



**Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation**

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New York, New York 10005

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February 25, 2013

Speaker Christine Quinn
New York City Council
224 West 30th Street, #1206
New York, NY 10001

Chair Robert Tierney
NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th floor
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Impending Demolition of 54 MacDougal Street in Proposed South Village
Historic District**

Dear Speaker Quinn and Chair Tierney:

I write to bring to your attention the impending demolition of yet another historic structure in the proposed South Village Historic District, a nearly two-hundred year old house and rear structure at 54 MacDougal Street. I urge you to take immediate action to prevent further destruction to this historic and imminently endangered neighborhood.

Demolition permits have just been filed for this structure at King Street. According to GVSHP's research, the house was built to two-and-a-half stories with the sloped roof and dormers characteristic of a federal house some time before 1827, and extended to a full three stories in 1874. Demolition permits have also been filed for a one-story rear structure behind it, likely a backhouse.

While modestly altered over the years, this structure clearly maintains the basic elements of an early 19th century lower Manhattan house. Though it began as a residence, over the years the structure has housed model railroad supply companies, art galleries, and antique stores. Its historic look and feel even made it a perfect setting for "Rosenberg's Jewelry Store" in the 1997 film "Men In Black." Located at the head of King Street, 54 MacDougal is visually prominent and serves as one of many recognizable "gateways" to the South Village.

For these and many other reasons, 54 MacDougal Street is clearly an important contributing structure to the proposed South Village Historic District. As you know, the proposed district has been determined eligible by the State of New York for the State and National Registers of Historic Places, and called one of the seven most significant endangered places in New York State by the Preservation League of New York State. The Landmarks Preservation Commission itself has determined the proposed district "landmark-eligible" in the environmental reviews for both the

Hudson Square and the NYU 2031 rezonings, and in 2009 Chair Tierney promised community leaders that he would consider this area for landmark designation.

Now, however, like so many other important contributing structures in this historic neighborhood, such as the Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments, Circle in the Square Theater, 186 Spring Street, 178 Bleecker Street, the Sullivan Street Playhouse, the Tunnel Garage, the Poe House, and many others, 54 MacDougal Street is about to be destroyed. Without landmark protections, its replacement could also be jarringly out-of-character with this historic neighborhood.

As you know, demolition and out-of-character development plans in this neighborhood have been rapidly accelerating, spurred onward in part by the proposed Hudson Square rezoning immediately adjacent to this area. This neighborhood has already suffered increased pressure and damage merely in anticipation of the possible rezoning; if the rezoning is approved and implemented in March without landmark protections for this neighborhood, we can expect the rate of destruction to accelerate rapidly.

I therefore urge the Landmarks Preservation Commission to immediately move ahead with consideration of the proposed South Village Historic District, as the Chair promised to four years ago, and the City Council not to approve the proposed Hudson Square rezoning at this time unless landmark protections are granted to the South Village.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director

cc: Assemblymember Deborah Glick
Community Board #2, Manhattan
National Trust for Historic Preservation
Preservation League of NY State
Historic Districts Council
NY Landmarks Conservancy
Municipal Art Society



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February 28, 2013

Chair Robert Tierney
NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th floor
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Historic Significance of 54 MacDougal Street, the Ezra Weeks-Daniel
Ludlow House, in the Proposed South Village Historic District**

Dear Chair Tierney:

I write to provide additional information regarding the historic significance of this house located within the proposed South Village Historic District, which is connected to some of the most significant figures in early New York and American history. In light of this information, I again urge you to take immediate action to prevent further destruction to this imminently endangered neighborhood.

As you know, demolition permits have just been filed for this three-story house and its one-story backhouse at King Street. According to GVSHP's research, 54 MacDougal Street was built in 1820, making it one of the oldest extant structures in Manhattan. It was built upon land owned by Aaron Burr, and thus was almost undoubtedly part of the Richmond Hill Estate – Burr's one-time home, George Washington's headquarters during the battle of New York, and the first Vice-Presidential residence.

In 1814 Burr sold the land upon which 54 MacDougal Street was built to Ezra Weeks, one of early New York's most prominent builders, who was involved in the construction of Alexander Hamilton's uptown estate, Hamilton Grange, and Gracie Mansion. Hamilton's rival Burr also had a strong connection to Weeks; Weeks' brother Levi was the defendant in the infamous and precedent-setting [Manhattan Well Murder Trial of 1800](#), the first recorded murder trial in the United States. Ezra used his considerable wealth and influence to get both Hamilton and Aaron Burr (who would shortly thereafter murder Hamilton in a duel) to defend his brother against the charge of murdering his fiancé, Elma Sands (Burr also owned the Manhattan Well where the alleged murder took place, and thus may have had additional motives for defending Weeks). Ezra Weeks was the principal witness for his brother's defense, [testifying](#) that he was at his home with his brother at the time of the murder. The other lawyer defending Weeks was [Henry Brockholst Livingston](#), a future U.S. Supreme Court Justice, while the prosecutor was [Cadwallader David Colden](#), the future Mayor of New York City.

Weeks was acquitted after a mere five minutes of jury deliberation. Because of the widely held public perception that Levi Weeks was guilty of the crime in spite of his acquittal, he was forced to leave New York, living the rest of his years in Massachusetts and Mississippi.

Ezra Weeks owned the property in 1820 when the house currently standing at 54 MacDougal Street was built. Our research has shown that not long after in 1826 Weeks sold 54 MacDougal Street to [Daniel Ludlow](#), after whose family Ludlow Street is named. Ludlow was the first President of [the Manhattan Company](#), founded by Aaron Burr and only the second commercial bank in New York City and the predecessor the today's JP Morgan Chase Bank, [the largest bank in the United States and the 22nd oldest in the world](#).

Prominent Americans and prominent American families continued to populate 54 MacDougal Street. Our research also found that shortly thereafter in [1827-28 Robert Inslee lived and/or operated a business at 54 MacDougal Street](#). Inslee was the first cousin of [Zebulon Montgomery Pike](#), discoverer of Pike's Peak, namesake of Pike Street in Lower Manhattan, and War of 1812 hero. Inslee was also a direct descendant of John Pike, one of the earliest European settlers in America and the founder of Woodbridge, New Jersey, where Inslee was born. Thus 54 MacDougal Street's connection to some of the most prominent (and in some cases notorious) figures in early New York and American history is quite remarkable.

As evidence of the neighborhood's shifting fortunes, by the late 19th century 54 MacDougal Street the scene of some ignominious criminal activity, as [reported by the New York Times](#). In later years, 54 MacDougal Street and the surrounding neighborhoods' fortunes shifted again, as it housed the respected [Julian Pretto gallery](#), and a series of popular antique stores, including The Question of Time, Around the Clock, and Strictly Solo.

54 MacDougal Street is an integral and vital part of the South Village and New York's history. I strongly urge you to use the occasion of this latest threat to act to designate the entire proposed South Village Historic District.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director

cc: City Council Speaker Christine Quinn
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
Community Board #2, Manhattan
National Trust for Historic Preservation
Preservation League of NY State
Historic Districts Council
NY Landmarks Conservancy
Municipal Art Society



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