

Snug Harbor

There is no guarantee of salvation, for life or landmarks. One battle leads to another. Sailors Snug Harbor on Staten Island, one of the country's finest Greek Revival groups, is still fighting for survival in spite of its landmark status and the city's purchase of the land and buildings for a cultural center a few years ago.

That act of enlightened civic self-interest seems like a miracle now. But the miracle—the money—has run out. Neglected and fragile, the best of these stately structures are well over a century old; if they are forced to close for lack of funds they will soon be beyond rescue or repair.

The loss would be extremely bitter now, with the beauty and value of the buildings only beginning to be fully understood. The earliest work is of the 1830's; the temple-like connected row is a superb classical landscape in the tradition of Thomas Jefferson's University of Virginia. In some ways, it is almost as fine.

And yet Snug Harbor was slated for demolition a few years ago, and its landmark designation was contested in a lawsuit. Those two battles were won, but the landmark is still endangered. What is needed now is so much less than the city's original heroic rescue: emergency repairs and interim use while the Snug Harbor Cultural Center completes its master plan.

This serene classical treasure overlooking the harbor is worth the short trip to Staten Island on any Bicentennial summer day. In the uncertain present, New Yorkers can still touch their past.