

FIRST PRECINCT POLICE STATION, South Street and Old Slip, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1909-11, Architects Hunt & Hunt.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 34, Lot 37.

On July 12, 1977, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the First Precinct Police Station, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. No witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The First Precinct Police Station, designed in the neo-Italian Renaissance style by the notable architectural firm of Hunt & Hunt, was erected in 1909-11. This impressive public building still commands its waterfront site, although it is now surrounded by modern office buildings.

The station house stands on Old Slip, in an area which has been important to the city since the late 17th century. Old Slip, at the foot of William Street, was the first slip in the city. These slips were openings between two wharves, where boats were unloaded during high tide. Originally a shady, natural meeting place, Old Slip became the site of one of the first official market places in New Amsterdam. The Old Slip Market at Pearl Street reached its peak of popularity in the 1720s. This market lingered on until 1778 and, beginning in the late 18th century, the Slip began to be filled in. Eventually it formed a wide street of the same name.

In 1821 another market, known as the Franklin Market, was erected on Old Slip. Despite all precautions, the Great Fire of 1835 entirely destroyed this market building and much of lower Manhattan. During the next year, the second Franklin Market was constructed on Old Slip between Front and South Street, the newly declared legal eastern boundary of Manhattan. The upper floors of the Franklin Market housed the First Police Precinct after the municipal police department had been organized in 1844. The station house was moved to 29 Broad Street for a short period during the 1860s.

On January 1, 1883, one of the many civic improvements suggested by the newly elected mayor, Franklin Edson, to the Board of Aldermen, was the erection of new station houses to replace the earlier dilapidated ones. As a result, several station houses were immediately built, including the First Precinct Police Station of 1884 at Old Slip. Reputedly the first modern police building, this four-story structure

stood until the present station house was erected on the same site in 1909-11. This police station was occupied by the First Precinct until January, 1973.

Renderings of this new station house were displayed at the 23rd Annual Exhibit of the Architectural League of New York in 1908. The architects, Richard Howland Hunt (1862-1931) and Joseph Howland Hunt (1870-1924), were the sons of the prominent New York City architect, Richard Morris Hunt (1827-1895). The elder son practiced with his father until 1895 and, in 1901, the brothers established their own firm. Well-known for their elegant Long Island and Newport residential works, as well as for their New York City town houses, they designed the George Washington Vanderbilt House (1902-05), a designated New York City Landmark. Richard Howland Hunt also carried out his father's design for the central portion of the Metropolitan Museum of Art after his death.

The four-story high First Precinct Police Station is a striking example of municipal architecture. This handsome neo-Italian Renaissance building of limestone is both massive in scale and simple in detail. It is divided horizontally into three sections -- a low base, a rusticated center section, and a smooth-faced attic story. Its visual power is created by the rhythmic series of tall arches, heavy walls and restrained ornamentation. The police station has the distinctive profile of an early Italian Renaissance palazzo. Many of the features, such as the arched openings of the main story, the rustication of the center section and the dominating cornice, are reminiscent of the fifteenth century Palazzo Riccardi in Florence, designed by Michelozzo.

All four facades of this freestanding building are treated in a generally similar manner. The long sides on Old Slip are eleven windows wide, while the narrow ends are only one window in width. A molded granite base supports the handsome pulvinated rustication of the center section. Above the low base, a series of round-arched openings, serving two stories, have smooth-faced enframements and bracketed sills at the windows. Within the arches, the square-headed first floor windows and round-arched second floor windows, separated by bronze spandrel panels, form single units. The arches above these windows have rusticated voussoirs stilted to meet the surrounding evenly coursed rusticated masonry of the center section. At every third arch of the principal west facade, a door interrupts the base. The two flanking doorways with paneled double doors are surmounted by wide bronze transom bars. The most elaborate feature of the building, the central doorway, is approached by a short flight of steps and has double doors with leaded-glass panels and transom above, set below a pediment carried on ornate brackets. The doorway is recessed, and enframed by rusticated Doric columns which support an entablature surmounted by a low balustrade serving the second story arched window.

The third story fenestration consists of small square paired windows separated by mullions. These flat-arched openings have corbeled sills and are enframed by smooth bands of stonework interrupting the rustication of the walls.

These windows are capped by rusticated voussoirs. The central window is surmounted by an elaborate cartouche, ornamented with the date of the building and a seal of the City of New York. The seal is composed of a windmill, beavers and flour barrels. A molded string course articulates the division between the rusticated center section and the smooth-faced attic story and serves as a sill for the small square windows. Just above these attic windows, a handsome roof cornice with console brackets above a row of dentils elegantly crowns this fine building.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the First Precinct Police Station has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the First Precinct Police Station is an impressive public building, designed in the striking neo-Italian Renaissance style by the notable architectural firm of Hunt & Hunt, that in its massive scale and restrained ornamentation the building creates an imposing effect, that it stands in an area of the city which is particularly rich in early history, and that today this station house still powerfully commands its waterfront site.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the First Precinct Police Station, South Street and Old Slip, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 34, Lot 37, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.