



**Greenwich  
Village  
Society for  
Historic  
Preservation**

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March 13, 2009

Hon. Robert Tierney, Chair  
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Centre Street, 9<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Threats to Proposed South Village Historic District**

Dear Chair Tierney:

I write to call to your attention the increasing number of threats to historic buildings within the proposed South Village Historic District, and to urge again that the Commission act as swiftly as possible to designate the proposed district.

The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation is extremely grateful that the Commission has surveyed the approximately one-third of the proposed district west of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and is considering initial steps to consider part of that area for historic district designation. However, there are a rapidly increasing number of sites within the entire proposed district which have been altered or demolished, where inappropriate development has taken place, or where such actions are imminent or threatened.

In just the last several months, the following has occurred within the proposed South Village Historic District:

- An 1835 transitional Federal/Greek revival house at 12 Leroy Street is having parts of its façade, roof, and attic story destroyed and an additional story added on top
- Demolition work has begun on 178 Bleecker Street, and 1861 house with an artists studio added in 1923 which is part of a row of similar houses between MacDougal and Sullivan Streets
- Demolition work has begun on the Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments at 133-139 MacDougal Street, which was determined eligible for listing on the State and National Register of Historic Places
- 180 Sixth Avenue was demolished, a rare 1878 rear-tenement which due to the construction of Sixth Avenue in the 1926 lost its front-tenement and thus faced the street directly – a historic anomaly perhaps unique in New York City
- 184 and 186 Sixth Avenue were demolished, 1831 houses with their original façades shaved off and a new façades added due to the 1926 construction of Sixth Avenue
- The famous and distinctive horse hoof ornaments have been removed from the entrance to the 1912 stable at 23 Cornelia Street as part of a renovation of that property
- The frontage of the former the San Remo café (1925-1967) in the ground floor of the 1907 tenement at 189 Bleecker/91 MacDougal Street has been completely refaced with artificial stone, covering and possibly

damaging or replacing the original cast-iron details of this historic haunt of Jack Kerouac, James Agee, Frank O'Hara, Dylan Thomas, William Burroughs, and Allen Ginsberg

- A large fake stone enclosure has been built and attached to the ground floor of 140 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street, a particularly distinctive 1901 tenement designed by Michael Bernstein

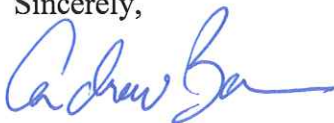
I have attached photos of all. This comes on top of the following tragic losses in recent years within the proposed South Village Historic District:

- The complete destruction of the façade of the Sullivan Street Playhouse, housed in an early 19<sup>th</sup> century rowhouse at 181 Sullivan Street, and its replacement with a glass-fronted condo. The Playhouse gained worldwide fame as the home of *The Fantasticks* from 1958 to 2003, reputed to be the longest running theatrical production in modern history.
- The destruction of the 1917 building at 159 Bleecker Street which housed the Circle in the Square Theater, New York's first non-profit theater, and before that the Amato Opera House, and its replacement with a grossly out-of-scale 100+ ft. tall apartment building
- The demolition of the 1922 Tunnel Garage at 55 Thompson Street, one of New York's earliest and most beloved Art Deco buildings, which had been determined eligible for listing on the State and National Register of Historic Places
- The demolition of the 1835 Edgar Allan Poe House at 85 West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, where Poe lived and wrote from 1844 to 1845
- The demolition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Judson Houses at 231-239 Thompson Street
- The alteration and removal of much historic detail from the ground floor of 144-146 Bleecker Street, a pair of 1831 rowhouses joined and renovated by Raymond Hood in 1920 and the location of the historic Mori's and Montparnasse Restaurants and the Bleecker Street Cinema.

Additionally, at 72-82 Sullivan Street/140 Sixth Avenue, within the proposed South Village Historic District, plans have been approved for an 18-story hotel, which would clearly be a woefully inappropriate scale of development facing this street of 19<sup>th</sup> century one to six story structures.

As you can see, the level of loss to the history of this neighborhood has already been great, has accelerated in recent years, and continues unabated. We are fortunate that the LPC is now focusing on this area, but I cannot stress enough how critical it is that the Commission move concretely to landmark the area and prevent further losses as soon as possible. As you know, GVSHP has compiled primary source materials establishing the history of every one of the buildings in the proposed South Village Historic District, which should make the LPC's job of moving ahead with designation significantly quicker and easier. Our longstanding offer to share these materials with you remains open, and we will gladly provide you with the materials at your first request.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman  
Executive Director

Cc: National Trust for Historic Preservation  
Preservation League of NY State  
NY State Historic Preservation Office  
Municipal Art Society  
New York Landmarks Conservancy  
Historic Districts Council  
Historic South Village Advisory Board  
Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer  
City Council Speaker Christine Quinn  
City Council Member Alan Gerson  
State Senator Tom Duane  
State Senator Daniel Squadron  
Assemblymember Deborah Glick



## Recent Losses in the South Village



**12 Leroy Street (1835) in 2008**



**12 Leroy Street today**



**178 Bleeker Street (r.)  
(1861, altered 1923) in 2007**



**178 Bleeker Street today**





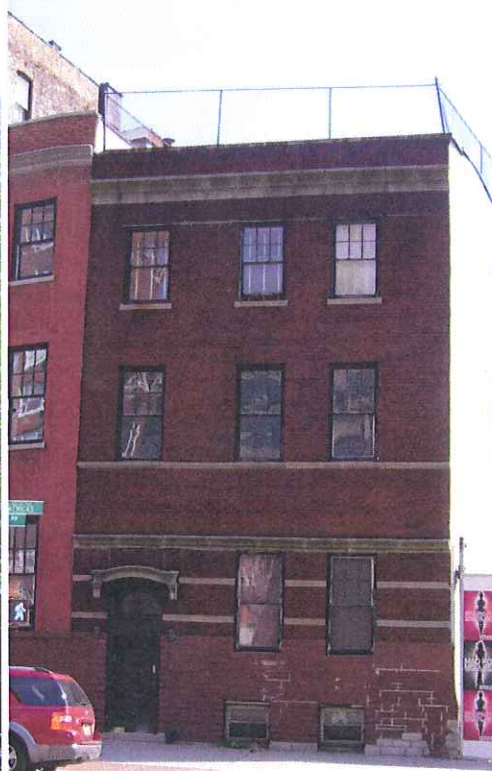
**Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments  
(ca. 1835, altered 1940)  
Determined Eligible for State and National  
Register of Historic Places 2008**



**Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments  
Fall 2008  
before commencement of demolition**



**180 Sixth Avenue (1878)**



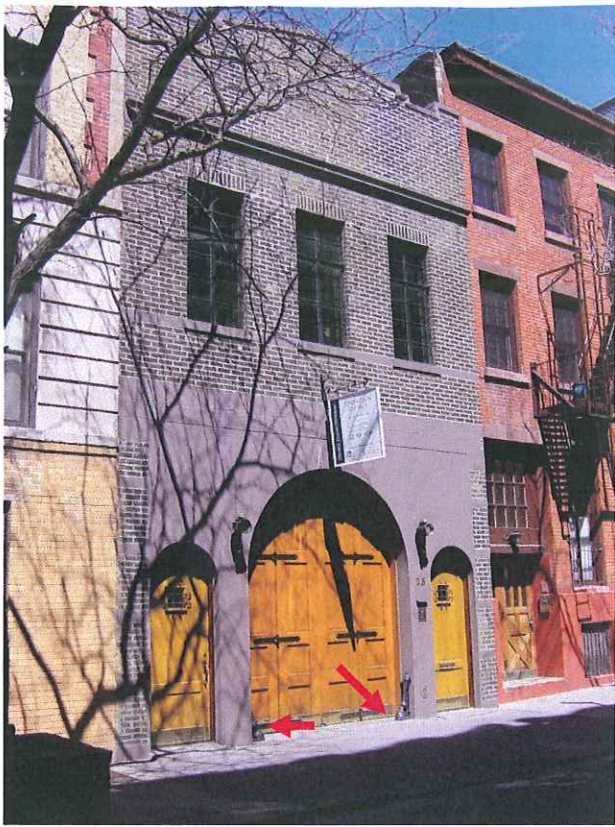
**184 Sixth Avenue (1832, 1926)**



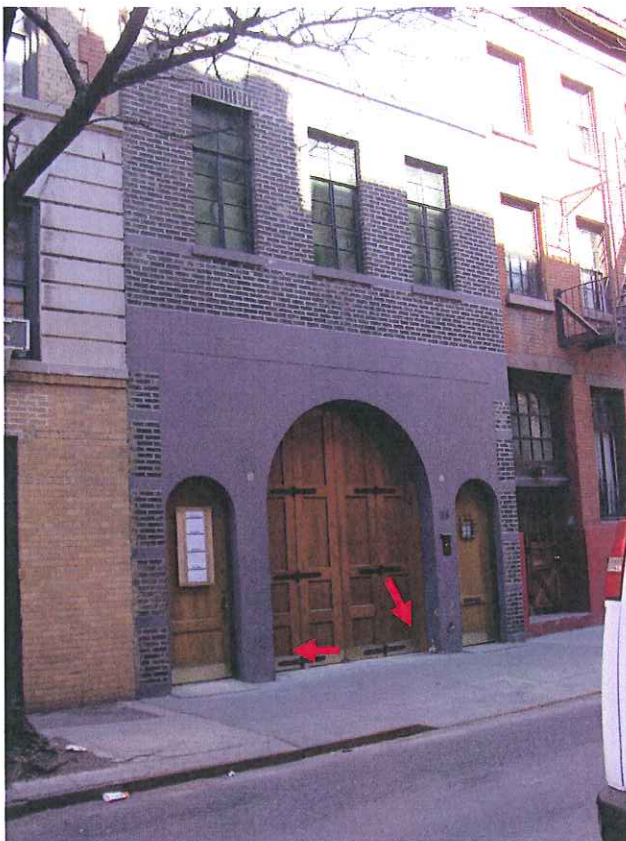
**186 Sixth Avenue (1832, 1926)**

***All demolished 2008***



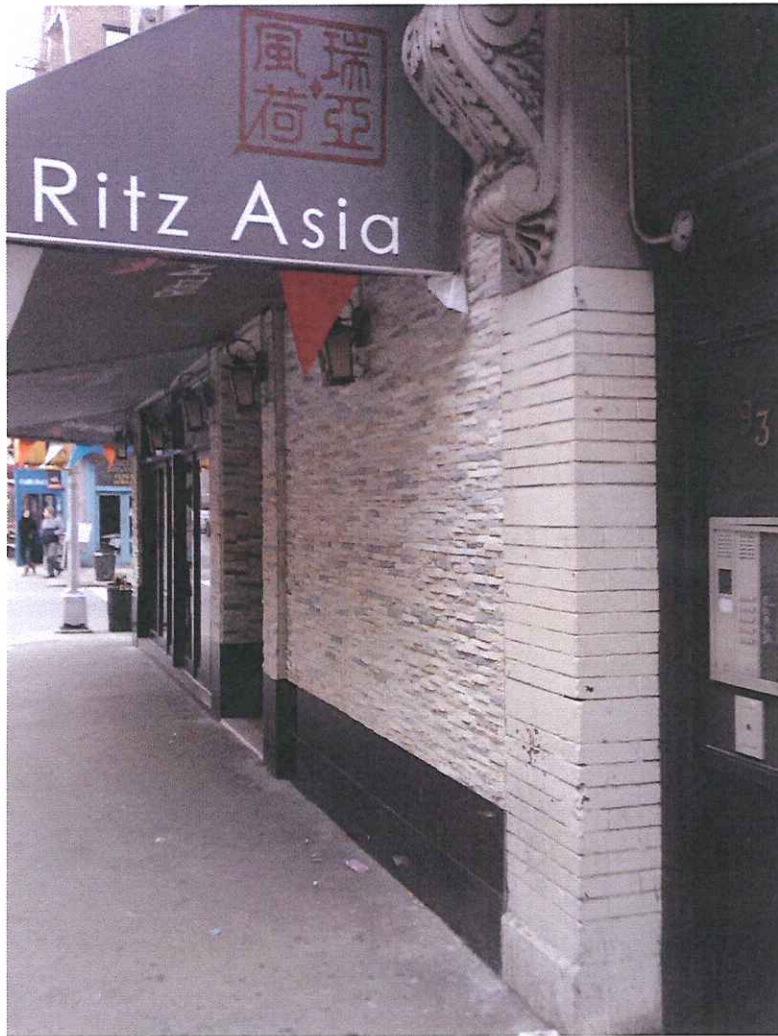


**23 Cornelia Street (1912) in 2006**



**23 Cornelia Street today**





Ground floor of 189 Bleecker (1907)  
former site of San Remo Café (1925-1967)



Ground floor of 140 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street (1901)

*both after recent renovations*



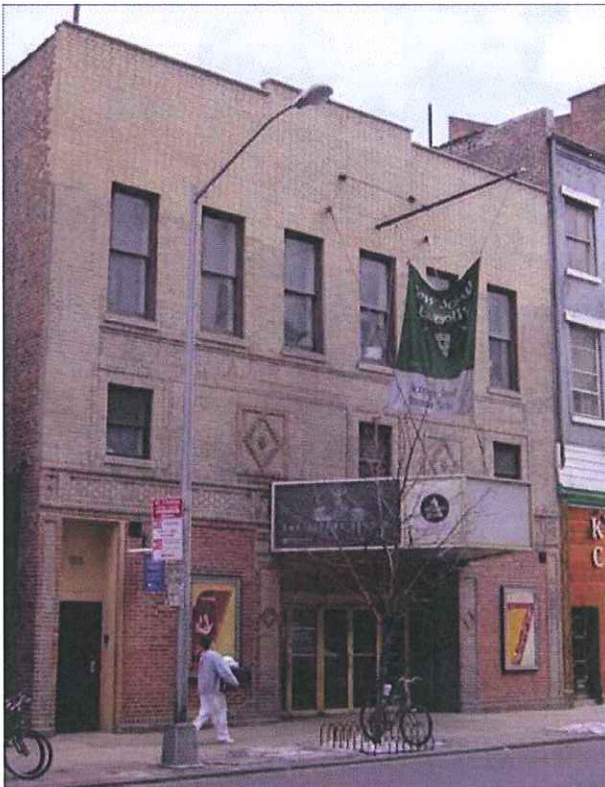
## **South Village Losses in Last Several Years**



**Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St.  
in 2002**



**former Sullivan Street Playhouse  
in 2007**



**159 Bleecker Street (1917) in 2003  
*site of Circle In the Square Theater, Amato Opera***



**159 Bleecker Street in 2006**





**Tunnel Garage (1922), 55 Thompson Street -- demolished 2006**



**Poe House (1835), 85 West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street – demolished 2001**



**Judson Houses, 231-239 Thompson Street – demolished 2002**



**72-82 Sullivan/140 Sixth Avenue – site of proposed 18-story hotel**