



## New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau • Peebles Island, PO Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189

518-237-8643

www.nysparks.com

David A. Paterson  
Governor

Carol Ash  
Commissioner

June 19, 2008

Andrew Berman  
Executive Director  
Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation  
232 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10003

RE: State and National Registers eligibility evaluation request  
Provincetown Playhouse  
133-139 MacDougal Street  
New York County, NY

Dear Mr. Berman:

Thank you for your interest in the State and National Registers of Historic Places. After reviewing your eligibility evaluation request it is the opinion of the State Historic Preservation Office that the Provincetown Playhouse at 133-139 MacDougal Street meets the criteria for listing to the Registers. Attached to this letter is a copy of our Resource Evaluation.

A copy of this letter of eligibility is being forwarded via email to Alicia Hurley at NYU. In order for a building to be listed in the National Register the property owner must not oppose the proposed listing. It is the policy of the State Historic Preservation Office to work closely with owners to inform them of the potential benefits of listing. Not only is listing to the Registers a prestigious honor, it brings with it economic benefits. Not-for-profit organizations that own registered properties may apply for historic preservation grants from various sources. Owners of historic commercial properties listed in the National Register may qualify for a preservation tax credit. The Tax Reform Act of 1986 allows a 20 percent tax credit for the substantial rehabilitation of income-producing historic properties.

If you have any questions about this determination of eligibility please feel free to call me at (518) 237-8643 ext. 3266.

Sincerely,

Kathleen A. Howe  
Historic Preservation Program Analyst

cc: Alicia Hurley, NYU



**New York State Office of Parks,  
Recreation and Historic Preservation**

Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau • Peebles Island, PO Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189  
518-237-8643  
www.nysparks.com

**David A. Paterson**  
Governor

**Carol Ash**  
Commissioner

## RESOURCE EVALUATION

DATE: June 18, 2008

STAFF: Kathy Howe

PROPERTY: Building at 133-139 MacDougal Street  
(Provincetown Playhouse)

MCD: Manhattan

COUNTY: New York

USN: 06101.016971

- I.  Property is individually listed on SR/NR:  
name of listing:
- Property is a contributing component of a SR/NR district:  
name of district:
- II.  Property meets eligibility criteria.
- Property contributes to a district which appears to meet eligibility criteria.
- Pre SRB:  Post SRB:  SRB date

### Criteria for Inclusion in the National Register:

- A.  Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;
- B.  Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
- C.  Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or represents the work of a master; or possess high artistic values; or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;
- D.  Have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The four-story, eight-bay-wide brick building at 133-139 MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village is actually four 1840's row houses that were joined behind one unified façade in 1940 though the interiors had been interconnected before that time. Called "the cornerstone of bohemia"<sup>1</sup> the building meets National Register Criterion A in the areas of social and cultural history as a center of the Village's radical cultural, intellectual, and political life especially in the early decades of the twentieth century.

<sup>1</sup> Steven Watson, *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991).

The Liberal Club, which also served as headquarters for the feminist Heterodoxy Club, occupied the ground floor of No. 137 beginning in 1913. "Until 1918 it sponsored programs of a radical nature ranging from discussions of Freud to lectures on birth control, and also functioned as an art gallery, a poker parlor, a dance hall, and an experimental theater."<sup>2</sup> Polly Holladay's popular basement restaurant opened in the basement of No. 137 in 1914, the same year that Albert and Charles Boni opened their Washington Square Bookstore next door at No. 135. No. 139 housed the Provincetown Playhouse theater from 1916 to 1918. It moved its theater space to No. 133 in 1918 which it has occupied for 90 years. While this space was renovated in 1940 and again in 1998 the original walls, volume, and stage location are intact. The upper stories of the building are historically and currently used for housing.

The Provincetown Playhouse theater, the Boni Brothers' Washington Square Bookstore, the Liberal Club, the Heterodoxy Club, and Polly's Restaurant were important bohemian meeting places where an extraordinary collection of writers, playwrights, actors, artists, and other cultural figures gathered including Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell, George Cram Cook, Charles Demuth, William Carlos Williams, Djuna Barnes, Edna St. Vincent Millay, John Reed, Theodore Dreiser, Marsden Hartley, Sinclair Lewis, Upton Sinclair, e.e. cummings, Edmund Wilson, Max Eastman, Lincoln Steffens, Margaret Sanger, and Jack London, among others. Notable residents of the upper floor apartments included Bernice Abbott, Eli Wallach, Anne Jackson, and Dorothy Gillespie.

The Provincetown Playhouse has been noted as the "birthplace of the new American drama" and many distinguished playwrights and actors have worked here during the past 90 years. Playwrights and actors associated with the theater's early years (1910s-20s) include Edna St. Vincent Millay, Bette Davis, Miriam Hopkins, Djuna Barnes, Paul Green, Paul Robeson, e.e. cummings, Susan Glaspell, George Cram Cook; and Eugene O'Neill. The stock market crash caused the financial collapse of the Provincetown Players in 1929. From 1936 to 1939 it housed the Studio Theater of the Community Drama Unit of the WPA Federal Theater. In the 1950s the theater included productions of Gilbert and Sullivan comic operas and George Bernard Shaw plays. From the 1960s through the 1980s the theater presented over 70 productions including plays by Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee, Harold Pinter, Sam Shepherd, and David Mamet. The theater continues to be the home of many independently produced plays and is an important site in the history of American theater. The renovations made in 1940 and in 1998 represent the ongoing cultural use of this space.

If you have any questions concerning this Determination of Eligibility, please call Kathy Howe at (518) 237-8643, ext. 3266.

---

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 667.