

WEST SIDE

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# Protect Stables?

## *Fresh debate over Landmark status*

**By Susan M. Sippelle**

Cars rush up Amsterdam Avenue today where horses once pulled carriages. Few drivers realize that the big brick garages on the corners of 75th and 77th Streets were originally built for use as stables in the late 1800s. Stalls held horses on the lower floors, and elevators carried carriages to the upper stories.

For the past 20 years, Landmark West!, a community preservation group, has sought landmark status for the two former stables from the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission. When demolition work began on one façade last spring, the stable's status became urgent for the group.

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# Public Hearing Set on 'Landmarking' Former Stable

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Council Member Gale A. Brewer and other elected officials joined the campaign to protect the former stable after the removal of some of its windows. And then recently, the preservationists were given some hope.

The city's Landmarks Preservation Commission scheduled a public hearing to be held on Oct. 17 to determine if the former Mason/Dakota Stables, 348-354 Amsterdam Avenue, merits landmark status.

Supporters of the stable's historic preservation do not doubt its architectural and historical significance.

A prestigious architect of the era, Bradford Lee Gilbert, designed the Mason/Dakota Stables, built on Amsterdam's "Stable Row," the stretch of blocks between 75th and 77th Streets. Gilbert used arched windows and two colors of brick to distinguish his five-story building, characterized as "a stylistic gem" by Christopher Gray, architecture critic for "The New York Times." The stable rented out horses, carriages, tack, and drivers for the convenience of the neighborhood's mostly working class residents.

Less than 25 years after the stable's construction, however, it was out-of-date, as the city rapidly embraced the automotive era. The large, multi-story stable was converted into a parking garage and remains in use as a parking garage today, almost a century later.

"The Dakota Stables is an excellent example of an important building type—the commercial stable, a major aspect of urban life in the 19th century," said Andrew Scott Dolkart, one of the founders of Landmark West! and a professor of historic preservation at Columbia University.

When demolition work began on the building's facade last month, Brewer obtained a stop work order on the property. She has vowed to help the effort initiated by Landmark West! to preserve the stable. Other backers of the stable's preservation include the Manhattan borough president, the local state senator and assembly member, Community Board 7, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Historic Districts Council, and Mosette Broderick, director of the urban design and architecture studies program at New York University.

The Landmarks Preservation

Commission grants three types of landmark designation: individual (exterior), interior, and scenic. The Dakota Stables, which lies just outside the boundary of the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, is under consideration for individual status.

If the eleven members of the landmarks commission decide in favor of granting the Dakota Stables landmark status, the designation takes effect immediately, but final approval is voted on by the City Council. Brewer, who has served on the City Council since 2002, said that only one landmark designation has been rejected by the City Council during her tenure.

The owner of a landmarked building is permitted to change its use without the permission of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, but not its facade. The Dakota Stables is owned currently by Sylan Associates.

Lisi deBourbon, communications director of the landmarks commission, said that no plans have been submitted by the owner of the Dakota Stables to the commission. But Related Companies, a real estate developer, has announced interest in building a 16-story luxury residence on the site. A spokeswoman con-

firmed last week that Related has entered into a contract to purchase the former Dakota Stables. Robert A. M. Stern would be the architect to redevelop the site.

Sketches and plans for the proposed new building can be seen on the web sites of two retail real estate companies: Robert K. Futterman & Associates and Winick Realty Group.

"They're trying to squeeze out all the little people, and that's not going to happen," said Joseph Ramos, who has lived on 77th Street for 21 years, around the corner from the Dakota Stables.

The outcome of the preservationists' two-decade attempt to save part of New York City's horse-and-carriage age is not certain, however, especially now that some of Dakota Stable's facade has been stripped.

Peg Breen, president of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, said that Amsterdam Avenue, less glamorous than nearby Broadway, served as the gritty workhouse of the Upper West Side at the time when the stable thrived.

"It's important to keep reminders of how the city has developed and its history," Breen said. "We don't want to lose the character of the city." ■