

Columbia University

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING

CENTENNIAL 1881-1981

23 January 1984

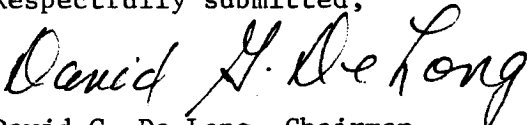
Mr. Gene A. Norman
Chairman
Landmarks Preservation Commission
20 Vesey Street
New York, New York 10007

Dear Mr. Norman:

As Chairman of the Division of Historic Preservation in the Graduate School of Architecture and Planning at Columbia University, I am interested in theoretical issues affecting preservation, particularly when they provide for responsible flexibility in the interpretation of legal issues affecting landmarks. In this regard I wish I could argue for the proposed addition to the New York Historical Society, for it is an intriguing design by one of the nation's most talented architectural firms. Unfortunately I cannot. It is wrong in terms of scale, and it is scale that is essential to the proper historic perception of both the original building and the surrounding neighborhood. In another location the proposed tower would surely be a notable example of sympathetic design, but such sympathies are stressed behind limit in this particular situation.

As a private consultant, I once advocated a proposed addition to an existing building in a landmark district, a proposal that was denied by the members of the Landmarks Commission. I have come to see how their decision was correct, and relieved that their judgment prevented a more permanent record of my error. In that case, as in this one, it was a matter of factors beyond the architects' control that led to serious problems. In such instances, the Landmarks Commission is often the last chance for the greater values of the city to be upheld. In this sense, I must urge that permission for the proposed tower be denied.

Respectfully submitted,



David G. De Long, Chairman
Division of Historic Preservation