

HOUSES ON HUNTERFLY ROAD, 1700 BERGEN STREET, Borough of Brooklyn. Built about 1830; architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1356, Lot 26.

On June 23, 1970 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the building at No. 1700 Bergen Street and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 24). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. More than fifteen persons spoke in favor of the proposed designation including students from Public School 243. The testimony clearly indicated that there is great community support for this designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION, ANALYSIS AND HISTORY

The four houses on Hunterfly Road form a unique and historically important enclave in what is now the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. They are unique in this area because they constitute the only surviving group of houses which were built parallel to the line of a colonial road and are now standing in the middle of a city block. They are historically significant because they lie on the edge of Weeksville, an early 19th century free Black community.

The earliest documentary evidence of the existence of Hunterfly Road occurs in March 1662 at which time it was called "Old Path to the Bay." The name is an Anglicization of the Dutch "Aander Vly" which means "to the low, or swampy, place." It may have followed the line of an earlier Indian trail leading to the wampum beds on the shores of Jamaica Bay and was developed by the Dutch principally as a hay path.

Under British rule, and well into the 19th century, Hunterfly Road was an avenue of communication from Jamaica Turnpike, near Bedford, to Canarsie. The grid street system for the area was laid out in 1838, but Hunterfly Road continued in use until the second half of the century. At the time the grid system for this area was laid out, an order was promulgated that Hunterfly Road be discontinued and closed from Jamaica Turnpike to the city line "whenever the Eastern part of Fulton Avenue and Howard Avenue, from Fulton Avenue South to city line shall be opened and fit for travel." The date at which such closing was effected cannot be precisely determined although a map on file with the Topographic Division of the Brooklyn Borough President's Office indicates that the section of the road on which these houses stand was closed "pursuant to Chapter 132 of the laws of 1835."

The houses definitely pre-date the closing of the road and have been found, by examination of 19th century maps and atlases of Brooklyn, to have been built in conformity to the line of Hunterfly Road. Loring McMillen, authority on the 19th century wooden architecture of New York City, has examined the houses and concluded that they were erected about 1830. He also stated that to the best of his knowledge, "they are the last buildings in Brooklyn and in the rest of the city with the exception of Staten Island which as a group face on an old original undeveloped highway and retain all the charm of their rustic setting."

1700 Bergen Street, a 2½ story frame building covered with shingles at the front and north side and by clapboard at the rear and south side, is the most northerly of the three structures that conform to the line of Hunterfly Road. It is three bays wide. The windows on the second floor, front, are of the casement or 'eye-brow' variety. Similar windows were apparently used at the rear but have been replaced by single pane types. The north side is pierced by only a small window just below the crest of the roof. On the south side, windows at the second and third floor level light the stairway. The pitched roof is currently covered with asbestos tile and has a chimney behind the crest on the northern end of the west pitch.

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No older buildings than the Hunterfly Road enclave are known to exist in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The connection of these buildings with the early 19th century community of Weeksville has not been fully documented. That Weeksville extended as far east as Hunterfly Road is evident from the fact that the address "Weeksville, near Hunterfly Road" was used in the 1850s.

Weeksville was the first major free Black settlement in the area now known as Bedford-Stuyvesant. Begun sometime about the time of the ending of slavery in New York (1827), it seems to have lasted as an all-Black or predominately Black community until after the Civil War. During the Draft Riots of the Civil War (July 1863), it served as one of the principal refuges for Black families fleeing from the terror of the Manhattan streets.

Little is known of Weeksville's history, though it is known that, at its height, it had seven black institutions: Colored School No. 2; Zion Home for Colored Aged People; Howard Colored Orphan Asylum; Berean Baptist Church; Bethel A.M.E. Church; Citizens Union Cemetery and the African Civilization Society. The archeologically oriented Project Weeksville of the City University of New York and the recently formed Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History are gradually piecing together some facts of its existence. The intent of the latter organization is to acquire the Hunterfly Road buildings and to use the properties as a local historical museum to display the artifacts and historic data that are being collected.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Houses on Hunterfly Road, 1700 Bergen Street has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Houses on Hunterfly Road, 1700 Bergen Street taken together with Numbers 1698, 1702-04 and 1706-08 Bergen Street, form a unique enclave in what is now the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, that the houses were built to parallel the line of an original Colonial road, that they retain all the charm of their rustic setting and that they lie on the edge of Weeksville, an early 19th century free Black community.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 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 a Landmark the Houses on Hunterfly Road, 1700 Bergen Street, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 1356, Lot 26, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.