

February 12, 2018

To: Landmarks Preservation Commission

From: Kathy Benson Haskins; member, Landmark East Harlem and East Harlem Preservation

Re: Support for designation of the Richard Webber Packing House (LP-20171114)

The Richard Webber Packing House stands as a testament to the historically working-class nature of East Harlem. Once part of a three-building complex, the remaining structure announces its purpose by means of a pair of terra-cotta cows' heads set in roundels that frame the central arch on its façade. The date of construction, 1895, appears at the center of the third story. Twelve small round-arch windows distributed in line with the bays below lead the eye to a dramatically protruding cornice.

The building's architects, Bartholomew and John Walther, also designed a warehouse at 220 East 125th Street (now the Church of Scientology Harlem Community Center) in 1896.

Richard Webber (1847-1908), an immigrant from England, achieved the American Dream to become the largest meat retailer in the world. He arrived in New York in 1870 and took a job as a journeyman butcher and salesman with David Warwick. By 1876 he had his own business located at the approximate site of the current building. Eventually his plant occupied 15 city lots and employed 500 people, according to an obituary in *The National Provisioner*, October 17, 1908, p. 136.

Very involved in Harlem affairs, he was a trustee of the Harlem Savings Bank and during the panic of October 1907, guaranteed the accounts of his employees and others. The obituary in *The National Provisioner* goes on to state, "He was a pioneer educator along the lines of teaching housewives the purchasing of and cutting of meats. When the teachers' college opened its domestic science department, Mr. Webber and four of his men took possession of one of the college halls at the invitation of the faculty and set up a butcher shop complete in every detail. He taught the girl students all about meats, explaining the mysteries of steaks, chops, chuck steak and stew. Similar lectures were given the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. During the hard times of 1893-94 he established a soup kitchen in his store for the needy. He was also responsible for the foundation of the Richard Webber Mutual Benefit Society, the organization of the employees of the house and the Employees' Profit Sharing Plan, which was put into effect in January, 1907."

Architecturally intact and significant historically, the building merits landmark designation.