



CITY OF NEW YORK  
**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

424 West West 33 Street, Suite #580  
New York, NY 10001  
tel: 212-736-4536  
www.nyc.gov/mcb4

**JEFFREY LEFRANCOIS**  
Chair

**JESSE R. BODINE**  
District Manager

October 14, 2022

Sarah Carroll, Chair  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
David N. Dinkins Municipal Building, 9th Floor North  
1 Centre Street  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: CB4 Request for Evaluation of 550 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street**

Dear Chair Carroll:

Manhattan Community Board 4 (CB4) asks for prompt action to our June 21, 2013 Request for Evaluation of 550 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street, originally the Seamen's House YMCA and later the Bayview Correctional Facility. **The building's lack of landmark protection is now an urgent concern.** At its full Board meeting of October 6, 2022, MCB4, on the recommendation of the Chelsea Land Use Committee, voted 37 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible, to approve this letter.

On February 26, 2019, MCB4 sent a second letter to the Commission seeking a response to our 2013 Request for Evaluation. LPC wrote back on February 28, 2019, only to say, "the agency will review the material and keep you informed of the process." We've heard nothing from LPC in the three and a half years since that response. It is now over nine years since our initial request without any meaningful action from the Commission.

Currently, the Empire State Development Corporation (ESD) is looking into potentially converting the building into supportive housing as part of the Penn Station Redevelopment Plan. This follows the failure to re-develop the property by an entity approved by ESD in 2016, which has withdrawn its application.

Recently, the New York State Office of General Services conducted work on the building. Many of the building's distinctive, polychrome terra-cotta elements have been replaced with conventional brickwork. New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) oversight and notification is required on any work on any building declared eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Seamen's YMCA was

declared eligible during the creation of the Special West Chelsea Zoning District. SHPO has reported that it was unaware of the work by the Office of General Services.

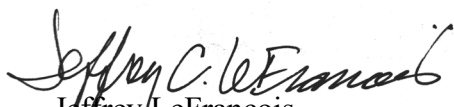
Actions by the Office of General Services call for the added layer of oversight that New York City landmark designation would provide.

The terra-cotta elements are a key to the design intent of the building's notable architects, Shreve, Lamb & Harmon, who designed the Empire State Building at about the same time. Their stylized ship-prow imagery speaks of the building's original use as the Seamen's House YMCA and Chelsea's history as a working waterfront. As noted in our 2013 Request for Evaluation, the building's New York City landmark designation would be consistent with the earlier designations of the American Seamen's Friend Society Sailors' Home and Institute at 505-507 West Street and the Keller Hotel at 150 Barrow Street, structures similarly built to serve sailors and embodying the community's history as "the heart of the busiest section of the Port of New York" to quote the Keller Hotel's designation report.

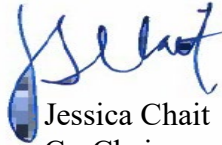
The community has had to rely on local elected officials to take action to ensure protection of this community asset. Instead, LPC should deliver on its mandate to protect our historic assets.

We would appreciate immediate action on our Request for Evaluation before further work is done to this building.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey LeFrancois  
Chair  
Manhattan  
Community Board 4



Jessica Chait  
Co-Chair  
Chelsea Land Use  
Committee



Kerry Keenan  
Co-Chair  
Chelsea Land Use  
Committee

**Enclosure**

cc: Hon. Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President  
Hon. Erik Bottcher, City Council



# Landmarks Preservation Commission

Municipal Building  
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor North  
New York, NY 10007  
Tel: 212-669-7700  
Fax: 212-669-7960  
info@lpc.nyc.gov  
[www.nyc.gov/landmarks](http://www.nyc.gov/landmarks)

## REQUEST FOR EVALUATION

The Landmarks Preservation Commission is responsible for safeguarding the architectural, historical and cultural heritage of New York City. The Commission's Research Department is pleased to accept requests from the public for the evaluation of the architectural, historical or cultural significance of properties throughout the five boroughs. If a property appears to meet the criteria for designation as a Landmark, the staff may recommend it for consideration by the Commission.

To request an evaluation, please fill out this form and return it to the address below. Please provide as much information about the property as you can and, if possible, include a photograph.

Thank you for your interest in the work of the Commission.

DATE: JUNE 21, 2013

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 4	212-736-4536
NAME COREY JOHNSON, CHAIR	TELEPHONE
EMAIL ADDRESS 330 W. 42ND STREET	AFFILIATION/REPRESENTING 20TH FLOOR
ADDRESS NEW YORK, NEW YORK	APT./STE./FLR. 10036
CITY, STATE	ZIP CODE

550 WEST 20TH STREET

ADDRESS AND BOROUGH

DAYVIEW CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

BUILDING NAME (IF ANY)

SEAMEN'S HOUSE YMCA

BUILDING TYPE (ORIGINAL USE)

SHREVE, LAMB & HARMON

ARCHITECT (IF KNOWN)

**PROPERTY  
TO BE  
EVALUATED**

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION** PLEASE INDICATE BELOW ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION YOU HAVE CONCERNING THE PROPERTY: HISTORY, SIGNIFICANCE, PRESENT CONDITIONS, CURRENT USE OR STATUS, ET CETERA.

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED.

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO THE ADDRESS AT THE TOP, ATTN: MARY BETH BETTS, DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

330 West 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, 26<sup>th</sup> floor New York, NY 10036  
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**COREY JOHNSON**  
Chair

**ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.**  
District Manager

June 21, 2013

Hon. Robert Tierney, Chair  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
Municipal Building  
1 Centre Street  
New York, NY 1007

**Re: Landmarks Committee  
Former Seamen's House YMCA at 550 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street:  
For Landmark Designation**

Dear Chair Tierney:

Manhattan Community Board 4 strongly urges the Landmarks Preservation Commission to designate the Seamen's House YMCA at 550 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street in Chelsea as a New York City Landmark as soon as possible.

The building is under imminent threat. It served as a YMCA dedicated to seamen until 1966 and later as the Bayview Correctional Facility. The Bayview facility is slated to close under New York State's Fiscal Year 2013-14 Budget. The Governor's Fiscal Year 2013-14 Executive Budget Briefing Book anticipated proceeds from the sale of Bayview in Fiscal Year 2014-15 and media accounts have recently reported that Empire State Development may put the facility up for sale within weeks.

If ESD goes forward with the sale, current development pressures in Chelsea will almost certainly result in demolition of the building and its replacement by new construction.

The only effective protection for the Seamen's House YMCA is prompt action by the Landmarks Preservation Commission to designate the building as a New York City Landmark. The process of disposal to private ownership almost certainly presents a window of time which would allow New York City Landmark designation. We believe designation is fully warranted on the merits of the building's architecture and character defining embodiment of neighborhood history. The Landmarks Committee of Community Board 4 has begun documenting the building and its history in support of a Request for Evaluation which it intends to submit imminently. This information should be an effective starting point for designation.

The Seamen's House YMCA was designed by the notable firm of Shreve, Lamb & Harmon, architects of the Empire State Building, and built in 1930-32. With the American Seamen's Friend Society and the Seamen's Christian Association, the YMCA was then one of three seamen's welfare organizations near each other on the Greenwich Village-Chelsea waterfront. Landmark designation of the Seamen's House YMCA would be consistent with the designation in 2000 of the American Seamen's Friend Society Sailors' Home and Institute at 505-507 West Street, and the 2007 designation of the Keller Hotel at 150 Barrow Street. The latter is cited in its designation report as "a significant reminder of the era when the Port of New York was one of the world's busiest and the section of the Hudson River between Christopher and 23rd Streets was the heart of the busiest section of the Port of New York," a description which applies no less to the Seamen's House YMCA.

The building exterior is in excellent condition. It has been significantly altered only by the introduction of a steel superstructure for a rooftop fence. This addition, which detracts from the compositional interest of the building's roofline, could easily be removed. Primarily clad in brick, the building has handsome art deco massing, a distinctive corner entrance and scores of polychrome terra cotta medallions featuring nautical themes as well as modeled terra cotta window surrounds and string courses.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Johnson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Corey Johnson  
Chair

cc: NYC Council Speaker Christine Quinn  
Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer  
NYS Senator Brad Hoylman  
NYS Assemblyman Richard Gottfried  
Congressman Jerrold Nadler



1. Distant view of the Seamen's House YMCA from the northwest showing bulkhead, with 100 Eleventh Avenue tower beyond.



2. View from northwest.





3. West façade.



4. North façade.



5. Entrance view from north.

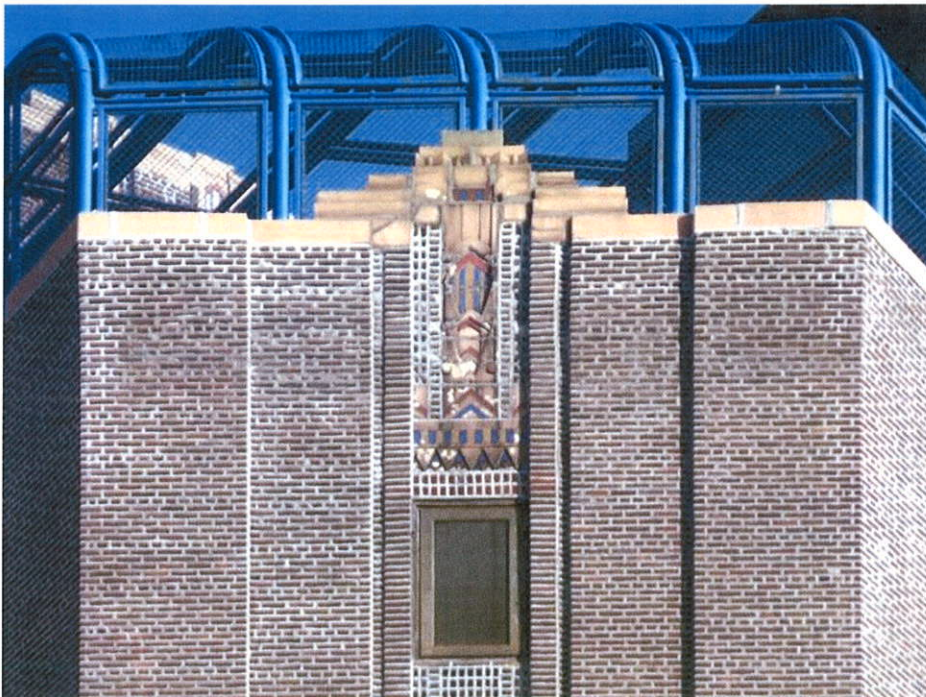


6. Upper entrance detail.





7. Entrance lamp detail.



8. Entrance corner peak.





9. West façade detail with typical polychrome terra cotta at window heads and spandrels.



10. West façade terra cotta string course, lighthouse medallion and window heads.

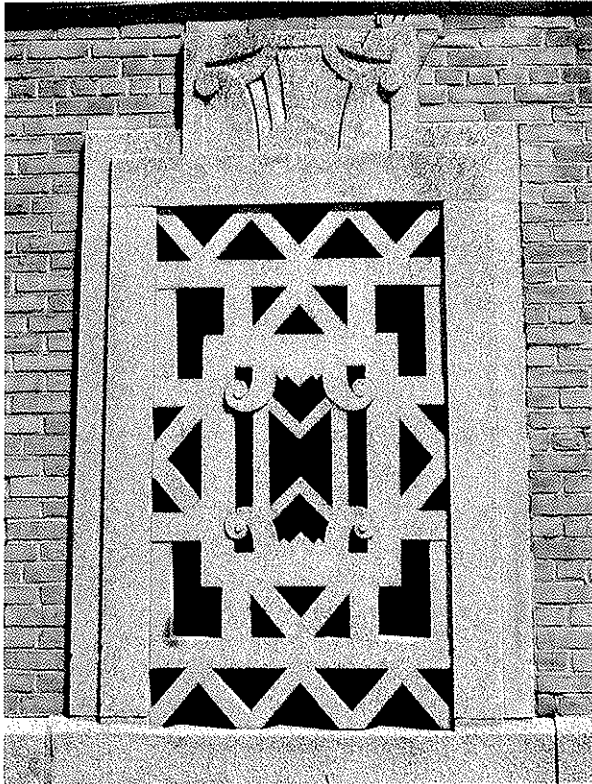




11. West façade terra cotta string course and lighthouse medallion.



12. West façade terra cotta window head with anchor motif.



13. West façade stone grille.



14. Cornerstone at west façade.



15. North façade balcony and arched windows with terra cotta motif above.



16. North façade window grouping with terra cotta string course, lighthouse medallion and modeled window surrounds.





17. North façade  
arched terra  
cotta window  
head.



18. North façade terra cotta window surround.

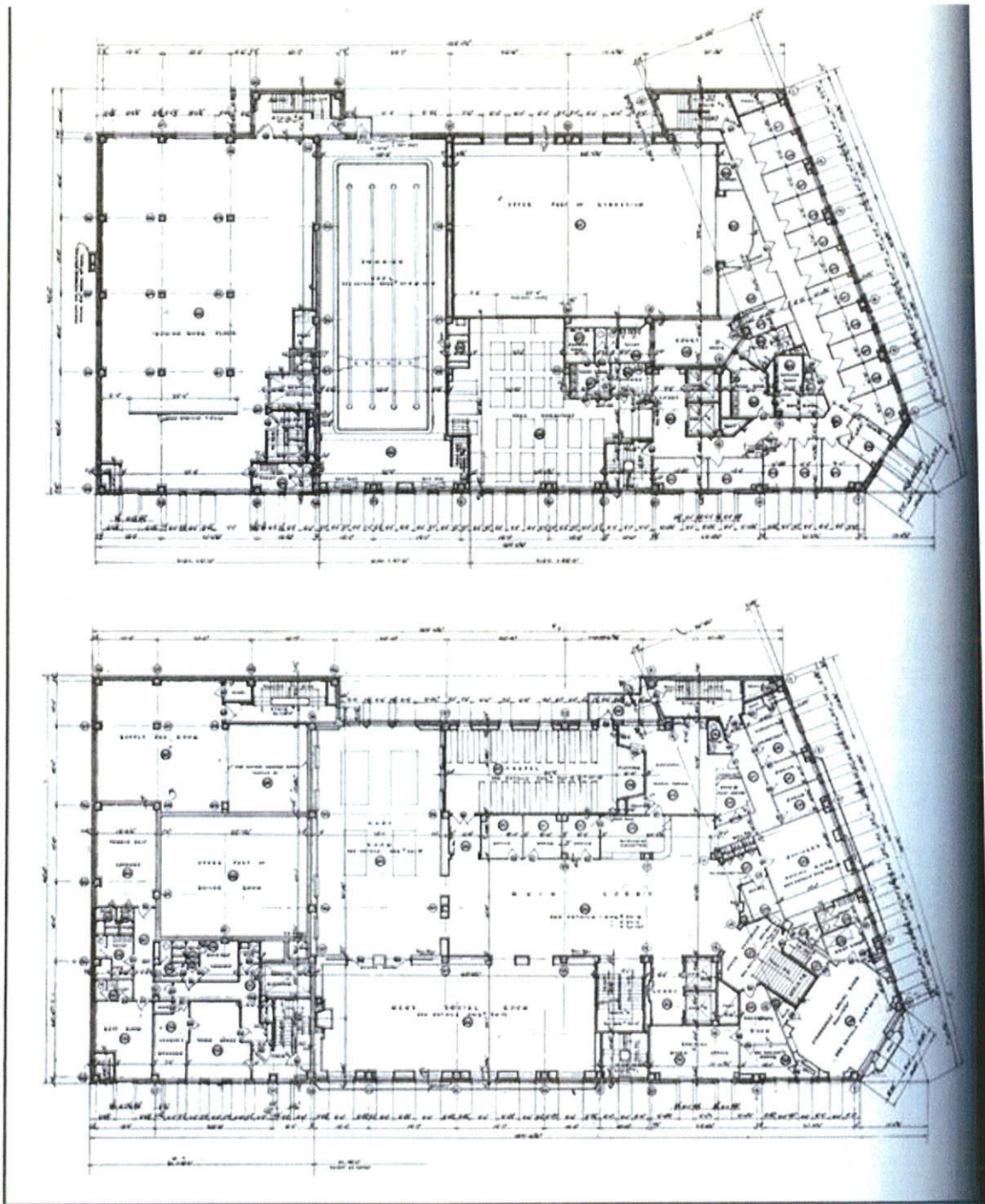




19. North façade terra cotta ship's wheel panel.



20. Penthouse view from northwest.



Second and fourth floor plans

SEAMEN'S HOUSE—Y. M. C. A.  
NEW YORK CITY  
SHREVE, LAMB AND HARMON, ARCHITECTS

21. Second and fourth floor plans published in *Architectural Record*, May, 1932.

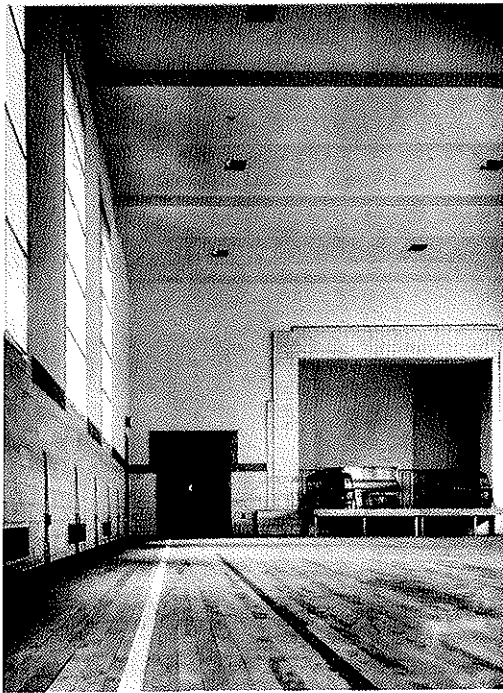


22. Historic exterior photo with "Seamen's House" sign on Eleventh Avenue, *Architectural Record*, May, 1932.

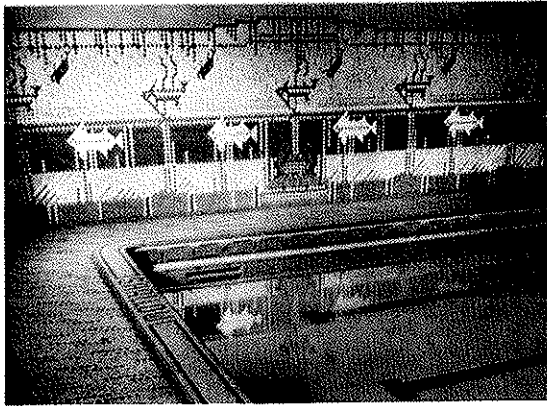


SEAMEN'S HOUSE - NEW YORK  
ARCHITECTS: H. H. HARRIS & COMPANY  
DESIGNED: 1929; BUILT: 1930-1931

23. Gym / auditorium photo, *Architectural Record*, May, 1932.



SEAMEN'S HOUSE - NEW YORK  
ARCHITECTS: H. H. HARRIS & COMPANY  
DESIGNED: 1929; BUILT: 1930-1931



Van Alstyne

Detail of swimming pool.

24. Swimming pool and lunch counter photos, *Architectural Record*, May, 1932.



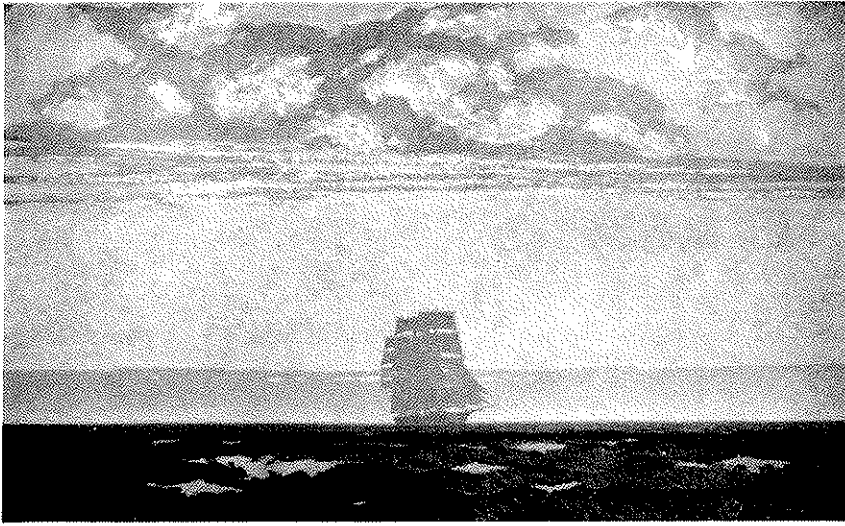
Van Alstyne

Lunch counter.

SEAMEN'S HOUSE - Y. M. C. A.  
NEW YORK CITY  
SHEEVE LAMB AND SPARKMAN ARCHITECTS



25. Warren and Wetmore's Chelsea Piers, completed in 1910, illustrated in *King's Views of New York*, much as they would have appeared directly across Eleventh Avenue from the Seamen's House YMCA upon its completion.



"Men that go down to the sea in ships, these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep"

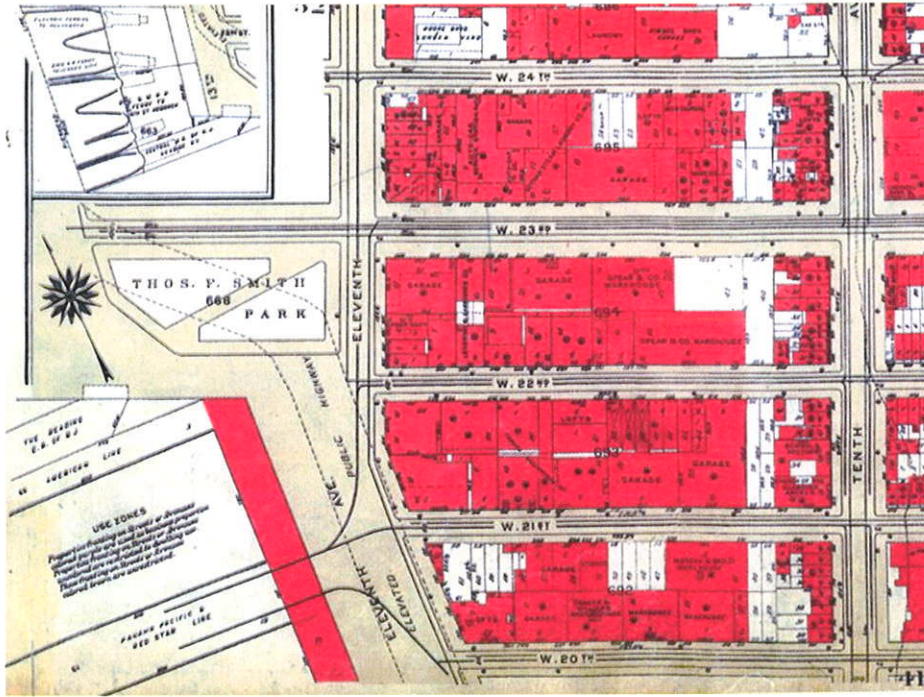
26. Vintage postcard of painting and inscription in the chapel of the Seamen's House YMCA

SEAMEN'S HOUSE Y.M.C.A.  
550 West 29th Street, Corner 11th Avenue  
A Branch of the New York City Y.M.C.A.  
Maintained especially for the  
service of seafaring men

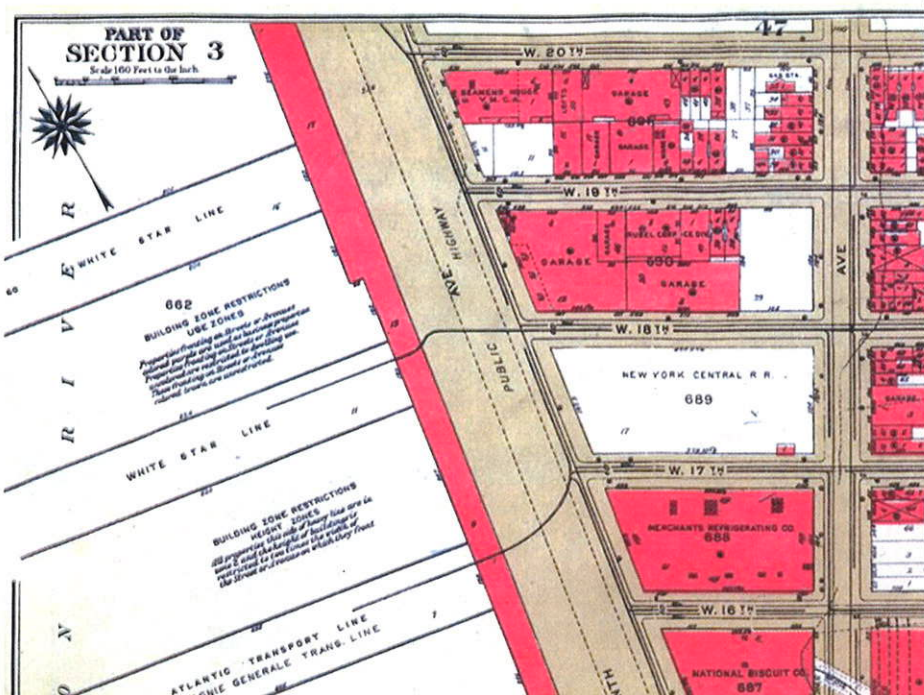
POST CARD

Stamp Here

27. Opposite side of same postcard, noting the building's dedication to seafaring men.



28. Near contemporary (1934) land map showing the area immediately north of Seamen's House YMCA, including continuation of Chelsea Piers.



29. 1934 land map showing Seamen's House YMCA with White Star Line's piers across Eleventh Avenue.