

PROPOSED CENTRAL RIDGEWOOD HISTORIC DISTRICT

BOROUGH OF QUEENS

The proposed Central Ridgewood Historic District is significant as an intact grouping of approximately 940 buildings, most of which are brick rowhouses, representing one of the most harmonious, and architecturally-distinguished enclaves of working-class dwellings built in New York City during the early twentieth century. Most of the houses were constructed between 1900 and the mid-1920s, when Ridgewood was being developed by German-Americans and immigrants from Germany. Many of the blockfronts, which feature projecting bays, uninterrupted cornice lines, and bricks produced by the Kreisler Brick



Manufacturing Company of Staten Island, were designed by the architectural firm Louis Berger & Company and built by developers August Bauer and Paul Stier. The district retains a high level of integrity and the ambience that has distinguished it since the early twentieth century.

Transportation improvements and the consolidation of Greater New York City contributed to the development of Ridgewood, which was characterized by open farmland and several amusement parks in the 19th century. Denser building activity had begun with the coming of the electric trolley in 1894, and after 1898, Ridgewood was subjected to the eastward expansion of a growing New York City. Located adjacent to Brooklyn's Eastern District (which contained the communities of Bushwick, Williamsburg and Greenpoint), Ridgewood became an ideal location for upwardly mobile German-Americans to relocate, away from the over-crowding and more recent immigrants inhabiting Bushwick and Williamsburg, as well as Lower East Side. Corresponding with the construction of the buildings in the proposed historic district, urbanization was triggered by the opening of the elevated train around the turn of the century. Providing rapid and dependable rail service, the "El" was extended from its original terminus at Myrtle and Wyckoff Avenues to Fresh Pond Road and 67th Avenue in 1915.

Louis Berger & Co. was the architect of record for over 5,000 buildings in Ridgewood and Bushwick between 1895 and 1930. Born in 1875 in Rheinpfalz, Germany, Louis Berger immigrated to America as a young boy in 1880 and settled in Ridgewood in 1892. He studied architecture at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and served as an apprentice with the firm Carrere & Hastings before establishing his own business in Bushwick in 1895. His specialty was in the design of tenement houses and in the laws governing their construction. In 1910, he moved his office to Ridgewood, Queens, when he joined the development team of August Bauer and Paul Stier as resident architect. Berger, the most prolific architect to work in Ridgewood, benefitted greatly from his association with Bauer & Stier, Inc., which alone built over 2,000 houses in Ridgewood.

Most of the houses in the district were built after 1905 when fire codes in Ridgewood began requiring masonry construction for attached rows. The buildings have load-bearing masonry walls constructed of red-, buff-, amber- and brown-colored Kreisler brick used in various combination from houses to house or row to row. The buildings have fine detailing in the Renaissance Revival Style, including cast-stone lintels, door surrounds, pediments, and string courses, as well as pressed metal cornices decorated with brackets, dentils, and swags. Almost all of the original brownstone stoops remain intact, as do many of the original cut-glass and wood doors and iron railings, fences and gates. Most of the corner buildings were built with commercial storefronts at the first floors, many of which have been altered. Representing a cohesive collection of speculative urban architecture, the row houses in the proposed Central Ridgewood Historic District retain extremely high levels of architectural integrity and represent an important part of the development of housing in New York City.