



A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

# CHINATOWN & LITTLE ITALY MANHATTAN





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.



**Council on  
the Arts**

**NYC Cultural  
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## CHINATOWN & LITTLE ITALY

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Immigration, and the resulting diversity of cultural influences, remains one of the central themes of American history and has been a key factor in defining an American identity. During its peak, between 1880 to 1921, New York City received as many as five times more immigrants than Philadelphia or Chicago, and although it was a widespread phenomenon, most of them stayed in the neighborhoods of Chinatown and Little Italy, along with the Lower East Side. Converted rowhouses and tenements housed people from different ethnic backgrounds from year to year, but ultimately the neighborhood became best-known for the Italian-Americans and Chinese-Americans who settled here.

The Chinese and Italian communities shared many parallel experiences, including fleeing civil unrest and dwindling opportunities in their homelands, remaining among fellow countrymen for linguistic and socio-cultural reasons. During the 1870s, they began to concentrate around Mott and Mulberry Streets, and the intersecting cross streets, bringing their respective cultures to New York. They have co-existed and overlapped, and occasionally conflicted, for nearly a century and a half within the boundaries of the neighborhood.

While the contributions of the Italian and Chinese residents constitute the central element of the neighborhood's significance, well over a century of settlement and development took place before these communities first concentrated here. Beginning in the mid-18th century, this area was an active industrial district and the location of some of the City's most noxious and dangerous businesses. As industry grew, immigration brought more residents and the neighborhood expanded. New mixed use and residential buildings were constructed, as well as commercial buildings, schools (**Site 2**), firehouses (**Site 6**), and churches.

Uninterrupted rows of Pre Law and Old Law tenements are still visible on Mott, Mulberry, and Elizabeth Streets, as well as numerous examples of New Law tenements at Kenmare Street. Federal-era townhouses can be found on Grand Street (**Site 7**), surrounded by 19th- and early-20th-century commercial and industrial architecture. Landmark examples of religious architecture are the Church of The Transfiguration (**Site 17**) and St. Patrick's Old Cathedral (**Site 1**), and one of the most historically significant public parks in New York City, Columbus Park (**Site 22**), which replaced the most notorious slums of Mulberry Bend.

Today, both neighborhoods are among the most popular tourist attractions in NYC, and part of the most valuable real estate markets in Manhattan. Over two centuries of development and redevelopment have resulted in a dense, cohesive area with a significance that extends beyond the traditional 19th-century immigration narrative to encompass architecture, ethnic heritage, social history and culture.

In 2010, thanks to community efforts led by the Two Bridges Neighborhood Council, Chinatown and Little Italy were listed as a Historic District in the National Register of Historic Places.

## OLD ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL & CEMETERY



263 Mulberry St  
(1815, Joseph F. Mangin /  
restored 1886)  
NYC IL

New York's first Cathedral was erected in what used to be a rural area, with funds that came largely from struggling Irish immigrants and several wealthy Catholic laymen.

It was completed in 1815, and was one of the earliest examples of Gothic Revival architecture in the city. Its massive stone facades with stained glass windows are one of the few elements that survived after the church was gutted by a fire in 1886. Today, St. Patrick's Old Cathedral remains a vital part of the community, serving a diverse community of Catholics.

Surrounding St. Patrick's Old Cathedral are the historic cemetery and underground catacombs. They are the final resting place of many prominent New York Catholics, such as Andrew Morris (first

Roman Catholic elected to public office in NYC), the Delmonico Family (founders of the hospitality industry in NYC) and Charlotte Melmoth (noted stage actor of the 18th century), among others. Over 32,000 burials were recorded in St. Patrick's Cemetery between 1813 and 1833, when it lost demand to a new Catholic burial ground which opened on 11th Street. It ceased to operate after 1852, when NY legislature prohibited new burials in Manhattan. In 2012, interments were resumed on a limited basis.

The Cathedral was designated as a New York City Landmark in 1966, alongside the Convent and Girls School. St. Michaels Chapel was designated as a NYC Landmark in 1977.



## 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

## ST. MICHAEL'S CHAPEL

Ia

266 Mulberry St  
(1858-59, J. Renwick & W. Rodrique)  
NYC IL



## CONVENT AND GIRL'S SCHOOL

Ib

32 Prince St  
(1826)  
NYC IL



This three-story brick structure was built in the late Federal style, a popular type in the post-revolutionary period. It replaced a wood-frame building that served as an orphanage for almost forty years, managed by the Sisters of Charity, who also established a School in 1822. In 1886, the interior of the wing was remodelled to expand the school, installing an entrance in the Mott Street wall. The Convent remained unaltered. *Photo courtesy of The Museum of the City of New York.*

## 14TH WARD INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL

2

256-258 Mott St  
(1888-89, Vaux & Radford)  
NYC IL



Also known as the Astor Memorial School, this striking Victorian Gothic building was donated by John Jacob Astor to the Children's Aid Society as a memorial to his wife. Established in 1853 by Charles Loring Brace, this organization aimed to provide indigent children with better living conditions. Earlier locations were small houses in various sections of the city, later replaced by larger buildings specifically designed for their use. It was later renamed as the Mulberry Community Center, providing services and resources for the residents. It was converted to residential use in 1972 and designated as a NYC Landmark in 1977.



3

## GOTHAM HEALTH, JUDSON

34 Spring St

(1912, Trowbridge & Livingston)



terra cotta building. This location remained open until 1949, when thanks to community action the building was purchased by the Judson Health Center, and continued as a neighborhood walk-in clinic. Today, it's part of NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health, serving as a primary health care facility focused on the needs of the LGBTQ community.

This understated Colonial Revival building was designed for the New York Dispensary, an organization created in 1791 by a group of notable residents, including Isaac Roosevelt, Robert Livingstone, James W. Beekman, and John Watts.

The NY Dispensary treated more than 100,000 indigent patients yearly, at their facilities or doing home visits. After being forced to leave their building at Centre and White Streets, and later from Worth Street, the Clinic was set up in this two-story five-bay brick and

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## LT. PETROSINO SQUARE

Lafayette St. & Cleveland Pl



Formerly known as Kenmare Square, this small park was renamed in 1987 in memory of Italian immigrant and Police Lieutenant Joseph Petrosino. He began his career in public service with the Department of Street Cleaning, then under the jurisdiction of the Police Department, while working undercover as an informant for the police in Little Italy. After joining the NYPD in 1883, Police Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt personally promoted him to Sergeant of Detectives in 1895. Within ten years he

had been named Lieutenant and given command of the squad known as the Black Hand, created to combat organized crime. He also founded the bomb and canine squads, the first units of their kind in the United States. Petrosino was killed while on assignment to Palermo, Sicily, making him the only New York police officer to die in the line of duty outside the United States.

Since the 1980s, the park has hosted temporary public art exhibitions, and in 2009 a city-funded capital renovation was completed to expand and improve it. In 2014, two bronze commemorative markers by sculptor Carter Jones were set into the southern entrance piers.

**HOLY TRINITY  
UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX  
CATHEDRAL**

**5**

359-361 Broome St  
(1901-02, Hoppin & Koen)



Originally named “The Church of San Salvatore”, this richly embellished Romanesque sanctuary was built on the land where once stood the Brooke’s Assembly Rooms, a former gathering place for fashionable society.

The San Salvatore congregation was formed around 1880, and held services at St. Phillip’s Episcopal Church on Mulberry Street before relocating due to the widening of Elm Street in 1897. The church was run by the New York Protestant Episcopal City Mission Society, a charitable and religious organization founded in 1831, providing assistance to an increasing number of Italian immigrants. It was originally connected to a parish house (now demolished) and had a two small Gothic-style stone towers. It continues to be a central part of the neighborhood, and has served the residents of Little Italy for decades.

**FIRE ENGINE CO. 55**

**6**

363 Broome St  
(1898-99, R. H. Robertson)  
NYC IL



This richly ornamented, mid-block firehouse was the only commission for the NYC Fire Department done by the prominent New York architect R. H. Robertson. The brick and limestone facade is characteristic of his late work, reflecting both the Romanesque Revival and the Beaux-Arts style, popular during the 1880s and 1890s, respectively. Among its main features are a monumental arch that serves as the apparatus bay, a company banner carved in stone, and a pair of oval windows draped with garlands.

Built to replace an earlier facility located at 173 Elm Street (now Lafayette Street), this structure was among several civic improvements planned and executed in the neighborhood at the turn of the century, and has continuously served its community for nearly one hundred years. It was designated as a NYC Landmark in 1998.

## FEDERAL HOUSES

190-192 Grand St & 149

Mulberry St

(ca. 1816 & ca. 1833)

NYC IL / NR P

7



These Federal-era rowhouses are among the oldest and relatively rarest buildings in Manhattan, built at a time when the area was an affluent residential quarter.

The houses located on Grand St. were part of a larger row of five houses built as an investment by Stephen Van Rensselaer, one of New York State's leading citizens. Both retain many of their original features, including Flemish bond brick, molded brownstone lintels at the third story, a pitched roof, and prominent segmental dormers. The first story was lowered to ground level to accommodate a storefront prior to the 1930s. They were designated as NYC Landmarks in 2010.

The house located at Mulberry Street was originally Van Rensselaer's residence. The two-story brick structure is set on a stone basement, with the main floor raised above the street level, featuring a stone stoop and wrought-iron handrailings. It was converted for mixed use in the 1880s, also hosting The Free Italian Library and Reading-Rooms, and has been used as commercial space since the early-20th century. It was designated as a NYC Landmark in 1969 and included in the National Register in 1983. *Photo: Houses at 190-192 Grand St.*

## L'ORDINE FIGLI D'ITALIA

203 Grand St

(ca. 1880)

8



Located at the corner of Grand and Mott Streets, this seven-story brick industrial building was the original location of the Order of the Sons of Italy in America (OSIA).

Founded in 1905 by a group of six immigrants led by Dr. Vincenzo Sellaro, it is one of the first US-based Italian mutual aid societies, dedicated to assist Italians in their transition to American society, and has grown into a national organization promoting the study and appreciation of Italian-American heritage.

Now a commercial property, the building maintains most of its Renaissance Revival features, like segmental and round arch window openings and corbelled quoins.



## ITALIAN-AMERICAN MUSEUM

9

181-189 Grand St  
(ca. 1830 original)



The original Banca Stabile building was part of a modestly elegant row of late Federal/early Greek Revival structures located at the southwest corner of Mulberry and Grand Street. It had a simple Doric door surround and architrave over the first-floor show windows.

Established in 1885 by Francesco Stabile, it was one of the “regional” banks that were available to Italian immigrants in the area. For almost 50 years, Banca Stabile offered regular banking services as well as other aid to the Italian American community.

In 2008, it became the Italian-American Museum, which had been established in 2001. Plans for new facilities began a few years later, and in 2018 the original structure was demolished for the construction of a 7-story mixed use building. The design by OP Architecture + Landscape includes a four-level area for the Museum, with an auditorium and a dedicated entrance on Mulberry St.

## ODD FELLOWS HALL

165-171 Grand St  
(1847-48, Joseph Trench &  
John B. Snook)  
NYC IL

10



Located on a prominent site on Grand Street, this building is an early and particularly fine example of the Anglo-Italianate style that Trench & Snook's firm helped introduce to NYC, and it is one of the city's few surviving institutional buildings of any style from the 1840s.

It was the first such hall specifically built for The Independent Order of Odd Fellows, one of the many mutual aid societies and fraternal organizations established in New York in the 19th century. Both the structure and the organization gained notoriety over the years, but the rapid northward growth of NY during the second half of the 19th century caused The Order to relocate further uptown, and the building was sold to the well-known firm of R. Hoe & Company, for manufacturing and business purposes. It was designated as a NYC Landmark in 1982.

## FORMER POLICE HQ

II

240 Centre St  
(1905-09, Hoppin & Koen)  
NYC IL / NR P



luxury co-op building by the firm of Ehrenkranz Group & Eckstut.

Designed to replace the police headquarters at 300 Mulberry St, this five-story granite and limestone building is considered one of the finest municipal examples of Edwardian Baroque style architecture and of Beaux-Arts principles of design in NYC.

It was designed to serve both a practical and symbolic purpose, to “impress both officer and prisoner... with the majesty of the law”, taking elements from other public buildings like City Hall and combining them with contemporary European design. This building provided a new official image for the police, and its architectural significance has been recognized with a NYC Landmark designation in 1978 and NR listing in 1980. In 1988, it was converted into a

## MUSEUM OF CHINESE IN AMERICA

I2

215 Centre St  
70 Mulberry St (archive)  
(1870 - 1901)



The Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) celebrates the living history of the Chinese experience in America. Founded in 1980 as a community-based organization, it was based at 70 Mulberry Street since 1984, in the former P.S. 23. The five-story Romanesque and Renaissance Revival brick building was designed by J.B. Snyder, and built between 1891-1893. After the opening of the new building at Centre St in 2009, it housed MOCA's collection and research center. In 2020, it was partially destroyed by a fire.

The current Museum building was designed by renowned architect Maya Lin, and features two distinct access points, or “windows,” to the museum. The main

entrance on Centre St. uses wood, concrete and bronze, while the facade on Lafayette St. is mostly glass and has a more austere expression. The core exhibit circles around an existing inner courtyard left deliberately untouched, displaying a chronological history of Chinese Americans from the 1800s to present day.

Known also as The Shrine Church of San Gennaro, the construction of this building began in 1891 by the Scalabrinian Fathers, who built the basement chapel, but it would not be completed until 1901, by the Franciscans. It served the Italian community that settled in Lower Manhattan, which mostly came from and around Naples, and brought with them the devotion to St. Januarius (San Gennaro). Celebrations honouring the patron Saint are still held at the church each year on September 19th.

The Romanesque Revival building features a central gable, flanking towers and elaborate wrought iron gates. Its marble main and side altars display marvellous craftsmanship by Borgia Marble Works of New York, and the remarkable Neapolitan Baroque interiors were designed by Donatus Buongiorno, an Italian immigrant from Solofra. It underwent extensive restoration work in 1995 and was re-consecrated in 1997.

## CHURCH OF THE MOST PRECIOUS BLOOD

I3

113 Baxter St

(1901, Schickel & Ditmars)



## ON LEONG TONG

83-85 Mott St

(1948-52, Andrew J. Thomas & Poy Gum Lee)

I4



east-west syncretism, a tribute to the work of the first well-known Chinese-American architect from Chinatown.

On Leong Tong is among the most prominent buildings in Chinatown, both historically and from a design point of view. Tongs were mutual aid societies that evoked place and family associations brought from China.

The building was designed by noted Chinese-American architect Poy Gum Lee, who studied at Pratt Institute, MIT and Columbia University. He became a prominent figure of Chinese Modernism, and worked as a senior architect for NYCHA after his return from China in 1945. During this period, he was also a consultant for the Consolidated Benevolent Association, and most likely collaborated with Andrew J. Thomas, cited as the architect on record for this building.

This concrete and steel structure with masonry veneer and ornamental pagoda tower is a unique example of

The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) is one of the oldest organizations in Manhattan's Chinatown. Founded in 1883, and modelled off clan affiliations in China, it performed a quasi-governmental role in the Chinese community and facilitated their integration into American society.

The CCBA's original location was at 16 Mott St., and plans for a new building began in 1947. Two proposals were developed by Chinese-American architect Poy G. Lee, but in 1958 Guangdong-native Andrew S. Yuen was hired for the project. This four-story structure with glazed white bricks was a mid-century take on stripped Classicism, with only subtle Chinese architectural references, such as the cast-stone cloud motif at the parapet. It was built between

1959 and 1962, marking a moment of transition in Chinese America. Currently, it houses the New York Chinese School, established in 1909, and The CCBA headquarters.

## CHINESE CONSOLIDATED BENEVOLENT ASSOC.

15

60-64 Mott St

(1960, Andrew S. Yuen & Assoc.)



## CHURCH OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

16

29 Mott St

(1801; 1815; 1861-68)

NYC IL / NR P



This Georgian Gothic building was originally the Zion English Lutheran Church. The interior was remodelled after a major fire gutted it in 1815, and in 1868 a copper-covered octagonal tower designed by Henry Engelbert was added. It follows the traditional rectangular plan, with a front tower set forward, thus penetrating the front gable and dividing it into two separate parts. This typology was very popular in the early-19th century, but few examples remain today.

In 1853, it was sold to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of NY to serve as a new home for the Church of the Transfiguration. This parish was established in 1827 by Felix Varela y Morales, a Cuban priest, teacher, writer, philosopher and politician also known as the Father of Cuba. Over the years the church has served the Irish, Italian and Chinese

immigrant communities, reflecting the demographic shifts occurring in the neighborhood.

Father Varela also established the Transfiguration School in 1832, which became open to children of all faiths in 1969 and currently has three campuses. The Lower School is located next to the Church, in a four-story brick building with cast stone or limestone trim. The Church was designated as a NYC landmark in 1966, and listed on the National Register in 1980.

## 16 MOTT ST BUILDING

**I7** (ca. 1820; raised 1888, Kurtzer & Rohl)



This building was originally a two-and-a-half-story Federal townhouse before being raised to three stories by architects Kurtzer & Rohl in 1888. It became the offices of the Chung Wah Gong Shaw, an organization succeeded by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), and was noted for having only Chinese carpenters, engineers, masons and woodworkers as part of the construction process. Another floor was added in 1896, with towers and a parapet, and in 1899 it became the CCBA Headquarters.

It is also part of the first documented purchases of real estate made by Chinese immigrants in 1883 on Mott Street, when grocer Wo Kee purchased No. 8, Tom Lee (Wong Ah Ling) bought No. 16, and merchants Kwong Hing Lung and Man Lee acquired No. 10 & No. 12 respectively. These purchases were especially significant since discriminatory practices were in place not long before, with Chinese people being denied residence and building owners refusing to lease even vacant buildings to them.

## KIMLAU WAR MEMORIAL

**I8** Kimlau Sq, Chatham Sq  
(1962, Poy Gum Lee)  
NYC IL



This granite ceremonial gateway was named after Second Lt. Benjamin Ralph Kimlau, a Chinese-American pilot who died in World War II. As part of Kimlau Square, the arch serves as the site of an annual celebration to honor war veterans and remains an important marker at the heart of Chinatown.

The design is a unique blend of traditional Chinese architectural forms with a streamlined mid-century modern aesthetic. It is the work of noted Chinese-American architect Poy Gum Lee, born on Mott Street in 1900.

Historical signage in Chinese was installed at the arch in 2001 by the Parks Department. It was designated as a NYC landmark in 2021, becoming the first that specifically recognizes Chinese-American history and culture. *Photo courtesy of The Landmarks Preservation Commission.*



This street's unique geometry, with a sharp bend in the middle, follows the old route of a stream and runs south and southeast from Pell Street to the intersection of Bowery. It was home to old tenement houses, many speakeasies including Apotheke and Peachy's, and from 1893 to 1911 it was the site of the first Chinese language theatre in New York City. It's named after Hendrik Doyers, an 18th-century Dutch immigrant who bought the property facing the Bowery in 1791, and operated a distillery and a tavern. In the early 1900s, the street earned the nickname "the Bloody Angle" or "Murder Alley," as gang members would reportedly hide behind the sharp bend of the street to attack their opponents as they turned the corner.

Today, Doyers is a pedestrian-only street with painted pavement, a mural by Dasic Fernández, several local businesses and a branch of the United States Postal Service. It is most well-known as the home of Nam Wah Tea Parlor, which opened in 1920, and is the oldest continuously running restaurant in Chinatown.



Cantonese opera was a popular form of entertainment developed in southern China, and early immigrants began sponsoring traveling opera troupes and opening theatres in the US as early as 1852. For laborers living without their families, these spaces were also places for public gathering, exchanging news and socializing.

This Italianate, five-story, brick and brownstone loft building was opened by actor Chu Fong in 1892-93, serving also as a residence for bachelors, and held opera performances until sometime around 1905. That year, an infamous attack occurred at the Opera House leaving six people dead. Soon after, the Bowery Rescue Mission took over the space, which remained open until 1911.



## FIRST CHINESE BAPTIST CHURCH

21

21 Pell St

(ca. 1935)

Originally a tenement, this five-story, three-bay brick structure features a scaled-down Chinese pagoda-esque porch roof at the first-floor entrance, with distinctive “swallowtail” eaves and tiled roofs. This type of modification was fairly common from 1920 to 1950, predominantly in buildings housing merchant, family or native place associations. Bold plaques in Chinese were affixed to the front of important buildings, as seen on many of the association buildings.

The building hosted the Chinese Seaman’s Club during the 1940s. Currently, it serves as the First Chinese Baptist Church and also hosts 21 Pell Street, a community organization with a focus on the Asian American experience, founded by Corky Lee and Rev. Bayer Lee in 2015.

## COLUMBUS PARK

22

Worth, Baxter, Bayard & Mulberry St.

(1887-97, Calvert Vaux)



Marking the southern edge of Chinatown, this park is located in what once was an industrial quarter, with a nearby collect pond used for cleaning and discharging waste. In the early-19th century, the area was developed for housing and commerce, and by the 1890s it was densely packed with early rowhouses and tenements. Over 2,500 people lived on less than three acres, mostly poor and working-class immigrants, and the area became known as Mulberry Bend.

In 1895 the buildings were cleared to develop a city park designed by Calvert Vaux, who saw it as an opportunity to bring new life and order into the depressed neighborhood. The Mulberry Bend Park opened in 1897, with bench-lined curved walkways and an expansive, open green area. It was rededicated in 1911 as Columbus Park as a gesture to the exponentially growing Italian community, and in 2019 the north plaza was renamed in honor of Dr. Sun Yan-Sen, the first Provisional President of the Republic of China (Taiwan) after 5,000 years of Chinese imperial rule.

Although it has undergone many changes over the years, it continues to be a gathering place for people of different cultures and ages engaging in myriad activities, including individual tai chi practice, five-on-five basketball games, and Chinese chess or card games.

