



**TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO
REVISED APPLICATION FOR CHANGES TO
131 and 131 1/2 CHARLES STREET (LPC-22-06302)**

March 1, 2024

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232 EAST 11TH STREET

NEW YORK NY 10003

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VILLAGEPRESERVATION.ORG

Village Preservation strongly urges the Landmarks Preservation Commission to again reject the revised application for alterations to this 1834 house and carriage house, significant as both individual landmarks and as part of the Greenwich Village Historic District Extension I.

The most recent version of the proposal still involves extensive excavation under the main house, rear yard, and carriage house, and we are extremely concerned about the potential damage this excessive excavation may cause. Given the City's troublingly poor track record of ensuring that excavation work is done safely and in a manner that does not endanger the affected building or its neighbors, we find it critical that extra precautions are taken to protect this important and delicate historic site.

At the last Public Meeting of October 13, 2023, the Commissioners agreed with our concerns about the excavation work, and asked the applicants to revise this scope. While the extent of excavation has since been reduced, it will still overwhelm the original massing of this early 19th-century house, and put historic fabric at serious risk.

While the width of the proposed studio window-esque rear dormer has been slightly reduced, we continue to find its design inappropriate to the intact Federal style house and its typical peaked roof. This rooftop alteration, in conjunction with the proposed modifications to the rear of the main house and facing facade of the rear house, will alter the important relationship between the two structures, critical to one's understanding of the development of the landmark site.

We also continue to oppose the elimination of much of the horse walk, and advocate for its full retention as a significant historic feature. This complete passageway is a critical reference to the fact that these were originally separate structures with distinct histories and functions, and erasing the direct visual and physical connection from the street to the rear house also erases that history and those distinctions.

No. 131 Charles Street is a uniquely intact Federal style row house which, according to the attached designation report, is one of the few remaining examples of its kind, while 131 1/2 Charles Street is a carriage house that dates to the late 19th century and from 1959 to 1968 was the residence of celebrated photographer Diane Arbus at the height of her career. Once again, we strongly urge the Commission to reject this proposal, which is inappropriate for this uniquely historic and significant pair of buildings.

Thank you.

131 CHARLES STREET HOUSE, Borough of Manhattan. 1834.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 632, Lot 30.

On March 8, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 131 Charles Street House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 36). Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. In a telegram to the Commission, the owner of the house favored its designation. In a letter, the Borough President's Community Planning Board No. 2 approved the proposed designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This charming, early Nineteenth Century two-story brick house with peaked roof, delicate dormers and high basement, is one of the few remaining examples of the small comfortable Federal street houses, once so abundant in New York City. Intimate in scale, the proportions and details are marked by a modest simplicity. The decorative doorway is the one note of richness in this simple builder's house. A low stoop with wrought-iron railings leads gracefully up to a handsome Federal style doorway with an eight-panelled door, slightly recessed behind two slender wood columns. The wood entablature above the door is surmounted by a rectangular leaded light, framed in handsome carved moldings. The lintel, supported on brackets above the door, appears to be a Victorian addition taking the place of an earlier plain type.

All the windows, except the dormers, have their original frames and lintels. The beaded wood cornice remains unchanged, but the alley door is missing and the interesting elliptical window above it has been bricked up. This small residence was built by David Christie, a stone cutter in 1834, for about \$2,600. These residences of the 1820's were almost all builder's, carpenter's, or stonemason's homes, and there were several blocks of them at one time. In 1899 Montgomery Schuyler, the critic, wrote that they were "the most respectable and artistic pattern of habitation New York has ever known."

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the 131 Charles Street House has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the 131 Charles Street House is a well preserved example of a charming, late Federal brick house of excellent proportion and scale, built of sound materials in the best tradition of craftsmanship, that it is evocative of the qualities of another century and of another way of life, and that it represents one of the best examples of the small New York town house.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the 131 Charles Street House, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 632, Lot 30, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

Form 10-300
(July 1969)UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: New York	
COUNTY: New York	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME			
COMMON: 131 Charles Street House			
AND/OR HISTORIC:			
2. LOCATION			
STREET AND NUMBER: 131 Charles Street			
CITY OR TOWN: New York			
STATE New York	CODE 36	COUNTY: New York	CODE 061

OFFICE COPY

3. CLASSIFICATION		STATUS		ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP			
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)				
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY			
OWNER'S NAME: Mr. & Mrs. John J. Stonehill			
STREET AND NUMBER: 131 Charles Street			
CITY OR TOWN: New York	STATE: New York	CODE 36	

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION			
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: New York County Hall of Records			
STREET AND NUMBER: 31 Chambers Street			
CITY OR TOWN: New York	STATE: New York	CODE 36	

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS			
TITLE OF SURVEY: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission			
DATE OF SURVEY: April 1966 <input type="checkbox"/> Federal <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> County <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local			
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission			
STREET AND NUMBER: 305 Broadway			
CITY OR TOWN: New York	STATE: New York	CODE 36	

Rep. Bella Abzug

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: New York	FOR NPS USE ONLY
COUNTY: New York	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

7. DESCRIPTION			
CONDITION	(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair
	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)		(Check One)
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site
DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE			
<p>This small late Federal house is two stories high, with an attic lighted by two pedimented dormers in the pitched roof. As in most of New York's Federal houses, the brick walls are laid up in Flemish bond, and the wood trim is painted white. The heavy window lintels and the cornice above the door are additions of a later period. It is likely that the original Federal trim exists beneath them. An eight-paneled oak door is set between slender Ionic side columns which support an entablature. Above the door, a leaded transom lights the stair hall. The cornice with dentils which extends the width of the facade, is wide for the Federal period, and with its added weight, it forshadowes the solidity which was becoming an aesthetic ideal.</p> <p>In 1834 Greenwich Village was still a suburban community. During the late 18th and 19th centuries the builders of houses in towns felt it necessary to include small dooryards or areaways between the front wall and the sidewalk to distinguish from the city residence a village house. The areaway at 131 Charles Street is still defined by a wrought-iron fence with a classical motif.</p> <p>The low stoop which gives access to the door is brown stone covered with cement, and retains its original wrought-iron hand railing with newel posts of a later date.</p> <p>Inside the house, the plan is notably different from the usual small Federal townhouse plan. The stairway rises from the front of the entrance hall rather than from the rear. The rear chimney is near the center of the house, between two rear rooms. A narrow passageway runs through the house at street level serving a backhouse causing the ceiling to be higher than the level of the main floor. The space above this passageway is utilized within the house for closets and china cabinets. An oval window, now bricked up, is located above the passageway on the main facade.</p> <p>Inside the house much of the original trim remains. The floors are the original pine boards. The carved wood mantels in the main rooms are the original ones, and the door and window architraves, pilasters and ceiling cornice in the front are original. In the rear dining room are the china cabinets with pine doors. The stairway still has its original newel post and bannister.</p>			

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Pre-Columbian☐ 16th Century☐ 18th Century☐ 20th Century☐ 15th Century☐ 17th Century☒ 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1834

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

Aboriginal

☐ Prehistoric☐ Historic☐ Agriculture☒ Architecture☐ Art☐ Commerce☐ Communications☐ Conservation☐ Education☐ Engineering☐ Industry☐ Invention☐ Landscape☐ Architecture☐ Literature☐ Military☐ Music☐ Political☐ Religion/Phi-

losophy

☐ Science☐ Sculpture☐ Social/Human-

itarian

☐ Theater☐ Transportation☐ Urban Planning☐ Other (Specify)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The area between Washington and Greenwich Streets, in which No. 131 Charles Street is located, was once a part of the estate of the Dutch Director-General Wouter Van Twiller. During the Colonial period it was a part of the Peter Warren farm which was bought by David Mallows from the Earl of Abingdon in 1788. It became the property of the patriot Abijah Hammond in 1794, then of the William W. Gilbert estate in 1796. David Christie, a stonecutter, bought it along with the adjoining lot (No. 129 Charles Street) at public auction in 1833.

David Christie built the house at No. 131 in 1834. Today the house is the best preserved example of at least thirty similar houses erected by Christie between 1817 and 1835.

In 1834, the lot was outside the most heavily built area of the city, and the house was probably intended for lease or rental to a middle-class family which could not afford to live in the urban area to the south.

The 131 Charles Street house, although it received some minor exterior alterations during the Victorian period, is notable for the remarkable number of original interior features, carved wooden fireplaces, floorboards, ceiling cornices, window and door frames and pilasters remaining. These are all examples of interior features typical of late Federal architecture in New York City.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

Form 10-301
(July 1969)UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY MAP FORM

(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with map)

STATE	
STATE New York	
COUNTY New York	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME			
COMMON: 131 Charles Street House			
AND/OR HISTORIC:			
2. LOCATION			
STREET AND NUMBER: 131 Charles Street			
CITY OR TOWN: New York			
STATE: New York	CODE 36	COUNTY: New York	CODE 061
3. MAP REFERENCE			
SOURCE: USGS Quadrangle, 7.5' Services, Brooklyn, N. Y.			
SCALE: 1:24,000			
DATE: 1967			
4. REQUIREMENTS			
TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS			
1. Property boundaries where required.			
2. North arrow.			
3. Latitude and longitude reference.			

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with photograph)

STATE New York	
COUNTY New York	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME			
COMMON: 131 Charles Street House			
AND/OR HISTORIC:			
2. LOCATION			
STREET AND NUMBER: 131 Charles Street			
CITY OR TOWN: New York			
STATE: New York	CODE 36	COUNTY: New York	CODE 36
3. PHOTO REFERENCE			
PHOTO CREDIT: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission			
DATE OF PHOTO: c. 1966			
NEGATIVE FILED AT: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission			
4. IDENTIFICATION			
DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. View of south facade on Charles Street			

131 Charles Street
House

JERSEY CITY QUADRANGLE
NEW JERSEY-NEW YORK
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

62°34' SW
CENTRAL PART



9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Files of New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
 William S. Pelletreau, Early New York Houses

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY				LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES			
CORNER	LATITUDE			LONGITUDE			
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	
NW	8			9			
NE	0			0			
SE	0			0			
SW	0			0			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: under one acre

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Stephen S. Lash and Ellen Rosebrock Associates		DATE November 1, 1971
ORGANIZATION New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission		
STREET AND NUMBER: 305 Broadway		
CITY OR TOWN: New York	STATE New York	CODE 36

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☐ Local ☒

Name

Title **Chairman, N.Y. State Historic Trust**

Date

24 I 72

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date

SEE INSTRUCTIONS