



The Union Square Community Coalition is one of the many preservation-oriented organizations to join the NYC Landmarks50 Alliance celebrating the 50th anniversary of the signing of the city's Landmarks Law.

Cover image: Labor rally in the North Plaza of Union Square Park in 1933. This spectacular scene captures the spirit behind the area's designation as a National Historic Landmark in recognition of a site where workers exercised their constitutional rights to free speech and assembly. The recent introduction of trees and planters has curtailed the original intent of this space.

Union Square Community Coalition

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The Union Square Community Coalition is a non-profit advocacy group founded in 1980.

THE UNION SQUARE COMMUNITY COALITION

CELEBRATES THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIGNING OF
NYC'S LANDMARKS LAW



WE HONOR OUR PAST

The Union Square Community Coalition is proud to present the 14 buildings we successfully supported for landmark designation.



The Union Square Community Coalition was formed in 1980 by neighborhood residents who were alarmed that severe cuts in the Parks Department's maintenance and recreation budgets would cause further deterioration in a park already overrun with drug users. USCC staged numerous events — from children's entertainers in the Pavilion to pot-luck suppers in the sunken area just south of the Pavilion — to bring folks back to the park. This successful campaign led to the renovation of the park, including replacing two small playgrounds with the enlarged modern playground that exists today. USCC has also been a champion of historic preservation, resulting in the landmarking of these 14 structures, all within a three-block radius of the Square.

Above: Commemorative plaque. In 1997 Union Square Park was named a National Historic Landmark. Union Square was the site of the first Labor Day parade, in 1882. Below: Early postcard shows horse-drawn carriages at the former Bank of the Metropolis on the west side of Union Square. Opposite: Of a slightly later vintage, this card shows several landmarked structures on the north and east sides of the Square. Note the horseless carriage and shorter skirts on the women.



1 ONE UNION SQUARE WEST (1890) THE LINCOLN BUILDING

So named because of its proximity to the statue of Abraham Lincoln, which was originally located in the southwest corner of Union Square opposite the building. The monument has since been moved to the inside of Union Square Park, in the crosswalk at East 16th Street.



2 31 UNION SQUARE WEST (1903) FORMER BANK OF THE METROPOLIS (BELOW LEFT)

At 16 stories, this was Union Square's first "skyscraper." It still dominates the skyline of the Square's western horizon. Where bank tellers' cages used to be, the ground floor behind the imposing columns is now occupied by a trendy restaurant, the Blue Water Grill.



3 33 UNION SQUARE WEST (1893) THE DECKER BUILDING (ABOVE RIGHT)

Once home to Decker Brothers' Pianos, the Spanish-Moorish architecture has been faithfully restored—with one glaring exception: The minaret that originally capped its crown has not been replicated, leaving a somewhat truncated look.



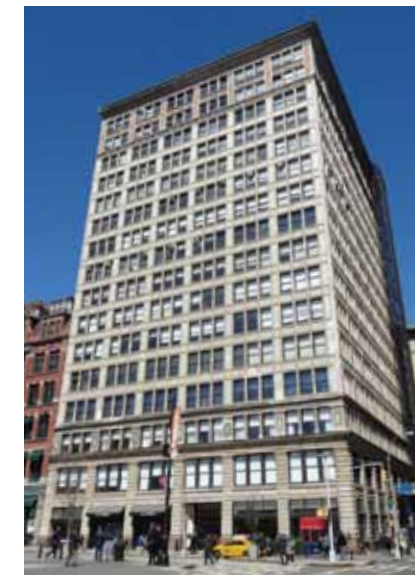
(ca. 1920)

4 33 EAST 17TH STREET (1881) FORMER CENTURY PUBLISHING BUILDING

In the so-called Queen Anne architectural style, this structure housed the original publisher of well-known authors like Mark Twain and Rudyard Kipling and popular magazines like *The Century* and *St. Nicholas*. Fittingly, the building is now a major bookstore of the nationwide Barnes & Noble chain.



5 200 PARK AVENUE SOUTH (1908) THE EVERETT BUILDING



The chief distinction of this office building, which replaced the Everett Hotel on the site, requires a bit of neck-craning to observe the remarkable rose-color terra-cotta tiles that architecturally decorate the two topmost floors of the two principal facades.

6 | 201 PARK AVENUE SOUTH (1911)
FORMER GUARDIAN LIFE INSURANCE BUILDING

With its extraordinary four-story mansard roof, this building was erected to cater to the insurance needs of German immigrants. Hence its original name, the Germania Life Insurance Company. Along came World War I, though, and the battle against the German enemy. So the company cast about for a name with the same number of letters as Germania. They settled on Guardian. Now it has been renamed again, as W Union Square (hotel).



7 | 105 EAST 17TH STREET (1963)
FORMER GUARDIAN LIFE ANNEX

Considered a compelling example of post-World War II architecture, this low-rise midblock building, which goes through to East 18th Street, is a product of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, one of the world's leading architecture firms.

The wide windows of the Annex reflect the historic houses opposite, in the East 17th Street/Irving Place Historic District, designated in 1998.



8 | 44 UNION SQUARE EAST (1928)
FORMER TAMMANY HALL

Built for the famous (and infamous) political club, and designed to emulate the respectability of the old Federal Hall on Wall Street, where George Washington took the oath of office. In 1943, Tammany sold the building to the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, which used the interior theatre space for labor rallies that often spilled out into the North Plaza of Union Square. Landmarked in 2013, the building was recently approved for a controversial rooftop expansion, allegedly inspired by the dome of Monticello, the Virginia home of Thomas Jefferson.



9 | 20 UNION SQUARE EAST (1907)
FORMER UNION SQUARE SAVINGS BANK



This Classical design, by architect Henry Bacon, has the solidity of an ancient Greek temple, meant to give depositors a sense of security for their funds. Bacon went on to design the imposing Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. The bank is currently the Daryl Roth Theatre.

10 | 109-111 EAST 15TH STREET (1869)
FORMER CENTURY ASSOCIATION CLUBHOUSE



In the Gilded Age of what some call Union Square's heyday, before it became the theatrical equivalent of today's Broadway, this building was the ultimate private club for gentlemen, many of whose mansions were nearby.

11 | 4 IRVING PLACE (1911-1929)
THE CONSOLIDATED EDISON BUILDING

Covering an entire city block between Irving Place and Third Avenue from East 14th Street to East 15th Street, this complex of structures built over almost two decades is perhaps most celebrated for its clock tower, illuminated nightly and visible from afar as the tallest building in the Union Square area.



12 | 126-128 EAST 13TH STREET (1904)
FORMER HORSE AUCTION MART

Before the days of automobiles, this is where the gentry bought their carriage horses. Built by Van Tassel & Kearney, it is one of the few such structures remaining from the Gilded Age that is also architecturally notable for its Beaux-Arts style. It now provides space for various dance companies.



13 | 34½ EAST 12TH STREET (1855)
POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE BUILDING



This was one of the first all-girls public schools and a benchmark for the education of children in New York City. As city-owned property, it still provides free activity space for juveniles from all five boroughs.

14 | 22 EAST 14TH STREET (1881)
FORMER BAUMANN BROTHERS STORE



But for intervening buildings of lesser commercial or architectural merit, this former furniture-and-carpet emporium might well have been included in the nearby Ladies' Mile Historic District, designated in 1989. Three lots wide, the Baumann facade above the ground floor is an elaborate cast-iron composition of sunbursts, garlands, and huge fenestration.



WE IMAGINE OUR FUTURE

The Union Square Community Coalition looks forward to landmark protection for these five remarkable structures.

Recognizing that there is still much to be mined in the historic Union Square area, USCC is starting the process of gaining landmark designation for these five additional buildings. The first step is the landmarks committee of the relevant Community Board, and if the full Board approves, the matter is sent to the Landmarks Preservation Commission with a Request for Evaluation. This might take awhile, necessitating repeated requests. Gaining the support of other groups is important when it comes time to testify anywhere in the process. Note that the five structures presented on these two pages are in three different jurisdictions: Community Boards 2, 5, and 6.

Besides the 14 already-landmarked buildings, the Union Square Community Coalition joined with other groups to secure the designation of two local historic districts: Ladies' Mile Historic District (shown partially in the map above) and the 10-building East 17th Street/ Irving Place Historic District.



A | 801 BROADWAY (1868) AT EAST 11TH STREET
FORMER JAMES MCCREERY DRY GOODS STORE

Here, near the start of the original Ladies' Mile, an Irish immigrant built one of the first department stores, with colossal cast-iron facades. Though the magnificent mansard roof was lost in a fire in 1972 and has been replaced by a humdrum addition, the building makes an impressive residence for apartment dwellers today.

B | 136 EAST 16TH STREET (1850 & 1889)



This is the story of a remarkable transformation — from an ordinary single-family rowhouse into five extraordinary French flats. Much facade embellishment came with the conversion: A columned and pedimented entrance portico; window enframements with sawtooth detail and triangular pediments; and top-floor windows with fanlights. Herter Brothers, primarily interior designers, were the architects.

C | 121 EAST 17TH STREET (CIRCA 1854)



Originally a carriage house (architect unknown), this simple brick structure has played many roles over the years — garage, residence, offices, café. Today it is a two-story restaurant known as The House. It is the last 19th-century survivor on its mostly 20th-century block. Its side facade, facing a courtyard, has more bull's-eye windows.

D | 129 EAST 17TH STREET (1879)

Arguably, this is the oldest intact apartment house in the entire city — and it is still functioning as such. It was designed by Napoleon Le Brun, the celebrated and prolific architect of the landmarked former Metropolitan Life Insurance Company tower on Madison Square, seven blocks to the north.



E | 141 EAST 17TH STREET (1889)

Behind this elaborately decorated two-story facade of pressed tin, Henry Luce and a colleague in 1922 rented an office for \$55 a month and came up with the idea for *Time* magazine, a concept that, in many ways, revolutionized journalism forever.

Joseph G. Cannon on the cover of the first issue of Time magazine, March 3, 1923. He was the leader of the Republican Party and the 40th Speaker of the House of Representatives.



ABOUT UNION SQUARE PARK

Although it is the neighborhood park to countless nearby residents, Union Square Park, a National Historic Landmark, is not in a specific community. It lies at the juncture of Chelsea, Greenwich Village, the East Village, Gramercy Park, and the Ladies' Mile. It is also at the heart of a busy business area and transit hub, resulting in endless applications to stage commercial events. Maintaining it as a peoples' park, and freeing its Pavilion for year-round community use, motivate USCC to guard it against massive privatization.

CREDITS:
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