



NEWS FROM FRIENDS

DECEMBER 2003

FRIENDS Fights to Save Historic Trolley Kiosk

Forlorn and seemingly abandoned, a small cast iron and terra cotta building sits on a concrete island at the base of the Queensboro Bridge. This lone remainder of five original trolley kiosks bears little semblance to its former elegance.

The New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) has applied to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to dismantle and store the structure, which FRIENDS believes is akin to demolishing it. To stop this misguided plan, FRIENDS has joined forces with the Municipal Art Society's Urbanists—a group of young design professionals—to save the structure and bring it a new life.



The trolley kiosk today, unprotected and damaged by repeated auto strikes.

their Guastavino Tile vaults and ornamental trim, served as bulkheads over staircases that lead to a lower level where the trolleys were boarded. Bus service eventually replaced the trolleys in 1957.

Of the five original kiosks, three have gone inexplicably missing under the DOT's watch. One now serves as the entry to the Brooklyn Children's Museum. The lone kiosk remaining in its original site is hemmed in

The trolley kiosk is a link to the dynamic transportation history that shaped the city. The Queensboro Bridge Railway Company Trolley service began in June 1909, three months after the opening of the Queensboro Bridge (now an individual landmark). The trolley line ran from the Manhattan terminal to as far as Astoria (a trip cost you a dime). The five elegant structures, with

by fast moving traffic and unprotected by bollards or even landscaping. Consequently, it has been hit by cars three times. Therefore, it does require an extensive repair, which DOT agreed to in the their master plan for the Queensboro Bridge (in Contract No. 6), even appropriating the funds for restoration. We hope the LPC requires them to live up to that obligation. *(continued, page 4)*

East 63rd Street: Layers of Upper East Side

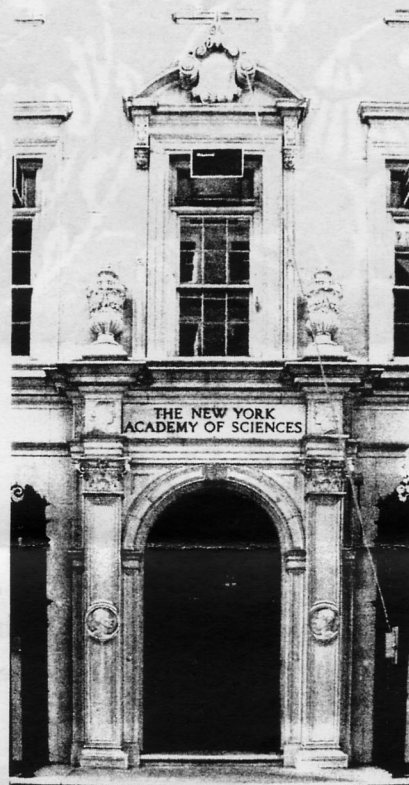
THE UPPER EAST SIDE has one of the richest—pardon the pun—and varied assortment of brownstones and townhouses in New York, including narrow modestly ornamented brownstones built after the Civil War for working- and middle-class families, grand 1880s and 1890s brownstones built for the well-to-do, and Beaux Arts and Colonial Revival townhouses and mansions constructed for the truly rich in the early years of the twentieth century.

A surprising number of Upper East Side blocks display this variety of residences built over the years, and one of the most attractive is East 63rd Street between Fifth and Madison Avenues.

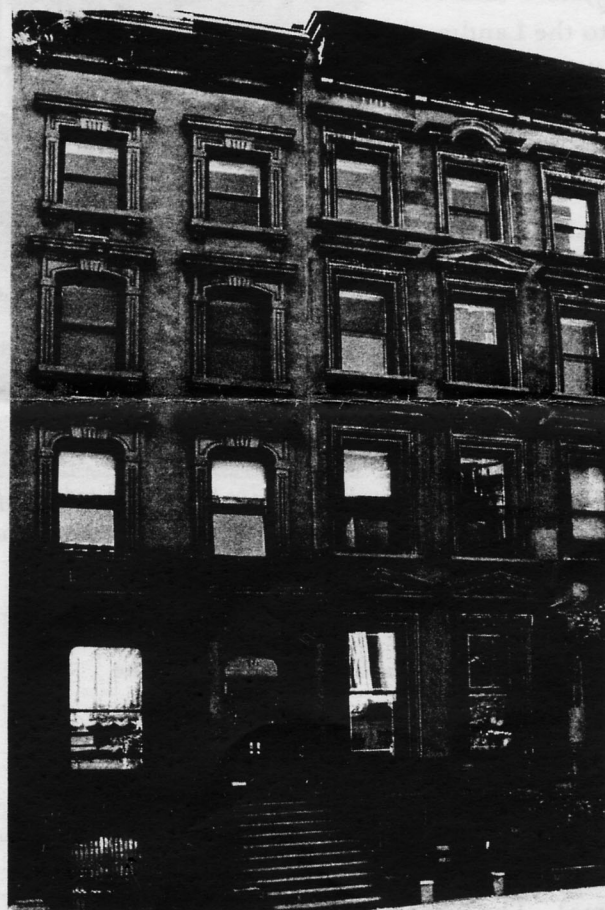
The three handsome Neo-Grec brownstones at No. 14 (1873) and Nos. 16 and 18 (1876) East 63rd Street are some of the oldest row houses in the East 60s near Central Park. Except for No. 18's missing stoop, all three have fairly intact brownstone facades. Nos. 16 and 18 are surprisingly modest for this location off Fifth Avenue. Their two-window-wide facades denote housing for the middle class that was typically built in the Upper East Side blocks east of Lexington Avenue. Somehow, they snuck onto this otherwise-pricey block.

These three brownstones probably stood largely by themselves in the 1870s. Although row house construction started marching up Madison Avenue north of 59th Street after the Civil War, many investors (or speculators) purchased—and held back—lots on the sidestreet blocks between Fifth to Madison Avenues, and particularly along Fifth Avenue itself. They believed that millionaires would want to build their mansions along Fifth Avenue opposite Central Park, and that's exactly what happened.

In the early twentieth century, millionaires also constructed fine homes on East 63rd Street. Nos. 15 (1901) and 17 (1901) are grand Beaux Arts townhouses. No 2 (1920) is a palatial mansion, originally the William Ziegler residence, now the New York Academy of Sciences. If you want a glimpse inside this landmark, the gallery is open September through June, Monday to Friday, from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. Call 212-838-0230.



2 East 63rd Street



14-16 East 63rd Street

Townhouse and Brownstone Mid-blocks

Lockwood

East 70th Street between Park and Lexington

ASK TOWNHOUSE-LOVING Upper East Side residents to name their favorite block, and many will single out East 70th Street between Park and Lexington Avenues.

What makes this block so special? To start with, it sits at the crest of Lenox Hill, and it has very little through-traffic. Most of the row houses are extremely well-maintained, and many are single-family homes. The block even has the Upper East Side Historic District's oldest surviving house, the charming Italianate style No. 129 East 70th Street (1863), which was part of a now-demolished five-house row.

This block also has two unbroken sides of row houses in a pleasing variety of architectural styles. Nos. 112-114 (1869) are a pair of Italianate brownstones with the mansard roofs that were so popular after the Civil War. (Both houses, unfortunately, lost their stoops and original front doorways.) No. 115 (1922) is a neo-Georgian townhouse with a few Beaux Arts touches. No. 107 (1921), just off Park Avenue, is a very grand, double-width Tudor Revival style mansion.

This block also boasts two fairly "new" houses. No. 124 (1941), which was designed by avowed Modernist William Lescaze for Edward A. Norman, proves that old and new architectural styles can—sometimes—successfully exist together. Standing directly across the street, No. 125 (1965), the Paul Mellon House, has a charming French-inspired style that complements this splendidly varied block.

You'll find one more treat at Lexington Avenue and East 70th Street: The original post-Civil War buildings still stand sentry on each of the four corners of this intersection. Astonishingly, except for ground-floor retail space, these buildings have scarcely changed in the past 100+ years.

Charles Lockwood is the author of "Bricks and Brownstone, the New York row house 1783-1929," which has been published in a new, expanded edition this Fall by Rizzoli. He advises townhouses owners on the restoration of historic facades and interiors.



111-121 East 70th Street



129 East 70th Street



In terms of the location of the kiosk, there are two options. The first is to leave it where it is, but improve the site through landscaping and protect the building with bollards or other protective structures. As a model for how to improve the site, DOT could look to the NYC Parks Department Greenstreets Program, which converts barren concrete triangles and traffic islands into mini landscapes, making the pavement spring to life by planting trees, shrubs and flowers. The other option for DOT is to move the 16-foot-by-16-foot kiosk, but only to a location in which it retains a visual connection to the bridge. The current island is dangerous for the pedestrians — to visit the kiosk requires a frightening (and illegal) run across several lanes of traffic. FRIENDS believes an ideal location would be across the street in Tramway Plaza, a NYC Park, where it could be restored by DOT and retrofitted for a new use and leased by the City to a vendor. With the Guastavino Tiles, rich terra cotta panels and decorative cast iron one can hardly imagine a more elegant place to buy a cup of coffee or newspaper.

Photo above: The original five kiosks in 1910. {credit: NYC Municipal Archives (Bridges 1028-iv)}. To see more historic images of the trolley kiosk and the Queensboro Bridge, visit our web site at www.friends-ues.org/Issues.htm.

Call Now for Your Building's History

Those of us lucky enough to live in a historic district know one of the great benefits — beyond assurance that the historic integrity of the neighborhood will be preserved — is the wealth of information available about the history of the buildings. Each building in a historic district has been thoroughly researched with information gathered on the architect, date of construction, alterations, historic use and occupants.

For our expansion of the Upper East Side Historic District to include Lexington Avenue, FRIENDS has done all of that research! So, if you live in our study area (see map) we have some or all of the information listed above. Just call the office and will tell you the history of your building.

Save the Date!

Join FRIENDS at our Annual Meeting and Awards Ceremony from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 4, 2004, at The Asia Society (725 Park Avenue at 70th Street). The public is welcome to attend but reservations are required. Please call (212) 535-2526.

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 are located at 20 East 69th Street, #4B, New York, NY 10021. Please contact us by calling (212) 535-2526 or e-mailing us info@friends-ues.org. www.friends-ues.org

