

PROPOSED PROSPECT HEIGHTS HISTORIC DISTRICT

BOROUGH OF BROOKLYN

Once a quiet farm area, the development of Prospect Heights as a residential neighborhood began in the mid-nineteenth century as Brooklyn's growing population pushed south and east from Brooklyn Heights. The subdivision of the land began in the late 1850s and the two frame buildings at 578 and 580 Carlton Avenue appear to date from that time. Prospect Heights' location was ideal for residential development, the Flatbush Avenue horse trolley provided transportation to downtown Brooklyn, the Manhattan ferries and later the Brooklyn Bridge. Construction of the Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted designed Prospect Park began in 1866, adding to the area's desirability.

The progressive transformation of Prospect Heights from farm land started along the east side of Flatbush Avenue in the years following the Civil War and spread south and east to Washington Avenue. Along Carlton Avenue and the adjoining streets, Dean Street, Park Place, Bergen Street, St. Marks Avenue and Prospect Place are many rowhouses, executed in the Italianate, Second Empire and neo-Grec styles, which date from the mid-1860s through 1880s. A fine example of an Italianate style row of houses was built c. 1870-72 at 117-127 St. Marks Avenue. By the end of the nineteenth century rowhouses were being designed in the neo-Renaissance and Romanesque Revival styles. The most impressive example of these is the Richardsonian Romanesque row on the southeast corner of Carlton Avenue and Bergen Street (577-579 Carlton Avenue, 562-564 Bergen Street) built in 1893 by Brooklyn architect Magnus Dahlander for William L. Beers.

To the southeast in what was once the James Underhill farm, rowhouse development between Vanderbilt and Washington Avenues and Prospect and Sterling Places started in the 1880s and 1890s. Stylistically Romanesque Revival and neo-Renaissance many of the residences were designed by William Reynolds, Axel Hedman and Magnus Dahlander, major Brooklyn architects of the time. An important new institution, Duryea Presbyterian Church was constructed between 1887 and 1925 at the south-east corner of Sterling Place and Underhill Avenue.

Linking the two areas, Vanderbilt Avenue a street of residential and mixed-use buildings was developed the in 1880s and 1890s. The predominant architectural influence along Vanderbilt is neo-Classical and Romanesque Revival styles with some neo-Grec.

The first groups of rowhouses in Prospect Heights date from the 1860s and 1870s and were designed in the Italianate Style popular in New York City from the 1840s until the 1880s. Two fine examples of Italianate rowhouse design can be seen in the ca. 1870 row on the north side of Prospect Place between Carlton and Vanderbilt Avenues and 616-618 Carlton Avenue part of a row of seven houses on the west side of the street between Prospect and Park Places built ca. 1871 by William Flanagan.

Another row on the north side of Park Place between Carlton and Vanderbilt Avenues (built prior to 1886) includes examples of both Italianate and the related Anglo-Italianate style.

One variation on the Italianate style was the addition of a mansard roof associated with the French Second Empire style. Examples are found on Carlton Avenue between Dean

Street and St. Marks Avenue at 562 and 555 and 557 built ca. 1874 by John Parkin and Manly Ruland respectively. However, the best preserved example is 97 St. Marks Avenue between Flatbush and Carlton Avenues.

By the mid-1870s the simpler neo-Grec style supplanted the rounded, ornate Italianate and Second Empire styles. Brooklyn architects such as the Parfitt Brothers, John Doherty, Nelson Whipple, J. J. Gilligan, Eastman & Daus, M. J. Morrill and B. Estes used it in Prospect Heights from the late 1870s through the 1880s. An excellent example is the intact row by Benjamin Estes (1884) at 574-580 Bergen Street between Carlton and Vanderbilt Avenues.

By the 1880s and 1890s the Romanesque style influenced by the work of Henry Hobson Richardson began to appear in Prospect Heights. With its asymmetrical massing, arched openings, materials of different colors and textures the finest example are the rowhouses at the corner of Carlton Avenue and Bergen Street previously mentioned. In the area east of Vanderbilt Avenue on Park, Prospect and Sterling Places are many examples reflecting the diversity of Romanesque Revival design with its use of heavy rustication, arched openings and carved decoration reminiscent of the Byzantine Revival style. In 1896 Axel Hedman designed a row for Bessie L. Martin on the south side of Prospect Place between Vanderbilt and Underhill Avenues. A simpler row was designed in 1892 by Charles Infanger for W. B. Bogart on the north side of Park Place between Vanderbilt and Underhill Avenues.

American architects after Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893 renewed their interest in more classical forms. The Renaissance Revival style widely found in Brooklyn was an eclectic form using elements from the Greek, Roman and Renaissance precedents. Two elegant rows of Renaissance Revival houses are found on Underhill Avenue. 153-175 Underhill Avenue designed by William Reynolds in 1897 and 120-144 Underhill Avenue designed by G. A. Schellenger in 1892 feature a variety of stone facades, Renaissance inspired garlands and a distinctive surround on the third floor windows.

In addition to the rowhouses, there are many small apartment houses and mixed used structures in a variety of styles. No. 375-377 Flatbush Avenue/185-187 Sterling Place is a speculatively built row of dwellings and mixed-use designed by William M. Cook for the developer John Konvalinka, in ca. 1885. This row is listed on the National Register. Using a combination of Italianate, neo-Grec and Queen Anne styles, the mixed use building with its corner tower and adjacent rowhouses anchors the northeast corner of Flatbush Avenue and Sterling Place. Most of the streetscape along the west side of Vanderbilt Avenue between Bergen Street and St. Marks Avenue was developed by Daniel O'Connell and his architect Timothy Remsen between 1891 and 1896. The mixed used structure at 576 Vanderbilt Avenue/638 Bergen Street with its rusticated base and prominent rounded corner bay anchors the block on the north. For the apartments at 578-592 Vanderbilt Avenue, Remsen designed simple brick facades with heavy rusticated stone window lintels and arched doorways topped by classically inspired lintels with keystones.

Small, neo-Classical style apartment houses are found throughout Prospect Heights. The row of flats at 537-549 Bergen Street between 6th and Carlton Avenues were developed by Thomas R. Farrell with designs by J. D. Reynolds & Son (537-539) and Henry Pohlmann (541-549) between 1894 and 1904. In light brick with stone trim the Pohlmann row has slightly swelled bays.

The diagonal path of Flatbush Avenue where it crosses St. Marks Avenue and Prospect Place created two flatiron shaped sites that were developed as interesting mixed use structures. The facades on the side streets were strictly residential with the ground floors on Flatbush Avenue including the corner being used for commercial enterprises. The Prospect View a five-story building with four-story corner bay was designed ca. 1889. Using a mixed classical vocabulary, the building creates a commanding presence on its corner.

The proposed Prospect Heights Historic District encompasses roughly 870 properties and retains many cohesive blocks of rowhouses, small multiple dwellings (both mixed-use and residential), and institutional buildings from the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries. It is among Brooklyn's most architecturally distinguished areas, retaining some of the borough's most beautiful and well-preserved residential streets, and featuring a broad array of outstanding residential architecture in popular late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries styles, including the Italianate, Second Empire, neo-Grec, Romanesque Revival, Renaissance Revival and neo-Classical. There have been some stoop and cornice removals, façade alterations and window and door replacements, but the area continues to retain its cohesion due to its tree-lined streets, scale, predominant residential character and its architectural integrity.