



A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

LOWER WEST SIDE MANHATTAN





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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LOWER WEST SIDE

Much of the Lower West Side was once underwater, with the Hudson River shoreline running approximately where Greenwich Street is now located. During the colonial period, the settlement at Manhattan's southern tip was guarded by Fort Amsterdam (renamed Fort George by the British), and later reinforced by the Whitehall Battery. Partially destroyed during the American Revolution, the fort was demolished and the Battery rebuilt as an elegant promenade. The adjacent blocks remained the city's most elegant residential neighborhood, as evidenced by several surviving Federal-style row houses in the neighborhood. In the lead-up to the War of 1812, the U.S. Government built a new fortification—the West Battery, later renamed Castle Clinton—on an artificial island 300 feet offshore.

By the mid-19th century, fashionable New Yorkers had moved northward and lower Manhattan was given over to commercial activity and tenement housing. Landfill extended the island's western shoreline, enveloping Castle Clinton, by then repurposed as an immigration station. Horsecar tracks plowed through the neighborhood's north-south thoroughfares and in 1867 the first elevated train in the country began operating along Greenwich Street. Single-family row houses were split up into multiple units, and purpose-built tenements were erected to cater to the neighborhood's increasingly diverse immigrant population.

One of the Lower West Side's most notable immigrant communities was “Little Syria”, which existed along lower Washington Street and the surrounding blocks from the 1880s through the 1920s. The “Great Migration” of Syrians to the U.S. was sparked, in part, by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the subsequent devastation of the local silk industry. Though government officials often referred to them as “Turks” due to their citizenship within the Ottoman Empire, the community generally identified as Syrian. The majority came from the Mount Lebanon area, and many embraced their Lebanese heritage in the 1920s with the rise of that country's national independence movement. Most of Little Syria was Christian; approximately half were Syrian Melkite and Lebanese Maronite Catholics.

Manhattan's Syrian Quarter was central to the lives of other Syrian communities throughout the U.S., both economically and culturally. Its merchants imported—and its factories produced—wares including Oriental rugs, cigarettes and mirrors. Printers modified their machinery to reproduce Arabic characters, and more than 50 Arabic newspapers and periodicals were produced at its height.

The Lower West Side's Syrian community began to decline in numbers and visibility during the 1920s, the same period in which the neighborhood was experiencing profound changes to its built environment. The Immigration Act of 1924 halted new arrivals to sustain the neighborhood, and residents either moved or Syrian quarters or assimilated into the general population. Rising property values also played a part as the commercial development of the Financial District increased during the Roaring Twenties. By the 1930s much of the neighborhood's low-scale row houses and tenements had been replaced by Art Deco skyscrapers. Today the neighborhood has largely vanished, although several significant sites remain nestled among the office towers of Lower Manhattan.

I

PETER MINUIT PLAZA

(2011, NYC DOT; AECOM, construction manager; Michael Victor Ruggiero, Landscape Architect; Ben van Berkel, UNStudio, Sculptor)



Situated at the foot of Manhattan within view of New York Harbor, this plaza memorializes the early contact between the Native American inhabitants of Manhattan and its European explorers. Its centerpiece, the Plein and pin-wheel-shaped Pavillion, was donated by the Kingdom of the Netherlands to commemorate Henry Hudson's arrival in 1609. The plaza's

namesake, Peter Minuit, was the third Director of the Dutch New Netherland colony, who in 1626 entered into an agreement with the indigenous Lenape. Though widely considered an outright purchase by subsequent colonists, this agreement was closer to a shared use contract allowing both parties equal access to live on and harvest the bounty of lower Manhattan. By the 1660s, the settlement of New Amsterdam was a thriving and diverse trading port with 18 languages spoken in the neighborhood. A bronze replica of the 1660 plan is on the north side of the plaza at State Street. Today, this plaza and transit facility is the city's "busiest intermodal hub," serving commuters by foot, bike, ferry, subway, and bus. *Photo by Wally Gobetz.*

LEGEND OF DESIGNATIONS

<i>National Historic Landmark</i>	<i>NHL</i>
<i>National Register of Historic Places - District</i>	<i>NR-D</i>
<i>National Register of Historic Places - Property</i>	<i>NR-P</i>
<i>New York City Historic District</i>	<i>NYC HD</i>
<i>New York City Individual Landmark</i>	<i>NYC IL</i>
<i>New York City Interior Landmark</i>	<i>NYC INL</i>



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MOTHER SETON SHRINE

(Originally the James Watson
House)

7 State Street

(1793, attributed to John McComb,
Jr.; extension 1806)

NYC IL, NR-P

Originally constructed in 1793 as the elegant private residence of James Watson, a merchant and the first Speaker of the New York State Assembly, the Federal style mansion at 7 State Street is a remarkable survivor from the early period when Lower Manhattan was home to the city's wealthy and fashionable families. It is also notable for its long association with the history of Roman Catholicism in America.

Elizabeth Ann Bayley (1774-1821), a Staten Island native and religious pioneer who later became the sainted Mother Seton, briefly lived at 8 State Street before an 1803 trip to Italy that resulted in her conversion to Roman Catholicism (in an 1805 ceremony that took place nearby at St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church on the corner of Church and Barclay streets) (Site 1a). In 1884, 7 State Street became home to the Parish of Our Lady of the Rosary to better serve the Irish immigrants. In 1965, it was restored and protected with landmark status and, in the same year, the Classical-Revival style Our Lady of the Rosary church containing a shrine honoring Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton was constructed immediately to the left. The first American citizen to reach official sainthood, Mother Seton was canonized in 1974, on the 200th anniversary of her birth.

To the east of the building was the Leo House, a settlement house founded by the German Catholic Church in 1889 to serve German immigrants. The settlement house moved in 1926 to West 23rd Street in Chelsea. To the right of Mother Seton Shrine sits a skyscraper at 1 State Street Plaza, a building which began the wave of displacement faced by the immigrant community of the area by replacing the tenements and rowhouses that formerly occupied its space.

THE BATTERY AND CASTLE CLINTON

(Castle Clinton: 1808-11, Lt. Col. Jonathan Williams and John McComb, Jr.)

Castle Clinton NYC IL, NR-P



Originally sited on an island some 300 feet off the Battery, Castle Clinton was built for the War of 1812 as one of a pair of fortifications, the other being the still-surviving Castle Williams on the northern shore of Governors Island. The horseshoe-shaped brownstone monument has seen many and varied incarnations during its over 200-year history, including pleasure garden and concert hall, aquarium, ruin and finally National Monument. It also served as an immigration station, processing nearly eight million immigrants newly arrived in America — as compared to the roughly 12 million immigrants who passed through Ellis Island, its successor.

During the 1930s and 40s Castle Clinton was at the center of an epic preservation battle between legendary city Parks Commissioner Robert Moses and opponents of his plan to raze the structure for a parkway and bridge connecting Manhattan's Battery with Brooklyn. A coalition of historic, art and landscape societies, led by the Regional Plan Association's Robert McAneny, advocate Albert S. Bard, Manhattan Borough President Stanley Isaacs, and admiralty attorney C. C. Burlingham organized as the Central Committee of Organizations Opposing the Battery Bridge to fight Moses' plan. Moses lost, Castle Clinton was declared a National Monument in 1946 and the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel was built instead.

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**BOOKLYN-BATTERY
TUNNEL AND BATTERY
PLACE**

Battery Place, Greenwich
Street to Washington Street
(1940-50, Ole Singstad, chief
engineer through 1946; Ralph
Smille, chief engineer after 1946;
Erling Owre, architect)



The Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, which connects Lower Manhattan with Brooklyn, was constructed over a ten-year period from 1940 to 1950—including a three-year wartime hiatus—and is the longest tunnel of its type in North America. It replaced the low-rise buildings of the former Syrian Quarter. The severe-looking Moderne style ventilation building at Battery Place was designed by Parks Department architect Aymar Embury II and completed in 1950. The facade inscription facing Battery Park commemorates the 1946 consolidation of the city's Tunnel Authority and Triborough Bridge Authority into the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority. The other architecturally notable vent building is the white octagon located off the northern tip of Governors Island, designed by the successor firm to McKim, Mead, & White. The Tunnel was renamed in 2012 in honor of former New York State Governor Hugh L. Carey. *Historic photo courtesy of The Library of Congress.*

MORRIS STREET AT GREENWICH STREET

*(Cunard Building: 1917-21, Benjamin
Wistar Morris with Carrere & Hastings)*
NYC IL, NR-D

The intersection of Morris and Greenwich Streets perhaps best embodies the economic and technological forces that reshaped Little Syria, and Lower Manhattan in general, over the course of the 20th century. On the southeast corner stands the rear facade of the massive Cunard Building, one of the first major skyscrapers to be built under the 1916 zoning resolution, which established certain limits on building bulk and massing in order to avoid the complete “canyonization” of Lower Manhattan. Across the street from the Cunard Building lies the giant trench that is the exit to the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel (site 4), a monument to mid-century automobile-based urban planning. It is here that Greenwich Street forks off into Trinity Place, notable as the location where one of Manhattan’s earliest elevated rail lines split into two lines running northwards along Sixth and Ninth Avenues, respectively. A historic mast-arm lamppost remains at the north side of Morris Street, in the section of median that will shortly become the southern part of an expanded, redesigned Elizabeth Berger Plaza (site 7). Famed photographer Berenice Abbott photographed Morris Street at Greenwich Street in the 1930s, capturing the last remaining tenement building juxtaposed with the towering Cunard Building. *Photo courtesy of The New York Public Library.*



6

WASHINGTON AND MORRIS STREET



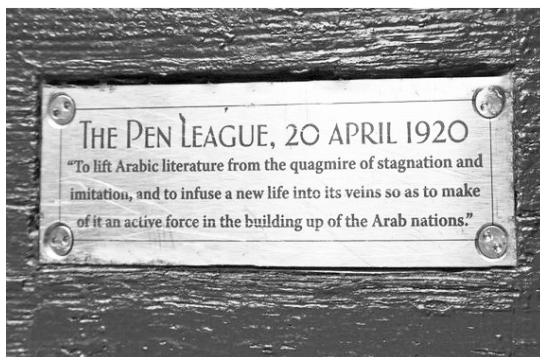
By the late 1920s, the human-scaled buildings of Little Syria were beginning to be hemmed in and overshadowed by skyscrapers. The intersection of Morris and Washington Streets, once lined with low-rise row houses and tenements, was transformed by the construction of two Art Deco skyscrapers between the years 1929 and 1931, both designed by the firm of Starrett and Van Vleck using a colorful, richly textured materials palette, then again by construction of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel beginning less a decade later. The Battery Parking Garage was part of the original plans for the tunnel and was the first municipal parking structure ever built in New York City. There are also a number of historic cast-iron street lamp posts in the vicinity on either side of the tunnel entrance, all of them the second generation of mast arm-type that was designed and installed throughout the city in the early 20th century.

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ELIZABETH H. BERGER PLAZA

Edgar Street, Greenwich Street,
Trinity Place

*(2019, NYC Dept. of Parks and
Recreation, Sara Ouhaddou, artist)*



For several years local advocates have been pushing the city to embrace their plan of combining the two small pocket parks located at the juncture of Greenwich Street, Edgar Street (reputedly the shortest street in Manhattan), Trinity Place and the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel exit into one larger, continuous park. Their efforts are bearing fruit: the City is set to begin construction on what will be known as Elizabeth H. Berger Plaza, in honor of the late head of the Downtown Alliance. The plaza's design will reroute the tunnel exit and merge the largely hardscaped parks into a unified landscape featuring more greenery with public art by Franco-Moroccan artist Sara Ouhaddou. Through the efforts of the Washington Street Historical Society, the plaza will also honor the local Syrian and Lebanese-American heritage by incorporating interpretive displays on Little Syria and its notable Arab-Americans residents, like writer and artist Kahlil Gibran.

8

DICKEY HOUSE

67 Greenwich Street

(1809-10)

NYC IL



The Robert and Anne Dickey House was built in 1809-1810, making it one of only a handful of houses surviving from this period in Manhattan. The four-bay front facade features Flemish bond brickwork, flat and splayed keystone lintels, and a later door hood installed as part of an 1872 renovation by architect Detlef Lienau, when the building was in use as a tenement. The rear of the house retains the most striking feature of its Federal-period construction, which is the rounded bay facing Trinity Place. The Dickey House will serve as the entrance to the new school in the base of a tower rising directly next to and behind it. *Photo courtesy of The Library of Congress.*

**RECTOR AND
GREENWICH STREETS**

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94 Greenwich Street

(ca. 1799-1800)

NYC IL



The three-and-a-half story brick house standing at the northwest corner of Rector and Greenwich Streets is among the remarkable group of Federal-era houses still surviving below Chambers Street, the oldest section of the city. 94 Greenwich Street still retains its Flemish-bond brickwork, splayed brick or marble lintels (on the Greenwich and Rector Street facades, respectively), and the top section of its original peaked roof, visible along Rector Street. Other survivors of this early period include the Watson House at 7 State Street (site 2) and the Dickey House at 67 Greenwich Street (site 8). At the southeast corner of the intersection is George's restaurant, established in 1950 and apparently the last of the area's Middle Eastern businesses. George's suffered significant structural damage in the events of September 11, and owner George Koulmentas, with his son Billy, chose to rebuild in place as a low-scale restaurant. *Photo by Christopher D. Brazee, NY Landmarks Preservation Commission.*

10

ST. GEORGE'S SYRIAN MELKITE CHURCH

103 Washington Street

(Current facade 1929-30, Harvey F. Cassab)

NYC IL



This former row house turned church embodies the community of immigrants that gave rise to Manhattan's "Syrian Quarter" in the last two decades of the 19th century and into the early 20th, many of whom were Melkite Greek Catholics from the former Ottoman province of Syria (which included present-day Syria and Lebanon). The parish of St. George was formed in 1889 as America's first Melkite congregation (Christians who recognized the Pope in Rome but maintained the Byzantine Rite). One of the first services was held in the basement of St. Peter's Church on Barclay and Church streets (site 17), and in 1925 the congregation moved into the former row house at 103 Washington Street (which had been raised from three stories to five when it became a boarding house in 1869). Lebanese-American architect Harvey Cassab designed the striking white terra cotta neo-Gothic style façade completed in 1929. At its height the Syrian Quarter was home to numerous churches, factories, and small businesses that were part of an international network of trade, and several Arabic language newspapers. Landmarked in 2009, St. George's remains an eloquent reminder of a time when Washington Street was the "Main Street" of Syrian America. *Photo by Carl Forster, NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission.*

II

DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY HOUSE

105-107 Washington Street

(1925, John F. Jackson)



The Downtown Community House was built in 1925-26 through a charitable donation given by financier William Hamlin Childs to the Bowling Green Neighborhood Association, a settlement house founded in 1915 to serve residents of Lower Manhattan. The Downtown Community House was intended to expand social services to a large multi-ethnic immigrant resident community. The Colonial Revival style brick building housed a worship space, nursery, recreation facilities, clinic and residences. In a 1925 article about the building's cornerstone-laying ceremony, *The New York Times* noted that "Wall Street financiers rubbed elbows with Nordic, Slav and Levantine neighbors in colorful crowds which packed Washington Street." By the 1940s, the Downtown Community House was being used for storage and offices, presumably because of the mass displacement of its patrons due to the construction of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel. By the late 1960s, the building was in use as a union hall. The Buddha reliefs within the second-floor window tympana date to the building's later incarnation as a Buddhist temple.

I2

109 WASHINGTON STREET

(1885, John P. Leo)



The five-story brick tenement and store at 109 Washington Street was built in 1886, possibly as an alteration from an earlier building, just as the Syrian community began taking root in this part of Lower Manhattan. The building's Neo-Classical style facade has changed little over the years. Although the storefront has been altered, the historic cast-iron structural columns are still visible at the ground floor and the existing cast-iron swag lintels are extremely rare architectural features. Built almost to the rear lot line and with only one small airshaft, 109 Washington Street is representative of the old-law tenement type that prevailed before the introduction of stricter housing laws around the turn of the century. The building has a remarkable history of housing multi-ethnic population as residents, often contemporaneously.

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102-104 GREENWICH STREET

(ca. 1857)



This five-story brick commercial building was likely constructed c. 1857. Some of the telltale signs of this relatively early date are the stone columns supporting massive stone lintels at the ground floor and simple molded stone window lintels above. Past commercial tenants of this building include the Mill Remnants Company (1910), which sold polishing rags; the Electric Manufacturing Co. of San Francisco (ca. 1910s), which sold electric dryers; and the Bowling Green Warehousing Company (1906), a bonded storage warehousing company whose painted sign is still visible in the storefront lintel.

14

106 GREENWICH STREET

(1879, William Grawl)



The five-story brick tenement and store at 106 Washington Street was built in 1879, just as the Syrian community began taking root in this part of Lower Manhattan. The building's neo-Grec style cornice remains, though the storefronts have been altered and other facade ornament removed. Built almost to the rear lot line with four apartments per floor and only two small airshafts, 106 Washington Street is representative of the old-law tenement that prevailed before the introduction of stricter housing laws around the turn of the century.

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WEST STREET BUILDING

90 West Street

(1905-07, *Cass Gilbert*)

NYC IL, NR-P

Designed by Cass Gilbert, architect of the Woolworth Building and one of New York City's preeminent commercial and industrial designers of the early 20th century, the West Street Building exhibits the hallmarks of the early Manhattan skyscraper in its classical detailing and column-like "base-shaft-capital" facade composition. Constructed in 1905-07, the building's location on what was then the industrial waterfront, was key to the shipping and railroad concerns it served. It was damaged during the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, but spared the fate of nearby St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, which was buried and damaged beyond repair. The former 1830's row house turned church at 155 Cedar Street was completely destroyed when the South Tower fell.



SAINT PETER'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

22 Barclay Street

(1836-40, John R. Haggerty and Thomas Thomas)

NYC IL, NR-P



Saint Peter's Roman Catholic Church is one of the finest examples of Greek Revival architecture anywhere in the city, featuring hallmarks of the style in its monumental hexastyle Ionic portico, massive pediment and austere, smooth granite facades with crisp punched window openings. St. Peter's has the distinction of being New York State's first Catholic parish. Over the centuries, many notable New Yorkers worshipped here, such as Pierre Touissant and Mother Seton, who professed her faith here. This church was also the root of the Knights of Columbus in New York State. The first house of worship was built on this site in 1786 and demolished in 1836, to make way for the present church, designed by architects John R. Haggerty and Thomas Thomas. St. Peter's fostered the city's first Syrian-American parish, St. George's (site 10), offering them space in which to worship before the congregation had the means to purchase or build their own building.

