

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park 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 Yonkers Public Bath House Thematic Resources

and/or common

2. Location

street & number see Continuation Sheets \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Yonkers \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district \_\_\_\_\_

state New York code 036 county Westchester code 119

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple Ownership--See Continuation Sheets

street & number

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Westchester County Land Records Office

street & number 148 Martine Avenue

city, town White Plains state New York

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Survey  
title Yonkers Historic Resources has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_\_\_ yes  no

date 4/15/80 to present \_\_\_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records NYS Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation

city, town Albany state New York

## 7. Description

**Condition**  
 excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

**Check one**  
 unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**  
 original site  
 moved date NA

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Yonkers Public Bath House Thematic Resources include three individual buildings built between 1898 and 1925. Public Bath House #2 (1898; 27 Vineyard Avenue), Public Bath House #3 (1909; 48 Yonkers Avenue), and Public Bath House #4 (1925; 138 Linden Street) are the surviving three of the original four structures constructed by the City of Yonkers during the last years of the nineteenth century and first third of the twentieth century in an attempt to ameliorate the sanitary conditions of its working-class population.

The properties included in this thematic nomination were identified and evaluated as part of a comprehensive survey/inventory of historic resources in Yonkers conducted by the Yonkers Planning Bureau between 1980 and 1983 in conjunction with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation.

The three buildings included in this thematic group are nominated for both their historical and architectural merit: each represents a distinct phase of public bath house construction in this country and each retains its intrinsic integrity of design, material, workmanship, feeling and association. Together the three structures illustrate changing conceptions concerning public welfare and the evolution of a specific building type over almost half a century. Both Public Bath Houses #3 and #4 are large two-story structures specifically built as both sanitary and recreational facilities and remain in operation. Public Bath House #2, built exclusively as a sanitary facility, is a small two-story building with a one-story rear ell that was decommissioned in 1962 by the city and subsequently sold to a local religious group that now uses the structure as a church. Although the three bath houses are located at some distance from one another, their settings are quite similar. All three are located in densely populated working-class neighborhoods in the urban core composed primarily of small two-story frame workers' dwellings and multi-family tenement buildings.

As the three bath houses were designed for a specific function--the provision of bathing facilities to urban dwellers whose homes lacked plumbing--each original interior configuration was similar. The interiors were divided into three components: a reception room, the bath area (and in the case of Public Bath #3 and #4 a plunge pool), and a custodian's apartment. However, as private sanitary facilities became increasingly commonplace in multi-family residences in the post-war years, the bath houses' interiors were remodeled to accommodate their new roles as exclusively recreational facilities. Bath House #2 was completely remodeled after it was decommissioned in 1962. Bath Houses #3 and #4, despite changes in their programmatic requirements over the years, retain a number of interior features. Bath House #3's interior is still marked by its original configuration and is divided into an unadorned reception room, a second story custodian's apartment, a large central space with mosaic-tiled wainscoted walls and a mosaic plunge pool (rebuilt in 1930 by the local architect William Katz), and flanking shower areas featuring

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stalls containing small dressing cubicles. Although Bath House #4's shower areas were completely altered in 1961 to the design of the local architect Maurice Capobianco, it still retains a large two-story pool room whose walls are articulated by pilasters with capitals and bleachers at the second-story level. This area also features a polychromed mosaic-tiled pool.

Despite some alterations in the bath houses' interiors due to changes in function, their exteriors remain virtually intact. Public Bath House #2, built in 1898 and the oldest extant structure of its type in Yonkers since the demolition of Bath House #1 in 1962, is representative of early bath house construction. Two stories high and featuring a rear one-story brick ell, its relatively unadorned brick facade heeds the early bath house advocates' admonitions that facades be kept as simple and unassuming as possible. Resembling a small-scale commercial building of the period, Public Bath House #2's Romanesque Revival facade is pierced by round-arched windows and a set of separate entrances for men and women. Ornament is confined to plain brick moldings and a cornice frieze decorated with classical swags. More monumental in scale and elaborate in ornament, Public Bath Houses #3 and #4 reflect changing conceptions concerning the bath house program as well as the role of public buildings in the urban environment. Built in 1909 by local architect George S. Cowles, Public Bath House #3's large two-story facade displays characteristics of the Second Renaissance Revival style. Forsaking the strictly utilitarian appearance of Bath House #2, Bath House #3 features segmental pediments supported on columns to enframe its entrances, tall round-arched windows, and boldly sculptured consoles that support a hipped tiled parapet that encircles the two-story building and hides its flat roof. Polychromed detailing and variegated brickwork further enliven this structure and underscore the contrast between its facade and the stark, unadorned facade of Bath House #2. Similarly, Public Bath House #4, designed by local architect O.J. Gette in 1925, employs classical detailing to articulate its colored stucco wall surfaces and a low-pitched tile roof. Rusticated entrance surrounds, a florid cartouche incorporating shell and swag motifs, and Palladian inspired windows are a few of the details that mark the facade of this two-story structure. As both Bath Houses #3 and #4 were designed to incorporate both swimming and bathing facilities, they are much larger than Bath House #2 and bear a closer resemblance to public buildings than to commercial structures.

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1925	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** see below

**Builder/Architect** see below

## Statement of Significance (In one paragraph)

The Yonkers Public Bath House Thematic Resources include three buildings built between 1898 and 1925 which together illustrate the development and evolution of municipally sponsored public baths during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Yonkers. Designed as a response to the health problems engendered by the rapid growth of the industrial city during the second half of the nineteenth century and constructed in the heart of the most congested working-class districts, the bath houses provided sanitary facilities to the urban poor. The three nominated buildings represent early examples of a municipally sponsored effort to ameliorate the environmental conditions of the poor and to combat the squalor of the industrial slum, and they remain as a reminder of the progressive era's contribution to the reshaping of the inner city. Additionally, each of the nominated buildings is individually architecturally significant as a representative example of a municipal building reflecting the prevailing aesthetic taste and architectural style of its time. Public Bath House #2, built in 1898, is Yonkers's oldest extant structure of its type and represents the search by contemporary social reformers for an efficient and reproducible building type to house a new field of municipal concern. Modest in execution and scale, it is an excellent example of Romanesque Revival style architecture featuring the characteristic attributes of its period and style. These include a simple brick facade pierced only by round-arched windows and entrances and articulated by unadorned moldings. Its unpretentious facade, which resembles a commercial building from the period, reflects the belief of early social reformers that bath house exteriors should not alienate the poor by a display of lavish ornamentation. Public Bath House #3, on the other hand, shows the influence of the "City Beautiful" movement on municipal buildings: Its monumental facade seeks to symbolize and engender public pride. Erected in 1909 to the design of the local architect George S. Cowles, Public Bath #3's bilaterally symmetrical facade is organized into distinct horizontal sections by stringcourses and embellished with segmental-arched pediments, columns, paired round-arched windows enframed by larger arches, and a projecting cornice supported on boldly sculptured consoles--all hallmarks of the Second Renaissance Revival style. An unusual feature, however, is its vibrant polychromed tile and ornamental brickwork which confers on the building the lavishness associated with public buildings from the period. Similarly, Public Bath House #4, designed by local architect O.J. Gette in 1925, employs classical detailing to articulate its colored stucco wall surfaces and a low-pitched tile roof. Rusticated entrance surrounds, a florid cartouche incorporating shell and swag motifs, and Palladian-inspired windows are a few of the Renaissance Revival motifs that mark

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its facade. However, although its monumental facade and entrance surround are legacies of the "City Beautiful" movement, its planar wall surfaces, which are sharply punctuated by ornamental trim and crisply cut window openings, are characteristic of the Spanish Mission style and point to the increasing tendency in American architecture during the first third of the twentieth century to forego the elaborate surface treatment and varied ornamentation that embellished earlier municipal buildings. Its unadorned stucco walls, which act as a foil for the applied Renaissance Revival style detailing, lend this building the stripped-down "modern" look that echoed the avowed utilitarianism espoused by contemporary architectural reformers. As the oldest public bath system in New York State, the Yonkers group is also significant architecturally and historically as it served as a model for similar systems throughout the country.

During the late nineteenth century, when Americans learned that Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch had isolated the specific bacilli and the general "germ culture" conditions for certain dangerous diseases, public health became a new and growing concern for municipalities throughout the country. In response to the recently discovered scientific evidence linking unsanitary conditions with specific diseases, reformers of the Progressive Era became increasingly aware that the provision of adequate housing and bathing facilities was of the utmost importance if the general public welfare was to be maintained and if the spread of contagious diseases was to be checked.

As late as 1887 it was noted in an address delivered to the American Medical Association that in 18 industrial cities surveyed, five-sixths of the inhabitants had no facilities for bathing "except such as are afforded by pail and sponge, or a river, lake, or other body of water which may be easily accessible."<sup>1</sup> Changing conceptions concerning the causes of poverty, which was no longer simplistically blamed on the deficient character of slum dwellers, as well as the new emphasis placed on qualitative environmental conditions led contemporary social reformers to advocate greater municipal involvement in restructuring the industrial city. The negligible effect the reformers' model tenements had on the design of speculative housing, the lack of adequate laws governing their construction, and the extreme concentration of working-class populations in urban areas, however, forced those concerned with the public welfare to seek new means of providing the working poor with sanitary facilities.

<sup>1</sup>Dr. George H. Rohe, "Recent Advances in Preventive Medicine," an address delivered to the American Medical Association in Chicago in 1897 and quoted in William Paul Gerhard's On Bathing and Different Forms of Baths (New York: William T. Comstock, 1895), pp. 16-17.

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Although in Europe public baths had been made available since the early nineteenth century and in this country public plunge pools were relatively commonplace in some of the larger cities,<sup>2</sup> it was not until the 1890s that attempts to establish municipally sponsored bath houses were to meet with government approval. One of the first pleas for their establishment was made by Dr. Simon Baruch of New York and appeared in an 1889 editorial in the Philadelphia Medical Times and Record. According to Baruch, "the erection, in the midst of populous tenement districts, of public baths which, by their accessibility and freedom from expense, would tempt the populace into the practise of bathing as a habit... (would have for its effect) the power for preventing the origin and spread of disease."<sup>3</sup> Advocates of public baths believed that not only would they help prevent the spread of contagious diseases among the working-class population, but they too would have a beneficent effect on the moral character of the poor. Indeed, cleanliness and morality were often seen as one, and it was noted that:

There has ever been an important and interesting connection between cleanliness and civilization... With very large classes of society cleanliness of person, apparel and home are inseparable from thrift, industry and prosperity, and it is the absence of this which distinguishes upright, honest poverty from the condition of the improvident, the depraved and the worthless.

In 1902 the well-known photographer of the slums, Jacob Riis, wrote in his Battle with the Slum:

Soap and water have worked a visible cure already that goes more than skin deep. They are moral agents of the first value in the slum.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Report on Free Bathing Facilities (Boston: City Document Number 102, 1866).

A.B. Stout, Report on Abattoirs and Public Baths (Sacramento, Ca., 1879).

<sup>3</sup> Harvey E. Fiske, The Introduction of Public Rain Baths in America: A Historical Sketch (undated pamphlet in the research division of the New York Public Library).

<sup>4</sup> John Paton, Public Baths (1893), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Riis, The Battle with the Slum (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1902), p. 54.

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Bath houses were also seen as a means of integrating the large immigrant working-class population into the mainstream of American life as the title of an article<sup>6</sup>—"Americanization by Bath"—in the 1913 Literary Digest underscores.

Initially, the erection and operation of public bath houses was undertaken by charitable organizations. In 1891, the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor constructed the Centre Market Place Bath House in New York City. This building, designed by J.C. Cady & Co., served as the model for similar establishments built in<sup>7</sup> New York, such as the DeMilt Dispensary and Baron DeHirsch Fund baths.

While these first attempts at providing public bathing facilities proved successful, with over 140,000 people reportedly employing them annually, Baruch and other public health advocates recognized that their work "had for its object the bathing of the masses--not the luxurious bathing of the elite, as in<sup>8</sup> ancient Rome--upon such a scale as had never hitherto been attempted,"<sup>8</sup> and therefore they campaigned for municipal support. In 1891, the same year as the opening of the bath house at Centre Market Place, the Medical Record noted that "there should be a number of baths distributed throughout the city and convenient to the tenement population" and called upon New York City to "undertake this work, since it would redound so much to the health of the people." Though Baruch's campaign in New York City proved initially futile, the bath advocates were more successful at the state level. In 1892 the governor approved a bill which made it "lawful for any city, village, or town to establish free Public Baths" and "any city, village, or town (was enabled) to loan its credit or make appropriations of its funds for the purpose of establishing free Public Baths." This law, though not mandatory, provided the nucleus for a second bill, passed by the state legislature and signed by the governor in 1895, which required that all cities of the first and second class "establish and maintain such public baths as the local Board of Health may determine to be necessary" and stipulated that "each bath shall be kept open not less than 14 hours for each day, and both hot and cold water be provided." Furthermore, it added that the "erection and maintenance of river or ocean baths shall not be deemed a compliance with the requirements of this section."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup>"Americanization by Bath," in the Literary Digest, volume XLVIII (August 23, 1913), p. 281.

<sup>7</sup>Fiske.

<sup>8</sup>Fiske.

<sup>9</sup>Fiske.

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In Yonkers the requirements of the new state law requiring the establishment of municipal bathing facilities were met quickly by the city authorities. In 1896 Yonkers's first public bath house was opened at 55 Jefferson Street. Built in the center of one of the city's most densely populated districts, Public Bath House #1 served, until its demolition in 1962, as a prototype for the erection of similar facilities within the municipality over the next forty years.<sup>10</sup> Bilaterally symmetrical and modest in execution, it heeded the reformers' admonition that:

the exterior of the building should be easily recognizable in order to be readily found, but all outward displays of lavishness in the architecture of the building must be avoided, as it would only have a tendency to keep poor people away.<sup>11</sup>

Bath House #1's plain brick facade was firmly rooted in the aesthetic of late nineteenth century Romanesque Revival commercial architecture. Incorporating many of the features that would become standard in later bath house construction, i.e. clearly delineated entrances for men and women, a two-story main facade and projecting one-story ell, and the division of the interior into three major sections: reception area, custodian's apartment, and the baths proper, it became a model for the erection of similar facilities throughout the country. It is likely that the configuration of Public Bath House #1 was derived from the Centre Market Place Bath House. It is known that Yonkers officials were present at the latter's opening in 1891<sup>12</sup> and that the city was in communication with the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor.<sup>13</sup>

Two years later, in 1898, the city embarked on the construction of a second bath house on Vineyard Avenue. Constructed of warm yellowish brick, its facade also featured separate entrances for men and women and the round-arched windows of the Romanesque Revival style. Two stories high, the building originally housed a reception area, custodian's apartment on the second floor, and the baths themselves, which were placed in the rear ell of the structure. Simple in execution, its plain brick facade was relieved only by a molded band course between the first

<sup>10</sup>Yonkers Board of Trade, Yonkers Illustrated (Yonkers, 1902?), p.7.

<sup>11</sup>Gerhard, p. 21.

<sup>12</sup>Marilyn Thornton Williams, "The Municipal Bath Movement in the United States, 1890-1915" (unpublished doctoral dissertation for New York University, 1974).

<sup>13</sup>See letter dated February 4, 1896 in The People's Baths, 9 Centre Market Place, New York City. A Study on Public Baths (reprint from AICP Notes #2, 1896).

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and second stories, the radiating voussoirs of its arched windows, a large centrally placed tripartite window, and a denticulated cornice featuring a frieze ornamented with classical swags that concealed its flat roof. Bath House #2 followed the same general proscriptions elaborated by Baruch and exemplified by Bath House #1:

- 1st. They must be located in the very center of the overcrowded districts.
- 2nd. Their exterior must be modest, so as not to repel the poor and lowly by their architectural pretensions.
- 3rd. They should be so constructed that a cleansing bath may be obtained without trouble or expense, or at a very trifling expense, and without sacrifice of much time.

These two bath houses proved to be an immediate success: in 1901, 26,384 bathers patronized the facilities.<sup>15</sup> They also served as prototypes for similar structures built throughout the United States and were often referred to as examples by public health advocates in other cities.<sup>16</sup>

Public Bath Houses #3 and #4, built during the first decades of the twentieth century, represent a distinct departure from the stark, utilitarian facades of their predecessors and bear witness to the evolution of bath house design in this country. Erected in 1909, Bath House #3 combines the restrained proportions of the classical tradition with polychromatic detailing and variegated brickwork. Rather monumental in scale and design, the Romanesque Revival facade reflects the tenets of the City Beautiful movement, which sought to symbolize and engender civic pride through architectural design. Originally incorporating the same spatial divisions employed by the two earlier bath houses, this bath house also featured a small public swimming pool. Pools, although often incorporated in later public bath houses, were not recommended by early bath house proponents who felt that they took up too much space which could be better used for showers. Nevertheless, the inclusion of pools in bath houses became increasingly more common in later bath house construction as their program evolved from providing simple sanitary facilities to recreational uses.

<sup>14</sup>Fiske, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup>Yonkers Illustrated.

<sup>16</sup>Civic Club of Allegheny County, Report of Boards of Managers of Bath Houses (Pittsburgh, May 1, 1899).

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Continuing the precedent established by Public Bath #3, Public Bath #4, built in 1925, boasts a small, though monumental, facade enlivened by a large single rusticated entrance and Palladian style windows. Notable as one of the few municipally sponsored buildings in Yonkers designed in the Spanish Mission style, the structure houses a large swimming pool and a small number of showers. Renovated in 1961, it continues to serve the local community, as does Bath House #3, although both are now used primarily for recreational purposes.

Together the three extant public baths in Yonkers represent the evolution of municipally sponsored bath houses in this country. Originally designed to provide sanitary facilities to the urban poor in congested areas of the city, the baths increasingly lost their clientele as private sanitary facilities became more commonplace in multi-family dwellings. Responding to these changes, the baths' function shifted from providing simple sanitary facilities to the poor to affording opportunities for neighborhood recreation.

(For further information concerning the nominated buildings, please see the individual building sheets attached to this form.)

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data See Continuation Sheet

Acreeage of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle scale \_\_\_\_\_

UMT References

A 

Zone	Easting			Northing			

B 

Zone	Easting			Northing			

C 

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

D 

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

E 

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

F 

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

G 

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

H 

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

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Individual Building Sheets

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state NA code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Neil Larson See continuation sheet

organization Div. for Historic Preservation date August, 1985

street & number Agency Bldg. 1, Empire State Plaza telephone 518-474-0479

city or town Albany state New York

# 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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Julia S. Rohy*

title Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation date Aug. 12, 1985

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
<i>See Continuation Sheet for listing</i>	date
Keeper of the National Register	
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	

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Major Bibliographic References:

Fiske, Harvey E. The Introduction of Public Rain Baths in America:  
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New York: William T. Comstock, 1895.

Williams, Marilyn Thornton. "The Municipal Bath Movement in the United  
States, 1890-1915." Unpublished doctoral dissertation for New York  
University; on file at the New York Historical Society.

Yonkers Board of Trade. Yonkers Illustrated. Yonkers: 1902?

Yonkers Herald Statesman. Articles dated 1.9.41; 3.16.48; 3.16.62;  
7.18.62; and 9.29.62.

(For more information concerning sources see the individual building  
sheets attached to this form.)

