

# A Landmark Law

New York Times (1923-Current file); Apr 27, 1965; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times  
pg. 36

Lower Manhattan expressway. If the expressway goes through after the legal designation period, a substitute area could not be named *for the next three years*. How much will be left to save in commercial districts by the time the next designating period rolls around?

Once designated, a fair and elaborate machinery of protection gives a building a chance to survive and helps its owner. But even with the law, New York's past will be hard to preserve. Much of the city's character and style is not in monumental structures, but in unpretentious stands of shabby nineteenth-century "street architecture": modest groups of buildings that involve special problems of retention and re-use.

It will take imagination, dedication, concern, citizen action, private financing and public cooperation to effect preservation under the new law. It will also require a sharp upswing in the business community's valuation of the status of a landmark address. Rehabilitation and remodeling costs in such buildings will often be as high as or higher than new construction. Preservation must be business-backed if it is to succeed at all.

The past is yet to be secured for the future. Celebration is premature until we can point to a safe and substantial legacy. New York is still the city that marks its history with gaping holes in the ground.

# A Landmark Law

After a long, hard fight that was going on while historic buildings were being knocked down like ten-pins, New York finally has a landmarks preservation law. The law is an immense achievement, but it gives no guarantee that anything can be saved. It is only a protective tool to make historic and esthetic preservation possible.

A model statute, the new law is based on the best experience of forty municipalities. Its chief strength is its use of architectural controls to protect designated landmarks. But its weakness, which has been consistently soft-pedaled, lies in an extraordinary joker in the final revision, called a "moratorium" clause.

The effect of this provision is that the law can be used for its basic purpose—selection of buildings or districts for protection—only once every three years. Beyond an initial eighteen-month designation period, nominations of landmarks are to be restricted to six-month periods at three-year intervals. The rest of the time this power stays under glass, like a pressed flower or a lacy valentine.

Safeguards for real estate processes were essential. But this extremely questionable solution is no more than an ironic guarantee of speculative destruction as usual—under protection of the preservation law itself.

To cite an example, the Landmarks Preservation Commission's preliminary selection of a historic "cast-iron" district," which can now be made an official designation, has its focal point in the path of the