

Melrose Parkside Historic District

Borough of Brooklyn

Proposed Action: Calendared August 9, 2022; Public Hearing October
18, 2022



Parkside Avenue (south side) LPC 2021

The proposed Melrose Parkside Historic District is a remarkably cohesive and intact group of 38 single- and two-family row houses located on Parkside Avenue between Flatbush and Bedford avenues in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn. Built between 1909 and 1915, the houses were designed by two of Brooklyn's most prominent architects, Benjamin Driesler and Axel S. Hedman, for developers William A. A. Brown and Eli H. Bishop & Son. The distinctive appearance and sense of place of the proposed historic district derives from its two architects' use of the then popular Neoclassical vocabulary in their designs to harmonize three disparate types of residences.

Originally established as one of the six colonial towns in what later became the borough of Brooklyn, Flatbush remained largely rural into the 1890s, when early suburban development followed the completion of Prospect Park (Olmsted & Vaux, 1865-73, a designated New York City Scenic Landmark), and transportation and infrastructure improvements. In 1883 Homer L. Bartlett, a local physician and landowner, purchased Melrose Hall, an 18th century manor house and estate located between today's Parkside Avenue and Winthrop Street, for a development he planned to call Melrose Park. The development failed to come to fruition, and Bartlett sold most of the property to the wealthy brewer and real estate speculator William Brown. Following Brown's death in 1905, his son William Arthur Alexander Brown opened the street, petitioned the city to rename it Parkside Avenue for its connection to Prospect Park and Ocean Parkway, and began developing row houses there.

A significant part of the proposed district are 20 two-family duplex houses designed by Benjamin Driesler and constructed for Brown in 1909-10. Originally developed in 1905 by the Kings & Westchester Land Company who marketed them as "Kinko houses," these duplex houses were built at the height of the type's popularity in Brooklyn and were promoted by Brown as "the most perfect houses ever built for two families," each with "the privacy of a one-family house." The historic district was completed between 1912 and 1915 with the construction of two rows of single-family houses including eight "no basement" row houses embellished with Jacobean style gables designed by Driesler for Brown in 1912-13, and ten "American basement" row houses designed by Axel S. Hedman in 1914-15 for developer Eli H. Bishop & Son.

The demographics of Parkside Avenue reflect the historical trends of Flatbush through the 20th and into the 21st century. Through the enumeration of the 1950 census, the residents of the row houses and duplexes on Parkside Avenue were white and predominately born in the United States, and included households headed by doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, businessmen, musicians, and artists. Flatbush saw a large increase in African American and Afro-Caribbean residents, as Black families moved into the area from other neighborhoods in New York City such as Central Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant in the mid-20th century. Central Brooklyn soon became the center of the city's Afro-Caribbean community and by the 1980s was a major destination for immigrants from Caribbean countries. Today, the well-preserved rows on Parkside Avenue continue to reflect the diversity of greater Flatbush.

