



A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

WESTCHESTER SQUARE

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**



The Six to Celebrate is generously supported by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature. Additional support is provided by New York City Councilmembers Margaret Chin, Robert Holden, Corey Johnson, Ben Kallos, Stephen Levin and Keith Powers.



232 East 11th Street, New York, NY 10003
tel 212-614-9107 fax 212-614-9127
e-mail hdc@hdc.org
www.hdc.org

WESTCHESTER SQUARE

Although Westchester Square may now be subsumed within the sprawl of The Bronx's residential and industrial neighborhoods, the community's roots as the nucleus of a rural village can still be seen today in its layout. Westchester Square's initial European settlement dates to the Dutch period, when the area was known as Oostdorp, or "East Village," to denote its geographic relationship to New Amsterdam at the tip of Manhattan. By 1653, before the English formally seized the Dutch territory, settlers from the New Haven Colony had settled in New Netherland and named their community "Westchester." In 1683, a few decades after the English takeover, the Province of New York created Westchester, one of the twelve original counties in the state, and identified the Village of Westchester as its seat. The center of regional government, Westchester Square soon became the home of the Parish of Saint Peter's, one of the city's oldest. Surrounding the village green, now Owen F. Dolen Park, Westchester grew into a small center of activity within the otherwise bucolic setting of The Bronx in the 18th Century.

Located near the boat landing at the head of Westchester Creek and along a long-established road, now known as Westchester Avenue, the village gained economic prominence as commercial activity grew. The geographically advantageous setting of the village took on tactical importance during the Revolutionary War. During the war, the community saw a skirmish at the bridging of the creek, rebel encampments on the village green, and the burial of soldiers in Saint Peter's cemetery. In the following century, this district of The Bronx retained its rural character even as Westchester Square saw slow, but steady, growth. Estates and farmlands were slowly subdivided and sold off for development, such as the construction of the Van Schaick Free Reading Room in 1883, while the street grid that was platted out on maps began to take shape. This nascent residential neighborhood was characterized by relatively large single-family houses, many of which still survive today. Westchester Village served as the center of government for the Town of Westchester until 1895, when the town was annexed into New York City.

Like other communities in the expanded New York City, Westchester Square was dramatically transformed with the introduction of subway service in 1920. The Interborough Rapid Transit Company's Pelham Line began in the South Bronx and ran above Westchester Avenue as an elevated line. Now the 6 Train, it included a stop on East Tremont Avenue which left the old village green and Saint Peter's Church in its shadow. The accompanying speculative development turned Westchester Square into a dense neighborhood of one- and two-family homes complemented by corridors of shopping and commercial activity. The demographic character of the neighborhood changed as well, with upwardly mobile Irish and Italian immigrants following the newly constructed housing. Westchester Square still hosts an immigrant community, now largely comprised of Latin Americans and South Asians, and boasts a built environment with remarkable reminders of the community's varying stages of development.

I

CITY OF LIGHT

East Tremont Ave. &

Westchester Ave.

(1993, Romare Bearden)



This three-paneled glass installation, also known as a triptych, greets commuters as they ascend the first flight of stairs at the elevated Westchester Square/East Tremont Avenue station. The colored glass vividly portrays a city skyline with a black subway train threading through the buildings. The artist, Romare Bearden, was a social worker in New York City for three decades who produced art in his free time, experimenting with a variety of mediums but primarily known for his collages. His only work in glass, *City of Light* was initially executed as a collage maquette before Bearden submitted his proposal to the MTA in 1983. Although Bearden died in 1988, glass fabricators Benoit Gilsoul and Helmut Schardt faithfully followed the artist's sketches to produce the work that now graces the subway station stairway. This work was funded through the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Percent for Art program, which has competitively selected over 300 artists to produce permanent works throughout the agency's properties since the 1980s.

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

2

WESTCHESTER SQUARE — EAST TREMONT AVENUE PELHAM LINE STATION

East Tremont Ave. & Westchester Ave.

(1920, *Squire J. Vickers*)

NR-P



Completed in 1920 as part of the Dual Contracts subway system expansion, the Westchester Square — East Tremont Avenue station sits on the Interborough Rapid Transit Company's Pelham Line, which stretches from the South Bronx to Pelham Bay Park. Westchester Square had retained the feel of a rural village center until the arrival of the subway, upon which the area rapidly developed into a residential commuter community with a variety of housing stock. A 1916 Public Service Commission report on the plans for the Pelham Line outlines the construction of three ornamental concrete stations, including one at Westchester Square, as well as a fixed bridge spanning The Bronx River and New Haven Railroad right of way. This elevated station consists of a steel frame structure and concrete facade, with a stair tower on the western side decorated with inlays of blue, green and orange ceramic tiles arranged in geometric patterns. Squire Vickers, who designed a majority of stations constructed as part of the Dual Contracts and Independent Subway Systems, was known for his utilitarian spaces complemented by colorful tilework. The interiors of the station mezzanine and stair tower were renovated in 1993 to include new terrazzo floors, ceramic wall tiles, glass block openings and a new stained glass window titled *City of Light* and designed by Romare Bearden.

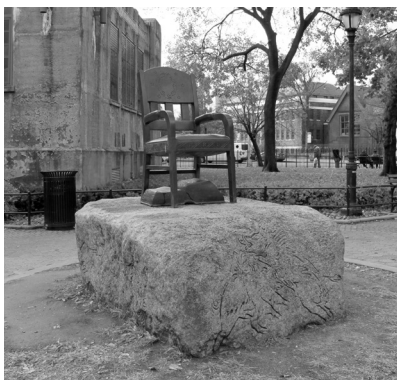
SEAT

3

2551 Westchester Avenue

(Owen F. Dolen Park)

(1987, *David Saunders*)



David Saunders designed this bronze sculpture, sited on a base of engraved Stony Creek granite. Dedicated in 1987, it references 19th century monuments that often featured a seated figure. *Seat* encourages viewers to consider themselves in the chair and is thus a monument to everyone. Beneath the chair rests a dictionary open to a plate depicting the "Common Birds of America", while the granite boulder itself is engraved with imagery of a wild boar with her four piglets on the sides. Commissioned by the Public Art Fund, *Seat* was the winner of the New York City Art Commission's 1985 Excellence in Design Award. David Saunders, a native New Yorker, has completed public sculptures displayed both elsewhere in The Bronx and abroad and has work featured at the Museum of Modern Art and Metropolitan Museum of Art, among others.

4

OWEN DOLEN PARK & RECREATION CENTER

2551 Westchester Avenue

*(Park: 1907; Recreation Center: 1927;**Alterations: 1983, John Ciardullo Associates)*

Acquired by the city through two purchases in 1907 and 1909, this park was known as Westchester Square until 1925, when it was renamed after Owen Dolen, a local educator who died after speaking at the dedication ceremony for the park's World War I monument. Benson Street divided the two parcels of this park until 1993, at which point a portion of the street was closed and replaced with vegetation that expanded the footprint of the park. The recreation center, built in 1927, was initially designed to serve as the park's comfort station before being converted to a branch of the New York Public Library in the 1930s. Designed with elements of the Spanish Revival style, the recreation center consists of a two-story, five-bay central building and two three-bay, one-story wings, all of which are characterized by large round arch windows and entryways. In 1982, the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation hired John Ciardullo Associates to redesign the building for use as the Owen Dolen Golden Age Center, which included a new entryway with a triangular facade built of architectural concrete, as well as ample space for programming serving senior citizens. *Photo courtesy of NYC Municipal Archive.*



5

WORLD WAR I MONUMENT

Lane Avenue & Westchester Square

(1925, John Oakman)

Dedicated in 1925 and relocated to this spot in the early 1940s, this fifteen-foot-high pink granite monument was donated by the “people of Westchester” to honor local residents who served in World War I. This monument takes the form of a pylon: It is rectangular in plan, grounded

on a plinth and tapering in tiers to culminate with a cornice. The memorial carries the inscription: “To perpetuate in grateful remembrance the sacrifice, heroism, and devotion of the men and women of the old town of Westchester who in the World War answered the call of their country that justice and righteousness should not perish.” Along with listing the names of soldiers who died in the war, the monument carries the names of the battles in which they perished, including the Battles of Cambrai, the Somme, and Vittorio Veneto, among others. Owen F. Dolen, a local educator who led the six-year initiative to construct the monument, gave a twenty-five minute speech at its dedication ceremony before suddenly dying of a heart attack minutes later. This monument is one of 103 memorials in New York City parks dedicated to those that served in World War I.

6

“WHITE ELEPHANT” BUILDING

44 Westchester Square
(ca. 1921)



Known locally as “The White Elephant,” this three-story white brick structure stretches the entire length of a prominent block. The monochrome brick is complemented by a striking variety of multicolored glazed terra cotta, including a band above the first floor retail fenestration and diamond patterning that covers the entirety of the facade above the building’s main entrance. Interestingly, the central archway, now occupied by a retail storefront, once opened inward to feature a round arched hallway lined with tilework. Although this structure never served as a theater, one may infer the building’s intended use from the terra-cotta detailing, which includes representations of theatrical masks and instruments. The White Elephant has hosted a variety of tenants over its long history, including cafes, realtors and an office of The Bronx Gas & Electric Company.



7

HARVEST FIELDS COMMUNITY CHURCH (FORMER WYOMING MASONIC TEMPLE)

2626 East Tremont Avenue
(ca. 1912)

This three-bay, three-story building features a limestone facade and pedimented entryway. The building was originally constructed as the Wyoming Masonic Temple to host the local

Wyoming Lodge of the Free & Accepted Masons (“Freemasons”). Legend holds that as a Westchester Lodge already existed, members selected the name “Wyoming” after randomly pulling a bank note issued by the Pennsylvania-based Bank of Wyoming. While the exact date of construction is unknown, the Wyoming Masonic Temple is referenced as a venue for Freemasons as early as 1912. Historic photographs demonstrate that while the Freemasons consistently occupied the upper floors of the building, the ground floor space was rented to a range of tenants over the years. With international roots that stretch back centuries, the Free & Accepted Masons is a fraternal organization that focuses on civic engagement, which is demonstrated by the variety of community events advertised at the Wyoming Masonic Temple over its long history. Of the seven masonic temples that originally served The Bronx, six remain standing. Only the City Island Temple retains its original function, housing the Wyoming Lodge along with the three other lodges currently active in the borough.



8

**P.S. X012 LEWIS AND
CLARKE SCHOOL**
2555 Tratman Avenue
(1966; 1910 Annex)

Although its current home was constructed in 1966, Public School 12's history stretches back to include

at least three buildings in the vicinity of Westchester Square. The first PS 12, replete with a spire-topped tower, was completed in 1886 and stood at the current site of the playground on Frisby Avenue. A later addition to the original structure, built around 1910, was designed in the Renaissance Revival style and still stands as an office annex connected to the four-story, yellow-brick Modern style classroom building, built in 1966. This building was the city's first school building purpose-built for the specialized education of students with behavioral issues. This building is divided into two architectural components: the corner portion, which features minimal fenestration, blank brick walls, and the school entrance; and the classroom wing, with the upper three stories characterized by contrasting bands of windows and panels. Interestingly, one of PS 12's most beloved and longest-serving principals, Dr. John Condon, made headlines in 1932 as the designated intermediary between Charles Lindbergh and the kidnappers of his child.

9

**APPLE BANK FOR
SAVINGS (FORMER
BRONX SAVINGS BANK)**

12 Westchester Square
(ca. 1940, Cross & Cross)



Originally a Federal Revival style building, in 1940 architects Cross & Cross updated the structure to reflect the latest architectural fashion of the time. The architects employed stylized classical elements such as a sawtoothed balustrade and fluted pilasters which flank the entrance in a Streamline Moderne expression. A integral clock adorns the facade, with gemoetric shapes in place of numbers set within carved ribbing. This edifice still features its original name — The Bronx Savings Bank — carved into stone beneath the contemporary Apple Bank for Savings signage that currently exists. A local banking institution, The Bronx Savings Bank operated from 1905 until 1974, which branches throughout The Bronx and Westchester County. Cross & Cross were a prolific firm who designed many distinguished Art Deco skyscrapers such as the General Electric Building, Twenty Exchange Place and 90 Church Street, all in Manhattan.

HUNTINGTON FREE LIBRARY AND READING ROOM

9 Westchester Square

10

(1882-83, *Frederick Clarke Withers*;
Addition, 1890-92, *William Anderson*)

NYC IL



The Huntington Free Library and Reading Room is one of the earliest institutions on Westchester Square and was the first library building in this part of The Bronx. The original building was designed by Frederick Clarke Withers and completed in 1883. Born and educated in England, Withers became known for his Victorian Gothic designs, epitomized by his 1874 Jefferson Market Courthouse in Greenwich Village. Commissioned by the executors of the estate of tobacco merchant Peter C. Van Shaick, who left \$15,000 for the construction of a free reading room for Westchester and in honor of his wife, Anna Mitchell Van Shaick, who died in 1876. The building sat vacant after the town government refused to accept the gift due to its limited endowment. In 1890, Collis Potter Huntington, a railroad magnate with a summer home in nearby Throggs Neck purchased the building, expanded it, and endowed it with funds to cover its operating expenses. The building is entered through an arched doorway set within a one-bay tower, which features a terra cotta plaque and rondels that commemorate Huntington's donation. The library was designated in 1994 as the "Van Shaick Free Reading Room/Huntington Free Library and Reading Room".

SAINT PETER'S CHURCH COMPLEX

2500 Westchester Avenue

II

(Church: 1855, Chapel: 1868, *Leopold Eidlitz*;
Cemetery: ca. 1750s)

NYC IL



Founded in 1693, the parish of Saint Peter's saw its first church completed in 1700 with funds collected through a tax on residents in the towns of Westchester, Eastchester, and Yonkers, along with the manor of Pelham. The Gothic church standing today was completed in 1855, and was designed by Leopold Eidlitz, who had recently completed St. George's Church in Stuyvesant Square, Manhattan. Rough-cut beige stone is utilized throughout the facade, including the archways and frames. Key features include a four-sided spire with clock faces and the entrance steps' marble walls with Gothic carvings. The church's cemetery, which contains graves dating to the 1750's, includes both modest headstones and elaborate tombs and serves as the final resting place of soldiers killed during the Revolutionary War. The Chapel was also designed by Eidlitz following the same Gothic style, and was completed in 1868. It has served as the home of The Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance (BAAD!) since 2013. For more information on BAAD!, see HDC's 2018 *Cultural Landmarks* guidebook.

12

FERRIS FAMILY BURIAL PLOT

Commerce Avenue
(In use: 1700s - 1914)

John Ferris, one of the five original recipients of the 1667 patent for the Township of Westchester, included provisions for a family burial ground in his 1717 will. The Ferris family used and maintained the cemetery for almost another two centuries until Charles Ferris passed away in 1908, leaving two vaults and around thirty gravestones to decay in an increasingly industrial setting. In 1928, the Benjamin Ferris family vault was vandalized and desecrated, prompting reinterment of almost half the bodies to Kenisco Cemetery in Westchester County. Through the ensuing decades, the cemetery has seen both periodic neglect and restoration, including the installation of a new fence in the early 2000s. Notable members of the Ferris family include James Ferris, who survived a stay on a British prison ship during the Revolutionary War and his wife, Charity Ferris, who purportedly housed British Admiral Richard Howe and transmitted strategically significant conversations to General George Washington. Whereas much of the Westchester Square was once farmlands of the Ferris family, nearby Ferris Place is the only surviving reminder in The Bronx of one of the borough's earliest settlers.

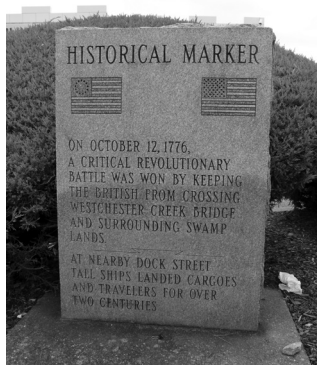


13

DOCK STREET HISTORICAL MARKER

2900 East Tremont Avenue

This marker notes the spot of a small, but important battle of the New York campaign of the Revolutionary War that occurred on October 12, 1776. After taking control of Lower Manhattan but failing to dislodge General George Washington and his troops from Harlem, British General William Howe (brother of British Admiral Richard Howe) sought to flank the Americans by landing at Throgs Neck, which was virtually an island, utilizing a bridge over the Westchester Creek. Near the point at which East Tremont Avenue currently spans the now-submerged creek, a group of Americans repelled Howe's advance over the bridge, providing time for Washington to begin his retreat from Upper Manhattan towards White Plains. The northern reaches of the Westchester Creek were buried over time so that the stream now emerges south of the Lehman High School football field. Starting in the Dutch period, Dock Street, which now serves as a driveway for businesses on Ferris Place, was the point of disembarkation for ships approaching the village via Westchester Creek. Although the creek sees much less maritime traffic than in years past, a marina, constructed in 1957, provides recreational boaters with slips amidst the otherwise industrial environs of the canal.



I4

HERBERT LEHMAN HIGH SCHOOL

3000 East Tremont Avenue

(1972, *Eggers and Higgins*)



Straddling the Hutchinson River Parkway, this large public high school was designed by the firm of Eggers & Higgins as a creative response to a lack of adequate land and site constraints. The main academic building, rectangular in plan, is linked to the circular 1,000-seat auditorium by a three-story classroom wing that occupies the air rights above the parkway. The school is situated at the head of the once bustling Westchester Creek, which still sees some traffic in the form of houseboats and oil barges. Designed for a student body of 1,700, Lehman High was initially plagued by racial tension as the school's population included students from white, Black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods. The school is aptly named after Herbert Lehman (1878-1963), who served as both a United States Senator and Governor of New York and was a tireless advocate for social programs and civil rights. Eggers & Higgins, a long-lasting firm comprised of partners Otto Eggers and Daniel Higgins, was involved in a variety of designs ranging from New York University's redevelopment of the Washington Square Park area to Lincoln Center's Guggenheim Bandshell.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF THROGGS NECK

I5

3051 East Tremont Avenue

(ca. 1880)



This prominently sited brick church, designed in the High Victorian Gothic style, boasts a distinct steeple that can be seen from blocks away. Notably, Crow Hill, on which the church sits, was the site to which General William Howe and his troops retreated after being repulsed by American forces as they attempted to cross Westchester Creek. The use of polychromatic materials, such as the contrasting white stone trim and red brick, as well as the incorporation of banded arches into the facade, is emblematic of High Victorian Gothic architecture. The First Presbyterian Church of Throggs Neck was organized in the 1850s, and during the Civil War, church parishioners offered bowls of soup to soldiers passing through Throggs Neck via train so that they would not be tempted to visit nearby taverns. The congregation's first structure burned down in 1870, and the date of current church is unknown, although some estimates date it to around 1880.

