



SIX
TO CELEBRATE



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL



A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

BAY RIDGE

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.

Additional support for Six to Celebrate is provided by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature and by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and New York City Councilmembers Margaret Chin, Inez Dickens, Daniel Garodnick, Vincent Gentile, Stephen Levin and Rosie Mendez.



232 East 11th Street, New York, NY 10003

tel 212-614-9107 fax 212-614-9127

e-mail hdc@hdc.org

www.hdc.org

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A BRIEF HISTORY

Purchased by the Dutch East India Company from the Nyack Native Americans in 1652, this area was originally called Yellow Hook after the yellow clay found in the soil. Recurring yellow fever epidemics in the mid 19th century caused the name to lose favor and it was changed to Bay Ridge in 1853—a nod to its location by the bay and the terminal moraine created by receding glaciers thousands of years ago along what is now Ridge Boulevard. During the Revolutionary War, British troops utilized Bay Ridge's Denyse Ferry Wharf for their landing on August 22, 1776 to fight the Battle of Brooklyn a few days later, and for their evacuation at the end of the war in 1783. Built by a Dutch landowner who ran a ferry to Staten Island, remnants of the landing still stand today just south of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge overpass.

After the Civil War, the magnificent views overlooking the bay inspired the construction of extravagant mansions, which transformed the neighborhood into one of Brooklyn's wealthiest suburbs by the end of the 19th century. Shore Road, which makes up the westernmost point of Brooklyn and profits from the best views, was particularly exclusive. On the current site of Fort Hamilton High School stood the Crescent Athletic Club, the center of Brooklyn's fashionable society at the turn of the century. Completed in 1892, it featured athletic fields, tennis courts, a golf course, boathouse and magnificent Shingle Style clubhouse with a glass-enclosed dining room overlooking the bay. Visitors included Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, and aviators Wilbur and Orville Wright.

Due to the arrival of the 4th Avenue subway in 1916, the population of Bay Ridge doubled between 1910 and 1924. To accommodate this growth, many mansions were replaced with apartment houses and rowhouses. Commercial thoroughfares on 86th Street, 3rd Avenue, 4th Avenue and 5th Avenue transformed the neighborhood into a thriving urban community. In the early 19th century, the population was largely made up of Scandinavians and Italians. Over the years, Bay Ridge has also become home to Irish, Greek, Arab, Chinese and Russian communities, as well, rendering it a fantastic example of a New York City neighborhood that thrives on its diversity of cultures in close proximity.

Today, the richly varied architecture of Bay Ridge tells its story, with vibrant commercial districts, uniform rowhouse blocks, historic wood frame farmhouses, Victorian mansions, magnificent places of worship, pre-war apartment buildings and quaint cul-de-sacs. It also benefits from scenic parks, including Owl's Head Park and the Narrows Botanical Garden at the northwestern tip of the neighborhood, and in its southeast corner, Fort Hamilton, New York City's only active military base. Named after Alexander Hamilton, the fort functions as a military induction center and is home to more than 1,500 military personnel. In 1990, the Bay Ridge Conservancy was established to preserve, protect and enhance the area's built and natural environments. Their recent work includes the beautification of 3rd Avenue, as well as seeking local landmark designations for public buildings, State & National Register of Historic Places listings for its cul-de-sac blocks, a National Scenic Byways designation for Shore Road and advocating for the responsible renovation of the Belt Parkway, constructed in 1940.

I. SENATOR STREET BETWEEN 3RD AND 4TH AVENUES

Fred W. Eisenla, 1906–12

State and National Registers of Historic Places

One of the only brownstone blocks in Bay Ridge, this stretch of Senator Street has 40 rowhouses making up a National Register of Historic Places Historic District: numbers 317–347 on the north side and numbers 318–370 on the south side. The neo-Renaissance style houses feature carved panels, rosettes, pilasters and lion's heads on the railings, as well as entry columns with unique capitals to differentiate each house. The street was named for Senator Henry Cruse Murphy, whose estate was nearby (see #3).



2. MADELINE COURT

68th Street between Ridge Boulevard and 3rd Avenue, ca. 1940s

Bay Ridge contains many cul-de-sac blocks developed to achieve small private enclaves. A particularly beautiful example is Madeline Court, whose adjoining houses are made of red brick and contain half-timbering details and slate tile roofs. Sloped brick gates with pitched-roof pillars form the entry into the court.



3. OWL'S HEAD PARK

Colonial to Shore Roads, between 68th Street and the Belt Parkway

Before Owl's Head Park, this property was the estate of Henry Cruse Murphy, Mayor of Brooklyn, U.S. Congressman, New York State Senator and founder of *The Brooklyn Eagle*. In 1866, he met other politicians here to formulate the agreement for the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge. In that same

year, he sold the estate to Eliphalet W. Bliss, a wealthy pressed metal manufacturer. Bliss constructed stables and an observatory tower, and upon his death in 1903, willed the estate to the city for use as a park. Locally the park is still referred to as Bliss Park. Its buildings were left to deteriorate and were all demolished before 1940. In 1994, the park was restored and an equestrian-themed playground was installed on the site of the stables.

4. AMERICAN VETERANS MEMORIAL PIER

Bay Ridge Avenue (69th Street) at
Shore Road

9/11 Memorial: Robert Ressler,
2005

This 600-foot pier once served as the embarkation point for the Bay Ridge–St. George ferry. After the completion of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, it was opened for recreational use due to its stunning views. Because the pier once boasted unobstructed views of the World Trade Center, a 9/11 memorial was placed on the pier in 2005.



5. NARROWS BOTANICAL GARDEN

Shore Road between Bay Ridge
Avenue and 72nd Street

The botanical garden began as a volunteer project in 1995 and features a variety of plant species, a lily pond, a butterfly garden, a Zen garden and a Native Plant Garden with a turtle sanctuary at its north end, which may only be visited by appointment or during special events.

6. BARKALOO CEMETERY

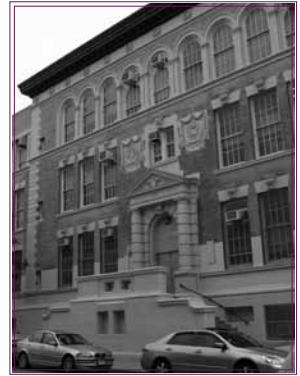
Narrows Avenue and Mackay Place,
founded 1725

Founded by Dutch immigrant William Harmans Barkaloo, this is Brooklyn's smallest cemetery and its only family plot that is not part of a larger cemetery. Several Revolutionary War veterans were buried here, according to a 1962 plaque on the entry gate. Its most recent burial was in 1848.



**7. PUBLIC SCHOOL 102,
THE BAY VIEW SCHOOL
211 72nd Street, 1904**

Designed in the Italian neo-Renaissance style of brick and limestone, P.S. 102's architectural gem is its 71st Street façade, whose decorative details include a dentilled cornice, wreath medallions, bracket lintels, arched windows and an arched doorway with columns and a triangular pediment. This site was previously home to the Bay Ridge District School No. 2, a red frame Queen Anne style schoolhouse built in 1883.



**8. FLAGG COURT
7200 Ridge Boulevard
Ernest Flagg, 1933–36**

This 422-unit, six-building complex contained architectural features that were avant-garde for its time, including reversible fans below the windows and exterior window shades, both now removed, as well as innovative uses of concrete as finished ceilings and for a vaulted auditorium. Its most pronounced exterior feature is the pendant Carpenter Gothic cornice at the eighth floor. The complex was socially innovative, as well, as it included a tea room, auditorium, swimming pool, bowling alley, tennis and handball courts, and a nursery school to allow the building's mothers three hours of daily free time.



**9. CHRIST CHURCH BAY RIDGE
7301 Ridge Boulevard
Ralph Adams Cram & Bertram
Goodhue, 1908–10**

Parish house: Cram & Goodhue, 1917

The congregation of Christ Church was established in 1851 at 67th Street and 3rd Avenue, but later moved to its current location at 75th Street and 4th Avenue. The Gothic Revival building was



donated by Eliphalet W. Bliss, who also donated his estate for the future Owl's Head Park. The old building, whose wood frame was stuccoed in the 1960s, was purchased by the congregation of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, which still operates there.

10. THE BAY RIDGE THEATRE

7120 3rd Avenue

Robert T. Rasmussen, 1915

Bay Ridge once had many theaters, but like most of the others, the Bay Ridge Theatre ceased to function as a theater in the early 1960s. The building, however, has retained much of its ornament, including arched windows, fluted pilasters, and the theater's name carved below the dentilled cornice.

Hubert Selby Jr., author of *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, grew up across the street and set one of his short stories in the Bay Ridge Theater.



11. 122 76TH STREET, ca. 1900

131 76TH STREET, ca. 1865 and
76TH STREET STAIRS

Perched along the ridge, these two houses are located at a traffic dead end, but pedestrians may continue to Colonial Road via a 61-step “stair street.” Number 122 is a Gothic Revival mansion originally owned by Dr. Fredric E. Elliot, founder of the Blue Cross. Number 131 is a neo-Georgian mansion that features a grand semi-circular porch with white Composite columns.

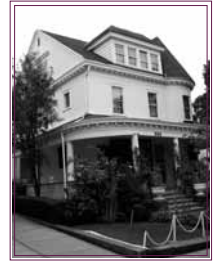
12. 75TH STREET BETWEEN 4TH AVENUE AND 5TH AVENUE, ca. 1899–1910

Known colloquially as “Doctor’s Row” for the medical offices at the street level, this street is a magnificent example of the neighborhood’s limestone rowhouse typology. Many blocks in Bay Ridge feature limestone due to its popularity at the turn of the 20th century. The houses on the south side are particularly graceful, with detailed carvings and gas lamps.



13. 81ST AND 82ND STREETS BETWEEN 3RD AVENUE AND COLONIAL ROAD, ca. late 19th century

81st and 82nd Streets have many late-19th-century mansions. Particularly notable on 81st Street are the Shingle style homes at numbers 163 and 175, which were constructed circa 1880 and feature conical towers, stepped gables, round-cut shingles and brick masonry. 82nd Street has many intact Victorians, including numbers 205, 217, 234, 247 and 254.



14. HARBOR VIEW TERRACE HARBOR LANE AND COLONIAL COURT, ca. early 20th century

This street and its two side cul-de-sacs form an enclave of suburban-like neo-Tudor and neo-Colonial homes with manicured lawns and plane trees lining the streets. Harbor Lane was originally called Crescent Court after the Crescent Athletic Club, which comprised several grand buildings and athletic facilities. The site is now home to Shore Road Park and Fort Hamilton High School, constructed in 1941.



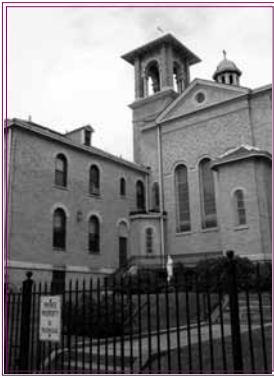
15. HOWARD E. & JESSIE JONES HOUSE

8200 Narrows Avenue

J. Sarsfield Kennedy, 1916–17

New York City Individual Landmark

Known to locals as the “Gingerbread House,” this is one of the city’s most fanciful examples of the Arts and Crafts movement. Its architect later designed the Picnic House in Prospect Park. Built for shipping magnate Howard E. Jones, the house features rustic boulders and a simulated thatch roof that lend it a distinctive country aesthetic described in the AIA Guide to New York City as “Black Forest Art Nouveau.”



16. VISITATION ACADEMY

8902 Ridge Boulevard, 1913

This private girls’ school was designed in the Italian neo-Renaissance style. The beige brick chapel features circular windows on its upper stories, triangular gables, a square tower with an arcaded belfry and decorative cruciform brickwork on its south façade. The entire complex is surrounded by a 20-foot stone and concrete wall. The site was previously home to the Kings County Inebriate Asylum and a natural glacier lake exists on the grounds.

17. BENNET /FARRELL/FELDMANN HOUSE

119 95th Street

Unknown architect, ca. 1847

New York City Individual Landmark

Built for Joseph S. Bennet, this house was one of three constructed in the 1840s for the Bennet family, who lived in the area since the mid 18th century. From 1890 to 1912, the house was occupied by James F. Farrell, a Tammany Hall politician and wool merchant. The structure was originally located on Shore Road, but was moved to its present location when it was purchased by Francis C. Feldmann in 1913. The frame structure features a Tuscan-columned porch and green shutters. It is the oldest house in Bay Ridge and one of the oldest free-standing Greek Revival houses in Brooklyn.



18. JOHNSON HOUSE/SHELL MANSION/FONTBONNE HALL 9901 Shore Road

McNally Brothers, ca. 1890

Originally the home of Tom L. Johnson, a three-term mayor of Cleveland, Ohio, the property is rumored to have belonged to actress Lillian Russell and “Diamond Jim” Brady in the 1920s. During Prohibition, the house was also rumored to have been used as a casino and speakeasy. Purchased by the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1937, it became Fontbonne Hall Academy, a private girls’ Catholic school.



19. JOHN PAUL JONES/ CANNONBALL PARK

Dover Patrol Monument: Sir Aston Webb, 1931

This site is steeped in military history, beginning in 1776 when it served as the launching point for the British when they mounted their Battle of Brooklyn campaign, which is commemorated on a plaque in the park. A few decades later, Fort Lewis was constructed here to protect the city during the War of 1812. In 1825–31, Fort Lewis was replaced with Fort Hamilton, which played a significant role in quelling the Civil War draft riots of 1863 and was a major embarkation point for troops going to fight in both World Wars. Fort Hamilton still exists today, and though this park was once part of the fort, its boundaries are just east of here. Today the site is named for Revolutionary War hero John Paul Jones, but is also referred to as Cannonball Park after the Rodman gun displayed here. The Rodman gun, a 116,000-pound cannon designed for Civil War use, was tested at Fort Hamilton but proved unsuitable and has remained a fixture here ever since. Also in the park is the Dover Patrol Monument, a granite obelisk commemorating U.S. Navy service in World War I.

20. VERRAZANO-NARROWS BRIDGE

Othmar Ammann, 1964

From John Paul Jones Park, cross Shore Road and walk along the entrance to the Belt Parkway for a good view of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. The bridge’s engineer designed seven other bridges around New York City, including the George



Washington and Whitestone Bridges. The bridge was highly contested during the planning phase, as many homes had to be razed. Upon completion, it was the world's longest suspension bridge and has become a symbol of Bay Ridge thanks to iconic views looking south down the neighborhood's avenues.

21. ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

**9818 Fort Hamilton Parkway
Church: 1890**

Rectory: 1910

St. John's Episcopal Church, originally Church of the Generals, was founded in 1834 and built by soldiers from Fort Hamilton. Numerous military leaders worshipped here, including Robert E. Lee, a vestryman from 1842 to 1844, and Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, a parishioner from 1848 to 1850 after he fought in the Mexican War. This small country church has a frame structure with details painted red, white and gold, and features a rustic stone base and a slate roof.



22. FORT HAMILTON BRANCH LIBRARY

**9424 4th Avenue
Lord & Hewlett, 1906**

The Fort Hamilton Branch of the Brooklyn Public Library began as a small book collection donated by Mrs. Gelston of Shore Road in the 1890s. Thanks to a gift from steel magnate Andrew Carnegie in 1901, the library was expanded and this modest building was constructed. Recently restored, the building is clad in red brick with horizontal black brick courses and features a dentilled cornice and limestone window sills and doorway surround.

BAY RIDGE

