



A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

CLAY AVENUE & GRAND CONCOURSE 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.



**Council on
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CLAY AVENUE & GRAND CONCOURSE

While just nine blocks apart, Clay Avenue and the Grand Concourse appear to be in different worlds in terms of architecture and urban form. However, both the small-scale street of two-family houses and the wide thoroughfare lined with Art Deco apartment buildings help to tell the story of the development of this section of The Bronx. Both are located in what was historically the village of Morrisania, named for the English brothers Colonel Lewis Morris and Captain Richard Morris who purchased the land in 1670.

In 1900, Ernest Wenigmann began amassing property on Clay Avenue with the intention of constructing 28 houses. Wenigmann commissioned architect Warren C. Dickerson, who had a reputation for designing many fine rowhouses across the borough. For the Clay Avenue development, Dickerson employed elements of the Renaissance Revival and Romanesque Revival styles, and while the houses are all different in their ornamentation, they are linked by the use of beige or red brick, as well as their similar massing and repetitive trends found on either side of the street. The houses were designed in pairs, with each house meant to house two families, but Dickerson subtly designed the houses so that each would give the appearance of a single-family dwelling. Thus, the aspirational middle-class homeowner could fit their family into one apartment while renting out the adjacent unit for additional income, all the while residing in what appeared to be a single-family home. The 28 houses on Clay Avenue were all constructed between 1901 and 1902, when Ernest Wenigmann began selling the properties. Within three years, the street was almost entirely occupied, illustrating the success of Wenigmann's venture and Dickerson's designs. Clay Avenue remains a beloved architectural ensemble and tight-knit community.

In 1909, seven years after Wenigmann completed construction of the houses on Clay Avenue, the Grand Concourse was opened to traffic and became a crucial link between Manhattan and the still rural sections of The Bronx. The completion of the Jerome Avenue subway in 1918 and the introduction of real estate tax exemptions precipitated a wave of development that swept the Grand Concourse from 1922 to 1931. This period saw the construction of over half of the district's buildings, primarily five- and six-story apartment houses situated on large lots and enlivened by decorative elements that evoked faraway places. The 1933 opening of the IND subway along the Grand Concourse sparked a second building boom from 1935 to 1945 that produced many now iconic Art Deco and Moderne style buildings. These structures feature terra cotta, mosaic tile, cast stone and beige brick in their designs. Although these buildings were executed in a range of architectural styles, many of them are representative of the garden apartment typology. This housing form, which developed in the late 1910s and 1920s, was principally characterized by medium-rise structures arranged around large courtyards.

The neighborhoods surrounding Clay Avenue and the Grand Concourse shared in the precipitous population loss and economic decline that plagued much of The Bronx in the post-World War II era. Nevertheless, the community emerged from the turmoil to become the stable, dynamic and diverse area that it is today. The significance and integrity of this neighborhood's built fabric prompted the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission to designate two historic districts here: Clay Avenue (1994) and the Grand Concourse (2011).

I

386 EAST 162ND STREET
(Architect & date unknown)



Wedged between the masses of two apartment buildings, the two-story, wood-framed house at 386 East 162nd Street survives as a symbol of an earlier period in The Bronx's development. This vernacular building is relatively unadorned except for its four Italianate cornice brackets. The Morrisania section of The Bronx dates back to 1850, when country estates were subdivided and developed with single-family houses that could be sold to professionals commuting into Manhattan on the New York & Harlem Railroad. The introduction of industry and manufacturing to the area and the coming of the elevated railway along Third Avenue in 1887 encouraged denser development so that by the turn of the 20th century, the neighborhood was a mix of tenements, single-family dwellings and old village housing.

2

1074 CAULDWELL AVENUE
(F.T. Camp, 1887)
1076 CAULDWELL AVENUE
(Charles C. Churchill, 1892)



This pair of two-and-one-half-story, wood-frame buildings is representative of a period in which large single-family homes were the predominant housing stock in this section of The Bronx. Characteristic of the Queen Anne style, 1074 and 1076 Cauldwell Avenue are asymmetrically massed and feature a variety of ornamentation. No. 1076, built in 1892, retains less of its original detailing than its southern neighbor. No. 1074, on the other hand, boasts an arched porch with turned posts on its first story and a smaller second-story porch framed by a whimsical bargeboard. This ornamentation is complemented by gables intersecting at different levels to create an irregular roofline.

3

SECOND BATTERY
ARMORY
1122 Franklin Avenue
(Charles C. Haight, 1906-
1911; addition by Benjamin
W. Levitan,
1926-1928)



Situated at the top of a steep slope overlooking the western Bronx, the Second Battery Armory consists of a large drill shed and administrative building topped with a six-story corner tower. Designed by Charles Haight, who was awarded the commission after winning a design competition, the asymmetrical red brick building is similar to other New York armories in its use of Gothic details like slit windows and crenellated parapets. In 1928, Benjamin Levitan designed a one-story addition for the building's Franklin Avenue façade, expertly replicating original design elements while providing additional storage space. The first permanent armory built in The Bronx, the Second Battery Armory was located in the burgeoning Morrisania neighborhood, which was also home to the borough's first high school (Morris High School, 1904). The Second Battery, whose successors occupied the armory until 1988, has a history dating back to 1833 that includes action in the Civil and Spanish-American wars, as well as in numerous New York City strikes and riots.

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

4

UNION RAILWAY COMPANY
1068 Brook Avenue
(Axel S. Hedman, 1908)



This utilitarian building was constructed in 1908 to serve as “Sub Station No. 2” for the Union Railway Company, which operated a streetcar network stretching

from the Westchester County line to a southern terminus in Harlem. Until the last route was discontinued in 1948, streetcars played an important role in The Bronx’s rapid transit network by providing both local service across the borough and shuttling commuters to elevated railway and subway stops. Raised brickwork and geometric patterning constitute the primary form of architectural ornamentation found on this two-story building, but the Union Railway Company name emblazoned at the cornice line is the structure’s most noticeable feature.



5

SHEFFIELD FARMS COMPANY (MILK) BOTTLING PLANT
1075 Webster Avenue
(Frank Rooke, 1914;
annex: 1923)

When the Sheffield Farms Milk Plant was completed in 1914, it was one of the most expensive and elaborate milk plants in the country, boasting one of the highest processing capacities in the dairy industry. Sheffield Farms, one of the largest and most innovative dairy companies of its time, hired Frank Rooke to design a series of four large-scale milk plants in The Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan (one of which survives as Columbia University’s Prentis Hall). Sheffield Farms was among the first to implement large-scale pasteurization, and pioneered the production of certified milk and introduced the world’s first paper-packaged milk container in 1930. The original building, designed in a modern French Renaissance style, was sold by the successor of Sheffield Farms in 1971 and demolished in 1991, leaving only the two-story ice and storage building standing. In homage to the site’s history, three glazed terra-cotta cow heads and milk bottles were salvaged from the plant and installed on a wall in the garden of the adjacent Webster House apartment building.



6

CLAY AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT
— NYC HD



The Clay Avenue Historic District encompasses one block between East 165th and East 166th Streets, and is made up of charming, low-rise and mostly

intact buildings that date from the early 20th century. In 1900, seeing a chance to earn a profit through speculative development, Ernest Wenigmann began amassing property on Clay Avenue in The Bronx, in some instances directly purchasing it from descendants of the Morris family that held title to the land since 1670. Intending to construct 28 houses on the block, Wenigmann commissioned Warren C. Dickerson, a reputable architect who designed many high quality rowhouses in The Bronx at the turn-of-the-century. Dickerson employed a transitional style, combining Renaissance-inspired massing and detailing with popular Romanesque Revival motifs, such as rock-faced stonework. Although all of the houses are faced with beige or red brick, Dickerson counterbalanced variations in ornamentation with the repetition of building forms to create a dynamic streetscape. Other details emerge upon further inspection: for instance, all of the houses on the west side of the street have single wooden doors, while the east side homes feature wood and glass double doors.

Dickerson, who was also responsible for a majority of the buildings in the Longwood and Morris High School Historic Districts, designed each detached pair to house four families, though each resembles a pair of single-family homes. At the turn of the 20th century, these two-family houses had become popular in Brooklyn and The Bronx, and were viewed as “the best possible investment for the young married man.” The aspirational middle-class homeowner could fit their family into one apartment while renting out the adjacent unit for additional income, all while maintaining the appearance of occupying an entire single-family home. On Clay Avenue, Ernest Wenigmann began selling his houses in 1902, and three years later the street was almost entirely occupied. The 1905 New York State census indicates that Clay Avenue was a predominantly middle-class street of owners and renters, with all residents identifying as white and most listed as American-born.

6a

381 EAST 165TH STREET
(Charles S. Clark, 1906)
— NYC HD



This two-story, red brick building at the corner of East 165th Street and Clay Avenue is the only single-family house in the historic district. Francis Keil commissioned Charles Clark, a Bronx-based architect, to design this grand neo-Renaissance style house to serve as his home. Keil, one of the original homeowners on Clay Avenue, was a Czech-born hardware manufacturer with a factory located nearby. The building’s façade is almost completely covered in ivy, which is only interrupted by an entrance porch of brick piers that supports a sloping roof and frames a pair of wood and glass doors. The house is crowned by a bracketed cornice and a brick parapet with inset panels, the latter of which can also be seen above the ivy-covered façade.

6b

1050 AND 1052 CLAY AVENUE
(Warren C. Dickerson, 1901-02)
 – NYC HD

While this pair of houses may be asymmetrical in its massing, Nos. 1050 and 1052 share common characteristics such as keyed limestone transom bars and dwarf pilasters flanking the doors. Non-historic iron railings guide visitors up the tall pair of stone stoops to the entryways. The façade, faced in Roman brick (red brick for No. 1050 and beige brick for No. 1052), is enlivened with window openings featuring keyed enframements and drip lintels. The shared gable that rises from the center of the pair features a galvanized iron pediment. Dormers with pediments supported by Ionic pilasters are found on either side of the gable. In 1905, No. 1050 was home to John E. Hubbard, a carpet salesman, and Thomas Ahearn, a fireman, as well as their families. Their neighbors at No. 1052 included Henry Cabaud and his mother, daughter and Irish-born aunt.



6d

1051 AND 1053 CLAY AVENUE
(Warren C. Dickerson, 1901-02)
 – NYC HD

The façade of this pair of red brick, three-story rowhouses is enlivened by the rock-faced stone at the buildings' bases, around the entrances, in the second-story window lintels and on the beltcourses. Stone stoops with historic wrought-iron railings lead up to the entrances, which each feature a wood and glass door set below a transom. With two-story rounded bays flanking either side, the façade culminates in a central gable with a set of two round-arch windows. Ornamented dormers, which rise above a bracketed cornice, are found on either side of the gable. In 1905, four households occupied the two buildings, including that of Helen Seamen, a dressmaker who lived at No. 1053 with her five children and a niece.



6c

1054 AND 1056 CLAY AVENUE
(Warren C. Dickerson, 1901-02)
 – NYC HD

Although Nos. 1054 and 1056 share similar asymmetrical massing with their southern neighbors, this pair of houses stands out with its rounded bays and gable topped with a segmental-arched pediment. Tall stone stoops, as seen throughout the district, lead to doorways flanked by dwarf pilasters with foliate corbels and caps. No. 1054 retains all of its original leaded-glass transoms in the second story windows. Both the gable and the dormers feature galvanized iron pediments, while only No. 1056 features its original bracketed cornice. The areaway retains its historic wrought-iron railings and cast-iron newels. In 1903, Henry Stiehl, a baking supply dealer, purchased No. 1054 and moved in with his wife, two sons and a servant. A year later, Martha Tezlaff, a German immigrant, bought No. 1056, and 1910 census data indicates that she lived here with her daughter, son-in-law and servant.



6e

1055 AND 1057 CLAY AVENUE
(Warren C. Dickerson, 1901-02)
 – NYC HD

These houses each feature three-sided, angled bays clad in rough-hewn stone at the basement and first story, and boast windows with leaded-glass transoms. A pair of tall stoops with historic wrought iron railings lead up to entrances framed in the same rough-hewn stone. The ensemble is topped by a galvanized iron cornice and a pair of curving Flemish-inspired gables. No. 1055 retains an original galvanized iron decorative urn in its gable. In 1905, the two apartments of No. 1055 were home to the families of Frederick Krauth, a clothing cutter, and John Elstner, a German immigrant. No. 1057, on the other hand, was home to a real estate agent, a police sergeant and their families.



6f

FULTON, 371 EAST 165TH STREET
(Neville & Bagge, 1909)

360 EAST 166TH STREET
(Neville & Bagge, 1910)

380 EAST 166TH STREET
(Neville & Bagge, 1910)

– NYC HD



The three apartment buildings found within the historic district were all designed in the neo-Renaissance style by Neville & Bagge, a prolific architectural firm in New York from the 1890s to the 1920s. While most well-known for its apartment buildings on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, Neville & Bagge designed rowhouses, individual residences and commercial lofts, in addition to hundreds of neo-Renaissance style apartment buildings. These brick buildings, trimmed with stone and terra cotta, face the side streets, with each centering on an entrance with a low stoop and limestone enframing featuring Doric pilasters. On the Clay Avenue side, each building has a pair of three-sided bays flanking a central bay that reflects, at a larger scale, the massing of the two-family houses on the street. These four- and five-story buildings are typical “new law” tenements, built in compliance with the standards outlined in the Tenement House Act of 1901. Catering to working-class households, all apartments in “new law” tenements met minimum size standards for rooms, boasted kitchens and bathrooms, and were guaranteed adequate access to light and air via light courts at the side and rear of the buildings. A look at the residents of 360 East 166th Street in 1910 sheds light on the buildings’ original social makeup. Eighteen households, averaging two to three people, lived in the building in 1910. A range of nationalities was represented, including American, Italian and German, and occupations such as bookkeeper, grocer, architect, photo engraver, asphalt company laborer and court clerk.

7

GRAND CONCOURSE HISTORIC DISTRICT
– NYC HD, NR-HD



The Grand Concourse Historic District encompasses 61 apartment houses that were built between 1917 and 1959 along the Grand Concourse, the major north-south artery of the West Bronx that was conceived in 1891 as a means of linking the park system of Manhattan with the rural Bronx. The development of apartment buildings along the Grand Concourse was precipitated by the completion of the Jerome Avenue subway, which made it possible for residents to commute to Manhattan, as well as the introduction of real estate tax exemptions. About half of the district’s apartment buildings were constructed following these two major developments, from 1922 to 1931, and were mostly designed in revival styles popular in Manhattan at the time, including Renaissance and Colonial Revival. The 1933 opening of the IND subway along the Grand Concourse sparked the Grand Concourse’s next building boom, which lasted until about 1945 and produced most of the remaining buildings in the district. Many of these were undertaken in the Art Deco and Moderne styles for which the district is famous. Charles Kreymborg & Son and Jacob M. Felson were the architects responsible for the greatest number of buildings found within the historic district, though it also features buildings by other illustrious architects of the day, including the prolific apartment building designer, Emery Roth. Despite a period of decline and deterioration lasting from the 1950s to the 1980s, the architectural character of the Grand Concourse survived and now serves as the backdrop to a diverse working class community with a large immigrant population.



7a

1212 GRAND CONCOURSE
(Horace Ginsbern, 1936-37)
– NYC HD, NR-HD

Occupying the corner of East 167th Street, this six-story brick apartment building designed by Horace Ginsbern embodies many characteristic

elements of the Art Deco style. While the majority of the building faces East 167th Street, its entrance opens onto the Grand Concourse, and is topped by a vertical band of raised bricks that stretch up to the roofline and culminate in a terra cotta crown. In addition to the geometric patterns found in the brickwork throughout the façade, the building boasts an eye-catching iron fire escape with curved railings and chevron details. This building’s location at the intersection is accentuated by its wrap-around corner window openings that punctuate the monotone masonry exterior.



7b
1150 GRAND CONCOURSE
(Horace Ginsbern & Marvin Fine, 1936-7)
 – NYC HD, NR-HD



With its curved corners, Art Moderne flourishes and geometric cast stone entryway, 1150 Grand Concourse is arguably one of the most striking examples of Art Deco architecture in the neighborhood. The six-story building incorporates six light courts, which not only provide tenants with fresh air, but also lend the façade a streamlined flare. The vibrant tinted mosaic tile mural of tropical fish at the building’s entrance lends 1150 Grand Concourse the nickname, the “Fish Building.” Notably, the building’s architects, Ginsbern & Fine, along with Ginsbern’s son Frederick, were also responsible for the designs of the Chock Full O’ Nuts restaurant chain in New York City.



7c
ANDREW FREEDMAN HOME
 1125 Grand Concourse
(Joseph H. Freedlander & Harry Allan Jacobs, 1922-24; wings by David Levy, 1928-31)
 – NYC HD, NYC IL, NR-HD

Sitting prominently on the Grand Concourse, the four-story Andrew Freedman home was designed by Joseph Freedlander and Harry Jacobs in the tradition of the Italian Renaissance palazzo. This monumental building is defined by its symmetrical massing and architectural details, including a balustraded terrace and beautiful ironwork. After his death in 1915, Andrew Freedman, who was involved with the construction of New York City’s first subway and had close ties to Tammany Hall, left his fortune for the establishment of a home for the “care and maintenance of aged and indigent persons of both sexes...who have been in good circumstances but by reason of adverse fortune, have become poor and dependent.” This home for the once-wealthy was expanded between 1928 and 1931 and remained in its original use until 1983. Purchased by the Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council, the rechristened Andrew Freedman Complex now serves as a lodging facility, cultural center and event space.



7d
EXECUTIVE TOWERS
 1020 Grand Concourse
(Philip Birnbaum, 1961-1963)
 – NYC HD, NR-HD



Designed in the Modern style by Philip Birnbaum, this 23-story cooperative apartment complex contains 453 units. Faced primarily in white brick, the Executive Towers features a slightly concave elevation with curved balconies, punctured by narrow light wells running up the height of the building. Projecting outward from the building, the entrance pavilion’s jagged, sawtooth roof, supported by green and white marble columns, contrasts sharply with the gentle curves of the tower. The complex was completed in 1963, just as the middle class began its rapid exodus from the Grand Concourse. Boasting features like central air conditioning, it was touted in real estate brochures as “the first luxury skyscraper in the Bronx.” Despite the development’s aspirations, the Executive Towers could not compete with the suburbs and larger complexes like Co-op City, which contained 15,000 apartments in a self-contained community in the northeast Bronx.

7e
1000 GRAND CONCOURSE
(Sugarman & Berger, 1935)
 – NYC HD, NR-HD

When it was completed in 1935, 1000 Grand Concourse was the first apartment building over six stories tall to be erected along the prestigious thoroughfare. The ten-story Art Deco building is faced with beige brick and features a cast stone entrance surround. However, the building’s most noticeable feature is the raised and contrasting brickwork along the spandrels and roofline that add variety to a relatively unadorned façade. The apartment house was designed by Sugarman & Berger, whose work can also be found in Greenwich Village and on the Upper West and Upper East Sides of Manhattan.



7f

888 GRAND CONCOURSE*(Emery Roth & Sons, 1937)*

– NYC HD, NR-HD



The only building designed by Emery Roth in the historic district, 888 Grand Concourse takes on a distinct streamlined appearance with its three curved bays, which stretch up six stories. The building's entrance, located beneath the central bay at the corner of East 161st Street, features a concave vestibule decorated with beige and gold mosaic tiles and a terrazzo floor. This central bay is further accentuated by cast stone window surrounds that run the full height of the building and terminate in a stylized Art Deco crown. Emery Roth, one of New York City's most renowned architects, was responsible for other landmark apartment buildings, including the San Remo and Eldorado on Central Park West in Manhattan.

7g

BRONX COUNTY COURTHOUSE

851 Grand Concourse

(Joseph H. Freedlander & Max L. Hausle, 1931-1933)

– NYC HD, NYC IL, NR-HD



Prominently overlooking Joyce Kilmer and Franz Sigel parks, this nine-story limestone building was designed in the neo-Classical style befitting a civic building situated on a prominent thoroughfare. The courthouse's solid square massing is juxtaposed with sculptural details and ornamental reliefs. Among these is a frieze that encircles the entire building, depicting the "universal working man" engaged in such activities as agriculture, industry, the arts and war. Like other public buildings constructed during the Great Depression, the project was intended to provide needed work for architects, artists and construction workers. While the courthouse is the only project on which architects Joseph Freedlander and Max Hausle collaborated, Freedlander designed other recognizable New York City buildings, including the Museum of the City of New York and the nearby Andrew Freedman Home.

7h

THOMAS GARDEN APARTMENTS

840 Grand Concourse

(Andrew Thomas, 1926-7)

– NYC HD, NR-HD



With its expansive courtyard filled with vegetation and landscaping, the red brick Thomas Garden Apartments stand out from the dense urban fabric that characterizes most of the Grand Concourse. Named after its architect, Andrew Thomas, this complex was financed by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., as a non-profit cooperative. Thomas is often associated with the garden apartment typology, which is typically characterized by groups of low-rise buildings arranged around an interior courtyard and located on relatively large building lots. Besides its notable layout, this Renaissance Revival style building features terra cotta detailing at the roofline and round-arched entry surrounds framed by stepped hood molding.

7i

730 & 740

GRAND

CONCOURSE

(Jacob M. Felson, 1939)

– NYC HD, NR-HD



Completed in 1939, this pair of six-story Art Deco apartment houses was designed and built by Jacob Felson. Felson was a Russian-born immigrant noted for his movie theaters and apartment houses, which can be found elsewhere on the Grand Concourse, as well as in the Upper West Side, Upper East Side and Riverside-West End Historic Districts in Manhattan. Felson used decorative brickwork to create the buildings' most significant architectural features, including vertical elements on the central bay, dark brick bands between window openings and rounded corner bricks on the outer bays. The cast stone surrounding the recessed entryways and the rounded metalwork of the fire escapes further contribute to the buildings' Art Deco aesthetic.

