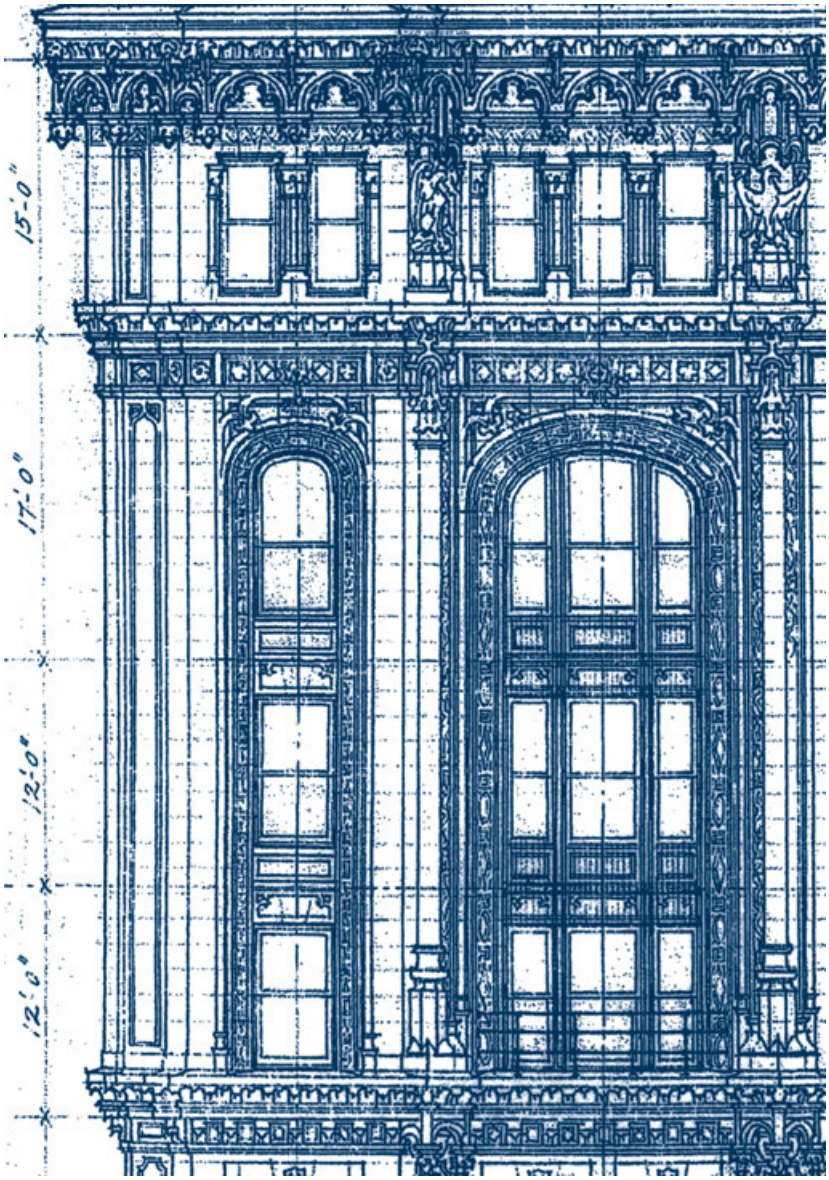
DISTRICT LINES

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL WINTER 2005 VOLUME XVIII NUMBER 3

Survival of the Fittest — 90 West Street Since 9/11

On September 11, 2001, the seven buildings of the World Trade Center complex and St. Nicholas Church were destroyed in terrorist attacks. Ten more suffered significant structural damage and survived. Of those ten, arguably the worst hit was 90 West Street, a 1907 landmark building by the famous architect Cass Gilbert, which suffered direct hits by heavy steel debris flying from the collapse of the WTC south tower just to the north (see map on page 2). It was the only building outside of the WTC complex to burn extensively, and there was a point at which it seemed likely to be demolished. Now, however, because of its rugged original construction and the vision of Peter Levenson, the architect and developer who bought it in damaged condition, it is likely to survive.

Ninety West Street is a Gothic Revival skyscraper 23 stories high plus attic and penthouse. It has a three-story granite base, a shaft clad in terra cotta and a three-story mansard roof of batten seam sheet copper. Stylistically, the terra cotta of the shaft is quite restrained from floors four to 15, while the upper floors form a richly ornamented polychrome cap, a design that prompted the "AIA Guide to New York City" to comment that it seemed "designed



Original drawing of architect Cass Gilbert shows the cap of 90 West Street just below the mansard roof. It is rich in polychrome details of animals and human figures. This area, floors 17 through 20, sustained minor damage. Fire damage and debris hits were above and below this level.

The author of this article, Robert J. Kornfeld, Jr., is an HDC director and also an architect with LZA Technology/Thornton-Tomasetti Group who worked on 90 West Street in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks. Earlier articles about restoration at Ground Zero appeared in issues of District Lines in 2002 and 2003.

for a view from the harbor or the eyries of an adjacent skyscraper."

At the beginning of that September, 90 West Street was midway through a program to repair weathered terra cotta and brick. During the attacks on the 11th, airplane explosions showered the building and its neighbors with wreckage, and heavy steel debris from the collapsing south tower penetrated about ten areas on the building's north facade, destroying sections of wall, windows, spandrel beams and adjacent portions of floor slab ranging from one to five floors in height. Steel from 2 WTC also hit the roof, and a large group of three-story-high triple columns emblematic of the tower design catapulted through the air and into the sidewalk vault in the basement of 90 West Street. Burning debris ignited multiple fires, melting steel and glass interior furnishings and collapsing ceilings and ductwork. Overall, there was moderate to severe fire damage in about half the building.

map: Thornton-Tomasetti Group

90 West Street is at the lower left, a darkened area. Worst hits were from the south tower, 2 WTC.

Cass Gilbert's building is constructed of steel frame encased in terra cotta and brick masonry fireproofing. These elements helped save the building and so did its floor system, which consists of terra cotta flat arches spanning from beam to beam, covered with a cinder concrete fill slab. This construction, a popular system for fire-resistive construction in the late 19th and early 20th centuries,limited the fire to the floors where debris actually penetrated.

As soon as they were aware of the disaster, workers in 90 West Street began to evacuate. However, two people, Maria Isabel Ramirez and George J. Ferguson, were trapped in an elevator when the building lost power, and perished—their absence was noticed too late to rescue them. They were the only two people to die in this building, and the memory of them is part of its history.

Diminished fires in 90 West Street continued to burn and smoulder for days. The portions of the interior that were not fire damaged had been blasted by a storm of smoke, dust, glass and light debris and soaked with water. The basement was flooded, and heating oil escaped, coating every surface including stairs, handrails and even the ceiling with slippery filth. Damaged mechanical equipment was strewn all around—hot water tanks, piping and more. There was no prospect of any plumbing, electric or heating service for the foreseeable future.

The New York City Department of Design and Construction, which normally only administers construction projects at city buildings, retained the structural engineering and architectural firm I work for, the Thornton-Tomasetti Group, to direct the engineering aspects

continued on page 9

Major hit by steel from the south tower damaged or destroyed terra-cotta and spandrel beams, leaving much masonry unsupported.

DISTRICT LINES

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE

HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

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THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL IS THE CITYWIDE NONPROFIT ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK'S DESIGNATED HISTORIC DISTRICTS, AND FOR NEIGHBORHOODS MERITING PRESERVATION. THE COUNCIL IS DEDICATED TO PRESERVING THE INTEGRITY OF NEW YORK CITY'S LANDMARKS LAW AND TO FURTHERING THE PRESERVATION ETHIC

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

The recent designation of Douglaston Hill in Queens by the Landmarks Preservation Commission was not only a well deserved recognition of an historic district in an often overlooked borough; it was significant, too, because it was a change of position by the LPC. It signaled not only flexibility by the LPC but also the recognition that the thinking as well as the evaluation process of the Commission can change over time. This type of change is appropriate, for all of us should maintain a degree of flexibility when evaluating the historical significance of potential landmarks and districts.

Along this line, we would like to see the LPC reconsider Port Richmond in Staten Island, Richmond Hill in Queens to consider 2 Columbus Circle in Manhattan.

In the course of the past year HDC has also recommended a number of changes to the procedures followed by the LPC. Foremost among these is that its Designation Committee resume functioning and do so with open meetings in accordance with the open-meetings legislation—the so-called Sunshine Law. An open, public operation is in everyone's best interest and will enhance the image of the LPC with the preservation community and the general public.

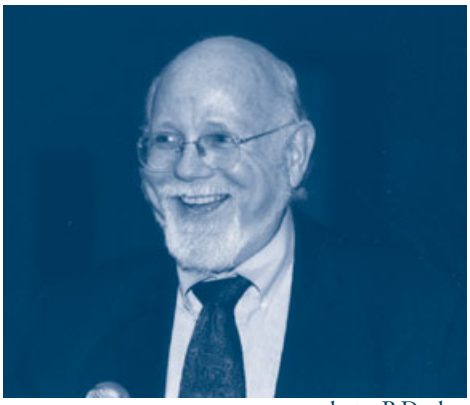


photo: P. Decker

David Goldfarb, HDC's president, at the Landmarks Lion Award ceremony

HDC has also advocated a number of changes to improve enforcement of the Landmarks Law and to the review process of Certificate of Appropriateness applications. Among our proposals to increase public confidence in the process is that a new or reopened public hearing be held when an application undergoes a significant change, so that new testimony can be heard. Basic fairness requires adopting this change.

In the last issue of this newsletter we printed an article about preservation facade easements which presented the pros and cons, the advantages and potential pitfalls of donating easements. Recently The Washington Post and The New York Times also published articles about preservation easements—and the Internal Revenue Service has issued bulletins about them. Whereas it is admirable for an owner to want to protect an historic property in perpetuity and natural to want to take advantage of a tax law permitting deductions for doing so, there are pitfalls, particularly when a sizable charitable deduction is involved. Leaders of the Senate Finance Committee recently announced that they are pushing for legislation to limit the value of easements and therefore the allowable deductions, and to create fines for those who greatly overvalue their properties. So consider the IRS rules carefully—they may be in flux.

Easement-holding organizations make their money by accepting payment for monitoring the facades year after year to make sure they are not changed without permission. If you are considering donating a facade easement, be aware that interpretations of laws change and so do the laws themselves. If you are promised something that appears to be too good to be true, it probably is too good to be true.

And finally, some better news. Recently, in two separate court cases, judges have upheld the legality of LPC rulings. In September a federal judge upheld the October 2000 LPC ruling that "The Wall," a 1973 abstract sculpture on the side of 599 Broadway in Manhattan at the corner of Houston Street, could not be removed by the building's owner. And in December the New York County Supreme Court upheld LPC's requirement that a landmark be kept "in good repair" when it ordered the owner of the derelict Skidmore House in Manhattan's East Village to repair the building and maintain it in the future. These are long-awaited and overdue affirmations of LPC's positions in these cases.

—David Goldfarb

Byrns Joins LPC; Olcott Returns, Replacing Kane

Stephen Byrns, architect and principal of the Manhattan firm BKSK, has been appointed a commissioner of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Mr. Byrns is a resident of Riverdale, The Bronx, and is representing that borough.

In other changes, Richard Olcott was reappointed to the commission after returning from Italy, where he spent nine months at the Rome Academy as recipient of the Rome Prize, awarded by the American Academy in Rome. Mr. Olcott is an architect with Polshek Partnership Architects. He replaced Meredith Kane, a commissioner for ten years, who stepped down. Both Mr. Olcott and Ms. Kane live in Manhattan.

Mr. Byrns grew up in St. Joseph, Michigan, on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan and says that his interest in historic preservation started as a very young child—"I'm told that as I was carried around I pointed out the old buildings in my neighborhood"—and that his fascination with architecture and building started almost at the same time. Not only are sand castles in his history but a seven-story tree house as well.

Stephen Byrns, an architect who lives in The Bronx and works in Manhattan, was recently named a commissioner of LPC

Mr. Byrns has an undergraduate degree from Princeton University and a graduate degree in architecture from Columbia University. During the summer before starting at Columbia, Mr. Byrns won an internship at the National Trust for Historic Preservation and spent his time preparing nominations for historic districts for several Michigan towns.

As a practicing architect, Mr. Byrns has designed a number of renovation and restoration projects in Riverdale. One that came before the commission showed a stylistic analysis of the building during various periods of time, so that commissioners and other interested parties could better understand the development and rationale of the proposal.

His experience as an applicant before the commission gives him, he told District Lines, a sensitivity to what others have to go through. "I want to make the process as streamlined as possible," he said.

2004 Landmarks Lion Award Presented to Beyer Blinder Belle

photos this article: P. Decker

Founders of Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners: John H. Beyer, left, Richard Blinder, with lion, and John Belle. Gladding, McBean, architectural terra-cotta firm, made and donated the award.

On a cool, crisp night in early November, more than 200 people gathered at a glittering, brand-new art museum in Manhattan to honor Beyer Blinder Belle, an architectural firm known for its work in historic preservation. The occasion was the Historic Districts Council's annual Landmarks Lion Award, and it was presented last fall to a firm that, since 1968—the dark ages of preservation—has played an important role in saving and renewing landmark buildings and buildings of landmark quality. Not so coincidentally, the celebration took place in a space recently converted by the same award-winning architects into the gleaming Rubin Museum of Art, an institution that showcases the arts of the Himalayas and surrounding regions of Central Asia.

Some of the more high-profile restorations the firm has undertaken in New York are the Immigration Center on Ellis Island, the South Street Seaport, Grand Central Terminal and the Enid Haupt Conserva-

Jack Beyer with Claire Whittaker and Stewart Klawans of The Kreisberg Group, a public relations firm specializing in cultural clients.

Daisey Hubbard and Dick Blinder, who cited the inspiration of the late James Marston Fitch, a BBB partner, in his acceptance speech.

BBB associate Jean Campbell, left, and Norma Barbacci, director of field programs for the World Monuments Fund.

John Belle during the reception. In his acceptance speech, he gave credit for the award to the entire 150-member firm.

Maxinne Leighton, BBB partner, center, with Roger Byrom, HDC vice president, and Peg Breen, president, New York Landmarks Conservancy

tory at the New York Botanical Garden in The Bronx. Other projects range throughout the world, engaging the services of BBB offices in Washington, D.C., and Beijing as well as New York City.

Susan Henshaw Jones, president and director of the Museum of the City of New York, made opening remarks and presented the award. In accepting, Jack Beyer said, "Dick, John and I originally got together...looking for a different way of building, to add life to the city. Instead of wiping away whole areas and starting over from scratch, we wanted to preserve, and reuse, and reinterpret existing buildings when it made sense to do so."

John Belle added, "It's a false opposition...to say that you can have either fresh, exciting ideas on the one hand or historic preservation on the other. We believe that historic preservation can be a design art. We believe this art is still developing and that its most innovative period has only begun."

BBB partner Fred Bland, left, with John Stubbs, vice president , World Monuments Fund, and his wife Linda.

Robert B. Tierney, chair of LPC, talks with HDC's Virginia Parkhouse, who is also of the Murray Hill Neighborhood Association.

dorris gaines-golomb of the Fort Greene Association in Brooklyn with HDC director and architect, Robert J. Kornfeld, Jr.

Entrance hall of the Rubin Museum of Art, showing a five-story steel and marble staircase by Andree Putman in former Barneys department store.

HDC Preservation Associate Alice Rich, right, and interns Carolyn Siegel, center, and Annemieke Beemster Leverenz, welcome guests.

Murray Hill Neighborhood Association in Manhattan was well represented by Paige Judge, center, Joyce Mendelsohn and architect Minor Bishop

Architect Nancy Owens with Edward Mohylowski of the New York Botanical Garden, second from left, and Walter Melvin, architect.

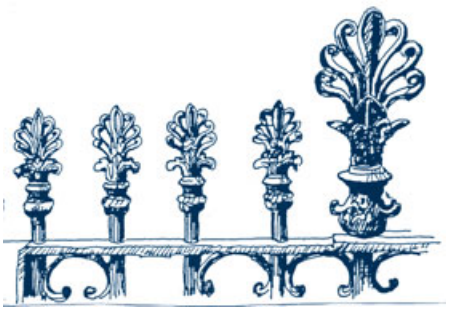
City Council Takes Preservation Lead

City Councilmembers are ultimately beholden to their voting constituencies, and since several initiatives undertaken in 2004 attempted to answer community concerns, the Council has emerged as a major player in the development of the city. Following is a brief synopsis of some of these initiatives:

Community facility reform: A much abused section of the Zoning Resolution deals with community facilities—medical offices, educational institutions, religious uses and other non-profit entities—which are granted leeway not permitted to buildings in the residential areas in which they lie. The ZR awards them additional building bulk, full rear-yard coverage, loosened parking requirements and the like. Last year Councilmember Tony Avella introduced the first-ever reform to this text, and it was adopted into the ZR in September.

The major components to the amendment dealt with prohibiting many kinds of health care facilities in low-density residential zones altogether; increasing the parking requirements on allowable ones; permitting houses of worship to be located within manufacturing zones but stiffening their parking requirements, particularly in low-density residential zones; and reducing the rear-yard allowances for community facilities in low-density residential zones. Although community facility reform is a hot-button topic from New Brighton to Bayside, these changes were not supported by the majority of citizen zoning advocates, who felt they did not go far enough—that the amendments did not address the primary concern of allowing additional bulk "as of right" for community facilities.

Wide-scale rezoning of residential areas: The Department of City Planning, spurred in many cases by community groups and elected officials, has embarked on the creation of Lower Density Growth Management areas to help curb the out-of-scale development that is overwhelming suburban areas in the city and rapidly changing their character. Mayor Bloomberg created a Staten Island Growth Management Taskforce, whose recommendations were adopted into the ZR last August. In an effort to retain neighborhood character while allowing for new development, the specific amendments to the ZR created guidelines that dealt with lot size, parking and yards, street frontage and private roads. The changes were largely supported by the Staten Island community.



drawing: Ann Walker Gaffney

In northeastern Queens, a new zoning designation, R2A, was created as a solution to oversized McMansions. However, many residents said the proposed amendment would actually result in bigger, bulkier buildings. The Queens proposal was corrected in late December in response to community and political pressure on the Department of City Planning. If the text is passed as currently formulated, R2A will be the first zone to encourage appropriately scaled new development and not the enormous mansions that have been devouring outer-borough neighborhoods for the past decade.

Strengthening the Landmarks Law: Intro 403, the Demolition by Neglect Bill, would enable the Landmarks Preservation Commission to use its civil enforcement powers to ensure that property owners maintain their landmarks in safe, watertight condition. After approvals in committee, the bill was scheduled to be adopted by the full Council in mid-November; but minor technical concerns and major opposition from the religious lobby have stalled it. Strong support from preservation and neighborhood organizations (more than 30 groups from all five boroughs have endorsed it) encourages hope that it will soon be adopted.

Another bill, Intro 317, the Demolition Delay Bill, would empower the LPC to intervene and save qualifying buildings more than 50 years old before demolition permits are issued. Despite assurances of interest by Councilmembers and widespread community support, the bill has not yet been granted a hearing. It was introduced to the City Council on April 10, 2004.

Oversight of the Landmarks Commission: Finally, responding to community concerns, the City Council recently held two hearings on the administrative practices of the LPC. These very well attended hearings helped focus the Council's attention and that of the general public on a number of process and budgetary issues at the commission.

All these activities and considerations have been undertaken by the Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses, chaired by Councilmember Simcha Felder, which also considers and ratifies all landmark designations.

STOP LANDMARKS ABUSE!
CALL 311

As our friends at the MTA say,
"If you see something, say something."
If you suspect illegal alteration
or demolition of a designated
landmark, or of a building
in a designated historic district,
don't hesitate to report it.
Call 311

Citywide Panel Discussions Held

In the summer of 2002 the Historic Districts Council added a new program to its roster of events, a panel entitled "Preserving Your Historic Neighborhood" that is intended to bring information about the merits of preservation to neighborhood groups. The panel typically consists of five experts on neighborhood preservation, including the leader of a local non-profit organization and representatives of the Landmarks Preservation

Commission and other city agencies. So far, the panels have played in five neighborhoods.

After the first trial summer series played to standing-room-only audiences at HDC's headquarters in Manhattan, the program was expanded by means of a generous grant from the New York Community Trust to other borough venues, the first of which was in the Fort Greene Historic District, Brooklyn. Participants gathered to discuss the rules governing designated neighborhoods and what local residents have done to pursue historic designation for their districts. Following on the success of that panel, HDC began to offer several others in different locations each year, and now an annual program brings together the interested public with experts in preservation and related fields. This year's series is sponsored in part by a grant from the Independence Community Foundation.

The most recent panel, on October 18, 2004 was held in Sunnyside Gardens, Queens, a neighborhood currently seeking designation. Co-sponsored by Sunnyside Gardens Preservation Alliance, the panel was entitled "Before and After Landmark Designation: Real Stories from Neighbors," tales told by panelists from Queens and Staten Island who discussed their experiences as residents of historic districts and how they went about gaining designation status. Their discussion was pertinent to the issues faced by Sunnyside Gardens but applied equally to efforts taking place throughout the city. One of the highlights was a discussion about the practical changes that designation brings about in day-to-day life. For example, Wanda Chin, a panelist from Jackson Heights, commented that a ripple effect of beautification occurred after designation, where one neighbor's improvements were often followed by others'; and all agreed that designation had enhanced community relations and brought neighbors together over a common interest.

As a component of HDC's educational programs and in keeping with our grassroots mandate, the panels are far more than a mode of community outreach: they are a means of opening up a dialogue between HDC and those who live in historic neighborhoods in all five boroughs. Experts are drawn from diverse backgrounds and focus on interaction with the audience, fostering the informal atmosphere that characterizes the panels.

On April 20, HDC will co-host another neighborhood panel, in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, in which employees of several city agencies have been invited to share information on landmarking.

Within the Preservation Panel Series, more general topics are addressed as well. A series of three panels in 2004, co-hosted by the American Institute of Architects' Manhattan chapter, opened with a panel on urban archaeology which discussed the challenges of preserving undeveloped land long enough to permit exploration for historic relics. The same series featured a panel discussion on the role of community boards in New York City's land-use process and another on fruitful public relations strategies that can be undertaken by grassroots groups.

In February a three-part lecture series tied in with HDC's March Preservation Conference theme of public stewardship of historic properties (see "Save the Date" box on page 0) will be held at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center in Greenwich Village, Manhattan, similar to the successful program there last year. Panelists and topics are to be announced. Dates are February 10, 17 and 24, 2005.

New Yorkers recognize the sense of place that comes from the wealth of historic resources they enjoy. It is our hope the Preservation Panel Series will serve as a step toward maintaining this good fortune for years to come.

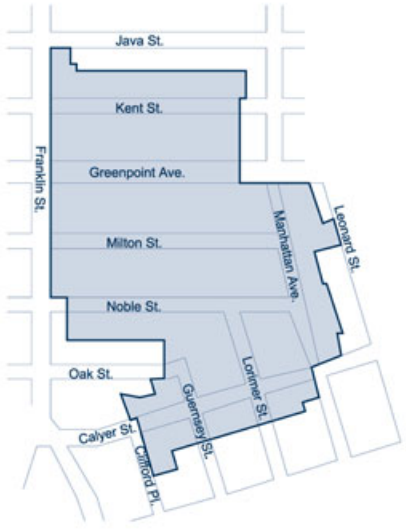
CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Do your favorite preservationists deserve recognition?
HDC is soliciting nominations for recipients of our 2005 Grassroots Preservation Awards.
Send suggestions with an explanatory paragraph to hdc@hdc.org
Check our Web site for more information

DISTRICT PROFILES

Greenpoint Historic District, Brooklyn

Anyone who still thinks historic preservation is the province of society's elite ought to pay a visit to the Greenpoint Historic District, a five-minute walk from the water's edge on the Brooklyn side of the East River. Here is a district which, originally settled in 1645 by a ship carpenter, was built up and thriving by the middle of the 19th century as an industrial center dominated by shipbuilding and populated largely by workers in the local shipyards. Later, other industries came into prominence—glassworks, porcelain production, oil refining, ironwork—and still, the workers lived within walking distance of their factories. Greenpoint in general and the historic district specifically was then and to a great extent remains a working-class neighborhood. Many houses have been owned for generations by the same families.



Designated in 1982, the Greenpoint Historic District lies less than a quarter mile from the East River and is situated roughly east of 20th Street in Manhattan.

photos this page: Penelope Bareau

The Gothic Revival Church of the Ascension, incorporated in 1847 and built midblock on Kent Street in 1865, is scarcely taller than its neighbors and nestled cosily among them. Its parish hall was funded largely by the owner of a local ironworks, Thomas Fitch Rowland.

In the 19th century, ships for the United States merchant navy were built on both sides of the East River, Manhattan and Brooklyn. In the 1850's more than a dozen shipbuilding companies were located in Greenpoint, one of which was Sneeden & Rowland, ironworkers, whose first contract was for the huge wrought- and cast-iron pipes manufactured to carry water on the Croton Aqueduct. Reorganized in 1860 as the Continental Works, the company was commissioned to produce gun carriages and mortar beds for the Department of the Navy. When the Navy contracted with the redoubtable engineer and inventor, John Ericsson, to build a Civil War battleship, he hired Continental Works to construct the hull and another Greenpoint firm, the Novelty Iron Works, to build a revolving gun turret. These elements crucially assisted the battleship, the Monitor, in its illustrious encounter with the Merrimac off Norfolk, Virginia, inaugurating a new era in the history of naval combat.

Shipbuilding declined after the Civil War, but many other industries were already in place in Greenpoint—china, glass, porcelain and oil refining among them—and the area remained vital. As the residential population grew, the need for new institutions was felt, particularly churches. Churches lent a sense of permanence to their community and a moral tone to the neighborhood, as they have done throughout history, and Greenpoint was no exception. Church societies were formed, each of which wished to contribute an appropriate building to the streets. In this small historic district, six churches were constructed in the middle of the 19th century, ranging from the modest Church of the Ascension on Kent Street to the imposing and magisterial Victorian Gothic Roman Catholic Church of Saints Anthony and Alphonsos on Manhattan Avenue.

The housing stock was built largely between 1850 and 1900, especially 1870-1890, and the architectural styles reflect the popular taste of the time: Italianate, Anglo-Italianate, French Second Empire, Neo-Grec, Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival. The more elaborate houses were built by masons or carpenters; some of the more modest ones by local workers themselves. On Franklin Street, for instance, at the western edge of the district (see map), shipwrights and carpenters built buildings in the 1850's that had stores on the ground floor and apartments above for workers from the yards. These buildings are still there. Factories of the area provided many of the architectural elements that embellished the houses—foliate brackets, wooden doors and sashes, shutters.

Among the more modest dwellings were two- and three-story frame houses constructed in the 1850's and reclad in the 1880's with novelty shingles. Some of the ones cited in the designation report were re-sided with aluminum during the 20th century, one of them 103 Noble Street (see photo). When the present owners acquired that house, they told District Lines recently, they knew right away they wanted to remove the green aluminum siding, and in 2004 they did and found that all architectural details underneath had been stripped to accommodate it. Because of both their own inclination and the urging of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, they embarked on a faithful restoration. Through an acquaintance in a building-preservation program, the owners got in touch with a craftsman who was able to replicate the siding that had been there in

A recent restoration took the facade of 103 Noble Street back to the 1880's with straight-edge, fish-scale and saw-tooth shingles, some laid in a diamond pattern between windows.

the 1880's, complete with window hoods and the gable hood over the entrance. Today, sporting straight-edge, fish-scale and saw-tooth shingles laid in patterns, the facade looks as it did in the 19th century and causes passersby to stop and say how beautiful it is. Other people hate it, but they're not preservationists.

New Books about Old New York

"Art Deco New York," by David Garrard Lowe. Watson-Guptill, 214 pp., $40. This colorful survey explores how a French-born craze for streamlining and chevrons shaped New York architecture, especially transit hubs, hotels, stores, apartment spires and nightspots. Lowe, a well known historian of the city, delves into icons such as Radio City Music Hall as well as lesser attractions like a glass mosaic in the lobby of Manhattan's 261 Fifth Avenue and a carved marble angel on the pulpit at St. Bartholomew's Church.

"The City and the Theatre," by Mary C. Henderson. Back Stage Books, 382 pp., $24.95. An update of a 1973 edition, this lively chronicle spans the centuries from circa-1700 productions for "the notorious transvestite Lord Cornbury" to the Broadway musical's surprising 21st century popularity despite astronomical ticket prices and stiff competition from TV and movies. Dr. Henderson also supplies thumbnail histories and charming line drawings of 82 theatres built since 1900, about half of which have been razed.

"The City Beneath Us: Building the New York Subways," by the New York Transit Museum staff with Vivian Heller. W.W. Norton, 248 pp., $45. Vivid anecdotes of tunnel excavation collapses and angry negotiations over the IRT-BMT merger are sprinkled with vintage photos of workers casting concrete forms or digging out column footings.

"Impressions of New York: Prints from the New-York Historical Society," by Marilyn Symmes. Princeton Architectural Press, 304 pp., $50. The book's 165 views, culled from the society's unrivaled collection of 175,000 prints, show how printmakers' image of the city has evolved: from Dutch harbors flanked by windmills to contemporary skylines missing the World Trade Center.

"A Maritime History of New York," by the New York City WPA Writers' Project. Going Coastal, 316 pp., $25. Going Coastal, a two-year-old nonprofit dedicated to promoting awareness and responsible use of New York's shoreline, has republished the WPA's loving 1941 tribute to the harbors. An epilogue-update covers the past 60 years' worth of port decline, redevelopment and preservation struggles.

"New York Changing: Revisiting Berenice Abbott's New York," by Douglas Levere. Princeton Architectural Press, 192 pp., $40. SoHo-based photographer Douglas Levere retraced Berenice Abbott's steps, to 100 of the sites she photographed during the Great Depression. He found some unrecognizably altered, some shabby but intact and a few—such as recently restored streetscapes in Fort Greene and Brooklyn Heights—in better shape than in Abbott's day.

"New York, Empire City 1920-1945," by David Stravitz. Abrams, 160 pp., $35. Stravitz, a design consultant and photographer, salvaged a trove of crumbling negatives 20 years ago at a New Jersey photo studio's going-out-of-business sale. This collection of 100 large-format photos (representing only about a fifth of his treasures) captures mid-century Manhattan, down to a gleam on a taxicab's chrome trim and a patch of spalling stonework on a doomed Vanderbilt mansion.

"New York Underground: The Anatomy of a City," by Julia Solis. Routledge, 252 pp., $35. Solis, an historian-adventurer who likes to explore forgotten steam tunnels and float through aqueducts on inflatable rafts, poetically describes some of the grimier wonders coursing below street level. She also carefully notes which are imminently in danger of being modernized, filled in or cleaned.

"A Passion to Preserve: Gay Men as Keepers of Culture," by Will Fellows. University of Wisconsin Press, 288 pp., $30. Gay men have long fought—alongside the equally stereotyped and unsung "little old ladies in tennis shoes"—to protect architectural heritage. Fellows's fascinating exploration of this little-researched topic includes first-person reminiscences by gay preservationists nationwide.

"Subway Style: 100 Years of Architecture & Design in the New York City Subway," by the New York Transit Museum staff. Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 242 pp., $40. The first in-depth study of the subway system's aesthetics, this welcome volume devotes equal space to vaulted stations, ergonomic train cars and way-finding graphics. "When in doubt ask a subway employee," suggested an optimistic 1938 map of the IND.

"Times Square Style: Graphics from the Great White Way," by Vicki Gold Levi and Steven Heller. Princeton Architectural Press, 144 pp., $20. The attractions of the "Crossroads of the World" have long promoted themselves on advertising ephemera such as tobacco tins, hankies, menus, pulp-fiction covers and ashtrays. This impressive kitsch-fest even shows a dozen variants on 1940's and '50's theater ticket stubs.

Survival of the Fittest—90 West Street Since 9/11

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of the emergency response, to assess the structural stability of the building and direct the city's contractors where shoring and other tasks were required. Our structural engineers first checked 90 West Street on September 13, while the building was still smoking. A few weeks later I went with a team of architects and mechanical engineers to survey the building and prepare an Interim Life Safety Assessment Report for the city. We identified hazards related to the facade, roof damage, floor damage from impacts and fire, electrocution hazards, and the like. We were particularly concerned with damaged pipe scaffolding, unstable masonry and windows and large amounts of WTC debris, including sheet-metal column covers, concrete, and rebar on the roofs and ledges. A gust of wind could send them flying. We recommended immediate measures to remove this debris as well as the heavy debris that was overloading floors. We advised shoring, erecting a sidewalk bridge and hanging netting on the north facade to control falling material.

Our team discovered something that surprised us and even made us optimistic–although the building was a scene of biblical devastation, there were good prospects for a full restoration. The structure had received outstanding fire protection from the terra-cotta encasement and flat-arch floor system because of terra-cotta's high resistance to heat. There were two steel support columns that had failed and slumped a few inches, but they were at remote areas and did not portend major structural failure. Most of the structural repairs would be required only where heavy debris had hit. The facade damage, which appeared horrific and extreme in degree, was not actually that bad when the whole building was considered—only one facade had extensive damage and it was a narrow side of the building. Expensive as the facade repairs were bound to be, they were not unlike the ordinary scope of repairs for masonry weathering and deterioration or corrosion of steel supports. The interiors and mechanical systems were trashed, and the building would not be usable until it had undergone a gut rehab and had all new mechanical systems installed. These changes, however, are easier to achieve in a building unoccupied by tenants, and a complete infrastructure rehab would enable 90 West Street to be converted into fully modernized office space or to be adapted to residential use.

In its heyday this building had been filled with maritime and other transportation offices. On the top floor had been the Garrett Restaurant, the Windows of the World of its age, exposed to views of the city, to the water across the masts and smokestacks of the busy port and in the distance, to the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island and the ferry and barge terminals across the Hudson. To take this opportunity to modernize the infrastructure or alter the use of the building would extend its life, and the work, we thought, could be substantially paid for by insurance.

Professionally, we determined in a systematic way what needed to be done to stabilize and restore the building. Personally, I wondered at first whether to restore the building was appropriate, if anyone would feel good living or working there and if the deaths that took place there could be respected in a restoration. It was hard to imagine a future for 90 West Street when it was a smoke-darkened hulk suffused with the fragments of countless ruined lives, papers, rolodex cards, financial manuals, computer diskettes, and family photos that had blown in from the WTC, as well as the abandoned personal effects of the building's own tenants and unseeable but ever-present human remains from the airplane explosions and pulverized remains in the dust from the collapsing towers. Through the battered north facade the ruins of the collapse zone were visible, extending for what looked like eternity, six blocks deep and three blocks wide, with the Gothic-looking remnants of the twin towers reaching ten to 15 stories overhead and smoke pouring from deep craters. Everywhere was the perpetual motion of the recovery operation, cranes, grapplers, trucks—a ceaseless roar of heavy machinery.

photo: AMR Shipping Ltd.

Pre-9/11 post card of 90 West Street with the top lit up, found in the building.

Although Thornton-Tomasetti Group had been retained as architects and engineers for the restoration in the fall of 2001 and had spent several months surveying and preparing restoration plans, design work was stalled by a stalemate between the owner and insurers over the insurance settlement. Ninety West Street sat for a long time in the same state as such buildings as Deutsche Bank, and Fiterman Hall: stabilized and mothballed. Finally developer/architect Peter Levenson, learning that 90 West Street was sitting dormant, had a vision of the building restored and converted to residential use. Together with his own Kibel Companies and other partners, and with assistance from the New York City Housing Development Corporation and other agencies, he purchased the building at a price that was deeply discounted to compensate for the restoration work required.

I toured the building on September 10, 2004, with Mr. Levenson and was gratified that it is being restored with historic materials: terra cotta, copper roofing and granite. The restoration that was interrupted by the attacks used substitute materials extensively. It is a credit to Mr. Levenson and a relief to the rest of us that they were not proposed for this restoration.

photo: Robert Kornfeld, Jr./TTG

View through the north facade showing the collapse zone beyond, six blocks deep and three blocks wide.

Some changes will even be an improvement over conditions in 1998 when the building was designated—new storefronts, for example, will more closely resemble the original street-floor shops. Another improvement will be the main lobby, where the damaged modern wall-panel veneer and dropped ceiling are

being removed to reveal portions of the original Gothic style lobby and ceiling. Damage at a few areas will be left unrepaired where it does not affect the soundness of the wall. These scars will remain as a visible part of 90 West Street's history as an office building, maritime headquarters, residence and proud survivor of our city's worst disaster.

—Robert J. Kornfeld, Jr.

photo: Robert Kornfeld Jr.

Part of a polychrome terra-cotta arch emerging from the current, ongoing restoration.

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