

BAYARD-CONDUCT BUILDING, 65-69 Bleecker Street, Borough of Manhattan.  
Built 1897-99; architect Louis H. Sullivan.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 529, Lot 72.

On November 26, 1974, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Bayard-Condict Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 6). At the owner's request the hearing was continued to January 28, 1975 (Item No. 1). Both hearings were duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A total of five witnesses spoke in favor of designation at the two hearings. The representative of the owner spoke in opposition to designation. Hearings had been previously held on this item in 1966 and 1970.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Bayard-Condict Building is the most significant commercial building utilizing skyscraper structural techniques in New York City. Built in 1897-99 on busy commercial Bleecker Street, the building provided a new and startling contrast to the classically-inspired skyscrapers which were being constructed by New York City architects at that time. It is the only building in New York designed by the internationally acclaimed architect, Louis H. Sullivan, the first American to work in a non-historic, modern architectural style. He was the first to solve the design problem of the tall building--the most significant new problem confronting architects in the late 19th century. Sullivan was a leader of the "Chicago School" of commercial architecture developed during this time which stimulated the subsequent development of 20th-century modern architecture, not only in the United States, but in Europe. Hugh Morrison, the author of the first study of the architect in 1935, entitled his book Louis Sullivan, Prophet of Modern Architecture.

#### The Architect

Louis Henri Sullivan (1856-1924), one of this country's greatest architects, was active during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Sullivan, who was born and raised in Boston, received his first architectural training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which he entered in September 1872. After a year, he went to Philadelphia and found employment in the offices of Frank Furness, one of that city's most original architects. After being dismissed from Furness's office as a result of the panic of 1873, Sullivan joined his parents in Chicago. Chicago was still recovering from the Great Fire of 1871, and architects' offices were extremely active. Sullivan found work in the office of William LeBaron Jenney, an innovator in skyscraper construction techniques. This experience led him to seek further training at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. From his mathematics tutor, M. Clopet, he was inspired to formulate a rule for architecture "so broad as to admit of no exception." Although Sullivan rejected the classical styles taught at the Ecole and felt that the problems given to the students could not inspire creative effort, the theoretical approach which he had learned later proved invaluable to him in organizing the interior spaces of large commercial buildings.

With his partner Dankmar Adler (1844-1900), Sullivan created some of the most architecturally notable buildings of the 1880s and 1890s, among them the Auditorium Building (1887-89), the Schiller Building (1891-92), the Transportation Building of the World's Columbian Exposition (1893), and the Stock Exchange (1893-94), all in Chicago; the Wainwright Building (1890-91) in St. Louis; and the Guaranty Building (1894-95) in Buffalo, New York. His commercial buildings not only express the vitality of the Chicago School of skyscraper design, but are indicative of Sullivan's quest for a new style of architecture--modern and non-historical in pre-

cedent and expressive of the ideals of American democracy. His buildings and theories were widely admired by architects of the 20th century. His work proved inspirational to many, notably to Frank Lloyd Wright who worked for him in Chicago for several years. In later years, he often referred to Sullivan as his "lieber Meister."

Sullivan's highly original, architectural ornament was an outgrowth of progressive theory of the character and role of ornament in the mid-19th century. Architectural ornament was employed by Sullivan to separate the various functional uses of the building and to symbolize the distinctions between load-bearing and non-structural members. Ornament was no longer an overlay, but an integral part of the building, much as it had been in medieval times.

Also influential for later architects was Sullivan's architectural theory expressed in such writings as Kindergarten Chats (1901-02, reprinted 1918, 1934), and The Autobiography of an Idea (1922-23; 1924). Sullivan's essay, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered" (1896), is a notable summary of his theories.

The design of large commercial and office buildings was a new and continuing architectural problem throughout much of the last quarter of the 19th century. Most architects considered height, volume, and uniformity of plan--primary characteristics of such structures--to be artistic liabilities. Consequently, when architects used classical historical principles in designing tall buildings--principles which had been developed for low horizontal buildings--the result was fragmented. Such tall buildings did not have visual or artistic unity. In addition, large buildings continued to be designed in a traditional manner, with an exterior of solid masonry which in no way expressed the interior steel skeleton or frame.

Sullivan, on the other hand, saw the tall office buildings as a new problem in architectural design, a problem which contained and suggested its own solution, and one which could not be solved by established architectural rules, conventions, or habits. According to Sullivan, such a building must respond to a number of practical conditions:

- (1) a basement story for boilers, engines, etc.;
- (2) a ground floor devoted to stores and banks which require a large area, ample space and light, and freedom of access from the street;
- (3) a main entrance at the ground floor;
- (4) a second story which is readily accessible by stairways;
- (5) above this, many stories of offices piled tier on tier;
- (6) an attic which is related to the life and usefulness of the structure to complete the building's circulatory system.

From these conditions Sullivan states that:

- (1) the main entrance and the first story must attract the eye and the remainder of the story must also be treated in a "liberal, expansive, sumptuous way";
- (2) the second story should be treated in a similar way but with "milder pretensions";
- (3) above, the window units will look all alike because the offices are all alike; and
- (4) the attic floor "gives us the power to show by means of its broad expanse of wall, and its dominating weight and character . . . that the series of office tiers has definitely come to an end."

Finally, for the design to be truly artistic, the architect must heed the voice of emotion and ask what is the chief characteristic of the tall office building.

Sullivan answers: "It is lofty . . . it must be every inch a proud and soaring thing, rising in sheer exultation that from bottom to top it is a unit without a single dissenting line . . ."

Sullivan asserts, in addition, that "the shape, form, outward expression, design or whatever we may choose, of the tall office building should in the very nature of things follow the functions of the building." This, in turn, gives rise to a "natural" and "organic" three-part division of the building, with the lower stories taking on a special character suited to special needs, the office tiers which have the same unchanging function continuing in the same unchanging form, and the attic being specific and conclusive in form and function.

From this theory evolved the famous dictum: form follows function. For Sullivan "function" meant the whole life that would go in a building. Far more than mechanism and utilitarianism, his idea of functionalism meant that a building must be organic, have life and unity; a building must also express intellectual, emotional, and spiritual realities. In addition, an appropriate system of ornament is necessary for architecture to realize its highest possibilities, for ornament carries on the creative impulse of the architectural expression of the building. Sullivan did not mean his skyscraper theory to be a formula but rather a set of guidelines to inspire the creativity of the architect from which the design would naturally arise. His theory provides useful illumination for a discussion of the Bayard-Condict Building.

#### The Client

The land on which the Bayard Building is now situated was sold by the Bank for Savings to the United Loan and Investment Company in August 1897. The intention of United Loan was to tear down the old bank building and to replace it with a twelve-story commercial building to be called the Bayard Building. The announcement of the property sale in the New York Tribune stated that the new building was to be designed by Louis H. Sullivan, who "planned the transportation building at the Worlds Fair, the Chicago Stock Exchange and the Auditorium in that city." In working with a New York architect as associate, in this case Lyndon P. Smith, Sullivan was carrying on his standard practice of always associating himself with a local architect when doing jobs out of his state.

The Bayards were one of New York City's old and prestigious families — with antecedents going back to Dutch Colonial days. Despite the illustrious family name, there were no Bayards financially involved in any part of the building project, and the use of the name for the building remains ambiguous. Available records indicate that the building was wholly undertaken by the United Loan and Investment Company, with its principal office at 30 Broad Street in New York City. All correspondence pertaining to the building was carried on by its president, Robert Avery, and the associate architect Lyndon P. Smith. Incorporated in 1895 as a company for the buying and selling of stocks, bonds, mortgages, and land for a commission or fee, its business permit was extended in 1897 to allow it to expand its interests in the real estate business.

#### History of Construction and Design

The design and plans for the building were commissioned from Sullivan presumably sometime during the summer of 1897, probably with Lyndon P. Smith, the associate architect, acting as intermediary. Sullivan had lectured at the Institute of Architects in New York in 1895--having just completed the Guaranty Building in Buffalo--and Smith may have attended the meeting. Sullivan and Smith became close friends while working on the Bayard commission, and Smith later wrote two articles for the Architectural Record of 1904 and 1905 on Sullivan's buildings.

Plans for a commercial building at 65-69 Bleecker Street were submitted to the Manhattan Building Department by Robert Avery on September 17, 1897, just three days after the transfer of the property was recorded, and before the demolition of the old Bank for Savings building had begun. The plan called for a building twelve stories in height with the top two stories handled internally as one story; the upper floor was designed as a gallery surrounding an open room two stories in height and was lighted from above by a skylight. A typical floor plan provided light-filled, loft-type rooms that could be readily partitioned for office space if desired. Setbacks at the rear of the sides of the buildings provided additional light and air to the rooms. Elevators, stairwells and utilities were grouped in core areas to leave as much open floor space as possible.

The exterior walls were to be of brick, twelve inches thick for the entire height of the building, and the front was to be faced with terra cotta. Significantly, it was also proposed to use the "Gray system" of columns for the structural framing of the building, which had been successfully used by the firm of Adler & Sullivan for the Guaranty Building in Buffalo. The Gray system, which was frequently used for bridge structures, was readily adapted to skyscraper construction. It consisted of fourteen-inch square columns set on cast bases; each column was connected to the one above and below by a special arrangement of plates and angle seat. The result is an entirely independent vertical steel structure, which does not need partitions or walls to keep it in position, capable of supporting all the other materials used in the construction of the building. This system was not only extremely effective structurally, but was economically advantageous, since it would increase the ratio of usable floor space.

Because of the restrictive policies of the New York Building Department, however, the Gray column system had to be abandoned, and the wall thicknesses also had to be changed from the planned uniform twelve-inch thickness to: twenty inches up to the fifth floor, sixteen inches to the ninth floor, and twelve inches to the roof. The diameter of the present structural columns varies from twenty-four inches on the ground floor to a diameter of thirteen inches on the twelfth and thirteenth floors. These changes affected the usable floor space, and were a financial setback to United Loan and Investment Company.

Construction began in December 1897, even before all the problems were resolved with the Building Department. Unfortunately, these problems proved to be too much for Avery: The Bank for Savings recalled the mortgage in June 1899, and the property passed into the hands of Emmeline and Silas Condict. The building was finished in December 1899, and the name was changed to Condict rather than Bayard. But in May 1900 the Condicts sold their interest to Charles T. Wills, the builder, who owned it until 1920. In 1901 Trow's City Directory has listings for the Bayard Building at 65-67 Bleecker Street and the Condict Building at 69 Bleecker Street; both were described as offices. The two buildings listed are, in fact, one structure, but the listing may indicate some sort of internal division that may then have existed.

The Bayard-Condict Building, the first work executed by Sullivan after the dissolution of his partnership with Dankmar Adler, splendidly evokes Sullivan's motto of the skyscraper as a "proud and soaring thing." While stylistically similar in some ways to the Guaranty Building in Buffalo, the design of the Bayard Building is closest to an unexecuted project of about 1895 for the Trust and Savings Bank Building in St. Louis; however, unlike those two buildings, the Bayard is not located on a corner site. Consequently, in the Bayard design, Sullivan concentrated his artistic energies on articulating the front facade--the only facade visible from the street. The design transforms the tripartite division of a classical column--base, shaft and capital--into a creative expression of height. The unbroken vertical continuity of the slender, molded piers defining the five narrow bays rise the full height of the building above the two-story



base, and terminate in arches just below the ornate frieze and strongly projecting roof cornice. These piers express the interior structural columns. Each two-window bay is divided by a narrow mullion which ends in double arches enclosed within the arch formed by the piers.

One of the most striking aspects of Sullivan's facade, which is entirely of terra cotta, is the contrast between the smooth simplicity of the structural design and the sculptural quality of the decoration which provides a coloristic play of light and shade on the facade. The ornament appears to spring to life on every available horizontal surface: above the entrance, in the spandrels separating floor levels, in the exquisite foliate ornament in the eaves, with panels separated by angels with outstretched wings and, finally, in the treatment of the roof cornice. Sullivan's fluid handling of ornament is a parallel in some ways to the work of Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933), the finest designer in glass in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Assisting with the design of the ornament for the Bayard Building was George Elmslie (1871-1952), a young architect who worked for Sullivan for a number of years, and later a member of the firm of Purcell & Elmslie.

In accordance with Sullivan's precepts, the main entrance still "attracts the eye," although the ground floor has been altered. The doorway is flanked by projecting ornamented piers supporting a cornice and lunette that is filled with leafy "organic" forms, combined with geometric designs. A cresting of similar leafy and geometric forms crowns the lunette. The transition between the ground floor and the upper stories is marked by ornamental spandrel panels surmounting each bay above the second story. The exuberant ornament has been characterized by a modern architectural historian, Paul Sprague, as having "a continuous and unimpeded undulating movement." Continuity and a sense of overall unification are achieved by means of sensuous tendrils, leaves, and spirals which are reinforced by attendant geometric decorations. Rising above the second floor are the tiers of identical paired window units, indicating the similarity of the offices within. Each floor is separated by richly ornamented spandrel panels, recessed between the vertical piers and mullions, which delineate the window openings. Each ornamental plaque combines leafy and geometric forms in the typical Sullivan manner, but just below the twelfth floor the plaques become increasingly plastic through the incorporation of lions' heads.

Finally, the attic floor clearly shows "that the series of office tiers has definitely come to an end." The horizontal sweep of the cornice powerfully terminates the soaring verticality of the building. The spandrels beneath the cornice are dominated by intriguing figures of "faerie" angels with outspread butterfly wings. Sullivan had used this motif in his widely acclaimed design for the Transportation Building at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago of 1893 and in his project for the 1895 St. Louis building. Silas Condict's son asserted many years later that the six angels were his father's idea--as a symbol to remind tenants of the building to treat their fellowmen fairly on the six business days of the week as well as on Sunday. However, Condict did not acquire the building until six months before its completion; a rendering of the building, published in the Brickbuilder in June 1898 already showed the winged figures. Sumptuous ornament composed of swirling organic and geometric forms fills the spandrels. The boldly projecting cornice is ornamented with rich soffit panels and has intricate crestings similar to the one crowning the lunette over the entrance.

The terra-cotta medium which faces the entire facade easily adapted itself to the facile and elaborate ornament at which Sullivan was so adept. This popular, late 19th-century material was expressly manufactured for the building by the Perth Amboy Terra Cotta Company--which, incidentally, held a mortgage on the property. Sullivan used terra-cotta facing and ornament for a number of his buildings. The use of this material first became practical with the development of iron and steel frame construction techniques, pioneered in Chicago during the 1870s and 1880s; Sullivan was one of the first to make extensive use of terra-cotta facing. Such a terra-cotta "curtain wall" was unique at the time of New York.

### Critical Reaction

Sullivan's buildings were published in architectural magazines and were widely acclaimed, especially the Transportation Building at the World's Columbian Exposition. Because of his work he was awarded three medals by the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs in 1894. In 1900 J.-L. Pascal, one of the foremost patrons of the ateliers of the Ecole in Paris, expressed his admiration for Sullivan in speaking to architect Max Dunning: "I consider that Louis Sullivan in his work has exemplified better the real essence of Beaux-Arts teaching than any other American."

The Bayard-Condict Building was illustrated under the name of the "Bayard Building" in June 1898 in the Brickbuilder, American Architect and Building News published two illustrations of the "Condict" Building in October 1900. In that same year Jean Schopfer, a Frenchman, writing of the architecture of New York City, described the Bayard Building as "the best skyscraper yet erected." Despite widespread praise in the Midwest and from abroad, Sullivan's work did not gain the attention of critics of the Eastern architectural establishment until after the Bayard Building was erected in New York City. This gave them a firsthand opportunity to observe the skyscraper construction techniques that had been pioneered in Chicago and to view an architectural style that was truly modern and non-historical in its design precedents.

Two of the most influential critics of the turn of the century were Russell Sturgis and Montgomery Schuyler, Sturgis, writing in 1898, stated that the Bayard Building "exemplifies the growth of modern American building connected with the steel cage construction . . . . There is here no pretense that the building is a massive structure of cut-stone, and no pretense that it allows of treatment in the modern classical way with orders and classical proportion. The whole front is a careful thinking-out of the problem, how to base a design upon the necessary construction in slender metal uprights and ties." The building exemplified "the architectural treatment of the future metal building in our cities in the form which it must pass through if it is to reach any serious architectural success."

Like Sturgis, Schuyler commended the Bayard Building for its frank expression of skyscraper form. In 1899 he wrote in the Architectural Record: "There is nothing capricious in the general treatment of this structure. It is an attempt, and a very serious attempt, to found the architecture of a tall building upon the facts of the case. The actual structure is left or, rather, is helped, to tell its own story. This is the thing itself. Nobody who sees the building can help seeing that . . . the Bayard Building is the nearest approach yet made, in New York, at least, to solving the problem of the sky-scraper. It furnishes a most promising starting point for designers who may insist upon attacking that problem instead of evading it, and resting in compromise and conventions." Schuyler also praises the ornament: ". . . the aesthetic, as distinguished from the scientific, attractiveness of the Bayard Building without doubt resides in the decoration which has been lavished upon it, and which is of a quality that no other designer could have commanded."

### Conclusion

The Bayard-Condict Building remains unique in the history of New York City architecture. It is the only building designed by Louis Sullivan in New York. It is the only skyscraper of the period that frankly expresses its structural components in the manner of the Chicago School. There is no attempt to make the terra-cotta look like a masonry building, to deny the nature of the material. Thus, it is the first truly modern skyscraper in New York City, where architects continued to design skyscrapers based on historical precedents and the Beaux-Arts tradition until well into the 1920s.

Louis Sullivan was one of this country's greatest, most innovative and influential architects, but his work was forgotten, resulting in the lamentable destruction of many of his buildings. New York City is indeed fortunate in retaining such an outstanding example of his mature work.

#### 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 Bayard-Condict 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, the Bayard-Condict Building is the only building in New York City designed by Louis H. Sullivan, one of America's greatest and most influential architects, that it is the first truly modern skyscraper in New York, that it frankly expresses its structural components in the manner of the Chicago School, that the vertical design is a poetic expression of Sullivan's theory of the skyscraper as a "proud and soaring thing," that it is distinguished by Sullivan's exuberant ornament of an organic foliate nature which complements the structural innovations of the building, and that the terra-cotta curtain wall was unique at that time in New York

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 Bayard-Condict Building, 65-69 Bleecker Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 529, Lot 72, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

Report prepared by Marjorie Pearson  
Research Department

Sullivan, Louis H., The Autobiography of an Idea, New York: Press of the A.I.A., 1924, (reprints 1934, 1956).

Sullivan, Louis H., "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," Lippincott's Magazine (March 1896); Inland Architect (May 1896); Western Architect XXIII (Jan. 1922) 3-4, 10-11; Progressive Architecture XXXVIII (June 1957) 204-206.

Tuft, Margaret, "The Bayard (later Condict) Building by Louis Sullivan: Its Role in New York Life," 1969, unpublished paper on file in the Avery Architectural Library, Columbia University, and in the Landmarks Preservation Commission files.