

**20th Annual Village Awards
Annual Report and 30th Anniversary Retrospective
Andrew Berman, Executive Director
June 7, 2010**

Welcome everyone to the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation's 20th Annual Awards, and our 30th Anniversary Annual meeting. I would like to extend our thanks to our hosts for the evening, the New School, to the Forbes Gallery for hosting the reception which will follow, and to everyone who has honored us with their presence tonight.

As in past years, we will be presenting you, our members and friends, with an overview of what the Society has done and accomplished over the last year, and will be presenting awards to a group of esteemed people, institutions, and businesses for their contributions to our neighborhoods. This year, however, it is our great honor, in light of the important milestones we are marking tonight, to look back over thirty years of GVSHP's work and accomplishments, and to honor not only tonight's awardees, but two decades of talented and worthy recipients of the Village Award.

Few community organizations can claim title to a 30 year history, and appropriately enough, if the Society were a building, this year it would be old enough to be considered for landmark status under New York City law. The Society started modestly enough in 1980 as the Greenwich Village Trust for Historic Preservation, and only two years later in 1982 named its first Executive Director, the esteemed Regina Kellerman, and moved into its offices in the attic floor of the Salmagundi Club on Fifth Avenue. Though modest in its resources starting out, the Society attracted some of the most prominent names in historic preservation as Trustees and Advisors, including Jane Jacobs, Margot Gayle, and Verna Small.

Much of the Society's early efforts were educational in nature, and laid a strong foundation for some of our most important accomplishments in recent years. In 1983, the young Greenwich Village Trust and Columbia University sponsored a study of the history and architecture of the Gansevoort Meat Market, then still a largely overlooked, gritty industrial backwater. By the late 1980's, the newly-renamed Greenwich Village Society staged an exhibition on the cultural and architectural history of the Greenwich Village waterfront at the Municipal Art Society, and published *The Architecture of the Greenwich Village Waterfront* by Regina Kellerman, which thoroughly documented the history of each surviving building in this then-unprotected and increasingly endangered area.

In 1991, GVSHP began New York's first historic preservation education program for children, "Greenwich Village: History and Historic Preservation," which was followed in 1995 by the publication of "Discovering Greenwich Village," a first of its kind 12-page children's workbook which accompanies the program. That same year, GVSHP, with assistance from Preserve NY, a grant program of the Preservation League of NY State and the NY State Council on the Arts, undertook an ambitious project to document all 300 or more surviving federal style houses, built between 1790 and 1835, in Lower Manhattan, with the goal of preserving those which were not landmarked. In the intervening years this has led to landmark designation of more than a dozen such houses, in the Financial District, the East Village, Hudson Square, and around Washington Square Park.

In 1997, the Society took on a more "nuts and bolts" project when, with the assistance of the Vincent Astor Foundation, GVSHP and the Village Committee for the Jefferson Market Area held a competition to finally replace the chain-link cyclone fence around Jefferson Market Garden with a more substantial and historically appropriate one made of wrought iron and steel. That new fence remains to this day.

1999 began a new era for GVSHP as we moved into our current home at the newly minted Neighborhood Preservation Center on East 11th Street. The landmarked former rectory of St. Mark's Church, which had suffered a devastating fire just a few years earlier, was reborn as a permanent home for GVSHP and other preservation groups, allowing us to share resources and expand our work. GVSHP expanded its preservation mission to include the East Village, site of our new home, and began what is now a time-honored tradition, our first benefit house tour, *Adaptive Re-use: From Stable to Studio*, to raise funds for the Society's work.

That same year, the Society, working with architectural historian Andrew Dolkart and the Organization of Gay and Lesbian Architects and Designers, made international news when, in commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, our proposal to list that site on the State and National Register of Historic Places is accepted by the National Park Service, becoming the first and only site in the United States so designated for its connection to lesbian and gay history. A year later the federal government names the site a National Historic Landmark, the highest such honor which can be bestowed upon a historic site.

Following the death of area property owner and 'accidental preservationist' Bill Gottlieb, in 2000, GVSHP focused its attention on preserving the

increasingly endangered Meatpacking District, forming its Save Gansevoort Market Task Force. With the help again of the Preserve NY grant program, over the next three years GVSHP produced a comprehensive history of the Gansevoort Market area, submitted a detailed proposal for landmark designation to the city, and rallied local, state, and even federal support for preserving the area. In 2003 GVSHP won landmark protections for about three-quarters of the neighborhood and secured State and National Register listing for the entire neighborhood in 2007. In 2003 and again in 2004, GVSHP defeated plans for a 500 ft. tall tower in the Meatpacking District. The groundbreaking designation of the Gansevoort Market Historic District was the first expansion of historic district protections in Greenwich Village since 1969, when the Greenwich Village Historic District was designated.

Galvanized by our success in Gansevoort Market, in 2004 GVSHP, working with other local community groups, launched the campaign to Save the Far West Village. Pioneering a two-pronged approach, GVSHP pushed for both landmark and zoning protections for the Far West Village, an area which, like the Meatpacking District, had been excluded from the Greenwich Village Historic District in 1969 and which saw an increasing amount of high-rise construction. After deluging City Hall with thousands of letters and staging Town Hall meetings, press conferences in both freezing cold and stifling heat, and several marches through the neighborhood, in 2005 the city downzoned most of the Far West Village, for the first time limiting the size and height of allowable development in the first downzoning in Manhattan in recent memory. In 2006 the city extended the Greenwich Village Historic District in the Far West Village, designated the Weehawken Street Historic District, and promised to landmark eight other individual sites in the Far West Village. Though the city carved out a few sites such as the Superior Inks Factory for well-connected developers, this was the first expansion of the existing Greenwich Village Historic District since its designation in 1969. And just today, the City Planning Commission finally voted to certify the much-needed and long-overdue rezoning of six blocks in the Far West Village we have been fighting for for over two years.

GVSHP's next major campaign, which reached a fever pitch this year, was to landmark the South Village, the historically immigrant, largely Italian-American section of Greenwich Village South of Washington Square Park and West 4th Street which was entirely left out of the Greenwich Village Historic District in 1969. GVSHP first approached the LPC about landmarking this area in 2002, and with the help of the Preserve NY grant program spent the next several years researching the history of each and every one of 800 buildings in the area. In late 2006 the Society submitted this research and a 95-page report arguing for the South Village's merit as a historic district, with proposed boundaries, to the city. The city responded by dividing the South Village into thirds which it would consider, one at a time, for landmark designation. In the fall of 2009 the city held a hearing on the first third, where the public expressed overwhelming support for designation of the entire neighborhood, and a vote to landmark this first third is scheduled for June 22nd. When designated, this will be the largest expansion of landmark protections in Greenwich Village since 1969. GVSHP is pushing for the city to consider the remaining two-thirds of the South Village as soon as possible.

GVSHP has also played a key role in preservation advances in the East Village, and is positioned to do much more in the months and years ahead. Beginning in 2005 the Society was part of a coalition which successfully pushed for a rezoning of the East Village which drastically reduced the allowable height for new construction and eliminated incentives for dorm and hotel development. When the city refused to include the 3rd and 4th Avenue corridors, where NYU has erected oversized dorm after oversized dorm, GVSHP continued to push, and with the help of neighbors, Community Board 3 and Rosie Mendez, has gotten the city to finally agreed to a rezoning which will eliminate some of these same problems here. And with the assistance of the Preserve NY grant program, GVSHP is documenting the history of every one of more than 2,000 buildings in the East Village, to allow us to work with fellow community groups and stakeholders to make recommendations to the city for landmark and historic district protections for the neighborhood.

GVSHP has also become a leader in the effort to prevent institutional overdevelopment in our neighborhoods. In 2006 GVSHP led the outcry against NYU's 26-story mega-dorm on East 12th Street, which led to the university entering a three year dialogue with community groups about its future plans and its consideration of locating some new development outside of our neighborhoods. We also saw a considerable re-working of development plans by the New School at 14th Street and 5th Avenue, after we raised objections to the size, height, lack of setbacks, projecting lights, and all-glass exterior of their original proposed building. The Society has also played a key role in either securing landmark designation for or saving

from demolition sites as varied as Webster Hall, Silver Towers, Westbeth, the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Martyr, and Congregation Mezritch Synagogue, the last remaining operating tenement synagogue in the East Village.

It's not only the Society's advocacy work which has grown tremendously over the years, but our programming, resources, and educational work as well. GVSHP now conducts about 50 free or low cost programs a year, ranging from walking tours, lectures, and book readings to panel discussions, exhibits, and town hall meetings, covering the cultural, literary, architectural, and social history of our neighborhoods. Our children's education program has grown by leaps and bounds since 1991, now serving more than 1,500 students a year, for the first time this year from all five boroughs, teaching them about immigrant history, urban development, and basic architectural features using the Village as a living classroom. As of this year our website contains a virtual memory book, oral histories with important figures in recent Village history, from Jane Jacobs to Richard Meier, an interactive map, historic maps, and landmark district maps, and most recently, a first-of-its-kind landmarks application page, showing each and every requested change to a landmarked property in Greenwich Village, the East Village, and NoHo which requires a public hearing, letting you know how you can provide input on the application, and tracking its progress and results.

We are proud that many of these firsts and successes have been recognized by our peers and the media. In recent years GVSHP has received the NY Landmarks Conservancy's Lucy Moses Award for Organizational Excellence and the Preservation League of NY State's Excellence in Historic Preservation Award, and was named "Best of NYC" by the Village Voice, while The Real Deal Magazine called us "among...the most powerful players in New York's real estate community" and Landmarks Preservation Commission Chair Robert Tierney has said GVSHP is "in the top tier of advocate groups around the city."

And that's only the highlights of GVSHP's first thirty years. Thank you for supporting us over these three decades, and in doing so making these accomplishments possible. We look forward to reaching many more milestones ahead with you as well.