

DESIGNATION REPORT

Richard Webber Harlem

Packing House



Landmarks Preservation
Commission

Designation Report
Richard Webber
Harlem Packing House

Designation List 505
LP-2595

DESIGNATION REPORT

Richard Webber Harlem Packing House

LOCATION

Borough of Manhattan
207-215 East 119th Street, Manhattan
Tax Map Block 1784, Lot 5 in part

LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

SIGNIFICANCE

Designed by the architectural firm of Bartholomew & John P. Walther for the prominent butcher Richard Webber, this Romanesque Revival and Renaissance Revival style building is a fine example of late-19th-century architectural design and an intact reminder of East Harlem's commercial and industrial past.



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Cornice detail
LPC, 2017 (above)

Circa 1939 Tax Photo
New York City Municipal Archives,



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March 27, 2018

Designation List 505
LP-2595
3 of 25

Richard Webber Harlem Packing

House

207-215 East 119th Street, Borough

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Built: 1895

Architect: Bartholomew & John P. Walther

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1784, Lot 5, in part consisting of the land beneath the footprint of the building.

On February 13, 2018 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Richard Webber Harlem Packing House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Public Hearing Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. At the Public Hearing, six people spoke in favor of designation, including representatives from the New York Landmarks Conservancy, Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, Historic Districts Council, the Marcus Garvey Park Alliance, and CIVITAS. In addition the Commission received four letters and one email in support of designation, from Borough President Gale Brewer, Lott Community Development, Landmark East Harlem and East Harlem Preservation, and two individuals. No one spoke in opposition



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Designation List 505

LP-2595

4 of 25

Summary

Richard Webber Harlem Packing House

The former Richard Webber Harlem Packing House is a historic meat market building in East Harlem, constructed in 1895 and originally part of a larger commercial slaughterhouse, meat packing and retail complex. Designed by the architectural firm of Bartholomew & John P. Walther for the prominent butcher Richard Webber, this Romanesque Revival and Renaissance Revival style building is a fine example of late-19th-century architectural design and an intact reminder of East Harlem's commercial and industrial past.

Richard Webber, an English immigrant, started a small butcher shop in East Harlem in the late 1870s. The company was very successful, expanding into a large complex with a staff of 500. Webber maintained other businesses, and at the time of his death in 1908, he was described by the New York Times as "one of the largest butchers in this city if not in the United States."

Webber was a member of the New York Produce Exchange, the Poultry and Game Trade Association, and the American Meat Packers' Association, and maintained affiliations with several local meat trade societies. He was active in the community, serving on the Harlem Board of Commerce, and as a trustee of the Harlem Savings Bank. He was also a pioneer educator, giving lectures at New York Teachers College for the opening of their domestic science department, and at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.

Bartholomew and John Peter Walther designed the meat packing house, which was constructed in 1895. Active in the late-19th and

early-20th century, the architects specialized in warehouses, factories and flats buildings, and designed a number of buildings in Upper Manhattan.

The formal design and high quality craftsmanship of the six-story, brick and stone Packing House presented a sophisticated public face for Webber's operations. The facade combines features of the Romanesque Revival and Renaissance Revival styles. The a tripartite facade composition, simplicity of lines, the decorative roundels, and repetitive design motifs, and particularly the projecting cornice with its paneled frieze, denticulation and modillions, speak to the Renaissance Revival style influences. Characteristic Romanesque Revival style facade elements include the triforium piers, and Roman arches with Byzantine and Corinthian capitals, which are repeated at the arched windows at the top story. The central bay of the facade includes the building's date 1895 in carved stone, and prominently features terra-cotta cow head reliefs symbolizing the building's original function.

The complex remained in use by Webber's meat packing company until 1928, after which the building served a variety of functions. This building retains a high degree of historic integrity; limited alterations including infilled windows and painted masonry at the base do not diminish its strong architectural character or presence.

The well-crafted and well-constructed facade arrangement and articulation is expressive of its interior use, while its elaborate ornamentation elevates its importance within the streetscape and community.

Building Description

Richard Webber Harlem Packing House

The Richard Webber Harlem Packing House at 207-215 East 119th Street was erected in 1895-97 and combines elements of the Romanesque and Renaissance Revival styles. The building has a 70-foot wide primary facade, located on the north side of East 119th Street between Third and Second Avenues. The Richard Webber Harlem Packing House is a six-story buff brick and stone building with terra-cotta embellishments. The building features a tripartite facade with a stone base, a mid-section with grand arches and pilasters with carved Corinthian capitals, surmounted by an arcaded top floor and a prominent bracketed cornice. The symmetrical five-bay facade arrangement features a wide central bay, two flanking bays, and narrow outer bays. The central bay includes the building's date 1895 in carved stone, and features terra-cotta cow head roundels.

East 119th Street (north) Facade

Historic

Base: The two-story base features five arched bays containing rectangular openings, which originally contained storefronts and entries, beneath what were originally arched tripartite windows. Window openings have been infilled with brick between painted historic mullions, and openings at the base contain non-historic masonry infill and entries, with historic mullions remaining at the two bays flanking the center bay, aligned with similar features above. At the first floor, granite piers with stylized Byzantine capitals support five brick arches with molded keystones at the second floor. Terra-cotta

roundels with projecting terra-cotta cow heads in tympanums flank the center arch, and a stone band that runs the width of facade and projects slightly at each keystone.

Midsection: Three-story buff brick facade with triforium piers, with stylized Renaissance Revival style stone capitals, and roman arches trimmed with corbeled brick and carved granite. The central bay of the facade contains the building's date 1895 carved in stone between the third and fourth floors. Within the monumental brick arches of all five bays is historic brick masonry with narrow window openings at the third through fifth floors. The fifth floor windows are arched, and the third and fourth floor windows are rectangular openings. All feature brick spandrels and molded stone lintels and sills. A slightly projecting molded stone belt course with brackets separates the top story from those below.

Crown: window arcade featuring roman arches and triforium piers and compound piers with slightly projecting stylized Corinthian capitals supporting a projecting metal cornice with paneled frieze, modillions and dentils.

Alterations

Windows infilled with glazed brick throughout; first-floor facade painted; western and two easternmost entrances infilled with wood and painted; central entrance contains a wide metal roll-down security gate; small secondary entrance west of the center bay contains a metal roll-down security gate; metal fire-escape at second through sixth-floors windows at each landing have been converted to exit doors; metal double-door at second-floor at fire escape with transom infilled with wood and painted.

East Facade

The visible east facade is a secondary, undesigned brick wall.

Alterations

Parged brick facade with two small secondary entrances and one wide secondary entrance with metal roll-down gate; two metal conduits run the width of the facade, one with light fixtures attached above entrances; HVAC supported on a raised metal platform; mid-facade, metal piping runs from first-floor to sixth-floor; two wood signs, one above center entrance and one at third floor; round metal vents at southern portion of facade at second through sixth-floors.

Site History

Richard Webber Harlem Packing House

East Harlem¹

The Richard Webber Harlem Packing House is located in East Harlem, a Manhattan neighborhood bounded by East 96th Street to the south, Fifth Avenue to the west, the Harlem River to the east, and East 125th Street to the north. Within East Harlem was the original village of *Nieuw Haarlem*, established in 1658 by Dutch Governor Peter Stuyvesant. Until the 19th century, scattered settlements and farmsteads dotted the area. Since the 19th century, successive waves of newcomers settled in East Harlem, attracted by the area's affordable housing, good public transportation, and accessible shopping, and each wave of transplanted residents and immigrants has left its mark on the neighborhood.

Significant to the history of East Harlem was the early development of convenient public transportation lines. The New York and Harlem Railroad began operation in 1832 and reached East Harlem by 1837 with horse-drawn railcars along Fourth Avenue (today's Park Avenue).² During that same time, lower Manhattan began to experience overcrowding due to the first large wave of immigration.³ Capitalizing on this transportation link and increased population, real estate developers began marketing former farmland, subdividing tracts into building lots. Indicative of the projected expansion northward and the creation of new neighborhoods, the city erected a Fire Watch Tower (a New York City individual Landmark) on nearby Mount Morris in 1855.⁴ Although many blocks were developed, scattered areas still remained semi-rural.

As early as the 1830s black farmers settled around East 130th Street; German and Irish immigrants soon followed. Italian-Americans arrived in East Harlem in the late 1870s. The Third Avenue Elevated line (EL) in Manhattan, constructed between 1875 and 1878 by the New York Elevated Railway Company, helped spur further settlement in East Harlem; later Interborough Rapid Transit Company (IRT) improved and expanded the line further north to the Bronx.⁵ In the forty years between 1870 and 1910 approximately 65,000 apartment units were built in East Harlem, a testimony to the tremendous demand for new housing.

By 1890 East Harlem's original Irish-and German-American communities were rapidly being replaced by Italians and a Yiddish speaking community of Eastern European Jews, which was located between Lexington and Fifth Avenues. From 1880 to 1910 Italians settled primarily in the area east of Third Avenue and by the 1930s East Harlem had one of the largest Italian communities in the country.⁶ Smaller Finnish-American and Greek-American communities also shared the area of East Harlem until the late 1920s.

During the 1890s, a small number of Puerto Ricans began arriving in East Harlem. With the passage of the 1917 Jones Act, which recognized Puerto Ricans as American citizens, the Puerto Rican population in East Harlem began to steadily grow. After World War I, Puerto Ricans started to create an enclave between 110th Street and Lexington Avenue. The growth in population was related to the industrial opportunities in the area prior to the end of WWII. By the 1920s-1930s, due to its large Latino population, the area soon came to be known as Spanish Harlem, however, Spanish speaking residents referred to the area as "El Barrio," or "the neighborhood". By the mid-1930s the neighborhood was home to nearly 65,000 Puerto Ricans. A second phase of Puerto Rican immigration, from 1946-1964,

was part of the “Great Puerto Rican Migration,” and greatly increased the size of the Puerto Rican community of East Harlem.⁷

As the population grew in East Harlem so did its need for quality food and provisions that catered to its immigrant populations. The Harlem Market was established as a public market in 1807, situated west of Third Avenue near 120th and 121st Streets. It was a small wooden structure and contained two butcher stalls.⁸ In 1838 the residents of Harlem petitioned the city to build another public market in the vicinity. The Finance Committee established that an area would be taken for a public market and for Engine houses, \$5,000 dollars would be paid to compensate the owners of the property.⁹ The property on the west side of Third Avenue between 120th and 121st Streets was slated for use as a public market to accommodate the inhabitants at Harlem; it would contain four butchers, one fisherman, and a vegetable stand.¹⁰

Richard Webber came to Harlem in 1877, establishing his butcher shop on eastern side of Third Avenue between 119th and 120th Streets in 1878. By 1900 he would expand his operations to include the six-story packing house at 207-215 East 119th Street; a four-story building at 207-214 East 120th Street; a four-story building at 2191 Third Avenue, and an improved three-story building within the complex. The evolution of the neighborhood around the turn of the century reveals the range of land uses in this part of East Harlem, including a church, school, commercial, industrial and residential buildings all on the same block during the time Webber was expanding his business. The population on that same block, according to census records between 1880 and 1900, shows a predominately German and Irish neighborhood with several Italian and Eastern European families. The neighborhood was primarily working-class, however on 119th and 120th Streets there were 14 butchers, two provisions dealers, and

two meat weighers, professions all pertaining to the meat packing industry.¹¹

In the 1950s and 1960s, large sections of East Harlem were leveled for urban renewal projects, and the neighborhood was one of the hardest hit areas in the 1960s and 1970s as New York City struggled with deficits, race riots, urban flight, gang warfare, drug abuse, crime and poverty. These social problems caused a decrease in Harlem’s population; leaving behind a high concentration of underprivileged residents and decaying housing stock. By the late 1970s and 1980s, years of economic recessions and abandonment, redlining and disinvestment had taken their toll.

Since the late 1990s and into the 21st century, Harlem is experiencing a renaissance, and by the beginning of the 21st century, East Harlem is becoming a more racially diverse neighborhood. Economic development showcasing East Harlem’s cultural history is spurring a rebirth and attracting new residents and businesses.¹²

Richard Webber¹³

Richard Webber was born in Devonshire, England on January 21, 1847. Upon reaching the age of 15, Richard left home and moved to Exeter where he obtained an apprenticeship with a butcher that lasted until 1863. Webber moved to London and lived there until he immigrated to Canada in 1868. Webber finally settled in New York in 1870, and accepted a journeyman butcher and salesman position with David Warwick, in a butcher shop located at 118th Street and Third Avenue.¹⁴

In 1873, Richard Webber became a master butcher and started his own pork trade store, operating a combined butcher shop and “street wagon.” Webber and James W. Sears started a partnership and opened a butcher shop at 2194 Third Avenue; this partnership dissolved in 1876. Webber stayed at this address and opened Webber’s Butcher

Shop in 1877. Webber formed a partnership with, his old mentor David Warwick, Webber and Warwick, which only lasted until 1880. David Warwick, had several financial set-backs, and Richard Webber acquired the Warwick Company and other business interests. Part of the deal included a packing house at 210 East 120th Street, which was originally a Warwick holding.¹⁵

Webber purchased three lots on 119th Street in 1890 to build a new six-story cold storage/meat packing building.¹⁶ Webber's business was expanding rapidly, and he would purchase in total ten lots that would form a large T-shaped configuration, consisting of the original butcher shop, a four-story building at 2191 Third Avenue, a new six-story packing house at 207-215 East 119th Street built in 1895; he purchased four lots on 120th Street, 207-214 East 120th Street; and an improved three-story building within the complex.¹⁷ In 1885 Webber's business employed 110 people. Webber expanded his business holdings to other cities; he opened a poultry and packing house in Sioux City, Iowa and a small stock slaughterhouse in Buffalo, New York.

In 1907 Webber introduced The Richard Webber Mutual Benefit Society, a profit sharing plan for his 500 employees: anyone employed by the company for one year or more would share 20 percent of the net profits from the preceding six months.¹⁸ Every year Richard Webber held an annual employee barbecue at Sulzer's Harlem River Park and Casino.¹⁹

Richard Webber introduced several innovations to the industry; in 1897, he introduced a trading card desk allowing his customers to purchase multiple large items with ease, increasing customer care and efficiency.²⁰ Webber was active in the East Harlem community: in 1893-94, he established a soup kitchen in his store for the needy, and in 1902, he was elected first vice-president of Twelfth Ward

Bank.²¹ Webber was also a trustee of Harlem Savings Bank, and in 1900 during a run on the bank, and again in 1907 he virtually saved the bank by guaranteeing all the accounts at the bank.²²

Richard Webber was a pioneer educator, after Teachers College opened their domestic science department Webber taught an annual class on purchasing the different cuts of meat, going as far as setting up a butcher shop in a hallway near the classroom. He gave similar classes at Pratt Institute and Horace Mann School of New York. After his death his son continued the tradition and added meat cutting demonstrations at the Tremont Branch of the New York Public Library in the Bronx.²³

In November 1878 Richard Webber married Lucy Ford,²⁴ and he and his wife moved to Harlem around 1880 and lived at 443 East 119th Street.²⁵ Together they had two sons Richard Jr. and William, and one daughter Hattie.²⁶ Webber purchased 1871 Madison Avenue in 1886 and lived there with his family until his death in 1908.²⁷

In October 1908, Richard Webber died of heart disease at sea, returning from a tour abroad. At the time of his death he was described by the *New York Times* as "one of the largest butchers in this city if not in the United States."²⁸ He left the bulk of his \$7,000,000 estate to his wife and three children. Webber also bequeathed \$500.00 dollars to every employee that worked for him for ten years.²⁹ His sons Richard Jr. and William Webber continued to operate the business until 1920 and sold the all properties associated with the Richard Webber Harlem Packing House in 1928.

Meat Packing Industry in New York City³⁰

Meat and poultry has been produced in New York for consumers since before the American Revolution. Meat packing is the industrialized purchasing of livestock, and converting it to saleable goods to consumers.³¹ Initially in-state farmers sold livestock

to drovers who transported the animals to market. Independent butchers bought animals from the drovers or from outlying stock yards to slaughter in the city. The butchers worked in spaces called “baulks,” in the slaughterhouses; small, poorly lit and poorly ventilated these spaces were built of wood and contained a hoist, table and gutters. As early as 1656, new measures were put in place to regulate slaughterhouses. Private slaughterhouses were banned and replaced with one public facility. One of the earliest livestock markets was founded in 1676 in Manhattan located between Pine and Wall Streets.³² Licensed butchers worked under controlled sanitary conditions. As the city expanded new public slaughterhouses were built and moved north. One opened on Peck Slip in 1696, another on Roosevelt and Water Streets in 1720, and the Bowery slaughterhouse near the Bull’s Head Tavern became Bull’s Head Market in 1825 and moved to a larger site near East 24th Street and Third Avenue, and in 1848 moved farther north to 44th Street. A livestock market was installed and several small illegal slaughterhouses sprang up. Mulberry Street slaughterhouse opened in 1776, and the street later became known as “slaughterhouse row or street.”³³

New York City’s unparalleled growth, from a population of 30,000 in 1790 to 800,000 in 1860; turned the former colonial port into America’s largest, and the Western world’s third-largest metropolis after London and Paris. As the population grew so did its need for quality food and provisions. Common types of meats eaten in New York City between 1790 and 1860 included beef, pork, mutton, veal, lamb, and poultry.³⁴

The public provision system was introduced in 1790, and these markets were regulated by city government. The public markets were the City Corporation’s property; they managed the property and collected fees from vendors. The vendors paid the rents for the exclusive right to retail at public

markets.³⁵ Public markets were the only places where fresh food, particularly meat, could be sold, and only licensed vendors such as butchers had the right to participate.³⁶ Since municipal laws and ordinances required fresh meat to be sold only in the public markets, this mandatory centralization encouraged trade solidarity and competition. The success of butchers rested on winning the loyalty of local officials as well as that of a steady, trusting clientele.³⁷ By the early 1800s there were as many as 13 public markets as well as small individual markets and butchers all competing to feed the continually increasing population of New York City.³⁸ With each new public market the number of stalls increased. The completion of Washington Market in 1813 provided 220 butcher stalls and the Fulton Market in 1820 increased the number of butcher stalls to 320. The public market system of provisioning reached its height in the 1830s, however by 1843 the city government decided to repeal the public market laws, which meant that instead of limiting the sale of fresh meat to licensed butchers, the city council now permitted anyone to open private butcher shops.³⁹ The butchers were sole proprietors, the customer could develop a rapport with the butcher and ask certain questions, on types and cuts of meat, storage, quality of certain cuts of meat and quantity need to serve large and small families and finally purchase high quality meats.

The Federal government began to regulate Public markets after the Civil War. Horace Capron, the United States Commissioner of Agriculture from 1867 to 1871, was the first commissioner to conduct a nationwide survey of public markets.⁴⁰ A sanitary code was issued during this time and slaughterhouses were considered a public health issue and immediately banned in New York City between Second and Tenth Avenues.⁴¹

Meat production in the 1860s to 1940s took place primarily with the use of slaughterhouses and

stockyards. A slaughterhouse is a facility where livestock are processed for consumption as food products. The production of beef and pork followed the same process of cleaning, inspecting, trimming, and curing. Up to the 1860s,” writes Lewis Corey, “meat packing was a small-scale enterprise, not yet industrial,” dominated by merchants.⁴² Livestock was slaughtered for local consumption where it was raised or, if transported to market, shipped or driven live to rail yards and, then, to urban packinghouses. Butchers, both in small community packing houses and retail markets, were skilled craftsmen, often self-employed or engaged in a facility with only a few other similarly skilled workers. As the control of municipal authorities was broken down, the number of independent slaughterhouses increased. Thus, by the early 1860s, there were over two hundred largely independent slaughterhouses located mostly in the Lower East Side.

As the city developed, slaughterhouses were considered a public nuisance, and prompted increasingly restrictive changes in the New York City health codes, that designated areas close to or surrounding railroad terminals. Abattoir centers such as “Butchertown” in the Turtle Bay neighborhood on the East River was an amalgamation of several slaughterhouses that operated from 1898 until the 1940s; it was razed to give way to the United Nations Plaza complex. The Gansevoort Market was an early open air market on the lower west side of Manhattan. It became the city’s center for slaughterhouses and wholesale meat trade and is still referred to as the Meat Packing District. The market had its own stockyard, power station, cold storage plants and was close to transportation links. The Meatpacking District runs from Gansevoort Street to West 14th street, between the Hudson River and Hudson Street, and at the start of the 20th century, contained around 250 slaughterhouses and packing plants. In 1847, railroad tracks ran down the west side of Manhattan.

However, after several accidents between the railroad cars and other traffic, it was decided that a new railroad system would be built as part of a reconstruction effort in the area. This new line, called the High Line, was an elevated track that stretched 13 miles and officially opened in 1934. It ran from 34th Street to Spring Street and went through blocks rather than over the avenues. In addition, it connected directly to factories so that large shipments of meat and other produce could be shipped and unloaded easily without disturbing traffic. The Gansevoort Market operated from 1880s until its decline the 1960s. The market’s decline was due to labor strikes, new technology, trucking and the advent of supermarkets which changed the distribution pattern for meat, dairy and produce from a locally or regionally based system to a more national one.

Transportation, Refrigeration, and Packing Houses

Advancements in transportation came to impact the exchange of various food products, such as grains, wheat, corn, seafood, alcohol, sugar and meat. This trade of food in turn had an enormous impact on the country’s economy. New York offered a multitude of transportation options that allowed for trade over long distances. The introduction of the Erie Canal in 1825 allowed the transport of goods to and from New York City at one-tenth the previous cost in less than half the previous time, and transformed New York City into America’s commercial capital. As the gateway to the Midwest, New York City became America’s commercial capital and the primary port of entry for European immigrants. The city’s population quadrupled between 1820 and 1850, and the financing of the canal’s construction also allowed New York to surpass Philadelphia as the country’s preeminent banking center. When rail transportation was introduced stock yards were built at railheads in

New Jersey, and slaughter houses increased on both sides of the Hudson River, primarily on West Street in Manhattan. By the 1850s New York City was the largest center of beef production in the country.

Technologies related directly to food storage, preservation, and processing also contributed to the growth of the industry, among the most important were those involved in the commercial production and storage of ice. American commercial ice production can be traced to the 1820s, with two important technological advances: an improved ice cutter that allowed ice companies to harvest ice from lakes, and improvements to the icehouse that vastly reduced waste from melting. Large ice blocks were cut with horse-drawn saws, floated to shore, briefly stored in icehouses, and then broken up and shipped in coolers via horse cart to nearby cities. There, icemen delivered them door to door to subscribers. Natural ice supply became a large industry in the 19th century and serviced cities such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.⁴³ By 1879 there were 35 commercial ice plants in America, more than 200 a decade later, and 2,000 by 1909. In 1907, 14 to 15 million tons of ice was consumed, nearly triple the amount in 1880.⁴⁴ However, by the 1890s pollution and sewage caused health concerns, and the introduction of refrigeration technology allowed mechanical refrigeration and ice production.

Within the packing plant itself, space for meat chilling and storage was usually cooled by ice in overhead lofts, connected to the area by flues that helped the natural circulation of cold air. With refrigeration, curing became a year-round activity and because animals could be brought to market at any time, not just in winter, and meat quality improved.⁴⁵ The great increase in the number of slaughterhouses in the city indicated the success of the meat industry's development and attributed to New York City's growing significance in America's meat-processing industry.

As the Industrial Era began, there were many changes to the New York diet and they were mainly due to the change in location of production, and new methods of transportation. Beginning in 1840, refrigerated cars were used to transport milk and butter. By 1860, refrigerated transportation was limited to seafood and dairy products; later. A patent by J.B. Sutherland in 1867, for an insulated car with ice bunkers in each end revolutionized the industry. There were various car designs based upon the type of cargo, such as meat and fruit. As a result production and consumption of meat, primarily beef, increased.⁴⁶

With the introduction of refrigeration, and refrigerated train cars, late in the 19th century, larger plants began to develop. Live animals, collected from throughout the Great Plains, were shipped to facilities normally located in major rail centers such as Chicago, Kansas City, or Omaha. Dressed beef was then shipped to branch houses for final processing and sale. It wasn't until 1949 that a refrigeration system made its way into the trucking industry by way of a roof-mounted cooling device, patented by Frederick McKinley Jones (1893-1931), an African American inventor. This system - eliminated the risk of food spoilage during long-distance shipping trips, and was later adapted to a variety of other common carriers, including ships and railway cars.⁴⁷

During the first half of the 20th century, the neighborhood butcher shop was a staple in American life. People relied on their local butcher to carry the high-quality cuts of meat they bought each week, and in turn, butchers knew the names and needs of their regular customers. These relationships slowly began to change in the 1960s, as meatpacking houses began shipping precut and boxed meat directly to supermarkets.

The Architecture of Meat Packing Houses⁴⁸

One of the earliest designs for industrial buildings gained wide acceptance by the 1820s. “Slow burning” heavy timber construction represented a somewhat safe design for many industries, including meat packing. Traditionally meat packing houses in New York City are typically multi-story buildings, and ornament on these utilitarian buildings was generally secondary to function. These buildings were often well crafted and well-constructed to support their historic uses. The buildings typically had ordered facades with regularly spaced window openings at the upper floors and first floor arrangements that reflected the building’s use through placement of entry doors, storefronts, windows, full-bay openings, and overhead doors. First-floor openings may have had traditional storefronts or display windows, many were designed to facilitate vehicular access and the loading of goods.

Early meat packing houses were constructed of durable materials, brick, and stone, with wood beams, columns and floor joists, for structural support of heavy machinery. Technology changed how larger meat packing houses or plants were built, and responded to the desire to rationalize procedures and integrate vertical technologies into the structure of buildings. The introduction of ice-cooled rooms made it possible to pack meat year round, and steam hoists made it possible to elevate carcasses, and an overhead assembly line moved the product.⁴⁹ With these improvements meat packing plants became enormous multistory facilities. Animals entered at an upper level and the carcass moved along a disassembly line until dressed meat and by-products emerged at ground level. Within the packing plant itself, space for meat chilling and storage was usually cooled by ice in overhead lofts, connected to the area by flues that helped the natural circulation of cold air these rooms were usually on lower stories.⁵⁰ During

the late 19th early 20th centuries designs would include steel framing with and reinforced concrete for structural support, with brick and stone facades.

Today, how modern meat packing houses are designed and built hinges on the types of processes the owner intends to have as part of the facility (e.g. slaughter, fabrication, production of ready-to-eat product).⁵¹ Most are one-story facilities, processing rooms are arranged on one floor for maximum usage, unloading livestock is typically at the rear of the plant next to the slaughter floor, there are a number of cooling rooms and several large meat freezer rooms. Various out buildings, including a hay barn and a hide room pens are typically adjacent to the rear of the building.

The Richard Webber Harlem Packing House was designed in the Romanesque Revival and the Renaissance Revival styles by architects Bartholomew Walther and John Peter Walther and constructed from 1895-1897. The facade arrangement and articulation is expressive of its interior use, including masonry walls and narrow windows to support interior refrigeration, while its elaborate ornamentation elevates its importance within the streetscape and community. Romanesque Revival style features of the facade include triforium and compound piers, and Roman arches with Byzantine and Corinthian capitals. The tripartite facade, simplicity of lines and overall flatness of the building, the roundels, as well as the repetitive design motifs, and particularly its projecting cornice with the paneled frieze, denticulation and modillions, speaks to the Renaissance Revival style influences. Both styles are expertly represented in the notably handsome facade.

Romanesque/Renaissance Revival Style⁵²

The Romanesque Revival style had its beginnings in Germany around 1820 and was known there as Rundbogenstil, the round-arched style. The use of

the Romanesque Revival style in New York City was prevalent in the second half of the 19th century, as architectural concepts from Europe, based on the buildings of ancient Rome, were imported to the United States and became popular during the Victorian era. Sometimes labeled Lombard, Norman or Roman, the Romanesque Revival style is categorized by predominately brick construction, imposing scale and formal design, and the use of round arches, squat columns, grouped windows, corbels and substantial pilasters with stylized capitals with carved Medieval or Byzantine ornament. Other distinguishing motifs are molded belt courses marking horizontal divisions and the arcaded corbel table which is a series of miniature arches below the eaves.⁵³

One of first Romanesque Revival style buildings erected in the United States is the former Church of the Pilgrims, now Our Lady of Lebanon, in the Brooklyn Heights Historic District, designed by Richard Upjohn and completed in 1846.⁵⁴ The Romanesque Revival style was widely utilized throughout the second half of the 19th century for a variety of building types, such as railroad stations, civic buildings, schools, armories, commercial buildings, factories, and masonry dwellings. This was one of the most popular forms of architecture in the United States during the 1880s, and among the first styles applied to tall buildings.

The Renaissance Revival style developed at the very end of the Victorian period of architecture and reflects the rebirth of Classical culture that originated in Florence in the early 15th century and spread throughout Europe, replacing the medieval Gothic style. As in the Classical period, proportion was the most important factor of beauty; Renaissance architects found a harmony between human proportions and buildings. This concern for proportion resulted in clear, easily comprehended space and mass, which distinguishes the Renaissance

style from the more complex Gothic. Filippo Brunelleschi is considered the first Renaissance architect. The Renaissance Revival Style was popular in this country in two phases; the first phase, was from about 1840 to 1885, and the second Renaissance Revival, which was characterized by larger more elaborately decorated buildings, was from 1890 to 1915.⁵⁵ The Renaissance Revival style features masonry construction of brick or stone, symmetrical facades with repetitive design motifs, and typically rusticated first floors with upper floors having a flat finish. Arches are prevalent facade features, as well as belt courses between stories, and elaborate projecting cornices ornamented with dentils and modillions.

The Richard Webber Harlem Packing House was built in 1895, at a transitional point between the Romanesque Revival and the second Renaissance Revival Style periods, and shares similarities with designated landmarks built within the five years of it in Lower Manhattan. 55-57 North Moore Street in the Tribeca West Historic District designed by Charles C. Haight in 1890 in the Romanesque Revival Style is six stories in height and feature similar corbeled arches and recessed windows.⁵⁶ No. 74-76 Laight Street in the Tribeca North Historic District, designed by Thomas R. Jackson in 1899-1900,⁵⁷ and 79 Sullivan Street in the Sullivan-Thompson Historic District, designed by Schneider & Herte in 1900,⁵⁸ share elements the Renaissance Revival, Romanesque Revival style. 79 Sullivan Street features the lighter brick facade, transitional molded stone banding, arched windows resting on Corinthian capitals round Roman arches; 74-76 Laight Street shares similar decorative details, wide piers, regularly spaced arched windows with keystones, and molded stone belt courses marking horizontal divisions.

Bartholomew Walther & John Peter

Walther⁵⁹

Bartholomew Walther (1853-1908), began his architecture firm in 1883 and his son John Peter Walther, (1864-1939), a carpenter by trade, joined the firm in 1899. The father and son duo were also inventors and held several patents.⁶⁰ Active in the late-19th and early-20th century, the architects Bartholomew Walther and his son John Peter Walther, together specialized in warehouses, factories and flats buildings, and designed a number of buildings in Upper Manhattan. John P. Walther was on the Harlem Board of Commerce.⁶¹ Their office was in Harlem at 205 East 125th Street from 1894 to 1900. John was a member of the Harlem Board of Commerce. They designed several buildings in Harlem including: 207-211 East 119th Street, (1895-97), 220-222 East 125th Street; Flats buildings at 172 East 119th Street, (1899) and 215 West 12th Street (1901); Stables at 322-326 East 103rd Street.

Subsequent History

In 1919, all buildings associated with the Richard Webber Packing House were leased for 21 years, with an option to purchase within three years, to Pharmaceutical Capital Company.⁶² Municipal Market Company purchased the Webber Packing House and the adjoining complex in 1921,⁶³ and the building changed hands several times over a period of seven years with the Webbers finally selling off any remaining interest in the property in 1928.⁶⁴ From 1930s to 1980s the property would change hands many times.

In 1984 Davis & Warshow purchased the property at 207-215 East 119th Street, the former Richard Webber Packing House.⁶⁵ Davis & Warshow was founded in 1925, when Bernard Davis joined forces with Louis Warshow to open a modest plumbing supply business in New York City.

Founders Louis Warshow and Bernard Davis sold their interests in the company in 1947 and 1966, respectively, to partner Irving Finkel. Finkel joined the company in 1934, and by 1941, he had acquired a one-third ownership of the company. He took on a larger share with Warshow's departure and became sole owner when Davis retired in 1966. Frank Finkel his son joined the company in 1967, he later became president in 1987. In 2012 Davis & Warshow was acquired by Ferguson Enterprises, the current owner of the building.⁶⁶

Conclusion

The Richard Webber Harlem Packing House is one of few high design style buildings in this East Harlem neighborhood from the turn of the century. The building represents the evolution of the neighborhood, a specific time in East Harlem's History, and the industrialization of food production in the early 20th century, that was needed to serve the growing residential community. The well-crafted and well-constructed facade arrangement and articulation is expressive of its interior use, while its elaborate ornamentation elevates its importance within the streetscape and community.

Report researched and written by

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Endnotes

¹ Information in this section is based on the following sources: James Riker, *Revised History of Harlem: Its Origins and Early Annals* (New York: New Harlem Publishing Co., 1904), 171-178; I. N. Phelps Stokes, *Iconography of Manhattan Island, Volume III*, (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1916); Jonathan Gill, *Harlem*, (New York: Grove Press, 2011); New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) *The New York Public Library 125th Street Branch* (LP-2305), prepared by Theresa C. Noonan; LPC, *Mount Morris Bank Building* (LP-1839), (New York: City of New York, 1993), prepared by Andrew Dolkart; LPC, *Graham Court Apartments* (LP-1254), (New York: City of New York, 1984), prepared by Jay Shockley.

² During the 1830s, Third Avenue extended from lower Manhattan into East Harlem, with horse-drawn rail service by 1853.

³ From 1830 to 1860, the population of the city quadrupled with immigrants from Europe, particularly Ireland and Germany. George J. Lankevich, *New York City: A Short History*, (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 70-71.

⁴ Now Marcus Garvey Park at Madison Avenue and East 120th Street; LPC, *Watch Tower* (LP-0313), (New York: City of New York, 1967), prepared by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

⁵ The line was to run from City Hall along the Bowery and Third Avenue to the Harlem River. The Manhattan Railway Company took control of the New York Elevated Railroad in 1879, and in 1891, the Manhattan Railway took over operations of a short railroad between 129th Street and 133rd Street in the southern Bronx, then operated by the Suburban Rapid Transit Company. Through service between the Bronx and Manhattan began in 1896. A 999-year lease deal made in 1902 brought the Third Avenue El under the control of the Interborough Rapid Transit Company. Information adapted from: http://www.nycsubway.org/wiki/The_3rd_Avenue_Elevated, accessed from the internet, 09/21/2017.

⁶ Information in this section adapted from: East Harlem History-197-A-Plan, www.eastharlem.com/cb11_197A_history.htm; Italian

East Harlem, www.myharkem.org/v2/sub.php?PK=19.

⁷ Information in this section adapted from: Clara E. Rodríguez, *Puerto Ricans: Immigrants and Migrants, A Historical Perspective*, (Portfolio Project, 1990), 3.

<http://www.americansall.com/PDFs/02-americans-all/9.9.pdf>.

⁸ The market was closed due to nonpayment of fees.

⁹ Information in this section adapted from: Thomas F. De Voe, *The Market Book, 1811-1892* (New York printed by author, 1862), 589-591.

¹⁰ Ibid. DeVoe, 589-591.

¹¹ 1900 United States Federal Census Records

¹² Information in this section adapted from: <http://urbanareas.net/info/resources/neighborhoods-manhattan/east-harlem-manhattanhistory/>, accessed 09/21/2017; <https://www.6sqft.com/east-harlem-from-manhattans-first-little-italy-to-el-barrio-to-a-neighborhood-on-the-cusp-of-gentrification/>, accessed 09/21/2017;

<http://www.east-harlem.com/index.php/history/>, accessed 09/21/2017.

¹³ Information in this section adapted from: Roger R. Shiel, *Early to Bed and Early to Rise: Twenty Years in Hell with the Beef Trust*, (Self Published, Indianapolis, Indiana: 1909), 194-198.

¹⁴ "The New York Section," *The National Provisioner*, v. 39 October 17, 1908, 136.

¹⁵ Shiel, 195; Webber purchased the building and business at a receiver's sale.

¹⁶ New York County, Office of the Register, Deeds and Conveyance, Liber 2301, p.263 (April 3, 1890).

¹⁷ "Webber Heirs Sell Plot," *New York Times*, October 26, 1927, 51.

¹⁸ Shiel, 193.

¹⁹ "Picnic of Richard Webber Society," *The New York Tribune*, July 14, 1908, 4.

²⁰ "Dressed Poultry and the Food Merchant," *Butchers' Advocate*, V. 22 (April 7, 1897), 15.

²¹ "Twelfth Ward Bank Elections," *New York Times*, January 9, 1900, 3.

²² Information in this section adapted from: "Death of Richard Webber," *The National Provisioner*, October 17,

1907, 136; “A Run on the Harlem Savings Bank,” *New York Times*, December 12, 1900, 1.

²³ Shiel, 197.

²⁴ Manuscripts and Archives Division of the New York Public Library; New York, New York; Methodist Episcopal Church Records in New York City and Vicinity.

²⁵ 1880 United States Census Records

²⁶ “Webber Estate \$7,000,000, Harlem Butcher Who Died on Ship Left Bulk to Wife and Children,” *New York Times*, October 31, 1908, 1.

²⁷ His wife Lucy Webber remarried and sold the property in 1920.

²⁸ “Richard Webber Obituary,” *The New York Tribune*, October 7, 1908, 7; “Richard Webber Dead at Sea,” *New York Times*, October 10, 1908, 9;

²⁹ “Webber Estate \$7, 000, 000,” *New York Times*, October 31, 1908, 1.

³⁰ Information in this section is based on the following sources: Kenneth T. Jackson, Ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City Second Edition* (New York: Yale University Press, 2010), 823-824; Peter Eisenstadt, Laura-Eve Moss, Editors, *The Encyclopedia of New York State* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 965-966.

³¹ Eienstadt, Moss, 965.

³² Eienstadt, Moss, 965.

³³ DeVoe, 589-591.

³⁴ Jackson, 823-824

³⁵ Information in this section adapted from: Gergely Baics, *Feeding Gotham: the Political Economy and Geography of Food in New York, 1790-1860*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 4.

³⁶ Ibid. 5-6

³⁷Information in this section adapted from: Helen Tangires, Project for Public Spaces, *Public Markets and the City: A Historical Perspective*, October 30, 2005, <https://www.pps.org/blog/6thmktstangires/> accessed from the internet: 08/29/2017.

³⁸ Information in this section adapted from: Andrew F. Smith, *Savoring Gotham: A Food Lover's Companion to New York City*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Paula Young Lee, *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse* (University of New Hampshire Press, 2008).

³⁹ Baics, 13-22.

⁴⁰ Tangires.

⁴¹ Jackson, 824.

⁴² Information in this section adapted from: Lewis Corey, *Meat and Man: A Study of Monopoly, Unionism, and Food Policy* (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), 37.

⁴³ Information in this section adapted from: Cindy R. Lobel, “Food in 19th-Century American Cities,” April 2016, accessed from the internet 09/18/2017, <http://americanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-281>.

⁴⁴Information in this section adapted from: Barbara Krasner Khait, *The Impact of Refrigeration*, <https://www.history-magazine.com/refrig.html>, accessed from the internet 09/22/2017,

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Information in this section adapted from: Fred M. B. Amram, Susan K. Henderson, *African American Inventors*, (Mankato, Minnesota: Capstone Press, 1996), 15-20; Sylvia Lovina Chidi, *The Greatest Black Achievers in History*, (Createspace Independent Publisher, 2014), 331-333, accessed from the internet 09/28/2017. Frederic Jones was the holder of 61 patents, winner of the National Medal of Technology and an inductee of the National Inventors Hall of Fame.

⁴⁸ Information in this section adapted from: Molly Meyers Naumann and Brian Schultes, *An Intensive Level Architectural & Historical Survey of the John Morrell & Company Meat Packing Plant*, Ottumwa, Iowa, April 1991 12-15, accessed from the internet 08/28/2017.

⁴⁹ Information in this section adapted from: Chicago Department of Planning and Development, *Historic Fulton Randolph Market District Design Guidelines*, November 21, 2014, Meat Packing, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/804.html> accessed from the internet 10/03/2017.

⁵⁰ Jackson, 824.

⁵¹ Information in this section adapted from: <http://articles.extension.org/pages/20445/plant-design-and-construction#Plant%20Design%20Guide>; <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/804.html>, accessed 10/03/2017; United States Department of Agriculture, “Facility Guidelines for Meat Processing Plants” 1997, Federal Register, 62, No.164, 4-10.

⁵² Information in this section is based on the following sources: Sir Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931, 9th ed.)261-274; Kathleen Curran, *The Romanesque Revival*, (University Park, Pennsylvania, 2003), 225-257; Robert A. M. Stern, *New York 1880 Architecture and Urbanism in the Gilded Age*, (New York: The Monacelli Press Inc., 1999), 477-493.

⁵³ Information in this section is based on the following sources: Cyril M. Harris, *American Architecture: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1998); Roger Dixon and Stefan Muthesius, *Victorian Architecture*, (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1978), 122; Curran, 251.

⁵⁴ Information in this section is based on the following sources: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission *Brooklyn Heights Historic District* (LP: 0099) (New York: City of New York, 1965).

⁵⁵ Information in this section is based on the following sources: Cyril M. Harris, *American Architecture: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1998), 186-187; John J.-G. Blumenson, *Identifying American Architecture*, (New York: Norton, 1981), 41; Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, *Italian Renaissance Revival Style 1890 – 1930*, <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/italian-renaissance.html>, accessed from the internet: 01/18/2018.

⁵⁶Information in this section adapted from: (LPC) *Tribeca West Historic District*, (LP-1713), (New York: City of New York, 1991).

⁵⁷ Information in this section is based on the following sources: (LPC) *Tribeca North Historic District*, (LP-1714), (New York: City of New York, 1992), prepared by Betsy Bradley, 100.

⁵⁸ Information in this section is based on the following sources: (LPC) *Sullivan Thompson Historic District* (LP-2590), (New York: City of New York, 2016).

⁵⁹ Information in this section is based on the following sources: General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New York 1938, 153. "He was initiated a member of the Society on November 7th, 1923. He died June 5th, 1939. John Peter Walther, Carpenter by trade, was born in New York City on March 24th, 1864. He was the son of Bartholomew and Catherine Walther."

⁶⁰ Information in this section adapted from: "American Artisan and Patent Record," Patented on May 5, 1868,

Patent No.77866.

⁶¹ Information in this section adapted from: "Carnegie Enabling Act," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 16, 1901, 6.

⁶² "Webber Meat Market in Harlem Leased, With Option to Buy," *The New York Tribune*, August 5, 1919.

⁶³ "Warehouse Lease Sold," *New York Herald*, September 23, 1922, 60.

⁶⁴ Information in this section adapted from: New York City Department of Finance, Deeds and Conveyances, April 30, 1928, Liber Number 3661, 231; Liber Number 3663, 165.

⁶⁵ Information in this section adapted from: "2003 Wholesaler of the Year: Davis & Warshow," *Supply House Times*, December 5, 2003, accessed from the internet 09/07/2017, <http://www.supplyht.com/articles/84318-2003-wholesaler-of-the-year-davis-warshow>. Davis & Warshow kitchen and bath distributor has eight showrooms throughout New York.

⁶⁶ Information in this section adapted from: "Davis & Warshow Showrooms Become Ferguson," *Residential Lighting*. October 28, 2014, accessed from the internet 09/07/2017, <https://www.residentiallighting.com/davis-warshow-showrooms-become-ferguson>.

Findings and Designation

Richard Webber Harlem Packing House

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of the building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that The Richard Webber Harlem Packing House has a special character and 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 Richard Webber Harlem Packing House is a historic meat market building in East Harlem, constructed in 1895 and originally part of a larger commercial slaughterhouse, meat packing and retail complex; and that it was designed by the architectural firm of Bartholomew & John P. Walther for the prominent butcher Richard Webber; and that this Romanesque Revival and Renaissance Revival style building is a fine example of 19th century architectural design and an intact reminder of East Harlem's commercial and industrial past; that Richard Webber, an English immigrant, started a small butcher shop in East Harlem in the late 1870s; and that the company was very successful, expanding into a large complex with a staff of 500; that Webber maintained other businesses, and at the time of his death in 1908, he was described by the New York Times as "one of the largest butchers in this city if not in the United States;" and that he was active in the community, serving on the Harlem Board of Commerce, and as a trustee of the Harlem Savings Bank; and that he was also a pioneer educator, giving lectures at New York Teachers College for the opening of their domestic science department, and at

Pratt Institute in Brooklyn; that the six-story, brick and stone formal design and high quality craftsmanship of the Packing House presented a sophisticated public face for Webber's operations; that the facade combines features of the Romanesque Revival and Renaissance Revival styles; that the a tripartite facade composition, simplicity of lines and overall flatness of the building, the decorative roundels and repetitive design motifs, and particularly the projecting cornice with its paneled frieze, denticulation and modillions, speak to the Renaissance Revival style influences; and that the characteristic Romanesque Revival style facade elements include the triforium piers, and Roman arches with Byzantine and Corinthian capitals, which are repeated at the arcaded windows at the top story; and that the central bay of the facade includes the building's date 1895 in carved stone, and prominently features terra-cotta cow head reliefs symbolizing the building's original function; that the complex remained in use by the Webber meat packing company until 1928, after which the building served a variety of functions; and that this building retains a high degree of historic integrity.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 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 Richard Webber Harlem Packing House designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1784, Lot 5, in part consisting of the land beneath the footprint of the building as its Landmark Site.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair

Frederick Bland
Wellington Chen
Michael Devonshire
Michael Goldblum
Anne Holford-Smith
Jeanne Lutfy
Adi Shamir-Baron
Kim Vauss
Commissioners



Richard Webber Harlem Packing House
207-215 East 119th Street
Barrett Reiter (LPC), March 2018



Window detail
Barrett Reiter (LPC), March 2018



Main facade detail
Barrett Reiter (LPC), March 2018



**Landmarks Preservation
Commission**

Designation Report
Richard Webber Harlem
Packing House
March 27, 2018

Designation List 505
LP-2595
23 of 25



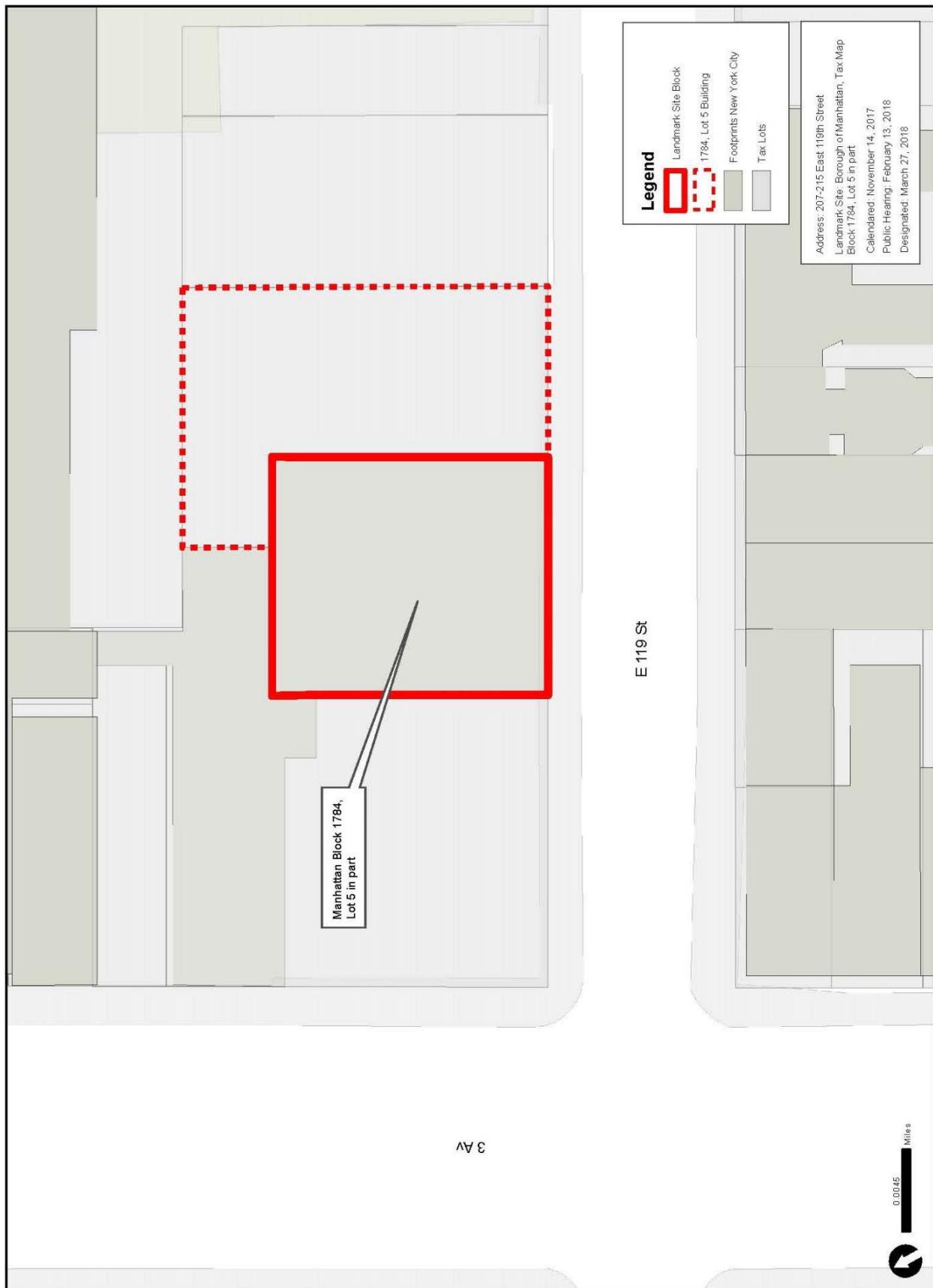
Main facade

Barrett Reiter (LPC), March 2018



Main facade detail

Barrett Reiter (LPC), March 2018



Graphic Source: MapPLUTO, Edition 16v2, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, DHW, Date: 3/27/2018



**Landmarks Preservation
Commission**

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Richard Webber Harlem
Packing House
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Designation List 505

LP-2595
25 of 25