

STUYVESANT POLYCLINIC HOSPITAL, 137 Second Avenue, Borough of Manhattan.
Built 1883-84; architect William Schickel.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 464, Lot 37 in part
consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On March 23, 1976, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Stuyvesant Polyclinic Hospital and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing was continued to May 11, 1976 (Item No. 1). Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A total of six witnesses at both hearings, including the representative of the Cabrini Health Care Center, spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation; however, four witnesses asked that the adjacent Ottendorfer Library be designated simultaneously with the Stuyvesant Polyclinic Hospital.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Stuyvesant Polyclinic, formerly the German Dispensary, was designed by William Schickel, a German-born architect, in an interesting exuberant version of the neo-Italian Renaissance style. The building is especially notable for its sculptural detail which includes a series of portrait busts of famous physicians and scientists. This learned assembly, many of whom wrote classic medical texts, alludes indirectly to the relationship between the Dispensary building and the small neighboring library. Both were constructed in 1883-84, designed by Schickel, and commissioned by Anna and Oswald Ottendorfer, philanthropists who concerned themselves with the welfare of the German immigrant community in New York City. In constructing these two buildings, the Ottendorfers hoped to "promote the bodily and mental health of their fellow Germans in the United States."

Dispensaries were the 19th-century equivalent to health clinics of the present day. They provided medical care free of charge or at nominal fees to "medically indigent" out-patients. The first in New York City was founded in 1791 on Tryon Street, and by the end of the 19th century dispensaries were located throughout the City, many being affiliated with hospitals. The German Dispensary was established in 1857 and became, through an amendment to its charter in 1866, a branch of the German Hospital at Park Avenue and 77th Street. As their names imply, both the German Hospital and the German Dispensary were founded and maintained by Germans, and were intended to serve the poor of the German community in New York City, although treatment was available to the general public. The lower east side of Manhattan had a large German immigrant population in the second half of the 19th century, and the Dispensary from its founding was located in this section of the City. In 1884 at the same time that the building on Second Avenue was completed, a dispensary department was opened at the German Hospital itself. Patients were obliged if "able" to pay a fee of ten cents.

By 1905, very likely in response to the growth of the Yorkville German community, plans for a new dispensary building near the Hospital had been formulated. The Board of Trustees of the German Hospital determined to sell the downtown building and in April of 1906 it was purchased by the German Polyklinik, another charity dispensary devoted to the care of New York's German population. This institution, founded in 1883, provided free medical treatment as well as clinical observation sessions for medical students. The building was renovated and repaired in 1906, and has since had several other interior alterations, and improvements, including the addition of an auditorium in 1941. The clinic has continued to provide free medical services, relying on private donations and volunteer doctors. The name of the clinic was temporarily changed to the Stuyvesant Polyclinic during World War I, owing to the intensity of anti-German sentiment in this country at the time; again, during World War II it was given this name and has since retained it. Very recently the Polyclinic has become affiliated with the Cabrini Health Care Center.

The German Dispensary building and the adjacent library were among numerous charitable gifts of the Ottendorfers. Anna Ottendorfer (1815-1884) had immigrated to New York in 1844 with her first husband, Jacob Uhl, a printer. They purchased the German language newspaper, the New Yorker Staats Zeitung, a weekly paper founded in 1834 (and still published today). At the death of her husband in 1853, Anna inherited the paper, by then a thriving daily publication, and six years later, married Oswald Ottendorfer, editor-in-chief since 1858. Oswald Ottendorfer (1826-1900) was educated at the Universities of Vienna and Prague and was politically active in Austria. After the Revolution of 1848 failed, he fled to Switzerland, and in 1850 to the United States. He worked first as a laborer and then joined the staff of the Staats Zeitung. Under his management the newspaper continued to grow in popularity, and was a highly respected, conservative paper, "severely classic in tone." By the 1870s the Staats Zeitung was housed in an elaborate building on "Newspaper Row" (Tryon Row, now the site of the Municipal Building.) Ottendorfer, a leading citizen within the German community of the City, was politically influential both at the local and national levels. In 1872 he was a New York City Alderman, and in 1874 as a staunchly anti-Tammany Democrat he ran unsuccessfully for Mayor. Both Ottendorfers were deeply concerned with philanthropic projects, although Mrs. Ottendorfer was more directly involved in their execution. She helped fund German schools in the City, gave a wing--The Women's Pavilion--to the German Hospital, and established the Isabella Home in Astoria (now located on Amsterdam Avenue and 190th Street). The Home, named in memory of her daughter who died as a young woman, was an institution which cared for old and indigent German women. The German Dispensary building was also Mrs. Ottendorfer's particular project. The Library was the special concern of Mr. Ottendorfer who personally directed the selection of books.

In November of 1883 Mrs. Ottendorfer was honored for her philanthropic work with a silver medal of merit and a citation by the German Empress Augusta. This well-deserved tribute to Mrs. Ottendorfer's benevolence came shortly before her death. Unfortunately, she did not live to see the completion of the Dispensary building, and therefore, the dedication ceremony held on May 27, 1884, was in part a memorial service for her. A portrait of Mrs. Ottendorfer "profusely surrounded by choice flowers" was displayed on a temporary platform draped in black, and the ceremony consisted of musical offerings from the Liederkrantz Quartet and a series of speeches. One of the many guests was Carl Schurz, the famous German-born statesman and politician.

At the dedication ceremony Mr. Ottendorfer noted that his wife had taken a great interest in the construction of the Dispensary building, and that she herself had selected the architect. William Schickel (1850-1907) was a native of Germany and received his architectural training there. After immigrating to New York he worked as a draftsman for several architectural firms, including that of the well-known New York architect, Richard Morris Hunt. In the 1880s Schickel established his own office and designed, in addition to the German Dispensary building and the Ottendorfer Library, the Stuart Residence on Fifth Avenue at 68th Street (1881) and a building for St. Vincent's Hospital (1882). Schickel enlarged his firm calling it Schickel & Company in the late 1880s, and during this period designed several notable buildings such as the brick commercial structure, No. 93-99 Prince Street, now within the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, the Constable Building on Fifth Avenue of 1893--a handsome neo-Renaissance office building adjacent to the former building of the Arnold Constable Department Store, and the Jefferson Building on West 23rd Street, an impressive structure of brick with terra-cotta trim. By 1896 Schickel had taken Isaac L. Ditmars as partner. Their best remembered commissions were for church architecture, including the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola on Park Avenue, a designated New York City Landmark.

Schickel's design for the Dispensary building is a handsomely ornate and individual version of the neo-Italian Renaissance style. The facade is of Philadelphia pressed brick (now painted white) above a stone basement. It is especially interesting to note that all the ornamental detail is executed in molded terra cotta, a building material then only recently introduced to New York. In the rebuilding of Chicago after the Great Fire of 1871 much architectural terra cotta was used; however, in New York City it was not generally used until late in the 1870s. The first important building to employ this material was designed by the eminent architect George B. Post. His Long Island Historical Society building of 1880 is richly ornamented with terra cotta and includes a series of portrait busts. The manufacturer employed

by Post was the Perth Amboy Terra-Cotta Company, established in 1879. Very likely this same company furnished the terra cotta for the Dispensary building. Schickel, in using terra cotta so extensively for the German Dispensary, ranks among the first architects in New York to make important use of this building material, which was to become so popular by the turn of the century.

The handsome facade of the Dispensary building is symmetrically arranged with paired round-arched windows under segmental arches at each floor, flanking the one-story entrance portico which has triple round-arched windows above it at the second and third stories. The paired windows are separated by Corinthian colonnettes which are adorned with delicate spiraling vines. The central round-arched windows of the upper stories are richly enframed and are linked horizontally at each floor by continuous entablatures. Panels with foliate reliefs appear between the floors connecting the windows vertically. Elaborate bas-relief foliate ornament adorns the spandrels and the pilasters which flank the windows. The projecting entrance porch is supported on slender paired piers of brick with evenly spaced vermiculated blocks and Corinthian capitals. Above these piers is a frieze with classical triglyphs and metopes with floral ornaments. The low arch above the entrance is set between the columns and is surmounted by a pedimental composition with the head of Caritas at the center from which leafy branches unfold toward seated cherubs holding cartouches inscribed with the dates of the Dispensary founding, "1857," and construction, "1883" at the corners. The single most interesting feature of the sculptural detail is the series of terra-cotta portrait busts set within circular niches. They are inscribed with the names of the men depicted. Four busts, portraying figures from Classical Antiquity adorn the porch: Celsius, Roman author of medical texts; Hippocrates, Greek physician; Asklepius, Greek god of medicine; Galen, Greek physician and writer of the Roman period. Within the elaborate foliate frieze beneath the cornice of the building are five additional busts depicting men of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries: Harvey, English physiologist and court physician; Linne, Swedish botanist; Humboldt, German scientist and explorer; Lavoisier, French chemist and physicist; Hufeland, German physician and author.

The Stuyvesant Polyclinic has long been a source of pride to local residents. It is an exceptionally handsome well-maintained structure which plays a vital role in community life today.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Stuyvesant Polyclinic Hospital has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Stuyvesant Polyclinic Hospital is an exceptionally handsome building designed in a modified version of the neo-Italian Renaissance style by the German-born architect William Schickel, that the extensive and imaginative use of molded terra cotta on the facade was innovative when the building was constructed, that the ornament is especially interesting for its series of portrait busts depicting famous physicians and scientists, that the Polyclinic was long associated with the German community in New York and provided free health care to the needy, that the building was the gift of two Germanic immigrants who were important and influential figures in New York and noted philanthropists, that the Polyclinic in combination with the adjoining library was intended to "promote the bodily and mental health" of Germans in New York, and that the Polyclinic still plays a vital role in community life today.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Stuyvesant Polyclinic Hospital, 137 Second Avenue, Borough of Manhattan, and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 464, Lot 37 on which the described building is situated.