

## Frederick Clarke Withers, Architect of the Jefferson Market Courthouse

Frederick Clarke Withers (1828 - 1901) is known for many landmark works, mostly ecclesiastical in style, but is best known for designing the Jefferson Market Courthouse which opened in 1877.

Withers emigrated to the United States from England in 1852 and over many decades worked with prominent architects. He initially partnered with Andrew Jackson Downing, who was considered to be the father of landscape architecture, and subsequently with Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, together the creators of Central Park and Prospect Park. In the 1870s after Central Park and Prospect Park were completed, he partnered with Vaux to build the Jefferson Market Courthouse and an adjacent prison. The work was done mostly by Withers as Vaux was busy at the time designing the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1967, the courthouse was repurposed as a branch of the New York Public Library. The prison was replaced by the Women's House of Detention in 1932 which itself was replaced by the Jefferson Market Garden in 1975.

While the courthouse is the most prominent of his works, Withers had many commissions including several in New York City, such as the Astor Reredos in Trinity Church; the lychgate (a roofed gateway) to the churchyard of the "Little Church Around the Corner" (Church of the Transfiguration) at One East 29th Street; the cast iron commercial building at 448 Broome Street in SoHo; the Chapel of the Good Shepherd on Roosevelt Island, and the City Prison which replaced the original "Tombs" (which itself was torn down in 1941).

Withers, primarily considered an ecclesiastical architect, published the influential book *Church Architecture* in 1873. It is no wonder then that many visitors to Greenwich Village often mistake the library branch, formerly the courthouse, for a church.