

## Brooklyn Heights—A Heritage

The Federal Government did last week what New York City has been notably derelict in doing—recognized Brooklyn Heights as one of the city's irreplaceable urban treasures by designating it a National Registered Historic Landmark.

The Heights' resident-owners, a small group working often desperately against the grain of New York investment patterns, have crusaded for protective recognition for years. This action is more than overdue for a historic area of fine nineteenth-century houses. More important, it demonstrates an equally belated recognition of another set of property values than those long subscribed to in New York.

The highest good to be served by any piece of land has almost universally been considered its maximum economic utilization for maximum financial return. By this reasoning Brooklyn Heights would be better bulldozed for some predictably ordinary high-rise apartments with a smashing harbor view.

For influential evidence of this attitude, read any of the city's promotional redevelopment brochures. The emphasis is always on "obsolete" buildings to be replaced, generally characterized as "nonfireproof four- and five-story structures over a hundred years old."

This can be a perfect description of an architectural heritage. It can also describe slums and firetraps. Both descriptions fitted Georgetown before it was transformed into one of the country's most expensive and highly rated neighborhoods by private recognition of its architectural qualities. The same is true of Greenwich Village.

It is probably too much to hope that the typical New York combination of historic and architectural ignorance and preoccupation with bigger and better deals is about to be replaced by universal acknowledgment of the need for history and beauty in a city with any claims to greatness. But spring, and hope, are breaking out on Brooklyn Heights; and it is only across the river.