



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

# ARTHUR AVENUE THE BRONX





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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232 East 11th Street, New York, NY 10003  
tel 212-614-9107 fax 212-614-9127  
e-mail [hdc@hdc.org](mailto:hdc@hdc.org)  
[www.hdc.org](http://www.hdc.org)

## ARTHUR AVENUE

Belmont was originally part of the Town of West Farms (incorporated 1846), which, with the Towns of Kingsbridge and Morrisania, was annexed by New York City in 1874. From 1901 to 1973 Belmont was served by the Third Avenue Elevated, which had stops at 180th Street, 183rd Street and Fordham Road.

Today, the easiest way to get to Belmont from Manhattan is by Metro-North to Fordham. A short walk east along Fordham Road, with Fordham University's beautiful campus on one's left, takes one to Arthur Avenue, the main commercial artery of Belmont, renowned as The Bronx's "Little Italy," though the neighborhood also contains sizable representations of Albanians and Mexicans. Notable residents have included the esteemed novelist Don DeLillo (b. 1936), who was born and grew up near Arthur Avenue (and who attended Fordham University) and was the recipient of the National Book Award in 1985 for his novel *White Noise*. DeLillo's novel *Underworld* (1997) is partly set in the neighborhood.

Perhaps the most famous of Belmont's native sons is Dion Francis DiMucci (b. 1939), who grew up at 749 East 183rd Street, at Prospect Avenue. A member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Dion (he has always been known by the single name) was one of the most popular recording artists in the world in the late 1950s and 1960s, and has been counted a principal influence by Paul Simon, Bruce Springsteen and Lou Reed. Dion got his musical start by singing a cappella on Belmont street corners. With three other neighborhood boys, he formed Dion and the Belmonts in 1957. Belmont is also notable as the setting of the Academy Award-winning film *Marty* (1955). Locals like to point out that actor Joe Pesci was "discovered" by Robert DeNiro while tending bar at Amici's, an Arthur Avenue restaurant. Another important cultural touchstone for the neighborhood is the off-Broadway play, film, and Broadway musical *A Bronx Tale* by Chazz Palminteri.

Fordham University, on the northern border of Belmont, originated as St. John's College in 1841. The campus was built on the Rose Hill manor farm of Robert Watts. Renamed as Fordham University in 1907, it was the first Roman Catholic college in the northeastern United States. Among Fordham's countless notable alumni are Congress Member Geraldine Ferraro, Governor Andrew Cuomo, CIA director William Casey, Attorney General John Mitchell, football coach Vince Lombardi, baseball announcer Vin Scully, novelist Don DeLillo, and actor Denzel Washington.

Belmont was once part of the landholdings of the Lorillard family. The Lorillard tobacco firm was founded in 1760 and moved to this part of The Bronx in 1792. In 1870, the family moved their manufacturing operations from The Bronx to Jersey City, and in 1888, the city acquired the eastern section of the Lorillard lands for incorporation into Bronx Park. The western section—today's Belmont—was subdivided for development. Many Italian immigrants were attracted to the area by jobs in the construction of the New York Botanical Garden (opened 1891), the Bronx Zoo (opened 1899) and the Jerome Park Reservoir (opened 1906). There is a persistent myth that Arthur Avenue was named by one of the Lorillards in honor of President Chester A. Arthur. However, the name "Arthur Street" appears on the New York City Department of Public Parks topographical map of the Bronx in 1873. That is eight years before Arthur became president, making it unlikely that the avenue was named for him.

To learn more about the area, visit [www.BronxLittleItaly.com](http://www.BronxLittleItaly.com).



## WILLIAM D. WALSH FAMILY LIBRARY

44I East Fordham Road  
(1997, Shepley, Bulfinch,  
Richardson & Abbott)



The main library of Fordham University houses the fine Fordham Museum of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Art, comprising the collection of William D. Walsh, who majored in Greek and Latin at Fordham before embarking upon a career in law, finance, and collecting. The museum is an excellent starting point for an afternoon's stroll through Belmont.



## AQUINAS HIGH SCHOOL

685 East 182nd St.  
(1940, Eggers & Higgins)



This Roman Catholic girls' high school was established in 1939. The inventive, complexly massed U-shaped building, Romanesque in style, greets the street with strong apsidal forms attached to wings that project from a recessed central section designed to resemble a Medieval cloister. The architects Otto Eggers and Daniel Higgins had just succeeded to the practice of their late employer, John Russell Pope, and were contemporaneously at work putting the finishing touches on the National Gallery of Art and the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C. *Photo courtesy of Aquinas High School.*

## LEGEND OF DESIGNATIONS

*National Historic Landmark*

*National Register of Historic Places - District*

*National Register of Historic Places - Property*

*New York City Historic District*

*New York City Individual Landmark*

*New York City Interior Landmark*

*NHL*

*NR-D*

*NR-P*

*NYC HD*

*NYC IL*

*NYC INL*

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## THEODORE ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

500 East Fordham

Road

(1929, *William H.*

*Gompert*)



This stately block-long building, with its distyle-in-antis portico, raises its distinctive cupola over Fordham Road. The architect, William H. Gompert (1875-1946), succeeded the long-serving C.B.J. Snyder as the New York City Board of Education architect in 1923, and served until 1927, though several of his designs, including Theodore Roosevelt High School, were not completed until after he had resigned. (A school designed by Snyder may be seen nearby: P.S. 32, at Belmont Avenue and 182nd Street, was built in 1900.)

Gompert, a New York City native, attended Pratt Institute and worked for McKim, Mead & White and for Maynicke & Franke before forming his own firm in 1906. He designed some 170 schools in the five boroughs, including the High School of Music and Art (1924) on West 135th Street, DeWitt Clinton High School (1929) in the Bedford Park section of the Bronx, James Madison High School (1926) at 3787 Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn, Jamaica High School (1927) in Jamaica, Queens, Seward Park High School (1929) on Grand Street in the Lower East Side, and, possibly his masterpiece, P.S. 101 (1929) in Forest Hills Gardens.

Notable alumni of Theodore Roosevelt High School include June Allyson, once one of the most popular movie stars in the world; Rocky Colavito, the slugging right-fielder who in his major league baseball career appeared in nine All-Star Games; Ace Frehley, lead guitarist of the rock band Kiss, and Jimmie “J.J.” Walker, comedian and star of the 1970s TV show *Good Times*. Perhaps most notable among the school’s alumni is Chazz Palminteri (b. 1952). Palminteri’s one-man play, *A Bronx Tale*, premiered off-Broadway in 1989 and is set in Belmont. In 1993, Robert De Niro adapted the play into a movie and a musical version, directed by De Niro, ran on Broadway from 2016 to 2018. *Photo courtesy of NYCago.*





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## VINCENT'S MEAT MARKET

2374 Arthur Avenue

Vincent's Meat Market was founded in 1954 and has been in its present location since 1981. It is family owned and operated, and provides high quality, fresh meat and poultry sourced from reputable farms. It appears as the butcher shop where *Marty* Piletti works in the film *Marty*. Filmed almost in a documentary style, *Marty* is one of the most evocative of all New York City films. Written by Paddy Chayefsky and directed by Delbert Mann, *Marty* won the

1955 Academy Award for Best Picture, as well as the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. Ernest Borgnine, who starred in the title role, won the Academy Award for Best Actor. The film tells the story of a lonely, middle-aged butcher who lives in Belmont. At the time, the meat market was called Oteri's Butcher Shop, and in the film, *Marty* refers to his boss as Mr. Oteri. *Marty* opens memorably with a shot of the Arthur Avenue Retail Market. *Photo courtesy of Bronx Little Italy.*

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## TEITEL BROTHERS

2372 Arthur Avenue



Teitel Brothers was founded in 1915. In a wonderful example of New York's immigrant synergies, this famous Italian specialty food store was started by an Austrian Jewish family. According to family lore, one of the founding brothers, Jacob Teitel, was a Yiddish speaker who learned to speak Italian before English. There is an inlaid Star of David in the entranceway, installed during the Depression as a show of resistance against the rising tide of facism and anti-Semitism in Europe. *Photo courtesy of Bronx Little Italy.*



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## MADONIA BROTHERS BAKERY

2348 Arthur Avenue

One of the most popular stories one hears on Arthur Avenue is that of how in 1924 the wife of Mario Madonia, the Palermo-born founder of the then six-year-old

bakery, still in its original location on nearby Adams Place, gave birth to her youngest son right in the bakery when a car crashed through the front window, sending her into premature labor. The child, Peter Madonia Sr., was incubated in a shoebox placed next to the oven. The bakery is now run by partners Peter Jr. and Charlie La Lima. In 2018, Peter Jr. returned to the family business after a distinguished career as Mayor Michael Bloomberg's chief of staff and as chief operating officer of the Rockefeller Foundation. In fact, Peter Madonia had once before left public service to steward the bakery. In 1988, his brother Mario, who had run the bakery, died in a car accident, and Peter, who had served in the Koch administration in City Hall, and then as deputy commissioner of buildings and as deputy commissioner of the Fire Department, returned to the bakery in an emergency capacity. In what seems almost like the plot of a Hallmark movie, he now appears to be back for good. *Photo courtesy of Bronx Little Italy.*

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## MARIO'S

2342 Arthur Avenue

Mario's opened in 1919. It received a rave review from Craig Claiborne in *The New York Times* in 1976, and is known to have served Nelson Rockefeller, Elizabeth Taylor and Eddie Fisher, the renowned soprano Anna Moffo, and Clint Eastwood. The restaurant's renown extended to its mention in Mario Puzo's novel *The Godfather* (1969), though the restaurant's owners, the Migliucci family, declined a request to have the restaurant appear in the film version. In 2018, John Mariani, the authority on Italian-American food, wrote in *Forbes* that Mario's "sets a civilized example for anyone who wants to know what the Italian-American restaurant should be." *Photo courtesy of Bronx Little Italy.*



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**ROBERTO'S**  
603 Crescent Avenue



Roberto Paciullo, from Salerno, in Campania in southwestern Italy, opened his eponymous restaurant a few doors from here in 1989, moving to the present location in 2004. Highly recommended by the *Michelin Guide*, which describes Roberto's as a "storied Italian-American favorite whose design falls somewhere between a cozy farmhouse and Mediterranean villa." *Photo courtesy of Bronx Little Italy.*

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**ÇKA KA QËLLU**  
2321 Hughes Avenue



This new restaurant (pronounced SHA ka chell-OO), which received an enthusiastic review from Pete Wells in *The New York Times* in 2019, is a rare Albanian restaurant that serves authentic Albanian cuisine, as opposed to Italian cuisine, and reminds us of the significant presence in Belmont of Albanian immigrants. *Photo courtesy of Bronx Little Italy.*



**ARTHUR AVENUE  
RETAIL MARKET**

2344 Arthur Avenue

Opened October 28, 1941, with “120 stalls for the sale of meat, poultry, fish, vegetables and other items sold on pushcarts.”

Mayor La Guardia believed that the chaotic street scenes around pushcart markets were bad for the city’s image, that street markets impeded the passage of fire engines and ambulances, and that it would be much easier for the city to regulate and tax vendors if they were in enclosed, city-owned spaces. An often-reproduced photograph from the 1930s shows Crescent Avenue curving into

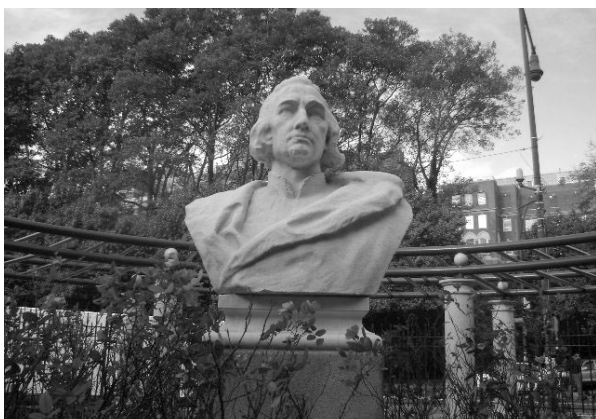
Arthur Avenue, with a view north of the west side of Arthur Avenue. A close look at the photo reveals that the buildings then are the same as the buildings now. What’s different is that the roadbed of Arthur Avenue is covered with crowded stalls selling all manner of foodstuffs. It was precisely to get rid of this that, for better or worse, Mayor La Guardia built the Arthur Avenue Retail Market, and similar markets throughout the city, including the Essex Street Market in the Lower East Side and La Marqueta in East Harlem. *Photo courtesy of Bronx Little Italy.*





## D'AURIA-MURPHY TRIANGLE

Adams Place & East  
183rd Street



This irregularly shaped open space, bounded by Crescent Avenue, 183rd Street, Adams Place, and Arthur Avenue, was created in 1918 and named for John D'Auria and Henry Murphy, two young men from the neighborhood who lost their lives in World War I. Within the "triangle" is a large bust of Christopher Columbus, executed in marble ca. 1926 by the famous Bronx-based stone-carver and sculptor Attilio Piccirilli. It was originally placed in front of P.S. 45 at Bathgate Avenue and Lorillard Place, and moved to D'Auria-Murphy Triangle in 1992.

Across Arthur Avenue to the west is St. Barnabas Hospital (now known as SBH Health System). The hospital site was originally the estate of Jacob Lorillard (1774-1839). Jacob's descendants deeded the land in 1874 to the Home for Incurables, and Jacob's mansion served as a doctors' residence until it was demolished in 1932. In 1947 the Home for Incurables changed its name to St. Barnabas Hospital.

This is the southern gateway to the main commercial section of Arthur Avenue. Across Crescent Avenue from D'Auria-Murphy Triangle, Prince Coffee Shop offers a generous sidewalk café, bordered by mature street trees, a surpassingly urbane segue to the bustle of Arthur Avenue. *Photo courtesy of NYC Park Department.*



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**OUR LADY  
OF MOUNT  
CARMEL  
CHURCH**

627 East 187th  
Street

*(1915-17, Anthony  
F.A. Schmitt)*

This beautifully preserved Romanesque Revival church, built for a parish founded in 1906, is the spiritual heart of the Belmont community. The twin-towered church has a triple portal, a great wheel window, and superb brickwork. Italian Catholic congregations typically built their churches in either Romanesque or classical styles, as opposed to Gothic, which they associated with Irish churches where Italian immigrants often found a frosty welcome.

The architect of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Anthony F.A. Schmitt, was a Roman Catholic architect with such credits as Holy Redeemer College (1934) in Washington, D.C., the Church of St. Pius V (1906-07) in Mott Haven, and Immaculate Conception School (1901) on Melrose Avenue and 151st Street.

The name “Our Lady of Mount Carmel” – shared by well-known churches in East Harlem and in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, as well as by the great shrine in Rosebank, Staten Island – refers to the 13th-century appearance of the Blessed Virgin Mary to St. Simon Stock in Cambridge, England. She bestowed upon him the scapular (a devotional artifact in the form of a cloth pendant) of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. In the Old Testament, Elijah lived in a grotto in Mount Carmel in present-day Israel. In the 12th century, the Carmelite Order was founded there.

This block of 187th Street is one of the finest in Belmont. The sidewalks are wide on both sides of the street, the tenement buildings with stores in their bases are beautifully scaled to the street, there are plenty of street trees, and the church lends its special excitement. When one imagines a young Dion DiMucci singing a cappella on the corner near the church, a whole slice of New York’s rich ethnic past comes vibrantly to mind. *Photo by Hugo L. Gonzalez.*

