



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

# DORRANCE BROOKS SQUARE 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  
Affairs**

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## DORRANCE BROOKS SQUARE

After the elevated train along Frederick Douglass Boulevard (then Eighth Avenue) was completed in 1879, this previously rural area of Harlem attracted intense speculative development. Between 1886 and 1904, four of the largest blocks in the district became a residential enclave with rows of private houses (**Site 2**) designed in styles that reflected the period's transitional moment in architecture. The housing market crisis of 1904, however, created an opportunity for African Americans who had been driven away from their neighborhoods by discrimination or demolition, and by the mid-1920s an emerging middle-class, including intellectuals, artists, actors, educators, and doctors began to call this part of Harlem home.

Construction of the new IND 8th Ave. subway line (now B and C trains) spurred further development, and new brick apartment buildings were constructed between 1914 and 1930. The Dorrance Brooks (**Site 4**) was even specifically marketed to middle-class Black professionals, but this didn't prevent developers and building owners from engaging in discriminatory housing practices. Residents, most notably those at 574 St. Nicholas Ave (**Site 6**), protested and challenged landlords in court to fight high rents for poorly-maintained buildings.

Dorrance Brooks Square was home to many prominent residents and institutions, such as intellectual and essayist W.E.B. DuBois (**Site 2b**), writer Nella Larsen, stage and motion picture actress Ethel Waters (**Site 7**), and celebrated sculptor Augusta Savage (**Site 12**). Regina Anderson, Luella Tucker and Ethel Ray Nance hosted at their apartment (**Site 7**) the "Harlem West Side Literary Salon," which helped foster the careers of many Harlem Renaissance artists. Several medical practitioners also resided here, including Dr. May Edward Chinn (**Site 2a**), and two small hospitals were founded by African American doctors to serve the Harlem community: The Vincent Sanitarium and Hospital, and the Edgcombe Sanitarium.

Religious congregations changed along with the area's residents. The two existing churches were purchased by African-American congregations in the early 1920s and became Grace Congregational Church (**Site 10**) and the Mount Calvary United Methodist Church (**Site 8**), with a third congregation joining their ranks and building St. Mark's United Methodist Church (**Site 3**). These institutions provided spiritual, educational, and social services to the community, and were also crucial in promoting civil rights.

The transformation of the neighborhood was formally recognized by New York City in 1925 with the dedication of Dorrance Brooks Square (**Site 1**), the first public place in New York City to honor an African American, Pfc. Dorrance Brooks who served in World War I. In the following decades, this was the site of many notable political protests, as well as two visits from President Harry S. Truman.

With its highly intact streetscapes of late-19th century and early-20th century architecture, Dorrance Brooks Square is an important reminder of the early development in NYC, as well as the backdrop for the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights movement. It is a testament to the contributions made by the African American community to the history of New York City and the nation.

## DORRANCE BROOKS SQUARE

Edgecombe Ave & W 136th St

(1925)

NYC HD

I



Located in the district's southwest corner at West 137th Street, Dorrance Brooks Square is a triangular pocket park with London Plane trees, benches, a memorial flagpole, and an entrance to the W. 135th Street subway station. It was dedicated in 1925 to honor the valor of Private First-Class Dorrance Brooks of the 369th Regiment, who lost his life in combat in France during World War I. It was the first public space in the city to memorialize a Black serviceman. Over the years, the square has been the site of numerous mass gatherings and protests, most notably those in 1948 and 1952, when massive audiences of mostly African Americans turned out to hear President Harry S. Truman speak about his administration's efforts to address racial inequality. *Photo by Marissa Marvelli.*

## 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

## ROWHOUSES AT EDGECOMBE AVENUE

2

30-110 Edgecombe Ave



and more restrained neo-Renaissance style with its emphasis on Classical forms. All retain an impressive amount of character-defining details, while also featuring typical row house details, such as two or three bays of windows, three or four stories in height, raised basements and entrances, stoops, and projecting cornices.

During the Harlem Renaissance era, 46 Edgecombe Avenue was home to the Edgecombe Sanatorium, one of the three main medical facilities that were established in the district (along with Vincent Sanatorium and Hospital, at 2348 Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard and the Maternity Hospital and Activists' Residence at 309 W 136th St). The adjacent property was the residence and practice of Dr. May Edward Chinn, the first Black woman to graduate from the University of Bellevue Hospital Medical School, and the only Black female medical practitioner in Harlem at the time.

Many row houses and flats buildings in this Historic District were adapted as medical facilities and doctor's residences, since African American professionals in the medical field were unable to practice in New York's major hospitals, and had limited opportunities to open their own practices outside of Harlem. Having their office within their established neighborhood, however, helped serve the needs of the community. *Photo courtesy of The NYC Municipal Archive.*

## FORMER EDGECOMBE SANATORIUM & DR. E. MAY RESIDENCE

2a

46-48 Edgecombe Ave  
(1886, William H. Boylan)



## WILLIAM E. BURGHARDT DUBOIS HOUSE

2b

108 Edgecombe Ave  
(1897, A. De Saldern)



This group of seven Renaissance Revival row houses feature high stoops, modillioned denticulated cornices, and varying ornamentation around doors and windows and across the façades. The buildings retain their historic high curved brownstone stoops, arched wood-and-glass double-leaf doors and transom, and their metal bracketed denticulated cornice and a wide frieze.

From 1921 to 1925, No. 108 was the residence of author, educator, and leader in the Pan-Africanist movement William Edward Burghardt

Du Bois. Founder of the Niagara Movement in 1905, W. E. B. Du Bois was among the founders of the NAACP in 1909 and from 1910-1934 served as director of publicity and research, a member of the board of directors, and founder and editor of *The Crisis*, its monthly magazine. Du Bois was the NAACP director of special research from 1944 to 1948, and served as a consultant to the United Nations founding convention in 1945. He was a prolific, gifted scholar, an activist and a journalist, a historian and a sociologist, a novelist, a critic and a philosopher.

This Gothic Revival church and parish house occupies a full, trapezoidal block between 137th and 138th Streets and Edgecombe and St. Nicholas Avenues. It comprises a parish house and the main church with a large, square crenellated tower rising from the center. The building's four façades feature smooth-faced, random ashlar sandstone with limestone trim, pointed-arch entrances, buttresses, and windows with stained glass.

It was dedicated in 1926 after a years-long fundraising campaign by its black congregation, which previously worshipped in Midtown Manhattan, and was among the most expensive churches erected in Harlem at the time. Over the years, St. Mark's played a significant role in Harlem's social and political life. In addition to hosting popular arts and literature programs, the church hosted numerous speeches by prominent African Americans; served as a WPA relief facility during the Depression; mobilized efforts to combat racist housing and employment policies, among other issues. *Photo by Marissa Marvelli.*

## ST. MARK'S METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

3

59 Edgecombe Ave  
(1922-26, Sibley & Fetherston)



Like the park at 136th Street between Edgecombe and St. Nicholas Avenues, this building was named after Private Dorrance Brooks of the 369th Infantry, a soldier killed in action during World War I. It was the last building to rise in the district after passage of the Multiple Dwelling Law of 1929, which made all new construction subject to the Zoning Resolution.

It showcases Art Deco influences, with intricate patterned brick and terra cotta details that create textured façades. The upper portion, on all street elevations, are distinguished with zigzag brickwork at the parapet. The building sits on a raised brick base and is organized with an H-plan that creates three-sided light courts on the eastern and western façades.

It was constructed well after the district had transformed into a wholly black neighborhood, when few housing developers built intentionally for Black clientele. It attracted notable residents in Black Harlem and commanded higher than average rents.

## THE DORRANCE BROOKS

4

337 W 138th St

(1930, George G. Miller)



## APARTMENT BUILDINGS AT EDGECOMBE AVE.

5

78-86 & 90-96 Edgecombe Ave.  
(1915, Gronenberg & Leuchtag)



These two apartment buildings were designed as a pair for the 14th Street and 7th Ave Construction Company. Notable residents of 80 Edgecombe include Sarah “Sadie” Delany (the first African American woman to teach domestic science in a New York high school), Annie Elizabeth “Bessie” Delany (the second African American woman to be licensed as a dentist in New York) and their mother, Nanny James Delany, who lived there from 1940 to 1957.

Walter Francis White resided at 80 Edgecombe Ave from 1923 to 1925, and later at 90 Edgecombe Ave from 1928 to 1930. He was an author and political activist who served as president of the NAACP for over 25 years. The great-grandson of President William Henry Harrison, White’s strategic work with A. Phillip Randolph helped promote federal measures to prohibit racial discrimination in defense industries and establish the first Federal agency to monitor compliance with anti-discrimination measures.

Julius Lorenzo Bledsoe, resident of 80 Edgecombe Ave in 1925, was an actor and singer who was the first African American to perform with a United States opera company in America.

APARTMENT BUILDING  
AT ST NICHOLAS AVE

6

574 St. Nicholas Ave  
(1913, Sommerfeld & Steckler)



The size and design of the apartment buildings erected in the district were highly impacted by the Tenement House Act of 1901. Motivated by the precarious living conditions in urban tenements, the act established a series of light, ventilation, fire protection and lot coverage regulations for new multifamily construction. It also set the maximum height of these structures, related to the width of the street. This made construction on the usual 25-foot-wide lot unprofitable, therefore flats started to be built on assemblages of lots.

This six-story Arts and Crafts style building was developed by the Solow Construction Company, featuring an H-shaped plan with deep light courts, consistent with the requirements of the Tenement House Act. It has a Flemish bond brick façade and one-over-one windows of various sizes throughout, topped by a brickwork parapet with stone coping. The main entrance is recessed within the light court facing St. Nicholas Avenue.

Robert Savon Pios, famed artist, illustrator, and muralist, resided at 574 St. Nicholas Avenue in the 1940s.

APARTMENT BUILDING  
AT ST. NICHOLAS AVE.

7

580 St. Nicholas Ave  
(1913, Robert T. Lyons)



Built almost at the same time as 574 St Nicholas, this six-story multi-family apartment building was designed in the Renaissance Revival style for the Herbert Miller Southerland Realty Company. It also has an H-shaped plan (in this case double) and deep light courts at the north and south façades, characteristic of New Law construction. The brick façade has one-over-one windows of various sizes throughout, decorative terra cotta cartouches, and a limestone and brick base, with brickwork pilasters at all corners.

Notable residents include Regina Anderson (the first black librarian for the NYPL), Luella Tucker and Ethel Ray Nance (secretary for the *National Urban League*, and contributor to *Opportunity Magazine*). They held community gatherings known as “the Harlem West Side Literary Salon,” or “580”, thus fostering the careers of notable artists like Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and many others.

Actress and singer Ethel Waters, also lived at this address from 1925 to 1929. She appeared on stage and in films, and reprised her Broadway role as Petunia Jackson in the film version of *Cabin in the Sky* in 1943. She was nominated for an Academy Award in 1949.

**MOUNT CALVARY  
INDEPENDENT  
METHODIST CHURCH**

8

116 Edgecombe Ave  
(1897-98, Henry Andersen)



Originally the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Atonement, this grey brick and limestone Gothic Revival building commands the streetscape with a 125-foot-tall corner tower. It features many of the hallmarks of Gothic architecture: an ogee arch entrance, a large rose window, and pointed arch windows with tracery. It is the second oldest house of worship in the neighborhood, built by the German immigrant community.

In 1924, it was purchased by former members of the long-established First A.M.E. Bethel Church, who had previously been meeting on the second floor of the Lafayette Building. By the 1940s, Mount Calvary had one of the largest African American congregations in Harlem, having both prestige and financial strain.

Shirley Chisolm was hired as a teacher in the church's nursery school in 1946, and taught there until 1953. She would be the first Black woman elected to the US Congress, and in 1972 the first Black candidate for President.

On July 2018, the New York City Department of Buildings issued a permit for the full demolition of the church, which was renewed and reissued on April 2021.

Comprised of seven buildings which have been merged into a single tax lot, these five-story tenements are executed in the Renaissance Revival style. They feature brick and brownstone façades with terra cotta details, brick pilasters and quoins, and varying window enframement details. Above the storefronts sits a brownstone architrave and cornice, featuring a shell fan detail above the central entrance.

Developed by

Matthew C. Kervan, their primary façades fronted the elevated rail tracks and 140th Street station of the IRT Ninth Avenue Line, which closed in 1940 and was subsequently dismantled. Within these tenements were about ten separate families, with additional German- or Irish-born boarders at some of the addresses.

Other buildings by Neville & Bagge are located along Frederick Douglass and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevards, and Edgecombe Avenue.

**THE BRADHURST**

9

2611-2623 Frederick Douglass Blvd  
(1896, Neville & Bagge)



Originally Lenox Presbyterian, this Romanesque Revival church is the oldest in the neighborhood, built by a small congregation of first generation New Yorkers. It briefly served the Swedish Immanuel Congregational Church, which sold it in 1923 to the African-American congregation of Grace Congregational Church.

That same year, Rev. Alexander C. Garner started the Harlem Community Center Day Nursery, the first to help working mothers in Harlem. Grace Church was also one of the hosts of the Fifth Pan-African Congress in 1927 where W.E.B. Du Bois was the keynote speaker.

The Church was dubbed “The Actor’s Church” because of its long-standing custom of ministering to performing artists and hosting recitals. Famed Violinist Joseph Douglas (grandson of abolitionist Frederick Douglas) gave a concert at the Church, and Countee Cullen read from a selection of his poems in 1928. *Photo by Marissa Marvelli.*

## GRACE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF HARLEM

10

310 W 139th St  
(1892, Joseph Ireland)



11

## ROWHOUSES AT W 137TH ST

302-322 W 137th St  
(1886, Dore Lyon)



This row of 11 Romanesque Revival-style houses feature rough-faced, coursed brownstone basements and first-story façades, and box stoops with cheek walls.

No. 313 was the residence of Barbados-born historian and educator Charles C. Seifert from 1925 to 1940. After a fruitful career as a carpenter and contractor in Harlem, he established in 1930 at this address the United Ethiopian Builders’ Association. The following year, he created the Ethiopian School of Research History as a way to share his vast collection of

African art and artifacts and rare historical texts. “Professor Seifert” collaborated with scholars W.E.B. Dubois and G. Carter Woodson, sharing his knowledge with activists like Marcus Garvey and artists like Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden, Earl Sweeting, and Robert Savion Pious, among others.

The Ethiopian School of Research History was renamed in his honor in 1939, and Seifert’s residence became a separate address. After his death in 1949, the library was moved to 203 West 138th St.

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## AUGUSTA SAVAGE HOUSE

284 W 137th St

(1897, Neville &amp; Bagge)

Sculptor and teacher Augusta Savage was one of the most influential artists in Harlem in the 1930s and 1940s. She was the first African American artist elected to the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, and in 1932 opened the Savage Studio of Arts and Crafts, becoming also the director of the Harlem Community Art Center, a model art center in the country. Her leadership and stature in the art community led to her prestigious commission to create a work for the 1939's World's Fair, named *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, also known as *The Harp*.

In the late 1920s, she resided at this Beaux Arts style rowhouse, and her studio was located two blocks south at 239 West 135th Street.



Savage was also a founding member of the Harlem Artists Guild, a collective of visual artists whose members included historian Arturo Schomberg, and painters Charles Alston and Aaron Douglas. By 1937, membership had grown to about 90 individuals and they were holding artist exhibitions.

From 1934 to 1941 the Guild was based in a two-story garage structure built in 1907 at the rear of a house on 321 West 136th Street. In 2019, a permit was issued for the full demolition of the property, but the former garage remains at the lot. It retains its brick façades with brownstone lintels and sills. The second-story windows have been removed and the roof appears not to be extant.

Photos: (top) 284 W 137th St, (bottom) Augusta Savage with her sculpture *Realization*, circa 1938. Courtesy of The Library of Congress

## THE RANGLEY APARTMENTS

2340-2344 Adam Clayton  
Powell Jr Blvd  
(1897, Henry Andersen)

I3



The Rangeley Apartments were the first post-Tenement House Act building to be constructed within the boundaries of the district. Developed by Leopold Khan, the seven-story Beaux-Arts structure is located on a corner site formed from the consolidation of four 25-foot lots. It features a commercial ground floor, and also includes three air shafts in a plan designed to meet light and ventilation requirements.

Window enframements vary by story and include decorative elements such as a Greek key pattern, keystones adorned with volutes, and splayed lintels. The third through sixth stories are adorned with brick quoins at the corners, while the seventh story is set above a terra cotta cornice and is patterned with horizontal brick bands.

In the 1920s, the Rangeley was acquired by the Sarco Realty Corporation, a Black-owned real estate business in Harlem that created multipurpose developments for the Black community. During this time, it was also the headquarters of the Association of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, a fraternal organization.

## BEULAH WESLEYAN METHODIST CHURCH

219 W 136th St  
(1965-68, Leon L. Dunkley)

I4



The Beulah Wesleyan congregation was founded in 1913 by Reverend A. B. Baker. They purchased two row houses at West 136th Street in 1926, but it wasn't until 1965 that they commissioned a modern church design from architect Leon L. Dunkley, purchasing a third house in 1968 to fulfill his vision.

The resulting asymmetric façade is divided by an off-center mass featuring a vertical ribbon window set within a stucco surround and brick piers and topped with a cross. The ground and first stories are recessed below brick-and-stucco second and third stories, with articulated vertical brick courses and narrow recessed window bays. The western portion of the recess includes a U-turn staircase with metal railings, and full-height windows on the first-story façade. The eastern part of the recessed façade features a basement entrance and horizontal ribbon window, a full-height window and a two-leaf cascade window on the first story, and an entrance to the off-center mass. The church retains most of its gold-colored wired glass windows.

These 32 three-story Queen Anne-style row houses were designed and developed by Thomas Van Brunt, and feature stone stoops and steeply pitched slate or tile gable roofs. Twelve of them (Nos. 225-237 and Nos. 257-265) also feature pyramidal roofs with panelled and foliated entablatures.

No. 203 was in 1918 the office of physician, educator and reverend Dr. William Ewart Davis and Dr. Hyacinth Davis, the first black woman to intern at Harlem Hospital.

No. 239 was during the 1920s, 30s and 40s the headquarters of the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first Black labor union in the United States. The union was active from 1925 to 1978 and was instrumental in securing better working conditions and salaries for its members, consequentially contributing to the burgeoning Black middle-class. Asa Philip Randolph was president of the Brotherhood in 1928, and became a

significant figure in the early Civil Rights Movement. He and Walter F. White, who lived in 78-86 Edgecombe Avenue, were instrumental in helping convince President Franklin D. Roosevelt to take action against racial discrimination at the federal level. The union headquarters moved to 2311 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard in the mid-1940s.

No. 245 was home to Dabney N. Montgomery and his wife Amelia from 1973 to 2016. He was a member of The Tuskegee Airmen, a group of primarily African American military pilots (fighter and bomber) and airmen who fought in World War II, at a time when the American military was racially segregated, as was much of the federal government. They were the first African American military aviators in the United States Armed Forces, received praise for their excellent combat record, and were awarded three Distinguished Unit Citations.

*Photos: (top) Streetscape on the north side of W 136th St, (bottom) 245-239 W 136th St.*

## ROWHOUSES AT W 136TH ST (NORTH SIDE)

15

203-265 W 136th St  
(1891, Thomas Van Brunt)



ROWHOUSES AT W 136TH ST  
(SOUTH SIDE)

I6

202-266 West 136th Street  
(1889-90, F. G. Butcher)



This group of 33 Queen Anne-style three-story row houses built by E. C. Butcher feature brick façades above stone basements and first stories, most with stone stoops and second-story oriels. They also include rough-faced stone elements and carved panels below first-story windows.

No. 204 has been home to the New York Urban League for more than 100 years. Founded in 1910, it is the result of several influential organizations joining forces and working to improve urban conditions for African Americans in New York City, later expanding to 45 urban centers across the country. This organization focused on helping Black people new to the urban environment, through education, training, and established fellowship programs for Black social workers. They created the *Opportunity Magazine*, which helped the careers of Harlem's many Black artists. In the 1950s and 1960s the Urban League joined other organizations in the pursuit for Civil Rights. They purchased 202-204 West 136th Street in 1917, and in 1925 they acquired 206 West 136th Street. Renovations included the creation of a central entrance within the combined buildings, with a projecting one-story masonry vestibule with a glass-block window and a retaining wall. A flagpole was also added, as well as basement façade coating and first-story façade cladding. It was re-opened in 1926.

No. 230 was home to the famed novelist, essayist and poet Richard Nathaniel Wright in 1938.

No. 262 was the location of the White Rose Mission between 1918 and 1984. Also known as the White Rose Home for Colored Working Girls, or the White Rose Industrial Association, it was a settlement house established in 1896 to aid young African American women who had recently arrived in New York City. It was founded by Victoria Earl Matthews, a writer, suffragist and advocate for equal rights for women, and Marittha Lyons in 1897, offering a place to stay, as well as education and employment services.

*Photos: (left) Streetscape on W 136th St, (right) 262 W 136th St.*



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## ROWHOUSES AT W 136TH ST

305-319 W 136th St

(1886, William J. Merritt & Co.)



Developed by Dore Lyon, this row of nine Queen Anne-style houses with Romanesque Revival elements features brick façades, second-story oriel windows, brownstone sill and lintel courses, and rough-faced brownstone box stoops and basements.

In 1927, No. 309 was listed in advertisements as a Maternity Hospital, intended to serve the Black population of Harlem, which was denied access to many medical services including maternity care at the time.

During the 1930s and 40s, No. 313 served as headquarters for several African American organizations. Among them was The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which had their offices at this address in 1932, and operated a community center under the direction of Dr. Lionel A. Francis. UNIA was a benevolent or fraternal reform association dedicated to “racial uplift” and the establishment of educational and industrial opportunities for black people, and became one of the most important political and social organizations in African-American history.

No. 315 was home in 1929 to the Eastern Unit Headquarters of the Republican Association of the 21st Assembly District. From c. 1929 through c. 1939, it would host the Appomattox Republican Club, a Black Republican advocates’ club with over 1,500 members. The club was an active advocate for tenants’ rights issues and was a notable proponent of a measure to protect renters in the event of rent increases that became part of the Civil Practice Act in 1929.

From 1906 until c. 1929, No. 317 was home to the Hill Sanitarium, a type of medical facility most typically associated with the treatment of tuberculosis in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Dr. Ubert Conrad Vincent and Dr. Frederick W. Seward, a nephew of William H. Seward, and Frederick W. Seward, Jr., were physicians at this institution.

*Photos: (left) 309 W 136th St, (right) Streetscape on W 136th St.*

