

QUEENS GENERAL COURT HOUSE, 88-11 Sutphin Boulevard, (aka 88-01 to 88-33 Sutphin Boulevard, 147-02 to 147-28 88th Avenue, 147-01 89th Avenue, 88-02 to 88-34 148th Street), Queens. Built 1936-39, architects Alfred H. Eccles and William Welles Knowles

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 9691, Lot 1

On Feb 9, 2010, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Queens General Court House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. A total of five witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of the Department of Citywide Administrative Services, the owner of the building; the Historic Districts Council; the Central Queens Historical Society; the Queensborough Preservation League; and the Four Borough Neighborhood Preservation Alliance. The Commission has received letters in support of the designation from Queens Borough President Helen Marshall, State Senator Shirley Huntley, and the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation. There were no speakers or letters in opposition to the designation.

Summary

The Queens General Court House is a grand, Modern Classic, Depression-era monument built between 1937 and 1939, with payment split between City funds and a Federal grant from the Public Works Administration. Mayor LaGuardia laid the cornerstone in 1937, and presided over the building's dedication in 1939. The new courthouse was considered a major public improvement, and convenience for the borough of Queens, consolidating various court facilities in downtown Jamaica. The building originally housed the offices of the Queens County Clerk, the City Court, the Supreme Court and the Surrogate's Court, and was meant to handle all the civil cases in Queens.



The Modern Classical style was selected for this building because it was thought to express the dignity and majesty of the law. An excellent example of the style, the E-shaped seven-story building is faced with Alabama limestone and is articulated with neo-Classical ornament. Following a long-standing tradition for courthouses, its most prominent feature is a two-and-one-half-story colonnaded portico fronted by a grand staircase. At the center of the portico the three arched entrances retain their original bronze coffered doors and are edged with bronze sculptural panels depicting famous lawgivers. Other notable features include the heavy bracketed cornices, balustraded balconies, stylized swagged relief panels, and shallow window surrounds.

Architects Alfred H. Eccles and William W. Knowles were Queens residents with architectural practices in Long Island City who had designed a number of prominent Queens buildings. In 1938, shortly before it opened, the building was awarded first prize in the public buildings classification in the Queens Chamber of Commerce's Best Buildings of the Year competition. The building's skillfully composed facades, handsome detailing, and the power of its monumental portico make it one of finest and most imposing public buildings in Queens.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Development of Jamaica¹

Historically an important crossroads of Long Island, the area of downtown Jamaica developed as a result of its central location and extensive transportation systems. Around 1836, the Long Island Rail Road, which had been incorporated in 1834, began running a trunk line from the foot of Atlantic Avenue to Jamaica and then eastward from Jamaica to eastern Long Island, making Jamaica a pivotal hub. This improved transportation encouraged non-agricultural business activity in the Jamaica area; industrial enterprises sprang up along the railroad, particularly after 1850 when the former toll road of the Brooklyn, Jamaica & Flatbush Turnpike Company was sold to a group of Jamaica businessmen who incorporated as the Jamaica & Brooklyn Plank Road Company. Following the Civil War, new modes of transportation continued to transform Jamaica by further facilitating commutation to New York City. The East New York & Jamaica Railroad Company established horse car lines along Fulton Street (renamed Jamaica Avenue in 1920) in 1866 replacing them 21 years later with electric trolleys.

The 19th century saw Jamaica evolve into a retreat for urban residents, who patronized its numerous inns and saloons on weekend excursions and built large summer homes. The permanent population of Jamaica also increased steadily throughout the second half of the 19th century, and brought with it the subdivision of farms into house lots and a proliferation of new development, as well as the growth of Jamaica's downtown. The pressure for housing increased, resulting in street regularization and somewhat denser residential development following the incorporation of Queens into the City of New York in 1898. The 1901 *Atlas of the Borough of Queens* shows two- and three-story brick and frame structures clustered along Fulton Street and freestanding frame houses and stables, on lots mostly ranging from 50 to 100 feet in width, in the surrounding streets.

In 1898 Fulton Street, under the jurisdiction of the local government, was widened and repaved. Local business and political leaders seized the opportunity to praise the numerous advantages of Jamaica—a place with a traditional village character, yet poised to enter a new age—in an effort to encourage commerce, promote residential development, and raise property values.² The perceived positive impact of the impending consolidation was declared by one source in 1894: “The days of Greater New York can now be seen not very far ahead, when Jamaica will naturally form the most eastern point to which the consolidated elevated railroad can be expected to run ... very likely before the end of this [century].”³

Although it would be 1918 before the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company extended its elevated train service from Cypress Hills to 168th Street along Fulton Street, the decade before World War I saw several other significant transportation improvements. The Long Island Rail Road was electrified in 1905-08 followed by the opening of the railroad tunnels beneath the East River in 1910 enabling direct access between Pennsylvania Station and the towns of Long Island with a major hub in Jamaica. Surface transportation to Queens was further enhanced by the opening of the Queensborough Bridge in 1909. With this improved accessibility to Jamaica's downtown, the population of Jamaica quadrupled between 1900 and 1920 and by 1925 the lots on Jamaica Avenue between 160th and 168th Streets had the highest assessed valuation in Queens County.⁴ During the 1920s and 30s several major office and commercial structures including the J. Kurtz & Sons Store (1931, Allmendiger & Schlendorf), the former Suffolk Title and Guarantee Company Building (1929, Dennison & Hiron) (both designated New York City

Landmarks) and the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce Building (1928-29, George W. Conable of Conable, Smith & Rowley) had joined the former Jamaica Savings Bank (1897-98, Hough & Duell, a designated New York City Landmark).

Queens Courthouses and the Construction of the Queens General Court House⁵

The county seat and court buildings were established in Jamaica by the British in 1666, moved by the Americans to Mineola in the 1780s following the Revolution, and then moved to Long Island City in 1870, where a new Second Empire style courthouse was constructed on Court Square (now New York State Supreme Court, Queens County, Long Island Branch, 1872-1876, George Hathorne, a designated New York City Landmark). This building was greatly enlarged (Peter M. Coco, 1904-08) following a fire in 1903 and two former town halls — Jamaica Town Hall at Jamaica Avenue and Parsons Boulevard (1870, demolished) and Flushing Town Hall on Northern Boulevard (1862, a designated New York City Landmark) were turned over to the court system following Consolidation. Queens's population, however, expanded rapidly in the early 20th century and by the end of World War I the demand for courtrooms had grown "beyond all belief."⁶ According to the *Long Island Press*,

Early in the 20's, even before Queens had launched the period of its greatest growth, there was agitation for a courthouse. Every community wanted the structure within its immediate confines. Long Island City could not see why the courthouse should not be built there. Elmhurst, claiming better transportation facilities, had a site or two to suggest. Jamaica, pointing to the fact that it was the heart of the borough from every viewpoint, urged that the courts be centralized there.⁷

By 1929, city officials had agreed to erect a new courthouse and several sites in Jamaica were under consideration. However, in February 1930 Queens Borough President George U. Harvey proposed a more ambitious scheme incorporating the new courthouse into a larger civic center to be located on the campus of the Parental School (now Queens College).⁸ Most community leaders and the Bar Association of Queens were convinced that the civic center project was too costly and the location too far from public transportation to be feasible and the proposal met with a storm of protest.

In the meantime the congestion in the courts increased. In the early 1930s, the Magistrate's Court and Municipal Court were in the Town Hall in Jamaica, the Children's Court was on Union Hall Street, the Surrogate's Court on Fulton Street in Jamaica, the Court of Special Sessions shared quarters with the Queens Department of Sanitation, and the Special Term of the Supreme Court met in a rented room in the Chamber of Commerce Building in Jamaica that was often compared to a bowling alley.⁹ Justices began giving press conferences voicing their frustration with their inadequate courtrooms.¹⁰ In 1934 a Queens County grand jury handed up a presentment condemning the County Court's quarters in Long Island City as a "firetrap."¹¹ These complaints together with the constant lobbying of County Judge Charles S. Colden, president of the Queens Bar Association, convinced Mayor LaGuardia to move forward on the courthouse project.

As soon as the project seemed to be going forward, various communities once again began lobbying for the courthouse to be built in their neighborhoods. Mayor LaGuardia "realizing that the hopeless confusion would continue unless some order was established,"

appointed a judicial committee headed by Supreme Court Justice Burt Jay Humphrey to pick the site.¹² In May 1935 the committee recommended a 96,000 square foot plot owned by the Brooklyn Catholic Diocese, on Sutphin Boulevard between 88th and 89th Avenues. This was considered an ideal location because of “its proximity to the shopping center, to Jamaica Station of the Long Island Railroad and to the proposed station of the Queens Boulevard subway at Sutphin Boulevard and Hillside Avenues.”¹³ Moreover the full-block site had the advantage of being vacant, most recently having been used as an athletic field.

Mayor LaGuardia intended to fund the courthouse project through a combination of grants and guaranteed loans from the Public Works Administration and to use Works Project Administration labor. The PWA gave preliminary approval in July 1935, but in September rejected the project because it did not provide enough “man-hours of work” relative to the cost of land and materials. Over the next year LaGuardia lobbied forcefully in Washington for the project, which he labeled “Queens Project No. 1 and second in the city only to the proposed Criminal Court Building in Manhattan.” After the City made some adjustments in the financing of the project, on July 19, 1936 it was announced that the PWA had awarded the City a grant of \$2,175,930 towards the cost of construction for the Queens courthouse.¹⁴ In late August the mayor convened a special meeting of the Board of Estimate to approve the plans and specifications for the courthouse the design of which had already been approved by the Art Commission. Part of the approval was for the contract for \$157,218 for architectural services from Alfred H. Eccles and William W. Knowles of Long Island City who had drafted the preliminary sketches for the courthouse in 1935.¹⁵ In May 1937 the general construction contract was awarded to John J. Kennedy & Co., Inc., of Manhattan. A cornerstone-laying ceremony took place in October 1937. In December 1938, the nearly completed courthouse building won first prize in the public buildings classification in the Queens Chamber of Commerce’s Best Buildings of the Year competition.¹⁶ The building opened March 1, 1939 with a dedication ceremony organized by the Queens County Bar Association at which Mayor LaGuardia was the principal speaker.¹⁷ Before a crowd of about 4,000 LaGuardia touted the savings of \$102,000 per year in rentals that would be realized by the concentration of all civil courts and offices in the new courthouse and enumerated a number of other civic improvements in Queens¹⁸ Among these improvements were the Triborough Bridge (1936), the municipal Independent (Eighth Avenue) Subway (completed 1937), the Queens-Midtown Tunnel (completed 1939), the North Beach (now LaGuardia) Airport, Queens General Hospital (1931-35), and Flushing Meadow Parks, and a host of public schools, playgrounds, and parkways.¹⁹ This new government-funded construction together with the work going forward on the World’s Fair led LaGuardia to dub Queens “the most promising borough” and allowed the Queens Chamber of Commerce to proclaim Queens “the greatest center of building activity in the world.”²⁰

Alfred H. Eccles and William Wells Knowles

Alfred H. Eccles (1888-1961) was born in Astoria.²¹ He trained as an architect and engineer and by 1910 was employed as a draftsman at an architectural terra cotta firm. Later he was an inspector for the Queens Department of Buildings.²² Around 1919 he established an architectural practice in Queens. He had numerous commissions between the late 1920s and the early 1950s and seems to have specialized in the construction of industrial and commercial

buildings, for which his knowledge of civil engineering would have been an asset.²³ In addition to Queens General Court House, his notable commissions included the Chatwick Garden Apartments at 68-04 Burns Avenue in Forest Hills (1928-29), the synagogue and Hebrew school for Congregation Beth El in Astoria (1935), the Grosvenor Square Apartments in Forest Hills Gardens (as an associate architect), and an office building on Northern Boulevard at 127th Street in Flushing (1949), which won a medal for excellence in design from the Queens Chamber of Commerce. He was also responsible for two neo-Romanesque apartment buildings at 82-02 and 82-16 34th Avenue (1929-30; within the Jackson Heights Historic District) and “many fashionable homes in Old Westbury, Valley Stream, and Jackson Heights.”²⁴ Although semi-retired in the late 1950s he continued to practice until his death.

Eccles was an expert on the building code and served as an advisor to the Department of Buildings and as Chair of the code committee of the Real Estate Board of Long Island. He was also active in the New York Society of Architects, where he sat on several committees and held various offices, including president (1941).²⁵

William Welles Knowles (1871-1944) was born in Harlem.²⁶ He attended City College and earned a diploma in architectural drafting from the Metropolitan Museum Art School. He worked briefly as a draftsman in the offices of Richard M. Hunt. In 1893 he left for Europe where he traveled extensively and in 1895 enrolled in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, studying in the atelier of Henri Deglane. In 1896 Knowles returned to New York and opened an office in Manhattan. One of his first commissions was for the Harlem YWCA Building at 124th Street, near Lenox Avenue.²⁷ Around 1908 he became associated with the Madison Square Garden Corporation. He was responsible for exterior alterations to the original Madison Square Garden building and served as the chief designer for the National Automobile shows held in the hall between 1908 and 1911. Knowles and his wife Suzanne moved to Flushing around 1903. Although his office remained in Manhattan through 1919, his commissions were increasingly in Queens and Nassau Counties. Notable projects included a sprawling Colonial Revival mansion in Kissena Park for developer John W. Paris (c. 1910, demolished) and substations and office buildings for the New York & Queens Electric Light & Power Company (c. 1916-20). In the 1920s Knowles designed the Flushing Terminal Building (1928), and the Bank of the Manhattan Building, Flushing. Later works included the neo-Georgian Flushing Post Office (1932, in association with Dwight James Baum), an alternative proposal for the Queens Civic Center (1934, unbuilt), and buildings for Parsons Hospital, Flushing (1935-36).

Knowles became a member of the Society of Beaux Arts Architects in 1896. He contributed several design problems for the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design competitions and served on a number of juries at the school. He was very interested in issues of urban design and planning and, with architect Theobald Englehardt, was responsible for forming a committee at the Queensborough Chamber of Commerce charged with fostering good design on Queens Boulevard.²⁸ In addition to his membership in the Chamber of Commerce, where he rose to the position of vice-president, Knowles was active in several other local organizations.²⁹ In 1934 Mayor LaGuardia appointed Knowles as his special consultant on architectural matters in Queens, a position which Knowles continued to hold until his death in 1944.

Prior to their collaboration on the courthouse project Eccles and Knowles maintained independent practices.³⁰ In 1935 Eccles moved his office to 1 Bridge Plaza North, where Knowles had had his office since the mid-1920s. Published drawings and early newspaper

accounts identify Eccles as the architect of the courthouse and Knowles as associate architect. A commemorative tablet in the lobby gives equal credit to both architects as do later newspaper accounts and journals. Following the completion of the courthouse, Eccles kept his office at 1 Bridge Plaza North. It has not been determined whether the two architects shared office space or had separate offices in the same building (they had different phone numbers). It does not appear that they collaborated on any other projects.

The Design of the Queens General Court House

One of the most imposing buildings in Queens, the General Court House is an excellent example of the American Modern Classical design of the 1920s and 30s.³¹ Architects working in this style sought to create a modern interpretation of classical architecture drawing on “the alphabet of forms that the world has known and loved for hundreds of years”³² while meeting modern needs and using modern technology. In contrast to the earlier phase of the Classical Revival, which emphasized careful copying of historic sources, Modern Classicism took a much freer approach to historic models, abstracting and simplifying classical motifs and using them with great restraint. The style also placed great emphasis on abstract design, massing, and the arrangement of shapes and forms. Classical architecture was particularly prized for its “serenity and dignity” and magazine articles that appeared when this building opened indicated that the Modern Classic style was chosen because it was the “most appropriate to express the dignity and majesty of the law to be administered in this new court house.”³³

The image of a classically-inspired temple-fronted courthouse was a familiar one. Courthouses had first been built in this country in great numbers in the 1820s and 1830s, when the Greek Revival style was at its height.³⁴ These buildings, including surviving examples such as Robert Mills’ U.S. Courthouse and Customs House, Wilmington, North Carolina (1823-24) and the Third Richmond County Courthouse, Staten Island, New York (1837, a designated New York City Landmark), featured free-standing columned porticos with pediments, creating a paradigm for the courthouse building type.³⁵ In the second half of the 19th century, when styles such as the Gothic Revival and the Richardsonian Romanesque predominated, new courthouses were built without porticos, but with the advent of the Classical Revival and Colonial Revival styles columned porticos and grand staircases became ubiquitous features of courthouse design. Both styles had associations that were thought to make them particularly suitable for courthouses — the Classical Revival evoked Greek democracy and Roman law and was prized for the sense of ceremony and dignity it imparted — the Colonial Revival style harked back to the early days of the Republic and was considered a natural springboard for the development of a truly American style. New York City possesses some outstanding late 19th and early 20th century Classical Revival courthouses including the Appellate Division Courthouse at 27 Madison Square (James Brown Lord, 1896-99, a designated New York City Landmark), the Richmond County Courthouse at 12-24 Richmond Terrace (Carrère & Hastings, 1913-1919, a designated New York City Landmark), the New York County Courthouse, now the New York State Supreme Court, at 60 Centre Street (Guy Lowell, 1913-27, a designated New York City Landmark), and the United States Courthouse at 1 Foley Square (Cass Gilbert, 1933-36, a designated New York City Landmark). The Colonial Revival style was popular for neighborhood courthouses in the 1920s and 1930s. Examples include the former Bronx

Municipal Courthouse (aka Bronx Traffic Court) 4000 Williamsbridge Road, (Max Hausle, 1926), and the former Ridgewood Court, 6902 64th Street (Thomas C. Rogers, 1929-31). In addition there were two other notable unexecuted neo-Colonial projects for Queens sites during the 1930s — a proposal for a general use courthouse on Sutphin Boulevard (presumably this site) of 1932 by Andrew Jackson Thomas closely based on Independence Hall and a proposal by William W. Knowles for a multi-building Queens Civic Center for a site on Queens Boulevard in Kew Gardens. Illustrated in the architectural journal *Pencil Points* in 1934, Knowles's project was described as being "in the spirit of our best early American architecture, similar to that adopted by the Treasury Department for the rebuilding of the 'Triangle' in Washington, D.C."³⁶

Eccles and Knowles seem to have used Knowles' design for one of the ancillary buildings in the Civic Center complex as a starting point for the General Court House, incorporating the projected corner pavilions, tripartite story groupings, heavy bracketed cornices topped by balustrades, and setback attic capped by a hipped roof of the earlier project. The courthouse is a much larger building with a complex program incorporating 19 courtrooms, judges' chambers, jury rooms, a law library, the County Clerk's Office, the Surrogate's Office, and other functions. The architects addressed these programmatic needs by using an E-shaped plan that provided ample light to the rear courtrooms and space for a ceremonial staircase and elevator bank in the center rear wing. The seven story plus basement structure incorporated three double-height stories with mezzanines (at the second, fourth, and sixth stories) for the balconied Municipal and State Supreme Court courtrooms and the sixth-story law library, which extends along the Sutphin Avenue (western) façade and is expressed by a series of giant arches.

The courthouse was a skeleton-framed steel and concrete structure. It incorporated all of the then most up to date building technologies, including air conditioning for all of the court rooms. In the tradition of the Classical Revival style the courthouse facades are clad with white Alabama limestone above a base of granite. The "uniform cast of the limestone" was thought to be symbolic of "the impartiality of justice to be administered therein."³⁷ The building's most prominent architectural feature, the two-and-one-half-story colonnaded portico fronted by a grand staircase also comes out of the Classical Revival style and was expressive of the building's function as a courthouse. The portico, employing monumental fluted Corinthian columns, a full entablature, pilaster responds, arched openings at the first story and trabeated window openings with stone balustrades at the second story, generally relates to Federal period monuments such as the White House and Capitol Building but seems to be more closely modeled on 18th century French neo-Classical sources, such as Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's courtyard façade for the Hôtel d'Uzès (1769, demolished) and Château de Bènouville (1768). The multi-light windows (replaced) were steel and were articulated in patterns suggestive of 18th century fenestration. The facades are also enriched by swagged sculptural panels, a common motif in both French and American neo-Classical design, here handled in a very abstracted stylized manner. A simple cornice and parapet extend along the seventh-story setback while the façade terminates in a parapet articulated with a simple box cornice of copper and capped with a fascia molding of copper. The windows are profiled by shallow recesses and have slightly projected sills. The arched openings have very flat stylized keystones. This emphasis on flat, planar wall surfaces and simple, stylized classical motifs is typical of Modern Classicism as is skillful interplay of horizontal, vertical, and arched elements. This careful handling of proportions, handsome detailing, and the overwhelming power of the building's monumental staircase and colonnade

contribute to making the Queens General Court House one of the finest and most imposing public buildings in the borough.

Later History

The new courthouse was considered a major public improvement, and convenience, for the borough of Queens, consolidating various court facilities in downtown Jamaica. These included the Civil, Supreme, Small Claim's and the Surrogate's Court, the offices of the District Attorney, the County Clerk, and the Sheriff, and the naturalization, motor vehicle, and marriage bureaus.

In the post-World War period as the population of Queens, Nassau, and Suffolk counties mushroomed, the demands on the Tenth Judicial District of the New York Supreme Court in Jamaica, which served all three counties, greatly increased forcing the court to subdivide courtrooms and take over spaces that had been designed for other purposes. In 1960, the Central Jury Part I, the Small Claims Court, and the Municipal Court moved from this courthouse to rented space on Queens Boulevard and the Queens Bar Association vacated its first floor meeting rooms for a newly erected headquarters building.³⁸ Gradually the General Court House came to be known as the Supreme Court Building. In 1981 Administrative Judge Seymour Boyers gave an interview to the *Daily News* in which he stated that in his opinion, the Queens General Court House was "esthetically and architecturally a landmark not just of the borough and the city, but of the whole nation."³⁹ By 1984 heavy use and deferred maintenance due to the fiscal crisis had taken their toll on the building. An inspection revealed many problems with the roof and a severe crack on the upper penthouse wall that were causing leaks throughout the building.⁴⁰ In 1985 the Department of General Services upgraded the air conditioning and electrical systems, erected a new cooling tower on the roof, and strengthened the supports for the existing tower. In 1988 the elevators were modernized and a masonry structure was constructed at the rear of the building for a trash compactor. By 1989 the windows had been replaced and a tall wrought iron fence had been erected around the perimeter of the property.

DGS commissioned the architectural firm of Gran Sultan Associates, specialists in historic preservation, to begin an extensive restoration of the exterior of this building that commenced in 1996. The scope of work included spot restoration of the exterior masonry, masonry cleaning, replacement of the bird proofing on the portico, re-glazing of the skylights over the stairs, repairs of the elevator penthouses, roof, and flashing. In 1998 a sculptural ensemble by artists Ed McGowin and Claudia DeMonte comprised of a bronze sculpture representing "The Wheel of Justice" and a group of cylindrical concrete benches inscribed with the names of Queens towns was installed in the plaza in front of the courthouse. In 1999, under the auspices of the New York State Dormitory Authority with Henry Spring of WASA Architects in charge, work began on phase 2 of the project of the project, which included a full upgrade of the building systems, interior renovations and construction of new cooling towers and penthouses on the roof. In July 2002 a crane, being used in connection with the renovations, collapsed damaging a portion of the parapet and wall on the projecting two-story wing containing the ceremonial lobby staircase.⁴¹ Due to litigation this damage was not repaired until 2009. Late in 2009 the portion of the perimeter fence in front of the entrance plaza was removed.

Description

The Modern Classic Queens General Court House occupies a full block site, which extends for 336.6 feet along Sutphin Boulevard and 148th Street and 285 feet along 88th and 89th Avenues. The main entrance faces Sutphin Boulevard. The building is set back 80 feet from the curblin and is approached by a paved forecourt flanked on the north and south by lawns surrounded by non-historic iron fences, which extend around the perimeter of the lot. The plaza in front of the building is paved with patterned concrete, an original feature of the design. (The concrete on the north side of the plaza is in poor condition.) At the center of the plaza a bronze sculpture representing “The Wheel of Justice” (1998) rests on a concrete base. Scattered about the plaza are cylindrical concrete benches inscribed with the names of Queens towns, which form part of the sculptural ensemble. Non-historic wrought iron benches are bolted to the sidewalk near the front of the plaza near the fences. Short concrete paths lead from the plaza to original metal flagpoles with sculpted bronze bases decorated with emblems of New York and Federal eagles. The yards flanking the sides of the building and rear yard are used as parking lots. Non-historic security booths have been installed near the northeast and southeast corners of the building. There are currently sidewalk bridges on the portico, at the northeast and southeast corners of the building, at the entry of the middle section of the eastern façade, and at the west end of the south facade.

The courthouse is E-shaped in plan and has seven full stories plus a basement, an attic, and a penthouse above the eastern portion of the center rear wing. There are mezzanines above the second, fourth, and sixth stories and setbacks at the sixth and seventh stories. The facades are clad with Indiana limestone above a granite base. The windows contain non-historic vinyl-coated aluminum sash, installed, c. 1998-2002.

The Sutphin Boulevard façade is arranged into a nine-bay wide center section flanked by four-bay-wide projected pavilions. Paired, often double-height, windows are used in the center bays, while smaller window openings are employed for the end pavilions. The main entrance is at the first story. It is approached by a broad staircase of eight steps. Stone-clad podia are set at either end of the stairs. Historic metal railings (the north railing is somewhat bent), dating from the late 1940s-early 1950s, frame the center section of the stairs leading to the main entry. There is a non-historic metal railing and chair lift at the south end of the stair and a free-standing control pole for the lift on the sidewalk between the lift and the south basement entry.

Basement: Each pavilion has four trabeated openings fronted by a sunken areaway and window well with stone side walls and concrete paving. Curving concrete paths at either side of the main staircase lead to original granite stairs providing access to the areaways. The southern stair has a historic metal pipe rail. Bays 1 and 2 (reading north to south) on the southern pavilion are entrances and retain their original wood-and-glass doors, which are protected by non-historic wire-mesh grilles. Bays 3 and 4 have non-historic replacement windows and are protected by historic iron grilles. There is a non-historic metal vent and electric switch box to the north of bay 1. A non-historic light fixture and a non-historic door buzzer box have been installed to the north of the entry in bay 2. A non-historic sprinkler head and Siamese hose connector have been installed on the wall to the south of bay 4.

On the northern pavilion, the entry is in bay 4 (reading north to south). It retains its original wood-and-glass door, which is protected by a non-historic wire-mesh grille. A non-

historic light fixture and a non-historic door buzzer box have been installed to the south of the entry. Just to the north of the doorway the masonry is pierced by a sawn-off metal pipe. Two non-historic perforated drain covers are located in the corner between the main stairs and the entry. Bays 1, 2, and 3 have non-historic replacement windows and are protected by iron grilles. A non-historic Siamese hose connector has been installed on the wall to the north of bay 1. The original cornerstone inscribed with the names of Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia and Borough President George U. Harvey and architects Alfred H. Eccles and William W. Knowles is set at the second course of masonry at the north end of the façade.

Porch: The most distinctive feature of the facade is the projecting two-and-one-half-story portico, which extends across the center section at the first and second stories. It has eight free-standing giant fluted Corinthian columns, flanked at either end by paired pilasters, and is capped by a full entablature, which is patched with stucco in several spots. Pilaster responds articulate the rear and side walls of the porch. The rear wall has arched openings at the first story and square-headed windows with stone balustraded balconies at the second story. At the first story the three center arches are entrances. They retain their original bronze metalwork including arched surrounds with decorative relief panels representing famous lawgivers and emblems of wisdom, outer doors with decorative coffering, transom bars decorated with scroll motifs, and transom grilles. During business hours, the outer doors fold back into pockets in the door jambs. The entrances retain their historic inner patinated metal-and-glass doors (a revolving door at the center, paired doors in the north and south entrances) topped by original six-light transoms. The arched-window openings contain non-historic paired one-over-one windows topped by arched transoms. The windows and transoms are protected by non-historic iron grilles. Non-historic light fixtures are set just below second floor balconies in all nine bays. At the second story the windows have non-historic paired one-over-one sash topped by single light transoms. (The original steel windows were eight-over-eight sashes, topped by an eight light transoms). Several non-historic metal boxes, presumably containing electrical equipment have been affixed to the south wall of the porch at the first story level. The porch floor is granite and is slightly raked towards the center. Currently non-historic pipe railings have been set into the pavement in front of the entries flanking the center door. A sidewalk bridge has been installed in front of the center bay and two bays to the south. The porch ceiling is coffered and probably originally had recessed lights. The porch ceiling, column capitals, and balconies are swathed in bird netting.

First Story End Pavilions: The end pavilions have tall trabeated window openings at the first story. Currently the windows have non-historic one-over-one window sashes topped by transoms. The windows are protected by non-historic iron grilles. A non-historic electrical conduit extends southward from bay 2 (reading north to south) to the center of northern pavilion providing power to a non-historic strobe light.

Upper Stories: Above the first story the windows are profiled by shallow recesses and have slightly projecting sills. On the pavilions, the windows between the second and fourth stories have recessed spandrel panels so that the windows are grouped into vertical files. The spandrels between the second and fourth stories and their mezzanines are decorated with swagged panels. All of the second-story windows have balustraded stone balconies. A band course extends across the façade beneath the fifth-story windows. Above the fifth story there is a heavy bracketed cornice that supports the balustraded parapet extending along the edge of the sixth-story setback. In the center bays the large arched openings are profiled by shallow recesses and

have simple flat keystones. The spandrel panels separating the trabeated sixth story window and mezzanine windows on the outer pavilions are decorated with swag panels. The sixth story is capped by a simple cornice and a low molded parapet which extends along the seventh-story setback. The seventh story windows are trabeated and are profiled by shallow recessed moldings. The seventh story terminates in a high parapet which is articulated with a copper box cornice and coped with a simple copper fascia molding.

Aside from the windows having been replaced and some patching and staining of the stonework, the upper stories remain largely intact.

The North Façade nine bays wide, arranged into a projecting seven-bay-wide center section and recessed one-bay wide corner bays. The articulation is very similar to that of the main façade. The window openings in the center bays are two-windows-wide; the end bays have single windows. As on the primary façade, all of the windows have been replaced by non-historic sash and panning.

Basement: The basement is faced with granite and has square-headed windows, which extend below grade and are protected by non-historic iron grilles. The end windows have semi-circular window wells with granite curbs. The middle windows are lit by a rectangular areaway, which is built into a concrete sidewalk that extends along the sides and rear of the building. The areaway has a granite curb and is covered by a non-historic iron grille. Non-historic Siamese hydrants have been installed on the basement wall at the west and east ends of the projecting center section, located just above historic spigots and hose rings. There are large stains on the stonework above the window in bay 4 (reading west to east) and to the west of bay 9.

Upper Stories: The upper story articulation is very similar to that of main façade. Here the window openings at the first story of the center section are square-headed and somewhat wider and shorter than the window openings in the end bays. At the second story a long balustraded balcony extends in front of the five middle windows while the windows in the two outer bays are set off by individual balconies. Aside from the windows having been replaced and some staining, especially on the second- and sixth-story balconies, the façade remains largely unchanged. Alterations include the installation of a non-historic light fixture just above the first story at the west corner of the façade and floodlights at the ends of the second-story balcony. All of the second-story balconies are covered with bird netting.

Rear (Eastern) Façade. At the rear, the building divides into north and south wings and a taller narrower center wing, which is linked to the northern and southern wings by recessed light courts. The eastern facades of the north and south wings are six bays wide and are articulated to match the end pavilions on the Sutphin Avenue façade. The center wing has a one-story plus basement projection and is articulated with simple moldings and pilaster strips and a tripartite arrangement of windows. In both courtyards, there are granite staircases leading to terraces which provide access to first story entrances on the side walls of the center wing. The staircase and terrace in the north court are original. The staircase and terrace in the south court were reconfigured when a masonry trash compactor enclosure was constructed on the north side of the court in 1988.

North Wing: At the basement level there is a non-historic Siamese hydrant at the north end of the wall located just above a historic spigot and hose ring. Beneath window bays 1 through 3 (reading north to south) the façade bumps out to form a masonry enclosure, constructed between 1999 and 2002, which is faced with granite and trimmed with a molded ogee molding that aligns

with the molding capping the original basement façade. Bays 4 and 5 have basement entries set slightly below ground level and accessed by a rectangular areaway with granite stairs and curbs and concrete sidewalls and pavement. The low stoop leading to the areaway retains its historic metal pipe rails. Both entrances have their historic wood-and-glass doors, which are now protected by non-historic iron grilles. There is a non-historic light fixture just to the south of the entry in bay 4. Bay 6 is a window bay, which extends slightly below grade level and is lit by a semi-circular window well with a historic granite curb. This window has non-historic replacement window sash and panning and is protected by a non-historic iron window grate. The windows on the upper stories have been replaced. At the first story there are non-historic iron grates on the windows in bays 1, 2, 4, and 5. Non-historic floodlights have been attached to the north end of the balustrade on the middle balcony and the south end of the southern balcony at the second story. All of the balconies are covered with netting.

North Court: The terraced north court is approached by an original granite stair at the base of the center wing. The lower level of the terrace is built over an underground fuel tank indicated by the four manhole covers. These are just north of the non-historic concrete path that leads to the stone staircase to upper level of the terrace. This staircase retains its-historic bronze handrail on its west side wall.

The easternmost basement window of the north court wall (south wall of the north wing) retains its historic curved light well with curved curb. The light well for the basement window in bay 2 (reading east to west) has been enlarged and is covered by a non-historic iron grate. The base of the windows in bays 3 and 4 are blocked from view by a masonry parapet leading to the terrace stairs. All four windows have non-historic replacement sash and panning and non-historic iron grilles. On the upper stories the windows have been replaced; all of the second story windows are protected by non-historic metal grilles. There is a non-historic light fixture set between window bays 2 and 3 just below the first story level that lights the terrace stairs.

All of the windows on the western (rear) elevation of the north courtyard have non-replacement sash and the windows at the basement and first story levels are protected by non-historic iron grilles.

The south wall of the courtyard (north wall of center wing), has one basement window that has replacement window sash and panning and is protected by a non-historic metal grille. A metal alarm box and electrical conduit have been attached to the east end of the basement. Next to wall and secured to it by wire is a vertical exhaust pipe which vents the fuel tank area below. At the first floor terrace level this entry retains a historic metal and glass door. The light fixture above the door is non-historic. The lowest window in the file of windows at the west end of the wall has been sealed, the upper windows all have non-historic replacement sash.

Center Wing: The ground immediately in front of the center wing was originally excavated to create a sunken area flanked on the north and south by granite retaining walls and low stair cases leading up to the terraced courtyards. The north retaining wall and stair remain in place but the south retaining wall and stair were removed and the ground level was re-graded when the south court compactor was installed.

The sidewalk in front of the center wing is approached by a concrete ramp from the parking lot installed around 2000. The basement entry retains its molded stone surround surmounted by an arched pediment. The paired wood doors are non-historic. There are three non-historic signs attached to wall immediately to the north of the entry. At the first story, the

large eight and four-light metal windows lighting the lobby appear to be historic, perhaps original. The parapet edging the lobby roof was damaged by a crane collapsing against it in 2002. The southernmost set of balusters and the lighter colored stone veneer immediately to the south were installed to repair the damage in 2009. On the upper stories all of the triple windows have non-historic replacement sash and panning. At the roofline most of the crowning cornice was removed c. 2000 to accommodate a non-historic metal louver.

South Court: In the south court the ground level was lowered and the staircases were rebuilt to accommodate the new trash compactor enclosure constructed c. 1988. This is set back a few feet from the façade of the middle wing and is approached by a non-historic concrete driveway. The compactor enclosure and the screening wall that extends from the enclosure to the north wall of the south wing are faced with granite matched to the facings on the original portions of the building. A pair of non-historic steel bollards flanks the entry to the compactor enclosure. The enclosure has paired iron gates. Just to the north of the entry is non-historic steel cabinet with louvered openings. On the south side of the court the sidewalk was rebuilt and widened c. 2000. A large non-historic metal shed has been installed on this sidewalk just in front of the northeast corner of the south wing. The sidewalk extends along the north wall of the south wing leading to the staircase. This non-historic staircase wraps around the compactor enclosure terminating in a terrace at the first story, which extends across the width of the courtyard but allows room at the rear of the court for an areaway to light the basement windows. While the staircase is recent the bronze railing is historic having been salvaged from the earlier stairs.

The north court wall (the southern elevation of the center wing) has a first story entrance, which retains its historic wood-and-glass door which is protected by a non-historic metal grille. The light fixture above the door is non-historic. The windows at the western end of the elevation have replacement sash and panning and the first story window has a non-historic security grille.

Most of the windows on the western (rear) elevation of the south courtyard have non-historic replacement sash and panning. All but the bottom south light at the second story level and the transoms at the fifth story have been replaced by non-historic metal louvers.

The south court wall (northern wall of the south wing) has non-historic metal louvers in place of windows at the basement level. The upper story windows are non-historic and the first story windows have non-historic metal security grilles. Non-historic light fixtures have been installed at the east of the façade just above the first story windows and between the bay 2 and bay 3 just below the first story windows.

South Wing: The sidewalk and areaway in front of the south wing was also partially rebuilt in the 1980s. At the basement level a number of holes have been cut in the granite near the north end of the façade for exhaust pipes and two meters. Bays 1 and 3 (reading north to south) retain their historic wood-and-glass doors, which are now protected by non-historic iron grilles. Non-historic light fixtures are located just south of both doors. The window opening in bay 2 currently contains non-historic metal louvers. At bays 4 through bay 6 the façade bumps out to form a masonry enclosure constructed between 1999 and 2002, which is faced with granite and trimmed with a molded ogee molding that align with the molding capping the original basement façade. The windows on the upper stories have been replaced. At the first story there are non-historic iron grates at all of the openings. There is a non-historic light fixtures at the south corner of the just above the first story windows. At the second story non-historic floodlights have been installed at the south end of the center balcony and on the northern balcony. All of the balconies

are covered with netting.

South Façade. The articulation of the south façade matches that of the north façade except that because of the sloping ground level the basement windows are entirely above ground. As on the primary façade, all of the windows have been replaced by non-historic sash and panning. Both the basement and first story windows are protected by non-historic iron grilles. Non-historic Siamese hydrants have been installed on the basement wall at the west and east ends of the projecting center section, located just above historic spigots and hose rings. There are floodlights at either end of the center second story balcony. All of the second-story balconies are covered with bird netting.

Roof. Most sections of the building are capped by hipped roofs, which are covered with standing-seam metal cladding (the original roof covering was copper clad with lead). On the long Sutphin Boulevard side of the building, the front slope of the roof levels off to form an asphalt-covered, pipe-railed, flat roof on which a large air-conditioning cooling tower and a number of other mechanical structures have been installed. There are also non-historic penthouses with louvered vents extending along the slopes of the roof facing 88th and 89th Street.

Report researched and written by
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Research Department

NOTES

¹This section is adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission [hereafter LPC], *Jamaica Chamber of Commerce Building Designation Report* (LP-2386) (New York: City of New York, 2010), prepared by Marianne Percival. Information in this section was compiled from LPC, *Former J. Kurtz & Sons Store Building Designation Report* (LP-1132) (New York: City of New York, 1981), prepared by Virginia Kushan, 1; E. Belcher Hyde, *Atlas of the Borough of Queens* (Brooklyn: E. Belcher Hyde, 1901), v. 1, pl. 10; Jon A. Peterson, ed., “A Research Guide to the History of Queens Borough and Its Neighborhoods” (typescript, Queens College Dept. of History, 1983); Frank Bergen Kelley, *Excursion Planned for the City History Club: Historic Queens* (New York: City History Club of New York, 1908), 5-6, 35; H. W. Munsell, *The History of Queens County, New York* (New York: H. W. Munsell & Co, 1882), 220-221; *Jamaica, Hempstead, Richmond Hill, Morris Park, and Woodhaven: Their Representative Men and Points of Interest* (New York: Mercantile Illustration Co., 1894), 17-21; Vincent F. Seyfried, *Jamaica Trolleys* (Long Island Trolley Histories, 1953), vol. 4, 1-5; and Theodore H. M. Prudon, ed., “Jamaica, Queens County, New York: Aspects of Its History” (typescript, Columbia University, Graduate Program for Restoration and Preservation of Historic Architecture, June 1975).

² Prudon, 39. See also the pamphlet *Souvenir Improvement Celebration, Jamaica, N.Y., April 20, 1898* (Jamaica, NY: Bertram Blackwell, printer, 1898).

³ *Jamaica, Hempstead, Richmond Hill, Morris Park, and Woodhaven*, 18.

⁴ Vincent F. Seyfried and William Asadorian, *Old Queens, N.Y. in Early Photographs* (New York: Dover, 1991), 26.

⁵ This history of the early courthouses in Queens is based on Munsell, 49-55; Clayton Knowles, “Queens Starts 3rd Courthouse In 150 Years,” *Long Island Sunday Press*, Oct. 16, 1936; Jon A. Peterson, “Queens,” *Encyclopedia of*

New York City, Kenneth Jackson, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press; New York: The New-York Historical Society, 1995); Jeff Gottlieb, "Origins of the New York State Supreme Court Building, Jamaica, Queens," Dec. 28, 1998, unpublished typescript in the "Jamaica Courthouses" Clippings File, Queensborough Public Library, Archive.

⁶ Knowles, "Queens Starts 3rd Courthouse."

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "Harvey Proposes \$8,000,000 Centre," *New York Times*, Feb. 8, 1930, 7; Soon after Harvey made his proposal a planning group with ties to Mayor Walker proposed an alternative site for the Civic Center in Maspeth that had formerly been owned by gangster Arnold Rothstein. Harvey subsequently countered with a proposal for a courthouse in Jamaica independent of the civic center. For these proposals see "New City Airport Advised for Queens," *New York Times*, Feb. 22, 1930, 28; "Fights Civic Centre on Rothstein Land," *New York Times*, Feb. 24, 1930, 21; "Charges Juggling on Queens Centre," *New York Times*, Apr. 2, 1930, 38; "Harvey's Pledge to Jamaica," *Long Island Daily Press*, Mar. 24, 1931; "Project Awaits Return of Mayor Walker from Vacation," *Long Island Daily Press*, Mar. 24, 1931; "As Jamaica \$2,000,000 Court House Will Look," *Brooklyn Daily Times*, Mar. 1, 1932; "Harvey Under Fire Over Civic Centre," *New York Times*, Mar. 10, 1934, 14.

⁹ "Special Term Designed to Give Dispatch to Supreme Court Litigation," unidentified clipping in the "Jamaica Courthouses" Clippings File, Queensborough Public Library. See also "Public Offices Here Widely Scattered," *Long Island Daily Press*, Sept. 9, 1934.

¹⁰ "Court Quarters Assailed," *New York Times*, June 30, 1933, 18.

¹¹ "Grand Jury Calls Court A Firetrap," *New York Times*, Feb. 28, 1934, 15.

¹² Knowles, "Queens Starts 3rd Courthouse."

¹³ "Construction Expected to Start July 1," *Long Island Daily Press*, May 15, 1935.

¹⁴ An additional \$1,625,000 was to be financed through the sale of bonds and the remaining costs through tax revenues.

¹⁵ By mid-September 1936, the specifications were ready and plans were filed with the Queens Department of Buildings. Groundbreaking ceremonies took place in mid-October.

¹⁶ "Photographs and Descriptions of Winning Buildings, 1938 Building Awards, Chamber of Commerce of the Borough of Queens," *Queensborough*, 24 (Dec. 1938), 26; "'Best Buildings' of the Year in Queens as Chosen by Chamber of Commerce," *New York Times*, Dec. 11, 1938, 225. Work briefly halted on the courthouse in October 1938, when Borough President Harvey's brother-in-law James A. Lunn, Superintendent of the Queens Bureau of Public Buildings and Offices, was terminated by the Civil Service Commission after he failed the oral exam for special construction supervisor. Lunn had been responsible for drawing up the specifications for the building and was the Borough President's personal representative on the project, signing off on all bills from contractors. After Lunn was fired, Harvey notified the building contractors that he would not authorize any payments for work. Mayor La Guardia then transferred responsibility for the construction to the Department of Public Works. Harvey retaliated in an interview to the *New York Times* accusing La Guardia of seeking personal glory by transferring the construction out of the Borough President's jurisdiction. See "Harvey Suspends Work on Building," *New York Times*, Oct. 15, 1928, 22; "Harvey Sees Politics in Court Job Change," *New York Times*, Oct. 21, 1938, 13.

¹⁷ "Queens General Court House to Open Wednesday March First," *Queensborough* 25 (Feb. 1939), 17; "Mayor Twits Foes During Dedication," *New York Times*, Mar. 2, 1939, 23; "Dedicate \$5,000,000 Queens General Court; LaGuardia Officiates," *Long Island Daily Press*, Mar. 2, 1939; "New General Courthouse in Queens Opens," *Daily News*, Mar. 2, 1939.

¹⁸ The building initially housed the Supreme Court (four trial parts and Special Term), the County Clerk's Office, motor vehicle offices, the Public Administrator's office, the Surrogate's Court, the Supreme Court grand jury, and offices for the Bar Association. All of the criminal courts were centralized at the courthouse in Long Island City.

¹⁹ “\$600,000,000 Worth of Public Improvements in Five Years, *Queensborough*, 25 (Dec. 1937), 5; Federal Writers Publications (NY), *New York City Guide* (New York: Random House, 1940), 560-561; Building Improves in Queens Borough,” *New York Times*, Jul 15, 1934. Like the courthouse, many of these projects were funded with Federal money. On the partnership between Mayor LaGuardia and President Franklin D. Roosevelt that resulted in New York City’s receiving 17% of the public works budget for the nation see, Gregory F. Gilmartin, *Shaping the City* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1995), 284.

²⁰ LaGuardia quote from “Mayor Twits Foes During Dedication;” Chamber of Commerce, \$600,000,000 Worth of Public Improvements,” 5.

²¹ Sources for this biography of Alfred H. Eccles include Knowles, “Queens Starts 3rd Courthouse;” U.S. Census, Queens, New York, 1900, Ward 1, ED 624, 1; Queens, 1910, ED 1167, 20B; Queens, 1920, AD 1, ED 41, 9B; Queens, 1930 ED 41-46, 17B; Office of the Surrogate, Queens County, Administrations file 6792-1961; Queens New York Directories, 1908-12; New York City Telephone Directories, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, 1925-1942; “Alfred H. Eccles, Architect and Engineer Has Moved,” *Architecture* 58(1928); “Queens Buildings Cited for Design,” *New York Times*, Dec. 3, 1951, 48; “The Three-Family House,” *New York Times*, Dec. 28, 1930, RE3; “New Synagogue for Beth-El, *Queensborough*, 21, n. 4 (Apr. 1935), 71.’`

²² In 1909 Eccles married Lucy Reidy, whose father, Michael J. Reidy, was a Queens builder and later the Assistant Superintendent of Buildings for Queens and a county inspector and was very active in Democratic party politics in Queens. During the first years of their marriage the Eccles lived with the Reidys. See “Michael J. Reidy,” *New York Times*, Sept. 13, 1940, 22; “Mrs. Michael J. Reidy,” *New York Times*, July 6, 1937, 19; US Census, 1910.

²³ Eccles was extremely prolific and announcements of his work were frequently published in the newspapers. A partial list of citations include: “Alterations,” *Real Estate Record & Guide*, May 1912, 1073; “Home Buying and Auctions Feature Suburban Market,” *New York Times*, Sep. 2, 1928, 124; “Forest Hills Progress,” *New York Times*, Sept. 2, 1928, 140; “Motor Car Makers Lease,” *New York Times*, Apr. 12, 1930; 38; “Grosvenor Square Apartments,” *New York Times*, Apr. 26, 1931, RE2, “Adds to Brewing Plant,” *New York Times*, Feb. 25, 1933, 29; “\$750,000 Apartment Planned in Astoria,” *New York Times*, Dec. 20, 1939, 47; “Housing Plans Are Filed,” Mar. 25, 1945, 38; “To Inspect Veterans’ Homes,” *New York Times*, Mar. 24, 1948, 2; “Building Plans Filed,” *New York Times*, Aug. 11, 1929, N21; Aug. 9, 1931, 32; Dec. 27, 1933, 37; Jan. 26, 1934, 35; Mar 14, 1934, 36; Mar 25, 1934, 40; Mar. 2, 1935, 29; Apr. 13, 1935, 29; Apr. 17, 1936, 40; Mar. 29, 1940, 42; Aug. 8, 1940, 35; Oct. 9, 1940, 46; Nov. 20, 1940, 42; Nov. 15, 1941, C30; Nov. 24, 1942, 39; Feb. 8, 1946, 38; Feb. 12, 1946, 38; Oct. 19, 1946, 34; Aug. 14, 1948; Aug. 29, 1949, Jun. 7, 1949; Jan. 30 1951, July 27, 1953, 29;

²⁴ Knowles, “Queens Starts 3rd Courthouse.”

²⁵ “Bush to Help Draft New Building Code,” *New York Times*, Nov. 29, 1929, 21; “The Three-Family House,” *New York Times*, Dec. 28, 1930, RE3; “Suggest Changes to Dwelling Law,” *New York Times*, Jan. 18, 1931, 153; “Architects Install Officers,” *New York Times*, Dec. 16, 1931, 36; “Jallade Heads Architects,” *New York Times*, Nov. 26, 1933, RE1; “Censures Teaching of Architecture,” *New York Times*, Jan. 20, 1935, RE3; “Rules are Given in Queens Contest,” *New York Times*, Sept. 9, 1951, R11; “Society of Architects,” *American Art Annual* 35 (1941), 339.

²⁶ This biography of William Welles Knowles is drawn from “William W. Knowles, *New York Times*, Jan. 20, 1944, 19; “W.W. Knowles, Architect, 72, Dies in Queens,” *New York Tribune*, Jan 20, 1944; “Who’s Who in the Chamber, *Queensborough*, Nov. 1934, 270, 277; “Mr. Knowles Visits France With Fellow Architects,” *Queensborough*, July 1931, 354; “Who’s Who on the Jury,” *Bulletin of the Beaux Arts Institute of Design* 16 (Jun. 1940), 4; “William W. Knowles,” *New York Sun*, Jan. 20, 1944; Knowles, “Queens Starts 3rd Courthouse;” James Ward, *Architects in Practice New York City, 1900-1940* (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1989); U.S. Census, Manhattan, New York, 1900, ED 562, 9B; Queens, 1910, ED 1286, 10B; Flushing, Queens, 1920, Third Ward, ED 222, 9B; Queens, 1930, ED 41-1089, 10A; Columbia University, Avery Architectural Library, “New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company Archive Data Base,” s.v. “Knowles, Wm. W.”

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- ²⁷ Young Women's Christian Association Building, 124th Street, New York City," *Architectural Record* 6 (June 1897), 577.
- ²⁸ "Queensborough's Highway of Tomorrow," *Queensborough* 27 (Apr. 1941), 7-9.
- ²⁹ Knowles served as Chairman of the Board of the Flushing Finance Corporation, was a director of the Walbert Realty Corporation and was a member of the Queensboro Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Queensborough Rotary Association, the American Legion, and the Bayside Yacht Club.
- ³⁰ Queens New York Directories, 1908-12; New York City Telephone Directories, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, 1925-1942.
- ³¹ For Modern Classicism see Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 20-27; Richard Guy Wilson, "Modern Classicism and Washington, D.C." in Craig Zabel and Susan Scott Munshower, eds. *American Public Architecture: European Roots and Native Expressions* (University Park, PA: Papers in Art History from Pennsylvania State University, 1989); Elizabeth Grossman, *The Civic Architecture of Paul Cret* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 82-90, 140-154; Richard Guy Wilson, Introduction, to the Da Capo Edition, C.W. Short and Stanley Brown, *Public Buildings: Architecture Under the Public Works Administration, 1933-39* (1939: rpt. New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), i-x; Elizabeth Grossman, "Paul Cret and the Federal Reserve Board Building," *Revue Française d'études Américaines* 102 (Dec. 2004), 6-19.
- ³² Talbot Hamlin quoted in Stern et al, 23.
- ³³ "Photographs and Descriptions of Winning Buildings," 26.
- ³⁴ This discussion of courthouse design is based on Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), 53-56; Mary B. Dierickx, *The Architecture of Public Justice: Historic Courthouses of the City of New York* (New York: City of New York, 1993); Julia and Albert M. Rosenblatt, *Historic Courthouses of the State of New York* (Nashville: Turner Publishing, 2006); Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin and John Montague Massengale, *New York 1900* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), 67-70; Stern et al., *New York 1930*, 93-102.
- ³⁵ Numerous examples followed, including the Greek Revival style Brooklyn City Hall, which originally contained a courtroom (now Brooklyn Borough Hall (Gamiel King, 1846-51, a designated New York City Landmark) and the Italianate style New York County Courthouse (aka Tweed Courthouse, John Kellum, 1861, a designated New York City Landmark). Both of these buildings had pedimented porticos, grand staircases and cupolas.
- ³⁶ "Proposed Development: Kew Gardens Site, for Queens Civic Center — William W. Knowles, Architect," *Pencil Points*, 15 (Oct. 1934), 494-95.
- ³⁷ Herbert C. Frey, "Our Court House," in "Queens General Court House Dedication" (booklet), Mar. 1, 1939, 15.
- ³⁸ "Apartment House Takes in 3 Courts," *New York Times*, Mar. 31, 1960, 33; "Queens Bar Group Dedicates Building," *New York Times*, Feb. 7, 1960, 21. In the 1960s, the court system was reorganized and Queens County became a separate judicial jurisdiction from Suffolk and Nassau Counties. See "Court Reorganization Plan Filed For Second Approval in Albany," *New York Times*, Nov. 18, 1960, 13.
- ³⁹ Stephen McFarland, "Court Building is Supreme," *Daily News*, Dec. 6, 1981. However, Boyers lamented that a courthouse that had been designed to serve five justices was housing 24 Supreme Court parts. (A part consists of a courtroom, judge and other personnel needed to conduct a trial.) Moreover, the courthouse, which had been intended to serve exclusively for civil cases, was being used for more criminal trials than any other courthouse in the borough and criminal cases brought increased maintenance problems.
- ⁴⁰ The information on this inspection report and the subsequent alterations to the courthouse are taken from New York City Department of Buildings, Queens, microfiche records for block 9691, lot 1.
- ⁴¹ "Crane Topples and Building is Evacuated," *New York Times*, Jul. 16, 2002, B6; Akiko Matsuda and Herbert Lowe, "Crane Topples onto Courthouse," *Newsday*, Jul. 16, 2002; "Toppled Crane Gets Lift at Last," *Newsday*, Jul. 17, 2002.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Queens General Court House has a special character and special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among their important qualities, that the Queens General Court House is a grand, Modern Classic, Depression-era monument built between 1937 and 1939, with payment split between City funds and a Federal grant from the Public Works Administration; that the new courthouse was considered a major public improvement, and convenience for the borough of Queens, consolidating the offices of the Queens County Clerk, the City Court, the Supreme Court and the Surrogate's Court in downtown Jamaica, and was meant to handle all the civil cases in Queens; that the Modern Classical style was selected for this building because it was thought to express the dignity and majesty of the law; that the E-shaped seven-story building, faced with Alabama limestone and articulated with neo-Classical ornament, is an excellent example of the style; that following a long-standing tradition for courthouses the building's most prominent feature is a two-and-one-half-story colonnaded portico fronted by a grand staircase; that the three arched entrances at the center of the portico retain their original bronze coffered doors and are edged with bronze sculptural panels depicting famous lawgivers; that other notable features of the design include the heavy bracketed cornices, balustraded balconies, stylized swagged relief panels, and shallow window surrounds; that architects Alfred H. Eccles and William W. Knowles were Queens residents with architectural practices in Long Island City who had designed a number of prominent Queens buildings; that in 1938, shortly before it opened, the building was awarded first prize in the public buildings classification in the Queens Chamber of Commerce's Best Buildings of the Year competition; that the General Court House's skillfully composed facades, handsome detailing, and the power of its monumental portico make it one of the finest and most imposing public buildings in Queens.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Queens General Court House, 88-11 Sutphin Boulevard (aka 88-01 to 88-33 Sutphin Boulevard, 147-02 to 147-28 88th Avenue, 147-01 89th Avenue, 88-02 to 88-34 148th Street), Borough of Queens and designates Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 9691, Lot 1, as their Landmark Site.

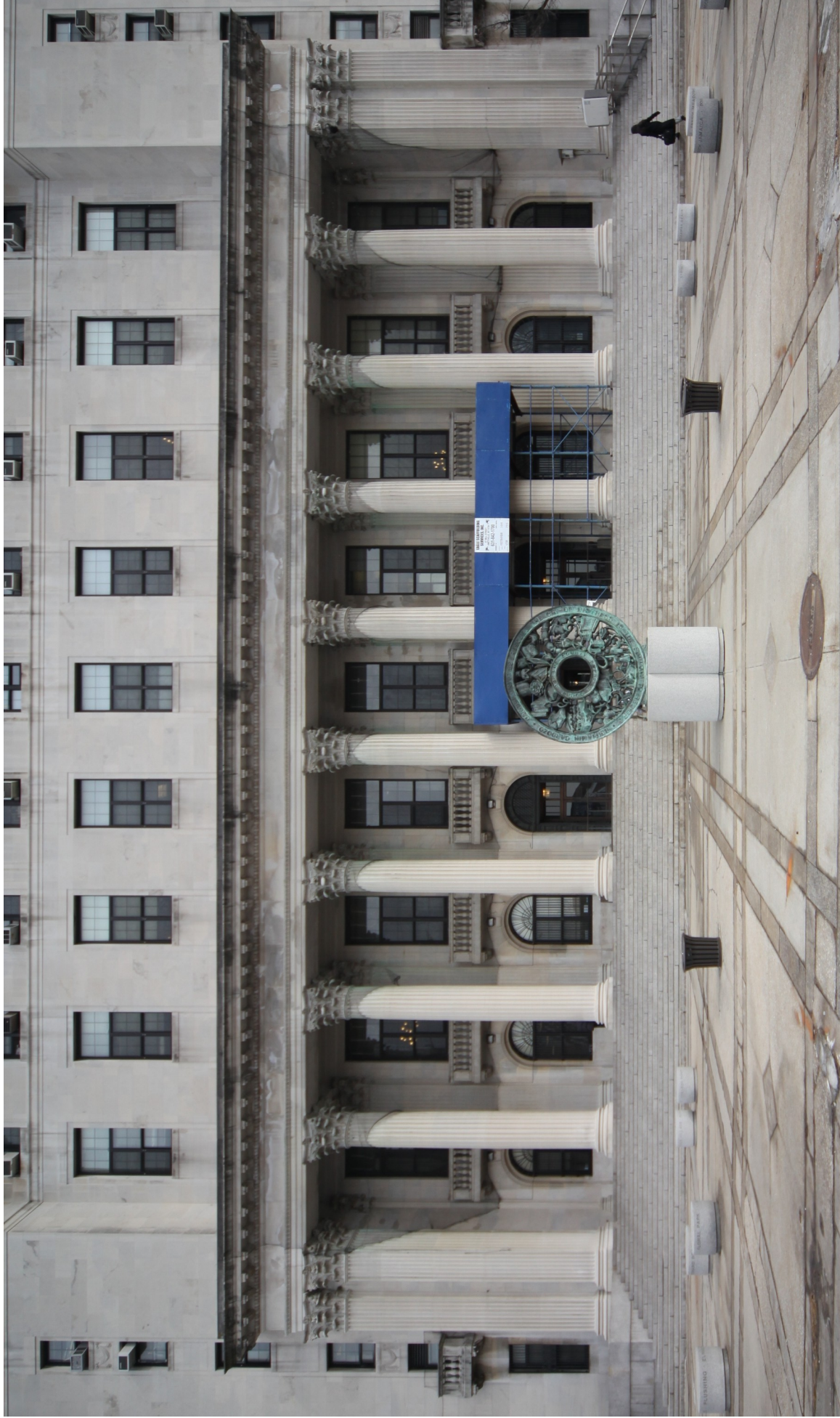
Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Pablo Vengoechea, Vice-Chair;
Diana Chapin, Roberta Brandes Gratz,
Christopher Moore, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



Queens General Court House
88-11 Sutphin Boulevard
(aka 88-01 to 88-33 Sutphin Boulevard, 147-02 to 147-28 88th Avenue, 147-01 89th Avenue, 88-02 to 88-34 148th Street)
Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 9691, Lot 1
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, October 2010



Queens General Court House
View from the northwest
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, October 2010



Queens General Court House
Colonnade and grand staircase, Sutphin Avenue facade
Photo: Christopher D. Brazeel, February 2010



Queens General Court House
Details of Colonnade and sixth-story window
Photos: left, Christopher D. Brazee, January 2007; right Christopher D. Brazee, October 2010



Queens General Court House

Details of north entrance and *Confucius* relief panel

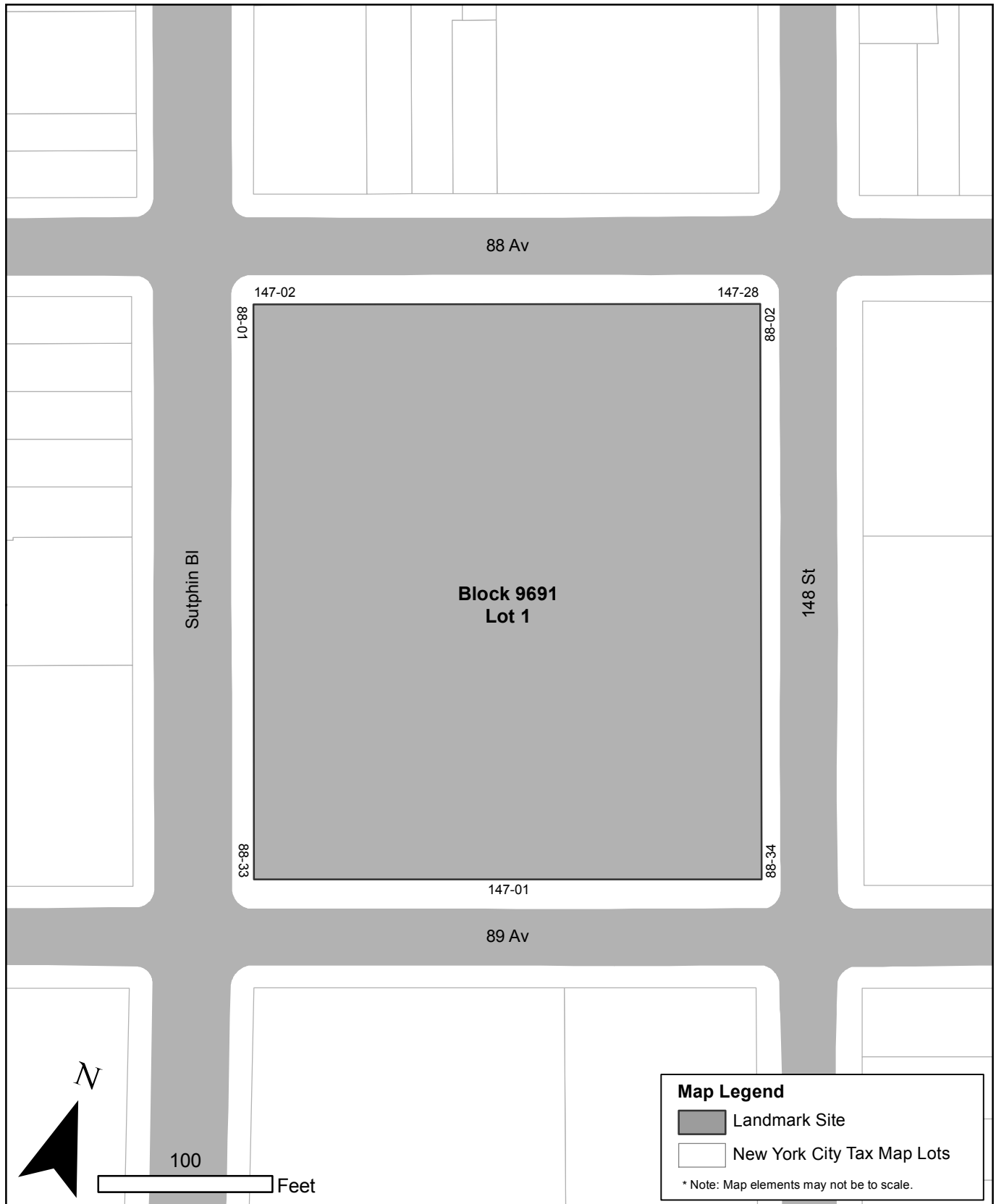
Photos: left, Gale Harris, July 2010 ; right, Christopher D. Brazee, October 2010



Queens General Court House
Eastern (rear) façade from 148th Street
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, February 2010



Queens General Court House
Detail of the upper stories, Sutherland Avenue facade
Photo: Christopher D. Brazeel, January 2007



QUEENS GENERAL COURT HOUSE (LP-2404), 88-11 Sutphin Boulevard (aka 88-01 to 88-33 Sutphin Boulevard; 147-02 to 147-28 88th Avenue; 147-01 89th Avenue; 88-02 to 88-34 148th Street
 Landmark Site: Borough of Queens, Tax Map Block 9691, Lot 1

Designated: October 26, 2010