



Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation

252 East 11th Street
New York, New York 10003

(212) 475-9585
fax: (212) 475-9582
www.gvshp.org

Executive Director
Andrew Berman

President of the Board
Mary Ann Arisman

Vice Presidents
Arthur Levin
Linda Yowell

Secretary/Treasurer
Katherine Schoonover

Trustees
Penelope Barau
Meredith Bergmann
Elizabeth Ely
Jo Hamilton
Leslie S. Mason
Ruth McCoy
Florent Morellet
Peter Mullan
Andrew S. Paul
Jonathan Russo
Judith Stonehill
Arbie Thalacker
George Vellonakis
Fred Wistow
F. Anthony Zanino III

Advisors
Kent Barwick
Joan K. Davidson
Christopher Forbes
Margaret Halsey Gardiner
Margot Gayle
Elizabeth Gilmore
Carol Greitzer
Tony Hiss
Martin Hutner
Regina M. Kellerman
James Stewart Polashek
Elinor Ratner
Henry Hope Reed
Alice B. Sandler
Anne Marie Sumner
Calvin Trillin
Jean-Claude van Itallie
Vicki Weiner
Anthony C. Wood

January 18, 2007

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

Re: Request for Evaluation for 233-237 Bleecker Street, Manhattan

Dear Chair Tierney:

I write to ask the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission to consider designation of the three connected buildings at 233-237 Bleecker Street as individual landmarks. While these buildings are within the South Village Historic District recently proposed by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, these rare, historic early 19th century structures face the continuing threat of insensitive alterations and possible demolition. These iconic buildings at a critical intersection in the South Village are in and of themselves historically and architecturally significant enough to warrant landmark designation; however, there is also evidence to indicate that they may have served as the inspiration for the renowned Edward Hopper painting "Early Sunday Morning" (1930), which would only add to their import.

233 Bleecker Street is a two-story wood frame house built in 1822 for a cartman named Hickson Wilson. 235 Bleecker Street is a brick extension of the building built in 1860. 237 Bleecker Street is a wood frame coach house built in 1830. 233 and 237 are wood frame structures of a type rarely found in Manhattan. They are architecturally and historically significant as embodiments of the early history, development, and evolution of New York.

The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation has conducted and compiled significant research upon these structures, documenting their early history, their significance in relation to this important confluence of streets at which they are located, their relationship to important historic events, and their possible connection to Hopper's iconic painting (see attached documents). We would be happy to speak to the Commission's staff further about the information we have on these buildings and the documents we can share with you to aid in your consideration of this proposal.

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent matter. I look forward to hearing back from you about it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Andrew Berman", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Andrew Berman
Executive Director

Cc: Borough President Scott Stringer
Congressman Jerrold Nadler
State Senator Tom Duane
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
City Council Speaker Christine Quinn
Historic South Village Preservation Project Advisory Board



A connection between Edward Hopper's *Early Sunday Morning* and the buildings at 231–235 Bleecker/15 Carmine Street

Linda Yowell FAIA

One of the most intriguing aspects of Edward Hopper's paintings is the contrast between the realism of their settings and the universal images into which those settings are transformed on canvas. Historians of Hopper's work have documented the actual locations of many of the buildings and landscapes that inspired his works. However, the location of his most iconic painting, "Early Sunday Morning" has long been elusive.

Completed in March 1930, the painting is first recorded in Jo Hopper's ledger as "Seventh Avenue Shops." Hopper later changed the title to "Early Sunday Morning." Newly discovered evidence suggests that the two-story early nineteenth century corner building at 231–235 Bleecker/15 Carmine Street, which still survives today, was Hopper's likely inspiration.

"Research for the biography also revealed that Hopper relied upon observing specific sites more often than anyone had

*previously realized.” – Gail Levin, Hopper’s Places p. x
(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).*



231-235 Bleeker, Percy Loomis Sperr photographer, 1933, collection NYPL

I. The general appearance today.

231 Bleeker Street evokes the Hopper painting in overall appearance, massing, color and materials. The structure has the two-story massing of the building in the painting and in passing appears to be entirely of brick, although

on closer inspection, it reveals itself to be a combination of wood framing faced in brick-textured building paper, and actual brick. The first story houses a series of shops, and the second a row of double-hung windows in a rhythmic pattern. A painted bracketed cornice caps the second story. The much taller neighboring tenement building to the north on Carmine Street has a strong presence as a backdrop. The windows in the brick sections have stone lintels and sills, while the windows in the frame section have wood surrounds.



231-235 Bleeker Street/15 Carmine Street , November 2006

II. Similarities between details of the painting and a 1933 photograph of 231-235 Bleeker Street.

"I find in working, always the disturbing intrusion of elements not part of my most interested vision, and the inevitable obliteration and replacement of this vision by the work itself as it proceeds." – Edward Hopper, "Notes on Painting", 1933

It is only upon examining a 1933 photograph of the building taken by Percy Loomis Sperr that one discovers a striking number of specific details, some of which have since disappeared, that match those in the painting.

Several details are especially similar:

(1) The barber pole in the sidewalk; historic photographs reveal that sidewalk-mounted barber poles varied greatly in design, but every detail of this barber pole matches the one in the painting.



(2) The scallop-edged, cloth-draped awning of the second storefront.

(3) The layout of the painted lettering in the store windows, with a curved upper line of type above straight lines below.



235-239 Bleeker, 1932, collection NYPL

(4) The stout fireplug in the foreground; although across the street, the location of the fireplug aligns with the corresponding storefront in the painting.



(5) The profile and color of the cornice; while the cornice is painted a light color today, the 1933 photo records a dark paint color for the cornice. The profile of the brackets and the overhang match those in the painting.

(6) The location of the tall building behind; a significant element of the painting is a dark mass that hovers above the building to the right. Note in the 1933 photo the dark shaded massing of the one wing of the tenement behind that has not been covered by a painted billboard.

III. The flattened perspective.

"More complicated was Hopper's use of multiple points of view, allowing the spectator to see his subject as it actually looked from several different viewpoints" – Levin, P. 11

Hopper's horizontal composition shows a building with ten second-story windows, the ends of the structure cut off by the canvas to divorce the building of context and flatten the perspective. At 231–235 Bleecker, there are only seven second-story windows across the Bleecker side facade. However, comparing the photograph of the building today with the painting, it seems that Hopper has nearly seamlessly placed both sides of the corner building into one plane, adding the three windows of the Carmine Street side to the Bleecker Street façade.

He actually gives us a clue to this flattening in his doubling of the roof bracket where the building would “fold” at the corner. He then throws us off course by also doubling a bracket on the left half of the canvas. The angled perspectives of the roof brackets, at odds with the even representation of the storefronts below, also indicate multiple viewpoints.

Another clue is the tall building shown as a black mass of indefinite height above the cornice at the right side of the canvas. This is 13 Carmine Street, as it would be seen behind 231 Bleecker from across Carmine Street. Hopper typically removed details of the taller buildings he portrayed as threatening the Village's lower buildings and roofscapes, as in his painting *City Roofs* of 1932.

IV. The distinctive long shadows parallel to the sidewalk and street but leaving the façade in relative darkness can still be seen at 231–235 Bleecker on early Sunday mornings.

The morning shadows, with a sharp contrast of light and shadows cast on the sidewalk but not lighting the building, and the eerie lack of activity on Bleecker Street

can still be seen today at 231–235 Bleecker on any similar blue-sky early Sunday morning.

The compass orientation of this section of Bleecker is east-west, allowing the early morning sun to glance sideways along the street, creating long shadows parallel to the street. If the barber pole were still there today, one could imagine it lit on one side and casting its shadow exactly as it is in the painting, with the darkened shopfronts behind it.

V. Why the original title, “Seventh Avenue Shops” ?

“The American impressionists selected the idyllic aspects of our country; if they sometimes pictured New York it was Fifth Avenue and not Seventh.” – Goodrich, Lloyd, Edward Hopper (New York:Harry N. Abrams, 1971)

If 231 Bleecker was the subject of the painting, why was it originally titled, “Seventh Avenue Shops”? Hopper’s subject could not have been on Seventh Avenue. Such morning shadows parallel to the curb and buildings could not occur on Seventh Avenue, a north-south street. The buildings clearly date from the nineteenth century and no buildings of this vintage ever existed in the Village on Seventh Avenue below Eleventh Street for a simple reason; there was no Seventh Avenue below Eleventh Street until 1916, when the City cut through several Village blocks to connect Seventh Avenue with Varick Street.

There is, however, another possible explanation. In the 1920’s and ‘30’s, “Seventh Avenue” indicated an everyday commonplace location, not as special as Fifth Avenue. Unlike the earlier American Impressionists, Hopper preferred to portray common everyday scenes in his work. The phrase “Seventh Avenue Shops” could have

been used as an adjective to describe small everyday shops, as opposed to the finer stores on Fifth Avenue.

VI. Hopper's subject often was changing New York.

Hopper lived at 3 Washington Square North from 1913 until his death in 1967. His interest in portraying places in his neighborhood on the verge of change is evident from the first years he came to live in the Village.

"In 1913, in part to make subway construction easier, the city decided to extend Seventh Avenue to the south, clear-cutting a 100-foot-wide swath through the West Village. It also widened Varick Street by slicing off the easterly side; in 1914 the project destroyed 194 buildings that housed several thousand residential tenants and hundreds of businesses."

Christopher Gray, "How 61 Grove Street Lost Its Southeast Corner," New York Times, December 8, 1996

Hopper's etching *City Scene with Tenements* of 1915-18 appears to show Seventh Avenue in the process of being cut through the Village. Piles of rubble in the street form the left side of the composition, while on the right a two-story frame house sits squeezed between a tall tenement on its left and a looming shadow on the right. A trio of men in overcoats and hats appear to be conferring, possibly about the construction of the new avenue or of the modern skyline indicated as tall blocks in the distance.

"He felt alienated by urban crowding, skyscrapers, airplanes and other signs of change" – Levin, p. viii

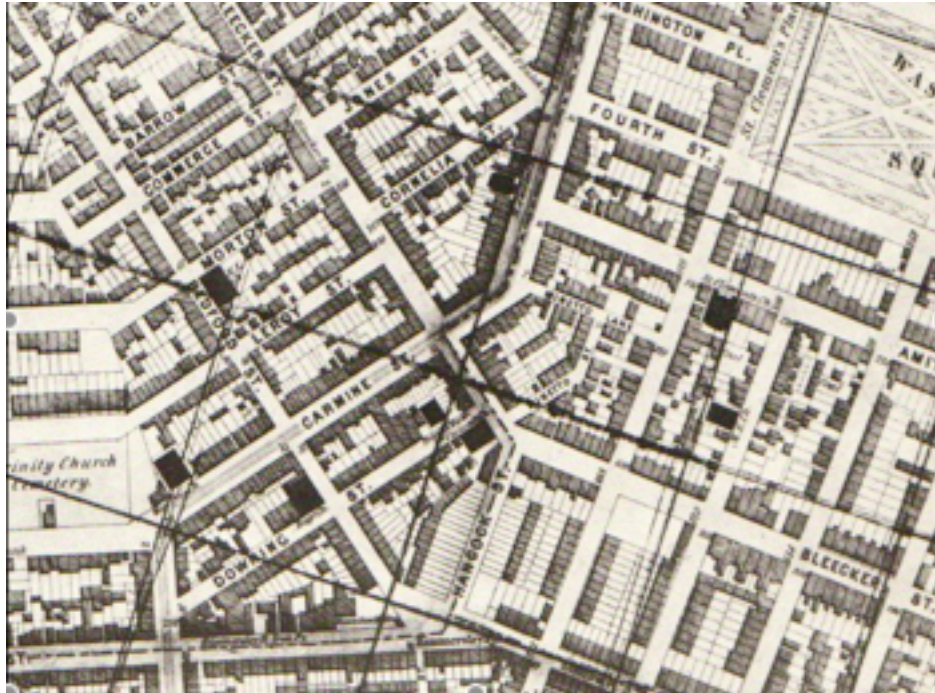


In 1930, 231 Bleeker was a survivor in the midst of change and is in fact located at the position from which Hopper viewed the subject of another etching he made in the 1915–1918 period.

"I spend many days usually before I find a subject that I like well enough to do...I had no other concrete data, but relied on refreshing my memory by looking often at the subject" – Edward Hopper letter to Charles Sawyer, October 1939, in Goodrich, p. 163

This site at Bleeker and Carmine, just a few blocks from his studio, had just survived the great upheaval of the

southward extension of Sixth Avenue, similar in scope to the Seventh Avenue work in the Village fifteen years earlier. Until 1925 Sixth Avenue ended north of Bleecker and turned into Carmine Street. Since 1819, the last time that Sixth Avenue was extended (from Christopher Street to Carmine Street) this had been a very important commercial intersection. In the mid-nineteenth century it was a major north-south route on the west side of Manhattan. An early Sixth Avenue horsecar line to and from uptown turned into Carmine Street and proceeded south on Varick.



1867 Dripps map, collection NYPL

At the time Hopper completed *Early Sunday Morning* in 1930, a large swath of Bleecker Street from Carmine across to Minetta Lane had just been sacrificed to the extension of Sixth Avenue below Carmine Street. Side streets off Bleecker, such as Hancock Street, were erased from the map. Major bank and church buildings were

demolished along with dozens of residential and commercial structures.

The demolished buildings included an entire streetscape that Hopper had recorded earlier in an etching of 1915–1918, *Carmine Street*, which shows a view looking northeast from the west side of Carmine, just above Bleecker, toward a section of Carmine between Minetta Lane and Bleecker Street.

Hopper would have known 231–235 Bleecker/15 Carmine as surviving this second great wave of change he had witnessed in the Village. Some of the emotional charge in the painting may have derived from this sense.

Once the City's work was complete in 1928, traffic along the new Sixth Avenue no longer turned onto Carmine Street and consequently bypassed the Bleecker storefronts. *Early Sunday Morning* records a place that life was passing by, but the place it records survives at 231 Bleecker Street.

"He treasured vernacular buildings decades in advance of historians and preservationists, drawing satisfaction from things that stayed as they were."

Avis Berman, *Edward Hopper's New York* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2005), p. 22.

Perhaps the heart of this painting is that what we take for granted to be a solid generic New York building is in fact revealed to be a lone, fragile survivor.



Pl. 11. *Carmine Street*, 1915–18. Etching, 7 × 8 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper 70.1061.



*Detail of photograph, Carmine Street from Bleecker Street to Sixth Avenue,
Percy Loomis Sperr photographer, late 1926, collection NYPL*



*Across Sixth Avenue wreckage from Carmine Street,
Percy Loomis Sperr photographer, May 12, 1927, collection NYPL*

Sources:

Berman, Avis, Edward Hopper's New York (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2005).

Brown, Mary Elizabeth, From Italian Villages to Greenwich Village Our Lady of Pompeii 1892-1992 (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1992).

Burrows, Edwin, and Wallace, Mike, Gotham (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Goodrich, Lloyd, Edward Hopper (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1971).

Gray, Christopher, "How 61 Grove Street Lost Its Southeast Corner", New York Times, December 8, 1996.

Hopper, Edward, "Notes on Painting," in 1933 catalog of retrospective exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, reproduced in *Goodrich*, p. 163.

Hughes, Robert, essay "Edward Hopper," in Nothing if not Critical (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. 227.

Jackson, Kenneth, ed., The Encyclopedia of New York City (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

Levin, Gail, Edward Hopper, the Complete Prints (New York: W.W. Norton in association with the Whitney Museum, 1979).

Levin, Gail, Hopper's Places (Berkeley: U Calif Press, 1998).

Maps:

1867 Dripps map of New York City, collection of the New York Public Library:

Plan of New York City, from the Battery to Spuyten Duyvil Creek. Showing every lot and building thereon; old farm lines, street numbers at the corners of blocks,

railroads, steamboat landings, bulkhead and pier lines, etc. Based on the surveys made by Messrs. Randall & Blackwell, and on the special survey by J. F. Harrison.

1860 Transit Map: Eastern District Clerk of the Court's Map of Lower Manhattan, reproduced in Landers, John, Twelve Historical New York City Street and Transit Maps (New York: H & M Productions, 1997).

Photos:

(P.2 et. seq.) 231-233-235 Bleecker/15 Carmine Street, Percy Loomis Sperr March 27, 1933, collection of the New York Public Library, Milstein Division #0710-D1.

(P. 3) 231-235 Bleecker Street, photographer Linda Yowell, November 2006.

(P. 5) Detail of 235,239 Bleecker Street, 1932 collection of Museum of the City of New York and NYPL, Milstein Division #0710-D2.

(P. 14 top) Carmine Street, from Bleecker Street to Sixth Avenue, showing also Sixth Avenue, east side, from Minetta Lane to 3rd Street. On the east side, 20 to 2 Carmine Street, from Bleecker Street to Minetta Lane, and 4 to 16 Sixth Avenue, from Minetta Lane to 3rd (formerly Amity) Street, are shortly to be demolished for the southward extension of Sixth Avenue. Percy Loomis Sperr, late 1926, collection of the New York Public Library, #0767-B3.

(P. 14 bottom) Across Sixth Avenue Wreckage from Carmine Street, May 12, 1927, Percy Loomis Sperr, collection of the New York Public Library #0372-A3.

Just to the left of the 1933 photo, across the street from 231 Bleecker, which would also be the vantage point of the painting, is the location of the then-newly constructed Our Lady of Pompeii Church, dedicated in October 1928. The prior church building of Our Lady of Pompeii at 210 Bleecker and Downing Street was demolished for the Sixth Avenue extension in 1927.

Percy Loomis Sperr, the photographer who captured the building in 1933, was also fascinated by physical change in the city's appearance and contributed over 30,000 photographs, mostly of streetscapes, to the New York Public Library.

Text © 2007 Linda Yowell

Manhattan Tax Assessment Records

15 Carmine Street (corner of Bleecker)

Block 589 Lot 48,1 Ward 9

Note: spellings as found, strikethroughs indicate corrections made by assessor

Researcher: Susan De Vries, 2001

<i>Year:</i>	<i>Owner:</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Assessed at</i>	<i>Personal Estate</i>	<i>Note:</i>
1827					
Herring & Sixth Avenue					
no#	Hickson Wilson	H&L	2,000		
	Jno Cox in			100	
no#	Estate Benj. Thorpe	H&L	1,200		
no#	Jno. Hyler	"	1,300		
no#	Jas Votey	1L	800		
no#	J.H. Metzler	1L	800		
no#	"	"	"		
1828					
Herring & Sixth Avenue					
no#	Hickson Wilson	H&L	2,200 cor		
no#	Est. B. Thorp	"	1,500		
no#	John Hiler	"	1,400		
no#	Thomas Ball	"	4,600 ? 1,600?		
no#	J.H. Metzler Johnathon Southwick	3/4 L	800		
no#	"	"	"		
1829					
north side					
no#	John Hiler	H&L	1,300		
no#	Est. of Benj. Thorp	"	1,300		
no#	H. Wilson	"	1,700		
17	John B. Schneilze	"	2,400		Bleecker and Bedford
1830 & 1831 missing					
1832					
Avenue 6 and Bleecker					
no#	John Parr	H&L	1,000		
7	E.A. Banks	"	3,500		
9	David Sutton	"	4,000		
	William Brown in			500	
11	John Wyler	H&L	2,000		
13	Est. B. Thorp	"	2,300		
15	Samuel Harris	"	4,000 cor	3,000	
1833					
7	E.A. Banks	H&L	3,500		
9	David Sutton	H&L	4,000		
	Wm. Browns in			500	
11	John Jyler	H&L	2,000		
13	Estate of B. Thorpe	"	"		
15	Saml. Harris	"	4,000	2,000	
1834					
7	E.A. Bankcer	H&L	3,500		
9	David Sutton	"	4,000		
	Wm. Brown in			2,000	
	Wm. Ranson? in			500	
11	John Huyler	?H&L	2,200		

13	Estate of Wm. Thorp	2H&L	2,200	
15	Saamuel H (ink blot)	H2L	4,000	2,000
1835				
5	John Parr	H&L	1,000	
7	Charles M. Hay	“	3,000	
9	David Sutton	“	4,000	
11	John Huyler	3H&L	2,500	
13	Widow Thorp	3H&L	2,300	
15	Samuel Harris	H&L	3,200	cor
1836				
5	John Parr	H&L	2,200	
7	Charles M. Hay	“	4,300	
9	David Sutton	“	5,300	
11	John Huyler	“	3,000	
	Lucas &? White in			500
13	Widow Margaretta Thorpe	2H&L	3,800	1,000
15	Samuel Harris	H&L	5,300	cor
1837				
5	John Parr	H ?oreL	3,000	note: it really doesn't look like store (no t)
7	Ch. M. Hay	H&L	4,500	
9	David Sutton	“	5,600	
	John Rith? in			1,000
11	Est. John Huyler	2H&L	3,300	
	Ar. Lucas in			1,000
	N.T. Birdebt in			1,000
13	Widow Thorp	2H&L	3,300	
15	Wm. Nixon	H& ½ L	5,000	cor
1838				
5	John Parr	H&?store?L	2,400	
7	Charles M. Hay	H&L	3,600	
9	David Sutton	“	4,500	
11	Est. of John Huyler	H&L	2,500	
	N.T. Burdett in			1,000
13	Widow Thorp	2H&L	2,500	
15	Andrew Nixson	H& ¾ L	4,000	
	Hubert Hall in			2,000
1839				
5	John Parr	H&?store?L	2,400	
7	Charles M. Hay	H&L	3,600	
9	David Sutton	“	4,500	
11	Est. of John Huyler	H&L	2,500	
	N.T. Burdett in			1,000
13	Widow Thorp	H&L	2,500	
15	Hubert Hall	H&L	4,000	
1840				
5	John Parr	H&store?L	2,400	
7	Charles M. Hay	H&L	3,600	
9	David Sutton	H&L	4,300	
11	Est. of John Huyler	2H&L	2,500	
	N.T. Berdett in			1,000
13	Widow Therpe	2H&L	2,500	
15	Hubert Hall	H&L	4,000	
1845				
5	John Parr	L&2H	5,500	

7	Charles M. Hay	$\frac{3}{4}$ L&H	3,600
9	David Sutton	H&L	5,000
11	John Huyler	"	3,300
13	Widow Thirp?	H& $\frac{3}{4}$ L	3,600
15	Est of D.C. Porter	H& $\frac{3}{4}$ L	4,500

1850

5	John Parr David Irwin	L&2H	5,500
7	Charles M. Hay	$\frac{3}{4}$ L&H	3,600
9	David Sutton	H&L	5,500
11	John Huyler	"	3,300
13	C.V.S. Roosevelt (sic)	"	3,700
15	Est of D.C. Porter	H $\frac{3}{4}$ L	6,200

1855

5	David Irwin	L&2H	5,500
7	Thomas Herring	$\frac{3}{4}$ L&H	4,000
9	David Sutton	"	6,000
11	John Huyler	"	3,300
13	C.S. Roosevelt (sic)	"	3,700
15	Est of D.C. Potter	"	6,200

1860-no house indication

5	David Erwin Thomas Turner	2S	5,500
7	Thos Fleming	"	4,500
9	"	"	6,000
11	John Huyler	"	3,800
13	---- Roosevelt	"	4,200
15	Est. of D.C. Potter	"	6,200

1865- no house indication

5	T.Turner	3S	7,000
7	Thos Fleming	3,3S	6,000
9	"	"	7,000
11	John Huyler	"	3,800
13	C.V.L. Roosevelt	"	4,200
15	Est. D. Porter	"	6200

note: do ditto marks mean just 1 3S house or 2 3S?

1870

5	T.Turner	3S 1H	10,800
7	Thomas Fleming	4S 2H	7,200
9	"	" "	8,400
11	John Huyler	4S 2H	7,200
13	C.S. Roosevelt	" "	"
15	Est. of D.C. Porter	" (sic?)	10,800

note: ditto marks of assesor

1875

5	T.Turner	3S 2H	15,000
7	Thos Fleming	3, 4S 2H	8,000
9	"	" "	10,000
11	John Huyler	3,3S 2H (sic?)	8,000
13	---- Roosevelt	" "	"
15	D.C. Porter Est.	2S 1H	14,000

northeast cor

1880

5	T.Turner	3S 2H	15,000
7	Thos Fleming	3, 4S 2H	8,000
9	"	" "	9,000
11	John Huyler	" "	8,000
13	---- Roosevelt	" "	"
15	Est. D.C. Porter	2S 1H	14,000

northeast cor

1885

5	T. Turner	3S 2H	15,000	
7	Thos Fleming	3, 4S 2H	8,000	
9	"	" "	9,000	
11	John Huyler	" "	8,000	
13	C.V.S. Roosevelt	" "	"	
15	D.C. Porter	2S 1H	14,000	NEC (northeast corner)