



NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Robert B. Tierney
Chairman

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2013
No. 13-10

LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION APPROVES A NEW HISTORIC DISTRICT IN GREENWICH VILLAGE AND AN INTERIOR LANDMARK IN THE BRONX

South Village Historic District Becomes NYC's 110th Historic District and the Bronx GPO Lobby on the Grand Concourse, with Its Famed Murals, Becomes Its 117th Interior Landmark



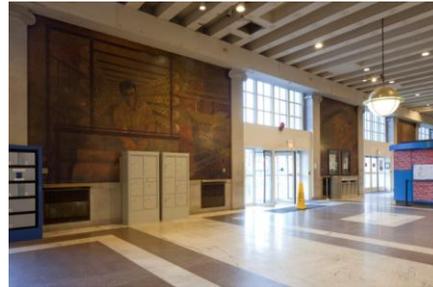
The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission today unanimously approved the designation of the 250-building South Village Historic District in Manhattan and the lobby of the Bronx General Post Office as an interior landmark, citing their architectural, historic and cultural significance.

The designations bring to 110 the total number of historic districts in all five boroughs, and to 117 the total number of interior landmarks in all five boroughs.

Descriptions of the new interior landmark and historic district are below:

Bronx General Post Office Lobby, 560 Grand Concourse, at East 149th Street

The lobby of the Bronx General Post Office, whose exterior was named an individual New York City landmark in 1976, consists of 13 murals completed in 1939 by the noted artists Ben Shahn and Bernarda Bryson against the backdrop of a double-height lobby designed in the Modern Classical style and featuring floor-to-ceiling Ionic columns, a striped marble and terrazzo floor, and a coffered ceiling with rosette ornamentation.



"These striking, larger-than-life murals are not only well preserved, they remain in the same location where they were originally installed 75 years ago this month, thanks to the fine stewardship of the U.S. Postal Service," said Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney, who also thanked the USPS for its support of the designation. "The lobby, which was completed during the depths of the Great Depression remains a monument to the ideals of the New Deal-era public works programs to this day."



Constructed in 1937 as the first postal headquarters in the Bronx to accommodate the borough's rapidly increasing population, the building and its interior were designed by the architect Thomas Harlan Ellett. The Public Works Administration, a New Deal program through which 1,100 post offices were constructed between 1934 and 1943 throughout the United States, funded the construction of the Bronx post office. Ellett, who designed other post offices during that period in Huntington, N.Y., Kentucky and Georgia, was also the architect of the Cosmopolitan Club on the Upper East Side, part of the Upper East Side Historic District.

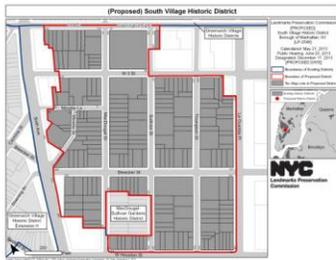
Shahn and Bryson won the commission for the murals through a jury competition that drew 198 entries. According to the competition requirements, the entries had to have a unified decorative theme, both thematically and compositionally, and portray everyday Americans. The artists' response was "Resources of America," executed in egg tempera on dry plaster, with a series of images of rural and urban Americans at work.



The central panel on the north wall of the lobby, which introduces the sequence of 13 murals, depicts Walt Whitman discussing democracy with laborers. Arranged in pairs facing each other across the lobby's axis, these murals portray miners, steelworkers, hydroelectrical engineers, wheat and cotton harvesters and textile manufacturers and include several African American figures and two women.

According to Howard Greenfield's biography, "Ben Shahn: An Artist's Life," Shahn, an acclaimed photographer and painter whose family immigrated to the United States from present-day Lithuania, is said to have once commented "My idea was to show the people of the Bronx something about America outside New York."

South Village Historic District



The new district consists of approximately 250 row houses, tenements and institutional and commercial buildings north of West Houston Street that reflect the area's development between the early 19th and mid-20th centuries from an affluent residential neighborhood, and a thriving immigrant and artist community to a magnet for bohemian culture and the center of gay and lesbian life in New York City.

The district encompasses approximately 10 blocks between Avenue of the Americas to the west, LaGuardia Place and West Broadway to the east, West Fourth Street to the north and West Houston to the South.

The designation brings to 2,459 the total number of protected buildings in Greenwich Village. That figure includes the 2,035 buildings in the Greenwich Village Historic District, 320 in two district extensions, 70 in the Charlton-King-Vandam Historic District, 20 in the Mac Dougal-Sullivan Gardens Historic District and 14 buildings in the Weehawken Historic District.

"The distinctive buildings in the district represent an incredibly dense layering of historic cultural and architectural development which forms a notable sense of place and cohesion," said Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney. "The district's theaters, clubs and cafes nourished generations of authors, playwrights, musicians and also served as an incubator of the gay rights movement in New York City."

Nearly all the major architectural styles that became popular over the course of the 19th century are represented in the district, located on farmland that was developed to accommodate the northward migration of the city's wealthy residents. Vestiges of that first wave of construction can be seen in the c. 1825 houses at **200 and 202 Bleecker St.** (at right) and the c. 1828 houses at **125 to 131 MacDougal St.**, all in the Federal style, featuring such details as brownstone lintels and keystones. The style later gave way to the newer, more ornate Greek Revival style in the 1830's, whose characteristics include temple-like entrance surrounds, paneled doors





flanked by sidelights and pilasters or free-standing columns below a three-framed transom. Examples include **179 Sullivan St.** (c. 1834, at left) and **228 Thompson St.** (c. 1834).

The district was also home to residential terraces of uniform design _ considered an architectural innovation at the time _ that were given unique addresses with exclusive-sounding names. One was St. Clement's Place, on the west side of MacDougal between West Houston and Bleecker. Three of these c. 1850 houses, at **73 to 77 MacDougal** (below right), originally built with triple-height cast-iron balconies, remain; some of their Gothic Revival details are still intact.

By the mid-19th century, many of the area's affluent residents began to move out, once again heading north, and large numbers of immigrants moved in. The first wave of new arrivals tended to be of Irish and German origin, but by the 1890s were overwhelmingly southern Italians, who eventually made the South Village one of the most densely populated Italian quarters in New York City. The neighborhood also was the home of "Little Africa," New York's largest African-American community in the 1850s, the heart of which was located on Minetta Street and Minetta Lane.



The influx of immigrants triggered the conversion of the single-family row houses to multi-family dwellings and boarding houses, and, between the 1860s and early 20th century, the construction of tenements in a variety of styles, including neo-Grec, Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival and Renaissance Revival.



The district has several noteworthy commercial buildings, such as the c. 1897 Mills House No. 1 at **156 Bleecker Street** (at left), a residential hotel for single, working-class men designed in the Beaux-Arts style by the noted architect Ernest Flagg. Later known as the Greenwich Hotel, the building originally had 1,500 rooms, a library, a laundry, lounges and restaurants, and is credited with helping to inspire legislation that influenced the design of housing for the working class in the subsequent century.

In 1958, the Village Gate, one of Manhattan's largest nightclubs, opened in the lower floors of the building, hosting such greats as John Coltrane, Miles Davis and Thelonius Monk in the 1960s. The Bitter End opened in 1961 at 147 Bleecker St., providing a venue for comedians and musicians including Woody Allen, Bill Cosby, Stevie Wonder, and most recently, Lady Gaga.

The South Village's bars and social clubs also provided a haven for the city's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, beginning as early as the last decade of the 19th century. Theaters also had a prominent role in the cultural development of the South Village.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission is the mayoral agency responsible for protecting and preserving New York City's architecturally, historically and culturally significant buildings and sites. Since its creation in 1965, LPC has granted landmark status to more than 31,400 buildings and sites, including 1,339 individual landmarks, 117 interior landmarks, 10 scenic landmarks, 110 historic districts and 20 historic district extensions in all five boroughs. Under the City's landmarks law, considered among the most powerful in the nation, the Commission must be comprised of at

least three architects, a historian, a realtor, a planner or landscape architect, as well as a representative of each borough.

Contact: Elisabeth de Bourbon/ 212-669-7938