

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC Surrogate's Court

AND/OR COMMON

Hall of Records

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

31 Chambers Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

New York

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

17th

STATE

New York

CODE

36

COUNTY

New York

CODE

061

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERICAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME City of New York, Honorable Abraham D. Beame, Mayor

STREET & NUMBER

31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN

New York

VICINITY OF

STATE

New York 10007

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

New York County Hall of Records

STREET & NUMBER

31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN

New York

STATE

New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE National Register of Historic Places

DATE

May 1973

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Washington

CITY, TOWN

D. C.

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Surrogate's Court rises 8 stories and is constructed of granite ashlar masonry over a steel frame. The north and south elevations have five bays: a large central bay with four evenly spaced columns and two pairs of end columns, two recessed bays with three windows each running six stories and two end bays with windows on the second, third, fifth and sixth floors. The east and west facades have three bays, the central bay framing 8 giant order Corinthian columns framed by the two narrow end bays set with five windows.

The plan is a rectangle with a large interior court that rises from ground level to the roof. The roof is a high mansard covered with gray slate ornamented with copper cresting. The roof is further embellished by dormer windows with carved hoods, the central dormer on all four facades are capped with elaborate sculptural groups. Above the fifth floor there is a console bracketed cornice supported by a frieze with dentils. A ballustrade carried carved standing figures by Philip Martiny. The main entrance contains three large arches under a projecting cornice. On the fourth floor at the corners are round port hole windows with a carved eagle above, wings spread over a ship's prow.

The following interior description was prepared for the New York City Landmarks Commission by Majorie Pearson and Nancy Goeschel:

"The Hall of Records is entered from Chambers Street through three doorways. The doors, with bronze grilles, are flanked by columns with modified composite capitals. Arched broken pediments with cartouches surmount the doors. Rising above the entrances are graceful arched windows which also have bronze grilles.

"The walls of the foyer are faced with the rusticated yellow Siena marble which is used throughout the interior on the first and second floors. Highly polished and a mellow gold in color, it imparts an exceptional effect of warmth and opulence. The arcade at the north, opposite the arched entrance openings is adorned in the spandrels with cartouches composed of central convex-shaped disks with enframing swags and scrolls. Set at each end of the foyer is a marble enframed doorway with double mahognay doors. Handsome mosaics incorporating lions' heads and boukrania (bulls' skulls) enhance the reveals and soffits. Above these end doorways are two impressive sculptural groups by Albert Weinert. Executed in white marble in a classicizing style, they depict personifications of historical events. On the east is 'The Consolidation of Greater New York,' in which a youth is flanked by seated female figures, one who proffers him the key to the City, the other leaning upon a model of City Hall. To the west is 'Recording the Purchase of Manhattan Island.' At the center of the composition a slim nude youth extends a bag of gold to a seated female figure at his right who holds a tablet and stylus, while a seated Indian brave at the left looks on.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES	1899-1907	BUILDER/ARCHITECT	James R. Thomas Horgan & Slattery
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Hall of Records, an American version of the Hotel de Ville in Paris, is the most accurate representation of the "style officiel" in New York. This French Empire style was enormously popular for municipal structures, such as city halls and courthouses and combined taste with grandeur--the Hall of Records needed not only an official repository but used the building as symbolic of the prosperity and achievement of New York City.

The history of the building is recorded in the New York City Landmarks Commission report:

"The first Hall of Records was established in 1831 in the old 18th-century 'goal' in City Hall Park, northeast of City Hall. Previously public records had been housed in City Hall, but in 1830 the Common Council had authorized the conversion of the old jail to fireproof offices for a Hall of Records, and, in addition, appropriated funds for exterior alterations in order to harmonize the building with City Hall. The New York Mirror recorded on September 17, 1831: 'Scientific gentlemen and artists pronounce the building the most perfect and chaste piece of architecture in this city. Its style is Grecian, from the model of the temple of Ephesus.' The growth of the city and the consequent increase in public records necessitated the addition of one floor to the building and the construction of a fireproof roof in 1870.

"The continuing accumulation of public records resulted in the formation of the Sinking Fund Commission in 1888 to erect a building in the vicinity of the New York County Courthouse (but not in City Hall Park), to be used primarily for the keeping of records. The law authorizing the construction of the building was amended in 1890 to allow such a building to accommodate other city offices, and it was amended again in 1892 to allow the building to be built in City Hall Park. These amendments led to the formulation of a plan to raze and replace the old City Hall building. A national competition resulted in over 130 entries and six prize-winning designs. Public outcry over the proposed destruction of City Hall was instrumental in the repeal of the law in 1894, and, instead, the Board of Aldermen authorized the Commissioner of Public Works to clean and renovate the existing City Hall early in 1895.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____
UTM REFERENCES

A	1 8	5 8 4 0 8 0	4 5 1 0 7 2 2 0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

C			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The square block bounded on the north by Reade Street; on the east by Centre Street; on the south by Chambers Street, and on the west by Elk (Elm) Street. Building described from south-east corner: west 197 7/8'; then north 151.2½'; then east 200.5 3/4'; then south 152.2'. Block 153, Lot 24.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

July 1977

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street, N. W.

TELEPHONE

523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington, D. C.

STATE

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ____

STATE ____

LOCAL ____

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

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Surrogate's Court

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE 2

"The most distinctive feature of the foyer is the elaborate mosaic of the elliptically arched ceiling. It was the creation of William de Leftwich Dodge (1867-1935), a Paris-trained artist widely acclaimed for the many murals he executed in public buildings throughout the United States and Canada. The ceiling mosaic of the foyer, organized into a series of panels within which are depicted ancient deities and zodiac symbols, displays a highly inventive and elegant stylistic amalgam; Dodge has made reference to Egyptian and early 5th century Greek motifs--stylistic allusions appropriate to the subject matter. Both these ancient styles also display a sensitivity and appreciation for line and pattern, characteristics associated, too, with the turn-of-the-century Art Nouveau style, the avant-garde movement which seems to have influenced Dodge in designing the foyer ceiling.

"Within the triangular panels of the ceiling are depicted eight of the twelve signs of the zodiac, labeled with Greek names: Didvmoi (Gemini); Leon (Leo); Toxeutes (Sagittarius); Aigokeros (Capricorn); Parthenos (Virgo); Krios (Aries); Hydrochoos (Aquarius); Tauros (Taurus). Below the personifications of the signs--each beautifully characterized--are pairs of heraldic sphinxes. Alternating with these panels are a series with the figure of Ra, the Egyptian Sun God. In panels at the four corners of the ceiling are single figures of Greek deities associated with the functions of Recorder and Surrogate; Themis (Justice), Erinys (Retribution), Penthos (Sorrow), and Panos (Labor).

"The lunettes of the foyer end walls are also adorned with mosaics by Dodge, although these scenes, which depict 'Searching the Records' and 'Widows and Orphans Pleading Before the Judge of the Surrogate's Court' are executed in a pictorial, naturalistic style rather than in the more decorative and emblematic style of the ceiling.

"All the mosaics are executed in ceramic tesserae predominantly in shades of red, green and blue on a dull gold ground. Shimmering glass tesserae accent the whole.

"Other interesting features of the foyer are the central bronze chandelier and wall sconces, and the great ornamental bronze radiator covers which are crowned with eagles with outspread wings perched on globes. The polished marble floor is laid in a large-scale guilloche pattern using pink Tennessee and Bleu Belge marbles.

"From the foyer one passes through an arcaded hall into the grand main lobby, a vast and imposing interior space. The use of Siena marble throughout and the wealth of ornamental detail make the room one of the most splendid in New York City. The lobby rises two full stories beneath an elliptically arched bronze

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Surrogate's Court

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 3

ceiling with skylight. An arcaded gallery at the second floor enhances the sense of spaciousness as does the rusticated arcade at the ground floor which opens on the surrounding corridor. Carved ornament adorns the arcades; at the first floor, beribboned garlands executed in unpolished marble, connect the scrolled keystones of the arches to small disks above elaborately enframed roundels of red Verona marble set in the spandrels of the arches. A frieze of triglyphs and bezants separates the two floors. The arches of the gallery are flanked by engaged columns with stylized Ionic capitals and the spandrels of the arches are carved with wreaths and oak branches. The vaulted skylight with geometrically patterned panels rises above an entablature with a frieze of vertically placed leaves.

"An outstanding feature of the lobby is the grand staircase. Although often compared to the great Beaux-Arts baroque stairway of the Paris Opera, the similarity is one primarily of mood, and not of plan. The grand staircase rises in two flights to a central balustraded landing above the archway leading to the west entrance. From this landing a single flight of stairs continues up to the second floor. The lower flights of stairs have giant consoles in place of wing walls, adorned with exceptionally rich and naturalistic acanthus scrolls executed in high relief. A great cartouche adorns the corbel supporting the balustraded landing, and in the lunette above this landing is an elaborate stucco relief which displays the seal of the City of New York held by winged putti growing from acanthus foliage.

"A large clock in heavy bronze enframement is suspended from the elliptical arch opening to the elevator lobby. The floor has a rectilinear pattern of highly polished colored marble.

"The first floor halls, again faced with rusticated yellow Siena marble, have groin vaulted ceilings from which are suspended handsome chandeliers with globes. Mahogany double doors set in deep reveals lead to the offices. The lunettes above these doors are adorned with red marble disks like those in the main lobby and are here flanked by cornucopias. An interesting feature seen in this hall as well as in the upstairs corridors are the bronze doors with studs and brass pulls. These conceal fuse boxes and other service functions.

"Secondary entrances with vestibules, at east and west, are similar in design, although the west vestibule has stairs leading up from the entrance doors. The doorways are protected by bronze and glass entry 'cages' with decorative grillework. A handsome bronze and glass door screen closes off the west vestibule from the corridor beneath the stairs. As in the foyer the most striking features of the

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Surrogate's Court

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 4

vestibules are the ceiling mosaics. Set in elliptical vaults, they are executed with glass tesserae, which results in a glittering and vividly colored composition. The figures and ornament are predominantly blue with accents of green and rose, set against a golden ground. Very different in style from the mosaics of the foyer, these mosaics combine an almost Byzantine richness of color with a decorative vocabulary borrowed from late Renaissance sources. The central panels are divided by garland borders into four triangular sections containing winged putti clasping acanthus scrolls and winged mask-like heads set above garlands and acanthus scrolls. The side panels have fanciful garland urns from which acanthus grows. The two side doors in each vestibule are surmounted by mosaic lunettes, one depicting a winged putto displaying a tablet and the other an eagle within a wreathlike garland.

"The second floor gallery, with arcade opening on the main lobby on all four sides, is divided into bays with shallow domes set on pendentives. Each pendentive is adorned in molded plaster with a helmeted head surmounted by an eagle and surrounded by oak leaves--a classically inspired motif though here imbued with a pleasingly romantic quality. Smooth Siena marble wall panels terminate in a cornice beneath the domes. Arched openings which reflect the gallery arcade contain handsome double doors of mahogany beneath carved wood transoms.

"The staircase rises from north to south in two straight flights intersected by a broad landing with handsome patterned marble floor. Heavy balustrades, like those on the stairways below and in the gallery arcade, flank the stairs. The staircase rises and is treated in a similar fashion up to the fifth floor.

"The corridors on the third, fourth, and fifth floors, all similar in overall character, surround the open interior court of the building. The walls are faced with gray-veined marble, while the handsome mosaic tile floors are bordered by a Greek fret pattern in shades of green and yellow. Each story is differentiated by the treatment of the windows on the light court and the ornamental detail--done in imitation of marble--of the doorway enframements. At the third floor unusually large bull's-eye windows have handsome marble enframements with lotus and scroll motifs executed in bas-relief. Above the doorway flat pediments with cornices are flanked by scrolls. The windows on the fourth floor are surmounted by large cartouches with plaques containing grimacing open-mouthed masks flanked by oak branches. Brackets decorated with triglyphs support a cornice shelf above each door, while a flat pediment, similar to those used on the third floor, rises above it. Flat cornice shelves are placed over the fifth floor windows, while the cornices over the doors are supported on console brackets and adorned with garlanded cartouches. At the ceiling on the inner walls in the east and west corridors are placed elongated acanthus branches flanking a shield and sphere. Rising from the fifth floor, the stairway is graced by a handsome wrought-iron and brass railing.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Surrogate's Court

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 5

"The North and South Court Rooms on the fifth floor are fitting and impressive seats of justice for the Surrogate's Court. The two rooms, designed as a pair, are both symmetrically planned with galleries at mezzanine level. While such architectural features as door and window placement are similar, each courtroom is given an individual character through the use of distinctive ornamental detail.

"The South Court Room, finished in rich Santo Domingo mahogany, has an almost somber, yet dignified air. A staircase at each end of the room leads to the gallery. The tall windows and end doors are surmounted by arched pediments with torch-embellished cartouches flanked by acanthus scrolls. The broken arched pediments surmounting the hall doors have shields bearing the City Seal held by female figures. On the door panels are large cartouches carved with scales of Justice. An elaborate entablature at the ceiling is decorated with eagles, books, and shields which alternate with vertical scrolled and garlanded brackets.

"Mask panels accent the entablature below the gallery. The ceiling is divided into panels by Greek-fret borders--a detail repeated in the floor pattern and in gilt on the plaster above the wall paneling. Classical foliate bronzed ornament executed in high relief adds further interest to the ceiling. Graceful crystal chandeliers with cut glass pendants light the room. The striking red Numidian marble fireplaces at each end of the room are in themselves elaborate classical compositions. A pedimented overmantel, flanked by stylized composite pilasters, incorporates a winged blindfolded head of justice above a wreath-enframed shield. Elaborate classical moldings surround the fireplace. The centrally-placed judge's bench is enhanced by classical carving. Behind the judge's chair is a freestanding pedimented panel with the carved figure of enthroned Justice holding a book on her lap. The inscription 'Sap.' (an abbreviation of the Latin word for Wisdom) and an hourglass, representing time, flank her head. A wrought-iron and brass railing leads to the bench from the judge's chambers.

"The North Court Room has tawny quarter-sawn English oak paneling. Eared enframements surrounding the doors and windows support a shallow cornice. The door panels are adorned with lions' heads above shields displaying the scales of Justice and the word 'LEX.' The wall panels are flanked by engaged fluted pilasters supporting a Doric frieze of triglyphs and metopes with a series of six repeating motifs in alternation with a convex disk. The six motifs include boukrania, scales of Justice, staffs of Mercury with cornucopia, military standards, ancient weapons, and tablets with staffs. Large wood panels elaborately carved in low relief present allegories inscribed 'Wisdom,' 'Truth,' 'Civilization,' and 'Degradation' in emblematic compositions. Three wall panels enframe portraits of former Surrogates: Abner C. Thomas, by C. Seymour Thomas; and

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Surrogate's Court

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 6

Daniel G. Rollins and Frank T. Fitzgerald by John W. Alexander. The gallery overlooking the room is entered from a fifth floor mezzanine. Panels, set in the gallery balustrade above the main entrance doors from the corridor, are carved in low relief with boukrania and garlands flanked by cornucopias. A gilt stylized foliate border adorns the plaster wall above the paneling above which the entablature at the ceiling has garlands set between vertical console brackets in the frieze. The paneled ceiling is decorated with intricate gilded ornament in high relief, surrounded by rich borders of garlands. Symbols of warfare are included in the ceiling, continuing the military theme which characterizes the entire courtroom. The handsome chandeliers are like those in the South Court Room. The great fireplaces of pale olive green Easton marble have overmantels with broken arched pediments featuring circular escutcheons. The mantel shelf supported on heavy console brackets is set above an emblem composed of ancient weapons and a stylized helmet. The judge's bench, like that in the South Court Room, has a freestanding pedimented panel behind the judge's chair. An enthroned figure of Justice holds a sword while the inscription 'Lex' (Law) and a lamp signifying truth flank her head.

"This magnificent building is a tribute to the talents of the architect who intended it as a showcase of city government. Careful attention was lavished on the building encompassing even such small details as light fixtures and bronze doorknobs. Many skilled craftsmen--masons, sculptors, mosaicists, bronze casters, and wood carvers--helped to make this an irreplaceable building, one which could not be duplicated today. Much appreciated for its beauty, the building also continues to play a vital role in City government as the Surrogate's Court and the Hall of Records."¹

1. New York City Landmarks Commission Report, December 1966.

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Surrogate's Court

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

"The need for a new Hall of Records was emphasized by a grand jury report issued in March 1896 condemning the old building as 'unsafe and susceptible to destruction by fire.' In December an association of real estate dealers, property owners, lawyers, and businessmen was organized to lobby for a new Hall of Records. The central issue was the selection of a suitable site not in City Hall Park; finally in April 1897 the Board of Estimate and Appraisal chose the site on the north side of Chambers Street at Lafayette (Centre Street), and John R. Thomas was appointed architect."¹

John Rochester Thomas (1848-1901), born in Rochester, New York, was self-taught and known for prison and reformatory design before arriving in New York City. He very quickly won a number of open competitions, especially for churches and armories. His greatest prize was first place in the City Hall competition. Montgomery Schuyler in the Architectural Record of May 1905 notes:

"Doubtless there were a considerable number of the pupils of the French school in the competition. But the fact nevertheless was that the expert judges of the competition, if we do not misremember, Professor Ware, the late Richard M. Hunt and the late Edward H. Kendall, gave the first prize, without hesitation, to the architect who had been his own schoolmaster in the 'style officiel.' Thereupon, however, the municipal aesthetes arose in their might and procured at Albany the passage of an act forbidding the proposed desecration of the City Hall Park, and thus withdrew the ground from under the premiated and accepted design. Thereupon, again, the good Mayor Strong, when the question of a new, or a, Hall of Records came up, reminded his Board of Estimate that the prize winner deserved some consolation for a failure that had occurred by no fault of his own, and proposed that he should be appointed outright architect of the authorized new building. And this was done, subject only to the report of a specially appointed new commission of assumed architectural experts on the architectural merits of the new plan. It was, as it has turned out, as good a solution of the problem as could have been devised."²

"The City acquired the land for the building in 1897; Thomas's plans were approved by an advisory committee consisting of Professor William E. Ware of the Architectural School of Columbia University, the influential architectural critic Montgomery Schuyler, and Henry G. Marquand, a business magnate and trustee

1. New York City Landmarks Commission Report. Majorie Pearson and Nancy Goeschel. December 1966.
2. Architectural Record, Vol. 17, No. 5. May 1905. p. 385. J. R. Thomas, Architect; Montgomery Schuyler.

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Surrogate's Court

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 3

of the Metropolitan Museum. The construction contract was awarded to John Pierce, who had a national reputation as a contractor in the construction of both public and private structures. He supplied the building stone which was granite from Hallowell, Maine, noted for its whiteness and durability of color. Although the building permit was filed in 1897, construction did not actually begin until 1899 because of delays in clearing the site.

"As in the case of many government buildings the construction of the Hall of Records was subject to a certain amount of controversy. Plans for the new structure were begun under the administration of Mayor William L. Strong, but when Tammany Mayor Robert A. Van Wyck took office in 1898, he wanted to put the stamp of his administration on the building. He engaged the Tammany-connected architectural firm of Horgan & Slattery which made a number of recommendations for altering Thomas's interior designs. The cornerstone was laid on April 13, 1901, by Randolph Guggenheimer, president of the Municipal Council. Following Thomas's untimely death on August 28, 1901, Mayor Van Wyck pushed through the appointment of Arthur J. Horgan and Vincent J. Slattery as architects of the building. Some of their proposed changes--the 'horganizing and slatterifying' of the building as the New York Times put it--were later reversed under the administration of Mayor Seth Low (1902-1906). Mayor Low was unable to abrogate their contract following his election in 1901, but fortunately, Thomas's designs appear to have been largely carried out in the way he originally intended them. In 1903 there was some controversy when the sculpture commissions were awarded to only two sculptors, Philip Martiny and Henry K. Bush-Brown. With the extensive amount of statuary planned for both interior and exterior, some criticism was expressed that they would not be able to adequately carry out the work with the best artistic effect within a reasonable amount of time.

"One of the more amusing incidents involving the ornamental decoration was a joke Vincent J. Slattery claimed to have played on the Municipal Art Commission in March 1903. He supposedly had Bush-Brown make copies of gargoyles and decorative detail by Michelangelo for submission to the Art Commission which rejected them as 'inartistic and immature.' Two days later the architects sent a letter to the Municipal Art Commission denying the newspaper stories, and Bush-Brown denied making any such designs."¹

1. New York City Landmarks Commission Report. Majorie Pearson and Nancy Goeschel. December 1966.

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Surrogate's Court

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 4

Philip Martiny produced the remarkably large number of sculptures between 1903 and 1908--eight cornice figures of famous New Yorkers, sixteen symbolic figures, two seated figures of "Justice" and "Authority" for the entrance, and two groups representing "New York in its Infancy" and "New York in Revolutionary War Times." Some of the upper level ornament such as festoons and swags, cartouches and richly carved capitals were by his hand--achieving what Wayne Craven calls Baroque grandeur.

"Shortly after various City departments began moving into the building in December 1906, it was discovered that some of the 'marble' embellishment on the upper floors was really of plaster. Although no graft was involved, the substitution of plaster for marble was the result of several changes of plans by three City administrations.

"The old Hall of Records in City Hall Park proved so unsafe that it was ordered closed late in 1902 and was then razed. The Register's Office and its records were moved to the Morton Building at 116 Nassau Street until the new Hall of Records was completed.

"The Surrogate's Court, long associated with the Hall of Records, was established under the Dutch in 1656 for the administration of the property of "orphans and minor children" who were residents within the jurisdiction of the city government. When the old Hall of Records was completed in 1831, the Surrogate's Court was accommodated there. Because of the increase in city records, the court was later moved into the New York County (Tweed) Courthouse behind City Hall. Accommodations for the Surrogate's Court were an important part of the plan for the new Hall of Records. The courtrooms on the fifth floor were planned by the architect John R. Thomas to be among the finest in the city. In response to the increasing use of the building by the Surrogate's Court, the City Council passed a resolution in 1962 calling on the Mayor and the Board of Estimate to change the name of the Hall of Records to the Surrogate's Court. This change was approved in 1963."¹

1. New York City Landmarks Commission Report. Majorie Pearson and Nancy Goeschel. December 1966.

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Surrogate's Court

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

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