

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

TROWBRIDGE STREET SCHOOL

(Written Winter 1991)

I. NAME

Historic: Trowbridge Street School

Common: Same

II. LOCATION

1943 East Trowbridge Street

Tax Key Number: 503-0812-100

Legal Description: LAKE SIDE PARK NO 1 IN SW ¼ SEC 10-6-22 BLOCK 2 LOTS 1 TO 24 INCL & ALL OF VAC ALLEY ADJ ALSO (LOTS 1 & 2) EXC ALLEY IN BLK 2 IN SAVINGS & INV ASSN OF MILW SUBD NO 11 ADJ

III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

IV. OWNER

Milwaukee Public Schools
5225 W. Vliet Street
Milwaukee, WI 53208

V. YEAR BUILT

1894; 1909

Architect: Walter A. Holbrook

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Trowbridge Street School is located on the south side of East Trowbridge Street between South Delaware and South Mabbett Avenues. The school is set back from the street behind a lawn enclosed with an iron picket fence.

The Trowbridge School is a 2 1/2 –story, cream brick, slat-clad, hip-roofed, Queen Anne style structure erected in two phases in 1894 and 1909. The façade, which faces East Trowbridge Street, is exceptionally long and is composed of five sections. The massing of this elevation reflects its two construction phases. The original 1894 building comprises the eastern three sections including the entrance pavilion and its lower flanking classroom wings, while the 1909 enlargement includes the two westernmost classroom sections. Each of the four classroom sections is fenestrated with banks of large, double hung windows on the first and second

stories crowned by a broad hip-roofed dormer at the attic level. The entrance pavilion is a three story, hip-roofed block that projects slightly from the body of the building. The broad entrance portal is framed by a block rock-faced stone arch that is flanked by a pair of tall, narrow, one-over-one, wooden windows. At the second story level a broad, shallow oriel window is centered over the doorway flanked by a pair of one-over-one, arched windows. The third story is fenestrated with a band of six evenly spaced one-over-one windows each surmounted by a single light transom. A brick gable flanked by round flame topped pinnacles at the roofline bears a terra-cotta plaque with the words "Public School" in relief. The principal alterations to the façade have been the bricking-in of the second and third story windows on the west side of the entrance pavilion and the removal of the chimneystacks and belfry.

The east and west elevations are simply treated with pinnacle enframed gables in the center defining the staircase towers at each end of the building. One story, cream brick, flat roofed vestibules shelter the entrance at each end.

The south elevation clearly shows the two periods of construction. The original eastern three bays are symmetrically composed of lower side wings with long banks of double hung windows flanking the three story central section with its two-story bay window and tall, slate-clad hipped roof. The 1909 section is U-shaped in configuration and somewhat utilitarian in character with various types of windows. The roof is pierced by numerous hip-roofed dormers, several paneled chimneystacks, and the tall, square incinerator or furnace chimney.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

The Trowbridge Street School is architecturally significant as a fine example of a Victorian era schoolhouse by a noted Milwaukee architect. It is historically significant for its associations with the development of the Bay View Neighborhood.

VIII. HISTORY

Education was a priority for early Bay View and Town of Lake settlers, but it took some years before a formal board of school commissioners was established on the township level. Early attempts to set up formal schools were frequently sporadic efforts that were dependent on the charitable efforts of a particular family or small group of neighbors. Historian Bernard Korn indicates that even before churches were established, the pioneer residents of the Bay View area had opened a small school. Attendance was said to have been small since children were needed to clear the land and cultivate the fields.

Pioneer Alexander Stewart, whose homestead once stood at the northeast corner of Kinnickinnic Avenue and Becher Street, donated a tract of land for a public school building and also allowed the teacher to board with his family. Korn did not indicate the specific location of this school, but Stewart did own considerable property in the vicinity of his homestead. Another early school, the first on Howell Avenue, was started by pioneer James Howard, who secured a tutor from the east. The tutor instructed Howard's children and neighboring children. The Territorial Census of 1840 showed that out of 92 children under the age of 15 in the Bay View area, 20 were students and attended a village school, probably the one on Stewart's property. Children who lived too far away from these early schools were instructed either by their parents or had private tutors.

Formal township government was organized once the pioneer homesteads evolved into producing farms. At the first meeting of the Town of Lake, school commissioners were elected, but it took awhile to establish a municipally sponsored school. A modest frame

structure was ultimately built on today's East Bay Street in 1854. Funds for its operation were raised from the sale of the northeast quarter of Section 16, which by law had been set aside for school purposes. The school on East Bay Street was not well attended since many of the intended pupils lived too far away from the schoolhouse. A school building was also said to have been built on Nicholson Road south of the St. Francis Monastery grounds.

With the opening of the Milwaukee Iron Company in 1867 a village known as Bay View grew up around the company grounds and educational instruction became formalized. The school on East Bay Street became well attended, and by late December of 1870, 168 children were enrolled. (Milwaukee Sentinel 1870 December 22 4/3) A second frame school was built on Wentworth Avenue (originally Michigan Street) south of Russell Street. Tax rolls show that this site on Wentworth Avenue was school property as early as 1871. (Town of Lake Tax Rolls, 1871)

While still under township rule, a second and more imposing school was built on the Wentworth Avenue site in 1873. After its incorporation as a village in 1879, Bay View assumed operation of this school from the Town of Lake and constructed a branch school on Dover Street. These two structures were later taken over by the City of Milwaukee when Bay View was annexed in 1887. The first school on East Bay Street was eventually discontinued, that portion of the Town of Lake between the Kinnickinnic River and Lincoln Avenue having been absorbed by the City of Milwaukee at an early date. When Milwaukee annexed the village of Bay View in 1887, it continued to operate the old village schools on Dover and Wentworth Streets for a while, but eventually replaced both facilities. As the population of Bay View grew in the later nineteenth century, new schools were built. One of these was the Trowbridge Street School.

The Trowbridge Street School was built to replace the aging and obsolete 1873 village school on Wentworth Avenue and was the last of Bay View's schools to be constructed in the nineteenth century. The Wentworth Avenue facility had been targeted for replacement from the time the City of Milwaukee had annexed Bay View in 1887. Construction of the Dover Street School in 1980 had helped to alleviate the overcrowding on Wentworth Avenue, but it could not accommodate all the school age children in Bay View. As a result, to the school board's displeasure, the old Wentworth Avenue building had to be retained temporarily until a new facility could be built in the eastern portion of the neighborhood.

Between July, 1891 and March, 1892 the Common Council periodically considered the issue of building a new school, but got bogged down on the amount of money to be appropriated. The issue was still being debated in December of 1892. The lawmakers were somewhat pressured to make a decision when they learned that students had to be sent home from the Wentworth Avenue School in February of 1893 due to the lack of sufficient heat from the antiquated heating system. Nevertheless, it still took the Council until June 5th to finally appropriate \$35,000 for a new Bay View School to be located east of the Chicago and Northwestern tracks and south of Iron Street. Advertising for site proposals was authorized on August 7, 1893. (Proceedings of the Common Council, 1891-1892, p. 350, 881; 1892-1893, p. 559; 1893-1894, p. 96, 335, 160)

Site proposals were reviewed in September of 1893 and thirteen lots were ultimately purchased for \$4,727.00 in Lakeside Park Subdivision No. 1, fronting on Trowbridge Street between South Delaware and South Mabbett Avenues. The site had originally been part of a large picnic grove owned by a Mr. Schildknecht, whose house is still located at the southeast corner of South Kinnickinnic Avenue and East Trowbridge Street. The wooded property

sloped down toward East Rusk Street and a pond would form at the lowest portion after a heavy rain. (Proceedings of the Common Council, 1893-94, p. 487)

A call for plans for an eight-room school that could be enlarged to twelve rooms was made after October 1893 and eight architectural firms responded: Ferry & Clas, W.A. Holbrook; N. Dornbach; Alexander C. Eschweiler; O. C. Uehling; B. Kolpacki; Charles Lesser; Rau & Kirsch. Holbrook received the commission for the \$30,000 building. Details concerning the method of heating and boilers was still under consideration in August of 1894 as the building was nearing completion. (Proceedings of the Common Council, 1893-1894, p. 588, 589, 651, 652, 912, 95; Proceedings of the Common Council, 1894-1895, p. 248, 305)

A new school opened in the fall of 1894 and the bell from the Wentworth Avenue School was placed in the new structure. The building had four classrooms on each of its two main floors and an assembly room was located on the third or attic floor. A playroom was located in the basement. The hip roofed structure featured dormers and an oriel window above the entrance. Like other projects by Holbrook in this period, the building combined elements of Queen Anne and Romanesque design with a Queen Anne façade punctuated by a large Romanesque arched portal.

Until 1906, pupils attended the 17th District Primary School, as it was then called, from first through sixth grade and then completed seventh and eighth grades at the Dover Street School. After 1905, pupils attended Trowbridge School through eighth grade and the school was called the 17th District, Second Precinct School. The first class of twenty-two students graduated from Trowbridge in June of 1907 and the event was celebrated with a special program of music, recitations and lectures. Since 1912, when most schools were renamed for their street locations, the school has been known as the East Trowbridge Street School.

In 1909, a \$37,546 addition was built to the west side of the school, which doubled its size. By 1927, Trowbridge had eighteen classrooms and a small assembly hall. Perhaps the most famous student of Trowbridge was actor Spencer Tracey who attended school there before World War I and was remembered by students Pearl Disch Jopke and Sylvia Peruzzo Schworck in the Trowbridge History.

As a result of the playground movement, the school grounds were expanded to the south in the 1920's and a number of residences on the site were removed. The playground was enlarged again along South Mabbett Avenue in 1970.

Trowbridge Street School remains in essentially the same form as it was in 1909 although various partitions and stairways have been altered through the years and classrooms have been updated a number of times. Trowbridge is still in use as a grade school and enrollment as of January 1989 was 321 with a faculty of 17. (Building Permits, 1943 East Trowbridge; Proceedings of the Milwaukee Board of School Directors (MBSD), January 25, 1989, p. 722)

The Architect

Walter A. Holbrook (1/12/1849-3/26/1910) was born in Sacketts Harbor, New York and as a young man came to Wisconsin where he settled first in Oshkosh. There he was said to have studied under an architect named Ball. In 1869 Holbrook relocated to Milwaukee and began a lifelong career with the city's most prestigious architect, Edward Townsend Mix. Holbrook worked his way up from draftsman to architect and became Mix's partner in 1881 when the firm became known as E.T. Mix & Co. Holbrook continued the firm after Mix's death in 1890. Holbrook's chief draftsman, Hugh Guthrie, had begun work with the firm back in 1884. Guthrie

and Holbrook formed a brief partnership in 1898 under the name W.A. Holbrook & Co., which ended in 1900 when Holbrook retired from the practice of architecture due to poor health. Guthrie went on to a successful career with his new partner, Cornelius Leenhouts. Holbrook, meanwhile, spent his last years managing his real estate holdings, which included a number of apartment buildings including the Belvidere Flats at Eight and Wisconsin and the Holbrook flats on Knapp Street (both razed). Holbrook died while bicycling on State Street on March 26, 1910.

During his first decade with E.T. Mix, Holbrook is credited as having worked on the Chamber of Commerce Building (today's Mackie Building) and the Mitchell Building. Obituaries indicate that Holbrook worked on virtually all the major commissions of the firm through the 1880's including St. Paul's Episcopal Church; the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad Depot; the Northwest Guaranty Building in Minneapolis, Minnesota; and the Globe Building in St. Paul, Minnesota.

After Mix's death, Holbrook continued to specialize in large projects such as office buildings, commercial blocks, public schools, and libraries as well as "high class residences." The projects he executed in the 1890's were generally in the Queen Anne or Richardsonian Romanesque style and included: the Williams Free Library in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin (1890); the Friedman Row House at 1537-1545 North Cass Street, Milwaukee (1891); the Asbury Methodist-Episcopal Church at 800 West Washington Street, Milwaukee (1891); the Sentinel Building at 225 East Mason Street, Milwaukee (1892); Trowbridge Street School in Bay View, Milwaukee (1894); the William Holbrook Residence, 1518 North Cass Street, Milwaukee (1899), and the H.L. Kellogg Residence at 3285 North Hackett Street, Milwaukee (1899-1900).

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Trowbridge Street School, 1943 East Trowbridge Street, be designated as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-1, e-5 and e-6 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e), of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

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. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

A. Roofs

Retain the roof shape and 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. Retain the existing slate roofing and metal trim. If replacement is necessary, duplicate the appearance of the existing materials as closely as possible.

B. Materials

1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted brick or stone should not be painted or covered. Avoid painting or covering natural stone. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint or coating 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 limestone surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. 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.
- 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. Retain 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, doors, and hardware, except as necessary to restore the building to its 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. Use storm windows or protective glazing that have glazing configurations similar to the prime windows and that obscure the prime windows as little as possible.
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 on concrete block. Avoid using modern style window units in place of the existing sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There should 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, color and appearance.

E. Additions

The north, east and west elevations and roofline are integral to the structure's architectural significance. Additions 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, color and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevations.

F. Signs/Exterior Lighting

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.

G. Site Features

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