

The Crumbling Landmarks

The latest word on the landmarks front is that there are about to be a few less of them—as usual.

The scaffolding is going up for the demolition of the 68th Street end of the Pyne-Davison block on Park Avenue.

The Astor Library on Lafayette Street, New York's cultural pride and architectural wonder from the 1850's to the 1880's, is to be sold by its present owner, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, which has sheltered generations of newcomers under the giant Corinthian columns of its halls.

The Friends' Meeting House on Gramercy Park is for sale, and rumor points the finger at more of the city's fine old mansions.

Certainly there could be no more tragically dramatic way to demonstrate the urgent need for the landmarks legislation now awaiting action by the City Council. It is commendable and proper for the Council to weigh clarifications, amendments and objections; but it should keep its eye on the wrecking ball. Protection is needed now.

Some revisions are desirable, such as the inclusion of provisions for natural and landscaped areas that would safeguard the city's park heritage, presently excluded from the bill. Whatever details in the process of protection and owner compensation remain to be ironed out can be quickly and fairly determined, without debilitating compromise.

This is not the first restrictive legislation that New York has found necessary for the purpose of controlling exploitation of the city's land and construction. The zoning law is a prime example. There would be no light, air or order without it.

Without the landmarks law there will be no color, character or history. Some want to strengthen the bill. Others want to weaken it. The main thing is to get on with it. Protective legislation too late to protect anything would be an ironic outcome.