



April 11, 2005

Honorable Robert Tierney, Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chair Tierney,

The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation has been following the progress of the rehabilitation of the three buildings at 753, 755, and 757 Greenwich Street very closely. During the past two and a half years, we have raised several substantial concerns with you and your staff regarding what the Commission has approved under staff level permits, the quality of the work that is being done, and the time it has taken for the critical stabilization work to be completed. To date, we have not been fully satisfied with the rehabilitation work, and we continue to be concerned with the structural and architectural integrity of these three buildings.

GVSHHP recently engaged an outside independent consultant, Michael Devonshire, to help us assess the work on these buildings. As you know, Mr. Devonshire's analysis corroborated our own concerns and conclusions about inappropriate work being done. Recently, GVSHHP and Mr. Devonshire met on site with the designer, Alan Barr, and masonry sub-contractor, Richard Mand of Five Boro Waterproofing. This meeting afforded us the opportunity to discuss the concerns we had about the work that had been done, to hear their perspective on the work, and to get a sense of what other work is planned. Unfortunately, this meeting confirmed many of our previously expressed concerns and revealed some very serious new ones.

Evidence of Storefront

The corner building, 753 Greenwich Street (a.k.a. 311 West 11th Street), was originally constructed with a storefront at its corner. During the 1830s, the intersection of Greenwich Street and West 11th Street was a commercial junction. Indeed, all of the buildings at the intersection's corners had storefronts during this time. The storefronts remain on the southeast and southwest corners of the intersection. On the northwest corner and on 753 Greenwich Street, evidence of the storefronts remains visible even though the storefront areas have been converted for residential use.

GVSHHP is concerned that the planned renovation of 753 Greenwich Street will erase the evidence of the storefront and will make it appear as if the building was always residential at its ground floor level. The introduction of window openings on the ground floor level of the 11th Street façade was apparently approved at staff level. We question the approval of the window openings, which in essence removes the evidence of the storefront and affects the historic integrity of the building. We regret that a public discussion before the full Commission of the appropriateness of the window openings was not offered.

Additionally, at our on-site meeting with Mr. Barr, he explained the intention to erect an areaway fence around both the Greenwich Street and 11th Street facades of 753 Greenwich Street. The alterations would create an areaway for planting in front of a building that never had this type of treatment. The sidewalk in front of the building is extremely narrow, and GVSHHP knows of no evidence to show that there was ever a fence at this part

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of the building, which as a storefront would not have had one. In fact, an 1879 photograph from the New-York Historical Society's collection shows that there was no areaway in front of this building at that time.

It is disturbing that a staff level permit was issued for the insertion of this fence and areaway for which there is no historic evidence and which erases the sense of the storefront at this location. Given the lack of historic evidence for the fence as required under the Commission's Restoration Rule, we ask that the Certificate of No Effect be revoked and that the applicants be required to seek a Certificate of Appropriateness for such a consequential and, in our minds, troubling alteration.

Alterations to the Garden Fence

Like the proposed alterations to the areaway, GVSHP is disturbed that the proposed alterations to the garden fence were issued a staff level permit. We understand that the LPC has consented to the removal of the iron fence temporarily to "dip and strip" it, and has permitted the cutting of the fence in order to relocate the gate from its historic location at the center of the garden fence to its western-most edge adjacent to the building. It is our understanding that the LPC's Restoration Rule only allows staff level permits for alterations that can be clearly evidenced by historic photographs, historic drawings, proof on the building's fabric of a prior condition, or similar conditions on buildings of the same period. The proposed alterations to the garden fence meet none of these criteria. Moreover, the current configuration of the thirty-foot garden fence dates to the construction of the building in 1836-37, and is a wonderful example of decorative ironwork in the Greenwich Village Historic District.

GVSHP is concerned that the process of removing, cutting up, and re-dipping the iron fence will do unnecessary harm to this extremely important historic element. The "dip and strip" treatment will only remove the paint from the ironwork and will not remove the corrosion from the iron. In addition, we understand that the designer and contractors intend to finish the iron with a "powder coat." This treatment method will not ensure the longevity of the ironwork; a treatment that involves thermal zinc spraying primer and epoxy modified paint finish should be used in order to protect the future of the ironwork.

Reconfiguring the location of the gate will also result in an odd configuration in the arrangements of the iron posts since the fence was designed to be symmetrical with the gate in the center. In light of the lack of historic evidence for the relocation of the gate and the substantial concerns about the effect of the alteration on the historic character of the house and the neighborhood, we ask the Certificate of No Effect permitting the work be revoked and a Certificate of Appropriateness be required.

Removal of the Coffin Windows at 753 Greenwich Street

The 11th Street façade of 753 Greenwich Street until recently featured coffin windows on the western bay of the second and the third stories. These false windows gave the appearance of window openings and featured inset bricked alcoves that originally would have allowed for shutters to be closed. GVSHP believes that these coffin windows were part of the 1830s design of the building. The false windows consisted of Flemish bond brickwork that matched the brickwork of the surrounding façade, and they appear in an 1870s photograph of the building. The opening of the windows received a staff level permit, but we know of no historic evidence to support the removal of this historic feature of the house. The Commission's Restoration Rule requires some evidence that these coffin windows were at some historic time traditional window openings. We know of no such proof and would like to see the Commission's evidence that supports this staff level decision.

Time Frame for Crucial Repairs to 755-757 Greenwich Street

At our site visit, Alan Barr would not provide a commitment regarding when work would begin to correct the damage to 755-757 Greenwich Street. GVSHP is distressed that a broken leader is causing damage to what remains of the original bricks on these two buildings. Each time that it rains or snows, the leader allows water to penetrate the bricks, causing substantial damage. There seems to be no timetable in place to correct the damage that has been done to the buildings during the past two and a half years. GVSHP asks the LPC to ensure that any stabilization and essential maintenance work take precedent over other non-essential work and that a timetable for the restoration of the houses be established immediately.

Brick Masonry Repairs on Greenwich Street Facades

As previously communicated to the LPC, we are troubled by the brick masonry repairs on Greenwich Street. At a meeting with the Commission in July 2004, GVSHP was assured that any historic brick that was removed from the buildings would be carefully marked and put back on the exterior. Despite conversations with LPC staff and the architect, we are still not convinced that the new brickwork on Greenwich Street consists of the historic brick that was removed from the exterior wythe of the masonry wall.

We should first clarify that the extent of the brick patching extends beyond the area of the former storefront and stretches down the Greenwich Street facade of the buildings. When we met with Alan Barr, he maintained that the patching consists of original historic brick with some newer bricks used from prior patching on the façade mixed into the batch. According to Mr. Barr, the discrepancy between the color of the historic brick areas and the color of the patching results from this mix. As evidence that the brick patching does contain bricks from the exterior wythe of the masonry wall, he pointed to some bricks that he stated contained graffiti from the exterior of the building.

Even after our meeting, we still refute Mr. Barr's assertion that those areas of patching consist primarily of the exterior bricks that were removed from the facades. Most of the bricks currently in place in the altered areas look like the new brick sample that was submitted to the LPC to be used for minor patching. We also suspect that the contractor when removing the brick did not properly separate the bricks from the inner wythes of the masonry wall from the more expensive and more durable bricks on the exterior wythe. We consent that there are some bricks on the wall where graffiti that may have been part of the original exterior remains. However, the extent of proper brick reuse is questionable, and even if Mr. Barr's explanation is correct, there is no denying that current brickwork looks awful, and the mixture of original and newer bricks makes for a disjointed and uneven façade. Given that what appears to be original bricks were removed from the coffin windows, we question why these were not re-used on the first floor to create a uniform patching of original bricks if, as Mr. Barr contends, there were not enough original bricks to do so due to prior patchings.

It cannot be disputed that much damage has been done to the building's masonry in the past two and a half years. The collapse of the party wall caused by the illegal work has resulted in the substantial settlement and movement of the building, making the recreation of the brick patterning much more difficult. In addition, the contractor's use of machine tools for removing the mortar has done a great deal of damage and has resulted in the sloppy appearance of much of the brickwork. Moreover, it has caused the destruction of the vitreous skin on the arrises of original bricks, which will eventually result in accelerated water related deterioration. Mr. Barr and Mr. Mand promised that any future raking of the mortar will be done by hand. We hope the LPC staff will be vigilant in ensuring that the contractor keeps this promise.

Thank you in advance for your attention to these matters. We look forward to working with the Commission to ensure that these wonderful buildings are appropriately restored and that the integrity of the Landmarks Law and the Commission's Restoration Rule is upheld. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Berman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Andrew Berman
Executive Director

cc: Sarah Carroll, LPC Director of Preservation
Mark Silberman, LPC General Counsel
Preservation League of New York State
Municipal Art Society
New York Landmarks Conservancy
Historic Districts Council
Congressman Jerrold Nadler
State Senator Thomas Duane
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
City Council Member Christine Quinn
City Council Member Charles Barron
City Council Member Leroy G. Comrie, Jr.
City Council Member Simcha Felder
City Council Member G. Oliver Koppell
City Council Member James S. Oddo
City Council Member Annabel Parma
City Council Member Bill Perkins
Manhattan Community Board 2



February 3, 2005

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

Dear Chair Tierney,

I write regarding the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation's very serious concerns about the work being performed at the properties at 753-757 Greenwich Street, owned by Annie Leibovitz.

As you know, we have been in communication with the Commission since early November, just after work began, regarding our concerns about the manner in which brickwork is being done on these properties. At that time, we noted that bricks were being removed from the façade of the building and placed in dumpsters for removal, though we had understood that the owner would be required to keep and re-use the historic brick for the reconstruction. We were told then by the Commission that the bricks being disposed of were from an interior layer, and that the façade bricks were being preserved and would be re-used.

However, when bricks were re-laid on the ground floor façade of these buildings, it was very clear to us that that these were not the original historic bricks, and that the new bricks were not being laid in an appropriate manner, destroying the integrity of the 1830's Greek Revival façade. When brought to the Commission's attention, we were quite surprised to be told that the bricks, which were so obviously not original, were determined upon inspection by the Commission to be original, and that there were no problems with the manner in which the brick was laid.

Eager to get an independent, expert opinion, GVSHP retained highly respected historic preservation consultant and architect Michael Devonshire to examine the visible work on the properties. His analysis and photographs are attached. As you can see, in his opinion, the brick being used is unequivocally not the original brick, the brick is being laid in a manner inconsistent with the existing pattern, there are very visible signs of damage to the brick, the joint cutting has in many cases been done in a completely inappropriate manner, and overall, the historic qualities of these landmarked building have been seriously compromised by the work. According to Mr. Devonshire

"much of the unfortunate damage which has been inflicted upon the historic façade masonry...is irreversible although the new inappropriate bricks can be removed and replaced with units which more closely replicate the originals. The type of damage which occurred and the incongruity of architectural elements is in my opinion precisely what we as preservationists attempt assiduously to avoid when designing restoration interventions on historic buildings. Interestingly, the LPC permit for the work mentions specifically the building's scale, materials, design, and details as being important features of the structures. Some of these have been irretrievably destroyed by the work being undertaken."

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James Ortenzio
James Stewart Polshak
Elinor Ratner
Henry Hope Reed
Alice B. Sandler
Calvin Trillin
Jean-Claude van Itallie
Anne-Marie Wiener-Summer
Anthony C. Wood

As you know, GVSHP has been very concerned about the fate of these 1830's buildings since the illegal work which was performed upon them by the owner nearly two and a half years ago did serious damage to their structural integrity and their facades. Since that time, we have consistently worked with the Commission to bring problems ranging from the lack of repairs to the buildings to the inappropriate manner in which restoration work has been done to the agency's attention. It is of great concern to us that it appears that significant historic features of the properties are now clearly being destroyed, in a manner contrary to permits issued by LPC, but the Commission is nevertheless allowing such work to continue, claiming it is appropriate restoration work.

This situation requires immediate attention. GVSHP would like to be able to work with the Commission and its staff to resolve this issue, and we request the opportunity to meet with staff in charge of this project to discuss this issue as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director

Cc: Congressman Jerrold Nadler
State Senator Thomas K. Duane
City Councilmember Christine Quinn
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
Municipal Art Society
New York Landmarks Conservancy
Historic Districts Council

**MICHAEL DEVONSHIRE
HISTORIC PRESERVATION CONSULTANT**

February 1, 2005

Mr. Andrew Berman, Executive Director
Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation
232 East 11th St.
New York, NY 10003

Re: 755-757 Greenwich St., Manhattan

Dear Andrew,

As you requested I recently visited the above mentioned site where renovation work is taking place on the building which wraps the corner at Greenwich St. and West 11th St. It was difficult to assess the complete scope of exterior work (such as cornice locations) due to the scaffolding and netting which have been installed above the sidewalk bridge, however, I was able to review the street level elevations and portions of the upper walls, and observations follow. I have attached some illustrative images as well.

Façade walls –

The brick masonry façade walls on both the Greenwich St and 11th St facades were originally constructed using either late water-stuck or early machine-pressed brick (more likely) with a predominantly “orange” hue, laid in Flemish bond (alternating courses of header/stretcher/header configuration). This configuration and color matches most of the remaining unaltered facades on the Greenwich St. block, which were presumably constructed also in the 1935-37 time period.

The existing original façade brick masonry has been infilled at several locations using brick which appears to be not pressed but hand struck, and of obtrusively dissimilar color (Photo 1). This has occurred not only at a large infill area on the Greenwich St. facade but also at newly cut window surrounds on the 11th St. façade. The newer brick has been laid in common bond rather than a replication of the original Flemish bond. Mortar joints on the original brick masonry system appear to have been a moderately uniform 1/8”, however, these have been cut out using a mechanical grinder. The horizontal joint cutting has been very poorly executed, and in some cases the joints are now 3/8” wide with “mistake” cuts to 1/2” at some locations, significantly and inalterably damaging original material.

Vertical joint cutting has been somewhat better executed, but over-cuts were noted at a few locations, where original bricks were damaged by the grinder (Photo 2).

Unfortunately, the consequences of the grinder damage not only affect the visual perception of the building, but damage the protective fire skin of remaining bricks, making them more vulnerable to water and frost damage. While at some locations the grinding has revealed original lime-based mortar remaining within the joints, several of what appear to be mortar field samples have been attempted, most of which do not replicate the appearance of the original. The Greenwich St. façade exhibits what appears to be salt efflorescence due to incompletely rinsed chemical cleaning attempts, however it was not clear that the masonry has been cleaned.

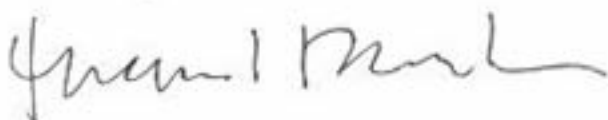
Windows

New wood windows installed at a few upper story window openings have sash configurations of 12-over-12 lights. This sash configuration is egregiously inappropriate for the period of the building construction, and considering the mid-19th C. window hoods which were later installed and remain on the 11th St. elevation. Window openings have been installed on the 11th St. elevation which clearly do not replicate an original window façade configuration.

Much of the unfortunate damage which has been inflicted upon the historic façade masonry (grinder damage) is irreversible although the new inappropriate bricks can be removed and replaced with units which more closely replicate the originals. The type of damage which has occurred and incongruity of architectural elements is in my opinion precisely what we as preservationists attempt assiduously to avoid when designing restoration interventions on our historic buildings. Interestingly, the LPC Permit for the work mentions specifically the building's scale, materials, design and details as being important features of the structures. Some of these have been irretrievably destroyed by the work being undertaken.

I would be very pleased to discuss the results of the observations with you at your convenience. Please let me know if I can be of additional assistance.

Best Regards,



Michael Devonshire

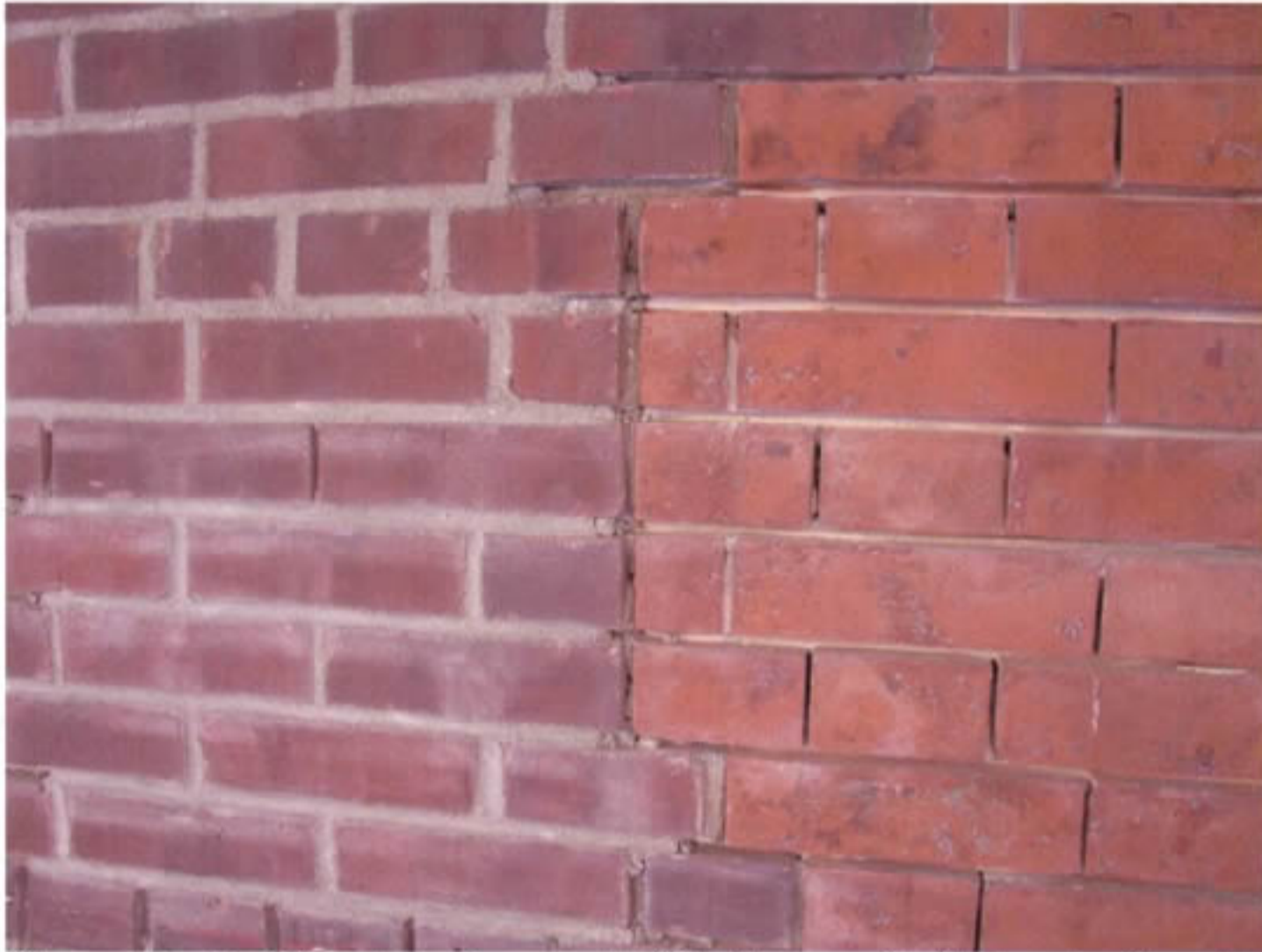


Photo 1: The dissimilar color and texture of infill brick is very visually obtrusive. Coursing of the new brick masonry does not replicate the original. Mortar joints in original bricks appear to have been widened to accommodate inappropriately wide new brick joints. Note grinder marks.



Photo 2: Poorly executed cutting of mortar joints is not only unsightly, but will affect the longevity of historic bricks. Note the unevenness of the grinder cuts. Joints should have been hand-cut if mortar removal was necessary.