

281 East Broadway House (Isaac T. Ludlam House), 281 East Broadway, Borough of Manhattan. Built c.1829

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 288, Lot 64

On April 21, 1998, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the 281 East Broadway House as a Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Seven people, including a representative of the Henry Street Settlement, the owner of the building, spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

Summary

This relatively modest Federal style rowhouse is a rare survivor of its type and era. Built about 1829 as one of a group of three for Isaac Ludlam, a New York City surveyor, the house occupies a twenty-foot wide lot on the south side of East Broadway, not far from the East River. Two-and-a-half stories high and three bays wide, the house has characteristic features of the Federal style including Flemish bond brickwork, brownstone lintels and sills at the window openings, and a sloping roof with two pedimented dormers containing arched window openings. At the time the house was built, this was a fashionable residential district. Ludlam lived in the house from 1836 to 1853. Between 1864 and 1903, the house was owned and occupied by shoemaker George Leicht and his family. Leicht's shop was in the basement. Between 1909 and 1977, it was the home and offices of two different doctors. The house has been owned since 1977 by the Henry Street Settlement, which undertook renovation and restoration work on the house beginning in 1996. Thus, this house reveals through its architecture and its owners the rich and diverse history of the Lower East Side.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Neighborhood

The house at 281 East Broadway is located in the area which is known as the Lower East Side,¹ near the intersection of Montgomery Street, six blocks west of the East River. During the first half of the nineteenth century as the streets leading from the East River, north of Franklin Square (now the site of the Brooklyn Bridge approach), were being developed, this was a prosperous and respectable neighborhood. Shopkeepers, skilled craftspeople, countinghouse clerks, and workers from the nearby shipyards along the East River lived in the area in modest frame and red brick Federal style rowhouses, similar to those being built in lower Manhattan near the Hudson River as far north as Greenwich Village.² Merchants whose businesses were downtown and ships' captains lived in larger, more elegant Federal style rowhouses located on broader streets such as East Broadway. East Broadway was originally called Harman Street, after Harman Rutgers (d.1753), a member of the family that had settled the area in the eighteenth century. House numbers were first assigned along the street in 1822 (an indication that development was beginning), and the name was changed to East Broadway in 1831.³ When the South Carolina author Caroline Howard Gilman visited New York in 1836, she described the area as "all handsomely built up with private residences." East Broadway was characterized by her as "a spacious and elegant street."⁴ When the *Daily Tribune* published a list of the 200 richest men in New York in 1851, four of them lived on East Broadway.

By that time the area was quickly changing, as newly arriving immigrants moved in. Middle-class families moved uptown, and rowhouses were turned into boarding houses or torn down for tenements. Many of the former ship captains' mansions on East Broadway were converted for commercial use with shops on the lower floors. The transition of the neighborhood was chronicled in the local press. In 1850 the *Daily Tribune* reported that "local hoodlums, who had once stayed on the narrow side streets off East Broadway were now gathering on that bustling thoroughfare itself." Ten years later in 1860, the *Daily Tribune* wrote that surviving single family houses on East Broadway sold for one quarter of the prices prevalent in the 1820s and 1830s.⁵

By the turn of the century, the area had become notorious for overcrowding and unsanitary living conditions. Such conditions led to many social

reforms and legislation which established minimum housing requirements, as well as the establishment of such institutions as the Henry Street Settlement. The 1930s-50s brought sweeping urban renewal with the demolition of most early nineteenth-century structures to make way for moderate income apartments.⁶ Nonetheless, Federal style rowhouses like No. 281 East Broadway have survived, sometimes singly or in pairs or clusters, as reminders of an early nineteenth-century residential community in New York.

The Federal Style Rowhouse⁷

The house at 281 East Broadway is a rare surviving structure from the early nineteenth century. The rapid growth of the city in these years led to the subdivision and sale of large plots of land and the construction of groups and rows of brick houses to meet the needs of the population. The architectural style of such buildings has been called Federal, after the new republic, but in form and detail the style bears similarities to the contemporaneous Regency style of Great Britain. Buildings in the style were constructed throughout the city, from the tip of lower Manhattan as far north as 14th Street, beginning in the 1790s through the 1820s.

The size of the lot dictated the size of the house; typically each house lot was twenty or twenty-five feet wide by ninety to one hundred feet deep, which accorded with the rectilinear plan of New York City, laid out in 1807 and adopted as the Commissioners' Plan in 1811.⁸ The rowhouse itself would be as wide as the lot, twenty to twenty-five feet, and thirty-five to forty feet deep. This would allow for a small front yard or areaway and a stoop with a fairly spacious rear yard or garden. The rear yard usually also contained a buried cistern to collect fresh rain water and the privy or outhouse.

During the early nineteenth century, often two or three houses were constructed together, sharing common side walls, also called party walls, chimneys, and roof timbering to form a continuous group and maximize the narrow lots. The houses were of load-bearing masonry construction or modified timber-frame construction with masonry cladding. With shared structural framing systems and party walls, each house in a row was dependent on its neighbor for structural stability. (See diagram.)⁹ With the increasing availability of pattern books such as Asher Benjamin's *American Builders Companion* (published in six editions between 1806

and 1827), local builders had access to drawings and instructions for exterior and interior plans and details.

Federal style rowhouses usually had a three-bay facade with two full stories over a high basement and an additional half story under a pitched gable roof with the ridge line running parallel to the front facade. A wooden box cornice extended across the front along the eave, which carried a built-in gutter. A leader head and downspout that drained onto the sidewalk extended down the facade on the opposite side from the doorway. Below the cornice was a plain fascia board. The front and rear facades were usually constructed of red brick laid in the Flemish bond pattern, which alternated a stretcher and a header in every row. This system allowed the linking of the more expensive face brick with the cheaper, rougher brick behind. Walls were usually two "wythes," or eight inches, thick. Because brick was fabricated by hand in molds rather than by machine before it was fired, it was relatively porous. Thus to protect the brick surface and slow water penetration, facades were painted red or gray, and mortar lines were delineated in white. Doorway and window lintels, either flat or incised, were commonly brownstone.

The most ornamental feature of a building was the doorway, often framed with columns and topped with a rectangular transom or fanlight. In residential structures the formal entrance was approached by a stoop -- a flight of brownstone steps placed to one side of the facade, which created a basement level below the parlor floor. Wrought-iron railings lined the stoop and enclosed areaways. Window openings at the parlor story were frequently taller than those on the upper stories, but the openings were aligned and the same width from story to story. The wood-framed sash were double hung, multi-light, and modest in scale. Shutters were common at parlor story windows and the windows of the story above, both on the interior and exterior. Matching windows on the rear added more interior light and ventilation to the living spaces. The roof was covered with continuous wood sheathing over the rafters and clad in slate. It was penetrated by one or two roof hatches or scuttles for access and often contained a skylight on the back slope, giving additional light to the attic work space. Pedimented dormers on the front roof slope were generally simple in design with delicate wood trim. The top sash of the dormer windows often had an arched top with decorative muntins.

The House at 281 East Broadway and its History
Alexander Hamilton, a Counselor at Law

practicing at 153 Pearl Street and living at 56 Greenwich Street, and his wife Elizabeth, acquired a parcel of land on Harman Street [East Broadway] on March 8, 1827, then sold three lots to Isaac Ludlam on August 21, 1827.¹⁰ Isaac T. Ludlam (1800-1880) purchased the property while working as a surveyor in his father's business at 12 James Street. His father, Stephen Ludlam, had been appointed a city surveyor by Mayor Dewitt Clinton in 1802. According to tax assessment records, Ludlam had three houses constructed on his Harmon Street [East Broadway] lots in 1829-30.¹¹ By 1836, Isaac Ludlam was living at 281 East Broadway and the family surveying firm was listed at 8 James Street.¹² Two relatives, Silas Ludlam and Thomas Ludlam, both surveyors, were also listed as working in the family business at 8 James Street.¹³

According to Ludlam's obituary in the *New York Times*:¹⁴

Isaac Ludlam was the oldest City Surveyor on the list at the date when he retired from active service. . . . Ludlam had received a thorough classical and scientific education, and was trained to surveying in his father's office, ultimately succeeding to his business at an early age. He had been in the employ of the City nearly forty years when the Tweed Ring came into power, and had already accumulated a large fortune, being regarded as an authority in his profession, and employed as referee in cases against the City requiring the services of an expert. When the Tweed Ring obtained possession of the City Government, it was important to them that such men as Ludlam should bend to their wishes and retain their positions. Overtures were accordingly made to the senior Surveyor, but he indignantly rejected all propositions having a view to making him the creature of Tweed and his coadjutors, and resigned an office that he had held for many years with honor and credit. "I can make no terms with these rascals," he said to his son as a reason for retiring, "that will leave me a vestige of self-respect." He lived to see the ring broken, its members disgraced, and its associates shunned by all honorable men.

Ludlam owned the house until 1853 when it was sold to John B. Webb, a ship builder, and his wife Catherine Jane. They lived in the house for one year, and then the house was sold in quick succession to two other shipbuilders, Daniel D. Westerrell in 1854, and Steven A. Bogert in 1855.

George A. Clark, a grocer with a business at 104 Murray Street, and his wife Stephanie purchased the house in 1856, living there until 1864. That year the house was sold to George A. Leicht, a shoemaker who lived there and carried out his business on the premises until 1903.¹⁵

During their long tenure, the Leicht family made a number of changes to accommodate both the shoemaking business and the family of George's son, John. Inspection of the exterior of the building, especially the brickwork, indicates that both the center window on the parlor floor level and the entranceway were shifted approximately ten inches to the east.¹⁶ Leicht had located his store at the basement level, and in 1872, an alteration permit was filed to enlarge the storefront by removing a brick pier and replacing it with a cast-iron column, as well as "take down brownstone stoop and put cast or wrought iron one, also move present steps to line of stoop on sidewalk."¹⁷

After George Leicht's death in 1903, his granddaughter, Katie Francis Leicht, sold the house to Morris and Beckie Simiansky. Simiansky had a trimmings business at 74 Canal Street; the family is first listed as living in the house in the 1906 city directory. An alteration application had been filed in 1903 to change a door on the rear facade to a window, to remove the existing interior stairs, and build new interior stairs.¹⁸ Simiansky sold the house in 1909 to Dr. Michael S. Landa. By 1916 when permits were filed to undertake additional interior alterations,¹⁹ there were two families living in the house, the basement was still being used as a store, and the first floor had an office, presumably for Dr. Landa's medical practice. Dr. Nathan Botwin acquired the house in 1946, and had further interior work done on the house.²⁰ Based on the evidence of photographs, Dr. Botwin replaced the doorway and the window sash, replaced the stoop railings and areaway fence, and redid the basement storefront.²¹ Dr. Botwin, a graduate of the University of Glasgow Medical School in 1936, maintained his medical practice and lived here between 1946 and 1977.

That year Botwin sold the house to the nonprofit social service agency, Henry Street Settlement. The Settlement rented the entire building to another nonprofit agency, the Betances Health Unit. Before occupying the space, Betances completed major interior renovations primarily at the interior basement level, but early marble fireplace mantels, mahogany doors, and decorative ceiling ornamentation were left intact.²² The basement storefront facade was also resurfaced in stucco. In 1996, the Betances Heath Unit moved to a larger

location within the neighborhood, and the Henry Street Settlement reclaimed the house for use as office and training space for one of its social service programs.

The Henry Street Settlement, a nonprofit social service agency, was founded in 1893 by Lillian D. Wald as the country's first visiting nurse service. Influenced by the overcrowded tenement housing with inadequate hygiene and sanitation which were prevalent on the Lower East Side, and non-existent labor laws, Ms. Wald set out to influence social policy and change living conditions in the area. The work of the Settlement continues today in a total of seventeen buildings scattered throughout the Lower East Side of Manhattan. In 1996, the Settlement began to renovate and restore the property under the direction of J. Lawrence Jones & Associates.

Description

The house at 281 East Broadway is situated on the south side of East Broadway on a lot which is 20 feet wide and approximately 87 feet deep. The house faces almost due north. It is two and a half stories tall above a raised basement with a below-grade cellar. The original footprint of the house was 20 feet wide by 40 feet deep. The three-bay facade of brick laid in Flemish bond with standard joints measuring between 3/16" and 1/4" (cleaned of paint and repointed in 1996) has the main entranceway on the left above a stoop and two parlor windows at the center and the right.

According to the 1872 building permit cited above, the original foundation of the house is of stone. The basement level was originally faced in brownstone laid in coursed ashlar or with sharply beveled horizontal and vertical joints. The basement level is currently covered with stucco (painted) and contains a basement entranceway with a wood and glass door and a square unarticulated window opening. The areaway in front was lowered to its present level in conjunction with the installation of the basement storefront in 1872. A projecting brownstone stucco beltcourse extends across the front facade above the basement level. The stoop would have originally been brownstone and has been replaced at least once, when the entranceway was moved to the east. The stoop walls and steps are now brownstone stucco. The simple iron stoop railings and areaway fence were installed c. 1946.

The entranceway opening was moved to its present location in the mid-nineteenth century (see above). It is surmounted by a molded brownstone lintel (covered for many years by a metal cap), which was exposed during the 1996 renovation.

The wood entrance surround and wood and glass door set below a transom were installed in 1946. The parlor floor window opening immediately to the right of the entranceway has been relocated, as described above. All other window openings are in their original locations. All the openings have carved brownstone lintels and brownstone sills, which had been covered by metal caps, removed in 1996. The window sash is wood-framed, double-hung, six-over-six, a 1946 replacement for later nineteenth-century one-over-one sash. Evidence of hinge mounts for shutters can be found on the wood window reveals. An iron sign mount projects from the facade between the parlor floor windows.

A wide metal fascia with two horizontal projecting moldings sets off the facade from the roof. The larger top molding projects out to support a copper ogee gutter that extends across the facade with the downspout on the right. This metal fascia is not original to the house but is of the correct size and proper location. The ogee gutter and molding below it give the appearance of a projecting cornice. The original would have been of wood enclosing the gutter trough and liner and a leader head for the downspout.

The roof is pitched with the ridge line running parallel to the front and rear facades. The slope of the roof is original, and it is covered with asphalt.

The original roof slates may survive underneath. Two large original dormers project from the front of the roof in line with the front facade. The trim around each dormer appears to be original; it consists of molded jamb casings, base blocks, and a broken pediment enclosing a round-headed window opening. The existing two-over-two sash were installed in 1946. Separating the row house from No. 279, its neighbor to the west, is the extension of the masonry party wall rising above the roof surface to serve as a fire stop.

Certain elements at the rear of the house are visible from the public way. Set in the original rear slope of the roof is a single centered dormer that appears to retain all of its original elements, enclosing a square-headed two-over-two sash. With the construction of a rear addition, the house has three chimneys, all along the west wall. The rear parlor chimney is the only one remaining intact with a corbelled two-course base cap visible above the roof line.

Report prepared by
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based on research by
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Notes

1. It is bounded roughly by the Brooklyn Bridge to the south, Houston Street to the north, the East River to the east, and Allen Street to the west.
2. Charles Lockwood, *Manhattan Moves Uptown* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 117.
3. I.N. Phelps Stokes, *Iconography of Manhattan Island* (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1926), V, Jan. 10, 1831.
4. Gilman is quoted in Lockwood, 117. Caroline Howard Gilman (1794-1888) lived in Charleston, South Carolina. In 1838 she published *The Poetry of Travelling in the United States*, a book of recollections and observations of her stay in several East Coast cities. One of the chapters is devoted to New York, although it does not include these precise quotations.
5. Lockwood, 118-119, chronicles the decline and cites the newspaper accounts.
6. For a brief overview see "Lower East Side," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, Kenneth T. Jackson, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 696-697.
7. For the history of the Federal style rowhouses, see the following sources: Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent, 1785-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1989); Ada Louis Huxtable, *The Architecture of New York: Classic New York Georgian Gentility to Greek Elegance* (Garden City, New Jersey: Anchor Books,

1964); Charles Lockwood, *Bricks and Brownstone: The New York Rowhouse, 1783-1929, an Architectural and Social History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972); Montgomery Schuyler, "The Small City House in New York," *Architectural Record* (April-June, 1899), 357-388.

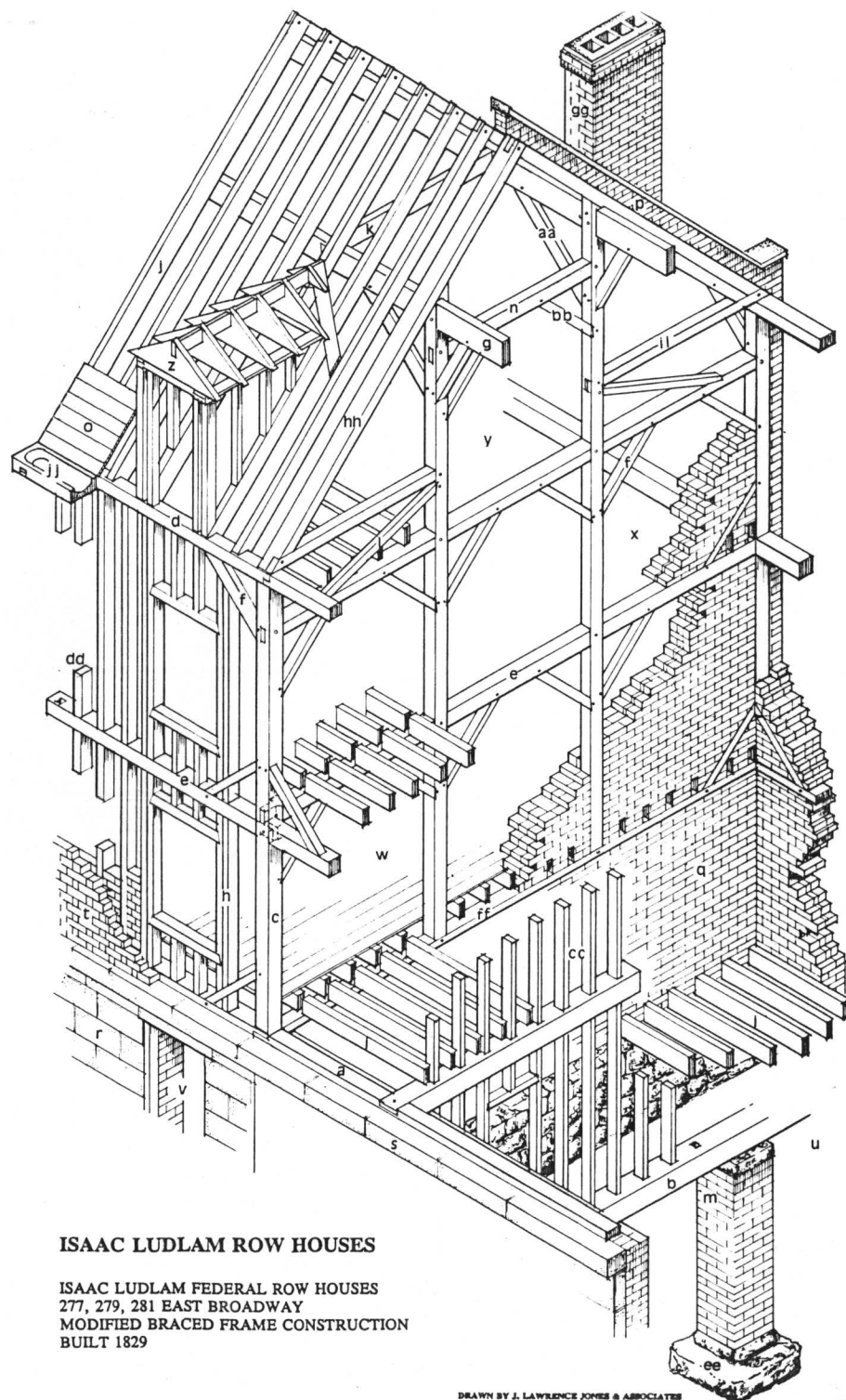
8. Donald Friedman, *Historical Building Construction* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995), 12.
9. On-site inspection of No. 281 East Broadway has revealed that it and the two houses constructed in conjunction with it (Nos. 277 and 279) employ a form of modified timber-frame construction, with all three houses framed as a single unit, then clad with brick on the outer walls and party walls. This system allowed for thinner masonry walls providing more usable interior space, quicker construction, and cost savings in the use of masons and materials. Testimony from J. Lawrence Jones, J. Lawrence Jones & Associates, at public hearing, April 21, 1998. Copy in Landmarks Preservation Commission public hearing file for LP-1993.
10. These were identified as "three lots of land in the 7th Ward of the City of New York known and distinguished in a map belonging to Nicholas Romeyn at Corlears Hook made by Charles Loss, City Surveyor and filed on April 8, 1802, as numbers 98, 99 and 100. Lots adjoining each other and containing 25 feet front and rear and each side 75 feet." New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances..
11. No. 279 survives but in a more altered state than No. 281. No. 277 was demolished in 1978 for the Dr. Martin Luther King Community Park.
12. *Longworth's New York City Directory for 1836-7* (New York, 1837), 410.
13. The direct descendants of Isaac Ludlam remained in the surveying profession; the last, Ralph Ludlam, practiced in the firm of Bartlett, Ludlam & Dill in Mineola, N.Y. The firm left Manhattan over 100 years ago and worked out of Brooklyn until moving to Mineola. Ralph Ludlam died in 1992 at the age of 97, bringing to an end a family business which lasted 190 years.
14. *New York Times*, December 28, 1880, 8.
15. New York City Directory listings, 1865-1903.
16. Letter from J. Lawrence Jones, J. Lawrence Jones & Associates, June 2, 1998, to Landmarks Preservation Commission, in Research files for 281 East Broadway. This alteration resulted in the narrowing of the entrance hall and the widening of the parlors. The style of the decorative plaster work on the interior may date this change as early as the 1850s. It so, it probably was work undertaken for George Clark.
17. New York City, Department of Buildings, Alteration permit 364-1872. The work was undertaken by carpenter Leo L. Dixon.
18. Alteration permit 1416-1903, architects Horenburger & Straub. *Atlas of New York, Borough of Manhattan* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1905), plate 14, indicates that a metal worker was located in the basement.
19. Alteration permit 1143-1916, architect Edward M. Adelsohn.
20. Alteration permit 365-1946.
21. See Dept. of Finance, Borough of Manhattan Tax Photo for Block 288, Lot 64 (1939/40), and photo of 277, 279, and 281 East Broadway by John Barrington Bayley (1965) in Landmarks Preservation Commission files.
22. None of these interior spaces or features are subject to this designation.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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 281 East Broadway House (Isaac Ludlam House) has a special character, and 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, this relatively modest Federal style rowhouse is a rare survivor of its type and era; that it was built about 1829 as one of a group of three for Isaac Ludlam, a New York City surveyor, and the house occupies a twenty-foot wide lot on the south side of East Broadway, not far from the East River; that the two-and-a-half story, three-bay house has characteristic features of the Federal style including Flemish bond brickwork, brownstone lintels and sills at the window openings, and a sloping roof with two pedimented dormers that contain arched window openings; that at the time the house was built, this was a fashionable residential district; that Ludlam lived in the house from 1836 to 1853; that between 1864 and 1903, the house was owned and occupied by shoemaker George Leicht and his family; that between 1909 and 1977, it was the home and offices of two different doctors; that the house has been owned since 1977 by the Henry Street Settlement, which undertook renovation and restoration work on the house beginning in 1996; and this house reveals through its architecture and its owners the rich and diverse history of the Lower East Side.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the 281 East Broadway House (Isaac Ludlam House), 281 East Broadway, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 288, Lot 64, as its Landmark Site.



ISAAC LUDLAM ROW HOUSES

ISAAC LUDLAM FEDERAL ROW HOUSES
277, 279, 281 EAST BROADWAY
MODIFIED BRACED FRAME CONSTRUCTION
BUILT 1829

REFERENCE GUIDE

1829 Row Houses
277-281 East Broadway
New York, New York

Builder: Isaac Ludlam
City Surveyor

Type of Construction: Modified Timber/Braced Frame
Masonry Clad

- a. Sill
- b. Girder
- c. Corner Post/Wall Post (Mortised to Sill Plate)
- d. Top Plate (Wall Plate)
- e. Girt (Framed Into Corner Post)
- f. Angle Braces (Mortised Into Sill, Girt or Plate)
- g. Purlin Plate
- h. Double Studs (Adjacent to Openings)
- i. Floor Joists (Second Tier of Beams)
- j. Rafter
- k. Purlin Strut
- l. Purlin Post Brace
- m. Brick Pier with Stone Cap
- n. Anchor Beam
- o. Roof Sheathing
- p. Brick Parapet with Sandstone Coping (First Class Construction-Fire Proofing Between Row Houses
Termed a Coped Roof)
- q. 12" Thick Common Side Wall Separates Row Houses (Laid in Common Bond)
- r. Coursed Ashlar Brownstone (Used on Basement Level, Front Facade)
- s. Projecting Water Table, Brownstone
- t. Face Brick, Front Facade, Flemish Bond
- u. Cellar Level
- v. Basement Level
- w. First Level
- x. Second Level
- y. Attic Level
- z. Dormer Framing
- aa. Sway Brace
- bb. Anchor Beam Brace
- cc. Bearing Partition (Hall Wall)
- dd. Stud (Mortised Into Sill, Girt or Plate)
- ee. Stone Footing (Usually Placed Below Floor Level in Cellar)
- ff. Cross/End Sill
- gg. Rear Chimney (Each Row House Had a Front and Rear Chimney)
- hh. Principal Rafter
- ii. Tie Beam
- jj. Hewn Timber Gutter, Wrought Iron Anchors



Photo by: John Barrington Bayley, 1965

281 East Broadway House, Manhattan



Photo: Dept. of Finance, Manhattan, Tax
Photo Collection, Block 288, Lot 64, 1939-40



281 East Broadway House, 281 East Broadway, Manhattan
Photo by: Carl Forster, 1998



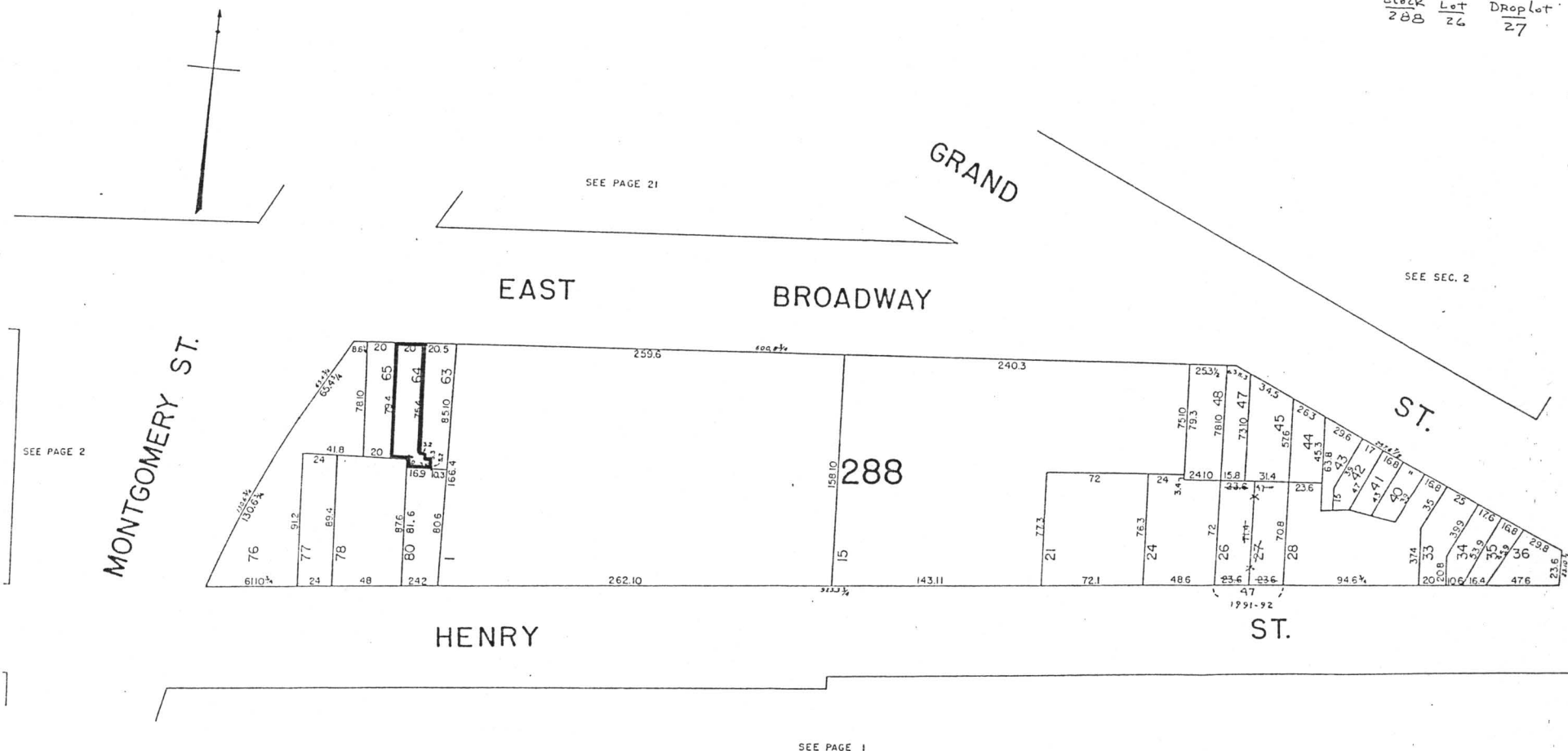
Upper story details
Photo by: Carl Forster, 1998

281 East Broadway House, Manhattan



Basement and first story details
Photo by: Carl Forster, 1998

12-5-90
 Block 288 Lot 26 Drop Lot 27



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281 East Broadway House, 281 East Broadway, Manhattan
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 288, Lot 64
 Source: Department of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map

