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The Honorable Gene A. Norman, Chairman
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
20 Vesey Street
New York, New York 10007

Dear Sir:

Under separate cover I have written to you of my interest in helping to advance landmark designation on the West Side. I write this letter to urge the Commission to reject The New-York Historical Society's proposal to build an apartment tower on top of its landmarked Classical Revival building.

Ideally, no tower, however sympathetically designed or sensitively proportioned--and the one proposed can be faulted on both counts--should be built atop a landmark. Unfortunately, the Commission allowed one to be built on top of (and through) the Villard Houses, and the depressing result is a constant reminder of that mishap. Since then, happily, the Commission has rejected a proposal for a tower on East 71st Street that would have overwhelmed the adjacent older, low-rise buildings, and Shearith Israel has withdrawn (one hopes permanently) its objectionable proposal for a needle skyscraper overhanging its landmark synagogue.

If the Commission were to grant The New-York Historical Society a C of A for a tower atop its building, a flood of similar proposals from landmarked institutional buildings would be certain to follow. (And the very next one to come in would likely be that of the Museum of Natural History!) With such a precedent in place, the landmarks law would be virtually useless.

Fortunately, the Historical Society has undeveloped property behind its building which could be used for additional work space and perhaps even a small apartment house. There is no impediment to denying the requested C of A, and it must be denied.

Sincerely,

Sarah Bradford Landau
Assistant Professor of Fine Arts