

Victorian Society Testimony for June 17, 2025: 38 State Street (LPC-25-08904); 142 Greene Street (LPC-25-10533); 67 Gansevoort Street (LPC-25-09434); 405 West 13th Street (LPC-25-09453); Bryant Park (LPC-25-10563); 232 West End Avenue (LPC-25-02404)

Approximate time: 10:20; join Zoom by: 9:30

LPC-25-08904 -- 38 State Street - Brooklyn Heights Historic District, Brooklyn

Good morning commissioners, _____ for the Victorian Society New York. Founded in New York City in 1966, the Victorian Society in America is dedicated to fostering the appreciation and preservation of our 19th and early 20th century heritage. The NY chapter promotes preservation of our historic districts, individual and scenic landmarks, interiors and civic art.

The VSNY Preservation Committee was divided over this proposal for 38 State Street. Some felt that this garage is not a contributing building within the Brooklyn Heights Historic District. As such, it would be acceptable to demolish it entirely and design a new building which would respond to the adjacent structures in terms of materials, details and scale.

Others felt that the building's handsomely detailed brickwork and its placement, flush with the street and the adjacent facades, should be preserved. It also has historic importance as the power plant and car barn for the Montague Street Cable Car Line of the Brooklyn Heights Railway Co.

But neither side thinks the applicant's proposal to leave the façade as a token screen-wall is successful as is. This is a rare case where facadism makes sense as a preservation tool. But the use of this façade as a detached wall is, we feel, too abstract and unrelated to the new building behind it. Further, we're concerned that the ground floor of the new building, seen through the openings in the garage façade, does not relate well either to the older façade in front or to the floors above. We believe that stronger organization and better detailing would help it relate better to both. Finally, the planters proposed outside the historic wall serve to obscure and diminish the historic façade.

Nevertheless, there are many good things about the proposal, including its height, massing, rear and side façades, and overall relationship to other buildings on the street. We recommend that the applicant return with a revised proposal and that the subsequent public meeting be opened for testimony by the public.

No action; increase integration of the historic façade with new building.

Approximate time: 12:00; join Zoom by: 11:00

LPC-25-10533 -- 142 Greene Street - SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, Manhattan

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

The Victorian Society supports some of the proposed work. This includes removal of previously installed fiberglass infill, and the replacement and repair of deteriorated cast-iron elements on the street façade. We can also accept the installation of new, painted wood windows and storefronts, but we note there are no details or dimensions shown for the existing or new windows, and only minimal details for the replacement storefronts. Full sets of both must be provided.

But we question aspects of this proposal. The applicant is proposing to remove the historic fire escape. They are showing photos of the similar Fernbach building at 165 Mercer which no longer has a fire escape as justification for its removal at 142. However, the existing fire escape, shown on the tax photos, Board 21, is well detailed, is over 100 years old, and is in a district where fire escapes, added after the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, are typical. It should be retained.

The tax photos also show the historic cornice which is still in place. This is simpler than the cornice at Fernbach's design at 165 Mercer. However, as it is visible in the tax photo, it should be retained. It should not be replaced just because Fernbach used a more elaborate design at another building. Cast-iron buildings were constructed from a kit of parts, and unless there is evidence that the cornices originally matched, Fernbach's choice for this one should be left alone.

We also question the applicant's request to remove the entire rear façade. That's a lot of historic masonry, as well as the historic fire shutter gudgeons to be destroyed. The gudgeons are the part of the shutter hinges attached to the wall.

And we were startled by the applicant's unusual proposal to disassemble and rebuild an entire historic cast-iron façade. We know that these facades were designed as individual parts which were assembled on site. But this material has now been in place for 154 years. Cast iron is brittle. We must ask how much original material will be left intact after the disassembly.

When we add up the removal of windows, storefronts, fire escape, cornice, the entire rear façade, and the possible destruction of original cast iron, the preservation mandate seems to have been lost. This is not appropriate.

Finally, we urge that the visible two-story rooftop addition, which will increase the overall height of the building by 31 percent, from 110 feet to 145 feet, be reduced.

No action; reduce height/visibility of rooftop addition (or wait for more willing commissioners); also review proposed paint color.

lunch

Approximate time: 1:30; join Zoom by: 12:30

**LPC-25-09434 -- 67 Gansevoort Street - Gansevoort Market Historic District,
Manhattan**

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

We take our usual position on proposals for painted signs in historic districts. We think the presence of such signs in this district is appropriate. In this case having two signs on the same building is appropriate, as the walls are opposite and the signs can't be seen together. The placement and scale of the signs are also appropriate.

However, we find that such signs can be appropriate *only* if the graphic quality of the sign is harmonious with the district. The photo-realistic style shown in the proposal and allowed by the master plan is, we find, inappropriate in character to this historic district. It's jarring and a reverse anachronism. While modern buildings in a historic district can be harmonious and contextual through proper use of materials and designs, these signs, by their nature, cannot be.

We aren't suggesting that the Commission regulate content, only style. We believe regulating graphic style for signs is within the Commission's purview. If the Commission can't or won't ensure that the graphics are harmonious with the character of the district, then we have to recommend denial of the proposed master plan.

Approved 6-0.

Approximate time: 1:50; join Zoom by: 12:50

LPC-25-09453 -- 405 West 13th Street - Gansevoort Market Historic District, Manhattan

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

The VSNY supports the legalization of the installation of the non-illuminated hanging signs installed on black-finished supports below the canopy. We note that the photo taken at the time of designation shows a sign hanging below this canopy. We also support the illuminated signs at the transoms and the proposed alterations to the canopy. However, we do not support legalization of the installation of the flagpoles and banners projecting above to the front edge of the canopy. We know Gansevoort is now a shopping festival. These banners tilt it too close to Disneyland.

The installation of the hanging and transom signs does not appear to have damaged or obscured any significant architectural features of the building; the hanging signs are attached to simple framing members finished to match the adjacent metalwork; the signs attached to the transoms are well scaled for the transoms; there doesn't appear to be any exposed conduit providing power to these signs; and the cumulative amount of signage does not overwhelm the building or the streetscape. Regarding the replacement of the existing corrugated metal roof panels on the canopy, it appears the work will not damage any significant features of the building and is easily reversible.

But we must recommend denial of the proposed legalization of the flagpoles attached to the front edge of the canopy. We believe there is no historic precedent for flagpoles in these locations and find they distract from the historic character of the canopy and the building. We also find that adding these banners to the historically appropriate signs hanging below the canopy, and the signs installed in the transoms results in sign overload. The flagpoles must be denied.

Approved 6-0 with modifications: hanging signs to be reduced in size meet the rules and the canopy flagpoles be eliminated.

Approximate time: 2:10; join Zoom by: 1:10

LPC-25-10563 -- Bryant Park - Scenic Landmark, Manhattan

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

Bryant Park is a Victorian-era park, having been laid out as a park and opened to the public in 1846. Its superb 1934 redesign in the French Classical style is a perfect complement to the rear façade of the Beaux-Arts New York Public Library.

For those of you who were of age in NYC in the late 1970s and early 80s, you know that Bryant Park was a no-go zone unless you were there for an illicit activity. It was so dangerous and decrepit that in 1973 the Parks Commissioner threatened to close the park permanently. Despite this, the Commission designated Bryant Park the next year as the third scenic landmark, right after Central Park and Grand Army Plaza.

No one is more appreciative than the Victorian Society of the work of the Bryant Park Restoration Corp. It did a magnificent job of restoring and maintaining the park and making subtle changes that completely supported the quality of the 1934 redesign. It invigorated the park by creating events and providing food service. It was a true success story that paralleled other things happening as the City was brought back from the brink of abandonment and bankruptcy.

But the gradual and in recent years intense and lengthy use of the park for marketplace events and large recreational and cultural gatherings has tipped the balance too far. It has become rare to find a time that the park can be enjoyed just as a park, a quiet open space in the heart of Midtown, with a stunning design that was found worthy of landmark designation.

The need to renew the master plan governing seasonal installations gives the Commission the opportunity to review the balance of time given to the physical installations that have resulted in intense commercialization of the park. People enjoy these marketplaces, events, and food service kiosks, but there is another constituency that would appreciate more time in all seasons in an unencumbered scenic landscape--a rare, beautiful, public open space in the heart of the City.

We ask the commission to engage in a dialogue with the Restoration Corporation and the Parks Department about reconfiguring the scale and time frames of the seasonal events and physical installations. The time and scope of commercial activities should be reduced in favor of more time for the park to reveal its historic design and purpose.

Approved 6-0 with some discussion of limiting the duration of seasonal installations.

Approximate time: 2:30; join Zoom by: 1:30

**LPC-25-02404 -- 232 West End Avenue - West End-Collegiate Historic District
Extension, Manhattan**

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

The Victorian Society is largely supportive of this application. We can't tell why the proposed modification to the main entry is subject to a public hearing, as it seems to be largely restorative. It appears to recreate the original, asymmetrical wood entrance, and the replacement ironwork is much more appropriate than the existing.

Concerning the existing rear façade, it appears to be altered and has no especially distinctive or significant features. The proposed design is not very inspired, but it has no visibility from the public way and limited visibility from within the block. It has some odd details, such as the fourth floor balcony that doesn't extend the width of the masonry opening.

The visibility of the rooftop addition doesn't appear to us to be intrusive in its context.

Approved 6-0.