

Emptying a Building Long Home to Activists

By COLIN MOYNIHAN on JAN. 16, 2014

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5 The building at 9 Bleecker Street must be vacated by Friday to make way for new tenants. Credit Ozier Muhammad/The New York Times

The three-story brick building at 9 Bleecker Street in Lower Manhattan, long a celebrated bastion of countercultural activity, was in a state of transitional disarray.

10 The upper floors were mostly emptied out, except for some stickers bearing slogans like “Impeach Reagan” and “No Nukes.” Moving boxes were piled on the ground floor on Monday, next to a framed copy of the manifesto of the Youth International Party, or Yippies, a written time capsule from 1968 with lines like “They cut our hair, ban our music festivals, put cops and narcs in the schools.”

15 For 40 years, the building has been a meeting place and way station for freethinkers and political firebrands.

“Tens of thousands of people walked through that door or were impacted by the social justice work done there,” said Aron Kay, who lived in the building, known as Number 9, from 1973 to 1978. The building, he added, “survived all these years when similar gathering spots around the country went under.”



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Alice Torbush salvaging copies of *Overthrow*, once published at 9 Bleecker Street.
Credit Ozier Muhammad/The New York Times

25 But now it is Number 9's turn. *Foreclosure proceedings* led a State Supreme Court judge, Jeffrey K. Oing, to order that the Yippies and their possessions vacate the building, which they bought in 2004, by Friday to make way for new tenants.

30 In addition to Mr. Kay, known for flinging pies at ideological opponents like the Watergate burglar G. Gordon Liddy, plenty of other storied figures passed through the building. There was A. J. Weberman, who practiced garbology — searching through the trash for information about people like Bob Dylan and John N. Mitchell, the Nixon attorney general. And there were “phone phreaks” like John Draper, who devised ways to hack into telephone systems and make free long-distance calls. Some Yippies used those methods to carry on crank-call battles with enemies that lasted years.

35 Decades' worth of marches supporting the legalization of marijuana were planned there. So were protests during national political conventions. Newspapers were printed on the building's top floor. People met on the second floor to coordinate the distribution of *medical marijuana*. And in 1981 the ground floor shook when a crude bomb detonated outside.

40 Although much of the activity there was rooted in the 1970s and '80s, the Yippies made some changes at 9 Bleecker during the past decade. They created a museum. There were comedy shows in the basement, and a cafe opened on the ground floor. Younger people began visiting the building, including 20-something musicians who performed there and activists from the Occupy Wall Street movement who held meetings there.

45 Few are likely to miss the musty old structure as much as Dana Beal, a Yippie whose residency goes back to 1973. He helped run a medical marijuana group there, organized nationwide pro-marijuana rallies and spent decades promoting the use of

Ibogaine, a derivative of a West African shrub that is said to counter addiction to opiates.



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Old posters on Ms. Torbush's walls recall the grass-roots activities that defined the building, known to many simply as Number 9. Credit Ozier Muhammad/The New York Times

Mr. Beal, who is in prison in Nebraska after being convicted of transporting 150 pounds of marijuana in a van in 2009, said that he expected to be released in February and had hoped to return to Blecker Street.

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"I call on Bill de Blasio to intervene to keep the Yippie Museum alive in N.Y.C.," Mr. Beal said during a recent phone call. "And my supporters can help by finding me a spare room so I can come home to the city."

Rob Gordon, a member of the group that bought the building, said that the foreclosure fight would continue and that the Yippies could benefit from an examination of evidence in the case. Nonetheless, Alice Torbush, the remaining resident, said she planned to vacate the building by Friday. She said that some of the building's contents would be put in storage. Other items would be donated to archivists. Those include copies of newspapers printed at 9 Blecker called The Yipster Times and Overthrow, and other underground papers that she had collected over the decades, like The Burning Spear, from Oakland, Calif., and The Bi-Weekly Blah-Blah, printed in Madison, Wis.

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On Monday afternoon, as volunteers carried boxes downstairs and resident cats prowled the premises, Ms. Torbush toured the building with Mr. Beal's lawyer, Noah Potter.

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One of the volunteers, R. J. Cote, said that he had not been inside the building in years, then reflected on its history.

"Rock musicians hung out here and activists of important national reputation," he said. "You don't get a chance very often to walk into that kind of orbit, right next to stars of the movement."

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