

March 4, 2021

Sarah Carroll, Chair  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
1 Centre Street  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: University Settlement, Educational Alliance, and former Young Men's Benevolent Association**

Dear Chair Carroll:

The mission of the Lower East Side Preservation Initiative (LESPI) is the preservation of the historic Lower East Side, primarily through the designation of Historic Districts as well as Individual Landmarks. This letter presents Requests for Evaluation for three buildings:

- University Settlement, 184 Eldridge Street
- Educational Alliance, 197 East Broadway
- Former Young Men's Benevolent Association, then Arnold Toynbee House (renamed Grand Street Settlement), presently Mikvah of the Lower East Side, at 311 East Broadway

These three buildings are exemplary for their architecture and for their representation of the highly significant Settlement House Movement, originating in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This was a period of widespread industrialization, rapid urbanization, and massive immigration and settlement houses offered a tangible response to communities in need, none more so than the densely packed Lower East Side. By 1910, New York housed a population that was 40% foreign-born, much of it in this crowded neighborhood.

The first Settlement House was founded in England in 1884, followed in 1886 by the first in the United States—University Settlement, which was even earlier than Hull House in Chicago (1889) or Henry Street Settlement (1903). University Settlement, still broadly active today, opened its new building at 184 Eldridge Street in 1898, and that location remains its headquarters.

The Educational Alliance opened at 197 East Broadway just a few years later, in 1891. That organization, founded in 1889, began as an engine of assimilation for the neighborhood's Jewish immigrants, but still thrives today with added satellites that meet the needs of a multi-ethnic community.

The distinctive 311 East Broadway building, at the intersection with Grand Street, is no longer a settlement house but its origins are firmly within that tradition. It was dedicated in 1905 as a Jewish





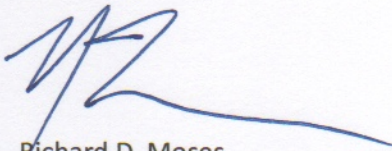
benevolent association and later, in 1916, was home to a more traditional settlement house. That latter organization, ultimately named Grand Street Settlement, was founded by one of the women pioneers of the movement—Mary Gruening—and continues its services at various sites today.

These three striking buildings, designed by well-known architects of their day, are extremely valuable architectural resources for New York City and the Lower East Side, and their singularity resonates because of their important historic function. Each evokes a sense of respectability, strength and dignity that must have reassured those newly-arrived immigrants who participated in their programs. These imposing structures were a stark contrast to the crowded tenements where their constituency lived.

The social and cultural impact of settlement houses cannot be over-stated, from the early years and into the present. In the Progressive Era, these organizations responded to vital yet unmet needs that are often fulfilled now by government programs. In fact, it was settlement house workers who instigated for many of these governmental social reforms. They learned from the community by living there, by “settling” in the neighborhood to better understand its needs. In response, they presented wide-ranging programs. Educational efforts included the first kindergartens; adult classes offered proficiency in English; library collections stocked books in native languages. The arts were also embraced, with music, drama, and visual art. Health standards and proper hygiene were encouraged by providing public showers and baths, as well as milk stations, free lunches, and clinics. Active recreation was stressed to keep children “off the streets” with supervised playgrounds, roof areas for gymnastics, and summer camps. There was also financial, legal, and employment advice available, and meeting rooms for community and labor groups.

The organizations housed at 184 Eldridge Street, 197 East Broadway, and 311 East Broadway have had a profound effect on the communities in which they are located. With both their architectural and cultural significance, they provide a vital link to our historic past, yet their contributions continue. These buildings are touchstones for the Lower East Side and for New York City, and well deserve the distinction of Individual Landmark designation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. D. Moses', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard D. Moses  
*President*

*LESPI Individual Landmarks Committee:*

Eoin Collins (former Young Men's Benevolent Association)  
Phyllis Eckhaus (Educational Alliance)  
Tom Kim (University Settlement)  
Deborah Wye (Coordinator)