

85 LEONARD STREET BUILDING, Borough of Manhattan. Completed 1861; built by James Bogardus.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 174, Lot 3.

On October 8, 1974, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 85 Leonard Street Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 10). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. The representative of the owner spoke in opposition to designation. Strong support for the designation of this building has been expressed in letters sent to the Commission.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The building at 85 Leonard Street is a fine example of cast-iron architecture, and the only remaining building in New York City attributed to James Bogardus, self-described "inventor of cast-iron buildings." A plaque reading "James Bogardus, Originator and Constructor of Iron Buildings, New York" was placed at the base of one of the ground floor columns. Built in 1860-61 on land owned by the estate of Thomas Swords, this is one of the later buildings by James Bogardus. The Watch Tower in Mount Morris Park, built in the 1850s, is also attributed to James Bogardus. It was designated as a New York City Landmark in 1967.

In November 1860 the Swords estate leased the property to Ziba H. Kitchen, William Montross and Aaron P. Wilcox on condition that they "erect with all reasonable dispatch...a good and substantial store house to cost not less than \$20,000." According to tax assessment records, the building was begun in December 1860 and completed sometime the following year. In 1868, Trow's City Directory lists Kitchen, Montross and Wilcox as a firm of drygoods merchants, with its place of business at 85 Leonard Street.

By the 1850s this area of Manhattan had begun to change from a residential neighborhood to a commercial and manufacturing district. Most of the buildings on both sides of Leonard Street, west of Broadway, were built for commercial purposes in 1860-61, replacing residences which had previously stood on the block, including that of Thomas Swords at 87 Leonard Street.

The building at 85 Leonard Street possesses unique historic significance of one of the few remaining works of James Bogardus, and his only surviving building in New York City. In 1848 Bogardus erected the first full cast-iron facade on a building in New York City for John Milhau at 183 Broadway. His own factory at Duane and Centre Streets was the basis for Bogardus's 1850 patent for an all-iron building. Partially because of Bogardus's work, the use of cast iron for facades and structural supporting systems became widespread in New York City during the mid-19th century. While his competitor, Daniel Badger, may be credited with popularizing the use of cast iron for facades, Bogardus advanced the use of iron for structural supporting systems, thus laying the foundation for modern skyscraper construction.

Although Trow's New York City Directory lists Bogardus as "architect in iron, constructor and patentee of iron buildings and manufacturer of the eccentric mill," he was usually associated with other architects in most of his work. However, it seems likely that Bogardus worked without an architect for the building at 85 Leonard Street since it is a relatively simple structure with brick party walls and a self-supporting cast-iron facade.

The five-story structure, which is still used for commercial purposes, stands as one of a row of similar buildings. It is one of the few extant buildings of cast iron designed in the so-called "sperm candle" style which became popular in New York City in the late 1850s and early 1860s. (The name was derived from the use of two-story columns that resemble candles made from sperm whale oil.) The style uses classical elements in combination with a non-classical emphasis on verticality, lightness and openness. Although it is not

certain if the style originated in stone or iron, the qualities of lightness, openness, and verticality are intrinsic characteristics of cast-iron architecture and later of skyscraper construction.

The building, which is three bays wide, has two tiers of elongated columns, which span the second to third and fourth to fifth stories with spandrel panels separating the two floors of each two-story grouping. The ground floor storefront has three arched openings flanked by semi-engaged fluted columns, and is surmounted by a modillioned cornice. Similarly, the two-story elongated columns above are also fluted and terminate in smooth capitals. Rope moldings and foliate motifs enhance the spandrels of the arches at the top of each two-story vertical unit. The horizontal panels which divide the two-story units have a motif of elongated round arches which echo the shape of the much larger arches enframing the window bays. The modillioned cornice separating the third and fourth floors is flanked by console brackets decorated with lions' heads on the ends.

An impressive entablature--composed of a paneled frieze formed by a rope molding, a row of dentils, and a modillioned cornice edged with a foliate molding--crowns the facade. Four foliate console brackets support the cornice. Small panels, each containing a man's head, interrupt the cornice molding above the console brackets.

When comparing this building with its neighbors, which are similar in style but have facades which are largely of stone, the advantages of cast iron become apparent. 85 Leonard Street has extensive detail of a very intricate and delicate nature which would be both difficult and costly to execute in stone. In addition, this detail enhances the basic forms of the building itself.

Not only does the building have historical significance as a work of James Bogardus, it also has aesthetic significance as an excellent example of a unique and original architectural style of the period. It not only expresses the intrinsic structural advantages of cast iron--lightness and openness--but also displays the fine quality and wealth of detail which made cast iron such a desirable building material.

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 the 85 Leonard Street Building has 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, the 85 Leonard Street Building is the last remaining building in New York City by James Bogardus, self-described "inventor of cast-iron buildings," that it is one of the few extant buildings of cast iron designed in the so-called "sperm candle" style, a style which uses classical elements in combination with a non-classical emphasis on verticality, lightness, and openness, and that the fine quality and wealth of detail enhance the basic forms of the building and illustrate the desirability of cast iron as a building material in the 19th century.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the 85 Leonard Street Building, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 174, Lot 3, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.