

14 July 2009

Testimony before the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission

re: West Park Presbyterian Church

Commissioners:

My Name is Dan Allen and I am here today in support of Landmark designation for West Park Presbyterian Church.

The complex, consisting of the original chapel by Leopold Eidlitz and the subsequent expanded church by Henry F. Kilburn, is worthy of preservation as both a neighborhood focal point and an example of the finest in the ecclesiastic architecture of Nineteenth Century New York. To allow this structure to further deteriorate or to be demolished would be a tragic waste of vision, craftsmanship and superb materials.

My specific task is to talk about the stone facades of the church. West Park is one of the few buildings in our city to be constructed of East Longmeadow Sandstone. In discussing the church's striking appearance many people have mentioned the unique stone. But what's really so special about East Longmeadow Sandstone? Isn't it just another Triassic Brownstone from New England?

This stone stands out for four reasons:

1. Its quality - far more durable than the more commonly used Portland Connecticut Brownstone
2. Its ability to take and retain fine carved detail. Again the grain structure, finer and purer than its Connecticut cousin
3. Its rarity. The sloping beds made the quarrying of this stone more and more economically challenging making the use of this stone less and less common.
4. Finally its color, a magnificent deep red.

These qualities have been recognized for a more than a century. The geologists Crosby and Loughlin writing at the turn of the Twentieth Century in their excellent guide; *The Building Stones of Boston and Vicinity* write about all of these qualities:

"The dip of the (Brownstone) beds carries them beneath a rapidly increasing thickness of overlying strata, and the cost of removing this cover narrowly limits the depth to which the stone can be worked profitably. The individual quarries are therefore subject to early exhaustion"

They go on to write:

"In comparison with Portland stone the grain is finer and much more even... and the color is redder. The color distinction holds especially for the Maynard quarry. In fact (this stone) more properly red than brown, is the brightest and handsomest sandstone which has been extensively quarried in New England."

This brightest and handsomest of materials helps to make West Park Church the visual delight that it is. This church should be designated, honored and restored.

Thank You.

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