



A History of the East Village and Its Architecture

by Francis Morrone

with chapters by Rebecca Amato and Jean Arrington

*

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The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation was founded in 1980 to preserve the architectural heritage and cultural history of Greenwich Village, the East Village, and NoHo.



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Foreword

Few places in New York City, indeed in America, are as rich in history as the East Village. And that history runs deep -- to New York's earliest days, and even before. The neighborhood contains streets that pre-date the Manhattan grid, following Native American trails or Dutch colonial roads. It was home to part of the earliest settlement of free Africans in North America. Its earliest extant buildings date to the 18th century, and include the oldest site of continuous religious worship in New York. Its building stock was developed by families as venerable as the Stuyvesants and the Astors. It was the home to the East River Dry Dock district, one of New York's busiest stretches of waterfront until the Erie Canal shifted the center of maritime activity to the Hudson River, making New York City the commercial capital of America.

And that's just the earliest chapter of the East Village story. While the neighborhood contained some of New York's most elegant and desirable homes from the first decades after American independence (several of which still stand today on St. Mark's Place and Second Avenue), in the 19th century the neighborhood became one of the great portals for immigrants to America. Some of the most densely-populated streets in the country, even the world, were found within its bounds, and for a half century the East Village contained the largest settlement of German speakers outside of Berlin and Vienna, whose presence is still apparent in the architecture of many of the neighborhood's tenements and institutions. Radical social movements took hold here, led by the likes of Emma Goldman and Dorothy Day.

By the early 20th century the neighborhood was part of the largest settlement of Jews in the world, and Second Avenue, the 'Yiddish Rialto,' was one of the fonts of worldwide Jewish culture and of New York popular culture. The first federally-subsidized housing development in the United States was built here. After World War II, many of the first migrants from Puerto Rico to the mainland made their home here, as did many Ukrainian and Polish refugees from communism.

Few parts of New York could be said to so thoroughly embody the devastation and the rebirth which swept through the city in the second half of the 20th century. The East Village suffered an epidemic of drugs, crime, and abandonment – by both private property owners and city government. But innovative movements took hold in the neighborhood which reimagined its streets and its buildings as homes for a new generation of urban pioneers.

In the 1960s, countercultural spaces flourished in former ethnic performance venues such as Andy Warhol's 'The Dom' on St. Mark's Place, and Bill Graham's Fillmore East on Second Avenue. Radical new forms of urban homesteading were established by CHARAS-El Bohio at the former P.S. 64, at the Liz Christie Garden (New York's first community garden) and at "squats" like C-SQUAT and the Umbrella House, where abandoned buildings and rubble-strewn lots were reclaimed and new life was breathed into them. The Cooper Square Committee

successfully fought off Robert Moses' urban renewal/destruction efforts, and charted a new path for adaptive reuse and non-displacement that manifests in today's Fourth Arts Block, among other places. Performance Space 122, LaMaMa Etc., Anthology Film Archives, and Theater for the New City took possession of formerly abandoned city-owned buildings, launching cultural entities with bold and unconventional new visions.

Cultural and artistic revolutions also emanated from the East Village during this time. In the 1960s, the Hare Krishna movement and the New York Chapter of the Young Lords were both founded in Tompkins Square. In the 1970s, punk rock was born at CBGB on the Bowery. In the 1980s, Club 57 and 51X on St. Mark's Place played a key role in launching the careers of artists such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat. The Pyramid Club on Avenue A launched a new era of politically-conscious performance art, particularly drag-based performance art, giving birth to the Wigstock Festival. The East Village can even claim credit as the birthplace of the "shag" haircut (at Paul McGregor's Haircutters, 15 St. Mark's Place) and "the happening" (at the Reuben Gallery, 61 Fourth Avenue).

The legacy of this rich cultural history can still be discerned in the streets and buildings of the East Village today. Early 19th century houses remain, though many have been altered to accommodate commerce, worship, or performance. An incredible array of civic and institutional buildings continue on, including the largest collection of CBJ Snyder schools in the city and some of New York's earliest public libraries. Houses of worship reflecting a kaleidoscope of ethnicities and religious denominations survive in every corner of the neighborhood, often shoehorned onto 25 foot wide lots. And of course one of New York's most impressive and intact arrays of 19th and early 20th century tenements live on in these blocks. Some date as far back as the first half of the 19th century when this form of housing was new, while many others were designed with florid detail by some of New York's most prominent architects, including George F. Pelham and the Herter Brothers. And in spite of its gritty, workaday veneer, the East Village can also boast works by prominent architectural luminaries such as Emery Roth, Ralph Walker, James Renwick, Calvert Vaux, and Ithiel Town, to name just a few.

But make no mistake – while this rich legacy survives in the hundred-odd blocks of the East Village, it is disappearing, and disappearing quickly. Over the years of the research and writing of this report, dozens of historic buildings in the neighborhood have been demolished or disfigured, including several early 19th century rowhouses that survived, improbably, in the easternmost reaches of the neighborhood. Churches and theaters, a hundred years old or more, have been destroyed. And cornices, wooden and cast-iron storefronts, and architectural detail that survived a century or more are being ripped from buildings, leaving them a shell of their former selves.

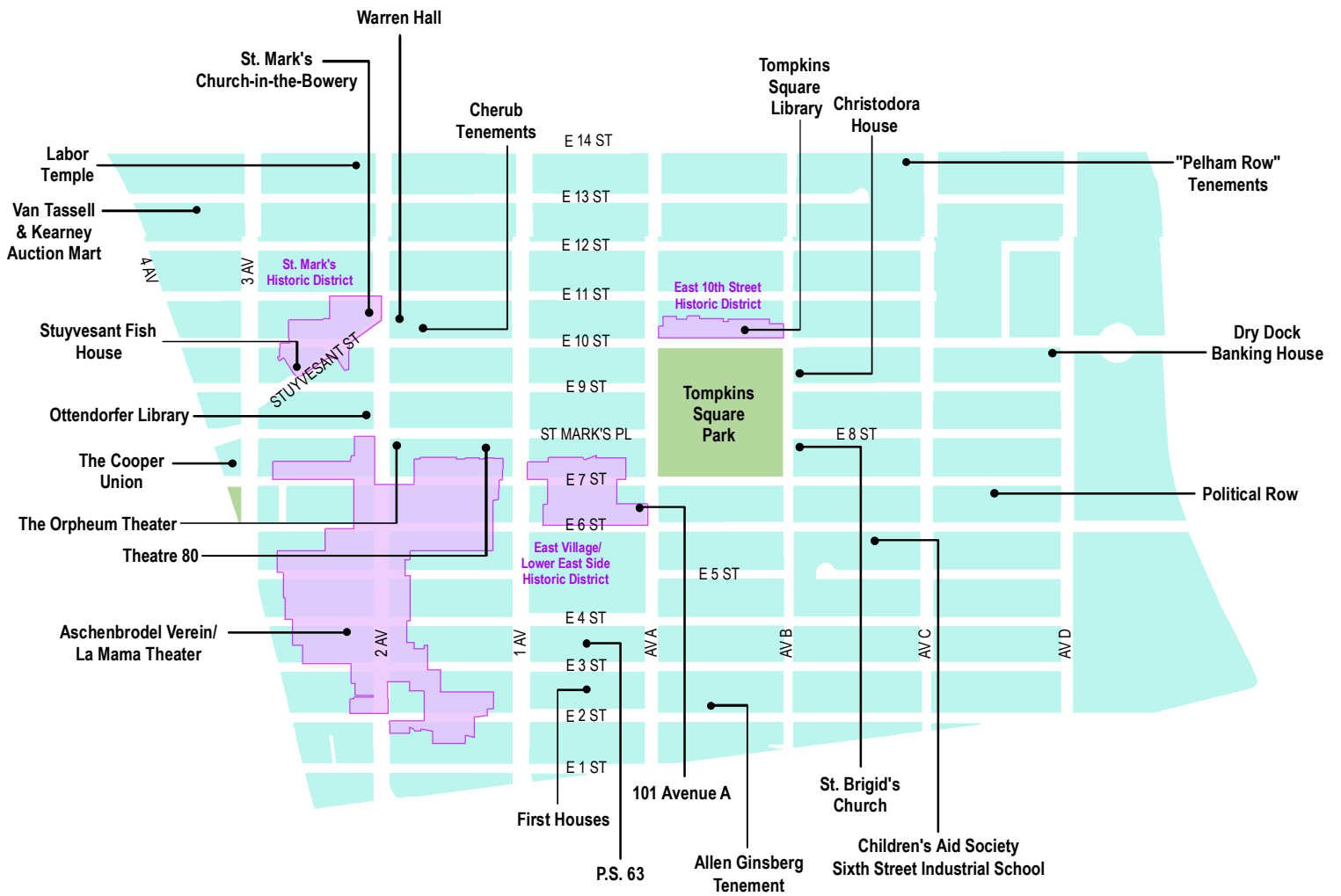
The East Village has always been a place of welcome to newcomers. But without further efforts to preserve its history, newcomers to the East Village will have no idea of, and no way to appreciate, the distinct and varied lives and experiences of those who came before them. Now is

the time for entities like the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission to act to protect the rich confluence of social, cultural, and architectural history that is the East Village.

Andrew Berman
Executive Director,
Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation
December, 2018

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I. A History of the East Village and its Architecture

In the mid-twentieth century, the term “East Village” meant one thing: an Emery Roth apartment building by that name at 235 East Seventy-Third Street. The first use in the *New York Times* of the term “East Village” to refer to the east side of Manhattan between Fourteenth and Houston Streets was on February 7, 1960.¹ Edmond J. Barnett wrote, “The walls of Jericho came tumbling down when the Third Avenue El was razed four years ago. ...When the El was wiped out, the barrier was broken between the Village and the Lower East Side.” The article reported that high rents had pressured many Greenwich Village renters, whose search for lower rents now led them to look at what they had recently considered “a slum area without comfort or prestige.” The article continued: “Rental agents — some of them advertising rooms for '\$40 and down' — are increasingly referring to the area as Village East or East Village.”

Barnett noted in the *Times* that old tenements had been renovated into modern apartments, that artists had become so eager for lofts on and near the Bowery that they offered landlords under-the-table bonuses of up to \$500 for such spaces, and that off-Broadway theater had a foothold in the area. The article said that old town houses on and near Stuyvesant Street that had become rooming houses were again owner-occupied homes, that on East Fourth Street between the Bowery and Second Avenue there was an espresso bar, and that Cooper Union's expansion program was bound to send even more artists and students eastward. Indeed, the twenty-one-story Stewart House, a luxury co-op between Broadway and Fourth Avenue and Ninth and Tenth Streets, may herald things to come. Students, the article said, now moved as far east as Avenue D, unafraid to live among the Ukrainians, Poles, Italians, and Puerto Ricans. The article is a nice snapshot of an area in transition — from Lower East Side to East Village.

In the eighteenth century, Greenwich Village was a country retreat well north of the heavily built-up parts of Manhattan. As the city's population grew, it did so in a

¹ Edmond J. Barnett, “‘Village’ Spills Across Third Avenue Divide,” *New York Times*, February 7, 1960, p. R1.

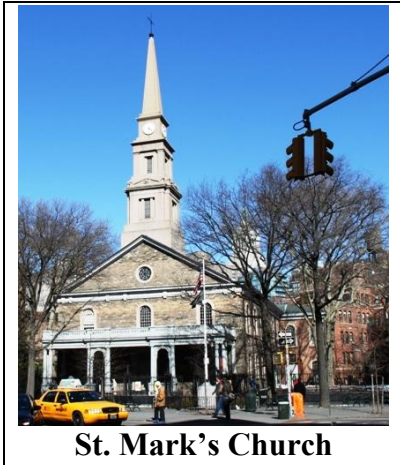
northward direction. The commuter suburb — the ideal of many well-to-do families who feared the pestilential conditions of the crowded city — had to await improvements in roads and transportation. The first commuter suburb in New York was Brooklyn Heights: the commute to and from the lower Manhattan business center over water by steam ferry (from 1814) was easier and faster than to and from Greenwich Village over land. The development of the horse omnibus and the horse-drawn streetcar in the 1820s and 1830s pulled Greenwich Village into the metropolitan orbit.² These changes encouraged speculators to move in and erect town houses on subdivided farms and estates.

The East Village, an Early Village

The last Dutch West India Company director-general, Peter Stuyvesant, came to New Amsterdam in 1647 and four years later purchased land for his farm from the Company. Stuyvesant remained in New York after he ceded New Amsterdam to the British in 1664. His farm was bounded roughly by the present Fifth Street to the south, Twentieth Street to the north, Fourth Avenue to the west, and the East River to the east.³ His house stood near the present Fourth Avenue and Eighth Street. On his farm in 1660 he built a chapel, where he was interred in 1672. Eventually the Stuyvesant farm was divided between Peter's great-grandsons, Petrus and Nicholas Stuyvesant. Nicholas called his portion of the land by the name of Bowery; Petrus called his Petersfield. (Today there is an apartment building, on Fourth Avenue and Twelfth Street, named the Petersfield.) Petrus's house, also called Petersfield, stood between the present Fifteenth and Sixteenth Streets and First and Second Avenues (the block where Stuyvesant High School opened its doors in 1907). In 1793 Petrus sold the chapel property, which had fallen into disuse, to the Episcopal Church for one dollar, and in 1799 the **Church of St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery**, at Second Avenue and Tenth Street, opened on the site. Eight generations of Stuyvesants are buried on the church's grounds.

² The horse-drawn streetcar represents a great leap forward in urban mass transportation, and made possible suburban settlements far from the city's business centers. The first streetcar line was that of the New York & Harlem Railroad, which ran along the Bowery, reaching as far north as Harlem by 1837. The dates of the opening of the streetcar line and of Thomas E. Davis's speculative housing developments are not coincidental.

³ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 178.

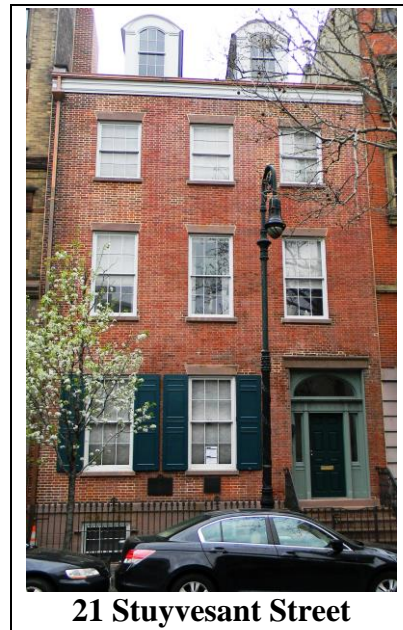


St. Mark's Church

Around the church emerged a neighborhood of town houses, known as Bowery Village. This included such houses as the one Petrus built for his daughter Elizabeth and her husband Nicholas Fish in 1803-04, at **21 Stuyvesant Street** between Second and Third Avenues. Both St. Mark's in-the-Bowery and 21 Stuyvesant Street are included in the St. Mark's Historic District, designated by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1969, with a

tiny extension in 1984. The Historic District covers portions of Tenth and Eleventh Streets between Second and Third Avenues and of Stuyvesant Street between Ninth and Tenth Streets.

In 1787 Petrus laid out a street grid on his land, which he began to subdivide in 1789.⁴ The Stuyvesant grid was eradicated by the city's own grid plan of 1811. The Stuyvesant plan can be seen in the Goerck-Mangin map of Manhattan of 1797. In it, we recognize Stuyvesant Street, of course, but not the streets to its north, such as Peter Street, Governor Street, Gerrard Street, Winthrop Street, and Tenbroeck Street, or to its south, such as Nicholas W. Street, Verplanck Street, and more. And we are no longer familiar with the north-south streets: Judith, Eliza, Margaret, Cornelia. The only street not to succumb to the city's grid was Stuyvesant Street, which seems to skew against the city grid at a southwest to northeast diagonal from Ninth to Tenth Streets between Third and Second Avenues. It actually comports with the points of the compass, as did all the streets of the original Stuyvesant grid, and as the city's own grid does not: Stuyvesant Street



21 Stuyvesant Street

⁴ New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *St. Mark's Historic District Designation Report*, 1969, p. 1.

runs in a true east-west direction. It was allowed to remain, city leaders said at the time, “both for Public convenience and for the accommodation of a large and respectable Congregation attending St Mark's Church as well as the owners and occupants of several large and commodious dwelling houses [such as No. 21], and other valuable improvements all of which would be destroyed, or rendered of but little value if that Street were closed.”⁵

When Petrus died in 1805, his land was divided between his sons Nicholas and Peter Gerard Stuyvesant. The former got the property south of Stuyvesant Street, the latter the property north of Stuyvesant Street. When Peter Gerard died in 1847 (he drowned at Niagara Falls) he was said by the diarist (and mayor 1826-7) Philip Hone to be the wealthiest man in New York, after John Jacob Astor. Of the childless Peter Gerard, Hone wrote: “How much this gentleman's son lost by never having been born!”⁶ Just two years before his death, Peter Gerard built a French Second Empire-style mansion for himself at the northwest corner of Second Avenue and Eleventh Street. Peter Gerard's will divided his properties among his nephews, Hamilton Fish (the son of Nicholas and Elizabeth of 21 Stuyvesant Street), Gerard Stuyvesant, and his great-grandnephew Stuyvesant Rutherford, who was only five years old. He had been born in Peter Gerard's earlier home, at 680 Broadway, where his mother, Margaret Stuyvesant Chanler, had been brought up under her granduncle's care. Thus, she was more like a daughter than a grandniece to Peter Gerard, and Stuyvesant Rutherford more like a grandson than a great-grandnephew.

The terms of the will, which bequeathed the new Second Avenue house to young Stuyvesant, required that he change his name to Rutherford Stuyvesant, to reflect more closely the nature of his relationship to Peter Gerard Stuyvesant. The boy did so, then later deeded the house to his father, the remarkable lawyer and astronomer Lewis Morris Rutherford, who built an astronomical observatory in the garden of the Second Avenue

⁵ *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1784-1831*, volume 18, New York: City of New York, 1917, p. 492.

⁶ Bayard Tuckerman, editor, *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851*, volume 2, New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1889, p. 322.

mansion. He equipped the observatory with one of the largest telescopes in the United States at the time. There Rutherford made groundbreaking astronomical photographs. He was also a pioneer in the use of spectroscopic analysis in astronomy. A trustee of Columbia College, Rutherford left to Columbia his scientific instruments and collection of astronomical photographs. The observatory that is today atop Columbia University's Pupin Hall is called the Rutherford Observatory. The mansion was converted to apartments in 1885, and replaced in 1935 by the six-story apartment building that still stands on the site.

In an 1831 real estate map, the disposition of the Stuyvesant lands just as the boom years got under way is clear. Peter Gerard controlled the old estate north of Stuyvesant Street, Nicholas south of Stuyvesant Street. This is with the exception of the parcels that had already been sold off, notably the blocks of Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Streets between Second and Third Avenues that were controlled by developer Thomas E. Davis. Historically, the East Village comprised the Eleventh Ward (Rivington to Fourteenth Streets and Avenue B to the East River), created by the Common Council in 1825, and the Seventeenth Ward (Rivington to Fourteenth Streets, Fourth Avenue to Avenue B), created in 1837 out of the original Eleventh Ward. To the immediate west of the Seventeenth was the Fifteenth Ward (Houston to Fourteenth Streets, Sixth to Fourth Avenues), created in 1832.⁷ (Unfortunately, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission Designation Reports have erroneously claimed that the Fifteenth Ward once extended east to the East River.) In the 1830s and 1840s a lateral swath through these three wards — Washington Square, the Bond Street and Lafayette Place neighborhoods, and St. Mark's Place and lower Second Avenue — formed the wealthiest and most fashionable residential section of New York City. While today it's in fashion to regard the East Village as a part of the Lower East Side that was renamed to make it sound nicer, the truth is that the early development of the East Village had as much in common with that of Greenwich Village to its west as with the Lower East Side to its south. Not until the mass immigration of Germans later in the century, and the development of

⁷ The ward system was used in New York politics from 1683 to 1938. Statistics collected for individual wards are invaluable in assessing social and economic trends through New York history.

Kleindeutschland on a south-north swath through the Lower East Side, from roughly Grand Street to Fourteenth Street, did the East Village's history become one with that of the Lower East Side. It diverged again, first in the gentrification wave of the 1920s that was stopped cold by the Great Depression, and then after World War II. By the turn of the twenty-first century, the gentrification of the Lower East Side put it and the East Village once again on a parallel course.



20 St. Mark's Place

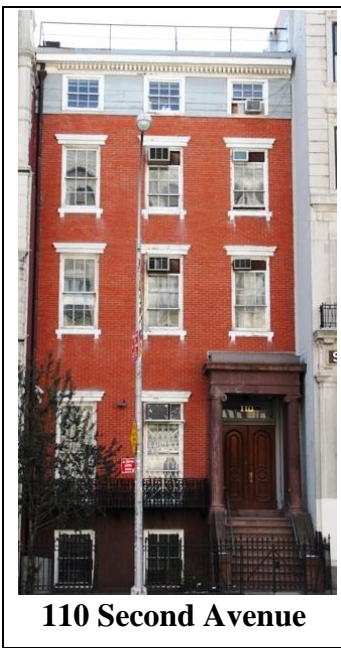


4 St. Mark's Place

The wealth and fashion of this lateral swath owed much, of course, to Washington Square and Lafayette Place. But there was considerable spillover to the east. Speculative builder Thomas E. Davis, for example, was involved in the subdivision and development of the Stuyvesant farm, and in 1831 erected grand houses on both sides of St. Mark's Place between Second and Third Avenues. A survivor with most of its original detail intact is the Daniel Leroy town house, a designated New York City Landmark, at **20 St. Mark's Place**. (Daniel Leroy was married to Susan Elizabeth Fish, daughter of Elizabeth and Nicholas Fish of 21 Stuyvesant Street, and was the brother-in-law of Senator Daniel Webster of Massachusetts. Leroy died in 1885 at his Newport cottage but was interred at St. Mark's in-the-Bowery.) This late Federal-style house, with a prominent arched doorway with a Gibbs surround, is the equal in grandeur of almost anything in the Washington Square or Bond Street neighborhoods. A similar house stands at **4 St. Mark's Place** (formerly the longtime home of punk clothier Trash & Vaudeville). In 1831 Davis built this fine house, also a designated New York

City Landmark, and in 1833 sold it to Alexander Hamilton Jr., the son of the first U.S. Treasury Secretary. Here he lived with, among other family members, his widowed mother, Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, who lived there for nine years.

Little is known about Thomas E. Davis, who was born around 1795 in England. When he came to this country he went into the distilling business in New Brunswick, New Jersey. By 1830 he was in Manhattan, buying land, including parts of freshly developed blocks. East Eighth Street, once part of the Stuyvesant farm, was opened in 1826, and Davis owned the whole of the block between Second and Third Avenues. He laid out unusually generous house lots — twenty-six feet wide, 120 feet deep. He was active in many parts of Manhattan. But he is especially known for St. Mark's Place and for other development, to the south and north, on the former Stuyvesant farm, and for purchasing a significant amount of land on the North Shore of Staten Island from Daniel Tompkins, where Davis laid the nucleus of New Brighton — and named a principal thoroughfare St. Mark's Place. He also bought and developed Fifth Avenue between Thirty-First and Thirty-Second Streets. Around the start of the Civil War he moved his family to Rome, where he lived out his years. Three of his daughters married Italian noblemen. Davis died in 1878 in Florence, Italy.⁸



Second Avenue was also quite fashionable. The grand Greek Revival townhouse at **110 Second Avenue**, between Sixth and Seventh Streets, was built circa 1837-38 and is a designated New York City Landmark. With its brownstone entablature, full Ionic columns, and beautiful ironwork, it is nearly the equal of the celebrated Greek Revival row houses on Washington Square North. From 1845 to 1857 this was the home of Ralph Mead, who had made his fortune as a commission merchant on South Street, and his wife Ann Van Wyck. (In 1874 the house became the Isaac T. Hopper Home of the Women's Prison Association, a pioneer halfway house, and has, remarkably, served in that capacity to this day. It is

⁸ Obituary, *New York Tribune*, April 1, 1878, p. 2.

often incorrectly referred to as the “Isaac T. Hopper House,” as though Hopper had lived there, which he did not.)

The Greatest Shipyard in New York

The Hooker real estate map of 1824 shows virtually no development east of Second Avenue. The 1827 map published by S. Marks of Vesey Street shows still a great deal of undeveloped land east of Second Avenue, with the conspicuous exception of the area bounded on the east by Lewis Street (which ran through the present site of the Lillian Wald Houses and the Jacob Riis Houses) and Avenue D, on the west by Avenue C, on the south by North (Houston) Street, and on the north by Twelfth Street. In the intervening three years between maps, this area had been developed by the New York Dry Dock Company. Nearby was Burnt Mill Point, where for many years stood, on an island in the marsh, Peter Stuyvesant's ruined windmill, a prominent landmark for ships in the river. But in short order, the area had been transformed into the Dry Dock District.

The New York Dry Dock Company received its charter and was granted banking privileges in 1825. This was a consortium of shipbuilders who pooled resources to make a major upgrade in the city's ship repair facilities. The company's first president was Ezra Weeks, a successful builder whose credits included the present City Hall and the Alexander and Elizabeth Hamilton country house, the Grange; Weeks may also have been the builder of Gracie Mansion. The *New-York Mirror* wrote in 1831:

[S]ome ten summers ago, when we were in the habit, “for our health's sake,” of rising at an early hour to take a stroll with a friend out to “Burnt-mill Point,” to pick mushrooms for our table, we well remember speculating on the probable object of those verdant mounds of earth which abounded in that part of the country, and which were evidently the result of manual labor. Our friend thought them to be the remains of revolutionary entrenchments; but we attributed them to the researches of money-diggers, and still believe that opinion to be correct.⁹ This region, however, is

⁹ It was a persistent fancy in old New York that the notorious privateer and pirate Captain William Kidd, onetime resident of Manhattan, had buried his supposed treasure at Burnt Mill Point.

no longer country. It is intersected with streets and avenues, and cut up into squares, like a checker-board. The city has extended in that direction till the Stuyvesant mansion is no longer out of town; and, were the old governor still living, it would be difficult to place his great arm-chair in any position that would not afford him some prospect of this growing Babel.

Should any of our readers feel a curiosity to visit this venerable ruin before its final destruction takes place, which is an event that must shortly happen, their most pleasant route would be up the Bowery and Third Avenue to Stuyvesant-street; then down the latter to the First Avenue, where they will find themselves within three hundred yards of the building. Allen-street affords a more direct course, but not so pleasant.¹⁰

In fact, new development on Avenue C and Avenue D is not all the S. Marks map shows. In the 1824 Hooker map, the eastern shoreline of Manhattan north of Sixth Street is jagged and irregular. But in the 1827 map, the shoreline has been straightened out and extended several blocks to the east. In 1824, Fourteenth Street terminated on its east end at the shoreline at Avenue B. In 1827, it extends all the way out, past Avenues C and D, to very near the present shoreline, where the F.D.R. Drive is today. Thus, between 1824 and 1827 landfill extended the East River shoreline along the East Side of Manhattan. This provided, among other things, the space for the New York Dry Dock Company's remarkable "marine railway," the first in America, the dock which was cut into the landfill to the east of Avenue D along Tenth Street. The marine railway began operation in 1826. Stephen C. Phillips, in his *Picture of New-York, and Stranger's Guide to the Commercial Metropolis of the United States*, described the marine railway:

An entirely novel and important method of repairing ships, and vessels of every description, is now practised with great success in this city, by a company incorporated for that purpose, and with banking privileges. The company have

¹⁰ S. Woodworth, "History of the Old Stuyvesant Mansion," *New-York Mirror*, Vol. IX, No. 26, December 31, 1831, p. 201.

purchased a large tract of ground near the water, at Burnt Mill Point, a little north [sic] of Manhattan Island, and south of Kip's Bay, at the eastern end of Tenth-street.

Projecting several hundred feet under water, from about high water to a depth of 20 feet, is laid an inclined plane of timber, resting on piles, firmly drove into the ground; on this inclined plane, a cradle of sufficient width to suit any vessel, is made to travel upon numerous small iron wheels; after a vessel is in the proper position, the power is applied on shore, by steam or horses, turning a windlass and cranks of a powerful description, connected with massive iron chains, which, with great ease and safety, haul up a ship of 500 or 800 tons in one or two hours, entirely high and dry; thus permitting the copper on any part to be examined and repaired, or a leak found with less trouble and expense than the old system of heaving down, or the still more expensive and tedious plan of wet docks.¹¹



143-145 Avenue D

The five-story building at **143-145 Avenue D**, at the southwest corner of Tenth Street, was built in 1827 as the New York Dry Dock Company Banking House. This was originally constructed as a four-story Federal-style structure for use as a bank, just a block from the marine railway. In 1854, the bank moved into new quarters right across Tenth Street, at 147 Avenue D. That building stood until 1961. The site was later redeveloped as the present 1.5-acre Dry

Dock Playground, a city park. Along the west side of the playground is a two-block street that used to be called Dry Dock Place and is now called Szold Place, after Henrietta

¹¹ Stephen C. Phillips, *Picture of New-York, and Stranger's Guide to the Commercial Metropolis of the United States*, New York: A.T. Goodrich, 1828.

Szold, founder of Hadassah. The first bank building still stands, having housed a laundry, a hospital for the indigent, a cigar factory, and more, before being converted into a residential building in 1999. Throughout the East Village are buildings that are like palimpsests, showing, however faintly but definitely, all the traces of their history. A good deal of the original 1827 fabric is gone from 143-145 Avenue D, replaced with materials and design from its nearly two-century ongoing metamorphosis. But the building is also the last tangible reminder of its immediate neighborhood's days as part of Manhattan's Dry Dock District. (See the Commercial and Industrial Buildings chapter for more on these buildings.)

Bear in mind that at the very time the New York Dry Dock Company built its marine railway, Thomas E. Davis developed posh residences around St. Mark's Place and Second Avenue. From its earliest days, the East Village has encompassed many worlds. Along the riverfront the East Village took shape as the shipbuilding industry grew northward. Farther inland, the East Village shared an identity with Greenwich Village to the west, as the latest settlement of the northward-marching rich.

In an article in 1902 the *New York Times* wrote:

The Eleventh Ward [Rivington to 14th Streets, Clinton Street/Avenue B to the East River] was long known as the Dry-dock district. It got its name from the number of drydocks along the river front. At one time there was nothing but shipyards along the East River, including the yards of William H. Webb and John Roach. When these yards were in full blast ... it was almost impossible to pass through the streets at noon, as an army of from 6,000 to 7,000 men would leave the yards in regiments to go home to their dinners.¹²

William Henry Webb is one of the most important names in the history of shipbuilding in America. His shipyard was located between Fifth and Seventh Streets on the East River

¹² "The Doom Near of Old 'Political Row,'" *New York Times*, May 11, 1902, p. 16.

from 1840 to 1865. There Webb built more than 130 ships,¹³ including packets, clippers, and steamers. He was born in the city in 1816, the son of a shipbuilder named Isaac Webb whose East River shipyard William inherited. William L. Calderhead wrote, “There along a waterfront hardly a mile in length lay several shipyards that produced the bulk of the packet and, later, the clipper ships built in the United States until the Civil War.”¹⁴ Webb attended Columbia College Grammar School. He launched his first packet, *Oxford*, in 1839. The elder Webb died the next year, and William ran the business for the next quarter century. At times the Webb yard employed as many as a thousand men.

Webb won renown as one of the greatest shipbuilders of his time. His 1843 thousand-ton packet *Yorkshire* made it from Liverpool to New York in sixteen days when the average was thirty. First the China trade and then the California Gold Rush created a demand for new, faster sailing vessels, and thus the clipper ship was born. Webb became one of the most prolific designers and builders of the sleek, speedy new ships, which bore such names as *Challenge*, *Invincible*, *Comet*, *Flyaway*, *Snapdragon*, *Young America*, and *Intrepid*. Webb moved, as the market demanded, from clippers to steamships. In 1858 he built *Grand Admiral*, at a cost of \$1.125 million, for the government of Russia. He also built two ironclad frigates for the Kingdom of Italy. Between 1862 and 1865 Webb built, for the Union navy, the USS *Dunderberg* (from the Swedish for “thunder mountain”), an ironclad frigate, and the longest wooden-hulled ship that had ever been built.

After the Civil War the shipbuilding industry went into a sharp and protracted decline, and Webb, who had amassed a considerable fortune both from his shipyard and from real estate, chose to retire and devote himself to philanthropy. In 1894, five years before his death, he founded the school that continues to this day as the prestigious Webb Institute of Naval Architecture (originally located in the Bronx and since 1947 located in Glen Cove, Long Island). A longtime resident of the Dry Dock District, by the time of his death he resided at 415 Fifth Avenue, between Thirty-Seventh and Thirty-Eighth Streets.

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_H._Webb, accessed August 6, 2011.

¹⁴ William L. Calderhead, “Webb, William Henry,” <http://www.anb.org/articles/10/10-01726.html>, *American National Biography Online*, February 2000, accessed August 6 2011.

Just north of Webb's shipyard, at Seventh Street, was Westervelt & Co. This was the shipyard of Jacob Aaron Westervelt (1800-79), like Webb one of the legendary ship designers and builders of the golden age of shipbuilding in New York. Among the ships he constructed at East Seventh Street was the *Brooklyn*, a steam frigate built for U.S. Navy Admiral David Farragut's fleet, which played an important role in the Civil War at the Battles of New Orleans and Mobile Bay. Here he also built a number of clippers for the China and California trades: *Eureka*, *Hornet*, *Golden Gate*, *Contest*, *Golden State*, *Cathay*. Westervelt was not the risk-taker and innovator in the quest for speed that some of his rivals were. His success was based on the dependability and seaworthiness of his vessels. During the time his shipyard was located at East Seventh Street, Westervelt, who had become involved with the reform faction of the city's Democratic Party, was elected mayor of New York. He served from 1852 to 1854. He was mayor at the time of the 1853 World's Fair — the Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations, featuring the specially constructed "Crystal Palace" — and when the land was acquired for Central Park. After his retirement from shipbuilding, in 1869, he served as president of the New York Dock Commission, but unlike Webb, apparently never lived in the district.¹⁵

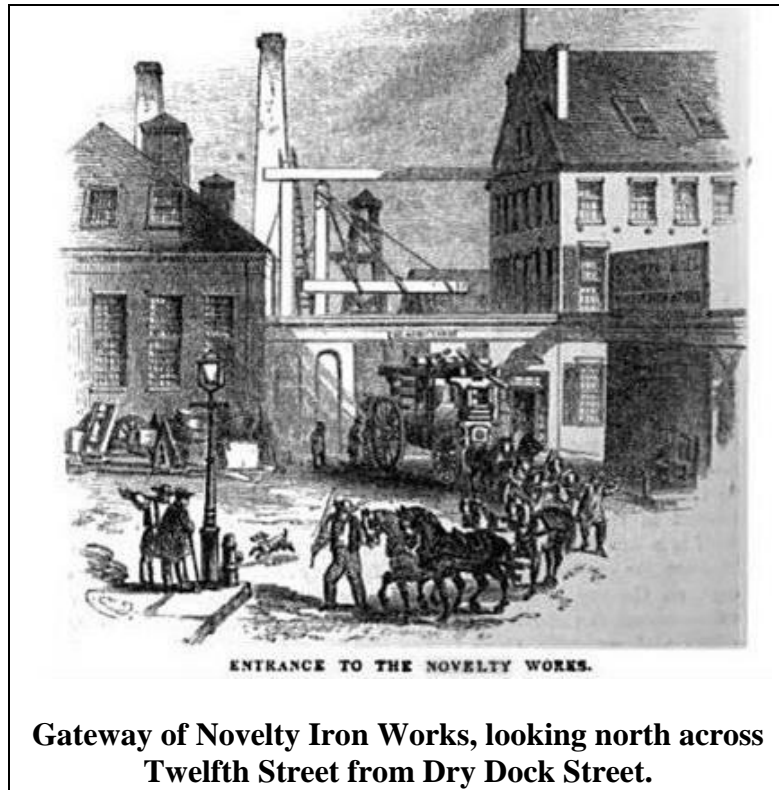
Webb and Westervelt were among the most renowned of the world's shipbuilders in the 19th century. Today the sites of Webb and Westervelt's shipyards are occupied by the Lillian Wald and Jacob Riis Houses and the F.D.R. Drive — no traces of them remain.

Many other notable firms operated along this waterfront. Novelty Iron Works may have been, by mid-century, the largest ironworks in America. Novelty produced every conceivable type of iron casting, but was especially renowned as a maker of engines for steamships. Novelty was formed around 1830 by the Reverend Eliphalet Nott, the president of Union College in Schenectady, New York, as well as an inventor working at Burnt Mill Point. (The company was originally H. Nott & Co., but was known as Novelty because the company produced the engine for a steamboat named *Novelty*. After 1837 the company became Ward, Stillman & Co., then underwent other name changes until 1855,

¹⁵ William L. Calderhead, "Westervelt, Jacob Aaron," <http://www.anb.org/articles/10/10-01733.html>, *American National Biography Online* February 2000, accessed August 6 2011.

when it was, at last, formally incorporated under the name Novelty Iron Works.) By 1850 the company had expanded to cover five acres along the river from Twelfth to Fourteenth Streets, with a gateway on Twelfth Street opposite Dry Dock Street (today's Szold Place) between Avenue C and Avenue D.

At the time, the Works employed about 1,200 workers. Novelty worked closely with the great East River shipbuilders. For example, Novelty produced the machinery for William Henry Webb's *California* (1848), the first steamship to make the voyage from New York around Cape Horn to San Francisco.¹⁶ Novelty



Gateway of Novelty Iron Works, looking north across Twelfth Street from Dry Dock Street.

produced the engines for most of the Collins Line's transatlantic steamers, and, in 1861-62, various hardware for the ironclad warship *Monitor*. Novelty's biggest competitor was the Morgan Iron Works, founded in 1838 and located just to the south, at Ninth Street and Avenue D. By the mid-1850s, "New York City housed seventeen steam engine and boiler foundries with aggregate invested capital of \$1.9 million and employment of 3,130, making the city the greatest foundry and machinery center in the nation and its premier community of practice."¹⁷

¹⁶ Jacob Abbott, "The Novelty Works," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Vol. II, No. XII, May 1851, pp. 721-734.

¹⁷ David R. Meyer, *Networked Machinists: High-Technology Industries in Antebellum America*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, p. 137.

One other East River industrialist deserves mention. Daniel D. Badger, a New Hampshire native who first began to experiment with cast iron as a material for building facades in Boston in the early 1840s, moved to New York and established a foundry on Duane Street in 1848. By 1854 Badger’s works had moved to Thirteenth and Fourteenth Streets between Avenue B and Avenue C. There, wrote the *New York Times*, “he had every department of his business provided for, from the foundry to the pattern shops and architectural rooms.”¹⁸ The firm was called Architectural Iron Works. Badger’s “ever-growing great iron works,” wrote Margot Gayle, “turned out some of the most dramatic iron buildings this country has ever seen.”¹⁹ His masterpiece was the Venetian Renaissance-style Haughwout Building, on the northeast corner of Broadway and Broome Street, built in 1856. Though that building is in SoHo, it was produced in the East Village. In 1860, Architectural Iron Works employed 400 workers. The factory complex in the East Village made “Iron Store Fronts, Manufactories, Grain Warehouses, Arsenals, Ferry Houses, Bridges, Roofs, Domes, Rolling Shutters, Venetian Blinds, Wrought Sashes, Railings, Verandahs, Balustrades” — the list goes on.²⁰ Badger retired in 1873. Two of his top employees migrated almost directly across the East River from East Thirteenth Street in the East Village to North Eleventh Street in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, to establish Hecla Architectural Iron Works, which lasted to the 1920s.



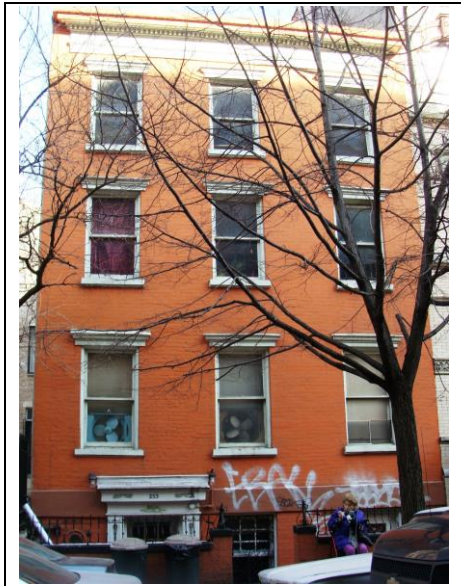
“Political Row,” East Seventh Street between Avenues C and D

Mention should here be made of another splendid survivor of Dry Dock District days, and that is old “**Political Row**,” East Seventh Street between Avenue C and Avenue D, where, according to the *Times*, “more politicians of every party were born and brought up

¹⁸ Obituary, *New York Times*, November 19, 1884, p. 2.

¹⁹ Margot Gayle, *Cast-Iron Architecture in New York*, New York: Dover Publications, 1974, p. xiii.

²⁰ J. Leander Bishop, *A History of American Manufacturers from 1608 to 1860*, third ed., volume 3, Philadelphia: Edward Young & Co., 1868, p. 205.



253 East Seventh Street

than on any other street in this city.”²¹ The 1902 *Times* article, “The Doom Near of Old ‘Political Row,’” lamented that “This week will see the beginning of the tearing down of more of the few old houses on ‘Political Row.’ ... In the place of these old houses will be built double tenements, six stories high, and equipped to accommodate forty-eight families.” It's true that there are tenements on the block. It's also true that, 112 years after the *Times* article, many of Political Row's houses are with us still, and several are in a remarkable state of preservation, enough to tell the story of this

fascinating street. In 1902, the *Times* noted, three luminaries of the city's politics still resided on the block: Patrick Keenan, the leader of the Sixteenth Assembly District, who lived at **No. 253**, a Greek Revival house built in 1843 which survived until 2015 when it was demolished; Leonard A. Giegerich, Justice of the New York State Supreme Court; and Benjamin Hoffman, Judge of the District Court. The *Times* noted:

Two score years ago [c. 1862] the old Eleventh Ward, which had the centre of its circle in “Political Row,” was distinctly an American district, and any foreigners who found their way into the ward were promptly made to feel so uncomfortable that they moved out. At that time East Seventh Street was well up town, and there was hardly a house in the ward that contained more than one family. The streets were then lined with trees covered with luxuriant foliage, and each house had its green patch of yard. Then Avenue D, which now runs between two towering walls of tenements, teeming with men, women, and children of foreign birth, was a thoroughfare that was made brilliant every Sunday by a promenade of all the youth and fashion of the neighborhood.²²

²¹ "The Doom Near of Old 'Political Row,'" op. cit., p. 15

²² Ibid.

East Seventh Street between Avenue C and Avenue D is still, it might be noted, lined with trees covered with luxuriant foliage. The *Times* continued:

It was largely due to the great numbers of artisans and mechanics employed in the different [ship]yards that the Eleventh Ward got such a large population as to make it the most fertile field for political work in the city.²³

The *Times* notes that the exodus from Political Row began in the early 1880s. Among the first to go was William Henry Webb, the great shipbuilder who, if not a politician, was a highly influential figure in the community. Webb owned 247 East Seventh Street, built in 1844 and converted in 1893 to the Tammany-affiliated Jefferson Club by the architect Walter H.C. Hornum, after Webb retired from shipbuilding business and moved uptown, to Murray Hill. The Jefferson Club was formed in 1877 and every Political Row resident who was a Tammany member (the Row was politically heterodox, with both Democrats and Republicans) was among the Jefferson Club's membership, which numbered 700 in 1902.

The article lists a dizzying number of district leaders, state assemblymen, judges, aldermen, county clerks, defeated mayoral candidates, Congressmen, and commissioners, few of whose names are familiar to us today but were as familiar in their day as their present-day counterparts are to anyone who follows the news or is involved with the local community board. (For more on the houses on Political Row, see the Row Houses chapter.)

A final landmark of Dry Dock District days is **St. Brigid's Roman Catholic Church** at 119 Avenue B. The church was built in 1848 to serve the growing number of Catholic workers and their families who had begun to crowd into the far eastern part of the East Village. It is said the church was built by Irish shipwrights who worked in the East River shipyards. It was built right in the midst of the Irish famine migrations. St. Brigid (whose name is also often rendered as Brigit or Bridget) was a fifth-century Irish nun and is one of the three patron saints — with St. Columba and St. Patrick — of Ireland. She is also

²³ Ibid.

the patron saint of sailors — appropriate given that the church served a major shipbuilding center. With demographic changes in the neighborhood, the church came to serve Slavic and Italian congregations, and most recently a largely Spanish-speaking congregation for whom St. Brigid's is Santa Brígida's.



The architect was Patrick Charles Keely (1816-96), who had only come to America (and settled in Brooklyn) in 1842, at the age of 26. Keely's timing was auspicious. He was the son of a builder and had been brought up to do the same. A carpenter (he himself carved the reredos of St. Brigid's) who became an architect, he established himself as the most competent Roman Catholic architect-

builder in New York, or even the country, right at the beginning of the biggest build-out of Catholic churches the country had ever seen. He was the most prolific Catholic and most prolific Gothic architect in the nation's history, and St. Brigid's was the first of his many churches in Manhattan. It is a simple Gothic church with twin towers that flank a gabled central section with a triple portal of pointed arch openings with three large pointed windows above. A crenellated parapet outlines the roof gable. The towers originally bore high spiky spires that were a major neighborhood landmark. The spires were removed in 1962. (St. Brigid's has had a remarkable recent history, discussed in the Houses of Worship chapter.) St. Brigid's remains the great Irish landmark of the East Village.

Population of the Eleventh and Seventeenth Wards²⁴

Year	Eleventh	Seventeenth
1830	14,918	
1840	17,052	18,619
1850	43,758	43,766
1860	59,571	72,953
1870	64,230	95,365
1880	68,778	104,837
1890	75,426	103,158
1900	99,144	130,796
1910	136,543	172,332

Population density per square mile, Eleventh and Seventeenth Wards (citywide rank in parentheses):

Year	Eleventh	Seventeenth
1830	43,796 (11)	
1840	50,061 (11)	41,090 (15)
1850	128,464 (7)	96,587 (10)
1860	174,887 (4)	161,000 (7)
1870	188,565 (4)	210,461 (2)
1880	201,917 (4)	231,364 (2)
1890	221,434 (4)	227,659 (3)
1900	291,065 (3)	288,653 (4)
1910	400,860 (2)	380,319 (3)

(Note: In 1830 there were 14 wards; in 1840, 17; in 1850, 19; in 1860 and subsequently, 22.)

²⁴ <http://www.demographia.com/db-nyc-ward1800.htm>, accessed August 6, 2011.

Little Germany

Change swept over the East Village in the 1850s. In 1859, on the western edge of the East Village, the **Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art** opened in a large building — one of the most imposing buildings in the city at the time — on a site bounded by Seventh and Eighth Streets and Third Avenue and Cooper Square. The building was designed by the Prussian-born architect Frederick A. Petersen (whose name is often misrendered as Peterson) in a variation of the Bavarian *Rundbogenstil*, faced in brownstone. The story of this remarkable institution is well known, and the building in



1966 was designated one of the first New York City Landmarks. Cooper Union brought to its neighborhood an institutional presence that marked, if not caused, the end of the glory days of Lafayette Place, directly to the south of Cooper Union, and St. Mark's Place, directly to the east. Institutions also came to Second Avenue. In 1857 the New-York Historical Society moved to its first purpose-built home,

designed by Mettam & Burke, at the southeast corner of Second Avenue and Eleventh Street, where the Peter Stuyvesant apartment building has stood since 1927. The Society — New York's oldest museum — remained at that location for fifty-one years, until it moved to Central Park West. In 1856, the thirty-six-year-old New York Eye and Ear Infirmary moved to the northeast corner of Second Avenue and Thirteenth Street. The Infirmary — the oldest specialized hospital in the Western Hemisphere — has remained and grown on and around that site to this day. Cooper Union, the New-York Historical Society, and the Eye and Ear Infirmary gave to the St. Mark's neighborhood a character very different from that of its fashionable row house days.

Ever restless, the well-to-do continued their northward migration. Murray Hill was now the fashionable neighborhood. Into the breach came the Germans. Germans migrated in vast numbers to America for a variety of reasons, which included the same potato blight that led to the mass immigration of the Irish. Many of the first-wave (1845-1864)

Germans came for reasons connected in some way to the political upheavals and revolutions in their homeland in 1848. In the census of 1855, some 18 percent of all New York City residents were German-born. The vast majority of them lived in *Kleindeutschland*, “Little Germany,” which was by far the largest non-English-speaking community in America. Great landmarks of

Kleindeutschland days include the **Ottendorfer Branch** of the New York Public Library at 137 Second Avenue,



Ottendorfer Branch (left) and Stuyvesant Polyclinic (right)

on the façade of which appear the words “Freie Bibliothek und Lesehalle,” and next door at No. 135, the former Deutsches Dispensary (later the **Stuyvesant Polyclinic**). These were both built in 1883-84 by Oswald Ottendorfer, the 1848 revolutionary who came to New York in 1849 and five years later became editor (and, after he married the owner's widow in 1859, publisher) of the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, the German-language daily newspaper. Both buildings were designed by the prominent German-born architect William Schickel, and both are designated landmarks.

German landmarks dot the East Village. The building that is now the well-known La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club at 74 East Fourth Street (a designated landmark) was built in 1873 as the Aschenbroedel Verein, a social and benevolent society for the city's German orchestral musicians. The society claimed among its members most of the city's leading musicians and conductors, including New York Philharmonic conductors Carl Bergmann and Theodore Thomas, New York Symphony Orchestra conductor Walter

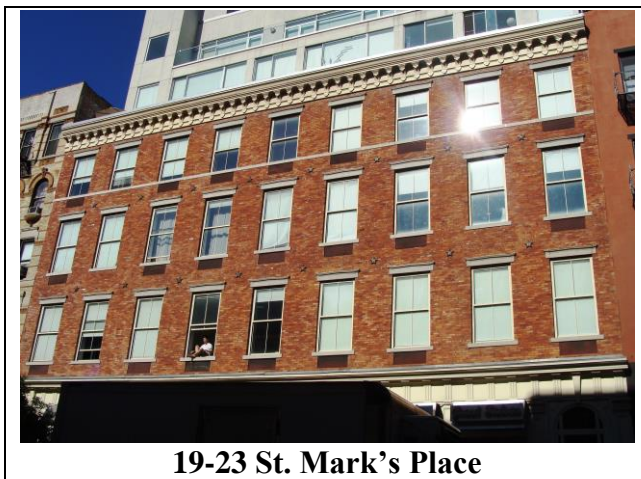
Damrosch, and the violinist Carl Fischer who founded his music publishing firm in 1872, which is still commemorated in a large mural facing Astor Place. It remained in the building until the society moved to Yorkville in 1892.

At **12 St. Mark's Place** stands the former Deutsche-Amerikanische Schützen Gesellschaft (German-American Shooting Society), built in 1888-89; it is a designated landmark. In 1874, a German singing club called the Arion Society bought two town houses — **19 and 21 St. Mark's Place**, built in 1833 by Thomas E. Davis — and converted them to their new clubhouse. In 1887 the Arion Society moved uptown (to Park Avenue and Fifty-Ninth Street) and the St. Mark's Place clubhouse was purchased by the prominent Baden-born brewer George Ehret. He joined the building to **23 St. Mark's Place**, another Thomas E. Davis-



12 St. Mark's Place

built town house that had been converted to a multiple dwelling. Ehret thus created Arlington Hall, one of the many “halls” that once played a large role in the life of the community. Such halls were where dances, banquets, and memorial services took place.

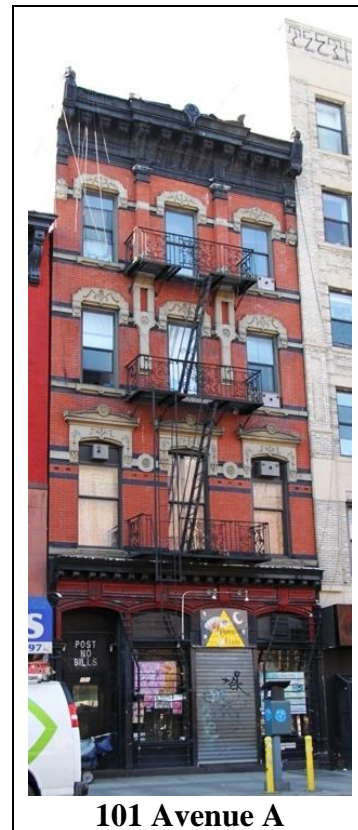


19-23 St. Mark's Place

But they were also the scene of political rallies (for example, in 1895 Police Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt, and in 1905 mayoral candidate William Randolph Hearst, gave a speech at Arlington Hall), as well as labor meetings; indeed, it may be said that halls such as these are where the American labor movement was born.

A building with a fascinating history of connections to the German community is **101 Avenue A**, between East Sixth and Seventh Streets. This building is today widely known as the home of the Pyramid Club, a nightclub opened in 1979. But it began life in 1876 as a four-story tenement and saloon designed by the prolific Prussian-born tenement architect William Jose. It is a pre-Old Law tenement with an elaborate neo-Grec façade. The building is miraculously intact, with its original cornice, incised lintels, polychrome belt courses, and ornamental iron fire escape. The building also, remarkably, retains much of the original storefront detail. It was built by the Peter Doelger Brewery, which in an earlier building on the site had opened its first brewery in 1859.²⁵ (Peter had earlier operated a brewery with his brother, Joseph Doelger, on Third Street between Avenue A and Avenue B. The brewery at 101 Avenue A was the first under Peter's name alone.) Peter Doelger, a brewer's son, had come to this country from Bavaria in 1850, at the age of eighteen. In 1863 he moved the brewery to East Fifty-Fifth Street between First Avenue and Avenue A (now called Sutton Place South), but retained ownership of the Avenue A property. The brewery, in fact, appears to have owned the property until 1932.

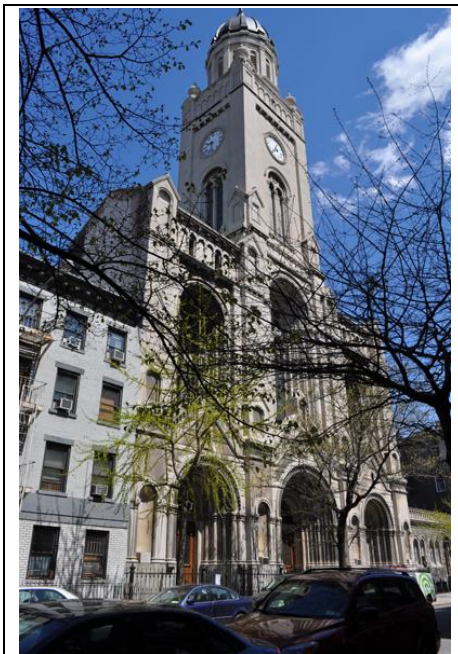
From the time the building opened in 1876, until 1936, the ground-floor space served as a “hall.” It was at first known as Kern's Hall. (In 1879 a dinner was held at Kern's Hall to celebrate the redesign and reopening of Tompkins Square.) Sometime in the 1880s the hall ceased to be Kern's, but remained a hall; later names included Shultz's Hall and Fritz's Hall. In 1886, New York City and Brooklyn representatives of the two-year-old American Federation of Labor met at 101 Avenue A to make their plans for the forthcoming state convention. In 1904 a memorial service for the victims of the *General Slocum* disaster (see below) was held at the hall, with an address by the Reverend George Haas, pastor of the nearby St. Mark's Lutheran Church.



²⁵ Obituary, *New York Tribune*, December 16, 1912, p. 11.

Around 1906 it became Leppig's Hall. John Leppig was a German married to an Irish woman named Katherine Moroney. He was known as the “Mayor of Avenue A.” When he died in 1907 the hall passed to John Leppig Jr., who also inherited his father's title of “Mayor of Avenue A.” Most people think that the title of “mayor” of a block or a street is an honorific bestowed in the most casual way by neighborhood residents upon an esteemed elder member of the community. But there was once a “League of Locality Mayors” that included the “Mayor of Avenue B,” the “Mayor of Essex Street,” the “Mayor of Washington Heights,” and so on. These “mayors” took their positions, conferred upon them by the good opinion of their neighbors, quite seriously, and felt responsible for helping those in need. Nonetheless, the newspapers' reports of the League's meetings have a decidedly jocular tone. John Leppig Jr. was a member of this League. The younger Leppig managed to keep going through Prohibition but eventually closed the hall, retired, and in 1936 moved from 101 Avenue A (where he lived upstairs from the hall, as his father had before him) to Riverdale, where he died a year later.²⁶ A funeral service was held at the Church of the Most Holy Redeemer on July 15, 1937.²⁷

(Some years later the hall's space would become a notable jazz club and later still the fabled Pyramid Club, subjects explored in the Arts chapter.)



Roman Catholic Church of the Most Holy Redeemer

Most of the first-wave German immigrants were Roman Catholic. The **Roman Catholic Church of the Most Holy Redeemer** at 173 East Third Street, between Avenue A and Avenue B, was known as the “German cathedral.” It was consecrated on November 29, 1852. Archbishop John Hughes presided over the dedication, and also present was Bishop John Neumann of Philadelphia, who came to America as a Redemptorist missionary and who is to date the only male American citizen to be

²⁶ "John Leppig," *New York Times*, July 13, 1937, p. 20.

²⁷ "Deaths," *New York Times* July 14, 1937, p. 21.

canonized as a saint of the Roman Catholic Church. The church, in a Baroque style, had a 250-foot-high tower — not as high as that of the then six-year-old Trinity Church on Broadway and Wall Street, but high enough to dominate the skyline of the East Village. The church was founded by Redemptorist priests whom Archbishop Hughes had sent for specifically to minister to the city's rapidly growing population of German Catholics. Most Holy Redeemer, perhaps the most impressive ecclesiastical edifice in the city at the time, was like a cathedral to the people of *Kleindeutschland*. Little of how the church looked in 1852 remains, however, for in 1913 it was radically remodeled by the architect Paul Schulz. Schulz simplified the design, and removed all the Baroque curves of the original. It is still, however, one of the most remarkable churches in Manhattan, and is not a designated landmark. (For more on Most Holy Redeemer, see the Houses of Worship chapter.)

Most of the second-wave (1864-79) German immigrants were Lutherans, with a large smattering of Jews.

In June 1904, St. Mark's Lutheran Church, on Sixth Street between First and Second Avenues, organized a midweek picnic outing for some 1,300 people, mostly the wives and children of German immigrant workingmen. On the morning of June 15, the excursion steamer *General Slocum*, named for the Civil War general and U.S. congressman, boarded its passengers at the pier at East Third Street and the East River (the present site of the Lillian Wald Houses). The boat proceeded on its way up the river, en route to Long Island's North Shore, where the women and children were to enjoy an afternoon's respite from the tumultuous streets of *Kleindeutschland*. Twenty minutes on, at infamous Hell Gate, disaster struck. As the historian Edward O'Donnell writes, "Most likely it originated with a match or cigarette carelessly tossed by a crewman, but it may have come from a lamp accidentally overturned by the roll of the vessel, or a spark from an overhead wire. In the end, all that mattered was that somewhere in the lamp room below the main deck of the General Slocum, a particle of fire had found a home."²⁸ In the

²⁸ Edward T. O'Donnell, *Ship Ablaze: The Tragedy of the Steamboat General Slocum*, New York: Broadway Books, 2003, p. 97.

end, 1,021 of those who were aboard the *General Slocum* when it pulled away from East Third Street died. That was almost as many as would perish on the *Titanic* eight years later. *Kleindeutschland* was devastated. No one was unaffected. Those who did not lose an immediate family member lost a member of their extended family, or a friend, or a schoolmate. (For more on this church building, see the Houses of Worship chapter.)

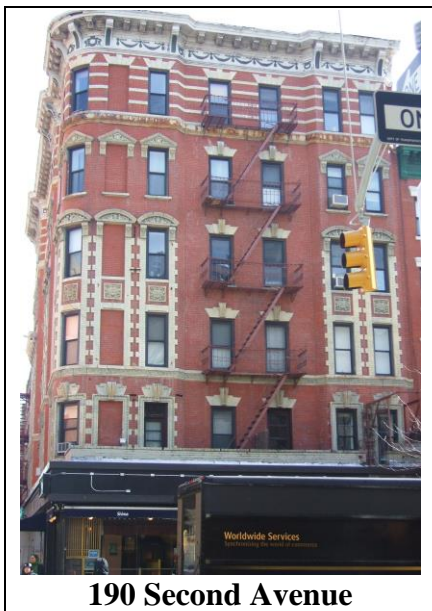
The Jewish Wave of Immigration

We are usually told that the disaster led many Germans to move out of the neighborhood, to escape their sorrow. In fact, the Germans had already begun to move from the neighborhood, “upward and outward” to Yorkville and Brooklyn and the Bronx. A new group, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, had begun to move into the East Village, and would soon be the dominant group. Between 1880 and 1890 the population of the East Village, defined as the Eleventh and Seventeenth Wards, increased by 15,812. Between 1890 and 1900, when the exodus of the Germans was well under way, it increased by 130,625. A part of the city that had already been crowded became ever more crowded. By the time of the Jewish migrations, the East Village was already filled with “tenementized” row houses, pre-Old Law tenements, and Old Law tenements. After 1901, by which time the Jewish migration was in full swing, significant numbers of New Law tenements supplemented the earlier housing. The early twentieth century saw Second Avenue develop into the “Jewish Rialto,” the vibrant center of the Yiddish-language theater. The **former Yiddish Art Theater**, a designated New York City Landmark at 189 Second Avenue, at Twelfth Street (1925-26), is one of the great testaments to this period. Designed by the prominent theater architect Harrison Wiseman for the playwright and impresario Maurice Schwartz, the building remained a Yiddish theater until 1945.



Former Yiddish Art Theater

By the time the Yiddish theater had moved as far north as Twelfth Street, it had earned for itself a literary respectability it had not had in its earlier years in the Lower East Side. Abraham Cahan and other writers at the *Jewish Daily Forward*, however, increased the reputation of Yiddish as a literary language, and increasingly the Yiddish theater (which traces its roots to Jassy, Romania, in 1876) grew in sophistication and accomplishment. Schwartz's dream was to create a New York-based Yiddish equivalent of Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theater. He formed the Yiddish Art Theater in 1918 and got his first permanent venue, 189 Second Avenue, with the help of a Brooklyn lawyer named Louis Jaffe. Schwartz was a demanding and difficult man and lost control of the venue in 1928, regained it in 1932, and lost it again in 1934. In that time, however, he staged legendary productions of his own *The Tenth Commandment*, in 1928, with dances by the great choreographer Michel Fokine (who had worked with Diaghilev) and sets by Boris Aronson, who would go on to win six Tony Awards; and, in 1932, I.J. Singer's *Yoshe Kalb*. In 1930 the space was occupied by Molly Picon's Folks Theater; she was the greatest female star — the Ethel Barrymore — of the Yiddish stage. In 1991 the building became Village East City Cinemas, a multiplex. In 1993 both the interior and the exterior were designated as landmarks by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission.



Another important landmark of the Jewish East Village is the New Law tenement at **190 Second Avenue** (Bernstein & Bernstein, 1903), right across the street from the former Yiddish Art Theater. But from 1908 to 1952 the space was occupied by the Café Royal, the fabled gathering place of the stars of the Yiddish stage, as well as of Jewish writers, celebrities, and characters of all kinds. Leo Rosten (under his *nom de plume* Leonard Q. Ross) wrote in the *New Yorker* in 1937:

It is the forum of the Jewish intelligentsia, the first spot one visits to learn anything about the Yiddish theatre, Yiddish art, music, letters, or life, and is the best place in the city to hear East Side gossip and argument. Devotees call the Royal the “Kibitzarnya,” the kibitzers' hangout. It is, more properly, the Colony, the Simpson's, and the Fouquet's of Second Avenue, all in one.²⁹

Rosten went on, “Everybody who is anybody in the creative Jewish world turns up at the Café Royal at least one night a week. To be seen there is a social duty, a mark of distinction, and an investment in prestige.”³⁰ Harrison E. Salisbury of the *New York Times* called it the “vortex of the creative winds that for half a century stormed up from the immigrant-jammed streets of the lower East Side.”³¹ Salisbury wrote, “Here a recent arrival from Vienna, from Paris, from Moscow, could — and did — feel at home.”

Rosten explained why:

It looks like any venerable coffeehouse in Vienna. The windows are opened wide in the summer, when box hedges and latticework enclose sidewalk tables. The Royal was probably the first place in New York to introduce this Continental touch, which is popular with its clients, most of whom like to be looked at.³²

In the back of the café were tables where people played games — pinochle, chess, and *klabiash*, a European card game. In the front was the see-and-be-seen café, serving tea in glasses (not cups), plus *palatschinken*, or crepes, and the restaurant, serving brisket of beef and sauerkraut, the favorite of Mayor La Guardia. When Salisbury went in 1955 for a look at the new Phoenix Theater, which had opened two years earlier in the former Yiddish Art Theater, he noticed, with sadness, that the Café Royal had been replaced by K. & S. Cleaners, “Three Hour Cleaning Service.”

²⁹ Leo Rosten, “A Reporter at Large: Café Royal,” *New Yorker* April 10, 1937, p. 45.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Harrison E. Salisbury, “About New York,” *New York Times* September 30, 1955, p. 19.

³² Leo Rosten, *op. cit.*

Arts and entertainment figures like Paul Muni (who first met his wife at the Café Royal), Jack Benny, David Sarnoff, Fannie Hurst, Eddie Cantor, Will Durant, Carl Van Vechten, and Sarah Adler (“Grand Old Lady of the Yiddish stage, once its most dazzling light”) all were cited by the *New Yorker* as Royal habitués. And there was another, as Rosten wrote:

I noticed a curious spectacle taking place under a Western Union clock which hung on a side wall. At a table for two, directly under the clock, a man was interviewing people who stood in a long line, waiting. This...was Rubin Guskin, manager of the Hebrew Actors' Union, in action. Almost every night, come weal, come woe, he sits at the table for two under the Western Union clock. Many a grandiose business deal is consummated there, many an artistic ego is soothed, many a bitter salary dispute compromised.³³



31 East Seventh Street

Reuben (the *New Yorker* uncharacteristically misspelled his first name) Guskin lived at 299 East Eleventh Street, at the northeast corner of Second Avenue, just down the block from the Café Royal. He was born in 1887 in Babruysk, in Belarus, and came to America at the age of seventeen. He served as the treasurer of the Workmen's Circle and on the board of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, and was a director of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. He was the manager of the Hebrew Actors' Union from 1919 to his death in 1951.³⁴ A four-story building at **31 East Seventh Street**, between

Second and Third Avenues, has the words inscribed in stone in a band above the second-floor arched windows: “HEBREW ACTORS UNION.” This was Local No. 1 of the union founded in 1899 as the nation's first theatrical union (which predated Actors'

³³ Ibid., p. 51.

³⁴ "Reuben Guskin, 64, Led Actors' Union," *New York Times*, October 5, 1951, p. 24.

Equity by fourteen years). The building was built as a row house between 1848 and 1850, and charmingly remodeled to its present appearance in 1923 by Victor Mayper when the union moved into the building from 123 Forsyth Street. (Mayper was the architect of most of the tall loft buildings that surround the Charlton-King-Vandam Historic District in the South Village and of several loft buildings farther south in the “Hudson Square” area, in all cases commissioned by Trinity Church.) The union had a peak membership of 400 in 1927. It disbanded in 2005.

When the union disbanded, many former members and others expressed deep concern about the building and its contents, which include many records and memorabilia that pertain to the history of the Yiddish theater. A grant from Los Angeles philanthropist Eli Broad has allowed New York's YIVO Institute for Jewish Research to restore the materials, which they will keep.³⁵ Mayper, who was one of the earliest New York architects to base his practice on International Style Modernism, designed a façade that is quite flat, with only the subtlest of moldings, but they are all in the right places, and the building rises to a balustrade with a center block that bears a mask and end blocks with torches. It's the same sort of playful blend of classicism and Modernism that we see in Miller & Noël's Whitney Museum of American Art of 1931 at 8-12 West Eighth Street (in the Greenwich Village Historic District).

Other Jewish landmarks in the neighborhood include, of course, its several synagogues. The East Village lacks grand synagogues such as are to be found in the Lower East Side or uptown. Interestingly, the congregation that would go on to build two of the grandest synagogues in the city's history, Temple Emanu-El, was housed from 1856 to 1868 in the former Twelfth Street Baptist Church at 120 East Twelfth Street. That building, which most recently was St. Ann's, a Roman Catholic church, has unfortunately been reduced to a façade awkwardly incorporated into the site plan of a towering New York University dormitory. Temple Emanu-El also once operated a settlement house, the Emanu-El Brotherhood, from 1911 to 1960 at 309-311 East Sixth Street.

³⁵ Iris Blasi, “End of an Era,” *Jewish Daily Forward*, October 13, 2006, (<http://www.forward.com/articles/4897/>, accessed August 20, 2011).

The most important synagogues in the neighborhood are modest in scale, and are what we call “tenement synagogues.” That does not mean they were tenements converted to synagogues, but rather synagogues built on the twenty-five-foot-wide lots on which pre-1901 tenements were erected, or converted from earlier row houses on those lots. Some of these are extraordinary, such as Congregation Adas Yisroel Anshe Mezeritz at 415 East Sixth Street. The building was built as a two-and-a-half-story house in 1841 and converted to a splendid classical synagogue in 1910 by the architect Herman Horenburger, known as a prolific designer of tenements. This is one of the great treasures of the East Village, for not only is the architecture wonderfully intact, but the same congregation has worshipped continuously in the building since 1910. Another beautiful classical synagogue, this one purpose-built on a tenement lot, is Beth Hamedrash Hagadol Anshe Ungarn, designed by Gross & Kleinberger, also known as tenement architects, built in 1908 and located at 242 East Seventh Street. It is an individually designated New York City Landmark.

Other synagogues are located in converted Christian churches. Congregation Tifereth Israel at 334-336 East Fourteenth Street has since 1962 been located in what was originally the First German Baptist Church of 1869-70, a wonderful Romanesque Revival building by Julius Boeckell. And St. Mark's Lutheran Church, 323-327 East Sixth Street, so associated with the *General Slocum* disaster, became, in 1940, the Community Synagogue, an Orthodox congregation formed by a group led by local business leader Saul Birns. There is more on the architecture of these synagogues in the Houses of Worship chapter.

New Arrivals from Eastern Europe

Other groups that established communities in the East Village as part of the same era of mass immigration include non-Jewish Russians, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Czechs, Poles, and Italians. We see an example of ethnic succession at 288 East Tenth Street, at the southwest corner of Avenue A. The picturesquely massed church on that site, designed by James Renwick Jr., was built in 1882-83 as a chapel of St. Mark's in-the-Bowery. In 1925, the building was rented from the Episcopal Diocese by the **St. Nicholas of Myra**

Orthodox Church, a Carpatho-Russian congregation formed in New York in that year by immigrants from the Carpathian Mountains in Czechoslovakia. In 1937 the Carpatho-Russians bought the building, and they continue to occupy it. The building is an individually designated New York City Landmark.

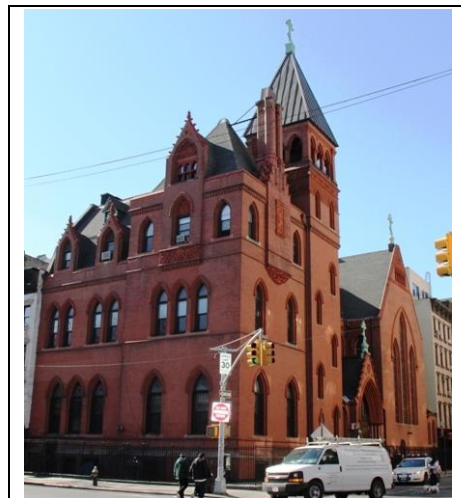
In 1900 the New York Times wrote about the “Hungarian Broadway”:

Almost anywhere in town children may be seen dancing to an organ-grinder’s music, but in no quarter have these impromptu dances developed into such a science as along what is known as “The Hungarian Broadway.” It is to that part of Second Avenue between Houston and East Tenth Streets that this title has been applied, for almost everybody who walks there hails from Hungary or Bohemia, and nearly every second house presents the sign “Hungarian Restaurant.”³⁶

(The *Times*’s use of “Hungarian” at that date refers to immigrants from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which included Slavs.)

One such Hungarian restaurant was the well-known Café Boulevard, on the east side of Second Avenue just to the south of Tenth Street; it opened in the late nineteenth century in a fifty-foot-wide mansion that had been “occupied by some relatives of the Astors.”³⁷

The *New Yorker* wrote in 1937, “In the middle eighties, the fashionable people who lived on lower Second Avenue began to move away



St. Nicholas of Myra

³⁶ “Terpsichore on East Side,” *New York Times*, August 5, 1900, p. 5.

³⁷ Maximilian Toch, “That Was New York: Second Avenue Baron,” *New Yorker*, February 20, 1937, p. 48).

because the Austro-Hungarians were moving in, and with the Austro-Hungarians came the coffeehouses, Viennese restaurants, and chess rooms.”³⁸ The article, by Maximilian Toch, was a profile of Baron Ferencz Béla Esterházy von Strakonitz. Every Saturday and Sunday the baron showed up in the café section of Café Boulevard. “His mustache was waxed, the points like daggers, and so was the point of his goatee. He wore a Prince Albert coat, gray trousers, and an old silk hat, highly polished. He had gray gloves and a black walking stick with a gold knob.”³⁹ In the café, he was treated deferentially. “His ancestors had owned thousands of fertile acres in Hungary. He had had a commission in the army. He had strutted around Budapest in his gay uniform, and he had worshipped at the shrine of wine, woman, and song. ...He had entertained lavishly and gambled tremendously, and János” — now a waiter at Café Boulevard on Second Avenue — “had waited on the Baron many a time when János was a waiter at the Jockey Club in Budapest.”⁴⁰ But the baron's profligate lifestyle bankrupted him, “and with a few thousand gulden he had left the country and come to America, a broken, middle-aged man.”⁴¹ He lived around the corner from the Café Boulevard, on Ninth Street, in a hall bedroom in a private house. He went to the café to play the role of baron. János learns after the baron's death that from Monday to Friday the baron had worked as a street sweeper among Colonel Waring's White Wings, the legendary street-cleaning force that operated with military precision in New York between 1894 and 1898. Colonel Waring (who himself lived nearby in an apartment in the former Peter Gerard Stuyvesant mansion, on the northwest corner of Second Avenue and Eleventh Street), had been partial to hiring men with military backgrounds.

When the great Czech composer Antonín Dvořák lived in New York between 1892 and 1895, in a house on East Seventeenth Street between First and Second Avenues (just outside our study area, and now demolished), he and his secretary Josef Jan Kovarik

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

“found compatible company at the Café Boulevard on Second Avenue, where they read the newspapers from Prague.”⁴²

In 1915, Café Boulevard closed and the grand old house was torn down to make way for



the apartment building at **156 Second Avenue**, on the southeast corner of Second Avenue and Tenth Street. Designed by Neville & Bagge and built in 1915, it was possibly the finest multiple dwelling that had been built in the neighborhood up to that time. In this building from 1954 to 2006 was the Second Avenue Deli, a famous kosher delicatessen founded by a

Ukrainian immigrant named Abe Lebewohl. When Lebewohl was shot and killed in a robbery in 1996, the *Times*'s Richard F. Shepard wrote, “Mr. Lebewohl was a significant performer in what might be the last Jewish stage setting for Second Avenue, the thoroughfare for which his delicatessen was named, but which had been known to earlier generations as the Yiddish Broadway or, more irreverently, Knish Alley.”⁴³

This one site tells us much about the evolution of the neighborhood: From patrician mansion to Hungarian restaurant and café to modern apartment house with a kosher delicatessen in its ground floor — to the deli losing its lease in a hot real-estate market and being replaced by a bank branch — it’s practically the neighborhood in a nutshell.

Other national groups to leave their mark on the East Village include the Ukrainians and the Poles. Poles had been in the city since Dutch colonial days. The Pole Tadeusz Kościuszko was a hero of the American Revolution. But the mass immigration of rural Poles took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, together with the

⁴² New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Antonín Dvořák House Designation Report*, February 26, 1991, p. 7.

⁴³ Richard F. Shepard, "A New York Era Dies with a Deli Man," *New York Times*, March 6, 1996, p. B1.

migrations of other eastern and southern European groups. The first Polish Roman Catholic parish in New York was St. Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr, formed in 1873 at 43 Stanton Street, between Forsyth and Eldridge Streets. In 1900-01 the congregation erected a new church, designed by Arthur Arctander, at 101 East Seventh Street. It remains a Polish church to this day: Of its seventeen weekly Masses, fifteen are in Polish. In both 1999 and 2001, the church was visited by Polish president Lech Walesa. The church's location, on East Seventh Street between Avenue A and First Avenue, was not by accident; the Poles, along with other Slavic groups, such as the Ukrainians, tended to live in the streets that surround Tompkins Square.

Ukrainians also came in the great migrations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At first the Ukrainian immigrants were commonly referred to as “Ruthenians,” as the people of western Ukraine were called in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The term, however, fell into disfavor among Ukrainians with the rise of a national consciousness and a Ukrainian nationalist movement in the late nineteenth century. In 1905 Ukrainian immigrants purchased a Baptist chapel at 322 East Twentieth Street and formed the St. George Ukrainian Catholic Church, a Byzantine Rite congregation that had actually celebrated its first Mass in 1890 at St. Brigid's — the Irish church at 119 Avenue B. In 1911 the congregation purchased the former Seventh Street Methodist Church, a distyle-in-antis Greek Revival church built in 1836 on Seventh Street between Second and Third Avenues. There the St. George congregation worshipped until 1978 when they replaced the old building with a new edifice, designed by the L'viv-born architect Apollinaire Osadca, on the same site. This remains the main spiritual home of many of the city's Ukrainians.



The wonderful building at 334-336 East Fourteenth Street that is now Congregation Tifereth Israel was, from 1926 to 1962, the Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox Church of St. Volodymyr, spiritual home to newly arrived eastern Ukrainians. After World War II many Ukrainian refugees were allowed to migrate to the United States, and a substantial number settled in the East Village. Thus the East Village enjoyed a vibrant Ukrainian presence through the second half of the twentieth century. Ukrainian institutions (such as the **Ukrainian Museum**, founded in 1976 by the Ukrainian National Women's League of America and since 2005 located in its purpose-built building at 222 East Sixth Street), and Ukrainian restaurants (Veselka was established by Ukrainian immigrants at 144 Second Avenue in 1954), all continue to flourish in the East Village.

Italian Immigrants Make Their Mark

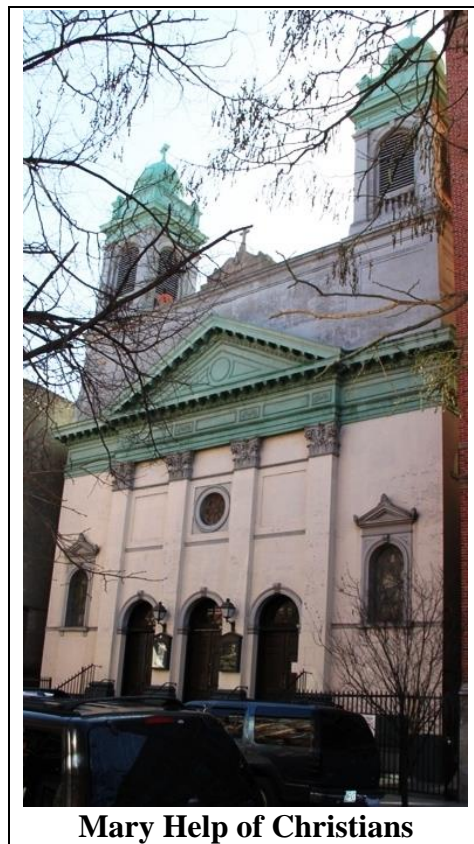
Italians formed yet another immigrant group that made its home in the East Village. The neighborhood just to the north and west of Tompkins Square — roughly bounded by Avenue B and Second Avenue and Tenth and Fourteenth Streets — once had a strongly Italian character. The immigration of Italians, mostly peasants from the south of Italy, took place over roughly the same years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the immigration of eastern European Jews, and similarly altered the city's demographic profile. The most celebrated of the city's several Italian enclaves was "Little Italy," roughly bounded by Canal Street on the south, Lafayette Street on the west, Houston Street on the north, and the Bowery on the east. Little Italy was contiguous with the East Village. Another major enclave of Italian immigrants formed in the South Village, south of Washington Square as far as Houston Street and from Sixth Avenue east to Broadway.

Italians differed from many other immigrant groups in that a large majority of Italian immigrants were, in the beginning, men. These peasant men came to America to work primarily in construction jobs (Italians became as dominant in construction as the Irish had once been), live very frugally, and send as much of their money as possible back to their families in Italy. The Italian men intended to return to Italy with enough money saved to buy their own small plot of land. And many of these men did return. But with

each wave of Italian men who came over, a percentage would not return, and often would arrange passage to America for their families. In later years, whole families were as likely as not to migrate together. Italian women in New York, not least in the East Village, often worked in the garment trades. As Italians gained a foothold in New York, many became small business owners, especially of food-related businesses: restaurants, cafés, bars, grocery stores, and fruit and vegetable stands. Many also worked, and sometimes prospered, as pushcart vendors. It is remarkable how many immigration-era food-related businesses continue to flourish in Italian neighborhoods such as Little Italy, the South Village, and the East Village.

In the East Village, the Polish Catholic community centered around the Church of St. Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr, the German Catholic community around Church of the Most Holy Redeemer, and the Italian Catholic community around the Church of Mary Help of Christians.

Of these three historic Roman Catholic churches, two survive and remain in use. **Mary Help of Christians**, however, closed in 2007 and was demolished in August 2013. It stood at 436 East Twelfth Street, between Avenue A and First Avenue, on the site of a cemetery affiliated with old St. Patrick's Cathedral. According to David W. Dunlap,⁴⁴ 41,016 people were buried here between 1833 and 1848. Those bodies were exhumed in 1909 and reburied in Calvary Cemetery in Woodside, Queens. In 1911, church plans were filed for a design by Domenico Briganti. The cornerstone, however, was not laid until July 15, 1917. By then the design had been



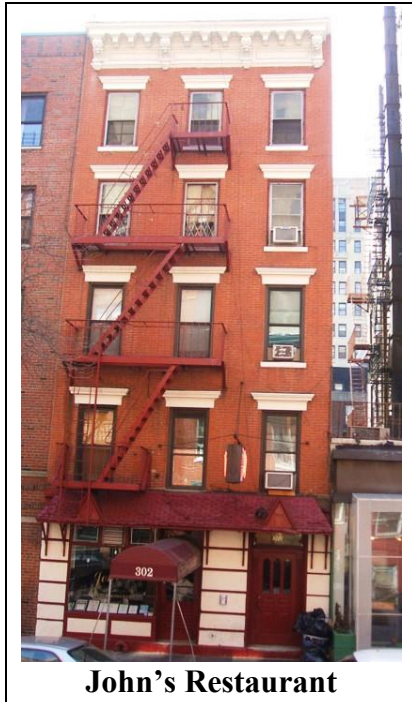
⁴⁴ David Dunlap, *From Abyssinian to Zion*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p.141.

altered by Nicholas Serracino (a fact discovered by the present writer in the preparation of this report). The design of the church, until recently credited to Briganti, is now properly credited to Serracino. He had recently designed the Roman Catholic Church of St. Jean Baptiste (completed 1914) on Lexington Avenue and Seventy-Seventh Street, one of the most ravishing churches in New York. It was paid for in its entirety by one of its parishioners, streetcar baron Thomas Fortune Ryan, one of the city's wealthiest men. The Church of Mary Help of Christians was a much more low-budget affair. But it is clear that Serracino was trying to see how much of the classical splendor of the earlier church could translate to the poorer project.

Mary Help of Christians obviously lacked the rich ornamentation, the beautiful stonework, and the majestic dome of St. Jean Baptiste. But the two churches have very similar twin towers, square with an arched opening rising over a balustrade on each face, and topped off by drums and domes. Rather than the four full Corinthian columns of the earlier building, Mary Help of Christians has four pilasters with Corinthian capitals. These rise to a richly modeled entablature and pediment. Mary Help of Christians also bears many features — the triple portal, the use of pilasters, the central oculus — that are similar to ones found at Serracino's Church of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary at 307 East Thirty-Third Street, which was built in 1915 and tragically demolished in 2008. (His Church of St. Clare, 436 West Thirty-Sixth Street, built in 1905-07 and demolished for the Lincoln Tunnel in the 1930s, was one of New York's treasures of church architecture.) Unfortunately, very little is known of Serracino. He attended the Royal University of Naples, and worked as an architect in Manhattan. The Church of Mary Help of Christians was a skillfully designed, immensely dignified work of architecture. It was appropriately impressive in its neighborhood context, one of the relatively few classical churches in the city, and one of only two Serracino churches remaining in Manhattan. It was the very model of a neighborhood landmark, and a devastating loss to the East Village.

The neighborhood's Italian heritage remains visible, however, in several eating establishments. Antonio Veniero, of Naples, opened his eponymous pasticceria, at 342

East Eleventh Street between First and Second Avenues, in 1894. When in 1961, June Owen wrote about Veniero's in the *New York Times*, lovingly describing the cannoli, sfogliatelle, torrone, pignolati, and strufoli, she wrote of what was already a venerable New York institution, then 67 years old.⁴⁵



John's Restaurant at 302 East Twelfth Street, just east of Second Avenue, was opened in 1908 by John Pucciatti, from Umbria. The Pucciatti family owned John's until 1973. Author Nunzio Pernicone, in his book *Carlo Tresca: Portrait of a Rebel*, about the famous Italian immigrant anarchist, anti-Fascist, and anti-Mafia crusader, wrote of Tresca's attachment to the Union Square neighborhood for its combination of radical organizations and proximity to Italian restaurants:

Tresca and his comrades found this “radical” district all the more attractive because it abutted Italian

neighborhoods in Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side, districts offering a multitude of Italian restaurants and bars, which Tresca and others frequented regularly, especially John's Restaurant at Second Avenue and 12th Street.⁴⁶

In his *Whittaker Chambers: A Biography*, Sam Tanenhaus writes,

A community of radical intellectuals flourished in the restaurants and cafés of downtown Manhattan. There was drinking at John's Restaurant, on East Twelfth Street, where Mike Gold, Carlo Tresca, and lesser-known figures might meet: Communists, socialists, anarchists.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ June Owen, “Italian Bakery Set for Feast Days,” *The New York Times*, December 4, 1961, p. 52.

⁴⁶ Nunzio Pernicone, *Portrait of a Rebel*, Oakland: AK Press, 2010, p. 104

⁴⁷ Sam Tanenhaus, *Whittaker Chambers: A Biography*, New York: Random House, 1997.

It is also said that John's was once frequented by members of organized crime, especially during Prohibition when the restaurant continued to serve alcohol. Although the fatal shooting of Carlo Tresca in 1943, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifteenth Street, has never been solved, many who have studied the case believe the murder to be a "hit" ordered by an organized crime leader. Tresca (1873-1949), the publisher of *Il Martello*, an anarchist newspaper, was exploring ties between organized crime and supporters of Fascism. (In the early 1920s, Tresca maintained the offices of *Il Martello* at 208 East Twelfth Street, at Third Avenue, where a large NYU dormitory now stands.) A memorial service was held for Tresca at Manhattan Center, on Thirty-Fourth Street and Eighth Avenue. Following that, his funeral cortège passed by the site of his execution, "and then," according to Pernicone, "to his favorite eating place, John's Restaurant at East 12th Street and Second Avenue," before cremation at Fresh Pond Cemetery in Queens.⁴⁸

Transformative Transportation Changes

Vast changes in transportation – elevated railways and subways, street widenings and highway construction – led to dramatic changes in the fabric, functioning, and desirability of the East Village.

The year 1878 brought the first major change in mass transportation since the extension of streetcar service to Third Avenue in 1858. This was the year the Manhattan Railway Company's Third Avenue elevated railway opened. The steam railroad ran on a high iron-and-wood trestle above the center of the Third Avenue roadbed. The trains operated from South Ferry to 129th Street (eventually to be extended all the way to Gun Hill Road in the Bronx) along the Bowery and Third Avenue. There were East Village stations at the Bowery and Houston Street, Third Avenue and Ninth Street, and Third Avenue and Fourteenth Street.

Two years later, the Manhattan Railway Company opened the Second Avenue elevated railway. The trains ran from Chatham Square along Division Street to Allen Street, which north of Houston Street becomes First Avenue. The Second Avenue El actually operated

⁴⁸ Op. cit., p. 267.

on First Avenue to Twenty-Third Street before the trains switched to Second Avenue as far north (in 1880) as Sixty-Fifth Street, and, eventually, as far as Freeman Street in the Bronx. There were East Village stations at First, Eighth, and Fourteenth Streets along First Avenue.

In 1904 the first I.R.T. (Interborough Rapid Transit Company) subway line opened. It operated north from City Hall under Lafayette Street and Fourth Avenue, at the western edge of the East Village, with nearby stations at Bleecker Street, Astor Place, and Fourteenth Street. These are all still functional.

In 1936 the Independent Subway's Sixth Avenue line opened an East Village station at Second Avenue and Houston Street. The 1930s subway construction that took place under the then narrow Houston Street necessitated that the street be widened, and that many buildings be demolished to the west of Essex Street, where the trains turned onto Houston. But that was nothing compared to the devastation the city wrought when, between 1957 and 1963, it chose to widen Houston Street yet again, this time all the way from Sixth Avenue to the F.D.R. Drive, to make it a six-lane, expressway-scale roadway.

While some of these changes in transportation in the post-war years helped lead to the depopulation and destabilization of the neighborhood, especially its eastern end, other changes helped catalyze the long-building process of artists and writers moving into the neighborhood and, more generally, the gentrification of the neighborhood.

In 1902 the I.R.T. Company acquired both the elevated lines which ran through the East Village. However, as part of a shifting commitment to underground subway lines over elevated lines, which began with Robert Moses and was finalized in the post-war years, the Second Avenue El ceased operation in the East Village in 1942. In 1955 the Third Avenue El was dismantled as well. While the widening of the easternmost section of Houston Street in the late 1950's to accommodate access to the FDR drive helped lead to the downward spiral of that part of the neighborhood, the simultaneous removal of the

elevated rail lines in the western part of the neighborhood helped lead to that part of the East Village's increasing prosperity during the last decades of the twentieth century.

A Gentrifying Neighborhood Even Then

In the prosperous 1920s, one of the periodic red-hot real-estate markets tore through Manhattan. It made silk purses of sows' ears all along the way. It was the decade of "gentrification." (Although that word would not be coined by the British sociologist Ruth Glass until 1964, in reference to the Islington section of London, the phenomenon long predates its label.)

"New York," wrote the *New York Times* in June 1929, "is changing so rapidly year by year, especially on Manhattan Island, that it is doubtful if the average New Yorker fully realizes what startling transformations have been made, and are still going on in its business and residential conditions."⁴⁹ The article mentioned the unlikely areas where luxury apartment development had taken place or was planned— "old Chelsea," Hell's Kitchen, and even the Battery. As for lower Second Avenue, "The earlier immigrant type of population from Russia, Poland, Rumania and other lands which invaded the locality twenty-five years ago and more has given way to a thoroughly Americanized and progressive class of citizens."⁵⁰

The 1929 marketing brochure for **Warren Hall**, at the northeast corner of Second Avenue and Tenth Street, states: "In the heart of the old aristocratic Stuyvesant and Astor Place section, a new and distinctive residential neighborhood is rapidly springing up. This district, so rich in City tradition, is once more coming into prominence as a desirable location for the modern home." Just as the Roaring Twenties drew to a close, just before the stock market crash in the fall of 1929, gentrification had dipped its toes in the waters of the East Village. So much of the East Side had been transformed in the 1920s: East End Avenue, Turtle Bay, Sutton Place, Beekman Place, Tudor City, Yorkville and Gramercy Park and most of all Greenwich Village, just to the west of here, had

⁴⁹ "Creating New Apartment Area on Lower Second Avenue," *New York Times*, June 2, 1929, p. RE1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

experienced dramatic changes. Was it now the East Village's turn? Some developers, such as Henry Kaufman, thought so. Kaufman took a sixty-three-year lease on a site owned by the City Baptist Mission Society. He razed the Baptist Tabernacle, a grand Gothic Revival edifice from 1850 with one of the more spectacular facades of the early Gothic Revival period. But as a lease condition Kaufman had to provide space for a new Baptist Tabernacle in the base of the apartment building which took its place. Today the words BAPTIST TABERNACLE still appear over a pointed-arch entrance on Second Avenue just north of Tenth Street. The Tabernacle, which served Italian, Polish, and Russian Baptists (the Baptists were successful proselytizers among many immigrant groups) is now an Urban Outfitters store.

The fifteen-story apartment building at 162-168 Second Avenue, which included the new Baptist Tabernacle, was designed by Emery Roth and re-opened in 1929. The brochure for “Warren Hall” went on to say, “The roof apartments are designed in the form of country bungalows, yet have all of the city conveniences, large private roof gardens and wood-burning fireplaces.” The brochure fatefully predicted, “The building will be completed in October, 1929.” This was a luxury building, much like new buildings that had recently gone up in Gramercy Park to the north and Greenwich Village to the west. Where the identity of the East Village had for the past eighty or so years been defined by the movement from the south of the Lower East Side, now it was affected by movements from the north and west. Henry Kaufman (1879-1951) was a prominent developer with credits that included the Normandy, on Riverside Drive and Eighty-Sixth Street, which was also designed by Emery Roth, and in which Kaufman himself resided. Emery Roth also contributed to the East Village the Labor Temple (see Houses of Worship chapter) built in 1924 at 242 East Fourteenth Street.



Warren Hall



Peter Stuyvesant

Directly to the north, the 15-story **Peter Stuyvesant**, at 170 Second Avenue (southeast corner of Eleventh Street), was built by Saul Birns, a prominent property-owner in the area, in 1927. The *Times* called the new building “the pioneer high-class multifamily edifice in that locality.”⁵¹ No one, prior to the crash, was more bullish on the neighborhood's prospects than Saul Birns. His last building before the crash, the six-story banquet and meeting hall structure at 107-113 Second Avenue, between Sixth and Seventh Streets, designed by Ralph H. Segal (whose firm of Segal & Sohn had

designed the Peter Stuyvesant), and built in 1928, proudly bears the name “Saul Birns Building” on its parapet. The ground floor was leased to two tenants: a Woolworth store and an opulent branch of the Bank of United States. Unfortunately, Bank of United States failed a year later. When the *Times* told of the neighborhood's travails in 1933, it noted that the space had only just found a new tenant, Ratner's dairy restaurant.

The **Saul Birns Building** had a glistening white terra-cotta façade, and with Saul Birns's name prominently displayed in gold lettering, the building exuded pride, if not irrational exuberance at an economically gloomy moment. Birns told the *Times* that before the crash he got \$50 a room in rent at the Peter Stuyvesant; in 1933 he got \$25. Birns said “In some of my other houses I am carrying



Saul Birns Building

⁵¹ "Lower 2d Avenue in Hopeful Mood," *New York Times*, February 19, 1933, p. RE1.

tenants who have paid nothing for six months. I cannot very well put them out as they have no jobs and I could not rent the rooms if they were evicted. Perhaps sometime a ray of financial sunlight may shine upon them and they may be able to pay me something as well as getting a new start in life.”⁵² He added, “But we are still carrying on, not entirely devoid of hope, and striving to show that we can find some comforts even though the dollars are not as plentiful as in the days of heavy speculation and heavy spending.”⁵³ Only in 1929 had the *Times* reported that “Mr. Birns admitted that he has plans for additional apartment improvements and within the next two or three years he predicts that on and closely adjacent to the avenue south of Twenty-third Street there will be a dozen or more high-class apartment buildings.”⁵⁴

The Peter Stuyvesant, by the way, was built on the site of the old New-York Historical Society, which in 1857 moved from its home in the main New York University building on Washington Square East to a stately Renaissance Revival palazzo designed by Mettam & Burke. The Society remained here until its move to Central Park West in 1908.

The other major example of high-class housing of that period in the East Village was the large **Ageloff Towers** development at 51-57 Avenue A between Third and Fourth Streets. The twelve-story Art Deco buildings were designed by Shampan & Shampan and built in



Ageloff Towers

1928 by Samuel Ageloff, an active developer over several decades, with credits that include the Breukelen apartments built in 1949 at 57 Montague Street in Brooklyn Heights. Ageloff responded to a growing need in the area for “modern apartments” that, it was said, would stem the exodus from the

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ “Creating New Apartment Area on Lower Second Avenue,” op. cit.

neighborhood of those who had climbed a rung or two higher on the economic ladder, and would attract to the neighborhood those, such as workers on Wall Street, who would find it convenient but had shunned it because of the low standard of housing. There was in the air at the end of the 1920s the notion that before long the whole of the East Village would be redeveloped with modern apartment buildings such as Ageloff Towers, Warren Hall, and the Peter Stuyvesant.

Perhaps most notably, three apartment towers by Frank Lloyd Wright were planned for the west side of the block between Tenth and Eleventh Streets. On October 19, 1929, the *Times* ran a story with the headline: “Odd-Type Buildings to Overlook Church.”⁵⁵ The Reverend William Norman Guthrie, rector of St. Mark's in-the-Bowery from 1911 to 1937, commissioned Wright to design three nineteen-story towers to surround the church. One would have been on Tenth Street to the west of the church, one would have filled the west blockfront of Second Avenue between Tenth and Eleventh Streets, and one would have been on Eleventh Street to the north and west of the church — thus the towers would presumably have spared the rectory designed by Ernest Flagg (1857-1947), which is home to the church rector. (It so happens that Flagg was one of the few architects Wright claimed to admire.) A church spokesman, Warren Matthews, told the *Times*, “We have decided to build up the property and gain income in this manner in preference to adopting the new idea of replacing the church itself with a skyscraper and using the lower floors for religious purposes.”⁵⁶ That was a thinly veiled reference to Warren Hall's arrangement with the Baptist Tabernacle across Second Avenue. But ten days after St. Mark's announced the towers, the stock market crashed. The towers were never built.

Wright eventually had the opportunity to use his design elsewhere, however. He adapted the towers' design decades later for his Price Tower in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, in 1956.

⁵⁵ “Odd-Type Buildings to Overlook Church,” *New York Times*, October 19, 1929, p. 24.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

‘New York Growing, a Hopeful Sight’

Part of what motivated such men as Saul Birns and Samuel Ageloff in the 1920s was the question of how to retain the area's population. The National Origins Act passed by Congress in 1924 effectively ended the era of mass immigration. Immigration from eastern Europe dwindled sharply. There were many reasons for the depopulation of the Lower East Side, but the immigration ban was chief among them. Parts of the city that had existed to house succeeding waves of immigrants emptied out when the last wave moved “upward and outward” and no new wave came to take its place. From the East Village, a family that took a step up the ladder might move to the Bronx, much of which was developed in the first three decades of the twentieth century as a place of solid apartment buildings that featured all the latest technology and amenities. The fine English novelist Arnold Bennett wrote one of the bestselling nonfiction books of 1912, *Your United States: Impressions of a First Visit*. Among the places he visited was the Bronx:

I departed from the Bronx very considerably impressed. It is the interiors of the Bronx homes that are impressive. I was led to a part of the Bronx where five years previously there had been six families, and where there are now over two thousand families. This was newest New York. No obstacle impeded my invasion of the domestic privacies of the Bronx. The mistresses of flats showed me round everything with politeness and with obvious satisfaction. A stout lady, whose husband was either an artisan or a clerk, I forget which, inducted me into a flat of four rooms, of which the rent was twenty-six dollars a month. She enjoyed the advantages of central heating, gas, and electricity; and among the landlord's fixtures were a refrigerator, a kitchen range, a bookcase, and a sideboard. Such amenities for the people — for the *petits gens* — simply do not exist in Europe; they do not even exist for the wealthy in Europe.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Arnold Bennett, *Your United States: Impressions of a First Visit*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1912, pp. 187-188.

And a little later:

Compare the East Side with the Bronx fully, and one may see, perhaps roughly, a symbol of what is going forward in America. Nothing, I should imagine, could be more interesting to a sociological observer than that actual creation of a city of homes as I saw it in the Bronx. I saw the home complete, and I saw the home incomplete, with wall-papers not on, with the roof not on. Why, I even saw, further out, the ground being leveled and the solid rock drilled where now, most probably, actual homes are inhabited and babies have been born! And I saw further than that. Nailed against a fine and ancient tree, in the midst of a desolate waste, I saw a board with these words: “A new Subway station will be erected on this corner.” There are legendary people who have eyes to see the grass growing. I have seen New York growing. It was a hopeful sight, too.⁵⁸

Warren Hall, the Peter Stuyvesant, and Ageloff Towers were all about bringing some of that success to the East Village, where, Saul Birns claimed, the residents would be more than happy to stay put — if there were suitable housing. The East Village, like every other place, staggered through the Great Depression. If the 1920s had promised rehabilitation and replacement of old housing stock, the 1930s set in motion the decades-long physical downward spiral that hugely afflicted the East Village. After a few years of depression and the “deferred maintenance” that went with it, even New Law tenements barely 20 years old looked preternaturally old and worn.

Swaths of the East Village became truly blighted. The East Village's ancient waterfront, the Dry Dock District of shipbuilders and engine makers and iron founders, yielded, in two fell swoops in 1949, to the Lillian Wald Houses (sixteen buildings, Houston to East Sixth Streets, Avenue D to the F.D.R. Drive) and the Jacob Riis Houses (eighteen buildings, East Sixth to Thirteenth Streets, Avenue D to the F.D.R. Drive). They were vast New York City Housing Authority projects among the many that, under the guiding

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 191.

hand of Robert Moses, utterly transformed the East River waterfront all the way from the Brooklyn Bridge to Twenty-Third Street.

Puerto Ricans and Artists

Many Jewish families remained in the East Village through the depression and World War II, and the war even brought waves of refugees (among them substantial numbers of Ukrainians) that reinforced the population groups that were already there. After the war, large-scale population change happened again. The East Village attracted large numbers of Puerto Rican migrants. Puerto Ricans had been United States citizens since 1917. But not until after World War II did a mass migration (the *Gran Migración*) occur, the result of a combination of depressed economic conditions in Puerto Rico and the introduction of inexpensive air service between San Juan and LaGuardia Airport. The newcomers settled in many parts of Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Manhattan, particularly Harlem, the Lower East Side, and what would soon come to be known as the East Village. At this time the area was definitely considered part of the Lower East Side, and for some of the

newcomers it was known as “Loisaida,” pronounced *lo-ees-eye-da*, “Spanglish” for “Lower East Side.” The Puerto Rican presence was strongest in “Alphabet City,” as New Yorkers pithily called the region of Avenues A, B, C, and D. In 1987, Avenue C was given the officially recognized alternative name of Loisaida Avenue. The Puerto Ricans of New York, particularly those born in New York to a Puerto Rican parent or parents, sometimes call themselves “Nuyoricans.” (Today there are many more New York-born Puerto Ricans than native-born Puerto Ricans in New York.) The term “Nuyorican” is believed to date from around 1973 and to have been popularized by, the **Nuyorican Poets Café**. This group of writers began to meet in the East Village



Nuyorican Poets Cafe

living room of poet Miguel Algarín, and included playwright and poet Miguel Piñero, and poet Bimbo Rivas (whose 1974 poem “Loisaida” is said to have introduced that term). By 1980 the Poets Café was established at 236 East Third Street where for more than thirty years it has offered readings, spoken word performances, and legendary “poetry slams.”

Puerto Ricans in the East Village and throughout the city faced peculiar hardships. Earlier migrant groups had been welcomed because the expanded labor pool was good for business, particularly the manufacturing sector that was long the bedrock of the New York economy. The Puerto Ricans came to New York from rural backgrounds, like the Irish and Italians before them. As “unskilled” workers the new migrants could be expected to take on the heavy-lifting jobs on the docks and in the factories where the Irish and Italians had, in their turns, dominated in the labor force. But the Puerto Ricans, like African-American migrants from the rural southern United States, got caught up in a historic structural transformation of the New York economy. In 1950, New York led the world in manufacturing output. But that soon changed, as the city rapidly deindustrialized. With traditional avenues of economic advancement unavailable to them, the new migrants faced joblessness, limited housing choices, dependency on government assistance, and the related social problems.

The 1950s and 1960s saw another significant development in the area. Many artists, writers, musicians, dancers, and filmmakers moved into the neighborhood, as well as many adventuresome young people and bohemians. In the 1950s the East Village was strongly associated with the writers and hangers-on of the Beat Movement. The poet Allen Ginsberg lived in the East Village, and the principal nightspots were jazz clubs such as the legendary Five Spot at 5 Cooper Square. Other major poets who were not part of the Beat Movement also called the East Village home, such as Frank O'Hara and W.H. Auden (who felt antipathetic toward Beat writing). The Poetry Project at St. Mark's in the Bowery became the city's leading venue for poetry readings.

In the 1960s, the East Village became the hippie center of New York. The Fillmore East briefly flourished as New York's mecca of rock and roll, and the Dom, on St. Mark's Place, featured the Velvet Underground at Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable. In the 1970s the East Village became the center of the culture formed around punk rock music. The famous club CBGB flourished on the Bowery, and introduced the Ramones, Patti Smith, Blondie, Television, and the Talking Heads. In the 1980s the East Village enjoyed a brief spotlight as the major neighborhood for trend-setting art galleries during a decade in which the art market shot through the roof, and conferred tabloid celebrity on artists as never before.

The defining hangout of this period was the Pyramid Club on Avenue A, and the time is captured in such films as Susan Seidelman's *Smithereens* (1982) and *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985), the latter of which starred onetime East Village denizen Madonna, and Julian Schnabel's *Basquiat* (1996), about the quintessential artist of the 1980s East Village scene, Jean-Michel Basquiat, who tragically died in 1988 at the age of twenty-seven. The 1980s also featured pitched conflict among the different groups that sought to call the East Village home — Puerto Ricans, young bohemians, and increasing numbers of prosperous newcomers derisively termed “yuppies.” Tensions boiled over in what can only be called a police riot in Tompkins Square in 1988, which called to mind another police riot in Tompkins Square, in 1874.

Tompkins Square, Then and Now

Tompkins Square has long been the symbolic heart of the East Village. Its name honors Daniel D. Tompkins (1774-1825), fourth governor of New York (1807-17) and fifth vice president of the United States (1817-25), under James Monroe. Tompkins was married to Hannah Minthorne (1781-1829), daughter of Mangle Minthorne (1740-1824), on part of whose land (and the land of other Minthornes and especially of Peter Gerard Stuyvesant) Tompkins Square was built. Tompkins established, in 1817, the first steam ferry service between Manhattan and Staten Island, and developed the community of Tompkinsville on Staten Island's North Shore. In 1834, several years after Tompkins's death, much of his Staten Island land was purchased by East Village developer Thomas E. Davis, who

created the New Brighton development, including a street that to this day is called St. Mark's Place. Tompkins is buried in the churchyard of St. Mark's in-the-Bowery, in the Minthorne family vault.

The 1811 Commissioners' Plan envisioned what it labeled a "market square" between Seventh and Tenth Streets and Avenue A and the East River, where presumably the market would have its own dock. The market square was never built. Around 1830 the City of New York purchased from Stuyvesant, the Minthornes, and others the land that would soon become Tompkins Square, Seventh to Tenth Streets, Avenue A to Avenue B, which was opened to the public in 1834. The land had been part of a swampy terrain known as "Stuyvesant Meadows" that, like nearby Burnt Mill Point, was a favorite place for city gentlemen to go snipe hunting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The swamp was drained, filled, and planted. In this time when such high-class developments by Thomas E. Davis had recently been built but two blocks to the west, there was every expectation that the streets that surrounded Tompkins Square would develop as an elegant residential neighborhood. Development, however, got caught up in the depression that followed the Panic of 1837. Six years elapsed before the economy was back on its feet, and by then such "uptown" developments as Gramercy Park and Madison Square had made Tompkins Square seem like a backwater. While a number of substantial row houses were built around the square, soon the whole area was engulfed by Irish and German immigrants.

Following the Panic of 1857 (such recurring panics characterized American life up to the Great Depression of the 1930s), several thousand jobless men occupied the square, which they used as a staging area for marches downtown, to City Hall or Wall Street. The men shouted for jobs and railed at the extreme divide that had opened up between rich and poor, then returned to the square. The workers, many of them German, demanded *Arbeit* — work. They demanded especially that Mayor Fernando Wood hire workers forthwith to begin the construction of Central Park. As an intransigent mayor weakened protesters' morale, a "bread riot" took off from Tompkins Square, as hungry job seekers pillaged food stores.

In 1866, the square was transformed into a parade ground for the drills of the Seventh Regiment.⁵⁹ In this period, the city's militia units had not yet built the vast armories that soon would begin to appear all over the city. Militia drills thus took place not in indoor drill halls but outside in open spaces known as "parade grounds." Washington Square and Madison Square, for example, had both served at one time as military parade grounds. The public would come and watch the precision drills as though they were sporting events. But there was another reason to put the Seventh Regiment (to move in 1880 to a splendid armory on Park Avenue and Sixty-Sixth Street) in Tompkins Square. The specter of civil unrest haunted mid-nineteenth-century New York. Such events as the Astor Place Riot of 1849, the Tompkins Square occupation of 1853, and the Draft Riots of 1863 had left the city shaken. Strategically deployed parade grounds (and later armories) might be a deterrent, or at least help assuage the fears of city elites.

Another financial panic, in 1873, which led to widespread joblessness, occasioned the gathering of several thousand workingmen in Tompkins Square in January 1874. This time, a city government and business class concerned that an uprising like the Paris Commune of 1871 could occur in New York acted decisively to stop the protesters. On the day of the mass gathering in the square, which was to lead to a march on City Hall, police on horseback attempted to disperse the mob. When a group of German workingmen resisted, they met the batons of the police and the hooves of their horses. It was, said Samuel Gompers, who witnessed the bloody melee, "an orgy of brutality."⁶⁰

In 1878 the State of New York, which had jurisdiction in such matters, returned Tompkins Square to use as a proper public park rather than a parade ground. The following year, a comprehensively renovated park opened, to joyous celebrations by neighborhood residents. (A celebratory banquet was held on the occasion at Kern's Hall, in the space now occupied by the Pyramid Club, at 101 Avenue A.) It has been said that the changes to the park resulted from the growing influence of the German community in New York politics. As the *Tribune* reported, "those living near the square are delighted

⁵⁹ "Tompkins-Square Parade-Ground," *New-York Tribune*, September 6, 1866, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Philip Yale Nicholson, *Labor's Story in the United States*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004, p. 106.

with the thought of having an attractive park to take the place of the old barren tract which had been for so many years an eye-sore.”⁶¹ The *Tribune* went on to say, “the broad pathways, two fine fountains and an abundance of shade trees will make this one of the most attractive spots in the city.” The following year marks the first appearance in any of the New York papers of the phrase “Tompkins Square Park,” as opposed to just

“Tompkins Square” — as though to emphasize the transition from parade ground to public park.

The writer and music critic James Gibbons Huneker, a peripatetic and inquisitive New Yorker with a first-rate mind, visited Tompkins Square for his essay

“The Lungs,” about New York City’s parks, in his 1915 book *New Cosmopolis*, which recounted his travels among the world’s cities.



“Popular Concert in Tompkins Square,” by Thure de Thulstrup, 1891

I entered. On the benches I found “lobbies” of old men, Germans, Israelites for the most part. They were very old, very active, contented, and loquacious. They settled at a “sitzung” the affairs of the nation, keeping all the while a sharp lookout on the antics of their grandchildren, curly-haired, bright-eyed kiddies who rolled on the grass. The boys and girls literally made the welkin ring with their games, in the enclosures. They seemed healthy and happy. There are vice and poverty on the East Side — and the West — but there are also youth and decency and pride. I should say that optimism was the rule. Naturally, in summer, even

⁶¹ “Improvements at Tompkins Square,” *New-York Tribune*, June 10, 1879, p. 5.

poverty wears its rue with a difference. I saw little save cheerfulness, and heard much music-making by talented children.⁶²

By the time Huneker wrote, the area had become home to many Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe, as well as to many Slavic immigrants, especially Poles and Ukrainians. Though the park's renovation in 1879 was celebrated by the local population, and though Huneker stressed a note of prevailing optimism, by 1938, when the *New York Times* surveyed the scene, the neighborhood had experienced serious physical deterioration, and the park was in poor shape:

The lawns have a worn look with their hard, dry patches of brown earth; the fences are twisted, sagging wires, and the trees show signs of neglect. In the middle of the park area stands a battered and abandoned refreshment pavilion. A canopied drinking fountain donated by an enthusiast in 1891 is covered with scribbings and offers no water. In the children's playground of the park the white marble of the monument erected in 1906 to the victims of the General Slocum disaster has been defaced.⁶³

The canopied drinking fountain is the **Temperance Fountain**, located just south of Ninth Street equidistant between Avenue A and Avenue B. It was designed and donated to the park by Dr. Henry Cogswell, a San Francisco temperance advocate, and it originally dispensed ice water. Its placement in a park heavily used by German immigrants, known for their consumption of beer and wine, was provocative.⁶⁴ The children's playground dated from 1894 and was among the first to be built by the Outdoor Recreation League founded by Lillian Wald and Charles Stover. Wald would later be honored in the name of the large New York City Housing Authority project a few blocks to the east of the park. The General Slocum Memorial, by Bruno Louis Zimm, is located just north of Ninth

⁶² James Gibbons Huneker, *New Cosmopolis*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915, p. 28.

⁶³ John W. Harrington, "Seek to Improve Tompkins Square," *New York Times*, June 12, 1938, p. 181.

⁶⁴ Margot Gayle and Michele Cohen, *The Art Commission and the Municipal Art Society Guide to Manhattan's Outdoor Sculpture*, New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1988, p. 85-86.

Street, opposite the Temperance Fountain. It was donated by the Sympathy Society of German Ladies.⁶⁵



In response to the conditions described by the *New York Times* in 1938, the city, under Parks Commissioner Robert Moses, had already begun the latest comprehensive renovation of Tompkins Square. The work took place between 1936 and 1942. This is when the Ninth Street path that runs from Avenue A to Avenue B

was built. The part of the park north of Ninth Street was made into one of Moses's signature recreational parks with handball and basketball courts and such. The southern part was meant to be a more traditional park with trees and benches, but, as authors Marci Reaven and Jeanne Houck point out, work on the southern side ran into funding shortages and then World War II, and was never completed.⁶⁶ The park then entered into a period of official neglect. After World War II, the demographics of the neighborhood changed as the Slavic population, which had been reinforced by war refugees, now shared the neighborhood and the park with new migrants. Puerto Ricans and southern African-Americans were moving to the area in unprecedentedly large numbers as they fled poverty and flocked to the promise of factory jobs in New York. As the factory jobs that had lured so many migrants began, for a variety of reasons, to leave New York, poverty and its attendant social problems intensified in the East Village. By the early 1960s, the area's crime rate had risen and Tompkins Square got a reputation as a dangerous place.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 87.

⁶⁶ Marci Reaven and Jeanne Houck, "History of Tompkins Square Park," originally in Janet L. Abu-Lughod, ed., *From Urban Village to East Village: The Battle for New York's Lower East Side*, Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley-Blackwell, 1994), <http://www.lespi-nyc.org/history.html>, accessed April 8, 2012.

In 1966 the city completed another renovation of Tompkins Square, which included the construction of a concert stage that faced a paved plaza “to accommodate 800 seats for concerts or to serve as a dancing area.”⁶⁷ This was just in time for another major cultural shift in the neighborhood. The East Village had begun to attract a bohemian population in the 1950s, and became a center of the Beat movement. The Beats and their hangers-on co-existed with the Slavic and Puerto Rican populations.

But by the 1960s, the East Village became the main East Coast gathering place of hippies. (A major link between the Beats and the hippies was the poet Allen Ginsberg, who over these years occupied several apartments near Tompkins Square.) On June 1, 1967, as though to inaugurate the “Summer of Love,” the San Francisco psychedelic rock band the Grateful Dead (they played, explained the *New York Times*, “electronically amplified variations on rock ‘n’ roll music”⁶⁸) performed a free concert on the stage in Tompkins Square. The park became New York’s playground and encampment for young hippies.

Two days after the Grateful Dead concert in the park, the *Times* reported:

The Puerto Ricans and Slavs living in the Tompkins Square Park area resent the hippies who congregate there, and the resulting conflicts have heightened old tensions among the many racial and ethnic groups that live in that Lower East Side neighborhood.⁶⁹

The article reported attacks on hippies “by blond youths with broad Slavic faces.” It was not the Summer of Love for everyone. The hippie scene wound down soon enough. Only a year later the *Times* reported:

Tompkins Square Park, the site of smoke-ins, rock concerts, gatherings of the garishly dressed tribes and the chanting of Hare Krishna has been returned to the

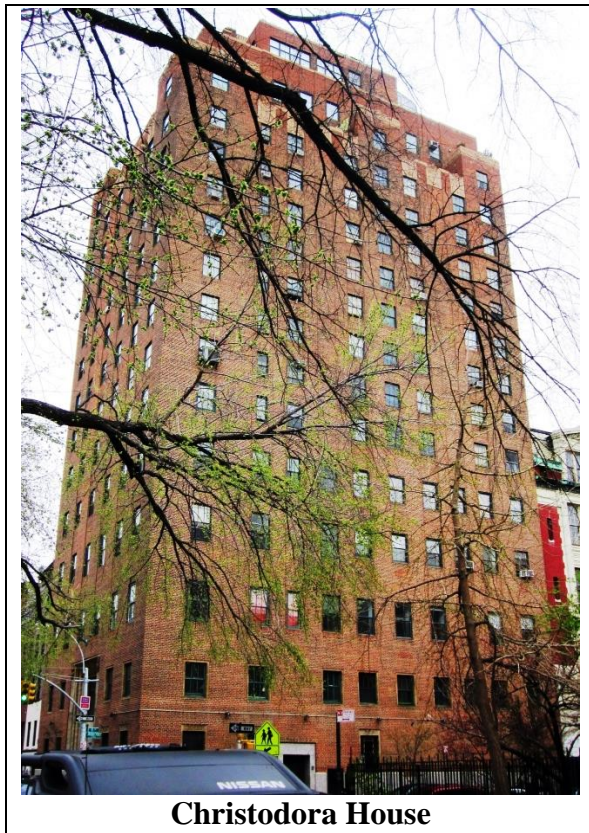
⁶⁷ “City Will Improve Four Local Parks,” *New York Times*, August 22, 1965, p. 64.

⁶⁸ “The Music Is Hip in Central Park,” *New York Times*, June 9, 1967, p. 40.

⁶⁹ Paul Hoffman, “Hippies Heighten East Side Tensions,” *New York Times*, June 3, 1967, p. 16.

elderly Ukrainian women who sit on the benches in heavy, ankle-length black coats and to the knots of Negro men who share pints of Gypsy Rose halfheartedly concealed in brown paper bags.⁷⁰

The hippies, the *Times* explained, had begun to move to rural communes. They had grown disenchanted with the city, where they felt unwelcome.



By the 1980s, the area around Tompkins Square, as with many other unexpected neighborhoods throughout the city, began to gentrify. In 1986 **Christodora House**, a former settlement house that faces the park on Avenue B between Ninth and Tenth Streets, was converted to luxury condominium residences as well as offices for community organizations. Because of its physical prominence, the building became a symbol of the 1980s gentrification of the Tompkins Square neighborhood. The city's imposition of a one o'clock in the morning curfew in Tompkins Square Park was endorsed by the local

Community Board, which complained of young people, many from outside the neighborhood, holding loud, raucous all-night parties in the park. But it was also interpreted by many area residents as the city — namely the Parks Department and the Police Department — doing the bidding of the affluent newcomers to the neighborhood, such as the “yuppies” who had bought apartments in Christodora House. The newcomers, it was alleged, wanted to stamp out the park's diverse uses and impose their own sense of order on the neighborhood. Thus the riot — by all accounts exacerbated by the police

⁷⁰ John Kifner, “Hippies Fading from City Scene,” *New York Times*, August 26, 1968, p. 41.

themselves — of August 6, 1988, followed from a protest rally that was largely about gentrification. After a bloody melee that involved unprovoked attacks by police — as attested to by eyewitness accounts, photographs, and videotapes — on unsuspecting bystanders (shades of 1874), a group of protesters hauled a police barricade across the street to Christodora House and used it as a battering ram to smash windows and break through the front door. Protesters vandalized the building's lobby.⁷¹ The 1988 protests made abundantly clear that many people were very unhappy with the state of things, but did little to alter the course of events, as gentrification of the East Village continued and intensified.

At the same time gentrification took hold, the city began to experience an unprecedented problem with homelessness. Many homeless slept in Tompkins Square. In 1991, the city closed Tompkins Square, and evicted its homeless residents, for yet another comprehensive renovation. The *New York Times*, in an editorial, supported the move:

Thanks to strong action by the Dinkins administration, Tompkins Square Park in New York City's East Village may once again be a park. It hasn't been that for many years, not since drug dealers, self-styled anarchists and the homeless took it over and turned it into a dangerous encampment that scared away neighborhood residents.⁷²

The park reopened on August 25, 1992. Gone was the concert stage. New features included a dog run. Needless to say, not everyone was pleased.⁷³ But if everyone were pleased, this would not be Tompkins Square — which more than any other ten acres in the city stands as a microcosm of the tensions, creativity, and longings that define New York.

⁷¹ Todd S. Purdum, "Melee in Tompkins Sq. Park," *New York Times*, August 14, 1988, p. 1.

⁷² "Retaking Tompkins Square," *New York Times*, June 5, 1991, p. 28.

⁷³ Clifford J. Levy, "Tompkins Square Park Reopens Amid Tensions," *New York Times*, August 26, 1992, p. B3.

Gentrification Redux

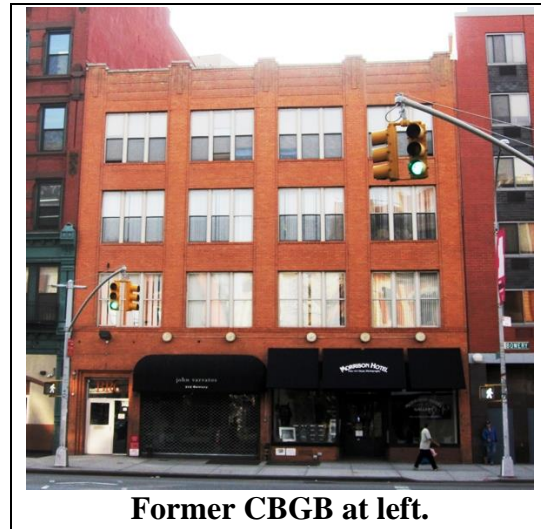
Since the Tompkins Square riot of 1988, the East Village has become ever more gentrified. Not long ago, no one would have mentioned “luxury rental” and “Bowery” in the same breath. Yet AvalonBay, one of the nation's leading builders of luxury rental apartment complexes geared to upwardly mobile young college graduates, has colonized the Bowery. Typically, an AvalonBay “community” is located in a prosperous suburb near a major city. A young couple lives in an Avalon Community until that couple decides to start a family and buy a house. The Bowery, on the other hand, refers, depending on one's purposes, either to the infamous street of lost souls (such as those served by the historic Bowery Mission, on the Bowery at Stanton Street, just outside our study area), or to the place one goes to buy restaurant equipment and furnishings. There is much more to the Bowery, of course, but until recently AvalonBay was not part of it.

Avalon Bowery Place replaced a building that from 1895 to 1902 housed the notorious concert-saloon known as McGurk's Suicide Hall. McGurk's attracted sailors who came for liquor, live entertainment, and prostitutes. For the prostitutes, McGurk's represented just about the furthest they could fall, and the “Suicide Hall” moniker refers to the young women who killed themselves there. In 1898, seven prostitutes allegedly committed suicide at McGurk's. The very name of the Bowery indicated life's nadir. As the historian Kenneth Jackson points out, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the Bowery was so awash with alcoholic men who lived in flophouses that even the prostitutes fled. In 1907, an estimated 25,000 men resided in Bowery flophouses. Jackson cites a fascinating statistic: in that year, 115 clothing stores operated on the Bowery. Every one of them sold men's clothing; none sold women's clothing.⁷⁴ The McGurk's building stood until 2005, when it was demolished, amid protests, for Avalon Bowery Place. In describing the neighborhood, AvalonBay promises on its website “excitement around every corner.” While the same claim might have been made in McGurk's day, one presumes today's excitements are of a different order.

⁷⁴ Kenneth T. Jackson, “Bowery,” in Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995, p. 131.

CBGB, the legendary punk rock club opened by Hilly Kristal in 1973 at 315 Bowery, closed in 2006. The space is now occupied by the retail store of the high-end men's wear designer John Varvatos. The men's clothing stores cited by Kenneth Jackson did not sell clothing like that purveyed by John Varvatos! (See Arts chapter for more on CBGB.) Indeed, the East Village is ever-changing, often in ways swift and unforeseen.

AvalonBay has also opened a complex on Chrystie Street on the south side of Houston Street — the area customarily labeled the Lower East Side, not the East Village. It shows how the distinction that many people (not just real estate agents) have for several decades made between the East Village and the Lower East Side has begun to blur. In the days of *Kleindeutschland* and of the Jewish East Side, the separateness of the areas to the

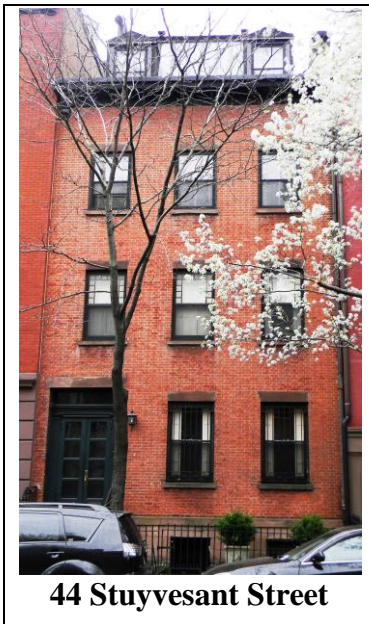


north and to the south of Houston Street blurred because of the areas' shared poverty and similar tenement streetscapes. Today it blurs because of shared prosperity, or gentrification — Michelin-starred restaurants, boutique hotels, buildings by Pritzker Prize-winning architects, raucous bars for the post-college crowd.

Whether one says “East Village” or “Lower East Side,” the pace of change at present in this neighborhood is ferocious. It is a good time to survey the historic resources of the East Village and see what the historic, social, and architectural significance of various sites may be. In what follows we will look more closely at significant buildings and streets in the East Village in an attempt to ascertain just that.

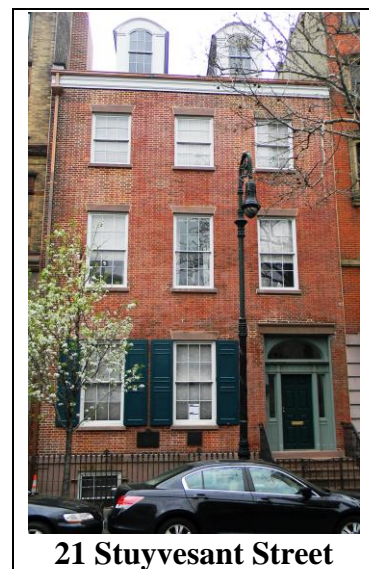
II. Row Houses

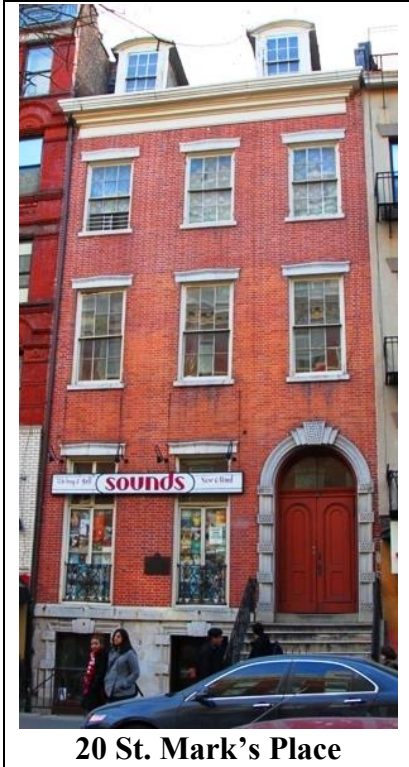
The East Village began life as a row house neighborhood, and possesses excellent examples of late Federal, Greek Revival, and Italianate row houses. Throughout much of the area, row house construction yielded to tenement development as early as the 1850s. The St. Mark's Historic District contains the oldest surviving house in the area, **44 Stuyvesant Street**, built for Nicholas William Stuyvesant around 1795. Nicholas William and his wife, Catherine Livingston Reade, resided here for twenty-three years.



The house has been altered but retains its original Flemish-bond brickwork, splayed lintels, and brownstone basement. The Elizabeth Stuyvesant and Nicholas Fish residence at **21 Stuyvesant Street**, built in 1803, is the oldest house with a fully intact façade. This is a textbook Federal-style town house with all the features one looks for, beginning with the Flemish-bond brickwork, the brownstone stoop, sills, and lintels, the low stoop, the shallow doorway, the sidelights set off by slender columns, the semi-elliptical fanlight, the six-over-six windows, and the pitched roof with dormers. It is simple, handsome, and unpretentious.

But this is the Federal of Bowery Village days. Most of the Stuyvesant estate did not experience development until later. When developer Thomas E. Davis, for example, began carving up St. Mark's Place, the Federal had been through some changes, and in parts of the city had yielded to the Greek Revival. In fact, it is customary to hear people refer to late Federal residences as Greek Revival (as many of them did, in fact, incorporate "Grecian" ornamentation).

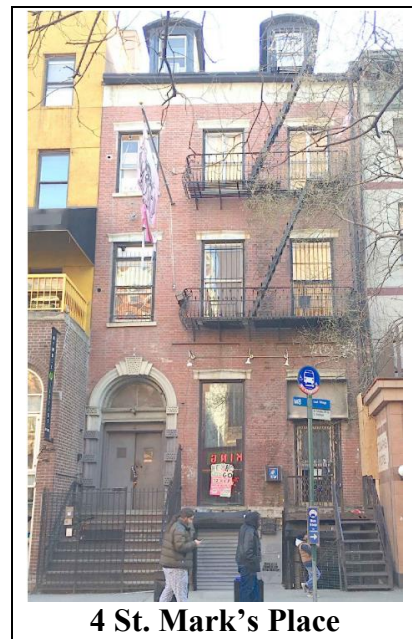




20 St. Mark's Place

An example is the Daniel Leroy residence at **20 St. Mark's Place** (a designated New York City Landmark), built in 1831. It has enough features in common with 21 Stuyvesant Street to be still of the same style, twenty-eight years later. We see the Flemish bond, the dormers, the six-over-six windows, the semi-elliptical fanlight — but this house is so much grander. You wouldn't look at it and think "unpretentious." Instead of the 1803 house's simple brownstone splayed lintels, we have pointed molded lintels of marble. Imagine the cost difference between the two sets of lintels alone. The earlier house's lintels could have been fashioned by any laborer. Those of the later house required a trained artisan, not to mention a costlier material. But what really lends the

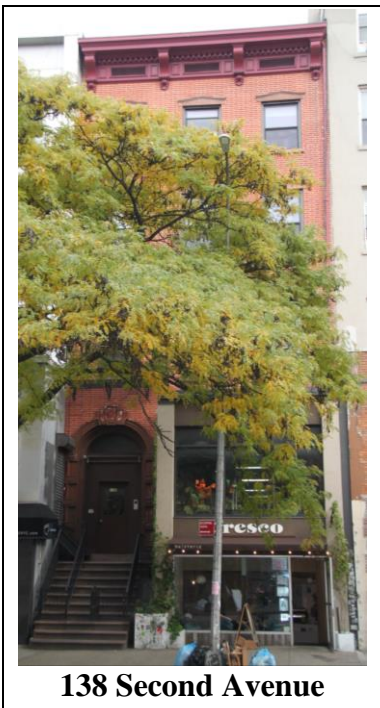
later house its grandeur is its marble stoop, higher and wider than the earlier house's brownstone stoop, and the marble doorway surround (or "Gibbs surround," after the eighteenth century English architect James Gibbs, though this use of the feature predates him). This is a heavy rusticated enframement, in this case using vermiculated blocks, five on each side of the doorway. At the top of the arched doorway is a prominent paneled keystone centered on a vermiculated block. But the differences don't end there. The earlier house has a simple, plain brownstone basement without window enframements. The later house uses Gibbs surrounds and paneled keystones in the openings of a fully marble revetment. An almost identical house stands at **4 St. Mark's Place** (the Hamilton-Holly House, a designated New York City Landmark), built by Thomas E. Davis in 1831 and once the home of the widow and son of Founding Father Alexander Hamilton.



4 St. Mark's Place

The Many Lives of Federal Houses

Though the two houses are nearly identical, 20 St. Mark's Place won landmark status in 1969, while 4 St. Mark's Place had to wait until 2004. Why? It's because the former is clearly the less altered of the two houses. Even though it has been converted to retail use in its lower floors, and has a loud sign strapped across its parlor windows, it nonetheless has been miraculously little changed over the years. No. 4, by contrast, has been heavily altered. It misses its original sash and molded cornice. The original front double door, framed by a Gibbs surround, yielded to battleship gray institutional doors. Most egregiously, an additional stoop and doorway replaced the farthest right parlor window. There is also a fire escape slung across the house front. But where once the tendency may have been to look at a house such as this one and lament the alterations, today we look at it and marvel that so much that is original remains from the various remodelings. We may even look at the remodelings themselves as telling the neighborhood's story. Indeed, the Landmarks Preservation Commission is to be commended for designating 4 St. Mark's Place and showing that it appreciates not just the pristine, but also buildings that display their layers of history.



One building that's weathered many uses is the four-story-plus-basement house at **138 Second Avenue** built in 1832-33, located between St. Mark's Place and East Ninth Street. In 1850, the rowhouse became the home of the prominent merchant Duncan Pearsall Campbell (1781-1861) and Maria Bayard Campbell. The Campbells were very well-placed in New York society — as much so as Daniel Leroy (the son-in-law of Elizabeth Stuyvesant and Nicholas Fish, and brother-in-law of Senator Daniel Webster) of 20 St. Mark's Place. Campbell had been a partner in the legendary New York merchant house of Le Roy, Bayard & Co., and married Catherine, a daughter of William Bayard. When she died he married Maria, a

second daughter of William Bayard.¹ From 1810 to 1850 he lived at 51 Broadway, then moved to 138 Second Avenue, where he resided for the last eleven years of his life. He was a director of many companies and charities, and, as a trained physician, was a trustee of the College of Physicians and Surgeons.²

In 1874, No. 138 was combined with No. 136 to form the Association for Befriending Children and Young Girls, operated by the Sisters of the Divine Compassion. In 1881, No. 134 was added to the complex. The stated object was "To rescue young girls who need reformation in any degree, or for any cause, and to protect children from evil influences." In the Charity Organization Society's 1888 *New York Charities Directory*, it was noted of the Association: "Laundry work and fine sewing done in the House at moderate prices. Also families in the country provided with servants."³ It was later renamed the House of the Holy Family by the Archdiocese and "besides having charge of children and young girls, now has a day school for neglected Italian children and an industrial school, in which between 300 and 400 children are taught to sew and are clothed."⁴ In 1916 it became the League for Foreign Born Citizens. The 1918 *New York Charities Directory* stated its purpose as "To interest immigrants in the ideals of American citizenship; to cause those who are not yet citizens to become citizens and to help bring about active public interest in the Americanization of immigrants."⁵ It is startling and sobering to see the speed with which the house went from being the fashionable home of a rich member of New York society to housing a Church-run charitable organization intended to aid the destitute girls in a neighborhood of tenements. The buildings it was combined with, Nos. 134 and 136, were both demolished and rebuilt in the twentieth century.

No. 138 Second Avenue is a grand Federal house that retains its Gibbs door surround, high stoop, pointed molded lintels, and Flemish-bond brickwork. It was altered in the late

¹ William S. Pelletreau, *Genealogical and Family History of New York*, New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1907, p. 110.

² See Walter Barrett, *The Old Merchants of New York City*, New York: Carleton, Publisher, 1863, vol. 2.

³ *New York Charities Directory*, New York: Charity Organization Society, 1888, p. 484.

⁴ "News for Catholics," *New York Times*, 29 November 1885, p. 10.

⁵ *New York Charities Directory*, New York: Charity Organization Society, 1918, p. 170.

nineteenth century with an enlargement of the top story and installation of a heavy cornice, and probable removal of dormers, and the addition of a projecting bay to the right of the stoop at the basement and parlor levels. The stoop railing is from the late nineteenth century. There is more than enough substance here to remind us of when this was the home of prominent members of New York society on a fashionable thoroughfare. But the house is also an excellent vintage example of the sensitive conversion of a portion of a row house to commercial use. Its original appearance, including most of the façade, is essentially as intact as that of 4 St. Mark's Place.

Both houses and ambitions had grown larger since the days of the early republic. The opening of the Erie Canal, together with such innovations as packet shipping, had caused New York to vault far ahead of its competitors for the title of America's leading seaport. The growth of population and improvements in surface transportation contributed to the northward sprawl of the city. (The first streetcar line opened along the Bowery between Prince and Fourteenth Streets in 1832, with an extension south to Park Row in 1839.) Mercantile and banking fortunes grew ever larger, as did the gulf between rich and poor. President Andrew Jackson's actions against the Bank of the United States helped precipitate the Panic of 1837, which devastated New York, but also, once the dust had settled, made New York the national banking center.

The 1830s was when modern suburbia came into its own, and well-to-do people were able as never before to live in one part of the city (often its periphery) and work in another (often its old core). This led to a high value being placed upon privacy, domesticity, and the nuclear family. The higher and wider the stoop, the bigger the areaway demarcated by an iron fence, the more prominent the doorway surround or the more recessed the doorway from the house front — all of these were markers, sometimes subtle and sometimes not, of the division of public from private, domestic space. This social phenomenon began to occur before a full stylistic adjustment had taken place in row house design. Thus the Federal home, which is valued for its charm and simplicity

("the most respectable and artistic pattern of habitation New York has ever known,"⁶ wrote the critic Montgomery Schuyler in 1899), grew grandiose at the end of its popularity. Think of houses such as 4 St. Mark's Place, 138 Second Avenue, and 20 St. Mark's Place as the McMansions of their day — but with superb architecture.



78 and 80 East Second Street

A late example of the Federal style, built well after the "Grecian" had become all the rage, is the pair of houses at **78 and 80 East Second Street**. With the historic New York City Marble Cemetery (designated as a landmark in 1969) as their backyard, these houses, between First and Second Avenues, enjoy one of the most magical settings in the East Village. Both houses were originally two houses combined

into one, and both date from approximately 1836-37, only a few years after the founding of the cemetery. The block-paneled lintels and the shallow, transomed doorways are more in the style of the Federal era rather than of the Greek Revival. In 2014 a multi-story rooftop addition was constructed at No. 80.



88 to 98 Third Avenue

A remarkable survivor is the row, built between 1835 and 1839, at **88 to 98 Third Avenue**, between Twelfth and Thirteenth Streets. The

pedestrian today walks right past these buildings without noticing the surviving 1830s facades above the motley assortment of modern storefronts. Nos. 88 and 90, at the northwest corner of Twelfth Street, date from 1835-36. Built by John J. Eddington, both

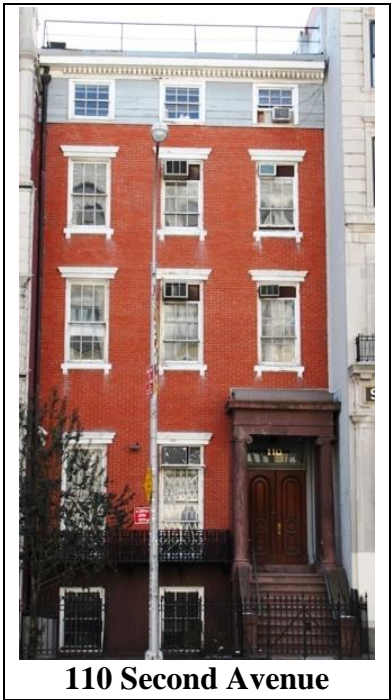
⁶ Montgomery Schuyler, "Small City House in New York," *Architectural Record*, vol. VIII, April-June 1899, p. 365.

buildings, which are quite wide, have upper facades of Flemish-bond brickwork. No. 88 has cap-molded lintels, while No. 90 has plain lintels. It is possible that both buildings originally had plain lintels. The three four-story houses at Nos. 92, 94, and 96 were built by Thorp Harris around 1837-39. The brickwork is standard bond and the lintels are cap-molded. The heavy bracketed cornices are slightly later additions. A few of the windows have plain lintels, but this is likely the result of the removal of structurally insecure molded lintels. Finally, the four-story house at No. 98 was built by Caleb Bartlett in 1839. It has a façade very similar to Nos. 92-96 with the exception that in the center of the top story is an unusual double window with shared lintel and sill. It's fascinating to think that these simple, handsome structures successfully serve East Village commerce more than 170 years after they were built at the northern extremity of the original New York & Harlem Railroad horsecar line.

Everyday Homage to Ancient Greece

The evolving city received its new architectural expression in the Greek Revival that dominated New York architecture of the 1830s and 1840s. The sources of the Greek Revival are numerous. The style fit the national mood in many ways. The impetus can clearly be found in the eighteenth-century rediscovery of Greek architecture, as exemplified by the magisterial compilation of measured drawings, *Antiquities of Athens* (first volume 1762), by the Englishmen James Stuart and Nicholas Revett. As the Federal had sources in Roman antiquarianism, so in a sense the Greek Revival follows in the line of styles that collectively are known as Neo-Classicism. This can be confusing, because there is also a sense in which the Greek Revival marks a decisive break with the Federal and can be yoked with the contemporaneous, though stylistically very different, Gothic Revival. This is the Romantic sense. In the rapidly changing city, experiencing industrialization, surging immigration, and breathtaking and disorienting technological transformations (telegraph, railroad, gaslight, steam-powered rotary presses that blanketed the city in newsprint, and fresh water supplied by the newly constructed Croton Aqueduct), many people yearned for a simpler time, a more honorable or a more pious time — or wished for their fashions to exhibit such yearning. (A classic example of this is a Samuel F.B. Morse oil painting of the original Gothic Revival building of New York

University, on the east side of Washington Square. The painting shows the building accurately, but where Washington Square should be are field and forest, and Greenwich Village beyond is filled with mountains and lakes.) But whatever the roots of Greek Revival, the popularity of the style for row houses probably had mostly to do with creating an image less of a pre-industrial past than of the impenetrable domicile of the family — which, ironically, was purely a phenomenon of industrial society.



110 Second Avenue

The Greek Revival row house adapted the temple front to the twenty-five-foot-wide (or even narrower) Manhattan lot. A grand civic building such as the former Custom House (now Federal Hall National Memorial, 1833-42) at 26 Wall Street, which bears a full octastyle portico with Doric columns roughly of the scale of those of the Parthenon in Athens, clearly registers as a "temple." You could not stick such a portico onto a row house — but you could adapt it. The great local example is the house at 110 Second Avenue (c. 1837-38), an individually designated New York City Landmark. Once the home of a prosperous South Street commission merchant named Ralph Mead and his wife Anne Van Wyck, it later became the Isaac T.

Hopper Home of the Women's Prison Association — precisely the same kind of transformation as occurred at 138 Second Avenue. Here we see that instead of 26 Wall Street's eight-column front, we have only two columns, both in the farthest right of three bays. The columns, in this case Ionic, support a chaste entablature (comprising architrave, frieze, and cornice). The columns are, as much as those of 26 Wall Street, freestanding, set out from the house front so that they support a canopy-like roof. The Daniel Leroy house at 20 St. Mark's Place differs from 21 Stuyvesant Street by sporting such a high and wide stoop and heavy doorway enframing. The house at **110 Second Avenue**, a New York City landmark, goes beyond 20 St. Mark's. Instead of the division of inside and outside being emphatically demarcated by a Gibbs surround, there is a whole intermediary space marking the transition. At 110 Second Avenue there is also a front

areaway separating stoop from sidewalk, and an iron fence at the property line. The passage from sidewalk to the inside of the house involves opening a gate, traversing an areaway, ascending a high stoop into a semi-enclosed space the size of a generously proportioned walk-in closet, and then, up one step more, finally passing through the doorway. The separation of public and private becomes a journey.



285 and 287 East Third Street

The house at 110 Second Avenue holds up in comparison with the celebrated row at 1-13 Washington Square North. This is a very grand Greek Revival house — the fully modeled columns are the giveaway. Most of the city's Greek Revival houses are more modest. The houses at **285 and 287 East Third Street**, between Avenue C and Avenue D, are

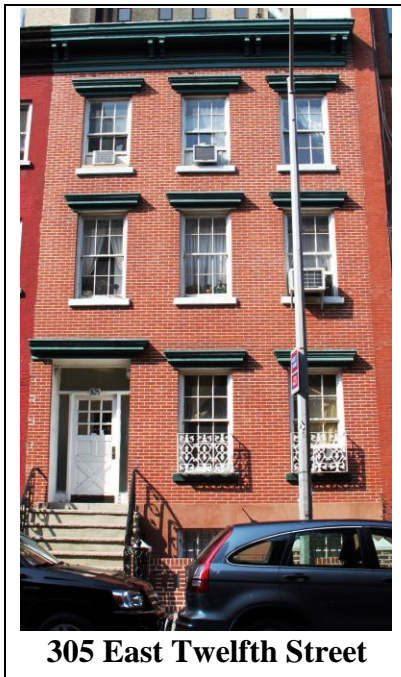
excellent examples. These were built in 1837, making them the contemporaries of 110 Second Avenue. The house at 110 Second Avenue reveals the temple front adapted to a 26-foot-wide row house. But not every homebuilder could afford the full columns, nor could a narrow house, such as the twenty-two-foot-wide 285 and 287 East Third Street, accommodate the full-templed stoop. The alternative for modest houses was to employ pilasters rather than columns, which saved money and, by not projecting the entablature so far out from the house front, created a more appropriately scaled entryway for a house of modest dimensions. The entablature still projects from the house front, and makes its point — even if the point is now more rhetorical and less like a walk-in closet.

These houses — which count among the few near-pristine to be found in the East Village — retain their original cap-molded lintels, transomed doorways, and iron stoop railings. They also beautifully exemplify something builders liked to do in the Greek Revival era, and that's to build multiple houses as a single unit. Sometimes this gave us the "colonnade row," as at La Grange Terrace on Lafayette Street. More often it gave us

buildings such as 285 and 287 East Third Street: two houses where the stoops and doorways were built next to each other (at No. 285 the stoop and doorway is on the right, at No. 287 on the left), so that when you stand back you could be looking not at two twenty-two-foot-wide houses but at one forty-four-foot-wide mansion. That both of these houses still stand makes each house doubly valuable. This is especially so as they illustrate a point on the spectrum of Greek Revival designs that is different from that of 110 Second Avenue, their exact contemporary.



311 East Twelfth Street



305 East Twelfth Street

The twenty-foot-wide house at **311 East Twelfth Street**, between First and Second Avenues, is another excellent example of the pilastered Greek Revival row house. Built circa 1853, this is a finely preserved house, once part of a long row of similar houses. The pilasters have Doric

capitals and carry an entablature with a frieze of triglyphs and metopes. It is interesting to note that the stoop of 311 East Twelfth Street is marble, where in the case of the vast majority of pilastered Greek Revival row houses the stoops are brownstone (as they are at 285 and 287 East Third Street). Also of note is the bracketed cornice of a type generally associated with the Italianate style. This house was built at the moment the Greek Revival style was yielding to the Italianate, and such transitional elements are not unusual.

Separated from No. 311 by the former Elizabeth Home for Girls (1892, Vaux & Radford; a designated individual New York City Landmark) is **No. 305**, also built circa 1853. It has obviously been much altered but retains its six-over-six windows and its original stoop railings, which terminate in elaborate vertical volutes. It is curious but true that

many Greek Revival houses, where the aesthetic values straight lines (trabeation), have curvaceous railings.



Sometimes pilasters were used even on grand houses, as we see at **147-149 Second Avenue**, between Ninth and Tenth Streets, built in 1850. Here is another case where the stoop and original entryway, with pilasters and entablature, as well as the upper façade, were left beautifully intact as the ground and parlor floors were made into commercial premises with the addition of a two-story projecting bay to the left of the stoop. The house is an extraordinary thirty-three feet wide, one of the widest individual houses in the East Village. In the late nineteenth century this was the home of Sir Roderick Cameron. On January 21,

1885, the *Times* reported that “Sir Roderick Cameron, the nobleman-merchant, sent out 450 invitations to the ball he gave in honor of his daughter last night, and fully 400 guests rolled up in carriages to the family home at No. 149 Second Avenue, amid the old-fashioned aristocracy of Stuyvesant-square.”⁷ Born in Canada in 1825, Cameron prospered as a commission merchant on South Street, then operated a fleet of clipper ships engaged in commerce with Australia. He served in the Union Army, and was knighted in 1883. His *Times* obituary in 1900 stated: “Sir Roderick Cameron was the only gentleman of British title who resided permanently in New York and was brought into daily intercourse with the life of the city. ...Few British noblemen or fellow-Knights have visited this country without being made aware that Sir Roderick was still true to the traditions of his caste, drank vintage champagnes and tawny port, ate roast beef and Stilton cheese, and in every way lived up to the precepts of his sovereign lady the Queen.”⁸ He also maintained, on Staten Island, one of the nation’s most famous horse-breeding farms, and attended the Patriarchs’ Balls at Delmonico’s.

⁷ “A Ball in a Nobleman’s House,” *New York Times*, 21 January 1885, p. 5.

⁸ “Sir Roderick Cameron Dead,” *New York Times*, 20 October 1900, p. 7.

Sometime between 1885, when Cameron held the lavish ball in his Second Avenue home, and 1900, when he died, he moved to Madison Avenue and Thirty-Fourth Street in Murray Hill — the standard move uptown for the old aristocracy of Second Avenue. In the 1890s the house became — again, reflecting a common progression — the House of the Holy Comforter, “to provide a free home,” according to *King’s Handbook of New York City*, “for the care of destitute Protestant women and children of the better class suffering from incurable diseases.”⁹ The House remained here until 1915. Between 1963 and 1965 the house was home to Café Le Metro (described in the Arts chapter). Note the felicitous way the house is cradled by two large tenements, an Old Law tenement at 145 Second Avenue (built 1899) by Charles B. Meyers to the left, and a New Law tenement at 151-153 Second Avenue (built 1903) by Bernstein & Bernstein to the right.

Merging Styles, Changing Uses

The Greek Revival row house at **326 East Fourth Street**, between Avenue C and Avenue D, was a wonderful survivor of Dry Dock District days until a developer destroyed it in 2011. Here is a cautionary tale, akin to the story of St. Ann's Armenian Catholic Cathedral at 120 East Twelfth Street, an immensely important house of worship reduced to a façade that awkwardly ornaments the plaza of a New York University dormitory. The house was part of a seven-house row built between 1837 and 1841. These were the first buildings erected on their sites. Although No. 326 had fallen on hard times, it miraculously retained most of its original façade elements: cornice, dentils, six-over-six windows, leaded transom, entryway pilasters and entablature, and stair railings. The house's original owner is listed in 1839 tax assessment records as Fickett & Thomas, a large shipbuilding concern. The firm's Francis Fickett (1798-1876) is credited with building the first steamship to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Tax records indicate that he developed several properties along this block and was buried in the New York City Marble Cemetery on East Second Street. His paddle steamer *Savannah* was launched from Corlears Hook in 1818 and made its first Atlantic voyage, under a combination of

⁹ Moses King, editor, *King’s Handbook of New York City*, 1892, p. 404.



326, right, and 328 East Fourth Street, prior to alteration

steam and sail power, in 1819.¹⁰ In 1842 ownership of No. 326 changed to George Fickett, a shipbuilder and undoubtedly a relative of Francis.

The house next door at **No. 328 East Fourth**, also recently destroyed,

was similarly intact. It had beautiful railings with swirling horizontal volutes at porch level and vertical volutes at sidewalk level. It has the same railings as 258-264 East Seventh Street, also between Avenue C and Avenue D, and it makes sense to think they were manufactured at one of several iron foundries in the neighborhood. The original owner of No. 328 was a Cornelius Read of whom very little is known. We do know that his daughter Catherine and her husband Joseph Bishop resided from 1845 to 1849 at No. 326, which they presumably purchased from George Fickett.

The houses bore witness to all the vicissitudes of East Village history. From housing the well-to-do, by the turn of the twentieth century the houses had been "tenementized," carved into small apartments housing the immigrant poor. No. 328 East Fourth became, around 1928, a synagogue (thought to serve a Hungarian congregation). The synagogue remained until 1974, when both Nos. 326 and 328 were purchased by the Uranian Phalanstery. This "artists' collective and burial society" was founded in the East Village in the late 1950s by the artists Richard Oviet Tyler and Dorothea Tyler. The name comes from combining Uranus, a planet that had particular significance for Mr. Tyler, and Charles Fourier's utopian "phalanxes." The Phalanstery was a utopian commune engaged in making art, documenting its members' lives, and enacting ceremonies based on

¹⁰ See Frank O. Braynard, *S.S. Savannah: The Elegant Steam Ship*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1963.

mystical practices. Its philosophy combined anarchist politics, Eastern mysticism, and a kind of hoarding of memorabilia.

In 2010 the Phalanstery, faced with tax liens, sold its two houses to a real estate developer.¹¹ The developer expressed a wish to add floors to the houses in converting them to residences, a move that preservationists opposed. The houses were remarkably intact, and what changes had been made — such as the doorway that the Uranian Phalanstery presumably added to No. 328 — were themselves expressions of vital aspects of the neighborhood's history. No row houses east of Avenue C have been designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (indeed only one East Village row house east of Second Avenue has been), nor has anything with a direct connection to the great shipbuilders and shipbuilding families who transformed this part of Manhattan into the fabled Dry Dock District. The houses were also examples of tenementized row houses, reflecting the tremendous changes that overcame the neighborhood in the mass immigration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It may be said that these two houses were the East Village in microcosm: one was for nearly half a century a "tenement synagogue," and the two houses together were for almost forty years a utopian artists' commune, and through it all miraculously retained such abundant original detail.

The six houses at **258-264 East Seventh Street** between Avenue C and Avenue D form a fascinating row of Greek Revival row houses. No. 258 has a double door (all four houses were built with double doors) recessed behind molded pilasters and an entablature that has a curved molding. The windows have elaborate double lintels: a cap molding over a curved molding. The house has notable iron railings with swirling horizontal volutes at the top of the stoop descending to vertical volutes at sidewalk level. The next three houses, Nos. 260-264, also retain these original railings. (These are the same railings that once adorned the destroyed 328 East Fourth Street.) No. 260 lost its doorway surround, and has only simple cap molded lintels over the windows. No. 262 has a similar doorway surround and lintels to No. 258. No. 264 has treatments similar to, but distinctly different

¹¹ See Rhonda Lieberman, "Stuff of Dreams," *Artforum*, 6 August 2010, <http://artforum.com/diary/id=26095>, accessed 26 July 2012; Colin Moynihan, "Artists' Collective and Burial Society Goes on the Move," *New York Times*, 12 September 2010, p. A24.

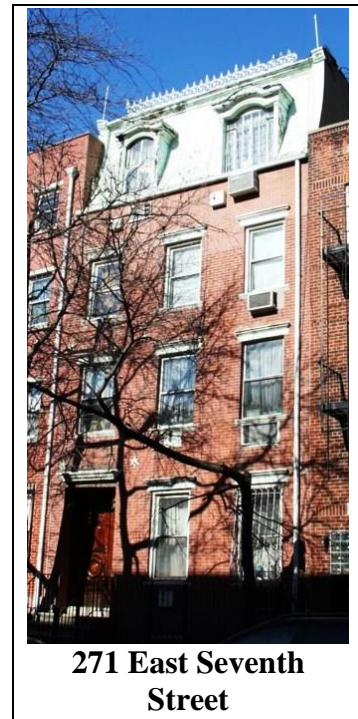


from, Nos. 258 and 262, and adds a heavy Italianate bracketed cornice. In 2016 a demolition permit was filed for No. 264.

There are some very fine architectural elements here, like the railings of Nos. 258 to 264, and some unusual ones

too, like the lintels of Nos. 258 and 262-264. The row is also historically important as a remnant of the legendary Political Row, the block of Seventh Street between Avenue C and Avenue D where most of the Eleventh Ward's political figures resided. Aldermen, judges, commissioners, district leaders, and more, from both the Democratic and the Republican parties, lived in fine (but unpretentious) row houses in a quiet and leafy enclave in the midst of the teeming Dry Dock District. By the turn of the twentieth century, newspaper and magazine articles began to lament the erosion of Political Row, as its denizens moved away amid the onslaught of tenement construction.¹² Despite this, a remarkably intact row remains. (For more on Political Row, see the History chapter.)

Across the street, the Greek Revival house at **271 East Seventh Street** was built in 1843 and retains its cap-molded lintels and marble stoop and what most likely is its original paneled double door. At some point in the next two decades it received a fashionable mansard roof. While we typically see mansards on houses with an Italianate body, we also sometimes see them stuck on Greek Revival houses, as well. The Greek Revival in all its essential chasteness



¹² See "The Doom Near of Old Political Row," *New York Times*, 11 May 1902, p. 16.

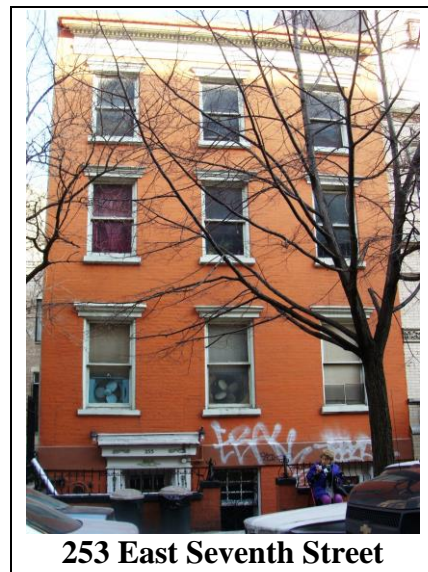
remained popular throughout the 1840s. But by the 1850s and 1860s many of the houses had begun to appear to their owners as impossibly plain.



263 East Seventh Street

Another example is **263 East Seventh Street**, also across the street from Political Row. Here we have another 1843 Greek Revival, this time with added Italianate flourishes in the form of an outside bracketed, paneled, and denticulated doorway entablature and a prominent cornice with dentils and a rondel frieze. The lintels appear to be the house's original cap-molded lintels, and the house retains its original six-over-six sash, as well as its gorgeous railings, the same as to be found across the street. This house is in a superb state of preservation and is as fine a house as may be found east of Avenue C.

The house at **253 East Seventh Street** also dates from 1843. It retains a great deal of its original charm — the original brickwork, the pleasing proportions and spacing of the windows, the plain sills and cap-molded lintels, the cornice — even though its stoop was removed. Stoops were sometimes removed for reasons of fashion, though in this neighborhood stoops were removed during conversions to multiple occupancy. It is important to note that such removals could be done well or badly. Here, the new basement entrance is similar to a Greek Revival surround, and the remainder of the façade was left untouched.



253 East Seventh Street



316 East Third Street

Row houses seldom remained static. They were carved into multiple dwellings, or made over to non-residential uses. Thus they acquired storefronts, fire escapes, additional stories, or had their stoops removed or rearranged. Houses also were remodeled to keep up with fashion. There are examples of Federal houses being remodeled to the Greek Revival, and, even more common, Greek Revivals made to look Italianate, as with the fine 263 East Seventh Street, now demolished. Another example was the house at **316 East Third Street**, between Avenues C and D, also demolished in spite of requests by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation and other groups to save the house. Built in 1835, it was the first building ever to occupy its site. It is probable that the third floor had been added in 1857, in which year the property's valuation

jumped (often indicative of an enlargement). The tip-off was the upper floor's discernibly different brick facing from the lower floors (which were done in the Flemish bond pattern, popular until about 1838). The house may in that year have been converted to a multiple dwelling. It is also quite likely that that is when the distinctive double door with its elliptical windows and carved wooden ornamentation was installed. The cornice and iron railings may also date from that renovation. In 1978 David Izenzon (1932-79), one of the most notable jazz bassists of the 1960s and 1970s — known especially for his work with Ornette Coleman — founded Pot Smokers Anonymous at No. 316.¹³ The house had been one of the few tangible reminders of the Dry Dock District.

¹³ “David Izenzon, Bassist; Anti-Marijuana Adviser,” *New York Times*, 10 October 1979, p. A25.

Developer Thomas E. Davis built the Greek Revival house at **68 East Seventh Street** between First and Second Avenues in 1835. It was given fashionable Italianate flourishes in the 1850s or 1860s, such as the window pediments (triangular on the parlor floor, rounded on the next floor, and cap-molded with central rondels on the next floor), the garlanded frieze, the denticulated cornice, and the molded entablature (carried by what may, in fact, be the original Greek Revival pilasters). The house retains its original brownstone stoop, Flemish bond brickwork, and six-over-six windows. The paneled doorway with its windowed door, sidelights, and unusually large transom probably dates from the remodeling. From 1882 to 1904



the house was converted from a residence to the Protestant Episcopal Church Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews. Remarkably, the building subsequently became a school operated by the Machzikei Talmud Torah, and then a synagogue. In 1960 it returned to use as a private residence. It would be a mistake to devalue a house such as this because its original Greek Revival architecture did not remain 100 percent intact. On the one hand, as the first building to be built on its site, its original appearance would hold great historical interest for us. On the other hand, buildings change with changing times. Here, the remodeling was done with great care, and the combination of elements results in one of the finest houses in the East Village.

Italianate Claims the Scene

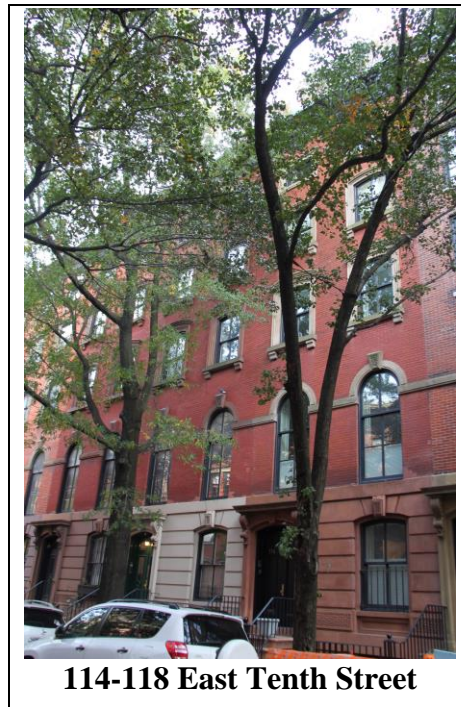
The Greek Revival emphasis on separation of inside and outside was carried further, typically in stone rather than in brick — though less so in the East Village — in the succeeding Italianate style. As with the Greek Revival, everything becomes just a little more pronounced: the long parlor windows, the high rusticated basements, the broad stoops, the heavy ironwork, the big double doors. And for the first time in New York row house design there is an abundance of ornamentation. In many Italianate houses this is most apparent in the richly carved ornamental brackets holding the doorway pediment.

These are floral in character, making use of variations of the acanthus leaf motif that is a permanent part of the art of decoration in the West. (Some other styles, such as French Second Empire and Renaissance Revival, are variations on Italianate.) The classic material of Italianate houses is the muddy sandstone quarried primarily in Connecticut. We call it "brownstone." The desire for the ever more imposing house fronts made people want stone facades. Finer, more durable, and handsomer stones existed, but home buyers' budgets, and the need of builders to build rapidly in a rapidly growing city, led to the extensive use of brownstone. Expedience in quarrying and dressing the stone led to scaling and spalling, and the widespread application of tinted aggregate-based coatings as a form of "restoration." In truth, the original builders and occupants of brownstone row houses did not imagine these houses to be permanent.

There is another reason for the popularity of brownstone: it was suited to cost-effective ornamental carving. One reason carving does not appear on row houses before the Italianate is that the popular taste, even when desirous of imposing effects, still hewed to notions of "republican simplicity." Not until mass immigration, particularly of the Germans, were there enough skilled carvers in town to drive down the price and make every middle-class family the proud owner of a pair of foliated brackets.

A variation should be noted: Houses in the so-called Anglo-Italianate style exhibit most of the characteristics of the Italianate, particularly the use of carved ornamentation. But the effect of grandeur may be somewhat subdued. The great case in point is the so-called "Renwick Triangle," the sixteen houses that wrap around the intersection of East Tenth and Stuyvesant Streets. These (**112-128 East Tenth Street**, 23-35 Stuyvesant Street) are included in the St. Mark's Historic District that was designated in 1969. (The houses' attribution to architect James Renwick Jr. is highly uncertain.)

These houses, some of which are quite narrow and shallow, have parlor floors sheathed in brownstone. The stone is rusticated (continuous channeling) with vermiculated panels at the bottom. The segmental-arched doorways have carved brackets but the stoops are low and narrow. There are double doors, which is surprising given the narrowness of the houses and the stoops. The houses are five stories high, making up in height what they generally lack in depth, with the second through the fifth floors faced in red brick. But the brick is set off by elaborate stone window enframements, a typical feature of the Italianate.



114-118 East Tenth Street



47-51 Avenue B

The row at **47 to 51 Avenue B**, between Third and Fourth Streets, comprises four relatively narrow (sixteen to eighteen feet) three-story houses that tax records indicate were constructed in 1842-43. The upper facades of these houses are remarkably intact from the mid-nineteenth century, but may be Italianate remodelings of

Greek Revival houses. The window treatments are curious. The farthest north of the houses, No. 51, has two windows each on its second and third floors, sporting the cap-molded lintels popular in the Greek Revival. The other, southernmost, set of windows has a full window surround of a type associated with the Italianate style. The farthest south of the houses, No. 47, has two sets of windows with full surrounds, and one set with cap-molded lintels. If all the windows originally had cap-molded lintels, then why were they not all remodeled with the full surrounds? But the treatments follow a definite rhythm

across the four houses: A-A-B, B-A-A, B-B-A, A-B-B. Given when these were built, it is possible either that the facades are original (including the strongly Italianate bracketed cornices), or remodeled a few years after they were built. No records attest to either possibility. Either way, the four houses form a strong, coherent unit. Although probably not built with storefronts, the southernmost, at least, had a storefront by 1882.



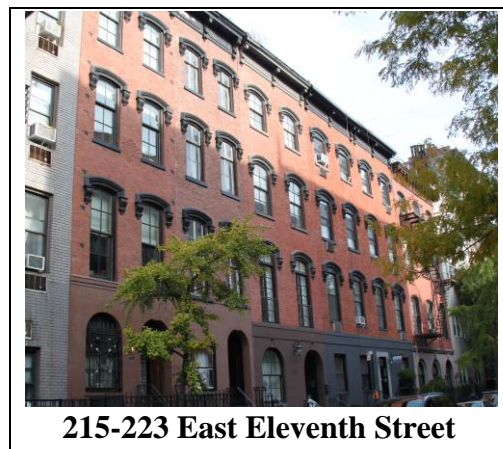
Possibly the finest Italianate house in the East Village is **249 East Thirteenth Street**, between Second and Third Avenues. It was built in 1864. The brownstone with which we normally associate the Italianate row house style appears here only in the large doorway enframing. The rest of the façade is red brick, and the cornice, sills, and lintels are brown. The windows have simple

cap-molded lintels that are more typical of those on a Greek Revival row house. The windows retain what is probably their original nine-over-nine sash, and in classic Italianate fashion the parlor windows go down to the floor. Here the entryway wears the foliated brackets, a deep rounded pediment, and a deeply recessed doorway with a double door. This house bears comparison with the celebrated row known as St. Luke's Place, in the West Village, built about a decade earlier.

A curiosity to note is that right next door to No. 249 is a low building bearing the address **249 1/2 East Thirteenth Street**. The address, plus its appearance, makes it seem like an auxiliary building — a stable, perhaps. But it was, remarkably, purpose-built as a sculptor's studio, at a time when, in fact, stables were being converted to just that use. As the well-to-do continued their march uptown, they left behind their stables. These were left abandoned, or maybe made over into workshops or given to nefarious uses, until sculptors discovered them. Sculptors have greater and more peculiar space requirements

than painters, and it is sculptors who are typically in the vanguard of artists exploring the suitability of unusual spaces for use as studios. After sculptors found and converted the stables at the end of the nineteenth century, it was they who also led painters to abandoned industrial lofts in the decades following World War II. Built in 1891, this little structure was a kind of faux-converted-stable (like the houses that would later be built along the south side of Washington Mews). It was designed by an architect named Max Schroff and it served as the studio of two sculptors, Giuseppe Moretti (1857-1935) and Karl Bitter (1867-1915). These were two notable artists, and their names are carved in stone on the building. The two men lived in the tenement at 215 Second Avenue, between Thirteenth and Fourteenth Streets. The studio was built in a yard that was owned by that building, not by No. 249. Building records indicate that the studio was built for \$1,200 and that the owner was "Joseph Moretti." But elsewhere in the same building application and in other records the owner is listed as Eimer & Amends, a local druggist and owner of 215 Second Avenue. Although the studio seems to have been purpose-built for Moretti and Bitter, they ended their partnership and left the studio after only one year, leaving behind their names carved in stone. The building is a curiosity, to be sure, and a charming one in today's streetscape.

Other interesting Italianate houses may be found on Eleventh Street between Second and Third Avenues. At **215 to 223 East Eleventh Street** stand what were originally five houses that look as though they were built as a group. But Nos. 215 and 217 were built in 1855-56 by William Beard. The houses are extremely narrow — a remarkable twelve feet, nine inches



wide. They are among the narrowest houses in the East Village. They are notable for their very deep arched entryways leading to double doors. Above the bases — originally brownstone, since covered — rise three stories faced in brick. The windows have exceptionally fine and exceptionally intact segmental-arched lintels with prominent

brackets. The typically heavy Italianate cornices also remain intact. (No. 217 was owned in the 1960s by the artist Adja Yunkers and his wife, the art historian Dore Ashton.) No. 219 seems a behemoth at 17 feet wide. It was also built by Beard, a bit earlier, in 1853-54. In all respects but width, it is the same as Nos. 215 and 217.

No. 223 was originally two seventeen-foot-wide houses, identical to No. 219, and also built in 1853-54, though perhaps not by Beard. These houses became rooming houses and then were combined and remodeled into modern apartments in 1967 by the architects Wechsler & Schimenti, a prominent firm that had recently designed the luxury apartment building at 200 Central Park South (1964). Here they applied a new base that is so strange that it practically deserves protection just for that reason. The arched windows of the base were replaced by square windows with black shutters quaintly set against a white background. The doorway, which bears a Colonial-style pediment, is not aligned with the window above it, and the original brownstone stoop was replaced by a metal stoop with a double stair. The whole thing looks like 1980s Post-Modernist Mannerism, but it's really just 1960s carelessness. It appears that every one of the houses, even No. 223, retains its original multi-paned sash, and Nos. 217 and 219 retain their original Italianate iron stair railings. This is a particularly fine row of modest Italianate houses retaining a great deal of original fabric.

Brownstone Gothic

Another, less common, style of row house architecture in the mid-nineteenth century was Gothic Revival. Gothic originated in the Middle Ages as a style for church architecture, and was revived for the same use in the early nineteenth century. St. Brigid's Roman Catholic Church (1849) at 119 Avenue B, and the Middle Collegiate Church (1892) at 112-114 Second Avenue are but two of several Gothic Revival churches in the East Village. The style also found its way into residential architecture, both in the Middle Ages and in the nineteenth century. In the 1840s the influential landscape gardener Andrew Jackson Downing promoted a light, casual "Carpenter Gothic" as a style for country and suburban cottage residences. These were enormously popular. Examples of Carpenter Gothic are rare in Manhattan because mid-nineteenth-century fire laws

prohibited the construction of wooden houses. The Gothic style, when applied to Manhattan row houses, tended to be rendered in brownstone. Such houses were clearly of limited popularity, because there are so few of them.



Charlie Parker Residence

A rare Gothic Revival house, as well as a rare (for the East Village) brownstone, is the house at 151 Avenue B, with its intact entryway featuring a pointed arch doorway, Gothic hood molding, and clustered columns. The house is a designated individual New York City Landmark known as the **Charlie Parker Residence**, as from 1950 to 1954 the legendary saxophonist and jazz innovator and his wife lived in the ground floor of the house shortly after it had been converted to a multiple dwelling. The house was built circa 1849, and may have been constructed contemporaneously with St. Brigid's Church one block to the south on Avenue B. The Charlie Parker

Residence is the only East Village row house east of Second Avenue to be designated a New York City Landmark. And it is a rare instance where the Landmarks Preservation Commission has designated a building less for its architecture (though the architecture is good) than for a very important cultural personage with whom the building is solidly associated. (Other examples include the homes of Louis Armstrong, Langston Hughes, and Edgar Allan Poe.) This subject is discussed further in the Arts chapter.

The buildings at **33-39 East Seventh Street**, between Second and Third Avenues, are a textbook lesson in the "tenementization" of row houses. Records show that all four of these buildings were originally constructed in 1832 by developer Thomas E. Davis. The only one that looks much as it did in 1832 is No. 37. The Federal-style house retains its heavy doorway surround (characteristic of the houses Davis built in the East Village), its original sills and lintels, and its original cornice. It retains its original Flemish-bond brick façade. It is a modest variation on the grand houses, such as 20 St. Mark's Place, that

Davis built around this time. Next door to the east, at 39 East Seventh Street, we see what at first looks like an altogether different building. It's a full floor higher, and its sill and lintel treatments are completely different.



But closer inspection reveals some interesting things. One is that the Flemish bond brickwork of the lower floors of No. 39 aligns perfectly with the brick of No. 37. The basements and sills line up perfectly. The patched brickwork on the right at the parlor level of No. 39 indicates pretty clearly that a stoop was removed and the parlor-level front door replaced by a window. (One suspects the stoop was removed *after*, and not as part of, the building's tenementization. Other tenementized houses in the row retain their stoops, and there is no pedimented lintel over the window as there is on every other window.) And finally, the uppermost story does not use Flemish bond.

Records are a little unclear, but do indicate that two major renovations were done. An incomplete alteration permit from 1873 indicates that the house was renovated, and no doubt tenementized, by the prominent tenement architect William Jose. But the house was not heightened in that year, as later records still record the house as being three stories. A 1904 permit for a rear addition by the architects Kurtzer & Rentz may suggest that that was when the house was heightened and the stoop removed. The other two houses (Nos. 33 and 35) in the row were also tenementized and raised a story, but both retained their stoops. No. 37 is by itself a landmark-quality house — not as grand as Nos. 4 or 20 St. Mark's Place, but in more pristine condition than either — and the whole row has exceptional value. Each house retains a considerable amount of its original fabric

(such as its Flemish-bond brickwork), and most additions, such as lintels, doorway surrounds, and cornices are good examples of the fashions of their times. The manner in which these houses lent themselves to adaptations amid vast social and economic upheavals make this row a great example of how the buildings of the East Village reveal their layers of history.

III. Tenements

The dominant housing type of the East Village is the tenement. The word comes via Middle English from the Medieval Latin verb "to hold." It once referred to freeholds, but from the fifteenth century onward came to refer to any place of residence. There is nothing in the word, historically, to suggest that it would be used to describe the multiple-unit dwellings of the poor in big cities, but so the word has come to be used.

New York offers a typology of tenements. There is first of all the subdivided house or other building never intended for multiple occupancy. New York at the time of the Commissioners' Plan in 1811 broke the city down into twenty-five-foot by one-hundred-foot lots because they were considered suitable for private, single-family houses. But between 1820 and 1830 the city's population nearly doubled to more than two hundred thousand people. It only took a decade to double the population that had taken two hundred years to achieve. By 1850 the population exceeded half a million, and ten years later, eight hundred thousand.

A New Home for the Masses

For its first two centuries, the city had been a place of merchants, artisans, farmers, and slaves residing and working in modest single-family houses on an island that was still substantially covered by woodland and countryside. In the 1820s, the opening of the Erie Canal, together with such mercantile innovations as packet shipping, helped New York, already the nation's largest seaport, become larger than the next four largest ports combined. The city would enjoy nearly a century and a half as the nation's preeminent seaport. The rise of industry — including shipbuilding, sugar refining, printing and publishing, iron forging, and clothing manufacturing — altered the structure of the economy and the nature of work in the city. Steamships, steam railroads, modern indoor plumbing, gaslight, cookstoves and iceboxes, steam-powered rotary presses that blanketed the world in printed matter — all these and more are why the 1840s may be regarded as the first fully modern decade. The accelerating pace of technological change utterly transformed and made dizzy the lives of ordinary people. The period of the 1830s

through the 1850s is when New York became the modern, frenetic, ambitious, chaotic, and overcrowded place we know — the city that called forth the delirious prose-poetry of Walt Whitman. It was in 1844 that diarist and former mayor Philip Hone coined the wistful phrase "the good old days." And it is when New York, more than ever, became the city of immigrants.

Between 1840 and 1860 the city's population swelled by more than half a million. The Irish and German waves of immigration intensified in the 1840s and 1850s. In the 1855 census, 28 percent of New York City residents were Irish-born, 18 percent German-born. The immigrants came largely for economic reasons: they were poor and sought opportunity. The swelling of the city's population was thus a swelling of the city's poor population. And it placed a tremendous burden on the city's housing supply.

At first, the immigrants (as well as the native poor, including former African slaves who had been emancipated with the abolition of slavery in New York in 1827) were shoehorned into buildings that had been built as single-family homes, then hastily subdivided to accommodate multiple families. Other types of buildings, such as warehouses and stables, were similarly subdivided. Neighborhoods where this shoehorning was rife, such as Five Points, became known as "slums" — a word dating only to the early nineteenth century. When single-family houses were "tenementized," they might have an additional story or stories placed on them. Row houses continued to be tenementized long after a new solution to the problem of slum housing came on the scene.

The solution was the purpose-built multiple-unit dwelling. Purpose-built tenements began to appear in the 1830s. These were constructed on the row-house lots the city had mapped out in 1811. No laws regulated these buildings' design (save for some laws related to the use of materials). Great profits awaited the builders of the new tenements.

The historian Roy Lubove wrote:

The urban housing problem which arose in New York during the Jacksonian era had its roots in the same ethos which determined western land development. The

counterpart of the speculator in western lands was the urban jerry-builder, eager to exploit his opportunities and move on. The city's land, the housing of its people, represented his rich lode of speculative profits. Just as the western land speculator resented any government interference, such as John Quincy Adams's program of regulated land disposal, the urban real estate speculator resented community control over his domain.¹

Speculative developers tended to fill their lots, leaving only a few feet at the back for the placement of outdoor privies. As five-story buildings rose one next to the other, the only light that entered homes came from the front windows, facing the street, or the rear windows, facing the privy yard. Consequently, interior rooms tended to be dark and airless. Early tenements tended to have no indoor plumbing and no gaslight. Toilet facilities were absurdly inadequate. Many privies were not hooked into the city's sewer system, and had to be manually cleaned out. Hallways, corridors, and landings tended to be dark, dank, and fetid. By 1864, some 500,000 out of 800,000 New Yorkers resided in tenements.² "New York staggered into the industrial age with housing regulations appropriate to the colonial era,"³ wrote Lubove.

Tenement Regulations Enacted

The first significant tenement house reform measure passed by the state legislature came in 1867. The law's requirements included fire escapes, as well as one toilet ("to be connected with the sewers on streets where sewers existed") for every twenty occupants of a building.⁴ The law also mandated alterations to cellars if they were to be used as residences, as was common, and also forbade the keeping of horses, cows, sheep, goats, or pigs in tenements. Various other provisions of the law were aimed at cleanliness and hygiene. In letter, the law was a laudable first step, but enforcement provisions were weak.

¹ Roy Lubove, *The Progressives and the Slums: Tenement House Reform in New York City, 1890-1917*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963, p. 3.

² <http://209.160.6.175/Encyclopedia/housing.htm>, accessed 27 July 2012.

³ Lubove, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

⁴ *Reports of the Industrial Commission on Immigration*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1901, vol. XV, p. 481.

This was followed by the Tenement House Act of 1879, based in part on a design submitted by the architect James E. Ware to a model tenement competition sponsored by the magazine *Plumber and Sanitary Engineer* in 1878. Ware devised a plan involving shallow side indentations in buildings to produce "air shafts." When one building's indentation was placed side by side with its neighbor's, it created a miniature courtyard the purpose of which was to get some sunlight and air into previously windowless interior rooms of the building. Because each building had these indentations on each of its longitudinal sides, the buildings when viewed from above slightly resembled exercise dumbbells. Hence the term "dumbbell tenement" came into use. These are also commonly referred to as "Old Law tenements," and everything that came before 1879 as "pre-Law tenements" — although there was an 1867 Tenement House Act, which is why the term "pre-Old Law tenements" is preferable, and is used throughout this report. But the 1867 act did not substantively address issues of light and air, nor did it fundamentally alter the shape of buildings. Old Law tenements are easily identified by looking for the side indentations, which are noticeable on real estate maps, and sometimes can be seen from the street.

The 1879 law produced buildings that, according to a report to Congress in 1901, "proved to be one of the worst forms of housing ever employed."⁵ The air shafts were inadequate for their purpose. Tenements tended to be built with one or two more stories than before (in part to offset the loss of rentable space to the air shafts), and this inhibited the penetration of light to lower floors. With no air intake at the bottom, and with the tendency of air shafts to become difficult-to-clean receptacles for garbage, they were more miasmatic than ventilating. The Congressional report of 1901 noted that tenants testified that "the air from these shafts was so foul and the odors so vile that they had to close the windows opening into them, and in some cases the windows were permanently nailed up for this reason."⁶

⁵ Ibid., p. 484.

⁶ Ibid., p. 485.

Obviously, the 1879 Tenement House Act was not a solution. The law did, however, coincide with the second of the great waves of immigration from Europe. Where the first wave comprised mainly Irish and Germans, the second wave comprised eastern and southern Europeans. Between 1880 and 1900 the population of Manhattan rose from 1,164,673 to 1,850,093 — in 20 years, a 59 percent increase. The buildout of tenements was so great that by 1901 the 1879-law (“Old Law”) tenements outnumbered the pre-1879 (“pre-Old Law”) tenements by about three to two. An 1885 law mandated height restrictions, and an 1887 law made modifications to the 1879 law, including the requirement that at least one toilet be provided for every two families, though this provision was modified a year later to at least one toilet for every fifteen occupants of a dwelling house. By the end of the nineteenth century it was clear that tenement house conditions had not improved nearly as much as reformers had hoped. And the issue of light and air came to the forefront amid widespread concern about epidemic tuberculosis in New York City, and the role poor ventilation played in the spread of the disease.

A great deal changed with the Tenement House Act of 1901. The historian Roy Lubove says the Act was "among the most significant municipal reforms of the Progressive era."⁷ Provisions included that lot coverage could be no more than 70 percent, that there be an indoor toilet for every two families and running water in every apartment, and that there be a window in every room. Many of its provisions were made applicable to older buildings. The various provisions of the law, including those concerning lot coverage and fire safety, made it exceedingly difficult (though not impossible) to build a building to code on a single lot. Consequently, tenement footprints grew, and it is generally easy to spot "New Law tenements" because of their size and because so many of them were built on corner sites: it was the easiest way to meet all the requirements.

New Law tenements also tend to be stylistically quite different from Old Law tenements. Old Law tenements tend to be Victorian in appearance, often in the Queen Anne style or some variation of it. The 1901 law came into being in the City Beautiful era, and if the typical New Law tenement may not look as though it would fit in the White City of the

⁷ Lubove, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, it tended to be a tastefully (or at least exuberantly) decorated building making use of classical ornamentation. (Some leading Beaux-Arts firms, such as Trowbridge & Livingston, had sidelines in tenement design.) In fact, New Law tenements often exhibited a great dignity, and as their physical amenities exceeded anything their earliest tenants had likely experienced, they represent a moment of mass uplift in New York. This is not to say that there were not problems. Landlords and real estate organizations fought the law tooth and nail. Some called it un-American, or even unconstitutional. When the recently formed Tenement House Committee, a charitable organization, sued Kate Moeschen, the owner of 332 East Thirty-Ninth Street, for non-compliance, she appealed all the way to the United States Supreme Court, which ruled against her and upheld the 1901 law.⁸ (Penn Central Corp.'s challenge to the 1965 Landmarks Law had striking echoes of this case.) But on the whole, the law improved many people's quality of living, and also provided the city with dignified basic housing standards that helped make tenements handsomer places than before.

Tenements of the East Village

The East Village is well supplied with all types of tenements. By 1910, the East Village (Eleventh and Seventeenth Wards) had a population of 308,875. The Eleventh Ward (west of Avenue B) had a population density of 400,860 people per square mile; the Seventeenth Ward had a density of 380,319. (By comparison, the densest city in the world today, Manila, has a density of 111,576 people per square mile. Manhattan had a density of 101,371 people per square mile at the time of its peak population, in 1910.) It is easy to see, given the extraordinary density of the East Village, why it did not remain a row-house neighborhood for long.

A superb example of a "tenementized" row house is **180 First Avenue**, at the southeast corner of Eleventh Street. It is quite plain, a five-story, twenty-two-foot-wide red-brick mass rising to a rather pronounced black cornice with a central curved parapet bearing the

⁸ Andrew S. Dolkart, *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City* (Santa Fe: The Center for American Places, 2006), 87.

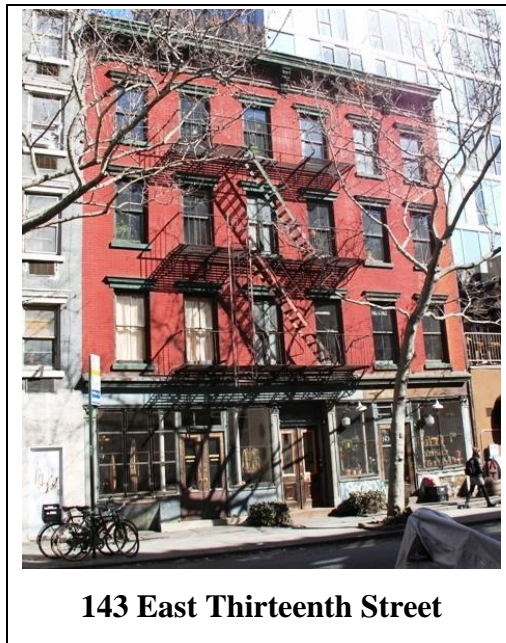
initials "P.L.B." and the date 1872. That is the date of the owner Peter L. Bernhardt's



180 First Avenue

conversion of a four-story house, built in 1840, into a tenement. The cap-molded lintels of the lower four floors are presumably original to the house, and it is interesting to see the care with which Bernhardt replicated them for the new fifth story. The whole east blockfront of First Avenue between Tenth and Eleventh Streets appears to comprise only tenementized row houses, with the exception of the Old Law tenement at No. 170. Of the eight tenementized houses, four had additional stories built; the others were row houses converted to multiple dwellings, without the extra floors.

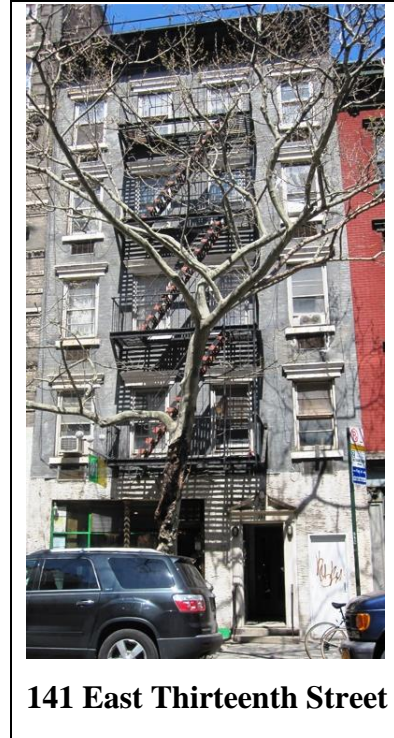
One of the finest, most intact early pre-Old Law tenements in the East Village is **143 East Thirteenth Street**, between Third and Fourth Avenues. The four-story building is forty feet wide and only twenty feet deep. It was built in 1863. The façade is very simple, in the manner of the earliest tenements, but also very handsome, the top three floors of deep red brick with plain sills and lovely cap-molded lintels and a fine, simple bracketed cornice. But it is the cast-iron ground floor that's the stunner. It is spectacularly intact. The building entrance is in the center, a superbly weather-beaten transomed double door framed by two molded pilasters with lush Corinthian capitals of cast iron. The two storefronts on either side of this entrance retain their original appearance. The store on the right was, from 1967 to 2011, the Flower Stall, a



143 East Thirteenth Street

neighborhood institution was owned by Cornell Edwards.⁹ The sills and lintels of No. 143 are identical to those on the five-story pre-Old Law tenement next door at **141 East Thirteenth Street**. While the upper stories are intact, the ground floor is anything but, with its coating of white stucco and Colonial-style doorway — but it is not without a charm of its own.

We mention **101 Avenue A** elsewhere in this report for its historic significance as one of the neighborhood's German meeting halls and also for its later life as a jazz club and as the famous



141 East Thirteenth Street



101 Avenue A

Pyramid Club. For all the historical interest of the building's uses, we must not neglect its outstanding architecture. The four-story pre-Old Law tenement, with a ground-floor saloon space, was erected in 1876. The architect was the Prussian-born William Jose (pronounced YO-sah). It was, as stated elsewhere in the report, built by the Peter Doelger Brewery on the site of its first brewery. It has a powerful neo-Grec façade of red brick with contrasting bands of black brick and pale sandstone, elaborate sandstone lintels with ornamental devices incised into the stone, and, at the third floor, distinctive sandstone pendant decorations. The building retains its elaborate, prominent cornice. Best of all is how the storefront retains all or almost all of its original detail. The fire escapes retain their original swirling ornamental

⁹ See <http://gvshp.org/blog/2011/04/06/cornell-edwards-of-the-flower-stall-1932-2011>, accessed 27 July 2012.

ironwork. It is rare to find a tenement of this vintage that has both such a distinctive design and is so magnificently intact. Jose, about whom we know little, was listed in New York City directories as an architect between 1869 and 1884, and was a prolific designer of tenements.¹⁰

Another notable work by William Jose in the East Village is the five-story pre-Old Law tenement at **87 East Second Street**, at the southwest corner of First Avenue. The double-lot building is fifty feet wide on First Avenue and ninety-eight feet wide on Second Street. This was built in 1871 and registers from a distance as a staid Victorian hulk. Closer up, however, we see ornamental terra-cotta, tinted to a red



87 East Second Street

identical to that of the building's brickwork. There are foliated spandrels and friezes and animal-head keystones. The coloration and some of the detail put one in mind of George B. Post's Long Island Historical Society at 128 Pierrepont Street in Brooklyn Heights; that building, justly famed for its pioneering use of ornamental terra-cotta, was not begun until seven years after 87 East Second Street.

An interesting block containing a mix of pre-Old Law and Old Law tenements is the north side of Sixth Street between Avenues B and C. The six-story Old Law tenement at **613 East Sixth Street** was designed by Michael Bernstein and built in 1900. It has the kind of tasteful neo-Renaissance façade we associate with New Law tenements, here placed on a twenty-five-foot-wide "dumbbell" tenement. Next door at **No. 615** is a five-story tenement that records show was erected in 1881, but it lacks airshafts required by

¹⁰ New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Greenwich Village Historic District Extension Designation Report*, 2006, p. 32.

the Old Law, so the date could be incorrect. It also has the kind of simple fenestration and brickwork pattern — nearly identical to 97 Orchard Street, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum — of early New York tenements. The architect, Julius Boeckell, designed the wonderful First German Baptist Church (now Congregation Tifereth Israel) at 334 East Fourteenth Street, built in 1869-70. The next two lots are occupied by one-story garages. The nine buildings at **Nos. 621-637** were all built by David Jones (1810-81), a prominent brewer whom the *Times* described as "the most extensive dealer in malt in this country." He was also, said the *Times*, a large real-estate owner.¹¹ Seven of the nine buildings (Nos. 621-633) were built in 1877. The *Times* reported on November 24, 1875:



613 East Sixth Street

“The most destructive conflagration that has visited this City for months occurred last evening, involving the complete destruction of an extensive brewery and several tenement-houses adjoining. The fire broke out a few minutes past 5 o'clock on the second floor of the brewery of David Jones, in Sixth street, near Avenue C. ... The building was a brick structure, with a frontage of 250 feet on Sixth street.”¹²

The brewery extended from No. 617 to No. 637 — the sites of the two garages plus the seven 1877 buildings, plus two additional structures at Nos. 635 and 637. The tenements Jones erected in place of his ruined brewery were designed by Peter Tostevin. Each is a five-story pre-Old Law tenement with a simple Italianate façade with curving molded lintels. Nos. 621, 623, 631, and 633 have non-commercial ground floors with rusticated stonework; the three buildings in the middle have commercial ground floors with no visible stonework.

¹¹ "Sudden Death of David Jones," *New York Times*, 18 January 1881, p. 8.

¹² "A Great East Side Fire," *New York Times*, 24 November 1875, p. 1.



**615 East Sixth
Street**

Finally, Nos. 635 and 637, above their non-commercial ground floors, look identical to Nos. 621-633, though records indicate that these were remodeled from two two-story buildings built in 1865, presumably a part of Jones's brewery. They were increased to their present height in 1888, after Jones's death, by D. & J. Jardine, who evidently went to some lengths to replicate the facades of the 1877 buildings. D. & J. Jardine was a prominent firm with some distinctive designs to its credit, yet it designed something utterly identical in appearance to adjoining neighbors built eleven years before. Suggesting that these last two were indeed built at a different date are their dimensions of twenty-five feet by sixty-eight feet, while the other seven buildings are twenty-five feet by fifty-five feet.



621-637 East Sixth Street

The Look of ‘Old Law’

Just as some pre-Old Law tenements have ornamentally distinctive facades, so too do many Old Law tenements. People often wonder why these buildings, erected to house the poor, bothered with such ornamentation. The fact is, not all tenements were created



equal. Façade ornamentation was meant to attract prospective tenants. The two tenements at **213 and 215 East Tenth Street**, between First and Second Avenues, were designed by Charles Rentz and built in 1891. Rentz, the architect of Webster Hall — a designated New York City Landmark on Eleventh Street between Third and Fourth Avenues, built in 1886-87 (annex 1892) — was the New York-born son of a German immigrant and had worked with William Jose. Like Jose, Rentz was a prolific designer of tenements, and worked mainly in the Old Law era. Nos. 213 and 215 East Tenth Street, with five and six stories respectively, feature an abundance of

molded ornamentation, including lion-head brackets at the doorways, acanthus ornaments over the second-floor windows of No. 215, masks at the keystones of the segmental-arched windows at the second floor of No. 213 and the third floor of No. 215, and, most striking of all, cherubs in the spandrels of the arched windows of the third floor of No. 213 and the fourth floor of No. 215. Such ornamental panoply would have suited any of the new apartment houses that had recently become popular among the more affluent classes.

A very impressive Old Law tenement is **66 East Seventh Street**, designed by George Frederick Pelham and built in 1897. It seems to soar over its neighbors. It is six stories on a 25-foot-wide lot, and wears a real top-hat three-part modillioned cornice with curving brackets and a lush ornamental frieze; it's as good a tenement cornice as you will see.

Every one of the twenty windows of the second through the sixth floors is carefully outlined in ornamental terra-cotta, including masks over windows on the second and fourth floors. A significant amount of original storefront detail remains, including the full frieze and cornice that runs in a continuous band over the two storefronts and the centrally placed building



68 and 66 East Seventh Street

entrance. Best of all is evidence of one architect acknowledging another across time. Abutting 66 East Seventh Street, at **No. 68**, is one of the finest surviving row houses in the East Village, built by Thomas E. Davis in 1835. Sometime in the 1850s or 1860s the house was given some fashionable Italianate flourishes, including rounded pediments over its second-floor windows. Pelham exactly duplicates those pediments on his third-floor windows.

George Frederick Pelham was born in 1867 in Ottawa, Ontario, and died in 1937. He was the son of the London-born architect George Brown Pelham, who established a New York City practice in 1875. The younger Pelham's training came exclusively in his father's office. He began his own practice in 1890, when he was twenty-three years old. At thirty, he designed 66 East Seventh Street. Pelham was a prolific tenement designer. Indeed, he was an extremely prolific architect, with several hundred Manhattan buildings to his credit. Perhaps his crowning achievement was the marvelous apartment complex called Hudson View Gardens, built in 1924-25 at 116 Pinehurst Avenue, overlooking the Hudson River. (His architect son, George Fred [sic] Pelham II (1897-1967), designed the nearby Castle Village complex, built in 1938-39.) Pelham also designed many other fine apartment buildings, such as the Woodhull (1911) at 62 Pierrepont Street in Brooklyn Heights, and 81 Irving Place (1930) at the northwest corner of Nineteenth Street in

Manhattan. Pelham's works can be found in at least eleven New York City historic districts. That's no coincidence — his buildings, even when they are Old Law tenements, typically only enhance their settings.



A feast of Pelhamiana may be had by walking way east on Fourteenth Street. Between Avenue B and Avenue C, at Nos. **626 to 642**, stand nine five-story Old Law tenements, among his earliest works, all built in 1890 and designed by a twenty-three-year-old George F. Pelham. It is a remarkably

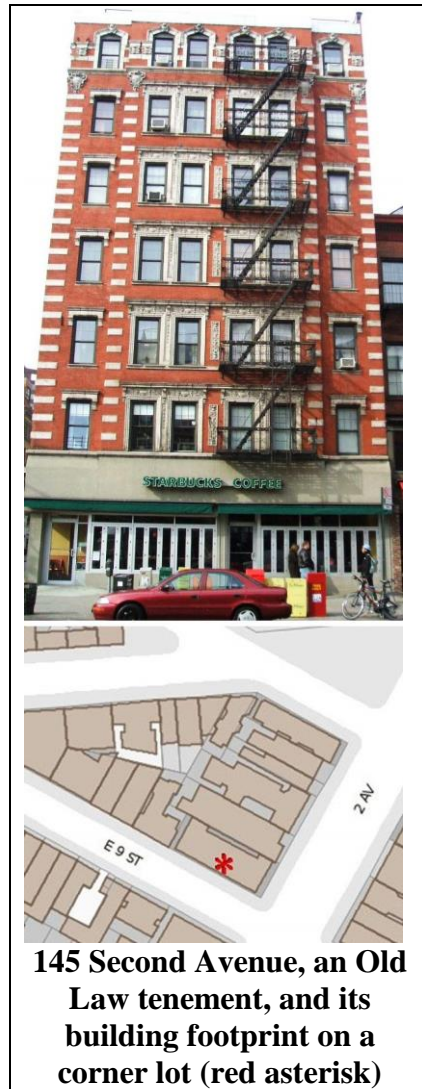
intact and cohesive group. Because Pelham did the whole row at once, he was able to impose a rhythm on the row. The ground floors from No. 628 to No. 640 alternate between two facades: a rockface brownstone with a central stoop leading to a linteled entrance, and a smooth brownstone with an arched entrance.

The second floor has square-headed windows all across the row, but their framing alternates between plain brick piers and brickwork laid to simulate rustication. At the third and fourth floors, buildings with arched windows alternate with buildings with square-headed windows (with each building switching off between the floors). The top floors are identical all across the row, as are the bracketed black cornices with high central parapets. The ground floors of the end buildings (Nos. 626 and 642) have storefronts. Every building except for No. 642 retains its cornice. These buildings have the same somber dignity as some of the arcaded warehouses of the time, such as Babb & Cook's 173 Duane Street (1880) or William Tubby's South Hall (1889-91) at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.

The seven-story Old Law tenement at **145 Second Avenue**, at the northwest corner of Ninth Street, looks at first like a New Law tenement, given its corner site, forty-foot width on Second Avenue, and neo-Renaissance detailing. There is a striking use of classical devices rendered in terra-cotta in full window enframements on every floor (rather than just on the lower floors, which was more customary), and in pendant panels running down the center of the façade on Second Avenue. The structure was built in 1899, and in broad outline it was for all intents and purposes a New Law tenement.

The architect, Charles B. Meyers (1875-1958), was one of the city's busiest architects in his time. It is remarkable to think he was only twenty-four years old, fresh from Pratt Institute, when he designed 145 Second Avenue. His many notable buildings include the Department of Health Building at 125 Worth Street (1935), Congregation Ohab Zedek at 118 West 95th Street (1926), Congregation Rodeph Sholom, of which he himself was a member, at 7 West Eighty-Third Street (1928-30), the Main Building of Yeshiva University at 2540 Amsterdam Avenue (1928), and, with Harvey Wiley Corbett, the Criminal Courts Building at 100 Centre Street (1939). He also held several positions on city commissions.

The year 1901 saw the last great wave of Old Law tenements built before the new Tenement House Law took effect. The *New York Tribune* reported on April 7, 1901:



The rush to file plans for flathouses and tenement houses, at the Department of Buildings before Governor [Benjamin B.] Odell takes final action on the bill drawn by the Tenement House Commission, which has passed both houses of the legislature, has amazed the employees of the department by its intensity. Nothing like it has been witnessed at the Buildings Department in a long time, if ever. ... The rush is due to the fact that the majority of builders in this city think that they could not erect as commercially profitable tenement and flat houses under the proposed law as they could under the present laws.¹³

Examples include the three six-story tenements at **224-228 East Thirteenth Street**. No. 226 achieved notoriety from its appearance in Martin Scorsese's 1976 film *Taxi Driver* as the location for Travis Bickle's assignation with the teenage prostitute played by Jodie Foster, as well as for the film's climactic shootout.¹⁴ By 1975, when Scorsese filmed on this block, the city's tenements, which had in their best days not received much tender loving care, were symbols of the city's physical distress. This is communicated in a single vertical shot panning up the facades of these three tenements. Yet even these buildings, as ominous as they were made to look in *Taxi Driver*, have their



224-228 East Thirteenth Street

grace notes: in the Renaissance Revival details, in the columned entryway with its ornamented entablature at No. 224 (the entryway has been removed from the other two buildings), and in the beaded moldings surrounding the front doors of all three buildings.

¹³ "Buildings Department Stormed," New York Tribune, 7 April 1901, p. 5.

¹⁴ See <http://gvshp.org/blog/2011/02/25/it-happened-here-taxi-driver>, accessed 27 July 2012.



334-336 East Thirteenth Street

The six-story **334-336 East Thirteenth Street**, designed by George F. Pelham and built in 1902, is forty-six feet wide. The commercial ground floor may not be distinguished, but the second floor has elaborate window enframements and the third and fourth floors have triangular and round pediments over the windows. This is the sort of dignified Renaissance Revival detailing that was popular with New Law tenements.

‘New Law’ Shifts the Streetscape

Another notable New Law tenement by Pelham is **415 East Twelfth Street**, between Avenue A and

First Avenue. The six-story building from 1903 is on only a 24-foot-wide lot, unusual for a New Law tenement. We first of all see the easy and handsome way Pelham has arranged the red brick façade with terra-cotta trim and ornament. Unfortunately, the ground floor lacks most of its original detail and the cornice has been replaced by a banal brick parapet. It’s mostly interesting to see how Pelham arranged the site plan, achieving the unusual feat of meeting the lot coverage and window requirements of the “new law” on a rowhouse-width lot by setting the long tenement back on its east side and placing all rear windows along that side.



415 East Twelfth Street



Another prolific firm of tenement designers was Sass & Smallheiser of 23 Park Row. Their six-story **437-439 East Twelfth Street**, between Avenue A and First Avenue, is a 1904 New Law tenement on a forty-nine-foot-wide lot. The bold detailing, including the outside brackets set on huge splayed lintels running up the center of the building, almost put one in mind of the Pop-classical effects of some of 1980s Postmodernism. But we actually see a lot of that in the speculative tenement and apartment buildings of this period. Sass & Smallheiser was not the sort of Beaux-Arts firm that garnered civic commissions and the like. Their instructions were to impress the average person, and at that they excelled. This building's site plan is unusual; it's really a dumbbell tenement, but with especially roomy airshafts.

Among the handsomest tenements in the East Village are the four buildings by architects Horenburger & Straub at **115-119** and **122-126 St. Mark's Place**, between Avenue A and First Avenue. The twin six-story, thirty-eight-foot-wide New Law tenements at Nos. 115 and 119 were built in 1904 for Harris and Ely Maran. Across the street, the pair at Nos. 122 and 126 are also six stories tall and thirty-nine feet wide, and were built for the Marans in 1903. They form a set of four lavishly ornamented buildings, just this side of overwrought. Both buildings retain most of their terra-cotta façade detail — including twisted columns, ornamental panels, broken pediments, and animal heads — as well as their original cornices. The buildings at Nos. 122 and 126 have fared better, however. In a band above the storefront awnings of the ground floor is a series of swelling shelves of brickwork that form bases for the columns (which have decorated surfaces) that frame each of the second-floor windows. These brickwork shelves are very important to the



115-119 St. Mark's Place



122-126 St. Mark's Place

almost Churrigueresque effect of these facades.¹⁵ Unfortunately at Nos. 115 and 119, these shelves have been replaced by a band of sheet metal. Horenburger & Straub was yet another prolific firm of tenement designers. On his own in 1910, Herman Horenburger designed the wonderful Congregation Adas Yisroel Anshe Mezeritz, at 415 East Sixth Street. Few architects did more to embellish the streets of the East Village.

The six-story New Law tenement at **190 Second Avenue**, at the southeast corner of Twelfth Street, dates from 1903. From 1908 to 1952 its ground-floor corner retail space was occupied

by the Café Royal, a legendary meeting place for the artists and writers of the “Yiddish Rialto.” This building occupies the corner, as many New Law tenements do, but with a curving cornice, chamfered corner, and sprightly surfaces (terra-cotta panels, richly ornamented rounded window pediments that group the third- and fourth-floor windows in continuous vertical enframements, outside brackets), it makes for an unusually handsome building.



190 Second Avenue

¹⁵ This is the Spanish Rococo style in architecture, historically a late Baroque aesthetics of overwhelming the spectator with a plethora of ornament. The name comes from architect José Benito Churriguera, although the Churriguera family members were not the most representative masters of the style.

Look also at Bernstein & Bernstein's six-story, forty-eight-foot-wide New Law tenement at **151 Second Avenue**, between Ninth and Tenth Streets. This building dates to 1904, and the surface design is very similar to the same architects' 190 Second Avenue. The difference between New Law tenements on corner lots and those on midblock sites can be seen in the lot coverages of these two buildings; whereas the corner building is able to provide the legally required light and air to all rooms with windows along the street, thus enabling it to occupy a larger portion of the site, the midblock building must make multiple indentations to its footprint in the rear in order to meet the requirements of the "new law."



151 Second Avenue



139 Second Avenue

The brothers Michael and Mitchell Bernstein were in partnership from 1903 to 1911, thereafter maintaining independent practices. Together and apart, they were among the city's most prolific tenement designers. Michael Bernstein also practiced on his own before the brothers formed a partnership. He designed the six-story Old Law tenement at **139 Second Avenue** between St. Mark's Place and Ninth Street. It was built in 1900, and is twenty-three feet wide and one hundred four feet deep. It has a good neo-Renaissance façade, and its cornice is still intact. Its red brick and identically hued terra-cotta diaperwork panels seem a nice bow to William Schickel's Stuyvesant Polyclinic (1882-83) next door. In the ground floor of No. 139 is the J. Baczynsky Meat Market, opened in 1970 by Julian Baczynsky, who came to America from his native Ukraine in 1950 at the age of twenty-five. The simple white

metal and plate glass storefront is one of the great storefronts of the East Village.

No. 139 adjoins **141 Second Avenue** to the north.

That corner building is a six-story New Law tenement designed by Alfred E. Badt and built in 1903. Badt's building maintains the sill and course levels of the Bernstein building, and echoes many of its ornamental features, including splayed lintels with raised keystones over many of the windows, and substitutes terra-cotta panels with floral patterns for the diaperwork panels of the earlier building.

Badt uses a light palette in contrast to Bernstein's dark red. The cornice of No. 141 is intact but there is nothing of interest in the storefronts. The most

interesting thing is how Bernstein and Badt, each in his own way, thoughtfully fit his building into the block to create a handsome and coherent streetscape. Also interesting, though not visible from the street, is how the northeast air shaft of No. 139 lines up with the much larger interior court of No. 141. This happened from time to time, and is another way the New Law buildings enhanced the livability of the Old Law buildings.



141 Second Avenue

Badt was yet another prolific tenement designer who, like so many Jewish architects who designed tenements for Jewish developers (e.g., Herman Horenburger, Schneider & Herter, Charles B. Meyers), also designed synagogues. Badt was responsible for the Pike Street Synagogue at 13 Pike Street, built contemporaneously with 141 Second Avenue. As for Michael Bernstein, he is the architect of record for no fewer than 211 tenements for which New Building permits were issued in Manhattan in 1901, which, as noted above, was a madcap year for tenement construction as developers raced to beat the new Tenement House Act.

The Arrival of 'Flats'

Finally, we note the arrival of the apartment house, as opposed to the tenement house, in the East Village. At first, multiple-unit dwellings in New York were only for the poor. Well-to-do New Yorkers preferred their own single-family houses. By the mid-19th century, however, the merely middle-class could no longer afford to build or buy their own homes. At first, they opted for boarding houses. These were often fine houses that had been subdivided, and located in good neighborhoods. But however nice the boarding house, however fine the neighborhood, such a living arrangement proved strenuous for a middle-class family with children. The main thing boarding houses had going for them was that they were not tenements, which were to be avoided.

But just as speculators invented the purpose-built multiple dwelling for the poor, so, in time, did developers create a socially acceptable form of purpose-built multiple dwelling for the middle class, as well. The first developer to do so was Stuyvesant Rutherford, Peter Gerard Stuyvesant's great-grandnephew who, in 1847 at the age of five, inherited Stuyvesant's recently built mansion on the northwest corner of Second Avenue and Eleventh Street (then deeded it to his illustrious astronomer father Lewis Rutherford). In 1870 the Stuyvesant, designed by Richard Morris Hunt, opened at 142 East Eighteenth Street. The building comprised what were called flats, sometimes "French flats" — the word "apartment" came into wide use about a decade later. The Stuyvesant is long gone. But other early French flat buildings are around. An outstanding example is 21 East Twenty-First Street, designed by Bruce Price and built in 1878. The East Village enjoyed little in the way of French flats, for the area was dominated by row houses built before the era of flats, and by tenements that housed a poorer population than did flats.

However, the area can boast of one truly outstanding French flat building, **206-208 East Ninth Street**, between Second Avenue and Stuyvesant Street. This five-story, forty-two-foot-wide, eleven-family building was built in 1885-86 by James Thomson and designed by George Browne Post, the immensely important architect whose credits by this time included the Long Island Historical Society (1878-81) in Brooklyn Heights and the Williamsburgh Savings Bank (1870-75) on Broadway and Driggs Avenue in



206-208 East Ninth Street

Williamsburg. The building is a dark red brick. As he had done at the Long Island Historical Society, Post matched the color of his terra-cotta ornamentation and of his mortar to that of the brick. The façade is powerfully rhythmical with each floor a row of six square-headed windows in arched frames, with exquisite terra-cotta work adorning the spandrels. The building's address in gold script over the front door is one of the loveliest details in the East Village. The building was part of a wave of French flats built throughout the greater area of which this is the easternmost point. Architecturally, it belongs in the same discussion as such buildings as the Ava (1888) at 9 East Tenth Street (which falls within the Greenwich Village Historic District), and the Lancaster (1887) at 39-41 East Tenth Street

(which lies right outside the District), though, surprisingly, it does not have landmark protection.

Such buildings, followed by luxury behemoths such as the Osborne (1883) at 205 West Fifty-Seventh Street — designed by the same James E. Ware who invented the dumbbell tenement — fitfully induced the well-to-do to take up apartment living. But with the exception of 206-208 East Ninth Street, none of this was occurring in the East Village, which in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s was a teeming immigrant district in which the only kind of residential edifices being constructed were tenements.

At **156 Second Avenue**, at the southeast corner of Tenth Street, stands a six-story brick apartment house, sixty-six feet on Second Avenue and 125 feet on Tenth Street. This was designed by Neville & Bagge and built in 1915. The building is far from its



156 Second Avenue

distinguished architects' best work (an example of which would be the Dorchester from 1909 at 131 Riverside Drive), but it is notable as a classic H-plan apartment house, with a deep light court over the entrance on Tenth Street, and another court in the rear of the building. This building signaled the beginning of change in lower Second Avenue. (Its ground floor was home from 1954 to 2006 to Abe Lebewohl's legendary Second Avenue Deli.)

In 1926 Saul Birns developed **63-65 Second Avenue**, a six-story, L-shaped building with a frontage of forty-eight feet on Second Avenue and 133 feet on Fourth Street, wrapping around the building at the southwest corner of the intersection. This building, which has subtly patterned brickwork and places all its second-through fifth-floor fenestration within four-story arched moldings, was designed by Charles B. Meyers, who was twenty-four years old when he designed the nearby 145 Second Avenue (mentioned earlier) but was 51 when he designed 63-65 Second Avenue. It has a deep light court on Fourth Street, a gated service alley along its entire west side, and a courtyard along its south side.



63-65 Second Avenue

The next year, Birns built the fifteen-story Peter Stuyvesant apartments at **170 Second Avenue** (Segal & Sohn, architects), at the southeast corner of Eleventh Street. In 1929, Henry Kaufman developed the fifteen-story Warren Hall, which incorporated a new home for the Baptist Tabernacle, at 162-168 Second Avenue (northeast corner of Tenth Street), designed by Emery Roth. These and the twelve-story Ageloff Towers (Shampan & Shampan, architects) at 51-57 Avenue A, built by Samuel Ageloff and constructed in 1928, represent a small wave of high-class apartment construction that would no doubt have transformed the East Village had it not been for the stock market crash in October 1929.

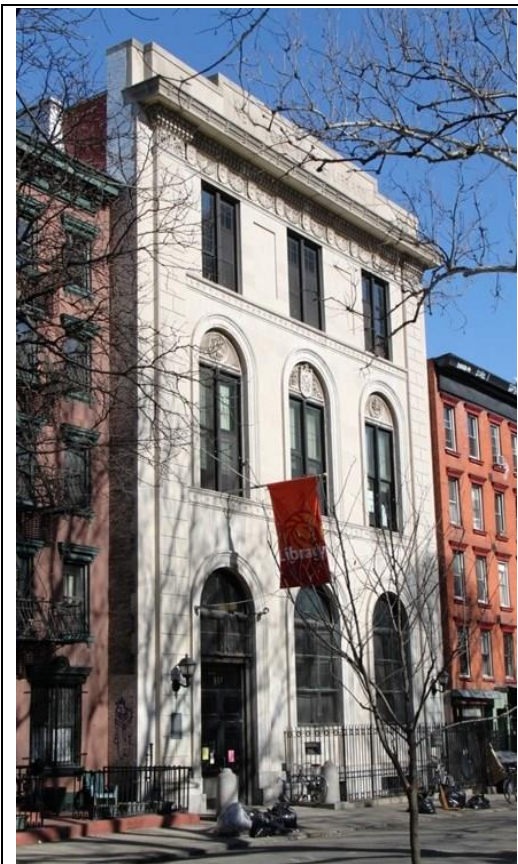


170 Second Avenue

IV. Institutional Buildings

In the East Village, a higher percentage of institutional buildings — for government, non-profit, educational, healthcare, and social service uses — has been designated by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission as individual landmarks than buildings of any other kind (e.g., houses of worship, tenements, row houses, commercial and industrial buildings).

Landmarked Institutional Buildings



Tompkins Square Library

The following six buildings have been designated as landmarks, representing a lively mix of architects, styles and purposes:

At 331 East Tenth Street stands the **Tompkins Square Library**, built in 1904. McKim, Mead and White designed this Carnegie-funded branch of the New York Public Library. Andrew Carnegie funded sixty-seven local libraries in New York City, and their designs were prestige commissions that went to some of the top firms in the city. The illustrious McKim, Mead and White, for example, designed thirteen of the libraries. This is a stately limestone palazzo notable chiefly for splendid carvings in the three tympana of the second-floor windows: In the center is the seal of the City of New York, flanked by the colophons, or printer's marks, of the historic Aldine press of Venice and Christophe Plantin press of Antwerp.

The **Ottendorfer Library** ("Freie Bibliothek und Lesehalle") and **Stuyvesant Polyclinic** (Deutsches Dispensary), at 135-137 Second Avenue, were built in 1883-84. The library, built long before the Carnegie bequest, was instead funded by Oswald Ottendorfer, editor and publisher of the *New-Yorker Staats Zeitung*, the German-language daily newspaper. Ottendorfer also funded the adjacent neighborhood healthcare clinic. Both structures are in the *Rundbogenstil*, are made



Library, left, and former Polyclinic, right.

of red brick with matching terra-cotta, and were designed by the prominent German-born architect William Schickel. The clinic boasts wonderful terra-cotta cherubs and busts of figures from medical history and lore such as Aesculapius and Galen.



former Free Public Baths

Nothing says you're "in the 'hood" like a public bath. Between 1901 and 1914 the city opened fourteen public bathing facilities in poor neighborhoods where many of the residents had no other means of washing themselves. The **Free Public Baths** at 538 East Eleventh Street, built in 1904-05, contained seven

bathtubs and ninety-four showers. Such facilities were considered by the hygienic reform movement to be essential in the cause of eradicating disease in the slums. The Eleventh Street Baths lie inside an Indiana limestone structure designed by Arnold W. Brunner in a rich Beaux-Arts style — rusticated stonework, panels in scroll frames, cabochons in

scroll frames, voluted brackets, and the like — that really makes this building stand out on a drab block otherwise enlivened only by the Father's Heart Ministry Center (a designated New York City Landmark) right across the street. It's now a photo and film studio.



The Tompkins Square Lodging for Boys and Industrial School of the Children's Aid Society, 295 East Eighth Street, was designed by Calvert Vaux and George K. Radford and built in 1886. It was a combination home and school for poor boys, particularly newsboys and bootblacks. The Children's Aid Society, founded by Charles Loring Brace in 1853 and endowed by Mrs. Robert L. Stuart, engaged Vaux and Radford to design

about a dozen Children's Aid Society buildings between 1879 and 1892; this is the third. Each is a wonderfully picturesque design. The Tompkins Square building is High Victorian Gothic in rust-colored brick with matching terra-cotta ornamentation, and the requisite varied roofline with dormers and chimneys and a prominent corner tower are obviously designed to complement the tower of St. Brigid's Church across Eighth Street. It was remade into apartments.

The Children's Aid Society's **Elizabeth Home for Girls**, 307 East Twelfth Street, was built in 1891-92, five years after the home for boys was erected. The picturesque Queen Anne-style building has a crow-stepped gable of the kind to be seen on many houses in the Netherlands and a delightful banded chimney. This, too, has been converted into apartments.



former Elizabeth Home for Girls

The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art

opened its imposing building at East Seventh Street and Cooper Square in 1859. Designed by the Prussian-born architect Frederick A. Petersen, the

brownstone building housed the remarkable school founded by industrialist and philanthropist Peter Cooper. Open to all regardless of race or sex, the school offered night



The Cooper Union

classes for working people who wanted to learn the skills necessary for advancement. The building's Great Hall was where, shortly after the building opened, Abraham Lincoln made the February 1860 speech — at the invitation of New York Republicans who were "auditioning" potential presidential candidates — that made powerful Republican interests take him seriously for the first time as a candidate.

Dedicated to Charity, Health, and the Mail

The Landmarks Preservation Commission has looked fairly extensively at institutional buildings in the East Village. What follows are some additional buildings of note that are not presently landmarked:

The Sixth Street Industrial School of the Children's Aid Society, 630 East Sixth Street, is a third East Village building designed by Vaux and Radford for the Children's Aid Society. All of them are remarkably intact. Unlike the other two, this 1889 building is not a designated New York City Landmark. Of the dozen or so Children's Aid Society industrial schools by Vaux and Radford, four have been demolished and three have been designated as landmarks (the two mentioned here, plus the Fourteenth Ward Industrial



School, 1888-89, at 256-258 Mott Street). Each of these schools had a benefactor. For example, the Tompkins Square facility was funded by Mrs. Robert L. Stuart. The Sixth Street school was funded by Emily Thorn Vanderbilt Sloane, the daughter of William Henry Vanderbilt (the richest man in New York City), and the wife of William Douglas Sloane of W. & J. Sloane, carpet merchant to the rich and famous.

The English-born Calvert Bowyer Vaux (1824-95) came to this country at the age of twenty-six to work in the landscape gardening firm of Andrew Jackson Downing in Newburgh, New York. Vaux (which he pronounced in the English way, *Vox*) formed a partnership with Frederick Law Olmsted to submit a design in the 1858 competition for Central Park. Although there is still a general tendency for people to say "Olmsted's Central Park," a growing consensus holds that Vaux deserves the lion's share of the credit for creating both Central Park and Brooklyn's Prospect Park. Following Downing's death in 1852, Vaux and another employee of the firm, fellow Englishman Frederick Clarke Withers, formed a partnership that yielded such buildings as the Jefferson Market Courthouse (1874-77) on Sixth Avenue and Tenth Street in the Greenwich Village Historic District. With still another fellow Englishman, Jacob Wrey Mould, an architect and decorator who worked closely with Vaux on Central Park, he designed the original building of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1880), a partial exterior wall of which is still visible inside the museum's Lehman Wing. Around 1873 Vaux formed yet another partnership with a civil engineer, of whom little is known, named George Kent Radford.

The Vaux and Radford partnership was responsible for the Children's Aid Society buildings and for joining two town houses (1881-84, now the National Arts Club) for Governor Samuel J. Tilden on Gramercy Park South. Vaux was close to Children's Aid Society founder Charles Loring Brace, and designed Brace's home in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. Vaux shared Brace's views on social reform and the need for hands-on work with children in the city's slums. Brace ran the Children's Aid Society, which is still a thriving charity, from its founding until his death in 1890. His best-known initiative was the "Orphan Train" program in which some 120,000 homeless children from the city were sent by train to live with Christian families on Midwestern farms. Next-best-known were the lodging houses and industrial schools set up in poor neighborhoods. The lodging houses provided temporary or extended-period homes for children who had nowhere else to go. The industrial schools taught basic skills (reading, writing, arithmetic) as well as job skills such as carpentry, cooking, and sewing.

The red brick and terra-cotta, four-story-plus-basement Sixth Street Industrial School is one of Vaux's typically picturesque concoctions. Like the Elizabeth Home for Girls, it has a crow-stepped gable etched prominently on the skyline as the school rises over its neighbors, including the *Iglesia de Dios*, which was remodeled in 1909 out of an 1889 mission of the Moravian Church, which Vaux had remodeled out of an 1846 row house, as discussed in the Houses of Worship chapter. But this gable is even better, because the building section it crowns has a striking three-story, three-sided bay window running down its center just below the gable. The façade is given additional depth by the use of cascading piers with stepped sloping set-offs, as in a Gothic church, though perhaps the best stylistic label for this building is "High Victorian." There is also a wonderful projecting entrance on the left, with an arched doorway and its own stepped gable. The inscription of the building's address, 630, in a shield at the apex of the gable is a particularly nice touch. This is not only splendidly preserved, but also one of Vaux's best industrial school designs. To the left of the entrance bay, separating Vaux's building from the *Iglesia de Dios*, is a slender six-story "tower" addition from 2000 by the architects Harden + Van Arnam, who undertook a highly sensitive renovation of the building (including a gut renovation of the interior and a thorough restoration of all exterior features) when the school was converted to a residence for people with AIDS. The renovation won a Lucy G. Moses Award from the New York Landmarks Conservancy in 2001.

Christodora House was founded in 1897 at Avenue B and Ninth Street. In 1928 it erected what can only be described as a deluxe settlement house, incorporating a profit-making apartment hotel. Its construction was funded by Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Curtiss James. Mr. James, a railroad and mining tycoon, was one of America's richest men, and Mrs. James was the president of Christodora's board.

The 16-story Christodora House, at 143 Avenue B, facing Tompkins Square, was designed by Henry Colden Pelton (1867-1935). The lower floors originally contained a swimming pool, a gymnasium, a chapel, music practice rooms, a concert hall, a lounge, classrooms, and a wood-paneled library with fireplaces. The upper floors consisted of



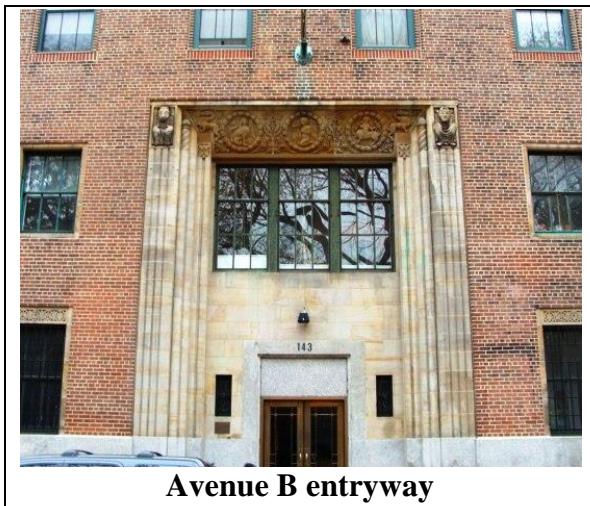
Christodora House, south elevation

residential suites, while the top floor had a dining room, a lounge, a roof garden, and a solarium. Christodora House was the first skyscraper settlement house, and the first settlement house to combine social service functions with an income-generating apartment hotel. Tompkins Square was chosen for the settlement because the other major Lower East Side settlements, such as University and Henry Street Settlements and the Educational Alliance, were all located south of Houston Street, but needs existed to the north as well.

Christodora was founded as the Young Women's Settlement by Christina MacColl and Sarah Libby Carson. The first American settlement house was Stanton Coit's Neighborhood Guild, later renamed University Settlement, founded in 1886. Lillian Wald's Henry Street Settlement was founded in 1893. The purposes of settlement houses included offering classes in academic and vocational subjects — not least in English — that would help poor neighborhood residents find jobs and climb the economic ladder. At the larger settlements, the breadth of the educational offerings was impressive, and included art, music, and drama classes as well as classes in sewing, typing, bookkeeping, stenography, and so on. Like Christodora, they also offered recreational amenities, such as swimming pools and gyms, counseling services (from job finding to dealing with government agencies), and basic medical services. Settlement houses also often had auditoriums or concert halls where plays, concerts, and lectures were offered to the

people of the community. The entire fourth floor of Christodora House was occupied by a concert hall. Christina MacColl, the daughter of a Presbyterian minister, remained Christodora's director until her death in 1939, and it was she who was in charge when the skyscraper settlement house went up in 1928.

The building is a great red-brick mass, its brick-faced steel piers subtly raised. Terra-cotta ornamentation is reserved for the two-story entryway on Avenue B, where medallions and two grotesques outline the top of a stately limestone enframement with fluted pilasters, and for the top of the building, where bands of Romanesque-inspired ornament outline the parapets. Pelton, the architect, was contemporaneously engaged in the design



Avenue B entryway

of John D. Rockefeller's Riverside Church on Riverside Drive and 120th Street, in collaboration with the firm Allen & Collens. That church's Gothic architecture we owe to the latter firm, a leader of the twentieth century's Boston-based Gothic Revival, while Pelton probably handled the details of Riverside's vast settlement house complex. Indeed, given that Riverside's

tower is actually a steel-framed skyscraper, it may be said that it was the second skyscraper settlement house, and that Pelton designed both. Pelton received his training at Columbia University and would later serve as a Columbia trustee. His funeral service was held at Columbia's St. Paul's Chapel and he was eulogized by the Reverend Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, the famous pastor of Riverside Church, and by Nicholas Murray Butler, the president of Columbia.

Under President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and similarly spirited initiatives undertaken in New York City by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, government at all levels accepted the responsibility of offering the social and recreational services that had been the province of the settlement houses. When this combined with the population losses in

the Lower East Side, it forced the settlements to redefine their missions. Christodora faced the additional challenge that its apartment hotel had ceased to be profitable, and the settlement could no longer afford to maintain its skyscraper home. In 1949 Christodora moved into the new Jacob Riis Houses on Avenue D. The city acquired the building through condemnation, and the Welfare Department used it for offices and training facilities. In the 1960s, the city allowed local community groups, including the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, the use of the building. That did not end well. In a dispute, someone turned on water valves that flooded the building's electrical systems, forcing the shuttering of the building in 1975. (It's hard to know exactly what happened. *New York* magazine said that someone turned on the fifteenth-floor water valves, which flooded the electrical systems.¹ The *New York Times* said a splinter faction of the Black Panthers turned fire hoses on the electrical systems in the basement.²)

In 1986 the building was converted to condominium residences as well as offices for community organizations. Because of its physical prominence, the building became a symbol of the 1980s gentrification of the Tompkins Square neighborhood. The city's imposition of a one o'clock in the morning curfew in Tompkins Square Park was interpreted by many residents as the city — the Parks Department and the Police Department — doing the bidding of the affluent newcomers to the neighborhood, such as the "yuppies" who had bought apartments in Christodora House. The newcomers, it was alleged, wanted to stamp out the park's diverse uses and impose their own sense of order on the neighborhood, though, in actuality, the park curfew was supported by a cross section of residents and endorsed by the local community board. In any case, the riot of August 6, 1988 — by all accounts exacerbated by the police themselves — followed from a protest rally that was largely about gentrification. After a bloody melee involving unprovoked attacks by police on unsuspecting bystanders, a group of protesters hauled a police barricade across the street to Christodora House and used it as a battering ram to smash windows and break through the front door. The building's lobby was vandalized. Like the Civil War draft riots — in which rioters used Tompkins Square as a staging ground — the 1988 protests made abundantly clear that many people were very unhappy

¹ Craig Unger, "The Lower East Side: There Goes the Neighborhood," *New York* (28 May 1984): 35.

² "Condos on Ave. B: Where Gershwin Played," *New York Times* (3 August 1986):R1.

with economic trends, but did little to alter the course of events, as gentrification of the East Village continued and intensified.

The **New York Eye and Ear Infirmary**, founded in 1820, is the oldest specialized hospital in the Western Hemisphere, and the third-oldest hospital in New York City after New York Hospital and Bellevue. The hospital, which brought true eye-care to America for the first time (including, in its first year, the first surgery to restore sight to the blind), was originally located at the present-day 83 Park Row. In 1856, following several moves, the Infirmary built a

new home, a four-story Italianate structure faced in brownstone, at the northeast corner of Second Avenue and Thirteenth Street.

According to the Eye and Ear Infirmary's web site, between 1890 and 1893 that original structure was remodeled and enlarged until we had the building that stands today.³



Eye and Ear Infirmary, East Thirteenth Street elevation

The expanded building, a massive structure in a loosely Richardsonian Romanesque style, was designed by Robert Williams Gibson (1854-1927). The base along both Second Avenue and Thirteenth Street is rusticated in rockface stone with arched windows

³ Gerald B. Kara, MD, "History of New York Eye & Ear Infirmary: One hundred fifty years of continuous service" (accessed 28 July 2012): http://www.nyee.edu/history_eye.html.

and deep reveals, and has a high arched entryway on Second Avenue. Above, the building is golden brick nicely broken up by sills, lintels, and courses of rough stone, subtle recesses and projections in the façade, and varied window treatments including many heavy transom bars and clustered blind arches. On the Thirteenth Street side the building reads as a trio of towers, with two light courts cut deep into the building above the stone base. The building is frankly utilitarian, but the architect went to great lengths to avoid ponderousness and to break up his facades to keep the building at a friendly scale. The building has for nearly 120 years housed one of the most historic institutions in New York City, and, as old photographs show, hardly anything on the outside of the building has been changed since it was built.

Gibson's other credits include the New York Botanical Garden Museum Building (1898-1901) in the Bronx, St. Michael's Episcopal Church (1890-91) at Amsterdam Avenue and Ninety-Ninth Street, the West End Collegiate Church and School (1892-93) at West End Avenue and Seventy-Seventh Street, the Morton Plant House (1903-05), later remodeled into the Cartier store, at 651 Fifth Avenue, and the Church Missions House (1892-94) at 281 Park Avenue South. All are designated New York City Landmarks. Possibly his masterpiece, the Randall Memorial Chapel (1890-92) at Sailors' Snug Harbor on Staten Island, was demolished. The English-born Gibson received his formal training at the Royal Academy of Arts in London.

The **Cooper Square Station** of the United States Post Office, at 101 East Eleventh Street, at the northeast corner of Fourth Avenue, was built in 1936-37. It is one of the finest post offices in New York from its time. It is the exact contemporary of the Bronx Central Post Office (1935-37), a designated New York City Landmark, and is its equal. From 1934 to 1940, Louis A. Simon served as the Supervising Architect of the United States Treasury, and was in charge of overseeing post office building projects, including selecting their designers. He made some inspired choices, including those of Thomas Harlan Ellett to design the Bronx Post Office and of Lorimer Rich to design the

Madison Square Station (1935) at 149-153 East Twenty-Third Street. Not least did Simon hire William Dewey Foster (1890-1958) to design Cooper Square Station. Foster had studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (as had Simon), and would soon be known as the architect, along with Gilbert Stanley Underwood, of the Harry S. Truman Building (1938-41), the headquarters of the State Department in Washington, D.C.

Between 1935 and 1937 Simon commissioned Foster to design post offices in the New York area. Foster is responsible for the Morrisania Post Office at 442 East 167th Street in the Bronx, the wonderful Knickerbocker Station at 130 East Broadway, and the Larchmont Post Office in Larchmont, New York, among others. Each is unique, though



each employs a "stripped classical" style, as do the Bronx Central and Madison Square post offices. It was the middle of the Great Depression. International Style

Modernism had not caught on yet in a big way, and the opulence and optimism of Art Deco had come to feel inappropriate. Art Moderne (a kind of "stripped" Art Deco) and stripped classical, often in combination, became the emblematic styles of the time. Rather than relying on rich ornamentation or fancy materials for his Cooper Square Station, he chose to meet the odd-angled intersection (created by the diagonal course of Fourth Avenue) with a sweepingly convex two-story façade. Dramatic features include a curving colonnade of six full-height (two stories high) fluted columns, flanked by two fluted piers that rise without bases to simple capped tops holding a stylized entablature with a curving frieze bearing the words "United States Post Office." This is topped by a shallow cornice and a roofline balustrade. Between the columns at each floor, rectangular windows are set in austere but elegant stone frames. The columns are stone and the main surface of the façade is a tan brick. Original, curving, vaguely Art Deco iron fences are set over

sidewalk grates between the columns. It is possible that Foster was inspired by the original Whitney Museum of American Art (1931), by Auguste Noël, at 8-12 West Eighth Street. In both cases there is a playfulness and low-budget imaginativeness in the use of classical forms by architects who clearly understood those forms. The Washington, D.C.-based Foster was also a leading restoration architect, with credits including Washington's Octagon House. He directed the Historic American Buildings Survey in New York State in 1932, and helped organize the Committee to Preserve the Capitol.

V. Commercial and Industrial Buildings

Of the many commercial and industrial buildings in the East Village — spanning uses from stables to theaters to banks — five have been designated as individual landmarks by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission.



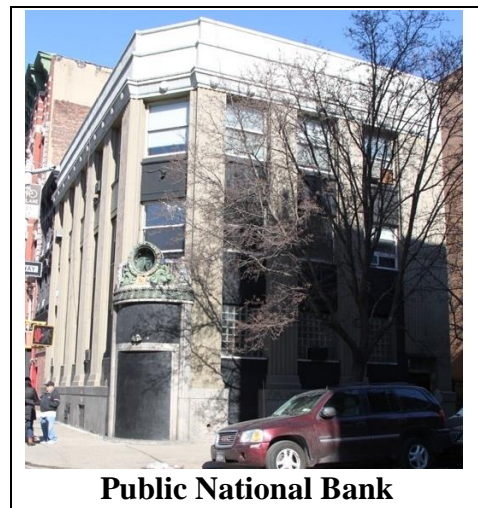
The former **Germania Life Insurance Company** building at 357 Bowery, between Third and Fourth Streets, was designated in 2010. The four-story building with a mansard roof, which housed an insurance company that served the residents of *Kleindeutschland*, was designed by the German-born architect Carl Pfeiffer (1834-1888) and built in 1870.

In 2008 the Commission designated the former **Public National Bank** at 106 Avenue C at the northeast corner of Seventh Street. This is a stunning 1923 building designed in a Viennese Secession style by the New York-born architect Eugene Schoen (1880-1957) who, as a young graduate of Columbia

University, had traveled to Vienna and met the influential architects Josef Hoffmann and Otto Wagner.

The former **Yiddish Art Theater** at 183-189 Second Avenue, at the southwest corner of Twelfth Street, was designated in 1993 as both a Landmark and an Interior Landmark (the only one in the East

Village). Built for Maurice Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theater, which represented the highest level of artistry and respectability achieved by the Yiddish-language theater, the





Yiddish Art Theater

building was designed by the noted theater architect Harrison Wiseman and built in 1925-26. It is the most vivid reminder we have of the glory days of the old Jewish Rialto, as lower Second Avenue was once known, and today serves as the Village East movie theater.

Finally, in 2008, the Commission designated the former **Wheatsworth Bakery** building at 444 East Tenth Street, between Avenue C and Avenue D. Designed by J. Edwin Hopkins and built in 1927-28, the seven-story reinforced-concrete factory has terra-cotta ornamentation in the Viennese Secession style. At this factory Wheatsworth produced its eponymous crackers, as well as Milk-Bone dog biscuits.



Wheatsworth Bakery

In 2012, the Commission designated as a New York City Landmark the last remaining example of a building type that was once common: the horse auction mart. The landmarked building is part of a handsome two-structure complex, the **Van Tassell and Kearney Auction Mart**. The non-designated part was constructed first. It's a five-story building at 126 East Thirteenth

Street, between Third and Fourth Avenues, designed by D. & J. Jardine and built in 1888 as stables for the horse auctioneers William Van Tassell and Edward Kearney, who began their business in 1874. According to the *New York Times*:

Van Tassel [sic] & Kearney sold an exceptionally long catalogue of roadsters, cobs, carriage teams, and business horses, as well as carriages and harness of all descriptions, last Friday, at their emporium on East Thirteenth Street. One team that especially attracted attention and is worthy of a place before any park carriage sold for \$475. The man who secured it has a bargain. They have in their up-stairs floors everything known to the trade in fashionable styles of carriages, at the lowest prices, but they say they have never before seen the time when a little would secure so much.¹

Auctioneer Edward Kearney was born in Manhattan to Irish immigrant parents in 1830. He attended the public schools and apprenticed as a butcher. He enlisted in the Union Army and rose to the rank of major. Kearney retired from butchering in 1874 when he went into the horse auction business with William Van Tassell. Kearney was a member of Tammany Hall and was said to be a friend of two of its leaders, John Kelly and Richard Croker. He held various Democratic Party posts but never elected office. A horse racing enthusiast, he was a member of the Coney Island Jockey Club and president of the Saratoga Racing Association. He died in 1900.²

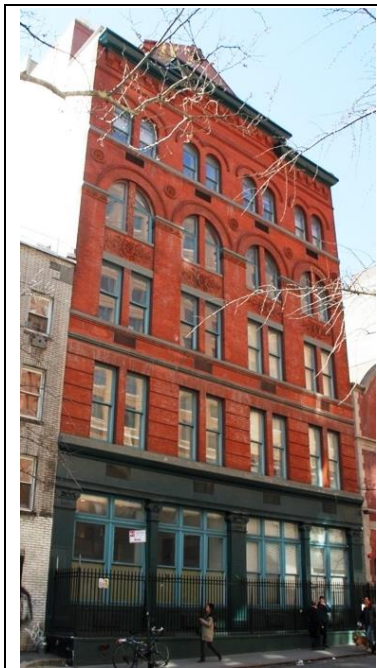
William Van Tassell was born in Manhattan in 1840 and, according to the *Times*, "came of old Knickerbocker stock." Around 1864, after some years of holding office positions in the horsecar (i.e., horse-drawn streetcar) business, Van Tassell entered the horse auctioneering field, taking on Kearney as his partner after a few years. From the start the firm was located on Twelfth Street (later extending through the block to Thirteenth Street) between Third and Fourth Avenues. Van Tassell met an unfortunate end when he showed a visitor around the recently completed Thirteenth Street building in 1888 and

¹ "Horses and Horsemen," *New York Times*, 12 November 1893, p. 3. Also, \$475 is equal to about \$12,000 in today's dollars.

² "Edward Kearney Dead," *New York Times*, 26 February 1900, p. 7.

fell down an elevator shaft to his death.³ Van Tassell and Kearney were, without question, the biggest names in their once very important business.

Sometime after Kearney's death in 1900 the firm, under his son Edward W. Kearney, went into the automobile auction business, which continued under Thomas V. Carter in the adjacent show-ring building. The building became a factory of King Philip Chocolate Company in 1916, which was later acquired by U.R.S. Candy Stores in 1920. In 1924 the company changed its name to Happiness Candy Stores, and remained in the building until 1928. Three floors became a powder-puff factory in 1943. The *Times* reported in 1946:



Former horse stables

Newport News, Va., will become an international incident, it was learned yesterday, if Local 65 of the Wholesale and Warehouse Workers Union, CIO, has its way.”⁴ The company in question was A.J. Siris Products, Inc., of 130 East Thirteenth Street. In 1989 the building was converted to the Zachary apartments.

The façade on Thirteenth Street is intact: an attractive design in the arcaded brick warehouse style. Four two-story arches contain the third and fourth floor windows, while four double-arched windows span the fifth floor below bands of corbels and an intact original cornice. The original cast-iron ground floor with its fluted pilasters is intact.

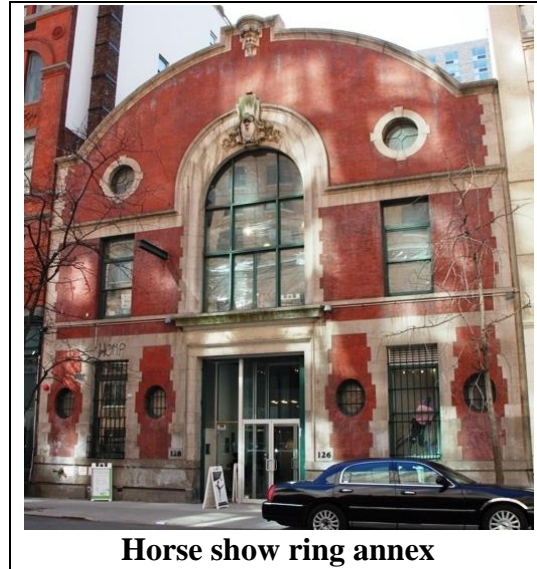
Next door, at 128 East Thirteenth Street, stands the auction firm's show ring annex, one of the most distinctive structures in the East Village and the one that was designated a landmark in 2012. The same firm — but now known as Jardine, Kent & Jardine — that built the stables in 1888 also designed the show ring, which was built in 1904. This is a

³ “Mr. Van Tassell Killed,” *New York Times*, 8 December 1888, p. 1.

⁴ “Union Fights Plant Shift,” *New York Times*, 30 September 1946, p. 34.

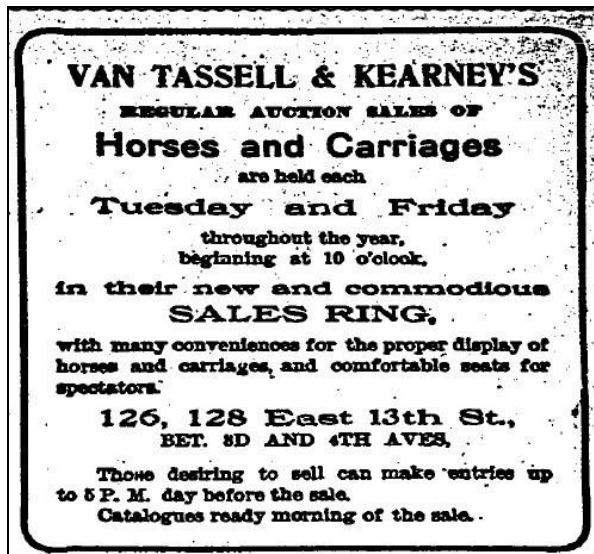
great arched structure in the Beaux-Arts style, which looks almost like a church. The façade is divided horizontally in thirds, made of red brick with contrasting light stone window and door enframements, quoins, and belt courses. At the lowest level the entrance is in the

center. Above it rises a dramatic story-and-a-half-high arched and chamfered window. "This was the place," said the *New York Times*, "where the Belmonts and Vanderbilts and other families transacted their horse affairs."⁵ It may seem church-like on the outside, but the inside ("an enormous space that could hold a blimp," wrote Christopher Gray) was more like the drill hall of an armory.



Horse show ring annex

In 1938, the Delehanty Realty Corp. took over the building for use as a "Civil Service School and Exhibit Room." Shortly after the U.S. entered World War II, the *Times* reported that "Delehanty Institute is to open a branch in machine shop practice for women, with offices at 126 [128] East Thirteenth Street. ... Women will be taught assembly and inspection work, the reading of blueprints, and various mechanical aspects needed in defense industries."⁶



David Jardine was born in Scotland in 1830 and moved to America in 1850. Here he practiced as an architect. When his younger brother John came over a few years later, the two formed a partnership in 1865, D. & J. Jardine. The firm continued under that name until 1892, the year of David's death. They

⁵ Betty Shannon, "Where Carriages Still Rule," *New York Times*, 14 April 1929, p. 88.

⁶ "Delehanty to Teach Women," *New York Times*, 28 December 1941, p. D6.

were one of the most prominent American architectural firms of the second half of the nineteenth century, producing every type of building in every style. Among their notable works are the cast-iron-fronted former B. Altman & Co. department store at 625-629 Sixth Avenue (1876-80), and the Wilbraham, a bachelor flat building, at 1 West Thirtieth Street (1888-90) — both designated landmarks. Following David's death the firm was known as Jardine, Kent & Jardine, for John Jardine, William Kent, and George Jardine, a third brother. The firm operated under this name until 1911, and under other names until 1936. They are the architects of at least four individually designated New York City Landmarks and of buildings in at least nine historic districts, including the St. Mark's Historic District, where the Jardines designed three fine Italianate row houses at 106-110 East Tenth Street, built in 1867, only two years after the formation of the firm. Also in the East Village, D. & J. Jardine designed 635 and 637 East Sixth Street, between Avenue B and Avenue C, two tenements fashioned in 1888 from a pair of earlier commercial buildings.

From 1978 to 2005, the show ring building at 128 East Thirteenth Street served as the studio of the artist Frank Stella, one of the most acclaimed and influential American artists of the postwar generation. Stella was born in Massachusetts in 1936 and moved to New York in 1958 after graduating from Princeton University. As a painter he rebelled against the intense emotionalism of Abstract Expressionism and adopted a cool style emphasizing simple geometries and flatness. His star rose high in the 1960s when he became part of the dealer Leo Castelli's celebrated stable of artists. By the time he moved to 128 East Thirteenth Street, he had added printmaking and sculpture to his repertoire, and his works had become pictorially more complex. Familiar examples of works he created in this studio are the stainless steel and carbon fiber sculptures featured in the exhibition *Frank Stella on the Roof* at the Cantor Roof Garden of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2007.

Of Dry Docks and Tall Lofts

Several other commercial and industrial buildings in the East Village warrant closer inspection for their noteworthy social history or architectural features.



143-145 Avenue D

This list begins with **143-145 Avenue D**, at the southwest corner of Tenth Street, which abuts the Wheatsworth Bakery Building. (In fact, this building did service for a while as Wheatsworth's bakery before the aforementioned landmarked building was erected.) The building was built in 1827 as the New York Dry Dock Company Banking House. It was originally constructed as a four-story Federal-style structure for use as a bank, just a block from the Dry Dock

Company's pioneering marine railway, an innovative apparatus for ship repair that began operation in the same year. (The marine railway was located near the footbridge that crosses the FDR Drive to East River Park beyond the Jacob Riis Houses.)

Tax records indicate that Nos. 143-145 ceased to function as the Dry Dock Company Banking House in 1849, in which year a rear addition was put on the building. We don't know what the building was used for in the thirteen years following that, but in 1862 it housed the Manhattan Steam Laundry, and in 1871 it was made into the New York Strangers' Hospital by John H. Keyser (1818-99). This was an ambitious attempt at founding "a hospital from whose doors no poor person was turned away."⁷ The *Times* reported: "During the great panic of 1873 Mr. Keyser fed daily 1,000 persons at his home in Second Avenue," which then stood on the site of what became the Yiddish Art Theater at the southwest corner of Twelfth Street. The *Times* tells of other such benevolent acts by Keyser. He became wealthy as a manufacturer who is believed to have had close ties

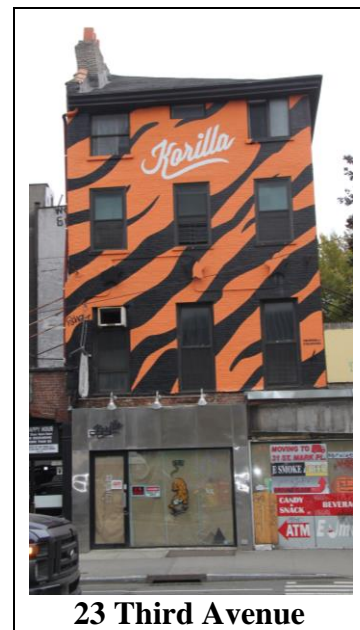
⁷ "John H. Keyser Dead," *New York Times*, 23 August 1899, p. 7.

to the Tweed Ring. He closed the Strangers' Hospital after only three years, during which he was caught up in the investigations of Boss Tweed.

In 1879, a new owner, Levy Brothers, wholesale dealers in clothing, added a fifth story and a cornice to the building. In 1885 the building was a cigar factory, and three years later a cast-iron storefront was added. In 1920, 143-145 was purchased by the F.H. Bennett Biscuit Company, which, under a new name, Wheatsworth, Inc., built its new factory next door in 1927-28. In 1999, 143-145 was converted to a residential building. Throughout the East Village are buildings that are like palimpsests, showing, however faintly (but definitely), all the traces of their history. While much of the original 1827 fabric is gone from 143-145 Avenue D, much remains, and it is the last remaining tangible reminder of its immediate neighborhood's days as part of Manhattan's Dry Dock District.

The name lives on, however, at the 1.5 acre Dry Dock Playground, a public city park. It occupies the site of the Dry Dock Company Banking House's second location; the bank moved across Tenth Street, to 147 Avenue D, in 1854. That building stood until 1961. Along the west side of the playground is a two-block street that used to be called Dry Dock Street and is now called Szold Place, after Henrietta Szold, founder of Hadassah.

Another structure dating back to the neighborhood's earliest days is the building at **23 Third Avenue**, at the northeast corner of St. Mark's Place (also known as 1 St. Mark's Place). Look closely and you will see that this is obviously a very old, if much altered, structure. Possibly dating to 1834-35, the four-story red brick building is shown in nineteenth-century photographs as a three-story building with an attic and a prominent hipped roof. At some point, the attic was raised to a full story and the hipped roof replaced by a flat roof. However, the original attic windows remain on the St. Mark's Place side. Also,



23 Third Avenue

the second-story windows appear to retain the multi-pane sash evident in the early photos. A portion of the building was once the Astor-Place Hotel, from at least the 1870s to the turn of the twentieth century. A mid-1950s photograph in Lawrence Stelter's book *By the El* shows the original attic and hipped roof still in place.⁸ So the top-story alteration was done sometime after the mid-1950s, although no permit on file with the city accounts for it. The alteration probably occurred around 1960. The *New York Times* reported in that year: "In its first change of ownership in 108 years, the four-story building at 23 Third Avenue ... has been sold by Marie O. Gregory to Sam Gabay and Louis Ameri. ...The upper floors will be converted to apartments and the stores will be remodeled."⁹ Despite the awnings and signage that typically have covered the ground floor and distracted from the structure's historicity, a surprisingly great deal of this building's original fabric remains intact. In 2018, a demolition permit was filed for this structure.

At **171 First Avenue**, between Tenth and Eleventh Streets, stands a distinctive five-story, twenty-three-foot-wide cast-iron-fronted building built in 1883 by Robert W. Goelet, at the time one of the largest owners of property in New York. New York's "aristocratic" families often derived their income from real estate, and often very unglamorous real estate in the form of tenements and loft buildings. Such leading families as the Astors and the Goelets did not leave the East Village unmined. Here a speculative loft building went up in 1883. Little is known of the building's occupants, but few cast-iron-fronted buildings so strikingly incorporate such large windows and reduce the metal on the façade to the remarkable minimum seen here. Not much is known of the architect, Joseph M. Dunn, other than that he was a versatile designer of loft buildings, row houses, and other building types, and frequently worked for the Goelet family.

Dunn's buildings can be found in at least four historic districts in Manhattan. His credits include 47-49 Mercer Street in the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, built in 1873 with a façade very much like that of 171 First Avenue. Dunn was also the architect of the 1879

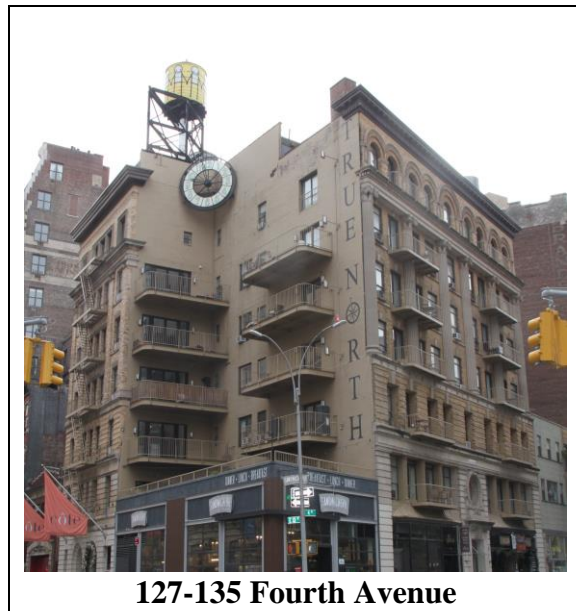
⁸ Lawrence Stelter, *By the El: Third Avenue and Its El at Mid-Century*, 2nd ed., New York: Stelterphoto, 2007.

⁹ "108-Year Holding Is Sold on 3d Ave.," *New York Times*, 21 October 1960, p. 55.



remodeling of Alexander Jackson Davis's New York City Lunatic Asylum on Roosevelt Island; Dunn added the distinctive dome to the structure, which was converted to apartments in 2006. In 1886 Dunn designed several picturesque Queen Anne row houses in the Manhattan Avenue Historic District on the Upper West Side. In between those commissions came 171 First Avenue, which is possibly the finest cast-iron-fronted building in the East Village. Its dramatic openness makes it of interest in the history of New York cast-iron architecture in general. Since 2003 the building has been partly occupied by David Chang's celebrated Momofuku Noodle Bar.

Designed by Marsh, Israels & Harder, the building at **127-135 Fourth Avenue**, built in 1897, wraps around the building at the southeast corner of Thirteenth Street, and also has a Thirteenth Street frontage. It is seven stories high, but the six three-story-high fluted Ionic columns across the fourth through sixth floors of the main façade on Fourth Avenue give the appearance of a much taller building. These columns seem to stretch the building, making it seem higher. Some critics, such as the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner, disapprove of mid-air columns when they are visually unsupported by columns below. While the mid-air column can be disorienting, it can also serve a purpose in the right hands, as here: These architects really do use the columns to achieve an effect that makes the building more imposing — and handsome. The Fourth Avenue façade is almost entirely intact, down to some details of the storefronts.



The building once housed the retail store of Hammacher Schlemmer. The hardware store, famous for its extensive catalogues (1,112 pages by 1912) as well as its retail stores, was founded in 1848 at 221 Bowery, between Rivington and Prince Streets. In 1859 it moved a block south to 209 Bowery, between Spring and Rivington Streets. There the store remained until it moved in 1904 to the seven-year-old 127-135 Fourth Avenue. In 1926, Hammacher Schlemmer moved to its present location at 147 East Fifty-Seventh Street. That it was founded and remained for so long in *Kleindeutschland* should be no surprise: William Schlemmer and Alfred Hammacher were both German immigrants. The gadgets and novelty items for which the store is famous did not become the stock-in-trade until after the move to Fifty-Seventh Street. Before that, the store was known for its comprehensive selection of hardware items, including obscure items that could be found nowhere else.

The Fourth Avenue building has a two-story base featuring two-story cast-iron storefronts on either side of the main building entrance. At the first floor the storefronts retain original cast-iron columns, and at the second floor cast-iron pilasters. Framing the storefronts is rusticated stonework; above that the building is faced in brick. The main building entrance is richly embellished. At the second floor is a fine wreath-encircled

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oculus with cornucopias and sprays of acanthus at its bottom. The three-story columns carry an entablature with a cornice at the sixth floor. The seventh, and top, floor is arcaded, and an intact cornice tops the whole. A similar treatment, minus most of the ornamentation

and the columns, is found on the secondary Thirteenth Street façade. The facades retain almost all of their original features and have been altered only by the insertion of simple

metal balconies on the Fourth Avenue façade as part of the conversion of the building to apartments.

The architects, Augustus Marsh, Charles Henry Israels (1864-1911), and Julius Harder had formed their partnership in 1894. Marsh left the firm the year this building opened, but Israels and Harder continued for several years, designing many loft buildings, apartment houses, hotels, and row houses. They also designed the Hudson Theatre (a designated New York City Landmark) at 139-141 West Forty-Fourth Street, built in 1902-04, and a wonderfully eccentric bachelor flat building at 22 East Thirty-First Street, built in 1900. Israels on his own, at the same time the firm was working on 127-135 Fourth Avenue, designed eleven of the thirty-six buildings in the Riverside Drive-West 80th-81st Street Historic District.

Charles Israels was married to the well-known political and labor activist Belle Moskowitz. (They met when they both worked at the Educational Alliance.) His *Times* obituary states that "he finished his [architectural] studies in France," making Israels one of the earliest Jewish American architects to attend the fabled Ecole des Beaux-Arts. He was secretary of the Municipal Art Society, and a highly perceptive writer on architecture. (His long essay, "New York Apartment Houses," in *Architectural Record* in 1901, is still required reading on its subject.) His dual interest in the classical architecture of the City Beautiful movement and in progressive politics, including socialism, was not unusual for the first decade of the 20th century. Israels was only 47 years old when he died, and had he lived longer, it is likely that with his talent and excellent connections he might have enjoyed a career that would have brought him lasting fame.

At **114-116 East Thirteenth Street** stands the handsome American Felt Company Building, designed by Knight & Collins and built in 1906. This twelve-story building has a very nicely detailed two-story base. Doorway bays at the east and west ends of the seventy-six-foot-wide base are faced in limestone. The doorways are richly framed, on the left with a pair of Tuscan columns carrying a deeply modeled entablature with a prominent cornice, and on the right a simpler treatment, without the columns, thus

signaling the left entrance as the main entrance. Above each doorway is a window with an elaborate stone enframement, and above each window is a ram's head. Between the doorway bays is a central section in cast iron. For the shaft the building turns to a tan brick, with cast iron reappearing in the central section from the fourth through the eighth



stories. The gabled central section of the building rises a story higher than the rest of the building. The American Felt Company was founded in Newburgh, New York, in 1899, and manufactured felt for a variety of products including hats, piano strikers, and pool tables. The company is still in existence, headquartered in New Windsor, New York. The old American Felt

Company Building was converted to condominiums in 1984, at which time the balconies were added to the building's exposed east wall — a solution that preserved the integrity of the façade on Thirteenth Street. Since then the building has attracted some celebrity residents, including the actor Tom Cruise.

The eight-story Fish Building at **113 Fourth Avenue**, at the northeast corner of Twelfth Street, was built by the Hamilton Fish Corporation in 1905-06 as a speculative loft building. The building occupies a trapezoidal lot along the blocks where Fourth Avenue tilts to the left in imitation of Broadway. At first, this appears a standard loft building. But it is a particularly strong example of the forthright expression of the structural steel frame in a multi-story business building. The architects, Robertson & Potter, relieved the building's white-brick massiveness by providing a handsome



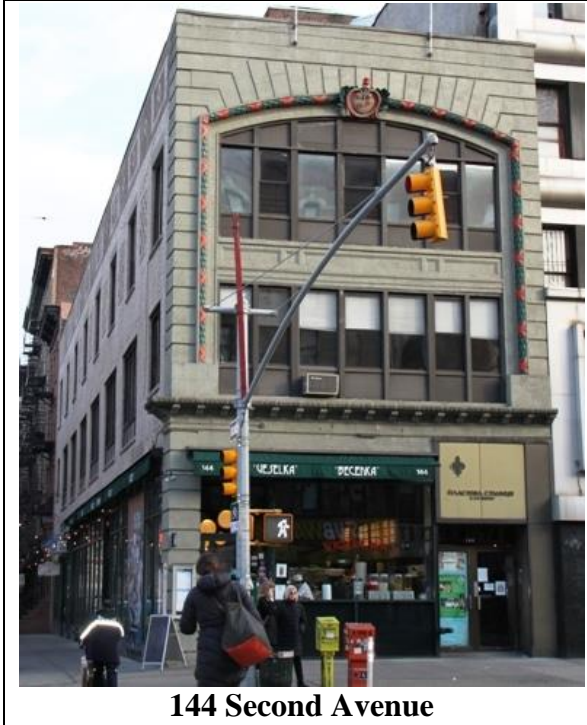
Renaissance-style entrance on Fourth Avenue, and crowning the building with a kind of crenellated parapet with a diamond pattern in the brickwork. Notable buildings designed by Robert Henderson “R.H.” Robertson (1849-1919) are too numerous to mention, although his Park Row Building of 1896-99 was still, at the time of the Fish Building, the tallest building in the world (not to be surpassed until the construction of Ernest Flagg's Singer Tower in 1908). At the time of the construction of the Fish Building he was in partnership with Robert Burnside Potter, the nephew of William Appleton Potter, who had been an earlier partner of Robertson's. The Fish Building was tastefully converted to apartments in 1986 and renamed the Petersfield, after the estate of Petrus Stuyvesant.



Directly across Twelfth Street, the thirteen-story loft building at **111 Fourth Avenue**, at the southeast corner, shares some strong similarities with the Fish Building. Clearly the architects, Starrett & Van Vleck, took their cues from the earlier building. Here, in 1919, is another frank expression of the steel frame. Again, the building is white (although in glazed terra-cotta rather than brick) with spandrel panels of contrasting color. This was known as the International Tailoring Building. The site was purchased in 1919 from Mathilda E.R. Stuyvesant.

Architect Goldwin Starrett (1874-1918) had worked in Chicago as a principal assistant to Daniel H. Burnham; in New York he and his brothers formed the Thompson-Starrett Construction Company in 1901. Among their projects was the Algonquin Hotel (1902) on West Forty-Fourth Street. In 1907 Goldwin Starrett formed a partnership with Ernest Van Vleck (1875-1956). The firm was particularly renowned for its department store designs, including Lord & Taylor (1914) on Fifth Avenue between Thirty-Eighth and Thirty-Ninth Streets, and Saks Fifth Avenue (1922-24), on Fifth Avenue between Forty-Ninth and Fiftieth Streets. Their building at 111 Fourth Avenue has many

similarities to their Everett Building (1908) at the northwest corner of Park Avenue South and Seventeenth Street.



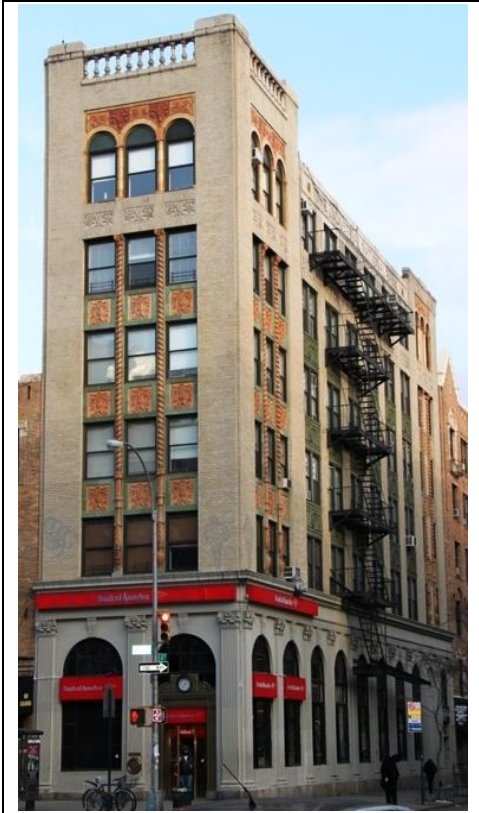
144 Second Avenue

At **144 Second Avenue**, at the southeast corner of Ninth Street stands a three-story building that has for many years housed the well-known Ukrainian restaurant Veselka. The building was built in 1914-15 as a motion picture theater, designed by Louis A. Sheinart. In 1928 the building was converted to retail and office use. It is notable for its Second Avenue rusticated stone façade dominated by a two-story, nearly full-width segmental-arched opening that is outlined in a band of glazed green terra-cotta scales and red terra-cotta ribbons. It

is simple yet one of the great visual delights of lower Second Avenue. Veselka has been in the building, gradually occupying more and more of it, since 1954.

From ‘Moorish Deco’ to Midcentury Modern

Another striking use of terra-cotta ornamentation, indeed a true extravaganza of glazed terra-cotta, may be seen at **72 Second Avenue**, at the northeast corner of East Fourth Street. The six-story building was built in 1928-29 as the Industrial National Bank, with the name prominently and beautifully displayed in terra-cotta in the parapet of the Fourth Street façade. It is protected as part of the East Village/Lower East Side Historic District, created in 2012. The slab-like building has only a twenty-four-foot frontage on the avenue, but ninety-eight feet on Fourth Street. Both facades are treated alike, with Corinthian pilasters framing two-story arched openings along the base. Up above is



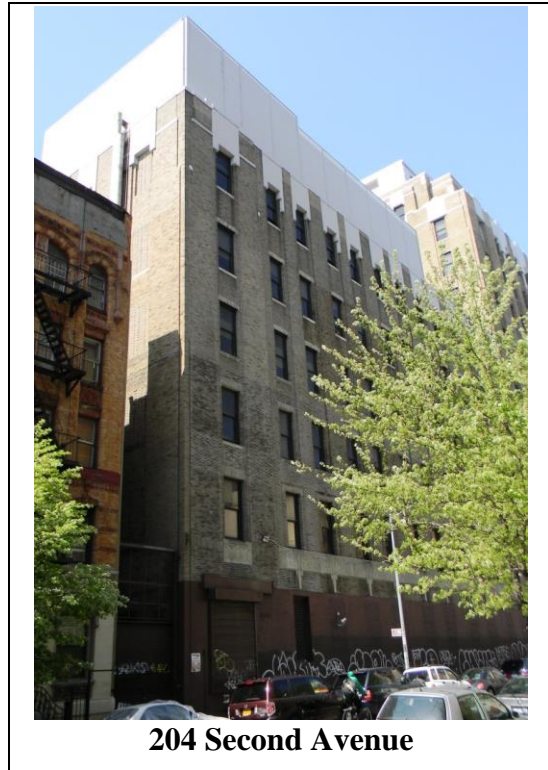
72 Second Avenue

where the action is; green terra-cotta-framed spandrel panels are filled with floral forms in earth-colored terra-cotta with a rich glaze. The slender piers separating the windows are in the form of twisted terra-cotta ropes, or vines. On Fourth Street the building has a pavilionated form, with a large central section recessed between two towers that rise to top stories with clustered-arch windows. The style is a kind of Moorish Deco, not unlike the Yiddish Art Theater (1925-26) at Second Avenue and Twelfth Street. One wonders whether, if the boomlet that began on lower Second Avenue just before the stock market crash of 1929 had continued, there might have been more of this type of development. The architects Landsman & Smith did not design

many buildings, but one other credit of theirs was the nearby Gramercy Park Memorial Chapel at 152-154 Second Avenue, the Moorish-style funeral home (where services were held for such well-known people as Julius and Ethel Rosenberg and the poet Delmore Schwartz) built in 1938 and closed in 2007. The building has since been remodeled beyond all recognition.

In the 1920s and 1930s the New York Telephone Company, amid a historic increase in telephone use, built numerous buildings to house switchboard and other technical operations. This included **204 Second Avenue**, at the southeast corner of Thirteenth Street, the first three stories of which were designed by McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin in 1923 (with the intention of adding more stories later). Later known as Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, the firm designed the remaining eight stories in 1929-30. The building exhibits many of the same characteristics as Ralph Walker's other works. The entrance on

Second Avenue features "columns" of telescoping clustered shafts with a chevron "entablature." It's the sort of exuberant entrance at which Walker excelled, though it is not identical to any of his others. The chevron form recurs throughout the building's ornamentation. Walker won fame for his unique ability to exploit the requirements of the stepped-back towers mandated by the Zoning Code of 1916. He did this not simply by placing a smaller volume atop a larger one, but by carefully patterning his surfaces with subtle projections and recesses that



204 Second Avenue

accentuate the building's verticality and create a subtle play of light and shadow across the building. He also used many shades of brick to lend visual drama to his facades. All of Walker's design techniques are in ample evidence at 204 Second Avenue.

Stephen Voorhees (1879-1965), Paul Gmelin (1859-1937), and Ralph Walker (1889-1973) were partners in a firm that grew out of the office of Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz, formed in 1885. Walker, the firm's chief designer, joined McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin in 1919 after working for Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue. Walker's New York Telephone Company Building on Barclay and Vesey Streets (1923-27) was one of the pacesetting Art Deco skyscrapers of the 1920s. After that building was completed, and Andrew McKenzie had died, Walker became a partner. Among the firm's notable works were a number of "communications buildings," mainly for the New York Telephone Company but for other companies as well, such as Western Union. The firm was particularly adept at designing for the special needs of such buildings — vast switchboard operations, for example. And Walker's signature modernistic style projected a progressive image of modern technology. In addition to New York Telephone's Barclay-Vesey Building, the firm's

communications buildings include the Western Union Building at 60 Hudson Street (1928-30), the American Telephone & Telegraph Long Distance Building at 32 Sixth Avenue (1930-32), and the New York Telephone Long Island Headquarters at 97-105 Willoughby Street in Brooklyn (1929-30). These are all designated New York City Landmarks.

Until recently, one of the most eye-catching buildings in the East Village was the five-story former Burger-Klein furniture store at **28 Avenue A**, between Second and Third



28 Avenue A

Streets. It had the kind of exuberant, almost kitschy mid-century modern façade that was an early reaction against the sameness and sterility of most International Modernism. The master of this genre was Morris Lapidus — his name leaped to mind when you looked at the Burger-Klein store, whose closest Manhattan cousin may be Lapidus's former Loews Metropolitan Hotel on Lexington Avenue and Fifty-First Street, which was under construction when the 1871 building at 28 Avenue A was refaced in 1960 following a devastating fire the previous year.¹⁰

In 2015, this building was highly altered, its unique façade mutilated and compromised. Burger-Klein had a façade of black opaque glass carved by bright metal mullions — which stand out vividly against the dark glass — into a regular pattern of rectangles. Across this the architect — whoever he was! — strapped four bright yellow balconies across three-quarters of the façade. The balconies pulled up short of the stairway bay. The right edge of the building was marked by a thin vertical strip of glazed red brick. And on the far left, chunky cubes like white dice with black lettering spelled out the name of the store. The ground floor was a glassy storefront. One of the most weirdly wonderful things about this building was how when it was viewed from the southwest, the high, domed

¹⁰ “Blaze on East Side Sends 75 into Cold,” *New York Times*, 25 December 1959, p. 38.

tower of the Church of the Holy Redeemer (1913) on Third Street between Avenue A and Avenue B loomed over the Burger-Klein store. Burger-Klein was in business at this address from at least 1939 until 1989. The building originally was Concordia Hall, one of the assembly halls that were especially popular in *Kleindeutschland*, and was used for labor meetings, social gatherings, rehearsals for singing societies, and so on.



137-153 Fourth Avenue

A final midcentury modern building deserves mention: **137-153 Fourth Avenue**, at the southeast corner of Fourteenth Street. Built in 1961, the seventeen-story office and retail building was designed by Horace Ginsbern & Associates. Ginsbern (1900-69) was a New York City native and Columbia University graduate who formed his own architectural firm at the age of twenty-one. In 1929 he was joined by Marvin Fine (1904-81), and the two were both responsible for the firm's designs. They were especially known for apartment buildings, including several Bronx classics such as 1050 Grand Concourse (the "Fish Building") of 1937, the Park Plaza Apartments at 1005 Jerome

Avenue (1929-31), Noonan Plaza at 105-145 West 168th Street (1931), and 2121 Grand Concourse (1936). These were all extraordinarily stylish buildings with great verve — among the best New York apartment buildings their era produced. Ginsbern and Fine were also known for zig-zagging facades, with windows angled for views and light, often resulting in facades like the punching horns of a jazz big band.

Though it is now an apartment building, records indicate that 137-153 Fourth Avenue was originally built as an office building. But it's still characteristically Ginsbern. Granted, gone is the Art Deco and Art Moderne detailing of his classic 1930s buildings, though the banked windows on Fourteenth Street continue to give something of the flavor

of that era. On Fourth Avenue, which cuts at a sharp diagonal against the grid at this point, Ginsbern uses five columns of jutting three-sided bay windows running all the way up the building, followed by a big slice taken out of the building, making it L-shaped and allowing a whole set of windows to have an unobstructed view to the south. The building takes maximum advantage of its awkward trapezoidal site. (Ginsbern, by the way, did something similar in his fine twenty-story apartment building at 77 East Twelfth Street, at the northwest corner of Fourth Avenue, just outside of our study area. That building was also built in 1961.) 137-153 Fourth Avenue may not be the most exciting thing Ginsbern ever did, and has lost its original graceful casement windows, but it's a lot better than most of what was being done at the time, it has anchored its corner well for fifty years, and it's by an architect who always did things his own way.

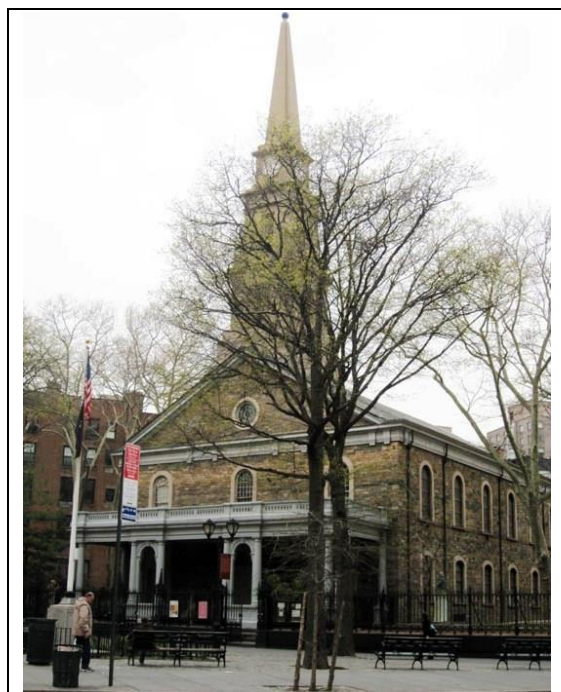
VI. Houses of Worship

The diversity of houses of worship in the East Village is impressive, reflecting the diversity of the area's inhabitants over more than two centuries. Six East Village houses of worship are currently designated New York City Landmarks, and four more are included in historic districts. Three were designated early on: St. Mark's in the Bowery and the Church of the Immaculate Conception in 1966, and the First Ukrainian Assembly of God, occupying the former Metropolitan Savings Bank, in 1969.

Landmarks of Faith

Probably the most famous landmark of the East Village is **St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery**. Indeed, in 1966 it was among the earliest buildings designated by the then-new New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. Located at 131 East Tenth Street, at the northwest corner of Second Avenue, the church is set back behind a large plaza right at the point where Stuyvesant Street meets East Tenth Street. This makes St. Mark's an unusually visible presence for a building located on the Manhattan street grid; it is

oriented toward true south. Its architecture justifies its visibility. The design results from three distinct building campaigns. The main, gabled block of the church, with fieldstone walls, dates to 1799. Together with the house at 21 Stuyvesant Street (1803-04), the church provides a vivid reminder of "Bowery Village" days. In 1828, a new, "Grecian" steeple was added, its design attributed to Ithiel Town, one of the most important American architects of the time. The cast-iron, Italianate-style portico, possibly by James Bogardus, was

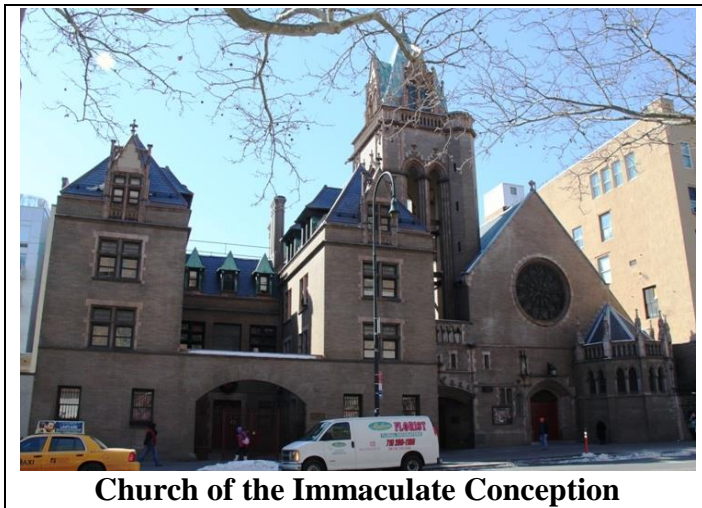


St. Mark's Church

added in 1858. The present iron fence dates to 1838 and may have been part of a series of renovations undertaken under the direction of the prominent architect Martin E. Thompson.

In 1900-01, a rectory, designed by the great American architect Ernest Flagg, was added to the rear of the church at 232 East Eleventh Street. One of the St. Mark's rectors to reside in the building was the Reverend William Norman Guthrie, who in 1929 commissioned three apartment towers from Frank Lloyd Wright to rise on the property surrounding the church; the stock market crash put an end to this project. (See History chapter for more on these.) Since 1998, the historic rectory has served as the Neighborhood Preservation Center, presently home to the church rector, as well as the Historic Districts Council, the St. Mark's Historic Landmark Fund, the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, and smaller groups.

St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery has played a major role in the artistic heritage of the East Village, especially as sponsor of the Poetry Project. (For more on this and other artistic endeavors associated with the church, see the Arts chapter.) A fire in 1978 came close to destroying the church, the restoration of which was not completed until 1986.



Church of the Immaculate Conception

The Roman Catholic **Church of the Immaculate Conception** at 406-414 East Fourteenth Street is one of the city's most beautiful ecclesiastical complexes. It began life as Grace Chapel, a mission of the Episcopal Grace Church on Broadway and Tenth Street. The splendid French

Gothic settlement church complex was designed by Barney & Chapman and built in 1894-96. When the mission closed in 1943, the complex was purchased by Immaculate

Conception, who had lost their 1858 Gothic Revival church, at 505 East Fourteenth Street, to the construction of Stuyvesant Town.

The **First Ukrainian Assembly of God** has, since 1937, occupied a building constructed in 1867 as the Metropolitan Savings Bank.

Architect Carl Pfeiffer's church is an Italianate/French Second Empire pile with a prominent mansard roof.

With Thom Mayne's 41 Cooper Square (2009) and Apollinaire Osadca's St. George Ukrainian Catholic Church (1978) directly across Seventh Street, this has got to



be one of the most unusual ensembles of buildings in the city. The First Ukrainian Assembly of God, which offers services in Russian and Ukrainian, has now occupied the building longer than its original occupant, the Metropolitan Savings Bank.

Another three houses of worship were designated more recently: the St. Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church complex and the former Congregation Beth Hamedrash Hagadol Anshe Ungarn synagogue in 2008, and the former Eleventh Street Methodist Episcopal Church in 2010.

The **St. Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church** complex, at 288 East Tenth Street, at Avenue A (just across from Tompkins Square Park), was originally the Memorial Chapel and parish house of St. Mark's in the Bowery. In 1925 immigrants from the Carpathian Mountains in Czechoslovakia leased the church for use by their American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox congregation. This congregation purchased the building in 1937 and continues to worship there. It's a highly picturesque Victorian Gothic composition, with the sort of exuberant skyline associated with such buildings as the former Jefferson



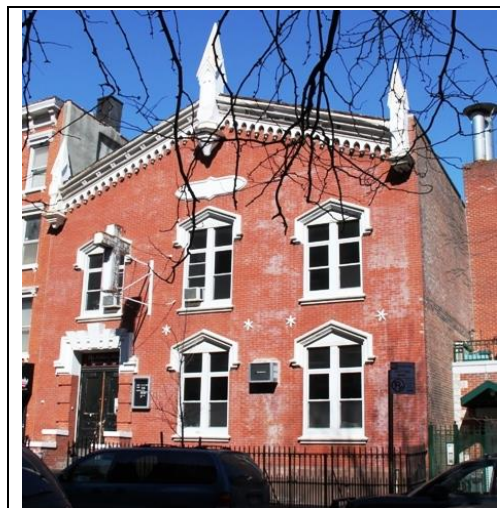
St. Nicholas of Myra

Market Courthouse (1874-77) at Sixth Avenue and Tenth Street. Here are crocketed gables of varying sizes, a high, pyramid-topped bell tower, high chimneys, and an irregular fenestration pattern composed entirely of pointed openings of different sizes. The congregation's school and library occupy the structure at the corner of Tenth Street and Avenue A. Like the adjoining bell tower of the church on Tenth Street, it is topped by a

pyramidal roof. The building is also ornamented in intricate terra-cotta, including a panel on the north face of the school and library structure featuring the lion, symbol of St. Mark.

The **Eleventh Street Methodist Episcopal Chapel**, at 545-547 East Eleventh Street, was built as a mission church in 1867-68. The architects, William Field & Son, were known for, among other things, their collaborations with the Brooklyn philanthropist Alfred Tredway White in creating model tenements in Brooklyn such as the Tower and Home Buildings in Cobble Hill and the Riverside Buildings in Brooklyn Heights. Here, on East Eleventh Street, they created a jolly Gothic edifice with a gabled front of red brick outlined in white-painted wood trim and with spiky finials at the ends and apex of the gable.

In 1901, the architects Jallade & Barber remodeled the building when the church's missionary work expanded. The remodeled church, renamed the People's Home Church and Settlement, retained most of the façade features of the original, but removed a central Gothic doorway that had made the building seem decidedly more churchlike and placed a new entrance on the left, which gave the



Eleventh Street Methodist

building a bit more of an institutional air. That new entrance was also given, incongruously but delightfully, a prominent Georgian-style door surround. In 1941 the Methodists sold the building to the Russian Ukrainian Polish Pentecostal Church, which the Landmarks Preservation Commission designation report tells us was "the first Slavic Pentecostal church in the country." This church merged in 1998 with Father's Heart Ministries, and since then the church has been known as the Father's Heart Ministry Center.

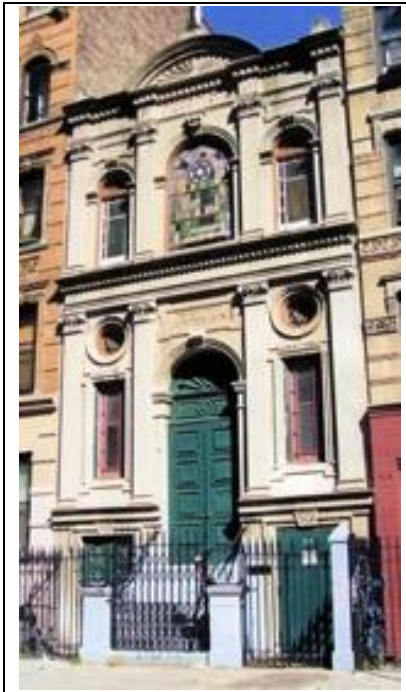
The tenement synagogue at 242 East Seventh Street, **Congregation Beth Hamedrash Hagadol Anshe Ungarn**, was built as a synagogue in 1908, unlike many other tenement houses of worship that were converted from preexisting row houses. The term "tenement synagogue" refers only to a synagogue built on the standard twenty-five-foot-wide lot used for row houses or pre-Old Law and Old Law tenements. The term seems to belie the splendor here, one of the city's finest classical synagogues. The architects, Gross & Kleinberger, were seasoned tenement architects, but at least in their years of partnership (1907-22) designed only New Law tenements, typically on lots larger than



twenty-five feet in width. But they demonstrated here that they certainly knew how to scale and detail a building of these narrower dimensions, and to create a uniquely wonderful synagogue. The congregation left this building in 1975, and in 1985 it was converted to apartments.

When the East Village/Lower East Side Historic District was created in 2012, four additional houses of worship were brought under the city's protection. The oldest structure of the trio is the **Congregation Adas Yisroel Anshe Mezeritz**, at 415 East

Sixth Street, between Avenue A and First Avenue, which occupies a building constructed as a two-and-a-half-story house in 1841. It was converted to a synagogue in 1910 by the



Anshe Mezeritz

architect Herman Horenburger. Horenburger, as a partner in Horenburger & Straub of 122 Bowery, was a prolific designer of tenements throughout Manhattan, but with a particular concentration in the Lower East Side. Here, however, he designed a "tenement synagogue."

The congregation was founded in 1892 by Polish immigrants and named for the town of Mezritch (also spelled Mezeritch or Mezeritz) in Poland. The town was a great center of Judaism in the eighteenth century, the home of Rabbi Dov Ber (died 1772), a disciple and the chosen successor of the Baal Shem Tov, the rabbi who founded Hasidism. Many such

"tenement synagogues" once existed in the Lower East Side and East Village. This one bears many similarities to, but is architecturally more elaborate than, Gross & Kleinberger's Beth Hamedrash Hagodol Anshe Ungarn (1905).

Horenburger's classical façade is quite extraordinary. He managed the feat of using pilasters, moldings, arches, oculi, stained glass, and a rounded roof pediment — all tightly but skillfully compressed — to create a façade with enough power to stand out on a block where taller tenement buildings prevail. The façade is good enough to warrant inclusion in any survey of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century classical movement in synagogue design in America. This is the best classical synagogue, and the best tenement synagogue, in the East Village. It is located within the East Village/Lower East Side Historic District.

It should also be noted how skillfully and tastefully Horenburger adjusted his design to the earlier buildings on either side of the synagogue. No. 417 East Sixth Street to the east

is a six-story 1897 Old Law tenement by George F. Pelham. It has a mutilated ground floor but some lovely terra-cotta ornament. It's easy to see how Horenburger lined up the frieze of the synagogue's lower entablature with the band of terra-cotta below the tenement's third-floor windows, and the way he aligned the capital bases of the synagogue's upper pilasters with the continuous sill below the tenement's fourth-floor windows. West of the synagogue are 409 and 411 East Sixth Street, two six-story Old Law tenements from 1899, also designed by Pelham. (The crispness of their classical details suggests the style of the New Law tenements soon to come.) Here, Horenburger aligned the synagogue's lower cornice with the tenement's second-floor lintels. It appears that Horenburger not only designed a beautiful classical synagogue façade, but also took pains to create a pleasing and harmonious streetscape where, in 1910, one might have least expected to encounter such a thing.

The Olivet Memorial Church at 59-63 East Second Street, now known as the **Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Protection of the Orthodox Church of America** and located in the East Village/Lower East Side Historic District, was built in 1891 for a congregation dating back to 1855, which had worshipped since 1867 on this site in what was known as Olivet Chapel. Olivet was a mission church of the New York City Mission and Tract Society, and provided services in German, Hungarian, Italian, and Russian. It was one of four non-denominational free mission churches, open twenty-four hours a day, in the city.¹

When Olivet merged with Middle Collegiate Church around the corner on Second Avenue, the Mission and Tract Society sold the building to a Russian Orthodox congregation that had been associated with the Cathedral of St. Nicholas at 15 East Ninety-Seventh Street. The congregation that bought the former Olivet Church had broken away from St. Nicholas Cathedral when in 1925 a court awarded control of it to the Soviet government. From 1927 to 1943 the breakaway group worshipped in St.

¹ "What a Pastor Sees and Hears," *New-York Tribune*, 26 December 1891, p. 2.

Augustine's Chapel at 107 East Houston Street. In 1943 the Russian Orthodox group purchased the former Olivet, which became the Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Protection.²

Designed by J.C. Cady & Company (the architects responsible for the design of the West Seventy-Seventh Street elevation of the American Museum of Natural History), the church could hold 1,000 worshippers. The complex also included a gymnasium, a library, and classrooms. Faced in Kentucky limestone, its stunning design features seven exuberant, deeply hooded Gothic windows with crocketed moldings at the second level and four crenellated turrets.



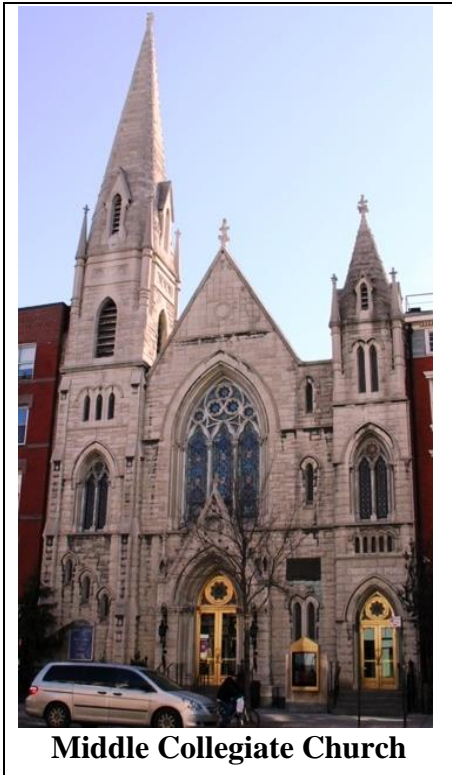
Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Protection

The first **Middle Collegiate Church** was built in 1731 on Nassau Street, a great barn-like structure that later became the main Manhattan post office. In 1836-39 a new church, designed by Isaiah Rogers, was built on fashionable Lafayette Place. This was a Greek Revival structure with a full octastyle portico (having eight columns) and a tower, modeled on the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates, holding a high pointed spire. That remarkable edifice was demolished in 1887, and for the next five years the congregation was without a permanent home. The present building was completed in 1892 at 112-114 Second Avenue, between Sixth and Seventh Streets. (It is only approximately three blocks from where the neighborhood's first Dutch Reform church, the chapel that Peter Stuyvesant built on his estate near Second Avenue and Tenth Street in 1660, once stood.) The architect of the new church was Samuel B. Reed, who designed a dignified Gothic Revival church featuring two uneven towers flanking the central gabled section, and a

² "East Side Church Sold to Russians," *New York Times*, 22 January 1943, p. 35.

David W. Dunlap, *From Abyssinian to Zion*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 106.

large pointed window above an entrance surmounted by a freestanding gable. The higher tower contains a bell cast in Amsterdam that was first installed in the Nassau Street location where it rang in honor of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.



Middle Collegiate Church

After being moved to the Lafayette Place church and later the Collegiate Church of St. Nicholas on Fifth Avenue and Forty-Eighth Street (since demolished), the bell was installed at its present location in 1949; it has tolled at every presidential inauguration and death since then.³

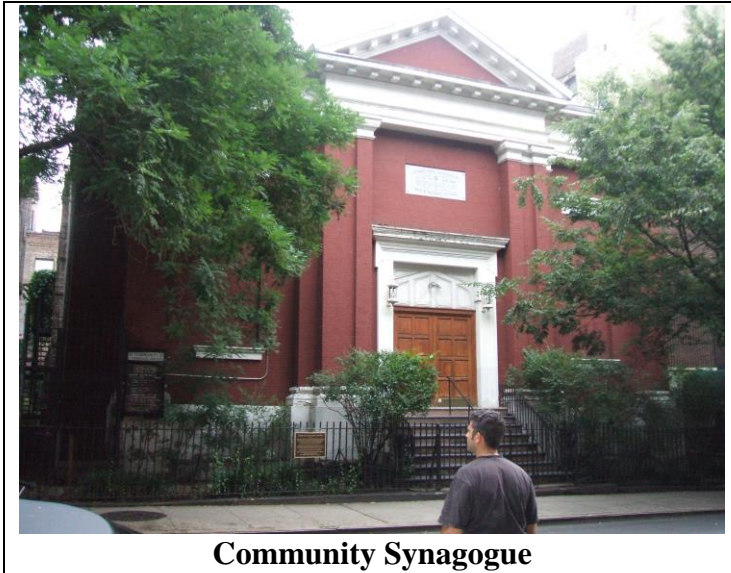
Of some interest is that the use of rough-textured Indiana limestone ashlar is remarkably similar to that of Robert W. Gibson's St. Michael's Episcopal Church on Amsterdam Avenue and Ninety-Ninth Street. The two churches were erected simultaneously, though Gibson's church is Romanesque Revival, not Gothic. The Connecticut-born architect Samuel Burrage Reed is perhaps best

known for his design of the highly picturesque house of James Bailey (of Barnum & Bailey Circus) at 10 St. Nicholas Place in Harlem, which was built in 1886-88 and is a designated New York City Landmark.

The house of worship that is today the **Community Synagogue** at 323-327 East Sixth Street, between First and Second Avenues, began in 1847 as St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church and changed its name ten years later to St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church. While it is consistent in feeling with the Greek Revival church architecture of the time, it is in fact one of the earliest Renaissance Revival churches in New York. It shows the distinct influence of the sixteenth-century master Andrea Palladio in its use of

³ "City Liberty Bell to Hail President," *New York Times*, 21 December 1959, p. 24. <http://www.middlechurch.org/about/history>, accessed 27 July 2012. Dunlap, op. cit., p. 145.

superimposed layers of pilasters to create the appearance of spatial depth in a tightly confined area. Though the architect is unknown, the church is, for its time, sophisticated and unique, and remarkably intact.



It remained a Lutheran church until 1940 when the congregation — then numbering a mere fifty people — merged with Zion Church in Yorkville to form Zion-St. Mark's Lutheran Church at 339 East Eighty-Fourth Street. St. Mark's had, from 1857 to 1940, baptized 21,950 people and performed

11,080 marriage ceremonies.⁴ After 1940, the building on East Sixth Street became an Orthodox synagogue. Since 1983, it has been known as Community Synagogue Max D. Raiskin Center after Rabbi Max D. Raiskin, the longtime principal of the East Side Hebrew Institute, which from 1928 to 1974 was located at 295 East Eighth Street at Avenue B. The leading figure among the founders of Community Synagogue was Saul Birns, the developer of the Peter Stuyvesant apartment building on Second Avenue and Eleventh Street and of the Saul Birns Building on Second Avenue between Sixth and Seventh Streets.

St. Mark's Lutheran Church sponsored the June 15, 1904 picnic outing that ended in the horrific *General Slocum* steamboat disaster. Of the 1,021 people who died, 784 (511 children and 191 mothers among them) were members of St. Mark's Church. In one procession from the church to the Lutheran Cemetery in Middle Village, Queens, there

⁴ Anthony Robins, National Register of Historic Places nomination form, German Evangelical Church of St. Mark, 2003, section 8, p. 3.

were 156 hearses.⁵ The *General Slocum* disaster was the deadliest event in New York City's history prior to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. (By contrast, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of March 25, 1911, resulted in 146 deaths.) Other than the Slocum Memorial Fountain in Tompkins Square Park, there has been shockingly little commemoration.⁶ The true memorial is the building at 323-327 East Sixth Street. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and was included in the East Villlage/Lower East Side Historic District, designated in 2012.

The most recent house of worship to be landmarked in the neighborhood is **Congregation Tifereth Israel**, in October 2014. This synagogue occupies a fascinating building at 334 East Fourteenth Street, between First and Second Avenues. The Conservative congregation was founded in 1949 and until 1962 held its services in the Labor Temple, one block to the west. In 1962 the congregation purchased the Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox Church of St. Volodymyr. The St. Volodymyr congregation in turn had purchased what was originally the First German Baptist Church in 1926. The First German Baptist congregation had built the church in 1869-70 when this was *Kleindeutschland*. (By 1926 even Lüchow's, the famed German restaurant that had opened in 1882 at 110 East Fourteenth Street, had revamped its menu to make it appear less German.)

⁵ Dunlap, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁶ See Edward T. O'Donnell, *Ship Ablaze: The Tragedy of the Steamboat General Slocum*, New York: Broadway Books, 2003.



Tifereth Israel synagogue

The church was designed by Julius Boeckell, and it is one of those Romanesque Revival buildings that can only be called jolly with its prominent central gable, its toothy corbeling, and its wild profusion of arched openings of varied sizes. It has the same jauntiness as the contemporaneous Flushing Town Hall (a designated New York City Landmark) in Queens. When the Ukrainians took over they removed a cross from the apex of the central gable and added a small, squat plinth and onion dome, and they removed conical spires from the towers flanking the gable and topped those off with onion domes, as well. Conveniently for Tifereth Israel, there were no crosses to

remove from the exterior of the building. This is one of the loveliest buildings in its neighborhood, and a textbook on ethnic succession in the East Village.

Lovely, But Not Landmarked

There are many notable houses of worship in the East Village that have not yet been designated as city landmarks.

St. Brigid's Roman Catholic Church, at 119 Avenue B at the southeast corner of East Eighth Street, was built in 1848 to serve the growing number of Catholic workers and their families that had begun to crowd into the far eastern part of the East Village. Built in the midst of the Irish famine migration, the construction of the church is attributed to Irish shipwrights who worked in the East River shipyards. St. Brigid (whose name is also often rendered as Brigit or Bridget) was a fifth-century Irish nun and is one of the three patron saints — with St. Columba and St. Patrick — of Ireland. She is also the patron saint of sailors, which was appropriate given that the church served the major shipbuilding center on the East River. With demographic changes in the neighborhood,

the church came to serve Slavic and Italian congregations, and most recently a largely Spanish-speaking congregation that refers to the church as *Santa Brígida*.

The architect was Patrick Charles Keely (1816-96), who came to America and settled in Brooklyn in 1842, at the age of twenty-six. Keely's timing was auspicious. He was the son of a builder and apprenticed as a carpenter (he himself carved the reredos of St. Brigid's). Later becoming an architect (though his exact path is unclear), he established himself as



the most competent Roman Catholic architect-builder in New York — indeed, in America — right at the beginning of the biggest building boom of Catholic churches the country had ever seen. The architectural historian William H. Pierson Jr. wrote that Keely had a "virtual monopoly" on Roman Catholic church-building in America.⁷ Most of his churches are in the Gothic style, although he is also noted for such buildings as the Baroque-style St. Francis Xavier of 1882 at 30-36 West Sixteenth Street and the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer of 1866 on Fourth Avenue and Pacific Street in Brooklyn. He was the most prolific architect of Catholic and Gothic buildings in the nation's history.⁸

⁷ William H. Pierson Jr., *American Buildings and Their Architects, vol. 2: Technology and the Picturesque, the Corporate and the Early Gothic Styles*, New York: Doubleday, 1978.

⁸ Francis Morrone, *An Architectural Guidebook to Brooklyn*, Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 1994, pp. 177-178.

St. Brigid's was his first of many churches in Manhattan. It is a simple Gothic church with twin towers flanking a gabled central section; the façade, recently restored to resemble the original brownstone, has a triple portal of pointed arch doorways and three



1870s photograph showing gazebo in Tompkins Square with St. Brigid's, spires intact, in background.⁹

large pointed arch windows above. A crenellated parapet outlines the roof gable. The towers originally bore high spiky spires that were removed in 1962. That was cited by the Landmarks Preservation Commission when it declined to hold a hearing

on the potential designation of St. Brigid's. The Commission also cited the building's structural instability, which caused the Archdiocese to shutter St. Brigid's in 2001.

Vociferous protests from parishioners and local elected officials to save the building from demolition seemed in vain, but in 2008 the Archdiocese received an anonymous donation of \$20 million to restore St. Brigid's, which reopened in January 2013. The architects of the restoration are Acheson Doyle Partners (whose credits include the new St. Agnes Church of 1998 at 141-143 East Forty-Third Street).

⁹ http://thevillager.com/villager_429/neighborhood.html, accessed August 15, 2011

When poet Frank O'Hara wrote "Weather Near St. Bridget's Steeples" in 1961, the spires were still there. At the time, O'Hara lived in a tenement at 441 East Ninth Street and could see St. Brigid's from his window. (Here and elsewhere he wrote "St. Bridget," not "St. Brigid.") The poem begins: You are so beautiful and trusting / lying there on the sky¹⁰

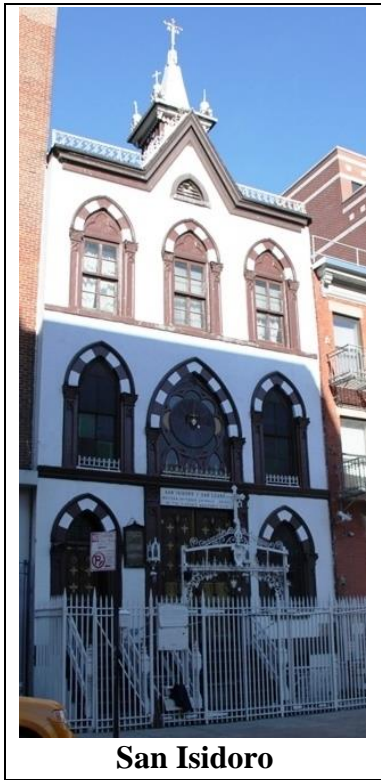
St. Ann's Armenian Catholic Cathedral, 120 East Twelfth Street, is a cautionary tale. Here one of the most historic houses of worship in Manhattan was reduced to a façade in 2005, a screen awkwardly posed before a massive New York University

dormitory. The church, whose architect is unknown, was built in 1847 as the Twelfth Street Baptist Church. In 1856 Temple Emanu-El, which had been founded by German Jews in 1845, moved here from its previous synagogue of seven years at 56 Chrystie Street. Temple Emanu-El remained on Twelfth Street until 1868 when its new home, the great Moorish synagogue by Leopold Eidlitz and Henry Fernbach on the northeast corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-Third Street, was completed. The Twelfth Street building then became St. Ann's Roman Catholic Church, at which time the interior was gutted. Behind the simple, early Gothic Revival façade of Manhattan schist was built an opulent French Gothic interior designed by Napoleon Le Brun & Sons; the new sanctuary was dedicated in 1871. In 1983 the church became St. Ann's Armenian Catholic Cathedral. The church closed in 2004 and the building, except the façade, was sadly demolished in 2005.



St. Ann's remnant

¹⁰ Donald Allen, ed., *Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, p. 430.



San Isidoro

The present **San Isidoro y San Leandro Orthodox Catholic Church of the Hispanic Mozarabic Rite** at 345 East Fourth Street (between Avenue C and Avenue D) was built in 1891 for St. Elizabeth of Hungary Roman Catholic Church, which in 1917 moved to 211 East Eighty-Third Street. The building later served the Carpathian Russian Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity, and later still, the Russian Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas. Designed by architect Edward Wenz, the white-painted brick building has eight pointed-arch openings with polychrome voussoirs. Although it looks like a converted row house due to its scale and fenestration pattern, it is a purpose-built church. The ornate interior has aisle walls completely covered in gold-framed paintings and a highly decorative chancel.¹¹

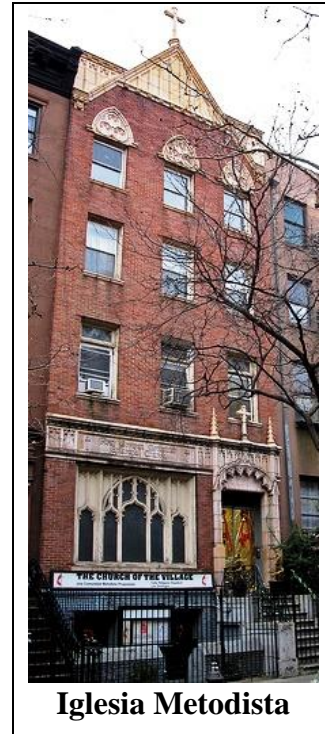
The Mozarabic Rite is a form of Latin Rite worship dating to the seventh century and the Mozarabs, or Christians living under Muslim rule in Andalusia. Until 2017 when this church was put on the market for sale, this was the only church in New York offering its form of worship. The ornate iron gate still bears the coat of arms of the Russian Empire.

¹¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyR3le87AHA>, accessed 27 July 2012.

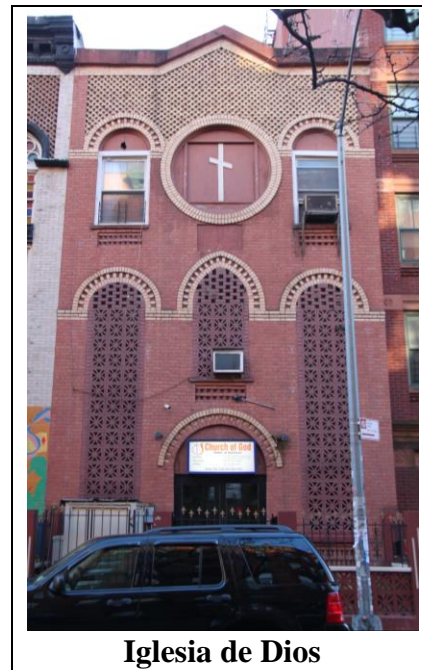
Row-House Religion

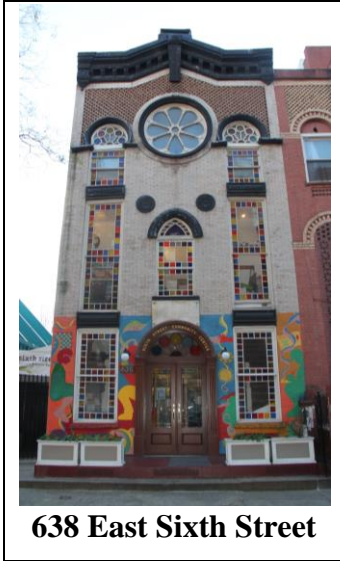
There are five notable row houses and tenements that were converted to religious use in the East Village.

First is the *Iglesia Metodista Unida Todas las Naciones* (United Methodist Church of All Nations) at 48 St. Mark's Place, which was built in 1841 as a four-story row house. In 1900 the First German Methodist Episcopal Church moved here from its 254 East Second Street location and had portions of the brick façade replaced with ornate white terra-cotta. Although it closed in 1975, the name of the church is still on the façade.



The *Iglesia de Dios* at 636 East Sixth Street between Avenues B and C is housed in a building erected in 1846 as a row house. It was remodeled for the United Brethren Mission of the Moravian Church in 1889 by Calvert Vaux and George K. Radford. The conversion was contemporaneous with Vaux and Radford's design of the adjacent Sixth Street Industrial School of the Children's Aid Society next door at 630 East Sixth Street. By 1906 the building had become a synagogue. Most of its present appearance (including the "Moorish screens," which put one in mind of Edward Durell Stone) dates from 1909 when the synagogue built a whole new front wall designed by Alfred L. Kehoe.

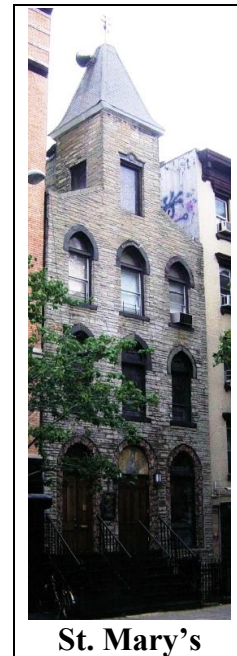




638 East Sixth Street

Directly to the west is the building's twin, at **638 East Sixth Street**. This was also an 1846 row house that became a tenement synagogue in 1891. Between 1900 and 1906 it was remodeled to its present appearance by Fred Ebeling, which slightly predates Kehoe's at No. 636. The facades have identical fenestration patterns, though the ornamental screens are absent from the earlier building. Now the Sixth Street Community Center, 638 East Sixth Street, was synagogue Ahawath Yeshurun Shara Torah for much of the twentieth century.

St. Mary's American Orthodox Greek Catholic Church, at 121 East Seventh Street between Avenue A and First Avenue, occupies a circa 1843-45 former row house. In 1903, the building was converted to religious use for the First Hungarian Reformed Church; Fred Ebeling, the architect of the tenement synagogue at 638 East Sixth Street, led the conversion. The building retains the lively profile of his design, which includes a prominent central tower that is now topped by a Slavic cross. In 1962, the church façade was clad in artificial Nature Stone.



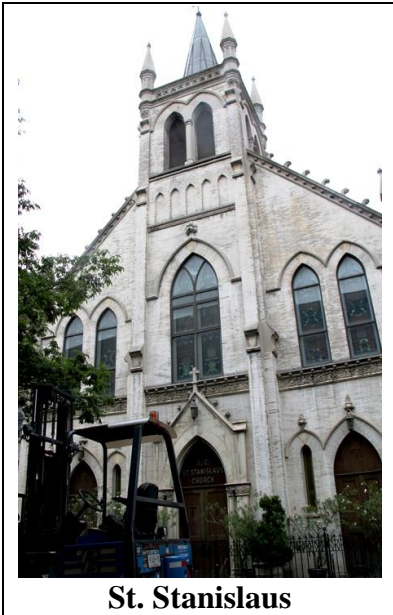
St. Mary's



St. Cyril's

Another row house church is 62 St. Mark's Place. This was converted from an 1843 house into **St. Cyril's Roman Catholic Church** by the architect Fred J. Schwarz in 1916. St. Cyril's remains a Slovenian parish. The three-bay-wide house was given a second stoop and doorway in the bay opposite that of the original stoop, while in-between was placed a soaring arched stained-glass window rising from the parlor through the second floor. St. Cyril's reminds us that there is nothing that can't be adapted out of a New York City row house.

Purpose-Built for Prayer



St. Stanislaus

The East Village also includes many purpose-built religious structures, such as the **Roman Catholic Church of St. Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr** at 103-107 East Seventh Street between First Avenue and Avenue A. Built in 1900-01, it is a Gothic Revival church with a single, squat, nicely detailed central tower with a conical finial topped by a cross. The architect was Arthur Arctander. This is the church of the oldest Polish Roman Catholic congregation in Manhattan, founded in 1873. Although there is a bust of Pope John Paul II in the churchyard, it appears he did not visit this church when he was Bishop of Cracow. (He visited the Church

of St. Stanislaus Kostka in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, which may have given rise to the false story.) However, former Polish President Lech Walesa did twice visit St. Stanislaus on East Seventh Street, in 1999 and 2001. St. Stanislaus has been a Polish church since opening in 1901. Today, only two of the seventeen weekly Masses are in English; the other fifteen are in Polish.¹²

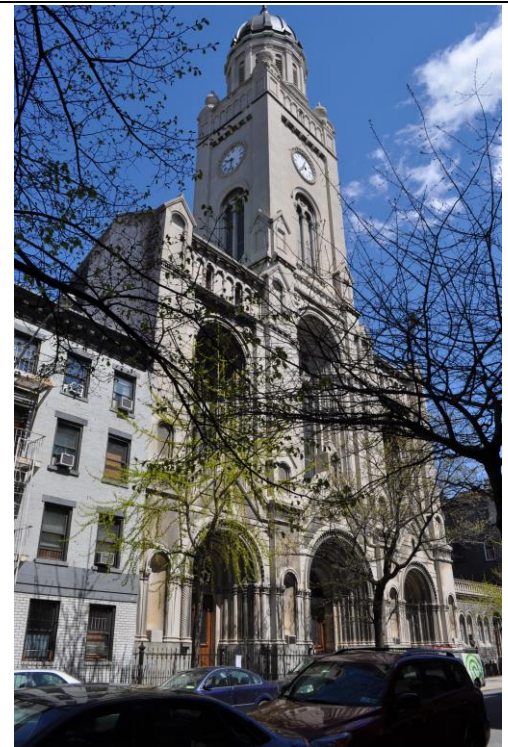
The **Roman Catholic Church of the Most Holy Redeemer** at 173 East Third Street between Avenues A and B was consecrated on November 29, 1852. Archbishop John Hughes presided over the dedication; also present was Bishop John Neumann of Philadelphia who came to America as a Redemptorist missionary and who is to date the only male American citizen to be canonized as a saint of the Roman Catholic Church.

The *New York Tribune* identifies the architect only as "J. Walsh."¹³ The church, in a Baroque style, had a 250-foot-high tower (not as high as that of the then-six-year-old Trinity Church on Broadway and Wall Street, but high enough to dominate the skyline of

¹² <http://www.polishmuseum.org>, accessed 27 July 2012.

¹³ "Consecration of a Roman Catholic Church," *New-York Daily Tribune*, 30 November 1852, p. 5.

the East Village). The church was founded by Redemptorist Fathers whom Archbishop Hughes had sent for specifically to minister to the city's rapidly growing population of German Catholics. Most Holy Redeemer, perhaps the most astonishing ecclesiastical edifice in the city at the time, was like a cathedral to the people of *Kleindeutschland*. Little of how the church looked in 1852 remains, however, for in 1913 it was radically remodeled by the architect Paul Schulz. Schulz simplified the design, essentially removing all the Baroque curves of the original. He also made everything a little



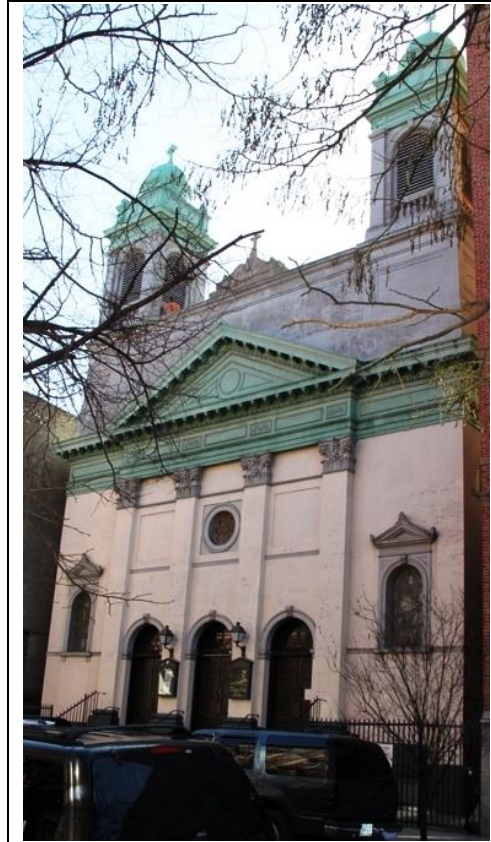
Church of the Most Holy Redeemer

more solid and bulkier. Importantly, he left the single central tower, though he reduced it in height to 232 feet. The church as a whole is still probably the most imposing in the East Village, and the single greatest reminder of the days of *Kleindeutschland*. The style is Romanesque, but the tower is also evocative of the square Romanesque/Renaissance Giralda type, topped by a drum and dome. It's probably the closest thing we have left in New York to the tower of Stanford White's Madison Square Garden. There are few more impressive churches, with richer histories, in New York that are not designated landmarks.

The Roman Catholic **Church of Mary Help of Christians** at 436 East Twelfth Street, between Avenue A and First Avenue, stood on the site of a cemetery affiliated with old St. Patrick's Cathedral. According to David W. Dunlap of *The New York Times*, 41,016 people were buried here between 1833 and 1848.¹⁴ Many of those bodies were exhumed in 1909 and reburied in Calvary Cemetery in Woodside, Queens. In 1911 plans were filed for a design by Domenico Briganti. The cornerstone, however, was not laid until July 15,

¹⁴ Dunlap, op. cit., p. 141.

1917.¹⁵ By then the design had been altered by Nicholas Serracino,¹⁶ which indicates that the design of the church should be credited to him. He had recently designed the opulent Roman Catholic Church of St. Jean Baptiste (completed 1914) on Lexington Avenue and Seventy-Seventh Street; the design of the Church of Mary Help of Christians was a more modest undertaking. It is clear, however, that Serracino attempted to translate the classical splendor of the earlier church on a more economical budget here. Mary Help of Christians lacks the rich ornamentation, the beautiful stonework, and the majestic dome of St. Jean Baptiste, but the two churches had very similar twin towers — square with an arched opening rising over a balustrade on each face — that are capped with drums and domes. Rather than the four full Corinthian columns of the earlier building, Mary Help of Christians had four pilasters with Corinthian capitals. These rose to a richly modeled entablature and pediment. Mary Help of Christians also bore many similar features — the triple portal, the use of pilasters, the central oculus — to Serracino's Church of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary at 307 East Thirty-Third Street, which was built in 1915 and demolished in 2008. (His Church of St. Clare, 436 West Thirty-Sixth Street, built in 1905-07 and demolished for the Lincoln Tunnel in the 1930s, was one of New York's treasures of church architecture.)



**Mary Help of Christians,
demolished 2013**

Unfortunately, very little is known of Serracino. He attended the Royal University of Naples, and worked as an architect in Manhattan. The Church of Mary Help of Christians

¹⁵ "To Lay Church Cornerstone," *New York Times*, 17 July 1917, p. 19.

¹⁶ See New York City Buildings Department, Alt. No. 682, 1917: "Upon the present basement walls and first floor beams now in place...the upper portion of the church will be constructed."

was a skillfully designed, immensely dignified work of architecture which was impressive in its neighborhood context, and one of the relatively few classical churches in the city. It was also one of only two Serracino churches remaining in Manhattan. Sadly, over the objections of community groups and preservationists, the building was demolished in 2013 without action by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

The large building at 242 East Fourteenth Street, at the southwest corner of Second Avenue, was built by the Church Extension Committee of the Presbytery of New York and was known as the **Labor Temple**. The Labor Temple had been founded in 1910 by the Reverend Charles Stelzle, a former machinist and union member, as a non-denominational church meant for trade union members. The *Times* reported, "In an effort to league the cause of Christian fellowship with the organization of trades unions among working people the Presbyterian Church of this city has decided to install a trades unionist minister in a Labor Temple to be established in the old Fourteenth Street Presbyterian Church [Second Avenue and 14th Street], recently vacated on account of the consolidation of its congregation with the Thirteenth Street Church."¹⁷ The article noted that Arlington Hall, on St. Mark's Place between Second and Third Avenues, "in which the labor unions now chiefly congregate," was nearby. It was also near Union Square, by then the site of labor rallies, though this goes oddly unmentioned in the article.

The Reverend Edmund Chaffee took over the leadership of the Labor Temple in 1921, and it was he who was in charge when the new home was built at 242 East Fourteenth Street.¹⁸ In 1924, after the Fourteenth Street Church was demolished, noted architect Emery Roth designed the new Labor Temple across the street. The 139-foot-wide, seven-story building was obviously much more than just a house of worship. The building contained a gymnasium and a cafeteria in the basement, retail stores and an auditorium on the first floor, offices on the second floor, studios and offices (some of them rented out to raise revenue) on the third through the sixth floors, and a director's apartment on the seventh floor.

¹⁷ "Church Converted into Labor Temple," *New York Times*, 24 February 1910, p. 5.

¹⁸ See Dugald Chaffee, "Edmund B. Chaffee and the Labor Temple," *The Courier*, vol. 11, number 1 (1973), pp. 38-50.



Labor Temple

In 1921 the philosopher and writer Will Durant founded the Temple School, a wildly successful adult education program that was part of the Temple's ever-broadening mission. It also included a settlement house and church services in five languages. Durant ran

the school, which offered courses and lectures in the humanities and social sciences, open to all, and taught classes at the Labor Temple until 1927. It was here that he developed the material that he incorporated into his *Story of Philosophy* — an enormous bestseller published by Simon and Schuster in 1926 while Durant was still teaching at the Labor Temple — and much of the material of his and his wife Ariel's monumental *Story of Civilization* in eleven volumes, the first of which appeared in 1935. In 1954, by which time Durant was one of the bestselling writers in America, he was honored at a dinner at the Labor Temple.¹⁹

In 1959 the Presbytery of New York, feeling that the Labor Temple had done its job, donated 242 East Fourteenth Street to the New York City Mission Society, which merged a Spanish-language mission church with an Italian-language one and, under the name Church of the Crossroads, began offering worship services and social programs in the building.²⁰ The Labor Temple's records are held at the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia. The building now contains apartments as well as ground-floor retail.

¹⁹ "Labor Temple to Honor Durant," *New York Times*, 17 May 1954, p. 10.

²⁰ John Wicklein "Sanctuary Opens in Labor Temple," *New York Times* 10 May 1959, p. 75.

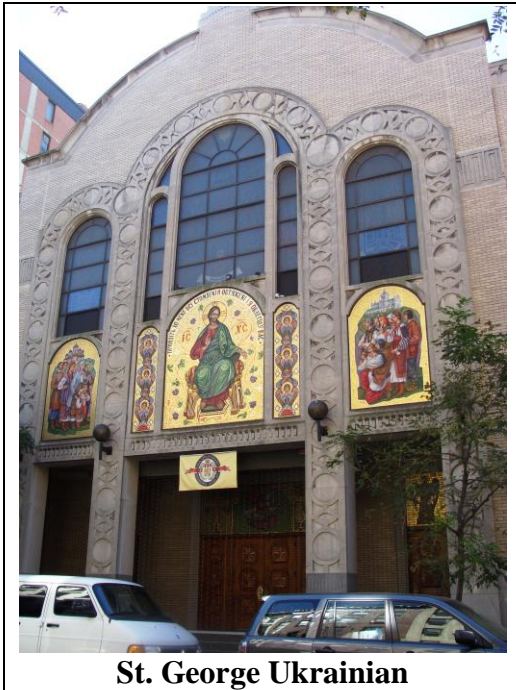
The Romanesque Revival style of the Labor Temple is reminiscent of late nineteenth-century warehouses, or of early arcaded skyscrapers, but it should be noted that Romanesque was also a popular style in the 1920s, as we see from such buildings as Arthur Loomis Harmon's Shelton Towers Hotel, Andrew J. Thomas's 237 Madison Avenue (now Morgans Hotel), and John Mead Howells's Memorial Hall at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. But above all the style is similar to that of the original Labor Temple, the Fourteenth Street Presbyterian Church, which the *New York Times* called "one of the historic church buildings of the city."²¹ Built in 1851, it was one of the city's earliest Romanesque Revival churches. The corbeling of the two buildings is especially similar. It is hard not to think that architect Emery Roth and the Reverend Chaffee were paying homage to the earlier building.

Emery Roth was born to Hungarian Jewish parents in 1871 in what is now Slovakia, and came to America in 1884. He first worked in Chicago as a draftsman for Burnham & Root, and then moved to New York to work first for Richard Morris Hunt and then for Ogden Codman Jr. before forming his own practice. In 1924, when he designed the Labor Temple, Roth's notable works included the Hotel Belleclaire (1903) on Broadway and Seventy-Seventh Street and the Congregation Adath Jeshurun of Jassy synagogue (1903) on Rivington Street. But the bulk of his most famous buildings — apartment buildings such as the Oliver Cromwell, the Eldorado, the Beresford, the San Remo, the Ardsley, the Normandy — were designed later. In 1928-30 his **Warren Hall** apartments, incorporating a new home for the displaced Baptist Tabernacle, would be constructed on Second Avenue and Tenth Street at a time when developers had just turned their attention to that



²¹ "Church Converted into Labor Temple," op. cit.

area as a potential location for luxury high-rises (only to be stopped by the stock market crash).²²



St. George Ukrainian

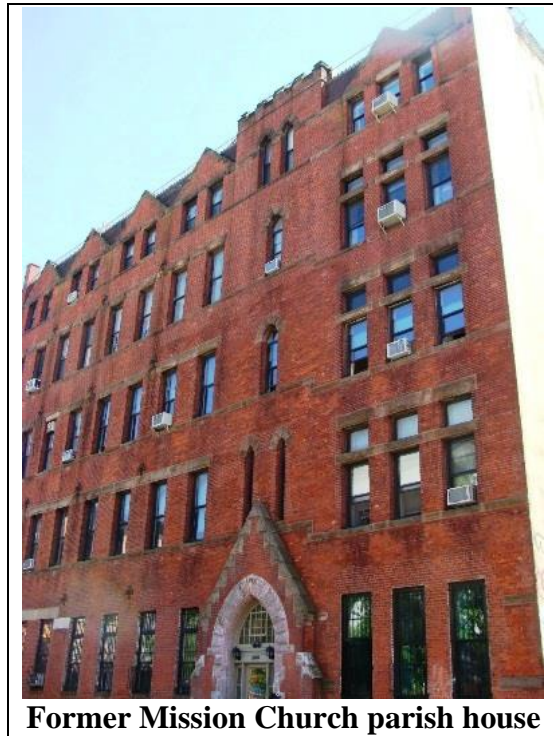
The spiritual home of the East Village's many Ukrainians has long been **St. George Ukrainian Catholic Church** at 30 East Seventh Street, between Second and Third Avenues. The Ukrainian Catholic Church is in communion with the Church of Rome, and this congregation dates back to services held at St. Brigid's Roman Catholic Church, at Tompkins Square, in 1890. In 1911 the congregation took over the former Seventh Street Methodist Church, a distyle-in-antis Greek Revival church built in 1836 on the site of the present church. The Ukrainian Catholics added a squat

tower bearing five onion domes to the apex of the front gable. In 1978 the old edifice was replaced by a great-domed and quite exuberant Byzantine/Romanesque-style building, designed by the Ukrainian-born architect Apollinaire Osadca. Above the north entrance are richly colored, gold-background mosaics. The one on the right shows the eighteenth-century St. George Cathedral in L'viv (Odasca's birthplace) and the one on the left shows St. Sophia Cathedral in Kiev. St. George Church stands in stark, even bizarre, contrast with its new neighbor to the west, 41 Cooper Square, designed by Thom Mayne for Cooper Union. Separating the buildings is Taras Shevchenko Place, formerly Hall Place, renamed in 1978 for the revered Ukrainian writer and artist who lived from 1814 to 1861.

Finally, two extant ecclesiastical structures formerly affiliated with demolished houses of worship deserve mention.

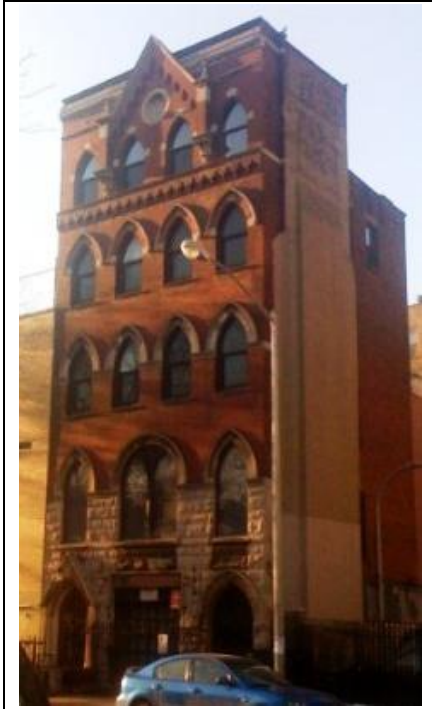
²² See "Emery Roth Dies; Noted Architect," *New York Times*, 21 August 1948, p. 16.

The first is the **former parish house and school of the Mission Church of the Holy Cross**, at 49-51 Avenue C (southwest corner of Fourth Street). The five-story brick building was built circa 1888 and designed by E.T. Littel. It was associated with a mission church at 43 Avenue C that served the German Episcopalians of *Kleindeutschland*, before it was demolished and replaced by an apartment building.



The parish house, which was later owned by the Presbyterian St. John the Baptist Foundation from 1911 to 1941, and later still became Yeshiva Ch'San Sofer, is now apartments. The building has an attractive Gothic entryway on East Fourth Street, with a pointed-arch doorway set into a one-story projecting gabled enframement. The doorway is heavily outlined in rough stone blocks and the gable is outlined in triangular stone blocks. Above the entryway, at the second floor, are two narrow lancets with stone voussoirs. The building is notable as well for the heavy stone lintels and transom bars of its many windows, for the series of gables and crenellated parapets along its roofline, and for unusual and lovely metal tie-rod ends in the form of crosses. The building seems remarkably intact from its original appearance, especially given its varied uses over the years.

At 135 East Second Street, between Avenue A and First Avenue, stands the **former rectory of St. Nicholas Roman Catholic Church**. The church was razed in 1959, but the rectory remained in use as a home for missionary priests. The five-story Gothic building has a façade of red brick with a base and trim of what is identified in records as “Indiana bluestone.” (This is limestone, not to be confused with the sandstone that was sometimes used for New York City’s “bluestone sidewalks.”) The pointed window lintels are articulated in stone at the lower floors, and brick and stone at the upper floors.



Former St. Nicholas rectory

With a rockface rusticated base, the rest of the building is predominantly brick. The building culminates in a corbeled gable set prominently against the top story with finialed piers on either side of it (similar to *aedicule*, or a miniature church). This section, as well as the vertical accentuation as a whole, make this a surprisingly appealing building incongruously set between the drably modern Cardinal Spellman Center, which replaced the original St. Nicholas convent in 1961, to the east, and a parking lot, which replaced the original church, to the west.

The architect of the rectory was Francis W. Herter (1854-1933), who with his brother Peter had designed Eldridge Street Synagogue of 1886-87. The brothers were also known for their design of high-class tenements in the Lower East Side. The partnership dissolved in 1893, and thereafter each brother practiced independently. Francis Herter practiced as an architect in New York from the early 1880s (when he and his brother came from their native Germany) to 1926. (There is no relation between these Herters and the renowned Aesthetic Movement decorators known as Herter Brothers, or the architectural firm of Schneider & Herter, whose credits include the tenements at 324 and 326 East Thirteenth Street.)

In 1978 the rectory was purchased by the photographer Timothy Greenfield-Sanders and his wife Karin, a lawyer. Greenfield-Sanders (b. 1952) is one of the leading portrait photographers of our time, having photographed seemingly every celebrated person in America, including several U.S. presidents, for major outlets. It is a measure of this building's charm that Greenfield-Sanders has prominently placed a photograph of it on the home page of his website (greenfield-sanders.com).

VII. Buildings for Arts and Artists

Between 1950 and 1954, Charlie Parker, the alto saxophonist who was one of the greatest innovators in the history of jazz, lived in the garden apartment of **151 Avenue B**, a Gothic Revival brownstone built around 1849. The house is of some architectural interest: Gothic Revival brownstones are rare, and this one is in reasonably intact condition. But in 1999, when the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the house a landmark, they called it the "Charlie Parker Residence." In other words, it was not a distinguished house made more distinguished by Parker's four-year residency in it. It was a house distinguished as Parker's onetime residence, made more distinguished by its possessing some architectural interest. As the designation report itself states, there are a few other examples of this kind of landmark, the house that is of compelling interest because of who lived in it. The Louis Armstrong House in Corona, Queens, the Edgar Allan Poe Cottage in the Bronx, and the Langston Hughes House in Harlem are the examples cited in the report.¹



Landmarks of Life and Work

This prompts the question: Are there other such landmarks in the East Village? We have identified four such residences of figures as compelling in their arts as Charlie Parker was in his — but none is landmarked. These are the homes of poets W.H. Auden, Frank O'Hara, Allen Ginsberg, and the painter Willem de Kooning. O'Hara lived at **441 East Ninth Street**, near Avenue A, for four years that represented "the high point in his

¹ New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, Designation Report, "Charlie Parker Residence," 1999.

writing, both in productivity and quality."² Auden lived at 77 St. Mark's Place, near First Avenue, for nineteen years. Ginsberg, the longest East Village resident of the four, lived in three apartments, including twenty-one years at 437 East Twelfth Street, between Avenue A and First Avenue. And de Kooning, one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century, lived and worked for the seven most critical years of his career at 88 East Tenth Street, between Third and Fourth Avenues, when that block was the center of the New York art world.

Frank O'Hara and his roommate and sometime lover, the writer Joe LeSueur, learned of an apartment in an Old Law tenement at 441 East Ninth Street, near Avenue A, from their



**441 East Ninth Street –
Entrance to left in photo**

painter friends Larry Rivers and Howard Kanovitz. (At the time, O'Hara was working with Rivers on *Stones*, the series of twelve lithographs they produced between 1957 and 1960.) O'Hara and LeSueur, with the help of the painter Al Held, moved their belongings from 90 University Place, where they had lived since 1957, to the second floor of 441 East Ninth Street in early 1959. As LeSueur described it, "There were two small bedrooms on opposite sides of the apartment, and I saw this as an ideal arrangement that would give each of us privacy

and allow me to get the sleep Frank so disparaged."³ They turned out not to like the apartment very much — the super was an alcoholic, there was a terrible vermin problem, and "a cacophonous symphony of ugly urban sounds played fortissimo outside our window, punctuated regularly by the sound of the Ninth Street crosstown bus making its stop next to the downstairs doorway."⁴ Even Tompkins Square Park "turned out to be a disappointment; in those pre-hippie days it was a bleak and forbidding place frequented

² Joe LeSueur, *Digressions on Some Poems by Frank O'Hara: A Memoir*, New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2003, p. xxii.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

by disgruntled old people."⁵ The apartment's chief attraction was that it was cheap. But even that was offset by the necessity of taking cabs, since the area that had recently been so well-served by the First Avenue El was now far removed from any rapid transit line. "Yet it was here," wrote LeSueur, "that Frank probably reached the high point in his writing, both in productivity and quality."⁶ (GVSHP installed a plaque to honor O'Hara on the building in June, 2014.)

Joe's Deli was right across Ninth Street from O'Hara's building. It was a meagerly stocked little grocery store where O'Hara and LeSueur bought cigarettes, coffee, milk, and Campbell's soup. "There was," wrote LeSueur, "only one reason we patronized Joe's Deli, which wasn't a delicatessen at all since they had no cold cuts: it was because Joe and his wife" — Ukrainian immigrants — "were so damn nice — always cheerful, as though their life together in that dim, grimy little store was all they ever wanted. They called both of us Sonny. One time Frank came in and Joe's wife said, 'Your brother was just here. You don't have to buy no milk.'"⁷

When Joe died, Frank O'Hara — legendarily gracious and generous — was Joe's wife's chief consoler, sitting with her in the back of the store, drinking sherry and listening to her tell stories of the old country. "My son couldn't come," she told LeSueur, "But your brother made it all right, Sonny."⁸

Francis O'Hara was born in Baltimore in 1926 to parents of Irish Catholic background. He grew up on a farm in Grafton, Massachusetts. He served in the U.S. Navy from 1944 to 1946, then attended Harvard on the GI Bill.⁹ He attended graduate school in comparative literature at the University of Michigan, and won the university's prestigious Avery Hopwood Award for creative writing. After Michigan, O'Hara moved to New York, where his close Harvard friend John Ashbery was living, and where he could live

⁵ Ibid., p. xxii.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ LeSueur, op. cit., p. 250.

⁸ Ibid., p. 252.

⁹ For biographical information on Frank O'Hara, see: Claudia Milstead. "O'Hara, Frank," *American National Biography Online*, February 2000 (<http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-02169.html>, accessed July 5, 2012).

more or less openly as a gay man. In 1951 he got a job working at the front desk at the Museum of Modern Art. The job was perfect for a twenty-five-year-old poet, as it did not interfere with his writing. Also, he had made friends in the New York art world, and these friends were always stopping by MoMA. O'Hara was a major art critic as well as poet. In 1953 he went to work for *ARTnews*, which, among the leading art magazines, was known for having poets write about art (Ashbery and James Schuyler, as well as O'Hara, served on its editorial staff). O'Hara would eventually become a curator at MoMA. (One wonders how many MoMA curators started out at the museum selling postcards at the front desk!) In 1952 his book, *A City Winter and Other Poems*, which included drawings by Larry Rivers, was published by the Tibor de Nagy Gallery. *Meditations in an Emergency* was published in 1957. (That book became a surprise bestseller a several years ago when in an episode of the television series *Mad Men* the lead character, Don Draper, is shown reading it in a bar.) In 1960, after having moved the year before to 441 East Ninth Street, he published two collections: *Second Avenue* (which mentions "Dairy B & H Lunch," still located on Second Avenue) and *Odes*. Also in 1960, Donald Allen's influential anthology *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960* featured fifteen poems by O'Hara, more than by any other poet. Most of his *Lunch Poems*, published in 1964, were written while living on East Ninth Street. O'Hara died in 1966 when he was struck by a Jeep on Fire Island after an evening spent at Morris Golde's house. Along with John Ashbery, James Schuyler, and Kenneth Koch, O'Hara is one of four major figures of the "New York School" of poets, so named by Donald Allen in *The New American Poetry*.

Lunch Poems includes O'Hara's single most reprinted poem, "The Day Lady Died." This was written in 1959 just after O'Hara learned of the death of the singer Billie Holiday on July 17, 1959. He and Joe LeSueur had recently moved to East Ninth Street. The poem is very much one of what O'Hara called his "I do this I do that" poems, in which he recounts the seemingly mundane events of his daily life and the things he sees as he walks around the city. Such poems capture hundreds of fragments of city life and put them together in a kind of collage, like Joseph Cornell boxes, which were also made up of fragments the artist picked up around the city. (So, too, Joseph Mitchell's *New Yorker* essays and Henry

Hope Reed's walking tours, other features of this time.) In the poem, O'Hara runs errands in midtown, stocking up on things to bring to a weekend in the Hamptons: a book to give as a gift to his host, cigarettes, a bottle of Strega. At a newsstand he sees the *Post*, and on the front page is a picture of Billie Holiday (known as "Lady Day"). The news of her death sends the poet's mind back downtown to an East Village location, the Five Spot, at the time still located at 5 Cooper Square at East Fifth Street:

and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of
leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT
while she whispered a song along the keyboard
to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing¹⁰

The Five Spot was founded in the 1930s as a somewhat divey neighborhood bar that later began to attract the writers and artists who started moving in nearby: Willem de Kooning, Alfred Leslie, Larry Rivers, Franz Kline, Howard Kanovitz, Grace Hartigan, David Smith, Frank O'Hara, Allen Ginsberg, Kenneth Koch, and others. It is said that the presence of the writers and artists attracted the musicians, and not the other way around. In the 1950s the Five Spot became one of the premier jazz clubs in the world, featuring John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus, Sonny Rollins, Ornette Coleman, and, of course, Billie Holiday. Kenneth Koch and the pianist Mal Waldron (mentioned in "The Day Lady Died") organized nights of jazz and poetry. Thelonious Monk and Eric Dolphy are among those who recorded famous live albums at the Five Spot.

In 1962 the club, which could hold only about a hundred people, moved to larger quarters nearby, at 2 St. Mark's Place. There the club flourished for a few more years. (The music critic Robert Christgau recalls sitting on a garbage can next door and hearing the sets loud and clear through the club's open windows.)¹¹ The original site is now occupied by the large 200 East Fifth Street apartment building (1983, Schuman Lichtenstein Claman

¹⁰ Allen, op. cit., p. 325.

¹¹ Robert Christgau, "Not So Misterioso," *Barnes & Noble Review*, December 13, 2009 (<http://bnreview.barnesandnoble.com/t5/Rock-Roll/Not-So-Misterioso/ba-p/1888>, accessed July 5, 2012).

& Efron). The later location, at the southeast corner of Third Avenue and St. Mark's Place, is the building with the St. Mark's Hotel in it. The club closed in 1967. The owners since the 1940s, Joe and Iggy Termini, cited the rock and roll boom that had transformed St. Mark's Place and pushed jazz into the shadows, and the brothers closed the club and opened a pizza slice shop next door. In 1972 they reopened the club under a new name, Two Saints, but by 1974 it was again called the Five Spot. The club closed later in the 1970s.

O'Hara's and LeSueur's apartment at 441 East Ninth Street was inherited in 1963 by Tony Towle, a twenty-four-year-old poet who attended the workshops of Frank O'Hara and Kenneth Koch and is considered a second-generation New York School poet. At this time, O'Hara and LeSueur moved to an apartment at 791 Broadway that overlooked Grace Church. LeSueur wondered why "lovely old Grace Church — as opposed to Joe's Deli and Garfinkel's Pharmaceutical Supply Company on Ninth Street — never found its way into Frank's poetry."¹²

In Joe's deli the old lady
greet me Sonny the man with
the rolls is my son, Sonny, how
are you today in the cold out? fine
and coffee too and Camels¹³

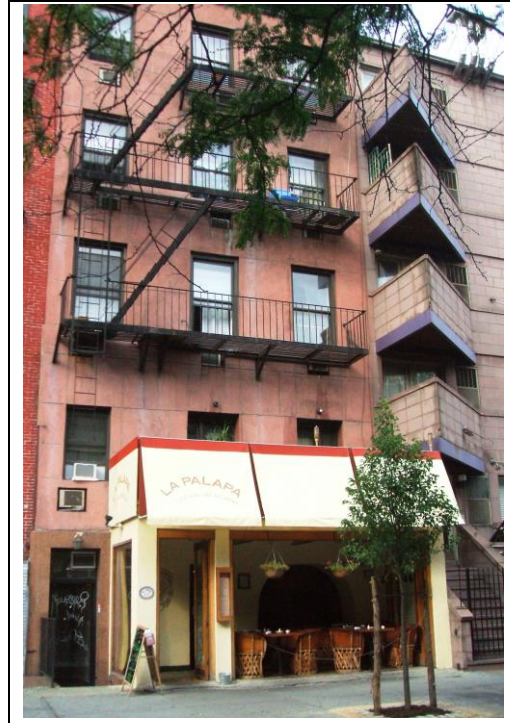
("Variations on Saturday," 1960)

Frank O'Hara's collaborator, the painter Larry Rivers, who helped O'Hara and LeSueur find their Ninth Street apartment, lived nearby in a second-floor apartment at **77 St. Mark's Place**, between First and Second Avenues. The address, however, is most well-known for its association with W.H. Auden, who lived in a first-floor apartment between 1953 and 1972.

¹² LeSueur, *op. cit.*, p. xxvi.

¹³ Donald Allen, ed., *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, p. 377.

Wystan Hugh Auden was not a “New York School” poet. He was certainly not a Beat poet — he did not care for the Beats. By the time he moved to the East Village, he was already an institution and one of the classic poets of Western literature. He was born in York, England, in 1907.¹⁴ He grew up in the industrial city of Birmingham, where his father was a physician. He graduated from Oxford in 1928 with a degree in English (at the time a subject that had only just been introduced to the Oxford curriculum). From about age twenty-one his fame grew. He was the leading voice of the skeptical



77 St. Mark's Place

generation that came of age while England still reeled from World War I — and toward World War II. His poems and other writings described the neuroses of the time, and appealed to Marx and Freud for diagnoses. The critic Clive James wrote: "In all of English poetry it is difficult to think of any other poet who turned out permanent work so early — and whose work seemed so tense with the obligation to be permanent."¹⁵

Auden was already one of the world's most famous poets when, in 1939, he, in the words of the critic Adam Kirsch, "broke his life in two."¹⁶ He left England for New York, and was accused by some of abandoning his country in its hour of greatest need. He moved from his youthful obsession with Marx and Freud to Christianity, to a devout Episcopalianism. (He was a longtime parishioner of St. Mark's in the Bowery.) He fell in love with an eighteen-year-old Brooklyn native named Chester Kallman, going so far as to wear a wedding ring — in 1940! The couple lived together for the last thirty-three

¹⁴ For biographical information on W.H. Auden, see: Edward Mendelson, “Auden, Wystan Hugh (1907–1973),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, January 2011 (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30775>, accessed July 5, 2012).

¹⁵ Clive James, “On *Epistle to a Godson*,” *Times Literary Supplement*, January 12, 1973, p. 25.

¹⁶ Adam Kirsch, “Auden’s N.Y. Households, from Slum to Sublime,” *New York Observer*, May 3, 1999 (<http://observer.com/1999/05/audens-ny-households-from-slum-to-sublime>, accessed July 5, 2012).

years of Auden's life, though it was a troubled relationship in which neither proved faithful to the other. The poet became an American citizen in 1946, but would insist that he was "not an American, but a New Yorker."¹⁷

His apartment at 77 St. Mark's Place was notoriously disheveled. There were times, his friend Hannah Arendt recalled, "when his slum apartment was so cold that the water no longer functioned and he had to use the toilet in the liquor store at the corner, when his suit — no one could convince him that a man needed at least two suits so that one could go to the cleaner or two pairs of shoes so that one pair could be repaired, a subject of an endlessly ongoing debate between us throughout the years — was covered with spots or worn so thin that his trousers would suddenly split from top to bottom."¹⁸ Auden, reported Edmund Wilson in his diaries, once said, "I hate living in squalor — I detest it! — but I can't do the work I want to do and live any other way."¹⁹

Auden did not live full-time on St. Mark's Place. Between 1956 and 1961, he was a professor of poetry at Oxford University, and in 1958 he and Kallman bought a farmhouse in Austria. But 77 St. Mark's Place was his New York home, to which he always returned. He remained until 1972, when he went to live in a cottage on the grounds of Christ Church, his old college at Oxford. He died the following year and was buried in Kirchstetten, near his farmhouse. He was sixty-six years old, but looked much older — alcohol, tobacco, and benzedrine having taken their collective toll. ("My face," Auden wrote, "looks like a wedding-cake left out in the rain."²⁰)

The following of Auden's works were published during the time he lived at 77 St. Mark's Place: *The Shield of Achilles* (poems, 1955), *Homage to Clio* (poems, 1960), *The Dyer's Hand* (essays, 1962), *Collected Shorter Poems* (1966), *Collected Longer Poems* (1968), and *A Certain World: A Commonplace Book* (1970). Auden's home, a five-story row

¹⁷ Edward Mendelson, "The European Auden," in Stan Smith, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 66.

¹⁸ Kirsch, op. cit.

¹⁹ Edmund Wilson, *The Fifties: From Notebooks and Diaries of the Period*, edited by Leon Edel, New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986, p. 292.

house, has been refaced, and its window sills and lintels have been removed. Its cornice is historic but probably not original. It was probably once identical to brick-faced No. 75 next door. The ground floor is now the restaurant La Palapa.

The literary and cultural figure perhaps most associated with the East Village is Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1926 (the same year as Frank O'Hara).²¹ His father was a high school English teacher and a poet. But it was his mother, who suffered from severe mental illness and was institutionalized for many years, who had the major impact in the formation of Allen's sensibility: His poems were often attempts to enter into the world his mother inhabited. He attended Columbia University and was inspired to pursue a literary career by such professors as Lionel Trilling and Mark Van Doren, and by his group of literary friends, including John Clellon Holmes, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, Herbert Huncke, Lucien Carr, and Neal Cassady. Ginsberg spent eight months in the Columbia Presbyterian Psychiatric Institute, where he befriended a fellow patient named Carl Solomon.

Shortly after this institutionalization, Ginsberg moved into a seven-story Old Law tenement at 206 East Seventh Street, between Avenue B and Avenue C. It was here that William S. Burroughs, the author of *Junkie*, sought refuge after accidentally shooting and killing his wife in Mexico. That building still stands, and has a highly intact façade of tan brick with contrasting courses of darker brick, terra-cotta ornamentation in an Italian Renaissance style, full and segmental arched windows, and an original cornice. Gone are the storefronts that were originally at street level.

In 1953, Ginsberg moved to San Francisco, where his most famous poem, "Howl for Carl Solomon," was published by Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Press, with an introduction by William Carlos Williams. Many young people responded to it as an anthem for their generation.

²¹ For biographical information on Allen Ginsberg, see: Ann Charters, "Ginsberg, Allen," *American National Biography Online*, June 2000 (<http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-03394.html>, accessed July 5, 2012).

After spending time in San Francisco and Paris with Peter Orlovsky (1933-2012), the man who became his lifelong partner, Ginsberg returned to New York in 1958. The couple moved into the handsome, six-story New Law tenement at 170 East Second Street, between Avenue A and Avenue B. It is a dignified building, forty-two feet wide, of red brick with limestone trim, restrained classical ornamentation, and a modillioned cornice, all of it perfectly intact. Also intact are the entrance and most of the two storefronts. Here Ginsberg wrote what some consider his finest work, "Kaddish for Naomi Ginsberg," an elegy based on the Jewish prayer of mourning, for his mother who had died two years before in a mental hospital in Brentwood, New York. In this apartment Ginsberg also helped Burroughs with the manuscript of his most famous novel, *Naked Lunch*, published in 1959. Ginsberg and Orlovsky remained at 170 East Second Street until about 1961.

Ginsberg was a central figure of the so-called Beat Generation. The term "Beat" is said to have been coined by Jack Kerouac and John Clellon Holmes, and has a double meaning: that of being beat, as in tired, or exhausted, or alienated by the social norms of American life in the postwar years; and that of beatific, or the transcending of those norms to a higher, better reality, perhaps with the aid of poetry or drugs. Ginsberg was also a central figure of the hippie culture of the 1960s and 1970s. In 1962 he and Orlovsky went to live in India for two years, where Ginsberg traded in his drugs for meditation. Eastern religion would thereafter be at the core of Ginsberg's being — as when he famously stood on a stage in Chicago's Grant Park in August of 1968 and led the crowd of protesters in a chant of "om" as they were being clubbed by Chicago policemen while the Democratic National Convention was being televised across America. He became a follower of the Tibetan Buddhist meditation master Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, who in 1974 founded Naropa Institute (now Naropa University), in Boulder, Colorado. There Ginsberg and the poet Anne Waldman established a creative writing program called the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. Also in 1974, Ginsberg's book *The Fall of America* won the National Book Award for poetry. Beginning in 1975, Ginsberg divided his time between Boulder and the one-bedroom apartment he shared with Orlovsky on the fourth floor of 437 East Twelfth Street.



437 East Twelfth Street

Designed by Sass & Smallheiser and built in 1904, it is one of the finest New Law tenements in the East Village (its architecture is discussed in the Tenements chapter). Ginsberg was living here in 1979 when he was inducted into the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. Ginsberg and Orlovsky remained at **437 East Twelfth Street** for the next twenty-one years. During much of his time in this apartment, Ginsberg taught part of the year at Naropa Institute, and part of the year at Brooklyn College. In 1996, Ginsberg, flush with the proceeds of the sale of his

personal archives to Stanford University for \$1 million, moved to a spacious loft at 405 East 13th Street, between Avenue A and First Avenue. (This is the same building as 404 East Fourteenth Street, an address known as the home of many artists.) He had the enjoyment of the loft for too brief a time, for he died one year later, in 1997, at the age of 70.

Painting on Tenth Street

Read about the heroic age of the New York School in painting, the 1940s and 1950s, and you will repeatedly see mention of the "Tenth Street artists," the "Tenth Street galleries," and the "Tenth Street scene." Though the Tenth Street in question was but a short block between Third and Fourth Avenues, it was the heart of the New York art world for a decade. Jed Perl, in *New Art City: Manhattan at Mid-Century*, writes that "Artists of de Kooning's generation had been in revolt against the old coziness of Greenwich Village, and they loved the fact that Tenth Street was anti-picturesque, and thus a perfect setting for the new anti-romantic romantic painting."²² In 1959 the art critic Harold Rosenberg, in an essay titled "Tenth Street: A Geography of Modern Art," published in the *Art News Annual*, approvingly noted that:

²² Jed Perl, *New Art City: Manhattan at Mid-Century*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005, p. 179.

"Everything on Tenth Street is one of a kind: a liquor store with a large 'wino' clientele; up a flight of iron steps, a foreign-language-club restaurant; up another flight, a hotel-workers' employment agency; in a basement, a poolroom; in another, something stored; in the middle of the block, a metal-stamping factory with a 'modernistic' peagreen cement and glass-brick front; on the Fourth Avenue corner, to be sure, an excavation."²³

(The excavation of which Rosenberg wrote was likely for either 75-91 Fourth Avenue [1957, H.I. Feldman, architect] or Stewart House, 772 Broadway [1958, Sylvan Bien, architect].) Only a tiny bit remains on the block between Third and Fourth Avenues that the artists of the 1950s would recognize today. But of what does remain we still have by far the most important building: the former home and studio of Willem de Kooning, at **88 East Tenth Street**.



Willem de Kooning was born in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, in 1904.²⁴ His background was humble and, after leaving school at the age of twelve, he apprenticed with a commercial art firm. He stowed away to America in 1926. He found work as a house painter in Hoboken, New Jersey, then moved to a studio on West Forty-Fourth Street from which he made his living as a commercial artist, house painter, and carpenter. He spent the late 1920s and early 1930s immersing himself ever more deeply in Manhattan's art scene and working on his own painting. He first exhibited in a group show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1936, the same year that he moved to 156 West Twenty-Second Street. Through his neighbor, the poet

²³ Harold Rosenberg, "Tenth Street: A Geography of Modern Art," *Art News Annual* XXVIII, New York: Art Foundation Press, 1959.

²⁴ For biographical information on Willem de Kooning, see: Tracy Schpero Fitzpatrick. "de Kooning, Willem," *American National Biography Online*, January 2001 (<http://www.anb.org/articles/17/17-01631.html>, accessed July 5, 2012).

and dance critic Edwin Denby, de Kooning received the commission to design costumes for a Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo production at the Metropolitan Opera House. He also gave private painting lessons. One of his students was Elaine Fried, whom he married in 1943. They moved to 63 Carmine Street, and he kept a studio at 85 Fourth Avenue between Tenth and Eleventh Streets (since demolished). He became friends with Jackson Pollock when they exhibited together at the McMullen Gallery in 1942. His first one-man show was at the Charles Egan Gallery, at 63 East Fifty-Seventh Street, in 1948. In that year he also taught at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, where fellow faculty members included Buckminster Fuller, John Cage, and Merce Cunningham. In that year he also sold a painting to the Museum of Modern Art. By 1950 when he had a painting in the Venice Biennale, he was recognized as one of his generation's major American painters.

Between 1950 and 1952 he painted *Woman I*, now in the Museum of Modern Art. In 1952 he moved his studio to the rear of the top floor of a Greek Revival row house at 88 East Tenth Street, which is where he put the finishing touches on *Woman I*. The front of the floor had been occupied as a studio since 1950 by the major New York School painter Esteban Vicente (1903-2001), a friend of de Kooning's. He had abandoned the painting and left the canvas crumpled up in a corner of his former Fourth Avenue studio when the art historian and critic Meyer Schapiro paid de Kooning a visit, saw the crumpled canvas, and encouraged him to finish it. Because he and Elaine were experiencing marital difficulties, he lived as well as worked at 88 East Tenth Street. The art critic Harold Rosenberg was a frequent visitor, and he and de Kooning talked about art and drank together in the studio. At first, when Rosenberg dropped by with a bottle, it was the critic who drank most of it. De Kooning had never been much of a drinker. But in 1953 he had begun to experience worrisome heart palpitations. A friend advised alcohol as a cure for these. From that point, de Kooning drank more and more, until he developed a serious drinking problem — which just made him more like the artists around him. ("It was like a ten-year party," said Elaine de Kooning of the hard-drinking New York art world of the time.²⁵) Another frequent visitor to the studio was a young commercial artist de Kooning

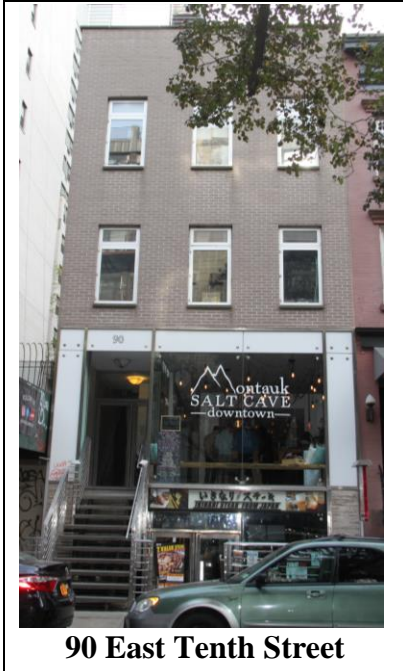
²⁵ Musa Mayer, *Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston*, New York: Knopf, 1988, p. 68.

had met at the Cedar Tavern. Her name was Joan Ward and in 1953 she became pregnant with de Kooning's child. He arranged for an abortion, but in 1956 Joan Ward, impregnated a second time by de Kooning, gave birth to Johanna Lisbeth de Kooning, Willem's only child. This occasioned the formal separation of Willem and Elaine de Kooning. (They would reconcile in 1975 and remain together until her death in 1989.) In March 1953, de Kooning had his first show at his new gallery, Sidney Janis on East Fifty-Seventh Street. There de Kooning exhibited six of his *Woman* paintings. The exhibition was the occasion for a rupture between de Kooning and Pollock when the latter accused the former of betraying their principles by painting the figure, rather than abstraction. In 1959 he moved his studio to a loft at 831 Broadway, between Twelfth and Thirteenth Streets.

Willem de Kooning kept his studio at 88 East Tenth Street for seven of the most critical years of his career. It is where he painted his *Woman* paintings (including *Woman III*, which in 2006 David Geffen sold to Steven A. Cohen for \$156 million, one of the highest prices ever paid for a painting). It's where he lived and worked when he began to exhibit with Sidney Janis, where he lived when he first developed a drinking problem, and where he lived when he began his relationship with Joan Ward and when his only child was born. In short, if any of de Kooning's residences or studios were to be preserved, this is the one. The façade is largely intact from de Kooning's time. By then the garden and parlor levels had been converted to commercial premises, but the stoop remains with its original iron railings. The second and third floors have been untouched, with the original brickwork, sills, cap-molded lintels, and cornice.

In 1962 de Kooning became a United States citizen, and the following year moved permanently from Manhattan to Springs, East Hampton. In 1964 he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the next year had his first full-scale retrospective at the Smith College Museum of Art in Northampton, Massachusetts. He continued painting through the 1980s. He died in 1997, at the age of 92, in East Hampton. *ARTnews*, in 1999, ranked him among the twenty-five most influential artists of the 20th century.²⁶

²⁶ "The Century's 25 Most Influential Artists," *ARTnews*, May 1999.



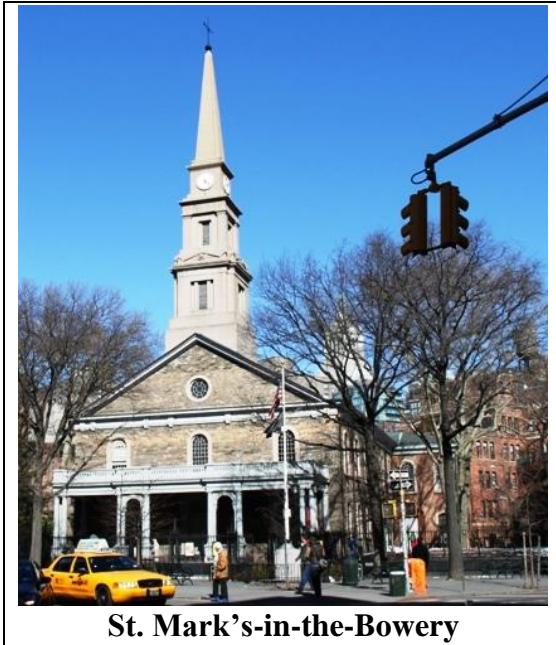
90 East Tenth Street

Right next door, in a mid-19th century row house was the Tanager Gallery, which operated at **90 East Tenth Street** from the autumn of 1952 to 1962. Largely intact until relatively recently, the façade of the building was significantly altered in 2010 with a new brick face, new storefront, and the removal of the stoop and window lintels. Four other important galleries once operated on this block. Brata Gallery was at 89 East Tenth Street from 1957 to the mid-1960s; Camino Gallery was at No. 92 (1956-1960), then at No. 89 (1960-1963); March Gallery was at No. 95 from 1957 to 1960; and Area Gallery was at No. 80 from 1958 to 1962 and at No. 90 from 1962 to 1965 (succeeding Tanager in that space).

These were known collectively as the "Tenth Street galleries." They were cooperatively owned and managed by artists, and they were where much of the new, avant-garde work of the 1950s was first exhibited. Willem de Kooning, Rudy Burckhardt, Al Held, Philip Guston, John Krushenick, Nicholas Krushenick, Alex Katz, Philip Pearlstein, Allan Kaprow, George Segal, Elaine de Kooning, Alice Neel, Mark di Suvero, Tom Wesselmann, Wolf Kahn, Charles Cajori, Lois Dodd, Sidney Geist, Sally Hazelet Drummond, Angelo Ippolito, Raymond Rocklin, and Red Grooms were among the artist-owners. As the list of names attests, the Tenth Street galleries were about far more than Abstract Expressionism. They showed figurative artists, Pop artists, color field painters, collagists, Minimalists, performance artists, and more. Of these, No. 90, site of Tanager and Area Galleries, is the only building still standing.

The Church of Poetry and Film

The most famous East Village institution dedicated to poetry is the **Poetry Project at St. Mark's in-the-Bowery**. The Poetry Project was begun in 1966 by the poet Paul Blackburn (1926-71). Blackburn grew up in the care of his maternal grandparents on a farm in Vermont, and from age fourteen on lived with his mother, who was a writer, and



her lover (whom Paul called "aunt") in a bohemian household in Greenwich Village.²⁷ His mother encouraged him to become a poet, and toward that end gave him a copy of W.H. Auden's *Collected Poems*, which proved highly influential — but not as influential as Ezra Pound, whom Blackburn began reading while an undergraduate at New York University. He transferred from NYU to the University of Wisconsin and received his B.A. in 1950. On several occasions he hitchhiked from Madison, Wisconsin, to Washington, D.C.,

to visit Pound, who was incarcerated at St. Elizabeth's Hospital from 1946 to 1958. Pound arranged Blackburn's first publications, and introduced Blackburn to the poet Robert Creeley. The close friendship of Blackburn and Creeley led to Blackburn's being grouped with the Black Mountain College poets, Creeley's circle, although Blackburn always objected to that or any other label. Blackburn published poems and translations (from Provençal and Spanish) throughout his brief life. His *Collected Poems*, published in 1985, contains 523 poems, believed to be a fraction of his output.²⁸

In addition to writing his own poetry, Blackburn was New York's great impresario of poetry in the 1960s. He organized poetry readings at Café Le Metro, an antique furniture store and coffee house that operated from 1963 to 1965 at 149 Second Avenue. (For more on this impressive Greek Revival town house, built in 1849, see the Row Houses chapter.) Blackburn maintained ties among the different groups of poets in New York — the Beats, the New York School, the Black Mountain School — and was uniquely positioned to program wide-ranging readings that would showcase the diversity of voices

²⁷ For biographical information on Paul Blackburn, see: Robert M. West, "Blackburn, Paul," *American National Biography Online*, February 2000 (<http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-01892.html>, accessed July 5, 2012).

²⁸ See Edith Jarolim, ed., *The Collected Poems of Paul Blackburn*, New York: Persea Books, 1985.

making up the booming New York poetry scene of the time. When Le Metro closed, Blackburn moved the reading series he had organized there to St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery. At St. Mark's, the reading series, known as the Poetry Project, was overseen by the church, and that had its good and its bad points. The church provided its facilities, and an institutional structure that could be useful in securing grants, but it also imposed a bureaucracy that had not previously been a part of the reading scene in the East Village. For example, the church asked the poet Joel Oppenheimer, not Paul Blackburn, to be the first director of the Poetry Project. But whatever early conflict there may have been, the astonishing fact remains that the Poetry Project continues to flourish almost half a century after its founding.²⁹ Among the many who have read at the Poetry Project are John Ashbery, Robert Creeley, Frank O'Hara, Robert Duncan, Anne Waldman (director of the Poetry Project from 1968 to 1978), Kenneth Koch, Ted Berrigan, Denise Levertov, Miguel Algarín (founder of Nuyorican Poets' Café at 236 East Third Street), Diane di Prima, Ed Dorn, Edwin Denby, Patti Smith, and Allen Ginsberg. On one memorable evening, February 23, 1977, Allen Ginsberg and Robert Lowell (who would die later that year), two enormously different poets, shared the stage for the first and only time.³⁰

St. Mark's had decided in the early 1960s to involve itself deeply in the arts, and initially funded these programs with federal anti-poverty grants. The Poetry Project was one result. Theater Genesis, where Sam Shepard put on his early plays, was another. Later came Danspace. In 1966 St. Mark's established the Film Project, the first director of which was the famous experimental filmmaker Ken Jacobs. In 1967, the Film Project moved to a new home, the old Magistrate's Courthouse at **32 Second Avenue**, at the southeast corner of Second Street. Now calling itself Millennium Film Workshop, the screenings, talks, and



²⁹ See <http://poetryproject.org/about/history>.

³⁰ "Allen Ginsberg Will Share Stage with Robert Lowell," *The New York Times*, February 22, 1977, p. 36.

workshops became as central to New York's burgeoning experimental filmmaking scene as the Poetry Project was to the poetry scene.³¹

In 1969 Millennium left the courthouse and after several moves found its permanent home at **66 East Fourth Street**, (see next page, and in ‘Lively Arts’ section) where the organization flourished until 2013, when it moved to Brooklyn. Millennium showcased the works of the leading avant-garde filmmakers from the 1960s to today, including Hollis Frampton, Michael Snow, Carolee Schneemann, Bruce Conner, Rudy Burckhardt, Robert Breer, and Kenneth Anger, among many others. Stan Brakhage, who lived most of his adult life in Colorado, liked to premier his films at Millennium, and made many personal appearances there from Millennium's founding to his death in 2003.



66 East Fourth Street

The courthouse, however, would again become central to the New York film scene when in 1979, a decade after Millennium moved out, Anthology Film Archives moved in. Anthology was founded in 1969 by Jonas Mekas (who wrote for many years about independent film for the *Village Voice*), P. Adams Sitney (author of the definitive 1974 book *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde*), Jerome Hill, Stan Brakhage, and Peter Kubelka. Its first home was in the Public Theater on Lafayette Street. In 1974 Anthology moved to 80 Wooster Street. It has now been in the old courthouse for forty years.³² The courthouse was designed by Alfred Hopkins and built in 1917. It is a rugged two-story structure, an essay in brick moldings, arched windows, and battered walls. It shows some influence of Henry Hobson Richardson and Louis Sullivan. Between 1979 and 1985 the interior of the courthouse was renovated by the architects Raimund Abraham and Kevin Bone. Anthology Film Archives is the leading organization of its

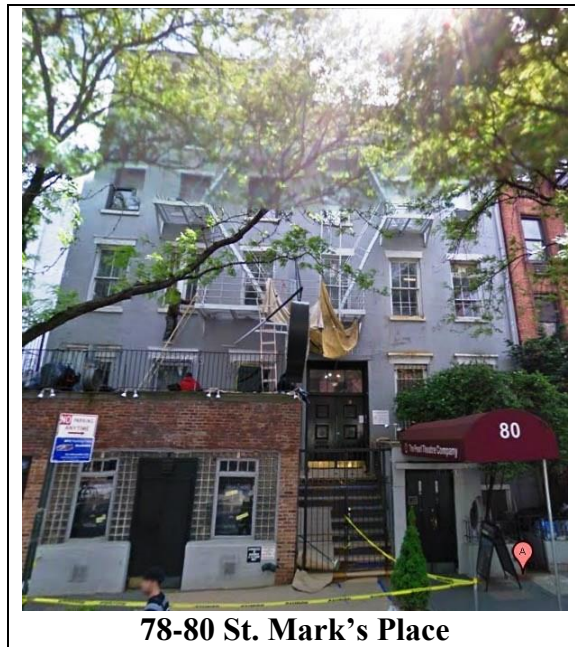
³¹ See <http://millenniumfilm.org/about>.

³² See <http://anthologyfilmarchives.org/about/about>.

kind in America. Its mission is to exhibit and preserve experimental and avant-garde films. It has a repository of film prints, two theaters for screenings, a film preservation department, and a reference library. In addition, Anthology publishes film reference books. Its importance to the world of independent filmmaking cannot be overstated.³² Second Avenue is part of the East Village/Lower East Side Historic District (designated in 2012); in 2017, the LPC approved rooftop and side additions.

A different sort of landmark of the East Village film scene is a pair of 1845 row houses at **78-80 St. Mark's Place**. It is said that Leon Trotsky lived briefly in the house at No. 80

in 1917, when he was a contributor to Nikolai Bukharin's and Alexandra Kollontai's magazine *Novy Mir*, which was published across the street at No. 77 (the house in which W.H. Auden would later live and about which he liked to tell people, falsely, that it had been Trotsky's home). The houses were converted into a music club called Jazz Gallery. This opened in 1959 and was owned by the brothers Joe and Iggy Termini, who also owned the Five Spot at 5 Cooper Square. Many of the same



artists who appeared at the Five Spot also appeared at Jazz Gallery. Music critic Robert Christgau recalls going there one night in 1960 when the double bill featured the Thelonious Monk Quartet and the John Coltrane Quartet.³³ It was also the site in 1960 of the final performance of the hipster monologist and performance artist known as Lord Buckley. By 1964, Jazz Gallery had closed. In 1966, the houses were owned by Howard Otway (1920-94) who, with architect Miller Breslin, converted them into Theatre 80.

³³ Christgau, op. cit.

In 1967, Theatre 80 premiered Clark Gesner's musical *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, starring Gary Burghoff as Charlie Brown and Bob Balaban as Linus. The Theatre 80 production of *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* ran for 1,597 performances, closing in 1971. In that year Howard Otway made Theatre 80 into a revival movie house.³⁴ Every day there was a new double feature of old Hollywood films, some of them rarely seen. This was the golden age of cinephilia in New York. The revival houses, which in addition to Theatre 80 included the Bleecker Street Cinema, which operated from 1960 to 1990 at 144 Bleecker Street, and the Thalia, at Broadway and Ninety-Fifth Street, which had a revival policy from the 1960s to 1987, among others, were the film buff's dream come true in the days before video cassettes, DVDs, or streaming video. These theaters were the *only* means of acquiring cinematic literacy. The several that were in Manhattan were by themselves reason for some people to move to New York from other parts of the country — as much so as any of the city's concert halls, jazz clubs, dance venues, art galleries, or museums. Theatre 80 did not show movies under ideal conditions. The dimensions dictated by the two row houses meant that seats were in long rows set perpendicular to St. Mark's Place, making for some odd viewing angles.³⁵ The dimensions also made it simpler for the theater to use rear rather than front projection, which could lead to distorted images when viewed from some spots in the house. Nonetheless, the many regulars who attended screenings at Theatre 80 did not mind. The more important things were having the chance to see films one might not otherwise ever be able to see, and to do so in the company of fellow film buffs. Howard and Florence Otway, the proprietors, knew many of their customers. They also sold espresso and brownies at a time when that was unusual in movie theaters.

Theatre 80 continued its revival policy until 1994. By then, the VHS cassette had led to a drastic reduction in the audiences for revival houses. That was also the year of Howard Otway's death. The Otway family then leased the theater to the renowned Pearl Theatre Company, known for its productions of the classical repertory of works by Shakespeare, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Molière, Ibsen, Shaw, and others. The Pearl was founded in 1984

³⁴ See “Howard Otway, 72; Ran Revival Theater,” *The New York Times*, April 21, 1994, p. B8.

³⁵ See discussion at <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/4698>.

and was located at 78-80 St. Mark's Place from 1994 to 2009, when it moved to City Center at 131 West Fifty-Fifth Street.³⁶ As for the state of the two houses at 78 and 80 St. Mark's Place, they retain their original 1845 upper facades, including sills, lintels, and cornices. No. 78 retains its stoop and, surprisingly, its multi-paned sash. At street level, the insertion of a sidewalk-level entrance to the right of the stoop was done very sensitively. At No. 80, a crude one-story brick extension, with glass block windows, projects from the house. Still, inside and out, this is a pretty remarkable example of the successful adaptation of old row houses to uses never dreamed of when they were built.

Nightlife's Glittering Landmarks

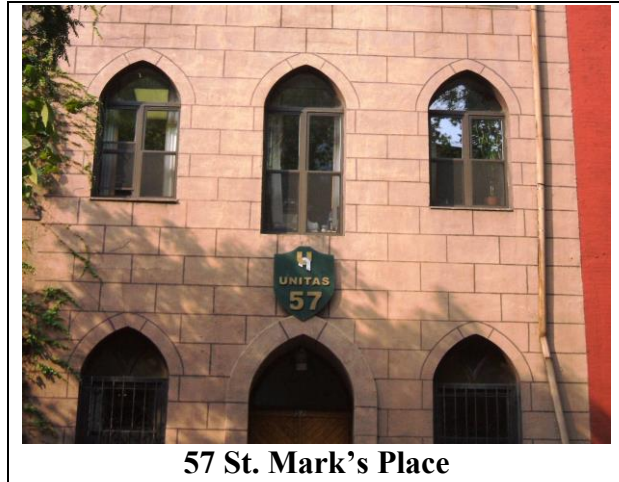
We have mentioned the Five Spot and Jazz Gallery, but there have been several other important music venues in the East Village.

The 1876 Old Law tenement and saloon by William Jose at 101 Avenue A is an amazingly intact and remarkably handsome building. It is important both for its architecture, and for its history as a meeting hall for the local German community. The building then entered into the artistic history of the East Village. It did so first of all in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a jazz club called the East Village In [sic]. The club featured such top-drawer performers as Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, the Booker Ervin Quartet, and the Lee Morgan Quintet. In 1973 the East Village In became the Jazzboat, owned by Aziz Latif, who had been a longtime percussionist in Duke Ellington's band under the name Gaylord Emerson. Jazzboat showcased such performers as Betty Carter, Sonny Fortune, Archie Shepp, Grady Tate, Charles Earland, and Bobby Timmons. When the club opened, Richard F. Shepard wrote in the *New York Times*: "The latest vessel for jazzmanship to drop anchor here is the spankingly new and attractive Jazzboat, which opened several weeks ago at 101 Avenue A. ...The place is decked out in shipshapely style, with fishnets, signal-flag table-cloths and lights in nautical trim, but it is all done with enough restraint so that it doesn't dominate the scene. ...This week, the guest is Joe Henderson with a five-piece band."³⁷

³⁶ See <http://www.pearltheatre.org/about/history.php>.

³⁷ Richard F. Shepard, "Going Out Guide," *The New York Times*, February 20, 1973, p. 22.

Then, in 1979, the Pyramid Club opened in the space. The Pyramid Club, which is still in existence, was one of the best-known and is the longest-lived of the East Village clubs of the 1980s and 1990s, a time when the East Village art scene boomed and a new generation of clubs, including the Pyramid and Club 57 at **57 St. Mark's Place**,



came into being. The style and ethos of the new clubs involved irony, satire, gender politics, personal and political responses to the AIDS crisis, embrace of popular culture, and the culture of celebrity. From these clubs emerged such performers as Madonna and Cyndi Lauper, as well as the hot artists of the time such as Keith Haring, Kenny Scharf, and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Less famous but still quite well-known performers such as RuPaul and Ann Magnuson (who managed Club 57) are also closely associated with this club scene. The Pyramid Club was known for showcasing new-wave drag queens — performers who questioned gender politics and sexual identity. These included RuPaul (who made his New York debut at the Pyramid in 1982), Lady Bunny, and Lypsinka.

In 1985, Lady Bunny, who had earlier performed in Atlanta with RuPaul, organized Wigstock, an annual drag festival in Tompkins Square. It later moved to other locations, such as Union Square, as the festival grew, before returning to Tompkins Square for its last three years, ending in 2005.³⁸ Lady Bunny and some other Pyramid Club habitués supposedly got the idea for Wigstock one night in 1984 after the club closed for the night and they went to Tompkins Square to continue their partying. Over the years, the performers at Wigstock included a who's who of the downtown music and performance scene, from Wendy Wild and John Sex to Lady Miss Kier and the B-52's. By 1990, 10,000 people jammed into Tompkins Square. By 1993, the square hosted 25,000 people. In 1995, when Wigstock moved to a pier on the Hudson River, 50,000 people attended.

³⁸ See <http://www.wigstock.nu/history/index.html>.

In 1986, the Pyramid Club hosted a benefit party for Martin Burgoyne, a graphic designer who was Madonna's roommate and best friend, as well as first manager and backup dancer, in her early days in New York. He would die from AIDS at the age of 23. His benefit was attended by Madonna, Andy Warhol, Keith Haring, and Kenny Scharf, among others.³⁹ The Pyramid Club is also known as the site of the New York debuts of such bands as the Red Hot Chili Peppers (1984) and Nirvana (1989).

In the History chapter, we mentioned Arlington Hall, an important meeting place for the German community at **19-23 St. Mark's Place**. In 1874 the row houses (built in 1833 by Thomas E. Davis) at 19 and 21 St. Mark's Place were combined to create a home for a German singing club called the Arion Society. In 1887 the German-born brewer George Ehret bought the Arion Society's home and added a third row house, 23 St. Mark's Place, to make Arlington Hall, scene of labor meetings and political rallies. In 1920 the complex became the Polish National Home, which five years later added 25 St. Mark's Place. In the 1960s Stanley Tolkin, who also owned Stanley's Bar, a bohemian hangout on Thirteenth Street and Avenue B, began operating a basement bar in the Polish National Home. It was called the Dom (the Polish word for "home").⁴⁰ In 1974 the *Times* noted: "Ten years ago this dimly lighted club on St. Mark's Place brought together doctors and lawyers, the socially prominent, poets and advertising men and construction workers, who drank whisky at 50 cents a shot and praised themselves as 'working-class people' while they struggled to breathe air that reeked of Gauloises."⁴¹

The Fugs, a highly irreverent band formed in 1964 by Tuli Kupferberg and Ed Sanders (who founded the Peace Eye Bookstore at 383 East Tenth Street) performed at the Dom. Within a few years the Dom had begun to draw a largely African-American clientele who came, as the *Times* said, to frug and watusi. The upstairs ballroom, known as "upstairs at

³⁹ See William E. Geist, "About New York: In the Face of a Plague, a Party," *The New York Times*, September 6, 1984, p. 31.

⁴⁰ See Christopher Gray, "The Eclectic Life of a Row of Houses," *The New York Times*, November 8, 1998, p. RE7.

⁴¹ "The Dom Closes; To Be Cowpalace," *The New York Times*, July 28, 1974, p. 42.



19-23 St. Mark's Place

the Dom," was leased to the multimedia artists Rudi Stern and Jackie Cassen for their experimental, psychedelic light shows. These used strobe lights, projected liquid slides, and more to create immersive light environments that some

people liked to experience while under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs. Rudi Stern (1937-2006), who had studied painting with Hans Hofmann, was a pioneering light and video artist who collaborated with such artists as Nam June Paik and Laurie Anderson, produced stage spectacles for the Doors and the Byrds, did lighting for Broadway shows, made commercial signs, created the lighting for Studio 54, and founded the Manhattan gallery Let There Be Neon. Jackie Cassen (1925-2010) was a pioneer in light shows, video art, and digital art. She was in later life best known as a poet. In April 1966, Andy Warhol rented the upstairs ballroom to stage the first of his nomadic Exploding Plastic Inevitables, his own light shows, which featured music by the Velvet Underground and Nico. Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett wrote, in their book *POPism* (1980):

The Dom was perfect, just what we wanted — it had to be the biggest discotheque dance floor in Manhattan, and there was a balcony, too. We sublet it immediately from Jackie and Rudi — I gave them the rent check, Paul [Morrissey, Warhol's assistant] had a fight with the owner over the insurance, then we signed a few papers, and the very next day we were down there painting the place white so we could project movies and slides on the walls. We started dragging prop-type odds and ends over from the Factory [then located at 231 East Forty-Seventh Street] — five movie projectors, five carousel-type projectors where the image changes every ten seconds and where, if you put two images together, they bounce. These

colored things would go on top of the five movies, and sometimes we'd let the sound tracks come through. We also brought down one of those big revolving speakeasy mirrored balls — we had it lying around the Factory and we thought it would be great to bring those back. (The balls really caught on after we revived the look, and pretty soon they were standard fixtures in every discotheque you walked into.) We had a guy come down with more spotlights and strobes that we wanted to rent — we were going to shine them on the Velvets and all around the audience during the show. Of course, we had no idea if people would come all the way down to St. Mark's Place for night life. All the downtown action had always been in the West Village — the East Village was Babushkaville. But by renting the Dom ourselves, we didn't have to worry about whether "management" liked us or not, we could just do whatever we wanted to. And the Velvets were thrilled — in the Dom, the "house band" finally had a house. They could even walk to work.⁴²

Neither Stern's and Cassen's nor Warhol's productions was conceived as a permanent club. But the next occupant of the upstairs ballroom was: the Electric Circus. Jerry Brandt and Stanton Freeman opened the club in 1967. (Brandt later opened the Ritz in 1980 in Webster Hall, 125 East Eleventh Street.) The club, designed by the high-style design firm of Chermayeff & Geismar (later redesigned by a young architect named Charles Gwathmey), featured a light show environment and such performers as Sly and the Family Stone, the Grateful Dead, Velvet Underground, and The Doors, as well as more offbeat performers such as the avant-garde composers Terry Riley and Morton Subotnick. In March 1970, a bomb exploded on the Electric Circus dance floor, injuring fifteen people.⁴³ Many believe the bomb to have been the work of a member of the Black Panthers. It is said that the Electric Circus, which catered to an almost exclusively white clientele, and a middle- to upper-class one that came in from other neighborhoods (the hippies of the East Village could not afford the admission charge at the club), became a lightning rod for neighborhood discontent . In any event, the club was never quite the

⁴² Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol Sixties*, New York: Harcourt, 1980, pp. 196-197.

⁴³ Michael Knight, "15 at the Electric Circus Injured in Bomb Explosion," *The New York Times*, March 23, 1970, p. 1.

same. The Electric Circus closed in August 1971.⁴⁴ It seemed to represent a moment that had passed. In fact, it was in many ways the prototype of the discotheques that would flourish in the 1970s, such as Studio 54, which opened in 1977 and for which Jerry Brandt served as a consultant. As for Stanley Tolkin's downstairs bar at the Dom, it staggered on for another three years before it closed. The building later served as a center for recovering drug addicts, and in 2000 was extensively remodeled and expanded, and is now a residential building with chain retail on the first floor.

At **105 Second Avenue**, between Sixth and Seventh Streets, stood a theater built in 1925-26. Its vast auditorium (originally more than 2,800 seats) is gone, replaced by an apartment building entered from 6th Street. But much of the original façade, on Second Avenue, remains. The Commodore Theatre was originally a Yiddish theater; it opened in the same year, and was designed by the same architect as the Yiddish Art Theatre at 189 Second Avenue. Architect Harrison Wiseman used similar Moorish details on the exteriors of both theaters. However, even though the Commodore was the larger of the two theaters, the Yiddish Art Theatre has a much more elaborate façade. Within one year of its opening, the Commodore became the Loew's Commodore, a movie theater. (In his *Letter to Elia*, a documentary about the director Elia Kazan, made for public television in 2010, Martin Scorsese recounts how as a twelve-year-old he went to the Loew's Commodore to see Kazan's *On the Waterfront*.) In 1963 the Loew's Commodore became a legitimate theatrical venue called the Village Theatre. In 1968 the Village Theatre became the legendary Fillmore East — but many people are unaware that as many famous rock and roll, jazz, and other performers appeared at the Village Theatre as at the Fillmore East.

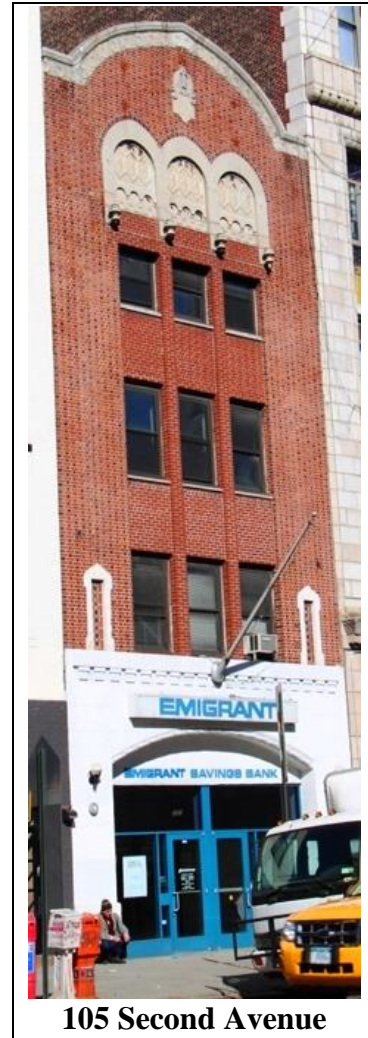
In 1963, Lenny Bruce performed at the Village. In 1965, 19-year-old Scottish singer-songwriter Donovan made his American debut there. In 1966, jazz giants John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman shared a bill at the Village. In 1966 and 1967, Timothy Leary, the

⁴⁴ Martin Gansberg, "Electric Circus Turns Off Lights for the Last Time," *The New York Times*, August 8, 1971, p. 58.

proselytizer for psychedelic drugs, gave lectures there, accompanied by light shows designed by Rudi Stern (see above). The Doors played the Village in 1967, and that same year saw a “Bread for Heads” concert — featuring the Mothers of Invention and two New York City bands, the Fugs and the Left Banke (whose “Walk Away Renee” had recently reached number five on the pop chart) — intended to raise money to pay the legal fees of those arrested for marijuana possession. In 1967, a year *before* the theater became the Fillmore, the Who appeared on a bill with Richie Havens and Blues Project, the Yardbirds on a bill with Vanilla Fudge, and Cream on a bill with Moby Grape; there were also concerts by Procol Harum and by the Grateful Dead.

The Fillmore East was opened on March 8, 1968, and closed just over three years later, on June 27, 1971.⁴⁵ The Fillmore was created by San Francisco-based rock impresario Bill Graham, who had come to the Bronx as

a Jewish teen fleeing his native Germany at the time of the Holocaust. (Graham’s mother died at Auschwitz.) The Fillmore East — its counterpart Fillmore West operated in San Francisco also from 1968 to 1971 — was, in contrast to the earlier Village Theatre, a highly professionally run operation, with assigned seats, a strict no-smoking policy, and security. It was far and away the city’s premier venue for rock concerts until Graham, noting that the nature of the business was changing, and that for many of the bands he had presented nothing less than an arena would now do, chose to close the concert hall.⁴⁶ The closings within one month of each other in the summer of 1971 of the Fillmore East and the Electric Circus marked the end of an era in the East Village.



⁴⁵ For a comprehensive chronological listing of shows at the Fillmore East, see: <http://www.fillmore-east.com/showlist.html>.

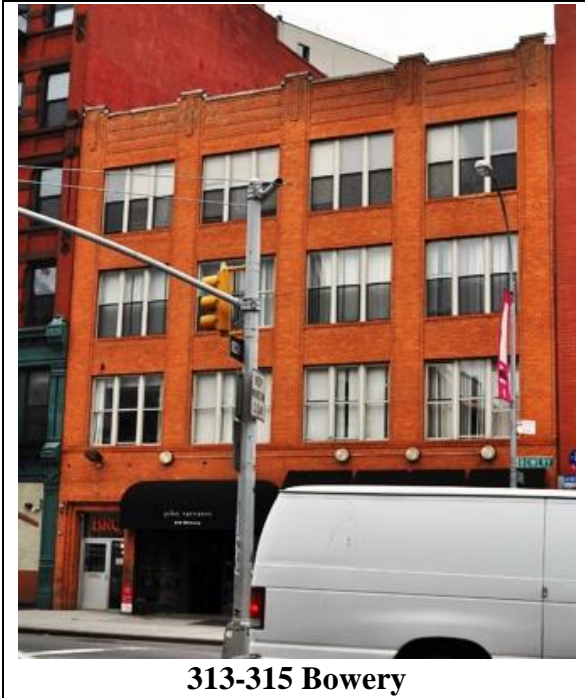
⁴⁶ Mike Jahn, “Last Rites Are Merry Ones at the Fillmore East,” *The New York Times*, June 29, 1971, p. 28.

The beginning of a new era was marked by the 1980 opening, in the Fillmore's old space, of a gay discothèque called The Saint. The impresario this time was Bruce Mailman, who by 1980 already had quite a résumé: He had established the Astor Place Theatre at 434 Lafayette Street in 1968, and the Truck and Warehouse Theatre at 79 East Fourth Street (now New York Theatre Workshop on the Fourth Arts Block) in 1970.⁴⁷ In 1979, Mailman opened the New St. Mark's Baths at 6 St. Mark's Place. (The Baths were closed by the New York City Health Department in 1985.) The Saint was the most famous gay discothèque in New York, and one of the most carefully and elaborately designed discothèques, gay or straight, ever, with a vast "planetarium dome" and spectacular lighting effects. The Saint closed in 1988.

CBGB was a fixture at **313-315 Bowery** from 1973 to 2006. The name stands for "Country, Blue Grass, and Blues," although the club became internationally famous for an altogether different form of music: punk rock. In 1969, Hilly Kristal opened a club at 313 Bowery called Hilly's on the Bowery. A New York City native, Kristal had been the manager of the legendary jazz club the Village Vanguard at 178 Seventh Avenue South in the West Village. He also co-founded the Central Park Music Festival that took place every year from 1966 to 1976 and that brought such performers as the Who and Led Zeppelin to the park. In 1973, he changed the name of Hilly's on the Bowery to CBGB-OMFUG ("Other Music for Uplifting Gourmandizers").⁴⁸ Almost immediately, the club began to change the face of rock music. In 1974 the Ramones, Television, and Blondie made their CBGB debuts. The Talking Heads and Patti Smith followed in 1975. Other punk rock bands associated with CBGB include the Dead Boys, the Dictators, the Fleshtones, and Richard Hell and the Voidoids. In 1978, the Police made their American debut there. In the 1980s CBGB was known for presenting hardcore bands such as Bad Brains, the Beastie Boys, and the Dead Kennedys.

⁴⁷ "Bruce Mailman, 55, Owner of Businesses in the East Village," *The New York Times*, June 12, 1994, p. 50.

⁴⁸ Ben Sisario, "Hilly Kristal, Catalyst for Punk at CBGB, Dies at 75," *The New York Times*, August 30, 2007, p. C13.



313-315 Bowery

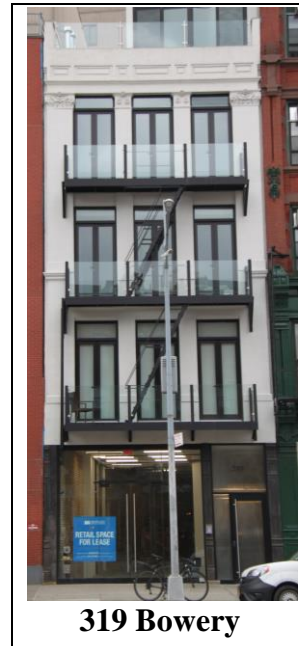
The nondescript four-story brick building, between First and Second Streets, backs onto Extra Place and was for many years one among many Bowery flophouses. Called the Palace, there is a possibly apocryphal but plausible story that when the swank Helmsley Palace Hotel on Madison Avenue opened in 1981, the Bowery Palace got misdirected phone calls asking for reservations. The Palace provided lodging for up to 500 indigent men. CBGB operated out of the 315 Bowery half of the structure, while in

the 313 half Kristal operated, at various times, a record store, an art gallery, a second performance space, and a store called CBGB Fashions. In 2006, as the result of a rent dispute with his landlord, the Bowery Residents' Committee, a nonprofit homeless-services provider that had taken over the Palace and operated it as a homeless shelter, Kristal closed CBGB.⁴⁹ The last performance was on October 15, 2006, and featured Patti Smith. In 2008, the 315 Bowery half, where CBGB was, became a John Varvatos boutique, purveyor of high-end men's fashion. The 313 half became Morrison Hotel, a gallery specializing in music photography.

⁴⁹ Ben Sisario, "A Fabled Run and One Last Night of Rock: An East Village Legend Closes After a Prolonged Demise," *The New York Times*, October 16, 2006, p. B1; Jon Pareles, "Fans of a Groundbreaking Club Mourn and Then Move on," *The New York Times*, October 17, 2006, p. E1; Sewell Chan, "Mayor Bids Goodbye to CBGB," *The New York Times*, October 17, 2006, p. E2.

Locations of the Lively Arts

A musical venue of an altogether different kind was for 45 years located just two doors north of CBGB on the Bowery. Anthony (Tony) and Serafina (Sally) Amato formed the Amato Opera in 1948. Its last production was in 2009. Tony was an operatic tenor who was teaching at the American Theatre Wing when he and his wife Sally determined that what the students needed was a place where they could perform in full-length, fully staged productions. The Amatos' first venue, in 1948, was the basement of the Church of Our Lady of Pompeii, where their inaugural production, Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, was sung in Italian for a largely Italian-speaking audience. In 1951 the theater moved into its



first permanent home, at 159-161 Bleecker Street, and began using a warehouse on the Bowery to store sets and costumes. (The Bleecker Street building later housed the Circle in the Square Theatre before being radically altered and partially demolished.) Tony and Sally later bought the warehouse at **319 Bowery** and in 1964, converted it into a 107-seat opera house (the "world's smallest," the couple liked to boast).⁵⁰

The Amato served a serious purpose in the musical world of New York. Not only did it present first-rate operatic performances at affordable prices, it provided a place where highly trained singers could hone their craft and gain valuable professional experience. "So many music schools turn out these singers full of great musical theory but with no practical repertory experience," Tony told the *Guardian* (U.K.) in 1975. "Even the Met and the New York City Opera send us singers to give them experience."⁵¹ And the Amato sent numerous singers on to the Met and the New York City Opera. Amato performers included mezzo-soprano Mignon Dunn, who sang for the Met for 35 years; Met tenor Jon Frederic West, a noted interpreter of lead roles in Wagner's *Ring* cycle; tenor George

⁵⁰ Theodore Strongin, "To Amato Opera, House Is a Home," *The New York Times*, September 12, 1964, p. 14.

⁵¹ Peter Rosenwald, "Amato Force," *Guardian*, December 29, 1975, p. 8.

Shirley, whose half-century career has seen him perform with the Met and every other major opera company in the world, and New York City Opera baritone Chester Ludgin.

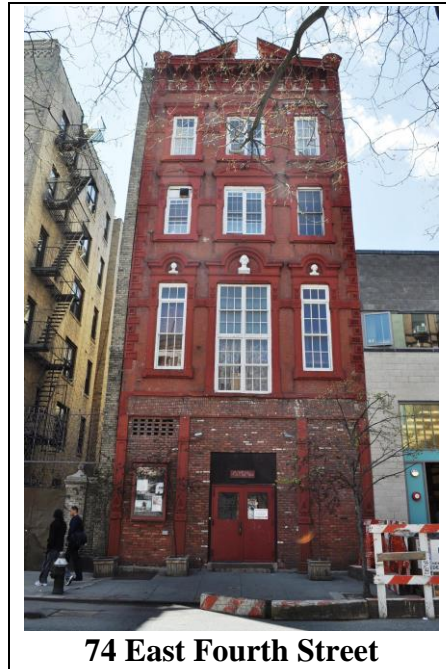
The charming building, twenty-two feet wide, was designed by Julius Boekell and Son and built in 1899. Boekell designed some of the most characterful buildings in the East Village, including the First German Baptist Church (now Congregation Tifereth Israel) at 334 East Fourteenth Street, built in 1869-70, and the five-story tenement at 615 East Sixth Street, built in 1881. The four-story building has a simple but powerful façade, with the top two floors having three window bays sandwiched by pilasters, the outer two of the four with florid capitals. Separating the third and fourth stories are molded panels. Similar panels appear above the fourth-floor cornice. On the second floor the three windows are collectively set within a large version of such a panel. The ground floor was significantly altered when the building served, as it did through the first half of the twentieth century, as the Holy Name Mission, a Roman Catholic mission ministering to the "lost souls" of the Bowery. In 2015 the building was converted to residences and the façade was altered, removing much of the historic detail. This includes the lettering spelling out "Amato Opera," which dated to the 1964 conversion from warehouse to opera house.

The Amato's last performance was of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* on May 31, 2009.⁵² Sally had died in 2000, and, at 88 years old, Anthony Amato felt it was time to call an end to his remarkable 61-year venture. Upon hearing the news of Amato's closing, a longtime audience member, George Sulkhan, told the *New York Times*, "Every time I come here, it's special. To me this is the grandest of the grand. It's the smallest place, but it's the biggest place."⁵³

⁵² Steve Smith, "Grand Exit for a Shoestring Opera," *The New York Times*, June 2, 2009, p. C1.

⁵³ Daniel J. Wakin, "Shock Greets Move to Close Amato Opera in May," *The New York Times*, January 13, 2009, p. C3.

74 East Fourth Street, designated a New York City landmark in 2009, was built in 1873 for the Aschenbrödel Verein (“Cinderella Society”), a musicians’ club formed in *Kleindeutschland* in 1860. 74 East Fourth Street was the society’s first purpose-built home, designed by August Blankenstein, a tenement architect who had once been the partner of Henry Herter (later of Schneider & Herter). The tremendous influx of Germans in New York through the second half of the nineteenth century transformed the city’s musical culture. Never before had there been so many skilled musicians in the city, and German



music, usually performed by German musicians, came to dominate the repertory in New York. Most of the city’s German musicians resided in *Kleindeutschland*, and many were members of, or otherwise attended events at, the Aschenbrödel Verein. A prominent member of the society was Theodore Thomas (1835-1905), the German-born violinist and conductor who did more than any other individual to build an audience for classical music in America and to improve the standard of performance. Thomas was for more than a decade the conductor of the New York Philharmonic (during which time the orchestra performed at Steinway Hall on the north side of Fourteenth Street, between Union Square East and Irving Place). He also was the founding conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and the founder and director of the Theodore Thomas Orchestra, based in New York and for many years the most important touring orchestra in the country.⁵⁴ Many Philharmonic players were members — and, it is said, every member of the Theodore Thomas Orchestra was a member — of the Aschenbrödel Verein. The society, grown to some 700 members, moved to 144 East Eighty-Sixth Street in 1892. In that year, No. 74 became home to another important German musical club, the

⁵⁴ See Ezra Schabas, *Theodore Thomas: America’s Conductor and Builder of Orchestras*, Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1989.

Gesangverein Schillerbund, which had been located since 1872 in the Turn Hall, on this block at Nos. 66-68 (see below). (*Gesangverein* means “singing society.”)

The present façade, more or less, was added to the building in 1892 by the tenement architects Kurtzer & Rohl. Much of that façade survives, especially from the second through the fourth (top) stories. The façade is of rusty-red brick with rust-colored cast-iron accents in the form of quoins and elaborate, pedimented window enframements. In the rounded pediments of the three second-floor windows are white busts. These are undocumented by the Landmarks Preservation Commission and no information on the busts appears in known records. A close look, however, reveals that the central bust is almost certainly of Mozart. The flanking busts appear, oddly, to be the same as each other, and both appear to be Schubert — who would of course be honored by a German singing society. In 1896 the Gesangverein Schillerbund, like the Aschenbrödel Verein before it, decamped uptown for Yorkville.⁵⁵ For the next seventy-one years the building went through a variety of uses until, in 1967, it became Ellen Stewart’s La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, part of the East Fourth Street Cultural District.

Ellen Stewart came to New York in 1950 and in 1961 opened Café La MaMa at 321 East Ninth Street (between First and Second Avenues). She had worked as a clothing designer and intended Café La MaMa to be a combination of boutique and theater. There in 1962 the theater company staged the American premiere of Harold Pinter's first play, *The Room* (1957). The theater company was forced to move several times. In 1964, it changed its name to La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, or La MaMa E.T.C. The kind of small-scale, off-off-Broadway, café-based theater that La MaMa represented was almost destroyed in the mid-1960s by legal action by Actors' Equity, which finally relented in recognition of the necessity to actors’ training of the small workshop theaters that could exist only if exempted from strict union rules. In 1967, the company received the grants to purchase and renovate 74 East Fourth Street. The renovation was completed and the first productions staged in 1969. There were ninety-nine-seat theaters on the first

⁵⁵ See New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission Designation Report, “Aschenbroedel Verein,” 2009.

and second floors, rehearsal space on the third, and Ellen Stewart's apartment on the fourth. A National Endowment for the Arts grant in 1974 allowed for expansion to an annex in the former Turn Hall (Nos. 66-68), where La Mama built a 295-seat theater. La Mama has staged more than three thousand productions in New York and won more than sixty Obie Awards. Ellen Stewart received a MacArthur Fellowship Award in 1985. La MaMa has been home to such playwrights as Sam Shepard, Lanford Wilson, Harvey Fierstein, and Terrence McNally; directors including Tom O'Horgan, Joseph Chaikin, Robert Wilson, and Richard Foreman; and such actors as Al Pacino, Robert De Niro, Richard Dreyfuss, Bill Irwin, and Danny DeVito.⁵⁶ Ellen Stewart died in January 2011 at the age of ninety-one.⁵⁷ La MaMa, which is still going strong and anchors the Fourth Arts Block, best epitomizes the off-off-Broadway theaters that from the 1960s to today have been a crucial — indeed a defining — part of the theatrical culture of New York City.

The East Fourth Street Cultural District is one block long between Bowery and Second Avenue and its story is one of community activism, preservation, and anti-displacement efforts for long time cultural organizations. The buildings that make up the district were slated for demolition in the 1950s by City Planning under Robert Moses. At the time, these buildings housed manufacturing and small businesses and were purchased by the city and federal government through eminent domain. The residents on the block formed the Cooper Square Committee and thwarted the razing of the buildings, both residential and commercial. Following La MaMa's occupation of 74 East Fourth Street in the 1960's, other small art groups started to occupy the buildings on this stretch of East Fourth Street through cheap leases and made improvements to the structures. Under the Giuliani administration, New York City decided to sell the properties. With guidance from the Cooper Square Committee, the non-profit East Fourth Street arts groups began organizing collectively in 2001, naming themselves Fourth Arts Block or FAB. With the advocacy from various community leaders, the City finally agreed to transfer the properties to the arts groups for one dollar each with the restriction that the buildings be used in perpetuity for non-profit cultural programs.

⁵⁶ See <http://lamama.org/about/mission-and-history>.

⁵⁷ Mel Gussow and Bruce Weber, "Ellen Stewart Dies at 91; Put Off Off Broadway on Map," *The New York Times*, p. B9.

Today the block is one of the most concentrated areas of arts activities in the entire city. As of 2018, there are fourteen nonprofit arts and cultural organizations on the block, plus two galleries that are MHA small business tenants. Eleven buildings plus two additional lots are included in the district. They are used to house twelve theaters, nine rehearsal studios, a set and costume building shop, an outdoor stage, and additional office space.

FAB initially worked to support the arts groups on East Fourth Street, bringing visibility and resources, but over time, its role expanded and evolved. Its current mission is to strengthen the cultural vitality of the Lower East Side, which is reflected in its broader membership, multiple community partnerships, anti-displacement work, and deep engagement with community issues.



66-68 East Fourth Street

Some of the buildings that form the East Fourth Street Cultural District, like the Aschenbrödel Verein, boast an arts-related history as well. **66-68 East Fourth Street** was Turn Hall of the New-York Turn-Verein, established in 1871. A *Turnverein* or *Turn-Verein* is German for what we call a gymnasium, or a hall or room for the practice of gymnastics or other athletic activities. (What the Germans call a *Gymnasium* is what we call a school.) *Turn* refers to gymnastics, or other types of exercise and sport, *Verein* to association or club. In 1871, the New York Turn-Verein took over two 1832 row houses, combined them, and unified them behind a new central section of richly enframed windows and a new, bracketed, dentilated, and pedimented cornice. Mayor A. Oakey Hall was

present at the cornerstone-laying on July 17, 1871, indicating that the New-York Turn-Verein was an important organization in the city. German immigrants formed many clubs and societies reflecting the interests the newcomers brought with them from their homelands. These included music (Aschenbrödel Verein) and singing (Arion Society),

shooting (Deutsche-Amerikanische Schützen Gesellschaft), and athletics (New-York Turn-Verein). But the large halls these societies erected for themselves also served a variety of other functions. The Turn Hall contained a theater, for example, that was rented out for various productions. In the summer of 1882, Abraham Goldfaden's *Koldunya* (or *Koldunia*), the first Yiddish-language stage production in America, premiered at the Turn Hall. Goldfaden had only staged the first Yiddish-language theatrical production anywhere in the world but six years earlier, in Jassy, Romania. (Jewish tradition had been hostile to the theater.) The Turn Hall production of *Koldunya* (*The Sorceress*) featured a then little-known Ukrainian-born singer and actor named Boris Thomashefsky (1868-1939), who would go on to become one of the greatest stars of the Yiddish theater. Because the play depicted working-class Jews, poked fun at Jewish customs, and was in Yiddish, some prominent "uptown Jews," concerned that the play would cast all Jews in a bad light, tried to suppress the production. (The Yiddish theater flourished in America rather than in Eastern Europe because of tsarist edicts against plays in Yiddish.)⁵⁸ It has been said that if the production of *Koldunya* had been halted, the Yiddish theater may not have gained the foothold in New York that it did. Thus, the Turn Hall must be reckoned the equal, at least, of the designated landmark Yiddish Art Theatre at 189 Second Avenue as an important reminder of the Yiddish theater in the East Village.

From at least 1899 to 1954 the Turn building housed the Manhattan Lyceum, a meeting hall that was once notable (and notorious) for its anarchist conclaves featuring such speakers as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman.⁵⁹ From about 1937 the ballroom was known as Manhattan Plaza. It was then that the present one-story-high, stylized classical/Moderne entrance, inscribed with the words "MANHATTAN PLAZA," was added to the building. In 1954 the building became a television studio. In 1974, La MaMa opened its annex here. Also in that year, Millennium Film Workshop (see above)

⁵⁸ Sarah C. Schack, "1,001 Nights at the Yiddish Theater: *From Goldfaden to Thomashefsky*," *Commentary*, November 1951.

⁵⁹ See, e.g., "Anarchists Raided: Wild Riot When New York Police Storm Meeting," *Washington Post*, October 31, 1906, p. 1: "A meeting of anarchists was raided and broken up by a large force of police about 10 o'clock to-night at the Manhattan Lyceum, 66 East Fourth street. The wildest kind of riot followed when the police stormed the hall. Women screamed 'Down with the police,' and 'Kill the oppressors.'"

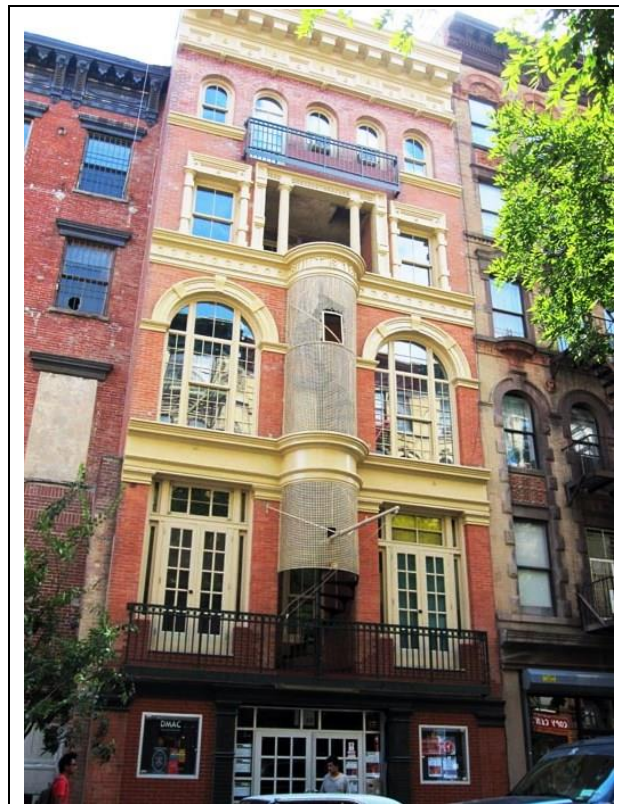
established its home in the building. Although Millennium later left the block, La MaMa is still going strong as the anchoring institution of the Fourth Arts Block.

Continuing west, the unusual building at **62 East Fourth Street** began life in 1889 as a hotel, but soon became a meeting hall known as Astoria Hall. The first mention of Astoria Hall in the *New York Times* was on March 11, 1906:

A Purim entertainment will be given this afternoon in Astoria Hall, East Fourth Street, near Second Avenue, to the 150 children of the Religious School conducted by the Jewish Endeavor Society.⁶⁰

In the summer of 1969, Andy Warhol rented the building's second floor for use as a movie theater showing gay pornographic films. Known as "Andy Warhol's Theater: Boys to Adore Galore," the theater was the idea of Paul Morrissey and was staffed by Gerard Malanga (manager), Joe Dallesandro (projectionist), and Jim Carroll (ticket taker).⁶¹

Today, the building is owned and managed by FAB and now houses the Rod Rodgers Dance Company, founded in 1963 with a goal of showcasing black dancers



62 East Fourth Street, restored

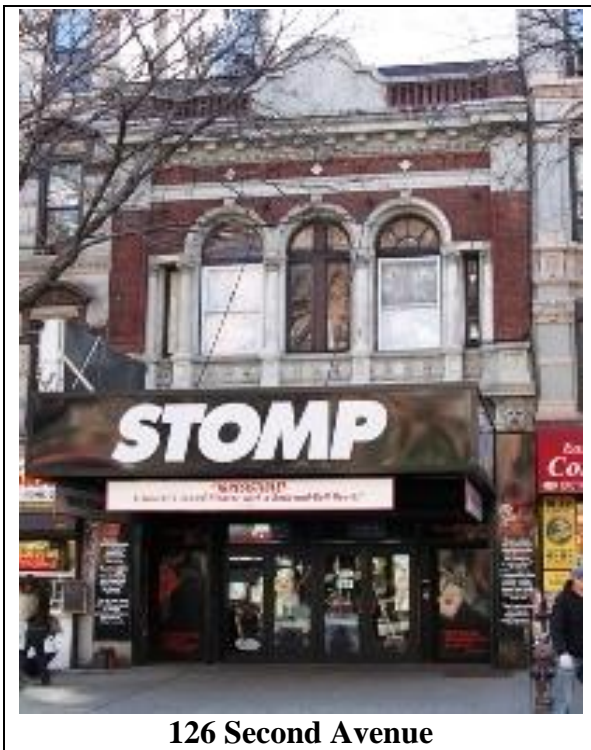
performing advanced modern dance rather than the traditionally African-American dance forms for which the dancers were often typecast. Architecturally, the building is notable

⁶⁰ "The Jews of New York Are Celebrating Purim," *The New York Times*, March 11, 1906, p. 20.

⁶¹ See <http://www.warholstars.org/chron/1969.html>.

for its high floors, big windows, elaborate window enframements, and strong cornice. But what stands out above all is the highly unusual iron-framed cylindrical fire-stair enclosure that is placed right down the middle of one and a half stories of the four-story façade. At the top of the turret-like cylinder is an unexpected, deep, columned loggia. For many years this façade was in wretched condition, but in 2011, Fourth Arts Block restored it beautifully and it looks probably as good as it ever has.

One final theater building deserves mention. The Orpheum Theatre at **126 Second Avenue**, between Seventh Street and St. Mark's Place, has a rich if murky history. Records pertaining to 126 Second Avenue are scarce, and we have found nothing that says definitively when the building was erected or when it acquired its present distinctive red-brick Georgian Palladian façade featuring a triple-arched window at the second floor and, at the top, a scrolled pediment. A large modern marquee extends from the building front at the top of the first-floor level. It is possible that the earliest building on this site, constructed sometime between 1837 and 1839, survives in the present altered form.



By 1890, according to newspaper accounts, the building contained residences. An 1892 alteration permit lists the building with a first-floor restaurant with apartments above. The building also provided meeting space for such organizations as the New-York Chess Club, the Liberty Cycle Club, and the Austro-Hungarian Republican League. The first record to indicate the building's use as a motion picture theater is an alteration permit from 1913. Neither that permit nor any other mentions façade alterations, but we may presume that the

present façade dates from this time or slightly later. This remained a motion picture

theater (called the Orpheum by 1929) until about 1958, when it became an important off-Broadway theatrical venue. In 1960, Eileen Brennan won the Obie Award for Best Actress in the production of Rick Besoyan's *Little Mary Sunshine* at the Orpheum. Other Orpheum Obies have gone to Anne Bancroft and Eli Wallach in 1963 for Murray Schisgal's *The Typists* and *The Tiger*, Marian Seldes in 1964 for J.P. Donleavy's *The Ginger Man*, Robert Livingston, Gary William Friedman, and Will Holt for Best Musical for *The Me Nobody Knows* in 1970, and Eric Bogosian for his *Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll* in 1990. In 1968 the Orpheum production of *Your Own Thing* by Danny Apolinar, Hal Hester, and Donald Driver won the Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Musical. Kevin Wade's *Key Exchange* ran for 352 performances in 1981-82, and Alan Menken and Howard Ashman's *Little Shop of Horrors* ran for 2,209 performances between 1982 and 1987 and won the 1983 Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Musical. *Sandra Bernhard: Without You I'm Nothing* ran for 223 performances in 1988, and David Mamet's *Oleanna* ran for 513 performances between 1992 and 1994. On February 27, 1994, *Stomp* opened, and is, as of 2018, still running; it received a 1994 Special Citation Obie Award. Few off-Broadway theaters can match this record over the last sixty-plus years.

VIII. Snyder Public Schools

In the East Village stands an amazing enclave of public schools designed by the singular architect Charles B. J. Snyder, whose thirty-one-year career with the Board of Education was remarkable in terms of both quantity and quality. Architect Robert A. M. Stern has described Snyder's corpus of "everyday masterpieces" as situated "among the great glories of our city," created by "a talented, historically overlooked architect."¹

Snyder was relentless, though never successful, in his effort to provide enough "sittings" for the number of children seeking public education every September. In his 1896 Annual Report, he asserted that "the number of contracts to be let for new buildings during the year 1897 ... will be not only the largest in the history of this city, but of the world." His 1904 Annual Report stated that the "Board of Education is conducting the most extensive building operation of any firm or corporation in the country." His tenure as Superintendent of School Buildings (1891-1923) coincided with the Progressive Movement in society, the City Beautiful movement in architecture, and three decades of the city's highest immigration rates, all boosting his effort to enlarge the city system with 408 schools and additions.

He also transformed New York's schools from barracks to palaces, as social reformer Jacob Riis put it. From largely "defective or unsanitary" buildings² (according to the *New York Times* in 1895) which, startlingly, included no high schools, he made New York's public schools into a model urban system, looked to by cities from across the country and even abroad. In 1899, prominent Boston architect Edmund Wheelwright wrote about the "radical and interesting innovations in schoolhouse architecture" occurring in New York City.³ One hundred years later *New York Times* architectural historian Christopher Gray wrote that Snyder "was hired to reform school design and instead created a revolution,

¹ Robert A.M. Stern, "Schools Too Grand to be Turned into Trash," *The New York Times*, January 22, 2000.

² "Needs of the Schools: Many Evils Reported," *The New York Times*, January 3, 1895.

³ "The American Schoolhouse XIV," *The Brickbuilder*, March 1899, p. 45.

setting a standard for municipal architecture that has proved hard to match.”⁴

Snyder changed the look of the public school in a dramatic way, initiating a new floor plan called the “H-plan,” as well as the use of Renaissance Revival and Collegiate Gothic styles for primary and secondary schools. He also pioneered construction innovations for health and safety, using steel-frame construction, large windows, and mechanical ventilation systems. The first to fireproof schools, he designed interlocking staircases for fast egress. Finally, by responding to the desires of educational reformers, he extended the definition of a school beyond simply a building with classrooms. He added gymnasiums, rooftop playgrounds, and swimming pools; auditoriums with projection booths and, in high schools, full pipe organs; manual training rooms for subjects such as carpentry and cooking; science labs; art and music rooms; libraries; nurses' offices; and special classrooms for tubercular or crippled children. He designed New York's first twenty-five high schools, many of them well known; all but one still operate as schools.

Of the ten schools and one addition that Snyder built in the East Village, all but the addition and one building still stand. That means ninety percent of his schools have survived in the neighborhood, in striking contrast to fifty-five percent of his buildings for Manhattan as a whole. Moreover, of the nine, three date back to the nineteenth century, representing more than a quarter of the eleven total extant nineteenth-century Snyder schools in Manhattan. Moreover, six of the nine still function as public schools. Of the other three, one is now the P.S. 122 arts complex, one is a shelter, and the third had a successful second life as CHARAS/El Bohio Community Center, but has stood unused since being sold to a developer in 1999.

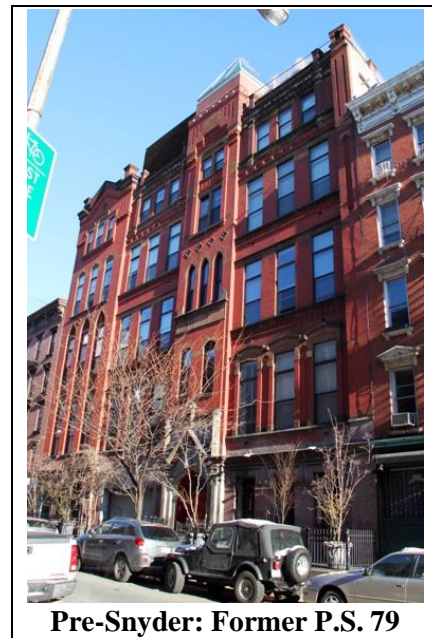
⁴ Christopher Gray, “Charles B.J. Snyder; Architect Who Taught a Lesson in School Design,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 1999.



Pre-Snyder: Former P.S. 36

The five nineteenth-century school buildings in the East Village emphasize Snyder’s new vision. The two pre-Snyder schools are dark red Victorian brick masonry buildings with narrow windows – **P.S. 36** on East Ninth Street (1876) and **P.S. 79** on East First Street (1886), which was converted to co-op apartments in 1994. The three Snyder schools, in contrast, employ steel-framed construction with large windows. Built in the Beaux-Arts style, they use lighter red or buff brick and prominent terra-cotta trim on symmetrical, mainly five-story buildings. The three schools ranged in size from fifteen to twenty-nine classrooms and at the time cost in the neighborhood of \$100,000.

Snyder’s second-oldest extant building, the five-story Flemish Renaissance Revival **P.S. 25**, now **P.S. 751**, opened in 1894. Located at 113 East Fourth Street, it was built as an addition to the Fifth Street school, which stood where the playground and parking lot are now. In 1905 the *Sun* reported that plans were filed “for the enlargement of the old Fifth Street school, a famous schoolhouse of old New York,” to cost \$70,000. Snyder added two more bays to the west end of the original three-bay structure.



Pre-Snyder: Former P.S. 79



The building has an uplifting appearance because of the light-colored red brick further lightened by prominent terra-cotta window surrounds and stringcourses on every floor. Its stepped gables and hipped roof with dormers refer to New York's Dutch past. The main staircase

has white glazed brick with rounded corners, wrought-iron banisters, and a skylight. The fifth-floor classrooms in the smaller gables also have skylights. There's a 120-seat auditorium on the third floor and double-classroom-sized print and wood shops on the third and fourth floors. Originally, the doorjambs, doorframes, and window sashes were solid oak and all the ceilings were pressed tin; many still are. The original bell system is still used. "These buildings were made to last forever," a twenty-year employee of the school reflected during a tour. The 1995 movie *The Indian in the Cupboard* was filmed there. Today it is the Manhattan School for Career Development which offers students in grades ten to twelve community-based work experience.

A year later **P.S. 122**, built in 1895 at First Avenue and Ninth Street, was completed in the Jacobean Early Gothic style, with Classical elements. Its western end overlooked the First Avenue El train for forty-seven years until the line was dismantled in 1942. The building is

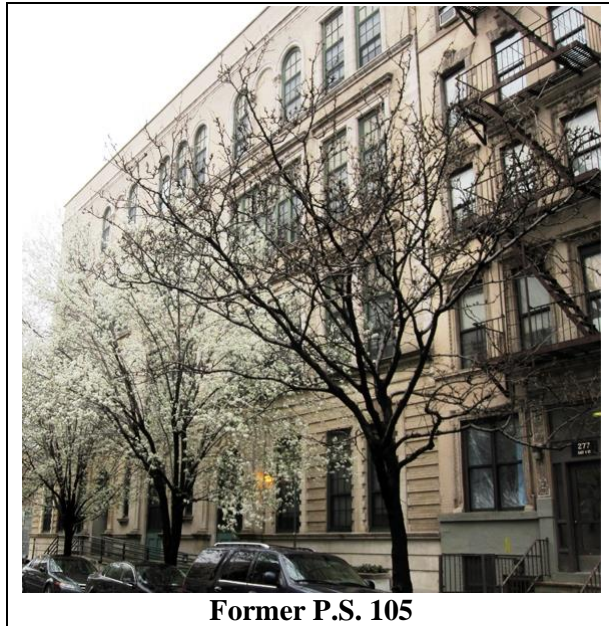


P.S. 122, facing First Avenue

unusual for Snyder because the main arched entranceway, instead of being in the middle of the horizontal axis, is at the western end of the longitudinal axis, while the

symmetrical four-story brick horizontal axis consisting of five shallow pavilions stretches along the north side of Ninth Street. Normally he put the entrances in the middle of the horizontal axis. White terra-cotta decoration includes stringcourses connecting the bottom edges of the windows, the second-story one elaborated by two more at the top of the first floor; window surrounds and heavy lintels over, originally, seven Gothic narrow-paned transoms; and, originally, a balustrade with six cones, one to emphasize the corner of each pavilion. When P.S. 122 stopped functioning as a school in 1976, local artists claimed the building, which the Department of Cultural Affairs later bought from the Board of Education. It is leased for \$1 a year to the P.S. 122 Community Center for five tenants: an AIDS drop-in center, a day-care center, two theater companies, and artists' studios. Performance Space 122, founded in 1980, stages three to four dozen productions a year. The movie *Fame* was filmed there in 1979.

The final nineteenth-century school in the East Village is the four-story Italianate **P.S. 105**, built in 1897 on Fourth Street between Avenues B and C and converted to a shelter in 1993. The only Snyder school in the East Village that is tan instead of red brick, the first floor rustication over the raised basement is made by means of indented lines in the brickwork and topped by an egg-and-dart cornice. The arches of the original three



entrance doors are repeated in the arched windows along the fourth floor. The windows are all tripartite (double hung with a transom on top); those on the second and third floors have heavily ornamented lintels.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw in the East Village the construction of what the *New York Times* deemed “the largest public school in all the United States, and

probably in the world.”⁵ Opening its doors in 1903, **P.S. 188** takes up an entire block at the far eastern end of Houston Street. The street names, two of which no longer exist, are incised in the corners – Manhattan Street, Lewis Street, East Houston Street, and Third Street. The article gives this further information:

The structure will be five stories in height, simple in design, but with sufficient architectural touches to make it an ornament to the neighborhood...

Two stories of the courtyard are to be roofed over, to afford a double playground, which will be heated in stormy and inclement weather... [They] are to be devoted to the smaller children in the primary and kindergarten departments, where they will not be required to climb more than one stairway.

In addition, the roof space of the building is divided into two large roof playgrounds. There are to be numerous stairways and exits on every side of the immense building, by means of which the school may be dismissed and the army of 5000 children reach the street within three or four minutes.

The classrooms for ordinary instruction will number 87, and in addition there will be four rooms for manual training, four kitchens for the teaching of cooking, large rooms for libraries, and a commodious gymnasium. The accommodations for the Principal and teachers will be ample. It is also intended to have public bathrooms in the basement of the structure.



P.S. 188, seen from its east side

The building is U-shaped, opening to the east for all floors above the first. The east entrance was originally an open seven-arch loggia, three steps leading up to a door in each arch except the middle one

⁵ “New York’s Latest School,” *The New York Times*, September 28, 1902.

which displays the school plaque. The loggia has a terrazzo floor with mosaic inlay. Because of homeless people sleeping there during the Depression, the loggia was enclosed. The first-floor huge open “inside yard” had skylights along the center with a glazed glass ceiling on each side. The wrought-iron staircases on the east side have posts with an egg and dart pattern and hand-laid mosaics on each landing; because the building is not square the landings are not clean rectangles. The second-floor auditorium has decorative three-coat plaster along the back of the stage. Engraved in the wood of the proscenium is “Knowledge is Power.” The proscenium of the fourth-floor auditorium reads, “Patient to perceive and wise to resolve.” There is also a music room with an oak stage. The fifth-floor ceilings are ten feet instead of fourteen, as on the other floors. When the school opened, the flagpole on the roof was the tallest structure in the East Village. On the roof also are fresh-air dampers with louvers that fed the original plenum ventilation system. No longer enclosed, the rooftop playground space is not used.

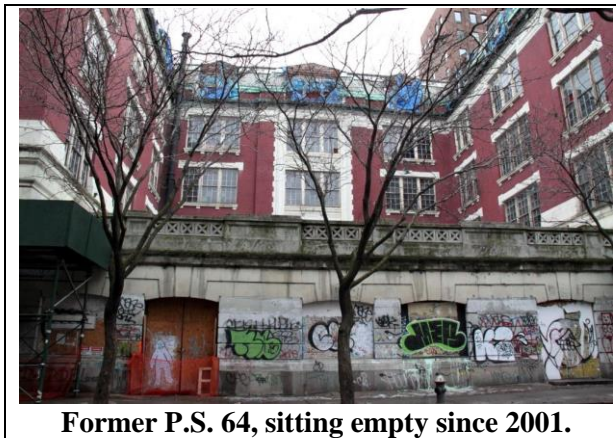
In 1906 three schools and one addition opened in this section of the city that the *New York Times* article about P.S. 188 had described as “more densely populated to the acre than any city or spot in the world,” a district “often and sometimes contemptuously referred to as ‘The Ghetto.’” Snyder, however, built schools in poor neighborhoods that were the equal of, and often better than, those in well-off sections. Two of the 1906 schools were H-plan buildings, a layout Snyder had devised particularly for northern Manhattan where the narrowing of the island reduced the number of open corner sites. Located midblock, the H-plan building has courtyards opening onto the side streets on opposite sides of a block, guaranteeing light and air for each classroom. H-plans were further advantageous because midblock real estate was less expensive, there was less noise from traffic, and the school had two handsome facades instead of just one.

P.S. 63, between Third and Fourth Streets and Avenue A and First Avenue, is a four-story symmetrical red brick building with windows grouped in sets of four, quoins that echo the window surrounds, and a



P.S. 63

classical balustrade at the top. On the central bay of the south façade, columns in ascending orders — Doric on the first floor, Ionic on the second, and Corinthian on the third — symbolically correspond to the increasing cultivation of students as they ascend through the grades. There is a gym on the fifth floor and a music room on the third. The auditorium is in the basement under the south courtyard. Starting in 1903, Snyder designed auditoriums with direct access from the street so they could be used by the community at night without having to open the whole school.



Former P.S. 64, sitting empty since 2001.

P.S. 64, between Ninth and Tenth Streets just east of Tompkins Square, is a five-story symmetrical brick building, French Renaissance Revival in style with opulent terra-cotta ornamentation, resulting from a \$350-per-classroom expenditure greater than that for P.S. 63 (\$5,950 per classroom rather than \$5,600, in 1906 dollars).

The first floor is limestone with lined rustication, the band course whose top becomes the sills of the second-floor windows. The voussoirs of the first-floor windows become brackets for the band course. The courtyard facing south is two bays deep and three bays

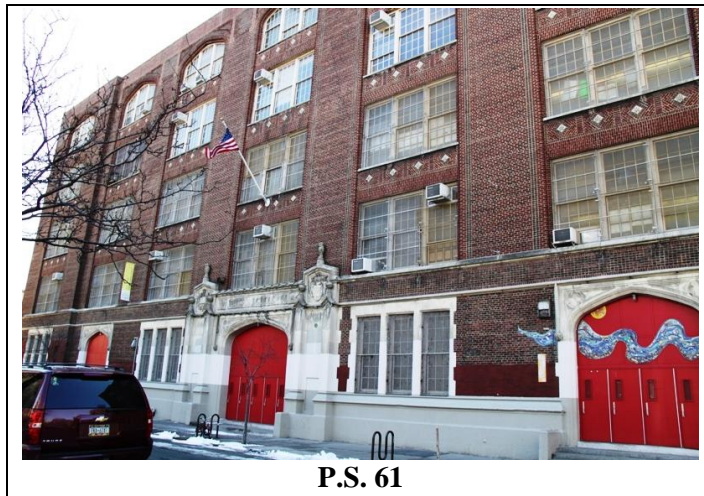
wide, all with windows grouped in sets of three; the central pavilion projects slightly and is elaborately decorated. Each bay is topped by a Greek temple pediment, the central one and the one on each end of the H facing the street larger than those over the three interior bays on each side. The larger ones have a cornucopia of foliage and fruit around an oval shield, suggesting the abundance to be gained from education. The Greek temple-front dormers emerge from a slate-covered mansard roof.

The school was closed in the mid-1970s, then reopened as CHARAS Community Center in 1978. In 1998 the city sold it to a private developer, CHARAS was evicted in 2001, and energetic community efforts got the building landmarked in 2006, to prevent its demolition by the developer. Famous alumni include songwriter Edgar Yipsel “Yip” Harburg, who wrote *The Wizard of Oz* lyrics; Joseph L. Mankiewicz, the great director of such films as *All About Eve* and *The Barefoot Contessa*; and actor Sam Levene, who played Nathan Detroit in *Guys and Dolls* on Broadway.



Like P.S. 25, **P.S. 15**, on Fourth Street almost at Avenue D, was built as an addition to a school building facing Fifth Street, located where the playground is now. Two extensions along Fourth Street were added in the 1950s. The five-story, red brick, Italianate 1906 building had a dentilated cornice and terra-cotta plaques on the fifth floor at the top of each pier separating the four bays.

The final two East Village schools were constructed during the last third of Snyder’s career, when his buildings had evolved to the more modern look that he called Simplified Gothic. In the more Classical, Federal garb of his successors, that basic style continued to be built all over the outer boroughs, but was relatively uncommon in Manhattan, as the opening of the subways allowed people to escape Manhattan’s congestion.



P.S. 61

P.S. 61, on Twelfth Street between Avenues B and C, built in 1913, is a symmetrical, five-story, red-brick building of seven bays with windows grouped in sets of three. The outer two bays project slightly. It has a Medieval-looking entranceway with an owl perched atop each side, diagonal and diamond-shaped brickwork in the spandrels, and Tudor arches over the top-floor windows. Leather doors lead into the auditorium. The dumbwaiter — standard equipment in the schools that had no elevators — still works in this one. Long low benches surround the first-floor playroom for young children to sit on.

“These schools were built with love of the children,” remarked a security guard.



P.S. 60

P.S. 60 (opened in 1925, also on Twelfth Street, between Avenue A and First Avenue) is a late H-plan building credited to William Gompert, even though Snyder’s 1922 Annual Report describes the school: “Plans and specifications in preparation, 72 classrooms, 2889 sittings.” It is one of the few Manhattan schools

built in the rush to make up for three years of no construction during World War I. It has a markedly more utilitarian look.

In 1892, before he had completed a single school, Snyder is quoted in the *New York Tribune* as saying, “We seek to make the school building itself quite as much a factor in education as the textbook.” These buildings teach that education is enlightening and uplifting, that students are worthy, that the whole of the Western cultural and educational tradition is available to them, that ideals and beauty are available to everyone, not just the privileged, and that school is liberating rather than imprisoning: a place one wants to be.

No neighborhood in New York has as dense a concentration of Snyder schools. Those from the nineteenth century were among the ones that led Jacob Riis in his 1902 book, *The Battle with the Slum*, to assert that “Mr. Snyder ... does that which no other architect before his time ever did or tried; he ‘builds them beautiful.’ In him New York has one of those rare men who open windows for the soul of their time. Literally, he found barracks where he is leaving palaces to the people.” Snyder’s schools are a living testament to New York’s innovation and commitment in the field of education.

East Village Snyder schools in chronological order

Status key: S = still a public school; D = demolished; C = converted to other use; L = landmark

	<i>School name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Number of classrooms</i>	<i>Cost at time of construction</i>
1	PS 25, now PS 751	1894	S	113 East Fourth Streets, between First and Second Avenues	31	unknown
2	PS 19	1894	D	Between Thirteenth and Fourteenth Streets, First and Second Avenues	18	unknown
3	PS 122	1895	C	150 First Avenue, at Ninth Street	29	\$105,000
4	PS 105	1897	C	269 East Fourth Street, between Avenues B and C	18	\$90,000
5	PS 188	1903	S	442 East Houston Street, east of Avenue D	87	\$383,000
6	PS 63	1906	S	121 East Third Street, between First Avenue and Avenue A	50	\$295,000
7	PS 15	1906	S	333 East Fourth between Avenues C and D	30	\$151,000
8	PS 71	1906	D	Between Sixth and Seventh Streets, Avenues B and C	6	\$51,672
9	PS 64	1906	C, L	605 East Ninth Street, between Avenues B and C	62	\$379,000
10	PS 61, now 315	1913	S	610 East Twelfth Street, between Avenues B and C	52	\$275,000
11	PS 60, now 450	1925	S	420 East Twelfth Street, between First Avenue and Avenue A	72	unknown

IX. Public Housing

In his 2010 book, “Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York,” historian Samuel Zipp tells the story of a Midwestern journalist taken to the rooftop of the Met Life building on Manhattan’s Madison Square. The reporter was guided to this precipice in the spring of 1942 by a Met Life official who, as he peered over the tenement-strewn blocks of the city’s Lower East Side, wondered aloud to the reporter how anyone could ever choose to live there.

“They could get decent quarters at a reasonable price elsewhere,” the official said. Why the Lower East Side, the official declared, when it was “almost all vacant”?¹

While the attitude of Met Life in the 1940s can be traced directly to its financial interest in a partnership with the city to build modern, middle-class housing — what would later become the significant Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village — the sentiment that the Lower East Side, and what would later be called the East Village, was unlivable, deteriorated, blighted, and mostly vacant, was widespread. Thus this notorious neighborhood was the first target for Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia as he and his advisors began to plan for government-funded housing for the city’s low-income residents during the Depression. If any area of the country could prove the worthiness of government intervention in housing the poor and make New York a “national laboratory for public housing,”² the Lower East Side was it.

To some extent, the Met Life official was correct when he surveyed the area and declared it mostly vacant. Because of the 1929 Multiple Dwellings Act, which went into effect in 1934 and required tenement landlords to add fireproofing and make other costly improvements to their buildings, many landlords elected instead to abandon their

¹ Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 73. Kirkpatrick’s article, “Along the Row: Facts and Comment” was published in the *Chicago Journal of Commerce* on April 24, 1943.

² Thomas Kessner, *Fiorello H. LaGuardia and the Making of Modern New York* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989), 324-5.

properties and evict their tenants, leaving a substantial number of tenements empty. By 1938, six percent of the housing stock on the Lower East Side was removed from the market as a result of the legislation.³ In addition to the loss of housing, the number of residents also declined as quotas set by the Immigration Act of 1924 limited the number of immigrants allowed to legally enter the country. Historically, these new immigrants had replenished the neighborhood population as older families moved out to higher-priced neighborhoods and the suburbs. Without a new supply of immigrant tenants, however, the vacancy rate for apartments hovered around twenty-two percent in the mid-1930s, leaving the Lower East Side so much less crowded than it had been decades before that comparatively, it appeared empty.⁴

What was left of the residential buildings in the neighborhood was shamefully decayed. Ninety percent of the building stock was more than thirty-five years old, and half was without central heating or private toilets; sixteen percent had no hot water. Few believed the housing on the Lower East Side could be rehabilitated.

Public housing was an expensive and controversial alternative to tenements, however, particularly on the Lower East Side. Despite high vacancies and decaying buildings, land prices in the neighborhood were prohibitively high after centuries of speculation. Even with a promised grant of twenty-five million dollars from the New Deal Public Works Administration (PWA) in 1934, New York City could not afford to buy land, demolish old tenements, and construct new buildings that would be affordable to the low-income tenants the city wished to house. Enter Vincent Astor.

Public Housing is Born

A businessman and member of one of the city's oldest and wealthiest families, Vincent Astor offered to make a deal with the city. For a down payment of sixty-five-year bonds and a low-interest mortgage for the remainder of the cost, Astor agreed to sell the city the

³ Jared Day, *Urban Castles: Tenement Housing and Landlord Activism in New York City, 1890-1943* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 175.

⁴ Andrew Dolkart, *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City: An Architectural History of 97 Orchard Street* (Sante Fe: Center for American Places, 2006), 70.

land and tenements he owned between First Avenue and Avenue A, on East Second and East Third Streets.⁵ Bypassing the grant from the PWA, which had been tied up in political red tape since the initial offer, the city decided to renovate the “pre-Old Law” tenements (built before 1879) that existed on the land and upgrade them into modern, comfortable, affordable housing. Because the project now fell under the heading of “renovation” rather than “new construction,” the city was able to secure funding from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration for labor and supplies. This meant that the new public housing project — appropriately dubbed **First Houses** — was to be built by laborers on relief, those who needed work most.

First Houses was completed in 1936 and its first tenants moved into their new homes that December. Constructed from twenty-four rehabilitated tenements, the project was designed by Frederick Ackerman, a leading housing reform advocate, with Howard McFadden and George Genug, all of whom would later help design additional public housing in the city.⁶ It comprised eight total buildings, boasting 122 apartments with central heating, fireproofing, and modern conveniences like electric refrigerators and state-of-the-art stoves.⁷ Each building had a laundry room. The grounds between buildings offered manicured lawns and playgrounds. Indoor recreation rooms and meeting halls in First Houses were intended to build a sense of community. So attractive was the prospect of living in the project that 3,100 families applied for the opportunity to live there. The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), which had been created the year before and was responsible for handling site selection, financing, design, tenancy, and upkeep for the city’s public housing, sent investigators to the home of every applicant, finally settling on a mix of families that represented what the *New York Times*

⁵The process of buying the land did not unfold smoothly. Andrew Muller, who owned two of the properties on Astor’s land, was not interested in selling his holdings at a price NYCHA deemed reasonable. NYCHA brought Muller to court on March 4, 1935 to force him to sell. In a landmark decision, Judge Charles R. McLaughlin ruled that NYCHA could confiscate the property with relatively low compensation to Muller (a total of \$26,000) because slums were the cause of “juvenile delinquency, crime and immorality.” Eliminating slums, McLaughlin argued, would serve the public good more than protecting Muller’s private property rights. The low-interest rate Astor offered the city for his property was 1.5% for the first year and 3.5% for every year thereafter until the year 2000. See Kessner, 328-9.

⁶Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 209.

⁷“First Families Get First Homes.” *New York Times*: 1 December 1935.

called “a cross section of the wage-earning lower East Side.” These were bakers, garment workers, sales clerks, and painters, among others.

First Houses has been rightfully acknowledged by historians, government officials, and preservationists alike as a turning point in both city planning and government intervention in poverty alleviation. The success of First Houses paved the way for further experimentation in public housing, particularly through increased federal funding for such enterprises. It also gave planners an opportunity to envision a new, modern, efficient city — one that would forever alter the nineteenth-century street grid that architectural critic Lewis Mumford once argued “fitted nothing but a quick parcelling of the land.”⁸ Honored for its pivotal role in this history, First Houses was designated a New York City Landmark by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on November 12, 1974.



Despite its importance, however, First Houses is unique in, rather than emblematic of, New York City public housing. No other project was funded in the same way, housed so few families, and relied so heavily on renovation rather than new construction. Moreover, few city projects were completely municipally owned, as First Houses was. Two years after its completion, the Federal Housing Act of 1937, also known as the Wagner-Steagall Act, created the United States Housing Authority, which provided loans and annual subsidies for low-income

housing. This put the funding stream for these projects mostly in the hands of the federal government. The Act also stipulated an emphasis on low-cost building to keep the price

⁸Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: its Origins, its Transformations and its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961), 421.

of rentals at a minimum. This, along with the New York State Housing Amendment of 1938, ensured that subsequent public housing projects would be state and federal efforts, and that construction and design would follow different principles from those of First Houses.

Slum Clearance and New Construction

The East Village provides three excellent examples of the direction in which public housing history moved during the World War II and postwar periods. These projects — the **Lillian Wald Houses**, **Jacob Riis Houses**, and Jacob Riis II Houses — mark not only a new set of concepts for publicly funded, low-income housing, but also a much broader vision for what a postwar, global city like New York could become with better, more modern planning. With the Housing Act of 1937 and the later act of 1949, which allowed for “Title I” urban renewal projects, larger swaths of slum-filled land could be cleared and re-imagined.



Lillian Wald Houses

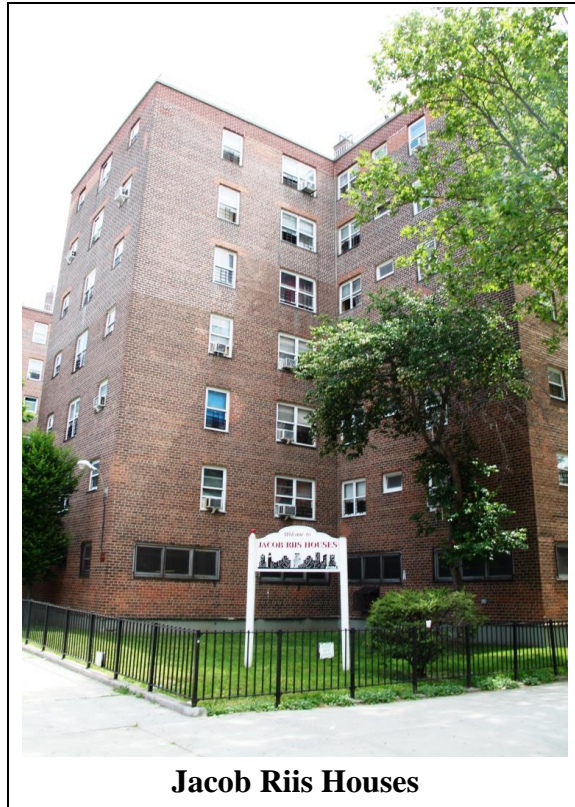
The effort to build these three projects, all of which were located on three superblocks between Avenue D, the East River, East Houston Street and East Thirteenth Street, began

in 1940. That year, the city's Planning Commission produced a map identifying areas suitable for clearance that it deemed "obsolescent." While this map was never ratified by the city's Board of Estimate, responsible for approving all construction plans, historians like Samuel Zipp and Joel Schwartz have argued that it "retained a kind of unofficial power."⁹ Indeed, the land that would serve as the foundation for Riis, Riis II, and Wald Houses was designated for clearance on this map. By June of 1940, surveys of the buildings and population of the area were already underway. As with all NYCHA sites, a team of photographers documented the buildings prior to demolition. Hauntingly captured in these images are streets dotted with pedestrians of all ages, small businesses such as drugstores and candy shops, restaurants, bars, warehouses, and produce stores. As the residential extension of the East River docks, the neighborhood was also home to businesses dependent upon shipping and transport, many of which lined the East River Drive. These included a Pepsi-Cola distribution warehouse at 294 East Seventh Street and East River Drive; First Machinery Corporation and Anderson Building Materials; Willard Hawes & Company, a lumber yard; and Dochterman Long Distance Moving and Storage. Also nearby were the East River Restaurant, where one could order pierogis and potato pancakes; Radisch Brothers Restaurant; Majestic Provision Company; River Drive Service Department, an auto repair shop on Avenue D; Grand Street Garages on East Eighth Street; and Dry Dock Iron Works, on the corner of East Eleventh and Dry Dock Streets. At 50-52 Avenue D, squeezed between two tenements, was a small but ornate synagogue – the only house of worship memorialized in these photographs.¹⁰

⁹ Zipp, 17.

¹⁰NYCHA Photograph Collection, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College, Long Island City, NY.

Where Riis and Riis II were to be located, 682 families (1,900 people) already resided, paying anywhere from four to eight dollars per room for their homes. Close to a quarter of the apartments in the area, most of which were located in “Old Law” tenements, were vacant. Despite what NYCHA would declare to be a slum, the area’s buildings were listed by its surveyors as being in “good” or “fair” condition.¹¹ Nearby, the land on which Wald Houses would be built was home to 2,615 people who lived in 790 apartments. All residents had heat, hot water, and



Jacob Riis Houses

electricity; 99 percent had indoor toilets, either in the apartment or down the hall. Most of the residents were members of small families and most were U.S. citizens, though a large number hailed from Austria, Poland, and Russia.¹² According to a 1940 U.S. Bureau of the Census report on housing in New York City, of the nineteen blocks that would later give way to Riis and Wald Houses, seven contained tenements that were built mostly between 1900 and 1919 (“New Law”); four were built in or before 1899 (“Old Law” or “pre-Old Law”). The rest either had no dwelling units on site or did not report any statistics. In comparison with blocks to the west and south of the area, these were in relatively new and good condition.¹³

¹¹ “Statistics and General Information Report,” October 15, 1940. NYCHA Collection, Box 0054D8, Folder 8, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College, Long Island City, NY.

¹² “Lillian Wald Site Survey,” NYCHA Collection, Box 0065E6, Folder 38.

¹³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 16th Census of the United States, 1940. *Housing, analytical maps, New York City : block statistics / prepared under the supervision of Leon E. Truesdell* (New York : Prepared and duplicated by New York City WPA War Services, 1942.)

What was to some a thriving, if somewhat sparsely populated, neighborhood was, in the eyes of city officials and housing experts, an outdated, outmoded remnant of the city's darker past, an era when immigrants flocked into the overcrowded and disease-ridden Lower East Side, desperately seeking work and opportunity. Tenements were old and crumbling; they did not depict the image of a city embracing the modern age. Public housing, however, was bright and efficient. Where tenements blocked all access to sunlight and fresh air, the new era of public housing would allow for giant plazas of greenery and play. Instead of cramped and overused tenement rooms, the projects lining Avenue D would offer large apartments, ample enough to provide separate spaces for separate activities, such as cooking, sleeping, and leisure. Public housing would communicate a message of abundance, health, and prosperity.

Though there were delays in securing funding for the three projects as the United States joined the war effort in 1941, approval for the construction of Riis, Riis II, and Wald was granted in 1942. Demolitions of extant tenements in the area began in August of 1943 and were completed for both projects by the fall of 1946. The original residents of the area were relocated to other parts of the city or moved elsewhere on their own. According to a 1947 report, only sixty families of the 682 who had lived on the site of Jacob Riis Houses and Jacob Riis II Houses were eligible to live in the public housing that replaced their former homes — in most cases, families who were not eligible earned too much money to qualify.¹⁴

Towers and Parks

According to architectural historian Richard Plunz, the model for the projects was the East River Houses located in East Harlem and completed in 1941.¹⁵ This project, like Wald and Riis Houses, followed the “tower in the park” design promoted by the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier, and embraced by New York's construction coordinator Robert Moses and his adviser, Modernist architect Gordon Bunshaft. The “tower in the park” model depended on groupings of high-rise apartment buildings on large stretches of

¹⁴Report, December 19, 1947, NYCHA Collection, Box 0067D3, Folder 05.

¹⁵ Plunz, 245.

land referred to as “superblocks.” The superblock eliminated cross-streets and avenues in favor of irregular building patterns that would allow for maximum open space in between units and daylong access to sunlight. Historian Nicholas Dagen Bloom has suggested that “tower in the park” design put a special premium on excellent groundskeeping, while leaving building interiors smaller and plainer than those offered in First Houses: “Beauty would be measured in hours of sunlight, breezes, and sanitary conditions rather than architectural innovation.”¹⁶ With a combined 34.13 acres of land devoted to Wald, Riis I, and Riis II Houses, plenty of space for light, air, recreation, and social gathering was made available. Tall buildings with broad spaces in between also allowed NYCHA to build within federal and state guidelines for low-cost construction, while at the same time making the projects aesthetically attractive.

Riis I was completed on January 17, 1949, Riis II on January 31, and Lillian Wald on October 14 of that year. Wald comprised sixteen buildings of differing height — eleven and fourteen stories tall — to allow for maximum sunlight. Riis Houses had thirteen buildings of six, thirteen, and fourteen stories, while Riis II, the smallest project of the three, had six buildings of six, thirteen, and fourteen stories. All of the units were constructed with reinforced concrete frames and brick exteriors. They also offered “skip-stop” elevator service.¹⁷ Apartments were equipped with gleaming bathroom and kitchen facilities, including bright, white bathtubs and electric refrigerators built-in ice makers.¹⁸ To ensure that every building would have sufficient sunlight and ventilation, each was arranged in multiple angles and shapes, which, viewed from above, made the ensembles look like jigsaw puzzle pieces or a child’s game of jacks.

Tenancy in all three projects was modestly mixed during its first years and later began to more closely resemble the population of the surrounding community, as it, too, changed. At the start of 1949, for example, Jacob Riis Houses had 1,104 white, 51 black, and a

¹⁶Nicholas Dagen Bloom, *Public Housing That Worked: New York in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 49.

¹⁷This means the elevators skipped every other floor. Skip-stop elevators were a cost-cutting measure under USHA guidelines.

¹⁸New York Times, January 1, 1948.

small number of “other race” families in residence.¹⁹ By 2010, the demographic make-up of the area in which all three projects are located is estimated at 63.5% Hispanic, 16.3% Black, 4.9% Non-Hispanic White, 13.8% Non-Hispanic Asian, and 1.5% other non-Hispanic and non-Hispanic mixed race.²⁰ Notable former residents of Wald, Riis, and Riis II Houses include: Antonio Garcia (aka Chico), a locally noted graffiti artist, and Charles Barron, a former Black Panther who later became a New York City Council member.²¹ So integrated into the East Village were these three projects that writers, poets, and artists have incorporated them into their work. Sociologist Dalton Conley, who grew up in the nearby Masaryk Houses, remembers touring Riis and Wald Houses with his parents when the family was seeking housing in the early 1970s. And Edgardo Vega Yunque returns again and again to both Riis and Wald Houses in his 2006 novel *The Lamentable Journey of Omaha Bigelow into the Impenetrable Loisaida Jungle*. Poet Victor Hernando Cruz includes them in his ode, “The Lower East Side of Manhattan.”²²

Taken together, the combination of First Houses, Lillian Wald Houses, Jacob Riis Houses and Jacob Riis Houses II tells a complicated and layered history of public housing in New York. Indeed, no other neighborhood has a concentration of housing that so thoroughly represents government efforts to shelter the city’s neediest citizens. It is difficult, however, not to wonder what might have been. The tenements and industrial buildings that characterized the neighborhood before the construction of Riis and Wald houses were remarkably similar to those that still exist and thrive nearby. Some were solid while some were more fragile. Some had stood for three-quarters of a century, while others were no older than the Flatiron Building at Madison Square, one of the city’s first modern, steel skyscrapers. More than a decade of population depletion had taken a toll on neighborhood ties, but, as Jane Jacobs lamented years later, overplanning and

¹⁹ NYCHA, “Rent Schedule for Families Receiving Public Assistance, Jacob Riis Houses (Federal),” Folder 05, Box 0067D3, NYCHA Collection, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College, Long Island City, New York.

²⁰ New York City Department of City Planning, “NYC Census Fact Finder,” Accessible at <http://maps.nyc.gov/census/>

²¹ New York Times: 22 September 2002; New York Times: 11 June 1995. “Chico” was a resident at Wald Houses, while Barron was raised in Riis Houses.

²² Dalton Conley, *Honky* (New York: Vintage, 2001); Edgardo Vega Yunque, *The Lamentable Journey of Omaha Bigelow Into the Impenetrable Loisaida Jungle* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006); Victor Hernando Cruz, *Maraca: New and Selected Poems, 1965-2000* (New York: Coffee House Press, 2001.)

urban renewal might have prematurely ended what she called “spontaneous unslumming.” Jacobs wrote that many areas in the Lower East Side had begun “unslumming” before they were “destroyed.”²³ Clearance and reconstruction can only go so far in creating healthy neighborhoods. In the end, it is the diversity and activity of people, as well as their attachments to place, that make neighborhoods develop and succeed.

²³ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1992), 172.



West side of Second Avenue, between East 9th and East 10th Street



"Political Row" – South side of East 7th Street between Avenue C and Avenue D