



PROPOSED BOROUGH HALL SKYSCRAPER HISTORIC DISTRICT BOROUGH OF BROOKLYN

In the first half of the nineteenth century, especially following the chartering of the City of Brooklyn in 1834 and the completion of its new City Hall in 1848, a distinct civic and commercial center began to crystallize along the eastern edge of residential Brooklyn Heights. As the city continued to grow during the 1850s and 1860s—in the process becoming the nation’s third-most populous urban area—the streets immediately adjacent to City Hall were taken over almost exclusively by businesses.

In the later decades of the nineteenth century transportation improvements further encouraged commercial development in the area. The Brooklyn Bridge, which opened in 1883, directly connected the neighborhood with Manhattan’s financial center. Soon newer—and often much taller—buildings began to rise on the surrounding streets, including the impressive Romanesque-Revival Franklin Building that survives at 186 Remsen Street.

Brooklyn’s commercial heart continued to grow in the years following the consolidation of Great New York in 1898. The Temple Bar Building, for example, was erected in 1901 at the corner of Court and Joralemon Streets and was intended to attract the city’s leading lawyers to the borough. Other office buildings soon followed including the speculative venture at 32 Court Street that was completed in 1918.

The conception and construction of the Brooklyn Municipal Building—originally planned in 1909 but not completed until 1927—lead many to speculate that the area surrounding Brooklyn’s Borough Hall would become a financial center to rival that of Lower Manhattan. The area’s tallest and most architecturally intricate skyscrapers were erected during this period, particularly the stately, 35-story Montague-Court Building at 16 Court Street and the handsomely detailed Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce Building at 75 Livingston Street, both completed in 1927.

The proposed Borough Hall Skyscraper Historic District, comprising approximately 20 properties, is characterized primarily by tall commercial buildings erected in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Designed in a range of styles from the Romanesque-Revival to the Beaux-Arts to the Modern, the structures in the study area represent the work of an impressive group of architects including Helmle, Huberty & Hudswell; McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin; George L. Morse; the Parfitt Brothers; Schwartz & Gross; H. Craig Severence; and Starrett & Van Vleck. It contains many of the borough's most architecturally distinguished business buildings, as well as its two most significant civic structures—the Brooklyn Municipal Building and the individually-designated Brooklyn Borough Hall.