

**TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE
THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING
AND MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF (FORMER) ST. GEORGE'S
SYRIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, MANHATTAN**

October 6, 2009

Good morning Council Members. My name is Jenny Fernández, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of the (former) St. George's Syrian Catholic Church at 103 Washington Street in lower Manhattan.

On January 13, 2009? Hearing was several years ago, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the former St. George's Syrian Catholic Church. A total of eleven witnesses spoke in favor of the building's designation, including historian Mary Ann Haick DiNapoli, historic preservation consultant, Mary B. Dierickx, co-author of *The Financial District's Lost Neighborhood*, Joanne Medvecky, and representatives of the Historic Districts Council, Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, Municipal Art Society, and New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Commission also received several emails in support of designation, including a message from Dr. Philip M. Kayal, Chairman of the Department of Sociology/Anthropology at Seton Hall University, Kathleen Benson, curator of a 2002 exhibit on Arab-Americans in New York City at the Museum of the City of New York; and scholar of Arab-American history Paula Hajar. No witnesses spoke in opposition to designation. The building's owner testified, but did not speak in favor of, or in opposition to, the building's designation. On July 14, 2009, the Commission voted to designate the building a New York City landmark.

The former St. George's Syrian Catholic Church is the most significant remnant of the Lower Manhattan immigrant enclave known as the "Syrian Quarter," the "Mother Colony" of Syrians and Lebanese in America. Immigrants from the former Ottoman province of Syria, which included modern-day Syria and Lebanon, began coming to this country in the 1880s, and over the next 40 years, thousands of them settled on and around lower Washington Street in a neighborhood that was their commercial and cultural center in the United States. Nearly half of these immigrants were Melkite Greek Catholics, who recognize the primacy of the Pope but worship using the Byzantine Rite. In Lower Manhattan, in 1889, they formed America's first Melkite parish; by 1925, as St. George's Syrian Catholic Church, they moved into this building, which had been purchased for their use by George E. Bardwil, an importer of fine linens and embroideries. In 1929, the church engaged Harvey F. Cassab, a young Lebanese-American draftsman, to

design a new façade for the building. Cassab's vibrant neo- Gothic composition, executed in bright white terra cotta, features a polychrome relief of St. George and the Dragon, and remains remarkably intact today.

The building that housed the former St. George's Church was constructed around 1812; three stories high with a peaked roof, it served as an immigrant boardinghouse by the 1850s. In 1869, it was raised to its present five stories and continued to function as a boardinghouse and tenement until Bardwil's purchase and its conversion to a church. With the decline of Lower Manhattan's Middle Eastern population after World War II, St. George's was converted to a Roman Rite church for a period, and in 1982, the building was sold to Chapel Moran, Inc., which operates a restaurant on the ground floor and maintained the building and its unique Washington Street façade for the past 27 years. The building remains Lower Manhattan's most vivid reminder of the vanished ethnic community once known as the Syrian Quarter, and of the time when Washington Street was the Main Street of Syrian America.

The Commission urges you to affirm the designation.

**TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE
THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING
AND MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF GRAMMAR SCHOOL NO. 9
(NOW MICKEY MANTLE SCHOOL / PUBLIC SCHOOL 811M), MANHATTAN**

October 6, 2009

Good morning Council Members. My name is Jenny Fernández, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of Grammar School No. 9 (Now Mickey Mantle School / Public School 811M) at 11 East 51st Street in Manhattan.

On December 16, 2008, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation. Six people spoke in favor of designation, including the great-granddaughter of C.B.J. Snyder and representatives of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, Historic Districts Council, Society for the Architecture of the City, and the New York City School Construction Authority.

Built in 1894-96 and opened in 1896, Grammar School No. 9 is the oldest known extant public school, and one of the few remaining nineteenth-century institutional buildings, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. This was an early design by C.B.J. Snyder, New York's long-time Superintendent of School Buildings (1891-1923), who exerted a tremendous influence on the design and construction of the City's schools during his tenure. Grammar School No. 9, one of eight public schools built between 1888 and 1899 on the burgeoning Upper West Side, was part of the vast school construction programs launched to meet the needs of the city's rapidly expanding population just prior to the consolidation of Greater New York in 1898. It replaced a wooden school on the same site that may have been built as early as 1829, and which was demolished in 1890.

The five-story structure has two major facades, is clad in yellow ironspot Roman brick with grey limestone trim above a limestone base, features stoops on both sides (with a porch on West End Avenue) and a picturesque roofline composed of stepped gables, finial-topped dormers, and chimney stacks.

The building is now the Mickey Mantle School (P.S. 811M) for special education needs. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1987.

The Commission urges you to affirm the designation.