



August 4, 1987

FINAL REPORT - ITTNER SCHOOLS SURVEY: RECONNAISSANCE LEVEL

OBJECTIVES

William B. Ittner was affiliated with the St. Louis Board of Education for 18 years, beginning in 1897 as Commissioner of School Buildings and ending in 1915 after a five-year term as Consulting Architect. He designed all City schools built during this pivotal era. The importance of his work lies both in architectural value and school design reform. Ittner's work in St. Louis constitutes a large portion of the public schools in the City today and is the largest collection of his works in the country. The objectives of this thematic survey were to identify all extant Ittner-designed public schools in the City of St. Louis and to evaluate them as to their eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

AREA SURVEYED

Because Ittner worked for the St. Louis Board of Education within the confines of the City Limits, the reconnaissance and survey area included the entire City of St. Louis.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS USED

William B. Ittner's projects for the Board of Education are all documented in their publications: Annual Report and Official Proceedings. Every aspect of each building is a matter of public record and appears in one or both of the official publications, the Annual Report being more a summation of the year's events, with minutiae concerning actual construction usually limited to the Proceedings. Lists of existing schools were published yearly, in addition to the other information. Through these sources, a list was compiled of the 49 buildings that Ittner designed for the Board of Education. City and School directories were consulted to obtain the addresses of these schools and a separate file was begun on each of the buildings. Each was numbered chronologically from oldest to newest (alphabetized within each year) to later correspond with the survey sheets. A citywide map (included here) was used to plot their locations. Sanborn Insurance maps were used to obtain the measurements and configurations of the schools. Each site was then visited, the building photographed and other physical information noted.

Additional information, including the derivation of the schools' names, came from records in the St. Louis Board of Education archival materials housed in the Harris-Stowe State College library and from Landmarks' files.

RESULTS

Of the 49 St. Louis public schools designed by William B. Ittner, 47 are still in existence. Special School Number 1 (1913) at Tenth & Carroll and the Taussig Open-Air School (1915) at 1540 South Grand have been razed. Three are vacant: Monroe School (1899) at 3641 Missouri, Carr School (1908) at 1421 Carr Street, and Maddox School (1911; also known as Delany School and the Virginia Avenue School) at 6138 Virginia Avenue. One, Gardenville School, is now leased by the Board of Education to the Gardenville Community Center for non-educational use; another, the Providence Educational Center (formerly Rock Spring School), is still functioning as a school although privately owned. The exteriors of both schools remain very little changed. The remaining 42 schools are all in use in the public school system (the Normal School/Harris Teachers College is used now as an audiovisual services center for the system rather than as a classroom building). Some of the schools originally in use as elementary schools are now middle schools, and this slight change in use is so noted on the survey sheets.

The schools are scattered widely throughout the City, a general effort having been made to geographically balance school locations by alternating north and south side sites.

Native St. Louisan William B. Ittner graduated from Cornell University School of Architecture in 1887. After practicing architecture in St. Louis for ten years, Ittner was asked in 1897 to take the position of Commissioner of School Buildings for the newly reorganized Board of Education. He immediately revamped the Building Department and began to analyze current school design, visiting schools around the U.S. and in Germany. Improvements in school design were not unknown in St. Louis; as early as 1857, some reforms had been incorporated, particularly in the areas of heating, ventilation and lighting. The early model schools had four corner rooms per floor with a center hallway and separate stairways for boys and girls. An early concern seems to have been about reducing the need for corporal punishment (hence the stairways). Later concerns relating more directly to student comfort and education are reflected in Ittner's designs. Equal thought and emphasis were given for the first time in St. Louis to every aspect of each school: siting, landscaping, play areas, architectural detailing, construction, sanitation, adequate room size, ventilation, gymnasiums, safety, lighting and suitability of each classroom to its individual use. Ittner's designs soon became the standard by which modern schools were judged.

A new era had already begun in education even before Ittner started designing schools; a complex hierarchy now administered large districts with a standard curriculum considerably expanded from former times. Manual training and other "progressive" subjects began to appear, most often in high schools, as educational thought moved into the modern era. Specialized areas in which to hold such classes became a necessity. Ittner addressed all these new issues, in the process developing such now-standard innovations as wide hallways; large, grouped windows; purposeful landscaping; a central auditorium and gymnasiums for high schools; efficient heating and ventilation systems; and the so-called "open plan," in which the elementary school building is designed in an E, H or U shape, with corridors on one side and classrooms on the other. Interested in all facets of the schools, Ittner provided such things as kindergartens with stained glass windows, fireplaces, aquariums, special wall murals and nursery rhyme friezes.

Perhaps his largest single innovation was the use of the open plan, a layout he did not incorporate in his earliest schools. With Wyman School, Ittner's eighth project for the Board of Education, we see the new plan for the first time (see Figure 2). He continued to use this plan with variations for the rest of the elementary schools he designed. The new plan allowed for a number of important things. First, the schools could be easily expanded while maintaining the style and proportion of the original building. Secondly, each building could be individually styled so that no two were exactly alike; a number of styles were used by Ittner to articulate what was essentially the same plan. Also, maximum benefit of light and air, both in short supply in early school houses, could be gained. Classrooms are always above ground, with play space for inclement weather, sanitation facilities, storage and utility spaces in the basement.

In addition to his other innovations, Ittner paid close attention to the aesthetics of the overall design inside and out, specifying materials for desired effects or certain superior qualities. Maple floors, oak trim, cement plaster and iron and slate stairways were standard interior features. Exteriors are often fine examples of the bricklayer's art. Because his father was a builder and brick-maker, Ittner was familiar with grades and variations of brick and employed a great variety in his school designs - particularly cull brick. Diaper bond was a favorite gable and cornice treatment and is used to good effect in various combinations in at least 14 of the surveyed schools. The visual impact of each school is rich and unique; other unusual brickwork, corbelling, arches, parapets, balustrades, mosaic tile insets, terra cotta and stone trim all appear in various combinations.

Ittner chose the Classical Revival style for his first four projects: Eliot, Jackson, Monroe and Sherman (all 1898). Their floor plans and those of the Providence Educational Center/Rock Spring School and Simmons, both also 1898, are all similar and consist of a central hall with rooms on either side (see Figure 1). Ittner's style evolved with each school until, in 1900, he designed the Wyman School in the Jacobethan style he was to use so extensively later. Wyman was in a sense Ittner's watershed school, marking both the shift to Jacobethan and the adoption of the open plan, thenceforth an Ittner standard.

While the Jacobethan Revival began in England about 1830, most American Jacobethan buildings date from about 1890. Although the style was used in a variety of building types, educational facilities lent themselves especially well to this synthesized form with its quoining and other ornate brickwork, fanciful parapets, turrets with shaped roofs and imposing entrances. Whiffen mentions the exuberant educational architecture by Cope & Stewardson, then says, "More typical, and at least as worthy of critical consideration, is the series of schools at St. Louis, Missouri, for which William B. Ittner is the architect."¹ While Ittner is perhaps best known for his work in this style, he continued to occasionally design schools in other idioms, particularly the Classical Revival and mixed revival styles, always retaining the open plan after 1900.

Ittner began taking commissions for schools in other cities in 1904, when the World's Fair brought national attention to St. Louis, and went on to design 500 schools in all.² By 1908, the Federal Commission on Education noted, "new public school buildings of St. Louis are probably the best in the United States."³ Ittner's non-St. Louis work gradually increased until 1910, when he decided to actively pursue out-of-town commissions and submitted his resignation as Commissioner of School Buildings to

the Board of Education. A reorganization of the Building Department led to Ittner's appointment the same year as the Board's Consulting Architect, a position that allowed him freedom to do other work while continuing to design all new St. Louis public schools until 1915. St. Louis continued to be known for the quality of its public schools; in December, 1914, Reedy's Mirror had this to say:

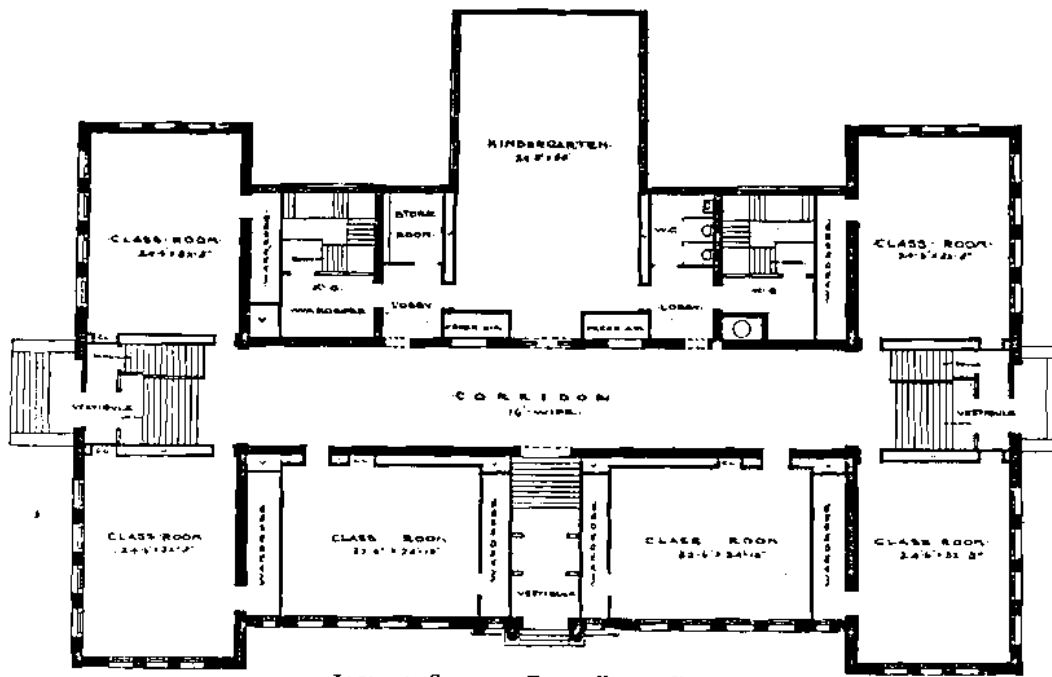
Educators turn their eyes to St. Louis for models of school buildings, even as they look this way for patterns of school laws. Visiting architects and casual sightseers alike ask to be shown the famous school structures of St. Louis. All of this fame is due to the genius of one man, William B. Ittner, known all over the world for his designs of this kind. The magazine advertisements show great buildings in other cities, with a note that they were designed by Ittner of St. Louis. A popular writer for a New York weekly is a trifle patronizing in his views of St. Louis as a whole, but he is unable to find words to tell of the beauty and fitness of the Soldan High School, one of Mr. Ittner's latest triumphs.

Due to the nature of Ittner's work for the St. Louis Board of Education, we are allowed a clearly defined look at his work within a rigid framework of time and spatial limits. Given this unique perspective, it is possible to study Ittner's work within the context of the growth from his seminal years through the full development of his school designs. This sui generis vantage point of Ittner's work and growth gives us an unparalleled opportunity for further analysis.

The results of this survey have exceeded the anticipated objectives. It appears that the 47 extant Ittner-designed public schools in St. Louis are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under the categories of Architecture and Education and that they should be nominated as such. A complete survey of public schools in St. Louis, of course, would include extant buildings built both prior to and after Ittner's tenure. In this way, the complete scope of building types, educational thought and architectural styles could be thoroughly analyzed. There are a number of non-Ittner schools (especially those of his successor, Rockwell M. Milligan) which would be likely to qualify for listing in the National Register; a survey to include all City public schools is indicated.

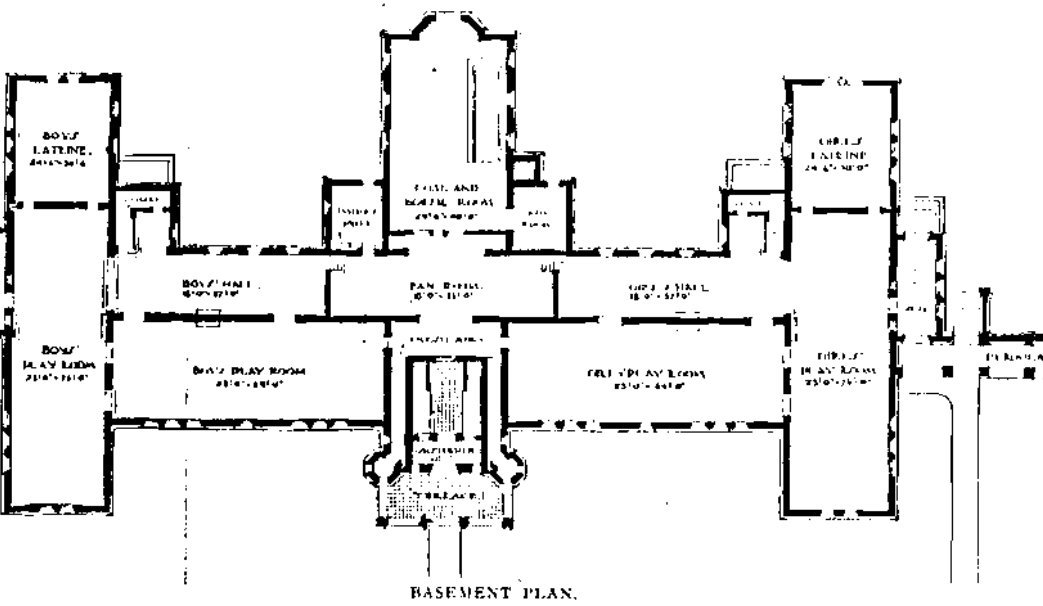
It should also be noted that while the majority of the original Ittner St. Louis schools are still in use and virtually unchanged, potential abandonment, poor maintenance and nonsympathetic remodeling plans (specifically, one-over-one bronze-colored aluminum sash) threaten these fine buildings.

ITTNER SCHOOLS SURVEY - FIG. 1 TYPICAL EARLY SCHOOL PLAN (1898)

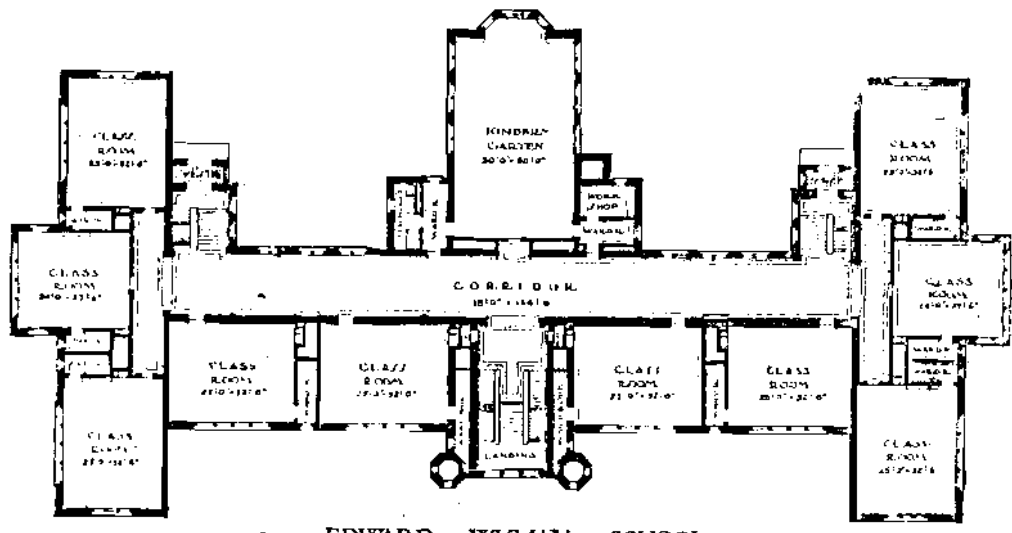


JACKSON SCHOOL,—FIRST FLOOR PLAN.

ITTNER SCHOOLS SURVEY - FIG. 2 TYPICAL "OPEN PLAN" (1900)

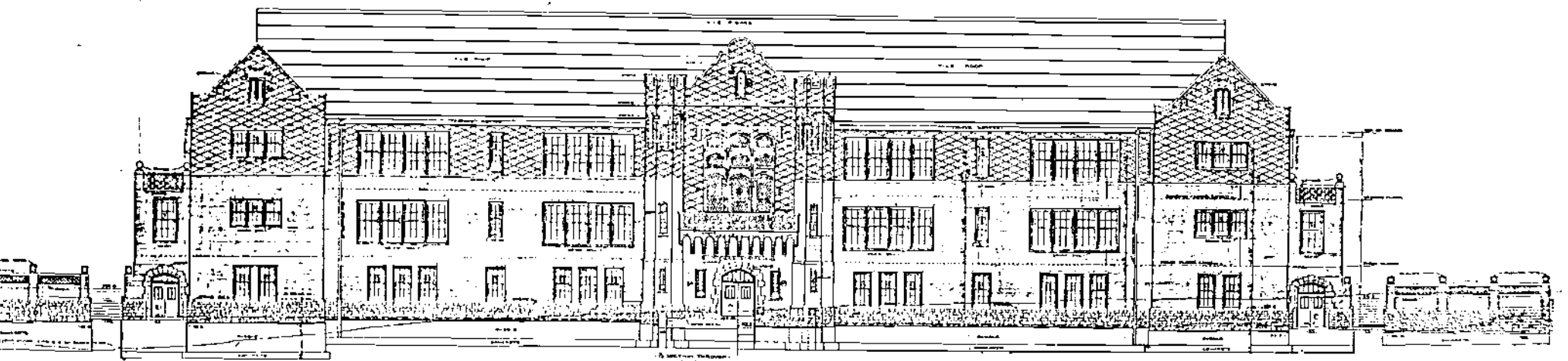


BASEMENT PLAN.



EDWARD WYMAN SCHOOL

FIRST FLOOR PLAN.



ELEVATION, MAIN FRONT.

FOOTNOTES

¹Marcus Whiffen, American Architecture Since 1780 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1981), pp. 181-2.

²Marie Anderson Ittner, Footprints (St. Louis: John S. Swift Co. Inc., 1955), 23 pp.

³Walter B. Stevens, "William Butts Ittner," St. Louis, History of the Fourth City 1763 - 1909 (St. Louis: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1909), p. 777.

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