

Victorian Society Testimony for September 9, 2025: 2 Hylan Boulevard - Alice Austen House (LPC-25-06304); 426 Clermont Avenue (LPC-25-12671); 392 West Broadway (LPC-26-00814); 208 West 10th Street (LPC-25-12746)

Approximate time: 10:00; join Zoom by: 9:30

LPC-25-06304 -- 2 Hylan Boulevard - Alice Austen House - Individual Landmark, Staten Island

Good morning commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. The brief but poetic designation report for the Alice Austen House states: "Situated in beautifully landscaped grounds, this charming house...was a showplace on Staten Island in the second half of the nineteenth century. From Alice Austen's artistic photographic record made during the 1880s and 1890s, we can see the undeniable beauty of the house in its setting, which leaves the viewer with a deep impression of architectural romanticism, beguiling enchantment and a nostalgia for this Victorian world."

We ask: how is it possible, in an important historic setting and with the availability of Austen's photographs, that not a single historic image is included in this presentation? How can you as commissioners make a valid finding of appropriateness, without this information? You cannot.

What we do know is that this picturesque, Gothic Revival house is set in a picturesque, rural landscape overlooking the water. We can compare the existing and proposed site plans and see that the landscape would become less rural, more formal, and more paved. A great deal of both soft and hard pavement is being added, often in a geometric, anti-picturesque manner. There are no clear illustrations or examples of what these pavements are or how they will look. Formal plantings are being moved closer to the house. This all seems inappropriate to the picturesque and rural character of the Gothic Revival house and grounds.

The new ADA access walk appears to include a stock neo-Colonial style railing of unspecified material. Is it plastic? The railing is a heavy-handed addition, stylistically inappropriate to the house. For most of its length a fall protection guardrail isn't needed; a handrail would be sufficient. If the steps at the end were reconfigured and the grade slightly altered, a handrail alone might suffice for its whole length. The design should reflect the picturesque style of the house and should be painted wood, as the Commission typically requires at historic houses.

A comparison with the approach being taken at the National Trust's Lyndhurst historic site is enlightening. Lyndhurst is a similarly picturesque landmark house in a rural, landscaped

setting overlooking the water. Its landscape is being restored based on historic site plans, photographs, and even archaeological evidence. Necessary new features are designed in compatible styles and materials. This supports and even enhances the house's historic setting. We should expect no less from the stewards of this city-owned historic house.

Approved 7-0 (Goldblum recused); work with staff on railing details to possibly lighten.

Approximate time: 10:50; join Zoom by: 9:50

LPC-25-12671 -- 426 Clermont Avenue - Fort Greene Historic District, Brooklyn

Good morning commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York.

The Victorian Society has no objection to this proposal to install HVAC equipment, screening, and railings at 426 Clermont Avenue. However, we believe that there is a basic flaw in the façade design of this visible rear yard addition which must be addressed.

The rear facades of 19th century rowhouses normally have a unified pattern of double-hung windows of a similar width on each floor. They aligned vertically. If the original architect chose to use one-over-one windows, they were all one-over-one. Typically, only the height varied, with taller windows on the parlor floor and shorter windows on the top floor. The windows on the primary façade of 426 Clermont follow this pattern of varying heights.

The visible top two floors of the rear of 426 Clermont retain their historic window openings, with three, one-over-one windows which align on each floor. The proposed design would break the pattern, introducing wider multi-light casements with hopper windows at the second floor. The result, which will be seen from Adelphi Street, will be a rear façade with a hodge-podge of windows.

This proposal will seriously diminish the unity of the rear “donut.” It should not be allowed. We urge denial of this portion of the application.

Approved 8-0; applicant to work with staff to ensure a harmonious relationship between the existing and proposed windows.

lunch

Approximate time: 2:00; join Zoom by: 1:00

LPC-26-00814 -- 392 West Broadway - SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension, Manhattan

Good afternoon commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York.

The applicant has provided a photo taken in 2009 showing the existing painted wall sign “7 For All Mankind” was in place when the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension was designated. It’s therefore grandfathered, but, as the Rules clearly state, when grandfathered items are removed or significantly altered, they lose their protected status.

We do not feel that it’s an undue burden to require that any new painted wall sign in this location follow the Commission’s Rules. These include providing the sign with a black or white solid painted border at least two inches wide; setting the sign back from the primary façade a minimum of three feet; and installing a sign which will occupy no more than twenty percent of the visible wall area.

The proposal meets none of these requirements. The most serious deviation is the size of the sign. This sign would cover twice the area the Rules allow.

This sign must not be approved. The applicant should work with staff on a design that meets the Rules, which can receive a staff level permit.

Finally, we maintain our previously stated opinion that photo-realistic wall signs are incompatible with the overall character of districts where 19th century buildings are predominant. From the distance at which they’re viewed, the claimed “painterly quality” is not evident.

Approved 8-0, but sign must comply with rules for size, setbacks of 3 feet from front façade and two feet from roof, and must have a border.

Approximate time: 2:20; join Zoom by: 1:20

LPC-25-12746 -- 208 West 10th Street - Greenwich Village Historic District, Manhattan

Good afternoon commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. We object to the proposed changes to 208 W 10th St. This proposal would alter the original ground floor facade of the building and change the curb view from a historical apartment frontage to a commercial storefront. We view the destruction of so much historic material as inappropriate and unnecessary.

If a storefront is indeed needed, it could be done by lowering the sill of one of the windows to create a door. The other windows could be modified within the existing openings to create small show windows, or they could be lowered as well. It would also be best to have a center door with a show window on either side. Having a new door to the store right next to the residential entrance doesn't work well, visually. Also, it isn't necessary to drop the windows below the existing stone base of the building, which can be left as-is, except at the door. As the ground floor wasn't originally symmetrical, there's no reason for a new storefront to match the existing one.

Ultimately, If there is a practical reason for this change, then there are certainly ways to do it which preserve more historic material and honor the original historic residential ground floor facade.

No action; clarify presentation and consider redesign.