



Post Photo by Terence McCarlen
The Brotherhood Synagogue, formerly the Friends Meeting House, at the southeast corner of Gramercy Park.

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A Happy Ending For a Landmark

By **ROBERTA B. GRATZ** . . . conditioning ducts and other mechanical requirements—
 It's rare in this city when problems resolve themselves satisfactorily for all concerned, particularly when rescue and restoration of a landmark is involved.

But that's exactly what happened with the Friends Meeting House on Gramercy Park, which is now the thriving home of the once-homeless Brotherhood Synagogue.

The 1859 building at 114 E. 20th St., one of the city's oldest designated landmarks, had been rescued from a developer's bulldozer in 1967 by a group of wealthy Gramercy Park residents. Then it was sold to the United Federation of Teachers, who planned to refurbish it for a meeting house but abandoned the idea because of the economics involved.

That was in 1974, and the future of the simple, sandstone structure seemed precarious.

Looking for a Home

At the same time, the Brotherhood Synagogue was looking for a home, having moved out of quarters it shared with the Village Presbyterian Church in 1973 after a dispute over the Middle East. The 600-member congregation bought the landmark for \$420,000 and raised over \$300,000 for a "historically accurate" restoration, designed by James S. Polshek, dean of Columbia's School of Architecture.

"I had goose bumps when I first entered the sanctuary," says Howard D. Westrich, a real estate lawyer who, as the temple's board chairman, negotiated the purchase. "Its beauty was unmistakable, despite its deteriorated condition." (The synagogue held its first service there in March 1975.)

The building's unembellished facade has been sandblasted clean, revealing an olive hue no one knew existed under decades of dirt. The 30-foot high arched windows were removed and carefully repaired. The wide-planked flooring, plain Quaker pews and long, curving stairways have also been carefully restored.

Concessions to the modern age—new plumbing, air con-

ditioning ducts and other mechanical requirements—are barely noticeable.

Detailing of paint colors and new lighting fixtures to enhance the building's historical simplicity was painstakingly worked out by Dean Polshek, who lived near the historic building for many years and admired the view while sitting in Gramercy Park.

"It was like coming home for me," Polshek says.

Tomorrow, the Municipal Art Society is holding its annual meeting at the Synagogue, an appropriate setting for the civic group that spearheaded the city's landmarks preservation movement. Through a decade of uncertainty, it was always the society—notably its Board Chairman Brenden Gill—that sounded the alarm for saving this landmark.

No 'Useless Ornament'

The severely simple Anglo-Italianate style of the former meeting house was popular here from 1845 to 1860. As the builders specified, it is bare of "useless ornament so as not to wound the feelings of the most sensitive among us."

By the early 1960s, the Quakers used the building only sporadically and in 1965 contracted to sell the property to a developer who planned to raze it to make way for an apartment house. That was the year the city's Landmarks Preservation Law went into effect and the Meeting House was one of the first buildings designated.

In its designation report of Oct. 26, 1965, the Landmarks Commission said of the meeting house: ". . . Its clean-cut lines, sound construction and admirably restrained design provide a significant building which reflects the outlook of the important group which built it."

Chattanooga Dry Spell

CHATTANOOGA (AP) — At least 200,000 homes and businesses in the Chattanooga area were asked yesterday to curtail water consumption until a possibly toxic substance, which makes the water smell like mothballs and kerosene, can be identified.