

FREE PUBLIC BATHS OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK, EAST 54TH STREET BATH AND GYMNASIUM, 342-348 East 54th Street, Manhattan. Built 1906-11; Werner & Windolph, architects.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1346, Lot 32.

On January 11, 2011 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Free Public Baths of The City of New York, East 54th Street Bath and Gymnasium and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were three speakers in favor of designation including a representative from the Department of Parks and Recreation, of the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, and the Historic Districts Council. The Commission received a letter in support of designation from City Council Member Jessica Lappin as well as a resolution of support from Community Board 6. No speakers testified against designation.

Summary

The East 54th Street Bath, the 12th of 13 Free Public Baths of the City of New York opened in Manhattan, is culturally significant for its part in the history of the progressive reform movement in America. An 1895 state law mandated public baths in large cities. The first municipally funded bath in New York City opened in 1901 at 326 Rivington Street. The East 54th Street Bath opened for public use in 1911 with 79 showers for men and 59 for women, providing sanitary facilities for area residents, as well as a gymnasium, running track and roof playground for recreational use.

The East 54th Street Bath initially served a largely poor clientele although the neighborhood had become a fashionable address by the 1920s. Most of the baths erected after 1904—including this one—incorporated gymnasiums and swimming pools to attract more patrons.

The public bath movement began to wane around 1915 as more landlords included bathing facilities in buildings and apartments. This building probably ceased operation as a bath house in 1938, at which time the city completely modernized the interior for use as a public gymnasium. The building is still owned by the city and is used as a community facility.

The East 54th Street Bath was designed by Werner & Windolph, who also designed the West 60th Street Bath. The firm's bath designs were considered to be a perfect solution, from a sanitary standpoint, and received endorsements from leading experts of the day and the Board of Health. Werner & Windolph were also well known as designers of country estates and suburban cottages. This imposing Classical Revival style structure is faced with brick and stone and trimmed with Arts and Crafts style details. Its most notable features include four monumental engaged Doric columns at the entrance, which creates a strong presence at the street, and the curving rooftop structure that houses the rooftop playground. The exterior, which remains remarkably intact, creates a powerful architectural presence and is a reminder of this movement in the neighborhood. Little more than a dozen bathhouses were built in New York City, making this structure a rare example of an important aspect of the progressive reform movement.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

East 54th Street between First and Second Avenues¹

East 54th Street, between First and Second Avenues is bordered by Beekman Place and Sutton Place. During the post-Civil War era, the area bounded by East 53rd to the south and East 59th Street to the north, between Third Avenue and the East River was beginning to develop as tenement district, with light industry. In the late-19th century, spurred by the arrival of public transportation, the area experienced another phase of rapid development as a mixed-use area consisting of residences and tenements amid factories, which provided employment to many residents.² The blocks between Second and Third Avenues were particularly undesirable because, since 1880, they had been sandwiched between two elevated railway lines. At the turn-of-the-century several local breweries employed many area residents; one of the largest, Peter Doelgers Brewing Corporation located at 55th Street between First Avenue and Avenue A (York Avenue), was in operation from 1846 to 1920.

The area bordered what would later become two of the most exclusive neighborhoods in New York City, Beekman Place, named for the Beekman family, and Sutton Place, named for real estate developer Effingham B. Sutton.³

The Public Bath Movement in 19th -Century New York⁴

With the goal of serving residents in a densely populated tenement district where bathing facilities were minimal or absent, this country's first public bath and laundry was erected on Mott Street in 1852, by the People's Bathing and Washing Association, a philanthropic organization incorporated in 1849 by wealthy New York merchant Robert B. Minturn specifically for that purpose.⁵ A small fee was paid by some 75,000 users a year, but revenues were insufficient to keep it in operation for more than a few years. Although its demise was later attributed to the fact that it was "too far in advance of the habits of the people whose advantage it sought,"⁶ an assumption that may or may not be justified, a heightened appreciation of its purpose emerged during the following decade.

In the late 1860s the Board of Health urged New York City elected officials to assume responsibility for the establishment of public bathing facilities; enabling legislation was approved in 1868, and by 1870 the east and west shores of Manhattan each had free floating saltwater public baths. Asking, "what a melancholy contrast to such enlightened public zeal (as Rome showed by its numerous public baths) in behalf of the health of its people does New York City present?" and noting that the "city was surrounded by water which can readily be utilized, with a population half of which never bathe for want of facilities, this city has but two public baths,"⁷ the Board of Health continued to press for expansion of the system. Over the next two decades additional floating baths were authorized and by the end of the century, 15 could be found anchored at various locations along the Manhattan shoreline. They were located, as were the five in Brooklyn, as close as possible to the working-class tenement neighborhoods. Although open only from mid-June to mid-October, they provided baths for many thousands of people each year. By 1896 the annual total of baths recorded exceeded five-and-a-half million.

The end of the 19th century saw the increasing pollution of the city's surrounding waters and made the development of indoor baths a necessity. Development of a city-wide system of public baths open year round was part of a wider effort to improve the general level of public health, particularly among less-advantaged groups; other contemporary endeavors such as tenement house reform were a product of the same impetus.

The technology that enabled the development of an indoor public bath system for the masses – the rain or shower bath – had been introduced to European military barracks in the late

1850s and by the late 1870s its use had been extended to such institutional settings as prisons and industrial and mining establishments. In contrast to the tub bath, the rain bath was, as an early summary of its advantages observes, "...the simplest, quickest, cheapest, cleanest...least expensive in fitting up..." It was further noted that it required "...the least space, least time in use, least amount of water, least fuel for warming water, and least cost for repairs and maintenance..."⁸ The 1883 Berlin Public Health Exposition awakened interest in a system of inexpensive public baths for working people and the number of such facilities proliferated thereafter, especially in Germany. These followed the models provided by industrial and institutional baths and furnished, in turn, the prototypes for the New York City baths.

Dr. Simon Baruch, the German-born physician and hydro-therapist later called the "father of the public bath movement in the United States," undertook a campaign in 1889 to persuade municipal officials to institute a public bath system in New York City. Paralleling the sequence of events which characterized other reformist movements, the initiative in this instance too was seized by private philanthropy. The concluding resolution of an 1890 conference on the subject attended by most of the city's major charitable organizations stated that "one of the greatest wants in this city was some place where at all seasons of the year hot and cold baths could be had at nominal cost and free if necessary."⁹ Convinced by Dr. Baruch of the impracticability of tub baths and the desirability of rain baths to be used for a facility for the masses, two of the attendees, the New York Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor (AICP, Robert B. Minturn was one of its founders) and the City Mission Society, agreed to mount a vigorous subscription campaign to raise funds for such a bath. A site was leased at the Centre Market Place between Grand and Broome Streets, a location described as being "in the midst of a large tenement house district and adjacent to an industrial center."¹⁰ Plans for a building were solicited and the one proposed by Josiah C. Cady accepted in 1890. A year later, in August 1891, the Centre Market Place People's Bath opened and was described as the "first in the United States for hot and cold baths."¹¹ A small section of the facility was reserved for those willing or able to pay a fee, but the services provided to the majority of its users were free.

In 1892, a bill that authorized municipalities to establish and operate public bathing facilities – its sponsor was Goodwin Brown, another ardent proselytizer for the cause – was approved by the New York State Legislature. Further efforts by Brown resulted in the 1895 law which made the establishment of such facilities mandatory in cities above a certain size; floating baths would not be considered in compliance. The appointment of a Mayor's Committee on Public Baths and Public Comfort Stations in 1895 was New York City's immediate response. The Committee's lengthy report of 1897 records exhaustive studies on the subject.

There were only a handful of public baths to examine here – the country's first year-round municipal public bath in Yonkers and the Centre Market Place People's Bath were the prime examples – so the Committee's attention focused principally on European models. The investigation of bathing establishments in all the major European countries yielded the conclusion that those of Austria and Germany provided the best models. The Committee believed that "cleanliness of person is not only elevating in its effects upon the mind and morals, but also necessary to health and to the warding off of disease."¹²

East 54th Street Bath and the 13 Free Public Baths of the City of New York¹³

The City of New York purchased the lot for the site of the East 54th Street Bath (located between First and Second Avenues) on May 31, 1906, for \$72,500.¹⁴ The facility was originally under the jurisdiction of Manhattan Borough President Jacob A. Cantor's Office, which started construction in 1906, but did not complete the building until 1911 due in part to a lawsuit. The East 54th Street Bath opened on February 17, 1911, and was the 12th of the 13 city-operated

public baths to open between the years of 1901 and 1914.¹⁵ A Public Recreation Commission was legislated in 1911 to oversee the day-to-day operations of the city-owned bath houses, however, in 1915 the commission was abolished and its duties were transferred to the NYC Parks Department, resulting in the Parks Department's partial jurisdiction of this facility (gymnasium and track) effective on October 1, 1915.¹⁶ It was not until 1938 that The New York City Department of Parks would have full jurisdiction over this and eight other city-owned bath houses in the Borough of Manhattan.¹⁷

Set in a predominantly tenement neighborhood, the facility contained a gymnasium with a running track and was outfitted with "all the modern equipment," as well as bathing facilities consisting of 79 showers for men and 59 for women. In its first year of operation the building served more than 130,000 men and women; that number more than doubled the next year.¹⁸ Each patron, depending on their gender, entered the bathing facility through separate entrances that led to a waiting room. A central office provided the only means of access between the waiting rooms, thus ensuring that men and women did not interact once they entered the bath house. Each shower stall was equipped with a changing room where the bather undressed before entering the shower space. Bathers brought their own towels and soap – standard practice in all the free baths – and were allotted 20 minutes to shower.

Though charitable organizations such as the AICP wrote pamphlets and held classes in tenement neighborhoods to educate the public about the health benefits of bathing and, in turn, increase patronage at the public baths, their efforts were never entirely successful. Thus, the construction of the municipal baths was more the product of reformers' campaign efforts than the demands of the masses. Lack of interest could be attributed to several reasons. At the time, habitual bathing was atypical among poorer classes; teachers, upon taking their students to the public baths, noted that many of them had never been thoroughly washed. Another factor was the gradual addition of bathing facilities to tenements in the first decades of the 20th century. The Tenement House Law of 1901 required new tenements to include toilets and many owners decided to include bathtubs as well. Some owners of older buildings, who risked losing their tenants, also added separate bathing and toilet facilities. The need for public baths therefore diminished.

The Architect: Werner & Windolph¹⁹

The architects of East 54th Street bath, August (Augustus) P. Windolph (1868- 1929) and Harold H. Werner (1871-1955), likely met at the Columbia University School of Mines, which they graduated from in 1892.²⁰ By 1895, the two had established their practice on Liberty Street in Manhattan, and by 1896, Werner & Windolph had designed the first of several houses in the exclusive beach community of Far Rockaway, New York.

In its early years, the partnership likely benefitted from the political connections of Windolph's father, John P. Windolph, a prominent Republican who served as a New York State Assemblyman, and as Vice President of the city's Board of Aldermen in the late 1890s.²¹ August himself was active in the Republican Party within a few years of graduating from college, and in 1899, the firm designed a Colonial Revival-style, three-story clubhouse for the Union Republican Club in the Bronx.²² Four years later, the selection of Werner & Windolph to design an engineer's residence and office near the New Croton Dam in Westchester County raised questions of favoritism, as John Windolph was then a high-ranking member of the city's Aqueduct Commission.²³ Nevertheless, Werner & Windolph would design some of their finest buildings for the City of New York, including two Classical Revival style bathhouses at 232 West 60th Street (begun 1903) and 342-348 East 54th Street (begun 1906), both of which stand today. Werner & Windolph were said to have designed these buildings following an extensive

tour of bathhouses in England and Germany; their 54th Street bathhouse was particularly impressive, “mark[ing] the culmination of the type” and featuring a “monumentally scaled, vigorously modeled” main facade.²⁴ As a recognized leader in public bath design, the firm was hired to design the “first up-to-date bathhouse” in Newark, New Jersey, which was completed c.1913.²⁵ Featuring large round-arched windows crowned by keystones, tall engaged columns, and decorative brick panels, this building, like the firm’s Manhattan bathhouses, exhibited Werner & Windolph’s characteristic adroitness with brick.²⁶

Werner & Windolph continued to design residences through the 1910s, including a fieldstone estate house at Breakneck Ridge, New York, which was featured in the *American Architect*, and a cottage within what is now the Douglaston Historic District in Queens.²⁷ Having moved to 25 West 33rd Street in 1917, the firm was in its final years as construction began on the Headquarters Troop Armory in Staten Island (1926-27, a designated New York City Landmark). Werner continued to practice after Windolph’s death in 1929. A longtime resident of Mount Vernon, New York, Werner designed or oversaw the construction of many of that city’s public schools between 1909 and his 1944 retirement.

Design and Construction of the East 54th Street Bath

The design of the East 54th Street Bath is in an imposing Classical Revival style with Arts and Crafts style details. At an estimated cost of more than \$244,800, its materials, scale and ornamentation set it apart from other buildings on the block and gave the building distinction in a neighborhood characterized by overcrowded tenements. The architects Werner & Windolph having made a thorough study of bath houses in Germany and England²⁸ described their bath house design as “expressive of its purpose and municipal in character.”²⁹ Several design aspects of the East 54th Street bathhouse were modeled after the best bathhouse designs of England and Germany.³⁰ The materials, layout of the building, including separate entrances for men and women, the use of ample natural light, sanitary considerations including stringent control of the water temperature, the elimination of bathtubs in favor of the use of showers, and the capacity to handle as many as 2,500,000 baths a year were just a few of elements adapted from European bath house design.³¹

Construction for the East 54th Street bath started in 1906 but when the facility opened to the public on February 17, 1911 it was not yet complete. The original design of the bath house called for the installation of a pool, but the Borough President’s office was dissatisfied with the way in which the construction work had been executed, and during construction the city became involved in a lawsuit that held up the completion of the building for some time.³²

The structure is faced with clinker brick. The tripartite recessed arched openings are divided by engaged Doric columns, on massive stone plinths that frame two stone stairways at the outermost bays, and give way to flanking entryways with ornately designed metal pedimented door surrounds (historically, stone steps were placed at the two outermost bays that provided for separate male and female entrances to the building). The brick columns boast limestone capitals adorned with Poseidon’s trident with intertwined winged dolphins symbolizing the caduceus. These columns support a massive modillioned stone cornice and divide three prominent recessed arches that are accentuated by multi-light arched windows. Additional interest is provided by the variety of ways the clinker brick is laid to give different types of decorative detailing, such as the spandrel panels with raised brick and marble that separates the first and second floors. It is echoed on the decorative inverted triangles on the pilasters at the third floor that separate three recessed multi-light windows and support a molded stone cornice.³³ The curved brick and stone end walls with chimneys have chevron details and

project above the adjacent buildings. The metal steel-and-wire mesh structure follows the curved roof line above cornice.

Subsequent History

After World War I New York experienced a housing shortage, due to a post-war depression that caused a lull in building. Conversions and redesign of tenement houses and brownstones started to become “attractive financial propositions.”³⁴ In the later part of the 1920s construction again boomed in Manhattan.³⁵ Around the late 1920s into the early 1930s, the area of East 54th Street developed a fashionable bohemian character resulting in the displacement of many of the neighborhoods poor, largely immigrant families. It was during this era that many converted tenement houses were replaced with more upscale housing, typically garden complexes laid out with deep private gardens, as well as lofts and luxury apartment buildings with amenities such as indoor plumbing.³⁶ As the century progressed, technical advances brought about dramatic changes in height, layout, and amenities of apartment buildings resulting in the “modern” apartment house that became the ultimate in modern living. Large luxury apartment buildings replaced the breweries in the area by the East River, such as Beekman Tower (1928-1930), 400-434 East 52nd Street (1929), and River House (1931). Construction started on the United Nations complex to the south between East 42nd Street to East 48th Street starting in 1947. The construction of modern buildings along First and Second Avenues completed the area’s transformation and soon only a few traces of the tenement character of the neighborhood remained.

With the transformation of neighborhood, the need for the bath house became obsolete. In 1938, the East 54th Street Bath house came fully under the jurisdiction of the Parks Department and the facility was renovated and upgraded with a mission to serve residents as a community and recreation center. The upgrades included two new separate pools, one for women and one for men, with additional upgrades to plumbing, heating and cooling to accommodate pools.³⁷ To boost attendance, area schools were encouraged to send their pupils to the gymnasium after school hours, and after 5 p.m. the facility was open to adults. Commercial organizations and clubs with leagues and organized tournaments were also offered use of the facility. The Parks Department sponsored a variety of activities to promote the intra-playground tournaments that were held annually. Tournaments were separated by gender, consisting of organized swim meets, basketball games, and gymnastics. Thought to promote good citizenship clubs were also encouraged including: athletic, civic, camp fire, boy and girl scouts, community chorus, dramatic, glee clubs, junior police, literary, military, orchestral, philanthropic and social. In February 1998, the East 54th Street Bath house was renamed “Recreation Center Fifty-Four.”³⁸

In 1996 the East 54th Street bath house was allocated \$4.2 million for renovations including: structural up-grades to the wall and metal roof trellis system; barrier free accessibility, improvements to the pools, the addition of skylights, the replacement of doors masonry, and new windows.³⁹ In 2001, the facility was again open to the community.

Description

The Free Public Bath of the City of New York, East 54th Street Bath and Gymnasium, is designed in the Classical Revival style with Arts and Crafts style details. The building sits mid-block on East 54th Street and is built to the lot line, with one visible façade. The five-bay façade is approximately 75-feet in width and three stories in height (plus cellar).

Historic: brick façade with stone details and trim; first floor center bay has a multi-light metal framed window with transom; outside bays with stone stairs and painted metal door surrounds; spandrel panels of brick with marble designs; arched metal framed multi-light windows with

stone at second floor; cornice with raised bronze lettering; tripartite metal framed windows at third level; stone cornice with stone at each column; steel-and-wire mesh structure above cornice.

Alterations: (1934-1938) structural and interior alterations; (1941) removal of sidewalk and vault, replaced with metal trap door; replaced sidewalk; removal of steel plate, replaced with reinforced concrete slab; removal of stairs leading to vault, refinish to match existing;⁴⁰ (1959) removal of steps at outermost bays; removal of existing doors and frames at both main entrances, replaced with new balanced metal-and-glass doors; removal of lettering above both doors;⁴¹ (1996) removal of existing roof cage, reconstruction of roof truss structural system, removal of existing parapet, coping and flashing, repair exterior masonry wall system, replace doors and windows.⁴²

Researched and written by
Theresa C. Noonan
Research Department

NOTES

¹ Information in this section is based on the following sources: Fremont Rider, *Rider's New York City* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1923), 302-307; Dr. William H. Tolman and Charles Hemstreet, *The Better New York* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1904), 172-190; Federal Writers' Project, *New York City Guide* (New York: Octagon Bks., 1970, reprint of 1939 edition), 226-229; Gerard R. Wolfe, *New York: A Guide to the Metropolis* (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1988), 340-344.

² The 1897 and the 1899 Bromley Atlas shows six breweries, a cigar factory, casket manufacturer and a wagon manufacturing company, all within a two-block radius of the future site of the East 54th Street bath house.

³ The neighborhood is said to have inspired Sidney Kingsley's play, *Dead End*, which dramatizes the contrast of wealth and poverty in a single district. Marilyn Thomas Williams, *Washing the Great Unwashed: Public Baths in Urban America*, (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 61.

⁴ This section adapted from LPC, *Public Bath No. 7 Designation Report* (LP-1287) (New York: City of New York, 1984), prepared by Shirley Zavin.

⁵ The Mott Street bath located at 141 Mott Street closed in 1861 due to poor attendance.

⁶ Mayor's Committee of New York City, *Report on Public Baths and Public Comfort Stations* (New York: 1897), 27.

⁷ *Ibid*, 28.

⁸ William Paul Gerhard, *Modern Baths and Bath Houses* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1908), 76.

⁹ New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, *The People's Baths* (New York: n.p., n.d.), not paginated.

¹⁰ *Report on Public Baths and Public Comfort Stations*, 37.

¹¹ *The People's Baths, 9 Centre Market Place: A Study on Public Baths* (New York, 1896), 2.

¹² *Report on Public Baths and Public Comfort Stations*, 36.

¹³ Information in this section is based on the following sources: Williams; *Public Baths and Lavatories* (New York: Citizens' Union of the City of New York, May 1897); *Public Baths Under the Supervision of the President of the Borough of Manhattan*

(New York: New York City Public Works Department, 1912); William Paul Gerhard, "Public Bath Houses," *Third Annual Meeting of the American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths*, Newark, 12 (May 1914); "Baths" *Phrenological Journal and Science of Health*, 117 (April 1904), 132; Bertha H. Smith, "The Public Bath," *Outlook*, 4 (March 1905), 566-577; "The New Public Bath," *New York Times (NYT)*, March 6, 1896, 7; "The Need of Public Baths," *NYT*, March 18, 1902, 8; "Plans for New Public Baths," *NYT*, November 25, 1903, 7; "The Building Department," *NYT*, November 25, 1903, 14; "Three New Public Baths," *NYT*, May 22, 1904, FS8; "New City Baths Opened," *NYT*, November 30, 1905, 4; Charles G. Bennett, "Car Washing Ban is Upheld; Pools, Rinks, Baths Curbed," *NYT*, January 7, 1950, 1; "Last Public Bath a Tile Taj Mahal," *NYT*, February 27, 1960, 21; "Awed by Baths," *New York Tribune*, April 13, 1905, 5; "Bathing Unpopular," *New York Tribune*, June 16, 1905, 5; "Hot Wave Kills Ten," *New York Tribune*, July 1, 1906, 1.

¹⁴ Information in this section based on the following sources: New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances Liber 133, page 161; New York City Department of Buildings, Block and Lot File for Block 1346, Lot 32.

¹⁵ The 13 Free Public Baths of the City of New York, in the order of their openings, were located at 326 Rivington Street (opened March 23, 1901); 327 West 41st Street (November 23, 1904, demolished); 243 East 109th Street (March 17, 1905, demolished); 133 Allen Street (November 23, 1905); 538 East 11th Street (December 18, 1905); 523 East 76th Street (January 28, 1906, demolished); 232 West 60th Street (June 28, 1906); 23rd St. and Avenue A (January 20, 1908); 83 Carmine Street (May 6, 1908); 100 Cherry Street (November 9, 1909, demolished); 5 Rutgers Place (December 23, 1909); 342 East 54th Street (February 17, 1911); and 407 West 28th Street (1914, demolished). The city-operated public baths built in public parks in Manhattan were located in Seward Park; Thomas Jefferson Park; 42nd Street and Eleventh Avenue; and 138th Street and Fifth Avenue. Six public baths were located in Brooklyn on Hicks Street (1903), Pitken Avenue (1903), Montrose Avenue (date unknown), Huron Street (date unknown), Duffield Street (date unknown) and Wilson Avenue (date unknown). One public bath was located in the Bronx at 156th Street and Elton Avenue (1909) and another was located in Queens (location and date unknown). Staten Island did not have public baths due to its suburban character.

¹⁶ Information in this section based on the following sources: Laws of New York 138th Session-1915, chapter 574, abolish the Public Recreation Commission and transfers duties to the NYC Parks Department, New York Charter Sections 629, 630 and 631; the East 54th Street bath house, 342-348 East 54th Street, Block: 1346, Lot: 32, is referred to as Park M-130 in New York City Parks Department records; City of New York, Department of Parks *Annual Report 1915*.

¹⁷ The entire building and property is under New York City Parks Department buy city charter of 1938. It not clear if jurisdiction over the Brooklyn Bath houses was also transferred to the NYC Department of Parks at this time.

¹⁸ Information in this section based on the following sources: Manhattan Borough President *Annual Report*, (1911-1915), 69, 105, 129, 171, 150; The City of New York Department of Parks, *Annual Report for 1915* (New York 1915), 50.

¹⁹ Sources for this section include: Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Headquarters Troop, 51ST Cavalry Brigade Armory*, Designation Report (LP- 2369) (New York: City of New York, 2010), prepared by Michael Caratzas; David Steadman Francis, *Architects in Practice in New York City 1840-1900* (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1979), 81; G.W.W. Hanger, "Public Baths in the United States," in United States Department of Commerce and Labor, *Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor* 54 (September 1904), 1334-6; Robert B. MacKay, "Werner & Windolph, Practiced 1890s-1900s," in Robert B. MacKay, Anthony K. Baker, and Carol A. Traynor, *Long Island Country Houses and Their Architects, 1860-1940* (New York: Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities and W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 440-1; Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and John Massengale, *New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism, 1890-1915* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1983), 73, 138-41; James Ward, *Architects in Practice in New York City* (Union, N.J.: J&D Associates, 1989), 84; *New York City Directories, 1786 to 1933/34* (New York: New York Public Library, 1950); "A New York Public Bath," *American Architect and Building News*, 90 (September 1, 1906), 1600-1; "A Public Bath and Gymnasium in the City of New York" and "A House on Break Neck Mountain, New York," *The American Architect* (May 15, 1912), 226-8, plates following page 228; "Harold H. Werner" (Obituary), *NYT*, October 1, 1955, 19; and "August P. Windolph" (Obituary), *NYT* December 26, 1929, 15.

²⁰ When Columbia's architecture program started in 1881, it was placed within the School of Mines, Columbia's engineering school, where it remained for more than two decades. See Cecil D. Elliott, *The American Architect from the Colonial Era to the Present* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2002), 72.

²¹ Windolph was described as "Assemblyman-elect from the 13th District" in "Drilling for Their Guests," *New York Times*, December 10, 1884, 4, and as Vice President of the Board of Aldermen in "A Day's Weddings: Geib-Windolph," *NYT*, February 28, 1896, 2.

²² "To Have Their Own Home," *New York Tribune*, March 12, 1899, 4.

²³ "Engineer's Home in Question," *NYT*, July 4, 1903, 12.

²⁴ Stern, Gilmartin, and Massengale, 139.

²⁵ "Richard W. Erler, "Newark's New Bathhouse," *Municipal Journal* (January 29, 1914), 134; "Public Bath, City of Newark, N.J.," *The American Architect* (June 11, 1913), plates following page 268.

²⁶ Other early-20th-century works by the firm included a firehouse for Hook & Ladder Company No. 35 at 232 West 63rd Street (1905-08, demolished), and the two-story, Colonial Revival style Sunshine Chapel at West 40th Street (begun 1906, demolished), which contained a kindergarten and assembly space, as well as a second-floor gymnasium. On the firehouse, see Stern, Gilmartin, and Massengale, 73, as well as “A New Type of Fire House,” *American Architect and Building News* (August 5, 1908), 47; on the Sunshine Chapel, see plates in *The American Architect* (December 23, 1908).

²⁷ For a description of the house designed by Werner & Windolph at 202 Shore Road in the Douglaston Historic District, see LPC, *Douglaston Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1957) (New York: City of New York, 1997), 628.

²⁸ Department of Commerce and Labor, “Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor, *Public Baths in the United States* (Washington, July 1904) 1334.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ “A New York Public Bath,” *American Architect and Building News*, 90 (September 1, 1906) 71-72. (APS Online)

³¹ Ibid.

³² 1913 Annual Report of the Manhattan Borough Presidents Office, the cost to complete the building, install a pool and make the necessary alterations would add an estimated \$75,000 to the original cost. Construction on two new pools measuring 54 feet long and 17 feet wide was begun in 1914, and opened on March 29, 1915 they officially opened to the public July, 17, 1917. The initial estimated cost was \$75,000, the city allotted funds in the amount of \$68,000 to cover the cost of the project; however, the job came in under budget, the actual cost of installing both swimming pools was \$53,648, leaving a balance and saving the city \$14,351.

³³ First floor interior contains decorative Gustravino brick tiles.

³⁴ Andrew Scott Dolkart, *The Row House Reborn: Architecture and Neighborhoods in New York City, 1908-1929*, (New York: John Hopkins University Press, 2009) 68-69, 71, 85, 87,174.

³⁵ Thomas E. Norton and Jerry E. Patterson, *Living It Up*, (New York: Atheneum, 1984), 21.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ City of New York, Department of Parks & Recreation, *Press Release*, (May 31, 1938).

³⁸ City of New York, Department of Parks & Recreation internal file.

³⁹ Lauren A. Elkies, “Midtown Recreation Center Gets Face-lift,” *Our Town*, (December 13, 2001), 7.

⁴⁰ New York City Department of Buildings, Borough of Manhattan, Alteration Application, (ALT 125-1941).

⁴¹ New York City Department of Buildings, Borough of Manhattan, Alteration Application, (ALT 699-1959).

⁴² New York City Department of Buildings, Borough of Manhattan, Alteration Application, (ALT 101316489-1996).

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the East 54th Street Bath and Gymnasium has a special character, and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as a part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the East 54th Street Bath is the 12th of 13 Free Public Baths of the City of New York opened in Manhattan; that it is culturally significant for its part in the history of the progressive reform movement in America; that the East 54th Street Bath opened for public use in 1911 with 79 showers for men and 59 for women providing sanitary facilities for area residents, as well as a gymnasium, running track and roof playground for recreational use; that the East 54th Street Bath initially served a largely poor clientele although the neighborhood became a fashionable address in the 1920s; that most of the baths erected after 1904—including this one—incorporated gymnasiums and swimming pools to attract more patrons; that this building probably ceased operation as a bath house in 1938, at which time the city completely modernized the interior for use as a public gymnasium; that the building is still owned by the city and is used as a community facility; that the East 54th Street Bath was designed by Werner & Windolph, whose bath designs were considered to be a perfect solution, from a sanitary standpoint, and received endorsements from leading experts of the day and the Board of Health; that Werner & Windolph were also well known as designers of country estates and suburban cottages; that this imposing Classical Revival style structure is faced with brick and stone and trimmed with Arts and Crafts style details; that its most notable features include four monumental engaged Doric columns at the entrance, which creates a strong presence at the street, and the curving rooftop structure that houses the gymnasium and track; that the exterior, which remains remarkably intact, creates a powerful architectural presence and a reminder of the progressive reform movement in the neighborhood; that little more than a dozen bathhouses were built in New York City, making this structure a rare example of an important aspect of the reform movement.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Pable E. Vengoechea, Vice-Chair

Frederick Bland, Diana Chapin, Michael Devonshire, Joan Gerner,

Michael Goldblum, Margery Perlmutter, Commissioners



FREE PUBLIC BATHS OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK, EAST 54TH STREET BATH AND GYMNASIUM
342-348 East 54th Street
Borough of Manhattan
Tax Map Block1346, Lot 32
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2010



East 54th Street Bath
(East 54th Street facade)
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011



East 54th Street Bath
(East 54th Street facade)
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011



East 54th Street Bath
(East 54th Street facade)
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011



Photo c. 1925

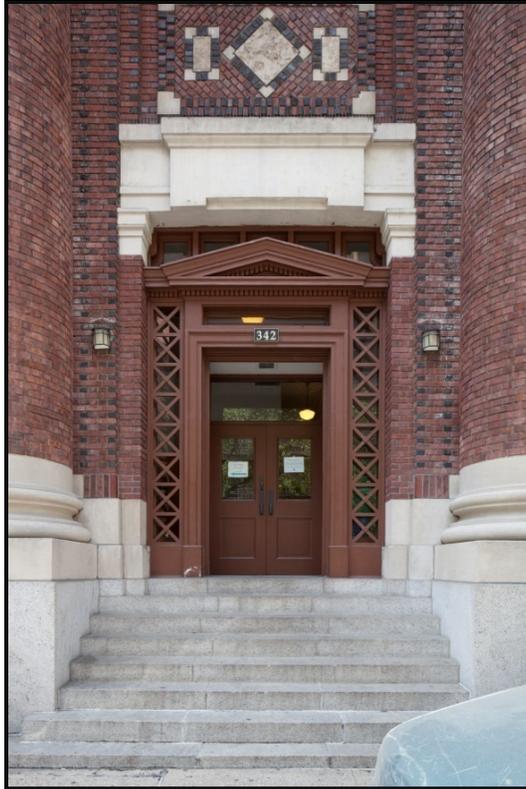
Photo Source: New York Public Library



East 54th Street Bath

New York City Dept. of Taxes Photo c.1939

Photo Source: NYC, Dept. of Records and Information Services, Municipal Archive



East 54th Street Bath
Details

Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011





East 54th Street Bath
Details

Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2010





East 54th Street Bath
Details

Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011





East 54th Street Bath
Details
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011





East 54th Street Bath
Photo c. 1939

Source: New York City Parks Department Photo Archives

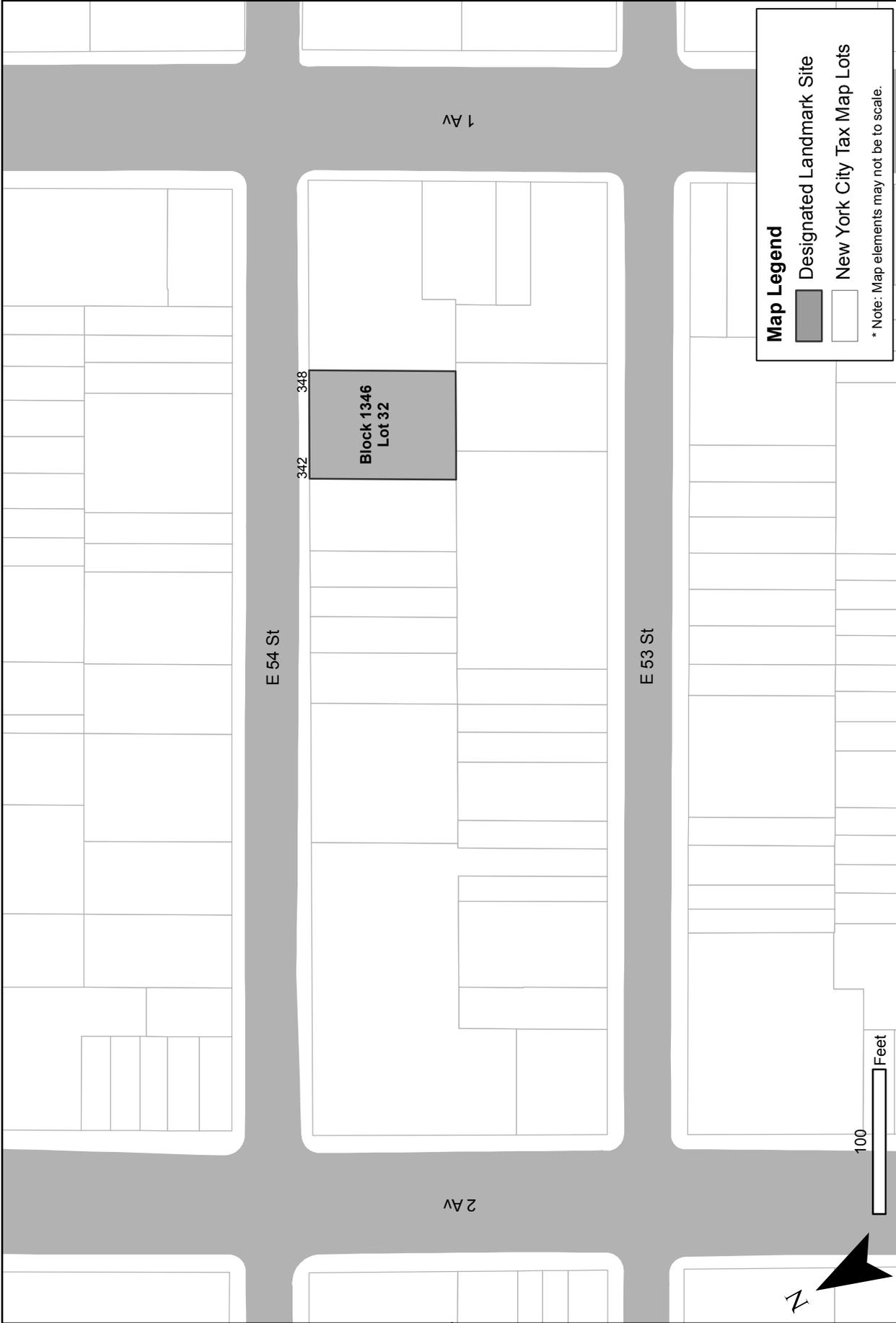




East 54th Street Bath
Photo c. 1940

Source: New York City Parks Department Photo Archives





Map Legend

- Designated Landmark Site
- New York City Tax Map Lots

* Note: Map elements may not be to scale.

FREE PUBLIC BATHS OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK, EAST 54TH STREET BATH (LP-2435), 344 East 54th Street
 (aka 342-348 East 54th Street) Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1346, Lot 32

Designated: May 10, 2011