

BUILDING-STRUCTURE INVENTORY FORM

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
NEW YORK STATE PARKS AND RECREATION
ALBANY, NEW YORK (518) 474-0479

UNIQUE SITE NO.
QUAD
SERIES
NEG. NO.

YOUR NAME: Azhar S. Tyabji
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ORGANIZATION (if any): Cornell University

DATE: Spring, 1994
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IDENTIFICATION

- 1. BUILDING NAME(S): The Corning Free Academy
- 2. COUNTY: Steuben TOWN/CITY: Corning VILLAGE:
- 3. STREET LOCATION: 11 West Third Street
- 4. OWNERSHIP: a. public b. private
- 5. PRESENT OWNER: Corning-Painted Post School District
ADDRESS: 165 Charles Street, Painted Post, New York
- 6. USE: Original: Public School Present: Public School
- 7. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road Yes No
Interior accessible: Yes No Explain:

DESCRIPTION

- 8. BUILDING MATERIAL: a. clapboard b. stone c. brick d. board & batten
e. cobblestone f. shingles g. stucco other: terra cotta, concrete
- 9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM: a. wood frame with interlocking joints
b. wood frame with light members
c. masonry load bearing walls
d. metal (explain)
e. other
- 10. CONDITION: a. excellent b. good c. fair d. deteriorated
- 11. INTEGRITY: a. original site b. moved if so, when?
c. list major alterations and dates (if known):
See Continuation Sheet
- 12. PHOTO: 13. MAP:

14. THREATS TO BUILDING: a. none known[X] b. zoning[] c. roads[]
d. developers[] e. deterioration[]
f. other: 10/99 School district considering
abandoning as school.
15. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS AND PROPERTY: a. barn[] b. carriage house[]
c. garage[]
d. privy[] e. shed[]
f. greenhouse[]
g. shop[] h. gardens[]
i. landscape features: See
Continuation Sheet

j. other:

16. SURROUNDINGS OF THE BUILDING: (Check more than one if necessary)
a. open land[] b. woodland[]
c. scattered buildings[X]
d. densely built-up[] e. commercial[]
f. industrial[] g. residential[X]
h. other:

17. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDINGS AND SURROUNDINGS:

See Continuation Sheet

18. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING AND SITE:
(Including interior features if known):

See Continuation Sheet

SIGNIFICANCE

19. DATE OF INITIAL CONSTRUCTION: 1922

ARCHITECT: Howard Greenley

BUILDER: J.E. Vroman Company, Hoboken, New Jersey

20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:

See Continuation Sheet

21. SOURCES:

See Continuation Sheet

22. THEME:

11c. MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND DATES:

In 1937, the third floor of the wings were added. In 1972, a gymnasium on the basement level was added. This gymnasium features unique synthetic rubber floors. [My information from here on is incomplete.]

15i. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS AND PROPERTY:

The building is a single unit, with no outbuildings on the property. The structure is fronted on the west facade by an open playground. The structure is built on a site which slopes northward down the hill. Thus, its "fourth" (basement) story cannot be seen along East Third Street, but may be discerned when viewed from the east facade along Pine Street.

INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS:

Although the building is set uniformly back from the street, it is inconsistent with its neighbors in size and east-to-west separation.

18. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING AND SITE:

This three-story five-bay brick structure consists of a rectangular block with a projecting bay at the center of the facade. This projecting bay is flanked by hyphenated projecting wings along the east and west facades of the building. Two 'hyphens' separate the three projecting bays on the south facade. The structure is an adaptation of a commercial arcaded block with classical-Romanesque Revival highlights, as described in Gottfried and Jennings' American Vernacular Design, 1870-1940. The Corning Free Academy displays features illustrative of this type of commercial structure, including stylistic elements such as round-headed arches above one-over-one double-hung sash with continuous lintels, belt courses separating the stories, a central pedimented entrance with a frieze, and solid massing, all with an overall symmetry evocative of the 'office block' designs of H.H. Richardson and Louis Sullivan, two prominent late 19th century American architects. This corner property, in the words of Gottfried and Jennings, captures "a rich design vocabulary stemming from the history of business-block development after the Civil War and the introduction of a new sensibility." The unique character of the building is enhanced by its terra cotta ornamentation in the form of symbolic medallions, corbelled belt courses, and lintels highlighting the patterned brickwork, all of which give the impression of variable textures on each facade.

The entrance to the building is on the south (main) facade, located centrally behind wide brick steps on the first story level of a three-story projecting bay. The entrance consists of multi-light double doors which are recessed in the projecting bay beneath a wide corbelled arch. The steps to the entrance are flanked on either side by wrought-iron lamp posts set on a high brick platform. There are three linked arched windows on the second-story level of the central projecting bay, set upon terra cotta corbelled brackets. The words "CORNING FREE ACADEMY" are engraved on the continuous terra cotta sill of the windows. The windows

have blind arches decorated with terra cotta reliefs of ceremonial trophies and emblems. According to an article in the 1923 issue of the Corning Evening Leader, a terra cotta frieze, designed by the New York sculptor Louis Lentelli, shows youth representing "the Arts and Sciences seeking Knowledge, a woman seated in their midst. To right and left are terra cotta medallions, one bearing the seal of the city of Corning and the other the seal of Steuben County." The frieze is crowned by a large blind arch, in which is centered a round window. Small arched niches with free-standing terra cotta turned posts flank the blind arch on either side on the third story level. The entire projecting bay is topped with a triangular pediment with a patterned cornice of brick.

The south facade consists of three stories, each with a continuous series of arched one-over-one double-hung sash. The first story level has one-over-one double-hung windows slightly recessed in the facade, resting on a continuous corbelled terra cotta belt course patterned with vegetal and dentil-like forms, and with periodic terra cotta lintels. There are corbelled brackets at the base of the pilasters separating each window. The second story repeats the features on the first story level, with the added feature of linked blind arches crowning the windows, reinforcing the continuity of the one-over-one double-hung sash on the facade. The third-story one-over-one double-hung windows are shorter in height, and echo the same features as those on the second story level excepting open arches interspersed with decorative medallions and periodic rectangular pediments on the pilasters. Brick turrets accentuate the flat roofs of the two wings on the southeast and southwest corners of the facade. The reentrant angles in the ell formed by the projecting wings feature three-story-tall blind arcades, the arches of which are interspersed with terra cotta medallions, and on the basement level the words "BOYS" and "GIRLS" engraved on the terra cotta belt courses above respective entrances.

The west facade mirrors the east facade. Both facades consist of three bays divided by shallow pilasters. Their fenestration and ornamentation are organized in a manner similar to that on the south facade, with the exception of the corner bays, which have two-story-tall blind arches covering the first and second stories, and a set of blind arches interspersed with terra cotta medallions on the third story level.

The rear of the building is characterized by a three-quarter-length continuous bay flanked by recessed bays at the northeast and northwest corners. Each recessed bay features one-over-one double-hung sash surmounted by arched fanlights in the reentrant angles of the ell formed by the recessed bays. While the corner bays reflect a pattern of fenestration similar to that of other facades, they also reveal a basement story accentuated with arched fanlights at the ground level.

The building has a poured concrete foundation. A central brick bell-tower rises above the third story of the building, featuring arcades near the top beneath a continuous terra cotta lintel. The bell-tower has operable clock dials on all facades. The tower has a hipped, tiled roof with pronounced overhanging eaves.

20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:

For the past seven decades, the Corning Free Academy has been reflective of a high standard of educational and architectural achievement in the Southern Tier of New York. Its architectural composition, conceived by well-known New York architect Howard Greenley, continues to stand out amid lesser buildings in Corning, as a monument to the city's progressive attitude toward technology, design, and an opportunity for education. The passages that follow quote mainly from a paper by Mary Biagetti and Thomas Goldbourn on the history of this school, (unless otherwise stated), providing a short background of the building's historical development.

"The original Corning Academy was a two-story wooden building located in the center of Court House Park, then known as the Public Square [of Corning]...With the passing of legislation in 1849, the state made into law free education..." The Academy was established in 1859, still in Court House Park, until a newer three-story structure was constructed in 1873 "on the corner of Walnut and Third Streets at the cost of \$75,000...In 1920, the Board of Education started to pursue sites for the construction of a new building." Dimitroff and Janes, in A History of the Corning-Painted Post Area, note that the present site was chosen once a final decision had been made, "with the agreement to use the property of Amory A. Houghton's former home...one block away from the old school, on the corners of Pine and Third Streets." The Houghton house was demolished for construction of the new school to begin. Various historical artifacts were preserved and reused in the construction of the building and its surrounding landscape, "[including] stones from the demolished Houghton house, [which] were used in the retaining walls, and some of the iron grill work [which] was utilized in the area of the front entrance." Biagetti notes that the building was planned to include "space for manual training, science laboratories, business education rooms, and a library, as well as provisions for future expansion on the third floor..." Plans initially included building an indoor swimming pool adjacent to the central auditorium on the first floor, but did not materialize owing to budget constraints. "An elevator shaft was placed through the building, but not until 1975 was it finally equipped for functioning."

One unique feature of the Academy is its two-ton bell, forged in 1873 in West Troy, New York, which belonged to the earlier Academy on the corners of Walnut and Third Streets. In 1923, it was moved by "heavy sledge" to the present building, where, as noted by The Corning Evening Leader of November 20, 1923, it "seems well pleased with its new quarters for it continues to ring out as cheerily as ever." Another unique feature of the building is a sculpted relief above the main entrance, designed by the New York sculptor Louis Lentelli. The panel, showing figures representing the Liberal Arts, is flanked by terracotta medallions, "one bearing the seal of the city of Corning and the other the seal of Steuben county" (see also section 18). The Leader notes further that local firms contributed significantly to the construction of the building. "Brick and terra cotta were furnished by the Corning Brick and Terra Cotta and Tile Company...[and] shades for electric lights along most of the building's corridors came from the Corning Glass Works." Dorothy Smith, in A History of Corning Free Academy (1956), notes that "the shades of the light in the building are of Ivrene glass, designed especially for illuminating purposes by Frederick C. Carder of Corning. In addition, special "cathedral glass," now removed, was used to illuminate ceiling of the first-story auditorium, as was Belgian plate glass on the original oak entrance doors facing Third Street.

Historically, the school has often set the stage for individual leadership and recognition. The west wing of the Academy housed the offices of a number of prominent citizens of Corning

who served as principals of the school, including Sherman L. Howe, the first superintendent of the school (1922-1929), William E. Severn (1929-1934), and Wilbur T. Miller (1934-1963). As noted in the Corning Glass Works Centennial edition of the Leader (September 20, 1948), the school's bell is inscribed with the names of "Hiram Pritchard, Samuel C. Robertson, George W. Patterson, Lewis C. Kingsbury, George Hitchcock, Charles G. Denison, [on the] Board of Education." Other notable members of the C.F.A. community have included Frederick Carter, the founder of Steuben Glass, who served for 36 years on the Board of Education prior to the construction of the building, and Mabel Haupt and Ada Hutchins, two teachers who in 1915 wrote the Alma Mater which is still in existence. The building proved exceptionally useful in 1972 when, as reported by that year's July 6 edition of the Leader, the Academy building was used as a refugee center and headquarters for communication with the Southside areas of the city.

The Corning Free Academy has been subject to renovation at various times, largely the result of increased enrollment. The most important years for expansion were the latter half of the 1920s, and, as Biagetti notes, "in 1937, [when] the third floor addition to the wings...were constructed. The building structure remained the same until the 1970s when renovations were again needed due to increased student population." In 1972, for instance, the "construction of [a] physical education wing was finished. This teaching facility was unique in structure due to the synthetic rubber surface of the floor, which was durable and virtually maintenance-free." Extensive modernization of existing facilities went hand in hand with a change in educational philosophy; the allocation of grade levels and "academic families" to different wings on separate stories, and the institution of areas devoted to Science, Social Studies, Language Arts, Mathematics, and Reading, occurred as a result of structural changes, including the construction of "segmented cafeteria areas," the construction of ramps for handicapped students, and the installation of new thermal safety windows on the first and second story levels.

Biagetti notes in conclusion that "to the present date the name of Corning Free Academy has not been changed to Corning Free Academy Middle School, but has had state and regional recognition for its model middle school structure. Educators from throughout New York and neighboring states have on many occasions visited Corning Free Academy to observe a middle school in action."

21. SOURCES:

"New C.F.A. Building Among Finest in the State; Formal Opening Today", The Evening Leader, Corning, Nov. 20, 1923, p. 10.

"Woman Was Teacher of Original School South of Chemung", The Evening Leader, Corning, Sept. 20, 1948, p. 21.

Biagetti, Mary Ann E. and Thomas Goldbourn: History of Corning Free Academy. Corning, NY, unpublished paper, Oct. 1992, pp. 8-18.

City of Corning Building Permits, City Engineer's Office, Corning, New York.

Corning City Directories, Boyd's 1874-75; Hanford 1893-1950.

Corning Free Academy, The Stator, Yearbook, Corning, NY, 1963, pp. 20-23.

Dimitroff, Thomas P. and Lois S. Janes: A History of the Corning-Painted Post Area: 200 Years in Painted Post Country (2nd ed.). Geneva, NY: W. F. Humphrey Press, 1977, pp. 162-164, 208-209, 277-278.

Map of Corning. 1855. Buffalo: H. Brewer and C.A. Canfield.

McAlester, V. and *L.A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991.

Smith, Dorothy: A History of the Corning Free Academy. Corning, NY, unpublished manuscript, 1926.

View of Corning, New York, Looking Toward the South. 1882. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Publishing House, C.J. Corbin, Field Manager.

City of Corning. 1893. Corning: Harry C. Heermans, City Engineer.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS: (To be attached later)