

TWEED COURTHOUSE, first floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, and the staircases leading to the second floor; second floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, the staircases leading to the third floor, and Rooms 201 and 202 (former courtroom); third floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, and the staircases leading to the fourth floor; fourth floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, the wells above the main stairhalls, and the staircases leading to the fifth floor; fifth floor interior consisting of the rotunda up to and including the skylight; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces including glass block, columns, light fixtures, stair railings, well railings, doors, and fireplaces; 52 Chambers Street, Manhattan. Built 1861-1881; architects Thomas Little, John Kellum, and Leopold Eidlitz. Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 122, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated

On January 8, 1980, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Tweed Courthouse, first floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, and the staircases leading to the second floor; second floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, the staircases leading to the third floor, and Rooms 201 and 202 (former courtroom); third floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, and the staircases leading to the fourth floor; fourth floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, the wells above the main stairhalls, and the staircases leading to the fifth floor; fifth floor interior consisting of the rotunda up to and including the skylight; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces including glass block, columns, light fixtures, stair railings, well railings; doors and fireplaces; and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 15). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Six witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. A letter has been received in favor of designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Tweed Courthouse, although associated by name and history with one of New York's most notoriously corrupt city governments, is architecturally one of the city's grandest and most important civic spaces. Built over a period of twenty years, it is the product of two of New York's most prominent architects, John Kellum and Leopold Eidlitz, and of two of the most disparate 19th century architectural movements, the mid-century commercial Italianate, and the later highly theoretical Victorian Romanesque.

As conceived by Kellum the courthouse was a grand Italianate civic monument, modeled both on English precedents and on the United States Capitol, with details developed in the 1850s and 1860s for New York's commercial buildings. Large parts of the interior were constructed in cast iron, the preferred material for 19th century commercial architecture that was pioneered by Kellum himself. Eidlitz's additions, comprising the southern wing and several basic alterations to Kellum's rotunda, reflect an opposing architectural philosophy: an American version of organic architecture, expressed through medieval forms, of which Eidlitz was New York's most distinguished theorist. The Tweed interior is one of the few and one of the best of both types, and although the architect's approaches were antithetical, they combined in the courthouse interior to form an overwhelmingly grand and rich public space.

Besides City Hall, the Tweed Courthouse is the only survivor of the many important civic buildings that once stood in City Hall Park. One hundred years after its completion, the Tweed is one of the city's finest civic monuments, and encloses one of its finest monumental interior spaces.

William M. Tweed and the Tweed Ring

The man chiefly responsible for the Tweed Courthouse, as well as for one of the most infamous political machines in American history, was William M. Tweed.¹ Tweed and his Ring dominated both the city and county of New York during much of the construction period of the courthouse, from 1861 until 1871. The era of the ascension and demise of the Tweed Ring, together with its tremendously successful and notorious schemes, constitutes a major epoch in the history of New York City.²

Tweed (1823-1878), the son of a New York chair manufacturer, began his political career as alderman in 1851, and went on to national politics the following year in the House of Representatives, where he served until 1855. He preferred the role of a city politician, however, and did not seek re-election at the end of his term.³

From 1857 to 1870, Tweed was a member of the newly bi-partisan Board of Supervisors, the chief legislative body of New York County.⁴ The innumerable frauds connected with the construction of the courthouse were made possible by his membership on the Board's Special Committee on the New Court House, which monitored all of the expenses for the project.

Tweed's power was solidified in 1861 when he was elected chairman of the Democratic Central Committee of New York County. In the following years, Tweed increased his personal fortune through various questionable business dealings. In September 1861 just a few days after construction had begun on the new courthouse, Tweed purchased a marble quarry in Sheffield, Massachusetts, from which a large portion of the marble for the courthouse was bought, undoubtedly at a tremendous profit to the owner.⁵ In 1864, he acquired the controlling interest in a printing concern, known as the New York Printing Company, which soon afterward had the contracts for all of the printing business of the city and county. Eventually, it became mandatory for all railroad, ferry and insurance companies to employ this firm if they wished to stay in business.⁶ Ventures such as these contributed substantially to Tweed's fortune. By 1867 he had moved his large family from the Lower East Side of Manhattan to the fashionable neighborhood of Murray Hill. At this time, he was serving as State Senator, New York County Democratic Chairman, School Commissioner, Deputy Street Commissioner and President of the Board of Supervisors. There was certainly no more powerful man in New York State.⁷

By 1868 the structure of the Ring was well established. According to The Report of the Special Committee Appointed to Investigate the 'Ring' Frauds, published in 1878:

Almost every person who did work or furnished supplies for the county at this time were informed by some member of the Ring that, in order to insure a continuance of the public patronage, increased orders and prompt payment, it would be necessary for them to add to their bills a certain percentage in excess of their true face, which increase or percentage it was understood and agreed should be paid to the corrupt combination of the Board aforesaid / Board of Supervisors/.⁸

The graft and corruption perpetrated by the Tweed Ring pervaded almost every aspect of the city and county activities.

The Tweed Ring's greatest fraud was the new county courthouse. Construction began on the building in 1861 and progressed at an outrageously slow rate. When the Tweed Ring disintegrated in 1871, the courthouse, by then considered a monumental symbol of corruption, was still not complete. It has been estimated that more than nine million dollars in graft was expended on this notorious undertaking.⁹ It appears that almost every major contractor involved with the construction of the courthouse was also associated with the Ring and submitted fraudulent bills. Corruption increased after 1870 when a new charter, officially known as "An Act to Reorganize the Government of New York," and commonly called the "Tweed Charter," was passed. Among its numerous provisions, this legislation conveniently abolished the Board of Supervisors and established a Board of Special Audit, made up of the Mayor, Comptroller, Commissioner of Public Works, who was then Tweed, and the President of the Parks Department. Four new commissioners for the courthouse were appointed and under their authority

...the new Court House job was made a richer mine than ever before for the Ring. The four Commissioners never held a meeting but passed upon bills for supplies taking care to divide 20% among themselves.¹⁰

The records of the payments made for the new courthouse were a major part of the evidence used in bringing about the downfall of the Ring in 1871.

These scandalous schemes of the Tweed Ring produced surprisingly little outrage or concern from the public.¹¹ The press, with the exception of the New York Times and Harper's Weekly, was unusually silent. This apparent apathy may be attributed to the fact that the Ring also heavily subsidized many of the local newspapers by supplying advertisements, and bribed many of the reporters directly.¹²

Nonetheless, the New York Times and the cartoonist Thomas Nast of Harper's Weekly waged their own battles against the Ring. The Times published numerous articles criticizing the extravagance of the courthouse; the accusations were meaningless, however, without specific evidence. Finally, in the summer of 1871, the New York Times was able to expose the frauds committed by Tweed and his men with documented proof. Evidence of the frauds was provided by the County Auditor, Matthew O'Rourke, who had replaced the Ring bookkeeper, the ex-convict James Watson, when the latter was killed in a sleighing accident in January 1871. It was O'Rourke who copied the figures from the Comptroller's book and gave them to the New York Times.¹³ On July 21, 1871, the New York Times began printing lists of the innumerable fraudulent payments made by Comptroller Connolly to the contractors for the new courthouse. The accounts of Garvey, Keyser and many others, together with records of padded payrolls, appeared in the newspaper for several weeks. The public could not ignore what had merely been suggested for so long.

Shortly after the exposures made by the Times, the Ring began to break up. "Boss" Tweed was arrested on October 27, 1871. He was released on bail soon afterward, however, and a variety of complications prevented him from going to trial until November 19, 1873.¹⁴ The trial took place in the Court of Oyer and Terminer in the new county courthouse which, ironically, was still not complete. Tweed, in a rather emotional trial, was convicted on 204 counts of the indictment against him and sentenced to twelve years of imprisonment and to a fine of \$12,750. The Court of Appeals reduced his sentence to one year in prison and a \$250 fine. After he was released from prison in January 1875, he was immediately arrested again on charges brought by the State. He was sent to jail but treated leniently. On the evening of December 4, 1875, while on leave from prison, Tweed escaped from his guards and fled to Cuba and then to Spain. It was a cartoon by Thomas Nast that aided Spanish officials in recognizing Tweed. He was returned to prison in New York City on November 23, 1876. During the next two years Tweed testified openly on the main crimes of the Ring, in hopes of gaining an early release from prison. However, he died in his room at the Ludlow Street Jail on April 12, 1878,

...a prisoner, exhausted, forsaken, miserable, betrayed, sick, William M. Tweed lies a-dying. From how high up to how low down.¹⁵

The Site

The land which is now known as City Hall Park has been an important part of New York City for several centuries. Of the many structures that have occupied the park during the last 200 years only City Hall and the Tweed Courthouse remain today.

When the Dutch settled the area that is now New York City, the park land was called the "Vlachte," or "Flat," and was open to the public as a place for holding meetings and for the grazing of animals. In 1686, during the English regime, the park property was acquired for use as the "Common," a place for punishing prisoners and for holding public meetings, as well as for a black burial ground.¹⁶ The first public building to be erected here was an almshouse, built on the site of the present City Hall (built 1738, demolished 1797). This was followed by the Upper Barracks (built 1757, demolished 1790) on part of the present site of the Tweed Courthouse, the "New Gaol" (built 1757-59, demolished 1903) to the east of today's City Hall, the Bridewell (built 1775, demolished 1838), which served as a military prison during the Revolution,¹⁷ the Second Almshouse (built 1795-96, demolished 1857), later known as the New York Institution, on the Tweed site,¹⁸ City Hall (built 1803-11, extant) and the Rotunda (built 1817-18, demolished 1870), which housed the art gallery organized by the well-known American artist, John Vanerlyn.¹⁹

During the 1850s, as the city began to expand rapidly, the need for new government offices became apparent. In 1852 a small brownstone building was erected immediately to the west of the Rotunda to serve as the City Court.²⁰ Additional municipal offices were needed and a number of plans were put forward in the 1850s for a "New City Hall," as the project which was to be the Tweed Courthouse was first called. It was not until several years later, however, that the many complications involved in such a major undertaking were resolved.²¹

On April 17, 1858, "An Act in Relation to the City Hall in the City of New York" was passed authorizing the appointment of three "Commissioners of the New City Hall" who were to "direct and superintend the erection of a building in the Park, in the rear of City Hall."²² This Act specifically enumerated the duties of the Commissioners and cited what offices were to occupy the building. These included the following courts: Supreme, Superior, Common Pleas, Oyer and Terminer, General Sessions, Surrogate, and Marine; the Grand and Petit Juries and the Offices of the Sheriff, the Commissioner of Jurors, the District Attorney, and the Law Institute. In addition, it authorized the Commissioners to "raise a sum not exceeding \$250,000, by the creation of a public stock, to be called the City Hall Stock..."²³

Early in 1859, the two Commissioners for the courthouse, having obtained several estimates for the building, determined that the already approved sum of \$250,000 would not be sufficient. They proposed a new figure of \$1,000,000.²⁴ However, this amendment was not acted upon by the legislature and on May 3, 1859, a resolution was passed by the Board of Supervisors for the Commissioners "...to proceed, immediately, to discharge the duties incumbent upon them, as Commissioners for Building the City Hall."²⁵

The first known reference to the new building as a courthouse was on March 19, 1860, when a resolution was passed by the Board of Supervisors that the "Committee on Civil Courts be directed to prepare plans for building a courthouse..."²⁶ During the next several months resolutions were passed concerning the building, which was then consistently referred to as a courthouse.²⁷

Finally on April 10, 1861, the definitive legislation for the new courthouse was passed. Entitled "An Act to Enable the Supervisors of the County of New York to Acquire and Take Land for the Building of a Court House in Said County," this legislation pertained to the actual acquisition of the site and the appraisal of the land. In addition, this Act authorized the Board of Supervisors to raise the money necessary for this project by the "creation of a public fund or stock, to be known and called as the court house stock."²⁸ The land was appraised in the early fall of 1861 for \$450,000 and construction was begun on September 16, 1861.²⁹ It had taken three years actually to initiate the construction of the new county courthouse; but the courthouse saga had barely begun.

The construction of the Tweed Courthouse was financed by stocks, issued at various times during the erection of the building. The major legislation related to the funding of the courthouse was passed by the State Legislature on April 9, 1862; it was entitled "An Act to Authorize the Board of Supervisors of the County of New York to Raise Money by Loan and to Create a Public Fund or Stock to be Called 'The New York County Court House Stock,' and to Authorize the Commissioners of the Sinking Fund to Receive and Purchase Said Stock."³⁰ This Act amended the earlier one of 1861 and authorized the expenditure of \$1,000,000 for the construction of the courthouse. Two years later, on April 14, 1864, another law was enacted which provided for an additional \$800,000 worth of stock. Again in 1868, \$800,000 more was apportioned for the courthouse. In 1869, 1870 and 1871 successive statutes were issued to provide more money for the new courthouse. The total sum authorized by these legislative acts amounted to \$4,550,000.³¹

However, the total cost of the courthouse cannot be calculated from these statutes alone. Throughout the period of construction, the true costs were concealed by the Comptroller who listed the expenses under various vague headings such as "County liabilities" and "Adjusted Claims." But in a report published by the Board of Estimate and Apportionment in 1914, the total cost of the building was estimated to have been between \$11,000,000 and \$12,000,000.³²

Construction History

The Tweed Courthouse was under construction for almost twenty years. A number of factors delayed the progress of the building. The Civil War broke out just as construction began and caused inevitable delays. Another and more direct cause of the seemingly endless period of construction, however, was the political and financial scheming of "Boss" Tweed and his Ring. In addition, the breaking up of the Ring. In addition, the breaking up of the Ring in 1871 led to an actual halt in construction which lasted until 1876. The final stages of construction also took an inordinately long time.

Ground was broken for the new courthouse on September 16, 1861, and the cornerstone was laid on December 26, 1861.³³ By the end of 1865, after four years of construction, it appears that the major portion of the exterior was built and that work was beginning to get under way on the interior. The basement level was essentially complete, but the upper floors consisted of little more than the outer shell of the building.³⁴ This work was built to the designs of John Kellum.

Although the courthouse was still a long way from being finished, it was occupied by the Court of Appeals in March 1867. It is surprising that the building was used at this point, since there was still a large opening in the roof, which was to be covered with a dome, but which in the meantime permitted rain and snow to fall into the building. The main stairway, made of iron, had only been completed to the second story and only a few of the rooms had been stuccoed. The public was becoming increasingly displeased with the extravagance of the project; the New York Times of March 12, 1867, wrote:

The "Great Sinking Fund of the Board of Supervisors," it is true has reached the stage of partial roofing in, but is yet far indeed from being completed. To the outside world it appears to want the cunning fingers of the glazier to complete the work of shutting the wind out of the marble halls; but to those who examine closely, the evidences are not wanting of great labor yet to be done and many holes both in the floor and roof are visible in which to bury the money of the tax-payers.³⁵

Charges of corruption in the construction of the courthouse were voiced as early as 1866. Supervisor Smith Ely, Jr. claimed that:

.....grossly extravagant and improper expenditures have been made by the persons having charge of the building of the new courthouse, in reference to the purchase of iron, marble and brick, and in the payment of various persons for services...³⁶

An investigative committee was formed by the Board of Supervisors to look into the activities of their own Special Committee on the New Court House, of which Tweed had been a member at various times since 1862. Not surprisingly, the investigative committee found no specific evidence of wrong-doing.³⁷ In the meantime, costs for the courthouse continued to mount and attention began to focus on the extravagance of the project.

Apparently almost all of the contractors associated with the courthouse were involved with the schemes of the Ring. Not only were the bills themselves fraudulent, but some contractors, such as J.A. Smith, and Hennessey, didn't even exist. ³⁸

The Tweed Ring began to break up almost immediately after the exposure made by the New York Times. Construction of the courthouse was interrupted in January 1872. The interior of the building with the exception of the rotunda, was substantially finished, and numerous courts and offices occupied the court house. Construction was not resumed until 1876, in which year the Commission to Complete the New County Court House, established in 1873, submitted its report to the Board of Estimate and Apportionment:

Gentlemen, the Commission...upon mature deliberation, concluded to finish the Chambers Street porch, as originally designed, to complete the interior of the main hall to the ridge of the roof, and then place upon it a skylight sufficient to properly light the interior of the building.

The Commission did not think it to the interest of the county to build another porch on the south side of the building, as was contemplated in the original design; such a porch, while very costly, is of no practical use.

To make a proper finish on the south side, it is proposed to extend a wing of about 50 by 70 feet, which will not cost much more than the contemplated porch, and will contain a number of large, airy rooms, for office use, which it is thought will save rentals now paid to the amount of some \$20,000.³⁹

Plans for this work were prepared by the architect commissioned to complete the new courthouse, Leopold Eidlitz.⁴⁰

Eidlitz began the rotunda and the pediment crowning the Corinthian columns of the Chambers Street portico in April of 1877.⁴¹ Like the earlier phase of construction, progress on the Eidlitz portion was slow. Originally the work was to have been done in two years, but in August 1879, it was reported that "the work is not yet nearly completed."⁴² Apparently, the Court House Commissioners entered into contracts for more than they had been authorized to spend. The original estimate for completing the courthouse was \$500,000; by 1877 this figure had nearly doubled.⁴³ In addition, several changes were made to the Eidlitz design after the contracts had been drawn up.⁴⁴

It is difficult to establish the exact completion date of the Eidlitz work. Minor alterations were still being performed on the new wing as late as March 1880. Court House Bonds were issued until March 31, 1881, indicating that construction continued until approximately that date.⁴⁵ Apparently the completion of the courthouse was not considered major news. Its construction had lasted almost twenty years.

The Architects of the Tweed Courthouse

The history of the design of the Tweed Courthouse involves several architects and a variety of stylistic sources. The principal architect of the building, John Kellum, died in 1871, before the courthouse was completed. Leopold Eidlitz was commissioned to finish the building. Furthermore, the original design for the courthouse may have been the work of the little-known architect, Thomas Little.

Thomas Little

The earliest building known to have been designed by Little was the New England Congregational Church in Brooklyn (1852), an Italianate brownstone building. Other buildings designed by him included two five-story commercial structures, also in the Italianate style, which stood on Duane Street in Manhattan.⁴⁶ Little's association with the courthouse project was undoubtedly a political one, since he was a member of the Board of Supervisors.⁴⁷ He submitted a bill for his design of the "New City Hall," as the project which was to be the Tweed Courthouse was referred to, in 1859.⁴⁸ During the 1866 investigation of the courthouse construction, Supervisor Smith Ely, Jr., who was questioned

by Supervisor Orson Blunt on the design of the building, named Little as the architect.⁴⁹ An article in the New York Times at about the same time as this testimony also implies that Kellum was not the original architect of the courthouse.⁵⁰

Two years later, on August 30, 1961, the Board of Supervisors passed a resolution "to employ a suitable architect" for the courthouse.⁵¹ By December, at the time of the laying of the cornerstone, John Kellum had been commissioned as the architect for the new courthouse, and both Little and Kellum were named as architects on the small box placed beneath the stone.⁵²

John Kellum

Kellum was born in Hempstead, Long Island in 1809. He began his career as a house carpenter and moved to Brooklyn when he was a young man, where he "worked at his trade with decided success, studying architecture diligently the while."⁵³ In 1846 the architectural firm of King and Kellum was formed, with Gamaliel King, the architect of the Brooklyn City Hall (1836-49), as senior partner. King & Kellum designed several commercial buildings in New York during the 1840s and 1850s. One of the most noteworthy was the Cary Building (1856), at 105-7 Chambers Street, one of the earliest cast-iron structures in the city. The firm of King and Kellum was dissolved in 1860.⁵⁴

Kellum's architectural career met with increased success after he received his first commission from the multi-millionaire Alexander T. Stewart in 1859. His Venetian Renaissance-style design for Stewart's impressive department store at Broadway and 10th Street achieved international renown. The store, "which marked the culmination of the iron-fronted, iron-framed structure in its heroic age...",⁵⁵ later became Wanamakers. It is interesting to note that the iron for the Stewart store as well as for Kellum's later James McCreery Dry Goods Store, was supplied by John B. and William W. Cornell, the iron contractors for the Tweed Courthouse. The A.T. Stewart Store was destroyed by fire in 1956. Kellum was also the architect of Stewart's luxurious residence (1863-69) on Fifth Avenue and 34th Street, a marble mansion in the Second Empire style with a mansard roof (demolished 1901). The Working Women's Hotel (1869-75) on Park Avenue between 32nd and 33rd Streets was also designed by Kellum in an elaborate Second Empire style and was another Stewart commission.⁵⁶ The final Stewart-Kellum collaboration was the development of the residential suburb of Garden City, Long Island. Kellum was commissioned not only to design the individual buildings, but also to lay out the overall plan of the suburb, and worked on the Garden City project until his death in 1871.⁵⁷

In addition to his work for Stewart, Kellum designed a number of commercial buildings during the 1860s:⁵⁸ the Italianate style Ball, Black & Company Building at 565-567 Broadway (1859-60), the cast-iron building at 55 White Street (1861), the Mutual Life Insurance Building (1863-65) at 140-146 Broadway, the cast-iron Italianate-style Fulton Ferry Terminal (1863), the original New York Stock Exchange (1865) on Broad Street, the New York Herald Building (1865-67), which stood at Broadway and Ann Street, and the James McCreery & Company Dry Goods Store (1868) at 801 Broadway, across the street from the large store he designed for Stewart.

John Kellum reached the height of his architectural career during the 1860s. In addition to the many buildings noted above which date from this period, he was also working on the Tweed Courthouse from 1861 until his death in 1871. Kellum's selection as architect for so prestigious a commission as the new county courthouse may have been due to his personal relationship with one of the Commissioners for the new courthouse, Wilson G. Hunt, for whom he designed commercial structures. In addition, Hunt was said to have been "of great advantage" to Kellum in the latter's obituary.⁵⁹

Kellum's design for the courthouse was never completed. The architect's death in August of 1871 together with the breaking up on the Tweed Ring that fall led to a halt in construction which lasted until 1876.

At the time of his death, Kellum's reputation as an architect was mixed, and there were two extreme points of view. On the one hand, the popular magazines such as Harper's Weekly and Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper considered him "one of the most distinguished architects of New York."⁶⁰ His talents were praised profusely in his obituary in Harper's Weekly:

His eminent success was due to his practical good sense and skill, his perfect integrity, and his entire fidelity to those who employed him. He was diligent, rapid and accurate in calculations, had a minute knowledge of all the particulars of his art....⁶¹

In sharp contrast to this attitude was that of the architectural critics of the period, specifically those writing for the newly-formed American Architect and Building News. According to these writers, the fact that Kellum had been the architect of the Tweed Courthouse was simply an additional negative aspect of the entire courthouse project. From the point of view of one particular critic, Kellum's work seems to have had no merit whatsoever:

As A.T. Stewart's architect and real-estate man, he secured a great influence over the millionaire, and executed for him the buildings which mark his want of taste as an architectural critic and judge. Beyond the Stewart work and this court-house, it is difficult to recall what Kellum ever did do. From a very poor carpenter's foreman, he suddenly blossomed into an 'architect' and rushed into a goodly fortune if not into much renown.⁶²

No doubt, a realistic appraisal of John Kellum as an architect lies at a point in between these two extreme attitudes. To be sure, Kellum was not a well-trained, sophisticated architect of the caliber, for instance, of Leopold Eidlitz. Nonetheless, Kellum worked for a number of important clients and designed many of significant buildings of the period in New York City. His commissions for Alexander T. Stewart, in particular the department store and Garden City, are major landmarks in the history of nineteenth-century American architecture. In addition, his early and extensive use of cast iron demonstrated a technological expertise which was evidently overlooked by the architectural critics of the day. Finally, it should be noted that Kellum's major architectural achievements occurred within a single decade. To have designed as many important buildings as he did within a relatively short time is in itself a noteworthy accomplishment.⁶³

Leopold Eidlitz

When work on the courthouse was resumed in 1876, Leopold Eidlitz was commissioned to complete the building. One of the leading American architects of the nineteenth century, Eidlitz had already established his reputation as a prestigious and expert designer of churches and commercial and public buildings.

Eidlitz was born in Prague on March 10, 1823.⁶⁴ After studying at the Vienna Polytechnic, he came to New York in 1843 and joined the office of the well-known Gothic Revival architect, Richard Upjohn. Eidlitz worked with Upjohn for only a few years and by 1846 had formed a partnership with Otto Blesch, a Bavarian architect. The firm of Blesch & Eidlitz designed St. George's Church (1846-48) on Stuyvesant Square in New York City. Eidlitz credited Blesch with the exterior of St. George's and claimed the interior as his own design. St. George's, a handsome Romanesque Revival structure, is one of the few Eidlitz buildings remaining in New York City today.⁶⁵

After the success of St. George's, Eidlitz was commissioned to design a number of churches, including the Gothic Revival St. Peter's Church (1855) in the Bronx and the small Victorian Gothic chapel (1867-68) which stands nearby;⁶⁶ the Congregational Church in Greenwich, Connecticut (1857); and Christ Church in St. Louis (1859-67). One of his most noteworthy designs was for the Church of the Holy Trinity which one stood at Madison Avenue and 42nd Street. Completed in 1874, the building was designed in the Romanesque Revival style and was distinctively enlivened by a variety of polychromatic brick patterns. Equally as dramatic, although not as colorful, his Temple Emanuel (1866-68) stood on Fifth Avenue at 43rd Street until it was demolished in 1928. The famed architectural critic, Montgomery Schuyler, called this synagogue "an attempt...to combine Gothic structure with Saracenic decoration" and considered its interior to be among the finest in the city.⁶⁷

Unfortunately, with the exception of the additions to the Tweed Courthouse, none of the secular buildings designed by Eidlitz in New York City has survived. The Produce Exchange (1860-65) on Whitehall Street, designed in the Romanesque Revival style, was a massive brick building equally as striking on the interior as on the exterior. The Brooklyn Academy of Music, completed by Eidlitz in 1860 and destroyed by fire in 1903, was noteworthy for its expression of the building's functions on the exterior. The Dry Dock Savings Bank in the Bowery (1875) was designed in the Gothic style with pyramidal roofs which created a picturesque effect. The interior of the bank was said by Schuyler to have been the prototype for the groin-vaulted Assembly Chamber at the State Capitol in Albany.⁶⁸

Eidlitz began work on the Capitol in 1875, the year before he was commissioned to complete the Tweed Courthouse. He joined Henry Hobson Richardson and Frederick Law Olmsted, replacing the original architect Thomas Fuller. Eidlitz's principal contribution appears to have been the Assembly Chamber, a handsome Gothic Revival space designed with medieval details, polychromatic materials and an impressive vaulted ceiling. The Chamber, which was referred to by Schuyler as "perhaps the noblest monument of the Gothic Revival in America," resembles in several respects the rooms Eidlitz designed at the Tweed Courthouse.⁶⁹ Eidlitz's work at the State Capitol may have led to the Tweed Courthouse commission: Governor Samuel J. Tilden, instrumental in appointing the Capitol Committee, may have recommended Eidlitz for the job.

Eidlitz had a very specific architectural philosophy. His Nature and the Function of Art with Special Reference to Architecture, published in New York and London in 1881, has been called "the fullest statement of the functional-organic view of architecture, based on a medieval-inspired approach to structure and composition, produced by any nineteenth-century American."⁷⁰ His ideas parallel those of John Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc, although he developed his own philosophy independently of these major nineteenth-century theorists. Eidlitz believed that the structure of the materials themselves were the most vital elements of architecture. He sought an organic method of design, in which neither "taste" nor "superficial invention" played a part. This emphasis upon the structure itself and upon the honest expression of materials led him to the conclusion that the Gothic style was the "most perfect system known to art."⁷¹ In actual practice it should be noted that the many buildings designed by Eidlitz in the Romanesque Revival Style reflect his preference for a medieval style, rather than a strict Gothic Revival mode.

During the later years of his life, Eidlitz did a great deal of lecturing and writing. He was a man of strong convictions who cared deeply about the future of his profession. In one of his many articles, "The Architect of Fashion," (Architectural Record, 1894), he condemned the current generation of architects for having become businessmen rather than acting purely as artists.⁷² Eidlitz set rigorous standards for himself and was held in high esteem by his colleagues. Upon his death in 1908, his great admirer, Montgomery Schuyler, paid him a fitting tribute:

To those who really knew the architect now departed, it will seem well within bounds to say that his was the clearest and most vigorous mind that in his day and in this country was applied to the practice of architecture.⁷³

The Courthouse Design

The earliest published design for the new courthouse appears to be that illustrated in Joseph Shannon's Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York of 1868. The design was no doubt by Kellum, since by this date he alone was referred to as the architect of the courthouse. It seems very likely, however, that it was based upon Thomas Little's earlier plans and that the dome, certain architectural embellishments and perhaps the rusticated basement were added by Kellum. The published design in Anglo-Italiane in style and relates to the work of the British architect Sir Charles Barry. Barry's Travellers' Club (1830-32) and Reform Club (1838-40) in London were designed in the Italian palazzo mode and became the precedents for the Anglo-Italiane style which was transported to the United States at about mid-century. The courthouse design is also related to an earlier English building, the Mansion House, designed by George Dance, Sr. in 1735. This early design for the courthouse shows the building to be approached by steps at either side of the portico, similar to the Dance building. The Mansion House, which was essentially an Anglo-Palladian villa, was published in Vitruvius Britannicus, Vol. IV (London, 1767-71) and was, therefore, not unfamiliar to American architects.⁷⁴

A more direct source and probably the inspiration for Kellum's design, and the courthouse as built, was the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. The wings and dome of the Capitol were under construction from 1851-65 and the designs, executed by Thomas U. Walter, were no doubt known by American architects.

During the late 19th century the Capitol was a standard model for government buildings. The plan for the courthouse dome, which was never carried out, was not as elaborate as that of the Capitol's; however, both domes have high drums, ornate detailing, ribbed surfaces and tall cupolas. Like that at the Capitol, the dome of the courthouse was to be of iron. The relationship between the courthouse dome and that of the Capitol was an obvious and natural one, and the similarities between the structures themselves are numerous. An 1869 guidebook to New York City noted that "when completed, the building will be surmounted by a large dome, giving a general resemblance to the main portion of the Capitol at Washington."⁷⁵

As Kellum was one of the champions of the Italianate style in New York, it is not surprising that he should have created in the courthouse one of the city's grandest Italianate interiors, as well as one of the few that still survive. Kellum was primarily a commercial architect, and the Italianate style, although it quickly spread to residential, ecclesiastic, and civic buildings, first developed in America as a commercial style. Its first major example was A.T. Stewart's store at Broadway and Chambers Street (across the street from the Courthouse site) built in 1846 as the country's first department store. Hundreds of Italianate commercial structures were erected in lower Manhattan over the following twenty years, and among the most important were Kellum's works, including the Cary Building, the Ball, Black & Company building, and Stewart's second store. Many of the largest such buildings had elaborate interior light courts, which were some of the finest Italianate interiors in the city; all such light courts in New York, however, were filled in long ago. Surviving Italianate interiors in New York include a few residences, churches, and civic buildings; the Tweed is one of this small number, and one of the grandest.

Although the first Italianate commercial buildings were masonry, a very great number of later ones were built with cast-iron fronts, and the new style and new material soon became closely associated. Kellum was a pioneer in cast-iron architecture, and he brought the material to the Tweed Courthouse interior, although in such a way that its use is not immediately apparent. Cast-iron as an architectural, rather than a structural, material was introduced to New York in the 1850s, and over the following forty years spread to commercial centers throughout the country. Hundreds of cast-iron-fronted commercial structures survive in Manhattan, by far the largest group anywhere in the world. Cast-iron interiors, however, were largely in mid-to late-nineteenth century commercial buildings like Kellum's second store for Stewart, and most have disappeared. The most notable surviving examples are in governmental buildings including the old City Hall in Richmond, Va., the California State Capitol in Sacramento, and the Tweed Courthouse. Kellum's iron contractor for the Tweed was the firm of J.B. and W.W. Cornell. The Cornells ran one of the largest and most important foundries in New York--their foundry mark can still be seen on dozens of cast-iron buildings in lower Manhattan--and they worked extensively with Kellum, casting the iron fronts for, among many others, the Cary Building and the second Stewart store. Kellum did not design a cast-iron interior for the Tweed in the sense of a design emphasizing the qualities of the material. He did, however, use the material extensively, and the Cornell ironwork in the Tweed's interior extends from the beams, columns, piers and stairways to such purely ornamental elements as door and window details, ornamental panels, and even the baseboards. Almost all the ironwork in the courthouse has survived, and it is an impressive display of one of the major technological innovations of the period.

It is appropriate that the only major iron interior in New York should have been designed by the architect who was one of the earliest and among the most prominent to adopt architectural cast iron.⁷⁶

Leopold Eidlitz's designs for the courthouse's southern wing had been anticipated as being "similar in style of architecture to the main building,"⁷⁷ but in fact it is substantially different. It is not surprising that Eidlitz did not simply imitate the earlier design by Kellum: his architectural philosophy was such that he could not copy another's work for the mere sake of congruity. Eidlitz designed in the Medieval style which he preferred, and while he attempted to make the southern wing conform in height and material with the main building, his details, such as the round-arched windows, which are not at the same levels as those in the earlier part of the building, and the bands of rich foliate carving, are in the Romanesque Revival style. His interior spaces are also in the medieval style. In keeping with his architectural philosophy of structural rationalism, he allowed the many materials themselves to create the architectural effects, much as he had at the Church of the Holy Trinity and the Assembly Chamber. The tri-colored brickwork of the rotunda at the Tweed Courthouse was particularly characteristic of Eidlitz and highly effective.

In completing the Rotunda, Eidlitz enclosed the open spaces with arcaded brick walls which connected with the earlier Kellum sections of the building. This stage of the construction was described in American Architect and Building News:

Massive piers of brick have been built from the foundation, up through the first floor, and stand on each side of the four entrances to the rotunda, narrowing these wide approaches from a clear space of about 24 feet to 10 feet, or about the width of the stairways.⁷⁸

Eidlitz used ornament and architectural detail to unify the design of the courthouse. He repeated ornamental details such as arches, foliation, and octagonal shapes--inside and out--to join the compartmentalized spaces. Arches are used for the doors, windows, walls, and entryways. Naturalistic foliate detail is repeated in banding on the exterior of the south wing as well as in the rotunda and Room 201-2 on the capitals. The octagon appears in the skylight, the floor tiles, and the column bases.

Eidlitz's work at the courthouse was severely criticized even before it was completed. In 1877 the New York Times wrote:

It is also charged that the new style of architecture is wholly out of keeping with the rest of the building and that while it might be well enough in a fashionable church on Fifth Avenue, or a highly decorated lager beer brewery at Yorkville, it is cheap and tawdry in comparison with the elaborate finishing and classic exterior of the present structure. The colors used on the new walls consist largely of red and white, in glaring contrast, set off by small squatty pilasters of brick and granite, which project into the hallways on either hand, and impede the circulation of air.⁷⁹

The architectural periodicals were equally critical about the Eidlitz design:

Of course no attention was paid to the design of the existing building and within and without a rank Romanesque runs cheek by jowl with the old Italian, one bald, the other florid; cream-colored brick and buff sandstone come in juxtaposition to white marble.⁸⁰

To Eidlitz, these charges made no sense. His attitude toward design can be understood from the following account of his work in the rotunda:

The 'boldness' and 'defiance' with which he was charged in adjoining what he regarded as an architecture of reason to an architecture of convention were to him merely a following of truth and reason, and he was honestly pained and puzzled by the commotion which his efforts in that direction inspired.... Standing in the Rotunda of the court house one day, when his own vari-colored brick arches and columns had been inserted between the cast-iron panels of the older work, he said, "Is it possible for anybody to fail to see that this," pointing to the new work, "performs a function and that that," pointing to the old, "does not?"⁸¹

Description

The Tweed Courthouse is a large and complex building. The floor plan, and design of the rotunda, the plaster walls and ceilings, the wood and marble floors, and the cast-iron classical ornament have all been carefully integrated into the overall scheme. Kellum's variations in the decorative treatment of the major rooms and Eidlitz's medieval overlay contribute to the variety of details within the courthouse.

The courthouse is three-and-one-half stories high, 248 feet wide, and 149 feet deep. The south wing projects 48½ feet from the center bay. The masonry structure has a low, multi-planed roof. The interior of the courthouse is virtually unaltered. The designated interior includes four floors, two mezzanines, and a fifth floor attic.⁸²

The courthouse was designed as a central pavilion with two symmetrical projecting wings, and an octagonal rotunda in the center. Two main staircases are located on either side of the rotunda. A rear wing was added to the building in the 1870s. The original entrance was up one flight of stairs at the center of the main, or north, facade. The present entrance is on the first or ground floor (formerly the basement) at the center of the south facade. All of the four floors have the same plan: rooms at the outside and stairs or light wells in the center. The general plan of the floors is intact, although the first floor has been altered through the addition and removal of partitions and staircases. The original paint and colors of the courthouse have been lost to replastering and repainting.

The central architectural feature of the interior of the Tweed Courthouse is the rotunda. An octagonal well in the middle of the center bay, the rotunda rises from the present first floor to the roof, where it terminates in a skylight. The well is enclosed by an arcaded brick wall which is trimmed with cast iron and stone and topped with a corbelled brick cornice. Two balconies with cast-iron balustrades extend into the well at the second and third floor levels.

The rotunda is a mix of John Kellum's cast-iron and plaster design in the Anglo-Italianate style and Leopold Eidlitz's medieval-inspired brick and stone elements. No original plans or drawings for the rotunda have been located, but the sections designed by Kellum and Eidlitz can be distinguished by their styles. Kellum used plaster and cast iron with classical forms: palmettes, anthemions, geometric banding and triangular pediments, while Eidlitz worked with brick and stone employing such medieval motifs as Norman arches and broad, naturalistic leaves. Kellum created large rectangular openings which can still be seen on the first and second floors and Eidlitz filled in these openings with brick arches supported by columns with foliate capitals.

Two magnificent and identical cast-iron staircases are located to the east and west of the rotunda.⁸³ They rise from the basement to the third floor. The freestanding, straight iron stairs divide into two at the second floor mezzanine. Four-sided iron newels, richly ornamented with foliate designs, relate to the foliation on the stringers. The plainer, four-sided balusters echo the newels. The first and second floor newels are topped by lamp posts which are not original. The first floor post is iron, and is ornamented with a swag pattern which does not match the design on the stairs. The second floor posts are fluted and are not iron, but might be brass. The lamp posts rise from blocks bolted to the newels.⁸⁴ The stringers on the staircases and the iron baseboard of the main stair hall have the same foliated banding. The underside of the staircases, which serve as part of the stair hall ceilings, are composed of panels separated by circles in the centers. The motif of rectangular panels which curve at the circle is a Renaissance design frequently used by Kellum throughout the Tweed Courthouse, and it also appears on the lower portions of the stringers. The ornamental iron steps were covered with cement, but the date of the change has not been determined. The stairwells were once lit by skylights composed of round glass blocks in cement. The wooden structures which still exist below the skylights might have held diffusers, but no documentation or physical evidence has been found.

Four staircases rise from the third to the fourth floor. The stairs, located in the corners of the main block, curve gracefully at the railings and have delicate, fluted iron balusters. Foliated bands adorn the iron stringers. The stairwells were also lit by skylights which unfortunately have been covered by the new roof. The southwest staircase, removed when the elevator was installed in 1913, was replaced by a small, plain steel staircase. Similar cast-iron stairs, located at the east and west walls of the main block, run from the fourth floor to the attic. Two iron stairs rise from the attic to the roof.

The two elevators, installed in 1911, are manually operated, and have open cages and handsome, decorative iron grilles.

Although the plan of the first floor (originally the basement) has been changed over the years, with rooms created and removed, the rotunda and the stair halls are intact. The rotunda area contains tall, cast-iron Corinthian columns which support the second floor balcony. The floor is covered with marble and glass blocks, set in iron frames, known as illuminating tiles. Four sconces which might be original are attached to the plaster walls. The two identical stair halls have a T-shaped plan. Each main hall runs east-west while all of the secondary halls run north-south. The floors are marble tile, the walls and ceilings are plaster. The secondary halls have arched plaster ceilings which are lower than the coved plaster ceilings in the main hall. Cast-iron doorways with architrave trim and paneled shutters have survived on this floor. More than ten of the walnut doors are original, but several of these have been altered. The majority of the doors are later additions. There are sconces on the walls of the rotunda which may be original.

The second floor was originally the main entrance floor and its plan has been altered very little. The rotunda area is closest to Kellum's conception of the space. Four cast-iron pedimented niches dominate the plaster walls. An elaborate bracketed cast-iron ceiling, cast-iron baseboard and balustrade complete the classical composition. The floor is composed of marble and glass blocks. Eidlitz filled the large rectangular openings to the stair halls with medieval brick arches. Without these arches, which made the entrances much smaller, the rotunda and the stair halls would function as one space. In decreasing the size of the openings, Eidlitz created three separate spaces--the rotunda and two stair halls. The south entrance is now the elevator lobby. The walls are of both plaster and brick, the materials favored by each architect. A small wooden closet in the northeast corner is not original. The two identical stair halls feature marble floors, plaster walls with cast-iron pilasters, and plaster ceilings. A medallion and a denticulated cornice adorn the ceiling near the rotunda. Three of the major rooms are entered from the main halls, and their doorways have pedimented cast-iron door enframements supported by paneled pilasters and foliated brackets. As on the first floor these doors have iron shutters. The wooden double doors have an etched glass panel above a wooden lower panel, all surrounded by an eared molding. Other doors were built in front of the hall doors before 1936, 85 and obscure the original doors and the design of the iron enframements. Doors were also installed in all but the southwest entrances to the secondary halls at the same time, before 1936. The cast-iron door enframements in the secondary halls have a simple architrave trim, but the same paneled wooden doors. The plaster ceilings are lower here than in the main halls and have no ornament. With a few minor exceptions, the hardware on the doors has been removed. The main hall has an iron baseboard with foliate bands; the secondary halls have molded iron baseboards.⁸⁶ The single- and double-armed sconces which light the halls might be original. There are two inverted tulip-shaped fixtures which were installed in 1911, and twentieth-century hanging incandescent fixtures.

Room 201-2 in the rear wing is entirely different from the rest of the interior, a monument to later nineteenth-century medievalism. The floor is covered with multi-colored encaustic tile in red, blue, beige, white and black laid in a geometric design with a foliate border. The arcaded walls consist of sandstone ashlar and columns with foliate capitals. Connecting stone arches spring from the rows of columns, giving the impression of a groined ceiling. Carved stone panels in the ceiling are made up of foliate and denticulated bands around a square filled with a Gothic dogtooth pattern. The arched doorways, like the windows, are subtly delineated by colonettes. Two sets of oak double doors lead into the hall. Simple arched casement windows are set into the arcaded wall. The hall doors have etched glass panels depicting the City Seal. Two lines of polished stone columns supporting molded arches divide the room into three arcaded spaces. The columns have octagonal bases and foliate capitals with broad, naturalistic leaves, which are reminiscent of early English-style ornament. A magnificent rectangular stone fireplace dominates the arched north wall of the room. A round space in the tympanum above might have held a plaque; a decorative iron plate covers the fireplace opening. The hardware on the doors--an escutcheon, handle, locks and corner hinges--are original. The room, now lit by twentieth-century hanging fixtures, originally was illuminated by hanging fixtures with clusters of glass globes. Iron radiators are located under the windows.

The third floor plan, which is mainly intact, has the same arrangement as the other floors. Except for the balcony, which has marble tile floors ending in a cast-iron balustrade, the design of the rotunda area appears to be the work of Eidlitz. The walls are made up of arches, most of which are blind. The arches are supported by squat, round columns with foliate capitals. Rectangular bases lead into plain baseboards. The columns, capitals, baseboards, and trim are stone, but are now covered with paint. Room 201-2, which has not been painted, gives an indication of the original appearance of the rotunda. The grayish stone, patterned floors--translated in the rotunda in patterned brick--and columned arches evoke the feeling of a medieval monastery. The rotunda was originally unpainted, and the colors of the brick--red, black, and tan--formed a pattern which complemented both the somber stone and lively skylight. The brick and stone were painted gray by 1908. Subsequently the columns were marbelized. Today the layers of paint evoke a twentieth-century institutional feeling rather than the medieval fantasy intended by Eidlitz. The two identical stair halls are similar to those on the second floor, except that the stairs end here, rather than splitting at the mezzanine and continuing upwards. The floor between the two wells is made of glass blocks. The wood doors have plain moldings. Arched entrances lead to the secondary stair halls which contain staircases. The mezzanine floor is visible at the top of the arch and is now fenced with wire mesh. The hall doors have etched glass panels on top, with the City Seal, ornate borders and a space for the room name. Mezzanines above the second and third floors have halls with marble tile floors and plaster walls and ceilings.

The fourth floor is also nearly intact. Its stair halls follow the same T-plan of the floors below. The main stair hall is pierced by the stair well and the secondary halls contain three sets of stairs. The corner stairs end here and identical stairs lead to the attic. The hall floors are marble, the walls and ceilings plaster. Closets have been added near the stairs. The cast-iron doorways have an architrave trim; the wooden doors are paneled and have no original hardware besides the hinges. A molded iron baseboard runs the length of the hall.

The fifth floor attic plan is generally intact. Its floor is the original concrete and wood. The main features of the attic are the excellent examples of mid-nineteenth century iron structural members, such as the lattice truss. Capping the rotunda is the skylight which had a stained-glass diffuser with clear glass above it; the stained glass, manufactured by Henry E. Sharpe, Son & Colgate was removed, but some of the glass has been found in the building. The pattern has been worked out, and it is a colorful design featuring stylized animals and foliated ornament.⁸⁷

Conclusion

In spite of its many fine architectural features, the Tweed Courthouse was totally unappreciated by the public because of its association with the Tweed Ring. The noted reformer George C. Barrett, like many others, could not view the interior with any degree of objectivity:

The whole atmosphere is corrupt. You look up at its ceilings and find gaudy decorations; you wonder which is the greatest, the vulgarity or the corruptness of the place.⁸⁸

The courthouse was seen only as a symbol of the crimes of the Tweed Ring. A booklet entitled The House That Tweed Built was published in 1871.⁸⁹ Written in an amusing satirical tone, it detailed the extent to which corruption pervaded the construction of the building. Unfortunately, this view of the courthouse as a monument to a notorious regime continued for many more decades. One uncritical description of the courthouse interior did appear, however, in Miller's New York As It Is or Stranger's Guidebook to Cities of New York, Brooklyn and Adjacent Places, published in 1872:

The court-rooms are large, airy, unobstructed by columns, made with reference to the principles of acoustics, and finished in an agreeable and pleasing manner, so that they form an attractive feature to the spectator and all to whom may be intrusted the administration of justice....⁹⁰

Following its completion, a number of alterations were made to the Tweed Courthouse, primarily on the interior. One of the earliest documented alterations was the painting of the rotunda which had occurred by 1908. As described by Montgomery Schuyler,

His [Eidlitz's] work in that rotunda has been shorn of much of its pristine force, which was much promoted by the tri-colored brickwork, while at the same time its contradiction of its surroundings has been considerably softened, by being subjected, stonework, brickwork and all, to an equal coat of gray paint which nullifies the accentuation of the design by color.⁹¹

In 1911 and 1913, passenger elevators were installed. Penthouses of steel and corrugated iron were erected on the roof above the shafts of these elevators.⁹² At the same time glass grating was installed on the attic floor to light the fourth floor rooms below. Other alterations were made after 1929 when a new County Courthouse was opened and the Tweed became the City Court, which it remained until 1961 when the court moved to 111 Centre Street. During the 1960s various New York County offices and the Family Court occupied the Courthouse. Today several municipal offices are located in the building. The rotunda has been used for public exhibitions and receptions. In 1978-79 the corrugated iron roof of the courthouse -- which had replaced the original roof in the early 1900s -- was removed and a new asphalt roof installed. At about the same time, the exterior wood supports of the skylight were replaced with cast-iron members.

In the one hundred years since the Tweed Courthouse was completed it has survived remarkably intact. The alterations to the building's interior have been minor and have not dramatically changed the original design. The courthouse today is recognized less as a monument to the 19th-century political corruption which surrounded its construction and more as one of the great 19th-century interiors surviving in New York. As one of the few remaining grand Italianate interior spaces in the city, as the sole known surviving cast-iron interior in the city where that architectural material was introduced and most extensively developed, as a product of the joint efforts of two of the city's best-known 19th-century architects, and as one of the most prominent constituent parts of New York's civic center, the Tweed Courthouse has finally emerged from the shadow of William M. Tweed, to be recognized as an important monument of New York City's architectural heritage.

Report prepared by
Anthony W. Robins
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Adapted almost entirely from the
"Historical Analysis," by Ann Bedell, and
"Existing Conditions," by Mary Dierickx,
in the Tweed Courthouse Historic Structure
Report, prepared by the Landmarks Preservation
Commission, New York City, Joan Olshansky,
Project Director.

FOOTNOTES

1. We would like to acknowledge the kind assistance of Brian McMahon, who has researched the Tweed Courthouse for a number of years and who generously allowed us to see his material.
2. This brief biography of Tweed is based upon information in the following more extensive studies: Denis Tilden Lynch, 'Boss' Tweed, The Story of a Grim Generation (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1927); Seymour Mandelbaum, Boss Tweed's New York (New York: John Wiley & Son, 1965); Alexander B. Callow, Jr., The Tweed Ring (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966); Leo Hershkowitz, Tweed's New York - Another Look (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1977). Hershkowitz presents a novel theory on Tweed; he does not consider him to have been the criminal that history has made him out to be. He also suggests that Tweed's middle name was Magear than the generally accepted Marcy. The former was his mother's maiden name and his son's middle name.

During the Tweed era, the City and the County of New York consisted of today's Manhattan and portions of the West Bronx.

3. Callow, pp. 3-16 and New York Times, April 13, 1878, p.1. Tweed was described in his obituary in the New York Times: "He was energetic in business, affable, generous, an excellent companion, and in every way very popular, being almost worshipped by the members of his fire company and standing high in the esteem of the entire Fire Department."
4. The Board of Supervisors was established in 1787 and abolished in 1870. It became bi-partisan for the first time in 1857 and Tweed was one of six Democrats appointed to the Board. Tweed served on the Special Committee on the New Court House in 1862, 1863, 1867, 1868, and 1869.
5. New York Times, December 25, 1866, p.4. Tweed purchased the quarry on September 23, 1861 for \$1,250. The other type of marble used for the main block of the courthouse came from Eastchester, New York.
6. Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), pp. 79-82.
7. For more information on the numerous positions held by Tweed see Callow, pp. 17-32.
8. New York City Board of Aldermen, Report of the Special Committee Appointed to Investigate the 'Ring' Frauds, Doc. No. 8, January 4, 1878, p. 14.
9. Callow, p. 197.
10. New York Times, April 13, 1871, p. 2. The four new commissioners were Mike Norton, James Ingersoll, Thomas Coman and John J. Walsh.
11. One of the few documents of protest against the Ring was The New York County Courthouse, a Communication from Peter Cooper, President of the Citizens Association, to Henry Smith, Esq., President of the Board of Supervisors, October 9, 1867.

12. Callow, p. 177, 178; New York Times, May 23, 1871, p.4.
13. Callow, pp. 259-260.
14. It took more than a year to get Tweed to trial, since an argument developed between the State of New York and the City and County of New York over the jurisdiction of the case. The Court of Appeals settled the matter by ruling that the two suits could be merged together. Tweed first went to trial on January 7, 1873. This trial ended on January 30, when the jury could not reach a verdict. The next trial began on November 19, 1873.
15. Quote from the World, cited in Callow, p. 298; also see Ibid., pp. 279-300; New York Times, April 13, 1878, p.1.
16. The land was also called the Fields, The Green and the Park. See I.N. Phelps Stokes, The Iconography of Manhattan Island (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1915), VI, p. 518. The land was ceded again to the Corporation of the City of New York by Governor Montgomerie in 1730. Much of the information on the history of City Hall Park is based on Edward Hagaman Hall, "A Brief History of City Hall Park," American Scenic and Historical Preservation Society Annual Report, VIII, No. 10 (Albany, 1910), pp. 383-424.
17. Stokes, III, pp. 947-55; Henry B. Dawson, Reminiscences of the Park and its Vicinity (New York, 1855), p. 58; E. Porter Belden, New York Past, Present and Future (New York: George Putnam, 1850), p. 47.
18. Stokes, III, pp. 584, 973; Hall, p. 394.
19. Stokes, III, pp. 947-55; Hall, p. 397.
20. Hall, p. 405; New York City, Department of Buildings, Block 122, Lot 1. This building stood until 1928.
21. For a more complete discussion of the early projects for a "New City Hall," see Deborah Gardner, "The Architecture of Commercial Capitalism: John Kellum and the Development of New York, 1840-1875" (unpublished PhD. dissertation, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University, 1979), Chapter IV, "The Commercial City: Politics."
22. New York City Board of Supervisors, Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors, Doc. No. 6, May 4, 1858, p.2.
23. Ibid., p.3. The passage of this act, however, did not ensure the speedy construction of the new building. On April 20, 1858, the Board of Supervisors passed a resolution to appoint a Special Committee of Six to discuss various details of the building. By October 1858, the Mayor's nominations for the three Commissioners had still not been approved. Finally on November 4, 1858, two Commissioners, Wilson G. Hunt and John Corlies, were confirmed. However, the Special Committee of Six was not pleased with the current legislation and sought amendments to it. See Ibid., April 20, 1858, p. 262; October 22, 1858, pp.684-87; November 4, 1858, p. 534; December 22, 1858, p. 906.

24. Ibid., January 18, 1859, p.36.
25. Ibid., May 3, 1859, p. 266. The authorized amount remained \$250,000. An additional complication had developed in July 1858, when the lawyer John McKeon questioned not only the Commissioners' right to build in City Hall Park without the consent of the Common Council, but also the power of the Board of Supervisors to issue stock. See Ibid., July 12, 1859, pp. 467-70.
26. Ibid., March 19, 1860, p. 282.
27. Ibid., May 22, 1860, p. 443; December 11, 1860, p. 623.
28. Laws of the State of New York Passed at the 84th Session of the Legislature (Albany: Munsell & Rowland, 1861), pp. 451-53.
29. The following document is on file in the County Clerk's Office, Surrogate Court Building, 31 Chambers Street:

"County Court House, Chambers Street, September 7, 1861
In the matter of the application of the Board of Supervisors of the County of New York - relative to - acquiring and taking lands for the building of a Court House in said county...

We do further report that we have appraised the value of the said lands and premises at the sum of four hundred and fifty thousand dollars...."
30. Laws of the State of New York Passed at the 85th Session of the Legislature (Albany: Munsell & Rowland, 1862), pp. 335-37.
31. The following amounts were authorized:

Chap. 167, Laws of 1862, April 9, 1862:	\$1,000,000.00
Chap. 242, Laws of 1864, April 19, 1864:	800,000.00
Chap. 854, Laws of 1868, June 3, 1868:	800,000.00
Chap. 875, Laws of 1869, May 12, 1869:	600,000.00
Chap. 382, Laws of 1870, April 26, 1870:	600,000.00
Chap. 583, Laws of 1871, April 19, 1871:	750,000.00
	\$4,550,000.00
32. New York City Board of Estimate and Apportionment, Minutes of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment of the City of New York, 11, pp. 893-97. This report gives a thorough recounting of the expenditures for the courthouse. It concludes that the "Cost on the books direct" amounted to \$8,134,703.19, and that "Adjusted Claims and County Liabilities" amounted to \$5,282,229.00.
33. New York Times, Dec. 27, 1861, p.4. This article gives a complete account of the corner stone laying ceremony.
34. New York Times, Dec. 26, 1865, p.8: "The porticoes with their grand Corinthian facades and polished pillars, facing the City Park and Chambers Street are yet only upon the drawing board of the architect. The rich wood interior may yet be, for all we know, shaking its withered leaves upon the snow in the forests of Maine; and the frescoes which are to give life and beauty to its lofty walls and the sculptured forms which will dignify its parapets and dome, may still be sleeping in the unconscious brain of an infant Angelo."

35. New York Times, March 12, 1867, p.4.
36. New York Times, Feb. 28, 1866, p.8.
37. The investigative committee was specifically concerned with contracts for marble, iron and brick for the courthouse. For more information on the 1866 investigation see New York Times, 1866: Feb. 28, p.8; March 3, p.8; March 6, p.4; March 11, p.4; March 27, p.8.
38. New York Times, July 29, 1871, p.3.
39. New York City Board of Estimate and Apportionment, Minutes of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, 1876, p. 1536.

The following letter from Eidlitz is included in these Minutes:

Hon. Willis Blackstone: June 29, 1876

Dear Sir: the following is the estimate of cost for completing the county Court House according to amended plans:

Finishing interior hall and skylights on top of same, including temporary roof, 8c:	\$147,579.00
South extension	325,244.50
Chambers Street porch	<u>17,758.00</u>

Leopold Eidlitz \$490,581.50

40. American Architect and Building News, 1 (June 24, 1876), p. 206. This article describes Eidlitz's early plans for the building: "Mr. Eidlitz is progressing also with his plans for the completion and general utilization of the New York City Court-house. It is a hard problem to work out; but the sketches place upon its flat roof another story in Gothic and a great dome treated with Gothic details."
41. New York Daily Tribune, April 7, 1877, p.3.
42. New York Daily Tribune, Aug. 4, 1879, p.8.
43. Ibid. and New York Times, April 29, 1877, p.7.
44. New York Daily Tribune, Aug. 4, 1879, p.8. This article also states that Eidlitz had originally planned to execute the rotunda in white marble rather than brick.
45. Proposals for minor alterations appear in Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen, Vol. 152, 1878-79, p. 631; Vol. 157, 1880, p. 551. Also see Minutes of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment of the City of New York, Vol. 11, 1914, pp. 893-97.
46. Andrew Dolkart, "The City of Churches: The Protestant Church Architecture of Brooklyn, 1793-1917" (unpublished Master's Thesis, School of Architecture, Columbia University, 1977), p.51.

47. The Trow Business Directory of the City of New York, 1852-68. Thomas Little, architect and member of the Board of Supervisors, lived at 48 East 11th Street from 1852 until 1868.
48. Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors, 1859, p. 531.
49. New York City Board of Supervisors, Report of the Special Committee on the Investigation of the Contracts for Building the New Court House, Doc. No. 9, June 26, 1866, p.14:

When you were Chairman of the (Building) Committee, who was the architect of that building?

I think the plans were drawn by Mr. Thomas Little & Son, and that they were the architects.

Were those plans of Mr. Little & Son carried out?

I think I required of Mr. Little about a year since in regard to it, and I understood from him that the plan was mainly carried out, except that the building has been raised.⁴

50. New York Times, March 27, 1866, p. 8:

The cost of the building was estimated by the architect who drew the original plans as not to exceed \$800,000. Since then the plans have been altered by adding a large amount of ornamental work, and placing upon it an enormous iron dome, which will cost an incalculable sum.⁵

51. Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors, August 30, 1861, pp. 372-73.
52. New York Times, December 27, 1861, p.4.
53. Annual Cyclopaedia, 1871 (New York: D. Appelton & Co., 1872), XI, p. 430. For a complete biography of Kellum see Gardner.
54. Winston Weisman, "Commercial Palaces of New York," Art Bulletin, XXXVI (Dec. 1954), p. 294; Margot Gayle, Cast-Iron Architecture in New York (New York: Dover Publications, 1974), p.14. Gayle calls the Cary Building "probably the oldest cast-iron building in the city."
55. Carl Condit, American Building Art - The 19th Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 40. Also see Gayle, pp. 160-161.
56. Nathan Silver, Lost New York (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 123; "The Working Women's Hotel," The American Builder, Journal of Industrial Art (May 1878), pp. 104-105.
57. Harper's Weekly, XV (August 12, 1871), p.14: "He (Kellum) had planned a large hotel there (Garden City) for Mr. Stewart, capable of accommodating 200 guests, and about 20 edifices of the value of from 3 to 12,000 dollars each, which later were in process of erection, commanding all the attention of Mr. Kellum..."

58. Other buildings by Kellum not cited in the text include 502-504 Broadway (1860), 18 Mercer Street (1861), 597 Broadway (1867) and 94-96 Greene Street (1869). The Landmarks Preservation Commission, SoHo-Cast-Iron Historic District Designation Report (LP-0768) (New York: City of New York, 1973), p. 180.
59. Kellum's relationship with Wilson G. Hunt is cited in two sources: Harper's Weekly, XV (Aug. 12, 1871), p.14, in which it is stated that Kellum designed stores for Hunt and in the Annual Cyclopedia, 1871, p. 430: He (Kellum) soon found favor among the wealthy merchants, and the influence of Mr. Wilson G. Hunt, who was his firm friend was of great advantage to him."
60. Harper's Weekly, XV (Aug. 12, 1871), p. 14.
61. Ibid.
62. American Architect and Building News, I (June 24, 1876), p. 206. Also see Ibid., V (March 1, 1879), p. 71, "Two Popular Architects," which in spite of its title is another negative appraisal of Kellum. These articles were not signed.
63. For a complete discussion of the contemporary critics' attitude toward Kellum, see Gardner, Chapter IV.
64. General information on Eidlitz is based on the following articles by Montgomery Schuyler: "A Great American Architect: Leopold Eidlitz, I. Ecclesiastical and Domestic Work; II. Commercial and Public; and III. The State Capitol at Albany," The Architectural Record, XXIV (Sept., Oct., Nov. 1908). See also Wm. Jordy and Ralph Coe, American Architecture and Other Writings by Montgomery Schuyler, pp. 17-23, which gives an account of Eidlitz's architectural philosophy.
65. Schuyler, Part I, p. 166: "Blesch, A Grand Prix of Munich, had the regular architectural training which the junior partner lacked." St. George's was designated a New York City Landmark in 1967.
66. Landmarks Preservation Commission, St. Peter's Church, Chapel and Cemetery (LP-0917) (New York: City of New York, 1976).
67. Schuyler, Part I, p. 179. Nathan Silver in Lost New York (Schocken Books, 1971), p. 150, states that the synagogue was designed in association with Henry Fernbach.
68. Schuyler, Part II, pp. 287-91.
69. Schuyler, Part III, p. 373. The similarities between the spaces include the use of polychromy, medieval details, carved stonework and the illusion of vaulted ceilings at the courthouse.
70. Jordy and Coe, p. 17.
71. Ibid., p. 18. For a discussion of Eidlitz's architectural philosophy, see pp. 17-23.

72. Eidlitz, Leopold, "The Architect of Fashion," Architectural Record, III (April-June 1894), pp. 347-53.
73. Schuyler, Part III, p. 378.
74. The stylistic precedents for the Tweed Courthouse have been discussed by several architectural historians: Alan Burnham, former Director of Research of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, noted the similarities between the Dance building and the Courthouse; Ada Louise Huxtable, New York Times, July 7, 1974, p. 19; and R. Craig Miller, "The Tweed Courthouse," a pamphlet prepared for the New York Chapter of the Victorian Society, December 1974. For more information on Dance, see Dorothy Stroud, George Dance, Architect, 1741-1825 (London: Faber & Faber, 1971).
75. New York Illustrated - A Pictorial Delineation of Street Scenes, Buildings, River Views and Other Features of the Great Metropolis New York (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1869), p. 13. The relationship between the courthouse dome and the Capitol is also cited in Redfield's Traveler's Guide to the City of New York (New York: J.S. Redfield, 1871), p. 63. Kellum originally thought of using the dome as a light house: see Rev. J.F. Richmond, New York and Its Institutions, 1609-1871 (New York: E.B. Treat, 1871), p. 127.
76. The architect's extensive use of iron was later criticized by the City of New York in a suit brought against the City by Kellum's widow Hannah. In 1876, Mrs. Kellum sued the City for what amounted to 3% interest on slightly more than \$2,800,000 to recover money she believed was owed her late husband for his work on the Tweed Courthouse. The City fought the claim on the basis of the incompetence of the architect: "...the ignorance and unskillfulness of the architect caused a dead loss to the city of much more than the whole amount of the claim, that the ignorant misuse of iron beams of false form, and of iron where other material could have been used to better advantage, cost the city about \$400,000 more than was necessary." Although Mrs. Kellum lost the suit, this is the only known criticism of the use of iron in the courthouse.
77. New York Daily Tribune, April 17, 1877, p. 3.
78. American Architect and Building News, II (Feb. 3, 1877), p. 40.
79. New York Times, April 29, 1877, p. 7.
80. American Architect and Building News, III (March 16, 1878), p. 94.
81. Schuyler, Part III, pp. 374-75.
82. The original floor numbering system is no longer followed. The basement floor is not called the first floor, while the cellar underneath is termed the basement. The original main entrance floor is now described as the second floor. The second floor mezzanine, the third floor, the third floor mezzanine, the fourth floor, and the attic, or fifth floor, complete the upper floors. This numbering system appears on the earliest set of plans found, which probably date from the late nineteenth century.

83. The firm of J.B. and W.W. Cornell provided the iron for the stairs.
84. After performing a paint analysis for the firm of Beyer, Blinder, Belle, Frank Matero pointed out that the lamp posts might not be original. Upon further investigation of the design and materials, it became obvious that the lamp posts were later additions.
85. According to the W.P.A. Plans.
86. All baseboards in the courthouse were originally planned to be wainscotting.
87. Frank Sanchis of the New York City Landmarks Commission supervised the recreation of the design.
88. Quoted in Callow, p. 206, from New York Times, April 7, 1871.
89. William James Linton, The House that Tweed Built; Dedicated to Every True Reformer (Cambridge, Mass., 1871).
90. Miller's New York as It is or Stranger's Guide-book to the Cities of New York, Brooklyn and Adjacent Places (New York: James Miller, 1872), p. 34-C.
91. Schuyler, Part III, p. 374.
92. New York City, Department of Buildings, Block 122, Lot 1: Alteration #2902-11, completed October 11, 1911 for \$5,000; Alteration #1717-11, completed October 11, 1911, for \$585; Alteration #2429-13, completed December 1913.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Tweed Courthouse, first floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, and the staircases leading to the second floor; second floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, the staircases leading to the third floor, and Rooms 201 and 202 (former courtroom); third floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, and the staircases leading to the fourth floor; fourth floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, the wells above the main stairhalls, and the staircases leading to the fifth floor; fifth floor interior consisting of the rotunda up to and including the skylight; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces including glass block, columns, light fixtures, stair railings, well railings, doors, and fireplaces; has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City, and that the Interior or parts thereof are thirty years old or more and that the Interior is one which is customarily open and accessible to the public and to which the public is customarily invited.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Tweed Courthouse Interior is one of New York's grandest and most important 19th-century interior spaces; that it was built over a period of twenty years, to the designs of two of New York's most prominent architects of the second half of the 19th century, John Kellum and Leopold Eidlitz, and that consequently it was the product of two very different but equally significant architectural trends, the mid-century Italianate and the later Victorian Romanesque, of which Kellum and Eidlitz were among the city's principal exponents; that it is one of the few and one of the best remaining grand Italianate interior spaces in the city, and an excellent example of the Victorian Romanesque type; that it is the sole known surviving cast-iron interior space in the city where that architectural material was introduced and most extensively developed; that although its architects' approaches were antithetical, they combined in the courthouse to form an overwhelmingly grand and rich public space; that historically the Courthouse is a reminder of the massive municipal corruption that characterized New York in the second half of the 19th century; and that, despite its early reputation as a symbol of greed and corruption, the Tweed Courthouse Interior survives as an important part of New York's architectural heritage, and one of its finest public interiors.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly Chapter 63) of the Charter of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as an Interior Landmark the Tweed Courthouse, first floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, and the staircases leading to the second floor; second floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, the staircases leading to the third floor, and Rooms 201 and 202 (former courtroom); third floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, and the staircases leading to the fourth floor; fourth floor interior consisting of the rotunda, the stairhalls, the wells above the main stairhalls, and the staircases leading to the fifth floor; fifth floor interior consisting of the rotunda up to and including the skylight;

and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces including glass block, columns, light fixtures, stair railings, well railings, doors, and fireplaces; 52 Chambers Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 122, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated, as its Landmark Site.

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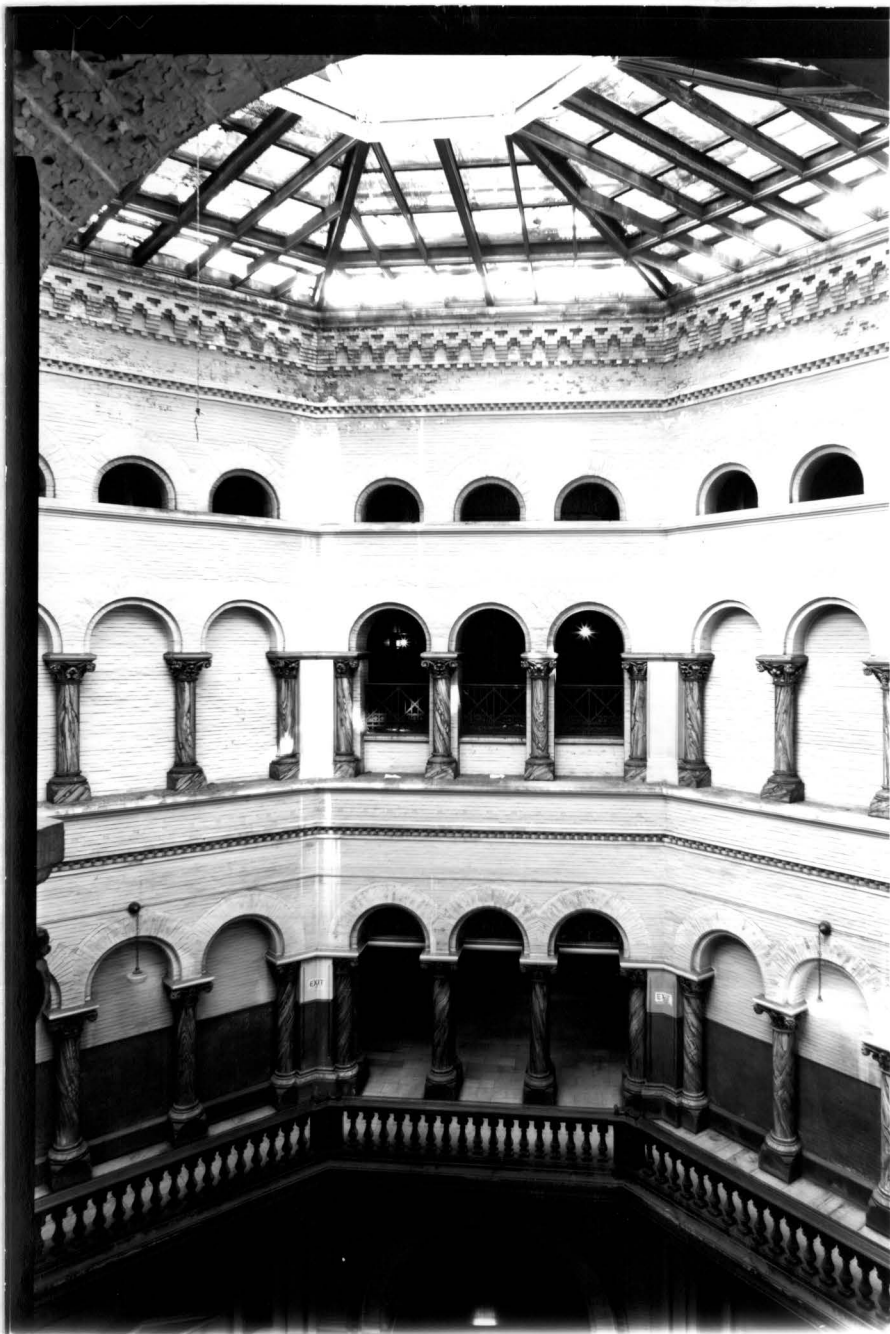
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TWEED COURTHOUSE INTERIOR
Rotunda and detail

Built: 1861-1881
Architects: John Kellum
and Leopold Eidlitz



Photo Credit: Walter Smalling, Jr.
For Historic American Building Survey

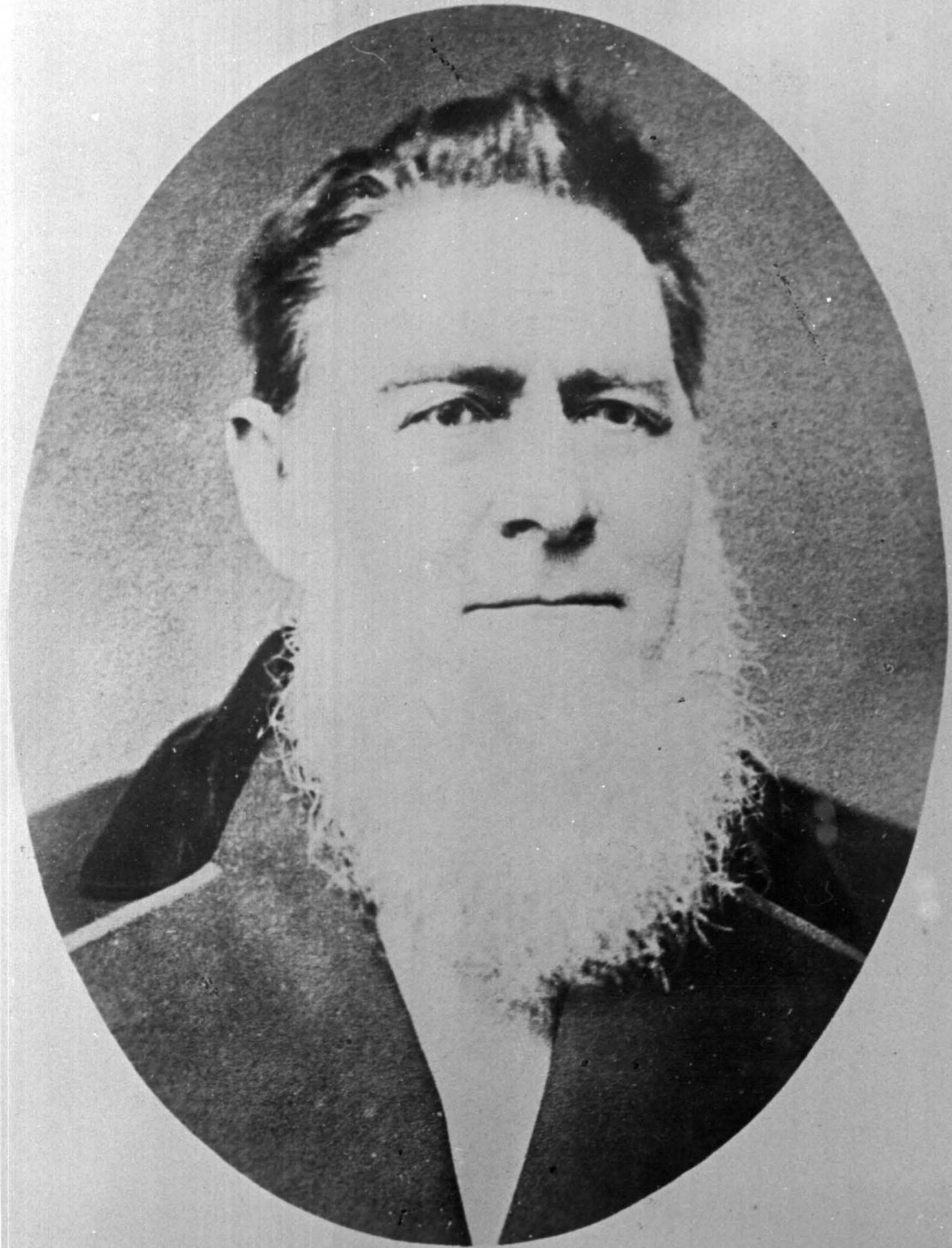


TWEED COURTHOUSE INTERIOR
detail, Rotunda, second floor



TWEED COURTHOUSE INTERIOR
detail, west stairway, first floor

Photo credit: Walter Smalling, Jr.
for Historic American Building
Survey



William M. Tweed