

Farewell to Landmarks

By action of the Board of Estimate, New York City now has a Landmarks Preservation Commission and a budget of \$50,000 to help it carry out its functions. The Fine Arts Federation is busy making up a list of potential commission members to be submitted to the Mayor for appointment. While this due process plods on, the bulldozers have been busy.

Destroyed the other day for new approaches to the Brooklyn Bridge, for instance, was the Greek Revival Lorillard building constructed in 1837 on Gold Street. Above the entrance piers of the five-story brick and cast-iron structure three sardonic faces with protruding tongues leered triumphantly down Ferry Street for one hundred and twenty-five years, until "progress" had the last leer. This may have been the only possible street to use, and the building may have been beyond repair, but the Preservation Commission will never have a chance to decide.

While the razing goes full steam ahead for various public and private projects, legal and economic procedures for practical conservation must be gathered by the commission and studied at length; enabling legislation must be proposed to and passed by the city; and an acceptable list of buildings and areas—if they are still around—must be specified for protection. If possible, city departments and private builders must then be persuaded to accept the commission's recommendations in place of the far simpler, cleaner solution of landmark elimination.

If we are slow enough—and we have set an ignoble precedent on this score—most of New York's architectural heritage and almost all of the city's remaining early nineteenth-century structures of historical interest will be gone. We can then point to our documents, plans, reports and excellent intentions, and say that no one was really to blame.