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Newburgh church among endangered sites

International panel picks landmark

Staff and wire reports

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NEWBURGH — It looks like an Athenian temple overlooking the Hudson River. And according to an historic preservation group, the Dutch Reformed Church of Newburgh is one of the world's 100 most endangered historic sites.

The World Monuments Fund included the 170-year-old church on its World Monuments Watch list along with New York City's hotly debated "lollipop building" at 2 Columbus Circle and the entire country of Iraq.

Released Tuesday, the list is chosen by an international panel and is meant to highlight significant sites and inspire donations to help preserve them.

"This, obviously, is going to be a big boost for us," said John McCormick, treasurer of the Dutch Reformed Church Restoration Committee.

The committee is spearheading a multimillion-dollar effort that aims to restore and convert the church to a new use. Its short-term goals include hiring professionals to define its best uses and raising \$10,000 to light the church's Ionic columns.

"It will be a beacon for people going up and down the river," McCormick said.

Symbol of democracy

The Dutch Reformed Church of Newburgh was designed by heralded architect Alexander Jackson Davis in the Greek Revival style he thought best embodied the Democratic ideals of the United States.

Davis wanted the church to "serve as a conspicuous and characteristic landmark, indicative of the taste, discrimination and sense of classical beauty of the inhabitants of Newburgh."

The church's congregation abandoned it in 1967, and maintenance was largely neglected until recently. The church was named a National Historic Landmark in 2001.

The 2006 World Monuments Watch List includes 100 sites in 55 countries. The biennial watch list was begun in 1995.

Among the notable sites: Edward Durell Stone's building at Columbus Circle, a Modernist design dismissed by former New York Times architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable as "a die-cut Venetian palazzo on lollipops."

The church also joins thousands of Iraqi historic sites at risk from war, looting and neglect.

"This is the first time we have listed a country as endangered," said Bonnie Burnham, president of the World Monuments Fund, "and I think that we can all understand that every site in Iraq that is significant in terms of cultural heritage is at risk today."

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