



The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

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COMMISSION BESTOWS LANDMARK STATUS ON 124-YEAR-OLD FORMER EAST HARLEM FIREHOUSE

Napoleon LeBrun & Sons' Fire Engine Company No. 53, a Symbol of New York City's Growth in the Late 19th Century, Is Cited for Its Handsome Design, Materials and Details

The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission today voted unanimously to give landmark status to Fire Engine Company No. 53, a four-story Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival-style building in East Harlem that was one of 42 firehouses and related structures designed for the City's Fire Department by the prominent architecture firm Napoleon LeBrun & Sons between 1879 and 1895.



"This engine company was among the first of the handsome and highly functional buildings designed by LeBrun & Sons that set the standard for firehouse construction in New York City," said Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney. "The building's marvelous details and design remain intact, and recall the days when horses, and later fire trucks, charged out of the main entrance to save lives and properties."

Located at 175 E. 104th St., Fire Engine Company No. 53 was constructed between 1883 and 1884, and covered the area bounded by Fifth and First avenues and 96th and 116th streets. The fire company moved into the building in January 1885, and responded to approximately 154 fires in the district during its first year of operation.

The Fire Department commissioned LeBrun & Sons in 1880 to be the lead architect for a major campaign to construct dozens of distinctively designed firehouses as part of an effort by the FDNY to establish a strong municipal presence in the City, which was in the early stages of a period of intensive growth. The firm introduced such design innovations as indoor horse stalls on the ground floor and hose drying towers.

Fire Engine Company No. 53, a four-story brick building, is comprised of a cast-iron base with a wide entrance, and features decorative motifs such as torches, terra cotta sunflowers and sunbursts, and a pair of small pediments that are supported by corbelled brick brackets. The façade is virtually identical to that of a former firehouse at 304 W. 47th St.,



More

in Manhattan, which also was designed by Napoleon LeBrun & Sons and was nominated earlier this year for New York City landmark status. A vote on the proposed designation is expected at a later date.

Napoleon LeBrun, the son of French immigrants, established his architecture practice in Philadelphia in 1841, and relocated it to New York City in 1864. The firm is responsible for a number of churches in Manhattan, as well as several office buildings, including Metropolitan Life's headquarters at 1 Madison Ave. and the Home Life Insurance Company Building, both of which are New York City landmarks.

Engine Company 53 was used as a fire station until 1974, and is now owned by Manhattan Community Access Corporation, a local cable television station.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission is the mayoral agency responsible for protecting and preserving New York City's architecturally, historically and culturally significant buildings and sites. Since its creation in 1965, LPC has granted landmark status to more than 25,000 buildings, including 1,206 individual landmarks, 110 interior landmarks, 10 scenic landmarks and 92 historic districts in all five boroughs.