

# Zero for Central Park

The 18th century loved romantic ruins; the 20th century is getting them whether it likes them or not. Central Park is in a state of galloping decay, horticulturally and architecturally, but there is no poetry of pathos intended. It is a simple case of vandalism and no cash.

The Parks Department goes through the idle and wishful exercise of making plans and setting up priorities, all of which slip right between the lines of the capital budget. In fact, the line in the present draft capital budget for critical Central Park "improvements" has no funds at all. Nor will there be any money for even the highest priority park items in the Mayor's revised executive budget due at the end of the month. Whether it is the Belvedere Castle, a crumbling century-old landmark, or an essential plan to restore the eroded landscape, the total funds allotted are zero.

As things stand now, the Belvedere's completed restoration drawings can be filed and forgotten. Its boarded windows, broken stonework and weed-gouged mortar embellished by graffiti can rot just enough more so that advanced deterioration and rising costs will put restoration totally out of reach. It can stand as a symbol of the decline of the park—the slow death of the Olmsted landscape in spite of spotty first aid and the private generosity that rebuilds an occasional bit of token architectural design.

What neglect starts, vandalism finishes. That Central Park will be a less-than-romantic ruin is becoming a certainty.