

How to Strengthen Historical Society

To the Editor:

Alas, despite valiant and somewhat successful efforts on the part of energetic new management, despite the swift and helpful response of both New York City and State, the New-York Historical Society again finds itself at the edge of the abyss (arts pages, Nov. 29).

If the proposed merger between the society and the Museum of the City of New York is the last best hope, then that hope might be advanced by the addition of a third partner: the New York State Museum. The collections of the Historical Society, the Museum of the City of New York and of the State Museum are rich in materials about both city and state. Together, the collections could enhance one another. An institutional framework that included all three organizations could bring up-to-date technology in, make new services possible and perhaps even reduce costs.

Best of all, the state could serve as the repository of last resort, insuring that the great New York City collections remain whole and protected against dismemberment even as pursuit of new resources inches forward.

JOAN K. DAVIDSON

New York, Nov. 29, 1995

The writer is a former New York State Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

Break It Up

To the Editor:

Every time the New-York Historical Society redefines its mission, New York shrinks a little. We have learned of the unimportance to New York of ships on the Hudson, of a copy of the Declaration of Independence printed in Philadelphia and of

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the first significant gallery of old master paintings in America.

Why should the only painting by Hercules Seghers ever in America now reside in the Thyssen Museum in Madrid because it was miscatalogued and sold by the society in the midst of another drive to raise funds in 1971? Why should the Metropolitan Museum of Art have been forced to raise more than \$2 million this year so that the Medici birth salver by Giovanni di Ser Giovanni might stay in New York?

It is time to dismantle the society and distribute the remains of its collections to New York State institutions that have responsible research, conservation, exhibition and deaccessioning policies. In an important sense the collections of the New-York Historical Society already belong to us. They should be redistributed, not redefined and certainly not sold to the citizens who already own them.

ROBERT TUGGLE

New York, Nov. 30, 1995