

PROPOSED ALICE AND AGATE COURTS HISTORIC DISTRICT
BOROUGH OF BROOKLYN

The proposed Alice and Agate Courts Historic District comprises two half-block cul-de-sacs on the north side of Atlantic Avenue between Kingston and Albany Avenues. Designed by Walter M. Coots and built in 1888-1889 for industrialist Florian Grosjean, the 36 Queen Anne row houses form a quiet residential oasis in the midst of the heavily commercial Atlantic Avenue.

Swiss immigrant Florian Grosjean co-founded the firm of Lalance & Grosjean champagne and kitchenware importing firm in the 1850s. In 1863, the firm opened a tin stamping factory in Woodhaven, Queens and within six years began manufacturing enamel-coated iron utensils with the mottled appearance of agate. The company's success was reflected by Grosjean's extensive land holdings, including the property speculatively developed as Alice and Agate Courts. Advertisements placed in newspapers in 1899 and 1901, by the realtor Haviland & Sons advertised homes for rent on Agate Court for small families with good references.

Originally from Rochester, New York, Walter M. Coots was trained in his father's architecture firm and relocated to Brooklyn in the 1880s. A prominent architect, he designed a number of residential buildings, both private dwellings and speculative row houses and apartment buildings in neighborhoods throughout Brooklyn, including Cobble Hill, Bushwick and East New York, and the Crown Heights North and Park Slope Historic Districts.

Alice Court (1889) is anchored at Atlantic Avenue by nos. 1 and 2, which are two and one-half story houses on raised basements with conically roofed corner turrets, dormers set into mansard roofs and two-story elliptical bays along the avenue. Nos. 3-17 and 4-18 are mirror images of one another. These two-story homes on rock-faced, rusticated basements share common elements such as a high stoops, wide patterned stringcourses, and alternating rectangular and arched window openings with rusticated voussoirs. At the second stories, flat facades with a variety of window styles alternate with either three-sided or swelled bays.

Constructed of brick and stone, the homes on Agate Court (1888) are two stories high on rock-faced, rusticated basements. The two center houses on each row are connected by a shallow oriel and triangular pediment with finial, which is evident at nos. 9 and 11 Agate Court. Nos. 1 and 2, the anchor buildings at Atlantic Avenue, have full-height round corner bays on the front facades, deep, three-sided bays on the rear facades and flat roofs. Nos. 3, 9-11 and 4, 10-12 have arched windows on the first floor, several of which retain their original stained-glass transoms with a handsome "peacock tail" pattern. In lieu of elaborate decoration, Coots' design employed symmetry within the rows themselves, creating an interesting overall composition. Nos. 5-7, 6-8, 11a-15, and 14-16 have swelled brick bays on corbels with a decorative band and nos. 17 and 18 have full height two-sided bays. Common elements on Agate Court are high, rock-faced stoops (many with original ironwork), rock-faced window lintels and rock-faced door lintels set on elongated, incised brackets. A narrow stone stringcourse beneath the second story windows and metal cornice unite the rows. A tall brick wall with recessed panels, corbelled brickwork and a low iron railing marks the end of the cul-de-sac and separates the street from the adjacent property.

To a large extent, the rows retain their original appearance and much of their original material. Situated just north of the busy thoroughfare of Atlantic Avenue, these Queen Anne style houses form a quiet enclave on two cul-de-sacs and represent small-scale residential development of late-19th century Bedford-Stuyvesant.