

# Homes seek landmark status

By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

A block-long row of closed West Side nursing homes — in danger of possible demolition—are now being considered for historic district designation by the Landmarks Commission.

The row, on the south side of 74th St. between Central Park and Columbus Av., is part of a Central Park West historic district that would also include 73d St. and the 1904 Langham apartment-house facing the park.

The surrounding community has long been concerned that the stretch of perhaps the finest Georgian townhouses in the city would be destroyed — all ironic spinoff of the nursing home scandals.

The 17 limestone and brick-front houses, designed as a unit in 1904 by one architect, has been known unofficially as nursing home row because it contained mostly small nursing homes.

## CODE VIOLATIONS

Most of the homes were closed after the scandal broke because they didn't meet fire and safety code regulations.

The buildings were put up for sale at prices well over \$200,000 and community residents feared they would be purchased by a developer who would alter the facades.

Two years ago, the community urged the commission to designate the block, pointing out that a developer could replace the row with a

14-story building under current zoning limitations.

If the block is designated, none of the houses could be externally altered without approval of the commission.

In 1966 and 1970, the commission held public hearings to consider designating the block — thought to be the longest Georgian-style row in the city.

## POLITICAL PRESSURE

Despite considerable support, the block was never designated. It has been reported, because of legal threats and political pressure from nursing home owners.

The simple but formal, columned-front buildings were designed by architect Percy Griffin and have remained almost totally unchanged for

70 years. The area was one of the first developed on the Upper West Side.

It was done for Edward Clark, president of Singer Sewing Machine Co. and real estate developer, who is best known for having built the landmark Dakota Apartments when the area was so far "in the country" it might have as well be in "the Dakotas."

While it was not unusual for West Side builders at that time to construct several townhouses together, this row is considered unique in its architectural unity. Common building materials, symmetrical architectural elements, wrought-iron detailing and cooper roof lines remain reasonably intact.