

FREE PUBLIC BATHS OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK, EAST 11TH STREET BATH, 538 East 11th Street (aka 538-540 East 11th Street), Manhattan. Built 1904-05; Arnold W[illiam] Brunner, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 404, Lot 23.

On October 30, 2007, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Free Public Baths of the City of New York 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. Five witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including New York City Council Member Rosie Mendez, representatives of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Historic Districts Council, City Lore and the Municipal Art Society of New York. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Commission also received letters and emails from New York City Council Member Tony Avella and several New York City residents in support of designation.

Summary

A highly intact work of prominent architect Arnold W. Brunner, the Free Public Baths of the City of New York, East 11th Street Bath at 538 East 11th Street is also culturally significant for its part in the histories of the progressive reform movement in America and the immigrant experience on the Lower East Side. Built between 1904 and 1905 and designed in the neo-Italian Renaissance style, the bath (as well as the other thirteen City-operated public baths opened between 1901 and 1914) was the result of hard-fought efforts made by progressive reformers decades earlier. The public bath movement in the United States began in the 1840s New York, gaining momentum in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when charitable organizations opened public baths for a small fee on the Lower East Side. Led by Doctor Simon Baruch, “the father of the public bath movement in the United States,” they pressured the municipal government to open multiple free public baths throughout the crowded tenement districts in order to provide immigrants with bathing facilities that were non-existent in their own apartments. The two-story East 11th Street Bath was situated in a predominantly German neighborhood a block north of Tompkins Square Park and was equipped with seven bathtubs and 94 showers, or “rain baths” as they were known. Reflecting Victorian sensibilities, the men’s and women’s arched entrances were placed on opposite ends of the façade that led to entirely separate waiting rooms and shower rooms. Attendance was greatest in summer months; during the 1906 heat wave, “people stood in lines ‘four deep’” and it soon became apparent that the poor used the baths more as a means of cooling off than for hygienic reasons. Gradually, as bathrooms became standard in apartment buildings public baths were less patronized. Closed in 1958, the building was used as a garage and warehouse until 1995 when Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Eddie Adams bought and converted it into a high-end fashion and corporate photograph studio.



Brunner’s use of Indiana limestone on the bath house facade not only contrasted the surrounding dark brick tenements, but also evoked a sense of “cleanliness” fitting for a bathing facility. Tridents and fish on the cartouches reflect the nautical theme of the building. The three arches, which once were fitted with metal grilles and pedimented revolving doors on the outermost entrances, are separated by rusticated pilasters. A balustraded parapet sits above a modillioned cornice and frieze bearing the name “Free Public Baths of the City of New York” in carved lettering. Brunner, highly influential as an architect and city planner in several U.S. cities, collaborated in the designs of several buildings that are now designated New York City Landmarks: portions of the Mount Sinai Dispensary (1889-90), Shearith Israel Synagogue (1896-97) and the Public Baths at Asser Levy Place and East 23rd Street (1904-06). In addition, several of his religious structures are located within the Upper West Side/Central Park West, Mount Morris Park and Jackson Heights Historic Districts. The Free Public Baths of the City of New York, East 11th Street Bath stands as a highly intact example of his work and as a culturally significant reminder of immigrant life in early-twentieth-century New York.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Nineteenth Century Development and History of (Today's) East Village Neighborhood¹

The area now known as the East Village, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was Dutch Governor Peter Stuyvesant's farm. St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery Church (1799)² was built on a higher, dry piece of land, while the area to the east of Second Avenue, known as Stuyvesant Meadows, remained an undeveloped marshy area. In the late eighteenth century, the area east of Second Avenue was the estate of Mangle Minthorn, slave owner and father-in-law of Daniel Tompkins (1775-1825), governor of New York (1807-17) and U.S. vice president under James Monroe (1817-25). The Commissioner's Plan of 1811, which plotted the layout of streets throughout Manhattan, created Clinton Square, located between Avenues A and B and 7th and 10th Streets, proposed as the site of a farmers' market. Clinton Square was renamed Tompkins Square in 1833, and the following year the City began to have it fenced, graded, and landscaped as a park, in part as an effort to encourage development.

Commercial and institutional intrusions and the continual arrival of immigrants ended the fashionable heyday of the wealthier enclaves, such as St. Mark's Place and Second Avenue, before the Civil War. In the 1850s, Broadway north of Houston Street was transformed from a residential into a significant commercial district. Also beginning in the 1850s, after the political upheavals in Europe of 1848 and the resulting huge influx of German-speaking immigrants to New York City, the Lower East Side (the area bounded roughly by Eighteenth Street, the East River, the Bowery/Third Avenue, and Catherine Street) became known as *Kleindeutschland* ("Little Germany"). Aside from their presence as residents, these immigrants contributed in significant ways to the vibrant commercial and cultural life of the neighborhood and the city at large. By 1880, this neighborhood constituted one-fourth of the city's population (as one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in the world) and was the first major urban foreign-speaking neighborhood in the U.S., as well as the leading German-American center throughout the century. A massive exodus of Jews from Eastern Europe from the 1880s to World War I led to approximately two million Jewish immigrants settling in New York; most lived for a time on the Lower East Side, establishing their own cultural and religious institutions.

As wealthier residents moved northward, their single-family residences were converted into multiple dwellings or boardinghouses, as well as other uses, such as clubs or community cultural institutions, or were demolished for denser development with French flats and tenements between 1874 and 1902. Hastening the changes in the residential character of this section of the Lower East Side after the mid-century were a wide variety of major cultural, religious, commercial, and educational institutions, beginning with the Cooper Union (1853-58, Frederick A. Petersen), Astor Place and Third Avenue,³ and Tompkins Market/ 7th Regiment Armory (1855-60, James Bogardus and Marshall Lefferts; demolished), Third Avenue and East 7th Street. The New York Free Circulating Library, Ottendorfer Branch, and German Dispensary (1883-84, William Schickel), 135 and 137 Second Avenue, catered to the German community.⁴ Institutions that selected locations around Tompkins Square included the Children's Aid Society, Tompkins Square Lodging House for Boys and Industrial School (1886, Vaux & Radford), 295 East 8th Street, for the education and shelter of destitute working children; New York Public Library, Tompkins Square Branch (1904, McKim, Mead & White), 331 East 10th Street, which became known for its Polish book collection; Public School 64 (1904-06, C.B.J. Snyder), 605 East 9th Street; and the Free Public Baths of the City of New York, East 11th Street Bath (1904-05, Arnold W. Brunner), 538 East 11th Street, which provided public bathing facilities.⁵ Cafés and beer gardens, such as Aaron Ligety's Orpheum (c. 1905-06), 126 Second Avenue, and assembly halls such as Webster Hall and Annex (1886, 1892, Charles Renz), 119-125 East 11th Street,⁶ became important neighborhood social centers. Scattered throughout the area were purpose-built churches and synagogues for wealthier congregations, as well as many religious structures created out of altered rowhouses.

Tompkins Square was used as a parade ground by the Seventh Regiment from 1866 to 1878, and was subsequently known as a gathering place for public demonstrations. The immediate neighborhood around the Square had become largely populated by the working and middle classes, mostly German-speaking. After the *General Slocum* tragedy of 1904, in which a steamboat burned and over one thousand people perished, mostly Germans from the neighborhood, many of the remaining German residents moved away. The neighborhood was repopulated by Italian, Eastern European, Russian, and Jewish immigrants.

The Public Bath Movement in Nineteenth-Century New York⁷

With the goal of serving the needs of residents in a densely populated tenement district where bathing facilities were minimal or absent, this country's first public bath and laundry was erected on Mott Street by the People's Bathing and Washing Association, a philanthropic organization incorporated in 1849 by wealthy New York merchant Robert B. Minturn specifically for that purpose. A small fee was paid by some 75,000 users a year, but revenues were insufficient to keep it in operation for more than a few years. Although its demise was later attributed to the fact that it was "too far in advance of the habits of the people whose advantage it sought,"⁸ an assumption which may or may not be justified, a heightened appreciation of its purpose emerged during the following decade.

In the late 1860s the Board of Health urged New York City elected officials to assume responsibility for the establishment of public bathing facilities; enabling legislation was approved in 1868, and by 1870 the east and west shores of Manhattan each had free floating saltwater public baths. Asking, "what a melancholy contrast to such enlightened public zeal (as Rome showed by its numerous public baths) in behalf of the health of its people does New York City present?" and noting that the "city was surrounded by water which can readily be utilized, with a population half of which never bathe for want of facilities, this city has but two public baths,"⁹ the Board of Health continued to press for expansion of the system. Over the next two decades additional floating baths were authorized and by the end of the century, fifteen could be found anchored at various locations along the Manhattan shoreline. They were located, as were the five in Brooklyn, as close as possible to the working-class tenement neighborhoods they benefited. Although open only from mid-June to mid-October, they provided baths for many thousands each year. By 1896 the annual total of baths recorded exceeded five-and-a-half million. The end of the century brought with it increasing pollution of the city's surrounding waters and made the development of indoor baths a necessity. Development of a city-wide system of public baths open the year round was part of a wider effort to improve the general level of public health, particularly among less-advantaged groups; other contemporary endeavors such as tenement house reform were a product of the same impetus.

The technology that enabled the development of an indoor public bath system for the masses – the rain or shower bath – had been introduced to European military barracks in the late 1850s and by the late 1870s its use had been extended to such institutional settings as prisons and industrial and mining establishments. In contrast to the tub bath, the rain bath was, as an early summary of its advantages observes, "...the simplest, quickest, cheapest, cleanest...least expensive in fitting up..." It was further noted that it required "...the least space, least time in use, least amount of water, least fuel for warming water, and least cost for repairs and maintenance..."¹⁰ The 1883 Berlin Public Health Exposition awakened interest in a system of inexpensive public baths for working people and the number of such facilities proliferated thereafter, especially in Germany. These followed the models provided by industrial and institutional baths and furnished, in turn, the prototypes for the New York City baths.

Dr. Simon Baruch, the German-born physician and hydro-therapist later called the "father of the public bath movement in the United States," undertook a campaign in 1889 to persuade municipal officials to institute a public bath system in New York City. Paralleling the sequence of events which characterized other reformist movements, the initiative in this instance too was seized by private philanthropy. The concluding resolution of an 1890 conference on the subject attended by most of the city's major charitable organizations stated that "one of the greatest wants in this city was some place where at all seasons of the year hot and cold baths could be had at nominal cost and free if necessary."¹¹ Convinced by Dr. Baruch of the impracticability of tub baths and the desirability of rain baths to be used for a facility for the masses, two of the attendees, the New York Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor (AICP, Robert B. Minturn was one of its founders) and the City Mission Society, agreed to mount a vigorous subscription campaign to raise funds for such a bath. A site was leased at the Centre Market Place between Grand and Broome Streets, a location described as being "in the midst of a large tenement house district and adjacent to an industrial center."¹² Plans for a building were solicited and the one proposed by Josiah C. Cady accepted in 1890. A year later, in August 1891, the Centre Market Place People's Bath opened and was described as the "first in the United States for hot and cold baths."¹³ A small section of the facility was reserved for those willing or able to pay a fee, but the services provided to the majority of its users were free.

In 1892, a bill that authorized municipalities to establish and operate public bathing facilities – its sponsor was Goodwin Brown, another ardent proselytizer for the cause – was approved by the New York State

Legislature. Further efforts by Brown resulted in the 1895 law which made the establishment of such facilities mandatory in cities above a certain size; floating baths would not be considered in compliance. The appointment of a Mayor's Committee on Public Baths and Public Comfort Stations in 1895 was New York City's immediate response. The Committee's lengthy report of 1897 records exhaustive studies on the subject. There were but a small handful of public baths to examine here – the country's first year-round municipal public bath in Yonkers and the Centre Market Place People's Bath were the prime examples – so the Committee's attention focused principally on European models. The investigation of bathing establishments in all the major European countries yielded the conclusion that those of Austria and Germany provided the best models. The Committee believed that "cleanliness of person is not only elevating in its effects upon the mind and morals, but also necessary to health and to the warding off of disease."¹⁴

538 East 11th Street and the Thirteen Free Public Baths of the City of New York¹⁵

The City of New York was slow to respond to the 1895 mandate that all large cities provide public bathing facilities for their citizens. In 1901, however, the first free public bath finally opened at 326 Rivington Street on the Lower East Side.¹⁶ The City followed the suggestion of the Mayor's Committee and built a large three-and-one-half story bath house rather than a low scale structure recommended by the bath advocates. Originally, the bath was to be sited in Tompkins Square Park as early as 1896, but the project was abandoned after neighborhood protests. Shortly under a decade later, however, the area received a public bath. In 1903, the City of New York bought two lots at 538-540 East 11th Street located between Avenues A and B one block north of the park; construction began in 1904.¹⁷ Completed in 1905 and opened on December 18th of that year, the Free Public Baths of the City of New York, East 11th Street Bath became the fifth of the eventual thirteen City-operated public baths to open between the years of 1901 and 1914 (exclusive of the four City-operated baths situated in public parks) and the third of the eventual seven located on the Lower East Side.¹⁸ Jacob A. Cantor, the Manhattan Borough President, held jurisdiction over the public baths in that borough.

The bath was designed by Arnold W. Brunner in the neo-Italian Renaissance style. Set in a predominantly German neighborhood, the East 11th Street Bath offered 94 showers (67 for men, 27 for women) and seven bathtubs (2 for men, 5 for women). Each patron, depending on their gender, entered the bathing facility through revolving doors that led them to a waiting room. A central office provided the only means of access between the waiting rooms, thus ensuring that men and women did not interact once entering the bath house. A staircase in the men's waiting room led to additional showers for men on the second floor. Skylights illuminated the shower rooms on both floors. Each shower stall was equipped with a changing room where the bather undressed before entering the shower space. Bathers brought their own towels and soap – which was standard in all the free baths – and were allotted twenty minutes to bathe.

The municipal baths were opened year round. In June and July 1906, the first summer the East 11th Street Bath was in operation, a fatal heat wave plagued the city. The *New York Times* noted that most heat-related deaths occurred on the east side of Manhattan and that the public baths were in high demand:

An unusual feature in the heat wave yesterday was the crowd which rushed upon the public baths. Down in Allen Street and at the Eleventh Street baths people stood in lines four deep. By and by the crush became so great that, despite the eighty-seven sprays and numerous tubs in each of these places, the police reserves had to be called to preserve order. The lines broke, and as each batch came out of the baths two or three hundred rushed to get in. Order was finally evolved by the police, and it was not necessary to make any arrests. At the West Sixtieth Street, West Forty-first Street, and East 109th Street baths there was a tremendous rush.¹⁹

Although the municipal baths were filled to their capacities on hot summer days, low attendance the rest of the year proved that the baths were not as popular as bath advocates had wished. In 1913, the AICP noted that all the municipal baths (excluding the 28th Street Bath, which had not yet opened) could accommodate 61,965 persons daily; however, in 1911 the average daily attendance was only 9,813. At the East 11th Street Bath, there were 427,557 patrons (of which 254,783 were men) in 1911. The number of bathers for the year of 1916 – the first year that all the municipal baths were in operation – totaled 7,385,496, a number that did not approach even half of the total yearly capacity of the baths (twenty million). Large crowds in the summer

months in contrast to the rest of the year indicate that the poor used the public baths to keep cool in the hot months rather than for hygienic reasons.

Though charitable organizations such as the AICP wrote pamphlets and held classes in tenement neighborhoods to educate the public about the health benefits of bathing and, in turn, increase patronage at the public baths, their efforts were never entirely successful. Thus, the construction of the municipal baths was more the product of reformers' campaign efforts than the demands of the masses. Lack of interest could be attributed to several reasons. At the time, habitual bathing was atypical among poorer classes; teachers, upon taking their students to the public baths, noted that many of them had never been thoroughly washed. Another factor was the gradual addition of bathing facilities to tenements in the first decades of the twentieth century. The Tenement House Law of 1901 required new tenements to include toilets and many owners decided to include bathtubs as well. Some owners of older buildings, who risked losing their tenants, also added separate bathing and toilet facilities. Need for public baths therefore diminished.

Despite these occurrences, the East 11th Street Bath did prove to be among the more popular of the City-operated baths, as well as the other public baths located on the Lower East Side.

The Architect: Arnold W[illiam] Brunner (1857-1925)²⁰

Nationally recognized in his time as both an architect and city planner of several American cities, Arnold W. Brunner served as a leading proponent of the City Beautiful Movement in the first decades of the twentieth century. Born in New York City in 1857, he received his education from institutions in New York and Manchester, England before graduating from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1879. Thereafter, he worked as a draftsman in the office of prominent architect George B. Post in New York and in 1881 was a founding member of the Architectural League of New York, of which he would become president in 1902. In 1883, he resumed his studies abroad by traveling through Europe.

Returning to New York in 1885, Brunner formed a partnership one year later with Thomas Tryon that lasted until 1897. The firm of Brunner & Tryon were responsible for a number of important commissions in New York, including the Mount Sinai Dispensary at 149-151 East 67th Street (in collaboration with Buchman & Deisler, 1889-90), Temple Beth-El (1890, demolished), West End Synagogue, Congregation Shaaray Tefila at 160 West 82nd Street (1893-94) and Shearith Israel Synagogue at 99 Central Park West (1896-97).²¹ The design of the latter synagogue was inspired by the discovery of the ruins of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in the late nineteenth century, which became the model for new synagogues; the Central Park West synagogue is believed to be the first to adopt this style. In contrast to his later work, Brunner employed Romanesque and Moorish Revival style details on these religious structures. The firm also designed the Educational Alliance at 191-197 East Broadway (1889-91), an early settlement house that provided a free library and classes in educational, social, physical and moral programs intended to turn immigrants into productive citizens. The purpose of the building serves as an early example of the philanthropic projects that characterized Brunner's later career.

After the dissolution of the firm, Brunner opened his own practice and in 1898 won the competition for Mount Sinai Hospital in New York (in later years, he would design additional buildings for the hospital). Reflecting his interest in public buildings, the hospital commission was followed by numerous municipal projects designed in classical styles meant to "beautify" the cities in which they were situated. In 1901, he designed the neo-Renaissance style Federal Building in Cleveland, Ohio, which became part of the larger grouping of similarly-styled public buildings planned as the city's civic center by Brunner, Daniel H. Burnham and John M. Carrère. The plan, which began to appear in many American cities at this time, clearly drew its inspiration from the Court of Honor at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago (Burnham is credited as the lead designer of the exposition).

Ideas introduced at the fair eventually led to the City Beautiful Movement; proponents believed that properly designed architecture – which became synonymous with the Beaux Arts style – could not only enhance the look of cities, but also could encourage good moral behavior in its citizens, a fact that was especially important to reformers in an age of mass immigration. Brunner's neo-Renaissance designs in Cleveland, which also included the United States Post Office, Custom House and Court House, were reflective of this movement. His involvement in that city continued for many years and in 1912 he was named the President of the Board of Supervision of Public Buildings and Grounds. Brunner was also responsible for the chapel and general plan for Denison University in Granville, Ohio and was active in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

A competition he won for his design of the Department of State Building in Washington, D.C. (1910) was never built. He produced city plans for Albany and Rochester, New York; Baltimore, Maryland; and Denver, Colorado, and served as a member of the city planning commissions in the latter three cities.

In New York, Brunner's work in the early twentieth century included both residential and, more notably, public buildings. His experience in hospital design and his active concern for the improvement of cities and its citizens through well-designed architecture made him a suitable candidate to serve as architect for two of the new public baths on the east side of Manhattan. In addition to the baths at 538 East 11th Street, Brunner designed the Public Baths at Asser Levy Place and East 23rd Street (1904-06, with William Martin Aiken).²² Both baths employ classical elements that are evident on his other works of the period. Other noteworthy New York commissions were pavilions for Seward and Thomas Jefferson Parks, the Cadet Hospital at West Point, Lewisohn Stadium for the College of the City of New York, the Students' Building at Barnard College, the School of Mines at Columbia University, Temple Israel and First Church of Christ, Scientist in Queens.²³

Brunner was heavily involved in many prominent organizations, some of which he served as an officer: the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (fellow and president), New York Architectural League (founding member and president), the National Sculpture Society (vice president), the National Institute of Arts and Letters (treasurer; an award was named in his honor), the Fine Arts Federation of New York (president), the Board of Education of New York City, the American Civic Association (vice president), the Art Commission of New York and the National Council of Fine Arts. He was also an author of several publications including "Interior Decorations" (1887).

Design of the East 11th Street Bath

Despite its intended use as a public bath for poor immigrants, the East 11th Street Bath was designed in the lavish neo-Italian Renaissance style at a cost of \$102,989, giving the building distinction in a neighborhood characterized by overcrowded tenements. Arnold W. Brunner in his travels had seen the ruins of the ancient Baths of Caracalla in Rome (and had most likely seen several others such as the Baths of Diocletian), elements of which are evident at the larger Public Baths at the corner of Asser Levy Place and East 23rd Street.²⁵ The narrow site of the two-story East 11th Street Bath prevented as grand a scheme, but the three archways and the overall design are similar to the Asser Levy façade.

At the time these public baths were constructed, the City Beautiful Movement had taken hold in the United States. Ideas typical of the period, such as the belief that well-designed architecture and carefully-planned cities could inspire good moral behavior in urban dwellers of any class level, were fostered in part at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. The Beaux Arts style used for the most prominent buildings at the Chicago fair quickly became the architectural symbol of this ideology. Thus, classical ornamentation, use of light-colored stone and symmetrical facades were generally employed on the municipal baths in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Male and female entrances were constructed at the opposite ends of the façade and the buildings ranged from two to four stories in height. The use of Indiana limestone at the East 11th Street Bath not only contrasted the surrounding dark brick tenements, but also evoked a sense of "cleanliness" fitting for a bathing facility.

Its materials, scale and ornamentation set it apart from other buildings on the block. Notable features include rusticated pilasters with pendants on the egg and dart capitals that separate the three archways; blank panels set above decorative consoles with shells and fruits serving as the keystone to the door surrounds; a frieze with the name "Free Public Baths of the City of New York" in carved letters flanked by cartouches accented with shells, cornucopia and fish holding a trident between their interlocking tails; and a block modillioned and dentiled cornice dividing the balustrated parapet from the lower façade. The archways originally had metal grille transoms and the outermost bays had pedimented revolving doors with the words "MEN" and "WOMEN" over their respective doors. The central bay had a metal and glass window that originally provided light to the central office inside. Steps were placed in front of the two outermost doors although today they are located at the central bay.

Public bath advocates such as Dr. Simon Baruch did not approve of the ornate styles of the municipal baths. They believed that the sophisticated designs were not practical, raised the cost of construction so that the baths would be difficult to operate, intimidated the city's poor and therefore discouraged them from using facilities constructed specifically for their benefit. To them, the success of the building depended on the

quality of the bathing facilities themselves rather than on the architectural designs of its exterior. The modest designs and scale of the AICP-operated People's Bath and Milbank Memorial Bath were more reflective of what they desired for the municipal baths. Nevertheless, Brunner stated in 1904:

All the buildings erected by the city should have a distinguishing character; and there is not a gain, but a distinct loss, in allowing the use of unrelated styles or no styles, in schools, fire, police and hospital buildings; that it would be much better to hold the designing within certain lines for these buildings, and that uniform architecture be maintained for each function which shall make it recognizable at first glance.²⁶

In comparison to the extravagant baths of Europe, the thirteen Free Public Baths of the City of New York were modest in scale, amenities and design. This could be attributed to the fact that American public baths were built for the poor.

Brunner's designs for civic buildings in Cleveland as well as other structures in the early twentieth century illustrate that by this period he was working in large, severe schemes with elements of Roman Classicism. The general design scheme of the East 11th Street Bath resembled those at 327 West 41st Street and 243 East 109th Street as they were also clad in limestone, low in scale with classically-inspired features, had a row of ground floor windows and entryways, and had masked second stories. The East 11th Street Bath is, however, the only extant building of the three. The 41st Street Bath also exhibited arch detailing, as did the other small-scale baths at 232 West 60th Street and 83 Carmine Street. In contrast to these baths, those at Asser Levy Place, 326 Rivington Street, 5 Rutgers Place, 342 East 54th Street and 100 Cherry Street were large in scale, often occupying corner lots.

Subsequent History²⁷

By the late 1950s, three public baths remained in operation and under the control of the Manhattan Borough President: East 11th Street, East 109th Street and Allen Street.²⁸ In 1958, a year that drew 131,000 people to the three baths, both the 11th Street and 109th Street baths were closed in order to "save money." As a result, attendance at the Allen Street Bath for 1959 increased by 9,000 people. In 1961 the 11th Street building was sold and converted into a parking garage for tenants of the adjacent 542 East 11th Street apartment building.²⁹ Some alterations that occurred when the building served as a parking garage still exist: steps leading up to the central archway as opposed to the side arches and the car ramp that leads down to the cellar at the westernmost arch.

The Tompkins Square neighborhood experienced a number of demographic changes. Starting in the mid-twentieth century, there was a large influx of Hispanic (especially Puerto Rican) immigrants. In the 1960s and 1970s, as New York City lost over half of its manufacturing jobs as well as a significant part of its population, the East Village (particularly the farther eastern section) suffered during this decline, with deteriorating infrastructure and housing stock, and lack of municipal investment. Following New York's fiscal crisis of 1975, many building owners in this area walked away from their buildings. "Alphabet City" or "Loisada" was often considered one of the rougher Manhattan neighborhoods in the 1970-80s. At this time, the former East 11th Street Bath served as a warehouse for various purposes, including a wholesale grocery and an art restoration space. The area became known as a drug-trading center; a resident of the block noted that "People used to come in from as far as New Jersey to shoot up here."³⁰

In 1980, the block was chosen as a setting for the filming of *Ragtime*, a movie directed by Milos Forman, featuring James Cagney (his last film role) and based on the 1974 novel by E.L. Doctorow. The film crew recreated 1906 New York on the block by building storefronts and "restoring" facades to suit the period. The former bath house also provided working space for the production crew. A plaque now attached to the façade of the building commemorates its participation in the film.

In 1995, the former bath was purchased by Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist Eddie Adams and his wife Alyssa who turned the interior into a photography studio, added new gates to the three exterior arches and had the façade cleaned.

Description

The neo-Italian Renaissance style Free Public Baths of the City of New York, East 11th Street Bath has a symmetrical three-bay façade that is two stories high (plus cellar) and fifty feet six inches in width. The limestone-clad building is built to the lot line. There are three arches with non-historic metal gates and the central arched entryway has a set of non-historic stone steps (historically, stone steps were placed at the two outermost archways only which provided for separate male and female entrances to the building).³¹ Above each entrance is an ornamental stone console and blank stone panels. Pairs of rusticated stone pilasters flank the archways while single rusticated stone pilasters separate the archways. Four non-historic metal and glass sconces are located on the four innermost pilasters (the original plans dated 1903 and photographs taken in 1912 and 1985 do not show sconces on the façade although an undated elevation likely drawn in 1903 shows two sconces on the pilasters flanking the archways. They are different in design to the current sconces.). A small metal plaque is placed on one of the pilasters and some graffiti is evident at the bottom of each pilaster and its base. A stone block modillioned eave sits above two nautical-themed cartouches that flank a carved frieze reading “FREE PUBLIC BATHS OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK”. Above the eave is a stone balustraded parapet. An elevator bulkhead on the roof is visible from the street.

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NOTES

¹ This section adapted from LPC, *Webster Hall and Annex Designation Report* (LP-2273) (New York: City of New York, 2008), prepared by Jay Shockley.

² St. Mark’s-in-the-Bowery Church is a designated New York City Landmark.

³ Cooper Union is a designated New York City Landmark.

⁴ Both buildings are designated New York City Landmarks. Also in the vicinity were the Astor Place Opera House (1847; later Clinton Hall/Mercantile Library; demolished), Astor and Lafayette Places; Astor Library (1849-52 Alexander Saeltzer; 1856-69 Griffith Thomas; 1879-81 Thomas Stent), 425 Lafayette Street; Bible House (1852; demolished), home of the American Bible Society and other religious organizations, Astor Place and Third Avenue; and Metropolitan Savings Bank (1867, Carl Pfeiffer), 9 East 7th Street. The Astor Library and bank buildings are designated New York City Landmarks.

⁵ The Children’s Aids Society, library, and school buildings are designated New York City Landmarks.

⁶ Webster Hall and Annex is a designated New York City Landmark.

⁷ This section adapted from LPC, *Public Bath No. 7 Designation Report* (LP-1287) (New York: City of New York, 1984), prepared by Shirley Zavin.

⁸ Mayor's Committee of New York City, *Report on Public Baths and Public Comfort Stations* (New York: 1897), 27.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰ William Paul Gerhard, *Modern Baths and Bath Houses* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1908), 76.

¹¹ New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, *The People's Baths* (New York: n.p., n.d.), not paginated.

¹² *Report on Public Baths and Public Comfort Stations*, 37.

¹³ *The People's Baths, 9 Centre Market Place: A Study on Public Baths* (New York, 1896), 2.

¹⁴ *Report on Public Baths and Public Comfort Stations*, 36.

¹⁵ Information in this section is based on the following sources: Marilyn Thornton Williams, *Washing "The Great Unwashed": Public Baths in Urban America, 1840-1920* (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1991); *Public Baths and Lavatories* (New York: Citizens' Union of the City of New York, May 1897); *Public Baths Under the Supervision of the President of the Borough of Manhattan* (New York: New York City Public Works Department, 1912); William Paul Gerhard, "Public Bath Houses," Third Annual Meeting of the American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths, Newark, 12 May 1914; "Baths" *Phrenological Journal and Science of Health*, Vol. 117 (April 1904), 132; Bertha H. Smith, "The Public Bath," *Outlook*, 4 March 1905, 566-577; "The New Public Bath," *New York Times (NYT)*, 6 March 1896, 7; "The Need of Public Baths," *NYT*, 18 March 1902, 8; "Plans for New Public Baths," *NYT*, 25 November 1903, 7; "The Building Department," *NYT*, 25 November 1903, 14; "Three New Public Baths," *NYT*, 22 May 1904, FS8; "New City Baths Opened," *NYT*, 30 November 1905, 4; Charles G. Bennett, "Car Washing Ban is Upheld; Pools, Rinks, Baths Curbed," *NYT*, 7 January 1950, 1; "Last Public Bath a Tile Taj Mahal," *NYT*, 27 February 1960, 21; "Awed by Baths," *New York Tribune*, 13 April 1905, 5; "Bathing Unpopular," *New York Tribune*, 16 June, 1905, 5; "Hot Wave Kills Ten," *New York Tribune*, 1 July 1906, 1.

¹⁶ In 1917, the Rivington Street Bath was officially renamed the Dr. Simon Baruch Public Bath in honor of Baruch's contribution to the public bath movement. "Will Honor Dr. Baruch," *NYT*, 26 July 1917, 6. Years earlier, in 1905, Baruch commented, "I consider that I have done more to save life and prevent the spread of disease in my work for public baths than in all my work as a physician. It is the duty of a municipality to prevent disease. It is the duty of a municipality to prevent immorality. I believe that money spent for public baths where people can go and get clean do more toward raising the standard of health and morality than a much greater amount spent in any other way." Bertha Smith, "The Public Bath."

¹⁷ New York City, Dept. of Buildings, Manhattan, Plans, Permits and Dockets (NB 824-03). Commencement and completion dates for construction were March 26, 1904 and November 22, 1905. Prior to the construction of the public bath, two brick buildings on Lots 23 and 24 were demolished. In 1903, the City of New York bought Lot 23 from Louis K. Eaton and Lot 24 from two separate parties, (1) Mary Kruger, and (2) Adam, Krezscentia, John and Bertha Kellerman. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 116, p. 289 (October 2, 1903); Liber 116, p. 358 and Liber 116, p. 357 (October 15, 1903).

¹⁸ The thirteen Free Public Baths of the City of New York, in the order of their openings, were located at 326 Rivington Street (opened March 23, 1901); 327 West 41st Street (November 23, 1904, demolished); 243 East 109th Street (March 17, 1905, demolished); 133 Allen Street (November 23, 1905); 538 East 11th Street (December 18, 1905); 523 East 76th Street (January 28, 1906, demolished); 232 West 60th Street (June 28, 1906); 23rd St. and Avenue A (January 20, 1908); 83 Carmine Street (May 6, 1908); 100 Cherry Street (November 9, 1909, demolished); 5 Rutgers Place (December 23, 1909); 342 East 54th Street (February 17, 1911); and 407 West 28th Street (1914, demolished). The City-operated public baths built in public parks in Manhattan were located in Seward Park; Thomas Jefferson Park; 42nd Street and Eleventh Avenue; and 138th Street and Fifth Avenue. Six public baths were located in Brooklyn on Hicks Street (1903), Pitken Avenue (1903), Montrose Avenue (date unknown), Huron Street (date unknown), Duffield Street (date unknown) and Wilson Avenue (date unknown). One public bath was located in the Bronx at 156th Street and Elton Avenue (1909) and another was located in Queens (location and date unknown). Staten Island did not have public baths due to its suburban character.

¹⁹ “Fourteen Die of Heat; Dozens are Prostrated,” *NYT*, 1 July 1906, 1.

²⁰ Information in this section is based on the following sources: “Societies,” *American Architect and Building News* (Vol. 87, 18 February 1905), v-xvii; “Arnold W. Brunner, architect, dies,” *NYT*, 15 February 1925, 26; “Arnold William Brunner,” *Who’s Who in America, 1922-23* (Chicago: A. N. Marcus and Company, 1922), 156; “Arnold W. Brunner, FAIA, 1857-1925,” *American Architect* (Vol. 127, January-March 1925), 167; Harvey Wiley Corbett, “In Appreciation of Arnold W. Brunner,” *Architectural Record* (Vol. 57, May 1925), 460-462; “Brunner, Arnold William,” *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Scribner, 1959), 185-186; Henry F. Withey, A.I.A. and Elsie Rathburn Withey, “Brunner, Arnold W.,” *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970), 85; Steven McLeod Bedford, “Brunner, Arnold William,” *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, Adolf K. Placzek, ed. (1982), 314; Lewis Randolph Hamersly et al., “Brunner, Arnold William,” *Who’s Who in New York City and State* (New York: L.R. Hamersly Company, 1904), 93; Edwin Childs Baxter, “The Grouping of Public Buildings in Cleveland,” *American Monthly Review of Reviews Company*, Albert Shaw, ed., (New York: The Review of Reviews Company, Jan-June 1905), 561-566; Cyrus Adler, “Brunner, Arnold William,” www.jewishencyclopedia.com, accessed 5 January 2008.

²¹ Mount Sinai Dispensary and Shearith Israel Synagogue are designated New York City Landmarks. Shearith Israel Synagogue is also located within the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District as is West End Synagogue, Congregation Shaaray Tefila.

²² The Public Baths at Asser Levy Place is a designated New York City Landmark.

²³ Temple Israel and First Church of Christ, Scientist are located within the Mount Morris Park and Jackson Heights Historic Districts, respectively. First Church of Christ, Scientist was designed shortly before Brunner’s death and was thus constructed under the direction of Gehron & Ross, Brunner’s successor firm. An addition to the church dates from 1951-53 and was designed by C. Faulkner.

²⁵ Robert Aitken, *Arnold W. Brunner and His Work* (New York: Press of the American Institute of Architects, 1926).

²⁶ “The City Beautiful,” *New York Tribune*, 13 February 1904, 4.

²⁷ A portion of this section is adapted from LPC, *Webster Hall and Annex Designation Report*. Information in this section is based on the following sources: “Last Public Bath a Tile Taj Mahal”; Richard F. Shepard, “Filming of ‘Ragtime’ Restores 1906 to Block on E. 11th Street,” *NYT*, 28 July 1980, C12; LPC slide library.

²⁸ Other surviving baths previously operated by the borough president had been converted into recreation centers when they were turned over to the Department of Parks in 1938, in accordance with the City Charter of that year. These baths, unlike the small shower baths, were larger structures built with a variety of amenities such as swimming pools and gymnasias that later made them optimal as recreation centers.

²⁹ Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 5147, p. 209 (April 20, 1961). The City of New York sold the building to 154 Realty Corporation who converted the building to a garage. The intent was to demolish the second story and store nine cars in the cellar and eleven cars on the first floor; demolition of the second story was not approved. Parts of the curb were lowered at this time to allow automobiles to enter the building. NYC, Dept. of Buildings (Alt 1769-61).

³⁰ “Filming of ‘Ragtime’ Restores 1906 to Block on E. 11th Street.”

³¹ The original infill of the archways according to a 1903 drawing (and existing in a 1912 photograph, the 1939 Department of Taxes photograph and 1940 drawings of the elevation showing existing features and planned alterations) shows that the outer archways were used as entrances to the male and female bathing facilities, respectively. The central archway was a decorative window. All three archways had metal grille transoms. Identical in design, the outer archways were accessed by stone steps, had wood revolving entrance doors, steel sash and frames. In 1943, the transoms were replaced with glass block and aluminum doors were installed, but these were removed in the early 1960s when the building was converted into a garage (LPC photos, dated 1985, reveal that cinder blocks served as infill for the transoms and roll-down gates were installed below). Architectural drawings dated 1903 and 1940 are on file at the Art Commission of the City of New York, located in City Hall.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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 Free Public Baths of the City of New York, East 11th Street Bath has a special character and a 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 Free Public Baths of the City of New York, East 11th Street Bath, is culturally significant for its part in the histories of the progressive reform movement in America and the immigrant experience on the Lower East Side; that it was built between 1904 and 1905 and designed by prominent architect Arnold W. Brunner in the neo-Italian Renaissance style; that the bath (as well as the other thirteen City-operated public baths opened between 1901 and 1914) was the result of hard-fought efforts made by progressive reformers beginning in 1840s New York that gained momentum in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when charitable organizations opened public baths for a small fee on the Lower East Side; that, led by Doctor Simon Baruch, “the father of the public bath movement in the United States,” these bath advocates pressured the municipal government to open multiple free public baths throughout the crowded tenement districts in order to provide immigrants with bathing facilities that were non-existent in their own apartments; that the two-story East 11th Street Bath was situated in a predominantly German neighborhood one block north of Tompkins Square Park and was equipped with seven bathtubs and 94 showers, or “rain baths”; that, reflecting Victorian sensibilities, the men’s and women’s arched entrances were placed on opposite ends of the façade that led to entirely separate waiting rooms and shower rooms; that the use of Indiana limestone on the bath house façade contrasted the surrounding dark brick tenements and evoked a sense of “cleanliness” fitting for a bathing facility and that Brunner’s use of tridents and fish on the cartouches reflect the nautical theme of the building; that the three arches, which once were fitted with metal grilles and pedimented revolving doors on the outermost entrances, are separated by rusticated pilasters, and that a balustraded parapet sits above a modillioned cornice and frieze bearing the name “Free Public Baths of the City of New York” in carved lettering; that attendance at the East 11th Street Bath was greatest during summer months and during the 1906 heat wave, “people stood in lines ‘four deep’” and it soon became clear that the poor used the baths more as a means of cooling off than for hygienic reasons; that gradually, bathrooms became standard in apartment buildings and public baths were less patronized, resulting in the 1958 closure of the East 11th Street Bath; that in 1995, Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Eddie Adams bought and converted the building into a high-end fashion and corporate photograph studio; and that Brunner, highly influential as an architect and city planner in several U.S. cities, collaborated in the designs of several buildings that are now designated New York City Landmarks and are located within several New York City Historic Districts, and that the East 11th Street Bath is a highly intact example of his work.

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 Free Public Baths of the City of New York, East 11th Street Bath, 538-540 East 11th Street, Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 404, Lot 23 as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice-Chair

Diana Chapin, Joan Gerner, Roberta Brandes Gratz, Christopher Moore, Commissioners



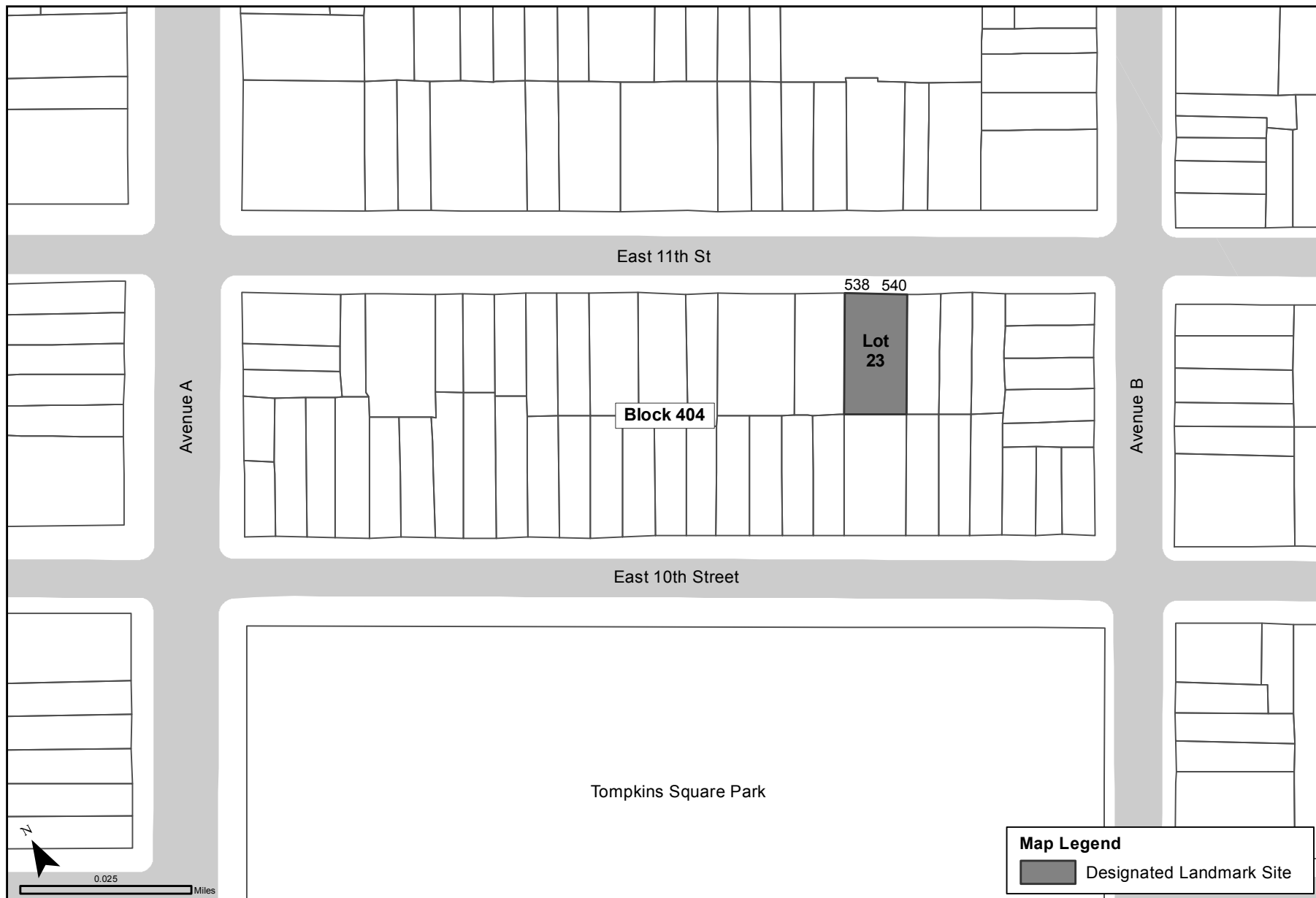
Free Public Baths of the City of New York, East 11th Street Bath
538 East 11th Street (aka 538-540 East 11th Street), Manhattan
Photo: Carl Forster



Free Public Baths of the City of New York, East 11th Street Bath
Entryways
Photo: Carl Forster



Free Public Baths of the City of New York, East 11th Street Bath
Detail of cartouche
Photo: Carl Forster



FREE PUBLIC BATHS OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK, EAST 11TH STREET BATH (LP-2252),
 538 East 11th Street (aka 538-540 East 11th Street). Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 404, Lot 23.

Designated: March 18, 2008

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 06C, December 2006.
 Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM.