



A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

# RICHMOND HILL QUEENS





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.



**Council on  
the Arts**



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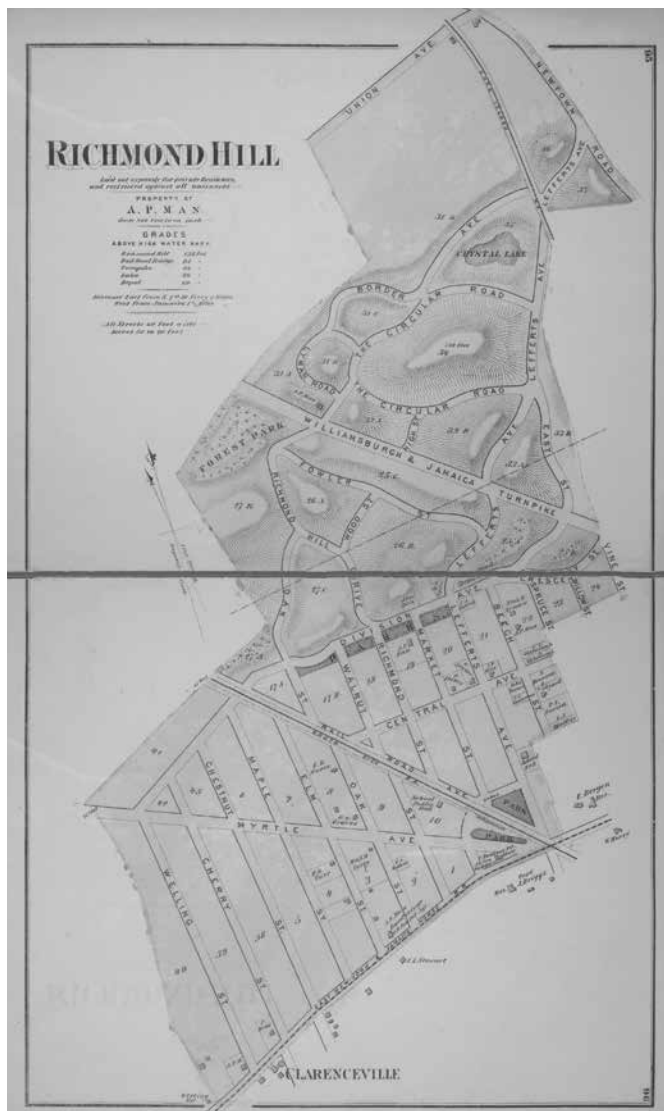
## RICHMOND HILL

Like much of Queens, Richmond Hill remained farmland well into the 19th century. Its transformation into a prosperous residential suburb began in 1868 when businessmen Albon Platt Man and Edward Richmond selected this particular location for a new neighborhood. According to local legend, Man first became aware of the bucolic location during a drive to his country estate on Long Island, although it is more likely that Man was actually attracted not by the picturesque landscape but by the area's lucrative potential, based primarily on the opening of the South Side Railroad that same year, offering commuter service to Brooklyn and Manhattan.

The original plan for Richmond Hill consisted of two sections. The southern section, encompassing most of present-day Richmond Hill, was laid out with a regular grid of streets (the northern section, comprising what is now Kew Gardens, wasn't developed until later and didn't follow Man and Richmond's plans). Expecting a flood of buyers, Man and Richmond quickly set about getting their lots ready for sale. They paved roads and planted thousands of shade trees. By 1870, twenty houses were under construction and in 1872 Man held the first auction of building lots. Local advertisements called the neighborhood a "Suburban Chef D'Ouevre" (masterpiece) and the "most magnificent suburban enterprise on Long Island." Though slowed by the Panic of 1873 and the subsequent economic depression, Man's confidence in the neighborhood eventually paid off. By the 1890s, Richmond Hill was starting to fill in with large residences and the area was developing its own identity. One of its earliest residents—and most famous to this day—was Jacob Riis: journalist, photographer, social reformer and author of *How the Other Half Lives*. The home at 84-41 120th Street, where he lived with his family from 1888 to 1913, was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1968, but because such a designation does not confer legal protection, the house was demolished in 1973.

The short-lived Village of Richmond Hill formed in 1895 (also encompassing the neighboring communities of Morris Park and Clarenceville), before being subsumed into Greater New York City in 1898. At that time, there were so many houses under construction that the press claimed, "Richmond Hill seems more like a Western boom town than a staid Eastern community." The distinct look of Richmond Hill's houses was guided by a series of restrictive covenants that prohibited certain uses, including the broad category of "nuisances" and the sale of alcohol, and made design recommendations, namely that all houses should occupy large lots and be set back 20 feet from the street. Most of the residences were developed speculatively, constructed not for a specific client but for the general market. Many were designed, built and sold by a small group of architect-builders who lived in the neighborhood. The most prolific, and by far the best remembered, was Henry E. Haugaard; with his brothers, he operated a lumber mill, designed numerous houses in the neighborhood and maintained a sales office on Jamaica Avenue. Advertisements from the period often called these houses "Queen Anne," although in reality many architectural styles were used, including Colonial Revival, Shingle and Tudor Revival.

Richmond Hill remained an exclusive railroad suburb until the mid-1910s, when the subway finally arrived in the area (the Liberty Avenue elevated opened in 1915 and the Jamaica Avenue elevated arrived in 1917). The neighborhood is now a diverse and vibrant community of native New Yorkers and immigrants alike, though its housing stock remains little changed from its turn-of-the-century building boom.



1873 map showing the original layout and landscape design of Richmond Hill



I

#### LEFFERTS FARM COTTAGE

86-20 115th Street

(c. early 19th century)

This modest house is the oldest and arguably one of the most historically significant in Richmond Hill, dating from the period when the surrounding area was still occupied by working farms. It originally stood around the corner on Jamaica Avenue and was moved to its present location in the early 20th century. It was built by the Lefferts family, whose farm was one of five purchased by Albon Platt Man in 1868 for his suburban development. By the early 1870s, Man's agent, Oliver B. Fowler, was living in the "Farm Cottage" and using it as a real estate office for the Richmond Hill Estate. In the late 19th century, it was owned by Clara Riis Fiske, daughter of Jacob Riis.

#### 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



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CHARLES PAULSON/  
JACOB L. VAN WICKLEN STORE  
117-19 Jamaica Avenue  
(c. 1868)



1868 was an exciting year for Richmond Hill. Man and Richmond began their suburban development that June and the South Side Railroad commenced commuter service to Brooklyn and Manhattan in July. Hoping to capitalize on this energy, Charles Paulson purchased a lot on “The Triangle” opposite the train depot in September, erecting this small commercial building that he leased to Jacob L. Van Wicklen as a grocery store and post office. In subsequent decades it went through many different owners and uses, including hotel, restaurant and saloon, as well as names, including the Wheelman’s Restaurant (a reference to the increasingly popular bicycle), Doyle’s Triangle Hotel and the Triangle Hofbrau Haus. Composer Ernest Ball wrote “When Irish Eyes Are Smiling” (1912) in one of the hotel rooms, and celebrities such as Babe Ruth and Mae West are rumored to have frequented the restaurant in the 1910s-30s. The Tudor Revival style storefront extension is a 20th century addition, but the bones of Richmond Hill’s most famous commercial building are intact and visible above the ground floor.



3

THE RICHMOND  
116-23 Jamaica Avenue  
(1910)

Jamaica Avenue is considered the oldest continually-used road on Long Island, originally

opened in 1703 as the King’s Highway and later privatized under the Jamaica & Brooklyn Plank Road Company. In the early 20th century, around the same time as the blocks north were filling with stately houses, the avenue began its transformation into an important local commercial corridor (eventually given a huge boost with the arrival of the elevated train in 1917). One of the largest and most ornate commercial structures in the neighborhood, the Richmond was also the first poured-concrete structure on Jamaica Avenue. Its solid, Renaissance-inspired design includes a modillioned cornice broken by two arched parapets, one of which is inscribed with the building’s name and date of construction.



4

RKO KEITH’S THEATRE  
117-09 Hillside Avenue  
(R. Thomas Short, 1926-29)

Richmond Hill once had a number of movie theaters, most located in small storefronts along Jamaica Avenue. By far the largest was the RKO Keith’s Theatre, which in comparison to others was a true motion picture palace. It originally featured both Vaudeville acts and movies on its roster of entertainment. Designed in the neo-Classical Revival style, the building’s prominent street façade is clad in buff brick with white terra cotta trim and features its original marquee. Architect R. Thomas Short was known for his theater designs, among them The Grand in Astoria, and The Rialto, The Shubert and The Midwood in Brooklyn. The L-shaped RKO Keith’s theater maintains its impressive architectural presence on Hillside Avenue; the large auditorium block is visible from Bessemer Street, and on its interior, the theater’s lobby, lounge and auditorium spaces remain largely intact.



5

**QUEENS PUBLIC LIBRARY, RICHMOND HILL  
BRANCH**

118-14 Hillside Avenue  
*(Tutbill & Higgins, 1905)*

The Richmond Hill branch was one of six public libraries in Queens funded by industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. It traces its origins to a lending library established circa 1899 by local resident Ella J. Flanders (Jacob Riis served as an early trustee). Unlike earlier libraries, which typically occupied

space in other buildings, the Carnegie branches were designed to stand out. Most, including the Richmond Hill branch, employ a classical architectural vocabulary; in the outer boroughs, they were also typically sited on larger lots, and were usually one-story, freestanding buildings with horizontally-oriented floor plans. In 1929, a sympathetically designed addition to the Richmond Hill Branch was constructed in the rear to house the Children's Library. The main reading room features a Works Progress Administration-sponsored mural titled "The Story of Richmond Hill," painted in 1936-37 by artist Philip Evergood, which contrasts the pastoral pleasures of suburban Queens on the left against a bleak industrial urban landscape on the right.

6

**RICHMOND HILL REPUBLICAN CLUB**

86-15 Lefferts Boulevard  
*(Henry E. Haugeard, 1908)*  
- NYC IL



While local architect Haugeard was known primarily for his residential designs, this building shows his equal fluency with civic architecture. Its Classical style ornament and orange brick façade nicely complement the nearby library. Like other social clubs, whether Democratic or Republican, the Richmond Hill Republican Club (RHRC) served as a locus of community activity for the neighborhood, organizing and hosting public lectures, rallies, parades, picnics, dances and dinners. The main floor contained meeting rooms and a billiards parlor, while the basement housed a bowling alley (a large auditorium was planned for the second floor but was never constructed). Beyond its role as a local social institution, the RHRC participated in national politics by inviting prominent political figures to speak; notable appearances were made by the likes of Theodore Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan. The RHRC closed in the 1980s, and the building has since been adaptively reused as a catering hall and event space.

The Church of the Resurrection, founded in the late 1860s as a mission of Grace Episcopal Church of Jamaica, was the first religious organization established in Richmond Hill. It built its first home on this site in 1874 when the surrounding suburban neighborhood was still mostly made up of unoccupied lots. A series of subsequent alterations culminated in 1904 with the construction of an entirely new stone and half-timbered structure around the existing church building, resulting in its present form and appearance. Like many Episcopal churches, the design takes its inspiration from the medieval parish churches of England, with its picturesque rooflines, asymmetrical massing and rustic materials palette of quarry stone, stucco and half-timbering. One of its most noted congregants was Jacob Riis, who donated the stained glass triptych in the north wall of the church in memory of his wife Elizabeth in 1905. The rectory building, constructed in 1888 on the corner lot directly to the north, has been known informally as "Riis House," although there is no record that the family ever lived there. The Church of the Resurrection is still an active congregation and its building was placed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places in 2003.

7

**CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION**

85-09 118th Street  
*(Nathaniel W. Vickers, 1904)*  
- NR-P



8

85TH AVENUE  
AND 117TH STREET

The blocks near this intersection feature some of the oldest houses in Richmond Hill, erected at the very beginning of the neighborhood's building boom. In 1884, Albon Platt Man himself commissioned five houses to jump-start the neighborhood's development. Of these, 116-03 85th Avenue is likely the only surviving example. At least two other houses in the area were built by the early 1890s, at 116-12 85th Avenue and 85-14 117th Street (which was listed on an 1891 map as the residence of architect Henry E. Haugaard). The area also contains a noteworthy cluster of Shingle Style residences, including the similar turreted examples at 117-03 85th Avenue (pictured) and 84-48 118th Street, both constructed around 1900 by local architect-builders Wade & Cullingford.



9

## HOUSES OF THE WEDGE

84-37 113th Street

(c. 1900)

84-11 112th Street

(c. 1900)



The full range of Richmond Hill's architectural styles is on display in the triangle-shaped wedge of residential blocks between Myrtle Avenue and the former South Side Railroad line (elevated above Bessemer and Babbage Streets since 1924). Most of the neighborhood's houses date to the period of Academic Eclecticism in architecture. Many use highly irregular massing—often including corner turrets, projecting bay windows and complex rooflines—enabled by new technologies and building techniques. The use of applied ornament also reflects the increasing industrialization of the building trades at the time. As factories began mass production of architectural components such as doors, windows, siding and decorative detailing, domestic architectural styles became much more flamboyant. Nominally based on medieval European precedents, these “Victorian” architectural styles were in fact a loose interpretation of both medieval and Classical models, and architects frequently mixed and matched elements in highly individualized components. One of the most individual houses is the unusual Japanese-inspired design at 84-37 113th Street (pictured left). Some of Richmond Hill's houses reflect post-Victorian architectural styles, which were more formal and rigorous in their use of historic precedents. Perhaps the most popular of these styles was the Colonial Revival, which favored symmetrical house forms more clearly. An impressive example of this style is found at 84-11 112th Street (pictured right).



10

PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
OF 86TH AVENUE

10a

## PUBLIC SCHOOL 56

86-02 114th Street

(C. B. J. Snyder, 1907)

10b

## PUBLIC SCHOOL 90

86-48 109th Street

(C. B. J. Snyder, 1907)

As the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* noted in 1905, “In Richmond Hill, as elsewhere, the growing demand for school accommodations is an infallible index of progress.” By that measure (and every other), the neighborhood was progressing at an incredible rate throughout the 1890s and 1900s. The first school in the area was built in 1892, accommodating only 125 students. From 1893-94, coinciding with the Compulsory Education Law, four additional schools were built and the original one enlarged, increasing capacity to more than a thousand pupils. In 1897 the Richmond Hill High School opened, and P.S. 66 (a designated New York City Landmark just east of Richmond Hill proper) was commissioned. Another round of expansion occurred in 1907, when two of the existing school buildings were enlarged or replaced, including P.S. 56 on 114th Street (pictured left) and a new school, P.S. 90, constructed on 109th Street

(pictured right), which was “to be the largest school in Queens.” Part of the New York City education system following the 1898 consolidation of Greater New York, these buildings were designed by the department's staff architect, Charles B. J. Snyder.



CHURCHES OF 86TH  
AVENUE

IIa

UNION CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH  
86-02 115th Street  
(1900)

IIb

ST. JOHN'S EVANGELICAL  
LUTHERAN CHURCH  
86-20 114th Street  
(Cherry & Nietz, 1922)

IIc

HOLY CHILD JESUS ROMAN  
CATHOLIC CHURCH  
111-01 86th Avenue  
(Henry V. Murphy, 1930)

IId

HOLY TRINITY METHODIST  
CHURCH  
107-12 86th Avenue  
(Oscar S. Peele, 1908)



Richmond Hill's boom years were also marked by a proliferation of religious organizations, many of which eventually built houses of worship near the schools, making this section of 86th Avenue the institutional heart of the neighborhood. The Union Congregational Church (pictured above) was founded in 1884 and occupied a series of borrowed meeting spaces before constructing its current building in 1900 (by one account, the congregation was primarily seeking to escape the noisy and nuisance-filled conditions of its previous locations). A block away, tucked in next to P.S. 56, St. John's (pictured top right) was established in 1903. After holding services in Arcanum Hall on Jamaica Avenue, in 1907 it erected a Shingle Style church on its present site, which was replaced by the current structure in 1922. Both of these churches were designed in the English-influenced Gothic Revival style favored by Protestant denominations during this period. The largest of the group, the Holy Child Jesus Roman Catholic Church (pictured middle right), was initially founded as a "daughter" parish of St. Benedict Joseph Labre in the Morris Park neighborhood just to the south. Its first services were held in 1901, also in Arcanum Hall, and its first

church building, occupying the southwest corner of 86th Avenue and 112th Street, was built around 1910-11. The current building, completed in 1930, was described by its architect as "Modern Romanesque." The church complex also includes a school at 111-18 86th Avenue (Gustave E. Steinbeck, 1916), an adjacent school annex (c. 1950s) and the Parish House at 112-06 86th Avenue (c. 1952). Perhaps the most unusual church building is Holy Trinity Methodist (pictured bottom right). The congregation held its first services in borrowed space, in a storefront on Jamaica Avenue, but within a year had commenced construction on a permanent home. This small building features interlocking hipped and gabled roofs, deeply overhanging eaves, ribbon windows and stucco cladding—all more characteristic of Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie Style of architecture than the typical English medieval precedents.



11b



11c



11d

12

### RICHMOND HILL-TYPE HOUSES

85-18 to 85-38 109th Street

85-17 to 85-19 109th Street

(Henry E. Haugeard, 1905-11)



Though many Richmond Hill houses fully display the individuality favored during the period of Academic Eclecticism, there is one design that appears multiple times throughout the neighborhood. It is prevalent enough (by one count there are more than 40 examples) that it may be considered a distinct Richmond Hill type. These houses are characterized by symmetrical façades with second-story oriel windows wrapping around both corners. There are two identifiable subtypes based on the roofline and applied ornament. The grander Colonial Revival examples typically have hipped roofs, large dormers and Classically-inspired cornices with dentils and modillions. The somewhat more modest Tudor Revival examples are gable-fronted, with stucco and half timbering in both the main gable and the smaller porch gable. Most of the Richmond Hill-type houses were designed by Henry E. Haugeard, including these examples on 109th Street commissioned by developer Martin Schmand.

The original 1860s plan for Richmond Hill extended westward only as far as 110th Street. The blocks between 109th and 106th street were added in the 1890s, near the beginning of the neighborhood's building boom. Most of the houses on this block were completed in the first decade of the 20th century. In the 1920s, the City ran a new sewer down the street, raising the roadbed significantly. It offered to help homeowners jack up their houses to the new grade level, which was accepted by everyone except the owners of no. 85-21 (pictured), which now appears much shorter than its neighbors.

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### 107TH STREET HOUSES

107th Street between  
85th and 86th Avenues



14

### DOCTOR'S ROW

105th Street between 85th  
and 86th Avenues



The blocks along 105th and 104th Streets were the last to be laid out in Richmond Hill, remaining unlotted until 1905. Within a year of its opening, however, 105th Street in particular became one of the grandest streets in the neighborhood, known widely as Doctors' Row for the wealthy homeowners who settled here. Amongst the notable houses on the block are the pair of Tudor Revival residences at nos. 85-14 and 85-18 (Andrew Woodin, 1908) and the Spanish Colonial house (unusual for the neighborhood) at no. 85-26 (D. B. Woodin, 1908). Most of the houses on the east side of the street were designed by Charles W. Vanderbeck for the Woodin family. Also notable is no. 85-36, which was destroyed by a fire in 2001 but rebuilt in 2004 by architect and president of the Richmond Hill Historical Society, Ivan Mrakovčić, whose design recalls the lost building and harmonizes with the block's grand, historic character.

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### HAUGAARD'S NEW HOUSES

105th Street between 86th and  
Jamaica Avenue  
(Henry E. Haugeard, 1905-07)



This block contains at least ten Haugeard-designed buildings, many of the classic "Richmond Hill-Type" featuring symmetrical facades, second-story oriel windows and front porches with low gabled roofs. Unlike the Tudor Revival examples on 109th Street (site 12), most of these houses have hipped roofs and Classically-inspired Colonial Revival details including oval windows, fluted pilasters and modillioned cornices. The group at nos. 86-27 to 86-47, on the east side of the street, was advertised in a 1907 newspaper as "Haugeard's New Houses." Occupying what the ad claimed was the "best block in Richmond Hill," the houses contained ten rooms, had hardwood trim and parquet floors throughout, and originally sold for \$9,750 each.



