

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

56-997

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.



1. Name of Property

Historic name: P.S. 186

Other names/site number: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 521 W. 145th Street

City or town: New York State: New York County: New York

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D

Michael P. Lynch Deputy SHPO 3/24/17
Signature of certifying official/Title: Date
NYS OPRHP
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government


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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:)

for 
Signature of the Keeper

5/15/17
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
Public – Local ☐
Public – State ☐
Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

- Building(s) ☒
District ☐
Site ☐
Structure ☐
Object ☐

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education: School

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Domestic: multiple dwelling

Social: club

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late Victorian: Renaissance Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Brick; Terra Cotta

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Former Public School No. 186 (P.S. 186) is part of the Hamilton Heights neighborhood of New York City, which is located in northern Manhattan between Manhattanville to the south and Washington Heights to the north. Hamilton Heights was developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a residential enclave for middle- and professional-class families. Its character is primarily residential, with streets filled with four- and five-story stone and brick apartment houses and two- and three-story townhouses. The intersections nearest P.S. 186 are Broadway to the west and Amsterdam Avenue to the east. These thoroughfares are heavily trafficked and contain first floor retail establishments and newer commercial buildings. West 145th Street is typical of the neighborhood with two lanes east and west. The former school is located midblock and fills the entire lot between W. 145th (front) and W. 146th Streets (rear). Across from the building on 145th Street is a five-story brick and stone apartment building; directly to the east is a five-story stone and brick building converted to a hotel; and to the west is a five-story stone, brick, and terra-cotta apartment building with first floor retail and offices. West 146th Street is a narrow, one-way east-bound road. It contains a mix of apartments, commercial, and public buildings. Across from the rear entrance to P.S. 186 is the two-story Hamilton Grange Station of the U.S. Post Office; to the west is a six-story brick apartment building and to the east is a gated empty lot, which exposed the school's windowless brick east façade and from which the rear of the hotel facing W. 145th St. can be seen.

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The narrow ends of the school's H-plan wings front directly onto the two streets. A set of curved stairs provide access to the courtyard entrances. The original decorative iron gates and fences on the perimeter walls are intact. There are no plantings or landscape features on the property; city sidewalks separate the site from the streets.

Narrative Description

P.S. 186 was constructed in 1903 in the Renaissance Revival style with a tripartite arrangement of base, shaft, and capital and is clad in brick with terra cotta ornament. The school was built in an H-plan configuration, with the cross wing parallel to the streets. The building is five stories tall and includes a below-grade cellar; the main entrance is on W. 145th Street. The cross wing of the H-plan is set parallel to and back from W. 145th and W. 146th Streets, behind elevated courtyards. The first floor is raised above street level on a stone plinth. The first and fifth floors are clad in buff brick and the second through fourth floors in red brick. The elevations facing the courtyard on W. 145th Street are three-bays wide, each bay consisting of triple windows. On W. 146th Street, the front facing elevation in the courtyard is three-bays wide; the side facing elevations are two-bays wide. The H-plan wings facing the street are also two-bays wide, expressed in two separate windows on the lower floors and a single triple window on the fourth and fifth floors. Stairs lead from the raised exterior courtyards to face W. 145th and W. 146th Streets. Stone walls capped with decorative iron fences enclose each street-facing courtyard.

EXTERIOR

West 145th Street

The primary façade of the school fronts on W. 145th Street and the building entrance is located in the east wing. A terra cotta bust of the Roman goddess of Wisdom, Minerva, is set in an elaborately designed niche above the entrance. (See Figures 1-5 for photographs of the W. 145th Street façade. Historic photographs are provided with Figures 12-13.)

The first floor is a rusticated brick base with arched openings set singly or in three-part groupings around the courtyard. These arched openings have terra-cotta surrounds, and Doric half-columns support the central arches in the tripartite openings. The central arch in each group originally provided access between the courtyard and the building interior, and the flanking arches functioned as windows.

A terra-cotta cornice separates the base of the building from the upper floors, which are characterized by large windows created by the building's steel structural system. There are three bays of triple windows on the second through fifth floors of the courtyard-facing elevations. The windows on the second and third floors are rectangular, the windows on the fourth floor are arched, and the small windows on the fifth (attic) floor are square. All of the

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windows retain their original terra-cotta surrounds. On the second and third floors, the windows fronting on the courtyard are large and oriented horizontally and divided by mullions.

The heavy terra-cotta architraves rest on thin sills. On the street-facing facades of the east and west wings there are two narrow windows on the second and third floors, both oriented vertically, and there are small utilitarian windows at the corners. The fourth floor windows are arched openings, also in groups of three. Within each of the arched windows, pilasters with projecting capitals frame the central opening. The fifth floor attic windows are also arranged in tripartite openings, and they have eared, terra-cotta architraves. At the intersection of the projecting and cross wings of the H-plan, the building corners are rounded and in these corners at the second through fourth floors there are narrow windows with terra-cotta lintels and scrolled keystones.

The east wing contains the main entrance to the building, which is set within a projecting bay in the rusticated base. The entrance, which is reached by a low stoop, is arched with a scrolled keystone. Terra-cotta circular plaques decorate the walls on either side of the door. "Public 186 School" is inscribed in the entablature of the cornice above the entrance. The bust of Minerva is set within a scalloped niche with scrolled supports above the entrance. A second entrance to the school from W. 145th Street is located through a decorative iron gate in the courtyard wall.

West 146th Street

The north elevation on W. 146th Street is similar in design to that of the main south elevation. There are some differences, however, that differentiate this secondary elevation from the primary. (See Figures 6-8 for photographs of the West 146th Street elevation.) The wings are shallower, with only two triple window bays, not three. The north elevation contains only one rounded corner at the juncture of the east wing with the cross wing. Additionally, the first floor of the east and west wings fronting on W. 146th Street each contain two windows; the east wing windows are square and the west wing windows are rectangular.

Other Elevations

The east and west elevations of P.S. 186 are blank brick, as they were designed to abut adjacent buildings. When the school was constructed in 1903, there was a cornice return at the southwest corner of the front elevation; however, there was no cornice return at the southeast corner of that elevation as of 1920, according to photographic records. Today there are no extant cornice returns or other details remaining on the side elevations.

INTERIOR

The floor plans and interior spaces as originally built have been adapted for housing and offices as part of the historic rehabilitation undertaken in 2014-2016, although the layout is suggestive of the building's original purpose. The Boys and Girls Club of Harlem (BGCH) occupies the south half of the first floor, facing W. 145th Street, while the north side of the first floor and the

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second through fifth floors contain a mix of studio, 1-bedroom, and 2-bedroom apartments. (See Figures 9-13 for original floor plan drawings and Figures 14-23 for photographs of the interior).

The W. 145th Street (south) side of the first floor contains a lobby in the east wing, which provides access to BGCH's administrative offices and meeting rooms connected by a corridor running along the east wall. The original lobby staircase to the second floor remains in place. In the west wing of the south side of the first floor are program rooms in approximately the same location as the original classrooms but now accessed by means of a corridor along the courtyard side of the wing. The original first floor assembly room in the cross wing is a large multi-purpose room on the south side and apartments on the north side. Next to the multi-purpose room to the east and west are additional offices, restrooms, a maintenance room, elevators and staircase of the upper floors. On the north side of the first floor are six apartments facing the courtyard, two in each wing and two facing the street in the cross wing. At the east end of the cross wing is a staircase and mechanical room and on the west end is a restroom, janitor's room, and the elevators. Access to the apartments is from a center lobby on the first floor facing W. 146th Street, adjacent to a long corridor that runs the width of the building in the cross wing and connects the staircase on the east side to the elevators on the west side. This corridor and auxiliary spaces are repeated on the second through fifth floors.

The apartments on the upper floor are located approximately where the classrooms were when the building was a school, allowing the retention of some classroom walls, doors, and wood trim. Most of the studio and one bedroom units share the space once occupied by a single classroom. A significant change from the original program is the insertion of walls to separate the units (and rooms within units) between windows within the tripartite bays. The large open classrooms no longer exist but from the exterior the windows appear the same. Another significant change is the removal of one of the four interlocking double stairs in each corner of the cross wing. The staircase in the northwest corner of this wing has been replaced with the elevators. The original ornamental wooden stairs with wrought-iron railings that connects the second and third floors on the east side of the cross wing has been retained and restored, as has the principal's wooden platform on the fourth floor above these stairs.

COURTYARDS

The existing stairs, iron gate, and wall that serve as the entrance to the south courtyard (facing W. 145th St.) has been retained and restored. Bluestone steps and landing mark the entrance to the BGCH's multi-purpose room in the center of the cross wing. The north courtyard has received similar treatment, with the existing wall and iron gate restored and bluestone steps leading to the residential lobby. Concrete planters are located on either side of this entrance. Both courtyards are paved with concrete tiles.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

☒

A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☐

B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒

C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐

D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.) N/A

☐

A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes

☐

B. Removed from its original location

☐

C. A birthplace or grave

☐

D. A cemetery

☐

E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure

☐

F. A commemorative property

☐

G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education

Architecture

Period of Significance

1903-1967

Significant Dates

1903: Date of construction

Significant Person

N/A

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

C.B.J. Snyder

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

P.S. 186 is significant under Criterion A at the local level in the area of Education. It was the first public school built in the newly developed Hamilton Heights section of Harlem and, as such, added significantly to the appeal of the neighborhood for families with children. The construction of P.S. 186 was part of the city's efforts in the early 20th century to meet the challenges of tremendous population growth and the related problem of overcrowding in the public schools. In addition to a reputation for academic excellence, P.S. 186 had for decades a successful night school, summer school, and after-school program. From the start, the elementary school's instruction included a comprehensive manual training course with rooms reserved for workshop and cooking instruction. Athletics was an early emphasis, and the music instruction in the 1960s was outstanding. For 72 years, until its closing in 1975, the school was

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the educational center for children and adults in the neighborhood, even as the neighborhood surrounding it changed.

P.S. 186 also meets Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Constructed in 1903, it is one of the over 400 new schools and school additions completed under the auspices of architect C.B.J. Snyder, New York's Superintendent of School Buildings from 1891 to 1923. At least 41 schools designed by Snyder are known to still exist. The press of Snyder's construction program required him to be prolific but his designs were also inventive, solid, and handsome. P.S. 186 is a fine example of the Renaissance Revival style as adapted for educational purposes. Notable architectural features include the heavy terra cotta cornice and window surrounds, as well as an unusual bust of Minerva, Roman goddess of Wisdom, located above the main entrance. The school is also an excellent representative of Snyder's H-plan, a notable contribution to school planning that was executed at several sites with space constraints. This distinctive floor plan provided classrooms with more light and better ventilation than other mid-block designs, and created spaces for outdoor recreation away from busy streets.

The period of significance is 1903 to 1975, when the school was operating as an elementary school serving the children of Hamilton Heights.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

New York City and Hamilton Heights in 1900

By the turn of the twentieth century, New York had become the industrial, commercial, transportation, education, and cultural capital of the United States. New York's sheer size allowed great economies of scale for manufacturing, trade, and transportation. Revolutions and famines in Europe brought a flood of immigrants to the United States in the late 1800s; many who disembarked at New York settled in its ethnic enclaves. Growth was stimulated by the consolidation of the five boroughs in 1898, after which the city's population surged, adding 1.5 million people, a 38% increase, between 1900 and 1910.

Along with this explosive growth came acute housing shortages and overcrowding. Development pressure was intense, compelling the extension of streets and infrastructure to hilly Upper Manhattan, which was previously sparsely populated. Settlement was intermittent in this part of the island until development was spurred by an accessible, inexpensive rapid transit system that facilitated travel to the area. The extension in 1879 of the Ninth Avenue elevated railway, with a stop at West 145th Street, was the first line to connect this part of the city to lower and midtown Manhattan, soon followed by other routes. The first underground line of the subway, planned since 1894, opened 10 years later and connected W. 145th St. at Broadway to City Hall. These and other infrastructure improvements in the late 1800s made

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upper Manhattan attractive to developers and home to a mix of New York's professional classes and German and Irish immigrants.

By the late 1800s, the established 17th century Dutch villages of Harlem and Manhattanville, located north of Central Park on the east and west sides respectively, would be swallowed by a marching tide of rowhouses and apartment buildings constructed, in large part, by speculators. It was during this time that "the Heights" were given their names by real estate developers to promote the new residential tracts as desirable neighborhoods in which to live.

Hamilton Heights, an area bordered approximately by 135th and 155th Streets, St. Nicholas Avenue, and the Hudson River, was named for Founding Father Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton, a lawyer, political philosopher, and the first U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, built a Federal style two-story house on 32 acres of woodland he purchased in upper Manhattan in 1800. Designed by John McComb Jr. (the architect of Gracie Mansion), the Grange, as Hamilton's home was called, was completed in 1802 and surrounded by landscaped grounds that included 13 sweet gum trees representing the original 13 colonies. The Hamilton family continued to occupy the Grange for 30 years after Hamilton's death in 1804, after which it changed hands several times and eventually fell into disrepair.¹

The former Hamilton estate was purchased by silk importer William H. De Forest in 1879 and subdivided into 300 building lots. Covenants imposed on lot sales in 1886 restricted construction to brick and stone private houses at least two stories in height, except along Tenth Avenue where commercial properties, including flats, were encouraged. To spur development, De Forest's son, William De Forest Jr., constructed an apartment building and four adjoining townhouses at Tenth Avenue at West 144th Street.² Naming the neighborhood in Hamilton's honor capitalized on his stature and gave the new townhouses a distinguished address. This pattern would be maintained throughout Hamilton Heights, although single family townhouses would give way to apartment buildings after the turn of the century when the original 20-year covenants expired.

During the first wave of development from 1890 to 1900, the new residents of Hamilton Heights were upper middle class professionals, primarily native-born Protestants, but also immigrants from Ireland, Britain, and Germany. Census records show that doctors, lawyers, merchants, as well as live-in servants of many ethnicities and races, occupied the townhouses

¹ Slated for demolition to make way for the extension of streets in that part of Harlem in 1889, the Grange was acquired by St. Luke's Episcopal Church. The congregation moved the house to Convent Avenue, the site the church had purchased for its new building, where it remained until 2008, when it was moved again by the National Park Service to its current location at 141st Street and St. Nicholas Avenue. Despite alterations and relocation to a new site, this early preservation initiative by St. Luke's recognized the national significance of Alexander Hamilton and his elegant home as one of the few remaining estates that once dotted the Harlem countryside.

² "A Recent Hamilton Grange Improvement." *Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide*, v. 46, no. 1174, September 13, 1890, pg. 334.

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and apartments. This composition began to change during the second wave of development when the neighborhood's first Roman Catholic Church was completed on West 142nd Street in 1903, which attracted more native-born and immigrant Catholic families.

Public School Education in New York

From Manhattan's earliest settlement to the turn of the 20th century and beyond, public officials had to contend with the need to efficiently provide educational opportunities in adequate facilities in the face of an ever-growing population. This was especially the case in the latter part of the 19th century, when the city's population increased dramatically, in large part due to immigration. The problem of overcrowding was complicated by an expanding public school curriculum that emphasized the teaching of English and job skills and the need to address public health concerns. It was the stated policy of educators and government officials that the schools would serve as laboratories for immigrant assimilation and to improve the health of poorer residents so both groups could become more productive members of society.

The New York City Board of Education, established in the 1840s but given full authority for school administration in 1853, would constantly update courses and implement initiatives to achieve its goals in the most economical fashion possible. A law was passed in 1888 that authorized the Board of Education to offer a series of free lectures for working adult men and women, held at the public schools. Subjects included hygiene, sanitation, elocution, American history, and other topics. The Board's Annual Report of 1889 stated that *It is the object of these lectures to disseminate useful knowledge among people, who, but for this means of instruction, would never become familiar with or even aware of some of the important, yet simple scientific principles and fact bearing upon actual daily life, health and happiness.*³

The New York State Legislature passed a law in 1887 that enabled the Board to acquire sites for new school buildings at reasonable prices through the legal process of condemnation.⁴ Finding and affording sites for schools had previously been one of the factors that delayed construction, both in the congested lower Manhattan and the desirable new neighborhoods uptown. The first evening high school for working youths and adults was established in 1866 at Grammar School No. 35 on W. 13th Street. This system of nighttime instruction was greatly expanded in the 1880s; the first such school in Harlem was organized in 1888 at Grammar School No. 39 on E. 135th Street. With this expansion came the elimination of the separate class of schools for black children. Their decline was the result of a law adopted by the New York State Legislature in 1873 that public schools be open to all students regardless of race. In 1900 the last remaining segregated school in Manhattan was closed.⁵ Along with the waves of

³ Forty-Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of New York for the Year Ending December 31, 1889. New York: Hall of the Board of Education, 1890, pg. 46.

⁴ Palmer, A. Emerson. The New York Public School, Being a History of Free Education in the City of New York. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905, pg. 176.

⁵ Ditto, pg. 178.

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immigrants entering the city, this meant that more children than ever were entering the public school system.

Women were first appointed as trustees to New York's Board of Education in the late 1880s, although they had served as teachers since public schools were first established in the city. By 1890, three trustees were women, 49 women were principals of Female Grammar (ages 10-14) Schools, and 118 women were principals of Primary (ages 5-9) Schools.⁶ Women were gaining in influence in the sphere of education, especially as it became professionalized. The New York Normal (now Hunter) College opened in 1870, specifically to provide advanced education and training to women who wished to teach.

These changes occurred at a time when manual training courses were increasingly important in New York's public schools. The manual arts included woodworking and modeling for boys, cooking and sewing for girls, and drawing for both. At first controversial, by the late 1880s school board trustees and administrators were persuaded that manual training would expose city boys to the benefits of working with their hands, demonstrate the need for focus and an attention to detail, and pave the way to occupations for non-academically inclined children.⁷ For girls, the application of science to domestic pursuits, especially the purchase and preparation of nutritious food for their families, was considered of almost equal importance as studying history and geography. As the field of domestic science matured and was renamed "home economics," the course of study expanded to include interior decoration, clothing design, child care, and household management.

This training curriculum was especially beneficial for the many students interested in acquiring skills needed for gainful employment. The benefits were hindered, however, by continued overcrowding; this problem was magnified by the State Legislature's passage of compulsory education laws for children aged 6 to 18 in 1894. Despite the law, placement was denied to many potential students for decades. It was not uncommon for students to attend school for only a half-day session or in the evening. The New York City Board of Education's Annual Report of 1896 stated, *the unprecedented growth of the city, together with unexpected movements of population, rendered it almost impossible to keep pace with the demands in given localities or to anticipate the needs of certain sections of the city that speedily outgrew the accommodations that were provided.*⁸ In 1895, 24,000 children were refused admission to school because of lack of room, a number that increased to 28,825 in 1896.⁹

⁶ Campbell, Mabel. "New York City Public Schools," The Journal of Home Economics. Vol. 2, No. 2 (April, 1910), pg. 196.

⁷ Palmer, A. Emerson. The New York Public School, Being a History of Free Education in the City of New York. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905, pgs. 178-179.

⁸ Fifty-Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of New York for the Year Ending December 31, 1896. New York: Hall of the Board of Education, 1897, pg. 53.

⁹ Ditto

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The powers of the City's Board of Education changed considerably when new laws were enacted in 1896 that established a Board of Superintendents charged with school management.¹⁰ That body was led by the City Superintendent with Assistant Superintendents overseeing special subjects, such as free (evening) lectures, manual training, physical education, and kindergartens. These changes anticipated even greater changes that came about as a result of passage of the Greater New York Charter in 1898 and its revisions in 1901. The Board of Education of the consolidated city was made up of representatives from all the boroughs and was authorized to appoint all the Superintendents, including Borough Superintendents, and a Superintendent of School Buildings. Local School Boards appointed principals and instructors upon the recommendation of the Board of Superintendents, and were authorized to select sites for new school buildings. The Charter also allowed schools to be used not only for educational purposes but for "recreation and other public uses," which opened the door to the creation of vacation (summer) schools, playgrounds, and recreation programs within the school grounds.

The bureaucratic and fiscal confusion that resulted from consolidation in 1898 meant that school construction was put on hold for a period of months. Bonding was again authorized in 1899, and between then and 1904 over \$41,000,000 in bonds were issued specifically to build new schools or repair and enlarge existing schools.¹¹ In 1903, 11 new schools were constructed and 11 additions made to existing schools, representing 394 classrooms that could accommodate 21,610 students.¹² C.B. J. Snyder, the Board of Education's Superintendent of School Buildings, oversaw the design and construction of schools during this period of explosive early 20th century growth.

Charles B.J. Snyder, Architect

Architect and mechanical engineer Charles B.J. Snyder (1860-1945) was hired by the Board of Education in 1891 as Superintendent of School Buildings for Manhattan and The Bronx after the previous school architect was fired for corruption. Born in Stillwater, Saratoga County, New York, Charles Snyder attended public schools in that village before moving to New York in 1879. He worked as a builder while attending Cooper Union, where he earned two certificates, in Practical Geometry and Elementary Architectural Drawing, and began to practice architecture in 1883. City directories indicate that Snyder was associated with master carpenter William E. Bishop in the mid- to late-1880s. Through initiative or friendship with influential Board of Education members, or both, Snyder was appointed to the position of Superintendent of School Buildings in 1891, a position he held for the next 32 years, until 1923.¹³

¹⁰ Palmer, A. Emerson. The New York Public School, Being a History of Free Education in the City of New York. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905, pg. 188.

¹¹ Ditto, pgs. 303-304.

¹² "Swarms of Pupils Settle in Schools," *New York Times*, September 15, 1903, pg. 16.

¹³ "May Retain Snyder to Rebuild Schools," *New York Times*, May 7, 1922, pg. 33.

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Snyder was responsible for planning, designing, and overseeing the construction of all school buildings in Manhattan and The Bronx until consolidation in 1898, when his responsibilities extended to all five boroughs. During his 32-year career, Snyder designed and built 408 new school buildings and additions, including the city's first high school.¹⁴ It was not uncommon for him to open more schools in a single year than existed in many other American cities.

While the sheer volume of his output was remarkable, Snyder was equally well known for his architecturally ornate buildings and innovative floor plans. Although limited funding forced Snyder to select sites in the less desirable middle of a block rather than the corner, he found this location preferable because it was quieter and, therefore, more suitable for instruction.

Fireproof materials were required by law for all school buildings taller than 35 feet. Snyder used a steel skeleton for all multi-story school buildings to conform to this law and save time during construction; this also allowed him to insert more and larger windows to let in air and light. The high cost of land required Snyder to build compact, taller schools, many of which were five stories high, which led him to create the "H" floor plan – two wings connected by a cross-wing – that ensured sufficient light in all classrooms even when adjacent buildings were constructed. Snyder also incorporated into the plan a system of interlocking stairwells that allowed the school to be evacuated quickly in case of an emergency. An auditorium was usually located on the first floor to allow easy access for the public to attend after-school programs, and often the fifth floor contained workshops, laboratories, and a gymnasium.¹⁵ But underpinning this technical proficiency was Snyder's belief in the transformative power of good design to address the ills of poverty found in the tenements that were home to so many immigrant families. Both the instruction offered to students and the high style buildings that housed them were intended to uplift and inspire young scholars for the benefit of current and future generations of New Yorkers. The journalist Jacob Riis wrote of Snyder in 1902, *New York has one of those rare men who open windows for the soul of their time. He found barracks, where he is leaving palaces to the people.*¹⁶

Snyder deftly executed the schools in a variety of styles popular in the late Victorian era and did not reject decorative elements as "too fancy" for children to appreciate. Snyder's design for the five-story Wadleigh High School for Girls in Manhattan, completed in 1902, was in the French Renaissance style. The DeWitt Clinton High School, also in Manhattan and completed in 1906, was in the Flemish Renaissance style. The two-story P.S. 17 in The Bronx was built in 1897 in the Neo-Georgian style. P.S. 9 on the upper West Side was constructed in 1894-96 in the ecclesiastical English Gothic style. P.S. 66 in Queens, completed in 1898, was a two-story

¹⁴ Ditto

¹⁵ Snyder, C.B.J., "Public School Building in the City of New York," American Architect and Building News, January 25, 1908, pg. 27.

¹⁶ Riis, Jacob. The Battle With The Slum. New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1901.

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Romanesque style building on a raised basement. Stuyvesant High School in lower Manhattan was constructed in 1905 in the Beaux-Arts style. Snyder's designs were confident stylistic expressions of this common building type despite funding constraints and the rapid pace of production.

Construction of P.S. 186

The H-plan prototype developed by Superintendent Snyder was adapted to dozens of school sites in New York, in high cost and congested areas because of its efficient use of space. He employed this plan at P.S. 186, which filled the 150-foot-wide by 250 foot deep lot between W. 145th and W. 146th Streets. The site was located in the middle of the block, midway between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue, to avoid paying for an expensive corner lot and reduce traffic noise so as not to distract the students and teachers.

At P.S. 186, the plan included a below grade cellar with steam boiler room, oil room, toilet, and storage room. Accessible from the sidewalk was a basement coal slide and ash hoist. In addition to the entrance foyers, the first floor contained the assembly room, kindergarten, woodworking shop, kitchen (also called the cooking room), a lunch room, janitor's room, nurse's room, and play room in the cross-wing.

Classrooms, teachers rooms, storage rooms, and lavatories were located on the second through fifth floors, with the principal's office on the fourth floor. In the cross-wing of the fifth floor was the gymnasium, where calisthenics was a regular part of the physical training curriculum. The gym also served as an auditorium with a stage at one end.

Snyder completed the drawings for P.S. 186 in May 1902, ready to be let out to bid. The Renaissance Revival style design specified a five-story building with cellar. The cross-wing of the H-plan was set parallel to W. 145th and W. 146th Streets, with north and south courtyards formed by the east and west wings. The plan called for an entirely fireproof building, a steel structural system clad in brick and terra cotta ornament. Buff brick was used on the first and fifth floors, with red brick on the second through fourth floors. The primary entrance faced W. 145th Street, in the east wing. The use of structural steel in the H-plan allowed the school to feature a series of large windows and openings on each floor of the south and north facades, giving it an arcaded appearance and allowing light and air into the school. This is in contrast to the east and west sides of the building, which remained windowless because of the adjoining five- and six-story buildings.

The contract to build P.S. 186 was awarded in August 1902 for \$274,500 to general contractor James J. Loonie, the son of prominent Manhattan builder Dennis Loonie. Sub-contractors included the New York Architectural Terra-Cotta Company of Long Island City, which provided Loonie with window and door surrounds and an ornamental bust of Minerva, the Roman goddess of Wisdom, which was set in a niche above the main entrance. The ornamental

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ironwork was made by the Manhattan firm of Clarke, Wright & Stowe. Also in the summer of 1902, the heating and ventilating contract was awarded to Frank Dobson for \$34,860. The electrical work, including the fire alarm connection, was awarded for \$10,675. The total cost of construction – not including the purchase of land – was \$320,035.¹⁷ The work must have been well underway early in 1903 because Superintendent Snyder was soliciting bids for furniture in January.

Opening in 1903

The *New York Times* reported on September 15, 1903 that just over 461,000 children had begun school that fall, with an additional 80,000 children attending only half-time because of overcrowding. This was an increase of almost 40,000 full time students from the year before, the result of an energetic construction campaign overseen by Superintendent Snyder. P.S. 186 was one of two new elementary schools to open in Manhattan that year, of a total of 11 opened citywide. James H. Wade, principal of P.S. 23, was transferred to P.S. 186 and served as its first principal.¹⁸

After the city's consolidation in 1898, Superintendent of Schools Dr. William Maxwell was successful in replacing a decentralized, borough-controlled operation with a centralized program that included, among other reforms, a new course of study that standardized the number of grades, the courses offered at each grade, and the 50-minute class length. Previously, the length of elementary school study was seven years in Manhattan and The Bronx, and eight years in Brooklyn, Queens, and Richmond. By the 1903 school year, Maxwell completed his reorganization of elementary education and P.S. 186 was constructed with 62 classrooms for its 3,100 full-time students, divided into eight grades. The school incorporated a kitchen and workshop to teach cooking and woodworking for the girls and boys in the upper grades. German, French, Latin, and stenography were introduced as electives in the eighth year.

Most of New York's newly constructed elementary and high schools also offered after-school activities, such as night classes for adults and sports for students during the evenings and weekends, and P.S. 186 was no exception. This reflected Snyder's design philosophy that school buildings should be useful beyond their primary purpose. Snyder spoke about this aspect of modern schools when he announced his retirement in 1922. *Buildings so planned ... can be used by the people of the neighborhood. The whole top part of the school, where the classrooms are, can be shut off from the lower part of the building. If there is night school in the building, the classes can go on, while there may be a dance in the gymnasium, a concert in the music room or a lecture in the auditorium. A school house of this kind can fill a great social need in the community.*¹⁹

¹⁷ Fifth Annual Report of the Department of Education of the City of New York for the Year Ending July 31, 1902.
Wm. C. Bryant & Company, 1903, pgs. 214-215, 228.

¹⁸ "Swarms of Pupils Settle in Schools," *New York Times*, September 15, 1903, pg. 16.

¹⁹ "May Retain Snyder to Rebuild Schools," *New York Times*, May 7, 1922, pg. 33.

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Academic Pride and Community Anchor

P.S. 186 immediately filled to capacity upon opening in September 1903. The school became an educational and cultural hub for the neighborhood as adults filled the assembly room at night to attend free lectures and vocational training, and children played in the yard after school. In almost every respect, Snyder's architectural program aligned with the goals of the era's social reformers who wished to boost the status of the public education system by building schools that emphasized light, play, health, safety, good ventilation, and community involvement. The political activist and philanthropist J.G. Phelps Stokes expanded on this view in a 1904 article, explaining how opening up the schools after hours benefited children as well as the neighborhood. *As school rooms become more attractive and as the school's functions broaden, and as the building become more largely social centres for their neighborhoods, the antagonisms so often existing between scholars and school diminish, and truancy lessens and the difficulty of interesting children in their school work becomes replaced by the far greater difficulty of providing adequate accommodations for all who eagerly seek admission. The modern schools with its social features is eagerly sought both in winter and in summer, both for lessons and for play.*²⁰

Throughout its 72-year history as an active school, the teachers and administrators of P.S. 186 had a well-earned reputation of being devoted to the students and held them to the highest academic standards. This involvement extended to a concern for their families and home life. Dr. John Nicholson, the school's second principal, wrote a letter to the newspaper in 1914, asking for help for the out-of-work father of one of his students: *A home made unhappy, and a family placed in dire need, through business reverses which have befallen the father... Distress in disaster has almost crushed [the father's] spirit, but if we can feed his fortitude with some employment we can bring him back into his own. Will you put this before your readers? I shall be glad to answer inquiries.*²¹

At P.S. 186, the cross-wing entrance facing W. 145th Street gave easy access to the first floor assembly room, which could be partitioned by a wooden accordion folding wall so that more than one class could be offered at a time. In addition, the practical arts rooms – the shop and kitchen – were deliberately located on the first floor for easy access by after-school and evening students. A 1903 report stated that, in addition to its elementary school program, P.S. 186 would host night schools and play centers in the evenings and weekends.²² The Board of Education's Supervisor of Lectures organized the adult education classes, which included subjects such as literature, history and the sciences, as well as teaching "occupations" like embroidery, fret sawing, sewing, and whittling. By 1907, P.S. 186 was offering 28 evening

²⁰ Stokes, J.G. Phelps, "Schools as Social Centres," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 23 (May, 1904), pg. 55.

²¹ "A Family in Need of Help," *New York Times*, May 10, 1914.

²² "Swarms of Pupils Settle in Schools," *New York Times*, September 15, 1903, pg. 16.

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courses with a total attendance of 5,500 people annually. In 1914, the *New York Times* reported that an evening high school for adults and teens would operate at P.S. 186, and registered 1,000 students during its first week. In a few short years the school became the neighborhood's center of learning for both children and adults. Night classes for adults would continue at P.S. 186 for over 50 years, for as long as they were offered through the Board of Education.

The school also offered athletics to young people after-school and on weekends. The appointment of the Board of Education's first Director of Physical Training in 1903, Dr. Luther H. Gulick, spurred the formation of a school athletic league that was active in all of the elementary and high schools, as well as at the City College of New York. Teams in track and basketball were formed with the aim of interesting "city boys" in physical development and outdoor sports. The *New York Times* reported in 1907 that the P.S. 186 basketball team handily beat members of the School Alumni Association team in an exhibition game because *the alumni players were not in good form through lack of practice, and their youthful opponents had an easy time of it, frequently causing merriment by the ease with which they eluded the attacks of the bigger players.*²³ It was Principal Nicholson who first offered sports to adults attending the evening high school in 1911.

This emphasis on physical education continued at the school, both as part of the hygiene and physical training requirement that was part of the curriculum and after-school. A "play school" – offering structured outdoor games for children from 5 to 14 years old in July and August – was established at P.S. 186 during the war years and continued late into the 1940s.²⁴ Programs like these addressed the concerns of educators regarding the health of city children and of parents who had to work and needed a safe place for their children to spend their summers. In addition, promising young athletes could continue to practice with teammates until the leagues started up again in the fall.

As early as 1913 the school's auditorium was used on Sunday afternoons by the People's Choral Union and People's Singing Classes to give lessons.²⁵ This was the beginning of a long-standing tradition of excellent music instruction at P.S. 186, both as part of the elementary school curriculum and its after-school and weekend programs. A highlight of this instruction was music teacher and social activist David McNair, who directed outstanding musical programs in the 1960s. Four of his students were selected to dance and sing in a 1965 televised Thanksgiving Day show, "Sammy Davis and the Wonderful World of Children."²⁶ In 1970, the black-owned record label, Silhouettes in Courage, sponsored a writing contest for New York City public school students aged 9 to 11 on the theme "What Freedom Means To Me." Some of the resulting 460 essays were turned into songs that were recorded by Mr. McNair's student choral

²³ "Lively Playing At Basket Ball," *New York Times*, March 8, 1907.

²⁴ "Four Schools To Test New Recreation Plan," *New York Times*, June 12, 1944.

²⁵ "Education Notes," *New York Times*, July 13, 1913.

²⁶ "Harlem Youngsters Star On Sammy Davis' New TV Show," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 16, 1965, pg. 17.

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group Symphonic Voices, and the resulting LP – titled “P.S. 186” – was produced and distributed by Doo Dat Productions, Inc.²⁷ When Mr. McNair heard that 600 delegates to the U.N.’s World Youth Assembly were afraid to visit Harlem during their stay in the summer of 1970, he staged an impromptu recital with his students on the U.N. grounds, to bring Harlem to them.²⁸

In 1946, the school was one of 54 sites in the city selected by the Board of Education to offer basic English language classes to students during the day. This was in addition to the tradition of offering basic English at the evening school at P.S. 186, a necessity as more non-native English speakers from Europe and the Caribbean swelled the population of Harlem in the late 1930s and 1940s.²⁹

A Changing Neighborhood

By the early years of the 20th century, much of Hamilton Heights had been developed with single family townhouses and well appointed apartment buildings. While the first residents were upper middle-class, primarily native-born families, they were soon joined by Eastern Europeans who relocated from the Lower East Side to Harlem and other boroughs in a sign of their increasing economic mobility. The German-Jewish impresario, Oscar Hammerstein I, lived on Edgecombe Avenue and built his first theater, the Harlem Opera House, on 125th Street in 1889. Norman Rockwell lived with his parents on St. Nicholas Avenue from 1897 to 1901. George Gershwin wrote his first hit song, “Swanee,” at his house on W. 144th St. in 1919.³⁰

One of the early students at P.S. 186 was Mortimer J. Adler, who became a noted philosopher and educator. Adler was the son of Bavarian immigrants, his father a jewelry salesman and his mother a teacher. They lived on W. 145th Street, from which he attended the school from 1908 to 1915. It was while he was student that he won an essay contest sponsored by the *New York Sun*. When Adler dropped out of DeWitt Clinton High School at age 14 to become a copy boy at a newspaper, he chose to interview at the *Sun* and got the job on the strength of the medal he’d won when he was 11 years old.³¹ Adler would go on to teach philosophy at the University of Chicago, among other institutions, serve as chairman of the board of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., created the Great Books Courses, authored over 50 books, and was the inspiration for the founding of the Aspen Institute.³²

Historically Harlem had a small population of African-American residents, mostly farmers, fishermen, and laborers, and their families. This community increased in size in the 1890s as

²⁷ Phillips, McCandlish. “Freedom: It Comes In All Sizes,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1970, pg. 48. The prize winning essay by P.S. 186 student Faye Green was reproduced on the cover of the album.

²⁸ Malcolm, Andrew, “Pupils Bring Harlem To Youths at the U.N.,” *New York Times*, July 11, 1970.

²⁹ “Students, 10 to 61, Learning English,” *New York Times*, October 4, 1946.

³⁰ “Hamilton Heights, Manhattan.” Wikipedia, n.d. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamilton_Heights,_Manhattan

³¹ Adler, Mortimer J., *Philosopher At Large*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977, pg. 3.

³² Grimes, William, “Mortimer Adler, 98, Dies; Helped Create Study of Classics,” *New York Times*, June 29, 2001.

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servants were sought by the middle- and upper-class white families who moved into Hamilton Heights. Apartment buildings and tenements were built especially for “colored” servants, and the first Negro churches and social clubs were formed to serve their religious and civic needs.

When the neighborhood’s first IRT subway line opened in 1904, the station was only a half a block from P.S. 186. Despite this long-awaited event, over building, high rents, and speculation in Harlem led to the inevitable bust in 1904-1905. While attendance at the school was not much affected, construction slowed considerably in Harlem as financial institutions would no longer lend to speculators, and many threatened to foreclose on newly constructed flats. To avoid financial ruin, some landlords specifically solicited African American families, while others used the threat of black neighbors to force nearby white property owners to buy them out.³³ Like other groups, the city’s prosperity attracted black workers from elsewhere in the city and region. An existing enclave of African Americans in the Tenderloin district was disrupted when construction began on Pennsylvania Station in 1901, forcing these families to relocate.

Harlem was the destination for many, spurred by the encouragement of Philip A. Payton, Jr.’s Afro-American Realty Company, a black-owned business that leased Harlem apartment buildings from white owners and rented them to middle-class African American families eager for a fashionable address. Even after the Realty Company folded in 1908, depressed real estate prices in Harlem persisted and white landlords continue to rent to black families. By 1910, almost 10% of central Harlem’s population was black.³⁴ This is in comparison to New York City’s total population of 3.1 million, only 2% of which was black.

The percentage of Eastern and Southern European families increased also, attracted to uptown for the same reason as African Americans, to leave behind the tenements of the Lower East Side. These new residents gradually replaced the original occupants of the apartment buildings and townhomes, families of German, Irish, and British descent. Historic photographs of P.S. 186 show that the school served a predominately white, immigrant community; a circa 1912 photograph of a lecture held in the school’s assembly room shows an all-white audience, a mix of well dressed men, women, and children.

The settlement of Harlem by African Americans continued for decades; by 1920 32% of central Harlem’s population was black, increasing to 70% by 1930 and 89% by 1940.³⁵ Not all of these new residents moved from elsewhere in New York. During the First Great Migration of African Americans from the southern states to the North (1916-1930), the threat of violence back home and the pull of economic opportunity in northern cities made New York, in particular, the preferred destination. The expansion of industry and manufacturing necessary for the war effort in 1916-1918 was another encouragement for black southerners to move north.

³³ Osofsky, Gilbert. Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York, 1890-1930. New York: Harper & Row, 1971, pgs. 90-91.

³⁴ Ditto, pgs. 105-110.

³⁵ “1943 New York City Market Analysis.” 1940s New York, n.d. <http://www.1940snewyork.com/>,

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These demographic changes were decades in the making in the streets surrounding P.S. 186. The 1920 U.S. Census enumeration district 1468, bound by W. 145th and W. 147th Streets, Amsterdam and Convent Avenues, shows a nearly all-white neighborhood of over 2,700 people, only 30 of which were listed as black or mulatto. Almost all of these black residents were live-in servants to white families; a few were porters or janitors. Their white neighbors were an equal mix of native born, first generation or immigrants, primarily from Russia, Poland, Hungary, Germany, Cuba and South America. By 1940, however, Hamilton Heights was about 35% black, 38% native born white, and 25% foreign-born white. This population mix was reflected in P.S. 186's student body, although the faculty and staff were primarily white.³⁶

The recollections of celebrated artist Faith Ringgold about her years at P.S. 186 expand on these statistics. Born as Faith Willie Jones, she lived with her family on W. 146th St., about seven blocks from the school. She attended the nearby all-black P.S. 90 on W. 148th Street for kindergarten and first grade but her mother transferred her to P.S. 186 in 1938 because it was considered to be a better school academically. Ringgold remembers that while the instructors at P.S. 186 were primarily Irish Catholic, the school was integrated, with students who were immigrants from China, Puerto Rico, and Germany. Of the 35 students in her 1942 eighth grade graduating class, 37% were black. Ringgold's talent was immediately recognized when she became the class artist in second grade.³⁷ In addition to painting, Ringgold is a sculptor, quilter, author of over a dozen children's books, and civil rights activist. Her work has been collected by the Guggenheim Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C., among other institutions.

Disinvestment and Decline

Drawings from the Municipal Archives record a series of improvements and modernization campaigns at P.S. 186, major and minor, beginning as early as 1911 through the 1960s. The sanitary system was upgraded in 1911 and again in 1934. Interior modifications to the first floor cooking room were made in 1913 and 1914, and improvements were made to the lighting and electrical system in 1915, 1926, and 1947. The wood sash and trim in the stairwells was replaced in 1932 with metal windows. Heating and ventilating repairs were made in 1933 and more significant upgrades were made in 1947. Alterations were made to the fifth floor gymnasium in 1967 to create a new cafeteria.³⁸

³⁶ United States Federal Census for Assembly District 22-1458 (1920); Manhattan District 1015 (1930); and Manhattan District 31-1822 (1940). U.S. National Archives and Record Administration. Accessed September 21, 2016.

³⁷ Ringgold, Faith. We Flew Over the Bridge. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995, pgs. 21-24.

³⁸ "P.S. 186." Architectural Drawings 1911-1967. Municipal Archives, New York City Department of Records, School Construction Authority. Series 1830.

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Despite construction in 1938 of a new school in Harlem – P.S. 194 – to relieve overcrowding, there was a lack of investment and maintenance in the schools as a whole during the Depression, which continued through the war years. It wasn't until 1946 that the Board of Education was able to implement its \$130 million building plan – five years in the making – which included modernization of seven public schools, one of which was P.S. 186. A major component of the plan was to provide classroom space for almost 15,000 students in areas of severe overcrowding, mostly by means of additions to schools in The Bronx and Queens.³⁹ Harlem's overcrowded schools were often overlooked or ignored because of Manhattan's overall population decline.

It was in 1946 that sixth grade students at the school created a "model city" of their neighborhood, reimagining the area from W. 145th to W. 149th Streets and from Broadway to Convent Avenue as filled with new, well-appointed housing projects and nearby shopping, served by the school and playground. The students also created a model of the existing community, showing, as the article in the *New York Times* reported, ... *a realistic commentary on tenement life-the back yards, catch-alls for tin cans and other rubbish, the sunless and airless buildings.*⁴⁰ These models were presented to Park Commissioner Robert Moses, who exhibited them at the Museum of the City of New York.

The racial make-up of the student body at P.S. 186 was over 90% black and Puerto Rican by 1960, although district-wide only 8% of the faculty and 3% of administrators were black.⁴¹ The school was labeled "difficult" as early as 1957 because of the racial imbalance of its students, when an appeal went out to teachers to volunteer to work in Harlem, specifically P.S. 125 and P.S. 186, and Bedford-Stuyvesant's P.S. 129.⁴² These schools had trouble attracting a full-time, permanent faculty and were forced to make do with a revolving door of substitute teachers. Conditions for students and teachers did not improve when the city attempted to integrate its majority minority schools for the 1961-62 school year.⁴³ This came on the heels of the first teachers strike in New York's history, in 1960, when the newly formed United Federation of Teachers union convinced 5,600 teachers and staff to stage a walk-out and another 2,000 to call in sick over poor pay and overcrowded classrooms.

P.S. 186 was caught in the middle of the much larger 1968 UFT teachers strike when it attempted to stay open with the help of parents, PTA members, and some teachers who defied the strike. In its reporting about the strike the *New York Times* called P.S. 186 "the plain old building on West 145th Street," an acknowledgement that the Board of Education had plans to replace the school with the new P.S. 153 on Amsterdam Avenue, between W. 146th and W.

³⁹ "Pupils Are Slated To Get 4,606 More Seats," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 18, 1937, pg. 6

⁴⁰ "6th-Graders Show Housing Models: Build Miniature Communities to Contrast Present Area With One More Ideal," *New York Times*, February 26, 1946.

⁴¹ "216 Schools Designated to Aid Integration of More City Pupils," *New York Times*, December 13, 1960.

⁴² "Teachers Sought In Problem Posts," *New York Times*, May 17, 1957.

⁴³ "216 Schools Designated to Aid Integration of More City Pupils," *New York Times*, December 13, 1960.

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147th Streets.⁴⁴ These plans were delayed, and maintenance was deferred at P.S. 186, by New York's worsening economic situation and burgeoning social problems of the late 1960s. By 1970 P.S. 186 served 1,450 black and Puerto Rican students in kindergarten through fifth grade.

Closure, Proposed Demolition, Preservation

Parents, teachers, administrators, and students staged a boycott of P.S. 186 on February 23, 1971 to protest what they called an antiquated building, unsafe conditions, and the long delay in constructing its replacement, P.S. 153. In particular, parents criticized the city and Board of Education because facilities were obsolete, broken windows had been boarded up and not repaired, and the site suffered from a rat and roach infestation. The PTA described the school as "inadequate for human habitation."⁴⁵ Construction funding for P.S. 153 was not included in the city's 1971 austerity budget, however, which led to an evacuation of the school in March 1972 by members of the National Economic Growth and Reconstruction Organization (NEGRO), a black self-help group led by Dr. Thomas W. Matthew. Teachers, administrators, and students cooperated in the re-location to temporary classrooms in the neighborhood, vowing never to return to the school.⁴⁶ This brought pressure on the city and it agreed to shift monies in the 1972-73 capital budget to allow construction of P.S. 153 to begin. With the opening of P.S. 153 in 1975, renamed for the U.S. Congressman from Harlem, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., P.S. 186 was closed.

The city gave the site to the New York County Local Development Corporation, which sold it to the Boys and Girls Club of Harlem (BGCH) in 1986 for \$215,000 on the condition that a new development was to be completed within three years.⁴⁷ Although this condition wasn't met, the Club retained ownership of the boarded up school. By the mid-2000s the neighborhood was divided over demolition versus preservation. The Club and its new development partner insisted that saving the building was financially infeasible for affordable housing, while several members of the Community Board and Hamilton Heights Homeowners Association advocated for the retention and renovation of the school.⁴⁸ The Club eventually changed its plans and, in 2014, undertook the rehabilitation of P.S. 186 for 78 mixed-income apartments and a 10,000 square foot headquarters for the Boys and Girls Club. Slated to open in late 2016, as of March the units had received over 56,000 online applications from prospective tenants.

⁴⁴ Sibley, John, "Those Opposed Call Walkout Invalid," *New York Times*, October 22, 1968.

⁴⁵ Campbell, Barbara, "14 Uptown Schools Boycotted To Protest Construction Delay," *New York Times*, February 25, 1971.

⁴⁶ Buder, Leonard, "Boycott Closes Harlem School," *New York Times*, February 24, 1971.

⁴⁷ Ellis, Will, "Inside Harlem's P.S. 186," July 8, 2012, www.abandonednyc.com/2012/07/08/inside-harlems-p-s-186.

⁴⁸ Iverac, Mirela, "Anger and Debate in Harlem Over What to Do With a Long-Vacant School," *New York Times*, August 2, 2010.

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Other

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☒ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property:

.72 acres

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☒ NAD 1983

1. Zone: 18	Easting: 588649	Northing: 4519991
2. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the lot historically associated with PS 186.

P.S. 186

Name of Property

New York Co., NY

County and State

Public School # 186
New York, New York Co., NY

521 West 145th Street
New York, NY 10031



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter

0 380 760 1,520 Feet

P.S. # 186

NEW YORK
OPPORTUNITY
Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

P.S. 186

Name of Property

New York Co., NY

County and State

Public School # 186
New York, New York Co., NY

521 West 145th Street
New York, NY 10031



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter

0 62.5 125 250 Feet



P.S. # 186



Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

P.S. 186
Name of Property

New York Co., NY
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Michael A. Tomlan
organization:
street & number: 207 West Sibley Hall
city or town: Ithaca state: New York zip code: 14853
e-mail: mat4@cornell.edu
telephone:
date: January 2017

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map. N/A
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: P.S. 186

City or Vicinity: New York

County: New York State: New York

Photographer: Michael A. Tomlan

Date Photographed: December 2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

NY_New York Co_PS 186_0001
Exterior, W. 145th St. façade, looking Northeast

NY_New York Co_PS 186_0002
Exterior, W. 145th St. façade, looking Northeast into the court

NY_New York Co_PS 186_0003
Exterior, W. 145th St. façade, looking Northwest into the court

NY_New York Co_PS 186_0004
Exterior, W. 145th St. façade, looking Northwest

NY_New York Co_PS 186_0005
Exterior, W. 145th St. façade, looking up at Minerva statue

NY_New York Co_PS 186_0006
Exterior, W. 146th St. façade, looking West along the street

NY_New York Co_PS 186_0007
Exterior, W. 146th St. façade, looking South into the court

NY_New York Co_PS 186_0008

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Name of Property

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Exterior, W. 146th St. façade, looking East along the street

NY_New York Co_PS 186_0009

Interior, W. 145th St. lobby entry, looking South

NY_New York Co_PS 186_0010

Interior, W. 145th St. lobby entry, floor mosaic

NY_New York Co_PS 186_0011

Interior, 1st floor, Boys and Girls Club entry, looking Northeast

NY_New York Co_PS 186_0012

Interior, 1st floor corridor, looking Southeast

NY_New York Co_PS 186_0013

Interior, 1st floor, secondary historic staircase, looking East

NY_New York Co_PS 186_0014

Interior, 4th floor, principal's platform, looking South

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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*Municipal Archives
Board of Education photo collection
boe 72,061
PS 186 Manhattan
1903*



Historic Photograph, Exterior, W. 145th Street façade, looking Northeast, 1903

P.S. 186
Name of Property

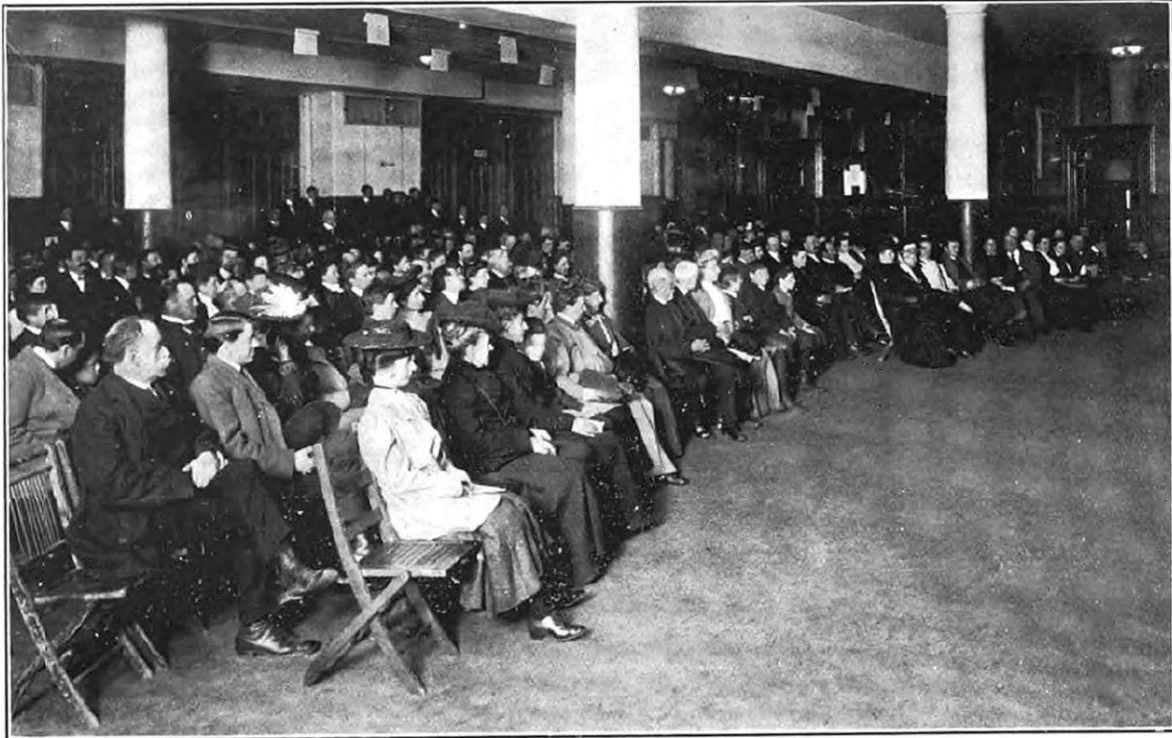
New York Co., NY
County and State



Historic Photograph, Exterior, W. 145th St. façade, looking Northwest, c.1920.

P.S. 186
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AUDIENCE AT PUBLIC SCHOOL 186
145th St., West of Amsterdam Ave., Manhattan

Historic Photograph, Interior, first floor assembly room, looking North, c1908



Juan A. Bravo
BROKERAGE
212-231-2112
FAX: 212-211-2112

HOME TAX

COLON SALON
212-926-4880

PAINTS
TOOLS
PLUMBING
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HARDWARE
SUPPLIES
LOCKETS
TILES
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HOTEL

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AND ALL TYPES OF
WOODWORK
AND ALL TYPES OF
WOODWORK









MINERVA



PUBLIC SCHOOL







526
PS186















NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Date Received: 3/31/2017 Date of Pending List: Date of 16th Day: Date of 45th Day: 5/15/2017 Date of Weekly List: 5/25/2017

 X Accept Return Reject 5/15/2017 Date

Reviewer	<u>Alexis Abernathy</u>	Discipline	<u>Historian</u>
Telephone	(202)354-2236	Date	

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



**Landmarks Preservation
Commission**

Meenakshi Srinivasan
Chair

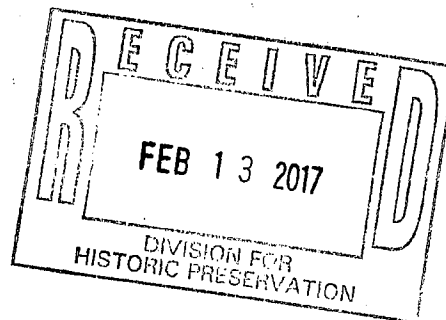
Sarah Carroll
Executive Director
SCarroll@lpc.nyc.gov

1 Centre Street
9th Floor North
New York, NY 10007

212 669 7902 tel
212 669 7797 fax

February 9, 2017

Ruth Pierpont, Deputy Commissioner
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation
P.O. Box 189
Peebles Island
Waterford, NY 12188-0189



Re: P.S. 186, 521 W. 145th Street, Manhattan

Dear Deputy Commissioner Pierpont:

I am writing on behalf of Chair Meenakshi Srinivasan in response to your request for comment on the eligibility of P.S. 186, located at 521 W. 145th Street in Manhattan, for the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

The New York Landmarks Preservation Commission's Director of Research Kate Lemos McHale has reviewed the materials submitted by the Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau and has determined that P.S. 186 appears to meet the criteria for inclusion on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sarah Carroll

cc: Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair
Kate Lemos McHale, Director of Research



**Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

ROSE HARVEY
Commissioner



24 March 2017

Alexis Abernathy
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1201 Eye St. NW, 8th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20005

Re: National Register Nomination

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to submit the following MPDF and seven nominations, all on disc, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

Southold Town Milestones, Suffolk County
Southold Milestone 7 (Southold Town Milestones), Suffolk County
Winans-Hunting House, Dutchess County
Reformed Church of Melrose, Bronx County
PS 186, New York County
Henry's Garage, Essex County
Nelson Methodist Church, Madison County
John S. Tilley Ladders Company, Albany County

This is the last batch until your move is completed. Please feel free to call me at 518.268.2165 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank
National Register Coordinator
New York State Historic Preservation Office