

Rochester Free Academy  
(Board of Education Building)  
13 South Fitzhugh Street  
Rochester  
Monroe County  
New York

HABS No. NY-5656

HABS  
NY,  
28- ROOM,  
36-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NY-5656

ROCHESTER FREE ACADEMY (BOARD OF EDUCATION BUILDING)

NY,  
28-ROCH,  
36-

Location: 13 South Fitzhugh Street, the west side between West Main and Broad Streets, Rochester, Monroe County, New York

Present Owner and Occupant: Board of Education, City of Rochester

Present Use: Administration Building

Statement of Significance: This high-styled, public structure designed by Rochester's noted architect of the third quarter of the nineteenth century, is one of the four buildings located within the City Hall Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1872-73.
2. Architect: Andrew Jackson Warner. Warner was also the architect of the Powers Building (HABS No. NY-5649).
3. Original and subsequent owners: Lot 86 of 100 Acre Tract.  
 1825 Deed, May 24, 1825, Book 6, p. 303.  
 From: Nathaniel Rochester, Charles H. Carroll, executor for Charles Carroll deceased, and William Fitzhugh.  
 To: Frederick F. Backus, Jacob Gould, Samuel Wicks, as trustees of School District No. 2  
 "... and their successors in office forever ..."  
 For: \$.01.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: W. H. Gorsline, general contractor, \$102,000.00; Sherlock and Sloan, heating, about \$12,000.00; Siddons and Son, plumbing, \$1,800.00; Banning, graining.
5. Original plan: Unknown.

6. Alterations and additions: There have been no additions. The interior has been remodeled.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The present building is the fourth which has been erected on this site. Upon completion, it could accommodate four hundred students, a library and office. In 1904, following the completion of two new high schools, the building became the Municipal Court and Education Building. Since 1926, the building has been occupied by the Board of Education. The first classes were held in 1874. The boys' school was located on the second floor; the girls' school located on the third floor. "In the language of the Hon. L. H. Morgan, the 'Free Academy is simply a special common school,--a finishing school, located in the center of a group of schools, for which the others are so many primary departments. It assumes that every common school, if possible, ought to be of equal grade with the Free Academy, which expresses the full development of the system.' The school was organized in September, 1857, as the Central High School, and chartered by the regents of the University in 1862 under the name of the Rochester Free Academy. The following persons constitute the faculty: N. W. Benedict, D. D., principal, ancient languages; James M. Wells, A. M., vice-principal, Latin and elocution; Martha E. Gaylord, preceptress, higher mathematics, elocution, mental philosophy, moral science; Mrs. Helen B. Case, assistant preceptress, Latin, French, English literature and composition; Caroline R. Wilkinson, rhetoric, composition, reading elocution, and logic; Lucy R. Pope, algebra, history, composition, and elocution; Charles Forbes, M. D., natural sciences and drawing; Alexander Trzeciak, German." Prof. W. H. McIntosh, History of Monroe County, New York, 1876.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: An etching and plans were published in Prof. W. H. McIntosh, History of Monroe County, New York, 1876.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deeds, Office of Monroe County Clerk.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Federal Writers Project, Works Progress Administration, State of New York. American Guide Series Rochester and Monroe County. Rochester: Scrantom's, 1937.

McGregor, Laura A. "History of Public Schools in Rochester, New York." Centennial History of Rochester, New York, Jubilee. Edited by Edward R. Foreman. Rochester: John P. Smith Company, Inc., 1934.

McIntosh, Prof. W.H. History of Monroe County, New York. Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign and Everts, 1876.

Peck, William F. Landmarks of Monroe County, New York. Boston: The Boston History Company, 1895.

Schmidt, Carl and Ann. Architecture and Architects of Rochester, N.Y. Rochester: Society of Architects, 1959.

2. Likely sources not yet investigated: George Eastman photographic collection, records and histories of the Board of Education.

Prepared by Kevin Patrick Harrington  
Society for the Preservation  
of Landmarks in  
Western New York  
November 2, 1966

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The High Victorian Gothic character of this structure is mingled with the Neo-Grec decorative motifs to produce a high-styled building not unlike those of Frank Furness in Philadelphia and Peter B. Wight in New York.
2. Condition of fabric: The structure is in good condition.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Eighty-three feet by one hundred and thirty feet; five bay facade; four stories; four-and-one-half story northeast tower; rectangular with projecting corner bays.
2. Foundations: The foundations are dressed blue limestone.

3. Wall construction: The red brick finely coursed walls have horizontal banding of Ohio and Gainesville stone.
4. Structural system, framing: The load bearing masonry walls support a wood floor system which has been reinforced by steel I-beams.
5. Chimneys: There are no visible chimneys.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Originally there were seven stepped entrances located in projections: three on the east facade; one each in the center of the north and south facades; one each facing east in the west corner projections. Today the center east entrance, the auxiliary entrance to the south and a rear service entrance remain open. All doors are set in recessed pointed arched doorways. The east flanking entrances, now blocked and filled with double hung windows, contained paired doors framed by three Ionic-like smooth-shafted columns which support the denticulated lintel and the filled and pierced upper arch. The arches contain two pointed, arched, triangular windows and a small recessed decorative circular panel. The elevated single projecting east central entrance is topped by a gable which contains the filled and pierced upper arch. A recessed decorative circular panel is flanked by small triangular piercings. The recessed door is framed by Ionic-like smooth-shafted columns set against blocky, chamfered piers. The other entrances are more simply treated.
  - b. Windows: On the east facade, all windows of the first and second floors and all doorways are finished with flat arched caps composed of alternating colors of Ohio and Gainesville stone. The window caps of the first and second stories are filled with stone deeply etched with a floral stencil-like motif. Third story windows in the center east section are arcaded with the window caps supported by the columns. The third story windows of the corner projections are framed similarly to the flanking entrances. The three fourth story windows in the south projection have arcaded window caps. The pair in the northeast projection are treated as single units, each with a recessed rectangular panel surrounding an etched pointed

arched stone panel. All other windows are similarly treated in an ascending order of lightness and complexity.

7. Roof: The east central section has a red slate-covered mansard roof pierced by three dormers. The center gable dormer has two lancet windows framed by columns. The jerkin-headed dormers have flat, eared, etched framing. The gable roof of the southeast corner projection contains a recessed circular panel with "1872" carved in relief. The northeast corner projection is treated as a tower, with a steeply pitched, slate-covered hipped roof pierced with an elaborately framed two-part gable dormer to the east and two steeply angled, projecting decorative gables fitted with molded and decorated triangular panels to the south. The central east-west section and west corner projections are all finished with mansard roofs and dormers. Most roof lines are finished with molded eaves supported by elaborate brackets. Originally all ridges were fitted with wrought iron cresting. A weather vane was mounted atop the northeast tower.
8. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: All entrances had projecting stone steps with handrails. The east center entrance retains this detail.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The center entrance of the east facade provides access to the lobby. Originally this entrance provided access only to the office of the Superintendent of Schools. The entrances in the corner projections provided access to four stairwells. Only the main staircase in the southeast corner and that in the southwest corner remain. Others have been closed and made into office space. Originally on the upper floors the stair halls opened into two large, sixty-four feet by thirty-one feet, classrooms. Two recitation rooms were located in the east and west center sections. The library, Board of Education room, and laboratories were on the first floor. The third floor center section was one large room. The fourth floor was occupied by a hall sixty-one feet by ninety feet, with seating capacity for one thousand people. The basement contained furnace, closets, coal bins, etc.
2. Stairways: The main stairway in the southeast corner

projection has an open, four story well fitted with heavily molded mahogany handrail and carved balusters and newel post.

3. Flooring: Most floors are of narrow strip hardwood now covered with linoleum. Terrazzo floors were laid in the lobby and southeast stair hall approximately forty years ago.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls and ceilings are plaster. Zenitherm walls in the lobby resemble marble, ashlar masonry.
5. Doorways and doors: All woodwork is molded and was originally painted a light color. Most doors are five feet by ten feet, paneled, with graining by Banning.
6. Special decorative features: A tablet of Ohio sandstone, cut with the names of officials interested in the construction of the building, is located in the lobby.
7. Hardware: All original hardware is in place.
8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating: At the time of construction, it was said that "There is no building of its kind in the state which is heated both by direct and indirect radiators, and has the ventilating shafts in connection therewith." (Prof. W. H. McIntosh, History of Monroe County, New York.)
  - b. Lighting: All fixtures are contemporary.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building stands on the west side of South Fitzhugh Street. St. Luke's Episcopal Church (HABS No. NY-5654) stands to the south. There is a parking lot to the rear of the building.
2. Historic landscape design: The structure nearly fills its site. Originally the Academy owned one half of the lot to the north which was enclosed by an iron fence.

Prepared by Amy Hecker

Society For the Pre-  
servation of Land-  
marks in Western New  
York

March 10, 1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project of twenty-six selections of historical and architecturally significant Rochester structures was undertaken in 1966, by the Society for the Preservation of Landmarks in Western New York, Inc., Mrs. Patrick Harrington, Executive Director, in cooperation with the Historic American Buildings Survey, James C. Massey, Chief. The project was under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Senior Historian. Architectural and historical descriptions were contributed by the Society for the Preservation of Landmarks in Western New York, Inc. General photographic documentation was undertaken by Hans Padelt, Senior Engineer, Graflex, on a contractual basis with Historic American Buildings Survey. The final documentation and editing was done by Susan R. Slade in 1978, for transmittal to the Library of Congress and the impending publication of the Historic American Buildings Survey New York State catalogue.