

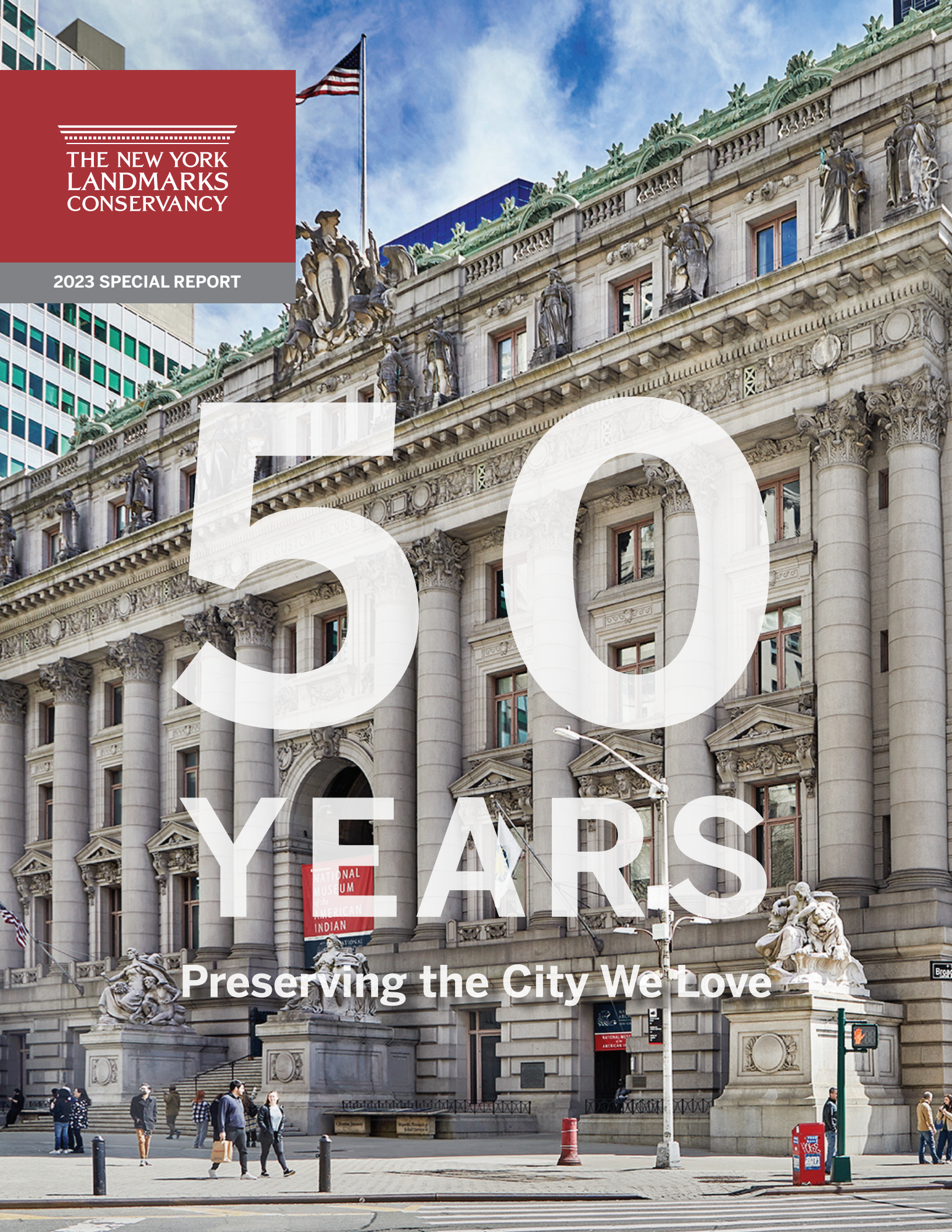
THE NEW YORK
LANDMARKS
CONSERVANCY

2023 SPECIAL REPORT

150

YEARS

Preserving the City We Love



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Our Mission

From the smallest buildings, to the most extraordinary landmarks, to our diverse neighborhoods, the New York Landmarks Conservancy preserves and protects the unique architectural heritage of the City we love.

We are on the front lines, giving New York's preservation needs a voice, advocating for sensible development, providing financial assistance and technical expertise—all to ensure that the character of our City continues to enrich the quality of life for all New Yorkers.

On the Cover – Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House, 1 Bowling Green (photo: Noël Sutherland)

From the President

Dear Friend of the Conservancy:

Celebrating a 50th Anniversary is exciting. There was no guarantee when we launched in 1973 that we'd make it this far. It is also enlightening. We've been pulling together five decades of projects, programs, publications, and people. The Conservancy has done a lot. We discovered things even we didn't know about earlier efforts.

Our founders were visionaries. The New York Landmarks Preservation Commission was only eight years old when we started. But it was already clear that designation alone wouldn't always save a building. The founders saw the need for a group with financial and technical skills to help property owners maintain their historic structures. They also sought a group that could devote the time required to pull off major preservation projects.

And here we are. From gutsy beginnings finding new uses for vacant public buildings like the Custom House on Bowling Green and Federal Archive Building in Greenwich Village, we've become one of the largest preservation groups in the country. Our range of financial and technical programs has helped maintain more than 1,000 historic structures. That includes immediate rescue efforts after 9/11 and Superstorm Sandy and continuing to work through a pandemic.

At our 25th anniversary, we proudly noted that we'd provided \$10.5 million to preserve worthy buildings and neighborhoods. That number is now \$60 million.

Our advocacy has helped promote hundreds of new landmarks and dozens of distinctive neighborhoods, support preservation tax credits, produce pioneering economic reports on preservation, and fight zoning and planning efforts that threaten historic areas.

It hasn't always been easy. New York is often cavalier with its history. The tug of war between preservation and development continues. New York will always grow and change. We've always promoted appropriate development and often work with developers to improve projects, rather than just oppose them.

We've been able to do all this because of a remarkable cast: My skilled predecessors, Anthony Newman, Susan Henshaw Jones, and Laurie Beckelman, who guided the Conservancy in its first decades. Dedicated board members who have given unstintingly of their time and knowledge. Talented and tireless staff who have steadfastly carried out the Conservancy's work. Generous funders who have underwritten our programs. And a wide range of supporters who now come from 38 states, plus Canada, the U.K., Spain, and New Zealand. Lots of people love New York.

We don't know what the next 50 years will bring. But, looking back at what we've accomplished, we have confidence that we will meet the challenges.

It's a privilege to fight for New York. We'll never stop protecting the City we love.



Peg Breen, President



Conservancy President, Peg Breen
(photo: James Salzano)



The Founding

“New York City is one of our country’s greatest and oldest urban environments – a global crossroads where waves of immigration and centuries of economic and cultural change are reflected in our very streetscape. Nearly fifty years since its passage, there is no doubt: the Landmarks Law is our most successful tool for preserving and passing on that heritage to future generations of New Yorkers. We have the New York Landmarks Conservancy to thank for much of that success.”

- City Council Member and former Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer

Aerial view of Pennsylvania Station from the northeast, circa 1915. It was demolished in 1963-66 (photo: Library of Congress)



Left to right: Laurie Beckelman, Susan Henshaw Jones, Peg Breen, Anthony J. Newman

Executive Directors & Presidents

1973-1975	Anthony J. Newman, Executive Director
1975-1980	Susan Henshaw Jones, Executive Director
1980-1990	Laurie Beckelman, Executive Director
1990-1993	Susan Henshaw Jones, President
1994-	Peg Breen, President

I. The Founding

This is a city being ruthlessly rebuilt – a process in which progress has merely become a misspelling of profit – at the near-total sacrifice of its distinctive urban quality. We need more than good intentions. Actions speak louder than proclamations and the only action so far is the steady swing of the wrecker’s ball. (*Ada Louise Huxtable, editorial, New York Times, September 24, 1964*)

New Yorkers as a whole love the idea of landmarks and landmarking but also take it for granted and do not realize how difficult it was to get where we are and how easy it would be to lose it. (*Prof. Andrew S. Dolkart, quoted in the New York Times April 24, 2015*)

What would New York City be without the Empire State Building? Without the Brooklyn Bridge? Without Greenwich Village or Central Park or the Broadway theaters? What would it be without Sailors Snug Harbor, brownstone Brooklyn, the Art Deco Grand Concourse, Harlem churches, Lower East Side synagogues or Jackson Heights garden apartments? Perhaps

impossible to imagine, but certainly a poorer, less recognizable place to live – a City with no vestige of its past to brighten its present or inspire its future.

The New York Landmarks Conservancy – brainchild of a group of architects, planners, writers, lawyers, and preservation activists – has supported historic preservation in New York City and State for the past 50 years. Though a private non-profit organization, it effectively works in tandem with the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) – a City agency only slightly older than the Conservancy – each doing what the other can’t. Where the Commission focuses on a City-wide mission of identifying, designating, and regulating landmarks and historic districts, the Conservancy brings financial and technical support to the stewards of historic sites, building by building, owner by owner.

Over the past fifty years the Conservancy’s mission has evolved to meet New York’s changing preservation challenges. At first the Conservancy brokered partnerships, working with alliances of the private, public, and non-profit sectors to tackle problems too large for any of them to handle alone. As the City struggled through the financial crises of the 1970s, the Conservancy focused on raising funds, accepting easements, even taking responsibility for an enormous, decommissioned federal archive building. But the City has evolved, and so has this organization.

Over the decades, the Conservancy has adjusted its orientation and developed new programs in response to emerging preservation questions. Where can building owners turn for technical guidance? The Conservancy’s Preservation Services program, created in 1979. Where can owners looking to restore their buildings find funding? The New York City Historic Properties Fund, 1982. What about buildings in imminent danger? The Endangered Buildings Fund, 1984. And

for non-profits in an emergency? The Emergency Preservation Grants program, 1999. What about the sticky, controversial issue of historic preservation for religious structures? The Conservancy's Sacred Sites program has been winning converts to preservation since 1986.

Fifty years on, the Conservancy continues its work in four major areas: financial assistance, technical support, public policy advocacy, and education. It works primarily in New York City, but also extends aid elsewhere in New York State. It focuses mostly on preservation but has become a voice of reason in the debates over the City's planning and land-use priorities.

In preparing for the next half-century, the Conservancy has stopped for a moment to look back at its own history. Taking stock of its accomplishments and progress can help the institution plan, and build on its past work. As always, recalling the past can shed light on the present, and help guide the future.

Preservation in New York City before the Conservancy

Our local antiquities: New York is so governed by a spirit of tearing down and rebuilding...that veritable landmarks of its past are rapidly disappearing. *(New-York Tribune, April 13, 1901)*

Landmarks of New York are transitory – familiar objects in this kaleidoscopic city become antiquities in one generation, then vanish. *(New York Times, July 19, 1925)*

Old New York Landmarks Wrecked for New Building. *(Christian Science Monitor, August 9, 1937)*

Decade after decade, the headlines told the story: New York, the famously temporary City, almost gleefully built, demolished, rebuilt – and demolished again. And yet, those headlines also suggest an uneasiness with the casual discarding of the City's landmarks. And indeed, though out of the limelight, many New Yorkers had long looked for ways to counter such disregard, and to protect some part of the City's built history.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, absent an organized municipal preservation program, the rescue of New York's historic sites fell to private efforts, generally motivated by threats to landmarks of early Americana. In 1904, the Sons of the Revolution in New York State bought and then restored (or, more accurately, recreated) Fraunces Tavern, famed site of General Washington's Farewell to the Troops. Similar efforts protected the Van Cortlandt House in the Bronx (National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of New York, 1897), Hamilton Grange (American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, 1924), and the Abigail Adams Smith House (now the Mount Vernon Hotel,

Colonial Dames in America, 1924). At times, even the City bought the odd historic site (the Morris-Jumel Mansion, 1903) or accepted gifts (the Dyckman Farmhouse, 1916). But that privately funded approach could salvage no more than a handful of landmarks. The threats continued and the losses mounted.

Moses Says Historic Battery Building...Will Be Demolished *(New York Herald Tribune, February 7, 1941)*

Moses to Raze Schenck House, 1705 Dutch Colonial Landmark *(New York Herald Tribune, April 6, 1941)*

The notion of a municipal preservation agency first arose in 1941, in response to a pair of proposed demolitions: Battery Park's Castle Clinton, dating to 1811, then home to the City's Aquarium; and the Schenck house, a relic of Brooklyn's early Dutch history. In a classic New York response to municipal problems, a group of concerned citizens met to discuss the issues.

Act To Save Landmarks: Historical and Scenic Groups Meet to Preserve Aquarium

A plan to try to prevent demolition of historic landmarks was adopted in a resolution at a meeting yesterday afternoon of the New York Historical Society in conjunction with the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society... [in response to] Park Commissioner Robert Moses's proposal... The resolution called for...setting up a permanent board to act on such questions in the future. *(New York Times, May 29, 1941)*

Support for preservation continued to grow. Shock and disbelief at the twin losses of the stunning, Beaux-Arts style Brokaw houses on Fifth Avenue at East 79th Street and the glorious neo-Classical Penn Station in Midtown Manhattan helped bring the fight before the public. After much political back and forth, New York City created the board proposed a quarter century earlier – Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr. signed the Landmarks Law in April 1965. The new Landmarks Preservation Commission held its first designation hearing on September 21st.



Mayor Robert F. Wagner signing the Landmarks Law, 1965 (photo: Margot Gayle)

The Landmarks Commission: Necessary But Not Sufficient

A Landmark Law

...even with the law, New York's past will be hard to preserve.... 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. *(Editorial, New York Times, April 27, 1965)*

Today, the Commission holds jurisdiction over roughly 40,000 buildings including some 1400 individual landmarks, more than 120 interior landmarks, 11 scenic landmarks, and more than 150 historic districts encompassing roughly 37,000 sites. A 1978 Supreme Court decision upholding the City's right to designate and regulate Grand Central Terminal settled the question of the Commission's constitutional legitimacy.

Yet, during its earliest years, the Commission seemed uncertain of its powers, and hesitated to take on battles for major monuments with no clear financial future. The Commission notably declined to hold a hearing on Ernest Flagg's splendid Singer Tower – one of the City's most significant early skyscrapers and once the world's tallest building – specifically because of economics.

Landmark On Lower Broadway To Go

Asked yesterday why [the Commission didn't designate the building, the Executive Director said:] "If the building were made a landmark, we would have to find a buyer for it or the city would have to acquire it. The city is not that wealthy and the commission doesn't have a big enough staff to be a real-estate broker for a skyscraper." *(New York Times, August 22, 1967)*

Even with its successfully designated buildings, the Commission ran up against challenges. It heard and designated Grand Central Terminal in 1969, only to see the designation challenged in a ten-year courtroom saga. The designated Laing Stores, New York's oldest surviving cast-iron structures, had to be disassembled to make way for an urban renewal project – its pieces stolen before reassembly could happen.

As one of its very first actions, in October 1965, the Commission did designate as a landmark the U.S. Custom House – Cass Gilbert's elegant, monumental masterpiece at the foot of Broadway – even though its future seemed uncertain. But in 1973, when Customs announced its planned move to the newly constructed World Trade Center, the obstacles to the grand building's survival became overwhelming. The Commission, as a municipal agency, had no formal jurisdiction over a federally owned building. The vast structure had no known future use.

Estimates for its restoration topped \$25 million – in 1970s dollars. On its own, the Landmarks Commission couldn't protect the designated landmark – any more that it could protect the Singer Tower.

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. *(Editorial, New York Times, April 27, 1965)*



Ernest Flagg's splendid Singer Tower, 1906-1908, demolished 1968

Enter the New York Landmarks Conservancy.

The Landmarks Conservancy: A Preservation Partner

Dear Joan: Here's my memorandum on a Landmark [sic] Conservancy.... I haven't gone into much detail and I haven't even touched on the organization and legal and financial technicalities of a Landmark Conservancy Fund. I assume this will be thrashed out by the group you were going to bring together informally. And then, presumably, the details would be worked out over some months by the MAS Ad-Hoc Committee.... (Memo from Simon Breines to Joan Kaplan Davidson, January 24, 1969)

Though officially born in 1973, the Conservancy can trace its gestation to early 1969 – the very year that saw the beginning of the Grand Central lawsuit and the disassembly of the Laing Stores. The Municipal Art Society (MAS) had long supported the concept of historic preservation, and the Conservancy began as a proposal for a new MAS department.

Besides being MAS members, many of the Conservancy's founders had ties to the Landmarks Preservation Commission, and they understood the issues facing the fledgling agency.

Landmark designation, desirable as it is, does not insure preservation. Private owners cannot always be counted on in the face of economic pressures.... At this very moment, designation notwithstanding, the Schermerhorn Row-South Street Seaport project is in serious danger. The Villard Mansions have been given an uneasy reprieve, but who knows what their owners will do tomorrow when land prices go even higher? (Memo from Simon Breines to Joan Kaplan Davidson, January 24, 1969)

In his January memo outlining the need for the Conservancy, architect and MAS board member Simon Breines at first imagined a body that could step into the real-estate market and simply buy endangered historic sites – privately funded preservation. He modeled the organization, and its name, on the Nature Conservancy, which had successfully raised funds to buy outright or accept easements protecting tracts of undeveloped land.

Besides easements, Breines envisioned an emergency fund to buy threatened sites, a revolving fund for long-range projects, and the use of a new Zoning Resolution feature permitting the sale of development rights. He expected to raise funds from "individuals, business, banks and foundations." He addressed

his memo to Joan Kaplan Davidson of the Kaplan Foundation, a major funder of preservation work.

By January of 1971, the group of founders included Breines, Kent Barwick (then executive director of the MAS, later LPC chairman), Terence H. Benbow (lawyer and LPC commissioner), Richard H. Buford (of Uris Brothers, a major real-estate developer), and William "Holly" Whyte (urbanist and later author of *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*), joined shortly by Michael S. Gruen (MAS member, Chairman of the Historic Districts Council and author of the 1973 amendments to the Landmarks Law) and Geoffrey Platt (architect and first LPC Chairman). Within a few months the group had expanded to include, among others, Philip Johnson (architect famously on the picket line protesting the demolition of Penn Station), Russell Lynes (art and architecture historian, author, and early LPC member), and Whitney North Seymour, Sr. (lawyer, MAS board member, and preservation advisor to Mayor Wagner). They were joined, finally, by Brendan Gill (*New Yorker* writer who would go on to lead the Conservancy from 1973 to 1983) and Ada Louise Huxtable (Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic of the *New York Times* and author of many unsigned pro-preservation editorials).

The Conservancy emerged as an independent non-profit organization in October 1971. Michael Gruen, as attorney for the group, submitted a Certificate of Incorporation for the "New York Landmarks Conservancy, Inc.," signed by Messrs. Breines, Gill and Whyte. This document laid out the founders' vision for the new organization.

The Conservancy's founders did not see the new body as a substitute for or rival to the Landmarks Commission, but rather as a separate organization that could rally support, locate funding, and organize long-range plans for specific buildings facing troubled futures. As a private non-profit, it would have a different focus than the official City agency, with different tools available for the work – but would share the same goals. The Conservancy would accomplish these goals by acquiring property, providing technical assistance for restoration projects, providing financing – grants, loans or otherwise – to assist such projects, and "promoting public awareness" of landmark preservation.

Organizing the new non-profit took another two years, but on April 11, 1973, the Conservancy officially launched – just in time to join a group of organizations battling for the future of the vacant U.S. Custom House. A more intractable first challenge could scarcely be imagined.

Help Save Landmarks - Stay Informed

Sign-up for our alerts and newsletter
visit nylandmarks.org



The First Years

"In an ever-changing city, we constantly need to fight to preserve our unique architectural and cultural history. That's why the New York Landmarks Conservancy has been so critical in our efforts to preserve both buildings and districts that animate that heritage. The results of your thoughtful advocacy are spread throughout New York City, and in every historic building and neighborhood that has been preserved for future generations."

- City Planning Commission Chair and former City Council Member Daniel R. Garodnick

U.S. Custom House (photo: Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian)

II. The First Years

Reimagining the Custom House



U.S. Custom House (photo: Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian)

The Landmarks Conservancy is being launched at a most propitious time. The present “soft” real estate market affords us the opportunity to get properly braced and funded for the inevitable assault on New York’s remaining landmarks. One of our first and most significant possibilities is the U.S. Custom House... which has been offered to the City and which the Conservancy might well acquire and manage. (Memo from Simon Breines, Brendan Gill and Holly White to the other founders, March 28, 1973)

Led by its newly hired director, Anthony J. Newman, the Conservancy joined a sizable, well-established group already focused on salvaging this extraordinary monument, including the Architectural League of New York, the City’s Office of Lower Manhattan Development, and the newly formed Custom House Institute, a group of downtown businessmen including David Rockefeller, James Wolfensohn and Robert W. Sarnoff as well as Mayor John Lindsay, Cyrus Vance, and Whitney North Seymour, Sr., all working with the U.S. General Services Administration. Although a brand-new organization with just a tiny staff, the Conservancy soon found its way into the heart of the Custom House issue.

The city...the Federal Government...which owns the building...and the leaders of the downtown business community, are all interested in saving the structure.... The preservation effort has started in earnest with a \$40,000 feasibility study to determine possible future uses and costs of renovation and operation. The money, raised privately, is being administered by the newly formed New York Landmarks Conservancy. (Ada Louise Huxtable, *New York Times*, October 4, 1973)

In many ways, this first battle exemplified much of how the Conservancy would approach its work over the next decade: working in partnership, behind the scenes as necessary; conducting in-depth studies; finding imaginative new uses; raising funds; and building public support with educational programs and promotional events ranging from concerts and art exhibits to grand receptions.

Mayor Lindsay last night presented the Diamond Jubilee Medallion of the City of New York to Ada Louise Huxtable...guest of honor in the old Custom House sponsored by the Architectural League of New York and the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The event was a \$100-a-plate fundraiser to aid the conversion of the former Customs Service headquarters.... Brendan Gill...acted as toastmaster.... (New York Times, December 4, 1973)

Three years later, cleaned and restored though without a final tenant identified, the Custom House reopened – if temporarily – to great acclaim as part of the City’s Bicentennial celebrations.

The United States Custom House on Bowling Green, an opulent monument to New York’s role in sea trade, has been scrubbed and restored until it glows like a pearl.... “We’re opening it as a Bicentennial event,” said Susan Jones, director of the New York Landmarks Conservancy.... Joseph Mitchell, a New Yorker staff member who frequently writes about lower Manhattan, said, “It’s like seeing something that has been dying, slowly dying, coming back to life and saying ‘Live! Live!’” (New York Times, July 1, 1976)

That same year the Conservancy produced the first of its many publications: a booklet about the Custom House written by Brendan Gill, the organization’s first president. The following year, the Conservancy together with several partners sponsored “Custom and Culture,” a series of free events held in the building’s rotunda.

Rainbows are appearing in the old United States Custom House...and sculptures are starting to climb the marble walls. That’s because [the Custom House]...has been transformed into a center for the arts this summer...[with] sculpture and painting, sound and light installations and performances of modern dance, as well as of traditional and avant-garde music.... (New York Times, July 8, 1977)

It would take another two decades – and the support of U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, whom Brendan Gill brought to the cause, and Donald Oresman, Board member both of the

Conservancy and of the Museum of the American Indian – but in 1994 the Museum’s Heye Center, part of the Smithsonian Institution, finally opened in the building’s grand rotunda and surrounding rooms, with federal offices on the upper floors.

The Custom House battle set the tone for the rest of the decade, as the Conservancy tackled some of the City’s most dramatic preservation issues, focusing on highly visible but vulnerable landmarks, mostly in Manhattan. The underlying issues varied from one crisis to the next, leading the Conservancy to adopt a variety of strategies. In some cases, it lobbied City agencies, in others it raised funds for repairs, and in still others it negotiated agreements with owners and developers. In one case the Conservancy bought the endangered properties outright, and in another functioned as the owner of a federally owned building turned over to New York City.

Lobbying the City

At the northern end of Battery Park, Pier A – one of the last of its kind in Manhattan – survived not just with its headhouse but also with a 70-foot-tall clock tower considered the nation’s first World War I memorial – one that struck “Ship’s Time” as in “eight bells and all’s well.”



Pier A, Battery Park, Lower Manhattan

The Department of Marine and Aviation moved out in 1959, leaving the pier vacant. Five years later the City stripped the building of its ornamental pressed-metal facades, and five years after that turned the pier over to the Battery Park City Authority, which prepared to demolish it.

In response, the Conservancy first nominated the structure to the National Register of Historic Places – effectively certifying its historic significance – and then pushed for the local designation that would keep the pier standing.

Pier A in Battery Park, the oldest functioning pier in the city, has been added to the National Register of Historic Places, the New York Landmarks Conservancy announced yesterday. The designation is considered a victory for groups fighting plans to demolish the pier to make way for office space. (New York Daily News, August 15, 1975)

The City agreed to keep the pier intact.

Other City-owned but threatened landmarks required a similar strategy – finding a way to change the City’s mind. The vacant New York County Courthouse – better known as the “Tweed Courthouse” for its infamous association with municipal corruption – had long been slated for demolition as part of a plan to create a new Civic Center. The administration of Mayor Abraham D. Beame (1974-1977) planned to replace it with a Colonial-style structure which it considered more in keeping with the design of City Hall.

Until now, this fine Anglo-Italianate monument to the peculations of the notorious Tweed ring has had few friends. Only architectural oddballs gave a final for its fate. There have been so many threats by so many mayors to demolish it that its very existence is a miracle. (New York Times, July 5, 1978)



Tweed Courthouse rotunda, polychrome brick detailing (photo: Larry Lederman)

Decades of neglect had left the Courthouse a ruin – damaged ornament, a leaking roof, a lost grand staircase on the Chambers Street façade. In 1974, even before the City had officially changed its plans for the building, the one-year-old Conservancy began to address the wreckage, carrying out basic repairs. Four years later, with a more sympathetic administration in City Hall, the Tweed got a new roof.

The New York Landmarks Conservancy...has led the battle to preserve the building.... The roof repair is merely a stopgap measure to keep the rain out. The decision to do a separate, complete rehabilitation of the building was made by city officials in recent days for an estimated \$3 million.... (New York Times, June 14, 1978)

The City finally completed the restoration in 2002, and then looked for an appropriate tenant. One possibility: the Museum of the City of New York. In the end, however, Mayor Michael Bloomberg made it home to the Department of Education and a school. Today the restored landmark stands as one of the Civic Center’s most impressive monuments, complete with a rebuilt grand staircase on Chambers Street.



Tweed Courthouse, rebuilt grand staircase on Chambers Street, Lower Manhattan

Changing Minds One Developer at a Time

Still other efforts required behind-the-scenes negotiations with owners and developers. The complex preservation history of the Villard Houses – the set of row houses, behind St. Patrick’s Cathedral, designed by McKim Mead & White to look like a single Italianate palazzo – involved its owner, the Archdiocese of New York; developer Harry Helmsley; architect Richard Roth Jr. of Emery Roth and Sons; the Landmarks Commission; the local Community Board; and various preservation advocates.



Villard Houses - early view, Madison Avenue (photo: Wikimedia Commons)

The initial plan for a hotel to rise above and behind the Villard Houses – and its impact on the exterior of the buildings – had to pass muster with the Landmarks Commission. The surviving Victorian interiors, however, lacked Landmarks protection, and the initial proposals called for their demolition, including the stunning Gold Room. The Conservancy therefore focused its efforts on their preservation.



Gold Room at the Villard Houses (photo: Angelica Vasquez)

The threatened Gold Room is part of the south wing, which was remodeled by McKim, Mead and White...in the 1890’s. Brendan Gill, who is engaged in a study of Stanford White, calls this “the richest and handsomest set of rooms then in existence in New York and perhaps in the entire country....” The double-height, barrel-vaulted, balconied room with its La Farge murals, sculptured wall detail and generous gold leaf is unequivocally magnificent; it is also the last of its kind in New York. (New York Times, June 22, 1975)

Though Helmsley and his architects argued that preserving the interior was simply impractical, pressure from preservation advocates built, with the Conservancy leading the way.

Leading architectural historians and community leaders interested in saving these houses visited them yesterday on a tour sponsored by the New York Landmarks Conservancy.... Tony Newman, the head of the...Conservancy, said that preservationists need more time to find “an architectural solution....” (New York Times, June 6, 1975)

Eventually succumbing to the pressure, Helmsley and Roth proposed a new plan which kept the Gold Room intact.

The new plan is considered a victory by landmarks preservationists, who had been battling with Mr. Helmsley and the Villard Houses owner, the Archdiocese of New York, since last December.... The plan will be reviewed in detail on Monday by the New York Landmarks Conservancy, a private organization that negotiated with Mr. Helmsley and the archdiocese during the controversy.... Susan Jones, executive director of the conservancy, said that the group was “delighted” at the redesign.... (New York Times, September 6, 1975)

Though he had furiously fought against the solution, Helmsley eventually changed his mind, and later said that he was carried “kicking and screaming” into the preservation movement.

It was, without doubt, a difficult and costly undertaking, but Mr. Helmsley is the first to admit that the results justified the money and effort.... “What started as a commercial venture,” he says proudly, “ended as a work of art.”(Ada Louise Huxtable, New York Times, October 19, 1980)



Fraunces Tavern block, 1907 (photo: Fraunces Tavern Museum)

Landmark Owner of Last Resort

Most dramatically, in several battles the Conservancy adopted the role its founders had initially imagined, by purchasing endangered properties.



Fraunces Tavern, 2022

In 1974, while Fraunces Tavern stood firmly in place, demolition began on the five vacant and decaying 19th-century commercial buildings next door – most built before the Civil War, and all in fact older than the recreated Tavern. Still a tiny organization, the Conservancy stepped in, arranged a temporary halt to the work, commissioned re-use feasibility studies, raised the necessary funds, and after four years of complex negotiations bought all five buildings.

The signing over of the deeds...took place over Madeira and biscuits in the Flag Room of the tavern at noon.... The Conservancy raised the amount needed for the purchase with a \$250,000 grant from the Astor Foundation.... Brooke Astor, the foundation’s president, signed the check over to the Conservancy as the first glasses of madeira were being passed. (New York Times, May 6, 1978)

That same year, at the Conservancy’s request, the Landmarks Commission designated the Fraunces Tavern Block Historic District. The Conservancy then selected a developer and a restoration plan and watched as the block became the first major residential/commercial conversion in the decades-long transformation of the Financial District into today’s mixed-use neighborhood coexisting with Wall Street skyscrapers. Meanwhile, in 1980, the Conservancy sponsored an archeological dig beneath one of the buildings that rested on 17th-century landfill, discovering thousands of artifacts from the area’s past.

By far the largest project – and one which would underwrite the Conservancy’s work for years to come – was the conversion

of the massive, federally-owned City landmark known as the Archive Building, occupying an entire block in the West Village.

Built in the 1890s as the United States Appraisers' Store, a Romanesque Revival warehouse for imports awaiting Customs inspection, and later known as the United States Federal Archive Building, it housed various federal records until, in 1975, the General Services Administration (GSA) declared the building surplus property. GSA offered it to the City, and – thanks to GSA's experience with the Custom House as well as to the influence of Senator Moynihan – looked to the Landmarks Conservancy for guidance on what to do with it, in line with a federal law that encouraged the transfer of historic properties to local governments so long as the project served a preservation purpose.

A huge, federally owned landmark building...is being given up by the Federal Government, and community leaders, preservationists and city officials are seeking to develop a plan for its use.... The New York Landmarks Conservancy...is playing a key role in drawing up proposals for the building....
(New York Times, May 19, 1976)

The Conservancy undertook a feasibility study, met with various governmental agencies as well as the local Community Board, solicited development proposals, chose a developer, and guided the complex project over the next decade.



The Archive Building, 666 Greenwich Street (photo: Noël Sutherland)

The Archive Building's apartments finally opened for rental in 1988. But more than just shepherding an adaptive reuse project for an imposing historic structure, the project put the Conservancy's finances on an entirely new footing, by funding its new revolving loan program to aid historic preservation projects throughout New York.

Some \$3.5 million in the project's \$52 million budget will go to create the New York City Historic Property Fund, a revolving loan fund for landmarks that will be monitored by the city and the nonprofit New York Landmarks Conservancy. In addition, 8% of all commercial rents over the life of the lease will go into the property fund, which is being set up to protect and aid landmarks all over the city. The first check of \$500,000 has already been handed over to start the fund.
(New York Daily News, January 14, 1982)

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of these early rescues is that the Conservancy was working on all of them more or less at the same time. But even in the midst of the whirlwinds, the Conservancy also focused on the future. What other vulnerable, as yet unrecognized landmarks still stood unprotected? What other tools might be developed to protect them?



Historic Properties Fund's 40th Anniversary party on the roof of the Archive Building in 2022 (photo: Noël Sutherland)



Expanding Horizons

"The grants that the Landmarks Conservancy has awarded to hundreds of New York congregations have clearly been transformative, both in the preservation of important buildings and in the renewal of vital communities... the leverage of these grants has been astonishing, so that the Landmarks Conservancy's investment has helped to gather a half-billion dollars of other support."

- Michael Gilligan former President of the Henry Luce Foundation

III. Expanding Horizons

Within a few years of launching, the Conservancy began to expand its activities in line with the ideals laid out in its incorporation papers, supporting historic preservation by providing resources – both financial and professional – through a variety of programs. The decade from 1975 to 1986 saw a blossoming of new initiatives.

Nobody knows New York. Its streets are a journey of architectural discovery. The city is full of buildings of every style, of which the majority are unrecorded and unsung. In fact, New York City has just been told by the New York Landmarks Conservancy that it is host to over 4,000 public buildings of a surprisingly high level of design.... This revealing inventory destroys the durable belief that except for a few landmark structures New York has little of architectural distinction. *(New York Times, July 18, 1976)*

One of the Conservancy's first ventures combined education and advocacy in a major architectural survey. Two of the Conservancy's most visible projects – the Custom House and the Archives Building – involved public buildings. Recognizing that the City must be host to many more such sites of architectural and historic value, in 1975 the Conservancy undertook a city-wide survey to find them.



123rd Precinct Police Station, 116 Main Street, Staten Island (photo: Jerry Spear)



Engine Co. 255 / Ladder Co. 157 at 1367 Rogers Ave, Brooklyn (photo: Jerry Spear)



Former P.S. 17 designed by C.B.J. Snyder, now City Island Nautical Museum
190 Fordham Road, City Island, Bronx (photo: Jerry Spear)



PUBLIC BUILDINGS INVENTORY New York Landmarks Conservancy

Cover of the Public Buildings Inventory (photo: Jerry Spear)

Perhaps the most remarkable fact about the Public Buildings Inventory is that it has only now come into existence.... What the Inventory establishes for the first time is that the three branches of government own many hundreds of lesser-known buildings of substantial architectural merit. *(Introduction, Public Buildings Inventory, June 1977)*

Understaffed for such a project, the Conservancy took the same approach to the survey as it did to the Custom House and Archive Building campaigns: build a partnership and find funding.

With financial support from the New York State Council on the Arts, Chase Manhattan Bank, and the New York Community Trust, the Conservancy created a Board Committee on Public Buildings and turned to The Center for Advanced Research in Urban and Environmental Affairs of the Graduate School of Architecture & Planning at Columbia University. Led by Alexander Cooper, but in close consultation with Conservancy staff, a study group carried out the survey.

We wish to give special acknowledgment to Brendan Gill...whose passion and vision have sustained us all in this effort. *(Introduction, Public Buildings Inventory, June 1977)*

Working from a list of more than 28,000 government-owned structures, the group whittled down the number to 760 potential candidates for preservation across all five boroughs, including schools, hospitals, fire houses, police stations, public libraries, and more. Only 65 buildings on the list had been designated landmarks, with another 13 in historic districts – many more have since joined them. In the summer of 1976, the Conservancy followed up the survey with an exhibition of photos mounted in the Custom House rotunda, part of the effort to demonstrate the viability of the rotunda for such events.

The Conservancy's study...makes it clear that specific, practical programs by qualified private groups can be extremely valuable to a city that must set its priorities by the limited funds and personnel available. The Conservancy plans to follow up this survey with a pilot rehabilitation project. This is a better way of dealing with the city's future than by the wringing of hands. *(New York Times, November 12, 1976)*

A dozen more surveys and studies would follow: a survey of endangered designated landmarks (1977); a firehouse survey (1980); a survey of Midtown Manhattan (1986).

Ninety-seven New York City firehouses are being surveyed by the Office for Metropolitan History for a new type of district for the National Register of Historic Places. "This will be one of the first 'thematic district' surveys in New York," said Christopher Gray, Director of the research firm.... The study [is] sponsored and administered by the New York Landmarks Conservancy. *(The Westsider, May 24, 1979)*

The Conservancy has also conducted surveys of issues affecting landmarks: a study of the economic impacts of the newly enacted Tax Reform Act (1977); a survey of deterioration in New York State religious properties (1984); a survey of 11 vacant city-owned buildings (1990); a conditions survey of 29 former medical buildings on Ellis Island (1996).

The Conservancy is carving a role for itself as protector of the architectural treasures of the City, and...there seems to be an underlying agreement that preservation needs its spokespeople, and a private group such as the Conservancy plays a constructive role. *(The Villager, August 18, 1977)*

Public Buildings Inventory
In 1975, The Conservancy commissioned a survey of 760 government-owned buildings within the City.

Historic Preservation Easements, 1979

Early on, the Conservancy began accepting donations of property easements, effectively acquiring a say over the fate of historic buildings or sites without actually owning them.

Building owners donate easements to the Conservancy generally in exchange for a federal income tax deduction, but sometimes just to get an extra level of protection for their buildings. The easements then empower the Conservancy to ensure the sites' proper maintenance and preservation. The first easement, donated in 1979, covered a townhouse on Riverside Drive. Today the Conservancy holds 44 easements, ranging from India House to The Plaza, all of whose owners consult with the Conservancy on any project affecting the protected portions of the site. Conservancy staff regularly inspect every easement property to ensure the sites are being well maintained.



India House on Hanover Square (photo: Wikimedia Commons)

India House sold its air rights for an undisclosed, substantial sum to the developers of [a] new office tower. As part of the deal, India House gave a preservation easement to the Landmarks Conservancy. (Historic Preservation, March 1982)

Enforcement does sometimes become necessary. India House, built in the early 1850s as Hanover Bank, is a rare surviving Italianate-style bank building faced in brownstone. In the early 2000s, Conservancy staff found the building in serious need of restoration. It took the threat of legal action, but eventually India House agreed to make the necessary repairs. Conservancy staff oversaw the work and helped arrange financing for the project.

St. Ann and the Holy Trinity, 1979

In 1979, the preservation campaign for a deteriorating Gothic Revival church helped lead to the founding of a separate department within the Conservancy, devoted to providing technical expertise to building owners. It also offered a preview of what would soon become a major initiative: support for historic religious properties.

Historic Church Is 'Adopted'

One of Brooklyn's architectural gems, the Church of St. Ann and the Holy Trinity in Brooklyn Heights...in bad need of repair...has been "adopted" by the New York Landmarks Conservancy.... (New York Daily News, November 19, 1980)



St. Ann and the Holy Trinity Church, Brooklyn Heights (photo: Wikimedia Commons)

The preservation of historic and architecturally significant religious properties has posed some of the thorniest issues facing historic preservation, both in New York and across the country. Churches and synagogues often find themselves with venerable but expensive buildings, while facing a devastating combination of shrinking membership, declining endowments, and deferred maintenance. In 1979, the Conservancy tackled one of its first such challenges, the Church of St. Ann and the Holy Trinity in Brooklyn Heights, not just as an individual project, but as a potential model for future such efforts.

Built in 1847 to designs by Minard Lafever, St. Ann and the Holy Trinity ranks with Trinity Church on Wall Street as a major Gothic Revival masterpiece. It also boasts 60 enormous stained-glass windows, among the very first made in the country, by William Jay Bolton. On opening day, the *Brooklyn Eagle* enthused about the glass: "gorgeous splendor," "life-like figures," "vivid colors," "dazzling."



Stained glass window at St Ann and the Holy Trinity Church, Brooklyn Heights

By the 1970s the church had fallen on hard times, and its once-dazzling windows had begun to deteriorate – several had fallen out and shattered on the floor.

...experts say its windows are a treasure to rival the stained-glass glories of Canterbury Cathedral in England and Chartres Cathedral in France. "I caught a fallen angel out of the clerestory just as it was disappearing into the woodwork – literally – because the woodwork is hollow and this one was on its way down," said Mel Greenland, president of Greenland Studios, Inc....[handling the] glass conservation and restoration. (Associated Press, August 19, 1981)

In a decades-long association with St. Ann's, the Landmarks Conservancy organized a fund-raising campaign for a multi-million-dollar restoration, drew up plans for the church's capital improvements, and oversaw the restoration work.

The Vincent Astor Foundation has approved a grant of \$100,000.... Mrs. Vincent Astor...was struck by the quiet beauty of the Church, and...by the quality of the remarkable stained-glass windows. Also apparent was the glaring sun, shining through broken panes.... (Brooklyn Heights Press, April 17, 1980)

A \$316,000 grant from New York State created a Stained-Glass Conservation Studio in the church building, established in partnership with the World Monuments Fund.

Saving the windows is as simple as shutting a ventilator...and as subtle as divining Bolton's intentions where pieces of glass are missing. Where paint is peeling or decayed, it will be stabilized. Where new paint is needed, it will be placed on new glass which will be plated against the original. All of the lead which joins the pieces of glass will be replaced. (Associated Press, August 19, 1981)

The Conservancy also conducted a feasibility study to identify various additional uses for the building, leading to the establishment of Art at St. Ann's, a performing arts program. And as for the stained glass:

...the result [of stained-glass restoration] can be tremendously gratifying, to judge from the experience of the Episcopal Church of St. Ann and the Holy Trinity... where parishioners burst into applause – and tears – on the unveiling of the first three restored windows. (New York Times, December 23, 1988)

The Conservancy supervised decades of restoration work at St. Ann's through its newly created Preservation Services program and funded brownstone and stained-glass restoration work at the Church through its Historic Properties Fund.

Preservation Services, 1979

Having problems with your terra cotta? Is your sandstone giving you plenty of trouble? Need a facelift for your façade? The Technical Preservation Services Center of the New York Landmarks Conservancy provides free technical advice.... Don't be put off by the fancy title. This outfit deals in bricks and mortar.... (Daily News, June 19, 1988)

Bricks and mortar would be just the beginning. Cast-iron columns, brownstone stoops, slate roofs; terra-cotta ornament, casement windows, pressed-metal cornices, cast-stone lintels. Half a century ago, the old crafts had largely died out. Building owners and contractors – no matter how well-meaning – had few places to turn for technical advice until the Conservancy established its Preservation Services program (originally Technical Preservation Services Center, later Technical Services Center) with funding from the J.M. Kaplan Fund.

The program provides preservation assistance to private, public, and non-profit owners, either pro bono or fee-for-service.

Assistance ranges from assessing building conditions, determining needed repairs and estimating costs, to helping select architects and contractors, to supervising projects from start to finish.

Over the decades Preservation Services has advised on work at such prominent landmarks as

- India House (2002)
- Original City Hall subway station (2003)
- Museum of the City of New York (2004)
- Shrine of Mother Elizabeth Seton (2006)
- TWA Terminal at JFK (2007 and beyond)
- Renwick Ruins and the Chapel of the Good Shepherd on Roosevelt Island (2008 and beyond)
- The Plaza (2010 and beyond)
- Castle Williams on Governors Island (2011)
- Andrew Freedman Home on the Grand Concourse (2012)
- Bronx General Post Office (2013 and beyond)
- Gould Memorial Library at Bronx Community College (2015 and beyond)
- Brooklyn Historical Society (2016)
- National Arts Club on Gramercy Park (2017)
- Brooklyn Heights Promenade (2018)
- Weeksville Center in Brooklyn (2019)
- Louis Armstrong House in Corona (2020)

But quite as important as the major landmarks are the thousands of less-well-known sites that fill the City's neighborhoods and historic districts.

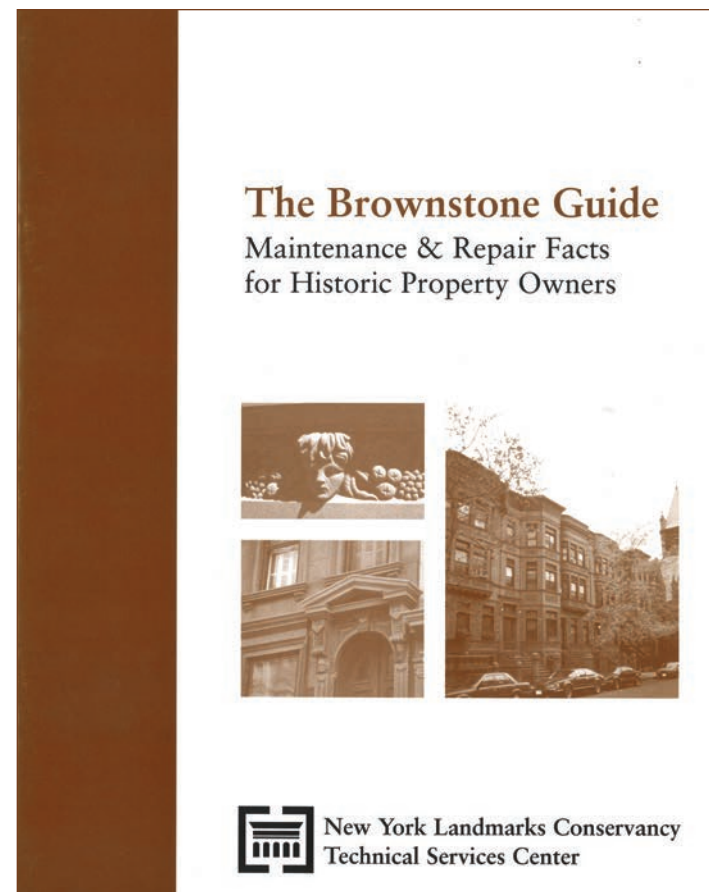
Do you have a building-restoration question? The New York Landmarks Conservancy runs a free "Technical Preservation Services" hotline. While... their conservationist can't diagnose all home-renovating ills over the phone, he'll hazard a guess on simple questions and direct you to people who can help if you stump him. (*Daily News, August 12, 1993*)

In the Conservancy's early years, conservation issues and techniques that today seem well established weren't nearly so well-known.

Sandstone, better known locally as brownstone, was a popular building material in New York.... Old newspaper accounts show that as early as the 1880's New Yorkers recognized that the brownstone facades of their town houses were not weathering well.... No solutions to the problem were found back then, but today, when preserving those town houses has become a high priority, solutions have become a pressing need. (*New York Times, December 5, 1982*)

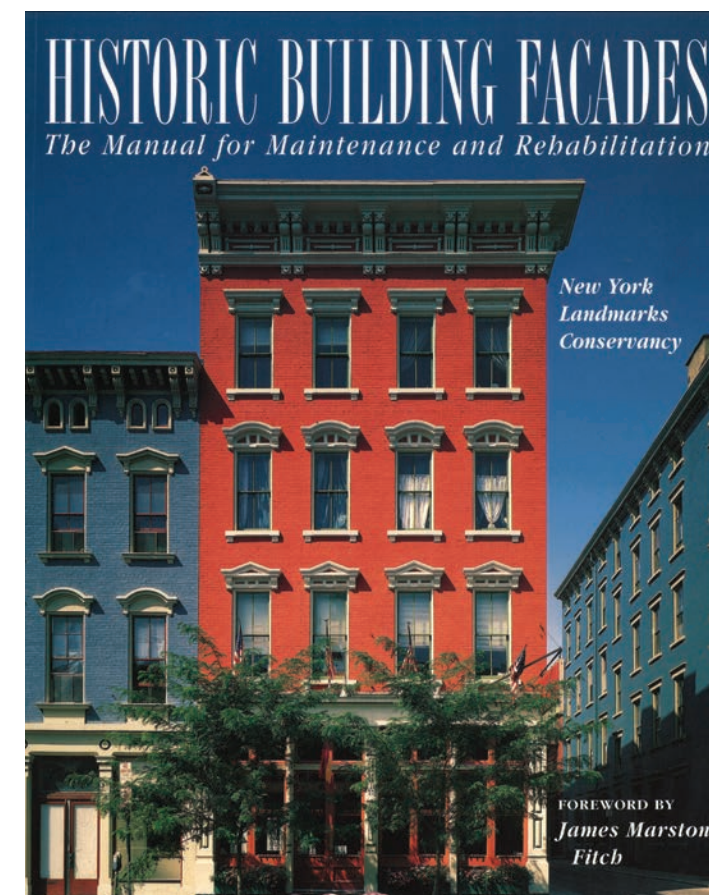
Brownstone owners started turning to Preservation Services for advice about how to repair the crumbling or spalling sandstone of their facades – advice freely given. But the Conservancy didn't stop there. Recognizing the need for more wide-spread knowledge, in 1979 the newly created program commissioned a study of the subject and used the resulting 150-page report as the basis for a guide for homeowners published in 1983.

The New York Landmarks Conservancy's new guide, "The Maintenance and Repair of Architectural Sandstone," helps...homeowners recognize the signs and causes of decay and shows how to protect sandstone, repair and replace it. For a copy, send \$1.50 to the N.Y. Landmarks Conservancy... (*Daily News, March 3, 1983*)



Cover of The Brownstone Guide

With the sandstone guide out, the Conservancy turned to the question of entire facades. A new City law of 1980, intended to protect pedestrians from falling masonry by mandating periodic inspection and maintenance, had had the unintended effect of encouraging owners to strip historic facades of their characteristic details. The Conservancy commissioned a special study to counter that trend.

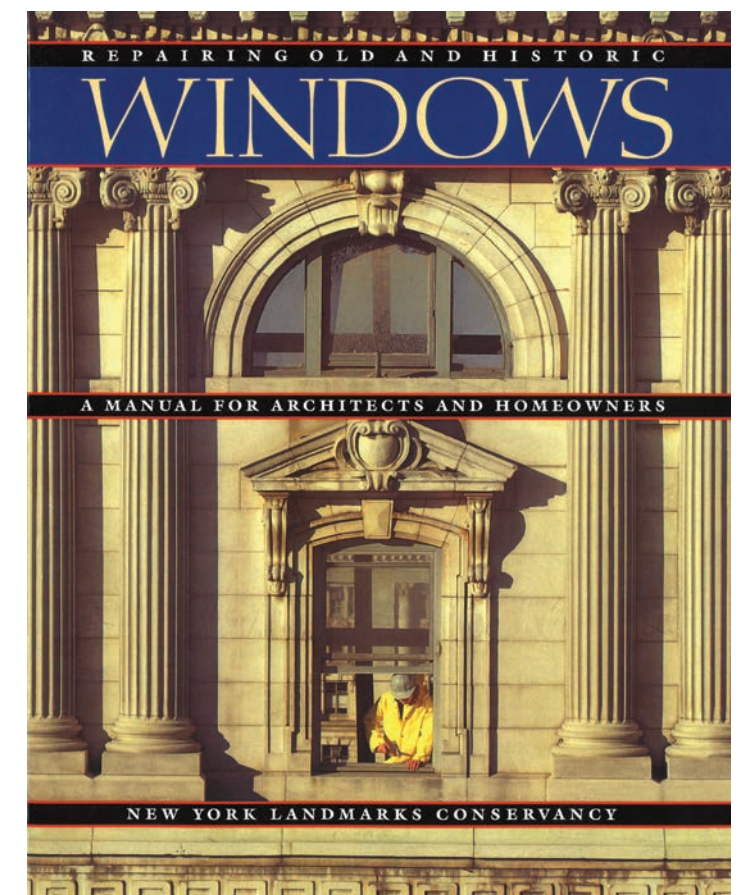


Cover of Historic Building Facades

To comply with the law, building owners began denuding facades of ornamentation. Such decorative details as gargoyles, cornices, parapets and balconies were destroyed to reduce the risk of mishaps. In the hope of preventing further defacement of New York's architecture, the New York Landmarks Conservancy recently issued "Historic Building Facades: A Manual for Inspection and Rehabilitation." The 165-page book, written in nontechnical language, is designed to educate the public on the protection and repair of façade components... (*New York Times, January 29, 1987*)

In several instances, the program's work has had nationwide distribution and impact, thanks to a partnership with the National Parks Service. Cast-iron architecture – anything from storefronts to entire buildings – can be found across the country, but nowhere as commonly as in New York City, home to the major 19th-century iron foundries. In the fall of 1991, the Conservancy and the Parks Service hosted a two-day-long conference on the topic.

In conjunction with the conference, the Conservancy and the Parks Service produced a new guide, *The Maintenance and Repair of Architectural Cast Iron*. The Parks Service published it in its series of "Preservation Briefs" which have a national readership. A second joint publication, *Removing Graffiti from Historic Masonry*, also appeared as a Preservation Brief.



Cover of Repairing Old and Historic Windows

In 1992 the National Trust for Historic Preservation published *Repairing Old and Historic Windows: A Manual for Architects and Homeowners* based on a 1985 Conservancy study.

Care and Feeding of Cast-Iron Buildings

In a workshop that is likely to attract architects, preservationists and building contractors from across the nation, the New York Landmarks Conservancy and the National Parks Service are co-sponsoring two days of seminars and tours that focus on the maintenance and repair of cast-iron buildings...[including] façade restoration, inspection procedures [and] paint selection...led by several specialists in the field, including architects and scholars from Utah, Texas, Alabama and New York. (*New York Times, September 8, 1991*)

How do old windows compare to today's replacement windows with respect to quality of construction, physical performance, and maintenance? Can old windows be upgraded to meet contemporary performance standards?... The data compiled by the study were transformed into a research report...under the direction of the Technical Preservation Services Center of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. (*Repairing Old and Historic Windows: A Manual for Architects and Homeowners, 1992*)

Preservation Services staff address everything from minor alterations to emergency demolition orders. In 2010, a small explosion caused by a broken gas line in a brownstone at 331 MacDonough Street in Stuyvesant Heights roused out the residents and brought in the Fire Department. The Buildings Department then issued a demolition order on both the building and its damaged neighbor at No. 329.

A botched contracting job has left eight residents... homeless and imperiled the future of a landmarked block famous for its immaculate brownstones.... The building's gas line was smashed when a wall collapsed on it during a renovation job next door at 329 MacDonough St.... Buildings Department officials said things went wrong...[during] illegal excavation work in the cellar...causing the wall collapse that left both buildings uninhabitable. Now, the Buildings Department wants to demolish both buildings to save the rest of the brownstones on the landmarked block.... (Daily News, January 25, 2010)

The owner of No. 329 went to court to ask for a delay until a structural engineer could offer an alternative. His neighbors came out in support because they didn't want to see the block disfigured.

"We're all here to protect the neighborhood," said [a neighbor].... "We work so hard to make the block beautiful.... They can't knock down those buildings." (Daily News, January 25, 2010)

Thanks to Conservancy staff, the buildings still stand. The Preservation Services director went to investigate, realized the buildings did not need to be demolished, went to court with the owner to get the stay on the demolition order, and convinced the Department of Buildings to let the Conservancy bring in a company to shore up the building.



Repair work at 329 and 331 MacDonough Street

Excavation work at 329 caused the Department of Buildings to order it and No. 331 demolished in January, alarming neighborhood groups. But the New York Landmarks Conservancy and others jumped in with assistance for stabilization work, and it looks as if the row will remain unbroken. (New York Times, February 28, 2010)

Preservation Services today averages 200 calls each year asking for expert advice and referrals, which staff make pro bono.

New York City Historic Properties Fund, 1982

Get loans for historic properties

Loans are now available for the preservation, restoration or rehabilitation of historic properties...the New York City Historic Properties Fund announced this week.... "A city small or big has to preserve its heritage," Mayor Koch said about the fund. "Doing that costs money. These monies, which add to the limited pool available for preserving our architectural heritage, are very valuable dollars." (Daily News, October 2, 1983)

Those valuable dollars came from the first revolving loan fund in New York City devoted to historic preservation. Financed by proceeds from the Archive Building redevelopment, the new Historic Properties Fund provided a substantial new funding source for preservation projects.

A separate, not-for-profit corporation, the Fund answers to a Board of Directors with members appointed by both the City and the Landmarks Conservancy, but Conservancy staff manage the program.

The Fund's first official loan went to a storied, pre-Civil War church in Greenwich Village.

The vaulted ceiling over the sanctuary of a 158-year-old landmark church near Washington Square in the Greenwich Village Historic District will be the first project financed by a new loan fund set up to preserve historic buildings. (New York Times, September 25, 1983)

Built in 1859, the Washington Square United Methodist Church had a twin-towered white marble façade, one of the few examples left in New York of the early Romanesque Revival, and a handsomely stenciled vaulted ceiling that suffered from water damage and deferred maintenance. The Fund provided the Church a \$45,000 low-interest loan, to be repaid within five years.



Former Washington Square United Methodist Church (converted to residential use in 2005)

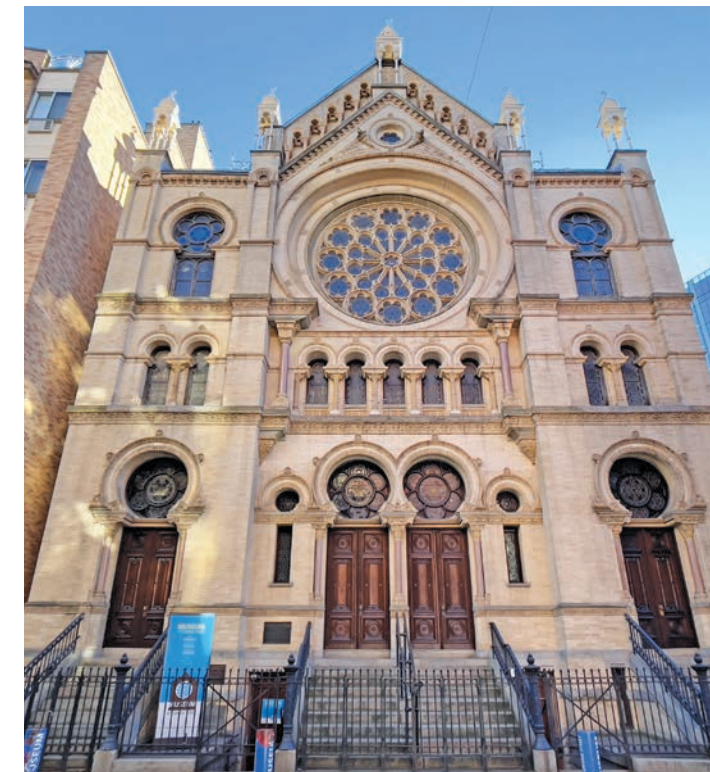
The loan...will pay for part of a larger renovation, said the Rev. Paul Abels, its pastor. "We applied to the fund because their terms were less than half the going market rate and also because the money came with a lot of advice and counsel in the restoration process..." (New York Times, September 25, 1983)

Another early loan went to the Eldridge Street Synagogue on the Lower East Side.

A silence of 50 years was broken gently...as the elegant, long-abandoned sanctuary of the Eldridge Street Synagogue was rededicated yesterday.... Three days before the Jewish New Year, people...filled the sanctuary once again to mark the completion of the basic work needed to keep the building standing while more intricate restoration proceeds.... A number of organizations [helped] to raise the nearly \$100,000 in grants and loans needed...[including] the New York Landmarks Conservancy.... (New York Times, September 24, 1984)



Eldridge Street Synagogue interior, before restoration

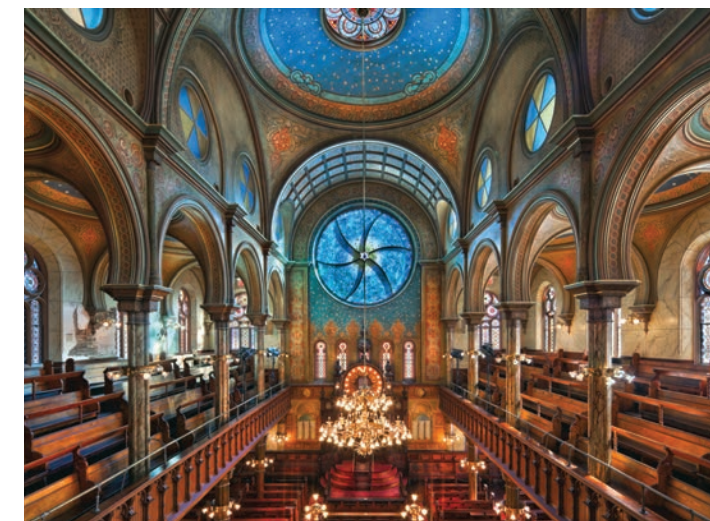


Eldridge Street Synagogue, after restoration

Historic Properties Fund

Since 1982, the Fund has assisted over 275 buildings. It is one of the largest, private revolving loan funds in the country used exclusively for historic preservation.

Loans generally apply to exterior work or structural repairs and range from \$80,000 to \$300,000.



Eldridge Street Synagogue interior, after restoration (photo: Peter Aaron/OTTO)

For major restoration projects, no single source of funding can hope to cover all the costs – but significant loans from the Fund combined with support from other sources can be remarkably fruitful.

Early on, the Fund focused on low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. In 1985, it started taking on projects in Fort Greene and Clinton Hill, and since then has made more than \$6 million in loans for some 80 projects in those two neighborhoods.

“The longevity of the [Historic Properties Fund] program has allowed the Conservancy to make a meaningful impact on our community,” said Deb Howard, former executive director of IMPACCT Brooklyn, also known as the Pratt Area Community Council, and a longtime resident of Fort Greene/Clinton Hill. To date, HPF has helped 84 property owners in that area of Brooklyn restore and maintain their buildings. (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, February 4, 2022)

The owners of the Italianate/Neo-Grec row house at 39 Clifton Place in Clinton Hill, built in 1876, took out a first loan of \$135,000 in 2006 to restore the façade. On starting the project, they discovered that first they would need to reinforce the foundation and floor joists of the corner commercial space and restore the storefront. A second loan in 2018 of \$290,000 made possible the completion of the project: restoring the brownstone façade, creating replicas of historic window surrounds, repairing and refinishing the cornices, and restoring the storefront on Grand Avenue modeled on historic photos.



Continuing its strategy of focusing on specific areas of the City, starting in 1991 the Fund loaned more than \$3 million for some 30 projects in Harlem neighborhoods including the Mount Morris Park and Hamilton Heights/Sugar Hill Historic Districts.

The Fund also reached out to areas that could benefit from its services but hadn't done so yet, notably the borough of Queens.

People in Queens don't apply for the New York Landmarks Conservancy's preservation loans – and nobody knows why.... So the Conservancy, which has \$1.5 million to give out citywide, is targeting Queens: Ridgewood, Hunters Point, Jackson Heights, Richmond Hill, Steinway, Old Astoria, Kew Gardens and Sunnyside Gardens. If you don't live there, but have an older, architecturally interesting house, call the Conservancy anyway, said Peg Breen, the group's president. (New York Times, September 3, 1995)

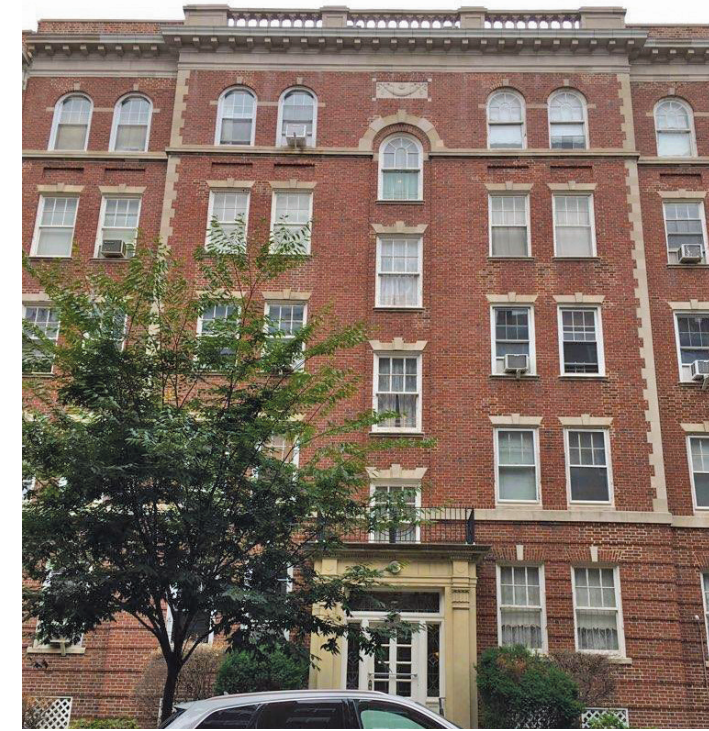
The strategy worked – Queens now participates enthusiastically in the program. Jackson Heights in particular has taken advantage of the Historic Properties Fund. The historic district there is known for its garden apartments built as the core of a planned garden suburb. Early development in the 1910s and 1920s created clusters of identically designed five-story buildings – each a separate cooperative, but all surrounding and sharing a common internal garden.

By 2020, the early co-ops faced a variety of maintenance and repair issues. No. 35-55 76th Street, one of the buildings making



39 Clifton Place, Brooklyn before and after restoration

up the cluster forming Hawthorne Court, applied for and received a \$300,000 loan in 2011 for new parapets and cornice, rear fire-escape repairs, window lintel and sill repairs, and chimney and bulkhead repairs. The following year, two other buildings in the complex, 35-19 76th Street and 35-33 76th Street, followed suit.



Hawthorne Court, 76th Street, Jackson Heights

Another early Jackson Heights complex, Hampton Court, followed a similar pattern – an initial loan to one unit in 2007, with more following to different units in 2012 and 2019. Success breeds success as word spreads from one co-op to the next, with co-op owners finding a knowledgeable ally in the Conservancy.

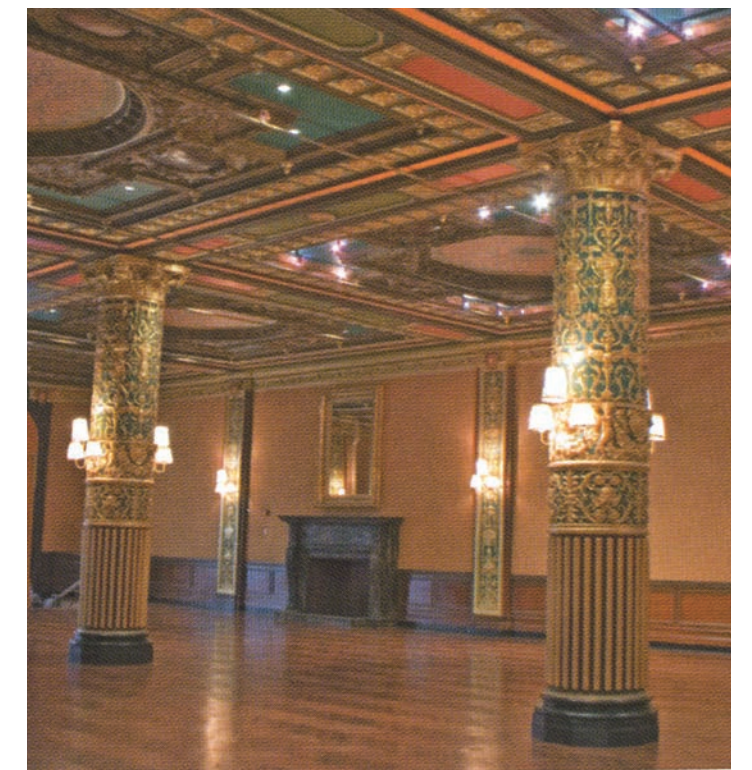
A small self-managed co-op in the Jackson Heights Historic District, in Queens...needed a new roof and extensive brick repointing.... But the co-op didn't have the cash or the expertise to repair a century-old building.... To the rescue came a little-known source of low-interest loans: ...the Historic Properties Fund.... With technical assistance from the conservancy, the co-op repointed bricks and replaced the roof.... “Our board members don't have a lot of construction and building-maintenance expertise” [said board member Mark Kempson] “and prior to this, we were at the mercy of contractors. Not only did the conservancy give us the loan, they gave us architects who are experienced working with landmarked buildings. It was nice working with them.” (www.habitatmag.com April 3, 2020)

The Historic Properties Fund has made loans all across the City, chief among them: the 1817 Federal-style house on Spring Street, home to the quirky “Ear Inn” (2001); a gingerbread Victorian Gothic cottage on Belden Street in City Island (2002); the Kehila Kedosha Janina synagogue on the Lower

East Side, housing the only Romaniote Jewish community in the country (2003); the remarkable Stick-Style 1861 house at One Pendleton Place in Staten Island (2004); the stunning ballroom of the Prince George Hotel on East 28th Street (2005); the Shepard Property at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (2006); St. Philips Episcopal Church in Stuyvesant Heights (2008); the Poppenhusen Institute in College Point (2009); the New York Studio School on West 8th Street, first home of the Whitney Museum of American Art (2014); an Arts-and-Crafts style house on St. Paul's Avenue in Staten Island (2017); and the Fourth Universalist Society on Central Park West (2019).



The Prince George Ballroom, before



The Prince George Ballroom, after

In some cases, the Fund has made a series of loans to borrowers who have demonstrated both the need for the loan and the ability to pay it back after carrying out the work. In 1993, St. Mary's Episcopal Church on West 126th Street in Manhattanville received a loan of \$100,000 together with a \$10,000 grant in 1993 to restore the front and roof of the rectory. In 1998, having paid off that loan, the Church took out another one for \$100,000 to restore the roof of the sanctuary, followed by subsequent loans in 2003 and 2013 for additional work.

St. Mary's Episcopal Church of Manhattanville and the New York Landmarks Conservancy celebrated the...restoration of the church's rectory, a project that received major financing and technical assistance from the Landmarks Conservancy.... "We celebrated the 1851 rectory house's structural and spiritual renewal as a 'homecoming,'" said Rev. Robert W. Castle.... "It's a sign to the neighborhood that St. Mary's will continue to be a servant to the community."
(Amsterdam News, October 22, 1994)



St. Mary's Episcopal Church of Manhattanville

Since its inception, the Historic Properties Fund has made loans and grants totaling \$32,185,236 spread across 275 projects.

Endangered Buildings Fund, 1983

When the recession of the 1970s gave way to the boom years of the 1980s, pent-up demand led to massive redevelopment in New York, and smaller, older buildings – including potential but not yet protected landmarks – made tempting targets.

The city has fallen prey to an attitude that can be called urban Darwinism – the survival of only the most lucrative use of any given plot of land.... The frantic rush of development puts special pressure on landmark buildings, since they are almost by definition not monoliths, and smaller than what is legally permitted on their sites – as well as less profitable.
(Paul Goldberger, New York Times, November 14, 1982)

In August 1981, preservation advocates fought to save the Biltmore Hotel on Vanderbilt Avenue, across the street from Grand Central Terminal. Built at the same time and designed by the same architects as Grand Central, the Biltmore functioned as part of the complex, but unlike the Terminal it wasn't protected by landmark designation. When word got out that the Landmarks Commission considered the Biltmore, or at the least some of its public interiors, potentially eligible for designation, its owners, who had planned to strip it and convert it to an office building, took action.

The Biltmore Hotel, for 68 years a celebrated hub of the Grand Central neighborhood, surprised guests, employees and city landmark officials by closing its doors Friday night and bringing in scores of workers to begin demolition.... City landmarks officials said that the start of the work on wrecking the interior took them by surprise. Private preservation groups responded angrily, and by evening two of them – the New York Landmarks Conservancy and the Municipal Art Society – won...a temporary restraining order....
(New York Times, August 16, 1981)

The work, however, already well underway, had closed off the hotel's legendary Palm Court, and piles of ornamental detail had been stripped from the walls.



Palm Court, the Biltmore Hotel, Vanderbilt Avenue in 1913

Laurie Beckelman, executive director of the Landmarks Conservancy, accompanied the police officers who served the...order last night. "The Palm Court is totally gutted," she said. "All you see is fireproofing. The ceiling is completely gone.... There is nothing left to save," she said.
(New York Times, August 17, 1981)

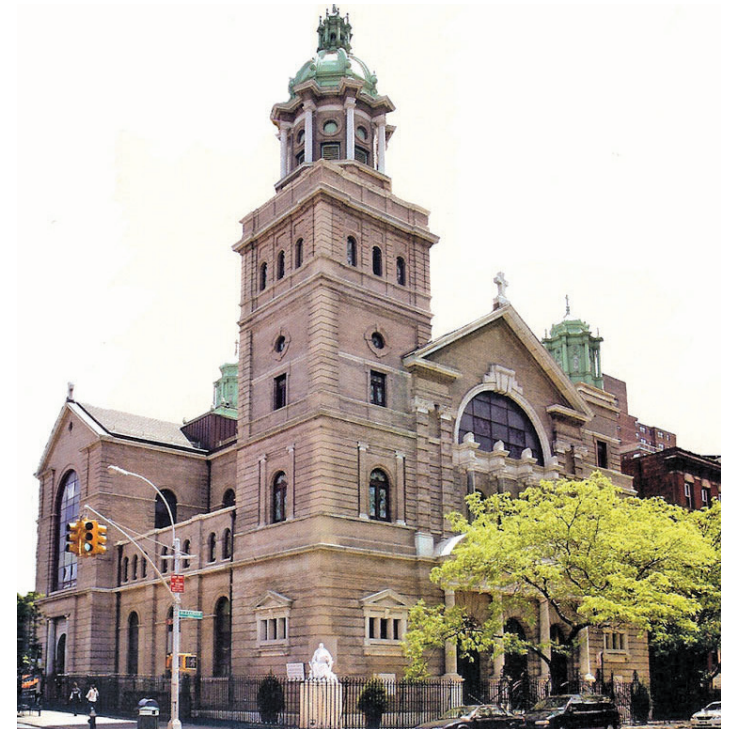
One month later, the Biltmore's owners and the Landmarks Conservancy reached an agreement that, though the building would be stripped and rebuilt as an office building, it would include a reconstructed Palm Court, so long as the Landmarks Commission opted not to designate any part of the building. The Conservancy so testified at the hastily called designation hearing for the surviving Biltmore interiors, and the Commission declined to act.

One year later, however, the agreement fell apart when the architectural firm retained to recreate the Palm Court withdrew, on the grounds that yet more unexpected demolition work had made the project impossible. Reluctantly, the Conservancy cancelled the agreement, in exchange for a \$500,000 contribution from the Biltmore's owners to finance an Endangered Buildings Fund.

The Fund has since been used in cases requiring quick action in response to sudden crises. Financing was instantly available in 1991 to help with repairs to the historic houses of Weeksville when vandals broke in during Christmas week.

In three break-ins between December 23 and Jan.1, thieves ransacked the three wooden houses that were part of the 19th-Century community of free blacks in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The break-ins caused damage estimated at \$44,000, and \$15,000 worth of office equipment was stolen.... The facility has been closed since the incidents. The New York Landmarks Conservancy began the campaign to reopen the project with a pledge of \$25,000 [from the Endangered Buildings Fund].
(Newsday, February 5, 1991)

Neither a program on its own, nor tied to a particular department, the Endangered Buildings Fund functions as a special source of support available to any program within the Conservancy. In 2001, the Conservancy gave a grant to St. Jerome's Roman Catholic Church in Mott Haven in the Bronx through the Sacred Sites program and added \$10,000 from the Endangered Buildings Fund. Together, the grants helped fund a major, \$700,000, dome and roof restoration, ensuring that this immigrant South Bronx parish could continue to assist its community with affordable housing development, nutrition, employment training, English as a second language and youth programs serving more than 2,500 people each year. In 2012, the Conservancy tapped the Endangered Buildings Fund to help with preservation grants to religious properties damaged during Superstorm Sandy.



St. Jerome Church, Mott Haven

Over time, the Endangered Buildings Fund has provided more than \$1.6 million in grants and loans for work on some 75 buildings, including eight grants totaling \$55,000 for Superstorm Sandy-related work.

Brendan Gill made no secret about his unhappiness with the circumstances that created the Fund.

"I would like this fund to memorialize a very unfortunate episode that should not have taken place," said Mr. Gill...
(New York Times, October 6, 1983)

The City certainly lost something of value with the destruction of the Biltmore Hotel. But the Conservancy has used the resulting Fund on select occasions to further the cause of preservation.

Sacred Sites Program, 1986

Special fund is a godsend to churches

About a dozen years ago, the historic Fifteenth Street (Quaker) Meeting House [on Stuyvesant Square]...learned that its windows needed repair or replacement...[that] would cost at least \$78,000.... "We gulped," said Betty Williams, the assistant clerk of the 300-member congregation. "We sat there, frozen in horror." Now that the shock has worn off, Fifteenth Street [will start work]... today, at least symbolically, when it accepts a \$10,000 check from...the Sacred Sites and Properties Fund.
(Daily News, May 17, 1987)

The significance to the City and State of historic houses of worship can scarcely be overstated – these are structures into which communities of every background, denomination and economic level have poured their resources. They stand at their communities' center and in some important sense represent their best. Such buildings often stand out for their size, their location, their carefully chosen materials, and their architectural design.

During the past century and a half religious institutions have increasingly opened their doors to serve as community centers. Often, they provide vital social services and educational and cultural programming.

Call them spiritual beacons, historical anchors or simply architectural statements that help define this huge city's neighborhoods. The fact is that houses of worship stand proudly on countless corners, their importance most apparent when one disappears. (New York Times, August 11, 1996)

At the same time, religious communities have often found themselves economically challenged, with growing maintenance costs and shrinking financial resources – and in possession of a sizable, centrally located site that attracts significant offers from real-estate developers.

Virtually no churches, anywhere, are self-supporting in terms of use versus land values and upkeep and operation; endowments are as shrunken by inflation as membership is by attrition and change.... In New York, underused church properties are threatened in every neighborhood and at every level. (Ada Louise Huxtable, New York Times, November 30, 1975)

The Conservancy had begun focusing on historic houses of worship within a year of its founding – a 1974-75 survey of the state of the City's religious properties, a 1979 partnership with St. Ann and the Holy Trinity Church, the Historic Properties Fund's first loans to Washington Square Methodist and Eldridge Street Synagogue.

The leaders of other churches and synagogues apparently noticed.

In the last year, religious property owners have been a major constituency in need of our expertise. Nearly 20 churches have sought and received technical assistance from us, from fundraising advice to construction management services. (Landmarks Conservancy Newsletter, 1985)

In the meantime, controversy over religious landmarks grew ever more strident. In 1982 the "Committee of Religious Leaders of the City of New York" issued a report challenging the Landmarks Commission's right to designate religious properties, on the grounds of church-state separation. The New York State legislature debated a law exempting such properties from landmark regulations. When in 1985 the Landmarks Commission turned down a development proposal to replace part of the St. Bartholomew's Church complex on Park Avenue with a glass tower, the church took the Commission to court in a saga that continued until 1991 when the Supreme Court declined to take the case.

In 1984, the Conservancy undertook a more detailed study of the economic and physical conditions of New York's religious properties, expanding it into a national study in 1985. That same year, the Conservancy began to publish *Common Bond*, a technical assistance newsletter meant for the stewards of religious properties, covering everything from pigeon and termite control to fundraising strategies.

Finally, in 1986, the Conservancy formalized its efforts by launching the Religious Properties Program, providing both technical support and financial assistance through a newly created Sacred Sites and Properties Fund. Today these combined efforts, plus publication of *Common Bond*, constitute the Sacred Sites program.

Sacred Sites, recipient of a J.M. Kaplan Fund grant of \$100,000, began offering matching grants of up to \$15,000 to cover planning, restoration and capital improvements of religious properties.

Preserving grand, old churches expands the ministry, an Episcopal pastor says concerning a new "Sacred Sites and Properties Fund"... A [Fund] director, the Rev. Thomas F Pike..., says maintaining notable religious sites "can impart a new vitality" to their ministries reaching "far beyond our own congregational boundaries." (Associated Press, May 30, 1986)

One of the new programs' first five grants went to the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of the Transfiguration.

The New York Landmarks Conservancy will present a check for \$10,000 to John Kushwara, president of the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of the Transfiguration, at an 11 a.m. ceremony Sunday at the cathedral... in Greenpoint. The 70-year-old cathedral, with onion-shaped domes characteristic of traditional Russian Byzantine architecture, is undergoing more than \$200,000 in renovations, including extensive repairs to the distinctive copper-covered domes. The money for the renovations comes in part from the conservancy's newly established Sacred Sites and Properties Fund. (Daily News, August 12, 1986)

The four other initial grants went to the College of Mount St. Vincent in the Bronx, St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Harlem, and two other Brooklyn sites: the Reformed Church of South Bushwick, to repair its steeple and bell tower damaged by Hurricane Gloria; and St. Philip's Episcopal Church, for repairs to its spires.



Russian Orthodox Cathedral of the Transfiguration, Williamsburg



St Martin's Episcopal Church, Harlem (photo: Barry Donaldson)

By the end of its first year of operation, the Sacred Sites program had approved a total of \$145,750 in matching grants to 40 applicants. By December 1990 it had approved more than \$775,000 for 165 sites throughout New York State.

The grants by themselves cannot cover all the needs of aging buildings, but they do attract additional support, often substantial. Conservancy grants and loans have helped leverage major State funding of \$100,000 to \$500,000 for dozens of sites throughout the City, including St. James Chapel in Queens, St. Cecilia's Church in East Harlem, the Fourth Universalist Society on Central Park West, the Church of St. Anselm and St. Roch in the Bronx, and Mount Lebanon Baptist Church and the Flatbush Reformed Church in Brooklyn. Upstate, Sacred Sites grants helped leverage substantial State grants for small rural churches, like the Presbyterian Church of Rensselaerville, and large urban churches, such as the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Albany or Trinity Episcopal in Buffalo.

"It's not going to make us or break us," the Rev. J. Douglas Ousley, rector of Church of the Incarnation, said of the [grant] his church received [from the Landmarks Conservancy] for brownstone renovation. "But this grant carries a lot of prestige. People will look at it and say, 'This church must know what it's doing.' " His congregation is contemplating a \$1 million restoration. (New York Times, December 24, 1990)

The program's range extends from grand structures to humble, from ancient to recent, of every denomination. What they all have in common is their place in a religious community, their essential communal service, and their role in both the history and the architectural character of New York.



Fourth Universalist Society, Central Park West (photo: Noël Sutherland)

Venerable beneficiaries of the program include the Church of St. Mark's in the Bowery, dating back in part to the 1790s, and the Quaker Meeting House in Flushing, whose earliest portion dates to 1694. The program helped the Flushing building with referrals and funding for architecture and administration, management of municipal and state grants, replacement of the cedar shingle roof and copper gutter, and repair of the shingled façade, plus installation of a new sprinkler system.



Flushing Friends Meeting House (photo: Noël Sutherland)

Even today, the structure...looks sturdy enough. Not bad for a building that was almost a century old by the time George Washington came to visit in 1789 and '90. Yet the wood-shingled roof, the copper gutters, the brick chimney, the window frames and the wooden porch deck all need repairs.... (New York Times, July 23, 2006)

At the other end of the timeline, Sacred Sites helped a small early 20th-century "tenement synagogue" in Corona, believed to be the oldest synagogue in Queens.

Twenty years ago, it seemed that Congregation Tifereth Israel in Corona...was headed for a date with a wrecking ball.... But in the late 1990s, a charismatic kosher butcher and rabbi from Central Asia...slowly transformed the synagogue into the spiritual home of a community of impoverished Bukharan Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Soon, the rabbi's wife figured out that in America, there was a way to save such a historic building. [She] called the New York Landmarks Conservancy for help.... After years of work...[the congregation] raised enough state, city and private grants to pay for a \$1.6 million exterior renovation. (New York Times, October 25, 2012)



Congregation Tifereth Israel, Corona, before restoration



Congregation Tifereth Israel, Corona, after restoration

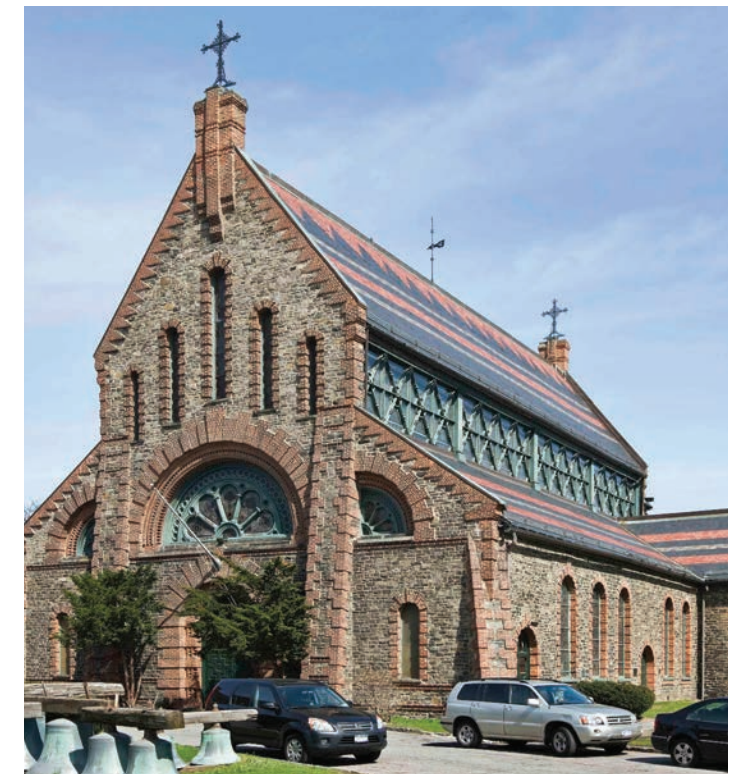
Over the decades, Sacred Sites has made grants throughout New York. Building on its partnership model at St. Ann and Holy Trinity, the program has developed long-term relationships with many grantees, including the Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew on the Upper West Side, the Kane Street Synagogue in Cobble Hill, and the Reformed Church of South Bushwick. Outside the five boroughs it has long-term partners in Christ Church, Walton; St. Johns Getty Square, Yonkers; and the United Presbyterian Church of Sackets Harbor.



Reformed Church of South Bushwick

The landmark Reformed Church of South Bushwick could once be described as the little white church in the wild woods. Started by 20 Dutch families in 1852, the Georgian-style church fell into disrepair over the years.... The [New York Landmarks] Conservancy made contributions of about \$5000 to help repair the steeple and protect 49 irreplaceable stained-glass windows.... [Rev. Kenneth] Cumberbatch credits the attention given the structure by the Conservancy.... "Their involvement and interest in the building itself has really stirred us and motivated us to look closer at what we have," he said. (Newsday, February 1, 1990)

Over the years, Sacred Sites has bolstered its funding with several outside funders, notably creating the Robert W. Wilson Sacred Sites Challenge Grants, the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation Grants for Long Island sites, and the David Berg Jewish Heritage Fund.



St. John's - Getty Square, Yonkers (photo: Yonkers Tribune)

The Jewish Heritage Fund Grant Program has been providing funding to preserve the city's most culturally-significant historic synagogues.... For Jane Blumenstein, president of Congregation Ramath Orah on Manhattan's Upper West Side, the...Fund has been a lifesaver.... "When it came to managing the gargantuan task of prioritizing what needed to be done and how to get money, I was at a loss," observed Blumenstein.... "[Conservancy staff] was there with us, holding our hand every step of the way, and giving us immense information on working with an old run-down New York City building.... Having a grant from the Jewish Heritage Fund gives legitimacy to the whole process." (Jewish Press, June 2015)

In 1991, Sacred Sites held its first two workshops: "Voices of Experience: Fundraising for Religious Properties," co-sponsored with General Theological Seminary, and "Long-Term Maintenance Planning for Religious Properties" co-sponsored with Trinity Episcopal Church in Roslyn in Nassau County.

Sacred Sites Grants

Since 1986, the Sacred Sites program has pledged 1,608 grants totaling nearly \$15.7 million to 836 religious institutions statewide, helping fund over \$855 million in repair and restoration projects.



Trinity Episcopal Church, Roslyn

Nonprofit Technical Assistance Grant Program (formerly City Ventures Fund), 1986

The Conservancy's birth in the early 1970s coincided with the City's declining fortunes – shrinking population, growing poverty, and the looming specter of municipal bankruptcy. The stunning economic turn-around of the early 1980s seemed happily tied to what had become known as the back-to-the-city movement, as young people reared in suburban homes clamored for the excitement of City life. Historic preservation played a central role – every year Brooklyn hosted a Brownstone Fair highlighting all the new historic districts where run-down row houses could be picked up at bargain prices and revived.

And then an uncomfortable truth dawned: newly minted urbanites moving into historic neighborhoods caused less prosperous existing residents to leave. New words – “gentrification” and “displacement” – entered the lexicon of urbanists and City planners.

The displacement of residents by the reclamation of inner-city property...has become an embarrassment for the developers and preservationists...of the back-to-the-old-neighborhoods movement. (New York Times, January 25, 1987)

The preservation world took note. Annual conferences of the National Trust for Historic Preservation devoted sessions to the phenomenon. The Trust itself responded with an Inner-City Ventures Fund, created by its president, Michael Ainslie, who happened to be a board member of the Landmarks Conservancy. In 1987, having seen the Trust's successes in other cities, the Conservancy created its own City Ventures Fund, with Ainslie as co-chair.

It worked in San Francisco's Chinatown, in the Cabbagetown section of Atlanta and in Boston's Jamaica Plain, and now the New York Landmarks Conservancy is hoping a grant and matching-loan program can help save historic neighborhoods without displacing their residents. (Newsday, January 12, 1987)

The Conservancy found a natural partner in New York's nonprofit community development corporations – another phenomenon of the 1970s. Following the creation in 1967 of the nation's first, the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, dozens more such organizations had sprung up in distressed neighborhoods throughout the City. Deteriorating and abandoned housing abounded in such areas and finding ways to rehabilitate such buildings while keeping them affordable became a major aim.

Trinity Episcopal Church in Roslyn will serve as both classroom and teacher Friday.... The workshop came about after the 1906 church, which is in the midst of a restoration program, received a \$5,000 grant from [the Landmarks Conservancy's] Sacred Sites [program].... “It's a very convenient site for this because the church itself becomes a laboratory to illustrate many of the points we're going to talk about,” said [the Sacred Sites] director. (Newsday, November 20, 1991)

Since that time, Sacred Sites has sponsored more than 40 workshops and conferences and participated in at least 50 others. Sacred Sites has also published two books: *Inspecting and Maintaining Religious Properties* in 1989 and *Managing Repair & Restoration Projects: A Congregation's How-To Guide*, 2002.

In 2004, Sacred Sites undertook a new, in-depth city-wide survey that has now covered some two-thirds of its historic religious sites. To help these properties qualify for grants, Sacred Sites has used outside historians and students from Columbia University's graduate program in historic preservation to prepare dozens of National Register nominations.

Preservation relies on public support, and public support requires education. Since 2011, Sacred Sites has organized the Sacred Sites Open House, in which religious institutions throughout the City and state open their doors for tours, talks, concerts, and other activities. In the dozen years since its inauguration, some 500 sites state-wide have welcomed the public.

As of 2022, Sacred Sites has made 1,608 grants of \$15.7 million, to 836 religious institutions, leveraging more than \$855 million in assistance with maintenance projects and capital investment.

Now the New York Landmarks Conservancy will attempt to imbue local contemporary urban pioneers with one collective conscience. In partnership with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, it has established a fund to aid local development organizations in historic city neighborhoods.... “It's much more expensive to do business in New York,” [Laurie Beckelman, executive director of the Conservancy] said, “but we've seen this program working across the country and we wondered why it couldn't be successful here.” (New York Times, January 25, 1987)

[One] of the [former Convent] homesteaders...said that while their main goal was housing and not restoration, the group was committed to preserving the building's details even before the Conservancy offered the money to help them do so. “This fund helps so that we don't have to cop out and buy cheap materials.” (New York Times, September 6, 1987)

In the following years, the Conservancy partnered with the St. Romero Housing Development Fund Corporation, the New Destiny Housing Corporation, the BRC Human Services Corporation, the Broadway Housing Development Fund Company, the Settlement Housing Fund, Habitat for Humanity of New York, and the Neighborhood Housing Services Community Development Corporation. Together they created low- and moderate-income housing units, permanent affordable housing for formerly homeless men, and housing for victims of domestic violence.

“Preserving historic buildings, which might otherwise be demolished, for low-to-moderate income residents is especially important in New York City where rising real estate pressures and gentrification threaten to displace low- and moderate-income residents from historic neighborhoods,” said Michael Ainslie, former president of the National Trust, board member of the Conservancy and creator of the trust's Inner-City Ventures program. (Daily News, August 26, 1987)



Row house, East New York, before and after restoration

The Fund's first three awards went to the Mutual Housing Association of New York, to restore three 1880s row houses in East New York; the Fordham Bedford Housing Corporation, to convert a former Catholic nursing home on the Grand Concourse into housing for homeless single mothers; and the People's Firehouse, to convert the former Convent of the Church of the Annunciation in Williamsburg into housing.



Former Convent, Church of the Annunciation, Havemeyer St. Brooklyn

The various low-income tax credits and other public funds available to the community corporations generally paid only for essential expenses. The Conservancy's funding made it possible for the newly converted buildings to retain or recreate their architectural details. A partnership in the late 1990s with the Pratt Area Community Council (PACC) produced 45 new housing units in five buildings in Fort Greene, Bedford-Stuyvesant and Clinton Hill. The bulk of the work was financed with public funds, while the City Ventures award took care of brownstone stoops, wood cornices, and elaborate window surrounds. In a 1999 renovation of a 1901 apartment building by the New Destiny Housing Corporation, a City Ventures award helped pay for 31 new arched transom windows, repairs to the masonry façade, and installation of decorative access ramps. Community corporations like New Destiny shared the Conservancy's belief that everybody enjoys and benefits from living in beautiful, well-cared-for surroundings.

NTAG Grants (formerly City Ventures Fund)
Since 1986, this fund has provided over \$1.5 million in grants and loans, resulting in the creation of over 1,223 affordable housing units.



BRC Human Services Building, former glass factory, 134 Avenue D



Entrance, Sixth Street Community Center



Kingsbridge Heights Community Center



Whitney Studio at the New York Studio School (photo: Margot Note)

“We knew it was important to keep intact the integrity of this truly beautiful old building. It’s true that they just don’t make them like this anymore. It is so solidly constructed and possesses elegant nuances you simply don’t get in new buildings. The conservancy’s participation meant we could do our project without sacrificing the details that make this building special.” – Bonnie Bean, Associate Executive Director, BRC Human Services Corporation. (*New York Landmark Conservancy Annual Report, 1999*)

A 2018 award to the Henry Street Settlement on the Lower East Side paid for the restoration of 1830s wrought-iron fencing at its headquarters.



Restored railing, Henry Street Settlement

In recent years, perhaps reflecting the relative lack of abandoned housing in the 21st-century City, the program has expanded to providing nonprofits with grants not specifically tied to housing. In 2010, a City Ventures award to the Sixth Street Community Center, housed in a once-abandoned Lower East Side synagogue, financed restoration of the building’s arched entrance with a wood door and glass paneling.

Thank You Donors!

The Conservancy has donors from 38 states plus Canada, the UK, Spain, and New Zealand. Three donors have been giving since the 1970’s, 64 donors have been giving since the 80’s, and 250 donors have been giving since the 90’s.

Most recently, in 2023 an award to the Kingsbridge Heights Community Center, occupying the former 50th police precinct headquarters in the Bronx, will pay for the upcoming restoration of the building’s prominent cornice as part of a larger roof replacement project.

In recognition of its expanded purview, the program has taken a new name: the Nonprofit Technical Assistance Grant Program. The program and its partners continue to bring the benefits of preservation to neighborhoods of every economic level, throughout the City. To date, it has funded grants and loans of \$1,517,529 for 74 projects.

Emergency Preservation Grants, 1999

A fire breaks out and leaves gaping holes that need to be closed immediately. A leak threatens to destroy priceless plasterwork ornament. Deferred maintenance leads to structural collapse. Wind and tidal surges from a once-in-150-years superstorm suddenly leave ruin in their wake.

Landmarks face many kinds of threats besides real estate pressure and insensitive development. Nonprofit owners of landmarks, generally operating on tight budgets, may lack the financial resources to respond quickly to such situations.

In its first 15 years, the Landmarks Conservancy dealt with such issues through several different programs, but in 1999, with funding from the New York Community Trust and the Hearst Foundation, the Conservancy inaugurated a new program specifically geared to aiding non-profits facing building emergencies.

The first three grants illustrate the program’s range. The New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture in Greenwich Village, original home of the Whitney Museum, received a grant for roof repairs to stop water damage in the Whitney Studio, a room with a plaster bas-relief rising from the fireplace to the ceiling.

Prospect Cemetery, as part of a larger Conservancy project, received a grant to repair the stained-glass window in the Chapel of the Three Sisters that had been shattered by vandals. And the Williamsburg Art & Historical Center, in the former Kings County Savings Bank in Williamsburg, received a grant to restore the large former clock tower in its mansard roof dormer that had been damaged by winds from Hurricane Floyd in 1999.

A September storm sent a 20-foot wooden beam crashing to the street from a clock tower atop a landmarked 131-year-old former bank building beneath the Williamsburg Bridge. The beam did not hit any passersby on Broadway. But it scored a direct hit on the finances of the Williamsburg Art and Historical Society.... Pledges of \$35,000 from the Landmarks Conservancy and Landmarks Preservation Commission are seed money to help fix the clock tower.... (*Daily News, December 23, 1999*)

Emergency Grants

Since 1999, The Conservancy’s Emergency Grant Program has distributed more than \$1.1 million in grants in all five boroughs, with an average grant range of \$10,000 to \$12,000 per project.



Williamsburg Art and Historical Society, clock tower dormer, before and after restoration

In the two decades since the program's inauguration, grants have gone to non-profit cultural institutions large and small: the Staten Island Historical Society (façade restoration on the Cooper's House at Historic Richmond Town, 2001), General Theological Seminary (repair of damage from a sub-roof that crashed through the Gothic ceiling of the refectory, 2004), the Alice Austen House (installation of prominent shutters to

protect the property, 2005), Lefferts Homestead in Prospect Park (repair of the porch, 2005), King Manor in Jamaica (repair of damage from a plumbing leak that caused an elegant plaster ceiling to fall to the floor, 2006), the City Island Nautical Museum (replacement of the entryway destroyed by fire, 2008), Lewis Latimer House in Flushing (mitigation of water damage from a leak around the chimney, 2009), Lower East Side Tenement Museum (repair of a top-floor leak, 2011), the Brooklyn YWCA (repair of damage from Hurricane Irene, 2011).

When the façade and entranceway for the City Island Nautical Museum caught fire in a suspicious blaze in 2007, those in charge of the more than 40-year-old society vowed to rebuild. Now, the City Island Historical Society's Nautical Museum has been brought back into commission. (*Bronx Times*, December 19, 2008)

In 2012 and 2013, the program found perhaps its most urgent use: aiding the restoration of properties in all five boroughs damaged by Superstorm Sandy. Emergency grants and technical assistance together totaling \$177,000 went to 21 non-profit and religious properties, among them Sailors' Snug Harbor, Woodlawn Cemetery, Green-Wood Cemetery, Prospect Park, South Street Seaport, historic house museums including Morris-Jumel and Bartow-Pell, the Robbin's Reef Lighthouse, and several shore-front churches and synagogues, as well as the Zen Mountain Monastery in Ulster County. An additional grant to the Alice Austen House paid to move the photographer's priceless photographic plates out of the basement to safe storage.



Entranceway, City Island Nautical Museum

Obelisks that stood upright for generations at Green-Wood Cemetery...hit the ground at crazy angles. The angel guarding the Lloyd family plot lost its head, an arm and the tip of its wing. The headstone of an 18-year-old boy, overturned by a falling pin oak, rests upside down beside its pedestal. "Thy will be done," it says... Hurricane Sandy...devastated Green-Wood in Brooklyn.... "The monuments are legally not ours, so we do not have an insurable interest," [Richard J. Moylan, Green-Wood's president] said. "Yet we feel we have a moral obligation to make the repairs as best as possible." He...said they were likely to take advantage of professional help offered by the New York Landmarks Conservancy. (*New York Times*, November 26, 2012)



Green-Wood Cemetery, damage from Superstorm Sandy

With recovery from Sandy underway, the program resumed: Gould Memorial Library at Bronx Community College (replacement supports of the heavy bronze doors at the entrance, 2016), American Academy of Arts and Letters (repair of stonework fallen from the cornice, 2016), Brooklyn Historical Society (repair of flood damage, 2016), Kingsland Manor in Queens (replacement of a deteriorated front porch, 2019), Louis Armstrong House Museum in Corona (repair of roof leaks, 2020), and the Wyckoff House in Brooklyn, oldest surviving house in New York City (preparation of a resiliency study, 2021).

Since 1999, the program has distributed more than \$1,101,667 in grants, assisting in 74 projects.

Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone & Historic Preservation Fund, 1999 – 2017

First on the list of programs are restoration grants to St. Martin's Episcopal Church and Ebenezer Gospel Tabernacle.... At Ebenezer, Pastor Jabez Springer said... "Miracles do happen because we have been praying for a long time for help to repair our roof..." (*Amsterdam News*, March 16, 2000)

Harlem – and Upper Manhattan generally – enjoys some of the City's finest architecture, especially its grand churches and elegant Victorian streetscapes. It also boasts an unmatched cultural history as home to the Harlem Renaissance and a century of Black culture. But it has often lacked the economic resources needed for the repairs and maintenance of historic buildings.

In 1994, federal legislation authored by Congressman Charles B. Rangel and signed into law by President Bill Clinton created the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone – covering Harlem, Washington Heights and Inwood – as one of nine such areas nationwide selected to receive federal grants and assistance intended to promote economic development. Unlike the other eight, in 2000 Upper Manhattan became the only Empowerment Zone to include a fund specifically in support of historic preservation, on the understanding that such an investment would promote economic development by encouraging cultural tourism. The Landmarks Conservancy's history of supporting Harlem landmarks earned it the invitation to administer the new fund.

Peg Breen, president of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, stated, "This one-of-a-kind collaboration is having a dramatic impact on keeping institutional... buildings in good repair while enhancing tourism in Harlem." Increased tourism in the Upper Manhattan community has become a major concern amongst many community groups, cultural institutions, restaurants and retail shop owners, as the influx of visitors will help to provide jobs for local residents and significantly boost the area's economy. (*Amsterdam News*, May 2, 2002)

Managed by Sacred Sites and Historic Properties Fund staff, the new program made possible up to \$100,000 in grants and up to \$100,000 in no-interest loans for each qualified site. Most of the awards went to churches as they form one of the most significant architectural and cultural resources in Upper Manhattan generally and as such are a major draw for tourists.

First-time visitors to Harlem should go on Sunday mornings. The streets are relatively calm then, providing the chance for unencumbered strolls. Besides, on the Sabbath the doors of Harlem churches – the area’s lifeblood – are flung wide to all comers. The church here is more than a hall of worship. More like a village meeting place, it purveys the mood and character of the surrounding neighborhood. *(Washington Post, October 30, 1994)*



St. Philip's Episcopal Church, Harlem

While the Conservancy had long provided financing for preservation work on Harlem’s churches, the need far outstripped the available resources – especially for such mundane issues as internal infrastructure.

“An incredible amount of what we pay for is water protection – roofs, drain pipes, internal leaders,” said Peg Breen, president of the private New York Landmarks Conservancy.... “It’s the toughest thing for a congregation to raise money for.... A family might want its name on a stained-glass window. But no one wants their name on a drainpipe....” So she welcomed as a “fabulous new vehicle” the \$4 million preservation fund set up by the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone Development Corporation.... *(New York Times, December 26, 1999)*

Often congregations faced serious structural problems. Mount Morris Ascension Presbyterian Church needed to replace its roof and stabilize the columns that kept its ceiling from collapsing.

“When did I know we had a problem?” says the Rev. Juan Guthrie.... “One day it was raining, and the water was running down the walls. It was like a scene from ‘The Amityville Horror.’” Like other pastors with... expensive repairs that their congregations could not afford, Guthrie applied for a grant from the Historic Preservation Fund, which is jointly run by...the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone and the New York Landmarks Conservancy. *(Daily News, June 29, 2002)*

Many of the churches responded to the sizable grants with words like “godsend” and “miracle.” St. Philip’s Episcopal Church on West 134th Street, the first major Black congregation to build in Harlem, received an award for work on its 1911 building designed by the firm of Tandy & Foster – Vertner Tandy being the first Black architect registered in New York State and George Washington Foster, Jr., one of the first Black architects to practice in the U.S.

“The miracle for us – and it’s kind of a Christmas miracle because the scaffolding is just coming down – is the gift of generous donors who make it possible for landmark buildings to retain their splendor and beauty,” said Canon Cecily P. Broderick y Guerra, priest in charge of St. Philip’s Episcopal Church in Harlem, which is awaiting the return of its stained-glass windows from the Gil Studio in Brooklyn. They have been restored with a \$100,000 grant from a program run by the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone Development Corporation and the New York Landmarks Conservancy. *(New York Times, December 22, 2002)*



Mount Morris Ascension Presbyterian Church, Harlem

The list of religious institutions awarded grants included a Harlem synagogue, enabling it to repair its roof, masonry, and windows.

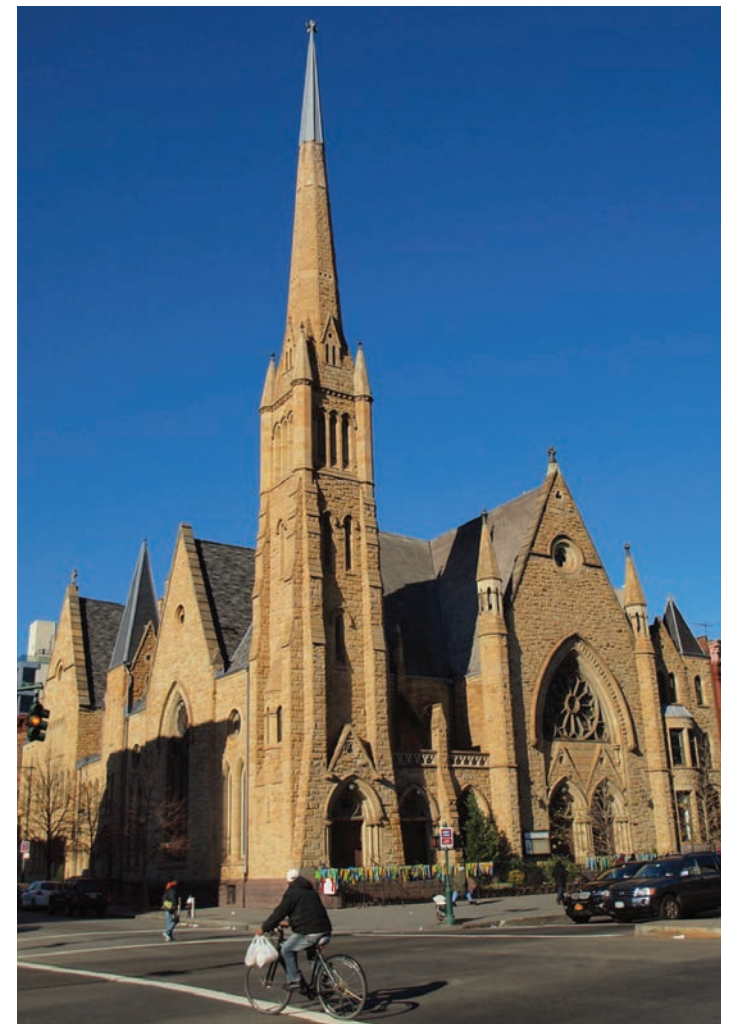
...the poignantly modest Old Broadway Synagogue, just off 125th Street, in Harlem.... Its main window, which was bricked over in the 60’s, is being restored... using part of a \$100,000 grant from the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone Development Corporation and New York Landmarks Conservancy. “It’s probably not the most important thing that the building has to have,” said Paul Radensky, the president of the synagogue, “but it’s a way of putting a new face on the building. Or restoring an old face.” *(New York Times, December 8, 2002)*

Other awards financed the restoration of the monumental stained-glass window at Convent Avenue Baptist Church; roof and drainage system repairs at Holy Trinity Church in Inwood; stabilization and repair of the elaborate white terra-cotta façade of the First Corinthian Baptist Church; rebuilding the sandstone tower, partially destroyed by fire in 1969, of the Ephesus Seventh-Day Adventist Church near Marcus Garvey Park. Ephesus, like several other congregations receiving awards, leveraged its initial \$100,000 grant to raise another \$500,000 to complete its facade restoration.



Old Broadway Synagogue, Manhattanville

A long-torn hole in Harlem’s skyline was mended yesterday when the Ephesus Seventh-Day Adventist Church on Lenox Avenue got its steeple back in full. To peals of excited laughter and a couple of exultant whoops from congregants gathered at the intersection of 123rd Street, workers hoisted a replacement pinnacle of lead-coated copper and steel – itself almost four stories tall – and set it atop the existing stone steeple.... Looking beyond copper and steel, Rupert W. Young, the interim senior minister, saw the new pinnacle as a “beacon of hope and love for the community....” Irene Bethea, a congregant, approached Dr. Young. “I feel like crying,” she told him. She was smiling broadly as she said so. *(New York Times, December 13, 2006)*



Ephesus Seventh-Day Adventist Church, 123rd Street, steeple restoration

The Fund awarded grants and loans to several congregations in Washington Heights and Inwood. Our Saviour’s Atonement Lutheran Church used its award for a new concrete slab and ventilation in its basement to protect its foundations from water damage. An award to Mount Washington Presbyterian Church covered repairs to its slate roof and a copper drainage system.



Our Saviour's Atonement Lutheran Church, Washington Heights

[Neil Shoemaker's] company, Harlem Heritage Tours, offers Sunday morning gospel and walking tours of the neighbourhood.... He runs the only local tour company that's fully owned, operated and staffed by Harlemites.... "The churches now welcome the tourists," Owens [says], "because they represent economic stability for the church and allow it to render community service." (Toronto Star, September 25, 2010)

Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund, 2001

The disaster of 9/11 was an event the likes of which New York had never seen before, and which New Yorkers hope never to see again. The loss of life, the pure horror of the event, had no equal in our history. The attack on the World Trade Center changed the course of national and world events.

Here at home, New York had to decide how to rebuild. The assault struck the historic heart of New York City – once the site of the 17th-century Dutch and then British colony; then the first, if temporary, capital of the new nation; and over the next two centuries the heart of the financial district, home to some of the City's oldest buildings and first and finest skyscrapers. While attention initially focused on whether and how to rebuild the World Trade Center site, questions arose about how to restore damaged landmarks, how to respond to development proposals threatening historic buildings as yet unprotected by landmark designation, and what to do with the ruins of the Trade Center, suddenly transformed from elements of a 1970s office building complex to the physical remains of a massive historical event.

The debris was a foot and a half high in the pre-Revolutionary War graveyard of St. Paul's Chapel. A few blocks away, Cass Gilbert's magnificent 1908 limestone and terra-cotta skyscraper at 90 West St. was in critical condition, its mansard roof ripped apart and its façade blackened with traces of fire that had roared through its interior. This was the way it looked a week after [the attack]. (Preservation News, November 2001)

Shortly after the disaster, the Landmarks Conservancy joined with four local, state, national and international organizations to create the Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund. Each one – the Conservancy, the Municipal Art Society, the Preservation League of New York State, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the World Monuments Fund – contributed \$10,000 to an initial financial pool. The Conservancy then managed the Fund.



Mount Washington Presbyterian Church, Inwood

By 2006, the UMEZ fund had fully distributed its resources to 34 selected sites: 29 churches, two synagogues, and one mosque, as well as the cast-iron fire watchtower in Marcus Garvey Park and the Museum of the City of New York. But the fund had an unexpected coda. As the program wrapped up, the Empowerment Zone authorized that \$300,000 of repayments coming in from outstanding loans be redirected to Upper Manhattan nonprofit historic sites, in matching grants ranging from \$8,000 to \$50,000, to be used for smaller projects, mostly helping pay for the initial planning of upcoming renovations. Seven institutions benefited, from Mt. Olivet Baptist Church in Central Harlem to Hebrew Tabernacle in Washington Heights.

When the fund closed out its last loans in 2017, it left behind three dozen major institutions in far better condition than it had found them. Harlem cultural tourism has indeed grown, as has the economy of Upper Manhattan. But the main beneficiaries are the communities who call these buildings home.

There was no question that the immediate needs of survivors and the victims' families should take precedence, but rebuilding on and around the Trade Center site would take one to two decades, and the five organizations meant to make certain that the ensuing long-range plans would take the historic and architectural character of downtown into account.

The blocks around Ground Zero contain significant reminders of our country's earliest history. The landmark older skyscrapers in and around Wall Street symbolize New York around the world. Ours is a relatively small, targeted role in the recovery efforts—but one we are grateful to play. (New York Landmarks Conservancy Annual Report, 2001)

First order of business: determine the extent of damage to landmark buildings.

Surrounded by gargoyles, men in mountain-climbing gear rappelled off the roof of a landmark building in lower Manhattan yesterday.... But this was far from a daredevil stunt. The men swinging above, video cameras in hand, were checking the 96-year-old neo-Gothic building's terra-cotta façade for possible damage.... "The cracks are very hard to see, and there is no substitute for getting up close," said [the] director of community programs for the New York Landmarks Conservancy.... The \$6,800 survey is being paid for by the Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund.... (Daily News, February 25, 2002)

The Conservancy then made grants to a number of damaged buildings, from St. Peter's Church to One Liberty Street.

In a major long-term effort, some 30 conservators, artists, and technicians spent two years restoring the lobby ceiling of the Verizon Building at 140 West Street.

It's not quite the Sistine Chapel, but New York now has its own newly restored ceiling murals, in the lobby of the Verizon Building...which suffered severe damage on Sept. 11, 2001.... "I'm sure that the Sistine Chapel paintings were dirty, but they didn't have to deal with the explosive force of 9/11, and the filth that came pouring into that poor lobby," said Peg Breen, president of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, which has been monitoring the work. "Verizon has made heroic efforts to restore these murals." (New York Times, October 30, 2003)

Attention next turned to the question of as yet unprotected historic buildings. In 2003, the Fund identified three "corridors of concern" for historic preservation within one square mile of Ground Zero: Fulton Street to the east, West Street to the west, and Greenwich Street to the south. On Greenwich Street, it identified two of the oldest houses in Manhattan: No. 94, built c. 1799-1800, and No. 67, built 1809-10. Advocacy for these buildings led to their designation as landmarks.



67 Greenwich Street and 94 Greenwich Street

On Broadway at the corner of John Street, the Fund identified the long-overlooked Romanesque Revival-style Corbin Building, an early skyscraper designed by Francis Kimball, obscured by a century of grime and now threatened with demolition to make way for the proposed new Fulton Street Transit Center. The Landmarks Commission eventually designated the Corbin Building, in 2015, but advocacy from the Fund and the Conservancy kept it standing long enough for that to happen.

The Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund is acting pre-emptively to ensure that the 114-year-old Corbin Building is not eliminated by plans for the Fulton Street Transit Center.... What the preservation fund hopes to do is build a constituency before it is too late.... "People who aren't devotees — as we are — of fixing up old buildings, you could tell that they couldn't see it," said Peg Breen, president of the New York Landmarks Conservancy.... (New York Times, July 24, 2003)

Cleaned and restored, the Corbin Building has become one of lower Broadway's most visible landmarks and can no longer be overlooked.



Corbin Building, 11 John Street

Perhaps the most complex preservation issue facing the Fund was determining what to preserve from the ashes of the Trade Center site itself. The Conservancy served as a consulting party to federal reviews of Ground Zero.

A debate with few precedents in American historic preservation – what are the meaningful physical remnants of a place that was all but destroyed?... No one doubts the significance of ground zero. But a complex federal review process is revealing stark differences of opinion over which remnants, if any, contribute to the historical resonance of the site. (New York Times, March 6, 2004)

Of all that survived the disaster, the most emotionally affective must be the “Survivors’ Staircase.” When New York State determined Ground Zero to be eligible for listing in the State and National Registers of Historic Places, it called out as particularly significant a staircase that once led from the World Trade Center Plaza to Vesey Street. Hundreds of people fled down that staircase to safety. But initial plans for new construction at the site called for its demolition. The Conservancy and its partners felt it should remain in place as the only above ground remnant of the Trade Center. Efforts to keep it in place or find another location for it proved daunting.

In August 2006, on learning from the State that the 9/11 Memorial Museum would accept the staircase if it could be transported, the Conservancy hired structural engineer Robert Silman to devise a plan. He cut the stairs and treads out of the concrete and held it in a specially designed “cradle.” Convinced by this demonstration, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation agreed to the move.

Revered Relic of World Trade Center is Moved

The steel cables tensed, like a sprinter's muscles at the start of a race. Then, the crane's engine roared as the operator pulled a lever, moving the staircase off the ground and 180 degrees from south to north. And that was how on Sunday the staircase became the last visible remnant of the World Trade Center to be removed from the place where it had stood on Sept. 11, 2001. The stairs' relocation marked a brief yet momentous occasion for...the preservationists who had spent years trying to save the staircase from destruction... (New York Times, March 10, 2008)

Today the Survivors' Staircase joins other rescued remnants of the World Trade Center site in the 9/11 Memorial Museum, placed adjacent to the escalator that brings visitors into the exhibition space.



Survivors' Staircase, in original location



Survivors' Staircase, in the 9/11 Memorial Museum (photo: Noël Sutherland)



Special Projects

“For the neighborhood preservationists who encounter an exceptional challenge requiring serious heft to surmount, the ability to access and engage the Conservancy with its Citywide--indeed National--reach, reputation and clout, can absolutely make all the difference.”

- Otis Pearsall, president emeritus Brooklyn Historical Society



Astor Row, West 130th Street, before restoration



Astor Row, after restoration (photo: Noël Sutherland)

IV. Special Projects

The Landmarks Conservancy has always operated more as a single entity than a collection of departments and programs. Often one building or project finds support through a loan from the Historic Properties Fund, plus a grant from Sacred Sites, or a grant plus loan from City Ventures/Nonprofit Technical Assistance, together with guidance from Preservation Services. And some projects have simply taken on a life of their own. In the early years, the Custom House, the Fraunces Tavern block, St. Ann and the Holy Trinity, and the Archive Building certainly did. More recently, three stand out as projects that have drawn from various funds and departmental expertise over several years: Astor Row, Prospect Cemetery, and the Olmsted House.

Astor Row

“We are trying to move into areas like Harlem, which has many wonderful but endangered buildings, and through preservation, preserve the community,” Susan Henshaw Jones said. She is president of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, a private nonprofit group that is leading the Astor Row restoration....
(*New York Times*, October 23, 1992)

A picturesque group of 28 Victorian brick houses, complete with wooden porches and iron railings, lines the south side of West 130th Street in Central Harlem. A block unlike any other in Manhattan, Astor Row once enjoyed a reputation as “among the most attractive and exclusive home centres” in the neighborhood, according to a *New York Times* reporter in the 1920s. Half a century later, however, Astor Row had fallen into disrepair, with several of its houses vacant.

The peeling paint, sagging foundations and boarded-up windows speak of hard times, but the ramshackle Harlem houses on Astor Row still show signs of a privileged past.... Built in the early 1880s by the famous family whose name it bears, Astor Row’s architecture boasts of a time when Harlem was farmland. The homes have wide country porches that just beg for a rocking chair, overlooking neat, postage-stamp yards.... It is those grand Victorian porches that are proving to be the salvation for the block.... (*Newsday*, January 3, 1992)

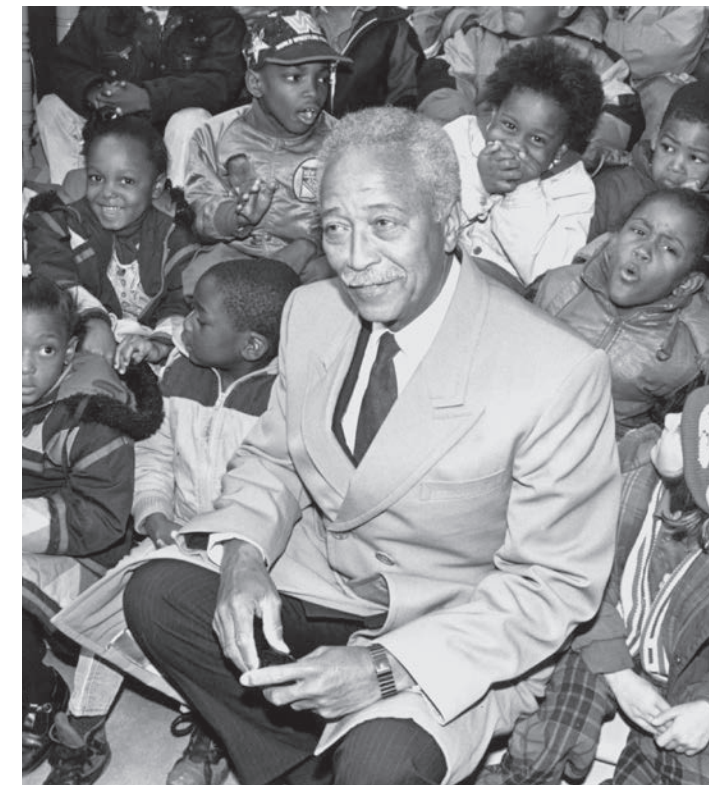
Astor Row - In the early 1880s, William Astor built 28, semi-attached row houses on 130th Street between Fifth and Lenox Avenues in Harlem.

The block’s residents convinced the Landmarks Commission to designate the Astor Row houses in August 1981. A decade later the Conservancy took on Astor Row as a major initiative, eventually raising a total of \$3,166,000 for the project, while the Vincent Astor Foundation – itself named for the grandson of William Backhouse Astor who had built the Row – donated \$1,700,000. Other funding came from the Commonwealth Fund, the Landmarks Commission, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, and several banks.

Restoring a neighborhood’s landmarks, and by so doing restoring neighborhood confidence and pride, is one goal of an unusual preservation effort under way on a tree-lined block in Harlem.... Facades, roofs, windows, porches and, in some cases interior sections...are being refurbished and repaired...[with] \$1.77 million in financing....
(*New York Times*, October 23, 1992)

Besides providing funding, the Conservancy documented the row’s history and current conditions, identified architects and contractors, negotiated contracts, reviewed plans, applied for relevant permits, ordered materials, and oversaw construction.

On October 6, 1992, Mayor David Dinkins and philanthropist Brooke Astor jointly presided over a ribbon-cutting ceremony, surrounded by 300 local residents including children, community leaders and elected officials, all there to celebrate the completed first phase of the project.



Mayor David Dinkins, Astor Row ribbon-cutting ceremony

And in 1996, seven families moved into two formerly vacant houses successfully converted into affordable cooperative apartments.



Reverend Calvin Butts, Mrs. Vincent Astor, Conservancy President Peg Breen, City Council Member C. Virginia Fields, Astor Row ribbon-cutting ceremony

Thanks to the Conservancy’s loans and preservation services and long-term partnerships it brokered with other parties, by 2009 Astor Row had recovered almost all of its original character.

Astor Row...was once regarded as one of the most tranquil and exclusive streets in Upper Manhattan.... Now, much of it is back. The gardens are in full bloom; porch sitting is back in style. After millions in public and private investment in the area – including efforts by newcomers and families with a heritage there going back decades – the block is at the center of an intense but, as yet, unfinished revival of the surrounding streets in Central Harlem.” (*New York Times*, August 9, 2009)

Prospect Cemetery, 1999

Surrounded by an expanding [York College] campus, Long Island Rail road tracks and a temporary city dump, Prospect Cemetery in Jamaica deteriorates beneath trash, poison ivy and broken tombstones. “Would you want your mother and father buried like that?” asked Amy Anderson, a neighborhood resident.... (*Newsday*, January 3, 1989)

Prospect Cemetery in Jamaica, Queens – established in 1660, and one of the few such surviving in the borough from Colonial times – became a City Landmark in 1977. The official Landmarks Commission report described it as remaining “in a well-preserved state.” A decade later its condition had seriously declined.



Prospect Cemetery, before and after restoration

The obscure 4.5-acre cemetery is hidden under a shroud of wiry thorns and thick weeds as tall as 6 feet. Most of the tombstones are barely visible through the thicket. The chapel is boarded up. The gates are bolted with padlocks. Yards of barbed wire fringe the chain-link fence.... Prospect Cemetery looks like an abandoned and grossly overgrown lot at the heart of downtown Jamaica. (Newsday, January 3, 1999)

In 1999, in what became a long-term project, the Landmarks Conservancy partnered in the Prospect Cemetery Revitalization Initiative, joining the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation and the Prospect Cemetery Association, along with New York City's Parks Department, the cemetery's owner. Together, the three nonprofits raised more than \$2.2 million, and over the following decade organized a three-phase restoration program.

In Phase I, completed in 2006, the partners fenced in the site, installed new lighting and sidewalks, and began to document the ancient grave markers. Phase II, completed in 2008, included restoration of the Chapel, with new doors and floors, heating and electricity, and the restoration, from surviving shards, of the two stained-glass rose windows.

The cemetery's main entrance and visual centerpiece is the pre-Civil War Romanesque Revival Chapel of the Sisters. Built in 1857 by Nicholas Ludlum as a memorial for his three daughters, all of whom died early, the chapel had fallen into serious disrepair.

"Weeping may endure for a night," proclaimed one of many palliative inscriptions on the chapel walls, this one from Psalms, "but joy cometh in the morning." What came in the 20th century were vandals. They used the windows for target practice. They toppled and effaced gravestones. They set fires in the four-and-a-half-acre burial ground.... (New York Times, June 14, 2008)



Chapel of the Three Sisters, Prospect Cemetery, entrance



Chapel of the Three Sisters, Prospect Cemetery, stained-glass windows

This month, with the return of the newly restored windows...the Chapel of the Sisters has at last regained its dignity. (New York Times, June 14, 2008)

The Chapel today is known as the Illinois Jacquet Performance Space, named for the jazz saxophonist.

Phase III, completed in 2014, brought new landscaping to the cemetery, along with conservation of the grave markers.

Volunteers from France and New York have raised more than two dozen toppled 18th century headstones in Queens' oldest grave site.... Erosion from time and the ravages of weather caused the 60-pound headstones to fall.... It took as many as four volunteers to lift each of the 30 slabs back onto their bases. Prospect Cemetery... is the final resting place of many Revolutionary War veterans and illustrious New York families like the Van Wycks, Sutphins and Brinckerhoffs.... "New Yorkers forget what an old city we are," said New York Landmarks Conservancy president Peg Breen. "But it's not just for history – this is open space." (Daily News, July 30, 2014)

To date, the Conservancy has leveraged \$2.4 million for Prospect Cemetery.

Prospect Cemetery, founded in 1660s, is the oldest burial ground in Queens and one of the oldest in the five boroughs of New York City.

Olmsted House and Farm

The city has bought the Staten Island home where landscape architect and planner Frederick Law Olmsted first designed Central Park, the Parks Department announced yesterday. The 13-room farmhouse at 4515 Hylan Blvd. in Eltingville will be used for educational purposes, and the land, 1.7 acres of it, will be operated as a public park.....the previous owners, the Beil family, wanted the house preserved, and City Council Member Andrew Lanza secured \$600,000 in city funds.... (New York Post, September 22, 2006)

In 1848, Frederick Law Olmsted's father bought a house with 130 acres of farmland for his son in Eltingville, on Staten Island. While living there, young Frederick cultivated fruit trees and exotic plants, and – perhaps most significantly for the future of New York City – developed his landscape design skills for his later "Greensward" design plan for what would become Central Park.

However short-lived Olmsted's time spent living and farming on Staten Island...it played a formative role in the burgeoning career of the visionary landscape architect. He was in his mid-20s when he...transformed the existing farm into somewhat of an open-air horticultural laboratory, complete with experimental nursery and ornamental garden, for concepts and ideas that he would later employ in his park designs. (The Architect's Newspaper, September 16, 2020)

The farmhouse had a long history even before Olmsted's stay, its oldest portion a one-and-a-half-story structure from the early 1720s, and part of its basement possibly dating to the 1690s. By the time Olmsted moved in, it had been enlarged into a 13-room house; Olmsted then added a one-and-a-half-story extension to create the building as it stands today.

Since Olmsted's time, most of the farmland has vanished beneath residential redevelopment, but not quite two acres still surround the house. When the Parks Department bought the farm and house in 2006, the Conservancy made a grant of \$20,000 to help stabilize the structure, but not much else happened. In 2012, the Parks Department told a New York Times reporter that house renovations would have to wait until a nonprofit group could step in and raise the necessary funds.

By 2017 the house had seriously deteriorated.

It is an out-of-the way house on Staten Island, the windows boarded up, the basement sloshing in an inch or two of water.... Signs in front are deliberately unwelcoming – “Historical site – no trespassing” – as if signs would deter vandals.... The house is dilapidated. It was damaged by an electrical fire several years ago.... The plaster ceilings upstairs suffered damage when the roof leaked. And then there is the wet basement....
(New York Times, February 12, 2018)



The charitable group Friends of Olmsted-Beil House celebrates Frederick Law Olmsted's 200th birthday and the restoration of his former Staten Island home

December saw the Olmsted house listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

[National Register listing brings] national recognition to this significant site which, until recently, was threatened with demolition by neglect.... The New York Landmarks Conservancy [has] completed fundraising efforts to support necessary emergency stabilization work.... Since then, all of the priority work identified by the Conservancy has been successfully completed, including full mortar repointing of the 17th-century foundation – conducted with social distancing measures in place, no less! *(The Cultural Landscape Foundation, December 16, 2020)*



Olmsted House, Staten Island, 2017

That fall, the Landmarks Conservancy stepped into the role of the nonprofit group that could raise the necessary funds. First, the Conservancy hired the firm of Jan Hird Pokorny Associates to prepare a report on existing conditions; the report concluded repairs would cost \$460,000. Then the Conservancy set out to raise \$150,000, beginning with a Kickstarter campaign that brought in close to \$30,000. To promote the campaign and raise awareness of the issue, the Conservancy created a Reclaim Olmsted House Committee whose membership included such major park advocates as the former directors of the Central Park Conservancy and Prospect Park Alliance, a former New York State Parks Commissioner, two former New York City Parks Commissioners, the president of Green-Wood Cemetery, a former Landmarks Commission Chairman, and the New York City Historic House Trust, along with well-known historians and preservation advocates.

The initial funds raised by the Conservancy attracted still more funding from private foundations, eventually reaching the goal of \$150,000. Work began in 2019, with the Historic House Trust supervising the removal of asbestos and mold from the basement. Additional funds became available in 2020, making possible completion of emergency stabilization work and clearing of the site.

As of 2023, the Olmsted House project has reached a midpoint. While still vacant, the house is stabilized and protected. The public now knows about the site, as do a number of national organizations devoted to Olmsted's work formerly unaware of its existence. The Friends of Olmsted-Beil House, formed by local residents, does educational programming. The City plans to acquire an adjoining related property that will allow significantly better access. Thanks to a recent \$50,000 grant from the Staten Island Foundation, Conservancy staff is managing several new projects at the house, including window restoration, installation of protective glazing, and evaluation of electrical systems. Fundraising continues for future work that one day will make it possible to open the house to the public.



Olmsted House, work in progress



Advocacy / Public Policy

“The New York Landmarks Conservancy has supported the work of the Landmarks Preservation Commission for 50 years. From their advocacy to their preservation programs and services, they have been instrumental in the protection of so many New York City landmarks. I look forward to continuing our work together to preserve and protect the buildings and sites that make our city so great.”

- Sarah Carroll, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission Chair

V. Advocacy/Public Policy

Unlike the New York City Landmarks Commission, a government body whose purpose is to designate officially determined landmarks, the conservancy is an advocacy body. (*New York Times*, April 23, 1982)

Given the major role that advocacy has played over the decades in the Conservancy's work, it may come as a surprise to learn that in its earliest days the Conservancy did not consider itself an advocacy organization. All its energy focused on rescuing endangered buildings in any way possible – all action, no talk. Every early annual report opened with a declaration from Brendan Gill:

Our response to a landmark in jeopardy is to utilize every possible real estate mechanism – combined with charitable contributions as required – in preserving and restoring important buildings and so ensuring them a place in the future life of the City.



Pier A, Battery Park, Lower Manhattan, before restoration, 2008



Pier A, after restoration, 2014 (photo: Hardy Collaboration Architecture)

With its initially tiny staff, the organization may have felt it had little time to spare for testifying at public hearings or writing letters to the editor.

And yet, every action the Conservancy took by its very nature could be described as advocacy, if more broadly defined – leading by example. If the former Custom House could engender such determination to find a new use, to inspire its admirers to obtain the money to restore it, how could its preservation not be important? What else could negotiating the fate of the Gold Room in the Villard Houses be called – what else changed the City's mind about the Tweed Courthouse – if not advocacy? Why undertake a survey of public buildings if not to advocate for their care?

Even the more formal version of advocacy – persuasion by argument – played a role in the Conservancy's work almost from the beginning. Securing National Register status for Pier A in 1975, and then encouraging the Landmarks Commission to designate it, perhaps the most common form of preservation advocacy, played a role in the pier's ultimate rescue.

Early examples of such advocacy include a 1979 call for a small historic district on lower Broadway at Bowling Green, in response to the refacing of No. 52, an unfortunate loss from the streetscape.



Lower Broadway at Bowling Green

Last June, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, a private, nonprofit group, urged the Landmarks Preservation Commission to consider the designation of a historic district for lower Broadway. The masonry walls of the curving portion of lower Broadway, the conservancy said, make up "one of the most dramatic urban vistas in the country." The conservancy has since decided to press for individual designations rather than a historic district. (*New York Times*, September 23, 1979)

Times Square and the Broadway Theaters

For much of the 1980s, the Conservancy took a strong stand on the question of the redevelopment of Times Square and the preservation of the historic Broadway theaters. Legendarily the heart of Manhattan and "Crossroads of the World," Times Square had deteriorated into a seedy, dangerous neighborhood best known for three-card-monte scams, drug dealing, and XXX-rated movies, even as it remained the home of the Broadway theater.



Times Square area, 1970s

A group of separate but interrelated issues played out around Times Square during the decade: the construction of the Marriott Marquis Hotel, which required demolition of two active Broadway theaters and three others not in use; the proposal to replace the blocks around One Times Square – the original New York Times Tower – with a set of tall, bland office towers topped by mansard roofs, designed by Philip Johnson.



John Burgee and Philip Johnson's proposed Times Square towers

Several proposals included redeveloping the block of West 42nd Street between 7th and 8th Avenues known then as "The Deuce," reputed to have the highest murder rate of any block in the City but also home to more theaters than any other block in the district.



"The Deuce," north side of West 42nd Street between 7th and 8th Avenues

A major rezoning proposal encouraged new office buildings in West Midtown rather than East Midtown - West Midtown encompassing the entire Times Square/Broadway theater district. The district could potentially have lost many historic Broadway theaters; Times Square could potentially have lost its characteristic enormous, brightly lit advertising signs.

One of the more outspoken groups opposing the Times Square Redevelopment Plan is the New York Landmarks Conservancy.... Along with other organizations, the group has filed lawsuits attempting to stop the city and state from proceeding. (*Boston Globe*, March 1, 1985)

The Conservancy, as always, partnered with a number of other organizations – the City Club of New York, the Municipal Art Society, the Parks Council, the Regional Plan Association, Save the Theaters, the Women's City Club, and the local chapters of the American Planning Association and the American Institute of Architects; but the Municipal Art Society and the Conservancy took the lead. And the Conservancy spoke out in the unmistakable voice of Brendan Gill.

On the Times Square redevelopment proposal:

From Brendan Gill, chairman of the New York Landmarks Conservancy:..."I do strongly feel that of all the things that have taken place since I became involved in these issues 25 years ago, this is the worst that has ever emerged. I think it will mean the destruction of Times Square as we know it. It's just going to gut the life out of Times Square, and we will never see it again." (*New York Times*, March 26, 1984)

On the proposed Johnson-designed towers and Robert Venturi's proposal to replace the old Times Tower with an apple statue:

What on earth causes these distinguished architects to make design suggestions that a talentless comic-strip-besotted schoolchild could devise in the course of a few moments of idle doodling?... Will nobody speak the truth about this heinous urban misadventure...? Where is the army of New Yorkers who should be standing shoulder to shoulder in Times Square and saying, "No!" (Brendan Gill, Letter to the Editor, New York Times, July 11, 1984)

On the lights of Times Square:

Brendan Gill, president of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, lambasted what he called "the steamroller" effect of the plan and said the proposed high-rise towers would leave Times Square in darkness for seven months of the year. "The operation will be a success and the patient will die," he warned, referring to the elimination of Times Square's low-rise, bright-lights tradition. (Daily News, March 27, 1984)

To emphasize the issue of light potentially lost, on November 7, 1984, the Conservancy and the Municipal Art Society sponsored a press conference in Times Square and managed to have 20 of the enormous neon-lighted signs turned off to show the impact of losing the area's distinct bright-lights character.



Landmark theaters on 45th Street, Midtown Manhattan

Eventually, in response to the critics, the City's plans did change. Johnson's proposed towers disappeared, new office buildings were obliged to maintain electrically lit signs, and the Landmarks Commission designated some 25 historic Broadway theaters as landmarks – assisted by interns supplied by the Conservancy to help with the required research.



"The Deuce" today, West 42nd Street between 7th and 8th Avenues

Protecting the Landmarks Law

Landmarks are only as safe as the law that protects them. Every so often, the City considers changes to how the Landmarks Commission operates. Apart from the times when the City has proposed to "zero out" the Commission – assign it a budget of zero dollars – threats have come from proposed changes to the law, proposed changes to the City Charter that could affect the law, and reorganizations that would fold Landmarks into another agency.

In 1989, when New York's Board of Estimate ceased operation, the City had to amend its charter to reapportion the duties once conducted by that body. The Board of Estimate previously had the final say on any designation by the Landmarks Commission. One proposal discussed by the Charter Revision Commission would have granted that final say to the Planning Commission. At the same time, with the battle over St. Bartholomew's Church still ongoing, another proposal called for exempting nonprofit and religious organizations from the Landmarks Commission's purview.

The city's large and well-organized preservation community, including the Municipal Art Society, the Historic Districts Council and the Landmarks Conservancy, fears that if these changes are implemented...a major breach will be created in the city's carefully crafted landmarks law. It sees in the changes a potential for unraveling the entire system of preserving historic or architecturally important structures. (New York Times, December 3, 1989)

Thanks to the strenuous objections of the Conservancy and its partner organizations, the final say over designations went to the City Council instead of the Planning Commission. Nonprofits and religious institutions remain subject to the Landmarks Law.

...the Charter Revision Commission received more mail on the designation process than on any other single issue.... (New York Landmarks Conservancy Newsletter, fall/winter 1989)

Ellis Island

The significance of Ellis Island's history in our national life can scarcely be overstated – millions of Americans can trace their families' history back to the immigration station in operation there from 1892 to 1924. After sitting abandoned in New York Harbor for decades, the complex of roughly 30 buildings on a largely artificial 27 ½-acre island underwent a major restoration, and in 1990 its main building reopened as the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. In 1993, the Landmarks Commission designated the entire island as a historic district. But the restoration left untouched two dozen interconnected medical offices on its south.

It was known as "the sad side" of Ellis Island. Just south of the exactly restored main immigration building...lies a crumbling, abandoned hospital campus where immigrants too sick to be allowed entry were sent to recover, or to die.... At a joint news conference on the island, officers of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Municipal Art Society and Preservation New Jersey plan to call on Congress to finance emergency repairs to the south side, which has gone largely untouched for 43 years. (New York Times, June 16, 1997)



Former medical office buildings on the South Side of Ellis Island

In 1996, the Conservancy started advocating for the rescue of the deteriorating medical buildings. Its staff conducted a conditions survey of the island's south side and began a campaign urging the National Park Service to stabilize its buildings. Thanks to that advocacy, in 1997 the National Trust for Historic Preservation placed the buildings on its annual list of "America's 11 Most Endangered Places."

Calling a dilapidated part of Ellis Island a potential "national disgrace," preservationists Monday vowed to pressure Congress to spend \$2 million on buildings that once housed sick and dying immigrants.... Some buildings have lost their roofs or have been overrun by ivy and vines, damaged by water and mildew. One 8-foot section of a roof rested on the ground, a single rusty metal beam holding it up like a pitched tent. (Bergen Record, June 17, 1997)

In 1997, the Conservancy raised \$50,000 to shore up a single building as an example of what could be done.

At nominal cost, the New York Landmarks Conservancy has performed a model stabilization on one building. They did just enough work – patching gutters, pulling down vines, repairing roof tiles – to halt further erosion and to create a 15-year window in which to plan for the building's future. (New York Times, May 3, 1998)



Ellis Island, medical complex, restored building example

Restoring the medical complex to the same level as the main building would have cost tens of millions of dollars. At the same time, some found the restored main building overly sanitized, while the abandoned south side seemed better able to conjure the sense of the island's difficult history.

Uncharacteristically, the advocates of preservation... propose to do only what is necessary to leave the structures as “stabilized ruins.” Ruins, in other words, like those of Greece and Rome – with pieces missing and cracks evident...[and] just enough to allow visitors to walk through and to reflect, in safety. (New York Times, June 16, 1997)

As Schools Superintendent from 1891 to 1922 – a time of massive immigration into the City, including families with many children – Snyder designed several hundred new school buildings. Taking inspiration from traditional styles ranging from Romanesque to Renaissance to Collegiate Gothic, he created some of the City’s finest buildings, while also including such innovations as steel-cage construction and H-plan arrangements allowing better ventilation while creating space for outdoor recreation. Today his schools can be found in neighborhoods throughout the five boroughs.

Snyder was hired to reform school design – and instead created a revolution, setting a standard for municipal architecture that has proved hard to match. (Christopher Gray, New York Times, November 21, 1999)

In 1998, the Park Service released a report, to which the Conservancy contributed, calling for Congress to provide \$6.6 million for emergency repairs, the money to come from franchise fees already levied on the ferryboats and concessions servicing both Ellis and Liberty Islands.

Even as a 1998 Supreme Court decision transferred jurisdiction over most of the island to New Jersey, the New York Landmarks Conservancy continued its work. By 2000, a combination of federal and New Jersey state funding became available and an initial \$8 million stabilization project got underway. In recognition of the Conservancy’s ongoing efforts, the organization was invited to sit on the Board of “Save Ellis Island!” – a new national nonprofit. The initial stabilization project was completed in 2006, but the work continues.

Advocating for New Landmarks

The Conservancy’s preservation advocacy picked up speed in the 1990s. The list of potential landmarks supported by Conservancy testimony at public hearings would run dozens of pages.

A typical year’s roster:

In testimony before various City and State agencies, the Conservancy’s voice was heard: urging building code reform for access to historic structures; calling for the relocation and restoration of the Hamilton Grange in Harlem; supporting the stabilization of the Octagon and Smallpox Hospital ruins on Roosevelt Island; endorsing the reuse of the Campagna Estate in the Riverdale section of the Bronx as a school and temple; and urging the designation of new landmarks as diverse as the TWA Terminal in Queens, the expanded Carnegie Hill Historic District in Manhattan, and the St. George Historic District on Staten Island. (Landmarks Conservancy, 1994 Annual Report)

The Conservancy often focuses on entire categories of potential landmarks. In 1999 and 2000 the Conservancy turned to the issue of New York City public schools designed by Charles B.J. Snyder.

One hundred years later, many of those schools suffered from deferred maintenance, and in some quarters were considered obsolete structures in need of replacement. Articles in the press regularly focused on the dreadful condition of the schools, often calling out P.S. 109 on East 99th Street as one of the worst. In 1998, the Schools Construction Authority began to demolish it, while its students were transferred to other schools.

A number of parents, upset at losing the school, called the Landmarks Conservancy to ask for help. Conservancy staff visited the school, saw that, despite its conditions, it was stable and also a largely intact Snyder school, and called the State Historic Preservation Office in Albany to ask about the mandated review of such projects – only to learn that the review had never happened. The demolition stopped. And the Authority agreed to conduct a survey of historic schools.

The New York Landmarks Conservancy complained that the authority had ignored a requirement to check with the New York State Office of...Historic Preservation, and the authority has canceled the work and reroofed and sealed the empty school for the winter.... “ [The authority agreed] to conduct a historic survey of all school buildings to determine which should receive special protection.... Such a survey should produce the first comprehensive list of Snyder’s works. (Christopher Gray, New York Times, November 21, 1999)

Architect and School Superintendent **C. B. J. Snyder** is credited with the design of over 400 structural projects – including more than 140 elementary schools.



Former P.S. 109, now “El Barrio’s Artspace/PS109” with artists’ housing

Fomer P.S. 109 has since been restored and converted into artists’ housing.

The schools controversy continued. Early in 2000, at the Conservancy’s request, architect Robert A.M. Stern came to the defense of Snyder’s work in a *New York Times* op-ed:

Driven by a desire to prepare New York City’s children for success in an economy built on computers and communication, some city leaders want to abandon or demolish existing public schools and replace them with state-of-the-art buildings. What they overlook is the beauty and value of hundreds of wonderful school buildings that are among the great glories of our city. New York doesn’t have to savage this heritage to get technologically functional schools. (Stern, New York Times, January 22, 2000)

As a result of the Conservancy’s advocacy, the City Council held a public hearing on the question of Snyder’s schools. The schools now enjoy a cachet – many have been designated landmarks. Several slated for demolition have instead been restored, some continuing to serve as schools, others converted for new uses. And in 2022, with Conservancy support, author and educator Jean Arrington wrote *From Factories to Palaces*, the definitive work on Snyder’s schools.

The Largest Picasso in the U.S.A

The Landmarks Conservancy advocated for and rescued the largest work of Pablo Picasso in the country, *Le Tricorne*, not once but twice – in 2005 and again in 2015.

When the Four Seasons restaurant opened in 1959 in the Seagram Building on Park Avenue, an enormous painted theater curtain by Pablo Picasso, measuring roughly 20 x 20 feet, hung on the wall of a long corridor connecting the two main dining rooms. Picasso had painted it in 1919 for the Diaghilev Ballet production, *The Three-Cornered Hat*, for which he also designed the sets and costumes. Clearly proud of the curtain, he signed it, “Picasso Pinxit.” Philip Johnson, the restaurant’s architect, and Phyllis Lambert, of the Bronfman family that constructed the Seagram Building, chose it specifically for the corridor.



Picasso Curtain in “Picasso Alley,” Four Seasons restaurant

The curtain hung in the corridor, known as “Picasso Alley,” for decades. Then Vivendi Universal, a French entertainment company that in 2000 had bought Seagram, including its building, ran into financial difficulties, and put its entire art collection up for auction.

At the time the pending sale was announced, architects and preservationists feared that the Picasso...would be taken down.... Their protests did not fall on deaf ears. (New York Times, December 9, 2005)

In 2005, instead of selling the Picasso, Vivendi donated it – at Phyllis Lambert’s suggestion – to the New York Landmarks Conservancy, on the understanding that the curtain would remain in the restaurant but be cared for by the Conservancy, as a gift not just to the Conservancy, but to the people of New York.

In 2014, a new owner of the Seagram Building, RFR Holding, wanted the curtain moved to free up the space. When the Conservancy resisted, fearing that moving the curtain could irreparably damage it, RFR threatened simply to take it down.

Pablo Picasso's most readily accessible painting... hangs in a New York restaurant...whose owner reportedly thinks that the painting is a piece of junk and wants to get rid of it. (Wall Street Journal, February 13, 2014)

John Richardson, Picasso's biographer, considers... the curtain... a priceless relic, one of the last surviving souvenirs of the most influential ballet company of the 20th century. (Wall Street Journal, February 13, 2014)

The Conservancy took RFR to court, arguing that because of the curtain's fragile condition it could be moved only in a careful process that could take a full week, while RFR planned to take it down in a day.

[According to the Conservancy,] "one of RFR's own movers told us that no matter how cautious they are, the work is so brittle and fragile that it could, as one of them put it, 'crack like a potato chip' ".... (New York Times, February 4, 2014)

A judge issued a temporary injunction against moving the curtain.

"I don't want to be the judge who has a Picasso destroyed...." (New York Times, February 9, 2014)

Resolution of the dispute finally came when it became clear that RFR wouldn't be renewing the restaurant's lease, thereby obliging the Conservancy to find a new home for the Picasso. The Conservancy and RFR agreed that RFR would pay for the curtain's careful removal, restoration and reinstallation. The Conservancy then announced that it would donate it to the New-York Historical Society. On May 18, 2015, the curtain moved to its new home, becoming the centerpiece of the Historical Society's second-floor gallery.



Picasso Curtain at the New-York Historical Society

A Broader View: Advocacy on Planning and Zoning

In 1973, the Conservancy's first year, New York's population had fallen to roughly seven million. With entire neighborhoods seemingly depopulated, the City embraced a policy of "planned shrinkage." By the beginning of the new century, with the turn-around in New York's fortunes – powered not least by the preservation movement – the population had rebounded to eight million, and by 2021 had grown by half a million more. Those one and a half million people had to live and work somewhere – hence an explosion of new construction throughout the five boroughs.

Since New York regulates development by zoning laws, developers have lobbied to loosen them – and "upzoning" has entered the political lexicon. Upzoning increases the possibilities for new, larger buildings, and in the process increases the pressure on "underbuilt" sites – including landmarks. Much of the real estate industry sees landmarks and historic districts as impediments to growth. More far-sighted observers see the demolition and redevelopment of landmark sites as a classic case of killing the goose that laid the golden egg.

By necessity, the Landmarks Conservancy has risen to the challenge of defending landmarks – and especially potential but not-yet-designated landmarks – from the pressures of upzoning. It has expanded its advocacy to include major city-planning initiatives as they affect preservation. Three such issues in particular have resulted in major long-term efforts: Midtown East, SoHo/NoHo, and, currently, the Penn Station district.



Despite Conservancy efforts to have Midtown East's 250 Park Avenue (Cross & Cross) designated a landmark, the building remains unprotected and vulnerable to demolition.

Midtown East

It is possible to look at the 80- and 90-year-old towers around Grand Central Terminal as buildings that give east Midtown Manhattan the desirable luster of civic history. It is equally possible to look at them as the buildings that give east Midtown the deathly shroud of commercial obsolescence. (New York Times, February 28, 2013)

Between 2012 and 2021, two of New York City's mayors each promoted the same approach to the eastern half of Midtown Manhattan: change the zoning to permit ever larger towers. Mayor Bloomberg's plan, announced in 2012, covered a 70-block area between 39th and 57th Streets and Madison and Third Avenues. Its stated goal: to ensure that the Grand Central Terminal district could stay competitive with other global business centers.

The Department of City Planning...[said] that allowing for about a dozen new skyscrapers around Grand Central was necessary to create premium office space that would keep New York competitive with cities like Shanghai and London. (Wall Street Journal, July 29, 2013)

The threat to potential landmarks immediately drew a response from the Conservancy and other preservation groups, as well as local Community Boards and elected officials.

[The] push to increase development in east Midtown would threaten some of the very buildings that give the neighborhood its character, preservation groups and community boards warn. The buildings include [many]...which many New Yorkers may think – incorrectly – are protected as landmarks already. (New York Times, December 7, 2012)

The Conservancy, the Municipal Art Society and the Historic Districts Council agreed on a list of 16 potential landmarks at risk of replacement.

An official of the conservancy...said, "[We believe]... that these structures are not obsolete, low-ceilinged disposable construction, but rather represent some of the best architecture in the area, designed by distinguished architects." (New York Times, December 7, 2012)

The Conservancy allied itself with the Multi-Board Task Force on East Midtown Rezoning, representing Community Boards 4, 5, and 6; conferred with political representatives; lobbied reporters; circulated petitions; and testified at every public hearing.

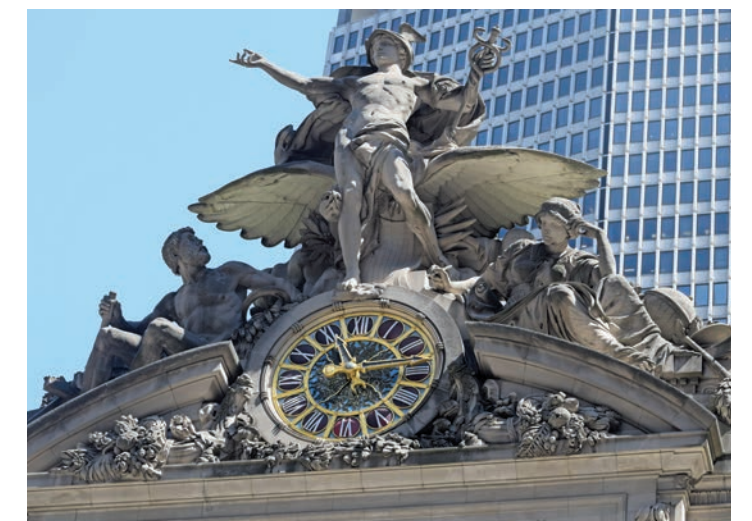
When it became clear that, in response to the general opposition, the project faced certain defeat at the City Council, Mayor Bloomberg withdrew the plan.

When the idea resurfaced in 2015 during Mayor Bill de Blasio's first term, the City paid more attention to Community Boards and civic organizations and addressed landmarks issues.

The attention to historic preservation pleases... the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The concern is a notable difference from the Bloomberg administration's attempt at rezoning, when "we were last to the table," [said the Conservancy's director of public policy].... "There is a lot of attention to landmarks, in the way that landmarks define a diversity of buildings and businesses in Midtown." (Wall Street Journal, June 15, 2015)

The Conservancy testified, again, at public hearings and public meetings. And it represented the preservation community on the East Midtown Steering Committee co-chaired by the Manhattan Borough President and the City Council member for Midtown East.

The City Council approved the new zoning in 2017. On balance, the Conservancy's advocacy improved the likelihood of more historic buildings surviving under the new regulations. The Landmarks Commission designated 12 new landmarks in Midtown East – not everything the Conservancy wanted, but more than originally thought possible. The new zoning also greatly expanded the ability of landmark owners to sell their unused development rights – a major tool for easing financial pressures on landmarks.



Grand Central Terminal clock and grand statuary group, Midtown East

The rezoning marks a new era in how development rights from landmarks are transferred. The Conservancy...will be watching to see how [the new rules will]...help or hinder landmark buildings. We will also be monitoring construction activity at the many historic sites in Midtown East that are not protected by landmark designation, and will continue to urge the LPC to designate additional landmarks in the rezoning area. *(Landmarks Conservancy, 2017 Annual Report)*

re-evaluation of its remarkable architecture attracted historic preservation advocates. The Landmarks Commission designated the SoHo/Cast Iron Historic District in 1973 and approved an extension in 2010. SoHo gradually evolved into the center of New York's contemporary art world. Galleries moved into well-lit storefronts, while a special City panel certified artists who would be permitted to occupy joint living-working quarters in the upper stories. SoHo thrived – as did its successors in the line of lower Manhattan commercial hubs turned historic districts – first TriBeCa, then NoHo.



Architectural details on Midtown East's 125 Park Avenue, designated as an individual landmark in 2016.



Broadway in SoHo, looking south

SoHo/NoHo

New York City's likely mayor wants to solve the housing crisis with denser buildings in rich neighborhoods. Eric Adams' strategy is a major change from decades of zoning for more housing in poorer areas. Upzoning in "sacred cows" like SoHo and other wealthy areas can even the playing field for homebuyers, he [told a reporter]. *(Business Insider, October 6, 2021)*

That very success has led to a new threat to SoHo and other historic districts like it. Urban memories can be short. A 20th-century solution can be perceived as out-of-sync with 21st-century needs. In January 2019, an advisory group that included the Conservancy was tasked with reconsidering the local zoning. At the same time, local residents attended several public meetings called to discuss the issues.

The future of lower Manhattan's Manufacturing District is now in the hands of the approximately 8,000 New Yorkers who live in NoHo and SoHo.... Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, City Councilwoman Margaret Chin and the Department of City Planning will host public meetings to discuss matters of interest to area residents and business owners in these "unique" areas.... The goal of the conversation series is to gain insight on what the community wants to prioritize for the future of its neighborhoods. *(AM New York, January 14, 2019)*

By October the following year, Mayor de Blasio's administration proposed changing the zoning in both SoHo and NoHo.

SoHo – a planners' acronym for "South of Houston Street" – epitomizes the historic district success story of the 1970s. The once-splendid commercial heart of Victorian New York, its streets lined with the latest in architectural technology – cast-iron facades – SoHo had declined over a century into a run-down collection of warehouses, sheltering light industry, known by the local fire department as "Hell's Hundred Acres" for its many factory fires. A planned "Lower Manhattan Expressway" threatened to bulldoze much of the area.

SoHo seemed doomed. Instead, the discovery of its cheap, well-lit loft spaces brought in New York's artists, while the

One of New York City's most expensive neighborhoods could be transformed under a new development plan that aims to increase the supply of housing as well as ease restrictions on retail storefronts... [Proposed new zoning] would allow real-estate developers to build more residential buildings than under existing rules. The aim is to produce some 3,200 new apartments, with at least 25% classified as "affordable" and subject to limits on rent price. *(Wall Street Journal, October 7, 2020)*

Worried about the potential impact of the rezoning on the historic districts, the Conservancy commissioned a report.

[The] report analyzed every historic district and compared it with surrounding areas to measure density, demographics, income, and housing costs. It found that historic districts generally reflect the range of people and incomes in their larger communities. Many historic districts are as dense, or denser, than their surroundings. *(Landmarks Conservancy, 2021 Annual Report)*

At public hearings on the proposal, the Conservancy testified in opposition.

In December 2021, the City Council approved the rezoning.



Broadway at Prince Street, SoHo

It was a bitter battle. Preservation was pitted against the promises of "affordable" housing. The benefits of these unique historic districts got lost amid charges that "rich" people didn't want lower-income neighbors. We never heard that sentiment in hundreds of hours of testimony and years of meetings.

This change will encourage out-of-scale construction that conflicts with the neighborhood's sense of place – a first for New York's historic districts. The plan also targets landmark buildings as development sites. While the plan was presented as a way to create affordable housing, there is nothing to require it. Instead, new allowances for larger buildings will almost certainly diminish the historic districts while doing little to alleviate real quality-of-life issues that bedevil residents.

Now, we will work to ensure that any proposal for new development in SoHo and NoHo is contextual and appropriate for this one-of-a-kind community. *(Landmarks Conservancy, 2021 Annual Report)*

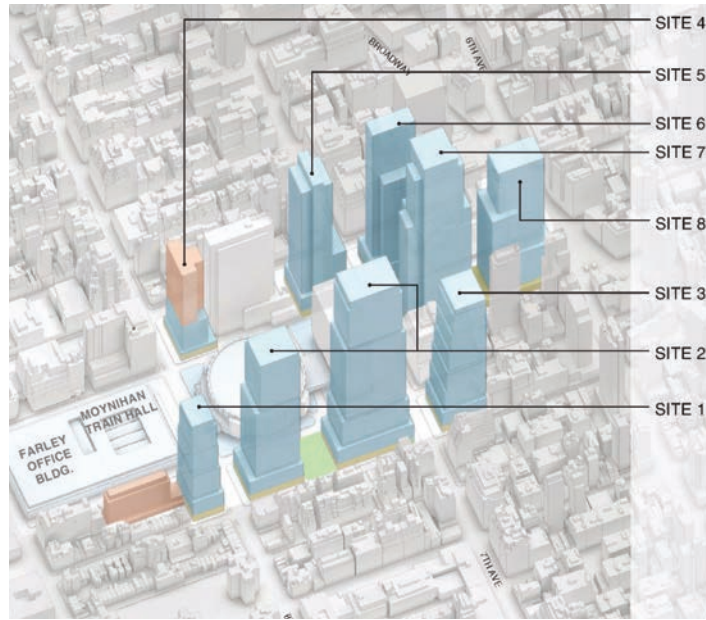
Penn Station

Not long ago, the phrase "Penn Station preservation battle" conjured images of the long-lost civic monument whose destruction in the early 1960s helped lead to the creation of New York's Landmarks Law. Today, it conjures images of a battle for the future of Midtown: a New York State-proposed redevelopment around the current Penn Station.

Opposition is...growing to the State's attempt to level six blocks around Penn Station for giant towers larger than Hudson Yards. Billed as necessary to fund improvements to Penn Station, it is an outrageous revival of long-discredited urban renewal. The blocks are full of historic buildings, businesses, and residents, that contribute to a thriving midtown area. The State has failed to say what improvements are planned for the Station or unveil a real plan. We opposed this from the start and will continue to do so. *(Landmarks Conservancy 2021 Annual Report)*

Penn Station

The busiest transportation facility in the Western Hemisphere with over 1,200 trains daily.



Rendering of Penn Station Civic and Land Use Project

As always with such large advocacy projects, the Conservancy has joined hands with other organizations and looked for allies to support their position, as in this op-ed piece by Chris Ward, the former Executive Director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and Conservancy Advisory Council Member:

...the new redevelopment vision remains a massive real estate play in search of a transit project. The unspecified and murky financing of the project through the construction of 10 large towers raises the question of what exactly is driving this plan.... Is this the city we will want to live in? Many elected and community officials have begun to raise these important questions. It is time to begin answering them. Otherwise, we might well repeat the mistakes of the original Penn Station and replace it with a canyon of bleak office towers. (Op-ed, Christopher Ward, Crain's New York Business, April 8, 2022)

As with advocacy generally, the work continues.



Penn Station Service Building, 236-248 West 31st Street



Opened in 1919, Hotel Pennsylvania at 401 Seventh Avenue was once the largest hotel in the world. It closed in 2020 and is being demolished to make way for Penn15 Tower



St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, 207-214 West 30th Street, sitting on a block now scheduled for demolition



Promoting Preservation / Education

"If we want to live in—and leave to our kids—a City rich with history and culture, great architecture and great neighborhoods, character and diversity, then we'll need to keep working hard to connect people's love of our NYC places to the hard work of preserving them. The work of the Landmarks Conservancy is essential in making those connections."

-Brad Lander, New York City Comptroller and former Council Member

Curator and Art Historian Morrison Heckscher gives Conservancy Professional Circle Members a tour of the newly renovated American Wing at The Metropolitan Museum, 2012

VI. Promoting Preservation / Education

The Landmarks Conservancy exists because it has a constituency – New Yorkers who care about their City, about the physical environment in which they live and work, about their connection to the City’s past, about the direction of its future. Without that constituency, without public and private support, the Conservancy would have folded its tents long ago.

But the Conservancy can’t take that constituency for granted, and it doesn’t. From the earliest discussions, its founders understood education – or, in the words of its incorporation papers, “promoting public awareness” – to be a major part of the mission.

Public support for its first project – reviving the Custom House – depended in part on educating the public to the building’s value, and the value of historic architecture generally. For six years, the Conservancy maintained a kiosk outside the building with an exhibit of photos and drawings, to help passersby understand the Custom House’s importance. Brendan Gill wrote a booklet about its history and design, and its value to the City, to New Yorkers.

Because its design is as simple as its scale is grand.... It is a presence formidable but not frightening.... Its sheer bulk and almost crushing weight of stone promise a permanence that few New York buildings have ever been able to attain, and we have reason to be increasingly grateful for manifestations of permanence. (Brendan Gill, *The U.S. Custom House on Bowling Green*, 1976)

With the phrase “grateful for permanence” the booklet artfully suggests that monuments like the Custom House can anchor some part of us in an otherwise constantly changing world, that its preservation has value above and beyond its particular characteristics.

Over the past half century, the Conservancy has channeled its educational efforts towards a variety of audiences: Owners and managers of historic properties; practicing architects, builders and craftspeople; preservation advocates; public officials; students; and the general public. It has done so with publications and exhibitions, talks and tours, seminars and workshops, and awards programs – and most recently with a robust online presence.

Publications

In Print – 20th Century

For more than 40 years the Conservancy has put forward dozens of publications in traditional media. Besides the annual reports and newsletters providing updates of the Conservancy’s activities, and brief pamphlets explaining the workings of its programs, most such publications are the technical works mentioned earlier, manuals regarding brownstone repair (1983), historic building facades (1987), architectural cast-iron (1991), historic windows (1992), religious properties (1989), graffiti (1995), and restoration projects for religious properties (2002). These are meant for property owners and professionals in the field. *Common Bond*, now an annual digital publication, covers the latest issues facing the stewards of religious properties.

Even in publications, the Conservancy looks for partnerships. In the 1990s it co-authored manuals with the Landmarks Commission – the *Tribeca West Historic District Manual* (1992) and the *Row House Manual* (1995).

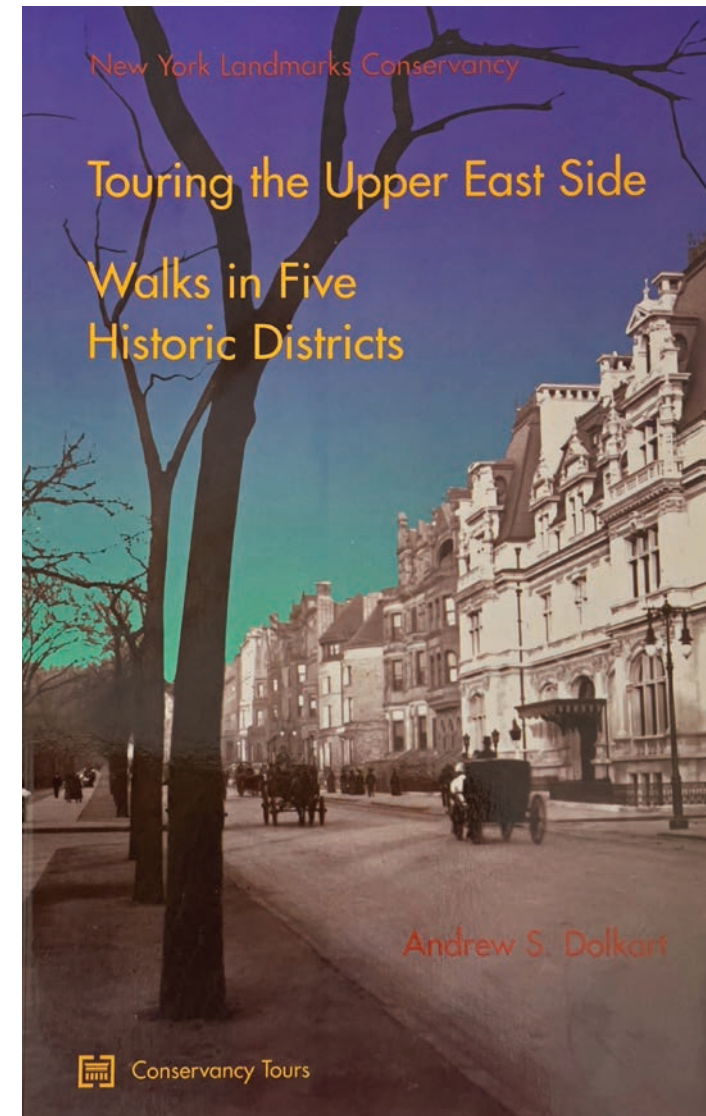
Row House Dos and Don'ts
When a lintel crumbles or a cornice chips...repairs cannot be done according to whim.... Last week, the commission published the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission Row House Manual.... [It] explains basic preservation methods...[and] was written with the help of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. (New York Times, November 2, 1995)

The Conservancy has also co-sponsored books published by outside experts. These include *Buildings Reborn: New Uses, Old Places* by Barbaralee Diamonstein (1978) which accompanied an exhibit sponsored by the Conservancy; *Landmarks Preservation and the Property Tax*, by David Listokin, co-published with Rutgers University’s Center for Urban Policy Research (1982); and *Reweaving the Urban Fabric: Approaches to Infill Housing*, co-sponsored with the New York Council on the Arts and published by Princeton Architectural Press (1989).

In a different vein, the Conservancy has published four guidebooks to historic districts: *Touring the Upper East Side* (Andrew S. Dolkart, 1995), *Touring Historic Harlem* (Andrew S. Dolkart and Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, 1997), *Touring the Flatiron* (Joyce Mendelsohn, 1998), and *Touring Lower Manhattan* (Andrew S. Dolkart and Steven Wheeler, 2000).

Landmarks in New York City - As of January 2023, there are more than 37,000 buildings that are protected as individual landmarks, interior landmarks, scenic landmarks, or as part of 149 historic districts.

“Touring the Upper East Side,” the [Landmarks Conservancy’s] first guidebook...takes its readers on leisurely peregrinations through five of the city’s more-or-less contiguous historic districts...[and] highlights all the usual street-side suspects with tales of mansions, mansards and megalomaniacs, but numerous surprises abound. For example, how many Manhattanites have been inside Trinity Baptist Church, at 250 East 61st Street, a 1929 marble-and-bronze ode to Swedish Art Deco? (New York Times, June 29, 1995)

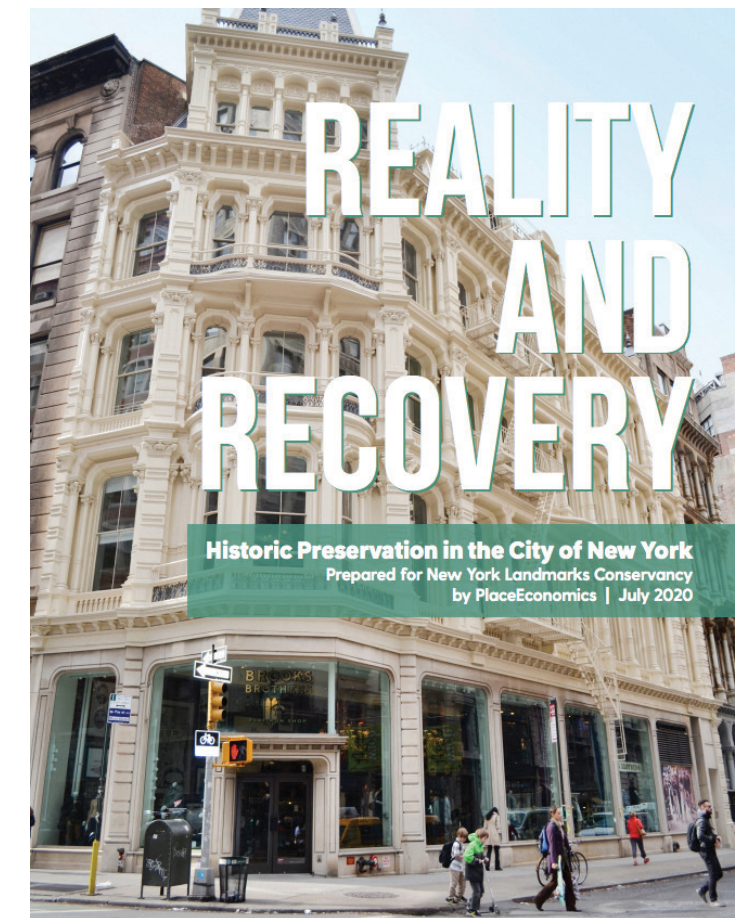


Touring the Upper East Side guide book

On-line – 21st Century

Caring about and protecting the past in no way means ignoring the present or future. The Landmarks Conservancy has leaned into the brave new digital world in a big way.

Its two newest publications – pioneering studies demonstrating the value of preservation to New York’s economy – will be found only online: *Historic Preservation: At the Core of a Dynamic City* (2016), and its updated version, *Reality and Recovery: Historic Preservation in New York City* (2020), both prepared by Donovan Rypkema of PlaceEconomics. The original study took a comprehensive look at the myriad ways preservation shapes the City, creating jobs, stimulating investments, attracting tourists, and conserving energy. The second found that a wide range of businesses - especially those in the rapidly growing high-tech sector, as well as the arts and entertainment industries - prefer to locate in historic districts.; and also that women- and minority-owned businesses are disproportionately located in historic districts. Their overall conclusion: historic buildings and neighborhoods are at the center of a dynamic, growing and diverse New York.



On-line study, Reality and Recovery

Historic Districts cover less than 4% of the City—but they are the locations of choice for businesses, retailers, and residents. More than \$800 million is invested annually in New York’s historic buildings, creating jobs for 9,000 New Yorkers.

Visitors who click on the links to those studies will find themselves on the Conservancy's website, where still more links lead to ever more information – advocacy, upcoming events, and each of the Conservancy's major programs. Special links lead to the latest updates on current issues, most recently the Penn Station redevelopment. No need to keep checking – those who sign up for the regular e-mail blasts will always be up to date on the latest preservation issues and will also receive the digital version of "preservation alerts" – which began pre-digitally in 1996 – calling out the troops to take action.

Also available for signup is the newest on-line benefit, "Tourist In Your Own Town" – short, lively virtual tours of New York's marvels. During the COVID lockdown these became more popular than ever.

If you've been waiting for tourists to clear out before visiting some of New York City's major landmarks, but you're now finding that you couldn't go even if you wanted to, don't worry. The New York Landmarks Conservancy has a catalogue of video tours that you can play from your couch. The Tourist in Your Own Town series can help you discover NYC's gems, including its parks, sacred sites, colonial landmarks, historic houses, museums and skyscrapers. *(Time Out New York, March 18, 2020)*

There are now 62 videos, and they have been accessed from around the City, around the country, even around the world – with over 476,000 views in more than 50 countries.



Conservancy President Peg Breen filming a video at Hamilton Grange

Awards Programs

Perhaps among the most effective tools for promoting sound preservation practice is recognition for successful and well-executed projects. Such programs both reward those who take the plunge and do the hard work, and spread the word about how rewarding such experiences can be. Today, a list of all the awards would read like a brief history of 40 years of New York preservation, hitting the highlights.

The Chairman's Awards

The Conservancy's first awards program initially honored outstanding restorations of New York buildings. One of the earliest, in 1979, honored the restoration of the terra-cotta exterior of the Woolworth Building.

The Woolworth Company is currently engaged in a five-year program of extensive exterior restoration.... The terra cotta is being cleaned and strengthened, with replacement of elements where necessary, to return it to its original condition and guarantee its future life. This investment in the city's heritage has just been honored with the Chairman's Award of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. *(Ada Louise Huxtable, New York Times, November 25, 1979)*

By 1981, the press was referring to "the coveted New York Landmarks Conservancy Chairman's Award" *(Daily News, November 8, 1981).*

In 1992, the Conservancy rededicated the Chairman's Award to recognizing prominent business leaders who incorporate preservation into their work, while the new Lucy G. Moses Awards would continue the focus on specific restoration projects. The first new Chairman's award honored Richard D. Parsons, Chairman of the Dime Savings Bank.

Richard D. Parsons, chairman and chief executive officer of Dime Savings Bank of New York, will accept the New York Landmarks Conservancy's 1992 chairman's award.... "in recognition of the outstanding contributions that Mr. Parsons and the Dime have made to the preservation and revitalization of New York City's neighborhoods," the organization said.... *(American Banker, November 4, 1992)*



2019 Chairman Awards: (from left) Brooklyn Borough President (now Mayor) Eric Adams, Shubert Organization President Robert E. Wankel, Hunter College President Jennifer J. Raab, Conservancy Board Chair Michael Braner, and Robert Bates of Walter B. Melvin Architects. (photo: James Salzano)

More recently, the 2016 Chairman's Award went to Apple for putting sensitively designed Apple stores in historic New York buildings. The company does not usually accept honors, but in this case sent top executives to accept the award.

Apple...has been honoured by a New York preservation group for its sympathetic repurposing of old buildings. It has been awarded the New York Landmarks Conservancy Chairman's Award. Apple has completed four stores in historic buildings, most notable among them is its very sympathetic integration of an outlet on a balcony at Grand Central Station, one of New York's most architecturally striking buildings. *(Irish Times, February 11, 2016)*



Chairman's Award luncheon at The Metropolitan Club (photo: James Salzano)

Lucy G. Moses Awards

The Lucy G. Moses Awards, which have been called "the Oscars of Preservation," began in 1991 with recognition for five projects: the Tribeca Film Center for its adaptive reuse of the former Martinson Coffee Building; the owners of 55 White Street for restoring its cast-iron façade; the Asser Levy Recreation Center on East 23rd Street for its successful redesign; the restoration of St. Alban's Church on Staten Island; and the restoration of the Prospect Park Carousel by the Prospect Park Alliance. And an award went to *Metropolis* magazine for its coverage of preservation.

Every year since then, a dozen or so projects have been called out, and their owners and architects or contractors honored for their perseverance and for the quality of their work – several hundred awards all told. The annual event has become an unofficial yearly get-together for those who

work in preservation in ever growing numbers – up to 670 attendees just before COVID, and at the most recent event, the first since the pandemic, more than 500.

From the beginning, the Moses Awards have included a special Leadership Award for outstanding figures in the preservation field with a lifetime of accomplishments. The first recipient was the now legendary Margot Gayle, in whose kitchen the Victorian Society in America was founded, who created and led the Friends of Cast-Iron Architecture, and who, in the words of one long-time preservationist, "was the mother of us all."

Leadership awards have since gone to dozens of honorees, among them such well-known figures as James Marston Fitch, founder of Columbia University's first-in-the-nation preservation program (1992); Joan K. Davidson, whose Kaplan Fund financed hundreds of preservation efforts; Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, president of the Central Park Conservancy (1995); Adolph Placzek, librarian of the Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library and Landmarks Commissioner (1998); Giorgio Cavaglieri, among the first New York architects to specialize in preservation work (2001); Evelyn and Everett Ortner of Park Slope, long-time preservation activists (2005); Ruth Abram, founder of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum (2008); and more recently John H. Beyer, founding member of Beyer Blinder Belle, considered the preeminent preservation architecture firm (2017); Barnett Shepherd, for decades of preservation advocacy on Staten Island (2018), and Yuien Chin, Executive Director of the West Harlem Community Preservation Organization (2021).



John Belle receiving a Lucy G. Moses Preservation Leadership Award in 2011



Lucy G. Moses Preservation Award winner in 2021, Moynihan Train Hall (photo: Lucas Blair Simpson / Aaron Fedor © SOM)

Living Landmarks

Other countries have long honored citizens considered “Living National Treasures.” Thanks to the Landmarks Conservancy, New York now honors its “Living Landmarks” – and has done so since 1994.

Until now, the New York Landmarks Conservancy has always honored historic buildings at its annual benefit. But this year the Conservancy is giving citations to six notable New Yorkers as the city’s “first living landmarks.” Presumably, the citations will prevent the facades of the honorees from being altered.... Citations will be handed out at the conservancy’s black-tie benefit at the Plaza. *(New York Times, August 31, 1994)*

The award honors New Yorkers who in some sense define the City, people without whom the City would be a poorer and less recognizable place – no different, really, than the immovable kind of landmark. The first honorees: New York Governor Hugh Carey, playwright John Guare, architect Philip Johnson, fashion designer Mary McFadden, entertainer Bobby Short, and producer George C. Wolfe.

On accepting the honor, the Living Landmarks explain why they believe historic preservation to be so important for New York, and which landmarks hold a special place in their hearts.

“When I tell you preservation’s important,” [Peg] Breen said, “what do you expect? When Walter Cronkite tells you, you listen more.” *(New York Times, September 9, 1996)*



Liz Smith at the 2011 Living Landmarks Celebration (photo: Will Ragozzino/BFA.com)

The latest group of honorees demonstrate the broad range and diversity of New York: Andreas C. Dracopoulos, of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF); Marlene Hess, of the Hess Philanthropic Fund; Earl Monroe, New York Knicks great; Charlotte Moore and Ciarán O'Reilly, of the Irish Repertory Theatre; Faith Ringgold, artist and activist; Oscar Tang, philanthropist and financier; and the late Rev. Calvin Butts III, pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church.

Aside from its role as an excellent fundraiser, the annual “Living Landmarks Celebration” has helped spread the word about the Conservancy’s programs, and about New York’s landmarks – both living and stationary.

Supporting Preservation Education

Today – as compared to half a century ago – far more New York schools teach local history, architectural history, historic preservation, and urbanism than ever before. Today’s young people will inherit the City we work so hard to protect. They represent the future of preservation.

To play its part in engaging the next generation, in 2014 the Conservancy entered a partnership with Bronx International High School to host interns from their Preservation Technology Program. The school, serving a primarily immigrant population, is one of four housed in the former Morris High School, the most prominent building in the Morris High School Historic District and a Collegiate Gothic-style masterwork of architect C.B.J. Snyder.

The Conservancy exposes interns to the profession of historic preservation and its various career paths. Tours of landmark buildings are also organized. Internships are funded by the New York City Department of Education.

For its members and the general public, the Conservancy co-sponsors lectures on historic preservation and related topics at the General Society of Mechanics & Tradesmen of the City of New York.



Bronx International High School students, Gould Memorial Library field trip

Professional Circle

The New York Landmarks Conservancy has established the Professional Circle.... Members include preservationists, architects, building owners, contractors, engineers, interior designers, landscape specialists, real estate professionals and lawyers. The “circle” visits restoration projects and works toward preserving landmarks structures throughout New York State. *(Newsday, August 23, 1996)*

In 1996, with an eye to encouraging firms in preservation and related firms to become more active in the organization’s work, the Conservancy created a membership program, the Professional Circle.

In an age when life-long learning has become a requirement in so many professions, the Professional Circle offers valuable networking and educational opportunities to individuals and firms working in architecture, construction, design, preservation, real estate, and related fields. It does this through exclusive tours, workshops, lectures and more. Many of these are AIA and CEU eligible.



Professional Circle members on a hard-hat tour of Grace Church, Brooklyn

Looking Forward

The state of historic preservation in 2023 looks quite different than it did fifty years ago. So many threatened buildings now proudly restored and valued. So many neglected neighborhoods now protected as historic districts. So many New Yorkers invested in preserving and maintaining the city’s landmarks.

Historic preservation has long since become officially recognized as a significant contributor to the city’s welfare. Its advocates are now often at the table where land-use decisions are made. Neighborhood groups, citywide organizations, state and federal agencies – preservation has allies in every sphere. Pick up a recent Conservancy annual report – the list of supporters goes on for pages.

What hasn’t changed are the dynamics of a great metropolis. The forces of change and development are as strong as they’ve always been. New issues and difficulties will arise. The Landmarks Conservancy will continue to have a major role to play.

Over the past fifty years, the Conservancy has evolved organically, as new challenges have given rise to new programs. From an initial focus on lower Manhattan, it has taken its work to all five boroughs and throughout the State. It remains a staunch supporter of communities once overlooked by the preservation community. The Conservancy’s scope has widened, considering preservation in the context of city planning, and addressing issues of sustainability, now that the City has learned that a superstorm can wreak havoc on historic buildings.

Who can imagine what preservation will face in the next half century? Some of the changes can be predicted, while others will catch us all by surprise. But the Conservancy will continue to evolve to meet new challenges. With its engaged board, its top-notch professional staff, its roster of consultants, its supporters and funders and a very long list of partners, the Conservancy will stand at the forefront, fighting to preserve the best of the City’s past while moving into its future.



We will continue to love landmarks, Conservancy staff member Colleen Heemeyer

Credits and Thanks

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Most of the photography is from Conservancy staff unless otherwise noted.

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50th Anniversary cake from 2023 kickoff event

Cheers!

Here's to another fifty years!



Brendan Gill, Chairman of the Conservancy, Roger Smith of Warner Communications, and Mrs. Vincent Astor, in a victory toast on May, 5 1978 celebrating the Conservancy's acquisition of the Fraunces Tavern block. A \$250,000 grant from the Vincent Astor Foundation and a mortgage from Warner provided the funding (photo: Daily News, L.P.)

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