

# Save Tweed —State Unit

By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

A state agency recommends that the Tweed Courthouse, which the Beame Administration wants to demolish, be named a national historic monument.

The New York State Board of Historic Preservation this week voted to recommend preservation of the building and its listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The register, kept by the Dept. of Interior, is a list of buildings, monuments and districts of historical, cultural and esthetic distinction.

### Pressure on Beame

Although subject to the approval of state Parks and Recreation Commissioner Alexander Aldrich, the move is expected to strengthen pressures being brought on Beame to preserve and restore the 103-year-old Italianate structure which for years has suffered from neglect.

As a national site, the courthouse, which faces Chambers St. behind City Hall, would be eligible for federal preservation funds.

"This may indeed cause the Mayor to ponder," noted City Council President Paul O'Dwyer, co-chairman of the Save the Tweed Committee.

The Mayor's task force that recommended demolishing the courthouse and replacing it with a new City Hall annex claimed \$6 million was needed to clean it up and \$11 million to replace it.

### Eye Federal Funds

"I think they exaggerated the first figure," says O'Dwyer, "and minimized the second but nevertheless the possibility of federal funds knocks a hole in the financial argument against saving it."

Public officials, historians, architects and preservation and civic groups have protested the possible destruction of what long has been considered a monument to civic corruption. Original estimates for the building when plans were approved in 1858 were \$350,000. It eventually cost between \$8 and \$12.5 million when completed in 1871.

The task force report was still in draft form when its recommendation first was revealed by The Post in June. Since then, the final report has been submitted to the Mayor but there is no indication of when he might act.

For any local structure to be listed on the National Register it must be recommended by the state historic preservation agency. The full process usually takes a year.

In this case, the process was started late July by an inquiry from National Register staff members concerned by reports of demolition plans. "We speeded up the normally slow bureaucratic process because we felt our recommendation should be known before the Mayor made his decision," said Lynn Beebe, a research assistant in the state Division of Historic Preservation. The office is part of the state Parks and Recreation Dept.

"In a matter of weeks" the board made its unanimous decision, Miss Beebe said. The 16-member committee, she said, "felt the Tweed Courthouse could stand on both its architectural and historical significance. It's considered a fine example of the Anglo-Italianate style that was popular in the last half of the 19th century and it is a tangible reminder of an era of municipal history that was remarkable."

O'Dwyer yesterday pointed out a new facet to the controversy revealed in a recent unpublished study of the courthouse. Before its construction, according to the report, the land under the building was a cemetery for "Negro Slaves and Black Freeman," then for soldiers of the American Revolution who died as British captives — "our first prisoners of war," says O'Dwyer and then for the indigent.

"There is nothing so deeply ingrained in our legislative enactments than the right of the home of the dead to remain undisturbed," said O'Dwyer. "It is obvious that the law was violated in the first instance by Mr. Tweed and his gang but that hardly justifies a second desecration."

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