

What Landmark Status Means for Park Slope

By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

Prospect Park was first proposed for landmark status, the Park Slope area adjacent to Prospect Park, along Grand Army Plaza, Flatbush Av. and down Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Aves. to 14th Street.

A small portion of the Park Slope area was first the subject of a public hearing in 1966 and was reheard as a larger district in 1970, but

had been left pending since then.

The final designation which covers the larger district is a roughly L-shaped area adjacent to Prospect Park, along Grand Army Plaza, Flatbush Av. and down Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Aves. to 14th Street.

In its designation report to be released next week, the commission describes Park Slope as "one of the most beautifully situated residential neighborhoods in the city

... with houses of relatively uniform height punctuated by church spires, which provide a living illustration of the 19th century characterization of Brooklyn as a 'city of homes and churches.'"

The district contains over 1900 structures representing a cross-section of architectural styles and dating from the five decades between the Civil War and World War I.

"The row house in Park Slope," says a commission chairman Harmon H. Gold-

stone, "provides a good example of self-generated town planning. Even long rows of 20 or so houses are given interest through disciplined variety. Three-sided bay windows may alternate with curved fronts. Materials, colors, details and depths of front yards may have subtle variations. And yet, the whole district has a wonderful quality of homogeneity and coherence."

Every structure in an historic district carries the

same legal protection as an individually designated landmark—it cannot be demolished or externally altered without approval of the Landmarks Commission.

Park Slope has been in recent years one of the most active brownstone revival areas in the city. Neighborhood proponents of landmark designation have complained that the long delay has caused considerable inappropriate alterations of the area despite its overall continuity.

District designation has proven to have a positive effect on areas around the city, particularly those that had experienced a period of neglect. New homeowner pride, increased community spirit, upsurges in renovations and rising property values have been seen in the four boroughs that have such districts. (Staten Island is the only borough without one.)

The other four Brooklyn districts are Brooklyn Heights, Cobble Hill, Stuyvesant Heights in Bedford-Stuyvesant and Carroll Gardens—all residential neighborhoods with a variety of rowhouse architecture. Breezums Hill has also been considered for landmark status but its designation remains pending.

A New York Post series in January of this year focused on the weaknesses of the 1965 landmarks preservation law and on widespread criticism of the commission's apparent reluctance to make full use of the powers, though limited, given it under the law.

Panel Prodded

Since the series, the commission has been under considerable pressure to move ahead more aggressively with designations. In April, the commission approved two pending historic districts on Manhattan's West Side—the Central Park-W. 76th St. Historic District and the Riverside W. 106th St. Historic District. In May, the commission designated Carroll Gardens in Brooklyn.

All three of those districts, like Park Slope, were first considered for landmark designation at public hearings in 1966.

Park Slope's history, according to the Landmark Commission report, is closely related to that of Prospect Park and was the scene of the battle of Long Island on Aug. 27, 1776. The area remained primarily rural until after the Civil War when Prospect Park was laid out on a plan by Olmstead and Vaux, designers of Central Park.