

GANSEVOORT MARKET
New York City

A Walking Tour



By Save Gansevoort Market
A Project of the Greenwich Village Society
for Historic Preservation
Spring 2002

The area you will be walking through is not large, bounded by Horatio Street (and Greenwich Village) on the south, 16th Street (and Chelsea) on the north, Hudson Street and Ninth Avenue on the east, and West Street. Yet Gansevoort Market is one of Manhattan's defining neighborhoods - gritty, hard working, low-rise, with its own special character, and a rich collection of buildings and history that cannot be replaced.

BACKGROUND

Today's Gansevoort Market area is actually the site of three distinct markets that have existed here at various times during the past century and a half: the original Gansevoort Farmers' Market, the West Washington Market, and today's Gansevoort Market Meat Center.



Herman Melville.



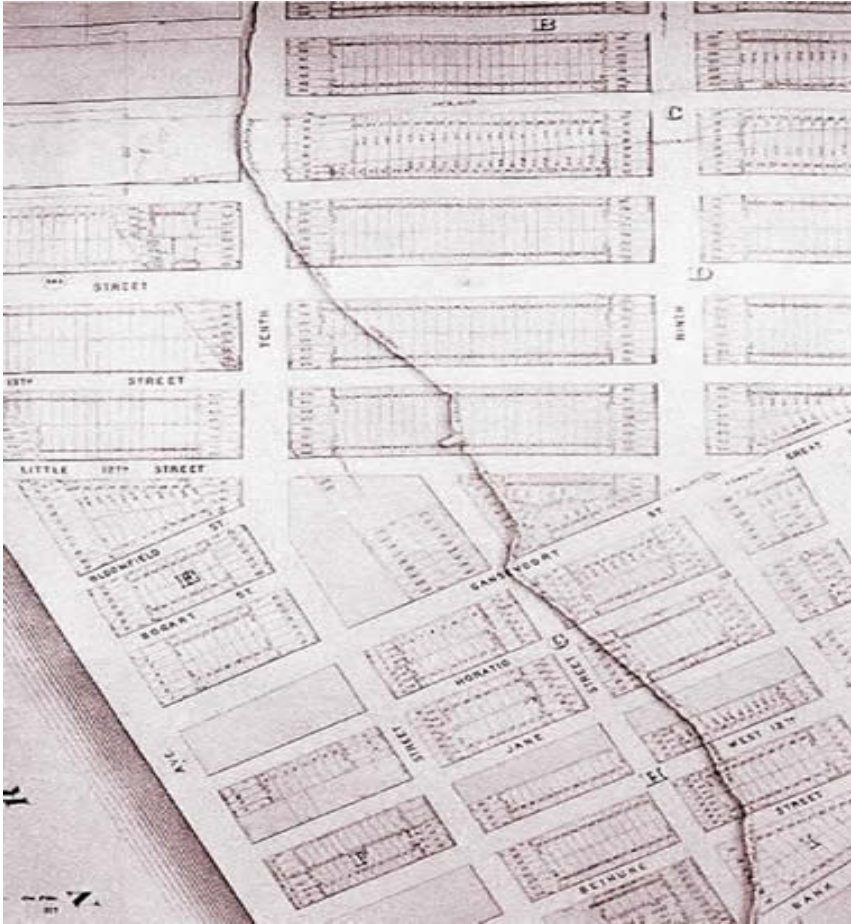
The original Gansevoort Market took its name from its location on Gansevoort Street. Originally an Indian trail leading to the Hudson River, later called the Great Kill or Old Kill Road, the street was renamed in 1837 for Fort Gansevoort, which had been hastily built in anticipation of the War of 1812 with Great Britain. The fort in turn had been named for General Peter Gansevoort, who had fought in the American Revolution. By a twist of literary fate, Gansevoort's grandson, the novelist Herman Melville, spent the years from 1866 to 1885 working as a Customs inspector for the Department of Docks in a long-since vanished building on the wharf at the

foot of the street named for his grandfather.

THE HISTORY OF THE MARKETS

New York City began planning a market on Gansevoort Street more than fifty years before the market's actual opening in 1884. As early as 1831, worried that the older markets to the south were becoming unmanageably overcrowded, the City proposed acquiring underwater property near Gansevoort Street, owned by the Astor family, in order to create landfill for a new market district. The sale was finally completed in 1852,

at which time the shoreline was filled in.



In 1854 the City again announced plans for a market, but nothing much happened. That same year, a freight depot for the Hudson River Railroad opened on Gansevoort Street and West Street, and by the mid-1860s a number of vendors had left the downtown Washington Market and set up business by the depot. By 1880, the City declared that the block bounded today by Gansevoort, Little West 12th, Washington and West streets, plus blocks to the west on landfill, would

become a public market. The Gansevoort Market officially opened in 1884 on the enormous paved open-air block between Gansevoort and Little West 12th streets, on the site of the former Fort Gansevoort, and of the future Gansevoort Market Meat Center.

This original Gansevoort Farmers' Market was an open-air produce market. Harper's Weekly described the scene in 1888, a few years after its official opening: "During the dark hours of early morning, as hundreds of wagons of all descriptions converge upon the market regions, pandemonium reigns as traffic chokes the thoroughfares for blocks around."

In 1887, to add meat, poultry and dairy products to the market activity, the City built the West Washington Market directly across West Street from the Gansevoort Farmers' Market. The West Washington Market was enclosed in ten two-story-tall red brick and terra cotta buildings, completed in 1889, set on four streets and one avenue. The West Washington Market survived until 1954 - the year of the buildings' demolition, the widening of West Street, and the construction of the Department of Sanitation's incinerator on the site (the "Gansevoort Destructor"). By that time, the City had built the

new (1949) Gansevoort Market Meat Center on the site of the old Gansevoort produce market, and meat eclipsed produce as the mainstay of the area.

THE HISTORY OF TRANSPORTATION

All markets depend on transportation networks, and the Gansevoort Market's growth is tied to transport via water, rail and highway. Early on, New York's produce arrived by boat from across the East and Hudson rivers, which is why so many markets were located



at the shoreline. The Hudson River Railroad depot, built in 1854 on Gansevoort Street, just in from the river, attracted the area's first produce vendors. The railroad first ran at ground level, through the market area; by 1934 its tracks were replaced by the High Line (construction begun 1924), a remarkable elevated freight line running roughly one story above street level, and

actually passing through dozens of warehouses along its route. The last train ran in 1980, but much of the High Line survives today as a great urban relic, including a stretch of it here in the Gansevoort Market area. A second elevated transport system, approved by the State in 1926, also served the Gansevoort Market: the Miller Elevated Highway (generally known as the West Side Highway), demolished between 1976 and 1989.

THE HISTORY OF THE BUILDINGS

The Gansevoort Market's physical character derives from the variety of its buildings and streetscapes. Most characteristic are the market buildings - long two- or three-story structures with metal awnings projecting over the sidewalks. Some of these were built for market use, while others, surprisingly, turn out to be the remains of taller residential structures reduced to market size. Next come the loft buildings - the five- and six-story warehouse and storehouse buildings typical of New York's commercial districts. The surviving segments of the High Line add another dimension, crossing over streets and cutting through neighboring buildings. Finally, the streetscape itself is a meeting of the pre- and post-1811 street grid plan, anchored by wide intersections and generous vistas.

Today's Gansevoort Market area survives as a thriving, vibrant city neighborhood in which unexpected neighbors co-exist surprisingly well. After 300 years of change - from Indian trail to Fort Gansevoort, to produce market, to meat market - it should come as no

surprise that the Gansevoort Market is changing again. As you walk through the neighborhood, you'll see that the galleries, restaurants and boutiques operate cheek by jowl with meat packing companies and late-night clubs, housed in the lofts and market buildings typical of the district.

THE WALKING TOUR

Our tour begins on Gansevoort Street - four blocks that shoot off to the east and west at an angle from Ninth Avenue. Just a block to the south, the genteel streets of Greenwich Village can be seen beyond Horatio Street. But here the character of the streetscape changes dramatically. The street names alone tell you that you've entered a special place - you're standing at a five-way intersection, where Ninth Avenue, Greenwich Street, and Little West 12th Street (very little - just two blocks) all collide, as they meet with Gansevoort Street.

The wide, five-way intersection paved in old Belgian blocks is unusual by Manhattan standards. Add to its configuration the mix of low-rise buildings - Greek Revival houses opposite early 20th century warehouses - with metal awnings projecting over either side of Gansevoort Street, and you have one of New York's quirkiest, and perhaps most evocative, historic commercial landscapes.

The large area of the original Gansevoort vegetable market that once existed a block to the west is now built up, but the intersection here gives some hint of what it might have been like - a broad, empty area jammed with overflowing produce carts and thousands of shoppers.

Among the oldest buildings in the Gansevoort Market are the three houses of the much altered row at **Nos. 3, 5 and 7 Ninth Avenue**, occupying the very short block-front between Gansevoort and Little West 12th Street. Built in 1848-49, they sit on land that was owned for more than a century by the family of merchant John G. Wendel. Least altered of the three is No. 5, in the center, which still has



its floor-to-ceiling parlor windows and a door, up a stoop, framed by Greek Revival columns with windows at the side and on the top - a very late example of a once - fashionable style. A hint of the building's original elegance survives in the patterned cast-iron designs at

the bottom of the areaway railing on the right. As the market area developed around the houses, they were turned to commercial uses. No. 3 - just a fragment of its former self, having lost its southern third in an 1887 widening of Gansevoort Street - got a corner store, while in 1897, No. 7 was converted to a hotel, with a ground floor saloon (whose space now houses the restaurant Rio Mar). All three houses have long since lost their cornices. (Photo: The Ninth Avenue "el," looking north from Gansevoort Street, 1876; note nos. 5 and 7, on the left. (Collection of the New-York Historical Society, x3252)

Everything else on this five-way intersection is either a warehouse or a market building. On the block to the north, the west side of Ninth Avenue offers us a first glimpse of a typical Gansevoort Market look: long, low buildings. The building occupying slightly more than the southern half of the block front, Nos. 9-19 Ninth Avenue, began life as a row of six three-story stables and stores. In 1922, they were reduced to two stories (for the estate of Vincent Astor) - not an uncommon occurrence in the market district, where two-story buildings were apparently the most useful. The half of that row that turns the corner on Little West 12th Street has been converted into a popular French bistro, Pastis.



The Astors owned land here - as they did all over Manhattan Island - for many decades. Across Ninth Avenue, the Astor estate also built the elegant six-story warehouse at Nos. 2-8 Ninth Avenue (architects LaFarge, Morris & Cullen, 1913). Paired windows and a modest cornice beneath a parapet offer the building's major decorative detail.

((Part of the collection of the Museum of the City of New York)

Turn west on Gansevoort Street, and you'll find yourself in the middle of a characteristic market block, marked by a line of corrugated metal awnings on either side of the street. On your right, tree branches billow out from a garden behind the Greek Revival houses of Ninth Avenue, partially obscuring the

curved, narrow edge of Nos. 53-61 Gansevoort Street. This five-story building, dating

from 1887, was designed by architect Joseph M. Dunn (responsible for many of the area's late-19th century warehouses) for the Goelet family - like the Astors, a major 19th century New York property owner. Built as a factory for wholesale grocers, the building later housed the New England Biscuit Company. Still visible today are the ground-floor cast-iron columns with their neo-Grec ornament and imaginative floral capitals. The building's narrow corner results from its odd triangular site. Its round edge caught the eye of photographer Berenice Abbot, who included it in her 1936 photo-essay, *Changing New York*.

Thomas McGeehan, a market worker whose father, grandfather and great-grandfather all worked in and around the Gansevoort market, remembers life growing up in the neighborhood: "The majority of people in this area depended on the waterfront. The men worked on the waterfront as longshoremen. Also the Gansevoort Market, they were what they call teamsters, with horse and buggy drivers. In those days my grandfather drove one, he was a teamster. My father worked on the piers, he was a longshoreman." McGeehan remembers the "R and L" restaurant, at No. 69 Gansevoort Street, that still operates here under the name of Restaurant Florent: "We used to call it the Eatem' and Beatem', because we used to go there at 3 o'clock in the morning, and eat our eggs and beat it out the door. And it was very popular, because it was open 24 hours a day. So, I don't know what time the bars were open to, maybe 4 o'clock. And when they fell out of the bar, they'd run to the R and L and have their breakfast, sleep for an hour or so, then run down to the pier to continue on."

Across the street, the two-story building with a metal awning looks like it must have been built for the meat market, but there's a clue to a different history - the decorative lintels over the second-story windows, which look like they'd be more at home on an old-law tenement. And in fact, the row at Nos. 60-68 Gansevoort Street was built in the 1880s as five-story tenements. In 1940, however, their owner removed the upper three stories (architect Voorhees, Walker, Foley & Smith - the firm of Ralph Walker, usually associated with big skyscraper projects) to create the typical market building with metal awning and second-floor offices.

Continue to the corner of Washington Street (note "Maggio Beef Corp" on the northwest corner of Gansevoort and Washington, and its handsome portrait bust of a stern bull), turn left, and walk south one block to Horatio Street. Nos. 799-801 Washington Street, at the corner of Horatio, was built in 1910 (architect J.C. Cocker) as a warehouse. By the mid-1940s a paper and twine company called it home, as did more recently a marine supply firm. The neighborhood is changing, however, and today the building houses a film production facility including studios and a screening room. The building's detail is simple, but carefully thought out. The window lintels and the band courses above the first and fifth stories are made of rusticated granite - an architectural conceit meant to suggest sturdiness. Look at those band courses, and notice how the five courses of brickwork below them gradually project to form a ridge supporting the granite. The square-headed

windows at the first through fourth stories turn round-arched at the fifth floor, while three-dimensional geometric brick patterns are set over the sixth-story windows, and the whole is topped by a heavy, imposing cornice.

Across the street, on Washington, between Horatio and Gansevoort streets, notice what looks like modern materials grafted over a large section of the old warehouse on the northwest corner of Horatio and Washington. The High Line - visible a block further north - once passed through this building. (Similar to the situation in the High Line photograph on page twenty five.) What you're looking at is the scar tissue left after its removal.

Continue on Horatio to West Street, but stop long enough to examine Nos. 110-112 Horatio Street, in the middle of the block - the only older building left on the south side of the block. If you look way up at the top, you can just make out four decorative terra-



cotta panels on the theme of painting. They're there because the building was part of a complex built for F.W. Devoe & Co., paint manufacturers. One of the last sections left of what was once an enormous group of buildings, 110-112 Horatio became a warehouse in 1920, and remained one until its 1984 conversion to residential use. (1913 Advertisement for Devoe Paints. (Collection of the New-York Historical Society, x66975)

Continue to the new pocket park at the end of Horatio Street for a fine view of the West Coast Apartments, which occupy the full block between Horatio and Gansevoort, and Washington and West streets. The complex was carved out of five massive old six- and seven-story warehouses: including Nos. 105-107 Horatio (architect John Graham Glover, 1913), Nos. 109-111 Horatio (architect L.C. Holden, 1898), and Nos. 521-527 West Street (L.C. Holden, 1898). All once housed the Gansevoort Freezing and Cold Storage Company, an enormous cold storage facility operated by the Manhattan Refrigerating Company. The company at one time owned or leased the entire block. All the warehouses were internally joined and shared a system that carried brine-cooled water in iron pipes beneath West Street to the West Washington Market, to aid in meat and poultry preservation. Then walk along the complex's West Street side to the corner of Gansevoort Street, where one lone beef and lamb wholesaler, the Weichsel Beef Company, still does business - and trucks still pull up under the metal awning to load or unload meat. (Manhattan Refrigerating Company, c.1920, West Street facade. (Collection of the New-York Historical Society, x54)



Across Gansevoort Street, at the corner of Tenth Avenue, sits the former Gansevoort Pumping Station. Built in 1906-08 (architects

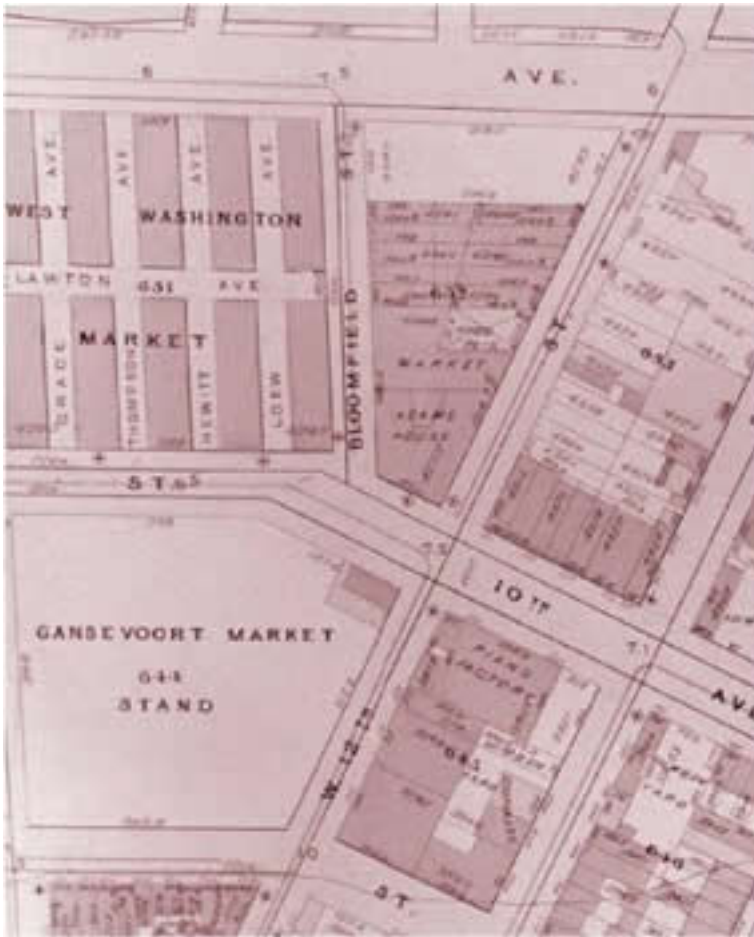
Bernstein & Bernstein), it was a former pump house supplying high-pressure water for fire fighting. In 1949, it became a cold storage meat warehouse, part of the City-sponsored Gansevoort Market Meat Center, and today is home to the Premier Veal & Lamb Company. Its Tenth Avenue front is adorned with colorful murals of contented cows munching on grass in the countryside - a place far



from Gansevoort Street and, for the cows, significantly safer. Along the Gansevoort Street side, three giant arches have been filled in, but the cornice still bears the words "High Pressure Fire Service" and "Gansevoort Pumping Station." Gansevoort Pumping Station, c. 1910.

(Collection of the New-York Historical Society, x61055)

Now, while standing on the southeast corner of Gansevoort Street and Tenth Avenue, you can survey the rest of the very large block beyond the Pumping Station, to the east, and then look west at the Department of Sanitation's structures across West Street. Had you been standing here during the late 19th century, or the first half of the 20th, you'd have found yourself in the middle of two of New York City's most chaotic market scenes. To the east, the block bounded by West and Washington, and Gansevoort and Little West 12th streets, was the enormous open area that housed the original Gansevoort Farmer's Market. Across West Street stood the West Washington Market. In 1939, the WPA Guide to New York City described them both:



“Gansevoort Market, or ‘Farmers' Market,’ as it is generally known, occupies the block between Gansevoort and Little West Twelfth streets. Farmers from Long Island, Staten Island, New Jersey, and Connecticut bring their produce here at night for sale under supervision of the Department of Public Markets. Activities begin at 4 a.m. Farmers in overalls and mud-caked shoes stand in trucks, shouting their wares. Commission merchants, pushcart vendors, and restaurant buyers trudge warily from one stand to another, digging arms into baskets of fruits or vegetables to ascertain quality. Trucks move continually in and out among the piled crates of

tomatoes, beans, cabbages, lettuce, and other greens in the street. Hungry derelicts wander about in the hope of picking up a stray vegetable dropped from some truck, while patient nuns wait to receive leftover, unsalable goods for distribution among the destitute. The market closes at 10 a.m. and is not open Sundays or holidays. Across West Street is the West Washington market, comprising ten quaint red brick buildings which house a live poultry market patronized mostly by kosher butchers. Since poultry requires ample heat in winter, every stall is equipped with a furnace, so that each roof adds more than a dozen chimneys to its picturesque architecture.”

The building that today occupies most of the site of the original Gansevoort Farmer’s Market (and of Fort Gansevoort before it), the Gansevoort Meat Center, was built by the City in 1949 to be the center of the meat market, effectively replacing the West Washington Market, which was demolished in 1954. As reported in the New York Herald Tribune of April 17, 1949:

“Workmen building the city's new Gansevoort Market and Meat Center at Gansevoort and Washington Streets have discovered the remains of an old American fort which has been unknown to New Yorkers and practically forgotten by historians. The fort was discovered when drillers sinking pilings for the market's foundations found that at levels

varying from eight to twenty-five feet below the surface they were hitting solid timber. A check of the city's old maps revealed that at one time Fort Gansevoort, built in 1812, occupied that site...."

Turn east on Gansevoort Street and walk to the corner of Washington (noticing, on the way, the row of columns on the back of the West Coast Apartments on your right). The three-story building at Nos. 817-821 Washington Street on the northeast corner of Gansevoort is yet another of the once-taller buildings cut down to size for market use. Built in 1887 (architect James W. Cole) for the Astor estate, it was originally a five-story tenement with a ground floor store. The 1940 conversion that removed the upper two stories also added the metal awning for a wholesale meat market on Washington Street; the second floor housed an egg packing operation, while the third floor served for coffee processing. Modest cast-iron columns survive at the ground floor, and you can still admire the former tenement's brick and terra cotta detailing on the Gansevoort Street side.

Turn left (north) on Washington Street and take in the block running from Gansevoort to Little West 12th Street. On the right, the long low buildings in the middle of the block date back to 1880, but both Nos. 823-829 Washington Street (architect Joseph M. Dunn for E.L. Donnelly) and No. 831 Washington Street (architect C.F. Ridder, Jr. for James McComb) underwent alterations, including the addition of metal awnings, for a 1940 conversion to meat market use.

At the next corner, turn right (east) down Little West 12th Street, to take in its typically market look. Then return to Washington Street. Nos. 837-843 Washington Street was built in 1938 (architect David M. Oltarsh for the Zanville Realty Co.) for market use, with offices above. The west side of Washington is dominated by the remains of the High Line. At street level, the corrugated metal wall now sports a mural of pigs. Take in the blocks north and south along this stretch of Washington Street. This is a remarkable Manhattan cityscape - low market buildings with metal awnings on the east, the High Line on the west, and vistas closed off at the north where Washington dead-ends into West 14th Street, and at the south where the street curves out of the line of sight past Little West 12th.

Continue north to West 13th Street. Built in 1887 (architect James Cole for the Astor Estate), this handsome, five-story red brick building on the northeast corner of Washington and West 13th Street, Nos. 859-877 Washington Street, takes up the entire block front from West 13th to 14th streets. Most impressive is the enormous, recently replaced metal awning that wraps around all three sides of the building, suspended from two-story-long metal supports attached to the upper wall, that recalls the previous functioning canopy system of the meat packing tenants. Today the building houses retail space on the ground floor, and the Hogs & Heifers Saloon, a famous watering hole for bikers, meatpackers and celebrities, at the corner of West 13th Street.

Turn right (east) on West 13th Street. On your left, on the north side of the street, are two six-story loft buildings, one wide and one narrow. The wide one, Nos. 421-425 West 13th



Street, was built in 1900-1902 (architect Hans E. Meyen, for Kluber & Ryan) for general storage. By 1937, a new storefront had been installed, along with a metal awning, for wholesale meat markets. The narrow building next door, at No. 419 West 13th Street, was built as a stable and loft building in 1900 (architect William H. Whittal, for H.

McNally and D.P. Chesebro).

In 1911, two bridges connected it to a meatpacking plant on West 14th Street. In 1939, it became a factory manufacturing industrial refrigerators. (Photo: Morning in the meat market, 1986. (GVSHP))

While you're standing here, don't miss the globe and torch backed by eagle wings across the street, above the entrance to No. 416 West 13th Street. Built in 1903 (architects Trowbridge & Livingston for the Astor Estate), the building originally served as a printing plant for Collier's magazine, and later as a factory for General Electric.

Continue east, to the end of the block, then turn left (north) on Ninth Avenue. At the northwest corner sits No. 29 Ninth Avenue, a six-story, solid structure in yellow Roman brick, rising to a patterned brick cornice. Its large windows are framed by four three-story tall arches, in each of the building's facades. This 1903 warehouse, later a food processing plant and then an electronics factory, was designed by the firm of Boring & Tilton, best known as the architects of the U.S. Immigration Station on Ellis Island.

Walk north up Ninth Avenue to West 14th Street, and you'll find another unusually wide, five-way intersection like the one two blocks south at Gansevoort and Little West 12th Street. The oddly shaped intersection is created by Hudson Street, which originates here, and branches southeast from the crossing of Ninth Avenue and West 14th Street. Ninth Avenue itself jogs eastward here just enough to direct its traffic flow south onto Hudson Street, creating an angle at the northeast corner of the intersection.



Standing at the northeast corner of Hudson and West 14th streets, you can see the narrow triangular block that opens between Hudson and Ninth. The building occupying the block, Nos. 669-681 Hudson Street, is sometimes known as the "Little Flatiron" building because its triangular footprint mirrors that of its more famous counterpart at Fifth Avenue and 23rd Street. The building began

life as a group of four-story structures built in 1849 for Silas C. Herring's safe and lock factory. In 1883, the fifth story was added, and the lock factory converted to stores and lofts. The cornice survives on Hudson Street, but not on Ninth Avenue.

The "Little Flatiron Building," formerly the Herring Safe & Lock factory. (Part of the Collection of the Museum of the City of New York)

At the wide-angled northeast corner of Ninth and West 14th Street, nine stuccoed and whitewashed early 19th-century, three-story houses wrap around and up the avenue, standing out dramatically from their surroundings. The row's north end is home to the Old Homestead, No. 56 Ninth Avenue, which bills itself as New York's oldest steakhouse, established in 1868. Don't miss the entrance marquee, with its statue of a steer inscribed, "We're the King of Beef."

Cross to the west side of Ninth Avenue, and walk west down West 14th Street. Take in the vista: awnings on the right and left, cast-iron columns, and miscellaneous brick and stuccoed facades. At the far end, the Hudson River peeks out from under the High Line. Halfway down the block, Washington Street dead-ends at West 14th. At that intersection, on the north side, No. 441 West 14th Street sports a handsome red brick facade with arched windows and a triangular pediment. At the southwest corner, No. 440 West 14th Street was built in 1887 by the Astor estate as a multiple dwelling (architect James W. Cole), probably housing people who worked in and around the markets. By 1935 it had gone out of residential use, and by 1957 it was connected to No. 442, its windows blocked up, and the whole complex converted to use as a cold storage warehouse.

Walk down to the end of the block. Here you can walk underneath the High Line and admire its massive steel structure. Turn right (north) onto Tenth Avenue and walk up to West 15th Street, where you will see the southwest corner of the Chelsea Market building, officially No. 75 Ninth Avenue. This indoor, urban market was converted from an enormous complex of 17 buildings, dating from the 1890s to the 1930s, that originally served as a baking and office complex for Nabisco (the National Biscuit Company). The bridges that connect it to buildings on two sides create a sense of the total interconnection

that makes a marketplace function. The complex is connected to a warehouse on the west side of Tenth Avenue at the second story by the High Line and at the fourth story by a covered pedestrian bridge. And it's connected to buildings across West 15th Street both by the High Line and by a covered pedestrian bridge reminiscent of the Bridge of Sighs in Venice. The buildings of the main complex march down the street with a series of four-story tall arches in sooty brick in the upper stories and narrow arches on the lower floors. Closer to Ninth Avenue, the arched entryways have imaginative, decorative wrought-iron grilles. (Across the street, look for the elegant arched doorway that is a back entrance for No. 441 West 14th Street, and mirrors the arched windows in the front facade.)



At Ninth Avenue, return to the intersection at West 14th Street to end the tour. Now that you've come to know and love the Gansevoort Market neighborhood, stop for a minute to consider the possibilities for its future. Manhattan's other markets are only a distant memory. If you think the Gansevoort Market neighborhood is worth preserving, then please lend your support to Save Gansevoort Market. (Photo: GVSHP)

Text by Anthony Robins (who admires the market despite long years as a staunch vegetarian), October 2001.

Based on research in the files of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, including the work of Regina Kellerman, Thomas H. Mellins, John T. Krawchuk, and interviews with local residents.

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The Save Gansevoort Market Task Force was comprised of local residents, building owners, business leaders, and preservationists who are working to protect this historic and unique area of New York. Under the auspices of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, the task force conducts educational programs about Gansevoort Market and advocates for its protection as an historic district.

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