

# HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

## EMANUEL PHILIPP SCHOOL

(Written Summer/Fall 1988)

### I. NAME

Historic: Emanuel Philipp School

Common: Same

### II. LOCATION

4310 North Sixteenth Street

Tax Key Number: 244-0070-110

Legal Description: Grootemaat & Sons Inc. Subd. (A L) in S.E. ¼. Sec. 6-7-22, Block 6, Lots 1 thru 14 and vac. Alley adj. Said subd. And blk. 2 lots 1-2-13-14 and part lot 12 com. S.E. corner lot 12-th nwly. 15.56'-th w 113'-th N. 30'-th E. 124'-th S. 41' to com. & vac alley adj. Ed Porth & Sons addn. No. 3 and Blk. 6, Lot 5, North Ridge Subd.

### III. CLASSIFICATION

Building

### IV. OWNER

Ed McMilin  
Division of Facilities Management  
Milwaukee Public Schools  
5225 West Vliet Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53208

### V. YEAR BUILT

1931 (1961-Auditorium)

Architect: Eschweiler and Eschweiler  
(Thomas L. Eschweiler: 1961, Auditorium)

## VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Emanuel Philipp School is located at 4310 North 16<sup>th</sup> Street in a 1920's and 1930's residential area of small scale, one-story bungalows and two-story colonial style houses. The school is sited in the middle of a long block of small houses with an extensive paved schoolyard extending to the rear through the block to North 15<sup>th</sup> Street. The school is set back from the street behind a grassy lawn dotted with a few mature trees.

The school is a three-story, flat roofed, rectangular, red brick structure in the late Art Deco style. The building consists of three major building elements: the three bay, three-story classroom section; the entrance tower at the north end of the original buildings; and the windowless, featureless mass of the one-story, flat roofed, red brick auditorium wing added in 1961 to the north of the entrance tower. The principal elevation facing west to North 16<sup>th</sup> Street is the most elaborately articulated, but all of the other elevations are well finished.

The west elevation is faced in a rich, red brick with a handmade appearance laid in a modified Flemish bond pattern. The plain classroom wing to the south consists of three bays of grouped steel, six-over-one, double hung windows painted verdigris with frosted glass in the upper sash. A stone belt course girds the building at the second floor windowsill level while a thin terra cotta tile coping caps the parapet wall at the roof. The principal ornamental feature of the classroom wing is the band of terra cotta triptych panels depicting nursery rhymes and children's stories that encircles the building at the first floor windowsill level.

To the north of the classroom wing is a tower-like entrance pavilion, which is the focal point of the façade. This feature consists of a tall three-story entrance block that raises a story above the roof of the classroom wing abutted by an even taller campanile-like stair tower on its north side. The entrance pavilion is embellished with numerous ornamental features in a variety of materials including wrought iron, carved stone, terra cotta and subtly patterned brickwork.

From the public sidewalk, stonewalls flanking the approach walk and steps curve up toward the deep, arched, brick entry portal. These thick stone walls with their molded stone coping are carved in the Art Deco style in an overall program of shallow reliefs of Indian figures and exotic animals interspersed with stylized foliage. Set deep within the round arched portal with its stone dado is the three-leaf front door with its tall arched transom faced with ornamental ironwork. Mounted on the face of the entrance pavilion above the portal, a three-tiered sign of cutout iron letters set between horizontal iron bars spells out Emanuel Philipp School with one word on each tier. Above this, at the second story level, a tall, narrow, three-part steel casement window is fronted by a false balcony railing consisting of carved penguin balusters set between incised Art Deco newel posts resting on animal head corbels. Above a patterned brick spandrel panel three more steel casement windows with transoms ornamented with metal silhouettes of ballerinas light the third floor level of the entrance pavilion. Patterned brickwork in an arch-motif tops the third story windows above which the Flemish bond masonry continues uninterrupted a full story above the roof of the classroom wing to a deep parapet frieze of Art Deco, stylized floral patterned, natural colored terra cotta tiles.

Abutting the entrance pavilion to the north is the small, square, four-story, brick flat-roofed stair tower. Steel, two-over-two windows, ornamented with iron silhouettes of

children in their upper sash, light each level of the tower. The upper windows are surmounted by flush, patterned brickwork laid in a Tudor arch motif. At the top story of the tower, a story above the roof of the entrance pavilion, is a large round opening filled with an Art Deco iron grill featuring silhouettes of children.

The narrow and nearly windowless south elevation consists of a stair tower with a stone enframed entrance in its base. A band of terra cotta tiles similar to those on the entrance pavilion parapet serves as a frieze at the roofline.

The east elevation is somewhat utilitarian in character with broad bands of grouped fenestration and smaller windows randomly placed to respond to floor plan requirements. Ornamentation is limited to the band of terra cotta children's story tiles at the first floor windowsill level that continues around the building from the west front.

The north elevation contains the 1961 auditorium addition. This is a windowless, one-story, flat roofed, brick box devoid of architectural features. It adjoins the low, brick, flat roofed, one-story powerhouse building behind the school, which was originally a freestanding structure. The principal feature of the powerhouse, which is laid in the same Flemish bond brickwork as the original school, is the tall tapering brick smoke stack. A barbed wire topped chain link fence has been erected around the top of the powerhouse to prevent people from climbing onto its low roof.

## **VII. SIGNIFICANCE**

The Emanuel Philipp School is architecturally significant for its outstanding display of Art Deco decorative craftsmanship and forward looking architectural design. It is a transitional structure uniquely exemplifying the fusion of art and architecture typical of the Art Deco period with the stark massing, planar wall surfaces, and simple lines characteristic of the International style. More than any other public school in the city, the Philipp Elementary School illustrates the Art Deco period emphasis on incorporating handcrafted artwork in a variety of mediums including terra cotta, stone, iron and sheet metal as an integral part of the architectural program. The building is executed in exceptionally fine brickwork that was intended to illustrate the artistic possibilities of the bricklayer's art. The dramatic cubic massing of the school presages the emergence of the International style in the later 1930's and 1940's in the United States.

## **VIII. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The decade of the 1920's was one of unprecedented growth for the Milwaukee Public Schools. Overall school enrollment increased over 47 percent. Annexation of more land by the city, the growth in the number of school-age children, the popular acceptance of the desirability of high school education, and the establishment of vocational schools contributed to severe overcrowding and the overtaxing of the city's aging school facilities. Barracks classroom buildings were utilized on the grounds of many of the older schools to temporarily alleviate the overcrowding problem and were also moved into new school sites until permanent structures could be built. From 1924 through 1929 various five-year plans were produced to identify current and future needs and to determine the most effective placement of future school buildings. During the 1920's, \$8 million was spent on new structures and grounds in addition to \$10 million in expenditures associated with improving schools in newly annexed territories. By 1932

the school system in Milwaukee included 88 elementary buildings, 9 high schools, 6 junior high schools, 2 technical high schools, and 6 junior technical schools.

The Emanuel Philipp School was a product of this 1920's and 1930's school building boom. Philip's location was not specifically identified in the official lists of future sites prepared between 1924 and 1929. By 1927 the School Board's Building Program Committee had recommended the construction of an elementary school on property it owned on Fiebrantz Avenue. The school superintendent, however, insisted that the Fiebrantz site be reserved for a junior or senior high school. As a result, the Board sought to acquire additional property in the area for an elementary school. A report to the board secretary F. M. Harbach on June 4, 1927 indicated that an option had been secured on six lots in the A. L. Grootemaat & Sons, Inc. subdivision and that additional adjoining lots could be obtained if the Board moved promptly before the prices of the lots went up. The Board approved this site and ultimately paid over \$19,000 for the property on North 16<sup>th</sup> Street. (Board of School Directors, Proceedings, 1927-28, pp. 435-536; Board of School Directors, Annual Report, 1921-32, unnumbered table; miscellaneous sites and building programs prepared between 1924 and 1929 bound under the title Milwaukee School Buildings and Sites at the LRB).

Temporary buildings were moved to the 16<sup>th</sup> Street site until a permanent school building could be constructed. In February of 1931 the board approved sketch plans for a seventeen room classroom building for the site designed by the well-known local architecture firm of Eschweiler and Eschweiler. (Board of School Directors, Annual Report, 1931-32, p. 21; Milwaukee Journal, Feb. 27, 1931, LRB clipping files). The architectural firm had been established by Alexander C. Eschweiler (8/10/1865 – 6/13/1940) in 1892. In 1923 he took his three sons, Alexander C. Jr., Carl F. and Theodore L., into partnership with him. In later decades the firm was continued under the name of Eschweiler, Schneider and Associates, Inc. When Theodore L. Eschweiler died in November of 1966, the firm was carried on by George G. Schneider and later by Robert W. Spinti through 1975, when it was last known as Eschweiler and Schneider. By the date of the Philipp School project, the School Board had its own full-time architect and a staff of eleven draftsmen and assistants, but apparently the large number of projects undertaken in the later 1920's and early 1930's overwhelmed the staff, and the School Board turned to an outside architectural firm for the design of the Philipp School. (MCHS Biographical Clippings Reel No. 86, Eschweiler; Milwaukee City Directory; Board of School Directors, 1929 Five-Year Plan, p. 10)

Working drawings for the school's façade are dated April 15, 1931. On May 5, 1931 the School Board's Committee of buildings entered a resolution to approve construction contracts for the following contractors: Riesen Building Corporation for excavating, grading, concrete and cement work (\$43,339); Robert L. Reisinger & Company for masonry work (\$45,800); P. Schmidt and Company, Inc. for cut stone work (\$7,189); C. Hennecke Company for steel and iron work (\$3,325); Badger Wire & Iron Works for ornamental metal work (\$1,330); Fred A. Mikkelson for carpentry work (\$18,700), and F.J.A. Christiansen for roofing (\$1,980). (Board of School Directors, Proceedings, 1930-31, p. 508; MPS copy of elevation drawing dated April 15, 1931) On June 2, 1931 the School Board approved contracts for fifteen additional contractors to handle the various internal jobs from plumbing and hardware to lighting fixtures, tile and terrazzo. ON the same day a resolution was entered to officially name the 16<sup>th</sup> Street structure after Emanuel Philipp, Wisconsin's governor during the First World War. The name was officially adopted on June 30, 1931. Additional contractors were retained to finish the

grounds and furnish the interior during the summer of 1932. Due to the problems with the vacation of an adjoining alley, the Philipp School had to be constructed without an auditorium or gymnasium. Eschweiler & Eschweiler designed them as an addition and were paid an additional \$2,250 for their efforts. Probably because of delays caused by the Great Depression and World War II, the auditorium wing was not constructed until 1961. The new designs were furnished by Thomas L. Eschweiler. The interior of the school was modernized in 1966 with the addition of fluorescent lighting and acoustical tile ceilings. (Milwaukee City Building Permits; Board of School Directors, Annual Report, 1931-1932, p. 21; Board of School Directors, Proceedings, 1931-32, p. 555)

In spite of its outstanding artistic embellishment, forward-looking design and unusual massing, the Emanuel Philipp School received little notice in the School Board's reports or in the press. Two other elementary schools, Morgandale at 3635 South 17<sup>th</sup> Street and Garden Homes at 4456 North Teutonia Avenue, were under construction and completed at the same time as the Philipp School, but these latter buildings stylistically resemble their Elizabethan-style predecessors. The press focused its attention on Garden Homes School and on the construction of several high schools during the early 1930's, particularly Juneau High School and Rufus King High School. Although in the Common Council's Annual Report for 1932, the Garden Homes School was "acclaimed one of the most modern grade schools in the state," neither the press nor the School Board made reference to the unusual Philipp School. This could be because the School Board members were being chastised in the press at the time for their so-called excesses in approving frills such as bronze doors and cut stone ornament at nearby Rufus King High School and did not want to focus public attention on the cost of the many purely decorative features that embellish the exterior of the Philipp School in the midst of the worsening national economic depression of the 1930s. Eschweiler and Eschweiler's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary publication in 1943, however, emphasized the school's different architectural approach and stated that "the Philipp school was on of the first to express the trend toward simplicity." (50 Years of Architecture, Eschweiler and Eschweiler, unnumbered pages, Emanuel Philip School; Milwaukee Common Council, Annual Report, 1932, p. 129; Legislative Reference Bureau, clipping collection, Milwaukee Public Schools).

Most of the outstanding decorative features can be attributed to designs made by Eschweiler and Eschweiler and executed by Milwaukee firms. The intent of the decorative program, as restated by the Eschweiler firm in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary publication, was to make this "a school for children." As a result, the program included whimsical penguin sculptures, imaginative carvings of Indians and exotic animals, silhouettes of children and depictions of children's stories, fables and legends. These were executed by local artisans including P. Schmidt and Company and the Badger Wire and Iron Works.

P. Schmidt and Company were the contractors responsible for the cut stonework on the Philipp School including the extraordinary penguin balustrade and the bas relief approach walls. The firm had been established in 1869 by Peter Schmidt at the corner of Market Street and Ogden Avenue. In 1891 the business moved to the corner of East North and Bartlett Avenues where they employed thirty to seventy persons. Information supplied by a former president of the company indicates that P. Schmidt and Company did not originate any designs at their shop. Rather, their draftsmen produced scale model drawings from the architects' plans. After approval from the architects, the stonecutters produced the required pieces. During their century of operation, P. Schmidt and Company was responsible for the stonework on Milwaukee's City Hall, the Uihlein

Building and the Pabst Theater among many other structures. The firm was liquidated in 1970. (Conversation with King C. Harte, June 10, 1988; Milwaukee – A Half Century's Progress, p 217; Milwaukee City Directory.

Badger Wire and Iron Works was the contractor for the ornamental metal work on the building. The firm was established in 1899 by Albert Haeger on South 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. Later the firm moved to Muskego Avenue, and finally it moved to 2933 West Cleveland Avenue where the company had an acre of land and a large plant. By 1922 the firm employed 35 persons. Badger specialized in architectural and ornamental metal work in aluminum, brass, bronze, stainless steel, and iron. Their products included entrances, elevator enclosures, storefronts, grilles, gratings, balcony railings, sidewalk doors, gates, jail cells, and wire window guards among other products. Haeger later went on to operate the Atlas Iron and Wire Works in the early 1930's, but Badger continued in operation at the Cleveland Avenue plant under a variety of officers until 1986 when it closed. Like P. Schmidt and Company, Badger executed projects according to the designs submitted by architects. Among Badger's later commissions were the War Memorial, the great apes' cages at the Milwaukee County Zoo, the old First Wisconsin Bank Building on North Water Street, the YMCA Building, and the Telephone Company Building on Broadway. (Conversation with Harold V. Radsppinner, former president of Badger Wire, June 10, 1988; Bruce, Vol. III, p. 522; Milwaukee City Directory)

The school has continued in use to the present without significant exterior changes except for the 1961 addition of the featureless multi-purpose room.

#### **IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Emmanuel Philipp School, 4310 North 16<sup>th</sup> Street, be designated a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria one, five, six and seven of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 2-335(2)(e).

#### **X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES**

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. These guidelines shall be applicable only to the Emanuel Philipp School. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or the restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

##### **A. Roofs**

Retain the original roof shape. Dormers, skylights and solar collector panels may be added to roof surfaces if they are not visible from the street. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline, or pitch.

##### **B. Materials**

###### **1. Masonry**

- a. Unpainted brick, terra cotta or stone should not be painted or covered. This is historically incorrect and could cause

irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.

- b. Repoint defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting brick, terra cotta or stone surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration and the accumulation of dirt on the exterior of the building. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products that could have an adverse reaction with the masonry materials, such as the use of acid on limestone or terra cotta.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed.

## 2. Wood/Metal

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance.
- b. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Avoid covering architectural features with new materials that are inappropriate or were unavailable when the building was constructed.

## C. Windows and Doors

- 1. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds and sills, except as necessary to restore to the original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Avoid changing the size or configuration of window panes or sash.
- 2. Respect the building's stylistic period. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design of the original window sash or door. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements. Avoid the filling-in or covering of openings with inappropriate materials such as glass block. Avoid using modern style window units such as horizontal sliding sash in place of double hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There shall be no changes to the existing trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design and appearance.

E. Additions

The west and south elevations are integral to the structure's architectural significance. Additions are not recommended and require the approval of the Commission. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevation.

F. Non-Historic Additions

Alterations to non-historic portions of the building shall be made in such a way as to be as sympathetic as possible to the historic building. If possible, alterations should seek to lessen the adverse impact of the non-historic addition on the historic components of the structure.

G. Signs

The installation of any permanent exterior sign shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign with the historic and architectural character of the building.

H. Site Features

New plant materials, fencing, paving and lighting fixtures shall be compatible with the historic architectural character of the building.

I. Guidelines for New Construction

It is important that new construction be designed so as to be as sympathetic as possible with the character of the school.

1. Siting

New construction must respect the historic siting of the school. It should be accomplished so as to maintain the appearance of the school from the street as a free standing structure in a landscaped setting.

2. Scale

Overall building height and bulk, the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof, and individual building components such as overhangs and fenestration that are in close

proximity to the historic building must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the school.

3. Form

The massing of new construction must be compatible with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the school as a distinct free standing structure. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project and recede from the main block should express the same continuity established by the historic structure if they are in close proximity to the school.

4. Materials

The building materials that are visible from the public right-of-way and in close proximity to the school should be consistent with the colors, textures, proportions, and combinations of cladding materials used on the historic structure. The physical composition of the materials may be different from that of the historic materials, but the same appearance should be maintained.