

Field's Buildings  
168-170 John Street (formerly  
32-38 Burling Slip)  
New York  
New York County  
New York

HABS No. NY-4391

HABS  
NY,  
31-NEYO,  
64-

PHOTOGRAPH  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NY-4391

## FIELD'S BUILDINGS

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NY,  
31-NEYO,  
64-

Street Address: 168-170 John Street (formerly 32-38 Burling Slip),  
New York, New York County, New York

Present Owner  
and Occupant: Baker, Carver & Morrell, Inc., 35 Water Street,  
New York, New York

Present Use: Marine supplies

Brief Statement  
of Significance: This structure, originally a row of four uniformly  
designed commercial buildings, is a particularly  
fine example of the Greek Revival commercial archi-  
tecture which followed the fire of 1835 on the  
east shore of downtown Manhattan.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

According to the records of the Title Guarantee Company (176 Broadway), the land on which this building was built was acquired gradually from 1826 to 1837 by a Hickson W. Field. There is no record of a date of erection; however, the building was probably built at some point between May 1837 and 1839. In the acquisition of those parts of the property fronting on Burling Slip, an earlier street numbering system is reflected: the building stands on what was, at least until May 1, 1837, 34, 32, and part of 30 Burling Slip (30 and 32 being divided by an alley). The divisions between these plots of land bear no relation to the three party walls in Field's Buildings. While Field himself did not move to the new building, beginning in Longworth's City Directory of 1839-40, a John Jay (Field's son-in-law was named John Jay), is listed as an attorney at "Field's Buildings, Burling Slip." Four fellow tenants from 1840/1841 at least until 1851 had different addresses in the 1839-40 Longworth directory.

Field died in 1873 leaving the building to his children, Hickson W. Field Jr. and Eleanor K. Jay. These divided the building between them in 1879, the son taking 32 and 34, the daughter 36 and 38. In 1902 the building was sold by Eleanor K. Jay, whose husband had died, and Hickson W. Field Jr.'s widow Mary Elizabeth K. to the China & Japan Trading Company, which had been a tenant for some time, first of #32, later apparently of 32-36. This company sold the buildings in 1916 to a Joseph F. Cullman (now Cullman Bros., 161 Front Street), whose heirs sold it in 1951 to the Paulsen Webber Cordage Corp. (now at 84 William Street). It was finally sold to Baker, Carver & Morrell, Inc. in April 1959.

There is no record of a builder, nor have any original plans been found.

Two significant alterations have been made in the buildings; the party walls separating the structure into quarters have been largely removed, and the roof and cornice have been raised some 41 inches. The buildings appear in three old views of Manhattan, in E. Whitefield's View of Brooklyn, L.I. from U.S. Hotel, New York, probably published in 1847 (reproduced on page 211 of The Columbia Historical Portrait of New York) and in two photographs taken from a pier of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1875-6 and 1917 and reproduced in "Valentine's Manual #2 of the New Series copyright 1917...." The earlier of these photographs is apparently the same one reproduced in The Iconography of Manhattan (as by J.H. Beal) and a print of which is in the collection of the New York Historical Society. The cornice and roof must have been raised after 1917 since the top floor windows, which had originally been almost square, were lengthened by the raising; in the 1917 photograph they are still square.

Other major, but less significant changes have been the addition of skylights to the roof and an elevator to the east corner of the building. Stairways have been limited to two (not original), one at each end of the buildings.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. The building is five stories high, and 86' wide by 45'-5" deep except at the eastern end of the building, which is some 5' shorter because of an areaway at the rear.
2. Foundations are of rough hewn stones in a wide variety of sizes. An exception to this are stone piers at the front of the basement, which correspond to those on the ground floor.
3. The walls, exterior and party, are of brick; that on the front of the building is faced with regular ashlar and supported by square stone Doric columns with entablature on the ground floor. On the first three floors the party walls have been largely replaced by metal columns; on the fourth floor it can be seen that the party walls were stepped out to form supports for the joists (running parallel with the front of the building). A band on the front wall of the building on a level with the upper sashes of the fifth floor windows is not faced with ashlar, but is of stucco on brick.
4. A step in front of a front entrance (at the second ground floor bay from the left) is carved:

C|J  
T|C

which presumably stands for China & Japan Trading Company.

5. One chimney remains, above the west wall of the building, towards the front.
6. Exterior doorways are merely the spaces between ground floor columns; the present doors, of which there are four, and the present placement of doorways are not original.
7. The double-hung windows, in the front wall of the building, are not hinged for shutters; the six-light sash in many are apparently the earliest.
8. The roof is not original (it is post 1917). The cornice is a simple one of stone with no gutter.

B. Technical Description of Interiors:

1. The building is divided by masonry party walls into four equal units, 21'-6" wide each.
2. At either end of the buildings there is an enclosed staircase, but neither is of any antiquity.
3. The visible flooring is not old.
4. The walls are largely plastered and the ceilings covered with embossed metal.
5. There are no interior doorways of any interest. However, on the fifth floor of #34 (Burling Slip) at the back, the brick is visible, and a low segmental arch (66" high from the present floor level) appears in each party wall.
6. Electric lighting.
7. Two chimneys project from the west side of each party wall, the front ones in the former #32 and 36 being wider than the others. In addition, a front chimney is evident in the west end wall, and towards the rear of this wall in the cellar there is the base of a chimney.

- C. Site: The general setting of the building is a waterfront one; the building faces somewhat east of north.

Prepared by Cervin Robinson, Photographer  
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