

BROOKLYN HEIGHTS HISTORIC DISTRICT, Borough of Brooklyn.

The property bounded by Atlantic Avenue, the Brooklyn-Queens Connecting Highway, Fulton Street, Henry Street, Clark Street, Monroe Place to the northern property line of 10 Monroe Place, the northern property line of 10 Monroe Place, the rear lot lines of 10 Monroe Place through 48 Monroe Place, the northern property lines of 125 and 127-129 Pierrepont Street, Clinton Street, the northern property line of 152-156 Remsen Street, the eastern property lines of 156 Remsen Street and 99 Clinton Street, the southern property line of 99 Clinton Street, Clinton Street, Joralemon Street to eastern property line of 170 Joralemon Street, the eastern property lines of 170 Joralemon Street and 57 Livingston Street, Livingston Street to the eastern property line of 66 Livingston Street, the eastern property line of 66 Livingston Street and a portion of the eastern property lines of 64 Livingston Street and 35 Schermerhorn Street, the rear lot lines of 37, 39 and 41 Schermerhorn Street, the eastern property line of 41 Schermerhorn Street, Schermerhorn Street to the eastern property line of 42 Schermerhorn Street, the eastern property line and the rear lot line of 42 Schermerhorn Street and a portion of the eastern property line of 40 Schermerhorn Street, the eastern property line of 171 State Street, State Street to the eastern property line of 192 State Street, the eastern property line of 192 State Street, a portion of the rear lot line of 201 Atlantic Avenue and the eastern property line of 201 Atlantic Avenue.

On November 17, 1965, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Brooklyn Heights Historic District (Calendar No. 9). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. More than 40 witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to the creation of the Brooklyn Heights Historic District. The representatives of Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York asked that their properties be excluded from the proposed Historic District.

Support from the Brooklyn Heights community for designation has been remarkably strong. Scores of property owners on the Heights have recently reaffirmed to the Commission their support of the establishment of an Historic District. Many signed petitions and letters were presented as evidence at the public hearing by Heights property owners, residents and their representatives.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Physically the Brooklyn Heights area is an elevated plateau, bounded on the west by the East River and on the north by Fulton Street. The development of the Heights as a residential district really began in the early 19th century when the ferry boats first became steam-propelled. Due to its great desirability, the Heights itself has always remained a residential area with business interests grouped about Fulton and Montague Streets. As a result, the Heights is an area of low buildings with only about eight percent of the buildings non-conforming in this respect.

The traditional boundaries of Brooklyn Heights have been on the west, the bluff facing the East River; on the south, the wide and heavily-travelled Atlantic Avenue and on the east and north, Court Street and Fulton Street. Brooklyn Heights was saved by the East River from the redevelopment that occurred in similar areas in downtown Manhattan, and it was left undisturbed while Brooklyn expanded southward. Today, block after block looks much as it did at the start of the Civil War with many excellent buildings, some of which were designed by outstanding architects such as Richard Upjohn and Minard Lafever.

The stately brick and brownstone houses on their tree-lined streets with stone sidewalks, represent most of the principal architectural styles of the 19th century. As seen today, interspersed by their stately churches, the houses represent almost unchanged the community as originally built.

Recent Developments

Over the past ten years Brooklyn Heights has experienced a remarkable renaissance. Before this time the Heights had begun to lose its character as a community of individual residences with the advent of apartment houses and the infiltration of rooming houses. Consequently property values were falling, and several blocks had begun to take on the character of slums. Starting in about 1955, young couples began moving into the area, restoring houses as individual residences. The primary impetus to this renaissance was the obvious remaining

charm of the area and its proximity to Lower Manhattan where so many were employed.

Despite the great progress which has been made and the enthusiasm of Heights residents in restoring and beautifying their properties, the area is still experiencing the steady deterioration of its historic character from several causes. One is the demolition of residences for the construction of apartment houses and other structures which do not conform to the height or quality of the surrounding architecture. Another cause is the defacement of houses through badly planned alterations. Unfortunately, this process of deterioration has accelerated since the restoration work began.

One of the worst dangers to this attractive area has been the defacement of houses by renovations which are often incompatible with surrounding architecture. Among these renovations which have proven detrimental to the neighborhood are the addition of an entire new story, requiring either the removal of a cornice or an entire pitched roof. Other renovations have resulted in the use of dissimilar materials in adjacent areas, the removal of front steps and in the complete re-arrangement of windows in such manner that they bear little or no relation to those adjoining. This type of renovation has a depressing effect on real estate values and, although often intended as an improvement has quite the reverse effect. If such renovations were to continue unrestrained, they would ultimately spoil the special character of the neighborhood which has been the actual source of its rejuvenation.

Importance of the District

At the public hearing, Otis Pratt Pearsall, Co-Chairman of the Historic Preservation Committee of the Brooklyn Heights Association, testified as follows: "Of the 1284 buildings fronting on streets within the proposed Historic District, at least 684 were built before the Civil War and at least 1078 before the turn of the century. There are 60 Federal, 405 Greek Revival, 47 Gothic Revival, and 201 Anglo-Italianate buildings as well as 216 buildings in eclectic and miscellaneous styles, not to mention 61 early carriage-houses grouped largely along unspoiled mews. In addition, 190 buildings the original styles of which are as yet unknown or which were originally without recognized style, are of generally conforming scale."

The architecture of the Heights is a remarkable example of stylistic development, rarely found in any American City. Its preservation may be directly attributed to the fact that for many years the Heights was an economic backwater. With centrally located Montague Street the principal shopping street of the Brooklyn Heights District, there exist surrounding it many charming residential streets — with large mansions on such streets as Pierrepont Street, Remsen Street and Columbia Heights; with smaller but very attractive houses on such streets as on Willow, Hicks, Joralemon, Orange, Pineapple and Clark Streets and with the very small houses on Willow Place and in the mews which once served as stables. Today, the eastern boundary of the Heights follows an irregular line representing the separation of this predominantly 19th century residential area from the civic and business center of Downtown Brooklyn.

For nearly eight years the Brooklyn Heights Association and other community organizations have, by means of volunteer workers, fought to secure protection for the neighborhood as a whole. The property owners and other residents, including the Heights Association which numbers over 1000 in its membership, have always strongly supported the program of designation and preservation. Because of its familiarity with preservation programs being carried on in other cities including Boston and Philadelphia, the Heights Association has led the drive to get municipal protection for this beautiful area. In 1962 the Association drafted its own preservation legislation, and 2,376 Heights residents signed petition sheets and cards supporting such legislation.

In his testimony, Mr. Pearsall said, "Scattered landmarks of great historical or architectural value must certainly be preserved. But individual monuments cannot convey the character and atmosphere of the City as it was. This can only be achieved through dense groupings of homogeneous structures which retain in high degree the integrity of their original architecture.

"From the totality of all this, the interesting old buildings arrayed on irregular streets, with unexpected vistas, emanates an appearance and even more a spirit and character of Old New York which no single part thereof, and certainly no individual Landmark, could possibly provide. It is this 'collective emanation' which distinguishes an Historic District, and particularly Brooklyn Heights, from a Landmark and gives it a unique aesthetic and historical value.

"Only the designation of Brooklyn Heights as an Historic District, with boundaries as proposed in the hearing notice....can halt its piecemeal destruction and assure its preservation for this and future generations of New Yorkers. We believe these proposed boundaries, which encompass virtually all of Brooklyn Heights, are both logical and sensible. Except for the heavily developed commercial area along its eastern periphery, Brooklyn Heights is an integral whole, a single community characterized throughout by its homogeneously historic architecture, and hence, not subject to defensible partition."

To accomplish the goals of the New York City preservation law, Brooklyn Heights should be designated in its entirety. It would not be desirable to permit exceptions for certain buildings or areas within the stipulated boundaries of this proposed District. The Commission hopes to guide the future development of the entire area for the benefit of all.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this area, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Brooklyn Heights Historic District contains buildings and other improvements which have a special character and special historical and aesthetic interest and value and which represent one or more periods or styles of architecture typical of one or more eras in the history of New York City and which cause this area, by reason of these factors, to constitute a distinct section of the City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Brooklyn Heights Historic District is a homogeneously composed residential neighborhood with a special character of its own retaining much of the atmosphere of a 19th century urban community, that it has an unusual aesthetic quality due to the great variety of architectural styles manifested in its handsome residences and stately churches, that each style is representative of an era in the historical development of the Heights over a period of more than 100 years, and that because of the generally uniform height and fine architectural quality of the houses, its superb and insular location and other distinguishing qualities, Brooklyn Heights is a neighborhood of rare charm and historic significance.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as an Historic District the Brooklyn Heights Historic District, Borough of Brooklyn, containing the land bounded by Atlantic Avenue, the Brooklyn-Queens Connecting Highway, Fulton Street, Henry Street, Clark Street, Monroe Place to the northern property line of 10 Monroe Place, the northern property line of 10 Monroe Place, the rear lot lines of 10 Monroe Place through 48 Monroe Place, the northern property lines of 125 and 127-129 Pierrepont Street, Clinton Street, the northern property line of 152-156 Remsen Street, the eastern property lines of 156 Remsen Street and 99 Clinton Street, the southern property line of 99 Clinton Street, Clinton Street, Joralemon Street to eastern property line of 170 Joralemon Street, the eastern property lines of 170 Joralemon Street and 57 Livingston Street, Livingston Street to the eastern property line of 66 Livingston Street, the eastern property line of 66 Livingston Street and a portion of the eastern property lines of 64 Livingston Street and 35 Schermerhorn Street, the rear lot lines of 37, 39 and 41 Schermerhorn Street, the eastern property line of 41 Schermerhorn Street, Schermerhorn Street to the eastern property line of 42 Schermerhorn Street, the eastern property line and the rear lot line of 42 Schermerhorn Street and a portion of the eastern property line of 40 Schermerhorn Street, the eastern property line of 171 State Street, State Street to the eastern property line of 192 State Street, the eastern property line of 192 State Street, a portion of the rear lot line of 201 Atlantic Avenue and the eastern property line of 201 Atlantic Avenue.