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Cover

### National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

This form is used for documenting property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (formerly 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items

X          New Submission          Amended Submission

#### A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Fire Stations in Puerto Rico

#### B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

Fire Sattions in Puerto Rico, 1942-1952

#### C. Form Prepared by

name/title Arq. Jorge Rigau, FAIA  
organization Jorge Rigau Arquitectos date June 15, 2012  
street & number #67 calle los baños, 1er piso telephone (787) 982-0002  
city or town San Juan state Puerto Rico zip code 00911  
e-mail rigau@jorgerigau.com

#### D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation.

(         See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Carlos A. Rubio Cancela  
Signature and title of certifying official | Date June 18, 2012

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

[Signature]  
Signature of the Keeper

8/6/2012  
Date of Action

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

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Carlos A. Rubio Cancela, State Historic Preservation Officer

Signature and title of certifying official

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Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in National Register Bulletin *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (formerly 16B). Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below.

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E. Statement of Historic Context

Introduction

This Multiple Property Nomination addresses a group of prototypical fire stations built in several municipalities of Puerto Rico from 1942 to 1952, approximately. The period comprises a decade in which USA/Puerto Rico relations were redefined, impacting each nation's history significantly. It is an epoch bracketed, on one hand, by the designation of Rexford G. Tugwell, who would be the last USA appointed Island governor and, in the other, with the establishment of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico by Luis Muñoz Marín, the first locally elected governor. Relevant to the Island's urban development in multiple ways, the prototypical fire stations hereby being nominated constitute key representatives at local and State level of the wide-scoped architectural legacy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Because they should be preserved as historic properties – related as they are - an understanding of their historical and cultural background is presented here. Many of them still claim integrity at different levels, be it of location, design, materials and workmanship, and particularly in terms of association. As stated ahead, the stations are connected to events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the Island's history, simultaneously embodying the distinctive characteristics of a particular building type.

Key reference sources for the study of fire stations in Puerto Rico include the Annual Reports of the Governors of Puerto Rico and the Reports of the Commissioner of the Interior of Puerto Rico to the Governor of the Island, for the years spanning from 1939 to 1952. Also informative are reports of the Puerto Rico Planning Board and the Insular Fire Corps covering that period. Pertinent documentation includes: original building contracts and certificates for payment from the contractors, correspondence (letters and telegrams), construction documents (plans and specifications), and photographs. Most of these can be found at the *Archivo General de Puerto Rico* (AGPR) and the Puerto Rican Collection at Lázaro Library in the University of Puerto Rico. Of particular relevance, the memoirs of former Island governor Rexford G. Tugwell, entitled *The Stricken Land: The History of Modern Puerto Rico* (1947), provide an effective understanding of the background conditions and social and political ideas behind the firehouse-building program.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published by Doubleday in New York, the memoirs have recently been translated into Spanish and republished in a special edition edited by Jorge Rodríguez Beruff; Rexford G. Tugwell, *La tierra azotada: Memorias del último gobernador estadounidense en Puerto Rico* (China: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín/Fundación Biblioteca Rafael Hernández Colón, 2010).

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To this day, official acknowledgement of Puerto Rico's built heritage has focused primarily on institutional buildings like churches, city halls, social centers ("casinos"), as well public parks and squares; all of them key protagonists within the traditional urban milieu. Emblematic residences and, more recently, extant examples of the industrial past, have also garnered attention. However, properties closely associated with the quotidian – while performing a secondary role in town – have, for the most part, remained "under the radar". In Puerto Rico, the high visibility of the Island's Spanish colonial building stock, the abundance of flamboyant turn-of-the-century houses, and myriad Modern manifestations have upstaged, so far, most buildings of a lesser presence, in spite of their comparable historical importance.

By primarily focusing in individual properties of a "louder" personality, a key urban process has remained largely undocumented by architectural historians: the repeated use of particular building prototypes to address specific use programs in almost identical architectural manner at different locations. In Puerto Rico, road keeper's houses (*casas de caminero*) and lighthouses dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century constitute some of the earliest examples recorded on the Island, and among the most familiar. However - even if less readily recognizable - 20<sup>th</sup>-century comparable instances prove useful to unravel further the nature of the development of the Puerto Rico's settlements in more contemporary terms. Among these are included: school buildings, telegraph stations, rural health units, low-income housing, police stations, court houses and, of particular interest to us here, fire stations built along the 1940's up to the early 1950's.<sup>2</sup>

Repetition of a building type as module represents a recurrent practice throughout architectural history. Its persistent validation as a venue for expedient construction stems from the three economies it represents in terms of cost, design and erection time, as well as administration of both the process and the facilities. In government-sponsored projects, specifically, prototypical structures constitute an ideal venue to address widespread needs in rather efficient, speedy manner. The program to provide fire stations in multiple municipalities in Puerto Rico by mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was not an exception. This initiative was endorsed at the dawn of the Second World War by different local government agencies assisted by federal fiscal support. A *Central Civilian Defense Committee* was established and funds were transferred to it from the *Insular Emergency Fund*.<sup>3</sup> The Division of Public

<sup>2</sup> See *La efervescencia de la repetición: estudio tipológico de los dispensarios médicos rurales de Puerto Rico (1936)* by D. Gabriela Torres Ferrer; *La primavera del patriarca: El "Partido Nuevo" y su arquitectura "tipo"*, by Edmundo R. Colón Izquierdo; *Prototipo como paisaje: las estaciones prototípicas que el Cuerpo de Bomberos construyó en Puerto Rico del 1940-1958*, Natalia K. Silva; *Típica promesa: Estudio de las fábricas prototípicas construidas por la Compañía de Fomento Industrial en Puerto Rico (1940-1960)*, Christian Laboy Aponte (Mid-Career Research Projects, Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico, 2009, 2001, 2010, 2010, respectively. Unpublished).

<sup>3</sup> Oficina del Gobernador, *Annual Report of the Executive Secretary of Puerto Rico for the Fiscal Year 1941-1942*. (Mimeographed copy) Archivo General de Puerto Rico (subsequently addressed as AGPR) Fondo: Oficina del Gobernador, Tarea 96-20, Caja 291.

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Buildings of the Department of the Interior of Puerto Rico drafted a plan to build 100 fire stations spread throughout all towns and cities, initially pursued in 57 municipalities.<sup>4</sup>

Newspaper articles, testimonies and photographs attest to the overall state of construction on the Island in the first decades of the last century.<sup>5</sup> In most towns, brick, masonry, and some concrete characterized the urban core, but beyond its few "solid" blocks, wood prevailed as the primary building material. Fear of fire eventually fostered the development of sophisticated public regulations whose strictness bears witness to what was understood to be an imminent, daily danger.<sup>6</sup> Collective memory contributed to exercise precaution, if not to raise further fear. Two events, even if by then somewhat removed in time, still lingered in people's minds: The Great Fire of Mayagüez in 1841, and Ponce's comparable experience dating from 1899.<sup>7</sup> Even if - as it might have been - time had by then endowed these events with legendary proportions, fire's destructive capabilities cannot be underestimated under any circumstance, particularly at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Puerto Rico and during the following three decades.

*Early firefighting efforts in the Island*

In Puerto Rico, firefighting as a public responsibility is traditionally dated back to the early nineteenth century in the city of Ponce, on the southern coast of the Island.<sup>8</sup> In 1820, a fire almost destroyed the budding city. Spanish Governor Miguel de La Torre made it mandatory for every male between 16 and 60 years to render voluntary services as a firefighter. The ruling was short lived, but in 1845,

<sup>4</sup> "The division has... prepared a project covering the construction of 100-fire stations for all the cities and towns of Puerto Rico... These projects have been submitted to the War Production Board requesting certificates of priority to obtain critical materials to carry out the work." Report of the Commissioner of the Interior of Puerto Rico for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 1942 to the Hon. Governor of Puerto Rico, (San Juan: Bureau of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation, 1943), 41, 42.

<sup>5</sup> Among key period publications, refer to: Eduardo Neumann Gandía, *Verdadera y auténtica historia de la ciudad de Ponce* (Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1987); *Puerto Rico Ilustrado* and *Gráfico*, weekly illustrated magazines; E. Fernández García, Ed., *El libro de Puerto Rico*, (San Juan, Puerto Rico: El Libro Azul Publishing Co., 1923); Antonio M. Monteagudo and Antonio M. Escámez, Eds. *El album de oro de Puerto Rico*, (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Habana, Cuba, 1939).

<sup>6</sup> The subject of fire control regulations in Puerto Rico has been addressed previously by Jorge Rigau in "La posible felicidad del país: Optimismo, pragmatismo y responsabilidad social en la reglamentación finisecular puertorriqueña relacionada a la construcción", *Revista del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña*, Núm. 98, 1991; also in *Puerto Rico 1900: Turn-of-the-century Architecture in the Caribbean* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992); and in "La legislación de la precaución en Ponce: Fábrica y fuego en la trama urbana de ciudades del suroeste de Puerto Rico", *Revista Patrimonio*, Vol. 1, 2010, 54-61, published by the Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office.

<sup>7</sup> Diverse authors address these historic fires. For Mayagüez, see Ramonita Vega Lugo, *Urbanismo y sociedad: Mayagüez de Villa a Ciudad, 1836-1877* (Academia Puertorriqueña de la Historia, 2009), 175-225. For Ponce, see Mariano Vidal Armstrong, *Ponce: Notas para su historia* (San Juan: Oficina Estatal de Preservación Histórica, 1983), 34,35.

<sup>8</sup> As stated by the Puerto Rico Fire Corps official website: <http://www.bomberos.pr.gov>

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another major fire occurred in the coastal section of Ponce. A new voluntary firefighting organization was created. All along the nineteenth century, many cities throughout the world fought fires with citizens committed to volunteer brigades. In 1862, under the auspices of city Mayor Luis Quijano Font, the fire corps of Ponce was reorganized as The Fire Service. In 1879, the Fire Services reorganized again, this time under the leadership of Ponce architect Juan Bertoly Carderoni.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Puerto Rico's fire fighting force reorganized in a more permanent manner in 1883 at the initiative of Máximo Meana, then Mayor of Ponce. The city's corps included 400 firefighters many of them distinguished citizens.<sup>10</sup> On January 25, 1899, two of them, Pedro Sabater and Rafael Rivera Esbrí, led a group of local firefighters in successfully appeasing a fire at the U.S. powder magazine barracks in downtown Ponce, where a large quantity of bullets, ammunition, and gunpowder was stored. Had the fire reached this depot, it would have certainly caused a major disaster. The men were hailed as heroes and, to this day, firemen are highly respected in Ponce.<sup>11</sup> **[FIGURE 1]** Born and raised in town, a young man eighteen years old joined the Ponce Fire Service as Lieutenant. Named Raúl Gándara Cartagena, he would later become Puerto Rico's first and foremost Fire Chief. Before the 1940's, other smaller towns also recruited volunteers as firefighters among the citizenry; by 1938 Santa Isabel had organized its own corps, providing for it a garage in a home improvised for said purpose.<sup>12</sup> Public appearances for showcasing equipment and demonstrating safety measures were common throughout the Island and highly publicized.<sup>13</sup> **[FIGURE 2, 3, 4]**

<sup>9</sup> Juan Bértoli Carderoni was an active practitioner in Ponce at that time. With several residential projects to his credit, he was the original architect for La Perla Theater, the city's most important artistic venue, later transformed by subsequent designers. Controversy surrounded him when, late in life, his professional credentials were publicly questioned. His legacy to the city of Ponce is extensive.

<sup>10</sup> Among its officers were key local citizens: Julio Steinacher, Juan Seix (Senior Chief), Oscar Schuck Oliver (Second Chief), and Fernando M. Toro (Head Brigade and in charge of the Academy of Gymnastics).

<sup>11</sup> Today, the Island's most visited building is the Old Fire Station located East of Ponce's main public plaza, notable for being painted in red and black. Local and foreign tourists are attracted to the brightly colored, wooden structure. Also of note are the firemen's houses west of town, similarly painted. Decades ago, these were raffled yearly amongst firemen. Now restored, many are still standing at 25 de enero and Hormiguero streets. Furthermore, a two-stories high mosaic mural (erected in the 1960's at a modern station, but now relocated at an even newer firehouse) reminds citizens and visitors alike of the by-now legendary event. *Bomberitos*, an Island-wide voluntary organization to educate children about fire prevention, survives in Ponce with more impulse than in any other location. Chief Raúl Gándara, lecturing publicly on the achievements of his Corps, underlined how "Ponce is... where the history of the Fire Corps has fostered in each citizen deep feelings of affection and sympathy to all things related to firemen". (Raúl Gándara, "El Servicio Insular de Bomberos", Lecture to the Lions Club of Río Piedras, delivered on November 1st, 1946; mimeographed).

<sup>12</sup> See Melvin Rivera Velázquez, "The Fire Department of Santa Isabel (1938)", December 23, 2009; <http://www.santaisabelpr.com/el-cuerpo-de-bomberos-de-santa-isabel-1938>

<sup>13</sup> As an early sample of firemen's activities being addressed as public events, see: *Gráfico*, edition of March 8, 1913; also *Puerto Rico Ilustrado*, editions of February 8, 1913, and March 28, 1914.

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At that time, most fire stations were lodged in inadequate facilities, some in old masonry buildings, most often constructed in wood.<sup>14</sup> **[FIGURE 5]** When on December 7, 1941 the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor by surprise, Puerto Rico lacked firefighting resources to rely upon in case of any foreign aggression. Tugwell narrates: “*For fire prevention... government depended upon men selected for their affiliation to the party in power, sitting at stations, languidly cleaning obsolete equipment unable to extinguish even a bonfire*”; and after complaining about their incompetence, he underlines “...*thus began a long struggle with politicians regarding the creation of a Fire Insular Service; but that would take some prudent time.*”<sup>15</sup> Local tensions echoed international apprehension and climaxed with repeated news of ships sunk by the enemy, carrying with them provisions, medicines, ammunition, and firefighting equipment.<sup>16</sup>

Events and processes set the stage for change

If the 1930's in Puerto Rico had been characterized by hunger, illness, unemployment and natural disasters, in the subsequent decade the Island embarked in its transition from an agrarian to an industrial society, a process several historians date approximately from 1940 to 1953.<sup>17</sup> Along these years, what had been primarily an agricultural, rural society transformed into an industrialized, urban one. Programs and strategies for economic growth, social betterment, and industrialization were implemented. The transformation of social and economic relations – under the umbrella of World War II - came hand in hand with urban growth. In only four decades, the Island's population doubled: from close to one million inhabitants in 1899, it reached almost two million in the early 1940's.<sup>18</sup> As it happened in many other cities at that time, rural/urban migrations fostered slums and overcrowding.

The government undertook an ambitious reform project that included infrastructure development and institutional reorganization. **The program to build firehouses across the Island was an integral component of politics then prevailing, both international and local. On one hand, these**

<sup>14</sup> Among key exceptions, by 1904 the city of Ponce (as an afterwards to its 1899 fire scare) was building a fire station at Barrio Playa, dotting it with foundations in Portland cement and walls in brick and masonry construction. Engineer Manuel V. Domenech, a prominent designer of the period was entrusted the project. (Ponce Municipal Archive: *Caja S-352-8, Planos 107-1903*).

<sup>15</sup>Tugwell, *La tierra azotada*, 184.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>17</sup> See Francisco A. Scarano, *Puerto Rico: Cinco siglos de historia* (México: McGraw-Hill, 1995), 708; also Eduardo Rivera Medina and Rafael L. Ramírez, *Del cañaveral a la fábrica: cambio social en Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Huracán-Academia, 1985), 66, 199.

<sup>18</sup> Brandon Howell, *The Planning System of Puerto Rico* (England: Liverpool University Press, 1952), 213.

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resources would assist in repealing any wartime attack. But locally, their construction was aimed at projecting publicly that common, widespread concerns were being taken care of; that everything was under control, in spite of a war going on, and in spite of an unstable political climate unfolding.<sup>19</sup> Said twofold, “dual usage” understanding best expounds the historical significance of the prototypical fire stations in Puerto Rico.<sup>20</sup> Architecture rarely occurs in a vacuum, but instead as a byproduct of larger societal trends that buildings often succeed at mirroring, even if unwillingly.

The unifying thematic framework to best elucidate the period includes the ascent of the *Partido Popular Democático* (PPD) and the rise of its populist leader, Luis Muñoz Marín, President of the local senate from 1940 to 1948. World and Island were changing. Germany invaded Poland in 1939, and with France and England's belligerent declarations, the Second World War began. By late 1941 the United States joined the effort. One year before, the recently created *Partido Popular* coupled forces with the *Unificación Puertorriqueña Tripartita* (three parties united as one), winning 10 out of 17 seats at the local Senate. With a broader base of support than that his party could provide on its own, Muñoz Marín pushed to implement his campaign promises regarding "social justice" through a broad program that encompassed agrarian, educational and labor-related reforms.<sup>21</sup> William D. Leahy was the USA-appointed Governor until 1941, when economist Rexford Guy Tugwell succeeds him, holding the position from September 1941 to until July, 1946. Tugwell's collaboration with Muñoz Marín paved the way for significant fiscal and organizational transformations. He “...wanted to reorganize government and turn its administration into an efficient and modern one, in keeping with the principles of good governance and healthy public management.”<sup>22</sup> Entrusted the future of Puerto Rico, Tugwell was determined to “... insure the viability of Puerto Rico as a society.”<sup>23</sup> In fact, he is

<sup>19</sup> In a letter dated June 26, 1943, Carlos Muñoz McCormick, head the Civil Defense in Puerto Rico, states to the Mayor of Arecibo, Sigfredo Vélez González, that his town's fire station will be “...a project that will truly represent an assurance to our community.” (AGPR, Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Edificios Públicos, Caja 813, Legajo 230).

<sup>20</sup> “...the construction of defense facilities, responded to the logic of strategic needs. Many of these investments (in roads, improved water supply and sewer facilities... a larger cement production, communications...) could be considered of “dual usage”, both military and civilian.” Jorge Rodríguez Beruff, *Strategy as Politics: Puerto Rico on the Eve of the Second World War* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2007), 359-60.

<sup>21</sup> See Fernando Picó, *Historia general de Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Huracán, 1988), 258. In addition, James L. Dietz, in *Historia económica de Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Huracán, 1989), 203-04, elaborates on how, from 1941 to 1949, the PPD concentrated on an agrarian reform, control and development of institutions as well as infrastructure, administrative reorganization, and industrialization. The second objective would prove determinant for the fire station building program.

<sup>22</sup> Tugwell, *La tierra azotada*, Introduction [without pagination].

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

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publicly acknowledged as “one of the architects assisting the Puerto Rico’s administrative modernization”.<sup>24</sup>

For the PPD party, economic control could best be granted through planning efforts led at state level.<sup>25</sup> It was the beginning of the party’s hegemonic control, one that would eventually last for over 25 years. As such, this proved to be a crucial period for Puerto Rico’s anchoring into the modern world. Along the process, Rexford G. Tugwell proved to be an educated ally for local leaders, though one not always devoid of antagonists. Before coming to Puerto Rico - as a close friend of Franklin Delano Roosevelt – he had been a member of the President’s *Brain Trust*, having been delegated key components of FDR’s New Deal initiative for their implementation. In the Mainland, many considered Tugwell’s ideals “left leaning” in light of his ideas about regulating or monitoring Capitalism.<sup>26</sup> In more recent years, Tugwell had acquired notoriety through collaboration in the planning programs of Major Fiorello La Guardia in New York City. Personal experience in the field of Planning would eventually come in handy for a governor convinced that the role of planning in a modern state was “to bind all project improvements in a logic whole”.<sup>27</sup> Upon his arrival to Puerto Rico, Tugwell’s frame of mind was set on an overriding idea: “For administrative purposes, and particularly planning, the island had to be understood as a unit”, convinced as he was about “substituting services in small cities for an insular conception...” acknowledging “a clear trend of centralization”<sup>28</sup> “In reference to [the Island’s] modernization, I was categorical”, he asserts in his memoirs.<sup>29</sup>

Between 1940 and 1947 in Puerto Rico - the State “made felt” its commitment to order and control, legislating and implementing said laws in the name of an “equalizing” democracy conducive to

<sup>24</sup> Roberto Sánchez Gándara describes him as “one of the architects of the State’s administration modernization.” *Ibid.*, Presentation (without pagination).

<sup>25</sup> Angel G. Quintero-Rivera, “La ideología populista y la institucionalización de las ciencias sociales”, in Silvia Álvarez-Curbelo, María Elena Rodríguez Castro, Eds., *Del nacionalismo al populismo: Cultura y política en Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Huracán, 1993), 128.

<sup>26</sup> Tugwell, *La tierra azotada*, Chapter 2 includes the governor’s own thoughts regarding both his public positions and the public’s perception of the.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 243-44. Tugwell boasts of his achievements in this area: “One measure for which I was largely responsible was the *Planning Law*.” He initially entrusted the development of said law to Alfred Bettman (1873–1945), amongst key founders of modern urban planning in the USA and the concept of “zoning” as we know it today. In the end, Bettman’s original proposals for Puerto Rico were amended significantly.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 244-45.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

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everyone's well-being.<sup>30</sup> Professor Angel G. Quintero-Rivera acknowledges how USA representatives on the Island adhered to "*far reaching state action*" that, in turn, led to increased centralization of the State's activity. Functions formerly entrusted to municipal entities would now be taken over by the insular government.<sup>31</sup> This "normative" approach would lead to the identification of multiple areas of intervention regarding public life and well being. At that time, as stated by Eduardo Rivera Medina and Rafael L. Ramírez, "...instances of extended governmental control went hand in hand with the expansion of existing public services."<sup>32</sup>

In parallel, the forthcoming impact of World War II was felt in spite of the geographical distance from the conflict; food, medicines, and supplies were in shortage during the first years of this decade.<sup>33</sup> The public's apprehension was fueled by the media, news and movies alike. Two movies first seen in Puerto Rico in 1941 contributed to general concerns regarding both fire and nazism. *Gone with the Wind's* recreation of Atlanta being devastated by fire must have distressed many; Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, made audiences laugh, but also uneasy... when Pearl Harbor was yet to happen. On April 17, 1942, a Civil Defense Law was signed locally. **[FIGURE 6]** Entrusted the general public's protection, funds were channelled to the Civil Defense effort that, initially, encompassed fire safety. Monies were used to buy related equipment.<sup>34</sup> In May 7, 1942 the creation of an Insular Fire Service was approved by Puerto Rico's Legislature, and some of the fire fighting equipment was transferred to the newly-created agency. One year before, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had appointed Mayor Fiorello La Guardia as Director of the United States Civil Defense. Tugwell and La Guardia, as mentioned earlier, had worked together in New York City. With US involvement in the war being imminent, Tugwell had to "*reorganize again the Civil Defense...supervise and exhort more actively local organizations for defense*"... "the plan to 'insularize' municipal services was furthered..." and "with the impulse of the Civil Defense, an Insular Fire Service came into being."<sup>35</sup> That same Spring season, the Governor appointed Dr. Carlos Muñoz-McCormick to head the Civil Defense in Puerto

<sup>30</sup> María Elena Rodríguez Castro, "Foro de 1940: Las pasiones y los intereses se dan la mano", in Silvia Álvarez-Curbelo, María Elena Rodríguez Castro, *Del nacionalismo*, 66.

<sup>31</sup> Quintero-Rivera, *La ideología populista*, 117.

<sup>32</sup> Eduardo Rivera Medina and Rafael L. Ramírez, *Del cañaverol*, 85.

<sup>33</sup> Tugwell, *La tierra azotada*, 277, 292. The governor acknowledges how "*lack of supplies became a worse problem than ever imagined*", imposing times of deprivation and hardship.

<sup>34</sup> Oficina del Gobernador, *Annual Report of the Executive Secretary*. Records addressing this early interface of the Civil Defense and the Insular Fire Service are scarce amongst research sources consulted. Because their responsibilities overlapped for some time, some disagreement seems to have surfaced, as evidenced in diverse communications and reports addressing legalities concerning both agencies, and the Civil Defense's tardiness in transferring its fire equipment to the Fire Corps. (Servicio Insular de Bomberos de Puerto Rico, *Government of Puerto Rico Insular Fire Service of Puerto Rico: Second Annual Report 1944-45*. Puerto Rico: Government of Puerto Rico Printing Division, 1946), 4.

<sup>35</sup> Tugwell, *La tierra azotada*, 246, 255.

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Rico.<sup>36</sup> During wartime, Civil Defense installations and Fire Service facilities complement military efforts rendering important public service. Firemen - besides extinguishing fires - are trained to save lives and property, an imperative consideration in times of conflict. At the local Civil Defense headquarters, volunteers received disaster messages that would be sent to local fire stations where firemen in charge of rescue, repair and demolition responsibilities would be ready.<sup>37</sup> Firefighters were key players, even if as passive soldiers: in case of an enemy attack - much feared at the time - they were entrusted with inhibiting any extended spread of flames. Tugwell identifies these and other procedures as "*measures to strengthen the government*".<sup>38</sup>

At the time, economic conditions forced a large segment of the population to migrate to the United States. Whether the Island should focus preferentially in agriculture or industrialization prevailed as common denominator of public debate; labor unrest loomed ever present. As part of an incipient agrarian reform, the Land Law of 1941 (*Ley de Tierras*) succeeded in wresting property from the wealthy landowners to distribute it more evenly as "*parcelas*" (small lots) among the local campesinos.<sup>39</sup> Plots in some urban areas were also distributed amongst the population, thus increasing the density of most settlements. Laws for improvement of existing conditions extended to the areas of education, health, and housing. If by 1940 one out of three inhabitants of Puerto Rico lived in urban areas, twenty years later, approximately half of the Island's population would dwell in cities.<sup>40</sup>

To lead the way for governmental transformation, several public corporations were established. The newly created *Autoridad de Fuentes Fluviales* (1941) was set up to provide electricity, water and sewage services throughout the Island. Electrical power would substitute, largely, widespread use of candlelight, the most challenging fire threat in both cities and the countryside. Two entities founded in 1942 would pursue industrial development of local and incoming entrepreneurs: *La Compañía de Fomento de Puerto Rico* and what survives to this day as Puerto Rico's Government Development Bank. The same year, the Island's first Planning Board (*Junta de Planificación, Urbanización y Zonificación*) was instituted to "*provide for an orderly urban growth*" through implementation of a wide-

<sup>36</sup> Carlos Muñoz McCormick was a renowned otolaryngologist and civic leader. First President of the Río Piedras Rotary Club, and President of the *Puerto Rico Medical Association*, he was owner of one of the most prominent art deco residences in Puerto Rico. Located at Sagrado Corazón street in Monteflores, Santurce, it was designed by architect Rafael Hernández Romero, educated at Syracuse University. [www.miramarpr.org/arqalgunosarq.htm](http://www.miramarpr.org/arqalgunosarq.htm)

<sup>37</sup> Tugwell, *La tierra azotada*, 465.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>39</sup> Blanca G. Silvestrini and María Dolores Luque de Sánchez, *Historia de Puerto Rico: Trayectoria de un pueblo* (España: Cultural Puertorriqueña, Inc., 1987), 504.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 527.

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scoped Master Plan for Development.<sup>41</sup> Said Plan, even if lacking legal clout, was to assist in the identification of the country's needs and the resources to fulfill them.

At that time, planning was highly regarded as a discipline and - in *tabula rasa* manner - most countries discarded traditional building regulations and substituted them with ideas being advocated by the *International Congresses of Modern Architecture* (CIAM). Founded in 1928 by a group of European architects organized by architect Le Corbusier and historian Sigfried Giedion, among others, CIAM meant to advance the cause of "architecture as a social art". A highly influential organization, CIAM was not only engaged in formalizing the design principles of the Modern Movement, but also promoted architecture as an economic and political tool useful to improve the world through building design and urban planning. CIAM proposed that social problems faced by cities could be resolved by strict functional segregation – known as “zoning”. As CIAM members traveled worldwide, their ideas and ideals spread outside Europe, notably within the United States and Latin America.

In the interest of projecting prosperity effectively into the future, Puerto Rico's Planning Board had the responsibility of envisioning an adequate infrastructure for the Island, capable of addressing health, transportation, and life-safety issues. Diverse concurrent strategies also tended to the improvement of the Island's physical conditions. Public housing became a priority; some 90,000 families lived in slums, which proliferated at astonishing rates. By 1943, the government had built 4,000 low-income units, while fast-paced migration to the *arrabal* amounted to 2,000 families per year.<sup>42</sup> Communications and transportation made viable connections previously hindered by geography and topography. New roads were built, as were bridges. Telegraphy and radio contributed to minimize isolation. It should not come up as a surprise that, in concord with this vision of improved “reachability”, government would formalize its efforts at facilitating public fire protection.

Today, few would be prone to acknowledge that these rather unassuming, somewhat small-scaled fire stations sprinkled throughout the Island owe their existence – primarily - to war preparations undertaken on the Island before Pearl Harbor's attack and the United States' formal entry into the war. By late 1941, Governor Tugwell appointed a *Fire Prevention and Safety Measures Committee* who met regularly to address the defense of the San Juan Bay. Military and governmental representatives, as well as civilians, integrated the group who worked as a small advisory board. Initially focused on the dangers posed by oil tanks and storage lumberyards within the capital city's

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<sup>41</sup> Picó, *Historia general*, 259.

<sup>42</sup> Silvestrini and Luque de Sánchez, *Historia de Puerto Rico*, 528.

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waterfront, many of the committee's discussions centered on how to shield, bury or camouflage these dock deposits.<sup>43</sup> Eventually, team discussions embraced the subject of fire liability conditions throughout the Island. At a January 28, 1942 meeting, Sergio Cuevas Bustamante - Commissioner of the Interior and committee member - raised the question: -"Why not establish certain fire stations in the Island?" Furthermore, on February 13, 1942, Jaime Annexy (who participated in the discussions as Chairman of the *Central Committee Civilian Defense*) argued about "the necessity for certain types of fire stations... 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Class".<sup>44</sup> Legislation was enacted expeditiously to that effect and, as a consequence, Law #158 of May 9, 1942 created Puerto Rico's Fire Department. For Governor Tugwell, firefighting constituted an essential public (and wartime) service; 1942 was all about getting prepared for any eventuality.<sup>45</sup>

Concomitantly, rural/urban migration had led to more densely populated urban centers and improvised, unsafe housing proliferated, most of it in wood, new and reused. Tugwell was aware that Puerto Rico was not only the most densely populated territory in the United States at the time, but that almost two million people lived in small wooden shacks at both urban and rural locations.<sup>46</sup> **[FIGURE 7]** Multiple common, but inadequate, practices like smoking in bed or leaving lit candles unattended were responsible for loss of life and property. City immigrants brought with them many unsafe countryside manners.<sup>47</sup> Sugar cane fields were also prone to fire, given the practice of burning plots during the harvest season, but also because of extended periods without much-needed rainfall. Between 1943 and 1944, a severe drought impacted negatively the Island's economy.<sup>48</sup>

After the war ended in 1945, a sense of renewal prevailed. The *Partido Popular Democrático*, which originally promoted political independence from the USA, decanted politically for the establishment of a semi-autonomous regime in the Island, economically advocating for industrial development based on imported capital, mainly from the Mainland. Incentives granted to investors were plentiful, among them assurances regarding life and property safety. Myriad official palliatives were needed to counteract opposing political forces. Muñoz Marín's bent away from independence had by now

<sup>43</sup> Minutes from the *Fire Prevention and Safety Measures Committee*, from January to May, 1942 (AGPR, Fondo: Oficina del Gobernador, Tarea 96-20; Caja 389).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Tugwell, *La tierra azotada*, 200, 524.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 200, 524.

<sup>47</sup> In February 1945, the town of Lares was almost completely devastated by fire. (Puerto Rico Planning, Urbanization, and Zoning Board, *Third Annual Report of the Puerto Rico Planning, Urbanization, and Zoning Board, submitted to the Governor of Puerto Rico, Fiscal Year 1944-45*, 81). The fire started at a kitchen where gasoline and kerosene were mixed, carrying extreme consequences but also helping to raise consciousness about fire prevention. The Lares disaster was quoted extensively as a tragedy that should never be repeated.

<sup>48</sup> Silvestrini and Luque de Sánchez, *Historia de Puerto Rico*, 505; also Tugwell, *La tierra azotada*, 573.

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become publicly evident, and pro independence forces grew restless, threatening the government's campaign that focused on "selling" Puerto Rico as a peaceful paradise for investment.

In 1946, President Harry S. Truman named the Island's first governor born in Puerto Rico, Jesús T. Piñero, militant in the *Partido Popular*. Two years later, Luis Muñoz Marín became the country's first elected governor. **[FIGURE 8]** In spite of the USA's "aperture" to local participation in the Island's political processes, endorsers of independence came together for a multisided show of force in 1950: on one hand, advocates of self determination proclaimed the Republic in the mountain town of Jayuya; on another, a group attempted a takeover of the Governor's Mansion in Old San Juan; and, almost coincidentally, three nationalists attacked Blair House in Washington, D. C. Alarmed by it all, the government made a point at granting continuity to its commitment for the establishment of order at all levels.

*Creation of Puerto Rico's Fire Department and the Fire Station Building Program*

After Puerto Rico's Legislature approved Law #158 (known as "The Fire Service of Puerto Rico Act") to create the *Servicio Insular de Bomberos de Puerto Rico* (Puerto Rico Insular Fire Services) in 1942, several appointees headed the new agency for short periods. In August 1st, 1943, Rexford G. Tugwell named as Fire Chief Raúl Gándara who was, at the time, Captain of the Ponce Fire Corps. To best fulfill duties of fire prevention and suppression, new municipal facilities were needed with urgency. War, undoubtedly, became the catalytic to accelerate their construction: it certainly justified the need. But in a way, war also became an opportunity to further local installations and public improvements.<sup>49</sup>

Brand-new firehouses were built for the Office of Civilian Defense under the supervision of the Department of the Interior. A first group of these was designed by personnel of the Department's Division of Public Buildings just months before the Fire Insular Board was established. By March 3, 1942, the Chairman of the *Fire Prevention and Safety Measures Committee* advised on the need for an architect to design the new stations. Jaime Annexy, Chairman of the *Central Committee for Civilian Defense* replied to him: "...engineers at the Department of the Interior are now drawing up plans for three different type stations – A#1, A-#2, and A-#3."<sup>50</sup> In the 1941-1942 *Report of the*

<sup>49</sup> In Puerto Rico today, federal funds allotted primarily to address Mainland needs, continue to be used, in parallel, to advance local interests not always directly related to the original purpose of the allocation.

<sup>50</sup> Minutes *Fire and Safety Committee*, March 3, 1942. The distinction between architect and engineers is made in the transcript, but not pursued by meeting participants in the following meetings recorded. Beyond this reference, no assertion can be made at this time as to who was responsible for the design. In Puerto Rico, *engineer* often substitutes the term *architect*, without taking into account the differences between fields.

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*Commissioner of the Interior to the Governor* (culminating in June 30), the Division of Public Buildings at the Department of the Interior reports as its own a program to erect 100 fire stations Islandwide. **[FIGURE 9]** As it happened, the Fire Insular Board, having been created just one month before, would end up being responsible for only the program's implementation.

An important consideration surfaces immediately regarding the identification of prototypes to be built and eventually erected. Jaime Annexy's designations (*A-#1, A-#2, and A-#3*), as he states, come from an alleged report on the subject prepared by the Office of Civilian Defense.<sup>51</sup> However, the listing of property types to be built as part of the Department of the Interior's 100 fire stations program adopts different nomenclatures: Type A, Type B, and Type C. The fact that two different agencies are involved might account for the inconsistency. In fact, Annexy's coding system is not referred to in subsequent documentation, and seems to have been dropped off, if ever used. However, the alphabetical categorization poses its own problems. The most confusing one relates to the unmethodical use of letters, repeatedly alternating their use when referring to one model for another. Moreover, the labeling of types in the original 100-stations plan contradicts subsequent official references to these. For example, in said plan costs are scaled as follows: Type A was priced at \$14,727.26; B at \$10,671.07; and Type C at \$4,006.02. In reality – as explained ahead – the smallest station was A, and the largest C, which is not in agreement with the above stated costs. How these inconsistencies were addressed at the time has yet to be determined. The initial contention was to build six Type A stations, twenty-seven Type B, and sixty-seven Type C to reach the one hundred count. Not all of them were built immediately. Upon examination of the first stations, it seems that – at some point – the designation of models A and C are switched, which not only seems consistent with their stipulated building cost, but also with the specific types that were first built in and around 1943, as documented by photos and extant properties. One early reference states that “*all Fire Houses to be obtained through Defense Public Works funds would be shelters*” and the two fire station types that lent most for such purposes are those, in fact, promoted (built?) during those first years.<sup>52</sup> With a larger interior area and more compact constitution, these models seem most appropriate for gathering people, as opposed to a two story prototype in which the fire truck occupied most of the first floor. The latter, however, would eventually prove to be the most used alternative. Reference to the use of firehouses as shelters vanishes quickly from the period's documentation, underlining it was discarded as a main concern attached to the fire station building program.

Once a fire station was completed under the supervision of the Department of the Interior, it was turned over to the Insular Fire Service for operation. Construction was subsidized with *Central Civilian*

<sup>51</sup> Research efforts to find this document at the time this nomination was prepared did not yield positive results.

<sup>52</sup> Minutes *Fire and Safety Committee*, May 5, 1942.

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*Defense Committee* Contingent Funds. In consequence, firehouses were often referred to as "*Parques de Bombas de la Defensa Civil*". The terrain upon which these stations were to be built was to be donated to the Civil Defense by each prospective city and had to meet the requirements of the recently created *Puerto Rico Planning, Urbanization, and Zoning Board*.<sup>53</sup> Municipalities – which also provided materials and some labor - had to provide a plot of land free of any legal constraint, embracing some 200-plus square meters, suitable for construction, and centrally located. Jurisdictions were responsible for the demolition of any existing structure or ruin within the lots. Some municipalities (like Arecibo and Ponce) exacted the required piece of land from the plots on which their public schools stood.<sup>54</sup> Due to many unforeseen conditions, the Planning Board delayed acceptance of several prospective lots, a situation that irked Fire Chief Gándara and led to a public dispute between him and the then President of the Board, Rafael Picó.<sup>55</sup> Haste prevailed. Contracts were awarded before land tenure issues were resolved; contractors were granted orders to proceed in parcels which had been misidentified in the building plan.<sup>56</sup>

Several private contractors were entrusted the construction of various fire stations. In lieu of a proper builder, others were erected by administration.<sup>57</sup> On instances where a contractor was recruited, some tasks were still tended to by administration by the Fire Insular Corps. Probably to diminish overall construction costs, when a job was awarded to a private contractor, some tasks were set aside for completion by administration, such as site cleaning, construction of outdoor ramps, toilet partitions, telephone installation, and items considered to be "decoration" (*obra de ornamentación*). These were not many, but included installation of the signature escutcheon of the Fire Corps. **[FIGURE 10]** In construction budgets and invoices from the contractor, the above-mentioned articles

<sup>53</sup>The Urban Development Division of the Puerto Rico Planning, Urbanization, and Zoning Board prepared a report on the proposed location of 16 fire stations in the following thirteen (13) municipalities: Aibonito, Aguadilla, Arecibo, Bayamón, Caguas, Lares, Manatí, Mayagüez, Ponce, Río Piedras, San Juan, San Sebastián, and Vega Alta. "*The Planning Board was called in to review the program after it was under way and when several stations were already built.*" (Puerto Rico Planning, Urbanization, and Zoning Board, *Second Annual Report of the Puerto Rico Planning, Urbanization, and Zoning Board, submitted to the Governor of Puerto Rico, Fiscal Year 1943-44*), 29-30.

<sup>54</sup>Letter from Herminio Echevarría, Office of the Secretary of the Municipal Government of Ponce to Charles McCormick, head of the Civil Defense, dated September 13, 1942. (AGPR, Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Edificios Públicos, Caja 807, Legajo 221).

<sup>55</sup>"Picó explicó lo ocurrido con los Parques de Bomba (sic)", *El Mundo*, 14 June 1946, p. 15.

<sup>56</sup>Letter from Carlos A. Molina to the Major of Guayama dated August 12, 1943; letter from Sergio Cuevas Bustamante to the Mayor of Santa Isabel dated July 22, 1943. (AGPR, Caja 807, Leg. 221).

<sup>57</sup>In the building industry, projects can be contracted in different ways. Besides construction by a straight, "all-inclusive" contract to execute all tasks required for completion, projects are often executed "by administration", requiring the owner to pay for materials, labor and overhead incrementally as the work progresses.

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and tasks are identified as "PA" (By Administration).<sup>58</sup> The *Servicio Insular de Bomberos* participated actively in the building process, supervised by engineers and architects working at the Department of the Interior. Often, firemen assisted in the construction, contributing their electrical, plumbing, and mechanical skills, if not just plain labor also in rebuilding trucks as water pumps. **[FIGURE 11]** The Fire Corps "volunteered" its most skilled members at one location to assist in nearby areas when their station was being built. Thanks to the help of volunteers, the city, and private companies, the expenses assigned to the construction of many fire stations could be significantly reduced.<sup>59</sup> In spite of every contributing party's good will, coordination problems surfaced along the course of action.<sup>60</sup> The diversity of participants entrusted with interpreting model plans may account for differences (rarely major) that nonetheless surface within the assortment of stations built. As it is to be expected, all of the above-stated conditions reflect in the varying final costs of construction for the fire stations. **To this day, the course of action followed in order to implement the fire station construction program – engaging government employees in a public works construction initiative - knows no comparable in the Island.**

Financial resources assigned to the program in 1943 were plentiful: "*Work contracted during the year amounted to \$544,636.72, a large portion of this being for the construction of fire stations throughout the Island.*"<sup>61</sup> The effort is highlighted in Governor Tugwell's yearly report:

*"During the fiscal year under review, the Office of Civilian Defense of Puerto Rico was able to provide every community in the Island with modern fire fighting equipment supplied by the National Office of Civilian Defense, and began the construction of fire stations to house this equipment. Never before has the Island had anything approaching adequate fire fighting facilities."*<sup>62</sup>

This marked the beginning of a decade long process through which – assisted by yearly budgetary assignments - many Island localities succeeded at having a new fire station of its own, thus granting official, public "assurances" of the Government's concern with the public's well-being. In 1943,

<sup>58</sup>See Certificates for Payment to contractor Miguel J. Nolla, 1943. (AGPR, Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Edificios Públicos, Caja 808, Legajo 222).

<sup>59</sup> Servicio Insular de Bomberos de Puerto Rico *Informe detallado de la forma en que fueron invertidos los \$80,000 asignados en la Ley Núm. 89 del 1949* (San Juan: 1951) 3, 5.

<sup>60</sup>Among these, the following recur: the lack of immediate availability of sites chosen, the selection of inadequate lots, initial reliance on wrong measurements, responsibility disputes, and payments withheld, as evidenced in multiple documents. (AGPR, Caja 808, Leg. 222).

<sup>61</sup>Oficina del Gobernador, *Forty-Third Annual Report of the Governor of Puerto Rico, Honorable Rexford G. Tugwell, 1943*, (San Juan: Insular Procurement Office, Printing Division, 1944), 36.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 48.

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contractor Miguel J. Nolla was entrusted the construction of 7 fire stations in the eastern region, 5 of them based on Prototype A, and 2 on Prototype B: Caguas, Cayey, Gurabo, Humacao, Juncos, San Lorenzo, and Yabucoa. Other contractors were simultaneously awarded construction contracts for multiple jobs: Aníbal Escanellas, Juan E. Casanova, and Martín Martell.<sup>63</sup> By 1944, over 30 fire stations had been erected throughout the Island.<sup>64</sup> For year 1945, the Office of the Governor did not include any additional information regarding the fire station building program.<sup>65</sup> No new fire stations were built during 1946, but funds were appropriated to build nine (9) stations in 1946-47.<sup>66</sup> Law #305, approved on April 13, 1946, allocated \$40,000 for said purpose. Subsequent reports from the Governor's Office for fiscal years 1947-48, and 1948-49 provided no related information, but in its yearly report to the Legislature, the *Servicio de Bomberos* notified that by 1948, 39 towns already had their own fire station; 36 – almost an equal amount of them – had yet to be provided with one.<sup>67</sup> For fiscal year 1949-50, several new fire houses were recommended for diverse municipalities and monies assigned by the Legislature for their construction.<sup>68</sup> By fiscal year 1951-52, no construction or completion of fire stations is informed to the governor by Puerto Rico's Commissioner of the Interior.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>63</sup>Among pertinent documents are: construction contracts, orders to proceed, certificates for payment, and general correspondence pertaining to the different builders and the stations assigned to them. (AGPR, Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Edificios Públicos, Caja 806, Legajo 220; Caja 807, Legajo 221; Caja 808, Legajo 222, Legajo 223; Caja 813, Legajo 230; Caja 818, Legajo 234). Escanellas, Martell and Nolla are listed among practicing contractors in 1949 in the *Directorio Industrial de de Puerto Rico, 1949-1950*, Vicente León, Ed. (San Juan: Asociación de Industriales de Puerto Rico, 1950, pp. 41-2)

<sup>64</sup>Oficina del Gobernador, *Forty-Fourth Annual Report of the Governor of Puerto Rico, Honorable Rexford G. Tugwell, 1944* (San Juan: Oficina Insular de Compras, División de Imprenta, 1945), 19, 28.

<sup>65</sup>Oficina del Gobernador, *Forty-Fifth Annual Report of the Governor of Puerto Rico, Honorable Rexford G. Tugwell, 1945* (San Juan: Service Office of the Government of Puerto Rico, Printing Division, 1946).

<sup>66</sup>Oficina del Gobernador, *Forty-Seventh Annual Report of the Governor of Puerto Rico, Honorable Jesús T. Piñero, for the Fiscal Year 1946-1947* (San Juan: Oficina Insular de Compras, División de Imprenta, 1947), 83, 84.

<sup>67</sup> Fire stations were in place at Adjuntas, Aguadilla, Añasco, Arecibo, Arroyo, Bayamón, Cabo Rojo, Caguas, Carolina, Cataño, Cayey, Ciales, Coamo, Comerío, Fajardo, Guánica, Guayama, Guayanilla, Gurabo, Humacao, Juana Díaz, Juncos, Lares, Manatí, Mayaguez, Ponce, Río Piedras, Sabana Grande, Salinas, San Germán, San Juan, San Lorenzo, San Sebastián, Santa Isabel, Utuado, Vega Alta, Vega Baja, Yabucoa, Yauco. Towns lacking a fire station by 1948 were: Aguada, Aguas Buenas, Aibonito, Barceloneta, Barranquitas, Camuy, Ceiba, Cidra, Corozal, Dorado, Guaynabo, Hatillo, Hormigueros, Isabela, Jayuya, Lajas, Las Marías, Las Piedras, Loíza, Luquillo, Maricao, Maunabo, Moca, Morovis, Naguabo, Naranjito, Orocovis, Patillas, Peñuelas, Quebradillas, Rincón, Río Grande, Toa Alta, Toa Baja, Trujillo Alto, Villalba. As reported in *Servicio Insular de Bomberos de Puerto Rico, Informe a la Honorable Legislatura de Puerto Rico* (San Juan, P. R.: Casa Baldrich, Inc., 1948), 16. Not mentioned in the list are: Canóvanas, Culebra, and Vieques. Florida did not become a municipality until 1971. Río Piedras was a municipality up to 1952.

<sup>68</sup>Oficina del Gobernador, *Fiftieth Annual Report of the Governor of Puerto Rico, Honorable Luis Muñoz Marín, 1949-1950*, San Juan: No publishing data, 1950), 101.

<sup>69</sup> Schools, hospitals, and health centers are now the center of attention. Departamento del Interior. *Informe Anual del Comisionado de lo Interior de Puerto Rico* (Año Económico 1951-52) al Hon. Gobernador de Puerto Rico, Roberto A. Sánchez Vilella, Comisionado, 19, 20.

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Table #1 below, summarizes the types of fire stations built by location and their year of completion, acknowledging some exceptions. On occasion, Type A would be expanded and referred to as the "Double Type", in order to include space for an additional vehicle. Under a "Special" nomenclature were included exceptions like expanding the second floor of a "Double Type", as provided for in one of the firehouses in Ponce. In a few cases, existing facilities were rehabilitated, like for the Comerío fire station, metamorphosed from the town's slaughterhouse. If by 1939 Puerto Rico could count on only 8 fire stations, by 1952-53, it could boast 67 of them.<sup>70</sup>

Table #1. Fire Station Prototypes by Municipality in Puerto Rico and year built.

Stations prototypes: A, B, C, D (Double), S (Special), R (Rehabilitation), D (Demolished), U (Unidentified)  
The buildings developed in municipalities do not embody the attributes associated to the nominated resources. The municipality of **Florida** had not been established by the 1950's; **Culebra** did not appear in any of the reports or documents of the Insular Fire Service consulted.

Municipality		Year	Prototypes								
			A	D	B	C	S	R	D	U	
1.	Adjuntas	1947-48		X							
2.	Aguada	1950-51						X			
3.	Aguadilla	1943			X						
4.	Aguas Buenas	1955-56	X								
5.	Aibonito	1950-51		X							
6.	Añasco	1947-48	X								
7.	Arecibo	1943			X						
8.	Arroyo	1945			X						
9.	Barceloneta	1950-51	X								
10.	Barranquitas	1953-54									X
11.	Bayamón	1945	X								
12.	Cabo Rojo	1944-45			X						
13.	Caguas	1944				X					
14.	Camuy	1954-55	X								
15.	Canóvanas	1950-51	X								

<sup>70</sup> "Mejoras permanentes de servicios: situación en el 1940, al completarse 432 años de civilización; obra realizada desde 1941 y lo que falta por hacer" Archivo Luis Muñoz Marín, Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín: Sección 16, Subserie 7 (Junta de Planificación), Caja 5, Cartapacio 50, Documento 2.

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16.	Carolina	1945	X							
17.	Cataño	1945	X							
18.	Cayey	1944	X							
19.	Ceiba	1954-55	X							
20.	Ciales	1947-48	X							
21.	Cidra	1951-52	X							
22.	Coamo	1943	X							
23.	Comerio	1947					X			
24.	Corozal	1951-52	X							
25.	<b>Culebra</b>									
26.	Dorado	1955-56	X							
27.	Fajardo	1943	X							
28.	<b>Florida</b>									
29.	Guánica				X					
30.	Guayama	1943			X					
31.	Guayanilla	1947-48	X							
32.	Guaynabo	1958-59						X	X	
33.	Gurabo	1943	X							
34.	Hatillo	1955-56	X							
35.	Hato Rey	1951-52								
36.	Hormigueros	1952-53	X							
37.	Humacao	1943				X				
38.	Isabela	1954-55			X					
39.	Jayuya	1950-51		X						
40.	Juana Díaz	1947-48	X							
41.	Juncos	1943	X					X		
42.	Lajas	1950-51	X							
43.	Lares	1947-48	X							
44.	Las Marías	1956-57	X							
45.	Las Piedras	1954-55								
46.	Loíza	1949-50	X							
47.	Luquillo	1950-51	X							
48.	Manatí	1944			X					
49.	Maricao	1951-52							X	
50.	Maunabo	1951-52	X							
51.	Mayagüez	1943			X					

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52.	Moca	1950-51					X	X		
53.	Morovis	1951-52	X							
54.	Naguabo	1950-51		X						
55.	Naranjito	1956-57								
56.	Orocovis	1950-51		X						
57.	Patillas	1955-56								
58.	Peñuelas	1954-55			X					
59.	Ponce	1943	X							
60.	Ponce Playa	1950-51			X		X			
61.	Quebradillas	1954-55								
62.	Rincón	1954-55	X							
63.	Río Grande	1950-51	X							
64.	Río Piedras	1943, 1947-48	X	X	X	X				X
65.	Sabana Grande	1943	X							
66.	Salinas	1947-48	X							
67.	San Germán	1951-52	X							
68.	San Juan		5X		X					X
69.	San Lorenzo	1943			X					
70.	San Sebastián	1947-48		X						
71.	Santa Isabel	1943			X					
72.	Toa Alta	1951-52	X							
73.	Toa Baja	1953-54	X							
74.	Trujillo Alto	1956-57	X							
75.	Utua	1943			X					X
76.	Vega Alta	1943			X					
77.	Vega Baja	1943			X					
78.	Vieques	1951-52		X						
79.	Villalba	1955-56	X							
80.	Yabucoa	1943			X					
81.	Yauco	1943			X					

To this date, almost six decades after, several fire stations have been emptied, demolished or sold; others have had different uses assigned to them by the municipality, often lodging the town's police headquarters, a branch of the national police, the municipal medical emergencies department, and the local Federal Emergency Management Agency. Many are leased by a minimal rent to American Legion chapters, Boy Scouts of America, or veterans' associations. Several accommodate now new

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offices for the local Civil Defense, the agency originally responsible for their existence. Most firehouses proved useful until the 1980's, when new fire stations were built at different Island locations to accommodate larger fire trucks, now more efficient. In spite of it all, a significant number of these original resources remain in place.

Most importantly, they claim space in Puerto Rico's collective memory due to the commitment to civic entrepreneurship exhibited consistently throughout the years by the Fire Corps. As public servants, firefighters enjoy unique prestige among a community.<sup>71</sup> To an extent, policemen can be compared to them, but being primarily agents of order and law enforcement, they are customarily denied the heroic dimension media, literature (particularly children's) and general publicity award to firemen. Led personally by Chief Raúl Gándara, firefighters of the period are still remembered for their self-imposed task of raising public awareness about fire prevention and the original ways in which they carried out said responsibility. A "*Colegio de Bomberos*" was established in 1946 for training future firefighters and carrying out simulacra exercises. Its two-story center still stands at Barrio Palmas, Santurce. **[FIGURE 12]** Committed to an extended educational campaign, Gándara himself – along with other *bomberos* – carried out house-by-house safety check ups, public lectures, fire station tours, and public demonstrations. School visits were frequent **[FIGURE 13]**; kids were urged to join "*Los bomberitos*", a voluntary organization that in Puerto Rico challenged the popularity of the Boy Scouts of America. **[FIGURE 14]** "*Apaguen al dragón*" – an exhortation to extinguish a dragon's fire – was a highly attended event. **[FIGURES 15, 16]** The Fire Chief's efforts also impacted the economy significantly. Home insurance premiums were lowered as a result of the efficiency of the fire program:

*"The greatest success of this Department is the reduction obtained in the risk premiums of fire insurance policies. As stated by mister Guy Postelle, Actuary for the Insurance Companies, the fire insurance premiums in Puerto Rico have been considerably reduced... between 5 and 55 percent, averaging 30%. In dollars and cents this represents an economy of \$660,000 for taxpayers in Puerto Rico. As made manifest by Mr. Postelle, improvements made regarding fire extinguishing equipment, as well as the fire prevention system of this Department were considered by him to recommend said reductions."*<sup>72</sup> **[FIGURE 17]**

Gándara's public persona was proactive, and charismatic; drive and success in keeping a highly visible public profile probably enabled him to remain in his post from 1942 to 1972. Because of his leadership, he succeeded at becoming an almost legendary figure associated with the equally

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<sup>71</sup> "Aurelio López: Jefe Estatal de Bomberos." *Anales de la Asociación de Humacaeños Ausentes*, Núm. 13 (1985): 32-33.

<sup>72</sup> Servicio Insular de Bomberos, *Second Annual Report 1944-45*, 7.

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extended tenure of Governor Luis Muñoz Marín.<sup>73</sup> [FIGURE 18] Magali García Ramis, noted Puerto Rican author, distinguishes Muñoz Marín, UPR Chancellor Jaime Benítez, and Gándara as the three great men ("*próceres*") of the first decades of the Commonwealth.<sup>74</sup>

On fire stations, related activities and the organization of the Fire Insular Board in Puerto Rico

Generally, a fire station, or firehouse (in Puerto Rico, *Estación de Bomberos*), comprises spaces for storage of firefighting engines and vehicles, personal protective equipment, fire hoses and complementary specialized equipment. It often includes dormitory/living facilities and work areas for firefighters; these are sometimes laid out above the truck garage, allowing personnel to sleep while waiting for a dispatch call. Customarily, firefighters have quick access to the ground floor when duty calls through a sliding pole called a *fireman's pole*. Firefighters customarily remain above the ground floor of fire stations (if these are two-story) until called for assistance, after which they descend, dress up in firefighting gear, and board the fire engine quickly. The fireman's pole allows firefighters to move down quickly, but it is not suitable for climbing up. The pole is attached to the ground floor, goes through a hole in the ceiling, and is attached to the ceiling of the floor above. In Puerto Rico, only stations Type C included a sliding pole. When needed, water hoses are hung from the pole to dry in order to prevent damage. At a typical station there may be clerical space for the officers, a library of reference and other materials, also a "trophy wall" or case where the firefighters display memorabilia. Most of the above-mentioned components, shared by firehouses all over the United States were featured in Puerto Rico's first examples, even if rather small in size. Routine activities for the personnel include inspection and cleaning of the fire truck and the equipment, as well as various drills in which firefighters practice their skills. During the 1940's and 50's, other tasks included: clean-up and maintenance of the station; drying hoses, polishing all metallic components; writing reports, and assisting "*los bomberitos*" in their activities.

In Puerto Rico, operation of the fire stations was entrusted to the Fire Insular Board, organized in two subdivisions: one dedicated to the inspection of public buildings, the other being the Fire Corps per se. The former addressed fire prevention; the latter fought and extinguished fires. With San Juan, capital city, as seat, by 1946 the Fire Service comprised eight (8) districts besides the metropolitan area. Firehouses were divided into two categories: *Parques de Distrito* (regional) and *Parques*

<sup>73</sup> Raúl Gándara Cartagena (1895-1989) remains the longest-serving fire chief of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. In 1951, Gándara wrote a firemen's manual: "*Cuerpo de bomberos: Manual del bombero*" (Firefighters' Corps: The Firefighter's Handbook San Juan P. R., 1951) A technical fire management manual, it was adopted officially in various Latin American countries. In addition, he wrote plays and poems. A public housing complex in Ponce is named after him. A street in Lares bears his last name, as does an avenue in Río Piedras. In 1999, the Puerto Rico Legislature established the *Raúl Gándara Award* to honor yearly the Island's best firefighters.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Magali García Ramis, Friday, March 2, 2012.

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*Municipales* (local). Municipal firehouses (named *parques*, a name inherited from Spanish colonial times) were those built outside the capital city, operating only at local level, not regional. Units serving the metropolitan area were considered apart.<sup>75</sup> District stations had two water pumps of 500 gallons each and hoses up to a total of 3,000 feet. Municipal parks had only one pump of a similar capacity, and 1,200 feet in hoses. Municipal stations would normally house one First-Class Fighter and three Third-Class Firefighters.<sup>76</sup> Firemen were classified according to three echelons of authority: First-Class Firefighter, Second Class, and Third Class. Municipal fire stations were under the command of the First-Class fireman who reported to a district chief. Each building had to include an American flag, “properly hoisted”. Codes ruling the men’s behavior while at the job are revealing in terms of the kinds of situations that could, in fact, happen on location. Only officers could sleep or use the beds at the station; their use during daytime was forbidden. Gatherings and chatting with “women of dubious reputation” on or near the premises was banned. Family visits were limited from 5 to 9 at night, but under no circumstance were they to be allowed access to the bedroom area. Driving cars over the water hoses was prohibited; anyone contracting a venereal disease had to inform it.

*Puerto Rico’s fire station building program*

In its annual reports for fiscal years 1949-40 and 1940-41, the Department of the Interior established that the responsibility of its Division of Public Works was to prepare, erect, and maintain buildings belonging to the people of Puerto Rico. During this period, the focus was placed on facilities for health, justice, police and educational uses. No mention is made of any fire stations.<sup>77</sup> An extensive list of towns crossreferenced to specific station prototypes is for the first time included in the Department of the Interior’s annual report for fiscal year ending June 30, 1942.<sup>78</sup> Construction of new *estaciones* coincided with the early stages of USA’s war effort. Lack of materials and gasoline constituted a problem, even if funds were available.<sup>79</sup> The War Production Board (WPA) insisted on withholding, as much as possible, any economic activity civil in nature. Official requests for building

<sup>75</sup>Servicio Insular de Bomberos de Puerto Rico, *Reglamento*, 1ro de enero de 1946. Artículo X: Organización y funcionamiento interno de los Parques. At that time, the metropolitan area was defined to include: Barrio Obrero, Carolina, Guaynabo, Hato Rey, Loíza, Río Grande, Río Piedras, San Juan, and Santurce.

<sup>76</sup> Organizational data is presented here as expounded by Chief Raúl Gándara in his lecture about the Fire Corps to the Lions Club of Río Piedras, 1946.

<sup>77</sup> Departamento del Interior. *Informe del Comisionado del Interior al Honorable Gobernador de Puerto Rico, Año Fiscal 1939-1940* (San Juan, P. R.: Negociado de Materiales, Imprenta y Transporte, 1941); Departamento del Interior. *Informe del Comisionado del Interior al Honorable Gobernador de Puerto Rico, Año Fiscal 1940-1941* (San Juan, P. R.: Negociado de Materiales, Imprenta y Transporte, 1942).

<sup>78</sup> Departamento del Interior. *Report of the Commissioner of the Interior of Puerto Rico for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 1942 to the Honorable Governor of Puerto Rico* (San Juan, P. R.: Insular Procurement Office Printing Division, 1943).

<sup>79</sup> Tugwell, *La tierra azotada*, 309, 320. In addition, use of materials that could assist in the war effort was forbidden, for example, copper, brass, or bronze pipes, fitting, or hardware thus finished was not allowed. (AGPR, Caja 807, Legajo 221).

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fire stations, as can be expected, underlined their pertinence in times of conflict.

Even construction projects using only local materials and local labor met the WPA's obstinate resistance adding great difficulty to the building effort being carried out in spite of the war.<sup>80</sup> Each project required submittal of an "Application for Authority to Begin Construction" Form PD-200 (Rev 2-1-43) to the War Production Board, stating priority assistance, use need, and reasons for choice of its location. Among arguments presented were:

*"Project will provide protection against fires, which is an obvious danger in any war outpost as is Puerto Rico... Conservation of critical materials has been attempted by adopting a very simple design with cement block curtain walls...the relatively small size of the island and the scattered location of garrisons and airfields makes it necessary to provide fire fighting facilities in various towns in Puerto Rico".<sup>81</sup>*

As mentioned before, standard plans were developed by the Public Buildings Division of the Department of the Interior for repetitive use throughout the Island. Although the original plan to build 100 firestations from 1942 assigned Types A, B, and C to different locations, by 1943, plans had been prepared for twenty-seven Type A, nine Type B, and none in Type C, for a total of thirty-six. Thirty-two of them were built through private contracts.<sup>82</sup> No documentation has been found that explains the sudden rejection of Type C, after it had been assigned to almost 70 towns, and being the cheaper to build (\$4,066.02) according to the original building estimates. Different contractors bid on blueprints and specifications developed for such purposes.

Several architects and one engineer were linked to the fire station program, but their specific design responsibilities have yet to be properly ascertained. Available documentation proves vague as to who is the author of one, some or all prototypes. One who may have been responsible, Fidel Sevillano (1894-1989), signs building specifications and contracts for different firestations, as prepared by the Public Buildings' Division of the Department of the Interior, where he worked.<sup>83</sup> From 1939 to 1942,

<sup>80</sup>Tugwell, *La tierra azotada*, 522.

<sup>81</sup>*Preference Rating Order P-19-H, Serial Number P-009-R*, dated June 23, 1943, regarding construction of a fire station by contractor Anibal Escanellas; letter dated October 30, 1943, from Adolfo S. Pagán to Carlos A. Molina, Director of the Public Works Division of the Department of the Interior; letter dated November 26, 1943, from Sergio Cuevas, Commissioner of the Department of the Interior, to Harold Lockheimer, District Manager of the War Production Board. (AGPR: Caja 807, Legajo 221).

<sup>82</sup> The 100-stations' list appears in Departamento del Interior. *Informe del Año Fiscal 1940-1941*, 41-42. For information about construction documents and work contracted see Departamento del Interior. *Report of the Commissioner for Fiscal Year ending June 30, 53, 59.*

<sup>83</sup> Construction Specifications for Fire Stations (AGPR, Caja 813, Legajo 230).

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Sevillano is listed as “assistant” in the Division of Public Buildings of the Department of the Interior.<sup>84</sup> Whether his endorsements mean he was the designer or just an employee representing a government agency is not clear.<sup>85</sup> For 1943, his title reads “Assistant Architect” to Inocente Rivera, Architect of the Division of Public Works.<sup>86</sup> By 1944 he has left the position; of Inocente Revira not much is known. During Second World War, Sevillano joined the Coast Guard and worked for the Civil Defense as Chief of Emergency Public Works In San Juan. To this day, he is best remembered in Puerto Rico as the architect of Mayagüez’ City Hall.

For fiscal year 1943-44, Pedro Méndez Mercado is acknowledged as architect in official documents pertaining to the then newly-entitled Division of Public Buildings and Municipal Works of the Department of the Interior.<sup>87</sup> After one of his several sojourns in his native city of Ponce, Méndez returned to San Juan in 1941. He worked as superintendent of the Capitol Building in Puerta de Tierra. Méndez Mercado is also responsible for key emblematic buildings pertaining to the Art Deco period on the Island, among these, Miami Apartments, in Condado, San Juan (1935), and the rehabilitation of Ponce’s 19th-century public market (1938).<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, much earlier he designed the *Parque de Bombas de Guayama*, an idiosyncratic version of a fire station in Spanish Revival style. In Ponce, he became an officer of the local fire corps.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, in 1981, upon being interviewed by architect/historian Jorge Rigau, Pedro Méndez was quick to mention him “*I have a building in every town*” – allegedly referring to the prototypical fire stations. However, from the available information, it is difficult to determine if indeed Pedro Méndez was the architect responsible for the prototypical designs.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Departamento del Interior. *Informe del Comisionado, Año Fiscal 1939-40*, 5, 7; Departamento del Interior. *Report of the for Fiscal Year ending June 30, 1942*, 7.

<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, as stated before, when the advisability of hiring an architect to design the firehouses was considered, Commissioner of the Interior Sergio Cuevas had argued that engineers at his department were already taking care of it. *Minutes Fire and Safety Committee*, March 3, 1942.

<sup>86</sup> Departamento del Interior. *Report of the Commissioner for Fiscal Year ending June 30, 1942*, 7.

<sup>87</sup> Departamento del Interior. *Informe Anual del Comisionado de lo Interior al Honorable Gobernador de Puerto Rico, Año Fiscal 1943-44* (San Juan, P. R.: Administración General de Suministros, División de Imprenta, 1946), 6.

<sup>88</sup> For more information on the architect, see *Pedro Méndez Mercado en su tiempo (1902-1990)*, exhibition catalogue, n. d., Ponce Art Museum, Puerto Rico Chapter of the AIA, and Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción de la Universidad de Puerto Rico (AACUPR).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 22, 24.

<sup>90</sup> Original plans *per se* are yet missing; they are often mentioned making reference to the Department of the Interior (for which Fidel Sevillano and Pedro Méndez worked) Some documents bear witness to Méndez’ association to the fire station building program. A letter written by the architect to Alonso Aguilar, the engineer acting as project inspector for the fire station confirms it: “*I see fit to return the list of materials necessary for the healthy installation of Cabo Rojo’s fire station, so you may see fit to send it to the Office for Emergency Assistance Program, which have taken over these works.*” Letter dated August 25, 1943 (AGPR, Caja 807, Legajo 221).

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A third name is more directly linked to Puerto Rico's Mid-20<sup>th</sup> century fire stations, that of engineer Raúl Buxeda.<sup>91</sup> A set of plans signed by him – the only ones available from the period so far – depicts in plan and axonometric representation a two-story fire station that closely resembles many of the units built on the Island as Type A. **[FIGURES 19, 20, 21]** His design was used extensively from 1945 on, when it is divulged in the press.<sup>92</sup>

If the issue of design authorship regarding Puerto Rico's fire stations has yet to be elucidated, so is the decision (whose?) of developing three (3) different official station prototypes, and ultimately having decanted preferentially for two of them. Questions abound: Which prototype was deemed proper for which conditions and locations originally? Why was Type C endorsed for most locations initially, and subsequently substituted for Type A? Do the inconsistencies in prototype labeling have a bearing on these queries? Providing the appropriate answer is hindered by key research limitations.<sup>93</sup> Built in reinforced concrete and spare in expression, the three main fire station models were officially adopted as prototypical. The local government's own cement factory proved to be a blessing: *"...buildings had to be simple, requiring a minimum of imported materials, using our own cement..."*<sup>94</sup>

Fire station prototypes

Repetition of a given architectural model facilitates public identification. Iteration conveys order. Both ideas proved important to the way in which consistency was pursued to communicate the State's concern for its people and their protection from warfare. Homogeneity would also convey democracy, for every town could now claim a similar fire station. Professor María Elena Rodríguez Castro,

<sup>91</sup>Information on Raúl Buxeda's early career is scarce. On September 19, 1944, he advertises his professional services in page 3 of **The Virgin Islands News**: "Raúl Buxeda, Engineer and Contractor Offers you his wide experience in building and road construction; preparation of complete plans for your house, and survey of your land. For additional information please contact Leon A. Mawson of this city." A member of the Buxeda family related to funerary services in Puerto Rico, he designed several cemeteries, also condominiums. His Social Security Death Index (SSDI) Death Record states Buxeda was born on February 3, 1915, and passed away on April 1, 2002, having lived 87 years.

<sup>92</sup> "Proyecto asigna parques de incendio a 47 municipios", *El Mundo*, 2 April 1946, p. 5.

<sup>93</sup> On one hand, related collections at the *Archivo General de Puerto Rico* (AGPR) have not been classified yet, on the other, *El Mundo* newspaper – although founded in 1920 - has only been catalogued from 1944 on, missing by two years the period crucial to our investigation. Furthermore, records of the formative years of the Civil Defense in Puerto Rico, for the moment, are scarce.

<sup>94</sup> Tugwell, *La tierra azotada*, 522.

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addressing this particular period in the Island's history, underlines how order came to fill the void that preceded in terms of the State's rather limited reach in previous years. Politicians promoted "integration" and "normalization" of public conduct; old and new manners would all be domesticated through institutionalization.<sup>95</sup> The "modern" Puerto Rican State would self legitimize itself through emblematic structures of representative capacity. Political culture customarily adheres to symbolic structures and their legitimization; these, in turn, influence public behavioral patterns and, in the end, promote and endorse imaginary understandings of the public realm.

Use of a consistent vocabulary and its consistent repetition with the intention of underlining an institutional presence relates to the concept of "connotation" as expounded by Umberto Eco in relationship to architectural objects. As Eco explains, beyond the *utilitas* attributed to a building, processes of contextualization and culturization customarily add a certain connotation, a meaning that transcends the pragmatic function of the object without necessarily overshadowing its purpose.<sup>96</sup> Habitually, this "added value" grants architecture reasons for permanence and preservation. That constitutes one of the reasons for inclusion of Puerto Rico's mid-20<sup>th</sup> century fire stations in the National Register for Historic Places.

The aggressive, government sponsored, station-building initiative focused on still available urban locations at the heart of town. Most of the sites chosen, characterized by a flat topography, were readily accessible from the town's main thoroughfares. Ease of access and dispatch were essential considerations. Some stations were located adjacent to the main plaza, or close to it. No specific environmental considerations regarding orientation were taken into account. These new public buildings, in spite of being rather small-scaled, introduced a more contemporary architectural idiom to the urban fabric. Traditional, high profile, longstanding icons like churches, city halls, and schools dated from previous periods, had been built following history-laden styles, be it Neoclassical, Spanish Revival, or Art Deco. At times appropriating some Deco features, fire stations in Puerto Rico adhered preferentially to a restrained, almost abstract, volumetric expression, highlighting their pragmatic *raison d'être* as primary attribute, and shying away from any ornamental affectations. **[FIGURE 22]** War imposed stylistic sobriety, as stated before, but architectural expression had by then evolved to incorporate key tenets of the Modern Movement opting for nonfigurative façade treatments, and retreat from any attempt at historicism. This new preference for non-representational design made easier to tackle the architectural severity imposed by wartime.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup>María Elena Rodríguez Castro, "Foro de 1940: Las pasiones y los intereses se dan la mano", 72-73.

<sup>96</sup> Umberto Eco, "Function and Sign: The Semiotics of Architecture", in Neil Leach, Ed., *Rethinking Architecture: a Reader in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), 187.

<sup>97</sup> In Puerto Rico, the Juana M. Colón High School in Comerío constitutes a comparable example pertaining to the same period. At the school – as in Type A fire stations - reference to the Art Deco style is limited to the main entrance portico (in bas-

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Firehouses occupied lots rectangular in shape, ranging from 148 to 200 square meters. Most of the left over, surrounding space was paved in concrete. All of the above-mentioned shared characteristics and conditions repeated from community to community, as if following a pattern. Construction documents included architectural details to be shared between different prototypes.<sup>98</sup>

No accompanying information about the particular attributes or components of the different prototypes developed by the Department of the Interior for the Fire Corps has been identified, but the differences between Types A, B, and C can be ascertained today through the surviving examples that still claim architectural integrity, original photographs, construction specifications, certificates for payment, correspondence, contracts, and some documents, as well as witnesses whose memory constitutes nowadays valuable oral history.

Prototype A was symmetrical in appearance, included two stories, and measured 14'-6" by 33'-0" in plan. **[FIGURE 23]** The truck would occupy most of the first floor level, which could be reached by a one-flight stair from the second floor, where a communal bedroom with bathroom facilities (shower, toilet and sink) were housed. The sleeping area faced to the front and could be well ventilated by an ample door facing a balcony used to hang and clean the hoses. A round, tubular iron railing surrounded this open area, accommodating a flagpole. A window smaller than the others ventilated the bathroom. Openings on the second level were detailed with individual concrete eaves. A continuous one was provided around the first floor. Windows were originally in wood, sometimes louvered, others with glass panes. Both a sign and an escutcheon were displayed; the former above the truck's entrance (over the eave), the latter at center, above the balcony door. This façade appliqué is a shield-shaped emblem displaying the equivalent of a coat of arms. Circular and three-dimensional, it incorporates the fireman's distinguishing hat, a ladder and two horns (the siren) all in bas-relief. **[FIGURE 10]** Signage could be in Spanish or English, sometimes with free standing letters (in concrete) reading Insular Fire Service.<sup>99</sup> In some cases, the first floor of Prototype A was expanded laterally to provide space to park a second fire truck or an ambulance, extending, as a consequence, the uppermost terrace next to the bedroom space. This model was referred to as

relief, stepping planes), while the rest of the structure (all in concrete) is developed without any embellishment. See Héctor L. Bermúdez-Ríos, *Un cuadro atemporal: Impronta de la Escuela Superior Juana M. Colón de Comerío en la memoria colectiva* (Mid-Career Research Project, Polytechnic University, 2012, unpublished).

<sup>98</sup> Letter dated August 3, 1943, from Carlos A. Molina to Alonso Aguilar, Project Inspector (AGPR, Caja 807, Legajo 221).

<sup>99</sup> Variations in signage were plentiful: Parque de Bombas, Parque de Bombas Insular, SIB, FIS, were all used. Documents consulted did no abound on the reasons for the use of Spanish or English in one or another.

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“Double”. Ceiling height at all prototypes was 10’-0” (to meet truck standards); all of them boasted corner guards (*guardaruedas*) in cast iron, and floors and wall bases in hydraulic mosaic.<sup>100</sup>

Prototype B was a single story, asymmetrical model with a roofed, yet open space for one truck, measuring 34’-6” x 33’-0”. **[FIGURE 24]** An entrance door to its right completed the main façade. Six small, square-shaped openings in this main elevation provided light for its interior spaces through glass panes or glass block, as well as an articulation of the otherwise plain concrete wall. Horizontal eaves (sometimes curving down) and roof parapets with rounded edges reverberate traces of the Art Deco style. Some of these structures include a flagpole in iron piping. The name “*Parque de Bombas*” is often featured in bas-relief concrete at the parapet over the truck opening. Prototype B can be found in towns like Arroyo, Yauco, Yabucoa, and Vega Alta, even if the truck’s garage – no longer practical – has often been sealed to provide more enclosed space at the service of a new use program. In some instances, the escutcheon substitutes text signage. It can be found next to the front door, whereas in others, it is displayed atop the truck’s entrance.

An example of Prototype C (larger than A and B) still stands in Caguas, and in Mayagüez; the former one has been well-maintained; the latter has been deprived of its integrity. Occupying fully two floors, Model C accommodates two trucks, but does away with the upper terrace, expanding interior space at the second level. It incorporates features from A and B, like round-edge parapets, eaves over openings, the official escutcheon, and the small, square-shaped openings for ventilation, now on both levels. A full stair (whose presence can be adumbrated from the façade) now allows access to the second floor. Next to it was located a fireman’s pole, being the only type in Puerto Rico to incorporate such feature. **[FIGURE 25]** In spite of their differences, all prototypes were rather compact. However, in towns where wooden structures predominated, these new, concrete, freestanding structures must have impressed as contemporary architectural expressions. Concrete was promoted as durable, nonflammable, and permanent, as an assurance of a future.<sup>101</sup>

After the mid-1950’s, new fire stations were built, some following different design criteria mirroring the renewed expectations of political leaders promising the establishment of the commonwealth status: “*Three new parks were finished and/or inaugurated during the year. [1956-57] These were Trujillo Alto, Naranjito, and Las Marías. Only Guaynabo has yet to have its own. It will be built during year*

<sup>100</sup> Cement tiles (also known as *losa isleña*, *losa criolla*, or *losa nativa*) were locally produced. They allowed for variety in patterning and color, although at firehouses, full-color, with no pattern ones were used. Mario Arturo Hernández Navarro, Hernán S. Bustelo Morán: *Puerto Rico Tile Designs* (Amsterdam: The Pepin Press BV, 2010), 17-20.

<sup>101</sup> Irving Santiago Martínez, *El discurso del cemento: la construcción de una imagen* (Mid-Career Research, Polytechnic University, 1998).

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1957-58.”<sup>102</sup> New architectural ideas were subsequently endorsed: a new station at Baldrich, Hato Rey, would be modern, and promoted as such. **[FIGURE 26]** In parallel, renewal led to the demolition of some of the earliest prototypes built as part of the initial construction program:

*“During the year 1957-58, initial steps were undertaken for the construction of new parks in Fajardo, Manatí, Cataño, and Río Piedras. In Río Piedras it was necessary to demolish our station in order to allow for construction of the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Road. Stations at Fajardo, Manatí, and Cataño will be destroyed due to their inconvenient location. This is part of the plan to relocate stations...”*

Fifteen (15) years after Puerto Rico’s Fire Corps was created in 1942, Fire Chief Raúl Gándara succeeded at fulfilling the 100-fire station building plan originally conceived in 1941. This constitutes a watershed in fire station design and construction in the Island, a process that would continue in subsequent years, but spurred by different performance criteria and architectural preferences.

*The effects of time on the fire stations*

Contextual urban conditions have dramatically changed for mid-20<sup>th</sup> century fire stations in Puerto Rico. Nowadays, their urban presence is diminished by larger, less sober, rather strident, but simultaneously less purposeful structures built around them in subsequent years. Small town life has been subjected to modernization, the fast-paced advent of the automobile, and other spiraling changes. Suburbanization has impacted building lots within and outside historic centers, built or unbuilt. Multistoried buildings now diminish traditional two-story properties. Contrast between old and new, unbridled, betrays any expectations of cohesion.<sup>103</sup> Population migration and contemporary distractions at home have undercut public life at many of these locations; per capita income is nowadays generally low amongst those remaining in their hometown. Public activities and events are now of a different nature. In general, the nature of development, population density, patterns of land use, and cultural proclivities all respond to renewed priorities.

Alterations and additions have somewhat contributed to the loss of character in some extant examples of the historic firehouses. Once their original purpose was lost – when larger fire trucks, technologically smarter, came into favor – the structures seemed to lose their reason for being, and

<sup>102</sup> Servicio de Bomberos de Puerto Rico. *Informe Anual del Servicio de Bomberos de Puerto Rico al Honorable Gobernador de Puerto Rico, 1 de julio de 1956 a 30 de junio de 1957*. Mimeographed copy.

<sup>103</sup> Aware that, throughout time, traditional towns in Puerto Rico have shied away from any consistent architectural profile – differences are too many – we address here, more specifically, issues of scale, building materials, and construction techniques that render previous traditional design efforts, if nothing else, strikingly different from their present comparables.

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yet... it is surprising how many of them still remain standing. **[FIGURES 27, 28, 29]** Some, as it is to be expected, have been stripped of their original personality, now missing railing, flagpoles, and escutcheons. Water piping and electrical conduits run exposed over exterior walls. Iron grilles are always added in detrimental manner. Others have been “disguised” beyond recognition, like the fire station in Toa Alta, now a center for artisans. In many instances, the few original details were lost along processes of “modernization”. As an example, the old fire station at Toa Alta, a “B” model, has suffered more changes than any other. It no longer serves its historic purpose. The façade has been effaced almost completely, though there is still some evidence of the original structure and its second story setback. Some eaves remain. Many structures have walled-up the garage entrance; others have been made less attractive by inclusion of parking areas next to them, particularly those now used to lodge the municipalities’ Civil Defense and Medical Services’ ambulances. Emergency response vehicles are currently kept where the fire trucks used to park. They fit in. And in a way, it seems consistent to use today the former fire stations as venue for these programs: they represent, after all, another kind of public service at communal level, just what the fire stations were about.

After more than half-a-century, long gone is the public excitement that characterized the triumph of the Allies in 1945, the same year Rexford G. Tugwell quoted in his memoirs as one in which “*serious achievements paved the way for an efficient government*”. Consolidation of Puerto Rico’s Fire Service Corps was one of the most important of these efforts, and surviving fire stations bear to the fact today.

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F. Associated Property Types

Description of Fire Stations in Puerto Rico

This *Multiple Property Documentation Form* addresses firehouses built in Puerto Rico within approximately one decade, from 1942 to the late 1952. More than sixty (60) of these were built in different towns within that ten-year span; over 40 remain standing. The structures themselves are referred to by different names: *Parque de Bombas*, *Parque de Bombas de la Defensa Civil*, *Estación de Bomberos*, *Parque de Bomberos* and, more recently (given that over half a century has elapsed since their construction) *La vieja estación de bomberos*.<sup>1</sup> In general, similar criteria were considered for placement of the stations within each town's existing fabric and most of them occupy rectangular lots of comparable size (from 148 to 200 square meters). The open, surrounding space is paved in concrete. These characteristics and conditions repeat all over the Island.

Fire stations are primarily represented in Puerto Rico by three (3) basic design types (A, B, C), even if sometimes a "double" version of A was sometimes endorsed, and places like Ponce were awarded a "special" version of Type C. Government reports, plans, official correspondence, contracts, and construction documents all make reference to these three models. Each type accommodates one fire truck, but Prototype A is often subjected to a variation: providing expanded vehicle space to incorporate an ambulance or a second truck. Prototype A incorporates two stories and is laid-out symmetrically. This fire station is rectangular, measuring roughly 15 x 35 feet. This width is determined by the garage space required for the truck to enter and exit. The structural system is based on concrete columns and beams, and 6-inch, cement block walls. The uppermost floor houses the sleeping areas and a bathroom including a water closet with one sink, a toilet and a shower stall. Two-thirds of the upper level is dedicated to dormitory. The garage can be reached from upstairs by a single-run ladder. The second floor sets back from the front facade ten (10) feet, creating an uncovered terrace area above. Symmetry is underlined here as the wall that faces the terrace steps back repeatedly, "staggering" timidly, in layers characteristic of the Art Deco style. The round escutcheon displayed above underlines further the symmetrical composition. Round, tubular iron railings surround the open area from where a flagpole, of the same make, projects out. Some stations included two flagpoles. A continuous concrete eave runs peripherally above the first floor. Free standing, flat faced letters over the eave (in cement) identify the building as Insular Fire Service atop the garage doors. All fenestration is partially surrounded by concrete eaves for protection from the rain. Rain leaders are exposed.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with retired firemen Juan Bautista Rivera and Antonio Hernández, from Jayuya. March 6, 2012.

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Prototype B is a one story high, flat roofed, concrete volume. Asymmetrical in terms of façade composition, the main elevation incorporates a set of garage doors, an entrance door and a group of six small, rectangular-shaped openings with small glass windows. Wood jalousie windows and individual horizontal eaves (in inverted U manner) complement most wall openings. The name “Parque de Bombas” is often featured as a sign in *bas-relief* manner at the parapet over the truck’s entrance opening. Sometimes, freestanding letters rise from the main eave. In some instances, the escutcheon substitutes and/or complements text signage. As a façade appliqué, also in *bas-relief* - this round shield/coat of arms incorporates the fireman’s distinguishing symbols: hat, ladder and blow horns. In some examples, the escutcheon is located next to the front door, whereas in others, it is displayed over the garage entrance. Roof parapets with rounded edges echo the Art Deco style. Some examples of Prototype B include a flagpole in iron piping.

Occupying fully two floors, Prototype C houses two trucks, but does away with the upper terrace, with added interior space upstairs. It incorporates several features from A and B, like round-edge parapets, eaves over window openings, the Corps’ official escutcheon, and the small, square-shaped openings for ventilation, now on both levels. A full stair (evident from the façade) now allows access to the second floor. Next to it was located a fireman’s pole, being the only type in Puerto Rico to incorporate such feature.

As a property type, fire stations are characterized by common physical, but also associative, attributes. Several key architectural characteristics are shared by all relevant examples, from one end of the Island to another. Spatial arrangements in plan are replicated in many stations. In structural terms and method of construction, they were all built in concrete, at a particular time that cement was enjoying a boom in Puerto Rico. More readily accessible for construction than ever before, concrete was by now the building material of choice, not only a safe bet against hurricanes, but also a statement of “modern”, “progressive” societal convictions. All of these firehouses – because of their resemblances – mirror each other to the point of repetition. Stylistically, they reflect the architectural transition particularly pursuant to the period, when the taste for Art Deco no longer dominated debate, but still had its followers and, in contrast, the International Style’s push for abstraction, plane surfaces, and the banishment of all ornament as excess grew stronger.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of their restrained bearing, and in addition to their volumetric consistencies, several architectural details grant fire stations a recognizable identity: the truck garage, the stepping planes at the upper level facade, the escutcheon, rounded parapets in many of them, the iron railings and the flagpole, as well as the rectangular openings. In terms of workmanship – even if these structures

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<sup>2</sup> Frances D. K. Ching, Mark M. Jarzombek, and Vikramaditya Prakash, **A Global History of Architecture**, (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 690.

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cannot claim remarkable artistry per se in their making – the process of how many of them were built – incorporating firemen’s contribution to becoming a reality - adds value to the final product as built.

Statement of significance

Fire stations constitute **the physical legacy of a key transitional period in Puerto Rico’s history**, when a crisis-ridden local government, concerned with order and control as duties inherent to public authority - particularly during a world-wide conflict - lent assurances of welfare and safety through the construction of fire stations at most Island locations. Through implementation of an aggressive construction program, over sixty (60) of these building units were built within five years, those in which the United States was fighting “Axis Powers” that included Germany, Italy and Japan. Architectural iteration – in terms of both a similar stylistic language and of modular repetition - attested to the government’s extended reach, well tended-to responsibilities, and cogent administration.

Associate attributes underline the uniqueness of these fire stations as mirrors of the specific period in History in which they came to be. Built concurrently as World War II develops, most are erected under the aegis of the last North American to hold office as Governor of Puerto Rico, Rexford G. Tugwell. A figure of importance at national and local level, he is not the only public, high profile personality connected to the construction of the fire stations. Puerto Rico’s first appointed native governor, Jesús T. Piñero, and, at that time, legislative leader Luis Muñoz Marín, prevail as political forces at the time. Other personalities involved included Commissioner of the Interior, Sergio Cuevas Bustamante; and the Chairman of the Central Committee Civilian Defense, Jaime Annexy.

Chronologically, this was a period in which USA/Puerto Rico relations were being redefined significantly, and not independently from the impact of war on the Mainland and elsewhere. Fire stations are part of the international conflict’s ripple effect in less protagonical scenarios, far removed from warfare, if not of fear of it. As such, they are the product of means and methods of entities like the Department of the Interior and its then secretary Harold Ickes, the United States Civil Defense, and the War Production Board. Driven by functionality as prime programmatic purpose, Fire Stations were sparingly designed and swiftly built. Their beauty lies in their restraint at stylistic expression and, contrastingly, their iconic character in town.

Specifically at local level, they are associated with attenuating, in parallel, the threat and the brunt of fires. In towns, a large segment of the population lived in wooden houses. The fire threat was ever present. Provision of a fire station at every locality relieved the population from fear of the destruction caused by urban fires. Extended fires – still remembered decades after, like the one at Lares in 1945 – could be fought locally, without depending on volunteers or firefighters coming from neighboring vicinities. Safety reassurances impacted at personal and economic levels. Not only did individuals felt

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less vulnerable to disaster; risk insurance premiums were lowered, making them more accessible to the general population.

In relationship to Puerto Rico's 20<sup>th</sup>-century architectural history, names of key construction industry figures participate in the design process of the Fire Stations: Fidel Sevillano, Pedro Méndez, and engineer Raúl Buxeda. Moreover, fire stations stand for the use of prototypical buildings developed to be replicated in different contexts and sites, a practice often overlooked as relevant subject by traditional architectural historians to this day.<sup>3</sup> Prototype design, however, deserves attention as it addresses issues of typification, standardization, and homogenization that remain to be further understood regarding other Island prototypes pursuant to the 20th century: from the health dispensaries built in rural communities in the late 30's, and police stations from the 1940's, to the late-modern court buildings erected in the 70's, among others.

Fire stations, most importantly, embody early efforts of public/private partnering and community involvement for building public facilities in the Island. To this day, no comparable effort has been recorded. The Federal Government provided the funding; local officials administered the process; municipalities and/or citizens made available the land (and often material and volunteer labor), and firefighters did much of the on-site work, assisting in the effort of saving money and materials during wartime. This civic entrepreneurship extended to the Fire Corps' self-imposed task of raising public awareness about fire prevention. An aggressive education campaign included in-house presentations, bringing townsfolk to the station to listen to firefighters on deterrence strategies. Visits to schools were frequent and the organization called "*Los bomberitos*" succeeded in attracting many children and young men to public events organized for them. Because of his leadership and personal involvement on most of these initiatives, Raúl Gándara - head of the Fire Corps for thirty years - succeeded at becoming an almost legendary figure associated with the equally extended tenure of Governor Luis Muñoz Marín (1948-1965).

The permanent heritage of the Mid-1940's fire station building effort – and its extended impact in Puerto Rico – may well be best represented today by the stubbornness with which the signature escutcheons of the Fire Corps have survived at most stations, for long enough time to now inspire – more than half-a-century after – their reassessment as public legacy.

International affairs, local events, social and political processes, public and private initiatives, as well as key players of History - all proved to be catalytic agents in the conception and implementation of the Fire Stations building program executed from 1941-1946.

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<sup>3</sup> To this day, accounts of local architectural history leave out prototypical structures, in spite of being signature buildings, numerous, and - without exception - the product of social and political forces.

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Property Type Registration Requirements

The quality of significance in reference to Puerto Rico's Mid-20<sup>th</sup> century fire stations rests on issues of historical association, as explained above, and their integrity regarding design attributes and construction method. As such, registration Criteria A and C apply, as established by the National Register of Historic Places for registration: A. Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; C. Embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, and method of construction.

Based on the analysis of data collected on the property types and related variations, the following registration considerations have been established for comparing actual historic properties and making judgments about their relative significance:

1. The fire station must have been built between 1942 and 1952 under the tenure of Rexford G. Tugwell as Governor or have been based on the same prototypical designs developed and implemented during that period.
2. The structure must retain its original volumetric expression, as pertaining to Prototypes A, B, C and their respective variations. Prototype A is a single-story building; Prototype B must include the original terrace space at front. No alterations or additions must now challenge the overall shape of the original prototype.
3. The building must keep the distinctive features of its original facade profile. At Prototype B the round parapet top is a key distinguishing feature (even if missing in some examples); so is the group of six rectangular openings at the front elevation. For Prototype A, the symmetrical disposition in elevation must be preserved, including the staggered planes (in bas-relief manner) at center, and the stepping up of second-floor the parapet.
4. Openings – doorways, windows and the garage entrance – must retain their original proportions, even if the original fenestration has been lost and/or substituted. Original eaves must be present. However, retrievable (i. e. easy to remove without further damage) alterations are acceptable.
5. At least two of the following distinctive components and details must still be in place and, if not, reproduced and reinstalled: the iconic escutcheon, the iron railings at the upper level, and the flagpoles. Identical reproduction of those missing represents no difficulty: these were mass-produced items requiring no special craftsmanship, and rendered in rather unsophisticated manner.

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When evaluating representative properties and their integrity, their location, setting or siting do not constitute important considerations, for these were the product of haphazardness: as prototypes, these buildings were expected to “fit-in” in any context with the appropriate size and oriented to a street. Lots were donated for such purposes, not chosen strategically. On the other hand, original interior features have not been awarded weight for nomination. They were spare, matter of fact and, in general, non-descriptive. Fire stations are primarily important as urban icons. As such, the five (5) points listed above constitute main priorities when determining how well a specific resource illustrates the property type.

During the past decades, the acknowledgement of architectural merit in any given property has customarily rested in two different historiographic stances: one endorsing official, mainstream, stylistic expressions in highly representative examples, and another bent on validating more quotidian manifestations, including regional and vernacular manifestations. The former finds supports in architectural critics like Henry Russell Hitchcock, Sigfried Geidion, and Vincent Scully; the latter feed from historians like Luis González y González and Alejandra Moreno Toscano, as well as philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, among others. These almost opposite models of history-making have succeeded in granting preferential recognition to official architecture (the great churches, palaces, and emblematic public buildings...) all representative of official stances, but also have acknowledged properties that, even if lacking “respectable” authorship, attest to the permanence of building traditions and cultural recurrences. The latter usually remain in the background, instead of the foreground. Prototypical structures like fire stations, however, invite an alternate type of consideration.

Somewhere between the history of exceptionalism and the merits of the quotidian, the stations’ prototypical architecture represents what could be called “*the quotidian history of officialdom*”. Examples akin to the fire stations abound in Puerto Rico; among these, the above mentioned *casas de caminero*, rural health centers, units of public health, and others. Because grandstanding is usually expected from most government architecture, these buildings – in contrast, and in spite of their repetitiveness – constitute non-events. It is the iteration of its kind – becoming aware of that a modest resource is part of a collection - what grants them cultural, urban and historical relevance. The felicities of these buildings are plentiful, being miracles of concision, volumetric expression, scale and tectonics. In contrast, architectural history in the Caribbean, so far, has not paid full attention officially to prototypical buildings as integral to the region’s development and its landscape. Inclusion of Puerto Rico’s early fire stations might lead the effort. •

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G. Geographical Data

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico

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## H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

This *Multiple Property Documentation Form* incorporates information from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of analysis included: archival material, publications from the federal, local, and municipal governments, plans and photographs. The memoirs of former governor Rexford G. Tugwell, quoted extensively, proved to be a vital relevance. Equally informative were the minutes from the *Fire Prevention and Safety Measures Committee*, from January to May, 1942. Key secondary sources were also reviewed: construction specifications; correspondence (letters and telegrams); building contracts and certificates for payment from the contractors; as well as government yearly reports. Among the most informative are those of the Office of the Governor of Puerto Rico, the Commissioner of the Department of the Interior, the Puerto Rico Planning Board, and the Insular Fire Corps. They all provided an effective understanding of the background conditions and partnering social and political ideas behind the firehouse-building program.

Interest in nominating the Island's fire stations for inclusion in *The National Register of Historic Places* was spurred by architecture student Natalia K. Silva's paper entitled "*Prototipo como paisaje: Las estaciones que el Cuerpo de Bomberos construyó en Puerto Rico del 1940 al 1958*", in fulfillment of a *Mid-Career Research Project*, established as a requisite at the School of Architecture at Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico, as of yet unpublished. Architect Jorge Rigau mentored her investigation and directed the preparation of this Multiple Property Documentation Form. Architect Guillermo Marrero was lead researcher of the effort.

For purposes of this nomination form, a preliminary survey of extant fire stations was conducted throughout the Island to identify and document the resources. The survey was not conducted to meet the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards*, nor was there an evaluation of properties referencing the National Register Criteria for Evaluation. The significant property types were classified according to their original, official categorization. This selection does not preclude the registration of any remaining properties identified in future efforts.

A more detailed inventory form was prepared for 4 representative buildings. Sampling and survey procedures were initially guided by identification of the different prototypes, and the detection of the most significant alterations to the original design. Knowledge of the condition of existing properties facilitated the definition of integrity requirements for the listing of member properties.

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<http://www.bomberos.pr.gov>  
[www.miramarpr.org/arqalgunosarq.htm](http://www.miramarpr.org/arqalgunosarq.htm)

**Interviews**

Magali García Ramis, Author  
Antonio Hernández, retired fireman, Jayuya  
Juan Bautista Rivera, retired fireman, Jayuya

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Fig. 1: Monument to the Ponce Fire Fighters. Designed by Alfredo B. Wiechers, built between 1904-1911.  
Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/fredandrebecca/3756902050/>

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Fig. 2: Events held during the inauguration ceremony of the Fire Station in Aguadilla.

Source: Puerto Rico Ilustrado

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Fig. 3: Members of the San Germán Fire Service with their hand pumps and hose reels.

Source: Puerto Rico Ilustrado

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Fig. 4: Acts to reward the work and courage of the members of the Ponce Fire Department.

Source: Puerto Rico Ilustrado

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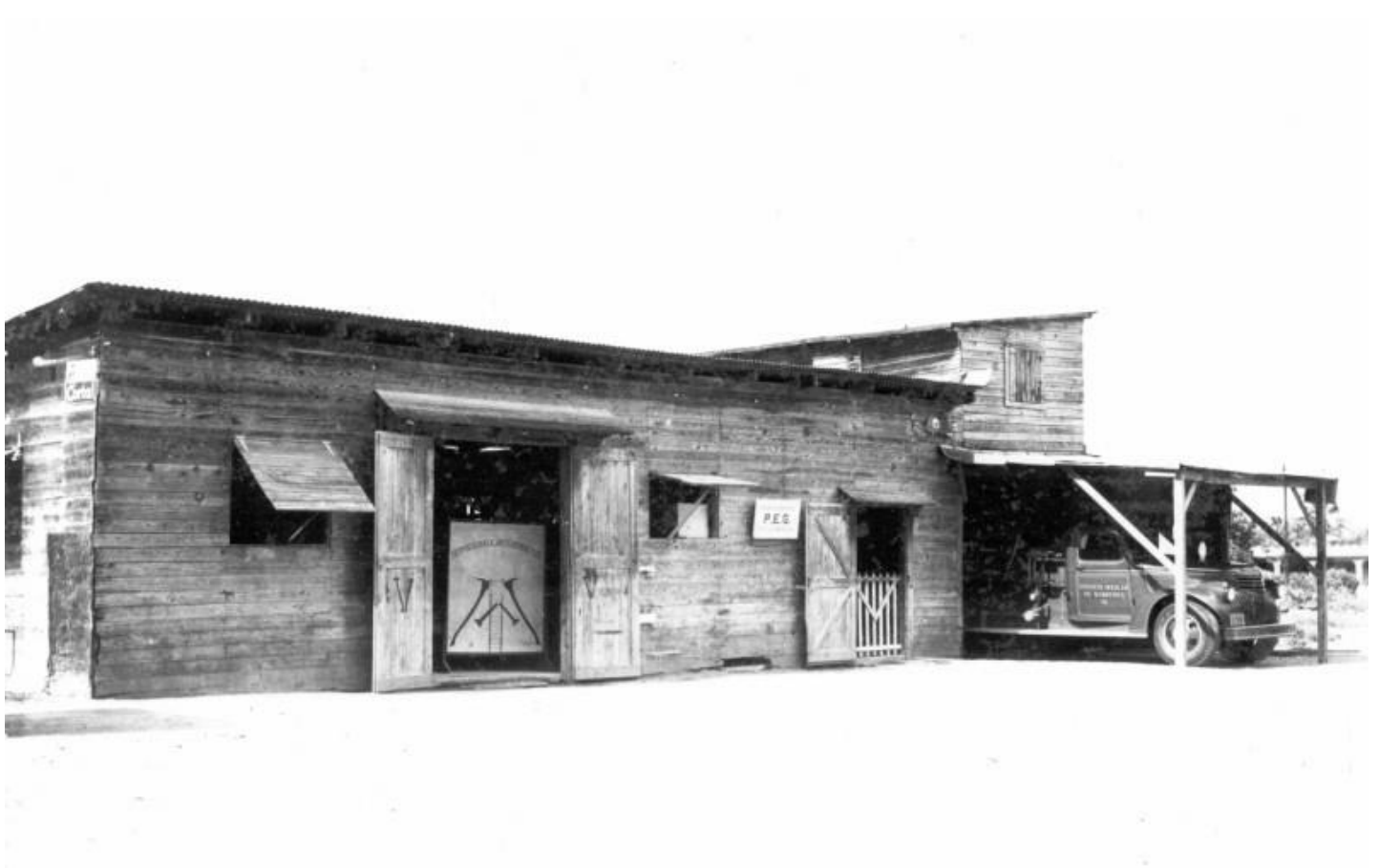
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**Fig. 5: Fire station in wooden structure in Río Piedras, characteristic of 1930's.  
Source: Cuerpo de Bomberos de Puerto Rico**

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**Fig. 6: Civil Defense Logo. Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:United\\_States\\_Civil\\_Defense\\_Roundel.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:United_States_Civil_Defense_Roundel.svg)**

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Fig. 7: Devastation from the 1945 fire at Lares, Puerto Rico. Source: *Cuerpo de Bomberos de Puerto Rico*

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Fig. 8:Luis Muñoz Marín, Jesús T. Piñero, and Fire Chief Raúl Gándara at a public event.  
Source: *Cuerpo de Bomberos de Puerto Rico*

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DIVISION OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS					41
FIRE STATIONS					
Town	BUILDING	No. of Bldgs.	Funds	Estimated Cost	
Adjuntas	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	44,096.02	
Aguada	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Aguadilla	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Aguadilla	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Aguas Buenas	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Aibonito	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Aibonito	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Arcebo	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Arcebo	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Arroyo	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Barroindiana	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Barranquillas	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Bayamón	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Bayamón	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Cabo Rojo	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Caguas	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Camuy	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Canivanas	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Carolina	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Cataño	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Cataño	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Cidra	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Cidra	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Comerio	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Corozal	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Dorado	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Dorado	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Guánica	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Guayama	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Guayama	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Guayanilla	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Guaynabo	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Guaynabo	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Hatillo	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Hormigueros	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Humacao	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Isabela	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Jayuya	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Juana Díaz	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Juncos	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Lajas	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Lares	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Las Marías	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Las Piedras	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Loquillo	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Manatí	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Manatí	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Maricao	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Maunabo	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Mayaguez	Fire Station-Type A	1	PWA	14,767.26	
Mayaguez	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Moca	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Moron	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Narabo	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Naranjito	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Orocovis	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Patillas	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Peñuelas	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Ponce	Fire Station-Type A	1	PWA	14,767.26	
Ponce	Fire Station-Type C	2	PWA	8,132.04	
Quebradillas	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Rincón	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Río Grande	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Río Piedras	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Río Piedras	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Sabana Grande	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Salinas	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
San Germán	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
San Germán	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
San Juan	Fire Station-Type A	4	PWA	56,969.04	
San Juan	Fire Station-Type C	7	PWA	28,482.14	
San Lorenzo	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
San Sebastián	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Santa Isabel	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Toa Alta	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Toa Baja	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Trujillo Alto	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Utuado	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Utua	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Vega Alta	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Vega Baja	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Vieques	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Villalba	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
Yabucoa	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Yauco	Fire Station-Type B	1	PWA	10,671.07	
Yauco	Fire Station-Type C	1	PWA	4,096.02	
				869,143.79	

Fig. 9: Chart by municipality of the project to erect 100 Fire Stations. Source: Report of the Commissioner of the Interior of Puerto Rico to the Honorable Governor of Puerto Rico, 1941-42

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**Fig. 10: Escutcheon incorporates the fireman's distinguishing symbols: the hat, ladder and blow horns.  
Photo: Jorge Rigau, 2011**

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**Fig. 11: Firefighters fixing fire vehicles and equipment.**  
*Source: Cuerpo de Bomberos de Puerto Rico*

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**Fig. 12: Insular Fire Service College in Santurce, completed in 1944. The contractor in charge was Martín Martell; the total cost was \$41,947.82.  
Source: Cuerpo de Bomberos de Puerto Rico**

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**Fig. 13: Fire Chief Raúl Gándara talks to school children.**  
*Source: Cuerpo de Bomberos de Puerto Rico*

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**How Puerto Rico's healthy, happy bomberitos got that way**

General Electric, Shell Oil—and 770 other American-owned plants are thriving in Puerto Rico. Now there are jobs. And schools. And high new hopes in this scrubbed and cultured commonwealth.

**T**HE small fry in our picture are called *bomberitos*. Which is a Puerto Rican's exuberant way of saying 'little firemen.'

Bomberitos do good deeds, learn all about fire prevention—and lead healthy, happy lives on an island that was once written off as 'stricken' and 'saddled with unsolvable problems.'

Today, Puerto Rico's renaissance is booming along at a pace worthy of a country five times its size. Average family income has *doubled* in the last ten years, and may well double again in the next ten.

But you won't catch Puerto Rico resting on its laurels. *One-third of the entire commonwealth budget goes into edu-*

*cation.* In a land half as big as Vermont, there are now no fewer than seven colleges and universities.

U. S. firms with plants in Puerto Rico have a lot to be proud of besides healthy profits and soaring production. They have helped to inspire high hopes in a country that, a dozen years ago, had none at all.

To find out how your firm fits into this sunny picture, write to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, 666 Fifth Avenue, New York 19.

**Fig. 14: Mainland promotion of "Bomberitos" program.  
Source: Unidentified.**

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Fig. 15: The wood and paper dragon used for “*Apagando el dragón*”.  
Source: *Cuerpo de Bomberos de Puerto Rico*

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**Fig. 16: The dragon in fire.**  
**Source: Cuerpo de Bomberos de Puerto Rico**

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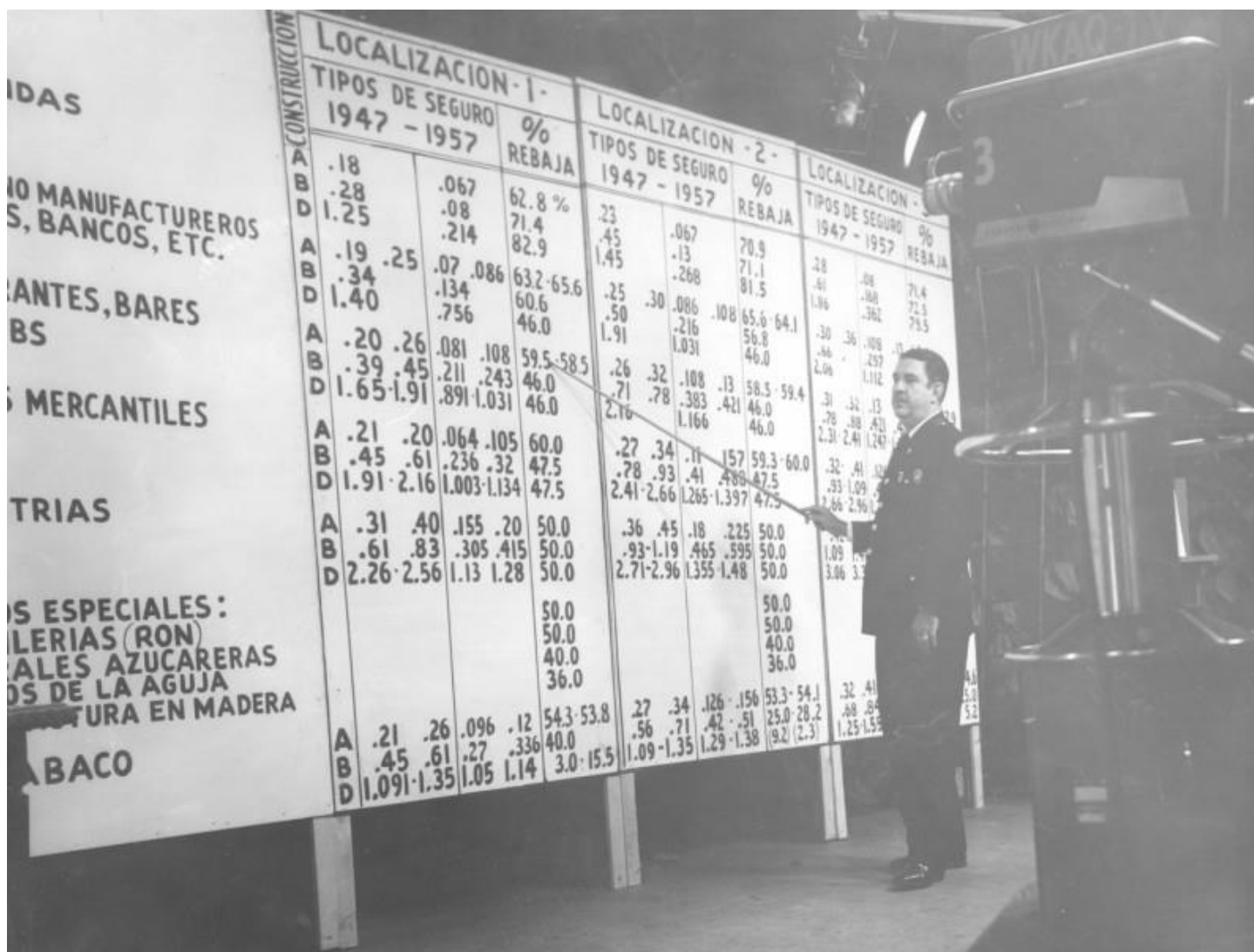


Fig. 17: Fire Chief Raúl Gándara explains the impact of fire prevention measures on the insurance industry. Source: Cuerpo de Bomberos de Puerto Rico

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**Fig. 18: Cartoon interpretation of Fire Chief Raúl Gándara by Filardi. Source: Reproduction of El Mundo Newspaper, date unknwn.**

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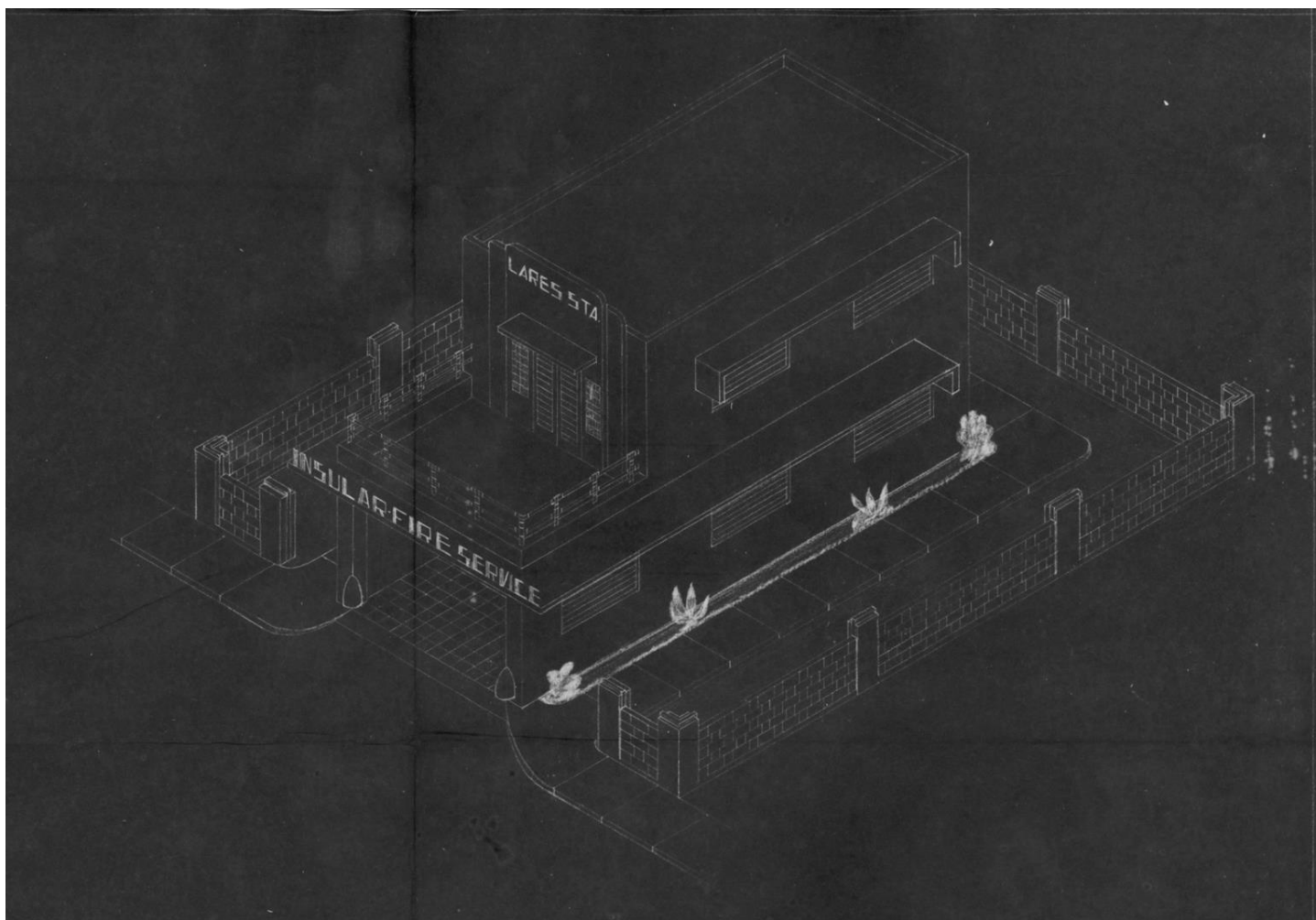


Fig. 19: Original blueprint of axonometric for a *Prototype B station* by Engineer Raúl Buxeda.  
Source: AGPR, Fondo: Obras Públicas. Serie: Edificios Públicos, Caja 813, Leg. 234

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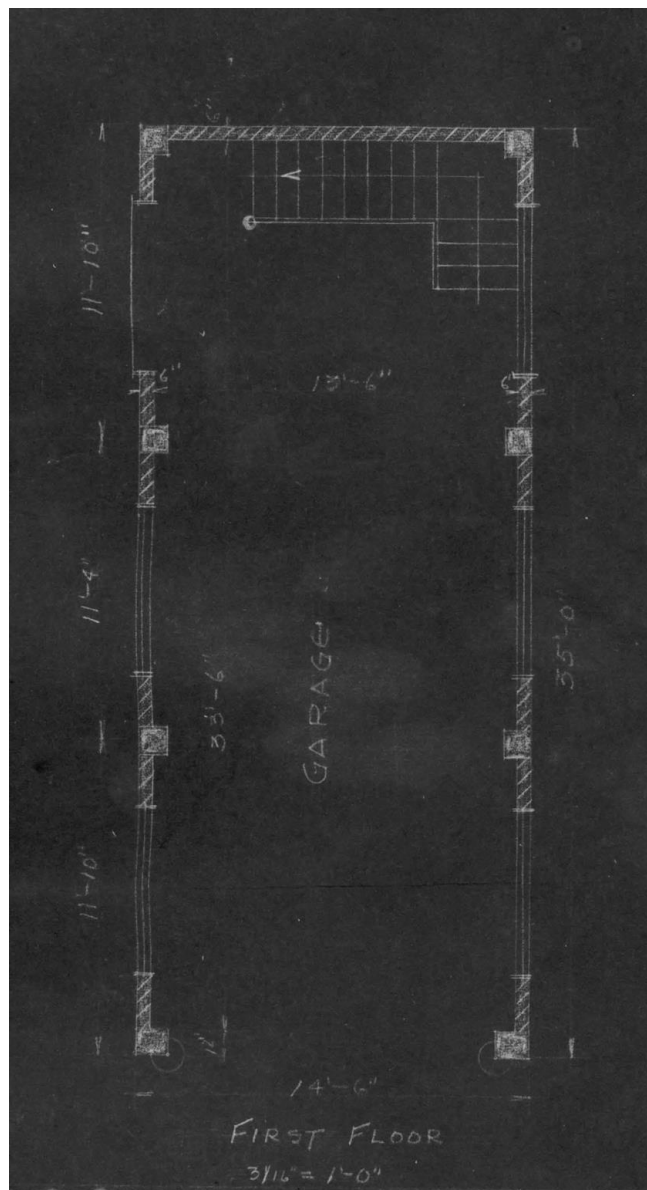


Fig. 20: Original blueprint of first floor plan for a *Prototype B station* by Engineer Raúl Buxeda. Source:AGPR, Fondo: Obras Públicas. Serie: Edificios Públicos, Caja 813, Leg. 234

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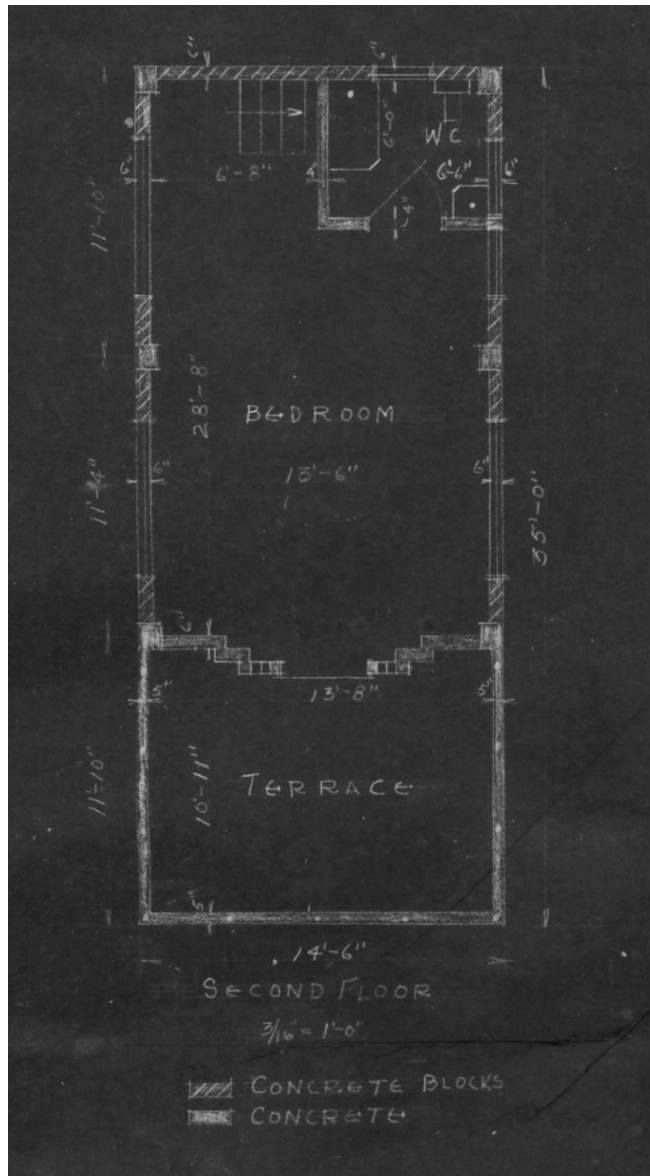


Fig. 21: Original blueprint of second floor plan for a *Prototype B* station by Engineer Raúl Buxeda. Source: AGPR, Fondo: Obras Públicas. Serie: Edificios Públicos, Caja 813, Leg. 234

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Fig. 22: Benediction ceremony at a prototypical fire station illustrating wood and glass fenestration as well as the emergency phone. Source: *Cuerpo de Bomberos de Puerto Rico*

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**Fig. 23: Prototype A at an unidentified location. Source: *Cuerpo de Bomberos de Puerto Rico***

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Fig. 24: Prototype B as it was built in Guánica. Notice the church in wood.  
Source: *Cuerpo de Bomberos de Puerto Rico*

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Fig. 25: Prototype C incorporates a sliding pole next to the stairs.

Source: Left: Cuerpo de Bomberos de Puerto Rico, Right: AGPR, Fondo: Oficina del Gobernador, caja 843

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Fig. 26: Modern Fire Station built in Hato Rey, 1952. The iconic structure appeared in the educational comic book "Fuego" published by Puerto Rico Fire Service in 1959. Source: Photo after 1952

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Fig. 27: Aguas Buenas firehouse today. Photo: Guillermo Marrero, 2011

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**Fig. 28: Ceiba's fire station today. Photo: Guillermo Marrero, 2011**

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Fig. 29: Yabucoa's firehouse today. Photo: Jorge Rigau, 2011