



PROPOSED EAST VILLAGE/LOWER EAST SIDE HISTORIC DISTRICT BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

The proposed East Village/Lower East Side Historic District consists of approximately 330 buildings located along Second Avenue and the adjacent side streets between East 2nd and East 7th Streets.

Development of the neighborhood began in earnest during the 1830s with the construction of scores of elegant single-family row houses and the attendant institutional facilities.

By the 1850s immigrants from Germany and Ireland began to settle in the area as wealthier residents moved farther uptown. Many of the row houses were converted for multiple-family dwellings and boarding houses, and eventually new purpose-built tenements began to slowly replace the older building stock to such an extent that the neighborhood is now characterized primarily by these larger five- and six-story buildings.

The tenements within the proposed district represent a range of styles and were designed according to an evolving set of building codes, including notable examples of pre-law Italianate and Neo-Grec buildings, old-law Queen Anne and Renaissance Revival structures, as well as a few new-law Beaux Arts tenements.

In addition to these residential buildings, the proposed district contains a number of institutional and commercial buildings that deepen the understanding of the area's history as an immigrant neighborhood. The German Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Mark's and the Turnverein Halle both speak to the rise of the *Kleindeutschland* German community during the mid and late 19th century, while St. Stanislaus Church and Congregation Adas Yisroel Anshe Meseritz indicate the later arrival of people from Eastern Europe to the neighborhood. Second Avenue in particular was the focus of the area's vibrant Jewish community and was known as the "Yiddish Rialto" for the number of Yiddish-language theaters erected along its lower lengths.

The neighborhood underwent another demographic shift in the mid twentieth century as some of the existing Eastern European inhabitants moved to other neighborhoods within the city. After World War II, the ethnic makeup of the Lower East Side changed again becoming dominated by Latin American immigrants. The community named itself Losaida to symbolize the second

generation Hispanic roots that had developed in the context of the African-American and Latino movements for social justice, equality and identity. The removal of the Third Avenue elevated line in 1955 increased the residential and cultural desirability of the neighborhood and drew new residents eastward from Greenwich Village, leading realtors to rename the area the East Village.

As Yiddish theater declined with the dispersal of the Eastern European community, the neighborhood gave rise in to new cultural institutions. “Off-Broadway” and “Off-Off-Broadway” theater had its beginnings in the area in the 1950s, and on East 4th Street the La Mama Experimental Theatre Club occupied the former social hall *Aschenbroedel Verein* as a theater and later took over another social hall the *Turnverein Halle* for its annex. The Commodore Theatre—once the largest and most important movie house in the area—was turned into the noted rock-and-roll venue Fillmore East.

The neighborhood has a rich history of social activism tied to its buildings, ranging from the late-19th- and early-20th-century use of the *Aschenbroedel Verein* as a social hall for dances, weddings, and mass meetings, to the successful campaign against Robert Moses’s mid-20th-century plan to clear several blocks in the area. The Cooper Square Committee was formed in 1959 to oppose the Title I slum clearance plan that would have demolished the existing buildings on the blocks between East Houston Street, the Bowery, St. Mark’s Place, and Second Avenue. The Committee’s alternative plan, which was adopted, minimized displacement, called for staged development, gave priority to existing tenants, and resulted in the rehabilitation, rather than the demolition, of over 300 buildings, including this row on the north side of East 4th Street.

The East Village Study Area contains a significant concentration of 19th century residential buildings. The intact streetscapes of five- and six-story tenement buildings, along with the earlier row houses and related institutional buildings, help tell the story of immigrant life in 19th- and 20th-century Manhattan and give the neighborhood a distinct sense of place.