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Fire Patrol House
240 West 30th Street
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The building at 240 West 30th Street in Manhattan was designed by D'Oench and Simon for the Fire Patrol and has been used as a fire patrol station for over 100 years.¹ It was built by the Board of Fire Underwriters in 1894-5 and opened on September 12, 1895 as the firehouse for Fire Patrol #3. It is now designated Fire Patrol #1. The four-story, three-bay masonry firehouse is rectangular in plan with a flat roof. There is a two-story, three-bay stable at the rear of the lot, used to house two horses as well as feed and hay. The firehouse is located in mid-block on a commercial street of two-twenty story masonry buildings dating mainly from the late 19th to the mid-20th century.

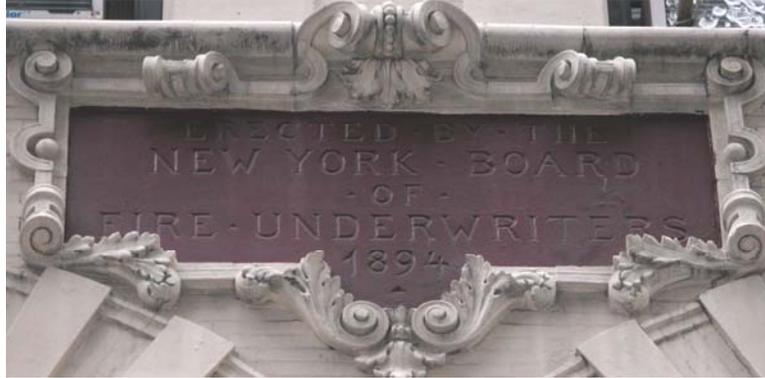
The building was considered a good example of a modern firehouse at the time. The New York Times in 1895 wrote that great “care in regard to details of construction has been shown everywhere in the building.... On the first floor the latest patterns of fire-alarm instruments have been put in and every known device that can lessen the time of leaving the building has been adopted.”²



On the inside, there were five sliding brass poles (two survive). One pole near the driver's bed landed him right in the seat of the fire wagon. On the second floor, each fireman had a brass bed. There was a sitting room and a billiard room.³

The building was designed in the eclectic Flemish Revival style. The buff brick façade has a classically inspired first floor. A molded cornice is supported by engaged columns. The cornice projects at the characteristic center vehicle entry, which is also marked by flanking Doric columns. The first floor, now painted red, is Indiana limestone with a granite base. The upper floors are buff brick with raised limestone bands.

The windows have ornamental terra cotta pediments, different on each floor. The large arched window on the top floor balances the classical base at the first floor. There is an ornate stone plaque between the second and third floors: "ERECTED BY THE NEW YORK BOARD OF FIRE UNDERWRITERS 1894."



The building originally had a Flemish gable and a peaked roof behind. This was replaced by a stepped parapet and flat roof. While not as imposing as the Flemish gable, the stepped parapet balances the base and provides a counterpoint to the arched top window. The doors are non-historic, as are the windows except for the top floor. The rear façade is brick, now painted. The large arched center door leading to the rear stables remains, although partially bricked up. The two-story brick rear building has segmentally arched window openings, a later exterior metal stair and replacement doors.

Left: former Fire Patrol #3, NY Times 9/11/1895

Below left: rear façade
Below right: stable



Architects

The architectural firm of Albert F. D'Oench (1853?-1918) and Albert B. Simon, designed at least two fire patrol buildings, the former #3 at 240 West 30th and #5 at 307 West 121st Street. Albert D'Oench studied architecture at Brooklyn Polytechnic. He practiced architecture from 1876 until his retirement in 1916. He formed D'Oench & Simon in about 1889. The firm lasted until 1900 when D'Oench partnered with Joseph W. Yost.

D'Oench served as Superintendent of Buildings in New York City under Mayor Grace, his father-in-law. He was an instructor at the first training school for firemen when it opened in 1892. In addition to the fire patrol buildings, he designed a number of large office buildings in Manhattan, including the Landmark Germania Life Insurance Company Building (D'Oench & Yost, 1910-11.⁴ He was a member of the Architectural League.

Fire Patrol

The Fire Patrol is New York City's oldest private fire fighting institution and possibly the oldest in the nation. It was founded by the insurance companies to save property. The present institution was founded in 1854 although the fire patrol dates to the early 19th century.⁵ The charter called for providing "a patrol of men, and a competent person to act as superintendent, to discover and prevent fires, with suitable apparatus to save and preserve property or life at and after a fire..."⁶

Private fire-fighting institutions funded by insurance companies were believed to have started in Philadelphia, with Benjamin Franklin playing a part. They were some of the first fire fighting forces. They operated in the major cities in the country throughout the 19th and part of the 20th century. Today, the fire patrol in New York City represents the last operating insurance company funded fire fighting force.

There were numerous fire patrol stations in New York City the 19th century but today there are just 3 operating fire patrol houses: Fire Patrol #1 at 240 East 30th Street (D'Oench & Simon, 1904-5), Fire Patrol #2 at 84 West 3rd Street (Franklin Baylis, 1906), both in Manhattan, and Fire Patrol #3 at 12 Dean Street (1909) in Brooklyn. They are funded by the New York Board of Fire Underwriters, which just announced this September that funding will cease in October. The Fire Patrol stations are now endangered buildings.

340 West 30th Street is significant for its history as a continuously operating fire patrol station for over 100 years as well as for its architecture, with its handsome eclectic style façade, ornate terra cotta and limestone ornament, characteristic wide center vehicle door, and rare rear brick stable. The Fire Patrol itself is significant as one of the earliest and the last remaining private firefighting institutions.



*Fire Patrol Building #2
84 West 3rd Street*

Notes

¹ This report was written by Mary Dierickx with research by Katie McLaughlin and additional information from the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation and the sources below.

² *New York Times*, 9/11/1895.

³ Op. cit.

⁴ Dennis Steadman Francis, *Architects in Practice in New York City 1840-1900*, New York: COPAR, 1979; *New York Times*, “Gothic a Lost Style” 12/4/1888; “A New Fire Patrol House” 1/31/1892; “Training School for Firemen” 10/23/1892; “Albert F. D’Oench Dies” 7/22/1918.

⁵ Kenneth Jackson, ed., *Encyclopedia of New York City*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, p.411, New York Board of Fire Underwriter’s website www.nybfu.org. The Fire Underwriters state that “The Fire Patrol can trace its beginnings back to 1803, when the Mutual Assistance and Bag Corporation was formed by a group of volunteers to protect and preserve the contents of buildings from fire and water damage.”

⁶ Moses King, *King’s Handbook of New York*, p. 594-95.