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SOCIETY FOR
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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*"Established in 1980 to protect
the cultural and architectural
heritage of Greenwich Village"*

October 26, 2004

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

Dear Bob:

It has recently come to the attention of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation that the Variety Theater at 110 Third Avenue has not had its lease renewed and the owner plans to demolish the structure.

Over the last several years, GVSHP had several research interns look into the history of this building, which has been rumored to have housed New York's first movie house (the AIA Guide to New York City asserts as much as well). Our research raised as many questions as it answered about the history of the building, but nevertheless it is clear that the Variety Theater was one of New York's earliest movie theaters and nickelodeons, and is one of the very few structures from this era in New York City that served in this capacity that survives to this day.

The theater should also be viewed in the context of the enormously important role this area played as the home to legitimate, popular, and ethnic theater in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While the Union Square area served as home to the center of legitimate theater in New York in the late 19th century, as time went on and that center moved north, this area and the neighboring East Village became a center of ethnic theater and popular theater, movie houses, nickelodeons, and dance halls. As the neighborhood became home to an increasingly immigrant and working class population, reflective of the waves of immigration which transformed New York at this time, so too were the area's theaters transformed. Other nearby sites such as Webster Hall, the Yiddish Theater, and the now demolished Palladium are examples of this trend and the importance of this area to the history of theater in New York.

I would thus like to share the information we have about this compelling and now endangered building with the Commission, and urge that, particularly in light of the very real potential threat to the building, its history and significance be examined and its appropriateness for landmark status determined before it is too late. We look forward to hearing the results of your examination, and offer our resources to assist in any way that can be helpful.

Sincerely,

Andrew Berman
Executive Director