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Linda S. Ferber
New-York Historical Society
170 Central Park West
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Dear Linda,

I reply to your recent letter about the Historical Society's plans. I sympathize with your complaints about the problems presented by exhibition spaces in the building as it now exists. However, you are not very specific about the steps that the Society wants to take to solve the problems. I would support --and write letters to support -- an architectural reorganization of the interior of the present structure. I also believe that it would be appropriate and acceptable to build an extension of reasonable height on the Society's so-called garden, the land that has long stood vacant immediately behind the building on 76th Street, and that, of course, would provide substantial additional space, solving many of your problems.

But, as we all know, word is about that the Society wants to undertake a much more ambitious project involving a high-rise tower, a proposed undertaking that goes unmentioned in your letter. If there is any truth to what is being said, you are asking for support of a wolf, in the form of a real-estate deal, masquerading in the sheep's clothing of your legitimate curatorial concerns. As I think I said when I last saw you at Lee Edwards's Xmas party, 76th Street between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue is one of the most beautiful blocks in New York (much more beautiful than my block on 75th Street), and I believe that a large scale construction of the sort that seems to be envisioned can only be to its detriment.

We also all know that the Society has had a long history of needing more money, a matter not mentioned in your letter, and that larger need, even more than your curatorial needs, is certainly the main factor behind the planning for which you are seeking approval. More gallery space, improved circulation patterns, and so on, do not require a high-rise tower. But a real-estate deal might seem like an easy way to pay for them, and indeed to help keep a financially shaky institution afloat, and pointing to your needs provides an argument for the need for such a deal. Nevertheless, I wonder if building a tower provides the best or only possible solution to the Society's problems. Other places find other ways of raising money, and I respectfully suggest that your trustees might try a little harder before they set about lessening the attractiveness of a particularly attractive street, and, in doing so, alienating not only a few neighbours, but also many other people who care about such things. We all hear constantly about the obscene amounts of money being made in hedge funds and otherwise on Wall Street and in corporate America, and we hear now and then about the vast amounts of money some very rich people pay for American art. I think it would not be impossible to find and recruit some person or persons with the means, the interest, and the philanthropic inclinations to support needs such as those you describe. Among other enticements, a new extension built on your vacant land would provide a fine naming opportunity for a potential donor with dreams of immortality.

