

Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office



DESIGNATION REPORT

Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office

LOCATION

Borough of the Bronx
1129 East 180th Street

LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

SIGNIFICANCE

Located at the edge of Bronx Park, this architecturally significant Italian Renaissance Revival-style building, designed by Frank J. Helmle in 1913, served as the Bronx Central Office of the FDNY's Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau beginning in 1923 and continues to play an active role in fire communications in the Bronx.



Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau
Michael Caratzas, February 2023

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Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office

1129 East 180th Street, the Bronx

opposition. The Commission also received 23 written submissions in support of the proposed designation, including from a representative of the East Bronx History Forum, and 22 individuals. No correspondence was received in opposition.

Designation List 533 LP-2668

Built: 1913-15

Architect: Frank J. Helmle

Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx, Tax Map Block 4333, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the ground beneath the building and projecting elements including its overhanging roof, staircase and areaways, and the front lawn extending from the building line to the front property line as described in this report and drawn in the attached map.

Building Identification Number (BIN): 2101003

Calendared: March 14, 2023

Public Hearing: May 2, 2023

On May 2, 2023, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office as a New York City Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Three people including representatives of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Historic Districts Council, and a representative of both the Mott Haven Historic Districts Association and Bronx Borough Landmarks Preservation Committee spoke in favor of designation. The representative of the New York Landmarks Conservancy testified in support of designation under Item 1. No one spoke in

Summary

Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office

The Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office is one of four dedicated borough offices constructed in the early 20th century after the Fire Department of New York (FDNY) decentralized its fire alarm telegraph operations. It was designed by the notable Brooklyn architect Frank J. Helmle in 1913 and completed in 1915. Its intact and highly refined Italian Renaissance Revival-style design and prominent siting at the southern edge of Bronx Park lend to its striking presence and historical and architectural significance, and it has remained in use for a century.

New York's fire alarm system developed through the 19th century to meet the needs of the growing city. From watchtowers, like the one in Mount Morris (now Marcus Garvey) Park (a New York City Landmark), lookouts alerted the city's volunteer firefighters by a series of bells. This system was enhanced in 1851 when the towers were connected to each other by telegraph. In 1871 a fire alarm telegraph system was constructed, consisting of public alarm boxes connected to a central office from which signals were relayed to the appropriate fire companies. The system, which at first served Manhattan and the East River Islands, was extended in 1874 to the newly annexed western section of the Bronx. Following consolidation in 1898, the FDNY's fire alarm operations centered in Manhattan were no longer sufficient to handle alarms for the entire city. To improve response time, new central offices were established in each borough, capable of directly receiving fire alarms and transmitting the information to the appropriate firehouse. The early

decentralized offices were placed in existing fire department buildings in densely populated areas. After creation of the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau in 1911, a FDNY building plan included new purpose-built offices for the Bureau in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. The new Central Offices were sited on large open lots within city-owned parks to protect them from potential hazards that could impact communications. The southeastern corner of Bronx Park was chosen as the site of the Bronx Central Office.

The Italian Renaissance Revival-style Bronx Central Office, along with its twin the Brooklyn Central Office (a New York City Landmark), was designed by Brooklyn architect Frank J. Helmle in 1913 and construction completed in 1915. The T-shaped building is clad in light brick and topped by a deep, terra-cotta cornice and hipped roof covered in Spanish tiles. A broad stoop leads to a recessed loggia screened by an arcade resting on a balustrade. Trabeated window openings along the front and side elevations have double architrave surrounds with bracketed lintels; the entrance is similarly treated and features a grille-work transom. The side elevations of the ell each feature a trio of large arched window openings set in an arcaded surround; the rear facade has a single arched window with similar decorative treatment.

The Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office was dedicated in 1923 when, like its Brooklyn counterpart, it became fully operational. Rehabilitated in the early 21st century with new windows in the style of the historic fenestration and a small addition at the rear, the building has excellent integrity to its original design and, after a century of service, continues to play an important role as part of the FDNY's communications system.

Building Description

Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office

The Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office, was designed by Frank J. Helmle in 1913 in the style of a formal Italian Renaissance pavilion. Executed in light-colored brick with limestone and terra-cotta trim and topped by an overhanging hipped roof clad in Spanish tiles, the Bronx Central Office is T-shaped in plan with a deep extension at the rear of the street-facing pavilion. In 2002 the FDNY undertook a project to rehabilitate the Bronx Central Office adapting the interior to meet the needs of a changing communications system. Work on the exterior focused on cleaning, repair, and restoration of the building envelope to its historic appearance. A rear addition, constructed at the time, is considered non-contributing to its architectural significance.

Drawing from Renaissance precedents Helmle's design includes a deep loggia screened by an arcade, double architraves with projecting lintels at the central entrance and fenestration of the front pavilion, and large round-arched window openings set within shallow arcaded surrounds along the stem of the "T" that recall the arcade at the building's front. The current windows are reproductions of the historic window units, which had been replaced sometime before 1980. The loggia has a red tiled floor and flat ceiling.

South (East 180th Street) Facade: A granite staircase leads from a raised terrace to the loggia which is screened by a three-bay arcade. Terra-cotta arches with keystones, spring from the quartet of freestanding and engaged limestone Tuscan columns resting atop a heavy balustrade with terra-cotta

balusters. Window openings at the first story on all exposed sides of the front pavilion are set within terra-cotta double architraves topped by a lintel with scrolled brackets and molded cornice and molded spandrel panels. Basement windows are square with simple stone sills and flush stone lintels incorporated into the building's stone water table. The entrance features a historic grille in front of the transom and is set within a terra-cotta double architrave topped by a bracketed and modillioned lintel. A bronze dedicatory plaque hangs adjacent to the entrance.

Alterations: Historic casement windows and transoms replaced in kind at basement and first story, one window opening at basement, added in mid-century, infilled; double-leaf wood doors replaced to match the historic doors; intercom; openings below loggia infilled with brick and small louvered vents and protected by non-historic grilles; pendant light fixtures in loggia replaced; three non-historic grilles in loggia ceiling; ornamental metal rails added to granite stoop in the 1960s; cameras; lights; spigot; a decorative sign with the legend "Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office" painted on the wall above the entrance prior to 2007

Secondary (East) Facade: The first-story and basement fenestration of the front pavilion continues on the east side as noted above. The historic extension behind the pavilion features a trio of arched window openings, each with a brick intrados and set within a shallow arcaded surround featuring brick pilasters with terra-cotta bases, capitals, and arches. Smaller trabeated window openings with simple lintels and sills flank the central feature. The small windows at the basement of the extension have the same sills and lintels as those on the front pavilion.

Alterations: Historic windows at basement and first story of front pavilion and first story of the ell replaced in kind; non-historic steel doors at basement; basement windows in ell infilled with brick, one includes a small louvered vent, all protected by metal grilles; lights, cameras, and conduits; remote utility meter; siamese connection; siren; pipes; signage

Secondary (West) Facade: Fenestration and ornamentation similar to the east elevation, a small window with simple sill and lintel on the west side of the front pavilion is original to the plans.

Alterations: Historic windows at first story and basement of the front pavilion and first story of ell replaced in kind; basement window openings of the extension infilled with brick, louvered vent, and power cables; addition at the rear continues along part of the west facade

Secondary (North) Facade: The first story and basement fenestration continues on the north facade of the front pavilion to the east and west of the ell. Two chimneys rise above the roof of the front pavilion. On the north facade of the extension a single round-arched window in an arcaded surround is flanked on the east by a trabeated window with simple sill and lintel.

Alterations: Historic windows at first story replaced in kind; all north-facing basement openings are infilled with louvered vents protected by metal grilles; through-wall air conditioner to east of ell; a non-contributing 1-1/2 story, brick, limestone, terracotta and glass pavilion with standing seam, hipped roof and east-facing door at basement was added at northwestern corner as part of the 2002 rehabilitation plan, intercom at door; lights; cameras; conduits

Site: The building is set at the southern edge of Bronx Park and is surrounded by a parking lot and utilitarian communications equipment and structures, which are not part of the landmark site. Within the landmark site the lawn in front of the building slopes down to the sidewalk and includes a non-historic steel fence with gate on a concrete curb; non-historic lampposts; security card readers/intercoms on posts; metal pipes; concrete curbs at property line and along concrete walkway, lower stoop, terrace and retaining walls which were replaced in the 1960s and repaired as needed as part of the 2002 rehabilitation project; lawn and shrubbery; flag pole. Gooseneck pipe and window wells with non-historic metal grilles in terrace. There is a double-pipe railing on granite coping on the west side of the building.

History and Significance

Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office

History and Early Development of the Bronx¹

The Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office is located near the center of the Borough of the Bronx, just east of the Bronx River at the southern edge of Bronx Park. Prior to the arrival of the European settlers, the area that became the Bronx was occupied by Indigenous peoples known as the Manhattans, Wiechquaesgecks, and the Siwanoy, members of the larger Algonquian group, the Lenape or Delaware, who spoke a dialect called Munsee.² Indigenous paths connecting Upper Manhattan with the mainland traversed the area. One path forked at Kingsbridge into Sachkerah [upper path] that connected to Eastchester and Pelham and the lower path which traversed today's Fordham University campus and bisected today's Bronx Park crossing Aquehung (or Ahquahung) today's Bronx River at Acqueegenom a point just north of today's Pelham Parkway and continuing to Bear Swamp (later Bronxdale), a Siwanoy settlement until 1782, located east of the Bronx Park.³

In 1639 the Dutch West India Company purchased an area west of the Aquehung known by the Indigenous tribes as Keskeskeck. Although European settlers considered their purchases of property from Indigenous people to be 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.⁴ Two years later, Jonas Bronck (c. 1600-1643) a Scandinavian sea captain from the

Netherlands became the first recorded European settler in the area of the present-day Bronx having purchased 500 acres between the Harlem and Aquahung Rivers from the Dutch West India Company.⁵ Other settlers arrived and in 1663 Edward Jessup and John Richardson bought land west of the Bronx River originally called the Twelve Farms but became known as West Farms for its location west of the river.⁶ By 1700 what later became the Bronx consisted of all or parts of the towns of Westchester and Eastchester and the manors of Pelham, Morrisania, Fordham, and Philipsburg.

The Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office is located within what today is Bronx Park, a two-mile long park, bisected north to south by the Bronx River, once the dividing line between the west and east Bronx. In the 18th and 19th centuries the Bronx River attracted prominent New York families who built country estates and took advantage of the river's power to operate mills there. Within the area encompassed by Bronx Park, Peter De Lancey – brother of Lt. Governor James De Lancey – operated mills here, and later a Manhattan flour merchant, David Lydig enlarged the mills after purchasing the property in 1825.⁷ The most notable landowners in this area were George and Peter Lorillard, who took over the snuff manufacturing business established in 1760 by their father Pierre A. Lorillard (1742-1776). In 1792, the brothers moved their main factory from Manhattan to the Bronx River where they purchased a grist mill, dam, water rights, buildings, and fifty acres. Peter Lorillard owned one enslaved person in 1800 and 1810 but it is uncertain if enslaved persons were used in the Bronx operation. Eight years later they replaced the old mill with one built of native fieldstone which they used to manufacture snuff until 1870 when they moved their facilities to New Jersey. The Lorillard Snuff Mill which is located in the New York

Botanical Garden is a designated New York City Landmark.⁸

Still largely rural into the 19th century, villages and towns such as West Farms (1846) and Morrisania (1855) were established and grew along the route of the New York & Harlem Railroad which was incorporated in 1831 and expanded over the Harlem River in 1840. As railroads and streetcars crossed the area, beginning in the 1860s, streets were laid out and land speculation began in earnest. In 1874, the area west of the Bronx River consisting of the townships of Morrisania, West Farms, and Kingsbridge split from Westchester County and became the 23rd and 24th wards of the City of New York, also known as the Annexed District. In 1895 the areas east of the Bronx River were annexed by New York City, three years before the act of consolidation created the Borough of the Bronx.

Beginning in the early 1880s, civic-minded booster organizations such as the North Side Association advocated for infrastructure improvements; streets were paved, sewers dug, and mass transit lines brought the elevated trains to the Bronx. In 1881 John Mullaly, a journalist, began a campaign for the purchase of land for parks prior to further urban development and by the end of the year the New York Park Association was incorporated. Working directly with the State legislature, the association won support for a plan for six parks in 1884 – Van Cortlandt, Bronx, Pelham Bay, Crotona, St. Mary’s, and Claremont parks – a total of 3,757 acres and three connecting parkways. By 1888 condemnation proceedings were completed.⁹

Bronx Park, where the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office was later built at its southern edge in 1915, is bounded by Williamsbridge on the north, the Harlem Railroad, Fordham and Southern Boulevard on the west, East 182nd and 180th streets on the south and the White Plains Road on the east. Today within Bronx Park

there are five designated New York City Landmarks in addition to the Lorillard Snuff Mill: The Conservatory, today known as the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory; New York Botanical Garden Museum (now Library) Building, Fountain of Life, and Tulip Tree Allee; Baird (now Astor) Court, New York Zoological Park; Rockefeller Fountain, New York Zoological Park; and Paul J. Rainey Memorial Gates, New York Zoological Park.

The population of the Bronx grew rapidly in the late 19th century. In 1890, there were 89,000 people living in the area of the Bronx known as the North Side; ten years later it had more than doubled to over 200,000. By 1915, the number had increased threefold, to 616,000.¹⁰ As the population and number of new buildings increased, protection from the ever-present danger of fire became increasingly important.

Firefighting in New York City¹¹

New York City’s firefighting history extends back to the colonial period, when the government of New York took the possibility of fire very seriously. Under Dutch rule, all men were expected to participate in firefighting activities. After the English took over, the Common Council organized a force of 30 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 city where most buildings were built of wood and non-fireproof construction. Of particular significance was the “Great Fire” of December 16-17, 1835, which destroyed 20 blocks

containing between 600 and 700 buildings. The damages resulting from several major fires between 1800 and 1850 led to the establishment of a building code requiring all new construction within the designated fire limits to be made fireproof through the use of brick or stone and roofed with tile or slate,¹² 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.¹³ 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 March 1865, the New York State Legislature established the Metropolitan Fire District, comprising the cities of New York (south of 86th Street) and Brooklyn.¹⁴ 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 34 engine companies and 12 ladder companies operated by a more efficient force of 500 men. Immediate improvements 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 and motorized vehicles, reflecting the need for faster response to fires in taller buildings. Throughout the 20th century to the present, the department has continued its vital endeavors to keep up with the evolving city and its firefighting needs.

Fire Communications¹⁵

An important part of firefighting in New York City has been the need to rapidly and accurately disseminate information regarding the presence and location of a blaze. In colonial times a night watch patrolled the streets, looking for fires and rousing the citizen bucket brigade with loud wooden rattles when one was discovered. By 1830, lookouts stood watch in the cupola of City Hall and rang a large bell when a fire was spotted, indicating the general location of the blaze by a flag by day or torch by night. Likely adding to the confusion was the continuous ringing of bells throughout the city until the fire was out. In 1850 the ever-expanding city was divided into eight fire districts, each of which had a watch tower and alarm bell.¹⁶ A primitive code would be rung to announce the district in which a fire had broken out and if the other towers were able to pick up the signal, they would relay the originating district number to call out the volunteer companies. The system was ineffective in pinpointing the exact location of the blaze; the inevitable delay often led to

substantial loss of property. An early improvement came in 1851 when the city connected the watch towers to each other by means of a telegraph system allowing lookouts to communicate via Morse Code and enabling the near-simultaneous ringing of the alarm bells.

From 1853 until 1865 an expanded telegraph system established two-way communication between the 68 firehouses in lower Manhattan (south of 14th Street) with a central office established in City Hall. Each firehouse had a transmitter that would send its designated number to the Central Office. The Central Office would retransmit the alarm simultaneously to all 68 houses where gongs would repeat the alarm improving on response times. For redundancy, the bells of the fire towers continued to be rung.

With the establishment of the professional fire department in 1865, the alarm system was revamped. In the first two years, firehouses between lower Manhattan and 86th Street, as well as police and fire patrol stations, were connected to the central office which had been relocated to Mercer Street. At the same time a new fire alarm code was devised to replace the Morse numerical code. Street patrols, once the main means of locating fires in the colonial period, returned in 1869, with each company mandated to have two members on patrol along a specified route day and night looking out for fires. Although daylight patrols ended in 1873, the night patrols continued for a while longer.

The most significant improvement in communications came in 1870 when the city adopted the fire alarm box. The system, developed by Dr. William Channing and Moses G. Farmer and put into operation in Boston c. 1852, sent alarms via telegraph from boxes mounted at street corners. In Channing's system, when the box was opened a crank was activated that sent a coded signal giving the number of the box to a central receiving station. From there it was relayed to the nearest firehouse,

where the bell would toll the number of the box and thus the location of the blaze. By the end of the decade there were 973 such alarm boxes across Manhattan, the East River islands, and the newly annexed sections of the Bronx. To prevent pranksters from sending in false alarms, the early boxes could only be opened with a key held by a policeman, firefighter, shopkeeper, or another "responsible" citizen; but within a decade keyless boxes became the standard and the city's existing alarm boxes were retrofitted with keyless doors.

In 1905 it was determined by Messrs. Carty and Miller, experts hired by the New York Board of Underwriters, that the Manhattan fire alarm telegraph system was outmoded and needed replacement. A plan was submitted two years later, and in 1911 the Bureau of Fire Alarm Telegraph, as it was then called, was established. The Bureau was under the oversight of an electrical engineer who reported directly to the Fire Commissioner and was responsible for overseeing the system within all boroughs and the construction of a new physical plant in each borough.¹⁷

Over the next decade sites were secured in city-owned parks in each borough to provide a more secure location for the central offices, plans were submitted and approved, and monies were requested for the completion and equipping of the new plants which were brought online in the 1920s. The central office structures continued to house the department's alarm system as voice communication equipment and computers replaced the telegraph beginning in the second half of the 20th century. The last vestige of the telegraph alarm system, the firehouse bells, were disconnected in 1983.¹⁸

Following the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, new communications centers, known as Public Safety Answering Centers (PSAC) were established to handle requests for all emergency services. PSAC I is responsible for Brooklyn, Staten

Island, and citywide requests while PSAC II is responsible for those from Manhattan, Queens, and the Bronx. The old central office structures have been repurposed for use by different divisions within the FDNY. The Bronx Central Office continues to support internal communications between fire alarm boxes in the Bronx and PSAC II.¹⁹

History and Design of the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office

As New York City expanded following consolidation in 1898, each borough became responsible for the maintenance and operation of their own fire alarm telegraph systems. In 1900, the *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* announced that the new headquarters for the Bronx would occupy part of the firehouse occupied by Engine 46 at 451-453 East 176th Street and within three years, the Bronx's first central fire alarm telegraph office was operational.²⁰ In 1912, the department announced plans for the construction of 42 fire houses and three dedicated fire alarm telegraph buildings in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. The Municipal Art Commission (now the Public Design Commission) had approved the designs of the three central offices the construction and equipping of which was estimated at roughly \$490,000.²¹ For Manhattan, the Bronx, and Brooklyn, the first of the new central offices to be designed, Fire Commissioner Joseph Johnson, instructed the architects "to plan types of buildings which will harmonize with the landscape scheme of the parks in which they will be located."²² The result was three low-lying buildings, each only large enough to house the actual fire alarm telegraph signal plant, and all wires to the building would be part of the new underground fire alarm telegraph system then being promoted. In 1912, the Municipal Art Commission approved Frank J. Helmle's design for a building in the northwestern section of Crotona Park on a site authorized by the Parks Department.

Neighbors of Crotona Park opposed the choice of site and in 1913 a prominent site on East 180th Street in the southeastern corner of Bronx Park, already home to the New York Botanical Garden (1891) and Bronx Zoo (1899) was chosen for the Bronx Central Office of the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau. For this new site, Helmle reused the design for the Brooklyn Central Office and construction began that same year.²³

Government buildings in the early 20th century were influenced by the City Beautiful movement that had emerged from the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where a model city of monumental Beaux Arts-style buildings was erected promoting the idea that civic buildings referencing classical themes inspired civic pride. Unlike large structures such as the Beaux-Arts style New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue (a designated New York City Exterior and Interior Landmark), the parti for the Bronx Central Office called for a small building located within a park. For his design, Helmle elected to use the Renaissance Revival style that was popular for both public and residential buildings from 1890-1930 and derived from Italian Renaissance precedents. The building was completed in 1915 but delays in funding left the building empty until 1923.²⁴ Now surrounded by transmission towers and auxiliary structures needed in support of modern communications, Helme's Italian Renaissance Revival-style building continues to house the infrastructure that supports internal communications between the fire alarm boxes and PSAC II, including power for the alarm boxes. It is also used by FDNY's Bureau of Communications as a training center for new dispatchers.²⁵

Frank J. Helmle²⁶

Architect Frank J. Helmle (1869-1939) was born in Ohio and educated at Cooper Union and the School of Fine Arts of the Brooklyn Institute. In 1890, he

entered the office of McKim, Mead & White in Manhattan and left the following year to open his own practice in Brooklyn. He joined with Ephraim Johnson in the firm C. L. Johnson & Sons in 1893, which became Johnson & Helmle in 1896 and lasted until 1901. In 1902 Helmle started a two-year appointment as Superintendent of Public Buildings for Brooklyn, turning over his private work to fellow Brooklyn architects Ulrich J. Huberty (1876-1910) and William H. Hudswell. Helmle joined the practice following his civic employment. The firm of Helmle, Huberty & Hudswell lasted until 1906 when Hudswell left to open his own practice. Helmle & Huberty continued in partnership until Huberty's death in 1910. Helmle subsequently joined with Harvey Wiley Corbett in 1913, sometimes working under his own name and sometimes under the firm name of Helmle & Corbett (later Helmle, Corbett & Harrison). Helmle retired from active practice in 1928.

Helmle and his various partners were responsible for many of Brooklyn's finest early 20th-century Renaissance-inspired landmarks, including the Brooklyn Central Office, Bureau of Fire Communications (1913, Frank J. Helmle, a New York City Landmark), Winthrop Park Shelter Pavilion (1910, Helmle & Huberty, a New York City Landmark), and the Boat House (1904, Helmle & Huberty, a New York City Landmark), Tennis House (1909-10, Helmle, Huberty & Hudswell) and Willink Entrance Comfort Station (1912, Helmle, Huberty & Hudswell) (all located within Prospect Park, a New York City Scenic Landmark). Helmle is also known for several prominent Roman Catholic churches in Brooklyn, including the neo-Spanish Baroque style church of St. Barbara in Bushwick (1907-10, Helmle & Huberty) and Early Christian Revival style church of St. Gregory the Great in Crown Heights (1915-16, Frank J. Helmle), within the Crown Heights North II Historic District.

Conclusion

The Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office was constructed in the early 20th century as part of the FDNY's program to improve and protect the department's communication system by placing borough communication centers within city-owned parks. Located at the southeast corner of Bronx Park, the low-rise Italian Renaissance Revival-style Bronx Central Office was designed by Frank J. Helmle in 1913 to blend with its rustic surroundings. Adapted internally as telecommunications equipment evolved from telegraph to radios, telephones, and computers the building's exterior is little changed since it was completed in 1915. Brought into operation in 1923, this small, elegant building with its beautifully proportioned details has been a part of the FDNY's fire communications for the Bronx for the last 100 years.

Endnotes

¹ The information in this section was derived, in part from: Stephen Jenkins, *The Story of the Bronx 1639-1912* (New York and London: The Knickerbocker Press, 1912); James L. Wells, Louis F. Haffen, and Josiah A. Briggs, eds., *The Bronx and Its People: A History 1609-1927* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1927); Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *Mott Haven East Historic District Designation Report (LP-1899)* (NY: City of New York, 1994), report prepared by Katharine E. Khan; Gary D. Hermalyn and Lloyd Ultan, “Bronx,” in *Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. by Kenneth T. Jackson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Lloyd Ultan, *The Northern Borough: A History of the Bronx* (Bronx: Bronx County Historical Society, 2009), 175.

² According to Ann-Marie Cantwell, the Munsee had social and economic ties with other Munsee speaking peoples in communities “across a territory that stretched from the lower Hudson Valley and western Long Island across northern New Jersey,” including the region now defined as New York City. Robert Grumet highlights the difficulty of establishing the identity of specific Indigenous communities in what is now New York City during the early colonial period as the names that have come to be associated with 17th-century Indigenous groups historically represented a diversity of things including place names, an individual or community leader, a village, or a longhouse community. In turn, these identities shifted as groups moved or were forced to relocate. Wiechquaesgeck, for example, was a local place name that became a general term for the larger community that inhabited portions of Northern Manhattan and the Bronx. The name Siwanoy represented the Indigenous communities that lived along the northern shore of Long Island Sound from Norwalk, Connecticut to the south Bronx that subsequently merged with the Wiechquaesgeck and other Indigenous groups in the Westchester highlands during the second half of the 17th century. The name “Manhattan” was historically identified as a language and a community of people living in northern-Manhattan and adjacent areas in the Bronx. Anne-Marie Cantwell “Penhawitz and Wampage and the Seventeenth-Century World They Dominated” in Meta F. Janowitz and Diane Dallal, eds., *Tales of Gotham, Historical Archaeology, Ethnohistory and Microhistory of New York City* (New York: Springer, 2013), 7–28; Robert Steven Grumet, *Native American Place Names in New York City* (New York: Museum of the City of New York, 1981), 24-26, 53, 59-62; Robert Steven Grumet, *The Munsee Indians: A History* (Norman, OK: The University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 309–310, Fn. 6. The present-day descendants of

the area’s Indigenous people are members of the Stockbridge-Musee Community Band of Mohicans, the Delaware Nation, the Delaware Tribe of Indians, the Shinnecock Nation, and the Unkechaug Nation.

³ Reginald Pelham Bolton, *Indian Paths in the Great Metropolis*, Indian Notes and Monographs (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1922), Map VII, C; p.110, 224, 240.

⁴ Reginald Pelham Bolton, *New York City in Indian Possession*, Indian Notes and Monographs, v. II, no. 7, 2nd ed. (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1975), 14; Grumet, *The Munsee Indians*, 310 fn. 6.

⁵ Grumet, *The Munsee Indians*, 310 fn. 6. Bronck brought with him his wife, three German men he had hired as indentured servants in Amsterdam and provided an indentured servant for his wife. Bronck may have hired additional servants during his short tenure in the area but is not known to have owned any enslaved persons. Lloyd Ultan, *The Bronx in the Frontier Era* (NY: Bronx Historical Society, 1994), 15, 185; Jenkins, 26.

⁶ Bronx Park, the location of the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office as well as the New York Botanical Garden and the Bronx Zoo is within the area of West Farms. Jenkins, 42.

⁷ Lydig lived in Manhattan from at least 1800-1820. He is recorded as owning three enslaved persons in 1800 but by the following census, he employed two free persons of color and two enslaved persons. By the 1820 census his household included four persons of color all of whom were free. The Lydig house and mills existed into the early 20th century after which only the dam remained. Jenkins, 83, 389; U.S. Census Records, 1800-1820; Ancestry.com *New York City Directory, 1829-1830* [database on-line] Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, 2002.

⁸ LPC, *Lorillard Snuff Mill, New York Botanical Garden Designation Report (LP-0121)* (New York: City of New York, 1966), 1; LPC, *New York Botanical Garden Museum (now Library) Building, Fountain of Life, and Tulip Tree Allee Designation Report (LP-2311)*, prepared by Jay Shockley (New York: City of New York, 2009), 2.

⁹ Jenkins 291.

¹⁰ Evelyn Gonzalez, *The Bronx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 8, 17.

¹¹ This section is taken almost in its entirety from LPC, *Fire House, Hook and Ladder 17 Designation Report (LP-*

2046), report prepared by Virginia Kurshan (New York: City of New York, 2000). The information came from the following sources: Donald J. Cannon, "Firefighting," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson, 2d. ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010); Augustine Costello, *Our Firemen, A History of the New York Fire Departments, Volunteer and Paid* (New York: A.E. Costello, 1887; reprinted New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1997); Kenneth Holcomb Dunshee, *As You Pass By* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1940); LPC, *Engine Company No. 7/ Ladder Company No. 1 Designation Report (LP-1719)*, prepared by Charles Savage (New York: City of New York, 1993); LPC, *Engine Company 47 Designation Report (LP-1962)* prepared by Laura Hansen (New York: City of New York, 1997); LPC, *Fire Engine Company No. 84 and Hook & Ladder Company No. 34 Designation Report (LP-1863)* prepared by Laura Hansen (New York: City of New York, 1997); LPC, *Fire Engine Company 55 Designation Report (LP-1987)* prepared by Matthew Postal (New York: City of New York, 1998); LPC, *Fire Engine Company 289, Ladder Company 138 Designation Report (LP- 2035)* prepared by Matthew Postal (New York: City of New York, 1999); and Lowell M. Limpus, *History of the New York Fire Department* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1940). Additional information and materials provided by the Fire Department of New York from its archives; Captain Douglas J. Mitchell, Jr., Ladder Company 38 provided assistance with research.

¹² Laws regulating construction of buildings within the city were first issued in the colonial period and updated over time as the city expanded northward. I. N. Phelps Stokes, *Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1909* (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1922, 1926), 4: 840; 5: 1540, 1691; 6: 331-332; "An Act to Amend Acts Heretofore Passed, for the Prevention of Fires in the City of New-York" in New York, *Laws of the State of New York Passed at the Fifty-third Session of the Legislature* (Albany: E. Crosswell, Printer to the State, for William Gould, Albany and Gould & Banks, New York, 1830), 349-356.

¹³ Firemen often served for various reasons in addition to their desire to help their city; participation in fire companies was seen as a starting point for political careers. Seven mayors elected after 1835 had initially served as firefighters.

¹⁴ The Metropolitan Fire Department (MFD) lasted roughly five years. The Brooklyn Fire Department was created by the legislature in 1869 and served Brooklyn until consolidation in 1898. By 1869 Tammany Hall Democrats were not only in control of the city government but the State government as well. In 1870 a "home rule"

charter also known as the "Tweed Charter" turned control of the fire department over to the city. The MFD was replaced with the paid Fire Department of the City of New York (FDNY). LPC, *Firehouse, Engine Company 40/Hook & Ladder 21 (Now Engine Company 240, Battalion 48) (LP-2526) Designation Report*, (New York: City of New York, 2013), prepared by Gale Harris, 3; New York City Fire Museum, *FDNY: An Illustrated History of the Fire Department of the City of New York* (New York: the Museum, 2003), 36-37, 41.

¹⁵ This section is based on William F. Hennessey, "A Century of Fire Communications in New York," *W. N. Y. F.* (October 1955), 8-13; "Bureau of Fire Communications," *W. N. Y. F.* (July 1955), 6-7; Costello, 890-903; *FDNY: An Illustrated History of the Fire Department of the City of New York*, 41; *The American Fire Alarm Telegraph* (New York: n.p., 1854); Putnam A. Bates, "Fire Alarm System of New York City," *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide*, November 28, 1914, 869-870.

¹⁶ The Watch Tower in Mount Morris Park (now Marcus Garvey Park) is the only surviving example and is a designated New York City Landmark.

¹⁷ From 1898 until 1911 the fire alarm system was under the jurisdiction of the Chief of Department.

¹⁸ *FDNY: An Illustrated History of the Fire Department of the City of New York*, 45.

¹⁹ "New York City Fire Department," *Wikipedia* (accessed, May 9, 2023); telephone conversation with William Nolan, Chief Dispatcher, Fire Dispatch Operations-Training Unit, FDNY, May 10, 2023.

²⁰ Hennessey, 10; "Protection from Fire in the Bronx," *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, October 20, 1900, 404. Fire Engine Company 39 and Ladder Company 16 Station House (Napoleon Le Brun & Sons, 1884-86) and Firehouse, Engine Company 46 (Napoleon Le Brun & Sons, 1894; 1904) are both designated New York City landmarks.

²¹ "Fire Department's Big Building Program," *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide*, June 1, 1912, 1184.

²² *Ibid.* In addition, it was required that all cables coming into the building be underground.

²³ The Bronx and Brooklyn Central Offices were not originally intended to be identical. Helme had submitted a different design for the Crotona site which was approved, along with the design of the Brooklyn Central Office in May 1912.

²⁴ “Park Invasion in the Bronx,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1912, 12. The Bronx Central Office became operational in 1923 based on the dedicatory plaque at the building’s entrance and substantiated by comments regarding the opening of the Brooklyn Central Office. “New Fire Alarm Bureau Placed in Operation,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 23, 1923, 2

²⁵ Borough communications were consolidated into two Public Safety Answering Centers (PSAC) between 2014 and 2018. NYC.Firenet\Forums\New York City\Fire Operations\Fire Dispatch Offices (accessed May 9, 2023); “New York City Fire Department,” *Wikipedia*, (accessed May 9, 2023); telephone conversation with William Nolan, Chief Dispatcher, Fire Dispatch Operations-Training Unit, FDNY, May 10, 2023.

²⁶ *AIA Guide to New York City*, 5th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 987; Brooklyn directories; Dennis Steadman Francis, *Architects in Practice, 1840-1900*. (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1980); 90-91; New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission *Guide to New York City Landmarks*, 4th edition (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 94, 219, 222, 262; “F. J. Helmle Dead: Retired Architect,” *New York Times*, July 16, 1939, 16; “Architect’s Appendix,” LPC, *Crown Heights North Historic District Designation Report (LP-2204)*, (New York: City of New York, 2007); “Corbett Joins Helmle,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December, 24, 1913, 7.

Findings and Designation

Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office 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, state, and the nation.

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 Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office and designates Borough of the Bronx, Tax Map Block 4333, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the ground beneath the building and projecting elements including its overhanging roof, staircase and areaways, and the front lawn extending from the building line to the front property line as described in this report as its Landmark Site, as shown in the attached map.



Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office
FDNY, undated



Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office – South Elevation
Bilge Kose, June 2023



Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office – East Elevation
Bilge Kose, June 2023



**Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx
Central Office, North Elevation**



West Elevation
Bilge Kose, June 2023



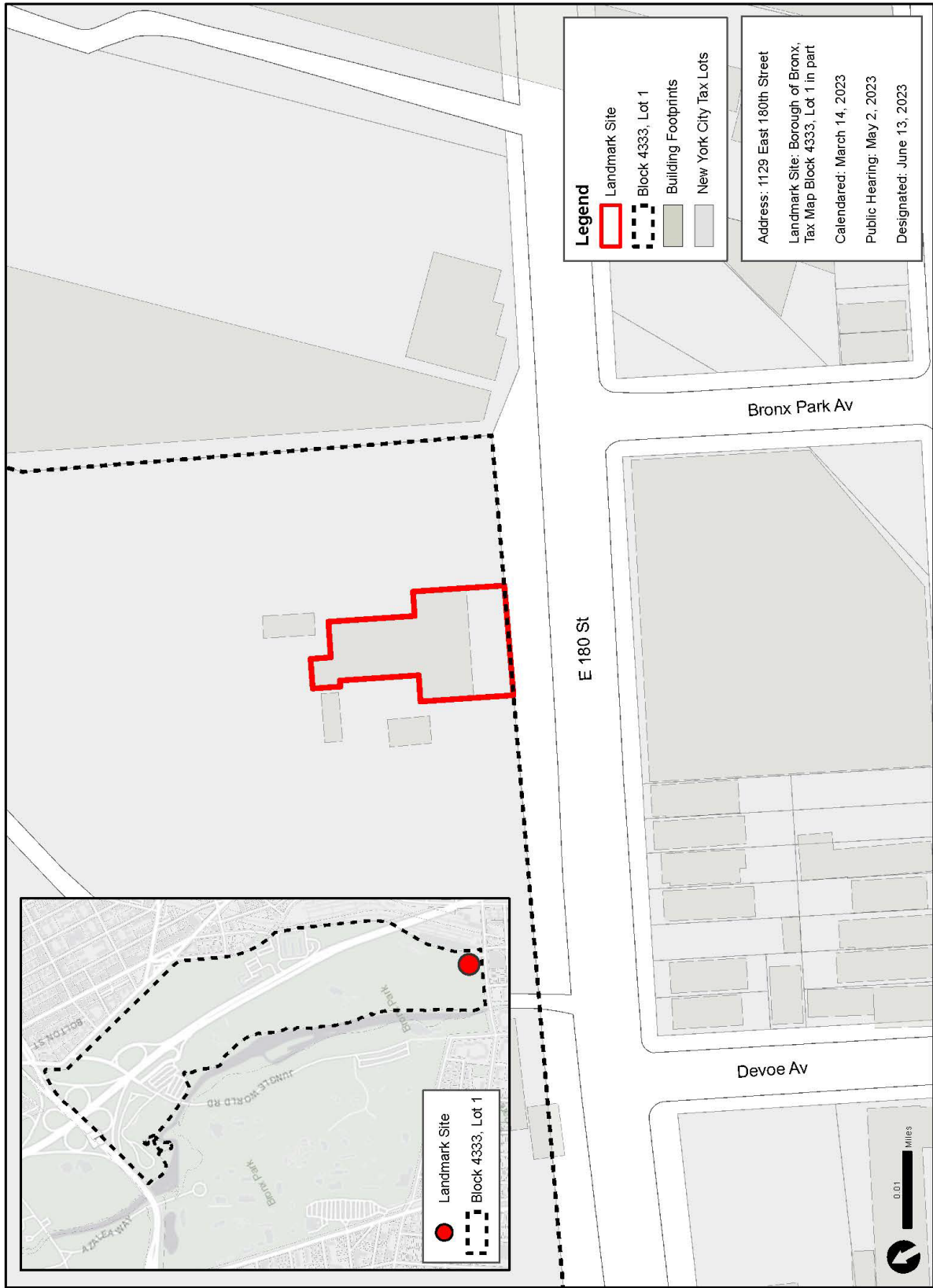
West Elevation, Front Pavilion
Bilge Kose, June 2023



Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office – Loggia
Marianne S. Percival, June 2023



Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office – Window detail
Lisa Buckley, June 2023



Graphic Source: MapPLUTO, Edition 22v1, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, DHW, Date: 6/13/2023