121 Charles Street
An Illustrated History of the Little House That Could

By Amanda Davis, Director of Preservation & Research
Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation
East 71st Street and York Avenue
(1916 Bromley map)
East 71st Street and York Avenue
(1921 Aerial, NYCityMap)
Mary Manning Walsh Home for the Aged, East 71st Street and York Avenue
(Google Maps)
Margaret Wise Brown, 1910-1952

Published 1947
Mister Dog: The Dog Who Belonged to Himself (1952)

LIFE Magazine, December 1946

The Hidden House (1953)
THE HIDDEN HOUSE

It was a little house in the middle of a big city. And nobody knew it was there. It had been there for years and years, for over a hundred years, forgotten.

And there it stood in a hidden garden in the middle of a big block of skyscrapers. It was very, very little, BUT— it was a HOUSE.
It had an upstairs,
and a downstairs.

And windows and a chimney,
and a stairway on the outside
of the house.
And a little front porch
and a garden.
And what more would you want
in a house?

A DOG?
“I started out to repair it, but when you touch one thing in an old house, you end up restoring it.”

-Sven Bernhard

Photos from The New York Times
(February 20, 1966)
Architect William “Bill” Shopsin

Mayor John Lindsay and Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton
“The movers said they couldn’t do anything if it snowed and when I woke up early Sunday it was snowing. Luckily, it stopped and the streets were sanded. Then we knew we were on our way.”

-Bill Shopsin
Route of Farmhouse from Yorkville to Greenwich Village

Sunday, March 5, 1967
Turning west on 14th Street from Second Avenue
Ingrid and Sven Bernhard as the house arrives at 121 Charles Street

*New York Daily News, 1967*
The house with its new foundation, with 719 Greenwich Street in the background (NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1967)
“Ordinary people can do this kind of thing. The money is not that much. People spend their money on different things. We’ve spent it on our home.”

–Ingrid Bernhard
Greenwich Village Historic District
(NYCityMap)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Street Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>MANHATTAN 10014</th>
<th>BIN# 1011847</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHARLES STREET</td>
<td>119 - 123</td>
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<tr>
<td>GREENWICH STREET</td>
<td>713 - 717</td>
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**Property Profile Overview**

- **Health Area**: 6400
- **Tax Block**: 632
- **Tax Lot**: 36
- **Condo**: NO
- **Vacant**: NO

**Landmark Status**: L - LANDMARK

**DOB Building Remarks**

- **Cross Street(s)**: HUDSON STREET, GREENWICH STREET
- **DOB Special Place Name**: 
- **DOB Building Remarks**: 
- **Local Law**: NO
- **SRO Restricted**: NO
- **UB Restricted**: NO
- **Environmental Restrictions**: N/A
- **Legal Adult Use**: NO
- **Additional BINs for Building**: NONE
As we look down this short street, which combines residential and commercial buildings, the eye is immediately drawn to the unusual little wooden house at the far end of the north side. According to tradition, it dates from the early Nineteenth Century, or even perhaps late in the Eighteenth. It was recently moved from York Avenue and Seventy-first Street to this more congenial spot in The Village and now occupies part of a vacant lot. Its low height and tiny scale is in startling contrast to the four and five-story apartment houses which occupy the rest of this side of the street, of which the tallest, a late Nineteenth Century Romanesque Revival building, is a good example of that style.

The most interesting building on the south side of the street is located at the intersection of Hudson and Charles Streets. Erected in 1827, this building, with a chamfered corner, still displays paneled Federal lintels and Flemish bond brickwork. The building steps down gradually from its three-story height to a small, one-story, stuccoed extension at the rear. Except for two houses at mid-block, the rest of the street is commercial, with a warehouse at the Greenwich Street intersection which is completely utilitarian in character.

The little vernacular wooden house at the corner of Greenwich and Charles Streets was recently moved to this location from Seventy-first Street and York Avenue. According to tradition, it dates from early in the Nineteenth Century, or perhaps even from the late Eighteenth Century. It appears for the first time on the tax map of 1898, and, consequently, must have been moved to the York Avenue location in the latter part of the Nineteenth Century. A one-story addition was added subsequently to this simple boxy two-story structure.

This four-story building of 1853 was recently (1961) completely refaced and renovated. Light-colored brick was used, in striking contrast to the rest of the building, around the entrance doorway. The facade is asymmetrical, with a tier of double windows at the left while the main doorway, beneath the fire escape, is at the right side.
“We all wanted the new construction to be in tune with the old, as if the house had grown over time.”

-architect George Boyle
“The goal was not to make things plumb.”
- architect George Boyle
The History of 121 Charles Street

Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation

Researched and written by
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Available at: gvshp.org/121charles
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