Landmarks Preservation Commission
July 15, 2008, Designation List 404
LP- 2229

THE GEORGE CUNNINGHAM STORE, 173 Main Street, Staten Island;
Built c.1892.

Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island, Tax Map Block 8026, Lot 5

On April 10, 2007, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the George Cunningham Store and the proposed designation of its related Landmark Site (Item No.5). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were six speakers in favor of designation 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 and an email in support. No one spoke in opposition to designation.

<u>Summary</u>

The George Cunningham Store at 173 Main Street, Tottenville, built c. 1892, is a rare and intact vernacular commercial building in the Queen Anne style from a significant period of development for Tottenville and its downtown Main Street. 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.

In the 19th century, Tottenville became the largest town on Staten Island's South Shore. It was founded in the 1840s on the industries of oyster fishing and shipbuilding. The 1890s, when this shop was built, were an expansive era in Tottenville's history. On a prestigious residential block, the little shop represented the emerging commercial success of the town's Main Street. From 1892 to 1913, for 21 years, this was George G. Cunningham's Butcher Shop. From 1913 to 1957, for 44 years, it was Benjamin Williams's Real Estate and Insurance Office. Their combined occupancy spanning 65 years documented Main Street's long-lasting commercial viability.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Tottenville

Tottenville is located on the shore of the Arthur Kill near Ward's Point, the southwestern tip of Staten Island and the southernmost point in New York City and New York State. Far from the urban culture of Manhattan, Tottenville remains a small isolated village. Across the Arthur Kill lies the city of Perth Amboy, New Jersey. South of Ward's Point is Raritan Bay. The village of Tottenville came into being around 1840. Its economy and culture arose from oyster fishing, shipbuilding and ship repair, and agriculture. Its trade routes with New Jersey and New York City linked it to the metropolitan region and the greater world. It became the largest town in Westfield, the historic name for this quarter of Staten Island. Even today, though encroached upon by modern suburban culture, the feeling of a small coastal town prevails, with characteristics unlike any other place on Staten Island. Tottenville residents prize their isolated location.

Before There Was Tottenville

Long before Europeans arrived in the New World, Native Americans of the Lenni Lenape group of the Delaware Nation were attracted to the beauty of the elevated shoreline and the abundance of oysters growing in the Arthur Kill and Raritan Bay. Major archaeological evidence of their encampments and burial grounds has been found on Ward's Point. By 1670 the Lenape had sold their land to European colonists and had departed from Staten Island.

Christopher Billopp, an Englishman, was the first European to settle in the area. He arrived in New York harbor with Major Edmund Andros in 1674. Andros became the Royal Governor of New York and Billopp, an officer in the British navy, was commissioned Lieutenant. In 1677 Billopp laid claim to 932 acres on Staten Island, soon thereafter building an imposing two-story stone house on the shore overlooking Perth Amboy. In 1687 he was given a royal charter for 1600 acres (including the original 932 acres) and made Lord of the Manor of Bentley. The manor would include today's Tottenville, Richmond Valley, Pleasant Plains and part of Prince's Bay. Billopp owned slaves and as captain of the ship *Depthford* he was involved in the slave trade.[1] Although Billopp stayed on Staten Island only intermittently, his wife apparently lived in the manor house and improved his land for farming. His grandson Thomas Farmar, who changed his surname to Billopp, inherited the manor in 1732 and lived there full time. Thomas Farmar Billopp also owned slaves[2] Thomas's son Christopher Billopp (1732-1827) lived in the stone house through much of the American Revolution. During his ownership the house was plundered by both Hessian soldiers and American patriots and Christopher sought refuge in his father-in-law's house nearby. During one of these raids the patriots carried off Billopp's cattle, horses and a slave. Little else is known about the actual daily life of the manor. The Billopp House was the meeting place for the Peace Conference held on Sept. 11, 1776. John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Edward Rutledge met with Lord Howe. The conference was unsuccessful and the war continued. (Today the Billopp House, a designated New York City Landmark, is called the Conference House.) In 1782 Christopher Billopp began to sell large portions of the manor. Among the buyers were members of the Totten family. In 1783 Billopp left Staten Island.[3]

The Totten Family

John Totten (d. 1785), a weaver, was probably the first Totten to settle on Staten Island. In 1767 he purchased land on Prince's Bay from the executors of the estate of Thomas Billopp.[4] Gilbert Totten (ca. 1740-1819), John Totten's son, purchased four parcels in what would become

Tottenville. Gilbert was a farmer and according to the 1790 census owned five slaves. Gilbert and Mary Butler Totten, his wife, were among the founders of the Woodrow Methodist Church, the mother church of Methodism on Staten Island. Impressive Greek Revival style obelisks mark their graves in the church's cemetery.

Tottenville, the Town the Oyster Built

The creation and growth of Tottenville in the 1840s were fueled by the increasing demand for fresh oysters. As New York's population grew and oyster beds became depleted from over harvesting it was discovered that oyster "seed" (young oysters) could be brought from other locations in New York harbor, Long Island, and the Chesapeake Bay and "planted" in the waters off Staten Island. The brackish water of Prince's Bay and parts of the Raritan River and the Arthur Kill was ideal for growing oysters. The young oysters were allowed to grow for a year or more and harvested in the fall. The success of this systematic oyster "farming" fostered the growth of Staten Island's maritime industry. The first documented instance of oyster planting in New York harbor occurred in 1825 in Prince's Bay.[5] Mariners Harbor on the North Shore also grew at a swift pace through the 19th century because of the oyster industry.

Sandy Ground, the African American community in Westfield, came into being about 1850. By 1880 African American oystermen from Virginia and Maryland had located there. Tottenville also attracted black oystermen. The Cooley family from Virginia settled in Tottenville after Abraham Cole Totten, a mariner sailing regularly to the South, sold property to them. Other free black oystermen have recently been identified in an historic resources survey of Tottenville now underway.[6]

According to one local history, the name "Tottenville" may have been in use as early as 1832.[7] The Bethel Methodist Church, Tottenville's first church, was built in 1841 on land given by John Totten Sr.[8] The first printed reference to the name "Tottenville" is found on Butler's Map of 1853. This map shows an unnamed street, today's Main Street, with about 20 houses, and another 20 houses on what became Amboy Road.

Oystermen required ships and ship repair facilities and this industry became a dominant employer in the town, second only to the oyster industry itself. By the end of the 19th century there were at least eight shipbuilding or repair shops on the Arthur Kill in Tottenville.[9]

The further growth and diversification of Tottenville were assured in 1860 when it became the terminus of the Staten Island Railroad, which afforded access to Staten Island's North Shore and Manhattan. For many decades the Staten Island Railroad operated the ferryboat *Maid of Perth* to Perth Amboy. Several hotels/boarding houses were located in Tottenville on Main Street near Totten's Landing. By the 1880s Tottenville had entered the golden age of oyster fishing, as the following period source indicates:

> To arrive in Tottenville is to become sensible of the importance of the oyster. Anchored out in the Kill; made fast to the little wharves; under sail in the offing, white-hulled oyster sloops meet the eye on every side. Below the bluffs, the beach is lined with oyster floats, upon which the bivalves in the fall are taken to the fresher waters of New Jersey rivers to be fattened for the market; oyster shells are everywhere. The largest and most comfortable houses in and about the village, we are told, belong to oystermen, active and retired, whose modest fortunes have been raked from the great oyster-beds covering the bottom of the Lower Bay from Staten Island to Keyport. .... Here the oyster is king.[10]

A major new industry, Atlantic Terra Cotta, opened its factory in Tottenville in 1897. By 1906 it employed over 450 men. The Tottenville Copper Company, also a large employer, was

established in 1900. Later it became the Nassau Smelting Company.[11] The oyster industry, and shipbuilding and ship repair, continued into the 20th century.[12]

Oyster beds were declared unsafe due to water pollution. About 1915 "authorities found that some shipments from the bay were making people as far away as Chicago sick with typhoid fever and intestinal diseases.... New York dealers became reluctant to purchase oysters from the bay. The industry declined, and finally in 1925 oyster planters abandoned the bay amid much negative newspaper publicity about polluted oysters being sold."[13] The closing marked the end of an era.

The rise of the automobile brought suburban life and more change. The Outerbridge Crossing opened in 1928. The opening of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge in 1964 and the construction of interstate highways on Staten Island fostered rapid population growth on the South Shore. Tottenville, along with the rest of Staten Island has seen dramatic population growth.

History of Main Street

In 1834, when John Totten Jr. purchased a five and one-half acre waterfront property, he gained the "privilege of a road to and from the main public road," today's Amboy Road. In 1836 when his brothers James and William purchased a six-acre riverfront lot adjoining John's to the east there was a "right to pass" between the two properties to the main road. John Totten Jr. built Totten's Dock about 1837 and his brothers established a shipbuilding and repair facility on their property. The dock gave access to the waterways of the region, assuring the commercial success of Tottenville. With steamships to Manhattan stopping here and the ferry to Perth Amboy, the dock became the focus of the emerging town.[14]

The road leading from the dock to Amboy Road was for many years unnamed. By 1845 John Totten Jr. had divided his property into building lots and the new owners built houses facing this road.[15] By 1859 the road was called "Totten Street." The name Main Street appears intermittently in the 1880s and 1890s, and was finally made official in 1897.[16]

Main Street runs straight in a northwesterly direction from Amboy Road to the Arthur Kill. The street is divided by two cross streets creating three large blocks. The northern end, terminating at Totten's Dock, is known as lower Main Street. The town's first commercial area developed here. In the late 19th century the middle section of the street was dubbed "Quality Row" because of the large residences built there by elite members of the community. The Theodore F. and Elizabeth De Hart House at 134 Main Street (a designated New York City Landmark) and the Dr. Walker Washington House at 127 Main Street are located here. The southern end of the street is could be called upper Main Street. This area became predominately commercial in the first decades of the 20th century and remains so today.

Beginning in the 1960s, the historic character of the street was greatly compromised by the demolition of historic homes and the construction of town houses and insensitive commercial buildings, making the surviving and intact nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings rare reminders of Tottenville's historic development.

Commercial Development of Main Street

Tottenville's first commercial buildings were constructed on the east side of Main Street near Totten's Landing. Walling's Map, 1859, shows "E. J. Totten's Store" on the east side of Main Street and "L. S. Hopping's Store" on the west side. These pioneer buildings were demolished before 1900. The Staten Island Railroad, running from Vanderbilt's Landing in Clifton to Tottenville, was completed in 1860. Its Tottenville station was located on the east side of Main Street. Commercial buildings soon went up nearby, including stores, hotels and a bank.

By 1895 the east side of lower Main Street was one continuous commercial row. Some of these buildings are still standing, but greatly altered. In 1896, when the Staten Island Railroad moved its station and terminus to Bentley Street, the character of lower Main Street changed and its commercial viability declined.

By the 1870s a few commercial buildings had been built in this residential section of middle Main Street, which begins on the other side of Broadway (today's Arthur Kill Road). The 1874 atlas shows D. S. Decker's house and store at today's 145 Main Street. This store was right on the sidewalk. The owner lived in the house on the same lot. It was destroyed before 1917. The Pepper and Joline General Store, 180 Main Street, at the corner of what would become Arents Avenue, was in place by 1874. W. Wood's store and Post Office at today's 179 Main Street was on the opposite side of the same corner. In 1882 druggist Rinalder Fisher built 103 Main Street on the northeast corner of Main Street and Arthur Kill Road. This three-story brick building was the largest commercial building in Tottenville for many years. It still stands but its shop front has been disfigured.[17] The shop at 173 Main Street, the subject of this report, was built ca.1892 as a butcher shop for Georgenia and George Cunningham. The small shop was built in front of, but to the right of and not connected with, the residence already on the property. The commercial development of this section of Main Street continued through the 1920s. In 1895 Rinalder Fisher built 111 Main Street near his earlier building. It may have been used by the coal dealers, Cole Brothers, and was later acquired by them. In the 1940s Benjamin F. Bedell and Marie P. Bedell purchased the building for their grocery store and residence. They later purchased and resided in the Theodore F. and Elizabeth De Hart House at 134 Main Street, across the street from the store.[18]

Twentieth-century buildings on this section of Main Street were more monumental in scale. In 1915 the Tottenville National Bank purchased W. Wood's store at 179 Main Street and constructed a new building there designed by the architectural firm Slee and Bryson of Brooklyn. Built of limestone, this is the most impressive commercial building ever erected in Tottenville.[19] It still stands today and is a branch of the Richmond County Savings Bank. Organized in 1906, the Tottenville National Bank was originally located on lower Main Street. In 1922 New York City constructed the 123rd Police Precinct at 116 Main Street. This large limestone building was designed by Staten Island architect James Whitford. It still fulfills its original purpose.[20]

The development of upper Main Street started in 1909 when the Huguenot Masonic Lodge built their building, designed by Staten Island architects Charles Schmeiser and Charles U. Thrall, at 234-236 Main Street. For a time this building, which features handsome terra cotta decorations, housed the Post Office on its street floor.[21] Soon after 1915, at 190 Main Street, the Richmond County Federal Savings and Loan Association built a building designed by James Whitford. In the 1920s several large commercial buildings were constructed on both sides of Main Street near Amboy Road. "The Flats," a large three-story apartment building at 239-241 Main Street, went up around 1923 and the Stadium Theatre at 217 Main Street opened in 1927.[22] In the 20th century upper Main Street, together with Amboy Road nearby, became the primary commercial section of Tottenville. It flourished until the 1960s when several of its major stores moved to the shopping center on today's Page Avenue. The Staten Island Mall opened in 1973, further diminishing Main Street commerce.

Early Owners of 173 Main Street

On Feb. 11, 1892, Georgenia Cunningham (1854-1895), wife of George G. Cunningham (1850-1915), a butcher, purchased the William B. Butler property on the east side of Main Street.[23] The property, with a 58-foot frontage, included the Butler house (today's 169 Main Street). Soon after purchasing the property they built the butcher shop (today's 173 Main Street)

on the right side of the lot. A directory from 1893-94 lists Cunningham as the owner of a meat market on Main Street, Tottenville.[24]

George G. Cunningham was born in Northfield, Staten Island. His father, Charles Cunningham, was born in Scotland. His mother Elizabeth was born in New York State. Charles Cunningham is listed in the 1850 census as the proprietor of an "Oyster Saloon" in Northfield. Son George is one year old.[25] By 1860 George, aged 10, is living with Nicholas and Eliza Van Pelt in Northfield. Nicholas Van Pelt's vocation is "fancy D[ry] G[oods] store."[26] It appears that Charles Cunningham had died and that Elizabeth had married Nicholas Van Pelt.

By 1870 George, aged 20, is living in Tottenville with John and Malinda Sharrot. John Sharrot was a butcher.[27] George was in all likelihood apprenticed to Sharrot to learn the butcher trade. The John Sharrot home, located at 198 Main Street, is standing today. The small shop still standing in front of the house may be the original butcher shop, but this is not certain. It has not been determined when George established his own butchering business, nor when he married Georgenia. After her death George remarried around 1898, but by 1910 he is again a widower.[28] On Oct. 29, 1913, George Cunningham sold the Main Street house and shop. On the same day the land on which the shop stood was made a separate lot and sold to Benjamin Williams.[29]

Benjamin Williams, a successful Tottenville businessman, was born around 1871 in Newport, Kentucky. He attended schools in Cincinnati, Ohio, and New Brunswick, New Jersey, before settling on Staten Island ca. 1888.[30] His wife, Elizabeth, was born in Pennsylvania.[31] In the *Standard Directory of Richmond County, 1893-94,* his vocation is listed as "insurance," a business he practiced for the rest of his life. Subsequent directories also specify "real estate."

Precisely why he came to Tottenville is not known. His arrival in the late 1880s is indicative of Tottenville's growing prosperity and its attraction to professional businessmen. On Oct. 24, 1902, Williams purchased a lot at 73 Hopping Avenue.[32] He soon built a house and came to reside at this prestigious address. He may have done business at more than one address, for some Staten Island directories give office addresses both on Main Street and Arthur Kill Road.[33] He was a representative of the Insurance Company of North America for over 60 years. In 1906 Williams was one of the organizers of the Tottenville National Bank. He became vice president and later president of the bank board. He was treasurer of the Richmond County Savings and Loan Association and a member of the Chase Manhattan Bank advisory board when that bank took over the Tottenville bank in the 1950s.[34] Benjamin Williams died on December 29, 1957. In 1958 Williams's executor sold the shop at 173 Main Street to David Becker, who sold it two months later to the Roselli Fuel Company.[35]

The Design of 173 Main Street

Shop bay windows with supporting brackets were found on American commercial buildings in the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century. The bracketed bay window brought the display area into the street, capturing the attention of passersby. The Ayscough Gun Shop at Colonial Williamsburg, an original 18th-century building, has one small multi-paned bay window supported with simple structural brackets.[36] The Eltingville Store at Historic Richmond Town, built c. 1860 (a designated New York City Landmark) has one bay window supported by decorative brackets. This window is quite similar to the windows at 173 Main Street, except that it is multi-paned.

According to 1940 tax photographs, nearly all the commercial buildings on lower Main Street had bay windows, as had several buildings on middle Main Street. On lower Main Street, No. 77, c. 1860, survives, but greatly altered, its shop windows shorn off. On middle Main Street, No. 103 is standing but it too has lost its shop windows. No. 111, ca. 1895, has its bracketed shop windows enclosed in aluminum. Only 173 Main Street has its windows intact.

Middle Main Street stores built in the early twentieth century do not have bay windows. No. 169, built ca. 1910 on the north side of 173 Main Street, has wide plate glass windows, the center section canted in toward the central doorway. No. 175 on the south side, also built ca. 1910, had a similar design for its display windows.

Bay shop windows exist elsewhere on Staten Island's commercial streets. Several can be found intact today in Tompkinsville: 9-11 Corson Street and 53 Victory Boulevard, both built ca. 1880, have bracketed bay shop windows. In Clifton, 1253 Bay Street also survives, its bay windows in a fine state of preservation. These are three-story, three-bay commercial buildings.[37]

Gable end decoration similar to that of 173 Main Street is found on numerous Queen Anne style houses in Tottenville. The house at 236 Lee Avenue, built ca. 1894, has barge boards with a circle motif and spindles at the peak, as does 5301 Arthur Kill Road, built ca. 1896. Ready-made gable decoration could be ordered from catalogs such as that published by Blumer & Kuhn Stair Co., Chicago, 1893.[38] Although 173 Main Street is much smaller than a typical Queen Anne residence, its fish-scale clad gable, robust barge boards and elaborate spindle decoration justify its being described as a Queen Anne shop.

The designer or builder of 173 Main Street has not been documented. Documentation may eventually come to light about the many carpenters practicing in Tottenville: Sixteen Tottenville carpenters are listed in the *Standard Directory of Richmond County, 1893-94*. The George Cunningham Store with its bracketed bay windows and Queen Anne style decorated gable remains a rare, intact example of Tottenville's late-nineteenth century commercial architecture.

Description

The George Cunningham Store at 173 Main Street is a small, three-bay, one-story commercial building composed as a single rectangular block. The end of its gable roof faces the street. The brick foundation has four courses above ground. The foundation stands about 18 inches away from the property line with the bay windows extending out to the property line. The brick entrance steps of two risers with shallow stoop extend part way into a modern concrete sidewalk. The stoop has a modern iron railing. There are no landscape features.

The front façade is composed of a central door with a bracketed bay window on either side. Each bay window projects beyond the façade about 20 inches, supported by a pair of heavy brackets. The sides of the bay window are slightly canted inward. The total width of the central portion of each window is 49 inches. The hipped convex roofs of the bay windows are covered with non-historic material. The central window of each bay has one sheet of glass. The sides are divided by a center muntin, creating a one-over-one sash. Above these windows are transom windows now filled with plywood. (Earlier photographs show that the transoms were composed of small, multi-paned squares.) The brackets supporting the bay windows have ogee curves whose carved rays reach toward the edge. The brackets are canted inward echoing the side windows above. The windowsills are covered with aluminum. The wall beneath each bay window has two recessed rectangular panels.

The doorway is marked by slender fluted pilasters five and one-half inches wide with plain rectangular bases and capitals. The thin cornice is undecorated. The transom is filled with plywood. A non-historic aluminum storm door hides the inner door, which is also non-historic.

The attic wall of the gable end is covered with fish-scale shaped wood shingles. The lower edge flares outward slightly. A small square multi-paned window lights the attic. Cutwork barge boards and a scroll with a series of cutout circles decorate the edge of the roof and the peak is screened with multiple turned spindles.

The northern elevation. The clapboard on the wall has a four and one-half inch exposure. There is one window near the front. A door near the back is filled with plywood. There are no visible gutters. The roof is clad in non-historic shingles.

The southern elevation. The clapboard wall has one window near the front. The window surround is plain, as is the sill. A drip board is on top. The window is filled with plywood and an air conditioner is mounted at the top of the window opening. There is no door on this elevation.

The east elevation (rear) is not visible.

Report researched and written by
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Many thanks to Linda Cutler Hauck, President of the Tottenville Historical Society, who gave much assistance in the preparation of this report.

NOTES

[1] William T. Davis, *The Conference or Billopp House: Staten Island New York* (Lancaster, Pennsylvania: Science Press Printing Company, 1926). Billopps' will states: "and further it is my will that Negores should go and be to the use of such as by this my will shall come to inherit my said premises of Bentley. . ." Davis, 94. Davis, 73, recounts the *Depthford* seizing the *Providence* carrying two hundred seventeen enslaved Angolans and selling them at St. Christopher's, Monserrat and New York City.

[2] Davis, 119.

[3] "Conference House: A History of the Billop House of Staten Island," by J[ackie] Haley, NYC Parks Department Museum Consultant. This unpublished, undated (ca. 2005) manuscript in the possession of Barnett Shepherd provides much information about the Billopps.

[4]For Totten's purchase of the property see: Richmond County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber D, p. 584. A formal history of the Totten family of Staten Island has not been written. Several unpublished papers on the Totten family are in vertical files at the Staten Island Historical Society. Three published sources provided information. Charles W. Leng and William T. Davis, *Staten Island and Its People: A History, 1609-1929*, v. 3 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1930), 14, provides concise information. Rosemary Fitzgerald, "Artist John Bradley and the Totten Portraits," *Staten Island Historian*, (January 1971), 42-44, is more comprehensive. Marjorie Scribner Wilcox, *The Tottens of America*, (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, Inc., 1994), is a recent study of a midwestern branch of the Totten family. She states that Silas Totten, who settled on Long Island from England, was the father of Gilbert Totten.

[5]Clyde L. MacKenzie Jr., *The Fisheries of Raritan Bay* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 38.

[6]Barnett Shepherd, "How Sandy Ground Began and Flourished," in Lois A. H. Mosley, *Sandy Ground Memories* (Staten Island: Staten Island Historical Society, 2003), 15-33. A photograph of the Cooley House is in the Staten Island Historical Society photography file for Tottenville Residences, Box 4.

[7]Leng and Davis, v. 3, 14.

[8]The church was a social as well as a religious center. In 1852 one of their "famous oyster suppers" netted $275.10. A. Y. Hubbell, *The History of Methodism and the Methodist Churches of Staten Island* (New York: Richmond Pub. Co., 1898), 62.

[9]The first of these, Butler and Sleight's Shipyard, located near today's Ward's Point, may have begun operation as early as 1833 when the land was purchased by Daniel Butler, Richmond County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber V, p. 349. William Totten's shipyard next to Totten's Landing probably began operation soon after he and his brother James purchased their waterfront site in 1836, Richmond County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 2, p. 157. The William H. and James M. Rutan Shipyard began about 1847 Richmond County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 16, p.466. (The site of the Rutan Shipyard adjoins the Henry H. Biddle House, a designated New York City Landmark.) Richard M. Bayles, *History of Richmond County, (Staten Island) New York, From Its Discovery to the Present Time* (New York: L. E. Preston & Co., 1887), 703.

[10]*Picturesque Staten Island, Gateway to New York Harbor In Pen and Pencil* (1886), 30.

[11]Charles L. Sachs, *Made on Staten Island: Agriculture, Industry, and Suburban Living in the City* (Staten Island: Staten Island Historical Society, 1988), 71 and 99.

[12]Mark Kurlansky, *The Big Oyster, History on the Half Shell* (New York: Random House, 2006), 244, tells the story of the decline of the oyster industry.

[13]MacKenzie, 148.

[14]The history of Tottenville and its buildings is documented in a book by Barnett Shepherd scheduled for publication in fall 2008. *Tottenville: the Town the Oyster Built, A Staten Island Community, Its People, Industry and Architecture* (Staten Island: Preservation League of Staten Island and the Tottenville Historical Society).

[15]A reference to John Totten Jr.'s land development is found in Richmond County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 21, p. 426.

[16]A copy of a letter from the village fathers, making Main Street the official name, appears in "Our Fathers Have Told Us: Tottenville, Facts and Traditions Told by Lovers of Their Home Town," 1935, 20, unpublished manuscript in Tottenville Public Library.

[17] Richmond County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 144, p. 177; *The Staten Island Business Register and Railroad and Steamboat Guide for 1879-80*, 58 reads: "Agents, Insurance: Fisher Rinalder, agent for Home Phenix, Hanover and New York City Insurance Companies," and ""Durggists: Fish Rinalder," and, 59 "Notary Public: Fisher Finalder"; Beers' Atlas, 1887, Section K, reads "R Fisher with two buildings on the lot, one is facing Main Street and the other Arthur Kill Road.

[18] Richmond County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 144, p. 177; Sanborn Atlas, 1898, plate 23, reads "Cole Bros, with footprint of the building and "66" as Main Street number; *The Standard Directory of Richmond County*, 1893-94, 252 reads: "Cole Jacob W., (Cole Bros) lumber Riverside av. R[ichmond] V[alley]; Tottpo," and "Cole J. W., broker, Johnson av. Tott." For Bedell ownership, see: Richmond County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 1286, p. 78.

[19] New York City Department of Buildings, Borough of Richmond New Buildings Docket Book for 1914, item 993, December 18.

[20] Leng and Davis, v. 5, 96; *Staten Island Architectural Drawings* (New York: Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences and Staten Island Historical Society, 1980); "James Whitford Sr." *New York Times* (September 11, 1945), 27.

[21] New York City Department of Buildings, Borough of Richmond New Buildings Docket Book for 1909, item 245, May 17.

[22] For 239-241 Main Street see: New York City Department of Buildings, Borough of Richmond microfiche of original plans dated May 30, 1923.

[23] Richmond County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 220, p. 306.

[24]*The Standard Directory of Richmond County, 1893-94*, 252, reads: "Cunningham George G., meat market, Main St Tottenville."

[25]*Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850,* New York, Richmond County, Northfield, 173.

[26]*Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1860,* New York, Richmond County, Northfield, p. 336.

[27]*Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870,* New York, Richmond County, Westfield, 11.

[28]*Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1910,* New York, Richmond County, Westfield, Sheet 7B.

[29]Richmond County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 436, p. 206.

[30]Obituary, *Staten Island Advance,* December 30, 1957, n.p. Benjamin Williams's father was born in Virginia and his mother in Louisiana.

[31]*Population Schedules of the Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1930,* New York, Richmond County, Westfield, Sheet 1A.

[32]Richmond County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 293, p. 359.

[33]*Industries of Staten Island Before Consolidation,* 1898, p. 75, list Benjamin's vocation as real estate and insurance. *A Souvenir of Masonic Fair For the Building Fund of Huguenot Lodge,* Oct. 10-14, 1905, gives his business address as 173 Main Street. *The Standard Directory for Richmond Borough,* 1906, 345, says real estate with business at 62 Broadway. This address would be today's 5418 Arthur Kill Road, which Williams leased in 1906, Richmond County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 314, p. 220. *The Richmond Borough Directory,* 1912, 306, reads "real estate and insurance" with offices also on Broadway and home at 73 Hopping Avenue.

[34]Williams obituary, *Staten Island Advance.*

[35]Richmond County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 1446, p. 223.

[36]*An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape,* edited by Carl R. Lounsbury, (University Press of Virginia, 1994), 41-42.

[37]Bay windows in residential buildings seldom have brackets but are supported from the foundation. They extend the living space of the house and afford expanded views of the landscape. In the early 19th century, bay windows are found in the picturesque designs of A. J. Davis and Andrew Jackson Downing. Two-story bays were standard components of the Queen Anne style from the 1880s through the 1910s. *Palliser's Model Homes,* 1878, promoted their use. A rare design found in *Palliser's New Cottage Homes* (1887) shows bracketed bay windows on the second floor. *Palliser's New Cottage Homes and Details, Containing Nearly Two Hundred & Fifty New & Original Designs....* New York: Palliser, Palliser & Co., 24 East Forty-Second Street, 1887, Plate 40.

[38]*Blumer & Kuhn Stair Co., Wholesale Manufacturers of Stairs, Stair Railings, Balusters, Newel Posts, Mantels....St. Louis, Mo.* Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, 1893. Pages 68-69 illustrate "Gable Finish, Made any size or pitch."

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 the George Cunningham Store 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, the George Cunningham Store is a rare and intact vernacular commercial building in the Queen Anne style and that it dates to a significant period of development for Tottenville and its downtown Main Street; that its robust bay windows with decorative brackets are rare survivors of a once popular feature of early American commercial architecture; that the building features a distinctive decorated gable end that gives this small one-story building great presence; that 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; that in the nineteenth century Tottenville became the largest town on Staten Island's South Shore and that it was founded in the 1840s on the industries of oyster fishing and shipbuilding; that the 1890s, when this store was built, was an expansive era in Tottenville's history; that on a prestigious residential block, the small shop represented the emerging commercial success of the town's Main Street; that for 21 years, this was George C. Cunningham's Butcher Shop and that for 44 years it was Benjamin Williams's Real Estate and Insurance Office; that their combined occupancy spanning 65 years documented Main Street's long-lasting commercial viability.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provision of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 24 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the George Cunningham Store, 173 Main Street, Borough of Staten Island and designates Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 8026, Lot 5 as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Stephen F. Byrns, Diana Chapin, Christopher Moore,
Margery Perlmutter, Roberta Washington. Commissioners

THE GEORGE CUNNINGHAM STORE
173 Main Street, Staten Island
Borough of Staten Island, Tax Map Block 8026, Lot 5
Photo: Barnett Shepherd

Bargeboard and bracket detail
THE GEORGE CUNNINGHAM STORE
173 Main Street, Staten Island
Photos: Barnett Shepherd

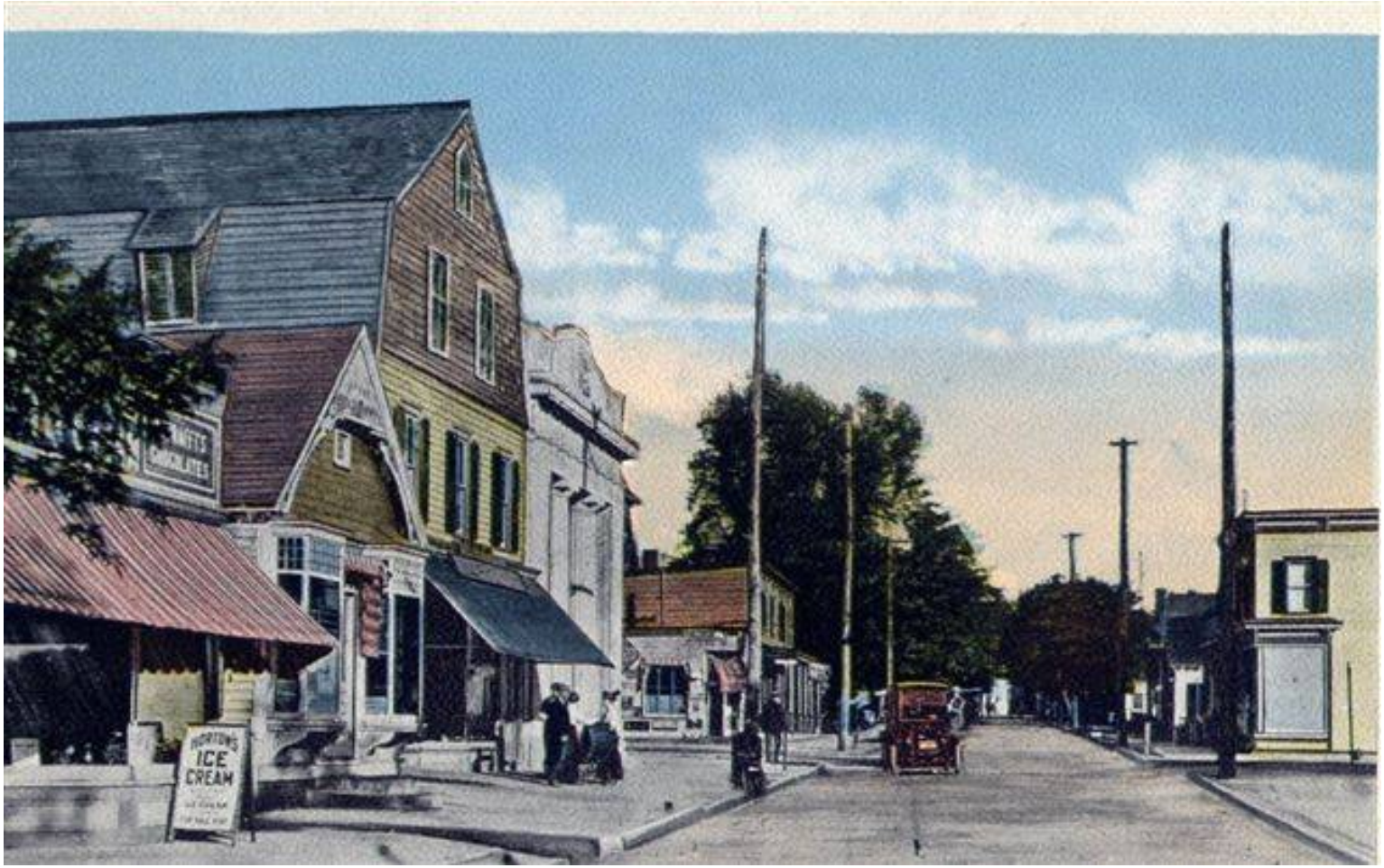
THE GEORGE CUNNINGHAM STORE
173 Main Street, Staten Island
Photos: Barnett Shepherd

Doorway detail

Panels below window

THE GEORGE CUNNINGHAM STORE
173 Main Street, Staten Island
Photo: Barnett Shepherd

THE GEORGE CUNNINGHAM STORE
173 Main Street, Staten Island
Photo: New York City
Department of Taxation, c. 1940



Main Street Post Card, c.1915, Tottenville Historical Society

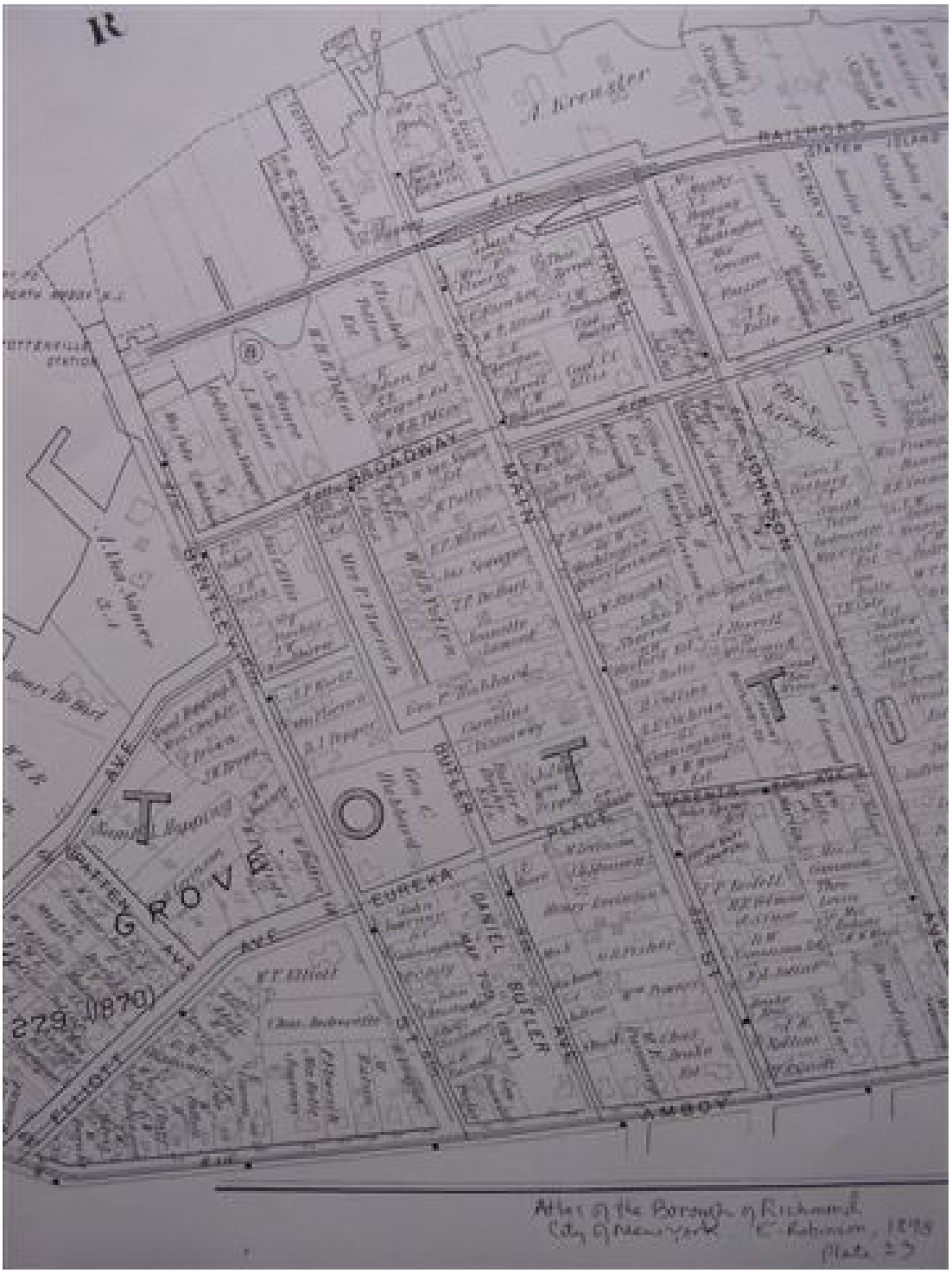
(Buildings from left to right)

169 Main Street, built c. 1910, Horton's Ice Cream Depot

173 Main Street, built c. 1892, Benjamin Williams Real Estate Office

175 Main Street, built c. 1908, Benjamin D. Brown Hardware Store

179 Main Street, b. 1915, Tottenville National Bank



THE GEORGE CUNNINGHAM STORE
173 Main Street, Staten Island
Atlas of the Borough of Richmond, City of New York
E. Robinson, 1891, Plate 23

"Lower Main Street, Tottenville"
Oil on canvas by Edith Dow, 1982
Copy of Chester Graham's painting, c. 1900
Collection of Diane Schaming, Tottenville

THE GEORGE CUNNINGHAM STORE (LP-2229), 173 Main Street.
Borough of Staten Island, Tax Map Block 8026, Lot 5.

Designated: July 15, 2008

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