

## Architectural Origins of the Randolph School Building and Carriage House

by

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The Randolph School Building and the Randolph School Carriage House were, built sometime between 1860 and 1893.

The school building itself is a large square brick structure with a later addition to the rear. Distinctive architectural features outside include

- 1) ornate brick work over each long narrow window
- 2) extensive wooden bracketing along the edge, of the roof
- 3) a high narrow porch with skinny square columns with carved capitals holding up the roof and turned spindle railing all round and
- 4) a brick privy to the rear of the house.

Inside the original part of the house the four main rooms downstairs (two on each side of a long narrow hallway) and two of the four bedrooms upstairs are each graced with fireplaces of marble or onyx. There is only one brick fireplace, in the downstairs room to the left of the hall in front. Most of the mantles are a mere 10 - 12 inches wide, and all but the brick fireplace have small rounded openings bounded by iron and fitted with iron grills. The right front fireplace is black onyx. The brick fireplace has a castle like facade design. The dining room fireplace is constructed of two different kinds of brown marble, one plain and one speckled.

Each room has an ornate carved-rosette in the center of the ceiling, from which a chandelier extends or probably did extend. Over the right parlor door there is an "abacus—like" carved wooden grill work in a ball and dowel pattern. The banister and newel posts of the stairway seem to be black walnut; the posts are cut in a squared off design like chess pieces with 'colonial' profiles raised on the sides for additional decoration. Spindles climb the entire length of the stairs.

These features all indicate a home built during the Parvenu Period (1860-1880) or as part of the Romanesque Revival (1876-1893) or combining characteristics of both eras, and thus built between 1876-1893.<sup>1</sup> Victorian Parvenu Gothic homes had high, narrow windows and porches, and lots of jigsaw brackets.<sup>2</sup>

Generally suburban homes of this ilk usually had a center hall with two rooms on each side<sup>3</sup> and upstairs bedrooms in similar positions.<sup>4</sup> This is true of the Randolph School building.

The favorite wood of the period was black walnut. But the fireplaces (usually in every room) are especially distinctive. They were usually thin, marble affairs with round headed openings surrounded by a cast iron frame. Inside was a basket of cannel coal.<sup>5</sup> All but one Randolph School fireplace meets this description.

Also distinctive was the "inevitable heavy and highly ornamental plaster rosette"<sup>6</sup> in the middle of the ceiling from which chandeliers hung. The motif "high and narrow" prevailed throughout. Many Randolph School rooms have these rosettes on the ceiling.

Beginning around 1876 this style developed into what Tallmadge calls the Romanesque Revival. Randolph School's porch, unique front parlor doorway and stairway come to mind as we read "It is in ornamental woodwork however that the architect of the 80's put its thrust."<sup>7</sup> His slogan was "Down with the Jigsaw, up with the turning lathe."<sup>8</sup> Balusters, spindles and columns appeared inside and out. "Grills filled in the heads of wide doors... great screens of turned spindles enclosed stairs and porches (and) were veritable tours de force of the turning lathe."<sup>9</sup> During this period also capitals were carved on columns.

Fireplaces especially became more bizarre. "The facing was invariably in color."<sup>10</sup> Onyx was a favorite in replacing the marble of the previous period.<sup>11</sup> The brown dining room fireplace and the black onyx fireplace at Randolph School were probably built during the Romanesque Revival.

The Carriage House at Randolph School was probably built during the same period as the house. It is constructed of the same brick, and each, window is topped by the same detailed brick work design that is found over all the long narrow windows of the main house.

The side windows of the carriage house are small and short, reminiscent of battlement openings; the chimney is designed to resemble a medieval castle tower.

Although landowners are listed on maps of the area from 1867,<sup>12</sup> I have not been able to find a record of anyone living at the location of the Randolph School Building until 1887. In that year the map of Dutchess County, Hughsonville area, shows the area of the school building to be the property of William A. Brewster<sup>13</sup> This gentleman was born in 1854. His father was a local foreman at the Garner and Company brickworks in Wappingers Falls. He himself attended local schools and then became a bookkeeper for the Bank of Wappingers Falls. Later he became the cashier of a private bank in the area and married a woman named Sarah Siddle. He brought her to live in Dutchess County.<sup>14</sup>

The history of local architecture, the chronology of the Brewster family, local maps, and detailed observation all suggest that the Randolph School building and its Carriage House were both built between 1876-1893. During this period features of the Parvenu Gothic Style combined with those of the Romanesque Revival to create buildings of unique character.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas E. Tallmadge, *The Story of Architecture in America* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1927).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> F.W. Beers, *Atlas of New York Vicinity* (New York: Beers, Ellis and Soule, 1867), page 32.

<sup>13</sup> *Dutchess County Atlas of 1887*, Map of Hughsonville Area.

<sup>14</sup> *Dutchess County Commemorative Biographical Record* (New York, J.S. Beers and Company, 1897), page 427