

PARNASSUS SCHOOL
300 Main Street
New Kensington
Westmoreland County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6180

HABS
PA
65-NEKEN
5-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, P.A. 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PARNASSUS SCHOOL

HABS NO. - PA-6180

Location: 300 Main Street, New Kensington, Westmoreland County,
Pennsylvania

USGS Pittsburgh West Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 17.604920.4489910

Present Owner: Redevelopment Authority of New Kensington, 421 Tenth Street, New
Kensington, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania.

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Parnassus School No 2 is significant to the New Kensington
community because of its unique architectural style. Its Spanish Mission
style is the only example of this style of architecture in the community of
New Kensington. (Parnassus merged with New Kensington in 1931.)

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of Erection: 1911-1912. The dates were determined from local newspaper articles, Sanborn Map Company maps, and date stone above the entrance of 1912.

2. Architect: Unknown.

3. Original Owner: School District of Parnassus. References to the Chain of Title to the land upon which the structure stands are in the office of the Recorder of Deeds, Westmoreland County Courthouse, Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

1911 Deed, June 27, 1911, recorded in Volume 524, p.524. J. G. Alter (widower) to the School District of the Borough of Parnassus (first parcel)

1913 Deed, August 18, 1913, recorded in Volume 540, p. 246. John McCartney Kennedy, et ux, to the School District of the Borough of Parnassus.

1931 The School District of the Borough of Parnassus merged with the New Kensington School District.

1965 The New Kensington School District and the Arnold School District merged to become the New Kensington - Arnold School District.

1971 Deed, May 11, 1971, recorded in Volume 2067, p. 875 New Kensington - Arnold School District to the Thomas Dillon Company, Inc.

1972 Deed, May 18, 1972, recorded in Volume 2097, p. 853. Thomas Dillon Company, Inc. to George and Dorothy Cohen.

1987 Deed, July 8, 1987, recorded in Volume 2749, p. 119. Dorothy Cohen (widow) to the Redevelopment Authority of the City of New Kensington.

Legal description of the property is as follows:

All those three certain lots, piece or parcel of land situate in the Borough of Parnassus, County of Westmoreland and the State Pennsylvania bounded and described as follows, to-wit:- BEGINNING at a point in the Southerly line of Lewis Alley, being a corner common to the property now or formerly owned by Mrs. Margaret Carson and the premises here described: thence Southerly along the line of property now or formerly owned by Margaret Carson, six (6) feet,

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more or less, to a point; thence Westerly along the line of property now or formerly owned by J. G. Alter, thirty (30) feet, more or less to a point in the Southerly line of Lewis Alley, and thence Easterly along the Southerly line of Lewis Alley, thirty two (32) feet, more or less, to the place of the beginning.

4. Builder, contractor, supplier: Unknown.
5. Original Plans and Construction: The original plans of the building do not exist. The property for the structure was purchased in 1911. There was no mention in the local paper as to who the architect or the builder was. Construction started in 1912 and was finished in 1913 just prior to the beginning of the basketball season. In "Public Schools of the Tri-Borough - The Parnassus Schools", located on page 1 of the August 29, 1912 Industrial Edition of the New Kensington Dispatch, the editor noted:

"The new building, which is under course of erection...will be modern building in every respect, being built of brick, stone and concrete and absolutely fireproof. It will contain 8 rooms for school purposes and a splendid large gymnasium which is provided with a stage, making the room suitable for amateur theatricals and other entertainments."

The school was constructed with 4 classrooms on each floor and with a principal's office over the entrance on the second floor. The gymnasium/auditorium was located in the basement along with the Boys Shop.

The original appearance of the structure has not been altered since it was constructed. An historic view of the building can be found in the New Kensington Local History Slide Collection of the Steel Industry Heritage Corporation, Homestead, Pennsylvania.

6. Alterations and Additions: As the population of the community increased due to work in the local mills, so did the number of pupils who attended the school. In 1923, the Borough of Parnassus School Board undertook the construction of an addition which was completed in 1924. The new addition included a gymnasium with locker rooms in the basement, an auditorium and three classrooms on the first floor and 5 classrooms on the second floor.

It is hard to determine any additional alterations to the interior due to its deteriorated, altered condition.

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B. Historical Content

The building was originally constructed as a Junior - Senior High School for the Borough of Parnassus. The Board of Directors of the School Board purchased the property of W. C. Morrison. The school building was completed in 1913 and it is unknown whether there was a formal opening. Walter Genbigler was the principal and there were five (5) teachers. The curricula consisted of straight academic subjects and sports, particularly basketball, which was to use the newly completed gymnasium.

In 1920, Professor W. Johnson came to the Parnassus High School as a history teacher and soon advanced to the job as principal. As principal he was instrumental in introducing science courses to the curriculum, and for planning the addition to the building. While the addition was under construction, classes were conducted in the second floor of the Town Hall which was located just down the street.

When the Borough of Parnassus consolidated with the Borough of New Kensington, the school became a Junior High School and the senior high school students went to Kensington High School.

The school district continued to use the building until 1971, when it was sold. After passing through several hands, the Redevelopment Authority purchased the building in 1987 for possible reuse as middle-income apartments. Unfortunately, this plan did not come to fruition.

In 1989, the addition was demolished due to its deteriorated condition. At some point in time, all the plumbing fixtures and black boards were removed from the building and salvaged.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Parnassus School No. 2 is the only Spanish Mission style building in the Parnassus-New Kensington area.
2. Condition of fabric: The general condition of the building is poor to deteriorated. The original slate roof has two very large holes. When the rear addition was removed, the supporting joists were left as is, causing subsequent disruption of the roofing system. There is also evidence of water damage behind the parapet and at the two stair towers on the Main Street facade. When the rear addition was demolished, the electricity was unhooked and all of the windows were covered. There is evidence of pigeon infestation.

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The first floor was used as a haunted house and was completely painted black with other colors for dramatic effects. The debris from the haunted house is still left within the structure.

B. Description of the Exterior

1. Overall dimension: The overall dimension of the building is 115 feet by 55 feet. The building has approximately four bays across the front and two bays along the side and is two and a half stories tall. The two middle bays are separated by the entrance to the building.
2. Foundation: The foundation of the building is four courses of rough cut sandstone with a quarterround watertable on top.
3. Walls: The exterior of the building is constructed of yellow brick masonry construction. Red brick is used throughout the building as decorative elements. Red brick headers are used at the top of the stair towers to form two (2) "X's". Red Brick headers and soldiers are used around the top and both sides of all the windows and in between the first and second floor windows. They are also used as a base for the "X's". Terra cotta is used extensively throughout the exterior of the building. It can be found on the capstones of the parapet, quioning, date-stone, ocular window, and around the entrance and the second floor gothic windows.
4. Structural systems, framing: The exterior of the building is constructed of brick masonry construction with exterior walls of vitrified clay tile over reinforced concrete construction and plaster walls. The interior of the stair towers and second floor near the Main Street facade has been subject to water from the leaking roof and is in a deteriorated condition.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: The major entrance into the building is flanked by terra cotta ionic capped pilasters supporting a terra cotta ogee arch and entablature. Carved within the entablature is PARNASSUS SCHOOL NO. 2. On top of the entablature is a terra cotta balustrade of 18 terra cotta balusters.
6. Chimneys: There are two chimneys located immediately on either side of the parapet on the ridgeline.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and Doors: The main entrance into the building is through two sets of double doors. These doors are not the originals and were installed

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when the building was used as a haunted house. It is surmised the original entrance was recessed where the second set of doors stands today.

There may have been other entrances associated with the addition, but due to its demolition and existence of heavy vegetation around the basement of the school building, it is hard to discern.

- b. Windows and shutters: The windows throughout the building were all one-over-one sash. There were four sets of windows in each classroom on the front and the rear, and two sets of three windows, one set in each class room, on the sides. A single, one-over-one sash was used in each coat closet and in the stair towers. The triple gothic windows over the entrance were also one-over-one.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape and covering: The roof is a hipped gable slate roof.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: The roof eaves extend approximately two feet beyond the facade. The fascia is constructed with tongue and grove paneling. There is no evidence of a gutter system.
- 9. Dormers, cupolas, tower: The two towers on the front of the building are stair towers with scissor stairs.

C. Description of the Interior

1. Floor Plans: The two floors of the building are identical. There are 4 classrooms, symmetrically located front to back, and are 31 feet by 25 feet with a coat closet separating the classroom from the stair tower or bathroom. The stair towers are located opposite the hall from the the mens and womens restrooms. On the interior walls of each classroom are the slate chalk boards.

In the basement, the gymnasium(then home economics room) was originally located on the right hand side with the boys shop on the left. The flooring in this room has been completely destroyed and dirt is visible in this area.

2. Stairways: there are two stairwells located on either side of the front entrance of the building. There are concrete scissor stairs with metal hand rails and balusters.
3. Flooring: The flooring was wood. It is hard to determine its finish and color due to the amount of debris on the first floor and deteriorated plaster on the second.

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4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls were all plaster and are in various stages of disrepair due to water damage and damage from the haunted house. The slate black boards were supported by wooden moldings and chalk trays. The baseboards are six inches in height. Most of the chalkboards have been removed and the plaster is damaged due to moisture and removal of the chalk boards.

5. Openings:

1. Doorways and doors: It is hard to determine the number of doors due to their removal and to the extent of damage from the haunted house.

2. Windows: The windows were all one-over-one sash. It is hard to determine the hardware due to damage prior to being covered.

6. Decorative features and trim: It is hard to determine the extent of the decorative features due to the water damage within the structure.

7. Hardware: It is hard to determine the type of hardware due to the extent of the damage within the structure.

8. Mechanical equipment: The blower unit was located in the front of the basement and was manufactured by the Massachusetts Fan Company, Watertown, Massachusetts. The boiler room was opposite the fan room on the back side of the building.

9. Original furnishings: There were no original furnishings left within the building.

D. Site

1. Compass direction: The Main Street facade faces west and is located on the intersection of Third Street and Main Street.

2. Landscaping: According to a historic post card there were two street trees located in the front yard of the structure. There was no other landscaping features on the property.

3. Outbuildings: There are no outbuildings associated with the property.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

Very basic floor plans of the building were prepared in 1988 for the Redevelopment Authority of New Kensington by Dorin + Mijlin Associates, Inc. 229 Commercial Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15216. These floor plans were not in reproducible condition and were very poor. The blue prints for these plans are in the offices of the
☐ Redevelopment Authority of New Kensington, 421 Tenth Street, New Kensington, Pennsylvania.

B. Historic Views:

A post card of the Parnassus School is part of the slide collection, made as part of local history project, of the Steel Industry Heritage Corporation, 338 9th Street, 1st Floor, Homestead, Pennsylvania.

C. Interviews:

None.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deeds

References to the Chain of Title to the land upon which the structure stands are in the office of the Recorder of Deeds, Westmoreland County Courthouse, Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

Maps

Sanborn Map Company, 11 Broadway, New York, New Kensington, 1915, sheet 19.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Clippings

"High School Notes - Parnassus High", New Kensington Dispatch, December 5, 1912, p. unknown, c.2.

"Large Brick Dwelling House for Sale", New Kensington Dispatch, June 29, 1911, p. unknown, c.2.

"New School Building", New Kensington Dispatch, June 8, 1911, p. unknown, c.7.

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"Public Schools of the Tri-Borough - The Parnassus Schools", Industrial Edition,
New Kensington Dispatch, August 29, 1912, Section two, p.1, c.2.

References

The Women's Club of New Kensington, Lore of Yore, New Kensington, Buhl
Brothers, 1986, p. 27-28.

E. ☐ Likely Sources not yet investigated: The architecture firm to see if they still have
measured drawings of the building.

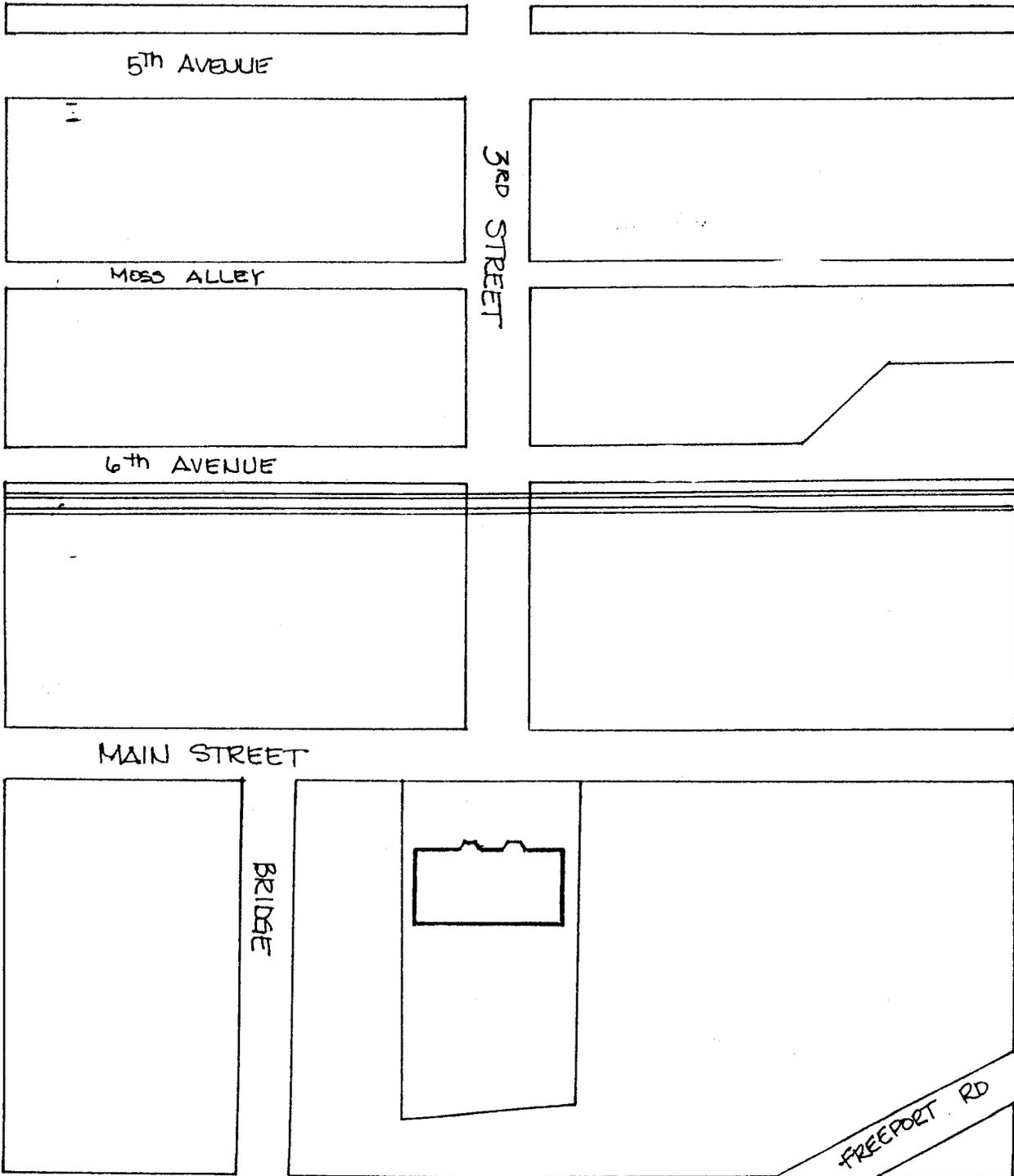
F. Supplemental Information: Unknown.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

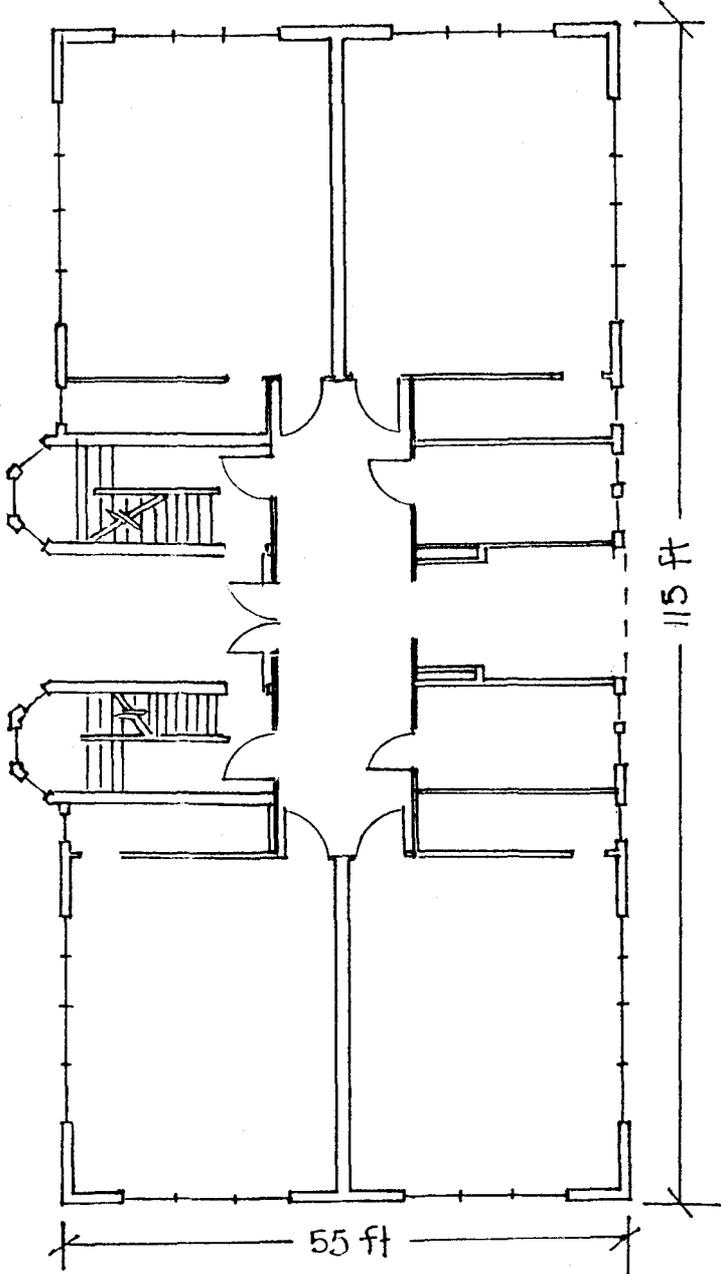
The Federal Agency involved in the project is the Department of Housing and Urban
Development through Community Development Block Grant funds. The funds will be used to
demolish the building due to its deteriorated condition. Demolition is based on City Engineers
Inspection Report, Parnassus School, City of New Kensington, September 30, 1994. The report
was prepared by Benchmark Engineering & Construction Co., Inc., P.O. Box 53, Laughlintown,
Pennsylvania, 15655-0053. The HABS Report will satisfy conditions placed on the project
according to the Memorandum of Agreement between the Pennsylvania State Historic
Preservation Officer and the City of New Kensington on June 8, 1995.

Prepared by: Bonnie J. Wilkinson
Title: President, B. Wilkinson & Associates, Inc.
Affiliation: Consultant
Date: November 15, 1995.

II. GRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION
A. Site Plan



B. Sketch floor plan
1. First Floor



- B. Sketch floor plan
- 2. Second Floor Plan

