Landmarks Preservation Commission
February 27, 2001, Designation List 324
LP-2050

Fire Engine Company No. 67, 514 West 170th Street, Manhattan
Built 1897-98; Ernest Flagg and Walter B. Chambers, architects.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2126, Lot 35.

On December 14, 1999, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Fire Engine Company 67 and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 6). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were two speakers in support of designation, including representatives of the fire department and the Historic Districts Council. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. In addition, the Commission has received a letter from the Land Use Committee of Community Board 12 in support of designation.

Summary

The station house for Engine Company 67 was constructed in 1897-98 for a newly-formed fire company established to serve the rapidly-growing section of New York City known as Washington Heights. Using the specific requirements developed for a firehouse, French-trained architects Ernest Flagg and Walter B. Chambers created a dynamic and lyrical composition which sets it apart from many other firehouse designs of the period. They used classical elements such as a bracketed cornice, a hooded, round arch, an elaborate cartouche, and a pedimented window opening set in a masonry building. They also included modern steel framing which is articulated in the large expanse of glass window openings, creating a unique facade which pays homage to both the past and future. Flagg and Chambers explored these same ideas again in 1898-99, on a second, larger firehouse at 44 Great Jones Street for Engine Company 33 (a designated New York City Landmark).

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Firefighting in New York[1]

As early as the colonial period, the government of New York was concerned about the possibility of fires. Under Dutch rule all men were expected to participate in firefighting activities. After the English took over, the Common Council organized a force of thirty volunteer firefighters in 1737. They operated two Newsham hand pumpers that had recently been imported from London. By 1798, the Fire Department of the City of New York (FDNY), under the supervision of a chief engineer and six subordinates, was officially established by an act of the state legislature.

As the city grew, this force was augmented by new volunteer companies. In spite of growing numbers of firefighters and improvements in hoses and water supplies, fire was a significant threat in an increasingly densely built-up city. Of particular import was the "Great Fire" of December 16-17, 1835, which caused more damage to property than any other event in New York City. The damages resulting from several major fires which occurred between 1800 and 1850 led to the establishment of a building code, and an increase in the number of firemen from 600 in 1800, to more than 4,000 in 1865. Despite rapid growth, the department was often criticized for poor performance. Intense competition between companies began to hinder firefighting with frequent brawls and acts of sabotage, often at the scenes of fires. During the Civil War, when fire personnel became harder to retain, public support grew for the creation of a professional firefighting force, similar to that which had been established in other cities and to the professional police force that had been created in New York in 1845.

In May 1865, the New York State Legislature established the Metropolitan Fire District, comprising the cities of New York (south of 86th Street) and Brooklyn. The act abolished the volunteer system and created the Metropolitan Fire Department, a paid professional force under the jurisdiction of the state government. By the end of the year, the city's 124 volunteer companies with more than 4,000 men had retired or disbanded, to be replaced by thirty-three engine companies and twelve ladder companies operated by a force of 500 men.

With the creation of a professional fire department in 1865, improvements were immediate, and included the use of more steam engines, horses and a somewhat reliable telegraph system. A military model was adopted for the firefighters, which involved the use of specialization, discipline, and merit. By 1870, regular service was extended to the "suburban districts" north of 86th Street and expanded still farther north after the annexation of parts of the Bronx in 1874. New techniques and equipment, including taller ladders and stronger steam engines, increased the department's efficiency, as did the establishment, in 1883, of a training academy for personnel. The growth of the city during this period placed severe demands on the fire department to provide services, and in response the department undertook an ambitious building campaign. The area served by the FDNY nearly doubled after Consolidation in 1898 when the departments in Brooklyn and numerous communities in Queens and Staten Island were incorporated into the city. After the turn of the century, the Fire Department acquired more modern apparatus on motorized vehicles, reflecting the need for faster response to fires in taller buildings. Throughout the twentieth century, the Department has endeavored to keep up with the evolving city and its firefighting needs.

Firehouse Design[2]

By the early twentieth century, the firehouse as a building type had evolved from the wooden storage shed used during the seventeenth century to an imposing architectural expression of civic character. As early as 1853, Marriott Field had argued in his *City Architecture: Designs for Dwelling Houses, Stores, Hotels, etc.* for symbolic architectural expression in municipal buildings, including firehouses. The 1854 Fireman's Hall,[3] with its highly symbolic ornamentation, reflected this approach; but it was the last firehouse built for many years. It was not until after the professionalization of the fire department that money was expended on the construction of appropriately impressive civic structures.

Between 1880 and 1895, Napoleon LeBrun & Son served as the official architectural firm for the fire department, designing forty-two new firehouses in a massive effort to accommodate the growing population of the city and modernize the firefighting facilities. Although the firm's earliest designs were relatively simple, later buildings were more distinguished and more clearly identifiable as firehouses.

While the basic function and requirements of the firehouse were established early in its evolution and had not changed by 1880 (and are essentially the same today), LeBrun is credited with standardizing the structural form and introducing some minor, but important, innovations in the plan. Two such changes included bringing the horse stalls into the main part of

the structure to reduce the time needed for hitching when responding to a fire, and creating hose-drying towers to accommodate a necessary activity in a space-saving manner. Firehouses were usually located on mid-block sites because these were less expensive than corner sites. Since the sites were narrow, firehouses tended to be three stories tall, with the apparatus on the ground story and rooms for the company, including dormitory, kitchen and captain's office, above.

After 1895, the fire department commissiond a number of well-known architects to design new firehouses. Influenced by the classical revival which was highly popular throughout the country, New York designers such as Hoppin & Koen, Flagg & Chambers, and Horgan & Slatterly created firehouse facades with bold, classical style designs.

Flagg & Chambers

Ernest Flagg (1857-1947)[4]

Walter Boughton Chambers (1866-1945)[5]

Born in Brooklyn, Ernest Flagg left school at age fifteen to attempt a career in business. In 1880, at the age of twenty-three, he joined with architect and developer Philip G. Hubert to design duplex apartment plans for cooperative apartment buildings. Much impressed by Flagg's ideas for these buildings, his cousin, Cornelius Vanderbilt II, sent him to Paris to study at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. There he worked in the atelier of Paul Blondel, meeting another American, Walter B. Chambers, with whom he later formed a partnership. In Paris, Flagg absorbed the French approach to design, including the concept of *parti*, which he believed to be "the logical solution of the problem from his [the architect's] dual standpoint as constructor and artist." Upon his return to New York in 1891, Flagg worked to promote French ideas of architectural design and continuously developed them in his work. His sense of structural rationalism was strongly influenced by the writings of Viollet-le-Duc.

Flagg's early institutional designs reflected classicism and idealism, as seen in the Corcoran Art Gallery (1892-97, Washington, D.C.), St. Luke's Hospital (1892-96, New York, NY), and the U.S. Naval Academy (1897-99, Annapolis, MD). His domestic architecture tended to reflect the prevailing taste for Colonial Revival, adapting it to the specific requirements for each program.[6] Perhaps his most innovative works are his commercial buildings, such as the "Little" Singer Building (1903-05, located in the Soho-Cast Iron Historic District), the Produce Exchange Bank (1905, demolished), and the Singer Tower (1906-08, demolished). In the "Little" Singer Building in particular, Flagg attempted to combine French structural rationalism with American skeletal construction, in the use of a broad expanse of glass set within a large, iron-framed, arched opening. The two store and office buildings for Charles Scribner's Sons publishers (153-157 Fifth Avenue, 1893-94, a designated New York City and 597 Fifth Avenue, 1912-13, a designated interior and exterior New York City Landmark) are both essays on the theme of combining design elegance with evolving new technology; the earlier building uses masonry walls and the later one a steel skeleton.

Flagg was interested in planning issues and how they affected design, and he explored these ideas in such writings as "The Limitation of Height and Area of Buildings in New York."[7] He argued in favor of zoning laws which would regulate the height and setback of buildings to allow light and air to reach the streets below them. His social concerns were reflected in his designs for decent hotels for working men and model tenements, and he wrote a book entitled, *Small Houses: Their Economic Design and Construction* (1922) in which he described a system of modular construction designed to reduce building costs.

Walter Boughton Chambers was also raised in Brooklyn, then educated at Yale University. He met Flagg while studying at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and later went on to further study in Munich. Chambers first worked as a draftsman for Flagg before becoming his partner from 1895 until 1906. This partnership resulted in some of the finest works of both architects, including the exuberant and luxuriously detailed Oliver Gould Jennings Residence at 7 East 72nd Street (a designated New York City Landmark) and the neo-Federal Jenks townhouse at 54 East 64th Street. In 1906 Chambers established his own practice, designing a number of private homes but achieving particular notice for his apartment houses, such as that at 563 Park Avenue which received the annual award of the Down-Town League of New York in 1912. His 1922-23 neo-Renaissance/neo-Georgian style apartment building at 1145-1149 Fifth Avenue is located in the Expanded Carnegie Hill Historic District. In the later years of his practice Chambers produced designs for several commercial buildings in New York and dormitory and classroom buildings at Yale and Colgate universities.

In their two designs for firehouses, Flagg and Chambers had the opportunity of working twice with the same program requirements and design concepts.[8] These firehouses were typically located on mid-block sites, and the design needed to accommodate a vehicular and pedestrian entrance on the ground story

with living spaces for the firemen above. In this building on West 170th Street and also on their later (and larger) firehouse at 44 Great Jones Street (1898-99, a designated New York City Landmark), Flagg and Chambers used an arched opening extending through all the stories to unify the facade. Solid, masonry corners contrast with this large, central opening in which they grouped all the windows and doors. The metal framework around the windows gives some indication of the structure although these nineteenth-century buildings were structurally transitional, with masonry bearing walls, cast-iron columns, and steel floor beams. The French influence is evident in the flamboyant cartouche at the top of the arch while the bracketed cornice topped with anthemia reflects the classical trends of the period. The dramatic contrasts of materials and textures as well as the arrangements of solids and voids created unique and notable facades in both the West 170th Street firehouse and that on Great Jones Street.

The Washington Heights Neighborhood[9]

The area of northern Manhattan between the Hudson and Harlem Rivers bounded on the north by Dyckman Street and on the south by 155th Street is known as Washington Heights. Named for Fort Washington, which was erected during the Revolutionary War on a ridge between what is now 181st and 186th Streets, this section had further associations with the general because Washington used the grand Georgian style home of Roger Morris at Edgecombe Avenue near 160th Street (now known as the Morris/Jumel Mansion, 1765, remodeled c. 1810, a designated New York City Landmark) as his military headquarters in 1776.

Originally the area was unproductive farmland, but it became a choice location for country estates of wealthy New Yorkers during most of the nineteenth century because of its high ground and spectacular views. In 1810, much of Morris' large estate was purchased by Stephen Jumel and his wife Eliza B. Jumel. After Stephen Jumel's death in 1834, the property was held by his widow until she died in 1865. Numerous claims were made on the estate by their heirs, and the cases were not settled until 1881. After that, the property was subdivided for development. Some of the first new buildings were the small attached, wooden houses on Sylvan Terrace, formerly a carriage drive leading to the Morris home. Later, more substantial, masonry rowhouses were built on Jumel Terrace and 160th and 161st Streets, beginning in the 1890s (both areas are within the boundaries of the Jumel Terrace Historic District). Development was limited, however, by a shortage of easy transportation to the rest of the bustling city to the south. The nearest elevated trains stopped at Eighth Avenue and 155th Street and were inconveniently located at the bottom of a cliff. In the late 1880s, a cable street railway was installed on Tenth Avenue (now Amsterdam) between 125th and 155th Streets, providing an easier link to the downtown commercial district. The Washington Heights Taxpayers Association was an active group of civic boosters that helped bring other improvements to the area, including, in 1890-91, the iron viaduct at 155th Street which connected the Central (now Macomb's Dam) Bridge with St. Nicholas Place to improve circulation between the Bronx, Harlem, and the Upper West Side. (Both the 155th Street Viaduct and the Macomb's Dam Bridge are designated New York City Landmarks.)

Engine Company 67

Well before the subway reached Broadway and 157th Street in 1904, the newly-divided lots in the northern part of Washington Heights began to be sold. During the 1880s, there were a considerable number of land transactions. Buyers tended to purchase single lots although very few houses were actually constructed. There was enough prospect of development, however, for the fire department to foresee a need for a new station in this area. With funds from a recent bond issue specifically for the purchase of sites for new buildings,[10] New York City purchased lot 35 from Marcus L. Stieglitz although the actual construction of the firehouse did not take place for four more years.[11] The fire department's projections were correct, as flats began to appear along the main avenues by the mid- to late 1890s. In the 1896 Fire Department Annual Report, there was notice of "numerous and urgent demands for more fire protection in the suburban districts..." and an announcement of plans and specifications for a new house at 170th Street, to cost $22,000.[12]

Engine Company 67 was organized on August 21, 1898, with one engine and a four-wheel hose wagon. During the last part of 1898, the company performed at four fires. This company has continued to operate out of this same location for more than 100 years,[13] now fighting more than 2,000 fires each year.

Description

Engine Company 67 is a three-story, brick and limestone structure with a metal-covered, pitched roof. It fills its lot and adjoins the flats building on its eastern side. To the west is a narrow alley, but the side of the building which faces it is unadorned. On the front

facade, the door and window openings are vertically linked and centrally located. The ground story is set off by a narrow stone bandcourse, and the pitched roof is distinguished by a projecting metal cornice carried on brackets and topped by a row of small anthemia.

The ground story contains two pedestrian entrances which flank a central vehicular entrance, all with replacement doors. Attached to the wall on each side of the doors is a modern light fixture. An original sign with the words "67 Engine 67" is located directly over the doors, and is topped by a smaller bronze plaque with the names of fire department officials and the architects.

Above the bandcourse a large, round-arched opening rises through the next two stories, almost filling the facade. The opening has coved edges, finished in brick on the lower part and stone around the upper curved section. At the keystone and within the cove below is an elaborate, carved cartouche. A narrow, raised label-molding with terminating bosses tops the curve of the arch. Within it are two stories of window openings, framed in metal, with one-over-one sash. There are four windows at the second story, fronted by a delicate, iron railing with swirling design patterns. The two center windows of this level are set off by narrow pilasters which support a pediment rising into the plain, metal spandrel which separates the two stories. At the third story, there are also four windows, but the tops are cut off by the shape of the arch. Another metal railing is located at this level.

Report Researched and Written by
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Research Department

NOTES

1. Information for this section came from the following sources: Donald J. Cannon, "Firefighting," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth Jackson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995); Augustine Costello, *Our firemen, A History of the New York fire departments, volunteer and paid* (New York: A.E. Costello, 1887); Kenneth Holcomb Dunshee, *As You Pass By* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1940); Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Engine Company No. 7/ Ladder Company No.1* (LP-1719), report prepared by Charles Savage (N Y: City of N Y, 1993); LPC, *Engine Company 47* (LP-1962) report prepared by Laura Hansen (NY: City of NY, 1997); LPC, *Fire Engine Company No. 84 and Hook & Ladder Company No. 34* (LP-1863) report prepared by Laura Hansen (NY: City of NY, 1997); LPC, *Fire Engine Company 55* (LP-1987) report prepared by Matthew Postal (NY: City of NY, 1998); *Fire Engine Company 289, Ladder Company 138* (LP- 2035) report prepared by Matthew Postal (NY: City of NY, 1999); Lowell M. Limpus, *History of the New York Fire Department* (N Y: Dutton, 1940).

2. Information in this section comes, in part, from the following sources: LPC, *Fire Engine Company No. 84 and Hook & Ladder Company No. 34* (LP-1863); LPC, *Fire Engine Co. 55* (LP-1987); Robert A.M. Stern, et al, *New York 1900* (N Y: Rizzoli, 1983); U.S. Department of the Interior: Heritage, Conservation, and Recreation Services, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, "New York City Firehouses: National Register Thematic Group" (Form prepared by Christopher Gray for the New York City Landmarks Conservancy, 1980); Rebecca Zurier, *The American Firehouse, An Architectural and Social History* (N Y: Abbeville Press, 1982).

3. This building, located at 153-57 Mercer Street (within the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District) no longer functions as a firehouse.

4. Information about Ernest Flagg and his work was taken, in part, from: Mardges Bacon, *Ernest Flagg, Beaux-Arts Architect and Urban Reformer*, (Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 1986); " Flagg, Ernest," in *Dictionary of American Biography, Sup.4 (1946-1950),* (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), pp 280-282; Mardges Bacon, "Flagg, Ernest." *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, ed. Adolf K. Placzek, vol. II (NY, Macmillan Co., 1982), pp 87-9; LPC, *Charles Scribner's Sons Building (LP-1100)*, (NY: City of NY, 1982), report prepared by Virginia Kurshan.

5. Information about Walter B. Chambers is from the LPC, "Architect's Appendix," *Expanded Carnegie Hill Historic District Report* (LP-1834), (NY: City of NY, 1993).

6. Examples of Flagg's designs for homes include townhouses for Charles Scribner II at 9 East 66th Street (located within the Upper East Side Historic District) and for Oliver G, Jennings at 7 East 72nd Street (a designated New York City Landmark), as well as Flagg's own country estate, Stone Court, on Staten Island (1898-c.1917, a designated New York City Landmark).

7. Published in *American Architect and Building News*, vol. 93 (April 15, 1908), pp 125-29.

8. Flagg also took this opportunity to rework his ideas in the two designs for the Scribner bookstores and office building.

9. Information in this section was taken in part, from the following sources: Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Morris-Jumel Mansion* (LP-0888), (New York: City of New York, 1975); and "Washington Heights," in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth Jackson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995).

10. Fire Department Annual Report for 1893.

11. New York County Register's Office, Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 4, page 185, November 21, 1893.

12. Fire Department Annual Report, 1896, p. 8 and p.72. The contract price for the new building is included in the Annual Report for 1897, p.72.

13. During the New York City budget crisis of 1975, this company was disbanded but reorganized two days later.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that Fire Engine Company 67 has a special character and a 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 firehouse for Fire Engine Company 67 was designed in 1897-98 by architects Ernest Flagg and Walter B. Chambers to house this newly-formed engine company; that this was one of numerous new engine companies created during the late nineteenth century in response to New York's huge growth in population; that after the standardization of firehouse design, which occurred between 1880 and 1895, the fire department hired several well-known architectural firms to design new fire houses, including the firm of Flagg and Chambers, whose work was quite different from that of the other firms; that for Engine Company 67, Flagg and Chambers, both trained at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, used French ideas of rational planning and expressive design to create an unusual, lyrical facade with a large, central-arched opening contrasting with solid masonry corners; that the transitional structural system of the building, including masonry walls, cast-iron columns, and steel beams, is expressed in the iron-framed windows within the arch and the solid, masonry walls around it; that the flamboyant cartouche and the bracketed and anthemia-topped cornice are elements of Beaux-Arts design popular in both this country and France at the time of construction; that within the confines of a narrow city lot and the requirements of the fire department, the architects created a dramatic and monumental facade which continues to represent the city and its dedicated servants in Washington Heights.

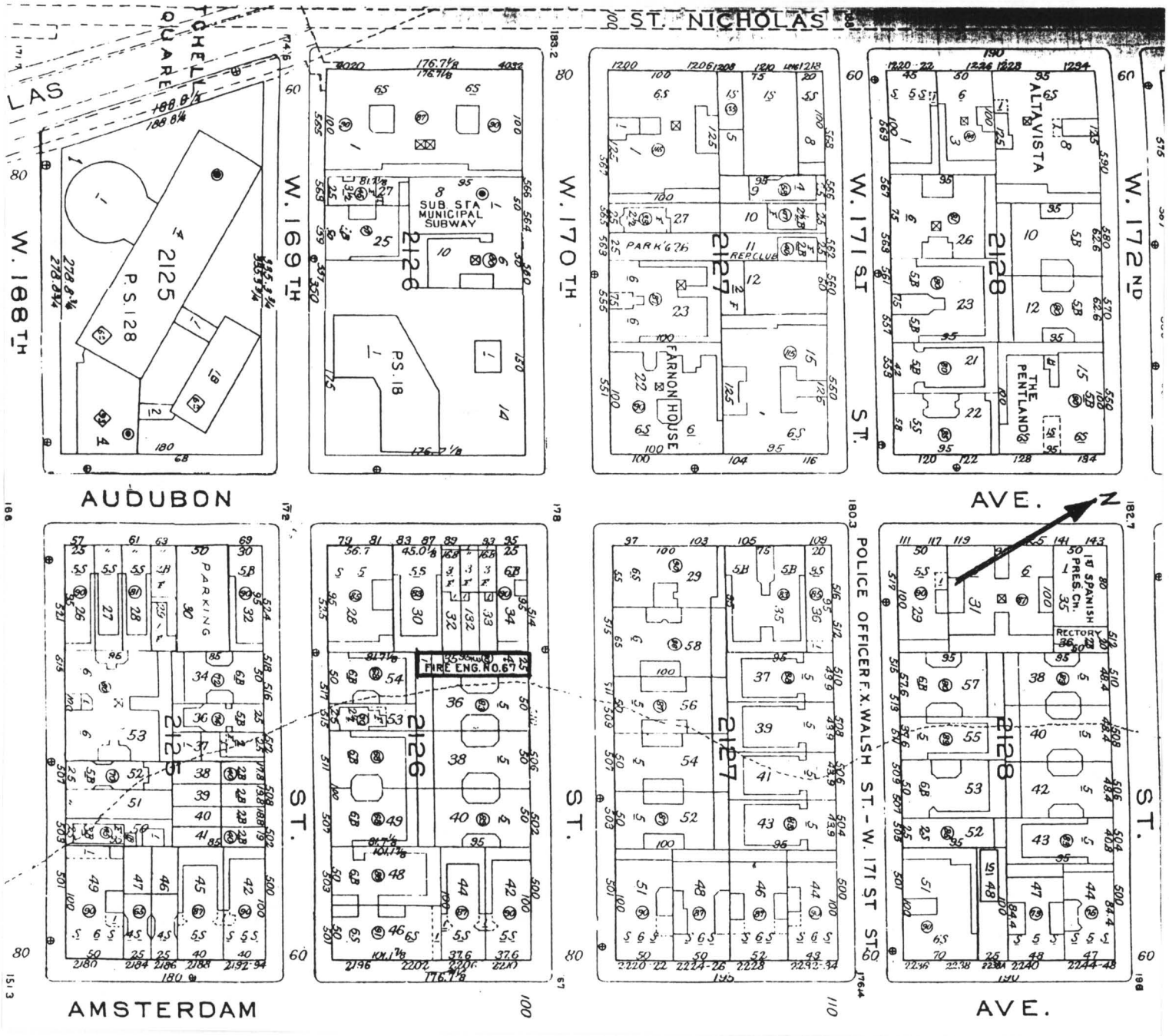
Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark Fire Engine Company 67, 514 West 170th Street, Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2126, Lot 35, as its Landmark Site.

Engine Company 67
514 West 170th Street, Manhattan
Facade Details

Photos: Carl Forster

Fire Engine Company 67
514 West 170th Street, Manhattan
Window Detail
Photo: Carl Forster

Fire Engine Company 67
514 West 170th Street, Manhattan
Cornice Details
Photo: Carl Forster



Fire Engine Company 67, 514 West 170th Street, Manhattan.
Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2126, Lot 35.
Source: *Sanborn Manhattan Landbook*, 1999-2000, plate 167.

Fire Engine Company 67, 514 West 170th Street, Manhattan
Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2126, Lot 35.
Source: New York City Dept. of Finance, City Surveyor.