

TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF THE WEST CHELSEA HISTORIC DISTRICT, MANHATTAN
October 2, 2008

Good morning Councilmembers. My name is Diane Jackier, Director of External Affairs for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of the West Chelsea Historic District in Manhattan.

On May 13, 2008, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation. Ten people spoke in favor, including representatives of City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, Borough President Scott Stringer, State Senator Thomas Duane, Assembly Member Richard Gottfried, Manhattan Community Board 4, the Historic Districts Council, the Municipal Art Society of New York, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Council of Chelsea Block Associations, and Save Chelsea. One of these speakers expressed interest in expanding the boundaries to include additional properties not within the proposed district. The owners and/or representatives of two properties (a total of ten speakers) were opposed to including their properties or portions of their properties in the proposed district. Representatives of two properties (a total of five speakers) took no position on the proposed district. One witness, representing an owner, asked for zoning changes in order to support the proposed district. One owner requested that the hearing be continued.

On June 3, 2008, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a continued public hearing on the West Chelsea Historic District. Four people spoke in favor of the designation as proposed, including representatives of the Roebbling Chapter of the Society for Industrial Archeology and the Chelsea Waterside Park Association. The owners and/or representatives of two properties (a total of eight speakers) were opposed to including their properties or portions of their properties in the proposed district. Two letters were also presented to the Commission in support of the proposed designation. On July 15, 2008, the Commission voted to designate West Chelsea a New York City historic district.

Located along the Hudson River waterfront in Manhattan, the West Chelsea Historic District is a rare surviving example of New York City's rapidly disappearing industrial neighborhoods. During much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the area was home some of the city's and the country's most prestigious industrial firms, including the Otis Elevator Company, the Cornell Iron Works, the John Williams Ornamental Bronze and Iron Works, and the Reynolds Metal Company. The district encompasses parts of seven blocks, with approximately 30 structures in total, dating from 1885 to 1930.

West Chelsea was first developed with a mixture of working-class residences and industrial complexes beginning in the late 1840s, at the moment when Manhattan was becoming the most important center of manufacturing in the United States. Rows of simple tenements were erected in close proximity to large iron works, lumber and coal yards, steam-powered saw mills, and stone dressing operations. The small stable building at 554 West 28th Street, which was erected in 1885 for Latimer E. Jones' New York Lumber Auction Company, is the only reminder within the historic district of the lumber yards that were once a prominent feature of the neighborhood.

By the 1920s, nearly all of the area's original small-scale buildings had been replaced with larger, more substantial industrial structures. Many were built at least in part as speculative ventures. The structure at 548 West 28th Street, for example, was commissioned in 1899 by real estate investor Augustus Meyers and was soon leased to the Berlin Jones Envelope Company. The architect, William Higginson, was a prolific designer of factory building - including several located in the designated DUMBO Historic District in Brooklyn. The building possesses many of the features of the American Round Arch style that characterized industrial architecture at the turn of the twentieth century, including a simple brick façade, arched openings, rhythmically placed windows recessed between vertical brick piers, horizontal banding, and a corbelled brick cornice. The Conley Foil Co. building at 521-537 West 25th Street, built in 1900 on a site formerly occupied by the Cornell Iron Works which had recently moved its heavy manufacturing operations out of Manhattan, employs many of the same architectural elements. That same year, the John Williams Ornamental Bronze and Iron Works opened their own modern factory building at 549 West 26th Street.

The pace of redevelopment in West Chelsea quickened during the second decade of the twentieth century as new industries moved into the neighborhood. In 1910, the H. Wolff Book Manufacturing Co. opened its new factory at 518 West 26th Street on a parcel of land that had previously been occupied by the Cornell Iron Works. It was the first of several publishing-related firms that would settle in the neighborhood, and in 1914 the *New York Times* proclaimed the area between West 23rd and West 42nd Streets the new center of the city's printing industry. The Wolff building was also one of the first structures within the historic district to take advantage of the emerging technology of reinforced concrete that was revolutionizing the design of industrial buildings in the early twentieth century. The reinforced concrete structure offered substantial improvements in fireproofing, floor load capacities, and vibration dampening. The material also allowed for larger windows that increased light and ventilation in factory buildings, and for fewer columns and overhead beams, thereby increasing available storage space in warehouses. While reinforced concrete would soon surpass all other as the preferred material for industrial building construction, similar advantages were obtained from the older technology of steel internal frames and terra cotta floors such as

the Otis Elevator Company Building at 260 Eleventh Avenue, erected in 1911-12 and designed by the noted architectural firm of Clinton & Russell. The structure originally housed the corporate headquarters of the famed elevator manufacturer, as well as a regional sales office and fabrication facilities for the firm's construction, repair, and research and development departments.

In addition to its manufacturing operations, West Chelsea also became a major center of warehousing and freight handling activity beginning in the late nineteenth century. The Terminal Warehouse Company opened its massive Central Stores complex in 1891 on land recently reclaimed from the Hudson River. Its owners were closely associated with the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad, whose tracks entered directly into the building through the massive round-arch entrance fronting Eleventh Avenue. In subsequent years, the waterfront property immediately surrounding the Central Stores was converted to freight-related uses by railroad companies that had moved to the area after being displaced by the construction of the Gansevoort and Chelsea Piers. The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad purchased the land bounded by West 25th and West 26th Street in 1897, and in 1912-13, improved its operations by erecting a large reinforced concrete warehouse at the northeast corner of the yard. At the time of its opening, it was said to be the largest concrete building in New York City and the first to employ the flat plate construction techniques.

The block immediately between the Central Stores and the B&O freight yard was acquired in 1900 by the Lehigh Valley Railroad and was used as an offline freight yard until it was improved in 1930-31 by the erection of the Starrett-Lehigh Building, an individual landmark in the district. This structure endures as one of the great early Modernist designs in the country, whose cantilevered floor slabs, continuous strips of windows, and innovative interior circulation pattern represented a radical new approach to industrial architecture.

The ensemble of buildings within the West Chelsea Historic District reflects important trends in the development of industrial architecture in the United States and in New York City. They convey a well-defined sense of place and a distinct physical presence which sets the neighborhood apart from other parts of Midtown Manhattan. Despite a decline in industry and freight-related activity in West Chelsea during the mid-twentieth century, the historic district still retains nearly all of its historic building stock, and represents a unique and enduring part of New York City's architectural and cultural heritage.

The Commission urges you to affirm the designation.

**TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE THE CITY
COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES
ON THE DESIGNATION OF THE GEORGE CUNNINGHAM STORE, STATEN ISLAND
October 2, 2008**

Good morning Councilmembers. My name is Diane Jackier, Director of External Affairs for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of the George Cunningham Store, located at 173 Main Street in Staten Island.

On April 10, 2007, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation. Six people spoke in favor including representatives of the Tottenville Historical Society, the Preservation League of Staten Island, the Westerleigh Improvement Society, the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, and the Historic Districts Council. The Commission also received letters of support from the Municipal Art Society. No one spoke in opposition to designation. On July 15, 2008, the Commission voted to designate the building a New York City landmark.

Built c. 1892, the George Cunningham Store is a rare and intact vernacular Queen Anne style building from a significant period of development for Tottenville. Its robust bay windows with decorative brackets are rare survivors of a once popular feature of early American commercial architecture. The building also features a distinctive decorated gable end that gives this small one-story building great presence on the street. It is the best preserved of the early shops remaining on Tottenville's Main Street and perhaps one of the few shops with bay windows remaining in New York City.

Founded in the 1840s on the industries of oyster fishing and shipbuilding, Tottenville became the largest town on Staten Island's South Shore in the nineteenth century. This little shop represented the emerging commercial success of the town's Main Street. From 1892 to 1913, this served as George Cunningham's Butcher Shop. From 1913 to 1957, it was Benjamin Williams's Real Estate and Insurance Office. Their combined occupancy spanning 65 years documented Main Street's long-lasting commercial viability. The building currently serves as an office for a heating-supply company.

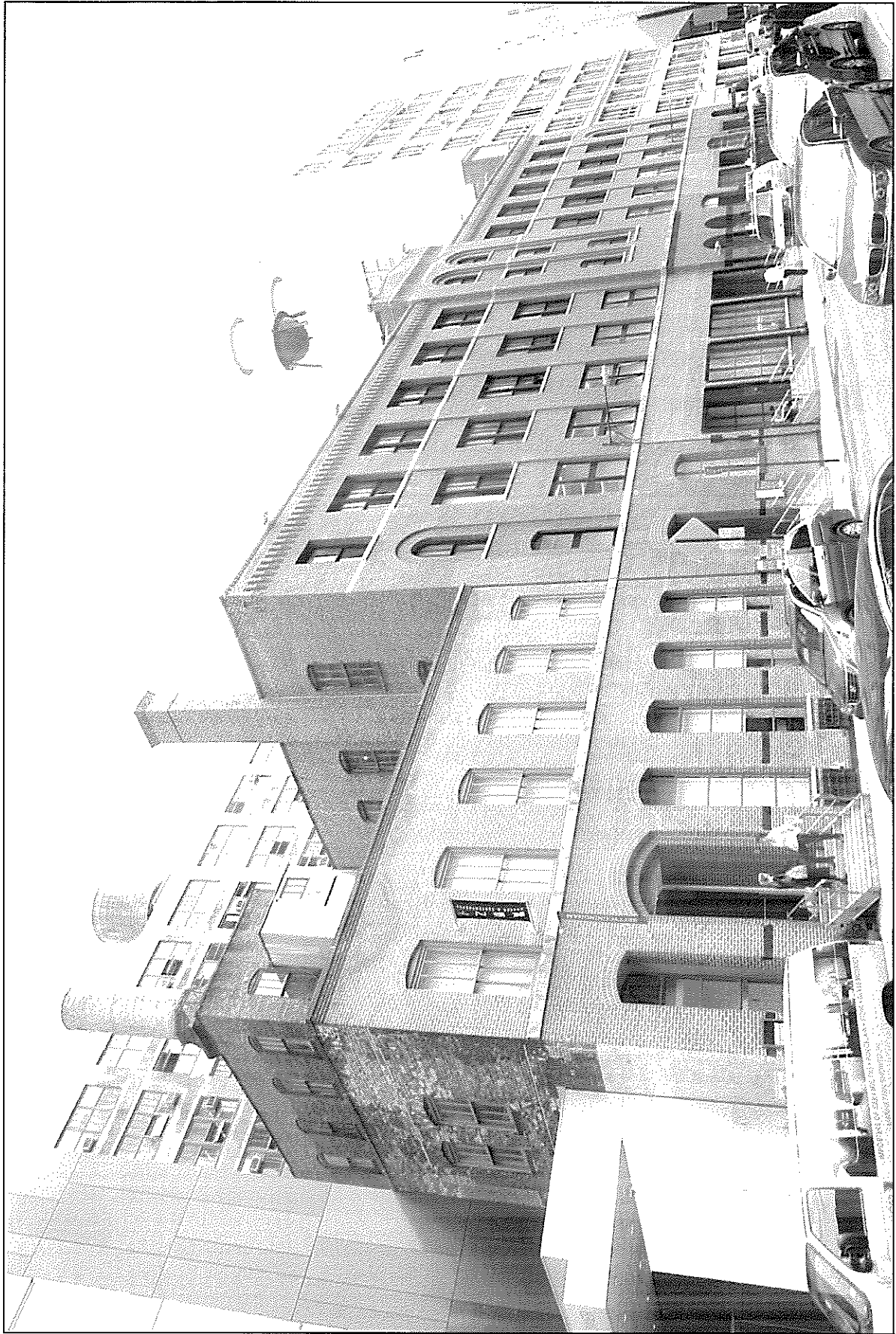
The Commission urges you to affirm the designation.



Latimer E. Jones Building
554 West 28th Street



548 West 28th Street



**Conley Foil Company Building
521-537 West 25th Street**



549 West 26th Street



H. Wolff Building
518 West 26th Street



Otis Elevator Company Building
260 Eleventh Avenue



Terminal Stores Building
261 Eleventh Avenue



Starrett-Lehigh Building
601-625 West 26th Street

THE NEW YORK
LANDMARKS
CONSERVANCY

October 2, 2008

**STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE
THE LANDMARKS SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE CITY COUNCIL REGARDING
THE DESIGNATION OF 173 MAIN STREET, STATEN ISLAND AS AN
INDIVIDUAL LANDMARK.**

Good morning Chair Lappin and members of the City Council. I am Andrea Goldwyn speaking on behalf of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Conservancy supports the designation of 173 Main Street, Staten Island as an individual landmark and urges this Subcommittee, the Land Use Committee and eventually the full City Council to affirm this designation.

173 Main Street in Tottenville, Staten Island, the former George Cunningham Store, was built in 1892 as a vernacular structure with the Queen Anne-style details that were typical in the late 19th century. The one-story commercial building conveys a particular charm as it has retained many of its original elements, including wooden clapboards and fish-scale shingles, an elaborate wooden gable end feature, and projecting storefront windows, supported by carved wooden brackets. Overall, it is a nicely preserved example of a vernacular commercial building, enlivened by well-crafted details.

Furthermore, the building recalls the 19th century history of Staten Island. Fueled by the oyster and shipbuilding industries, Tottenville was the largest town on Staten Island's South Shore when George Cunningham had his butcher shop at 173 Main. While much of Main Street's historic fabric has been lost to demolition and new development, 173 Main Street is an intact reminder of that previous era.

In conclusion, the Conservancy finds that 173 Main Street, Staten Island, the George Cunningham Store, possesses the "special character" required for a landmark designation, and supports its designation as an individual landmark. Thank you for the opportunity to present The New York Landmarks Conservancy's views.

*and as one
of a series of
recent
designations
on Staten Island*