

BOUWERIE LANE THEATRE (originally Bond Street Savings Bank), 330 Bowery, Borough of Manhattan. Completed 1874; architect Henry Engelbert.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 530, Lot 41.

On March 8, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Bouwerie Lane Theatre and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 16). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. At the public hearing the representative of the owner opposed the proposed designation. Since the public hearing conferences have taken place between the owner of the building and a representative of the Commission during which the provisions of the law were discussed.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Bouwerie Lane Theatre is an especially interesting cast-iron building because Henry Engelbert, the architect, designed it in the elaborate style of the French Second Empire. The wealth of ornamental detail, with its plastic, almost sculptured effect, makes this building an unusually fine example of this important type of construction.

The building occupies a conspicuous corner site. It has a long frontage on Bond Street but its end facing the Bowery is comparatively narrow. To solve the problem of making these two different elevations pleasing and harmonious, the architect succeeded in unifying both elevations by using the same design elements in each while making the extent of their use equal to the width of the elevation. Thus corner quoins frame the Bowery facade and columns flank the central one of its three windows. On the Bond Street facade quoins appear not only at the corners but they also frame the windows at either end. Handsome columns frame the windows of the five center bays as they did the Bowery windows - but here they are coupled. To unify both fronts horizontally, the architect ran band courses at the top of each story around both elevations. To give to the building a sense of emphatic culmination at the top, the main cornice is handsomely detailed and imposing in scale. Again, in recognition of the disparate dimensions of the elevations, the architect placed a pediment across the head of the second floor center window of each facade, but on Bond Street he set a low-pitched pediment on the cornice of the central section to give it emphasis.

Upon completion in 1874, it was known as the Bond Street Bank and later became the German Exchange Bank. At a much later date, it was put to general commercial use as a loft building. In 1963 it became the Bouwerie Lane Theatre after being converted to its present use. This history of change demonstrates how successfully an old building can serve new needs without destruction or loss of its architectural characteristics or its integrity.

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 Bouwerie Lane Theatre 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, the Bouwerie Lane Theatre is an exceptionally fine example of cast-iron construction, that the elaborate detail of the facades is a notable expression of French Second Empire architecture, that it is an interesting example of the skillful treatment of disproportionate elements and that the history of its varied uses is a clear indication that landmark buildings can serve the needs of the community over a long period of years without necessarily being destroyed or defaced.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A 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 Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 530, Lot 41, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.