

JAMAICA HIGH SCHOOL, 167-01 Gothic Drive, Jamaica, Queens
Built: 1925-7, architect, William H. Gompert

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 9858, Lot 100, in part consisting of that portion of the lot south of the masonry wall that is 15 feet north of the central wing of the school and that extends along the southern line of Lot 87 across Lot 100 to the point where it meets 168th Street.

On December 16, 2008, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Jamaica High School and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were eight speakers in favor of designation including a representative of Assemblyman Rory Lancman and of Councilmember James Gennaro. Jamaica High School Principal Walter Achim spoke in support of designation, as did representatives of the Historic Districts Council, the Landmarks Conservancy the Central Queens Historical Association, the Jamaica Hill Community Association and the New York City School Construction Authority. The Commission also received letters in support of designation from Councilmember Leroy Comrie, the Municipal Art Society, and several individuals. There were no speakers in opposition.

Summary

This large, classically-styled public high school was designed by William Gompert and opened in 1927 to accommodate the rapidly expanding population of Jamaica, Queens. Residential development of Queens flourished after the construction of the Queensboro Bridge in 1909 and the improvement of other forms of transportation such as roads, subways and trains. The previously rural spaces in this borough suddenly became more accessible and developers surged in, building huge numbers of houses and apartment buildings for people seeking to escape crowded living conditions in Manhattan and Brooklyn.



In 1924 William Gompert was appointed to the position of Superintendent of School Buildings, following C.B.J. Snyder who served in this position from before Consolidation until 1923. Snyder had been the first Superintendent to deal with the physical needs of a newly-unified school district enlarged by a wave of immigration around the turn of the 20th century. Although Snyder designed a prodigious number of school buildings, the demand for more space was equally great when Gompert began his work. With the growth of new neighborhoods and a continuing flood of immigrants, the New York City school system was sorely stretched, with many students in half-day sessions or attending classes in rented facilities designed for other uses.

At its opening Jamaica High School had the capacity to seat 3,388 students. Its Georgian Revival style was said to help “Americanize” the numerous immigrant children among its student body. It was fitted with the latest and most complete facilities available, including fully equipped athletic fields and a field house added in 1929. Its expansive grounds are quite unusual for New York City where schools are more likely to be crammed into tight city lots. As the population of Queens soared during the rest of the 20th century and the original, mostly European population was replaced by a mix of immigrants from South Asia, Africa and the Caribbean this building has continued to anchor the neighborhood and provide a rich educational environment for the children of the borough.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Jamaica, Queens¹

Jamaica, in central Queens, is one of the oldest and most densely populated areas in the borough. The southern part of the area centered around Beaver Pond and was inhabited by a Native American tribe called the Jameco or Yamecah, (a word meaning Beaver in Algonquin) when the first Europeans arrived there in 1655. They came from neighboring Hempstead looking for more space to farm. In 1656, Robert Jackson applied to Governor Stuyvesant for a patent and “purchased” 10 acres of land from the native tribe.² A further patent in 1660 extended and incorporated the settlement under the Dutch name Rusdorp, meaning resting place. The town’s original boundaries can be approximated today by Jamaica Avenue on the north, Linden Boulevard on the south, the Van Wyck Expressway on the west and Farmers Boulevard on the east.

The town’s name was changed to Jamaica when the English took over in 1664. Queens County (then including all of Nassau County) was chartered in 1683 as one of the ten counties of the colony of New York and official town patents were given to Jamaica, Newtown, and Flushing. Through the next century the community of Jamaica served as the county seat and became a trading post where farmers from outlying areas brought their produce. During the Revolutionary War, many residents supported the British although the town did have its own company of 56 Minutemen. A 1698 census of Queens County showed a total population of 3,366 whites and 199 blacks.³

Although early records indicate the existence of slaves, throughout its history Jamaica also had a free black population. One of its most well-know black residents was Wilson Rantus who was born in Jamaica in 1807. He owned his own farm and invested in other residential properties in the town. Well-educated, he started a school for black children and became involved in the effort (along with other black men from Queens such as Samuel V. Berry from Jamaica and Henry Amberman of Flushing) to achieve the right to vote for black citizens.

Incorporated as a village in 1814, Jamaica became a center of trade on Long Island. Early roads, and the first railroad in 1836, provided a link between Eastern Long Island and New York. In a story concerning life in the town in 1837, a local resident is quoted as saying, “Hundreds of persons daily pass from Jamaica to and from the city of New York; our boarding houses are often full.”⁴ As a half-way point to New York City from rural Long Island, citizens in Jamaica also became known for making and repairing wagons.⁵ More growth arrived after the Civil War, with the beginning of a horse car line in 1866 and an electric trolley in 1888.

During the 19th century Jamaica evolved into a retreat for urban dwellers who patronized its numerous inns and saloons on weekend excursions and built large summer homes on its open land. The permanent population of Jamaica increased steadily throughout the second half of the century and eventually some of the nearby farms were subdivided for house lots. Throughout the 1890s many of the blocks along Fulton Street and the surrounding streets began to be developed with two- and three-story brick and frame houses.⁶

The decade prior to World War I brought a series of transportation improvements that opened Jamaica and the entire Borough of Queens to rapid growth and development. The Long Island Railroad was electrified in 1905-08, the Queensboro Bridge was opened in 1909, railroad tunnels were completed beneath the East River in 1910, and the elevated line was extended along Jamaica Avenue in 1918. Between 1900 and 1920, the population of Jamaica quadrupled and its commercial district became one of the busiest and most highly valued on Long Island. As soldiers returned from World War I wanting to settle down and start families, a shortage of building materials and a financial downturn exacerbated the lack of housing in the New York

area. The stage was set for a massive construction boom in the 1920s as “families fled from paying exorbitant rents for walk-up apartments in Manhattan to buy houses in Queens.”⁷

During this time, the area near Hillside Avenue filled with Colonial Revival style rowhouses for working people. There were detached residences as well, often in the Tudor Revival or bungalow style. Queens came to be known as the “Borough of Homes.”⁸ While low-scale apartments around a central court were less common in Jamaica than in other parts of Queens, there were some taller buildings called “hotel apartments” constructed in the 1920s. A 1926 newspaper article reported the apartments currently under construction in Queens would house “several thousand families.”⁹ Growth continued throughout the 20th century as more people purchased automobiles and new areas not reached by mass transit became accessible. The 1930 Queens census showed that foreign-born residents numbered just 24%, with sizeable numbers of blacks in Corona, Jamaica and Flushing.¹⁰ In the early 1930s, South Jamaica had a mixed population, with about 40% Jews as well as blacks, Italians and other white residents.¹¹ Much of the white population began to move away in the 1950s and 60s, often replaced by South Asians. An article in the *Long Island Daily Press* in 1956 called Jamaica “the fastest growing community in America.”¹²

High Schools in New York City¹³

Before Consolidation of the City of New York in 1898, the existence and quality of public higher education in New York varied greatly depending on the location. Brooklyn organized its first public day high schools in 1878.¹⁴ Erasmus Hall Academy, started as a private school, received a charter from the Regents of the State of New York in 1787 and was transferred to the Brooklyn Board of Education in 1895. In Manhattan, the first free academy for studies above the primary grades was begun in 1849. It started as a five year program but in 1853, New York State allowed it to be called the Free College with a collegiate course of four years and a one year preparatory course.¹⁵ In 1870, the New York Board of Education established the Daily Female Normal and High School to educate girls to become teachers.¹⁶ Queens had two high schools, the Flushing Academy, a private school founded in 1875 and one in Long Island City started in 1889. Staten Island had only high schools classes in some elementary schools.

With Consolidation, it fell to the first Superintendent of Schools in New York City, William Henry Maxwell (1852-1920), to create a unified public educational system and to bring together areas that previously had different educational policies, standards and experiences.¹⁷ At his retirement in 1918, Maxwell was credited with being “responsible for the development of secondary education in the City, for improved methods of training teachers [and] for better school buildings.”¹⁸

Maxwell was aided by reformers such as Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University who had long been concerned about the poor state of public education in New York. Butler started the Teachers College in 1891 and in 1894 began the Public Education Society to help make the public aware of the terrible conditions in its schools. He campaigned for improved high schools to prepare young people for their future lives and to be good citizens. He helped frame the idea that public education is a communal responsibility and that it required sufficient public funding. This led to the passage of the School Reform Law of 1896, creating a professional Board of Superintendents to provide the daily management of the schools. Butler was also instrumental in the charter revision of 1901 that was an effort to remove political influence from the education system. It gave more consolidated power to the City Superintendent of Schools to set standards for curriculum and teacher hiring, while abolishing the separate school boards from each borough.

In 1898 there were 35 independent school districts in Queens, among them were the larger, urban areas of Long Island City, College Point, Flushing, Jamaica, and Richmond Hill. There were also two schools for “colored” children, one in Flushing and one in Jamaica.¹⁹ Generally the course of study in all these schools was seven years, although in 1900 only about 13,700 of the half million enrolled students finished all seven. In Queens, among those who did finish, only 60% went on to study in high school. Originally high schools accepted students directly out of elementary school for a five year course. By the turn of the century separate high school buildings existed only in Long Island City (started 1889) and Flushing (begun 1875), with high school departments located in seven elementary schools in Queens.

Superintendent Maxwell believed that universal education was “necessary for an organized and harmonious society” and that it would lead to “universal individual development” and “equality of opportunity.”²⁰ The 1894 Compulsory Education Law requiring school attendance until age 14, along with large numbers of new immigrants to New York led to huge population growth in the schools. From 1920 to 1930, the population of New York City increased from 5.6 million to 6.9 million, including a foreign-born population that increased from 1.99 million to 2.29 million. During this same period in Queens, the population grew from 470,000 in 1920 to more than 1 million, mostly as a result of improved transportation and an increase in available housing units.²¹ A budget cutting proposal by Mayor Hylan’s administration in 1926 exempted projects in Queens because they recognized the extreme need for improvements in that Borough.²²

Between 1906 and 1926, the high school-age population in New York City grew from 21,493 to 125,201 or an increase of 482%.²³ Authorities were scrambling to keep up with the overwhelming need for more buildings. In his school review of 1948, the Superintendent reported that, “The City embarked upon the greatest school construction program in its history....But the erection of new buildings could not keep pace with the growth and movement of the school population.”²⁴ The huge population growth in the outer boroughs created a need for more buildings as well as for modern facilities that were different from earlier schools.²⁵

The Architect: William H. Gompert²⁶

The person charged with planning and overseeing the construction of the needed school buildings was William H. Gompert (1875-1946). Gompert was born in New York City and educated at Adelphi Academy, Pratt Institute, and the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences. After employment in the firms of McKim, Mead & White, Maynicke & Franke, and Harding & Gooch, he established his own practice around 1906 and specialized in the design of commercial and institutional buildings. He was elected president of the Brooklyn chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1923. Gompert was hired in February 1923 by the New York City Board of Education as an expert to assist in the reorganization of the Bureau of Construction and Maintenance and to facilitate the construction of public schools; his initial six-month contract gave him the “powers and duties of Superintendent of School Buildings.”²⁷ According to the *New York Times*, Gompert had “much experience in the directing of large building construction enterprises.”²⁸ After a six-month extension of his contract, Gompert was appointed in January 1924 to the position of Architect and Superintendent of School Buildings for the Board of Education, and became the third-highest paid official in the administration of Mayor John F. Hylan. Gompert was the first successor to the noted architect C.B.J. Snyder, Superintendent of School Buildings from 1891 until January 1, 1923, who had been responsible for the vast school construction program following the consolidation of New York City in 1898, and had been “virtually forced out of the post under pressure by . . . Mayor Hylan.”²⁹

To alleviate the serious overcrowding in the schools in the 1920s, New York City undertook another extensive program of school construction. Gompert was forced to contend with a significant shortage of bricklayers in the citywide building industry, as well as a lack of interest on the part of major construction firms to bid on public school construction projects. Nonetheless, he attempted to bring about economy and change in the process of school construction, including standardizing design and construction work, employing general contracts instead of individual construction contracts, and instituting double shifts to shorten construction time. In 1925, however, charges began to surface (first by a mayoral candidate) that many of the schools constructed under Gompert were defective. By the end of 1927, three separate investigations were underway and Gompert resigned in December.³⁰ Former Mayor Hylan responded to critics that Gompert was under attack because he had "built too many schools to suit those that do not want the children educated."³¹ The Board of Education's Joint Committee of Architects and Engineers issued its report in 1928 and called Gompert's schools "in general honest, safe, efficient and appropriate to the purpose."³²

In his nearly five years as school architect, Gompert was credited with overseeing the design and construction of 169 new schools or school additions, including DeWitt Clinton and Theodore Roosevelt High Schools (1929), the Bronx; James Madison High School (1926), Brooklyn; Jamaica High School (1927) and Far Rockaway High School (1929), Queens in austere versions of such contemporary institutional styles as Collegiate Gothic, Georgian, and Spanish Colonial. The towered Public School 101 (1929), Forest Hills Gardens, has been considered Gompert's most stylistically interesting design.³³ The New York Training School for Teachers/New York Model School (a designated New York City Landmark) was one of the most significant school commissions produced by Gompert's office. Gompert continued to be listed in city directories until at least 1940, and was associate architect of the U.S. Marine Hospital (1933-36, with Kenneth Murchison and Tachau & Vaught), Staten Island.

Jamaica High School

Jamaica had previously met its educational needs with a brick school at 162-02 Hillside Avenue, designed by William B. Tubby and built in 1896-8. This building originally housed 115 students and 7 teachers in its high school department.³⁴ By 1909, the high school had grown to 826 students with 36 teachers.³⁵ By 1926 Jamaica High School required three annexes and part-time study to accommodate all the children. The community eagerly awaited the completion of a new high school to alleviate these problems.

Lobbying for a new high school for Jamaica began by 1922 and architectural plans were in place by 1924,³⁶ but various citizen and commercial groups supported different sites and there was no consensus as to the best location. This site, a "vast plateau of land at the head of 168th Street" in the Hill section, near Hillcrest Avenue was finally chosen in 1925 and work began.³⁷ The school opened February 1, 1927. By this time another large lot behind the school had been acquired and plans were underway to create athletic facilities there.³⁸ In May, 1929 the Board of Education approved approximately \$275,000 to acquire the property in front of the high school building. The houses that were originally located there blocked the view of the new school building from the main streets. This purchase allowed for the houses to be razed and the creation of a large green area with appropriate landscaping and building approaches.³⁹ This purchase also created the largest school site in the country, with almost 625,000 square feet.⁴⁰

The building is in the Georgian Revival style with granite columns, brick walls and a symmetrical design. The entrance is located in a central pavilion with a shallow pediment and is topped by a tiered cupola that stands out in this residential area. It sits on a gentle hill surrounded

by lawn and a series of terraces and stone stairways. With a height of only three stories and its expansive setting, this building is highly unusual for a city school.

Because of the spacious site, the school was created in an “E” plan, with dimensions of 400 feet long and 200 feet deep. The two outside wings accommodated 83 classrooms and the central projecting space held the auditorium, several gymnasia and a swimming pool. The building was designed with the latest in science labs and specialized rooms for drawing, home economics, nursing and hygiene. On the inside, a series of murals showing the complete history of Long Island was installed in 1930, created by the “noted New York artist” Suzanne Miller.⁴¹ At the rear of the building is a well-equipped field house in a complimentary style, along with a series of tracks and playing fields that accommodated numerous sport activities.⁴² (Neither the murals nor the athletic facilities are part of the designation.)

Notable alumni from Jamaica High School include Art Buchwald, noted author and columnist, movie director Francis Ford Coppola, sportswriter George Vecsey, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, writer and journalist, Sheila Jackson-Lee, Congressional representative from Texas’ 18th district, Pulitzer-Prize winning poet Alan Dugan, and Obba Babatundé, actor on Broadway, motion pictures and television.⁴³

The Design of Jamaica High School

Jamaica High School was designed using the Georgian Revival style, an architectural style that was popular in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as part of the general use of various classical revival styles for civic buildings, a period defined by some as “the American Renaissance.”⁴⁴ At this time, many people in this country had begun to see themselves as a world power and felt the need have a similar stature as Europeans, with similar kinds of cultural references. Classical styles were also believed to help Americanize the many new immigrants who arrived in New York from diverse backgrounds and needed to be acculturated to the American mainstream. The Georgian style, in particular, was very regular and depended on an imposed order and symmetry that came from its original development.

The Georgian Revival style is based on details and materials of buildings originally from the 18th century, (generally during the rule of George I-IV in England) although the large scale of the building reflects the needs of people in the 20th century for larger spaces and modern accommodations. This style is defined by buildings with a symmetrical arrangement, the use of contrasting brick with stone trim and classical details such as double-height columns, a pedimented portico and cupola. At Jamaica High school, the Georgian Revival style can be seen in the building’s central entrance portico supported by over-scaled columns, the symmetrical, axial arrangement of its wings extending to each side and then to the rear, and the use of brick and stone as facing materials. This style of building was called by contemporaries “distinctive American architecture particularly fitted to Jamaica, where one of the earliest settlements was founded.”⁴⁵

Because the architect had an exceptionally large lot to work with, the school is only three stories high and expands over a large area to accommodate more than 3,000 students. The elaborate drives and terraces leading to the building and its site on the crown of a hill help to increase the grand effect of such a large, classically-inspired building. Its important role as a proud community symbol continues to the present day.

Subsequent History

In 1948, a bronze plaque was dedicated to the former 188 students of Jamaica High School who were killed in World War II. The memorial was designed by Paul Fjelde, a professor at Pratt Institute and was installed on the side of the school near Gothic Drive (since removed).

As Jamaica continued to attract more residents, its high school was reported to have the largest enrollment in the borough, with 4,613 students in 1950. The Queens Assistant Superintendent of Schools reported that “Young couples who have children of school age are moving further out on the Island, to Eastern Queens and to Nassau.”⁴⁶ By 1956, however, the high school was “falling apart” and parents were upset by the conditions which were described as peeling interior paint, crumbling plaster, leaky faucets and gas jets, and worn electrical connections. The need was great for repairs and modernization⁴⁷ but it did not occur until 1965. At this time a major interior overhaul included expanding the library, modernizing the plumbing, heating, and electrical systems, installing a public address system and an elevator, as well as plaster and concrete repairs⁴⁸

By 1985 conditions at the school had greatly improved. Jamaica High School had the third lowest drop-out rate in the city and appeared in the city’s list of outstanding high schools. The school received a Carnegie grant for a project to study Jamaica’s ethnic diversity and immigrant experiences that resulted in a student-written publication about its history and the immigrant experiences of its residents.⁴⁹ A recent “Inside Schools” profile of Jamaica High School notes that its large size allows for a wide range of offerings, courses, activities and athletics, including special programs in finance, law, business and computer science. Its recent population includes approximately 60% African American, 20% Asian 18% Hispanic, 3% White.⁵⁰

Description

Jamaica High School sits on a rise of land between Gothic Drive and 84th Avenue in a residential section of Jamaica filled with private homes and apartments. There is a small park with a pond to the southwest and a vocational high school is located across the street at the rear of the lot. The school is fronted by a large lawn and there are several athletic fields and a field house behind the school building. (The athletic fields and field house are not part of this designation.) A masonry wall behind the school extends from Chapin Drive on the west to 168th Street on the east and forms the rear boundary of the designated property. The extensive school grounds are surrounded by a non-historic iron fence. Two openings in the fence on Gothic Drive, at the center point of the building, lead to a central stone wall with a sculpted panel facing out and a built-in seat facing the school. A series of walkways and rock-faced stairs create dramatic approaches to the building, in the front and on both sides. A grand driveway bisects the front lawn, running from 166th Street to Chapin Parkway, a short way down the hill from the front of the building.

The building has an “E” shaped plan, with the continuous, wide side facing the front, toward Gothic Drive. Symmetrically designed, this façade has a projecting pavilion at the center and short, projecting wings at each end. On the opposite side, three long wings extend to the north. A broad paved area fronts the school and is accented by a large central flagpole. Grassy hills with occasional mature trees and bushes extend beyond the pavement and on both sides while the rear of the school is paved for parking.

The building is three stories tall, with a shallow-pitched, standing seam copper roof. The ground story is faced with rusticated stone and the two stories above are faced with red brick with stone and terra-cotta trim. A basement story is fronted by an open areaway fenced by iron pipe railings. All of the basement windows have non-historic metal grilles. Most of the windows are replacement, double-hung, multi-light windows, except for those on the auditorium and the gymnasium in the rear.⁵¹

Front Façade, central pavilion: The projecting central pavilion is reached by several broad steps. The ground floor has three, round-headed entrance doors set in stone voussoirs. Each

opening holds a pair of paneled bronze doors set in an elaborate bronze grille with transom and fanlight. Elaborately-detailed, paired copper lanterns are fixed to the wall to each side of this set of doors, while each pair is topped by a non-historic light fixture. Round stone seals are set between the three sets of doors, one holding the seal of the City of New York and the other the seal of the Board of Education.

Above the base the two stories in the pavilion are three bays wide. Each bay at each level holds paired double-hung windows with stone keystones. Shallow stone bas-reliefs are located in the spandrels between the floors. Double-height, granite Ionic columns front this section and support a terra-cotta cornice engraved with the name "Jamaica High School." Above this is a triangular pediment that is faced with terra-cotta blocks and trimmed with dentils and moldings of terra cotta. A copper-edged clock is located in the middle of the pediment. Set back slightly on each side of the central pavilion are narrow bays faced with rusticated stone; a single narrow window is located at each level in these bays.

Centered above the front pavilion is a copper-clad cupola.⁵² It is set on a square base, each side of which is three bays wide with a central window or door flanked by flat panels. Pilasters divide the bays. The base is topped by an open balustrade with urns at each corner. A polygonal steeple rises above the base, capped by a flared polygonal roof with a weathervane at its peak. The lower section of this steeple is solid, but the upper area is composed of pilaster-framed open arches that hold a set of bells secured by balusters within the arches.

Front Façade, sides: The two sides of the front façade are recessed further from the central pavilion and extend to the east and west for six bays before projecting toward the front for two bays. Each bay of the ground story has a pair of double-hung windows set in the rusticated stone façade. This level is topped by a stone string course. The two stories above this are faced in brick with double-height, flat, Ionic stone pilasters between each bay. Paired, double-hung windows are located in each bay with a shallow bas-relief panel in the spandrels between the two floors. A fluted terra-cotta frieze broken at intervals by ornate medallions and capped by a terra-cotta cornice crowns the composition.

The same fenestration pattern continues as the two wings wrap around toward the front (south), with continuous rusticated stone piers at each corner. Flat stone pilasters are located just inside these piers. The south-facing facades have a single bay marked by a central, round-headed entrance on the ground floor. The doors have been changed but the original bronze fanlight is still extant and non-historic lights flank each entrance. In each of the two stories above this are single, double-hung windows with splayed stone lintels and keystones set in the brick facade. There is a carved stone panel between the floors and an ornate iron balcony on double brackets in front of the lower window. The eastern wing has historic iron railings that flank the small set of stairs leading to the entryway while the western wing has non-historic pipe railings.

Side Facades: The facades that face east and west are identical, mirror images of each other. The side façades are 14 bays wide, including two bays at each end that form a slightly projecting pavilion framed by rusticated stone piers at each side. A stone string course carries around from the front and tops the rusticated stone base, while the two floors above are faced with brick. The base has paired double-hung windows in each bay. A slight drop towards the rear of the building allows the paired basement windows to become larger toward the back. Each of the bays is separated by double-height, flat stone Ionic pilasters. The ten bays between the two end pavilions set back slightly. The fifth bay back from the front has an entrance at the ground story formed by a round-headed opening with replacement door topped by a fanlight filled with multiple rectangular lights. Non-historic light fixtures flank the door which is reached by a short stairway with historic iron railings. The two stories above the entrance are different from the other bays, with a single window topped by a triangular pediment at the second story and a single window

with a stone lintel at the third story. This type of fenestration pattern occurs at the fifth bay from the rear also. All the other bays have paired double-hung windows with keystones and stone spandrel panels between them. The entire elevation is capped by a fluted terra-cotta cornice with medallions, dentil moldings and parapet.

Rear: Three wings extend toward the north. The two side wings hold classrooms and continue the fenestration and decorative motifs from the other facades. The center wing houses the auditorium and several gymnasia and extends farther north than the others.

The two side wings are almost identical, with narrow northern facades that echo the short southern facades of these wings. They are framed by rusticated stone piers and flat stone pilasters. Each has single bay with a central entrance with non-historic doors under a round-arched fanlight. The entrance on the east wing has non-historic doors under a non-historic transom, while the entrance on the west wing has non-historic doors but retains its original transom and fanlight. A divided stairway with historic iron railings leads to the door on each side. Each of the two floors above has a single, central window with a bas relief stone panel in the spandrel between the floors. An historic balcony with ornate ironwork carried on double brackets fronts the second story window. A stone string course above the ground story and terra-cotta frieze and cornice at the top continue onto the north facades from both side facades.

The facades of the two wings that face into the courtyard (the western façade of the eastern wing and the eastern façade of the western wing) are identical. Each is eight bays wide. The two outside bays are set off by stone pilasters and framed by rusticated stone piers that edge into quoins on the inside of the second bay. The ground story of the two outside bays is faced with rusticated stone, but the other bays are faced with brick and the six inside bays do not have stone pilasters separating the bays. Except for the fifth bay in from the end, each bay has paired windows topped by brick splayed arches with stone keystones. The stone string course above the first story and the terra-cotta frieze, cornice and moldings at the top continue from the other facades. The fifth bay (from the north end) is distinguished by a single-story projecting entranceway in which is set a triple doorway (non-historic) under an original multi-paned fanlight. It is framed by a brick molding with stone keystone, and non-historic light fixtures on each side. A stone panel with bas relief of swags is located above the doorway. The top of the projection has a historic iron railing around it. A single window is located in each of the two stories above this. The window on the second story is capped by a triangular pediment while the one on the third story is framed by a footed stone sill and plain stone lintel. Paired, square-headed windows are at the basement level.

Between the side wings and the central wing, the main body of the building extends for seven bays on each side. The two sides are mirror images except for a non-historic pipe that extends for the entire height of the building, in the middle of the western part. All of this façade is faced with brick and the stone string course above the first story and the terra-cotta frieze, cornice and parapet continue around from the other facades. Except for the bay closest to the central wing (which has a single narrow window in each bay), each bay has paired, square-headed, double-hung windows with stone sills and brick splayed-arch lintels with stone keystones. At the corner where these facades meet the central wing is a one-story projecting entrance that houses three, non-historic doors.

Central Wing: The two sides of the central wing are mirror images of each other. The five bays closest to the central block of the building house the auditorium which can be seen from the large windows at the second story. Near the center of this façade is a single, projecting bay that holds another entrance door. The final four bays of this façade set back again and have another distinctive fenestration pattern, indicating the gymnasia and swimming pool that are housed here.

The five bays closest to the central block are fronted by a one-story projecting element that is topped by a stone balustrade. It has a stone base with brick above and a single, square-headed window in each of the five bays. Above this base and set back from it are five, double-height round-headed windows with original metal sash. They are edged by brick moldings with stone keystones. A single, stone bas relief is centered between this story and the one above it, which has five smaller windows topped by splayed stone lintels with keystones. The bay closest to the main body of the building has three window openings, all blocked by solid panels, while the other four bays have paired, square-headed window openings with multi-light, double-hung sash.

The projecting section, near the center of this façade has a square-headed entrance with three non-historic doors and transom at the ground level. It is flanked by non-historic lights and small, narrow windows. It is reached by a short set of stairs with historic iron railings. A second story with three single windows is located above the doorway and a stone string course above sets off the stone-faced lower floors from the two, brick-faced floors above. The upper section is framed by stone quoins and has a large, central Palladian window grouping at the third story and a single window with splayed lintel at the fourth story. The gable-fronted roof of this section is framed by projecting terra-cotta moldings with returns and has a round terra-cotta disk centered under the gable.

The section of this façade farthest from the central block has four bays. The main part of it sets back from the projecting section, but is fronted for two bays by a two-story section and by a single-story section for the last two bays. This single story wraps around the rear of this wing to meet a similar section on the other side. Both of these sections are topped by a stone balustrade. They are faced with stone and have square-headed windows.

The top two floors of this part are faced in brick, with stone quoins at the corners and terra-cotta cornice, frieze and parapet at the roofline. Each of the four bays is enclosed by a continuous arch recessed in the brick that contains two small windows on the third story and a large, round-headed arched window with original metal sash on the fourth story. Ornamental features of this section include terra-cotta disks between the large arches, stone keystones and brick moldings around the arches and rectangular bas relief spandrel panels between the third and fourth stories.

The narrow northern façade of the central wing faces the athletic fields, is seven bays wide and continues the motifs from the two sides. Its one-story, projecting base has square-headed windows with non-historic grilles set in the stone façade. It is topped by a stone balustrade and has non-historic light fixtures. The rest of the façade sets back one bay. The second story has paired large, windows and is topped by a stone string course. The two stories above are set within a brick recessed arch and consist of two small windows at the third story and a large, round-headed window at the fourth story. The same terra-cotta frieze, cornice and parapet continue around this façade as the others.

Researched and written by
Virginia Kurshan
Research Department

NOTES

¹ The information in this section comes from numerous sources, including: Benjamin F. Thompson, *History of Long Island* (New York: E. French, 1839); "Jamaica," in *The Encyclopedia of New York*, Thomas Jackson, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 610-611; Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *Suffolk Title and Guarantee Company building (LP-2088)* (New York: City of New York, 2001), report by Virginia Kurshan; LPC, *Jamaica Savings Bank (LP-2109)* (New York: City of New York, 2008), report by Donald Presa.

² The Native American "system of land tenure was that of occupancy for the needs of a group" and that those sales that the Europeans deemed outright transfers of property were to the Native Americans closer to leases or joint tenancy contracts where they still had rights to the property. Reginald Pelham Bolton, *New York City in Indian Possession*, 2nd ed. (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1920; reprint 1975), 7, 14-15.

³ Jeff Gottlieb, "History of Jamaica," (n.d.) in the clippings file of the Long Island Division, Queens Library.

⁴ "The Jamaica of 1837," *Long Island Press*, Aug. 22, 1937.

⁵ "Horse and Wagon Days," *Long Island Press*, Dec. 26, 1937.

⁶ Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970, Jamaica (Queens Co.), New York (April, 1891) Sheets 8,9; and (Feb., 1897) Sheets 6, 11, 13, accessed at: <http://sanborn.umi.com/ny>.

⁷ "Elbow Room," *Long Island Press*, Jan. 9, 1938.

⁸ Theodore H.M. Prudon, ed. *Jamaica, Queens County, New York, Aspects of its History* (June, 1974) Columbia University Graduate Program for Restoration and Preservation of Historic Architecture, 134.

⁹ "Queens Builders Continue Activity," *New York Times*(*NYT*), Aug. 29, 1926, RE1.

¹⁰ History of Jamaica compiled by Jamaica High School students, 31. No bibliographical data. Located in Long Island History room of Queens Library.

¹¹ Jeff Gottlieb, "Jews of Downtown Jamaica," n.p., in Jamaica clippings file of Long Island Division, Queens Library.

¹² William A. Raidy, "Jamaica Marks 300th Birthday," *Long Island Daily Press*, Mar. 11, 1956.

¹³ Much of the information on the early years of higher education in New York comes from, Gary Hermalyn, *Morris High School and the Creation of the New York City Public High School System* (The Bronx, NY: The Bronx Historical Society, 1995).

¹⁴ Hermalyn, 8.

¹⁵ This institution became the City College of New York in 1866.

¹⁶ This later became the Normal College and then Hunter College.

¹⁷ LPC, *New York Training School for Teachers (LP-1859)* (New York: City of New York, 1997), report by Jay Shockley, 2.

¹⁸ Hermalyn, 35. Quote from Arthur Somers, of the Board of Education.

¹⁹ This situation was upheld by the Court of Appeals and led to the 1900 amendment to the Education Law that abolished segregated schools in New York City. New York City Board of Education, *The First Fifty Years: A Brief Review of the Progress, 1898-1948* (New York, 1948), 8.

²⁰ Hermalyn, 34.

²¹ *The First Fifty Years*, 85.

²² "\$100,000,000 Saved For the City's Need's," *New York Times*, Mar 17, 1926, p.27.

²³ *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools*, (New York Board of Education, 1926), 652.

²⁴ *The First Fifty Years*, 86.

²⁵ *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools*, 1925, 843.

²⁶ This material is taken from LPC, Gompert obit., *NYT*, May 21, 1946, 23; Henry and Elsie Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970), 238-239; James Ward, *Architects in Practice, New York City 1900-1940* (New York: Comm. for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1989), 29; Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930* (New York: Rizzoli Intl. Publ., 1987), 117-121; "William H. Gompert," *Who's Who in New York* (New York: Who's Who Publ., 1924), 519, and *Who's Who in America* 17 (Chicago: A.N. Marquis Co., 1932), 957; *Journal of the Board of Education*, (New York, 1923); ". . . Gompert to Aid Building," *NYT*, Jan. 25, 1923, 18; "Asks New Contract Form," *NYT*, Apr. 17, 1923, 24; "Single Contract for School Buildings," *NYT*, Apr. 29, 1923, IX, 2; "Move to Rush School Work," *NYT*, June 28, 1923, 19; "Hylan Sees Propaganda," *NYT*, Dec. 3, 1927, 18; "Big Shake-up Likely in Gompert Office," *NYT*, Dec. 4, 1927, 24; "W.H. Gompert Sees Regime Vindicated," *NYT*, Feb. 2, 1928, 5.

²⁷ *Journal of the Board. of Education*, (1923), 293-294.

²⁸ *NYT*, Jan. 25, 1923. Gompert designed the Pullman, Cuyler (119-123 West 31st Street), and Burrell Buildings, the Embassy Hotel, and Automobile Club of America, and was a consultant on the New York County Courthouse (1913-27, Guy Lowell), a designated New York City Landmark.

-
- ²⁹ *NYT*, Dec. 4, 1927.
- ³⁰ "Gompert Resigns as School Builder; His Work Under Fire," *NYT*, Dec. 3, 1927, 1, 18.
- ³¹ *NYT*, Dec. 3, 1927.
- ³² *NYT*, Feb. 2, 1928.
- ³³ See Stern, et al.
- ³⁴ Jamaica's first school had been established in the small Presbyterian church near the center of town in 1676. In 1792, a private school, Union Hall Academy was founded in Jamaica but it did not get enough support from the community to continue. In 1854 Jamaica's first public school was constructed on Herriman Avenue. It accommodated 300 students, from ages 5 to 18, with a high school department on the third floor of the building.
- ³⁵ "Jamaica High School," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July, 1909.
- ³⁶ Dates on school plans in the files of the Municipal Archives.
- ³⁷ "Construction of Jamaica High School Fitting Climax to Career of Principal," *Long Island Daily Press*, Mar. 24, 1933.
- ³⁸ *Long Island Life*, Jan., 1927, no title, in Jamaica clippings file of Long Island Division of Queensboro Public Library.
- ³⁹ "Chamber Wins High School Fight," *Jamaica Jinjer*, May, 1929. Before the purchase of the extra land, the school was called a "monument on a mudhole." Local residents wanted a suitably grand plaza or approach in keeping with the grand style of the school building. After two years of negotiations, the land was purchased from Magistrate Benjamin Marvin at a reduced price.
- ⁴⁰ "Construction..." *Long Island Daily Press*, Mar. 24, 1933.
- ⁴¹ *Jamaica Jinjer*, May, 1929.
- ⁴² *The Hilltopper*, Nov. 24, 1931
- ⁴³ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamaica_High_School_\(New_York_City\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamaica_High_School_(New_York_City)).
- ⁴⁴ "The First Fifty Years," 85.
- ⁴⁵ "Jamaica's New High School Building to Cost \$2,000,000," *Queensboro Chamber of Commerce*, Apr., 1925.
- ⁴⁶ "Jamaica Has Largest Enrollment, Topping Andrew Jackson High," 1950, in Jamaica clippings file in Long Island Division of Queens Public Library.
- ⁴⁷ "Jamaica High Falling Apart; Parents Demand Repairs," *Long Island Daily Press*, Jan. 14, 1956.
- ⁴⁸ "Jamaica High School Fix-Up Set Finally," *Long Island Daily Press*, Jul. 7, 1965.
- ⁴⁹ "Jamaica High School Named One of the Best," *Queens Chronicle*, Dec. 19, 1985; and "School Cashes in on Its Ethnic Diversity Project," *Newsday*, May 7, 1985.
- ⁵⁰ <http://insideschools.org/index12.php?fs=1184&str=jamaica%20high%20school&formtype=name>.
- ⁵¹ The gymnasiums have metal-framed windows with some fixed panes and some awnings.
- ⁵² The roof is copper and the sides are formed of sheet metal that appears to be copper.

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 Jamaica High School has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

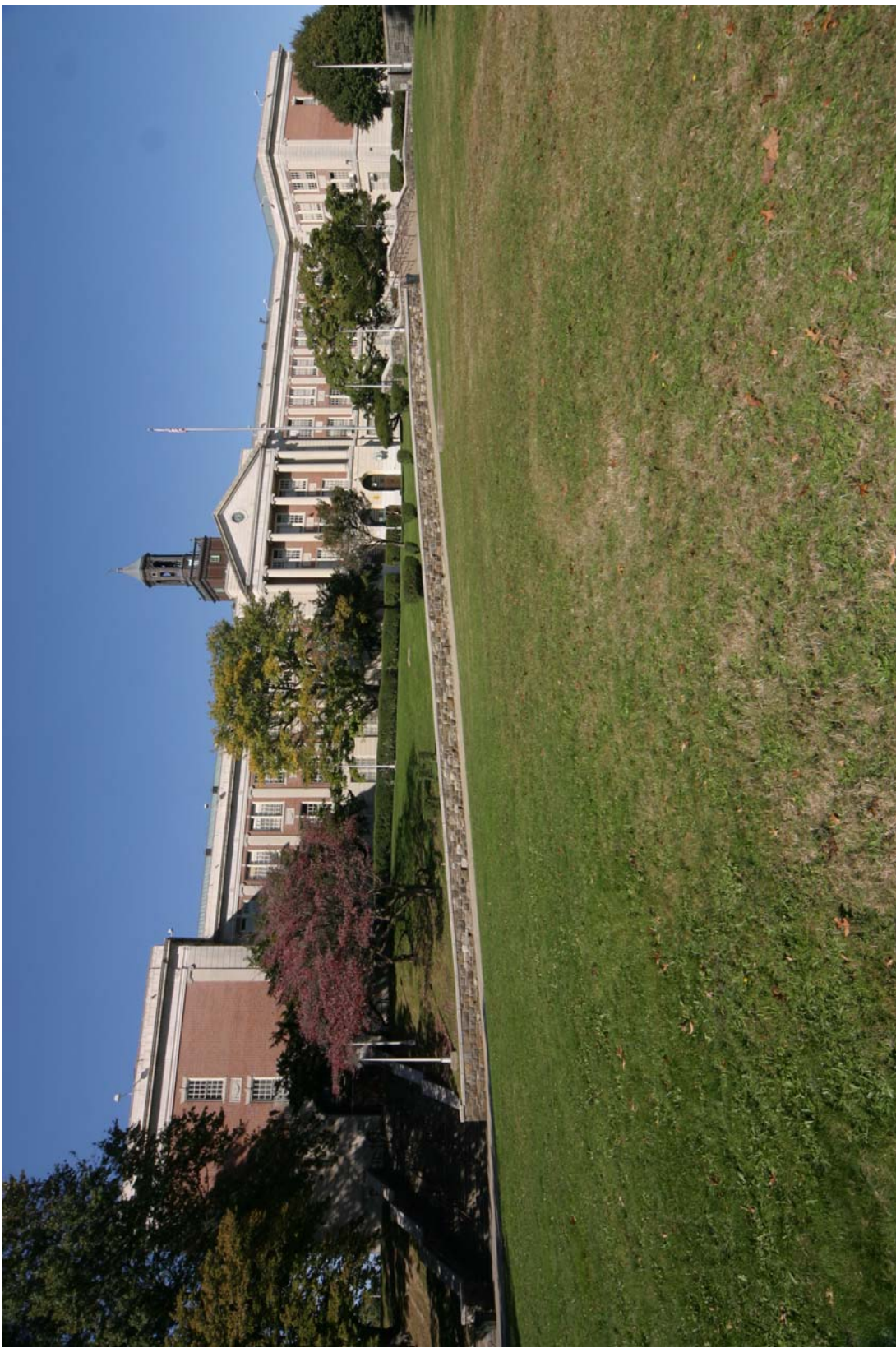
The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, Jamaica High School was designed in 1925 by then Superintendent of School Buildings William Gompert; that Gompert was the first successor to C.B.J. Snyder who had served in this position for more than 25 years and designed countless new schools for New York after Consolidation; that Gompert was well-trained and experienced in directing large building projects such as the work of the New York City School Board; that a similarly acute shortage of school buildings faced Gompert due to a substantial increase in the number of immigrants coming to the city; that Gompert designed many new schools, especially in the outer boroughs to deal with the expansion of population; that Jamaica High School opened in 1927 to house 3,111 students, many of whom had moved with their families into the district because of the many new houses and apartments that were being constructed in this area; that the building provided the latest in facilities such as laboratories, home economics rooms, and athletic fields; that it was constructed in the Georgian Revival style, seen as a way to help Americanize its many immigrant children; that the Georgian Revival style is manifest in the symmetrical arrangement of the building with its wings, and the use of contrasting brick and light-colored stone and terra-cotta trim; that this large building sits on an equally large, finely-landscaped lot which was quite unusual for a city school; that its fine materials, including copper roof, bronze doors, brick, granite and limestone used on a classically-oriented design create a distinctive building that both anchors and serves as a centerpiece for this busy neighborhood that has continued to welcome new Americans from many lands.

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 Jamaica High School, 167-01 Gothic Drive, Jamaica, Queens, and designates as its Landmark Site Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 9858, Lot 100, in part consisting of that portion of the lot south of the masonry wall that is fifteen feet north of the central wing of the school and that extends along the southern line of lot 87 across lot 100 to the point where it meets 168th Street.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice-Chair

Frederick Bland, Stephen Byrns, Diana Chapin, Christopher Moore, Commissioners



Jamaica High School
167-01 Gothic Drive
Jamaica, Queens
Photo: Christopher Brazee, 2008



Jamaica High School
Front façade
Photos: Christopher Brazee, 2008



Jamaica High School
Front pavilion and cupola
Photos: Christopher Brazee, 2008



Jamaica High School
Front door and window details
Photos: Christopher Brazee, 2008



Jamaica High School

Façade details:

Capitals and cornice detail

Spandrel panel

City seal over door

Photos: Christopher Brazee, 2008





Jamaica High School
Façade detail
Photos: Christopher Brazee, 2008





Jamaica High School
East wing, east façade
Photo: Christopher Brazee, 2008



Jamaica High School
East wing
Photos: Christopher Brazee. 2008





Front (south façade) of east wing



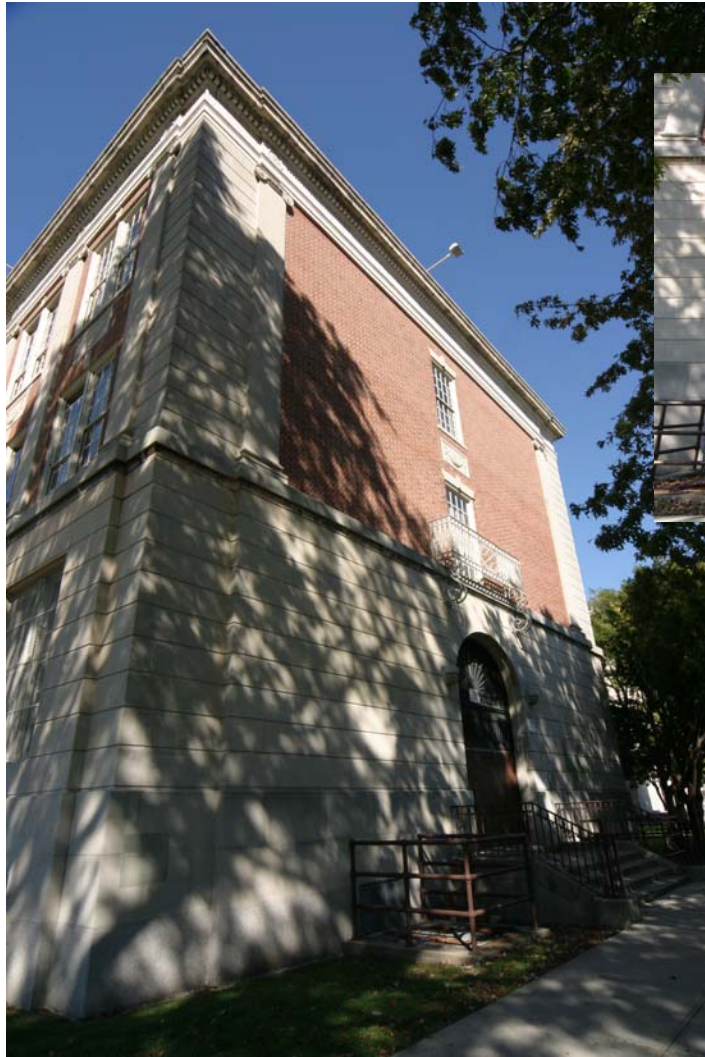
Rear (north façade) of east wing

Jamaica High School
East wing
Photos: Christopher Brazee, 2008



Jamaica High School
West wing, west facade
Photos: Christopher Brazee, 2008



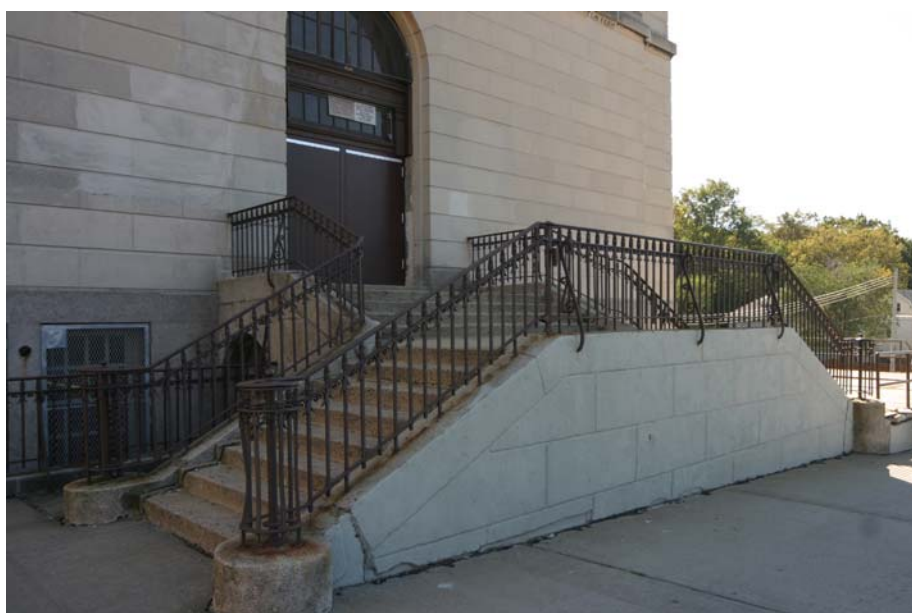


Jamaica High School
West wing, south façade
Photos: Christopher Brazee, 2008





Jamaica High School
West wing, north façade
Photos: Christopher Brazee, 2008





Jamaica High School
Center rear wing, north façade
Photos: Christopher Brazee, 2008





Jamaica High School
Central rear wing, east façade
Photos: Christopher Brazee, 2008





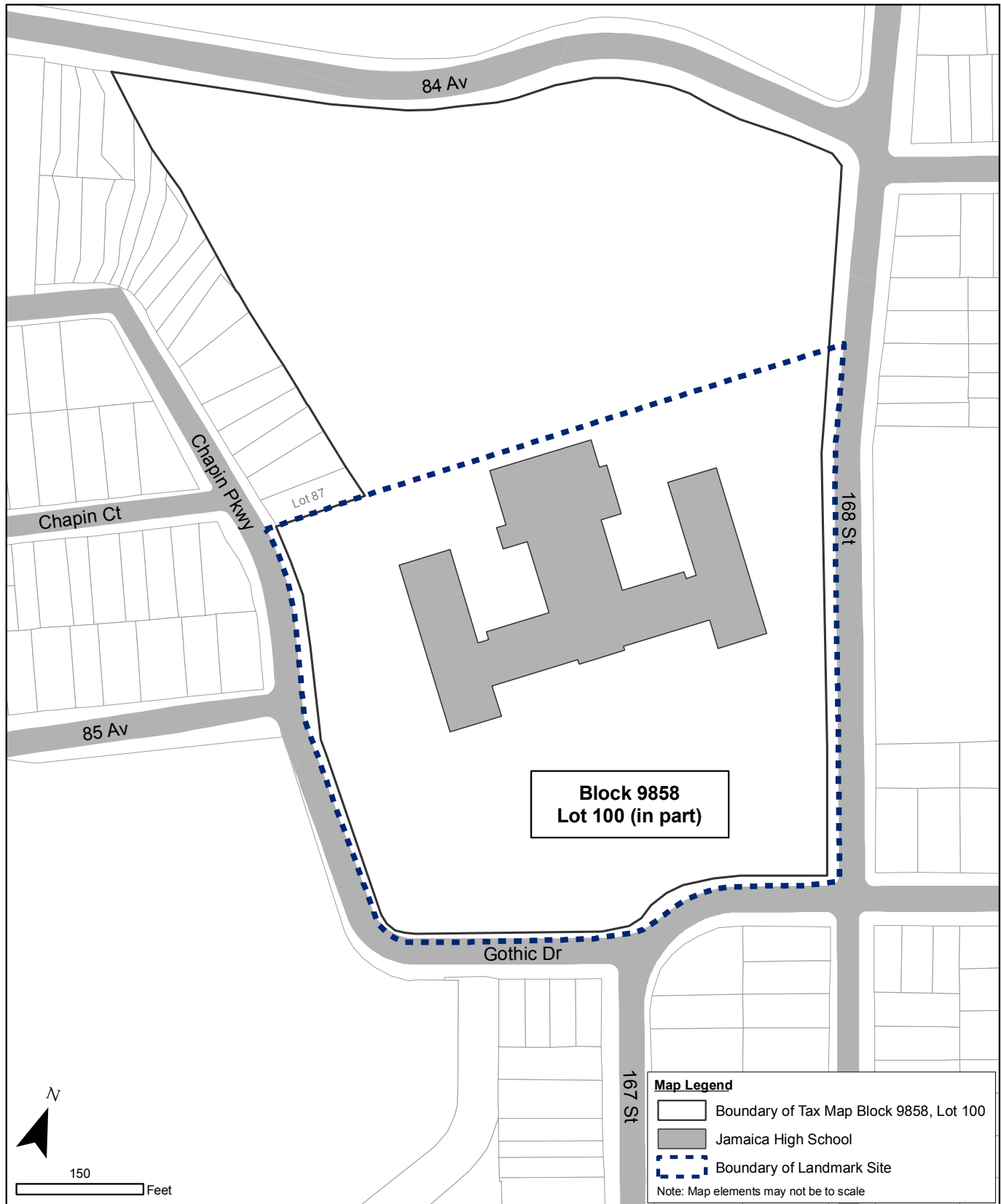
Jamaica High School
Center rear wing, west façade
Photos: Christopher Brazee, 2008





Jamaica High School
Rear façade of central block
Photos: Christopher Brazee, 2008





JAMAICA HIGH SCHOOL (LP-2316), 167-01 Gothic Drive.

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens, Tax Map Block 9858, Lot 100 in part, consisting of that portion of the lot south of the masonry wall that is 15 feet north of the central wing of the school and that extends along the southern line of Lot 87 across Lot 100 to the point where it meets 168th Street.

Designated: March 24, 2009