

**WEBSTER HALL and ANNEX**, 119-125 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Manhattan. Built 1886-87 and 1892; Charles Rentz, Jr., architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 556, Lot 68.

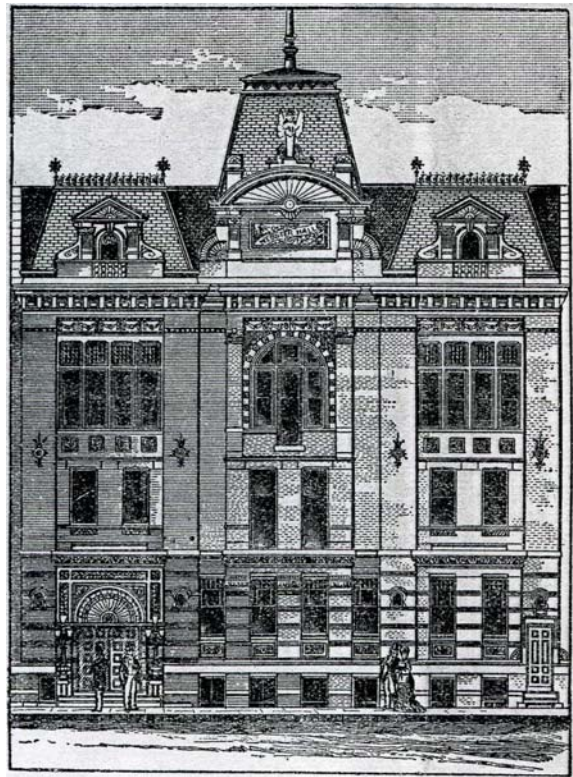
On October 30, 2007, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Webster Hall and Annex and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 9). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Seven people spoke in favor of designation, including City Councilmember Rosie Mendez and representatives of the building's lessee, Assemblymember Deborah J. Glick, the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, Historic Districts Council, Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, and New York Landmarks Conservancy. Two representatives of the building's owner opposed designation. In addition, the Commission received a number of communications in support of designation, including letters from City Councilmember Tony Avella, Manhattan Community Board 3, the Friends of Terra Cotta, and City Lore: The New York Center for Urban Folk Culture.

### Summary

One of New York City's most historically and culturally significant large nineteenth-century assembly halls, Webster Hall was constructed for Charles Goldstein in 1886-87, with an eastern Annex in 1892, to the designs of architect Charles Rentz, Jr. The Queen Anne style original structure and Renaissance Revival style Annex are clad in red Philadelphia pressed brick with brownstone trim, and effusively ornamented with unglazed red terra cotta, that on the original building was likely produced by the Boston Terra Cotta Co. or Perth Amboy Terra Cotta Co., the leading manufacturers of the day. The building is terminated by a c. 1911 bracketed pressed metal cornice, and had an elaborate, high dormered mansard roof until it was destroyed by fire in 1930. Though little known, the highly prolific Rentz (1855-1906) practiced in New York from around 1880 to his death, and was commissioned largely for flats and tenement buildings.

Throughout its history as one of Greenwich Village/East Village's leading public rental halls and social centers, Webster Hall has been the venue for countless balls, dances, receptions, lectures, meetings, conventions, political and union rallies, military functions, concerts, performances, festivities, and sporting and fundraising events, particularly for the working-class and immigrant populations of the Lower East Side. In the 1910s and 20s, it became famous for its masquerade balls, following the success of a 1913 fundraiser for the socialist magazine *The Masses*, first attracting

the Village's bohemian population, which nicknamed it the "Devil's Playhouse." The hall was significant as a gathering place for the city's early twentieth-century lesbian and gay community, who felt welcome to attend the balls in drag, and then sponsored their own events by the 1920s. Among the many notables who attended events here at this time were artists Charles Demuth, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray, as well as writers Djuna Barnes and Scott Fitzgerald. A favorite venue for progressive, leftist, and union political organizations, the hall was attended by such luminaries as Samuel Gompers, Margaret Sanger, Emma Goldman, and Dorothy Day, and was the site of the



Source: *Webster Hall Letterhead* (c. 1900), Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

formation of the Progressive Labor Party in 1887, and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America in 1914.

From 1953 to 1968, RCA Victor Records operated a notable sound recording studio here, which was famed for its acoustics. Pop vocal, jazz, Latin, folk, and gospel phonograph albums were recorded here by such disparate musical icons as Louis Armstrong, Harry Belafonte, Perry Como, Coleman Hawkins, Lena Horne, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Stan Getz, Sergio Franchi, and Joe Williams. The hall was noted as a venue for Broadway cast recordings, which included Julie Andrews in *The Boy Friend*, Mary Martin in *Peter Pan*, Barbara Cook in *Show Boat*, Ethel Merman in *Annie Get Your Gun*, Carol Channing in *Hello, Dolly!*, and Liza Minnelli in *Flora, the Red Menace*, as well as those of classical artists such as Artur Schnabel, Marian Anderson, and Beverly Sills in *Giulio Cesare*. In the 1970s-80s, the building housed Casa Galicia, a meeting and event space, and the rock club The Ritz. It was also the location for a number of movie scenes, such as “Raging Bull” (1980). The name Webster Hall was returned in 1990 with the current club.

## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### The Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Development and History of (Today's) East Village Neighborhood<sup>1</sup>

The area of today's Greenwich Village was, during the eighteenth century, the location of the small rural hamlet of Greenwich, as well as the country seats and summer homes of wealthy downtown aristocrats, merchants, and capitalists. A number of cholera and yellow fever epidemics in lower Manhattan between 1799 and 1822 led to an influx of settlers in the Greenwich area, with the population quadrupling between 1825 and 1840. Previously undeveloped tracts of land were speculatively subdivided for the construction of town houses and rowhouses. To the east, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was Dutch Governor Peter Stuyvesant's farm. St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery Church (1799)<sup>2</sup> was built on a higher, dry piece of land, while the area to the east of today's Second Avenue, known as Stuyvesant Meadows, remained an undeveloped marshy area. In the late eighteenth century, the area east of Second Avenue was the estate of Mangle Minthorn, father-in-law of Daniel Tompkins (1775-1825), governor of New York (1807-17) and U.S. vice president under James Monroe (1817-25). Both Stuyvesant and Minthorn were slave owners.

In 1832, the Common Council created the 15<sup>th</sup> Ward out of the eastern section of the large 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, its boundaries being Sixth Avenue, Houston and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets, and the East River. According to historian Luther Harris, "by 1845, 85 percent of the richest citizens living in the city's northern wards resided in the Fifteenth."<sup>3</sup> For a brief period beginning in the 1820s-30s, Lafayette Place, including the grand marble Greek Revival style LaGrange Terrace (1832-33, attributed to Seth Geer),<sup>4</sup> and Bond, Great Jones, East 4<sup>th</sup> and Bleecker Streets were among the most fashionable addresses, the latter developed with three block-long rows of houses in 1827-31. Both sides of the block of St. Mark's Place (East 8<sup>th</sup> Street) between Third and Second Avenues were built in 1831 with grand 3-1/2-story Federal style marble-and-brick-clad town houses by speculative real estate developer Thomas E. Davis.<sup>5</sup> In the early 1830s, Davis became involved with the Stuyvesant family in the development of the former farm to the north of St. Mark's Place as an elite residential neighborhood. Lower Second Avenue and adjacent side streets became fashionable through the 1850s.

Commercial and institutional intrusions and the continual arrival of immigrants ended the fashionable heyday of the wealthier enclaves, such as St. Mark's Place and Second Avenue, before the Civil War. In the 1850s, Broadway north of Houston Street was transformed from a residential into a significant commercial district. Also beginning in the 1850s, after the political upheavals in Europe of 1848 and the resulting influx of German-speaking immigrants to New York City, the Lower East Side (the area bounded roughly by 18<sup>th</sup> Street, the East River, the Bowery/Third Avenue, and Catherine Street) became known as *Kleindeutschland* ("Little Germany"). Aside from their presence as residents, these immigrants contributed in significant ways to the vibrant commercial and cultural life of the neighborhood and the city at large. The German community was critical to the American socialist movement and the creation of labor unions. By 1880, this neighborhood constituted one-fourth of the city's population (as one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in the world) and was the first major urban foreign-speaking neighborhood in the U.S., as well as the leading German-American center throughout the century. A massive exodus of Jews from Eastern Europe from the 1880s to World War I led to approximately two million Jewish immigrants settling in New York; most lived for a time on the Lower East Side, establishing their own cultural and religious institutions there.

Beginning in the 1850s-60s, the vicinity of 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Union Square developed into a

center of musical and theatrical culture. The Academy of Music (1853-54, Alexander Saeltzer), East 14th Street and Irving Place, an opera house with the world's largest seating capacity at the time, quickly became the center of musical and social life in New York, presenting such notable performers as Adelina Patti (who made her debut here in 1854), and events such as the grand ball in honor of the Prince of Wales in the autumn of 1860. The building burned down in 1866, and was replaced by a new Academy of Music (1868, Thomas R. Jackson). (The Academy remained fashionable until the construction of the Metropolitan Opera in 1883; the building was converted to a theater in 1887, and was demolished around 1926.) Irving Hall (1860), a ballroom, concert, and lecture hall annex to the Academy, served as the home to the New York Philharmonic in 1861-63. The Steinway piano company opened Steinway Hall (1866), a combination showroom and recital hall at 109 East 14th Street, which for many years was the foremost concert hall in the country (it closed in 1890). The Tammany political club constructed a new headquarters building (1867-68, Thomas R. Jackson) on East 14th Street next to the Academy of Music. Tammany Hall included a large theater that was site of the National Democratic Convention in 1868, and was subsequently leased (it was demolished around 1928). By the mid-1860s, a number of legitimate theaters were also opening in the vicinity of Union Square, which during the last quarter of the nineteenth century became the center of New York theater. These included Wallack's Theater (1861, Thomas R. Jackson), 728 Broadway at 13th Street, the most prestigious dramatic theater in the country during this period; the Union Square Theater (1870), an adjunct of the former Union Place Hotel; Chickering Hall (1875), Fifth Avenue and 18th Street; and Amberg Theater (1888, Theodore G. Stein; Irving Place Theater after 1893), 11 Irving Place (all demolished). The Germania Theater, which along with the Amberg catered to a specifically German clientele, was located in Tammany Hall in 1874-81, in Wallack's Theater in 1881-82, and until 1902 in the former Church of St. Ann, East 8<sup>th</sup> Street near Broadway. Union Square, after the Civil War, became the traditional site for workers', union, and political protests and rallies.

As wealthier neighborhood residents moved northward, their single-family residences were converted into multiple dwellings or boardinghouses, as well as other uses, such as clubs or community cultural institutions. For instance, of the Federal style houses on the westernmost block of St. Mark's Place: No. 29 became the Harmonie Club, a German-Jewish singing club (1856-59); Nos. 19-21 housed another German musical club, the Arion Singing Society (1870-87), and these buildings, along with No. 23, became Arlington Hall, a ballroom-community center in 1887; the Children's Aid Society's Girls' Lodging House (by 1871) and its offices (by 1891) were at Nos. 27 and 24; and No. 12 was replaced by the German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse (1888-89, William C. Frohne).<sup>6</sup> Most of the remaining houses were demolished for denser development with French flats and tenements between 1874 and 1902.

Hastening the changes in the residential character of this section of the Lower East Side after mid-century were a wide variety of major cultural, religious, commercial, and educational institutions, including the Astor Place Opera House (1847; later Clinton Hall/Mercantile Library; demolished), Astor and Lafayette Places; Astor Library (1849-52 Alexander Saeltzer; 1856-69 Griffith Thomas; 1879-81 Thomas Stent), 425 Lafayette Street; Bible House (1852; demolished), Astor Place and Third Avenue, home of the American Bible Society and other religious organizations; Cooper Union (1853-58, Frederick A. Petersen), Astor Place and Third Avenue; and Tompkins Market/ 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment Armory (1855-60, James Bogardus and Marshall Lefferts; demolished), Third Avenue and East 7<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>7</sup> The New York Free Circulating Library, Ottendorfer Branch, and German Dispensary (1883-84, William Schickel), 135 and 137 Second Avenue, catered to the German community.<sup>8</sup> Assembly

halls such as Webster Hall and Annex (1886-87, 1892, Charles Rentz, Jr.), 119-125 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street, and cafes and beer gardens, such as Aaron Ligety's Orpheum (c. 1905-06), 126 Second Avenue, became important neighborhood social centers. Scattered throughout the area were purpose-built churches and synagogues for wealthier congregations, as well as many religious structures created out of altered rowhouses.

Architect: Charles Rentz, Jr.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the prominent, early commission of Webster Hall, little is known about the life and career of Charles Rentz, Jr. (1855-1906). He was born in New York City, the son of Charles Rentz, Sr., a cigar manufacturer born in Wurtemberg, Germany. Rentz, Jr., was listed in an 1879 city directory as a beer dealer, then as an architect in the 1880 New York census, and in city directories as an architect beginning in 1882. A notice in the *Real Estate Record & Builders Guide* in April 1886 stated that Rentz had formerly been associated with architect William Jose, and was moving his office from Greenwich Avenue to larger quarters in the German Savings Bank Building, Fourth Avenue and East 14<sup>th</sup> Street (three blocks north of Webster Hall) because "his rapidly increasing business has necessitated the change."<sup>10</sup> The recently deceased Jose (c. 1843-1885), born in Prussia, was listed as an architect in city directories between about 1869 and his death, and was active as a designer of multiple dwellings primarily in the vicinity of today's Tribeca, SoHo, and Greenwich Village neighborhoods. Rentz was extraordinarily prolific in the design of flats and tenement buildings in the 1880s. It is unknown how he obtained the Webster Hall commission, which is his most significant known building. He was the partner of Rudolph L. Lange in Rentz & Lange in 1888-90, and of William Kurtzer<sup>11</sup> in Kurtzer & Rentz in 1904-06. Rentz apparently died prior to the August 1906 dissolution notice of Kurtzer & Rentz in the *New York Times*; a 1907 city directory listed Rentz's wife, Emma, as a widow. (Kurtzer continued to practice in Manhattan and the Bronx until around 1925). Of Rentz's known works, the majority were flats and tenements, many located on the Lower East Side and in Greenwich Village, but he also designed factories, stables, and utilitarian buildings. Among the more interesting architecturally is the row of flats buildings at Nos. 519-525 Hudson Street (1889, Rentz & Lange).<sup>12</sup>

Construction, Design, and Ownership of Webster Hall and Annex, 1886-1949<sup>13</sup>

The site of Webster Hall, on the north side of East 11<sup>th</sup> Street, between Fourth and Third Avenues, had once been part of the Stuyvesant farm that was inherited by Peter Gerard Stuyvesant and remained in the Stuyvesant/Rutherford family. P.G. Stuyvesant's house (1845), located at No. 175 Second Avenue (and East 11<sup>th</sup> Street), was later home to Lewis Morris Rutherford, a lawyer and noted astronomer; Rutherford's son, Stuyvesant Rutherford (c. 1840-1909), inherited this property after Stuyvesant's death, under the condition that he change his name to Rutherford Stuyvesant.

In July 1886, lot 68 (No. 119-123) was leased by Charles Goldstein from Rutherford Stuyvesant for \$2000 a year. Goldstein (c. 1856-1898), born in Poland and brought to New York City at the age of three, was raised on the East Side. After learning the trade, he became a cigar manufacturer. He married his Russian/Polish-born wife, Annie (c. 1857- ), in 1873. Goldstein later went into the business of meeting/dance halls, becoming the proprietor around 1879 of Clinton Garden (later Apollo Hall; demolished), 126 Clinton Street. In June 1886, the *Real Estate Record & Builders Guide* had noted that Charles Rentz was working on plans for "a large ball and concert hall, to be called Webster Hall... It will have a brick front trimmed with brown and Nova Scotia stone and terra

cotta. The building will contain a main hall about 40 feet high, also a gallery, private boxes and reception rooms.”<sup>14</sup> Though it is unknown how Rentz obtained the commission from Goldstein, it is interesting to note the connection of both men to the cigar manufacturing business. Rentz filed in July for the construction of the 3-story, 70-foot-wide structure, expected to cost \$65,000. Work commenced in August 1886.

On the same side of the block were already two institutional buildings by distinguished architects: St. Ann’s R.C. Church’s parochial school (1870, Napoleon LeBrun), 113-117 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street, and the New York City Dept. of Public Charities and Correction headquarters (1869, James Renwick)(after 1895, the Bureau of Dependent Children; demolished), 66 Third Avenue. The *New York Times* mentioned in December 1886 that the pastor of St. Ann’s was opposing Goldstein’s application for a liquor license, due to its location next door to its school. The building was said by the paper to have cost \$75,000, and was “intended for balls, receptions, Hebrew weddings, and sociables, and not a barroom.”<sup>15</sup> The *Record & Guide* in January 1887 noted that it was “now rapidly nearing completion” and “will contain one of the largest assembly halls in the city.”<sup>16</sup> The building was completed in February 1887. The interior framing consisted of spruce timbers, as well as iron columns and rolled iron beams on part of the front facade and in the ballroom floor. There was an apartment on the first story, where the Goldstein family lived.

The original symmetrical design of Webster Hall, in an eclectic Queen Anne style, featured three vertical sections flanked by monumental pilasters, large window groups on the third story (round arched in the center), a modillioned cornice, and a complex roofline consisting of sections of mansard roof on each end having elaborate, pedimented and scrolled dormers, and a central mansarded tower rising above a large decorative plaque with a scroll bearing the name “Webster Hall” surmounted by a sunburst pediment. The structure is clad in red Philadelphia pressed brick with brownstone trim, and effusively ornamented with unglazed red terra cotta, as well as large decorative iron tie-rods above the second story. The source of the terra cotta is unknown, but was likely produced by the Boston Terra Cotta Co. or Perth Amboy Terra Cotta Co., the leading manufacturers of the day (other terra cotta companies selling in New York in 1886 included the recently founded New York Architectural Terra Cotta Co., and the lesser known A. Hall Terra Cotta Co. and Baltimore Terra Cotta Co.).

Webster Hall is a fairly early and significant surviving building to employ exterior architectural terra cotta in its second American phase of the 1870s-80s. While a number of architects had attempted in the 1850s to use architectural ornament of terra cotta in New York,<sup>17</sup> it was revived as a significant interior and exterior building material in the United States after the Chicago and Boston fires of 1871-72. Walter Geer later noted that “by these fires it was conclusively demonstrated that fire-proof buildings could not be made of unprotected stone or iron, and that only brick and terra-cotta walls were practically fire-proof. This increased use of brick work, and of terra-cotta as a constructive and decorative material in connection with brick work, revived the demand for the manufacture of this material in or near New York.”<sup>18</sup> (The term “constructive” in this quote refers to the manner in which the terra cotta was fully integrated into the exterior brick bearing walls). In the late 1870s and early 1880s, architectural terra cotta was often a color that matched stone (commonly brownstone, buff or red) that could be employed in pleasant juxtaposition with brick, or as a substitute for brownstone. The *Record & Guide* remarked that during this period “terra cotta is most generally used for the trimming and ornamentation of buildings, taking the form of panels, courses, friezes, small tiles, roofing tiles and paving blocks.”<sup>19</sup> Among the leaders in the use of exterior terra cotta during this period in New York City were George B. Post in the Long Island Historical Society (1878-

81),<sup>20</sup> New York Produce Exchange (1881-84; demolished), and Mills Building (1881-83; demolished); Silliman & Farnsworth in the Morse Building (1878-80), 138-142 Nassau Street, and Temple Court Building (1881-83), 3-9 Beekman Street; Kimball & Wisedell in the Casino Theater (1881-82; demolished), an early New York building having highly intricate, exotic terra-cotta ornament; and N.G. Starkweather in the Potter Building (1882-86), 38 Park Row, with terra cotta supplied by the Boston Terra Cotta Co. Webster Hall also employed red Philadelphia pressed brick during the period when leading producers, such as the Peerless Brick Co. of Philadelphia, were pioneers in the improvement of brick-making machines that successfully increased the efficiency and quality of their manufacture, as well as the quality of the brick's finish and color.

In November 1891, Charles Goldstein leased lot 67 (No. 125 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street), then occupied by a 3-story dwelling owned by Alfred E. and Eliza J. Goetz, though located on Stuyvesant land. In January 1892, Charles Rentz filed for the construction of a 3-story, 20-foot-wide, \$10,000 Annex to Webster Hall, planned for an apartment for the owner's family in the basement; saloon, restaurant and hat rooms on the first story; ballroom on the second story; and sitting rooms and gallery on the third story. Construction occurred between May and November 1892. While the design of the Annex is harmonious with the original building, the style is Renaissance Revival, and is dominated by a large round-arched window group on the third story with a molded arched surround with voussoir blocks with bosses, a keystone bearing a head, and decorative spandrel panels with musical references. The Annex was originally terminated by a pedimented gable (it is unclear, based on existing historic photographs, whether it also had a mansard roof).

Charles Goldstein died in November 1898. A foreclosure auction of the original Webster Hall (not Annex) occurred in March 1899, with the property's lease going to John Stich, a pawnbroker at No. 118 Third Avenue who brought the mortgage action. The leasehold was transferred back to the widow, Annie Goldstein, in April, and Charles Goldstein's personal estate was auctioned at Webster Hall in May. In 1901 and 1907, the leases for Webster Hall and Annex were renewed. Later newspaper accounts refer to a fire here in 1902. In 1900, Annie Goldstein began to expand her business activities, commissioning Charles Rentz to design a three-story hall at Lexington Avenue and East 101<sup>st</sup> Street, and purchasing in 1903 the Palm Garden, 150-152 East 58<sup>th</sup> Street, for private and public entertainments. Around 1909, she married Russian-born lawyer William H. Weissager, and continued to reside in the Webster Hall Annex. The *Times* announced in September 1910 that Weissager, "the proprietor of Webster Hall,"<sup>21</sup> planned to build the McKinley Square Theater, for vaudeville and a ballroom, in the Bronx. He became financially overextended during this venture, however, and a receiver was appointed in November.<sup>22</sup> A 1911 city directory listed his firm as the Weissager Amusement Construction Co. In October 1910, Annie Goldstein Weissager transferred the lease of Webster Hall and Annex to the Wanderman Brothers (Charles, Isidor, and Walter), of the Wanderman Construction Co., who were also the proprietors of Clinton Garden (later Apollo Hall) at No. 126 Clinton Street. Members of the Wanderman family were listed in city directories residing in the Webster Hall Annex. In November 1911, the building suffered the first of a series of four major documented fires; the *Times* reported that "all the upper floors of the hall were wrecked, with the damage estimated at \$20,000."<sup>23</sup> The current bracketed pressed metal cornice appears to date from this period.

The Estate of Rutherford Stuyvesant was partitioned in 1911, following his death in 1909. The trustee of the estate, the Bank of New York & Trust Co., transferred the feehold of Webster Hall and Annex in April 1923 to Wand Holding Co., apparently an entity of the Wanderman Brothers. The

*Times* reported the sale at \$65,000.<sup>24</sup> In November 1925, the property in its entirety was transferred by the Wandermans to the recently-incorporated Webster Enterprises, Inc. (Harris Reiner, president; Aaron Rappaport, vice president). Reiner was listed in city address directories in the building into the 1940s as a caterer; Rappaport was listed in the 1935 directory in the Annex as a dealer in cotton duck. The Annex was sometimes known as “Webster Manor” c. 1928-52. After a 1928 building renovation, at a reported cost of \$220,000, Webster Hall had its second major fire, in March 1930. The top two stories and roof were destroyed, with an estimated \$200,000 worth of damage; there were four ballrooms in the structure at that time. An alteration, the application for which was filed in May for \$75,000 in repairs, apparently eliminated rebuilding the mansard roof, which was replaced by a flat roof fronted by a tan brick parapet.

Webster Enterprises leased the property in September 1932 to Webster Manor, Inc. (Emanuel M. Lebowitz, president), at \$22,000 a year, and it was reported that the hall “will be used only for catering, meeting rooms, dance hall and kindred purposes.”<sup>25</sup> Webster Manor, Inc. was apparently an associated entity of Webster Enterprises, as Harris Reiner was later the president of both. In February 1938, Webster Hall’s third major fire, lasting three hours, burned out the structure’s interior and killed a watchman and porter working inside; Mayor LaGuardia stopped by to observe the fire. The *Times* listed the interior layout as rest rooms, kitchen and checkroom in the basement; office and private dining rooms on the first story; dance floor, stage and bar on the second story; and a balcony on the third story. Webster Hall’s fourth major fire, in February 1949, totally burned out the interior and destroyed the roof, with an estimated several hundred thousand dollars worth of damage.

### Social and Cultural History of Webster Hall and Annex to World War II<sup>26</sup>

Throughout its history as one of Greenwich Village/East Village’s leading public rental halls and social centers, Webster Hall has been the venue for countless balls, dances, receptions, lectures, meetings, conventions, political and union rallies, military functions, concerts, performances, festivities, and sporting and fundraising events, particularly for the working-class and immigrant population of the Lower East Side. As opined by historian Kathy Peiss:

*For the working-class population packed into small tenement apartments, large halls that could be rented for dances, weddings, mass meetings, and other gatherings were a requirement of social life. The number of public halls in Manhattan rose substantially in a short period; business directories listed 130 halls in 1895 and 195 in 1910, an increase of 50 percent. While some of these, like Carnegie Hall, were cultural spaces of the privileged, most were located in working-class districts. The largest East Side halls... were always in great demand.*<sup>27</sup>

The earliest event at Webster Hall reported by the *Times*, on February 11, 1887, was a ball held by the crew of the cruiser *Atlanta*, attended by 900 people.<sup>28</sup> Other early functions ranged from a benefit for the Grant Monument Fund (April 1887); the formation of the Progressive Labor Party (September 1887); a banquet and ball for the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian army officers of the ship *Hecla* (October 1887); to a celebration of the centennial of the French revolution, by 62 French societies in the city (May 1889).

That Webster Hall from the very beginning acquired a reputation as a center of leftist, socialist, anarchist, and union political activity was evidenced by a January 1888 *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* article: *Webster Hall... is a big, bare, dingy place, where all the year round discontented men meet to discuss their wrongs and sympathize with one another, and where secret*



*societies and political organizations, labor unions and similar associations make a business of pleasure. It is a grimy neighborhood, where the rattle of trade continues all day and leaves poverty to toss itself to sleep at nightfall. There are more children in this section of New York City than live on an area of equal extent in any other part of America.*<sup>29</sup>

This was a venue attended by many luminaries, as well as workers, such as labor leader Samuel Gompers, at a meeting of striking brewery workers (April 1888), and social activists like Emma Goldman and Dorothy Day, and was the site of myriad politically-related events, such as the United Clothing Cutters' ball celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Knights of Labor (November 1889).

Webster Hall continued as a popular venue for a multiplicity of events, including those of the Columbia Athletic Club, Jewish divisions of the Socialist Labor Party, National Association of Naval Veterans, and Volunteers of America, and was a campaign stop for politicians, such as Seth Low in the 1897 mayoral election, and Theodore Roosevelt in the 1898 New York gubernatorial contest. Among events held here in the 1910s were Hungarian opera performances, conducted by Erno Rapee; the 1912 march, led by birth control pioneer Margaret Sanger, bringing the children of striking Lawrence, Mass., millworkers to Webster Hall for a meal, in order to dramatize the plight of the workers; a 1913 "Debate on Socialism," between John Wesley Hill and Bouck White; the founding of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America in 1914, representing about 40,000 workers; and its use in 1916 as the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union's strike headquarters, and for the Jewelry Workers Union's meeting to vote on a strike, demanding an 8-hour day; and for meetings of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee (c. 1920).

In the 1910s and 20s, Webster Hall became famous for its masquerade balls, following the success of a 1913 fundraiser for the socialist magazine *The Masses*, attracting first the Village's bohemian population, which nicknamed it the "Devil's Playhouse." Allen Church, in his book *The Improper Bohemians: A Re-Creation of Greenwich Village in Its Heyday* (1959), reminisced

*Today no name rings more gloriously in the bosoms of those who knew the early and middle periods in Greenwich Village than that of Webster Hall. For in its spacious premises, where boxes overlooked the dance floor, were held fancy dress balls without number, beginning with the Masses balls – the first of which was so successful that others followed – Greenwich Village made Webster Hall its particular place of frolic. So many dances-till-dawn and fancy dress balls were held there that one Villager said of himself and his wife: "We've sold our bed. Why sleep when there's a dance every night at Webster Hall?"*<sup>30</sup>

The hall became known especially for the "wilder" Pagan Routs, which benefitted the Liberal Club, and Cynthia White's annual Greenwich Village Ball, featuring competitions for the most exotic or extravagant costumes, often quite risqué. Prohibition did not hamper the crucial free flow of liquor at these events at the hall. The Blind Man's Ball (1917), to protest the Society of Independent Artists' refusal to accept Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain" in its exhibition, was attended by Duchamp, as well as artists Joseph Stella, Man Ray, and Francis Picabia. Others among the many notables known to have attended events here at this time were artists Charles Demuth and writers Scott Fitzgerald and Djuna Barnes. By the time of the 1923 Greenwich Village Ball, it was reported that "veteran patrons of Greenwich Village dances were moved to lament that things had become more formal than in other years, that the nude had been replaced by the prude in the way of costuming."<sup>31</sup>

Webster Hall is significant as a favored gathering place for the city's early twentieth-century lesbian and gay community, who felt welcome to attend the balls in drag, and then sponsored their own events by the 1920s. As pointed out by historian George Chauncey:

*The organizers of the balls... welcomed the presence of flamboyant gay men – sometimes making them a part of the pageants they staged – precisely because they knew they enhanced the reputation and appeal of such events. ... By the early 1920s, the presence of gay men and lesbians in the Village was firmly established. No longer were they simply visitors to the Liberal Club's masquerade balls. They organized their own balls at Webster Hall and appropriated as their own many of the other social spaces created by the bohemians of the 1910s.*<sup>32</sup>

Political events, as always, continued at a re-built Webster Hall (after the 1938 fire), as evidenced by the February 1940 protest, attended by 2,500, against a Washington grand jury investigation of the *New Masses* magazine, said by its editor Joseph North to be about the publication's opposition to the war; and the 1945 convention of the World Congress of Dominated Nations.

### Twentieth Century History of the East Village<sup>33</sup>

After a period of decline, Greenwich Village was becoming known, prior to World War I, for its historic and picturesque qualities, its affordable housing, and the diversity of its population and social and political ideas. Many artists and writers, as well as tourists, were attracted to the Village. By the 1910s, property owners and merchants attempted to improve the Village's economy and rehabilitate its physical condition, with "shrewd realtors beg[inning] to amass their holdings of dilapidated housing."<sup>34</sup>

These various factors and the increased desirability of the Village to upper-middle-class professionals lead to a real estate boom – "rents increased during the 1920s by 140 percent and in some cases by as much as 300 percent."<sup>35</sup> New York University, particularly after World War II, became a major institutional presence around and to the south and east of Washington Square. During the 1950s, the area south of Washington Square, to Houston Street, was targeted for urban renewal. The surviving historic streets to the west became particularly popular for coffee houses, restaurants, and clubs.

After World War II, the ethnic make-up of the Lower East Side changed again, becoming dominated by Latin American immigrants, especially those from Puerto Rico. Their immigration was encouraged by the government as a source of cheap labor, particularly for the garment trades, hotels, and small manufacturing. The community named itself Loisaida to symbolize the second generation Hispanic roots that had developed in the context of the African-American and Latino movements for social and economic justice, equality, and identity.

The residential and cultural desirability of the neighborhood that came to be known as the "East Village" increased with the removal of the Third Avenue El in 1955. As indicated by Terry Miller,

*the psychological barrier that had marked the eastern boundary of Greenwich Village was gone. Blocks that once had no prestige were suddenly seen as intriguing, and apartments here were less costly than those in Greenwich Village. ... As artists and writers moved east, the blocks from St. Mark's Place to Tenth Street were the first to hint that the Lower East Side was being transformed. Realtors began marketing the area as "Village East," and by 1961 as the "East Village," a name that stuck.*<sup>36</sup>

From World War I to the 1940s, Second Avenue between East 14<sup>th</sup> and Houston Streets had been considered the heart of New York's Jewish community, known as the "Yiddish Rialto" for its role as the world's center of Yiddish theater. As Yiddish theater declined, the East Village gave rise in the 1950s to "off-Broadway" theater, including the Phoenix Theater (1953-61) in the former Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater (Yiddish Art Theater) building (1925-26, Harrison G. Wiseman), 181-189 Second Avenue;<sup>37</sup> the Orpheum Theater (1958), 126 Second Avenue; and Ellen Stewart's La Mama Theatre (1962), 321 East 9<sup>th</sup> Street (after 1969 at 74 East 4<sup>th</sup> Street). In the 1950s, the East Village also became home to a number of key Beat Generation writers, including Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Norman Mailer, and W.H. Auden. The neighborhood was renowned for its protest art and politics, galleries, poetry and coffee houses, bookstores, clubs, and the *East Village Other* "underground" newspaper (1965-72). The East Village's "counterculture" scene centered on St. Mark's Place. Nos. 19-25 (in part formerly Arlington Hall) had been the Polish National Home (Polski Dom Harodowy) since the 1920s. In the 1960s, "the Dom" was associated with a number of seminal figures of the period, including Timothy Leary and his "psychedelic celebrations," the counterculture band The Fugs, and Andy Warhol's "The Exploding Plastic Inevitable," featuring his films performed with live music by the Velvet Underground. For a time the Electric Circus disco, this facility became a community center after 1971.

#### History of Webster Hall and Annex After World War II<sup>38</sup>

After, yet again, Webster Hall's renaissance after the 1949 fire, from 1953 to 1968 RCA Victor Records operated a notable sound recording studio here, which was famed for its acoustics. Pop vocal, jazz, Latin, folk, and gospel phonograph albums were recorded here by such disparate musical icons as Louis Armstrong, Harry Belafonte, Perry Como, Coleman Hawkins, Lena Horne, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Stan Getz, Sergio Franchi, and Joe Williams. The hall was noted as a venue for Broadway cast recordings, which included Julie Andrews in *The Boy Friend*, Mary Martin in *Peter Pan*, Barbara Cook in *Show Boat*, Ethel Merman in *Annie Get Your Gun*, Carol Channing in *Hello, Dolly!*, and Liza Minnelli in *Flora, the Red Menace*, as well as those of classical artists such as Artur Schnabel, Marian Anderson, and Beverly Sills in *Giulio Cesare*. [See: Appendix: A Partial Listing of Phonograph Albums Recorded at Webster Hall, 1953-68]

A number of historians of recorded sound have written on the significance of Webster Hall in this period. David Simons, in *Studio Stories: How the Great New York Records Were Made* (2004), stated that

*In an effort to keep pace with Columbia's bustling studio system, in the early 1950s RCA converted the hall into a full-service recording studio, which served as a companion to the label's main studios on East 24<sup>th</sup> Street. A popular venue for Broadway-cast and pop-vocal albums, the Webster also turned out scores of jazz classics...*<sup>39</sup>

RCA producer Jack Pfeiffer recalled that

*After the advent of the LP [Long Playing] record, ... thought was again directed at the possibility of a stereophonic record... I was so enthusiastic that I pressed for every opportunity to experiment with live orchestras. The first was on October 6, 1953, with Leopold Stokowski and his Symphony Orchestra in Webster Hall, New York City. Nothing remains of the two-track results of that session...*<sup>40</sup>

Ashley Kahn, in *Kind of Blue* (2000), commented that

*[Columbia's] 30<sup>th</sup> Street [Studio] was part of a family of well-known recording facilities in the New York area turning out the music of the 1950s and '60s. Today musicians, engineers and producers nostalgically recall 30<sup>th</sup> Street and other revered studios in and around the city, including Victor's Webster Hall on the Lower East Side, Vanguard Records' Masonic Temple in Brooklyn, and the less grand Regent Sound of Fifty-seventh Street. They became the shrines of the age of hi-fi [high-fidelity], worshiped for their generous space, curved interiors and wooden walls, all offering a warm, natural reverb. In those hallowed halls, great musical performances were transubstantiated into timeless recordings.*<sup>41</sup>

Simons, writing on the size of the large recording studios, such as 30<sup>th</sup> Street, Webster Hall, and the Pythian Temple, noted that

*Some of the very best rooms in Manhattan had room to spare – which wasn't a luxury, but a necessity. Before multi-track technology made it possible for one or two players to sound like a roomful, a roomful of players was required. This was an era of cheap rents and low utilities; when it came to securing studio space, in some instances, the sky was the limit.*<sup>42</sup>

Producer Creed Taylor remembered that “RCA had the place Monday through Friday for recording sessions. Then they put up a glass booth on the side of this immense dance hall so they could rent the space out on weekends.”<sup>43</sup> Jazz historian Nat Hentoff wrote in 1961 that “Webster Hall... occasionally doubles as a site for neighborhood functions but is most often in use for RCA-Victor's pop recordings. When time is available, a number of independent entrepreneurs... use the hall and generally also employ RCA staff engineers.”<sup>44</sup> Lastly, Jim Cogan and William Clark, in *Temples of Sound: Inside the Great Recording Studios* (2003), called Webster Hall one of New York's “legendary studios.”<sup>45</sup>

A very brief sampling of events, outside of the recording studio, taking place at Webster Hall included a 1952 “Webster Manor” jazz concert, with Red Allen, Jimmy McPartland, Sonny Greer, and Jimmy Rushing; the January 1955 Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of its founding at Webster Hall; 1950s folk music “hootenannies;”<sup>46</sup> a Lithuanian Independence day celebration in 1964; a 1964 campaign appearance by Robert F. Kennedy, in his bid for the New York Senate seat; and the first New York performance by Jefferson Airplane in 1967.

In 1970, Webster Manor, Inc. (Harris Reiner, president) surrendered its lease and Webster Enterprises (Harris Reiner, president) sold the property (now combined as solely lot 68) to Unity Gallega of the United States, Inc. This Galician Spanish community organization operated Casa Galicia, a meeting and event space, along with a restaurant, until around 1987. Unity Gallega also rented out the facility to other groups, notably the Balkan Arts Center. A 1978 concert here was said to have “helped spark a major revival of the Jewish folk music known as klezmer.”<sup>47</sup> From 1980 to 1989, the building also housed the rock club The Ritz, the site of performances by “Madonna, Prince, Eric Clapton, Tina Turner, Sting, Kiss, and B.B. King,”<sup>48</sup> among many others, as well as such events as fashion shows and awards ceremonies. Terry Miller, in *Greenwich Village and How It Got That Way* (1990), called The Ritz “the first club designed with a video component, setting a style that was later borrowed by other clubs nationwide.”<sup>49</sup> A number of movie scenes were filmed here, including *Raging Bull* (1980) and *Big* (1988).

In 1990, the property was leased, reportedly for \$5 million,<sup>50</sup> by Ballingervision, Inc., a corporation of the Ballinger Brothers (Douglas, Stephen, Peter, and Lon), nightclub operators from Toronto. The name Webster Hall was returned in 1990 with the current club, which opened in 1992.

Today, Webster Hall and Annex, notable for its long and distinguished social and cultural history, is one of the few surviving large nineteenth-century assembly halls in New York City, in particular halls that catered largely to the working-class and immigrant population of the Lower East Side.

### Description

Webster Hall and Annex consists of the original 1886-87 Queen Anne style Webster Hall (No. 119-123 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street) and the Renaissance Revival style Annex of 1892 (No. 125 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street). The building suffered major fires in 1911, 1930, 1938, and 1949, resulting in a number of exterior alterations. The structure is clad in red Philadelphia pressed brick (now painted in parts) with brownstone trim, and effusively ornamented with unglazed red terra cotta (the source of Webster Hall's terra cotta is unknown, but was likely produced by the Boston Terra Cotta Co. or Perth Amboy Terra Cotta Co.). The building originally had an elaborate, high dormered mansard roof and tower, which were destroyed by the 1930 fire; it is now terminated by a c. 1911 bracketed pressed metal cornice and tan brick parapet (c. 1930), which had a plaque with the letters "Webster Hall" until c. 1990.

**Webster Hall** has a symmetrical articulation featuring three vertical sections flanked by monumental pilasters. **Base:** The areaway is covered by metal plates and bordered by c. 1990 wrought-iron railings (that replaced the pre-1913 ones). Two metal boxes on poles are placed in the areaway. Two sets of metal stairs lead to basement entrances with non-historic metal doors, and have metal housings for rolldown gates (c. 1990). The original stone watertable has been heavily parged, covered with tiny mosaic tiles, and painted (pre-1989). Basement windows have been filled with cinderblock and louvers (c. 1990). **First Story:** The western main entrance has three stone steps with stone cheekwalls on which are set historic iron railings, and non-historic metal double doors. Over the entrance, the original round-arched fanlight set within an elaborate terra-cotta panel has been partially covered by the heavy metal marquee with side "Webster Hall" signage panels (pre-1928). The original narrow rectangular single-door eastern entrance was altered (pre-1928) with a slightly projecting brick section (that covered the easternmost window), having three stone steps flanked by stone cheek walls on which are set historic iron railings, a molded brownstone round arch over the doorway with a keystone with the initials "WH," non-historic metal double doors, a round domed copper awning (c. 1990) that replaced a pre-1939 steel marquee, and two griffin sconces (c. 1990). The five rectangular windows, set above foliate terra-cotta panels, were filled with brick (c. 1990), some with louvers and air conditioners (originally there were multi-pane upper wood sash, which were later replaced). There are three small arched niches placed on the three westernmost pilasters. Each vertical section is terminated by an entablature with foliate terra-cotta moldings, the two easternmost supported by foliate terra-cotta corbels. Lighting and security cameras have been placed along the entire facade (c. 1990). **Second Story:** Six rectangular windows (originally with one-over-one wood sash) have pre-1939 multi-pane metal sash, which were painted (c. 1990), with the easternmost window covered with metal. The stone lintels have been parged. **Third Story:** There are three large window groups; that in the center is round-arched, with an elaborate terra-cotta surround, while both sides are rectangular with stone lintels (originally with stone mullions and multi-pane transoms), placed above square terra-cotta panels, which are flanked by four large decorative iron tie-rods. Each window group is surmounted by long horizontal terra-cotta panels with swags. The central window group has a brick structural support that was installed after the 1911 fire. Stone mullions, transoms, and older sash were replaced (pre-1939) with multi-pane metal sash, which were painted (c. 1990); the easternmost

window section is partly covered with metal, and the westernmost window section has metal mechanical boxes.

**Annex: Base:** Windows are painted (c. 1990) and have iron grilles. The original stone watertable has been heavily parged, covered with tiny mosaic tiles, and painted (pre-1989). Metal stairs with pipe railings (c. 1990) lead to the first story; below this is a mesh grille and gate, and a wood platform over the areaway. A basement entrance (c. 1990) has metal stairs and metal door. **First Story:** Two rectangular windows, set above terra-cotta panels with a griffin design, were filled with brick, the central one also with a louver (c. 1990), while the westernmost window was altered into a doorway (c. 1990), eliminating the terra-cotta panel, with a metal door and metal panel. The entablature has foliate terra-cotta corbels and foliate terra-cotta molding and supports a balustrade with decorative ironwork. Lighting and security cameras have been placed here (c. 1990). **Second Story:** Three rectangular windows have stone lintels (parged) with pre-1939 multi-pane metal sash, which were painted (c. 1990), the central one having a metal panel. **Third Story:** The large round-arched window group has a molded arched surround with a keystone bearing a head and voussoir blocks with bosses (there are two eras of terra cotta, reflecting an apparent repair after one of the fires). The brick piers within the arch may be replacements (post-1910s) of original mullions. Multi-pane metal sash (pre-1939) were painted (c. 1990), the central one covered with wood. Decorative terra-cotta spandrel panels have musical references.

Report prepared by  
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## NOTES

1. LPC, *New York Public Library, Tompkins Square Branch Designation Report* (LP-1998) (N.Y.: City of New York, 1999), prepared by Mary Dierickx, *Children's Aid Society, Tompkins Square Lodging House for Boys and Industrial School Designation Report* (LP-2055) (N.Y.: City of New York, 2000), prepared by Eric Washington, *Hamilton-Holly House Designation Report* (LP-2157)(N.Y.: City of New York, 2004), prepared by Jay Shockley; and *East 17<sup>th</sup> Street/Irving Place Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1976)(N.Y.: City of New York, 1998), prepared by Gale Harris and Jay Shockley.
2. The church is a designated New York City Landmark.
3. Luther Harris, *Around Washington Square: An Illustrated History of Greenwich Village* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Pr., 2003), 35.
4. Of the original nine houses, Nos. 428-434 are extant and are designated New York City Landmarks.
5. Two houses on this block, Nos. 4 and 20 (Hamilton-Holly and Daniel LeRoy Houses), are intact and were designated New York City Landmarks in 2004 and 1969.
6. It is a designated New York City Landmark.

7. All of the extant buildings are designated New York City Landmarks.
8. Both buildings are designated New York City Landmarks.
9. LPC, architects files; *New York City Directories* (1879-1908); Dennis S. Francis, *Architects in Practice, New York City 1840-1900* (N.Y.: Comm. for the Pres. of Archl. Recs., 1979), 64; James Ward, *Architects in Practice, New York City 1900-1940* (N.Y.: Comm. for the Pres. of Archl. Recs., 1989), 45, 64; "Charles Rentz, Jr.," U.S. Census (New York, 1880), and passport application (1902); "Copartnership Notices," *NYT*, Aug. 4, 1906, 9.
10. "Special Notices," *Real Estate Record & Builders Guide*, April 10, 1886, 459.
11. William Kurtzer (c. 1850- ), born in Germany, immigrated in 1871 and was a partner in the architectural firm of Kurtzer & [Richard] Rohl from about 1888 until 1901. Rohl (1847- ) was also born in Germany. The firm specialized in tenements and flats buildings, including No. 95 Bedford Street (1894) and No. 285 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street (1900), located within the Greenwich Village Historic District, and No. 121 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street (1899), located within the St. Mark's Historic District. "William Kurtzer," U.S. Census (Bronx, New York, 1920); "Richard Rohl," U.S. Census (New York and Bronx, 1900 and 1910).
12. These are located within the Greenwich Village Historic District.
13. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances; NYC, Dept. of Buildings (NB 1212-1886, Alt. 7-1892, Alt.1031-1930); *New York City Directories* (1879-1934); *Manhattan Address Directories* (1929-45); "St. Ann's Church in Twelfth-Street," *NYT*, July 2, 1870, 2; "Dedication of the New Catholic Church of St. Ann," *NYT*, Jan. 2, 1871, 5; "Charles and Annie Goldstein," U.S. Census (New York, 1880); Charles Goldstein obit., *NYT*, Nov. 29, 1898, 7; "Convicted of Arson," *NYT*, Oct. 23, 1888, 8; "The Building Department," *NYT*, Jan. 1, 1896, 15; "The Building Department," *NYT*, Dec. 31, 1898, 10; "Today's Auction Sales," *NYT*, Mar. 15, 1899, 12; "The Auction Room," *NYT*, Mar. 16, 1899, 12; "Auction Sales," *NYT*, May 27, 1899, 13; Webster Hall, letterhead (190\_), in the Billy Rose Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; "Real Estate Transfers," *NYT*, Feb. 7, 1901, 14; "In the Real Estate Field," *NYT*, Feb. 17, 1903, 14; Rutherford Stuyvesant obit., *NYT*, July 5, 1909, 7; "Real Estate Transfers," *NYT*, Oct. 29, 1910, 16; "William H. and Annie Weissager," U.S. Census (New York, 1910); "Business Troubles," *NYT*, Nov. 29, 1911, 19; "Last Rites in Auto to Dying Fireman," *NYT*, Nov. 26, 1911, 4; John Stich obit. listing, *NYT*, June 15, 1919, 22; "Bank Sells Webster Hall," *NYT*, Apr. 27, 1923, 29; "New Incorporations," *NYT*, Oct. 28, 1925, 42; "Webster Hall Fire Ruins Two Floors," *NYT*, Mar. 9, 1930, 2; "Webster Hall Repairs Cost \$75,000," *NYT*, May 16, 1930; "Manhattan Mortgages," *NYT*, Jan. 8, 1931, 46; "Business Records," *NYT*, Aug. 14, 1932, S8; "Manhattan Mortgages," *NYT*, Feb. 7, 1933, 35; "Two Killed in Fire at Webster Hall" and "Webster Hall," *NYT*, Feb. 23, 1938; "Plans for Buildings Filed by Architects," *NYT*, Apr. 23, 1938, 28; "Manhattan Mortgages," *NYT*, Oct. 4, 1938, 45; "Old Webster Hall Wrecked by Blaze," *NYT*, and "Webster Hall Destroyed by Five-Alarm Fire," *New York Herald Tribune*, Feb. 6, 1949; "Building Plans Filed," *NYT*, Apr. 22, 1949, 41; "A 'Costly Looking Barn' for the Charities Agency," *NYT*, Sept. 17, 1989, RE12; LPC, *Potter Building Designation Report* (LP-1948) (N.Y.: City of New York, 1996), prepared by Jay Shockley.
14. "Out Among the Builders," *Real Estate Record & Builders Guide*, June 19, 1886, 803.
15. "A Bar But No Barroom," *NYT*, Dec. 30, 1886, 3, and "City and Suburban News," *NYT*, Dec. 29, 1886, 3.
16. "The Costly and Substantial Buildings of 1886," *Real Estate Record & Builders Guide*, Jan. 1, 1887, 7.
17. Examples of this period include the Trinity Building (1851-53, Richard Upjohn; demolished), 111 Broadway, St. Denis Hotel (1853, James Renwick; altered), 797 Broadway, and Cooper Union Building (1853-58, Frederick A. Petersen), a designated New York City Landmark. See: Jay Shockley and Susan

- Tunick, "The Cooper Union Building and Architectural Terra Cotta," *Winterthur Portfolio* (Winter 2004), 207-227.
18. Walter Geer, *Terra-Cotta in Architecture* (N.Y.: Gazlay Bros., 1891), 20. Advantages seen in terra cotta for both exterior architectural ornament and interior fireproofing included its fireproof properties, strength, durability, lower cost and weight in shipping and handling, the relative ease with which elaborate decoration could be molded, and the retention over time of crisp ornamental profiles compared to stone.
  19. "The Use of Terra Cotta in Building," *RERBG*, Mar. 3, 1883, 85.
  20. The Long Island Historical Society (now Brooklyn Historical Society), 128 Pierrepont Street, Brooklyn, is located in the Brooklyn Heights Historic District and is a designated New York City Interior Landmark.
  21. "In the Real Estate Field," *NYT*, Sept. 29, 1910, 16.
  22. In 1926-27, as president of the Faybert Realty Co., Weissager headed a venture to construct a 2200-seat movie theater, with stores, swimming pools, and tennis courts in the Bronx. Presumably after the death of Annie Goldstein, Weissager married again, nee Fannie Shubert, sister of theatrical producers Lee and Jacob J. Shubert. "Buys Five Blocks in the East Bronx," *NYT*, Sept. 26, 1926, E16; "Plans Bronx Theatre," *NYT*, May 19, 1927, 47; Fannie Weissager obit., *NYT*, Nov. 5, 1928, 18.
  23. "Last Rites in Auto to a Dying Fireman," *NYT*, Nov. 26, 1911, 4.
  24. "Bank Sells Webster Hall," *NYT*, Apr. 27, 1923, 29.
  25. "Leaseholds Listed," *NYT*, Sept. 16, 1932, 38.
  26. "City and Suburban News," *NYT*, Feb. 12, 1887, 3, and Apr. 9, 1887, 3; "An Interesting Family Group," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (*BDE*), Sept. 9, 1887, 2; "Brooklyn 'Progressives'," *BDE*, Sept. 12, 1887, 2; "The Sentence Denounced," *NYT*, Sept. 16, 1887, 2; "To Entertain Their Countrymen," *BDE*, Oct. 9, 1887, 3; "The Brewers Remain Firm," *NYT*, Apr. 25, 1888, 8; "Saved in the Nick of Time," *NYT*, Aug. 5, 1888, 3; "One Note of Discord," *NYT*, May 6, 1889, 1; "Coming Events," *BDE*, Nov. 30, 1889, 5; "Knights of Labor Anniversary," *BDE*, Dec. 1, 1889, 1; "Some Important Athletic Events," *BDE*, Jan. 10, 1892, 14; "In New York," *BDE*, Dec. 29, 1895, 24; "Veteran Tars in Convention," *BDE*, June 29, 1896, 4; "Choate to Jeffersonians," *NYT*, Oct. 30, 1897, 5; "The Poor Remembered in New York," *BDE*, Dec. 26, 1897, 5; "Roosevelt Tours the City," *NYT*, Nov. 5, 1898, 3; "Debate on Socialism at Webster Hall, New York City, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1913" (N.Y.: Internatl. Peace Forum, 1913); "Sullivan Dances as Enemies Drink," *NYT*, Mar. 3, 1916; "Rio Grande Rally Costume Ball" advertisement, *NYT*, Mar. 29, 1917, 11; "Curfew Tolls Knell of Village Ball," *NYT*, Jan. 16, 1927; "Children of Reds in Campaign Rally," *NYT*, Oct. 29, 1928, 3; "Public Notices," *NYT*, Aug. 5, 1932, 3; New Theatre Ball flyer (1935), Billy Rose Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; "Dance to Pay Losses of Burglar Forays," *NYT*, Dec. 20, 1937; Margaret Sanger, *Margaret Sanger: An Autobiography* (N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Co., 1938), 82; "2,500 Protest Inquiry into the New Masses," *NYT*, Feb. 27, 1940; "Lord Marley Makes Plea," *NYT*, May 18, 1941; "Tresca to be Honored," *NYT*, Dec. 17, 1944, 30; "Events Today," *NYT*, Apr. 14, 1945, 13; Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (N.Y.: Internatl. Publr., 1947), 153; David Ewen, *Dictators of the Baton* (Chicago: Ziff-Davis Publg. Co., 1948), 282; Andrew C. Ritchie, *Charles Demuth* (N.Y.: Museum of Modern Art, 1950), 17; Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness: Autobiography of Dorothy Day* (N.Y.: Harper, 1952), 58; Andrew Turnbull, *Scott Fitzgerald* (N.Y.: Scribner, 1962), 139; Steven Watson, *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde* (N.Y.: Abbeville Pr., 1991); Jonathan E. Weinberg, *Speaking for Vice: The Art of Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley and the First American Avant-Garde* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 1993), 207; Patrick Bunyan, *All Around the Town: Manhattan Facts and Curiosities* (N.Y.: Fordham Univ. Pr., 1999), 153; Peter Glassgold, edit., *Anarchy!: An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2001), xxiii; Irene



- Gammel, *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Pr., 2002), 238; Bruce Kayton, *Radical Walking Tours of New York City* (N.Y.: Seven Stories Pr., 2003), 70-71; Michael Ashley, edit., *The Mammoth Book of Roaring Twenties Whodunnits* (N.Y.: Carroll & Graf Publr., 2004), 4; Marci Reaven and Steve Zeitlin, *Hidden New York: A Guide to Places That Matter* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rivergate Bks., 2006); Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, "Webster Hall History and Significance" (2007).
27. Kathy Peiss, cited in Reaven and Zeitlin, 65-66.
  28. "City and Suburban News," *NYT*, Feb. 12, 1887, 3.
  29. "The Talk of New York," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Jan. 1, 1888, 6.
  30. Allen Church, *The Improper Bohemians: A Re-Creation of Greenwich Village in Its Heyday* (N.Y.: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1959), 109.
  31. "Charcoal Costume Wins at Village Ball," *NYT*, Oct. 28, 1923, E2.
  32. George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (N.Y.: BasicBooks, 1994), 236-237. See also: Molly McGarry and Fred Wasserman, *Becoming Visible: An Illustrated History of Lesbian and Gay Life in Twentieth-Century America* (N.Y.: Penguin Studio, 1998), 65.
  33. LPC, *Public School 64 Designation Report* (LP-2189) (N.Y.: City of New York, 2006), prepared by Virginia Kurshan, and *Hamilton-Holly House Designation Report*.
  34. Jan S. Ramirez, "The Tourist Trade Takes Hold," in Rick Beard and Leslie C. Berlowitz, edit., *Greenwich Village: Culture and Counterculture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Pr., 1993), 388.
  35. Jan S. Ramirez, "Greenwich Village," in Kenneth T. Jackson, edit., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 1995), 508.
  36. Terry Miller, *Greenwich Village and How It Got That Way* (N.Y.: Crown Publr., 1990), 258.
  37. This building is a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark.
  38. *Manhattan Address Directories* (1950-80); Library of Congress, Columbia University, and New York Public Library, online catalogues of sound recordings; Reaven and Zeitlin; "New Legion Post to Hold Dance," *NYT*, Nov. 25, 1947, 31; "Music Notes," *NYT*, Sept. 19, 1952, 18; Webster Manor, jazz concert advertisement, *NYT*, Sept. 19, 1952, 18; "Building Plans Filed," *NYT*, July 9, 1954, 30; "40 Years Marked by Clothing Union," *NYT*, Jan. 16, 1955; "700 Lithuanians Celebrate Nation's Independence Day," *NYT*, Feb. 17, 1964, 19; "Goldwater View Assailed," *NYT*, Sept. 21, 1964, 1 and 23; "Born of Strife 50 Years Ago, Amalgamated Union Prospers," *NYT*, Dec. 27, 1964, 47; "Ritz Entertainment Organization, Inc. v. Unity Gallega of the U.S., Inc.," case summary (1990), [www.fastcase.com](http://www.fastcase.com) website; "Is Nightlife Dead?," *NYT*, Sept. 27, 1992, sect. 9, 1 and 9; "Rock and Strolling Around New York," *NYT*, Oct. 16, 1992, C1 and 16; "The Halls of Rock," *NYT*, Nov. 19, 1993, C1 and 25; "New York, Cradle of Labor History," *NYT*, Aug. 30, 1996, C1 and 26; "10 Parties That Shook the Century," *NYT*, Dec. 26, 1999, ST1 and 2; Jeff Tamarkin, *Got a Revolution!: the Turbulent Flight of Jefferson Airplane* (N.Y.: Atria Bks., 2003), 232; "A Rec Room for Rallies, Fistfights and Rock," *NYT*, Dec. 9, 2007, RE2.
  39. David Simons, *Studio Stories: How the Great New York Records Were Made* (San Francisco: Backbeat Bks., 2004), 173.

40. Jack Pfeiffer, "Jack Pfeiffer's Corner: the Age of Living Stereo," [www.classicrecords.com](http://www.classicrecords.com) website.
41. Ashley Kahn, *Kind of Blue* (N.Y.: DaCapo Pr., 2000), 77.
42. Simons, 14.
43. Simons, 173.
44. Nat Hentoff, *The Jazz Life* (N.Y.: Dial Pr., 1961), 118.
45. Jim Cogan and William Clark, *Temples of Sound: Inside the Great Recording Studios* (San Francisco: Chronicle Bks., 2003), 182.
46. Reaven and Zeitlin, 68.
47. Reaven and Zeitlin, 67.
48. Miller, 266.
49. Miller, 266.
50. "Taking Manhattan," *Macleans*, Oct. 12, 1992, 70-71.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that Webster Hall and Annex has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, Webster Hall and Annex, one of New York City's most historically and culturally significant large nineteenth-century assembly halls, was constructed for Charles Goldstein in 1886-87 and 1892, to the designs of architect Charles Rentz, Jr.; that, though little known, the highly prolific Rentz (1855-1906) practiced in New York from around 1880 to his death, and was commissioned largely for flats and tenement buildings; that the Queen Anne style original structure and Renaissance Revival style Annex are clad in red Philadelphia pressed brick with brownstone trim, and effusively ornamented with unglazed red terra cotta, that on the original building was likely produced by the Boston Terra Cotta Co. or Perth Amboy Terra Cotta Co., the leading manufacturers of the day, and that the building is terminated by a c. 1911 bracketed pressed metal cornice, and had an elaborate, high dormered mansard roof until it was destroyed by fire in 1930; that throughout its history as one of Greenwich Village/East Village's leading public rental halls and social centers, Webster Hall has been the venue for countless balls, dances, receptions, lectures, meetings, conventions, political and union rallies, military functions, concerts, performances, festivities, and sporting and fundraising events, particularly for the working-class and immigrant population of the Lower East Side; that in the 1910s and 20s, it became famous for its masquerade balls, first attracting the Village's bohemian population, which nicknamed it the "Devil's Playhouse," and that the hall was significant as a gathering place for the city's early twentieth-century lesbian and gay community; that artists Charles Demuth, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray, and writers Djuna Barnes and Scott Fitzgerald were among the many notables who attended events here at this time; that, a favorite venue for progressive, leftist, and union political organizations, the hall was attended by such luminaries as Samuel Gompers, Margaret Sanger, Emma Goldman, and Dorothy Day, and was the site of the formation of the Progressive Labor Party in 1887, and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America in 1914; that from 1953 to 1968, RCA Victor Records operated a notable sound recording studio here; that pop vocal, jazz, Latin, folk, and gospel phonograph albums were recorded here by such disparate musical icons as Louis Armstrong, Harry Belafonte, Perry Como, Coleman Hawkins, Lena Horne, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Stan Getz, Sergio Franchi, and Joe Williams; that the hall was noted as a venue for Broadway cast recordings, which included Julie Andrews in *The Boy Friend*, Mary Martin in *Peter Pan*, Barbara Cook in *Show Boat*, Ethel Merman in *Annie Get Your Gun*, Carol Channing in *Hello, Dolly!*, and Liza Minnelli in *Flora, the Red Menace*, as well as those of classical artists such as Artur Schnabel, Marian Anderson, and Beverly Sills in *Giulio Cesare*; and that in the 1970s-80s, the building housed Casa Galicia, a meeting and event space, and the rock club The Ritz, was the location for a number of movie scenes, such as "Raging Bull" (1980), and that the name Webster Hall was returned in 1990 with the current club.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the

Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark Webster Hall and Annex, 119-125 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 556, Lot 68, as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair  
Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice-Chair  
Diana Chapin, Joan Gerner, Roberta Brandes Gratz,  
Christopher Moore, Commissioners

## Appendix: A Partial Listing of Phonograph Albums Recorded at Webster Hall, 1953-68

Artur Rubinstein, *Piano Sonatas* (1954), *Mazurkas* (1965-66), and *Brahms Piano Quartets Nos. 1 & 3* (1967)  
*Lady in the Dark*, cast recording (1954), with Ann Sothorn, Carleton Carpenter  
*Peter Pan*, cast recording (1954), with Mary Martin, Cyril Ritchard  
*The Boy Friend*, cast recording (1954), with Julie Andrews, Ann Wakefield, Ruth Altman, Bob Scheerer, Eric Berry  
*Fanny*, cast recording (1954), with Ezio Pinza, Walter Slezak, Florence Henderson  
*Damn Yankees*, cast recording (1955), with Gwen Verdon, Stephen Douglass, Ray Walston  
*Silk Stockings*, cast recording (1955), with Hildegard Neff, Don Ameche, Gretchen Wyler  
Louis Jordan, *Rock 'n' Roll Call* (1955)  
Perry Como, *So Smooth* (1955), *Como Swings* (1959), *The Young at Heart* (1960), and *The Songs I Love* (1963)  
Harry Belafonte, *Calypso* (1955), *Swing Dat Hammer* (1960), and *Midnight Special* (1962)  
Al Cohn, Zoot Sims, etc., *From A to Z* (1956)  
Jimmy Dorsey, *The Fabulous Jimmy Dorsey* (1956)  
Coleman Hawkins, *The Hawk in Paris* (1956)  
*Happy Hunting*, cast recording (1956), with Ethel Merman, Fernando Lamas  
Lee Wiley, *As Time Goes By* (1956-57)  
Lena Horne, *Stormy Weather* (1956-57) and *Lena on the Blue Side* (1962)  
Cootie Williams, Rex Stewart, Coleman Hawkins, etc., *Cootie and Rex in the Big Challenge* (1957)  
*New Girl in Town*, cast recording (1957), with Gwen Verdon, Thelma Ritter  
*Jamaica*, cast recording (1957), with Ricardo Montalban, Adelaide Hall, Lena Horne, Ossie Davis  
Mary Martin, *Mary Martin Sings*, *Richard Rogers Plays* (1957), and *Three to Make Music* (1958)  
Xavier Cugat, *Cugat in Spain* (1958)  
New Glenn Miller Orchestra, *The Miller Sound* (1958) and *Glenn Miller Time* (c. 1961), Ray McKinley, conductor  
*Cinderella* (1958), with Mary Martin  
Drinkard Singers, *A Joyful Noise* (1958)  
Ames Brothers, *The Ames Brothers Sing the Best in Country* (1959)  
Gil Evans, Jimmy Cleveland, Cannonball Adderley, Art Blakey, etc., *The Complete Pacific Jazz Sessions* (in part, 1959)  
Art Farmer, *Aztec Suite* (1959) and *Listen to Art Farmer and the Orchestra* (1962)  
Miriam Makeba, *Miriam Makeba* (1960)  
*Greenwillow*, cast recording (1960), with Anthony Perkins, Cecil Kellaway  
Andy Williams, *The Village of St. Bernadette* (1960)  
Jan Peerce, *A Plea to God* (1960) and *Jan Peerce Sings Hebrew Melodies* (1960)  
Louie Armstrong, *Louie and the Dukes of Dixieland* (1960)  
Stan Getz, *Focus* (1961), *Jazz Samba Encore!* (1963), with Antonio Carlos Jobim and Luis Bonfá, and *Stan Getz with Guest Artist Laurindo Almeida* (1963)  
Sister Rosetta Tharpe, *The Gospel Truth* (1961, Verve)  
Mildred Miller, *100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Concert* (1961)  
*How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, cast recording (1961), with Robert Morse, Bonnie

Scott, Rudy Vallee, Charles Nelson Reilly  
*Wildcat*, cast recording (1961), with Lucille Ball  
 Perez Prado, *Perez Prado Features the New Dance "La Chunga"* (c. 1961) and *Exotic Suite of the Americas* (c. 1962)  
*The Long Road to Freedom: An Anthology of Black Music* (in part, 1961-71), Harry Belafonte, producer  
 Paul Desmond, *Desmond Blue* (1962) and *Take Ten* (1963)  
*Little Me*, cast recording (1962), with Sid Caesar, Virginia Martin, Nancy Andrews  
 Marian Anderson, *Christmas Carols* (1962), *Songs at Eventide* (1964), and *Schubert and Brahms Lieder* (1966)  
 Gerry Mulligan, *Gerry Mulligan '63* (1962)  
 Peter Nero, *Young and Warm and Wonderful* (1962), *Hail the Conquering Nero* (1963), *Peter Nero Plays Songs You Won't Forget* (1964), and *Screen Scene* (1966)  
 Bill Evans, *Conversations With Myself* (1963), *Plays the Theme from the VIPs* (1963), *Trio '64* (1963), and *Further Conversations With Myself* (1967)  
 Paul Anka, *Our Man Around the World* (1963)  
 Benny Goodman, Lionel Hampton, Teddy Wilson, Gene Krupa, *Together Again* (1963)  
*Amahl and the Night Visitors*, cast recording (1963), with Kurt Yaghjian  
 Joe Williams, *Me and the Blues* (1963) and *The Exciting Joe Williams* (1965)  
 Itzhak Perlman, *Perlman Rediscovered* (1963)  
*Fiddler On the Roof*, cast recording (1964), with Zero Mostel, Beatrice Arthur, Maria Karnilova  
 Sergio Franchi, *The Exciting Voice of Sergio Franchi* (1964), *Songs of Richard Rogers* (c. 1965), and *The Heart of Christmas* (1965)  
*Hello, Dolly!*, cast recording (1964), with Carol Channing, Eileen Brennan, Sondra Lee, Charles Nelson Reilly  
 Ethel Ennis, *This is Ethel Ennis* (1964)  
*The Roar of the Greasepaint, the Smell of the Crowd*, cast recording (1965), with Anthony Newley, Cyril Ritchard  
*Kismet*, cast recording (1965), with Alfred Drake, Anne Jeffreys, Lee Venora  
*Flora, the Red Menace*, cast recording (1965), with Liza Minnelli  
*Carousel*, cast recording (1965), with Eileen Christy, John Raitt  
 Kai Winding, *Rainy Day* (1965)  
*On a Clear Day You Can See Forever*, cast recording (1965), with Barbara Harris, John Cullum  
 J.J. Johnson, *J.J.!* (1965)  
*I Do! I Do!*, cast recording (1966), with Mary Martin, Robert Preston  
*Show Boat*, cast recording (1966), with Barbara Cook, Constance Towers, Stephen Douglass, David Wayne, William Warfield  
*Annie Get Your Gun*, cast recording (1966), with Ethel Merman, Bruce Yarnell, Benay Venuta, Jerry Orbach  
 Kate Smith, *The Kate Smith Christmas Album* (1966), *Kate Smith Here and Now!* (1967), and *Just a Closer Walk With Thee* (1967)  
 Morton Gould, *Morton Gould Makes the Scene* (1967)  
 Vic Damone, *On the South Side of Chicago* (1967)  
 Ed Ames, *Time, Time* (1967) and *When the Snow is On the Roses* (1967)

*Giulio Cesare*, opera recording (1967), with Beverly Sills, Beverly Wolff, Maureen Forrester,  
Norman Treigle; Julius Rudel, conductor

Hot Tuna, *Hot Tuna* (1967)

*Happy Time*, cast recording (1968), with Robert Goulet, David Wayne

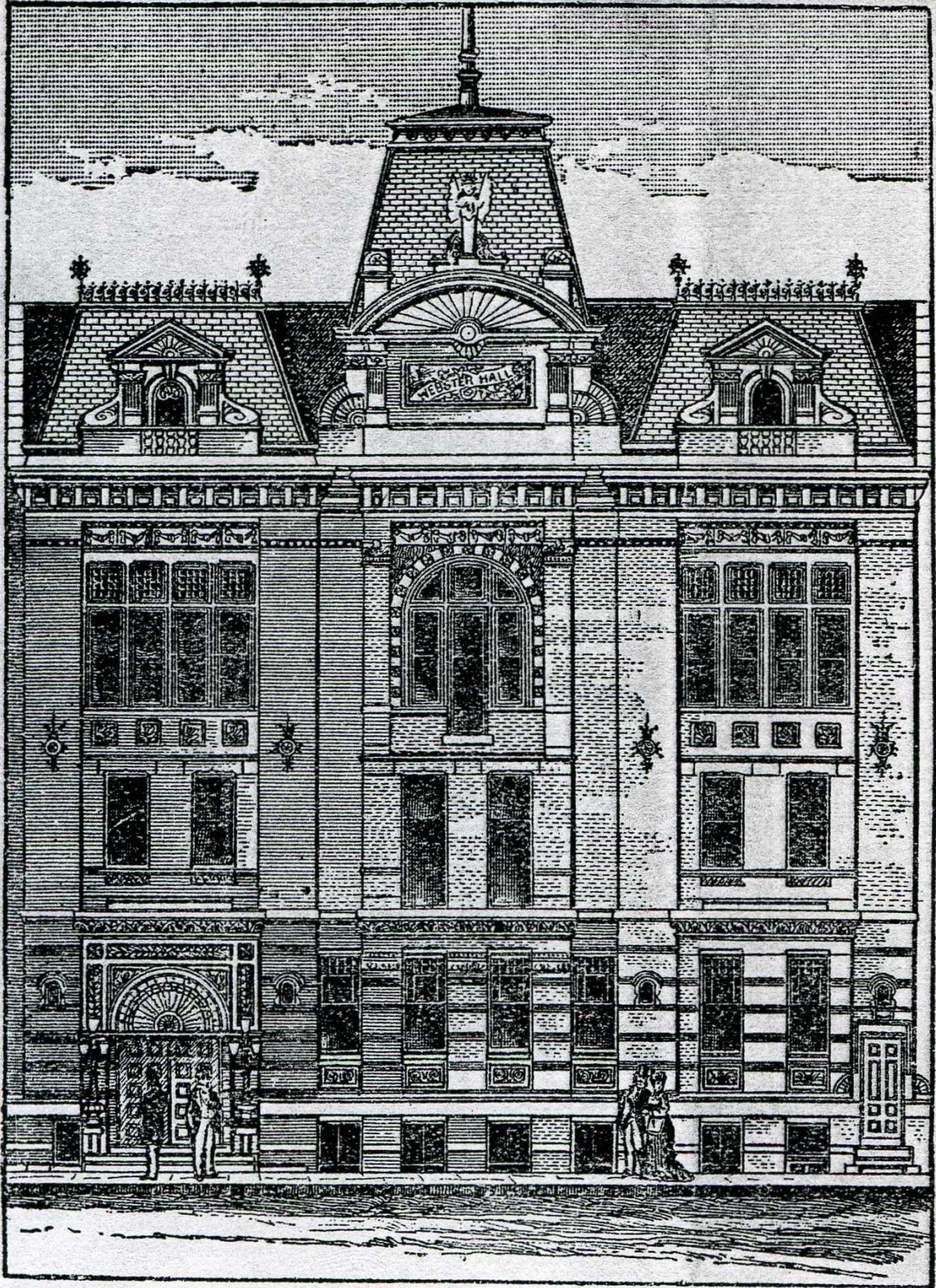
Lana Cantrell, *Another Shade of Lana* (1968)



**Webster Hall and Annex, 119-125 East 11th Street, Manhattan**

Photo: International News Service (1913)





**Webster Hall**

Source: Webster Hall Letterhead (c. 1900), Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations



**Webster Hall and Annex**

Photo: Landmarks Preservation Commission (early 1980s)



**Webster Hall and Annex**

Photo: Caroline Pasion



**Webster Hall Annex**

Photo: Caroline Pasion



**Webster Hall**, third story detail

Photo: Carl Forster



**Webster Hall**, second story detail

Photo: Carl Forster



**Webster Hall**, first story detail

Photo: Carl Forster



WEBSTER HALL AND ANNEX (LP-2273), 119-125 East 11th Street.  
Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 556, Lot 68.

Designated: March 18, 2008

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 06C, December 2006.  
Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM.