

165 JOHN STREET BUILDING, Borough of Manhattan. 1811; architects unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 74, Lot 9.

On October 19, 1965 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 165 John Street Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 43). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

In the minutes of the Common Council, June 22, 1807, we find George Codwise, Jr. and Peter Schermerhorn engaged in negotiation with the City in connection with wharfage and development rights at the foot of Burling Slip. We do not know if Schermerhorn and Codwise were ever associates, but they certainly were the major - if not the only - property holders in the present Block 74. A. A. Low's buildings (LP-0070) just to the east were built on property which he purchased from the Codwise family.

In 1811, when 165 John Street was erected, the east end of John Street was known as Burling Slip and this building was known as No. 11 Burling Slip. The architect/builder cannot be ascertained, but the property was assessed at that time to George Codwise for \$5,000, a rather high assessment, and we may assume that it was built for him.

The present extra width of John Street, between Front Street and the East River, reflects the earlier existence of the Slip. The Slip was filled in in 1835, and although additional space was gained thereby, it has never been encroached upon. The attractiveness of these potentially expanded building sites makes the survival of all of the present buildings on Burling Slip a rare chance. Perhaps the persistence of 165 John Street on the site had something to do with retention of the building line back against its own front. Whatever it is that accounts for the survival of the outlines of the old Slip, and the splendid buildings enclosing the space, it is a happy circumstance; for if the most important feature in the history of this part of New York is the fact that it was the center of our burgeoning foreign commerce, then these buildings are highly significant, and the Slip itself hardly less so. This particular Slip happens to be lined with superb buildings, and the extra width of the street adds to their prominence.

Though the records are gone, we would judge from the style that 165 John Street had its exterior completely redone in the 1830's or possibly 1840's. Its present design carries out in every detail the design of its neighbor to the west, 159-163 John Street (LP-0072). Thus unless it was remodeled prior to 1836, and 159-163 John Street then built in imitation of it (not likely), it must either have been done at the same time as 159-163 John Street, possibly by the same builder, or subsequently, in imitation of it. In any event it is very well done, and whoever did it deserves our praise.

Its architectural elements are held to a minimum; yet the whole is so well harmonized, the touch so deft, that the building, the simplest kind of commercial building, may properly be called elegant. It is classically (i.e., perfectly) Greek Revival in style, the base and ground floor of granite with the typical, but here somewhat superior, square granite columns and large show windows. The four upper stories are of brick with plain granite window lintels and sills. Fortunately for us this building did not, like its neighbor, have a sixth story added, and we can see, therefore, the original fascia, cornice and roofline.

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 165 John Street 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.

165 JOHN STREET BUILDING

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the building at 165 John Street is a perfect example of New York Greek Revival commercial architecture, that it has been well preserved and has fortunately withstood the changes of the surrounding area, that it is an important vestige of a crucial era of New York history, and that it is a handsome example of vernacular functional design.

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 165 John Street Building, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 74, Lot 9, Borough of Manhattan as its Landmark Site.