

32nd Police Precinct Station House

Individual Landmark

1854 Amsterdam Avenue

Designation Date: August 13, 2002



Former 30th Police Precinct Station House, Nathaniel Bush, 1871-72. New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission 32nd Police Precinct Station House Designation Report. Photo by Ed Mohylowski

The 32nd Police Precinct Station House was built as part of a citywide reconstruction and renovation campaign to modernize police facilities, and was often cited in its day as one of the finest of the new station houses. New York City was first divided into precincts by an 1844 law, which also required that each precinct be furnished with a station house. Some stations were set up in buildings originally intended for other uses, while others, hastily erected “without much, if any, regard for the comfort of the men, or the sanitary or architectural advantage of the houses,” were quickly judged obsolete. By the early 1860s the Police Department had retained an official full-time architect, Nathaniel D. Bush, with offices at Police Headquarters on Mulberry Street. Bush “went to work with characteristic energy and in a few years [the] station houses began to put on a very different appearance.”

Over the course of two decades Bush was to design more than 20 new or renovated station houses. These larger and more architecturally commanding buildings reflected not only the growth and prosperity of the city, but also the increased professionalism of its police force. Before the act of 1844, the majority of the city's law enforcers—nicknamed “Old Leatherheads” for their fireman-like varnished hats, or “Coppers” for their star-shaped badges—had daytime jobs and only served alternate nights on watch duty. The first attempt, in the early 1840s, to introduce full uniform met with hostile opposition. The uniform, patterned after that of London's renowned Metropolitan Police, and likened to livery, was deemed “undemocratic”, while the many Irishmen on the force resented its English connotations.

The reorganized, and now uniformed, police force was larger, more selective in its hiring policy and better trained, but was frequently criticized, as had been its predecessor, as a tool of political partisanship. Ostensibly to correct this condition, but in reality to shift control from the city Democrats to the state Republicans, the New York City Police were placed under the jurisdiction of the state-run Metropolitan Police District, by a state legislative act in 1857. This District included Westchester County, and beginning in 1866, the 32nd Precinct had substations in Yonkers and West Farms. These were retained until 1871, the year after the Tweed Charter returned control of the Police Department to the city.

These political machinations apparently had no effect on the architectural improvement campaign, and architect Bush, who had been appointed by the Metropolitan Police District commissioners, retained his position in the ensuing Democratically-controlled years. In 1876 he was even appointed to sergeant.

[Read the full NYC LPC designation report here.](#)