

FORMER POLICE HEADQUARTERS BUILDING, 240 Centre Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1905-1909; architects Hoppin, Koen and Huntington.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 472, Lot 31.

On July 11, 1978, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Former Police Headquarters Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). The building had been heard previously in 1966, 1970 and 1974. The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Seven witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Designed by the architectural firm of Hoppin and Koen, the former New York City Police Headquarters building at 240 Centre Street was built between 1905 and 1909 and stands today as one of New York City's most important examples of the Edwardian Baroque style and of the Beaux-Arts principles of design.

On May 6, 1905, Mayor George B. McClellan, amid the ceremony of a police band and mounted troops, wielded a silver trowel to lay the cornerstone of the building which was hailed by the press as the most up-to-date of its kind in the world. ¹ Since the establishment of the first police office at City Hall in 1798 when "to facilitate the apprehension of criminals" an effort was made to supplement the traditional night watch, ² the New York Police Department had witnessed the uneasy growth of the nation's largest city. Between the date of the installation at City Hall and that of the inauguration of the new headquarters the population of the city had increased a remarkable fifty-six fold and this growth was to continue. The large numbers of people who flowed into the city during the 19th century reflected every walk of life, and municipal services struggled to keep abreast with their needs. However, the high density of population in itself created problems. Damaging riots during the 1830's prompted the passage of the Municipal Police Act of 1884 ⁴ which abolished the antiquated watch system and established the police force as we know it today. Under this act the 17 wards of the city were divided into precincts complete with a station house, captain and a sergeant. Although formal training of the police was not established for another ten years, they were, at this time, furnished with a manual explaining their duties and legal powers. The modern notion of the "public servant," however, was not wholly acceptable to the newly established Municipal Police who refused to wear the

proposed blue uniform which reminded them of a servant's livery. 3
A star-shaped "copper" badge, which gave rise to the colloquial term for a policeman, worn over the left breast, served to identify the early force.

Over the next 57 years the numerous changes in the structure of the department reflect the rapid increase of crime in the growing city, and the authorities' attempts to keep pace with this development. Following an effort to enlarge the territorial responsibilities of the force and to initiate state control of the system, a bill was finally adopted in 1901 which gave a single commissioner of police full responsibility for administering the city's police organization.⁴

Housing the growing Police Department was another problem. The first centralized headquarters for the department as has been noted was situated in City Hall, where the force was housed until 1862 when the Police Department built its own headquarters building at 300 Mulberry Street. A rather plain Italianate style building, "300 Mulberry" figured prominently in the city's history. Here the Detective Bureau originated the harsh line of questioning known as the "third degree," and here also politicians such as Ulysses S. Grant and Chester A. Arthur flocked to hear the results of the city's elections. However, by 1900 the Police Department had quadrupled in size, and larger, more modern quarters were clearly needed.

In 1903 the New York architectural firm of Francis L.V. Hoppin (1866-1941) and Terence A. Koen (1858-1923) produced a series of drawings for the new Police Headquarters which was to be located on a wedge-shaped site, bounded by Grand, Centre Market Place, Centre and Broome Streets, where the old Centre Market had stood since 1817. In 1838 the market had been housed in an imposing Greek Revival building designed by Thomas Thomas, a founder of the American Institute of Architects. It is interesting to note that Thomas' design solution for this restricted site was a long rectangular mass with a blind arcade on the ground floor supporting trabeation above. The entrance of the market was marked by a central pavilion topped by a cupola and the ends were rendered in a temple form facing the side streets. Over half a century later Hoppin and Koen chose a design which was both a reflection of the earlier market building and of the most contemporary taste in civil architecture.

A graduate of Brown University, Francis L.V. Hoppin had studied architecture at M.I.T. and in Paris. Hoppin met Koen in the office of the prestigious architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White where they were both employed as draftsmen. When the two draftsmen set up their own firm in 1894, their work like that of most contemporary architects showed the strong influence of the French Ecole des Beaux-Arts which through its teaching stressed the use of classical tenets to achieve an architecture of balanced proportion and logical planning. McKim, Mead & White were the foremost promoters in the United States of the French approach, and the architects of the new Police Headquarters show a clear understanding

of the system. However, Hoppin and Koen were also clearly attuned to the most current architectural tastes of England and the Continent. The final stages of work on the Headquarters were supervised by architect and civil engineer Franklin B. Huntington who joined the firm during the buildings' construction. Huntington had previously worked for Architect H. G. Thompson, and the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad. Huntington has been credited with the design of 4 police stations and 56 fire stations.

From 1889 to 1906 a new taste was developing in England and France for a version of classicism which was freer in spirit and grander in scale than the rather static Beaux-Arts design. In England prosperity initiated a building boom, and in 1897 Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee needed the endorsement of a new style to fit the occasion. Looking back patriotically to the English Baroque of Christopher Wren's Greenwich Hospital and the architects of the early 18th Century, English architects produced a "Wrenaissance" at the turn of the century. In contrast to the limited scale of the contemporary arts and crafts movement, the bold massing of the Baroque seemed especially suitable for the scale of flourishing municipal projects. As early as 1887, England's renowned architect Richard Norman Shaw had chosen a Scottish Baroque for the new police headquarters at Scotland Yard (1887-90), and Edward Mountford's Central Criminal Courts, Old Bailey (1900-1907) was a clear statement in the Edwardian Baroque. Several English architects who were especially eclectic, such as the firms of Lanchester and Richards and Mewes and Davis looked, in addition, to the Baroque of Austria and France. Architectural publications abounded during this period and architects were well travelled. Nothing escaped the knowledgeable eyes of American architects like Hoppin and Koen who kept pace with such developments. This awareness was an important factor in their design for the Police Headquarters building.

Spread out majestically along Centre Street, the main facade of the Police Headquarters building with its central pedimented pavilion topped by a dome and balanced by end pavilions of lesser importance, is a clear reflection of Beaux-Arts or Classical composition. Hoppin stated quite frankly that the building was not intended to look like a police station, but was inspired by the dignity of City Hall which Hoppin called "the handsomest building on Manhattan Island." 5 The basic form, which in addition to a central pavilion with dome includes end porticos at cross axis to the ridge of the main portico, is also similar to that of the old Centre Market. Hoppin and Koen were consciously adapting their building to the rich architectural history of the area.

Sited like the traditional French hotel de ville within a confined urban space, the five-story granite and limestone Police Headquarters building with its five-part composition incorporates a rusticated arcade which supports two main stories linked by monumental Corinthian pilasters. The windows of the second story are capped with pedimented hoods and those of the third story are outlined by a crosset architrave. A two-story attic is set back from the main facade and rises like a clerestory above the modillioned cornice and roof balustrade. The main focus of the facade is the central portico where monumental Corinthian columns rest on a three-part rusticated arcade adorned with decorative iron grilles and sconces by Harris H. Uris Iron Works. The pediment is filled by an impressive bas relief of the seal of New York City flanked by trailing rinceaux. Atop the gable sits an allegorical figure of Manhattan.

Although the rather flat surface of the main facade with its arcaded base and pedimented portico suggests a French classical approach to design, several important features are clearly interpreted in the Baroque manner. Two domed towers with narrow fenestration pierce the main cornice and tightly flank the central portico. Here caryatids and oeils de boeuf are worked into the roofline composition. From the towers the eye is drawn to the crowning dome where cornices are pushed out by paired columns and pushed up by clocks set into oeils de boeuf. The end pavilions with their broken-bed pediments and Gibbs window surrounds are surmounted with low domes gilded and panelled in the Austrian rococo manner.

The classical portico facing Grand Street echoes that of the main facade while the Broome Street elevation with its elaborate porte cochere is conceived in the Baroque manner. Here, rising above the vermiculated stone entranceway, a single round-arched bay thrusts its way up past Corinthian columns and through the bed of the pediment. The rear of the building along Centre Market Street is a flat, almost two dimensional, reiteration of the main facade.

Built during a period which produced such venerable establishments as New Scotland Yard and the Criminal Courts, Old Bailey, the Police Headquarters building was designed to serve both a practical and symbolic end. Francis Hoppin stated clearly that the architect's intention was "to impress both officer and prisoner...with the majesty of the law."⁶ Borrowing inspiration from other public buildings like City Hall and from contemporary European design, the Headquarters building incorporated a new, official image for the nation's largest and most sophisticated police force. As the architectural focus of the bustling community of Little Italy, the Headquarters building plays a vital role in the area. However, as one of the finest municipal examples of Edwardian Baroque architecture in New York City, former Police Headquarters Building serves as an important reminder of the police department's proud history.

FOOTNOTES

1. Frank Marshall White, "The Finest Police Headquarters in the World," Harper's Weekly 53 (1909): 27.
2. William Thompson Bonner, New York: The World's Metropolis (New York: R. L. Polk & Co., 1924), p. 215.
3. I.N. Phelps Stokes, The Iconography of Manhattan Island V (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1928), p. 1728.
4. Stokes, p. 2043.
5. New York Times, 27 January 1907, 3:6.
6. Ibid.

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 former Police Headquarters Building 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 Former Police Headquarters Building is one of New York City's most important examples of the Edwardian Baroque style of architecture and of Beaux-Arts principles of design, that it was designed by the architectural firm of Hoppin and Koen to replace the headquarters building at 300 Mulberry Street, that the building was located on a site where the old Centre Market had stood since 1817, that it incorporated a new, official image for the nation's largest and most sophisticated police force, that it is an important reminder of the police departments proud history, and that it has found a new use serving the Little Italy community.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly 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 Former Police Headquarters Building Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 472, Lot 31, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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Photo Credit: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

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240 Centre Street
Borough of Manhattan
Architects: Hoppin and Koen
Date: 1905-1909



ALFRED J. YOUNG COLLECTION, N. Y. C.

POLICE HEADQUARTERS (FORMER)
Hoppin & Koen

240 Centre Street
1905-09