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April 9, 2020

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

**Re: Additional research regarding historic significance of 86 University Place in the proposed historic district south of Union Square**

Dear Chair Carroll,

I write to share with you additional information we have uncovered regarding the historic significance of 86 University Place, part of our proposed historic district south of Union Square. No. 86 University Place was built c. 1842 as a single-family row house, and later altered with additional decorative detail and space, reflecting its changes in uses and the ascendancy of commerce in the area. Over the course of the building's existence, it has had several noteworthy occupants and owners who were significant to New York City history, women's history, and LGBT history. Notable residents and commercial occupants of the building included Benjamin Hazard Field, the prominent 19th century merchant and philanthropist who was among the founders of the New York Free Circulating Library (one of the main forebears of the New York Public Library), the American Museum of Natural History, the nation's first chronic disease hospital, the city's first library for women, and



countless other New York institutions. It also included German immigrants Bernard and Emma Mittelstaedt, owners of E. Mittelstaedt, Inc. a highly successful hair product company; the restaurant "The Royalist" operated by Barney Gallant, aka "The Mayor of Greenwich Village;" and The Bagatelle, a lesbian bar which was frequented by several significant literary figures and played a significant role in LGBT life, especially for women, in the 1950s.

### **Benjamin Hazard Field**



*Benjamin Hazard Field, from History of Westchester County: New York, by J. Thomas Scharf, 1886*

Benjamin Hazard Field (1814-1893) was a leading philanthropist in New York City during the 19th century. In its obituary in 1893, the [\*New York Times\*](#) stated "his name was prominently associated with most of the philanthropic enterprises that have been undertaken in New York during the past fifty years." He gave tirelessly of both time and money to some of New York City's most notable charitable and educational institutions. The early successes of many of these entities were a direct result of Field's leadership and generosity, which gave them the foundations that allowed them to thrive for generations, in many cases into the present.

Benjamin H. Field was born in Yorktown, New York and worked for his uncle, Hickson W. Field, in his mercantile business. By 1838, Field's uncle had retired and Benjamin Field took over the family business, spurring it on to even greater success. Additionally, he served as Vice President of the Bank for Savings, the oldest institution of its kind in New York City, as well as serving as Director of the Old Fulton Bank and Director of the Atlantic Mutual Insurance Company. Field and his family moved into 86 University Place (originally numbered 56, then numbered 50 between 1851 and 1898) around 1843, shortly after the house was built. New York City directories show the family at this location until 1856, when they moved to an elegant mansion on East 26th Street fronting Madison Square Park (demolished).



Painting of Benjamin and Catherine Field and Family by Daniel Huntington from the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum

As impressive as Field's success in business was, his philanthropic endeavors reached an even *greater* level of prominence. [J. Thomas Scharf in his \*History of Westchester County\*](#) (1886) said of Field "From [1838, when he took over his uncle's business] to the present Mr. Field has been justly ranked as one of the most prominent citizens of the great metropolis." Scharf went on to say:

*But to him the earning of a fortune was simply a means to enable him to accomplish his ends - to show by a bright example the good that*

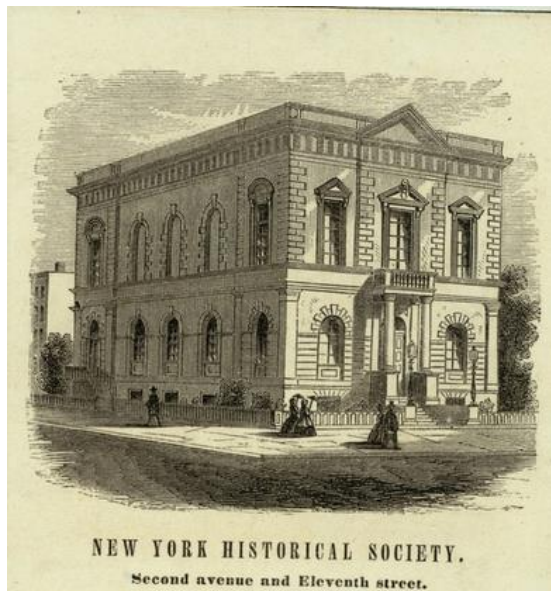
*can be done by men possessed of wealth and actuated by the spirit that seeks the welfare of their race. In all efforts of a benevolent character no one has taken a more active part and it is safe to say that there is scarcely an association or institution, having for its object the amelioration of the condition of the poor and suffering, with which his name is not connected, and of which he has not been a liberal supporter*

The Home for the Incurables at Fordham figured prominently into Field's philanthropic endeavors. Credited with being the nation's first chronic disease hospital, Field was responsible for its founding in 1866 as well as its success. He was elected president of the institution at its inception and remained so for the rest of his life. At this time, hospitals could not care for patients suffering from such chronic conditions as epilepsy, paralysis, and senility, among others. The hospital began by receiving 33 patients in a modest frame home in West Farms. Under Field's leadership, in 1874 it moved to a 10-acre-site on



Home for Incurables, West Farms, Westchester, NY (now the Bronx)

Third Avenue in the Bronx which it still occupies today, now known as St. Barnabas Hospital.



Field had a profound impact upon the growth and longevity of the New-York Historical Society. His formal involvement began in 1844, when he became a life member. In 1849, he became a member of the Executive Committee, and would remain so until his death. He served as the Society's treasurer from 1860 to 1877, and Vice President from 1878 until 1885, when he was elected president. Also [according to Scharf](#) "[i]t was largely owing to his earnest efforts that the fire-proof building of the [New-York Historical] Society was erected" in 1857, its first permanent home, at Second Avenue and East

11th Street. Also during his tenure, the Society was also able to secure the site for its future and present location on Central Park West.

Field was also one of the original founders of the New York City Free Circulating Library (NYFCL), and its president from 1885 to 1893. He was key to the NYFCL's success and rapid growth, extending branches into poor neighborhoods and reaching New York City residents who could not access the private libraries of the day or gain much of any exposure to literature. The NYFCL would merge at the beginning of the 20th century with the New York Public Library, which was advancing the free public circulating branch library system pioneered by the NYFCL.

In the second half of the 19th century, New York City had no public library system and no free circulating library. The city had the large private Astor reference library, and a number of subscription libraries such as the Mercantile Society, but lacked a circulating library accessible to the broader population. What would become the New York Free Circulating Library (NYFCL) was started in 1879 by a Grace Church teacher and a group of other women and teachers as a reading room at 127 East 13th Street in Grace House, part of the Grace Church Chapel. Though initially open only two hours a week and containing only 500



49 Bond Street, first branch of NYFCL from *History of the New York Public Library*

books, the free public reading room was so popular there were often lines around the block, and as few as two books were left at the end of a session. Within a year, the library's collection increased to 1,200 volumes purely from donations, and patrons ranged from children to 70-year-old men.

The New York Free Circulating Library was incorporated on March 15, 1880. Benjamin H. Field was one of the original incorporators, along with Phil Schuyler, William W. Appleton, Julia Blagden and Mary S. Kernochan. The library moved to two rooms in a private house at 36 Bond Street (since demolished), which opened on March 22, 1880. By 1882, the trustees were able to purchase a nearby

house at 49 Bond Street, establishing the library's first official branch. Circulation had increased from 69,280 volumes during its first full year (November, 1880-October, 1881) to 81,233 volumes in 1882-1883.

Field became President of the board of NYFCL in 1885, shortly after the opening of its second branch, the Ottendorfer Library at 135 Second Avenue, the system's first purpose-built branch, and remained in that position until his death in 1893. After the Ottendorfer branch's opening "it was predicted that the demand for books in the [New York Free Circulating] library would decrease" according to [the New York Times](#). However the exact opposite occurred; under Field's leadership the combined circulation of both branches rose to



Ottendorfer Library, 135 Second Avenue

240,000 books per year. During Field's Presidency, NYFCL implemented a plan to secure a sound financial footing with appeals to the various trades and professionals for annual memberships. His campaign was quite successful, and with the additional generosity of large benefactors such as Andrew Carnegie, new branches were opened.

During Field's time leading the NYFCL, the system expanded exponentially and introduced innovations in libraries which are still being used today. In 1887, Catherine W. Bruce gave \$50,000 for the purpose of opening and maintaining a branch to be named after her father, George W. Bruce, at 226 West 42nd Street (demolished). It opened in 1888 with about 7,000 volumes on its shelves. NYFCL partnered with the Children's Library Association (CLA) assigning a room of the Bruce Library for the exclusive use of children. CLA furnished the books for the

children's library and provided supervision and maintenance of the room. Also in 1888, the Jackson Square branch at 251 West 13<sup>th</sup> Street was opened (extant, Greenwich Village Historic District); the lot, building, and books were all donated by George W. Vanderbilt. The beginnings of what would be the East Harlem branch was started in a room at 2059 Lexington Avenue, and in February of 1893, the Muhlenberg branch was opened in Chelsea in the Parish House of the Church of the Holy Communion at 49 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street.



Originally NYFCL Jackson Square Branch, 251 West 13<sup>th</sup> Street

Field, who died on March 17, 1893, would not live to see the eventual merger of the New York Free Circulating Library with The New York Public Library in 1901, and the NYPL's adoption of many of the innovations, and branch libraries, of the NYFCL. However, the imprint of

his work can still be felt today as the New York Public Library celebrates its 125th anniversary this year.

Women's and children's causes were also of particular focus for both Field and his wife, Catherine M. Van Cortland de Peyster (1818-1880). In 1860 Field was among the founders and initial benefactors of the first women's library in New York, located at New York University, an enterprise also supported by Horace Greeley, Henry Ward Beecher, and Peter Cooper. Field served as a trustee of the Sheltering Arms and of the Children's Fold, Vice President of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and donated nearly \$100,000 towards the construction of a school near his birthplace in Westchester County. He also served as trustee for Working Women's Protective Union. Founded in 1863, the Union's mission was to protect working women by providing legal protection from unscrupulous employers.



American Museum of Natural History  
original building

Field was also one of the founders of the American Museum of Natural History, along with Theodore Roosevelt and J. Pierpont Morgan, among others. He was instrumental in the placement of the Admiral Farragut monument in Madison Square Park (near his home) and the statue to of Fitz-Greene Halleck in Central Park.

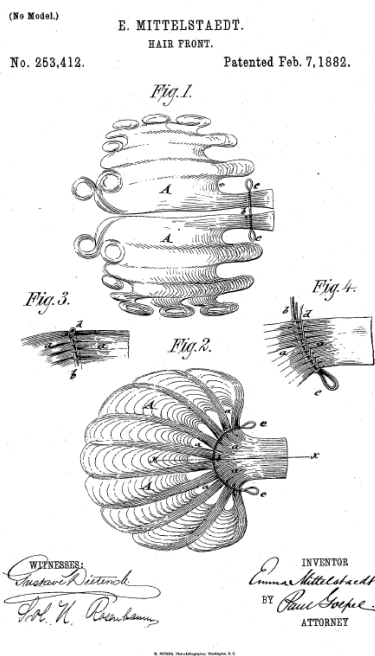
It should be noted that Field served in leadership positions and/or as a trustee several other prominent 19<sup>th</sup> century New York most charitable institutions, including the New-York Eye and Ear Infirmary, Roosevelt Hospital, Greenwood Cemetery, the Good Samaritan Dispensary, the New York Dispensary, and the New York Institution for Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, and served in many of these capacities until his death in 1893. In his genealogy of the Field family published in 1901, historian Frederick Clifton Pierce [said of](#)



Admiral Farragut monument in Madison Square Park

[Benjamin Hazard Field's passing](#): "The death of Mr. Field ends a career of remarkable activity in philanthropic work. He was most widely known for his activity and unselfish devotion in working for the good of his fellow citizens. In this work he was most lavish in the expenditure of his money and time. The best part of his life was given up almost entirely to work for others."

### **Bernhard and Emma Mittelstaedt**



After the Civil War, the single-family row houses south of Union Square and specifically along University Place were in many cases changed to accommodate commercial uses, or were replaced entirely by commercial structures or multi-family housing. German immigrants Bernhard and Emma A. Mittelstaedt purchased No. 86 University Place in 1889 for both their family residence and to house their business, E. Mittelstaedt, Inc., which sold women's hair products. Bernhard immigrated to the United States in 1866, though Emma's date of arrival in America is unclear.

New York City directories first show the family business of importing and wholesaling human hair during the 1870s under Bernhard's name at a Canal Street location. Long before the

Images from Emma Mittelstaedt's hair piece patent

advent of synthetic wigs, elaborate coiffed wigs and hair pieces were very much in demand by Victorian women, and this proved a lucrative endeavor for the Mittelstaedts. By the 1880s the family had moved their home and business to 5 Wooster Street.

Interestingly, shortly thereafter Bernhard's name stopped being listed in the New York City directories in relation to the business, and Emma's was instead. Also shortly after the move, Emma filed a patent for a new and improved women's front





hair piece. The patent was filed in November of 1881 and issued in February of 1882 for "an improved construction of hair-fronts for ladies' use, whereby they can be finished in a neater and more durable manner, more easily secured to the hair, and worn with or without parting, as desired."



In 1889, according to *the Real Estate Record and Builders Guide*, the Mittelstaedts purchased the property at 86 University Place. The initial conveyance was in Emma's name as were some of the subsequent alteration permits. Presumably at some point after the Mittelstaedts bought the building in 1889, the elaborate cornice and

pediment that we still see today on the building which proudly boasts "E. Mittelstaedt, Established 1867" appeared. The 1900 Federal census shows that the Mittelstaedts rented part of No. 86 to tenants, a tradition that would continue through the 20th century by their heirs. In 1905, an approximately 40 foot rear extension was added at the first floor, which at that time was being used as a store.

Emma died in 1908 and Bernard in 1917, but shortly before Bernard's passing, New York City directories show the firm expanded its operation into the still-extant commercial loft building next door at No. 84 University Place. Patents and advertisements illustrate the company continuing to operate at No. 84 under the leadership of his children after Bernard's death. Meanwhile Bernard and Emma's daughters, Emma and Harriet, continued to live at No. 86 while renting some floors to tenants. The last Mittelstaedt to occupy No. 86 was Harriet, who donated the family home to New York University in 1958 with the condition that she could live there for the rest of her life, which she did until her death in 1964.

## **Barney Gallant, "The Royalist"**



Barney Gallant (seated), date unknown

By 1937, a new and colorful character entered 86 University Place's history. Barney Gallant opened a restaurant in the raised basement level of No. 86 called "The Royalist." By the early 1940s, the establishment expanded to the first floor with a cabaret. Gallant, a lifelong bachelor, was an opponent of Prohibition and gained celebrity as the first person in New York to be prosecuted under the Volstead Act in 1919 for serving alcohol (when police prepared to arrest several of his waiters for serving alcohol, Gallant took full responsibility, refused to comply with the law, and was sent to the Tombs for thirty days). Following this, he opened a series of successful speakeasies and cafes throughout the neighborhood that earned him the name "The Mayor of Greenwich Village." Originally from Hungary, Gallant was a member of the Liberal Club in the 1910s, worked for a time as the business manager of the Greenwich Village Theater, and was Eugene O'Neill's first roommate upon his arrival in New York.

## **The Bagatelle**

In 1951, a new establishment would occupy 86 University Place, "Danny's Bagatelle." Like Gallant's club, it at least initially had a floor show. Quickly it became a lesbian hangout, and the name "Danny" was dropped. The first floor was closed and the club would occupy the raised basement level with a bar at the front and a small dance floor at the rear. It would become known as "the Bag," and throughout the 1950s it was one of the most popular lesbian bars in Greenwich Village, with a clientele of mostly white working-class women.

It was frequented by famed lesbian writers Audre Lorde and pulp-novelist Ann Bannon. Like many other gay and lesbian bars in Greenwich Village at the time, the Bagatelle was run by the Mafia, since such establishments were



(l.) Audre Lorde (right in picture) with friend, 1950s; (r.) Ann Bannon

considered illegal, and frequently raided by the police. Employees at the Bagatelle would switch on a red light when the police were entering for a raid, so patrons knew to scatter or try to hide any activity for which they could be arrested, which included dancing with someone of the same sex or wearing clothing considered inappropriate for their gender. The Bag closed in 1959.

### **Conclusion**

No. 86 University Place has a rich history connected to many of the themes seen throughout the area south of Union Square. The building bears strong connections to important developments and figures in New York's commercial, philanthropic, literary, immigrant, cultural, and LGBT history. Additionally, its 19th century brick façade, original fenestration at the top floors, early 20th century storefront and magnificent bracketed cornice with raised pediment make No. 86 stand out as a true architectural gem in the area.

The history and architecture of 86 University Place is worthy of recognition and preservation. On this basis, and on the basis for the myriad other historic and architectural resources in the area we have detailed to you previously, I again urge you to designate the area south of Union Square an historic district as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman  
Executive Director

cc: Borough President Gale Brewer  
City Council Speaker Corey Johnson  
City Councilmember Carlina Rivera  
Senator Brad Hoylman  
Assemblymember Deborah Glick  
Community Board 2, Manhattan  
Historic Districts Council

NY Landmarks Conservancy  
Municipal Arts Society  
The New York Public Library  
The New York Historical Society  
St. Barnabas Hospital  
American Museum of Natural History