

DISTRICT LINES

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL WINTER 2006 VOL. XIX NO. 3

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FRIENDLESS IN QUEENS AND BROOKLYN— CITY COUNCIL NIXES TWO LPC PICKS

THE RECENT DENIALS of two landmark designations, a former Jamaica Savings Bank in Queens and the former Austin, Nichols & Company Warehouse in Brooklyn, reveal much about how the City Council handles the approval process—especially about how much hinges on the vote of a single councilmember. The buildings themselves—their neighborhoods, constituencies and how they came to be designated—are very different, and so is what happened to each of them after their designations were denied.

The Jamaica Savings Bank is a small bank branch located at the bustling intersection of Queens Boulevard and 56th Avenue in Elmhurst. A 1966 modernist building by little-known architect

William Cann, it strikes a dramatically triangular shape with its peak at the street corner, the copper-clad roofline descending precipitously at more than 60 degrees on both sides. The design clearly reflects such period Queens influences as the 1964 World's Fair and Eero Saarinen's Trans World Airlines Terminal at Kennedy Airport, completed in 1962, and like them is built of reinforced concrete. Acting largely on its own initiative, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the bank building in June 2005.

The Austin, Nichols & Company building, on the other hand, is a monumental former warehouse located at 184 Kent Avenue on the East River in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. It was designed by

Cass Gilbert, a celebrated New York architect who also designed the Woolworth Building, the U.S. Courthouse and the George Washington Bridge. Austin, Nichols was built in 1913, also of reinforced concrete, for one of the world's largest grocery wholesalers and is said to be a rare American example of Egyptian Revival architecture, characterized by a flared cornice and sloping walls. Partly vacant for many years, it became home in 1998 to artists who moved in with the approval of the owners, the Kestenbaum family. Six years later, when the owners applied for variances to permit a massive rooftop addition, the tenants sensed the start of a major redevelopment—indeed, the landlord had asked them all to sign an agreement to vacate in 60 days if requested (see *District Lines*, Autumn 2005). Some tenants along with other community members formed the



P. BAREAU



M. SALISBURY

Former Jamaica Savings Bank in Queens, left, and Austin, Nichols Warehouse in Brooklyn were both designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission and turned down by the City Council.

Williamsburg Waterfront Preservation Alliance and started a campaign for landmarking.

At the Landmarks Preservation Commission's hearing for the designation of Jamaica Savings Bank, only a few speakers appeared in support—representatives of the Historic Districts Council, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, DoCoMoMo and the Queensborough Preservation League. The North Fork Bank, its current occupant, expressed strong opposition, alleging that the building is expensive to operate and maintain because of its design.

At the LPC designation hearing for Austin, Nichols, on the other hand, supporters turned out in record numbers to testify in favor of designation, along with representatives of HDC and other organizations. The owners protested, saying designation would spoil their development plans and that the building had no architectural or historical merit. LPC disagreed and designated it in September 2005.

The City Charter empowers the City Council to ratify, modify or deny a designation. It is considered first by the Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Sitting and Maritime Uses, then by the full Land Use Committee and finally by the

full City Council. The closest scrutiny normally comes at the subcommittee level; committee and full Council votes almost always agree with it.

When the Jamaica Savings Bank designation was considered by the subcommittee, the owner, BA Property LLC, argued against landmarking, citing the complaints its lessee had made at LPC and contending that designation would prevent it from developing the site. Helen Sears, councilmember for the area, had already voiced her support, as had the local community board, but when asked at the hearing if she still supported the designation, she equivocated, reiterating the owner's objections. Otherwise, there was limited testimony, largely a repeat of that given at the commission. Subcommittee Chair Simcha Felder declared that the building did not "look like" a landmark and did not deserve designation. The subcommittee voted to overturn with only Councilmember Bill Perkins dissenting.

The meeting of the full Land Use Committee as usual ratified the subcommittee vote. Despite advocates' requests, no public testimony was taken; discussion was limited and dismissive. Chair Melinda Katz said she, too, thought the building did not "look like" a landmark, and Councilmember Charles Barron aired his often expressed opinion that modern buildings are not old enough to be worthy of landmarking. Councilmembers brushed off the witnesses in favor of designation as people who would testify for any designation. The full City Council vote went the same way, adopting the no vote of the Land Use Committee. Only Councilmember Sears voted yes at the full City Council meeting.

Councilmember David Yassky, chair of the Waterfronts Committee, represents the area where Austin, Nichols stands. Unlike Helen Sears, who vacillated, Mr. Yassky was opposed to the designation from the beginning and lobbied his colleagues actively against it. Calling the building "nondescript" and "not worthy of landmarking," he concurred with Mr. Felder, chair of the landmarks subcommittee, who denounced the building again and again as "a piece of trash" and said it should be demolished. Ms. Katz also felt that the building was unworthy, and finally, on November 20, 2005, the full City Council voted against designa-

tion 43-6 with one abstention.

One of those six was Councilmember Tony Avella, who had written a letter to the full Council membership saying it would be "hypocritical" to vote no after not only asking LPC for more designations outside Manhattan, but also after the Council specified this site as a "significant historic resource" in the May 2005 rezoning.

Nevertheless, Austin Nichols was turned down. Mayor Michael Bloomberg vetoed the City Council's action, saying of the landmarks commission, "... its members are the experts charged with determining what buildings are worthy of landmarks designation."

No, said the City Council, in effect. We are, and overturned the veto. ■

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

WHOSE HANDS SHOULD HOLD decisions about historic preservation? Recent actions by the New York City Council that overturned the landmark designations of the Jamaica Savings Bank in Queens and the Austin, Nichols Warehouse in Brooklyn (see page 1) must give preservationists pause. As discontented as we may be at times with the Landmarks Preservation Commission, would we be better off if more decisions rested with a political body like the Council?

Not every building or district needs



P. DECKER

HDC Board President David Goldfarb.

DISTRICT LINES

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HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

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THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL IS THE
CITYWIDE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK'S DESIGNATED
HISTORIC DISTRICTS AND FOR NEIGHBORHOODS
MERITING PRESERVATION. THE COUNCIL IS
DEDICATED TO PRESERVING THE INTEGRITY OF
NEW YORK CITY'S LANDMARKS LAW AND TO
FURTHERING THE PRESERVATION ETHIC.

to be saved. New York is great because of its ability to reinvent itself, including its architecture. But someone needs to make the important decisions about what should be preserved. Those decisions must be made in a public, fair and reasonable way. There needs to be a plan—both a plan for protecting the architectural and cultural heritage of the city and a management plan to handle the enormous work of designating and regulating landmarks. Without a plan and without a public agenda that is perceived to be fair and open, the system falls into chaos. Everyone is displeased and little gets accomplished.

By and large, people feel the system we have now is broken. As a community we need to come up with a balanced agenda for changing the system. This should include reforms that would allow the city to act quickly to protect significant endangered buildings; allow public participation in setting the agenda for historic designations; provide economic incentives for people who own landmark buildings; and provide strict but fair regulation of landmarks.

HDC will be engaged over the next year in working with community groups in developing such a plan—a list of reforms to restore faith in the system of landmarking historic properties. I urge you to join us in developing an agenda that will enhance the designation process, bring order to the regulation procedure and allow New York City to save the best of its past while permitting a wise plan for progress in the future. —*David Goldfarb*

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Do your favorite preservationists deserve recognition?

HDC is soliciting nominations for recipients of our 2006 Grassroots Preservation Awards.

Send suggestions to: hdc@hdc.org with an explanatory paragraph.

Check our Web site for more information: www.hdc.org

EMINENT DOMAIN: HIGH COURT DECISION MAKES EVERYBODY SCRAMBLE

The 21-acre Atlantic Yards development plan in Brooklyn, with its basketball arena and millions of square feet of new construction, is stirring controversy over its potential impact on Prospect Heights. So is the Downtown Brooklyn Plan for its effect on Duffield Street. Because a major tool in both projects is the exercise of eminent domain, or the taking of property, and because eminent-domain laws are changing, District Lines takes a look at the issue in flux to see how the projects would be affected.

WHEN THE UNITED STATES Supreme Court decided last June that the city of New London, Connecticut, could seize private houses by eminent domain and grant them to a developer, few people could believe it. Give one private person's property to another private person? To make money? Even if the ostensible reason in the New London case was to increase the tax base, the decision had a bad smell and was considered outrageous by many across the political spectrum. Starting with Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, dissenting, fears were expressed all over the country that nobody's property was safe and that land grabs would begin forthwith.

Justice John Paul Stevens, writing the majority opinion, said that economic development was a long-honored and justified activity of local governments and that the Court would defer to New London's decision. He also said, however, there was nothing keeping states from passing laws making the exercise of eminent domain as restrictive as they like, and many states have sprung to do exactly that. So has the House of Representatives, which voted 376 to 38 in November for a bill to prevent any state or local government from using federal money for a project involving eminent domain if that project is undertaken for economic development or to increase tax revenue, the tax base or jobs.

Meanwhile, in New London nothing has happened. According to news reports, no one has been evicted, no bulldozers have moved in and the Connecticut General Assembly has advised local governments to hold off using eminent domain until it can consider new state laws.

The doctrine of eminent domain has been used for centuries, and there have been abuses on both sides. Kings seized their subjects' land for royal hunting grounds; individuals speculated on land,

expecting to resell it at windfall profits to the government for public works (see the District Profile of Fort Totten, page 8, for a local example).

The Fifth Amendment states, in part: "... nor shall private property be taken for



P. BAREAU

Billboards dotted throughout the Atlantic Yards site protest eminent-domain abuse. This one is on Carlton Avenue near Dean Street.

public use, without just compensation." New York State's constitution has a similar provision—"Private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation" (Article 1, Section 7).

Just compensation and public use are the two conditions making eminent domain acceptable, not only constitutionally but in the public mind. The Supreme Court decision is a turning point because it condoned seizing property not for

“public” use but for private development.

Forest City Ratner, in partnership with the Empire State Development Corporation, says that areas of Prospect Heights are blighted and thus liable to condemnation by the state. Opponents say that only the rail yards are blighted, and Ratner bought them last fall from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. The developer owns much of the contested land already; 30 to 50 additional properties could be seized. Opponents call this a venture for private gain—residential development and a basketball stadium for the Nets, which the developer owns. Signs protesting eminent-domain abuse dot the neighborhood.

In New York State today three entities are currently empowered to exercise eminent domain, and they are all quasi-governmental bodies not accountable to the public:

- 1) state agencies such as the Department of Transportation, authorities such as the MTA and development bodies such as the Empire State Development Corporation, which is the organization doing the Atlantic Yards project;
- 2) city agencies such as Housing Preservation and Development or Economic Development Corporation;
- 3) private entities such as utilities under highly circumscribed instances.

In all cases, public hearings and review are necessary, but state agencies do not need further authority to proceed. City agencies must follow the findings of the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure, commonly referred to as ULURP. Both city and state agencies have to come up with a rationale of public purpose in order to employ eminent domain; New York City can exercise it only insofar as New York State grants it permission to do so.

Just compensation for residential properties is determined by appraisers basing their estimates on comparable sales in the neighborhood; commercial property value is determined on a multiple of earnings.

People who own property they have lived in for years, like Jason Donegan, are worried. Since 1976 he has lived on Duffield Street, which is in the way of the Downtown Brooklyn Plan to replace the houses with millions of feet of mixed-use construction. His parents bought 231 Duffield Street in 1943, a three-story brick Greek Revival about 18 feet wide and 60



P. BAREAU

These houses on Duffield Street may be condemned for new buildings and parking space as part of the Downtown Brooklyn Plan. Residents hope it will save their buildings if they can prove a connection to the underground railway, but so far they have been unable to do so.

feet deep with a single-story storefront addition and a sign saying, “Jason’s Psychic-CJ Tea Room, Bookstore and Center for Conscious Awareness.” The top two floors are unused and the windows are blackened. The house immediately west of his has been torn down, leaving a vacant lot; and Mr. Donegan’s backyard runs the width of his building for about 30 feet. There is much open space and lots of sky around him, and the sidewalk is one step down from his front door. He says if his property were condemned, he could never find anything like it, which seems probable: “Where would I go?”

Others on the street are worried too, and they are trying to establish that their buildings, which housed a number of prominent abolitionists in the mid-19th century, was a way station of the underground railway for runaway slaves. They hope that this distinction, if they can prove it, might persuade the Landmarks Preservation Commission to designate their street an historic district. The trouble is, they haven’t been able to prove it ... and anyway, the doctrine of eminent domain trumps local laws, even preservation laws; an historic district in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, is currently threatened by renewal plans of the Lower Merion Township.

Changes in laws relating to eminent domain are taking place all over the coun-

try, no less in New York. Letitia James, City Councilmember from Prospect Park—“the face of Atlantic Yards,” as she calls herself—introduced legislation in the City Council that would ban the city from using eminent domain solely for economic development and prohibit city funds from being used for such projects. Two bills will be before the New York State Legislature when it reconvenes in January, one sponsored by Richard Brodsky, assemblyman from Westchester, and the other by Roger Green, assemblyman from Brooklyn.

Mr. Brodsky’s bill would, he told District Lines, require any issue involving eminent domain to be voted on by locally elected governmental officials—it would no longer be approvable only by an agency, authority or industrial development agency. In addition, a comprehensive economic plan would be required of the developer, and it would have to be approved by the local government. Increased compensation—150 percent of the value, not 100 percent—would have to be paid. Citizens would have a longer time period in which to appeal decisions to condemn; and the bill would establish an ombudsman to liaise with the state and to represent the interests of the public in court cases.

Mr. Green’s bill would go farther in compensation: a developer who exercises

eminent domain outside a blighted area would have to pay the people he displaces 15 percent of the gross profits of the development per year for ten years.

Councilmember James is opposed to the size of the Atlantic Yards project and noted that it wasn't the only one—five additional areas in Brooklyn are currently being considered for development. She told District Lines that Borough President Marty Markowitz wants the Atlantic Yards project downsized and that “Hillary is sympathetic to my cause.” But the most hopeful note she struck was to say that the Environmental Impact Statement is not likely to be issued before April, and that if Assemblymen Brodsky and Green's bills are passed in January or February, their provisions would prevail and the timing “will give us a window of opportunity.”

FIVE NEW ADVISERS JOIN HDC'S BOARD

THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL'S board of advisers provides expertise and guidance to our programs and mission. We are pleased to welcome the following, whose backgrounds represent law, design, education administration, historic preservation, nonprofit management and community activism:

- **dorris gaines golomb**, who uses lower-case type for her name, is an interior designer and long-time resident of Fort Greene, Brooklyn, where she works to protect and preserve her historic neighborhood as chairman of the Fort Greene Association's Landmarks Committee and as a member of the Land Use/Landmarks Committee of Community Board 2.

- **Richard Moylan**, president of The Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, trained as a lawyer and has been with the cemetery for more than 30 years. Under his leadership, Green-Wood initiated its “Saved in Time” program to increase awareness of the 478-acre cemetery's history and raised thousands of dollars in private funds to help restore its celebrated monuments. He is a Brooklyn resident.

- **Carl Rutberg**, a Manhattan resident, is currently executive director of the Alice Austen House Museum on Staten Island and has taken major steps toward making it financially more secure

and viable for the future. He is finishing a Ph.D. in American studies at New York University, has served as an adjunct professor at the College of Staten Island and currently teaches American history at the Fashion Institute of Technology.

- **Thomas Schutte** has served as president of several colleges and universities, including the Rhode Island School of Design, the Philadelphia College of Art and, currently, Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, which he helped develop into a national center for community-based planning and whose design-arts programs he revitalized. He is also affiliated with numerous arts and community organizations in Brooklyn and beyond, acting as chairman of both the Myrtle Avenue Revitalization Corporation and the Brooklyn Arts Council as well as a trustee of the New York Landmarks Preservation Foundation.

- **Sophie LaVerdiere Truslow** is a lawyer in private practice and a historic preservation consultant, advising on New York urban and suburban properties and cultural resource issues. An alumna of Columbia University's Graduate Preservation Program, she is a trustee and member of the advisory board of the New York Marble Cemetery, Manhattan, and was a fellow in the office of the National Council on the Arts. Ms. Truslow is a Brooklyn resident.

HDC IMAGE ARCHIVE IS UP AND RUNNING

LAST FALL the Historic Districts Council launched the Historic Districts Image Collection, an online assemblage of photographs of New York City's designated areas. It is a selection from HDC's Digital Image Library, an archive of more than 2,500 contemporary photographs in an ongoing project funded in part by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. Taken in 2004 specially for the library, the district photographs will be used for research and advocacy purposes by students, researchers and community groups and will be available in a searchable format on HDC's Web site within the year.

To make these images available to a wider audience and in different forms, HDC has partnered with POD (Print



HISTORIC DISTRICTS IMAGE COLLECTION

Detail on the Bayard Condict Building (1897, Louis Sullivan) on Bleecker Street in the NoHo Historic District, Manhattan.

On Demand) Gallery, a SoHo-based online publisher of fine-art prints, cards and posters that was founded in 2000 to permit art to be seen and distributed widely. All 6,000 works on POD's online gallery are available for sale and are produced on demand. HDC has arranged with POD to provide a similar service using the Historic Districts Image Collection.

The images in the collection are available by order from POD as customized archival quality cards, notecards, fine-art photographs and giclee [jy-KLEE] prints, which are produced on large-format printers that spray the ink, producing images without a visible dot-screen pattern. The results have the tonalities and hues of the original work and are considered museum quality.

Says HDC Executive Director Simeon Bankoff, “The images capture the distinctive sense of place of each neighborhood and display some of the individual buildings within them as well. We hope these photos will encourage people's appreciation of the city's historic districts.”

To view and order the Historic Districts Image Collection, go to www.hdc.org to order, or call 212-614-9107 for more information.

PRESERVATION STRATEGIES: LANDMARKING IS ONLY ONE ANSWER

PHYSICAL GROWTH IN NEW YORK CITY is controlled by an intricate and interlocking structure of regulations and laws that govern what may be built where and what may not be. The New York City Landmarks Law, adopted 40 years ago, is still the best tool to preserve historic neighborhoods; but it is not the only one. For neighborhoods seeking protection it is possible, even desirable, to pursue other means while campaigning for landmark designation. This article will focus on the two most common ways of doing that in New York City: rezoning and gaining listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Another, strictly grassroots way to enhance an historic neighborhood is described in the box on page 7.

Rezoning

The current Zoning Resolution, adopted in 1961 and amended many times since, determines the physical envelope of a structure and its use. Often, especially in historic areas, the underlying zoning does not match the existing built environment because the predictions of 45 years ago never came to pass, and neighborhoods have changed in unforeseen ways. As a result, special difficulties are faced by communities that wish to retain and reuse historic buildings where zoning allows much larger ones.

Community groups that want to rezone all or part of their neighborhood work with the Department of City Planning to either “downzone” an area—lower the allowable bulk and in some cases height of new development—or create a “contextual zone” that encourages new development to fit in with existing buildings. Community groups and DCP study the area to be rezoned, weighing factors such as existing building stock, existing uses (commercial, residential, manufacturing), traffic, environmental effects and the like. DCP then works with the sponsoring group on the “scope” of the plan, which establishes limits in terms of both area and amount. After the plan is “certified,” or accepted by the agency, it is sent out for review under the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure. ULURP establishes a schedule of up to 180 days for public hearings before the commu-

nity board, the borough president, the City Planning Commission (which votes to adopt changes to the Zoning Resolution) and the City Council (which votes to affirm or deny the rezoning). The City Council can also modify the rezoning “within scope,” or within the boundaries of the plan.

Rezoning, though effective, is a blunt instrument. It determines the general



NANCY CATALDI

Queen Anne houses like this one populate the village of Richmond Hill, Queens, recently rezoned to prevent out-of-scale development.

shape of development and, except in special cases, does not affect the actual architectural details that help create the sense of place in historic areas.

Andrew Berman, executive director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, has recently led a successful rezoning effort of the formerly industrial area in the Far West Village. He states that “while downzonings and contextual zonings don’t provide all the protections we’d like, they do provide some, and in some cases landmarking is simply not a realistic option. We find contextual zoning and landmarking best go hand in hand to complement one another.”

Another problem is that development does not wait while the zoning is being adjusted (this is also true of landmark designation). “We find our larger lots are still suffering from demolition,” says Nancy Cataldi, president of the Richmond Hill Historical Society, which has recently sponsored a downzoning of that late 19th century suburban Queens neighborhood. “The rule of getting demolition permits first and then submitting the building permits later has been a huge disadvantage, since some of the downzoning has not caught up to the developer’s agenda.” In 2005 City Councilmember Tony Avella sponsored legislation to strengthen new zoning plans, but it was not adopted and will have to be reintroduced in 2006 to the new City Council.

National Register Listing

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 created the National Register of Historic Places, the federal listing of recognized historic resources. These resources include individual buildings, neighborhoods, parks and bridges that possess architectural excellence and historical or archaeological significance. New York State in 1980 established its own State Register of Historic Places

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HDC TO LEAD TALKS ON PRESERVATION

JACKSON HEIGHTS, QUEENS, was the site last November of HDC’s first panel discussion in a series called Downzoning, Designation and Development. In the next panels, to be held in Brooklyn in February and on Staten Island in April, issues affecting preservation and overdevelopment will be explored.

Representatives from city agencies responsible for preserving neighborhood character will discuss how the historic district designation process works, and neighborhood activists will discuss landmark designation, rezoning initiatives and public awareness campaigns as ways to preserve local character. For times and places, contact 212-614-9107 or hdc@hdc.org.

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with largely the same standards as the national listing. Properties placed on the State Register are almost always subsequently placed on the National Register. Structures and properties listed on the Registers gain recognition, are eligible for preservation incentives such as tax credits for approved restoration work and gain a measure of protection from government action that requires environmental review, such as road widenings, building variances and construction of government buildings. However, listing does not carry any obligation or restriction for private owners.

Properties may be nominated for listing by anyone who wishes to do so; the State Historic Preservation Officer is authorized to issue a determination of eligibility for listing. In New York State the officer is Bernadette Castro, commissioner of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The nomination form requires detailed information about the history and significance of the property as well as a complete set of archival photographs—for some districts, clearly, that can amount to hundreds of pages.

Once a property has achieved eligibility for listing, impacts of government action on it must be considered during environmental reviews. However, in order for an owner to take advantage of the financial benefits that listing confers, the property must be Register-listed, not just eligible. A state review board votes on the nomination and, after passing it, forwards it to the Keeper of the Register in Washington, D.C., with a recommendation that it be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In Richmond Hill, Ms. Cataldi has placed a number of historic sites within her community on the State and National Registers over the past three years, including the Church of the Resurrection, P.S. 66, RKO Keith's, Maple Grove Cemetery and the Forest Park Carousel. She says, "It's a pile of paperwork, but did add prestige to our area." Typically, the entire process of getting a building or neighborhood on the State and National Registers takes less than two years, as opposed to the three years or longer—sometimes much longer, if ever—that a New York City historic district designation can take.

MANHATTAN'S WEST 72ND STREET: TALE OF AN URBAN MAIN STREET

IN A 1997 ARTICLE for The New York Times, Christopher Gray wrote, "Nothing on the Upper West Side slipped as dramatically as 72nd Street from a prestigious parkway of private houses in the 1880s to little shop fronts and commercial buildings in the 1920s ... but in recent years the block has taken on a honky-tonk air."

The two blocks between Central Park West and Broadway were protected as part of the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, but by the time it was designated in 1990 a good deal of historic fabric had already been lost, altered or covered up. Because many changes were grandfathered, the Landmarks Preservation Commission was unable to find them in violation.

To rectify matters, in 1997 the community group Landmark West! launched its Retail Assistance Program (RAP) pilot project on West 72nd Street between Columbus Avenue and Broadway, extending it from Central Park to Riverside Park in 2001.

Today West 72nd Street is one of New York City's most acclaimed commercial revitalization success stories, cited by the New York City Department of Small Business Services in its publication "Facade: Guide to Storefront Design."

Local residents, building and business owners, elected officials, city agencies and professional architects, historians, planners and preservationists, all pitched in to improve this once preeminent thoroughfare. Early on, Landmark West! joined forces with then-City Councilmember Ronnie Eldridge, who secured more than \$1 million toward installing historic bishop's crook lampposts; planting street trees; substituting a forest of parking meters with muni-meters; and laying new "landmark gray" sidewalks and granite curbs.

These streetscape improvements inspired business owners to upgrade their storefronts by curing violations and restoring the balance between commercial signage and historic details. They removed canopies—there were 18 illegal ones between Columbus and Broadway alone—awnings, security gates, banners and other inappropriate materials. Replacement signs, soft-canvas retractable awnings, and window displays were designed to complement rather than compete with the street's architecture; and individual expression was encouraged to foster a vital urban character.

Once anchor stores began to spruce up, improvements became so widespread that the merchants won a special Small Business Award from Commerce Bank and Manhattan Media in 2003; and in 2004 the street was the first New York City semifinalist for a Great American Main Street Award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Landmark West! is committed to helping other community groups and recently received a small grant from the foundation called Furthermore... to create a handbook documenting steps to street improvement. Contact Landmark West! at 212-496-8110 or landmarkwest@landmarkwest.org. 📞

The Registers use slightly different criteria than does the Landmarks Preservation Commission, so sometimes even communities that already have locally designated districts pursue Register listings to enlarge their areas. Gansevoort Market, Jackson Heights, Hamilton Heights and Murray Hill all have districts

on the Registers larger than their city ones, and some see that as a way to encourage restorations that may not actually be required by LPC.

Making Your Voice Heard

All preservation efforts, regardless of their legislative basis, depend on commu-

nity support. Without neighbors, property owners and elected officials, a preservation campaign, no matter how worthy, is almost certainly doomed to failure. Communicating and connecting with neighbors and



HISTORIC DISTRICTS IMAGE COLLECTION

Looking southwest on St. Nicholas Avenue at West 146th Street in the Hamilton Heights/Sugar Hill Extension in Manhattan.

elected officials is one of most vital steps of any preservation initiative.

Techniques for getting the word out vary: "Whenever we have events in the neighborhood," says Ms. Cataldi, "it is good for me to be there and network with people in the community. It is a good place to get your point across face to face if there are questions to be answered and to make things clearer for those who do not understand. We have had restoration fairs and handed out owners' welcome packages with restoration resources. It is also a great opportunity to get signatures on petitions and postcards."

Mr. Berman finds that "e-mails, public meetings, town halls, marches, rallies and media coverage are very effective tools to help get our community organized around our issues."

Yuien Chin, from the Hamilton Heights/West Harlem Community Preservation Organization, reports that "generally, e-mail blasts are quick and easy, but they exclude a good percentage of the community that is not tied to a

computer, as some of us are. So, in addition to e-mail, what works best for me is old-fashioned coalition-building, public meetings, posting fliers around the neighborhood and engaging the leadership in the community along with the block associations, block by block. I strongly believe in the multiplier effect."

After popular support, elected officials are most important. Mr. Berman says, "The most successful way to engage our elected officials is simply to show them how much support we have behind our efforts. By having large turnouts at our rallies, town halls and hearings, elected officials are more willing to listen to our agenda and more likely to take the positions we are advocating for." Ms. Cataldi adds that "attending functions and facing the politicians works for us. It is very difficult to make a connection, so I use every event possible to confront our officials and ask for help one on one. I make sure I can speak to them and get my point across."

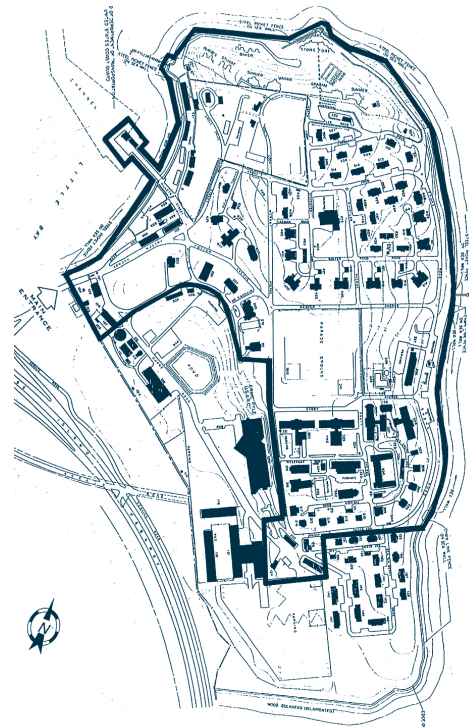
Just as there is no such thing as a typical landmark or a typical historic neighborhood, it's almost impossible to create a "one size fits all" checklist for a successful preservation campaign. Still, hard work, passion for the project, organization and persistence go a long way to achieving success. ■

DISTRICT PROFILES

FORT TOTTEN HISTORIC DISTRICT, QUEENS

ONE OF THE MOST STRIKING of all New York City's historic districts is Fort Totten, a 19th and 20th century military enclave that sits on a peninsula in Long Island Sound north of Bayside, Queens. Built over a 130-year period, from 1830 to 1960, it occupies 136 acres and has more than 100 houses and smaller buildings. But it is the dramatic granite-clad masonry battery, standing low and stout, that makes Fort Totten the memorable place it is.

Displaying what the Landmarks Preservation Commission's 1999 designation



Fort Totten, on Willets Point in Queens, was built as part of a nationwide coastal fortification system in the mid-19th century.

report calls "the features of the last phase of the Third System of coastal fortification," the battery was built between 1862 and 1864 on brick masonry walls that extend 12 feet below sea level, are eight feet thick and have granite walls pierced by gun embrasures, or openings for guns, overlooking the water of Long Island Sound.

The United States government had been interested in the defense of New York Harbor since the Revolutionary War, concentrating first on the Inner Harbor using the so-called First and Second Systems of fortifications. The results were Fort Jay, Castle Williams and South Battery, all on Governors Island, Castle Clinton in Manhattan and Fort Gibson on Ellis Island.

After the War of 1812 the U.S. government established a board to create a permanent system of defenses, called the Third System. One of the leaders of the board and its most influential member was the chief engineer of the Army Engineers, Major General Joseph G. Totten (1788-1864), who led the development of coastal fortification and designed most of the forts built in the U.S. between the 1820's and 1860's. Alas, he never lived to see the fort named after him—during his lifetime, it was known as The Fort at

Willetts Point and did not become Fort Totten until 1898. Two other forts are also named for the general, in North Dakota and North Carolina.

Construction of the original Third System battery began during the Civil War and ended then, when military technology advanced more quickly than anticipated.



P. BAREAU

Fort Totten's battery is built of granite blocks over brick masonry. A barrel-vaulted vehicular access tunnel connects the battery with the rest of the military post. Torpedo mines were stored nearby.

The Rodman cannon was developed at the time, able to smash stone walls with iron balls. In addition, the accuracy of rifleshots over long distances improved so much that the enemy could land explosives inside those smashed masonry walls. Together, these developments made the fortifications obsolete, and construction was abandoned.

The fort itself was not abandoned, however. It became important as an advanced training center for Army Engineers and as a research center for military medicine and technology. Walter Reed (1851-1902), who became famous for his research in yellow fever and for whom the Army hospital in Washington, D.C., is named, was post surgeon here at Fort Totten in 1875-76.

In fact, the main period of expansion of the fort came during the years 1885-1914, after its role in strategic defense diminished. The Army upgraded fortifications and batteries, installed torpedo buildings and built housing for the military. In the hillside behind the battery a main magazine was built with walls 17 to

36 inches thick for the storage of gunpowder. A tunnel was built through the hillside in 1870 to link the battery with the rest of the post, a barrel-vaulted "vehicular access tunnel," as the designation report calls it, big enough to drive a truck through. Adjacent to it are vaults where torpedo mines were stored, also built into the hill. These

features are extant—and still dramatic.

The peninsula where Fort Totten sits was originally wetlands occupied by the Matinecock Indians until the Dutch took it over in 1639. They granted it to William Thorne, an Englishman who had been banished to Long Island from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for assisting religious dissenters. The property was called Thorne Point until Ann Thorne married William Wilkins and it became known as Wilkins Point. In 1829 the Wilkinses sold it to a man with a similar name, Charles Willetts, an area nurseryman who, the designation report suggests, bought it in hopes of selling to the Army, which he had heard might be taking various strategic locations like this one to use as fortifications for New York Harbor. Willetts, whose name still attaches to the peninsula, died before the Army made a decision; and in 1857 his heirs sold it to a New York land speculator who turned it around and sold it to the Army for \$200,000, an amount so scandalous it inspired a Congressional

investigation and no doubt profound regret among the Willetts heirs.

Since the late 1960's, Fort Totten has served as headquarters for major military commands, an Army Reserve post and the Coast Guard. In 1971 it was a Job Corps Training Center. The Army Reserve still uses it; so do the New York Fire, Police and Parks Departments and a couple of nonprofit organizations. Much of the original wetlands was filled in early on; the major open space today is a parade ground surrounded by buildings.

Restoration is an ongoing process; the battlements were completed last fall and are now open to the public for Park Ranger tours during specific weekend hours. For more information, telephone 718-352-1769. ■

"PLACE, RACE, MONEY AND ART"—HDC's 2006 CONFERENCE

A DISTINGUISHED GROUP of preservationists, planners, artists, architects, educators and developers will take part in the Historic Districts Council's 12th Annual Preservation Conference to discuss "Place, Race, Money and Art—the Economics and Demographics of Historic Preservation." The conference will be at Columbia University on Saturday, March 4, and will be the centerpiece of a three-day event kicked off with an evening party on Friday, concluded with walking tours Sunday and preceded in the weeks beforehand by a series of related lectures.

At press time, the participants were as follows:

- **Robert Fishman**, professor of architecture and urban planning at the University of Michigan, who will deliver the keynote address, "Historians of Hope: Preservation and the End of the Urban Crisis."

Three consecutive panels will follow: "Economics of Preservation," "Race and Preservation" and "Artists and Neighborhoods."

- **Eric Wm. Allison** will moderate "Economics of Preservation," exploring the real financial consequences of preservation practices and the long-term effects of preservation on economic and hous-

ing development. Mr. Allison is co-chair of Pratt Institute's historic preservation graduate program, a former president of HDC and now an HDC adviser. He will be joined by **Greg O'Connell**, developer from Red Hook, Brooklyn; journalist and a commissioner of the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission, **Roberta Brandes Gratz**; and Columbia University professor and assistant commissioner for local legislative affairs with the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, **Carol Clark**.

- **Michael Henry Adams**, Harlem historian, preservationist and author, will moderate "Race and Preservation" and discuss how preservation can be and is incorporated at sites and communities of diverse cultures. Panelists will be: former City Councilmember **Bill Perkins**; professor of urban affairs and planning at Hunter College, **Tom Agnotti**; professor of history and director of the Rutgers University Institute on Ethnicity, Culture, and the Modern Experience, **Clement Price**.

- **Hal Bromm**, Tribeca gallery owner, a former HDC president and a current director, will moderate "Artists and Neighborhoods." **Doreen Gallo**, an artist and long-time resident of DUMBO; **Nicholas Evans-Cato**, an urban landscape painter, president of the Vinegar Hill Neighborhood Association, Brooklyn, and an HDC adviser; and **Jenny Dixon**, director of the Noguchi Museum in Long Island City, will sit on the panel. Speaking from their personal and professional experiences, the panelists will discuss the role of artists in changing neighborhoods and how artists both affect and are affected by those changes.

The Friday evening reception will be held at The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen on West 44th Street in Manhattan, and the weekend's activities will conclude on Sunday with a choice of walking tours of Astoria/Long Island City, West Chelsea, Williamsburg/Greenpoint, historic districts in The Bronx and other neighborhoods that illustrate issues discussed during the conference.

As a preface to the conference and on subjects relating to it, HDC is planning two lectures in February. Speakers and topics, dates and venues will be posted on the Web site and announced in fliers to be sent by mail. For other information or to register for the conference, visit www.hdc.org or telephone 212-614-9107. ■

BARRY LEWIS, LION

THE SELF-TAUGHT HISTORIAN, architecture buff and New York booster, Barry Lewis is known to millions of Public Broadcasting System viewers for walking tours of the city that he conducts with David Hartman. More than anything, though, he is remarkable for the fresh and limitless enthusiasm he brings to the discovery of the built environment. Mr. Lewis was the recipient of the 2005 Historic Districts Council's Landmarks Lion Award, and he is shown below giving a slide presentation at the award ceremony about his favorite subject, in this case modern architecture. ■



P. DECKER

Barry Lewis, HDC's Landmarks Lion for 2005.

NEW BOOKS ABOUT OLD NEW YORK

"**The American Skyscraper: Cultural Histories**," edited by Roberta Moudry. Cambridge University Press, 281 pp., \$75. Urban historian Roberta Moudry has gathered essays by 13 American scholars exploring how skyscrapers evolved between 1880 and 1950 in New York and Chicago. Amid historical overviews of height-regulation laws and philosophical discussions of skyscrapers as bastions of capitalist male wealth, some fascinating architectural factoids emerge: Steelworkers

on Cass Gilbert's 1913 Woolworth Building broke construction speed records by assembling 1,153 tons in six days, and visitors to Burnham & Root's 1892 Masonic Temple in Chicago gazed across the skyline from a roof garden sheltered by a innovative, greenhouse-like ferrovitreous vault.

"**Building New York: The Rise and Rise of the Greatest City on Earth**," by Bruce Marshall. Universe, 304 pp., \$49.95. A useful compendium of in-progress or just-finished shots of hundreds of well known structures, the book shows bridges in mid-cantilever, skyscraper skeletons not yet veneered in stone, the Guggenheim Museum and Shea Stadium before stains and cracks set in. Bruce Marshall, a book editor and publisher, also devotes pages to lost icons, both high style (Stanford White's 1890 Madison Square Garden, the World Trade Center) and vernacular (bay-fronted brownstones in the East 60's).

"**Great Houses of New York, 1880-1930**," by Michael Kathrens. Acanthus Press, 383 pp., \$80. To hold on to a high rung in Manhattan society before World War II, a hostess had to live on Fifth or Park Avenue, between 50th and 95th Streets. Her townhouse ballroom ideally needed to hold 500 people, her boiler needed to burn up to 14 tons of coal a day and her servant quarters had to accommodate at least 12 staffers. Voilà—and the "right kind" of guests would have flowed in! Architectural historian Michael Kathrens has written lively, sometimes gossipy profiles of 43 such posh houses, half of which have been razed. All illustrations are vintage photos—many of them from the author's own collection.

"**Metropolis**," by Elizabeth Gaffney. Random House, 480 pp., \$24.95. HDC board member Ann Walker Gaffney's daughter Elizabeth wrote this riveting, widely praised novel about a German immigrant stonemason's travails in post-Civil War New York. Gaffney expertly interweaves tales of gang warfare, altered identities, sewer construction and star-crossed love—Elle magazine lauded the book for "mixing raw realism with fantasy, irony, and black humor." Ms. Gaffney read excerpts from her book at an Historic Districts Council party in December.

"**Rubble: Unearthing the History of Demolition**," by Jeff Byles. Harmony Books, 372 pp., \$24. New York-based freelance journalist Jeff Byles has, improb-

ably, produced an entertaining romp while chronicling how buildings suffer manmade deaths. His self-described "unbildungsroman" spans the centuries from Joshua trumpeting down Jericho's walls to Britain's recent proposal to broadcast the dynamiting of a building that the populace has voted most-hated. The razers in his tales express little remorse, although Morris Lipsett, the former junk-car dealer who tore down Pennsylvania

Station in the 1960's, preferred afterward to build subway or highway tunnels. Construction, he once confided, "makes a man feel better" than wrecking does.

"Tugboats of New York: An Illustrated History," by George Matteson. New York University Press, 272 pp., \$39.95. Battling ice and ornery tides, maneuvering hazardous cargoes through tight channels, tugboat operators are among the city's least appreciated heroes.

Maritime historian George Matteson, who has piloted tugs since 1979, explains how an 1828 steam-driven towboat called the Rufus King set precedents for an industry. Tugboat captains now communicate by satellite as 8,000-horsepower diesel engines haul tankers around, and computer-controlled propulsion systems can turn the tugs on a dime. This informative book is rich in vintage photos of tugs, machinery and crews. 卐

RECENT GIFTS AND GRANTS

ALL CONTRIBUTIONS by government, foundations, organizations, companies and Friends of the Historic Districts Council are very much appreciated. Many thanks to those who gave in the period from July through October 2005:

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