



July 28, 2020

Hon. Sarah Carroll, Chair  
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Centre Street, 9th Floor  
New York, NY 10007

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**Re: Additional research regarding historic significance of 59 Fifth Avenue in proposed historic district south of Union Square**

Dear Chair Carroll,

I write to share with you additional information we have uncovered regarding the historic significance of 59 Fifth Avenue, part of our proposed historic district south of Union Square. [Prior submissions to the LPC](#) have included information about the history of the house and its construction by **James Lenox**, one of the most significant figures of 19th century New York, and one of the "fathers" of the New York Public Library. However, additional research has shown that the building was also home to several members of a family who were among the most important American patrons of the arts of the 19th century, and significant figures in the fields of science, philanthropy, business, and government: **Jonathan Sturges**; his son-in-law and daughter, **William H. Osborn** and **Virginia Reed Sturges Osborn**; and their children, **Henry Fairfield Osborn** and **William Church Osborn**.

The house, located between 12th and 13th Street, was built ca. 1853 by James Lenox, at a time when lower Fifth Avenue emerged as one of the most prestigious addresses in the city. This was due in no small part to the location of James



Lenox's mansion directly to the south on the same block (Lenox and Sturges were both deeply involved with the New-York Society for the Relief of the Ruptured and Crippled, where the former served as a Vice President and the latter as Treasurer and a founding trustee). The house was also located in the midst of New York's emerging arts and cultural center, with the [National Academy of the Arts nearby at 58 East 13th Street](#), the Tenth Street Studios at 51 West 10th Street, the New York Society Library on University Place between 12th and 13th Streets, and the Astor Place Opera House, the Astor Library, the Academy of Music, Cooper Union, the New-York Historical Society, and New York University all just a few blocks away .

In this context, it's no surprise that Jonathan Sturges, prominent businessman and patron of the arts, chose to purchase the newly-built house at 59 Fifth Avenue for his new son-in-law William H. Osborn, and his daughter, Virginia Reed Sturges Osborn. They too were extremely generous and prodigious patrons of the arts and cultural and charitable institutions in 19th century New York City — a tradition which would be carried on well into the 20th century by their children, Henry Fairfield Osborn and William Church Osborn, who also lived at 59 Fifth Avenue.

### **Jonathan Sturges (1802-1874)**

[According to scholar Christine Isabelle Oaklander](#), "Jonathan Sturges was a leading force in promoting American art and American art institutions from the 1830s until his death in 1874." Born in Southport, Connecticut, Sturges came to New York City in 1821 and soon went to work for the man who would eventually become his business partner, Luman Reed (1787-1836), owner of a mercantile business at 125 Front Street. Sturges would become very successful, purchasing 5 East 14<sup>th</sup> Street c. 1850, retiring from the mercantile business by 1868, and subsequently founding and running The Bank of Commerce of New York and the Illinois Central Railroad.

Reed's tutelage of Sturges extended beyond business and into patronage of the arts. Through



Jonathan Sturges, c. 1850s

Reed, Sturges developed relationships with artists such as Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, and William Sidney Mount. Sturges is credited with encouraging Durand to transition from portraits to landscapes, and in 1836 commissioned Durand's first landscape, *View Near Saugerties*. Other artists who were the beneficiaries of Sturges' patronage included Henry Peters Gray, Frederic Edwin Church, John Gadsby Chapman, Henry Kirke Brown, Francis W. Edmonds, Henry Inman, Robert W. Weir, Daniel Huntington, and Charles C. Ingham.



[View Near Saugerties by Asher B. Durand, 1836](#)

Sturges became a leading force in promoting the arts in America, through purchases, financial support of New York's young arts institutions, and facilitating the sale of art to his friends and colleagues. His art collection was recognized as one of ten noteworthy private collections in New York City by Henry T. Tuckerman in his 1867 *Book of Artists*. His generosity included paying above asking price for works by artists he supported, and offering them stipends to paint. His name is not nearly as well-known as some of his contemporaries who supported the arts, in large part because Sturges consistently shunned public attention for his philanthropic activities, unlike many of his peers who actively sought and encouraged it.



In 1844, Sturges, along with Reed's son-in-law Theodore Allen, founded the New York Gallery of the Fine Arts, the city's first public art museum. The Gallery was established to preserve and exhibit Reed's collections after he passed away in 1836, and Sturges soon became its president. When the New York Gallery of the Fine Arts dissolved, the collection went to the New-York Historical Society, another New York institution which benefitted from Sturges' generosity. So supportive of the aforementioned National Academy of Design was Sturges that he was made one of only a very few non-artist members. The Academy also commissioned his portrait for their permanent collection, and upon his death the Academy's Council said of Sturges "to no other lay members are we more generously and gratefully indebted." Sturges was also a founding member of the Sketch Club, a social club of artists and patrons, and its offshoot, the Century Association.



[Consummation of Empire by Thomas Cole, 1835-36.](#)

Sturges was also one of the founders of the Union League Club, the pro-Union, anti-slavery club established to support the cause of the Union and abolition during the Civil War in the face of significant opposition from New York's governing elite and its working class. Sturges was also the club's second president beginning in 1863, at the time when

the club, located a few blocks north of Sturges' home on Fifth Avenue, was a prime target, along with the Colored Orphans Asylum, of mobs during the 1863 Draft Riots. Club members kept the mobs at bay with an armed vigil in the locked and barricaded clubhouse. Following the riots the club chose a bold gesture to show it was not intimidated by such threats; they recruited, trained, and equipped for military service a Colored Infantry regiment, whom club members accompanied on a march from the Union League clubhouse to Canal Street's Hudson River piers to see them off to duty in Louisiana (the club continued this tradition during World War I, when it sponsored the 369th Infantry, the famed Harlem Hellfighters, which was commanded by club member William Hayward).



Edward Lamson Henry's *Presentation of Colors, 1864*, depicts the outfitting of two African-American regiments at the Union League Club of New York's first clubhouse on 17th Street, facing Union Square

Toward the end of his life, Sturges was involved with the planning and founding of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which in large part grew out of the efforts of the Union League Club.



**William H. Osborn (1820-1894) and Virginia Reed Sturges Osborn (1830-1902)**

**William H. Osborn**, born into humble beginnings, proved as successful in business as his father-in-law Jonathan Sturges, becoming one of the country's most prominent and successful railroad tycoons. In addition to turning around the fortunes of several of the nation's largest railroads, Osborn like his father-in-law was also a profoundly generous patron of the arts, and had a significant and lasting impact on New York politics and government.

Starting his business career early, Osborn joined a merchant company at the tender age of 13, and made partner by 21. By the age of 30 he was a wealthy man, subsequently moving to and settling in New York City. He came to know Jonathan Sturges and married his daughter Virginia in 1853. Tax records from 1854 show Sturges as the new owner of the newly-completed 59 Fifth Avenue, with William and Virginia listed as its occupants in the New York City Directory from that year, indicating Sturges purchased the house, near to his own at 5 East 14<sup>th</sup> Street for the couple.



William H. Osborn, c. 1853-53, Osborn Family Archives



Virginia Sturges Osborn

That same year, Osborn took over the presidency of the Illinois Central Railroad. Under Osborn's leadership, the Illinois Central Railroad was saved from bankruptcy and scandal stemming from stock fraud. Also during his tenure with the Illinois Central, Osborn worked with Abraham Lincoln, then general counsel for the railroad, as well as Ambrose Burnside, its treasurer, and George McClellan, its chief engineer and Vice President. The latter two served as generals in the Union Army during the Civil War, while Osborn directed the movement of Union troops and supplies on the Illinois Central.



W.H Osborn (left) with Ambrose Burnside (center). 1860s. Osborn Family Archives

An adviser to New York State Governor and 1876 Presidential popular vote winner Samuel J. Tilden, Osborn is often credited with playing a key role in procuring and providing the evidence which led to Tilden's exposure of Boss Tweed's corruption and the downfall of the Tammany Hall ring.

Much like and perhaps influenced by his father-in-law, Osborn also became a significant patron of the arts. Of particular note is his relationship with renowned Hudson River School painter Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900), perhaps the most famous American

painter of his time. Some of the notable paintings by Church that Osborn purchased include *Andes of Ecuador* (1855), *Chimborazo* (1864), and *Pichinacha* (1867). Osborn financed Church's travel to locations that served as settings and inspiration for these masterpieces, perhaps most famously *The Aegean Sea* (1877). Osborn's youngest son William Church Osborn was named after Church. So close were William H. and Virginia Reed Sturges Osborn to Church that Church and his wife Isabel spent most winters when not traveling at their home. Isabel died on May 12, 1899, after a long illness, at their home, and on April 7, 1900, Church died at the same location.



[The Aegean Sea \(1877\) by Frederic Edwin Church. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.](#)

Other artists represented in the Osborns' collection include George Loring Brown, Samuel Worcester Rowse, Thomas Cole, Asher Durand, Daniel Huntington, and Sanford Gifford, among others.

Osborn was also one of 19th century New York's great patrons of the arts, including as one of the founders of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and one of the largest donors to the museum's initial capital campaign. In addition to monetary support, he donated paintings from his own collection to the museum, and along with Sturges, donated



money to a fund to keep a collection of Egyptian antiquities in New York City to be displayed at the museum.

Osborn's wife, **Virginia Reed Sturges Osborn**, was remarkable in her own right. In addition to being a great patron of the arts, she also was extremely involved in philanthropic services to benefit the infirmed and impoverished — endeavors she shared with her mother Mary Cady Sturges. She helped establish the Bellevue Training School for Nurses, opened in 1873, the first school in the United States to be organized according to Florence Nightingale's nursing principles. The school was part of Bellevue Hospital, the oldest public hospital in America (1736), which had the first maternity ward in the country and just the second ambulance service in America (1869).



Bellevue Training School for Nurses, c. 1910. MCNY

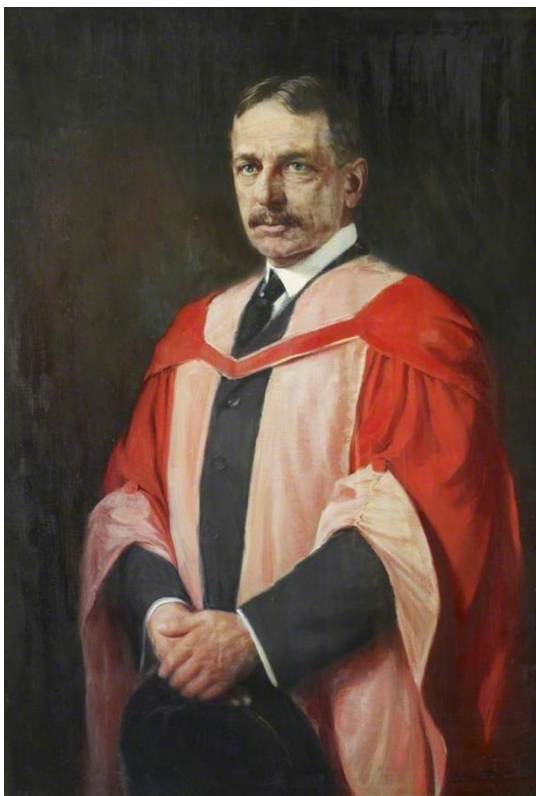
Virginia Reed Sturges Osborn also served on the board of the Society of Decorative Arts, which encouraged women to earn a living by creating needlework and ceramics, and the

board of the art section of the 1864 New York Sanitary Fair, which was held to raise money for medical provisions for the Union troops.

The Osborns left 59 Fifth Avenue by 1870 for a newly-built townhouse at 32-34 Park Avenue designed by Richard Morris Hunt, next door to Jonathan Sturges' own newly-built house at 36-38 Park Avenue, designed by Charles D. Gambrill and Henry Hobson Richardson (these, along with a twin house adjacent to Sturges at 40 East 36th, also designed by Gambrill and Richardson for Sturges' son Frederick, were demolished in 1954).

### **Henry Fairfield Osborn (1857-1935) and William Church Osborn (1862-1951)**

The Osborns had two sons, Henry Fairfield and William Church Osborn, both of whom grew up and lived at 59 Fifth Avenue. Both also had as impressive a legacy as their parents in their contributions to venerable New York City institutions, and in their impacts in their respective fields of science and government.



**Professor Henry Fairfield Osborn, Oil  
Painting by Orlando Rouland**

The elder son, **Henry Fairfield Osborn**, owned and collected art like his parents, but his greatest renown lies in the field of natural science. In that regard he led two of New York's great cultural institutions simultaneously, co-founding one of them. Osborn was the President of the American Museum of Natural History (Osborn was the [first Museum president trained as a scientist](#)) from 1908 to 1933, a period of dramatic growth and expansion for the museum. In 1895 he was a founder of the New York Zoological Society (now known as the Wildlife Conservation Society, operator of the Bronx Zoo, New York Aquarium, Queens Zoo, Prospect Park Zoo, and the Central Park Zoo) and its president from 1909 to 1925. The New York Zoological Society was one of the

first conservation organizations in the United States, and [during Osborn's tenure as President](#) both the Bronx Zoo and New York Aquarium expanded tremendously. Also during Osborn's tenure the NYZS succeeded in securing passage of significant legislation protecting wildlife in America, and established the zoo's wildlife education department, teaching zoology, conservation, and natural history to visitors and students.

Henry Fairfield Osborn began his work at the American Museum of Natural History in 1891 as the curator of a newly formed Department of Vertebrate Paleontology. He was also a professor of biology and zoology at Columbia University, and is credited with greatly influencing the education of paleontologists in both this country and Great Britain, as well as with popularizing the field of paleontology through the art of display at the American Museum of Natural History. He also accumulated what was then the finest collection of fossils in the world, and was responsible for the naming of many specimens of dinosaurs. According to his obituary in *The New York Times*, during his time as president of the Museum of Natural History, Henry Fairfield Osborn raised about \$11,000,000 towards buildings and \$20,000,000 towards natural history exhibits.



[Bust of Henry Fairfield Osborn at the American Museum of Natural History](#)



[Henry Fairfield Osborn with fore and hind limbs of carnivorous and herbivorous dinosaurs from Wyoming, 1899.](#)



EDITION: CENTRE

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# TIME

*The Weekly Newsmagazine*



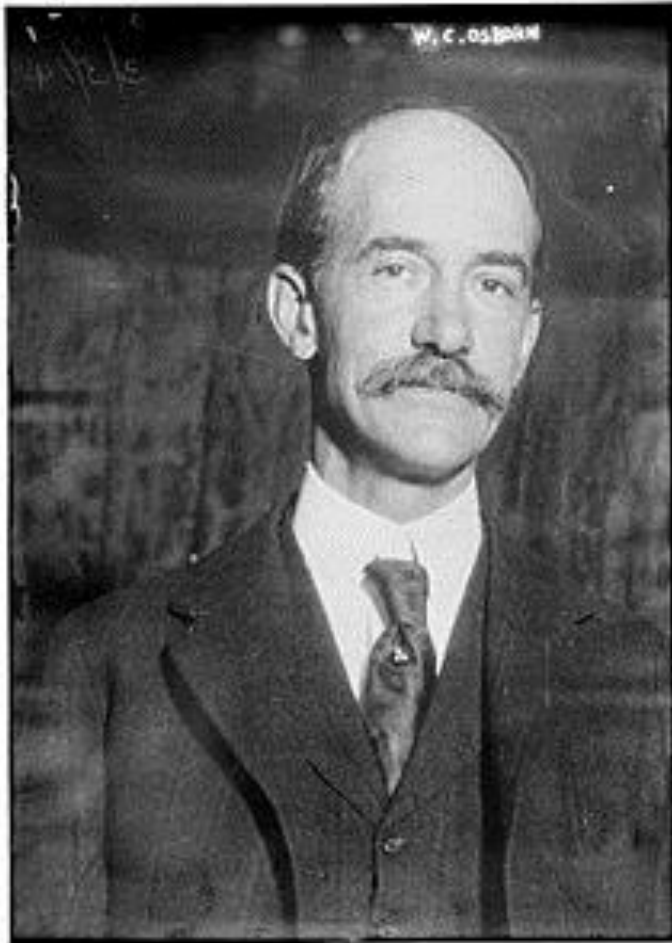
Volume XII

HENRY FAIRFIELD OSBORN

*Continental Gravel led to Galapagos of Galapagos.  
(See STORY)*

Number 27

*Circulation this issue more than 200,000*



William Church Osborn

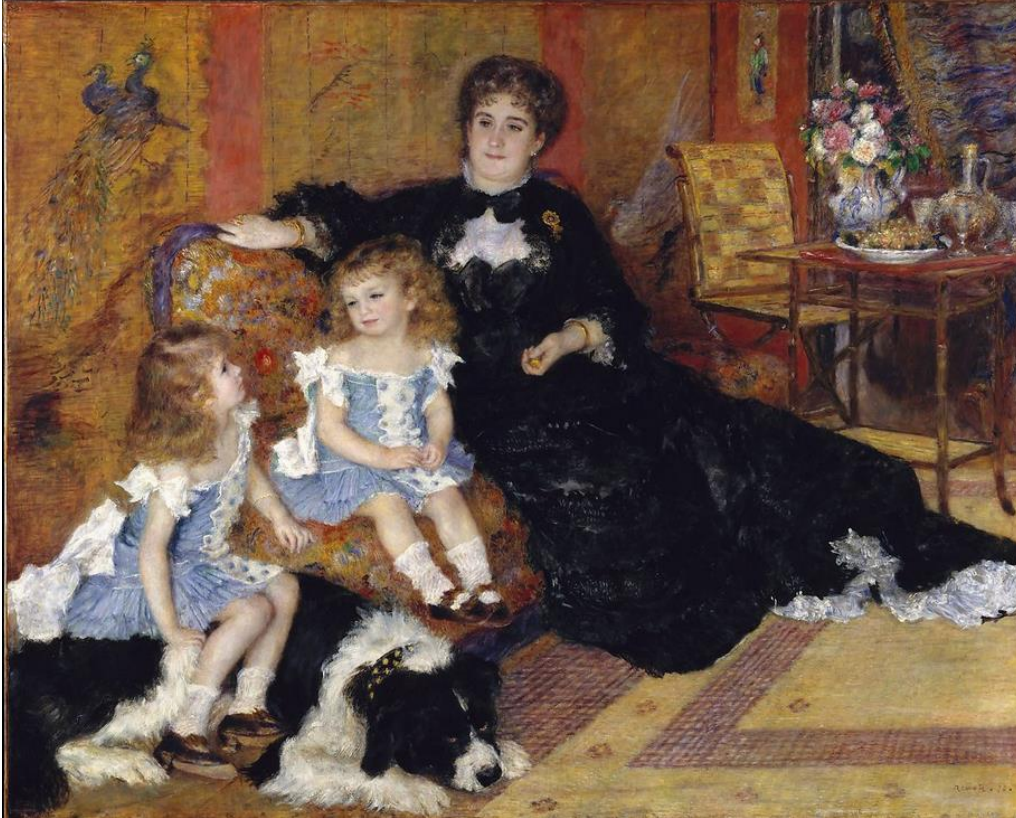
Of the younger son, **William Church Osborn**, *The New York Times* said in [its obituary](#) "Few men have made so rich and varied a contribution to their community" as he. Trained as a lawyer, he served as counsel for corporations and railroads. He was also a philanthropist, environmentalist, patron of the arts, and longtime trustee and president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. With the death of Virginia in 1902, William and Henry each inherited half of their parent's vast art collection, and donated many of those artworks to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. William expanded his personal collection with works by French Impressionists and post-Impressionists such as Monet, Manet, and Gauguin, at a time when such art was largely a novelty in this country.

In 1904, William was elected a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and would serve the institution in various critical capacities until his death in 1951. In 1932 he became Vice-President, and in 1933 when the current President William Sloane Coffin died suddenly, the board proposed Osborn as his successor. He declined, instead recommending George Blumenthal for the position, the museum's first Jewish trustee. Osborn succeeded Blumenthal as President in 1941, remaining in the position until 1947.

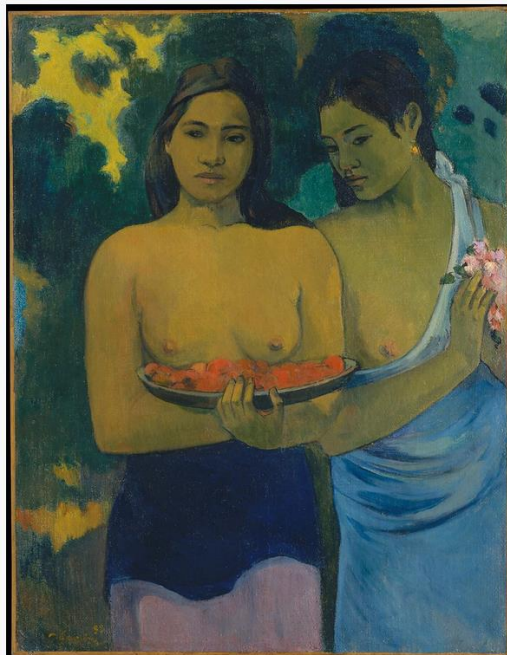
Osborn's tenure with the Met came during a pivotal period for the museum. Several building projects were executed, collections and staff were expanded, and practices of museum management were formalized. In 1907 he directed the museum's first purchase of an Impressionist painting, Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Madame Charpentier and Her Children* — a bold and controversial acquisition at the time. He also established the Met's



junior museum, an innovative interactive and educational resource for schoolchildren soon emulated by many other museums. Osborn made several important gifts of artwork to the museum, including Edouard Manet's *The Spanish Singer* and Paul Gauguin's *Two Tahitian Women*. Through bequests he left works by Monet, Pissarro and William Blake.



Madame Charpentier and Her Children, Auguste Renoir, 1878. Metropolitan Museum of art.



Two Tahitian Women by Paul Gauguin, 1899. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of William Church Osborn, 1949.





Regatta at Sainte Adresse by Claude Monet, 1867. Metropolitan Museum of Art, bequest of William Church Osborn, 1951



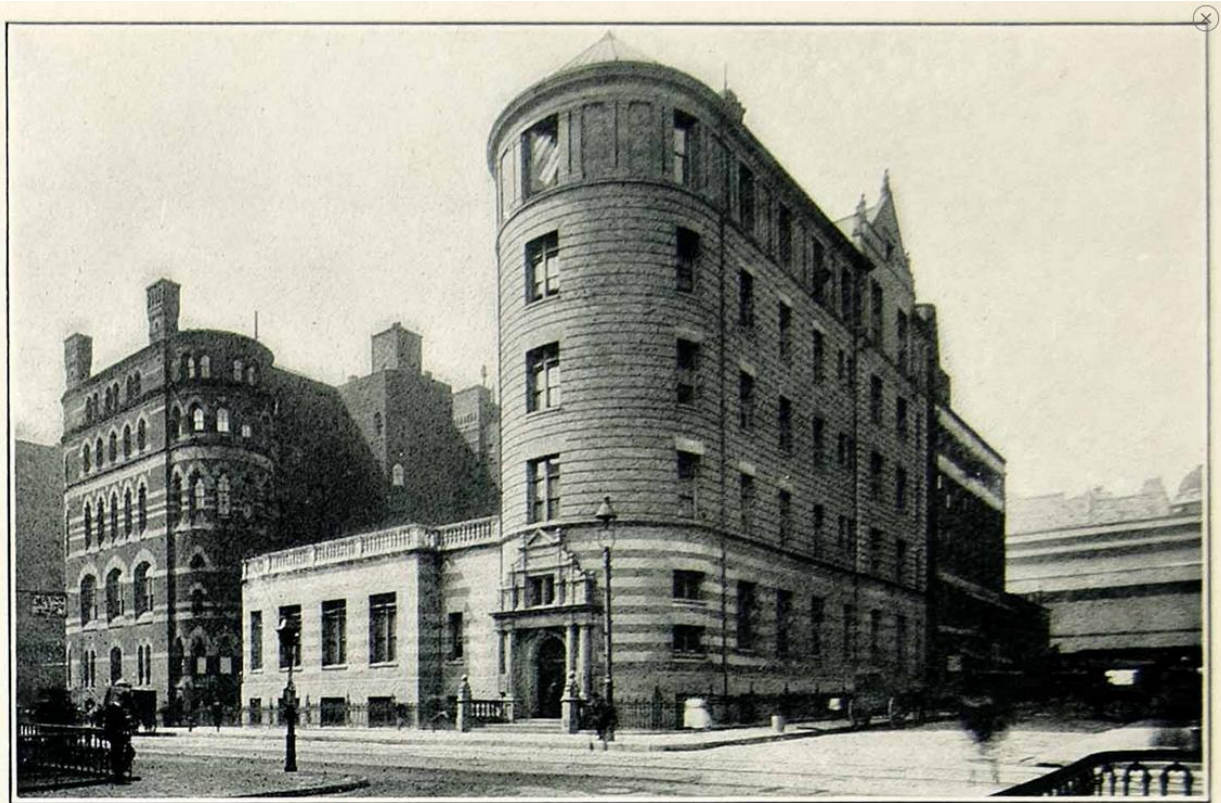
The Manneporte (Étretat) by Claude Monet 1883. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of William Church Osborn, 1951





Water Lilies and Japanese Bridge by Claude Monet, 1899. Collection of the Princeton University Art Museum. From the Collection of William Church Osborn, Class of 1883, trustee of Princeton University (1914-1951), president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1941-1947); given by his family

His work with the Metropolitan Museum was only a small part of William Church Osborn's civic and philanthropic legacy. He also served on the board of the Children's Aid Society for more than sixty years, from 1890 until his death in 1951. For almost fifty of those years he served as president, from 1901 to 1949; when he retired as president, the position of chairman of the board was created for him, which he held until his death. He also served as President of the New York Society for the Relief of the Ruptured and Crippled, of which his grandfather Jonathan Sturges was a founding trustee and treasurer. The Society founded the New York Hospital for the Relief of the Ruptured and Crippled, now the Hospital for Special Surgery, the first and oldest orthopedic hospital in the United States.



42nd Street                      Lexington Avenue                      43rd Street                      Grand Central Station  
**SOC. FOR THE RELIEF OF RUPTURED AND CRIPPLED**, Lex. Ave., 42nd and 43rd Sts.  
 Pre-eminent charity. Founded 1863 by Dr. James Knight. Attractive brick and stone buildings; 42nd Street  
 opened 1867; 43rd Street, 1900. Free to indigent city residents and U. S. crippled soldiers. 250 beds.

1903 Print Society Relief Ruptured Crippled Lexington Avenue James Knight NYV1

Though never elected to office, Osborn played a prominent role in New York State politics during his lifetime. In 1894 and 1904 he ran for New York State Senate as an Independent Democrat, and sought the governorship in 1918. In that bid he was endorsed by Franklin D. Roosevelt and put forth at the Democratic convention by Samuel Seabury, but lost the nomination to Roosevelt's rival Alfred E. Smith (who would come to live just a few doors down from Osborn's childhood home at [49-51 Fifth Avenue](#)). Though unsuccessful in his bids for elected office, he nevertheless had a profound and lasting impact upon New York State government. He served as president of the Society to Prevent Corrupt Practices at Elections, and chairman of the New York State Democratic Committee. In perhaps his most impactful role, in 1932 he founded the Citizens Budget Commission, serving as its president and chair.

Osborn also had a prominent and successful career in business. He served as director of Phelps Dodge (his mother's family's Business), the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and



Pacific Railroad, and the Picacho Mining Corporation, and was the chairman of the executive board of the Texas and Pacific Railroad.

William Church Osborn's contributions to the arts, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and to New York civic life are memorialized in a particularly prominent and beautiful form with the Osborn Gates at the Fifth Avenue and 85th Street entrance to Central Park, just north of the Museum. Located at the entrance to the Ancient Playground, the gates depict five of Aesop's fables. Declared by the Municipal Art Society one of the most important pieces in Central Park when installed in 1953, the gates were designed by sculptor Paul Manship and architect Aymar Embury II, and donated by the William Church Osborn Memorial Committee as a tribute to his contributions to the city and museum. Additionally, along with his children, Osborn bought up land on the eastern shore of the Hudson River, donating thousands of acres to the state, including Sugarloaf Hill in Putnam County (now Hudson Highlands State Park). He was also involved in the establishment of the Hudson River Conservation Society.



Osborn Gates at the Fifth Avenue and 85<sup>th</sup> Street entrance to Central Park.

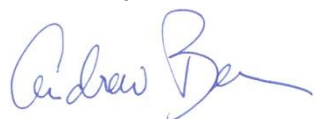
## Conclusion

The members of the Sturges and Osborn families who lived at or owned 59 Fifth Avenue helped found and grow some of New York's greatest cultural institutions, had a profound effect upon New York government and civic life, and deeply impacted the fields of business and science. Today, the art from the Sturges and Osborn families' collections find their home in some of the finest museums and institutions across the country.

The work and legacy of these individuals doesn't stand in isolation in the proposed historic district south of Union Square, much as 59 Fifth Avenue doesn't stand in isolation as a building of historic significance in the area. As per prior submissions to the LPC, other similarly prominent figures in business, philanthropy, and government made their homes here, such as [Benjamin Hazard Field and his wife Catherine Van Cortlandt de Peyster](#), [the Roosevelt Family](#), [James and Henrietta Lenox](#), [the Stuyvesants](#), [the Brevoorts](#), [the Renwicks](#), [Alfred E. Smith](#), and [N.H. Wolfe](#), among many others. They were attracted to this area by the combination of the Lower Fifth Avenue neighborhood's social status and the concentration of great cultural, religious, and eleemosynary institutions in the area.

On this basis, and on the basis of the myriad other historic and architectural resources we have detailed to you previously, I again urge you to designate the area south of Union Square an historic district as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andrew Berman".

Andrew Berman  
Executive Director

cc: Governor Andrew Cuomo  
Mayor Bill de Blasio  
Borough President Gale Brewer  
City Council Speaker Corey Johnson  
City Councilmember Carlina Rivera  
Senator Brad Hoylman  
Assemblymember Deborah Glick

New York State Historic Preservation Office  
Community Board 2, Manhattan  
Historic Districts Council  
NY Landmarks Conservancy  
Municipal Arts Society  
Victorian Society of America  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art  
The Museum of Natural History  
The New York Historical Society  
The Union League Club  
Hospital for Special Surgery  
Citizen's Budget Commission  
Central Park Conservancy  
Children's Aid Society  
Wildlife Conservation Society