

The New York Times (by Robert Walker)

**THREATENED BY EXPRESSWAY: Building on northeast corner of Broadway and Broome Street, built in 1857. Its cast-iron facade was inspired by a Venetian palazzo.**

## NOTED BUILDINGS IN PATH OF ROAD

**Cast-Iron Structures on  
Broome St. Seem Slated  
to Go for Expressway**

**By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE**

One of the first areas planned for designation as a historic district by the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission is in the path of the Lower Manhattan Expressway. Whether the expressway is constructed above or below ground, the buildings seem slated for certain demolition.

In the words of the commission, "this section contains the best cast-iron architecture still preserved in the United States."

"Our hands are tied," said James Grote Van Derpool, executive director of the commission. "Under the new landmarks law we are only an advisory body. We must wait to be asked by other city departments. Nobody has asked us anything."

"When we were a temporary agency, before the law went into effect, certification by the commission that no buildings warranted preservation on a site to be cleared by the city was obligatory. Now landmark review is optional."

When a city department requests a landmark review, it is not bound by the commission's report.

### Forerunner of Skyscraper

The district that the commission had hoped to preserve is a T-shaped enclave that runs north on Greene Street from Canal Street, and east-west on Broome Street from Broadway to Wooster Street. The route of the expressway is on Broome Street.

The blocks between Canal and Houston Streets from Wooster to Mercer Street are considered the richest stand of Victorian commercial architecture of the Civil War era in the city, and one of the best survivals of "The Iron Age" in the country. Broome Street bisects the area.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission lists the north side of Broome Street as "a remarkably fine collection of mid-nineteenth century commercial buildings."

Technologically, the liberal use of cast-iron fronts for these five- and six-story buildings, which gave the period its name, marked the first step toward the steel skeleton and a much more famous New York building type—the skyscraper.

The repeated, rhythmic iron framing of oversize glass windows led to the modern glass and metal wall. Experts consider the buildings an important chapter in American architectural history.

Esthetically the ornate iron or marble fronts, modeled after Italian palazzi, are rated as particularly handsome by critics. They were elegant enough to be called "Palaces of Trade" by proud businessmen-owners in the late eighteen-sixties.

Although the area is almost unknown to New Yorkers, it is a pilgrimage point for Euro-

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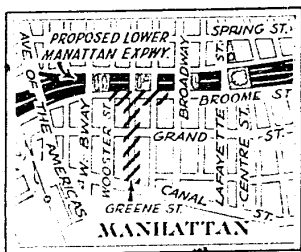
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pean architects and historians. Originally stores and warehouses, the buildings are now used for a variety of small industries and storage.

As a historic district, its uses would not be changed. But the buildings would be protected from demolition and out-of-character remodeling.

Brooklyn Heights has been named as a historic district and national landmark by the Federal Government, but not yet by the city. Beacon Hill in Boston and the Vieux Carrée in New Orleans have official historic designations. Greenwich Village will be eligible when New York starts its designation hearings in September.

The endangered structures on Broome Street are almost iden-



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A clean sweep of old Broome Street to make way for new expressway threatens architectural landmarks (shaded).

tical to the ones destroyed on Worth Street in 1962, when the entire central section of an intact block of "mint" examples of the period was ripped out for a parking lot.

More than half of the south side of Broome Street between Greene and Mercer Streets, consists of cast-iron fronted buildings in the same style as those on Worth Street, built two or three years after the Worth Street buildings, in 1871 and 1872. They are even by the same architect, Griffith Thomas, one of the city's most prominent nineteenth century designers.

According to the commission, the outstanding building of the area is the former E. V. Haughwout Store, on the northeast corner of Broadway and Broome Street. Now a dingy dark gray, it was the Tiffany's of New York when it was completed in 1857, with the city's first passenger elevator and some of its most expensive merchandise. Its crisply modeled iron facades are patterned after a Venetian Renaissance palace.

The Landmarks Commission calls the Haughwout Store "the Parthenon of New York's Iron Age." It was a reference to this building in a letter from the commission to Mayor Wagner when the expressway hung in the balance in 1962 that is believed to have tipped the scales against its approval at that time.

The expressway has been the center of bitter controversy for almost 20 years. After the 1962 veto by the Board of Estimate, a fight to demap the expressway was unsuccessful. It was reapproved by Mayor Wagner last May and is scheduled for immediate construction.