

GERMAN-AMERICAN SHOOTING SOCIETY CLUBHOUSE, 12 St. Mark's Place, Manhattan. Built 1888-89; William C. Frohne, arch.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 463, Lot 15.

On April 24, 2001, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No.2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witness spoke in favor of designation, including a representative from the Historic Districts Council. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Commission has received several letters in favor of designation, including one from the owner and one from the Friends of Terra Cotta.

Summary

Designed by William C. Frohne and constructed in 1888-89, the German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse (Deutsche-Amerikanische Schützen Gesellschaft) is a rare, intact reminder of the important German immigrant community that formed the majority population of Manhattan's Lower East Side during much of the nineteenth century. Beginning in the 1840s, this area became known as *Kleindeutschland* or Little Germany. The newcomers organized a variety of German institutions for mutual support, such as churches, benevolent societies, small industries, saloons, beer halls, theaters, social clubs, and shooting societies. Shooting clubs and militias served a social function and were primarily dedicated to target practice and marksmanship. The German-American Shooting Society's Clubhouse was the headquarters for twenty-four shooting companies, and helped continue the community's bond with *Kleindeutschland*, even after many German-Americans began to move out of their original neighborhood, to Yorkville and beyond, toward the end of the century. The exuberant German Renaissance revival style of the Clubhouse, with its flamboyant ornament, is unusual in New York and provided the original occupants of this building with a strong visual connection to their homeland. The building's steep mansard roof with tall, ornate dormers and its prominent, fourth-story, terra-cotta relief sculpture depicting a target and rifles are quite distinctive and serve as enduring evidence of the once-numerous German population of this neighborhood.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Kleindeutschland¹

From its founding in 1626 by Peter Minuit, a native of the German town of Wesel am Rhein, New York City has had a significant German population. During the 1820s, the first German neighborhood and commercial center developed in the area southeast of City Hall Park and by 1840 more than 24,000 Germans lived in the city. During the next twenty years, their numbers increased dramatically as “mass transatlantic migration brought another hundred thousand Germans fleeing land shortages, unemployment, famine, and political and religious oppression.”² To accommodate this growth, a new German neighborhood developed east of the Bowery and north of Division Street, which became known as *Kleindeutschland*, Little Germany, Dutchtown, or *Deutschlandle*. Dislocations caused by growth of the German Empire brought 70,000 new immigrants to the area in the mid-nineteenth century while thousands of American-born children of German immigrants established their own homes in the neighborhood. By 1880, the German-speaking population of *Kleindeutschland* exceeded 250,000, making up approximately one-quarter of the city’s population, and the neighborhood’s boundaries had expanded north to 18th Street and east to the East River. *Kleindeutschland* was “the first large immigrant neighborhood in American history that spoke a foreign language,” and remained the major German-American center in the United States for the rest of the century.³ This was true despite the fact that toward the end of the nineteenth century, German neighborhoods began to be established across the East River in Williamsburg and Bushwick, and across the Hudson River in Hoboken, New Jersey. Other large German settlements were started in Yorkville, around Third Avenue and 86th Street, and at Steinway, in Queens.

German Immigrant Life and Clubs⁴

The contributions of German immigrants and their descendants had a widespread impact on New York in fields such as religion, politics, business, labor, publishing, the arts, and philanthropy. Newcomers usually settled in neighborhoods where others from their home country lived, to provide mutual support, as well as economic and social opportunities. Most of *Kleindeutschland*’s new residents started by working in neighborhood factories and shops in what came to be regarded as German trades – as tailors, bakers, grocers, shoemakers, brewers, cigar makers, piano and furniture makers, and dressmakers. They worshiped in German-speaking churches and synagogues, took part in

benevolent, fraternal, and mutual aid societies like the *Harugari*, *Vereineigte*, *Deutscher Bruder*, the German Society of New York, *Landmannschaften*, and *B’nai B’rith*, and created their own banking and insurance companies such as the German-American Bank, and the Germania Life-Insurance Company (later the Guardian Life Insurance Company). They formed numerous political associations, such as the Workers’ League and the Socialist Labor Party, as well as the American Federation of Labor. Several publishing houses and newspapers were owned by German New Yorkers, including the popular and influential *Staats-Zeitung*.

In 1883-84, two of the more successful German immigrants, Anna and Otto Ottendorfer, provided the land and resources to build a library and a free medical clinic to serve the neighborhood. The Ottendorfer Branch of the New York Public Library and the Stuyvesant Polyclinic (German Dispensary), (both designated New York City Landmarks) on Second Avenue provided help for both the mind and the body of local residents.⁵

Kleindeutschland’s thousands of beer halls, saloons, wine gardens, concert halls, and clubhouses formed the heart of German-American social life. These establishments provided immigrants with an escape from the harsh living conditions of the Lower East Side’s tenements, and were generally lively gathering places where the people could listen to music, dance, drink beer, or watch theatrical performances. As these halls grew more numerous, they became increasingly specialized and gave way to the organization of social clubs:

...Saloons often catered to specialized clienteles, residents of a local neighborhood, workers in a particular trade, immigrants from a particular locality in Germany, church members, or political radicals. They provided meeting rooms for *Vereine* whose meetings brought in a steady flow of customers- who came in early and had some beer or wine, drank steadily through the meeting, and then stayed on to socialize and drink with friends after the meeting ended. Some of the more popular *Lokale*, like Hillenbrand’s on Hester Street, the Concordia on Avenue A, and the Germania on the Bowery, grew into larger conglomerations of meeting halls, bars, ballrooms, billiard rooms, and bowling alleys. Some of the larger *Vereine*, like the Social reformers, the Turners, and the shooting associations opened their own meeting

quarters with similar facilities. Between the many *Lokale* and the large meeting halls, the number of organizations that could meet at once in Kleindeutschland was phenomenal, but the Germans must have met the challenge as few halls failed to prosper- or at least survive.⁶

These gathering places and organizations provided immigrants with ways to sustain German regional ties in the United States, meet people with common interests, and create a more pleasant environment to counteract the obstacles that they experienced in their daily lives.

The German-American Shooting Society and Its Clubhouse⁷

While German-American militia companies first appeared in the 1830s, their rise in popularity in the late 1840s and early 1850s can be attributed to the immigrants' support of the German revolutions of 1848, combined with strong concern about nativist violence in New York. In 1853, 28 percent of militia members in New York City were German-American. At the peak of the militia companies' popularity in the late 1850s, "every conceivable group in Kleindeutschland appeared to have discovered the social possibilities of having its own Guard,"⁸ with most companies specializing in beer drinking and partying. Although many companies served with honors during the Civil War, the shooting clubs became less popular after this time, possibly due to the violence confronted in real battles.

By the 1880s shooting became a middle class pastime, and most halls had moved to the suburbs along with many residents of *Kleindeutschland*. However, the German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse remained an important link to the old neighborhood despite the migration. It served as a headquarters for meetings for twenty-four such groups, and was the site of fund-raisers for the construction of rifle ranges and travel to Germany for international shooting contests. While there was a small shooting gallery in the basement of this building, the numerous companies in the metropolitan area, including the Germania Schützen Bund, Independent Schützen Corps, and the Brooklyn Rifle Club competed at Creedmoor, a vast rifle range in Queens Village (the present site of Creedmoor Psychiatric Center), as well as at another rifle range in Ridgewood, Queens.

The completion of the construction of the Society's clubhouse in 1888 was celebrated with a spirited opening night:

The German-American Shooting Society, an organization of about 1,400 members,

dedicated its new hall and headquarters in St. Mark's Place last evening. For years the society has been striving for this consummation. Its 24 companies had previously met in the Germania Assembly Rooms in the Bowery. Last evening they gathered together there for the last time and marched in a body, escorted by several sister societies, to their new headquarters...The entire building was handsomely draped and festooned with the national colors of Germany and America and with fancy banners [*sic*].⁹

In addition to the basement-level shooting gallery, the new Shooting Society clubhouse contained a bowling alley (also in the basement), a saloon, a large restaurant, and an assembly room on the first floor, company and lodge rooms on the second, third, with fourth floors, and a top floor apartment for the caretaker.

St. Mark's Place¹⁰

St. Mark's Place, where the German-American Shooting Club is located, was an upscale residential area in the early 19th century, dominated by Greek Revival and Federal style town houses. Of these original homes, only No. 20 St. Mark's Place, the Daniel Leroy House (1832, a designated New York City Landmark), and No. 7 St. Mark's Place survive. By the 1850s, "at least three of the private homes on the block had become commercial boarding houses. With the completion of Cooper Union across Third Avenue from St. Mark's Place in 1853-59, the neighborhood developed an institutional character."¹¹ In 1856-59, the Harmonie Club, a German-Jewish singing and entertainment club, used a space at 29 St. Mark's Place as its headquarters,¹² and in 1870 the Arion Society (Arion Gesangverein), another German musical society, purchased its clubhouse at 19 and 21 St. Mark's Place (later the site of the Electric Circus). When the Arion Society moved into a luxurious clubhouse at 59th Street and Park Avenue in 1887, George Ehret, a real estate investor, purchased its two buildings in addition to 23 St. Mark's Place, and converted all three into a large ballroom and community center named Arlington Hall.¹³ Built in 1888-89, the German-American Shooting Society was among the last of the German institutions constructed in *Kleindeutschland*. Its location in the northwestern corner of the Lower East Side marks the northernmost area of settlement of middle-class German-Americans in this area. This clubhouse is a rare survivor from this period when German institutional buildings proliferated in the neighborhood and is one of the few still extant

that was originally constructed for a German institution.

The Architect and the Building¹⁴

Little is known about the architect of this building, William C. Frohne, or his career. He was in practice as early as 1885 and worked in New York until at least 1921. It appears that the German-American Shooting Society clubhouse was Frohne's first major commission. As a Lower East Side resident, Frohne's selection was probably based on local ties and familiarity with German customs. He later went on to design his own house at 153 Fourth Avenue, and a group of tenements at 516, 518, and 520 Manhattan Avenue. His loft buildings in Renaissance-inspired styles at 26-32 West 17th Street (1907-1908), 16-20 West 19th Street (1906-1907), and 7-9 East 20th Street (1907) are all located in the Ladies' Mile Historic District. It is likely that his work on the German-American Shooting Society clubhouse influenced his 1895 commission to design the Bohemian National Hall at 321-325 East 73rd Street (1895-1897, a designated New York City Landmark). This Renaissance Revival style building is Frohne's best-known work, featuring an elaborately ornamented entrance porch supported by paired granite columns, as well as a two-story arcade with paired columns and terra-cotta ornament.

New York architectural styles during the late nineteenth century were extremely eclectic, drawing their associations and ornamental details from a number of earlier periods and a variety of locales. Designs derived from the French and Italian Renaissance were very popular, connoting a certain prestige, and were commonly adapted to the needs and structures of the growing city. Occasionally the Dutch Renaissance served as a model, when the designer wanted to make reference to the early settlers of Manhattan Island. In the German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse, Frohne used the German Renaissance as his stylistic inspiration, a style which was rarely seen in New York City. It was entirely appropriate here, since those seeing and using the building would have understood the connection to their homeland.

The German Renaissance revival was a modern adaptation of an architectural style that developed in Germany during the sixteenth century and appeared there on castles as well as on the street-facades of more urban structures. A hallmark of this style was a high, heavily-ornamented gable, often stepped, either set in a high mansard or on a gable-fronted facade. The facades of the German Renaissance generally had both strong horizontal and vertical divisions, creating a grid-like pattern, and were pierced by both round-headed

and square-headed window and door openings. The facade of the German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse is marked by strong cornices separating each floor level, while each bay is set off by pilasters. There are both round-headed and square-headed window and door openings set in a rusticated base, and the top is crowned by a steep mansard roof with three dormers. The center dormer is particularly tall, with sloping sides and an ornate crown. The roof was originally much more elaborate, with a series of pointed finials which separated each dormer and crowned the smaller ones, as well as metal cresting along the top of the mansard and a larger, more ornate crown on the central dormer.

The materials on this building, a combination of brick and terra cotta, came to be associated with this style as well. Terra cotta as a building material began to be used in this country in the mid-1870s, primarily for its fireproof qualities. Architects started to explore the decorative possibilities of this material in the early 1880s when it was "most generally used for the trimming and ornamentation of buildings, taking the form of panels, courses, friezes, small tiles, roofing tiles and paving blocks."¹⁵

The finely-modeled terra-cotta ornament on this building distinguishes both its style and purpose. It was created by the Stephens, Leach & Conkling Terra Cotta Company, a firm started in Philadelphia in 1886. The name of the company changed several times during its long history, becoming Stephens, Conkling & Armstrong and, by 1894, Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Company. Work produced by this firm can be found throughout the country, including on such New York buildings as the Bowling Green Offices Building (W. & G. Audsley, 1895-98, 5-11 Broadway, a designated New York City Landmark), and the large Wanamaker's Department Store at Broadway and Eighth Street by D. H. Burnham.¹⁶ The German-American Shooting Society clubhouse displays a variety of terra-cotta ornament. The name of the club figures prominently in a cornice above the second story, in three-dimensional letters rising from a textured background. The helmeted heads above the first story are delicately-modeled and indicate something of the militaristic nature of the activities in the building. The terra-cotta panels between the third and fourth stories featuring swags and foliate designs, as well as the keystones, and pilasters throughout the building reveal the classical origins of the style. At the fourth story, the large terra-cotta panel underscores the martial theme with a target with crossed rifles and the motto "EINIGKEIT - MACHT - STARK" (Unity Makes [You] STRONG). It bears the signature of Professor

H. Plasschaert, a noted sculptor and modeler for the company. Plasschaert also taught at the University of Pennsylvania and at the Philadelphia School of Industrial Arts and several of his students worked with him on the models for the Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Company.¹⁷ It was quite unusual for the artist to sign a terra-cotta work and indicates Plasschaert's high standing in the industry. The enthusiastic use of such a variety of materials and decorative terra cotta is also uncommon for this neighborhood. Earlier German-built structures, such as those constructed for the Ottendorfers, were much more subdued in style and tone, perhaps because of the more serious nature of the pursuits to which these buildings were dedicated.

Subsequent History¹⁸

The Shooting Society owned this building until 1920 when it was sold to Anna Brindell who held it until 1930. Beginning in 1943 it was the site of the St. Mark's Community Center, a Polish community group which then sold the building in 1962. This building housed a Ukrainian Culture Center in the 1960s and was purchased by its present owner in 1992.

Description

The German-American Shooting Society clubhouse is four stories high with a full, slate-covered mansard. Three bays wide, it is faced in limestone, yellow brick and terra cotta. Throughout the front facade, the windows have one-over-one wood sash, except for those in the dormers which have replacement, metal sash.

The ground story has three, round-arched openings separated by rusticated limestone piers. The restaurant entrance, located in the eastern bay, has double, paneled, wooden doors with a single glass pane in each.

The center bay, which is taller and wider than the others, is completely filled by non-historic openings. Here, two hinged doors can be opened to allow seating at a sidewalk terrace, marked off in front of the building by a non-historic iron fence. The round transom above this opening contains non-historic windows with a center section that opens. The western bay has double wooden doors which open to a hallway with stairs to the upper stories. These doors are original; each has eight glass panes above a single wood panel on the lower section. There is also an elaborate historic iron pull bar, as well as a non-historic call box on the reveal. Both of the narrower doorways are topped by plain, fixed-glass transoms, above which are ornate, carved keystones.

The top of the ground story is marked by a string course, above which is centered an ornamented panel

carved with "1888." To each side of this panel is a finely-molded terra-cotta head wearing a helmet. Just beneath each head, in the first story spandrel, is a large embossed disk which originally formed a base for a hanging lantern (removed). The heads support the projecting cornice which also serves as a continuous sill for the four windows of the second story. At this level, the center bay projects slightly and has two, round-arched windows while the side bays each have one, square-headed window. The windows of the center bay are framed by ornamented moldings and have a narrow pilaster between them. Engaged brick pilasters with stone capitals and bases separate and frame the three bays.

Above the second story is a broad frieze which displays the words: "DEUTSCH-AMERIKANISCHE-SCHUTZEN-GESELLSCHAFT." A series of brackets support the projecting cornice at the center bay. The third-story windows are square-headed, with two in the center bay and one in each side bay. Plain, brick piers are located between each bay.

Between the third and fourth stories is a series of intricate terra-cotta panels, narrow vertical panels on the piers and horizontal ones in the spandrels between the windows. These panels contain swags and foliate designs, with another head centered in the main horizontal section. The fourth story has two square-headed windows in each side bay and a large terra-cotta panel filling the center bay. The round-arched panel displays a target backed by crossed rifles above an eagle with spread wings. Drapery fills the background while the words, "EINIGHEIT - MACHT - STARK" (Unity Makes [Us] Strong) curve above the emblem. At the lower right corner of the panel is the signature of "Professor H. Plasschaert" Brick corbelling forms the lintel above this panel, while the windows on each side bay have stone lintels.

A projecting stone cornice with dentils terminates the main section of the building, separating it from the mansard roof above. This is faced with hexagonal slates and has three dormers. The two on the sides are smaller, gabled dormers. Their cornices and window frames have been covered with sheet metal. The larger, central gable has sloping sides and a brick front with stone framing the window. At the top of this dormer, the projecting cornice is crowned by a large terra-cotta form consisting of a broken-arch inset with a foliate panel, and flanked by two smaller finials.

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NOTES

1. The following section on *Kleindeutschland* is based on Landmarks Preservation Commission, (*Former*) *Scheffel Hall Designation Report (LP-1959)* (New York: City of New York, 1997), report prepared by Gale Harris; Stanley Nadel, *Little Germany: Ethnicity, Religion, and Class in New York City, 1845-1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); "Germans" and "Kleindeutschland" in *The Encyclopedia of New York*, Thomas Jackson, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1983).
2. "Germans," *Encyclopedia of New York*, 463.
3. "Germans," *Encyclopedia of New York*, 463.
4. "Germans," *Encyclopedia of New York*, 463; Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Stockholm Street Historic District Designation Report (LP- 2081)* (New York: City of New York, 2000), report prepared by Donald Presa.
5. These important buildings still provide the same services today for area residents. See Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Ottendorfer Branch, New York Public Library Designation Report (LP-0969)* (New York: City of New York, 1977) and *Stuyvesant Polyclinic Designation Report (LP-0924)* (New York: City of New York, 1976).
6. Nadel, 105.
7. Nadel, 113; "Creemore" and "Target Companies," in *The Encyclopedia of New York*; Gray.
8. Nadel, 113.
9. "In its New Headquarters," *New York Times* (Dec. 27, 1888), 5.
10. Christopher Gray, "The Eclectic Life of Row of East Village Houses," *New York Times*, (Nov 8, 1998), sec. 11, 7; Gerard R. Wolfe, *New York: A Guide to the Metropolis* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 104.
11. Gray.
12. *Harmonie Club of the City of New York 1852-1952* (New York: Spiral Press, 1952).
13. All of these buildings have been highly altered.
14. LPC, (*Former*) *Scheffel Hall Designation Report (LP-1959)* (New York, City of New York, 1997), report prepared by Gale Harris; and *Bohemian National Hall Designation Report (LP-1914)* (New York: City of New York, 1994), report prepared by Anthony Robins; Dennis Francis, *Architects in Practice in New York City, 1840-1900* (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1979), 32, 48.
15. "The Use of Terra Cotta in Building," *Real Estate Record & Guide*, Mar. 3, 1883.
16. Information about the terra cotta on this building was provided by Susan Tunick and the Friends of Terra Cotta, including "The Manufacture of Architectural Terra Cotta in America," *The Clayworker*, vol. 43 (June, 1905), pp.753-755.
17. "Terra Cotta Work in Philadelphia," *The Clayworker* vol.25 (1896), 40-42.
18. New York County, Office of the Register. Liber Deeds and Conveyances.

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 German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse (Deutsche-Amerikanische Schützen Gesellschaft) 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 German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse (Deutsche-Amerikanische Schützen Gesellschaft), designed by William C. Frohne and constructed in 1888-89, is a rare surviving example of the countless German clubs (*Vereine*) which were established during the second half of the 19th century on New York's Lower East Side, in the area known as *Kleindeutscheland*; that this building served as the headquarters for twenty-four shooting clubs, which were organized to promote good marksmanship and for social support, and which sponsored competitions among themselves and with other companies in the New York area; that the German Renaissance Revival style of this building, seen in the high mansard roof with tall, ornate dormers and the classical detailing on the rest of the facade, is unusual in New York City; that this style was chosen to serve as a reminder of their homeland for the numerous German immigrants in the area; that the building has a large amount of finely-modeled and well-preserved terra-cotta ornament which clearly identifies the original purpose of the building: that the large terra-cotta panel at the fourth story which exhibits rifles, a target and the club motto is unusual in its design and the fact that it is signed by its creator and modeler; that the building is a unique structure in this section of Manhattan and serves as a reminder of an important ethnic group which once lived here and their many contributions to the City of New York.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse (Deutsche-Amerikanische Schützen Gesellschaft), 12 St. Marks Place, Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 463, Lot 15, as its Landmark Site.



German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse
12 St. Mark's Place
Manhattan



German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse
12 St. Mark's Place
Photo: *King's Handbook of New York City* (1893)



German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse
Fourth story details, terra-cotta panel
Photo: Carl Forster



Details, mansard roof

German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse

Details, ground floor



Photos: Carl Forster



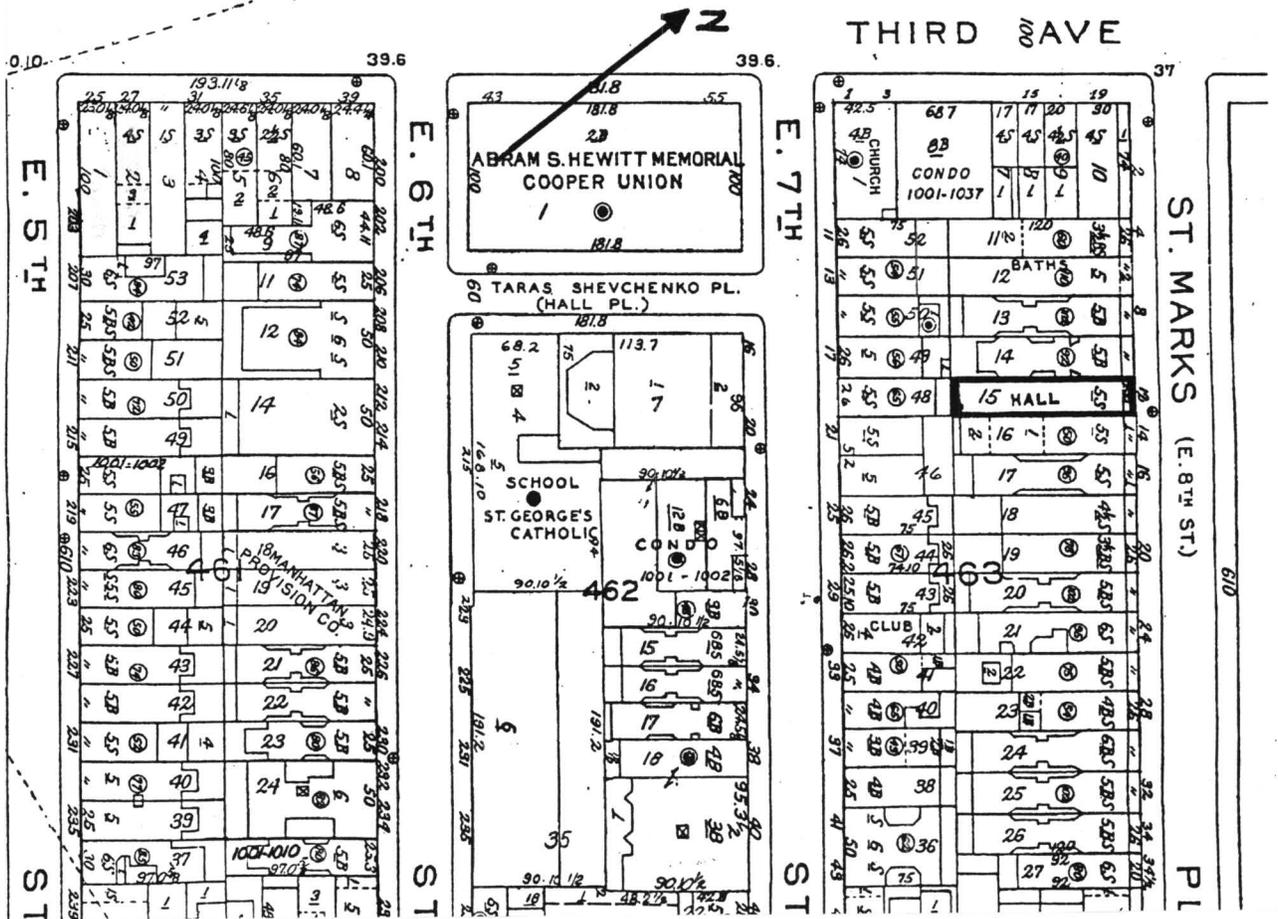
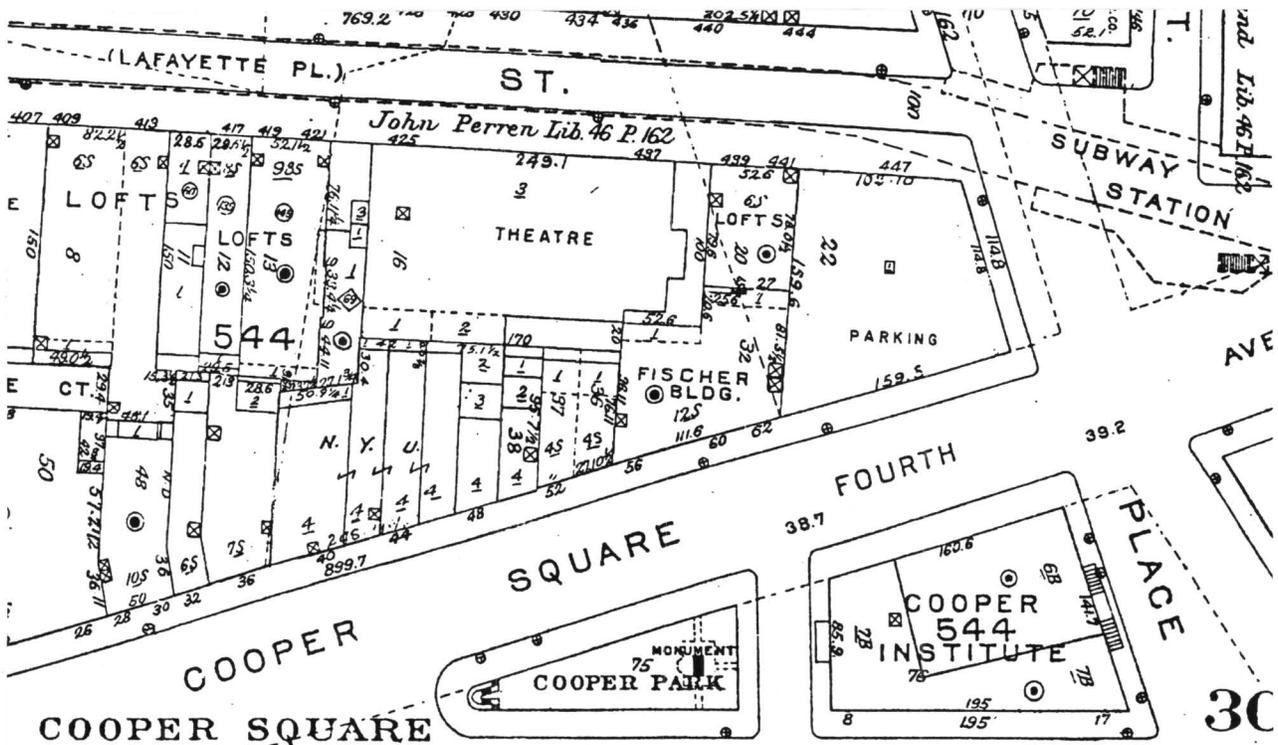
Second story details

German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse

Cornice details, above ground story



Photos: Carl Forster



German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse
 12 St. Mark's Place, Manhattan
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 463, Lot 15
 Source: Sanborn Manhattan Landbook, 2000, pl. 23.



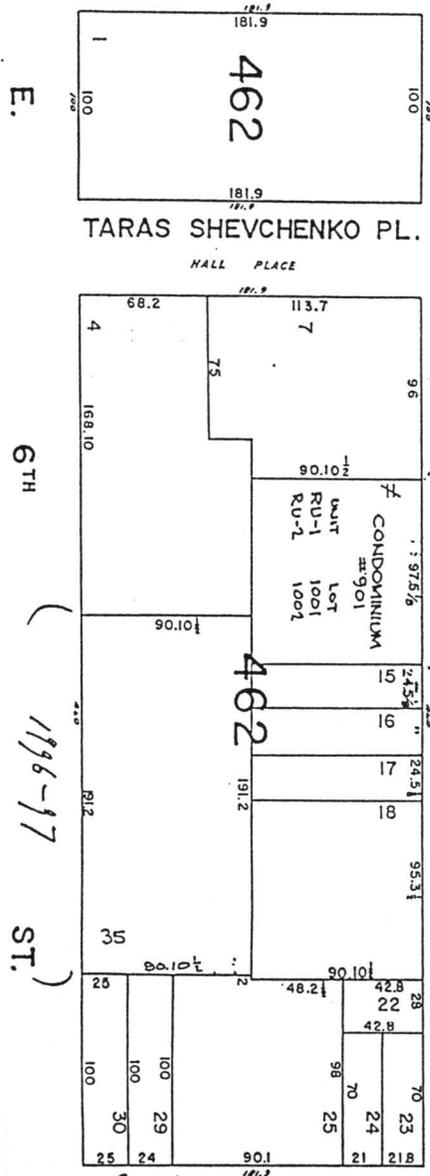
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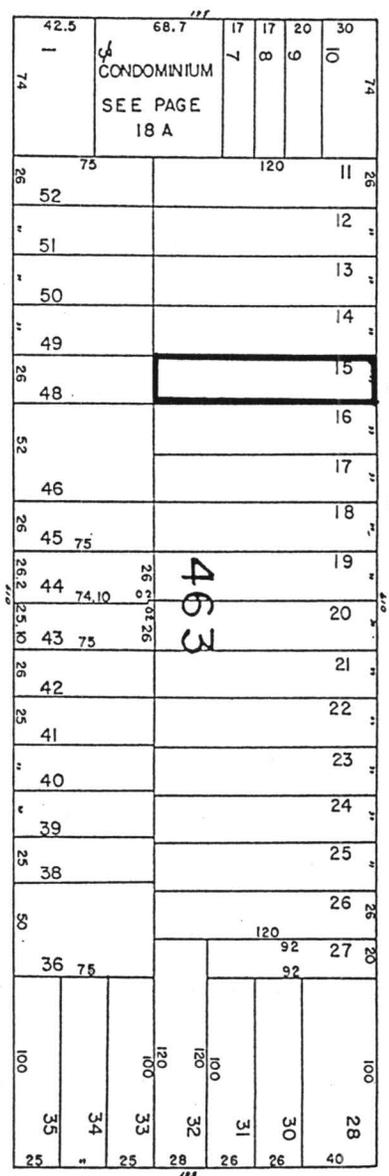
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ST. MARKS PLACE

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BLOCK 462
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German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse
 12 St. Mark's Place, Manhattan
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 463, Lot 15
 Source: New York City Dept. of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map