

159-163 JOHN STREET BUILDING, Borough of Manhattan. 1836;  
architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 74, Lot 10 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On October 19, 1965, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 159-163 John Street Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 44). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

In 1836, when this building was erected, its address was Burling Slip, rather than John Street. The extra width of John Street between Front Street and the East River reflects the earlier existence of the actual Slip. The Slip was filled in in 1835, and the development of 159-163 John Street and 189 Front Street is probably related to that event. The present 165 John Street, though considerably altered, is a very early building (1811), hence was here when the Slip was filled; and the corner buildings, here described, are replacements of buildings which also were here when the Slip was in existence. We know that construction of the 1836 buildings was begun in 1835, and we may perhaps assume that this was before the Slip was filled. (These earlier buildings were owned by Anson G. Phelps, founder of Phelps, Dodge and Company.)

However we may account for the preservation of the outlines of the old Slip, 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 the slips are as significant as the buildings. This particular Slip happens to be lined with superb buildings, and the extra width of the street adds to their prominence.

159-163 John Street deserves prominence, for, apart from its historical associations, it is an excellent building. Its architectural elements are held to a minimum, yet they are so well harmonized, the touch is so deft, that the building, a simple 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 original upper stories are of brick with plain granite window lintels and sills. The plain brick fascia of the original cornice remains above the fifth floor windows, and above it is what we may assume to be a slightly later one-story addition. The latter is, fortunately, very sympathetically executed, and hardly, if at all, detracts from the quality of the total structure. A picture of it appears in Ada Louise Huxtable's Classic New York.

#### 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 159-163 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.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the building at 159-163 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 159-163 John Street Building, Borough of Manhattan and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of the Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 74, Lot 10 which contains the land on which the described building is situated.