

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!  
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission  
Regarding the Designation of the former Jamaica Savings Bank  
89-01 Queens Boulevard, Borough of Queens  
March 15, 2005**

LANDMARK WEST! is a non-profit community organization committed to the preservation of the architectural heritage of the Upper West Side.

LW! supports the designation of the former Jamaica Savings Bank (1966-68) in Queens, an interesting example of mid-twentieth century bank architecture. The *AIA Guide to New York City Architecture* (4<sup>th</sup> edition, Norval White and Elliot Willensky), calls this building, which is prominently located on Queens Boulevard – the better to attract the attention of passing motorists – “a dynamic form concerned as much with image as with function” (p. 831). It certainly conforms to the definition of a Landmark, as spelled out in the 1965 New York City Landmarks Law: “Any improvement, any part of which is thirty years old or older, which has a special character or special historical or aesthetic interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the city, state or nation...” (NYC Administrative Code, §25-302).

Many other, as yet unheard, buildings also meet this standard – some of them imminently threatened, some already lost. We applaud the Commission for moving ahead with this public hearing and, we hope, designation now, while this particular building retains its integrity, before the eleventh hour, before it's too late.

Preservation technology these days is a wondrous thing. Damaged or destroyed historic buildings can be rebuilt almost seamlessly. With enough patience and money, Penn Station could be re-created on the site of Madison Square Garden, probably to the great joy of some nostalgists. But the lesson of Penn Station is not in its theoretical – indeed, fantastic – reconstruction, but in its destruction, a lesson one hopes the Landmarks Commission and Chairman Tierney have learned by now.

Whereas the proposed designation of the former Jamaica Savings Bank can be perceived as a positive and proactive use of New York's Landmarks Law to preserve our mid-twentieth-century heritage, the Commission's failure to apply its vested authority to calendar public hearings for buildings such as the Lapidus-designed Paterson Silks building, the former Summit Hotel – and, dare I say it, 2 Columbus Circle – in time to prevent their compromise or loss, and then to suggest that a destroyed Landmark can be refabricated as though this were Disneyland rather than New York City, reinforces the worst stereotypes about the Commission and, by extension, all preservationists – that we are obstructionist, reactionary and retrograde.

Now, it's true that, given its limited resources, of which we are all keenly aware, the Commission cannot possibly hold a public hearing on every building or district that may possess special historical or aesthetic interest. The Commission can, however, listen to its constituents – historians, architects, those of us working in our communities to preserve their various senses of place – *real* place. The people in this room sincerely want to help the Commission set appropriate priorities and otherwise function in accordance with its legal mandate.

Two Columbus Circle is a perfect example of the kinds of help we can offer. Over the past ten years since this building became eligible for landmark designation, we have compiled the research – Robert A.M. Stern, among many other experts, has called 2 Columbus Circle “a landmark in the history of architectural taste.” We have mobilized a vast constituency of support for a public hearing – over 1,000 people and organizations at the national, state and local levels, including the National Trust for Historic Preservation, DOCOMOMO, the Preservation League of New York State, the Municipal Art Society and the New York Landmarks Conservancy. We know there are potential users who would want to restore the building. We know that it can be restored.

If the Landmarks Commission held a public hearing for 2 Columbus Circle, literally hundreds of people would attend and testify – both for and against designation. **The question is, what more will it take?** What more evidence is needed for 2 Columbus Circle to get the same treatment – just a hearing! – that has been granted to the former Jamaica Savings Bank?

**“We will probably be judged not by the monuments we build but by those we have destroyed.”** (*New York Times*, October 1963 editorial in response to the demolition of Pennsylvania Station)