

The West 67th Street Committee

January 30, 1984

Mr. Gene Norman, Chairman
Landmarks Preservation Commission
20 Vesey Street
New York, NY

Re: New York Historical Society

Dear Mr. Norman:

I wish to register strong opposition to the application for a certificate of appropriateness regarding the proposed piggyback tower on top of the New York Historical Society. As one of New York's originally designated, and stateliest, landmark structures, the Historical Society should not be subordinated to the function of baseboard for Mr. Hardy's new structure.

I attended the public hearing before the Commission, and join the voices of those who opposed the certificate on architectural and preservationist grounds. I trust that the Commission will not be distracted by the rather uncommon circumstance that Mr. Hardy's design, in the abstract, is not bad -- indeed, in another location, it surely would be preferable to many of the sterile designs otherwise polluting our neighborhoods. The issue, of course, is not the academic or abstract quality of Mr. Hardy's talent: It is whether we are to permit our landmarks to be converted to footstools. It is inconceivable that the Commission will allow this to occur.

As a resident of the West Side for 24 years, I suppose I should not be surprised by the ingenuity of real estate developers. However, the audacity of the developers demonstrated in recently proposed ventures has jarred even my jaded sensibilities.

Item. Demolish Second Church of Christ Scientist (CPW & 68) and build a tower with space for the church in the basement.

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Item. Cantilever a tower over the
Spanish-Portugese Synogogue (CPW & 70th)

Item. Historical Society.

Item. Serious discussion of the possibility of
erection of a tower on the land surrounding the
Museum of Natural History.

I recognize that the Commission must evaluate every application on its own merits. However, in formulating a philosophic approach to the general subject of landmark preservation, it is surely not irrelevant to consider the preservation/development environment. The fact that at this particular juncture in our history, the convergence of high real estate values and Washington budget cuts for non-profit agencies and social services has made strange bedfellows of religious and other non-profit organizations and real estate developers, does not mean that preservation is to be sacrificed. Once demolished or perverted, our landmarks are gone forever. It is the noble task of the Commission to resist the "fast buck" ethic of the present overheated environment, and to protect the longer range interests of our society -- to protect our heritage, and preserve it for future generations.

I know that you are equal to the task, and devoted to the cause.

Sincerely,


Arlene Simon

cc: Members of the Commission