

Landmarks Preservation Commission
October 29, 1968, Number 19
LP-0074

170-176 JOHN STREET BUILDING, Borough of Manhattan. 1840; architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 72, Lot 26.

On October 19, 1965 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 170-176 John Street Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 46). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

In 1840, 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 though additional space was gained thereby, it has never been encroached upon. The attractiveness of these potentially expanded building sites makes the survival of the present buildings on Burling Slip a rare chance.

We do not know exactly how it is that the outlines of the old Slip and the splendid buildings enclosing the space should have survived, but however it may be, 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 is lined with superb buildings, and the extra width of the street adds to their prominence. 170-176 John Street is a particular beneficiary, for it is in the middle of the block and could not properly be appreciated if deprived of its perspective.

It is a building which we may well stand back to admire. Though it could hardly be simpler, it is very striking. Its architectural elements are held to a minimum; the rhythm is unvarying, and except for openings, the front is one material throughout. This well detailed commercial building may properly be praised as elegant. In large measure, the special architectural character of the building is determined by the fact that it is of granite.

There probably were many Greek Revival buildings with granite fronts in New York, but now this building and 167-171 John Street (LP-0070), across the Slip, may be the only survivors. A picture of the building and the facts in the next paragraph may be found in Ada Louise Huxtable's Classic New York.

No report on this building would be complete without recognition of the exemplary restoration conducted by the present owners. Baker, Carver and Morrell, ship chandlers in Lower Manhattan for some 140 years, moved to this particular building relatively recently, evidently loved it and treated it beautifully.

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 170-176 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 170-176 John Street is a perfect example of New York Greek Revival commercial architecture, and in particular, that it is of granite, which is very rare, that it is in a good state of preservation, that it is rich in important historical associations, and that it is an exemplary expression of simple, refined 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 170-176 John Street Building, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 72, Lot 26, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.