

Proposed Addisleigh Park Historic District Borough of Queens

The proposed Addisleigh Park Historic District consists of approximately 426 primary buildings including attached and freestanding houses constructed largely between the 1910s and 1930s, the St. Albans Congregational Church (1958-59, William H. Heidtmann of Gibbons and Heidtmann) and its Robert Ross Johnson Family Life Center (1983-84 , Gibbons, Heidtmann and Salvador) as well as the nearly 11 acre St. Albans Park. Centered along Murdock Avenue and the adjoining streets, the houses are sited back from the street, many on large landscaped lots, and have a consistent scale that gives the neighborhood a suburban feel. Built in brick, stucco, wood and stone, the homes reflect the predominant architectural styles of the early part of the 20th century: English Tudor, Colonial and Mediterranean Revival.

Edwin H. Brown purchased the land that includes Addisleigh Park in 1892 and is credited with planning the neighborhood. The earliest houses were constructed in the 1910s and 1920s concentrated at the eastern end nearest the Long Island Rail Road station and the St. Albans Golf Course (now the site of the St. Albans Community Living Center of the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System) on the south side of Linden Boulevard and by 1926 had extended westward to 175th Street. Many of these houses were designed in the Colonial Revival style and feature symmetrical facades, pedimented door enframements or porches, doors with fanlights or sidelights, and gabled or gambrel roofs.

With the start of large scale speculative development in 1926, the dominant style became the Tudor Revival with its asymmetrical facades of stucco and brick decorated with half-timbering and steeply pitched overlapping gables. The first of these developers was the Burfrey Realty Corporation who purchased what was described as “the entire southerly portion of Addisleigh, St. Albans” for the construction of 61 homes. The largest developer was the Addisleigh Homes Company, which appears to be a subsidiary of Rodman & English Company which offered homes with the latest conveniences. The Tudor Revival’s domination continued through the 1930s and was adapted for the row houses on Sayres Avenue (c. 1931) and 180th Street (c. 1937-38).

Addisleigh Park was initially developed as an exclusively white community enforced by restrictive covenants that prohibited the sale of property to African-Americans. During the 1940s the New York State Supreme Court upheld covenants in two suits where homeowners were sued by their neighbors for selling their homes to African-Americans. While he ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, the judge in the case of *Kemp v. Rubin* (1947) acknowledged that Addisleigh Park already was home to 48 African-American families including both Lena Horne and Count Basie who had purchased their homes in 1946. Following the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948) that ruled that state judicial enforcement of racially restrictive covenants was a violation of the equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment, the demographic make-up of Addisleigh Park changed as more African-Americans moved to the area. By 1952, an article on the neighborhood in the magazine *Our World* noted that it was home to the “richest and most gifted” African-Americans, among them Count Basie, Lena Horne, Milt Hinton, Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella and Ella Fitzgerald as well as the many middle class residents of the area. Among the earliest of the prominent African-American residents, if not the first, was Thomas W. “Fats” Waller who lived on Sayres Avenue at the time of his death in 1943.

Today Addisleigh Park remains a distinctive enclave with a remarkable sense of place due to its period revival style houses that are set back from the street on spacious well-landscaped lawns and its remarkable history that illuminates African-Americans’ struggle for and achievement of the basic civil right of home ownership.