

PROPOSED FILLMORE PLACE HISTORIC DISTRICT
BOROUGH OF BROOKLYN

The proposed Fillmore Place Historic District, located in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, is a small and mostly intact enclave of 29 properties consisting of rowhouses erected in the mid-nineteenth century during a period of rapid urbanization in the area. The buildings on Fillmore Place are part of a development orchestrated by the real estate firm of Clock & Miller beginning in the 1850s.

Fillmore Place was not included in the original street plan of Williamsburg as laid out after the village's incorporation in 1827. It was only in 1850 that real estate developers Alfred Clock and Ephraim Miller—who had begun acquiring property on the block in 1847—filed plans with the local government to open a new road between Fifth and Sixth Streets (now Driggs Avenue and Roebling Street). Initially called Fillmore Street, the lane was soon graded and paved. In 1852, Clock & Miller announced their plans in the *New York Times* to build it up with what they termed “magnificent buildings.”

The 1850s were a period of exceptional growth for the Williamsburg area. The village's population doubled between 1840 and 1845, and grew at an even greater rate during the late 1840s and early 1850s when a large number of German immigrants began settling in the area. Large industries began occupying the East River waterfront at this time—including the Havemeyers & Elder Refinery, later known as Domino Sugar—and a number of important local institutions such as the Kings County and Williamsburgh Savings Banks were founded to serve the burgeoning population. The former Village of Williamsburgh was officially incorporated as an independent city in 1852; its population of 35,000 made it the twentieth largest urban area in the country. Three years later in 1855, it was annexed by the City of Brooklyn.

Although Clock & Miller initiated the development, it is likely that several additional speculators were also involved in construction of houses along Fillmore Place. In spite of this, the buildings on the street possess a strong cohesiveness of design. Nearly all of the rowhouses are three-stories tall with a raised basement and a short stoop. Ornamental embellishment is provided primarily by brownstone window lintels and sill, wooden cornices, and decorative door frames. Several of the houses retain their historic cast iron railings.

The buildings along Fillmore Place were planned and erected during the height of this fervent period of development. As a cohesive, intact ensemble and lining a narrow, block-long street with a definite sense of place, these rowhouses serve as an important reminder of Williamsburg's transformation from a rural village to a bustling urban neighborhood.