



# THE ANTHEMION

Fall 1994

THE GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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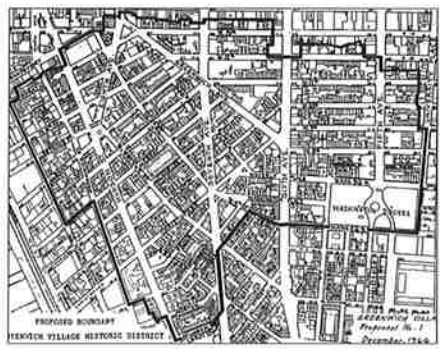
## A Landmark in Landmarking *The Greenwich Village Historic District Turns 25*

This year the Greenwich Village Historic District is 25 years old. On April 25, 1969, the Landmarks Preservation Commission said yes to a proposal uniting 65 diverse blocks and more than 2,000 buildings of mixed periods in a district larger and more heterogeneous than any designated before. It had been a hard-won decision, argued for six years and troubled by lawsuits real and threatened. When designation finally came, it signaled a change of direction within the preservation movement, a new attitude placing

emphasis on the integrity of streetscapes and neighborhoods rather than on isolated buildings.

Before the Landmarks law was signed in 1965, a temporary commission had been formed to assemble the documentation necessary to implement it on a city-wide basis. James Grote Van Derpool, an architect who headed Columbia University's Avery Architectural Library, was asked to run the commission in 1962. He put together a staff whose research might uncover buildings eligible for landmark status: those which were at least 30 years old and demonstrated architectural and historical significance.

Mr. Van Derpool asked his staff to establish the date of construction, builder, original owner, original use, present owner and use of every single building in the City of New York. Not surprisingly, the Department of Buildings was inhospitable to the use of its busy files by this eager young group, and its records also only went back to 1898. For (continued on page 2)



*Greenwich Village Historic District, as designated.*

## GVSHP Fall Events

*Look, Listen, and Walk: Celebrate Village History!*

This fall, GVSHP's programming gives us a chance to reflect on our 25-year-old historic district, its significance and future. A detailed calendar of these events is opposite this article.

Who ever walks the boundaries of our historic district? We will as we revisit the decisions made over 25 years ago surrounding our 65-block district designation. We will be looking both inside and outside; this will give us a chance to examine the two-thirds of the Village not currently protected by designation.

The future of our waterfront is an issue for all of us to consider. When was the last time you took an evening stroll there? Walk with us for a close look at this fragile, unprotected area and be current in your thinking about the waterfront.

In mid-November, meet our new Commissioner of City Planning, Joseph Rose, who will speak on the interface between planning and preservation. Plan to attend—it is important for us to meet policy-making officials whose decisions affect the city. (Continued on back page)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### PRESERVATION CAFE

**Speaker: Anthony C. Wood, Chair Emeritus, Historic Districts Council** Wednesday, September 21, 1994 at 6:00 p.m., upstairs at the Cedar Tavern, 82 University Place, cash bar.

Noted preservation advocate Anthony C. Wood has been researching the history of the landmarks preservation movement in the City, and has interviewed key preservationists active at the time of the designation of the Village Historic District. He will share his thoughts on the evolution of attitudes towards districting over the 25 years since designation of the Village.

### LECTURE AND GALLERY TOUR

**Greenwich Thrillage: The Bohemian Village of Jessie Tarbox Beals** Jan Seidler Ramirez, Sunday, September 25, 1994 at 2:00 p.m., Museum of the City of New York, 5th Avenue at 103rd Street, \$5 suggested museum admission.

Jan Seidler Ramirez, Associate Director for Collections and Curator of Paintings and Sculpture, will speak about the works of Jessie Tarbox Beals in the Museum's gallery. Beals is credited as the first American woman photojournalist, and the images in the exhibition represent some of the rarest visual documents of the "bohemian life" in the Village during the early 1900s. *Reservations are appreciated.*

### SPECIAL FAMILIES TOUR

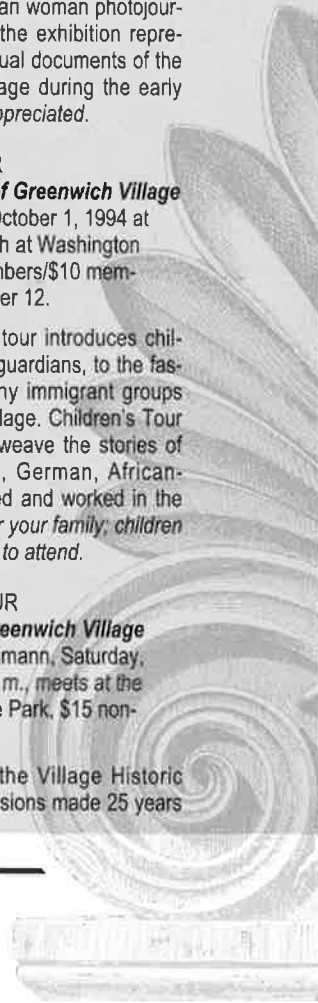
**The Immigrant Families of Greenwich Village** Nezka Pfeiffer, Saturday, October 1, 1994 at 1:00 p.m., Meets at the Arch at Washington Square Park, \$12 non-members/\$10 members/FREE for children under 12.

This very special walking tour introduces children, and their parents or guardians, to the fascinating history of the many immigrant groups who have inhabited the Village. Children's Tour Guide Nezka Pfeiffer will weave the stories of the Irish, Italian, Jewish, German, African-American families who lived and worked in the area. *Make reservations for your family; children and adults are encouraged to attend.*

### 25TH ANNIVERSARY TOUR

**The Boundaries of the Greenwich Village Historic District** Alan Neumann, Saturday, October 15, 1994 at 1:00 p.m., meets at the Arch at Washington Square Park, \$15 non-members/\$12 members.

Walk the boundaries of the Village Historic District, and revisit the decisions made 25 years



ago to define this architecturally and historically rich area. Architect Alan Neumann will look both inside and outside the landmarked area, and examine the two-thirds of the Village not currently protected by designation.

#### WALKING TOUR

**Greenwich Village Waterfront Twilight Tour**  
Regina Kellerman, Tuesday, October 25, 1994 at 5:30 p.m., location to be announced, \$12 non-members/\$10 members

Join architectural historian Regina Kellerman, editor of *The Architecture of the Greenwich Village Waterfront*, for an examination of the cultural and architectural heritage of our diverse waterfront neighborhood. The tour will focus on the area bounded by the Hudson River on the west and the Village Historic District on the east.

#### PRESERVATION CAFE

**Speaker: Peter Quinn** Wednesday, October 26, 1994 at 6:00 p.m., Upstairs at the Cedar Tavern, 82 University Place, cash bar.

Peter Quinn will share his insight on the richness of history, and its importance in how we view the world around us today. Born and raised in the Bronx, he is currently a speech writer with Time Warner. His recent novel, *Banished Children of Eve*, is a view into 19th century Irish New York and the Draft Riots.

#### SPECIAL LECTURE

**Joseph B. Rose, Chairman, New York City Planning Commission** Monday, November 14, 1994 at 7:00 p.m., Snow Dining Room, Bobst Library, NYU, \$15 non-members/\$12 members.

Historic preservation and urban development are generally seen to be at odds with one another. Joseph Rose has said that "preservation and planning share a natural affinity, and the role of the planners is to identify and enhance these [historic] resources in the community." Mr. Rose will be our special lecturer, sharing his point of view. A reception will follow. Co-sponsored by NYU. *Reservations & pre-payment are required.*

#### PRESERVATION CAFE

**Speaker: To Be Announced** Tuesday, November 22, 1994 at 6:00 p.m., Upstairs at the Cedar Tavern, 82 University Place, cash bar.

#### ANNUAL HOLIDAY PARTY

**Speaker: David G. Lowe** Monday, December 14, 1994 at 7:00 p.m. Salmagundi Club, 47 Fifth Avenue, \$24 non-members/\$20 members

Renowned architectural historian David G. Lowe, Gallery Director of the NY School of Interior Design, will present an illustrated lecture on "The Glory of New York Interiors" at GVSHIP's annual holiday celebration. The Salmagundi Club, decorated for the holidays, will provide a festive and historic atmosphere, and refreshments will be served.

*Call the Society at 924-3895 for reservations.*

(continued from page 1) construction before then, which would include the majority of buildings in the Village, the staff referred to early tax-assessment records.

Even as the LPC staff dug up its research, multi-story so-called "modern luxury apartment buildings" were springing up, making Greenwich Village residents uneasy. Civic groups formed to defend remarkable old buildings, the Jefferson Market Courthouse among them. Four individuals emerged in leadership roles: Margot Gayle, who had been an active preservationist since the 1930's and whose major success ultimately was to rescue SoHo from the wreckers' ball; Jane Jacobs, urban planning critic and author of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*; Verna Small, one of the nation's first preservationists and a researcher of Greenwich Village architecture; and Ruth Wittenberg, who had been active in politics and community affairs since World War I, and served as chairman both of Community Board 2 and its Landmarks Committee.

Mayor Robert F. Wagner signed the landmarks bill into law in April 1965. The statute required owners of landmarked buildings to obtain approval before altering the exteriors of their buildings. Interiors were not included, and only those exteriors visible from the street were covered. A permanent Landmarks Preservation Commission would review applications to permit changes consistent with the style of the building and prohibit those that were not. The same rules and application process had to be followed for all buildings in an historic district, but in addition, building alterations there would have to blend into the neighborhood.

A proposal to designate Greenwich Village as an historic district was first presented to the commission in December 1965. Outlining a single, 65-block district, the proposal was overwhelmingly supported by CB2 (then called Local Planning Board 2), but it was not destined to be a simple process. Some argued that in order for an area to qualify as an historic district, every building in it had to meet the standards for a single landmarked building—be 30

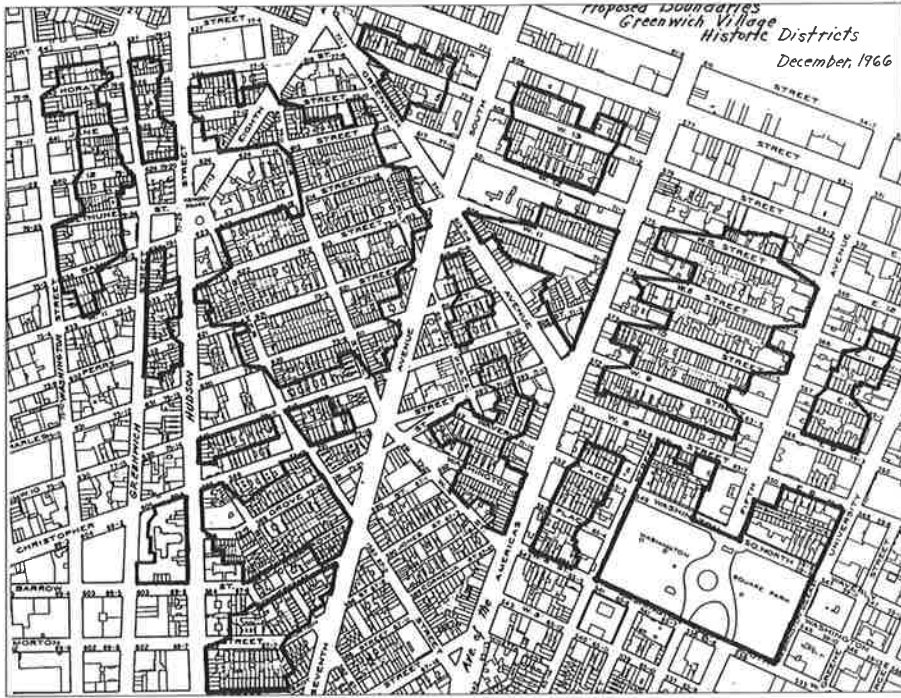
years old, architecturally and historically significant.

Greenwich Village had modern luxury apartment buildings, practically brand new. It also had parking garages and commercial warehouses, many of them thought to be of lesser significance. All of it was mixed together in a heterogeneous stew. That was one of the arguments heard in December 1965 against districting, but there were others. Some people feared that landmarking would freeze the district, scare off new businesses, kill expansion of existing ones and begin an unstoppable process leading to erosion of the tax base and neighborhood decay. Investors would suffer disastrous losses, or so said such groups as the Sixth Avenue Association, The Real Estate Board of New York, individual real estate firms and several banks. One bank even wrote clients ominous letters saying that mortgage lending in the Village would be suspended until the designation proposals were resolved.

A specially formed coalition, Realistic Landmarks Preservation Inc., sought to restrict designation to specific buildings. Word went out that property owners would be prohibited from changing anything, exterior or interior, on their property and moreover, that LPC would demand expensive alterations to conform to arbitrary standards. It got pretty nasty.

Landmarks sought a compromise. At the December 1966 hearing, a full year later, LPC presented two proposals. One was the same single-district proposal made in 1965, and the second was for eighteen separate districts, their boundaries carefully drawn like jigsaw-puzzle pieces to avoid newer and commercial buildings. In addition, the second proposal included twenty-seven individually designated buildings.

In anticipation of the December 1966 hearing, the Greenwich Village Historic District Council was formed. This was a coalition of the groups that had already been involved, and new ones as well. The Council was led by Mrs. Wittenberg and Mrs. Small, who organized letter-writing campaigns, wrote letters to the editor, and enlisted the support of prominent people.



The eighteen district "raisins in the pudding" proposal, offered in 1966 by the Landmarks Preservation Commission to achieve a compromise solution to the designation of the Greenwich Village Historic District.

The hearing was animated. Despite its December 21 date, at the height of the holiday season, it nevertheless attracted nearly 200 people, who packed the little hearing room to make a last-minute appeal for a single district. At the end of the hearing, Commission chairman Geoffrey Platt said the board would decide in about a month.

The Greenwich Village Historic District Council used that time to meet with Landmarks Preservation Commission staff and Mr. Platt, bringing their considerable powers of persuasion to bear in favor of one district and against the "raisins in the pudding," as Verna Small called the 18-district proposal. "A designation of small historic districts with endangered and uncontrolled buildings in between would be disastrous," she said recently. "It would result in clusters of little 19th century buildings surrounded by 20th century towers."

Finally, in March 1967, the LPC endorsed the single-district proposal. Two years of delays ensued, caused partly by bureaucratic foot-dragging and partly by threats of lawsuits that did not materialize. The two volume report which accompanied designation contains not only complete documentation of every existing build-

ing in the district but also a history of notable buildings lost when the present ones were built.

At the time, Mr. Platt projected what he thought designation would mean over the next 25 years. He said it would help preserve and maintain fine buildings, encourage the restoration of deteriorated buildings and enable new building which would enhance the existing environment. "There is no intention on our part," he said, "to freeze an historic district in its exact form on the date of its designation."

When designation finally became a reality, Ruth Wittenberg and Verna Small issued a joint statement that said, "What is preserved here is the life of a distinctive and well loved area, known around the world. The thriving buildings and animated streets of the Village constitute the oldest surviving historic section of the nation's oldest large city. In their human scale and pleasant irregularities, [they] make a pattern for living that future urban planners might well have tried to recreate at great expense for our descendants if we did not now preserve it."

—Penelope Bareau

## BULLETIN BOARD

News bits, hot tips and other items of interest...

**BOOK *Preservation Manual: A Guide to Working on New York City Landmarks***  
Distributed by the Historic Districts Council, \$5.  
Call (212)799-5837 to order.

Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts has just published the second edition of this useful manual which presents information that "will allow anyone working on historic buildings—property and store owners, managing agents, tenants, architects, preservationists, attorneys, and contractors—to have a better understanding of how decisions are made about designation and caring for individual landmarks and buildings in historic districts."

**BOOK *Conservation of Stained Glass in America: A Manual for Studios and Caretakers*** by Julie L. Sloan. Order from Art In Architecture Press, Inc., Tonetta Lake Road, Brewster, New York, 10509. \$24.95 plus \$4.00 shipping.

Written especially for caretakers of stained glass windows, owners, restoration architects, church committees, preservation commissions, and overseers of public buildings, as well as for craftspeople who restore stained glass windows, this 256 page book is packed with illustrations that make the text come to life. It provides comprehensive information on the repair, conservation, and preservation of stained glass in American buildings.

**FAIR New York Archives Week 1994:**  
**October 9-15** New York University's Loeb Student Center, Washington Square South at LaGuardia Place. For additional information, call (212) 415-5547. Free.

As part of the annual celebration of New York Archives Week, the Archivists Roundtable of Metropolitan New York will be sponsoring a Family History Fair on October 9, 1994, at NYU's Loeb Student Center. The Fair will feature genealogical organizations and vendors offering exhibits, workshops, and information for family history enthusiasts. Information on family history, preserving and interpreting family documents, and using archives and libraries around New York will be readily available.

**CONFERENCE 48th National Preservation Conference** October 26-30, 1994 in Boston, Massachusetts. For information on registration, call the National Trust at (800) 944-6847.

Entitled "Preservation, Economics, & Community Rebirth," this event (sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation) will feature speakers, educational sessions, local & regional tours, mobile workshops, and special events. The conference will focus on topics

such as downtown revitalization, housing, financing preservation, stewardship, heritage tourism, and how preservation can boost a community's "bottom line." It includes events appropriate for children, and encourages newcomers to the field of preservation to take part.

**SEMINAR *House, Garden, Interior: Creating the Classical Residence Today*** October 29-30, 1994. For information call Donald Rattner at the NY Academy of Art, (212) 570-7374.

Sponsored by the Institute for the Study of Classical Architecture at the New York Academy of Art, and Traditional Building Magazine, this seminar will consist of lectures, workshops, and demonstrations on the creation of classically styled houses, gardens, and interiors. It will feature a roster of distinguished guests, and will provide guidance in the intricacies of classical design.

**TOURS *Macabre Greenwich Village: The Halloween Version*** Sunday, October 30, 1994 at 12 noon. Join tour guide Joyce Gold on a Halloween tour of the ghosts, graveyards, hanging trees, and murders of Greenwich Village. The cost is \$12; the tour meets at the Arch at Washington Square Park. ***Greenwich Village: Its Nautical Face*** Sunday, November 13 at 12 noon. Ms. Gold will lead an investigation of the marks left in the West Village by Bell Labs, the Titanic, Robert Fulton, and the State Penitentiary. The cost is \$12; the tour meets at Christopher and West Streets. Call (212) 242-5762 for more information about these and other great tours given by Joyce Gold.

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THE GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY  
FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
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## Fall Events...

(continued from page 1) Preservation Cafe, a new program (see below), will be a casual dialogue on a wide range of issues. Our first session will provide an historical perspective on the historic district designation process; a subsequent session will look at the meaning and importance of the history surrounding us.

There are not enough opportunities to engage children in the history around them. Our walking tour for families will provide children and adults with a look at our immigrant ancestors—a group on the outside of the Village history familiar to most.

For the adventurous, a trip outside the Village to the Museum of the

City of New York will give an intimate, inside view of Village life at the turn of this century, as seen through the photographs of Jessie Tarbox Beals. These document a life we can no longer experience.

Finally, David Garrard Lowe will help us celebrate the holiday with an expert view on ways to look at and think about the interiors of New York. Our annual holiday party will be held in the parlor of the Salmagundi club, home to GVSHP.

We look forward to seeing you at many of our exciting fall events. Be sure to sign up early—call the Society for reservations. Come and bring your friends!

## Preservation Cafe

*A bohemian experience for the '90s*

GVSHP will be presenting a new program, *Preservation Cafe*. This series of monthly gatherings will foster dialogue on a wide range of preservation issues.

Individuals focusing on topical preservation issues will briefly present their thoughts to an assembled group in an informal environment. Discussion and dialogue will follow.

*Preservation Cafe* will be held in a quiet, somewhat removed room in a public tavern in the Village, where cash bar beverages can be purchased. While the sessions will be conducted along the lines of a casual academic

seminar, individuals from outside the academic community are strongly encouraged to participate.

*Preservation Cafe* fulfills GVSHP's goal of leadership in preservation issues by fostering public dialogue with individuals who have an impact on the preservation of the city. The unique format honors and maintains the history of intellectual life in the Village's bars, restaurants, and cafes. It continues the tradition of expression for which the Village is famous.

A listing of speakers and dates can be found in the *Upcoming Events* column. See you at the Cafe!

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