



Greenwich
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Society for
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Preservation

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TESTIMONY OF THE
GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

**First German Baptist Church (Later Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox
Church of St. Volodymyr/Later Congregation Tifereth Israel Town and
Village Synagogue), 334 East 14th Street**

**Public Hearing for Proposed Landmark
March 25, 2014**

The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation strongly supports the proposed designation of the Tifereth Israel Town and Village Synagogue as a New York City Landmark. Also, through our work in the community, we are aware of at least 153 letters in support of designation that have been emailed to the LPC. This 148-year-old house of worship is a distinctive building that is also a living encapsulation of the Lower East Side's immigrant histories.

Considering this structure worthy of landmark designation is no whim of current fashion: It was first proposed in 1966, shortly after the LPC's founding, but a vote was never taken. We are thrilled it is now receiving the attention it deserves.

The stately stone building has a commanding presence on its broad downtown street. Called a "pure Gingerbread Romanesque fantasy" by architectural writer David Dunlap, the structure was designed in 1866 by Julius Boekell as the First German Baptist Church, at the edge of *Kleindeutschland*, the third-largest urban German community in the world after Berlin and Vienna. It was stylistically German, an important assertion of the immigrant group's identity. The structure contained two symmetrical spires, a large cross sitting on the building's highest point, and many stained glass windows. Architect Boekell, whose designs include a variety of downtown residential buildings, here employed the rounded arches often seen on German churches, hearkening to the *Rundbogenstil* which has been incorporated into the American round-arch style.

The congregation first met in 1846 at Stanton and Essex Streets, before relocating to Avenue A near Second Street in 1850. As many of Little Germany's residents eventually migrated further uptown, the church moved too – eventually either merging with other congregations or simply ceasing to exist sometime after 1920.

In 1926, it became the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church of St. Volodymyr, which removed the central cross and replaced the spires with onion domes, a common feature in Eastern European architecture. This church, or "cathedral," was critical to the religion in the United States; it was the site where two jurisdictions in the U.S. unified

into one, in October of 1950. The cathedral was a great focus of Ukrainian Orthodox life in the metropolitan region.

Similar to the northward movement of the German Baptists before it, this congregation also moved uptown in 1962, making way that year for the Town and Village Synagogue, Congregation Tifereth Israel (Glory of Israel). A Conservative congregation, it was founded in 1949 and first worshipped at the Labor Temple at 242 East 14th Street. The Christian-themed stained glass was removed, though the onion domes remained and serve as a reminder of congregations past. Large panels of Jewish-themed stained glass presently adorn the sanctuary. The mid-century flourishing of nearby Stuyvesant Town-Peter Cooper Village, as well as the neighborhood generally, has been a major source of support to the congregation through the present day.

Now the building has been put on the market, and sales documents tout the possibility that the structure be razed and a new building erected. Should that happen, the East Village will lose both a tangible reminder of its rich history, as well as a grand and civilizing presence on a stretch of 14th Street with few examples of uplifting or distinctive design.

Given that this architecturally and culturally unique German Baptist-Ukrainian Orthodox-American Jewish edifice has been waiting for 47 years to be considered as a landmark, and its future is now in question, we ask that the Landmarks Preservation Commission give it the recognition it deserves.

Thank you.