

5. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Please provide a statement explaining why you think this building or site should be considered for designation as an Individual, Interior, or Scenic Landmark by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

The Eastern Dispensary at 75 Essex Street was recommended for individual landmark designation in 2013 by the Friends of the Lower East Side. At that time, the Friends stressed not only the architectural and cultural significance of the building but also the potential for damage it faced, due to the upcoming construction of Essex Crossing. The Friends also noted the strong possibility of alteration or demolition if the building were sold. Here, L.E.S.P.I. (Lower East Side Preservation Initiative) and the Friends of the Lower East Side jointly reissue that Request for Evaluation based on conditions in 2019.

In 2019, the effects of Essex Crossing construction are clear, as the Eastern Dispensary building is now dwarfed by contemporary architecture encroaching upon it. It stands as a dramatic and isolated reminder, at that crossroad of the Lower East Side, of the immigrant community of the late 19th and early 20th centuries—a highly significant period in the history of New York City, and of America, generally. As the neighborhood rapidly changes, with the routine destruction of so much of its historic architectural fabric, it has become increasingly urgent to protect the Eastern Dispensary.

The early function of this building represents one era's solution for providing health care to the urban poor. The dispensary system, originating in the United States in the late 18th century, began as an alternative to alms-house infirmaries and then became imperative in the period of mass immigration. Dispensaries were private/public efforts to serve individual humanitarian needs and also to help keep the general population disease-free. Integral to the program was the training of medical students, who saw a wide range of patients in these facilities. The purchase of land and the construction of dispensary buildings were funded by private contributions, while daily operations received government support.

Carnegie libraries employed a similar private/public model, with a philanthropic donation for land and buildings, and municipal support for books and programs. Also similar to Carnegie libraries in immigrant neighborhoods, the Eastern Dispensary was an uplifting architectural monument for area residents. Built by the distinguished firm of Rose and Stone, its style represents the simplicity yet grandeur of a Renaissance palazzo, when many institutional buildings of the Beaux-Arts period would be more highly ornamented. Instead, the physical presence of the Eastern Dispensary evokes a sense of solidity, permanence and dignity, which must have been reassuring to the immigrant population it served. It surely communicated a sense of trust in the medical care it offered.

Landmark status has been granted to other dispensaries in New York City, including the Northern Dispensary in Greenwich Village, the hospital-affiliated Mount Sinai Dispensary, and the German Dispensary erected especially for the German immigrant community. The Eastern Dispensary is deep within a neighborhood that was once among the most densely populated places in the world. It should remain there as a beacon of that past, even as it demonstrates an unquestionable potential for adaptive re-use.

Attachments to this reapplication for evaluation include a covering letter, detailed text and images for the 2013 RFE from the Friends of the Lower East Side, and current images of the building from 2019.