



**Greenwich Village
Society for Historic Preservation**

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August 20th, 2010

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

**Re: Urgent Request for Evaluation for 328 and 326 East 4th Street,
Manhattan**

Dear Chair Tierney:

As a follow-up to our letter of August 13th, we would like to share with you some additional information pertaining to the architectural and cultural history of 326 & 328 East 4th Street researched by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. We hope that this illustration of how the history of these two houses is so tightly interwoven with the history of the East Village will allow you to reconsider your finding that they fail to meet the criteria for landmark designation.

Architecturally, these houses are extraordinary. The first and only houses ever to occupy these lots, they originally existed as part of a row of several constructed between the years 1837 and 1841 (see attachments 1 & 2). Five of these houses – Nos. 320 to 328 – still exist today. No. 320, which was constructed in 1837-1839, is the earliest of the survivors; the others were first assessed a couple of years later. Though altered to varying degrees, Nos. 320 – 326 most likely originally appeared similar to 328, which is remarkably intact and retains its original height and configuration, dentiled cornice, molded stone sills and lintels, ironwork, and many of its original windows. Its door is especially distinguished for having maintained all of its classic Greek Revival elements including its rectangular sidelights, leaded transom, flat pilasters and brownstone enframingent.

No. 326 is nearly as intact as 328. United with its neighbors by a continuous dentiled cornice, it has retained its stoop, ironwork, door enframingent, and original height and configuration. The door itself has been replaced, but with one evocative of Alphabet City in the 1970s – a period of major significance in this neighborhood as well.

Nos. 326 & 328 East 4th Street exemplify the highly-significant Greek Revival style, which has yet to be represented among landmarks in this portion of the neighborhood. They are as intact and nearly identical to those along the row at 406-418 West 20th Street in the Chelsea Historic District, which is noted in the designation report as being “one of the most splendid and best preserved

uniform rows of town houses in New York City. Simpler, but as carefully designed, it nonetheless ranks with the row at the northeast corner of Washington Square.”

The buildings also have a direct cultural connection to a few noteworthy periods in the history of the far East Village, all of which remain underrepresented among landmarks in the city. The earliest of these periods is that during which the East River thrived as the heart of New York’s working waterfront. While the Commission has recognized the significance of the South Street seaport to the history of the city, it has scarcely recognized the contribution of the portion of the East River bordering the East Village. It is no coincidence that a majority of the owners of the first buildings constructed around Lewis Street (since demapped) and Avenues C and D were stakeholders in the industries connected to the waterfront. The original owners of 326 & 328 East 4th Street were no exception.

Tax assessment records from 1839 indicate that the original owner of 326 East 4th Street was Fickett & Thomas, a large shipbuilding company that Longworth’s city directory from 1827 (approx. 13 years prior to the house’s construction) states was located at the corner of Clinton & Water Streets (attachment 3). Notably, Francis Fickett is credited with the construction of the SS Savannah, the first steamship in the world to cross the Atlantic Ocean (attachment 4). He appears in tax assessment records numerous times as the original developer of several homes along the block and was, at least until the 1890s, buried in the East Village’s own New York City Marble Cemetery (attachment 5; whether or not his remains are still there has yet to be confirmed). In 1842, the ownership of No. 326 had changed to George Fickett, who is noted in Longworth’s 1835 city directory as being a shipbuilder and was most likely a relative of Francis (attachment 6). Little is known of Cornelius Read, the original owner of No. 328, except for two genealogical records that point to his owning a lumberyard and working as a carpenter (attachments 7 - 10). When he died in 1849, the house was transferred to his estate. Between 1845 and 1849, his daughter Catherine and her husband Joseph Bishop lived next door at No. 326, which they allegedly purchased from George Fickett.

Most remarkably, the buildings have remained in their original state through a number of changes in use that stemmed directly from shifts in neighborhood demographics. With the influx of immigrants to what is now known as the East Village in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries came the transformation of many single-family homes to tenements. Both 326 & 368 housed multiple families by the turn-of-the-century (attachments 11 & 12). By 1927, historic building permits indicate that No. 328 housed a synagogue that is believed to have served a Hungarian congregation (attachment 13). The shul remained until 1974, when both buildings came to house the Uranaian Phalanstery, which calls itself “an anarchist utopian commune for practitioners of art and cosmology” and still exists today (attachment 14).

East Village folklore paints a romantic picture of the neighborhood in the later post-war years, in no small part due to institutions such as the Uranian Phalanstery, which sprang up when the low cost of living in the neighborhood made it attractive to artists and which paved the way for the neighborhood’s resurgence and transformation to a cultural hotbed. The Phalanstery was the brainchild of Richard Tyler, who, together with his wife Dorothea, founded the organization with a mission to document their lives through art (though Richard died in 1983, Dorothea has continued to foster the mission). In the years since, the couple amassed scores of spiritual artifacts that have transformed the buildings’ interiors into a sort of shrine to bohemia. The doorway of No. 326 most likely dates from around the time of the Phalanstery’s founding.

Nos. 326 and 328 East 6th Street come about as close as possible to a physical representation of the history of the far East Village – from its years as a working port to its shift to an immigrant community to its transformation to an epicenter for the artistic community. That these houses have remained virtually unchanged in the past 170 years is miraculous and noteworthy; that they could be lost to irresponsible development would be nothing short of tragic. We strongly urge the Commission to reconsider their original assessment and swiftly calendar these buildings for landmark designation.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
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Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation



Kurt Cavanaugh
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Cc: Councilmember Rosie Mendez
Mary Beth Betts, Director of Research, LPC
Municipal Art Society
NY Landmarks Conservancy
Historic Districts Council