



JIM OWLES LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC CLUB

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

Dear Chairman Tierney:

On behalf of the Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club, I want to urge you to move ahead with the designation of the proposed South Village Historic District and to protect 186 Spring Street from destruction. Our club is named after Jim Owles, who resided at 186 Spring Street in the early 1970's. Jim was the founding president of the Gay Activists Alliance, one of the earliest and most important gay rights organizations in the country immediately after the Stonewall Riots in 1969. As president of the alliance from 1970 to 1971, Mr. Owles advocated the very first anti-discrimination bill in the NYC Council, Intro 475, as well as a state-wide anti-discrimination bill in Albany. In 1973 he became a candidate for the New York City Council, becoming the first openly-gay person to do so. Jim went on to be a founder of the Gay and Lesbian Independent Democrats in 1974, the first such political club in the nation. In 1985, he was one of seven founding members of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, which today is a nationwide organization with profound influence upon the coverage and depiction of lesbians and gay men in the media.

Other early gay liberation figures have also resided at 186 Spring Street, including Arnie Kantrowitz, who was an early secretary and vice-president of the Gay Activists Alliance, a co-founder of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, and the author of "Under the Rainbow: Growing Up Gay," one of the first autobiographies by a gay activist.

Dr. Bruce Voeller lived at 186 Spring Street through the early 1980's. Bruce was a specialist on human sexuality and sexually transmitted diseases who was in the forefront of the fight against AIDS. Bruce was also an early president of the Gay Activists Alliance, a co-founder of the National Gay Task Force in 1973, of which he was director until 1978. The Task Force became the first and largest national political advocacy organization for gay men and lesbians. From 186 Spring Street in 1978 he also founded the Mariposa Education and Research Foundation, one of the very first such entities established to educate and change attitudes about homosexuality and to reduce the stigmas attached to sexuality generally. The Foundation commissioned the George Segal sculpture "Gay Liberation" that was placed in Christopher Park at 7th Ave. South and Christopher Street to commemorate the Stonewall Riots. Dr. Voeller is also credited for changing the name of the disease afflicting mostly gay men in the early 1980s from "Gay Related Immune Defense Disorder," or GRID, as it was initially

known, to "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome," or AIDS, the more accurate name by which it is now known.

Each of these men did much of their critical early work while living at 186 Spring Street, which was also often used as the mailing address and point of contact for these groundbreaking organizations.

186 Spring Street is by no means isolated as a location in the South Village that served a critical role in the history of the LGBT community. As it was for African-Americans in the mid-19th century, Italian-Americans from the late 19th century through the mid-20th century, and a range of artists, writers, musicians, and radical thinkers from the 19th century onward, the South Village served a key center and an incubator for the LGBT community starting in the late 19th century.

For all of the reasons mentioned above, we urge you to move ahead to protect this site and the entire area as soon as possible.

Sincerely,
Allen Roskoff
President, Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club