

PROPOSED FISKE TERRACE – MIDWOOD PARK HISTORIC DISTRICT BOROUGH OF BROOKLYN

The proposed Fiske Terrace – Midwood Park Historic District is a planned development consisting of approximately 250 predominantly free-standing single-family residences constructed during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The predominantly Colonial Revival and Shingle Style houses are largely intact, asymmetrically massed and feature spacious porches, elaborate projecting towers, oriels and bays, Palladian windows and deep eaves. The neighborhood also has an unusual street plan that includes landscaped malls and short streets that dead-end at the BMT subway cut.

Fiske Terrace – Midwood Park occupies land that was originally part of the Lott farm, and is now considered to be part of the larger neighborhood of Flatbush. The initial impetus for development of Flatbush occurred with the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883 and followed with the construction of the Brooklyn, Flatbush and Coney Island railroad in 1895. The first development in the area was Tennis Court in 1886. The construction of park-like suburbs such as Prospect Park South (1899) provided a model for the developments of Fiske Terrace and Midwood Park.

Despite their visual similarity Fiske Terrace and Midwood Park developed independently. Theodore B. Ackerson, one of Brooklyn's most important contractors and real estate developers purchased the 30-acre estate of George P. Fiske in 1905. Ackerson constructed residences in series of tens from stock plans. The houses had uniform features and standards of quality but with some exterior variety suited to the buyers' tastes. The construction of Fiske Terrace was virtually completed by 1920. Midwood Park was developed by contractor and architect John R. Corbin also starting around 1905. Corbin used innovative prefabrication techniques. He built a factory on Jamaica Bay at East 56th Street that was capable of turning out 1,000 homes a year. All frames, beams, and interior trim were cut at the factory and then shipped to the construction site for assembly. Corbin's clients could hire their own architects, or they could employ one of Corbin's designers. Midwood Park was nearly completed by 1910.

The residences of Fiske Terrace – Midwood Park are important early examples of houses that were either mass-produced at the factory or designed in multiples of ten. Within this uniformity of design, however, there is considerable variety among the houses, and individual architects played a key role in the area's development. The most prolific architect in Midwood Park was Benjamin Driesler, whose 1907 design for the shingled house at 670 East 18th Street is characteristic of his work. A full open porch wraps around the left side of the house and includes six Doric columns. There is a three-sided angular bay to the right of the main entry, a motif that is repeated on the second floor where two three-sided bays articulate the façade. A high peaked roof with its gable end to the street crowns the structure. A diamond-shaped panel of novelty shingling—a common decorative device on the houses in Fiske Terrace – Midwood Park—lies just under the eaves. Many of the houses in the Fiske Terrace section were designed by unknown architects, although the development also includes designs by Slee & Bryson and Arlington Isham. An excellent example of a Free Colonial style house in Fiske Terrace is 797 East 18th Street, designed by Robert Schaefer in 1905. The house features a notably wide open veranda that wraps around the right side of the house and boasts paired columns with handsome Scamazzi capitals. Above those columns is a dentilled frieze, while a wide pediment over the stairs crowns the central entry. A sharply

peaked dormer with a triple window framed in pilasters punctuates a hipped roof that projects out over the second floor on carved wooden brackets. 811 East 19th Street with its stucco finish and half-timbering is exemplifies the neo-Tudor style adapted to a more modestly scaled, compact house. The proposed historic district also contains several excellent examples of bungalows including 633 E. 19th Street with its overscaled porch columns.

Today the proposed Fiske Terrace – Midwood Park remains a quiet residential enclave featuring a street plan that separates it from the adjoining neighborhood and excellent examples of Colonial Revival and Shingle style single family houses that were built with innovative construction techniques.