	FEBO	Z 1993
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form	NATIO REGI	
This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and district National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete ex- by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documenter architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcated entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word pr	ach item by marking d, enter "N/A" for " gories from the instru	"x" in the appropriate box or not applicable." For functions, uctions. Place additional
1. Name of Property		
historic name <u>Plainfield Central Fire Headquarters</u>		
other names/site number		
2. Location		<u> </u>
street & number 315 Central Avenue	NA	not for publication
city or town <u>Plainfield</u>		_ 🗆 vicinity
state <u>New Jersey</u> code <u>034</u> county <u>Union</u>	code _039_	zip code <u>07061</u>
3. State/Federal Agency Certification	<u> </u>	
☐ nationally ☐ statewide I locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.) Assistant Commissioner for Natural & Historic Resources Signature of certifying official file (//LS/i) Date //LS/i) Date State of Federal agency and bureau In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ storments.)	s/DSHPO	et for additional
Signature of certifying official/Title Date	_	
State or Federal agency and bureau		
4. National Park Service Certification		
4. National Park Service Certification I hereby certify that the property is: Signature of the Keeper Pentered in the National Register. See continuation sheet. I determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet. I determined not eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet. I determined not eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet. I determined not eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet. I removed from the National Register. See continuational Register.	Intered in the Hational Reg	
ther, (explain:)		

NPS Form 10-900 (Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service



EED 02 1002

NJ Union County County and State

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Res (Do not include pre	sources within Proper aviously listed resources in t	'ty he count.)
private	🛛 building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing	
⊠ public-local □ public-State	☐ district ∏ site	1	0	buildings
public-Federal				sites
	object			structures
				objects
		1	0	Total
Name of related multiple p (Enter "N/A" if property is not part	roperty listing of a multiple property listing.)	Number of cor in the National	ntributing resources p Register	reviously listed
N/A		0		
6. Function or Use				
Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)		Current Function: (Enter categories from	-	
GOVERNMENT/fire sta	tion	GOVERNMENT/f	ire station	
tehnson over				
				• • •
e		·		
7. Description				
Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)		Materials (Enter categories from	instructions)	
LATE 19th & 20th CEN	TURY REVIVALS:	foundation <u>conc</u>	rete	
	-Georgian Revival	walls <u>brick</u>	·	
		sandst	one	
		roof asphalt		
				the management of the

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significan

- X A Property is associated a significant contribut our history.
- **B** Property is associated significant in our past
- **C** Property embodies the of a type, period, or r represents the work o high artistic values, o distinguishable entity individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, information important

- \Box **A** owned by a religious religious purposes.
- **B** removed from its orig
- **C** a birthplace or grave.
- **D** a cemetery.

Record # _

- E a reconstructed buildi
- **F** a commemorative pro
- G less than 50 years of within the past 50 year

NJ Union County County and State

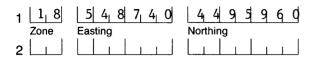
a. Statement of Significance			
Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property	Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)		
for National Register listing.)	Community Development		
A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.	_Architecture		
□ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.			
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.	Period of Significance		
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.			
Criteria Considerations N/A (Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)	Significant Dates		
Property is:			
A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.			
B removed from its original location.	Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)		
\Box C a birthplace or grave.			
D a cemetery.	Cultural Affiliation <u>N/A</u>		
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.			
F a commemorative property.			
□ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.	Architect/Builder Robinson, George Ernest (architect)		
Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets	5.)		
9. Major Bibliographical References			
Bibilography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on o	one or more continuation sheets.)		
Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A	Primary location of additional data:		
 preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested previously listed in the National Register previously determined eligible by the National Register designated a National Historic Landmark recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey 	 State Historic Preservation Office Other State agency Federal agency Local government University Other Name of repository: Plainfield Public Library 		
recorded by Historic American Engineering			

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.6 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)



Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

11 Form Prepared By

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

3						1	1
Z	Zone	Easting		Northir	ng		
4						1	I

See continuation sheet

name/titleRobert P. Guter, Director	
organizationAcroterion	dateSeptember 1992
street & number 161 West 73rd Street	telephone (212) 799-0156
city or town <u>New York</u>	state <u>NY</u> zip code <u>10023</u>

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner				
(Complete this item at	t the request of SHPO or FPO.)			
name	City of Plainfield			
street & number_	515 Watchung Avenue	telephone	(908)753-3000	
city or town	Plainfield	stateNJ	zip code07061	

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

NJ Union County County and State

Plainfield, N.J. Quad

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES/CONTINUATION SHEET

<u>Section 7 Page 1 of 3</u> Plainfield Central Fire Headquarters City of Plainfield Union County, New Jersey

Central Fire Headquarters stands in the northwest sector of the City of Plainfield at the corner of Central Avenue and West Fourth Street. The remainder of the block is occupied by 1-story brick and stuccoed buildings dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, built for storage and light industry. One half block to the north lie the tracks of the Central Railroad of New Jersey. Opposite the facade is a recent low-rise brick apartment complex.

EXTERIOR

George Ernest Robinson emphasized the functional character of his fire headquarters by adopting a stripped-down Georgian Revival mode ornamented with abstracted classical motifs. Redbrown brick walls laid-up in Flemish bond rise above a granite base. Trim is limestone and cast stone.

The building is rectangular in shape, measuring 75'x 91', with a flat roof and a 20'-deep one-story wing at the rear. The Central Avenue facade has a seven-bay principal floor. The five-bay second and third floors are set back from the north and south elevations so that the ground floor is treated as a podium; the third floor, lower in height than the second, suggests a classical attic.

Facade

The Central Avenue facade is the principal elevation (photo #1). Its seven apparatus bays are deeply recessed beneath elliptical arches defined by vertically set bricks and limestone keystones. Six heroic-size bronze lanterns with amber-glass lights flank the doors, which are overhead-door replacements for the original side-hinged models.

The great length of the facade is tempered by a five-bay center section that projects slightly and carries a more detailed entablature. Six brick pilasters rise from granite plinths and terminate in limestone capitals. Simplified pilasters, without caps, frame the outer bays.

The second and third floor facades are taken up almost entirely by groups of casement windows set between brick pilasters. Each floor has a separate stone entablature.

Side Elevations

The side elevations are similar in design, with the Fourth

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<u>Section 7 Page 2 of 3</u> Plainfield Central Fire Headquarters City of Plainfield Union County, New Jersey

Street elevation slightly more elaborated because it incorporates the building's public entrance (photo #2). A three-bay center section projects slightly beyond two framing bays. The entry is double-height, centered on the elevation beneath a limestone entablature supported by console brackets. A high granite water table is butted up against the sills of the first-floor windows, which, like the other windows, are casements. Almost all the original casement windows were replaced recently with new casements. Ornament includes limestone sills, keystones, and blank panels.

Rear Elevation

At the ground floor a five-bay one-story wing projects from the seven-bay main block. It has one vehicle bay on the Fourth Street elevation. Another, at the rear, has been blocked in and filled with windows. The upper floors display a simplified version of the windows-framed-by-pilasters arrangement found on the facade (#3).

INTERIOR

First Floor

Most of the first floor is occupied by the huge apparatus room (#4), which measures approximately 75'x 80' and is entirely a clear-span space (see plan). The floor is concrete (a 2" "granolithic top," according to the original specifications). The walls are plastered above a dado of "salt-glazed bricks" measuring 1 1/2"x 4"x 8," bullnosed at all external angles.

Along the Fourth Street elevation is the entrance lobby and stair hall and a group of three subsidiary rooms. The rear wing contains the original machine shop, store rooms, and toilet room.

Second Floor

The second floor plan utilizes a double-loaded corridor to zone officer's rooms at the front and dormitory rooms at the back. Transverse groups of rooms complete the short ends of the rectangle, with additional dormitory rooms, principal stair hall and offices overlooking West Fourth Street, and dormitory rooms, locker room, washroom, and toilet room occupying the opposite end. Two subsidiary stair halls are accessible from opposite ends of the corridor.

Typical features include pine trim and doors stained a dark

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color, and floors of "Battleship linoleum," according to the architect's specifications. The original Chief's Room has builtin pine bookshelves, stained to match the predominant trim, and a cast stone mantel in a simplified Gothic Revival style.

The original box shower with concrete and tile interior survives in fair condition. Marble toilet stalls are extant, but toilets and sinks are new. In the locker room some original wooden benches survive, as well as an iron spiral stair to the apparatus room. The original plan called for nine sliding poles of "2 1/2" heavy gauge seamless brass tubing." Some of these have been closed off or removed (#5).

Third Floor

This floor is dominated by two large rooms, one on either side of the corridor at front and rear, with transverse subsidiary rooms at the sides. The larger of the two principal rooms measures approximately 20'x 45.' Originally designed as a "Game Room," it has since been subdivided with a partition down the center. This is the single significant plan change in the building.

The second large room is the "Lounging Room," which measures 15'x 45' and opens to the loggia at the rear. Both short ends of the room are equipped with cast stone mantels in a simplified Classical Revival style. The lounge and game room are each lighted with three rectangular skylights.

The transverse rooms (see plan) contain no original features of more than ordinary interest. Typical features throughout this floor include linoleum floors and double-leaf pine doors with twelve lights.

Integrity

Although ordinary maintenance has suffered over the years, spatial configurations and original finishes have survived in almost all instances.

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<u>Section 8 Page 1 of 6</u> Plainfield Central Fire Headquarters City of Plainfield Union County, New Jersey

Plainfield Fire Headquarters meets National Register Criterion A for its illustration of modern consolidation of a suburban firefighting system and Criterion C, as the work of a noted specialist in firehouse design.

Fire Protection in Plainfield

With few exceptions, fire protection in New Jersey during the first half of the 19th century was the province of sporadic and sometimes rag-tag assemblages of volunteer companies. These doubled as fraternal lodges whose rivalries--and consumption of alcohol--earned them reputations for rowdyism. In Plainfield the modern history of firefighting dates to 1858, when a group of citizens met to discuss the rapidly growing city's lack of adequate fire protection under the volunteer system. The following year the city passed a law creating a fire district and providing for election of commissioners empowered to levy a special fire tax. The first significant commitment to the new system was construction of a brick engine house on Park Avenue. Subsequently, several fire companies were formed to serve the district, which embraced present-day Plainfield and part of what is now North Plainfield. These companies functioned with a combination of volunteer manpower and equipment furnished by the commissioners.

A substantial improvement over the old system, this arrangement served the city until 1887, when a citizen challenged the legality of the fire tax, in effect challenging the semiautonomous power of the fire commissioners. When the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled in favor of the complainant, the City of Plainfield took possession of all property and debts of the fire commissioners, preparatory to creating a city fire department in 1888.

In 1890 the city began to modernize the delivery of fire protection. It installed thirteen telegpaph alarm boxes, bought six horses, and hired the first full-time drivers. In 1892 201 hydrants were put into service.

In 1893 a reassessment of firehouses began with the sale of the antiquated Engine House No. 3 and the erection of the first headquarters building, on East Second Street. As the city spread out more and more from its old center of population, more engine houses were needed. The first was built in 1898 on East Fourth Street in the west end, the second in 1901 on West Second Street. By the time the Second Street house was completed

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horsepower had grown to twelve and hydrants numbered 296. (1)

In 1910 Firehouse No. 4 was opened to serve a development of commuter homes being built in the vicinity of the Netherwood Station of the Central Railroad of New Jersey. On January 1, 1915, just five years after Firehouse No. 4 was dedicated, the city inaugurated a fully-paid fire department. (2) Soon afterward Plainfield saw the passing of the horse-drawn fire wagon, a milestone memorialized by a photograph of Station No. 4 with both horse-drawn and gasoline-powered equipment drawn up before the facade. Although built in the 20th century, Firehouse No. 4 was really the culmination of 19th-century attitudes toward firefighting. The next step in Plainfield's firehouse architecture was to take off in a radically different direction.

A New Headquarters Building

Plainfield's emergence as a modern city with municipal services to match both its growing population and its claim to be the "Queen City" of New Jersey was symbolized by completion in 1919 of a dignified "Modern Georgian" City Hall. For a government that had until then operated out of a series of rented spaces, the commitment of a substantial sum of money to consolidate municipal services was a significant step in the direction of professionalism and civic pride.

A 1926 promotional booklet mentioned the still-new city hall in its opening article and went on to assert that "The churches, schools, clubs and public buildings pictured serve to give the stranger some conception of the beauty of the city and its right to be termed the 'Queen City of New Jersey.'" (3) In a further burst of civic pride, the uncredited Plainfield booster wrote:

Plainfield is well protected from the hazards of fire by a fully paid Fire Department. A fine new central headquarters, costing upwards of \$200,000, to replace the present headquarters, now outgrown, is in the course of erection. Two other firehouses, one in the east and the other in the west end of the city, assure the arrival of a fire apparatus within a few minutes after an alarm. . .

Plainfield's new city hall was an expression of the reform movement in American politics, a movement that combined City Beautiful planning with honest politics and fresh ideas about government efficiency. To the reformers, efficiency usually involved consolidation and professionalization of services. As

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<u>Section 8 Page 3 of 6</u> Plainfield Central Fire Headquasters City of Plainfield Union County, New Jersey

part of this same trend, the Plainfield Fire Department had made great strides toward modernization in 1915, with the motorization of all its companies. In the following decade, however, what one historian characterized as the shift "from oats to gasoline" brought with it even more rapid change. Motorized equipment became more specialized, with the development of improved pumpers, hoses, chemical apparatus, and aerial ladders. An advertisement from 1926 (see illustration), the year that Plainfield's new headquarters building was completed, illustrates one of many improved apparatus options--shown against the background of a typical suburban neighborhood of the period.

Plainfield's existing firehouses were inadequate to house the variety of improved and specialized equipment. At the same time, the speed and efficiency of new apparatus allowed a compromise between the city's previous policy of decentralized firehouses to serve different neighborhoods and the modern preference for consolidation of services. In practice, the compromise involved retaining two small existing buildings, one for the east end of the city (Firehouse No. 4, the last to be built) and one for the west. These became, in effect, substations, served by a new headquarters building that would combine administration, firemen's quarters, and an array of specialized equipment, all under one roof.

Instead of a deferential building designed, like Firehouse No. 4, to be compatible with a residential neighborhood, Central Fire Headquarters is a monumental building that symbolizes the power and utility of the redesigned firefighting system. Its appearance was made possible by careful siting adjacent to light industrial buildings, where its size would not be intrusive.

The movement toward firefighting centralization dependent on efficient new buildings was not unique to Plainfield. Cities the size of Paterson and Trenton acquired large new fire headquarters during this era of civic improvement, but Plainfield's new building was especially large and elaborate for a town of its size.

George Ernest Robinson, Firehouse Specialist

Just as Plainfield had made a significant financial and architectural commitment in the design of its new city hall, so, too, it took special care in choosing an architect for its next major capital improvement, realizing that "the new mood of specialization and professionalism in government that affected

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the fire service extended to its architecture as well." (4) The city found its firehouse specialist in Boston. Trained at M.I.T., George Ernest Robinson became the era's leader in firehouse design. (5) His headquarters building for Plainfield was one of his earliest commissions, designed in the same year that saw completion of what remained his most publicized work, the fire headquarters at Arlington, Massachusetts.

According to Rebecca Zurier in <u>The American Firehouse</u>, the Arlington headquarters "incorporates many features that Robinson either invented or was among the first to employ, which would characterize up-to-date fire stations for the next twenty years. And it shows the effects of some of the new methods conceived in the 1920s." (6) The same thing can be said of his building for Plainfield, designed almost concurrently.

Robinson's principles of firehouses design fell into four categories: 1) Engineering that resulted in unobstructed apparatus space; 2) accommodation for an apparatus fleet of unprecedented size; 3) use of the best long-wearing and fireproof materials; and 4) provision of elaborate recreational and residential quarters. Central fire headquarters in Plainfield incorporates all of these ideas.

The apparatus room (see plan) incorporates seven vehicle bays, allowing the city to house all of its most important and upto-date equipment in one place. Robinson designed this 75'x 91' space with an advanced steel frame that permitted him to span the huge room without supporting columns. This resulted in maximum flexibility for movement of men and apparatus inside. At the rear a machine shop with a separate entry added more flexibility.

Robinson's specifications (7) attest to his interest in the finest materials. Structurally, he called for reinforced steel, concrete, and hollow clay tile. The apparatus floor has a "2" granolithic top," still in excellent condition, and the roof is concrete as well. "Salt glazed brick" is used to face the walls of the apparatus room. The windows were "International Cotswold Steel Casements," with "rolled steel muntins and drop-forged pivot hinges." On the exterior, all elevations are finished with brick, limestone, and cast stone above a granite base.

On the second floor Robinson provided ten dormitory rooms in place of several large common sleeping areas. At the rear, directly accessible from six of these rooms, is a "loggia" that doubled as a sleeping porch. But it was on the third floor where

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Robinson's belief in the finest accommodations found full expression. In addition to a kitchen, dining room, and reading room, he provided a huge game room and a lounge with two fireplaces.

Although some of the spaces in the building have been assigned different uses, its survival as a fully functional headquarters after more than half a century of use proves Robinson's assertion that the best construction and the finest materials, combined with a large, open apparatus space, would produce a firehouse of lasting value.

As an early and innovative example of the work of a recognized specialist, Central Fire Headquarters is a landmark in the evolution of American firehouse design. In its local context, it is important to the history of the city's growth for two reasons. In contrast to Firehouse No. 4, nominated separately, it illustrates how radically firehouse design changed in a span of only sixteen years in order to accommodate technological improvements in firefighting methods. Together with City Hall, also nominated separately, Central Fire Headquarters illustrates Plainfield's transition from a nineteenth-century suburb where the provision of municipal services was not yet taken for granted on a large scale and in professional terms, to a modern city government where function and appearance were melded in impressive government buildings.

References

1. An account of Plainfield's changing attitudes toward fire protection is found in Eugene Peltier and G. B. Elmhurst's <u>History of the Plainfield Fire Department, 1827-1901</u>. Plainfield, N.J.: Titsworth Press, n.d.

2. Peltier and Elmhurst, 15.

3. "Plainfield and Vicinity in Pictures." <u>Courier News</u>, Plainfield, NJ, 1926, unpaginated.

4. Rebecca Zurier. <u>The American Firehouse</u>. New York, Abbeville Press: 1978. 179.

5. Zurier, 179-185.

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<u>Section 8 Page 6 of 6</u> Plainfield Central Fire Headquarters City of Plainfield Union County, New Jersey

6. Zurier, 179.

7. "Specifications for the Erection of a General Fire Headquarters, September 1926." George Ernest Robinson, 80 Federal Street, Boston, Massachusetts. On file in Fire Chief's office, Plainfield, New Jersey.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES/CONTINUATION SHEET

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Sources Consulted

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- Kobbe, Gustav. <u>The Central Railroad of New Jersey</u>. New York: Gustav Kobbe. 1890.
- National Board of Fire Underwriters. "Report on Plainfield, NJ." New York: 1956.
- Peltier, Eugene, and Elmhurst, G.B. <u>History of the</u> <u>Plainfield Fire Department, 1827-1901</u>. Plainfield, NJ: Titsworth Press. n.d.
- "Plainfield and Vicinity in Pictures." Plainfield, NJ: Courier News. 1926. unpaginated.
- Plainfield, New Jersey, Fire Department. Archive and clipping files. Fire Headquarters.
- Robinson, George Ernest. "Specifications for the Erection of a General Fire Headquarters, September, 1926." George E. Robinson, 80 Federal Street, Boston, Massachusetts. On file in the office of the Fire Chief, Plainfield, NJ.
- Sanborn Map Company. Fire Insurance Maps for the City of Plainfield, NJ. Updated through 1955.

Zurier, Rebecca. <u>The American Firehouse</u>. New York: Abbeville Press. 1978.

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Boundary Description

The boundaries of the nominated property are the lot lines of Lot 2, Block 103 as established by the Tax Map of the City of Plainfield, 1987 (see Map A).

Boundary Justification

The boundaries are the same as those established when the building was constructed. They remained constant during the period of significance.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number ____Photos Page ____

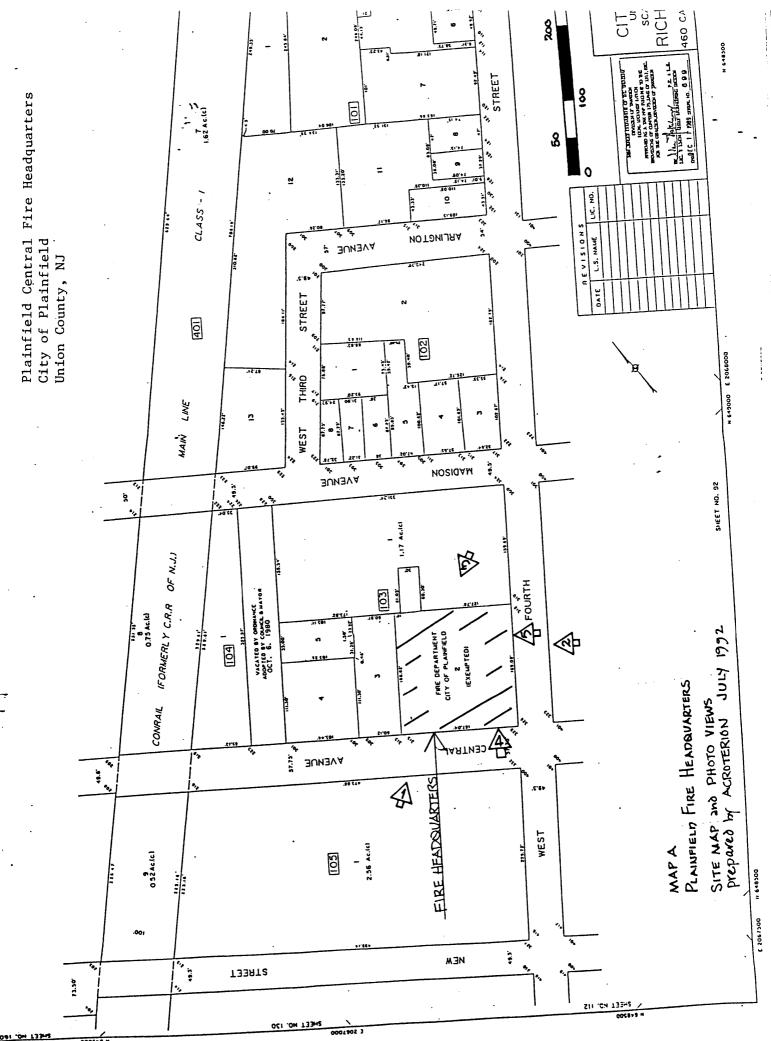
Central Fire Headquarters, Plainfield, Union County, New Jersey

PHOTOGRAPHS

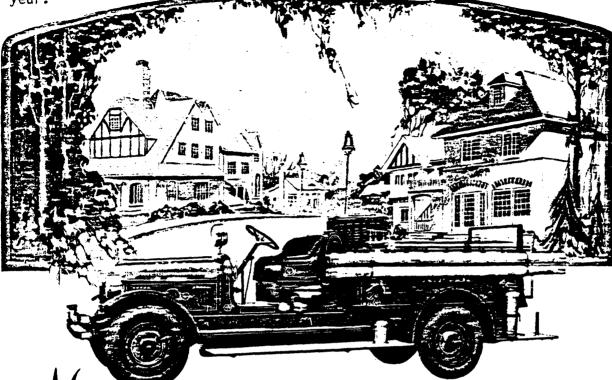
Photographer:	Acroterion
Date:	July 1992
Location of negatives:	City of Plainfield Planning & Community Development 515 Watchung Avenue

Plainfield, New Jersey 07061

- 1. Exterior view looking north.
- 2. Exterior view looking west
- 3. Exterior view looking southwest.
- 4. Interior of first floor looking north
- 5. Interior of second floor looking west.



Advertisement from the August 25, 1926 issue of Fire Engineering, illustrating the modern equipment and suburban environment typical of Plainfield when the Central Fire Headquarters was built in the same year.



Meets the needs of small communities~ The SEAGRAVE SUBURBANITE

The need for efficient fire-fighting service for communities, suburban villages, small towns and the residential districts of cities is adequately met by the Seagrave Suburbanite.

This speedy, light-weight apparatus is of the usual Seagrave high-quality workmanship and gives years of satisfactory service.

The Seagrave Catalog explaining the Suburbanite in detail will be sent to you upon request. Fire Departments in every part of the world are equipped with apparatus made by —

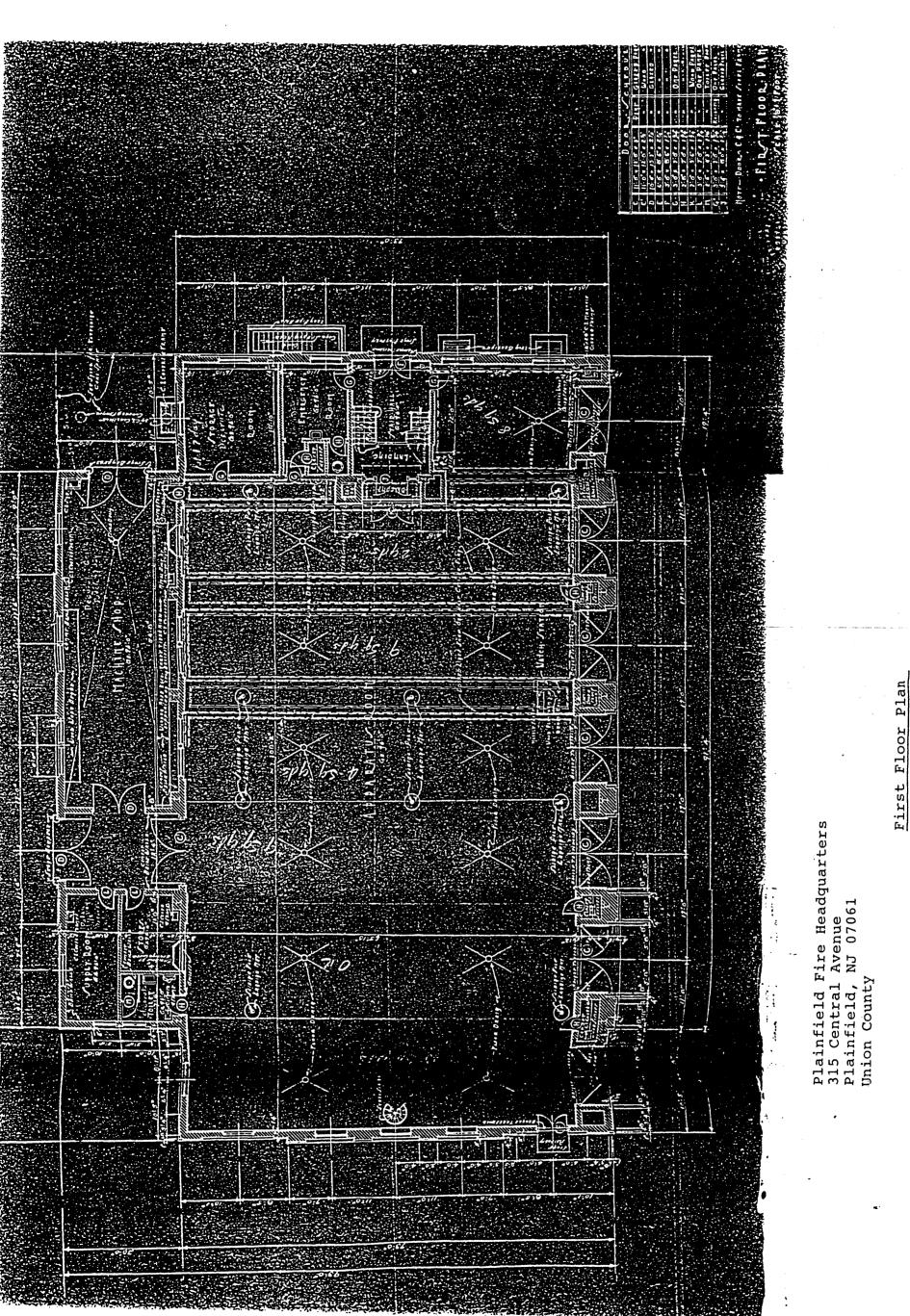
SEAGRAVE CORPORATION

Boston, Mass. New Haven, Conn. Birmingham, Ala. Philadelphia, Pa.

Kanaas City, Mo. Pittsburgh, Pa.

Seattle, Wash. San Francisco, Calif.

Plainfield Central Fire Headquarters, City of Plainfield, Union County, New Jersey



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	Plainfield Fire Headquarters

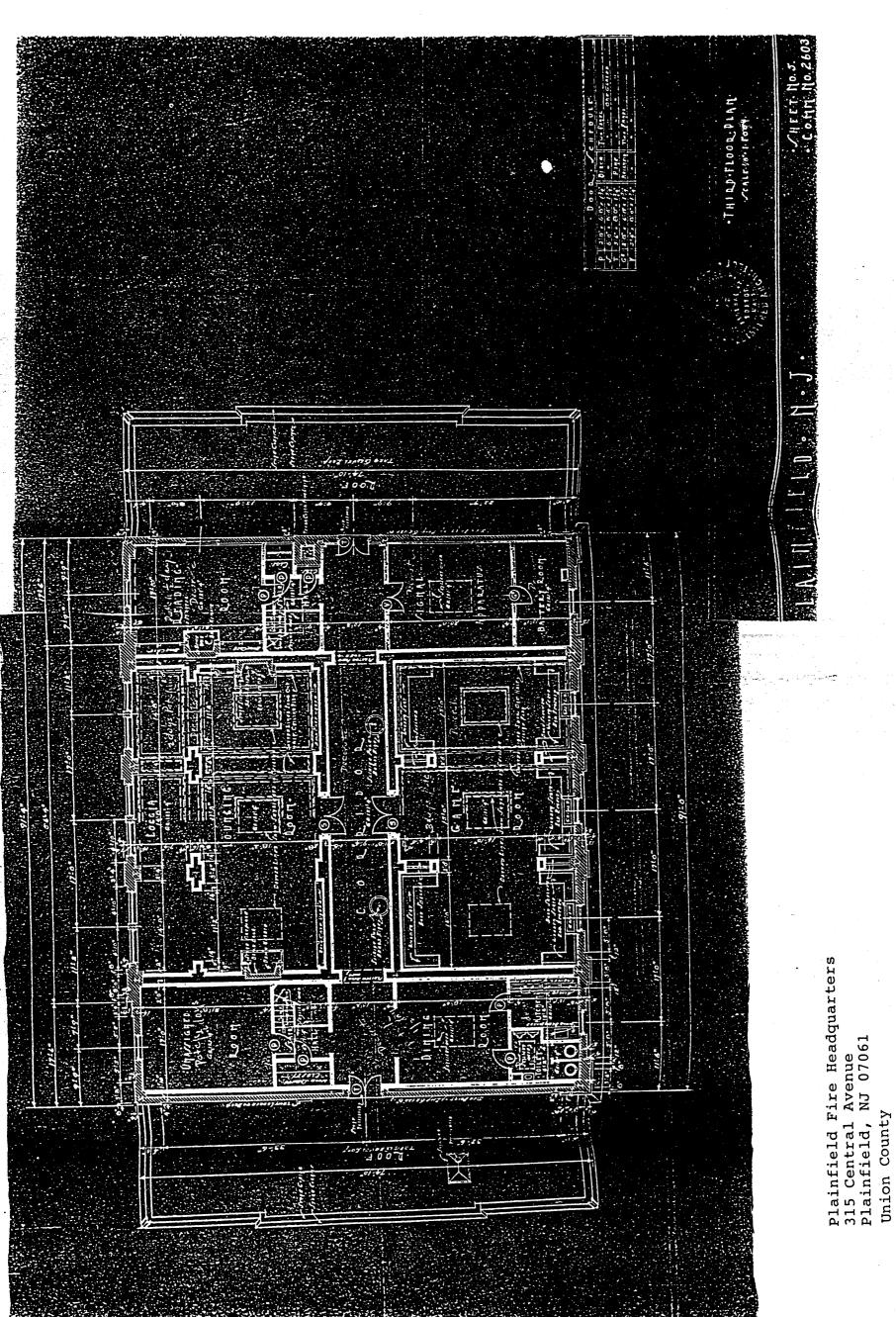
يساريه التراكي ليراكي

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Third Floor Plan

