



Greenwich
Village
Society for
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Preservation

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TESTIMONY OF THE GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY
FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
REGARDING PROPOSED INDIVIDUAL LANDMARK DESIGNATION OF
THE ASCHENBROEDEL VEREIN BUILDING
74 East 4th Street, Manhattan
March 24, 2009

Thank you Commissioners for the opportunity to testify before you today. The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation strongly supports the proposed designation of 74 East 4th Street, originally constructed for the Aschenbroedel Verein, as an individual landmark.

The Commission should be applauded for recognizing the importance of the building as a symbol of a critical transition period in East Village history. The German-speaking population for which it was constructed was the first major foreign language group to settle in what was then known as the Lower East Side, and essentially kick-started the neighborhood's shift to an immigrant haven. Outside of Berlin and Vienna, from the 1850s through 1880s New York City came to have the largest German-speaking population in the world, and approximately half of this population lived in the Lower East Side's Kleindeutschland. The neighborhood quickly became the center of German-American cultural and economic life, with the Aschenbroedel Verein as one of its leading organizations.

The prejudice toward German musicians at that time encouraged them to form insular entertainment circles. The Aschenbroedel Verein was founded in 1860 as a small musician's club, which evolved into a social organization of which some of the most prominent German-American musicians in New York City were members. The society's first purpose-built home was constructed at 74 East 4th Street in 1873 by German-born architect August H. Blankenstein. The design of the 4-story brick building echoes German Renaissance Revival influences, especially with the sculptural ornament above the second-story windows. It has maintained intact a playful variety of Neo-Grec lintels and decorated quoins.

Since 1960, the building has been home to the La MaMa Experimental Theater Club. Though theater has been heavily concentrated along East 4th Street since the early 19th Century, La MaMa is one of a significant number of experimental theatres that have defined the East Village in the post-war years. This important aspect of Village history is in danger of being erased as theatres throughout the East Village, South Village, and Greenwich Village are rapidly being lost.

Thus, we thank the Commission for recognizing 74 East 4th Street as a symbol of several significant eras in the history of the East Village. It is highly deserving of landmarking, and we urge the Commission to move forward expeditiously with designation.

Thank you.