Form No. 10-300 (Rev 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Old New York County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON
Old New York County Courthouse; **Tweed Courthouse**

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
52 Chambers Street — NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN — CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
New York — VICINITY OF — 17

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
New York	36	New York	061

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	X PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
X BUILDING(S)	__PRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	X YES: RESTRICTED	X GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER.

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
City of New York

STREET & NUMBER
City Hall (Paul O'Dwyer, Council President

CITY, TOWN — STATE
New York — VICINITY OF — New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC
New York County Hall of Records

STREET & NUMBER
31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN — STATE
New York — New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
National Register of Historic Places

DATE
1974 — X FEDERAL X STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
National Register of Historic Places

CITY, TOWN — STATE
Washington — D.C.

(162)

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
__EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	__UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
X GOOD	__RUINS	X ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
__FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Distinguished architect John Kellum completed the Old New York County Courthouse design in 1858, the same year that the enactment legislation for the building passed. Legal wrangling over whether the State or the city should provide funds delayed further action until 1862, when "Boss" William Marcy Tweed became president of the city board of supervisors. By no coincidence, Tweed encouraged the board to vote funds, and in 4 years the supervisors appropriated more than $3 million. The Tweed Ring profited from a 65% commission on each shady contract; Tweed himself owned the quarry that supplied the marble. By 1871, when the Ring was broken, it had run up a $13 million bill on the still-unfinished building. Some offices were uncarpeted, though the bill for carpeting amounted to $350,000. The plasterer's repair bill exceeded the cost of his original work. Historian Alexander B. Callow, Jr., unconditionally designates "the building of the County Courthouse a classic in the annals of American graft."[10] Surely no extant building could better represent the Tweed Ring at the pinnacle of its power.

Despite the corruption of the contractors, the Old New York County Courthouse possesses "real architectural merit," according to R. Craig Miller of the Victorian Society of America.[11] It represents the creative work of two distinguished American architects, Kellum and Leopold Eidlitz, who completed the building during the 1880's. Eidlitz added a rear wing and remodeled parts of the interior, but the remainder of the exterior and much of the interior follows Kellum's original plan.

The courthouse stands in the northern part of City Hall Park, a large nearly triangular space in Lower Manhattan. The city hall, itself a National Historic Landmark, faces southward in the park, and the remaining area is a network of sidewalks and tree-shaded lawns. The three-story courthouse has granite bearing walls and iron framework sheathed by white Massachusetts marble from Tweed's own quarry. The structure has a 250- by 150-foot midsection flanked on either side by a connective element and a pavillion. The pavillions protrude well beyond the connective sections and slightly beyond the three-bay-wide center section and front portico. Four giant, fluted Corinthian columns support a pedimented portico. Unfortunately, in 1955 workers widening Chambers Street removed the original front steps. Three-bay-wide sections join the midsection to the pavillions, which measure

(continued)

[10] Callow, The Tweed Ring, 202.

[11] R. Craig Miller, The Tweed Courthouse (New York, 1974), 5.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION	
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE	
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE	
__1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
__1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER	
X 1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION	
X 1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	X POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		__INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1862-1872 BUILDER/ARCHITECT John Kellum, Leopold Eidlitz

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

According to historian Alexander B. Callow, "the building of the /New York/ County Courthouse /is/ a classic in the annals of American graft," and its builder, the Tweed Ring, ranks as "the most infamous political machine in our history."[1] From 1866 to 1871 William Marcy Tweed and his three close associates, "Elegant" Oakey Hall, Peter "Brains" Sweeny, and Richard "Slippery Dick" Connelly, ran New York City as their personal fiefdom, and in the process they pocketed between $60 million and $300 million. By 1868 the Ring had extended its control to the New York Governorship and Legislature and had begun to set its sights on control of the Federal Government. By 1871, however, internal dissension, Samuel J. Tilden's prosecutions, Thomas Nast's cartoons, and the crusading journalism of the New York Times had combined to smash the Ring, destroy its influence, and end the greatest among many instances of Reconstruction Era corruption.

Malfeasance on an hitherto unprecedented scale represents only one aspect of the Tweed Ring's significance. Tweed was the first big city political boss in the modern sense of the term, and the emergence of men like him, according to Carl N. Degler, "was one of the first signs of the adjustment of politics to the social realities of the urban-industrial society."[2] Cities like New York, undergoing phenomenal growth, faced a myriad of problems like inadequate streets, water, and lighting; the assimilation of hordes of immigrants; and increased demands on charitable services. Often, because of antiquated charters and constitutions and control by State legislatures, the municipalities were unable to deal with these problems effectively. Despite corruption and waste, however, Tweed increased New York City's water supply; improved and extended streets; provided better public transit; constructed a new county courthouse; advanced the planning of Central Park; provided public works jobs and charity for the destitute; and created an improved governmental structure for the city. Under circumstances of inflexible governmental structures and unprecedented demands for governmental services, perhaps only what historian Seymour Mandelbaum has described as "a universal payment of benefits--a giant 'pay off'" could have pulled the city together in a common effort to meet its ever increasing needs.[3]

(cont)

[1] Alexander B. Callow, Jr., The Tweed Ring (New York, 1966), 3.
[2] Carl N. Degler, The Age of the Economic Revolution, 1876-1900 (Glenview, Ill., 1967), 108.
[3] Quoted in Charles N. Glaab and A. Theodore Brown, A History of Urban America (New York, 1967), 205.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Callow, Alexander B., Jr., The Tweed Ring (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

Degler, Carl N., The Age of the Economic Revolution, 1876-1900 (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1967).

(continued)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	18	583960	4507180
B			
C			
D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The

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 Cathy A. Alexander and Ralph Christian, Assistant Editors

ORGANIZATION American Association for State and Local History

DATE December 1975

STREET & NUMBER 1400 Eighth Avenue, South

TELEPHONE (615) 242-5583

CITY OR TOWN Nashville

STATE Tennessee 37203

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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three bays across the front and nine bays along the sides. The east and west facades emulate the front design: Their three center bays project slightly and have a pediment supported by four fluted Corinthian pilasters.

The courthouse wall ornamentation begins with a rusticated ground floor. Above it, two-story pilasters support a full entablature, and a stone balustrade tops the seemingly flat roof. Except for the four Corinthian pilasters at the center of either side facade, pilasters are Roman Doric. In each of three stories, spaced regularly between the pilasters, one sash window appears. On the second or main story of the pavillions, the windows have stone balustrades beneath the sills and stone segmental pediments on consoles. The other second-story windows and shorter third-story windows have stone cornices on consoles and relatively simple stone sills. While these details derive from the Kellum design, parts of it were never executed, such as a dome over the rotunda and a portico in the rear, where Eidlitz created a three-bay-square wing instead. Built of materials similar to the original, the Eidlitz extension has arches and pilasters for decoration.

Inside the courthouse, perpendicular corridors divide the center section. At the halls' intersection an **octagonal** rotunda extends from the ground floor to an iron-and-glass skylight. Apparently, except for the ground story and a balustrade and four large cast-iron wall panels on the second or main floor, little of Kellum's rotunda decoration remains. Eidlitz added the polychrome brickwork, which has since been painted over, and the arches, which lead to the second-story halls. Still, in the connective sections, Kellum's dramatic staircases in open wells remain. Open-shaft elevators stand at the south end of the hall.

Kellum designed the suites of courtrooms in the pavillions. On the second floor, they have elaborately corniced door and window openings, beamed ceilings with full entablatures, and ceiling rosettes. On the third floor, their windows and doors have pedimented or decoratively paneled frames. Eidlitz's design work is illustrated in the courtroom in the south wing. Now a storage area, the square room divides into nine bays set off by semi-circular arches on columns. Four of the columns are polished granite and freestanding, and the others are brownstone. A fireplace distinguishes the north wall, intricate carvings ornament the chamber, and a colored tile floor adds lightness.

The Old New York County Courthouse embodies the Tweed Ring, its power, and the paradox whereby it provided services for the city and gained corrupt profits for itself. Despite the graft involved in its construction, the three-story building, sheathed in white marble from Tweed's own quarry, incorporates the designs of two distinguished American architects, John Kellum and Leopold Eidlitz. There is no known extant residence associated with Tweed.

History

William Marcy Tweed, the organizing genius who set the Tweed Ring in motion, was born in New York City on April 3, 1823. Unlike many of his political associates, he was neither Irish, Catholic, or poor. His solidly middle class family owned a chair and brushmaking concern, but young William found politics more to his liking than business. In 1848 he helped found a fire-fighting company, the Americus Engine Company, Number 6, which provided him with a stepping stone into politics.

In 1850 Tweed ran for assistant alderman and narrowly lost. The next year he ran for alderman; won election; and during his service to the board learned firsthand the techniques of corruption. In 1852 he was elected to the U.S. Congress where he spent an uneventful 2 years and decided that he preferred municipal politics to the national arena. An 1854 defeat for alderman at the hands of the Know-Nothing Party slowed his rise but won him a following among Catholics and the foreign-born population.

Tweed in 1857 won appointment to the New York County Board of Supervisors. A member for the next 13 years and four times its president, Tweed used the board's power to audit county expenditures, appoint election inspectors, and supervise public improvements, taxation, and the various city departments as a weapon for plunder and political power. By 1861 he had replaced Fernando Wood as the city's most powerful Democrat and was chairman of the New York Democratic Central Committee. Two years later Tweed controlled the politically powerful Tammany Hall, and while still a county super-

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visor he gained appointment as deputy street commissioner. This gave him an almost inexhaustible source of patronage.

As he increased his power grasp over city affairs, Tweed took into his confidence three individuals who ultimately contributed much to the Tweed Ring's success. "Elegant" Oakey Hall, who became mayor of New York in 1868, brought respectability to the group, acting as liaison between the Ring and the better element. Peter "Brains" Sweeny, the county treasurer, served as patronage broker and backroom operator. Richard "Slippery Dick" Connelly, the city comptroller and only immigrant in the inner circle, had a powerful personal appeal especially among the Irish. Working together, they "consolidated, centralized, and modernized politics in a way never seen before their time."[4]

By 1866, the government of New York City was completely under the control of Tweed and his cronies. In 1868 a Tweed-backed Governor, John Hoffman was elected, and Tweed himself won election to the State senate. Here, he made certain, says historian John M. Dobson, that "no legislation detrimental to his operations in the city was approved."[5] In the 1870 elections Tweed tightened his control over State politics with Hoffman's reelection and the election of a Democratic legislature. Hoffman's victory made him a contender for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 1872, thus offering the Ring an opportunity possibly to extend its operations to the national level.

From 1866 to 1871, the Ring enjoyed its heyday in New York City, as Tweed and his associates pocketed between $60 million and $300 million from padded city contracts, bribes, shakedowns, and outright theft. The New York County Courthouse, according to Alexander B. Callow, Jr., "was the Tweed Ring's masterpiece of graft."[6] This project yielded at least $9 million to the Ring. The courthouse cost four times as much as the Houses of Parliament had cost the British and twice the amount the U.S. Government had paid for Alaska. Marble

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4 Callow, Tweed Ring, 7.

5 John M. Dobson, Politics in the Gilded Age: A New Perspective on Reform (New York, 1972), 46.

6 Callow, Tweed Ring, 197.

was purchased at inflated prices from a quarry owned by Tweed, and $2,870,464.06 was spent for plastering worth at most $20,000.

Malfeasance on an hitherto unprecedented scale, however, represents only one aspect of the Tweed Ring's significance. Tweed was the first big city political boss in the modern sense of the term, and as Carl Degler points out, the emergence of men like him "was one of the first signs of the adjustment of politics to the social realities of the urban-industrial society."[7] Cities like New York, undergoing phenomenal growth, faced a myriad of problems, including inadequate streets, water, and lighting; the assimilation of hordes of immigrants; and increased demands on charitable services. Often, because of antiquated governmental structures and control by State legislatures, the municipalities were unable to deal with them effectively.

Despite the corruptness of his Ring, thanks to Tweed, New York City's water supply was increased; streets were improved and extended; more rapid transportation was provided for by granting franchises for horse-drawn railways; a new county courthouse was built; Central Park came closer to reality; public works jobs and handouts were provided for immigrants and the destitute; and a flexible governmental structure was created that, in the opinion of James Bryce, was "for the most part sound and wise, according to principles and the most advanced modern theory of municipal administration."[8] Despite the accompanying graft, the "process of urbanization," argue urban historians Charles N. Glaab and A. Theodore Brown, placed such urgent demands on governmental agencies not equipped for the task "that in the circumstances corruption was the agency by which they were provided."[9]

Although the Ring had been under attack for several years by the New York Times, cartoonist Thomas Nast, and sporadic reformer Samuel J. Tilden, they had little effect until 1871 when internal

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7 Degler, Age of the Economic Revolution, 108.

8 Quoted in Callow, Tweed Ring, 228.

9 Glaab and Brown, History of Urban America, 205.

dissension made it vulnerable. Early that year, James Watson, the county auditor and the Ring's bookkeeper, died, and Matthew O'Rourke his replacement, angered at not being admitted to the inner circle, turned over damaging matter to the New York Times. Other disclosures of the Ring's malfeasance soon followed, and by the fall Nast, Tilden, and the Times had aroused the city against Tweed and his cohorts. The Ring itself became divided between the adherents of Tweed and Connelly on one side and Hall and Sweeny on another, and in November 1871, the Ring suffered a smashing defeat in the city elections.

Although numerous individuals were indicted, including the four principals, only Tweed went to prison. Convicted of 204 counts of fraud, he was sentenced to 12 years in prison and fined $12,750, but he served only 1 year before he was released. Arrested again in a civil suit by the State to recover stolen money, he escaped jail and fled to Spain, where he was captured and returned to New York. He made a thorough confession of the Ring's operations, but nothing further was done--probably because Tweed's testimony seemed to implicate prominent men like Tilden, Daniel Manning, Peter Cooper, David B. Hill, Samuel S. Cox, and Samuel J. Randall. Still imprisoned because of the civil suit against him, Tweed died of pneumonia at the Ludlow Street Jail on April 12, 1878, at the age of 54.

Dobson, John M., Politics in the Gilded Age: A New Perspective on Reform (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972).

Glaab, Charles N. and A. Theodore Brown, A History of Urban America (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967).

Mandelbaum, Seymour, Boss Tweed's New York (New York: John Wiley Publishers, 1965).

Miller, R. Craig, The Tweed Courthouse (New York: New York Chapter, The Victorian Society in America, 1974).

National Register Nomination for the New York County Courthouse, prepared by Lynn A. Beebe, New York State Division for Historic Preservation, August 1974.