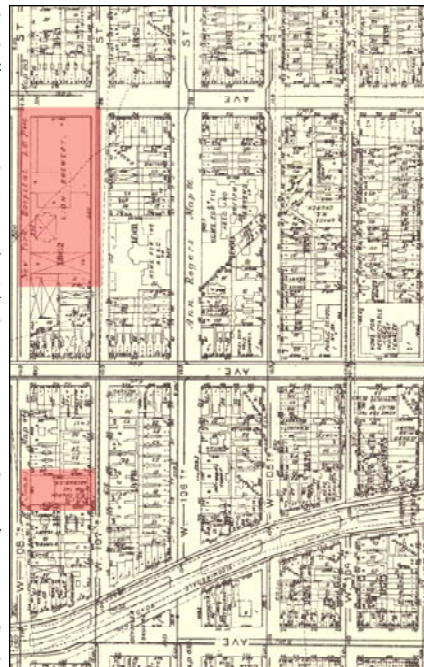


Celebrating 100 Years: A Brief History of the Ascension School, 1912-2012

Going back to its earliest beginnings, the history of Ascension School began with the Church of the Ascension and NY Archbishop Corrigan's decision to form a new parish in a portion of Holy Name Parish lying north of 101st Street in the autumn of 1885. This Upper West Side neighborhood, identified as Manhattan Valley, lying north of 96th Street and East of Broadway, was expanding rapidly. The population boom at the end of the 19th century and early 20th century, due in large part to access provided by the newly built IRT Ninth Avenue Line (1870) and IRT Broadway-Seventh Avenue Line (1904), consisted predominantly of working-class Germans. The Lion Brewery, one of the area's earliest landmarks, was built and run by Catholic Bavarians in 1857 and occupied six square city blocks from Central Park West to Amsterdam from 107th to 109th Streets. Before the construction of Ascension Church, Sunday mass was held in the brewery basement. For Father Nicolas Reinhart, first rector of the Ascension Parish, his very first service was celebrated in the Lion Hall Park Building on 109th Street and only eight parishioners showed up! Soon after Father Reinhart along with his assistant Father Uleof, began offering Sunday masses in the Chapel at the Home for the Aged of the Little Sisters of the Poor (135 West 106th Street) with a significant upswing in attendance to around 5,000. Furthermore, approximately 400 children were enrolled in the parish Sunday school, located in a small building used as a rectory at 228 West 104th Street.



A detail of an 1898 map featuring "Manhattan Valley" looking east from the sinuous curve of Bloomingdale Road, which later became Broadway. The Lion Brewery and Ascension Church are highlighted in red.



The Church of the Ascension exterior façade, c. 1914.

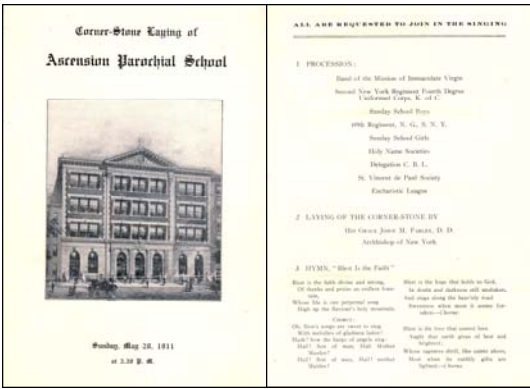
Finally in 1896, pastor Reinhart located the property to erect his Church and the Archdiocese purchased eight lots which extended through the block between Amsterdam Avenue and Broadway, from 107th to 108th Street, thus providing ample room for a church and rectory on 107th Street as well as

affording space for a parochial school on 108th Street. The cornerstone for the Church of the Ascension was laid in June of 1896 and was accompanied by much pomp and ceremony in both English and German. Construction began soon after, largely led by the skilled German laborers from the neighborhood, and the building's estimated cost rose quickly from sixty thousand to well-over one hundred thousand dollars. The exterior was completed first and the beautiful façade, made of rough stone and limestone trim with a rose window sitting aloft a triple portal entrance, attracted great attention with some proclaiming it the best on Manhattan's Westside. However, the interior needed so much work that the parishioners labored faithfully to aid the building fund by holding fairs and contests in the basement and awarding handmade prizes.

In just one year's time, the Church was ready for use and on Sunday, March 14, 1897 six masses were held while the children of the parish gathered in the basement for Sunday school classes. On May 23, 1897 the friends of Ascension presented their church with a stunning gift of a stain glass window depicting the Ascension of Jesus which today still keeps vigil from its place over the Main Altar. This eleven by twenty-two feet work of art was created in Munich with incredibly beautiful results stemming from newly-developed coloring procedures. A few days later, on Ascension Thursday, the Church was officially dedicated and as part of the festivities, 150 children received their First Holy Communion. Archbishop Corrigan presided at the dedication with Bishop Farley, Monsignor Lavalley and about 100 priests in attendance. The celebration closed with the renewal of Baptismal vows by all and a celebratory dinner followed in the make-shift dining room. At this time, there were already 80 boys and 100 girls registered in a small Ascension School located on 107th Street administered by seven nuns.



Contemporary view of the stain-glass "Ascension of Christ" over the altar in Ascension Church.



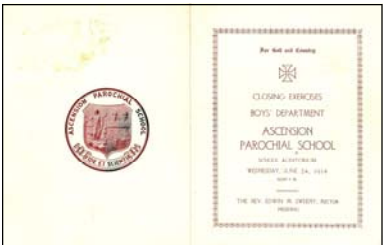
Cornerstone Program, May 28, 1911.

When Father Edwin M. Sweeney was appointed Ascension's second pastor in 1901, his goal was to build a school large enough to accommodate the many children in the parish. He believed that a good school was the foundation-stone of a thriving parish and he soon had architects at work planning a model parochial school. Consequently, he erected a new school building on 108th Street and closed the overcrowded school housed on 107th Street. Cardinal Farely officiated at the laying of the cornerstone of the school on Sunday, May 28, 1911. The white granite, four-story building constructed on the lines of Catholic Roman architecture cost about \$125,000 and was helped paid for by the generosity of the German, Irish and Italian parishioners of Ascension Church.



The First Ascension Community of the Christian Brothers surrounding Msgr. Sweeney, 1913.

The completed Ascension School opened its doors for the first time on September 12, 1912. Run by the Brothers of the Christian Schools at the desire and request of the beloved Monsignor Sweeney, Brother Gerardus, Visitor, appointed Brother Leo the Great, Principal, and Brother Albert George teacher of the first class. The remainder of the staff was made up of three lay men and three lay women. The school had a very modest beginning with no eighth grade offered its first year in operation. On the first day of school there were 167 pupils, but this number increased rapidly over the following weeks to reach 400.

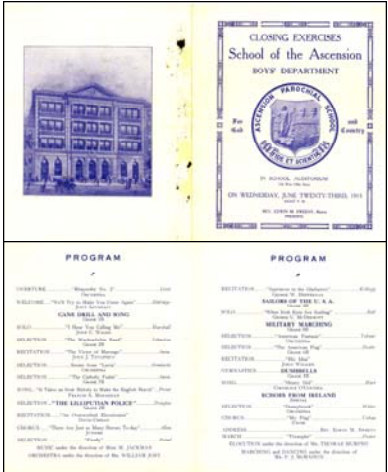


Program	Program
10:00 A.M. - Opening Prayer	10:00 A.M. - Opening Prayer
10:15 A.M. - Scripture Reading	10:15 A.M. - Scripture Reading
10:30 A.M. - Singing	10:30 A.M. - Singing
10:45 A.M. - Address by the Principal	10:45 A.M. - Address by the Principal
11:00 A.M. - Address by the Visitor	11:00 A.M. - Address by the Visitor
11:15 A.M. - Singing	11:15 A.M. - Singing
11:30 A.M. - Address by the Pastor	11:30 A.M. - Address by the Pastor
11:45 A.M. - Singing	11:45 A.M. - Singing
12:00 P.M. - Closing Prayer	12:00 P.M. - Closing Prayer

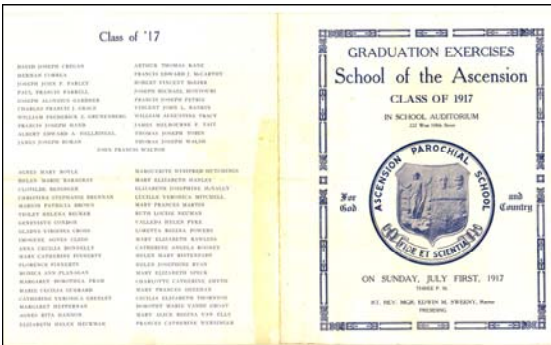
Closing Exercises for the Boys, 1914 Program.

By 1914 there were 407 boys in the care of three Christian Brothers and five lay teachers and 459 girls under seven Sisters of Charity and two lay teachers. The boys' and girls' departments were strictly separated, each with its own entrance and each with its own principal. With the Brothers in charge of the boys' school and the Sisters guiding the girls' school, Reverend Sweeney busied himself looking for residences for the religious members of his teaching staff. He bought two homes; one on 105th Street for the Brothers and another on 106th Street for the Sisters. The Brothers, who resided and commuted from Manhattan College in the Bronx, took up residence at 220 West 105th Street on December 21, 1916. Rector Sweeney also established a Parish Hall on 107th Street.

The following years witnessed the successful growth of the Ascension School under the guidance of the Christian Brothers and the Sisters of Charity. By 1917 the school had 1,100 children enrolled and 10,000 parishioners.



Closing Exercises for the Boys, 1915 Program.



Graduation Exercises for boys and girls, 1917 Program.

During the roaring 1920s, many renovations and improvements were made to the school. Father Joseph Donohue opened a new convent for the Sisters of Charity on 108th Street, adjoining the school. The Brothers were given the Sisters' former home on 106th Street, after completely modernizing the building. Enhancements to the curriculum were made at the beginning of the



Girls Graduation Class of 1921.

1924-1925 scholastic year, when the Sisters took charge of all the youngsters, both boys and girls in grades one and two while the Brothers continued to strengthen the boys' course of study in grades four through eight. The diligence of the student-body proved successful. During the month of April 1924, the Central Savings Bank of New York offered various prizes for the best essay on "Thrift". All the Catholic schools of the West Side competed. The first prize of twenty dollars was won by William Kenealy of the 8th grade and the third prize was won by Gerard O'Brien of the 8th grade. The following fall, the John Wannamaker Contest in drawing was held and was participated in by all the pupils of the public and private schools in Greater New York. About 8,000 children in all took part. Ingrid Sjusius, a student of the 8th grade succeeded in capturing the second prize, a silver medal.

The Ascension School
New York City

September, 1926.

Dear Sir or Madam:

I respectfully call your attention to the following **School Regulations**, and earnestly ask your hearty cooperation in putting them into effect.

School Sessions:
School begins promptly at 8:40 in the morning and at 12:40 in the afternoon. Every child should be at his place in the classroom at the appointed time.

Children's Mass:
Mass for the children is celebrated in the lower church on every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation at 9 o'clock. It is most important that the children be on time for the beginning of Holy Mass.

Absent Children:
Children who are absent from Mass on Sunday or on a Holy Day of Obligation, or from either school sessions, will not be admitted to their respective classrooms without a note explaining the reason for the absence. The same obligation holds good for children who come late.

Home Studies:
In all grades a certain amount of work is given to the children to be prepared at home in the evening. Parents should see that this work is properly done, as it means much for the intellectual advancement of the child.

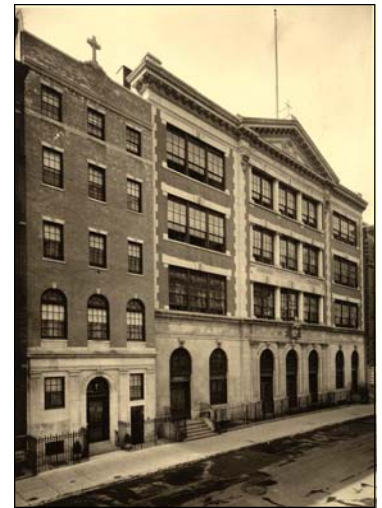
Report Cards:
Watch the weekly and monthly Reports. Low marks show negligence.

Very sincerely yours,
BROTHER CONRAD,
Principal

New York District Office
100th Street
Riversdale, New York 10463



Brother Charles Austin Regan's 7th grade up on the roof, c.1927.



The Sisters of Charity Convent and the Ascension School 1928.

-: Program :-

CAST OF CHARACTERS—(Continued)

Mr. Murphy	Charles O'Brien
Mrs. Murphy	Albert Lago
Jimmy D'Arcy	William Kowse
Mary D'Arcy	Michael Nerney
Diggins	Harry Jenon
Bobbs	James Tockan
Chairman of Merchants	George Decker
Mr. Blake	John Gannon
Factory Forelady	Bernard Sweeney

MEGRANTS
F. Maganese J. Schmitt J. Weil S. McCallough

SCENES
G. Anselmi J. Jones J. Forde C. Connelgan
J. O'Donnell J. O'Connell E. Finnell

FACTORY GIRLS
H. Powers A. Sullivan T. Ruck J. Guffy C. De Via

PEASANTS AND FARMERS
J. Sweeney J. Murphy T. Gibson E. Kane T. Rooney
E. Walsh M. Clarke E. Ryan E. Maloney J. Herbert
E. Delmore W. Mosey J. Moran W. Smith

ALTAIR BOYS
Thomson McGowan Gordon Wells

Scenes Between the Scenes
J. Gordon Wells
and Group of Sixth Grade Boys

Dramatics
Miss Margaret Mooney
Pianist
Orchestra
Professors Edward Hen
Singing
Miss Margaret Sweeney

ENTERTAINMENT
BOYS DEPARTMENT
SCHOOL AUDITORIUM
229-234 West 108th Street
MARCH 18th and 19th, 1935
At 8:00 P. M.
Rev. Reverend Joseph P. Donohue, P. P.



Boys Graduating Class of 1934.

Class Plays were always an important part of the curriculum as this "Entertainment" Program from 1935 demonstrates.



Sisters of Charity on the roof in their outdoor summer dress, 1937.

The thirties were spent attending to the physical and spiritual needs of the students. Discipline, knowledge of prayers and the Catechism and neatness of both the pupils and the school were essential features. Class-size continued to number around fifty-five students with one teacher per class, which seems considerably large compared to today's standards. During one scholastic year a first grade class consisted of 90 pupils! Ascension was, of course, not immune to the stress and strain the Depression put on family stability. The largely Irish, German and Italian working-class community surrounding Ascension certainly felt the sting and it was not uncommon to recognize the faces of those selling apples at the local bus stops.



Pirates of Penzance, 1941.

The decade of the 1940s was characterized by the Second World War. School records from this period suggest that students were involved in war-related activities and issues. The girls knitted squares for afghan blankets, scarves and sweaters for GIs, boys and girls hid under their desks following directions during air-raid drills and families pulled down the shades at night to comply with the blackout. All members of the community considered it their patriotic duty to buy saving stamps, eat less meat and sugar, scour ration books and even save the tinfoil gum wrappers to donate to build the next bomber.



Eighth Grade Girls on the roof, 1947.



Boys on the Roof, 1949.

In the years after World War II, the school experienced vigorous expansion and Ascension's curriculum, extra curricular activities and facilities all continued to grow. The religious characteristic of the school was strictly maintained, class prayers were reverently prayed and most of the pupils carried rosary beads and wore scapulars. Student performances were presented by every class and proved to be a highlight to not only the theatrical participants, but those spectators seated around the auditorium and in the balcony. Also by the 1940s, Ascension was part of a robust intramural athletics program where generations played organized games in the basement, outdoors in local parks or in borrowed gyms throughout the neighborhood. Less organized activities were relegated to recess on the roof under the watchful eye of the Blessed Virgin.



Brother John Lindhardt teaching class, 1952.

"A laudable pride in the care of the hair would be highly commendable," commented Bishop Joseph Donohue, upon one of his monthly inspections of Ascension in 1950. (Reverend Donohue had originally come to Ascension in 1924. He successfully ascended the ranks in the Archdiocese and was consecrated as Bishop in 1945. He oversaw the school and parish until his semi retirement in 1957 and ultimate death in 1959.) For three decades overseeing Ascension, Bishop Donohue held the Brothers and Sisters to a very fine, high quality standard and certainly complimented them on their success in achieving it. There continued to be large class-sizes averaging sixty students and the curriculum remained traditional. Teachers carefully prepared lessons, emphasizing written composition and silent reading, they gave penmanship instructions, recitation contests and assessments on the fundamental truths of the Catholic religion. The quality of work was commensurate with the neatness and politeness of the pupils. The girls looked very attractive in their navy blue jumpers and white blouses with peter-pan collars while the boys appeared quite smart in their white-pressed shirts and ties.



Brother James Kelley's Class c.1956 on the roof.



Hanging out in the neighborhood, 1950s.

The School was a humming hive from 8:30 until three o'clock in the afternoon and even later for after school lessons in dance or piano and spilling over to the streets, parks and alleyways of the neighborhood where pickup ball-games were played. Gone from morning until dinner time, enthusiastic boys were out at the playgrounds at Riverside Park armed with basketballs and baseball bats often times with their teachers, the Brothers who also lived in the neighborhood and who were encouraged and expected to be involved in their student's extra curricular affairs.



Father Thompson outside school, 1950s.

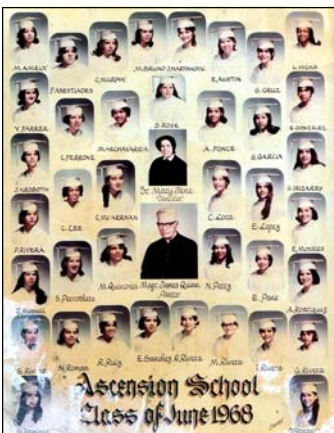


The Sisters of Charity outside their convent, 1955.

According to the census records, by the late 1950s and early 1960s the predominantly Irish population of the neighborhood was relocating beyond Manhattan and even the Greater New York City borders and the population shift, which involved the building of new housing in the area, resulted in the migration of black and Hispanic families to the parish. By the close of the decade, about 65% of the student population was Latino. Major structural changes were taking place as well during this period. In 1963 the auditorium was remodeled for the purpose of athletics and to accommodate social gatherings.



Brother Michael Dwyer's Choir 1961



The Big "A", as it was affectionately known, welcomed 631 pupils in the scholastic year 1968-1969. By that time, the effects of the Second Vatican Council on the Church and on religious life were evident at Ascension. The division between the boys and girls school was eliminated and all classes became mixed or "co-ed" under the co-principalship of Brother Kenneth Cottrell and Sister Rosaleen Burbage. There were approximately 631 students in this new structure; 308 boys and 323 girls in grades one through eight. The faculty consisted of six Sisters of Charity, four Christian Brothers and nine lay men and women making a total of nineteen teachers.



Young student in her plaid jumper, 1979.

The 1970s began with a great deal of change as Ascension experienced a dramatic shift in the leadership of the School. With only two Brothers serving the school in 1970, by 1973 the Christian Brothers withdrew from Ascension altogether, attributing the decrease in personnel and overall policy change within the District administration for the reasons. The Sisters of Charity's withdrawal from Ascension also occurred during this period of change in 1973. While they were no longer present, the religious legacy embodied in the spirit of concern and involvement in the school, parish and civic community continued. During those times, the neighborhood suffered under the hardship of poverty, crime and drugs making life for the community at times dangerous and insecure. However Ascension created an atmosphere of happiness and the school accomplished a wonderful service under such difficult circumstances; a service of the word of God and eternal values but also

as a service of the human values of our civilization. With the construction of a new science laboratory and the expansion of new language arts curriculum to provide greater emphasis on the Spanish culture, the children responded favorably with enthusiasm, friendliness and joy which proclaimed a significant commentary of the education that took place in the school.



Keith Haring Mural.



Sister Sarah Ryan's 4th grade class, Nov. 1983

In the early 1980s, the former convent of the Sisters of Charity adjoining the school which had been rented out to the Catholic Youth Organization Grace House became home to a mural painted by famed street-artist Keith Haring. Beginning in the lobby, the iconic characters wind, leap and dance their way up the stairwell to the former mother superior's suite on the third floor. As the students today pass by on their way to dance or art classes, the mural remains as a significant attribute to the long and diverse history of the school.

From the 1990s to the present, Ascension school activities have continued to evolve, reflecting the changing interests and needs of the students and faculty. All this change has strengthened the school. The primitive computer systems and dot-matrix printers introduced early in the decade gave way to computer labs filled with the sophisticated technology of today.



The twenty-first century brought more changes to Ascension. September 11 left many students confused, upset and assigned with the task of understanding the meaning of the event. Then as now, the teachers and staff have provided spiritual guidance and educational leadership to help the students become active responsible citizens in their multi-culture, democratic society. The curriculum was expanded in 2004 with the development of an early childhood program for pre-kindergarten three and four year olds to help younger children experience a learning atmosphere and to create an early bond within the community. Today the students of all ages remain progressive and spirited, gaining signal victories for the ever-developing school, in areas of both scholarship and extra-curricular activities.



Buildings and facilities exist for people and their enhancement reflects the development and commitment to Ascension's most precious commodity, its faculty, alumni and students. The spirit of an educational institution is more valuable than buildings and convenience and Ascension has been singularly fortunate in its heritage. It has kept pace with reasonable development and it has provided for its students faculty and alumni with infinite care. The closeness of the community and its diversity continues to flourish today in this truly unique, urban school and today we gather to celebrate the joy of being part of something larger.



Miss Alison's Pre-K 4 year olds, fall 2011.

This account testifies to the devotion and loyal support of the many alumni, former teachers and friends who have been associated with the Ascension School. Thank you for your contributions to this brief history, in particular I want to thank the amazing alumni especially those who contribute to the website. I hope you do not mind me reading all your wonderful accounts and appropriating some of your images. The visual truly helps tell the full story. Thank you to the alumni who shared their stories with me specifically Peggy McKiernan, Joyce Gormally, Peggy Walsh, John McGuire, Ed McClain, Mike Agliodoro, Noreen Murphy, Sister Christine Hennessy and Dennis Cleary. I am so grateful for the help of Sister Maryellen Blumlein at the Sisters of Charity Archives, Pat McNamara at the Archives of the Archdiocese of NY, former teachers Brother John Mueller and Brother Francis Bowers and for the use of materials in the Christian Brothers Archives.