

# FRIENDS

## of the UPPER EAST SIDE HISTORIC DISTRICTS

*Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, founded in 1982, is an independent, not-for-profit membership organization dedicated to preserving the architectural legacy, livability, and sense of place of the Upper East Side.*

SUMMER 2014

# NEWS FROM FRIENDS

## WE DID IT!!!!!!



*Kerri Culhane, Board Member at the Historic Districts Council presents a 2014 Grassroots Award to Tara Kelly, Executive Director at FRIENDS, and Elizabeth McCracken, representing Friends of the First Avenue Estate and Concerned Citizens of East 64th & East 65th Streets-First to York Avenues.*

On Tuesday, May 20th the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission **voted unanimously to deny** Stahl York Avenue's request to demolish landmark affordable housing on the Upper East Side at the City & Suburban Homes First Avenue Estate. The Commission agreed with Chair Tierney that "the owner here has not carried its burden of demonstrating to the satisfaction of this Chairman of this Commission... that the property cannot earn a reasonable return under the Landmarks Law."

At the hearing, each of the Commissioners spoke in some detail about their conclusions.

Commissioner Michael Goldblum eloquently summarized these sentiments: "Destroying the First Avenue Estate would be a significant blow against affordable housing, trading its 190 relatively affordable, humanely designed units with yet more upscale, market rate condos or high-end developments. Maintaining this landmark, which I believe the record shows is both feasible and profitable, allows for the continued habitation of one of our city's most optimistic, altruistic efforts."

And so—a hearty round of applause goes to tenants, neighbors, advocates, and

elected officials who have worked alongside us over the last four years. FRIENDS was proud, indeed eager, to lead the effort to rebut the owner's claims, denying any reward for neglect and mismanagement of an important landmark—and most importantly defending preservation from an egregious attack.

Thanks especially to those who contributed financially to our effort, as well as the following champions of this cause: Former Council Member Jessica Lappin, Council Member Benjamin Kallos, the Historic Districts Council\*, Friends of the First Avenue Estate, Concerned Citizens of East 64th & East 65th Streets-First to York Avenues, Residents of 429 East 64th & 430 East 65th Streets, James Lima Planning + Development, HR&A Advisors and, of course, **the Landmarks Preservation Commission for making the right decision!**

\*FRIENDS is thrilled to be included in the Coalition to Save the First Avenue Estate, recipients of a 2014 Grassroots Award from the Historic Districts Council!!

*For more details of the decision, turn to Page 3.*

# PARK AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT MAKES IT SEVEN



On Tuesday, April 29th the Landmarks Preservation Commission voted unanimously to designate the Park Avenue Historic District which protects an additional twelve blocks of historic buildings along northern Park Avenue. The district—stretching from 79th Street to 91st Street—connects the existing Upper East Side and Carnegie Hill Historic Districts and provides protection for an additional 64 sites. The area consists mainly of high-rise apartment buildings from the 1910s and 1920s, but also features a number of low-rise residences and two churches.

One of the churches, the Park Avenue Christian Church, was the subject of debate during the long process to create the district and decide its boundaries. Preservation organizations and local citizens fought to designate the entire church complex, including its former parish house. Ultimately, the LPC decided to list the former parish house as having “no style,” a classification that allows for broad changes to be made to the building—even demolition. Although FRIENDS and many others were disappointed with this decision, several Commissioners vowed to carefully review any future application for the site.

FRIENDS is proud to have been part of a group of dedicated preservation and advocacy organizations that fought hard to protect this important area in our city’s history.

*Left: The aptly-named Park Avenue Historic District connects the Upper East Side and Carnegie Hill Historic Districts along the famed boulevard.*

## PRESERVING PARKING



*The Ardsley Garage, built in 1913, may become the Upper East Side’s next landmark.*

The Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the Ardsley Garage on March 25th, at which time FRIENDS testified to its architectural and cultural merits. The garage, located at 159-165 East 77th Street, is an impressive, five-story brick and terra-cotta building constructed in 1913. Designed by architect George F. Pelham, the Ardsley Garage is a lasting symbol of the automobile boom in the city during the early twentieth century, originally used by the Ardsley Garage Company of Queens to house new automobiles in close proximity to the showrooms of Park Avenue in Midtown.

The Ardsley Garage Company began as a car manufacturer in 1905, producing the W.S. Howard-designed Ardsley Car, yet stopped producing cars just a year later in 1906. The garage was built as a way to bring in revenue and revive the Ardsley Company by housing cars from other manufacturers.

George Pelham was a well-known and respected architect who worked on apartment houses, hotels, row houses, and commercial buildings. Pelham had an eclectic style, and his designs ranged from Renaissance Revival to Gothic Revival to Colonial Revival. With a career lasting over forty years, his work can be seen throughout the city in multiple historic districts, including the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, the Tribeca West Historic District, and the Upper East Side Historic District Extension, to name a few. Pelham’s design for the Ardsley Garage was intended to emulate the works of Louis Sullivan, mixing his style with an industrial aesthetic featuring large windows and an elaborate terra-cotta cornice with a geometric design.

The Ardsley Garage survives as a testament to the heyday of automobile manufacturing in New York City, when numerous car companies emerged to meet the growing demand for automobiles and automobile parts. The garage retains a high level of integrity, including its original steel casement windows and terra-cotta ornament. In addition, the building has continued to serve its intended function as a garage. The Ardsley also boasts the beautiful design of a notable architect, making it a prominent building in its neighborhood, and in the city as a whole. ♦

## PRESERVING PRESERVATION

The archiving project at FRIENDS has been completed! Archivist William Dean has sorted through dozens of old file boxes and created a database using Archivists’ Toolkit, an open-source archiving program. The database produced is fully searchable. The majority of the material processed relates to the work of FRIENDS from the 1980s to the early 1990s, focusing on the creation and expansion of historic districts and general preservation issues on the Upper East Side. There is correspondence with Mayors Dinkins, Koch, and Guilliani, and numerous other well-known New Yorkers. There is also a great deal of internal communication showing the planning of campaigns to rezone sections of the Upper East Side to encourage contextual construction, save historic buildings, and a variety of other related projects. Eventually the records will be linked to digital objects, such as scans of documents and pictures, and be available online!

The database is an important resource for preserving the history of FRIENDS as an organization, making the information in our archives more accessible to the public.

# WE DID IT!

*continued from page 1.*

As hardship applications are rare and this case was especially complicated and technical, it is worth briefly reviewing some of the key issues that were taken into account, using some of the language of the law and the proceedings, with additional notes from FRIENDS. The Commission considered the following in their resolution:

**What is the “improvement parcel”?** *Note: The owner sought to demolish just the eastern-most buildings of the full block. The question was if just those buildings or the whole complex should be analyzed.*

Property management practices, including tax filings, indicate that the owners of the First Avenue Estate operate the entire block [from First to York Avenues and 64th to 65th Streets] as one unit, and so the finances for the whole complex might be considered together in the hardship application. According to General Counsel Mark Silberman, “On this ground alone, the application can be denied. Nevertheless, the Commission did a full analysis of the hardship application, presuming that the improvement parcel is just lot 22 (the Subject Buildings), as proposed by the owner.”

**What rents can renovated apartments generate?** *Note: The owners claimed the average apartment could not rent for more than \$600.*

The Commissioners asserted that any apartment in the Subject Buildings would be as nice, if not nicer, than the units in the Other Buildings after renovation. Thus rents should be equal to, or higher than, those achieved in the rest of the complex. The Commission resolved that an average rental of approximately \$865-\$1236 per month could be employed depending on the renovation scheme.

**What is the appropriate level of vacancy and collection loss?** *In other words, how long might a renovated apartment remain vacant, and what would that cost the owner?*

Commissioner Chapin noted, “The vacancy rate for the Upper East Side averaged approximately 1.5 percent over the five year period from 2007 to 2011, yet Stahl’s vacancy rate in the Other Buildings exceeds 20 percent.” The Commission chose to employ a 5% vacancy and collection loss based upon well-documented neighborhood trends, rather than

relying on the reported rate at adjacent properties owned by the applicant.

**Does or could the improvement parcel generate other sources of income?**

The Commission was not satisfied with the applicant’s limited evaluation of the potential for other income in the Subject Buildings (such as laundry services, storage facilities, installation of cell antennae and the sale of development rights) which could have an enormous impact on the return on investment.

**What will the post-renovation operating expense be?**

Again, the Commissioners asserted that any apartment in the Subject Buildings would be as nice, if not nicer, than the units in the Other Buildings after renovation. The Commission resolved that operating costs after renovation should be no more than 15 percent higher than the average for the Other Buildings in the complex.

**What is the proper amount for depreciation?** *In other words, going forward, how much of the renovation costs should be counted towards lowering the owner’s taxes?*

Rather than consider all 110 currently vacant units in the two Subject Buildings, the Commission decided to evaluate the renovation cost of just the 53 apartments vacant at the time of designation. Mr. Silberman noted, “the owner’s decision to continue to vacate apartments after designation constituted a conscious business risk, and the costs to renovate these apartments are therefore a self-imposed hardship and should not be taken into account.”

**How should projected soft costs be considered in the analysis?** *Note: Soft costs are indirect construction expenses such as architectural, engineering, financing, and legal fees.*

The Commission allowed for a 15 percent contingency and 22 percent soft cost in the analysis.

**What will the projected real estate taxes be?** *Note: The NYC Department of Finance uses the “income approach” to assess value of income-producing properties, and thus real estate taxes. The owner wanted to use the “cost approach” which would result in a higher expense, and thus a lower return on investment.*

Chair Tierney stated that “The applicant is asking us to use a method that will guarantee a high assessment, which in the normal course of things would generate very high real estate

taxes. No sensible property owner wants to maximize their property taxes.” Thus, the post-renovation real property assessment and future real estate taxes should be projected using the income approach.

For readers who are interested in knowing more about this proceeding, the written decision and transcript of the hearing can be found on our dedicated First Avenue Estate web site:

<http://www.friends-ues.org/advocacy/first-avenue-estate/> ♦

## PARTICIPATE IN HISTORY: LANDMARKS50 EVENT ON BROKAW HOUSES

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Landmarks Law in 2015, the NYC Landmarks50 Alliance will work to broaden the appreciation of New York City’s landmarks through a series of events held throughout the five boroughs. As members of the Alliance, FRIENDS of the Upper East Side Historic Districts and the New York Preservation Archive Project are teaming up to present a special program on the Brokaw Mansion. Located at One East 79th Street, the lavish Brokaw Mansion sat on “Millionaire’s Row,” a 50-block stretch of Fifth Avenue facing Central Park. Like most of the palaces on Fifth Avenue, the Brokaw Mansion met with the wrecking ball—but no other building had such an important role in the advancement of landmarks in New York City! Many believe it was the fall of Pennsylvania Station that was the catalyst for adoption of the Landmarks Law, when in fact it was the public outcry and scathing press surrounding the Brokaw Mansion’s sudden demolition that led Mayor Wagner to sign the proposed legislation, effectively preserving our city’s architectural heritage for generations to come.

Were you involved in the fight to save the Brokaw Mansion? Do you have archival materials, original photos, or ephemera that are related to this key moment in preservation history? We want to know! Please email [info@friends-ues.org](mailto:info@friends-ues.org) to help us explore and celebrate this significant moment in the history of the Landmarks Law!



# Young FRIENDS



*During a pilot program at PS 267, kindergarteners identify building components.*

This fall, FRIENDS welcomed Heidi Carey as our new Education Coordinator. Heidi has a MS in Historic Preservation from Columbia University,

and considerable experience in architectural education. She is very enthusiastic about working with children of all grade levels. She has developed her own architectural curricula for students in Pelham, New York, and has worked in educational programming for the Chicago Architecture Foundation.

Heidi has taken the reins from Sarah O'Keefe, who skillfully led our Young FRIENDS program for the past six years. In addition to teaching and administering Building Fun, Sarah created our Yorkville Immigration and Landmarks & Preservation programs. She will continue to teach for Young FRIENDS, but will now focus on other personal pursuits. Sarah has been an invaluable asset to FRIENDS—her recent Anne Millard Preservation Education Award was just

a small token to thank her for all she has done for the Young FRIENDS program.

Under Heidi's leadership, Young FRIENDS reached 1230 students in eight elementary schools this year, including four new ones: PS 83 in East Harlem, PS 155, The Gillen Brewer School, and Saint Stephen's of Hungary in Yorkville. Heidi also piloted a Building Fun Kindergarten program at PS 267. As our standard Building Fun program is recommended for students in first grade and up, this is an exciting opportunity for us to reach even younger children, exposing them to the wonders of New York City history and architecture. Thanks to our generous grant from the Selz Foundation, we look forward to greater opportunities to explore the built environment with many more students on the Upper East Side and East Harlem.

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



*Council Member Benjamin Kallos, Executive Director Tara Kelly, and interns prepare to complete the Yorkville Survey.*

Education in the broadest sense has always been a fundamental part of FRIENDS' mission. That core element will be growing significantly in two areas throughout the next year.

Our Young FRIENDS program has been teaching students in public and private schools from Beekman Place to East Harlem since 1995. In recent years we have taught over 1,000 students annually in 35 different schools, and now, through a generous grant from Bernard and Lisa Selz, we will attempt to double the num-

ber of students we reach. We will be seeking especially to serve schools in East Harlem and other parts of the neighborhood that do not know our programs. We have three curricula: Building Fun for younger students; the Yorkville Immigration program for fourth graders; and Landmarks & Preservation that introduces

how preservation works in New York City. We are happy to contact any schools you know that would like to be part of Young FRIENDS!

In the second initiative, FRIENDS will continue to inventory every building in every unprotected block on the Upper East Side. As we look over our shoulders to the supertowers rising on 57th Street, and see the Second Avenue Subway nearing completion, we need to identify significant historic and cultural resources, as well as the underlying zoning that guides appropri-

ate development and ensures the livability of our neighborhoods. We are fortunate that a class of students in Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation has made a huge dent in the survey this semester by studying approximately 86 blocks and over 3000 buildings! Many thanks to Board Member Andrew Dolkart, Director of the Historic Preservation Program at Columbia, and professor Ward Dennis for his leadership of the Yorkville Studio.

More recently, Council Member Benjamin Kallos committed an army of interns to complete the remaining blocks.

Thank you for your support, and stay tuned as we carry on this important work!

Sincerely,

Franny Eberhart

# 31ST ANNUAL AWARDS

**SAVE THE DATE!**  
Tuesday, September 30

FRIENDS held its Thirty-First Annual Meeting and Awards Ceremony on April 28, 2014 at The Frick Collection. Every year, FRIENDS highlights outstanding restoration, renovation, new construction, and advocacy work on the Upper East Side, both in and out of the historic districts. FRIENDS Board Member Hermes Mallea gave an insightful presentation of this year's projects. Following the awards ceremony, honorees and guests enjoyed a lovely reception in the Garden Court.



*Teri Cooney receives the Good Neighbor Award on behalf of Glaser's Bake Shop from Council Member Benjamin Kallos*

- **Good Neighbor Award**  
Glaser's Bake Shop  
Presented by Council Member Benjamin Kallos
- **Renaissance Award**  
Board of Officers Room at the Park Avenue Armory  
Presented by Board Member Thomas Jayne
- **Preserving Classic New York Award**  
Jeremiah's Vanishing New York  
Presented by Jamie McDonald
- **Restoration Award**  
The Cherokee Apartments  
Presented by Anthony W. Robins
- **Excellence in New Design**  
135 East 79th Street  
Presented by Board Member Robert C. Quinlan
- **Anne Millard Preservation Education Award**  
Sarah O'Keefe Greig  
Presented by Board Members Annie MacRae & Franny Eberhart



*Kathy Jolowicz, Walter B. Melvin, Nadezhda Williams, Simeon Bankoff, Hafina Allen, and Board Member Rita Chu enjoy the Garden Court reception*



*Board Members Hermes Mallea, Franny Eberhart (President), and Robert C. Quinlan*



A graduate of Pratt Institute, Walter Melvin was one of the first architects in New York City to develop a practice based upon historic preservation. Over the years, Mr. Melvin has skillfully restored such notable New York City landmarks as: Alwyn Court; the Cloisters; the **Cosmopolitan Club**; the Dorilton; Grace Church; **the Jewish Museum**; **Marymount School**; **the National Academy Museum and School of Fine Arts**; New York Public Library, Fifth Avenue Branch; the Normandy; the Osborne; **Park Avenue Christian Church**; **the Plaza Hotel**; the San Remo; **the 7th Regiment Armory**; and the Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace.

Mr. Melvin has worked extensively in our own neighborhood, successfully completing over 300 projects on the Upper East Side in the last twenty years alone. In fact, in our very first year of incorporation, he won the **1983 Excellence in Conservation Award** from FRIENDS for his work on **778 Park Avenue**, and we have honored him with eight additional awards since then, most recently in 2013 at our 30th Annual Meeting for the restoration of **998 Fifth Avenue**.

Mr. Melvin is also a recipient of the prestigious Landmarks Lion Award from the Historic Districts Council, along with ten Lucy G. Moses Awards from the New York Landmarks Conservancy.

\*FRIENDS is honored that **Frederick W. Beinecke** has agreed to serve as the Honorary Chair of the event. Mr. Beinecke is well known as a philanthropist and leader of a variety of cultural institutions including the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, and the New York City Ballet—and he has just been named the president of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.\*

## STAFF UPDATE

FRIENDS was sad to say farewell to Preservation Associate Matthew Coody who began a full-time post as Executive Director of the New York Preservation Archive Project. Matthew was a valuable member of the FRIENDS team for four years, and we couldn't be more proud of him. The Preservation Associate torch was picked up by Michael Hall who joins us from the National Trust for Historic Preservation where he worked at the Philip Johnson Glass House. Michael is a graduate of the Historical and Sustainable Architecture program at New York University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

## OUR MISSION

FRIENDS of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, founded in 1982, is an independent, not-for-profit membership organization dedicated to preserving the architectural legacy, livability, and sense of place of the Upper East Side. In addition to monitoring the Upper East Side's seven historic districts and 128 individual landmarks, FRIENDS has also been a leader in successful efforts to improve the zoning laws governing the area's avenues and residential side streets. Through effective advocacy and successful educational programs, FRIENDS acts as a steward safeguarding the future of all Upper East Side historic districts and the designated and contributing buildings that make those districts special.

## 2014 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## IN GRATITUDE

FRIENDS of the Upper East Side Historic Districts wishes to acknowledge the generous support of: The Gilbert & Ildiko Butler Conservation Fund, the J.M. Kaplan Fund, the Vilcek Foundation, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and the Selz Foundation.

## CORPORATE SUPPORT

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