

**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

For HCRS use only

received FEB 29 1980

date entered APR 23 1980

1. Name

historic Public Baths

and/or common

2. Location

street & number Asser Levy Place and East 23rd St. not for publication

city, town New York vicinity of congressional district 18

state New York code 036 county New York code 061

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Gordon Davis, Commissioner, Dept. of Parks and Recreation

street & number 830 Fifth Avenue

city, town New York vicinity of state New York

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. New York County Register's Office

street & number 31 Chambers Street

city, town New York state New York

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title LP-0842
Landmarks Preservation Commission has this property been determined eligible? yes X no

date March 19, 1974 federal state county X local

depository for survey records 305 Broadway

city, town New York state New York

7. Description

Condition

☐ excellent
☐ good
☒ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Public Baths occupies the southern end of the shady block east of Asser Levy Place between East 23rd and 25th Streets.¹ The park-like setting is surrounded by modern high-rises, commercial structures and the East River. Built by the City of New York between 1904 and 1906, it was designed by architects Arnold W. Brunner and William M. Aiken in the neo-Classical style.

This one-story red brick building with its limestone base and ornamental details is roughly cross shaped in plan. The entrance block faces Asser Levy Place. Its front facade is strikingly accented by four pairs of freestanding columns which flank two entrances—one for each sex. The two entrance doors are crowned by triangular pediments with shield motifs and carried on scrolled brackets. Each door is set into a large, arched opening enframed in stone with a scrolled keystone. Multi-paned windows with diagonal muntins fill the arch above and flanking each door. The center of the facade, between paired columns, is accented by a fountain set in a niche. Above the fountain are three horizontal bands of stonework simulating falling water surmounted by an arch containing an elaborate scallop shell.

The facade is surmounted by a full entablature with modillioned cornice, decorated frieze, and shallow architrave. It comes forward above the paired columns and is crowned by urns, one above each column. The frieze contains the inscription "Free Public Baths, City of New York" above the arches. This section of the building is surmounted by a roof balustrade with paneled blocks above the columns. A large, swag-decorated shield, containing the emblem of the City of New York, rises above the balustrade over the fountain at the center of the facade.

The side facades of the entrance block contain round-arched window openings with paneled brickwork beneath them. The side wings of the building, which contain showers and dressing rooms, have similar round-arched windows. They are also surmounted by simple dentilled roof cornices. The rear wing, which contains the swimming pool, is simpler in style. The center of the cruciform building has a gable-ended copper roof with skylights of copper and galvanized iron. Similar skylights also crown both the men's and women's locker rooms, though here they are a quarter of the size of that above the pool.

Mahogany and glass revolving doors lead into the main entrance hall. This large, open space rises a full two stories and is crowned with a vaulted ceiling. Originally this space was divided in the center, providing separate waiting rooms for men and women. From these segregated waiting rooms bathers would pass into the locker rooms, located in the side wings of the building. When the bath house was designed in 1904,

(See continuation sheet)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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Public Baths

CONTINUATION SHEET New York County ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

the women's locker room was equipped with showers and bath tubs. In 1906, the bathtubs were removed and more showers were added. The women's dressing area is divided into rows by numerous aisles of individual dressing booths of white marble. The men's locker room is a large open space articulated by marble and wooden benches. The walls are covered in smooth white marble in both dressing rooms. The floors of both locker rooms have the original marble flooring, laid in a grey and white checkerboard pattern.

The natatorium is the largest room in the bathhouse, rising over three stories to a gabled roof covered almost entirely by the large skylight. Both the lowest ten feet of the walls and the deck is covered with ceramic tiles. The swimming pool was enlarged in 1906 to nearly 25 yards in length, and is surrounded by the narrow pool deck. A bronze lion's head painted silver provides jets of water which fill the pool. On the second story of the eastern gable end is broad balcony from which one can view the swimmers. The walls at the balcony and above are of smooth brick. Enormous steel girders, which support the skylight and roof, spring from the lateral walls to the ceiling, supported by heavy stone modillions.

In the early 1960s, a diving and a swimming pool were installed outdoors, in the triangular parcel of land east of the bathhouse. A plain stone fence encloses these two pools, hiding them from the street. More recently, a wading pool was built in the center of the tree-lined park, north of the public baths. Also enclosed by a fence, this shallow pool is completely hidden from view due to the careful landscaping. All three pools are constructed of concrete, fiberglass and tile. These modern pools are included in this nomination, but are not significant.

¹The text of this report was taken almost in its entirety from the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission Designation Report, Public Baths (LP-0842), March 19, 1974, by Marjorie Pearson.

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	☒ architecture	☐ education	☐ military	☒ social/
☐ 1700-1799	☐ art	☐ engineering	☐ music	☐ humanitarian
☐ 1800-1899	☐ commerce	☐ exploration/settlement	☐ philosophy	☐ theater
☒ 1900-	☐ communications	☐ industry	☐ politics/government	☐ transportation
		☐ invention		☐ other (specify)

Specific dates 1904-06 **Builder/Architect** Brunner & Aiken

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Public Baths at Asser Levy Place is one of the few remaining public bathhouses in Manhattan, and the only one still operated as such by the City of New York. The New York State Law of 1895, Chapter 351, established free public baths in all major cities in the state. This act was the first of its kind in the United States. The Public Baths at Asser Levy Place was the largest free public bath ever built under this law as well as being the most elaborate in design. Furthermore, the Public Baths is an exceptional example of a building in the neo-Classical style.

Public baths were a necessity for many New York City residents during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The area of Manhattan north of City Hall to 23rd Street and east to the river had an extremely high population density. The residents of this area were housed in overcrowded tenements which for the most part contained no bathing facilities. In the majority of these tenement houses, hot water was not provided, and their occupants could use only the city's river baths for bathing, available only a few months a year.

Until the turn of the century,

luxuriously appointed public baths in costly monumental buildings were intended more for well-to-do people, and were not at all adapted for the requirements of the working classes. And while wealthy women often had ample bathing facilities at home or could find them at the expensive Turkish bath establishments, the needs of the working women... were often forgotten. Both men and women of the poorer classes of the population were debarred from using the public bathing establishments by the price charged for a bath, as well as by other reasons. ¹

In April, 1895, the New York State Legislature passed a bill which provided for the establishment of free public baths in cities and towns of the state.² The act, known as Chapter 351, Laws of 1895, established that public baths would be maintained by the Board of Health and that both hot and cold water would be provided. It also clearly stated that river or ocean baths would not be deemed a compliance with the requirements of the law.

The Public Baths at East 23rd Street and Asser Levy Place was the largest and most impressive bathing establishment built in the City of

(See continuation sheet)

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Brooklyn

UTM NOT VERIFIED
ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	8	5	8	6	4	4	1	0	4	5	0	9	7	3	0
Zone			Easting						Northing						

B

Zone			Easting						Northing						

C

Zone			Easting						Northing						

D

Zone			Easting						Northing						

E

Zone			Easting						Northing						

F

Zone			Easting						Northing						

G

Zone			Easting						Northing						

H

Zone			Easting						Northing						

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property occupies Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 981, Lot 2 and is roughly 295' X 455' in size (see attached site map)

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

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

Holly Huckins, Research Consultant for

name/title Joan Olshansky
National Register Coordinator

Contact: Elizabeth Spencer-Ralph
(518) 474-0479

organization Landmarks Preservation Commission date October, 1979

street & number 305 Broadway telephone (212) 566-7977

city or town New York 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Director, Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau date 2/28/80

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

for Bruce Van Donge date April 23, 1980
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: Lynn D. Belbe date April 17, 1980

Chief of Registration

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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Public Baths New York County ITEM NUMBER 8

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CONTINUATION SHEET

New York. An unusual characteristic for a City-built bathhouse is its extremely decorative facade. Up to this time, the city had always stated that the exteriors of the bathhouses should be simple, but reasonably attractive, and permanent in character. The building was to "be easily recognizable in order to be readily found, but all outward display of lavishness in the architecture was to be avoided, as it would only keep the poor people away."³ However, for the East 23rd Street Bathhouse the architects, Brunner & Aiken, appropriately felt that since it was a distant descendant of the famous Roman baths, this 20th-century version should be in a neo-Classical Roman style. This extravagant facade reflects the city government's change in point of view towards such serious municipal undertakings as public baths. This change in outlook was partially due to the City Beautiful movement current at the time.

The plan and layout of the Asser Levy Place Public Baths is grandiose in scheme. It was one of the first city bathhouses to provide both bathing facilities and a recreational swimming pool. The locker rooms introduced several innovative features of modern technology. This public bath originally contained 155 shower compartments, or "rain baths" as they were then known. "This novelty... consisted of an inclined overhead tepid spray in place of the tub. It was not strictly new as it had previously been used in prisons and military barracks."⁴ This form of body cleansing was the most economical and hygienic method devised, and by 1906 most public baths had totally eliminated the installation of bath tubs in the men's quarters. When the designs for the bathhouse were first being drawn up, the women's shower room had five tub baths in addition to the showers, but by 1906 these were removed and more showers were added. In addition to the bathing facilities, automatic flushing toilets and urinals were provided. An unusual feature in this bathhouse is the use of marble partitions, wall coverings and flooring instead of the traditional galvanized corrugated iron that had been "enameled." Unlike any other New York City public bath, this one had a natatorium, a separate room with a swimming pool shared by members of both sexes, unlike the "plunge" baths⁵ which were exiled to locker rooms. The swimming pool was a non-cleansing pool--no soap was allowed-- and it was considered a luxury. The building cost \$273,052 on completion in 1906--\$136,747 more than any other public bath built by the city.

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Public Baths
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The public baths at Asser Levy Place were not the first baths to be designed by the architects, Brunner & Aiken. In 1905, Arnold W. Brunner had designed the public baths on East 11th Street in New York City. This neo-Georgian style municipal building contained 103 showers and cost \$42,000 to build. William Aiken came to New York City, after working in H.H. Richardson's office, as the Consulting Architect for the Borough of Manhattan. Here, while working on the designs for municipal structures, he met Brunner. Brunner and Aiken joined forces for the public baths at Asser Levy Place, which was to be one of their few joint efforts.

Today the public baths at Asser Levy Place still serves its community as a bathhouse and public pool, and is administered by the Department of Parks and Recreation for the City of New York.

¹William Paul Gerhard, Modern Baths and Bath Houses (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1908), p.72.

²This law was advocated and persistently pushed by Mr. Goodwin Brown, a former member of the New York State Lunacy Commission, and to him great credit is due for having secured the first legislation on the subjects of baths ever in this country.

³Gerhard, p.74.

⁴Ibid., p.76.

⁵Plunge baths were unheated, non-cleansing swimming pools, often rather small, and intended for "a quick plunge" after one's hot bath or shower. The first bathhouse in New York City to have a plunge bath as well as shower was the East 78th Street bathhouse in John Jay Park, built in 1905. In 1906 the Public Bath on West 60th Street was also built with a plunge bath.

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Public Baths

CONTINUATION SHEET

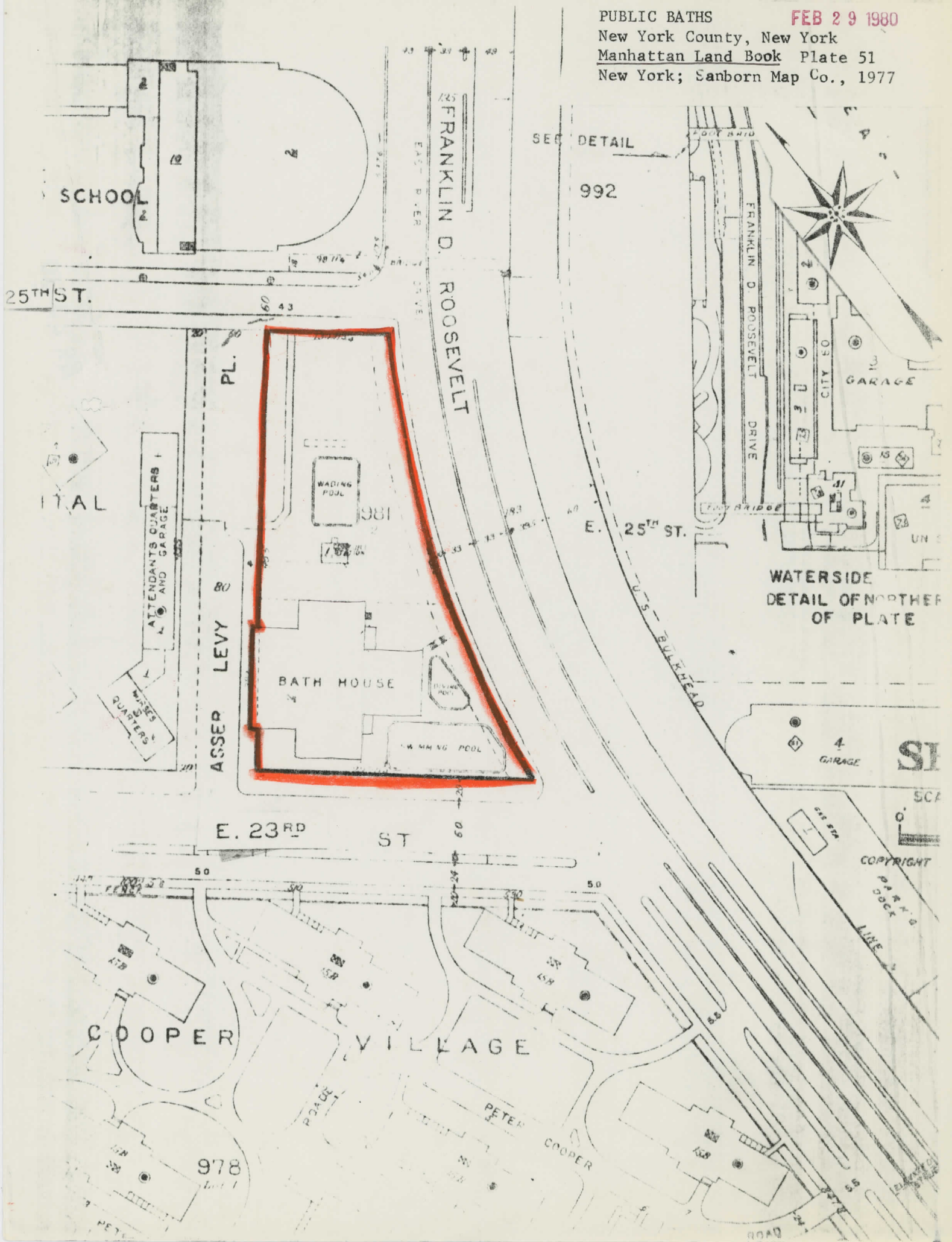
New York County NM NUMBER 9

PAGE 1

Gerhard, William Paul. Modern Baths and Bath Houses. New York:
John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1908.

Landmarks Preservation Commission. Landmarks Preservation Commission
Designation Report (LP-0842), by Marjorie Pearson.
New York: City of New York. March 19, 1974.

Tauranac, John. Essential New York. New York: Holt, Rinehart &
Winston, 1979.



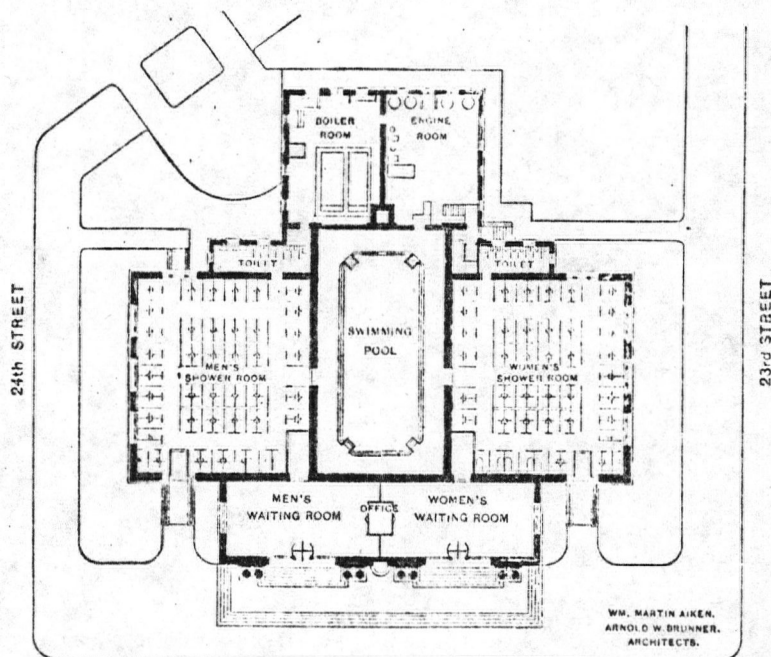


FIG. 39. PLAN OF 23D STREET PEOPLE'S BATH HOUSE, IN NEW YORK CITY.

WILLIAM MARTIN AIKEN and
ARNOLD WILLIAM BRUNNER's 1904 PLANS FOR THE
23rd STREET PEOPLE'S BATH HOUSE, in
NEW YORK CITY

From:

Modern Baths and Bath Houses, by William Paul
Gerhard. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.,
1908.) Fig. 39, page 108.

Public Baths
New York
New York County

80002709

Property Public Baths

State NY - New York

Working Number 2-29-80665

TECHNICAL

CONTROL

Photos 3

Maps 2

HISTORIAN

Among a limited number of turn of the century public bathhouses ~~westside~~ extant in Manhattan, the Public Baths at A. Levy Place are an intact example of small-scale Beaux Arts design + period public architecture, and are associated with the turn of the century extension of municipal services to meet the needs of the working classes in the city - services that had previously been available only to the wealthy who could generate their own facilities.

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN

Accept
L. Beale
4/17/80

ARCHEOLOGIST

OTHER

HAER

Inventory _____

Review _____

REVIEW UNIT CHIEF

Accept
L. Beale
4/17/80

BRANCH CHIEF

KEEPER

National Register Write-up _____
Federal Register Entry 2.3.81

Send-back _____
Re-submit _____

Entered APR 23 1980



I. Public Baths

Asser Levy Place and East 23rd Street

New York, New York *County*

Photo by: Stephen L. Senigo *1979*

Neg. at New York City Landmarks . . .

Preservation Commission

View of front facade from northwest

APR 23 1980 FEB 29 1980

1 of 3



2. Public Baths

Asser Levy Place and East 23rd Street
New York, New York *County*

Photo by: Stephen L. Senigo *1979*

Neg. at New York City Landmarks

Preservation Commission

View of Public Baths from Northeast

APR 23 1980

FEB 29 1980

2083



3. Public Baths

Asser Levy Place and East 23rd Street
New York, New York *County*

Photo by: Holly Huckins 1979

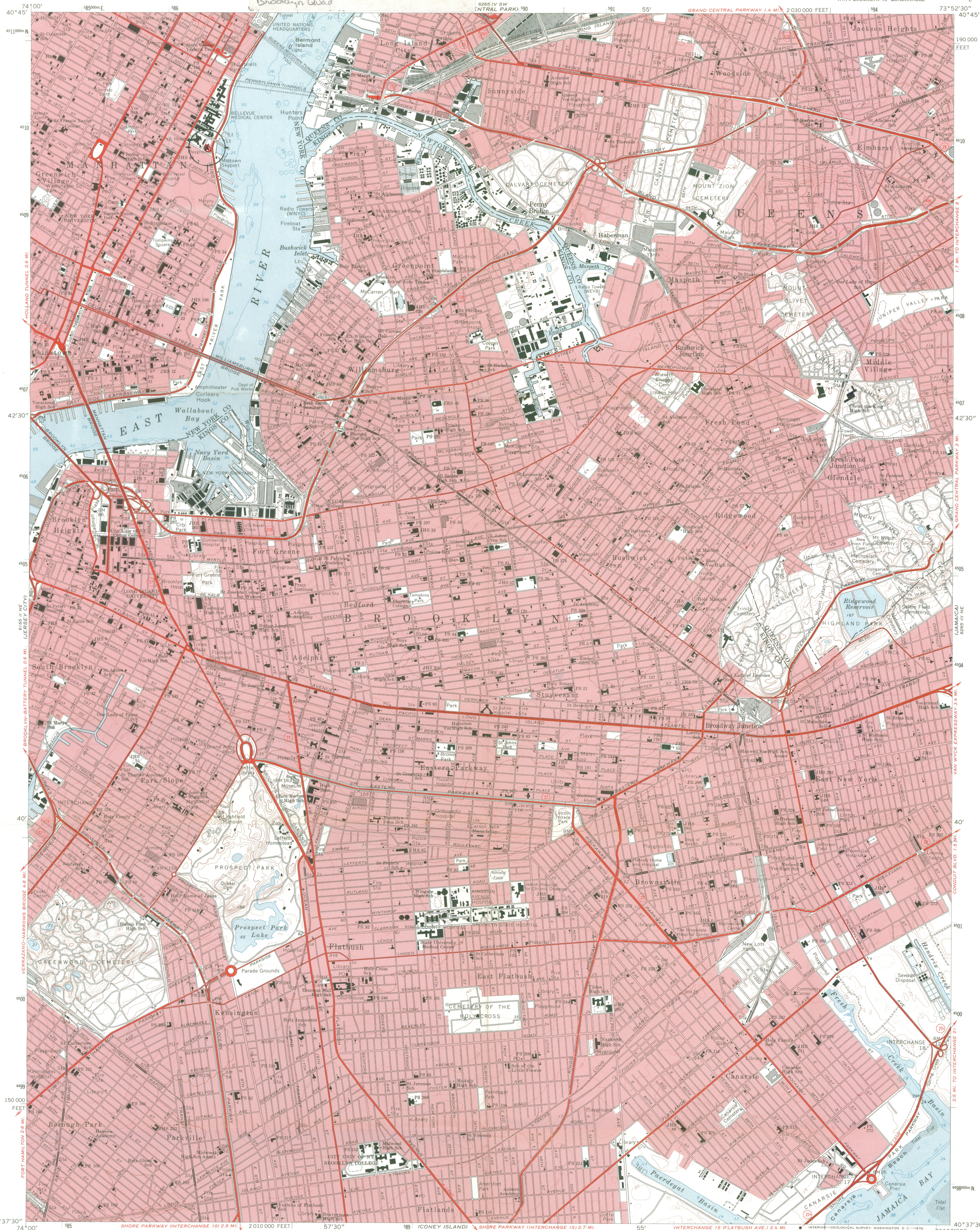
Neg. at New York City Landmarks
Preservation Commission

View of interior; natatorium

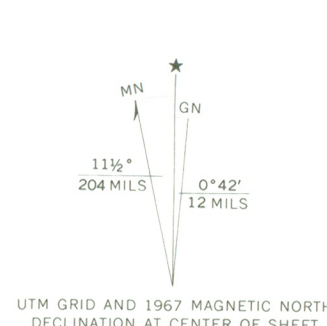
APR 23 1980

FEB 29 1980

3073



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Revised in cooperation with New York Department of Transportation
Control by USGS, USC&GS, USCE, and City of New York Board of
Estimate and Apportionment
Planimetry by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs
taken 1954, and from USC&GS Charts T-5094, T-5335, T-5454
T-5459, T-5460, and T-8449
Topography by planetable surveys 1955-1956. Revised from
aerial photographs taken 1966. Field checked 1967
Selected hydrographic data compiled from USC&GS Charts
275 (1964), 542 (1967), and 745 (1967). This information
is not intended for navigational purposes
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grid based on New York coordinate system, Long Island zone
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 18, shown in blue
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown
Entire area lies within New York City



SCALE 1:24,000
1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 FEET
1 KILOMETER
CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
DOTTED LINES REPRESENT 5-FOOT CONTOURS
DATUM IS MEAN SEA LEVEL
DEPTH CURVES AND SOUNDINGS IN FEET—DATUM IS MEAN LOW WATER
SHORELINE SHOWN REPRESENTS THE APPROXIMATE LINE OF MEAN HIGH WATER
THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY 4.2 FEET IN THE EAST RIVER
AND 5.2 FEET IN JAMAICA BAY
THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20242
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty ——— Light-duty
Interstate Route ——— State Route

BROOKLYN, N. Y.
NW/4 BROOKLYN 15' QUADRANGLE
N4037.5—W7352.5/7.5

1967

AMS 6265 III NW—SERIES V821

APR 23 1980

ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE NEW YORK

Date Entered APR 2-3 1980

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>
Old Colony Club	New York New York County
Town Hall	New York New York County
Old Grolier Club	New York New York County
Public Baths	New York New York County

Also Notified

For further information, please call the National Register at (202)343-6401.

ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE NEW YORK

Date Entered

APR 23 1980

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>
Belnord Apartments	New York New York County
Schinasi House	New York New York County
Ponckhockie Union Chapel	Kingston Ulster County
Addison Village Hall	Addison Steuben County
Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society	Buffalo Erie County
St. Jean Baptiste Church and Rectory	New York New York County
Bouwerie Lane Theater	New York New York County
Bowery Savings Bank	New York New York County
Chanin Building	New York New York County

Also Notified

Honorable Ted Weiss
Honorable Hamilton Fish, Jr.
Honorable Stanley N. Lundine
Honorable Henry J. Nowak
Honorable S. William Green

For further information, please call the National Register at (202)343-6401.

ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE NEW YORK

Date Entered

APR 23 1980

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>
St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church	New York New York County
Moore-McMillen House	Staten Island Richmond County
Building at 85 Leonard Street	New York New York County
Reformed Church of Newton Complex	Elmhurst Queens County
New York, Westchester and Boston Railroad Administration Building	Bronx Bronx County
St. Bartholomew's Protestant Episcopal Church and Rectory	Brooklyn Kings County
Hanson Place Seventh Day Adventist Church	Brooklyn Kings County
Union Theological Seminary	New York New York County
Bailey House	New York New York County

Also Notified

Honorable Daniel P. Moynihan

Honorable Jacob K. Javits

Honorable John M. Murphy

Honorable Benjamin S. Rosenthal

Honorable Mario Biaggi

Honorable Frederick W. Richmond

Honorable Charles B. Rangel

State Historic Preservation Officer

Mr. Orin Lehman

Commissioner

Parks and Recreation

Agency Building #1

Empire State Plaza

Albany, New York 12238

4/30/80

Byers/bjr

NR

For further information, please call the National Register at (202)343-6401.