

Sir Harold Evans  
2 Beekman Pl #4A  
New York, NY 10022

March 3, 2020

Hon. Sarah Carroll, Chair  
NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Centre Street, 9th Floor  
New York, NY 10007

Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor  
City of New York  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

RE: No. 14-16 Fifth Avenue in the Greenwich Village Historic District, former home of Isaac Merritt Singer

Dear Chair Carroll and Mayor de Blasio,

It has come to my attention that there is a proposal to demolish 14-16 Fifth Avenue despite its presence within the Greenwich Village Historic District. As the author of *They Made America* (2004), identified by *Fortune* magazine as one of the best books in its 75 years of publication, I am writing to express my strong support for the effort by Village Preservation to protect these historic, combined 1848 row houses. Isaac Merritt Singer (1811-1875), the great innovator of sewing machine technology and the founder of what was originally known as the Singer Company, bought No. 14 Fifth Avenue around 1859. As I detail in my book, the Singer Company was one of the first American multi-national businesses, which brought an innovative design to a mass consumer base utilizing a groundbreaking rent-to-own program.

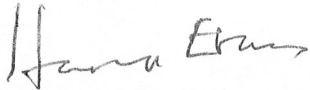
The son of a German immigrant, Isaac Merritt Singer was working on developing a printing machine when other workers sharing his building enlisted his help with a sewing machine design. Singer's ideas greatly improved the model, leading him to patent his own sewing machine and found the Singer Company the following year, in 1851. Seeing the potential of marketing the sewing machine not just to industry but to the burgeoning middle class, he created a sewing machine for the home called the "turtle back." At a cost of \$125, however, this machine was still out of reach for the average American household. To make the appliance more accessible, the company set up a rent-to-own program, unheard of in its day.

The rent-to-own system was a great triumph, spurring sales significantly. While in 1858 the company had sold only 3,594 machines, by 1861 over 16,000 had sold. It was right in the midst of this lucrative development that Singer purchased 14 Fifth Avenue for his family. Over the

next few years, following the company's sharp rise in sales and income, Singer was able to develop mass production methods using the technique of interchangeable parts, an innovation first employed in America in the manufacture of muskets for the War of 1812. This brought the cost of production down considerably and lowered the price of the machines for consumers. By 1876, the Singer Company (eventually known as the Singer Sewing Machine Company) had sold 262,316 machines, reportedly twice as many as their nearest rival.

Without a doubt, Isaac Merritt Singer's impact on the areas of design and industry are closely linked to his residency at 14 Fifth Avenue. I therefore request that you share this information with each of the Commissioners of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, so that they are aware of and take into account this vital information as they consider the application for permission to demolish this historic structure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Harold Evans".

Sir Harold Evans

## Sir Harold Evans

Sir Harold Evans was the editor of *The Sunday Times* from 1967 to 1981 and the *Times* in 1981. From 1990 until 1997, he was the president and publisher of *Random House*, and later the editorial director for *US News and World Report*, the *New York Daily News*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*. He edited three books by Henry Kissinger, *My American Journey* by Colin Powell, *Game Plan: How to Conduct the U.S. Soviet Contest* by Zbigniew Brzezinski; *Debt and Danger: The World Economic Crisis* by Harold Lever; and *The Yom Kippur War* by The Insight Team of *The Sunday Times*. He is additionally the author, in association with Edwin Taylor, of *Pictures on a Page*. Continuously in print for 37 years, the publication is the culmination of a five-volume series on editing and design featuring interviews by Henri Cartier Bresson, Bert Stern, Harry Benson, Bill Brandt, Eddie Adams, Andre Kertesz, Eugene Smith, and Richard Avedon.

Evans' best known work, *The American Century*, won critical acclaim when published in 1998, staying on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 10 weeks. The sequel, *They Made America* (2004), describes the lives of some of the country's most important inventors and innovators, and was named by *Fortune* as one of the best books in the 75 years of that magazine's publication. The latter was adapted as a four-part television mini-series that same year and as a National Public Radio special in the USA in 2005.

[sirharoldevans.com](http://sirharoldevans.com)





Georg-August-Universität  
Göttingen

Wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Fakultät  
Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte

Prof. Dr. Hartmut Berghoff | Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte |  
Platz der Göttinger Sieben 5 | 37073 Göttingen

Hon. Sarah Carroll, Chair  
NYC Landmarks Preservation  
Commission  
One Centre Street, 9th Floor  
New York, NY 10007  
USA

Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor  
City of New York  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007  
USA

**Prof. Dr. Hartmut Berghoff**

Direktor  
Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte  
Georg-August-Universität Göttingen  
Platz der Göttinger Sieben 5  
37073 Göttingen  
Germany

Telefon: +49-(0)551-39-5521 (Sekretariat)

Fax: +49-(0)551-39-12433

[berghoff@uni-goettingen.de](mailto:berghoff@uni-goettingen.de)

<http://www.uni-goettingen.de/wsg>

Göttingen, March 3rd, 2020

**RE: No. 14-16 Fifth Avenue in the Greenwich Village Historic District, former home of Isaac Merritt Singer**

Dear Chair Carroll and Mayor de Blasio,

It has come to my attention that there is a proposal to demolish 14-16 Fifth Avenue despite its presence within the Greenwich Village Historic District. As the General Editor of the collaborative research project *Immigrant Entrepreneurship: German-American Business Biographies, 1720 to the Present*, I am writing to express my strong support for the effort by Village Preservation to protect these historic, combined 1848 row houses. Isaac Merritt Singer (1811-1875), the great innovator of sewing machine technology and the founder of what was originally known as the Singer Company, bought No. 14 Fifth Avenue around 1859. This was right in the middle of the Singer's Company's historic rise to success. One of the first American multi-national businesses, this enterprise brought an innovative design to a mass consumer base utilizing a groundbreaking rent-to-own program.

The son of a German immigrant, Isaac Merritt Singer was working on developing a printing machine when other workers sharing his building enlisted his help with a sewing machine design. Singer's ideas greatly improved the model, leading him to patent his own sewing machine and found the Singer Company the following year, in 1851. Seeing the potential of marketing the sewing machine not just to industry but to the burgeoning middle class, he created a sewing machine for the home called the "turtle back." To make the appliance more accessible, the company to set up a rent-to-own program, unheard of in its day.

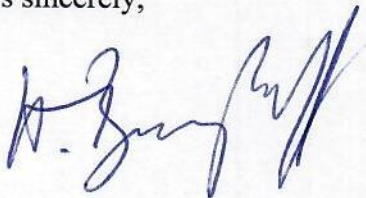


The rent-to-own system was a great triumph, spurring sales significantly. While in 1858 the company had sold only 3,594 machines, by 1861 over 16,000 had sold. It was right in the midst of this lucrative development that Singer purchased 14 Fifth Avenue for his family.

Without a doubt, Isaac Merritt Singer's impact on the areas of design and industry are closely linked to his residency at 14 Fifth Avenue. I therefore request that you share this information with each of the Commissioners of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Apart from the historical significance, the building which is planned to replace No. 14-16 will house luxury apartments out of reach for ordinary New Yorkers and be just another faceless high-rise, which will alter the architectural ensemble of the historic area for good. I ask myself if New York hasn't already had enough land speculation and whether a historic building – even if stripped of some of its special architectural features – might not be more valuable to the great city of yours and its citizens. I sincerely hope that there is a possibility to reconsider the plan to demolish 14-16 Fifth Avenue.

Yours sincerely,



Prof. Dr. Hartmut Berghoff

General Editor  
Immigrant Entrepreneurship: German-American Business Biographies  
German Historical Institute  
Washington DC

Director  
Institute for Economic and Social History  
University of Göttingen  
Platz der Göttinger Sieben 5  
37073 Göttingen  
Germany



**New Amsterdam**  
HISTORY CENTER

Dedicated to the public exploration of the early history of  
New Amsterdam and New York City

April 1, 2020

Hon. Sarah Carroll, Chair  
NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Centre Street, 9th Floor  
New York, NY 10007

Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor  
City of New York  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

RE: 14-16 Fifth Avenue in the Greenwich Village Historic District, originally built by Henry Brevoort, Jr. and former home of Bret Harte

Dear Chair Carroll and Mayor de Blasio,

It has come to my attention that there is a proposal to demolish 14-16 Fifth Avenue despite its presence within the Greenwich Village Historic District. As the Executive Director of the New Amsterdam History Center, I am writing to express my strong support for the effort by Village Preservation to protect these historic, combined 1848 row houses, which have connections to two prominent Dutch-Americans. 14-16 Fifth Avenue was originally built by the highly influential land owner Henry Brevoort, Jr. (1782-1848) in 1848. Just over two decades later, the literary icon Bret Harte lived here at the height of his career.

Henry Brevoort, Jr. was the son of his namesake father, whose family farm Fifth Avenue cut through. The elder Brevoort was so influential that he is the reason why Broadway swerves to the northwest at 10th Street – to avoid demolishing his orchard located where Grace Church stands today. The younger Henry Brevoort exerted no less of an influence upon New York's development. A patron of the arts and literature, he was known for his close association with writers Washington Irving and Sir Walter Scott. Like his father, the younger Brevoort also had designs upon shaping New York real estate, and in fact did so extensively. This stretch of Fifth Avenue's initial development, largely instigated by Brevoort, accommodated elegant townhouses and mansions housing the city's elite. In 1848, 14 and 16 Fifth Avenue were built as two of

a row of four Gothic Revival townhouses by Brevoort, just down the block from his own mansion at 24 Fifth Avenue. As the area evolved and these houses gave way to apartment buildings and hotels, Nos. 14 and 16 miraculously held on.

Bret Harte lived at No. 16, the home of his sister Eliza Knaufft, in 1871. That year, Harte moved eastward after living in and writing about the American West, having served as somewhat of a bridge between emerging West Coast writers and East Coast scholars and critics. Harte not only challenged the prejudices held against western writers and their subject matter, but he went so far as to facilitate the introduction of Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, Ina Coolbrith, Joaquin Miller, and others to the *Atlantic Monthly* and other eastern papers. The year 1871 was a critical one in the career of Harte. He was welcomed to New York and New England by the promise of fame and wealth, and signed what had been recorded as the most lucrative contract in American letters at that time. Paid ten thousand dollars to write all the fiction and poetry he could in a year for the *Atlantic Monthly*, Harte became the highest earning and most widely followed writer in America. Needless to say, Harte's stay at 16 Fifth Avenue was an essential part of his physical and professional journey during the height of his fame.

Though he was never as greatly esteemed as he was that year, Harte went on to publish dozens of stories over the course of his life, which were regularly translated into many different languages, including German, French, Italian, Swedish, and Russian. In 1877, Harte collaborated with Mark Twain on the play *Ah Sin*, for which he is commonly remembered today.

Without a doubt, the legacies of renowned Dutch-Americans Henry Brevoort, Jr. and Bret Harte are inextricable from 14-16 Fifth Avenue. Brevoort's impact on the development of this part of New York City is in many ways embodied by 14-16 Fifth Avenue. Likewise, Harte's time at 16 Fifth Avenue, though brief, represented an important stage in the author's transition from the west to the east during his most celebrated year. I therefore request that you share this information with each of the Commissioners of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, so that they are aware of and take into account this vital information as they consider the application for permission to demolish this historic structure.

Sincerely,

*Esme E. Berg*

Esme E. Berg

Executive Director

New Amsterdam History Center

1345 Avenue of the Americas, 33rd Floor

New York, NY 10105



March 4, 2020

Hon. Sarah Carroll, Chair NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Centre Street, 9th Floor  
New York, NY 10007

Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor City of New York  
City Hall New York, NY 10007

RE: 14-16 Fifth Avenue in the Greenwich Village Historic District, former home of Bret Harte


Dear Chair Carroll and Mayor de Blasio,

I have learned that there is a proposal to demolish 14-16 Fifth Avenue despite its presence within the Greenwich Village Historic District. I am writing to express my strong support for the effort by Village Preservation to protect these historic, combined 1848 row houses. Bret Harte, a leading literary figure in the United States during the nineteenth century, stayed at No. 16, the home of his sister Eliza Knauff, when he first came to New York in early 1871. As I have written in my book *Bret Harte: Opening the American Literary West* (University of Oklahoma Press), Harte's distinguished career, which bridged the divide between western writers and the eastern literary world, reached its apex in 1871. This year, Harte himself moved east and became the best known and highest paid writer in the country.

Harte travelled eastward after living in, writing about, and connecting the Atlantic coast-based scholars and critics to the American West and its authors. He not only challenged the prejudices held against these western writers and their subject matter, but as editor of the *Overland Monthly* he was instrumental in introducing Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, Ina Coolbrith, Joaquin Miller, and others to a national audience of readers. 1871 was a critical year in the career of Harte, when he was welcomed to New York and New England by the promise of fame and wealth and signed what has been recorded as the most lucrative contract in American letters at that time. Paid ten thousand dollars to write all the fiction and poetry he could in a year for the *Atlantic Monthly*, the highest salary to that date in the history of American letters, Harte became the most widely followed writer in America. Needless to say, Harte's stay at 16 Fifth Avenue was an essential part of his physical and professional journey at the height of his fame. He went on publish dozens of stories over the rest of his life, which were regularly translated into many different languages, including German, French, Italian, Swedish, and Russian. In 1877, Harte collaborated with Mark Twain on the play *Ah Sin*, for which he is commonly remembered today. For the record, too, the house in London where Harte lived toward the end of his career has been designated a historic landmark there.

Without a doubt, Harte transformed the American literary scene, and his time at 16 Fifth Avenue, though brief, was an important stage of Harte's transition from the west to the east during his most celebrated year. I therefore request that you share this information with each of the Commissioners of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, so that they are aware of and take into account this vital information as they consider the application for permission to demolish this historic structure.

Sincerely,

  
Gary Scharnhorst  
Distinguished Professor Emeritus of English  
University of New Mexico



February 19, 2020

Hon. Sarah Carroll, Chair  
NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Centre Street, 9th Floor  
New York, NY 10007

Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor  
City of New York  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

RE: No. 14-16 Fifth Avenue in the Greenwich Village Historic District, former home of Civil War Major General Daniel E. Sickles

Dear Chair Carroll and Mayor de Blasio,

It has come to my attention that there is a proposal to demolish 14-16 Fifth Avenue despite its presence within the Greenwich Village Historic District. I am writing to express my strong support for the effort by Village Preservation to protect these historic, combined 1848 row houses. No. 14 was the home of Civil War Major General Daniel E. Sickles from 1881 to 1883. As I have written in my book *The Longest Night: A Military History of the Civil War*, Major General Sickles was one of the Civil War's most prominent generals, awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during the Battle of Gettysburg.

An American politician, soldier, and diplomat, Major General Sickles recruited the New York regiments that became the Excelsior Brigade in the Army of the Potomac and served as the commander of the Third Army Corps. On the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg, Sickles defied the orders of Major General George Meade and decided to advance on Peach Orchard, a series of events that transformed the battle and led Sickles to lose his leg. He is remembered not simply for his actions during the war, which earned him the Medal of Honor, but for his efforts after the war to shape its historical record. Sickles donated his amputated limb to the Army Medical Museum in Washington DC, now the National Museum of Health and Medicine, and returned often to the museum and to Gettysburg to speak about his experience. Sickles also played a major role placing monuments on the field and establishing the Gettysburg National Military Park. When the New York State Legislature founded the New York Monuments Commission for the Battle of Gettysburg, Sickles was appointed the chairman.

A Tammany Hall Democrat, Sickles maintained a lengthy career in New York politics throughout his life, beginning with his position as member of the New York State Assembly in 1847. He was appointed the Secretary of the Legation at London by President Franklin Pierce, serving from 1853 until 1855, and later became a member of the New York State Senate from 1856 to 1857. Sickles was then elected a Democrat to the Thirty-Fifth and Thirty-Sixth Congresses (March 4, 1857 until March 3, 1861), and a chairman of the New York State Civil Service Commission from 1888 until 1889. In 1890, he became a sheriff in New York City, and three years later he was elected again as a Democrat to the Fifty-Third Congress (March 4, 1893 until March 3, 1895). Following Sickles' death on May 3, 1914, a military funeral procession marched up Fifth Avenue from Ninth Street to St. Patrick's Cathedral in his honor.

Sickles is further known for murdering Philip Barton Key II in 1959. Key, the district attorney of the District of Columbia and the son of Francis Scott Key, was having an affair with Sickles' wife, Teresa Bagioli Sickles. Sickles made history when he was acquitted based on his defense of temporary insanity, the first use of this defense in the United States.

Without a doubt, Major General Daniel E. Sickles was a key figure in Civil War and 19<sup>th</sup> century New York City political and legal history. I therefore request that you share this information with each of the Commissioners of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, so that they are aware of and take into account this vital information as they consider the application for permission to demolish this historic structure.

Sincerely,

David Eicher

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Eicher", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.



Katherine Anne Porter Society  
c/o University of Maryland Libraries  
College Park, MD 20742

February 11, 2020

Hon. Sarah Carroll, Chair  
NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Centre Street, 9th Floor  
New York, NY 10007

Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor  
City of New York  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

RE: No. 14-16 Fifth Avenue in the Greenwich Village Historic District, former home of Cyrilly Abels

Dear Chair Carroll and Mayor de Blasio,

It has come to our attention that there is a proposal to demolish 14-16 Fifth Avenue despite its presence within the Greenwich Village Historic District. As executive committee members of the Katherine Anne Porter Society, we are writing to express our strong support for the effort by Village Preservation to protect these historic, combined 1848 row houses. No. 14 was the longtime home of Cyrilly Abels, an intimate friend of and literary agent and editor to Katherine Anne Porter. Abels was a highly influential figure not only through her relationship with Porter, but also as the managing editor of *Mademoiselle* magazine and an agent for many of the most prominent writers of the twentieth century.

Abels lived at 14 Fifth Avenue for at least two decades, and throughout the most significant years of her career. From 1945 to 1960, Abels served as the managing editor of *Mademoiselle*, which she helped transform from a fashion magazine for young women into a platform for emerging writers such as Eldridge Cleaver, Truman Capote, Carson McCullers, James Baldwin, Hortense Calisher, Eugene Ionesco, Flannery O'Connor, Sylvia Plath, and James Purdy. Plath also worked for Abels at *Mademoiselle*, and later based the character Jay Cee in her landmark novel *The Bell Jar* on Abels.

After leaving the publication, Abels continued to work with and bring the spotlight to esteemed literary figures through her own private agency. Her clients included Warren Hinckle, Zelda Popkin, Christina Stead, Francis Steegmuller, T.S. Mathews, and Robert Scheer. Hinckle actually credits Abels with transforming the role of the agent into both an editor and ombudsman, as was best exemplified by her close working and personal relationship with Katherine Anne Porter.

Abels and Porter became acquainted in 1950, when Abels began soliciting Porter's writing for *Mademoiselle*. Despite a long-standing distrust of agents, in 1962 Abels became Porter's agent, and their relationship developed into an intimate friendship that endured until Abels's death in 1975. According to Alexandra Subramanian's 2001 dissertation *Katherine Anne Porter and Her Publishers*, Abels influenced the writer profoundly in these years as a reliable professional ally and a cherished friend. Abels and Porter's devoted correspondence, spanning the topics of writing, gardening, and fashion, is available to researchers and interested individuals in Porter's papers and those of Abels in the holdings of the University of Maryland Libraries. Porter's extensive correspondence with Abels will soon be available on "Katherine Anne Porter: Correspondence from the Archives, 1912-1977"

(<https://www.lib.umd.edu/kaporter-correspondence>), a project that will make publicly available digital surrogates of Porter's correspondence at the University of Maryland Libraries.

It is clear that Cyrillic Abels contributed greatly to the literary scene of the twentieth century, transformed the agent-artist relationship, and played a seminal role in the life and work of one of the most compelling literary figures of the twentieth century. Without a doubt, her very important place in New York City history is inextricably linked to Greenwich Village, a longtime hub of writers and artists. We therefore request that you share this information with each of the Commissioners of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, so that they are aware of and take into account this vital information as they consider the application for permission to demolish this historic structure.

Sincerely,

The Katherine Anne Porter Society Executive Committee Members

Jerry Findley, PhD, President of the Katherine Anne Porter Society

Beth Alvarez, PhD, Curator of Literary Manuscripts Emerita, University of Maryland

Darlene Unrue, PhD, Porter Biographer and Emerita Distinguished Professor of English,  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Alice Cheylan, PhD, Université de Toulon

Christine Grogan, PhD, University of Delaware, Dover

Jeff Lawrence, PhD, Rutgers University