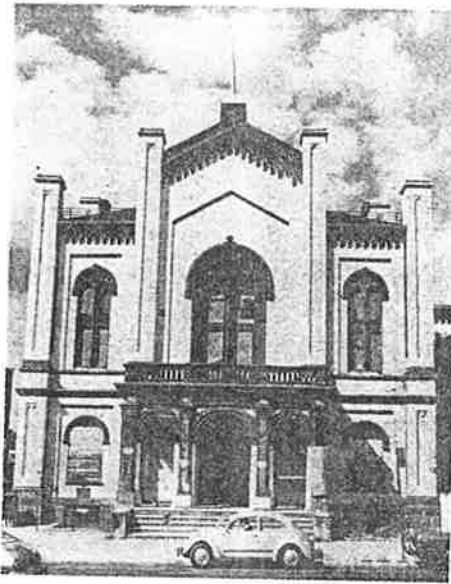


New Lease on Life



The vacant Flushing Town Hall, a rare Romanesque Revival structure built in 1862 which has been deteriorating for the past 10 years, may become a privately run restaurant and theater. A Kew Gardens man wants to lease it from the city and spend \$500,000 to restore and renovate it. Story on Page 25.

Post Photo by Frank Leonardo

A New Life For Flushing Landmark?

By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

After a 10-year vacancy the historic 1862 Flushing Town Hall is about to gain a new and appreciative tenant.

Stephen Phillips, former Manhattan and Queens restaurateur, is negotiating with the city to rent the landmark property for use as a multi-purpose building including a restaurant, a 450-seat theater and community office space.

With approving nods from community groups, the Landmarks Preservation Commission and the Borough President's office, Phillips is now working out details of a lease for the city-owned building and hopes for Board of Estimate approval in the next month. If so, he may be in business by Christmas.

Funds Unavailable

The Town Hall, which Phillips used to admire as a student years ago at Flushing High School, a few blocks away, has been a source of endless frustration to preservationists and community leaders seeking a new use for it. Every alternative failed because public funds were required but unavailable.

A rare Romanesque Revival edifice of the Civil War era, the Town Hall at Northern Boulevard and Linden Place was designated a city landmark in 1968. Until the turn of the century, it was the focal point of every important function in the community—light opera, fancy dress balls, military ceremonies, community meetings. Ulysses Grant and Theodore Roosevelt made speeches from its balcony and later notables like Toni Thumb entertained there.

After Flushing was consolidated into the City of New York, the building became a courthouse and remained in use until around 1960. Except for use as headquarters for the 1964 World's Fair police, it has been vacant ever since.

"I've always been fascinated by the building," says Phillips, who lives in Kew Gardens. After his Forest Hills restaurant burned down and he sold his Manhattan restaurant, Phillips was looking for a new place.

Consults Community

Starting about 6 months ago and with the assistance of his attorney, State Sen. Emanuel R. Gold, Phillips went through all the necessary channels including consultation with community groups who, he says, "were skeptical at first because they didn't know what I had in mind."

Actually, says Gold, the Phillips plan has the advantage of not requiring public funds and endless red tape even if "it wasn't everyone's first choice."

It will remain a city-owned landmark, which Phillips will lease. He will spend an estimated \$500,000 to restore and renovate it.

"The place was falling to pieces from neglect," says Jane Trebbing, past president of the Flushing Council of Women's Organizations who has tried to find a public use for the building.