

## Flatbush Town Hall Becomes Landmark

By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

The Flatbush Town Hall has been designated an official city landmark, four years after it was scheduled for demolition and replacement by a 40-car parking lot. The long sought designation, announced today by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, follows an intensive community effort to save the 1875 symbol of colorful Flatbush history.

Government inactivity and disinterest, inter-agency acrimony, borough politics, neighborhood conflicts and a whole host of roadblocks stood in the way of the small but energetic neighborhood group determined to save the Town Hall and turn it into a "living landmark."

Their only hope rested with the Landmarks Commission which, Flatbush residents felt, was too "Manhattan-oriented." But now that the commission has made the designation, the red brick building that was once the center of Flatbush civic and cultural life cannot be externally altered or demolished without approval of the commission.

### A Post Series

The handsome Victorian hall figured prominently in a New York Post series last January focusing on the weakness of the landmarks preservation law and the apparent reluctance of the commission to use its limited powers in the face of political or realtor resistance.

Following the series, governmental forces seemed to take a new interest in the Town Hall which had already been designated a national and state landmark by the National Historic Trust and the New York State Historic Trust.

"But all that is now water under the bridge," noted Irving Choban, a Flatbush lawyer who has lived in the community for 50 years. Choban—tireless, spirited and never the pessimist—led the community effort as chairman of the Committee to Preserve the Flatbush Town Hall.

"We've waited a long time for this," Choban said. "Now we have the equally big task of making this building a living landmark for the community." The committee's plans call for leasing the property from the city and converting it into a community center with opera, theater and music performances, Flatbush museum and library, meeting rooms for local groups, performing and visual arts workshops, and income-producing shops and restaurant.

"We've already raised \$3000 from individuals and foundations," Choban says, "and we may be eligible for a \$15,000 matching grant from the New York Historical Trust."

The Town Hall was the center of civic and cultural life for the Town of Flatbush until 1854 when Flatbush was absorbed by the City of Brooklyn and the

hall became a police station. It remained a police station until last year when the 67th Precinct force moved to a new facility three blocks away.

In its designation report, the Landmarks Commission notes that the Town Hall was designed by John Y. Culyer, one of the engineers of Prospect Park. "Built as a town hall," the report says, "it is one of the best of its type in New York City and appropriately expresses the pride of Flatbush." It is of the same architectural vintage as the Jefferson Market Courthouse in Greenwich Village.

The Flatbush Town Hall is part of a "ribcage of history" contained on one square Flatbush block bounded by Bedford, Church, Flatbush and Suyler Aves. At Flatbush and Church is the 178-year old Dutch Reformed Church which was granted its charter by Peter Stuyvesant, New York's last Dutch Governor.

Across the street, in the courtyard of Erasmus H.S. is the 185-year old Erasmus Hall Academy, a wooden schoolhouse built for the Dutch that remains one of the oldest in the country.

In 1965, the Landmarks Commission held public hearings only on the church and the school and later designated them. The Town Hall on Suyler Av. was not considered at a public hearing until July of this year. The new designation now has to be approved by the Board of Estimate but commission spokesmen do not foresee any problem.

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