

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 Third Judicial District Courthouse (Jefferson Market Courthouse)  
AND/OR COMMON Jefferson Market Branch New York Public Library

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER Sixth Avenue at 10th Street (425 Sixth Avenue)  
CITY, TOWN New York VICINITY OF 19th  
STATE New York COUNTY CODE

**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 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 type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input 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 City of New York, Mayor Abraham D. Beame  
STREET & NUMBER City Hall  
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 Historic American Buildings Survey  
DATE June 1968  FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Library of Congress  
CITY, TOWN Washington STATE D.C.

# 7 DESCRIPTION

<b>CONDITION</b>		<b>CHECK ONE</b>	<b>CHECK ONE</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input 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 Jefferson Market Courthouse was designed under the firm name of Withers and Vaux (Frederick Clarke Withers and Calvert Vaux) but is the work of Withers executed between the years 1874 to 1877. On June 15, 1878, an article appeared in American Architect and Building News that described the original use: "These buildings, commenced in 1874, were completed during the past year, and are located on a triangular plot of ground, formed by Sixth Avenue, Tenth Street, and Greenwich Avenue. The entrance to the court-house is on Sixth Avenue, through a large ornamental archway, into a porch 16 feet square, from thence on the left through a vestibule of the same size to the police court, and on the right by a circular stone staircase to the civil court above; each of these rooms is about 61 feet by 37 feet. An examination room, 37 feet by 24 feet, adjoins the police court, with a room for officers in charge of those awaiting trial, for whom separate rooms are provided in the prison building. The police magistrate's entrance is on Tenth Street, where offices for himself and his clerks are arranged. The rooms for the judge of the civil court are on the second floor adjoining the court room, with an entrance to them through the small tower on Sixth Avenue, in which is a staircase leading also to the rooms of the janitor on the third floor. The clerks of the civil court reach the offices provided for them by the principal staircase in the tower, and the third floor over these offices, and connected with them by a small turret staircase is a fire and burglar-proof room for the records of the court. The tower for the fire-bell is at the acute angle formed by the junction of Sixth Avenue and Tenth Street. The room for the look-out is reached by a separate, spiral stone staircase, with a private entrance from the street; the floor of this room is 98 feet from the sidewalk and above the ridges of all the surrounding roofs, so that an uninterrupted view of the neighborhood is obtained. Between the buildings occupied by the courts and the prison is an enclosed yard with an entrance into the latter so that prisoners may be conveyed to and fro without publicity. The entrance to the prison is on Tenth Street, and leads directly from the porch into a guard-room 24 feet by 14 feet, adjoining which is a small bedroom for the keeper. On this floor are two large waiting or lodging rooms, for male and female prisoners. Accommodation in separate cells is provided on the second floor for 29 female prisoners, and on the floor above, and entirely separated, for 58 male prisoners. Each cell is 8 feet by 5 1/2 feet and 9 1/2 feet high. A steam elevator is arranged near the staircase to convey prisoners to their respective quarters, as well as to carry up the supplies from the kitchen which is in the basement. Rooms for the keepers are arranged at the entrance to the male and female prisons, and in connection with each; there are two large cells for the detention of such persons as it may be considered advisable to separate from the ordinary class of prisoners. A small airing court 30 feet by 20 feet is provided in the roof, and reached only by the elevator, so that those prisoners who are detained any length of time may be able to take air and exercise without any possibility of escape.





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The buildings are of brick, those of the court-house and bell tower being faced with Philadelphia brick, and those of the prison with Croton fronts. The stone used is from Berlin, Ohio, and its color contrasts well with the real brick. The carving, which forms an important element of the design, was done under the direction of Mr. William Simon. The interior walls of the main halls and staircase are lined with stone, with ornamental arches over the doorways, windows, etc., and enriched with a large amount of carved foliage. The interior of the court-rooms and offices are trimmed with black-walnut and cherry-wood wainscoting, doors, etc., and the floors of the vestibules and halls laid with ornamental tiles. The buildings are heated by steam throughout.

The total cost of the buildings, exclusive of architects' fees, amounts to rather less than \$360,000.<sup>1</sup>

The building is in excellent condition. It rises two and one half stories over a full basement. Irregular in plan, the foundation walls are faced with granite on the street sides. The walls are of red brick laid up in Flemish bond, granite belt courses and black brick decorative details; the three red brick chimneys has a stone belt course and friezes. There is a stoop on the east facade with a modern rail and on the north facade with an old iron railing, possibly original. The main entrance is lancet-arched with a modern door. Above the transom "Third Judicial District Court House" is carved in a stone roundel. Most of the windows are single-light panes and metal sash, a few have trefoil arched stained-glass. The roof has gables, mansards and pyramid forms now covered with gray sheet metal replacing shingles. The cornice and frieze are granite.

<sup>1</sup>On the east facade there is one dormer which is faced with brick and carved stone and has two single-light windows. On the north facade is one dormer which is faced with gray sheet metal and has three single-light windows. A dormer on the rear facade is similar to that on the east facade. At the northeast corner of the building there is a clock tower with iron balcony and a pyramidal roof. At the rear of the building is a small wooden tower painted gray. Gargoyles and iron finials surmount the towers and roofs at various points.

<sup>1</sup>American Architect and Building News, June 15, 1878, p. 209.

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Floor plans, by floor: Basement: A hallway consisting of brick vaults connects the spiral stairway with the reference room at the south end of the building. First floor: To the west of the main entrance are library staff work areas and an elevator. To the south of the main entrance are a children's reading room and a smaller room used as an auditorium beyond. A spiral staircase in the tower to the north of the main entrance leads to the second floor. Second floor: Immediately to the south of the staircase is the circulation desk and staff work areas. To the south is the main reading room with three bays on the west side. To the south is a smaller reading room. Third floor: A balcony leads across the main reading room connecting a staff work room in the north section with a staff lounge on the south portion.

Stairways: In the clock tower at the north corner of the building, a stone staircase with stone walls leads from the first to second stories; a modern steel spiral staircase painted black runs from basement to first floor. At the south end of the building is a modern concrete staircase with iron railing.

Flooring: In the basement and second floor hallways the floors are covered with modern tile. All reading rooms and the auditorium have modern wood parquet floors. The floor of the entrance hall on the first floor is covered with terrazzo with brass strips laid in diamond pattern.

Wall and ceiling finish: In the basement hallway and reference room the walls and ceiling consist of red brick vaults laid up in English garden wall bond except for the east wall which is plastered and painted white. On the first floor the children's reading room has plaster walls painted white and a cream colored stucco ceiling with panels painted gold; the auditorium has wooden wainscoting, painted black, plaster walls and paneled ceiling, both painted white. On the second floor the main reading room has plaster walls and paneled ceiling, painted white; the south reading room has plaster walls and ceiling painted white.

Doorways and doors: A modern glass and metal vestibule surrounds the main entrance. Doorways in the hallway on the first floor are limestone with square-headed openings faced with marble. Original carved wood doorways and paneled doors throughout the building have been painted black. On both first and second floor- three new doorways faced with marble were cut between the main reading rooms and rooms to the south."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Waite, Diana, HABS data sheets, 1968.

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Later additions and alterations include plumbing and partition alterations in 1918-1919, in 1939-1944 other additions and changes were made (fireproof doors, partitions, some ceiling heights). "In 1961 the clock in the tower was electrified as a result of efforts by Greenwich Village citizens. On August 23, 1961, it was announced that the building would be rehabilitated and used as a branch library for the New York Public Library. Giorgio Cavalleri was the architect. Contracts for the works-which included cleaning the brick, installing new windows, doors and sash, constructing a walkway across the main reading room, and installing new plumbing, heating, and lighting--were let in 1964. In 1965 construction work was begun and on November 27, 1967, the building was formally opened as a library."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

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plot defined by Sixth Avenue on the east, Greenwich Avenue on the west, and West Tenth Street on the north. Associated in the minds of New Yorkers of Withers' class with "everything that is bad, mean, and unsavory," the old Jefferson Market, which had housed a dingy police court over a saloon, had been clustered without architectural pretense around a wooden fire tower. The complex Withers created on the cramped site consisted of four distinct units: the courthouse facing Sixth Avenue, the five-story prison (demolished) inclosed behind a high wall on Greenwich Avenue, the fire and bell tower attached to the courthouse at the corner of Sixth Avenue and West Tenth Street, and the market (also demolished), which was not designed by Withers but by Hogan and Hogan in 1883, in the southern wedge formed by Sixth and Greenwich Avenues. Withers incorporated the site's customary functions of market, fire observatory, police court, and prison in a tightly knit architectural scheme, one of the nation's best-thought-through urban renewal projects.

The judicial building, comprising the police court on the ground floor and the district court on the second floor, was Withers' masterpiece. Its plan, an ingenious organization of space, exploited the unusual site to obtain the maximum accommodations. Taking his clue from the three-cornered piece of ground, Withers created what in effect were two triangular buildings: the base of the larger one parallels Sixth Avenue and the base of the smaller one parallels West Tenth Street. These two wedges were fitted into the acute angle formed by the junction of the narrow street with the broad avenue. The central area of the larger portion of the smaller triangle contained a court clerk's office facing West Tenth Street. The corner staircase, which is in the base of the fire tower, leads to the district court and hinges the two triangles together.

An opulent though regulated profusion of ornament bedecks the nonstructural parts of the elevations, especially the Sixth Avenue facade. Carved details encrust the entrance portal and accumulate in the diaper panels under the windows, around the polygonal base of the tower, on the capitals of the numerous colonnettes, and in the pediments of the smaller gables. Enshrined at the bottom of the bell tower is a water fountain embellished with reliefs depicting the weary traveller and the life-giving pelican. The most pretentious areas of sculpture are the mighty state seal in the main gable and the epigrammatic frieze representing the trial from Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice in the tympanum over the window above the entrance.

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The Jefferson Market Courthouse was not only more elaborate than Withers' earlier works, it was also more challenging because of the nature of its urban location at the convergence of smaller streets with a major avenue. Withers responded by exploiting the scenic potential of the acute angle at Sixth Avenue and West Tenth Street, the point at which the haphazard street pattern of Greenwich Village meets the gridiron of upper Manhattan..... Withers created a landmark that still impresses today in its greatly changed surroundings."<sup>1</sup>

Nearby, designed at about the same time, is Withers' only cast-iron building. Located at 448 Broome Street, this Gothic store is discussed in the SoHo Historic District report.

The flamboyant facade was noted by Montgomery Schuyler in American Architecture and produced an amusing anecdote concerning the ubiquitous gray paint that often covered city buildings inside and out: "It seems impossible to keep the painter away from public works. Mr. Withers came to me once in much distress to know if I had no "influence" which would thwart the project of which he had heard of painting the brickwork of the Jefferson Market Court House, then just beginning to take " a plausible aspect of moderate antiquity" and to weather into mellowness. I managed to meet the official custodian of the building, who informed me that it was quite true that he was going to have the front painted, but that he was going to do it simply out of the interest and pride which he felt in the building, which he regarded as "shabby." When I asked him whether he thought he felt more interest in the appearance of the building than its architect, his answer was, "Aw, that dingy look may do for London, but it won't do for New York," and "freshened up" the poor front accordingly was."<sup>2</sup>

In 1967, a refurbished building reopened, after many years of misuse and neglect, as a branch library of the New York Public Library. The remodeling was skillfully executed by Giorgio Cavaglieri, architect.

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<sup>1</sup>Kowsky, Francis R., The Architecture of Frederick C. Withers, JSAH Vol. XXXV No. 2, May 1976, pp. 98-101.

<sup>2</sup>Schuyler, Montgomery, American Architecture, edited by William Jordy and Ralph Coe Belknap Press, Harvard, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1961, pp. 180-181.

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Number 2, pp. 83-107.

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"Contracts Are Let to Convert Court," The New York Times, November 25, 1964,  
p. 61.

"Court House, Bell Tower and Prison, Third Judicial District, New York,"  
The New-York Sketch-Book of Architecture, II.

"The Third District Court-House, Bell Tower, and Prison, New York,"  
The American Architect and Building News, III (June 15, 1878),  
209 and one plate.

"Village Loves Its 'Old Jeff,' Red Face, Balky Clock and All," New York  
World Telegram, September 6, 1961.

"'Villagers' Fight to Save Building," The New York Times, February 19, 1961.