

# WASHINGTON STREET FOUNDATION

## 105-107 AND 109 WASHINGTON STREET



Borough of Manhattan, Block 54, Lots 4 & 6

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Washington Street Foundation

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## SUMMARY

The six-story, five-bay red brick Downtown Community House at 105-107 Washington Street and the five-story, four-bay red brick tenement at 109 Washington Street, along with Saint George's Church at 103 Washington Street, are among the few vestiges of the Lower West Side of Manhattan's former life as an ethnic neighborhood known as "Little Syria." From the time of its establishment, the Bowling Green Neighborhood Association, housed in the Downtown Community House beginning in 1926, was a pioneering organization that served the local immigrant population and continued to provide important services for the area well after the community house became defunct. Built in 1925 with philanthropic funds from William H. Childs, the founder of the Bon Ami household cleaner company, the Downtown Community House was designed by John F. Jackson, architect of over 70 Y.M.C.A. buildings and community centers, and through its Colonial Revival style speaks to the underlying desire for the neighborhood's immigrant population to become Americanized and associate themselves with the country's foundations. The adjacent tenement, built in 1885 of red brick with brownstone trim and a Neo-Grec cornice, is the last of its kind on this street and was home to over thirteen different nationalities and ethnicities in the first sixty years of its existence. Together, these three contiguous buildings represent the religious, residential, and communal aspects of the lives of thousands of immigrants in this Lower Manhattan neighborhood that has disappeared because of massive eminent domain actions, development, and assimilation.

## CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### Early History of the Area

Colonial Manhattan's coastline on the west side of the island was located along present-day Greenwich Street, with Washington Street originally submerged under water. The area east of Washington and Greenwich Streets in Lower Manhattan was one of the earliest areas of the city to be settled; Trinity Church, located two blocks east of Washington Street, has been the site of three consecutive churches since 1705, when the church was granted land on its current site by Queen Anne of England.<sup>1</sup> (Image 1) Trinity Church was granted water rights in 1751 to the area west of its location, while the water lots just north of Carlisle Street were conveyed by the city to Nicholas Roosevelt in 1765.<sup>2</sup> Carlisle Street opened in 1795, and by 1797, Manhattan's landmass had grown westward to Washington and West Streets, infilling the water lots that treated areas of water as if they were plots of land and capable of ownership and possibly later development.<sup>3</sup> The lots where 105-107

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<sup>1</sup> "Timeline: 1705." *Trinity Church History*, [www.trinitywallstreet.org/history/timeline](http://www.trinitywallstreet.org/history/timeline). Accessed 14 March 2012.

<sup>2</sup> New York City Department of Finance, Conveyance Liber No. 6, Prior to 1917, Lots 45-54.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Finance, Conveyance Liber No. 6, Prior to 1917, Lots 45-54; "More Ordinances..." *The Diary or Loudoun's Register*, 13 May 1797, p. 2.

and 109 Washington Street are located were originally part of a larger tract of land purchased in 1799 by George Pollack, an Irish-born importer of Irish linens; within the next six or seven years, the tract was divided into smaller lots and sold to merchants and investors.<sup>4</sup> Bowling Green, located three blocks south of Rector Street, was the center of fashionable, elite city life and was in close proximity to the commercial wharves along West Street, creating a bustling neighborhood with horse-drawn carriages and carts and a wealthy residential area on Greenwich Street.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the mid-1800's, the area continued to thrive as a commercial center, with the Washington Market at the intersection of Washington and Fulton Streets, while other four- and five-story commercial and residential structures lined Washington Street further south. 109 Washington Street was a brick commercial structure; 105 and 107 were brick residential tenements with commercial spaces on the ground floors.<sup>6</sup> By the 1840's and 1850's, the area's previously wealthy inhabitants had moved to more stylish neighborhoods in the city and by the 1880's, the area was home to Irish and German immigrant communities, as well as some Swedish and German-speaking Austrian immigrants, who settled in the area because of its close proximity to Ellis Island and the wharves. Most of these early immigrants made their living working as servants, sailors, longshoremen, cooks, machinists, and laborers.<sup>7</sup> Around the turn of the 20th century, the neighborhood remained populated in large part by immigrants, but of a more diverse nature. Residents hailing from over 25 different nations including Armenia, Austria, China, Czechoslovakia, England, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Scotland, Lebanon, Lithuania, Macedonia, Norway, Palestine, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Sweden, Syria, Turkey, and Wales shared the small neighborhood north of Bowling Green, creating an ethnic mix that was as varied as the immigrant community on the Lower East Side.

### A "Syrian" Community of Commerce and Culture

Beginning in the 1870's, immigrants from the Ottoman province of Syria, which included present-day Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Syria, and Jordan, began arriving in New York, probably lured by the promise of the wealth seen by visiting Syrians at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876 and by economic conditions created by a relative decline in the silk industry due to Chinese imports through the Suez Canal.<sup>8</sup> Most were Christian: Maronite Catholic, Orthodox, and Melkite Catholic.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> American-Irish Historical Society. *The Journal of the American-Irish Historical Society*. Vol. 15, p. 289.

<sup>5</sup> Burrows, Edwin G. and Mike Wallace. *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. p. 653.

<sup>6</sup> Perris, William. *Maps of the City of New York*. Volume 4. New York: 1853.

<sup>7</sup> US Census Records, 1880. Manhattan, New York, Enumeration District 6.

<sup>8</sup> Naff, Alixa. "The Mother Colony." in *A Community of Many Worlds: Arab Americans in New York City*. Benson, Kathleen and Philip M. Kayal, Editors. New York: Museum of the City of New York, 2002. p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Freidlander, Jonathan. "Images of Early Arab Immigration to New York City." in *A Community of Many Worlds: Arab Americans in New York City*. Benson, Kathleen and Philip M. Kayal, Editors. New York: Museum of the City of New York, 2002. p. 48.

The early arrivals chose Washington Street, with its lively commerce from the wharves and Washington Market (the large and famed produce and fruit exchange), as an appropriate place to establish their peddling and merchandising businesses, often selling Middle Eastern religious objects, food, and clothing (especially silk, embroidery, and lace). By the turn of the 20th century, “Little Syria” (an Americanism that emerged around this time) became a distinctive commercial and cultural center for Syrian immigrants. Many of the older buildings on Washington Street were residential rowhouses or tenements with a commercial shop on the ground floor that sold goods to peddlers on credit; many of the shipping warehouses were also used to supply the peddlers and retailers in South America, Canada, and the West Indies.<sup>10</sup> Pack-peddling, where the peddler purchases goods from a merchant on credit and then travels the city or the region with his bag, or “pack,” of merchandise, selling his wares, was the most popular profession for arriving immigrants because of its low start-up cost and minimal required training and English-language skills.<sup>11</sup> Pack peddlers could travel throughout the neighborhood or the city, or venture to other communities or states to sell their goods; it was through these traveling pack-peddlers that a national network of trade through the Syrian immigrants was established.

Most of the 56,909 Syrian immigrants recorded by the United States Department of Commerce and Labor between 1899 and 1910 were holders of Turkish passports; most were also Christian and established churches for the Maronite, Melkite Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox communities.<sup>12</sup> Because of the evolving nationalisms in the region, many Syrian immigrants tended to identify themselves according to their hometown or religion. One of the first Arab parishes in Little Syria was founded in 1890 in a rented hall at 127 Washington Street for St. Joseph’s Maronite Church; ten years later, its congregation had grown, allowing it to move into its own structure at 81 Washington Street, and finally in 1910 it moved again to 57-59 Washington Street, with a house for the pastor and a school for local children. Melkite Greek Catholics, also part of the Arabic-speaking “Syrian” community on Washington Street, moved from the basement of Saint Peter’s Roman Catholic Church on Barclay Street to 103 Washington Street in 1916, while the Antiochian Orthodox congregation founded their own parish in 1895 on the second floor of a tenement at 77 Washington Street.<sup>13</sup> Other churches in the area included a Roman Catholic church/school further north on Cedar Street that accommodated a largely Irish constituency and the Greenwich Street Chapel, which had German services.<sup>14</sup>

The community was well-known for its significant contributions to Arab thought and literature through the publication of many newspapers in both English and Arabic. In 1892, the first Arabic

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<sup>10</sup> Miller, Lucius Hopkins. *A study of the Syrian population of greater New York*. [New York? : s.n., 1904?]. p. 31.

<sup>11</sup> Kayyali, Randa A. *The Arab Americans*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2006. p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Malek, Alia. *A Country Called Amreeka: Arab Roots, American Stories*. p. 234.

<sup>14</sup> “City Missions: Chapels and Services.” *New York Evangelist*. 17 August 1871; “War on Public Schools.” *The New York Times*. 6 March 1880.

newspaper in the United States, *Kawkab Amerika*, was published by the Arbeely family, and soon other newspapers including *Al-Hoda* and *Al-Naar* were published in the area; also founded in 1892 was the Syrian Society, which aimed to provide educational opportunities for the community, specifically English language lessons, classes on trade and industry, and explanations on how to become a naturalized citizen, a right established in 1914.<sup>15</sup> Many well-known writers such as Ameen Rihani, Kahlil Gibran, and Elia Abu Madi were an important part of the local culture and either lived or worked in the area.<sup>16</sup>

### Little Syria's Diaspora

World War I and the ensuing restrictive immigration laws changed the nature of the active Syrian and multi-ethnic community in Lower Manhattan. During World War I, many Syrians, like other immigrant groups, felt the need to assimilate and they were especially eager to take part “in wartime American patriotic fervor that was in good part hostile to the Ottoman Empire.” Children from a young age were encouraged to salute the American flag and sing “Yankee Doodle” and “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee.”<sup>17</sup> Yet, after the war, the United States Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1924, which put ethnic-based quotas on the number of immigrants allowed to enter the country every year and depleted the shrinking Manhattan community of newly-arrived immigrants.

While a number of Syrian families had lived in the South Ferry part of Brooklyn (parts of today's Cobble Hill and Brooklyn Heights) since the 1890's, beginning in 1920, Brooklyn's Syrian population began to grow as new generations and immigrants moved beyond peddling and many merchants became wealthy enough to leave the ethnic enclave and only use the crowded streets of Lower Manhattan as a place of business. The desire to move out of the area, coupled with the lack of new immigrants and the increasing real estate values as Lower Manhattan became a financial center with larger and taller buildings, reduced the number of residents of Little Syria.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1940's, much of the area just north of Bowling Green along the southern end of Greenwich, West, and Washington Streets was razed to build the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel, and most of the remaining members of the local Syrian community moved to South Ferry or South Brooklyn, which already had an established Syrian community, or Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. The final impetus that drastically changed the nature of the community and erased much of what remained of the diverse neighborhood was the construction of the World Trade Center just north of Albany Street, beginning in 1966. Five streets were closed and all buildings on the 12-block, 16-acre plot were demolished, from

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<sup>15</sup> Naff, Alixa. “The Mother Colony,” In *A Community of Many Worlds: Arab Americans in New York City*, edited by Kathleen Benson and Philip M. Kayal. New York: Museum of the City of New York, 2002. p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Jackson, Kenneth T. *The Encyclopedia of New York City*.

<sup>17</sup> Suleiman, Michael W. *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999. p. 228; “Sights and Characters of New York's 'Little Syria'.” *The New York Times*. 29 March 1903.

<sup>18</sup> Parsons, Walter B. “Syrian Business Section Changing.” *The New York Times*. 21 March 1920.

Trinity Place west to West Street and from Cedar Street north to Vesey Street, including over fifty tenements from the turn of the 20th century and earlier.<sup>19</sup> Today, there is little architectural fabric that speaks to the low-scale residential and commercial community that existed in the area for decades.

## 105-107 WASHINGTON STREET

### Early History

The community house located at 105-107 Washington Street was completed in 1926; prior to its construction, the lot was separated in two, with two early residential buildings, perhaps a single-family house with both front and rear buildings, constructed sometime prior to 1822. One of 107 Washington Street's early residents was Samuel Healy, a money broker, who had an office nearby on Greenwich Street.<sup>20</sup> By the 1860's, both tenements were boarding houses used by Irish immigrants and sailors from the nearby piers, and No. 105 had a saloon on the ground floor.<sup>21</sup> The area, because of its proximity to the wharves, was often the scene of fights, shootings, and other crimes; an inspection of No. 105 Washington Street in 1894 described it as a "five-story front and four-story rear tenement... The Inspector found the houses to be dirty, poorly ventilated, and the stairways considerably worn."<sup>22</sup> (Image 2) By 1896, both structures were condemned by the Board of Health, and the tenements were vacated until 1897 when they were remodeled and considered fit for human habitation.<sup>23</sup> Residents, including recently arrived Syrian immigrants, returned to the tenements and the storefronts continued to be occupied to serve the local community – the ground floor of 107 Washington Street had an Italian restaurant called Ferrantino Signorgro's in 1908.<sup>24</sup> (Image 3) In 1920, the two tenements were purchased by a realty corporation from Mrs. Schroen of Reno, Nevada, after having the property in her family for over fifty years.<sup>25</sup> In 1925, the property was purchased for the construction of the Downtown Community House to contain the Bowling Green Neighborhood Association.

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<sup>19</sup> Lower Manhattan Development Corporation. "Historic Resources." in *World Trade Center Memorial and Redevelopment Plan GEIS*. 2003. pp. 5-10; Sanborn Map Company, 1951.

<sup>20</sup> New York State Court of General Sessions. *The New-York City-Hall Recorder*. New York: E.B. Clayton, 1822. p. 102.

<sup>21</sup> "A Sailor Shot in a Washington Street Boarding House." *The New York Times*. 12 March 1873; "Suicide of a Saloon-Keeper by Poison." *The New York Times*. 12 April 1869.

<sup>22</sup> "Patchwork of Trinity: Only Partial Repairs Follow Health Board's Order." *The New York Times*. 23 December 1894; "Mr. Roosevelt's Justice." *The New York Times*. 24 July 1896.

<sup>23</sup> New York City Board of Health. *Annual Report of the Board of Health*. New York: Martin B. Brown Company, 1897. p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> New York City Board of Health. *Annual Report of the Board of Health*. New York: Martin B. Brown Company, 1896. pp. 38, 71; "Robbed of \$3,011 Savings." *The New York Times*. 30 January 1908, p. 2; "Missing Persons." *The New York Times*. 26 March 1923.

<sup>25</sup> "Tenants Buy on Franklin Street." *The New York Times*. 30 April 1920.

## Settlement and Community Houses in the United States

Community and settlement houses were a vital part of the settlement movement, a progressive social movement that began in the mid-19th century in London with the intention of improving the quality of life in poor urban areas through education initiatives, food and shelter provisions, and assimilation and naturalization assistance. The movement spread to the United States in the late 1880's, with the opening of the Neighborhood Guild in New York City's Lower East Side in 1886, and the most famous settlement house in the United States, Hull-House (1889), was founded soon after by Jane Addams and Ellen Starr in Chicago. By 1887, there were 74 settlement and neighborhood houses in America; the number grew to over 400 by 1890, and by 1905, New York City alone was home to 119 settlement houses.<sup>26</sup>

Settlement workers often lived in the settlement house, believing that only residents of the area could truly understand the needs of the people who lived there, but a clear class distinction was made between those who gave aid and those who received it.<sup>27</sup> Women played an important role in both the founding and maintenance of these settlement houses; in an era when women were still excluded from leadership roles in business and government, they held pioneering roles in determining the structure, ethics, and responsibilities in the social welfare movement.<sup>28</sup> Women also began to see a need for a more formal education regarding these social services and eventually this led to the development of the field of social work.<sup>29</sup>

The need for trained professionals highlighted the shift towards formal, organized settlement houses, often with their own set of ethics, ideology, or religion; funding also became an issue with the need to pay the professional social workers.<sup>30</sup> Typically, financing for the settlement houses and their workers came from wealthy philanthropists who frequently served on the board of directors of the house or association, and government agencies at this point contributed very little to the community agencies.<sup>31</sup>

Although the work of settlement houses aimed at welcoming the immigrants to the new country while encouraging the maintenance of certain aspects of their lifestyles from their native lands, many

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<sup>26</sup> "Settlement House Movement." *Immigration to the United States, 1789-1930*.

<http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/settlement.html>. Visited 18 March 2012; Kraus, Harry P. *The Settlement House Movement in New York City, 1886-1914*. New York: Arno Press, 1980. p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>28</sup> "Settlement House Movement." *Immigration to the United States, 1789-1930*.

<http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/settlement.html>. Visited 18 March 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Rosenberg, Rosalind. *Changing the Subject: How the Women of Columbia Shaped the Way We Think About Sex and Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Kraus, Harry P. *The Settlement House Movement in New York City, 1886-1914*. New York: Arno Press, 1980, p. 228.

<sup>31</sup> Blank, Barbara Trainin, "Settlement Houses: Old Idea in New Form Builds Communities", in *The New Social Worker*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Summer 1998.

settlement and community houses, the Downtown Community House included, simultaneously sought to acculturate and Americanize the immigrants they helped by teaching English and instilling them with asserted American values. At the Hull-House, for example, immigrants were educated with classes in history, art, and literature; many community houses had specific Americanization classes and programs. In their 1926 annual report, they stated that they that “never prod[ded] them [the immigrants] into citizenship, but when they have reached the point where they want to become citizens, we give them all the help we can with their papers.”<sup>32</sup>

In the 1920’s, settlement house usage began to decline with the reduction of recently arrived immigrants under quotas of the Immigration Act of 1924. Many settlement workers demanded salaried wages and no longer desired to live in the settlement house, and consolidation of settlement houses into larger neighborhood or community centers often led to the selling of the old settlement buildings and moving into larger, newer structures. In 1979, the National Federation of Settlements changed its name to United Neighborhood Centers of America.<sup>33</sup>

### A Community House Opens

The Bowling Green Neighborhood Association was formed in 1915 and had its first residence at the Bowling Green Community House at 45 West Street. (Image 4) At its inception, it was primarily devoted to children’s work, but over time also created services for adults, with a focus on education and health; the Association had a medical and dental clinic and sponsored folk dances, fund-raisers for special holidays, and English classes for over fourteen nationalities in hopes of working to “weld together the peoples of the many nations in the [Bowling Green] neighborhood,” according to news articles from 1922 to 1925.<sup>34</sup> The Association described the neighborhood in 1922 as having an infant mortality rate that was twice the rate of the average of all of New York City and a death rate of tuberculosis that was four times the average in New York; they described the area as “the first, cheapest, and most convenient home for a motley immigration of Italians, Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Syrians, Slavs and Poles.”<sup>35</sup> In the early 1910’s, Bowling Green Neighborhood Association was one of the only health clinics or dispensaries serving the downtown Manhattan residential community.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The Bowling Green Neighborhood Association. *Activities of the Bowling Green Neighborhood Association*. New York: Bowling Green Neighborhood Association, 1926.

<sup>33</sup> Wade, Louise Carroll. “Settlement Houses.” *The Encyclopedia of Chicago*.  
<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1135.html>. Visited 19 March 2012.

<sup>34</sup> “Bowling Green Neighborhood Association.” *The Wall Street Journal*. 24 December 1917; “Bowling Green Neighborhood Association.” *The Wall Street Journal*. 22 December 1922; “Bowling Green Neighborhood Association Needs Help to Bring Better Living Conditions.” 14 December 1922; “Downtown Community House.” *The Wall Street Journal*. 25 September 1925. p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> “Bowling Green Neighborhood Association Needs Help to Bring Better Living Conditions.” 14 December 1922.

<sup>36</sup> New York State Board of Social Welfare. *Annual Report, Vol. 53*. Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, 1920.

The Bowling Green Association also published annual reports of both the current conditions and of their successes in “Wall Street’s backyard,” announcing a decrease in infant mortality rates in Bowling Green by two-thirds between 1910 and 1924, a decline in the death rate in the area by 1923 of 14.5%, and the daily attendance of 400 people to their playground.<sup>37</sup> The Association’s Health Center, equipped with four doctors and a part-time dentist, carried out pioneering medical studies, documenting the eating habits and improved health of the neighborhood’s children when given adequate nutritional options, treating thousands of patients.<sup>38</sup> In 1919, the Health Center had provided 1,801 physicians’ visits, 4,579 nurses’ visits, and had an annual attendance of 3,447; infant mortality was reduced from 321 to 175 per thousand.<sup>39</sup>

In 1917, after the publication of their second annual report, which received a special recommendation from the Mayor and other city officials, the Police Commissioner at the time, Arthur Woods, said that the Bowling Green Neighborhood Association had, “in the brief space of two years... developed a successful model program for community organization... that can, with profit, be studied by other social forces.”<sup>40</sup> Their 1918 experimental study, in which three meals a day were provided to neighborhood immigrant children for a period of six months, aimed to instruct parents in the proper nutrition and feeding of children.<sup>41</sup> These significant accomplishments, in particular the nutrition study, were well-known in New York and often published in newspapers and medical and health journals, as well as Henry Collin Brown’s *Valentine’s City of New York: A Guidebook*.<sup>42</sup> (Image 5)

Along with medical concerns, sanitary living conditions were also of the utmost importance to the Bowling Green Neighborhood Association. Workers at the Downtown Community House were constantly on the lookout for unsanitary or unacceptable housing conditions, which they would subsequently report to the social worker in charge of building incidents; he would then notify the owner or agency of the building before informing the government agency of the situation. Two weeks after the complaint was recorded, the social worker would follow up on the case and send a letter to

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<sup>37</sup> “Democracy and Welfare.” *The New York Times*. 28 October 1924.

<sup>38</sup> New York State Board of Social Welfare. *Annual Report, Vol. 53*. Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, 1920. p. 208; The Bowling Green Neighborhood Association. *Activities of the Bowling Green Neighborhood Association*. New York: Bowling Green Neighborhood Association, 1926. p. 9; Davis, Michael M. *Immigrant Health and the Community*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1921. p. 381.

<sup>39</sup> New York State Department of Social Welfare. *Annual Report, Vol. 2*. 1919. p. 209; “The Bowling Green Neighborhood Association.” *The Outlook*, Vol. 120. 11 September 1918. p. 44.

<sup>40</sup> New York Public Library. *Municipal Reference Library Notes, Volume IV, No. 3*. New York: The New York Public Library. 19 September 1917. p. 36

<sup>41</sup> “Medical News.” *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 74. 24 January 1920. p. 258.

<sup>42</sup> Brown, Henry Collins. *Valentine’s City of New York: A Guidebook*. New York: The Chauncey Hold Company, 1920. p. 42; New York Department of Health. *Weekly Bulletin of the Department of Health of the City of New York*. Vol VI, No. 20. 19 May 1917. p. 158; Gebhart, John C. “Defective Nutrition and Physical Retardation.” *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*. Vol XXIX. Albany: The Brandow Printing Company, 1921. p. 147; Manny, Frank A. “Philanthropy and the Public Health.” *Modern Hospital*. Vol. X. January 1918. pp. 129-120.

the head of the appropriate municipal department if the requested improvements were not made.<sup>43</sup> This ultimately resulted in a complete housing survey of the area and significant improvements in housing in the neighborhood, sometimes to the point of buildings being torn down or completely remodeled.<sup>44</sup>

In 1925, after years of campaigning for donations of money, toys, and food from the wealthy who worked on nearby Wall Street, William H. Childs, the founder of the Bon Ami powdered cleaner company, made a \$250,000 donation to the Bowling Green Neighborhood Association with the promise of other Wall Street investors to double their annual donations to the cause. William Hamlin Childs (1857-1928), a native of Hartford, Connecticut, earned his fortune in the soap and detergent industry at the turn of the 20th century. His father, owner of a grist mill in Manchester, Connecticut, had leased the mill to John T. Robertson, a scientist who was experimenting with feldspar ground into a powder and mixing it with liquid soap to produce a gentle cleaning agent he called *Bon Ami*.<sup>45</sup> Taking advantage of the prospering market of store-bought soap by housewives at the turn of the 20th century, William H. Childs and his cousin formed *Childs and Childs* and became the exclusive sales agents for Bon Ami, which by the 1890's was packaged in paper and stamped with the company logo, a yellow chick.<sup>46</sup> By World War I, Bon Ami was being sold in powder form in cardboard cans throughout the globe, from Latin America to Europe. Even during the Great Depression, the cleaner continued to do well on the stock market, never reducing or failing to pay a dividend on the New York Stock Market.<sup>47</sup> In the past thirty years, the powdered white cleanser, often used for cleaning kitchen sinks and bathtubs, has continued to fare well with the implementation of new marketing schemes.

The popularity of Childs' product made him a wealthy man in New York City, and he constructed a red brick and limestone Flemish Revival home in well-to-do Prospect Park, Brooklyn (Architect: William B. Tubby, 1901, Image 6).<sup>48</sup> It also enabled him to devote much of his free time and income to philanthropic pursuits; he was director and a significant contributor to the Beekman Street Hospital in New York City, chairman of the Brooklyn Bureau of Charity, President of the Battery Park Association, and Vice President of the Park Association of New York City. Through these charitable foundations and his reputation among wealthy New Yorkers, Childs was able to secure the promise of other Wall Street investors to double their annual donations for the construction of the Downtown Community House. With these pledges from Wall Street in 1925, the Neighborhood Association was able to extend its bounding limits to provide services to an estimated 10,000 people speaking twenty-

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<sup>43</sup> "Effective Neighborhood Work." *Housing Betterment*, Vol. 6. March 1917. p. 31.

<sup>44</sup> "The Bowling Green Neighborhood Association." *The Outlook*, Vol. 120. 11 September 1918. p. 44.

<sup>45</sup> "Simple Ingredients From the Very Beginning." *The Bon Ami Story*.

[http://www.bonami.com/index.php/about\\_bon\\_ami/](http://www.bonami.com/index.php/about_bon_ami/) Accessed 23 May 2012; "William H. Childs, Financier, Dead." *The New York Times*. 3 November 1928.

<sup>46</sup> "Bon Ami's Chick: Off the Endangered Species List." *Nation's Business*. Mar 1981, Vol. 69, p. 70-73.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Lawson, Carol. "Touring Brooklyn's Gold Coast." *The New York Times*. 21 July 1978.

five different languages as well as move to a new, larger space at 105-107 Washington Street, purchased in March 1925.<sup>49</sup>

The new Downtown Community House, designed by architect John F. Jackson, opened on May 5, 1926 with two pageants, a play by children in local public schools explaining the development of New York from Henry Hudson's discovery in 1609 through the opening of the community house, and a speech by Mayor Walker. Patriotism and a feeling of pride in America and its history were apparent, and as Mayor Walker said, the Community House was "turning back the Bolsheviki, helping God and man, and making the Stars and Stripes brighter than ever." Housing the first public library in Downtown Manhattan with an initial collection of 1,000 books, the building also contained clinics, a milk dispensary, assembly hall, cooking school, gymnasium, and a Roosevelt Memorial Nursery with furniture small enough for infants.<sup>50</sup> Within the first year of its opening, the workers of the community house made over 10,570 visits, ranging from medical appointments, to the upkeep and maintenance of the local tenements, to assistance with obtaining working papers.<sup>51</sup>

In the years following its opening, the Downtown Community House provided a wide range of medical, social, and occupational opportunities, including musicals, a drama club, classes in scientific housekeeping, and Christmas activities for the neighborhood children with music, dances, Christmas trees, and food baskets donated by wealthy sponsors and Wall Street corporations.<sup>52</sup> In 1929, the Neighborhood Association conducted an occupational survey of the area's female population, discovering that over two-thirds of the 788 women surveyed were found to be scrubwomen, most over the age of 30, who worked long hours overnight in nearby office buildings on Wall Street at a wage of 50 cents per hour; the results of the survey were then used to establish free summer vacation camps for Lower Manhattan working women.<sup>53</sup> The medical center continued to be a vital resource to the community, providing over 1,500 schoolchildren with dental care in 1926 and 1,400 in 1928; in only one month in 1930, 1,041 visits to 535 people were made, with a total attendance of 3,774 at the health

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<sup>49</sup> "Wall Street Poor Get \$250,000 Gift." *The New York Times*. 26 January 1925. p. 1; "Bowling Green Home Site is Purchased." *The New York Times* 4 March 1925.

<sup>50</sup> "Dedicate a New Community House." *The New York Times*. 6 May 1926; "Downtown Library Opens." *The New York Times*. 2 December 1926. p. 27.

<sup>51</sup> The Bowling Green Neighborhood Association. *Activities of the Bowling Green Neighborhood Association*. New York: Bowling Green Neighborhood Association, 1926. p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> "Bowling Green Group." *The Wall Street Journal*. 25 December 1930; "Xmas Made Merry for Downtown Child." *The Wall Street Journal*. 26 December 1927. p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> "Women's Free Outing Camp Finds Candidates Are Few." *The New York Times*. 19 May 1929. p. XX12.

center.<sup>54</sup> Community activities during the Great Depression included plays directed by out-of-work locals, giving the unemployed men “something to work on during their enforced idleness.”<sup>55</sup>

In 1930, after the death of the Association’s president Chellis A. Austin, Guy Emerson, the vice president of Bankers Trust Co., was elected president.<sup>56</sup> That same year, though, the Association’s surveys showed a significant increase in skyscraper construction in the area, ultimately resulting in an 8 to 10% decrease in the area’s population, and in 1940, the dramatic changes in the structure of the downtown communities, especially the decreasing population, led to the consolidation of the Bowling Green Neighborhood Association/Downtown Community House with the Beekman Street Hospital, today known as New York Downtown Hospital.<sup>57</sup> In 1945, the Beekman-Downtown Hospital sold the property to Nathan Wilson for \$183,000, with the proceeds of the sale most likely used to establish an endowment or reserve fund for the Beekman-Downtown Hospital Building.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the change of hands of the building, 105-107 Washington Street remained an important resource in the neighborhood as a pioneering recreation and health center. In 1936, it became the Recreation & Training School or the Recreation Center for the Adult Physically Handicapped, sponsored by the Works Progress Administration. It was the first center devoted to the recreation and athletics of handicapped adults in the United States, “helping [its users] to overcome their so-called ‘inferiority complex’” and it offered classes in play leadership and techniques for “social adjustment” through community recreation such as arts and crafts, swimming, dancing, puppetry, sports, and story-telling.<sup>59</sup> In 1943, the “modern six-story structure” formerly housing the Downtown Community House reopened as the War Shipping Administration and United Service, a government office for medical services for merchant seamen about to ship out or for those who would need recuperation after their return.<sup>60</sup> In 1946, the WPA relinquished the property, and in the 1950’s, it served as the headquarters of Local 88 of the International Organization of Masters, Mates and Pilots, a longshoremen union local chapter.<sup>61</sup> It most recently housed the True Buddha Diamond Temple, but today stands vacant.

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<sup>54</sup> “Oral Hygiene Clinic to Treat 1,500 Downtown Children.” *The New York Times*. 22 February 1926. p. 19; “Bowling Green Clinic Service Grows.” *The New York Times*. 20 April 1930. p. 29; “Cleaning 1,400 Children’s Teeth.” *The New York Times*. 26 March 1928. p. 21.

<sup>55</sup> “Jobless Staging Light Play to Help Forget the Depression.” *The New York Times*. 20 April 1932. p. 24.

<sup>56</sup> “In and Out of the Banks.” *The Wall Street Journal*. 20 February 1930.

<sup>57</sup> “Population Cut 8% at Bowling Green.” *The New York Times*. 24 June 1930. p. 22; “Beekman Hospital in Proposed Merger.” *The New York Times*. 5 February 1940. p. 12.

<sup>58</sup> “Office Structure Sold By Hospital.” *The New York Times*. 25 December 1945.

<sup>59</sup> Federal Writers Project. *New York City Guide*. New York: Scholarly Press, 1976. p. 77; Pallen, C. McDougall. “Letters to the Editor: Another House of Courage.” *The New York Times* 7 May 1936. p. 22; “WPA Has School for Play Leaders.” *The Christian Science Monitor*. 17 Nov. 1937. p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> “New Medical Unit to Treat Seamen.” *The New York Times*. 12 December 1943.

<sup>61</sup> “104,204 Feet of Space Relinquished by the WPA.” *The New York Times*. 15 July 1946.

## John F. Jackson, Architect

The Downtown Community House was built with Childs' funds for a total cost of \$300,000 (\$50,000 more than Childs' original gift) by John F. Jackson (1867-1948), an architect who completed over 70 Y.M.C.A. buildings and neighborhood houses over the course of his career. Born in New Brunswick, Canada in 1867, Jackson moved to Buffalo, New York to complete his apprenticeship at the firm of Green & Wicks before moving to New York in 1901.<sup>62</sup> He was a partner in two New York firms, Jackson, Rosencrans & Canfield and Jackson & Rosencrans before practicing alone in New York beginning in the 1920's and finally moving to Passaic, New Jersey six years before his death.

Jackson designed numerous Young Men's Christian Association buildings in New York including the Prospect Park Branch (1925), the Highland Park Branch (1925), and the Harlem 135th Street Branch (1918), as well as other community and youth centers in New York City, such as the Boys Club of New York at 321 East 111th Street (1926) and the Seaman's Branch of the Y.M.C.A. in Brooklyn (1921, not extant). Jackson's contributions extended beyond New York City as the architect of the Y.M.C.A. in Rochester (1919, Image 7), Elmira (not extant), and Watertown (not extant), New York; Montreal (1911-1912), Halifax (1908, not extant), Ottawa (1908) and Winnipeg (1911), Canada; and Jersey City (1924) and Passaic (1924), New Jersey. Several of his plans, sketches, and drawings for these buildings were published in national architectural magazines; in 1922, *The American Architect and the Architectural Review* described his sketches for the proposed Y.M.C.A. building in Jersey City as "showing a finely developed artistic ability."<sup>63</sup> While describing a building of a grander scale and a larger budget than the Downtown Community House, the same sense of massing and design seen through the articulation of the different floors, the Flemish bond and limestone ornamentation, and the influence of Greek Revival detailing at the Y.M.C.A. in Jersey City is also seen at 105-107 Washington Street; from it, one also gets a sense of the original interiors that which might have existed at the Downtown Community House. (Images 8-10)

However prolific he was as a designer of community houses, Jackson's abilities were by no means limited to this form; he also designed the Calvary Baptist Church in Clifton, New Jersey (1924), the Methodist Church in Westfield, New Jersey (1928), and the Congregational Church in East Brookfield, Massachusetts.<sup>64</sup> Jackson was also involved in residential architecture in New Jersey; he designed several homes in Passaic, including that of William H. Carey (1920; Image 11), Judge W.W. Watson

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<sup>62</sup> "John F. Jackson, 81, Y.M.C.A. Architect: Designer of 70 Association Buildings, Dies In Passiac." *The New York Times*. 28 April 1948.

<sup>63</sup> "Office Sketches in Pencil by John F. Jackson, Architect, of Rooms and Details." *The American Architect and the Architectural Review*. Vol. 122. 11 October 1922. p. 322.

<sup>64</sup> "Campaign Started to Erect New Masonic Temple." *The Westfield Leader*. 20 April 1927.

"Jackson & Rosencrans." *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada, 1800-1950*.

<http://dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org/>. Accessed 24 March 2012; *Office for Metropolitan History*.

<http://metrohistory.com> Accessed 24 March 2012.

(1920, Image 12), and Charles L. Denison (1920), all of which had images and plans published in *American Architect*.<sup>65</sup> The architectural style of both his civic structures and his private residences was typically a mixture of Colonial Revival and Italian Renaissance details and ornament using red brick and limestone accents.

### The Colonial Revival Style & Community Houses

The Colonial Revival was a nationalistic architectural style that was popular in the United States from the end of the 19th century through the 1930's. Attempting to emulate and recall the designs of America's early history, the Colonial Revival stemmed from the restorations of the mid-19th century at Independence Hall, Mount Vernon, and Washington's headquarters at Newburgh as well as a newly founded sense of patriotism originating out of the 1876 Centennial celebration in Philadelphia.<sup>66</sup> A popular style for residential architecture, the Colonial Revival took its precedents from the Georgian and Neoclassical architecture of the East Coast and England, roughly from 1720 to 1840, as well as Greek Revival influences, with defining characteristics such as symmetrical wood clapboard or Flemish-bond brick facades with elaborate front doors, crown or broken pediment entrances, fanlights, Palladian windows, gabled or mansard roofs, Classical-inspired details such as swag reliefs and urns, and dormer windows.

Patriotism played an important part both in the rediscovery of these buildings and in their subsequent emulation across the nation, in particular around the turn of the 20th century when the United States was experiencing a dramatic increase in immigrant population and desired to clarify and express American identity. Moreover, after the emotionally devastating World War I, the country was in need of a renewed sense of comfort, manifesting itself architecturally in the Colonial Revival, which evoked the past and was "not meant to overwhelm but to welcome."<sup>67</sup> Architectural magazines from the time also looked back to Colonial America for "inspiration for modern builders" and examined Colonial-era structures in each month's publication, believing there to be an inherent honesty and truth in this style that evoked the memories of the American past.<sup>68</sup>

Although predominantly used for residential buildings, Colonial Revival style became increasingly used throughout the United States for civic structures that served the poor, deprived, or newly-arrived. Fiske Kimball, in a 1919 article on social centers in *Architectural Record*, suggested that community centers "do not have a standardized form of organization" because of their wide range of activities, but the Colonial Revival was a popular style for many of these centers partially because of

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<sup>65</sup> "House of William H. Carey, Passaic, N.J." *American Architect*. 14 July 1920; "House of W.W. Watson, Passaic, N.J." *American Architect*. 22 September 1921.

<sup>66</sup> Rhoads, William B. "The Colonial Revival and American Nationalism." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. Vol. 35, No. 4 (December 1976). p. 239.

<sup>67</sup> Rothstein, Edward. "National Design That's Hidden in Plain Sight." *New York Times*. 13 June 2011.

<sup>68</sup> "Old State House, Newport Rhode Island." *American Architect*. February 1921. Vol. 109. p. 120.

the wide variety of decorative options and arrangements made possible by the style.<sup>69</sup> More importantly, though, Colonial Revival was common for community and neighborhood houses precisely because of the way it physically expressed nationalistic and patriotic feelings to the nation's newcomers.

In the early 20th century when immigration and ethnic tensions were running high, most neighborhood, settlement, and community houses had a program of Americanization to help their users assimilate better into American society. Architecture began to play an important part in the educational programs at many of these settlement houses, with classes on local history using prints and images of New Amsterdam and old New York. Tours were given to immigrant children of Colonial landmarks in New York, such as the Dyckman House, with the intention of moralizing the newcomers: "the very walls of the old Dutch house were said to present 'our young citizens... [with a] living history of honest and upright life.'"<sup>70</sup> This need to Americanize immigrants and provide them with a strong set of morals extended beyond the programmatic schedules of these centers into the architectural language through the use of the Colonial Revival. By referencing forms, materials, and shapes from Colonial era in combination with showing the immigrants true "American" architecture, the aim was to visually articulate and define America and inform the newcomers of American history and patriotism. The Colonial Revival style was thus a physical expression as well as a physical extension of the assimilation process that occurred inside its doors.

While building styles were quite diverse in New York City in the 1880's through the 1930's, the Colonial Revival style was favored in particular for community and neighborhood houses, such as the well-known University Settlement House (1901, Howells and Stokes) and Greenwich House (1917, Delano & Aldrich).<sup>71</sup> (Images 13 and 14) The University Settlement House, originally known as the Neighborhood Guild, is a six-story, red brick building with a prominent entrance flanked by two Corinthian columns and a limestone base, belt courses, inset plaques, and projecting window lintels. The tall arched windows on the second floor diminish in size to smaller windows on the upper stories, with a final band of arched windows on the sixth floor capped with a Greek Revival cornice. The Greenwich House, a settlement house founded in the West Village in 1901, served the needs of its largely Italian community in its Colonial Revival seven-story, red brick building with painted shutters, a steep gabled roof, and dormer windows. Other community houses designed in the Colonial Revival style are found throughout the country in particular in urban areas, including the Chicago Orphan Asylum Building (later the Parkway Community House; Chicago, Shepley, Rutan, & Coolidge, 1898-1899) and the William Hale House (Chicago, Argyle Robinson, 1908), as well as other red brick and

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<sup>69</sup> Kimball, Fiske. "The Social Center, Part II." *Architectural Record*. January 1919, p. 526.

<sup>70</sup> Reginald Pelham Bolton, "The Dyckman House Park and Museum," *Beaver* 4 no. 2 (February 22, 1917: p. 3, in Rhoads, William B. "The Colonial Revival and the Americanization of Immigrants." in *The Colonial Revival in America*. Alan Axelrod, Ed. New York: Winterthur Museum, 1985. p. 342

<sup>71</sup> Jackson, Professor Kenneth T. *The Encyclopedia of New York City*. 2nd Edition. New York: Yale University Press, 2010.

limestone trim community and youth centers such as the Philadelphia University House (1907) and South Bay Union in Boston.<sup>72</sup>

### Design of the Downtown Community House

The five-bay, six-story red brick building at 105-107 Washington Street was designed in the Colonial Revival style with a granite base, limestone first floor, limestone window lintels with projecting keystones, stone plaques between each floor, arched window surrounds on the second floor, and a slate mansard roof with metal-framed dormer windows. (Image 15) The eagle and swag plaques above the third story windows, along with the swag relief details in the cornice frieze and the Flemish bond, harken back to the early buildings of the United States. (Image 16) The articulation of the windows, beginning with large, arched window frames on the second floor, become smaller and less decorative on each successive story, but still employ the sense of “good proportions” and the correct “proportion of voids to solids” that Jackson described as appropriate for Y.M.C.A. community houses in a 1911 article for a Y.M.C.A. publication, *Association Men*.<sup>73</sup> The swag details, seen on other neo-Classical and Colonial Revival structures by John F. Jackson such as the Prospect Park branch Y.M.C.A., are proportionally appropriate for a six-story building, while the eagle relief in the limestone plaques in particular emphasizes the patriotism evident in the Colonial Revival style.

The original windows on the building were three-over-three double-hung windows with painted white frames, with smaller two-over-two windows on the dormer windows on the sixth story. (Image 17) The main entrance is flanked by two fluted pilasters and crowned by a molded arch and a decorative cornice. On either side of the central entrance are service entrances, still retaining their original two-over-two windows, which have been painted over. The mansard roof, unique among extant buildings by John F. Jackson, was most likely chosen for its ability to function as a roof as well as provide ample ceiling heights and dormer windows on the top floor and to distinguish the building from its neo-Classically detailed, metal-corniced residential neighbors.

The mansard roof could also have its origins in the design of Colonial Revival clubhouses in New York City. Jackson did not make any specific recommendations in terms of appropriate styles for Y.M.C.A. buildings and community houses, but he did suggest building materials that would not be “too rich in effect” to ultimately “have a club-like appearance.”<sup>74</sup> Community houses, in this sense, were likened to buildings used by the social elite, even though they were in fact used by middle and lower-class citizens and immigrants; in appearance, then, they hoped to rise above their social class and evoke a

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<sup>72</sup> Commission on Chicago Landmarks. *Chicago Orphan Asylum Building*. Approved December 4 2008.

[http://www.cityofchicago.org/content/dam/city/depts/zlup/Historic\\_Preservation/Publications/Chicago\\_Orphan\\_Asymlum\\_Bldg.pdf](http://www.cityofchicago.org/content/dam/city/depts/zlup/Historic_Preservation/Publications/Chicago_Orphan_Asymlum_Bldg.pdf); Rhoads, William B. “The Colonial Revival and the Americanization of Immigrants.” in *The Colonial Revival in America*. Alan Axelrod, Ed. New York: Winterthur Museum, 1985. p. 349.

<sup>73</sup> Jackson, John F. “Constructive Criticism on Associated Building.” *Association Men*. Vol. 36. March 1911. p. 263.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

wealthy lifestyle, often with its heritage and roots in early America. It is perhaps from the slate mansard roofs of turn-of-the-century clubhouses in New York that the roof on the Downtown Community House is derived: the neo-Federal “Old” Colony Club in New York City (now the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, McKim, Mead and White, 1905-1906), with its gray slate roof and dormer windows, and the “New” Colony Club in New York (Delano & Aldrich, 1916), which had a red slate roof, could have influenced Jackson’s design. (Images 18 & 19) The Century Association (H.H. Richardson, 1869), although older and in the Second Empire Style, also boasts a slate mansard roof. (Image 20).

The building’s current state has undergone only minor alterations; it was converted to office space in 1946, but was then soon reconverted into a community house with a recreation room, lounge, reading rooms, and classrooms in 1949.<sup>75</sup> The exterior windows were replaced in 1965, and upon its conversion to a Buddhist temple in 2003, a small relief ornament of Buddha was placed on top of each keystone above the second story windows. (Image 21) At some point, the fluting of the pilasters of the entrance has also been painted, and the granite base and limestone ground floor have also been painted. (Image 15) A terra-cotta Chinese-style cornice was also added just above the ground floor and is already in disrepair. Apart from these minor, removable and reversible additions, the visual appearance of the Downtown Community House remains largely the same as it was intended and is an excellent example of the Colonial Revival style being used as a way to visually define America to a diverse immigrant community.

## 109 WASHINGTON STREET

### Early History

A four-story, brick “public store” that received goods from the piers on West Street stood at 109 Washington Street since the early 1820’s, if not before; several other nearby buildings on Washington Street at Nos. 97, 101, and 103 were also commercial structures serving the same purpose.<sup>76</sup> Typically, public stores in large cities like New York housed goods coming directly from the wharves so that they could be appraised before being brought to the individual shops or markets where they would be sold. Owned at the time by Samuel Swartwout, a wealthy land speculator, an 1837 fire at the store led to a valuation of its goods at approximately \$300,000, including pipes of lime juice, boxes of glass, cases of wine, brandy, and gin, boxes of cigars, and cases of cordials.<sup>77</sup> By the 1850’s, the property housed a

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<sup>75</sup> Department of Buildings, New York City. Alteration Application #1682-46; Department of Buildings, New York City. Alteration Application #385-48.

<sup>76</sup> New York City Board of Health. *A History of the Proceedings of the Board of Health, of the City of New-York...* New York: P & H Van Pelt, 1823; Jones, Andrew A. *Jones' Digest: Being a Particular and Detailed Account of the Duties Performed by the Various Offices Belonging to the Custom-House Departments of the United States.* New York: G.F. Hopkins & Son, 1835. p. 53

<sup>77</sup> New York City Department of Finance, Conveyance Liber #6, Prior to 1917, Block 45-54; United States Congress House. “Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury.” *House Documents, 27th Congress, Third Session.*

residential building that was occupied by Irish and Irish-American families throughout the 1860s and 1870's; beginning in the 1880's, German immigrants joined the Irish population. Common occupations were servants, sailors, cooks, machinists, laborers, longshoremen, and barbers.<sup>78</sup>

#### "Old Law" Tenements and No. 109 Washington Street<sup>79</sup>

Tenement buildings are by legal definition a multi-family building housing more than three families, according to the Tenement House Law of 1867; the later association of tenements with lower-income, immigrant families is believed to have stemmed from the typical 25-foot-wide lots in New York City, creating narrow apartments with little access to light and ventilation except for in the front rooms. Most tenement houses built before the first tenement law in 1879, also known as the "old law," were constructed with little to no building regulations; after 1879, the typical shape of tenements shifted to the "dumbbell" apartments, where three-foot wide light shafts on either side of the structure were an attempt at providing light and air to the inner rooms. Unfortunately, this did not provide the desired access to air and light but rather created what essentially became garbage shafts and fire flues and did little for residents in the way of privacy from neighbors in the buildings next door. 1901 saw the second wave of tenement reform, with requirements addressing both access to lighting for interior rooms, slightly larger air shafts, and indoor toilet facilities; many of these reforms became requirements for preexisting tenements that had to be brought up to code. Stylistically, the "old law" tenements tended to be four- or five-story red brick structures with stone or terra-cotta window details and a neo-Grec pressed metal cornice; later "new law" tenements could be up to six stories with brick and glazed terra-cotta trim, often with Renaissance or Classical, strongly-projecting details.

In 1881, the existing pre-1879 tenement was sold in foreclosure for \$5,000 and then subsequently resold that same year to Lawrence O'Connor, resident of 111 Washington Street.<sup>80</sup> Much of the tenement construction during the late 19th century was carried out by local entrepreneurs with a small amount of savings who sought an opportunity to become landowners and landlords; these entrepreneurs, like the Irish-born Lawrence O'Connor, typically were members of the same ethnic or religious groups as those who would occupy the tenement.<sup>81</sup> Four years later in 1885, O'Connor demolished the existing brick building and hired architect John P. Lee to construct an "old law"

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January 19, 1843. p. 2; "Domestic: Fire and Loss of Life." *The Boston Recorder*. 9 June 1837. American Periodicals, p. 91.

<sup>78</sup> "To The Anniversary folks." *The New York Daily Tribune*. 13 May 1857, p. 7; US Census, New York, New York. 1860.

<sup>79</sup> Information in this section is based on the following sources: Dolkart, Andrew. *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City*. Santa Fe: The Center for American Places, 2006; Stern, Robert A.M. *New York 1900*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc, 1983.

<sup>80</sup> "The Real Estate Market: Recorded Real Estate Transfers." *The New York Times*. 4 March 1881. p. 6; New York City Department of Finance, Conveyance Liber #6, Prior to 1917, Block 45-54.

<sup>81</sup> Dolkart, Andrew. *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City*. Santa Fe: The Center for American Places, 2006. p. 26.

tenement of five stories, with a storefront and perhaps two or three apartments on the ground floor and four three-room apartments on each of the upper floors. (Image 22) Typical of most tenement buildings constructed after the 1879 “old law” regulations and before the 1901 “new law” requirements, No. 109 Washington Street was designed for 19 apartments, each with two windows in the largest of the three rooms and little to no light or ventilation in the other rooms, except for a narrow three-foot wide airshaft on the southern wall as required by the “old law” of 1879. An airshaft was never constructed on the northern side of the building, perhaps because of the tenement at 111 Washington Street that was a front-and-rear style tenement in 1885 and thus had a small courtyard in the middle of the lot, providing some access to air and light for its neighbors. (Image 23)

Most of the tenements further south on Washington Street were of a lower class, considered “foul,” while the tenements further north on Washington Street near Rector Street, like No. 109, were for the slightly better-off immigrants and were viewed as “the better class,” most likely because they were newer than many of the converted warehouses and rowhouses converted further down on Washington Street.<sup>82</sup> (Image 24) Once a pervasive building type in the area, these “old law” tenements were “low, red brick tenements whose fronts [were] scrawled over with fire escapes” and consisted of apartments of three or four rooms and “whose rears opened down into desolately dark courts.”<sup>83</sup>

Like many other tenements in Little Syria, No. 109 Washington Street had a commercial space of two large rooms on the ground floor. Although there is little documentation of the tenement’s early inhabitants or the use of the ground floor storefront, three Syrian immigrants ran cigar factories at 57 and 109 Washington Street in 1894 and were caught for fraudulently putting on revenue stamps for tax purposes on their products.<sup>84</sup> In the late 1910’s, the space was occupied by Pedro Caram, an immigrant from Syria, who specialized in the exportation of cotton and silk goods, hardware, dry goods, tools, shoes, and jewelry to South America.<sup>85</sup> By 1917, Caram’s business was in trouble, and the storefront was occupied in the early 1920’s by another merchant of Syrian descent, Leon Labe, who sold silk and cotton textiles, including silk kimonos, embroidery, curtains, hosiery, and sweaters to the

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<sup>82</sup> Childe, Cromwell. “Exiles of the Orient: Queer Types Found in New York’s Syrian Quarter.” *The Washington Post*. 21 August 1899. p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> “A Bit of Syria Between the Skyscrapers: Lower New York.” *The Baltimore Sun*. 22 March 1931, p. SM 16.

<sup>84</sup> The majority of the census records from New York in 1890 (the first year that census record would be available for this 1885 tenement) were lost in a fire. Records from 1900 are the earliest ones to account for residents of the current structure at 109 Washington Street; “Notes From the Courts.” *The New York Times*. 21 August 1894.

<sup>85</sup> Hough, Benjamin Olney. *American Exporters’ Export Trade Directory*. New York: Johnston Export Publishing Company, 1912. p. 22.

Dutch West Indies, Peru, Puerto Rico, Chile, Honduras, Brazil and Argentina.<sup>86</sup> (Image 25) By 1940, a retailer selling glass occupied the ground floor store.<sup>87</sup> (Image 26).

### Inhabitants of 109 Washington Street

Beginning in the mid- to late-1880's, Washington Street near Rector Street began to see an influx of immigrants from the Middle East, but No. 109 in particular remained largely populated by Irish and German immigrants. By the turn of the century, the buildings adjacent to No. 109 were home to Greek, Turkish/Syrian, Russian, Italian, German, Austrian, Welsh, Norwegian, English and Irish immigrants. Most of the Syrians, often referred to as Turks because of their Turkish passports from when Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria were part of the Ottoman Empire, lived with extended family -- brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles. Their occupations ranged from machinists, peddlers, cigar makers, shoemakers, and grocers to the occasional dealer of jewelry.<sup>88</sup> Women were sometimes employed as dressmakers or embroiderers.

No. 109 was home to 37 people in 1900, roughly 75% of whom were Irish or first generation Irish-American; the rest were German or first-generation German-Americans, and most males worked as laborers, longshoremen, truck drivers, or bank clerks. Depending on the family, women were also sometimes employed, usually as scrubwomen in the nearby office buildings of the new skyscrapers in the Financial District.<sup>89</sup> By 1905, about 60% of the block's 47 families (196 people) were Syrian immigrants; Greeks and Egyptians also began to move into the area, but the tenement at 109 Washington Street was inhabited by 34 residents of Irish, Hungarian, or Austrian origin.<sup>90</sup>

By 1910, the number of occupants of 109 Washington Street doubled to over 60 people as the Austrian-Hungarian, Irish, Scottish, Russian-Lithuanian, Italian, and Austrian-Slovak families took in lodgers of their own respective ethnicities.<sup>91</sup> This increase could be due to the large numbers of immigrants that arrived in the community during the decade spanning 1900 to 1910, or could also be due to improvements made to the structure in 1907.<sup>92</sup> Because of the wave of immigrants arriving in New York around the turn of the century, there was a heightened demand for housing and the Department of Buildings sought to improve the conditions of the "old law" tenements throughout

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<sup>86</sup> "Business Troubles." *The New York Times*. 10 April 1917; Hough, Benjamin Olney. *American Exporters' Export Trade Directory*. 6th Edition. New York: Johnston Export Publishing Company, 1920. p. 146.

<sup>87</sup> Sperr, Percy Loomis. *Manhattan: Washington Street - Rector Street*. c. 1940. Courtesy of New York Public Library Digital Gallery.

<sup>88</sup> US Census, New York, New York. 1900.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> New York State Census, New York, New York, 1905.

<sup>90</sup> Miller, Lucius Hopkins. *A study of the Syrian population of greater New York*. [New York?: s.n., 1904?]. p. 8.

<sup>91</sup> US Census, New York, New York. 1910.

<sup>92</sup> New York City Department of Building, Alteration #1044-07.

Manhattan and Brooklyn, perhaps improving the conditions only to have the structures filled with even more inhabitants than before.<sup>93</sup>

By 1920, only one of the original Irish families was still living in the tenement, and the influx of newer immigrants from Slovakia, Poland, and Russia who arrived in the United States between 1905 and 1915 is evident in the Czech-Slovak, Austrian, and Austrian-Slovak residents of the building.<sup>94</sup> Throughout the 1920's and 1930's, the tenement was home to Czech-Slovak, Irish-American, Polish, and German families and lodgers who worked as elevator runners, file clerks at a bank, dishwashers in a restaurant, watchmen in an office building, furniture painters, waiters, seamen, telephone electricians, porters, wholesalers, and cooks in restaurant.<sup>95</sup> Similar demographics are seen again in 1940, but with fewer residents -- only 40 people lived in the building, perhaps indicative of the changing nature and decrease in population of the neighborhood. The building's inhabitants, hailing from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, and the United States (with many native-born New Yorkers), worked as porters, salesmen at a cigar store, longshoremen, dishwashers, accountants, and bakers. Women, as well, were often employed, typically as office cleaners in nearby office towers or as waitresses.<sup>96</sup>

109 Washington Street was a typical example of a tenement in Little Syria both in its construction and in the wide range of its residents: it housed hundreds of people of more than thirteen nationalities in the first sixty years of the building's existence -- Austrian, Slovakian, Scottish, Irish, Hungarian, Russian, Lithuanian, Italian, Polish, Czech, German, Yugoslavian, and American. Because no Syrian residents have been documented through census records at 109 Washington Street, this could perhaps speak to the tendency for building owners to rent apartments to people of the same ethnicity -- the O'Connors, of Irish background, may have purposely avoided housing Syrian immigrants despite their large numbers in the area, or they may simply not have been residents at 109 Washington Street at the time of the census. While a similar tenement in New York City's Lower East Side, another significant immigrant enclave, would most likely have had a higher occupancy rate, Washington Street was home to a wider range of nationalities and ethnicities and truly represented a melting pot of backgrounds.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> "Tenements." in *The Encyclopedia of New York City, Second Edition*. Kenneth T. Jackson, ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010. p. 1289-1290.

<sup>94</sup> US Census, New York, New York. 1920.

<sup>95</sup> US Census, New York, New York. 1930.

<sup>96</sup> US Census, New York, New York. 1940. ED 131-103.

<sup>97</sup> Dolkart, Andrew. *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City*. Santa Fe: The Center for American Places, 2006. p. 100.

## Design of 109 Washington Street

Of the 16 four-, five- and six-story brick residential buildings and tenements that lined Washington Street between Rector and Carlisle Street in the 1910's, No. 109 was among the taller, newer structures on the street and had a projecting metal-framed bay window storefront.<sup>98</sup> (Image 26) The architect of the tenement, John P. Lee, had his offices at 168 East 89th Street and was perhaps the same John P. Lee, president of the Builders League in the early 20th century. He frequently acted as a consultant and representative of the Builders League regarding amendments to the Tenement House Law of 1901, and, if in fact the architect of 109 Washington Street and several other tenements, he would have been very familiar with the building type.<sup>99</sup>

The five-story, four-bay running-bond brick tenement building at 109 Washington Street was constructed in 1885 to be a residential structure that extends nearly all the way back to its rear lot line. The original windows were most likely three-over-three double-sash windows and have molded brownstone sills and lintels with neo-Classical inspired swags reliefs. (Image 27) The painted sheet-metal, neo-Grec cornice held up by projecting brackets has a matching sheet-metal belt course just below the cornice; both are painted a brown color to resemble the brownstone window trims. (Image 28) These architectural details were most likely purchased from builder's yards but the subtle swag detail and the use of brownstone as a trim material, as opposed to lintels and sills with no ornamentation at all, indicates at least some desire to provide ornamentation on the façade.<sup>100</sup> A belt course of slate or bluestone runs through the upper edge of the windows on each floor, and a fire escape on the facade of the building has been extant on the building beginning some time prior to 1907; the current fire escape was most likely preceded by another one, due to holes in the masonry of the facade where the previous escape would have been attached. The fire escapes were typically used to air out bedding, dry laundry, or store large items such as basins or baths.<sup>101</sup>

The apartments of No. 109 Washington Street were divided into three rooms, with the front room or parlor having access to the two windows in the front and rear of the building; a kitchen occupied the middle room, and a small bedroom was situated in the center of the structure, either across from or next to the staircase. Each apartment was entered through the kitchen, which then had doors leading to either the bedroom or the parlor. The entrance on the ground floor was located on the north side of the building, and the stairs were accessed via a long, narrow hallway. (Image 29)

The building has been through two alterations. Originally intended for 19 families when it was built in 1885, 109 Washington Street was home to roughly 35 to 40 people at any given time through the turn

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<sup>98</sup> Bromley, G.W. *New York City 1909, Revised 1915*. Map 2. New York: G.W. Bromley & Co, 1915.

<sup>99</sup> "Mayor Hears Protests Against the Charter." *The New York Times*. 14 April 1901.

<sup>100</sup> Dolkart, Andrew. *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City*. Santa Fe: The Center for American Places, 2006. p. 27.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

of the century; beginning in 1910, the number roughly doubles, with 67 occupants in 1910, 60 in 1920, and 56 in 1930.<sup>102</sup> In 1907, the building was brought up to code outlined in the 1901 Tenement House Law, carried out at No. 109 by John J. O'Connor, an architect and relative of the owner. The 1907 changes included blocking out and flooring over the existing light shaft and creating a new one that would measure five feet by five feet, adding two shared toilets on each floor next to the new light shaft, and inserting windows on interior partition walls in the apartment for light and ventilation.<sup>103</sup> (Image 29) At a later date, the windows were replaced, in some cases in a haphazard manner, and the original metal and glass bay window storefront has been replaced with a tacked-on storefront.

The tenement remained in the O'Connor family for over 70 years following Lawrence O'Connor's purchase of the property; in 1955, O'Connor descendants sold the property to Finkenstadt Realty, and through the new owner Robert Ehrich, further improvements were made to the building.<sup>104</sup> In 1955, the first floor store was equipped to prepare food and was converted into a deli, while two new toilets on the north side of the building were added on each of the residential floors.<sup>105</sup> The ground floor has since remained a food service location, housing various restaurants including Marin's Restaurant in the 1980's and currently Budtharasa Thai Food. Aside from the replaced windows and the changed storefront, the building looks remarkably similar to the way it did over one hundred years ago.

## CONCLUSIONS

Little evidence, other than the three buildings on Washington Street between Rector and Carlisle Streets, speaks to the significant and varied immigrant community that lived in the area for decades. Although the former Saint George's Church at 103 Washington Street is already a designated landmark, the five-story tenement at 109 Washington Street and the adjacent Colonial Revival Downtown Community House at 105-107 Washington Street together reflect the multi-ethnic commercial and residential community that once occupied the area. The tenement, built in 1885 out of red brick with brownstone trim, is now a unique reminder of what was once a ubiquitous building type in the area. Even though approximately fifty such tenements were located on Washington Street between Battery Place and Barclay Street in the 1920's, today No. 109 Washington Street is a lone survivor of this building type on Washington Street.<sup>106</sup> The tenement, home to over thirteen different nationalities and hundreds of residents, continues to play an important part in the rich cultural memory of the neighborhood. The six-story, red brick Downtown Community House is noteworthy in its use of the Colonial Revival style and architectural language, which sought to emulate wealthy

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<sup>102</sup> Department of Buildings, New York City. New Building #466-\*85; US Census, Manhattan, New York. 1910, 1920, 1930.

<sup>103</sup> New York City Department of Building, Alteration #1044-07.

<sup>104</sup> "Village Holdings Go To New Buyers." *The New York Times*. 18 July 1955. p. 33.

<sup>105</sup> New York City Department of Buildings, Alteration #1023-55.

<sup>106</sup> Bromley, G.W. *Manhattan 1930 Land Book*. New York, United States. G.W. Bromley & Co., 1930; New York Public Library, Digital Gallery.

clubhouses of New York City and was also used as a didactic visual tool in the process of Americanization for newly arrived immigrants using the community house. Even after the Bowling Green Neighborhood Association ceased to exist, the building continued to function as a noteworthy social and recreational center in the area. Moreover, although there are many settlement and community houses in New York City, only the Henry Street Settlement House (housed in three 1830's Federal-era rowhouses) and the first Y.M.C.A. building in New York (222 Bowery, architect Bradford L. Gilbert, 1884-1885) are designated New York City landmarks. Neither of these buildings demonstrates the frequent use of political overtones of the Colonial Revival employed in settlement houses in New York City and throughout the nation. The Greenwich House, within the Greenwich Village Historic District, is designated as part of the larger historic district, but not as an individual landmark. The minimal changes to both the Downtown Community House and the tenement at 109 Washington Street allow them to be read, along with Saint George's Church, as a snapshot of immigrant life in "Wall Street's backyard" nearly one hundred years ago.