



A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

# EAST FLATBUSH BROOKLYN





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  
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## EAST FLATBUSH

Established as one of Kings County's original six towns, Flatbush, formerly called Midwout, was an important market town during the first half of the 17th century. During the British occupation and well into the 19th century, it remained a predominantly rural area devoted to agriculture, with slave labor at the core of its economy. Recent findings in the area point towards the existence of an African Burial Ground **(Site 2)**, providing valuable insight into the early history of Brooklyn.

One of the first structures built on Flatbush was a Dutch Reformed Church (NYC Landmark 1966, NR listed 1983), and alongside the Erasmus Hall Academy (NYC Landmark 1966, NR listed 1975), they remain among the oldest buildings in New York. During the 1880s, a series of transportation and infrastructure improvements transformed the area from a rural enclave into an established town. Residents voted to remain independent from the city of Brooklyn, building a new Town Hall in 1875 (NYC Landmark 1973, NR listed 1972). The Holy Cross RC Church **(Site 1)** is one of the institutions that settled in the area during this period.

This continued progress brought an increase in population. Residential development boomed around the turn of the 20th century, with the extension of public transportation and the selling of large estates. Investors laid grids, water and sewer lines, and began to sell lots to developers. Among them was Henry Meyer, responsible for two sets of rowhouses at East 25th St **(Site 12)** which have remained as a cohesive and intact example of Renaissance Revival architecture. Designated as a NYC Historic District in 2020, the site is also a beacon in urban gardening and community outreach, receiving several awards and acknowledgments over the last decades.

At the end of the 19th century Flatbush was annexed to Brooklyn, and when the borough was consolidated into New York City, new services like the FDNY **(Site 14)** were established. The beginning of the 20th century was a time of prosperity, with the advent of grand movie theaters like The Rialto **(Site 9)**, The Albermarle **(Site 4)**, and the outstanding Kings Theatre **(Site 5)**. Despite the financial struggles that followed the Great Depression, East Flatbush continued to flourish, with the Sears building **(Site 8)** opening in 1932, and a new building for the USPS **(Site 3)** carried out under the "New Deal" Program.

After World War II, the neighborhood's racial and ethnic makeup became more diverse, while also overcoming the effects of "redlining" put in place during the late-1930s and early-1940s. Today, Flatbush has a vibrant African American and Afro-Caribbean communities, who continuously advocate for its improvement and protection.

## HOLY CROSS ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH COMPLEX

I

2530 Church Ave

(1872 church - ca. 1900-1915 rectory,  
school & convent)



The Holy Cross parish was established in 1845, and was the first to serve the growing Catholic population of Flatbush.

As numbers increased, by the second half of the 19th century the congregation had outgrown the wood frame structure they had built at the corner of Veronica Place (then Prospect Street) and Erasmus Street, and plans began for a new building.

In 1871 they purchased an adjacent lot on Church Avenue, and began construction of this Gothic Revival structure. Under the leadership of Father James Doherty, the former church was converted into a parochial school for girls, and a rectory and convent were added.

In 1883, Father J. T. Woods took over as head of the congregation, and began an extensive renovation and expansion project. By the early 1900s, the church complex included the Holy Cross RC School and a new rectory, with a new brick building for the Convent. A new hall was also erected, replacing the former church. Around 1915, another school building was added to the group.

Today, Holy Cross has adapted to the changing demographics by offering services in Spanish, Haitian Creole, and English. They maintain a strong community presence through their educational role, while also providing services such as food pantry and after school programs.

## 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

Until the 19th century, Flatbush was mostly a rural area devoted to agriculture, with Dutch settlers relying on enslaved Black laborers to work their land. Family cemeteries on these farms are known to have had separate burial sites for these workers, but their location was often excluded from records and obscured.

Information about the existence of a burial ground in the area was provided in 1810 by the publication of an obituary for a Black woman named Eve, as well as on a map from 1855. Local historians also mention the relocation of remains when Bedford Avenue was laid out in 1865.

In 1878, this site became the location for the Flatbush District School No.1, later P.S. 90. Reports noted the discovery of human remains during construction work in 1890 and in 1904. In 2001, archaeological excavations validated these findings, although no graves could be identified. The school building was demolished in 2015 due to its deterioration, and ever since the community has been actively working towards memorializing the history of the site, while also protecting it from being developed.

## FLATBUSH AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND

2

2286 Church Ave  
(ca. 1750s-1850s)



## UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

3

2273 Church Ave  
(1936, Lorimer Rich)  
NR P



This two-story brick structure evokes the form of an idealized residence from the colonial period, making it a more academic example of Colonial Revival than most 1930s post offices in New York state, which had a more stylized manner. It features modest ornamentation, with the main entrance marked by a large limestone panel with the name of the post office inscribed in Colonial style script. The interior is laid out in a utilitarian manner, with a rectangular lobby and no ceremonial spaces. It maintains the original terrazzo floors, and a few of the marble panels on the lower part of the walls.

It was one of seven postal stations commissioned to Lorimer Rich as part of the “New Deal” program, created by the federal government to promote economic recovery after the Great Depression. Rich was best known for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. It was listed on the National Register in 1988.



The Albermarle Theater opened in 1920, hosting vaudeville shows and motion pictures. Above the auditorium there was a grand banquet hall, with an entrance on the side.

Although it wasn't initially considered a success, the theater became a neighborhood staple and remained in operation until a fire partially damaged the structure in 1984. After being closed for several years, the building was purchased by the Jehovah's Witnesses and presently serves as their Kingdom Hall.

The main façade has a central bay with terra cotta cladding and flanking bays in red brick. Carved ornamentations, also in terra cotta, frame window openings and divide the second and third floors, as well as the pediment marking the entrance. The building is capped by a Doric cornice, and at each corner there's a double height pilaster. Most of the ground openings have been sealed, with the exception of the entrances on Flatbush Avenue and Albemarle Road.

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## FORMER ALBERMARLE THEATRE

1027 Flatbush Ave

(1920, Harrison G. Wiseman)



## KINGS THEATRE

1027 Flatbush Ave

(1929, C. W. Rapp & G. L.

Rapp)

NR P

5



The Kings Theatre was built at the height of the movie palace boom, when theatre chains attracted audiences with luxurious and exotic environments. One of Loew's five "Wonder Theaters" in the metropolitan area, it was meant to bring the grandness of the Times Square/ Midtown Manhattan Theater District to residential areas.

Designed in the French Renaissance Revival style, the 82-foot-tall three-story structure features ornamental terra cotta tiles on the façade, a large lobby with full-height semi-circular-arched openings and Corinthian pilasters and columns, and lavish classical ornamentation. The ceilings in the entrance, lobby and auditorium areas are vaulted with French Baroque paintings.

Among the theaters built in the area in the 1920s, Kings Theatre was the grandest and served as a neighborhood landmark. It closed in 1977 and remained vacant until 2010, when it was completely renovated and reopened as a performing arts venue in 2015. It was listed on the National Register in 2012.

## FORMER FLATBUSH SAVINGS BANK

6

1045 Flatbush Ave  
(1927, Halsey McCormack & Helmer)



Place façade. In 1946, a two-story, 50-foot-wide extension was added to the north of the building. In 1997, the bank became a branch of Astoria Federal Savings & Loan Association, and in 2019 it was purchased by a hotel developer with plans to replace it with a nine-story, mixed-use building. *Photo by Julia Charles, ca. 2019.*

In 1825, the Brooklyn Gas Light Company was established to light the town's streets with methane. Although it was short-lived, the idea was revived in the mid-1840s, and the Company signed a contract with the city.

In 1897, they acquired the Flatbush Gas Company, which had been recently awarded a contract for the street lighting in the area. This two-story, classically designed building was erected as their sales office.

The red brick clad structure has large window bays at the ground floor, which contain the original decorative metal transoms. These windows are separated by paired fluted stone pilasters, which support a Doric stone cornice that extends across the façade. The entrance is surmounted by a broken stone pediment, framing a decorative shield.

In the 1960s, the building housed a Loehmann's Department Store, and in the late 1990s it became offices for the Federation Employment and Guidance Service (FEGS). It currently serves as sheltered housing for the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services. *Photo courtesy of the NY Municipal Archive.*

## FORMER BROOKLYN UNION GAS COMPANY

7

19 Duryea Pl  
(1930)



## SEARS BUILDING

2307 Beverley Rd

8

(1932, Nimmons, Carr & Wright

- Alton L. Craft)

NYC IL



The Sears Roebuck & Company was founded as a catalogue company in the early 1890s, but did not enter the retail market until 1925. The first store in NYC opened in 1930 in Crown Heights, and in 1932 plans for a large department store in Flatbush Avenue which would cater to “motoring shoppers” were announced.

The L-shaped building was accessible from both streets by car, with 47 1/2-foot tall asymmetrical façades. Decorative Art Deco reliefs highlighted the entrances, and were executed in colors that complement the limestone.

The most recognizable feature was the 103-foot-tall corner tower, present in many of the Sears stores and warehouses as an advertisement and utilitarian element. An extension was built in 1940, designed by the same architects,

making the structure a total of 170,000 sqft.

Despite the economic struggles at the time, the store was a great success and remained in operation until 2021. It was designated as a NYC Landmark in 2012.

Built by Abraham H. Schwartz, The Rialto was one of the first “luxury” theatres built exclusively for showcasing motion pictures. Musical selections were played before and after each feature, and an orchestra provided accompaniment to silent films. Unlike other venues at the time, there was not a full setup for vaudeville or stage productions.

The theater’s success prompted Schwartz to establish Century Circuit Inc., a chain of movie theaters in Brooklyn that by 1928 operated 25 locations.

The building’s façade maintains the ornamental brickwork and carved theatrical masks. The original iron and glass marquee and signage were replaced by the late 1930s, and removed in 2019. The lobby was reported to have marble floors, mirrors and plasterwork adorning the ceiling. The auditorium had a seating capacity of over 1,500 people, retaining many of the wall moldings, pilasters and the arabesque ornaments that flank the wall sconces. The theater closed in 1976, after which it was converted into a church. In 2021, part of the building was put up for rent by the current owner.

## FORMER RIALTO THEATER

1085 Flatbush Ave

(1916, R. Thomas Short)

9





New York builder F. E. Moore designed these 14 Dutch Colonial Revival single-family houses in 1913, which were completed by 1915. Born in 1866, Moore had been working in the area since the late 1890s, and specialized in frame residential structures. He lived at No. 335 until the 1920s, with his wife and mother.

The two-story frame structures feature gambrel roofs with a three-bay dormer window facing the street.

Although the original roof shingles have been replaced, there are a few houses that still have wood shingles on side walls and/or the façade. The entrance is framed by three equidistant pillars, and the base of the wall is clad in rustic stone.

Early residents were white middle-class families, mostly first-generation Americans, with a few immigrant families from northern Europe.

10

## HOUSES AT EAST 23RD STREET

315-363 East 23rd St  
(1913-15, Floyd E. Moore)



## HOUSES AT VANDERVEER PL

2219-2247 & 2246-2222 Vanderveer Pl  
(1912, Cohn Brothers – 1914, Charles Goell)

II



The first houses to be erected at Vanderveel Place were a group of 14 two-story brick single-family homes on the north side of the street, which were developed by the Jaret Construction Company, and designed by the prolific Cohn Brothers, a firm which had recently opened its first office in Flatbush.

The Cohn Brothers specialized in residential buildings, and remained in operation through the early 1950s. Some of their work can be found in the Jackson Heights, Crown Heights and Park Slope Historic Districts.

With three designs interspersed, this group exemplifies the firm's different stylistic influences, including elements of Colonial Revival, Renaissance Revival and Arts-and-Crafts, among others.

The south side of the street was developed two years later by Charles Infanger in partnership with builder Charles Goell, who designed a group of 11 two-story brick houses that replicate some of the elements of the Cohn Brothers houses. In this case, two designs are alternated, and a wooden portico with a pediment marks every entrance. Infanger and Goell also built a group of 9 two-story brick houses on the west side of East 23rd St, using the same design.

## EAST 25TH ST. HISTORIC DISTRICT

12

315-377 & 314-378 E 25th St  
(1909-12, Glucroft & Glucroft)  
NYC HD



This group of 56 Renaissance Revival rowhouses were built by the Henry Meyer Building Company. At the time, transit improvements spurred residential development in Flatbush, and farmland began to be subdivided and sold to developers by the early-1900s.

This area was part of the former Vanderveer farm, owned by one of the oldest families of Brooklyn.

Motivated by Flatbush's affluent reputation, Meyer and his son Charles developed East 25th Street as "one-family houses of a high grade," unlike the many two-family houses that they had previously built in Cypress Hill and Woodhaven. The design included four types of houses, with either a limestone or brownstone front and rounded or angled full-height bays. All feature carved ornaments, pilastered entrance surrounds, and modillioned cornices.

Similar developments quickly lined the surrounding streets, with notable examples still remaining at 31st and 32nd

Streets, between Beverley and Cortelyou Roads.

Meyer's firm only sold 14 houses between 1909 and 1912, ultimately transferring them to developer Realty Associates, who completed the sale.

Before World War II, residents were upper-middle-class white families, with a handful of immigrants, mostly from northern and western Europe. Since the 1950s, the houses' ownership started to reflect the growth of Flatbush's African American and Afro-Caribbean communities. Today, the outstanding integrity of the East 25th Street houses is a testament to the remarkable community spirit, pride, and dedication of its homeowners and residents. Their efforts also extend to the carefully maintained front gardens, whose meticulously manicured tropical flowers, shrubs and trees have earned it recognition as "Brooklyn's Greenest Block" for several years. It was designated as a NYC Historic District in 2020, and certified as eligible for the National Register in 2023. *Photo: (top) View of 336-354 E 25th St (bottom) View of 315-325 E 25th St.*

## ST. STEPHENS LUTHERAN CHURCH

13

2806 Newkirk Ave  
(1900, Benjamin Driesler -  
1913 *additions*)



St. Stephen's English Lutheran Church was formally organized in 1898, with regular services held initially at the Vanderveer Homestead. During its first year, the congregation grew exponentially, prompting plans for a permanent building.

A plot of land on the corner of Newkirk Avenue and East 28th Street was purchased in 1899, and construction began of a two-story wooden structure in the English Gothic style, which was intended as a wing of the proposed future church. The lower floor had a Sunday School room, a parlor and a kitchen. An auditorium with seating for about 300 people was located on the upper floor. It was completed and consecrated in 1900.

By 1913, plans began to expand the building. The auditorium was made 20 feet wider, and a new structure was added to the right side for extra sitting space. The old building was moved back and new materials like limestone, stucco and brick were used "in harmony with surrounding buildings". *Photo by Julia Charles.*

## FDNY ENGINE 255/ LADDER 157

14

1367 Rogers Ave  
(1897, Johnson & Hemle)



Inspired by Georgian architecture, this firehouse was the headquarters for the Battalion Chief when built. The two-story structure features a three-bay façade with brick and limestone. The large rounded windows on the second floor are flanked by limestone pilasters and an ornate entablature, with wrought-iron balustrades and a balcony on the central bay.

The first floor was designed for a steam engine, hose wagon, and a ladder truck, along with stables for six horses. The second floor had office space and living facilities for the firemen.

It is an early work of prolific architect Frank J. Hemle, and one of the few examples of his partnership with Ephraim Johnson. Throughout his career, Hemle designed a variety of houses, churches, banks, and park buildings. Some of his most noted works are the St. Barbara's Church in Brooklyn, the Williamsburgh Trust Company building and the Bush Tower in Manhattan, all designated NYC Landmarks. *Photo by Julia Charles.*

