

Landmarks Preservation Commission
March 22, 1988; Designation List 202
LP-1651

55 WHITE STREET, 55 White Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1861;
architect John Kellum & Son. Iron founder Daniel D. Badger.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 175, Lot 25.

On January 19, 1988, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of 55 White Street, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty-eight witnesses spoke in favor of designation. Nine witnesses spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission has received many letters and other expressions of support in favor and in opposition of this designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

Fifty-five White Street was commissioned in 1861 by cousins John Eliot and Samuel H. Condict as a store and warehouse for their saddlery business. The building was designed by John Kellum, one of the most important commercial architects of the mid-nineteenth century, whose many buildings had a strong impact on the redevelopment of the Lower Broadway area as a thriving commercial center. Kellum was also a major figure in the development and design of cast-iron architecture. Daniel D. Badger, the iron founder who fabricated the building's facade, was second only to James Bogardus in his importance to the promotion and manufacture of this distinctively American building material and method of construction.

The building has an especially noteworthy example of the so-called "sperm candle" facade, characterized by double-height arcades with tall and slender columns which reminded nineteenth century observers of candles made from sperm whale oil. Although this type of facade, with its emphasis on verticality, light and openness, seems particularly suited to the structural properties of cast iron, it was also employed for contemporary marble facades, which apparently imitate, in traditional materials, an innovation. Only a handful of these "sperm candle" designs, which seem to be indigenous to New York, now survive. Fifty-five White Street is the largest, one of the finest, and unique in that the facade is continued in a one-bay return on the Franklin Place side elevation.

History

Opened in 1806, White Street was initially a quiet middle-class residential street, part of a neighborhood of small Federal and Greek Revival houses. By mid-century, with the northward expansion of the city, the area had changed to a commercial district, the center for Manhattan's dry goods and especially textile merchants. With the outbreak of the Civil



War and the consequent upheaval of the cotton industry in the South, (which could no longer adequately supply raw cotton to Great Britain, then the leading textile producer) the Northern textile industry assumed a new significance. New York's dry goods merchants prospered, and by the end of the war, the White Street area had been transformed. Houses had been replaced by tall stone and cast-iron warehouses, many with inviting street-level store fronts, with large windows of the kind that brought the term "window-shopping" into vogue. Although the retail textile business has for the most part long abandoned this area for locations further uptown, many wholesale textile firms remain--contemporary reminders of more than a century of New York's mercantile history and tradition. The 55 White Street building was commissioned by Stephen H. and J. Eliot Condict, cousins in a newly reorganized firm of saddlers. They had occupied previous stores at Warren and Chambers streets. The firm had its own factory in Newark, New Jersey, and also sold imported saddlery hardware.

Fifty-five White Street for many years after its original ownership by the J.E. Condict & Co., was occupied by textile concerns, among them a drapery manufacturer and later a firm of cotton jobbers and converters. Like many other buildings on this White Street block, among them the Woods Mercantile Buildings of 1865, located directly across the street (a designated New York City Landmark), 55 White Street is not only an architecturally notable structure, but a significant element within its historic and geographic context.¹

The "Sperm Candle" Facade

Mid-century proponents of cast iron as a building material, such as James Bogardus and Daniel D. Badger, pointed out its particular virtues--strength, lightness, economy, durability and incombustibility.² The so-called sperm candle facades, with their double-height arcades and large plate glass windows seem especially suited to the structural independence and compressive strength of cast iron. This design was also well-suited to the tall, for the most part narrow, facades of New York's commercial buildings; the verticality of the design expressed their height, while the large expanses of glass allowed for well-lit interiors. This verticality and the elimination of solid wall surface represent a distinct break with the horizontally-oriented designs of many early cast-iron buildings. Although still employing a traditional stylistic vocabulary of a vaguely Italianate or neo-classical inspiration, it was now being used in an essentially non-traditional manner. This new emphasis on height, light and openness has led many architectural historians to see the "sperm candle" facade as a forerunner of the modern skyscraper.³

Whatever its structural advantages might be, the "sperm candle" facade's aesthetic appeal seems to have been powerful enough to invite its imitation in stone, a transformation made possible by the structural stability of interior cast-iron construction.⁴ According to one observer, writing in 1899, it was these marble versions which gave the style their colorful nickname. He notes that cast-iron designs have caused a change in the design of stone buildings and that "the storefronts along Broadway diversified with engaged columns very long, very slender and very smooth, which when cut out of white marble, explain the popular phrase about the sperm candle order."⁵ This reference to candles made from sperm whale oil seems to demonstrate a rather high degree of contemporary popular interest

in these double-height arcaded buildings.

Fewer than a dozen of these buildings with "sperm candle" facades remain in New York today. ⁶ Two of them, 85 Leonard Street of 1861, a cast-iron example by James Bogardus, and 502-504 Broadway, a marble example by John Kellum are designated New York City Landmarks. One important example, frequently cited by historians, the Tefft, Weller & Co. store of 1859-60, has been demolished. Fifty-five White Street has been described as its "near twin" by Sarah Bradford Landau in her study of New York City's arcaded buildings, while the Landmarks Commission described 55 White Street as "the most notable example of all cast-iron buildings in this style." ⁷ It is also the largest surviving example, and one that is unique, in that its corner site has allowed for a one-bay return which continues the cast-iron articulation of the facade.

The Architect and the Iron-Founder

John Kellum (1807-1871) ⁸

John Kellum was one of New York's most prominent and prolific mid-nineteenth-century architects. His career as a specialist in commercial buildings coincided with the redevelopment of the Lower Broadway area and with the development of cast-iron architecture. Between 1850 and 1859, Kellum was the junior partner in the firm of King & Kellum. Gamiel King (1800-c.1876) was a successful Brooklyn architect who opened the firm's Manhattan office in 1859. Its major Manhattan commission was the Cary Building, a large and early cast-iron Italianate structure of 1856-57 (a designated New York City Landmark.) This building was fabricated by Daniel D. Badger's ironworks.

Soon after the dissolution of the partnership, and the formation of a partnership with his son, ⁹ Kellum received his first commission from New York's first department store magnate, A.T. Stewart. It was to begin a life-long association--Stewart was at Kellum's deathbed. This first commission for Stewart's second store, located "uptown" at Broadway and 9th Street, was a cast-iron Italianate structure--the largest cast-iron building in New York until its demolition in 1956. Kellum went on to design Stewart's Fifth Avenue mansion, his stables, a warehouse, and a charitable hotel for working women. He was also responsible for the layout and some of the buildings in Stewart's pioneering suburban development, Garden City, Long Island, begun in 1869.

Kellum designed literally hundreds of buildings employing both the Italianate and Second Empire styles, a number of them in the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, including 502-504 Broadway, a "sperm candle" building with a marble facade and iron storefront. ¹⁰

Daniel D. Badger (d. 1884)¹¹

Badger first encountered John Kellum while he was still in partnership with King. Badger's Illustrated Catalogue of Cast-Iron Architecture (1865) lists approximately two dozen cast-iron projects by the firm, both in Brooklyn and Manhattan, all of which must have been designed prior to the 1859 dissolution of the partnership. It was in this same catalogue that Badger illustrated 55 White Street.¹²

Daniel D. Badger began his career as a blacksmith in Woburn, Massachusetts, moving to Boston in 1830. In 1842 he introduced a cast-iron storefront which he called "the first structure of iron ever seen in America."¹³ In 1843 Badger purchased a patent from A.L. Johnson of Baltimore for "Revolving Iron Shutters", used to burglar-proof windows. The combination of the storefront and shutters, which came to be known as the "Badger fronts" was highly successful.

In 1846 Badger opened his business in New York, where his first major commission was for the storefronts of A. T. Stewart's first Broadway store at the corner of Chambers Street (a designated New York City landmark). It was not until the 1850's that he began to fabricate full cast-iron facades. His foundry was incorporated as the Architectural Iron Works in 1856. He continued to produce cast-iron architecture which he shipped all over the United States and to several foreign countries until his 1873 retirement. According to one late nineteenth-century source "No man connected with the business ever did as much as Mr. Badger to popularize the use of cast-iron fronts."¹⁴ Next to James Bogardus, he was by far the most important figure in the development and manufacture of cast-iron buildings.

Description

Located at the corner of White Street and Franklin Place, the building has a six-bay cast-iron seventy-three foot long facade on White Street which is articulated in three horizontal sections; a single-story base, with two boldly scaled double-height arcades above. These are formed by five tall and slender engaged columns, cast in one piece, and two engaged quarter columns. Recessed ornamented spandrels divide each arcade. The large windows are composed of two-over-two sash. A molded sill course separates the two arcades and incorporates the corbels supporting the upper arcade's columns. Diamond-faced quoins remain at the west side of the facade, but have been lost at the eastern corner. The cornice, with modillions and corbel table is supported by console brackets and is crisply delineated in a manner which suggests its metallic character. Roundels appear above the arches of the third story and also between the arches of the fifth story. At present the original iron elements of the building's base are covered by a frame casing of wire lath and cement. The original treatment can be seen in Badger's Illustrated Catalogue of Cast-Iron Architecture, plate CII. The original keystones above the arched windows and the Corinthian capitals, which were separately cast, have been removed.

Fifty-five White Street is unique among the surviving "sperm candle" buildings in that one bay of the facade treatment is repeated around the corner on the Franklin Place elevation. An iron post-and-lintel entrance two bays wide, with a replacement iron shutter door and replacement

windows between simple paneled pilasters, appears at the building's southeast corner. This entryway forms a two-bay return of the articulation of the rear facade. The fenestration at the upper stories of this side elevation retains its original configuration. These windows are covered by iron shutters which seem to be original. These windows have stone sills and lintels. This elevation is constructed of brick.

The rear facade, also executed in brick, can be viewed from Franklin Place, and is exposed to the sub-basement level. The first story and basement level are interestingly treated. Simple paneled cast-iron pilasters separate the six bays at the first and basement stories. Some of these original pilasters have foundry plaques--"D.D. Badger"--at their bases. At the basement level iron rolling shutters which conform to the description in Badger's advertisements for his shutters appear, and very likely are original. On each side of the shutters are the original tracking mechanisms.¹⁵ At the first story, the original windows, separated by pilasters, appear in the two westernmost bays. At both stories beneath the shutters and windows, cast-iron panels in two sections appear. In the upper four stories the windows, in the original configuration with one window in each of the six bays, again have iron shutters and stone lintels and sills like those on the Franklin Place elevation. This southern elevation is surmounted by a simple brick dentil course.

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Notes

1. See Landmarks Preservation Commission, Woods Mercantile Buildings (LP-1040), James T. Dillon, (New York, 1979), and Margot Gayle, Cast-Iron Architecture in New York, (New York, 1974), especially 28.
2. See Landmarks Preservation Commission, Cary Building (LP-1224), Anthony W. Robins, (New York, 1982), especially 3.
3. Letter to the Landmarks Commission from Daniel M. Bluestone, Jan. 29, 1988; Sarah Bradford Landau, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Reconsidered; Arcaded Buildings of the New York School, c.1870-1890," In Search of Modern Architecture: A Tribute to Henry-Russell Hitchcock, (Cambridge, MA, 1982) 136-164.
4. Both cast-iron and marble "sperm candle" facades were built contemporaneously beginning about 1860, so that it is difficult to say which came first; however the design itself and the opinions of nineteenth century writers argue that it was initiated in metal. See Landau, 141; Gayle, 28; Deborah Gardner, The Architecture of Commercial Capitalism: John Kellum and the Development of New York, (New York, 1979); Landmarks Preservation Commission, Soho-Cast Iron Historic District, (New York, 1973), 42.
5. Soho-Cast Iron, 42 (citing A History of Architecture and the Building Trades in New York (1899.)
6. There are nine similar buildings to 55 White Street known to the Landmarks Commission, including the designated 85 Leonard and 502-502 Broadway. The others are; 388, 392, and 394 Broadway, 80-82, 83, and 87-89 Leonard Street.
7. Landau, 141 and illus. 140; Soho-Cast Iron, 11.
8. See Cary Building, 6; Gardner.
9. Little is known of Kellum's partnership with his son; he apparently had two sons, both architects; Benjamin (1832-1862) and Hiram (b.1833). See Gardner, 48.
10. Soho-Cast Iron, 42.
11. Cary Building, 3; Daniel D. Badger, Badgers Illustrated Catalogue of Cast-Iron Architecture (New York, 1981 reprint.)
12. Badger, pl.CII
13. Badger, 3.
14. William J. Fryer, "A Review of the Development of Structural Iron," History of Real Estate, Building and Architecture in New York City, (New York, 1967 reprint), 458.
15. For similar rolling shutters, see Badger, pl. LXXI, and for the

advertisement, see Badger (reprint), p.vii, where they are described as "made of slats, or plates of iron, about two inches wide and one-eighth of an inch thick connected together by several rows of hinges on the inside." It is interesting to note that above the Franklin Place entrance there appears the remnants of a rolled iron shutter which has been raised. This seems to be the same as the shutters in the five westerly bays of the rear basement level elevation. The easternmost bay at this level and the first-story bay above have slightly different shutters.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that 55 White Street has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, 55 White Street, designed in 1861 as a saddlery for J.E. Condict & Co. by architect John Kellum, is a cast-iron building which employs the so-called "sperm-candle order"; that Kellum, one of the most important mid-nineteenth century commercial architects whose many buildings had a strong impact on the redevelopment of the Lower Broadway area as a thriving commercial center, was a major figure in the design of cast-iron architecture; that the building was fabricated by Daniel D. Badger, an iron founder second only to James Bogardus in his importance to the promotion and manufacture of cast iron as a building material; that the distinctive "sperm candle" facade is characterized by double-height arcades on tall and slender columns, giving the facade its particular sense of verticality, lightness, and openness, which is particularly suitable to cast-iron construction; that the rear elevation retains utilitarian iron rolling shutters and other elements of cast-iron construction including the iron pilasters, with Badger foundry plaques, framing the bays of the basement and first story; that the building is one of the few with a "sperm-candle" facade to survive in New York where it is apparently an indigenous type; and that it is the largest of these to survive and is unique in that the facade has a one-bay corner return on side (Franklin Place) elevation which also has a two-bay entrance with cast-iron elements at the southeast corner.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark 55 White Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 175, Lot 25, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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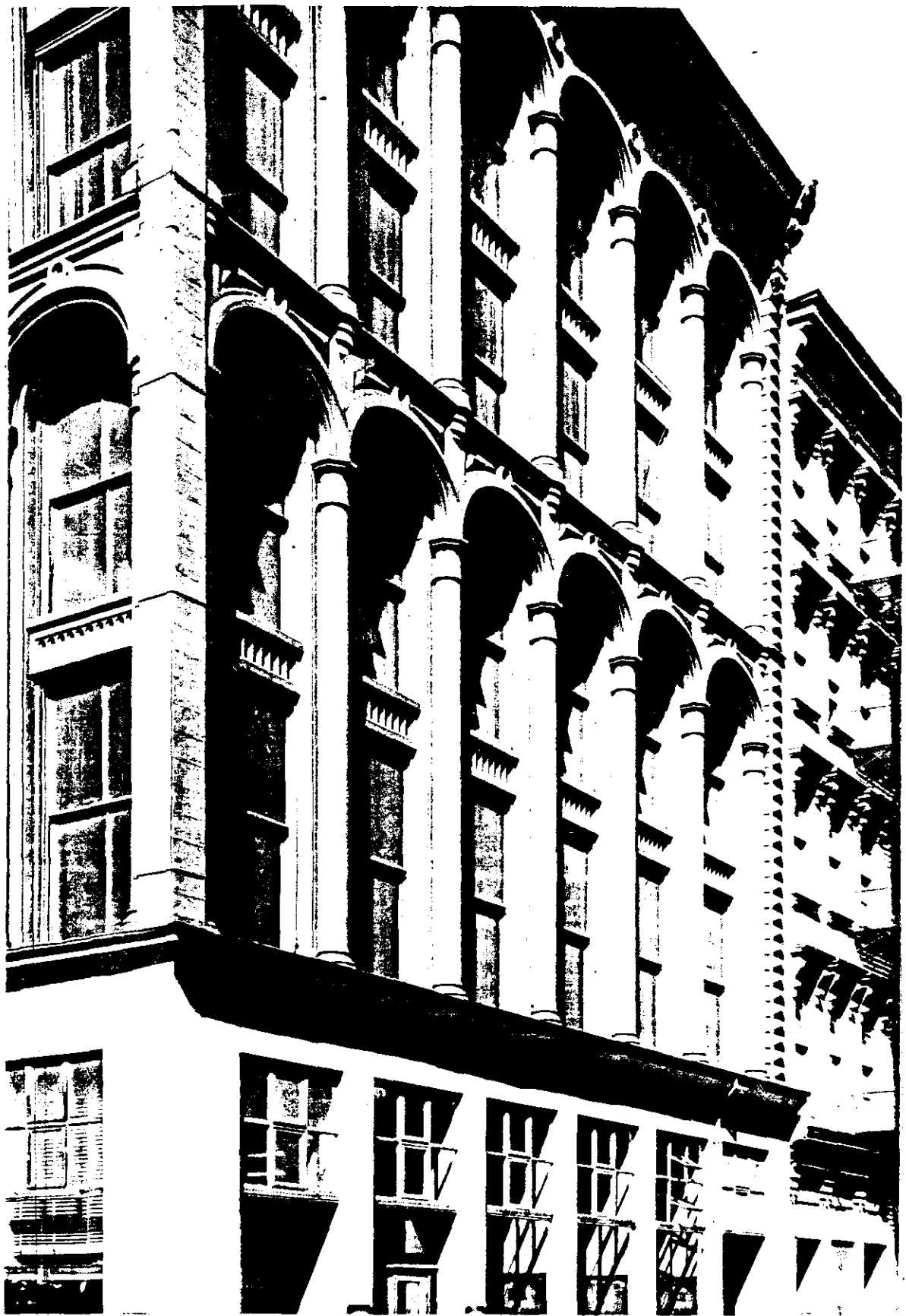
Landau, Sarah Bradford. "The Tall Office Building Artistically Reconsidered; Arcaded Buildings of the New York School, c.1870-1890", In Search of Modern Architecture; A Tribute to Henry-Russell Hitchcock. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1982, 136-164.

Landmarks Preservation Commission. Cary Building (LP-1224). Anthony W. Robins. New York: City of New York, 1982.

_____. 85 Leonard Street (LP-0877). Marjorie Pearson. New York: City of New York, 1974.

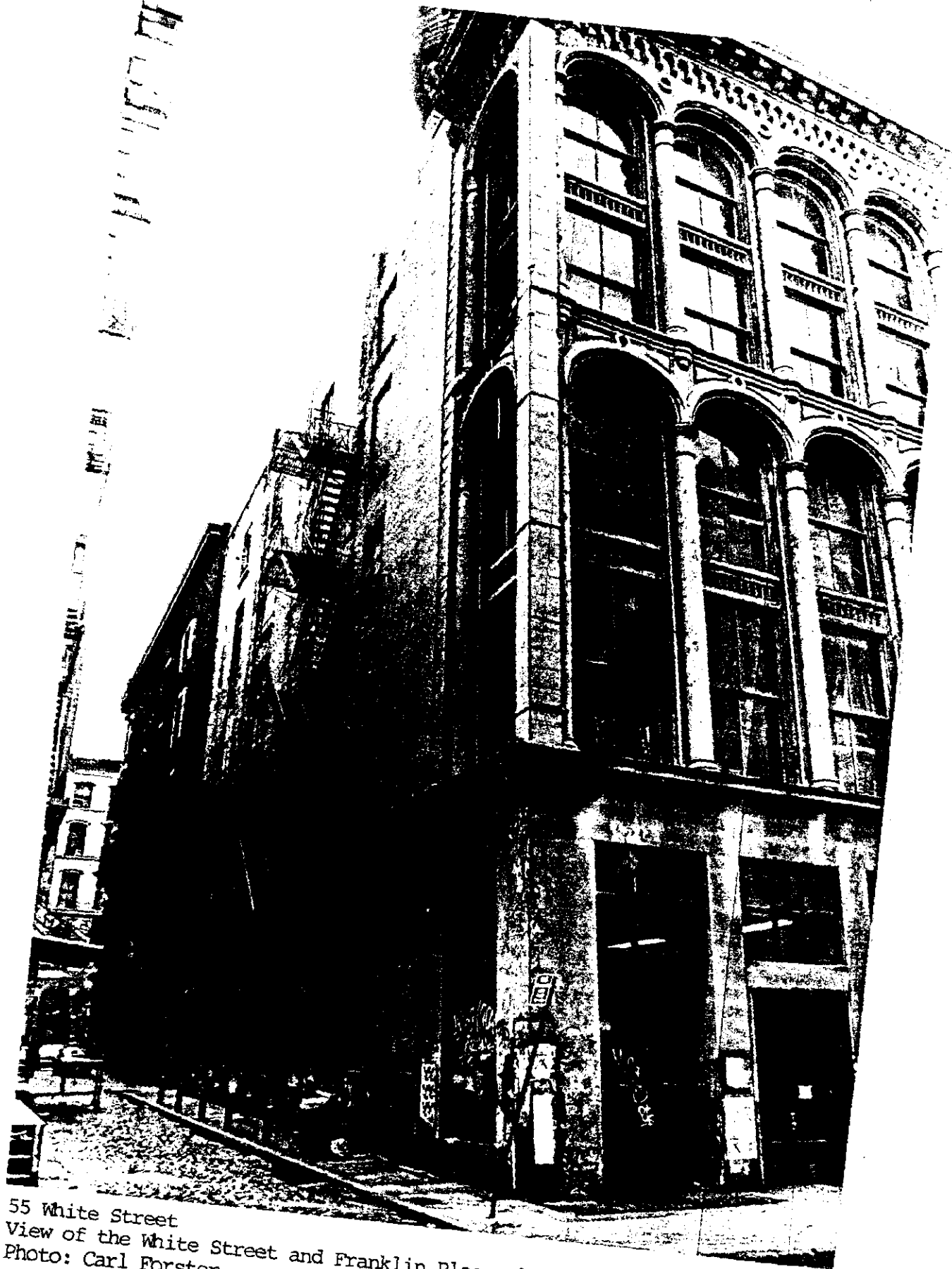
_____. Soho-Cast Iron Historic District (LP-0768). New York: City of New York, 1973.

_____. Woods Mercantile Buildings. (LP-1040). James T. Dillon. New York: City of New York, 1979.



55 White Street
Built 1861
Photo: LPC

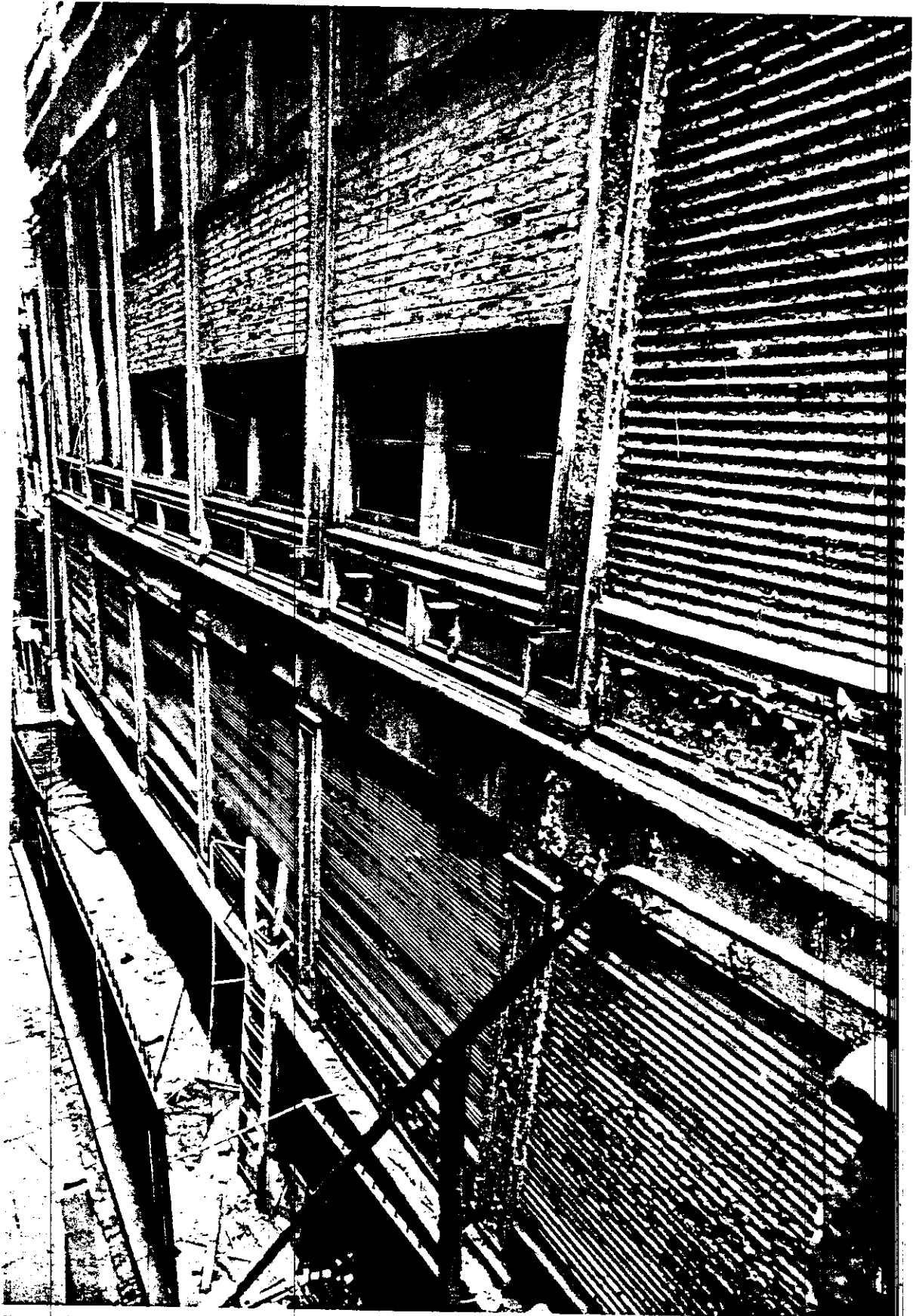
Architect: John Kellum & Son
Founder: Daniel D. Badger



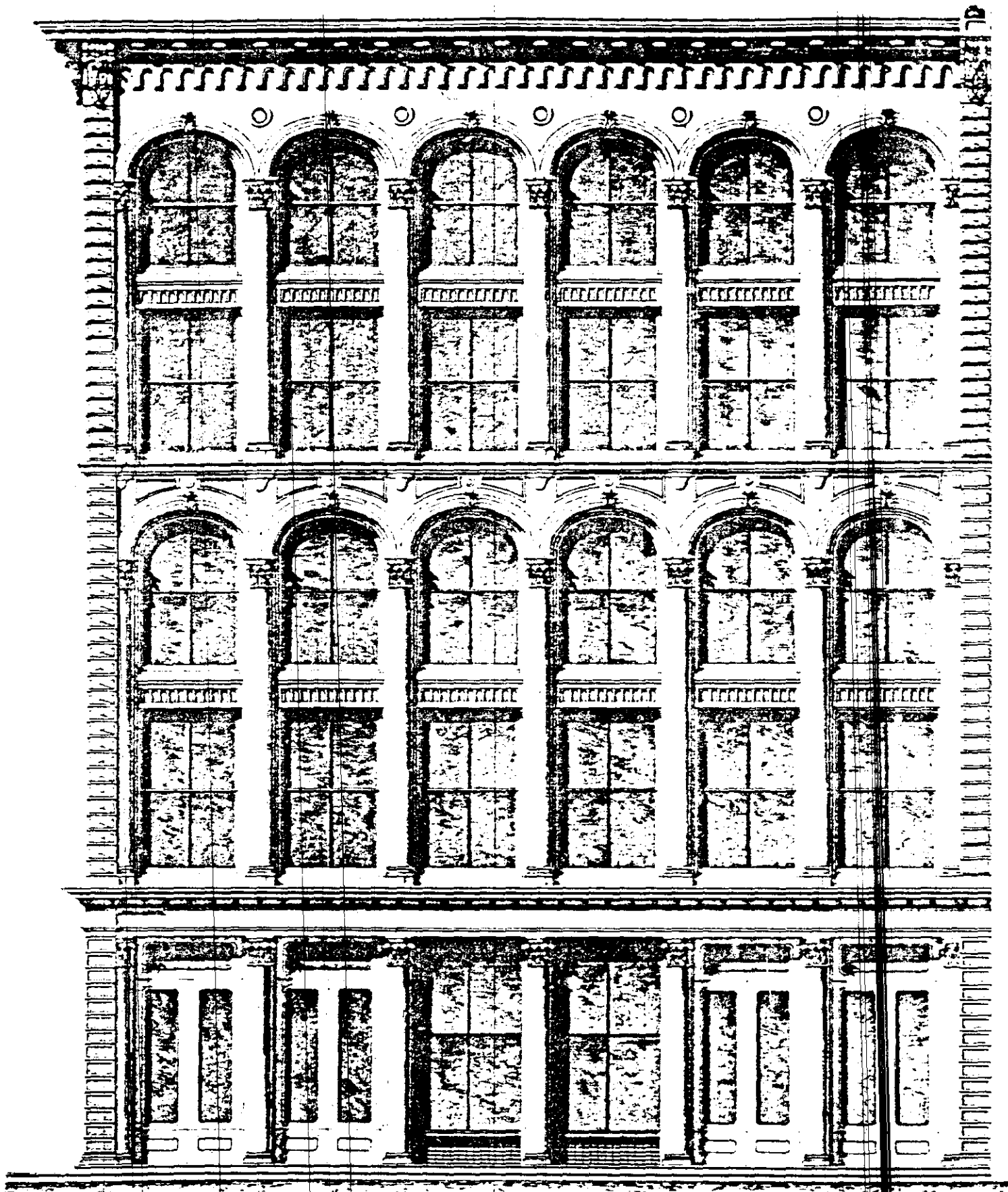
55 White Street
View of the White Street and Franklin Place elevations
Photo: Carl Forster



55 White Street
View of the Franklin Place and rear elevations
Photo: Carl Forster



55 White Street
View of basement and first-story rear elevations
Photo: Carl Forster



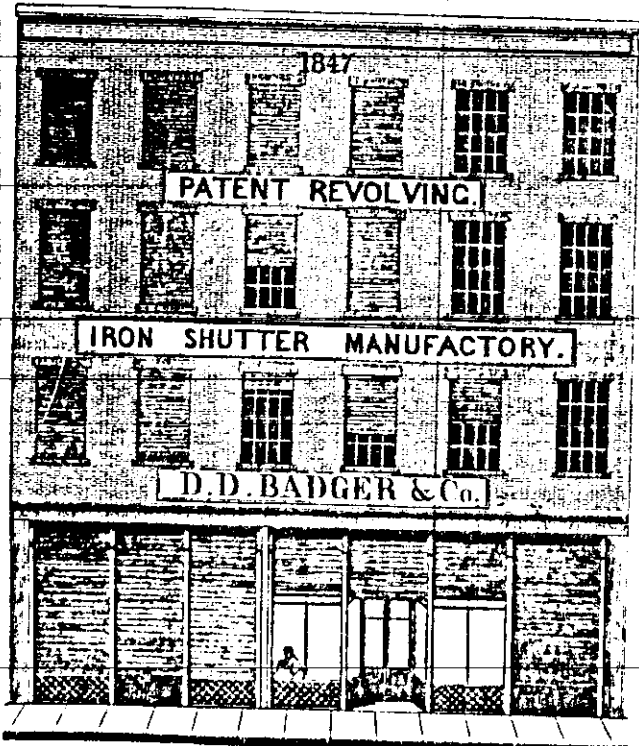
55 White Street
Source: Badger's Catalogue, pl. CII

PATENT REVOLVING IRON SHUTTERS

MANUFACTURED BY

D. D. BADGER & CO.

NOS. 41 & 46 DUANE STREET, N. Y.

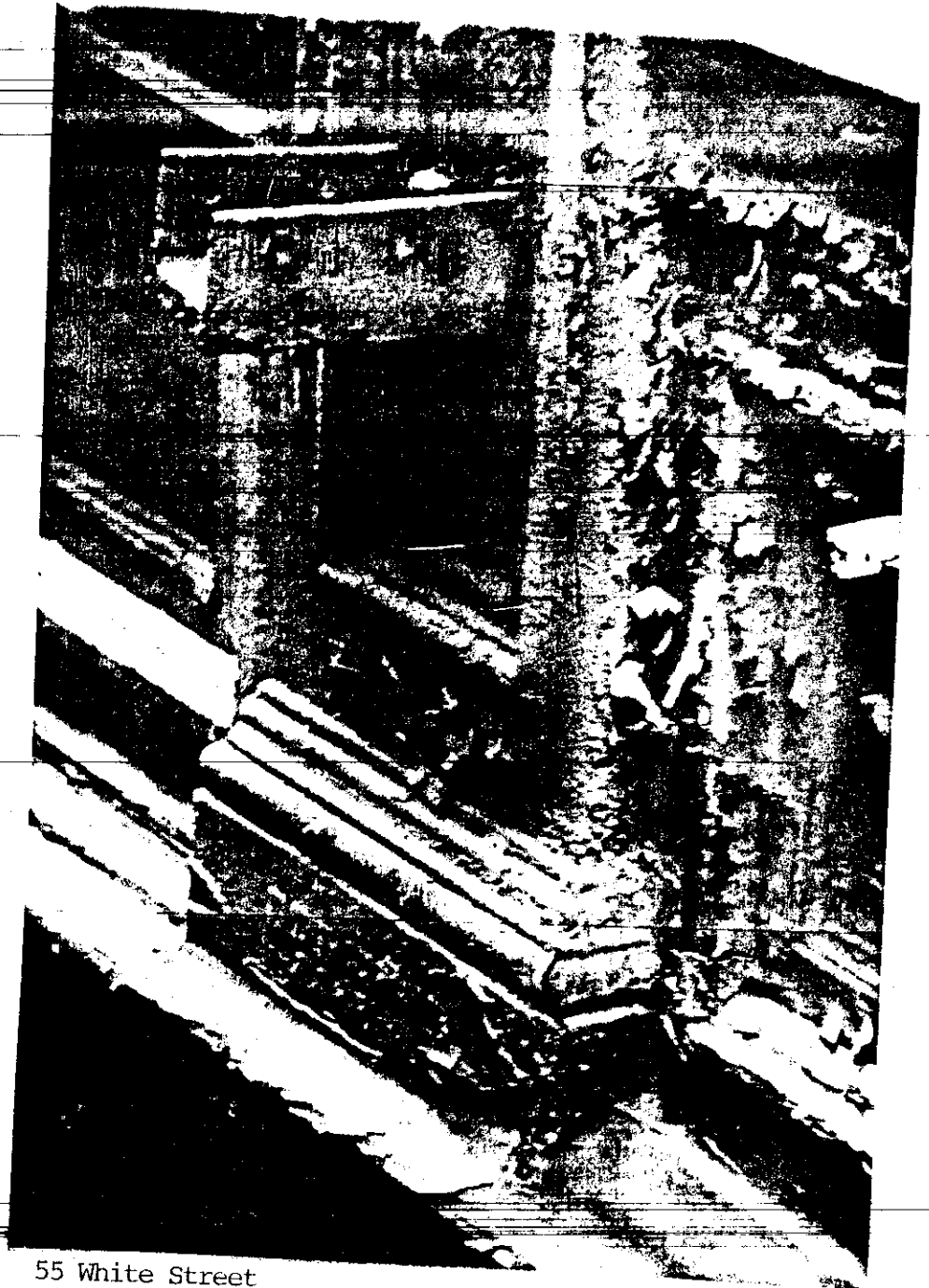


These Shutter are made of cast iron, about two inches wide and one eighth of an inch thick, connected together by a series of rollers on the inside. The ends are by each other, and the ends are connected in grooves, so that they cannot be drawn apart.

They are a perfect non-combustible fire and burglar proof, and they are not liable to get out of order. They are properly made, so that when the building upon which they are placed, they are raised, or lowered, or open, or close them. They are wound around a shaft over the top of the window, which work is raised, or lowered, or open, or close them. They are wound around a shaft over the top of the window, which work is raised, or lowered, or open, or close them. They are wound around a shaft over the top of the window, which work is raised, or lowered, or open, or close them.

By These Shutter are admirably adapted for houses having large windows and large glass, the entire front of a house being raised up, or down, by one operation, it is also fire, burglar, and theft proof, and without removing or disturbing any articles placed in the window.

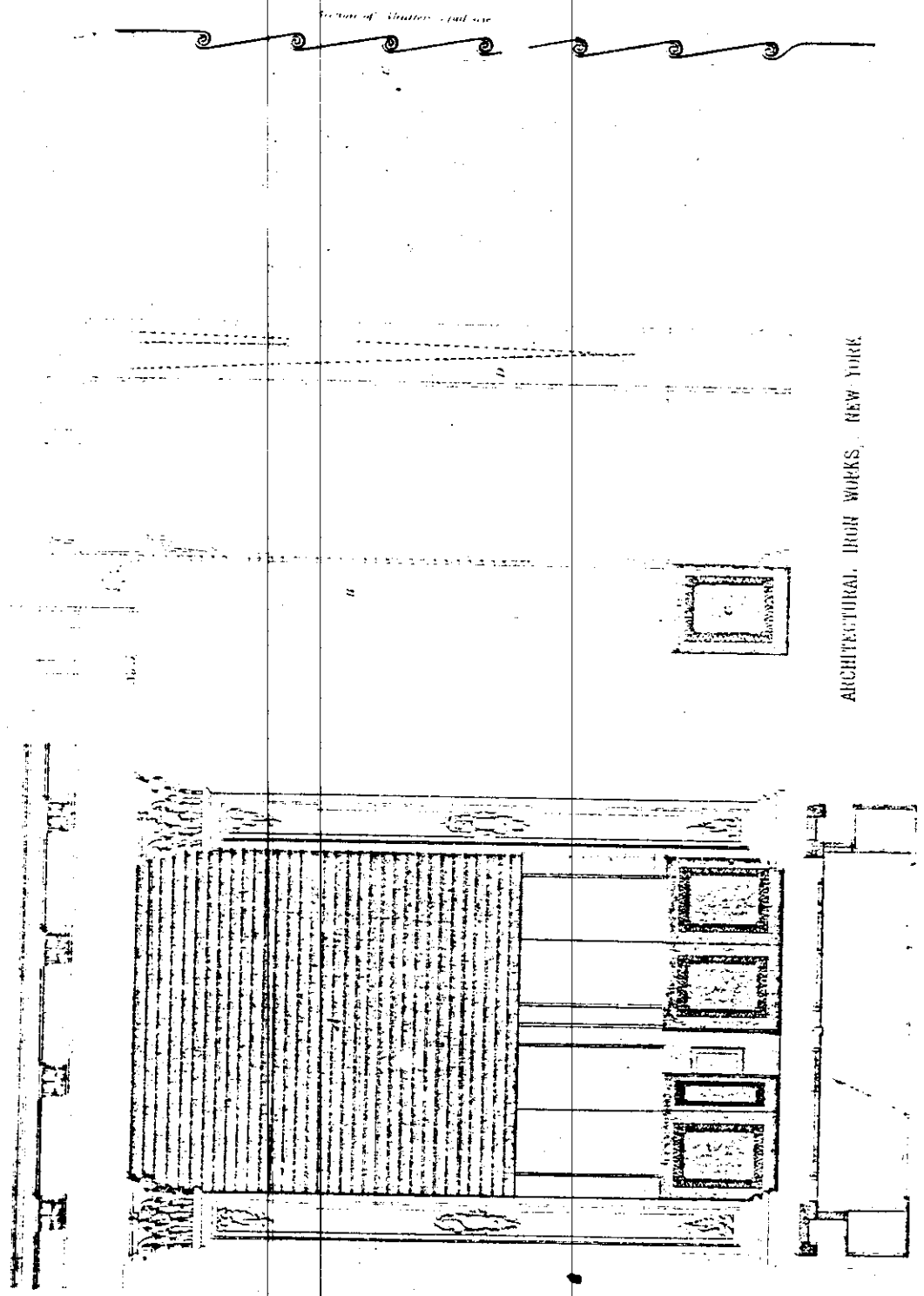
Advertisement for Badger's rolling iron shutters
Source: Badger's Catalogue (Dover reprint, 1981, vii).



55 White Street
Detail of foundry plate with "D. D. Badger"
Photo: Carl Forster

Plate LXXI

Details. Rolling Iron Shutters.



ARCHITECTURAL IRON WORKS, NEW YORK

Details of rolling iron shutters by Daniel D. Badger
Source: Badger's Catalogue, pl. LXXI