

The Towers, one symbol of the nursing home scandal, now stands vacant at Central Park West and 106th St.

Post Photo by Richard Gummers

A Nursing Home Eyed as Landmark

By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

The Towers nursing home—that red brick chateau-like edifice at Central Park West and 106th St. which for a year and a half has been a focus of the nursing-home scandal and its most visual symbol—will be considered for designation as a landmark next month by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

The five-towered building gained notoriety during the nursing-home scandal because it was at the center of the Bernard Bergman empire. And although it was closed in the early days of the scandal's evolution, it has remained a pivotal architectural attraction for the slowly redeveloping Manhattan Valley Community surrounding it.

The owners of the property, 40 partners of Towers Associates, are reportedly considering demolishing the building as a preliminary move to sell the land to a developer. The developer wanting to buy it, at an undisclosed price, is, according to community sources familiar with the plans, planning an eight-story apartment house.

Applications for an FHA assistance loan and rent supplement subsidies are reportedly already on file with the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development.

Community Opposition

Conrad Lee Levenson, an architect and owner of a nearby brownstone, says that community groups are hoping to delay demolition long enough to come up with a plan to re-use the visual landmark for housing.

"It would be a big help in stimulating the redevelopment" of the Manhattan Valley Community, Levenson says, which has been one of the slowest of the West Side areas to enjoy a resurgence in recent years.

The State Board of Historic Preservation will decide on July 7 whether the building should be placed on the Federal Register of Historic Places. Federal funds cannot

be used to demolish a national landmark without a formidable environmental impact study.

Erin Drake, a 27-year-old student in the Preservation Program at Columbia University, started a campaign to save the building about two years ago.

A series of old West Side nursing homes, she says, were being closed due to structural deficiencies. Several of them, she added, had considerable architectural distinction and should and could be used for much-needed housing.

As a school project, Miss Drake wrote an architectural history of the Towers which indicated that it was a quirk in medical research that inspired the awesome towers that make the block-long building look like a French chateau.

The building was constructed in the 1880's as the New York Cancer Hospital, when it was believed "that corners were potential harbors for germs." Thus the five towers were designed to contain cornerless circular wards.

If the Towers is declared a city landmark, it cannot be torn down or externally altered without approval of the Landmarks Commission.

Last week Community Board 7 voted to recommend the Towers for landmark designation. The Landmarks Commission will consider it at a public hearing July 13.

Belgian Princess On Visit to D.C.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Princess Paola of Belgium arrived here yesterday for an informal Bicentennial visit.

A highlight of her two-day stay will be her attendance at a performance here tonight of Belgium's 20th Century Ballet.

The princess, sister-in-law of King Baudouin, will have no official contacts during her visit.