



Subject: Rehabilitation and Adaptive Use of Schools

Applicable Standards: 2. Retention of Historic Character
5. Preservation of Distinctive Features, Finishes and Craftsmanship

Issue: The rehabilitation of a historic school requires the introduction of a new, compatible use within the framework of an existing building. When rehabilitating an older school, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation call for the retention and preservation not only of the exterior features but of those distinctive interior spaces, features, and finishes that characterize the building as an educational institution.



School after rehabilitation.

Spaces, such as classrooms, auditoriums, hallways, lunchrooms, and libraries; features and finishes, such as wainscoting, transoms over doors, marble floors, and blackboards; and site features, such as playgrounds, walkways, and lawns are elements that often characterize a historic school building. In other cases, the sequence of spaces - the relationship of classrooms to corridors and stairs, for example - or the generous floor-to-ceiling heights and room sizes may contribute to the school's historic character. Identification and retention of these elements in the process of rehabilitation will help ensure a successful rehabilitation project.

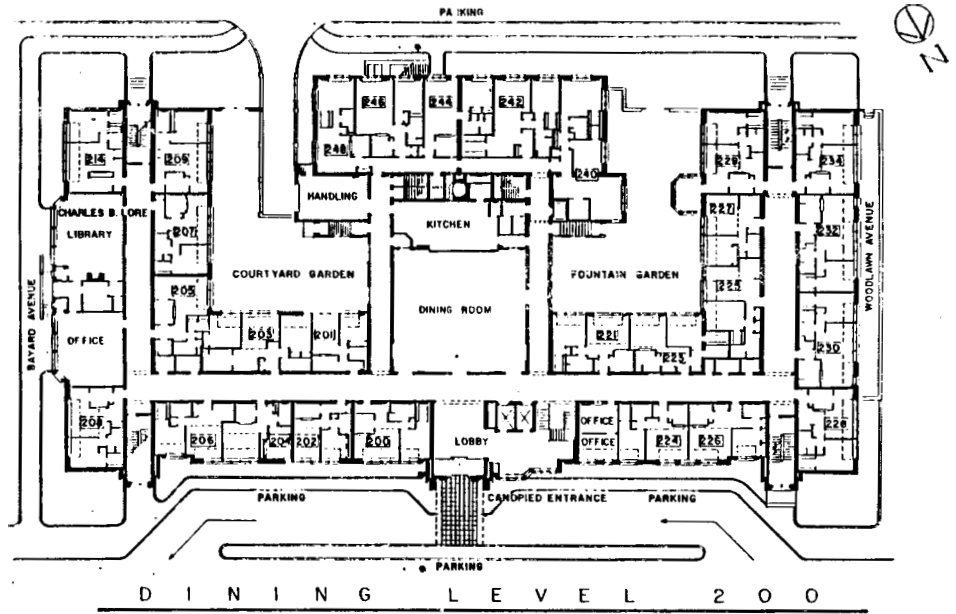
Application (*Compatible treatment*): Built in 1932, this brick English Collegiate Gothic-style school was rehabilitated into a residential retirement facility. The building, E-shaped in plan, has wide, double-loaded corridors flanked by classrooms and offices with an auditorium and gymnasium behind the main entrance tower. Vacant and deteriorating before rehabilitation, the school nonetheless retained its original interior configuration and many of its distinctive elements: gymnasium, auditorium and classrooms, wide corridors, wood window and door surrounds, brass light fixtures, and built-in furniture



Left: Corridor after rehabilitation. Right: Corridor width and length, as well as features such as the brick wainscoting, were retained.

such as wood window seats, cabinets and closets. Although several aspects of the initial proposal for rehabilitation were not compatible with the historic character of the building, these treatments were revised to meet the Standards.

In the completed project, classrooms and offices were converted into apartments. Although ceilings were lowered from 10'-6" to 9'-8", no decorative plasterwork was obscured in the process. Moreover, a generous floor-to-ceiling height was retained, and windows and window surrounds were left exposed in drapery pockets. The corridor ceilings were also lowered approximately 1'-8" to accommodate a fire suppression system and other utilities. However, the original corridor width and length, tiled floor, and brick wainscot were retained.



Floorplan after rehabilitation.

The rectangular auditorium featured tall, tripartite windows, glazed brick wainscoting, and intact proscenium arch, brass light fixtures, and a sloping floor. All these features were retained when the space was converted into a dining room, with a new level floor. A new partition was added immediately behind the proscenium for a new kitchen. The gymnasium, unlike the auditorium, was utilitarian in appearance and function, without distinguishing features or finishes. For this reason, in addition to the fact that the auditorium space was being preserved, the gymnasium was determined to be expendable, and the space divided into two-level apartments. Other interior features such as built-in wood benches, built-in cabinets and the kindergarten fireplace, were also preserved. In addition, features associated with the school's site were preserved in the rehabilitation project, providing residents with such amenities as an outdoor picnic area, benches, and courtyards. The adaptive use project successfully preserved the school's distinctive spaces, features, finishes, and site, while less distinctive elements were modified or removed.



Former auditorium before rehabilitation as the dining room.



The new library (formerly a kindergarten) retains the fireplace after rehabilitation.

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These bulletins are issued to explain preservation project decisions made by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The resulting determinations, based on the [Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation](#), are not necessarily applicable beyond the unique facts and circumstances of each particular case.

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