



A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

CROWN HEIGHTS SOUTH BROOKLYN





The Historic Districts Council is New York's citywide advocate for historic buildings and neighborhoods. The Six to Celebrate program annually identifies six historic New York City neighborhoods that merit preservation as priorities for HDC's advocacy and consultation over a yearlong period.

The six, chosen from applications submitted by community organizations, are selected on the basis of the architectural and historic merit of the area, the level of threat to the neighborhood, the strength and willingness of the local advocates, and the potential for HDC's preservation support to be meaningful. HDC works with these neighborhood partners to set and reach preservation goals through strategic planning, advocacy, outreach, programs and publicity.

The core belief of the Historic Districts Council is that preservation and enhancement of New York City's historic resources—its neighborhoods, buildings, parks and public spaces—are central to the continued success of the city. The Historic Districts Council works to ensure the preservation of these resources and uphold the New York City Landmarks Law and to further the preservation ethic. This mission is accomplished through ongoing programs of assistance to more than 500 community and neighborhood groups and through public-policy initiatives, publications, educational outreach and sponsorship of community events.



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CROWN HEIGHTS SOUTH

Located along the hilly terminal moraine between the prosperous communities of Bedford and Flatbush, Crown Heights South was considered a rocky no-man's land of scrub farmland for most of the 19th century. During that time, it was home to subsistence farmers whose homes dotted the landscape, as well as poor Irish and black families who settled in shantytowns called "Crow Hill" and "Pigtown" by a derisive press. In 1846, this was where the city of Brooklyn placed the Kings County Penitentiary, as far from downtown Brooklyn as was feasible.

By 1874, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux had completed Eastern Parkway (site 1) as a Parisian-style boulevard to extend the picturesque character of Prospect Park into the expanding residential neighborhoods of Brooklyn. The parkway, which followed the moraine through the neighborhood that was now called Crown Heights, was designed to be lined with fine homes and mansions, though this housing never developed as Olmsted and Vaux envisioned. The thoroughfare did bring attention to the neighborhood, though, and formed the border between Crown Heights North and Crown Heights South in later years. While the northern side of Crown Heights was fully built up by 1900, it wasn't until after the new century began that large-scale residential development began in southern Crown Heights. The north-south corridors of Nostrand, Bedford, Rogers and Franklin Avenues were already important transportation corridors, leading to the paving of Union, President, Carroll and other cross streets.

Several major changes led to the development of Crown Heights South after the turn of the 20th century. These included the 1907 demolition of the infamous Kings County Penitentiary, which was replaced by a Jesuit Prep school and college (site 8); the 1913 construction of Ebbets Field, home to the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball team; the development of Brooklyn's famous Automobile Row (site 9), with its showrooms and service centers, which flourished on Bedford Avenue between 1905 and 1945; and the presence of the nearby Brooklyn Museum, which opened in 1897. Encouraged by these developments, as well as the new subways constructed under Eastern Parkway, developers built up entire blocks at a time with new housing. With the exception of certain blocks of single-family mansions, much of what was built was designed for multiple families, as the age of the single-family rowhouse had nearly passed. Crown Heights South displays a fine array of architectural styles of the early 20th century, designed by such prominent Brooklyn architects as Montrose W. Morris, Axel Hedman, J. L. Brush, Arthur Koch and Slee & Bryson in the Revival styles popular at the time: Renaissance, Colonial, Flemish, Tudor and more.

Today, the neighborhood retains its vibrant mix of residential architecture, including attached rowhouses, detached mansions and grand apartment buildings, as well as some fine religious buildings and grand institutions. One of its most well-known structures is the Bedford Armory (site 10), the city's first mounted cavalry-unit armory that occupies an entire city block. The armory's future is a source of controversy, with developers seeking to construct housing on the site and community members vying to preserve the building. Unfortunately, none of Crown Heights South's architectural gems have been designated as landmarks by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. Local advocates, including the Crown Heights South Association, formed in 2016, are working to survey and advocate for the neighborhood to ensure that any future changes are sensitive to its rich past.



I

EASTERN PARKWAY

(Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, 1870-74)

– NYC Scenic Landmark,
NR-P

Eastern Parkway, the world’s first six-lane parkway and one of only 10 scenic landmarks in New York City, was built between 1870 and 1874. The parkway, a term that Olmsted himself coined, was modeled on Parisian boulevards, and designed for “promenading” and leisurely carriage rides and strolls. Its broad green medians with rows of trees are flanked on either side by service roads originally meant for carriages. Though it was narrowed over the years, the parkway retains this layout today.

Eastern Parkway was designed to extend the picturesque character of Prospect Park, also by Olmsted and Vaux, eastward into the neighborhoods of Brooklyn. It runs between Grand Army Plaza and Ralph Avenue, which was, at the time, Brooklyn’s eastern border. Olmsted & Vaux envisioned mansions and townhouses lining both sides of the parkway, a goal never realized in great numbers. Instead, Eastern Parkway is lined with middle-class apartment buildings, rowhouses and fine civic buildings such as museums, houses of worship, theaters and libraries. Today, this “shaded green ribbon,” as Olmsted called it, forms the boundary between Crown Heights North and Crown Heights South.

LEGEND OF DESIGNATIONS

National Historic Landmark:	NHL
National Register of Historic Places—District:	NR-D
National Register of Historic Places—Property:	NR-P
New York City Historic District:	NYC HD
New York City Individual Landmark:	NYC IL
New York City Interior Landmark:	NYC INL

2

PHILADELPHIAN SABBATH CHURCH

530 Eastern Parkway
(Harrison Wiseman, 1924)



This Egyptian-inspired, Art Deco style theater opened in 1924 as the Cameo Theater. A year later, it was purchased by the Loews chain and renamed the Kameo. The exterior is striking for its multiple rows of polychrome terra cotta tile, highlighted by a frieze incorporating a stylized Muse repeated across and around the façade. The theater also features a roof garden auditorium and screening wall, which can be seen from the back and sides of the building. The 1500-seat theater was a neighborhood fixture until it closed in 1974, when the building was purchased by the Philadelphian Sabbath Church, an African-American Pentecostal congregation. Luckily, much of the original interior remains intact.



3

**ST. FRANCIS DE SALES
SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF**

260 Eastern Parkway
(Robert J. Reilly, 1925)

The construction of this large school was inspired by Crown Heights South’s inexpensive land, nearby public transportation and a growing Catholic population, while the building’s Beaux-Arts design was inspired by that of the Brooklyn Museum across the street. Its most striking feature is an impressive colonnade running almost the entire length of the building. Originally constructed as the Bishop McDonnell Memorial High School for Girls, its students were known as “Memorialites” and were all awarded tuition-free scholarships until the 1960s. In another design nod to the museum, whose façade is engraved with the names of historic figures known for their contributions to the arts, philosophy, science and literature, the school features the names of female saints engraved above the third-floor windows. The high school closed in 1973, and was repurposed as a school for the deaf. The building’s architect, Robert J. Reilly, trained at Columbia University and worked extensively with the Catholic diocese of New York. Reilly was also a protégé of Ernest Flagg, known as much for his mastery of Beaux-Arts design as for his advocacy of urban reform and the social responsibility of architecture.

4

MORRIS J. GOLOMBECK SPICE COMPANY
960 Franklin Avenue
(Architect unknown, 1900)



A sure sign of approaching this industrial complex is the pleasant scent of cardamom and cinnamon wafting down the street. Before it became the Morris J. Golombek Spice Company in 1955, it was originally constructed as the Consumer's Brewery, the first brewery in the United States to be powered entirely by electricity. In addition to the brewery, in its heyday, this multi-building complex also housed the long-gone Brick Garden Hotel – a restaurant, beer garden and entertainment venue. Notably, the complex's influence was such that it had its own stop on the Brighton Line of the subway, now part of the Franklin Avenue shuttle. The business later merged with the Interboro Brewing Company, but unfortunately failed with the advent of Prohibition. At that time, the subway station closed and the platform was removed. The handsome Romanesque Revival style factory and its Queen Anne style auxiliary building are endangered treasures in this area of low density and large lots. Development has already claimed the lots across the street, once home to a commercial laundry complex.



5

73-97 EMPIRE BOULEVARD
(Architect unknown, circa 1914)

In 1913, Ebbets Field, home of the Brooklyn Dodgers, was one of the most popular gathering places in all of Brooklyn. To accommodate traffic to the stadium and to capitalize on patronage by the team's fans, Empire Boulevard and the surrounding streets became home to an array of parking garages. Despite the utilitarian function of these one-story buildings, their façades were still richly adorned with a rhythm of terra cotta Gothic arches along the roofline, perhaps reminding sports fans of their religion – baseball. This building, which was converted to retail and commercial space, is one of the last remaining garage structures in this area, and is unfortunately in danger of being lost to a redevelopment scheme due to its location on Empire Boulevard, now a bustling thoroughfare.

6

FIRESTONE TIRE AND SERVICE STATION
1728 Bedford Avenue
(Architect unknown, circa 1928)



During the first half of the 20th century, Bedford Avenue was known as “Automobile Row,” with car dealerships and service centers between Fulton Street and Empire Boulevard. This Art Deco/Streamline Moderne style service station, which still sells Firestone products, was patronized by auto buyers and sports fans from nearby Ebbets Field. Although the building has been modernized over the years, the original cantilevered roofline has not lost its Streamline Moderne curves. However, because of rapid development along Empire Boulevard, this building is also in danger of being lost.

7

THE PASADENA APARTMENTS
132-152 Crown Street
(Architect unknown, 1928-1930)



Typical of the era's “Classic Six” apartment buildings, the Pasadena was designed to appeal to the emerging middle class moving to Brooklyn in large numbers, arriving via new subway lines. Its Spanish/Mediterranean Revival design is characteristic of the era's penchant for Tudor, Medieval and Spanish Revival suburban homes, which was echoed in apartment house styles in the urban environment. These apartment buildings offered tenants such amenities as impressive marble lobbies, large apartments with multiple bedrooms, sunken living rooms and a maid's room and bath off the kitchen. In addition, many of these buildings were given fancy names to evoke a certain stature and identity; in this case, the distant and beautiful city of Pasadena. It is possible that Pasadena's allure was also derived from its proximity to Hollywood, which was, at the time, reaching its peak of glamour and influence across the United States. The building is accessed through a graceful open courtyard in the front, allowing residents and visitors a grand entrance and reinforcing the building's persona to passersby.



8
**CUNY MEDGAR EVERS
 COLLEGE BUILDING**
 1150 Carroll Street
(Architect unknown, 1908)

Constructed on the foundations of the old Kings County Penitentiary in 1908, this large, Beaux-Arts style building was built as the Brooklyn Preparatory School by the Jesuits. The school complex then grew to include playing fields and supporting classrooms. The all-male institution provided a superior classical education to students who went on to careers in law, business and the arts. Graduates included William Peter Blatty, author of the Exorcist, and Joseph Califano, United States Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare under President Jimmy Carter. Brooklyn Prep’s final class graduated in 1972, after which the building was sold to the City University of New York (CUNY), which opened Medgar Evers College in the complex. The school has flourished and expanded to include a much larger campus along Bedford Avenue and the surrounding streets.

9
1590 BEDFORD AVENUE
(Architect unknown, 1926)



America’s love affair with the automobile was in full swing by 1924, when Guy O. Simons was appointed by Walter Chrysler to oversee all of the Chrysler dealerships in Brooklyn and Long Island. This building was constructed as a service center, storage facility and garage for the Simons Motor Sales Company. It served his Chrysler and Maxwell showroom, which was located farther north on Bedford Avenue. Simons’ building is a classic, early 20th century commercial warehouse structure, but is embellished with the Tudor styling so popular at the time, especially in suburban residential architecture. The clinker bricks and decorative roof parapet add charm and visual interest to what could have otherwise been a very plain utilitarian garage.



10
**TROOP C ARMORY
 (AKA BEDFORD ARMORY)**
 1555 Bedford Avenue
(Pilcher & Taschau, 1903-1906)

This massive structure was New York City’s first National Guard cavalry unit armory, and is the only Art Nouveau-inspired armory in Brooklyn. Architect Lewis F. Pilcher designed a unique stable wing within the building that could sanitariously house 117 horses – a major feat in the urban environment of Brooklyn. He utilized various levels and pitches for his floors, a complex drainage system and an abundance of windows and vents, all hidden behind the bays of the President Street exterior. The armory’s enormous drill shed, extra tall for ventilation, was also used for sporting and social events, and more recently, as a stage for movie sets. The administrative wing housed officer’s quarters and meeting rooms. The armory functioned as an active National Guard unit until as recently as 2011. Despite its important history and architectural contribution to the neighborhood and the city, the structure is unfortunately not protected as a designated landmark. Many local and citywide activists are concerned that the building could be in danger of becoming the centerpiece of an inappropriate and unsympathetic development project that would destroy the original façade of its signature stable wing, and loom over the surrounding neighborhood.

11
1361-1381 UNION STREET
(Axel Hedman, 1912)



When rowhouse development began in Crown Heights South in the early 20th century, Renaissance Revival style architecture was still very popular. Typified by the use of limestone cladding and Classical ornamentation, rowhouses designed in this style are quite numerous across the neighborhood. Prolific architect Axel Hedman designed some of the best, and put his signature touch on this group, alternating façade designs and sculptural ornamentation. These homes are especially unique for their distinctive roof parapets and railings, as well as for the fact that they are exceptionally intact.



I2

ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
1417 Union Street
*(Henry M. Congdon & Son, 1907;
additions: 1937)*

This Romanesque Revival style building was designed as the community center for a large church planned for the lot next door that was never built. The building included a basement gym, kitchen, auditorium and classrooms. Interestingly, the firm had recently designed the homes on the opposite side of Union Street (site 13), thus allowing for a certain continuity

and design harmony on the block. Thirty years after designing the original structure, the architectural firm of Henry M. Congdon & Son returned in 1937 to permanently transform the building into a church, adding Gothic details with a new sanctuary, steeple, entrance and stairway. The corner structure benefits from being set back by grassy lawns from both Union Street and Brooklyn Avenue, lending it a pleasant stature in addition to its architectural charm.

I3

"SPOTLESS TOWN" HOUSES
1423-1454 and 1368-1410 Union Street
(Henry M. Congdon & Son, 1902-04)



Designed by the same architectural firm as St. Mark's Episcopal Church (site 12), this block was planned and executed as an upscale development of single-family homes. Congdon designed large, semi-detached homes in the Edwardian English and Flemish Revival styles, creating suburban elegance in an urban setting. The houses, touted for their beauty, were also cutting-edge for the shared amenities introduced by the developer, the Eastern Parkway Company. These included a power plant that pumped central heating to all of the houses and back service alleys for automobiles. The latter was an idea that quickly inspired other developments in Crown Heights South, and is now a distinctive feature of many blocks in the neighborhood, emphasizing the importance of the automobile at the time the neighborhood was being built up. Another amenity that this block enjoyed was gated entry for privacy purposes. This feature gave rise to the nickname "Spotless Town."

I4

1237-1297 CARROLL STREET
(John Wandell, 1913)



The mixture of Renaissance Revival and Colonial Revival style details in these alternating bow- and flat-front houses is unique to Crown Heights South. To visually link these different stylistic elements, which were not typically found side-by-side or on the same structure, architect John Wandell designed some of them to have a common cornice line and a molded belt course over the first floor. Unlike earlier rowhouses, many of the houses have English style stoops, which rise to only a few steps above street level, rather than the classic high stoops of the late 19th century.

I5

1301-1337 CARROLL STREET
(Slee & Bryson, 1913)



Brooklyn's most prolific architectural firm specializing in the Colonial Revival style was that of Slee & Bryson, who, in addition to designing Colonial Revival style architecture in Crown Heights South, also built similar rowhouses in nearby Lefferts Manor, Albemarle and Kenmore Terraces, Park Slope and Crown Heights North. This row of houses included such popular Colonial style details as dormers, fan lights and white trim on red-brick, all of which could be seen on much of the American residential architecture of this style in the early 20th century. While many of the houses in this remarkably long row have been altered with unsympathetic details, such as patches of vinyl siding and window grilles, the row is still largely intact and stands out for its fine proportions and overall rhythm.

I6

ST. MARK'S DAY
SCHOOL
1346 President Street
(Ludlow & Peabody,
1916)



Built as the Hospital of St. Giles the Cripple, this building was constructed at a time when polio and other crippling childhood diseases were at almost epidemic proportions. The hospital, whose original location was on DeGraw Street in Cobble Hill, was founded in 1891 by an Episcopalian nun and was one of the first hospitals dedicated to the orthopedic care and treatment of children. The hospital raised enough money to build a larger facility, and despite initial community opposition, relocated here in 1916. Designed by the prominent firm of Ludlow & Peabody, which specialized in institutional architecture, the Spanish Mission Revival style might have been chosen for its association with sunny and warm climates, in order to inspire its young patients with thoughts of ample light and fresh air. At the charity's peak in the first half of the 20th century, annexes were also constructed in Long Island and Garden City, New Jersey. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the Salk and Sabine vaccines had finally conquered polio, and by the 1970s, orthopedic care was incorporated as a service offered in larger hospitals. Therefore, in 1978, St. Giles closed the hospital and sold the building to St. Mark's Episcopal Church across the street. The church transformed the building into the St. Mark's Day School, a parochial school for students from pre-Kindergarten to 8th grade, and the building still operates as such today.

I7

341-347 NEW YORK AVENUE
AND
1268-1270 PRESIDENT STREET
(Montrose W. Morris, 1912)



Designed by famed Brooklyn architect Montrose W. Morris, these two pairs of double duplex homes were among the architect's last commissions in New York City. While very different from his earlier Romanesque Revival and Renaissance Revival style works in Bedford Stuyvesant and Park Slope, these Beaux-Arts/ Colonial Revival style homes share the Morris signatures of large overhanging bracketed cornices and elegant detailing. Each unit, with its own entrance and street address, was designed as a two-family home, with two two-story apartments in each. The buildings are faced in red and tan brick with limestone trim, with side quoins, Juliette balconies and columned entry porches. The buildings have a back service alley. Some unfortunate alterations were made over the years, including the removal of the cornice on number 347 and the loss of all of the original doors. The buildings, unlike the mansions around the corner on President Street (site 18), were constructed to capitalize on the area's influx of middle-class residents. This early 20th century shift to communal-style living is represented in Crown Heights South's many two-family rowhouses and apartment buildings. These structures at the intersection of New York Avenue and President Street represent an interesting cross between the two.

I8

“MILLIONAIRE’S/DOCTOR’S ROW HOUSES”

President Street between New York and Kingston Avenues

These two blocks represent some of Brooklyn’s finest early 20th century mansion architecture. While much of Crown Heights South was experiencing dense development to accommodate a growing middle-class population, this stretch of property was being developed to

appeal to wealthy industrialists and professionals, and the result is a neighborhood that one might more easily expect to find in a wealthy suburb on Long Island. Unlike the late 19th century mansions of Victorian Flatbush, also in central Brooklyn, these early 20th century gems were built during a time of even greater prosperity just before the Great Depression hit. However, it is possible that the configuration of the mansions set back from the street by lush front lawns was borrowed from that very successful development in Flatbush. Both neighborhoods benefit from a strong overall character and sense of place, provided by the unified scale of the buildings and the existence of beautiful green space that is visible from the public way. The architects here ranged from a young William Van Alen, who would later design the Chrysler Building, to the Cohn Brothers, William Debus and Henry M. Congdon. By the 1930s, these two blocks became home primarily to doctors, many of whom worked at nearby St. Giles, Kings County and other hospitals. It is still known today as both “Millionaire’s Row” and “Doctor’s Row” due to these historical associations.

I8a

1290-1294 PRESIDENT STREET

(William Debus, 1911)



Though this Beaux-Arts style structure has the appearance of one large mansion, it is, in fact, a pair of houses unified by its symmetry and Classical details. William Debus was a prolific late 19th and early 20th century architect in Brooklyn who specialized in Parisian-style flats and tenement buildings, as well as elegant Beaux-Arts style townhouses, such as these. The house features a grand portico entrance, elaborate window surrounds, a deep cornice and garages in the rear. While all of the structures on the block are set back from the street by elegant lawns, a wide porch with a stone railing lends the building a commanding presence, even on this block of very impressive architecture.

I8b

1337 PRESIDENT STREET

(William Van Alen, 1914)



Perhaps a bit surprisingly, the architect of the Chrysler Building, William Van Alen, got his start with Brooklyn residential commissions, like this one. His work in this realm was largely inspired by 18th century Federal style mansions, although he designed this one in the Renaissance Revival style, which was popular at the time. The house features a grand entrance portico, limestone window surrounds, a deep overhanging cornice and detailed brickwork. Between 1928 and 1933, this home belonged to David Shapiro, publisher of the influential *Jewish Day* (*Der Tog*) newspaper.

I8c

1362 PRESIDENT STREET

(Cohn Brothers, 1921)



This over-the-top mansion was built for real estate developer Louis Halperin. Its architects, the Cohn Brothers, designed hundreds of apartment buildings and a few private homes in New York City for people like themselves – the children and grandchildren of Jewish immigrants. This brick and limestone house, mostly designed to impress, is not confined to one style, but rather contains a mixture of elements from the French Renaissance, Romanesque Revival and Georgian styles. One of its more pronounced – and unusual – features is its grand porte-cochere, which today harkens back to the glory of the automobile’s early days, a common theme found in the architecture of Crown Heights South.

