

# Don't Destroy--Restore!

In the decade since New York City first established its landmarks law and Landmarks Preservation Commission, after a long battle against real estate hostility and public indifference, much has changed.

The destruction of landmarks that was routine in cities everywhere is now opposed and often stopped by a public newly aware of the values of the urban heritage and increasingly sophisticated about the politics of protest. The kind of urban renewal that once turned historic neighborhoods into windfall profits with the backing of the authorities has been fought to a standstill, with a near-total reversal of policy and practice.

It is easy to be heartened—even in the face of problems as large and complex as New York's legal setbacks in the Morgan Library and Grand Central cases—by the overwhelming number of cities and towns engaged in active, visible restoration and reuse of fine old buildings. Cities are finding economic and environmental strengths in the recognition of their past.

A current wave of "recycling," with factories and warehouses turned into housing and handsome old public buildings refurbished that were slated for the bulldozer, has been spurred by inflation and the energy shortage. Preservation has become fashionably practical in terms of the greater costs in money and energy of demolition and new construction.

But every silver cloud has its lead lining. With the recession, construction costs are now dropping—a threat that preservationists, in their current euphoria, might overlook. If it becomes a better deal again to destroy rather than to save, the battles will start all over. Can those hard-won historic, esthetic and environmental values survive a return to conventional investment economics? Will cash flow triumph over community character? In preservation there are no victories; only spoils.