

Greetings, Neighbor...



Despite the chaotic swirl of political events that seems to consume whatever energy New Yorkers have for public affairs, landmarking issues continually arise – and are decided. And the consequences of those decisions will be with us long after the scandal of the day fades from view.

Rockefeller Center—that icon of New York—receives LPC approval for dramatic changes in major architectural details, with hardly a peep. Privatization – and some corporate exploitation of public spaces – proceeds apace (see R.O. Blechman’s timely, thought-provoking cover, and p. 9). A plea to limit the expansion of “gates of hell” – those roll-down, solid metal gates that degrade shopping areas (p. 11). Big steps are taken in our pilot project to rejuvenate W. 72nd St.’s shopping district (p. 2). We reveal how it is that LANDMARK WEST! can do so much with so little: our hard-working interns (p. 10). Finally, a portrayal of an artisan – the keeper of historic steel casement windows (p. 4).

No scandal. Nothing salacious. The nation does not tremble. But the everyday world we occupy – the streets we walk – the building’s that surround us – the parks we treasure – the stuff that counts! – that’s what we watch, and try to protect. With your help.

Preservationally Yours,

Arlene Simon, President

63rd Street YMCA: The Fight Continues

LW! and other community groups, supported by Madonna’s affidavit, have filed a lawsuit against the City of New York and Vornado, the intended developer of a mid-block 41-story tower designed to be cantilevered over the landmarked 63rd St. West Side YMCA. The lawsuit challenges the use of a 10-year-old “special permit,” issued before other enormous projects were squeezed into the Lincoln Square neighborhood (e.g., the three Millennium blockbusters clustered around W. 66 St.). The special permit was based upon a now woefully outdated environmental impact statement, in the context of a less dense traffic pattern, and prior to designation of the Upper West Side/ Central Park West Historic District, which includes this site. In 1987, when it was first proposed, Paul Goldberger wrote in the *New York Times* that this skyscraper “would be plopped atop a distinguished older building,” and, whatever design merit the new building might have had, “was like saying a hippopotamus would be just dandy if it were the size of a mouse.” A small silver lining in this very dark cloud: the development is not a done deal. Vornado and the YMCA have yet to close on their deal, and the Buildings Commissioner hasn’t approved a site safety plan. Let’s see if the Supreme Court of the State of New York will heed our plea of rationality and common sense.



Long’s Love Letter

Note: The past few LW! newsletters have kept our readers up to date on the revitalization of West 72nd Street. Now, a word from a 60-year-old business presence on the block. We’ve come a long way.

August 19, 1998

Dear LANDMARK WEST!

We wish to commend you and your committee for your outstanding work on restoring West 72nd Street (Broadway/Amsterdam to Columbus) to the beginnings of its former glory. In your unique, persistent way, you managed to get the job done properly.

When you first approached us about taking down our canopy and awning, we mistakenly thought the committee was another “ten minute wonder” that would create a lot of commotion and accomplish nothing, while burdening us with unneeded stress and costs. We thought West 72nd Street, committee or not, would remain an architectural nightmare of dirty, unsightly buildings, and that any improvements on our part would be a waste of time and money. We felt the removal of our canopy and awning was unfairly being forced upon us.

The turning point for us came the day you brought in some beautiful, historical photographs, showing West 72nd Street in the early 20th century. We were impressed with the overall elegance of the block, and the purity of the architecture at the time. After you left, we looked outside our door and realized how the block had been so tastelessly changed into an ugly commercial strip, and how restoration to the feeling of a bygone era might restore some of the block’s former elegance. We fully understood your vision, and realized LANDMARK WEST!’s intentions were the best and that restoration was not only a possibility but a probability.

We have completely reversed our thinking and happily support LANDMARK WEST!’s good works. In support and agreement, we have voluntarily removed our canopy and plan to continue with the removal of our awning in the near future. They will be replaced by a rolldown awning conforming to Landmark’s standards. A new sign is being ordered to be placed in the front window of the store. We have abandoned the idea of erecting a sign, lighted or otherwise, on the exterior of the building, since we feel it will detract from the outside appearance of the building. We are even making improvements to the interior of our store, to continue the positive feelings inside as well as outside.

We are delighted with the work completed so far. The new sidewalks, granite curbs, lampposts and muni-meters have greatly improved the appearance of the block and seem to be attracting more pedestrian traffic.

Again, our compliments on a job well done. We look forward to the continuance of improvements, by LANDMARK WEST!, local merchants and building owners.

Sincerely,

Robert and Judith Long

Long’s Bedding & Interiors, Inc.

Dear LPC: Our Designation Wish List

There are still many unprotected buildings on the Upper West Side. LANDMARK WEST!'s Board of Directors has compiled a list of seven individual buildings and two potential historic districts as our highest priorities for designation. These include: two Collegiate Gothic style schools designed by C.B.J. Snyder; two exuberant apartment houses by George & Edward Blum; a former Art Deco automat; two former commercial stables; and districts of rowhouses of Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival, and neo-Renaissance design. We have officially nominated these buildings for designation to the Landmarks Preservation Commission, and hope that the Commission will calendar them for hearing in the near future. Please call us to see how you can support these nominations.



Great minds do think alike. As we were preparing this newsletter we came across this wonderful article. It's a perfect sequel to Lori Segal Zabar's spring '98 article about fighting a window replacement plan at 565 WEA.

Thousands of Windows: Little Time

by Christopher Gray



There are thousands of steel casement windows around New York City, and John Seekircher wants to repair them all – one by one. Mr. Seekircher established his old-fashioned, hands-on business a quarter of a century ago. Seekircher Steel Window Repair is in Scarsdale, NY, the heart of casement-window country, where a drive down any street of prewar houses can make him wince or smile with pleasure. “How can somebody do that – what were they thinking?” he blurts out, passing a brick Tudor, intact except for the new, plate-glass windows. “But look at that one, it’s got the texture, it’s part of the house,” he says about a comparable house with the characteristic swing-out, multipaned sash.

Casement sashes were the earliest operable windows in America, in wide use in the 17th century. But the frames sagged and the double-hung window – two fixed frames sliding up and down tracks – must have seemed a big advance. It replaced the casement by the mid-18th century. Metal casement windows swept into the residential market by the 1920s. The modernism of the 30s and 40s favored casements, although without the small leaded panes.

Mr. Seekircher first took notice of steel casement windows in 1975, when he worked for Steel Casement Service in Yonkers. After attending college, he got work as a boilermaker at Metro-North. His experience with steel windows stuck with him, and he began fixing steel casement windows on the side. “In the first 10 years it was a constant battle to convince people that the windows were worth keeping,” says Mr. Seekircher. But in the last 10 years, he says, people have seen that the energy savings were illusory, and that removing historic windows actually diminished property value.

He went into steel casement repair full-time in 1988. In Manhattan, he has done big buildings like Riverside Church, the Parc Vendome and Rockefeller Apartments. He stores salvaged hardware and several hundred entire windows and enjoys being able to supply a “new” old window for an expansion project. Mr. Seekircher holds most new windows in low regard, even the most expensive ones. “That’s why they call them replacement windows – because you’re going to have to replace them,” he says.

Although almost everyone in the preservation industry has sought to expand their businesses, Mr. Seekircher has defined himself by what he won’t do: he doesn’t paint, he doesn’t do leadwork, he “won’t touch” aluminum and he has never replaced a window. Rather, he likes watching people’s eyes when he polishes hardware to a golden shine, working “like a chiropractor” to bend windows back into line and splinting salvaged steel sections into rusting frames. “These windows, they’re like my kids,” he says.

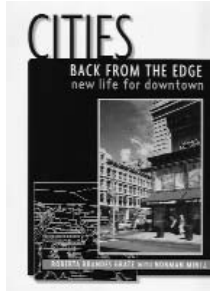
Adapted from material in Christopher Gray's New York Times August 16, 1998 article.

ROCKEFELLER APARTMENTS, 17 W. 54 ST., 1936. OFFICE OF METROPOLITAN HISTORY

Books in Brief

***Cities Back from the Edge: New Life for Downtown* by Roberta Brandes Gratz with Norman Mintz, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998, 361 pages, \$29.95.**

In *Cities Back from the Edge*, Gratz and Mintz provide a “cookbook for downtown revitalization” that addresses the key issues facing the nation’s cities and towns today. As David Shribman of the *Wall Street Journal* writes, “It turns out that the most valuable contribution to urban understanding of the year isn’t only a book, it’s also a bumper sticker: Think globally, act locally.”



***Cast-Iron Architecture in America: The Significance of James Bogardus* by Margot Gayle and Carol Gayle, foreword by Philip Johnson, W.W. Norton, 1998, 272 pages, \$39.50.** James Bogardus’ cast-iron structures were forerunners of the modern skyscraper. The first book on Bogardus’ life and work, *Cast-Iron Architecture in America* describes how iron architecture remade the face of American cities in the mid-nineteenth century. Includes illustrations of every Bogardus building for which an image can be found.



“The effect is like a sudden whirling of birds’ wings out of a tree. And if anyone wants to know what is modern ornament, that is what it is—something built for use, which suddenly, when it hits you at the right angle, begins to sing like the four and twenty blackbirds.”

Lewis Mumford, regarding Rockefeller Apartments’ casement windows (see p. 4)

Fall Events: Lecture Series & Walking Tour

A Closer Look at the Shapers of New York City This lecture series will examine several of the lesser known builders and designers who were responsible for creating the incomparable metropolis of New York City. The architectural and aesthetic contributions of Cass Gilbert, Dwight James Baum, and Vertner Woodson Tandy will be considered with reference to the work of contemporaneous architects. **Three Tuesdays, Nov. 3, 10 & 17, 1998 from 7-8:30pm. Sponsored in conjunction with the Bard Graduate Center. The cost including the walking tour (listed below) is \$60, \$40 for seniors, students and LW! members. Contact Bard at 501-3013/3011.**

Downtown: Where It All Began Lower Manhattan is filled with architectural monuments by both well-known and largely forgotten architects. In conjunction with the “Closer Look” lecture series listed above, Andrew Scott Dolkart will lead a walking tour examining a selection of the great buildings in America’s financial center. The exterior and interior of the grand Beaux-Arts U.S. Customs House will be studied in detail. **Sunday, Nov. 8, 1998, 2:30-4:30pm. \$17, \$12 for seniors, students and LW! members. Contact Bard at 501-3013/3011.**

LANDMARK WEST!

Support LANDMARK WEST! – we need your help. Please make your tax-deductible contribution below, and return this form.

★ **A special offer:** Contribute \$150 or more, and receive a gift of either *Cities Back from the Edge*, by Roberta Brandes Gratz with Norman Mintz; *Cast-Iron Architecture in America*, by Margot Gayle and Carol Gayle; an autographed copy of *Guide to New York City Landmarks (2nd edition)*, by Andrew Scott Dolkart, or another book from our collection.

\$30 \$50 \$100 \$150 ★ \$250 \$500 \$1000

Cities Back from the Edge *Cast-Iron Architecture* *Guide to NYC Landmarks*

Whatever you give will help \$ _____

Thanks, you can keep the book...but here’s my gift of \$150

I would like to make a gift in honor of _____

I will do volunteer work for LANDMARK WEST! – send me a form

My employer offers a Matching Grants Program – the form is enclosed

Send me a copy of the LANDMARK WEST! map newsletter

I would like to be notified of walking tours

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Thank you for your support!

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About LANDMARK WEST!

LANDMARK WEST! is a non-profit award-winning community group working to preserve the best of the Upper West Side’s architectural heritage from 59 to 110 Street between Central Park West and Riverside Drive. Since 1985 it has worked to achieve landmark status for individual buildings and historic districts. Today, **LANDMARK WEST! is the proud curator of the area’s 2,605 designated landmarks (up from only 337 in 1985)**, and continues to promote awareness of these architectural treasures and the urgent need to protect them against insensitive change and demolition.

Preservation Profile: Sherida Paulsen

by Laura Hansen



As a practicing architect for 19 years, a former co-chair of the Design Committee of the Real Estate Board of New York, and a Trustee of the One East 60th Street Historical Foundation, Sherida Paulsen brings to the Landmarks Preservation Commission a wealth of knowledge of design, real estate and historic structures. But it is her analytical skills which she feels are key to being an effective Commissioner.

The Commission is often presented with projects that have many small components, she explains. The challenge is to view these elements not in isolation, but within the context of the building as a whole, a concept which is especially critical in historic districts where eclectic elements often exist “cheek by jowl.” Equally important, decisions of appropriateness or inappropriateness must be informed by the context of the city as a complex and dynamic organism. Thus, Ms. Paulsen brings to the review process a constructive ability to break down a large problem into manageable parts while maintaining a sense of how the parts work together harmoniously. Observers of the Commission praise her contributions as a clear thinker. She not only brings this skill to public hearings, but also to her role as a member of the Policy Committee, in which the Commission’s rules, regulations, and Certificate of Appropriateness are regularly reviewed.

Ms. Paulsen’s attention to the big picture is echoed, she feels, in the Commission’s efforts to work closely with other city agencies, including the City Planning Commission, the Department of Buildings, and the Economic Development Corporation (EDC). She cites the Commission’s role as an advocate for the reuse of the Coast Guard base in Staten Island, recently selected to house The National Lighthouse Museum. As the lead agency in that property’s redevelopment, the EDC “looked to the Commission to be a revitalizer, not only a regulator,” Ms. Paulsen reported. As a result, a close collaboration identified and secured a successful developer, tenant and reuse – not to mention bringing a nationally significant institution to New York City.

At the other end of the spectrum, Ms. Paulsen attributes the Commission’s ability to protect the city’s 21,000 landmark properties in part to the participation of grassroots organizations like LANDMARK WEST!. “The testimony of these groups brings an important perspective to the discussion and is extremely helpful to us in our decision making process,” she said. She also credits these organizations for the designation of some of the city’s greatest landmarks, which are a direct result of the nomination and lobbying efforts by groups like LW!

Ms. Paulsen earned a B.A. in Architecture at the University of California at Berkeley and her M.Arch. from UCLA. She moved to New York in 1979 and has worked at several prominent architectural firms. She was appointed to the Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1995, and she is currently Project Principal at Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn.

Laura Hansen is the coordinator of Place Matters, a city-wide advocate for New York’s places of history, story and tradition.



July 1998 Men at work laying new sidewalks and granite curbs on W. 72 St. See p.2.

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No Parking Today

by Guy Trebay

Charging up Poet's Walk in his in-line skates, Joe Wills gets almost as far as the Naumberg Bandshell and suddenly pulls up short. The entire area, he finds, has been cordoned off and covered with big white

tents. This would make it two weeks running that this part of Central Park has been closed to the public, the second consecutive weekend that Wills has been forced to find someplace else to skate. Is this a tragedy in the larger scheme? Probably not, concludes Wills. It just happens that this prime spot of asphalt is where Wills and scores of other exhibitionists meet every weekend. There's something disturbing about finding it off-limits. "I mean," says Wills, "doesn't this still belong to the public? Wasn't there an ad campaign that said, 'You Gotta Have Park'?"

It does and there was, but we don't live in that city anymore. The reason for the tents was a gala to benefit the private nonprofit Nature Conservancy, mounted in affiliation with the Central Park Conservancy. Since signing a \$4 million annual contract with the city last year, the Central Park Conservancy has taken over the running of the park under terms that, critics claim, remove operating decisions from public view. No one can be accused of keeping "The Third Great Party To Save the Last Great Places" a secret, however. Trumpeted in a full-page New York Times ad, the party had major sponsorship from Anheuser-Busch, Bacardi, and G.M.

"Last Great Places" is the Nature Conservancy's effort to preserve endangered ecosystems. To a lot of people, Central Park is a "Last Great Place." There are no small disruptions in the framework of an ecosystem totaling a mere 843 acres. Every incursion registers. Try erecting a party tent in the 3,472-square-mile expanse of Yellowstone and you'd be hanged. But not only are you free to do it in Central Park, with the right connections you can truck in potted palms, sound equipment, murals of bosky woodlands, and Rain Forest beverage vans.

The expansion of private enterprise into public space is the dirty little secret of late-'90s urbanism. Central Park is not a country club or a catering hall. A private benefit there hardly seems to justify closing off portions of the park to public use for 10 days. Neither the Parks Department nor the Central Park Conservancy is offering figures on the number of hours city personnel were employed to police the tents, essentially keeping the rest of us from disturbing privately owned structures on public space. Instead they point to an event they claim was inclusive, meaning Nature Day, when selected school groups were invited to experience eco-tents, to be opened to the general public at noon. Alas, if you'd happened to bring your children and friends at one o'clock, you would have found the eco-tents being struck and carted away. "We really couldn't afford to stay longer," said one Nature Conservancy employee. "We would have had to pay everyone so much money and it's really expensive. A lot of people don't realize you can rent Central Park. But you can. For real."



The Interns: Not Smoke and Mirrors

by Jennifer Morris

Anyone who has called our office and seen our work probably wonders how it all gets done. I'll let you in on a secret: it's all done, not with smoke and mirrors, but with interns. The past four years at LANDMARK WEST! have marked the era of the student intern. As my tenure at LW! ends, I'm writing this brief history of our time together on behalf of all the interns.

The relationship between LW! and students from Columbia University's graduate Historic Preservation Program began when Kirsten Moffett, who had worked for LW! previously, continued working here when she entered the program. LW! found Kristen Prachar – its next intern – when she (and we have all been shes) came to the office for research on her thesis and decided to stay. (Her thesis evolved into the pilot project of our Retail Assistance Program, West 72nd Street.) After that, LW! realized that it had struck gold, and started to actively recruit students from Columbia – which is how three of us (Preuit Hirsch, Beth Sitterly, and I) came to work for LW! in the fall of 1996. Several other students have come and gone in the past two years, and by the time this article is published, several more will have joined our ranks.

At LW!, we coordinated walking tours, the Certificate of Appropriateness Committee, and current issues and projects. We learned how the New York landmarks law works, and how the preservation community supports its efficacy through its activities and constant vigilance. Most importantly, we kept the office running by performing the prosaic tasks of paying bills and answering phones. One of my personal favorite responsibilities was brainstorming with Arlene for our biannual newsletter, and then editing, proofreading, finding errant photos and facts, until at long last we had a finished product – like the one you're reading now.

Working at LW! proved to be a wonderful complement to the Columbia program. It gave us insight into the "real world" implications of the theories and subjects we were studying. In fact, we sometimes acted as sources of information for our friends in the program because we were so well informed on current issues. We got to know our professors – some of them LW! board members – outside the classroom. In short, LW! lent a broad, fresh perspective to the academic world.

Although I'm new to New York, I can say with a New Yorker's confidence that there is no better city in which to learn about preservation. In many ways, that holds true for LW! as well. This is preservation "in the trenches." And to quote Frank Sinatra, if you can do it here, you can do it anywhere.

Jennifer Morris is a graduate of Columbia University's Historic Preservation Program.



Preuit



Jennifer



Dalila



Beware: The Gates of Hell

by Fred A. Bernstein

"Superior design," trumpets the brochure for City-Gates. The company must mean ease of operation; it can't be touting the esthetics of its products. City-Gates and its competitors market the rolldown, corrugated metal "gates" that turn attractive storefronts into rusty-metal eyesores and, collectively, reduce entire shopping streets to visual back alleys. Truly, these are Gates of Hell.

Choose a corner – let's say 42nd and Madison. It's nighttime: Grand Central Terminal and the Chrysler Building are at their floodlit best. But something else catches the eye: Almost the entire west side of the avenue from 41st to 42nd Sts. is blighted by what look like oversized garage doors. The effect? It's like you're strolling past the loading dock of an abandoned factory, instead of through one of the world's great shopping districts. Things are almost as bad on every other commercial

thoroughfare throughout the city. Instead of rolling up its sidewalks at night, like some other cities, New York rolls down its facades.

There's nothing wrong with corrugated steel, which has been used to pleasant effect in the architecture of Frank Gehry and others. It's the amount of it, used to repel and obscure. With the gates down, it's impossible to tell a bookstore from a supermarket. And, of course, the gates are nearly always covered in graffiti, adding to the sense of urban degradation.

Two City Council members, Thomas Duane and Andrew Eristoff, have introduced a bill to eliminate solid metal gates on 34th and 42nd Sts. The Council members are to be commended, but their bill doesn't go far enough. A citywide ban on solid gates is overdue. The law could be phased in over several years, with tax breaks for businesses that spend money to comply. Besides, more inviting streets means more pedestrians, which means increased tax revenue and decreased crime. This improvement could pay for itself.

Would storeowners resist? City-Gates and other companies sell less offensive products – open-weave gates of horizontal rods and vertical connectors – which provide as much protection as the opaque models.

The open-weave gates can even be attractive (especially when they're installed behind glass); at Galileo, a home-design shop on lower Seventh Ave., the metal forms a kind of scrim, turning the corner store into a softly lit showcase for '50s objects. No solid gate has ever been anything but repulsive.

Solid metal gates are the equivalent of obnoxious car alarms that scream, "My paranoia is more important than your quality of life." Like car alarms, they're a form of incivility New Yorkers are ready to do without.

Adapted from Fred Bernstein's July 1, 1998 column in the New York Daily News.

LANDMARK WEST!

THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE



NEWSLETTER

FALL 1998