

Gothic Facades on Fourth Av.: Hope Revived

By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

An elderly person living on a Social Security income anonymously donated \$1 to the effort to preserve a row of Gothic revival buildings on Fourth Av. owned by Grace Church.

"It hurts to think build-

ings like these can be torn down," she wrote, apologizing for not having more to give.

That gesture occurred more than a month ago when the fate of the 19th century building facades still hung in the balance. Now

the preservation of the facades is all but insured. The church yesterday said it would hold off demolition and would draw up new plans and the preservationists said they would agree to demolition if enough money was not raised in six months. Observers felt there would be little problem raising the needed money in that period.

The effort to save them stands as a symbol of one of this city's most unusual landmark rescues—it started with bitter controversy and ended with a cooperative effort involving all factions.

Unanimous Vote

Last night, the Grace Church vestry voted unanimously to reverse their earlier decision to demolish the historic facades and voted to draw up new architectural plans.

Earlier in the day, preservationists agreed to support demolition if in six months enough money can't be raised for preservation.

"It is the only resolution that seems right and sound," said Grace Church rector,

Dr. Benjamin Minifie, adding that until the new plans are actually completed and new bids are in, the final course cannot be determined.

Some \$200,000 of the \$450,000 goal has already been raised by a joint fundraising drive led by Joan K. Davidson and Whitney North Seymour Sr.

Philanthropist Davidson, whose J. M. Kaplan Fund had earlier pledged \$50,000, is a longtime supporter of landmarks preservation. She is a member of the Joint Emergency Committee to Preserve the Grace Church Houses, which instituted a law suit—since dropped—against the church to stop demolition. Seymour, a Wall St. lawyer and an early leader in the fight to gain passage of the city's 1965 Landmarks Preservation Law, is a senior vestryman of the church. He had supported the demolition plan because church funds were too limited to save the Gothic facades.

Bronson Binger, vice president of the Municipal Art Society and a member of

the Panel of Mediating Architects, said, "The Landmarks Preservation Commission was most useful in getting both sides together. This is the best example yet of the commission's helping to resolve a dispute."

Special Hearing

In March the commission held a special public hearing to consider landmark designation of the Gothic row whose rare and delicate facades had long been cherished as unofficial landmarks. The commission has not yet voted, but all parties

seem to agree that the public hearing served as a turning point on the road to resolution.

Although the 1843 church at Broadway and 10th St. was designated a landmark in 1966, the Fourth Av. row was not considered for designation at that time.

Those facades were constructed several years after the church was built but were designed to form an architectural unit with it. The entire grouping was the work of James Renwick, credited with sparking this country's 19th century Gothic renaissance. Renwick also designed St. Patrick's Cathedral.