



**Greenwich
Village Society
for Historic
Preservation**

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November 7, 2018

Hon. Sarah Carroll, Chair
NYC Landmarks Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: 14-16 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan

Dear Chair Carroll,

In light of the potential proposal for demolition of 14-16 Fifth Avenue in the Greenwich Village Historic District, I am submitting this letter to bring to your attention and that of the Commission the important history and significance of this building,

Originally constructed as two Gothic Revival townhouses in 1848 by Henry Brevoort, Jr. (1782-1848), 14 and 16 Fifth Avenue were built at a time when this stretch of Fifth Avenue was the most desirable residential thoroughfare in New York City and home to grand single family houses belonging to the city's most prosperous residents. The initial development of this thoroughfare was largely a result of the efforts of Henry Brevoort, Jr., whose own mansion was only a block away at No. 24 Fifth Avenue. Nos. 14 and 16 Fifth Avenue are part of the Washington Square neighborhood, the development of which started around 1830 following the conversion of what would be Washington Square Park from a potter's field to a military parade ground between 1826 and 1828. It was also at this time that the city's elite moved north to this area from Lower Manhattan. In 1834 Henry Brevoort, Jr. built his Greek Revival style mansion, reputedly designed by Ithiel Town and Alexander Jackson Davis, on the northwest corner of Fifth Avenue and West 9th Street. The mansion set the tone for development along the thoroughfare, attracting the city's elite. The Brevoort Family had owned land in this part of New York City dating back to the 1700's.

In April of 1845, the *Evening Post* reported that many contracts had been taken out for homes along Fifth Avenue. Nine months later the same publication reported that Fifth Avenue had surpassed Second Avenue, its biggest competitor at the time, in terms of lot values and the extent of development. Neighbors of the Brevoorts included Hart M. Shiff, a merchant and banker, at 62 Fifth Avenue (1852); James Lenox, sole heir of his millionaire father's estate, in a Gothic Revival mansion at 53 Fifth Avenue (1847); John A.C. Gray, prominent banker and Central Park Commissioner, at 40 Fifth Avenue (1854); Robert Minturn, partner in the firm Grinnell, Minturn & Co., at 60 Fifth Avenue (1847); and Irad Hawley, coal baron, at 47 Fifth Avenue (1853).

Between 1844 and 1845 Brevoort built eight Greek Revival row houses, five of which were for his daughters, at 14-28 West 11th Street. According to tax records, in 1844 Brevoort bought four abutting lots from the John Rogers family at 10 through 16 Fifth Avenue, beginning at the northwest corner of Fifth Avenue and West Eighth Street (then Clinton Place). The John Rogers family was a long-time landholder in the area north of Washington Square (see attached 1831 map).

In 1848, Brevoort built four Gothic Revival townhouses on these lots just before his death in May of that year. Gothic Revival was introduced into American architecture primarily through churches in the beginning of the 19th century. Alexander Jackson Davis was the first architect to promote the application of the style to residential design, and popularized it through his 1837 book *Rural Residences* which featured many examples of the style. However, Gothic Revival was rarely employed for city townhouses and row houses. According to Charles Lockwood in *Bricks and Brownstone*, in spite of the rarity of Gothic Revival row houses, the use of the Gothic Revival style was a crucial turning point in the city's row house design. It marked the introduction of the Romantic tradition in design for row houses, which would reach its fullest expression with the Italianate style in the 1850s and 1860s.

Although Gothic Revival was not the style typically employed in townhomes and row houses in New York City, it was popular in and around this stretch of Fifth Avenue. Examples include the Church of the Ascension at 36-38 Fifth Avenue (1840-41, by Richard Upjohn), Church of the Ascension Rectory at 7 West 10th Street (1839-41, architect unknown), First Presbyterian Church at 48 Fifth Avenue (1844-46, by Joseph C. Wells) and New York University's Main Building at Washington Square East (1833-36, by James Dakin, Ithiel Town and AJ Davis; demolished).

By the 1850s, Fifth Avenue was lined with townhomes and upscale hotels, and considered one of the city's most elegant residential thoroughfares. One such hotel was the Brevoort Hotel which opened in 1854 across Fifth Avenue from Nos. 10-16. With Henry Brevoort's death, his family sold the newly built Fifth Avenue townhomes. Tax records and city directories show that the LeBarbier family owned and lived at 14 Fifth Avenue. Adolphus LeBarbier or Charles LeBarbier was listed as the owner in the tax records of No. 14 from 1850 to 1871. In the city directories, Adolphus' home was listed as 14 Fifth Avenue from 1850-1858, and his profession was listed as banker.

Between 1851 and 1853 Charles Green (1810-1900) owned and lived at No. 16 Fifth Avenue. Green came to New York from Boston in 1849 when he took over the family business following his brother's death. The company owned several ships and was involved in the New Orleans cotton trade and the China trade. Due to the ample level of insurance for his ships, at the end of the Civil War his worth was over half a million dollars. He died in 1900 at the Hotel Brevoort where he lived during the last year of his life.

By 1853 No. 16 Fifth Avenue was owned by Simeon Draper, where he resided until his death in 1866. Draper was a prominent New York merchant and politician; a Whig, who

then became a Republican with the party's founding in the 1850s. He served as chairman of the New York Republican State Committee from 1860-62. He also served as Collector of the Port of New York, appointed by President Lincoln, from 1864-65. He was a friend of Daniel Webster, John Jacob Astor, and other prominent 19th century New York City figures. Following his death in 1866, his wife Francis sold the property to Cornelius K. Sutton.

Sources show that both buildings became boarding houses by the late 1860s. In 1871, the sister of Bret Harte lived at No. 16. Harte, a leading literary figure in the United States during the 19th century who collaborated with Mark Twain on the play *Ah Sin*, stayed with his sister at 16 Fifth Avenue when he first came to New York in March of 1871. In May of 1871 through 1872, the Army and Navy Club made No. 16 its home.

A rear addition to No. 14 Fifth Avenue designed by architect William Hume was built in 1879 according to alteration permits. The newly altered building was listed on the permit as a French flat with one family per floor. In 1936 Nos. 14 and 16 were combined into one building per the designs of Albert E. Schaefer of the firm Schaefer & Rutkin (designers of 765 Riverside Drive, (1931-32) in the Audubon Park Historic District; and 721 Walton Avenue (1927), 735 Walton Avenue (1927), and 1011 Sheridan Avenue (1929) all in the Grand Concourse Historic District).

Over the course of 14-16 Fifth Avenue's long history it housed other notable figures, including:

General Daniel E. Sickles, (resided at No. 14 from 1881 to 1883): An American politician, soldier, and diplomat, he was one of the Civil War's most prominent political generals, recruiting the New York regiments that became the Excelsior Brigade in the Army of the Potomac. He was awarded a medal of honor for his actions at the Battle of Gettysburg. Sickles was a member of the New York State assembly, 1847; secretary of the legation at London by appointment of President Franklin Pierce, 1853-1855; member of the New York state senate, 1856-1857; elected as a Democrat to the Thirty-fifth and Thirty-sixth Congresses (March 4, 1857-March 3, 1861); chairman of the New York State Civil Service Commission, 1888-1889; sheriff, New York City, 1890; elected as a Democrat to the Fifty-third Congress (March 4, 1893-March 3, 1895). In 1859, he murdered Philip Barton Key II, the district attorney of the District of Columbia and son of Francis Scott Key, who was having an affair with Sickles' wife. Sickles was acquitted based on his defense of temporary insanity, the first use of this defense in the United States.

Baroness Eva Gourgaud, (resided at No. 14 c. 1900-1959): Widow of the French explorer Baron Napoleon Gourgaud (d. 1944), together they founded the Napoleonic Museum of the Island of Aix. She died in 1959 after she and her husband owned the building for 60 years. On August 22, 1962 *The New York Times* stated: "The five-story elevator apartment building containing twenty apartments at 14 and 16 Fifth Avenue...has been sold by the estate of Eva B. Gebhard Gourgaud...the sale was the first involving the property in about sixty years..."

Cyrrily Abels, (resided at No. 14 in 1975): A literary agent and former managing editor of Mademoiselle Magazine, Abels was an intimate friend of Katherine Anne Porter. As managing editor, Abels transformed the publication from a fashion magazine to an important medium for young and talented writers, many of whom she brought to the mass audience. These writers include Eldridge Cleaver, Truman Capote, Carson McCullers, James Baldwin, Hortense Calisher, Eugene Ionesco, Flannery O'Connor, and James Purdy. Abels also co-founded her own publication called *Creative Writing*. She died in her home at 14 Fifth Ave in 1975.

14-16 Fifth Avenue has great significance both because of its connection to Henry Brevoort, Jr. and the development of Lower Fifth Avenue and the Washington Square neighborhood. Although its original Gothic Revival details have been removed, the original townhomes are discernable through its form, massing, fenestration, and the incised detailing at its base. Much of the significance of the Greenwich Village Historic District lies in its collection of 19th century row houses and townhomes which evolved over time, like 14-16 Fifth Avenue, reflecting the changing demographics and socio-economics of the surrounding area and city.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director

cc: Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer
Congressman Jerrold Nadler
City Council Speaker Corey Johnson
State Senator Brad Hoylman
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
Community Board #2, Manhattan
Municipal Art Society
New York Landmarks Conservancy
Historic Districts Council

14 Fifth Avenue Today



10, 12 & 14 Fifth Avenue, 1926 (MCNY)



14 & 16 Fifth Avenue, 1925 (NYPL)



1853 Perris Map (NYPL)

