

THE BANK OF AMERICA - ALLISON BUILDING  
115 Exchange Place

Architectural Rating: Purple  
Construction Date: 1866  
Architects: Gallier and Esterbrook, construction supervisors for the Bank  
of America

Nomination Information

Date: May 25, 1978  
Nominated by: Jean Felts  
Seconded by: Diane Manget, Michael Duplantier, Imre Hegedus  
Recommended by: Staff

Site Description

Square 34, Lot B  
1st M.D., 6th A.D.  
Zoning: CBD-3

Lot Size: 34'0"0''' X 59'3"6'''

Current Use: Vacant

History of Property

Current Owners: Dean Phillip Allison  
Date of Aquisition: December 27, 1973  
Purchase Price: \$400,000.00

The nomination of this building was based upon its architectural significance and the fact that it is the work of a noted architect. Each of the four areas of criteria used in determining landmark qualification, and outlined in City Ordinance No. 6699 MCS, will be examined on an individual basis in order to provide information upon which a final decision will be made on whether or not to designate the property.

Architectural Significance

According to records in the Office of Conveyance, the land on which this building stands was acquired by the Bank of America on January 16, 1865. A little over a year later on May 25, 1866, the Bank of America signed a contract with the noted architectural firm of Gallier and Esterbrook to "build and erect a double five story store with ornamental iron front." The contract also called for the remodeling of the bank's offices located on the corner of Canal and Exchange and the erection of a one story link between the bank and the new iron front store. Both the original bank and the single story connection which contained the vault and the director's office have been demolished. The total cost quoted for the renovations to the bank, the single story link and the Exchange Place store was \$38,500.00 to be paid in eight installments. After it was constructed the store was occupied by C. Cavaroc and Co., a wine and import business. A Vidal lithograph executed in 1871 advertising the imported wholesale wine company reveals the C. Cavaroc signage on the cornice and above the first floor openings. It is interesting to note that Charles Cavaroc was president of the bank at the time of the signing of the contract with Gallier and Esterbrook and was obviously planning his future commercial enterprises at that time.

The building contract specifies that the store's iron front was to be furnished by the Bank of America and was to be similar to that of C. Slocomb's store on Canal Street. Since demolished, the Slocomb Baldwin store was located between Camp and Magazine on the uptown side of Canal Street. Designed by William A. Freret, the five story four bay Slocomb Building built by Crozier and Wing in 1859 at a cost of \$50,000.00. The

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drawings in the Notarial Archives for 115 Exchange Place show a five story iron front six bays wide. The completed structure however contains only five bays, one bay more than the Slocumb Baldwin Building. Otherwise the two buildings are almost identical in style and detail. It was not unusual at this time for architects to be inspired by already existing structures especially when cast iron facades were used. Whole iron facades and various prefabricated parts were manufactured and illustrated in numerous catalogues from which the architect or builder could select his designs. The architect also had the option of designing an original facade himself, having molds cast, and the facade assembled on the site. The local iron foundry of Bennett and Lurges was responsible for the casting of the iron used for the facade of 115 Exchange Place. The firm was responsible for the ironwork of one of New Orleans' most exuberant iron facades, the Frois Building, formerly located on Canal between Camp and Magazine.

The cast iron facade was an American innovation of the 1850's. James Bogardus originated the process and built the nation's first all iron building in 1849. Although its popularity began in the East, by the late 1850's cast iron facades were going up in all parts of the country. During the 1860's and early '70's, New Orleans built its share of iron front buildings, such as the Tulane Building, the Story Building and the magnificent Moresque Building, none of which exist today. Two excellent examples however do survive: William A. Freret's building at 622 Canal Street and the building under nomination. Since 622 Canal has lost its original cast iron ground floor, the Exchange Place building is the only completely intact cast iron facade left in the city. Its importance cannot be overstated.

The Bank of America - Allison Building is Venetian Renaissance in style featuring a magnificent rhythm of diminishing arches moving up its five story height. The arches on the impressively high ground level spring from intricately detailed fluted Corinthian columns. Both the window and door enframements are made up of a series of mouldings which project out from the plane of the opening creating a strong three dimensional effect. This sculptural quality is further heightened by the projecting ledges or cornices which divide the stories. These cornices are terminated at either end by brackets, the first and fifth levels being elaborately decorative acanthus leaf designs. The facade is further embellished by the triangular foliated forms which fill the spandrels between the arches. The facade terminates in a high Italianate cornice.

This intricate surface modeling was possible because of the cast iron process which used sand molds made from original wood carvings. Once these molds were made they could be used again and again to create prefabricated parts that could then be bolted together to form an entire facade. The decorativeness of these facades was particularly appealing to businessmen who sought to attract customers with the elegance that the facades achieved. Almost exclusively used for commercial buildings, the cast iron facade offered the advantages of easy maintenance, durability and low cost. Because of its strength it also allowed a large percentage of the facade to be given over to openings and the needed light they provided in dense commercial sections of growing cities. The innovations achieved in cast iron architecture played an important role in the subsequent development of the steel frame structure of today. 115 Exchange Place is New Orleans' only completely intact cast iron facade, and stands as an example of Victorian elegance and American ingenuity.

### Architect

One of this city's most important 19th century architects, James Gallier, Jr. was born in Huntington, England in 1827. He arrived in New Orleans in 1834, when his father, James Gallier, Sr. established his architectural practice in the city. In 1849, with the retirement of the elder Gallier, James Gallier, Jr. took over control of his father's office. Associated with John Turpin in the 1850's and Richard Esterbrook in the 1860's, Gallier, Jr. was responsible for some of the city's most important buildings, the most famous of which was the French Opera House build in 1859 and destroyed by fire in 1919. He also designed the Leeds Foundry Warehouse at

923 Tchoupitoulas and the Luling Mansion at 1436 Leda Street, both designated landmarks. Perhaps his best known work is his residence at 1132 Royal Street, built in 1857 and now open to the public. The fact that the building in question was technically not designed by James Gallier, Jr., does not detract from its importance in terms of his career. At this time in the 19th century, architects served as builders as well as designers. Given the special techniques required for the erection of a cast-iron facade, the choice of an architect of Gallier's reputation for the supervision of the construction merely serves to indicate that his abilities as a builder were as respected as were his skills as a designer.

Historic Personages

None

Cultural, Political, Economic and Social History

None