

NPS Form 10-900
(3-82)
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(3-82)

OMB No. 1024-0018
Expires 10-31-87
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Expires 10-31-87

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Christodora House

and or common

2. Location

street & number 147 Avenue B _____ not for publication

city, town New York _____ vicinity of

state New York code 036 county New York code 061

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	NA in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	NA being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant

4. Owner of Property

name Christodora House Associates c/o Mr. Samuel Glasser

street & number 225 Lafayette Street Room 1002

city, town New York _____ vicinity of state NY 10012

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Surrogate's Court/Hall of Records

street & number 31 Chambers Street

city, town New York _____ state NY

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Cooper Square Survey has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date 1985 _____ federal _____ state _____ county ☒ local

depository for survey records New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

city, town 20 Vesey Street New York state NY 10007

7. Description

Condition

☐ excellent
☒ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date NA

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Christodora House, located on Avenue B at the northeast corner of East 9th Street in Manhattan, is a sixteen-story brick building formerly used as a settlement house (photo 1). Directly to the west of the building, across Avenue B, is Tompkins Square, a park of approximately 458,000 square feet. Christodora House is the tallest building on the square; all of the other buildings are small-scale row houses, apartment buildings, and institutional structures. Directly to the north of Christodora House is a group of three and four story and basement mid nineteenth-century row houses as well as a five-story tenement with a commercial ground floor (photo 2). To the east is P.S. 64, an early twentieth century Beaux-Arts style public school. To the south, across East 9th Street, are row houses, tenements, and a vacant lot. Christodora House is one of several institutional buildings facing onto Tompkins Square. Christodora House is not part of a potential historic district.

Christodora House is a brick building with stone trim at its main entrance and at the setbacks on the upper floors. The rectilinear building was built on the lot line and its brick facades rise from a low base of granite. The building is anchored by cubic, one-bay wide, towerlike masses located at the corners and in the center of the East 9th Street facade. Each of these pavilions rises fourteen stories. Between these pavilions are shallow vertical brick piers which rise from the third floor to the thirteenth floor. On most levels simple three-over-three windows are set between each of these piers and on the faces of the towers (on East 9th Street several floors do not have windows in each bay). The corner pavilions and brick piers accent the verticality of this high-rise building and add to its presence on Tompkins Square.

The massing of the building steps back above the thirteenth and fourteenth floors. All of the towerlike pavilions rise fourteen stories, while the central piers are setback above the thirteenth floor. A one and two story brick section rises above these setbacks. This form steps back above the fifteenth floor. Above the sixteenth story is the building's crown which is surmounted by a flat-topped pyramid.

Ornament is limited to the main entrance, the coping stones of the setbacks, and the roof. The front entrance (photo 3) is reached by three granite steps with angled stone walls. The granite of the base of the building continues in a narrow band to form a frame for the entrance. The entry is flanked by two small rectangular windows with foliate guards. Surrounding the windows and doorway are nine courses of smooth stone ashlar, above which are three large nine-paned windows separated by heavy metal piers with foliate ornament. This entire entrance group is set within a carved stone frame composed of outer piers with vertical incised bands, inner colonnettes and piers, and a wide horizontal sculptural band. Each of the incised piers is crowned by a rectangular panel with a stylized figure carved in deep relief. The sculpted panel which runs along the top of the ensemble rakes inward and is adorned with three panels with mythological figures set within wreaths and surrounded by delicate ornament. There is an attached flagpole above the entrance grouping. A secondary entrance to the building is located on East 9th Street. This entrance is unadorned except for a granite surround. Each of the building's setbacks is ornamented with carved coping stones (photo 4). The thirteenth floor setbacks have large panels with stylized winged forms, each of which originally supported a head. Most of these heads are now missing. The fourteenth floor setbacks are marked by carved bands with large central roundels that rose above the parapet wall. Each of these roundels originally contained a star, but all have had the upper half of the circle removed. The large roundels are flanked by smaller roundels

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with carved centers. Incised stone panels are located at the top of the building's crowning pavilion.

The rear, or west, facade of Christodora House is visible above the seventh floor. It is faced with the same brick used on the street fronts and is articulated by similar windows. The north facade is visible from the fifth floor. It is also faced with brick and has the three-over-three windows of the street elevations as well as several smaller two-over-two windows.

The interior retains its original plan and layout and a high degree of architectural integrity. The interior spaces also reflect the building's original multi-use character. The lobby contains decorative Colonial Revival style wooden moldings and arched entries. Among the facilities remaining on the lower floors are a gym, swimming pool, small chapel, library, lounge, music practice rooms, a concert hall, and various classrooms. The upper floors, containing the residential units, consist of two or three single rooms grouped together in suites, each group sharing a small foyer and a bath. A communal dining room was located on the top floor along with a lounge, roof garden, and solarium. Interior finishes in all of the residential units, the classrooms, and the large public spaces are simple and utilitarian. The building is presently undergoing a complete rehabilitation.

8. Significance

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below					
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	humanitarian		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation		
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)		

Specific dates 1928

~~Builder~~ Architect Henry C. Pelton

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Christodora House is historically significant for its association with one of New York City's most important social service endeavors. Based on English precedents, settlement houses in this country were organized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to aid in ameliorating the appalling conditions in the slums of American cities. The American settlement houses far surpassed the somewhat limited, mission-oriented programs of their English counterparts to become major positive forces for social reform whose goals were eventually incorporated into government policy. In New York City the effort was focused on the Lower East Side, an area which was home to an enormous immigrant population during this period. More than simply providing charity, these settlement houses had an important educational function in helping immigrants to assimilate into American life and culture. Christodora House, founded in 1897, grew from a small organization located in an old tenement into a local institution of major importance to the surrounding population. In 1928, the settlement began construction of a new home designed by local architect Henry C. Pelton. Conservative in form and restrained in decoration, the sixteen-story red brick building was the first high-rise settlement house and the first to combine settlement activities (lower floors) with an income-producing residential hotel (upper floors). Christodora House remained an educational, social, and cultural center on the Lower East Side for more than fifty years. In the 1940s the Tompkins Square building was vacated and the settlement finally ceased operation in the 1970s. The building stands today in an area undergoing rapid change and is an important link to the immigrant history of the Lower East Side and New York City.

The settlement house idea had its genesis in England in the 1880s. In 1884 the first true settlement, Toynbee Hall, was founded by two Oxford students who moved into East London to teach residents of the area and learn, first-hand, about urban poverty. Toynbee Hall was followed by a series of similar ventures and by 1911 there were 46 settlements in Great Britain.¹ Although Toynbee Hall was a nonsectarian venture, most British settlements were linked to the Anglican church, and many were little more than church missions. The first of the religious settlements was Oxford House, founded a few months after Toynbee Hall.

Soon after the opening of the British settlement houses Americans began to visit and were impressed with the work undertaken by these young British reformers. The first American settlement was New York's Neighborhood Guild (later reorganized as the University Settlement), founded in 1886 by Stanton Coit. Coit's project, like the early settlements in Britain, was organized and staffed largely by college students and recent graduates, some of whom were to dedicate their entire lives to social reform and others of whom remained at this work for only a short time. The Coit venture was followed within a few years by the College Settlement (1889, run by college women), Jane Addams's Hull House, Chicago (1889), and Lillian Ward's Henry Street Settlement (1893). The settlement movement in America grew to be far more widespread than that in Britain. In 1891 there were six settlements in America;

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by 1897 there were 74; by 1900 over one hundred; and by 1910, over four hundred.²

Although urban poverty was extensive in Great Britain, the need for social centers and urban reform was overwhelming in turn-of-the-century American cities. By the late nineteenth century the cities of the Northeast and Midwest had been overwhelmed by an unprecedented flood of immigrants. Most of these immigrants were poor unskilled or semi-skilled laborers who lived in horribly overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. In fact, in 1894, sections of New York City were recorded as being the most densely populated in the world, with 986.4 people per acre, compared with 759 people per acre in Bombay, 485 in Prague, 434 in Paris, 365 in London, and 350 in Glasgow. The settlements founded after 1886 were the first concerted effort by affluent and privileged people to change the conditions of poor city dwellers. To be successful, settlements had to be located in the center of the slum area and the people who worked at the settlements had to settle in the community so that a bond of trust between social worker and residents could develop. The settlements aimed at bettering the lives of local residents, but they were not traditional charitable organizations. They did not, in general, administer alms but, rather, supported a credo of self help, teaching the poor skills that would lead them out of the slums. Among the services offered by settlements were classes ranging from English to sewing, music and drama; they served as recreational centers, medical offices, meeting places for unions and as employment offices. Many of the settlements were short-lived, but others, such as Hill House, Henry Street, University, and Christodora were active for many years and were positive forces for social reform on the neighborhood, city, state, and federal levels.

The people attracted to settlement work tended to be highly educated; many entered the settlement movement as part of their college education or immediately upon graduation. Most, but not all, were liberal Protestants (primarily Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Unitarians, and Episcopalians) influenced by the social gospel movement which sought to involve the church in the issues of modern society. Despite the religious beliefs of most settlement workers, most American settlements, unlike their British counterparts, were nondenominational in their work, serving people of various religious, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. There was, of course, a practical reason for this, since most of the urban poor at the turn of the century were Jews and Catholics from eastern and southern Europe and Ireland. A settlement that proselytized would have soon found itself without a base in the neighborhood. Even such settlements as Christodora House, founded by devout Protestants, were able to appeal to large numbers of Jews and Catholics.

Christodora House was founded in 1897 as the Young Women's Settlement. The settlement was organized by Christina MacColl and Sara Libby Carson for the "physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual development of the people in the crowded portions of the city of New York and the training of those who shall be in residence in practical methods of settlement work."³ It was Christina MacColl who guided the settlement through its early years and remained its director until her death in 1939. Christina Isobel Proudfoot MacColl was the daughter of a Presbyterian minister. She was educated at the Emerson School of Oratory in Boston and came to New York to work at the YWCA. MacColl and Carson decided to found a settlement after a minister had commented to them that "we can't do anything for these people."⁴ The two women rented a tenement apartment at 163

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Avenue B and opened their settlement in June 1897. The location chosen was in the heart of the teeming Lower East Side, but was north of the established University and Henry Street settlements, both of which were south of Houston Street. Thus, Christodora House opened in an area that was not widely served by major settlements. In June 1897, MacColl and Carson invited "all girls in the neighborhood over 16...to come at 8 o'clock Free."⁵ According to one source there were 25,000 young working girls in the ward where the new settlement was established.⁶ The initial invitation brought 98 girls to the meeting and after a discussion of the needs of their guests it was decided that a millinery course would be the first activity of the new organization. The settlement was so successful that in May 1898 a down payment was placed on a four-story brownstone at 147 Avenue B. At this time the name of the settlement was changed to Christodora House and men were invited to attend the settlement's activities. Like many settlement workers, the founders and many of the student residents were activated by Christian principles. Although Bible classes were offered at Christodora House, 80% of the people who frequented the settlement were Jewish or Catholic and all were welcome. In 1928 Commissioner of Welfare Bird S. Coler "praised the institution for its non-sectarian ideals."⁷

As the extent of activities at Christodora House increased, the physical plant was enlarged by the purchase of adjacent row houses. As an educational, social, and cultural center, Christodora offered classes in English, cooking, history, math, bookkeeping, typing, stenography, sewing, embroidery, singing, dressmaking, millinery, etc.; it maintained a library with a paid librarian, had a doctor in residence, sponsored concerts and plays, ran athletic events, and maintained a summer camp called Northover in Bound Brook, New Jersey.

By the 1920s the facilities in the old row houses on Avenue B were becoming increasingly inadequate. Also at this time the composition of the neighborhood was changing as Jews moved out and Italians and Poles moved in. Christodora House decided to meet the challenge of the changing neighborhood by replacing their outmoded buildings with a new high-rise settlement. The old row houses were demolished and on January 7, 1928 the cornerstone was laid for a new sixteen-story settlement designed by Henry C. Pelton and funded by Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Curtiss James. Henry C. Pelton (1867-1935) was a well-established architect in New York when he received this commission. Pelton was a graduate of Columbia University and was designing buildings for important patrons by the first years of the twentieth century. Pelton designed many houses for wealthy New Yorkers, but he is best known for his churches, including Riverside Church (with Allen & Collens, 1930), Park Avenue Baptist Church (with Allen & Collens, 1920), and the Park Avenue Methodist Church. The funds for the new building were donated entirely by Mr. and Mrs. Arthur C. James; Mrs. James was president of the board of managers of Christodora House. Arthur Curtiss James was one of the wealthiest men in America. He was the largest individual holder of railroad stock in America and, through the Western Pacific Company, controlled the largest railroad empire in the western United States. He also owned extensive interests in gold, silver, and copper mines. James was born to great wealth. His grandfather founded the family fortune and he inherited 26 million dollars from his father in 1907. James adored publicity but was quietly active in many charitable ventures. He was one of the few members of his financial

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class to support such liberal politicians as Al Smith and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

For Christodora House, Pelton designed a red brick structure that combines a conservative Colonial Revival form with more modernistic ornament. The building is a cubic structure with setbacks above the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth floors. Each of the setbacks is ornamented with stylized carved ornament. The main entrance on Avenue B is set within a monumental stone enframing also ornamented with carved detail. The building is a restrained structure which rises above the surrounding residential and institutional structures. The new building was the first high-rise settlement house and the first which combined settlement activities with an income-producing residential hotel. The top nine floors had room for 154 guests. These rooms were arranged in suites of two and three rooms, each with a bath and telephone. These suites were planned so that the residents of each unit could socialize easily. The residential section was not only designed to be financially self-sufficient, but it was assumed that those who came to stay at Christodora House would be socially minded young people who would assist in the work of the settlement.

The lower floors of the new building were planned specifically for settlement uses with well-equipped athletic, health, education, and art facilities. Among the facilities included in the building were a library and lounge designed in a Colonial Revival style, a Poet's Guild room furnished in an Italian Renaissance mode, a music school with practice rooms and a concert hall on the entire fourth floor, a gym and swimming pool "thoroughly equipped with the latest in shower baths,"⁸ game rooms, arts and crafts rooms, cooking rooms, etc.

Christodora House weathered the Depression and war years, but by the 1940s many of the social service activities that Christodora and other settlements had undertaken had become government policy. This, plus changing demographics, made many of the settlements obsolete. In 1947 Christodora's hotel ceased to be financially viable. The settlement sold the building to New York City and moved to a new location in a nearby housing project. The building on Avenue B served as a foster home for neglected children run by the city's Department of Social Services. This closed in 1975 and the building has been vacant ever since. It remains intact on the exterior.

On December 23, 1928 the new Christodora House building was dedicated. At the dedication Arthur James gave an address in which he summarized the ideals of Christodora House:

Christodora House should be a symbol for the awakening of latent possibilities in thousands who rise from poverty to places of importance in American life....It should stand for the open door of hope and opportunity for those who need it and for service to your community, to your city and to your God.⁹

Christodora House did indeed succeed in aiding thousands of New York's poorest citizens, opening doors to a new life. Although no longer a settlement, the Christodora House building continues to be a monument to these worthy goals.

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Footnotes

- ¹ Allen F. Davis, Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890-1914 (NY: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.3.
- ² Ibid, p.12.
- ³ R.A. Woods, Handbook of Settlements (1911), p. 235.
- ⁴ Harry M. Kraus, The Settlement House Movement in New York City, 1886-1914 (Ph.D. dissertation, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1970), p. 108.
- ⁵ Ibid, p. 109.
- ⁶ Margaret E. Sangster, "Christodora House," The Congregationalist (March 2, 1898) 304.
- ⁷ New York Times, January 8, 1928, p.19.
- ⁸ Better Times 11(December 3, 1928) 15.
- ⁹ New York Times, December 24, 1928, p.16.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Brooklyn, N.Y.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	8	5	8	6	1	0	0	4	5	0	8	6	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

D

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

See map

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
			NA

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Merrill Hesch

organization NYS Department of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

date October 1985

street & number Agency Building 1

telephone 518-474-0479

city or town Albany

state NY 12238

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Julia S. Stohr

title Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation

date 2/7/86

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Better Times 11(December 3, 1928) 15.

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Davis, Allen F. Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890-1914. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.

Kennedy, Albert J. et al. Social Settlements in New York City. New York: Columbia University Press for the Welfare Council of New York City, 1935.

Kraus, Harry M. The Settlement House Movement in New York City, 1886-1914. Ph.D. dissertation in history, University of Pennsylvania. Ann Arbor: University Microfilm, 1970.

New York Times, January 8, 1928, p.19; December 24, 1928, p. 16.

Sangster, Margaret E. "Christodora House." The Congregationalist (March 2, 1898), 304.

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Form written by:

Andrew Scott Dolkart
201 West 92nd Street--3F
New York, NY 10025
212-877-2088

Form researched by Anne Covell and Andrew S. Dolkart

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

61651 SE
(WEETAWKEN)



Christodora House
New York County, NY
Brooklyn Quadrant
Zone 18
East 586100
North 4508660