



ELDRIDGE STREET PROJECT COMPLETES 20-YEAR RESTORATION OF 1887 ELDRIDGE STREET SYNAGOGUE, A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK ON MANHATTAN'S LOWER EAST SIDE

RESTORED SITE HOME TO THE NEW MUSEUM AT ELDRIDGE STREET, FEATURING EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

NEW YORK, NY (June 2008) – Just days before Chanukah, the **Eldridge Street Project** brought together leading figures from the government, business, cultural and entertainment worlds at a rededication ceremony to celebrate the completion of its extensive restoration of the 1887 Eldridge Street Synagogue on Manhattan's Lower East Side. The day also marked a new chapter in the history of the Project, which is being renamed the **Museum at Eldridge Street**. The new name communicates Eldridge Street's continuing mission as a vital cultural and educational center celebrating more than a century of Jewish life in America and serving people of all backgrounds. The rededication also marks the National Historic Landmark's 120th anniversary, highlighting the Eldridge Street Synagogue's significance as the first great house of worship built by East European Jews in America.

The Museum at Eldridge Street will take its place as a dazzling addition to New York City's and the nation's cultural, historic and architectural landscape, offering tours of the Eldridge Street Synagogue, educational and cultural programs, a new Family History Center and interactive exhibits on Lower East Side history and synagogue practice.

The Eldridge Street Project's restoration campaign, conducted over a 20- year period, raised more than \$18 million dollars. Six million dollars in funding was provided by the City of New York. Other support came from state, federal, corporate and foundation sources, and donations from more than 18,000 supporters from around the country.

"We are thrilled to re-open the doors of the Eldridge Street Synagogue and invite the public to admire the restored splendor of this remarkably beautiful and important place in New York and American Jewish history," said Bonnie Dimun, executive director of the Museum at Eldridge Street. "Eldridge Street is the only public marker of the great wave of Jewish migration to the Lower East Side that is open to a broad public. Here people of all backgrounds, New Yorkers and visitors alike, can learn about and experience the history of America's Jewish immigrants."

History of the Eldridge Street Synagogue

The Eldridge Street Synagogue opened its doors in 1887. It was a literal sanctuary for the Jewish immigrants who worshipped there. In America, they could practice their religion freely. The synagogue's founders mounted Stars of David atop the building's rooftop towers, proudly proclaiming their newly-found religious freedom. With its soaring 70-foot ceiling, decorative painted finishes, and luminous stained glass, the synagogue provided an inspiring contrast to the crowded tenements, factories and shops in which its members lived and worked.

The building experienced a decline with the introduction of the 1924 Immigrant Quota Laws and the increasing exodus to outer boroughs. A small but stalwart congregation relocated to the synagogue's lower level chapel in the 1940s, and fully sealed off the main sanctuary sometime in the early 1960s. The building, and its glorious main sanctuary, severely deteriorated during this time. One hundred years after the synagogue first opened, new generations recognized the significance of this historic structure and rallied to save the building, forming the non-sectarian Eldridge Street Project.

Glorious Again! A Landmark Restoration

“It was as though the synagogue was held up by strings from heaven,” said Roberta Brandes Gratz, founder of the Eldridge Street Project, of her first impression of the synagogue in the early 1980s. Pigeons roosted in the balconies, benches were covered with dust, and stained glass windows had warped with time. Early investigations showed that emergency stabilization was needed; if no work were done, the building would collapse. Public interest in the synagogue's fate grew, and by 1986 the Eldridge Street Project was formed.

The Eldridge Street Project conducted emergency repairs, and secured National Historic Landmark designation for the building. The Project also gained recognition of the synagogue from the U.S. Department of the Interior, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and the City of New York – for its architectural beauty, its significance as part of the American immigrant experience, and its revitalization as a vital heritage center for people of all backgrounds.

Walter Sedovic and Jill Gotthelf of Walter Sedovic Architects bring a commitment to environmentally sound materials and techniques to the restoration of the Eldridge Street Synagogue. “The immigrants who built the Eldridge Street Synagogue were green without trying -- they located the synagogue near forms of public transportation, used local labor and long-performing materials, and made the most of natural light and ventilation,” said Sedovic. “Today we have to make a concerted effort to use sustainable methods in our preservation of historic buildings.” “Sustainability is not just about green buildings,” Gotthelf added. “It's about interconnectedness with the community and the environment.”

A New Museum for Lower Manhattan

In recognition of the completion of the building's restoration and the expansion of cultural and educational programs that serve a broad audience, the Eldridge Street Project has been renamed the Museum at Eldridge Street. The Museum offers guided tours of the magnificent historic main sanctuary and women's balcony, as well as exhibits and educational and cultural programs.

The newly restored space houses new exhibit and programming areas. The Gural-Rabinowitz Family History Center features photographs and artifact that tell the story of Jewish migration to America through the lens of the family. An animated 12-minute film by artist Rose Bond is an evocative portrait of the 120-year-old synagogue and its dynamic immigrant neighborhood. The Family History Center provides resources for people to research their own family history, and offers oral history and genealogy workshops. The Family History Center is being supported by a generous \$1 million grant from Jeffrey Gural, CEO of Newmark Knight Frank, and the Gural-Rabinowitz families to honor their ancestors.

A new Limud (Learning) Center in the building's lower level features interactive exhibits on Lower East Side history and synagogue design. School children and adults use these “history tables” to explore the social, political and religious life of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century Lower East Side, as well as the components that make up a synagogue. The history tables were created by Philip Tiongsen and Jared Schiffman of Potion Design. The historic women's balcony is home to the Lise and Jeffrey Wilks Gallery with an inaugural exhibit on the Eldridge Street Synagogue restoration

Museum Hours & Information

The Museum at Eldridge Street is open Sunday-Thursday from 10 AM to 4 PM. General admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors, and \$6 for students and children 5- 18. Museum at Eldridge Street members and children under 5 will be admitted free.

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