

**TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF THE SOUTH VILLAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT IN MANHATTAN.**

**April 1, 2014**

Good morning Council Members. My name is Jenny Fernández, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of the South Village Historic District in Manhattan.

On June 25, 2013, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the South Village Historic District. Twenty-four people spoke in support of designation, including representatives of City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn, State Senator Brad Hoylman, State Assembly Member Deborah J. Glick, and Manhattan Community Board 2. Several residents and property owners also spoke in support of designation, as did representatives for the Bleecker Area Merchants' and Residents' Association, Charlton Street Block Association, Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, Historic Districts Council, New York Landmarks Conservancy, and the Society for the Architecture of the City. The commission received a letter in support of designation from City Councilmember-Elect Corey D. Johnson. The commission also received five letters and emails regarding the proposed designation, three in support of designation, and two requesting a property be removed from the proposed historic district, as well as a postcard campaign comprising 104 submissions supporting designation. On December 17, 2013 the Commission voted to designate the South Village Historic District.

The South Village Historic District consists of approximately 250 buildings, including row houses, tenements, commercial structures, and institutions, with streetscapes that illustrate the growth of the neighborhood from its origins as an affluent residential area in the early 19th century to a vibrant community of artists and working-class immigrants in the early 20th century. Throughout the 20th century, the blocks of the South Village Historic District have served as one of the most important and famous centers of artistic, social, and cultural movements and foment in the city. The area was the center of 20th-century gay and lesbian life in New York, with numerous sites representing the history of the LGBT community from the end of the 19th century to the present. The South Village was one of the first neighborhoods in New York City that allowed, and gradually accepted, an open gay and lesbian presence, which resulted in its emergence as an early significant LGBT enclave, while its music clubs nourished generations of artists from jazz to folk to rock. Bohemians and Beatniks congregated in its famous cafes and a flourishing off-Broadway scene developed in its small theaters.

Development in this area began in earnest during the 1820s and 1830s when unprecedented growth pushed the limits of the city northward and—for some four decades—made the blocks of the historic district one of New York’s most prestigious residential neighborhoods. Many blockfronts were developed with architecturally harmonious rows of houses, which were often given their own address schemes with distinguished-sounding names. Among these is the nucleus of a community of African-Americans established by the mid-1800s and which remained until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century in the South Village. By the time of the 1863 Draft Riots, which targeted several locations in the South Village, the area was home to nearly a quarter of the city’s African-American population. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the blocks around Minetta Street and Minetta Lane become known as “Little Africa,” the largest such community in New York. Within the South Village, the history of the community of Little Africa, with its core residing on the Minettas, provides important documentation on African-American life in New York City before 1910.

Several houses remain from its earlier period that recall the South Village’s history as a fashionable residential district that include Federal, Gothic Revival, and Greek Revival styles. Tenements designed in Neo-Grec, Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival and Renaissance Revival styles are in the historic district.

The South Village Historic District contains some notably intact historic buildings; nevertheless, the stylistic and commercial alterations from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century are also a defining characteristic of the neighborhood. The north-facing studio windows installed on houses on Bleecker Street, for example, are typical of the renovations undertaken during the bohemian rediscovery of the Village.

The Commission urges you to affirm this designation.



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## TESTIMONY OF THE GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION REGARDING THE SOUTH VILLAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT April 1, 2014

The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, the largest membership organization in Greenwich Village, the East Village, and NoHo, strongly supports the designation of the South Village Historic District. Neighborhood residents have called for landmark designation of this area since the earliest days of the landmarks law in the 1960's. In 2002, the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation first approached the Landmarks Preservation Commission about considering this area anew for landmark designation, and in 2006 submitted a formal proposal for designation with boundaries. This designation is a long time coming, and enjoys overwhelming support in the affected community.

Earlier this year the district was listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. In 2012, the South Village was named one of New York's "Seven To Save," one of the seven most significant endangered historic sites in the State, by the Preservation League of New York State. Thus the South Village's social, cultural, and historic significance have been broadly recognized.

The South Village is one of the most important places manifesting evidence of our nation's last great wave of immigration in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, particularly of Italian-Americans. The South Village is even more pre-eminent as home to a wealth of sites associated with artistic and counter-cultural innovation and ferment in the late 19<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The number of sites of historic significance in the South Village and the reasons for its landmark-worthiness would be nearly impossible to enumerate here. But just a few of the people known to have lived or honed their craft there include Bob Dylan, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Eugene O'Neill, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Louisa May Alcott, Pete Seeger, Richie Havens, Berenice Abbott, Elizabeth Irwin, James Baldwin, and Jackson Pollack, among many others. The work of architects including Ernest Flagg, Raymond Hood, and Calvert Vaux are represented there.

Among the area's incredible list of credits include the birthplace of modern American Theater (the Provincetown Playhouse – now sadly largely demolished); the first non-profit theater, Circle in the Square; the city's first progressive school, Little Red Schoolhouse; the first coffeehouse in America to introduce cappuccino, Caffe Reggio; the site of Dylan's earliest performances and where he wrote Blowin' In the Wind; the

site of Lenny Bruce's last arrest for obscenity; and one of the earliest and largest examples of reform housing in America, Mill's House No. 1 at 160 Bleecker Street .

The South Village was also home to the City's most prominent African-American community in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, "Little Africa," located around Minetta Lane and Street, and what was probably the city's first visible gay community, centered around MacDougal, West 3<sup>rd</sup>, and Bleecker Streets, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

I strongly urge the committee to uphold this designation. Thank you.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/1/14

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jenny Fernandez

Address: 1 Cent St 9th flr

I represent: Landmarks Preservation Comm

Address: St Ann

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: April 1, 2014

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SIMEON BANKOFF

Address: 232 E 11 Street NY

I represent: Historic District Council

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/1/14

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Amanda Davis

Address: 232 E. 11th St NYC

I represent: Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation

Address: same

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms