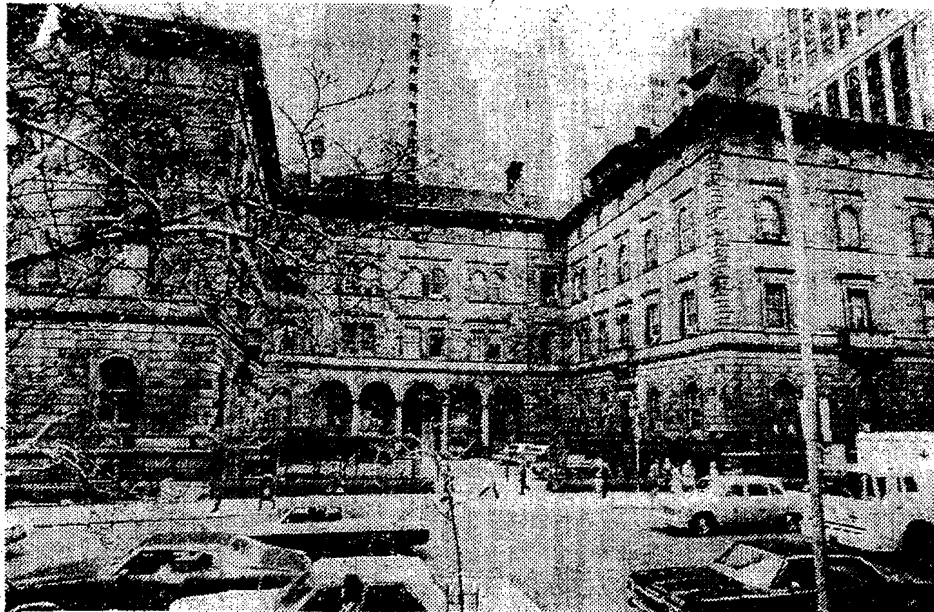


# Plan 52-Story Tower to Blend With Landmark 12/9/74



The Villard Houses on Madison Avenue.

Post Photo by Terence McCarten

By ROBERTA BRANDES GRATZ

One of the city's most important landmarks will form the entranceway of a projected 52-story Midtown building if plans are approved by the city.

The landmark is the 1880s Villard Mansion, an Italian Renaissance palazzo designed by McKim, Mead & White, on Madison Av. between 50th and 51st Sts. that faces the back of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Until a few years ago, it was the headquarters of the Archdiocese of New York and the Random House publishing firm.

Known best as the Villard Houses, the U-shaped building is actually four brownstone structures built around a courtyard.

Vacant and up for sale for several years, the Villard Houses were designated a city landmark in 1968. Although the Archdiocese was committed to saving the buildings, they have been an economic burden.

A long-term lease has now been negotiated between developer, Harry B.

Helmsley, and the Archdiocese, which would permit Helmsley to build a 52-story combined luxury hotel and office tower — similar to the Helmsley-owned Park Lane Hotel on Central Park South.

The tower would abut the landmark and involve demolition of two rear extensions and some small adjacent buildings but, in effect, would preserve the main body.

The facade of the center of the Villard Houses would be altered but retained and would serve as the entrance to the building. This is the portion facing Madison Av.

The interior of that central portion, some observers note critically, contains richly detailed 19th-century rooms but will be totally demolished to form the hotel lobby. However, it is the south wing which is the original Villard mansion, containing an assortment of elegant and well-preserved rooms, rich in marble, inlaid floor and unmatched details.

That wing formerly used by the arch-

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