

DISTRICT LINES

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

AUTUMN 2003 VOLUME XVII NUMBER 2

p.1 - Landmark Demolition, by Intent or Neglect *p.2* - President's Column
p.3 - Landmarks Commission Proposes Fees for Permits—Update *p.4* - District Profiles: Charlton-King-Vandam Historic District, Manhattan
p.5 - "Streams of Exotic, Devilish Creatures"—Herbert Muschamp's Ideal City *p.7* - Heartfelt Tribute: HDC to Lionize Kitty Carlisle
p.8 - A Recent LPC Appointment *p.9* - HDC Welcomes New Directors and Advisers *p.10* - Latest Gifts and Grants

LANDMARK DEMOLITION, BY INTENT OR NEGLECT

In the past two or three years, many landmarks have been destroyed without Landmarks Preservation Commission permits and without Department of Buildings permits. It has happened sometimes in the middle of the night with no one around, sometimes behind walls by workers with jackhammers and axes. Because this is such a major offense not only of the Landmarks Law but also, more importantly, to the buildings and neighborhoods in which the vandalism occurs, District Lines is using this issue and the next to explore the topic.

PART ONE: BY INTENT

When the owner of a landmark takes up tools or hires a contractor to tear down his or her building or parts of it and does so without permits or in violation of permits issued for alterations only, he or she commits demolition by intent. It is a grievous violation of the Landmarks Law and makes the owner liable for a fine up to the fair-market value of the landmarked parcel.

Owners who demolish without ostensible intent, by failing to maintain deteriorating buildings, commit demolition by neglect. A leaking roof that goes unrepaired long enough will collapse. This is common knowledge. It's how ruins come about. Owners who allow demolition by neglect can be subject to criminal action by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

We deal first with six notorious examples of demolition by intent. One of the most egregious is:

Amster Yard, bulldozed in 2001. Amster Yard was a courtyard on East 49th Street between Second and Third Avenues in Manhattan with 1860s cottages inside garden walls, visible from the street. There were also two side-by-side town houses facing the street. The complex was one of the LPC's first des-

ignations, in the 1960s, and deserved to be. In 1970 the owner, hoping to preserve Amster Yard in perpetuity, sold the air rights to a developer of an office building on Third Avenue so that nothing could be built over the cottages. In

May 1999 the site was purchased by the Instituto Cervantes, a Spanish-government cultural organization, which wanted an auditorium and, not allowed to build over the cottages, proposed to build underneath them. The institute applied to the LPC in August 2000 to excavate the courtyard, demolish two of the four houses inside the courtyard and perform other alterations. The LPC held four public hearings between October 2000 and February 2001 and finally approved the application. Apparently, no concerns were raised during the hearings about how the structures



photo: Catherine McNeur

Digging in the basement of photographer Annie Liebovitz's house, left, on West 11th Street in Manhattan led to the near collapse of the neighbors' corner house.

would withstand the proposed construction. A month or so after construction began, one wall of the small courtyard houses was judged to be unstable. Instead of just the wall, all of the buildings were torn down completely. Today only the facades of the two former town houses on East 49th Street and a small structure in the courtyard exist. The decision to demolish was made by the contractor, who did not consult any government entity that could validate such a decision—the LPC, the Department of Buildings, the Fire Department or any other agency. No penalty has been levied against the developer because the Instituto Cervantes has promised to restore the garden to its predesignation 1949 state. It hasn't happened yet.

The house owned by celebrity photographer **Annie Liebovitz** at 305-307 West 11th Street, in the Greenwich Village Historic District, is another example. That house is next door to a corner house that Ms. Liebovitz had apparently tried and failed to buy to enlarge her space. She had already combined two town houses by gutting them; the one on the corner would have been the third. In October 2002, workers were digging in her sub-cellar to lower its floor when the party wall

with the corner house cracked and shifted, causing the wall to drop and detach from the floor. A gas line ruptured in that house, and the owners were forced to move out; the Department of Buildings later declared it unsafe for occupancy. Subsequently the house was braced, but during the winter Ms. Liebovitz's house was left without windows and was open to the elements, and the corner house suffered rain damage

continued on page 3

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

My first privilege as the new president of the Historic Districts Council is to thank the past presidents who have served HDC so well—Joe Rosenberg, Tony Wood, Eric Allison and Hal Bromm. They have given unstintingly of their time both while in office and afterward. I only hope that with their continuing support and advice I can meet the high standard they have set.

The first challenge in my short tenure has been to oppose the Landmarks Preservation Commission's proposal to levy fees for permits to do work on individual landmarks and buildings in historic districts. HDC has consistently opposed LPC fees—see the article on page 3 for details—and hopefully we will succeed one day in reversing them. We should reward people who maintain historic properties, not charge them.

On the brighter side, there is good news for HDC in the form of a three-year capacity-building grant from the Mertz Gilmore Foundation. This grant not only enables us to expand our advocacy efforts throughout the city; it challenges us to raise more funds to support our efforts. We are fortunate also to have received funds from the Manhattan delegation of the City Council. A thank you to Councilmember Gale Brewer for her continuing supportive efforts. Both these items of good news are testament to the hard work and skills of our directors and advisers, especially Eric, Franny Eberhart and David Freudenthal.

Other good news is that we will be honoring Kitty Carlisle Hart as this year's Landmarks Lion. Mrs. Hart has

given much encouragement to preservation groups as a member and as chair of the New York State Council on the Arts and even supported advocacy groups when other funders shied away from it. Be sure to read our profile of this remarkable woman on page 7.

What do we hope to accomplish in the near future? Our conference last year on "Preserving the Suburban Metropolis" has spurred us to redouble



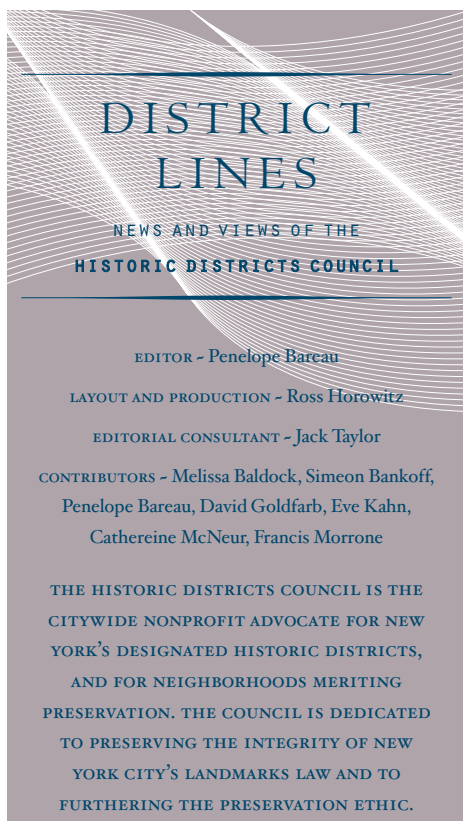
photo: Catherine McNeur

New HDC president, David Goldfarb, left, hands Hal Bromm an antiquarian book about New York as a token of thanks for his service to HDC as the outgoing president.

our efforts to get long-neglected and worthy areas in The Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island designated as historic districts, and we are working with local neighborhood organizations to meet this goal. We are also expanding our educational efforts by holding mini-conferences on preservation topics throughout the boroughs. In Lower Manhattan we are focusing our efforts to preserve the historic fabric in a proposed John Street/Maiden Lane Historic District.

Carrying out our goals has been in the able hands of our executive director, Simeon Bankoff. His enthusiasm and hard work have contributed greatly to our growth and accomplishments over the last few years. I would also like to welcome to the office our two new preservation associates, Melissa Baldock and Catherine McNeur. Our staff has brought a high level of professionalism to all our efforts. I look forward to working with both staff and volunteers in the coming years.

—David Goldfarb



LANDMARK DEMOLITION, BY INTENT OR NEGLECT

continued from page 2

through the roof where it came apart from the wall. Minimal work has been done by Ms. Liebovitz other than the installation of an emergency metal brace to prevent the buckling wall on the corner building from collapsing. She faces a violation and a fine of up to \$2,500 to be set at a court date. In March 2003, the owners of the corner house sued Ms. Liebovitz for \$15 million, accusing her of conspiring to drive them from their building and of launching a "terror campaign of harassment, provocation, and ultimately destruction" after they refused to sell her their house. It is now so damaged that it would have to be completely rebuilt, and they have dropped the lawsuit and agreed to sell to Ms. Liebovitz. She still has not undertaken necessary repairs for the three buildings.

The Towers Nursing Home on Central Park West between 105th and 106th Streets in Manhattan was originally the New York Cancer Hospital, the first cancer hospital in the United States. Designed in the Romanesque

style by Charles Coolidge Haight, it was built in stages between 1884 and 1926. The building's round towers with conical slate roofs have long defined its picturesque profile. As a nursing facility, the building closed in 1975 and has been vacant since then. Over the past quarter century, this individual landmark has been a victim of arson and has gone through a series of negligent owners who have allowed it to deteriorate. However, it is the Towers's most recent owner who is responsible for intentionally demolishing significant portions of the landmark, including the building's signature conical roofs. In early 2001, the owner began work on the site using a Certificate of Appropriateness the LPC had issued eight years earlier that called for the stabilization and rehabilitation of the historic structure. It also allowed for the construction of an adjacent 27-story tower. Ignoring the COA, the owner subsequently demolished significant portions of the Towers building and removed the conical slate roofs, leaving the interior of the building open to the elements. It is still open, two years later. The 27-story tower has been built, but the landmark looks like a victim of the

continued on page 11

LANDMARKS COMMISSION PROPOSES FEES FOR PERMITS—UPDATE

Fiscal crises sometimes inspire bad ideas, and the current crisis facing New York City is no exception. Asked by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg to raise an unprecedented \$1.05 million in annual revenue (more than a third of its annual budget), the Landmarks Preservation Commission has proposed instituting fees for work permits on landmark properties. Although this idea has been put forward several times before, the current fee scheme is different in that it applies to landmarks permits that also require Department of Buildings permits.

LPC currently issues three kinds of permits:

- Permits for Minor Work (PMW), which apply to work such as facade repainting and window and door replacement that do not require DOB permits;
- Certificates of Appropriateness (COA), which affect the protected features of landmark buildings and are brought to public hearing for review by the commissioners;
- Certificates of No Effect (CNE), which ensure that the work applied for at DOB, such as interior renovations and infrastructure enhancements, will not affect the protected features of a property.

The current proposal calls for fees equal to half of the existing Department of Buildings fees to be charged for all COAs and CNEs—more than 80 percent of all applications, according to the LPC. This amounts to a surcharge on preservation, and penalizes residents and owners who seek to invest in historic properties.

That these fees will equally apply to work *not* affecting the protected features of a landmark does not make sense and only worsens the blow.

On July 8th the LPC held its first public hearing on this proposal. More than 40 groups and individuals sent



photo: Catherine McNeur

Conical slate roofs of the Towers Nursing Home were ripped off in violation of LPC permits to stabilize. The towers have been left open to the elements for two years.

statements or letters against the proposal, and an additional 28 speakers from across the city testified against it, including City Councilmember Bill Perkins and former LPC Commissioner Anthony M. Tung. Elected officials who weighed in against the proposal were Councilmembers Christine Quinn, Michael McMahon, Alan Gerson and Tony Avella, and Assembly member Deborah Glick. HDC has orchestrated a widespread public-awareness campaign that included coverage in The New York Times, New York Newsday, the Queens Chronicle, The New York Sun and television's NY1.



The New York Sun got it right with this cartoon drawn by Igor Kopelnitsky and used here by permission.

Those in opposition were unified in their contention that this proposal undermined the fragile ethos of preservation by penalizing positive preservation action. Far better, most of them argued, to raise revenues from violators of the Landmarks Law, who currently are under-prosecuted and under-penalized. Others suggested charging a special fee to movie or television productions for permission to film in designated historic districts.

Only three organizations came out in favor of fees, the Municipal Art Society, the New York Landmarks Conservancy and the Real Estate Board of New York. Frank Sanchis, executive director of MAS, testified in person and said that the preservation committee had made the decision to back fees but that it had not been unanimous. The Conservancy did not testify in person but sent a letter. The Real Estate Board has long been a proponent of fees.

LPC has said that a vote will be taken on this matter in the fall. Until then,

HDC will continue to fight this proposal. If fees are enacted, HDC will endeavor to have them removed from the budget for the coming year and to have this amendment to the Landmarks Law rescinded.

The Landmarks Law and the Landmarks Preservation Commission have survived and prospered for 38 years working in partnership with New Yorkers who care passionately about our historic city. To tax citizens for that passion is a form of betrayal.

DISTRICT PROFILES

CHARLTON-KING-VANDAM HISTORIC DISTRICT, MANHATTAN

In the early years of the Republic a fabulous Georgian mansion stood on a 400-foot-high hill where this designated historic district now lies. The estate, known as Richmond Hill, was just south of what is now West Houston Street and

was bordered on the west by Greenwich Street and the Hudson River (landfill later added Washington and West Streets). The house had been built for an emissary of George III in 1767 and was used by George Washington as his headquarters during the Revolutionary War. It was later used as a vice-presidential mansion by John Adams when New York was the capital; Aaron Burr bought it when Adams's term ended in 1797.

Records show Burr residing at other addresses, but his entertainments at Richmond Hill were said to be among the most lavish in the city. He must have been thinking early on about developing the property because in 1797 he filed a map—still in the Hall of Records—dividing the six-acre property into 25-by-100-foot building lots and mapping Charlton, King and Vandam Streets.

In the presidential election of 1800, Burr became vice-president, and the capital moved from New York to Washington, so Burr would have had to move there. However, he kept Richmond Hill and from there ran unsuccessfully for governor of New York State in 1804. Alexander Hamilton had published slurs about him, and the famous duel between the two men took place that year because of the insults. Burr mortally

continued on page 8



photo: Penelope Bareau

As cited by the designation report, the north side of Charlton Street "retains what is probably the longest row of Federal and early Greek Revival houses in the City."

“STREAMS OF EXOTIC, DEVILISH CREATURES”— HERBERT MUSCHAMP’S IDEAL CITY

FRANCIS MORRONE CRITIQUES THE TIMES’S ARCHITECTURE CRITIC

Mr. Morrone, author of the following article, is the architecture critic for The New Criterion and a columnist for The New York Sun. He is also an architectural historian and the author of three books on architecture, with another to be published by Rizzoli later this year.

* * *

When Herbert Muschamp became architecture critic at The New York Times, few New Yorkers had heard of him. Some within the architecture field were well aware of him, however. He had held a number of prestigious positions, having been architecture critic for the New Republic and for Artforum, and having created, at Parsons School of Design (his alma mater), a master’s degree program in design criticism. He was also the author of “Man about Town: Frank Lloyd Wright in New York City,” published in 1983.

At first I thought this a marvelous book. In its first half, Muschamp clearly

limned Wright’s complicated relationship to a city he disingenuously professed to disdain. The second half of the book, however, was another matter. Here Muschamp strung together a bunch of oracular or otherwise cryptic remarks—and nothing but remarks, not in the least amounting to critical discussion—on a variety of urban and philosophical themes. I sensed in this section the notebook—even the diary—jottings of an eager undergrad. Muschamp was a smart guy, to be sure. And young. As he matured, perhaps he might be a major critic.

And then he got the Times job. He replaced Paul Goldberger, a fine, plain-talking critic who had been promoted by the paper to cultural-affairs editor. (He now serves as The New Yorker’s architecture critic.)

Way back in 1992, Muschamp wrote a review of Frank Williams’s Trump Palace apartments, on Third Avenue and 68th Street, that was an exemplary piece of archi-

tecture criticism. I recall that I felt I was in the presence of a critic maturing by the week, a critic who might indeed carry on the high standard set by his predecessors, Ada Louise Huxtable and Paul Goldberger. And later in that same year it was nice to see Muschamp demonstrate his editorial independence by hammering away at the misconceived Times Square Center project, which his own newspaper had promoted.

Yet in that very piece Muschamp set the tone for his next 11 years of commentary. He used one of his favorite conceits, the personalization of inanimate objects. Muschamp: “Perhaps the most constructive approach would be simply to stop, look and listen to Times Square’s own ideas about what it wants to be.”

What?

“And what it mostly wants to be is a version of the Freudian id. It’s the great maw of pleasure, desire and fear, opening itself wide for our entertainment like the hell’s mouth in a medieval morality play. We’d feel cheated if we didn’t see streams of exotic, devilish creatures come skipping out of those jaws in search of cheap thrills and tawdry glamour, and we’d be equally disappointed if we couldn’t also depend on the morality brigade to come scampering right after, like the Save-a-Soul Mission in ‘Guys and Dolls,’ wielding nightsticks, Bibles and urgent referrals to social service agencies, prodding the little devils to clean up their acts.”

Mind you, that’s what Times Square told Herbert Muschamp it wants to be. Eight years later, Lincoln Center said to Muschamp:

“I want glass and travertine walls. No diamonds, please. Give me rhinestones. Arches that look paper thin. An opera house with Sputnik chandeliers that rise heavenward at curtain time. A massive grand staircase that goes nowhere. Just a place to pose on yards of red carpet. The biggest bad Chagalls in this poor diva’s world.”

Okay, that’s a critical tic, I thought; annoying, to be sure, but not necessarily related to his substantive worldview.



photo: Simeon Bankoff

Times Square speaks to Herbert Muschamp, and that’s saying a lot. Here is what the “great maw of pleasure” looked like on a recent afternoon.

As time went on, however, Muschamp became that *avant-garde* cliché: the self-conscious revolutionary who wishes to subvert an establishment in order to impose his own. To wit: "Conflict remains the most important cultural product a great city puts out." Or: "Gehry's great gift is to present aesthetic disobedience and urban disturbance as pure exercises in social responsibility." Or this: Rem Koolhaas's goal, in his plan for the Museum of Modern Art, "was to weaken the existing boundaries between private (the museum) and public space (the street). His design resumed the modern task of relaxing the conventions of social and psychological encounter." Or, in the aftermath of 9/11: "Patriotism would have a greater depth right now if our surroundings reflected a more modern and progressive outlook."

Muschamp loves to cite his favorite architects as beleaguered outsiders crying for a chance to be heard. In a 2001 piece on Morris Lapidus, Muschamp wrote: "Have you been wondering, perhaps, why Frank Gehry, Rem Koolhaas and Peter Eisenman have been criticized for maintenance problems with their buildings, while Richard Meier, Charles Gwathmey and Norman Foster have gone relatively unscathed? I have. Buildings that are not normative, that appeal to the emotions, that find beauty in the commonplace, transgress rules of decorum that are even more rigid now than in Lapidus's time. They are all too close to the beach, too far from the rational, sensible and orderly, too nomadic in their aesthetic sensibility. As for Philippe Stark, he's too ... swanky."

How "not normative" can you be when, like Koolhaas, you have a Pritzker Prize and *billions* of dollars in commissions? As for Muschamp, he's so "not normative" that he can find no better medium than The New York Times from which to spout his views!

In addition, Muschamp came increasingly to employ the language of the morally righteous and to attack in the most *ad hominem* ways those he disdained. His shrill invective bore the flavor of religious fundamentalism. Robert A. M. Stern "represents a brand of theme park design that has misrepresented itself as classicism—as architecture, for that matter—for three decades." The Municipal Art Society is "a group that should have been keeping the city on its architec-

tural toes [and] has instead contributed to the city's creative torpor."

When the first chair of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, Harmon H. Goldstone died in 2001, David Dunlap wrote in The Times: "Mr. Goldstone lived to see a day when the preservation movement was regarded by its critics as so powerful and influential that it had stultified the development of innovative modern architecture in New York City." Dunlap clearly had Muschamp in mind. Muschamp loathes most preservationists. In a 2000 piece, he wrote of the "good buildings that have gone unbuilt because preservation has absorbed much of the energy that once supported the idea of architecture."

His animosity is so great that if Marcel Breuer's 1970s scheme for a Modernist tower atop Grand Central Terminal were

"...Muschamp came increasingly to employ the language of the morally righteous..."

revived, Muschamp would probably endorse it. After all, the '70s was the last period of real architectural verve in New York, as he repeatedly avers.

Writing in 2001 about Rockrose Development's Queens West project, Muschamp opined: "For a site where views are paramount, the [design] guidelines restrict the use of glass in favor of masonry walls. Instead of encouraging new approaches to planning, the master plan mandates neo-traditional towers on bases with uniform street lines. Can the bishop's-crook lampposts, world's-fair benches, hexagonal pavers and other theme-park accessories be far behind? Will we have Gene Kelly look-alike door-men dancing to 'Singing in the Rain'?"

Writing of French architect Jean Nouvel's proposed Broadway Grand Hotel in 2001, when some local preservationists said it broke too harshly from the prevailing architecture of the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, Muschamp brutally dismissed their concerns and praised Nouvel's design thus: "This hotel is made for 'Moody's Mood for Love' as performed by King Pleasure, on a rainy weekday afternoon, downtown, in a room surrounded by low-rise buildings. Think Edward Hopper crossed with Pedro Almodóvar. Not least, this design is about sex... Modulating the

visual texture of glass with reflectivity, fretted patterns, screened-on images, blurring, veiling, coloration, support systems, and other techniques, these projects summon forth states of narcissism, exhibitionism, voyeurism, veiling, vamping, elusiveness, disconsolation, Hitchcock's blonde."

That architecture should "summon forth states" of exhibitionism and voyeurism, that this is something the Landmarks Preservation Commission should get behind, is a remarkable notion. We can only conclude that Muschamp's ideal city is based on puerile fantasies of watching people disrobe in uncurtained, glass-walled rooms. I think he could use a cold shower.

In the end, Muschamp is an intellectual poseur. Nothing underscored this for me more than a piece that began thus: "Oh, what can you do with a man like Jacques Barzun?" Barzun is, of course, the eminent cultural historian and one of the greatest scholars of the 20th century. At the time of Muschamp's writing, Barzun's magnum opus, entitled "From Dawn to Decadence," had just come out and occupied a spot on the Times best-seller list, rare for a book of intellectual heft. But Muschamp invoked Barzun's name only to supply a cutesy intro to an article about Frank Gehry. Muschamp characterized "From Dawn to Decadence" as "the best-selling jeremiad on the culture of our times." Yes, it was a best seller. No, it's not a "jeremiad" and no, it's not "on the culture of our times." If Muschamp had done more than look at the title of the book he would have known that, but Herbert Muschamp saw fit to take Barzun to task for his failure to appreciate that we live in a golden age defined in large part by the achievements of the architect of Guggenheim Bilbao. "You can send Mr. Barzun and all the other evil eyes out there to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum," where they could see a show that "goes far toward dispelling the anger that has restricted our age from acknowledging artistic greatness in our midst."

We have Muschamp the implacable foe of preservation, Muschamp the narcissistic revolutionary and Muschamp who believes that voyeuristic sex fantasies form a perfectly reasonable basis of architectural judgment.

Oh, what can you do with a man like Herbert Muschamp?

HART-FELT TRIBUTE: HDC TO LIONIZE KITTY CARLISLE

"I've called them all 'Governor, darling,'" said Kitty Carlisle Hart, with her customary twinkle. She was reflecting on her decades of public service to cultural organizations and her knack for increasing government arts funding under four governors so far; from Nelson Rockefeller, to George Pataki. From 1976 to 1996 she chaired the New York State Council on the Arts, and is currently titled chairman emeritus. "When I came aboard, we were only funding a handful of institutions," she recalled. "I was like Johnny Appleseed, running around the state, figuring out where to give money next and pushing for more funding. The staff would tell me, 'There's a tiny organization doing wonderful things, it's five flights up in the north-west corner of the state, where it's snowing now,' and I'd say, 'Let's go!'"

In early November the Historic Districts Council will honor Mrs. Hart as its 2003 Landmarks Lion with a benefit celebration. As a new Lion, Mrs. Hart joins a distinguished group of preservationists, among whom are Margot Gayle, founder of Friends of Cast Iron; Joan Davidson, former New York State Parks and Recreation chair; and Otis Pratt Pearsall, former chair of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Saying how thrilled he is to be honoring Mrs. Hart, HDC President David Goldfarb commented, "Preservation groups blossomed while Mrs. Hart was chair of NYSCA. Her advocacy for preservation organizations has enabled them to survive and flourish across New York State. Everyone in the preservation movement owes her a debt of gratitude."

"On Mrs. Hart's watch, NYSCA committed over \$20 million for historic-preservation projects and groups," explained Anne Van Ingen, NYSCA's director of the Architecture, Planning and Design Program and Capital Projects, who oversees some \$2.5 million in yearly grants out of NYSCA's \$46 million annual outlay. When Governor Rockefeller established the agency in 1960, Ms. Van Ingen added, "A core principle of the enabling legislation was the celebration, protection and reuse of the state's historic architecture. The vast majority of other state arts councils don't fund preserva-

tion, or have had those programs cut drastically or altogether, and no other arts council gives operating money to historic-preservation groups."

NYSCA funds 25 staffed preservation organizations, including the Preser-



Kitty Carlisle Hart, the HDC's Landmarks Lion for 2003. Mrs. Hart, singer, actress and enthusiastic preservationist, headed the New York State Council on the Arts, where she aided preservation groups during the terms of four governors.

vation League of New York State, the Landmarks Society of Western New York and the Historic Districts Council. "Mrs. Hart," Ms. Van Ingen continued, "has been an unflagging champion of our program through the good budget times and the bad. She has fought to keep it flourishing."

Born in New Orleans as Catherine Conn, Mrs. Hart was a young girl when her father died, and she grew up mainly in Europe, traveling with her mother, who encouraged her to study music and drama. In the 1920s the family alighted in New York. "I'd ride the bus from our apartment on Riverside Drive and 98th Street to Gramercy Park and back," she said. "That was my big excitement on a

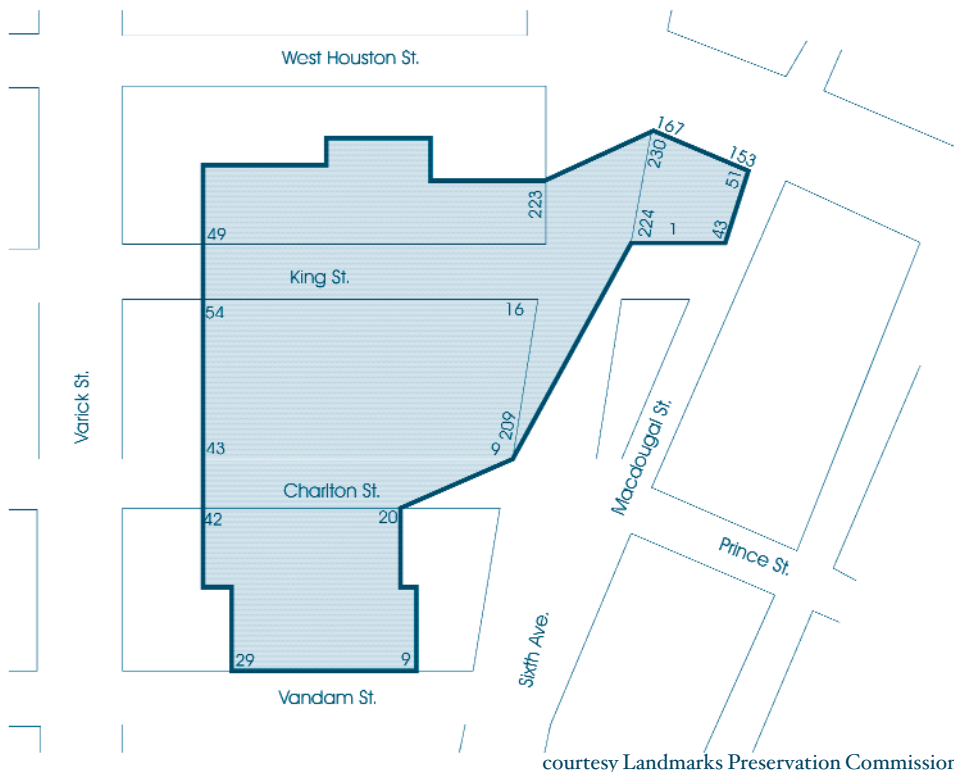
Saturday afternoon, and the top of the double-decker bus was my bailiwick."

As Kitty Carlisle, she has been performing as a singer and actress since her Broadway debut in 1931 at the 1919 Empire-style Capitol Theatre, a movie palace and legitimate house on 50th Street designed by Thomas W. Lamb (it was demolished, she laments, in 1967). She married playwright-director Moss Hart in 1946, and the couple collaborated and socialized with dozens of Hollywood and Broadway legends including Irving Berlin, George S. Kaufman, the Marx Brothers, Cole Porter and Noël Coward. Beginning shortly after Mr. Hart's death in 1961, she devoted herself to charitable work and has served on museum, university and foundation boards around the U.S.

She raised her children, Christopher and Catherine, in an apartment on the Upper East Side where she still lives (and is frequently visited by three grandchildren). The building, a 1907 Neo-Classical palazzo, was designed by William E. Mowbray. It is as flawlessly kempt as the ever-elegant Mrs. Hart herself. Cartouches are sculpted onto its cream-colored-brick exterior, and rows of lions' heads gaze out from the densely bracketed cornice—which, of those on the many landmarks she has helped save, is one of her favorites.

"We had that cornice restored in the late 1980s," she said. "It's one of the largest in the city, with a huge upholstered room behind it—you could practically live there!" Her décor is an example of devoted preservation, too; even the flocked red wallpaper in the dramatic foyer has not changed in four decades and has held up well. The only traces of modernity in sight, amid the European and Asian antiques and theatrical memorabilia, are dozens of crystal and silver thank-you mementos from arts organizations across the country.

Her life remains a whirl of cultural and social events and singing performances. "And I'm still discovering wonderful things in the city," she said. "I hoof it, I try to walk miles each day. I've never lost my curiosity."



Map of the Charlton-King-Vandam Historic District in Manhattan, one of the first districts to be designated by the LPC, in August 1966.

They were built on speculation by a small number of architect-builders, and the Landmarks Preservation Commission's designation report of August 1966 credits that circumstance for the "exceptional harmony of old houses built within a few years of each other. On the north side of Vandam Street," the report goes on, "there is an unbroken row of Federal houses, almost all retaining their original steps and entrances, their pitched roofs and dormers and their ironwork. Charlton Street, on its north side, retains what is probably the longest row of Federal and early Greek Revival houses in the City. Such continuity of period and such excellent state of preservation are not known to exist anywhere else ..."

The original residents of these streets were successful builders, lawyers and merchants involved in marketing the food products moved off the nearby wharves. As early as 1822, landfill was in place west of Greenwich Street up to and including West Street. "For some reason," according to the designation report, "the neighborhood ... remained settled, serene and genteel, while comparable nearby streets of similar age became less fashionable or entirely commercial ... Many houses were kept in the same family for generations, and many people who led lives of distinction in the City continued to live here." This was especially remarkable during the 1920s, when large factories and commercial buildings took over the corners of Varick Street, bringing rumbling truck traffic with them. Now, except for this quiet domestic enclave, the area is commercial all the way to the river.

A RECENT LPC APPOINTMENT

In February 2003 Roberta Brandes Gratz was appointed as the second new commissioner of the Landmarks Preservation Commission in six years. Robert B. Tierney, now the chairman, was the first, in January.

Ms. Gratz is a distinguished author and urban critic whose 1994 book, "The Living City: Thinking Small in a Big Way," earned her the sobriquet of this generation's Jane Jacobs. Her most recent book, "Cities Back from the Edge: New Life for Downtown" (John Wiley & Sons, 1998), documents urban recovery in different cities in the United



photo: Penelope Bareau

A splendid Greek Revival doorway in the Charlton-King-Vandam Historic District with fluted columns, entablature and original leaded-glass lights.

CHARLTON-KING-VANDAM HISTORIC DISTRICT, MANHATTAN

continued from page 4

wounded Hamilton and soon afterward left New York.

But first he made an arrangement with John Jacob Astor, New York's most active property developer of the time, to take over the house and property, provided Burr could buy it back within a period of 20 years. In 1817, back in New York and practicing law, Burr completed the sale to Astor and received a generous payment for the property. Development began.

The house was rolled down the hill to the southeast corner of Charlton and the newly opened Varick Street, where it served as a space for public gatherings until it was demolished in 1849. The hill was leveled, lots laid out according to Burr's plan and by the mid-1820s all the houses on Charlton and Vandam Streets and many on King Street were built. Except for four Greek Revival houses on the north side of Charlton built to replace ones destroyed in an 1840 fire, all that exist today are original.

States and details successful techniques for bringing it about.

Ms. Gratz first gained attention in the preservation community in the 1970s with an award-winning series in the New York Post on the workings of the LPC. Her subsequent urban-planning and preservation activities have been numer-



photo: Susan K. Freedman

Appointed February 2003, Roberta Brandes Gratz is the newest commissioner at the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

ous, including membership in the New York Governor's and Mayor's Task Force on the West Side Highway and Waterfront, founder of the Fire Island Historical Society, founder of the Eldridge Street Project, trustee of the Preservation League of New York State and board membership in the Salzburg Conference on Urban Planning and Development. She served as the keynote speaker at HDC's 4th Annual Preservation Conference in 1998.

HDC WELCOMES NEW DIRECTORS AND ADVISERS

This year the Historic Districts Council is pleased to be adding two directors and seven advisers to our boards. All of them have a history and record of work in preservation, whether in district designations, in well-established preservation organizations, in work on individual buildings or a combination of all these

things. Geographically, they represent a broad swath of the city

Joining the Board of Directors are:

Linda C. Jones, who returns as a director after a pause of several years. During that time and before, she was active in the Preservation League of Staten Island and for her efforts was honored with an HDC Grassroots Preservation Award in 2002. Ms. Jones runs Winter Hill Associates, a company that maintains computer networks and Web sites, and through it provides technological assistance to many preservation groups throughout the city.

Ronald L. Melichar, who lives in Hamilton Heights in Manhattan and works as director of the Commercial Revitalization Program for the New York City Department of Small Business Services. He was actively involved in the designation of the Hamilton Heights and Sugar Hill Historic Districts and is a founding board member of the Morningside Heights Historic District Committee and the president of the Hamilton Heights/West Harlem Community Preservation Organization.

Joining the Board of Advisers are:

Andrew Berman, executive director of the Greenwich Village Society for His-

toric Preservation and the Save Gansevoort Market Project of the GVSHP. He is a co-founder and co-coordinator of the Citywide Coalition for Community Facility Reform and prior to his work at GVSHP was chief of staff for Thomas K. Duane in his capacities as both New York City Councilmember and State Senator.

Nicholas Evans-Cato, a painter of cityscapes whose work is included in the collections of the Museum of the City of New York, The New-York Historical Society, Brooklyn College, the Brooklyn Historical Society and many galleries. Mr. Evans-Cato has been working since 1998 to designate the Thompson Meter Building in DUMBO, Brooklyn. He has also been very active in preservation throughout Brooklyn, particularly in the downtown waterfront area. Many historic areas appear in his cityscapes.

Thomas A. Fenniman, principal of the architecture firm bearing his name. Mr. Fenniman specializes in the analysis and rehabilitation of existing buildings and the restoration of historic structures. He did the restoration of the facade of Carnegie Hall; the Langham Apartments, for which he received an award; Saint Francis Xavier Church and the Brisbane House, to name just a few in Manhattan.



photo: Catherine McNeur

HDC director and former executive director, Franny Eberhart with Mitchell Grubler, new HDC adviser and longtime preservationist active in Queens and Staten Island.

Paul Graziano, an urban planner and historic-preservation consultant, who is the zoning and land-use chairman of the Queens Civic Congress. He has been a consultant for the rezoning of Richmond Hill and Greater Flushing and has worked to preserve areas and individual properties throughout Queens such as Waldheim, Richmond Hill, and the Kabrinski Mansion, to name but a few. Mr. Graziano was a speaker at HDC's 9th Annual Preservation Conference last spring and a Grassroots Preservation Award winner in 2001.

Mitchell Grubler, a resident of Staten Island, who has been the executive director of the Queens Historical Society since 2000. Mr. Grubler has also served as a consultant for the Preservation League of Staten Island and was president of that organization for ten years. Also on Staten Island, Mr. Grubler has acted as a consultant for the Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve and was a long-serving executive director of the Alice Austen House Museum.

Jo Hamilton, who has been co-chair of the Save Gansevoort Market Project since 2000 and won a Grassroots Preservation Award for that work in 2002. She is an active member of Manhattan Community Board 2, serving on the Landmarks

and Environment Committees and as co-chair of the Traffic Strategies Committee. She is also a trustee of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, a board member of the Chelsea Village Partnership and founding chair of the Jane Street Association.

Kate Wood, who has been actively involved with New York City preservation on many fronts, most recently as executive director of Landmark West! since 2001. She was the co-chair of the Save the Coogan! Coalition in the Midtown South area of Manhattan and for that work received a Grassroots Preservation Award from HDC in 2000. She is currently a board member of the Victorian Society in America, Metropolitan Chapter.

LATEST GIFTS AND GRANTS

The Historic Districts Council is grateful to all those groups and individuals who contribute so generously to make our work possible. Without their assistance, we would be unable to carry out our advocacy, planning and education activities. The most recent contributors are:

Foundations: Falconwood Foundation, Ford Foundation, Mertz Gilmore Foundation.

Organizations: Association of Village Homeowners, Brooklyn Heights Association, Defenders of the Historic Upper East Side, Ditmas Park Association, The Drive to Protect the Ladies' Mile District, DUMBO Neighborhood Association, East Harlem Historical Organization, Friends of Terra Cotta, Fort Greene Association, Gramercy Neighborhood Associates, Gramercy Park Block Association, Greater Astoria Historical Society, Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, The Green-Wood Cemetery, Historic Landmarks Preservation Center, Landmark West!, Municipal Art Society, Murray Hill Neighborhood Association, Natural Resources Defense Council, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Parkway Village Historical Society, Queens Historical Society, Richmond Hill Historical Society, The Save Gansevoort Market Project of the GVSHP, State Street Block Association, Stuyvesant Park Neighborhood Association, Union Square Community Coalition.

Corporations: Charisma Graphics.

Friends: Alan M. Ades, Thomas Agnew, Timothy Allanbrook, AIA, AICP, Oliver & Deborah Allen, Rhiannon Allen & Arthur Reber, Bernadette Artus, Elizabeth Ashby, George Beane & Patricia Begley, Sharen Benenson, Joel & Judith Berger, Andrew Berman, Minor L. Bishop, Ann Bragg, Hal Bromm & Doneley Meris, Robert Buckholz Jr. & Anne Elizabeth Fontaine, George Calderaro, Vincent Colangelo, Elizabeth Rose Daly, Georgia & William A. Delano, Alan & Barbara Delsman, Mary Dierickx, Phillip Dodd, Andrew Scott Dolkart, Frances A. Eberhart, Rebecca & Yehuda Even-Zohar, Marjorie Ferrigno, Ann Walker Gaffney, William Gambert, Linda Gillies, David Goldfarb, Christabel Gough, Rudie Hurwitz, David I. Karabell Esq., Edward S. Kirkland, Robert Kornfeld Sr., Abigail Mellen, Gerard O'Connell, Norman Odlum, Evelyn & Everett Ortnor, Mr. & Mrs. Otis Pratt Pearsall, Robert W. Phillips, Shepherd Raimi, Joseph S. Rosenberg, Susan Sanders, Mr. & Mrs. Frederick R. Selch, John B. Senter III & Mary Frances Loftus, Beverly Moss Spatt Ph.D., Deirdre Stanforth, Jack Taylor, Robert M. & Sue Wasko, Gloria Withim, F. Anthony Zunino III & Sally Auer Zunino.



photo: Catherine McNeur

New HDC Director Ronald L. Melichar (left) was active in the Hamilton Heights and Sugar Hill Historic Districts designations, shown here with Adviser John Reddick.

LANDMARK DEMOLITION, BY INTENT OR NEGLECT

continued from page 3

blitzkrieg. Robert Silman, a structural engineer who has assessed the condition of the Towers several times since the mid-1980s, was recently asked by Landmark West! to have another look at the structure and was taken aback by how much damage had been done. In a letter to the LPC he wrote, "A great deal of original fabric was demolished that could have been saved." The LPC has been silent on the issue.

Renovations on the landmark **IRT subway stations at 110th and 116th Streets** on the Upper West Side of Manhattan began in February 2003. Columbia University, in preparation for its 250th anniversary in October 2004 and because the stations service its campus, gave \$1 million to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, according to an article in The New York Observer on July 7th. Columbia wanted the money to be used to move the project along so that it would be completed in time for the anniversary celebration. Unfortunately, the Landmarks Preservation Commissioners did not review the proposed work; staff-level permits were granted. Upon investigation it became clear that the work being done was destructive. By

late March many of the historic ceramic elements were destroyed during the process of "restoration." The plans not only incorporated inappropriately placed modern amenities such as garbage-storage areas but also controversial artwork designed by the MTA's Arts for Transit Project. The LPC did not review the design, impact or placement of the artwork in its blanket approval of the project. In March the New York State Historic Preservation Office intervened and halted the MTA construction on the stations as well as the Arts for Transit Project. SHPO was concerned that the MTA was not handling the fragile historic tile and iconic mosaics with care. Friends of Terra Cotta and Landmark West! have been working to have the removed tiles replaced with ceramic that more closely replicates the tiles destroyed by the contractors hired by the MTA.

Many buildings in the **Farm Colony-Seaview Hospital Historic District** on Staten Island have suffered demolition by neglect, but the district has undergone demolition by intent as well. In 1999, a 1909 Dutch Revival dormitory building in the Farm Colony section of the district was intentionally demolished at the request of Staten Island City Councilmember James Oddo. The dormitory was located in close proximity to two ball fields that



photo: Landmark West!

Historic tile was torn off the wall at the 116th Street station of the IRT subway. Work has been halted by the New York State Historic Preservation Office until replacements can be made.

had been built in the district without the approval of the LPC. Councilmember Oddo convinced the city to declare an emergency and demolish the building because he believed it was unstable and posed a threat to the children playing at

BECOME A FRIEND OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL TODAY!

Douglaston, Queens; Charlton-King-Vandam, Manhattan; Fort Greene, Brooklyn; Longwood, The Bronx are all designated historic districts, protected from inappropriate alterations and development. Unfortunately, many more neighborhoods throughout the city are not, though they are seeking designation. That's where the Historic Districts Council can help.

As the citywide advocate for New York's historic neighborhoods, HDC works to preserve and protect the city's architectural and cultural heritage. We consult with building owners in historic districts to help them understand what Landmarks Preservation Commission regulations mean and how to comply with them. We talk with communities that are not designated but want to be, helping them with the process and advising them on how to proceed.

It's a big city and our advocacy is never finished. Our agenda would not be possible without you and preservation partners like you. You are the backbone of HDC.

Yes, consider me a Friend of HDC!

Enclosed is my gift of

\$50 ___ \$100 ___ \$250 ___ \$500 ___ Other \$ _____

Please make check payable to Historic Districts Council and mail to: 232 East 11th Street, New York, NY 10003. For information, call 212-614-9107.

name _____

address _____

city/state _____ zip _____

telephone _____

fax _____

e-mail _____
(for news and electronic alerts)

the nearby ball fields. A New York Times article quoted the councilmember as stating that the building “resembled something you’d see in Berlin in 1945,” and that he did not discuss the issue with the LPC because he thought the agency would be “obstructionist.” Lost forever, the Farm Colony dormitory building illustrates how vulnerable our historic structures are when up against powerful and determined opponents.

Another Staten Island landmark was intentionally destroyed in 1996 when the **Brighton Heights Reformed**

Church was leveled shortly after a three-alarm fire. The fire was started by workers who were using heat guns to remove paint from the wooden building. Although the church claims to have had permission from the LPC to use the heat guns, the LPC has never confirmed this. The church, a landmark since 1967, suffered severe damage during the fire, and it was demolished at 5 a.m. on a Saturday under an emergency order of the Department of Buildings. Although the DOB and the church cited hazardous conditions, they never persuasively

demonstrated that no other steps could have been taken to secure the building at least until a salvage plan could be developed. Despite the fire, the structure was largely intact except for the roof, and the walls could have been braced as an interim measure.

Demolition by intent is not an easy thing to prevent. However, with a stricter enforcement of the Landmarks Law and the imposition of harsh fines when a building owner illegally demolishes a landmark, perhaps an owner will be deterred from breaking that law.



Art: Ann Walker Gafney

DISTRICT LINES

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE
HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL



THE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK CITY'S
HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

232 East 11th Street
New York, NY 10003
tel 212-614-9107 fax 212-614-9127
e-mail hdc@hdc.org
www.hdc.org

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
NEW YORK, NY
Permit No. 3732