James Bogardus Biography

James Bogardus

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Biography

Architecture underwent a significant transformation during the 1800s. At the beginning of the century, the heavy walls of a building were designed to bear the load of the entire structure. By the end of the century, facades of brick and masonry were built upon skeletal frames which supported the weight of the structure. The modern architecture movement had begun.

An early leader in this movement was James Bogardus. Bogardus was born in Catskill, New York in 1800. As a young man, he became a prolific inventor and a lecturer on technical subjects. He became interested in architecture on a trip to Europe in 1836, where he was influenced by the form and function of Europe's classic structures. Upon returning to the United States in 1940, he established a foundry in New York City which produced prefabricated cast-iron beams and columns that could be shipped anywhere and then easily assembled or disassembled at the building site. This new method was fully demonstrated in the construction of Bogardus's own five-story factory in New York in 1848.

Bogardus preferred cast iron as a building material because of its malleability. It could be easily molded into the classic shapes he had seen in Europe, and it was both functional and decorative. A cast-iron shot tower which he built with a cast-iron framework is thought to have influenced architect William Jenney. Bogardus is credited with several other inventions, including a refillable lead pencil, a new engraving process for postage stamps, a dry-gas meter, and deep-sea sounding and drilling machines.