



**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
REGARDING PROPOSED LANDMARK DESIGNATION OF THE
FORMER VAN TASSEL & KEARNEY HORSE MART
126-128 East 13th Street/123 East 12th Street
September 7, 2006**

Good afternoon Commissioners. I wish to thank you for the opportunity to testify, and especially for taking the unusual action of holding this emergency meeting to consider landmark designation of this wonderful and imminently endangered building.

The LPC has an all-too-rare opportunity today – to bring a treasured piece of New York City’s history facing destruction back from the brink. In July the new owner of 128 East 13th Street filed plans for development of a 7-story building on this site, but fortunately had not yet filed demolition permits for the existing building. This created an uncommon opening to save this building, and we seized it, bringing the danger and the narrow window of opportunity to the Commission’s attention right away. I can only praise the Commission for responding so swiftly and resolutely, and because of this you now have the opportunity to consider landmark designation of this gem of a building while there is still time. As you know, however, that time will not last much longer, and thus we hope you will act today.

This building certainly warrants such action. The former Van Tassel & Kearney Horse Mart is as admired for its unassuming monumentality as it is for its rich and incredible history. The building’s elegant proportions and materials and grand arch and central hall are particularly pleasing to the passerby, and speak to the building’s origins as a place of business for the city’s elite at the turn of the last century. Few structures can seem as modest and yet as grand at the same time, as the building balances stateliness with humble proportions, while reflecting both the elegance and functionality of its original incarnation as a place where the rich came to view and chose horses for purchase. By all accounts, this is likely the last surviving example in the city of this once-common building type, the horse auction mart, though in later years it served as an assembly line training center, including for women during World War II, and from 1978 to 2005 served as the studio of one of the late 20th century’s greatest and most influential artists. You don’t often get a better resume for a candidate for landmark designation than that.

It is perhaps this unusual history that makes this building most remarkable. How many structures in New York can conjure up images of the Vanderbilts purchasing polo ponies, Frank Stella creating masterpieces of 20th century art, and Rosie the Riveter fighting the war on the home front? In fact, the building’s transformation from auction mart for the city’s leisure class to training ground for the city’s working class to cradle of the city’s artistic class perhaps mirrors the city and this neighborhood’s evolution better than any other single building.

128 East 13th Street's progression from a place where horses, then manufactured goods, and then great works of art were produced perfectly captures the arc of downtown's development.

However, the building now sits at a crossroads, which also reflects the state of our city and our neighborhood. 128 East 13th Street can be preserved and honored for its remarkable contributions to our city's history and development, or it can be destroyed to make way for a slightly more profitable but infinitely less remarkable building. I hope the Commission will make the same laudable decision here that it has recently at nearby PS 64 in honoring the precious but fragile artistic, cultural, and architectural history of the East Village, and designate 128 East 13th Street as a New York City landmark.

Thank you.