

# Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts Newsletter

Volume 7, No. 1

Spring 1992

## **FRIENDS to Create "11 Most Endangered Properties List" for Upper East Side**

The Upper East Side is blessed with a rich assortment of landmarks. It would be a grave mistake, however, to assume that all the architectural, historical, and cultural treasures of our neighborhood are appreciated and protected. In fact, many of the structures you walk by every day and assume are landmarks, are not. To avoid waking up one morning and finding scaffolding around such a structure or, even worse, returning home after a trip and finding a cherished piece of the neighborhood lost, we invite you to participate in the creation of the Upper East Side's "11 Most Endangered Properties List."

This spring and summer, FRIENDS will be compiling a list of the Upper East Side's threatened architectural, historical, and cultural properties. What constitutes a threatened site? Threats can range from actual demolition plans for a site (such as a portion of the City & Suburban Homes complex) to a property's importance having gone unrecognized as a possible landmark (such as the Montgomery Block on 86th Street). A designated landmark falling into disrepair from neglect or facing unsympathetic alteration could also earn it a place on this list.

You can propose a property for the list either by sending us a letter identifying the property and providing us with information on why you feel it is important and how you feel it is threatened, or by calling our office to receive an official nomination form. We need to hear from you by June 1, 1992. FRIENDS will further research the site, and a special committee will select the 11 Most Endangered Properties on the Upper East Side. FRIENDS will release the list in September and focus public attention on these sites through advocacy and public education efforts.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has used a national 11 Most Endangered Properties List to successfully focus national attention on threatened sites across America.

If you, your block association, or your neighborhood group have been working to draw public attention to an unrecognized and unprotected part of the Upper East Side's heritage, the Most Endangered Properties List offers you another vehicle to help achieve your goal. Or, if you have admired a structure for years and always assumed it was protected but aren't sure, now (before the eleventh hour) is the time to determine the status of the building and get involved.

For more information on the 11 Most Endangered Properties List, please contact the FRIENDS' office at 535-2526.



## **Fee Proposal for LPC Goes Down in Defeat**

On March 3, 1992, the Landmarks Preservation Commission unanimously rejected a proposal to establish a schedule of fees for applications and permits for the purpose of raising revenues to partially offset the budget cuts mandated by the City's Office of Management and Budget. The proposed fees ranged from \$25 to \$1500. At a public hearing last December, the proposal immediately created a furor in the preservation world, as well as among real estate interests and in political circles. It was a rare moment when real estate and preservation groups found themselves on the same side of an issue.

## Letter from the President

In testimony before the Commission on December 3, 1991, FRIENDS Vice President Teri Slater stated, "The proposal under consideration is, quite simply, a disastrous idea. Fees will be a *disincentive* to property owners in historic districts to invest in their buildings, a *disincentive* to create new districts, and a *disincentive* to comply with the Landmarks Law."

David Dunlap, reporting on the hearing in *The New York Times* the following day, wrote, "A steady stream of preservation leaders, neighborhood organizers and elected officials warned the Commission that such fees would amount to a tax on the very property owners whose cooperation is essential in maintaining the 19,000 structures covered by landmark or historic district designation." Mr. Dunlap quoted FRIENDS President Anthony C. Wood, "Charging fees for the privilege of being regulated is political suicide." A second hearing in February saw the testimony against the proposed fees continue unabated.

When it came down to a vote on March 3, 1992, Commission Chair, Laurie Beckelman, noting the enormous volume of correspondence received on this issue, said that the Landmarks Preservation Commission and City Hall had heard the public loud and clear. Commissioner Sarah Landau, in a brief statement before casting her *no* vote, spoke about how important it was for people to consider it a privilege to live in, or own, a landmark property and pointed out that for the Commission to penalize them would undermine the very *raison d'être* of the Commission. The letters and testimony were a landmark in themselves: It is believed to be the first time that an issue before the Landmarks Commission had received unanimous support or, in this case, unanimous rejection.

Dear Friend:

I am happy to report—thanks to the good efforts of our Board, our Executive Director, and many of you—that much of what we only dreamed about at the writing of our last Newsletter is now a reality. At the top of the list is our wonderful new office at 20 East 69th Street with its glorious views, both up and down Madison Avenue. Come enjoy the view for yourself at our "office warming" on May 2 from 2:00 to 5:00 pm.

Not only do we have a new home, we also have five new additions to our Board. A warm welcome to Reita Cash, Franny Eberhart, Nohra Haime, Mark Hampton, and Carol F. Sulzberger. I would also like to thank our departing Board Members, Evelyn Lauder and John Burgee, for their longtime efforts on behalf of FRIENDS.



FRIENDS' long search for a larger office finally became a reality on February 1 when we moved into our new office at 20 East 69th Street. Thanks to Board Member William Judson, FRIENDS finally has an office in one of our historic districts—after nearly ten years in existence! Pictured above is a black-and-white copy of the beautiful watercolor of 20 East 69th Street by new Board Member Mark Hampton for the cover of our Tenth Anniversary Benefit invitation. On Saturday, May 2, FRIENDS will hold an "office warming" for members and friends from 2:00 to 5:00 pm. Come meet our Executive Director and members of our Board, and join us for some light refreshments.

On Tuesday evening, May 5, we begin the celebration of our Tenth Anniversary with a fund-raising dinner and cabaret at Mortimer's Restaurant.

Again, thanks go to all of you who responded to our call for letters and phone calls against the proposal for the levying of fees on permits at the Landmarks Preservation Commission. When the fee proposal was announced, we were told it was a "done deal," and conventional wisdom said, "accept the fees." Instead, we banded together with grass-roots preservation groups from across the City, and the fee proposal was justly defeated.

We have also been active in less public ways. FRIENDS went with a delegation of preservation groups to meet with U.S. Representative Bill Green regarding the current development threat to the southern part of Ellis Island. Our word processor has been working overtime generating letters on that topic and many others—in support of the preservation of the Naumberg Bandshell, in opposition to the ill-conceived proposal to merge the Landmarks Preservation Commission with the Department of City Planning, in support of designating the interior of the Seventh Regiment Armory, and also on a host of Certificate-of-Appropriateness applications on the Upper East Side.

Thanks to your continuing support, FRIENDS has been able to be a strong voice for the Upper East Side—both behind the scenes and in very public ways. These are trying times for New York City and New Yorkers. FRIENDS is making a difference every day and you can too. If you would like to make the Upper East Side more livable, call us and see how you can help. Welcome to the fight!

### About "FRIENDS"

FRIENDS of the Upper East Side Historic Districts is an independent, nonprofit preservation organization. FRIENDS was founded in 1982, under the auspices of the Municipal Art Society, to be the curator of the newly created Upper East Side Historic District. FRIENDS has expanded its role to encompass the Upper East Side's five historic districts and 135 individual landmarks.

In addition to safeguarding the future of our past on the Upper East Side and being an advocate for sound preservation policies for the City, FRIENDS has also been a leader in successful efforts that dramatically altered the zoning laws governing residential blocks on the Upper East Side.

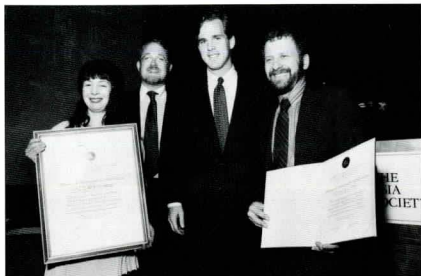
FRIENDS is a membership-supported group, and depends not only on your annual contribution but also on your involvement. Call us on how you can make a difference.

Anthony C. Wood  
President

Copy: Britt Densmore

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Credit: Jay Bandy

At FRIENDS' Ninth Annual Meeting, City Councilmember Charles Millard presented the Alteration for Handicapped-Accessibility Award to 552 East 87th Street; (l-r) Mary Clarke accepting on behalf of Bertram and Muriel Clarke; FRIENDS President Anthony C. Wood; Councilmember Millard; and Carl Stein, FAIA, The Stein Partnership, architect for the project.

## **FRIENDS Honors Halina Rosenthal and Landmarks at Annual Meeting**

FRIENDS' Ninth Annual Meeting held on January 9, 1992 was dedicated to the memory of Halina Rosenthal, a founding member of FRIENDS' and its first president. Over 250 guests filled the Wallace Auditorium at the Asia Society to hear opening remarks by FRIENDS President Anthony C. Wood, the annual election of Board Members and Officers conducted by FRIENDS Vice President Rita C. Chu, and the presentation of awards that was followed by a reception.

Newly sworn-in City Councilmember Charles Millard presented the Alteration for Handicapped-Accessibility Award to the Bertram and Muriel Clarke residence at 552 East 87th Street, located in the Henderson Place Historic District. An Excellence in Store-Front Design Award was presented by FRIENDS Vice President Teri Slater to Melvin and Lawrence Friedland, owners of 750 Madison Avenue. Philanthropist Frederick R. Koch was the recipient of a Restoration Award, presented by FRIENDS Vice President Anne Millard, for his C.P.H. Gilbert-designed home at 6 East 80th Street. Writer and Board Member Brendan Gill presented a Restoration Award to the Knickerbocker Club at 2 East 62nd Street for its "flawless restoration."

The awards ceremony concluded with a moving slide presentation that was created by Britt Densmore and Anthony C. Wood, and narrated by

actress and Board Member Tammy Grimes in tribute to Halina Rosenthal. Mr. Wood then announced the creation of the Halina Rosenthal Fellowship to be awarded to a graduate student in the field of preservation.

## **Halina Rosenthal Fellowship Offered by FRIENDS**

The Board of Directors of FRIENDS is pleased to announce the creation of the first annual Halina Rosenthal Fellowship in Historic Preservation. Offered to graduate students for intern experience in preserva-

tion, it is named in memory of Halina Rosenthal, a founding member of FRIENDS and the organization's first president from 1982 until her death on March 31, 1991.

The decision to create such a fellowship was unanimously supported by the Board of Directors as being very much in keeping with Halina's ideas of bringing as many people as possible into the "fold" of preservation and the importance she placed on a hands-on, grass-roots approach to preservation in New York City. In early February, a letter announcing the Fellowship was sent to graduate schools across the country that offer a degree in historic preservation. Currently, the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors is reviewing applications, and plans to make a decision on the first Fellowship winner by the end of April. This year's Rosenthal Fellow will work for a period of approximately eight weeks over the summer or fall months to coordinate research on FRIENDS' "11 Most Endangered Properties List" and to assist FRIENDS with its general advocacy and preservation activities.

The Fellowship, which comes with a stipend of \$1000, has been generously supported by FRIENDS' Honorary Chairman, Tony Rosenthal. Donations received in Halina's memory last spring have been placed in a special Fellowship Account and will help provide future funding for the Fellowship. Anyone wishing to make a contribution should make the check payable to the Halina Rosenthal Fellowship Fund.



Credit: B. Densmore

It was a standing-room-only crowd that filled The Urban Center when FRIENDS presented its symposium, "The New World Order: Preservation and the City Council," on Wednesday, November 13, 1991. Panelists were: (l-r) Gene Ruslanoff, Senior Staff Attorney at NPIRG; Michael Tomasky, columnist for *The Village Voice*; Edward Wallace, attorney and former City Councilmember-at-Large; and The Hon. Mary Pinkett, City Councilmember representing Brooklyn and Chair of the Governmental Operations Committee.

## FRIENDS'

### Walking Tours for Spring

FRIENDS' first tour of the season is more than a walking tour. FRIENDS will be offering a tour of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, located in an 1863 tenement building on Orchard Street, in combination with a tour of the City and Suburban Homes complex, considered to be a model tenement built between 1901 and 1913. The tour, which will start at 1:30 pm on Sunday, May 3, 1992, will include a trolley ride from FRIENDS' office at 20 East 69th Street down to the Tenement Museum, and then up to the City & Suburban Homes complex at 78th Street and York Avenue. The tour will be led by architectural historian Deborah Gardner. The \$25 cost of the tour includes transportation and refreshments. Advance reservation is required and will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

On Sunday, May 17, at 2:00 pm, architectural historian and urban critic David Garrard Lowe will lead a tour of the opulent townhouses and magnificent churches of the Upper East Side Historic District.

On Sunday, June 7, at 2:00 pm, architectural historian Barry Lewis will return to lead another tour for FRIENDS that will continue his walk up Fifth Avenue from 86th Street, where his fall tour left off, taking in the current Carnegie Hill Historic District as well as some of the soon-to-be (we hope) designated expansion of this wonderful district. (See Calendar for further details of the above tours, or call FRIENDS at 535-2526.)

### "On the Upper East Side"

**The Preservation and Planning Committee** of FRIENDS has been hard at work with monthly meetings since our last Newsletter in October. Led by Co-Chairs Anne Millard and Teri Slater and our Executive Director, the Committee's main function is to review and address the Landmarks Preservation Commission's Certificate-of-Appropriateness applications, violations in the historic districts and on landmark buildings, and issues of concern which might include zoning questions, Board of Standards and Appeals applications, or expansion plans for an institution.

The Committee reviewed 24 Certificate-of-Appropriateness applications from October 1991 through March

1992. FRIENDS follows these issues through the Community Board review process and later testifies on all items at the LPC's monthly hearings. The items have ranged from applications for through-the-wall air conditioners at numerous locations throughout the historic districts, to legalization of the removal of a unique bronze entranceway railing at 10 East 76th Street, to a request for an additional story on a townhouse at 244 East 62nd Street.



244 East 62nd Street, located in the Treadwell Farm Historic District, shows the townhouse (center with bay window) as it currently exists. Design of an additional floor was rejected by the LPC at their January 28 Certificate-of-Appropriateness Hearing.

The Committee regularly invites guests to its monthly meetings to speak on timely and relevant issues. Christabel Gough, representing The Society for the Architecture of the City, spoke at the Committee's November meeting. In December, Timothy Marshall, Deputy Administrator for Capital Projects for Central Park, gave a slide presentation of recent projects in the Park as well as long-term plans. In January, Lenore Norman, Director of Intergovernmental Relations at the New York City Department of Buildings, came to speak about the intricacies of the agency. And in March, Mark Weber, Director of the Technical Preservation Services Center at the New York City Department of Buildings, spoke about the scope of his work and, more specifically, about the restoration of wood and steel windows in landmark buildings and in buildings within historic districts. Mark brought with him Chris McMillan and John Seekircher, specialists in the restoration of wood and steel windows, respectively, who gave short

presentations, showed samples, and fielded numerous questions. We are grateful to all our guests for their time and interest.

**Over the winter, efforts by volunteer monitors** and regular walks through the historic districts by our Executive Director turned up almost a dozen violations which were subsequently reported to the LPC. These violations ranged from air conditioner sleeves cut through the limestone facade at the third-floor level of 880 Fifth Avenue, to the non-conforming use of the ground floor by a psychic reader at 44 East 65th Street. If you notice work being done on a landmark building or on a building in an historic district and you don't see an LPC permit posted, let us know and we will follow up.

**Central Park has been very much in the news** over the last three months.... The Naumburg Bandshell, located on the Mall in the Park, has weighed heavily on our minds since January 13 when the Art Commission voted to permit its demolition. For several years various groups connected to Central Park have campaigned for the Bandshell's removal, and as the restoration of the Mall nears completion, the removal of the 70-year-old structure becomes more imminent.

There are two distinctly different viewpoints on this issue, and while FRIENDS can respect the opinions of those in favor of the Bandshell's removal in order to restore the Concert Grounds to their original design, we must come down, quite decidedly, on the other side of the issue. In early January, in a letter to Edward Ames, President of the Art Commission, FRIENDS wrote,



The Naumburg Bandshell with the Wisteria Pergola in the background, located on the Mall in Central Park.

Credit: B. DeBenedictis

Credit: B. DeBenedictis



"While some people may feel strongly that the design and location may not be in keeping with the Park's original plans or its ongoing restoration projects, the Naumburg Bandshell is, nonetheless, part of the history of the Central Park, and could be easily integrated into the plans for the Mall's restoration."

To further cloud the issue, the Bandshell's disrepair and its use by drug users, prostitutes, and the homeless have been described as "a maintenance nightmare." While we sympathize, FRIENDS feels that the Parks Department has exacerbated those problems associated with the Bandshell by allowing it to deteriorate to the point where razing it appears to be the only solution.

Due to the tremendous outcry from the public, the Art Commission voted on February 10 to impose a 90-day moratorium on the Bandshell's demolition. But the moratorium, according to the Art Commission, is to allow time for them to consider, if any, relocation proposals. Their decision on its removal appears not to have wavered. We want to commend Christopher London, great-grandson of the Bandshell's donor, for spearheading an exhaustive campaign to keep the Bandshell in its present location by establishing "New Yorkers to Save the Naumburg Bandshell" that includes such notables as Avery Fisher, Brendan Gill, Dizzy Gillespie, Frederick R. Selch, Robert A.M. Stern, The American Guild of Musical Artists, Local 802 AFM (The Associated Musicians of Greater New York), The Women's City Club of New York, to name just a few. We also wish to thank *The New York Observer* for its very vocal support of the Bandshell, printing at least one story or editorial every week.

**The landmark designation of the Seventh Regiment Armory's** truly magnificent interior is one step closer to becoming a reality. On February 11, 1992, Board Member Alexandra Schlesinger testified on behalf of FRIENDS at a public hearing at the Landmarks Preservation Commission. In her testimony in support of the designation, Mrs. Schlesinger stated, "There can be no doubt that the Armory's interior spaces meet the criteria for landmark designation set forth in the law. Architecturally, it is a virtually intact treasure trove of the high-style Victorian....New York is enriched by these interiors and if anything should ever happen to them we would be culturally impoverished."

While fully supporting the proposed designation of the drill shed and the first, second, and fourth floors of the Armory, FRIENDS requested that the Commission review once again the spaces that they are omitting from the designation, specifically the third floor, to be absolutely sure that there is nothing worthy of protection in those spaces. The third floor of this vast structure is currently not being considered because of its present use as a women's shelter. FRIENDS believes that now is the time to fully protect this structure, knowing how difficult it is for the LPC to revisit a site at a future time. Completed in 1879, the Seventh Regiment Armory is both a New York City and a National Historic Landmark.



Above photo, courtesy of Friends of the Seventh Regiment, is of the Veterans' Room (also known as the Tiffany Room), one of the many significant interiors to be found in this landmark building.

**The facade of 631 Park Avenue** does not suggest that this site would be the subject of a precedent-setting case before the Board of Standards and Appeals....Nevertheless, the legality of a dry-cleaning establishment, on the ground floor of 631 Park Avenue, which is located in both the Park Improvement District (PID) and the Upper East Side Historic District, is currently being heard before this city agency. At issue is the non-conforming use of the space by a commercial business in what was formerly a medical office, for city regulations stipulate that commercial business must use commercial space. But in August 1991, the Department of Buildings allowed a dry-cleaning business to occupy what was formerly a podiatrist's office on the basis that the

latter could have been classified as either a medical office or a commercial professional office. This ruling would set a terrible precedent, paving the way for other commercial establishments throughout the PID and the residential side streets of the Upper East Side and effectively opening a Pandora's box.

The case was brought before the Board of Standards and Appeals by a tenant in the building who has since been joined in his effort by neighbors, community groups (including FRIENDS, Carnegie Hill Neighbors, and the Park Avenue Association), as well as elected officials representing the Upper East Side, including U.S. Representative Bill Green, Assemblymember John Ravitz, and City Councilmember Carolyn Maloney. The appeal has been further bolstered by the support of the Department of City Planning that found the Building Commissioner's interpretation to be inconsistent with its previous memorandum on regulatory classifications.

## "The City Scene"

**Rumors circulating through preservation circles** in recent months were confirmed on February 11, 1992, when City Hall released the Mayor's Management Report. According to the Report, the Landmarks Preservation Commission will have no budget and no staff for 1993. Upon closer examination, the Report indicated that the Landmarks Preservation Commission will be "consolidated" into the Department of City Planning. In letters to elected officials, FRIENDS wrote, "Not only do we feel any short-term financial savings resulting from such a merger would be extremely modest (at best), while the long run costs to the City would be immense, more importantly we strongly believe that merging two agencies that must interact substantively with one another on key policy issues is extremely poor public policy." The Commission (established in 1965) was made an independent agency by the 1989 Charter Revision, and was confirmed by the voters that fall. It has often been a target of poorly reasoned proposals aimed at undermining its integrity and new independence. Preservationists are therefore particularly sensitive to any tampering, implied or implicit, that would undermine the effectiveness of the Commission. Despite assurances from the Mayor's

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Office that the Report was "misinterpreted" and that the proposal involved only "housekeeping functions." FRIENDS and preservation groups throughout the City remain wary and on alert as to the Mayor's true intentions. The preservation of our Landmarks Law, the independence of the Commission that makes that law a reality, and its financial stability are top priorities for FRIENDS. We will keep you posted.

**Despite numerous obstacles, opponents of the proposed Ellis Island Conference Center** on the southern portion of the Island managed to fill the auditorium in the Great Hall at the Immigration Museum on December 17, 1991. The National Park Service gave every indication that they wanted to torpedo public participation in the public-hearing process. Considering the short notice, the hour, the date, the location, and the infrequent transportation available—plus the size and discomfort of the auditorium itself—the public must be congratulated for its tenacity. Adding to the overall feeling of a poorly orchestrated evening was a non-presentation of proposed plans that were incomplete, barely comprehensible, and as ambiguous as possible. And if you missed the opportunity to speak, you had only until January 6, 1992 to submit written testimony. The deadline was eventually extended after a public outcry.

The three issues that were foremost in the minds of the opposition were the proposed demolition of 12 (of the 32) historic buildings, the commercialization and privatization of the whole southern portion of the Island, and the proposed construction of a permanent vehicular bridge from New Jersey.



View of some of the historic buildings slated for demolition to make room for the proposed Ellis Island Conference Center.

Speaking against the proposal were Orin Lehman, New York State Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; U.S. Representative Ted Weiss; J. Jackson Walter, President of the National Trust, among others. In testimony that evening, FRIENDS President Anthony C. Wood added the group's name to the growing list of organizations and individuals opposing the plan for the Ellis Island Conference Center. "FRIENDS works long and hard to convince private property owners to do the right thing by their landmark properties. And now our government decides to apply lesser standards to a site whose national importance is without question? What happens on Ellis Island should be a model for the country to follow—not a national embarrassment," Mr. Wood said, and further urged the National Park Service to find a true preservation vision for Ellis Island.

Currently, the development proposal and testimony are being reviewed by the National Park Service. No date has been given for a final decision.

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