



January 24, 1984

STATEMENT BEFORE THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION IN OPPOSITION
TO THE CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS APPLICATION SUBMITTED BY THE
NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The New York Landmarks Conservancy is opposed to the Landmarks Preservation Commission granting a Certificate of Appropriateness for the restoration, renovation and enlargement of the buildings on the site of the New-York Historical Society.

In an effort to evaluate this application with regard to the spirit as well as the letter of the landmarks Law, the Conservancy has concluded that the proposed new construction on the New-York Historical Society site cannot be allowed. An alteration of this magnitude to the landmark must be considered inappropriate. Plainly, the purpose of the landmarks law is to preserve the buildings as they were designed and constructed--not just to maintain selected elements such as the facade or ornamentation. This application seeks approval for an addition to the landmark site that is not just behind but also on top of the existing building. In a similar application in 1982, the Commission denied a Certificate of Appropriateness for addition of such a tower on the C.P.H. Gilbert building at 22 East 71st Street; the Conservancy believes that the same determination is called for in this instance.

The proposed construction of a 20-odd story apartment radically alters the nature of this landmark. However pleasing the new design, it reduces the building to a mere platform, destroying its present horizontal orientation and diminishing the very qualities of the building that were deemed worthy of protection.

New York Landmarks Conservancy
330 West 42nd Street
New York, New York 10036
212-736-7575

Brendan Gill, *Chairman*
William G. Bardel
Jonathan Barnett
Terence H. Benbow
Simon Breines
Richard H. Buford
Paul S. Byard
Mrs. John D. Coffin
Lewis Davis
Barbaralee Diamonstein
Michael S. Gruen
Mendès Hershman

Mrs. Ada Louise Huxtable
Susan Henshaw Jones
Edgar A. Lampert
Stephen S. Lash
Ronald S. Lander
Mrs. Sarah Tomerlin Lee
Mrs. Mortimer Levitt
Mrs. John L. Loeb
John H. B. Moore
The Hon. Daniel Patrick Moynihan
Anthony J. Newman
Donald Oresman

Geoffrey Platt
Daniel Rose
Arthur Ross
Whitney North Seymour, Sr.
Mrs. Alfred R. Stern
John H. Vogel
The Hon. Robert F. Wagner, Sr.
Richard S. Weinstein
William H. Whyte
James D. Wolfensohn
Laurie Beckelman,
Executive Director

A positive aspect of New York City's landmarks law is that it is flexible. A showing of hardship on the part of the landmark owner might provide justification for so drastic an alteration. No such showing is being made in this case, however, so the question of justification does not arise.

For the reasons stated above, the New York Landmarks Conservancy would like to go on record as being opposed to the approval of this virtual obliteration of the venerable home of the New-York Historical Society.

The New York Landmarks Conservancy is a private, not-for-profit corporation dedicated to the protection, preservation and continuing use of architecturally, historically, and culturally significant buildings throughout the state.