on fortifications in Virginia, and was present in Ford's Theater the night President Lincoln was shot.

At war's end, Culyer was named engineer of Central Park. James S.T. Stranahan, President of the Brooklyn Park Commission, then hired him as chief engineer of Prospect Park (designed 1865, a designated New York City Scenic Landmark), and Culyer "began his great work of transforming Prospect Park from a wilderness to a playground second to none in the world."<sup>64</sup> He served, for several years, as the park's superintendent and as the head of Brooklyn's Parks Department, until resigning in 1886.<sup>65</sup> Culyer remained professionally active, and was chosen to design Eastside Park in Paterson, N.J. in 1888.<sup>66</sup> Two years later, he was picked to design the grounds of the Masonic Home and School in Utica, N.Y., and he returned to work in Brooklyn as a consulting engineer on Winthrop Park (now Monsignor McGolrick Park), which was then being planned.<sup>67</sup>

Culyer was a longtime member of the Brooklyn Board of Education, serving two long stints from the 1870s to the 1890s, and chairing the Committee on Boys' High School.<sup>68</sup> In 1897, he was appointed secretary of the Tree Planting Association of New York City, which sought to "plant trees in all the streets and avenues, to beautify the city, and to improve the atmosphere."<sup>69</sup> In this capacity, and also as a private citizen, Culyer frequently wrote letters to the *New York Times* expressing a love of nature and the urban environment, and an interest in conserving natural resources. In 1898, he reminded readers of a law preventing "the killing, maiming, or trapping of our feathered songsters"; in the following year, he urged the protection of forested areas against "vandalism and despoliation"; and in 1906, he warned about the damage done to street trees by "the teeth of horses thoughtlessly tied to them."<sup>70</sup> Culyer also served alongside J. Pierpont Morgan as a member of the Merchants' Association Committee on the Pollution of the Waters of New York, which opposed the construction of a Bronx River sewer that would have dumped manufacturing waste and raw sewage into the Hudson River.<sup>71</sup> Seven years after his death in Mount Kisco, N.Y. in 1924, the *Brooklyn Eagle* remembered Culyer as "one of the most useful citizens Brooklyn has ever known, and while there is no statue of him in any public square, every tree and bush and shrub and meadow in Prospect Park will keep his memory green forever."<sup>72</sup>

### Design of the Flatbush District No. 1 School<sup>73</sup>

As the trustees of Flatbush School District No. 1 planned their new schoolhouse in 1878, the town was undergoing a transformation that was similar, if smaller in scale, to the one experienced by Brooklyn two decades before. Although Flatbush was changing from a semi-rural town into a suburban one, and Brooklyn had grown into a city, both saw profound changes during their development in the architectural character of their public schools.

Brooklyn's older schools, such as the three-bay Public School 8 on Middagh Street (1846, 1860, within the Brooklyn Heights Historic District) were simple, modest structures that were closely related to residential architecture. So, too were the Flatbush schools that preceded the new District No. 1 School. The 1840s Flatbush village school, which the District No. 1 School replaced, was a freestanding, wood-framed building sided with clapboards, and with shutters on its three-bay main façade.<sup>74</sup> Culyer's District No. 3 School, completed in 1876 in the quiet, outlying Windsor Terrace section of Flatbush, was constructed in a vernacular form of the essentially domestic Stick style. Featuring a front-facing gable filled with vertical siding and zigzagging trim, and a prominent side dormer crowned by a decorative truss, the District No. 3 School had the appearance of a large wood-framed house.<sup>75</sup>

The new District No. 1 School, unlike the Windsor Terrace school or the old Flatbush village schoolhouse, was constructed in the heart of a rapidly developing community that had just completed a substantial new town hall. In designing the kind of modern schoolhouse that the district trustees and the public desired, Culyer may have looked to the neighboring Brooklyn schools—which he would have been familiar with, through his service on that city's Board of Education—for inspiration.

By the end of the 1850s—and particularly after 1858, when Samuel B. Leonard became the Brooklyn Board of Education's Superintendent of Buildings—Brooklyn's schools began to acquire a readily identifiable character as public institutional buildings. In designing Brooklyn's schools, Leonard frequently utilized the American adaptation of the *Rundbogenstil* ("round-arch style"), which evolved in

Germany in the 1820s among a group of architects who sought to create a synthesis of classical and medieval architecture by drawing upon historical precedents in the round-arched Byzantine, Romanesque, and Renaissance styles. Transmitted to this country through the immigration of German and Central European architects in the 1840s, as well as through architectural publications, the *Rundbogenstil* tended to be conflated here with the Romanesque Revival and other mid-nineteenth-century round-arched styles. In the United States, the term *Rundbogenstil* was rarely used; instead, buildings whose design drew upon the style were called Byzantine, Norman, Romanesque, or Modern Italian, among other terms.<sup>76</sup> The *Rundbogenstil* had many qualities that made it attractive for school construction, including rapidity of construction, economy of materials and workmanship, durability, ample fenestration, and ease of adding extensions without grossly violating the original building fabric. Public School 34 in Greenpoint (1867, 1870, 1887-88), Public School 111 in Prospect Heights (1867, 1888), and Colored School No. 3 in Bushwick (1879-81), all of which are designated New York City Landmarks, are excellent, extant examples of Leonard's *Rundbogenstil* schools.

Displaying many *Rundbogenstil* characteristics, including Philadelphia brick facades with plain pilasters, decorative, patterned brickwork, and of course, round-arched openings accented with archivolt, the original, H-shaped portion of Culyer's school displays a kinship with Leonard's schools. While one cannot state conclusively that Culyer based the District No. 1 School on any specific example, its handsomely proportioned main façade—its tripartite outer bays crowned by angular pediments featuring bracketed cornices with returns—is reminiscent of the original, central portions of Public Schools 34 and 111. Although its main façade lacks the expert modeling and use of ornament that are typical of Leonard's schools, this somewhat-less-sophisticated quality is telling, and significant, in recalling that Flatbush was then a country town aspiring towards urbanity.

Between 1890 and 1894, the original portion of the building was extended to the south with a harmonious *Rundbogenstil* extension. The schoolhouse has not been significantly altered since then. During the building's occupancy by the Brooklyn Talmudical Academy, however, the schoolhouse lost its original square wood cupola, which sat atop the center of the building. This feature, with its pyramidal roof and small openings ringing its perimeter, was more typical of the Italianate style than the *Rundbogenstil*. Its presence was valuable in recalling that the boundaries between the *Rundbogenstil* and the Italianate, another round-arched style that was popular concurrently, were often not sharply drawn.<sup>77</sup>

### Description

The Flatbush District No. 1 School, later Public School 90, is a two-story brick building located at the southwest corner of Church and Bedford Avenues in Flatbush, Brooklyn. Its main entrance is on Church Avenue. The original portion of the building, designed by John Y. Culyer, completed in 1878, and approximately 53 feet by 85 feet in size, comprises the entire Church Avenue façade and the symmetrical, northernmost nine first-floor bays, or eleven second-floor bays, of the Bedford Avenue façade. The rest of the building appears to have been constructed as an addition between 1890 and 1894. The four facades, including the addition, share many features: each is faced with red Philadelphia brick laid in running bond and articulated into simple, two-story brick pilasters, and has, except for a few exceptions, square-headed window openings at its basement and first floors, and round-headed window openings crowned by gauged-brick voussoirs at its second floor. All of the building's visible basement- and first-floor window openings are filled with cinderblock. The brick is set off by brownstone trim, including projecting sills and flush lintels at the square-headed openings; flush, angled sills at the round-headed openings; continuous beltcourses between the basement- and first-floor windows and at the second-floor window heads, wrapping the extrados of their gauged-brick arches. Both the sill and second-floor beltcourse wrap all four of the building's facades.

### **North (Main, Church Avenue) Façade**

The building's main façade is composed of a narrow, central, recessed bay flanked by two larger bays, each of which is crowned by a triangular gable with cornice returns. The central bay contains the former school's tripartite main entrance, made up of a large central round-headed opening flanked by two narrow round-headed sidelights. Continuous extrados trim crowns the arches of all three openings. The main entrance is set behind a porch whose wood roof is supported by stone columns and pilasters with



ornate capitals, and by a round brick arch supported by elaborate stone imposts. Leading to the main entrance is a stone stoop featuring paneled newel posts and walls with punched circular openings. The main entrance is flanked on each side by three square-headed basement and first-floor openings. At the second floor, a pair of narrow round-headed window openings within the central, recessed bay is flanked on each side by three windows in a tripartite arrangement, with a large, central window flanked by narrower, round-headed windows. Above each of the square-headed windows is a round-headed transom panel filled with patterned brick; the square-headed, second-floor windows on this façade retain their historic, wood three-over-three double-hung wood sashes, and the outermost second-floor round-headed openings retain their historic two-over-two double-hung sashes.

Some alterations have occurred at the main façade, where a sidewalk bridge has been erected. At the main entrance, a metal roll-down security gate with exterior housing has been installed, as has a metal alarm box. The transom panel over the main-entrance opening has been coated with stucco, and the panes of the sidelight windows have either been painted over or replaced with wood boards. A metal light fixture has been attached to the soffit of the porch roof, and much of the first-floor portion of the façade has been painted. In addition to the loss of the windowsills at the three westernmost basement-level openings and the filling of the basement- and first-floor openings with cinderblock, the central four second-floor openings have been boarded up.

#### **East (Bedford Avenue) Façade**

The original, 1878 portion of the east façade, like the main façade, comprises a recessed central bay flanked by two large, wider bays. The central bay contains an original entrance and is divided into three bays at its first floor and five bays at its second floor. Each of the large outer bays is divided into three smaller bays, and also contains a single bay of windows on its side, facing the central recess. The original entrance on the east façade is reached by concrete stairs with metal pipe railings. The entrance opening is crowned by a brownstone lintel, and by a round-headed transom panel filled with patterned brick and headed by a brick-voussoir arch. The remnants of the historic wood door hood, including one of its supporting brackets, surround and crown the transom panel. Square-headed window openings flank the entrance stairs and opening at the basement and first floors. Above each of the first-floor window openings is a plain, square panel. The two outermost of the five narrow, second-floor, round-headed window openings retain their double-rowlock arches and historic, stone extrados trim. The southernmost bay of the east façade's original portion features a basement entrance with a brownstone lintel, reached by stairs.

Bridging the original portion of the east façade and the southernmost, c.1890-94 portion of the building is a single-bay connector that contains the east façade's tall, south entrance opening below a second-floor round-headed window opening that is identical to those on the original building. The recessed south entrance, which is sealed with cinderblock, is reached by concrete steps; a square-headed window opening faces into the entrance recess from its north wall. Also present are remnants of the entrance's historic door hood.

The c.1890-94 portion of the façade south of the connector comprises three asymmetrical bays crowned by a central, angular pediment containing a simple recessed, circular medallion filled with patterned brick. The fenestration and general treatment of this façade are similar to those of the façade's original portion, except for the presence of smaller square-headed window openings at the northernmost first- and second-floor bays, and the pairing of the openings at the southernmost two bays. This portion of the east façade has a basement entrance, which has been sealed with cinderblock, at its northernmost bay. Its entrance is reached by a set of stairs with pipe railings attached to the façade and to the stone coping of the stair walls.

Although the second-floor openings on both the original and early-1890s portion of this façade retain many of their historic, wood double-hung sashes—one-over-one at the five narrow round-headed openings over the original entrance, and two-over-two at the other round-headed openings and the single square-headed opening—most of these sashes are in poor repair. Alterations to this façade include the loss of the historic door hoods over both first-floor entrances; the installation of concrete stairs at the original entrance; the loss of face brick and stone trim above the second-floor windows over the original entrance; the attachment of a light fixture to the transom panel over the original entrance; the application

of stucco around and above the second-floor window over the southern first-floor entrance; and the painting of graffiti on portions of the façade's first floor. Three "no parking" signs have been attached to the east façade on the addition.

### **West Façade**

The original portion of the partially visible west façade is nearly a mirror image of the original portion of the east façade, with almost identical fenestration and general treatment. Although the central, recessed bay, like that of the original portion of the east façade, contains a historic entrance, this entrance features taller first-floor window openings, as well as a peaked door lintel decorated with a small, recessed trefoil. The entrance is reached by a brick stoop with stone or concrete steps. Two pairs of narrow round-headed windows are present at the second floor over the west façade's original entrance. Two basement entrances, accessed by stairs with pipe railings, exist at each of the large, original, projecting north and south bays. As on the other façades, the basement- and first-floor openings are filled with cinderblock, and the second-floor openings retain many of their historic wood sashes, which are in poor shape. A tall, cylindrical flue extends from the basement to above the cornice line between the second- and third-southernmost bays on the original portion of the east façade.

The c.1890-94 addition projects farther into the west yard than it does into the east yard. The addition's west façade appears to be a mirror image of its east façade. A cylindrical flue is attached to the façade with brackets and extends above the roofline. Light fixtures are attached at the second floor of the northwest corner of the addition; conduit has been installed on both the original and early-1890s portions of the west façade.

### **South Façade**

The symmetrical south façade of the c.1890-94 addition is similar in fenestration and general treatment to the other façades. It differs primarily in the treatment of its central portion, which is crowned by an angular pediment. This façade also features a large, central round-headed door opening at its second floor, and corbelled brickwork above the second-floor windows that flank this opening. Metal fire stairs extend from the yard to the central second-floor opening.

### **Roof**

The roof of the former Flatbush District No. 1 School is made up of intersecting hips and gables. Much of the roof appears to be of standing-seam metal construction, although portions are coated with tar and covered with what appear to be asphalt shingles. Portions of the building's historic bracketed cornice remain on the north, south, and west façades. The building has at least five brick chimneys, with four—two tall east chimneys, and two west chimneys that have been reduced in height—located at the center of the original portion of the building. These chimneys originally surrounded a wood cupola with a pyramidal roof, which was removed between 1954 and 1967. One chimney is present near the northwest corner of the early-1890s addition. A pressed-metal fascia, portions of which are now hanging loosely, was installed after 1954 on the east façade, just below the cornice line.

Report researched and written by  
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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The photograph accompanying this summary is the circa-1940 New York City Department of Taxes photograph for Block 5103, Lot 58 (New York City Department of Records and Information Services).

<sup>2</sup> This section is largely adapted from the introduction, prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart, to LPC, *Ditmas Park Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1236) (New York: City of New York, 1981), 2-14; and LPC, *Prospect Park South Historic District Designation Report* (LP-0979) (New York: City of New York, 1979), 2-18. On the Lenape, see LPC, *Crown Heights North Historic District Designation Report* (LP-2204) (New York: City of New York, 2007), 7-8. Other sources include *Flatbush: Architecture and Urban Development from Dutch Settlement to Commercial Strip* (New York: Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, 1990); Historical Perspectives, Inc., *Stage 1A Archaeological Assessment, Beth Rivka School, Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York* and *Stage 1B Archaeological Investigation, P.S. 325-K, Church and Bedford Avenues, Brooklyn, New York* (both prepared for AKRF, Inc., 2000; LPC files); Marc Linder and Lawrence S. Zacharias, *Of Cabbages and Kings County: Agriculture and the Formation of Modern Brooklyn* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 80-88; Elizabeth Reich Rawson, "Flatbush," in Kenneth T. Jackson, Ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 416; and Henry R. Stiles, *The History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, New York from 1683 to 1884* (New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., 1884), 213-49.

<sup>3</sup> For a map of known Native American sites and pathways in Kings County, see Joan Geismar, *Archaeological Assessment of the Proposed Bishop Mugavero Geriatric Center Site, Block 189, Brooklyn* (December 1990; LPC Archaeology Library), 11. A comparison of this map with the "Map of the Battle of Brooklyn, August 27, 1776" adjacent to page 51 of Stiles' *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn* shows how the primary Colonial routes of Kings County followed prehistoric Lenape pathways. In the seventeenth century, Flatbush's "only houses were a few erected on the road to Flatlands, which in all probability was what is now Flatbush Avenue," according to "The Old County Towns: How They Were Settled, Developed, and Annexed," *Brooklyn Eagle* (January 2, 1898), 32. Concerning Church Avenue, John J. Snyder writes that "The old road in point of antiquity is in all likelihood a close rival of Flatbush Avenue. It linked together New Utrecht, Flatbush, and New Lots, in all of which the Dutch settled at about the same period." See Snyder, "Glimpses of Flatbush History," in *Flatbush Chamber of Commerce Souvenir: Seventh Annual Dinner, March 30, 1922* (Brooklyn: Flatbush Observer Press, 1922).

<sup>4</sup> Although, in Stiles' words, in the 1630s, Director Kieft of the Dutch West India Company "secured by purchase from the Indians the title to nearly all the land in the counties of Kings and Queens," the Lenape likely saw things differently: the European concept of holding title to land was foreign to them, and they probably viewed these "purchases" as little more than a customary exchange of gifts smoothing the way for the settlers' temporary use of the land for camping, hunting, fishing, and the cultivation of crops (*History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn*, 43-44).

<sup>5</sup> The other towns were Flatlands (settled 1624), Brooklyn (1636), Gravesend (1645), New Utrecht (1657), and Bushwick (1660). Although the village was probably settled in 1651 or 1652, farms within the boundaries of what was to become the town of Flatbush were probably settled as early as the 1630s.

<sup>6</sup> This wood-framed building—the first church on western Long Island—was succeeded on its site by a stone church built in 1699. The present Flatbush Dutch Reformed Church (Thomas Fardon, 1793-98, a designated New York City Landmark), was constructed on the foundations of the second church. See LPC, *Flatbush Dutch Reformed Church Designation Report* (LP-1013) (New York: City of New York, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Despite this change, Flatbush, like the other outlying areas of Long Island, was largely left alone by its new rulers. After the Revolutionary War, little changed in Flatbush, but in 1832, the Flatbush courthouse burned, triggering the courts' relocation to the city of Brooklyn, and ending the era in which Flatbush played a significant governmental role.

<sup>8</sup> *Of Cabbages and Kings County*, 81.

<sup>9</sup> *Of Cabbages and Kings County*, 81.

<sup>10</sup> Concerning the construction of the previous school on the same lot in the early 1840s, John J. Snyder wrote in 1938 that "The plot of ground selected for the new schoolhouse had formerly been a burying ground for ... slaves.... While excavating for the cellar a large number of bones were brought to the surface all of which were gathered together and reinterred into what is now Holy Cross Cemetery" ("The Flatbush Village School," Brooklyn, N.Y.,

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1938, in the collection of the Brooklyn Historical Society). The authors of the *Stage 1B Archaeological Investigation* explain on page 4 that “The Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church was erected in 1849 on Church Avenue east of Bedford Avenue.... However, the Holy Cross cemetery was established on land ... near Snyder Avenue and Brooklyn Avenue.” They were unable to find records confirming the interment, at Holy Cross, of remains from the school site.

<sup>11</sup> On Town Hall, see LPC, *Flatbush Town Hall Designation Report* (LP-0770) (New York: City of New York, 1973). On the proposed 1873 annexation, see *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn*, 237-38 and “The Consolidation of the Towns and the City—the Vote Tomorrow,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (November 3, 1873), 2.

<sup>12</sup> A proposed Fiske Terrace-Midwood Park Historic District was heard by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on October 16, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> On Erasmus Hall, see LPC, *Erasmus Hall Museum Designation Report* (LP-0171) (New York: City of New York, 1966); and LPC, *Erasmus Hall High School Designation Report* (LP-2130) (New York: City of New York, 2003), prepared by Virginia Kurshan.

<sup>14</sup> The 1890 *Robinson’s Atlas of Kings County, New York* (New York: E. Robinson, 1890) shows a predominance of wood-framed structures in Flatbush well after the Flatbush District No. 1 School was constructed.

<sup>15</sup> Sources for this section include “Compulsory Education in Brooklyn,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (January 1880), 218-27; Edmund D. Fisher, *Flatbush, Past and Present* (Brooklyn: Flatbush Trust Company, 1901), 49-60; *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn*, 249-54; Carleton Mabee, *Black Education in New York State from Colonial to Modern Times* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1979), 35-47, 213-225; A. Emerson Palmer, *The New York Public School: Being a History of Free Education in the City of New York* (New York: Edwin C. Hill, 1908), 198-205; “Public Schools,” in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, 955-61; John J. Snyder, *Tales of Old Flatbush* (Flatbush: Self-Published, 1945), 133-141; and Thomas M. Strong, *The History of the Town of Flatbush, in Kings County, Long-Island* (New York: Thomas R. Mercein, Jr., 1842), 108-37. For information on Parkville and Windsor Terrace, see John B. Manbeck, Ed., *The Neighborhoods of Brooklyn* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), 147-49, 212-14.

<sup>16</sup> *The New York Public School*, 200.

<sup>17</sup> This schoolhouse was completed in 1659, according to “Education: Progress of the Schools in the Rural District,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (January 20, 1877), 3; most other sources, however, are vague about its construction date. For a detailed description of this building, see *History of the Town of Flatbush*, 118-19.

<sup>18</sup> The old schoolhouse was sold to a man who took it down and, from its materials, constructed a dry-goods and grocery store elsewhere in Flatbush. For information on Erasmus Hall, see LPC, *Erasmus Hall Museum Designation Report*; and LPC, *Erasmus Hall High School Designation Report*, prepared by Virginia Kurshan.

<sup>19</sup> *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn*, 240.

<sup>20</sup> *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn*, 252.

<sup>21</sup> *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn*, 252-53. In addition to serving as a schoolhouse and polling place, the building was used as a “courthouse, recruiting station during the Civil War .... [and] a place of assembly for ‘town meetings’ and was made generous use of by local associations,” according to *Tales of Old Flatbush*, 138. There is some dispute over the date of the building’s construction: according to *Tales of Old Flatbush*, it was built in 1842; “Education: Progress of the Schools in the Rural District” says that it “was constructed about the year 1842”; and *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn* says that it was constructed in 1845. As Church Avenue, then known as East Broadway, had a bend in it and swung slightly north of its current alignment, the school was slightly to the north of the brick school building that is the subject of this report, standing within what is now the Church Avenue roadbed. Church Avenue was straightened, acquiring its present alignment between 1898 and 1912, judging by the following two maps: Hugo Ullitz, *Atlas of the Brooklyn Borough of the City of New York* (New York: Hyde & Company, 1898-99); and Hugo Ullitz, *Atlas of the Borough of Brooklyn, City of New York* (Brooklyn: E. Belcher Hyde, 1906, updated to 1912).

<sup>22</sup> *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn* is vague on the founding date of District No. 3, but an 1876 *Brooklyn Eagle* article confirms the date of 1875. See “Education: Progress of the Schools in the Rural District,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (January 20, 1877), 3.

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- <sup>23</sup> “News from the Suburbs: Flatbush Public Schools to be Reorganized,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (February 1, 1898), 5. The article “Education: Interesting Facts from the School Commissioner’s Forthcoming Report,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (November 21, 1877), 4 gives assessed valuations for the various districts, allowing comparisons of their sizes.
- <sup>24</sup> Although the law boosted school attendance, it also permitted to be “instructed regularly at home at least fourteen weeks in each year in spelling, reading, writing, English grammar, geography, and arithmetic, unless the physical or mental condition of the child is such as to render such attendance or instruction inexpedient or impractical” (“Compulsory Education in Brooklyn,” 219).
- <sup>25</sup> “Flatbush School Accommodation: The Old Town Sponging on Brooklyn,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (January 15, 1877), 3.
- <sup>26</sup> “A New Era in Our Future,” *Kings County Rural Gazette* (August 17, 1878). Microfilmed copies of the *Gazette* are accessible at Brooklyn Public Library’s Brooklyn Collection, which is housed in the central library on Grand Army Plaza.
- <sup>27</sup> “The School Meeting,” *Kings County Rural Gazette* (February 23, 1878).
- <sup>28</sup> The District No. 1 colored school was established in 1872, according to *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn*, 253. See also “Education: Progress of the Schools in the Rural District,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (January 20, 1877), 3; and “News from the Suburbs: Flatbush Public Schools to be Reorganized.” Although a short section of Malbone Street currently exists between New York Avenue and Clove Road, nearly the entire street was renamed Empire Boulevard following the infamous “Malbone Street Wreck,” a 1918 subway accident that killed more than 90 people. On this topic, see Brian Cudahy, *The Malbone Street Wreck* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999).
- <sup>29</sup> On school integration in Brooklyn, see *Black Education in New York State from Colonial to Modern Times*, 213-25; Harold X. Connolly, *A Ghetto Grows in Brooklyn* (New York: New York University Press, 1977), 26-29; and LPC, (Former) *Colored School No. 3, Later Public School 69 Designation Report* (LP-1977) (New York: City of New York, 1998), prepared by Donald G. Presa.
- <sup>30</sup> Carter G. Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* (Washington: Associated Publishers, 1919; reprinted Salem, NH: Ayer Publishing Co., 1986), 315.
- <sup>31</sup> This conclusion is based on several pieces of information. Stiles, in his 1884 *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn*, writes that the dimensions of the original building were 53 feet by 85 feet, the approximate dimensions of the portion of the building comprising the entire Church Avenue façade and the symmetrical, northernmost, nine first-floor bays of the Bedford Avenue façade. A photograph of this H-shaped building appears on pages 28 and 29 of Brian Merlis and Lee A. Rosenzweig, *Brooklyn’s Flatbush: Battlefield to Ebbets Field* (Brooklyn: Israelowitz Publishing, 2006). (Merlis and Rosenzweig give this photograph a date of 1877, but it must have been taken between the end of 1878, when the building was completed, and 1887, when its photographer, George Bradford Brainerd, died.) No additions to the building appear to have been constructed before 1890, judging by *Robinson’s Atlas of Kings County* of that year, which shows the schoolhouse, in that year, as having an H-shaped footprint. By the time of the 1898-99 Hyde *Atlas of the Brooklyn Borough of the City of New York*, the Flatbush District No. 1 School acquired its current footprint. As a reading of the *Proceedings of the Board of Education of the City of Brooklyn* for the years 1894 through 1898 finds no mention of an addition to the school, it may be assumed that the addition was constructed between 1890—when the building still had an H-shaped footprint—and 1894, when Flatbush was annexed by Brooklyn. Although “The Schools of Flatbush,” in Herbert F. Gunnison, Ed., *Flatbush of Today* (Brooklyn, 1908) implies, on page 34, that the addition was constructed in 1886 or soon thereafter, this appears to be incorrect.
- <sup>32</sup> According to the 1842 *History of Flatbush*, 118, the original schoolhouse “was located on a triangular lot of ground situated on the east side of the main street ... on the site now occupied by the store of Mr. Michael Schoonmaker & Son.”
- <sup>33</sup> “A New School House at Last: Seventeen Thousand Dollars to be Paid for It,” *Kings County Rural Gazette* (March 2, 1878).
- <sup>34</sup> “School No. 1,” *Kings County Rural Gazette* (April 20, 1878).
- <sup>35</sup> “The Old No. 1 School House,” *Kings County Rural Gazette* (August 10, 1878).
- <sup>36</sup> “Annual School Meetings,” *Kings County Rural Gazette* (October 12, 1878).

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- <sup>37</sup> “The Public School,” *Kings County Rural Gazette* (November 30, 1878).
- <sup>38</sup> “Professor Whigam,” *Kings County Rural Gazette* (December 14, 1878).
- <sup>39</sup> “Centuries Old: The Schools of the Country Towns,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (November 2, 1880), 3.
- <sup>40</sup> “The Schools of Flatbush,” in Herbert F. Gunnison, Ed., *Flatbush of Today* (Brooklyn, 1908), 34.
- <sup>41</sup> “A New School House at Last.”
- <sup>42</sup> “Apportionment of School Money for 1881” and “Apportionment of School Money for 1882” by C. Warren Hamilton, School Commissioner, in the microfilmed Kings County town records at the New York City Municipal Archives. On the c.1890-94 date for the addition, see Note 31.
- <sup>43</sup> 1894 *Proceedings of the Board of Education of the City of Brooklyn*, 522, 671-72.
- <sup>44</sup> By 1894, two annexes to P.S. 90 had been built. One was at East New York Avenue near Albany Avenue, and the other was at Rogers Avenue near Robinson Street. When Brooklyn annexed Flatbush, these were named P.S. 91 and P.S. 92, respectively. See *Proceedings of the Board of Education of the City of Brooklyn* (1894), 671-72. As described below, P.S. 92 was replaced by a new, larger school building in 1907.
- <sup>45</sup> *Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the City of Brooklyn* (1894), 91.
- <sup>46</sup> “An Overcrowded School,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (September 15, 1896), 4. Although the article calls the school’s principal “Principal Jeremiah,” his name was actually Jeremiah Townsend. See, for example, “News from the Suburbs,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (November 15, 1895), 7; and “Site for a New School,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (February 10, 1896), 5.
- <sup>47</sup> “Talk of Closing a School,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (October 5, 1900), 13.
- <sup>48</sup> “The Schools of Flatbush,” 34.
- <sup>49</sup> *Journal of the Board of Education of the City of New York* (1916), 396. The 1918 *Journal of the Board of Education*, on page 1,642, states that 735 students were registered for the school, which had 637 seats; many students were attending classes part-time.
- <sup>50</sup> “Misfit Lads Find Selves in P.S. 90, Says Reynolds” (October 18, 1923); and “Boro Opportunity School, Only One in World, Begins Fifth Year Under J. J. Winter” (March 24, 1926). These two articles, from the *Brooklyn Eagle* morgue of the Brooklyn Public Library’s Brooklyn Collection, are from unknown newspapers. Hugo Muensterberg was a controversial figure; shortly after his death in 1916, during the First World War, the *New York Times* remarked that “The outspoken views of Professor Munsterberg on the issue of the war raised storms of controversy. He appeared as probably the most eminent supporter of German policies in this country, and as soon was most bitterly condemned by the Allies and their friends, while to pro-Germans he appeared almost an idol.” See “Stirred War Controversies,” *New York Times* (December 17, 1916), 19.
- <sup>51</sup> “Parents Protest P.S. 90 Conditions” (October 28, 1929). This article, from the *Brooklyn Eagle* morgue of the Brooklyn Public Library’s Brooklyn Collection, is from an unknown newspaper.
- <sup>52</sup> “Flatbush Landmark to Go,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (January 19, 1931). See also “Schools Weigh Revision of Probationary Plan” (March 21, 1941), which is from an unknown newspaper, in the *Brooklyn Eagle* morgue of the Brooklyn Public Library’s Brooklyn Collection.
- <sup>53</sup> *Journal of the Board of Education of the City of New York* (1951), 1,546-47 and 3,291-92; *Journal of the Board of Education of the City of New York* (1954), 1,720.
- <sup>54</sup> “The Abuse Excuse” (Book Review), *New York Times*, October 16, 1994, BR14. Dershowitz, who placed second in the 1954 *New York Journal-American* Tournament of Orators, was hailed as the “Henry Clay of T.A.” in the school’s 1955 yearbook. See *Elchanite* (Brooklyn Talmudical Academy Yearbook), 1955, in the Yeshiva University Archives.
- <sup>55</sup> *Elchanite* (Brooklyn Talmudical Academy Yearbook), 1957.
- <sup>56</sup> In photographs of the building in the Yeshiva University Archives that appear to have been taken at the time that it was first occupied by Yeshiva, the fence was not present, but the cupola was. The cupola was not present in a

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photograph of the building in the 1967 *Elchanite*. In 1967, the Academy's last year in the building, the staff of *Elchanite* dedicated the publication to their schoolhouse, in a tribute written by co-literary editor Alan Lebenbaum:

Each year, when we came into the school, the classrooms were painted another exotic color, the floors were a bit shinier and the bulletin boards a bit barer. But the building was there, smug and squat, planted on the corner of Church and Bedford. It wasn't much, but it aroused a certain defensive pride in the heart of every student who survived four years there.

The building will finally succumb to an institution's growing pains and the wrecker's ball. 2270 Church Avenue will be vacated, but the time we spent there in study, and other assorted pursuits, will be forever etched in our minds.

<sup>57</sup> New York Telephone Company, *Brooklyn Address Telephone Directory* (New York Telephone Company, 1968).

<sup>58</sup> Allen J. Abel, in *Flatbush Odyssey: A Journey Through the Heart of Brooklyn* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995) describes the building in use as Beth Rivkah at that time. It was vacant by the time of the Historical Perspectives archaeological assessment and investigation, in 2000. For more on Chabad-Lubavitch and its Beth Rivkah schools, see Sue Fishkoff, *The Rebbe's Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003).

<sup>59</sup> "Caribbean American Chamber of Commerce and Industry Celebrates a Major Milestone in the United States," *Caribbean American Chamber of Commerce and Industry Newsletter* (Winter 2006).

<sup>60</sup> Sources for this section include "John Yapp Culyer" in James Grant Wilson, John Fiske, and Stanley L. Klos, Eds., *Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1887-89); "John Yapp Culyer" in Rossiter Johnson, Ed., *The Twentieth Century Biographical Dictionary of Notable Americans* (Boston: The Biographical Society, 1904); "Prospect Park Lasting Memorial to Culyer," *Brooklyn Eagle* (August 10, 1931); Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1994), 158-60; and "Saw Booth Shoot Lincoln: Colonel John Y. Culyer Was in Theater When the President Was Assassinated," *Brooklyn Eagle*, February 12, 1901, 8.

<sup>61</sup> On the District No. 3 School, see *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn*, 253-54; and the circa-1940 New York City Department of Taxes Photograph for Block 5274, Lot 28 (New York City Department of Records and Information Services). On the Stick style, see Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 254-87.

<sup>62</sup> Town of Flatbush Board of Public Improvement records, on microfilm at the Brooklyn Collection of the Brooklyn Public Library.

<sup>63</sup> *Twentieth Century Biographical Dictionary of Notable Americans*.

<sup>64</sup> "Prospect Park Lasting Memorial to Culyer."

<sup>65</sup> Culyer's title appeared variously in the press as Chief Engineer of Parks (1874); Chief Engineer of Prospect Park (1875, 1878); Superintendent of Prospect Park (1876, 1884); Chief Engineer and Superintendent, Brooklyn Park Commissioners (1884); Superintendent and Chief Engineer of the Park Commission of Brooklyn (1884); Superintendent of Parks (1886); and Engineer and Superintendent of Parks (1886). See "Prospect Park," *Brooklyn Eagle* (March 24, 1874), 4; "Mr. John Y. Culyer as an Editor," *Brooklyn Eagle* (February 20, 1875), 4; "About Brooklyn People," *Brooklyn Eagle* (September 8, 1878), 2; "Mr. John Y. Culyer," *Kings County Rural Gazette* (June 29, 1878); "City and Suburban News," *New York Times* (June 9, 1876), 8; "Ladies Insulted by Rowdies," *Brooklyn Eagle* (July 6, 1884), 12; "City and Suburban News," *New York Times* (April 4, 1884), 8; "Brooklyn and New-York Parks," *New York Times* (July 10, 1884), 8; "McKane's Fight with Culyer," *Brooklyn Eagle* (May 7, 1886), 4; and "Culyer Goes," *Brooklyn Eagle* (September 7, 1886), 4. Culyer's 1886 resignation followed unfounded accusations by a former park employee, James Rowan, that Culyer "had robbed the city in various ways and that he was unfit for his present position." Rowan later retracted his charges after Culyer sued him for libel, admitting that he had no proof for them. In addition to "Culyer Goes," see "Culyer's Name Exposed to Hatred, Contempt, and Ridicule," *Brooklyn Eagle* (July 30, 1886), 4; and "Admits He Lied: Rowan Retracts His Charges Against Colonel Culyer," *Brooklyn Eagle* (August 13, 1886), 4. According to the *Times*, Culyer's resignation was largely the product of one commissioner's "desire to get the office of Superintendent and Engineer for a friend." See "Col. Culyer Gets a New Position," *New York Times*, June 22, 1890, 9.

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<sup>66</sup> “Anticipated Improvements,” *New York Times*, January 15, 1888, 5; Julia Lawlor, “A Glorious Past: Paterson Residents Seek to Preserve the Eastside Neighborhood,” *New York Times* (December 21, 2003), NJ6.

<sup>67</sup> “Grand Lodge of Masons,” *New York Times*, June 1, 1890; and “Col. Culyer Gets a New Position.” For more on Monsignor McGolrick Park, see “Monsignor McGolrick Park,” New York City Department of Parks & Recreation website, accessed September 24, 2007 at [www.nycgovparks.org/sub\\_your\\_park/historical\\_signs/hs\\_historical\\_sign.php?id=201](http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/historical_signs/hs_historical_sign.php?id=201)

<sup>68</sup> “The Brooklyn Board of Education,” *New York Times*, June 13, 1897, IWM14.

<sup>69</sup> “To Plant Trees in Town,” *New York Times*, December 9, 1896, 6.

<sup>70</sup> John Y. Culyer, “Protect the Songbirds” (letter), *New York Times*, April 22, 1898, 6; John Y. Culyer, “Papermaking To-Day” (letter), *New York Times*, November 9, 1899, 6; John Y. Culyer, “To Protect Shade Trees” (letter), April 13, 1904, 8.

<sup>71</sup> “Harbor Menaced by Sewer Plans,” *New York Times*, February 18, 1907, 5.

<sup>72</sup> “Prospect Park Lasting Memorial to Culyer.”

<sup>73</sup> Portions of this section are largely adapted from (*Former*) *Colored School No. 3*, *Later Public School 69 Designation Report*; *Public School 34 Designation Report*; *Public School 111 Designation Report* (LP-0975) (New York: City of New York, 1978). On the growth of Brooklyn in the nineteenth century, see Margaret Latimer, “Brooklyn” in the *Encyclopedia of New York City*, 148-152.

<sup>74</sup> Snyder’s *Tales of Old Flatbush* includes a rendering, from Snyder’s recollection, of the 1840s Flatbush village school.

<sup>75</sup> Cyril M. Harris, in *American Architecture: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998) defines the Stick style as an eclectic style of American domestic architecture primarily from about 1860 to 1890 (p. 317).

<sup>76</sup> LPC, *128 West 18<sup>th</sup> Street Stable Designation Report* (LP-1816) (New York: City of New York, 1990). Kathleen Curran, an expert on the American adaptation of the *Rundbogenstil*, has recommended “American round-arched style” to cover the various incarnations of the *Rundbogenstil* in the United States. See Betsy Hunter Bradley, *The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 235.

<sup>77</sup> On this relationship, see Carroll L.V. Meeks, “Romanesque Before Richardson in the United States,” *Art Bulletin* (March 1953), 17-33.



## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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 Flatbush District No. 1 School has a special character and 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, the Flatbush District No. 1 School dates from 1878 and is one of a handful of significant buildings recalling Flatbush's days as an independent "country town"; that it stands near Flatbush's historic center, was one of the town's few masonry structures at the time of its construction, and is an important link to the years in which Flatbush was transformed from an agricultural village into a major suburb; that during this period, the town expressed its independence and growing strength through the construction of this building, along with Flatbush Town Hall; that as the direct descendant of the original, seventeenth-century Flatbush school, which was the earliest school on Long Island, this building is a major contributor to Flatbush's long and rich educational history; that the District No. 1 School was seen as "a model" and "an ornament to our town" and a source of "just congratulation and pride" by its builders; that it was described, soon after its opening, as a "commodious brick edifice, which is not surpassed by any school of its size in the county for architectural beauty, healthy location, and sanitary arrangements"; that its original portion was designed by John Y. Culyer, a locally prominent civil engineer and landscape architect who was the chief engineer and superintendent of Brooklyn's Prospect Park and a member, for many years, of the Brooklyn Board of Education; that the original, H-shaped portion of the building was designed in the *Rundbogenstil* or round-arched style, which was then the prevailing style among the new Brooklyn schoolhouses; that a harmonious southern addition was constructed, probably between 1890 and 1894; that, following Flatbush's annexation by Brooklyn in 1894, it was renamed Public School No. 90 and served, beginning in the 1920s, as a unique school for what were termed "misfit boys"; and that it closed as an elementary school in 1951 and served from 1954 to 1967 as the Brooklyn Branch of the Yeshiva University Boys' High School, and from 1968 into the 1990s as the Beth Rivkah Institute, a private girls' school.

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 the Flatbush District No. 1 School, 2274-2286 Church Avenue (aka 2192-2210 Bedford Avenue), Borough of Brooklyn, and designated Brooklyn Tax Map Block 5103, Lot 58 in part, consisting of the land upon which the described building is situated, as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice-Chair

Stephen F. Byrns, Diana Chapin, Roberta Brandes Gratz, Christopher Moore,

Margery Perlmutter, Elizabeth Ryan, Robert Washington, Commissioners



Flatbush District No. 1 School, Later Public School 90, east and north façades  
*Photo: Carl Forster, 2007*





Flatbush District No. 1 School, Later Public School 90, east façade  
*Photo: Carl Forster, 2007*



Flatbush District No. 1 School, Later Public School 90, south and east façades  
*Photo: Carl Forster, 2007*





Flatbush District No. 1 School, Later Public School 90, south façade  
*Photo: Michael Caratzas, 2007*



Flatbush District No. 1 School, Later Public School 90, north and west façades  
*Photo: Carl Forster, 2007*



Flatbush District No. 1 School, Later Public School 90, north façade  
*Photo: Donald Presa, 1988*





Flatbush District No. 1 School, Later Public School 90, west façade  
*Photo: Michael Caratzas, 2007*



Flatbush District No. 1 School, Later Public School 90, east façade detail  
*Photo: Michael Caratzas, 2007*



FLATBUSH DISTRICT NO. 1 SCHOOL, LATER PUBLIC SCHOOL 90 (LP-2285),  
 2274 Church Avenue (aka 2274-2286 Church Avenue; 2192-2210 Bedford Avenue).  
 Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map Block 5103, Lot 58 in part, consisting of the land  
 upon which the described building is situated.

Designated: November 20, 2007

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 06C, December 2006.  
 Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM.