

A Tribute to the New Deal-Funded Restorations to Gracie Mansion

Emily Gruber
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Professor Elizabeth Blackmar Section Leader: Rebecca Lossin
Columbia University
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Celebrated as the “People’s House,” Gracie Mansion is the City of New York’s official mayoral residence.¹ The mansion presides over East End Avenue at 88th Street, nestled in Yorkville’s Carl Schurz Park. The building is a New York City Landmark and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.² The concept of a structure that functions as the hub of the mayor’s professional and personal activities is unique to New York City.³ As Edward I. Koch, Mayor of the City of New York from 1978 to 1989, advised, “to know the history of Gracie Mansion is to know the history of New York, the most exciting city in the world.”⁴ On December 29, 1798, ship merchant Archibald Gracie traded his Lower East Side townhouse for this \$5,625 Yorkville mansion, which he purchased from wealthy merchant Jacob Watson to serve as his country retreat.⁵ Former Chairman of the Gracie Mansion Conservancy Joan K. Davidson noted that Archibald Gracie “was a leading citizen of early New York and an active player on the stage of the young republic.”⁶ A friend of Alexander Hamilton and husband of “a daughter of a Mayor of New York,” Gracie channeled his mercantile wealth into building a summer residence for his family in 1799.⁷ The War of 1812 wiped out the Gracie fortune, requiring that the family sell the home to Rufus King, one of the first New York senators.⁸ It was subsequently owned by a series of wealthy New York families. The mansion transitioned from

¹ City of New York. “Gracie Mansion: The People’s House.” Nyc.gov.

<http://www1.nyc.gov/site/gracie/index.page>

² Historic House Trust of New York City, and City of New York Parks & Recreation. *Historic Houses in New York City Parks*. (New York: Historic House Trust of New York City and the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation., 2003), 37.

³ Mary Black. *New York City’s Gracie Mansion: A History of the Mayor’s House 1646-1942*. (New York: J.M. Kaplan Fund, 1984), viii.

⁴ Black, *New York City’s Gracie Mansion: A History of the Mayor’s House 1646-1942*, vii.

⁵ Ibid, 14.

⁶ Ibid, viii.

⁷ “Old Gracie Mansion on East River Open.” *New York Times* (New York, NY). March 21, 1927. <http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1927/03/21/104066627.html>.

⁸ Historic House Trust of New York City and the City of New York Parks & Recreation, *Historic Houses in New York City Parks*, 36.

private to public ownership in 1896 when the City of New York purchased its eleven acres to expand the surrounding Carl Schurz Park.⁹ Under government ownership, Gracie Mansion served as “a comfort station, an ice cream stand,” and the original location of the Museum of the City of New York.”¹⁰ New York City Parks Commissioner Robert Moses called for the creation of “a permanent, simple and dignified home for successive Mayors of the City of New York,” a vision realized in 1942 when Fiorello H. La Guardia became the first mayor to reside in Gracie Mansion.¹¹ The Mayor’s Office, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Gracie Mansion Conservancy led by Executive Director Paul Gunther, currently collaborate to oversee the financial, operational, and civic functions of the residence. The New Deal-sponsored restorations that preceded Gracie Mansion’s transformation into the official mayoral residence inaugurated a newfound privileging of the executive in the City of New York and created an analogue between the national president and the local mayor.

At 217 years old, Gracie Mansion’s façade serves as the location where “one comes under the spell of the American past as nowhere else in the city.”¹² The residence is hailed by former Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg as “one of the oldest surviving Federal-style wood houses in New York” (Hamilton Grange and the Morris-Jumel Mansion stand as two of the other few

⁹ Historic House Trust of New York City and the City of New York Parks & Recreation, *Historic Houses in New York City Parks*, 37.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Robert Moses. Robert Moses to Walter Hoving, “Robert Moses letter to Walter Hoving re. major living in Gracie Mansion.” March 24, 1943. 22. New York City Department of Parks Press Releases, January-December 1943. New York, NY.

¹² “Other Matters: Spell of America’s Past – Some Prints and Drawings.” *New York Times* (New York, NY). March 27, 1927.

<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1927/03/27/97137526.html?pageNumber=175>.

examples).¹³ The mansion's Federal Style dominated the American landscape between 1780 to 1820 and is characterized by "clarity of form, simplicity, restraint and subtle use of color."¹⁴ One could speculate that Archibald Gracie chose this patriotic style to counter the fact that "to build his mansion it was necessary to remove the remains of an American fort."¹⁵ It takes only a glimpse at this two-storied mansion to understand why Gracie deemed his residential creation with "its white humility of modest frame" a suitable retreat from the density of the Lower East Side.¹⁶ The mansion's light hues of yellow, white, and green pick up on its surroundings, the natural niche of Carl Schurz Park. The rows of windows with green shutters and narrow Doric columns overlook a bucolic lawn. The home's windows double as tributes to the inhabitants since mayors' daughters Millie Foulke,¹⁷ Margie Lindsay, and Caroline Giuliani¹⁸ scratched their names on the library's window panes in 1873, 1965, and 2001 respectively. This detail reflects the affection for this residence that is engrained in its structure itself as former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's then-wife Donna Hanover explained her daughter's window-decoration as "just to say,

¹³ Michael R. Bloomberg. Forward to *Gracie Mansion: A celebration of New York City's Mayoral Residence*, by Ellen Stern, 9. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2005.

¹⁴ Cyril M. Harris. "Federal Style." In *American Architecture: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 123.

¹⁵ "East River Drive to Avoid Mansion." *New York Times* (New York, NY). December 27, 1938, 30.

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/102461777/E14F2F4096E44EF6PQ/1?accountid=10226>

¹⁶ "Other Matters: Spell of America's Past – Some Prints and Drawings." *New York Times* (New York, NY). March 27, 1927.

<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1927/03/27/97137526.html?pageNumber=175>.

¹⁷ David Saltonstall. "Say Hello, Gracie Mansion reopens after \$7M face-list." *New York Daily News* (New York, NY), October 6, 2002, 29.

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/305748518/abstract/DD7FE087BF2B4150PQ/4?accountid=10226> .

¹⁸ Christopher Gray. "Streetscapes/Gracie Mansion; A Residence with a view, Even Without the Mayor." *New York Times* (New York, NY), May 26, 2002, Real Estate.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/05/26/realestate/streetscapes-gracie-mansion-a-residence-with-a-view-even-without-the-mayor.html>.

‘I was here and liked being here very much.’¹⁹ The white porch that wraps around the sixty-five feet long by fifty feet wide home provides an elevated walkway that marks a break from bustling city sidewalks.²⁰ This path also provides a place for rocking chairs from which inhabitants can overlook the East River and enjoy the breeze. These architectural and functional details announce Gracie Mansion’s status as a relic of 1930s’ “migration to the East River”²¹ in which mansions sought to carve an “extended country”²² into the urban fabric. The *New York Times* indicated the centrality of this architectural style to the legacy of the building when noting in 1942 that “the most important furnishings” would remain “in keeping with the post-colonial style of the structure” despite a restoration project.²³

Although the origin of the idea to restore Gracie Mansion for conversion into the official mayoral residence remains vague, the evolution of its Yorkville neighborhood in the 1930s likely influenced the modifications. The reinvigoration of East River Park – with a new estimated worth of \$1,826,000 – in the first decade of the 1900s reshaped the immediate surroundings of Gracie Mansion.²⁴ The New York Department of Parks listed improvements including that “the fence with its handsome gate and gateposts was removed” and “benches were installed along the

¹⁹ Heidi Evans. “Farewell to Gracie: Donna, kids leave mark on mansion.” *New York Daily News* (New York, NY). January 1, 2002, 8.
<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/305667802/DD7FE087BF2B4150PQ/9?accountid=10226>

²⁰ “Historic Mansions Restored by City: Park Department Announces Completion of Work on Gracie House and Jumel Home.” *New York Times* (New York, NY). April 27, 1936.

²¹ “The East River Becomes the Fashion: It Is Luring Imaginative Folk From the Inland Streets to Make Homes Along Its Banks.” *New York Times* (New York, NY). October 16, 1927.
<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1927/10/16/101508845.html>.

²² William Russell Birth. *The Country Seats of the United States*. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 2009), 31.

²³ “Repairing Gracie Mansion: WPA Crew Starts Preparing it as Residence of Mayors.” *New York Times* (New York, NY). January 23, 1942.
<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1942/01/23/85019964.html>.

²⁴ Black, *New York City’s Gracie Mansion: A History of the Mayor’s House 1646-1942*, 76.

promenade encircling the mansion.”²⁵ The park also assumed a new duty as a memorial landscape in response to a June 1910 letter to the editor of the *New York Times* from President of the United German Societies Theodore Sutro that articulated, “our German fellow-citizens urge the naming of a New York City park in honor of Carl Schurz. This is natural and commendable.”²⁶ Additionally, the construction of the Franklin D. Roosevelt East River Drive (colloquially, the “FDR Drive”) in late 1930s and early 1940s not only introduced change into the vicinity but also confirmed that Gracie Mansion stood as an important location. A December 1938 *New York Times* article announced that Borough President of Manhattan Stanley M. Isaacs advocated for a tunnel-system for the FDR drive that would ensure that “persons on the riverside plaza will have an unbroken view of the mansion and sloping park instead of a view of a double-decker roadway.”²⁷

This boom of Yorkville modifications perhaps inspired Bronx resident C. C. Coogan to pen a note to then-Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia in 1935 with the news that he, “asked approximately seventy-five people if they knew where the Mayor of New York City lives. Only one had a vague idea where he does reside.”²⁸ This *New Yorker* tapped into the mayor’s concern about recovery from the Great Depression by noting that “the cost of materials is low and many are unemployed,” circumstances that justified the construction of “a mansion to house the present and future Mayors of our great city” as a project that would simultaneously stimulate the

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Theodore Sutro. “Carl Schurz Park: Urges That East River Park Should Bear This Name” [Letter to the Editor]. *New York Times* (New York, NY). January 4, 1910, 8. <http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1910/06/04/104937401.html>.

²⁷ “East River Drive to Avoid Mansion.” *New York Times* (New York, NY). December 27, 1938, 30.

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/102461777/E14F2F4096E44EF6P/Q/1?accountid=10226>

²⁸ C. C. Coogan. C. C. Coogan to Fiorello H. La Guardia, June 3, 1935. La Guardia Files Roll #74, 000371. La Guardia and Wagner Archives. La Guardia Community College, Queens, NY.

city's economy.²⁹ However, Mayor La Guardia's Secretary Lester B. Stone countered this memo, informing Mr. Coogan of Mayor La Guardia's belief that "the suggestion of an executive mansion for the Chief Magistrate of the City is an excellent one for some future Mayor."³⁰ Secretary Stone specified that "no one so devoted to the public service, and with such an unselfish attitude toward his task, as Mayor La Guardia has, would want to encourage such a home for himself."³¹ As the "first reform Mayor" who put an end to Tammany Hall and was "a crusader all his life in the interests of the underprivileged and the oppressed," Mayor La Guardia cringed at the proposal that he swap his six-room apartment at 1274 Fifth Avenue for an estate at the city's edge.³²

Although Secretary Stone disparaged the suggestion of an official mayoral residence as "one of those things that is revived from time to time," it was New York Park Commissioner Robert Moses who ultimately obtained the mayor's approval for this project.³³ In June 1941, Moses received a letter from George J. Steidler who urged the Parks Commissioner to consider the possibility of adapting a historic home into a museum. Although Mr. Steidler's condition that he and his wife must reside within this home rendered the plan impractical, this vision for the recycling of a storied space struck Moses. Robert Moses's biographer Robert A. Caro's recollection, "the best proof that, in the fields Robert Moses had carved out for his own, he and he alone had the final say in New York City, is his relationship with the postwar Mayors of New

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Lester B. Stone. Lester B. Stone to C. C. Coogan, June 8, 1935. La Guardia Files Roll #74, 000370. La Guardia and Wagner Archives. La Guardia Community College, Queens, NY.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "La Guardia Is Dead: City Pays Homage to 3-Time Mayor." *New York Times* (New York, NY). September 21, 1947, 1.

<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1947/09/21/104339128.html>

³³ "Mansion Plan Revived: No Steps Taken Yet, However, on Using Gracie House for Mayor." *New York Times* (New York, NY). December 6, 1941, 19.

<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1941/12/06/104311513.html?pageNumber=19>

York under whom he served,” solidified the plan to establish an official mayoral residence.³⁴ Moses’s acquaintance with Mayor La Guardia, evidenced by the informality of their correspondences and his lament to Commissioner Paul Moss, “I am afraid I shall have to be away from the party for the Mayor, which I should not think of missing for any other reason,” enabled him to frame the venture in a way that he knew would appeal to the Mayor.³⁵ The Park Commissioner consequently knew to abandon the suggestion of the 1905 neo-Loire Valley chateau on Riverside Drive at West Seventy Third Street, which repelled Mayor La Guardia due to its castle-like façade and origin as the mansion of U.S. Steel’s first president Charles M. Schwab.³⁶

Thus, on November 9, 1941 Moses wrote to Mayor La Guardia, pleading with him to consider the former summer home of Archibald Gracie, recently vacated by the Museum of the City of New York, for the site of an official mayoral residence. Moses advised Mayor La Guardia that he would use New Deal dollars to fund needed structural improvements as well as infrastructure to lend privacy to the home settled in the public Carl Schurz Park. The Commissioner’s efforts to persuade Mayor La Guardia found reinforcement in the February 1942 correspondence from Adeline Kay Gracie, a descendant of the family that gave the mansion its name. Gracie addressed Mayor La Guardia with a “sincere wish that you will accept the present plan of using the Gracie Mansion as the official home of he Mayor New York” since “you have done so much for the development and beautifying of this City you are aptly suited to be the first

³⁴ Robert A. Caro. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1975. 755.

³⁵ Robert Moses. Robert Moses to Paul Moss, December 2, 1941. Book 16, Cabinet 3 (1941-1942), Drawers (4-M-Z) Folder M13. Robert Moses Papers. New York Public Library, The Brooke Russell Astor Reading Room for Rare Books and Manuscripts. New York, NY.

³⁶ Ellen Stern. *Gracie Mansion: A Celebration of New York City’s Mayoral Residence*. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc., 2005), 45.

to occupy my old home.”³⁷ Rumors of such talks about repurposing Gracie Mansion reached the media, which buzzed with headlines such as the *New York Times*’ “Mansion Plan Revived: No Steps Taken Yet, However, on Using Gracie House for Mayor” and referenced that “private sources were reported yesterday as backing a proposal to convert the Gracie mansion at Eighty-eighth Street and East River into an official residence for Mayor La Guardia”³⁸ The triumph of convincing the mayor that moving into Gracie Mansion was a practical decision emerged in Mayor La Guardia’s 1945 letter to a disgruntled citizen that clarified that “it is cheaper to have it tenanted than to have watchmen to protect it.”³⁹ Still uncomfortable with the term “mansion,” Mayor La Guardia stipulated that his new home be known as “the Mayor’s House” or “Gracie Farm.”⁴⁰

Mayor La Guardia’s commitment to the conversion of Gracie Mansion into the official mayoral residence enabled Robert Moses to launch negotiations with the New York City Board of Estimate to determine and approve the restorations to the building’s exterior and interior. In an early November 1941 “Memorandum to the Mayor,” Moses outlined the costs – totaling \$25,000 – including \$10,000 for “alterations to the house,” \$5,000 for “draperies, rugs and additional furniture for public rooms,” and \$10,000 for “reconstruction of park area at Gracie

³⁷ Adeline Kay Gracie. Adeline Kay Gracie to Fiorello H. La Guardia, February 1942. La Guardia Files Roll #74, 000378. La Guardia and Wagner Archives. La Guardia Community College, Queens, NY.

³⁸ “Mansion Plan Revived: No Steps Taken Yet, However, on Using Gracie House for Mayor.” *New York Times* (New York, NY). December 6, 1941. <http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1941/12/06/104311513.html?pageNumber=19>.

³⁹ Fiorello H. La Guardia. Fiorello H. La Guardia to Mrs. Rattray, November 15, 1945. La Guardia Files Roll #74. La Guardia and Wagner Archives. La Guardia Community College, Queens, NY.

⁴⁰ Stern, *Gracie Mansion: A Celebration of New York City’s Mayoral Residence*, 49.

Mansion so as to provide entrance, fencing, etc.”⁴¹ “The work can be funded by the W.P.A.” he wrote on November 18, 1941.⁴² This decision to tap into the funds of the New Deal agency known as the Works Progress Administration suited not only Moses’s but also Mayor La Guardia’s ambitions for built tributes to a renewed post-war morale; Mayor La Guardia’s *New York Times* obituary recollected that “he was a New Dealer even before the New Deal came into being.”⁴³ This commitment to economical restorations emerged in Robert Moses’ note to Walter Hoving in which he articulated, “the additional expense of upkeep as the Mayor’s residence is so small that it could have no conceivable effect on the balancing of the budget.”⁴⁴ Thus, Commissioner Moses forwarded Mayor La Guardia the notices from the Board of Estimate along with the plans for the exterior and interior restorations, advising, “if this is the way you want to do it, the item should be put on the next calendar.”⁴⁵ In 1941, the New York Board of Estimate published its resolution “that the Gracie Mansion, located in Carl Schurz Park, is hereby designated and made available to the use of the Mayor of the City of New York, as the official residence of the Mayor and his successors during their incumbency in office.”⁴⁶

⁴¹ Robert Moses. Robert Moses to Fiorello H. La Guardia, “Remodeling Gracie Mansion,” November 8, 1941. La Guardia Files Roll #74, 000339. La Guardia and Wagner Archives. La Guardia Community College, Queens, NY.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “La Guardia Is Dead: City Pays Homage to 3-Time Mayor.” *New York Times* (New York, NY). September 21, 1947, 1.

<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1947/09/21/104339128.html>

⁴⁴ Robert Moses. Robert Moses to Walter Hoving, “Robert Moses letter to Walter Hoving re. major living in Gracie Mansion.” March 24, 1943. 22. New York City Department of Parks Press Releases, January-December 1943. New York, NY.

⁴⁵ Robert Moses. Robert Moses to Fiorello H. La Guardia, November 17, 1941. La Guardia Files Roll #74, 000340. La Guardia and Wagner Archives. La Guardia Community College, Queens, NY.

⁴⁶ New York City Board of Estimate. Resolution on Gracie Mansion. December 18, 1941. La Guardia Files Roll #74, 000342. La Guardia and Wagner Archives. La Guardia Community College, Queens, NY.

These rulings initiated the restoration process, which began on January 22, 1942 and was scheduled to span “two to three months.”⁴⁷ *The New York Times* headlined that a “WPA labor force” had arrived at Gracie Mansion to execute the visions of architect Aymar Embury II and Chief Engineer W. Earle Andrews.⁴⁸ Moses advised the New York City Board of Estimate, “it will be necessary to fence off the mansion and to provide a vehicular entrance.”⁴⁹ The project also included the addition of a “new roof, new clapboards, new ornamental railings, and a rebuilt porch.” Inside, the restorations included the maintenance of a public bathroom in the basement, a “door between the dining room and pantry closed to accommodate lavatories,” and Colonial stair rails.⁵⁰ The fact that these WPA-executed restorations did not prioritize traditional New Deal architectural and decorative details – streamlined classicism, images of eagles – signifies its status as what former Deputy Mayor Patricia E. Harris termed, “a gem that needs to be polished.”⁵¹

These restorations initiated a competition between companies that hoped to add work at Gracie Mansion to their resumes, and Mayor La Guardia’s mailbox filled with contractors’ inquiries as to, “may we have the pleasure of serving you?”⁵² Weissberger Moving & Storage Co, Inc. appealed to Mayor La Guardia’s frugal taste by informing, “we know that our prices are

⁴⁷ “Repairing Gracie Mansion: WPA Crew Starts Preparing it as Residence of Mayors.” *New York Times* (New York, NY). January 23, 1942, 13.

<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1942/01/23/85019964.html>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Robert Moses. Robert Moses to New York City Board of Estimate, November 18, 1941. La Guardia Files Roll #74, 000341. La Guardia and Wagner Archives. La Guardia Community College, Queens, NY.

⁵⁰ Black, *New York City’s Gracie Mansion: A History of the Mayor’s House 1646-1942*, 86.

⁵¹ Jennifer Steinhauer. “A Worn Gracie Mansion Awaits Its Face-Lift.” *New York Times* (New York, NY), April 28, 2002, N.Y./Region. <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/28/nyregion/a-worn-gracie-mansion-awaits-its-face-lift.html>

⁵² C.H. Pepper Inc. C.H. Pepper Inc. to Fiorello H. La Guardia, January 10, 1942. La Guardia Files Roll #74, 000355. La Guardia and Wagner Archives. La Guardia Community College, Queens, NY.

consistently fair.”⁵³ Many of these companies picked up on the mayor’s pragmatism, hoping to inspire confidence by declaring that their storage facilities “have been in business for the past thirty-five years”⁵⁴ or that “we are are the oldest rug cleaner in New York, having been established in 1863.”⁵⁵ Similarly, companies such as rug cleaner T.M. Stewart Inc. even borrowed Mayor La Guardia’s rhetoric of remaining a man of the citizenry by writing, “we are mighty proud of this record and attribute our success to the people of New York. We would deem it an honor and a privilege to be able to do the necessary repairing, refitting, and cleaning of carpets and rugs for Gracie Mansion.”⁵⁶ The city was thus determined to make Gracie Mansion a centerpiece of commercial as well as civic activity.

The project provoked controversy regarding materials used for and the new function of the mansion. The iron fence emerged as the focal point of the restorations, and the responses to this new infrastructure reveal the public’s reaction to the restorations. New Yorkers confronted Moses with the question of “whether the metal used for the fence could not have been better used in war industry.”⁵⁷ Moses countered this criticism by explaining that the six foot tall and four hundred feet long fence “was made from junk, all junk, that we repaired with the WPA and park

⁵³ Weissberger Moving & Storage Co, Inc. Weissberger Moving & Storage Co, Inc. to Fiorello H. La Guardia, January 10, 1942. La Guardia Files Roll #74, 000356. La Guardia and Wagner Archives. La Guardia Community College, Queens, NY.

⁵⁴ Dwyer Storage Warehouses Inc. Dwyer Storage Warehouses Inc. to Fiorello H. La Guardia, January 10, 1942. La Guardia Files Roll #74, 000359. La Guardia and Wagner Archives. La Guardia Community College, Queens, NY.

⁵⁵ T.M. Stewart Inc. Robert J. Duffy to Fiorello H. La Guardia, January 17, 1942. La Guardia Files Roll #74, 000363. La Guardia and Wagner Archives. La Guardia Community College, Queens, NY.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ “Moses Says That Gracie Mansion Iron Fence is Reclaimed Junk and Valueless as Scrap.” *New York Times* (New York, NY). July 8, 1942, 25.

<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1942/07/08/85042107.html>.

employees. Most of it had been there along the waterfront for years.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, the Commissioner reminded the dissenters that his early attempt to donate “fifteen twenty tons of scrap metal” had been snubbed and that the function of iron scraps “was misunderstood by the public.”⁵⁹ Additionally, coalitions of New Yorkers claimed that the mayor had disregarded public opinion on the transformation of Gracie Mansion into the official mayoral residence. A.B. Montgomery rebuked Mayor La Guardia for “curtailing as it will the right and privilege of free access to this park and the shelter provided by Gracie Mansion,” terming the New-Deal project an “invasion.”⁶⁰ Similarly, the Citizens Union of New York disapproved of the mansion’s new function with the explanation, “it involved a permanent change in city policy, was introduced and passed at the same meeting without advance notice on the calendar and therefore without giving the public a proper opportunity to present any opposing opinions.”⁶¹ Articles in the *New York Times* predicted tension when it described the new fence as an addition that “separates it from park visitors, and grounds are well covered with trees, shrubbery and flowerbeds,” a feature that could inadvertently lend an air of aloofness to the mansion and the mayoralty that it represents.⁶² However, Mayor La Guardia himself defended the practical purpose of this new fence when he explained, “sections of the grounds must be fenced off because ventilators of the Tunnel are there and exposed. Children and others stuff these

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ “La Guardias Begin Moving Into the Gracie Mansion.” *New York Times* (New York, NY). March 27, 1942.

<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1942/05/27/85037723.html?pageNumber=19>

⁶⁰ A. B. Montgomery. A.B. Montgomery to Fiorello H. La Guardia. La Guardia Files Roll #74, 000366. La Guardia and Wagner Archives. La Guardia Community College, Queens, NY.

⁶¹ Citizens Union of the City of New York. Citizens Union of the City of New York to Fiorello H. La Guardia. La Guardia Files Roll #74, 000372. La Guardia and Wagner Archives. La Guardia Community College, Queens, NY.

⁶² “La Guardias Begin Moving Into the Gracie Mansion.” *New York Times* (New York, NY). March 27, 1942.

<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1942/05/27/85037723.html?pageNumber=19>.

ventilators with missels and other obstacles and it is a constant source of trouble to the tunnel and park authorities.”⁶³

The project progressed despite controversies and concluded on May 21, 1942.⁶⁴ Mrs. Marie La Guardia and the Columbia Storage Warehouse Company – Mayor La Guardia himself was in Quebec to attend a Canadian-United States Joint Defense Board meeting – embarked on the first of four trips from 1274 Fifth Avenue to Gracie Mansion on May 26, 1942.⁶⁵ The residence attracted media attention as New York news outlets announced the completion of the restorations and even national journalists such as those at the *Daily Boston Globe* teased, “the Mayor, like any other husband on moving day, was out of town.”⁶⁶ The final days of May brought throngs of New Yorkers encircling the new boundaries created by the fence and reinforced by a flock of police officers.⁶⁷ The *New York Times* reported that “neighborhood mothers raised their youngsters outside a six-foot fence for a look at the old Gracie Mansion” while painters and moving men gained access to the landscape beyond the fence.⁶⁸ Despite this potential barrier between the mayor and the public, the proximity of Gracie Mansion to Carl

⁶³ La Guardia, Fiorello H. Fiorello H. La Guardia to A. B. Montgomery, January 17, 1942. La Guardia Files Roll #74, 000365. La Guardia and Wagner Archives. La Guardia Community College, Queens NY.

⁶⁴ Stern, *Gracie Mansion: A Celebration of New York City's Mayoral Residence*, 48.

⁶⁵ “La Guardias are Moving Into the Gracie Mansion: Mayor Away, Wife Supervises Transfer in 4 Van-Loads.” *New York Herald Tribune* (New York, NY). May 27, 1942.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1264520150/D127F5A6019A40A1PQ/4?accountid=10226>

⁶⁶ “Moving Day for LaGuardia Finds Mayor Out of Town.” *Daily Boston Globe* (Boston, Massachusetts). May 28, 1942, 16.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/817007008/D127F5A6019A40A1PQ/5?accountid=10226> .

⁶⁷ Stern, *Gracie Mansion: A Celebration of New York City's Mayoral Residence*, 48.

⁶⁸ “Mrs. La Guardia Moves In: Mayor Away, She Unpacks at the Gracie Mansion.” *New York Times* (New York, NY). May 28, 1942.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/106471460/D127F5A6019A40A1PQ/3?accountid=10226>

Schurz Park eliminated the divide as Mrs. La Guardia was spotted “walking Mac, the pet Scottie, in the park” and “hanging out the family’s laundry in the yard.”⁶⁹

These New Deal-funded restorations remain and have established a tradition of mayors’ restoring and refurbishing Gracie Mansion in efforts to literally impress their memories in the building’s framework. William O’Dwyer who succeeded Fiorello La Guardia as Mayor, serving from 1946 to 1950, is reported to have straddled the oasis of Gracie Mansion and the bustle of the park as he “chatted with strollers through the iron fence” and “took the sun on a Carl Schurz bench.”⁷⁰ However, the most notable wave of restorations following the New Deal-sponsored project was orchestrated by Mayor Robert F. Wagner who fittingly remarked, “every time I smell fresh paint, it reminds me of Gracie Mansion.”⁷¹ To honor a plan proposed by New York’s First Lady Susan Wagner who lost a battle with lung cancer in 1963 while living in Gracie Mansion, a civic organization known as the Committee for Gracie Mansion “had raised the \$800,000 from individuals, labor unions and business corporations.”⁷² In 1966, this sum funded the creation of a fifty by twenty four foot wing intended for public events and physically separated from the private quarters by a narrow hallway with historic trinkets hanging on one wall and a series of windows on the other overlooking a garden. This wing includes eighteen foot ceilings, a dining room, a ballroom, a drawing room, a conference room, and a mayor’s office.⁷³ Reporters at the *New York Times* noted that such restoration projects can cause “friction” between mayoral families when it reported that the Wagner and Lindsay families were cordial upon meeting at the

⁶⁹ Stern, *Gracie Mansion: A Celebration of New York City’s Mayoral Residence*, 49.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 51.

⁷¹ Ibid, 61.

⁷² Thomas W. Ennis. “The Susan Wagner Wing Is Opened at Gracie Mansion.” *New York Times* (New York, NY), September 28, 1966, 49.

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/117186339/DD7FE087BF2B4150PQ/24?accountid=10226>

⁷³ Ibid.

Wagner Wing opening ceremony despite “Mrs. Lindsay’s remarks about the ‘rundown’ condition of Gracie Mansion after Mr. Wagner left it officially Jan. 1, 1965.”⁷⁴ Although the mayors who called Gracie Mansion home between 1966 and 1977 did renovate the building, it was not until Edward I. Koch entered office that it experienced a makeover in line with the New Deal restorations. In the spirit of the restorations leading up to its 1942 conversion into the mayoral residence, Mayor Koch’s prized his “\$5.5 million dollar, two-year renovation in November, 1984” due to the fact that, in his own words, “the porch was put together without any nails...same way it was built.”⁷⁵ This mayor who placed a mezuzah at the mansion’s entrance responded to criticism⁷⁶ for this lavish spending by penning a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*. “The Gracie Mansion Conservancy was formed to rehabilitate and restore the house to its original elegance through private contributions,” Mayor Koch explained, citing the “over 20,000 people” who visit the mansion annually.⁷⁷ Thus, subsequent mayors executed fewer physical changes to the building and instead began traditions that continued the mansion’s commitment to defining its relationship with New Yorkers. For example, in 1990, Mayor David N. Dinkins launched a “Kids Day at Gracie Mansion” that invited children to visit the residence and unite in play.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ T.J. Collins and Karen Freifeld. “Gracie Mansion’s History Dates to 1799.” *Newsday* (Long Island, NY), October 10, 1990, 35.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/278251039/5A59955CBB7341B2PQ/14?accountid=10226> .

⁷⁶ Purdum, Todd S. “Wastefulness at Gracie Mansion Cited.” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), February 22, 1991, B.3.

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/427964647/DD7FE087BF2B4150PQ/8?accountid=10226>

⁷⁷ Edward I. Koch. “Restorers of Gracie Mansion Earn No Preferential Treatment.” *New York Times* (New York, NY), June 5, 1986, A.26.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/425928046/2379DC28CAFE44EDPQ/4?accountid=10226>.

⁷⁸ Stern, *Gracie Mansion: A Celebration of New York City’s Mayoral Residence*, 85.

This past decade has drawn attention to Gracie Mansion as former Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and current Mayor Bill de Blasio have reinterpreted the residence's form and function. Mayor Bloomberg's decision to break with the tradition upheld by nine previous mayors by not moving into Gracie Mansion and remaining in his East Seventy Ninth Street Beaux-Arts town house surprised the city. The magnitude of this decision is evidenced by its being mentioned in the *New York Times*' Real Estate section as recently as April 17, 2016.⁷⁹ When reflecting on his three terms as mayor – elected in 2001, 2005, and 2009 – billionaire Mayor Bloomberg shared with *The New York Times*, “a lot of people want to be mayor – you don't have to give them extra money as a housing allowance.”⁸⁰ “To take one of the great houses in this city away from the public I just think is wrong,” continued Mayor Bloomberg.⁸¹ His advocacy for Gracie Mansion as only a symbol of the mayoralty and its commitment to the citizenry above all took the form of a renovation project to which he likely contributed nearly \$85,000; in the spirit of the New-Deal restorations, these adjustments were principally practical and determined to maintain its identifying features – “the exterior will remain yellow” and included, “the columns will be restored, and the rotting balcony will be repaired.”⁸²

Thus, when elected Mayor of the City of New York in 2013, Mayor de Blasio vowed to dispel the belief that his moving from his 1,200 square foot Bronx rowhouse to the 20,000 square

⁷⁹ Vivian Marino. “A \$14 Million Co-op for Michael R. Bloomberg.” *New York Times* (New York, NY), April 15, 2016, Real Estate. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/17/realestate/a-14-million-co-op-for-michael-bloomberg.html? r=0>.

⁸⁰ Kate Taylor. “City Room: A Mayor Who Never Slept Here (Gracie Mansion) Says No Successor Should.” *New York Times* (New York, NY), March 28, 2012. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A01E5D9133CF93BA15750C0A9649D8B63>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Jennifer Steinhauer. “A Worn Gracie Mansion Awaits Its Face-Lift.” *New York Times* (New York, NY), April 28, 2002. N.Y./Region. <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/28/nyregion/a-worn-gracie-mansion-awaits-its-face-lift.html>.

foot Gracie Mansion⁸³ would be, in Mayor Bloomberg's words, "depriving the rest of the city of one of the great facilities any city has." Mayor de Blasio turned to the New-Deal restorations to follow through with his campaign promise to terminate the "Tale of Two Cities" percolating in New York.⁸⁴ Upon moving from Brooklyn to the "buttercream-hued mayoral residence on a bluff," Mayor de Blasio has repeatedly opened Gracie's fence, most notably when he invited New Yorkers selected from a lottery to an open house to celebrate his election, sip hot chocolate, and take photographs with 109th Mayor of the City of New York.⁸⁵ This event prompted "a diverse line of well-wishers" that extended "out to its grounds and into nearby Carl Schurz Park, where it stretched nearly three city blocks along an East River promenade," a visual reminder of Mayor de Blasio's commitment to proactively bridging the divide between government and citizens⁸⁶ Interestingly this open house is reminiscent of President Andrew Jackson's opening the White House to the public upon his 1829 election as president.⁸⁷ Mayor de Blasio's appointment of Paul Gunther as Executive Director of the Gracie Mansion Conservancy

⁸³ Michael Barbaro. "De Blasio on the Move: Comparing 2 Houses." *New York Times* (New York, NY), December 12, 2013. N.Y./Region.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/12/nyregion/de-blasio-on-the-move-comparing-2-houses.html>.

⁸⁴ Bill de Blasio. "State of the City Remarks." Speech, La Guardia Community College Performing Arts Center, LA Guardia Community College Performing Arts Center Queens NY, February 10, 2014. Cited on: Press Office. "State of the City Remarks by Mayor De Blasio, as Prepared for Delivery." NYC. Last modified February 10, 2014. Accessed March 17, 2016. <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/045-14/state-the-city-remarks-mayor-de-blasio-prepared-delivery#/0>.

⁸⁵ Michael Grynbaum. "De Blasio Holds Open House at Gracie Mansion." *New York Times* (New York, NY), January 5, 2014, N.Y./Region. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/06/nyregion/de-blasio-holds-open-house-at-gracie-mansion-his-new-home.html?_r=0.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Herbert Mitgang. "The Transition: A Populist Inauguration: Jackson, With Decorum." *New York Times* (New York, NY). December 20, 1992. A.24.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/428816870/DB7D30F46094DFEPQ/1?accountid=10226>.

promises that Gracie Mansion open for public tours four times each Tuesday.⁸⁸ It is vital to consider the fact that, as reported by spokeswoman Rebecca Katz, Mayor de Blasio and his security team made the decision to increase the fence’s height after examining the perimeter with other NYPD officials and in the wake of the White House fence jumping incidents.”⁸⁹ A Gracie Mansion visitor can spot joggers and dog-walkers passing by the perimeter defined by the black fence, unfazed by the building peeking out above the iron or the important-looking black SUV emerging from the driveway. Likewise, the *New York Times* reported in 2014 that “many residents appeared unbothered on Friday by the high fence, which has compromised views of the home from a park pathway just beside it” and also quoted Yorkville resident Steve Rosenthal who agreed that the raised fence “blends in” with the façade.”⁹⁰ The de Blasios have striven to convey their inclusive ideology spatially, an effort facilitated by the Gracie Mansion Conservatory’s curatorial work. Therefore, just as First Lady Chirlane I. McCray shared in an interview, “insofar as Gracie Mansion exists to honor history, it should tell the stories of all New Yorkers,” the Conservancy has curated an exhibit that exists throughout the house and features portraits of unrepresented New Yorkers.⁹¹ This administration’s advocacy of Gracie Mansion as the “People’s House” is embodied in the First Lady and the Gracie Mansion Conservancy’s collaboration to establish a Gracie Mansion Book Club with the theme “Envisioning Distant

⁸⁸ Paul Gunther. Interview by Emily Gruber. Gracie Mansion, NY. April 1, 2016.

⁸⁹ Matt Flegenheimer. “Fence at Gracie Mansion Now Taller Than de Blasio.” *New York Times* (New York, NY), December 12, 2014. N.Y./Region. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/13/nyregion/fence-at-gracie-mansion-now-taller-than-de-blasio.html>.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah. “Chirlane McCray and the Limits of First-Ladyship: What two years in Gracie Mansion have meant for a woman who aspired to be the ‘voice for the forgotten voices.’” *New York Times Magazine*, February 9, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/14/magazine/chirlane-mccray-and-the-limits-of-first-ladyship.html>.

Neighbors,” inviting New Yorkers to traverse the fence, enter her home, and discuss literature.⁹² Gracie Mansion Conservancy Executive Director Paul Gunther reflected, “Gracie Mansion is an ideal place to foster reading as a source of personal discovery and community-building.”⁹³

This enduring dedication to the function of Gracie Mansion forwarded by the New Deal-funded restorations in the 1940s has elevated the residence to the status of a local White House. The La Guardia and Wagner Archives suggests that this connection finds its origins in 1934 when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt “gained a great ally when Fiorello La Guardia became mayor of New York City” because the mayor “defeated Tammany Hall...while successfully creating a direct relationship to the White House to fund New Deal projects.”⁹⁴ Although historian Ellen Stern noted that New Yorkers have long been aware of their mayors’ addresses when she lists “the downtown wood dwelling of Thomas Willett, the city’s first mayor in 1667” and “the Gramercy Park Greek Revival rowhouse of James Harper, the sixty-fifth,” the centralization of the mayor’s residence to Gracie Mansion has provided a built representation of the city’s leadership akin to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.⁹⁵ The similarities between Gracie Mansion and the White House are also articulated spatially. The White House’s fence shares Gracie Mansion’s fence’s ability to act as a timeline for the building and city’s evolution. In September 1942 – the same year as the completion of Gracie Mansion’s New Deal-funded restorations – the Department of the Interior turned “1,600 feet of iron spikes that had formed the

⁹² City of New York Office of the Mayor. “Gracie Mansion Conservancy and First Lady Chirlane McCray Launch Book Club.” News release. April 12, 2016.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ La Guardia and Wagner Archives. “The Roosevelts and Fiorello La Guardia.” La Guardia and Wagner Archives. Last modified September 2014. Accessed March 18, 2016.

http://laguardiawagnerarchives.blogspot.com/2014/09/as-la-guardia-looks-on-president_16.html

⁹⁵ Stern, *Gracie Mansion: A Celebration of New York City’s Mayoral Residence*, 43.

White House fence” into scrap metal for World War II.⁹⁶ Just as is the case at Gracie Mansion, the White House’s fence threatens to divide the citizens from the Commander-in-Chief, a possibility countered by moments such as when “on V-J Day, President Truman shook hands through the White House fence with some of a happy crowd that had gathered outside.”⁹⁷ The need to provide safety measures also emerges in the White House’s fence and was reinforced in July 2015 with the addition of “a removable anti-climb feature consisting of sharp metal points” intended to dissuade potential fence climbers.

The vocabulary used to describe Gracie Mansion suggests that the creation of an official mayoral residence in 1942 created an analogy between local and federal powers. In fact, the New York City government itself celebrates Gracie Mansion’s “tradition as New York’s ‘Little White House’” on its website.⁹⁸ Mrs. Marie La Guardia’s reflection, “it was like he owned the United States” upon her husband’s election to mayor following twelve years of unsuccessful campaigns exemplified this use of presidential rhetoric with regard to the office of the Mayor of the City of New York.⁹⁹ In her *Gracie Mansion: A Celebration of New York City’s Mayoral Residence*, Ellen Stern paraphrases Robert Moses when she writes “the mayor’s role demanded dignity” and therefore “should have a permanent residence like the White House or Governor’s Mansion.”¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the *New York Times* justified Mayor Bloomberg’s decision not to live in the residence by explaining that he “will use the home as a kind of ‘Blair House – a place

⁹⁶ White House Historical Association. “History of the White House Fence.” White House Historical Association. Accessed April 21, 2016. <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/press-room/history-of-the-white-house-fence>.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ City of New York. “A Brief History of Gracie Mansion.” Nyc.gov. <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/gracie/about/about.page>.

⁹⁹ Robert A. Caro. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1975. 358.

¹⁰⁰ Stern, *A Celebration of New York City’s Mayoral Residence*, 43.

for visiting dignitaries to crash, much like the vice president's residence in Washington."¹⁰¹ Gracie Mansion's prominent place in the city's consciousness is evident as it provides the framework for children's picture books such as *The Ghost of Gracie Mansion* and appears in the blockbuster *Ghostbusters*. The Off-Broadway musical *Mayor*, which fêted Mayor Koch, slipped references to this residence in its lyrics as the character of Mayor Koch sings, "oh I heard La Guardia haunted this place!"¹⁰² This interest in the mystery of the mayoral residence emerged also in research for this paper; historian Michael Wallace shared his intrigue in the little-known details of mansion's 1940s restorations during an email interview, and the official documents codifying this project remain scattered across archives.¹⁰³ The New Deal restorations to Gracie Mansion ennobled the mayoralty, and this building reminds New Yorkers of their place in a "capital of the world."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ David Saltonstall. "Say Hello, Gracie Mansion reopens after \$7M face-list." *New York Daily News* (New York, NY), October 6, 2002, 29. <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/305748518/abstract/DD7FE087BF2B4150PQ/4?accountid=10226>.

¹⁰² *Mayor: The Musical*. By Charles Strouse. Directed by Jeffrey B. Moss. Performed by Lenny Wolpe. Harbinger Records, 1985, compact disc.

¹⁰³ Michael Wallace. E-mail interview by Emily Gruber. April 13, 2016.

¹⁰⁴ E. B. White. *Here is New York*. (New York: The Little Bookroom, 1949), 55.

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