

July 14, 2009

**Testimony of the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America
Regarding the Designation of the Interborough Rapid Transit Powerhouse
850 12th Avenue, Borough of Manhattan**

Good morning Chair Tierney and Commissioners. I am Joyce Mendelsohn, First Vice President of the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America. Founded in New York City in 1966, the Victorian Society in America is dedicated to fostering the appreciation and preservation of our nineteenth-century heritage as well as that of the early twentieth century (1837-1917). The Metropolitan Chapter, oldest of numerous chapters now flourishing throughout the country, is an independent organization affiliated with the national society.

The Chapter strongly supports designation of the former Interborough Rapid Transit Powerhouse as an official New York City Landmark. As you know, this is the third designation hearing for this monumental Beaux-Arts building, designed by McKim, Mead & White and opened in 1904 to provide electricity for New York's first subway system, known as the IRT. The current owner Consolidated Edison's removal of the last surviving original smokestack underscores the urgency of acting now to grant the Powerhouse the landmark protection it so justly deserves.

The Powerhouse remains one of our city's most compelling examples of early 20th-century industrial design. In a significance statement issued for one of its prior designation hearings, the Landmarks Commission called the Powerhouse "the embodiment of the aesthetic ideals of the civic-minded City Beautiful movement... which held that public improvements could beautify American industrial cities." The building's potential to serve as a public amenity, enriching the lives of all New Yorkers and visitors to the city, survives to this day.

Leading architectural historians, preservation advocates and public officials have described this monumental Beaux-Arts building as a "masterpiece," "a great work, a monument to the new era," "uplifting, civic-minded," "one of only a handful of great powerhouses remaining in the five boroughs," "the largest powerhouse in the world" when it opened in 1904, "extraordinary," "an integral piece of New York City's architectural and transportation history," "a stunning combination of structural practicality and esthetic brilliance."

We urge the Commission to give the IRT Powerhouse official landmark status without delay. Thank you for your consideration.