

# 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station



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## LOCATION

Borough of Queens  
16-12 Mott Avenue, Far Rockaway

## LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

## SIGNIFICANCE

The first police station built by New York City in the Rockaways, this dignified structure reminiscent of an Italian Renaissance palazzo recalls a crucial period in Far Rockaway's development, when new civic facilities heralded its emergence as a year-round community and cemented its connection to New York City and its government.



**53rd (now 101st) Precinct  
Police Station, Mott Avenue  
Facade, 2018, LPC**



**53rd (now 101st) Precinct  
Police Station, Scott A. Gadell  
Place Facade, 2018, LPC**



## **53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station**

16-12 Mott Avenue, Far Rockaway, Queens

### **Designation List 507 LP-2610**

**Built:** 1927-28

**Architect:** Thomas E. O'Brien

**Landmark Site:** Borough of Queens, Tax Map  
Block 15557, Lot 4

On April 24, 2018, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station as a New York City Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Two people testified in favor of the proposed designation, including representatives of Council Member Donovan Richards and the Historic Districts Council. There were no speakers in opposition to the proposed designation. The Commission also received an email message from the New York Police Department stating that it had no objection to the proposed designation.

## Summary

### 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station

The 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station is an impressive civic structure in the Rockaways. Completed by early 1929, this building, which incorporates elements of the Renaissance Revival and Colonial Revival styles, replaced Far Rockaway's dilapidated former precinct house with a dignified, stately structure reflecting its important community role and the prosperity of the city that constructed it. It was built as part of a program initiated by Police Commissioner Richard E. Enright to "modernize, motorize, and stabilize" the Department, which included the replacement of "old, insanitary, and useless station houses," especially in the outer boroughs. This program expanded upon an earlier one, in the 1910s, to construct modern police facilities in rapidly growing outlying areas of the city.

The first police station built by New York City in the Rockaways, it was designed by the son of Irish immigrants, Thomas E. O'Brien, who had worked in the contracting business before joining the New York Police Department as a patrolman in 1890. O'Brien also studied architecture at Cooper Union, and in 1896, he was given the task of inspecting the city's police stations before being promoted to Superintendent of Buildings in 1923. In that role, and as the Department's head architect, O'Brien designed several new police stations as part of Enright's building campaign.

The three-story 53rd Precinct Police Station has two fully developed facades facing Mott Avenue and Scott A. Gadell (originally Mott) Place. It recalls an Italian Renaissance palazzo, featuring a rusticated

ground story with round-arched openings crowned by stepped arches, classical second-story window surrounds with consoles supporting alternating segmental and angular pediments, eared third-story window enframements, quoining, and a deep modillioned cornice with rosettes and a dentil molding. Harvard brick ranging in color from deep red to dark gray faces the upper stories in a subtle cross-bond pattern that adds additional visual texture. A one-story garage adjoining the station house reflects the increasing importance of motor vehicles to patrol work in the city's outlying areas by the 1920s.

Little-changed from the time of its opening, the 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station remains one of Far Rockaway's most prominent buildings as well as a significant link to a crucial period in the neighborhood's development, when new civic, educational, transportation, and recreational facilities heralded Far Rockaway's emergence as a year-round community and cemented its connection to New York City and its government.

## Building Description

53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station

The 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station is located in Far Rockaway, Queens, at the northeast corner of Mott Avenue and Scott A. Gadell (originally Mott) Place. Construction began in the fall of 1927 and was substantially completed by the end of 1928. Three stories in height with two fully realized primary facades, its symmetrical facades and palazzo-like form are characteristic of the Renaissance Revival style, as are other features including its granite base, rusticated ground story, classical second-story window surrounds with consoles supporting alternating angular and segmental pediments, and eared third-story window surrounds. The hierarchical, horizontal organization of these facades, with ornament and window size diminishing at the top story, is also typical of the style. Projecting quoins frame the primary facades as well as the decorative portions of the secondary facades, and a deep modillioned cornice with rosettes and a dentil molding crowns the building. Although the ground-story facing and upper-story trim and cornice appear to be of stone, they are actually of terra cotta.

The station's one-story garage, which is linked to it by a narrow wall, is faced in rusticated terra cotta and dominated by a central round-arched entrance portal. Originally, it housed four vehicles as well as a chauffeur's room and the station's morgue.<sup>1</sup>

Complementing the building's Renaissance Revival style elements is the Colonial Revival style brickwork of the police station's upper stories, which are faced in Harvard brick ranging in color from deep red to dark gray. The brick is laid in Dutch or

English cross bond, which was used throughout America's Dutch and English colonies through the 18th century; similar to English bond in its alternating courses of headers and stretchers, here the stretcher courses shift slightly as they go up, creating a subtle patterning. Cross bond was revived by architects working in the Colonial Revival style, including McKim, Mead & White, by the early 1920s.<sup>2</sup>

The police station has two visible secondary facades. The north facade has a fully designed western portion similar in its detailing to the primary facades, while the rest of this facade has little ornament other than soldier-brick lintels, terra-cotta sills, and a terra-cotta belt course above the first story. The secondary east facade is similar to the north facade.

The 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station remains remarkably well-preserved—retaining its original granite stoop, paneled main-entrance doors with decorative grilles, bronze entrance lanterns, and entrance transom, among other significant features—and its appearance is little-changed from the time of its opening in the late 1920s.

Historic features of, and alterations to, the police station and garage are described separately in detail below.

### Police Station

#### Primary South (Mott Avenue) Facade Historic

Granite base; rusticated terra-cotta first story; four round-headed window openings and one round-headed main-entrance opening crowned by stepped arches; bronze lanterns and cartouche containing the New York City seal at the main entrance; paneled wood main-entrance doors with decorative grilles; half-round main-entrance transom sash; short rusticated terra-cotta wall with square-headed door and transom openings and original gate and grille at

eastern end of facade connecting police station with garage; Harvard-brick upper stories; terra-cotta corner quoins at second and third stories; terra-cotta projecting second-story sill course; terra-cotta second-story window surrounds with consoles supporting alternating segmental and angular pediments; eared third-story terra-cotta window enframements; deep projecting terra-cotta cornice with modillions, rosettes, and dentils; possibly historic rooftop flagpole; granite stoop.

#### **Alterations**

Sashes, except for main-entrance transom, replaced; air-conditioner panels within some window openings; double signboard at main entrance; metal stoop railings.

#### **Primary West (Scott A. Gadell Place) Facade Historic**

Similar in design to Mott Avenue facade, but without an entrance and seven bays wide rather than five.

#### **Alterations**

Replacement sashes; air-conditioner panels within some window openings; first-story signage; cameras at each end of second story.

#### **Secondary North Facade**

##### **Historic**

Western portion of facade similar to primary facades; remainder of facade common-bond brick, with historic first-story window grilles, soldier-brick lintels, corbeled-brick-and-terra-cotta belt course above first story, terra-cotta second- and third-story window sills, soldier-brick banding above the third-story window openings, and terra-cotta coping.

#### **Alterations**

Replacement sashes; air-conditioner panels within some window openings; first-story conduit and fixture.

#### **Secondary East Facade**

##### **Historic**

Southern portion of facade similar to primary facades; remainder of facade common-bond brick, with terra-cotta window sills, soldier-brick lintels, soldier-brick banding above third-story window openings, and terra-cotta coping; historic first-story window grilles.

#### **Alterations**

Replacement sashes; vertical conduit north of fully designed portion of facade; gas piping attached at first story.

#### **Garage**

#### **Primary South (Mott Avenue) Facade**

##### **Historic**

Granite base with rusticated terra cotta above; round-headed main-entrance opening crowned by stepped arch; two narrow square-headed window openings; multipane half-round entrance transom sash; projecting terra-cotta cornice; iron portal guards.

#### **Alterations**

Paneled double-leaf entrance doors replaced with metal roll-down security gate; replacement window sashes; metal mesh in front of transom; key box with conduit.

#### **Garage Secondary West Facade**

##### **Historic**

Common-bond brick; terra-cotta sills; soldier-brick lintels; terra-cotta coping; door and window openings with soldier-brick lintels and historic wood sash at north end of facade (visible from Scott A. Gadell Place).

#### **Alterations**

Fill pipe at south end of facade; metal louver above door and window openings, at north end of facade; replacement door.

## Garage Secondary East Facade

### Historic

Common-bond brick with terra-cotta band at top of facade.

### Site

#### Rear areaway

Historic concrete areaway with raised bulkheads containing grilles; basement stairs with historic metal pipe railing; historic brick wall with terra-cotta coping; original metal gate.

#### Areaway between police station and garage

Concrete (portion replaced with asphalt); raised bulkheads containing grilles; gas equipment.

## Site History

53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station

### Policing New York City<sup>3</sup>

From the mid-17th century to the end of the 18th century, policing in New York City consisted of nocturnal patrols; the watch grew from one *schout* provided for in the 1651 Charter of Nieuw Amsterdam, to a constable and his band of watchmen in the English colonial city of New York.<sup>4</sup> In 1798, an act of the state legislature providing for the regular policing of the city laid the foundation for the present police force. By 1809, there was a force of about 200 non-uniformed disciplinarians called “roundsmen,” but by the early 1840s, New York’s fragmented, amateur police force was increasingly viewed as inadequate for a rapidly growing and increasingly complex city. In response, in 1845, New York became the first American city to establish a professional full-time police force similar to London’s.

New York’s police first donned official uniforms in 1850; three years later, formal training was instituted and a board of police commissioners created. A Metropolitan District governed by a board of police was established for the counties of New York, Kings, Westchester, and Richmond in 1857, and 12 years later, it was extended to include sections of Queens. But in 1870, the District was done away with and control of the city’s police reverted to a local board comprising four commissioners who appointed a superintendent of police. The city was divided into inspection districts composed of precincts; each district was headed by an inspector and each precinct by a captain. The Greater New York Charter of 1898 mandated the



consolidation of all police within the city's limits, and in 1901, the police board was abolished and its powers vested in a single commissioner. By the mid-1910s, there were 17 inspection districts across the city, with two covering Queens: the 12th District, which included the Flushing, Whitestone, College Point, Jamaica, Far Rockaway, and Rockaway Beach precincts; and the 17th District, containing precincts in Astoria, Long Island City, Newtown, Ozone Park, Richmond Hill, and Glendale.

New York's booming population and the geographic expansion created by consolidation led to robust police building campaigns in the early 20th century under commissioners Rhinelander Waldo and Richard E. Enright. Waldo was appointed commissioner in 1911; previously, as the city's fire commissioner, he had initiated a plan to construct 25 new firehouses, many in outlying neighborhoods that had joined the city under consolidation. At the Police Department, he initiated plans for seven new stations, all recalling Italian Renaissance palazzi. Planning for the 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station began during the tenure of Enright, who was the first commissioner to rise through the Department's ranks to lead it from 1918 to 1925. One of Enright's chief aims was to "modernize, motorize, and stabilize" the police force, much of which involved redrawing precinct boundaries and updating, closing, and replacing "old, insanitary, and useless" station houses in the city.<sup>5</sup> In 1922, Enright announced plans for nine new police stations—all or most of which would be designed by Thomas E. O'Brien—all in the outer boroughs and Upper Manhattan. All were of similar design, combining Renaissance and Colonial Revival influences, with many incorporating garages reflecting the increasing centrality of motor vehicles to patrol work in outlying areas. Today, the 101st Precinct Police Station remains a fine, well-preserved example of this period of police architecture in New York City.

## Far Rockaway<sup>6</sup>

Far Rockaway is New York City's easternmost community on the Rockaway Peninsula, a four-mile-long barrier beach sandwiched between Jamaica Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. Bordered by the Edgemere neighborhood on its west, Far Rockaway adjoins the town of Lawrence in Nassau County on its east. Before Europeans made contact with Native Americans on Long Island, present-day Rockaway and its vicinity were occupied by bands of Eastern Algonquian people known as the Rockaway and the Canarsie. "Rockaway" has been translated as "sandy place" or "place of our people." Although Captain John Palmer "purchased" the peninsula from Native chiefs in 1685, several large shell banks marking indigenous gathering places remained through the 19th century.<sup>7</sup> In 1918, historian Alfred H. Bellot noted that one of these banks, at Bayswater, "must have contained many thousand tons of clam shells," which, by that time, had been "carted away and used for filling in purposes and road making."<sup>8</sup>

The title to the entire Rockaway Peninsula derives from John Palmer's patent. In 1687, Palmer and his wife Sarah sold the land to Richard Cornell, an ironmaster from Flushing. Cornell and his family are believed to have been the peninsula's first white settlers, constructing a house in present-day Far Rockaway in 1690; their household included at least three enslaved African Americans. In 1830, John Leake Norton purchased a portion of the Cornell Estate, and three years later, he organized the Rockaway Association, which counted dozens of prominent New Yorkers among its members. The Association soon demolished the old Cornell house and constructed, in its place, the Rockaways' first commercial hotel—the Marine Pavilion—as well as a new stagecoach route called the Jamaica and Rockaway Turnpike. Over its three decades in business, the Marine Pavilion "attracted attention to the Rockaways throughout the Union," establishing

the peninsula's reputation as a fashionable seaside resort and spurring the construction of several other hotels there.<sup>9</sup>

Improved transportation fueled Far Rockaway's subsequent development as both a summer resort and year-round community. In 1869, the South Side Railroad completed a line between Valley Stream and Far Rockaway, and by 1873, a competing line, operated by the Long Island Rail Road, linked Far Rockaway with Jamaica. In 1880, the New York Woodhaven, and Rockaway Railroad completed a trestle over Jamaica Bay, providing access from the mainland to the middle of the peninsula. In 1888, the community was incorporated as a village within the town of Hempstead. Over the following decade, Far Rockaway acquired many of the trappings of a permanent community, including gas, water, and telephone service, sewers, curbed and paved streets, a permanent postmaster, and its own bank and newspaper.

Far Rockaway's growth continued after 1898 when it joined the City of New York, forming, along with Rockaway Beach and Arverne-by-the-Sea, the Fifth Ward of the Borough of Queens. That year, Brooklyn Rapid Transit trains began providing summer service over the Rockaway trestle, and the subsequent electrification of this line and inauguration of direct service between the Rockaways and Manhattan in 1910 attracted many commuters to the area. Summer steamships continued to serve the community from various points across New York City, including Manhattan, Sheepshead Bay, and Coney Island.

By 1918, Far Rockaway's population was around 11,000, according to Bellot, and included "four churches, two synagogues, a splendidly equipped ... hospital ... ; two banks; three newspapers; many spacious and elaborate hotels; a cable terminal where the Atlantic cables reach the shores of America," as well as numerous golf, yacht,

and tennis clubs, movie theaters, and "splendid stores."<sup>10</sup> The post-World-War-I housing crisis, which led many bungalow owners to winterize their homes, increased the community's year-round population, as did public projects such as the construction of the Rockaway boardwalk and the Cross Bay Bridge for automobiles.<sup>11</sup> These may have been initiated, at least in part, in response to a robust local secession movement, which was fueled by a perceived lack of city services among Far Rockaway residents. By 1925, according to one contemporary account, the neighborhood was experiencing a "real estate boom which ... outclasses Florida's palmiest days."<sup>12</sup>

Far Rockaway remained a popular seaside destination until after World War II, when increasing prosperity, widespread automobile ownership, and the rise of air travel led to the decline of many of the region's old resort areas. Although Far Rockaway became increasingly accessible with the extension of the IND Subway to the peninsula in 1956, urban renewal drastically changed the community, leading to large-scale clearance, the construction of high-rise apartment buildings along the beach, and the displacement of many families to other neighborhoods or to substandard housing in the Rockaways. Today, Far Rockaway is a diverse neighborhood with large white, African American, and Latino populations and a substantial Orthodox Jewish community. Its growing population includes immigrants who have settled there since the 1980s from countries including Afghanistan, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, and Jamaica.

### **Construction and History of the 53rd Precinct Police Station<sup>13</sup>**

At the time of its incorporation in 1888, Far Rockaway "had a lockup and two policemen," according to Alfred Bellot.<sup>14</sup> Ten years later, when

New York City absorbed Far Rockaway, the city began leasing a former residence for use as the neighborhood's police station. This building, which housed the 53rd Precinct's predecessors, the 279th and 125th Precincts, was located on the south side of Cornaga Avenue within the current Mott Avenue right-of-way. It was in deplorable condition by 1918, when Commissioner John S. Kennedy of the State Commission of Prisons, which conducted annual inspections of police stations and lockups across New York, decried it as "a dilapidated and rundown wooden building ... heated by coal stoves and lighted by gas, the pressure being so poor that it was difficult to see clearly in the station house or jail."<sup>15</sup> Calling the facility "about the worst I have ever seen," Kennedy stated that "the need for a modern fireproof station with jail quarters ... is very great in the Rockaway section."<sup>16</sup> By the end of that year, the jail had been closed, forcing the 125th Precinct to send prisoners to other Queens stations for holding. At that time, the precinct comprised 44 men including a captain and lieutenants, and extended from Beach 55th Street eastward to the Lawrence town border.

Frustrated by its annual negotiations with the building's owner and recognizing the need for a new, modern Far Rockaway station house, the Police Department soon began searching for a building site. In November of 1922, Commissioner Richard Enright requested that the city acquire a lot at the southeast corner of Mott Avenue and Beach 19th Street, or look into replacing a courthouse then located between the firehouse and library on Central Avenue with a new police station. No action was taken, and by early 1924, the Beach 19th Street site was sold to a private developer. Enright then shifted his attention to a property on the north side of Cornaga Avenue at Mott Avenue before settling on the parcel directly to its west. On October 30, 1924, the Commissioners of the Sinking Fund approved the

acquisition of this latter parcel at the northeast corner of Mott Avenue and Mott Place, which measured 100 by 100 feet and was valued at \$10,000. At that time, Mott Avenue in front of the property was only 30 to 40 feet wide, and the acquisition included a 25-foot-wide portion enabling the widening of Mott Avenue to its full 60 feet. Mott Place, which was then "a narrow private driveway," would also be widened and improved.<sup>17</sup>

The 125th Precinct would need a temporary home until its new station house was ready, as its former home on the south side of Cornaga Avenue had been acquired for demolition as part of the southward extension of Mott Avenue. In 1925, the 125th Precinct moved to a three-story structure described as "the old Schenck house" on Mott Avenue near the Far Rockaway train station.<sup>18</sup> Renamed the 53rd Precinct in 1926, the Far Rockaway precinct would continue to occupy this building until its new home was finished.

By September of 1927, the city's Board of Estimate had approved a \$250,000 appropriation for the new station house, the city's Art Commission had approved Thomas E. O'Brien's renderings, and the Police Department was accepting sealed bids for its construction. Formal groundbreaking took place the following month, with Deputy Commissioner John E. Leach starting the steam shovel that would dig the building's foundation. In an address, Leach offered the new station as evidence that the department was "doing [its] utmost to extend adequate police protection to the outlying districts of Queens." Underscoring the importance of its garage, Leach noted that the "motorization of the force" had helped expand police coverage "fourfold" in Far Rockaway in recent years. Richard M. Gipson of the Rockaways Chamber of Commerce called the new station "another greatly needed improvement in the community."<sup>19</sup>

Upon its completion in late 1928 or early 1929, the 53rd Precinct Police Station was the first such structure built in the Rockaways by the City of New York. Shortly afterward, the precinct's name changed to its current name, the 101st. In August of 1929, the Rockaways Chamber of Commerce held an all-day festival celebrating "the recent improvements that have come to the Rockaways," including a new high school, roads, a new section of boardwalk, and this police station.<sup>20</sup> John S. Kennedy, who had so severely criticized the former station house, hailed the new structure, calling it "one of the finest police buildings of the city" as well as "a credit to the New York Police Department and to Superintendent of Buildings—Thomas E. O'Brien—its architect and designer."<sup>21</sup>

### **Thomas E. O'Brien<sup>22</sup>**

The architect of the 53rd Precinct Police Station, Thomas E. O'Brien, was born in 1860 to immigrant parents from Ireland. O'Brien worked for a contracting firm for several years before joining the New York Police Department (NYPD) as a patrolman in 1890. Soon afterward, he began taking night classes in architecture at the Cooper Union. O'Brien was promoted to sergeant in 1895 and to lieutenant in 1896, when then-President of the Police Board Theodore Roosevelt "learned of his knowledge of architecture." Roosevelt apparently encouraged O'Brien to "demonstrate his ability to a committee, and he was appointed department architect."<sup>23</sup>

O'Brien was assigned to the force's Department of Repair and Supplies, where his duties included inspecting the city's station houses. By March of 1897, he was filing alteration applications with the Buildings Department on behalf of the NYPD. O'Brien apparently designed his first new building in 1921, when he filed an application for the 60th Precinct Police Station in Tottenville with the

city's Art Commission. With its palazzo-like form, rusticated ground story, and brick upper stories with Renaissance style window surrounds, quoining, and cornice, this building likely served as the model for O'Brien's subsequent buildings. In addition to the 53rd Precinct Station, other extant station houses designed by him include those for the 42nd Precinct at Wadsworth Avenue and West 182nd Street in Manhattan (begun 1922); the 45th Precinct at 257 Alexander Avenue in the Bronx (1922-24, within the Mott Haven Historic District); the 116th Precinct at Catalpa Avenue and 64th Street in Queens (1924); the 58th Precinct at 91st Avenue and 168th Street in Jamaica (1927); and the 123rd Precinct in Rockaway Beach (1928-29). Although these buildings continued recent practice of using Renaissance forms and elements as the basis for police station design, they differed in their use of brick at their upper stories, reflecting the increasing popularity of the Colonial Revival style in the 1920s.

O'Brien was promoted to Superintendent of Buildings in 1923; at that time, he was described as "the only registered architect in the Police Department," and his experience in contracting and building construction was "said to be responsible for the saving of thousands of dollars for the city."<sup>24</sup> Two years later, he attained the rank of Deputy Chief Inspector.<sup>25</sup> O'Brien's final building appears to have been the 32nd Precinct station house at 242 West 135th Street in Harlem (1930), but he continued to serve as Superintendent of Buildings until his death, in 1932, at the age of 71. Following O'Brien's passing, he was hailed as a "former carpenter" who was "responsible for the design of nearly all police buildings in recent years."<sup>26</sup>

### **The Renaissance Revival Style<sup>27</sup>**

The design of the 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station follows the example established by Thomas E. O'Brien in his earliest police stations, including



the 60th (now 123rd) Precinct station in Tottenville, Staten Island (begun 1921) and the 45th Precinct station in the Bronx (1922-24, within the Mott Haven Historic District). For each of these buildings as well as his subsequent police stations, O'Brien drew primarily upon the Italian Renaissance-inspired Renaissance Revival style, which was employed for a wide range of grand urban buildings in the early 20th century. This style reflected both the ideals of the City Beautiful Movement and the aspirations of the so-called American Renaissance, an intensely nationalistic period between the 1876 Centennial and World War I in which Americans cleaved to the idea that their country—with its imperial reach, technological prowess, and democratic heritage—was the world's true heir to ancient Greek, Roman, and Renaissance ideals. By the 1920s, the Renaissance Revival style had more specific precedents in police architecture, having been employed for the First Precinct Police Station (Hunt & Hunt, 1909-11) and the 62nd Police Precinct Station House (Hazzard, Erskine & Blagden, 1912-14), both designated New York City Landmarks, as well as for several other palazzo-like precinct houses begun under the commissionership of Rhinelanders Waldo.

### **Later History<sup>28</sup>**

Over the past 90 years, the 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station has continued to serve Far Rockaway in its original capacity. In 1968, Mayor John V. Lindsay visited the station to inspect its new community room, and in 1975, local politicians and hundreds of residents rallied to save it from closure during the city's fiscal crisis. In 1986, officer Scott A. Gadell of the 101st Precinct was killed in a shootout near Beach 31st Street and Seagirt Boulevard, and Mott Place was subsequently renamed in his honor.

Little-changed from the time of its opening, the 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station remains one of the most prominent structures in Far Rockaway as well as an important link to a crucial period in the neighborhood's development, when new civic, educational, transportation, and recreational facilities heralded Far Rockaway's emergence as a year-round community and cemented its connection to New York City and its government.

### **Report researched and written by**

Michael Caratzas

Research Department

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Thomas E. O'Brien, "One Hundred & Twenty-Fifth Precinct Station House" [architectural renderings], 1926, New York City Public Design Commission Archives. These drawings were submitted as part of the Police Department's application to the Art Commission of the City of New York (now the Public Design Commission). The author wishes to thank the Design Commission's Archivist and Records Manager, Julianna Monjeau, for her assistance with these drawings.

<sup>2</sup> Calder Loth, "English Bond and Its Kin," Institute of Classical Architecture and Art website ([www.classicist.org/articles/classical-comments-english-bond-and-its-kin/](http://www.classicist.org/articles/classical-comments-english-bond-and-its-kin/)), accessed April 11, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Much of this section is adapted from LPC, *62nd Police Precinct Station House Designation Report* (LP-1809) (New York: City of New York: 1992), prepared by Charles Savage, 2-4. Other sources include Joseph P. Viteritti, "Police," in Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City Second Edition* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2010), 1006-11; *Annual Report of the Police Department, City of New York for the Year 1922* (New York: Police Department Bureau of Printing, 1923), 145; "Enright Explains Reorganization of Police Department," *New York Times*, January 17, 1922, 1; "New Police Station on Staten Island," *New York Times*, November 9, 1923, 18; and "R. E. Enright Dies; Headed Police," *New York Times*, September 5, 1953, 15.

<sup>4</sup> According to historian Stefan Bielinski, the *schout* was the "chief officer of the law ... combin[ing] the duties of a modern-day sheriff and public prosecutor." Bielinski, "The *Schout* in Rensselaerswijck: A Conflict of Interests," New Netherland Institute website ([www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/files/3813/5067/3657/1.1.pdf](http://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/files/3813/5067/3657/1.1.pdf)), accessed April 11, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> "Enright Explains Reorganization of Police Department."

<sup>6</sup> This section is partially adapted from LPC, *Firehouse, Engine Company 268/Hook & Ladder Company 137 Designation Report* (LP-2527) (New York: City of New York, 2013), prepared by Cynthia Danza, 3-4. Other sources include Alfred H. Bellot, *History of the*

*Rockaways from the Year 1685 to 1917* (Far Rockaway, New York: Bellot's Histories, 1918), 34-36 and 83-94; Caroline C. Pasion, *Preserving the Beachside Bungalows in Far Rockaway* (Master's Thesis in Historic Preservation, Columbia University, New York, 2008), 20-49; Vincent Seyfried, "Far Rockaway," and Seyfried and Andrew Sparberg, "Rockaway Peninsula," in Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City Second Edition* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2010), 429 and 1114.

<sup>7</sup> Although European settlers considered their "purchases" of property from Native Americans as outright acquisitions, the European concept of holding title to land was foreign to the Lenape, who considered these transactions as customary exchanges of gifts smoothing the way for settlers' temporary use of the land for camping, hunting, fishing, and the cultivation of crops.

<sup>8</sup> Bellot, 90.

<sup>9</sup> Bellot, 85.

<sup>10</sup> Bellot, 90.

<sup>11</sup> Formal plans for the boardwalk were announced in 1925, and when it was completed from Beach 9th to Beach 125th Street, it was the second-longest on the East Coast. The Cross Bay (now Joseph P. Addabbo Memorial Bridge) opened in 1925.

<sup>12</sup> "Boom in Real Estate," *Nebraska State Journal*, August 4, 1925, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Sources for this section include *Proceedings of the Commissioners of the Sinking Fund of the City of New York* (New York: M. B. Brown Printing and Binding Company) for 1915 through 1928; *Annual Report of the State Commission of Prisons* (Ossining, New York: Sing Sing Prison) for 1918 through 1926; *Annual Report of the State Commission of Correction* (Albany: State Commission of Correction) for 1929 through 1931; "Far Rockaway Jail Is Called 'Unfit,'" *Brooklyn Eagle*, October 31, 1918, 10; "Insanitary Jails to Be Abandoned," *New York Times*, October 10, 1920, 25; "Women's Court Conditions Here Declared Bad," *Brooklyn Eagle*, December 6, 1924, 24; "Pass Rockaway Police House Plans," *New York Times*, August 12, 1927, 17; "New Police Station at Far Rockaway," *Rockaway Beach Wave*, August 18, 1927; "Bids for Rockaway Police Station," *New York Times*, September 1, 1927, 26; "Bids for Far Rockaway Station," *New York Times*, September 14, 1927, 16; "Leach Starts Work on New Police Station," *New York Times*, October 26, 1927, 29; "Rockaways Mark

Achievements of Year with Outing,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 7, 1929, 12; and “Wants New Station for Police at Coney Island,” *New York Times*, September 25, 1930, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Bellot, 88.

<sup>15</sup> “Far Rockaway Jail Is Called ‘Unfit.’”

<sup>16</sup> *Annual Report of the State Commission of Prisons* (1920), 149.

<sup>17</sup> *Proceedings of the Commissioners of the Sinking Fund* (1924), 1165.

<sup>18</sup> “Bids for Rockaway Police Station.”

<sup>19</sup> “Leach Starts Work on New Police Station.”

<sup>20</sup> “Rockaways Mark Achievements of Year with Outing.”

<sup>21</sup> *Annual Report of the State Commission of Correction* (1929, 1931), 232, 245.

<sup>22</sup> Sources for this section include *Annual Report of the Police Department, City of New York for the Year 1922*, 145; “Police Building Unsafe,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1896, 9; “Building Plans Filed,” *New York Daily Tribune*, March 18, 1897, 8; “Shakeup by Enright Indicates Intent for ‘Clean Sweep,’” *Brooklyn Standard Union*, June 23, 1923, 1; “Honor Lieut. T. E. O’Brien by Appointment to New Post,” *New York Evening Telegram*, June 24, 1923, 13; “Lieut. O’Brien’s Position Upheld,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1924, 30; “Picking New Police Head Sport at Headquarters,” *Brooklyn Standard Union*, December 12, 1925, 6; Schiefflin Is Upheld by Court of Appeals,” *New York Times*, July 10, 1926, 15; “New Police Station Is City’s Best,” *Long Island Daily Press*, April 1, 1927, 2; “To Start Building New Police Station,” *Rockaway Beach Wave*, December 13, 1928, 1; “Police Building Job Given O’Brien,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, February 27, 1929, 22; “Whalen Names O’Brien as Head of Buildings,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, February 28, 1929, 4; “Gets New Police Post,” *New York Times*, February 28, 1929, 27; “Police Department,” *New York Times*, April 20, 1930, 41; “New Police Cells to Cost \$52,000,” *New York Times*, August 6, 1930, 13; “Budget Meeting Friday to Decide Police Plea,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 13, 1930, 2; “New Structure to House Patrolmen of 32nd Precinct in Harlem Being Put Up by Old Construction Firm,” *New York Age*, September 27, 1930, 1; “Says ‘Country Club’ Precinct Station to Stay,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, September 3, 1931; “Move Cycle Squad from Central Park,” *New York Times*, January 24, 1932, RE1; “Police Department,” *New York Times*, February 16, 1932, 42; “Thomas O’Brien Dies; Architect of Police Force,” *New York Tribune*, February

14, 1932, 20; and “T. E. O’Brien Is Buried with Police Honors,” *New York Times*, February 17, 1932, 23. Other sources include Municipal Commissions Index of the Art Commission of the City of New York, 1902-1930 (LPC files); alteration records listed in the *Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* (March 20, 1897, 481; August 22, 1914, 333; November 6, 1915, 803; November 27, 1915, 927; and July 15, 1916, 45); the United States Census (Bronx, New York, 1900, 1920, and 1930; and New York, New York, 1910); and New York State Census (New York County, 1905; and Bronx County, 1925).

<sup>23</sup> “Thomas O’Brien Dies; Architect of Police Force.”

<sup>24</sup> “Honor Lieut. T. E. O’Brien by Appointment to New Post.”

<sup>25</sup> Shortly before filing for the 53rd Precinct Police Station, O’Brien was removed from his post as Superintendent of Buildings following a ruling by the state’s highest court finding that his appointment required a competitive examination that had never been given. Nevertheless, O’Brien continued to serve as the Police Department’s head architect “on his lieutenant’s salary” until a new office of Superintendent of Buildings was created by the Board of Estimate in 1929. Police Commissioner Grover Whalen appointed O’Brien to this new position, stating that O’Brien was “worth many times his salary for what he has saved the city.” (“Schiefflin Is Upheld by Court of Appeals”; “Gets New Police Post.”)

<sup>26</sup> “Thomas O’Brien Dies; Architect of Police Force.” At the time of his death, O’Brien, his wife Eleanor, and two of their daughters resided at 2788 Bainbridge Avenue in the Bronx. Previously, the O’Brien family, including Thomas, Eleanor, and their six children, had lived at 682 East 143rd Street in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx (by 1900); they moved to 304 East 120th Street in East Harlem between 1905 and 1910 and to O’Brien’s final home on Bainbridge Avenue by 1920.

<sup>27</sup> Portions of this section are adapted from LPC, *Interborough Rapid Transit Company Powerhouse Designation Report* (LP-2374) (New York: City of New York, 2017), prepared by Michael Caratzas, 20-22.

<sup>28</sup> Sources for this section include “Mayor Plays Ball Here; to Visit Broad Channel,” *Rockaway Beach Wave*, August 15, 1968, 1; “101st Precinct Is Saved” and “Far Rockaway Police Station Is Saved,” *Rockaway Beach Wave*, October 23, 1975, 1, 4; and Dennis Hevesi, “A Rookie Police Officer Is Killed in a Shoot-Out in a Queens Alley,” *New York Times*, June 29, 1986, A1.

## Findings and Designation

53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of the building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station 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 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station is an impressive civic structure in the Rockaways incorporating elements of the Renaissance Revival and Colonial Revival styles; that it replaced Far Rockaway's former precinct house with a dignified, stately structure reflecting its important community role and the prosperity of New York City; that it was built as part of a program initiated by Police Commissioner Richard E. Enright to, in his words, "modernize, motorize, and stabilize" the Department, which included the replacement of "old, insanitary, and useless station houses," especially in the outer boroughs; that this program expanded upon an earlier one to construct modern police facilities in rapidly growing outlying areas of the city; that it was the first police station built by the City of New York in the Rockaways; that it was designed by the son of Irish immigrants, Thomas E. O'Brien, who had joined the New York Police Department as a patrolman in 1890, later studied architecture at Cooper Union, and as Superintendent of Buildings and head architect of the Police Department, designed several new police stations as part of Enright's building campaign; that the building



has two fully developed facades facing Mott Avenue and Scott A. Gadell (originally Mott) Place and recalls an Italian Renaissance palazzo, featuring a rusticated ground story with round-arched openings crowned by stepped arches, classical second-story window surrounds with consoles supporting alternating segmental and angular pediments, eared third-story window enframements, quoining, and a deep modillioned cornice with rosettes and a dentil molding; that its upper stories are faced in Harvard brick ranging in color from deep red to dark gray, laid in a subtle cross-bond pattern that adds additional visual texture to the facades; that the one-story garage adjoining the station house reflects the increasing importance of motor vehicles to patrol work in the city's outlying areas by the 1920s; and that the 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station is little-changed from the time of its opening, remaining one of Far Rockaway's most prominent buildings as well as a significant link to a crucial period in the neighborhood's development, when new civic, educational, transportation, and recreational facilities heralded Far Rockaway's emergence as a year-round community and cemented its connection to New York City and its government.

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 the 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station, and designates Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 15557, Lot 4 as its Landmark Site.

## **Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair**

Frederick Bland, Vice Chair

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Adi Shamir-Baron

Kim Vauss

Commissioners



**53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station**  
**16-12 Mott Avenue, Queens**  
**Mott Avenue facade**  
Sarah Moses (LPC), May 2018



**53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station**  
**Scott A. Gadell (originally Mott) Place facade**  
Sarah Moses (LPC), May 2018



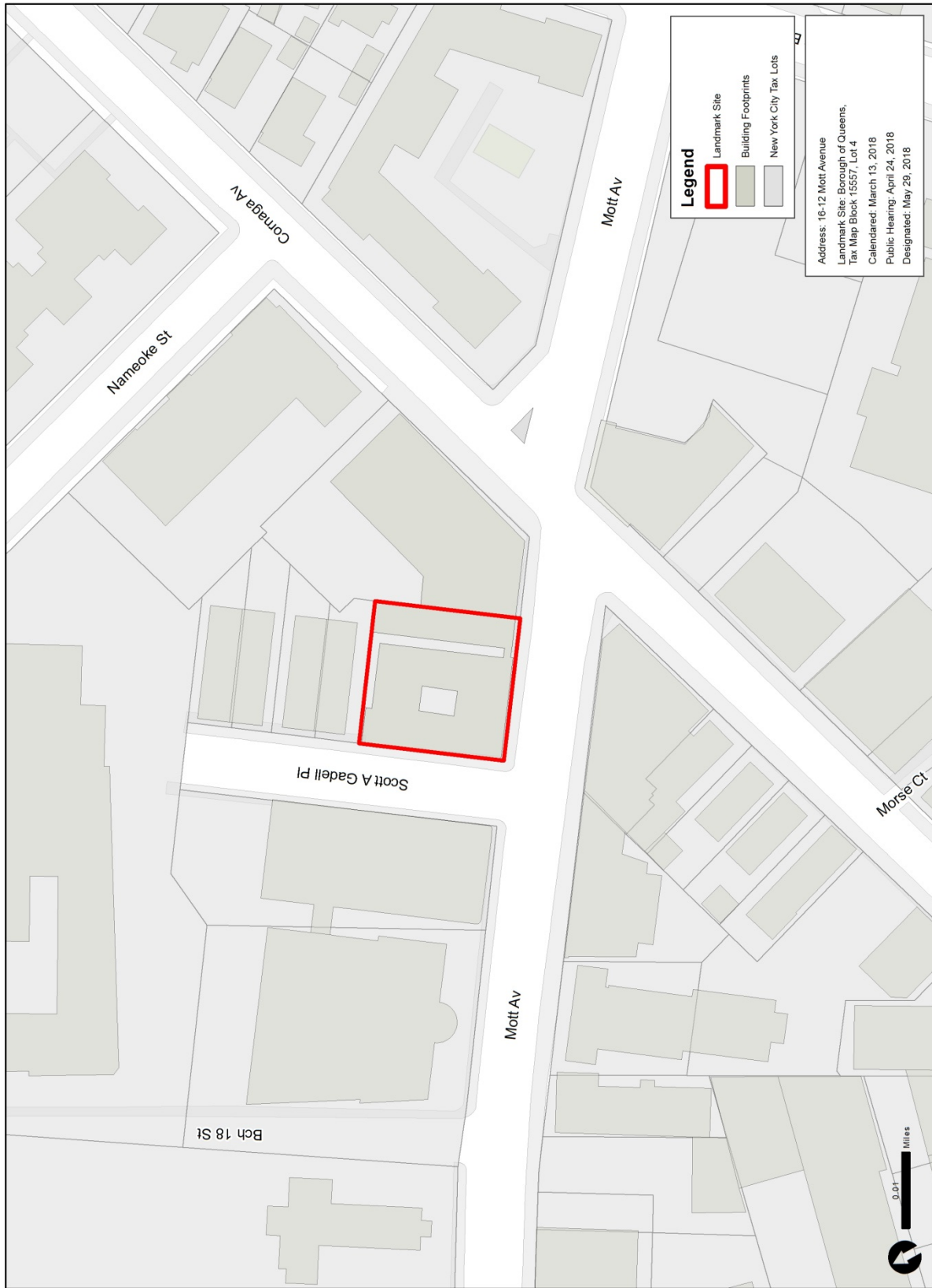


**53rd (now 101st) Precinct  
Police Station, rendering of  
Mott Avenue facade by  
Thomas E. O'Brien, 1926**  
New York City Public Design  
Commission



**Rendering of Scott A. Gadell  
Place facade by Thomas E.  
O'Brien, 1926**  
New York City Public Design  
Commission





Graphic Source: MapPLUTO, Edition 16/2, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, DHW, Date: 5/29/2018