

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**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 Old Cape May County Court House Building

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number North Main Street (Route 9) not for publication

city, town Middle Township (Cape May Court House) congressional district 2nd

state New Jersey code 34 county Cape May code 009

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Board of Chosen Freeholders, County of Cape May

street & number County Library Office Building, Mechanic Street

city, town Cape May Court House vicinity of state New Jersey

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Building, County Clerk's Office

street & number North Main Street

city, town Cape May Court House state New Jersey

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title N.J. Historic Sites Inventory has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1970  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Cultural and Environmental Services

city, town Trenton state New Jersey

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" 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

The Old Cape May County Court House, completed in 1850 by prominent local master builder Daniel Hand, is a late Georgian, rectangular 2 1/2 story, clapboarded building with a three bay pedimented gable front, a domed open arch bell tower, and excellent detailing including dentils, lunette, fanlight and broken pediments. The building is four bays by three bays and has a brick foundation and a cedar shingle roof. The first floor Greek Revival courtroom interior is particularly well preserved.

The three bay pedimented gable front features a central entrance with a double leaf door. (Photo #9) The six panel double leaf door is surmounted by a circular fanlight. (Photo #12) The fanlight is framed by carved moldings with a center wooden keystone block. Single engaged round columns on square bases flank the door. A single 12/8 sash window with broken pediment cornices is on either side of the entrance. The shutters are louvered. There are three windows on the second floor - the outside ones are 8/8 sash with broken pediment cornices and follow the vertical lines of the windows on the first floor while the center opening is a 6/6 sash double window with wide mullion capped by a flat cornice. Well defined dentils trim the pedimented gable which is flush board featuring a lunette with molded wooden trim and keystone. (Photo #2)

The square bell tower at the front is frame with wooden quoining at the base. (Photo #10) The belfry has pilasters flanking round arch openings with engaged balustrades and is capped by a copper dome roof, topped with a weathervane. The bell is original and weighs over 300 pounds.

The side facade has four windows with broken pediments on each floor. (Photos #1, 3) The first floor windows are full-length 16/16 sash with louvered shutters. The second floor windows are 8/8 sash, also with louvered shutters. The slightly overhanging cornice is highlighted by dentils.

The entrance opens to a front vestibule containing a dog-leg stair at the west, a small hallway in the center and a storage closet against the east wall. (Photo #13) A six panel double-leaf door provides access to the main courtroom. This courtroom, approximately 34 feet by 54 feet, is particularly well preserved, and has wooden bench seats to either side of the center aisle separated from the judicial/jury area by a wooden railing with turned balustrade and a raised platform. (Photo #6) The judge's bench sets in a shallow apse featuring a center judge's chamber, paneled door with transom, and flanking windows, all with paneled pilasters. The sidewalls have wide beaded wainscoting. The pressed metal ceiling is later, circa 1900. (Photo #7, 8) Particularly noteworthy is the Greek fret-work in the transom above the entry. (Photo #7)

NOV 18 1981

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Old Cape May County Court House, Cape May Courthouse  
Continuation sheet Cape May County, New Jersey Item number 7

Page 1

7. DESCRIPTION

Around 1900 a two bay, two story section was added to the rear to expand the Judge's Chamber. This section has 2/2 Victorian sash, but the broken pediment cornice attempts to follow the fenestration of the original structure. (Photo #1)

The 1957 addition off the rear is a one story low pitched frame addition with double window openings. This section is 75 feet by 31 feet. There are a side and an enclosed rear entry. The interior is undistinguished and has a center longitudinal hall with numerous offices to either side. (Photo #4)

The Old Cape May County Court House building is located on North Main Street (Route 9) just south of the intersection with Church Street.

The circa 1900 County Detective's Office (nee Surrogates Office) and the 1920's Cape May County Court House immediately to the south are not included in this application.

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1848-50      **Builder/Architect** Daniel Hand

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Old Cape May County Courthouse, a well preserved transitional late Georgian/Greek Revival building, has been in continuous governmental use since its construction in 1848-1850. Designed by Daniel Hand, a local master builder/architect, the building is high style in terms of Cape May County architecture. However, the unusual combination of elements reflects that the building is the work of a local builder.

Architecture

Classical references are blended together throughout the building. The exterior is a fine example of a Georgian building with slender columns flanking a six panel double leaf door, a semi-circular fanlight with keystone, broken pedimented windows, a pedimented front elevation with a lunette, denticulated cornice line, and a domed open arch belfry with columns, modillions, a balustrade and quoins.

The interior of the building, also very ornate for Cape May County, reflects Greek Revival detailing. Its key elements are slender columns flanking the windows and doors and Greek fretwork above the entrance doors.

In addition to its blending of architectural elements, the Courthouse also reflects its location by its timing. Cape May County, geographically removed from an urban center, has experienced throughout its history a stylistic time lag. With this time lag, it is not surprising to find an 1848-50 building designed in a composite Georgian/Greek Revival style.

Politics/Government

The earliest settlers of the Cape May area were whalers from Connecticut and Long Island in the last quarter of the 17th century. Population had increased sufficiently by 1692 to enable the formal creation of Cape May County. A County court was established the following year, but it was not until 1745 that Cape May Court House was designated the county seat.

In 1763 the Freeholders petitioned the State Assembly for the privilege of erecting a County courthouse and jail and the following year built a building 24' x 30'. This early building was located south of the present county complex on the east side of Shore Road (Route 9) between Whitesboro and Rio Grande, and it served the county until 1850 when the present Courthouse was built.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

NEED NOT BE FILLED  
AGREEMENT NOT PRINTED

Acreage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Stone Harbor

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A 

1	8	5	1	5	2	4	0	4	3	2	5	8	8	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

B 

Zone	Easting				Northing									

C 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

D 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

E 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

F 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

G 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

H 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

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 Terry Karschner, Historic Preservation Specialist  
Nancy Zerbe, Senior Environmental Specialist

organization Cultural & Environmental Services date 5/1981

street & number 109 West State Street telephone (609) 292-2028

city or town Trenton state New Jersey 08625

# 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Laura Schmitt*

D 5490

title date October 29, 1981

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

*Bruce L. ...*

date 12-22-81

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

NOV 18 1981

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Old Cape May County Court House, Cape May Courthouse

Continuation sheet Cape May County, New Jersey Item number 8

Page 1

8. SIGNIFICANCE

In 1848 the citizens voted to have a new Courthouse built in Cape May Court House and plans for the present building began. Since its completion in 1850, this building has been in continuous governmental use. Political meetings have been held in the building, and the first floor has served as a courtroom continuously since 1850. The second floor was originally the Freeholders room, but this function was relocated to the new brick County Building when it was completed in 1927. The second floor now functions as offices for the Probation Department.

The Hand family played an important role in the settlement and development of Cape May Court House. In 1695, Shamgar Hand purchased 1,108 acres from Dr. Daniel Cox, agent of the West Jersey Society, and established a farm. His plantation, originally called Romney Marsh, later developed into the hamlet of Middletown, and finally became known as Cape May Court House. Typical of the early practice of holding court sessions in private homes, in 1704 the general sessions of court were ordered by Governor Cornbury to be held at the house of Shamgar Hand.

In 1764 when the County petitioned to build a new Courthouse and jail, Daniel Hand (not the master builder) donated to the Justice of the Peace and Freeholders one acre of land on which the buildings could be built. The 24' x 30' Courthouse, which was built on Daniel Hand's plantation, served the County from 1755 until 1850 when the present Courthouse was opened.

The 1848-50 Courthouse building was designed and built by Daniel Hand, a prominent local master builder/architect and great-grandson of Shamgar Hand. In addition to the Courthouse, Daniel Hand designed and built several important buildings in the area including the New Asbury Episcopal Meetinghouse (National Register 9/17/80), the Calvary Baptist Church (National Register 11/25/80), and the Cape Island Presbyterian Church in Cape May City (National Historic Landmark district 1977) as well as numerous homes.

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

NOV 10 1981



Old Cape May County Court House, Cape May Courthouse

Continuation sheet Cape May County, New Jersey Item number 9

Page 1

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Stevens, Lewis T., The History of Cape May County, Cape May, New Jersey. 1897.

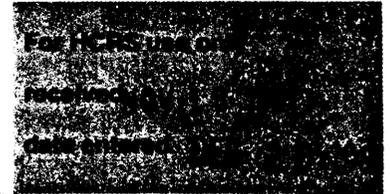
Alexander, Robert C., Cape May County Magazine of History and Genealogy, Cape May County Historical Society, Cape May Court House, NJ, June, 1964, pages 24 and 25.

Way, Dr. Julius, Historical Tour of Cape May County, 1930.

NOV 17 1981

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Old Cape May County Court House, Cape May Courthouse

Continuation sheet Cape May County, New Jersey Item number 10

Page 1

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

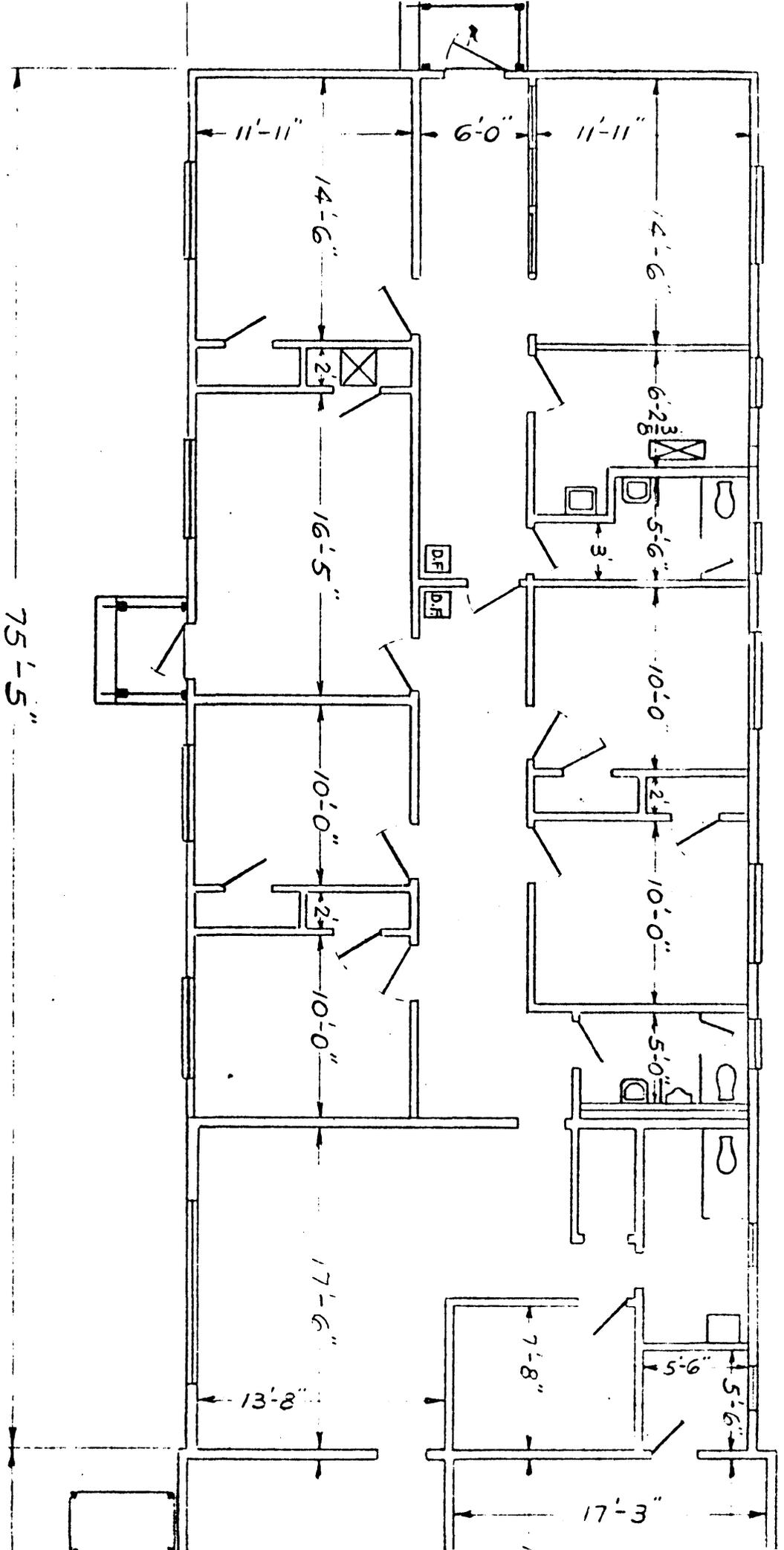
The Old Cape May County Court House sets upon a portion of Block 234, Lot 20 of Middle Township. The specific area being nominated begins at the southeast corner of Block 234, Lot 5 and proceeds southwest along the north curb of North Main Street 54 feet, continues northwest 130 feet to the corner of Block 234, Lot 5 and then follows the said property line to the point of beginning.

DEC 22 1981

ADDITION TO OLD COURT HOUSE BUILDING

ONE STORY - BUILT 1957

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE, N. J.



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

PROBATION DEPT.

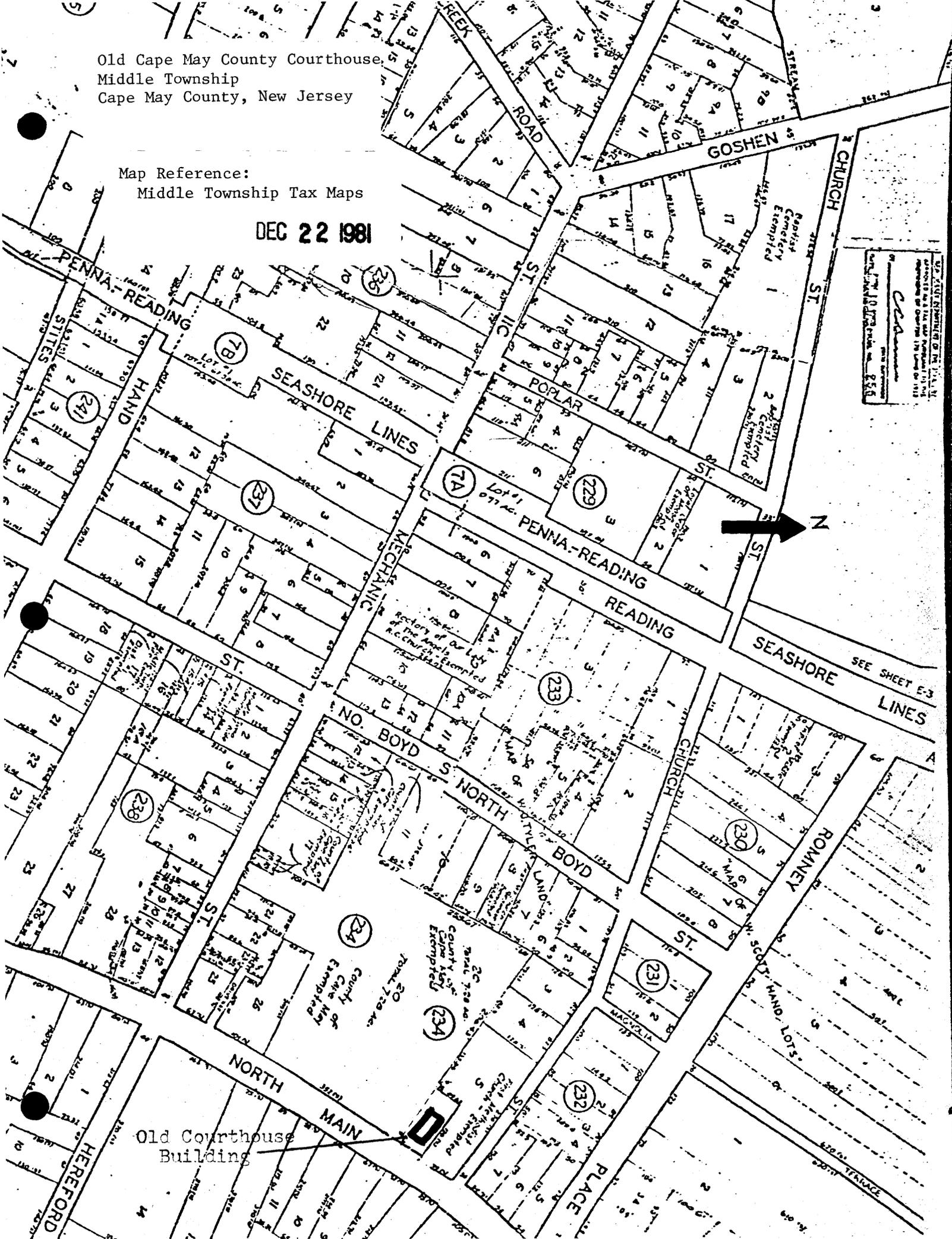
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

Old Cape May County Courthouse,  
Middle Township  
Cape May County, New Jersey

Map Reference:  
Middle Township Tax Maps

DEC 22 1981

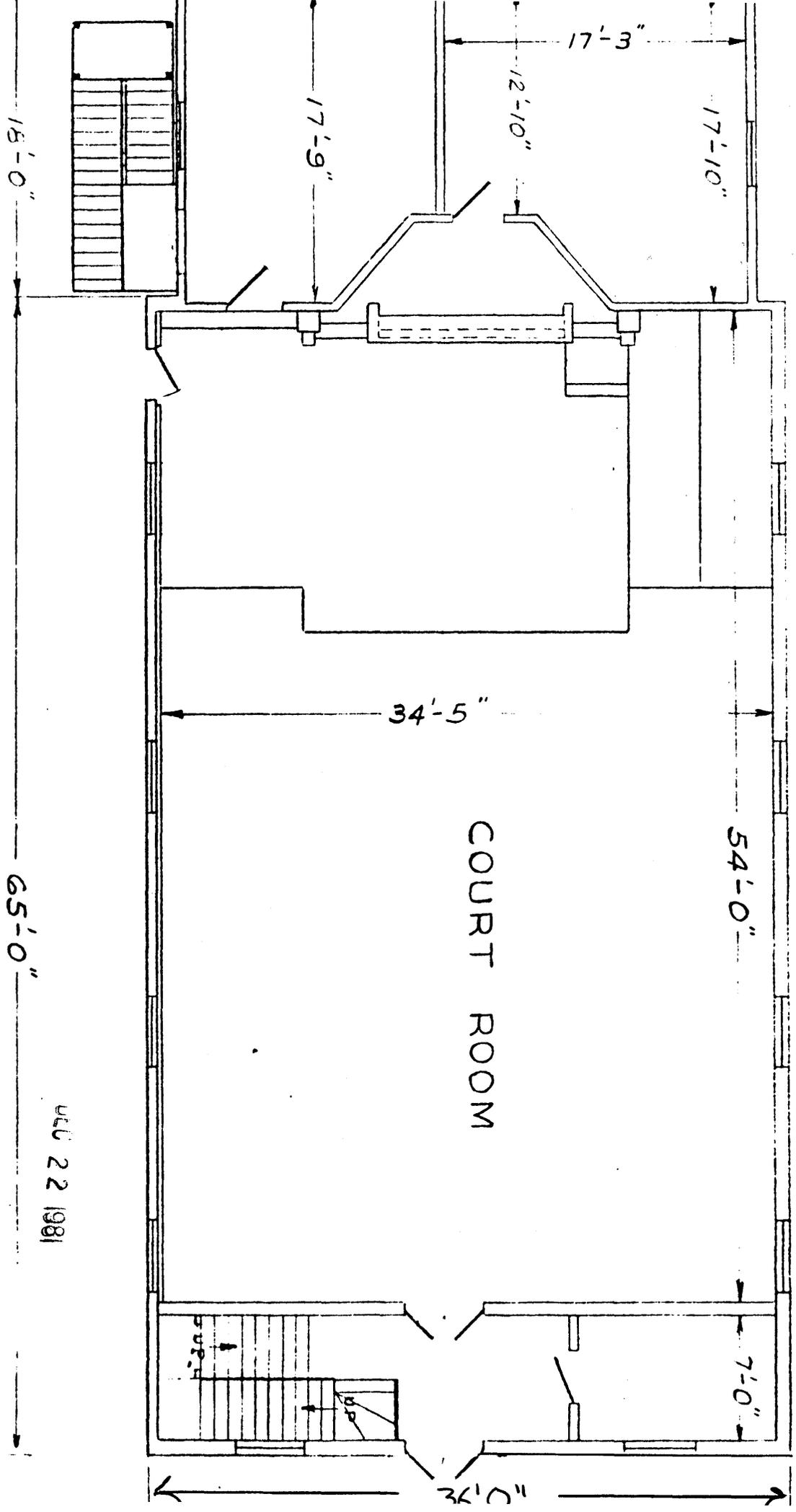
SEE SHEET E-3  
LINES



Old Courthouse  
Building

1900  
ADDITION

OLD COURT HOUSE BUILDING - FIRST FLOOR  
CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE, NEW JERSEY



FIRST FLOOR PLAN  
OLD COURT ROOM

W.C. 22 1981