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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

### National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

#### 1. Name of Property

historic name Rockaway Courthouse

other names/site number N/A

#### 2. Location

street & number 90-01 Beach Channel Drive [ ] not for publication

city or town Rockaway Beach [ ] vicinity

state New York code NY county Queens code 081 zip code 11693

#### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide  locally. ([ ] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Ruth A. Purpura DSHPO*

*12/12/13*

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([ ] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register [ ] see continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register [ ] see continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

*Edson H. Beall*

Signature of the Keeper

date of action

*2-5-14*

**Rockaway Courthouse**

**Queens County, New York**

Name of Property

County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____	buildings
1	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
1	0	<b>TOTAL</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/ courthouse

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY REVIVAL/

Classical Revival

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Stone, Structural Clay Tile, Brick

roof Asphalt

other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

**Rockaway Courthouse**

Name of Property

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location
- C** a birthplace or grave
- D** a cemetery
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by historic American Building Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Queens County, New York**

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**Areas of Significance:**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

**Period of Significance:**

1931

**Significant Dates:**

1931

**Significant Person:**

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation:**

N/A

**Architect/Builder:**

Paul C. Hunter

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other repository: \_\_\_\_\_



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Rockaway Courthouse  
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Narrative Description of Property

The Rockaway Courthouse is located in on the narrow Rockaway Peninsula, which is the western terminus of Long Island. The Rockaway Beach neighborhood is centrally located on the peninsula, and is comprised of various local districts that are named based on historical settlement patterns. Located in the Hollands area of Rockaway Beach, the Courthouse served as the Magistrate's and Municipal Courts of Queens County, beginning in 1932.

The site is bounded at the north by Beach Channel Drive, at the east by Beach 90th Street, at the west by Beach 91<sup>st</sup> Street, and at the south by private development. Located on the south side of Beach Channel Drive, only one block south of Jamaica Bay, the Courthouse is situated in a dense residential area that also includes some commercial properties. Just west of the Courthouse, the Cross Bay Bridge connects the Rockaway peninsula north to the mainland of Queens County. The building is one of the first structures seen when entering the Rockaways on the bridge. Just south of the courthouse is an entrance to the elevated subway, which provides alternate access to the Boroughs of New York City.

The boundary for the nomination was drawn to include the entire tax parcel, which corresponds to the original historic boundaries of the property, measuring 200 wide feet by 100 feet deep. The sole contributing building on the property is the Courthouse. The sole contributing object is a decorative steel fence surrounding the property at the north, east, and west sides. Sidewalks abut the fence on each side. The geometric spaces between the fence and irregularly shaped building are raised landscapes, currently overgrown.

The Rockaway Courthouse has three significant exterior facades due to its modified "V"-shaped plan, and positioning on the site. The main spaces of the building are its elaborate courtrooms, which are located in the projecting wings, both at 45 degrees from the street, each with its own ornate Greek detailed entrance portico. The central portion of the building connects the wings, and historically was used as office space.

Though designed as a single building, the public Magistrate's and Municipal courtrooms were located in opposite wings, and essentially used as separate structures, despite being connected by an interior stairway. Unlike the elaborate entrances and courtrooms, access upstairs was not part of the primary public circulation sequence. Support spaces for those courts were smaller, and private, and access provided by a functional staircase.

A physical description of the Courthouse served as the introduction to a 2007 pre-schematic report written by John G. Waite & Associate Architects for the City University of New York, who had hoped to rehabilitate the building. It is being included in this report, as it has remained largely unchanged during the past six years:

"The Rockaway Courthouse is a 3-story plus basement structure built in 1931 and unused by the City of New York since 1962. As one of the only civic buildings in the immediate neighborhood, the Rockaway Courthouse encompasses approximately 25,000 gross square feet.

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The Rockaway Courthouse plan is organized as two courtroom wings symmetrical about a taller center core. The plan is a V-shape, with the wings forming both legs, opening to the south towards a rear concrete paved courtyard, initially designed for vehicular access. Wings are two stories with double-height courtrooms and two levels of chambers to the south. The central portion is a three-story block with octagonal rooms at the intersection of the wings. Roofs of all three portions are defined by parapets and are penetrated by stair bulkheads.

A number of public and private entries originally served the building. A portico at the end of each wing served as the primary street entrance to each of the courts; these porticos face Beach Channel Drive and open towards the exterior corners at Beach 90<sup>th</sup> and Beach 91<sup>st</sup> streets. Nine steps lead up approximately six feet from grade. The southeast side of each wing is accessed by stairs from first floor to grade, that were likely separate entrance as for judges or administrators. Finally one areaway to the west was likely the original prisoner entry and is connected to a metal-framed chain link cage structure.

The primary and most noticeable material on the courthouse is stone, which is arranged in a coursed ashlar pattern on the exterior facades of the wings and north façade of the center portion. It is coursed in thicker and thinner bands; the narrower units align with heads and sills. All areas of stone across the façade are consistent in material; including water table, plinth, exterior stairs, portico stairs, columns, entablature, cornice, parapet and coping.

The center-south portion of the building is faced in a cream-colored glazed brick and appears visually discontinuous from the rest of the structure. Detailing on this portion is utilitarian with simple square window penetrations, and an octagonal chimney which rises above the third floor and which once carried exhaust from the furnaces below.

The stone facades employ classical details. The porticos utilize fluted Doric columns and entablatures with carved signage indicating "Municipal Court" to the east and "Magistrates Court" to the west. The portico doorways are ornamented with stone surrounds and pediments. The east and west sides of the courtrooms are large window walls, consisting of four double-height arch top windows edged with decorative surrounds and keystone scrolls. The remaining window openings in the stone facades are rectangular with stone heads and slightly projecting sills. The perimeters of the wings and the north façade of the center section are banded with stone cornices, while the brick portion has none. A projecting stone water table with plinth course wraps the perimeter of the entire building.

The building has two window types: wood double-hung sashes in rectilinear openings and steel lunette-top windows in the courtroom spaces. The wood windows had similar detailing in stone and brick facades, and most have been augmented with concrete block or plywood infill. Vertical, steel bar grates protect windows in the basement of the west wing as it formerly housed prisoners. Courtroom windows are twenty-pane steel frames with lunette transoms and four operating center units that pivot on their horizontal axis. They have been infilled with concrete masonry units.

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The roofs on all areas of the building are flat, hot-mopped asphalt, and pitched to internal drains. The portico roofs are separated by parapet walls, and drain onto the courtroom roofs through copper scuppers. The center roof and the roofs of both wings have stair bulkheads which lead to the floors below.

The perimeter of the Rockaway Courthouse site is surrounded by a decorative steel picket fence that is currently painted black. The fence is comprised of square-section vertical bars spaced four inches apart ending in tapered points at the top. The fence is typically four feet in height from the adjacent landscape and rises in a gentle curve to approximately seven feet at the swinging gate openings and corners.”<sup>1</sup>

“Several public and therefore more prominent spaces within the Courthouse retain original materials and features that differed from the utilitarian rooms throughout the building. The former courtrooms are the largest spaces within the building. In these double-height rooms, the remaining plaster on the walls exhibits a square-edged paneled relief pattern.

In these two rooms, the suspended plaster ceiling was divided into twelve recessed square coffers with decorative profiles and applied composition molding in an egg-and-dart pattern.

The walls of typical rooms throughout the building are finished with traditional three-coat painted plaster. Interior partitions are constructed out of ribbed 12”x12”x4” structural clay tile units; exterior brick masonry walls are furred out on the interior with similar one inch thick tile, to which the plaster finish is directly adhered. Exterior walls throughout the basement appear to be board-formed cast concrete construction, visible primarily where the plaster finish has failed.

Ceilings throughout the typical rooms of the first, second, and third floors of the building are painted plaster on ferrous metal lath suspended from the reinforced concrete slab of the floor or roof framing above. The basement ceilings are three-coast plaster directly adhered to the underside of the concrete slab and steel beam encased system.

Floors for the typical rooms throughout the building are terrazzo, with the exception of the entrance lobbies, and several rooms on the second and third floors and in the basement. The typical terrazzo floor consists of approximately 2’x2’ panels of light colored terrazzo with narrow metal divider strips. Many white stone door thresholds remain. Alternate flooring in smaller rooms included unfinished concrete, sheet linoleum, wood flooring and vinyl tile. Floors in former entry lobbies are a light rose-colored stone, which appears to be similar to stone used at typical hallway wainscots.

Two public lobbies provide a transition space between each main entrance to the building and to the courtrooms. These single-story spaces have painted, suspended, wood-paneled coffered ceilings with

<sup>1</sup> John G. Waite Associates, Architects. P. 7-9.

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similar decorative treatment as the courtrooms; full height dark stone paneled walls, and light-stone flooring laid in a running bond with dark stone perimeter trim.

Within the public circulation spaces on the first floor and the central stairway up to the third floor and roof, light rose-colored stone panels and trim form a 6'-0" high wainscot. Similar stone is used for the stair treads, which rest upon steel pan stairs with exposed painted stringers and risers, at the central staircase as well as at the two other stairways within the wings."<sup>2</sup>

"The structural system of the Rockaway Courthouse is a composite of load-bearing brick and fireproofed steel frame construction. Exterior walls are composed of at least two wythes of common brick faced with either stone or glazed brick. The center south portion of the courthouse, clad in brick, is load-bearing masonry, while a grid of steel columns extends through the center of this area. Columns continue through the wings, and are concealed by masonry piers on the exterior wall. The masonry that forms the window walls of the courtroom is self supporting, non-loadbearing construction.

Interior walls are non-load bearing structural clay tile block throughout, with very few exceptions within the eastern portion of the basement.

Floors and roofs are supported by steel girders and beams encased in approximately 1-1/2 inches of concrete. Floors are poured-in-place concrete slabs with internal draped mesh reinforcing, and embedded steel anchors for hung plaster ceilings below. Spandrel beams catch the edge of slabs at load-bearing masonry walls."<sup>3</sup>

The Courthouse was last in use as a civic structure in 1962, with occasional use by local arts groups in the 1970s. Since then it has been abandoned and mothballed. No furnishings, nor fixtures, remain. Though the attempt was made to secure the building from decades of weather, material degradation still occurred. However, the exterior structure remains intact, and areas of finish deterioration repairable. The integrity of the building has been compromised, but certainly not lost in its years of vacancy.

Integrity is strongest in terms of plan, massing, and association. The floor plan of the building has barely been altered since construction. On rare occasion a room has been subdivided by a non-permanent partition. The massing of the building too has remained almost entirely unchanged. The stone of the facades is in fair condition, with some that are in need of repair. The Greek detailing and entrance porticoes which help to define the building as a prototypical Courthouse are intact. Unfortunately, the entire site is overgrown, encased by single-story scaffolding, a chain link fence, and the building unclean, but all are reversible conditions.

The interior finishes have suffered the most, due to moisture infiltration. In particular, plaster has crumbled, paint has peeled, and metals have rusted. Portions of all the historic finishes remain in situ, some in fair/good

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 23-25.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 26.

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condition, but nowhere is an entire room complete. However, many significant features remain: large portions of the original floor and wood trim, as well as original stone stair and railings. The original Courthouse windows, though blocked in, are in place and visible from the interior of the building. The jail cells in the basement are in place, as is the prisoners entrance. Despite some poor conditions, the remaining finishes are original, and can inform repairs and replacement, especially given the high integrity of massing, plan and association.

The Rockaway Courthouse remains a significant landmark in the area, its prominent site and stately design, a long time feature of Rockaway Beach.

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**Statement of Significance:**

The Rockaway Courthouse is significant as an intact example of high style civic architecture associated with the growth of Rockaway Beach in the early and mid-part of the twentieth century. Constructed in 1931 for the New York City government, the building was designed by architect Major Paul C. Hunter, who was long associated with the Metropolitan Transit Authority. The Rockaway Courthouse served as a local Municipal and Magistrate's Court for only thirty years when New York City consolidated its courthouses, and has remained vacant since. The period of significance is the 1931 date of construction.

**History of Rockaway Beach**

Rockaway Peninsula is a narrow strip of land on the western terminus of Long Island, with Jamaica Bay at its north and the Atlantic Ocean to its south. At its westernmost point, the peninsula is due south of Brooklyn, and at its easternmost, it is south of Queens. Rockaway is 12 miles long and a half mile wide. Since it was sold to the Dutch by the Indians in 1640, it has been used as farmland, a luxury summer resort, a resort for persons of modest income, and now currently a bedroom community to New York City.

Historically, development of the Rockaway Peninsula moved forward at a leisurely pace due to the limitations of transportation. The earliest evidence of vehicular connectivity was via stage coach, which left the Village of Hempstead, Long Island each morning on route west to Rockaway. In 1833, the railroad extended further westward into the peninsula which is credited for the establishment of the Rockaway Beach neighborhood, located at the central part of the peninsula. The availability of train travel prompted wealthy New Yorkers to buy up farm acreage, and transform the landscape from farmland into a summer waterfront resort for the rich.<sup>4</sup>

The "Hollands" section of Rockaway Beach is where the Rockaway Courthouse is located. Named for the founding family who settled there, the Holland's arrived on the Rockaway Peninsula in 1858 on the Schooner Virginia, which landed near the present Beach 90<sup>th</sup> street and Jamaica Bay. They had purchased what is now Beach 88<sup>th</sup> to Beach 95<sup>th</sup>, which was solely occupied by a hotel that catered to summer visitors. In addition, the Holland's constructed their family farm between Beach 91<sup>st</sup> and Beach 94<sup>th</sup> streets along what is now Rockaway Boulevard. Michael Jr. grew to become the first postmaster of the area that is today bounded by Beach 88<sup>th</sup> Street, Beach 100<sup>th</sup> street, Jamaica Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.

Rockaway Boulevard and the New York & Rockaway Beach Railroad (later the Rockaway Division of the Long Island Railroad) were the major east-west thoroughfares which spurred the growth of Rockaway Beach in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as nearby New York City grew in size and status. The railroad was located at the north edge of Jamaica Bay, adjacent to the mud flats at low tide.

The more rapid development and growth of the Hollands section of Rockaway Beach did not occur until the 1920s, when the Jamaica Bay Infill project commenced. During the winter of 1922/1923, the mudflats along the

<sup>4</sup> "Rockaway Losing Seasonal Status"

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bayfront between Beach 88<sup>th</sup> and Beach 116<sup>th</sup> Streets were filled with sand. Once the marsh was built up, Beach Channel Drive was paved along the infill as the northernmost east-west thoroughfare across the island, running parallel to the Bay. The existing Beach Streets were extended northwards to meet the new Beach Channel Drive and at the intersection of Beach 90<sup>th</sup>, Beach 91<sup>st</sup> and Beach Channel Drive, the Rockaway Courthouse was constructed in 1931.

A number of historic beach buildings were demolished to complete the Jamaica Bay infill project. This included the Jamaica Bay Yacht club which stood far out in the bay, accessible via a 600' dock that connected back to the railroad. The Courthouse now stands at the site of the Yacht Club.

When the Courthouse was constructed in 1931, it was the first building on its infilled site. Beach Channel Drive would become one of the busiest streets of Rockaway Beach, a two-way corridor with frequent stop lights and crosswalks. Two-story semi-detached residences were quickly built to its south, but it would take many years for the newly reclaimed city blocks to become occupied. However, an entrance to the elevated subway only one block south of the Courthouse helped along development, and a new bedroom community to Manhattan was settled. The 1930 Census listed the population of the peninsula as 30,000.

The years between 1925-1940 marked an era of transportation improvements for Rockaway, which also aided in its transformation. During those fifteen years, not only was Beach Channel Drive constructed, but also the Cross Bay Boulevard and Marine Parkway Bridge were opened. Existing main roads were widened, and a ferry system developed between the Peninsula and the rest of Queens. Railroad service became more frequent, and perhaps most importantly, a beach boardwalk was built, finalizing Rockaway's status as a summer getaway for modest income city occupants.<sup>5</sup> By 1950, the census population had grown to 50,000.

Rockaway Beach boasts ten miles of beautiful oceanfront on the Atlantic, and another sixteen miles of waterfront on Jamaica Bay. However, today, between both waterfronts exists a troubled residential neighborhood fraught with poverty, deterioration, slums and racial tension. This transition began after World War two when summer bungalows were converted to year-round use and were not maintained during the off-season. In addition, sewage began to be dumped into Jamaica Bay, and a sea wall effectively shut off access to it. By 1960, the city acquired these derelict properties and transferred them to a private sponsor for a \$70 million redevelopment urban renewal program. It was at this same time that the Rockaway Courthouse was closed.

**History of Queens Government**

The Rockaway Courthouse served as the Third District Magistrates Court and the Fifth District Municipal Court of Queens. Before the Borough of Queens became a part of greater New York City in 1898, Municipal Rockaway court cases were heard at the Jamaica Courts, Queens County Courts, Long Island City Courts and Town of Hempstead Courts. The Far Rockaway Village Hall was a 5-story brick building that served as a school initially, before becoming a station house, lockup, and early Magistrate's Court. Although an addition was built

<sup>5</sup> "Rockaway Losing Seasonal Status"

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onto it in early 1929, it became clear that there was a need for another courthouse altogether, especially given the new infill and subsequent development of the north side of Rockaway Beach. The Magistrate's Court cases were moved to the new Rockaway Courthouse upon its opening in 1932. However Rockaway Beach also had at least 6 other various makeshift municipal courthouses and lock up facilities across the peninsula, including the old library building at Beach 91<sup>st</sup> Street and Rockaway Boulevard, just down the street from what would be the new Rockaway Courthouse. This hodgepodge approach to government necessitated a central courthouse large enough to operate in an organized fashion.

A newspaper article which ran the week of its opening noted that, "The new court house will replace the thirty-year-old magistrates' court in Central Avenue, Far Rockaway, and the crowded offices of the Municipal Court on the second floor of the Seaside Branch of the Queens Borough Public Library. The magistrates' court was so inadequate in recent years that hundreds of litigants had to wait outside the little building at the thrice-weekly sessions until the clerk shouted their names from a side window."<sup>6</sup> The building was demolished in 1946.

The Rockaway Courthouse was the second public structure erected on the peninsula in the early 1930s, after three decades of maximizing, and overusing, existing civic spaces. The Ridgewood Courthouse cornerstone was laid a year earlier, marking a new era of public buildings for Rockaway.

However this was interrupted in 1962 by the centralization of the court system to Jamaica, Queens. Since that time, the problem of abandoned civic buildings has proven a serious concern in New York City, and has remained so for many decades. The Rockaway Courthouse was featured in a 1992 publication entitled, "Preservation and Recycling of Public Buildings," which served as marketing and inventory of vacant civic structures.

### **History of Building**

The architect of the Rockaway Courthouse was Paul C. Hunter (b. 1862). Hunter was trained as both an architect and engineer who worked on a wide variety of projects. Early on in his career, Hunter was associated with Everett F. Murgatroyd in the firm of Hunter & Murgatroyd. Among his noted projects during that era was the Hotel Allerton in New York City. The partnership dissolved when Hunter served as an engineer in France during World War One, where he attained the rank of Major. Upon his return, he worked as an architect with the Manhattan Railway Company and the Interborough Railway Company (subway) in New York City. During his tenure there, he was responsible for both powerhouse and substation design. Hunter returned to solo practice and was known for his Edyth Totten Theater in New York City, built in 1926 and demolished in 1988. He also has a number of suburban residential projects to his name in Keansburg, New Jersey. The Rockaway Courthouse was among his last projects, as he passed in 1935.

The site on Beach Channel Drive between Beach 90<sup>th</sup> (formerly Bayview Ave) and Beach 91<sup>st</sup> (formerly Oceanus Ave) streets was selected in June of 1929. Test borings were dug that autumn, but the entire project

<sup>6</sup> "Open Court House at Rockaway Beach"

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was paused due to the Great Depression. Work recommenced in April of 1931 when foundations were dug, and construction occurred between August 1931 and April 1932. A lack of furnishings kept the building closed until September 1932 when it opened.<sup>7</sup>

To say that its opening was an important day in the community is an understatement. A New York Times article covered the event:

“The building’s dedication ceremony was attended by 4,000 persons.... The Police Department Band led an automobile parade from Arverne through the Beach Channel Drive to a grand stand outside the new building. The exercises were opened by James J. Buckley, chairman of the court house committee of the Rockaway Beach Board of Trade. Paul C. Hunter, architect of the building, turned over the keys to Frederic S. Marsell, president of the Rockaway Beach Board of Trade and general chairman of the program. Mr. Marsell presented the keys to Borough President Harvey of Queens, who spoke briefly, stressing the part Mayor Walker had played in getting a new, combined court house for the Rockaways. In behalf of members of Daniel M. O’Connell Post, American Legion, Rockaway Beach, Michael Gillespie presented an American flag to Magistrate Peter M. Daly. Miss Agnes G. Buckley handed over another flag as the gift of the post’s auxiliary to William J. Morris Jr., municipal court justice. Other speakers included S. Meredith Strong Jr., Superintendent of Public Buildings and Offices in Queens; Timothy A. Leary, president-justice of the municipal court; Max Tachna, president of the Allied Civic League of the Rockaways; Abner H. Pike, Assistant District Attorney; Montrose Strassberger, Assistant Corporation Counsel; Richard M. Gipson, civic leader; the Rev. Joseph F. Curran, pastor of the St. Camillus Roman Catholic Church of Rockaway Beach; the Rev. Francis Urbano, rector of St. John’s Protestant Episcopal Church of Far Rockaway, and Rabbi Robert Gordis of Temple Beth-El of Rockaway Park....Visitors inspected the court house after the formal opening. More than 300 civic workers of the Rockaways celebrated the event at a dinner without speeches last night in the Moulin Rouge Inn, Rockaway Beach.”<sup>8</sup>

The new Courthouse was a local landmark, stories higher, and far grander, than any other buildings in the neighborhood, and opened to much fanfare in 1932. An article written the week that the Courthouse opened, describes the interior of the building: “The new court house....has three stories and forty-seven rooms. It is constructed of Tennessee marble in a modernized Greek classic design. A steel cage has been installed in the cellar for receiving and dispatching prisoners from and to prison vans. The prisoner’s pens in the basement are steel sheathed. Fireproof vaults for records and quarters for the custodian are on the sub-surface floor. The two courtrooms, each in a wing, are on the street floor, as are jury rooms, judges’ chambers and clerks’ rooms. The second story houses the municipal court library and offices for clerks, stenographers and court officers and attendants. A large auditorium is on the top floor.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Emil Lucev Papers.

<sup>8</sup> “Open Court House at Rockaway Beach”

<sup>9</sup> “Open Courthouse at Rockaway Beach”

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By 1933, it was a bustling courthouse with a high case load. The municipal court was used for hearings on “among other matters, parking tickets and summonses issued to people who walked public streets in bathing attire – illegal behavior through the 1940s”<sup>10</sup> This remained the case until the centralization of the court system. The courthouse was surrendered by the Department of Public Works in 1962, and under the jurisdiction of the City’s Department of General Services, Division of Real Property since 1963. It was slated by the Queens Borough President’s Office to be used as a recreation center under the jurisdiction of the Parks Department but the plan was not realized.

In 1970, two nonprofit organizations, the Rockaway Cultural Society and the Rockaway Repertory Theatre operated a cultural and educational facility on the first floor. The groups made many improvements, given their limited funding. However by 1974, attempts at raising money to make additional necessary improvements failed, and the building was ordered closed by the City of New York for safety concerns.

In 1993, the New York City Department of General Services published a report about its Historic Courthouses, both occupied and vacant. Within, the architecture and significance of the Rockaway Courthouse was summarized quite well, and remains accurate twenty years later:

“The classical style neighborhood courthouse harmonizes with the low scale of the neighborhood but stands out through its classical ornament. It represented justice on the most local scale. It functioned, with the police station and the other local civic structures, as a civic presence in the area.”<sup>11</sup>

Both the City of New York Division of Real Property and the Rockaway Task Force have always expressed interest in reviving the site, hoping to find a suitable use for it. Newspaper articles dating as early as the mid-1980s, through the present, remark on potential purchases of the court house, though many were just false starts. In 2012 the New York City Economic Development Corporation solicited proposals for the development of the Rockaway Courthouse, noting that “It’s a beautiful building – it has great bones...It’s also located in an area that is convenient to transportation and that has seen a significant amount of development in recent years...It’s an opportunity to take something that can’t be replicated and make a significant contribution to a growing community.”<sup>12</sup> Prompted by the nearby Arverne-on-the-Sea residential building boom, Harmony Rockaway LLC purchased the building and will be rehabilitating the structure to its former grandeur, transforming the courthouse into a medical center.

<sup>10</sup> Herszenhorn, “Neighborhood Report”

<sup>11</sup> Dierickx, 101.

<sup>12</sup> Colangelo, “A Rare Peek inside the long-shuttered Rockaway Courthouse”

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Name of Property  
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Verbal Boundary Description

Located on a .48 rectilinear lot 90-01 Beach Channel Drive in the Far Rockaway Neighborhood of Queens County, the Rockaway Courthouse is bounded at the north by Beach Channel Drive, at the east by Beach 90th Street, at the west by Beach 91<sup>st</sup> Street, and at the south by private development.

Boundary Justification

The Rockaway Courthouse is located on the parcel associated with its 1931 date of construction and period of significance. The boundary is indicated by the heavy line on the attached mapping.

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Rockaway Courthouse

Name of Property

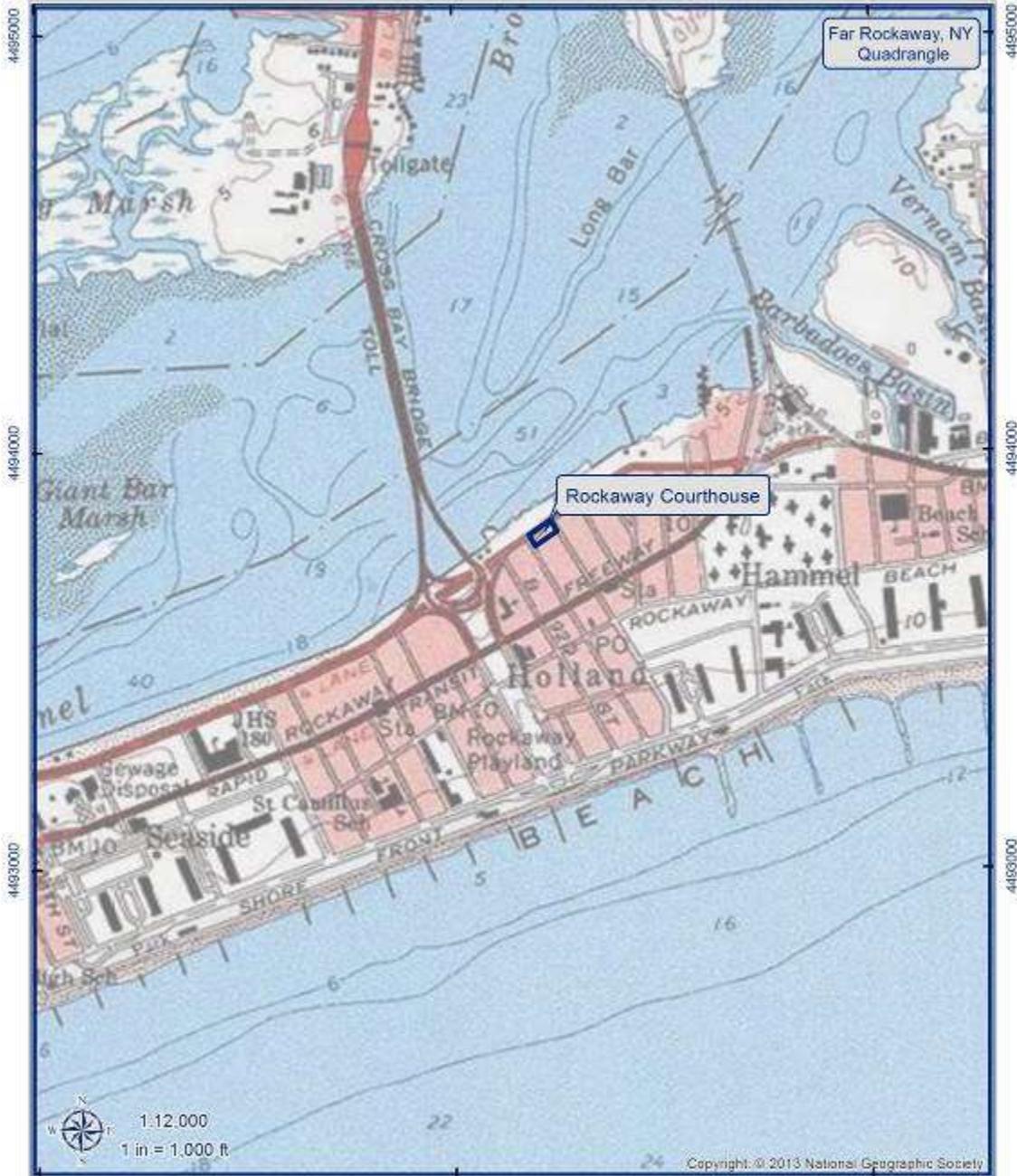
Queens County, New York

County and State

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Rockaway Courthouse  
Queens, Queens Co., NY

90-01 Beach Channel Drive  
Rockaway Beach, NY 11693



599000 600000 601000  
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



Tax Parcel Data:  
NYC PLUTO  
<http://www.nyc.gov/>



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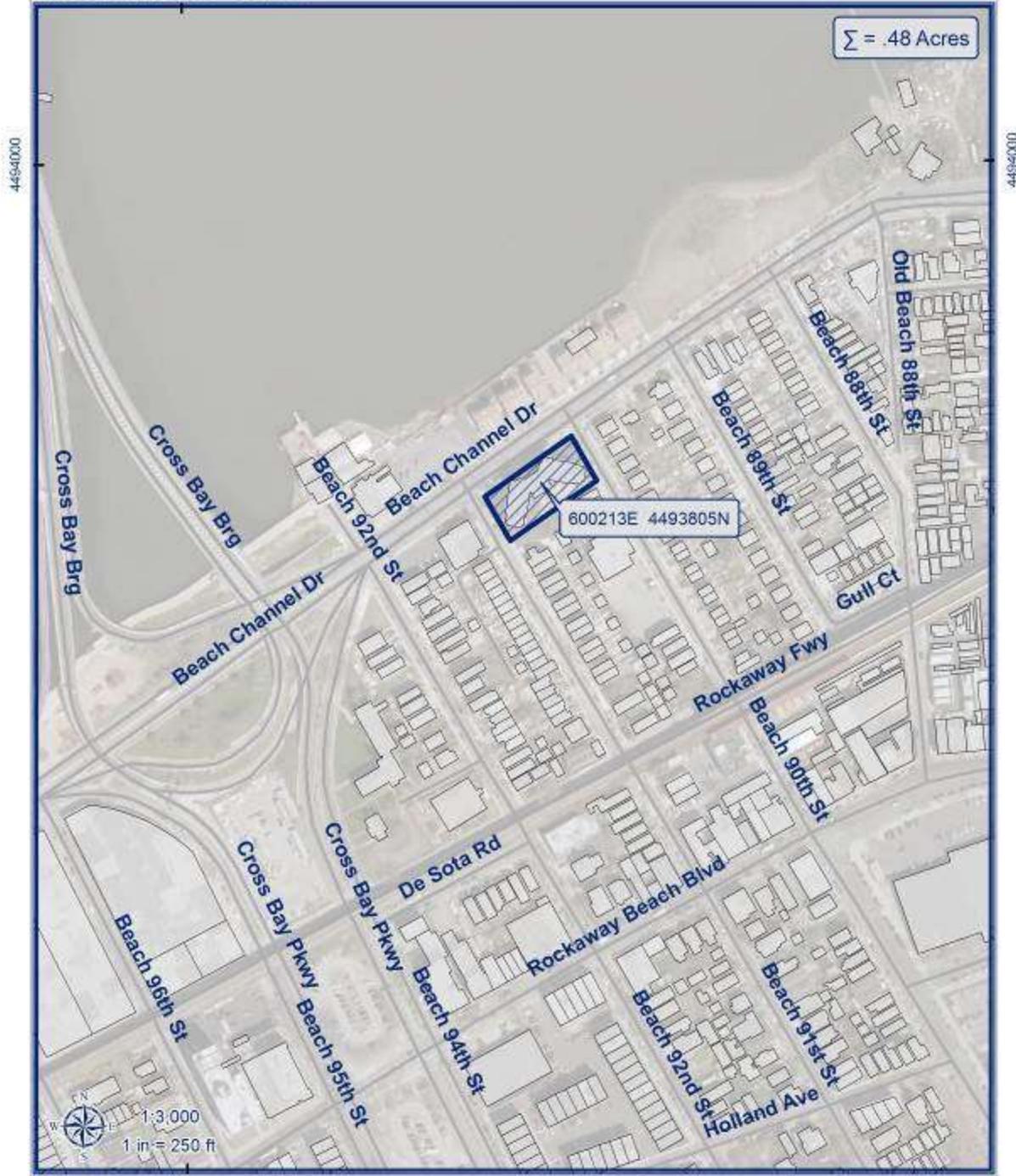
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Rockaway Courthouse  
Name of Property  
Queens County, New York  
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Rockaway Courthouse  
Queens, Queens Co., NY

90-01 Beach Channel Drive  
Rockaway Beach, NY 11693



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



 Rockaway Courthouse

Tax Parcel Data:  
NYC PLUTO  
<http://www.nyc.gov>



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Rockaway Court House  
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Additional Information

Name of Property: Rockaway Courthouse

City or Vicinity: Rockaway Beach

County: Queens State: NY

Photographer: Susan Lawson, Architect

Date Photographed: August 6, 2013

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

Photograph #1: NY\_Queens County\_Rockaway Courthouse\_0001  
2013 aerial view towards the north. Source: Google Maps.

Photograph #2: NY\_Queens County\_Rockaway Courthouse\_0002  
Overall View. North and East elevations. Camera facing southwest.

Photograph #3 NY\_Queens County\_Rockaway Courthouse\_0003  
West Elevation. Magistrate's Court Entrance and Courtroom. Camera facing southeast. Courtroom windows blocked up.

Photograph #4 NY\_Queens County\_Rockaway Courthouse\_0004  
Magistrate's Court Entrance Portico, Upper Half.

Photograph #5 NY\_Queens County\_Rockaway Courthouse\_0005  
Magistrate's Court Entrance Portico, Lower Half.

Photograph #6 NY\_Queens County\_Rockaway Courthouse\_0006  
North Elevation, Upper Stories. Municipal Court Entrance (left). Camera facing southwest.

Photograph #7 NY\_Queens County\_Rockaway Courthouse\_0007  
Detail. "Magistrate's Court" engraving on Entrance Portico Cornice. Camera facing south.

Photograph #8 NY\_Queens County\_Rockaway Courthouse\_0008  
East side of Rear/South Elevation at Municipal Court. Camera facing north.

Photograph #9 NY\_Queens County\_Rockaway Courthouse\_0009

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Center portion of Rear/South Elevation at Office Block. Camera facing north.

Photograph #10 NY\_Queens County\_Rockaway Courthouse\_0010  
West side of Rear/South Elevation at Magistrate's Court. Camera facing northwest. Prisoner's Pen in foreground.

Photograph #11 NY\_Queens County\_Rockaway Courthouse\_0011  
Interior view, First Floor Municipal Courtroom.

Photograph #12 NY\_Queens County\_Rockaway Courthouse\_0012  
Interior view, Stairway Connecting Municipal to Magistrate's Court Wings.

Photograph #13 NY\_Queens County\_Rockaway Courthouse\_0013  
Interior detail, Ceiling at Municipal Court Entrance Lobby.



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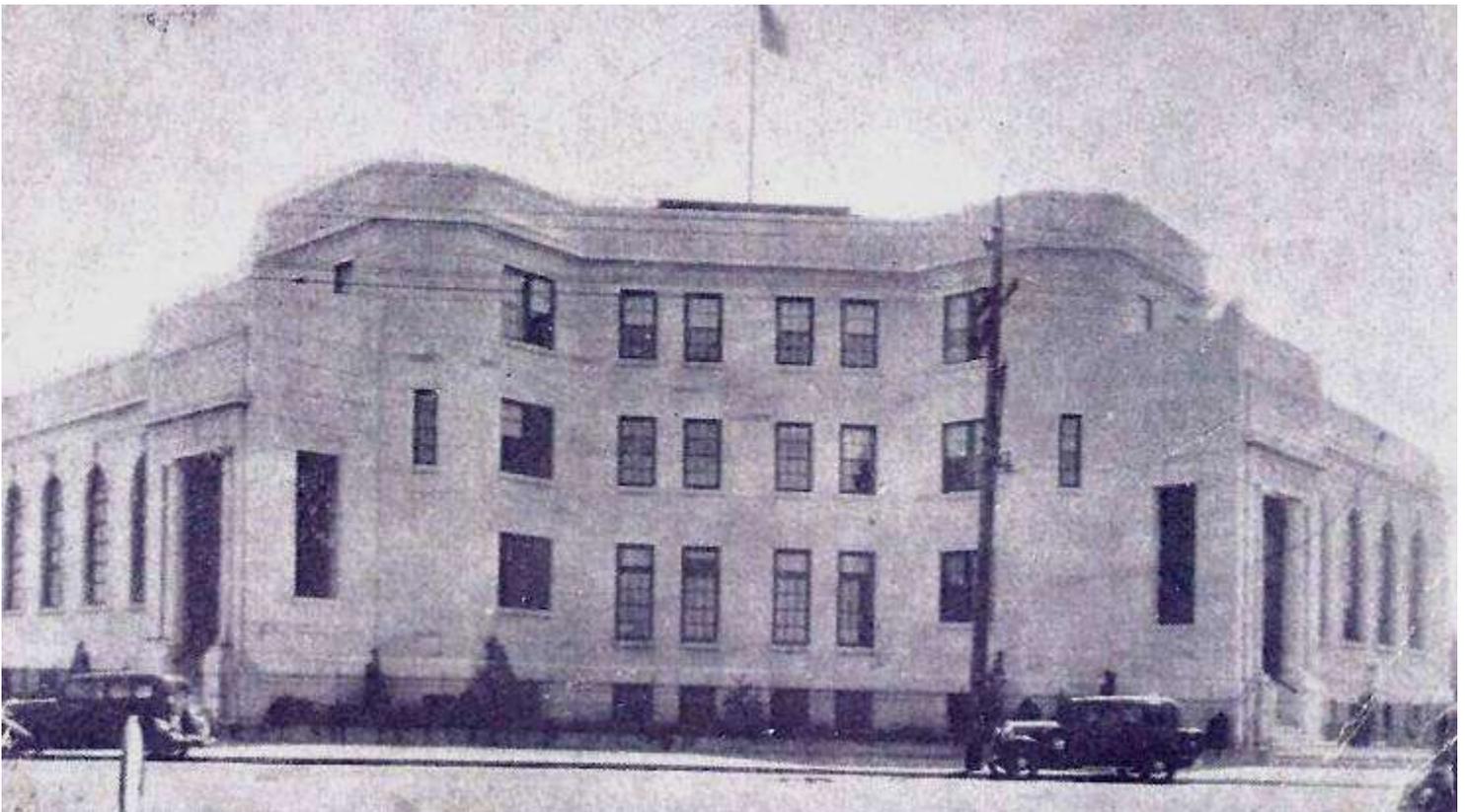
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Rockaway Court House

Name of Property

Queens County, New York

County and State





MUNICIPAL COURT

TWIN & SWING  
SCAFFOLDING, INC.  
49-47 31st ST  
LIC NY 11101  
718 361-2861









MUNICIPAL COURT

THIN & SHINE  
SCAFFOLDING INC.  
48-47 31st ST  
LIC NY 11101  
718-361-2261



MAGISTRATES

COURT











