

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

GOLDA MEIR SCHOOL

(Written Summer, 1988)

I. NAME

Historic: Fourth Street School

Common: Golda Meir School

II. LOCATION

1555 North Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive.

Tax Key No. 361-0204-000

Legal description: ORIGINAL PLAT OF THE TOWN OF MILW WEST OF THE RIVER IN
SEC (20 & 29)-7-22
BLOCK 24 ALL SD BLK 24 & PUBLIC LAND ADJ IN SD SUBD TID #8.

III. CLASSIFICATION

Building

IV. OWNER

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

V. YEAR BUILT

1889-90

Architect: Henry C. Koch & Co.

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Golda Meir School is located at the southeast corner of North Fourth and West Galena Streets about one-quarter of a mile northwest of the Central Business District. Sited at the crest of a hill in an area of low-rise industrial buildings, the school is one of the most prominent visual landmarks in that part of the city. The school property occupies an entire city block, most of which is paved or used as a playground.

The school is a rectangular, painted brick and limestone trimmed, hip-roofed, Romanesque Revival style structure that rises three stories above a raised basement that is fully exposed on all sides. Each of the four elevations is fully architecturally articulated to the point that there really is no "façade" or main

elevation, each being of about equal architectural importance. The addition of a boiler house and fire escapes to the west elevation have detracted from the design of this side of the building that was the original entrance front. The entrance is now located on the north or Galena Street side of the structure.

Each of the elevations employs a similar scheme of two stories of large grouped window bays with terra cotta spandrel panels unified by brick arcading above a rusticated limestone basement. The third story level is defined by a projecting stone beltcourse above which tall, narrow, flathead windows with transoms rise to a corbelled brick cornice. Gabled wall dormers with arched windows break the cornice line at the central bays of each elevation and projecting pavilion. The tall, steep, overhanging hipped roof is pierced by numerous massive rectangular chimneystacks ornamented with deep brick coffer paneling.

In terms of massing, the east and west elevations are composed of a three-bay recessed central gabled element, flanked by two projecting, three-bay-wide, hip-roofed pavilions. The seven-bay north and south elevations are flat except for the slightly projecting central bays that terminate at the attic level in gabled wall dormers. The rusticated flat-roofed, limestone powerhouse with its five-story tall, square, tapering, brick chimneystack is built in front of the west elevation obscuring portions of it.

The building is ornamented with stone belt courses, label molds, pinnacles, carved pilaster caps, and other decorative stonework. The terra cotta spandrel panels with their molded enframements, low relief foliage and lettering are particularly fine.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

The Golda Meir School is architecturally significant as a fine example of a Romanesque Revival school building by master architect Henry C. Koch. It is historically important for its associations with the life of the late Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir. The building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on August 2, 1984 and was declared a Milwaukee Landmark by the former Milwaukee Landmarks Commission in 1978.

VIII. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Golda Meir School was a product of the major expansion that the Milwaukee Public School system experienced in the 1880's and 1890's.

Brewer's Hill in the Sixth Ward was a densely populated area at an early date and schools had been established there as early as 1836. The first frame school buildings were replaced by a brick structure in 1852 that stood on Fourth Street between Cherry and Galena. This site had originally been set aside for a courthouse when the city was platted, but the courthouse was built east of the river instead. In 1872, the 1852 building was replaced by the more substantial Humboldt School. As enrollment grew, area residents demanded better facilities. The old Humboldt School was finally declared unhealthy and replaced by the present building. Public demand in this case went hand in hand with the goals of School Superintendent William Anderson. Anderson recognized the need for more school buildings as soon as he took office. During his tenure, 1883-1892, an unprecedented twenty-six school buildings were constructed. Anderson was also a progressive in curriculum revision and instituted mandatory German language classes as well as experimental physics and cooking classes.

The new Fourth Street School, as the Golda Meir School was originally known, was constructed in 1889 to the designs of architect H. C. Koch. He was selected architect as a result of a competition that also included E.T. Mix and Company. Mix's plans were deemed best by the press in terms of strength of construction and in lighting, but Koch's plans were ultimately chosen because of the larger floor space

they afforded. The general contractor was B.J. Danielson (\$45,800). The plumbing contract was awarded to Theo. Engel (\$1,678) and the steam fitting was done by M. Coogan (\$6,140). The building opened for use on September 2, 1890.

A one-story heating plant was added to the west side of the building in 1915 at a cost of \$14,000. Milwaukee architects Van Ryn and DeGelleke designed this addition. A fuel room was added in 1937. Fire escapes were completed and the enclosure of the stairways for fireproofing occurred in 1957. An interior and exterior renovation took place in 1976 under the direction of Wauwatosa architects Brust-Zimmerman, Inc. This included painting, woodwork refinishing, landscaping, and the addition of a new cafeteria at a cost of \$200,000. The 1976 renovation helped maintain its original appearance. The interior retains its original incised moldings with bull's eye corner blocks. The third floor contains a gymnasium with stained glass insets in the windows, while the rest of the structure houses sixteen classrooms.

Golda Meir is the most famous person associated with the Fourth Street School. Born in Russia in 1898, Golda and her family arrived in Milwaukee in 1906. There they were reunited with her father, Moshe Mabovitch, who had come to the U.S. in 1903 to find work. Political activity had surrounded Golda since childhood. Her sister's political associations had attracted attention and prompted the family's relocation to Milwaukee. Golda's family settled on Walnut Street where her mother operated a small store and her father worked as a carpenter. Although never financially successful, the family quickly assimilated into the Jewish immigrant community that had established itself on the southern slopes of Uihlein's Hill. Golda attended the Fourth Street School from 1906-12 and graduated as valedictorian. During her school days there, she displayed the initiative and determination that would characterize her later years. In 1908 she organized the American Young Sisters Society in order to provide textbooks to needy children. After finishing grade school, Golda began high school in Milwaukee, but her studies were interrupted by a stay in Denver due to a family dispute over her career. Upon her return to Milwaukee, Golda finished high school and began studies at the teacher's college (UW-Milwaukee today). It was during this time that her political sentiments were formulated.

Golda joined the Labor Zionists, in 1915 and lead marches and conducted rallies for them. She worked for various Jewish relief programs during the war. She also taught Yiddish at the Jewish Community Center. The decision to eventually settle in Israel was made in 1916. After convincing her fiancé to eventually emigrate, Golda married Morris Meyerson from Milwaukee in 1917. Golda dropped out of college and spent a brief time as librarian and traveled for the Labor Zionists. Throughout all of this activity, however, Milwaukee remained her home base where her parents and husband lived. Golda visited her old school during a brief visit to Milwaukee in 1969, not having seen Milwaukee since her departure for Israel in 1921.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDTION

Staff recommends that Golda Meir School, 1542 N. Fourth Street, be designated a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria one, three, five, six and nine 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 Gold Meir School. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or the restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

A. Roof

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 windowpanes 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

All of the 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 the height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the original building.

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 freestanding structure.

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 district freestanding structure. The profiles of roofs and buildings 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.