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September 19, 2019

Dear Landmarks Preservation Commission Chair Carroll,

The New York Metro Chapter of the Victorian Society in American strongly urges the LPC to designate the imminently-threatened Demarest Building at 335-339 Fifth Avenue and save it from demolition. Built to showcase horse carriages by a firm which eventually became one of the first American manufacturers of cars, this beautiful building across from the Empire State Building by one of the 19th century's most prominent architects was the home to the world's first operating electric elevator, and is an important piece of New York and American history and architecture which should be saved.

The Demarest Building was designed in 1889 by the firm of Renwick, Aspinwall & Russell, led by James Renwick Jr., one of America's greatest architects of the 19th century. He is revered for having helped begin the Gothic Revival in America with his National Historic Landmark Grace Church at 11th and Broadway in Greenwich Village, and is broadly celebrated for landmarks such as St. Patrick's Cathedral, and the Smithsonian Institute, and Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. He was particularly prolific in Greenwich Village where he lived and was the scion of two great early building families who profoundly shaped the development of New York, the Renwicks and the Brevoorts. And though many of his great works survive, including those mentioned and the Renwick Triangle and Renwick Row terraces of houses in East and West Village respectively, many more of his works have sadly been demolished and lost over the years. It would be a shame if the Demarest Building were added to that list.

The building's status as the first to successfully use an electric elevator alone makes it worthy of preservation. Additionally, its striking spotted tan brick and terra cotta architecture and dramatic arched openings have stood for one hundred thirty years at this prominent intersection, admired and enjoyed by generations of New Yorkers directly across from the Empire State Building. The A.T. Demarest Company, which commissioned the building and was located here, originally constructed and showcased horse carriages here, and starting in 1902 began producing automobile bodies here -- a full eleven years before Ford began producing his Model T.

I understand the Landmarks Preservation Commission has told preservationists that it is declining to landmark the building due to alterations to its arched windows. However this justification is inconsistent with past LPC actions where historically and architecturally significant buildings of equal or greater level of alteration have been landmarked or included in historic districts, another option for saving this building. In recent years, many of the wonderful late 19th and early 20th century buildings found on

and alongside lower Fifth Avenue have been lost. All the more reason why it would be a shame if the Demarest Building suffered the same fate, and thus I urge you to act immediately to save it.

Sincerely,

George Calderaro

George Calderaro, Board Member

New York Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America

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