

81ST CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 7953

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 31, 1950

Mr. COUDERT introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Public Lands

A BILL

To provide for the acquisition and preservation of certain historic property north of Washington Square in New York City, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 That the Secretary of the Interior is authorized to accept
4 on behalf of the United States the donation of certain his-
5 torical land and structures known as the Rhinelander Prop-
6 erties extending from number 14 Washington Square North
7 to number 18 Washington Square North and number 2
8 Fifth Avenue in the Borough of Manhattan, city, county,
9 and State of New York, for historical purposes.

10 SEC. 2. Upon the acceptance by the United States of

1 title to the aforesaid properties, such properties shall con-
2 stitute a national historical area.

3 SEC. 3. In the event that the Secretary of the Interior
4 determines that the national historical area should be ad-
5 ministered by the Federal Government, it shall be adminis-
6 tered by the Secretary of the Interior in accordance with
7 the Act of August 25, 1916 (39 Stat. 535), and the Act
8 of August 21, 1935 (49 Stat. 666).

9 SEC. 4. In the event that the Secretary determines that
10 the national historical area may be suitably administered by
11 a nonprofit organization without cost to the United States,
12 the said Secretary may convey title to such property to
13 such a non-Federal agency, without consideration, upon such
14 terms and conditions as he shall consider to be appropriate
15 and consistent with the purposes of this Act.

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By Mr. COUDERT

MARCH 31, 1950

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APR 10 1950



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

Washington Square
Typed
4/16/50

My dear Mr. McAneny:

The Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments, during its meeting in Washington on April 19, adopted the following resolution concerning the north side of Washington Square, in which I concur:

"Resolved, that the Advisory Board considers that the ensemble of buildings joining the north side of Washington Square is of great cultural significance to the Nation as the principal surviving ensemble of old buildings in the metropolis of this country. It appreciates that any breach in the line of appropriate buildings now existing on the north side of the Square, above all the threatened destruction of the building occupying the conspicuous position on the so-called 'Rhinelander property', at the corner of Fifth Avenue, jeopardizes the future preservation of the whole line. The Board strongly endorses the effort being made in New York to preserve these buildings, and particularly the effort to defeat the present danger of the erection of a high building on the corner site."

I am aware of your deep interest, and that of the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings, in the effort now under way to preserve the historic architectural setting of Washington Square, and I want you to know that I am deeply sympathetic with this endeavor. I sincerely trust that this movement to save this interesting section of old New York may meet with success at an early date.

Sincerely yours,

Secretary of the Interior

Mr. George McAneny
c/o Federal Hall Memorial Associates
Wall and Nassau Streets
New York, New York

Washington
Square

Talbot

Letters

To ...
The Editor



Alarm Over What's Happening to New York

FROM New York City comes news that the face of that city will once more be changed. A syndicate has purchased a group of buildings covering 46,000 square feet facing the northwest corner of Washington Square.

If the present plans are consummated, there will be a 12-story apartment building towering over famous old Washington Arch. Washington Square, which has been undergoing minor change for some years, will be permanently changed and New Yorkers and all Americans will have lost another part of their heritage.

It should not seem strange that Washington should view this with alarm. Now that the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States has received its charter, the nation feels a stronger right than ever to be interested in any locality where the destruction of the American heritage is threatened.

Included in the proposed razing are four fine old houses, known as the Rhinelander houses, which face the Square itself. Across Fifth Avenue, facing the south corner of the Square, is a similar group of houses, which New York University has agreed to keep inviolate for 200 years. It is reasonable to suppose that if the new apartment is built across the way, the University may yield to the demand that skyscrapers take the place of these distinguished houses as well.

We wonder whether New Yorkers realize the implication which comes so naturally to those of us who try to take the national point of view. Howard Robertson, the English architect and author, recently wrote: "It does seem to me that New York is not so rich in fine historic buildings that it could afford to give up any more of Washington Square. It is a curious thing that American citizens, and New Yorkers in particular, will travel thousands of miles to visit the fine places of tradition in countries like England, and yet might be unmoved by the threat to Washington Square. . . . It represents a wealth which is irreplaceable and incalculable."

It has been said that after the buildings of the University of Virginia, those on the north side of Washington Square form the most distinguished architectural group work remaining in this country.

We wonder, too, whether New Yorkers realize that if a tall building is built in that location, the Washington Arch would become almost ridiculous in scale. The incongruity would encourage the destruction of the rest of the good old houses around it. The Washington Arch would become minuscule, in fact, puny in comparison.

Is it too late to appeal to New Yorkers of means to club together to take over this property and to build further north a half block away from the corner of Fifth Avenue and the Square an apartment house reaching to 8th Street, and along that street for some 250 feet, including with it the property now occupied by the Whitney Museum? This is a substantial property which should pay a reasonable interest on the investment.

Such an apartment building would be assured of a permanent south view over the park and the Rhinelander houses on Washington Square would remain at their present height forever.

We repeat that the implications of this tall building on Washington Square and Fifth Avenue are uglier than people in New York may real-

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We repeat that the implications of this tall building on Washington Square and Fifth Avenue are uglier than people in New York may realize and we pray that someone will come forward at this last moment to save that part of the Square, built when New York was at its best, and the only thing of its kind left in America.

U. S. GRANT III.

Major General, USA, Ret.
President, National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings.

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