



NEWS *from* FRIENDS

WINTER 2008/2009

KEAN HOUSE DEMOLISHED



Mrs. John Kean residence at 863 Lexington Ave.,
New York City (1944 May 8. Gottscho-Schleisner
Collection, Library of Congress)

As our readers know, FRIENDS has been tirelessly working to save the Kean House from demolition by urging the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to designate an expansion of the Upper East Side Historic District. Sadly, despite our best efforts, the LPC has not yet acted, leaving priceless and cherished architecture vulnerable to the

wrecking ball. As shocking as this loss is to the neighborhood, there are still 196 additional buildings proposed for inclusion in the expansion. Please urge the Landmarks Preservation Commission to act quickly and protect our architectural heritage by writing a letter to the New York City Landmarks

Preservation Commission (samples can be found on our website):

Landmarks Preservation Commission
Robert Tierney, Chair
Municipal Building
One Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007
comments@lpc.nyc.gov

Fall Benefit Honoring Liz Smith

On September 22, 2008, over 120 "friends" from across the city gathered for our *Fifth Annual Ambassador to the Upper East Side* award dinner honoring Liz Smith. Liz Smith calls herself "The 2000-year-old gossip columnist." Arriving in Manhattan from the University of Texas journalism school in 1949, she has worked in celebrity/show biz for 57 years. Her philanthropy is legendary – she has raised millions for AIDS, Literacy Partners, N.Y. Restoration Project, P.A.L., the Mayors Fund to Advance New York, the Landmarks Conservancy and now Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts.

We were very fortunate that Marie Brenner, author and writer at large for *Vanity Fair*, co-hosted this special evening and gave a warm and entertaining



Elaine Stritch and Liz Smith

introduction to Liz Smith. With such outstanding company, it was an evening to remember!



Kean House, Fall 2008

Continued on page 2

Fall Benefit continued

Special thanks to the Benefit Committee and all those who helped to make the event so successful. With the money raised, FRIENDS can continue to be the vigilant curator of the Upper East Side's architectural heritage.



Peter Pennoyer (Friends' 2007 Ambassador to the Upper East Side), Lauren Collins of *The New Yorker*, Honoree Liz Smith, FRIENDS' President Anne Millard



Education Director Sarah O'Keefe with husband David Greig, Executive Director Seri Worden with husband Nico Entel

SAVE
the
DATE!

Join FRIENDS for our Twenty-Sixth Annual Meeting and Awards Ceremony on Monday March 16, 2009 from 6:00-8:00 p.m. at The New York School of Interior Design, 170 East 70th Street. The public is welcome to attend but reservations are required. Please call (212) 535-2526 or email info@friends-ues.org.

Young Friends

FROM ELLIS ISLAND to the UPPER EAST SIDE

On a recent visit to Ellis Island, I sat on the benches in the Great Hall where immigrants waited in line to be inspected and questioned. These benches witnessed over twelve million people make their way through Ellis Island from 1892-1954. Objects such as these provide a direct and powerful tie to history. Buildings can also provide this link to our past, and thanks to historic districts, many of these pockets of history are protected for future generations.

In order to share these connections with our youngest friends, we are introducing a new offering to our children's education program: *Yorkville Immigration*. Luckily, evidence of immigrant history is not limited to Ellis Island — it is displayed throughout the built environment in many parts of New York City, including the neighborhood of Yorkville.

Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Irish and Jewish

Europeans all settled on the Upper East Side in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Though it has lost many of its historic buildings, Yorkville still retains some very interesting sites that we will explore with our 1st through 5th graders. Our students learn that East 86th Street between First and Third Avenues was considered "German Broadway", East 79th Street was "Hungarian Boulevard", and that East 72nd street was known as "Bohemian Boulevard". We examine churches, stores, restaurants, and tenement buildings and try to imagine what life would have been like as a young immigrant in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Through a classroom visit, a walking tour, and an art activity, we can bring the past to life for our students. In addition to our new program, we are continuing to offer our traditional architectural education program, *Building Fun*. We have visited 20 classrooms this Fall and are still scheduling visits for the Spring.

If you would like to learn more about our youth education programs, please contact Sarah O'Keefe at s.okeefe@friends-ues.org or 212-535-2526.

LETTER from the PRESIDENT

New York City is abuzz of late with the election, the economy, the 3 year mayoral term hearings, our Lexington Avenue expansion and sadly, the destruction of the Kean Mansion at 65th Street and Lexington Avenue. These issues have all kept us wide awake and very aware of our changing city.

As your voice, FRIENDS will continue to be vigilant about preservation issues affecting the Upper East Side. During these rocky economic times, we will depend on our loyal and dedicated members so that we may continue our important and much needed work preserving the historic architecture of the Upper East Side.

FRIENDS is continuing to work with the Landmark Preservation Commission in the hope that they will act favorably and quickly on the Lexington Avenue extension.

In other news, we are very proud of our Education Program run by Sarah O'Keefe. She has done a wonderful job. You can read more about our programs in her article *From Ellis Island to the Upper East Side* (above).

We thank you for your support and please keep us posted on your concerns.

Anne Millard

FIRST AVENUE ESTATES —

Landmark Status Upheld

New York City has won a legal victory that will uphold the landmark status of City and Suburban Homes Company First Avenue Estates, located on First Avenue between East 64th and 65th Streets. In 2006, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designated 429 East 64th and 430 East 65th Street, restoring the original boundaries of this full block individual landmark constructed between 1898 and 1915 to address the housing needs of the city's working poor.

Despite the dedicated work of Councilmember Jessica Lappin and an outcry from the community, the owners began defacing the buildings just before the 2006 LPC hearing. Architectural details were demolished and the building's buff brick was covered over in garish red stucco in an effort to avoid landmark's protection. Happily, the LPC did the right thing and moved forward with the buildings' designation.

The owners are continuing to fight the rightful designation of these important social and cultural buildings. In 2007, they sued the city to revoke the tenement's hard fought landmark status. FRIENDS is pleased to now report that such an underhanded strategy has not prevailed. In October of 2008, the court denied the owner's petition to nullify the designation. This



First Avenue Estate, pre-alterations

Update on 133-137 East 73rd Street

This Fall, we reported on an application that went before the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to construct a large and highly visible rooftop addition and alter the storefronts of 133-135 and 137 East 73rd Street. These two handsome buildings fall just within the border of the Upper East Side Historic District and are well known for their residential and commercial appeal.

The original proposal presented in August included the removal of the elaborate cartouche on the 73rd Street façade as well as other architectural flourishes that have been added to the storefronts over the years. FRIENDS spoke out strongly against the removal of these artifacts that add interest and character to the pedestrian experience of Lexington Avenue. We also adamantly disapproved of the scale, visibility and materials of the proposed three-story rooftop addition.

The LPC commissioners undoubtedly heeded our comments at the August hearing and rejected the large out of scale addition, asking for revisions that would reduce its visibility and scale. We are pleased to report that the architecture team returned in October with vastly improved revisions.

decision emphasizes the LPC's authority to designate landmarks that not only have architectural significance, but also have cultural and historical importance. The buildings may not look as attractive as they once did, but these structures are survivors and will continue to stand as monuments of an effort to address housing problems in New York City nearly a century ago.

But it's not over yet. On October 27th, 2008, the owners filed an appeal of the court's decision. FRIENDS is confident that the appeal will also be



133-137 East 73rd Street at Lexington Avenue

The Commission ultimately approved a one-story addition, set further back from the building's edge, and constructed of darker materials to further reduce any visibility of rooftop construction. The LPC is also requiring the cartouche and other architectural features of the storefronts to remain.

For all of our friends and neighbors who saw the towering orange netting showing the proposed outsized rooftop addition, we can all rest assured that the significance and beauty of this lovely Lexington Avenue building will be preserved. Let us hope that the LPC will act on the expansion of the Upper East Side Historic District to preserve other equally beautiful but unprotected buildings.

denied and we will be sure to keep our readers up to date.



First Avenue Estate, post-alterations, 2007

Community Board 8 says YES to Lexington

On Wednesday September 17th, Community Board 8 voted in overwhelming support of a proposal to expand the Upper East Side Historic District to include buildings along Lexington Avenue and the neighboring sidestreets between East 61st and 75th Streets. Wearing bright orange "Save Lexington Avenue" stickers, our supporters packed into the auditorium and spoke artfully and passionately about the urgency to save the architecture and livability of this threatened neighborhood. Thank you to all of our attendees for an outstanding display of support. It is because of you that the community board heard loud and clear what the neighborhood wants and needs.

What's next? With widespread support from our elected officials, city and state preservation organizations and the impressive outpouring of enthusiasm from residents, business owners and preservationists across the city, the Landmarks Preservation Commission must now act quickly and designate this much needed expansion. If the LPC and the Mayor have not heard from you, be sure to write a letter, sign our petition and spread the word! For more information on the expansion, visit our website at <http://www.friends-ues.org>.

2008 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Seri Worden, *Executive Director*

* deceased

In memoriam

DOROTHY MINER

This Fall, the preservation community lost a champion of preservation—Dorothy Marie Miner. Dorothy developed legal protection for historic landmarks nationwide in her longtime role as counsel to the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission and was a beloved Professor of Historic Preservation at Columbia University. Below, one of Dorothy's many students remembers her ongoing influence and kindness.

IN MEMORY OF PROFESSOR DOROTHY MINER

Being one of Dorothy Miner's students was like being admitted to a private club—and its membership provided privileges long after you left the classroom. Her teaching was marked by the same dedication and acuity that was the trademark of her legal career. She once explained that teaching was a great

gift since she knew she couldn't fight all the battles worthy of waging. Instead, she sought to inspire and instill within us her incomparable experience and vast knowledge before we were sent out into the world. She treated each of her students with great respect and reverence, and took the time to get to know each of them personally. She held us all to a very high standard, but would also do anything to help us achieve. One of the best privileges in the "Dorothy Club" was personal use of her beloved silver station wagon for site visits and survey work. Even years after graduation, Dorothy would remember your thesis topic, the steps on your career path and would always demand to know if your career was still dedicated to preservation. She will be deeply missed by her former students and will undoubtedly be remembered by many as their most influential teacher.

*Mary Kay Judy, Architectural Conservator,
Columbia HP Class of 1998*

FRIENDS of the UPPER EAST SIDE HISTORIC DISTRICTS

FRIENDS of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, founded in 1982, is an independent, not-for-profit membership organization dedicated to preserving the architectural legacy, livability, and sense of place of the Upper East Side. We safeguard the future of the Upper East Side's six historic districts and 126 individual landmarks and act as an advocate for sound preservation policies for the city. FRIENDS has also been a leader in successful efforts to improve dramatically the zoning laws governing the area's avenues and residential side streets.

For more information please call 212-535-2526 or visit our website at www.friends-ues.org.

Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts

20 East 69th Street, #4B

New York, NY 10021

p. 212-535-2526

f. 212-535-2155

In Gratitude

Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts wishes to acknowledge the generous support of: The J. M. Kaplan Fund, The Samuel H. Kress Foundation, The Gilbert & Ildiko Butler Conservation Fund, The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, State Senator Liz Krueger, Councilmember Daniel Garodnick and Councilmember Jessica Lappin through the Department of Youth and Community Development.

Informing our Friends

FRIENDS continues to be a good neighbor. Via an e-mail list, we inform the community about items under review at the LPC and we have recently implemented an email alert list of important preservation issues on the Upper East Side. Members can subscribe by visiting our website at www.friends-ues.org.

And don't forget, you can also check our website for a list of all LPC Upper East Side items and the LPC's decision.