

97 MURRAY STREET, BOGARDUS BUILDING, Borough of Manhattan. Completed 1848;
architect-engineer James Bogardus.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 131, Lot 21.

On February 3, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of 97 Murray Street, Bogardus Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 20). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This building, known originally as one of the Laing Stores, is one of an integrated group of five which have great architectural importance and are of special significance to the world of engineering design.

It was designed by James Bogardus (1800-1874) and was built in 1848. It has, along with the adjoining buildings Nos. 258-262 Washington Street, the first complete cast-iron front (facade) constructed in New York and still standing. To erect this store, Bogardus stopped work on his Eccentric Mill on Centre Street, which has long since been demolished. Unlike the Bogardus Building, the Eccentric Mill included his patented iron floor and roof system. The latter never caught on, however, and it is the Bogardus Building which is the prototype of all subsequent cast-iron facades. J. Milhaus' Pharmacy, at 183 Broadway, was built early in 1848, slightly before the Bogardus Building, but its original facade was replaced many years ago.

Heretofore cast-iron columns with lintels had been used for store fronts to support the masonry above, but this was the first complete self-supporting cast-iron front extending through the upper stories and was the prototype upon which subsequent cast-iron construction was based. The brick party walls and timber floors of this building were of conventional construction.

This type of iron front was the lightest type of construction which had been achieved, and in contrast to the conventional masonry bearing-wall construction permitted the use of slender uprights and a much greater percentage of window area resulting in more light and air than had been heretofore possible.

Built with a simple post and lintel type of construction, this cast-iron front foreshadowed the development which led to the skeleton steel construction of the skyscraper.

A column in the New York Evening Post of May 3, 1849 said of the Laing Store facades that: "each piece may be put up as fast as it is brought on the ground. They may be taken down, removed and put up again in a short time, like any other casting." Shop-fabrication and extraordinary ease in assembly, disassembly and re-assembly are implicit in the patent which Bogardus held for his method.

This designation is of special significance because these facades can be disassembled, moved and reassembled at another location.

Bogardus' pioneer work has been so highly valued that when it was first feared that the Stores would be razed, the Smithsonian Institution wished to have one entire structural bay cut out for them. As buildings of the greatest importance in the development of structure, their status has been recognized by such noted architectural historians as Siegfried Giedion, in his book Time, Space and Architecture, and by Carl W. Condit, in his book, American Building Art among others.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of the building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that 97 Murray Street, Bogardus Building, 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, 97 Murray Street, Bogardus Building, which is a part of five stories, united behind a uniformly designed cast-iron facade, has great architectural elegance and distinction, that it forms a part of the first complete cast-iron building front ever erected in the United States, that it employed a novel system of assembly and erection and that it was a forerunner of the multi-story steel-framed office building of today.

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 97 Murray Street, Bogardus Building, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 131, Lot 21, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.