

North End Bathhouse and Playground Architectural Significance (Continued)

The window details and the field of red brick laid up in Flemish bond imbue this otherwise neoclassical building with a New England Colonial Revival sensibility. Three ornamentally framed oeil-de-boeuf (bull's eye) windows highlight the mezzanine story above the main entrance. Belt courses accentuate window sills and heads and also align with door and window arch spring points. The building has a Renaissance-style *piano nobile*, with the two upper floors combined into one dominant story, emphasized by an ornamental molded belt course surmounted by a dado and an arcade of terra cotta pilasters.

Each façade features symmetrical and repetitive design elements honoring the Second Renaissance Revival style. The recessed-panel pilasters, decorated with chevron patterns, connect the second-story dado to the classical entablature and slate hipped roof. The three colossal arched windows on the North Bennet Street side of the building, with masonry arches and horizontal transoms, are evocative of the ancient Roman baths. Framed in terra cotta, these two-story windows are divided by additional pilasters and red brick haunches featuring terra cotta medallions; generously illuminating the gymnasium within, they align with tripartite flat-arched windows on the lower stories, featuring terra cotta keystones. Flanking the large window groupings on all principal facades are brick panels framing quoined window openings with carved tympanums echoing the entrance tympanum below. Throughout, the facades are populated with keystones, vase-type finials, chevrons, seashells, sea creatures, crenellation, and other exuberant ornamentation.

Inside, the showers and dressing rooms were originally located on the first and second floors, along with an infirmary and residence for the superintendent. Most of the second floor was occupied by a two-story gymnasium, encircled by a suspended running track. Maureen Meister cites the building in *Arts and Crafts Architecture: History and Heritage in New England*.ⁱ Its largest space was an assembly hall, that was conceived as an informal town hall that would 'help the district achieve civic unity.'ⁱⁱ

The gray slate roof, with copper step flashing from brick chimneys and copper vents, features slate saddle ridges and a continuous bracketed cornice with a classical frieze. Three arcaded chimneys, designed in the original drawings to be open, are currently bricked-in as recessed blind arches. A pyramided skylight with copper mullions and cap flashing offers a dramatic, crowning conclusion at the top of the building. While a \$1 million renovation in 2004 updated the interior facilities for modern community usage, the building's exterior fully retains its original, elegant design.

Architects Charles Donagh Maginnis (1867-1955), Timothy Walsh (1868-1934) and Matthew Sullivan (1868-1938) were nationally prominent for their design of Roman Catholic churches and university buildings. Maginnis emigrated from Ireland in 1885 and began working five years later in the office of Edmund Wheelwright, the Boston City Architect. Walsh was born in Cambridge, educated at English High School, and studied in the Paris ateliers. Sullivan also worked in Wheelwright's office until in 1895 he succeeded him as Boston City Architect.

(Sullivan is said to have left the partnership in 1905.) The firm's work included the Boston College and Emmanuel College campuses, the chapel at Trinity College, law school at the University of Notre Dame, Harkness Tower at Yale University, the chancel at Trinity Church in Boston's Copley Square, and the high altar at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. From 1937-1939 Maginnis was President of the American Institute of Architects, which presented him in 1848 its Gold Medal for "outstanding service to American architecture," the highest award in the profession. The Pope also honored him for his work in ecclesiastical architecture.

The North End Bath House and Gymnasium (Nazzaro Center) was constructed with its principal entry on the Prince Street Playground's northern street frontage. Now known as the Polcari Playground, this land was acquired by the city in 1897. It preserves the historic open space between two of the neighborhood's principal interior thoroughfares and commercial corridors (Salem Street and Hanover Street), and serves as the entry plaza for the Bath House. The playground was established in 1897 at the southern Prince Street end, and then expanded by the Parks Department in 1999 and 1900 to North Bennet Street through additional land-takings.ⁱⁱⁱ The playground is the principal feature around which the North End Municipal area was organized between 1897 and 1913, to improve the quality of life in one of the city's most congested areas. By the late 19th century, the urban playground had gained importance as a means for opening up densely settled interior blocks to increase light and ventilation for residence, in addition to providing a safe place for children so they would not have to play in the street. While the three privatized buildings retain most of their original exterior architectural features, the playground does not currently display historic finishes. Iron fencing about six feet high defines the street frontages; low iron fencing defines the property where it abuts neighboring buildings on the east and west. There is a concrete plaza with benches at the northern end, and a full basketball court occupying the southern two-thirds of the parcel. Shade trees and benches dot the edges of the playground and basketball court.

ⁱ Maureen Meister, *Arts and Crafts Architecture: History and Heritage in New England* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2014.)

ⁱⁱ Fiske, Kimball, "The Society Center. Part II. Philanthropic Enterprises," *Architectural Record*, vol. 45, no. 6 (June, 1919) pp. 531-33, as quoted in Meister.

ⁱⁱⁱ City Planning Board, City of Boston, *The North End. A Survey and Comprehensive Plan*. Boston: City Printing Department, 1919. 76-77