

*Albert and
David Confino,
residents of
97 Orchard Street,
circa 1920*

Right page:
Left to right:
*Davey Russo,
nephew of
Victoria Confino,
circa 1922*

*Ouija board,
doll head and
whiskey bottle
found inside
the tenement
at 97 Orchard
Street*



Affected Environment



INTRODUCTION

This chapter identifies the topics selected for analysis on the basis of legislative requirements, resource information, planning issues, and other concerns arising from scoping sessions with NPS, the Museum and the public. The alternatives described in the previous chapter will be analyzed in Chapter IV in terms of their potential impacts on each of these topics. Some affected environment topics were eliminated from further evaluation as it was determined that they had little or no relevance, given the site's setting in Manhattan.

The tenement building at 97 Orchard Street and the surrounding Lower East Side neighborhood are significant artifacts in the story of the working-class immigrant experience in the United States. The site is listed in the National Register and has been designated a National Historic Landmark, and part of the Lower East Side is a National Historic District. There are a number of other National Register properties and National Historic Landmarks in the vicinity.

The significance of the site and the neighborhood derives from two major themes in 19th- and 20th-

century United States and New York history:

- immigration experience as a broad national phenomenon, a story that builds upon the interpretation of the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island and Castle Clinton
- urban social reform as expressed by early tenement housing laws in New York

The tenement building and the Lower East Side, which continues as an eclectic, mixed-use immigrant neighborhood in the city, play a key role in providing a comprehensive understanding of these themes.

TOPICS ELIMINATED FROM FURTHER EVALUATION

Natural Resources

The site is located in an urban setting that has been highly altered from its original natural state. There are no natural drainage systems or wetlands in the vicinity. Issues related to topography, soils, vegetation, and wildlife are not present. The proposed alternatives are not likely to present any short- or long-term impacts in these areas.

Left to right:
*Charley, Esther,
 and Jack Confino
 and Davey Russo,
 1922*

*Rachel Confino
 after moving from
 97 Orchard Street,
 circa 1930s*

*Joseph and
 Lilly Confino,
 circa 1922*



Threatened and Endangered Species and Species of Concern

Except for occasional transient individuals, no rare or listed species or species proposed for listing under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or any state or city regulatory agency are known to exist in the vicinity of the site. No significant natural communities are known to occur in the area, and there is no designated or proposed critical habitat. Therefore no biological assessment or further Section 7 consultation under the Endangered Species Act (87 Stat.884, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.) will be required with these agencies. (See Appendix B for letters from the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the New York State Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources.)

Air Quality

None of the alternatives will have a measurable impact on air quality or any factors known to affect air quality. Transportation links between the site and other NPS units will emphasize the use of mass transit, and anticipated additional visitors will come primarily via public transportation systems. Emissions from occasional charter bus or school bus visits will have a negligible impact on local air quality.

Climate Change

None of the alternatives will impact known factors related to regional or global climate change.

Hazardous Materials

Other than some lead-based paint within the building at 97 Orchard Street, there are no known hazardous materials present at the site. Window units, a common source of airborne lead contaminants, have all been replaced with new sashes. In areas where lead paint will remain for historic purposes and may come in contact with the public or with site staff, minimal abatement efforts may be appropriate. If needed, they will be undertaken in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations.

Noise

Either of the alternatives could produce some local, short-term construction noise. Since the site is located within a vibrant urban area, any increase in noise above existing levels will be negligible.

Sacred Sites and Indian Trust Resources

Consultation with the American Indian Liaison for NPS, Northeast Region, indicated that there are no known sacred sites associated with a federally recognized tribe in this area, nor is the site an Indian Trust resource.

Floodplains

The Flood Insurance Rate Map published by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (Map Panel No. 47, November 16, 1983) indicates that the site and adjacent properties referenced in the alternatives are not within either the 100-year or 500-year floodplain.

IMPACT TOPICS: CULTURAL RESOURCES

Historic Structures

97 Orchard Street is an outstanding surviving example of the vast number of tenement buildings constructed during the 1860s. It preserves a great deal of integrity in both its exterior and interior because its upper floors were boarded up for nearly 60 years and thus did not undergo any major changes after the early 1900s.

It is a simple building with a red brick façade, crowned by a bracketed Italianate-style cornice. Each floor of the façade is articulated by four segmental arched windows. The rear elevation is simpler than the front and is faced with the lesser quality brick that was typically used for the side and rear elevations of buildings in New York.

The structure has five stories plus a raised basement at ground level and a cellar below grade, used for storage and mechanical systems. When first built there were two stores in the basement. The first and higher floors were all originally devoted to apartments; two on the first floor were later converted to businesses. The main entrance was originally a centrally located stone stoop with an iron railing (later replaced by cast-iron stairs) in front of a segmental arched brownstone doorway leading into the hallway and staircase that provide access to the apartments.

In a typical apartment, the 138-square-foot front room or parlor served many functions—during the day it might be used for work to earn a living, in the evening it could become a dining room, and at night it was often converted into a bedroom. The middle room served as the washroom and kitchen. In the back was the main bedroom, a cramped 67-square-foot space with no direct source of natural light or ventilation.

The layout changed over the years in response to housing reform laws. The floor plan as it currently appears dates to the building's closing as a residence in 1935, still containing the two toilets per floor that were installed in 1905. For a complete description of the building and its history, refer to the Special Resource Study prepared by the National Park Service and the

Museum entitled *A Tenement Story: The History of 97 Orchard Street and The Lower East Side Tenement Museum*.

Collections

In 1988 the Lower East Side Tenement Museum moved into the 19th-century tenement building at 97 Orchard Street. Although the building's four storefronts continued to be active until the early 1990s, the apartments on the upper floors had been uninhabited since 1935. Residents and shopkeepers left behind numerous objects. The Museum contacted former residents, shopkeepers, building owners, and their descendants, who donated textiles, photographs, and other items. These artifacts comprise the permanent collection of the Tenement Museum.

This collection of food and beverage containers, furniture, clothing, cosmetics, toys, household accessories, storefront signs, shop merchandise, and decorative items illuminates day-to-day life in a typical tenement in New York. The Museum's artifact collection is one of the few in the nation to offer information about the material culture of the urban working class and poor in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In addition to its permanent collection the Museum has an exhibition collection that is similar in object type to the permanent one, but without primary historical significance to 97 Orchard Street or the Lower East Side. These objects are typically used in exhibitions and for educational programs. The Museum will accept loans as part of this collection for a specified period of time. Loaned items must significantly enhance the interpretation of 97 Orchard Street and/or be used in a temporary exhibition sponsored by the Museum.

The permanent and exhibition collections of artifacts are maintained and treated in accordance with the Museum's Collections Care Manual. Complete records for each object are incorporated into the Collections Database, including description, classification, provenance, measurements, defining marks, multiple images, and present location. The database allows staff and researchers at the Museum to easily and securely search and examine the records without



disturbing the items themselves. Photographs of each artifact in the database further reduce the need for researchers to access and handle them.

The Museum possesses an archive of documents related to 97 Orchard Street and other tenements on the Lower East Side, as well as a collection of oral histories recorded with Lower East Side residents, shopkeepers, and landlords. The Museum's photographic archives contain prints and photographs of 97 Orchard Street, its former residents, other Lower East Side buildings, neighborhood street scenes, and tenements throughout New York City.

Archives and most items from the collections are stored in the cellar of 91 Orchard Street. The remainder are in the cellar of 97 Orchard Street. In December 2001 the Museum's Board of Trustees approved a revised Collections Policy with guidelines for acquisition and maintenance. In April 2005 NPS completed a Collections Management Plan for the Museum; its recommendations are outlined in Chapter IV.

Archeological Resources

Between 1991 and 1993 the back yard of the tenement was excavated. The main purpose was to uncover evidence of the toilet facilities used from the time

Left to right:
Restoration of the Gumpertz apartment, 1994

Parlor of the Gumpertz apartment restored to its 1878 appearance

Nathalie Gumpertz, resident of 97 Orchard Street from 1870 to 1885, and her memorial card

the building was first occupied until indoor toilets were installed in 1905. The excavations showed that there had been no stone privy pit as expected; rather, the brick vault of the school sink was the original privy, and it was water-flushed and connected to the city sewer system. In addition these investigations revealed that the original yard surface was approximately 2 feet below the modern grade and that it was paved with stone. Some artifacts were also recovered.

IMPACT TOPICS: SOCIOECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Throughout the years the Lower East Side has continued to maintain its historic role as a gateway for new immigrants. Over time these groups have included African, Asian, German, Irish, Italian, Jewish, and Latino. The neighborhood has a number of local religious, business, educational, and social institutions that support its diverse cultural communities.



According to available figures, the Lower East Side neighborhood is presently about 33% Hispanic (largely Puerto Rican), 30% Asian, 29% Caucasian non-Hispanic, and 8% African-American.

Land Use and Economy

97 Orchard Street is located mid-block between Broome and Delancey Streets, near the center of the Lower East Side as defined by both the historic and modern boundaries. The area is zoned C-6 (General Central Commercial District) by the city, reflecting and perpetuating a mixture of uses that include a wide range of multiple family residential, retail, office, amusement service, custom manufacturing, and related uses normally found in the central business district.

From the early 19th century through the end of World War II the Lower East Side was a source of industrial and manufacturing jobs for unskilled entry-level workers. Although garment factories remain, employment in the industrial and manufacturing sector has dropped to half its 1960 level. Poverty is higher in this neighborhood than the borough-wide average.

The Lower East Side has historically offered less expensive housing than most other parts of Manhattan. However, the real estate boom of recent years has brought skyrocketing rents, making it less affordable for its traditional immigrant population base. Although it has resisted complete gentrification and retained much of its primary character as a working-class neighborhood, the area continues to evolve and is undergoing a steady change. Real estate prices are climbing rapidly and speculative development is increasing. The Lower East Side Business Improvement District, which represents some local business and property owners, is attempting to maintain the neighborhood's rich diversity while encouraging private and public investment, streetscape improvements, and historic preservation. There is concern among some long-term residents and small businesses that such efforts will inevitably result in increased rents and displacement.

Traffic, Parking and Transit

The tenement at 97 Orchard Street is located in a busy urban neighborhood with a significant amount of vehicular traffic on surrounding streets. A large number of visitors come to the tenement's immediate vicinity, drawn not only by the national historic site but by Orchard Street itself, a popular shopping street that attracts both city residents and tourists to its stores.

The site is well connected to public transportation, by which most visitors arrive. A total of seven subway lines serve the area (B, D, and Q at Grand Street; J, M, and Z at Essex Street; F at Delancey Street). The M15 bus and sightseeing buses stop at Grand and Allen Streets, bringing visitors from the Ellis Island Ferry stop.

According to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum's August 1999 Visitor Survey, approximately 27% of the total visitors travel to the tenement by automobile. The primary vehicular routes are Delancey, Allen and Grand streets. While curbside parking is very limited, a number of commercial parking lots are located within walking distance of the site. Three hours of free parking are provided by the Lower East Side Shopping District at the Shopper's Free Parking lot located on Broome Street between Norfolk and Suffolk Streets.

IMPACT TOPICS: VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Since the Lower East Side Tenement Museum opened its doors in 1988 it has won national and international renown for its pioneering mission. It has also become a local institution rooted in the context of the Lower East Side, New York's most diverse immigrant neighborhood since the 1800s. Over the years the Museum has expanded the range of its programs to include interpretive and other educational activities, art, and social services.

The Museum has broken new ground in documenting and interpreting the lives of urban immigrants. The restored site with its period re-creation of resident families' humble living spaces is the centerpiece of its interpretive mission. Moving beyond a traditional role of documentation and exhibition, the Museum has been very successful in developing ways of using history to foster public dialogue on contemporary issues. In December 1999 the Museum's founder, Ruth J. Abram, reached out to comparable institutions around the world and formed the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, a group of museums that believe in their capacity to inspire social change and are dedicated to using their histories to encourage civic participation in contemporary issues. Building on this philosophy the Tenement Museum has, over the years, sponsored many programs with contemporary relevance to the community. Current programs offered by the Museum include:

Tours—Visitors tour carefully restored tenement apartments and learn about the lives of actual past residents and the challenges they faced. On the tour entitled "Getting By: Immigrants Weathering Hard Times" visitors meet the Gumpertz family, German Jews (1870s), and the Baldizzi family, Sicilian Catholics (1930s), and learn how each struggled to make their way through economic crises. In "Piecing It Together: Immigrants in the Garment Industry," visitors enter the 1897 home and dressmaking shop of Harris and Jennie Levine, Polish Jews, and compare their experience in the "sweat shop" with that

of the Lithuanian-Jewish Rogarshevsky family in 1918, whose father died of tuberculosis, the "tailor's disease." An interactive, family-oriented living history program focuses on the Confinos, Sephardic Jews from Kastoria (part of present-day Greece) (1916). The next apartment to open will interpret an Irish family living at 97 Orchard Street just after the Civil War. "The Lower East Side Stories" walking tour of the neighborhood, created in collaboration with the Lower East Side Community Preservation Project, showcases the area's complex history.

Immigrant Arts—The Museum invites visual artists, performers, digital artists, and poets to layer its historic home for immigrants with the expressions of new arrivals to this country. Through its Immigrant Arts Program each quarter the Museum hosts artistic productions in a variety of media that explore contemporary immigrant issues and experiences.

After September 11th, 2001, the Museum curated a series of four visual arts installations in its storefront windows. This exhibit, called "Points of Entry," was done in partnership with the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. The first installation was "The Burqua Project," an exhibit by Haitian artist Jean-Ulrick Desert that explored the strength and message of cultural iconography by creating traditional Afghani veils out of flags of the west. In its Tenement Theater the Immigrant Theater Project produced the American Dreams Series, a summer of readings by diverse emerging immigrant playwrights.

Education—In fiscal year 2004-05 the Museum's educational programs served nearly 30,000 school children from throughout the United States and beyond. Its teacher-training program has been endorsed by the New York State Department of Education and is in keeping with the New Jersey Core Proficiencies. Tenement Museum staff piloted a new children's program at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum and trained NPS rangers to deliver it. Entitled "After Ellis," the program simulates the 19th-century immigrant processing

experience at Ellis Island followed by an opportunity to “settle” in a Lower East Side tenement. The Museum’s first-of-a-kind Urban Museum Studies Program, in collaboration with City College, offers graduate training for the museum profession to the college’s largely working-class and immigrant student population.

In 2001 the Museum teamed with the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to create “Tenement Inspectors,” an exciting and interactive program to educate students about the history of housing reform in New York City while simultaneously teaching them to be active citizens in the present. In the “Tenement Inspectors” program, school groups make inspections of 97 Orchard Street with an educator, learning about reforms that added ventilation, indoor plumbing and electricity to the building and how these improvements aided in ameliorating some of the harsh conditions earlier immigrants faced. The program also informs students of their rights as contemporary tenants, teaching them how to make sure that their homes comply with the law and how to contact HPD if any violations are found.

Contemporary Issues—The Museum is pioneering a new role for historic sites by using its history to address contemporary issues. For example, recognizing the need for free English classes, the Museum developed a series of “English for Speakers of Other Languages” workshops in the late 1990s. These workshops use the diaries, letters, and memoirs of earlier immigrants not only to teach English but also to help present-day immigrants understand that they are not alone in their experience. Graduates of these classes have helped develop a guide for new immigrants, the product of collaboration between the Lower East Side Tenement Museum and *The New York Times*, published by St. Martin’s Press.

Using historic preservation to build bridges among diverse elements of its local community, the Museum initiated the Lower East Side Community

Preservation Project in 2000. This project brings together community leaders to identify and preserve cultural landmarks in their neighborhood as centers for ongoing dialogues on common community concerns.

As the above examples show, despite limited resources and spatial constraints the Museum has developed innovative approaches to interpretation and other forms of education and has successfully expanded its program beyond the walls of 97 Orchard Street. The interpretive goals of the Museum go past standard exhibits to increase participation by the community. The ultimate goal of the Museum is to make people aware of the link between the history of most Americans and the day-to-day experience of new immigrants as they struggle to make a new start in their adopted country.

IMPACT TOPICS: VISITOR USE

More than 125,000 people toured the site last fiscal year. Tours start from the visitor center and gift shop. Groups of a maximum of 15 are escorted into the tenement through the main entrance on Orchard and depart via the back entrance on Allen Street. Open seven days a week, 360 days a year, the site experiences its heaviest demand on Saturdays and Sundays when the Museum offers its tenement tours every 15 minutes, the Confino living history program every hour and, seasonally, two walking tours during the day. Attendance peaks in the early afternoon on both weekdays and weekends. Currently a maximum of about 90 people arrive and depart during peak hours.

Thousands of visitors are turned away each year, and demand is expected to continue rising. Visitors who cannot climb the narrow stairs are unable to visit the upper floors. Because the demand for tours exceeds the carrying capacity of the tenement, and the historic structure cannot be modified for accessibility, long-term plans involve expansion into additional facilities as well as development of new programs relevant to contemporary issues and needs.