

P.S. 81Q's Main Building, located on Cypress Avenue between Bleecker and Menahan Streets was erected in 1903 and completed in 1904. This school building was designed by the Superintendent of New York City School Buildings C. B. J. Snyder, an architect noted for his school's letter H plan layout and Gothic style. There is also a P.S. 81Q Annex, which houses 8 classes, located at 511 Seneca Avenue and Bleecker Street. This Annex building, formerly known as Public School 75 Metropolitan (*Old 75*) is where the history of P.S. 81Q actually begins.

We are located in the town of Ridgewood, Queens, New York, a neighborhood mainly occupied by German immigrants and German American families during the late 1800s through the turn of the century who began arriving during the Civil War period. The land throughout this vicinity, known as Metropolitan, had been large farms run and owned by the area's dominant families many of whom were Dutch: Wyckoff, Suydam, Troutman, Onderdonck, Cooper, Covert, etc., etc. Wyckoff Heights, circa 1892, covered an area on both sides of the boundary and named for the Wyckoff family of Flushing Avenue who owned the land. Previously, the area was called South Williamsburgh and then finally Ridge Wood because of the ridge extending from Long Island and the heavily wooded landscape of the community. As we became industrialized, farmland was forfeited over to housing thus changing the terrain of our neighborhood along with its population which kept growing as people left the island of Manhattan for Queens borough.

The building we call the P.S. 81 Annex, was the original site of our school, then known as P.S. 75, Metropolitan located at Covert Avenue (now Seneca Avenue) and Bleecker Street in the Town of Newtown School District #9. It housed eight classrooms, a gymnasium and a library. The Principal, William H. Dumond, served as Administrator to Public Schools 75 and 68 since 1989 simultaneously. In 1903, P.S. 75 Ridgewood Heights had a total of 847 pupils and as the neighborhood's population grew, more space for schooling was needed.

The City proposed expansion of the *Old 75* on Covert Avenue from Bleecker Street all the way to Greene Avenue but this potential school site was later rescinded. A tract of land on part of the old Wyckoff farm called Wyckoff's Woods was selected and determined to be the destination of a new school building. And so, The Fourth Annual Report of the Department of Education of the City of New York for the Year ending July 31, 1901 announced that the plot on Cypress avenue, Bleecker and Ralph streets (later renamed Menahan Street), Metropolitan was where P.S. 81 would be built. In 1902 the Newtown Register reported on a new school containing 40 rooms, to be known as Public School 81 Ridgewood Heights, a rapidly growing section close to the borough line. This would relieve the over-crowded conditions on both sides of the boundary and was expected to cost \$220,000.00 out of the county's unprecedented \$1,000,000 school construction budget.

Speculations by 1903, claimed P.S.81 would be the biggest building in Queens. A 4-story brick and stone building with terra cotta trimmings that would

be capable of holding 2,400 pupils in its 48 classrooms and now costing \$270,000.

In September of 1905, P.S. 81 Ridgewood Heights opened with a register of 2,005 pupils in addition to 454 pupils registered at the Old 75 Ridgewood Heights. Mr. William H. Dumond continued as Principal of 75 and was also in charge of the new P.S. 81 building.

By September 1909, P.S. 81 had the largest school body in Queens – a total of 3,220 students. Some of these students attended their classes in the *Old 75*, now the school's annex or they went to one of our other annex locations - the Ridgewood Park Hotel on Myrtle Avenue, the old Zion Evangelical Church on Covert Avenue or a wooden portable building in the schoolyard. In September 1910 registration reached 2,790 pupils but the Old 75 went down to 351. In the years that followed registration hovered between 2,000 and 3,000 and the Old 75, at one time or another, served as annex to Bushwick High School among others.

P.S. 81's lower grades were on the lower floors while the 8th grades were on the upper floor. In 1935, there were up to 49 pupils in a class and each class on the grade had designations such as 8A1, 8A2, 8A3, 8B1, 8B2, 8B3, etc. We did not have an assembly hall, but on the 3rd floor several rooms were partitioned by wooden walls that rolled away to create a large assembly space such as was needed for a graduation.

In the summer of 1930, residents in the vicinity reported to the Ridgewood Times their concern that the local children couldn't get into the schoolyard after

hours to play. Instead the children played out on the streets risking automobile traffic and of course interfering with those adults who wanted to sit quietly on their stoops chatting the night away. More popular activities included picnics, parades, circuses, beer halls and dance halls. The industries in Ridgewood Heights, which employed our student's families, were the many knitting mills, breweries, mortuaries, steel and ironworks plants, ribbons, trimmings and cotton waste companies.

Our school was named for the German writer, philosopher and satirist Johann Paul Richter who went by the pen name of Jean Paul Richter and died in 1825. This honored the German Americans who lived here and were so much a part of the Ridgewood's early history. Our school is located in a Federally designated historical section and continues to serve an industrious population of Hispanics, Asians, Middle Easterns, Europeans, African-Americans, and Eastern Europeans. We serve pupils at full capacity and continuously refine our teaching methodologies to reach every child regardless of background or ability. In the past few years we have consistently improved our academic achievements and look forward to celebrating our School's 100th Birthday, giving all of us a new experience in exploring a bit of history that has personal perspective and meaning.

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I would like to thank the Greater Ridgewood Historical Society for providing the above-mentioned archives. The Greater Ridgewood Historical Society is located at 1820 Flushing Avenue, Ridgewood and owns the Historical Landmark known as "The Vander Ende-Onderdonk House".