



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

ATLANTIC AVENUE BROOKLYN





The Historic Districts Council is New York's citywide advocate for historic buildings and neighborhoods. The Six to Celebrate program annually identifies six historic New York City neighborhoods that merit preservation as priorities for HDC's advocacy and consultation over a yearlong period.

The six, chosen from applications submitted by community organizations, are selected on the basis of the architectural and historic merit of the area, the level of threat to the neighborhood, the strength and willingness of the local advocates, and the potential for HDC's preservation support to be meaningful. HDC works with these neighborhood partners to set and reach preservation goals through strategic planning, advocacy, outreach, programs and publicity.

The core belief of the Historic Districts Council is that preservation and enhancement of New York City's historic resources—its neighborhoods, buildings, parks and public spaces—are central to the continued success of the city. The Historic Districts Council works to ensure the preservation of these resources and uphold the New York City Landmarks Law and to further the preservation ethic. This mission is accomplished through ongoing programs of assistance to more than 500 community and neighborhood groups and through public-policy initiatives, publications, educational outreach and sponsorship of community events.

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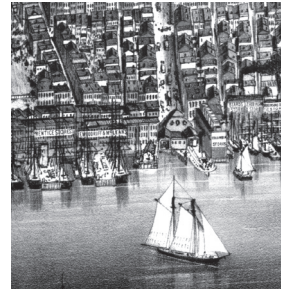


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ATLANTIC AVENUE

Prior to European settlement, Atlantic Avenue was an unpaved trail ending at the East River. By 1816, when the Village of Brooklyn was incorporated, the road became the village's southernmost boundary. Originally called District Street, it was renamed Atlantic Street in 1855 (at 75 Atlantic Avenue, an engraved street sign marked "Atlantic Street" is still extant) and designated an Avenue in the 1870s. In 1825, District Street developer Charles Hoyt and his associates petitioned the City to establish a ferry between Manhattan and Brooklyn, but Manhattan landholders feared real estate development competition with Brooklyn, so it was not until 1834, the year Brooklyn was incorporated as a city, that a lease was granted for the "South Ferry" between Whitehall Slip and District Street, for which an ornate ferry house was built.



City of Brooklyn, New York, Map by Currier & Ives, 1879 (detail)

In 1832-36, the Brooklyn and Jamaica Railroad was built to connect District Street to Long Island, with its terminal at the present intersection of Flatbush Avenue. The line was operated by the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR), incorporated in 1834. The world's first subway was constructed at this time underneath Atlantic Avenue to provide steam train service between the railroad terminal and the South Ferry. After steam trains were outlawed in Brooklyn in 1859, the subway tunnel was abandoned and horse car service was introduced above ground (the brick-vaulted tunnel was long forgotten, but in 1980, many decades later, it was rediscovered by a historian named Bob Diamond). Thus, in the span of just a few years, District Street became the conduit for business transactions and the transport of goods between Long Island and Manhattan. The street was poised for major change and the surrounding area became desirable as a suburban community due to its newly acquired access to Manhattan.

The earliest development began in the 1840s to take advantage of the commercial waterfront. Mercantile and industrial buildings included the Flint Glass Works, producers of gaslight probes, and the original Benjamin Moore Paint Factory at 55 Atlantic Avenue. The transfer and importation of goods was a major enterprise, and businesses like The Fruit Cleaning Company at 14 Atlantic Avenue, prospered. Many commercial buildings from this period are extant on the blocks from Hicks to Clinton Streets. In the late 19th century, the waterfront to Court Street became a premier commercial boulevard with a bank (site # 18), small shops and a large dry-goods store called Journey & Burnham (site # 19). In 1933, bridges and tunnels had surpassed ferries as a means of entering Manhattan, and the South Ferry was terminated. Beginning in the 1940s and completed in 1964, the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE) significantly altered the character of western Atlantic Avenue, resulting in the demolition of all structures from the waterfront to Columbia Street.

In order to promote economic vitality, attract and retain businesses, create jobs and improve residents' quality of life, the Atlantic Avenue Business Improvement District (AABID) launched in early 2012. The AABID is also committed to marketing and advocating for the street's roughly 300 businesses and to making capital improvements, such as street beautification, as well as celebrating and preserving Atlantic Avenue's history and architecture. The western end of the Avenue is protected by the Brooklyn Heights and Cobble Hill Historic Districts, designated in 1965 and 1969, respectively.

I

Times Plaza and
Atlantic Terminal
intersection of Flatbush,
Atlantic, and Fourth Avenues

Times Control House
(Heins & LaFarge, 1908; restoration:
diDomenico/Parsons Brinckerhoff,
2005) – NR-P



The intersection of Atlantic, Flatbush, and Fourth Avenues has been the location of the LIRR terminal since the 1830s. The terminal has had a number of different homes since then. The first was constructed around 1877, when steam trains were reintroduced from this location to extend eastward to Long Island. In 1907, two years after the LIRR began electrifying trains, a new Beaux-Arts style building replaced the earlier structure. That building, in severe disrepair, was demolished in 1988 after the railroad suffered decades of diminishing use as patrons increasingly favored automobiles and planes as modes of transport. The site lay virtually vacant for the next 15

years. The process of transforming the area into a shopping, entertainment and transit hub began in the early 2000s, and is still underway. The terminal's present structure includes an entry pavilion and ticket office (completed in 2010) and a shopping mall (completed in 2004). In addition to the LIRR station, Atlantic Terminal is the city's largest subway stop, serving nine train lines. While this overhaul has completely modernized the intersection, the Times Control House, a Flemish Revival style kiosk, still stands as a reminder of the terminal's earlier history. Built as the entrance to the IRT subway, the kiosk was designed by Heins & LaFarge, the architects of many subway platforms and control houses across the city, few of which remain today. The kiosk was named after its location in Times Plaza, which itself was named for the nearby offices of the Brooklyn Daily Times (later acquired by the Brooklyn Eagle). The little building is clad in glazed terra-cotta and features polychrome ornament in the form of cartouches, swags, fruit and floral garlands. In the 1970s, the building was converted

to modern uses and, at one point, covered with modern lettering. For a long time, it was abandoned as the size of its small lot was not conducive to other development. The building was meticulously restored in 2005.

Legend of designations

National Historic Landmark:	<i>NHL</i>
National Register of Historic Places—District:	<i>NR-D</i>
National Register of Historic Places—Property:	<i>NR-P</i>
New York City Historic District:	<i>NYC HD</i>
New York City Individual Landmark:	<i>NYC IL</i>
New York City Interior Landmark:	<i>NYC INL</i>

2

552-554 Atlantic Avenue
(Henry I. Oser, 1928)

542 Atlantic Avenue
(c. 1925)



The Art Deco store and office building at 552-554 Atlantic Avenue was originally called the Gross

Building, after its first owner, realtor Joseph M. Gross. The six-story building replaced a group of mid-19th century rowhouses. Its original tenants were real estate companies, trade union offices and lawyers. Since 1977, it has been home to a mosque, cultural center and related stores. The building is clad in white glazed terra-cotta and features neo-Classical details, like swags, garlands, grand arches and pilasters. Next door, the U.S. Post Office Times Plaza Station at 542 Atlantic Avenue is a civic building with elaborate brickwork. Its upper floor once housed the headquarters of the Brooklyn Local 361 of the Bridge, Structural and Ornamental Ironworkers' Union. Beginning in the 1920s, a group of men from Mohawk reservations in Quebec came to New York looking for work during the steel construction boom. After a landmark court case in 1926 recognized the Mohawk as a separate nation with rights to move freely between the United States and Canada, many Mohawks came to the city, settling in Boerum Hill and joining the union (it is believed that the presence of the headquarters at 542 Atlantic Avenue was the reason for their settlement in this part of the city). When the building boom came to an end in the late 1950s, the Mohawks began to move elsewhere, and the community dwindled. However, through some of its buildings, this part of Brooklyn still tells their story. Hank's Saloon, at 46 Third Avenue, was formerly The Doray Tavern, a popular Mohawk hang-out, and Cuyler Presbyterian Church at 360 Pacific Street (now a private residence) offered services in the Iroquois language.



3

543 Atlantic Avenue
(c. 1855)



This now stucco-covered structure has had many lives. It was originally constructed as the Atlantic Street Baptist Church, a

brick building dedicated in 1855. The building was subsequently home to St. Matthew's English Lutheran Church, the Metropolitan Mission (Independent African Methodist Episcopal Church), the Swedish Baptist Church, the Salvation Army and the Brooklyn Tabernacle. Today it is home to the Ahlul Bayt Islamic Library. This fascinating turnover of cultures and denominations makes this seemingly insignificant building a great example of Brooklyn's rich religious heritage. In fact, Brooklyn has long been known as the "Borough of Churches" for the many steeples that dot its landscape. Just west of this building, on the north side of the Avenue, note the row of brightly painted commercial buildings with intact storefronts.

4^a

362 Schermerhorn Street,
a.k.a. 475 State Street (c. 1840)

4^b

360 Schermerhorn Street
(Weary & Kramer, 1894-95; Dodge
& Morrison, 1917-18) – NR-P

4^c

59-75 Third Avenue
(Albert Kahn, 1929)

4^d

72 Third Avenue
(1894)



North and south of Atlantic Avenue on Third Avenue are grand civic buildings across from equally grand churches. 362 Schermerhorn Street was originally the Brooklyn Boys' Boarding School. It later became Public School 15 (a sign on the Third Avenue façade still bears this name) and served as an infirmary during the Civil War. It now houses the Metropolitan Corporate Academy High School. Across the

street is the former Baptist Temple (now the Recovery House of Worship), a brick and brownstone, Romanesque Revival style church rebuilt after a fire in 1917-18. Cross Schermerhorn Street for nice views of both of these buildings. South of Atlantic Avenue, at 59-75 Third Avenue, is a neo-Classical, limestone structure with Art Deco details built as the printing plant for The New York Times. The building still bears the newspaper's name, and has retained its large windows, meant to display the printing, collating and folding of newspapers going on inside. Today it is part of The Math and Science Exploratory School (M.S. 447), Brooklyn High School of the Arts and the Kahlil Gilbran School. Across the street, at 72 Third Avenue, is a brick church with a prominent tower and lovely rose windows. It was built as the Swedish Evangelical Bethlehem Lutheran Church to serve the area's significant Swedish population. In fact, in the late 19th century, Atlantic Avenue was often called "Swedish Broadway" or the "Swedish Colony."

5^a

510 Atlantic Avenue
(Murray Klein, 1931)

In the 1920s, a wave of development brought a series of civic structures to the eastern end of the Avenue, including the Post Office (site # 2), the Brooklyn YWCA and the Times Plaza Hotel. The latter, at 510 Atlantic Avenue, was designed in the Art Deco style as an economy-priced residential hotel for single, retired and working men only. The hotel fell on

hard times in the mid-20th century and closed. In the 1990s, Lutheran Social Services acquired the building and turned it into the Muhlenberg Residence to provide care and housing for the needy.

Today, the center provides apartments for the formerly homeless, with supportive services and programming. On the opposite corner is the Brooklyn YWCA, which was established in 1892, and moved here in 1927 from its original home at 376 Schermerhorn Street. This YWCA is noted as the nation's first to racially integrate in 1943. The multi-use facility includes low-income housing for women, a pool and a theater. In 2010, a performing arts organization leased space in the building, including the theater, which was restored. Note the exuberant Beaux-Arts style commercial building immediately adjacent to the YWCA at 503 Atlantic Avenue, which features cast-iron columns at the base and a richly ornate bracketed cornice.

5^b
30 Third Avenue
*(Frederick Lee Ackerman
and Alexander B. Trowbridge,
1927)*



6
423 Atlantic Avenue
(1932)
435-443 Atlantic Avenue
(c. 1880)



Ex-Lax, short for “Excellent Laxative,” was invented in 1906 by Hungarian-born pharmacist Max Kiss in New York City, and opened its first factory that same year. By 1932, a larger headquarters

was established on Atlantic Avenue that incorporated existing structures (435-443 Atlantic Avenue) and a new building (423 Atlantic Avenue). The existing structures had been home beginning in the 1880s to the Herman Themig Bottling plant, a wholesale and retail beer merchant for the Anheuser-Busch company. After Themig's death in 1892, the plant resumed operation under the August Busch Company until 1903. Budweiser, introduced in 1876, was bottled here. After Ex-Lax was sold to a pharmaceutical company in 1981, the building was converted to residential use, making it one of Brooklyn's earliest factory conversions.



7^a

403 Atlantic Avenue
(1850)

7^b

413-415 Atlantic Avenue
(c. 1893)



Two charming churches sit on the north side of this block. On the corner is St. Cyril's of Turau Parish of the Belarussian Autocephalic Orthodox Church. The Gothic-inspired building features pointed arch windows, intricate brickwork and buttresses. The church was originally home to St. Peter's Episcopal Church. A few doors to the east is a church commissioned by the Svenska Evangeliska Pilgrimskyrkan (Pilgrim Swedish Evangelical Congregational Church), another reminder of Atlantic Avenue's once vibrant Swedish community. The beige brick structure was designed in the Romanesque Revival style with banded brick arches and a square tower with a pyramidal turret. It is now home to the House of the Lord Pentecostal Church.

358-364 Atlantic Avenue

375, 377, 377A and
387 Atlantic Avenue

394-402 Atlantic Avenue

405-409 Atlantic Avenue

406-420 Atlantic Avenue
(c. 1850s)



While there are many intact Victorian-era storefronts on Atlantic Avenue, the blocks between Hoyt and Nevins Streets contain a particularly dense concentration. It is believed that many of them date to before the Civil War due to the presence of St. Peter's Episcopal Church (site #7a), since, in typical neighborhood development patterns, churches followed residential and commercial construction. A post-Civil War building boom led to the development of plate glass that made large storefront windows possible. Thus, these storefronts stand as evidence of Atlantic Avenue's early history as a bustling shopping district. While this part of Atlantic Avenue is not protected by historic district status, it does benefit from designation as a special zoning district. In 1972, the combined efforts of the Mayor's Office, the Office of Downtown Brooklyn Development and the NYC Department of City Planning created the Special Zoning District on Atlantic Avenue between Court Street and Flatbush Avenue. These bulk and use regulations aim to preserve the avenue's scale and character, including original architectural features like its Victorian-era storefronts. In 2004, when the City created the Special Downtown Brooklyn District, Atlantic Avenue's regulations were retained as the Atlantic Avenue Subdistrict.





9
368 Atlantic Avenue

The architect and construction date of this building are unknown, but it was likely constructed as a residential building with a commercial ground floor. It was converted in 1917 into a Jewish school and synagogue called Talmud Torah Beth Jacob Joseph, at which point it gained its Moorish Revival façade, with intricate brickwork and medallions around the entrance. In the 1970s, the building was purchased by an antiques dealer, one of many in this part of Atlantic Avenue. In fact, the block between Hoyt and Bond Streets was once known locally as “Antiques Row,” as antiques dealers began operating businesses here in the 1960s and 70s. Their presence helped to revitalize the area, but many have since closed. In 2004, 368 Atlantic Avenue was converted into a night club, and became a catering hall and event space a few years later.



10
Hoyt Street
Community Garden
(1975)



At the corner of Hoyt Street is a vibrant community garden. The 25-by-50-foot lot contains several trees, brick walking paths, benches and a mural designed by Margaret Cusack, one of the garden’s founders, which depicts the tree of life. The lot had been abandoned when the community took it over as a green space in 1975, and it still represents the importance of community and the power of neighborhood activism to improve the quality of life. The garden is often open to the public and is maintained by members of the community.

11
314 Atlantic Avenue
(c. 1920)



In the 1930s and 40s, this Art Deco gem housed an office and showroom for the National Cash Register Association. The structure has many fine Art Deco details, such as stylized, fluted pilasters capped with terra-cotta medallions, and doors and windows inlaid with branch-like mullion patterns. Interestingly, another similar business operated on the avenue to the east. A less remarkable building than 314, 388 Atlantic Avenue was once the home of the Standard Johnson Company, producer of electric coin counting machines.

12

Red Hook Lane
property line
viewable inside 228
Atlantic Avenue



Red Hook Lane was a Native American trail that became a major artery through the center of Brooklyn beginning in 1760. It was a key route for the Continental Army during the Revolutionary

War, especially during the Battle of Brooklyn in 1776. The trail eventually fell prey to the imposition of the street grid. Remnants of the Lane survive, including a block-long alley south of the Fulton Street Mall, between Adams and Smith Streets, as well as ghosts of the Lane's configuration at 234 State Street and here at 228 Atlantic Avenue.



The odd angle of the building, most prominently viewed by stepping inside to see the diagonal orientation of the tavern, reveals the original property line. The city officially de-mapped Red Hook Lane, making this building's orientation all the more noteworthy to the neighborhood and the city.

13

130 Court Street
(McKenzie, Voorbees & Gmelin, 1922;
addition: Charles A. Holmes, 1936)
— NYCHD



Photo: Sandy Balboza



This formidable civic building stands on the site of the formerly sizeable Cobble Hill or "Cobleshill," as it was known in the late 18th century. Before this steep hill was flattened in the mid-19th century, it was the location of the Cobble Hill Fort, from which it is believed that General George Washington oversaw the Battle of Brooklyn in 1776 (a plaque on the building commemorates this). During the War of 1812,

the fort was reestablished as Fort Swift, named after General Joseph G. Swift. The Renaissance Revival style building resembles a Florentine palace, with its heavily rusticated façades, large arched windows and distinctive cornice held up by sculpted eagle brackets. It was originally home to the South Brooklyn Savings Institution, which formerly operated from 160 Atlantic Avenue at the corner of Clinton Street (site # 18). The building now houses a grocery store.

I4

180 Atlantic Avenue
(1873) – NYCHD



This four-story commercial building has a cast-iron façade, an unusual feature for Atlantic Avenue. The wrought-iron railings at the window openings are separated by smooth pilasters rising up the three stories above the ground level. It is capped by a Neo-Grec bracketed cornice. Aside from the storefront, which was replaced, the façade retains its original materials and configuration.

I5

170-178 Atlantic Avenue
(1846) – NYCHD



These five buildings were originally part of a row

of eight Gothic Revival style houses. By 1860, as the street was becoming more commercial, three of the houses introduced stores to their ground floors with residential units above. They were all originally three stories tall, a configuration that only the two end buildings have retained.

I6

Middle Eastern
businesses



Atlantic Avenue is home to a plethora of Middle Eastern shops and restaurants, mostly concentrated on the block between Court and Clinton Streets. The Middle Eastern population arrived on Atlantic Avenue in the early 20th century largely as a result of the construction of the

Brooklyn Battery Tunnel on Manhattan’s Lower West Side, which had been home to a sizeable Middle Eastern community. This displaced population came to Atlantic Avenue and self-identified as the “South Ferry community,” in homage to their previous home near the South Ferry terminal and also in reference to the South Ferry at the foot of Atlantic Avenue.



I7

164 Atlantic Avenue
(1864)

166-168 Atlantic
Avenue
(1856-60)
– NYCHD



These mercantile buildings display the importance of architecture as a means of representing and advertising businesses in the 19th century. The quality of the materials and attention to details, such as stone quoins and bracketed roof cornices, is exceptional. They were designed in a simplified Italianate style and the center of 166-168 Atlantic Avenue has a prominent central gable. As evidenced by the painted sign, the buildings were home to a shop selling shipbuilders' goods. New York City's ports were some of the busiest in the world in the mid-19th century, and Atlantic Avenue was host to a number of nautical goods manufacturers and dealers. These buildings were restored and converted to residential units in 2006, and the painted sign got a fresh coat of paint. Note the ornate parapet on 177 Atlantic Avenue, a commercial building directly across the street.

This stately building was originally constructed for the South Brooklyn Savings Bank, which moved to a larger building at 130 Court Street (site # 13) in 1922. The bank had a number of influential board members, including merchant James Van Nostrand and businessman and politician James S. T. Stranahan, who,

I8

160 Atlantic
Avenue, aka 191
Clinton Street
(*Ebenezer L.
Roberts, 1871*)
– NYCHD



during his time as president of the Brooklyn Park Commission, was largely responsible for securing funding and support for the creation of Prospect Park. The Neo-Grec style, Tuckahoe Marble-clad building features round and square pilasters, corner quoins, arched windows supported by colonettes, and a bracketed cornice. Many of its original details have been lost, however, including a two-story pedimented temple front entrance and a balustrade with decorative urns on the roof. The ground floor has also been remodeled. The bank interior had been clad in marble and black walnut woodwork, but was refurbished many times over the years to accommodate new uses.



19

124-128
Atlantic
Avenue
(1851)
— NYCHD

This Italianate commercial building was originally home to the area’s largest dry-goods store, Journey & Burnham. The business was known for stocking fine quality fabrics and fashionable clothing. The business moved to Flatbush Avenue near Fulton Street in 1892, and closed in 1907. The building was subsequently home to the Atlantic-Pacific Chandlery Manufacturing Company, suppliers of ship provisions. The

company’s name remains above the storefront, providing a reminder of Atlantic Avenue’s nautical past and its link to New York City’s bustling harbor.



20

Historic bars &
restaurants
— NYCHD



Atlantic Avenue’s western end, near Henry Street, is graced with a number of eating and drinking establishments, some of which have been here since the mid-20th century and others that are more recent. Those in the former category were set up to serve the community of people who worked on the nearby waterfront, and some of them still have their original, historic neon signage. This mid-20th century neon signage on buildings dating to the mid-19th century makes for a dynamic juxtaposition. 110 Atlantic Avenue, for instance, still has its mid-19th century cast iron, star-shaped tie rods, but also has a distinctly Modern storefront.

On the south side of Atlantic Avenue is the northern tip of the Long Island College Hospital campus. The hospital opened in 1858, followed by the medical college in 1860. The distinguished institution was a trailblazer in its early years as the first in the country to employ bedside teaching and the first to provide an ambulance service in Brooklyn. The hospital served as a medical base for the Union Army during the Civil War, and treated sick immigrants after a fire at Ellis Island around the turn of the 20th century. In 1954, the hospital merged with the State University of New York and enjoyed several decades of renowned success. By the 1990s, the hospital was plagued with budget issues,

21

Former Long Island College
Hospital campus

21^a

100 Amity Street, a.k.a. 350 Henry
Street (Marshall Emery, 1896-97)
NYC HD

21^b

110 Amity Street
(William C. Hough, 1902)
NYC HD



and after many lawsuits, real estate deals and protests on the part of hospital workers, local residents and politicians, the institution finally closed in 2014. Plans are underway for mixed-use redevelopment. Two late 19th and early 20th century hospital buildings are extant just south of Atlantic Avenue: the Polhemus Memorial Clinic at 100 Amity Street and the Dudley Memorial at 110 Amity Street. The former was a gift from Caroline Herriman Polhemus in honor of her husband, Henry Ditmas Polhemus, a regent of the hospital and a well-known figure in Brooklyn. It was built as a clinic to serve underprivileged people in the area, as well as provide laboratories and lecture rooms for the college. The latter was a gift from Henry W. Maxwell in honor of the hospital's first Council member, Dr. William H. Dudley, and designed as a residence for student nurses. Both buildings were designed in the French Renaissance Revival style, making for a fanciful and exuberant display at the corner of Henry Street.

22

Groundswell Mural
Brooklyn-Queens
Expressway Overpass
(2013)



One of the AABID's goals from its inception in 2012 has been to improve the pedestrian connection between Brooklyn Bridge Park and the shops and restaurants



on its commercial strip. The obvious impediment is the elevated BQE that has bridged Atlantic Avenue since the 1950s. In late 2012, the AABID was awarded the BID Challenge Award to fund a re-design of the highway bridge and re-imagine it as a gateway. As a first step during the summer of 2013, the AABID worked with the NYC Department of Transportation to fund a mural produced by the Summer Leadership Institute youth from

Brooklyn-based Groundswell on the bridge's north wall. The mural has added vibrancy and humanity to a previously foreboding space. The youth artists truly reflected the history and culture of Atlantic Avenue in their design. Its background vertical lines provide a clue to the pre-BQE past: these represent the lot lines of the buildings torn down for the highway's construction. The large space in the center represents where Columbia Street veered slightly to the right going north, connecting Willowtown and South Brooklyn.

