

**(FORMER) FIREHOUSE, ENGINE COMPANY 29, 160 Chambers Street,
Manhattan**

Built c. 1832-33, architect not determined; altered 1868, Nathaniel D. Bush

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 137, Lot 25

On February 11, 2014, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the (Former) Firehouse, Engine Company 29 and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1).¹ The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were three speakers in favor of designation, including representatives of Tribeca Trust and Historic Districts Council.

Summary

The Former Firehouse, Engine Company 29 is one of the city's earliest surviving police stations, and is an early and an important reminder of the development of Chambers Street and southern Tribeca. While the relatively narrow width of the building recalls its early residential character, the height and design of the facade signals the building's later civic uses.

The building at 160 Chambers Street has served a variety of private and public uses since the early 19th century. Located on the south side of Chambers Street between West Broadway and Greenwich Street, it was built as a three-story residence by Samuel Thomson, a noted builder, c. 1832-33. In 1836 David B. Ogden, a prominent lawyer, purchased the house and lived here until about 1848. The building attained its present appearance as the result of several alterations. New York City purchased the building in 1862 to serve as the 3rd Police Precinct Station House. It was raised to five stories, including a mansard roof, and altered in the Second Empire style, in 1868 for the 3rd Precinct by Nathaniel D. Bush, the official architect of the New York City Police Department. The 3rd Police Precinct Station House was located here until 1875; and then the building housed the House of Relief, a hospital under the charge of New York Hospital, from 1875 until 1894. In 1896 the building was further altered at the first story to house the New York City Fire Department's Engine Company 29. Engine Company 29 occupied the building from 1897 to 1947.



The City retained ownership until 1962, and from 1947 to 1962 the Uniformed Fire Officers Association occupied the building. It was converted to commercial use in 1967 and since the mid-1980s it has had commercial use at the ground story with residential units above. The building remains mostly intact since its 1868 and 1896 alterations.

BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Description

Five-story and penthouse, three-bay, stone-and-brick building.

Front (north) Facade

Historic: large center opening, window and transom at eastern bay, door and two transoms at western bay of first story; iron beam with circular designs, sign (“29 ENGINE 29”), and cornice with dentils above first story; continuous projecting band below second-story windows; projecting window lintels and pediments at second through fourth stories; bracketed sills at third and fourth stories; cornice with dentils and consoles above fourth story; five stories including a mansard roof with two dormers having paired arched windows; cap at western end of mansard.

Alterations: facade painted; modern infill at window, door, transoms, and storefront at first story; roll-down gate, flagpole, bracket sign (“Nail & Spa”) with exposed conduit, light fixtures with exposed conduit, and signage (“Chambers 160 Beauty Spa”) with exposed conduit at storefront; one cleat for flagpole rope on either side of storefront opening return; plate with keyhole on eastern return of storefront opening; metal window grille at first-story window; light fixture and fixed awning (“160”) above door; intercom by door; siamese connection with two pipes, two signs (sprinklers), sprinkler alarm and signage at first story; tiles at step by door at first story; sash at second and third stories may be replaced; replacement sash at fourth and fifth stories; dormer lintels replaced; three through-the-wall air conditioners; brackets on either side of fourth-story cornice removed; dentils below fourth story cornice may have been replaced; asphalt shingles at mansard roof; cap at eastern end of mansard roof; penthouse with skylights above mansard roof.

Rear (south) Façade

Parged brick façade; exposed conduit at first story; replacement sash; top-story window opening enlarged; non-historic window grille at first story; through-the-wall air conditioners at fourth and fifth stories; concrete block at parapet; metal leader; rooftop railing.

Side (east) Façade

Partially visible at rear of building; painted brick façade; replacement sash; through-the-wall air conditioners at second, third and fourth stories; metal stack; rooftop railing

Site features: pipe attached with metal strap to façade; fuel cap, gooseneck pipe and metal hatch in sidewalk.

SITE HISTORY

Development of the Neighborhood²

The (Former) Firehouse, Engine Company 29 is located on the south side of Chambers Street between West Broadway (formerly known as Chapel Street, then College Place) and Greenwich Street in what is now known as southern Tribeca (the “Triangle Below Canal” Street). Prior to the arrival of European fur traders and the Dutch West India Company, Manhattan and much of the modern-day tri-state area was populated by bands of Lenape Indians. The Lenape traveled from one encampment to

another with the seasons. Fishing camps were occupied in the summer and inland camps were used during the fall and winter to harvest crops and hunt. The main trail ran the length of Manhattan from the Battery to Inwood following the course of Broadway adjacent to present day City Hall Park before veering east toward the area now known as Foley Square. It then ran north with major branches leading to habitations in Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side at a place called Rechtauck or Naghtogack in the vicinity of Corlears Hook. In 1626, Dutch West India Company Director Peter Minuit “purchased” the island from the Lenape for sixty guilders worth of trade goods.³

Throughout the 17th and most of the 18th centuries the area was open land. A large tract of land, extending from Broadway to the Hudson River, from Fulton Street to Reade Street, and then running irregularly north between the Hudson River and Hudson Street to Christopher Street was owned by Trinity Church. This land had been held by the Dutch West India Company in the early colonial period, before passing to the Crown under British rule. In 1705, the British governor, Lord Cornbury, acting on behalf of Queen Anne, deeded this property to Trinity Church as a means of establishing an endowment for the Church of England in New York State. Trinity at first leased the land to farmers, but in 1760 the Common Council voted to extend Broadway from Ann Street to Reade Street. Envisioning the potential for future development, the church had the portion of the farm south of Reade Street mapped into streets and lots. In 1761, the streets between Fulton and Reade Streets were ceded to the city.

The first phase of urbanization in the area occurred in the late 1780s, as Trinity sold the lots, or more often, leased the lots through long-term leases. Individuals and speculators constructed frame or brick workshops and modest dwellings. About 1806, new leases required leaseholders to erect more substantial brick or brick-clad houses, leading to the area’s transformation within a decade into one of the most desirable residential neighborhoods in the city. Soon after, very wealthy New Yorkers moved to Broadway and the side streets between Barclay and Chambers Streets, and by the 1830s the neighborhood also attracted shops and fashionable hotels, such as the Astor House, (1834, Isaiah Rogers, architect, demolished), at Broadway and Vesey Street. Regardless of whether or not wealthy New Yorkers actually owned slaves, most directly profited from American slavery. In the early 19th century, New York’s ties to the slave system were strengthened by its increased connections to the Southern economy, particularly through its port activities and financial industry. New York merchants also made huge profits from the sale of goods to southerners.⁴

In the 1840s, commercial development increasingly displaced residents along Broadway, making it the city’s primary commercial artery. Chambers Street also experienced commercialization, including the erection of the Girard House (1844-45, within the Tribeca South Historic District), a businessmen’s residential hotel, at No. 125-31.⁵ A. T. Stewart opened the city’s first department store (1845-46, Joseph Trench & Co., architects; 1850-53, Trench & Snook, a New York City Landmark) at Broadway and Chambers.⁶ The Hudson River Railroad, incorporated in 1846, opened its southern terminus in 1851 at the southwest corner of Chambers and Hudson Streets.⁷ With the advent of this railroad, along with the port, the Erie Canal, and New York & Erie Railroad, New York City was provided with a transportation advantage that allowed it to emerge as the country’s leading center of commerce. The streets of Tribeca began to reflect this prosperity. By the mid-1850s, Chambers Street west of Broadway had been

transformed into a thoroughfare of shops, boarding houses, restaurants and hotels. Also in the 1850s, the wholesale drygoods trade (previously located on Pearl Street to the south, until the Fire of 1835) migrated to this area, causing store-and-loft buildings to be constructed for drygoods (and other) merchants. Some of these structures were built for wealthy investors as profitable rental properties. During this period there was a considerable African-American presence in the area,⁸ especially on Duane Street, where the street directory of 1851 indicates that African-Americans lived at 125, 127, 128, 134, 139 and 140 Duane Street.⁹

By 1870, hardware and cutlery merchants, previously centered around Beekman Street, were concentrating around Warren, Chambers, Reade Streets. In 1899, E. Idell Zeisloft wrote in *The New Metropolis* that Chambers Street was an “extremely busy street of diversified interests, the cutlery and hardware trade being the best represented.”¹⁰ (This area remained a center of the wholesale hardware business until the 1960s.) In the first half of the 20th century, the upper stories of the store-and-loft buildings in the area continued in use for wholesale businesses while ground-story storefronts, used as retail space, were frequently altered.

The Site and Early History of the Building

A recorded deed dated May 29, 1790 from Trinity Church to Abraham Wilson¹¹ [sic] granted him a large tract of land that was bounded on the east by Greenwich Street, on the south by Warren Street, on the north by Chambers Street (which had recently been widened), and extended on the west into the Hudson River 200 feet from the low water mark.¹² The 1790 U.S. Census lists an Abraham Wilson living in the West Ward owning two slaves; the 1810 U.S. Census lists an Abraham Wilson living in the 1st Ward owning four slaves. On March 25, 1793 Willson, a merchant, sold the plot of land, measuring 24 feet by 75 feet, upon which the building at 160 Chambers Street is now situated, to Uzal Tuttle, a carpenter.¹³ Tuttle was living in a house erected on the land by 1795.¹⁴ Subsequent owners include Richard Tagart, a teacher, and Sarah Ann Ellet. The census does not indicate that any of the other owners of the property has enslaved persons in their households.

The property was purchased by Samuel Thomson (1784-1850), a noted builder, from Ellet in 1831.¹⁵ Thomson replaced the house in 1832-33 and resided there while his business, Samuel Thomson and Son, was located at 68 Lumber Street (now Trinity Place).¹⁶ Thomson was born in Baltimore and apprenticed as a carpenter in his youth. He moved to New York City in 1804 and became one of the most prosperous builders in the city. His buildings include the former Administration Building at Sailors’ Snug Harbor on Staten Island (a designated New York City Landmark), which was designed by Minard Lafever and built in 1831-33.¹⁷ Thomson was involved with many organizations and was a member of the General Society of Mechanics & Tradesmen of New York City, a director of the Merchants Exchange Bank and New York & Harlem Railroad, and a trustee of the New York Life & Trust Company. Thomson sold the house at 160 Chambers Street to David B. Ogden in 1836,¹⁸ Thomson built himself a large Greek Revival style mansion in Fort Washington (now Inwood) (demolished).¹⁹

David B. Ogden (1775-1849), a prominent lawyer, and his family lived in the house until about 1848. Ogden was born in Morrisania, New York and was known for his numerous appearances arguing important cases before the United States Supreme Court

against such adversaries as Daniel Webster, William Wirt, William Pinkey, and John C. Calhoun.²⁰

David B. Ogden and then his estate continued to own the house after the family moved and it was used as a boarding house by tenants in the 1850s.²¹ A notice of an auction sale in *The New York Times* on January 16, 1854 described it was a “first-class three-story and attic brick dwelling and lot of ground...the house is 24 feet in front by 50 feet in depth, with an addition at the rear; the lot is 24 feet in front and rear by 75 feet in depth.”²² In 1859 the house was sold to William and Jane Robinson, who ran a hotel on the premises.²³

The New York City Police Department in the 19th Century²⁴

In the first half of the 19th century, the number of policemen in New York City remained quite small, despite the growth of the city and the accompanying problems and increase in crime. In 1845, a full-time professional “Day and Night Police” force was established by the state legislature through the Municipal Police Act; in 1853, the force was placed under a Board of Commissioners headed by the mayor. Policing, subject to the influence of local ward politics, was frequently susceptible to corruption. The police were also required to provide a variety of social services, including sheltering the homeless and attending to “drunkards.” In 1857, the Republican-dominated New York State Legislature, intending to wrest control from the city’s Democratic politicians, created the Metropolitan Police District (consisting of New York City and the surrounding counties), headed by a board of gubernatorial appointees. After Democrats regained the majority in the legislature in 1870, the Metropolitan Police District was abolished and the police in New York City returned to local (Tammany Hall) control. By this time, the size of the force had nearly doubled, but the New York City Police Department struggled to keep abreast of the increasing volume and the changed nature of crime that accompanied the phenomenal growth of the city’s population. Due largely to the close connections between policing and politics, the department continued to be “a symbol of corruption in the late nineteenth century and for much of the twentieth.”²⁵ Slow to adopt new methods of communication, the New York police force lagged far behind other cities, and adequate police coverage was thus dependent upon a heavy concentration of police station houses throughout the city.

19th Century Police Station Houses in New York City²⁶

The Municipal Police Act of 1844 divided New York into police precincts according to ward boundaries, and required that each precinct be furnished with a station house. The Metropolitan Police Act of 1857 also required that a suitable station house be furnished for each precinct.²⁷

Most early Manhattan police stations were located in leased buildings, including former residential structures that were adapted by the city to meet basic departmental needs. Around 1854, Chief of Police George W. Matsell complained to the mayor of:

the inadequate accommodations of the station houses, their unsanitary condition and general dilapidation, [so that] an inspection and report of the various station houses were caused to be made, from which it appears that the necessity for reform and improvement was urgent. Chief Matsell, in view of these facts, suggested that two or three eminent architects should

be invited to draw plans for a model station house, and that thereafter all station houses be required to be build according to the plan adopted.²⁸

Although no immediate such action was taken toward a model station house design, an Architect to the New York City Police Department, Nathaniel D. Bush, was appointed in 1862. The *Annual Report* of the Metropolitan Police Board that year further commented on the sorry state of police buildings:

When the station houses of New York and Brooklyn ...were transferred to the Board of Police, many were so out of repair as to be unfit habitations; others were so limited in size, that policemen after serving their tours of duty on post were compelled to occupy beds that had just been vacated by their companions. Several of the stations were designated pest-houses by the police surgeons, so fruitful were they of disease. The cellars of the station-houses were divided into cells for prisoners and lodging rooms for the houseless poor. The latter were crowded nightly to their utmost capacity, and so defective was the ventilation, that the stench from these rooms poisoned the atmosphere of the whole building.²⁹

The Police Department began a concerted effort in the 1860s to secure or build permanent station houses, to renovate existing facilities, to improve health conditions, and to separate prisons and lodging houses from the main buildings by locating them in the rear. One historian of the police department notes, however, that “the city could never keep pace with its geographical expansion and the rate of obsolescence of older buildings... Even though the need was often expressed, New York was behind such cities as Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Boston in providing accommodations for the police.”³⁰ Overcrowding of patrolmen’s quarters and prisons, unsanitary conditions, and adequate ventilation were continual problems in the station houses to the end of the century.

3rd Precinct History, Design and Construction

The police precinct for the 3rd Ward was located at City Hall, along with the precincts for the 2nd and 4th Wards, under the 1844 Municipal Police Act, but was moved to 38 Robinson Street (now Park Row) by 1845. The station house was located at 35 Barclay Street by 1851 and then moved again to 79 Warren Street by 1857. It remained there until moving to 160 Chambers Street in 1863.³¹ The building was purchased by the City of New York from William and Jane Robinson for \$20,000 in 1861 for use as the new station house.³² Soon after moving into the building the 3rd Precinct, under the command of Captain James Greer, participated in the suppression of the Draft Riots of July 13-16, 1863, and several African-American women and their children were given shelter at the station house during the riots.³³

The Annual Report of the Metropolitan Police in 1866, three years after the 3rd Precinct moved to 160 Chambers Street, noted that

The prison of the 3rd Precinct is insufficient size. It is 12 x 24 feet, two stories high, with five cells in the first story, and two lodger’s rooms, 12 x 12 feet in the second story. Neither the cells nor the lodger’s rooms are adequate to the work of the precinct....The station-house was originally a dwelling, 24 feet 8 inches by 50 feet, three stories and attic above the

basement. Although a good building, it is not of sufficient size to accommodate the large force of the precinct. A story should be added to the station-house, and the prison should be rebuilt and enlarged. For this purposes the sum of \$15,000 will be required.³⁴

The Annual Report of 1867 merely states that the station house required extensive repairs, and in part rebuilding, with an addition.³⁵ By the following year, it was noted that “the Board has made a contract for the thorough repair and enlargement of the station house and prison. When finished, the building will be as complete and as well adapted to the use of the Police, as can be constructed on a single lot of land of the dimensions of 25 x 90 feet.”³⁶ In 1868 under the direction of New York Police Department architect, Nathaniel D. Bush, the building was raised to a full five stories with a mansard roof, extended to the rear lot line with the existing rear façade remaining in place, and altered on the exterior and interior.³⁷ The 1869 Annual Report noted that the work was completed and the station house was occupied and proved a sufficient accommodation for the precinct.³⁸ However, by 1871 the precinct station house was noted as being in good condition but “not sufficiently capacious,”³⁹ and in 1875 the 3rd Police Precinct moved to 19 Leonard Street.

In the 1860s and 1870s Nathaniel D. Bush favored the French Second Empire style, then at the height of its popularity in this country. The building at 160 Chambers Street, as enlarged and altered by Bush to serve as the 3rd Precinct station house, is a very fine but simplified example of the style. Although some of the characteristic features of the style, such as composition by pavilions, outlines set off by cast-iron railings, and arcades composed of columns and entablatures,⁴⁰ could not be utilized on a façade that is only 25-foot wide, the building does have the defining characteristic feature of the style, the mansard roof, as well as other characteristic details such as projecting window lintels and pediments, an elaborate cornice below the mansard, and dormer windows. Bush used similar styling three years later on the considerably larger 32nd (later 30th) Police Precinct Station House (1871-72) at 1854 Amsterdam Avenue, a designated New York City Landmark.

Nathaniel D. Bush, Architect⁴¹

Little is known of the background of Nathaniel D. Bush (c. 1821-1897), though he was born in New York State and moved to Brooklyn about 1867. He was appointed Architect to the New York City Police Department in 1862, and became a detective sergeant in the department’s detective squad in March 1867. Bush retired from the force in June 1887, apparently the result of the Police Board of Commissioners’ enforcement of the policy that all men on the force over the age of 60 must retire. Bush moved to Nyack, New York, but returned to Brooklyn by 1894, and continued to be listed in Brooklyn directories as an architect. He was the architect for New York City’s police station houses until April 1895, when the New York Times ran a notice the Bush had “resigned because age has unfitted to perform his duties properly.”⁴² After that, the new police commission under Theodore Roosevelt solicited designs from many architects.⁴³ Bush was buried in Highland Mills, Orange County, New York.

Over the course of three decades, Bush had a significant impact on police station house design in New York City. An observer noted in 1872 that “the new [Bush-designed station house] buildings are models of their kind, and the old ones are being improved as

rapidly as possible.”⁴⁴ From his office in police headquarters at 300 Mulberry Street, Bush had “built, reconstructed or repaired” more than 20 police structures by 1885, when Police Department historian Augustine E. Costello wrote that Bush had

found the Police station houses in a very crude condition. But little had been done in the line of “modern improvements,” and they had been run up, so to speak, to meet pressing emergencies, and without much, if any, regard for the comfort of the men, or the sanitary or architectural advantage of the houses. Mr. Bush went to work at once with characteristic energy, and in a few years our station houses began to put on very different appearances. The old ones were repaired and remodeled, and new ones designed; and thus the work went on until to-day these station houses are models for all others over the United States.⁴⁵

Bush’s earlier designs incorporated simplified versions of several contemporary historical styles, mostly Italianate, Second Empire, and Renaissance Revival. The earliest known extant building by Bush is the 18th Police Precinct Station House (1864-65), 325-27 East 22nd Street, built to replace the one at 163 East 22nd Street that had been destroyed by a crowd during the Draft Riots of July 1863. There are ten known surviving Bush-designed station houses in Manhattan, others include those for: 3rd Precinct at 160 Chambers Street; 5th Precinct (1868), 19-21 Leonard Street (within the Tribeca West Historic District); 10th Precinct (1868), Essex Market, 105-07 [originally 87-89] Eldridge Street; 14th Precinct (1870-71), 205-07 Mulberry Street; 32nd Precinct (later 30th Precinct) (1871-72), 1854 Amsterdam Avenue (a designated New York City Landmark); and 6th Precinct (1881-82), 19-21 Elizabeth Street. Bush’s later station house designs, after the late 1870s, began to depart from his earlier, simpler ones and incorporated elements of the *Rundbogenstil* and the Renaissance Revival and neo-Grec styles. Bush’s most significant design departure was for the 25th Police Precinct Station House (1886-87), 153-155 East 67th Street (a designated New York City Landmark). The Police Department employed this design as a general prototype for at least four later station houses, including those (also extant) for the 28th Precinct (1892-93), 177-79 East 104th Street; and the 8th Precinct (1893-94, altered), 194 Sixth Avenue [originally 24-26 MacDougal Street].⁴⁶

House of Relief

When the Park Hospital, which was located in City Hall Park on Centre Street, closed in 1875 there was a need for a hospital to treat emergency cases in lower Manhattan. The House of Relief, also known as the Chambers Street Hospital and the Hospital for Accidents, was founded and operated by New York Hospital for this purpose. The hospital occupied the building at 160 Chambers Street from July 1875 to November 1894⁴⁷ under a lease with New York City. It treated emergency cases, including accidents and sudden illnesses, provided ambulance services below Canal Street, and operated a dispensary; all services were rendered free of charge. At the time of its move in 1894 the facility at 160 Chambers Street was described by *The New York Times* as “shabby and wholly inadequate,” although the article goes on to state that

Few institutions of the kind in the country have become as famous as the old Chambers Street Hospital. Cases by the thousand have been treated

there. Bridge jumpers, attempted suicides, victims of the Russell Sage bomb thrower, victims of would-be murderers, accident victims, and thousands of patients whose cases have not called for newspaper attention have passed through its doors.⁴⁸

According to the article, as of October 1894 its record was 42,983 ambulance calls, 6,751 general ward patients, 30,917 reception ward patients, and 276,633 dispensary patients.⁴⁹ Although the hospital only had 26 beds,⁵⁰ during its last year at Chambers Street its horse-drawn ambulances made 3,000 calls and more than 65,000 new and returning patient visits were made.⁵¹ In 1894 the hospital moved to a new building at 67-69 Hudson Street (within the Tribeca West Historic District).

Firefighting in New York⁵²

Even in the colonial period, 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 up city. 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, 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.⁵³ Intense competition between companies began to hinder firefighting with frequent brawls and acts of sabotage, often at the scenes of fires. During the Civil War, when fire personnel became harder to retain, public support grew for the creation of a professional firefighting force, similar to that which had been established in other cities and to the professional police force that had been created in New York in 1845.

In May 1865, the New York State Legislature established the Metropolitan Fire District, comprising the cities of New York (south of 86th Street) and Brooklyn. The act abolished the volunteer system and created the Metropolitan Fire Department, a paid professional force under the jurisdiction of the state government. By the end of the year, the city’s 124 volunteer companies with more than 4,000 men had retired or disbanded, to be replaced by 33 engine companies and 12 ladder companies operated by a 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. 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, the department has endeavored to keep up with the evolving city and its firefighting needs.

The first known female firefighter in the United States was Molly Williams, an African American slave who was owned by a New York City merchant, Benjamin Aymar. She was part of the Oceanus Engine Company No.11 in 1818 and was known as Volunteer no. 11. In 1898 the first male African-American, William H. Nicholson, joined the paid fire department in New York City. Robert O. Lowery was appointed the first African-American Fire Commissioner of the FDNY, a position he held from 1966 to 1973. In 1982 the first paid female firefighters joined the department.⁵⁴ On March 18, 2014 New York City settled a lawsuit that accused the FDNY of racial bias.⁵⁵

Fire Engine Company 29

Fire Engine Company 29 was organized on October 20, 1865 as a volunteer fire company and was initially located at 304 Washington Street. The Engine Company and Hook and Ladder Company 10 were located at 193 Fulton Street from August 30, 1866 to March 29, 1897, except for two brief periods when their quarters were being remodeled. On March 29, 1897 Fire Engine Company 29 moved to 160 Chambers Street, which had been vacant since the Hospital of Relief left in 1894, and remained there until it was disbanded on January 1, 1947, while Hook and Ladder Company 10 continued to occupy 193 Fulton Street.⁵⁶ The entrance to 160 Chambers Street was widened with new brick piers from the foundation to the second story to prepare the building to house the fire engine company; the work commenced on November 5, 1896 and was completed on March 31, 1897.⁵⁷ The fire engine company sign above the entrance (“29 Engine 29”) remains.

Subsequent History

The Uniformed Fire Officers Association occupied the building after Engine Company 29 was disbanded until 1962⁵⁸ when the City, after owning the property for 100 years, sold it to the 160 Chambers St. Corp. The building was used as a lumber yard at the cellar, first and second stories with the third through fifth stories vacant from 1967 to 1973; the uses remained the same after 1973 except at the first story, which was used as private parking for four trucks.⁵⁹ The building became residential at the upper stories with commercial at the first story in 1983. It was at this time that a penthouse with skylights was added above the mansard roof.⁶⁰

Report prepared by
Cynthia Danza
Research Department

NOTES

¹ This item was previously heard at a public hearing on September 19, 1989 (LP-1720) (Item No. 6).

² This section is adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *Swift, Seaman & Co. Building Designation Report* (LP-2061), (New York: City of New York, 2000) prepared by Jay Shockley, and LPC, *Tribeca South Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1712), (New York: City of New York, 1992), prepared by Gale Harris, Elisa Urbanelli, and Kevin McHugh.

³ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5-23; Historian R. P. Bolton speculates that the land of lower Manhattan may have been occupied by the Mareckawick group of the Canarsee which occupied Brooklyn and the East River islands. Upper Manhattan was occupied by the Reckgawawanc. The Native American “system of land tenure was that of occupancy for the needs of a group” and that those sales that the Europeans deemed outright transfers of property were to the Native American closer to leases or joint tenancy contracts where they still had rights to the property. The Weckquaesgeek fled to Rehtauck/Naghtogack to escape the Mohawks only to be massacred by order of Willem Kieft of the Dutch West India Company. Reginald Pelham Bolton, *New York City in Indian Possession*, 2d ed. (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1920; reprint, 1975), 7, 14-15, 79; Robert Steven Grumet, *Native American Place Names in New York City* (New York: Museum of the City of New York, 1981), 69.

⁴ Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris, eds., *Slavery in New York* (New York: The New Press, 2005), 22.

⁵ Girard House, one of New York’s oldest surviving hotel buildings, was expanded in 1852-53 and 1867-69 and renamed the Cosmopolitan Hotel; and was altered in 1987-89.

⁶ The Stewart store was further expanded in 1872, 1884, and 1921.

⁷ The terminus was removed from this location in 1867 when a new one was built at St. John’s Park.

⁸ African-American communities were established in this general area by the end of the 18th century. The first church constructed in New York for a black congregation was the Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church, built 1800 at the southwest corner of Leonard and Church Streets. By 1860 the 5th Ward, extending from Reade Street to Canal Street west of Broadway, had the second largest black population in the City.

⁹ LPC, *Tribeca South Historic District Designation Report*, 9; *Doggett’s New York City Street Directory for 1851* identifies residents in these buildings on Duane Street as “colored.”

¹⁰ E. Idell Zeisloft, *The New Metropolis* (New York, 1899), 603.

¹¹ His last name appears as Willson and Wilson. A primary source for slave ownership information is the census records. A search of the 1790, 1800, 1810 and 1820 U.S. Census for the individual owners of the property prior to 1861 found an Abraham Wilson living in the West Ward in 1790 as owning two slaves and an Abraham Wilson living in the 1st Ward in 1810 as owning four slaves. The 1790 Hodge, Allen & Campbell City Directory has an Abraham Wilfon [sic] at Queen’s Ware Manufactory, Vauxhall and an Abraham Wilfon, jun. at 8 Murray. Later directories list Abraham Wilfon as a fur merchant and Abraham Wilfon, jun. as a potter. In the 1810 Longworth City Directory has an Abraham Willson, furr [sic] merchant, at 121 Broad Street with a home address of 9 Front Street.

¹² This deed states that Wilson [sic] was already in possession of the land under an Indenture dated August 1, 1789 that covered other land as well. This earlier indenture is not recorded but it appears that the block upon which 160 Chambers Street is situated may have been included in the other lands he possessed and had obtained from Trinity Church. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, deed dated May 29, 1790, recorded July 31, 1793, from Rector and Inhabitants of the City of New York in communion of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the State of New York to Abraham Wilson [sic], Liber 49, page 164.

¹³ Deed recorded May 10, 1793, Liber 49, page 66.

¹⁴ Ducan New York City Directory, 1795. The house number changed from 88 to 146 between 1808 and 1809 and changed again from 146 to 160 between 1827 and 1828. New York City Tax Assessments.

¹⁵ Deed recorded August 16, 1809 from Uzal and Susan Tuttle to Richard Tagart, Liber 83, page 516; deed recorded March 17, 1823 from Executors of Richard Tagart to Sarah Ann Ellet, Liber 164, page 328; deed recorded May 5, 1831 from Sarah Ann Ellet to Samuel Thomson, Liber 273, page 158. The tax assessments indicate that this building remained until being replaced by Samuel Thompson in 1832-33, although there was an increase in the assessment in 1815, the surrounding houses also had their assessment increased at this time.

¹⁶ The 1831 tax assessment notes that the house and lot have a valuation of \$4,500, in 1832 Samuel Thompson appears as the owner and the lot is valued at \$5,000 but there is no notation that there is a house on the lot, and in the 1833 assessment there is a house and lot valued at \$15,000. The Longworth Directories for 1833/34 and 1835/36 list Samuel Thomson as living at 160 Chambers with his business located at 68 Lumber Street. The 1835/36 directory also lists John Thomson, dry goods, as living in the house with a business address of 48 Maiden Lane.

¹⁷ Thomson also designed buildings and in 1833 he submitted a design for the new Custom House (now Federal Hall National Monument, a designated New York City Landmark) to be built at the corner of Wall and Nassau Streets. The firm of Town & Davis initially received the award but design was rejected prior to construction and Thomson redesigned the building in 1834 although he resigned a year later in a dispute over his compensation.

¹⁸ Deed from Samuel and Ann Thomson to David B. Ogden recorded August 8, 1836, Liber 364, page 264.

¹⁹ Information about Samuel Thomson is from Geoffrey Carter, "Samuel Thomson: Prolific New York Builder," *Preservation League on New York State Newsletter*, Fall 1991, 4-5.

²⁰ He was trustee of Columbia College from 1814 to 1845, Surrogate of New York County from 1840 to 1844, and vestryman of Trinity Church from 1845 to 1849. Information about David B. Ogden is from Arthur Lowndes, ed., *Archives of the General Convention*, vol. IV, *The Correspondence of John Henry Hobart*, (New York, 1912), 520; James Parker, compiled, *Historical Sketches of Parishes Represented in the Conventions of the Protestant Episcopal Church in New Jersey 1785-1816*, (New York, John Polhemus, 1889), 71.

²¹ According to the 1851 Doggett Street Directory, Sophia L. Wait operated a boarding house on the premises and according to a February 7, 1853 article in *The New York Times* ("New-York City. Suicide in Chambers-Street," page 5) Mrs. Grace A. Francis operated a boarding house on the premises.

²² "Auction Sales," *New York Times*, January 16, 1854, 6.

²³ Deed from Euphemia M. and Fanny L. Ogden to William and Jane Robinson recorded March 28, 1859, Liber 870, page 264. Trow's City Directories 1859 – 1862.

²⁴ This section is taken almost in its entirety from LPC, 28th *Police Precinct Station House Designation Report* (LP-2034) (New York: City of New York, 1999) prepared by Jay Shockley.

²⁵ "Police," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, Kenneth T. Jackson, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 912.

²⁶ This section is taken almost in its entirety from 28th *Police Precinct Station House Designation Report*.

²⁷ The police station house of the mid- and late-19th century served a variety of functions. The office of the captain and the sergeant's desk were located on the first floor, with sleeping accommodations provided on the upper floors for patrolmen who customarily worked long shifts. Each precinct had a small cell block, as well as (after 1857) lodging rooms for the homeless. In 1896, Police Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt removed the responsibility of housing the homeless from the police.

²⁸ Augustine E. Costello, *Our Police Protectors, A History of the New York Police* (New York: A. E. Costello, 1885), 133.

- ²⁹ Annual Report of the Metropolitan Police, 1862, 3.
- ³⁰ James F. Richardson, *The New York Police: Colonial Times to 1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 169.
- ³¹ Costello, various pages.
- ³² Deed from William and Jane Robinson to the Mayor, Aldermen and Commonalty of the City of New York recorded February 1, 1862, Liber 849, page 532. Included in the appropriation at that time was \$1,670 to William E. Berrien for building a prison for the 3rd Precinct Station House. Annual Report of the Comptroller, 1863, 319.
- ³³ “The Metropolitan Police, Their Services During The Riot Week. Their Honorable Service,” *New York Times*, August 6, 1863, 3; David M. Barnes, *The Draft Riots in New York. July 1868. The Metropolitan Police: Their Services During Riot Week. Their Honorable Record* (New York: Baker & Godwin, 1868), 36-38.
- ³⁴ Annual Report of the Metropolitan Police, 1866, 4-5.
- ³⁵ Annual Report of the Metropolitan Police, 1867, 6.
- ³⁶ Annual Report of the Metropolitan Police, 1868, 5.
- ³⁷ New York City Department of Buildings, Manhattan, ALT 106-1868. The docket book indicates that the building was four stories and attic with a basement and it was being raised to a full five stories with a mansard roof. If this is accurate then the building was already raised one story prior to this alteration.
- ³⁸ Annual Report of the Metropolitan Police, 1869, 5.
- ³⁹ First Annual Report of the Police Department of the City of New York, 1871, Exhibit 12, 57; reprinted in Costello, 248.
- ⁴⁰ Alan Gowans, *Styles and Types of North American Architecture: Social Function and Cultural Expression* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 192.
- ⁴¹ This section is taken almost in its entirety from 28th *Police Precinct Station House Designation Report*.
- ⁴² “Police Architect Bush Resigns,” *New York Times*, April 24, 1895, 9.
- ⁴³ John DuFais’ design for the new 9th Police Precinct Station House (1896-97), 133-37 Charles Street, (within the Greenwich Village Historic District Extension) was the first selected under this system.
- ⁴⁴ James D. McCabe, Jr., *Lights and Shadows of New York Life; or the Sights and Sensations of the Great City* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), reprint of 1872 edition, 179.
- ⁴⁵ Costello, 452.
- ⁴⁶ Only two of Bush’s station house buildings remain in police use today, the 25th (now 19th) Police Precinct Station House, 153-55 East 67th Street, and the 6th (now 5th) Police Precinct House, 19-21 Elizabeth Street. Among the now-demolished station houses designed or “rebuilt” by Bush were those for: the 8th Precinct (1868), 128 Prince Street; the 31st Precinct (1869), 134 [originally 434] West 100th Street; the 29th Precinct (1869), 137-39 West 30th Street; the 4th Precinct (1870), 9-11 Oak Street; the 27th Precinct (1870), 9 Church Street; the 20th Precinct (1870), 434-36 West 37th Street; the 12th Precinct (1870), 146-48 East 126th Street; the 23rd Precinct (1873), 432-34 East 88th Street; the 19th Precinct (1877), 163 East 51st Street; the 30th Precinct (1879), 270 West 126th Street; and the First Precinct (1884), Old Slip.
- ⁴⁷ Christel Haesicke, “Finding Aid to the Records of the House of Relief, New York Hospital,” Medical Center Archives of New York-Presbyterian Hospital, November 2012.
- ⁴⁸ “The New House of Relief,” *New York Times*, November 8, 1894, 9.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ “Letter from New York,” *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, XCVII (July-December 1877), 433.

⁵¹ “New Emergency Hospital,” *New York Herald*, July 1, 1894, 12.

⁵² This section is taken almost in its entirety from LPC, *Fire House, Hook and Ladder 17 Designation Report* (LP-2046), prepared by Virginia Kurshan (New York: City of New York, 2000).

⁵³ 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.

⁵⁴ Information about Molly Williams, William H. Nicholson, and Robert O. Lowery is from the History of the Vulcan Society, <http://www.vulcansocietyfdny.org/History.html>; and information about William H. Nicholson and women firefighter is from New York City Fire Museum Teacher’s Guide, <http://www.nycfiremuseum.org/TeachersRG.pdf>.

⁵⁵ “New York City Settles Lawsuit Accusing Fire Dept. of Racial Bias,” *New York Times*, March 19, 2014, A17.

⁵⁶ Fire Company Locations of New York City compiled by Mike Boucher, <http://nyfd.com/cityhist.pdf>.

⁵⁷ ALT 843-1896. All interior partitions were removed as part of the work performed under this alteration application. In addition to removing the stoop and altering the masonry openings at the basement and first story, it appears that the brick façade at the first story was replaced with stone. No architect is noted in the DOB records for this alterations; the architectural firm of Napoleon LeBrun & Sons were the official architects for the NYFD between 1880 and 1895.

⁵⁸ New York Telephone Company Address Directories.

⁵⁹ New York City Department of Buildings, Manhattan, Certificate of Occupancy No. 64404 dated May 5, 1967, New York Telephone Company Address Directories, ALT 337-1965, Certificate of Occupancy No. 73269 dated April 17, 1973. The lot numbers of 160 and 162 Chambers Street changed between 1969 and 1977. No. 160 Chambers Street was originally lot 26 and No. 162 was lot 25, No. 160 is now lot 25 and No. 162 is lot 26. See various deeds dated 1969, 1971 and 1977 for lots 25 and 26.

⁶⁰ Certificate of Occupancy No. 83707 dated June 15, 1983. ALT 387-1978, date of completion June 13, 1983.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the (Former) Firehouse, Engine Company 29 has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and culture characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the (Former) Firehouse, Engine Company 29 has served a variety of private and public uses since the early 19th century; that it is one of the city's earliest surviving police stations; and that it is an early and an important reminder of the development of Chambers Street and southern Tribeca that it was built as a three-story residence by Samuel Thomson, a noted builder, c. 1832-33; that in 1836 David B. Ogden, a prominent lawyer, purchased the house and lived here until about 1848; that the building attained its present appearance as the result of several alterations; that New York City purchased the building in 1862 to serve as the 3rd Police Precinct Station House; that it was raised to five stories, including a mansard roof, and altered in the Second Empire style, in 1868 for the 3rd Precinct by Nathaniel D. Bush, the official architect of the New York City Police Department; that the building served as the 3rd Police Precinct Station House until 1875; that the House of Relief, a hospital under the charge of New York Hospital, was located here from 1875 until 1894; that in 1896 the building was further altered at the first story to house the New York City Fire Department Engine Company 29; that Engine Company 29 occupied the building from 1897 to 1947; that the City retained ownership until 1962, and from 1947 to 1962 the Uniformed Fire Officers Association occupied the building; that it was converted to commercial use in 1967 and since the mid-1980s it has had commercial use at the ground story with residential units above; that while the relatively narrow width of the building recalls its early residential character, the height and design of the facade signals the building's later civic uses; that significant characteristic features of the building include the large, recessed central opening, upper story windows capped with projecting pediments or lintels, the consoled and denticulated fourth-story cornice and mansard roof with two dormers; that the Former Firehouse, Engine Company 29 remains mostly intact since its 1868 and 1896 alterations.

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 (Former) Firehouse, Engine Company 29, 160 Chambers Street, Manhattan, and designated Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 137, Lot 25, as its Landmark Site.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair

Frederick Bland, Wellington Chen, Michael Devonshire, Michael Goldblum, Jeanne Lufty, Adi Shamir-Baron, Commissioners

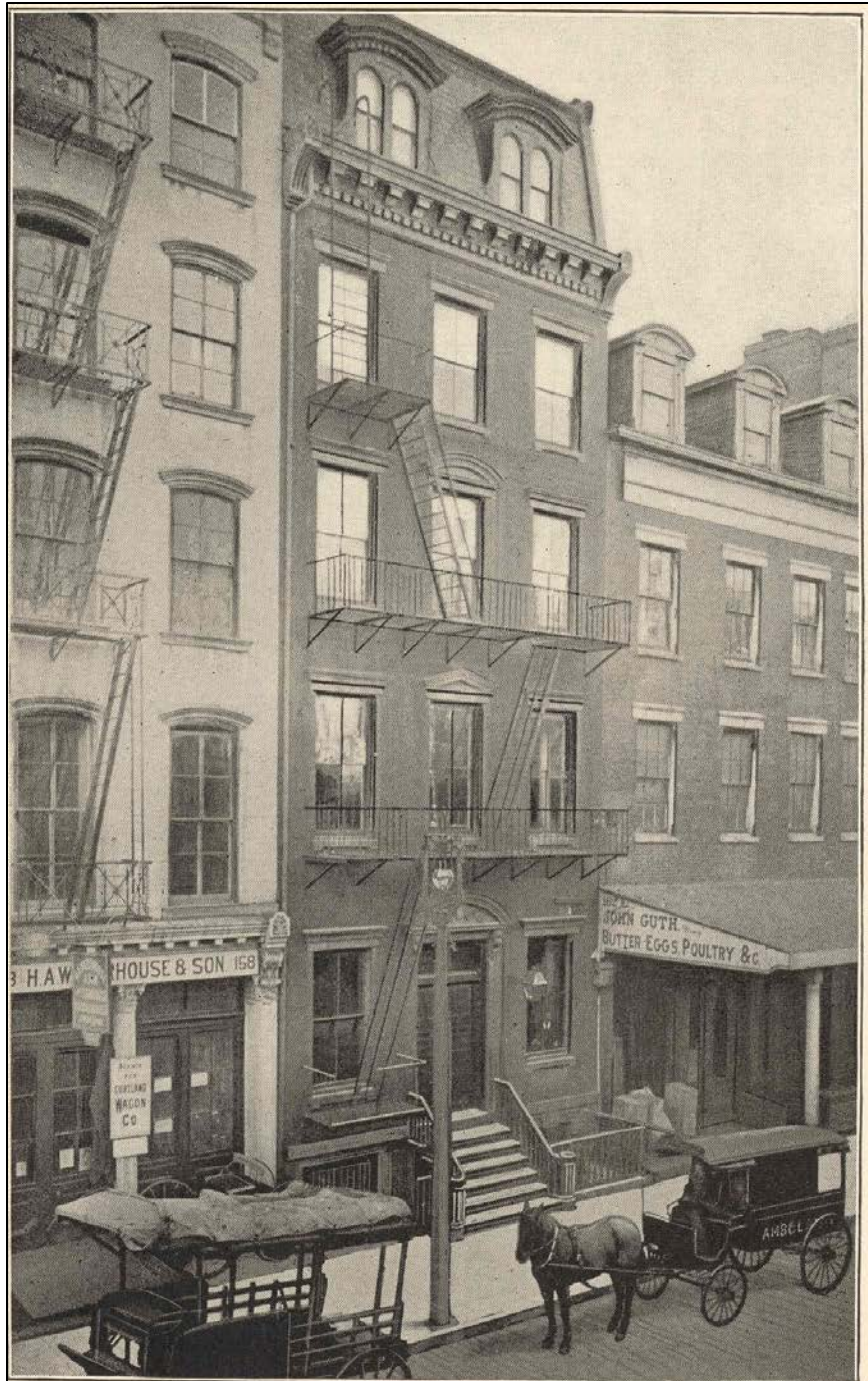


Main Façade of (Former) Firehouse, Engine Company 29, 160 Chambers Street,
Manhattan

Photo: Sarah Moses June 2016



Main Façade from West
Photo: Sarah Moses, 2016



HOUSE OF RELIEF (FORMERLY POLICE STATION),
160 CHAMBERS STREET.
1875-1894.

House of Relief (160 Chambers Street) c. 1893
Courtesy of Medical Center Archives of New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell



Detail of Mansard Roof and Upper Stories
Photo: Cynthia Danza, 2013

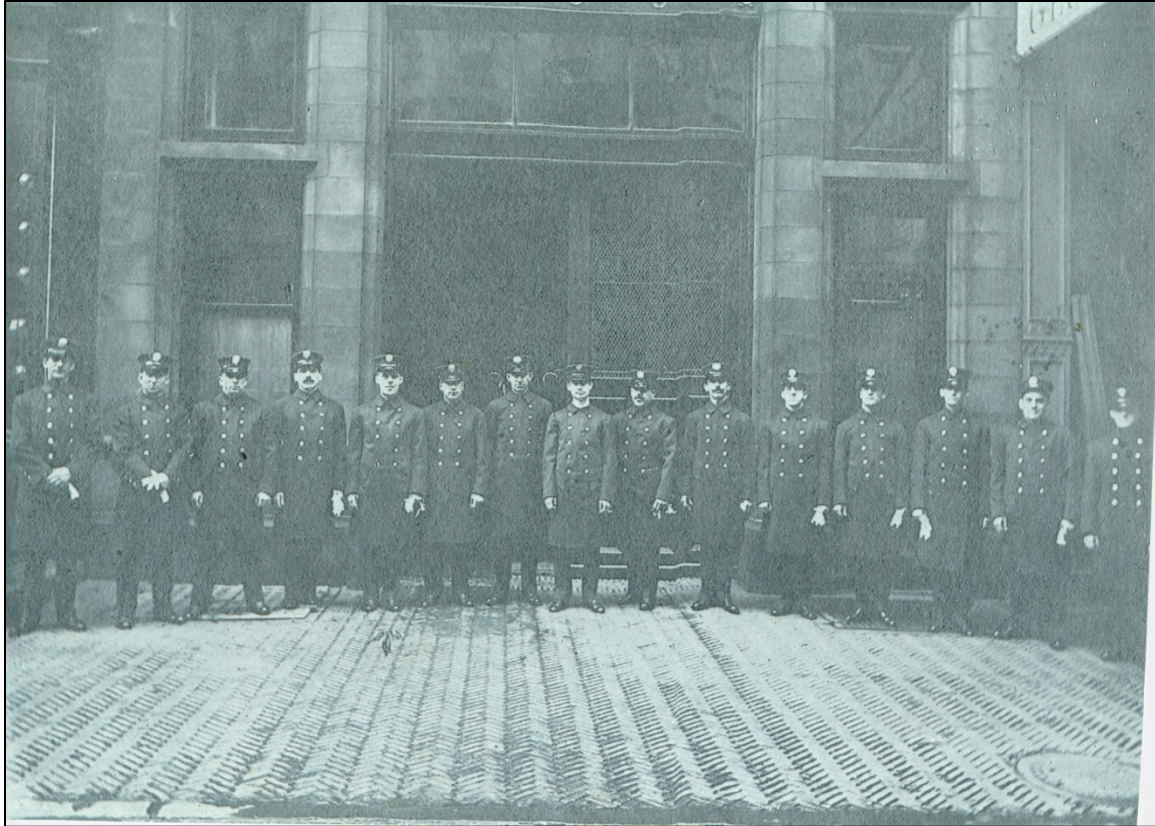


Detail of Windows
Photo: Cynthia Danza, 2013



Detail of Base

Photo: Christopher Brazee, May 2014



Firehouse, Engine Company 29, Date Unknown
Courtesy of George F. Mand Library, FDNY Fire Academy

