



**Greenwich Village
Society for Historic Preservation**

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March 9, 2011

Hon. Robert Tierney, Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: Urgent Request for Evaluation for 285 and 287 East 3rd Street, Manhattan

Dear Chair Tierney:

We request that the Landmarks Preservation Commission consider for landmark designation Nos. 285 & 287 East 3rd Street in Manhattan, two highly intact Greek Revival "sister" rowhouses dating from 1837, built on land originally owned by the prominent Fish family. The only houses ever to stand on their lots, both have miraculously survived 174 years of neighborhood change and exist today in excellent physical condition. As the attached photographs indicate, the houses have retained an exceptional level of architectural integrity. Their dentiled wood cornices, sills, lintels, and door entablatures have survived intact and have clearly been well-maintained for nearly two centuries. The only two survivors of a row of six, they recall the days when the majority of the blocks between Avenues C & D were lined with similar homes.

Rowhouses that survive in this portion of the East Village are the earliest buildings ever to exist on their sites; before their construction, the area was primarily farmland. The majority of these homes were built for merchants associated with the blossoming shipbuilding industry that crept up from Corlear's Hook and thrived along this portion of the East River in the 1830s and 40s when the area was known as the Dry Dock Neighborhood. With the recent loss of Nos. 326 & 328 East 4th Street, two of the most intact houses from the Dry Dock era, fewer and fewer of these homes now stand as a testament to this decisive time in the neighborhood's history, making swift action by the Landmarks Preservation Commission to protect those that remain all the more critical.

Reflecting the homes' connection to the shipyards, tax assessment records indicate that No. 285 was constructed by Charles Dodge, a ship carver for many years. Dodge later achieved political prominence as Trustee and Commissioner of the New York Board of Education, Deputy Tax Commissioner, and as a member of the New York Common Council and the Board of Alderman for the Eleventh Ward.

As was the case with many other East Village rowhouses built originally as single-family homes, Nos. 285 & 287 accommodated multiple families by the mid-19th Century. Unlike other houses, however, these two managed to escape being raised in height or extended in the rear, and therefore look much as they did when they were first built; a rarity in parts of the city that housed dense immigrant populations. Census records show that by 1870, 22 people resided in No. 285 and 27 in No. 287. In that year, the majority of the residents were German, but in the remaining decades of the century Bavarians, Russians, Hungarians and others of Eastern European origin also lived in the homes, working as cigar, clothing and shoe makers and in other manufacturing professions. By 1930 the homes were still occupied by multiple families but most were Jewish Austrians and Hungarians, reflecting the transformation of the neighborhood from Kleindeutschland to the Jewish Lower East Side.

To find one 174-year old home in such exceptional physical condition and with this degree of architectural integrity is uncommon; to find a matching pair is nothing short of extraordinary. However, the fate of No. 285 remains uncertain, as the home is currently for sale. We urge the Commission to act quickly to consider landmark designation of this Nos. 285 & 287 East 3rd Street, so future owners may continue to be stewards of the significant history of the East Village and of these remarkable homes.

We have attached photos and primary source documents to confirm our research. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director
Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation



Kurt Cavanaugh
Managing Director
East Village Community Coalition

Cc: Councilmember Rosie Mendez
Mary Beth Betts, Director of Research, LPC
Municipal Art Society
NY Landmarks Conservancy
Historic Districts Council