

# Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts Newsletter

Volume 6, No. 1

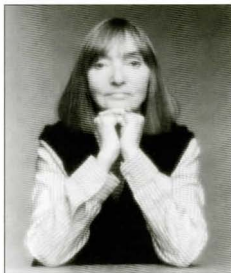
Fall 1991

**Dear Friend:** *"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose."* Halina instructed us to begin our current newsletter with this proverb. She knew that she would not be here to write it, as she had written all the others, but she knew the message that she wanted conveyed to you. Although she died on Easter Sunday, Halina is still very much with us.

We will continue to be guided by her preservation legacy. We will be passionate but not shrill. We will be firm but not harsh. We will write countless letters and testify frequently – whether it be at the Community Board, the Landmarks Preservation Commission, or the City Council. We will continue to be curators of the Upper East Side and constantly vigilant of our neighborhood's special treasures.

There have been some changes at FRIENDS. Tony Rosenthal has graciously agreed to serve as our Honorary Chair, and I have accepted the nomination as President. FRIENDS' strong Executive Committee meets regularly to direct the running of the organization. The duties of Britt Densmore, our Executive Director, have been greatly expanded. In addition, we hope FRIENDS will soon be moving into a new office space (if you have any leads on a space, please call us!).

Not a day goes by that we don't think of Halina and wish that she was still at the helm. However, as she wanted, we have picked up her banner and are marching in the forefront of those



Halina Rosenthal, 1917-1991  
Founding member and first President of  
FRIENDS, 1982-1991

Don Wynn

working to preserve both the Upper East Side and the Landmarks Law that makes it all possible. I look forward to working with all of you in the months ahead as we continue to wage the good fight for NYC and Halina.

Anthony C. Wood  
President

## New Officers Elected at September Board Meeting

Anthony C. Wood, a vice president of FRIENDS since its founding in 1982, was elected President at the September 12, 1991 meeting of the Board of Directors. Tony, who is Program Officer for the J. M. Kaplan Fund, has long been involved with preservation in

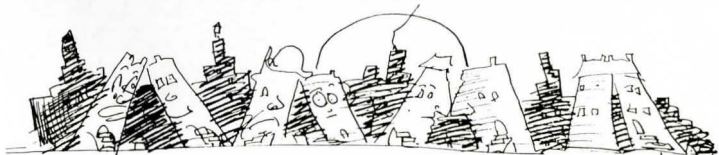
New York. He has worked for both the Landmarks Preservation Commission and the Municipal Art Society, served on Community Board No. 8, is Chairman Emeritus of the Historic Districts Council, and is currently teaching at Columbia University.

Tony Rosenthal, noted sculptor and husband of the late Halina Rosenthal, was elected to the Board in April and will now serve as Honorary Chair of FRIENDS. We are extremely pleased that Tony will continue his long association with FRIENDS.

Teri Slater, a Board member since 1985, was elected to fill the vice-president position vacated by Anthony Wood. Teri is a long-time Upper East Side resident and a member of Community Board No. 8.

Joyce Matz, who joined the Board of FRIENDS in January, was elected to the position of Secretary. This position became vacant when Jeanne Brown, Secretary for the last nine years, moved away from the City. (See page 2.) Joyce, a public relations consultant, is also active in the community and chairs the Landmarks Committee of Community Board No. 5.

Anne Millard and Rita C. Chu, both of whom have been Board members since FRIENDS' inception, will continue in their positions as vice presidents. Other long-time officers of the Board are Mimi Levitt, Treasurer, and David Karabell, Counsel, who will also remain in their present positions.





Celebrants gather around the Doris C. Freedman Award in the Great Hall of the Cooper Union on May 7: (l-r) FRIENDS Board Member Rita Chu, Tony Rosenthal, Susan Freedman, Councilman Robert Dryfoos, Borough President Ruth Messinger, Board Member Anne Millard, Deputy Mayor Barbara Fife, Board Members Anthony Wood, Tammy Grimes, Mimi Levitt, Jeanne Brown and David Karabell.

Doug Berg

### **Halina Rosenthal and FRIENDS Receive the 1991 Doris C. Freedman Award**

Shortly before her death on March 30, 1991, Halina Rosenthal received a letter from Mayor Dinkins informing her that she and FRIENDS had been chosen as the recipients of the 1991 Doris C. Freedman Award.

Established by Executive Order in 1982, the Doris C. Freedman Award is presented annually to an individual or organization for "a contribution to the people of the City of New York that greatly enriches the public environment."

### **Board Member Jeanne Brown Forsakes the Upper East Side for Rural Virginia**

Jeanne Brown, one of FRIENDS founding Board members, has left New York City after 20-odd years and headed for the countryside of Virginia and beyond. Jeanne has rented a pre-Civil War farmhouse outside of Charlottesville, and is considering a job offer in Geneva. "It was time for a change - past time!"

Jeanne was a force behind so much of what FRIENDS has accomplished over the years; most especially, Jeanne was instrumental in putting together eight successful annual meetings and countless receptions as well as our 1986 benefit.

Our loss is Charlottesville's gain. We will miss her presence on the Upper East Side and we wish her well.

At the award ceremony on May 7, 1991, elected officials, preservationists, and many close friends of Halina's and the organization that she headed for nine years gathered in the Great Hall of the Cooper Union. Deputy Mayor Barbara J. Fife presented the Freedman Award to Tony Rosenthal and the Officers of the Board of Directors of FRIENDS. Actress and Board Member Tammy Grimes narrated a moving slide tribute, tracing the history of Halina and FRIENDS.

A particularly poignant aspect of the award ceremony was the actual award itself, since it is a maquette by Tony Rosenthal of his sculpture "The Alamo" (aka The Cube), located at Astor Place and East 8th Street.

### **FRIENDS' Monitors Committee to Host Landmarks Preservation Commission Speakers on Tuesday, October 29, 1991**

Each year FRIENDS invites its corp of monitors and other interested

friends to a session on preservation issues. On Tuesday, October 29, Tom Reynolds, Director of Enforcement, and Alex Herrera, Director of Preservation at the Landmarks Preservation Commission will speak on violations in the historic districts, the newly drafted window guidelines and other topics of concern to both the Commission and Upper East Side residents.

At the April 30, 1991 Director's meeting, Board Member Margaret Parker was elected to chair the Monitors Committee. Margaret, a FRIENDS Board Member since 1986 and a long-time community activist, will seek to expand the group of FRIENDS' members who volunteer to "monitor" the many blocks in the historic districts for violations of the Landmarks Law. Cutbacks in the city agencies have been particularly devastating to the Landmarks Preservation Commission where the already understaffed agency has seen its budget and staff pared to the bone. It is Margaret's hope that increased numbers of residents who live in and around the historic districts will take on a more active role as the "eyes and ears" of FRIENDS and, by extension, the Landmarks Preservation Commission. We are more concerned than ever about the continuing onslaught from forces who tirelessly chip away at our historic districts and the Upper East Side neighborhoods as a whole.

The Monitors Meeting will be held in the Sunderland Room, on the second floor of the parish house, of St. James' Episcopal Church, 865 Madison Avenue, on Tuesday, October 29, 1991 at 6:00 pm. We urge those members who live in or around the historic districts to join us in our efforts to monitor these areas. If you plan to attend the meeting, please call the FRIENDS' office at 644-2828 and let us know you will be coming.

### **About "FRIENDS"**

FRIENDS of the Upper East Side Historic Districts is an independent non-profit 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. We need your money, but we also need your time. Become a monitor or join our Alert Network. (See page 5.) You can make a difference.



AIA Photo/Graphic

Recipients of FRIENDS' Eighth Annual Awards in January: (l-r) Jonathan Foster, AIA, Joy Hendricks, and Claude Vogel for Yves Saint Laurent/North America (Yves Saint Laurent Boutiques, Madison Avenue); FRIENDS' Board Member Anthony Wood; Sobhan Nolan of Kreisler Management and Elizabeth Krauss, President of Cherokee Owners Corp. (The Cherokee Apartments); Douglas Brandrup, President of the Metropolitan Club; and Richard Feigen and Harold Butrick, AIA for the Richard Feigen Gallery (formerly Mrs. J. William Clark House)

## FRIENDS to Offer More Walking Tours in October and November

FRIENDS will continue its series of historic walking tours this fall with two planned for October and November.

The first tour, scheduled for Sunday, October 27, at 1:30pm, will be led by urban historian Val Ginter, and will highlight the architecture, history and growth of the Upper East Side's Gold Coast. The second tour is scheduled for Sunday, November 3, at 2:00pm. Noted architectural historian Barry Lewis will lead a tour of the Metropolitan Museum Historic District and environs that will include the history and expansion of the Metropolitan Museum as well as the history of Central Park. Cost of each tour is \$15.00. For more information and reservations, please call the FRIENDS' office at 644-2828.

We want to thank, again, all those who participated in our two tours this past spring. The May tour of the Carnegie Hill Historic District and its proposed extension (led by noted architectural historian William Kingsland) and the June tour of historic East End Avenue (led by Board Member Michael George) were both great successes. We are very grateful to William and Michael for all their time and efforts on behalf of FRIENDS. We hope to bring them back for an encore.

## FRIENDS Will Host Symposium at the Municipal Art Society in November

Under the City Charter revision of 1989, the City Council is now a key player in the landmark designation process. The Council's recent actions on Dvorak House and Tribeca West Historic District demonstrate how active a role it will play in this process. How will the new Council make its decisions? What type of voting patterns will emerge? Will power remain with the leadership? How can preservation's agenda be successfully advanced in the Council?

These and other questions will be explored on Wednesday, November 13, at 6:00 PM as FRIENDS presents the symposium: "The New World Order: Preservation and the City Council." The Municipal Art Society is a co-sponsor of this event.

Former City Council member Edward Wallace, an attorney, and Michael Tomasky, a columnist with *The Village Voice* will be two of our guest panelists. Other guests are being scheduled. Anthony Wood, newly elected President of FRIENDS, will be the moderator for the evening.

We predict this will be a most interesting evening and urge our "Friends" to attend. The event will take place at the Urban Center at 457 Madison Avenue. For reservations please call 935-3960.

## Britt Densmore is Named Executive Director

Although Britt has been with FRIENDS as Administrative Director since late 1989, we thought that his increased visibility and expanded duties warranted a formal introduction. Now you can connect the voice on the phone and on our answering machine with a name, if not a face.

After ten years of living in Boston, eight of which were spent restoring an 1854 brick bowfront in the South End Historic District, Britt moved to New York City in November 1989. In a long contemplated – and finally realized – career move, Britt made the leap from accounting to preservation.

## AIA Guide to New York City is Offered as a Special Membership Premium

FRIENDS is offering copies of the quintessential architectural guide to New York City to those who make contributions of \$100 or more. The third edition of the *AIA Guide to New York City*, by Elliot Willensky and Norval White, is a feast of architectural information. It is a must for layman and professional, young and old. It is also a great gift – once you have it, you'll never give it up! A limited number of copies are available. Please see the membership form on the back page of this newsletter.



AIA Photo/Graphic

Halina Rosenthal was honored with the Historic District Council's Landmark Lion Award at the Americas Society in March: (l-r) Halina Rosenthal, Beverly Moss Spatt, Kent Barwick, Hon. Laurie Beckelman, FRIENDS' Board Member Margaret Parker, Tony Rosenthal, Gene Norman, Hon. David Todd, Carlyle Morris, FRIENDS' Board Member Joyce Matz and Jack Taylor.



## "On the Upper East Side"

*The Preservation and Planning Committee of FRIENDS has been meeting monthly since its formation in April of 1991. Led by Co-Chairs Anne Millard and Teri Slater and our Executive Director, the Committee meets to discuss the Upper East Side items calendared for the monthly*



552 East 87th Street, Henderson Place Historic District. Permit to construct a barrier-free access ramp at areaway of this private residence was granted by the LPC at their May 28 Certificate of Appropriateness hearing. Above photo, taken in mid-September shows completed ramp that was built within the confines of what was previously the garden area at the right of entrance steps.

Certificate of Appropriateness hearing at the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC). FRIENDS regularly gives testimony at both Community Board No. 8 (CB8) and the LPC on items of concern to us. Between April and August, FRIENDS testified on fifteen applications before the Commission. Anyone interested in attending the public hearings at the LPC are welcome to call the FRIENDS' office for information. A representative of our Preservation Committee also regularly attends CB8's Landmarks Committee meeting as well as its full board meeting each month.

*Efforts by our volunteer monitors brought more than a dozen reports of violations to the attention of the LPC over the summer. Ranging from the illegal removal of a limestone balustrade on a townhouse in the Metropolitan Museum Historic District to an awning installed on a McKim Mead & White mansion in the Upper East Side Historic District, all of them had one thing in*

common – all work was done without the approval of the LPC. If you notice work being done on a building in an historic district and you don't see a bright yellow LPC permit posted, let us know the location and we will follow up.

*This spring, the Jewish Museum (formerly Felix M. Warburg Mansion) at 92nd Street and Fifth Avenue began the long-planned renovation of its Gothic chateau-style mansion and construction of its new addition. The addition, designed by architect Kevin Roche, replaces the 1963 annex (built on Fifth Avenue just north of the main building) with a structure that exactly duplicates the original style of the 1908 building designed by C.P.H. Gilbert. In our Spring 1988 Newsletter, Halina Rosenthal wrote of the new design and its architect, "A true sleight-of-hand performance. Kevin Roche is not only a prestigious architect, but obviously also a prestidigitator quite secure since he is willing to bow to the ornate style of C.P.H. Gilbert and keep things contextual. The result is felicitous.... Bravo!"*



Renovation and expansion in progress at the Jewish Museum, at Fifth Avenue and 92nd Street.

*The Coalition to Save City & Suburban Housing's Article 78 lawsuit against the Board of Estimate was dismissed by Manhattan Supreme Court Judge Charles Ramos on August 22, 1991. A request for an immediate injunction against demolition, until an appeal could be heard, was also denied. The rulings ease the way for Peter Kalikow, Post publisher and owner of the full block site between 78th and 79th Street and York Avenue and FDR Drive, to demolish the four eastern-most buildings in the J-4 building complex. An appeal has been filed with the New York State Court of Appeals.*

## "The City Scene"

*In preservation circles, 1991 will almost assuredly be remembered as the year of the battle over the hardship-appeals-panel bills. The revised City Charter required formation of a body to hear hardship appeals of not-for-profit groups owning individual landmarks or properties within historic districts.*

*Mayor Dinkins' bill, Intro. #672, strongly supported by preservation groups and many members of the clergy, was pitted against Intro. #663, supported by the Catholic Archdiocese of New York. In testimony before the City Council in June, FRIENDS said it viewed the opposition's bill "as a direct broadside at the Landmarks Law, cloaked in the purported needs of one special interest group...[that] if allowed to pass in any form, will undermine the integrity of the Landmarks Law and the entire future of preservation in New York City. We see Intro. #663 as no less than the most vicious and far-reaching attack on the Landmarks Law in its 26-year history."*

*In late June a compromise bill, #672-A, was passed by the City Council that was not substantially different from the original. And though there are some lingering concerns about the final language of the bill, there is no doubt that the preservation community and everyone else who was a part of this tremendous effort were victorious – demonstrating once again the strength and determination of which the preservation community is capable.*

*We want to thank all our members who participated in this effort by filling out thousands of yellow post cards and writing letters and/or testifying before the City Council on behalf of the Mayor's bill. Most especially, we want to thank the New York Landmarks Conservancy for their Herculean efforts on behalf of the preservation community, the Municipal Art Society, and Council Member Mary Pinkett who, with polite determination, held to her guns and moved Intro. #672 through City Council virtually unscathed. Her unique Councilmanic style – part preacher, part teacher, part no-nonsense politician mixed with a great sense of humor – endeared her to preservationists across the City.*

*On July 19, Mayor Dinkins signed Local Law 672-A into law. We will be sure to keep you updated as to the appointments to, and activities of, this new hardship appeals panel.*

*Harlem was the location of the LPC's quarterly designation hearing on*

**Monday, July 15.** A total of 25 structures were proposed for landmark designation in this area of upper Manhattan. Laurie Beckelman, Chair of the LPC, is intent on focusing attention on areas of the City which have been largely excluded from the landmarking process in the past. Harlem is an area rich in architectural treasures which have often been overshadowed by more pressing social problems. Because of the tremendous amount of time required for research on individual sites as well as the amount of time required to present a property and to hear public testimony on each, the Commission was forced to limit this designation hearing to 25 properties. But Ms. Beckelman has made clear that these 25 were just the beginning.

*We never thought it would happen...* this summer the City Council confirmed three new mayoral appointments to the Landmarks Preservation Commission. They are Vicki Match Suna of Queens, senior associate architect at Lee Harris Pomeroy Associates, Stephen M. Raphael of Brooklyn, a real estate lawyer, and Rev. Thomas F. Pike, Rector at St. George's Episcopal Church. FRIENDS is particularly pleased to see Reverend Pike, a strong voice for preservation of sacred sites, among these new members. We welcome the new commissioners and look forward to hearing their views. As to others on the Commission: architectural historian Sarah Landau and landscape architect Lee Weintraub have both been reappointed to new terms. Commissioner Gaston Silva has left the LPC to become Chair of the Board of Standards and Appeals.

*The City Council hearings on affirmation of the Landmarks Preservation Commission's designation of the Tribeca West Historic District (TWHD)* brought out the faithful in July and August. The district, designated in May of this year after a seven-year effort, came under intense fire from the Real Estate Board of New York over the summer. The Real Estate Board proposed their own version of the historic district that effectively cut the size of the LPC-designated district in half. In testimony before the City Council on August 12, FRIENDS questioned the Real Estate Board's motives and its "ability to put forth a more objective opinion on the district boundaries than the LPC and the City Planning Commission," the latter having



Joists are all that remain of the former Dvorak house at 327 East 17th Street.

already affirmed the designation. Except for six lots on the southeastern edge, the district borders held up to scrutiny by the Council's Land Use Committee, and on September 4, the district's designation was affirmed by a vote of the full City Council, 32-0. Though we are pleased to see this new district, we are deeply troubled by the City Council's apparent need to gratuitously trim its boundaries in order to appear responsive to developers' concerns. Are we to see the carefully drawn boundaries of all our future districts redrawn to reflect political concerns?

*Antonin Dvorak's former home in America at 327 East 17th Street*, where he wrote the New World Symphony, is now rubble. Beth Israel Medical Center demolished the building and will construct an AIDS hospice on the site. The LPC, having courageously designated the building in February as an individual landmark on the merits of its historical and cultural significance, found itself overruled by the City Council in late June. Supporters of this historic site fought a long, and often contentious, battle to see the designation affirmed by the Council. Despite an advocacy effort that included rallies, tours, choirs of St. Philip's Church of Harlem and Gramercy Park's Calvary Church performing Dvorak's works in front of his home, and a gala concert featuring William Warfield at St. George's Church on Stuyvesant Square, the City Council bowed to the wishes of the hospital. Special kudos go to Jack Taylor for his exhaustive efforts on behalf of this landmark.

## FRIENDS' Preservation Alert Network

The record of the City Council in its first year of having final authority over landmark designation is a sobering one: The Council is less concerned with the architectural, historical and cultural merits of a landmark than with the forces that either support or oppose a designation.

Successful preservation in the '90s will require preservationists to improve their ability to convey public support for landmarks to the members of the City Council. To improve FRIENDS ability to "educate and enlighten" members of the Council, we are creating an organizational structure that will enable us to better mobilize your volunteer efforts.

If you are willing and able to call or fax your elected officials and other city

officials in support of a preservation position, please fill out the form below and send it back to FRIENDS.

Our goal is to be able, on short

notice, to generate a flood of phone calls and faxes to our Council members, the Council leadership, and members of the City administration.

Yes, I want to be part of FRIENDS' Preservation Alert Network.

My name is: \_\_\_\_\_

My address is: \_\_\_\_\_

My daytime phone number is: \_\_\_\_\_ My evening phone number is: \_\_\_\_\_

My City Council representative is (if you don't know we can tell you): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would be willing to call other members of the Network to ask them to call/write/fax their Council member.

Please mail completed form to FRIENDS  
140 East 63rd Street, Room 803, New York, New York 10021

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## CALENDAR OF MEETINGS AND EVENTS PLANNED

### OCTOBER

- Tuesday, 22** Monthly Certificate of Appropriateness Hearing at the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Begins at 9:30 am.
- Sunday, 27** Walking Tour of the Upper East Side Historic District led by urban historian, Val Ginter. Meets at the northeast corner of 60th Street and Fifth Avenue, 1:30 pm. Cost is \$15. Call 644-2828 for information and reservations.
- Tuesday, 29** Monitors Meeting with guest speakers from the Landmarks Preservation Commission, Sunderland Room, St. James Episcopal Church, 865 Madison Avenue, 6:00 pm. Call 644-2828 for information and reservations.

### NOVEMBER

- Sunday, 3** Walking Tour of the Metropolitan Museum Historic District led by architectural historian Barry Lewis. Meets at the northeast corner of 78th Street and Fifth Avenue, 2:00 pm. Cost is \$15. Call 644-2828 for information and reservations.
- Wednesday, 13** Symposium: "The New World Order: Preservation and the City Council." Panelists will include former City Council Member Edward Wallace and Michael Tomasky of The Village Voice. Anthony Wood will moderate. To be held at the Urban Center, 457 Madison Avenue, 6:00 pm. For reservations please call 935-3960.
- Tuesday, 26** Monthly Certificate of Appropriateness Hearing at the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Begins at 9:30 am.

**Yes! I want to help protect the future of the Upper East Side by joining FRIENDS.**

Enclosed is my tax deductible contribution.

\_\_\_\_\_ \$ 25 Contributing Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ \$ 50 Supporting Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ \$ 100 Sustaining

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