



## NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Robert B. Tierney  
Chairman

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### COMMISSION RECOGNIZES BLACK HISTORY MONTH WITH THE DESIGNATIONS OF THE ADDISLEIGH PARK HISTORIC DISTRICT IN QUEENS AND FOUR LANDMARKS IN STATEN ISLAND'S SANDY GROUND SECTION, SETTLED BY FREED AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

*Picturesque St. Albans Residential Neighborhood Chosen for Role as Home to Dozens of Prominent African Americans Including Some of the World's Greatest Jazz Musicians*

*Highly Intact AME Zion Church and Three Houses Recall Sandy Ground's Remarkable Past*

The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission today unanimously approved the designations of the Addisleigh Park Historic District in Queens and the Rossville AME Zion Church and three modest houses in the Sandy Ground section of Staten Island as landmarks.



"Addisleigh Park and Sandy Ground attracted generations of African Americans who influenced the cultural and economic development and history not only of New York City, but also the nation," said Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney. "Their contributions were so significant that we thought it was fitting to honor them with these votes at the start of Black History Month."

Addisleigh Park encompasses 422 houses in the St. Albans section of Queens that were initially sold only to whites. Still, dozens of prominent African Americans, including Fats Waller, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Jackie Robinson, Joe Louis and W.E.B. and Shirley Graham DuBois, moved to the neighborhood in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The restrictions that attempted to bar blacks from owning homes there and elsewhere in the country eventually were struck down in a 1948 U.S. Supreme Court decision.

Addisleigh Park is Queens' 10<sup>th</sup> historic district, and its designation brings to 118 the total number of historic districts and extensions citywide. Since 2003, the Commission has approved the designations of 23 historic districts, 16 of which are located in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island.

Sandy Ground, located near the center of the southern part of Staten Island, is one of the earliest surviving African-American communities in New York City. Early settlers who purchased property there in 1828 were joined in the 1840s by freed African Americans from Maryland who moved to the area, also known as Little Africa or Woodrow, to work in the then thriving Staten Island oyster business. The four sites that were given landmark status are: the **Rossville AME Zion Church** (c.1908 photo, at right), at 584 Bloomingdale Road; the **Coleman House** at 1482 Woodrow Road and a pair of vernacular frame cottages at **565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road**.



In other business, the Commission held a public hearing on a proposal to designate the first and second floor interiors of the former **Manufacturers Hanover Trust Building** at 510 Fifth Avenue, between 42<sup>nd</sup> and 43<sup>rd</sup> Streets. The exterior of the Modernist building, designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, was named a landmark in 1997.

Below are descriptions of designated sites:

### **Addisleigh Park Historic District**



Located in the St. Albans section of south Queens, the triangular-shaped district consists of 422 single-family residences and the 11-acre St. Albans Park. It's bordered by Sayres Avenue to the north, Linden Boulevard to the south, Merrick Boulevard to the east and 180<sup>th</sup> Street to the west.

Edwin H. Brown, a Manhattan patent lawyer, purchased the land for the neighborhood in 1892 and planned it according the principles of the English garden suburb movement, carving out wide streets and lots with 20-to-30 foot setbacks for freestanding houses designed in romantic revival styles and set amid a rich landscape.

Most of the homes in the district were built between the 1910s and 1930s in the Colonial Revival, English Tudor Revival and Arts and Crafts styles. Constructed of stucco, brick, wood and stone, the buildings were constructed by several different developers, but are similar to each other in terms of scale and size.

The developers initially limited the sale of the houses to whites, and restrictive covenants were introduced by some Addisleigh Park homeowners that attempted to bar the sale of property to African Americans. These restrictions, which were eventually struck down as part of a 1948 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Shelley v. Kraemer*, did not deter African Americans from purchasing property in Addisleigh Park. One of the first was Thomas W. "Fats" Waller, the famed pianist and composer, who lived at 173-19 Sayers Ave. from 1940 to 1943.

About 48 African American families, including the renowned jazz pianist **William "Count" Basie** (174-27 Adelaide Road, above) and the singer and actress **Lena Horne** (112-45 178th St.) were living there by 1946. In some cases, the covenants were circumvented by third-party sales, or simply ignored.

Other influential African Americans who lived there included soul singer **James Brown** (175-19 Linden Boulevard), celebrated jazz vocalist **Ella Fitzgerald** (179-07 Murdock Avenue); **Milton "Milt" "The Judge" Hinton**, the dean of jazz bass players (173-05 113<sup>th</sup> Avenue); baseball legend **Jackie Robinson** (112-40 177th Street, at right), boxing giant **Joe Louis** (175-12 Murdock Avenue) and **Shirley Graham DuBois**, a distinguished author and playwright, and her husband, the civil rights pioneer **W.E.B. DuBois**. They lived and were married at 173-19 113rd Avenue.



"Addisleigh Park was a byword for African-American elegance, affluence and success by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and its architectural integrity and charm continue to this day," said Chairman Tierney. "The amount of talent and high achievement that was concentrated in one relatively

small suburban enclave is remarkable. I am very proud of this designation and all that it represents and will preserve for future generations.”

### **Sandy Ground Designations**

Sandy Ground, also known as Woodrow, Harrisville or Little Africa, was founded near the center of the southern part of Staten Island. African Americans first purchased land there in 1828, making the area one of the first places within what is now New York City where free African Americans owned their own properties.



They were followed in the 1840s by freed African Americans from Maryland, where restrictions on boat ownership made it difficult to earn a living in the oyster business, then the most important industry on Staten Island. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, African Americans were living in more than 50 houses at Sandy Ground. Their numbers began to decline in 1916 after the City closed the island’s oyster beds because of pollution. Two large fires in 1930 and 1963 destroyed many of the houses and property, but a recognizable community remains, including descendants of residents who have lived there for a century.

“The four rare, vernacular buildings at Sandy Ground that earned landmark designation today are tangible links to the rich history of one of the earliest continuing African-American neighborhoods in New York City,” said Chairman Tierney. (c. 1900 photo of Coleman House above)

### **Rossville AME Zion Church, 584 Bloomingdale Road**



Constructed in 1897, the church is the congregation’s third home in Sandy Ground. It was founded in 1849 at the home of its first minister, William H. Pitts, and erected after the congregation had outgrown its first church building, which was constructed in 1854 and located adjacent to the Rossville AME Zion Church Cemetery, a New York City Landmark.

The one-story church, set on top of a high masonry basement, was constructed by a Swedish-born builder-developer, Andrew Abrams, a member of the Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church in Tottenville. Originally sided with clapboards, the church was a simple vernacular gable-roofed structure that had a Gothic Revival bell tower.

Throughout its history, the Rossville AME Zion Church played a central role in Sandy Ground. Many of its ministers were noted figures in the abolitionist and civil rights movements, including Florence Spearing Randolph, a renowned missionary and suffragist who led the congregation from 1919 to 1922.

The church also was well-known for its camp meetings, open-air barbeques, clambakes and other social events that drew hundreds of people, both black and white. Now led by Rev. Janet H. Jones, the church continues to serve a small congregation and leases the basement to a small alternative school.

### **565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road Cottages**

The small, frame houses at 565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road are rare surviving examples of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century “baymen’s cottages” that were built in Sandy Ground. Constructed



between 1887 and 1898, the two houses are nearly identical: two stories tall, with peaked roofs, central chimneys, side hall entrances with shallow stoops and porches.

569 Bloomingdale Road, the northernmost of the two houses, has entrances at the front and side and a one-story extension with peaked roof. It was occupied from 1900 to 1930 by William D. Landin the owner of an oyster business whose father, Robert Landin was one of the Maryland oystermen who settled in Sandy Ground. 565 Bloomingdale Road has a built-out entrance porch covered in white shingles, and its tenants were associated with the oyster business.

The two cottages were erected as rental properties by Robert E. Mersereau, who purchased this lot in 1878. In 1922, Mersereau's heir Gertrude M. Jacobus, sold the property to George H. Hunter, the owner of a local construction and maintenance business, who was the subject of a 1956 New Yorker profile, "Mr. Hunter's Grave," by Joseph Mitchell. Rossville AME Zion Church purchased the property in 1981.

### **Reverend Isaac Coleman and Rebecca Gray Coleman House, 1482 Woodrow Road**



The Reverend Isaac Coleman and Rebecca Gray Coleman house is a vernacular frame structure that was constructed before 1859; however the exact date of its construction is unclear.

It was occupied at that time by Ephraim Bishop, an oysterman who arrived from Maryland in 1851. Isaac Coleman and his wife Rebecca Gray Coleman

bought the house in 1864, when he became pastor of the Rossville A.M.E. Zion Church in 1864. The building has been owned by the descendants of Rebecca Gray since that time.

The house was likely built as a 1 ½ story structure, with a single room on each story. The shed roof addition to the east, probably used as a kitchen, was added at some point early in its existence and the two-story, two-bay addition was made on the western side, possibly sometime around the Coleman's purchase, since they moved there with her children from an earlier marriage.

It is likely that the most recent section of the house, the two-story section on the western side, was added during the late 1880s to accommodate a growing extended family. Throughout this time, the basic form of the house has remained, although these later additions have enlarged the space.

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The Landmarks Preservation Commission is the mayoral agency responsible for protecting and preserving New York City's architecturally, historically and culturally significant buildings and sites. Since its creation in 1965, LPC has granted landmark status to more than 27,000 buildings, including 1,280 individual landmarks, 110 interior landmarks, 10 scenic landmarks, 102 historic districts and 16 historic district extensions in all five boroughs. Under the City's landmarks law, considered among the most powerful in the nation, the Commission must be comprised of at least three architects, a historian, a realtor, a planner or landscape architect, as well as a representative of each borough.

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