

Landmark status sought for firehouses

12 present, former city sites take first step in process today

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When the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 burned itself into ashes there were at least 250 people dead, 100,000 homeless, and all eight firehouses in the path of the flames were gone.

Since then firefighting and firehouses have changed enormously. The Commission on Chicago Landmarks hopes to create a permanent physical record of the changes by obtaining city landmark status for a dozen present and former firehouses. They represent changes in architecture, equipment, duties and treatment of firefighters, and civic pride.

When William Musham became chief in 1901, he demanded "clean and comfortable" firehouses with lighter, tiled, easy-to-clean interiors for firefighters who lived and slept in second-floor dormitories. In 1914 as it began to phase out horse-drawn units, the city began building "motor friendly" firehouses with large bays and doors for quick exits.

The staff will submit its recommendation to the commission, the first step in a lengthy process, at today's meeting.

Firehouses proposed for land-



marking include eight still in use and four that have long since ceased to be used for firefighting. They date from 1874 to 1929. One is a wood frame building, others are brick with stone or terra-cotta trim.

Addresses are 1244 N. Wells, 1625 N. Damen, 2414 W. Cuyler and 1401 S. Michigan (all former firehouses), and 1052 W. Waveland, 5349 S. Wabash, 4600 S. Cottage Grove, 324 S. Desplaines, 5714 N. Ridge, 8120 S. Ashland, 3000 W. 42nd and 6204 S. Green (all working firehouses).

The oldest building is former Engine Company 27 at 1244 N. Wells, built in 1874 of orange-red face brick with Joliet limestone trim. It is a "storefront" type designed to blend with the neighborhood. Sold in 1978, it is an interior design studio, with the owner's

apartment on the second floor.

The oldest remaining wood-frame firehouse is the West Cuyler structure built in 1899, now a residence. Even after the Chicago Fire some frame firehouses were built because of the need in outlying areas to put up a firehouse fast.



ROBERT A. CHAPMAN/SUN-TIMES PHOTOS

The firehouse at 5714 N. Ridge was built in 1928 of dark red brick with terra-cotta trim on all four sides, a rarity. Landmark panel staffers are recommending the site.

The firehouse at 5714 N. Ridge, near Hollywood, is an example of the grand sites intended to be civic buildings. Built in 1928, it is of dark red brick with terra-cotta trim on all four sides. Usually firehouses had only one finished side, or two if they were on corners.