

# DISTRICT LINES

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

WINTER 2004 VOLUME XVII NUMBER 3

*p. 1* - In the Shadow of 9/11: Planned Fulton Street Transit Center Threatens Historic Buildings *p. 2* - President's Column  
*p. 4* - City House Prices Rise in Districts *p. 4* - Staten Island's Good Shepherd *p. 5* - Grassroots Preservation Awards  
*p. 6* - Landmark Demolition, by Intent or Neglect *p. 7* - Explore Our Web Site *p. 8* - A Prime-Cut Designation: The Meaty Story of Gansevoort Market  
*p. 10* - District Profiles: Prospect-Lefferts Gardens, Brooklyn *p. 11* - Recent Gifts and Grants

## IN THE SHADOW OF 9/11: PLANNED FULTON STREET TRANSIT CENTER THREATENS HISTORIC BUILDINGS

AMID THE FANFARE over the planning of new buildings at the World Trade Center site, a less dramatic project that may jeopardize significant historic resources has been moving forward largely out of view. Preparations are well underway for the Fulton Street Transit Center, a \$750 million development of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority one block east of the WTC site. First announced in August 2002, the project's completion is scheduled for late 2007. This is a proposal separate from the transportation hub for PATH that Santiago Calatrava has been chosen to design for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey at the WTC site.

Intended to cover the entire eastern blockfront of Broadway between Fulton and John Streets, the transit center would make it easier to transfer among the A, C, J, M, Z, 2, 3, 4 and 5 subway lines and, by way of a subterranean concourse, to reach the E, N and R lines. These subway lines,



### SAVE THE DATE

HDC's Tenth Annual Preservation  
Conference

"Cultural Landmarks: Controversy,  
Practice & Prospects"

Co-sponsored by Place Matters

March 5-7, 2004

Reception Friday, March 5th

Panels Saturday, March 6th

Walking tours Sunday, March 7th

Visit our Web site at [www.hdc.org](http://www.hdc.org) for details.

*The proposed John Street/Maiden Lane Historic District, darkened, lies south of City Hall Park and east of the World Trade Center site. The Metropolitan Transit Authority wants to build a new subway-transfer station—the Fulton Street Transit Center—whose entry hall could result in the demolition of the entire east side of Broadway from Fulton to John Street. HDC proposes a smaller footprint for the entry pavillion.*

servicing six separate stations, were built from 1905 to 1932, when their operators were in competition, so convenience was not part of the original planning.

At street level, the transit center would feature a conspicuous entry pavillion. Some of historic Downtown's most

venerable buildings stand in its path. At risk are several early skyscraper office buildings that reflect the commercial-development history of Lower Manhattan and were designed by prominent architects of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Perhaps the finest is the 1889 Corbin

Building, designed by Francis Kimball, at the northeast corner of Broadway and John Street, where the southern end of the proposed transit center would be located.

While there is little doubt that the transit center would make a desirable contribution to Downtown, acquisition and demolition of potential landmarks such as the Corbin seem both costly and unnecessary. Although linking the subway lines by pedestrian passageways is quite feasible, the new connections would all exist underground, raising the question of whether a large, elaborate aboveground pavilion is necessary.

It is exactly this aboveground "great hall" that threatens the historic buildings. Variousy described in the MTA's April 2003 Draft Scoping Document as a "new surface presence," "a central distinguishing portal" and a "highly visible focal point of subway transit," such a street-level pavilion would mean the demolition of early buildings on Fulton Street, Broadway and John Street. It sounds as if the MTA seeks to recast a subway-system transfer point as a railroad terminus endowed with the splendor and gravity of the late Pennsylvania Station. Indeed, the proposed construction of the new PATH station one block to the west, with the creative Mr. Calatrava as architect, sug-

gests that MTA and PATH are competing to see who can outdo the other.

In the aftermath of the WTC disaster in 2001 a group of preservation organizations formed the Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund to support preservation projects in Lower Manhattan and to advocate for the area's historic buildings. Consisting of city, state, national and international organizations, the LMEPF has vigorously drawn atten-

the respected engineering firm Robert Silman Associates, which concluded that underground construction could be done without jeopardizing the Corbin. Recently, an article in The New York Times reported that the MTA has agreed to try to reuse the building in its design but that it is still committed to developing the remainder of the historic Broadway blockfront at the cost of other historic commercial buildings.

Working with our colleagues in the fund, the Historic Districts Council has been advocating for the protection and

*continued on page 3*



photo: Catherine McNeur

*Broadway blockfront threatened by transit center includes early skyscrapers: 1902 Girard Building, left, 1889 Corbin Building.*

tion to Lower Manhattan's unprotected historic resources, identifying three "corridors of concern" derived from Mayor Bloomberg's plan for the area. Many properties that fall within these corridors are neither listed on State or National Registers of Historic Places nor protected as locally designated historic districts. One of the corridors, and the one under the most immediate threat, is the area covering Fulton Street, John Street and Maiden Lane east of Broadway within which the MTA plans to place its transit center.

Countering the proposal's original suggestion that new development warrants a sweeping erasure of expendable historic blockfronts, the fund engaged a design firm to show how the Corbin Building might be preserved as part of the transit center's aboveground "great hall." The fund also commissioned a report by

IN NOVEMBER, the Historic Districts Council joined Landmark West!, DOCOMOMO (DOcumentation and CONservation of building sites and neighborhoods of the MODern MOVement) and a number of individuals as petitioners in a lawsuit to save 2 Columbus Circle. The lawsuit challenges New York City's sale of the building to the Museum of Arts and Design, which plans to alter drastically the historic if controversial Edward Durell Stone masterwork commissioned by Huntington Hartford and built in 1965. HDC and the other petitioners contend that an Environmental Impact Statement is required because the building is an important historic resource despite the fact that the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission has refused to designate it.

A few months before that, HDC filed a friend-of-the-court brief in a petition by CitiNeighbors and Mr. and Mrs. Woody Allen, among others, in an effort to prevent Citibank from building a tower on top of its branch at East 91st Street and Madison Avenue in Manhattan. HDC argued that Citibank's final proposal was so altered from the original that the Landmarks Commission should have held a new public hearing. The main issue raised by CitiNeighbors was whether LPC action could proceed without an Environmental Impact Statement, which is very time-consuming. Although the case lost at the lower Court and Appellate Division levels, in October it was accepted for review by New York State's highest court, the Court of Appeals.

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

**DISTRICT  
LINES**

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE  
HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

---

EDITOR - Penelope Bateau

LAYOUT AND PRODUCTION - Ross Horowitz

EDITORIAL CONSULTANT - Jack Taylor

CONTRIBUTORS - Melissa Baldock, Simeon Bankoff,  
Penelope Bateau, Hal Bromm, Franny Eberhart,  
David Goldfarb, Eve Kahn, Edward S. Kirkland,  
Catherine McNeur

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.

HDC has continued to be concerned about the rapid pace of teardowns in all five boroughs, particularly the “urban-suburban” areas of Brooklyn, The Bronx, Queens and Staten Island. The city is losing many landmark-worthy buildings, and potential historic districts are being destroyed before they can even be considered for designation. In October we held forums in Queens and Staten Island to discuss preservation issues there. HDC has drafted and is supporting proposed changes to the city’s Administrative Code to prevent the demolition of any building 50 years old or older until the LPC chairman and the commission itself have had an opportunity to consider whether the building is worthy of landmarking or of being part of a potential historic district. We plan to lobby actively to have this legislation passed by the City Council in 2004.

Finally, I would like to welcome Jay Platt, former member of the preservation staff at LPC, as our new deputy director. He joins a strong team consist-

ing of Executive Director Simeon Bankoff and Preservation Associates Catherine McNeur and Melissa Baldock. This new position was made possible by a capacity-building grant from the Mertz Gilmore Foundation, to which we are grateful. But the ability to sustain our preservation efforts will be possible only with the continuing help of our many Friends and supporters.

—David Goldfarb



photo: Melissa Baldock

*HDC President David Goldfarb at a pre-Lion party with honoree Kitty Carlisle Hart.*

## IN THE SHADOW OF 9/11...

*continued from page 2*

designation of a John Street/Maiden Lane Historic District largely within the LMEPF’s Fulton Street corridor of concern. This area (see map, page 1) encompasses a strong collection of 19th century skyscrapers by some of New York City’s most prominent architects as well as a fine collection of early 20th century office buildings complementary to their older neighbors in size and scale. Within this proposal the Corbin Building is pre-eminent, but two structures immediately north of it on the transit center site—the 1911 Childs Building and the 1902 Girard Building at 196 and 198 Broadway, respectively—are also fine examples of early commercial architecture. Not far away are two additional significant buildings, the Tyler Building, at 17 John Street, and No. 63 Nassau Street. The latter is an early commercial building attributed to James Bogardus, inventor of cast-iron facades.

In the fall of 2002, HDC nominated this district for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, incorporating most of the Fulton Street corridor, an area that includes the southern part of the transit center site and the

buildings mentioned above. Listing on the State and National Registers affords a level of protection beyond that of any local authority, such as the Landmarks Preservation Commission, because state agencies are empowered to demolish local landmarks. This is why HDC has not strenuously pursued local designation, although a Request for Evaluation was submitted to LPC in September 2002.

In March 2003, HDC formally submitted a request for a determination of the district’s eligibility for the State Register to Commissioner Bernadette Castro, New York State’s Historic Preservation Officer. Her office declared the eligibility in October 2003 but excluded all historic buildings on Broadway between Fulton and John Streets except the Corbin.

About the same time as this declaration was made, Peter Kalikow, chair of the MTA, stated that both the transit center and Downtown’s historic architecture in general were important to the future success of Lower Manhattan and that he was pleased to work with preservationists and the community to preserve the Corbin Building. Both the MTA and the State Historic Preservation Office ultimately answer to Governor George Pataki, so Mr. Kalikow’s remarks could be construed

as a palliative if he knew that SHPO would be denying protection to buildings in the transit center’s way.

HDC is currently surveying building conditions in the district and assembling historical research in preparation for an official nomination to SHPO, which normally recommends listing on the National Register at the same time as it issues state listing. National listing is important because it offers additional protections not afforded at the state level. For example, under Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1996, no federal funding for a transportation project that affects a nationally listed historic resource can be approved unless “there is no feasible and prudent alternative” and unless planning is done to “minimize harm to the historic site resulting from such use.” Although Section 4(f) Review, as it is called, has proven useful in protecting historic properties nationwide, it is under attack from highway lobbyists in Washington. For up-to-date information on this legislation, contact Preservation Action at [www.preservationaction.org](http://www.preservationaction.org).

HDC has also proposed an alternative transit-center concept that reduces the aboveground footprint and limits the site to the north end of the Broadway block-front between Fulton and John Streets. This alternative would accept the removal of two low, undistinguished structures at the southeast corner of Broadway and Fulton Street that together form a footprint of 16,000 square feet. While fulfilling the MTA vision of a street-level pavilion, the HDC alternative would not require demolition of the Childs or Girard Buildings or any other significant structures and would meet all stated goals of the MTA with a less intrusive aboveground structure. It is unknown whether the MTA and its architects are considering HDC’s proposal.

Robert B. Tierney, who as chair of LPC has been consulting with MTA, recently said he was “delighted ... that we have taken the first major preservation step on the Fulton Street Transit hub by securing Francis Kimball’s Corbin Building.” He added that “there are, of course, other important buildings that should also play prominent roles in the Fulton Street Corridor, and the Landmarks Commission is actively engaged in working to make that a reality.”

The work is far from over; one building is only the beginning.

## CITY HOUSE PRICES RISE IN DISTRICTS

SINCE THE EARLY 1990S, studies in different parts of the country have shown that property values in historic districts increase at a higher rate than those outside districts. Analyses were done for cities in Indiana, Virginia and North Carolina; but many considered their findings irrelevant to special real estate conditions in New York City. In September 2003, however, the New York City Independent Budget Office released a study that brings New York up to speed.

Entitled "The Impact of Historic Districts on Residential Property Values," the paper is a response to a request in the late 1990s by former City Councilmembers Andrew Eristoff and Kenneth K. Fisher (now an adviser to the Historic Districts Council) that the city determine whether it was true that historic districts in New York have held back growth in residential property values. The results of the study, initially a letter published in 2001, suggested they have not. The recently published background paper adds to the original letter by including documentation of the IBO's research and methodology.

In fact, the study found that far from having a negative effect on the property values, "prices of houses in historic districts are higher than those of similar houses outside historic districts." Moreover, the study found that "although prices for historic properties have at times increased less rapidly than for similar properties outside historic districts, overall price appreciation from 1975 through 2002 was greater for houses inside historical districts."

The IBO limited its analysis to residential properties, more specifically to one-, two- and three-family dwellings, in order to respond to their owners, who claim that designation would have a detrimental effect on property values. In addition, small residential properties are not subject to rent regulations, so analyzing market-value changes in such buildings generates a more reliable picture than it would for larger residential buildings.

Commercial buildings were excluded from the study because sale prices are affected by tax considerations and the

length of existing leases. Studies exist for other parts of the country and show results similar to those in residential studies, but they cannot be assumed to be applicable to commercial areas in New York City.

The IBO created its data set by using statistics kept by the city's Department of Finance, including information on residential property sales excluding co-ops since the mid-1970s, assessed values and estimated market values. In addition, the IBO added to the data such variables as inclusion in designated historic districts, distance to the nearest subway and mean household income in the neighborhood, and then focused its analysis on Brooklyn, which was the only borough with enough sales to allow comparisons between similar properties inside and outside historic districts.

To read the IBO's background paper in its entirety, visit the Web site: [www.ibo.nyc.ny.us](http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us).

## STATEN ISLAND'S GOOD SHEPHERD

ON EVERY STATEN ISLAND STREET that Barnett Shepherd travels, he can tell compelling anecdotes. Each pristine or decrepit landmark, new tower, McMansion or empty lot elicits a tale of original architects' visions, adaptive reuses, follies over the decades and restoration efforts stymied or rewarded.

"You see those new cream-colored wooden windows on Borough Hall, where the dark aluminum frames used to look like black holes?" he asked excitedly on a recent spin near the ferry piers. "And look at that intact WPA concrete retaining wall, just past that new stadium with the wonderful Manhattan views, and that abandoned gypsum-board plant. And that restaurant over there is the last of a row of Greek Revival mansions; the shoreroad runs where their lawns used to be."

Staten Island's pre-eminent historian/preservation-activist, Mr. Shepherd has been at the battlefront for three decades. He founded the Preservation League of Staten Island, conducted a 2,500-building survey of the borough's historic properties and helped save Sailors' Snug Harbor. At age 65 he is still a workaholic, juggling historic-structures

reports, National Register and New York City landmarks nomination research, and stints as a teacher of local history at the College of Staten Island. Last fall he received the special Mickey Murphy Award, a lifetime-achievement recognition, from the Historic Districts Council for his accomplishments in studying and saving streetscapes.

From 1981 to 2000 he ran the Staten Island Historical Society, transforming it from a sleepy attraction to a reckonable force. He curated three dozen existing buildings while overseeing millions of dollars of new construction. In addition, he supervised numerous restorations of historic structures and acquired and relocated the 1820 Jacob Crocheron House to the Historic Richmondtown complex. At the Staten Island Historical Society, he wrote definitive architectural histories and greatly expanded the art and decorative-arts collections. Meanwhile he has altruistically been restoring the 1830s Greek Revival mansion that he shares with his partner Nick Downen in New Brighton, from its fluted Corinthian porch columns to its lead-lined copper gutters. The house belongs to the historical society; as the building's live-in custodian, he says with typical self-mockery, "I've spent over \$100,000 on a house I don't own. How's that for idealism?"

He's a courtly, mild-mannered proselytizer, as befits a former Presbyterian minister. Son of an antiques-collecting milliner and a gypsum-company executive in Mississippi, he was ordained in 1964 and first served at the only integrated Presbyterian church in civil-strife-torn Birmingham, Alabama. He then transferred to Columbus, Indiana, where the Cummins Engine firm had just begun financing high-profile architect schemes for virtually all civic buildings in town, and that helped spark his interest in design.

After studying art history at Indiana University and teaching at the University of Florida, he moved in 1972 to a small commune on Staten Island. While earning his living as a janitor and legal typist, he started researching Sailors' Snug Harbor. In 1976 he became the first historian to attribute the Harbor's design to revered classicist Minard Lafever. It had previously been attributed to Samuel Thomson. Poring through 100 accounting volumes in the Harbor's neglected archives, Mr. Shepherd had discovered an 1831 scrap of paper

documenting a \$50 payment to Lafever for plans rendered. Elated, he quickly published the information in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, his first scholarly publication of any kind.

In the mid-1970s, Mr. Shepherd recalls, "There were hardly any preservationists out here. I started the Preservation League of Staten Island in 1977 to help jump-start the movement. There's still little academic work here, and the consciousness isn't what it ought to be, but it's getting better. There are growing circles of committed people who realize that land-marking is the safest way to protect their neighborhoods."

When not meticulously researching landmark nominations for Harrison Street and Mud Lane/St. Paul's Avenue, Mr. Shepherd is promoting a book he just co-authored: "Sandy Ground Memories," published by the historical society. He's also orchestrating restoration projects for his own mansion; a \$150,000 porch overhaul is the next priority.

He is often found tending his garden as well, which is studded with conical boxwood and flowering trees. Three young magnolias have been espaliered, wired to climb an 1890s brick wall. "I'm Southern," Mr. Shepherd laughs. "I had to have magnolias in my yard."



photo: Jim Romano

*Barnett Shepherd showed Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis around Staten Island's Sailors' Snug Harbor in 1976.*

## GRASSROOTS PRESERVATION AWARDS

LAST FALL was the fourth year the Historic Districts Council has presented its Grassroots Preservation Awards to outstanding advocates for local historic communities. The main body of the awards goes to nonprofessional individuals and volunteer organizations engaged in local efforts. In addition, two special categories honor government or elected officials and print or broadcast media: Friend in High Places and Friend from the Media, respectively.

The special Mickey Murphy Award is given for lifetime achievement to someone whose unflinching preservation work has been unusually distinguished. It is named for the late Mary Ellen (Mickey) Murphy, a passionate preservationist, steadfast advocate for historic neighborhoods in Brooklyn and New York City and a hardworking Historic Districts Council board member. Ms. Murphy died in 2002 at the age of 84. The 2003 award was presented to **Barnett Shepherd** of Staten Island. A profile of him appears at left. Other winners were:

- **CitiNeighbors Coalition for Historic Carnegie Hill**

Jurate Kazickas, Carol McFadden, Jane Parshall, Manhattan

The CitiNeighbors Coalition led a three-year campaign to preserve the low-rise character of Carnegie Hill by opposing a 14-story development that would have replaced a one-story building on Madison Avenue at East 91st Street. They were supported by a large band of neighbors, including movie luminaries Woody Allen and Kevin Kline, and succeeded in defeating the original proposal.

- **Josephine E. Jones, Manhattan**

Ms. Jones has long been an advocate for Harlem and the proposed Mount Morris Park Extended Historic District, where she has lived for 27 years. She has campaigned tirelessly to improve and enhance her neighborhood. Her beautifully restored 1887 brownstone is a showpiece of historic Harlem. It was designed by Francis Kimball, the 19th and early 20th century architect of Lower Manhattan skyscrapers, the Corbin Building among them (see page 2).

- **Senator Street 300 Block Association**

Ron Gross and Eric Rouda, Brooklyn

This block association nominated Senator Street in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, to the National Register of Historic Places and secured listing. This exceptional street of 38 Renaissance Revival brownstones, all designed by architect Fred Eisenia, is the first National Register Historic District in Bay Ridge.

- **Seaport Community Coalition and Manhattan Community Board 1**  
Gary Fagin, Barbara Marks and Madelyn Wils, Manhattan

The Seaport Community Coalition and Community Board 1 led a 20-year campaign to downzone the South Street Seaport Historic District. The success of their effort was one of the major grassroots victories of 2003 and has ensured the continued preservation of one of New York's oldest neighborhoods.

### FRIEND IN HIGH PLACES AWARD

- **City Councilmember Michael McMahon, Staten Island**

Environmental campaigns against overdevelopment and traffic congestion have been Councilmember McMahon's targets. He recently formed a task force on Staten Island to curb sprawl—the first organization of its kind there.

### FRIEND FROM THE MEDIA AWARD

- **The Villager and Albert Amateau, reporter, Manhattan**

The Villager is a 70-year-old local weekly newspaper covering Manhattan below 23rd Street. A model community publication, it is a must-read for its constituency. Albert Amateau is an exceptionally capable journalist who has shown that he knows and understands preservation issues, nuances and all.

## LANDMARK DEMOLITION, BY INTENT OR NEGLECT

*In recent years, many landmarks throughout the city have been destroyed without Landmarks Preservation Commission sanction or Department of Buildings permits. Sometimes the demolition happens on purpose, by workers hired to undermine a building, or by arson. Sometimes it happens when owners allow their buildings to fall into ruins. Either way, the matter is serious not only because of its flouting of the Landmarks Law but also, and more important, because of the vandalism inflicted on the building and its neighborhood. The Autumn 2003 issue of District Lines dealt with demolition by intent; this issue takes up demolition by neglect.*

### PART TWO: BY NEGLECT

OWNERS WHO ALLOW their landmark buildings to deteriorate—who make no repairs when the roof develops major leaks, when architectural elements pull away from the facade, when window openings gape unprotected from the elements—these owners are committing demolition by neglect. Their inaction is dramatically different from demolition by intent, which is active and deliberate. Though total destruction of a landmark is the end result of both, demolition by neglect takes longer and takes place because the owner fails to care for his or her property.

New York City's Landmarks Law addresses this phenomenon in a section that provides criminal sanctions for offenders: "Every person in charge of an improvement on a landmark site or in an historic district shall keep in good repair (1) all of the exterior portions of such improvement and (2) all interior portions thereof which, if not so maintained, may cause or tend to cause the exterior portions of such improvement to deteriorate, decay or become damaged or otherwise to fall into a state of disrepair." (Section 25-311)

Just when has an owner gone too far in the neglect of a building? And what can be done, by the city or by neighbors, to keep an owner from allowing his building to deteriorate? In past years the city seldom prosecuted owners in criminal court, the only recourse for demolition by neglect under the Landmarks Law. Recently, however, that reluctance has softened, and the city is now prosecuting three owners of derelict landmarks.

Skidmore House was a row house built in 1845 in the then-fashionable Manhattan neighborhood of East 4th Street

between the Bowery and Lafayette Street. As the photo on this page indicates, without the massive bracing, it would collapse.

The building was owned by Sol Goldman, a developer whose 600-odd properties were estimated to be worth \$1 billion at the time of his death in 1987. Caring for Skidmore would not have been a question of lack of funds. However, in a real-estate portfolio of such size, Skidmore was small potatoes. After Mr. Goldman's death, the estate owned Skidmore, the corner lot on one side of the house now used for public parking and two row houses adjoining Skid-

more on the other side. These two were pulled down around 1989, compromising the Goldmans' own house and the landmarked Merchant's House Museum, which had been attached to the demolished properties, for row houses are not constructed to stand free from their neighbors.

Mr. Goldman's estate fell into dispute between his wife and children and was in litigation for seven years, until 1994, when several dozen major properties went to the widow and the rest—including Skidmore—went to the children. The house languished. A "For Sale" sign had been put up in 1991, but the deal was for the whole parcel, not just the extant house. Estimates were from \$12 to \$16 million to develop the property, and one after another deal fell through. A plan in the early 1990s incorporated the landmark into a multi-use project, but it was never built, and the building continued to languish.

Neighbors watched as homeless people moved in, built fires in the reception rooms, trashed much of the interior. Water collected in caved-in sections of the roof. Cries of alarm and arm-twisting by neighbors and the Landmarks Preservation Commission resulted in a more effective sealing of the building; but by



photo: Catherine McNeur

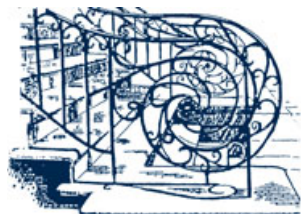
*The landmarked 1845 Skidmore House at 37 East 4th Street, Manhattan, after criminal prosecution forced its owner to stabilize it. Neglected for more than 15 years, its roof had fallen in and it was in danger of collapse. The Merchant's House Museum, 29 East 4th Street, is at left, beyond a vacant lot. It is also a landmark.*

then, to make a long, sad story short, in the fall of 2002 the roof collapsed.

Having brought suit successfully as a criminal proceeding, the Landmarks Commission and the New York State Supreme Court are now directing the stabilization. Sky is visible through an upper-floor window, but caissons are buttressing the house. Ultimately, one hopes, the Skidmore House will be whole again. It could happen. It has happened elsewhere.

At 306 State Street is an Italianate house in an attached row of individual landmarks between Hoyt and Smith Streets in Boerum Hill, Brooklyn. In the mid-1980s it was inherited by a woman who was not capable of taking care of it or, for that matter, the other properties she inherited at the same time. Incompetent on her own, she apparently had no surrogate to oversee her property, and the house at 306 State Street was allowed to deteriorate so badly that it became a threat to health and safety, to say nothing of neighboring property values. She relocated to Hawaii and was ultimately served papers there. Before the case went to court, she died and her estate became the owner, so the city brought suit against the estate. As part of the settlement, the estate repaired the house and then, when the violations were removed, sold it. New people have just moved in.

New Brighton Village Hall on Staten Island, a French Second Empire brick building, was built from 1868-71 at a time when this northern neighborhood of Staten Island was populated by prominent New Yorkers. It was designed by James Whitford Sr., also the architect of two elegant police precinct headquarters and a church, all on the island. The New Brighton property eventually became a publicly owned civic building and was designated in the first year of the Landmarks Law, 1965. In 1985 it was purchased by developers who claimed to be specialists in renovating historic buildings. But in the following year the federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit program reduced the amount of rehabilitation costs deductible from income tax to 20 percent from 25 per-



art: Ann Walker Gaffney



photo: Linda C. Jones

*New Brighton Village Hall on Staten Island, a splendid French Second Empire brick building designated in 1965, fell into disrepair. The developers who bought it in 1985 abandoned work on it when the federal tax credit dropped from 25 percent to 20 percent in 1986.*

cent, and the owners reportedly claimed the economics of the project evaporated. Sixteen years later, in 2002, the city sued them and is currently negotiating with them to find a solution. It won't be easy—last winter the roof collapsed. A potential new owner, however, a nonprofit organization, is interested in turning the building into a nursing home and is waiting to line up financing before the sale goes through.

Each of these stories has evolved over the better part of two decades, and lately the Landmarks Preservation Commission has been on the case, doing what it can under the law. In January 1998 amendments to the Landmarks Law were created permitting civil sanctions for violations of alteration permits. At the same time, amendments were sought to prosecute demolition by neglect, clearly more serious than violations of permits, in civil rather than criminal court. However, representatives of religious organizations fought that provision and it was dropped. Ironically, it is not usually the stewards of religious properties who are the problem.

Demolition by neglect, therefore, remains a criminal offense and the city is prosecuting. Let us hope the successful outcome of other cases will be the ultimate rehabilitation of landmarks, as it was at 306 State Street. That was the purpose behind the law. It's good to see it work.

## EXPLORE OUR WEB SITE

THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL'S Web site has been renovated, expanded and improved. Now you can find lots of information about the work and mission of our organization, upcoming lectures and educational programs and how to become an intern or a volunteer.

Read the testimony we prepare and deliver to city agencies. Discover resources you can use to help preserve your historic neighborhood.

Check it out at [www.hdc.org](http://www.hdc.org).

## A PRIME CUT DESIGNATION: THE MEATY STORY OF GANSEVOORT MARKET

YOU COULD PRACTICALLY HEAR a cheer go up last September when most of the meatpacking area in Manhattan was designated a new historic district, henceforth to be known as Gansevoort Market. The voices would have been those of dozens of people who waged an intense campaign for designation over a period of 16 years, with almost as many reverses as advances.

Anchoring the northwest corner of Greenwich Village from West 14th Street to about five streets south, Gansevoort Market consists of a dozen or so city blocks that in the mid-1800s had become the site of the Gansevoort Farmers' Market. Later in the century it hosted a wholesale-produce and dairy-products market also and since the 1930s has been home to meat wholesalers. Its name comes from Gansevoort Street, the backbone of the area, and the fact that it has been a market for so long.

For some years, the area had been watched by Regina Kellerman, Ph.D., an architectural historian, former director of research for the Landmarks Preservation Commission, and a founder and the first executive director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. The Gansevoort area had many fine examples of prominent 19th century architects' work, and its vernacular architecture was remarkable; but it looked too enticing to developers, sitting there on the edge of the Hudson with its rundown meat-market buildings. Indeed, one landowner, William Gottlieb, had accumulated property in parcels that looked for all the world as if he were assembling development sites. He owned more than 100 properties in Manhattan, 14 in the meat market alone. But he couldn't be reached, wouldn't talk to anyone. He bought and bought, but he never sold. What was he waiting for?

Unwilling to wait to find out, Dr. Kellerman pulled together funding and a staff that researched, photographed and wrote up every single building not only in the Gansevoort area but on the entire West Village waterfront, using original city records. "The Architecture of the Greenwich Village Waterfront, an Archival Research Study" was published in 1989. It

was undertaken to support designation of the waterfront and it was the bedrock of the Gansevoort Market research.

In the late 1990s, new construction in the West Village worried residents there enough that some of them formed the West Village Community Task Force to seek designation for the entire waterfront from 14th to Houston Streets. The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preserva-

tion (GVSHP) felt that "all or nothing" could too easily end up "nothing," and wanted to pursue Gansevoort by itself. An industrial area with commercial renters and no legal residents, it could count on scant support from inside, the thinking went, while the rest of the waterfront was filled with resident Villagers known to get passionate about causes. No one would take up the oar for Gansevoort unless it was GVSHP. Ultimately GVSHP and WVCTF agreed that if the task force did not oppose Gansevoort's designation, GVSHP would support the task force in its later effort.



photo: Penelope Barea

*Three small mid-19th century buildings, 3, 5 and 7 Ninth Avenue, with Gansevoort Street receding on the left. On the right is Little West 12th Street; the restaurant Pastis located later on the corner. Beside it, meatpacking businesses in two- and three-story buildings reduced from four and five stories in the 1930s.*

tion (GVSHP) was worried enough to focus its institutional role on advocacy. People who worked in the Gansevoort Market were worried, especially Florent Morellet, a Frenchman with a degree in urban planning whose 24-hour bistro, Florent, on Gansevoort Street opened in 1985 and brought many outsiders to the neighborhood in the wee hours. They were astonished to see the meat-market activity. They told their friends and came again.

In July 1998 the board of trustees of GVSHP voted to pursue landmark designation for Gansevoort. A potential partner, the West Village Community Task Force (WVCTF), had an all-or-nothing stance regarding the entire waterfront.

Dr. Kellerman's book provided the research. Representatives of the NoHo, Ladies' Mile and TriBeCa Historic Districts made suggestions. Vicki Weiner, then executive director of the Historic Districts Council, said support of property owners was most important; also storefront leaseholders, since they would be the regulated ones; and elected officials. Linda Yowell and Arbie Thalacker, co-chairs of GVSHP's preservation committee; Tony Zunino, its president; and Kim Stahlman Kearns, then its executive director, met with Jennifer Raab, then chair of the LPC. She was reported to be "receptive" to the idea of a designated Gansevoort district and urged GVSHP



representatives to talk with the City Planning Department and with Bill Gottlieb, the property owner.

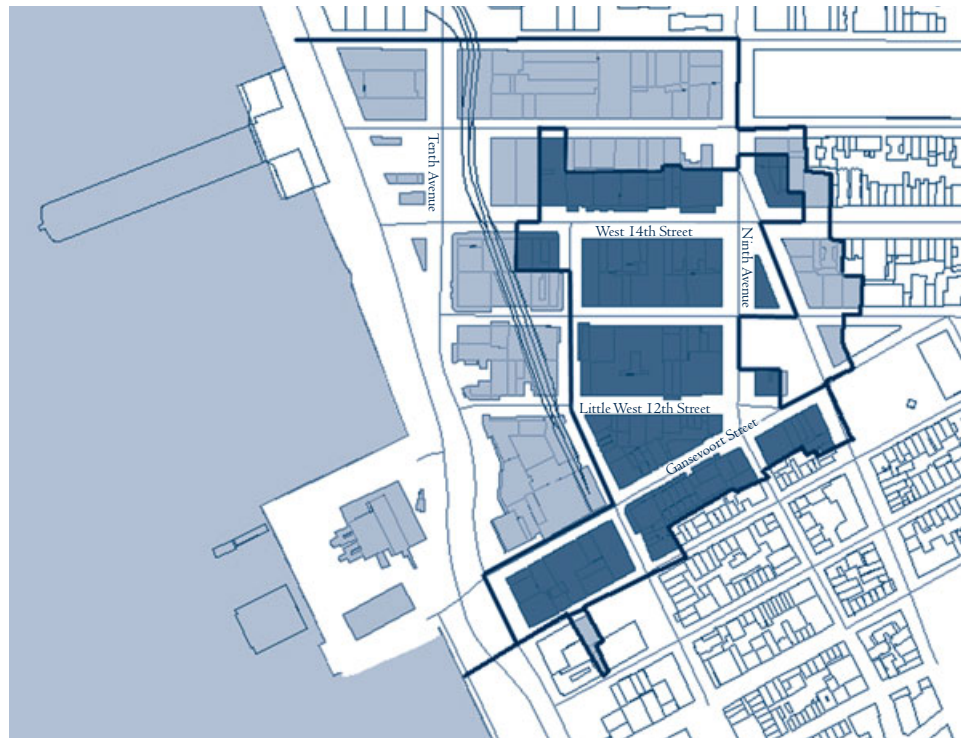
And then Bill Gottlieb died suddenly. Mr. Morellet, whose restaurant Mr. Gottlieb frequented, had been talking to him a couple of weeks before he died, saying he wished he could do something to safeguard the neighborhood. “What this district needs,” Mr. Gottlieb said, “is landmarking.” It was a stunning remark coming from a property owner.

At the end of November 1999, Jennifer Raab took a walk of Gansevoort wearing high-heeled shoes to tread the cobblestones. She was not impressed.

A separate organization was formed under the aegis of GVSHP to administer the movement. It was called Save Gansevoort Market and it needed leaders. Jo Hamilton, a resident of nearby Jane Street, was considered a politically savvy activist on the community board. She was a clear pick. Florent Morellet was another obvious choice. Well known in the community, well liked and vitally interested in the market as a viable entity, he was already talking about doing something to save it. Jo Hamilton and Florent Morellet agreed to work as co-chairs of the Save Gansevoort Market Task Force. In August 2000 Mr. Morellet had estimated that \$65- to \$70,000 would be needed to support the project for the next year; \$11,000 was in hand through grants and pledges.

A local group looking to host a country-and-Western music-street festival in Gansevoort was seeking a nonprofit organization to donate the proceeds to, an estimated \$5,000. A deal was struck, and on the day of Beefstock, GVSHP had a table near the sidewalk with fliers, postcards (“Dear Jennifer Raab, I support GVSHP’s work to designate Gansevoort Market”) and two large fishbowls. Five hundred bright red can’t-miss-’em postcards had been printed to last a few months. All were used up in one day, many dropped in the fishbowls along with dollar bills as big as \$20. Support was enthusiastic and widespread. Everyone was surprised how many people loved Gansevoort, how many even thought of it as their very own.

Mr. Morellet hosted a kick-off party at his restaurant in November 2000, and 250 people came, raising \$10,000. With a grant from the Preservation League of New York State and the New York State



*Gansevoort Market area at the northwest corner of Greenwich Village. Light-shaded area was proposed; dark-shaded area was designated.*

Council on the Arts, architectural historian Tom Mellins was hired to write a history and a case for designation of the area. Ms. Hamilton and Mr. Morellet met with elected officials. A logo was designed by Two Twelve Associates, stationery was printed by Mines Press—and a press kit was put together by the task force. Diane von Furstenberg, a fashion designer and celebrity with a local showroom and offices, agreed to host a fund-raiser in May 2001. It netted \$85,000.

Although support was building in the community—Community Boards 2 and 4 had pledged support—nothing coming out of LPC was overtly stated, everything was nuance. So when Linda Yowell of GVSHP and Tom Mellins met with staff at LPC in May and were told that the commission had been looking at one building in Gansevoort to be an individual landmark, they took it as a sign that the greater entity was not being considered. But then the staff said they were “quite interested” in Gansevoort, so what was what? Staff even said they would consider wider boundaries to include the former Nabisco factory on West 15th Street.

By June 2001 Mr. Mellins had a draft of his report to show LPC staff, who felt it

made a convincing argument and said that one district was still in the pipeline before Gansevoort would be considered.

Everything was stalled by the terrorist attacks of that September 11th, but eventually work continued. It was all exciting. Some of it was bizarre. Newspaper articles had begun appearing in 1999 and more were being published; television spots showed Michelle Dee, proprietor of Hogs & Heifers bar, talking about why Gansevoort should be designated; meat-market workers were filmed unloading sides of beef; the boutique Jeffrey was discovered as a place where one could buy a blouse for \$500 (a sleeveless blouse). And candidates for every office in the upcoming mayoral election were approached, informed about Gansevoort and lobbied.

Aubrey Lees, then chair of Community Board 2, which includes Gansevoort and the Village generally, started a series of meetings with Sherida Paulsen, acting chair of LPC appointed to fill out Jennifer Raab’s term when she resigned. Ms. Paulsen thought Gansevoort was “difficult.” Around December 2002, LPC told the Save Gansevoort Market Task Force that it was “holding off on all new projects” until after Mayor-elect Bloomberg and his

*continued on page 12*

## DISTRICT PROFILES

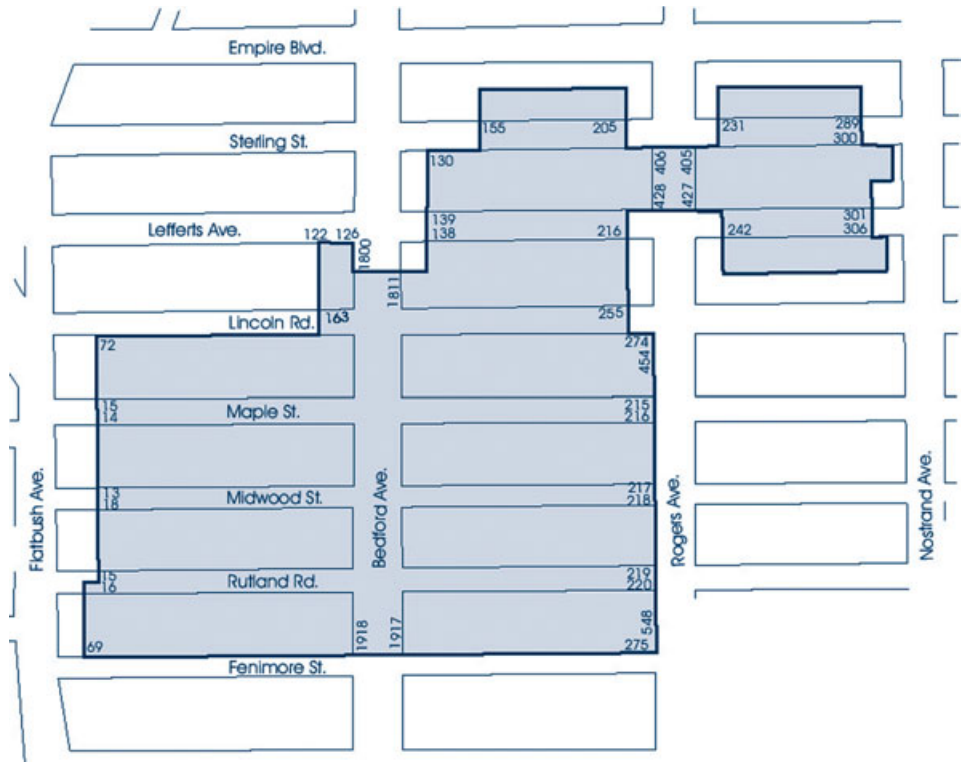
## PROSPECT-LEFFERTS GARDENS, BROOKLYN

ATTACHED TO LAMPPOSTS in several blocks of this historic district are signs saying, "This landmarked district ZONED. Houses on this block restricted to one family only." It must be that visitors to Prospect-Lefferts Gardens are so charmed by the neighborhood that they frequently ask passing residents how to get an apartment there, and the residents put the signs up in self-defense.

Zoned it may be, but the houses are single-family because of a covenant written by James Lefferts when in 1893 he subdivided the family farm. The development was to be called Lefferts Manor, near the old Lefferts Homestead at Flatbush Avenue between Midwood and Maple Streets in the northern part of Flatbush. Much new construction was going on in Brooklyn at the time, but not as far south as Flatbush; and Lefferts, anticipating its arrival, wanted to make sure his development was high quality and geared for middle-class professionals. According to the Landmarks Preservation Commission's designation report (1979), "By restricting the area to fairly substantial, although not exorbitantly expensive or excessively grand houses, Lefferts hoped to attract a stable middle-class population that would give the newly developing area an aura of respectability."

The covenants prohibited commercial and manufacturing uses, apartments and tenements and, as the designation report quotes Lefferts, "any noxious, offensive, dangerous, unwholesome ... business whatsoever."

Moreover, the covenants restricted the houses to single family habitation, to be at least two stories high and built of stone or brick. No house was to be worth less than \$5,000—they go for a good deal more than that today, of course—and there were more restrictions in the covenants relating to setbacks from the street, outbuildings, fences and so on. The Lefferts Manor Association, founded in 1919, renewed the covenants, and they are still in effect. That they are may have something to do with the well groomed



map: courtesy Landmarks Preservation Commission

*Prospect-Lefferts Gardens Historic District was formed around Lefferts Manor, the 18th century Lefferts family homestead. An 1893 covenant written when the land was developed restricted buildings to single-family houses. The covenant is still in effect.*

and peaceful streets making up this prosperous and stable, racially integrated middle-class neighborhood.

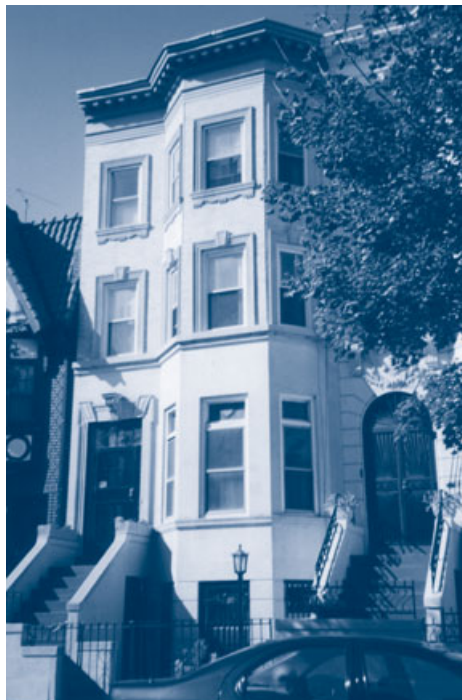


photo: Penelope Bateau

*Neo-Renaissance house at 37 Rutland Road next to a neo-Tudor, partly visible at left.*

Though subdivision took place in 1893, the earliest construction in the new development was in 1897-99 when 160 houses went up. Sales were slow, however—those 160 houses may have flooded the market—and building ceased until 1905, when it resumed with a frenzy. In the following six years more than 500 houses were built.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries revivalist architecture was the order of the day, and this district is a virtual dictionary of revivals—Romanesque Revival, neo-Renaissance, neo-Georgian, neo-Federal, even neo-Medieval, with Tudor arches and half-timbered gables. Only 20 architects were involved, but among them were some of Brooklyn's most important practitioners: Benjamin Dreisler, Axel Hedman and the firm of Slee & Bryson, for example. Partly because of the covenants and partly because of the small number of architects, this district has a degree of cohesiveness unusual even among designated historic districts.

One gem is missing from it, the Lefferts Homestead itself. Lefferts is an old Brooklyn name, going back to Leffert Pietersen van Haughwout, who emigrated from Holland in 1660 and settled in Mid-

wout, now Flatbush, Brooklyn. ("Flatbush" is a transliteration of the Dutch word, "vlackebos," or "wooded plain.") Eventually the family acquired huge tracts of land in Brooklyn and raised many leading citizens of their days — senators, judges, congressmen. The Lefferts Homestead was built in the late 17th century and was burned by American soldiers in 1776 during the Revolutionary War. Family members salvaged timber and hardware from the wreckage and rebuilt the house between 1777 and 1783. Presumably some family members lived there for another 130 years or so, for soon after James Lefferts's death in 1918 the house was ceded to New York City and moved to Prospect Park, where it still reposes.

## RECENT GIFTS AND GRANTS

THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL is grateful to all the Friends and institutions that make contributions. Without them, our work would be severely handicapped. The most recent donors are:

**Foundations:** Gramercy Park Foundation, Samuel H. Kress Foundation, D/J McManus Foundation, New York Community Trust/Fosdick Fund, Arthur Ross Foundation.

**Government:** New York State Council on the Arts, Manhattan Delegation of the New York City Council.

**Local groups:** Carnegie Hill Neighbors, Douglaston/Little Neck Historical Society, East Side Rezoning Alliance, Fiske Terrace Neighborhood Association, Friends of Cast Iron Architecture, Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, Gramercy Park Block Association, The Green-Wood Cemetery, Hamilton Heights/West Harlem Community Preservation Organization, Preserve & Protect, Queensborough Preservation League, Sutton Area Community, Union Square Hospitality Group.

**Friends:** Alan M. Ades, Thomas Agnew, Oliver & Deborah Allen, Eric Wm. Allison, James & Elois T. Banks, Penelope Bateau, Sharen Benenson, J. Joel & Judith I. Berger, Andrew Berman, Minor Bishop, Leo J. Blackman & Kenneth T. Monteiro, Louis Blumengarten, Françoise Bollack & Tom Killian, Ed Botwin, Ann Bragg, Brian Breyre, Hal Bromm & Doneley Meris, Lisa Burcham, Roger Byrom, Doreena M. Chan, Jane Forbes Clark, Christopher Collins & Robert R. Kulikowski, Elizabeth Rose Daly, Joan K. Davidson, Phillip Dodd, Andrew Scott Dolkart, Florence D'Urso, Franny & David Eberhart, Mr. & Mrs. Richard Eckfeldt, Eleanor Edelman, Constance Eiseman, Stephen A. Facey, Mr. & Mrs. Nicholas Falco, Marjorie Fer-

rigno, Kenneth K. Fisher, Naomi Freistadt, Ken Foreman & Danielle Brooks, David Freudenthal, Ann Walker Gaffney, Jill Gill, Linda Gillies, Karen Ginsberg, David & Liz Goldfarb, Gloria Gottschalk, Christabel Gough, Paul D. Graziano & Heidi Klukas, Eugenie Cowan Have-meyer, John & Diana Herzog, Marilyn Horne, Phyllis Cynthia Huyler, Linda C. Jones, Aida A. Koundakjian, Florent Morellet, David I. Karabell & Paula A. Moss, Mr. & Mrs. Stephen M. Kellen, Robert Kornfeld Sr., Mr. & Mrs. Werner H. Kramarsky, Ken Lustbader, Ronald L. Melichar, Pauline Metcalf, Danny Meyer, Richard J. Moylan, Elizabeth Newman, Norman Odlum, Evelyn & Everett Ortnier, Lois Osborne, Kate Burns Ottavino & Neill Parker, Frederic Papert, Virginia Parkhouse, William & Susan Rifkin, Elizabeth B. Rogers, David Rosenberg & Bernice K. Leber, Joseph S. Rosenberg, Mr. & Mrs. Edwards F. Rullman, Susan Sanders, Julia Schoeck, Thomas F. Schutte, Martin E. Segal, Mr. & Mrs. Frederick R. Selch, I. Barnett Shepherd, Teri Slater, Beverly Moss Spatt, Martha Roby Stephens, Jim Stratton, Jack Taylor, Eugene & Clare Thaw, Helen S. Tucker, Philip Tusa, Anne Van Ingen & Wesley Haynes, Elise Ward, I. Donald Weston, Madelyn Wils, Gloria Withim, Anthony C. Wood, Richard & Melmie Young, F. Anthony & Sally Auer Zunino.

### BECOME A FRIEND OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL TODAY!

Douglaston, Queens; Charlton-King-Vandam, Manhattan; Fort Greene, Brooklyn; Longwood, The Bronx are all designated historic districts, protected from inappropriate alterations and development. Unfortunately, many more neighborhoods throughout the city are not, though they are seeking designation. That's where the Historic Districts Council can help.

As the citywide advocate for New York's historic neighborhoods, HDC works to preserve and protect the city's architectural and cultural heritage. We consult with building owners in historic districts to help them understand what Landmarks Preservation Commission regulations mean and how to comply with them. We talk with communities that are not designated but want to be, helping them with the process and advising them on how to proceed.

It's a big city and our advocacy is never finished. Our agenda would not be possible without you and preservation partners like you. You are the backbone of HDC.

Yes, consider me a Friend of HDC!

Enclosed is my gift of

\$50 \_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_ \$250 \_\_\_ \$500 \_\_\_ Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to Historic Districts Council and mail to: 232 East 11th Street, New York, NY 10003. For information, call 212-614-9107.

name \_\_\_\_\_

address \_\_\_\_\_

city/state \_\_\_\_\_ zip \_\_\_\_\_

telephone \_\_\_\_\_

fax \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
(for news and electronic alerts)

## A PRIME-CUT DESIGNATION...

*continued from page 9*

staff were in office and that "Gansevoort Market was no longer on their agenda." This news stunned GVSHP. Aubrey Lees notified Ms. Paulsen emphatically and perhaps loudly that CB2's top priority was still Gansevoort, and by the end of January 2003, the market district seemed back on track. At any rate, in one of the CB2 meetings with Landmarks, Ms. Paulsen said they would "put something together in six to twelve months." Still, nothing was definite, and the signs were alternately encouraging and depressing.

In the meantime, alterations were taking place all over Gansevoort. Some were okay, some were discouraging.

In January 2002 Andrew Berman, formerly chief of staff to New York State Senator Tom Duane, joined GVSHP as its new executive director. As Jo Hamilton put it a few weeks later, "He caught up to speed in a nanosecond" and became a

strong presence in the campaign. At the end of July, LPC promised to take action by the end of the year, and by September the issue had become boundaries and what would be included in the district. Almost all the area north of 14th street was dropped.

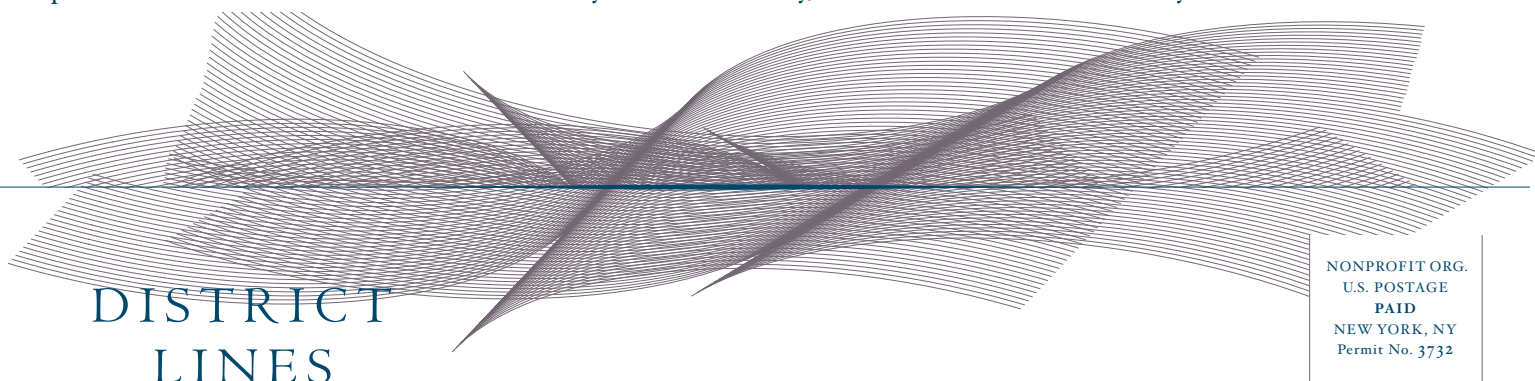
Ms. Hamilton, Mr. Morellet and now Mr. Berman never let up. At each setback, they redoubled their efforts. GVSHP secured the support of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and applied for and received eligibility for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The Preservation League of New York State cited Gansevoort Market as one of its "Seven to Save" sites.

Then more good news: in December 2002 Landmarks scheduled a community meeting to talk about Gansevoort. It was their first really solid show of commitment and it fell on a night from hell. Bitter cold, fierce winds blew sheets of rain horizontal, but almost 150 soaked people showed up. Sherida Paulsen led the meeting accompanied by Robert B. Tierney, who would take

the LPC chair in January. Many people from the community spoke: no property owners, but many business people and community figures did.

Property owners did show up at the public hearing LPC scheduled in March. Bill Gottlieb's heirs did not appear, but three speakers represented two other owners. They and a representative of the Real Estate Board of New York were the only negative voices among the 30 or so who spoke, and they protested that they would never be able to alter their buildings or realize the development potential their property held. But much of LPC's work is involved in hearing, checking and approving new buildings and alterations to existing ones in historic districts, and potential is never guaranteed in life. The commission voted to designate.

Dirty, rundown, sometimes smelly as it may be, Gansevoort has an indisputable sense of place, and that is the basic reason it was designated. What is sense of place? Well, it's like love: everybody knows what it is but nobody can define it.



# DISTRICT LINES

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

THE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK CITY'S  
HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

232 East 11th Street  
New York NY 10003  
tel 212-614-9107 fax 212-614-9127  
e-mail [hdc@hdc.org](mailto:hdc@hdc.org)  
[www.hdc.org](http://www.hdc.org)

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
NEW YORK, NY  
Permit No. 3732