

September 26, 2023

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

RE: Former Gouverneur Hospital at 621 Water 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 and Individual Landmarks. This letter accompanies a Request for Evaluation for a highly significant building at 621 Water Street—the former Gouverneur Hospital—which strongly merits consideration as an Individual Landmark for both its architectural qualities and its cultural history.

This building, which opened partially in 1901 and was completed in 1909, exemplifies the aims of the City Beautiful Movement, when distinguished architecture was seen as uplifting for the citizenry of urban centers. Its purpose—to serve the medical needs of the immigrant poor—and its location amid crowded tenements, made it a symbol of civic responsibility and a source of pride for the Lower East Side, historically New York City's most important immigrant neighborhood.

The residents of this area were in dire need in 1885, when the city determined that a hospital should be located at 621 Water Street. At first, it was housed on the site in a building readapted for medical purposes. Soon the needs of the constantly growing population called for a larger facility. A new building was erected around the old building—allowing medical treatment to continue during the construction period; later the old building was demolished. Today, the former Gouverneur Hospital has become Gouverneur Court, a special needs housing facility. It is surrounded by NYCHA housing, which replaced the area's tenements during the period of urban renewal. With its Renaissance Revival architecture remarkably intact for a historic hospital building, its distinctive ornamentation, and its curving pavilion wings, the building remains a striking presence.

In addition to its architectural significance, the former Gouverneur Hospital has a rich cultural history. It boasts many firsts, including the city's first TB clinic and its first female ambulance surgeon, among other milestones. It once served as the Gouverneur State School when severely disabled children were

Lower East Side Preservation Initiative

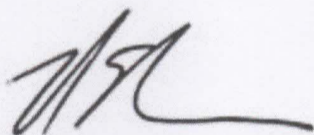


transferred there from the notorious and overcrowded Willowbrook School. Also, over the years, Gouverneur Hospital was the focus of highly successful community activism, when neighbors from various ethnic groups joined together to protest diminution of services. The building remains a beacon on the Lower East Side and deserves the honor and protection of Individual Landmark designation.

Research for this RFE was undertaken by LESPI Board Member, Deborah Wye, and LESPI Individual Landmark Committee Member, Lisa Vogl. If you have questions, please contact Deborah Wye at debwye@gmail.com or 917-846-2953.

With thanks for your consideration,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'RM', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard Moses
President

5. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE—621 Water Street

Executive Summary:

The former Gouverneur Hospital building, at 621 Water Street between Gouverneur Slip East and West, has a long and remarkable history of serving the underserved. Opening in stages between 1901 and 1909, the building is also an architectural gem of brick, brownstone and terra cotta, designed by John Rochester Thomas. It was constructed by the city to answer the dire medical needs of an impoverished and immensely crowded tenement neighborhood. Now it is surrounded by public housing and serves as a special needs housing facility.



Gouverneur Hospital pavilions, facing the East River. Today. (Photo: Ephemeral New York)

Highly ornamented, and always a striking presence in its context, the building reflects the architectural aims of the City Beautiful Movement. Its design also follows

developments in germ theory from that time, when requirements for ventilation found form in pavilion structures. Its two pavilion wings facing the East River are filled with windows as well as outdoor balconies. They end in curves meant to prevent germs from settling in corners—an example of “aseptic design.”

The hospital’s cultural history resides not only in serving an immigrant population in great need, but also in establishing several firsts: a municipal tuberculosis clinic, a female ambulance surgeon, a hospital and dispensary for children with trachoma, a ferry-boat day camp—and also the first hospital to cooperate with Lillian Wald upon the founding of Henry Street Settlement. Later it housed the Gouverneur State School when some 200 severely disabled children were transferred there from the notoriously overcrowded Willowbrook State School. It was also the site of vocal and effective community activism, as a determined local population refused to allow its needs to be ignored.

Architectural Description:

At the turn of the century, New York City lacked sufficient governmental regulation in urban infrastructure, and residents of crowded immigrant neighborhoods like the Lower East Side suffered from inadequate housing, unsanitary conditions, and a lack of public



Gouverneur Hospital, entrance facade. 621 Water Street. Today. (Photo: Daytonian in New York)

facilities. Diseases spread rapidly, as did frequent fires, in what was the most densely populated neighborhood in the world. Medical facilities were lacking or underprepared to care for those who needed public healthcare most. But the construction of Gouverneur Hospital at 621 Water Street represented a pioneering change in local urban infrastructure and medical care.

The former Gouverneur Hospital is a five-story building of red brick designed in the Renaissance Revival style. The entrance faces Water Street, while its two curved pavilion wings with balconies on the second, third, and fourth floors, make a striking impression on those traveling by car on the FDR drive.

The focus of the Water Street facade is a highly detailed main entrance of brownstone, with an elaborately ornamented double-story window above. Adorning the entrance at

its upper corners, above an arch, are two helmeted female heads symbolizing the Roman goddess Minerva, whose domains included medicine and healing. At the mid-point of the double-story window is a panel inscribed “Gouverneur Hospital.” In addition, quoins articulate bays and window surrounds, and segmented arches with foliated keystones embellish the first-floor windows. Classical detailing includes Greek Key trim, egg-and-dart molding, dentils and rosettes.



Gouverneur Hospital entrance, 621 Water Street. (Photo: D.Wye)

making it roughly contemporary with other City Beautiful projects in NYC. And while the building harkens back to a much earlier time, it continues to signal its importance as a social service institution for the Lower East Side. Today the building is Gouverneur Court and serves as a special needs housing facility.

The impulse that led to the creation of such an ornate structure in a poor tenement neighborhood can be found in the City Beautiful Movement (1893-1900s). The Movement’s mission was to design monumental and highly ornamented public buildings meant to conjure civic pride and thus uplift society by inspiring well-being.

The Gouverneur Hospital must have had a dramatic impact set amidst the surrounding tenements. That impactful presence remains today after urban renewal leveled the neighborhood and replaced the tenements with the stark architecture of public housing.

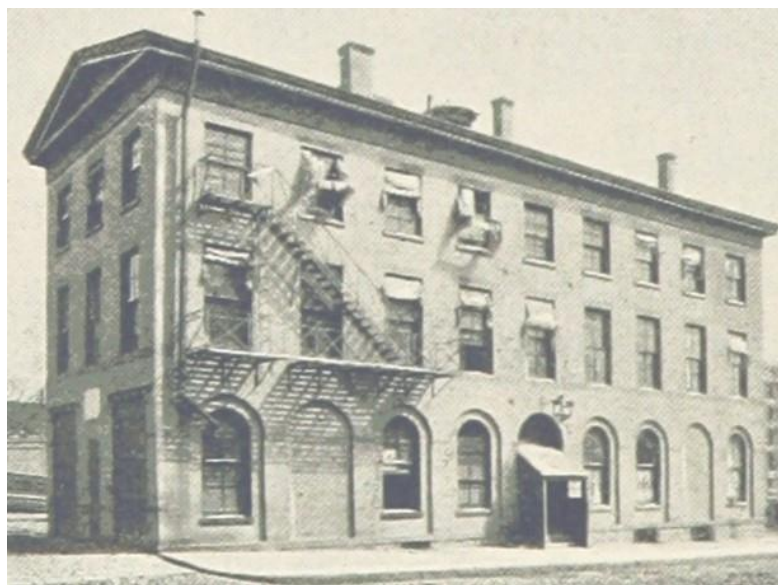
The Gouverneur Hospital’s construction began in 1897,



*Gouverneur Hospital, Water Street façade details.
(Photos: D.Wye)*

Architectural Evolution:

The first Gouverneur Hospital opened on the site in 1885 in a three-story building that had been home to a market and a police station. It served as an emergency “reception” hospital, before patients were transferred to Bellevue. That building soon proved inadequate and architect John Rochester Thomas was chosen to draw up plans for an enlarged facility. He chose to follow the standard plan for hospitals at that time—



Original Gouverneur Hospital on the site opened in 1885. (Photo: Wikipedia)

isolating wards in pavilions, narrow in design and with surrounding windows to maximize light and air. In an urban setting, with a lack of land, it was necessary to make such pavilions multi-story.

The cornerstone for the new building was laid in 1898 and in 1901 the hospital opened, but only with the central entrance wing on Water Street and the Gouverneur Slip East pavilion wing. During construction, services at the original 3-story hospital continued. By 1909, the new building was completed, with the second pavilion wing,

under the direction of architect Raymond Almirall, who seems to have taken over after Thomas's death. Almirall used Thomas's plans to finish up. The original 3-story hospital was demolished to be replaced by an ambulance garage between two pavilion wings.



The new building opened in 1901 with the Gouverneur Slip East pavilion completed. The original hospital, left of the pavilion wing, remained open during construction. (Photo: Harvard Art Museums)



Gouverneur Hospital entrance wing. n.d. (Photo: NY Academy of Medicine)

It can be noted, today, that the façade of the initial Gouverneur Slip East pavilion has the ornate window ornamentation of the Water Street façade, while the later Gouverneur Slip West pavilion façade does not. Perhaps funding or scheduling was an issue. The fifth-story addition also has a simplified treatment.

With the two pavilion wings completed in 1909, an ambulance garage replaced the old hospital building between them. The balconies were used by patients with beds brought outside. Curtains blocked the direct sun. As the hospital became overcrowded, a separate Gouverneur Dispensary building was built, opening in 1914, across Gouverneur Slip East at No. 7. This handsome Renaissance Revival building remains today as an addiction treatment center and could also be considered for designation. The two buildings make an outstanding historic pair in this neighborhood setting. The former Dispensary's original 3 stories were expanded to 6 stories. In 1930, the hipped roof of the Gouverneur Hospital building was removed, and a fifth story was added.



South St. view. After 1914. New dispensary at right. (Photo: NYC Gov/Records)



Former Gouverneur Dispensary. 7 Gouverneur Slip East and detail. Opened in 1914 with 3 stories; later enlarged. Now houses Lower East Side Center – Su Casa. (Photos: D.Wye and Boston Valley Terra Cotta)



Untapped New York by Michelle Young

Former Gouverneur Hospital center and former Dispensary right, a historic reminder of the past amidst the surrounding public housing buildings. (Photo: Untapped New York-Michelle Young)



Former Gouverneur Hospital. Front entrance at 621 Water Street, between Gouverneur Slip West (right) and Gouverneur Slip East (left). (Photo: Google Earth)

John Rochester Thomas, Designer

John Rochester Thomas (1848-1901) was considered in his day to have designed more public buildings than any other American architect. Originally from Rochester, New York, Thomas moved to New York City in 1882. Among his many distinguished buildings are New York's Beaux-Arts Surrogate's Court at 31 Chambers Street, and the remaining façade of the picturesque, Gothic 8th Regiment and Squadron A Armory on Madison Avenue between 94th and 95th Streets. Both were among New York City's earliest landmarks, designated in 1966. Many of his buildings have been demolished, but Gouverneur Hospital still stands.

Raymond F. Almirall, Completed the Project

Raymond F. Almirall (1869-1939), a Beaux-Arts trained architect, took over the Gouverneur Hospital project from John Rochester Thomas (presumably at his death), completing it according to Thomas's plans. Almirall is noted for many churches, libraries, and public baths around New York City. Other medical facilities by Almirall include buildings in the Seaview Hospital complex in Staten Island, once known as the largest tuberculosis hospital in the world. He is also the architect of the Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank at 49 Chambers Street, a NYC designated landmark.

Recognition for Excellence:

The significance of the former Gouverneur Hospital building has long been recognized. In 1977, it was listed on the New York Landmarks Conservancy's "Public Buildings Inventory," the city's first survey of public buildings with landmark qualifications. In 1982, it was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Then, after a period of abandonment from 1981-1992, it was rehabilitated by Community Access, a non-profit organization for supportive housing and social services. In its new role as special needs housing, it was honored in 1993 as a recipient of the Preservation League of New York State's "Award for Affordable Housing and Historic Preservation." The current stewards of the building recognize this significance and in 2010-2011 had its exterior carefully restored by CTA Architects, New York, with the entry arch rebuilt and restored by the firm in 2013.

Other than the removal of the roof for an additional floor—a feature of many historic buildings in the city—the former Gouverneur Hospital building remains largely unchanged today. The striking and highly ornamented central entrance building, and its iconic twin pavilion wings, stand proudly as remnants of the Lower East Side's importance in New York City architectural, cultural, and medical history. At the same time, it continues to serve as a mission-driven community facility today.

Cultural History:



Dr. Emily Barringer, city's first female ambulance surgeon. (Photo: Public Domain)

Gouverneur Hospital was the site of important firsts for New York City. It was pioneering not only for its robust ambulance service in a time of horse-drawn ambulances, but also for the city's first female ambulance surgeon, Dr. Emily Barringer. Additionally, Gouverneur was the first to have a devoted tuberculosis clinic when the disease was the deadliest for crowded urban areas. During the building's construction period, it also pioneered a dedicated hospital and dispensary in the old building for the treatment of children with trachoma, an eye infection that could lead to blindness. The disease was particularly widespread in public schools in tenement districts in the early 20th century. New York was the first city to make such an effort, and it was called "A Municipal Crusade."



Gouverneur TB Clinic. 1907. First municipal TB clinic in NYC; opened in 1904.. (Photo: MCNY, Byron Co.)



"Alice in Wonderland" murals. Gouverneur Hospital Children's Ward (Photo: NYC.gov/Records-Arts in Medicine-NYC.Health + Hospitals)

In the 1930s, WPA artist Abram Champanier was commissioned to paint fifteen "Alice in Wonderland" themed murals on canvas for the Children's Ward. After the building was purchased by a new owner in 1981 there were fears the murals would be destroyed in the planned renovations. But they were rescued by preservationists and a painting restorer, and the new ownership deal ultimately fell through.

Some murals were restored and placed in other NYC medical buildings, including one in the new Gotham-Gouverneur Health facility at 227 Madison Street. NYC's Arts in Medicine program continues to restore additional murals, believing the immersive nature of this project shows how large-scale public art was used to support healing.



"Alice and Friends at the NYPL, 42nd St." Now located in the Gotham-Gouverneur Health facility (Photo: Arts in Medicine-NYC Health + Hospitals)

In 1940, a notable innovation at Gouverneur was a pre-paid medical plan devised by a hospital doctor for low-income patients living at the neighboring, city-built Vladeck Houses. That plan ultimately became known as HIP.

From 1962-79, when the hospital was providing only outpatient care, and eventually left for a new facility, the building housed the Gouverneur State School, with 200 severely disabled children who had

been transferred from the Willowbrook State School in Staten Island, due to overcrowding there.

Site of Community Activism:

Contributing to the legacy of the Lower East Side as a center of dynamic multiculturalism, Gouverneur Hospital was the site of all-important coalition building among various community ethnic groups in the 1960s and early 1970s. Puerto Rican, Black, Chinese, Jewish and Italian neighbors came together in collective action. (Some of the activist leaders would go on to become elected officials.) In 1961 they fought to save Gouverneur Hospital outpatient services, after the city had closed its inpatient services. Outpatient services ultimately continued under the auspices of Beth Israel Hospital, which took over the Gouverneur Health Services Program (GHSP) and the Gouverneur Ambulatory Care Unit.

A leading opposition group was LENA, the Lower East Side Neighborhood Association. Pressure from this group also contributed to the city eventually agreeing to build a new Gouverneur Hospital at 227 Madison Street, which opened in 1972. It is now called Gotham-Gouverneur Health.



Protest organized by the LES Neighborhood Health Council. 1971. Photo: Corky Lee-Gouverneur Newsletter 1973)

Formed under the leadership of LENA was another multi-ethnic community organization—the Lower East Side Neighborhood Health Council-South. This group focused on ensuring that GHSP and the Gouverneur Ambulatory Care Unit responded to community needs. Among its accomplishments was the commitment to a multilingual staff at the new Gouverneur

Hospital.

A coalition of the Young Lords and the Health Revolutionary Unity Movement also provided momentum during this period of activism. While it would ultimately focus on minority-community hospitals around the city, the alliance joined a group of mostly Black and Latino Gouverneur Hospital personal in 1969 to force for improved labor conditions and medical services.

A more narrowly focused activist organization formed in 1971 to serve the Gouverneur State School, which resided in the Gouverneur Hospital building from 1962-79, during the period when other inpatient care had ended. This group was comprised of parents of children who had been transferred to the facility because of the notorious overcrowding at Willowbrook State School on Staten Island. Due to budgetary constraints, the city wanted to return the children to Willowbrook. The parents, with the help of other community organizations, fought this plan in court and prevailed. Later, in 1978-79, the population would be sent to Flowers Fifth Avenue Hospital and then, ultimately, to small group homes.

Abandonment, Restoration, Re-Use:



Gouverneur Hospital, abandoned from 1981-1992. (Photo: Larry Racioppo, HPD)

In 1981, the Gouverneur Hospital building was purchased at a city auction by the Walter Realty Corporation for eventual apartments. The fate of that project is unclear. The building was then abandoned from 1981-1992 and suffered badly from neglect, even though it had been added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. In 1992,

Community Access, Inc., a non-profit pioneer of supportive housing and social services, acquired the building and began renovations. A special needs housing facility known as Gouverneur Court opened in the building in 1994; Gouverneur Court continues today. Remarkably, the former Gouverneur Hospital has served an underserved public on the Lower East Side since 1901, except for the decade of abandonment. It merits designation as a NYC landmark for its enormously rich architectural and cultural history.



Gouverneur Hospital, abandoned, 1981-1992. (Photo: Larry Racioppo, HPD)

Timeline

1885:
City opens first Gouverneur Hospital at location.

1895:
Facilities of first Gouverneur Hospital soon prove inadequate; Mayor and Governor approve plans for new hospital.

1898:

Construction begins on new Gouverneur Hospital building at site; services continue in old building.

1901:

With entrance wing and Gouverneur Slip East pavilion wing completed, new hospital opens.

1902:

NYC School Board and Department of Health establish Eye Hospital and Dispensary for children with trachoma in old hospital building.

1903:

At Gouverneur Hospital, Dr. Emily Dunning Barringer (1876-1961) becomes city's first female ambulance surgeon.

1904:

City's first TB clinic opens at Gouverneur Hospital; clinics at Bellevue and Harlem Hospital follow.

1904-1907:

Construction of Gouverneur West Slip pavilion wing.

1908:

Full building completed; balconies added in 1909.

1914:

Newly-constructed Renaissance Revival building at 7 Gouverneur Slip East opens as Gouverneur Dispensary due to overcrowding in main hospital building. Today, with three additional stories, building houses Lower East Side Center-Su Casa, addiction treatment center.

1915-1929:

Gouverneur Hospital operates Westfield, first day camp on a ferry boat; later renamed Camp Huddleston.

1929-1930:

Hospital building's hipped roof and dormers removed; 5th floor added.

1936:

WPA artist Abram Champanier paints cycle of "Alice in Wonderland" murals for Children's Ward.

1940:

Gouverneur Hospital doctor establishes pre-paid medical plan for tenants of nearby city-

built Vladeck Houses; plan evolves into HIP (Health Insurance Plan).

1956:

Hospital Council of Greater NY suggests closing Gouverneur Hospital without replacing it, arguing Bellevue Hospital could serve the LES.

1961:

Loses accreditation and inpatient services close; continues as outpatient clinic under auspices of Beth Israel Hospital.

Community activism begins on behalf of Gouverneur Hospital; continues through 1960s and early 1970s.

1962:

Although building is deteriorating, Gouverneur State School is established when 200 severely disabled children transfer there from the Willowbrook State School in Staten Island, due to overcrowding at Willowbrook.

1971:

Under budgetary constraints, state attempts to return Gouverneur State School children to Willowbrook. Association of parents, with help of other community organizations, fights against this in court and prevails.

1972:

New hospital facility opens nearby at 227 Madison Street; inpatient services there fall victim to financial crisis of 1970s. Expansion and modernization in 2014; now called Gotham-Gouverneur Health (largest freestanding ambulatory healthcare center in New York State; includes nursing home facilities).

1978-79:

Gouverneur State School population relocates from Gouverneur Hospital building to Flowers Fifth Avenue Hospital and ultimately to small group homes.

1981:

Walter Realty Corporation purchases Gouverneur Hospital building at city auction for future apartments; fate of project unknown.

“Alice in Wonderland” murals in the Children’s Ward rescued.

Gouverneur Hospital building abandoned for next 11 years.

1982:

Gouverneur Hospital building added to National Register of Historic Places

1992:

Community Access, Inc, non-profit pioneer in supportive housing and social services for

people with mental health concerns, acquires Gouverneur Hospital building and begins renovation.

1994:

Gouverneur Hospital building re-opens as Gouverneur Court, a special needs housing facility.

2011- 2012:

Exterior restoration work on building by CTA Architects, New York; entry arch re-built and restored by firm in 2013.

2012:

Building hard hit by Hurricane Sandy; ground level inundated; \$1 million restoration of basement interior completed in 2013.

2023:

Former Gouverneur Hospital building at 621 Water Street remains Gouverneur Court, a social service housing facility.

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