



**SIX**  
TO CELEBRATE



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL



A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

# VICTORIAN FLATBUSH

## BROOKLYN





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.

*Six to Celebrate is generously supported by The New York Community Trust.*

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## A BRIEF HISTORY

Established as a Dutch farming village in 1652, Vlacke Bos, meaning “flat woodland” in Dutch, was later Anglicized to Flatbush. Around the time that it became part of the city of Brooklyn in 1894, Flatbush began its transformation into a residential suburb. Real estate development in Flatbush was spurred in large part by the arrival in 1878 of the Brooklyn, Flatbush and Coney Island Railroad (now the Brighton Beach line) and the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883. These infrastructure advances made it possible for residents to commute to downtown Brooklyn and Manhattan for work.

Flatbush was subdivided into several neighborhoods with distinct names at the turn of the 20th century. These residential enclaves were developed between the 1890s and 1920, with house prices ranging from roughly \$3,000 to \$13,000. The most elite was Prospect Park South, which was established by developer Dean Alvord. Alvord envisioned a “garden within the city,” eschewing the rowhouse trend that was popular throughout Brooklyn. To ensure this aesthetic was achieved, the infrastructure and landscaping were laid out prior to the sale of the lots. Alvord required that fences and plantings not extend beyond the house lines in order to create a unified sweep of front yards. The streets were given British names, such as Buckingham and Westminster, to further evoke the country ideal that had its roots in the English country house and that was experiencing a surge in popularity throughout America. Instead of street signs, Alvord installed masonry gateposts engraved with the street names.

Today, Victorian Flatbush is comprised of 11 neighborhoods that were all developed with the suburban country aesthetic as inspiration, which is still evident in the layout of the streetscapes with their yards, freestanding homes, and in some places planted street medians. While the houses were all constructed around the same time, their ornamental details were carefully selected to distinguish each from the other. Today this group of neighborhoods makes up one of the largest collections of Victorian-era wood-frame residential architecture in the country, though only roughly half are legally protected by the city as historic landmarks. The area’s five historic districts are Albemarle-Kenmore Terraces, Prospect Park South, Ditmas Park, Midwood Park and Fiske Terrace. Due to the neighborhoods’ common attributes and shared sense of place, local residents and advocates are keen to “complete the quilt” of historic district designation and include Caton Park, Beverley Square West, Beverley Square East, Ditmas Park West, West Midwood and South Midwood.

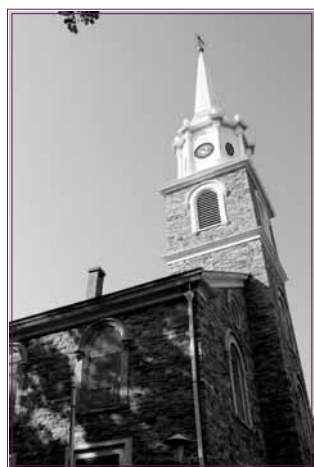
Hidden within this tapestry of grand turn-of-the-century homes are glimpses of Flatbush’s more distant past. At the northern end is the Flatbush Dutch Reformed Church, which has its roots in the earliest settlement of the area, and at the southern end stands a farmhouse dating to before the Civil War, when Flatbush was still farmland. These reminders of 18th- and 19th-century Flatbush lend the neighborhood a rich and multi-dimensional context to an otherwise largely monochrome landscape.

## I. BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY, FLATBUSH BRANCH

22 Linden Boulevard

R. L. Daus, 1905

To serve the new residents of Flatbush, a Brooklyn Public Library branch was constructed with funds from steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, who donated many branches throughout the city. The original structure, which had vaulted reading rooms lit by skylights, underwent major changes in 1937, including the addition of east and west wings, a vestibule and a new moderne façade by the Brooklyn Public Works with Works Progress Administration funds.



## 2. FLATBUSH DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

890 Flatbush Avenue

2a. Church: Thomas Fardon, 1793–98

*New York City Individual Landmark*

2b. Parsonage: Unknown architect, 1853

2c. Church House: Meyer & Mathieu, 1924

*New York City Individual Landmark*

*State and National Registers of Historic Places*

This church, which has held services here since 1654, was one of three churches established by a mandate from Governor Peter Stuyvesant. The current building, though it was completed in 1798 and is one of the oldest structures in Flatbush, is the church's third structure. It contains classic elements of the Georgian style popular in early America, including a white octagonal spire and belfry adorned with Tuscan colonnettes and urns. Its façades are made of Manhattan schist and are punctuated with arched windows. The Tiffany stained glass windows were installed in 1889 to commemorate the descendants of some of Flatbush's early Dutch settlers. Some of the gravestones in the cemetery also bear the names of prominent Flatbush families, including Ditmas, Gerritsen, Livingston, Lefferts, Martense, Van Sieten and Vanderveer.



mas, Gerritsen, Livingston, Lefferts, Martense, Van Sieten and Vanderveer.

### 3. ERASMUS HALL MUSEUM and ERASMUS HALL HIGH SCHOOL 911 Flatbush Avenue

3a. Museum: Unknown architect,  
1786, *New York City Individual Landmark*

3b. High School: Charles B. J.

Snyder, 1902–25, *State and National  
Registers of Historic Places*

Erasmus Hall Museum, which is slated to be re-stored and converted into the Caribbean American Chamber of Commerce and Industry, was originally Erasmus Hall Academy, a private school founded in 1786 by the Flatbush Dutch Reformed Church across the street. The inner quadrangle of Erasmus Hall High School contains the Academy's original Georgian-Federal style frame building with hand-carved beams and clapboards. Also in the quadrangle is a statue of the Dutch Renaissance philosopher Desiderius Erasmus, the school's namesake. Prior to the Academy's construction, for which both Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr contributed funds, the site was home to a Dutch public school erected in 1658. The later school buildings were designed in the Collegiate Gothic style and are made of buff brick, limestone and terra cotta. Notable alumni include Barbara Stanwyck, Mickey Spillane, Bobby Fischer, Samuel LeFrack, Clive Davis and Barbra Streisand.



### 4. FLATBUSH TOWN HALL

35 Snyder Avenue

John Y. Culyer, 1874–5

Currently functioning as a public school, this building has served many purposes since its construction in 1875. Built as the Flatbush Town Hall after residents defeated an early proposal to become part of the city of Brooklyn, it has been preserved over the years as a community center and police precinct, among other things. Its fanciful tower, mansard roofs and iron cresting lend grace and charm to this part of Flatbush.



## 5. ALBEMARLE and KENMORE TERRACES

Slee & Bryson, 1916–20

*New York City Historic District*

*State and National Registers of Historic Places*

Designed by the same architectural firm, the houses on Kenmore Terrace (not pictured) were built in the English Arts and Crafts Revival style, while those on Albemarle Terrace are Georgian Revival brick houses with bay windows, entry porches and slate tile mansard roofs.



## 6. CATON PARK

John C. Sawkins, Edward R. Strong and  
William A. A. Brown, 1902–09

Caton Park consists of about 50 large frame houses located in a small area three blocks wide and one block long. Constructed by three different developers, Caton Park benefits from its northerly neighbor, the Prospect Park Parade Grounds, which give the neighborhood an even more bucolic and suburban-like setting.

## 7. HOUSES ON BUCKINGHAM ROAD BETWEEN ALBEMARLE ROAD AND CATON AVENUE

Prospect Park South

100: Arthur Harmon, 1908

104: Carroll H. Pratt, 1902

115: John J. Petit, 1900

125: Brun & Hauser, 1911

131: Petit & Green, 1903

143: Walter S. Cassin, 1906

*New York City Historic District*

*State and National Registers of Historic Places*

There are many eclectic houses on these two blocks, including number 100, which was built in the Renaissance Revival style by Arthur Harmon, whose firm would later design the Empire



State Building. Number 104 was designed in a Classical Revival style, with a grand columned entry porch, pilasters and painted shingles. Like number 100, number 115 (not pictured) also has a claim to fame. It is the one-time home of M. G. Gillette, of Gillette razors. The Shingle style house's most prominent features are its gambrel roof and bell-shaped tower. Built as a show-piece for the Prospect Park South development, number 131 incorporated elements of Japanese design, taking advantage of the late-19th-century rage for all things "Oriental." Also notable are numbers 125 (not pictured) and 143. The former was designed in a mix of Renaissance and Classical Revival styles, and the latter evokes an Italian villa with a tower overlooking the neighborhood.



## 8. TEMPLE BETH EMETH

83 Marlborough Road

Prospect Park South

S. B. Eisendrath & B. Horowitz, 1913–14

*State and National Registers of Historic Places*

In 1908, the few Jewish residents of Flatbush at the time formed the congregation of Temple Beth Emeth and constructed this Classical Revival style building several years later. The rounded building features red brick with cast-stone trim, arched window openings and a Corinthian-columned entry porch.

## 9. HOUSES ON RUGBY ROAD BETWEEN CHURCH AVENUE AND ALBEMARLE ROAD

Prospect Park South

94: John J. Petit, 1907

100: John J. Petit, 1900

101: John E. Nitchie, 1900

*New York City Historic District*

*State and National Registers of Historic Places*

Dean Alvord developed Prospect Park South with homes of nearly uniform size and layout, but achieved variety through the use of often whimsical details. This block contains houses that showcase this concept to great effect, including number 94 in the style of a Spanish Mission and number 100 evoking a Swiss chalet, both on the west side of the road. Across



the street, the Shingle Style house at number 101 became famous for its role as a boarding house in the 1982 film “Sophie’s Choice,” starring Meryl Streep and Kevin Kline.



## 10. WESTMINSTER ROAD SOUTH OF BEVERLEY ROAD

### Beverly Square West

**T. B. Ackerson, 1901**

After purchasing and developing the small plot that he named Beverly Square East, T. B. Ackerson then purchased an adjoining farm to create the Beverly Square West neighborhood. While the homes he constructed here also featured many of the same architectural elements, including Palladian windows and grand columns, Beverly Square West was built with the intention that no two houses be exactly alike.



## 11. 242, 305, 312 RUGBY ROAD Beverly Square West

**T. B. Ackerson, ca. 1900**

Number 242 was designed in the Shingle Style with arched porch openings and a polygonal onion-shaped tower. Number 305 was built for a female member of the Guggenheim family, and number 312 (not pictured) was once the home of composer and film producer Arthur Schwartz, who was

famous for his Broadway and film music of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.





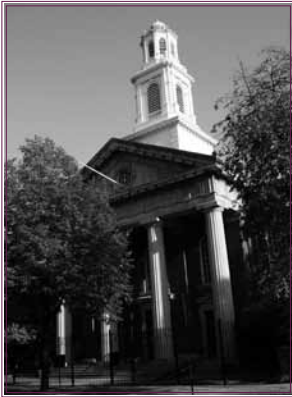
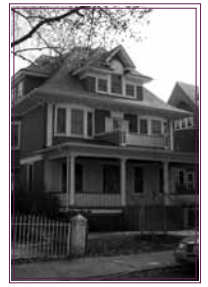
## 12. HOMES ON EAST 19TH STREET BETWEEN BEVERLEY AND CORTELYOU ROADS

**Beverly Square East**

**T. B. Ackerson, 1898–1901**

Beverly Square East's first properties were developed by Thomas Benton Ackerson in 1898 along East 19th Street. The houses were well-appointed, with interior wooden moldings and silk wallpaper, as well as such modern amenities as steam heat and electricity. Particularly extravagant examples of Ackerson's original development are numbers

217, 223 (not pictured) and 247. Number 257 served as Ackerson's "model home" in sales brochures and advertisements and nearly 100 years later played a role in Spike Lee's 1992 film "Malcolm X."



## 13. FLATBUSH TOMPKINS CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH COMPLEX

**East 18th Street at Dorchester Road  
Ditmas Park**

**Church: Allens & Collins, 1910**

**Parish house: Whitfield & King, 1899**

*New York City Historic District*

The neo-Georgian church, designed by the same firm responsible for the Union Theological Seminary and Riverside Church in Morningside Heights, features a Greek Revival temple front and tower. The earlier parish house was designed in the Shingle Style and its polygonal rounded body has 16 sides.

## 14. 445 AND 456 EAST 19TH STREET Ditmas Park

445: Foster & Gallimore, 1931

456: Arne Delhi, 1910

*New York City Historic District*

*State and National Registers of Historic Places*

These two houses stand across the street from one another. On the east side, number 445 (not pictured) was designed to emulate an English cottage and features multi-colored rough-cut brick, a steeply pitched roof with slate tiles and a large fanciful brick chimney. Number 456 was designed by a Norwegian architect in the Spanish Mission style, but its eclectic contribution to the streetscape also includes a pediment suggesting a Dutch influence.



## 15. 1320 DITMAS AVENUE Ditmas Park West, ca. 1920

The eclectic mix of homes in Ditmas Park West is the work of multiple builders who purchased lots from Lewis Pounds (who would later become Brooklyn Borough President) beginning in 1903. This neo-Tudor house is particularly notable because it is rumored to have been the home of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, film stars of the 1920s and 1930s.

## 16. NEWKIRK PLAZA, 1907

The oldest purpose-built outdoor shopping plaza in America, Newkirk Plaza is home to some of the area's longest-standing businesses, including Leon's Barber Shop, which has been in operation for roughly 100 years. Below the plaza is the Brighton subway line, which was "sunk" below street level in 1917. Turning north up East 16th Street, the block between Newkirk and Ditmas Avenues is home to a group of 13 bungalows constructed in 1908–09 after designs by Arlington Isham.



## 17. 527 EAST 23RD STREET

### South Midwood

Unknown architect, ca. 1866

South Midwood was developed by the Germania Real Estate and Improvement Company and its homes were largely designed by Benjamin Driesler in 1899–1908. Number 527 predates the neighborhood's development by several decades, as it is believed to have been built in the 1860s. The farmhouse, which was moved from its original location

somewhere near the present-day Regent Place and modernized around 1910, was the home of Henry Lyles Jr., a sperm whale oil dealer and president of both the Flatbush Gas Works and the Bowery Savings Bank. Though it has undergone some major renovations over the years, the house stands as a reminder of what came before the grand Victorians.



## 18. HOMES ALONG WESTMINSTER AND ARGYLE ROADS BETWEEN GLENWOOD ROAD AND AVENUE H

### West Midwood

T. B. Ackerson, 1905–08

Developed by the Germania Real Estate and Improvement Company, the neighborhood of West Midwood was developed in a more methodical way

than some of the others. Though still architecturally grand and of a high quality, the houses were mass-produced to take advantage of successful real estate operations in the area.

## 19. MIDWOOD PARK and FISKE TERRACE

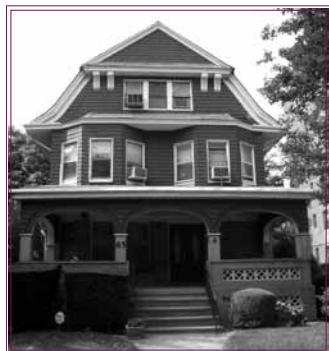
MP: John Corbin,  
1906–10

FT: T. B. Ackerson,  
1905–07

*New York City Historic District*

Midwood Park and Fiske Terrace are graced with beautiful landscaping, including medians along Glenwood Road and East 17th Street, and street name gateposts at the entrance to each block.

One of Fiske Terrace's highlights is the Avenue H subway station at East 19th Street (19a), an individual landmark which opened in 1878 as an excursion line to Brighton Beach as part of the city's steam-powered rail system. The station was recently restored.



# VICTORIAN FLATBUSH

