



NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project

Making an invisible history visible

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November 3, 2017

Hon. Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor North
New York, NY 10007

Re: Support for Walt Whitman Residence, 99 Ryerson Street, Brooklyn

Dear Chair Srinivasan:

On behalf of co-directors Andrew Dolkart, Ken Lustbader, and Jay Shockley, I am writing in support of the Request for Evaluation recently submitted by Brad Vogel for 99 Ryerson Street, Brooklyn, NY, also referred to as the Walt Whitman Residence.

As you know, the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project is a cultural heritage initiative and educational resource that is documenting historic sites connected to the LGBT community throughout New York City from the 17th century to 2000.

The project included the residence on its website launch of 100 documented sites earlier this year due to its significance as one of the only two known extant sites in New York City associated with the great American poet. We recently drafted the *Historic Context Statement for LGBT History in New York City* for the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, which is currently being reviewed. Once completed, we will be sending your office a copy along with a list of recommended LGBT-related sites for evaluation.

Whitman (1819-1892) lived in this house when the first edition of his epochal first collection of poems, *Leaves of Grass*, was published in July 1855. Whitman's family, including his mother Louisa, brother George, and father Walt. Sr. (who died in July), had moved there in May of that year.

Whitman's poetry was then considered controversial by some for its sensuality, and a later edition of *Leaves* included the famously homoerotic "Calamus" poems expressing male-male love. These made Whitman iconic in the United States and Europe as one of the first people to openly express the concept of men loving men.

Although altered, the building retains the same fenestration pattern and door opening from Whitman's time. It is also possible that the original wood siding still exists under the vinyl siding. A potential future restoration could refer to the c. 1939 tax photo (attached). In designating the site, the Commission would be preserving a site associated with New York City and LGBT history as well as one that illustrates the LGBT community's influence on American culture.

We urge you to evaluate this property for further study. Please let us know if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,



Amanda Davis

Project Manager

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Attached: 99 Ryerson Street, c. 1939 tax photo

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