

53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station

16-12 Mott Avenue, Queens
Tax Map Block 15557 Lot 4

Built: 1927-28

Architect: Thomas E. O'Brien

Style: Renaissance Revival/Colonial Revival

Proposed Action: Proposed for Calendaring March 13, 2018



53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station and Garage, Mott Avenue Facade, LPC, 2018

Located on Mott Avenue in Far Rockaway's commercial center, the 53rd (now 101st) Precinct Police Station is a stately structure recalling Far Rockaway's transition from a summer resort to year-round community and its integration into Greater New York City. Prior to this station's opening in 1928, the 53rd Precinct occupied a wood-framed former dwelling that was inadequate for a growing Police force. The new station house, by contrast, exuded a sense of dignity and permanence, reflecting an ongoing effort by New York City—which had absorbed Far Rockaway in 1898—to extend modern municipal services to its remotest areas.

The building's architect, Thomas E. O'Brien, was the Police Department's Superintendent of Buildings. Originally a carpenter, he joined the force as a patrolman in 1890 and was later promoted to sergeant and lieutenant. During his time as an officer, O'Brien took night classes in architecture at the Cooper Union, and was said to have been appointed department architect at the personal urging of then-Police Superintendent Theodore Roosevelt.

The 53rd Precinct Police Station is located four blocks east of the Far Rockaway train station, at the corner of Mott Avenue and Scott A. Gadell (formerly Mott) Place. Five bays wide on its main facade and seven bays wide on its west facade, 53rd Precinct Police Station recalls a Renaissance palazzo featuring a granite base, rusticated ground story with stepped-arch openings, classical second-floor window surrounds with alternating angular and segmental pediments, projecting quoins, and a heavy modillioned terra-cotta cornice. Flanking the main entrance are its original bronze lamps below a carved tablet containing the city seal. The second and third stories are faced in Harvard brick laid in Dutch or English cross bond characteristic of the Colonial Revival style.

An original one-story garage faced in granite and terra cotta is connected to the station facing Mott Avenue. Originally housing four police cars, it reflects the growing importance of motor vehicles in patrol work by the 1920s, especially in large, semi-rural precincts like Far Rockaway's. Around 1930, the 53rd Precinct was renamed the 101st, and today, the well-preserved station and garage remain in use by the New York Police Department's 101st Precinct. Little changed from the time of its opening 90 years ago, this building continues to recall a significant period in the development of the Rockaways and remains one of the peninsula's most prominent civic structures.

