



NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Robert B. Tierney
Chairman

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COMMISSION EXTENDS LANDMARK PROTECTION TO A BLOCK ON TOMPKINS SQUARE PARK IN THE EAST VILLAGE AND A BANK BUILDING IN WILLIAMSBURG



The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission today voted unanimously to designate the 26-building East 10th Street Historic District and the Williamsburg branch of the former Public National Bank of New York as a landmark.

The district, which lines the north end of Tompkins Square Park and is encompassed by Manhattan's culturally and historically rich East Village neighborhood, consists of an unusually intact row of single family row houses, including some dating to the 1840s, mid-to-late 19th century tenements, and the c. 1904 Tompkins Square Branch of the New York Public Library, already a New York City landmark.



"This part of East 10th Street has retained its architectural character and cohesion for 152 years in an important park setting," said Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney. "Several of the row houses have been attributed to the noted architect Joseph Trench, further reinforcing the district's special sense of place."

The neo-Classical style Williamsburg branch of the former Public National Bank of New York at 47-49 Graham Avenue, was completed in 1923 and is now a Bank of America branch. The Commission also held a public hearing on a proposal to form the Crown Heights North Historic District III, a diverse collection of 640 buildings between Pacific Street and Lincoln Place to the north and south, and Kingston and Brooklyn avenues to the west, and Albany Avenue to the east.

Descriptions of the East 10th Street Historic District and bank building follow below.



East 10th Street Historic District, between Avenues A and B

The opening of Tompkins Square in 1834 was one of the factors that helped spur development in the area, which was envisioned as the northward-moving city's next fashionable neighborhood. The first building in the district, located on the northern edge of what is now Tompkins Square Park, appears to have been no. 301 (above, left), a single-family row house on the westerly half of the street that was completed in 1844 as a speculative investment.

The row of four houses at nos. 293 to 299 (right), completed 1846, and no. 301 are among the first in the city to incorporate elements of the Italianate style. They are attributed to the noted architect Joseph Trench, who is credited with introducing the Italianate style to the United States. Trench was responsible for the A.T. Stewart Store at Broadway between Chambers and Reade streets, New York City's

first department store and one of its most influential buildings. It's currently the headquarters of the City's Department of Buildings.



By the 1850s, new residents from Germany and Ireland began to settle in the neighborhood, pushing the wealthier residents farther uptown, and prompting the conversion of the row houses into multiple dwellings or boarding houses and the construction of tenements on the eastern side of the district.

11 buildings that were originally constructed in the mid- 19th century as single-family row houses, 14 mid-to-late 19th century tenements, and the c. 1904 Tompkins Square Branch of the New York Public Library, already a New York City landmark

The row houses at 313 and 315 East 10th Street, completed c. 1848 in the Greek Revival style, were converted in 1870 to serve as the home of St. Brigid's Academy, a select school for girls. Like most of the other buildings in the district, they were modernized in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with new architectural elements that differed from those originally used.



The buildings at 327 and 329 East 10th Street (left), constructed around 1852-53 are the district's first tenements. Known as "old-law" tenements, the buildings were erected prior to the passage of laws of 1867 and 1879, which required every room in each unit have direct access to light and air. Tenements typically housed 10 to 20 families on each floor living in four apartments with two or three rooms.

Meanwhile Tompkins Square Park was used increasingly for political activity and demonstrations, even as recently as 1988 when a riot broke out following the imposition of a park curfew and the eviction of the area's homeless population.

Only a few buildings were erected in the district in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including the pair of tenements at 321 and 323 East 10th and the Tompkins Square Branch of the New York Public Library. Completed in 1904 to the designs of Charles Follen McKim of the renowned firm of McKim, Mead & White, the building replaced two c. 1860 tenements and was one of the first of 67 libraries that opened with Andrew Carnegie's \$5.2 million grant that established a citywide branch library system.

Eastern European and Russian Jewish immigrants began moving to the neighborhood as early as the 1880s, transforming the ethnic composition of East Village by the 1940s. For example, the buildings at nos. 313 and 315, the site of St. Brigid's Academy, became home to organizations such as the Russian Erudition Society "Nauka," and the American Russian Democratic Club. The neighborhood changed again after the Second World War with the arrival of Latin American immigrants, as well as artists and writers looking for an affordable housing alternative to Greenwich Village.

"Despite all of the cultural changes in and around the district, the buildings have hardly changed since the early 20th century," said Chairman Tierney. "In many respects, they reflect the entire history of the East Village, from its beginnings as a tony quarter to a thriving immigrant neighborhood."

Williamsburg Branch, Public National Bank of New York, 47-49 Graham Ave.



Located at the corner of Graham Avenue and Varet Street in the eastern section of Williamsburg, the bank building, now the site of a Bank of America branch, was the first of several branches that were designed by the architect Eugene Schoen for Public National Bank of New York.

Schoen, a native New Yorker of Hungarian Jewish descent whose work was influenced by the Viennese Secessionist architects Otto Wagner and Josef Hoffmann, was for the first half of the 20th century at the forefront of modern American architecture. Today, he is primarily remembered for his furniture designs.

The bank, considered one of Schoen's most interesting and intact architectural commissions, was designed in the neo-Classical style and completed in 1923. Designed in the form of a one-story temple, the building is a rare example in New York City of early 20th century Viennese influence. Another is Schoen's Public National Bank of New York branch at 106 Avenue C in Manhattan.

Founded in 1908 on the Lower East Side as the Public Bank of New York, the Public National Bank was by 1917 considered one of the largest banks in the United States with a predominantly Jewish clientele. The bank commissioned the Williamsburg branch after outgrowing another location two blocks away.

The building, clad in cast-stone, features rusticated columns and corner piers on both of its main facades that frames rectangular and round arched windows, with panels and entrance surrounds that display a combination of classical and Secessionist ornament.

"This unusual building has served as a financial and visual anchor for nearly 90 years, and will endure for generations now that it's a landmark," said Chairman Tierney. "We are delighted that the Bank of America given their enthusiastic support for this designation."

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 29,000 buildings and sites, including 1,302 individual landmarks, 113 interior landmarks, 10 scenic landmarks, 107 historic districts and 16 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.

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