



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
243 West 76th Street
February 17th, 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 remove an altered stoop and create a window opening at 243 West 76th Street, an Eclectic-style rowhouse designed by William H. Boylan and built in 1889-90.

Number 243 West 76th Street is one in a row of seven beautiful houses designed and built by William H. Boylan in 1889-90. Over the years, these rowhouses have suffered many ill-conceived alterations which have considerably impacted the row. On top of this, many years of neglect have taken their toll.

The 1940s tax survey photograph documents a grand, rusticated dog-leg stoop at Number 243. Further, the front areaway featured two prominent stone piers leading to the basement-level entrance underneath the stoop. One pier and one areaway wall are still extant. The West End-Collegiate Historic District designation report states that the stoop was extant at the time of designation, notes that the building was altered in 1982, but makes no mention of any part of the stoop being altered to the conditions we see today. Was part of this dog-leg stoop removed *after* designation? If so, we question whether this was done with the Commission's consent. Without it, this is a serious violation of LPC *Rules*. The Violations Department should be included in this discussion to determine the legality of the existing conditions before any further step is taken.

The majority of this magnificent stoop is still extant, yet the applicant is proposing to remove it. This is most inappropriate. Not only is the stoop a significant feature, but a significant amount of original historic fabric remains. Its loss of it would impact not only the building, but also the row, as well as the character of streetscape in this historic district. The applicant is misguided in looking to examples of removed stoops and basement entrances on which to base this proposal. These are not original conditions but unfortunate and much later, ill-conceived alterations.

It must be noted that the stoop at Number 243 is not a sole survivor – the stoop still exists at Number 251, is in its original condition and is in use today. Rather than demolish them in turn, these stoops should be the inspiration for others in the row to undertake stoop reconstruction. A stoop restoration is a powerful gesture and often sets off a “domino reaction” – once one property owner does the right thing and restores a stoop, neighbors follow suit. On a block that is home to several rowhouses, this one could set a tone for the character of the street by

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reconstructing its stoop.

It could also set a standard for sensitive rowhouse façade restoration in the West End-Collegiate Historic District.

To begin moving in the right direction, our Committee's advice to the applicant is as follows:

- 1) Reconstruct the dog-leg stoop to its historical condition;
- 2) Reconstruct the front areaway and front areaway stone piers to match their historic conditions;
- 3) Slate is neither a historically nor a physically appropriate material for front areaway pavers. Bluestone is recommended by the Commission's *Rules*;
- 4) Reveal the rowhouse's brickwork – do not mask it with paint. There is evidence today that the façade has already been stripped and the beautiful brickwork is exposed. If painting must be done, the applicant should propose a color which resembles the original brick color.

We look forward to seeing this long-neglected building fully restored, and urge the Commission to require a re-study of the stoop prior to any approval.