



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!  
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee  
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission  
123 West 69<sup>th</sup> Street  
October 6, 2009**

LANDMARK WEST! is a not-for-profit community organization committed to the preservation of the architectural heritage of the Upper West Side.

The Certificate of Appropriateness Committee wishes to comment on the application to install a stoop railing at 123 West 69<sup>th</sup> Street, designed by Thom & Wilson and built in 1882.

LANDMARK WEST! consistently advocates for the restoration of stoops on historic rowhouses, so many having been lost over time as the use of these diminutive structures has evolved from single- to multiple-family residences. Each time we encourage New Yorkers to take on the challenge of stoop restoration, we talk about a critical chain reaction: the domino effect. One person does the right thing—restoring their stoop to its original glory—and others see the benefit to the larger neighborhood and follow suit.

Number 123 West 69<sup>th</sup> Street is in amazing company, alongside one of the most striking examples of this very important phenomenon: 129-135 West 69<sup>th</sup> Street. The determination of just one homeowner in the late 1990s to restore his stoop tipped the first of what would be four consecutive restoration projects. Now, No. 123 is poised to kick off the next wave of stoop restoration on West 69<sup>th</sup> Street. Knowing that others will look to this rowhouse as an example of appropriate stoop restoration, it is imperative that we get it right.

### **Research**

Founding a proposal on solid historical foundations is the key to a successful design. Our committee was thrilled to see the homeowner understand this and seek out historical sources, such as tax photos. However, even with the information the photos provide, our committee was still left with some questions.

For example, the materials of the original balustrades and newel posts, as pictured in the circa 1940s tax photo, is difficult to identify with 100% certainty. Some members of our committee posited cast iron. But without corroborating sources—the designation report is silent on the composition of the stoop and the Department of Buildings records have yet to be consulted—how can we say for sure? If in fact the stoops at Nos. 123-127 were made of cast iron, then a replacement stoop in brownstone, regardless of its quality and ability to harmonize with other stoops on the block, is just not appropriate. Materials as dissimilar as metal and stone are not interchangeable, and we should not imply that they are by approving this proposal.

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We understand that the Commission staff discussed with the homeowner the option of fiberglass balustrades and newel posts to replicate the possible original cast iron. Fiberglass is a tested material in historic districts, used widely for cornice restorations, and evidence seems to show that the material is up to the challenge of satisfying high expectations of both quality and aesthetics. We encourage the homeowner to reconsider this possible option.

Though we long to see the stoop at 123 West 69<sup>th</sup> Street fully restored, we do not want to encourage unfounded, over personalized gestures in a historic district. Until more research is completed, no work should be approved on the stoop of this rowhouse, and thus we do not support this proposed as presented today.