

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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52ND POLICE PRECINCT STATION HOUSE, 3016 Webster Avenue, The Bronx. Built 1904-06; architects Stoughton & Stoughton.

Landmark Site: Borough of The Bronx Tax Map Block 3325, Lot 5.

On July 24, 1973, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 52nd Police Precinct Station House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Eleven witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Located on Webster Avenue at the junction of Bronx Park and Mosholu Parkway, the picturesque silhouette of the 52nd Police Precinct Station House is visible from the New York Botanical Garden as well as from the Parkway and the Harlem division of the Penn Central Railroad. The 52nd Precinct (known as the 41st Precinct at the time of its construction in 1904-06) serves the Norwood and Bedford Park sections of the Bronx. This area, which formed a portion of Phillipsburgh Manor during the 18th century, was part of Westchester County until 1874, when it was annexed by New York City, together with the part of the present borough lying west of the Bronx River. The eastern section was added in 1895, and in 1898 the Bronx became one of the five boroughs of the Consolidated City of New York. The ensuing rapid growth in population, which reached a peak around 1905, created an urgent need for expanded police protection.

The city government responded with a precinct house that was both aesthetically pleasing and functional. Stoughton & Stoughton, one of the city's more prominent architectural firms, was awarded the design commission. In contrast to the massive, classical grandeur of their well-known Soldier's and Sailor's Monument on Manhattan's Riverside Drive, the architects chose for the Precinct House, the more romantic elements of the neo-Italian Renaissance style. The choice was particularly appropriate to what was at the time a quasi-rural setting and what is still a remarkably open area of the city.

The 52nd Police Precinct Station House is a three-story red brick structure, approximately fifty by eighty feet in size. The south facade is dominated by a centrally located, twenty-one foot square clock tower with boldly projecting eaves and triple openings beneath -- recalling a Tuscan villa. The upper portion of this tower is accented on its three free sides by large polychrome terra-cotta clock faces. Each clock face is set in a central recessed arch and protected by a little pitched roof supported on wooden brackets. These are painted a deep green, as are all the other roof brackets and overhanging eaves. The lower recessed portions of the clock tower are filled with paired windows and terra-cotta plaques. Similar terra-cotta plaques are used between the second and third story windows on the southern and western facades of the building. Added interest is provided by the diaper-patterned brickwork on the upper floor of all but the northern facade. The walls of the ground floor are laid in Flemish bond and are separated from the upper section by a stone bandcourse which runs all around the building below the second story windows. On the southern and western facades of the ground floor, round-arched windows are set within rectangular frames, with cobalt-blue tiles filling the spandrels.

The main entrance on Webster Avenue is approached through a brick porch which retains its original lamps and flower pots. Above the porch, an elaborate terra-cotta plaque, crowned by a pediment and bull's-eye window, displays the City arms and the precinct number. A secondary entrance, originally used by patrol wagons to discharge prisoners, is located within a porte-cochere beneath the clock tower.

Behind the Station House is a former stable with a readily accessible garage space for a patrol wagon and a room with stalls for horses. Even on such a purely utilitarian structure, the upper floor, above the garage area, has the same band-course and diapered pattern in the brickwork as the Station House.

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 52nd Police Precinct Station House 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 52nd Police Precinct Station House, erected between 1904 and 1906 in the neo-Italian Renaissance style, commands attention by its strikingly picturesque silhouette, that it was designed by one of the more prominent New York City architectural firms of the day, that its well-preserved exterior retains much original ornamental detail, that it evokes a sense of community pride and tradition, that its romantic character is appropriate to its surroundings of park and parkways, and that it continues to serve the needs of the Police Department.

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 52nd Police Precinct Station House, 3016 Webster Avenue, Borough of The Bronx, and designates Tax Map Block 3325, Lot 5, Borough of The Bronx, as its Landmark Site.