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# Cast-Iron Case For Landmark

By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

Last month, scrap metal thieves walked off with the cast iron facade of a 126-year-old landmark building that had been carefully disassembled for preservation.

Less than half of the facade's components have been recovered and city officials are still trying to decide what to do with them.

In the meantime, the Landmarks Preservation Commission is being urged to designate the city's only other cast iron building designed by James Bogardus, originator of the Erector Set-style of construction that was the 19th century forerunner of the modern skyscraper.

The stolen facade was known both as The Laing Stores and the Bogardus Building because of its designer. When designating it a landmark in 1970, the commission noted that it was "the first complete cast-iron front construction in New York."

## 'Immediate Designation'

With that facade all but lost, The Friends of Cast Iron—the group most responsible for getting the SoHo cast-iron area designated an historic district—is calling for the "immediate designation" of the other Bogardus at 85 Leonard St.

The commission already considered designation at a public hearing in 1966 but never made a decision.

"The five-story iron-front with its double tier of giant columns is replete with the ornament which became a Bogardus hallmark," wrote Margot Gayle, chairman of the Friends of Cast Iron, in a letter to the commission. She is also president of the Fine Arts Federation.

"Of infinite interest," she added, "is the following, cast into an iron window ledge and still to be seen at the ground level, 'James Bogardus, Originator and Patentee of Iron Front Buildings, Pat. May 7, 1856.'"

The commission is expected to discuss the proposal this month in executive session. Whether a new public hearing will be held is unknown.

Bogardus is often referred to as the "grandfather of cast-iron architecture in America." In her book, "Cast Iron Architecture in New York City," due in September, Mrs. Gayle notes: "Bogardus was the man who envisioned the prefabrication of sections of buildings in cast iron and the assembling of these sections into facades or whole buildings."

## Easy to Reassemble

Cast iron refers as much to a method of building as an actual architectural style. It was an early form of modular construction with intricate ornamental detail that could be easily taken apart and reassembled.

Now there is some question among city officials as to how to use the remaining pieces of the stolen Bogardus front. The 1849 facade had been dismantled in 1971 from its site at Washington and Murray Sts. to make way for the Washington St. Urban Renewal Project. They were to be reassembled nearby on the site of the new CUNY Manhattan Community College.

The options: reassemble the sections that are left (most of the 3rd and top floors); distribute them to different museums, or recast the missing parts so as to have a total facade.

"The most important feature of the cast-iron system is that it is reproducible," says John Boogaerts, principal urban designer. "It consisted of standardized, industrial components. The technological genius that we were documenting with this landmark can be seen whether the parts are original or reproduced today.

It is important as a building type. Other cast-iron buildings are more architecturally important."

## Sawhill Sworn In

WASHINGTON (AP) — John C. Sawhill was sworn in yesterday as head of the new Federal Energy Administration by Vice President Ford. He succeeds William E. Simon, now Treasury Secretary.