

Victorian Society Testimony for May 13, 2025: 956 Park Place (LPC-25-08411); 430 Lafayette Street - NoHo Historic District and Individual Landmark (LPC-24-11008); 284 Fifth Avenue – The Wilbraham - Individual Landmark (LPC-25-09203); 228 Lenox Avenue (LPC-25-08473); 35 Remsen Street (LPC-25-02663); 310 Malcolm X Boulevard (LPC-25-02849)

Public Meeting Item No. 2

Approximate time: 10:00; join Zoom by: 9:30

LPC-25-08411 -- 956 Park Place - Crown Heights North Historic District II, Brooklyn

Good morning commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. When we began our review, we were disappointed to find the presentation lacked basic information concerning the recent reconstruction of the bay window the applicant now proposes to remove. But we were interested to see it did include part of a 1908 Sanborn Map which shows rear-facing bay windows at 956 and five of its immediate neighbors. And we noted that there were three identical rear-facing bay windows visible in the photos of houses facing Sterling Place on the other side of the rear donut. We then wondered why there are so many identical bay windows on this block.

So we looked at the Crown Heights II Designation Report. It turns out that every house on this block--a total of 37--facing Park Place, Sterling Place, and Brooklyn Avenue, were built by architect Axel Hedman for Charles Reynolds between 1897 and 1903. It appears that 19 of the Hedman-Reynolds houses on the block retain their historic bay windows.

We believe that the rear-facing bay windows constitute a significant defining feature of this block. They must be retained. Although this bay was recently reconstructed, it apparently retains its historic cornice, window openings, details and footprint. We strongly recommend this proposal to remove the bay window and extend the rear ell be denied.

Approved with modifications 8-2 (Bland, Jefferson). Bay window form including its historic cornice at second floor to be retained, and lower floor extension to be redesigned with staff.

Approximate time: 11:30; join Zoom by: 10:30

LPC-24-11008 -- 430 Lafayette Street - 430 Lafayette Street Building - NoHo Historic District - Individual Landmark, Manhattan

Good morning commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. With this application, we have seen within the past few months proposals for access at three of the four houses of Colonnade Row. We acknowledge that access should be provided at these buildings because of the commercial activities at the basements and ground floors. We also understand the difficulties of providing access if in fact the houses are under separate ownership and are not interconnected. But is this really the best we can do for these remarkable individual landmarks?

At typical rowhouses, lifts usually affect basement level entrances and areaways. At Colonnade Row, however, the main entrances have always been at the ground floor. Despite some alterations, the ground floor appearance of the houses seen in the earliest drawings and photographs of the row is largely intact. Lost details are restorable. Historic images of the row suggest potential solutions. See our written testimony.

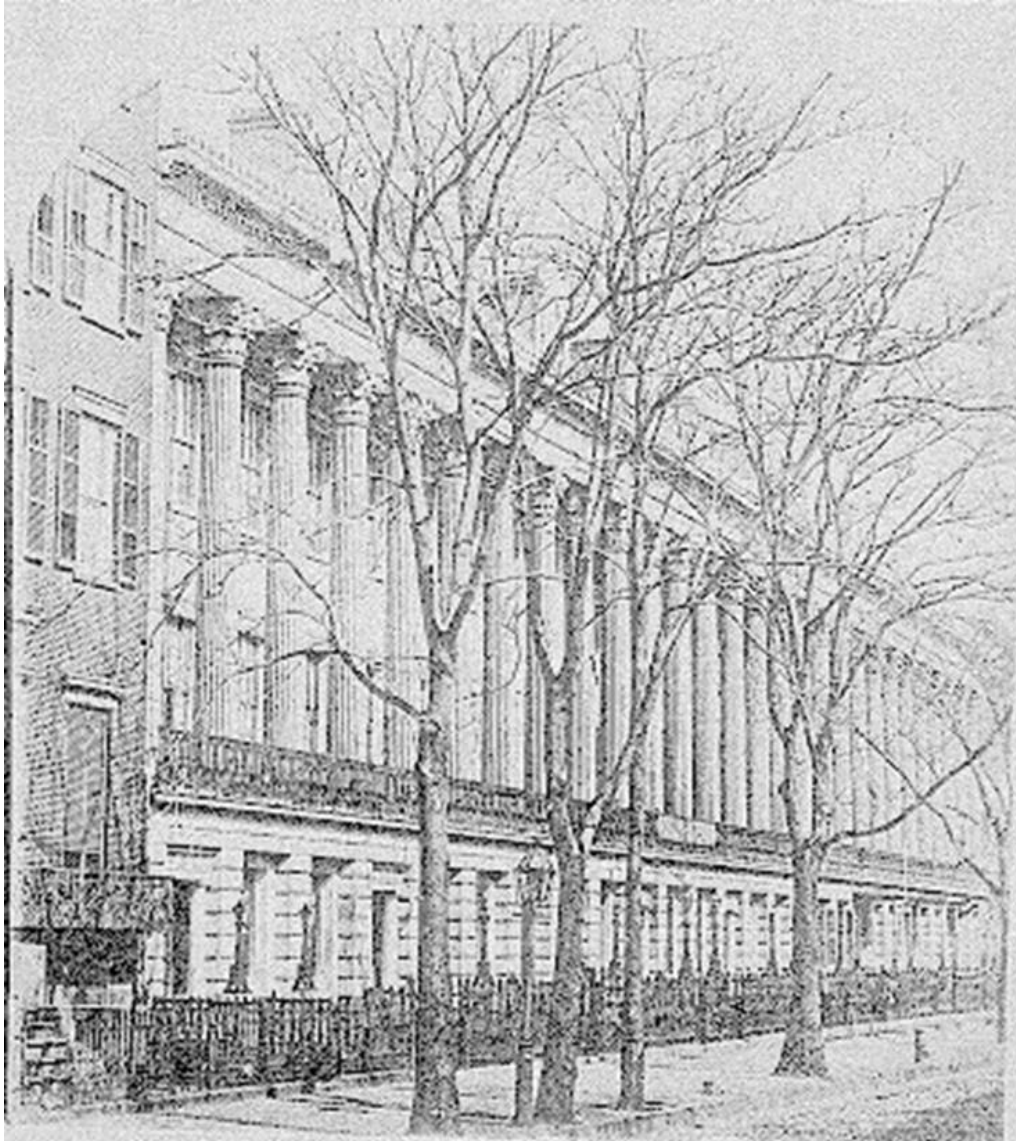
Instead, the street level facades will be presented to the public as a series of hulking mechanical devices.

Our testimony on the previous two proposals for access noted the extremely deteriorated conditions of the buildings and asked why discretionary permits are being issued before restorative work is undertaken. We were told that the owners are working on testing masonry restoration materials. The permits for façade restoration were issued in 2018, seven years ago. They have expired. Masonry testing doesn't require seven years. Meanwhile, permits continue to be issued for interior alterations and for non-restorative exterior work that in some cases degrades the fabric and appearance of these buildings. This gives the owners no incentive to get moving with the restoration.

It's time for a more preservation-oriented approach from both the owners and this Commission towards these important landmarks. We again ask that this and other non-restorative permits not be issued until real progress is made on restoration.

Approved 10-0.

Please see photographs on the following pages.



19th Century view from "Daytonian in Manhattan." Potential solutions can be imagined if the missing historic fencing were restored.



The relationship between masonry and window and door openings at the building's base is largely as it was originally.



The marble façade is severely deteriorated. The columns have been wrapped in mesh for years.



Additional conditions at the base of the buildings. The stone has been poorly patched and painted.

Approximate time: 11:45; join Zoom by: 10:45

LPC-25-09203 - 284 Fifth Avenue – The Wilbraham - Individual Landmark, Manhattan

Good morning commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York.

The Victorian Society recommends that proposed first floor display windows be redesigned to better reflect the historic configuration of this Romanesque Revival style individual landmark building. The designation report and historic photos describe missing features as well as those that exist but are covered over.

First, the Fifth Avenue storefronts should include bulkheads, as do the ones on 30th Street. These storefronts originally had bulkheads, as do all historic storefronts from this period.

Second, the large decorative cast-iron column visible on the second floor of the Fifth Avenue façade should extend down through the first floor. According to the designation report, this column remains behind modern cladding. It's seen in historic photographs, starting on slide 4 of the presentation, and shown most clearly in the 1930 NYPL picture on slide 7. While the Commission perhaps can't require that it be uncovered, it can disallow the proposal to recover it. The designation report also states that original bulkhead grilles remain behind plywood panels. Finally, the storefront originally had glazed transoms where the proposed sign bands are. Signs were placed on the masonry band above. Reinstating the transoms is important to restoring the grand, historic proportions of the building.

Many first-floor modifications here were made without a permit. The extent of all original historic materials should be clarified in the presentation, with clear notes that this is to be retained. This renovation is an opportunity to regain some of the lost detail and articulation seen in nineteenth-century streetscapes, so that this building can further contribute to Fifth Avenue's rich character.

Thank you, commissioners.

No action; restudy signs and transoms, inconsistency between facades, look to historic conditions.

Lunch

Approximate time: 1:15; join Zoom by: 12:15

LPC-25-08473 -- 228 Lenox Avenue - Mount Morris Park Historic District, Manhattan

Good afternoon commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York.

With apologies to the applicant, we are going to use some of our time to discuss increasingly common problems with presentations. These problems are reflected in three of the seven applications heard today, including this one. Our preservation committee, which includes experienced architects and preservation professionals, has been finding more often that presentations are confusing, inaccurate, lacking in necessary material, and subject to undisclosed changes following their initial posting. Some of them have grown to absurd length, with many irrelevant slides, leading us to think the purpose is to overwhelm rather than clarify. Some are subject to endless oral presentations by the applicant, while public input--which is, after all, a purpose of public hearings--is limited to the same 3 minutes no matter how complex the proposal is.

We increasingly wonder whether the LPC staff is reviewing these presentations before they're calendared, and whether they are empowered to require changes to bring them to some basic level of competence. While some clarity may be achieved during the presentation, that information comes too late to be incorporated into the public's testimony.

This presentation lacks basic information. Both the canopy and the windows have active LPC violations. It's unclear when the original curved sash were removed, and importantly, whether they were removed prior to designation. The Commission typically has a photograph of each building taken at the time of designation; this should be made available.

There is little description of the proposed new flat sashes in the round bay. There are no dimensions and elevations to indicate how close they will come in appearance to typical historic sash. There is no indication of material or of color. Appropriateness cannot be determined without this information.

Most importantly, a comparison of slides 5 and 6 shows an intent to enlarge the masonry openings at the parlor floor. This important change isn't called out in notes or described anywhere. Such a change would destroy the integrity of the building's design. The money saved by leaving the masonry alone could be used towards the cost of fabricating new curved sash.

We think the rooftop bulkhead, though visible, is appropriate because of its minimal size and typical, utilitarian form.

No action; explore single glazed curved sash with interior storm; bulkhead to be approved.

Approximate time: 1:45; join Zoom by: 12:45

LPC-25-02663 -- 35 Remsen Street - Brooklyn Heights Historic District, Brooklyn

Good afternoon commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York.

The Victorian Society does not support this proposal to allow a historic oriel window to be rebuilt without the salvaged leaded glass which is its most significant original feature.

There's been an oriel window at 35 Remsen since at least 1908. Photos of the oriel show that it was rebuilt using modern materials. And pictures of the original leaded glass show that it has been removed and stored. But we found all this material confusing as it didn't list any warning letters or violations for alterations to the window or permits for the removal and salvage of the historic glass.

So we checked the LPC Violations page. Nothing. Then we looked at all the permits which have been issued for 35 Remsen Street since 2016.

We learned that in 2023 the Commission issued a certificate of no effect which allowed changes to the oriel at the first floor. These included removing "three existing windows at the central bay and the plywood panels at both outer bays and installing five one over-one double-hung metal windows within the existing openings." The permit did not mention the leaded glass windows.

In May 2024, that permit was amended and stated: "Recently, information was submitted indicating that the five (5) windows in the oriel are not simple one-over one double hung, but instead all contain special leaded glazing, and that an additional window at the second floor contains stained glass. In response, the Commission received a proposal for an amendment...to include retaining and restoring all five (5) of the double-hung wood windows at the oriel...and repairing the leading and replacing missing textured glass pieces in kind to match the extant textured window glazing."

Commissioners, the cited amendment is the appropriate and sensible way to address the unfortunate changes this historic oriel window has suffered. A year ago, staff knew this and acted upon that knowledge. We ask that you deny this application and instruct the applicant to proceed with the approved restoration of this important historic oriel.

Approved 10-0.

Approximate time: 2:00; join Zoom by: 1:00

LPC-25-02849 -- 310 Malcolm X Boulevard (aka 373 Decatur Street, 310-318 Malcolm X Boulevard) - Bedford-Stuyvesant/Expanded Stuyvesant Heights Historic District, Brooklyn

Good afternoon commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. Our preservation committee spent hours trying to understand this proposal. The presentation includes contradictory notes, conflicting drawings, and unclear depictions of existing conditions. The presentation should have been corrected before this application was scheduled for a hearing.

The contradictions include whether the existing exterior rolling gates are to be retained or removed; whether the existing storefronts at the rear extension are to be retained, altered, or removed; and whether the existing metal and plastic canopy, installed following designation without a permit, is to be retained, modified, or replaced entirely. Also unclear is the status of the HVAC equipment on the roof of the extension. It wasn't there in 2016. Is it in violation or part of this application? Also unknown is the status of the retractable canvas awnings at the extension, appropriate and present at designation, which seem to have disappeared.

Because of the lack of clarity about what's being proposed, we hesitate to comment on the appropriateness of the design. But as the Commission's procedures aren't likely to give us another opportunity once the application is clarified, we'll hazard some comments.

We support the construction of the proposed two story storefront at the corner, modelled on its historic predecessor. However, the display window on the ground floor should be a single large sheet of glass matching the photos of the historic storefront. The height of this window should be at least as tall as those on the second floor. To accomplish this, the proposed bulkhead should be reduced to its historic height.

The new windows on the second floor of the visible rear or south elevation should be painted, wood double-hung windows in punched openings matching the proportions of other windows on the facade.

We question glueing the canvas sign to historic brick. If a large wall sign is appropriate, it should be painted directly on the wall, which is already painted.

If the storefront infill at the one-story extension is being replaced, it should not be aluminum framed but should match the painted, wood-framed storefront proposed for the corner building.

All exposed electrical conduit, existing and proposed, should be removed and concealed.

Finally, the proposed metal and plastic canopy seems designed to shout, “Look at Me!!!!” without any consideration for this building and this historic district. Aside from considerations of design, corrugated plastic is not an appropriate material.

Approved (conceptually) 10-0, with all details to be worked out with staff.