



## **Spring Hill Elementary School**

### **City of Pittsburgh Historic Landmark Nomination**

**Presented by Preservation Pittsburgh**



412.256.8755  
1501 Reedsdale St., Suite 5003  
Pittsburgh, PA 15233  
[www.preservationpg.org](http://www.preservationpg.org)

May 2018



## INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY HISTORIC NOMINATION FORM

1. HISTORIC NAME OF PROPERTY:

<u>HRC Staff Use Only</u>
Date Received: .....
Parcel No.: .....
Ward: .....
Zoning Classification: .....
Bldg. Inspector: .....
Council District: .....

**Fee Schedule**

Please make check payable to *Treasurer, City of Pittsburgh*  
 Individual Landmark Nomination: \$100.00  
 District Nomination: \$250.00

2.

2. CURRENT NAME OF PROPERTY:

Spring Hill Elementary School

3. LOCATION

a. Street: 1351 Damas Street

b. City, State, Zip Code: Pittsburgh, PA 15212

c. Neighborhood: Spring Hill

4. OWNERSHIP

d. Owner(s): Pittsburgh Public Schools

e. Street: 341 S. Bellefield Ave.

f. City, State, Zip Code: Pittsburgh, PA 15213 Phone: (412)529-4357

5. CLASSIFICATION AND USE – Check all that apply

<u>Type</u>	<u>Ownership</u>	<u>Current Use:</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Structure	Private – home	<u>School</u>
District	Private – other	_____
Site	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public – government	_____
Object	Public - other	_____
	Place of religious worship	_____

6. NOMINATED BY:

- a. Name: Matthew Falcone
- b. Street: 1501 Reedsdale Street #5003
- c. City, State, Zip: Pittsburgh, PA 15233
- d. Phone: (412 ) 256-8755 Email: mfalcone@preservationpgh.org

7. DESCRIPTION

Provide a narrative description of the structure, district, site, or object. If it has been altered over time, indicate the date(s) and nature of the alteration(s). (Attach additional pages as needed)

*If Known:*

- a. Year Built: 1908
- b. Architectural Style: Classical Revival
- c. Architect/Builder: Unknown

Narrative: see attached

8. HISTORY

Provide a history of the structure, district, site, or object. Include a bibliography of sources consulted. (Attach additional pages as needed.) Include copies of relevant source materials with the nomination form (see Number 11).

Narrative: see attached

9. SIGNIFICANCE

The *Pittsburgh Code of Ordinances, Title 11, Historic Preservation, Chapter 1: Historic Structures, Districts, Sites and Objects* lists ten criteria, at least one of which must be met for Historic Designation. Describe how the structure, district, site, or object meets one or more of these criteria and complete a narrative discussing in detail each area of significance. (Attach additional pages as needed)

The structure, building, site, district, object is significant because of (check all that apply):

1. Its location as a site of a significant historic or prehistoric event or activity;
2. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related aspects of the development of the City of Pittsburgh, State of Pennsylvania, Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;
3. Its exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship;
4. Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;
5. Its exemplification of important planning and urban design techniques distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design or detail;
6. Its location as a site of an important archaeological resource;

7. Its association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;
8. Its exemplification of a pattern of neighborhood development or settlement significant to the cultural history or traditions of the City, whose components may lack individual distinction;
9. Its representation of a cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related theme expressed through distinctive areas, properties, sites, structures, or objects that may or may not be contiguous; or
10. Its unique location and distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh.

Narrative: see attached

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#### 10. INTEGRITY

In addition, the ordinance specifies that “Any area, property, site, structure or object that meets any one or more of the criteria listed above shall also have sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship to make it worthy of preservation or restoration”. (Attach additional pages as needed)

Narrative: see attached

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#### 11. NOTIFICATION/CONSENT OF PROPERTY OWNER(S)

##### *1.3(a)(2) Community information process.*

*Preceding submission of a nomination form for a District, the Historic Review Commission shall conduct at least one (1) public information meeting within or near the boundaries of the proposed district, which shall include at least one (1) member of the Department of City Planning and one (1) Commission member, to discuss the possible effects of designation. Notice shall be given to the owners of property in the proposed district in accordance with Section 1.3(b) below. The final public information meeting shall be held no more than six months before the nomination form is submitted.*

##### *1.3(a)(1)(a) Subsection F.*

*In the case of a nomination as a Historic District, by community-based organizations or by any individual, but in either event the nomination shall be accompanied by a petition signed by the owners of record of twenty-five (25) percent of the properties within the boundaries of the proposed District.*

- Please attach documentation of your efforts to gain property owner’s consent.-

\*\* The nomination of any religious property shall be accompanied by a signed letter of consent from the property’s owner.

#### 12. PHOTO LOGS: *Please Attach*

#### 13. BIBLIOGRAPHY: *Please Attach*

14. NOMINATION FORM PREPARED BY:

- a. Name: Angelique Bamberg for Preservation Pittsburgh
- b. Street: 233 Amber Street
- c. City, State, Zip: Pittsburgh, PA 15206
- d. Phone: (412   ) 956-5517 Email: clioconsulting@me.com
- e. Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



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## **HISTORIC NOMINATION – INSTRUCTIONS**

### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR FILLING OUT THE NOMINATION FORM**

1. Indicate the original name of the property if it is currently known by a different name; e.g. Union Station.
2. Indicate the current name of the property
3. Indicate the street address for the property. For districts, attach a separate sheet listing the street address of each property included in the nomination and a clear street map of the area showing the boundaries of the proposed district.
4. Indicate the owner of the property and his or her mailing address. For districts, attach a separate sheet listing the owner of each property and his or her mailing address.
5. Check the classification as indicated.
  - a. **“Historic Structure”** means anything constructed or erected, the use of which requires directly or indirectly, a permanent location on the land, including walks, fences, signs, steps and sidewalks at which events that made a significant contribution to national, state or local history occurred or which involved a close association with the lives of people of nations, state or local significance; or an outstanding example of a period, style, architectural movement, or method of construction; or one of the last surviving works of a pioneer architect, builder or designer; or one of the last survivors of a particular style or period of construction.
  - b. **“Historic District”** means a defined territorial division of land which shall include more than one (1) contiguous or related parcels of property, specifically identified by separate resolution, at which events occurred that made a significant contribution to national, state, or local history, or which contains more than one historic structure or historic landmarks, or which contains groups, rows or sets of structures or landmarks, or which contains an aggregate example of a period, style, architectural movements or method of construction, providing distinguishing characteristics of the architectural type or architectural period it represents.
  - c. **“Historic Site”** means the location of a significant event, a prehistoric or historic occupation or activity, or a building or structure whether standing, ruined or vanished, where the location itself maintains historical or archaeological value regardless of the value of any existing structures.
  - d. **“Historic Object”** means a material thing of historic significance for functional, aesthetic cultural or scientific reasons that may be, by nature or design, moveable yet related to a specific setting or environment.
6. Indicate the person(s) responsible for the nomination. Please note: According to the Historic Preservation Ordinance:  
*“Nomination of an area, property, site, or object for consideration and designation as a Historic Structure, Historic District, Historic Site, or Historic Object may be submitted to the Historic Review Commission by any of the following:*

- a. The Mayor of the City of Pittsburgh
  - b. A Member of the Historic Review Commission
  - c. A Member of the City Planning Commission
  - d. A Member of the Pittsburgh City Council
  - e. The Owner of Record or any person residing in the City of Pittsburgh for at least one year (for the nomination of a Historic Structure, Site or Object)
  - f. A signed petition of 25% of the owners of record (for the nomination of a Historic District)
7. Write a physical description of the nominated property or district. Include the following information as applicable:
- architectural style(s)
  - arrangement of architectural elements
  - building materials
  - method(s) of construction
  - visual character
  - street pattern
  - density
  - type and arrangement of buildings
  - topography
  - history of the development of the area
8. Provide a narrative history of the structure, district, site, or object. Include the following information when available:
- History of the development of the area;
  - Circumstances which brought the structure, district, site, or object into being;
  - Biographical information on architects, builders, developers, artisans, planners, or others who created or contributed to the structure, district, site, or object;
  - Contextual background on building type(s) and/or style(s);
  - Importance of the structure, district, site, or object in the larger community over the course of its existence.
  - Include a bibliography of all sources consulted at the end. Where historical information is uncertain or disputed, reference sources in the text.
9. Listed below are the categories and criteria for historic designation as set forth in the Pittsburgh Historic Preservation Ordinance. Describe in detail how the structure, district, site, or object meets one or more of the criteria. According to that legislation in Section 1.4 of the Pittsburgh Historic Preservation Ordinance, *Criteria for Designation*, a building must meet at least one of the following criteria in order to be designated:
1. Its location as a site of a significant historic or prehistoric event or activity;
  2. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related aspects of the development of the City of Pittsburgh, State of Pennsylvania, Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;
  3. Its exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship;
  4. Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;
  5. Its exemplification of important planning and urban design techniques distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design or detail;

6. Its location as a site of an important archaeological resource;
  7. Its association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;
  8. Its exemplification of a pattern of neighborhood development or settlement significant to the cultural history or traditions of the City, whose components may lack individual distinction;
  9. Its representation of a cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related theme expressed through distinctive areas, properties, sites, structures, or objects that may or may not be contiguous; or
  10. Its unique location and distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh.
10. In addition, the ordinance specifies that “Any area, property, site, structure or object that meets any one or more of the criteria listed above shall also have sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship to make it worthy of preservation or restoration.”
11. The nomination must be accompanied by evidence that the nominator has made a good-faith effort to communicate his or her interest in the historic designation of this landmark or district to the owner(s) of these properties. Describe how this was done, and attach evidence that the owner(s) of the nominated landmark or of the properties within the nominated district have been informed of the nomination. This may include a copy of a notification letter with a mailing list, a letter confirming phone calls, or a petition signed by affected property owners.
12. Clear photographs of the nominated buildings or districts should accompany the nomination form. The applicant shall include photographs of all elevations of an individual building and its setting, or the front elevation of each building in a district. In the case of closely spaced buildings or rowhouses, several buildings may be included in one photograph. Each photograph must be labeled with the street address of the building(s) and the month and year the photograph was taken.
13. Copies of major supporting documents should accompany the nomination form. Such documents may include, but are not limited to:
- historic photographs;
  - historic and contemporary maps;
  - historic or contemporary texts describing the subject property or district;
  - historic or contemporary texts describing people, places, or events that comprise the historic context of the subject property or district.
  - Oversized materials (such as architectural drawings) and materials too fragile to copy may be accepted.

**PLEASE NOTE:** It is the responsibility of the nominator to provide the Historic Review Commission and its Staff with information sufficient to fairly evaluate the nomination. **Incomplete nomination forms will not be accepted. Fee must be included. Nominations must be submitted in both electronic and hard-copy format.**



**CHECKLIST: INSERT NAME OF PROPERTY HERE**

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**#1-6 Nomination Form:** Address, Ownership, Classification, Nominator Info.

#7: Description

#8: History

#9: Significance

**#10 Integrity**

**#11 Consent of Property Owners**

**#12 Photographs of Property:** numbered and labeled

**#13 List of Supporting Documents**

**Fee**

**Hard-Copy nomination**

**Electronic nomination (Word Format for text).**

## **Physical Description**

### Setting and Site

Spring Hill School is a one-to-two story, brick and stone Classical Revival elementary school building in the Spring Hill neighborhood of Pittsburgh. It faces north onto Damas Street at its T intersection with Rockledge Street. It is surrounded by grassy lawn and trees to the north and west and paved play areas to the south and east. A brick plinth in the yard in front of the school identifies it as "Spring Hill Elementary School." The entire site is enclosed by fencing: iron "hairpin" fencing typical of older Pittsburgh Public schools at the front (north), and chain link fencing on the sides and rear. The neighborhood surrounding the school consists of modest single-family brick and frame houses dating from ca. 1880-1920.

### Exterior

The school consists of two wings. The western wing consisting of the first story of an original two-story building constructed in 1896 and renovated in 1936. The school's eastern section is a substantial two-story addition constructed in 1908. The two wings are joined by a one-story connector which also dates to 1908. Both wings are rectangular in plan and constructed of red brick with sandstone foundations.

The older, western section of the school is nine bays wide by seven bays deep. Its northwestern corner has a rounded projection which originally supported a conical roof atop its second story (no longer present). The foundation of quarry-faced sandstone rises five courses to a smooth sandstone water table. Window openings have flat sandstone sills and lintels and contain replacement sash with blind upper panels installed in 1992. The red brick is a perceptibly different color and texture near the top of the walls, where they were rebuilt when the second story was removed in 1936. The current walls are capped by sandstone coping. The roof is flat.

Entrance to this section of the building is via an arched portal in the westernmost bay of the primary (north) facade, which projects at a depth of one bay. This projecting section was added at the time the second story was removed, in 1936. It has a stepped pediment with sandstone coping and symmetrically-placed stone medallions above and to either side of the entrance. The entrance itself is surrounded by sandstone voussoirs and contains replacement double doors.

A more elaborate stone entrance surround of Neoclassical design is found on the western side facade. Its opening has been mostly blocked in, but contains a single modern doorway accessed by a concrete ramp added in 1992.

The rear elevation of the western wing originally had nine window openings. Currently, from west to east: three openings have been bricked in, one opening (which is narrower than the rest) has been altered, one has been converted to a doorway, and four continue to function as windows.

The 1908 eastern wing is 11 bays wide and seven bays deep with facades of symmetrical design. The foundation is of dressed sandstone ashlar with a flat sandstone water table, except on the projecting five-bay central section of the primary (north) facade, where the water table is of white glazed terra cotta with a molded profile. The main entrance surround spans the central three bays of this section on the first floor and is also of white glazed terra cotta. The design of the surround encompasses a concentric arch springing from a telescoped series of squat engaged piers with Sullivanesque capitals; a frieze containing the words "PUBLIC SCHOOLS" in relief; and two round lozenges with the year "1908" in relief. A pair of round-arched windows surmounted by glazed terra cotta voussoirs flank this main entrance on the first floor. The first through third and ninth through eleventh bays—which are set back from the building's central block—contain window openings with flat sandstone sills and lintels on the first floor. The windows themselves are the same modern sash with blind upper panels found on the school's western wing and installed in 1992.

The second floor of the projecting central block is separated from the first floor by a glazed terra cotta string course, which also serves as the sill of the second story windows in this section. The three central windows have round arches and the first and fifth are rectangular. All have glazed terra cotta voussoirs. On the recessed flanking bays of the second floor are round-arched windows with flat sandstone sills and brick lintels.

Beginning at the arches of the second story windows, the red brick is a perceptibly different color and texture. This marks where the original crenellated parapet was removed in 1913. The upper walls were rebuilt with a narrow, linear glazed terra cotta cornice and sandstone coping. The roof is flat.

The eastern side facade is seven bays deep. Because of the downward slope of the site toward the east, the basement level here contains full-sized window openings and a doorway in the center bay. The doorway is infilled with brick and modern double doors below the water table. Above the water table, the center bay contains a one-and-a-half story arch that has been infilled with modern aluminum windows and solid panels. A slender band of white glazed terra cotta frames the top of the arch. On either side of this arrangement are flat-topped window openings on the first floor and arched window openings on the second floor. A narrow penthouse rises above the parapet at the center of the roofline.

The rear of the building, like the front, has a projecting 5-bay central block. The basement and first story have flat-topped window openings and the second story has round-arched window openings. The only exceptions to this fenestration are the fourth and eighth bays, which contain windows of narrower dimensions which are round-arched on the first floor and flat-topped on the second.

The eastern and western wings of the school are connected by a one-story, four-bay segment constructed along with the 1908 addition. This has a bay window facing north and evidence of four original openings facing the rear. Of these, the center two are windows, but a doorway in the westernmost bay and a window in the easternmost bay have

been bricked in. In the latter location, a new doorway has been added, accessible via a concrete stair. A tall chimney rises adjacent to this and the main 1908 building.

### Interior

The interior of the Spring Hill School has been substantially altered. Floors are vinyl tile, walls are gypsum board, ceilings are hung acoustical tile, and lighting is fluorescent tube. Historic features which remain include staircases with paneled wooden newel posts and ornamental wrought iron railings; two pair of classical wall reliefs dating from the 1936 renovation; and a safe marked "Pittsburg Safe Company/Pittsburg, Pa." in the main office, which is located in the one-story connector.

## History

The original two-story, brick Spring Hill Elementary School was constructed as the Seventh Ward Public School in 1896 on land purchased from Damas Lutz. The neighborhood of Spring Hill, named for natural underground springs in the area, was settled predominantly by German immigrants between about 1850 and 1920. Settlement and development of industries began along East Street and spread east during the 19th century. Lutz was a member of the Board of Directors of the German National Bank of Allegheny—then a separate city from Pittsburgh—who owned several acres of land at the intersection of Hetzell (now Homer) and what is now Damas Streets, called “Vineyard Park.”

In 1907, Allegheny was annexed to the City of Pittsburgh, resulting in changes to street names and ward numbers and boundaries. By 1925, the portion of the Lutz estate immediately adjacent to the school had been subdivided for building lots, and the school was known as the Spring Hill School after the neighborhood growing around it.

The 1896 Spring Hill/Seventh Ward Public School was designed to face west toward Noster Street. It was a typical late Victorian school house with a turret at one corner and a bell tower rising two stories above the main classroom block. The bell tower featured a clock and a weathervane befitting the school’s role as the civic centerpiece of its neighborhood. A secondary entrance on the north facade was emphasized by a gablet in the roofline above it. The architect of the original building is unknown. The earliest, undated plans in the Spring Hill School file at the Pittsburgh Public Schools Facilities Division depict a different building labeled “13th Ward Public School.”

The years around the turn of the 20th century were a boom time in new construction for the Allegheny and Pittsburgh public schools, as the school systems of both cities expanded to accommodate a rapid influx of new industrial workers and managers and their families. In 1908, the Seventh Ward Public School received a substantial, two-story addition which doubled its size. This addition faced north onto Damas Street and originally had a crenellated parapet, seen in a 1912 photograph. In 1913, this was removed and replaced with the current, flat parapet. This alteration is marked by a change in brickwork at the upper walls of the building. A one-story connector housing an office for the principal linked the 1908 addition with the original building.

In 1936, the school received substantial alterations which brought it to its present exterior form. Because the Pittsburgh School Board’s building staff and program were funded by the federal government at this time, the project was known as Federal Public Works Project Docket PA 1156. Marion Steen, the Pittsburgh School Board’s staff architect and Assistant Superintendent of Buildings from 1935-1954, was the architect for the 1936 renovations. The project involved the removal of the entire second story and bell tower of the school’s original wing, the blocking in of the former west-facing main entrance, and the construction of a new auditorium entrance on the north facade. Stone relief lettering above the original main entrance, which read “Seventh Ward Public School,” was ground away, leaving flat recessed panels. On the interior, the school received such modern new specialized spaces as play rooms, a gymnasium, a library, sew-

ing and manual training rooms, a kindergarten (in the basement), and an auditorium with stage, dressing rooms, and a motion picture projection booth.

The architecture firm of Akers, Erwin, Thompson, and Gasparella designed extensive renovations to the school's interior in 1991. These plans also guided the current site design of the property, including the locations of walkways, hardscape and landscape features, the plinth in the school yard which serves as the school's sign, and the accessibility ramp.

## Significance

According to that legislation in Section 1.4 of the Pittsburgh Historic Preservation Ordinance, *Criteria for Designation*, a building must meet at least one of the following criteria in order to be designated:

1. Its location as a site of a significant historic or prehistoric event or activity: *Spring Hill School does not meet this criterion for designation.*
2. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related aspects of the development of the City of Pittsburgh, State of Pennsylvania, Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States: *Spring Hill School does not meet this criterion for designation.*
3. Its exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship: *Spring Hill School does not meet this criterion for designation.*
4. Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States: *Spring Hill School meets this criterion for designation.*

Spring Hill School is associated with Marion M. Steen, who served as in-house staff architect for the Pittsburgh Board of Education from 1935 to 1954. Known primarily for his Art Deco designs, Steen faced a unique challenge in renovating the older Spring Hill School to meet the educational requirements of the modern era.

Steen graduated from Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1908 and worked for Henry Hornbostel as a draftsman on campus buildings. In 1918, he left Pittsburgh for a brief stint of working in Chicago, returning later that year to head the architectural department of the Carnegie Land Company. In 1922, he joined the family firm, James T. Steen and Sons, established in Pittsburgh in 1864. While there he began his school design career with Oliver, Prospect, and Herron Hill Schools. As the city's official school architect for almost 20 years, Steen designed a series of fireproof structures in the nationally popular Art Deco style, including Letsche, Weil, and Concord Schools. Steen was able to attain a high point in the evolution of Pittsburgh public school design by consistently meeting the new educational requirements in a succession of high-quality architectural designs. He retired from the Board of Education in 1954.

Charged with renovating, not rebuilding, Spring Hill School, Steen worked with its existing architecture and spaces to bring the facility in line with modern ideas about education (see Criterion 7, below).

5. Its exemplification of important planning and urban design techniques distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design or detail: *Spring Hill School does not meet this criterion for designation.*
6. Its location as a site of an important archaeological resource: *Spring Hill School does not meet this criterion for designation.*
7. Its association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States: *Spring Hill School meets this criterion for designation.*

Spring Hill School is associated with the history of public school design in the cities of Allegheny and Pittsburgh. The ways in which Spring Hill School has been added to, subtracted from, and altered since its construction illuminate the three distinct historical eras of public school-building in these cities: the ward-based era, the consolidated era, and the federally-funded era. Spring Hill School illustrates the progression of ideological and architectural approaches to urban education from the late nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries, a period which coincides with Pittsburgh's peak of immigration, population gain, and industrial prominence.

Both the 1896 and 1908 Spring Hill School buildings were constructed under the first of these eras. Prior to 1911, each ward of both Allegheny and Pittsburgh had its own separate School Board elected by constituents and charged with the complete operation and maintenance of the schools. Only two other major cities in the United States, Boston and Philadelphia, followed the ward-based school board system. By 1907, when Pittsburgh and Allegheny united, there were 61 subdistricts (46 in Pittsburgh, 15 in Allegheny), and 366 citizens supervised the city's elementary schools. This multiplicity of authority provided the city with a chaotic school system and a diverse array of school buildings.

Spring Hill School's first building was constructed by the City of Allegheny and its second by the City of Pittsburgh under the ward-based system. The original Spring Hill School was a typical Victorian schoolhouse of the era, with an elaborate exterior designed to serve as a civic landmark, but a fairly simple interior plan of classrooms. Its lack of specialized spaces such as a gymnasium or auditorium were consistent with the straightforward pedagogical practices of the 19th century.

In 1911, a centralized, consolidated school board was formed and hired a Superintendent of Buildings to oversee building construction and maintenance. This era was dominated by a Scottish-born artist and mechanical engineer named James Bonar, who held the position of Superintendent of Buildings from 1919 to 1934. During this period, the school district contracted with independent architectural firms for new school designs, but appears to have undertaken minor renovations to Spring Hill School (such as the reconstruction of its parapet and improvement of its heating system) itself in 1913.



This system lasted until 1934 when, in the depths of the Depression, the City sought help from the federal government to maintain and improve its schools. From 1935 to 1954, the centralized School Board employed an in-house architectural staff funded by the federal Public Works Administration. Marion Steen, the Pittsburgh School Board's staff architect and Assistant Superintendent of Buildings during this era, was the architect for the 1936 renovations which modernized the interior program of Spring Hill School and brought the exterior to its present state.

In the early twentieth century, Pittsburgh's educational policy was greatly influenced by the theories of John Dewey and the practical dictums of William Wirt, who in 1908 was named Superintendent of Schools in Gary, Indiana, a community not unlike Pittsburgh for its industrial base and large immigrant population. Wirt believed that the school should be an idealized microcosm of the real world, in which trained personnel provided as many activities for students within the school as past generations had experienced through apprenticeships and household industry. In order to accomplish this, Wirt advocated the design and construction of schools with specialized spaces: a full auditorium capable of handling dramatic performances, a large gymnasium for sports activities, home economics rooms, and shop spaces. Hallways lined with art work would act as local museums, and libraries would serve as each community's branch library.

By 1913, former classrooms in the 1896 building had been designated as a sewing room, kitchen bench room, and drafting room in support of vocational education for students. Steen's design for the renovations of Spring Hill School in 1936 removed the Victorian second floor, roofline, and bell tower from the original building, streamlined its first floor, and reoriented its interior around a modern auditorium complete with a stage, dressing rooms, lantern screen, and motion picture projecting booth. The auditorium was located on the first floor for ease of public access. Steen also added such specialized spaces as a kindergarten classroom, library, gymnasium, and manual training room, in accord with best educational practices of the time.

8. Its exemplification of a pattern of neighborhood development or settlement significant to the cultural history or traditions of the City, whose components may lack individual distinction: *Spring Hill School does not meet this criterion for designation.*
9. Its representation of a cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related theme expressed through distinctive areas, properties, sites, structures, or objects that may or may not be contiguous: *Spring Hill School does not meet this criterion for designation.*
10. Its unique location and distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh. *Spring Hill School meets this criterion for designation.*

The location of a school in a residential neighborhood is not unique, but Spring Hill School has since 1896 provided an important architectural and civic focal point in the Spring Hill Neighborhood, which otherwise lacks a commercial or civic center.

### **Integrity**

In addition to significance, the ordinance specifies that “Any area, property, site, structure or object that meets any one or more of the criteria listed above shall also have sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship to make it worthy of preservation or restoration.”

The Spring Hill School building has moderate integrity on its exterior. The loss of the second floor of the 1896 building has drastically altered the character of the original wing of the school. However, this is mitigated by the relatively intact nature of the 1908 wing and the fact that the date of the alterations to the original building—1936—reflects a significant period in the history of the Pittsburgh Public Schools in general and Spring Hill School in particular. Other than minor alterations to fenestration and the installation of new windows and doors, the only notable alteration to the 1908 building is the reconstruction of the parapet to eliminate the original crenellations. The eastern wing of the school retains sufficient integrity to convey its architectural purpose as a turn-of-the-20th century public school.

## **Bibliography**

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**Photo 1.** Spring Hill School, view to southwest, 1908 building in foreground



**Photo 2.** Original (1896) wing, west facade; first story and main entrance of original Spring Hill School building



**Photo 3.** 1908 (east) wing, primary (north) facade



**Photo 4.** 1908 (east) wing



**Photo 5.** View of side and rear to northwest, 1908 building in foreground



**Photo 6.** Connecting segment between 1896 and 1908 buildings, north facade



**Photo 7.** Original (ca. 1895) main entrance,



**Photo 8.** 1908 main entrance, east wing



**Photo 9.** North facade entrance, west wing



**Photo 10.** Safe in main office, east wing





**Photo 11.** Auditorium, west wing



**Photo 12.** Staircase detail, east wing



**Photo 13.** Reliefs, east wing



**Photo 14.** Reliefs, east wing

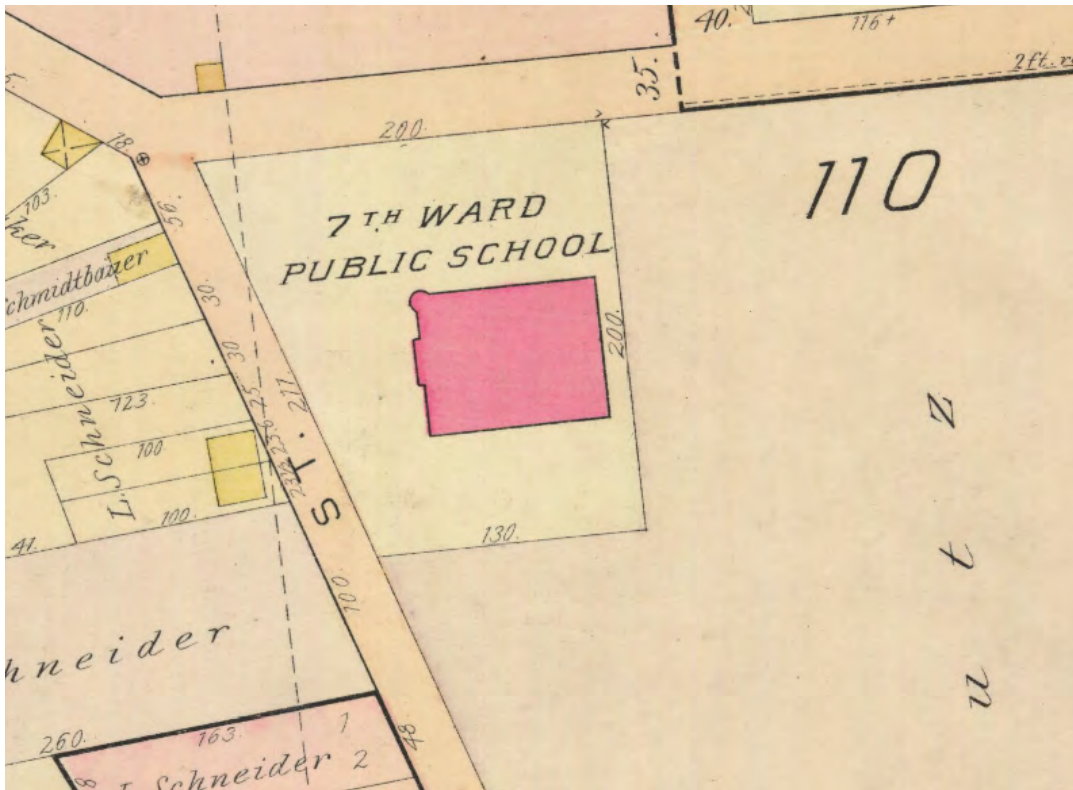


Fig. 1. Hopkins Real Estate Plat Book of the City of Allegheny, 1901, detail

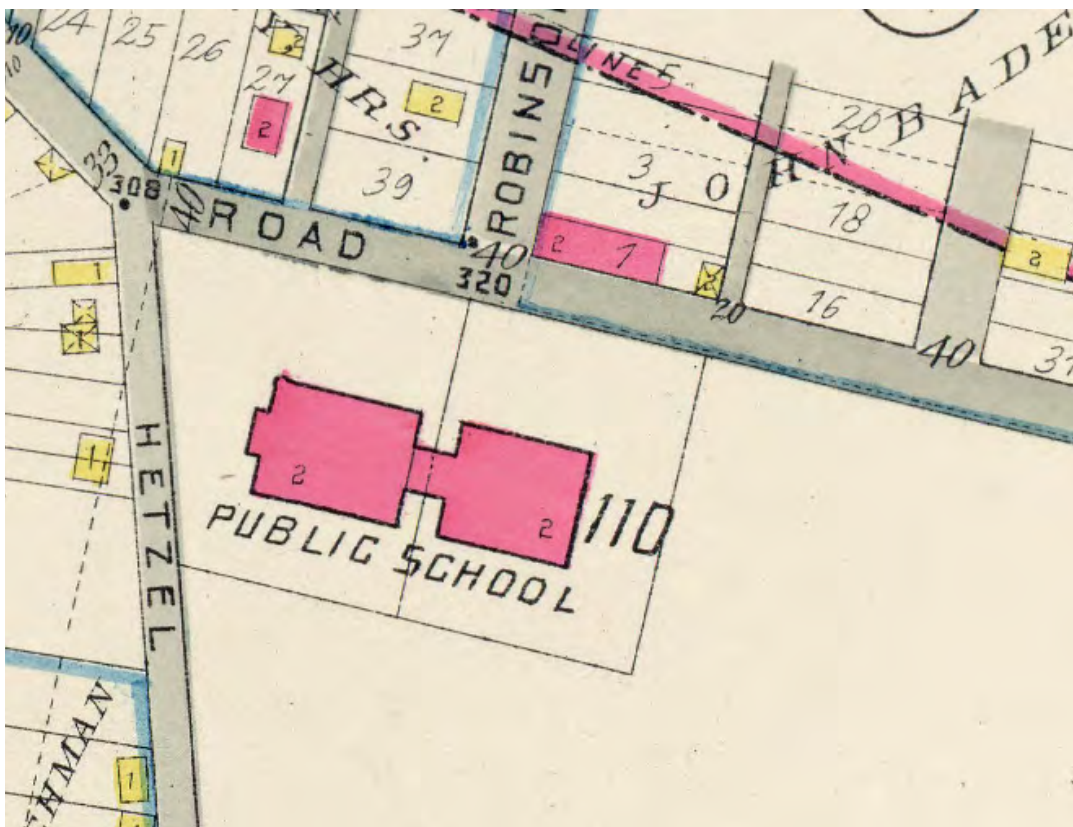


Fig. 2. Hopkins Atlas of Greater Pittsburgh, 1910, detail

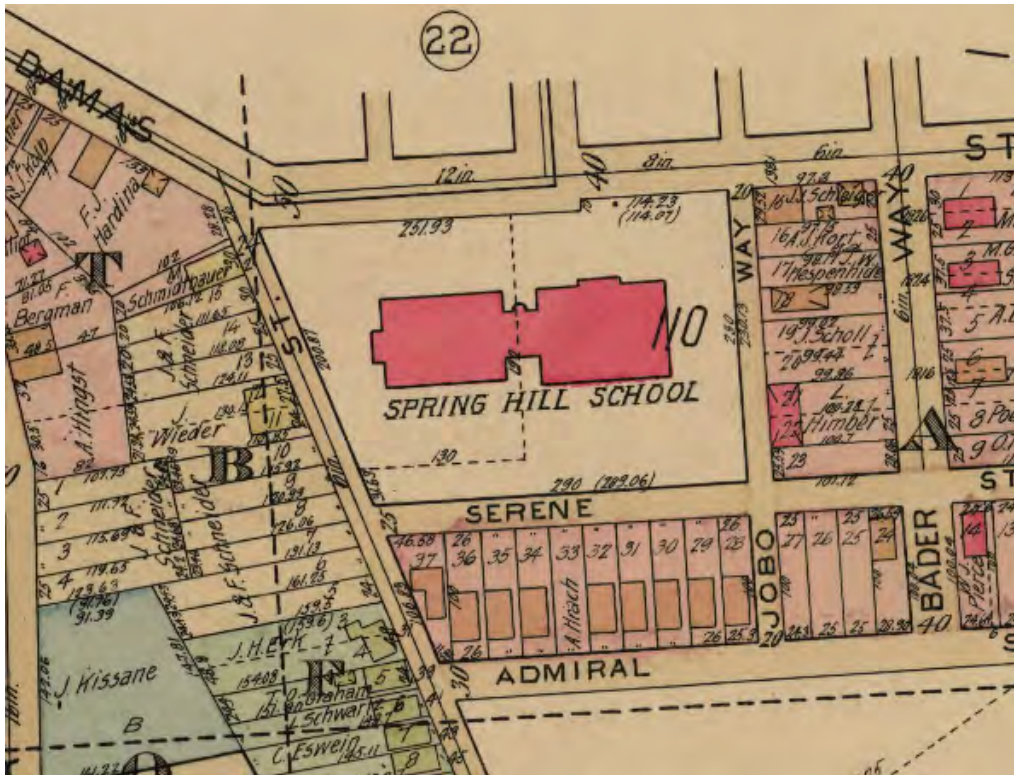


Fig. 3. Hopkins Real Estate Atlas of the City of Pittsburgh, 1925, detail



Fig. 4. Undated photograph of 1896 Spring Hill School (Pittsburgh Public Schools)



**Fig. 5.** Damas Street from Homer Street, looking east, 1912  
Building at middle right with tower is original Spring Hill School  
1908 addition with crenellated cornice visible beyond (Historic Pittsburgh)



**Fig. 6.** Spring Hill School, 1917 (Pittsburgh Public Schools)



**Fig. 7.** Spring Hill School renovations in progress, 1936 (Pittsburgh Public Schools)



**Fig. 8.** Spring Hill School renovations in progress, 1936 (Pittsburgh Public Schools)



**Fig. 9.** Spring Hill School renovations in progress, 1936 (Pittsburgh Public Schools)



**Fig. 10.** Spring Hill School renovations in progress, 1936 (Pittsburgh Public Schools)



**Fig. 11.** Spring Hill School, renovations completed, 1936 (Pittsburgh Public Schools)