The University Heights Campus of Bronx Community College, a 19th century gem, is the first community college campus to be named a national historic landmark. Announcing the designation on Oct. 17, 2012, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar called the original buildings “a nationally significant example of Beaux-Arts architecture in the United States, and among the most important works by Stanford White, partner in McKim, Mead & White, the preeminent American architectural firm at the turn of the 20th century.” The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission first designated the buildings a landmark in 1966. The City University of New York bought the University Heights Campus from New York University in 1973 as a new home for Bronx Community College. In 1979, the buildings joined the National Register of Historic Places. In 2012, CUNY completed Stanford White’s quadrangle – first conceived in 1892 – with the architecturally harmonious and technologically advanced North Hall and Library, designed by Robert A.M. Stern.

What follows comes from the college’s National Historic Landmark application. It was written by Easton Architects, a consultant to Bronx Community College on historic preservation. The University Heights Campus is a tour-de-force of Beaux-Arts influenced American Renaissance architecture. Stanford White of the renowned firm of McKim, Mead & White designed the campus for New York University in a bucolic setting on a bluff in the Bronx overlooking the Harlem River. NYU’s desire for a more spacious and architecturally unified campus followed important design trends for academic institutions of higher learning at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Although White’s master plan was never fully realized, the strength and importance of the design still reads clearly in the centerpiece rotunda and flanking buildings, completed between 1894 and 1912, that were the core of its conception.
The genius of White’s design lay both in the exquisitely detailed architecture and in the interplay between the formal and natural landscapes. Situated on the west side of the main quadrangle, the Gould Memorial Library, Hall of Languages, Hall of Philosophy, and Havemeyer Laboratory comprise an ordered, axial, and hierarchical ensemble that was an expected and essential part of contemporary campus design. The land drops dramatically toward the river behind these buildings and White planned the Hall of Fame for Great Americans, the first facility of its kind in the United States, to take advantage of the steep topography. The open colonnade on the top of the Hall of Fame provides a permeable connection between Gould Library, Hall of Languages, and Hall of Philosophy, heightening the interplay between the formal, built environment and the natural environment beyond. White’s handling of the architecture and the landscape at the University Heights Campus stands in clear and pleasing contrast to his partner Charles McKim’s concurrent design for Columbia University, which was both more subdued architecturally and more rigorously ordered on its Morningside Heights site.

Facing severe financial troubles in the 1960s, NYU sold the campus to The City University of New York in 1973 and the White-designed ensemble continues to serve as the architecturally distinguished centerpiece of the Bronx Community College campus.

The buildings comprising the University Heights Campus and their siting on the main quadrangle at the edge of the bluff maintain a high degree of integrity and clearly convey the significance of the design.

**HISTORIC PHYSICAL APPEARANCE**

The University Heights Campus is dramatically sited on the highest point in the Bronx overlooking the Harlem River and the Palisades beyond. The nationally-significant complex includes Hall of Languages (1894), Havemeyer Laboratory (1895), Gould Memorial Library (1900), the Hall of Fame for Great Americans, the nation’s first such facility (1900), and Hall of Philosophy (1912). Stanford White also designed the Gould Residence Hall (1896), which is located to the east of the complex on the far side of the athletic field. The hall was the only building in a secondary quadrangle completed and no longer functions as a residential building and is considered a non-contributing resource. The complex is formally arranged and its location at the extreme western edge of the campus provides contrast with the natural beauty and dramatic topography of the surrounding landscape.

**Gould Memorial Library**

The Gould Memorial Library (1900) stands as one of the finest examples of the work of Stanford White and McKim, Mead & White, the preeminent Beaux-Arts practitioners in the United States, and was the focus of the overall campus scheme. The large, domed building is designed in an eclectic classical revival style and features an impressive portico on the main entry façade (east façade) with six Corinthian columns of Indiana limestone. The exterior elevations of the building have Corinthian pilasters of limestone, set against yellow Roman brick and Milford pink granite used in the walls. Windows are set into the bays created by the pilasters, and are detailed with moulded jambs and full entablatures. By creating shallow side and rear wings and a deep front wing, Stanford White relieved the grandeur of the design allowing it to more fully engage, rather than dominate, the natural landscape. The cornice on the dome is detailed with a terra-cotta frieze of garlands and pendants. The roof of the dome rises from the cornice, covered in copper tiles, to the richly-decorated oculus. The classical forms of the exterior of the library are freely interpreted to make a bold architectural statement while simultaneously blending with the romantic setting.

The exuberance of the building’s exterior is far surpassed by the dramatic spaces and sumptuous detailing of the interior. The building is centrally planned with a modified Greek cross plan. A large round, domed reading room occupies the center of the plan with shallow arms extending outward
encompassing offices and other support spaces on the north, south, and west, and the top landing of the monumental stairway on the east rising from the entrance portico up to the reading room. The space containing the stair extends to the east of the centrally planned building and is opulently finished with a coffered barrel vaulted ceiling, Renaissance Revival architectural details rendered in marble, and massive wall sconces. Stained glass, marble stair treads, and bands of red, yellow, black and white mosaic floor tiles add to the material richness of the entrance hall. The upper stair landing (east arm of the Greek cross plan) features a shallow dome with a round piece of green Tiffany stained glass from which a glass globe lamp hangs. From the landing, one can catch a tantalizing glimpse of the reading room beyond. The expansiveness of the rotunda reveals itself slowly as visitors pass through the stair hall doorway. The original administrative offices are located on either side of the stairway and contain handsome wood paneling and fireplaces.

The rotunda is a magnificent and dramatic Beaux-Arts interior, rising four stories to the spring line of a coffered dome. The dome is supported by sixteen green Connemara Irish marble columns, which rise from bases of white Vermont marble that are capped by Corinthian capitals covered in a gold-colored metal applied by the Tiffany Decorating Company. The columns support a full entablature, ornamented by a Greek fret band, a bracketed cornice, and a carved frieze. Above the entablature of the colonnade is a balcony with plaster railings in a classical openwork pattern set between plaster pedestals. Each pedestal supports a classical female statue, aligned with the columns below. The back wall of the balcony features Tiffany glass mosaic panels and forms the drum of the low coffered dome. The coffers diminish in size as they move towards the central oculus. On the rotunda floor, directly below where the original stained glass oculus sat, a glass panel floor serves to allow light down into the auditorium below. Each of the Corinthian columns that decorate the rotunda is echoed by an engaged fluted column at the wall. The floor between the two colonnades is laid with panels of white, yellow and black marble. Bookcases line the bays, behind which are seminary rooms and book stacks entered from “book doors” on hinged sections of the bookcases.

The rooms located in the alcoves surrounding the rotunda are notable for their functional innovation: each academic department was assigned one and an adjoining section of book stacks. This allowed the head professor more access to available books on the subject and provided a home base for the students of the department. Above the first level in each alcove are book stacks with floors having glass panels set in a cast iron armature, allowing light to filter down to the lower levels of the alcoves.

Although it no longer functions as a library, Gould Memorial Library retains its original configuration and much of its original historic fabric. It houses perimeter and first floor offices, a lower level auditorium and the main Rotunda space. Library functions were relocated to a new campus facility in 1968.

In 1919, a group of artists and patrons was organized to memorialize Stanford White. The committee was headed by architect Thomas Hastings. It was decided that the memorial should be a pair of bronze doors to be placed at the entrance to Gould Memorial Library. White’s son Lawrence Grant White designed the door with eight panels, each with a symbolic figure cast in relief to represent aspects of Stanford White’s life and career.

The panels were cast by sculptors who had worked with Stanford White in his lifetime. Andrew O’Connor created panels with the themes “Inspiration” and “Generosity,” Philip Martiny created panels with the themes “Architecture” and “Decoration,” Herbert Adams created panels with the themes “Painting” and “Sculpture,” and Adolph A. Weinman created panels with the themes “Mosaic” and “Drama.” The decorative lion’s heads on the doors were created by artist Ulysses Ricci, and the door pulls were created by artist Janet Scudder.
Hall of Fame for Great Americans

A desire to cover Gould Memorial Library’s exposed concrete retaining walls along the steep hill of the rear façade led to the development of the Hall of Fame for Great Americans. Stanford White’s semicircular arcade design for the Hall of Fame (1900) makes dramatic use of the site drop-off, hugging against the rear of the Gould Memorial Library. The structure is unified by its eclectic Roman style and monumental scale, featuring a promenade from which commanding views unfold. The open-air colonnade contains the bronze busts of noted scientists, writers, educators, and other leaders who contributed significantly to American culture. Below the busts sit bronze tablets designed by Louis Comfort Tiffany, containing the name, birth and death dates, and a memorable quote from the person commemorated. The Hall of Fame is constructed of Milford pink granite and Indiana limestone with a ceiling of segmented, vaulted Guastavino tile carried on columns and piers. It is 630 feet in length and approximately ten feet wide. Wrought iron gates were added to the colonnade of the Hall of Fame in 1929 by the Philadelphia artist Samuel Yellin.

Below the exterior open-air colonnade sits the Hall of Fame museum, a series of gallery spaces for exhibitions on the honored Hall-of-Famers, unified by a semicircular passageway. The corridors leading from the galleries to the auditorium feature buff-colored brick walls and Guastavino ceiling tiles.

Today, the Hall of Fame exists much as it did when first constructed, remaining true to its original design intentions. The lower-level gallery is mostly vacant, occasionally used for movie sets. The colonnade’s northern end was extended to terminate in line with the front of the Hall of Philosophy, an alteration to Stanford White’s symmetrical original layout.

Hall of Philosophy and Hall of Languages

Although completed eighteen years apart, Hall of Languages (1894) and Hall of Philosophy (1912) were designed by Stanford White as a matched pair of flanking buildings for the library, the former to the south and the latter to the north. They are identical in design and symmetrical in plan. The two buildings have simple rectangular masses, approximately double-cubes, with low-pitched hipped roofs and skylights in the attics. They are both clad with a distinctive yellow Roman brick and trimmed with Indiana limestone and terra-cotta finishes. Copper alloy and bronze detailing articulate the roofs, cornice lines and main entrances to the buildings. The windows of the ground level are set upon a Milford pink granite belt course with brick arches at their headers. Second-floor windows have stone sills in place of the belt course. Third floor windows are set on a stone belt course with brick arches at the headers, similar to the ground level, however here the windows are framed in stone and embellished with terra-cotta garlands. The cornices on both halls are decorated with two rows of dentils and elaborate cresting of antefixae. Both buildings feature Ionic porticos over their main entrances with full entablatures rising to the height of the third floor belt courses. Behind the portico columns are porches with three arches on the rear wall framing the main entry doors and side windows. Both halls are approached from a series of grand stairs.

When Hall of Philosophy was built eighteen years after Hall of Languages, some alterations in construction were made. For example, the roof of Hall of Philosophy was designed as a steel structure as opposed to the wood trusses used in Hall of Languages. In addition, the floor structure is composed of concrete arches, not hollow terra-cotta as in the earlier building.

Hall of Philosophy and Hall of Languages remain true to their original purposes, housing classrooms, offices, computer laboratories, a faculty lounge and a conference room, with centrally located stair halls for vertical access. Select interior spaces in the halls are detailed in a variety of fine materials. Recent repair, restoration and conservation projects include repair and select area replacement of the roofs, abatement of roofing materials, reconstruction of drainage components, repointing of select areas of masonry repair and sheet metal repair.
Havemeyer Laboratory

Havemeyer Laboratory, designed by Stanford White, was completed in 1895, and is situated to the southeast of Hall of Languages on the south side of the quadrangle. The materials mirror those of Hall of Philosophy and Hall of Languages, with straw-colored Roman brick facades accented with terra-cotta, limestone, and marble.

The building is rectangular in massing, seven bays wide and four bays deep with a low hip roof embellished by a denticulated cornice. The main set of double doors are surmounted by a transom having a decorative grille; the doors and transom are contained within a tabernacle frame. Today, Havemeyer Lab contains language immersion classrooms and offices.

The Havemeyer Annex is a modern addition to the campus, having a standing seam metal roof and buff-colored stucco walls. Because of the steep topography, the Annex’s gable roof sits just below the first floor level of Havemeyer Laboratory and the building does not compete with the Laboratory.

Gould Hall and the Athletic Field

Stanford White’s design for the University Heights Campus was divided into three parts: on the west, a group of buildings facing a rectangular quadrangle with the library at the center; in the middle, an athletic field; and on the east, a smaller, closed and irregularly shaped residential quadrangle. Completed in 1896, Gould Hall was the only building constructed in this eastern quadrangle. The residence hall is constructed of light-colored “Staten Island brick” and sandstone with a Spanish tile roof. The long façade on the four story (plus basement) building is accentuated with three-story height pilasters framing the north and south entries. While the building remains in good condition, it no longer serves a residential function and, as part of an unrealized portion of White’s design, is not considered a contributing resource. While the athletic field is positioned in roughly the same location as White planned, it constitutes an entirely modern facility. Furthermore, the original grandstand for the field was removed in 1953 with the construction of the Roscoe C. Brown Student Center, which also divided the original campus in half, fully isolating the modern field and historic residence hall from the rest of White’s campus.

The National Historic Landmark Boundary (NHL) for the University Heights Campus focuses on the centerpiece buildings on the western edge of the campus—the Gould Memorial Library, Hall of Languages, Hall of Philosophy, and the Hall of Fame for Great Americans—and the formal lawn onto which they front. These elements ably convey White’s vision for the campus. As designed, the lawn was to be almost entirely lined with buildings. Only Havemeyer Laboratory on the south side of the lawn was ultimately constructed during the period of significance on a design by White and is included within the NHL boundary. The grouping consisting of the Gould Memorial Library, Hall of Languages, Hall of Philosophy, and Hall of Fame, was the intended focus of the campus and ably convey the formality of White’s design as well as its relationship with viewsheds to the west over the river.

The NHL boundary includes only the lawn and its adjacent White-designed buildings. The buildings and landscape maintain a high degree of integrity to the period of significance.

The continued importance and primacy of the main quadrangle, and its centerpiece buildings, to Stanford White’s composition has been reinforced over time by its full enclosure by later buildings. Meister Hall stands to the east of the Havemeyer Annex, slightly back from the quadrangle. It was constructed in 1967 and was part of Marcel Breuer’s expansion of the campus to the south in the late 1950s and 1960s. Except for Meister Hall, they are located a grade slightly below the Stanford White complex and include: the Colston Residence Hall (1957-61) Begrisch Hall (1964), and Polowczek Hall (1964).
The Roscoe C. Brown Student Center (1953, Eggers & Higgins, architects) and Annex extend along the east side of the quadrangle. It was intended that two buildings on the eastern side of the main lawn would frame an open space opposite the library, establishing a dominant east-west axis between the library and the second, smaller quadrangle at the eastern end of the campus. Except for Gould Hall, the smaller quadrangle was not constructed. As there was no longer an obvious need for a unifying east-west axis, in 1953, NYU constructed a single building across the east side of the principal quadrangle. Originally a symmetrical composition, the main entrance of the student center aligns with the entrance of Gould Library, reinforcing the dominant axis of this quadrangle. A compact, nearly square Annex was later added to the north end of the building.

The North Instructional Building and Library, located along the north side of the quadrangle, has recently been completed by Robert A.M. Stern Architects. The design of the building utilizes materials and design elements similar to those in White’s campus buildings. The building steps back at its western end, forming a wing that echoes the scale and position of Havemeyer Laboratory on the south side of the quadrangle.

While of varying ages and scales, the buildings on the south, east, and north sides of the quadrangle reinforce the centrality of White’s Gould Memorial Library and flanking buildings as the architectural focus of the campus and White’s sophistication as a designer.

CONCLUSION

The University Heights campus exemplifies the finest of the Beaux-Arts influenced American-Renaissance tradition, and is an exceptional illustration of Stanford White’s work at McKim, Mead and White. The Gould Memorial Library, Hall of Fame for Great Americans, Hall of Languages and Hall of Philosophy, along with Gould Hall and Havemeyer Laboratory, form a unique architectural ensemble. The project provides a compelling comparison of the design styles, and interpretation of the American Renaissance style, of the principals of McKim, Mead and White, as Charles McKim’s design of Columbia University occurred simultaneously with Stanford White’s design for NYU. Additionally, with the push to move the NYU campus to the Bronx, the University Heights Campus exemplifies the trends of early-twentieth-century campus planning. Moreover, the Hall of Fame for Great Americans at NYU’s University Heights campus retains its own significance due to its importance to American culture of the period.

Hosting just two lecture halls seating a total of 250, Bronx Community College’s Bergrisch Hall is more a work of art than of necessity. Its mid-20th century vigor offers a starkly modern counterpoint to the 19th century Beaux-Arts elegance of the University Heights Campus quadrangle. Architect Marcel Breuer poured concrete into rough wooden forms to create this trapezoidal, cantilevered wonder just off Stanford White’s nationally landmarked quadrangle. The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission designated Bergrisch Hall a city landmark on Jan. 8, 2002, calling it “the most daring” of Breuer’s designs for the campus, a “bold sculptural form” that appears “to defy gravity.” It is one of five buildings that he designed there between 1960 and 1970, when the campus was part of New York University.