

# NYC Landmarks Preservation

## Celebrating 40 Years

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Among American cities, New York is the leader in the preservation of its landmarks, and in the range and quality of its surviving architectural resources. The abundance and variety of these buildings is surprising, ranging from the best efforts of our finest architects, to excellent examples of vernacular building types. It is an architectural record that touches upon every aspect of life. Hidden within this great metropolis is evidence of our proudest achievements: the taverns and farms of the eighteenth century; the factories, banks, and offices of the nineteenth; and three centuries of urban housing that speaks to the needs of every group – from the modest to the well-to-do. In its twentieth century civic buildings, factories, office towers, universities, museums, parks, and houses of worship, one will find the history of New York's citizenry written large in buildings that express their most noble aspirations and deepest values.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the enactment of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Law. Since its passage on April 19, 1965, the result of an awareness of the increasing loss of New York's iconic historic, architectural and cultural monuments beginning with the razing of Pennsylvania Station (1963), New York City has been in the forefront of what has become an established worldwide preservation movement. The vision of preserving our past found permanence in the Landmarks Law, which played a key role in shaping the evolving face of the city. The law now protects nearly 23,000 structures -- from parks and individual trees, to piers and bridges, cemeteries and archeological sites, interiors and clocks, as well as theaters, factories, museums and forts -- to enumerate some examples.

The first designations, on October 14, 1965, were the Pieter Claesen Wyckoff house (before 1641) in Brooklyn, the Street Plan of New Amsterdam and Colonial New York, which represented New York's earliest Dutch and English settlements, and the Brooklyn Heights Historic District, a signature nineteenth - century brownstone neighborhood, all of which represented the established vision of the City's history. Through the years, the Landmarks Preservation Commission has recognized successive eras of the City's development: the transition from houses to apartments, typified by the Dakota apartments; and the evolution from agriculture to manufacturing, and now, the transformation to a commercial center, with the designation of SoHo's lofts, the Ladies' Mile grand stores, and early skyscrapers, such as the Singer and Woolworth buildings. As structures from the recent past have come of age, they, too, have been designated. It is ironic that we now recognize those buildings, whose proliferation were the impetus that helped engender the preservation movement.

Preservationists have long understood the benefits of protecting the past from destruction. The preservation of our landmarks provides a sense of continuity between past and present, and an appreciation of the accomplishments that outlast an individual life. This exhibition documents the quality and diversity of New York City's landmarks.

The photographs of landmarks on exhibition were not taken at the time of construction, but at the time of designation, or later. Therefore, these images show that although many of the structures retain their architectural and esthetic integrity, others have been altered, or even neglected. The photographs have been selected from the more than 1,100 landmarks designated in all five boroughs from 1965 through early 2005. The dates of construction of these buildings range from 1640 to 1967. They provide evidence of some of our realized ambitions, and touch upon every aspect of metropolitan life. They help to chart the growth of New York City from a small merchant city to a modern metropolis, shed light on the evolution of our cultural history, and encompass the dreams and illusions of one generation passed on for the enrichment of their successors.

New York City's official definition of a landmark is "a building, property, or object that has been designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission because it has a special character, or special historical or esthetic interest or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the city, state, or nation." To be eligible for landmark status, some part of the building, property or object must be at least thirty years old.

There are three types of landmarks: an individual (exterior) landmark is a property, building, or object that has been designated -- it is also called an exterior landmark because only exterior features are included in the designation; an interior landmark is an interior space that has special landmark qualities, and is accessible to the public. A scenic landmark is a natural landscape feature, or group of features, situated on city-owned property. Examples of each type of landmark are included in this exhibition. In addition to landmarks, the Landmarks Preservation Commission may also designate historic districts. An historic district is an area of the city that has a special character, or historical, or aesthetic, interest that represents at least one period.

The last 40 years have not been without legal challenges, but the Law has withstood them all at the highest level, and was validated by the United States Supreme Court in the Penn Central case in 1978, which saved Grand Central Terminal. The law has responded to the tough issues it has faced, time and again. What was once, and in some quarters still considered to be, an impediment to progress, has proved that appropriate recognition and protection of the built environment does create economic value and foster beauty and neighborhood pride, as well. The hopeful vision of a few, has become a strong instrument for the protection of our architectural future, in recognition of our rich past. But it is not, and will not be, the evolving application of the Law itself, but the individuals and grassroots organizations that have given voice and vitality to a movement that has transformed New York City aesthetically, culturally and economically. Having arrived this far as we enter the 21st Century, the challenge now is what bold and innovative direction should preservationists embrace to build on the bedrock accomplishments that have been achieved in the past 40 years?