

Unity in Diversity

A city is more than the sum of its buildings. The image evoked by the words London, Paris or New York is unique and irreplaceable—except to those who trade in destruction and change. The work of a Landmarks Commission is to protect that total image as much as single structures, and New York has been moving in thoughtful, creative ways to a kind of environmental or cultural preservation.

The commission's most recent hearings stressed a new kind of preservation package that is very special both in its components and in its totality. It moves into expanded fields with the selection of three contiguous items: a scenic landmark, Bryant Park; the interiors of the New York Public Library; and a skyscraper, the American Radiator Building (now American Standard). Both buildings flank the park. The first two selections represent desirable extensions of the Landmarks law and the third gives recognition to the city's most spectacular and characteristic building type—the New York skyscraper of the recent past.

Most important, the proposed designations link all three in acknowledgement of the fact that the park, the serenely classical library and the "jazz-age" Art Deco tower are the anchors of a particular urban group that is a valuable and non-expendable part of the New York scene. The full meaning of the group is not in each item separately but in everything together as one of those "places" that define New York for all New Yorkers, rich in stylistic diversity and united by a beautifully scaled public open space.

This quality of place and variety of style bequeathed by the past to the present is the essential culture of cities. No investment parcels can ever replace it.