

Grand Central —New Status

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Grand Central Terminal, built in 1913 and considered the city's finest example of Beaux Arts architecture, has been named a national landmark — a designation which might possibly save it from the wrecker's ball.

Although the building had been named a city landmark, State Supreme Court Justice Irving Saypol last month ordered the designation removed, declaring that its maintenance was a hardship on its bankrupt owner, the Penn Central Railroad.

The city's Landmarks Preservation Commission had listed the building in 1967. If the city loses an expected course of appeals on Saypol's ruling, it may have to pay upwards of \$60 million in damages to the railroad.

Penn Central and a British developer have been seeking to erect a 59-story office building on the 42d Street site, either by partially demolishing the terminal and preserving only its facade, or by engulfing the present structure.

The terminal gained national landmark status in a quiet move last month, it was learned yesterday, when the National Register of Historic Places listed it at the behind-the-scenes urging of state officials.

According to Frederick L. Rath of the state's Office of Parks and Recreation, the application for federal listing had been in the works for about two years.

Rath said that the national landmark status is not a certain safeguard for the endangered terminal, but it does mean the federal government now has a stake in the future of the building.

The state official said that before a national landmark can be altered or destroyed, "there has to be a memo of understanding among the affected parties" In this case, that would include the state, the federal Dept. of Transportation and Penn Central.

If there is no agreement, a hearing must be held by the Presidential Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, a body of about two dozen members, which would advise the Transportation Secretary, who can accept or reject that advice.

The new landmark status

is considered important, according to preservationist sources who have been fighting to save the station, for a number of reasons:

¶ It means that federal funds can be appropriated to help maintain the station.

¶ It means that the Congress, if it should decide to do so, can make future subsidies to the bankrupt railroad conditional upon promises to preserve the new landmark.

"The designation certainly helps make the preservation of Grand Central a national issue," said Kent Barwick, executive director of the Municipal Arts Society.

"We're very pleased that the terminal is now protected by the federal government and hope that both the legislative and executive branches will take full cognizance of the designation in further dealings with the railroad."