

Landmarks Preservation Commission
May 14, 1991, Designation List 237
LP-1654

JEFFREY'S HOOK LIGHTHOUSE, ("The Little Red Lighthouse"), Fort Washington Park (Property No. M-28), Manhattan. Erected 1880, moved to current site and reconstructed 1921.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2178, Lot 3 in part, consisting of a triangular site surrounding the lighthouse, bounded at the northeastern corner by the northwestern corner of the southern George Washington Bridge tower base, extending southwesterly approximately 235' on a line established along and extending from the western edge of this tower base to the point where it intersects the U.S. Bulkhead Line of the Hudson River, northwesterly approximately 240' along the U.S. Bulkhead Line to a point where it intersects with a line established by and extending from the northern edge of the southern Bridge tower base, and then southeasterly approximately 70' along said line to the northwestern corner of the Bridge tower base.

On April 19, 1988, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Little Red Lighthouse and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Six witnesses spoke in favor of designation. The Commission received many letters in support of designation, including over fifty from school children.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The Jeffrey's Hook lighthouse, erected in 1880 and moved to its current site in 1921, has become widely known as the children's literary landmark, "The Little Red Lighthouse." The story of the lighthouse in Fort Washington Park was popularized by the children's book The Little Red Lighthouse and the Great Gray Bridge, by Hildegard H. Swift with illustrations by Lynd Ward, which was published in 1942; in this fictional account of the Jeffrey's Hook lighthouse, the structure was presented as a symbol of the significance of a small thing in a big world. The lighthouse became a celebrated "child's landmark," representing importance and permanence, after the proposed removal of the lighthouse in 1951; the public outcry of children and their allies prompted the preservation of the structure through its transfer to the jurisdiction of the Department of Parks of the City of New York. The Jeffrey's Hook lighthouse, which formerly had stood as the North Hook Beacon at Sandy Hook, New Jersey, from 1880 to 1917, was reconstructed in 1921 by the United States Bureau of Lighthouses as part of a project to improve the navigational aids on the Hudson River. A standard type conical iron tower, painted red, the lighthouse was in operation at Jeffrey's Hook from 1921 to 1947 with a flashing red light and a fog signal.

The Jeffrey's Hook lighthouse, the southernmost fixed navigational aid on the Hudson River and the only lighthouse on the island of Manhattan, marked a prominent point projecting into a deep stretch of the river below Mount Washington and is a reminder of a more natural river shoreline than exists today. The erection of the lighthouse at its current site was associated with the importance of river shipping in the first decades of the twentieth century when the New York State Barge Canal system was improved and the Deeper Hudson shipway and the Port of Albany were under development.

Jeffrey's Hook¹

Ten miles north of the tip of Manhattan, a small point extends out into the Hudson River which has been known since the colonial era as Jeffrey's Hook.² The point is slightly elevated and exists today as a low-lying grassy plain below Washington Heights, although, as depicted on historic maps, it had originally a more irregular shoreline and topography. Jeffrey's Hook has played an identifiable role in many eras of New York City history. Around the turn of the century, archaeologists, including the prominent local authority Reginald Pelham Bolton, uncovered American Indian artifacts on the south shore of the point, which was probably used as a fishing site. Nearby was the large cultivated field on the plateau to the east, known to Dutch colonists as the "The Great Maize Land." The archaeological and documentary evidence suggests a long period of Native American settlement in the area although there is no known record of an Indian name for the point of land.

The name Jeffrey's Hook appears to date from the Dutch colonial era since the term hook, used to name many small points along the rivers and seacoast of the former colony of New Amsterdam, is an anglicization of the Dutch word hoek or hoeck, meaning literally an angle and also a small spit of land.³ Reginald Bolton searched, with little success, for the origin of this place name in conjunction with his study of the Washington Heights area and found no prominent Dutch-era family associated with the site. He did suggest, however, that Jeffrey or Jeffery may have been an anglicization of the Dutch word juffrouw, which means young woman. Bolton also noted the presence in New York during the mid-eighteenth century of an English family with the name Jeffrey that included several mariners.⁴ There certainly is a possibility that the name is of combined English and Dutch origin -- Jeffrey from the English and Hook from the Dutch -- since "Jeffrey's Hook" seems to first appear on maps of the late eighteenth century.⁵

At the end of the British colonial era, the name Jeffrey's Hook was in common usage and appeared on maps drawn during the Revolutionary War. Located just to the south of the highest elevation in Manhattan, named Mount Washington in 1775, the small point of land was an element in the defensive plans of the colonial army during the Revolutionary War. In conjunction with the construction of Fort Washington in 1776, a small demi-lune battery with a single gun was erected at the extreme end of Jeffrey's Hook and a rifle redoubt was constructed on the rocky slope above the point.⁶ Until at least the mid-nineteenth century the remnants of the earthworks near Fort Washington remained visible, including mounds of earth on the tip of the

point, which was known after the War, and throughout much of the nineteenth century, as Fort Washington Point.

Jeffrey's Hook had been included within a large tract of land allotted in 1691 to Joost Van Oblien, a magistrate of New Harlem. John A. Haven acquired the parcel of property which included Fort Washington Point in 1834 and built a country residence south of what became 181st Street. The point was accessible by a lane, probably built when the area was fortified, although it was later cut off from the higher ground by the construction in the late 1840s of the Hudson River Railroad just below the bluff. The larger area, which became known as Washington Heights, remained essentially rural throughout the nineteenth century as the pastoral setting for many country estates and was considered one of the most elegant and fashionable suburbs of the city.⁷

Jeffrey's Hook was included in the original portion of Fort Washington Park, which was established in 1896. With the addition of this park land to that already protected in Riverside Park (established 1876), the preservation of the Hudson River shoreline of northern Manhattan as a picturesque amenity of the city was well underway. Ft. Washington Point or Jeffrey's Hook, with the requisite romantic elements of a rocky, uneven shore, grassy slopes, and cedar trees growing above the ruins of the Revolutionary War era redoubt, was sometimes pictured in guidebooks to the scenic Hudson River.⁸

A Light at Jeffrey's Hook⁹

The Hudson River is a navigable fiord for 150 miles due to the ebb and flow of the ocean tide. As the only river route through the Atlantic fall line and the well-connected gateway to an extensive network of waterways, the Hudson has been one of the most important rivers in the development of the United States. The river, essentially wide, straight, and deep, has a fiord-like river bed configuration. In many areas, including the stretch from the Battery to Irvington, the deepest channel follows the east bank. This topography, coupled with the large volume of shipping on the river, prompted the improvement of navigational aids along the river in the late-nineteenth century.

In 1889 Jeffrey's Hook, extending over 100 feet into the river and adjacent to one of the deepest channels, was marked with a navigational light. This first signal, erected by the United States Light-House Board, was a wood post from which hung two oil lanterns; the signal consisted of fixed red lights of ten candlepower, placed vertically eighteen feet and twenty-eight feet above the water level.¹⁰ In 1895 the inadequacy of these lights was noted and plans were proposed by the Light-House Board for improvements to the signal with the addition of a fog bell and a stronger light. Several proposals for improving the light were made by the Light-House Board through 1907, although they were never funded.¹¹

In 1913 the Commissioner of Lighthouses, director of the reorganized Bureau of Lighthouses, proposed "Hudson River Aids to Navigation" as a high

priority special project.¹² The poor condition and obsolete nature of many of the existing navigational aids and the increasing traffic on the river, including the number of steamers navigating the river at night, mandated that a modern system of flashing lights and fog signals be established. At this time the New York State Barge Canal system was nearing completion and plans were underway to develop the Deeper Hudson shipway (between Hudson and Albany) and the Port of Albany to receive ocean-going vessels. The improvement of navigational aids at this time was surely linked to the anticipated increase in freight traffic on the Hudson River due to these projects.

The Hudson River navigational aids project was funded in 1916 and the work was accomplished over the next few years. Twenty lights were improved and four new lights were established; these lights were placed on black or red steel skeletal structures. Although initial descriptions for this project indicated that the Jeffrey's Hook light would be treated like the others, in fact, in 1918 the Bureau of Lighthouses applied to New York City's Department of Parks for a permit to erect a small lighthouse and fog signal at Jeffrey's Hook. In 1921 a cast-iron lighthouse which had stood as the North Hook Beacon, Sandy Hook, New Jersey, was moved to that location.

The North Hook Beacon, one of three lights on Sandy Hook, was established in 1817 and first known as the East Beacon; the light was improved in 1880 with the erection of a cast-iron tower which stood on an octagonal concrete foundation several yards from a keeper's residence. In 1889 the North Hook Beacon was electrified, and became one of the country's first such lighthouses. In 1917, the iron tower was dismantled and replaced with a skeleton tower after the Beacon was found to be in the direct firing line of nearby Fort Hancock's new gun battery.¹³

The former North Hook Beacon, now the Jeffrey's Hook Lighthouse, is a standard design cast-iron conical tower, a smaller version of a design used often in the late nineteenth century; the typical tower of larger dimensions was occupied by a keeper and often had a covered, open "porch" surrounding the base. There are several of these towers in the New York Harbor, including Old Orchard, Great Beds, Romer Shoal, and West Bank in the Lower Bay and Robbins Reef (erected in 1883) in the Upper Bay, as well as the Hudson River lighthouse at Tarrytown (erected in 1882-83). The utilitarian design of the former North Hook tower is enriched with Renaissance-inspired Tuscan style window surrounds and ornamental brackets supporting the gallery deck platform, and originally had a decorative railing at the walkway around the base of the lantern. The reconditioning of the structure at the Tompkinsville (Staten Island), New York, depot of the Third District of the Bureau of Lighthouses, prior to its relocation at Jeffrey's Hook, included the replacement of the paneled main door, of the double-hung windows with smaller porthole-type windows, and of the railing of the lantern walkway.

On October 10, 1921,¹⁴ with the structure in place, the light at Jeffrey's Hook was changed to a one-hundred candlepower, fifth-order acetylene red lamp, flashing every three seconds with each flash one second in duration; the focal plane of the light was sixty-one feet above the water. The fog signal, a bell which sounded one stroke every fifteen

seconds, was placed in commission two weeks later.¹⁵ The lighthouse was tended by a part-time keeper.¹⁶

The Jeffrey's Hook Lighthouse was the southernmost fixed light and fog signal on the Hudson River and is the only lighthouse on the island of Manhattan. Its prominence as a navigational aid, however, was soon diminished by the construction, almost directly above the lighthouse, of the George Washington Bridge (1927-1931, O.H. Ammann and Cass Gilbert) upon which an aeronautical beacon was placed in 1935. The Jeffrey's Hook Lighthouse remained in use, with signals unchanged, through 1947.

The Little Red Lighthouse: A Symbol for Children

"As pharos, beacons, towers, monuments or symbols, lighthouses have reached far beyond their rocky settings."¹⁷ Such is certainly the case with the Jeffrey's Hook lighthouse which was popularized by a children's book and subsequently rescued from proposed demolition. In 1942 Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. published The Little Red Lighthouse and the Great Gray Bridge, by Hildegard H. Swift with illustrations by Lynd Ward, and a small lighthouse was headed for immortality.

Swift's book, a fictionalized account of the Jeffrey's Hook lighthouse, relates the pride and importance, then worry, and final triumph experienced by the lighthouse which felt displaced after the George Washington Bridge was completed above it. On a foggy night, however, the continuing need for the Little Red Lighthouse was affirmed when the Bridge called to its little brother to shine. The story emphasizes the contrast between the small lighthouse -- humanized with emotions and depicted in anthropomorphic illustrations -- which symbolizes children, and the massive bridge which represents the adult world. Even the youngest reader can sense the importance of a small thing in a big city and be reassured that small children can contribute to the larger adult world.

"The Little Red Lighthouse" became a literary symbol and a landmark of urban geography to children of the New York area, who could spot it standing under the George Washington Bridge and visit it in Fort Washington Park. The popularity of this book, and the degree to which children in the New York City area had adopted "The Little Red Lighthouse" as their own, became apparent when the lighthouse was no longer needed as a navigational aid. In July, 1951, three years after it was decommissioned by the Coast Guard,¹⁸ the lighthouse was offered for sale as excess property. The 1918 agreement between the Bureau of Lighthouses and the Department of Parks of the City of New York had required the removal of the lighthouse and restoration of the site at such a time when the lighthouse was no longer in use.

The impending loss of "The Little Red Lighthouse" prompted a public outpouring of affection and support for making the lighthouse an historical landmark, from both the readers of Swift's book and their allies. A four-year-old boy offered to buy the lighthouse himself. A mother noted that "In all of this vast, inchoate mass of buildings and people that is New York, a real child's landmark is rare." A prominent child psychiatrist,

perhaps reflecting the post-war mentality of uncertainty in the face of rapid change, urged the preservation of the lighthouse as a symbol of security for children for whom it had come to represent assurance that, "even though you are little in a big world, you won't be annihilated."¹⁹ Editorials in the New York Times and New York Herald Tribune decried the loss of the small lighthouse.²⁰ This overwhelming public response prompted Commissioner of Parks Robert Moses to request that the lighthouse be given to the city, and on July 23, 1951, it was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Department of Parks of the City of New York. As a popular feature in Fort Washington Park "The Little Red Lighthouse" has continued to serve as a "beacon to children instead of to ships."²¹

Description

The Jeffrey's Hook lighthouse is situated on a flat natural rock formation at the edge of the water at the tip of a small point extending into the Hudson River known as Jeffrey's Hook. The conical tower, fourteen feet, six inches in diameter and forty feet high, is constructed of cast-iron plates and stands on a cylindrical concrete foundation of twenty-two feet, six inches in diameter. An eight-foot high cast-iron picket fence with a gate through the lower portion of the fence edges the foundation.

On the otherwise smooth exterior of the tower (painted red) four tiers of iron plates are joined with prominent rolled horizontal seams. The main access door, facing south, has a protruding surround with a semi-elliptical arched top; the metal replacement doors have riveted perimeters. Three windows, placed to light the freestanding spiral staircase on the interior, are at base level facing north, an intermediate level facing west, and at a high position facing south. The window surrounds, edged with battens, have semi-elliptical arched tops which are encompassed by pedimented hoods supported on small brackets. The porthole-type window openings (installed 1921), with circular glazing in metal frames on the upper two windows and an iron disc in the frame on the base-level window, are centered in the upper portion of the surround. Four additional, small glazed porthole windows light the watch room at the top of the tower, and are accentuated by a small projecting molding which extends from window to window at mid-point and describes the upper half of each opening.

The gallery deck platform is supported by twelve curved, pierced brackets terminated by pendant finials at the outer edge of the platform. The gallery is edged with an iron pipe post-and-rail balustrade with ball joints (added 1921). The lantern (ten feet in overall height), cylindrical in shape on the lower iron portion, is accessible through a small door facing south. The upper portion of the lantern, which is ten-sided, is glazed with single-pane fixed sash separated by narrow mullions. The polygonal iron roof is topped by a replacement cast-iron ball and finial.

The lighthouse site is a triangular area between the George Washington Bridge south tower base and the Hudson River. The lighthouse stands on a natural rock formation adjacent to riprap at the water's edge. The site is brush- and grass-covered south of the lighthouse where there are some small

locust, mulberry, and ailanthus trees near the water. To the north and east of the lighthouse the packed earth and remnants of gravel allow for vehicular access. Short lengths of iron post-and-rail fences extend to the north and to the south of the lighthouse. A carved stone slab marker identifying the structure as "The Little Red Lighthouse" is embedded in the ground east of the southern fence near some small locust trees.

Subsequent History

The Jeffrey's Hook lighthouse was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 as part of a thematic nomination of Hudson River lighthouses. A restoration project, which included the replacement of missing elements, site improvements, and the placement of an identifying marker, was undertaken by the City of New York Department of Parks and Recreation from 1982 to 1986.²² The story of the Jeffrey's Hook lighthouse has continued to enchant succeeding generations of children as The Little Red Lighthouse and the Great Gray Bridge remains in print as a popular children's book.

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NOTES

1. This section is based on Bolton, Stokes, Van Laer, Lossing, Wilstach, and the Sauthier, Stevens, and 1860 Topographical maps.
2. On the Sauthier and Stevens eighteenth-century maps the spelling "Jeffery's Hook" was used. This spelling may have been influenced by the name of the prominent eighteenth-century cartographer, Thomas Jeffereys, who published a map of the New York city area in 1755 which, unfortunately, did not include a name for the point of land in question. By the late nineteenth century, when the United States Light-House Board erected a navigational aid on the site, the spelling "Jeffrey's Hook" was in use; this spelling has been adopted for this report. Even though the Hudson River was long known as the North River, the modern name for this river has been used.
3. These hooks included Corlears Hook which extended into the east river near Grand Street, Dominies Hook which extended into the North River between Duane and Canal Streets, Tubby Hook above Jeffrey's Hook near the northern end of Manhattan, and Paulus Hook which became Jersey City, and also Sandy Hook, New Jersey.

4. The use of the Dutch word juffrouw in place names has been suggested by a point of land with a similar name near Poughkeepsie that Bolton cites. A reference to the strand (beach) of Jeffrau's valley (the site of which was not indicated) in a contract to construct a fence, signed in Ft. Amsterdam in 1644 (Van Laer, document 106), gives additional weight to the theory of a Dutch-era origin of the place name, although conclusive evidence has not been found. Bolton, 138.
5. The scholarship of Bolton and Stokes did not link Jeffrey's Hook conclusively with the Dutch era. The availability of more recent work that addresses this point is unknown; a thorough study of all historic maps of the area is beyond the scope of this report.
6. The narrowest point in the river, at Jeffrey's Hook, was chosen as the site for the construction of a cheval-de-frise, an underwater obstruction of ship hulks tied together with timbers, which was completed by August, 1776, but failed to play a role in the dominance of the Hudson River during the War.
7. Woodward, 6.
8. For example, Lossing, 379 and Woodward, 6-7.
9. This section is based on the Light-House Board Annual Reports; the Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Lighthouses; the Notice to Mariners; Light List, North Atlantic Coast of the United States; Brouwer, Bachand; Conway; Greene; and Fasulo.
10. The original Jeffrey's Hook light post and the oil storage house nearby are pictured in Bachand, 325.
11. The 1895 proposal was downscaled in 1897 when the projected cost was halved. In 1905 the Light-House Board's recommendation was changed to the construction of a fog signal and dwelling, with the justification that the effectiveness of a fog signal depended upon residence of the keeper at the station. This recommendation was made through 1907 and then allowed to lapse. Bachand, 324, notes that in 1909 it was suggested that a lighthouse be erected, similar to another farther up the Hudson River, that would provide a room where a keeper could sleep.
12. See the Annual Report of the Commissioner of Lighthouses, for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1914, p. 80, for a complete description of the project.
13. Bachand documents this early chapter of the Jeffrey's Hook lighthouse. The lighthouse was probably stored as well as reconditioned at the Bureau of Lighthouses Tompkinsville, Staten Island, Third District depot.
14. Notice to Mariners, Sept. 23, 1921, 4.

15. The fog signal was outside of the tower; inside were placed the automatic fog bell striker and the machinery weights which were hung in the well provided by the tower's central support column.
16. In the late 1920s this position was held by Bill Collins, a building superintendent in Washington Heights, who made two trips a day down through Fort Washington Park to Jeffrey's Hook to determine that all was in order. "The Hudson's Rusty Red Lighthouse," The Record, research file, LPC.
17. "New York's Little Red Lighthouse," Sites, 31. This article is an excellent review of the history and preservation of the lighthouse.
18. The Coast Guard had assumed responsibility for navigational aids in 1939.
19. "Save Lighthouse, Child Experts Ask," New York Times, July 12, 1951, pp. 23-24.
20. "The Little Lighthouse," New York Times, July 12, 1951, p. 24 and "Lighthouse for Sale," New York Herald Tribune, July 14, 1951, p. 14.
21. "Famous American Lighthouses," advertisement of the White & Wyckoff Manufacturing Company, 1952, research file, LPC.
22. This project, the "Reconstruction of the Little Red Lighthouse," contract number M-28-182, Kane, Liede and Ratyna, Landscape Architects, included: a new concrete cap for the foundation; rehabilitation of the fence and the fabrication of a new gate; installation of newly-fabricated doors; installation of new glass in the porthole and lantern windows; replacement and restoration of materials on the interior of the lighthouse; replacement of the ball and finial; cleaning and painting of the lighthouse and railings; erection of new lengths of fence adjacent to the lighthouse; and the placement of an historical marker. A copy of the project plans is on file in the Research Department, LPC.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this structure, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Jeffrey's Hook Lighthouse, also widely known as "The Little Red Lighthouse," has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Jeffrey's Hook lighthouse was erected in 1880 and moved to its current site in 1921 by the United States Bureau of Lighthouses as part of a project to improve the navigational aids on the Hudson River; that the lighthouse, made well-known by a popular children's book, The Little Red Lighthouse and the Great Gray Bridge (1942), has become, as "The Little Red Lighthouse," a symbol for children of the significance of a small thing in a big world; that the lighthouse became a celebrated "child's landmark," representing importance and permanence, after children and adults protested the proposed removal of the lighthouse in 1951, and this public support prompted the preservation of the structure through its transfer to the jurisdiction of the Department of Parks of the City of New York; that the lighthouse, a standard type conical iron tower which was the North Hook Beacon, Sandy Hook, New Jersey, from 1880 to 1917, was in operation at Jeffrey's Hook from 1921 to 1947 as a red tower with a flashing red light and a fog signal; that the Jeffrey's Hook Lighthouse, the southernmost light and fog signal on the Hudson River and the only lighthouse on the island of Manhattan, marked a prominent point projecting into a stretch of deep water in the Hudson River below Mount Washington, and is a reminder of a more natural river shoreline than exists today; and that the erection of the lighthouse at its current site was associated with the importance of river shipping in the first decades of the twentieth century when the New York State Barge Canal system was improved and the Deeper Hudson shipway and the Port of Albany were under development.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 (formerly Section 534 of Chapter 21), of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Jeffrey's Hook Lighthouse, ("The Little Red Lighthouse"), Fort Washington Park, Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 2178, Lot 3 in part, consisting of a triangular site surrounding the lighthouse, bounded at the northeastern corner by the northwestern corner of the southern George Washington Bridge tower base, extending southwesterly approximately 235' on a line established along and extending from the western edge of this tower base to the point where it intersects the U.S. Bulkhead Line of the Hudson River, northwesterly approximately 240' along the U.S. Bulkhead Line to a point where it intersects with a line established by and extending from the northern edge of the southern Bridge tower base, and then southeasterly approximately 70' along said line to the northwestern corner of the Bridge tower base, as its Landmark Site.

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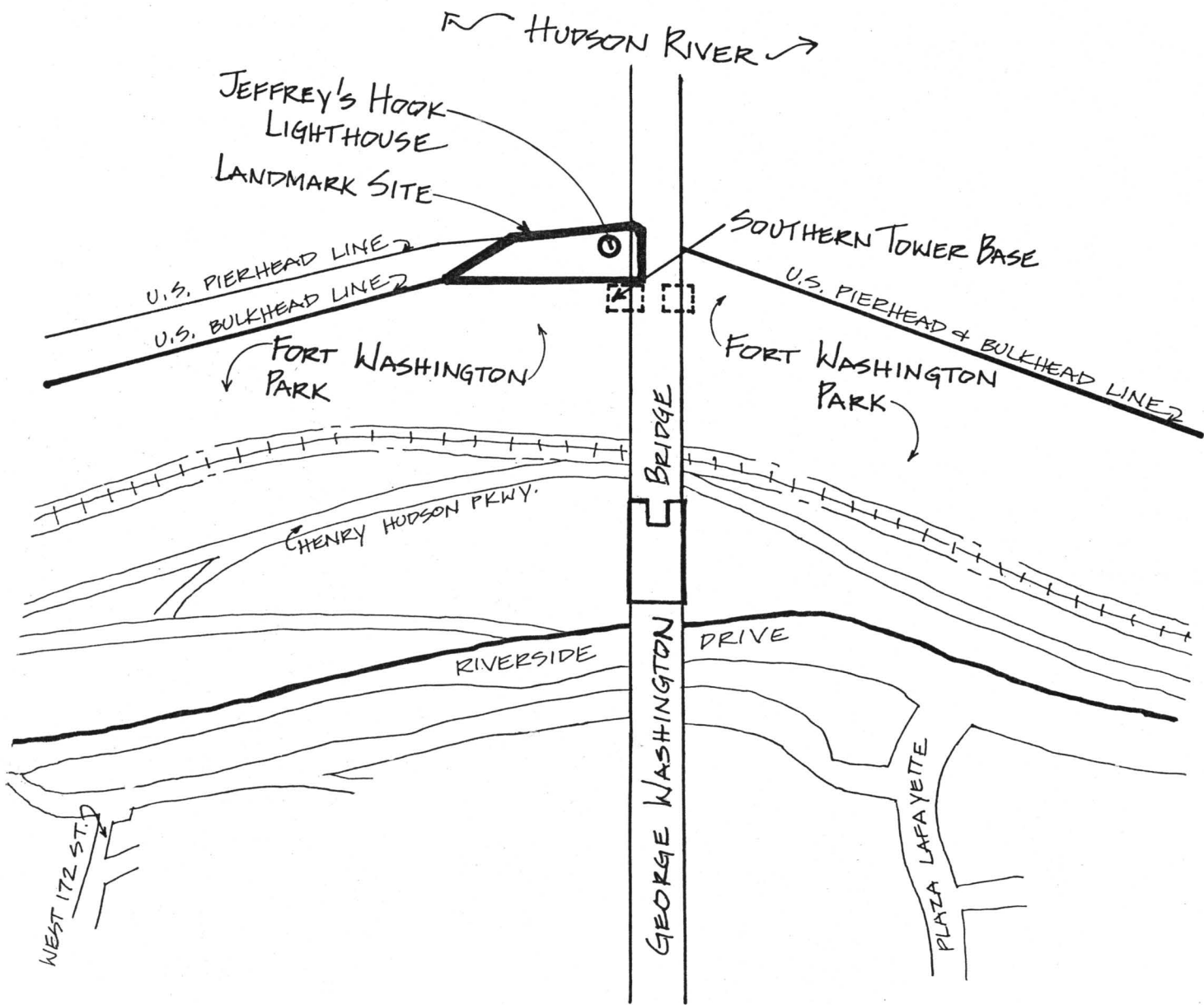
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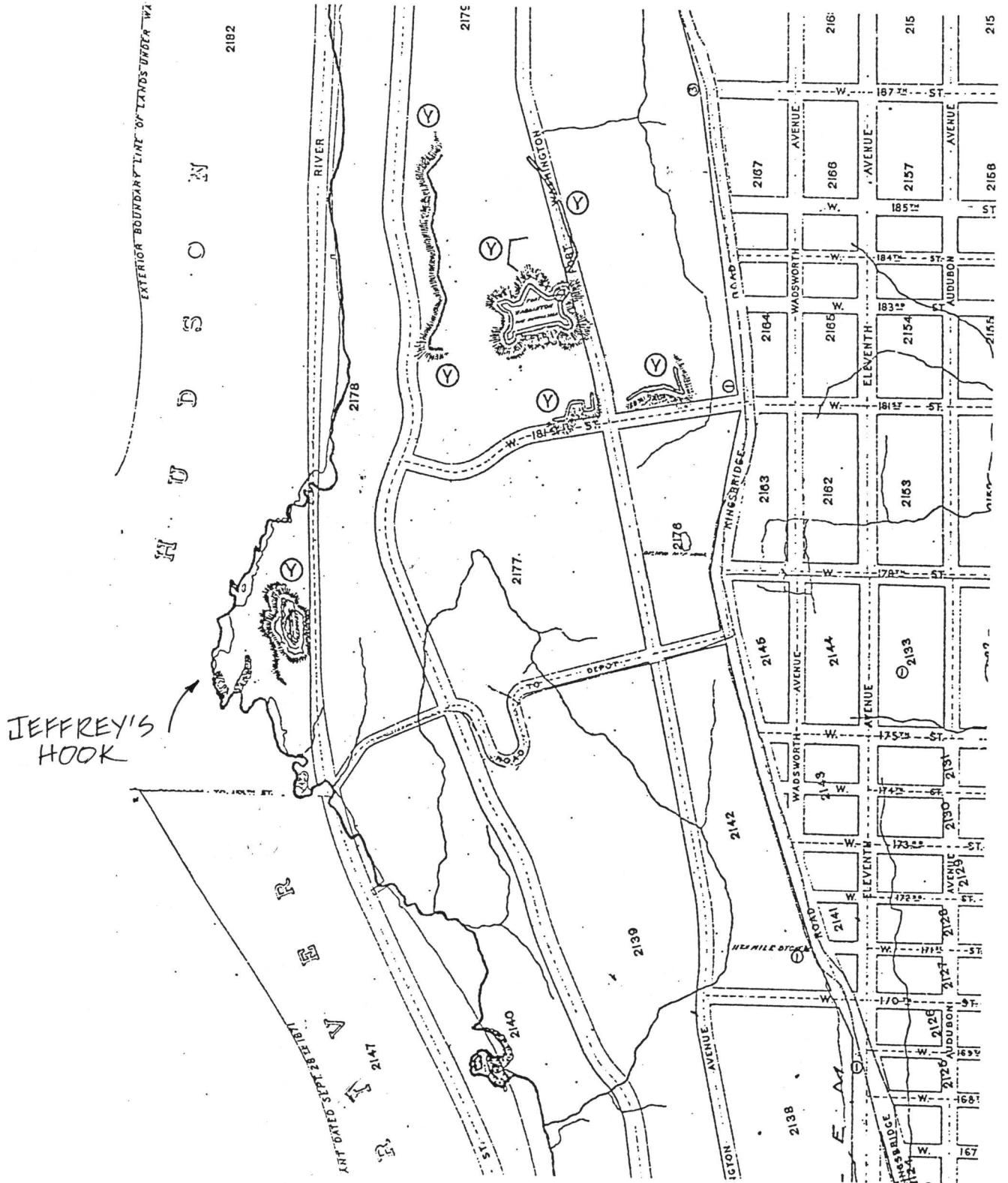
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JEFFREY'S HOOK LIGHTHOUSE, FORT WASHINGTON PARK, MANHATTAN. LANDMARK AND LANDMARK SITE.



Jeffrey's Hook with Revolutionary War fortifications depicted.
 Map adapted from Stokes, The Iconography of Manhattan Island. Plate 180,
 Vol. 3.



Jeffrey's Hook Lighthouse, Fort Washington Park, Manhattan.
Photo credit: Betsy Bradley