

Architecture

Just a Little Love, a Little Care

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

IN 1871, the Ladies' Pavilion, a 9 by 15 foot cast and wrought iron Victorian confection, was put up at Columbus Circle as a shelter for passengers — presumably ladies — waiting for horse cars. It was built from the design of Calvert Vaux, who was responsible for many of the buildings and small structures of Central Park, working in collaboration with Frederick Law Olmsted, the park's creator.

Those who have seen the original watercolor drawings of such designs by Mr. Vaux, and also of the park's other 19th-century architectural embellishments by J. Wrey Mould, have been enchanted by their delicate washes, exquisitely detailed ornament and omnipresent fluttering pennants. Most of them have been gone from the park for a long time.

The Ladies' Pavilion can now be seen at 75th Street, on the west side of the lake, in a reconstruction, or reincarnation if you will. The ornate iron supports with gilded touches, the heavily bracketed roof with overhanging eaves, and the lacy ridge crest are carefully reproduced. There are no fluttering pennants. One wonders if they actually flew on opening day in 1871, or thereafter.

In 1912-13, the Ladies' Pavilion was moved to its present site, the Hermshead, a land protrusion on the west lake. From that point on, it suffered the fate of most original park structures — neglect and deterioration. Some of them were replaced by buildings in Robert Moses's brick-and-tile lavatory style.

By 1969, there had been enough of an outcry from park groups and preservationists for the city to undertake restoration plans for the Pavilion. Funds for architectural studies were contributed by the Greensward Foundation and the drawings were done by Adams and Woodbridge. The structure was in bad shape but, unlike so many other casualties, at least it was still there. Or was for a while. In 1971 it was totally vandalized.

All that was left was to bury it, or start all over. The preservationists, the park's friends and the city decided on reconstruction. The old coping stones and steps were used. The restored metalwork — it required 500 cast parts — is a combination of new

cast and hand-forged iron with some original pieces. The ironwork alone took nine months to produce. The costs for repairing this stand either the nature or the problems of the park. First, the Shepfold, has been taken a joint matter of civil engineering and landscape restoration. Because the ugly building, which it is not; system, designed and installed by Olmsted, must be analyzed and overhauled; much tampered with, erosion, forestation, preservation and replacement of plant materials, and the clearing of silted lakes and ponds, as well as repair of structures, are all related priorities.

Another structure, the Tavern on the Green, originally the Sheepfold, has been taken a joint matter of civil engineering and landscape restoration. Because the ugly building, which it is not; system, designed and installed by Olmsted, must be analyzed and overhauled; much tampered with, erosion, forestation, preservation and replacement of plant materials, and the clearing of silted lakes and ponds, as well as repair of structures, are all related priorities.

There is a moral, of course, to be hoped that the building orities. A little care, a little appreciation, some proper evaluation of the worth of the park's ornamental landmarks, for Central Park, and that is

heavily used, and is currently disrupted by subway construction. It would also take any care of spot emergencies elsewhere.

It was, in fact, realtor Harry Helmsley's desire to desilt the duck pond, which serves as foreground in the retouched glamour photo ads of his new luxury hotel on Central Park South, that kicked the long-simmering project off.

That job would have cost Mr. Helmsley \$300,000, but it became evident that much more was involved. A grant of \$200,000 from the Astor Foundation, matched by city funds, got the over-all studies started, and the civil engineering firm of Praeger, Kavanagh, Waterbury was hired. The first phase research was completed last August.

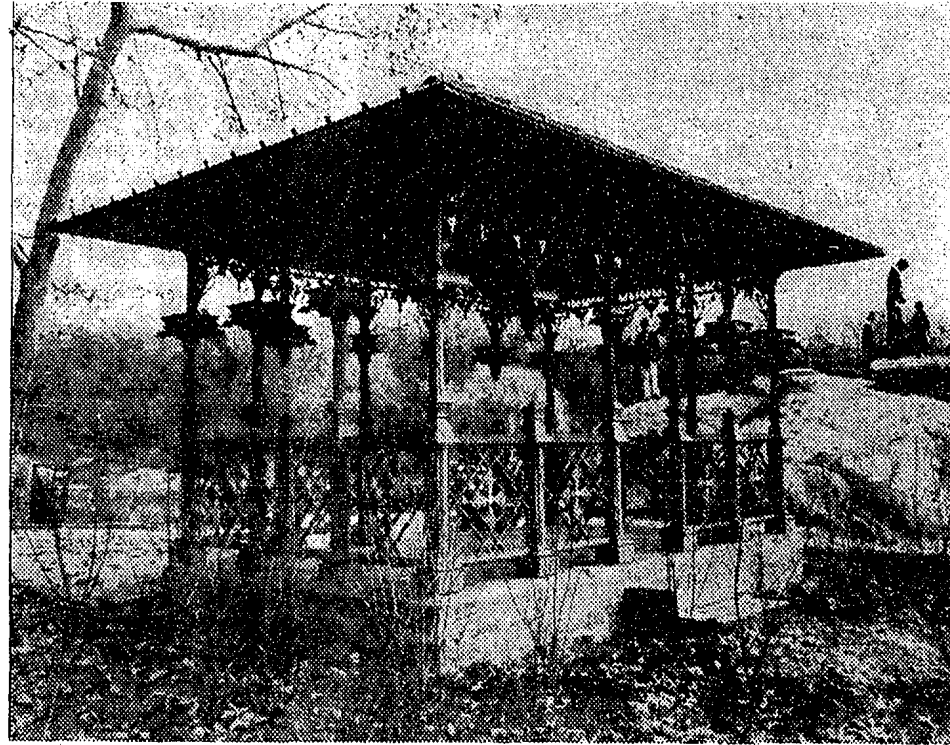
The second phase will deal with the section north of the 100th Street cross drive. New housing in the area will increase recreational park use uptown. The three remaining phases will cover the east and west central sections, divided into various work zones.

"We have a grasp now of what the major problems are," Mr. Post says, "but not necessarily of the solutions. We have to match Olmsted's ideas against the things he did not have to cope with."

But Olmsted had to cope with a great deal. The park has always been popular. There were 10 million visitors a year in the 1860's when it was new. The figure is 15 million a year now, with 100,000 on a fine weekend day in season. In the 1870's the use was as heavy as it is today and, even then, Olmsted's carefully planned horticulture was threatened.

Many people are concerned about Central Park. A recent letter from Mrs. Eric Valdemar Larsen shows an even greater concern than usual. That is not surprising, since Mrs. Larsen's great grandfather, James Conway, was the first shepherd-keeper of the Sheepfold and three generations of her family lived there. She worries that her view of the place may be "highly colored," and that the building she cares so much about might not be "architecturally or historically" notable.

We hasten to assure her that it is indeed notable on both counts. It is an intrinsic part of Central Park, the finest bit of environmental design and the most grace New York.



Reconstructed ladies' pavilion in Central Park
For want of a nail . . .

a modicum of maintenance very good news indeed. The is expected to take 10 years over the years, would have Parks Department has finally and to be done in five stages, been much cheaper. More important, the original structure study and is development of \$55-million. The project is under the supervision of Deputy Administrator Herschel Post.

The same thing happened to the Ballplayers' House — and the plan can be seen at neglect, decay, vandalism the Metropolitan Museum and, in addition, fire — and through January 1. Incredibly, nothing like this has been attempted since the 1920's, when the wear and heavy use, vandalism and staffing problems, and to arrive at activity patterns compatible with rehabilitation and maintenance.

The Bow Bridge, 114 years old and in very sad condition, If anyone thinks for a minute that this is a matter of inattention. Its benefactors restoring a few plants and shoring up some topsoil and the most artificial area and the most