



January 24, 1984

The Preservation Committee of the Municipal Art Society would like to express its unanimous opposition to the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the construction of an addition to the New-York Historical Society. The Municipal Art Society supports the efforts of Community Board 7 and the Upper West Side ^{community} to safeguard its vital dynamic of physical and social characteristics.

What is at issue today is the very concept of landmarks preservation. We believe the purpose of the Landmarks Law is to preserve significant architectural, cultural and historical assets of our city. While we recognize that a designated landmark may be altered in an appropriate way, the tower proposed for this particular landmark relegates the New-York Historical Society to be merely a base for a new building, which dominates the forthright character of the landmark.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission is right to encourage contextual architecture within historic districts. This talented architect could design a sympathetic extension in the rear yard; however, we cannot support even the finest architect's design for a new building over a distinguished landmark. If the Landmarks Preservation Commission approves the proposal, a destructive precedent will be established that will clear the way for other towers atop buildings whose rich architectural detail needs no further augmentation or competition.

To paraphrase the Commission's own 1969 opinion of the tower proposed over Grand Central Terminal, "to balance a 23-story tower above a Neo-Classical facade seems nothing more than an aesthetic joke...The 'addition' would be four times as high as the existing structure and would reduce the landmark itself to the status of a curiosity."

The Municipal Art Society urges the Landmarks Preservation Commission, in making this decision, to be precise in applying the Landmarks Law ^{and deny the C of A.}