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## HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 11-23

### **Park View School (including the auditorium interior)**

**3570 Warder Street, NW**

**Square 3033, Lot 830**

Meeting Date: May 24, 2012  
Applicant: Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1A  
Affected ANC: 1A  
Staff Reviewer: Tim Dennee

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After careful consideration, the HPO recommends that the Board designate Park View School, 3570 Warder Street, NW, a landmark to be entered in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, including the interior of the auditorium, and that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places with a positive recommendation for listing as of local significance, with a period of significance of 1916 to 1931, to include the period of its construction and expansion. The property meets D.C. designation Criterion D and National Register of Historic Places Criterion C as an exemplar of a particular type and era of public school. As such, it is eligible for designation under the multiple-property document *Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960* as an example of the property sub-type “The Office of the Municipal Architect, Snowden Ashford, 1909-1921”:

The buildings designed during this period include the Renaissance, Elizabethan, and Gothic style buildings favored by Municipal Architect Snowden Ashford and the private architects with whom he contracted. They are of brick and are decorated with limestone and tile....

### **Background**

In 1886, Benjamin H. Warder purchased the twenty-acre former estate of Asa Whitney adjoining the Old Soldiers’ Home, intending to subdivide it for residential use. Known as “Whitney Close,” the tract saw some interest from purchasers of suburban-type lots, but little construction before the turn of the century. It was then that a new name for the neighborhood, Park View, was adopted, reflecting the proximity of the park-like Soldier’s Home. An explosion of rowhouse development came after 1904, and a new citizens’ association formed in 1908.

Development was so rapid that by 1911, the Citizens’ Association was demanding an elementary school for the neighborhood’s 600 children, most of whom were pupils at the Hubbard and Petworth Schools.<sup>1</sup> Denied an appropriation for a typical eight-room school that year, in 1912 the neighborhood was granted two portable classrooms that were immediately serving 100 students and turning away more. Based on the overwhelming demand, the Citizens’ Association

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<sup>1</sup> That is to say, white children, as both the schools and most new housing developments such as Park View were then racially segregated.

began to win commitments for a twelve-room school, to serve some of the now 900 neighborhood children before Municipal Architect Snowden Ashford began drawings for a *sixteen*-room school in September 1914.

Although not much bigger than many of the later extensible schools, Park View, completed in 1916, is more imposing for its Collegiate Gothic or Elizabethan architecture—with elaborate limestone detail, high parapets and raised basement—more similar to contemporaneous high schools than to the modest Victorian and Colonial Revival elementary schools that preceded and followed it. A Jacobean balustrade encloses a raised, brick entry court. And very unusual for an elementary school, an auditorium wing backs the central entry/administrative block. Matching the ornate building exterior, the auditorium’s timber purlin and principal-rafter system is supported by elaborate, Medieval-looking scissor trusses. Congress had appropriated \$135,000 for the project, but builder Wells Brothers won the contract with a low bid of \$120,000.

Total enrollment in the school’s first year was 740. Attendance grew steadily, and the school was soon overcrowded. With more than 1,000 students at the end of 1920, the Board of Education began constructing portable classrooms at the rear of the building. At opening, even the auditorium was said to be “hardly adequate now to meet the demands of the growing community.” Thirty-two classes soon occupied the entire building and five portables. As a consequence, Park View School was the first in the District to employ the “Platoon System,” relieving overcrowding by rotating classes between academic classrooms, physical education, and arts and manual training. Still, by 1926, a permanent expansion was necessary. Two classroom and gymnasium wings, swept back from the original wings to leave their secondary facades exposed but designed to match the building’s architecture, were completed in 1931 at double the cost of the initial construction.

### **Evaluation**

Park View Elementary is *sui generis*. While it is consistent with the school property subtype associated with the first municipal architect, Snowden Ashford, it is unique for its 700-seat auditorium. No other elementary school before 1949 had its own dedicated auditorium, although some had gymnasium/cafeteria/auditorium spaces. And such multipurpose rooms did not compare to this soaring space, with its balcony and remarkable, complicated trusses, clearly calculated to serve as a public meeting and performance venue. Inside and out, Park View is a superior specimen of the public elementary school.

The school as a whole is an excellent example of Elizabethan Revival architecture, lauded at the time for its expanse of windows, as well as technical improvements such as steam heat. The Tudor and Gothic styles were favorites of Snowden Ashford, evocative of traditional institutions of higher learning and thought particularly appropriate to educational use. In this, Ashford was opposed by the new U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, established in 1910. The Commission preferred classical and post-Renaissance modes, soon settling on the Colonial Revival for elementary schools beyond the city center. In this instance, Ashford’s vision won out.

The reason for construction of the auditorium lay in the vision for the school’s use. In good Progressive fashion, the new building was to serve as “a school social center,” “designed for the use of adults as well as children,” and “as inviting at night to the adult residents of that section as it is beneficial to the children during the day.” In a Thanksgiving address in the school auditorium, U.S. Commissioner of Education Philander Claxton told the Park View Citizens’

Association, “We are getting away from the idea that the school is for children alone, and it is coming to be the place of meeting for all, and it should be even more extensively used than it is.” The auditorium soon hosted plays, orchestral performances, scholastic and graduation exercises, elections and, of course, the regular meetings of the Citizens’ Association. In the early 1960s, U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy addressed the students there and discussed such issues as Civil Rights, at a school that had desegregated only a few years earlier.

The provision of the auditorium and the accommodation of intensive community use were not accidental, but rather a calculated result of the advocacy of the Park View Citizens’ Association. While most of the schools of this era had been requested by their respective neighborhood citizens groups, Park View is an exemplar of that kind of civic advocacy. The young Citizens’ Association, and especially its indefatigable leader, John G. McGrath, had demanded first the temporary classrooms then construction of a permanent school. It insisted on naming it “Park View,” contrary to the “Lemon G. Hine” preferred by Hine’s successors on the D.C. Board of Commissioners (and ultimately assigned to a Capitol Hill school). It pushed for a larger playground, now the Park View Recreation Center. The Citizens’ Association wanted the school to be a true community center for an area that still lacked much retail and institutional buildings. By spring 1917 the members had begun a food cooperative in the basement. It was soon joined by a post office branch. The strapped Board of Education adopted other Progressive measures such as “platooning” the many classes.

Despite its conservative architectural style, Park View School was up to the minute in design for its building systems and naturally lit classrooms and progressive in its provision of adult education, community-use spaces, and extensive playgrounds.