

# **The South Village:** *A Proposal for Historic District Designation*



**Report by Andrew S. Dolkart**

Commissioned by

**the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation**

232 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10003

212-475-9585

[www.gvshp.org](http://www.gvshp.org)

*Report funded by Preserve New York, a grant program of the Preservation League of New York State  
and the New York State Council on the Arts*



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212-475-9585

212-475-9582 Fax

www.gvshp.org

gvshp@gvshp.org

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation would like to thank Preserve New York, a grant program of the Preservation League of New York State and the New York State Council on the Arts, for funding this report. We would also like to thank the following for providing additional resources for the background research and materials that made this report possible: the Kaplen Foundation; City Council Speaker Christine Quinn and Council Member Alan Gerson through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; State Senator Tom Duane and Assemblymember Deborah Glick through the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; and our generous members.

In addition, we are grateful to Ken Cobb, Leonora Gidlund, and the staff of the Municipal Archives for providing access to the historic block and lot files that enabled the thorough research of the buildings in the South Village. We also would like to express our appreciation to the many interns, past and present, who conducted the South Village research and otherwise assisted the staff of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation in our South Village project: Angelica Bailon, Lily Bernheimer, Jamie Bleyer, Catherine Brandli, Jessica Breitbach, Sarah Brennan, Tali Cantor, Melissa Celii, Leah Eriksen, Susan Willetts Favate, Matthew Feinstein, Meagan Foster, Hope Friedland, Michael Hirsch, Lauren Iannucci, Greg Geiser, Eleni Glekas, Paul Goldstein, Kelly Gorman, Kelli Gantt, Jennie Johanson, Sang Rhee Kim, Victoria Konarski, Laura Koo, Katherine Lane, Candace Laning, Helen Lee, Chris Magalhaes, Logan McClintic-Smith, David Mellisy, Kristy Menas, Matt Miga, Kristin Moe, Elizabeth Moore, Andrew Murray, Lucy Ofiesh, Alexa Elise-Pinto, Emily Przylucki, Matthew Roe, Caitlyn Rohan, Gina Ruotolo, Christian Scardaville, Julia Schoene, Fern Sieck, Amanda Smith, Patrick Smith, Thomas Smith, Jesmarie Soto, Sarah Steen, Marta Stupnicka, Sarah Tilitz, Amaku Ukpong, Blaire Walsh, Luke Weinstock, Cheney Wells, Stephen Layne White, Tricia Wisneski, and Sarah Beth Wooden. These interns and their research were overseen by GVSHP Executive Director Andrew Berman and Director of Preservation and Research Melissa Baldock. Lastly, GVSHP's South Village project would not have been possible

without the help of former GVSHP staffers, Meredith Donnelly and Leslie Fitzpatrick, and current GVSHP staffers, Drew Durniak and Sheryl Woodruff.

## FOREWORD

Greenwich Village, one of New York and the world's most venerable and beloved neighborhoods, owes much of its continuing appeal to its well-preserved architecture, its palpable sense of history, its charm, and its human scale. No small part of this can be attributed to the designation by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission of the Greenwich Village Historic District in 1969, the city's first truly large-scale neighborhood historic district. The battles over that designation are now legendary, as neighborhood activists including Jane Jacobs lobbied for one large district encompassing the entire neighborhood, while the City proposed an archipelago of some dozen or more small districts. The result, one large district and three small ones, covering much but not all of the neighborhood, was a compromise which gave activists much to brag about, but still left them with much work to do. In recent years the City has begun again, at the persistent urging of neighborhood activists, to ensure the survival of more of historic Greenwich Village, by extending landmark protections westward in 2003 and 2006.

But residents, visitors, and even long-time preservationists are still shocked to discover that what many consider the heart of Greenwich Village – the area south of Washington Square Park/West Fourth Street and east of Seventh Avenue, also known as the South Village – is not a designated historic district, and its historic buildings could be lost at any time. Streets in this area, including Bleecker, Carmine, MacDougal, Sullivan, Thompson, Downing, Cornelia, Jones, Minetta Street and Minetta Lane, are some of the Village's most charming and iconic, and contain links to some of the neighborhood and the city's most important historic events. They also formed the cradle of the Village's Italian-immigrant community.

It may therefore seem entirely counterintuitive that the South Village was left out of the Greenwich Village Historic District in 1969, but I have long had my suspicions about why this may have been so. A trip to the Museum of the City of New York in 2005 seemed to confirm my theory. There on display was a map produced by the State Legislature in 1919, charting the location of various immigrant settlements throughout

New York City. Clearly demarcated as an identifiable Italian immigrant enclave was a section of the southern portion of Greenwich Village forming almost the exact boundaries of the South Village, the area left out of the Greenwich Village Historic District.

While ethnic biases probably had nothing to do with the Commission's decision fifty years later to exclude this area, the connection is nevertheless clear. This is a neighborhood whose built form and history were utterly shaped and transformed by working-class immigrants, most prominently, but not exclusively, Italian Americans. And while the genteel townhouses and picturesque cul-de-sacs of the West Village were considered the stuff of historic preservation in the 1960s, working-class architecture, consisting of tenements and converted rowhouses, were not considered by most to be worthy of preservation, nor was immigrant and ethnic history yet deemed worthy of recognition through landmark designation.

However in the last thirty-five years, neighborhoods rooted in the immigrant experience such as the South Village have proven among the most resilient and most vital in the city. At the same time, our understanding of what merits historic preservation and the critical importance of immigration in our city's history has continued to grow, especially as we experience a surge of immigration unrivalled since the last great wave in the early twentieth century, which so transformed the South Village and much of New York.

The South Village is an archetypal immigrant community from that last great wave of immigration, with perhaps New York's finest complement of intact working class architecture from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As such, it now clearly deserves a second look from the Landmarks Preservation Commission. The incredible concentration of tenements of every style and configuration – pre-law, old law, new law, Neo-Grec, Italianate, Romanesque Revival, Beaux Arts – is virtually unrivalled in New York, as is the frequency with which precious details such as original storefronts, cornices, and iron work – so often lost over time on tenements – remain intact. The South Village is also tremendously rich in early nineteenth century rowhouses, albeit

particularly modest ones. Within its boundaries are more than fifty intact rowhouses in the Federal style (1800-1835), twenty-five in the Greek Revival style (1835-1850), and an additional 150 Federal or Greek Revival houses which have been completely transformed over time for commercial or multi-family use. These houses, combined with the stables, back houses, loft buildings, reform housing, and institutional and ecclesiastical structures created to serve the immigrant communities of the South Village, also define the neighborhood and tell the story of its working-class roots.

Of course these are not the only qualities which make the South Village so exceptional, and so worthy of preservation. While few physical vestiges of it remain, the South Village was once home to “Little Africa,” the largest African-American community in mid-nineteenth century New York. In later years, in part because of its gritty appeal, the South Village had a special draw for those whose lives or tastes fell outside of the conventions of the day. Much of what the Village became famous for in the twentieth century centered around this area, from the coffeehouses of Bleecker Street to the jazz and folk clubs of West Third Street, from the converted theaters on Sullivan Street and Minetta Lane to the gay bars and tea rooms clustered along MacDougal Street in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Today, with all the pressure for change throughout New York, and especially in this part of Manhattan, the South Village maintains a palpable sense of connection to its roots. Italian eateries, coffeehouses, and social institutions still line Bleecker and Carmine Streets, and the neighborhood is still defined by Our Lady of Pompei and St. Anthony of Padua churches (the latter being the first church built in the Americas for an Italian parish). Jazz, folk, and other musical venues still abound throughout the neighborhood, some dating back several generations, while theaters including the Provincetown Playhouse and the Players and Minetta Lane Theatres still thrive.

Thankfully, the South Village’s architecture remains strikingly unchanged. Whole streets are largely untouched from a hundred years ago or more, with colorful tenements, ornate



fire escape balconies, cast-iron and wooden storefronts, and early nineteenth century rowhouses still defining the cityscape. Now is the time to ensure the preservation of this neighborhood's rich history, while it is still largely intact.

It is with this in mind that the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation puts forward this proposal to designate the South Village as a New York City historic district. We are proud to present this superb report by renowned architectural historian Andrew Dolkart, which builds on four years of research by literally dozens of people on behalf of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. With this report and additional scholarship and programming, it is our hope that the immigrant history, working-class architecture, and socially transforming movements of the South Village will finally be recognized, honored, and preserved.

Andrew Berman  
Executive Director,  
Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation  
December, 2006

# The South Village: A Proposal for Historic District Designation

## By Andrew S. Dolkart

### INTRODUCTION: THE SOUTH VILLAGE – AN URBAN CULTURAL RESOURCE

The streets of the South Village are lined with a rich array of buildings of architectural, historical, and cultural significance (*Figure 1*). The tenements, row houses, industrial



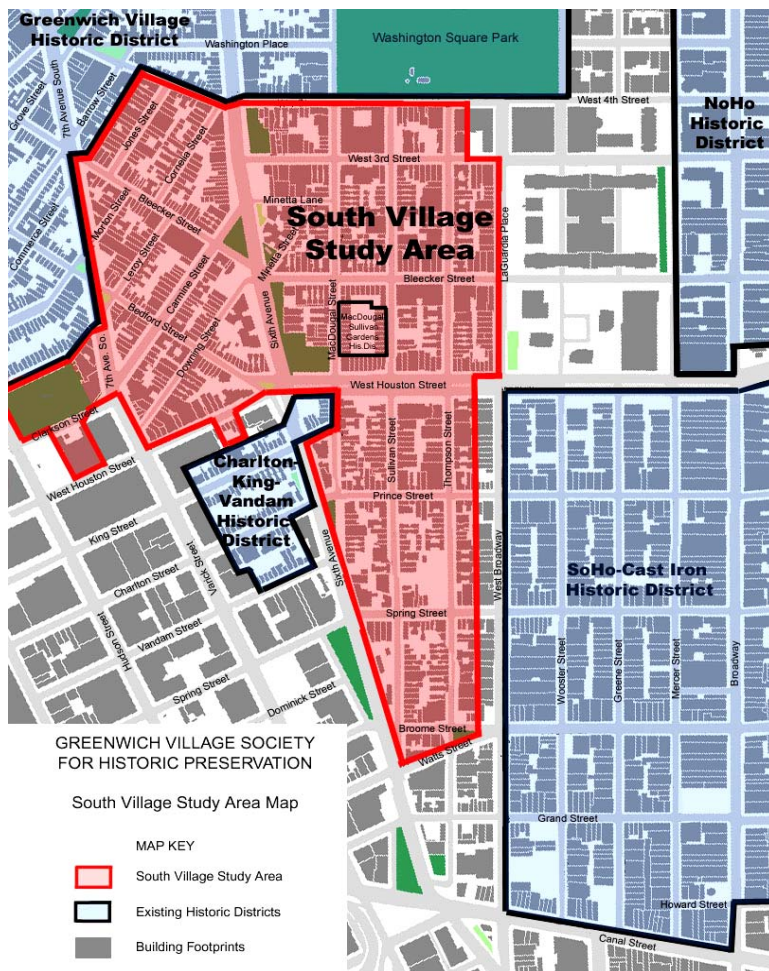
**Figure 1. East side of MacDougal Street between West 3rd and Bleecker Streets.**

lofts, churches, and other buildings in the area reflect the changing character of life in New York over a period of almost two hundred years. Although only a few buildings in the area are significant as great individual works of architecture, this area forms an amazingly cohesive urban cultural

landscape of great value to the character of New York City and to the history of the city and the nation. The buildings in this remarkably intact area are vulnerable – in danger of demolition or insensitive alteration. Indeed, during the preparation of this report, the Tunnel Garage, a historically and architecturally significant early automobile garage was demolished; the historic Circle in the Square Theater was mutilated; and the Sullivan Street Playhouse, where the musical *The Fantasticks* ran for decades, was destroyed. As an urban cultural landscape, this area should be protected by landmark designation.

In August 2003, the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation (GVSHP) received a Preserve New York grant from the Preservation League of New York State and the New York State Council on the Arts to undertake a historic resources survey of the South Village. The area surveyed included all or part of thirty-eight blocks (defined

not by official block number, but by the fact that each is surrounded by streets). The boundaries of the study area were partially determined by major streets and avenues that divide neighborhoods, partially by the character of the historic physical fabric, and partially by the boundaries of previously designated historic districts or proposed districts (*Figure 2*). The study area is located to the south of the Greenwich Village Historic District, east and north of the Charlton-King-Vandam Historic District, and west of the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District (south of Houston Street) and the Washington Square South Urban Renewal Area (north of Houston Street). The west side of West Broadway between West Houston and Canal Streets, lined primarily with nineteenth-century



industrial and commercial buildings, abuts the South Village study area, but is located within the boundaries of a proposed SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District extension. The MacDougal-Sullivan Gardens Historic District is located within the boundaries of the study area. There are also eleven individual landmarks within the study area. Most of this area had not previously been surveyed for historic district potential.

**Figure 2. Map of the South Village.**

The fact that the South Village Study Area is not part of one or more historic districts, but adjoins several districts designated by the New York City Landmarks Preservation

Commission early in its history (the commission was established in 1965), reflects the interests and concerns of commissioners and preservation advocates during the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, preservationists focused on the preservation of the city's nineteenth-century row house neighborhoods. Thus, the small Charlton-King-Vandam district, with its intact Federal and Greek Revival style row houses dating from the 1820s and 1830s, was one of the city's first historic districts, designated in 1966, while the Greenwich Village Historic District, with its dense concentration of early row houses became a landmark district in 1969. The Greenwich Village district includes many tenements erected in the later part of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century to house working-class and immigrant households. However, these buildings are barely mentioned in the voluminous historic district designation report. Likewise, the report does not discuss the fact that immigrants, largely Italian, but also including people from Germany, Ireland, and other countries, dominated large portions of the district by the late nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the 1967 designation report for the MacDougal-Sullivan Gardens Historic District discusses the early history of these row houses between Bleecker and West Houston Streets, erected between 1844 and 1850, and their conversion into an upscale garden community in 1921, entirely skipping the period when these buildings housed hundreds of Italian immigrants.<sup>2</sup> The 1973 designation of the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District differs from these earlier district designations in that it focuses almost entirely on mid and late nineteenth-century commercial and industrial buildings. The boundaries of that district exclude the immigrant tenement blocks immediately to the west that are part of this survey.

During the 1960s and 1970s, there was little interest in preserving buildings erected for poor and working-class New Yorkers, nor in recognizing and celebrating the architecture and history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century immigrants. However, as historians broadened the scope of their research into American history, investigating the place of the poor; immigrants; women; ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities; and other people whose stories had been neglected by traditional historical accounts of the nation's development, the focus on the physical fabric of communities shifted. In New York,



architectural and urban historians began expanding their studies from high style buildings and nineteenth-century row houses, to examining tenements, apartment buildings, and other forms of vernacular architecture.

The study of urban cultural landscapes, entailing the investigation of the vernacular built fabric of a neighborhood and the people who have used it over time, developed in response to this new interest in a diverse history. The South Village is an architecturally rich and complex area where immigrant tenements are the dominant built form, but where streets also contain early nineteenth-century row houses, churches and buildings erected



**Figure 3. 36-38 MacDougal Street, brickwork.**

by philanthropic organizations, industrial lofts and factories, garages, and other structures. The built fabric is primarily brick – hand-made and mass produced; headers, stretchers, and Roman bricks; red, yellow, black, glazed white, and other hues (*Figure 3*).

The brick is ornamented with varied stones, cast iron, terra cotta, and other materials. A complex array of architectural details highlights buildings throughout the South Village study area – fire escapes and fire balconies, cast-iron piers flanking storefronts (*Figure 4*), and, indeed, a significant number of intact wood and glass storefronts, iron stoop



**Figure 4. 135-137 Sullivan Street, storefronts.**

railings, stone and cast-iron window lintels, pressed-metal cornices, carved corner street signs, etc. These and other architectural features illustrate the utilitarian and aesthetic concerns of their builders and those who lived, worked, shopped, worshiped, or played in the buildings. Over time, the South Village has been a diverse neighborhood, where patrician New Yorkers, Italian immigrants, African Americans, bohemians, beatniks, hippies, gays and lesbians, and others have contributed to the vibrant neighborhood character.

Thus, as interest in varied urban landscapes grows, the time is ripe for the Landmarks Preservation Commission to designate districts that reflect this appreciation of vernacular architecture and history. The creation of one or more historic districts in the South Village would allow the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission to recognize the importance of tenements and immigrant history to New York City's architectural, historical, and cultural patrimony. Indeed, the creation of such a district or districts would complement the earlier designations in the neighborhood, creating a group of districts that, together, interpret the extraordinary variety of New York's residential and commercial life.<sup>3</sup> **This proposed designation is even more compelling because so much of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century built fabric of the area is intact. This is one of the few places where the landscape of working-class New York remains virtually unaltered.**





## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The South Village Resource Survey was undertaken in 2004-2006 by architectural historian and preservationist Andrew S. Dolkart, holder of the James Marston Fitch Professorship and Associate Professor of Historic Preservation at the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation. Professor Dolkart's work largely focuses on the architecture and development of New York City. This survey was augmented by extensive building research undertaken by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation (GVSHP). GVSHP staff and interns examined New York City building records to determine the original architect, date, and owner of each building in the area, as well as detailing significant alterations to the built fabric. In addition, a group of buildings were examined in census records. All buildings within the study area were photographed.

Initially, a detailed reconnaissance survey of all of the blocks in the study area was undertaken. The character of each block was identified, including building types, scale, materials, and the cohesiveness of the block. Particular attention was paid to extant historic fabric, including storefronts, cornices, terra-cotta ornament, etc., and to significant alterations that reflect the changing character of the neighborhood, notably the presence of artist-studio additions on rooftops or studio windows cut into facades. Besides the extensive research completed by GVSHP, additional research was undertaken at major New York City libraries, including the New York Public Library, the New-York Historical Society, and Columbia University's Avery Library.

A critical aim of this survey was to identify those sections of the study area that should be nominated for official status as one or more New York City historic districts.



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The area meets the criteria for the designation of one or more historic districts by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. Although boundaries would need to be carefully drawn, most of the South Village neighborhood could easily be included within a historic district. A single South Village Historic District could be drawn, or the area could be divided into subsections, with the major streets and avenues serving as a divide.



## A HISTORY OF THE SOUTH VILLAGE

### *Early History*

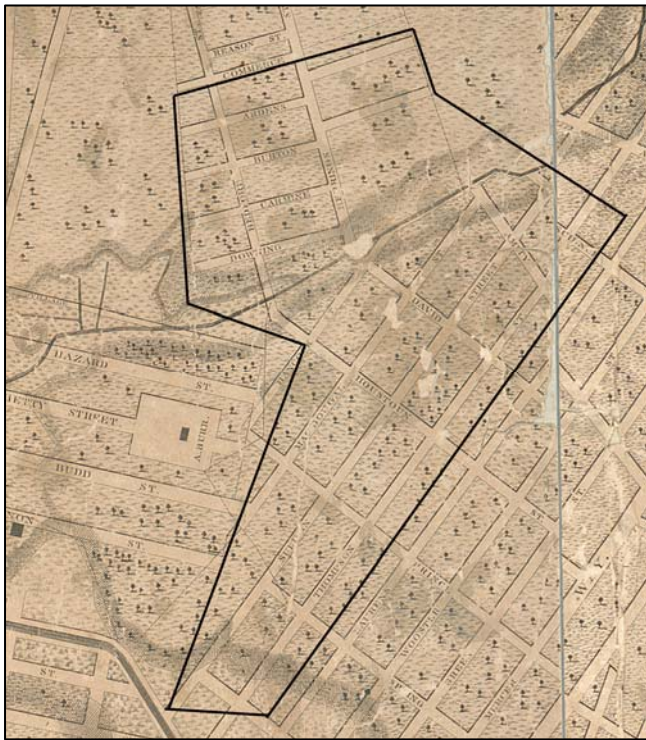
The land that is now within the South Village study area was undoubtedly traversed by the Algonquin-speaking Native Americans who had seasonal settlements on Manhattan Island. However, the recorded history of the area begins in 1644 when William Kieft, the Director General of the Dutch colony of New Netherland, transferred property to the north of the small settlement of New Amsterdam, located at the southern tip of Manhattan Island, to freed African slaves. The Dutch chose to settle the families of former slaves on this land in order to protect the town from incursions by Native Americans – the Africans would serve as a buffer and would be the first settlers attacked during a raid. Gracia D’Angola and Paulo D’Angola were among those of African descent who owned property in the “negroes land” that included what later became the South Village.<sup>4</sup> By the late seventeenth century, the land of these black families had been sold to large landowners, generally second or third generation New Yorkers. Most of the land in the study area was part of the Bayard West Farm, acquired by Nicholas Bayard, grandson of the original Dutch immigrant of the same name in the 1690s. The Bayard farm was split in c. 1775 when Great George Street (later Broadway) was cut through the property, creating the East Farm and the West Farm. The northern boundary of Bayard’s property was marked by Amity Lane, a small road that ran southeast from the present-day corner of MacDougal Street and West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street (originally Amity Street). The farm was inherited by another Nicholas Bayard (known as “the younger”), and he conveyed the property to trustees in 1789 for the benefit of his creditors. Beginning in 1790, the trustees sold some of the land in lots and other parts of the estate to Aaron Burr and to Anthony L. Bleecker, who later sold off the property.

Much of the land west of present-day Sixth Avenue was part of Dutch Director General Wouter van Twiller’s bowery which was transferred to Elbert Herring and became part of what was known as the Herring Farm.<sup>5</sup> Portions of the Herring property were acquired by Aaron Burr in the 1790s, while other sections were inherited by Herring descendants in the Jones family (thus Jones Street), including Cornelia Jones (thus Cornelia Street).



The early land-holding pattern in the South Village remains evident today. The street pattern east of Sixth Avenue, including MacDougal, Sullivan, and Thompson Streets and West Broadway (originally Laurens Street) reflects the grid of rectangular blocks, with the long blocks running in a north-south direction, laid out on the Bayard property. On the Herring Farm, the street grid north of West Houston Street, including Downing, Carmine, Leroy, Cornelia, Morton, and Jones Streets between Varick, Bedford, Bleeker, and West 4<sup>th</sup> Streets, runs diagonal to the streets laid out on the Bayard property.

According to I. N. Phelps Stokes, in his exhaustive history of New York, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island*, the blocks on the Bayard West Farm may have been



**Figure 5. A 1799 map of Manhattan with the approximate boundaries of the South Village study area added.** (Goerck, Casimir. *Plan of the city of New-York/ drawn from actual survey by C[a]simir Th. [G]oerck, and Joseph Fr. Mangin, city surveyors.* 1803. Reprinted with permission from the Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.)

laid out as early as 1752. Stokes writes that lots were surveyed in 1788.<sup>6</sup> The present grid pattern for most of the study area is evident on the 1799 map, *A Plan of the City of New-York* (the Goerck-Mangin Plan; **Figure 5**), which was the result of a survey conducted at the behest of the city by Casimir Goerck and Joseph-François Mangin. According to a note appended to copies of this map by the Common Council, with the exception of Spring Street and Bullock Street (now Broome Street), the streets within the study area had been planned but not yet laid out or deeded to the city. The streets did

exist by 1811 when the Commissioners' Plan was promulgated, creating the grid of rectangular blocks over most of Manhattan Island. Streets that already existed, including all of those within the study area (except West 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets which are part of the grid system) were retained.

#### *Development of an Affluent Row House Neighborhood*

As New York's population increased in the early decades of the nineteenth century and as commerce expanded in Lower Manhattan, displacing residents, new residential neighborhoods developed to the north of the historic core of the city at the southern tip of Manhattan Island. By the 1820s and 1830s, major residential development was occurring in the South Village. Landowners sold or leased their property, and individuals or developers erected new houses. There was no comprehensive plan for the development of the blocks in the South Village. Rather, the neighborhood was built up with a mix of modest and grand houses, some wood, others wood with brick fronts, and still others with solid brick structures.

Many of the finest streets of row houses in the area were given special names that, to residents and visitors, denoted their character as locations for elegant residence. Among the finest blocks of row houses in the South Village were St. Clements Place (now MacDougal Street between Bleecker and West Houston Streets), Varick Place (now Sullivan Street between Bleecker and West Houston Streets), and Depau Place (now Thompson Street between Bleecker and Houston Streets). Other streets lined with uniform rows of houses were the blocks of Bleecker Street from St. Clements Place (now MacDougal Street) to Laurens Street (now West Broadway). The Bleecker Street frontage included Depau Row (**Figure 6**), erected in 1829-30 as what Charles Lockwood refers to as "one of the city's first uniform blockfronts or terraces."<sup>7</sup> More modest homes could be found on Leroy Place, Jones Street, Sullivan Street, and other streets in the study area. Just as the houses varied in scale and use of materials, the economic and social level of early residents also varied. Nonetheless, the new neighborhood largely attracted members of New York City's dominant white Protestant communities, as is



**Figure 6. Depau Row, Bleecker Street, south side between Thompson and Sullivan Streets in 1896; later replaced by Mills House.** (Collection of The New-York Historical Society, negative # 4633.)

evident from the religious buildings erected by or for neighborhood residents, all of which were Protestant churches, not one of which survives.<sup>8</sup>

### *Row House Architecture in the South Village*

The initial phase of development in the South Village lasted for approximately a quarter of a century, beginning in the second decade of the nineteenth century and extending into the 1830s, by which time the area had been almost totally built up with row houses of varied scale. Few of these row houses were designed by architects, but all made use of the classically-inspired ornamental details that were fashionable on residential buildings in New York at the time. Although the neighborhood has largely been redeveloped since this initial phase of building, over one hundred early row houses are extant, some virtually intact, and others altered when they were converted into tenements or commercial buildings. Only ten of these buildings are designated landmarks.<sup>9</sup>

Houses erected in the 1820s and early 1830s were designed in the Federal style. These range from modest 2½-story buildings to grander 3½-story homes, all of which had sloping roofs articulated by dormers. Most had brick facades, with the brick laid in

Flemish bond, the pattern of brick composed of alternating headers or long bricks and stretcher or short bricks. The facades were simple in their detail, with modest stone window lintels, some ornamented with panels or stylized frets. Each house was capped



Figure 7. Rear building at 10 Bedford Street.

by a wood cornice. The focus of each facade was the ornate entrance, generally marked by attenuated colonnettes, leaded sidelights and transom, and a multi-paneled door. The entrances are generally reached by stoops, often only a few steps high. Some of these houses had small residences or workshops in their rear yards reached either by walking

through the house or by a passage cut through the house, colloquially known as a “horse walk,” although few of them were probably ever used for horses (*Figure 7*). Federal style row houses can be found on almost every block in the study area.



Figure 8. 7 Leroy Street, with “horse walk” at the left.

Many of the surviving Federal style row houses in the South Village were originally modest 2½-story structures. One of the finest, a classic example of the type, stands at 7 Leroy Street (*Figure 8*). This wood house with brick front was erected in 1830-31. It has





**Figure 9. 134 Sullivan Street doorway.**

a facade of Flemish-bond brick, sloping roof with a pair of dormer windows, modest stone window lintels and sills, multi-pane window sash, a low stoop, wrought-iron railings, and a multi-paneled entrance door flanked by attenuated columns and capped by a transom. There is also a “horse walk,” leading to a dwelling in the rear.<sup>10</sup> This building was heard but not designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1966. The entrance at 134 Sullivan Street, just north of Prince Street, is even more elegant (*Figure 9*). This transitional

Federal/Greek Revival style brick house is entered through a doorway with attenuated Ionic pilasters. Other Federal features include the Flemish-bond brickwork and paneled brownstone window lintels. The three-story building has a Greek Revival style cornice.



**Figure 10. 200-202 Bleecker Street.**

Perhaps the grandest unprotected Federal style row houses in the South Village study area are the pair at 200-202 Bleecker Street (*Figure 10*), now part of the Little Red School House. Each of these brick houses, built in 1826, was originally only 2½-stories tall, yet each has an imposing arched entrance with a paneled stone surround, as well as paneled lintels. A full third story was added to each

house – in 1876 at no. 200 and in 1899 at no. 202 (for Joseph Laemmle, whose name can still be seen in the cornice). A house with a more modest arched entrance and paneled window and doorway lintels stands at 57 Sullivan Street (*Figure 11*). Like the Leroy Street house, this is also a wood structure with a brick front. Originally 2½-stories tall, 57 Sullivan Street was expanded to three stories in the late 1850s. The house was built in 1816-17 by Frederick Youmans, a carter, and sold upon completion to David Bogart, a mason.<sup>11</sup> The sale to a mason reflects the fact that in the early nineteenth century, modest row houses were affordable to families of prosperous working-class mechanics and tradesmen. As land values in New York City rose, this class was priced out of the market for single-family housing. The house at 57 Sullivan Street appears to be the oldest extant structure in the study area; it was heard but not designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1970. Like 7 Leroy Street, it has also been separately nominated for individual landmark designation as part of a proposal by GVSHP and the New York Landmarks Conservancy for designation of thirteen Federal row houses in Lower Manhattan.

As noted, there are several exceptional examples of Federal style row houses in the South Village. However, even more interesting than the individual buildings are the clusters of early row houses still visible in the area. Notable groups of Federal row houses still stand on Bleecker Street between LaGuardia Place and Thompson Street (north side), between Cornelia and Jones Streets (north side), and between Leroy and Morton Streets (south



**Figure 11. 57 Sullivan Street.**



side); at 42-46 Carmine Street (1827; complete with original sloping roofs and dormer windows; **Figure 12**); at 38-42 Bedford Street; on the south side of West Houston Street between Varick Street and Sixth Avenue; and on the north side of West Houston Street between LaGuardia Place and Thompson Street.



**Figure 12. 42-46 Carmine Street.**

In the 1830s, the Greek Revival style became popular in the study area. Houses in this style have street fronts that are grander and more austere than those on the earlier Federal houses.<sup>12</sup> All have brick facades, with the brickwork generally laid entirely with stretchers. The sloping roofs of the earlier houses have been replaced by flat roofs; in some cases the wood cornices are articulated by small rectangular attic windows. The entrances were far grander than those on the earlier houses, with doors recessed behind stone temple-like enframements reached by high stoops. Often, as at 134 Sullivan Street, noted above, or at 12-20 Leroy Street, houses are transitional in design, with features of the older, more established Federal style, blended with newer Greek-inspired features. Another example of this transitional type is 114 Sullivan Street (**Figure 13**), with its old-fashioned Flemish-bond brickwork and low



**Figure 13. 114 Sullivan Street.**



**Figure 14. 198 Prince Street, ironwork.**

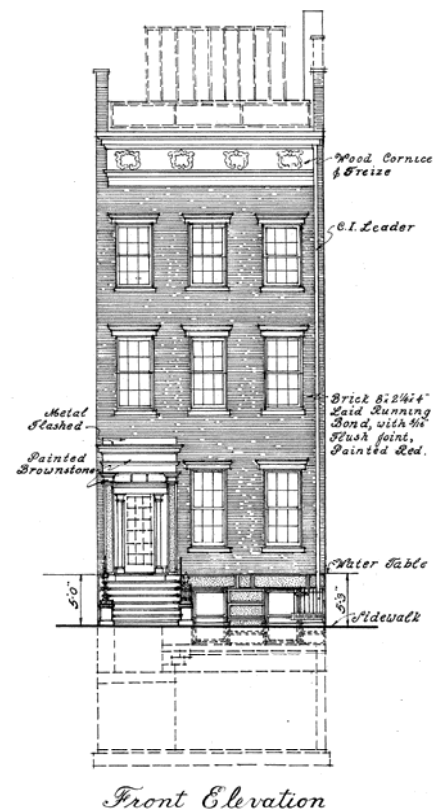
spectacular iron stoop railings at 198 Prince Street (*Figure 14*), with their combination of curvaceous wrought-iron forms and cast-iron Greek anthemion.

stoop, but magnificent Greek Revival style stone entrance enframingent (for many years this was the home of James Rossant, a prominent architect of the 1960s and 1970s). Originally a 2½-story building, 114 Sullivan Street had become a tenement even before its transformation into a three-story building in 1898. Transitional design is also evident on the

The grandest extant Greek Revival house in the study area is 132 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street (*Figure 15*), intact except for a studio cut into the center of the cornice and casement windows on the parlor floor. The brick house has a high stoop with iron railings, an imposing stone entrance enframingent, and an austere recessed entranceway with wood pilasters and simple sidelights and transom. The 3½-story house is crowned by a cornice that incorporates small square attic windows, each surrounded by an iron laurel wreath. This building was recorded by the Historic American Buildings Survey in the 1930s (*Figure 16*).<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 15. 132 West 4th Street.**



**Figure 16. 132 West 4th Street, Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) elevation drawing, c. 1935.** (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, Reproduction Number HABS NY, 31-NEYO, 38.)



In 1967, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on this building and its neighbor, 134 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street, but never designated the buildings. Also impressive, is the pair of houses at 130-132 MacDougal Street (*Figure 17*), notable for their cast-iron veranda, an extraordinarily rare survivor of this feature in New York City.



**Figure 17. 130-132 MacDougal Street.**

Probably built in 1845, these are relatively late examples of single-family row house construction in the study area.<sup>14</sup> This late date is evident in the fact that each of the three-story brick houses is capped by a wood cornice with an early Italianate style bracketed cornice (Louisa May Alcott's uncle, Bronson Alcott, lived in no. 130, and Alcott is said to have written *Little Women* here). The Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the designation of these houses in 1966, but they have not been designated. The two rows in the

MacDougal-Sullivan Gardens Historic District, erected by the Low Family in the 1850s, are also examples of transitional Greek Revival/Italianate style houses. As with the Federal houses, clusters of Greek Revival homes can also be found in the study area, notably on the north side of West Houston Street between Sullivan and Thompson Streets, on the south side of Bleecker Street between MacDougal and Sullivan Streets, and on Minetta Street and Minetta Lane.

### *“Tenementized” Row Houses*

The South Village remained a relatively stable residential neighborhood for several decades. However, by the 1850s and 1860s, major changes were occurring in the neighborhoods north of Canal Street, including the South Village. Commerce was moving north, leading to the transformation of the area to the east of the study area (now SoHo). Stores and hotels appeared on and just off of Broadway, while many of the old houses nearby were converted into brothels, advertised in guidebooks such as the *Directory of the Seraglios in N.Y., Phila., Boston & All the Principal Cities in the Union*, edited and compiled by a “Free Love Yer” in 1859. As commerce and unsavory land uses crept closer to their homes, affluent residents of the South Village moved uptown to new residential neighborhoods where houses were more up-to-date in style and were erected with technological innovations such as indoor plumbing.

Some of the row house owners, both individual owners and estates that had leased homes, sold their holdings as the character of the neighborhood changed. Others, however, retained their property, profiting from renting space in former single-family homes to multiple tenants. This was the case, for example, on the block bounded by MacDougal, Sullivan, Bleecker, and West Houston Streets. The Low family had developed this block with row houses in the 1840s and early 1850s and retained ownership even as the houses deteriorated into densely packed immigrant tenements. Indeed, most of the old houses in the South Village were not immediately torn down and replaced by new structures. Rather, they were converted into multiple dwellings. In 1865, a sanitary inspector, working for the Council of Hygiene and Public Health of the Citizens’ Association of New York, reported that the “tenant-houses” located east of Sixth Avenue were “with few exceptions, old buildings, originally private dwellings, in which are now crowded from four to six families, averaging five persons each.”<sup>15</sup> The new residents were a heterogeneous group of poor and working-class New Yorkers – white and black, native born and immigrant. As part of the conversion of the old row houses into multiple dwellings, many of the earliest houses had their sloping roofs and dormer windows removed and replaced by

full-story additions. For example, historian Christopher Gray has recorded that the 2½-story house at 90 West Houston Street (*Figure 18*), erected in 1829, already housing four families in 1870, was expanded a year later into a four-story building, with the addition of the mansard roof that is still extant. In addition, a four-story rear tenement was erected in the backyard at this time.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, 186 Prince Street, on the corner of Sullivan Street (*Figure 19*), is a Federal house that had a single story added when it was turned into a tenement. The presence of an Italianate style cornice leads to the conclusion that this alteration probably occurred in the 1860s. Despite the changing use, the building retains many original Federal style features. Other row houses had several stories added and their facades altered, although evidence of their original character is evident to the careful observer. For example, 147 Bleecker Street, was originally a 3½-story Federal style row house, but was later transformed into a six-story apartment building; some of the original Flemish bond brickwork is still evident on the front facade, as it also is on the flanking houses at 145 and 149 Bleecker Street. These two buildings also retain their original



Figure 18. 90 West Houston Street.



Figure 19. 186 Prince Street.



sloping roofs and dormer windows, although the lower floors have been altered by the addition of storefronts (*Figure 20*).

### *The Tenement Era*

Even with the construction of one or more additional stories to many of the row houses and the construction of new residential units in the backyards, the number of people who could be crowded into an old house was limited. Thus, beginning c. 1870, the old row houses in the South Village were torn down and replaced by purpose-built tenements – multiple dwellings specifically planned to house large numbers of households on



**Figure 20. 145, 147, and 149 Bleeker Street.**

narrow lots and with few amenities. This development reached its peak in the final decades of the nineteenth century and first years of the twentieth century. **Today, it is these late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century tenements that dominate the streetscapes of the South Village. Indeed, the South Village provides an opportunity to study and understand the entire history of tenement design, construction, and use, with archetypal examples of pre-law, old law, new law, and reform tenements.**<sup>17</sup>

“Tenement” is both a legal term, codified in city regulations, and a word commonly used to refer to a certain type of multi-family housing. As officially defined in the Tenement House Law of 1867, a tenement is any building housing more than three families, each living and cooking independently. In 1887, this definition was officially expanded to also include those buildings that housed just three families. This broad definition can apply to almost all of New York City’s multiple dwellings, even such luxurious apartment houses as those erected on Fifth and Park Avenues and on Central Park West; however, the term “tenement” generally came to define only those multiple dwellings built for the poor and which contained few, if any, of the amenities demanded by

wealthier apartment dwellers, such as private toilets, running water, gas lines, and one or more windows in every room.

Although many factors contributed to the substandard living conditions in New York City's overcrowded tenement neighborhoods, the root of the problem lay both in the division of New York City's blocks into narrow building lots, generally twenty-five feet wide and appropriate for single-family row houses, and the pattern of individual lot ownership that resulted from this division. Only with the construction of tenements built to house twenty or more households did this limited size of building lot become a problem. By the late nineteenth century, the noted architect Ernest Flagg, one of the leaders of the tenement reform movement and the designer of the Mills House on Bleeker Street in the study area, wrote that:

The greatest evil which ever befell New York City was the division of the blocks into 25 x 100 feet. So true is this, that no other disaster can for a moment be compared with it. Fires, pestilence and financial troubles are nothing in comparison, for from this division has arisen the New York system of tenement-houses, the worst curse which ever afflicted any great community.<sup>18</sup>

### *Pre-law Tenements in the South Village*

The exact date of construction of the first purpose-built tenement in Manhattan is unknown, but it is often traced as far back to the 1820s or 1830s. However, it was only in the 1860s and 1870s that large numbers of custom-built tenements began to appear on the streets of working-class and immigrant neighborhoods such as the Lower East Side, Lower West Side, and South Village. The earliest tenements were erected before there was any substantial regulation of this type of housing. The first law that governed the actual physical form of tenements was not passed until 1879 and is known as the "old law." Thus, the first wave of tenements erected in New York City and, in particular, in the South Village, are "pre-law" tenements. The typical pre-law tenement was five stories tall and housed ten to twenty families on a narrow twenty-five foot wide lot.

There were generally four units on each of the upper floors, with a pair of stores and two rear apartments on the first floor. Each apartment had two or three rooms. Windows only lit one room in each apartment; thus, most rooms had no immediate access to natural light or fresh air. These apartments were not supplied with gas or water, although both gas lines and water lines had already been laid on Village streets. Some tenements had a single water line with a tap in the hall on each floor. Most, however, had both the water source and toilets in the shallow backyard. In some cases the toilets were placed between a front building and a rear tenement erected at the back of the lot. The entrance to the tenement was generally in the center of the facade with stores to either side. Cast-iron pilasters flanked projecting storefronts with large plate-glass windows and slender wood frames, generally painted in imitation graining.

Examples of pre-law tenements can be found throughout the South Village. Their construction coincided with the popularity of the Italianate style. Unlike the Italianate brownstone row houses erected in large numbers during the 1850s, 1860s, and early 1870s for affluent households, and the marble and cast-iron commercial palazzi built in new commercial districts, the Italianate style tenements were almost always faced with inexpensive brick. Italianate features are evident in the horizontal massing of the facades, segmental-arch window openings, modest projecting lintels of stone or cast iron, and pressed-metal bracketed cornices. These features were probably not chosen because the tenement designers were concerned about projecting an up-to-date image for their buildings. Rather, they appear because these were elements available from building yards and other suppliers.

Among the earliest purpose-built tenements in the South Village are the five-story brick buildings at 18 and 20 Cornelia Street (*Figure 21*) and 6 and 8 Jones Street, all



**Figure 21. 18-20 Cornelia Street.**





Figure 22. 31-33 Carmine Street.

designed in 1871 by William E. Waring. The Cornelia Street pair are largely intact, including all four of their storefronts, their simple stone lintels, and their pressed-metal cornices. Also largely intact are the more modest tenements at 31, 31½, and 33 Carmine Street (*Figure 22*) built c. 1859; they are among the earliest tenements in the South Village. These narrow, four-story buildings retain their original storefronts with cast-iron piers, cast-iron window lintels and sills, and cornices with paired brackets. Other extant Italianate tenements include the pair at 498-500 LaGuardia Place (c.



Figure 23. 498-500 LaGuardia Place, cornices.



Figure 24. 25-29 Jones Street, fire balconies.

1875), with their rhythmically-placed segmental-arch windows and original lintels, sills, and cornices (*Figure 23*); and 25-29 Jones Street (William Jose, 1872), which retain several original fire balconies (in case of a fire in one building, a resident was, ideally, to escape onto a balcony and then exit to safety through the neighboring building; *Figure 24*). Perhaps the most interesting early tenement in the study area is 123 West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street



**Figure 25. 123 West 3rd Street.**

(*Figure 25*), designed in 1871 by Bula & Co. This is one of a small group of tenements in New York City with cast-iron facades.<sup>19</sup> The second through fourth stories of the facade of the West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street building are faced with blocks of iron cast in imitation of rusticated stone. The building originally had a mansard roof, but this was replaced by a full fifth story in 1913.

While the basic form, plan, and lack of amenities of the pre-law tenement remained static until these buildings were banned by the 1879 tenement law, the style of their facades changed as fashions in building design evolved. Thus, by the mid-1870s, most of the tenements in the South Village had facades designed in the Neo-Grec style. Construction of buildings with Neo-Grec features (see below) did not stop with the passage of the 1879 law, rather they continued in popularity into the 1880s.

### *Old Law (Dumbbell) Tenements*

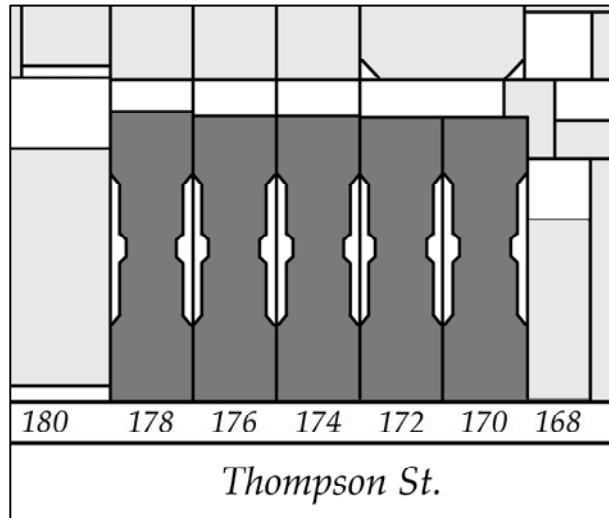
The 1879 law was the result of a campaign by reformers who had become concerned about conditions in New York's increasingly congested neighborhoods. The result, the Tenement House Act of 1879 (often referred to as the "old law"), actually did not greatly improve conditions. This law had no effect on tenements that had already been constructed or on row houses that had been converted into tenements, and it did nothing to alleviate the problem of erecting buildings for large numbers of households on narrow lots. However, the law succeeded in prohibiting the construction of buildings with windowless interior rooms, requiring that all rooms have windows facing the street, rear yard, or an interior shaft. The most common design resulting from this requirement was

the “dumbbell,” so named because the required air shafts created a building footprint that resembles the shape of a dumbbell weight (*Figure 26*).

Unfortunately, the shafts required by the 1879 law were so small that they provided little light and air to apartments below the top floor; instead, they became receptacles for garbage and created flues that sucked flames from one floor to another during a fire.

In addition, the shaft windows of adjoining apartments were so close that privacy was virtually eliminated. Most dumbbell tenements in the South Village and in other immigrant neighborhoods continued to be built with four apartments of two or three rooms per floor, although a few had only two apartments per floor, with rooms set in a straight line, giving rise to the term “railroad” apartment. Despite its shortcomings, the dumbbell was the most accepted plan for tenements for over twenty years, until a new tenement law was passed in 1901. Several dozen five- and six-story dumbbell tenements were erected in the South Village.

Tenements built just before and just after the passage of the 1879 law were generally designed using Neo-Grec style features, such as the stylized, angular brackets and incised ornament that were widely available from the suppliers of building materials. Neo-Grec tenements, like their Italianate predecessors, are generally faced with red brick and trimmed with stone or cast-iron lintels and sills and are capped by pressed-metal cornices. Almost all had ground-floor storefronts. Examples can be found throughout the study area. Especially beautiful examples of the Neo-Grec aesthetic are the window lintels of 200 Spring Street, at the southeast corner of Sullivan Street, where an old law building was erected in 1880. Here the crisply carved, slightly projecting, light-colored stone



**Figure 26. Plan of dumbbell tenements at 170-178 Thompson Street.**





**Figure 27. 200 Spring Street, lintels and street sign.**

lintels with shallow, flat-topped pediments, are each ornamented with a central rosette, incised flourishes, and a pair of stylized flowers (*Figure 27*). These lintels are supported by brackets with incised channels. This tenement was designed by William Jose. Although little is known about Jose, he was one of the most prolific tenement architects in New York at the

time. Seven tenements designed by Jose between 1872 and 1880 have been identified in the South Village, and he designed dozens of others located in nearby tenement districts.

Archetypal examples of Neo-Grec cornices can be seen atop the pair of stone tenements at 104 and 106 West Houston Street designed in 1881 by William Waring (*Figure 28*). Stylized single and paired incised brackets support pediments that are capped by acroteria. Perhaps the most elegant Neo-Grec tenements in the area are the pair of red brick buildings at 55 and 55½ Downing Street (*Figure 29*), pre-law buildings designed in 1876 by Thom & Wilson, a firm that would become known for the hundreds of row houses that it designed on the Upper West Side, in Harlem, and in other neighborhoods in the final decades of the



**Figure 28. 104-106 West Houston Street, cornices.**



**Figure 29. 55 & 55 1/2 Downing Street.**

nineteenth century. Together, these five-story red brick buildings with paired street-level entrances are six windows wide and housed twenty families – two per floor. Each window is capped by a pedimented stone lintel with a central rosette. The facades retain original wood double doors, handsome fire balconies, and pressed-metal cornices with stylized brackets.

A number of Neo-Grec style tenements in the South Village study area erected between 1873 and 1878 are notable for the use of virtually identical paneled cast-iron window lintels – pedimented on the second story and flat, with a small projecting foliate flourish, on the upper floors, all with central rosettes (*Figures 30-31*). Although ornamented similarly, these buildings were designed by several different architects – William Graul, Julius Boeckell, John Foster, and William Jose. The similarity of facades brings up a crucial unanswered question relating to tenements – just how much of the design was the responsibility of the architect? Architects names are listed on building permits for these buildings, as was legally required in New York City. Most of these architects are little-



Figure 30. 143-145 Sullivan Street, lintels.



Figure 31. 39-43 Carmine Street, lintels.

known practitioners, many of whom were immigrants. It is not known what, if any, training these architects had, but they chose to work or were forced to work at the lowest end of the design spectrum. The basic plan of all of these tenements on their narrow, twenty-five-foot-wide lots is the same, and, it can be assumed, the structure with brick walls and wood beams is also virtually identical in each building. Exterior features, such as lintels, sills, cornices, and storefronts, as well as interior features such as doors, stair rails, wainscot, and mantels would have been acquired from building yards and other suppliers and could have been chosen either by the architect or the builder. Only occasionally does the taste of a specific architect become evident. For example, William



**Figure 32. 52 Carmine Street.**

Jose, who employed the cast-iron lintels popular with other architects, also favored extremely elaborate cornices for his tenements designed during the 1870s. This is evident at 52 Carmine Street (*Figure 32*), designed by Jose in 1873, with its swan's-neck pediment, stylized anthemia, bold brackets, and fascia ornamented with swags. Although far more research needs to be undertaken into the larger issue of the architect and the speculative construction of tenements, it appears that in the 1860s and 1870s, the architect had little to do with the design of these vernacular buildings; much of the ornamental detail was being mass-produced in factories and foundries and was simply purchased ready-made for use on these buildings.

By the 1880s and 1890s, as fashions became more flamboyant and as a greater array of building materials and ornamental details became available with the expansion of American industry, architects appear to have had a little more influence on the aesthetics of their tenement facades. This is evident on the Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival style tenements that appeared during these years, with their richly textured facades, ornate





**Figure 33. 95 MacDougal Street.**

terra-cotta detail, and flamboyant pressed-metal cornices. Tenements from these decades were still regulated under the Tenement House Act of 1879, so their basic plans are the same as those of the Neo-Grec buildings. However, their facades are constructed with an array of bricks of differing hues (both red and yellow brick were popular) and with extensive terra-cotta ornament. The five-story building at 95 MacDougal Street (**Figure 33**), designed in 1888 by Rentz & Lange, exemplifies the Queen Anne tenement. The facade is clad in yellow brick, heavily ornamented with red terra-cotta panels, blind fans, and balcony sills, as well as with light-colored stone lintels and other trim. The dynamic facade is enlivened by a play of planes – the central section of the upper floors projects

from the main front.

The facade culminates in a massive cornice ornamented with sunbursts and brackets and a crowning plinth that deeply projects out towards the street.

The six-story building at 50 Carmine Street (Paul R. Lewis, 1896; **Figure 34**) is an especially elegant example of the use of Romanesque Revival features for a narrow tenement. This tenement has a yellow brick facade ornamented with contrasting, rough-textured, red sandstone beltcourses and trim around the rectangular and round-arch windows. Old law tenements adorned with such Romanesque Revival



**Figure 34. 50 Carmine Street.**

features are less common than those with Queen Anne fronts, perhaps because Romanesque designs rely on more subtle contrast of texture and form than Queen Anne fronts. Tenement builders and their architects may have sought to attract rent paying tenants to their buildings by creating flamboyant fronts with the ornate, but relatively inexpensive, terra-cotta panels and pressed-metal cornices popular on Queen Anne designs.

Many of the pre-law and old-law tenements extended well into their lots, with only a small yard at the rear. In many other cases, however, the tenements extended only partially into the lot with a second building, a back house, at the rear of the lot, separated from the front tenement by a narrow yard where the outdoor toilets were located. The rear tenements are extremely simple in design since their facades were not visible from the street. An example of a rear tenement can be seen in the five-story building located deep in the lot at 180 Sixth Avenue (*Figure 35*). This was the rear tenement of 14 MacDougal Street, demolished in the late 1920s for the extension of Sixth Avenue, thus opening the rear building to public view. The rear tenement, planned with two apartments per floor, was designed by John B. Franklin in 1878. An examination of land



Figure 35. 180 Sixth Avenue.

book atlases shows that there are many back houses extant in the South Village, although they are not visible from the street (*Figure 36*).

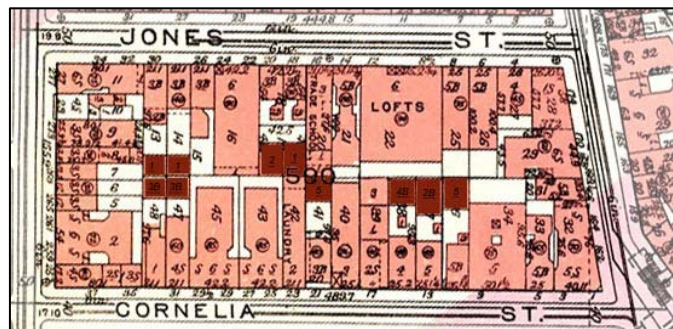


Figure 36. The block bounded by Jones, West 4<sup>th</sup>, Cornelia, and Bleecker Streets has a particularly high concentration of back buildings (shown in dark red). They range in height from one to five stories, indicating that some may be rear tenements, others back houses, and some simply utilitarian structures.



### *New Law Tenements*

The failures of the 1879 law became evident almost immediately after its passage, but the owners of the extremely lucrative tenements (return on investment could be as high as 20 per cent) resisted changes. It was not until early in the twentieth century that reform efforts bore fruit and the New York State Legislature passed the Tenement House Act of 1901 (known as the “new law”). While this act did not officially ban the construction of tenements on twenty-five-foot-wide lots, it made it difficult to efficiently plan such buildings. Most new law tenements were built on lots with a width of thirty-five feet or more. As required by the law, these tenements had larger, if still relatively small light courts and occupied somewhat less of the total lot area. The new law mandated that all rooms have windows and each apartment have its own toilet facilities. New law tenements, most designed in the Neo-Renaissance and Beaux-Arts styles, are scattered throughout the study area.

Another important aspect of the law was its impact on older tenement buildings. The law mandated a series of changes designed to address the dangerous and unsanitary conditions in these pre-existing tenements. Changes included improved lighting, banning second windowless interior rooms (a provision later rescinded), and requiring the addition of one toilet for every two families.

The 1901 law was the result of intense pressure brought to bear on the New York State Legislature by housing reform groups. This pressure resulted in Governor Theodore Roosevelt appointing a commission to study the issue in 1900. In February 1901, the commission issued a report to the new governor, Benjamin B. Odell, Jr. (Roosevelt had become vice president), recommending new legislation. The State Legislature almost immediately held hearings, and on April 12, 1901, only two months after the commission issued its report, the Tenement House Act of 1901 was enacted.

Real estate owners were outraged at the passage of the new tenement law, claiming that it “came unannounced and unheralded upon an unsuspecting real estate public like a

thunderbolt from a clear sky,” and had been “railroaded through the Legislature.”<sup>20</sup>

However, tenement builders were certainly aware that this law was about to pass since in March and early April 1901 they rushed to file plans with the Department of Buildings for new tenements before the terms of the new law became effective. A *New York Tribune* reporter, describing how builders “literally stormed” the department, compared the rush to submit plans to a run on a bank.<sup>21</sup> In an attempt to evade the provisions of the new law, some builders and architects apparently even submitted “dummy” plans that would later be amended. In July 1901, the Tenement House Committee accused architect Michael Bernstein of submitting fifty-three false plans before the new law went into effect.<sup>22</sup> This rush to build is evident in the South Village study area where plans for at least fourteen old-law tenements were filed in March or early April 1901, seven by Michael Bernstein. Bernstein, by himself and in partnership with his brother in the firm of Bernstein & Bernstein, was the most prolific architect designing tenements in the South Village (the Bernsteins were also major designers in other turn of the twentieth-century tenement neighborhoods). The passage of the new law did not inhibit development of tenements as some real estate interests had feared. On the contrary, the peak years of tenement construction in the South Village were 1903 and 1904, just after the law was passed; several dozen tenements were erected in the area during this two year period.

The tenements built in the South Village and other immigrant and working-class neighborhoods of Manhattan in the late 1890s, during the waning years of old law tenement construction, and in the early years of the twentieth century, during the first years of new law tenement construction, were designed with facades embellished with Renaissance and Classical ornament. Many of these buildings are ornate Beaux-Arts structures with bold, three-dimensional terra-cotta detail. Often, the facades are red brick with white, glazed terra cotta (in imitation of limestone), providing a dramatic contrast. The Bernsteins’ tenements at 200-206 Thompson Street (1902) and 208 Thompson



Figure 37. 202-206 and 208 Thompson Street (reading from right to left).

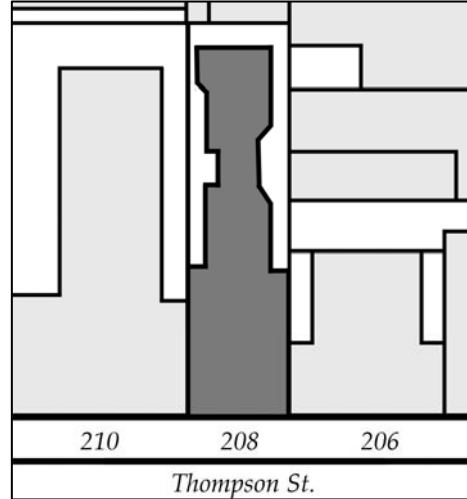


Figure 38. 208 Thompson Street footprint.

Street (1903) are excellent examples of the type (*Figure 37*). All three are six-story, walk-up buildings with red brick facades and white terra-cotta trim. Each has a galvanized-iron cornice highlighted with swags. No. 208 is of special interest because here Bernstein & Bernstein adapted the requirements of the 1901 law to a narrow, twenty-five foot wide lot. In plan, the building occupies the entire front of the lot, with a

stem surrounded on three sides by narrow courts, extending to the rear (*Figure 38*). The apartments must have been small, since the Bernsteins found room for sixteen units (probably three on each of the upper floors and one behind the ground floor store). The facade of this building employs the bold white terra-cotta that the Bernsteins preferred, but the second floor is ornamented with a diaper pattern of beige brick. French-inspired diaperwork was also employed by Janes & Leo at 210-214 Thompson Street (*Figure 39*), a white-brick building with pale yellow brick patterning. This is one of two seven-story, walk-up tenements designed



Figure 39. 210-214 Thompson Street.



**Figure 40.** 139 Sullivan Street storefront.

by Janes & Leo in the South Village in 1909. This firm is far better known for its upper-middle-class French-inspired row houses and apartment buildings, such as the Dorilton and Manhasset on the Upper West Side, than for its tenements. Like on the earlier tenements in the South Village, new law tenements almost always had stores at street level. Many of these storefronts are wholly or partially intact, such as those on architect Horenburger & Straub's tenements at 135 and 137-139 Sullivan Street (*Figure 40*), with their wood frames, plate-glass windows, and bracketed cornices.

Speculative building construction tended to attract small investors who built only a few buildings. Often these investors were themselves working-class immigrants, many of the same nationality or ethnic group as their tenants. In the 1860s and 1870s, many of the tenement builders were German immigrants, as were many of the tenants in these buildings. In addition, at this time, many of the architects responsible for tenements were also German immigrants. By the late nineteenth century, Jewish investors became heavily involved in tenement construction, and some of the architects employed were also Jewish, notably Bernstein & Bernstein. By the early twentieth century, as the South Village became increasingly Italian, Italian immigrants began investing in real estate, either purchasing older buildings, or building new tenements. There were, however, relatively few Italian architects in New York at this time. Thus, Italian builders hired architects proficient in tenement design: Bernstein & Bernstein designed 156-158

Sullivan Street in 1904 for Abbate & Alvino; Janes & Leo's 210-214 Thompson Street was commissioned by Anne Pisaira and Victoria Cavagnaro (see *Figure 39*); and Alessadro Paoli commissioned Horenburger & Straub to design 170-176 Spring Street in 1911.

### *French Flats*

Tenements planned for the city's poorer residents were not the only multiple dwellings erected during the nineteenth century. Indeed, the first apartment house erected specifically for middle-class tenants, the Stuyvesant Apartments at 142 East 18<sup>th</sup> Street (demolished), was built in 1869-70. The success of this building resulted in the construction of similar structures which, at the time, were referred to as "French flats."<sup>23</sup> These buildings had well-appointed apartments with windows in every room, and included modern kitchens and bathrooms. They generally also had accommodation for servants. French flats were erected in many of the city's affluent neighborhoods, including Greenwich Village. In the Village most of the French flats are located north of Washington Square. Thus, there is only one major example of a French flat in the study



area. This is the Washington View Apartments at 39½ Washington Square, on the corner of West 4<sup>th</sup> Street, catercorner from Washington Square Park. The Renaissance-inspired, five-story, brick and stone building, with its bold, brownstone entrance (*Figure 41*) and its keyed first- and second-story window surrounds, was designed in 1883 by Thom &

**Figure 41.** 39½ Washington Square.



Wilson. This firm was also responsible for the handsome Neo-Grec tenements at 55 and 55½ Downing Street (see *Figure 29*). The Washington View had two apartments per floor, on a lot that was thirty-four feet wide and eighty-six feet deep. These apartments were far more spacious than those in contemporary tenements.

### *Reform Housing*

Although major laws were passed in 1879 and 1901 that sought to improve conditions in the city's tenements, many reformers realized that profitable speculative construction would never create decent housing for all of the low-income New Yorkers who needed it, nor would it provide the variety of units required in a diverse city where single men and women as well as large families were seeking affordable apartments with adequate light, air, and sanitary amenities. Thus, reformers themselves sponsored the construction of model tenements and other forms of housing that would provide safe and healthy apartments for the working class.



**Figure 42. Mills House, 160 Bleeker Street.**

One of the most important experimental housing projects in New York is located in the South Village – Mills House No. 1 (*Figure 42*), which replaced Depau Row on the south side of Bleeker Street between Thompson and Sullivan Streets in 1896-97. Mills House was a home for single men funded by banker and philanthropist Darius Ogden Mills and designed by housing reformer Ernest Flagg. Typifying model housing projects sponsored by the city's elite, Mills House was not a charitable building project; rather Mills ran the home as a business, but he expected only a limited profit. Mills House consisted of two ten-story, fireproof brick



blocks with concrete floors. These buildings surrounded a fifty-foot square light court. Inside there were 1,500 tiny bedroom cubicles, each 5 x 7 feet and lit by a single window facing either a street or the court. The rooms were to be used only for sleeping, with residents at work during the day (they were forbidden to use their rooms between 9:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M.). Amenities included a sitting room with palms; restaurants; reading and smoking rooms; a self-service laundry; and baths and washrooms.<sup>24</sup> On the exterior, the building is faced in light-colored brick, with the windows arranged in groups of six. Flagg's French training is evident in the cartouches over the entrances and in the monumental cornice supported by wrought-iron brackets. The building was heard but not designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1966. Mills House has two additions – one, at 183-185 Sullivan Street, is a six-story building designed by Flagg in 1897, and the other, at 183-185 Thompson Street, is a seven-story structure designed in 1907 by J. M. Robinson. Mills House is now a condominium known as the Atrium; needless to say, its small cubicles were combined as part of the conversion in the mid-1970s.

While Mills House No. 1 has been extensively researched and is a well-known example of reform housing efforts at the turn of the twentieth century, another group of buildings in the South Village remains virtually unknown. These are the five tenements designed between 1911 and 1914 by Louis A. Sheinart for Italian-born builder and real estate developer Dominick Abbate.<sup>25</sup> Abbate was involved with many building projects in the South Village area, including such typical tenements as those at 26 Thompson Street (1899) and 64 MacDougal Street (1904). In c. 1911, Abbate established the Citizen's Investing Company, which commissioned four unusual tenements in the South Village – 150-152 Sullivan Street (1911) and 90-92 (1913), 132-136 (1912; *Figure 43*),



**Figure 43.** 132-134 Thompson Street.



**Figure 44. 152-154 Thompson Street.**

and 152-54 (1913; *Figure 44*) Thompson Street. A fifth building, 101-103 Thompson Street (1914), was erected by Abbate's Thompson Construction Company. Each of these buildings is faced with glazed white brick, a material undoubtedly chosen because it symbolized health and cleanliness; this use of white brick continues into the entranceway and lobby. These buildings were erected decades before white glazed brick became fashionable on Modern apartment houses in the late 1940s and 1950s. Each building is a six-story walk up. They were erected on lots ranging in width from forty-nine to sixty feet. In plan, each is shaped like an H, with light courts to either side and in the rear. This was a plan favored for middle-class apartment houses erected in large numbers,

particularly on the Upper West Side and on Morningside Heights. Plans for 150-152 Sullivan Street show seven apartments per floor, ranging in size from three to four rooms. Some apartments have separate kitchens and "parlors," while others have the kitchen and parlor combined into a single "living room." Each apartment had a double wash tub and a toilet closet, but no bath. Nothing is known about the genesis of these projects, how conditions in these buildings compare with those in contemporary tenements, or how they were marketed; this extraordinary group of tenements should be the subject of further investigation.

#### *Population Change in the Tenements of the South Village*

As has been noted, by the 1860s, the population of the South Village was changing. Although the neighborhood would become best known as a center of Italian-immigrant settlement, Italians did not arrive in the South Village until later in the nineteenth century. In the 1860s and 1870s, the residents of the converted row houses and new

tenement buildings were a mix of the native-born and immigrants. The 1865 sanitary inspection report for the area south of Houston Street indicates that the dominant groups in that area were Irish and Germans and notes that there were also “a few negroes.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, by the 1860s, the South Village had become home to a substantial black population. The black population of what was known as “Little Africa” was estimated at about 5,000 people.<sup>27</sup> In his pioneering 1930 history of New York’s black community, James Weldon Johnson writes that “as late as 1880 the major portion of the Negro population of the city lived in Sullivan, Bleecker, Thompson, Carmine, and Grove streets, Minetta Lane, and adjacent streets.”<sup>28</sup> Jacob Riis also discussed the population of Little Africa in his famous 1890 book, *How the Other Half Lives*. Riis felt that Little Africa provided the worst housing for the city’s black residents and particularly singled out Thompson Street for its “vile rookeries.”<sup>29</sup>

Besides the streets listed by Johnson, other black families lived on adjacent streets, including Cornelia Street between Bleecker and West 4<sup>th</sup> Streets, where census enumerators consistently recorded large numbers of African Americans. While a few of the adults in these households were born in New York and other northern states, the census records show that as early as 1880 most were migrants from the south, especially from Maryland, Virginia, Georgia, and other Atlantic states. These African-Americans moved north to New York decades before the more famous “great migration” of the early twentieth century. In New York, they were segregated into a limited number of menial jobs – men as waiters and porters and women overwhelmingly as laundresses and dressmakers. Most black families lived in buildings inhabited entirely by other black families, although neighboring buildings might be entirely inhabited by white residents. For example, in 1900, 32 Cornelia Street had black residents while 30 Cornelia Street housed white residents born in Italy, Germany, France, and the United States. By 1910, the area was becoming more solidly Italian, although 32 Cornelia Street remained home entirely to black families. By 1920, Cornelia Street, and most of the rest of the South Village, was heavily Italian; New York’s African-American population had, by this time, largely migrated north to Harlem.

The presence of a substantial black community is also evident in the evolution of local churches. As the population changed, the early Protestant congregations, with their largely white memberships, either disbanded or moved north to be closer to their congregants, and sold their buildings. Some were immediately demolished and replaced by tenements, but others were sold to congregations that met the needs of the area's new residents. Several churches, for example, were sold to black congregations. In 1862, the Sullivan Street Methodist Episcopal Church at 214 Sullivan Street between Bleecker and West 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets became the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Two decades later, in 1883, the Church of St. Benedict the Moor, the first church established in the north for black Roman Catholics, acquired the imposing Greek Revival church building that had been erected by the Third Universalist Society at 210 Bleecker Street at Downing Street.<sup>30</sup> Both of these historic African-American church buildings have been demolished.

While the 1880 United States census indicates that a substantial black community had developed in the South Village, it also shows that the area was far from a homogeneous one. Indeed, this was an area with a diverse population. Many people living in the new and old tenements were working-class residents born in the United States, with other more recent immigrants from Ireland, England, and the German-speaking states of Central Europe. This settlement pattern is not unexpected in New York in 1880, when the largest number of immigrants came from England, Ireland, and Germany. The presence of a sizable French community, living on the streets south of Washington Square and as far east as Broadway, is more unexpected. This "*Quartier Français*," settled in part by exiles following the 1871 Paris Commune, was featured in an 1879 article in *Scribner's Monthly*. Author William Rideing reported that the French were an "insular and exclusive group...of the lowest and poorest class," although he admitted



**Figure 45. Making Artificial Leaves, 1879.** (*Scribner's Monthly.*)

that “the denizens of the quarter are mostly industrious, thrifty and honest.”<sup>31</sup> He reports on local French restaurants and *boulangeries* and the fact that many apartments doubled as factories for the manufacture of artificial flowers and leaves and for feather dying; “in the attics of the tenement houses entire families are found engaged in one of these occupations.”<sup>32</sup> *Scribner's* provided an illustration of a factory where artificial leaves were manufactured (*Figure 45*). It is clear from the image, which shows women working in a room articulated with monumental Ionic columns, that this factory is in a converted row house.

By the 1890s, the population of the district was again changing as the South Village became a major center of Italian settlement. Large-scale Italian immigration to America began in the mid-1880s and continued into the first decades of the twentieth century. The South Village was not the first location in New York where Italians settled – the Lower East Side, west of the Bowery, along Elizabeth and nearby streets, was the earliest area with a substantial Italian population.<sup>33</sup> By 1900, however, Italians were a major group throughout the South Village, sharing streets and, in many cases, buildings with native-born residents and immigrants from Germany and elsewhere. By 1910, Italians were the dominant group. Indeed, a 1919 map of ethnic settlement patterns on Manhattan Island demarcates an Italian ethnic enclave with boundaries almost synonymous with those of



**Figure 46. Boundaries of the Italian South Village, as shown on a 1920 map illustrating the ethnic neighborhoods in New York.** (Ohman Map Co. *Map of the Borough of Manhattan and Part of the Bronx Showing Location and Extent of Racial Colonies*, 1920. Reprinted with permission from the Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.)

the South Village study area (*Figure 46*).<sup>34</sup> In contrast to Elizabeth Street and other streets on the Lower East Side where immigrants were almost entirely from Southern Italy and Sicily, southern Italians and Sicilians in the South Village mixed with immigrants from Genoa and other sections of northern Italy. According to Caroline Ware in her history of Greenwich Village, the Genoese and other Northern Italians from the Piedmont and Tuscany were the earliest Italian residents of the South Village, but by 1900, Southern Italians “began to swarm into the district . . . [and] the area had become thoroughly Italianized.”<sup>35</sup>

The dominance of Italians in the South Village is manifested in the presence of two large Roman Catholic churches that catered to this community. The earliest Italian church, indeed the first “national parish” to minister to Italians in the United States, was St. Anthony of Padua, founded in 1866.<sup>36</sup> The congregation acquired a small Methodist Church on Sullivan Street, south of Houston Street, where it was to minister to the city’s still small Italian community, as well as to the large Irish population that lived in the immediate neighborhood. Even as the Italian population increased on the surrounding blocks, the Irish continued as a presence in the parish. Donald Tricarico, who examined the church records, notes that as late as 1899, eighty-three weddings were performed for couples of Irish descent (there were 153 Italian weddings that year).<sup>37</sup>



The other Italian church in the South Village is Our Lady of Pompei.<sup>38</sup> The establishment of this parish in the 1890s reflects the large increase in the Italian population in New York, and specifically in the South Village at that time. The congregation's first home was the former Methodist church on Sullivan Street between Bleecker and West 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets that had become the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1862. Its second home, acquired in 1898, was the former Universalist Church on Bleecker Street that had housed St. Benedict the Moor, the black Roman Catholic congregation, since 1883. The influx of Italians to the South Village, coupled with the late nineteenth-century rise of the Tenderloin in the West 20s to West 50s, and later of Harlem as major centers of black settlement, resulted in an exodus of African Americans and their institutions. In *How the Other Half Lives*, Jacob Riis comments on how Italians were "overrunning the Old Africa of Thompson St., pushing the Negro rapidly uptown... occupying his home, his church, his trade and all."<sup>39</sup> As has previously been noted, the black population declined but did not disappear from the South Village until the 1930s. Indeed, Konrad Bercovici notes in his 1924 ethnic history of New York that the black residents "living in Carmine Street speak Italian as well as the Italians."<sup>40</sup>

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the picturesque street life and shops of the Italian South Village were described by travel writers and urban chroniclers, and the area attracted tourists. Of particular interest to outsiders were the local street festivals, the small cafes, and the unusual ethnic food – pasta, broccoli, and other foodstuffs that were not yet well known to most Americans. Robert Shackleton described the spirited street life of the South Village on a festival day:

The streets, arched with little oil lights in tumblers of colored glass, the flags, the banners, the festoonings, the tinsel, the flowers, the color and life of the throngs that are at once so gay and so devout, the scarlets and violets and saffrons and greens, the baldachino set up in the open air, in the open street, with its effigies of the Madonna and Child – yes; it is a veritable Naples!<sup>41</sup>

In 1925, Helena Smith Dayton and Louise Bascom Barratt quipped that “when you see a window of noodle rosettes, braids, flowers and geometrical devices imaginatively treated, you will realize that your knowledge of spaghetti and macaroni products has been extremely limited up to now.”<sup>42</sup> Some years later, the Federal Writers’ Projects’ *Guide to New York City* described:

The numerous Italian cafés and restaurants, some small and wholly native, several – particularly on West Houston Street – having city-wide fame, cater to the needs of the residents and visitors. Here are held minor fiestas, with streets strung with lights, with singing and dancing, and the sale of candies and ices.<sup>43</sup>

The gustatory delights of the neighborhood were most evident on Bleecker Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues. Here the Federal Writers’ Projects’ author recorded a “pushcart market displaying fruits and vegetables, many, such as finocchio and zucchini, exotic to Americans” and also noted the store where broccoli was said to have first been imported into the United States.<sup>44</sup>

For many Italians living in the tenements of the South Village, life was far harsher than the picturesque descriptions of the community so widely published. Most tenements contained the small, crowded apartments with minimal amenities, and these apartments were often a place of work in addition to a home. Tenement factories, or “sweat shops,” were especially prevalent in Italian immigrant neighborhoods since, by tradition, married Italian women did not leave the house for work. Instead, they took in work, toiling through the evening, often assisted by their young children. In 1912, when the National Child Labor Committee undertook a survey of child-labor conditions in America, photographer Lewis Hine recorded conditions in many South Village tenements. Hine photographed the Cattena family making the legs for Campbell Kid dolls at 71 Sullivan Street and the Romana family manufacturing dresses for the same dolls at 59 Thompson

Street (*Figure 47*). Other images show the Gatto family making pansies at 106 Thompson Street and Mrs. Barattini, the “janitoress” of 212 Sullivan Street, working at 9:00 P.M. on silk rose petals with her son and daughter.



**Figure 47. Romana Family making dresses for Campbell Kid dolls.** (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, National Child Labor Committee Collection, Reproduction Number LC-DIG-nclc-05492.)

### *Community and Social Service Buildings*

By the early years of the twentieth century, the tenement was the dominant building type in the South Village. But, as in any neighborhood, residential buildings were not the only type of structure in the area. Several important buildings were erected to meet the needs of the immigrant Italian population. The most prominent buildings were those erected to serve the spiritual needs of the area’s residents. As previously noted, America’s earliest Catholic church established to minister to



**Figure 48. St. Anthony of Padua Roman Catholic Church, 155 Sullivan Street.**

Italians was St. Anthony of Padua, with its national Italian parish combined with a local parish that was primarily Irish. The impressive rock-faced stone church facing onto Sullivan Street (*Figure 48*), and its adjoining mansard-roofed friary on Thompson Street

were designed in 1886 by Arthur Crooks. Originally built in the middle of the block between Prince and West Houston Streets, the church is now highly visible since the demolition of buildings on the south side of Houston Street in conjunction with subway construction in the 1930s resulted in St. Anthony having a corner location. The second major Catholic church built for Italian communicants, Our Lady of Pompei, commissioned a new church in 1926 when its former home was condemned for the extension of Sixth Avenue. Italian-American architect Matthew Del Gaudio's Italian Baroque-inspired church on the corner of Carmine and Bleecker Streets remains a prominent anchor in the community (*Figure 49*).

Although most Italian immigrants were members of the Catholic Church, some Italians arrived in America with anti-Catholic views, since for them, the Church in Italy had been associated with the elite. Thus, Protestant denominations established missionary churches in Italian immigrant neighborhoods seeking congregants who were alienated from the Catholic Church. The most famous of these missionary churches is the landmark Judson Memorial Church, a Baptist institution located on Washington Square South, at the northern edge of the study area. One of the most beautiful buildings in the study area is the former Bethlehem Chapel and Memorial House at 196-198 Bleecker Street, designed in 1918 as a missionary church and settlement house (*Figure 50*).



**Figure 49. Our Lady of Pompei Roman Catholic Church.**



**Figure 50. Bethlehem Chapel, 196-198 Bleecker Street.**

Construction was funded by the elite First Presbyterian Church, located on Fifth Avenue just north of Washington Square. This four-story building, originally crowned by a rooftop pergola, housed both English and Italian speaking congregations (Bethlehem Chapel for English services and Church of the Gospel for Italian services), as well as spaces for the mission's settlement work. The building was designed in an Italian-inspired style, with rough-textured pale pink stucco, multi-pane window sash (extant), and red brick highlights. This style was chosen specifically for its appropriateness in an Italian neighborhood. In 1923, an *Architectural Forum* writer noted how inspiring it was for immigrants, living "amid the miles of dreary streets of an American city," to find a building that "suggests some old quarter of a city in his homeland." Thus, according to this critic, for architect George B. Post & Sons "the problem was to plan a building which by its appearance would attract and impress favorably the people for whose use it was meant."<sup>45</sup> By the early 1930s, the chapel was rented to progressive educator Elisabeth Irwin and her experimental Little Red School House, which purchased the mission chapel in 1937 and has maintained it ever since.



**Figure 51. Children's Aid Society, 221 Sullivan Street.**

While the Bethlehem Chapel was a settlement house with a specific religious purpose, other, more secular social service organizations also appeared in the South Village in the late nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth century. One of the earliest was the Children's Aid Society which built its Sullivan Street Industrial School at 221 Sullivan Street in 1891 (*Figure 51*). This was one of approximately a dozen industrial schools and lodging houses designed by Calvert Vaux and the firm of Vaux & Radford for the Children's Aid Society, an organization founded in 1853 by Charles Loring Brace in response to the problems of vagrant children. Vaux designed at least five industrial schools where poor boys and girls would be



taught respectable trades. All were freestanding structures where light entered classrooms from at least three sides. Each of the industrial schools was privately financed by wealthy donors – in this case two women, Mrs. Joseph M. White and Miss M. W. Bruce. The Sullivan Street school is a picturesque Victorian Gothic style brick building, typical of Vaux’s work. It is still in use by the Children’s Aid Society.<sup>46</sup>



**Figure 52. Greenwich House Pottery, 16 Jones Street.**

pioneering ceramics studio was established in 1909. The present building was designed in 1928 and, like the main settlement house, it is a Colonial Revival style structure designed by the prominent architectural firm of Delano & Aldrich.

Also secular in its outlook is Greenwich House, a settlement house established in 1901 by Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch to improve the lives of the immigrant population of Greenwich Village. Greenwich House offered classes in English and in citizenship, organized activities for local children, inaugurated a neighborhood improvement organization, and ran a famous arts program. Although the main settlement house building is just outside of the study area (on Barrow Street in the Greenwich Village Historic District), the Greenwich House Pottery is at 16 Jones Street in the study area (*Figure 52*). This

The City of New York also sponsored projects in the South Village that catered to the needs of the area’s working-class immigrants. Reform efforts by the city centered on the construction of buildings that would improve the physical and intellectual lives of the city’s poor; thus libraries, bath houses, parks, and schools were major building types planned by the city during the Progressive Era in the late nineteenth century and first



**Figure 53. New York Public Library, Hudson Park Branch, 66 Leroy Street.**

decades of the twentieth century. In 1906, Carrère & Hastings designed the Hudson Park Branch of the New York Public Library on Leroy Street (*Figure 53*), and Renwick, Aspinwall & Tucker designed an adjoining public bath on Carmine Street (now the Tony Dapolito Recreation Center). Both buildings overlooked Hudson Park, which was landscaped by Carrère &

Hastings (the firm's impressive fence and gate posts are extant, but the park landscape has been redesigned several times). The Hudson Park library branch catered particularly to the Italian community. Father Antonio Demo of Our Lady of Pompei Church helped the librarians choose Italian-language books for the collection.<sup>47</sup> These two structures were originally midblock buildings, but with the southern extension of Seventh Avenue through the Village many of the buildings to the east were demolished and both buildings were given avenue facades. In 1922, a small section of the bath was demolished and an application was submitted for the construction of an addition along the new Seventh Avenue frontage. Frank Hines, the Superintendent of Public Buildings and Offices was in charge of the reconstruction project. It does not appear that the addition was erected at this time, since seven years later, in 1929, architect Mitchell Bernstein applied to build an extension along Seventh Avenue that would include a rooftop sun porch and garden; this conforms to the present building (*Figure 54*). In 1934,



**Figure 54. Tony Dapolito Recreation Center, 1 Clarkson Street.**

architect Raphael Glucroft designed a two-story wing for the library that was constructed on Seventh Avenue.



**Figure 55. P. S. 95, 16 Clarkson Street.**

Just south of Hudson Park and the public bath, on the south side of Clarkson Street, extending through the block to West Houston Street, is P.S. 95, built in 1910-12 and named the Hudson Park School in 1916 (*Figure 55*). This is one of many schools erected by the city's Board of Education in the final years of the nineteenth

century and first decades of the twentieth century as the city committed itself to the education of all its children, including the tens of thousands of immigrant children and the American-born children of recent immigrants. P.S. 95, with its Neo-Gothic ornament, was designed by C. B. J. Snyder, the Superintendent of School Buildings for the Board of Education. Snyder specialized in school buildings designed in revival styles. His major innovation in school design was planning buildings on restricted urban lots that would maximize the amount of light and air that reached each classroom. Thus, P. S. 95 is an H-plan school with large windows opening onto either the street or one of two substantial courts, which also doubled as playgrounds. When it opened, P. S. 95 had 58 classrooms with a capacity of 2,537 students. Among other amenities, the school had a fourth-floor gymnasium, first-floor playground, and a basement auditorium. Later the school building became an annex to the Chelsea Vocational High School and a school for children with mental disabilities. Now it is City As School, an alternative public high school that encourages students to learn through experience in a workplace.



### *Industrial and Commercial Building in the South Village*

Few independent commercial buildings were erected in the South Village, since most of the tenements included shops on their ground floors. There are, however, a number of notable factories and lofts in the study area. Many of these are in the eastern end of the area, along LaGuardia Place and West Houston Street, close to the industrial lofts of SoHo. Historically West Broadway was a boundary between the residential neighborhood to the west and the largely commercial and industrial area to the east. Although the old commercial and industrial buildings north of West Houston Street were demolished in the 1950s, the character of the area remains evident in SoHo, south of West Houston Street. Indeed, several industrial buildings on the east side of Thompson Street, south of West Houston Street, are the rear elevations of buildings facing onto commercial West Broadway.



**Figure 56. H. H. Upham & Co., 508 LaGuardia Place.**



**Figure 57. Granite sidewalk in front of 116-122 West Houston Street.**

Within the study area there are a few fine examples of the industrial architecture of the late nineteenth century. Perhaps the finest is 508 LaGuardia Place, a Romanesque Revival style building constructed of ironspot Roman brick and trimmed with rock-faced brick and terra cotta (*Figure 56*). The building was designed in 1891 by Brunner & Tryon, one of the most prestigious firms in New York, for H. H. Upham & Co. There are several notable commercial buildings on the north side of West Houston Street, including no. 116-122 designed in 1883 by Stephen Decatur Hatch. This simple straightforward loft building has an exceptional granite sidewalk dating from the nineteenth century (*Figure 57*). This



**Figure 58. Varitype Building, 333-337 Sixth Avenue.**

sidewalk is especially notable for the manner in which the granite forms a sloping curb cut that permitted carts to back up to the building's loading docks. The most prominent commercial building in the study area is the Varitype Building, a twelve-story "flatiron" structure at the confluence of Sixth Avenue and Cornelia Street, designed in 1907 by Fred Eberling (*Figure 58*).

The western portion of the district includes a number of commercial stables and garages. Downing Street, in particular, is lined with former stables, including a Romanesque Revival style example at no. 49 (Werner & Windolph, 1896), adorned with a projecting horse head (*Figure 59*). Next door is the Tassi Garage, designed by George Provot in 1910, a three-story building with a cast-iron ground floor and white, glazed-brick facade above (*Figure 60*). The construction of commercial garages increased dramatically in the 1920s when private automobile ownership grew. Among the finest garages from this era in New York was the recently demolished Tunnel Garage



**Figure 59. 49 Downing Street, horse head.**



**Figure 60. Tassi Garage, 47 Downing Street.**





**Figure 61. Tunnel Garage, 520 Broome Street.**



**Figure 62. Tunnel Garage medallion.**

on Broome and Thompson Streets designed in 1922 by Hector Hamilton (*Figure 61*). As its name suggests, this garage was built in anticipation of the opening of the Holland Tunnel, the first physical link for automobiles between New York and New Jersey. Until its demolition in 2006, the two-story building had a striking curved façade and retained its original steel windows, terra-cotta lettering, and a terra-cotta plaque displaying an early automobile from the 1920s (*Figure 62*); the building's owner claims to have salvaged the plaque for reinstallation in the lobby of the apartment building that will rise on the site. Somewhat later, but also striking, is the three-story Art Deco style garage at 17-19 Leroy Street (*Figure 63*) through to 18-20 Morton Street, designed in 1931 by Matthew Del Gaudio, architect of Our Lady of Pompei Church.



**Figure 63. 17-19 Leroy Street.**

### *Bohemia in the South Village*

Even as the population of the South Village was changing in the final decades of the nineteenth century with the arrival of immigrants, streets at the north end of the area, notably Bleecker Street, attracted an early group of bohemians. James McCabe, author of *Lights and Shadows of New York Life*, noted as early as 1872 that Bleecker Street was the “headquarters of Bohemianism.”<sup>48</sup> In fact, by the 1890s, Bleecker Street, West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, and adjoining streets had become notorious for their rowdy nightlife. In May 1890, the New York City newspaper, *The Press*, published an extensive article describing what it considered the city’s lowest dens of iniquity. The article was accompanied by a map of the South Village that recorded the location of all of the “dives” in the area and noted their proximity to churches, schools, and the local police station. West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street between Thompson Street and Sixth Avenue was lined with “disorderly houses” (a euphemism for a brothel), and, the reporter suggested, it “might well be named Profligate lane” because of the “licentiousness” of the behavior in the local establishments.

Bleecker Street from Broadway to Sixth Avenue was considered to be even worse – “a long lane of corruption and drunkenness. On both sides of the street are low dives where men and women of the lowest order are received as welcome guests.” For example, on the north side, between Thompson and Sullivan Streets, were Frank Carroll’s saloon, “a resort for white and colored women,” and John C. Dodd’s saloon, which attracted “gamblers and degraded women.” William Hickey’s saloon at the corner of Bleecker Street and Cottage Place (Cottage Place, which no longer exists, was located west of MacDougal Street) was an elegantly appointed place with private back rooms that were available to those who paid for drinks. It shared a building with the Cottage Place Industrial School and was next door to St. Benedict’s Roman Catholic Church. The author of the *Press* article describes how “the drunken carousers of this place stagger out in the morning, tumbling against the children of the school overhead and staggering into church people wending their way to St. Benedict’s Church.”<sup>49</sup>

None of these were considered as bad as Frank Stevenson’s Slide located in the basement of no. 157. *The Press* characterized the Slide as not only the “lowest and most disgusting

place on this thoroughfare,” but “the wickedest place in New York.” The Slide was especially popular with what gay historian George Chauncey has called “fairies”: described by *The Press*, in derisive terms typical of the time, as men who were “not worthy the name of man...effeminate, degraded and addicted to vices which are inhuman and unnatural.”<sup>50</sup>

However, it was not until the early decades of the twentieth century that the blocks to the west and south of Washington Square became a nationally-famous center of bohemian culture. Artists, writers, political radicals, and others interested in a less conventional life were attracted to the cheap rents in apartments on the quaint streets of the Village. Here the bohemians lived and worked, patronizing new artistic restaurants and bars that opened near Washington Square, writing for and publishing journals such as *The Masses*, attending artistic salons, joining leftist political movements – in sum, contributing to America’s early twentieth-century artistic and literary heritage. Within the South Village, bohemian and pseudo-bohemian meeting places clustered on MacDougal Street between West 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets and on adjoining streets. These included the Provincetown Playhouse (133 MacDougal Street), the Washington Square Bookshop (135 MacDougal Street), the Liberal Club (137 MacDougal Street), Polly’s Restaurant (137 MacDougal Street basement and later at 147 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street), Café Bertolotti (West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street), the Pepper Pot (146 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street), the Samovar (148 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street), and the Mad Hatter (150 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street). The bohemian area also attracted a gay and lesbian clientele, frequenting the cheap restaurants and tearooms of the bohemian South Village, as well as their own speakeasies and tearooms, especially on MacDougal Street between West 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets. By the 1920s, notes George Chauncey, this block of MacDougal Street had become the city’s “most important and certainly the best-known locus of gay and lesbian commercial institutions.”<sup>51</sup>

### *Street Pattern Changes*

The early twentieth century is not only marked by population change in the Village, but also by major physical changes to the streetscape as wide avenues were cut through the

neighborhood. Street widening first arrived in the South Village in 1870 when Laurens Street was widened and renamed South Fifth Avenue (later West Broadway), establishing the eastern edge of the area. The portion of the widened street between West Houston Street and Washington Square South was renamed again in the early 1960s as LaGuardia Place, when it became the western boundary of the Washington Square Urban Renewal project and, specifically, the boundary of Washington Square Village. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the first decades of the twentieth century, Greenwich Village had no through north-south avenues. However, beginning in 1913, in association with the construction of the Seventh Avenue extension to the Interborough Rapid Transit Company's subway line, Seventh Avenue was cut through the neighborhood, resulting in the demolition of hundreds of buildings. This was followed in 1926-30 by the extension of Sixth Avenue through the neighborhood as part of the construction of the Independent Line subway. These two wide avenues brought traffic into Greenwich Village and separated the once uniform neighborhood into quadrants.

The bulk of the architecture on the streets to either side of the new avenues remained unchanged. However, the construction of the Sixth and Seventh Avenue extensions resulted in the construction of new buildings, often on oddly-shaped lots, facing onto the avenue. In some cases, the former party walls of buildings facing the side streets became avenue fronts. In other cases, buildings were literally cut in half and entirely new facades were constructed facing onto the avenue. For instance, part of the rear facades of the 1886 tenements at 9 and 11 Morton Street were demolished in 1914 as a result of the Seventh Avenue Extension.

Architect Robert E. LaVelle designed a new rear facade for these buildings, facing onto Seventh Avenue (*Figure 64*). Similarly, what is now 184



**Figure 64.** 51-55 Seventh Avenue South, also 9-11 Morton Street.

Sixth Avenue had a MacDougal Street address until Sixth Avenue was extended. In 1926, as a result of the avenue construction, the 1831-32 peak-roofed, Federal-style row house was given a new facade on the avenue, designed by architect Morgan O'Brien, and the peak roof was flattened (*Figure 65*).

The final change to the street pattern occurred between 1933 and the late 1950s when narrow Houston Street was widened, cutting off the north side of the South Village blocks between West Broadway and Sixth Avenue. These wide boulevards are now defining elements of the neighborhood.



**Figure 65. 184 Sixth Avenue.**

### *Architecture in the Bohemian South Village*<sup>52</sup>

The actual early twentieth century bohemian period in the Village was short lived, but the vision of a bohemian neighborhood where people were free to break away from more traditional social strictures had a far longer life span. Real estate interests, led by Village realtor Vincent Pepe, saw the potential of marketing the Village as a bohemian neighborhood. By about 1914, Pepe became aware of the possibility of profitably capitalizing on the artistic and bohemian reputation of Greenwich Village by attracting residents who could pay higher rents than most of the bohemian artists and writers. He hoped to take advantage of the increasingly large number of single professionals entering the job market and looking for apartments away from their families. The bohemian reputation of Greenwich Village was a natural attraction for educated young people who may not have been bohemian artists themselves, but were seeking a neighborhood that was open to new ideas and new lifestyles, and where inexpensive restaurants, shops, and nightspots abounded. By the 1920s, as Caroline Ware notes, “more and more of the Village population came to consist of young people holding ordinary jobs, coming from ordinary backgrounds.”<sup>53</sup>



Pepe's radical notion was to take the rundown row houses of the Village, invest a modest amount of money in improving the utilities (adding hot water, new electric lines, and improved plumbing), and make minor changes to the exterior and interior finishes in order to attract higher rents. Pepe began this rehabilitation work on Waverly Place between Washington Square West and Sixth Avenue in 1915. Soon, buildings within the study area were being updated and redesigned as a part of this movement. For example,



**Figure 66. 146 West 4th Street.**

in 1916 Pepe acquired 146 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street, a four-story and basement Greek Revival style brick row house that had become a tenement with a total rent roll of only about \$1,500 per year. In rehabilitating the old building, Pepe and his architect Frank Vitolo preserved historic details, such as original stone lintels and iron railings. Vitolo cut studio windows into the facade on each floor, giving the apartments the air of being artist's studios, although no special effort was made to rent specifically to artists. A modest tiled mansard roof crowned the building and a tall glass studio rose from the roof. The rent roll increased substantially to \$4,600 per year, since Pepe was able to rent the building to middle-class tenants (*Figure 66*).

The success of Pepe's project at 146 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street resulted in other "improvements" on the block. The most interesting of these was at 132 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street, the handsome Greek Revival row house previously discussed. This house was rehabilitated in 1917 by architect Josephine Wright Chapman, one of the first successful women architects in America. Chapman installed new plumbing and a new heating system, enlarged rooms by



Figure 67. 132 & 134 West 4th Street.

removing partitions and made other interior repairs. The intact exterior was largely retained; however, Chapman added stylish multi-pane casement windows to the parlor floor and a three-sided, angled studio window to the center of the attic level. Among those able to pay sixty to ninety dollars a month in rent for an apartment here was actor John Barrymore.<sup>54</sup> A year later, at the neighboring house at 134 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street, the young architect Raymond Hood added a full fourth floor with large, multi-pane casement windows (*Figure 67*). Both 132 and 134 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street were heard but not designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission as individual landmarks in 1967.

The rehabilitation work in the South Village peaked in the years immediately after World War I. A few other individual buildings were upgraded, but most of the work in the South Village focused on creating small artistic enclaves. The most famous of these is MacDougal-Sullivan Gardens, planned in 1917 by William Sloane Coffin's Hearth and Home Company. Coffin purchased the rundown row houses from the Low Estate, which had held the buildings since the early nineteenth century, and had his architects Francis Y. Joannes and Maxwell Hyde undertake modest redesign to the facades of the twenty-two old houses. Each house was converted into two housekeeping apartments (with kitchens) and one non-housekeeping unit (no kitchen). All of the houses share a common garden. MacDougal-Sullivan Gardens, which attracted a group of elite New Yorkers, was

something of an anomaly in the poor immigrant tenement district of the South Village. The economic and social contrast between the rehabilitated row house development and the surrounding immigrant tenements was evident in a 1928 advertisement for one of the non-housekeeping apartments. The ad catalogued the attractive features offered, but, referring to the surrounding neighborhood, admonished the potential renter not to be “misled by the approach.”<sup>55</sup>



Initially William Sloane Coffin had intended to rehabilitate all of the buildings on the block, but when this became too expensive he sold most of the old row houses on Bleecker Street (he rehabilitated the corner row houses). In 1923, the remainder of the buildings on the block were upgraded into small apartments by John D’Anna and Aniello Orza’s Village Estates, Inc., which hired Frank Vitolo as architect. As he had for Pepe, Vitolo added an artist’s studios atop each of the houses (*Figure 68*).

**Figure 68. 172-178 Bleecker Street.**

The row house rehabilitators looked around the Village for locations that had the potential to become quaint enclaves, turning West Village locations such as Grove Court and Patchin Place into popular residential complexes. In the South Village, real estate interests focused on the Minettas, the warren of short irregular streets west of MacDougal Street, that the *New York Tribune* referred to in 1919 as “the pest-hole of New York.”<sup>56</sup>





**Figure 69. 17 Minetta Street gate.**

In 1924 thirteen houses on Minetta Place and Minetta Street were converted into a picturesque residential enclave focusing on a central garden; unfortunately, most of this complex was demolished when work began on cutting Sixth Avenue through the South Village in the 1926. However, another, smaller complex from the same year still survives at 1, 3, and 5 Minetta Lane and 17 Minetta Street. Here, architect Richard Berger, Jr. transformed each house into four small apartments. All of the stoops were removed and new rear entrances were constructed off of a courtyard entered through a gate on Minetta Street (*Figure 69*).



**Figure 70. 224-228 Sullivan Street.**

Less well known is the rehabilitation of six buildings at 224-228 Sullivan Street (*Figure 70*) – three old row houses and three back buildings. In 1930, the group was purchased by Washington-Green, Inc., and combined into small apartments – eighteen or twenty in each of the front buildings and ten in each of the rear structures. Each of the eighty-eight units had a living room with a wood-burning fireplace and a kitchenette and was provided with modern plumbing, steam

heat, and electric wiring. On the exterior, only the ground-floor was altered; a stucco coating was applied to the brick and a pair of portals cut to permit entry into a passage leading to the landscaped central garden created between the front and rear buildings. The alteration permit issued by New York City's Department of Buildings does not list an architect, but newspaper articles attribute the design to Thomas Williams, vice president of Washington-Green, Inc.<sup>57</sup>

Rehabilitation work was not limited to old row houses. During the 1920s and 1930s, tenement owners also realized that by investing a limited amount of money in upgrading their buildings, they could increase rents. This is clearly evident at 11 Cornelia Street, a lot with five-story front and rear tenements designed in 1876 by John Franklin. In 1928, the old tenement apartments were converted into modern studios. As part of this extensive renovation project, outdoor toilets were removed from the rear yard and modern bathrooms installed in each of the new apartments. Architect James H. Galloway updated the street facade with the addition of fashionable, Mediterranean-inspired, rough-textured stucco, into which were impressed ornamental ship forms (*Figure 71*). The stucco is highlighted with

picturesque, irregularly-laid brick trim at the entrance and windows on the ground floor. A Spanish-tile cornice crowns the redesigned first story and additional Spanish tile marks a "bridge" spanning the narrow alley leading to the rear tenement. The complex was dubbed "Seville Studios," with the name inscribed on a metal sign shaped like a painter's palette.



**Figure 71. 11 Cornelia Street.**



In August 1928, the apartments were marketed for their modern kitchens and their “Old World” atmosphere.<sup>58</sup>

Other interesting tenement alterations are evident at the 1871 buildings at 6 and 8 Jones Street, which in 1928 acquired a unified stucco ground floor with brick surrounds at the entrance and windows, iron balconies, and metal faux-Spanish tiling (*Figure 72*).

Records indicate that these tenements were altered separately: no. 6 in 1928 by architect Ferdinand Savignano, and no.

8 the following year by

Mitchell Bernstein. At 117 Sullivan Street, Ferdinand Savignano, a designer

extremely active in the business of rehabilitating old houses in Greenwich Village, removed the old stores of an 1894 tenement and, in 1928, covered the original first floor and basement with stucco

trimmed with red brick and added large expanses of steel casement windows to the basement (*Figure 73*).

Rehabilitation projects that upgraded the utilities and rearranged the floor plans on the inside and altered all or part of the facades continued into the 1940s, as is evident at



**Figure 72. 6-8 Jones Street.**



**Figure 73. 117 Sullivan Street.**



**Figure 74. 7 Cornelia Street.**



**Figure 75. The Adora, 78 Carmine Street.**

7 Cornelia Street (**Figure 74**). In 1944, during World War II, prominent apartment house architect Mayer & Whittlesey applied for a permit to rehabilitate this tenement, but, as the *New York Times* reported, the alterations would be undertaken “when materials are available.”<sup>59</sup> It was not until 1946, after the war had ended and construction materials became available for civilian projects, that the Art Deco style alteration, focusing on a modest metal entrance canopy, was actually undertaken.

The rehabilitation of row houses in the Village helped establish the area as one that became increasingly popular with middle-class households and led to the development of a few new apartment buildings in the South Village area. Between about 1928 and 1940, a small number of interesting middle-class apartment buildings were constructed to take advantage of this new tenant market. These buildings were designed in the styles popular for urban apartment houses at the time. These are often the same traditional “homey” styles popular with the designers of suburban houses. Examples of these buildings include the Renaissance-inspired Adora at 78 Carmine Street (Charles Anderson, 1928; **Figure 75**) and the Colonial Revival style building at 16-22 Minetta Street (H. I. Feldman,





**Figure 76.** 62 Leroy Street, detail of brick and stone.

1939). Perhaps the finest of these traditional buildings is that at 62 Leroy Street, designed in 1940 by Israel Crausman. Crausman employed clinker bricks, probably manufactured in the Netherlands, and eccentrically placed blocks of rough stone to lend the building the appearance of an ancient monument (*Figure 76*).

### *Post-War Culture*

The bohemian character of the blocks close to Washington Square, established in the early decades of the twentieth century, became even more significant in the decades after World War II as these streets became central to the development of beat and hippie cultures. The buildings along MacDougal Street, Bleecker Street, West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, and nearby streets became home to music clubs that incubated many of the great folk and jazz musicians of the era. Avant-garde theaters, beat poetry venues, and the shops, restaurants, bars, and other commercial establishments frequented by artists and writers and by those attracted to the new music and to new lifestyles that developed in the area also abounded in the South Village. The places popular with each group of bohemians changed frequently, but for decades these locales centered on Bleecker and MacDougal Streets. After World War II, the most popular bohemian bar and restaurant for both straight and gay bohemians was the San Remo, an old Italian watering hole established in about 1925 on the northwest corner of Bleecker and MacDougal Streets.<sup>60</sup> According to cultural historian Steven Watson, “The younger generation of bohemians regarded the San Remo as the closest thing in New York to a Paris bar, an addiction and nightly hangout that continued into the early hours of the morning.”<sup>61</sup> Among those who were regulars at the bar were Jack Kerouac, James Agee, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Miles Davis, Dorothy Day, Frank O’Hara, Jackson Pollack, Larry Rivers, and Gore Vidal.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the center of the folk music revival was Izzy Young's Folklore Center in a storefront at 110 MacDougal Street, just south of Bleecker Street, while Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Peter, Paul & Mary, Odetta, and other leading figures could be heard in nearby clubs. Such jazz greats as Stan Getz, Dizzy Gillespie, John Coltrane, and Herbie Mann also played in local clubs. Folk and jazz venues (often with

overlapping programs) included the Village Gate (185 Thompson Street), Gerde's Folk City (founded at 11 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street in 1956 and moved to 130 West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street in 1969),<sup>62</sup>

The Gaslight (116 MacDougal Street), The Bitter End (147

Bleecker Street), the

Blue Note (131 West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street), Café Au Go Go (152 Bleecker Street; Lenny Bruce was arrested here on charges of obscenity in 1964), and the Fat Black Pussycat (105 MacDougal Street). The presence of the latter, a coffee house where Tiny Tim, Mama Cass, Richie Havens, and others performed, is still evident from the painted sign that survives on the rear facade along Minetta Street (*Figure 77*).



**Figure 77. Sign for the Fat Black Pussycat, 11-13 Minetta Street.**

On Carmine Street, the small shopfront at No. 31 was home to Café Cino, a coffee house that also became the birthplace of the Off-Off-Broadway theater movement and, in particular, was the first place to extensively program plays with gay themes. In this tiny café space, such playwrights as John Guare, William Hoffman, Robert Patrick, Sam Shepard, Doric Wilson, and Langford Wilson presented their earliest plays in the decade



beginning in 1958. Other important theaters in the South Village included the Circle in the Square at 159 Bleecker Street (the Amato Opera Company was founded here in 1951) and the Sullivan Street Playhouse (181 Sullivan Street), where *The Fantasticks* opened in May 1960 and ran for 17,162 performances, closing in January 2002. Sadly, the Circle in the Square's building has become the base for a new apartment building (**Figure 78**) and the Sullivan Street Playhouse has had its facade ripped off and interior destroyed as part of a conversion into luxury condominiums (**Figure 79**).



**Figure 78. Former Circle in the Square Theater with Apartment Tower, 159 Bleecker Street.**



**Figure 79. Former Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan Street, summer 2006.**

One important venue that attracted a variety of uses is the former Mori's Restaurant at 144-146 Bleecker Street, originally a pair of Federal row houses. In 1883, the ground floor of one of these houses was converted into Mori's Restaurant by Florentine immigrant Placido Mori. By 1920, one of the residents of the apartments upstairs was the young architect Raymond Hood. Mori had Hood design a new facade for the two buildings. Hood created a conservative Colonial Revival front with a row of Doric



**Figure 80. Raymond Hood rendering of Mori's.** (image from the book, *Raymond Hood*, essay by Robert A.M. Stern with Thomas P. Catalano, Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies: Rizzoli International Publications, 1982.)

columns at the base and carved stone plaques above (*Figure 80*). Every Friday, Hood, Ely Jacques Kahn, Joseph Urban, and other architects met here for lunch, often bringing guests including Ralph Walker and Frank Lloyd Wright. Mori's closed in 1938, and the building later served as a theater, a center for anti-fascist organizations, the restaurant Montparnasse, and, for many years as the Bleecker Street Cinema, a major venue for classic, avant-garde, and foreign films, which closed in 1990.<sup>63</sup>

Although most residents of the South Village largely interacted with members of their own ethnic, racial, religious, or social group, people of different groups shared the streets and buildings and did interact with one another. Both Irish and Italian South Village residents attended services at St. Anthony of Padua; poor Irish and African Americans lived in the same deteriorated buildings in the Minettas and frequently intermarried; black residents of the South Village became proficient in speaking Italian; and bohemians and tourists frequented the restaurants, food stores, and other shops run by immigrants. At times there were tensions. In his history of the Washington Square area, Luther Harris discusses the negative reaction that some members of the Italian community had to the Beats and the hordes of young people who descended on the South Village on weekends, noting how in 1959, street muggings, especially of interracial couples and gays, increased, and windows of new commercial establishments were smashed.<sup>64</sup> However, most people – residents and visitors alike, went about their business, interacting when necessary. No commercial establishment better reflects this mingling of cultures than the cafes of the



**Figure 81. Cafe on MacDougal Street, 1942.** (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, Reproduction Number LC-USW3-006919-E.)

South Village. These cafes were opened by Italians who were recreating a social space from Italy. The simple interiors generally centered around a large espresso machine (*Figure 81*). Cafes, especially those on MacDougal and Bleecker Streets – Reggio, Dante, Borgia, Figaro, and others – soon became popular with other groups and are symbols of the rich overlapping histories of the South Village.

**The South Village is an extraordinary area, one where the physical character is largely the result of waves of construction in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the buildings retain their integrity to an extraordinary degree, they have hosted a remarkably diverse population that has continued to evolve ever since the first affluent Protestant families settled in the area’s newly constructed row houses in the early years of the nineteenth century. The South Village has remained a vibrant neighborhood that powerfully reflects the evolution, diversity, and vitality of New York. The architecture of this district deserves preservation in recognition of the quality of design and the social and cultural history of the streets, and so that it can continue to host future generations of New Yorkers, who, undoubtedly, will add to the diversity of the neighborhood’s history.**

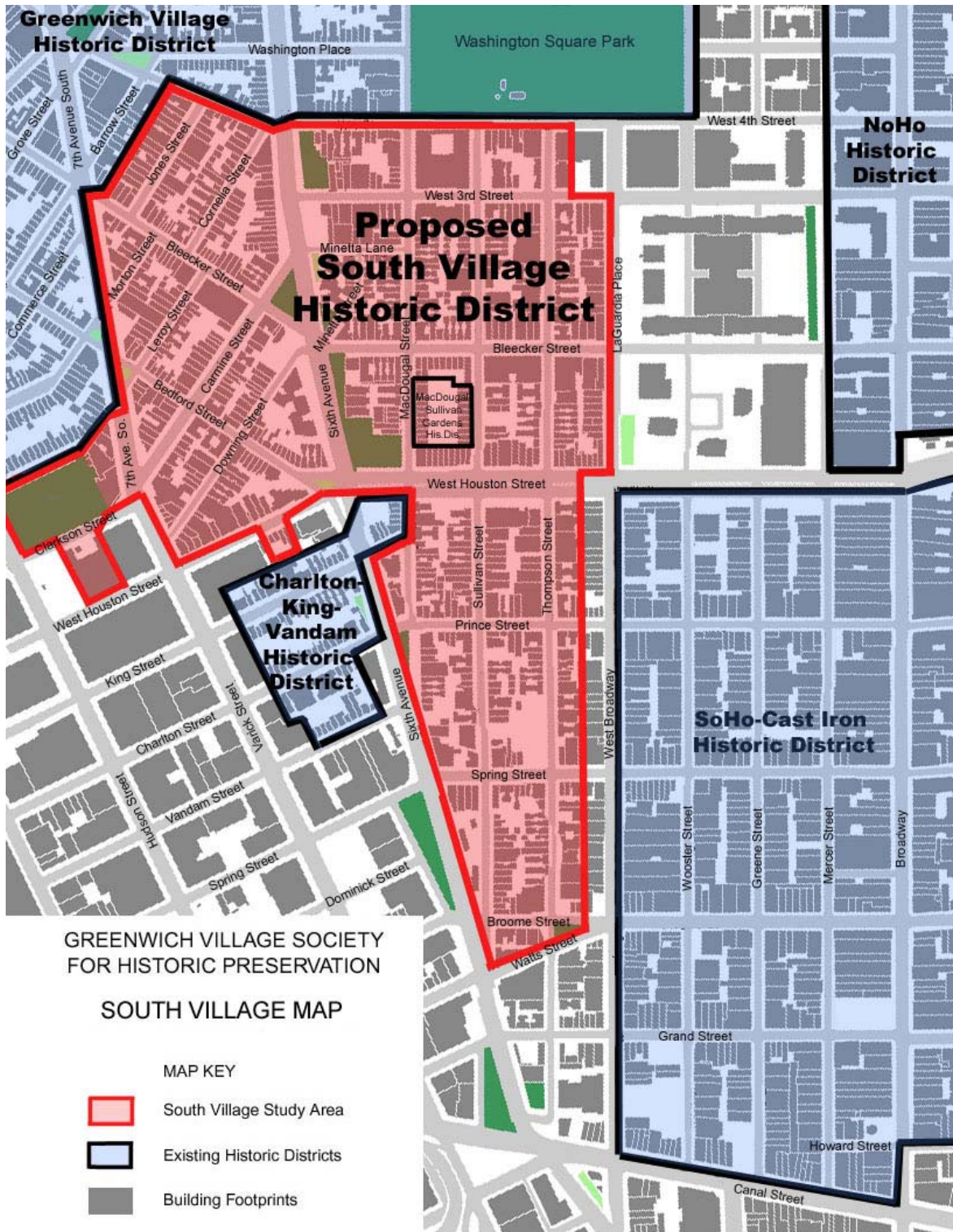
## RECOMMENDATIONS

The South Village meets the criteria for designation as a historic district by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission on several levels. Streets in the South Village are lined with an extraordinary array of row houses and tenements that reflect the history of architectural development and redevelopment in the area. This is one of the largest extant areas of working-class tenements in New York and, therefore, is one of the places where the history of working-class and immigrant life can best be explored. In addition, the buildings in the area retain their design integrity to a very high degree, with only minor alterations evident on most buildings.

The South Village study area is relatively large, with over seven hundred buildings. This is a cohesive area with all blocks having related histories of physical and social development and change. Thus, the area could be designated as a single historic district. However, the Landmarks Preservation Commission may not designate such a large district all at once. Thus, the Commission may examine the possibility of designation in phases, with major streets such as Sixth Avenue and Houston Street potentially serving as convenient points of division. It should also be noted that the area to the west of Sixth Avenue, including Cornelia, Carmine, Jones, Leroy, and adjoining streets, bears a significant relationship to the adjacent Greenwich Village Historic District. The small group of buildings, largely Federal style row houses, on the south side of West Houston Street between Sixth Avenue and Varick Street, closely relates to the buildings in the Charlton-King-Vandam Historic District, which is largely comprised of similar residential buildings. Thus, the entire area could be designated as a new South Village Historic District at once, or could be designated in phases; certain parts could alternatively be designated as additions to existing related adjacent historic districts. In any case, in light of the increasing pressure for demolition and alteration of the considerable historic resources found in the South Village, inclusion of the area in one or more historic districts as soon as possible is merited and strongly recommended.







GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY  
FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

**SOUTH VILLAGE MAP**

- MAP KEY
- South Village Study Area
  - Existing Historic Districts
  - Building Footprints



## Notes

1. New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Greenwich Village Historic District Designation Report*, 2 volumes (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1969).
2. New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *MacDougal-Sullivan Gardens Historic District Designation Report* (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1967).
3. For an introduction to the concept of urban cultural landscapes, see Dolores Hayden, "Urban Landscape History: The Sense of Place and the Politics of Space," in Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi, eds., *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 111-133.
4. Christopher Moore, "A World of Possibilities: Slavery and Freedom in Dutch New Amsterdam," in Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris, eds., *Slavery in New York* (New York: New Press and the New-York Historical Society, 2005), 42-44; Thelma Wills Foote, "Crossroads or Settlement?: The Black Freedmen's Community in Historic Greenwich Village, 1644-1855," in Rick Beard and Leslie Cohen Berlowitz, eds., *Greenwich Village: Culture and Counterculture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 120-123.
5. Early farm histories are noted in I. N. Phelps Stokes, *Iconography of Manhattan Island*, vol. 6 (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1928), 70-71, 82-83, 104-106. Other information on early land transactions from New York City Department of Finance, Conveyance Records.
6. Stokes, vol. 6, 71.
7. Charles Lockwood, *Bricks and Brownstone: The New York Row House 1783-1929* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972; reprinted, New York: Rizzoli, 2003), 42.
8. There must have been some Roman Catholics in the area from the earliest period of development, since St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, erected in 1833-34, is just outside of the study area, on the northwest corner of Sixth Avenue and Washington Street, within the boundaries of the Greenwich Village Historic District.
9. The landmark row houses in the South Village are the Federal style buildings at 83, 85, and 116 Sullivan Street, 203 Prince Street, and 127, 129, and 131 MacDougal Street, and the Greek Revival row houses at 26, 28, and 30 Jones Street.
10. Susan DeVries, "Federal Era Row Houses of Lower Manhattan," (New York: New York Landmarks Conservancy), 11.



11. Ibid, 7.
12. Ibid, 7.
13. Historic American Buildings Survey, No. NY 448.
14. These houses are traditionally dated 1852, but tax records examined by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation record buildings on the lots by 1845.
15. J. W. Purdy, "Report of the Fifth Sanitary Inspection District," in *Report of the Council of Hygiene and Public Health of the Citizens' Association of New York, Upon the Sanitary Condition of the City* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1865), 71.
16. Christopher Gray, "90 West Houston Street," *New York Times*, November 30, 2003, sec. 11, 7.
17. The discussion of tenements and tenement design is based on Andrew S. Dolkart *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City: A History of 97 Orchard Street* (Staunton, Virginia: Center for American Places, 2006).
18. Ernest Flagg, "The New York Tenement-House Evil and its Cure," *Scribner's Monthly* 16 (July 1894): 109.
19. A survey of undesignated cast-iron buildings in New York City, commissioned by the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America and completed by the author of this survey, identified five additional extant tenements with cast-iron fronts, 321 and 323 East 53<sup>rd</sup> Street (1870) and 969, 971, and 973 First Avenue (1869), all with rusticated facades; see "Cast-Iron Fronts in New York City," (Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, 2006).
20. Adolph Bloch, "History of Tenement House Legislation," *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* 84 (July 21, 1909): 227.
21. "Building Department Stormed," *New York Tribune*, April 7, 1901, 5.
22. "Tenement Law Violated," *New York Tribune*, July 23, 1901, 1; "Tenement Law Evaded, Says Mr. De Forest," *New York Times*, July 23, 1901, 2.
23. For a discussion of French flats and other early New York City apartment buildings, see Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).
24. Marges Bacon, *Ernest Flagg: Beaux-Arts Architect and Urban Reformer* (New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1986), 258-261.

25. "Dominick Abbate, 70, A Realty Man, Dies," *New York Times*, December 31, 1939, 22.
26. E. B. Warner, "Report of the Fifth Sanitary Inspection District," in *Report of the Council of Hygiene*, 67.
27. A detailed discussion of Little Africa is provided in Gerald W. McFarland, *Inside Greenwich Village: A New York City Neighborhood, 1898-1918* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 11-25.
28. James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (1930, reprinted, New York: Da Capo, 1991), 58.
29. Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), 157.
30. David W. Dunlap, *From Abyssinian to Zion: A Guide to Manhattan's Houses of Worship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 24, 195.
31. William H. Rideing, "The French Quarter of New York," *Scribner's Monthly* 19 (November 1879): 1-2.
32. *Ibid*, 7.
33. For Italian settlement in the Elizabeth Street area, see Donna R. Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change Among Italian Immigrants 1880-1930* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).
34. Ohman Map Co. *Map of the Borough of Manhattan and Part of the Bronx Showing Location and Extent of Racial Colonies* 1920. (The Lionel and Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).
35. Caroline Ware, *Greenwich Village 1920-1930: A Comment on American Civilization in the Post-War Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1935), 153.
36. Dunlap, *From Abyssinian to Zion*, 192.
37. Donald Tricarico, *The Italians of Greenwich Village: The Social Structure and Transformation of an Ethnic Community* (New York: Center For Migration Studies, 1984), 12.
38. For Our Lady of Pompei, see Mary Elizabeth Brown, *From Italian Villages to Greenwich Village: Our Lady of Pompei 1892-1992* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1992).

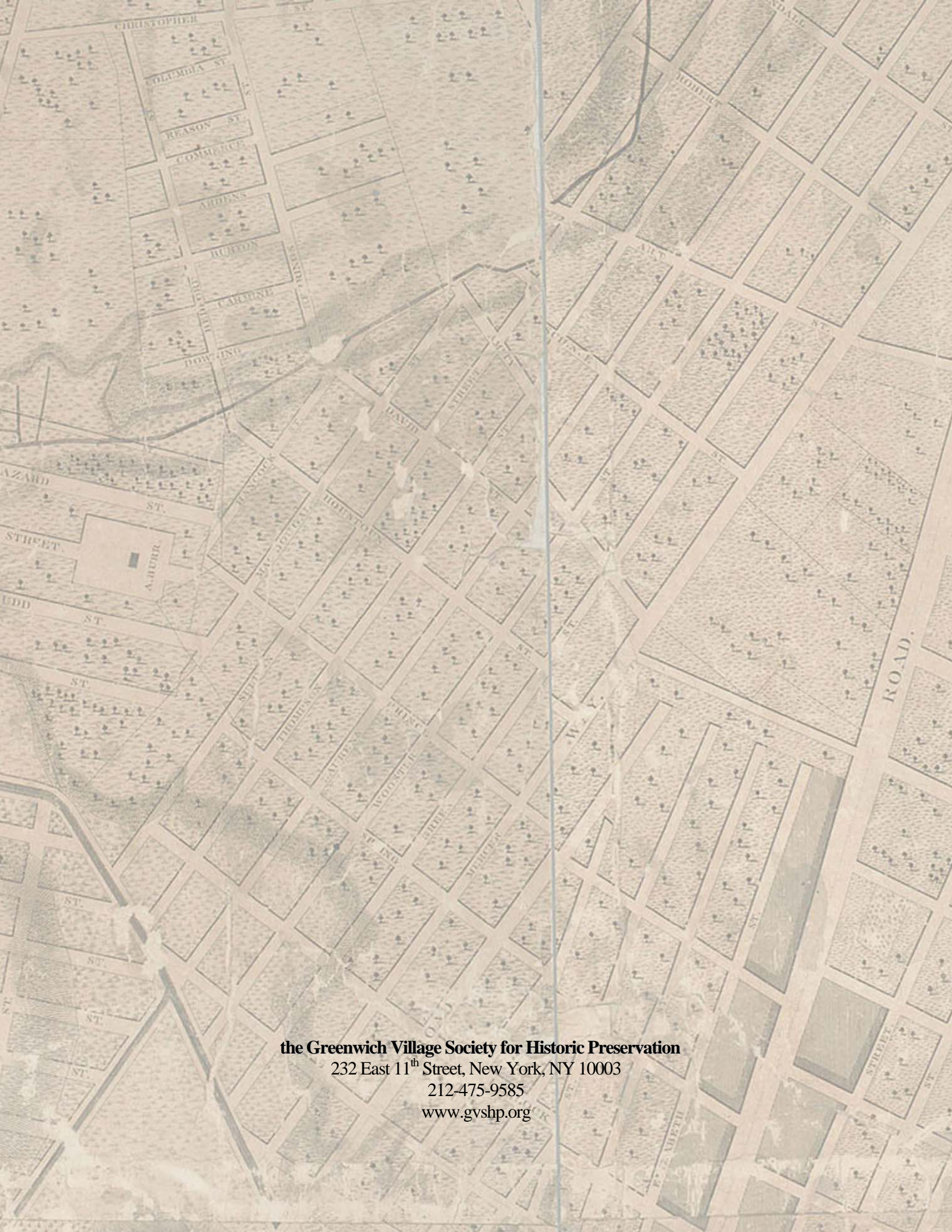
39. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, 22.
40. Konrad Bercovici, *Around the World In New York* (New York: The Century Co., 1924), 131.
41. Robert Shackleton, *The Book of New York* (Philadelphia: The Penn Publishing Co., 1917), 145.
42. Helena Smith Dayton and Louise Bascom Barratt, *New York in Seven Days* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co., 1925), 123.
43. Federal Writers' Project, *New York City Guide* (New York: Random House, 1939), 137.
44. Ibid.
45. "A New York Settlement House: Bethlehem Chapel and Memorial House," *Architectural Forum* 38 (February 1923): 67. The chapel is also discussed in Theodore Fiske Savage, *The Presbyterian Church in New York City* (New York: The Presbytery of New York, 1949), 116-117, and Christopher Gray, "Streetscapes/The Little Red School House at 196 Bleecker Street: Progressive Education in a Onetime Mission Church," *New York Times* March 29, 1998, sec. 11, 5.
46. Two of the Children's Aid Society buildings have been designated as individual landmarks – the Fourteenth Ward Industrial School (Vaux & Radford, 1888-89), at 256-258 Mott Street, and the Tompkins Square Lodging House for Boys and Industrial School (Vaux & Radford, 1886), on Tompkins Square East and East 8<sup>th</sup> Street. The buildings are discussed in Francis Kowsky, *Country, Park & City: The Architecture and Life of Calvert Vaux* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 292-298.
47. Brown, *From Italian Villages*, 65. An image of the original building was published in *Brickbuilder* 16 (January 1907), plate 5; also see Mary B. Dierickx, *The Architecture of Literacy: The Carnegie Libraries of New York City* (New York: Cooper Union, 1996), 143.
48. James B. McCabe, *Lights and Shadows of New York Life; or the Sights and Sensations of a Great City* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Co., 1872), 386.
49. "Blot Out the Crime Breeders," *The Press*, 11 May 1890, 13-15. West 3<sup>rd</sup> and Bleecker Streets are discussed on p. 15.
50. "Blot Out the Crime Breeders," 15; George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 37. The Slide was also described in "Here, Mr. Nicoll, Is a Place to Prosecute," *New York Herald*, 5 January 1892, 8, cited in Chauncey, 37-39.

51. George Chauncey, "Long-Haired Men and Short-Haired Women: Building a Gay World in the Heart of Bohemia," in Beard and Berlowitz, eds., *Greenwich Village*, 162; quoted in New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, "127 MacDougal Street House Designation Report," report written by Jay Shockley (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2004), 4; also see Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 237-243.
52. This section is largely based on research for the chapter "The Real Estate of Bohemia" in Andrew S. Dolkart's forthcoming book *Ugly Ducklings Into Swans: Redesigning Row Houses and Recreating Row House Neighborhoods* (tentative title).
53. Ware, *Greenwich Village*, 252.
54. United States Census, 1920, E. D. 718. Owner Julia Nichols also lived in the building. The house was recorded by the Historic American Buildings Survey in the 1930s (Survey No. NY 448).
55. "Apartments Unfurnished – Manhattan," *New York Times*, 23 September 1928, sec. 13, 13.
56. "The Minettas, Pest-Hole of New York, Capitulates to Great Demand For Living Accommodations and Are To Be Made Into a 'Latin Quarter,'" *New York Tribune*, November 30, 1919, sec. 3, 8.
57. "Real Estate Notes," *Wall Street Journal*, July 7, 1930, 17; "Sullivan St. Suites Built," *New York Times*, March 22, 1931, sec. 11, 6.
58. Advertisement, Seville Studios, *New York Times*, August 8, 1928, 17.
59. "Apartment Sold on West 113th St.," *New York Times*, June 12, 1944, 29.
60. The San Remo is discussed in Steven Watson, *The Birth of the Beat Generation: Visionaries, Rebels, and Hipsters, 1944-1960* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995), 119-121, and in Paul Orentlich, "Bohemia's Last Stand," *Cue*, 18 (12 February 1949): 14-15.
61. Watson, *Birth of the Beat Generation*, 120.
62. Robbie Woliver, *Bringing It All Back Home: 25 Years of American Music at Folk City* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).
63. Christopher Gray, "The Lost Frescoes Of an Artist-Soldier," *New York Times*, November 4, 1990, 8; "Placido Mori Dead," *New York Times*, July 19, 1927, 23; "Mori's In Village Is Forced to Close," *New York Times*, January 5, 1938, 23.



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**the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation**  
232 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10003  
212-475-9585  
[www.gvshp.org](http://www.gvshp.org)