



A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

# WOODLAWN HEIGHTS BRONX





The Historic Districts Council is New York's citywide advocate for historic buildings and neighborhoods. The Six to Celebrate program annually identifies six historic New York City neighborhoods that merit preservation as priorities for HDC's advocacy and consultation over a yearlong period.

The six, chosen from applications submitted by community organizations, are selected on the basis of the architectural and historic merit of the area, the level of threat to the neighborhood, the strength and willingness of the local advocates, and the potential for HDC's preservation support to be meaningful. HDC works with these neighborhood partners to set and reach preservation goals through strategic planning, advocacy, outreach, programs and publicity.

The core belief of the Historic Districts Council is that preservation and enhancement of New York City's historic resources—its neighborhoods, buildings, parks and public spaces—are central to the continued success of the city. The Historic Districts Council works to ensure the preservation of these resources and uphold the New York City Landmarks Law and to further the preservation ethic. This mission is accomplished through ongoing programs of assistance to more than 500 community and neighborhood groups and through public-policy initiatives, publications, educational outreach and sponsorship of community events.



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## WOODLAWN HEIGHTS

Woodlawn Heights is located in the northernmost section of The Bronx, bounded by the City of Yonkers to the north, Woodlawn Cemetery to the south, the Bronx River to the east and Van Cortlandt Park to the west. The area, originally part of the town of Kingsbridge, was one of the first to be annexed to the City of New York in 1874, along with West Farms and Morrisania. Just as the rest of The Bronx, these towns had previously been part of Westchester County. The remainder of the borough was annexed in 1895-96, prior to the 1898 consolidation of the boroughs to form the City of New York. In the 18th century, the area was known as Washingtonville, named in honor of General George Washington, who constructed a redoubt and stored munitions during the Revolutionary War in the southeast corner of what is today Woodlawn Cemetery. By the early 20th century, perhaps due to the prominence of Woodlawn Cemetery (established in 1863), area residents began calling the neighborhood Woodlawn Heights or simply Woodlawn. The area remains anchored, both in name and geography, by Woodlawn Cemetery (see site #2), which is well known for its beautiful landscapes and some of the finest mausoleums in the country.

For most of the 19th century, the area was largely rural, dotted with farms and woodlots. As is the case for most neighborhoods in the five boroughs, development was spurred on by the availability of transportation. The New York and Harlem Railroad (now Metro-North's Harlem line) played a vital role in the development of Woodlawn Heights. The first section in lower Manhattan was constructed in 1832, and by 1841 this street railway had reached The Bronx. Although it was one of the first railroads in the United States, it was not very popular in its early days. Cornelius Vanderbilt acquired the Railroad in 1864 and merged it with the Hudson River Railroad five years later (this was a precursor to what became the New York Central Railroad). Even though ridership was still low, the presence of this rail line was very appealing to the founders of Woodlawn Cemetery, and, indeed, was a major factor in selecting a site for the cemetery (the railroad runs adjacent to the cemetery's eastern edge). In 1891, Manhattan's Third Avenue El extended to The Bronx, and in 1914-17, the IRT subway reached this area with a network of elevated lines that not only connected The Bronx to the rest of the city, but connected Woodlawn Heights to other parts of the borough. Of all these transit improvements, the extension of the subway to this part of the city had the greatest impact, transforming it into a low-density, suburban enclave. Much of the neighborhood was constructed around this time or just after.

Early residents of Woodlawn were primarily German, Italian and Irish, and were members of the working class. Today, the neighborhood's largely middle-class population of about 8,000 includes a significant portion that are of Irish descent, including more recent Irish immigrants. In fact, Woodlawn is affectionately known as New York City's "Little Ireland," physical evidence of which is found in its many Irish pubs along Katonah Avenue, its commercial spine, architectural flourishes like green trim and shamrock details, and its robust annual St. Patrick's Day Parade. This family-oriented neighborhood features a charming array of detached, one- and two-family houses, some apartment buildings and hilly streets. In May 2016, Woodlawn was down-zoned to maintain orderly growth and to avoid out-of-character mid- to high-rise development, thus preserving its low-rise residential character.

# I

## WOODLAWN STATION

Jerome Avenue Subway Line,  
Bainbridge Avenue & Jerome  
Avenue

(Squire J. Vickers, 1917)  
— NR-P



Woodlawn Station is the northern terminus and last stop on the Jerome Avenue Subway line. Squire Vickers, along with his design and chief engineers, J. Cooperstock and Alfred Craven, respectively, designed the steel framed station. With two tracks and side- and island- platforms, this elevated station is architecturally significant for its Arts and Crafts design and use of ornamental concrete. Most elevated stations typically have rough, bush-hammered concrete surfaces, but the Woodlawn Station has a smooth and streamlined finish throughout. Cornell University-educated Vickers worked for 36 years as chief architect for the New York City Subway, and often utilized simple but colorful tiles in his work. Vickers painted as a hobby, employing dynamic colors and fantastical imagery. The high level of craftsmanship and material quality of these inlaid tiles are exceptional and indicative of his careful attention to detail.

Woodlawn Cemetery is considered to be one of the most beautiful cemeteries in the United States. Roughly bounded by East 211th Street to the south, East 233rd Street to the north, Webster Avenue to the east and Jerome Avenue to the west, the cemetery encompasses 400 acres. Founded in 1863, its location was considered remote enough for a burial site, but still accessible via the New York and Harlem railroad from Manhattan. The

# 2

## WOODLAWN CEMETERY

517 East 233rd Street

(Founded 1863)  
— NHL, NR-P

## LEGEND OF DESIGNATIONS

National Historic Landmark:	NHL
National Register of Historic Places—District:	NR-D
National Register of Historic Places—Property:	NR-P
New York City Historic District:	NYC HD
New York City Individual Landmark:	NYC IL
New York City Interior Landmark:	NYC INL

development of the cemetery in this relatively rural area followed the New York Legislature's 1847 Rural Cemeteries Act, which authorized commercial burial grounds and encouraged the establishment of such resting places outside of the growing city, as well as an 1852 law prohibiting burials within the city limits by the Common Council of New York City. Prior to this legislation, burials took place almost exclusively in churchyards. The founders of Woodlawn Cemetery, led by Reverend Absalom Peters (see site #4), acquired the majority of the land through a state charter authorizing the establishment of a cemetery, purchasing the initial 313 acres from a farm owned by the Bussing family.



Photo courtesy Woodlawn Cemetery

In the mid-19th century, Romantic-style cemeteries were fashionable as retreats from city life. These cemeteries functioned not only as places of burial, but also as the precursor to major public parks. The Romantic style of landscape design was championed in America by Andrew Jackson Downing, and featured curvilinear pathways, undulating topography, air-purifying trees and picturesque views popularized in British gardens of the 18th century. Woodlawn is one of the city's hallmark Romantic cemeteries, initially designed by Philadelphia architect James C. Sidney in the rural cemetery tradition, incorporating the existing topography, trees and a serene lake to be harmonious with the site's history as a farm and woodland. In 1867, Sidney's plan was altered to allow for larger, centralized family monuments surrounded by low grave markers and property boundaries. Woodlawn's trustees turned to another landscape professional, Robert Edward Kerr Whiting, to take charge of the cemetery plan and its undeveloped sections. Whiting was familiar with the new "landscape lawn plan," a concept developed by landscape gardener Adolph Strauch at the Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati, Ohio. As the name suggests, the landscape lawn plan incorporates open and continuous grassy lawns. The fenceless and hedgeless landscape and ground-level grave markers produced unencumbered vistas, interspersed with elegant stone monuments. For Woodlawn Cemetery, the result was a public recreation space in a picturesque and sweeping landscape. The half-park, half-cemetery characteristics of Woodlawn invite contemplation and meandering.

The Woodlawn Cemetery was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2011, and bears the distinction of containing the largest architecturally significant collection of historic private mausoleums (1,271) of any cemetery in the country. Many accomplished individuals are buried here, including Nellie Bly, Celia Cruz, Duke Ellington, Collis P. Huntington, Philip Lehman, Herman Melville and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.





2a

**HUNTINGTON MAUSOLEUM**  
Magnolia Plot  
(Robert Caterson, 1891)

Designed and manufactured by Robert Caterson, whose monument firm was located close to Woodlawn Cemetery, the mausoleum of Collis P. and Elizabeth

Huntington is located on a hill adjacent to the main entrance to the cemetery. This enormous granite and marble Classical Revival style temple cost \$250,000 and took five years to build. Its massive bronze door depicting a standing woman draped in a heavy robe was sculpted by Herbert Adams and added in 1932. The mausoleum has six Tuscan columns along each of the side façades and Tuscan columns framing the entrance. Collis P. Huntington was one of the Big Four who were responsible for developing the transcontinental railroad system in the United States. Befitting a railroad magnate, its grand double-flight staircase was inspired by one in New York's Pennsylvania Station.

2b

**LEHMAN MAUSOLEUM**  
Walnut Plot  
(William H. Deacy, 1938)



Photo courtesy Woodlawn Cemetery

This large, austere, Classical Revival style monument, set in a large lot, was designed by William H. Deacy for Philip Lehman and family in 1938, nine years before Lehman himself passed away in 1947. The simple and monolithic mausoleum is made of limestone, with a stepped roof and a recessed, bronze double door entrance. The austere and dignified design was meant to reflect Lehman's illustrious career as a banker and financier. Philip Lehman was senior partner of Lehman Brothers, director of the F. W. Woolworth Company and a noted art collector. His son, Robert Lehman, who died in 1969, is also entombed here. Deacy worked as chief designer for Presbrey-Leland, which manufactured a great number of mausoleums and monuments in Woodlawn Cemetery. It was conveniently located just across the street from the cemetery's main entrance.

2c

**ADMIRAL DAVID  
GLASGOW FARRAGUT  
GRAVESITE**  
Aurora Hill Plot  
(Casoni and Isola, 1872)  
— NHL, NR-P



Photo courtesy Woodlawn Cemetery

This exquisite white marble pillar is dedicated to Admiral Farragut, a Civil War hero loyal to the Union and the first officer to hold the ranks of rear admiral, vice admiral and admiral in the United States Navy. Farragut was widely praised for his victories in the Battle of New Orleans and the Battle of Mobile Bay. After the Civil War, Farragut lived in New York City until his death in 1870 at the age of 69, and was interred at Woodlawn Cemetery. Situated on Woodlawn's first circular mound, a gift from the cemetery, Farragut was the first person to be buried in the Aurora Hill Plot. The monument, which set an architectural standard in its day, is shaped into a broken ship's mast and is draped with an American flag, a symbol of a life gone too soon. At the base, it is decorated with military emblems and other insignia of naval warfare: three shields, a sword, compass, sextant, block and tackle, and an anchor and rope. The pedestal bears the inscriptions for Farragut, his wife, son and daughter-in-law. The monument was manufactured by Casoni and Isola, a New York City-based firm that owned a shop on Broadway, as well as extensive marble quarries in Carrara, Italy. The firm also fabricated the Seventh Regiment Memorial in Central Park.

3

**MUSKRAT COVE**  
located between Bronx River  
Parkway and the Metro-North  
Railroad and East 233rd and  
East 234th Streets  
(c. 2001)



beyond an opening in the guardrail at the park entry. Local residents have beautified this site, cleaning up the path and planting a garden. Green Ash trees lining the pathway honor the victims of the attacks on September 11, 2001. Muskrat Cove is part of the Bronx River Greenway, a 23-mile, recreational, multi-use path that connects Bronx River communities. The path extends from the Bronx River Parkway to beneath the multi-arch Nereid Avenue Bridge.

4

**PETERS PLACE**between Webster Avenue and  
Vireo Avenue

Peters Place, located just across from Woodlawn Cemetery, is named for Reverend Absalom Peters, a theologian and poet considered to be the “Father of Woodlawn Cemetery.” Peters was responsible for championing and campaigning for a non-sectarian, rural cemetery in The Bronx, which, he was determined would become the country’s most beautiful cemetery. Peters appealed to individuals with a sense of civic pride to support the endeavor, and assembled a committee of eight prominent New York City residents to be its first trustees. Born in 1793 in New Hampshire, he attended Dartmouth College and Princeton Theological Seminary. Peters Place is a subtle reminder of Peters’ crucial role in the establishment and development of the cemetery, which ultimately had an immense impact on The Bronx.

5

**ORIO J. PALMER WAY**East 234th Street between Webster  
and Vireo Avenues

These two blocks of East 234th Street are named in honor of FDNY Battalion Chief Orio J. Palmer, who perished in the South Tower of the World Trade Center when it collapsed as a result of the attacks on September 11, 2001. Palmer managed to ascend to the South Tower’s 78th floor, the location of the plane’s impact,

and his radio communications from those moments have provided ongoing analysis on the part of emergency personnel regarding how events unfolded that day. A Woodlawn native and graduate of The Bronx’s Cardinal Spellman High School, Palmer was hailed as a hero for rushing to the aid of those who were injured and trapped in the South Tower, providing comfort to the injured and guiding evacuees in the stairwells.

6

**CARRIAGE HOUSE**340 East 234th Street  
(c. 1878)

This charming building with remarkably intact historic details is believed to have originally been used as a carriage house. It features a multi-gable roof covered with slate tiles, a full-width front porch supported by Tuscan columns and brick cladding in a stretcher bond pattern. Bracketed cornices are found above the porch and along the roofline. The stately double-door entrance is topped with a fan window and a white surround. The windows on the front façade are furnished with fixed louver shutters, but the two ground-level, full-height windows are especially picturesque. The property has retained its original wrought iron fence enclosing the front yard and, at the curb, hitching posts, originally used to tie up horses and horse-drawn carriages, are an extant reminder of this house’s long history.

7

**65 EAST 233RD STREET**

(c. 1850)



This two-story structure is believed to be the oldest house in Woodlawn. It belonged to the Valentine family, who owned much of the land that became Woodlawn Cemetery. The house was once located in the present-day Van Cortlandt Park, but was moved to its current location after the city acquired the land for the park in 1888. The house features an elaborate entrance with a multi-light transom and sidelights, pilasters and a columned entrance porch. Multi-light sidelights mimicking those found around the doorway are echoed on either side of the window above the entrance on the second floor. Perched on an incline, several sets of stairs lead to the entrance, lending the symmetrical ensemble a sense of grandeur when viewed from the street.



8

### VAN CORTLANDT PARK (1888)



Van Cortlandt Park is situated in the northernmost part of the city between Yonkers and Kingsbridge. At 1,146 acres, it is the third largest public park in New York City. The current park is part of a large parcel acquired by the Dutch West India Company from the Wiechquaskeck Lenape nation in 1639. It was purchased in 1646 by Adrian Van der Donck, New Amsterdam's first lawyer, who then sold it in 1670 to Frederick Philipse, New York's wealthiest man. Philipse's son-in-law, Jacobus Van Cortlandt, mayor of New York City in 1710–11 and 1719–20, purchased a part of the estate—the present park—in 1699. At that time, Tibbett's Brook was dammed to power two mills, forming the Van Cortlandt Lake, which still exists. The Van Cortlandts operated the mills and a grain plantation here to process wheat into flour, transporting these goods down the Harlem and Hudson Rivers with their own fleet of boats. Jacobus Van Cortlandt's son, Frederick, established the Van Cortlandt Mansion in 1748, although he did not survive to see its completion. Vault Hill, a square, stone-walled structure that served as the family's burial ground, was also constructed around this time atop Fordham Gneiss. It was here that Augustus Van Cortlandt, who was serving as City Clerk, hid the municipal records during the British occupation of New York in 1776. After 140 years, the Van Cortlandts sold the property to the City in 1888. To transform it into a park, the City filled in swamps, planted trees and added recreational facilities, including the country's first municipal golf course in 1895. The City named the park after its former occupants in 1913.

8a

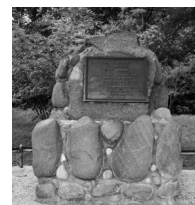
### VAN CORTLANDT MANSION corner at Broadway and West 246th Street (1748) — NHL, NR-P, NYC IL, NYC INL



This fieldstone and brick Georgian style manor is The Bronx's oldest house, built for Jacobus Van Cortlandt's son, Frederick. Unfortunately, he died before it was completed and was the first to be buried in the family burial plot on Vault Hill, north of the house. Frederick left the estate to his son, James Van Cortlandt. Most notably, George Washington used the house for military maneuvers and as a temporary headquarters before his triumphant march into Manhattan during the Revolutionary War. The mansion has operated as a house museum—the first in the city—since 1897, when the National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of New York was granted custody to manage the site and exhibit its collection of 18th- and 19th-century furniture and decorative arts. The grounds also include a 1902 bronze statue of Major General Josiah Porter by William Clark Noble.

8b

### INDIAN FIELD East 233rd Street between Jerome Avenue and Van Cortlandt Park East



Indian Field is dedicated to Chief Daniel Nimham, the last sachem of the Wappinger people, who, along with a number of other Wappinger that included his son, Captain Abraham Nimham, was ambushed by the British near this spot in 1778. The battle was fought on land owned by the DeVoe family, who were responsible for the burial and placement of a stone cairn on the Chief's grave. In 1906, the Bronx Chapter for the Daughters of the American Revolution also honored their sacrifice with a stone cairn and plaque, known today as the Chief Nimham Memorial, which is located at Van Cortlandt Park East and East 238th Street.

8c

### WORLD WAR I MEMORIAL Rita Ley Triangle/Oneida Triangle East 238th Street and Oneida Avenue (dedicated in 1925)



This 13-foot stone monument, topped with a sphere and an eagle sculpture, honors the residents of Woodlawn Heights who served and sacrificed their lives in World War I. The Oneida Triangle is an appropriate place for a war memorial given that it was the site of a small battle during the Revolutionary War, when Oneida Avenue was known as DeVoe's Lane (it became Oneida Avenue in 1896). Oneida was also the name of a Civil War ship (USS Oneida) built at the New York Navy Yard in 1861 and commissioned in 1862. The Triangle, which was provided by the New York City Departments of Parks and Transportation for use as a memorial site, is also occupied by Norway and Sycamore maples, London plane trees and shrubs.

8d

**JOHN MUIR TRAIL ENTRANCE**  
Broadway and Mosholu Avenue  
or Van Cortlandt Park East &  
Oneida Avenue (1997)



The John Muir Trail is a 1.5-mile trek that passes through the Northeast Forest, the Croton Wood, the old Croton Aqueduct and the Northwest Forest. It is the only trail in Van Cortlandt Park that runs east-west, from Van Cortlandt Park East to Broadway, connecting Woodlawn Heights to Riverdale. The trail, established in 1997, was named for Scottish-American naturalist, author, early advocate for wilderness conservation in the United States and founder of the Sierra Club, John Muir (1838-1914).



This memorial is dedicated to the 23 men who lost their lives between 1970 and 2000 during construction of City Water Tunnel No. 3, a massive project that is still being built in stages. Tunnels No. 1 and No. 2 were completed in 1917 and 1936, respectively, to bring fresh water to the city from upstate New York. The construction of Tunnel No. 3 is a long-term endeavor to enhance and improve the water delivery system to the five boroughs. The Manhattan and Bronx legs of the tunnel have already been completed, while the Brooklyn and Queens legs, which will also supply water to Staten Island, have been completed but await activation (expected in 2020). The Department of Environmental Protection and the Local 147 sandhog union worked together to build this memorial, which consists of 23 manhole covers embedded in the pavement, a drinking fountain, trees, plants and a flag pole whose base is made of gray stones from the tunnel. Each manhole cover is engraved with the name of the person and the year of his death. The memorial's location was selected due to its proximity to the underground chamber that directs flows from upstate water supply systems to all of the boroughs.



9

**TUNNEL WORKERS MEMORIAL**  
Katonah Avenue and East  
242nd Street (2000)

10

**TRINITY COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
4390 Katonah Avenue  
(1913)



The Trinity Community Church has an imposing presence facing Katonah Avenue. Its exterior, evoking a quaint country church, is clad in fieldstone and features a deeply crenellated parapet at its tower. The structure was built for the Methodist Episcopal Church of Woodlawn Heights, which later became St. Luke's United Methodist Church. Established in 1875, the congregation's first church was located on East 237th Street between Katonah and Kepler Avenues, on land donated by Edwin K. Willard. The parish commissioned this structure, completed in 1913, but eventually outgrew it, moving four blocks north to another site. The historic bell perched on the church's front steps is older than the church, as evidenced by its inscription: "Clinton H. Meneely Bell Company, Troy, N.Y. A.D. 1892."

Established and dedicated on the day of the feast of St. Barnabas in 1910 by Archbishop John Farley, this Catholic parish flourished from its approximately 360 original members to a congregation boasting almost 15,000. Its founder and pastor Reverend Michael A. Reilly fostered the church from its beginnings as a small storefront mission at the intersection of Webster Avenue and East 240th Street to the completion of this grand, Italianate style church and rectory. Over the next 15 years, the church also established an elementary school, high school and rectory, and later, a new high school building and a chapel. The architects of the church were Starrett & Van Vleck, a firm famous for its Art Deco department store buildings and whose portfolio includes several iconic landmarks, such as Saks Fifth Avenue, the American Stock Exchange Building, the Everett Building at Union Square North and Garfinckel's Department Store in Washington, DC. St. Barnabas Church is monumental in scale and features a triangular pediment, circular rose window and massive Corinthian pilasters. Its cream-colored brick façades are punctuated by stained glass windows.

11

**ST. BARNABAS CHURCH**  
409 East 241st Street  
(Starrett & Van Vleck, 1911)







12

**WOODLAWN HEIGHTS  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
4371 Martha Avenue  
(1914)

In the spring of 1911, a group of Presbyterian residents of the neighborhood began holding services in private homes. The first official services open to the public were held in Hopewell Hall on East 240th Street in May of that year, presided over by Reverend Stevenson. In January 1913, the church was formally organized by the Presbytery of New York and a lot was purchased that year on the northwest corner of East 240th Street and Martha Avenue. The cornerstone was laid on September 28, 1913, and on May 10, 1914, the church was dedicated and the keys were presented to the first Pastor, Reverend W. F. Daun. The design of Woodlawn Heights Presbyterian was influenced by the Gothic Revival style, and features two large, ornate stained glass windows, one on the main façade facing Martha Avenue and the other on the side façade facing East 240th Street. Above the bright red double-door entrance are a crenelated parapet and a modest bell steeple. Unfortunately, the bell was subsequently removed and the steeple filled in with stucco.

13

**ST. STEPHEN'S  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
439 East 238th Street (1901)



Originally established as the “Chapel of Advent” in 1897, this small parish’s first services were held in a rented storefront chapel on Webster Avenue and East 234th Street. Renamed in honor of its first vicar, Reverend Stephen Van Rensselaer, St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church purchased its present site in 1899 and the cornerstone was laid the following year. The white clapboard building resembles a countryside church, set back from Vireo Avenue by a green lawn with mature trees. Reportedly, a botanist from the New York Botanical Garden discovered a new species of English Ivy on the grounds of the church in 1981, and named it “238th Street” Ivy or “Hedera helix 238th Street.” Inside the church, there is a marble altar and a three-paneled painting by the Reverend John Walsted, an Episcopal priest and accomplished iconographer whose works also hang in the Church of the Transfiguration and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. The rectory, which was remodeled in 1947, is adjacent to a Victorian style parish house, where the church operates a thrift shop.



14

**PUBLIC SCHOOL 19  
JUDITH K. WEISS SCHOOL**  
4318 Katonah Avenue  
(1924)

Woodlawn Heights’ local Public School 19, serving students from kindergarten through eighth grade, spans Katonah Avenue between East 237th and East 238th Streets. The imposing brick structure features Classically-inspired details, including a monumental entrance with engaged columns topped with an ornamental shield, window lintels with urn and garland motifs, and a dentilled cornice above the second story. Perhaps the most prominent feature on the building is its multi-light windows with green frames, which appear to be relatively new. The green color scheme is quite striking, and may have been chosen to reflect and honor Woodlawn Heights’ Irish-American and Irish heritage.



