

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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DATE ENTERED

NHL

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Third Judicial District Courthouse (Jefferson Market Courthouse)

AND/OR COMMON

Jefferson Market Branch New York Public Library

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Sixth Avenue at 10th Street (425 Sixth Avenue)

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

New York

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

19th

STATE

New York

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

## CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT☒ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT

## OWNERSHIP

☒ PUBLIC☐ PRIVATE☐ BOTH

## PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED

## STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

## ACCESSIBLE

☐ YES: RESTRICTED☒ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO

## PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE☐ MUSEUM☐ COMMERCIAL☐ PARK☒ EDUCATIONAL☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ ENTERTAINMENT☐ RELIGIOUS☐ GOVERNMENT☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ MILITARY☐ OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

City of New York, Mayor Abraham D. Beame

STREET &amp; NUMBER

City Hall

CITY, TOWN

New York

VICINITY OF

STATE

New York 10007

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE.

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

New York County Hall of Records

STREET &amp; NUMBER

31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN

New York

STATE

New York

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

June 1968

☒ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Library	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1874-77

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Frederick Clarke Withers (1828-1901) Calvert Vaux (1824-1892)

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Jefferson Market Courthouse is Frederick Clarke Withers' best known work, which included a number of Victorian Gothic churches, and the complex of buildings at Gallaudet College. Although his churches were rather conservative for the time, the Jefferson Market is exuberant by comparison and is designed in the "Venetian" or "Ruskinian" style. An outstanding example of civic design, the structure still stands on its triangular lot with a commanding view, its survival is the result of a heated battle to preserve it (1965-1967). Today it is a neighborhood branch of the New York Public Library.

Withers was born in England where he took his architectural training (his brother also became a distinguished British architect). In 1853 he emigrated to America, settled in Newburgh, New York, and eventually joined the firm of Vaux and Olmsted contributing to their designs for Central Park. Withers had a large practice and was held in high esteem, he designed and wrote about English Gothic-Revival churches, and was particularly influenced by C.W.A. Pugin. Withers was also aware of Northern Italian Gothic churches that had also caught the eye of John Ruskin in England and Viollet-le-Duc in France and began to use the style in secular designs. When A. J. Bicknell published Withers' work under the title of "Church Architecture" (1873) the architect's fame was established. Francis Kowsky discusses the old courthouse: "The idea of erecting a new municipal building on the site of the Jefferson Market was born in the Albany legislature, where by 1870 it had become one of the many pork barrel bills fostered by the Tweed political machine. In the autumn of 1873, after \$150,000 had been appropriated and spent, the city had for its investment only a rotting pile of building materials. New supervisory commissioners were appointed at the beginning of 1874. The fact that the original scheme would have cost "several millions to complete" caused the new commissioners to accept the suggestion of Andrew Green, the city Comptroller, that it be discarded. Withers was hired to draw up a new plan.

Withers' initial design for the courthouse, which owed a large debt to William Burgess' competition design for the London Law Courts, was approved by July 1874 and it was only slightly altered when a drawing was published in The New York Sketchbook of Architecture in June 1875. Construction began, and simultaneously accusations, contractor's disputes, and citizens' investigations were renewed, all of which were to continue even after the building was completed.

The Jefferson Market Courthouse is a group of buildings that replaced the sprawling Jefferson Market and a dilapidated prison which stood on the triangular

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plot defined by Sixth Avenue on the east, Greenwich Avenue on the west, and West Tenth Street on the north. Associated in the minds of New Yorkers of Withers' class with "everything that is bad, mean, and unsavory," the old Jefferson Market, which had housed a dingy police court over a saloon, had been clustered without architectural pretense around a wooden fire tower. The complex Withers created on the cramped site consisted of four distinct units: the courthouse facing Sixth Avenue, the five-story prison (demolished) inclosed behind a high wall on Greenwich Avenue, the fire and bell tower attached to the courthouse at the corner of Sixth Avenue and West Tenth Street, and the market (also demolished), which was not designed by Withers but by Hogan and Hogan in 1883, in the southern wedge formed by Sixth and Greenwich Avenues. Withers incorporated the site's customary functions of market, fire observatory, police court, and prison in a tightly knit architectural scheme, one of the nation's best-thought-through urban renewal projects.

The judicial building, comprising the police court on the ground floor and the district court on the second floor, was Withers' masterpiece. Its plan, an ingenious organization of space, exploited the unusual site to obtain the maximum accommodations. Taking his clue from the three-cornered piece of ground, Withers created what in effect were two triangular buildings: the base of the larger one parallels Sixth Avenue and the base of the smaller one parallels West Tenth Street. These two wedges were fitted into the acute angle formed by the junction of the narrow street with the broad avenue. The central area of the larger portion of the smaller triangle contained a court clerk's office facing West Tenth Street. The corner staircase, which is in the base of the fire tower, leads to the district court and hinges the two triangles together.

An opulent though regulated profusion of ornament bedecks the nonstructural parts of the elevations, especially the Sixth Avenue facade. Carved details encrust the entrance portal and accumulate in the diaper panels under the windows, around the polygonal base of the tower, on the capitals of the numerous colonnettes, and in the pediments of the smaller gables. Enshrined at the bottom of the bell tower is a water fountain embellished with reliefs depicting the weary traveller and the life-giving pelican. The most pretentious areas of sculpture are the mighty state seal in the main gable and the epigrammatic frieze representing the trial from Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice in the tympanum over the window above the entrance.

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The Jefferson Market Courthouse was not only more elaborate than Withers' earlier works, it was also more challenging because of the nature of its urban location at the convergence of smaller streets with a major avenue. Withers responded by exploiting the scenic potential of the acute angle at Sixth Avenue and West Tenth Street, the point at which the haphazard street pattern of Greenwich Village meets the gridiron of upper Manhattan..... Withers created a landmark that still impresses today in its greatly changed surroundings."<sup>1</sup>

Nearby, designed at about the same time, is Withers' only cast-iron building. Located at 448 Broome Street, this Gothic store is discussed in the SoHo Historic District report.

The flamboyant facade was noted by Montgomery Schuyler in American Architecture and produced an amusing anecdote concerning the ubiquitous gray paint that often covered city buildings inside and out: "It seems impossible to keep the painter away from public works. Mr. Withers came to me once in much distress to know if I had no "influence" which would thwart the project of which he had heard of painting the brickwork of the Jefferson Market Court House, then just beginning to take " a plausible aspect of moderate antiquity" and to weather into mellowness. I managed to meet the official custodian of the building, who informed me that it was quite true that he was going to have the front painted, but that he was going to do it simply out of the interest and pride which he felt in the building, which he regarded as "shabby." When I asked him whether he thought he felt more interest in the appearance of the building than its architect, his answer was, "Aw, that dingy look may do for London, but it won't do for New York," and "freshened up" the poor front accordingly was."<sup>2</sup>

In 1967, a refurbished building reopened, after many years of misuse and neglect, as a branch library of the New York Public Library. The remodeling was skillfully executed by Giorgio Cavaglieri, architect.

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<sup>1</sup>Kowsky, Francis R., The Architecture of Frederick C. Withers, JSAH Vol. XXXV No. 2, May 1976, pp. 98-101.

<sup>2</sup>Schuyler, Montgomery, American Architecture, edited by William Jordy and Ralph Coe Belknap Press, Harvard, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1961, pp. 180-181.

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Jefferson Market Courthouse was designed under the firm name of Withers and Vaux (Frederick Clarke Withers and Calvert Vaux) but is the work of Withers executed between the years 1874 to 1877. On June 15, 1878, an article appeared in American Architect and Building News that described the original use: "These buildings, commenced in 1874, were completed during the past year, and are located on a triangular plot of ground, formed by Sixth Avenue, Tenth Street, and Greenwich Avenue. The entrance to the court-house is on Sixth Avenue, through a large ornamental archway, into a porch 16 feet square, from thence on the left through a vestibule of the same size to the police court, and on the right by a circular stone staircase to the civil court above; each of these rooms is about 61 feet by 37 feet. An examination room, 37 feet by 24 feet, adjoins the police court, with a room for officers in charge of those awaiting trial, for whom separate rooms are provided in the prison building. The police magistrate's entrance is on Tenth Street, where offices for himself and his clerks are arranged. The rooms for the judge of the civil court are on the second floor adjoining the court room, with an entrance to them through the small tower on Sixth Avenue, in which is a staircase leading also to the rooms of the janitor on the third floor. The clerks of the civil court reach the offices provided for them by the principal staircase in the tower, and the third floor over these offices, and connected with them by a small turret staircase is a fire and burglar-proof room for the records of the court. The tower for the fire-bell is at the acute angle formed by the junction of Sixth Avenue and Tenth Street. The room for the look-out is reached by a separate, spiral stone staircase, with a private entrance from the street; the floor of this room is 98 feet from the sidewalk and above the ridges of all the surrounding roofs, so that an uninterrupted view of the neighborhood is obtained. Between the buildings occupied by the courts and the prison is an enclosed yard with an entrance into the latter so that prisoners may be conveyed to and fro without publicity. The entrance to the prison is on Tenth Street, and leads directly from the porch into a guard-room 24 feet by 14 feet, adjoining which is a small bedroom for the keeper. On this floor are two large waiting or lodging rooms, for male and female prisoners. Accommodation in separate cells is provided on the second floor for 29 female prisoners, and on the floor above, and entirely separated, for 58 male prisoners. Each cell is 8 feet by 5 1/2 feet and 9 1/2 feet high. A steam elevator is arranged near the staircase to convey prisoners to their respective quarters, as well as to carry up the supplies from the kitchen which is in the basement. Rooms for the keepers are arranged at the entrance to the male and female prisons, and in connection with each; there are two large cells for the detention of such persons as it may be considered advisable to separate from the ordinary class of prisoners. A small airing court 30 feet by 20 feet is provided in the roof, and reached only by the elevator, so that those prisoners who are detained any length of time may be able to take air and exercise without any possibility of escape.

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The buildings are of brick, those of the court-house and bell tower being faced with Philadelphia brick, and those of the prison with Croton fronts. The stone used is from Berlin, Ohio, and its color contrasts well with the real brick. The carving, which forms an important element of the design, was done under the direction of Mr. William Simon. The interior walls of the main halls and staircase are lined with stone, with ornamental arches over the doorways, windows, etc., and enriched with a large amount of carved foliage. The interior of the court-rooms and offices are trimmed with black-walnut and cherry-wood wainscoting, doors, etc., and the floors of the vestibules and halls laid with ornamental tiles. The buildings are heated by steam throughout.

The total cost of the buildings, exclusive of architects' fees, amounts to rather less than \$360,000."<sup>1</sup>

The building is in excellent condition. It rises two and one half stories over a full basement. Irregular in plan, the foundation walls are faced with granite on the street sides. The walls are of red brick laid up in Flemish bond, granite belt courses and black brick decorative details; the three red brick chimneys has a stone belt course and friezes. There is a stoop on the east facade with a modern rail and on the north facade with an old iron railing, possibly original. The main entrance is lancet-arched with a modern door. Above the transom "Third Judicial District Court House" is carved in a stone roundel. Most of the windows are single-light panes and metal sash, a few have trefoil arched stained-glass. The roof has gables, mansards and pyramid forms now covered with gray sheet metal replacing shingles. The cornice and frieze are granite.

"On the east facade there is one dormer which is faced with brick and carved stone and has two single-light windows. On the north facade is one dormer which is faced with gray sheet metal and has three single-light windows. A dormer on the rear facade is similar to that on the east facade. At the northeast corner of the building there is a clock tower with iron balcony and a pyramidal roof. At the rear of the building is a small wooden tower painted gray. Gargoyles and iron finials surmount the towers and roofs at various points.

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<sup>1</sup>American Architect and Building News, June 15, 1878, p. 209.

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Floor plans, by floor: Basement: A hallway consisting of brick vaults connects the spiral stairway with the reference room at the south end of the building. First floor: To the west of the main entrance are library staff work areas and an elevator. To the south of the main entrance are a children's reading room and a smaller room used as an auditorium beyond. A spiral staircase in the tower to the north of the main entrance leads to the second floor. Second floor: Immediately to the south of the staircase is the circulation desk and staff work areas. To the south is the main reading room with three bays on the west side. To the south is a smaller reading room. Third floor: A balcony leads across the main reading room connecting a staff work room in the north section with a staff lounge on the south portion.

Stairways: In the clock tower at the north corner of the building, a stone staircase with stone walls leads from the first to second stories; a modern steel spiral staircase painted black runs from basement to first floor. At the south end of the building is a modern concrete staircase with iron railing.

Flooring: In the basement and second floor hallways the floors are covered with modern tile. All reading rooms and the auditorium have modern wood parquet floors. The floor of the entrance hall on the first floor is covered with terrazzo with brass strips laid in diamond pattern.

Wall and ceiling finish: In the basement hallway and reference room the walls and ceiling consist of red brick vaults laid up in English garden wall bond except for the east wall which is plastered and painted white. On the first floor the children's reading room has plaster walls painted white and a cream colored stucco ceiling with panels painted gold; the auditorium has wooden wainscoting, painted black, plaster walls and paneled ceiling, both painted white. On the second floor the main reading room has plaster walls and paneled ceiling, painted white; the south reading room has plaster walls and ceiling painted white.

Doorways and doors: A modern glass and metal vestibule surrounds the main entrance. Doorways in the hallway on the first floor are limestone with square-headed openings faced with marble. Original carved wood doorways and paneled doors throughout the building have been painted black. On both first and second floor- three new doorways faced with marble were cut between the main reading rooms and rooms to the south."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Waite, Diana, HABS data sheets, 1968.

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Later additions and alterations include plumbing and partition alterations in 1918-1919, in 1939-1944 other additions and changes were made (fireproof doors, partitions, some ceiling heights). "In 1961 the clock in the tower was electrified as a result of efforts by Greenwich Village citizens. On August 23, 1961, it was announced that the building would be rehabilitated and used as a branch library for the New York Public Library. Giorgio Cavalleri was the architect. Contracts for the works-which included cleaning the brick, installing new windows, doors and sash, constructing a walkway across the main reading room, and installing new plumbing, heating, and lighting--were let in 1964. In 1965 construction work was begun and on November 27, 1967, the building was formally opened as a library."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



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PAGE 1

Kowsky, Francis R., The Architecture of Frederick C. Withers (1828-1901),  
Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians Volume XXXV,  
Number 2, pp. 83-107.

Records of the Buildings Department, Municipal Building, New York, New York.

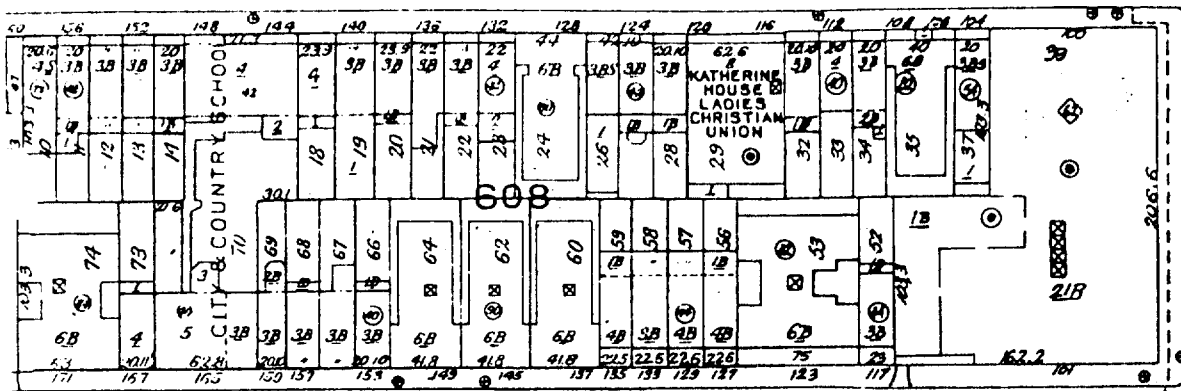
"Contracts Are Let to Convert Court," The New York Times, November 25, 1964,  
p. 61.

"Court House, Bell Tower and Prison, Third Judicial District, New York,"  
The New-York Sketch-Book of Architecture, II.

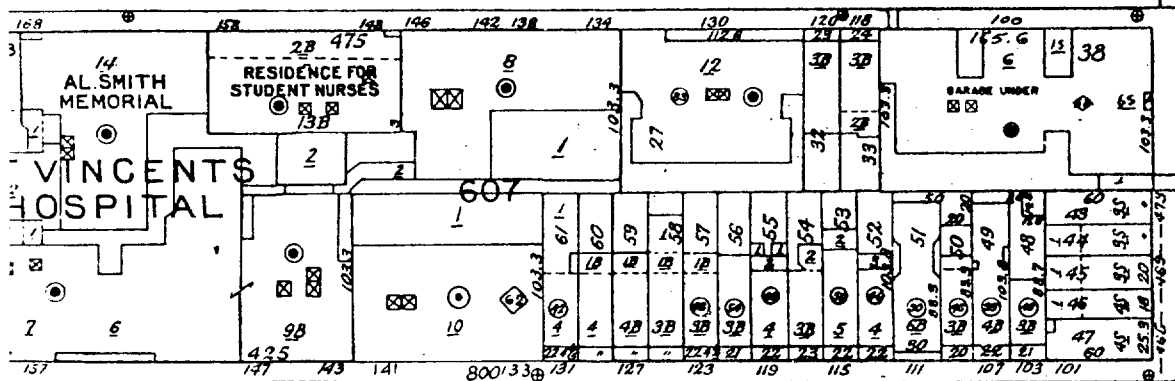
"The Third District Court-House, Bell Tower, and Prison, New York,"  
The American Architect and Building News, III (June 15, 1878),  
209 and one plate.

"Village Loves Its 'Old Jeff,' Red Face, Balky Clock and All," New York  
World Telegram, September 6, 1961.

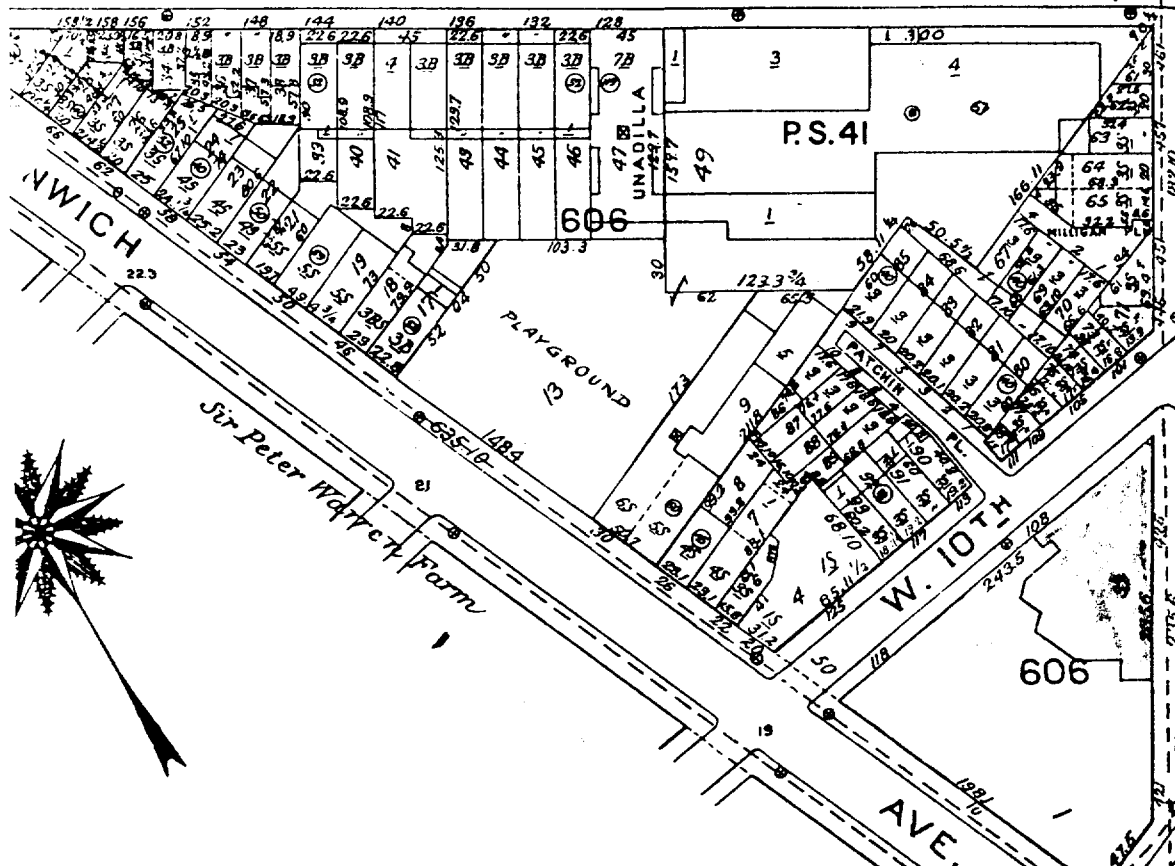
"'Villagers' Fight to Save Building," The New York Times, February 19, 1961.



W. 12TH



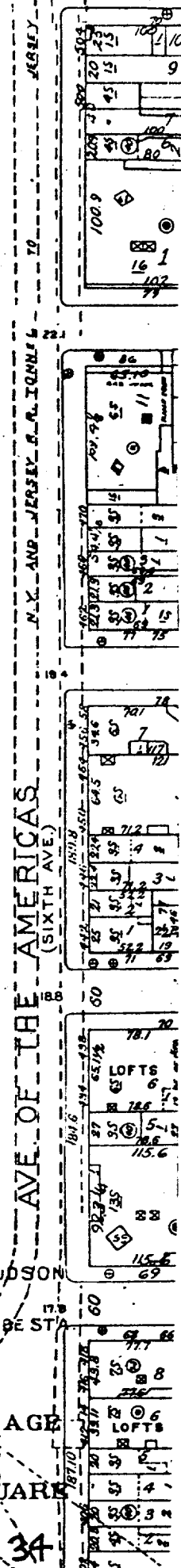
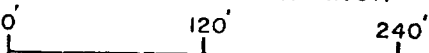
W. 11TH



**PART OF  
SECTION 2**

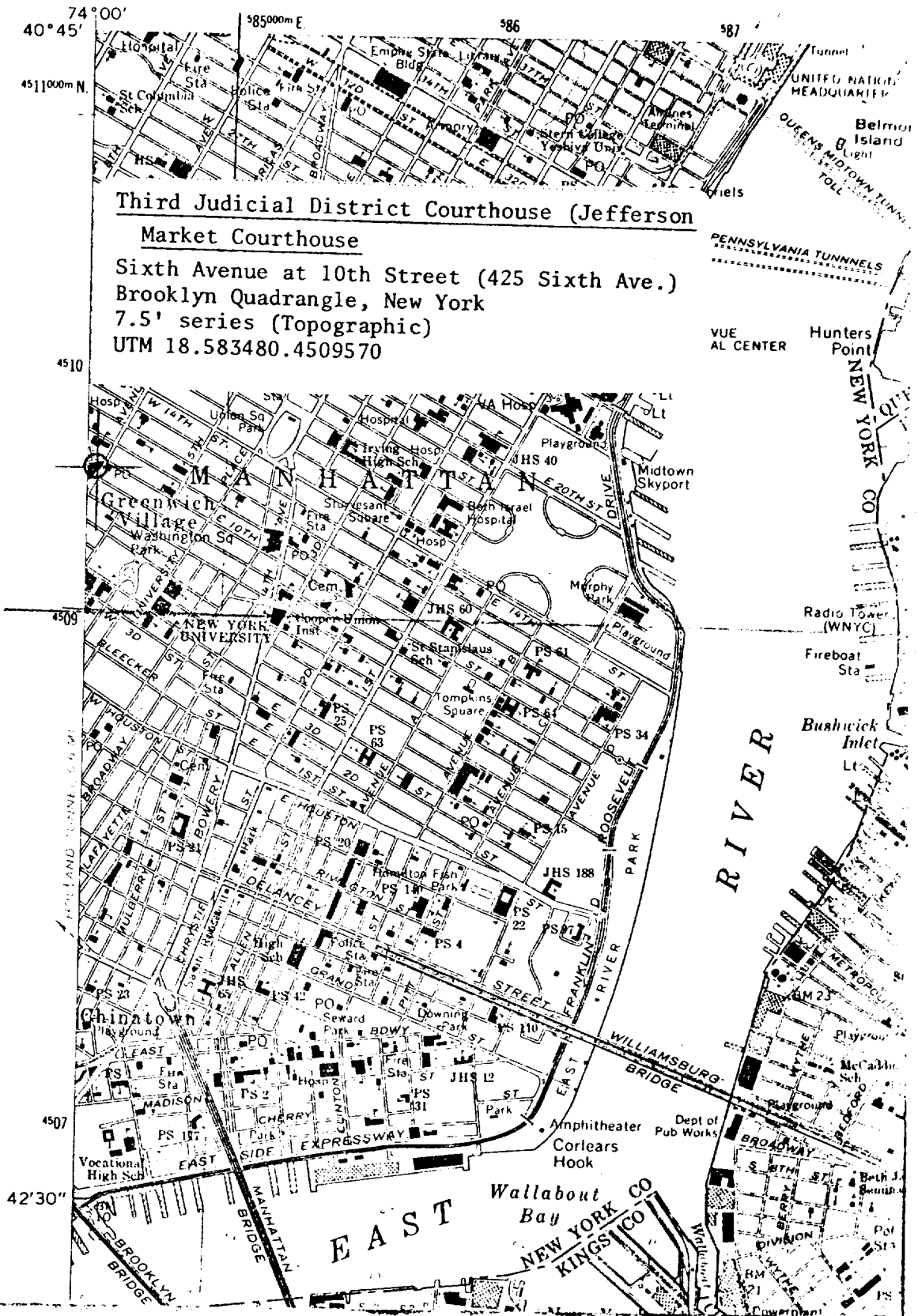
*Jefferson Court  
Market  
Court House*

SCALE: 120' TO AN INCH



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

51651 SE  
(WEEHAWKEN)



## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See Continuation Sheet)

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

UTM REFERENCES

A 

1	8
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5	8	3	4	8	0
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4	5	0	9	5	7	0
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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B 

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C 

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

D 

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION  
Bounded on the north-west by West 10th Street; on the south-west by former site of the Women's House of Detention (destroyed; now an empty lot used as a garden); on the east by 6th Avenue (Avenue of the Americas).

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey Division, National Park Service

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

CITY OR TOWN

Washington,

DATE

5/24/77

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

STATE

D.C. 20240

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL \_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_

LOCAL \_\_\_\_

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

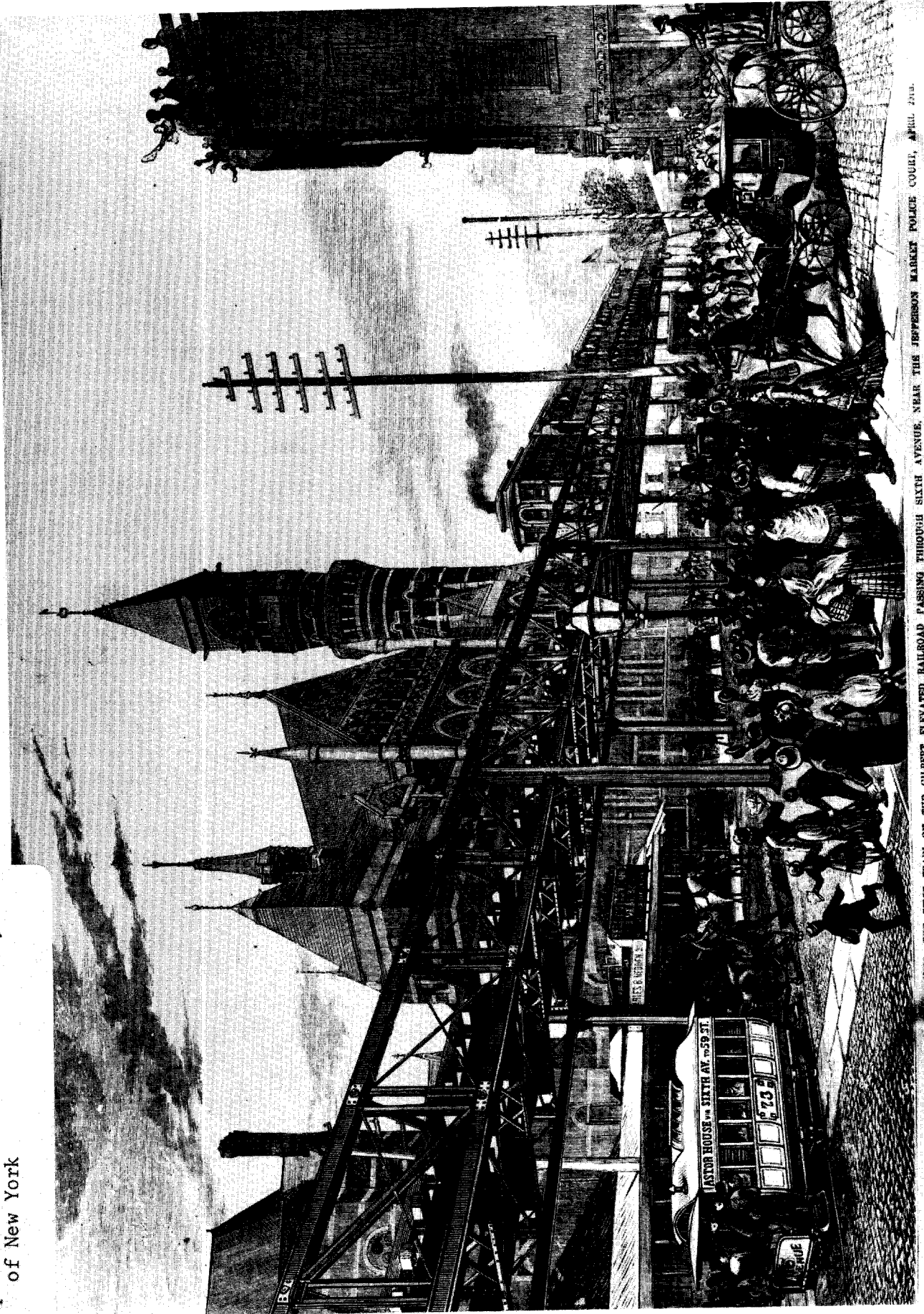
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

JEFFERSON MARKET COURT HOUSE, 1878

New York, New York  
photo credit: Museum of the City  
of New York



NEW YORK CITY.- THE DEVELOPMENT OF RAIL TRANSIT.- THE FIRST TRAIN ON THE GILBERT ELEVATED RAILROAD PASSING THROUGH SIXTH AVENUE, NEAR THE JEFFERSON MARKET POLICE COURT, APRIL 24th.





THIRD JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURTHOUSE  
(JEFFERSON MARKET COURTHOUSE), New York, N.Y.  
PHOTO CREDIT: HABS  
DESCRIPTION: Facade

JEFFERSON MARKET COURT HOUSE, 1880's

New York, New York  
photo credit: Museum of the City  
of New York





THIRD JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURTHOUSE  
(JEFFERSON MARKET COURTHOUSE), New York, N.Y.  
PHOTO CREDIT: HABS  
DESCRIPTION: Interior door.





THIRD JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURTHOUSE  
(JEFFERSON MARKET COURTHOUSE), New York, N.Y.  
PHOTO CREDIT: HABS  
DESCRIPTION: View of rotunda.