



A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

ELMHURST

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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ELMHURST

The first European settlement in Elmhurst was founded in 1642 at the head of the Maspeth Creek. The town was destroyed due to increasing conflicts between Native Americans and the Dutch, and was replaced in 1652 by a new village located on safer ground inland, at what is now Queens Boulevard and Broadway. The English called the place Middelburgh, since Dutch authorities required a Dutch name, but referred to it as Newtown among themselves, to distinguish it from the old town at Maspeth.

The 18th century was a period of prosperity for Newtown Village, population slowly increased and the local economy became more diversified. The proximity to New York allowed for crops to be sold in the open market or traded for manufactured goods, and also provided access to luxury goods and services. The road system was largely created during this time, connecting the outlying hamlets with the churches and town offices at Newtown, giving them access to the mills, the meadows and the shore. During the Revolution, the British Army occupied Newtown. Officers were billeted in the houses and buildings were repurposed for field hospitals, armories and headquarters. After the war, the town recovered gradually, mostly thanks to new practices and technologies in agriculture that boosted the economy. Social change was spurred by the abolition of slavery in New York State in 1827 and a group of newly freed African Americans established the first African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church and cemetery in the town (site 5).

In the years before the Civil War, and during the first decade after, Newtown remained largely a one-street town. Although there was some commercial growth, and a new building was erected for the Newtown High school (site 6), attempts to expand the limits of the old village were unsuccessful. This began to change in 1869, when large estates were auctioned. In 1893, the Meyer brothers, led by Cord Meyer Jr., bought over 100 acres of the Samuel Lord estate to develop an ambitious plan for a new suburb northwest of the old Newtown Village (sites 2a, 2b and 2c). This development was planned to offer amenities rarely present in a rural district, and certainly nowhere else in Queens at the time: paved streets, a water system and private sewers. The project proved to be extremely successful, and the neighborhood became known for its fashionable housing developments and infrastructure. Cord Meyer, Jr. also lobbied to have the name of the village changed to Elmhurst, to avoid any association with the polluted Newtown Creek. The name is said to have been inspired by large, mature American elms that existed along Broadway, particularly in front of St. James Church (site 9a). Despite initial resistance from the townspeople to discard the historic name of the village, in 1896 the Post Office officially changed to Elmhurst.

The opening of the subway in 1936 spurred local development which resulted in the destruction of much of the old village's building stock, most notably the Moore Homestead (site 1). After the Second World War, Elmhurst became a place for architectural innovation. Influenced largely by the New York World's Fair of 1964, buildings like the Pan American Hotel (site 17), the Queens Place Mall (site 14) and the former Jamaica Savings Bank branch (site 15) changed the neighborhood's landscape. In the 1980s, immigrants from many different countries changed Elmhurst from an almost exclusively white community to the most ethnically diverse neighborhood in the city.



**CLEMENT
CLARKE MOORE
HOMESTEAD
PARK**

82-02 Broadway
(1954)

The Moores were one of the most prominent families of Elmhurst, then Newtown, settling in the mid-1600s after Captain Samuel Moore was granted eighty acres of land as acknowledgement for the efforts of his father, Reverend John Moore, during the colonization of the area by the Dutch. Captain Moore built a house there in 1661, and the property remained in the family for centuries. During the Revolutionary War, the British General William Howe made the house his Long Island headquarters.

One of Captain Moore's great-great grandsons was Clement Clarke Moore, who is best known as the author of the classic children's poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas" (better known as "The Night Before Christmas"). He was also a major developer of the Chelsea neighborhood in Manhattan. Clement Clarke Moore was believed to have used the family homestead as a periodic country retreat. The property is also known as the birthplace of the famous "Newtown Pippin" apple, the oldest commercially grown variety to be bred in the US and a famed apple during Colonial times, favored by Queen Charlotte of England, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

By the early 1800s, most of the Moore estate was divided into lots and sold at auction. The site of the homestead remained in the family until the Board of Transportation acquired it during the construction of the Independent Subway in 1930, razing the buildings in 1933. This photo depicts the buildings before their demolition. In 1954, Parks acquired the property to build the Elmhurst Playground, which was renamed the Clement Clarke Moore Homestead Park in 1987. *Photo courtesy of the New York City Municipal Archive.*

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

CORD MEYER HOUSES

2a - 87-04 to 87-20 Elmhurst Avenue

(1912)

2b Judge Street (1904)

2c - Corner of Hampton St. and 43rd

Ave. (1897)

(Cord Meyer Development Company)



Throughout the 20th century, the Cord Meyer Development Company played a significant role in Queens development. Led by Cord Meyer Jr., the Meyer brothers originally focused development in Elmhurst in 1893, when they purchased a farm in Newtown from Samuel Lord, co-founder of Lord & Taylor. They renamed the area Elmhurst, laid out subdivisions and streets, installed sewers and established trolley connections. .

Some of Cord Meyer's developments still survive in Elmhurst, like a row of Colonial houses with distinctive green terra-cotta tile roofs built in 1912 on the south side of Elmhurst Avenue, between Hampton and Ithaca Streets (top image), and a group of brick English-style townhouses built in 1904 on Judge Street, between Whitney

and Elmhurst Avenues (middle image).

Besides residential construction, Meyer also developed commercial properties for residents. The first storefront opened in 1897, and one original Meyer-built shop remains extant at the corner of Hampton Street and 43rd Avenue (bottom image).

By the late 1920s, there was a shift in construction from the single-family row house to five and six story apartment buildings in Elmhurst. The Cord Meyer Company responded to this trend by building, in 1928, the Hasting Court Apartments (40-40 Elbertson St) and Alida Court (87-15 Britton Ave).

3

ELMHURST BAPTIST CHURCH

87-37 Whitney Avenue
(1902-1903, A. F. Leicht)



Before the Civil War, there was a Baptist Chapel at Queens Boulevard, but the congregation eventually disbanded. In 1900, a series of cottage prayer meetings resulted in the organization of a new congregation, who started a fundraising campaign to build a church after Cord Meyer donated a plot of land. Since the site was located in the midst of the new upper-class Elmhurst community, the congregation was anxious to build a structure that would be an ornament and an asset to the neighborhood.

Designed by the church architect A. F. Leicht, the plans called for a stone building with an octagonal interior and a concave ceiling finished in hardwoods with a seating capacity of 500. The cornerstone was laid on July 1902 and the congregation moved into the building in 1903. The formal dedication ceremony took place in the summer of that same year. *Photo by Elmhurst Baptist Church.*



ELMHURST MEMORIAL HALL

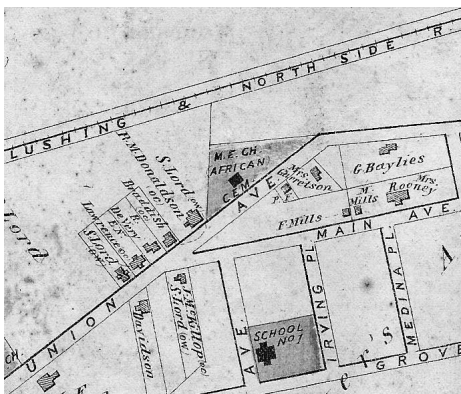
88-24 43rd Avenue
(1926)

Erected in 1926 by the Elmhurst Memorial League, this Colonial style building was conceived as a memorial for the men and women of Elmhurst who gave their services, and in some cases their lives, to the country during World War I. After the cornerstone was laid, the committee launched a campaign throughout Elmhurst in order to raise the funds needed to complete the building. The festivities included a machine gun demonstration and a concert given by a Veteran's Band..

5

AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND

47-11 90th Street
(1908-1928, AME Church)



In 1828, one year after the abolition of slavery in New York State, newly freed African Americans formed a religious community and congregation of their own. The United African Society, later known as the African Methodist Episcopal Church, established a church and burial ground at this site.

St. Marks A.M.E Church started as a small church surrounded by a cemetery which would later be replaced by a new building thanks to the efforts made by the congregation and contributions from other local churches. Construction began in 1908, but only the shell of the building would be completed due to a lack of funds.

In 1911, the Queens Building Department deemed it unsafe and ordered posts to be set up in the basement to hold up the weight of the floor. This prompted renewed efforts to raise money, and by the end of the year, the church was completed and dedicated. Little is known about what happened to this building, but in 1928 the congregation moved to a new location in North Corona and attempted to move their deceased, but the City of New York declined the request and only twenty remains were successfully transferred.

While there are no physical markers that remain of this burial ground, documentation has determined that there are 310 interments, the majority of which remain beneath the earth today. Nearly forgotten, vast public interest of this site was awakened after Martha Peterson was found in an iron coffin in 2011. Ms. Peterson's life — and death — was the subject of a special television program that aired on PBS in 2018.

Though small plot of land has survived as a touchstone to one of the earliest freed African American communities in the region and its history is nearly as old as freed African American society in New York State itself. *Photo courtesy of the Queens Library.*

NEWTOWN HIGH SCHOOL

48-01 90th Street

(1900 by Boring & Tilton, 1921 by C.B.J. Snyder, 1931 by Walter C. Martin,
1958 by Maurice Salo & Assoc.)

NYC IL, NR-P



One of Elmhurst's and Queens' most prominent buildings, the Newtown High School is the result of several building campaigns, which began with the construction of a small, wooden school house in 1866 to serve children from the Village of Newtown and the surrounding farms.

The school's first expansion took place in 1898-1900, when a much larger, brick building, designed by the architectural firm Boring & Tilton, was added to the site. It was renamed the Newtown High School in 1910, after the lower grades were moved out.

As Elmhurst's population grew in the early twentieth century, Newtown High School needed to expand. Plans began in 1917 for an addition to be designed by C.B.J. Snyder, the noted Superintendent of School Buildings for the Board of Education, but the First World War delayed construction until 1920. The new impressive Flemish Renaissance Revival-style wing was opened in 1921, featuring stepped gables and a dramatic 169-foot, centrally-placed tower topped by a cupola and turrets.

Two Flemish Renaissance Revival-style wings designed by Walter C. Martin were constructed in 1930-1931, and the Boring & Tilton's turn-of-the-century wing was replaced by an International Style addition in 1956-1958, designed by the Manhattan architectural firm Maurice Salo & Associates. The remarkably intact Newtown High School now serves a diverse body of 4,500 students and employs more than 200 teachers.



DURKEE SPICE FACTORY

7

45-10 94th Street

(1917)

Established by Eugene R. Durkee in 1851, the Durkee Company is a manufacturer of spices, condiments and grocers' specialties, which is still in business today. They relocated from Hudson Square in Manhattan to

Elmhurst in 1917, when they built this four-story industrial structure as their new mustard and spice factory. News of this move was met with opposition from the community, who wanted to preserve the residential use of the neighborhood. As a way to mitigate this negative reception, when announcing the purchase of the property from the Cord Meyer Company, Durkee stated that the factory would be surrounded by lawns and flower beds, and it would be a boon to the community. Durkee became the largest factory and employer in Elmhurst with over 300 employees, mostly women.

E.R. Durkee died in December of 1926, leaving everything to his daughters. The Company was sold in 1986 and was subsequently absorbed into a larger-food processing conglomerate. In 2007, the building was renovated and became the Elmhurst Educational Campus, which hosts three separate high schools: The Pan American International High School, the Civic Leadership Academy and Voyages Preparatory High School. *Photo courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York.*

REFORMED CHURCH OF NEWTOWN

8

85-15 Broadway

(1832, main building - 1858

Fellowship Hall)

NYC IL, NR-P



Founded by Dutch settlers, the original building for this church was a small, octagonal wooden structure with a high-pitched roof, constructed in 1731. It was in use for almost one hundred years, and served as an armory for the British during the Revolutionary War. Demolished in 1831, it was replaced by the present Georgian-style sanctuary in 1832, incorporating the cornerstone of the preceding church into the new one's foundation. The bell tower contains the bell from the original 1731 church building. The Greek Revival-style Fellowship Hall was built in 1858. Originally located closer to the street, it was moved in 1906 to line up with the church building and connected to it by a covered passageway. In 1954, a small wing was added to the rear of the Fellowship Hall to house offices and classrooms. The flat roofed porch on the church and the columned portico on the Fellowship Hall were both added after the original construction, although the exact dates are not known. Adjoining the Church building to the north is a small cemetery filled with simple tombstones dating from the early years of the church's history.



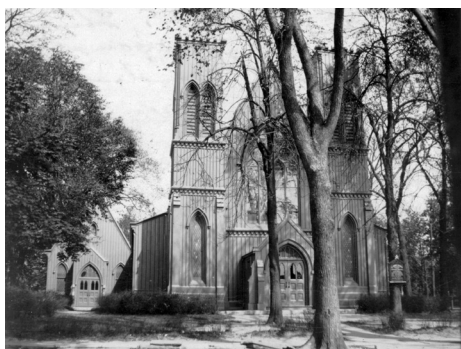
9a

OLD ST. JAMES CHURCH

86-02 Broadway

(1735, addition built in 1772)

NYC IL, NR-P



9b

ST. JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH, PARISH HOUSE AND CEMETERY

84-07 Broadway

(1848-1975, current building 1976)

Built in 1735 at what became the southwest corner of 51st Avenue and Broadway, St. James Church is the oldest surviving building in Elmhurst, and the City's second oldest extant religious building. Chartered by King George III, it is a remarkable Colonial-era mission church that still retains its early 18th-century rectangular box-like form, wood shingle siding, round-arched windows, and heavy timber framing. In 1772, the building was lengthened and the main entry moved from the south side to the Broadway façade.

Prominent citizens associated with the parish included the Reverend Benjamin Moore, a president of Kings College (later Columbia College), and the Reverend Samuel Seabury, Jr., the first American Episcopal Bishop. It was also a place of worship for British officers and men during the Revolution.

In 1848, after a period of growth, the parish built a larger church a block away and Old Saint James Church became a chapel and later a parish hall. It was renovated and altered over the years, until 2004 when it was restored to how it appeared in the 19th century.

The new St. James Episcopal Church located in 84-07 Broadway was originally a three-story wood-frame structure with windows made in Germany. It served the community from 1848 until 1975, when it was destroyed by arson. Parishioners were only able to salvage some vestments, altar linens, and brass ornaments from the rubble, but despite the considerable losses, they were able to rebuild the following year. This site also harbors a cemetery, where some of the original settlers of Elmhurst are buried. *Photo of the first new St. James Church courtesy of the Queens Library.*

10

SITE OF THE ELMHURST CARNEGIE LIBRARY

86-01 Broadway
(1906 Lord & Hewlett)



Between 1886 and 1919, steel manufacturing mogul Andrew Carnegie donated more than \$40 million to build over 1,500 new library buildings in communities throughout America. In New York City, Carnegie libraries were built citywide. In the less dense neighborhoods in The Bronx, Brooklyn, Staten Island and Queens, the buildings were typically freestanding structures constructed on a large lot. They frequently featured brick walls with limestone ornamentation, and typically had a symmetrical layout, large windows to allow an abundance of light into the reading rooms, and a prominent, decorative entrance.

In Queens, the Queensborough Public Library applied in 1901 for five sites, one of which was for Elmhurst. Cord Meyer Jr. offered a free site in his new development, but the library trustees lobbied for the purchase of a more central location. Construction began in 1904, with architectural firm Lord & Hewlett in charge of the design. It opened to the public in 1906, and served as the Elmhurst Branch of the Queens Borough Public Library until its demolition in 2012. *Photo courtesy of OldElmhurst.*

11

PAN AMERICAN HOTEL

79-00 Queens Boulevard
(1962, Brodsky, Hopf &
Adler)



In 1962, Adelson Industries announced the purchase of a plot of land in Elmhurst to build an ambitious \$2 million project: the Pan American Motor Inn. Upon opening, the seven-story luxury hotel had 216 rooms, an outdoor swimming pool, a health club and, a dining facility for 250 people. Its location was strategic, as it was the nearest major hotel facility to the planned 1964 New York World's Fair and Shea Stadium, which also opened in 1964. Designed by New York City architectural firm Brodsky, Hopf and Adler, it received critical praise, including an award from the Queens Chamber of Commerce in 1963.

Adelson Industries's initial plan for the Pan American Motor Inn was for it to be the first of a chain along the Eastern Seaboard, but the motel never achieved superstar status in Queens as they had hoped. After a succession of buyers, it never made a profit. In 2014, the city turned it into a homeless shelter, just like its former competitor down the block, once called the Mets Motel and later the Metro Motel.



I2

ELKS LODGE AND HALL

82-10 Queens Boulevard

(1923, *Ballinger Co.*)

NYC IL, NR-P

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks was established in 1868 in New York City, following the increase in popularity of fraternal orders at the time, especially after the Civil War. They founded the Queensboro Lodge No. 878 in

1903, and held meetings at Lodge 828 in Long Island City until 1923, when they erected this Club House.

This Italian Renaissance Revival structure was designed by the Ballinger Company, a firm primarily known for its industrial and commercial buildings and notable for its expertise in steel-reinforced concrete design. Inside the five-story building and its annex were a swimming pool, a gym, an Aztec-themed 700-seat theater, 28 guest rooms, a banquet hall, three bars, smoking rooms and a six-lane bowling alley. The design received critical praise for its exotic interiors and for its ability to provide members with a private environment while simultaneously hosting non-members on a regular basis within the same building.

Known for its devotion to charity and to community service, membership at the Queensborough Lodge peaked during the 1960's with 6,600 members, which included businessmen, professionals, and politicians, among others. By 2000, national and local membership had decreased dramatically, and in order to offset costs incurred by taxes and maintenance, the Elks began to rent out the dining hall for special events and leased out individual rooms for regular use by social and religious groups. In 2001, Elks officials decided to sell the building to the New Life Christian Fellowship, a Korean church organization. At the same time, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission acted to designate the building as an Individual Landmark, a move which the building owners supported.

I3

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH OF NEWTOWN,
MANSE AND PARISH HALL**

54-02 Queens Blvd.

(1894/1907 Frank A. Collins -

1931 Meyer & Mathieu)

NR-P



In 1891, the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church of Newtown received a large donation from one of its parishioners with instructions to build a stone church that replicated the First Presbyterian Church of Cherry Valley, New York. The Gothic Revival structure was designed by Queens architect Frank A. Collins, and was completed in 1894. Their old colonial church, built in 1791, was retained as a Sunday School and continued in use until its destruction in 1929.

When the city widened Queens Boulevard in 1924, the church was moved 125 feet southwest. During the move, it lost its steeple as well as a small attached lecture hall. Its present location has a two-and-a-half story manse, or parsonage, built in 1907, also likely designed by Collins. The building was originally located on a site across Seabury Street to the west, and was moved to its current position and orientation around the same time as the church.

A two-story Collegiate Gothic parish hall was built in 1931 and connects to the church on its south. It features brick walls and slate pitched roof, and was designed by the Brooklyn firm Meyer & Mathieu.

QUEENS PLACE MALL (FORMER MACY'S BUILDING)

88-01 Queens Boulevard
(1965, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill)



In 1965, Macy's engaged the prominent architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill to design their newest store in Queens, for which they had purchased almost all of the irregular block bounded by Queens Boulevard, 55th Avenue, 56th Avenue and Justice Avenue. The original design included an elaborate entranceway to the circular building, surrounded by a parking garage, but because they failed to acquire the lot at the corner of Queens Boulevard and 55th Avenue, Macy's was forced to create street-level entrance doors along the perimeter of the exterior. The property and house in question belonged to Mary Sendek, who bought it with her husband in 1922 and had lived there ever since. She refused to sell it, even after Macy's offered five times the value of the land. When Mary died in 1980, her estate sold the property and a commercial building now stands on the site.

Macy's design was innovative for its time and succeeded at introducing the automobile-centered shopping mall of the suburbs to the urban density of Queens. Less than a decade after Macy's on Queens Boulevard opened, Queens Center — a larger, more modern and centrally located mall — would open just blocks away. In 1996, Macy's relocated to Queens Center and the building now houses various stores and a Macy's furniture gallery.

Photo courtesy of the Queens Library.



I5

BANK OF AMERICA

89-01 Queens Boulevard

(1968, William F. Cann Co.)

Formerly a branch of the Jamaica Savings Bank, this modernist building is a bold expression of mid-20th century engineering and a standout architectural expression on Queens Boulevard. It was built between 1966 and 1968 as part

of the bank's centennial by the William F. Cann Company, who were commissioned to design a small branch that would not be overshadowed by neighboring commercial structures. The Bank Building Corporation, which designed and built hundreds of branch offices in the United States, helped introduce Modern aesthetics into the banking mainstream, supplanting the classical sources that long dominated bank building typology. To create this eye-catching form, called a hyperbolic paraboloid, the architects used reinforced concrete as the primary construction material. The copper-clad roof extends 116 feet, reaching a height of 43 feet above the entrance. This roof had both practical and symbolic advantages, it enhanced the structure's visibility and created a column-free interior. Today a branch of Bank of America, this distinctive example of mid-20th century Modern architecture remains intact and continues to serve its original bank function. It was designated as an Individual Landmark by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission in 2005, but the designation was overturned by the New York City Council, responding to owner opposition, political concerns and an antipathy for Modern architecture.

NEWTOWN PLAYGROUND AND CEMETERY

I6

92-02 56th Avenue

(1935, renovated in 1997)



As early as 1730, the land now comprising Newtown Playground was used as a cemetery. The peak of its use was from about 1825 to 1840, after which it gradually lapsed into neglect. From around 1850 onward, it began to be used as a potter's field. In 1890, it was closed and cleaned-up but by 1897, the old ground was again in poor condition. In 1898, the newly consolidated City of New York acquired the land and placed it under control of the Department of Parks in 1917, which started development of the playground in 1934 and opened it the following year. The playground underwent renovation work in 1997, redesigning it and updating facilities for contemporary users. Open lawn areas were created over archeologically sensitive areas, and the original cemetery wall was reconstructed with traditional materials. A ring of weeping cherry and beech trees were planted to memorialize the mostly anonymous townspeople still buried in Newtown Cemetery.

