

PRATT-NEW YORK PHOENIX SCHOOL OF DESIGN (New York School of Applied Design for Women), 160 Lexington Avenue, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1908-09; architect Harvey Wiley Corbett.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 886, Lot 21. *

On January 11, 1977, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Pratt-New York Phoenix School of Design and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (item No. 2). At the request of the School, the hearing was continued to March 8, 1977 (item No. 2). Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Pratt-New York Phoenix School of Design, a five-story brick and stone neo-classical institutional building, is located on the northwest corner of Lexington Avenue and 30th Street. Built in 1908-09, it was designed by New York City architect Harvey Wiley Corbett of the firm of Pell & Corbett.

The school was founded as the New York School of Applied Design for Women on May 31, 1892, and was first housed in rented quarters at 200 West 23rd Street. Its stated purpose was that "...of affording to women instruction which may enable them to earn a livelihood by the employment of their taste and manual dexterity in the application of ornamental design to manufacture and the arts." The school fulfilled this mission, and generations of students received instruction in areas such as book illustration, textile and wallpaper design, interior decoration, and other related fields. The Directors of the school were intensely concerned with the students' professional achievements, and the commissions of both students and graduates were duly noted in the Minute Books.

The concept of providing professional training for working class women was very advanced for the period. It placed the institution in the forefront of the movement in America for quality education for women. The program was unique in that it was specifically directed toward that low income group of women who might have difficulty in paying the fees.

The school was closely associated with Columbia University. Prior to 1912, when the "Atelier Columbia" was established on Morningside Heights, architecture students at Columbia received part of their professional training in the "ateliers" of various practicing architects in New York City. One of these was in the office of Harvey Wiley Corbett, an instructor at the New York School of Applied Design for Women and the architect of its Lexington Avenue building. The Minutes of the Board of Directors, dated December 7, 1910, state that the "Architecture Department of the New York School had become associated with Columbia University, providing instruction for women architecture students at Columbia for the first two years of their four-year course. The facilities and quality of instruction available to young women interested in architecture at the New York School of Applied Design for Women appear to have enabled them to enter Columbia University as third year students.

The concept of professional training for women caught the imagination of some of the more illustrious social and business leaders of the period. Among the original directors were: Reverend John Wesley Brown, D.D., Rector, St. Thomas Church; J. Carroll Beckwith, Esq., Professor, Metropolitan Museum of Art and Art Students' League; Ellis Root, lawyer and statesman; and Mrs. Dunlap Hopkins. Later supporters of the school included J.P. Morgan, Adolph Lewisohn, and John D. Rockefeller.

Mrs. Ellen Dunlap Hopkins, wife of Amos Lawrence Hopkins, exerted the greatest influence upon the growth of the institution. She remained actively involved in its management and growth from the time of incorporation until her death in 1939 at the age of eighty-one. Ellen Hopkins was personally responsible for interesting some of America's wealthiest men in supporting the school, without whose financial involvement the Lexington Avenue building could never have been constructed. She was involved in all aspects of the school, including its construction, the academic program, and the school

administration. In 1936 she was awarded the Michael Friedsam Gold Medal, the first woman so honored. The award had been given annually since 1922 for outstanding contributions to art in industry. The citation read:

"Courageous leader in the education of women, student of the arts and friend of artists, sympathetic teacher of young designers destined to improve by their work and their ideas the standards of art in industry, founder of the New York School of Applied Design for Women and for 45 years its guide and counselor, devout adherent of the belief that the might of fine design will make the right of successful industrial art."

By 1897 it was apparent to the directors that a new school building was necessary. In 1904 the 23rd Street quarters were so crowded that they were forced to rent space in an adjoining building. An advisory committee was formed to discuss methods of financing, site selection and choice of architect for the proposed new building.

Despite the great wealth of the supporters of the school, fund raising for the new building was not easy. Mrs. Hopkins was instrumental in convincing J.P. Morgan of the merit of the project and he, in turn, aided Mrs. Hopkins in soliciting John D. Rockefeller to make a major commitment. The Rockefeller contribution had various restrictions, but was ultimately paid in 1916.

The site, at the northwest corner of Lexington Avenue and 30th Street, was selected because property values were low in this area of Manhattan. Originally part of the Eastern Post Road and the Rose Hill Farm, the site was composed of two city lots, Nos. 160 and 162 Lexington Avenue, each containing a three-story house built in 1836. These buildings were demolished to make way for the new school designed by Corbett.

Harvey Wiley Corbett, (1875-1954) was born in California and was educated at the University of California (1895), the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1900) and received a Litt. D. (Hon.) from Columbia University (1929). His career was long and varied. The New York School of Applied Design for Women was one of his earlier projects. Corbett ran, in association with Columbia University, the "Atelier Corbett", one of the forerunners of the "Atelier Columbia" which was established in 1912. Students received a great deal of practical experience during this part of their training, which was modeled after the system of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. When Corbett stated the possibility to the Board of Directors of employing students from the architectural department of the New York School of Applied Design "to work on the plans for the New Building, same to be paid for their work according to the regular scale prices," he was very likely referring to those currently at work in his atelier.

Corbett was involved in the design of Rockefeller Center, Brooklyn College, Bush Terminal, Manhattan, and many other buildings in a variety of styles both in New York and other parts of the country. He was an early and strong advocate of the skyscraper as an urban building form and wrote and lectured extensively in support of this thesis.

Corbett designed the New York School of Applied Design for Women specifically as a school of art, and it has been used exclusively for that purpose since its completion in 1909. There appear to have been no major alterations made to the building.

Corbett designed a five-story brick, terra-cotta, and stone school building in an exceptionally imaginative version of the neo-classical style. The building, almost exactly half as wide as it is long, has its main facade facing on 30th Street. It is a symmetrical building, the symmetry interrupted only on the facade at the base where the windows flanking the central doorway are of differing heights. The side elevation is completely symmetrical and continues the composition of the facade. The high ashlar base has deeply revealed windows and an entrance door six steps above the level of the street. Longer tiered windows are to the west of the central doorway and are separated vertically by spandrel panels with twelve panes above the panel and sixteen below. To the west of these windows is a basement doorway which rises to the string course. The double-paneled main doorway is surmounted by a paneled spandrel with a cornice above and a five-paned transom above that. Pilasters rise alongside the reveals of the doorway. The base is surmounted by a bas relief frieze composed from casts of portions of the Parthenon frieze (part

of the British Museum collection called the Elgin Marbles). Above this frieze rise four polished, unfluted, granite Ionic columns which, with their broken entablature, emphasize the verticality of the building. This entablature, executed in terra cotta and ornamented with rich classical moldings, is boldly plastic. The tiered windows, set between the columns and the end walls and separated by spandrel panels, further enhance the verticality of the colonnade. The third section of the building--at the fourth, attic story--is composed of a series of recessed windows aligned with those below, and has simple brick pilasters which accord with the projecting entablatures and columns. A cornice of terra cotta displays ornate acanthus scrolls punctuated by palmettes. The steep gabled roof continues the vertical emphasis of the composition. This roof, of galvanized iron and tin, which was painted green, imitates a copper roof, which the Directors of the School had determined would be too costly. The roof was constructed with standing seams and included a skylight to provide light for the fifth-floor studio.

The building is an excellent example of the use of varied materials and textures to create a unified composition. The smoothness of the gray ashlar masonry blends with the subtle texture of the buff brick above the bas relief. Among the architectural refinements is the continuation of the roof-line ornament and the brickwork around the north side of the structure, above the roof-line of the neighboring row houses. The terra-cotta ornament along the roof is carried far enough so that a passerby on Lexington Avenue or 30th Street perceives the ornament as encircling the building.

Certain of the elements present in the facade of the New York School of Applied Design for Women recur in many of Corbett's later buildings. Although these elements were more refined in the later buildings, the concepts were repeated in the same manner as they had been developed in this first example. Among his other buildings in the related style are the Brooklyn Masonic Temple and the Horace Bushnell Memorial Hall in Hartford, Connecticut.

The Brooklyn Masonic Temple by Lord & Hewlett with Pell & Corbett as associate architects, is very closely related to the New York School. The ashlar base is capped by a frieze-like arrangement of small windows reminiscent of the frieze above the first story of the New York School. Above this, the Temple is of brick with a monumental Ionic colonnade. This is essentially the same facade composition used for the School. The Horace Bushnell Memorial Hall continues the motif of the raised colonnade. In this example six Ionic columns support a pediment.

The New York School of Applied Design for Women merged in 1944 with the Phoenix Art Institute, founded by Lauros M. Phoenix, and was reincorporated as the New York Phoenix School of Design. In October, 1974, the school merged with Pratt Institute of Brooklyn and became known as Pratt-New York Phoenix School of Design. The building is used by the New York-Phoenix School of Design for the purpose of conducting three year certificate programs in various fields of art and is presently used by Pratt Institute primarily for purposes of conducting degree programs other than the usual baccalaureate programs offered at the Brooklyn campus and special programs which benefit from being situated in Manhattan, all such programs being in various fields of art and design. The building is adequate, suitable and appropriate in carrying out these purposes at the present time, and it is contemplated that it will continue to be so in the future. For nearly three-quarters of a century, this handsome structure has housed important educational institutions. The design of the building, which has served them well, is a tribute to the abilities and talents of the architect, Harvey Wiley Corbett.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

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

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Pratt-New York Phoenix School of Design is a handsome, neo-classical institutional building, that it was designed by the prominent New York architect, Harvey Wiley Corbett, that it long housed the New York School of Applied

Design for Women, a leader in the American movement for professional education for women, that this school was supported by prominent social and business leaders of New York who became interested in the school owing to the efforts of Mrs. Ellen Dunlap Hopkins, a founder and guiding spirit of the institution, and that this imposing structure continues to house an important educational institution.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Pratt-New York Phoenix School of Design (New York School of Applied Design for Women), 160 Lexington Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 886, Lot 21, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.