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New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Division for Historic Preservation
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RESOURCE EVALUATION

DATE: April 30, 2018

STAFF: Jennifer Betsworth

PROPERTY: Alku and Alku Toinen (Finnish Home Building Assn)

MCD: Brooklyn

ADDRESS: 816 & 826 43rd Street

COUNTY: Kings Co

PROJECT REF:

USN: 04701.020972; 04701.020973

- I. Property is individually listed on SR/NR:
name of listing:
- Property is a contributing component of a SR/NR district:
name of district:
- II. Property meets eligibility criteria.
 Property contributes to a district which appears to meet eligibility criteria.
Pre SRB: Post SRB: SRB date

Criteria for Inclusion in the National Register:

- A. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;
- B. Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
- C. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or represents the work of a master; or possess high artistic values; or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;
- D. Have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Based on the information submitted, Alku and Alku Toinen, the buildings constructed by the Finnish Home Building Association in 1916 and 1917, respectively, are eligible under Criterion C in the area of architecture at the local level as examples of progressive apartment building construction during the period. While the buildings' architectural ornamentation is typical of the period, their plan and generous, light-filled units were lauded by contemporary publications as exemplary examples of housing being constructed for working class, immigrant populations. They are additionally significant under Criterion A in the area of social history at the state level as the first purpose-built true cooperative apartment buildings constructed in New York City. Conceived by members of Brooklyn's Finnish community and constructed by the Finnish Home Building Association, the apartment buildings were an immediate success at providing housing and contributing to Finnish social and cultural cohesiveness. The period of significance for the buildings begins in 1916, when Alku was constructed; an end date to the period of significance will be determined pending further research. As the buildings have continued to operate on a cooperative model since their construction, an end to the historic period might relate to changes in legislation for

cooperative buildings or a substantial shift in the cooperative's ownership from its original exclusively Finnish population.

Finnish immigration to the United States had begun by the 1860s and grew substantially by the turn of the twentieth century in response to rural poverty, political tension, and Russian influence in the country. During the same time period, Finnish people developed strong trade union, labor and cooperative movements in response to these challenges. Finns who immigrated to New York City brought their familiarity with these forms of organization with them, and used them to help adjust to the challenges of living in a new country and adapting to a new language and culture while maintaining cultural identity. In 1890, Finnish immigrants established Imatra, a Finnish mutual aid society. The Finnish Home Building Cooperative was established by Finnish carpenters at Imatra Hall to build one- and two-family homes for Finnish immigrants. In response to the scarcity of available and affordable land, the group decided to change their tactics and established the Finnish Home Building Association during the mid-1910s to build cooperative apartment buildings.

The members of the Association, initially about a dozen people, worked together, saved funds in weekly installments, and were ultimately able to buy land and obtain a mortgage from the Cooperative Bank in Fitchburg, Massachusetts. A committee of three Finnish carpenters worked with architects Maxwell Cantor and Boris Dorfman to design an apartment building that would be affordable and meet the community's standards; they worked with Eric O. Holmgren to design their second building. Alku ("beginning") and Alku Toinen ("beginning two") were completed in 1916 and 1917, respectively. Contemporary publications praised the apartments' size, open plan, and modern conveniences – all of which were uncommon in contemporary buildings constructed for immigrants. The families that moved in to the apartments were each responsible for helping to pay off the debts accumulated during the apartment building's construction. Each apartment was worth one share, and the value of the share was held at the purchase price to avoid speculation. Each shareholder was also able to vote on matters of importance to the cooperative.

"Home clubs" or "housing clubs" had begun to gain popularity for luxury apartments in Manhattan during the late 19th century. While these buildings, such as The Gramercy, have been referred to as early cooperative apartments, they were organized as joint-stock companies and did not follow cooperative principles. The Finnish Home Building Association, which followed the Rochdale Cooperative principles, established in 1844, that set standards for cooperative governance, has been widely recognized as the first true cooperative apartment buildings in New York City. As cooperatives remained rare, and primarily associated with non-residential businesses, the Finnish Home Building Association's buildings were registered through the New York State Department of Agriculture, which was responsible for tracking all cooperatives in the state. By 1920, Brooklyn had 22 cooperatives; the Finnish Home Building Association had the only cooperative apartment buildings. Within the next decade and especially after the passage of the New York Housing Act in 1927, the establishment of cooperatives gradually became more common in New York City. The Finnish Home Building Association has continually operated Alku and Alku Toinen as cooperative apartments since they were constructed.

In 1920, the Finnish Building Association constructed a third building, located next to the apartments at the corner of 43rd Street and 8th Avenue, to serve as the Finnish Cooperative Trading Association. This building provided space for a cooperative bakery, store, and restaurant to serve the community. While the building remains, it has been significantly modified from its historic appearance and, based on a preliminary evaluation, does not appear eligible for inclusion in this mini-district.

Alku, located at 816 43rd Street, is a four-story, four-bay by five-bay, dumbbell-shaped dark red and black English Bond brick apartment building with a flat roof. Designed in a modest Classical Revival style, the building features limestone details, decorative brickwork, brick and limestone pilasters, and decorative limestone panels and cartouches. The building retains its fenestration pattern, but none of the original windows remain. On the first floor, the central entrance has double doors with metal grills, a transom with "ALKU 1 816" painted on, and is framed by a limestone surround with a central corbeled keystone. The entrance is flanked by four sets of paired sash windows, each of which have limestone surrounds framed by projecting brickwork. A limestone band runs across the façade between the first and second stories. On the upper stories, the outer bays, which all have tripartite windows, are framed by projecting pilasters. On the second and third stories, they are framed by one continuous brick header and limestone pilaster; a limestone panel is located between the windows, and the columns end at a brick and limestone entablature with dentil and cartouche detailing. On the fourth story, the bay is framed by limestone pilasters. The central bays each have four windows, each with a brick surround and limestone sill. A fire

escape is located on the center of the façade, running from the second through fourth floor windows. A wide band of brick headers runs under the parapet roofline, which features cartouches in the stepped parapets on the outer bays.

Alku Toinen, located at 826 43rd Street, is a four-story, four-bay by five-bay, dumbbell-shaped yellow and red brick Flemish bond brick apartment building with a flat roof. With more modest detailing than Alku, the building features patterned brickwork and limestone details. The building retains its fenestration pattern, but none of the original windows remain. On the first floor, the central entrance has double doors and a transom with metal grills and an eared limestone surround with ALKU TOINEN carved at the top. The entrance is flanked by four sets of paired windows, each of which have a limestone surround. On second through fourth stories, the outer bays, which all have tripartite windows, are framed by two pairs of continuous projecting red brick header and limestone pilasters. A rectangle made of red brick laid in a soldier course is located between each floor. The central bays each have four windows, which are framed by a red brick surround and have limestone sills. A wide band of brick headers, which has a pattern of red brick headers and squares runs under the parapet roofline, which has a central stepped parapet and angled parapets on the outer bays.

If you have any questions concerning this Determination of Eligibility, please contact Jennifer Betsworth at Jennifer.Betsworth@parks.ny.gov or (518) 268-2189.