



A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

# KEW GARDENS

## QUEENS





The Historic Districts Council is New York's citywide advocate for historic buildings and neighborhoods. The Six to Celebrate program annually identifies six 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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## Kew Gardens

Residential development in Queens began in the late 1860s, spurred by improvements in transportation and the creation of Forest Park (**Site 08**) in the 1890s. This made the area increasingly attractive to developers, including New York lawyer Albon P. Mann. In 1869, Mann purchased five large farmsteads north of the Jamaica Turnpike. He developed the southern portion into Richmond Hill, reserving the northern section for a Country Club.

The opening of a new LIRR station on Lefferts Boulevard in 1909 (**Site 1**) led to the area's renaming as Kew Gardens, inspired by the Royal Botanical Gardens in Kew, England. Soon after, Mann's sons—Alrick, Arthur, and Albon Jr.—began transforming the Country Club grounds into a residential community. Their plan was influenced by the Anglo-American garden suburb movement, emphasizing privacy, quality of life, and integration with the natural landscape. Though they sold plots to other developers, the Manns established restrictive covenants to control the quality and character of construction, ensuring their vision for the neighborhood was preserved.

As a result, Kew Gardens developed into a cohesive yet varied neighborhood, with townhouses, apartments, and single-family homes ranging from cottages to mansions. Early examples of homes remain on Grenfell Street (**Site 15**) and Mowbray Drive (**Site 16**), while the first apartment building, The Kew Bolmer (**Site 12**), was erected on the northern edge. Starting with The Homestead (**Site 9**), mixed-use buildings clustered around Lefferts Boulevard (**Sites 10 and 11**). By the 1920s, housing options included apartment hotels like The Homestead (**Site 4**), which offered visitors a peaceful and convenient alternative to the hustle of Manhattan.

The 1930s marked a period of significant change for the neighborhood. The Kew Gardens Country Club went bankrupt, and its clubhouse was demolished and replaced by the Kew Gardens Cinemas (**Site 2**). The opening of a new subway station at Union Turnpike reduced Kew Gardens' sense of isolation, while the construction of the Interboro Parkway (now the Jackie Robinson Parkway) created a physical divide between Kew Gardens and neighboring Forest Hills Gardens. Several institutions closed, and the Kew Gardens Corporation went bankrupt, with the Mann family relinquishing control over future development. Despite these setbacks, the neighborhood continued to uphold high standards for architecture and planning, with outstanding residential complexes like Hampton Court (**Site 14**) added to the landscape.

Today, Kew Gardens' built environment remains remarkably intact, thanks to the efforts of community groups such as the Kew Gardens Improvement Association and the Kew Gardens Preservation Alliance. Now, with support from HDC, these groups are leading a campaign to formally protect the neighborhood's historic core, ensuring its character endures for generations to come.

This brochure was developed by the Historic Districts Council in partnership with the Kew Gardens Improvement Association and the Kew Gardens Preservation Alliance. The featured sites offer a glimpse into the neighborhood's rich history, inviting you to explore further and support efforts to protect, preserve, and celebrate its unique legacy.

INFRASTRUCTURE & SERVICES



KEW GARDENS LIRR STATION

Austin St at Mowbray Dr  
(1909-10)



The first station in the Kew Gardens area was known as Hopedale, and was established in 1875 along the new main line to Hunters Point to serve the newly opened Maple Grove Cemetery. After a new station was built closer to the cemetery, Hopedale was closed in 1884, and its building was relocated and converted into a private residence.

The new Kew Gardens station opened in 1910 along with the introduction of electric service to Penn Station, providing quick access to Manhattan. The one-story brick structure features terra cotta and stucco ornamentations and a prominent hipped roof with a porche supported by columns. The station played an integral role in the development of tthe area, prompting the construction of several residential buildings and services.

In 1936, following the opening of the Queens Boulevard Line to Kew Gardens, ridership at this station decreased. Over the years, the platforms have undrgone a series of modifications, with the waiting room on the eastbound platform removed in the late 1970s. Despite this, the station remains a focal point of the community, especially due to its connection to the “Ponte Vecchio” Bridge (Site 3).

LEGEND OF DESIGNATIONS

National Historic Landmark	NH L
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

Originally the Austin Theatre, this neighborhood staple opened in 1935 on the site previously occupied by the Kew Gardens Country Club House. With a capacity of 600 seats, it was designed by prolific theater architect Charles Sandblom, who was responsible for at least 42 other theaters in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens and Manhattan. Sandblom began his career working for Thomas Lamb, one of New York's most renowned theater architects, and left to start his own firm in 1921. His style was austere, with some of his buildings showcasing simple Moderne and Art Deco ornamentation.

In 1943, it was taken over by Rugoff & Becker, predecessors of Cinema V and one of the seminal figures in the 1960s art cinema world. Despite the community's appreciation for it, dwindling audiences caused it to be converted into an adult-film theatre in the early 1970s. The advent of rental video prompted another crisis in the 1990s, and the building once again changed owners. It was renovated and reopened as a multi-screen movie theater, and renamed Kew Gardens Cinemas. It is currently owned by Harvey Elgart, who also operates Williamsburg Cinemas and Cobble Hill Cinemas.

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## KEW GARDENS CINEMAS

8105 Lefferts Blvd

(1935, Charles Sandblom)



3

## LEFFERTS BOULEVARD BRIDGE

Lefferts Blvd, between Austin St & Audley St

(Ca. 1930)



With the opening of the newly realigned and electrified Long Island Railroad, several street crossings were built over the tracks, including the Lefferts Boulevard bridge. Since it was the closest to the train station, it was frequently used by residents. Around 1930, two parallel structures were constructed to host commercial buildings, seamlessly connecting both sides of the neighborhood.

The west side of the bridge features buildings in the Tudor Revival style, while the east side has Art Deco-style structures with terra cotta decoration. This indicates that they were developed at different times, although specific dates are still unclear. The rear facades of the stores, facing the railroad tracks, are unornamented brick. The bridges are supported by steel piers over the tracks, with masonry basements and foundations on both sides.

Locally known as “Ponte Vecchio,” after the famous Italian medieval bridge, this unique group of storefronts plays a significant role in the cohesiveness of Kew Garden's commercial corridor and has become a distinctive feature of the neighborhood.



In January 1928 builders Martin M. and Harry Wohl opened a hotel on Grenfell Street and named it the Homestead. The brothers had previously opened similar hotels in Flushing and Jamaica, offering long-term leases as well as overnight stays. The Homestead was the second hotel in the area, with the first being the Kew Gardens Inn, built in 1921 on Kew Gardens Road at Union Turnpike.

The four-story brick and concrete structure had nearly 100 rooms, with central heating, an elevator, and a restaurant bar and grill on the first floor. A large dining room and a banquet hall were located in the basement.

The Homestead was sold in 1942 to the Kew Gardens Realty Corporation and leased in 1952 by Abe Sonenstein. The opening of hotels near LaGuardia and JFK caused a decline in business in the early 1960s, and it was eventually closed in 1965. It reopened in the early 1970s as a senior citizen retirement residence and was renamed The New Homestead.

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## FORMER HOMESTEAD HOTEL

82-45 Grenfell St

(1928)



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## FORMER FIRST CHURCH OF KEW GARDENS REFORMED

80-10 Lefferts Blvd

(1928)



Kew Garden's first church was incorporated in 1919 by the Queens County Supreme Court. Although it was organized as Protestant, the intention was that it remained nondenominational. It was named after former President Theodore Roosevelt, who had recently passed away.

Construction was planned to start that same year, but never materialized. Efforts were renewed in 1925, when a new congregation was organized and acquired this property at the corner of Lefferts Avenue and Kew Gardens Road the following

year. They initially worshipped in a frame structure at the corner of Mowbray Place, while work on a new church building began in 1928. The cornerstone was laid with ceremonies performed by the Grand Lodge of Masons of New York, and the church was renamed Kew Gardens Reformed. The Colonial Revival brick structure had an auditorium, and the old church was converted to a Church House. Since 1986 it has hosted the Kew Gardens Sung Shin Reformed Church.

## MAPLE GROVE CEMETERY

127-15 Kew Gardens Rd

(1875-1941)

NR P

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Building, built in 1880 and used until 2009, when offices were moved. Both were designed by noted architect James E. Ware.

The Memorial Park section opened in 1943, and features lawn-level memorials in order to maintain the park-like environment. It includes the new administrative building designed by architect Peter Gisolfi and a memorial for the people who died in the 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2004.

This Neo-Gothic style building is the second location for Public School 99, which was initially located at a small wood-frame structure at Cuthbert Road near Lefferts Boulevard.

The new brick structure was designed by William H. Gompert, who had recently been hired as Architect and Superintendent of School Buildings for the New York City Board of Education. During his tenure, Gompert was responsible for the design and construction of around 170 new schools and additions.

In 2001, P.S. 99 underwent a complete brick resurfacing. At this time, the decorative heads that adorned the top of the building were removed, recast and given to the Kew Gardens Civic Association, who in turn gave them to the nearby Maple Grove Cemetery. It remains the only public school in Kew Gardens, and has special programs for gifted students.

## PS 99 KEW GARDENS SCHOOL

82-37 Kew Gardens Rd

(1923-24, William H. Gompert)

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## THE OVERLOOK

80-30 Park Ln

(1911-12, *Buchman & Fox*)



Overlook” for its extensive views. It was originally conceived as a one-room building, but in 1915 six more rooms were added by architects Erdmann & Hahn.

Among the Park’s most noted employees was author Henry Miller, who began working as a grave digger and eventually moved up to an office assistant at The Overlook. During this period, and motivated by an impasse with his wife, he wrote a manuscript that would serve as the outline for much of his literary work.

From 1895 until 1898, the Brooklyn Parks Department purchased parcels of land to create the Brooklyn Forest Park. It was then acquired by the City of New York and renamed Forest Park, with an independent Queens Parks Department established in 1911 to manage the parklands in the borough. This Spanish Mission style structure was designed by the renowned firm of Buchman & Fox to house the Park Commissioner’s office, and was known as “The

## MIXED-USE BUILDINGS

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## THE HOMESTEAD BUILDING

81-37 to 81-45 Lefferts Blvd

(1914)



The first mixed-use multi-family building in Kew Gardens was The Homestead. Located at the heart of the commercial corridor, this three-story brick structure was designed to have stores and restaurants on the ground floor and apartments on the upper floors. Its Tudor Revival style evoked an idyllic English village, meant to attract wealthier residents, featuring a half-timbered façade with picture windows capped off with steep peaked dormers. Tenants entered the building through several peaked roofed doorways spaced between the stores.

It was originally conceived as a group of five buildings that occupied most of the block, but two of them were destroyed in a fire and replaced with a Neo-Classical bank.

Kew Gardens’ first grocery store was in the Homestead Building. In the 1920s, it became Freudenberg & Spreckels Grocery Store and remained so until after World War II, when new owners turned it into the Homestead Gourmet Deli. *Photo by the Kew Gardens Improvement Association.*



Following the construction of the new Kew Gardens LIRR station, and over the next two decades, Lefferts Boulevard became the neighborhood's main commercial corridor. Among the first mixed-use buildings that were erected in the area was this cluster of eight two-story brick structures. With Neo-Tudor features, storefronts populated both facades of the first floor, while the second floor was occupied by apartments. It was developed by builders Gross & Lommerman, with designs by the prolific firm of Slee & Bryson.

John B. Slee graduated from Baltimore's Maryland Institute and moved to New York soon after. Robert H. Bryson was originally from Newark, New Jersey, but moved to New York with his family in the late 1800s. They established their firm in 1905, and were soon commissioned for residences in Prospect Park South and other growing suburban developments in Brooklyn. They also designed apartment buildings, garages, additions and alterations.

Slee & Bryson designed some of the earliest and best examples of Neo-Tudor buildings in Prospect Park South, Prospect Lefferts Gardens and the Albemarle-Kenmore Terraces Historic District in Flatbush. Examples of their apartment buildings can also be found in Riverdale, Manhattan and Staten Island.

In the early 1960s, this was the home of Kitty Genovese, a 28-year-old bartender whose murder had a profound effect on psychological research and journalism, becoming known as the bystander effect, or "Genovese syndrome."

Sometime after 1980, three of the first-floor stores facing Austin Street were merged into a large commercial space, which currently houses Austin's Ale House. *Photos: (top) View from Austin St. (bottom) view from Kew Garden LIRR Station.*

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## COMMERCIAL BUILDING AT AUSTIN ST.

82-74 to 82-66 Austin St  
(1925, Slee & Bryson)



II

## THE KEW CORNERS

120-32 83rd Ave

*(1925, Kieswetter & Hamburger)*

This mixed-use, four-story walk-up building occupies a prominent lot in Kew Gardens' commercial corridor, overlooking the neighborhood's five-corner intersection. It features a U-shaped floor plan with an interior courtyard, and separate entrances that allow for two apartments per landing and floor-through layouts.

Although they feature Dutch Expressionist influences, the design of each façade is slightly different, adjusting to the profile of each street. The storefronts are concentrated along Lefferts Boulevard, a commercial street, while the access to the interior court on 83rd Avenue is marked by an arched "porte-cochère" and greenery. The acute angle where the streets meet was resolved through a chamfered corner, with a patterned brick gable with Dutch influences.

Not much is known about architects Kieswetter & Hamburger, except that they were active in the early-1920s designing apartment buildings.

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## THE KEW BOLMER

120-10 Queens Blvd

*(1922-23, Bloch & Hesse)*

This area was originally part of Daniel Cooper Foulke's farm, who passed it on to his daughter Sarah Bolmer. In the early 20th century, the Bolmers switched to real estate and began developing sections of their land, establishing a realty office at 124-03 Union Turnpike.

In 1922, they commissioned Bloch & Hesse to design an apartment building at the acute intersection of Queens Boulevard and Kew Gardens Road. Professional suites were located on the first floor, while apartments occupied the other four levels. Entrances were located at both sides, while the west façade featured balconies and a picturesque cornice capped the building. The surrounding gardens were converted to storefronts soon after.

Ben C. Bloch and Walter Hesse established their firm in 1916, designing synagogues, hospitals, schools, restaurants, housing developments, and private homes. Among their most notable works are Lundy's Restaurant (NYC Landmark, 1992), the Jewish chapel at JFK Airport and the Brooklyn Civic Center.

## APARTMENT BUILDINGS

Kew Hall was the first major apartment building to go up in the heart of Kew Gardens. Covering half a block, it followed the plan of The Dakota (NYC Landmark, 1969), with an interior garden court and multiple entrances so there would be only two floor-though apartments per landing. This courtyard plan became a favorite among Kew Gardens developers throughout the 1920s.

The five-story steel frame and brick structure featured concrete floors and a heating plant. It offered amenities like automatic elevators, a swimming pool, a concierge's house, and a separate garage building. Builder John K. Turton is listed as the architect.

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### KEW HALL

8309 Talbot St

(1922, John K. Turton)



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### DALE GARDENS

Bounded by 125th St, Austin St, 126th St & 84th Rd

(Ca. 1927, Robert Tappan)



This low-rise apartment complex is another example of the “Garden Apartment” typology that was amply used in Kew Gardens. It consists of three and four-story townhouses grouped around a central greenspace, which included picnic grounds, a playground and a small stream with a Japanese style bridge over it. The houses feature Neo-Georgian details, with floor-through layouts and main entrances that face the central greenspace. Also included were built-in garages and a small retail complex at one end.

The design was by Robert Tappan, a prolific Queens architect who specialized in residential buildings. Tapan was a long-time resident of Forest Hills. He graduated from MIT and advocated for the standardization of the essential units of small homes to speed up construction. In 1918 he invented a system of coordinated unit planning and construction, and later built an experimental model home for the US Housing Corporation. His work includes the Arbor and Forest Closes Complexes in Forest Hills, for which he won the Better Building Award from the Queens Chamber of Commerce, the English Gables retail complex in Jackson Heights, and St. Luke's Episcopal Church (National Register, 2010).

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## HAMPTON COURT

11701 Park Ln S

(1937, Benjamin Braunstein)

NR P



During the mid-1930s, the owners of this parcel made plans to develop an apartment complex in the popular garden style. The land had originally been considered for the construction of Forest Park, resulting in a complex surrounded by open space and wooded areas.

The design by Queens architect Benjamin Braunstein consists of four six-story Georgian Revival buildings with H-plans, with a total of 316 apartments. Each had finely detailed entrances and spacious interiors with cross-ventilation and plenty of natural light. The first two stories of each building have clustered brick quoins on the corners, and a simple horizontal band between the second and third floors, while a more ornamented

horizontal brick band is below the sixth story. Three of them have solariums and roof terraces, and all are connected by an interior courtyard with copious greenery, where an octagonal one-story central office is located.

Originally built as rental apartments for middle-class families, the complex was first known as Kent Manor. It was renamed Hampton Court in 1987, when it became a cooperative under a non-eviction plan. It was listed on the National Register in 2020.

*Photo by the Kew Gardens Improvement Association.*

## SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES

Development of Mowbray Drive began in 1914, when architect Frank E. Newman commissioned builder James J. Fogarty to construct two-and-a-half-story frame houses at Nos. 114 and 116. Newman provided the architectural designs through his firm, which he co-founded in 1902 with James R. Harris. The firm became one of the more prominent early 20th-century architectural practices in Philadelphia. Among their most significant works is the Fairmount Apartments in Jersey City, designated a New Jersey Landmark in 1994 and added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1995.

No. 114 was initially purchased by real estate developer Frank Droesch, who resided there until the 1930s. No. 116 was acquired by Dr. Julia H. Lombard, who was then married to Alfred Miller, a well-known Kew Gardens resident. Dr. Lombard was among the first women to practice medicine in the United States and spent many years working with the Little Mothers Aid Association. A gifted linguist, she spoke several languages fluently and translated technical works and literary classics from Russian, German, and English.

## HOUSES AT MOWBRAY DR.

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114-116 Mowbray Drive

(1914, Newman &amp; Harris)





One of Kew Gardens' most cohesive and well-preserved streets is Grenfell (also known as Greenfell). Developed between 1910 and 1930, this picturesque thoroughfare features an array of distinctive two-and-a-half- and three-story single-family homes, reflecting popular architectural styles of the era, including Italianate, Craftsman, and Dutch Revival.

The earliest section to be developed was between Onslow Place and Quentin Street (now 80th Road). Among these early homes is a notable example of an Italianate Villa at No. 80-83, built in 1913. This two-and-a-half-story frame house showcases low hipped roofs, wide overhanging eaves supported by broad curvilinear brackets, and a columned porch framing the main entrance. It was designed by Arthur M. Gaynor and built by the John R. Corbin Company, which was also responsible for much of Midwood Park's development. Around 1915, the property was acquired by Sidney H. Burns, a stock and bonds broker, who had plumbing installed that same year. The Burns family were among Kew Gardens' most prominent residents and active members of the Kew Gardens Country Club, frequently hosting events at their home.

By 1920, development had extended to the southwest side of Grenfell, between Onslow Place and Audley Street. Noteworthy examples from this phase include Nos. 82-28 and 82-34, constructed in 1915 by the Chappelfields Construction Company with designs by architect Walter McQuade. Based in Amityville, Long Island, Chappelfields developed several homes in the area during this time. McQuade remained active in the neighborhood for years, eventually becoming a house planning consultant for the Kew Gardens Corporation in 1921.

Another Grenfell noted resident was Cleveland Rodgers, who lived at No. 80-32 from the late 1910s until his death in 1956. Born in Greenville, South Carolina, Rodgers joined *The Brooklyn Eagle* in 1906 and held various positions, including editor. In 1938, he was appointed to the City Planning Commission by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, serving until 1951. Afterward, he focused on managing the Brooklyn Civic Center and published several books. *Photos: (top) 80-83 Grenfell St. (middle) 82-28 & 82-34 Grenfell St. (bottom) 82-16 & 82-26 Grenfell St.*

## HOUSES AT GRENFELL ST.

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80-20 to 82-34 & 80-45 to 82-37

Grenfell St

(Ca. 1912 - Ca. 1930)



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## HENRY BOHACK HOUSE

83-4 Beverly Rd  
(1920, Koch & Wagner)



semicircular porch with columns, flanked by half-point-arch windows. A few years later the firm designed the Ralph Bunche house (Site 20).

Bohack and his wife lived at this address when he died in 1931. At the time, his business was estimated to be worth \$40 million a year, and his personal wealth amounted to \$10 million. The company was successfully managed by his heirs until 1965, when a series of bad investments led to bankruptcy and a complete shutdown in 1977.

Born in Ukraine, Rossina Lhévinne studied piano at the Moscow Conservatory, graduating in 1898 with a gold medal. She then married Josef Lhévinne, whom she had met at school, and began playing together and touring Europe and America. When World War I broke out, the Lhévinnes were subjected to internment in Wannsee because they were Russian citizens. They immigrated to the United States immediately after the war, and settled with their two children at this house in Kew Gardens. In 1924, both were invited to join the faculty of the newly established Juilliard Graduate School, sharing the same studio.

Josef Lhévinne died in 1944, leaving Rossina Lhévinne devastated. She moved from Queens to Manhattan and continued teaching, growing even more famous as her students won several national and international piano competitions. She resumed her soloist career in 1956, performing with orchestras around the country to great acclaim. She continued teaching at Juilliard until age 96, training some of the most famous musicians of the 20th century, including Van Cliburn, John Browning, Mischa Dichter, Adele Marcus, Ralph Votapek, Martin Canin, David Bar-Ilan, James Levine, and Arthur Gold.

In 2014, the Friends of Maple Grove unveiled a bronze plaque at the front garden of the Lhévinne house, honoring their contributions to the arts. *Photo by The Kew Gardens Improvement Association.*

Born in Germany, Henry Christian Bohack immigrated to the United States in 1882 and opened his first grocery store in Brooklyn in 1887. Two years later he married Emma Augusta Steffens, also a German immigrant. Bohack was so successful that by 1930 he had 740 chain stores in Brooklyn and Queens, with over 3,000 employees. During this period, he also expanded to gas stations and restaurants.

In 1920, he commissioned Koch & Wagner to design a large two-and-a-half-story house with a detached garage at this corner of Beverly Road. The brick and stone structure features a hipped roof and chimney, with a main entrance marked by a

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## LHÉVINNE HOUSE

119-19 83rd Ave  
(1919)



Ralph Johnson Bunche was an American political scientist and diplomat, and the first person of African descent to be awarded a Nobel Peace Prize. He was an active member of the US civil rights movement, and played a significant role in the formation and early administration of the United Nations (UN).

Upon the establishment of the UN, Bunche and his family relocated from Washington, D.C. to New York in 1947, purchasing this house in Kew Gardens in 1952. The two-and-a-half-story Neo-Tudor structure is faced in stucco pierced by random

bricks and stones, and features a central, full-height, projecting gable capped by a clipped roof. It was built by Louis Frisse in 1927, with designs by prominent Brooklyn architects Koch & Wagner, who formed a partnership in 1910 and designed numerous industrial, commercial, and residential buildings, primarily in Brooklyn and Queens. Both graduated from Pratt Institute and served terms as president of the Brooklyn Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Among their most renowned works are the Ridgewood Masonic Temple (NYC Landmark, 2014), Hamburg Savings Bank at 1451 Myrtle Avenue, and the Lincoln Savings Bank at Fifth Avenue and Bay Ridge Parkway in Brooklyn.

The house was listed on the National Register in 1976, and designated as a NYC Landmark in 2005.

## RALPH BUNCHE HOUSE

115-24 Grosvenor Rd

(1927, Koch & Wagner)

NYC IL / NR P

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