

May 15, 2023

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

Re: Former firehouses at 209 Elizabeth Street and 269 Henry Street

Dear Chair Carroll:

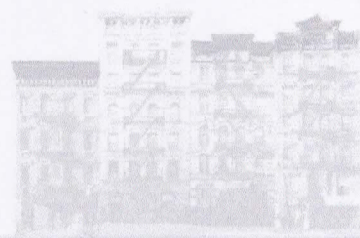
The mission of the Lower East Side Preservation Initiative (LESPI) is the recognition and preservation of the historic Lower East Side through the designation of New York City Historic Districts as well as Individual Landmarks. This letter accompanies Requests for Evaluation for two architecturally and culturally distinctive buildings:

- Former Fire Engine Company No. 15 at 269 Henry Street
- Former Hook and Ladder Company No. 9 at 209 Elizabeth Street

These buildings exemplify a pride in civic architecture that was embraced by the city when it hired the distinguished firm of Napoleon LeBrun & Sons to undertake a building campaign for the Fire Department from 1879-1895. Such buildings were particularly significant in the immigrant neighborhoods as symbols of both dignity and protection.

Former Fire Engine Company No. 15, at 269 Henry Street, was built in 1884, a decade before the celebrated Henry Street Settlement opened on the block, in an area that would become home to predominately Eastern European Jewish immigrants. The former firehouse presently houses a neighborhood center under the auspices of the Settlement House, and it completes a historic row of buildings on the north side of Henry Street.

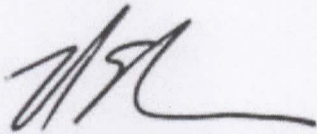
Former Hook and Ladder Company No. 9, at 209 Elizabeth Street, was built in 1883. It, similarly, is distinguished not only for its architecture but also as a touchstone for an immigrant neighborhood—in this case, “Little Italy.” No. 209 presently houses an art gallery and is situated beside the sculpture-filled Elizabeth Street Garden; it is integral to the streetscape. While the building’s architectural features recall its firehouse function, it is also adorned with a faded sign for an Italian bakery, signaling yet another layer of its history.



Lower East Side Preservation Initiative

Several of the firehouses of Napoleon LeBrun & Sons—found throughout New York City—have been landmarked, but none on the Lower East Side. Such distinguished civic structures have symbolic resonance for those who live close by and must have held special importance for new arrivals to the city. These two elegant firehouses help tell the story of this city's and country's role as a home for immigrants. No. 209 Elizabeth Street and No. 269 Henry Street merit the distinction and protection of Individual Landmark status.

Sincerely,

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

Richard D. Moses
President

LESPI Individual Landmark Committee:

Lisa Vogl (RFE preparation)
Deborah Wye (Coordinator)

5. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE—No. 269 Henry Street

Executive Summary

No. 269 Henry Street, which once housed Fire Engine Company No. 15, is a strong candidate for landmark designation for its significance as civic architecture, its unique cultural history extending back to Boss Tweed, and its contribution to the fabric of its streetscape, renowned for the Henry Street Settlement. The building is remarkably intact and meticulously restored.



This former firehouse, built in 1884, was among the early buildings designed for the Metropolitan Fire Department of New York by the distinguished firm of Napoleon LeBrun & Sons, which had been hired for a major building campaign for the Department. As a prominent civic institution, the former Fire Engine Company No 15 building has certain features which are still recognizable to pedestrians today as belonging to a firehouse. But its unique historic elements clearly set it apart from modern firehouses. The building's long-lasting presence in the neighborhood as a symbol of protection, and its evocation of the past, adds resonance to its current use for community services provided by the historic Henry Street Settlement.

Architectural Description:

This 1884 former firehouse is located on Henry Street, south of East Broadway between Montgomery Street and the Sol Lain Playground. The building's design is influenced by both Queen Anne and Romanesque

Revival styles, with red brick, stone and terracotta materials. The former Fire Engine Company No. 15 features a cast-iron base encasing a wide central door, flanked by two pedestrian doorways. The base is distinguished by its pilasters and decorative capitals, topped by pedimented medallions at either end. Above the base are two stories of red brick, separated by stone belt courses and molded brick tile friezes. The third story features 5 windows with arches capped by decorative brick archivolts.

At the roofline, a handsome cornice is flanked by stylized brackets with corbelled brick that are striking in their detail. They are topped with



pedimented forms containing sunbursts. Just below the denticulated cornice are ten terra cotta rosette medallions.

As was often the practice for civic architecture, LeBrun repurposed designs for efficiency and cost savings. No. 269 Henry Street is virtually identical to two other LeBrun firehouses, one at 107 East 104th Street and the other at 304 West 47th Street, which have both been landmarked.

After being vacant since 2001, this building was acquired by the Henry Street Settlement from the city in 2017 for \$1. A careful restoration was then undertaken by the firm of Beyer Blinder Belle, widely recognized for its stewardship of historic buildings.

Napoleon LeBrun & Sons:

Napoleon LeBrun designed churches and office buildings in New York City beginning in 1864, including the landmarked Metropolitan Life Insurance Company tower at 1 Madison Avenue. His firm was appointed by the city to design fire stations during a major campaign to enhance municipal services. Between 1879 and 1895, the firm of Napoleon LeBrun & Sons designed and constructed 42 firehouses, 12 of which have already been landmarked, but none on the Lower East Side.

A Block with a Unique Cultural History:



This building, home to former Fire Engine Company No. 15, is a part of a block of four buildings, all now owned by the historic Henry Street Settlement.

Nos. 263, 265, and 267 Henry Street—two Federal style townhouses and a Georgian Eclectic townhouse—were among the city’s earliest designated landmarks in 1966. At that time, No. 269 was still operating as a firehouse, and was not designated a landmark.

But, well before the founding of the Henry Street Settlement in 1893 and the purchase of their buildings, No. 269 was the site of a firehouse. Beginning in

1854, it was the home of Engine Company No. 6, one of the many raucous and rival-ridden volunteer fire companies of 1830s-1860s that dominated NYC firefighting before the founding of the Metropolitan Fire Department in 1865, with its paid force. Engine Company 6, also called the Americus Engine Company, is infamous for its foreman, William “Boss” Tweed, and the tiger symbol

painted on its engine (a symbol taken over by Tammany Hall). After its founding, the Metropolitan Fire Department re-designated Company No. 6, as Company No. 15.

Amidst a confluence of busy roads, this small and unique block would be fittingly recognized for its significance if the former firehouse at 269 Henry Street were designated as an Individual Landmark, thereby completing the status of this historic row. In so doing, the unique story of this Lower East Side neighborhood—home to immigrants for nearly two centuries—would be more fully portrayed.

Timeline:

1854:

No. 269 Henry Street becomes site of Engine Company No. 6, a volunteer company. William “Boss” Tweed had become foreman of Engine Company No. 6 in 1849.

1865:

Newly formed Metropolitan Fire Department (no longer a volunteer department), takes over Engine Company No. 6 as a paid force, renaming it Engine Company No. 15.

1865-79:

City institutes a ban on the construction of new firehouses in an effort to weed out Tammany influence remaining from the days of volunteer firefighting companies; civil service will be introduced in 1884 to increase professionalism and keep the Fire Department out of politics.

1879:

Era of firehouse construction begins under the direction of the architectural firm of Napoleon LeBrun & Sons.

1884:

Engine Company 15 moves into the new LeBrun-designed building at No. 269 Henry Street and occupies it until November 2001.

1975:

The financial crisis of the 1970s threatens to close Fire Engine Company No. 15 in this location, but neighborhood residents protest and the Fire Company remains active at this address until 2001.

2001:

After 9/11, Engine Company 15 moves to Pitt Street, joining Ladder Company 18. The building at No. 269 Henry Street remains vacant.

2017:

Building is acquired by the Henry Street Settlement from the city for \$1. Restoration is undertaken by the firm of Beyer Blinder Belle.

2019:

In November, the Henry Street Settlement opens the Dale Jones Burch Neighborhood Center in the beautifully restored building at 269 Henry Street.

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