

**RIDGEWOOD LODGE NO. 710, FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS**, 1054 Bushwick Avenue (aka 1052-1054 Bushwick Avenue and 1122 Gates Avenue), Brooklyn  
Built: 1919-20; Koch & Wagner, architects

Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 3339, Lot 19

On June 18, 2013, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Ridgewood Lodge No. 710, Free and Accepted Masons and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item. No.4). The hearing was duly advertised according to the provisions of law. A representative of the owner testified against the proposed designation. The hearing was continued on October 29, 2013 (Item No. 5), at which a representative of the owner offered additional testimony opposing the proposed designation. The Commission received letters of support for the designation from former Council Member Diana Reyna and current Councilmember Antonio Reynoso. The owner also submitted a letter rescinding the organization's earlier request to designate the building.

Summary

The Ridgewood Lodge No. 710, Free and Accepted Masons, also called the Ridgewood Masonic Temple, were constructed in 1919-20 from designs by the architectural firm of Koch & Wagner. The Free and Accepted Masons, one of the oldest fraternal and benevolent organizations in the world, was founded during the middle ages. Freemasonry grew tremendously in the United States, beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, almost every city and town in the nation, and many neighborhoods in New York City, had at least one Masonic Lodge. The classically-inspired Ridgewood Masonic Temple follows the formula common in the design of fraternal buildings, whereby monumentally-scaled



buildings are placed on prominent sites, in this instance a large corner lot on what was a prestigious, neighborhood street at the time of its construction. The Ridgewood Masonic Temple maintains a commanding presence along Bushwick Avenue. The firm Koch & Wagner designed numerous residential, commercial and institutional buildings over a span of 40 years, mostly in Brooklyn and Queens, including the Ralph Bunche House in Kew Gardens (designated an individual New York City landmark). The Ridgewood Masonic Temple is a freestanding brick building with an ornate main facade featuring a rusticated stone base, terra-cotta details (including Masonic symbols), two-story arched bays containing multi-pane sash, Ionic columns at the entry portico, a terra-cotta cornice decorated with an egg and dart molding and dentils, and a brick parapet with terra-cotta coping blocks.

This remarkably-intact Ridgewood Masonic Temple is an excellent example of early-20<sup>th</sup> century neighborhood club architecture, as well as one of Bushwick's most prominent civic buildings.

## **DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS**

### **Development of Bushwick**<sup>1</sup>

The Ridgewood Masonic Temple is located with the historic boundaries of the town of Bushwick near the present boundary line between Brooklyn and Queens. Bushwick's early rural and agricultural character began to change in the 1850s as a large number of people from Prussia immigrated to the New York area following the political upheavals in central Europe in the late 1840s and settled in large numbers in the Williamsburgh/Bushwick area. Hundreds of houses were built and new businesses were established in the neighborhood. Chief among these was the beer industry, and beer became Bushwick's most celebrated product. The area boasted a number of features attractive to the brewing industry: an abundant water supply, soil suitable for the construction of underground storage chambers, and convenient water and rail transportation. Henry R. Stiles, the notable Brooklyn historian, wrote in 1870: "That quarter of Brooklyn, the Eastern District...has been for some time the centre of the lager bier manufacturing interest in the Metropolitan District. Here are located some of the largest breweries in existence in the country."<sup>2</sup> He also observed that the population of the area was "almost exclusively" German.

A second wave of development began after the opening of the elevated railroad along Myrtle Avenue in 1888, making the area an attractive alternative to the congestion of downtown Brooklyn and lower Manhattan.<sup>3</sup> Development, consisting primarily of three- and four-story multiple dwellings, spread eastward toward the Queens border during the following two decades. Many civic and institutional buildings were constructed in Bushwick in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to serve its increasing population. These included schools, churches, fire houses, police stations, and club houses, such as the Ridgewood Masonic Temple.

Germans and German-Americans remained the predominant ethnic group through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, but were joined in increasing numbers by immigrant families from southern Europe, especially Italy. A great influx of people from the Caribbean, especially Puerto Rico, as well as African Americans from the southern United States and people from Asia looking for opportunity and better living conditions replaced much of the neighborhood's European-American population, and continue to form the area's largest group. Recently, the neighborhood has been attracting young artists and professionals from Manhattan and Brooklyn looking for affordable housing.

### **The Free and Accepted Masons**<sup>4</sup>

The Free and Accepted Masons, one of the oldest fraternal and benevolent organizations in the world, was founded during the Middle Ages. Present-day members of the group see themselves as the spiritual heirs of the craftsmen responsible for the architectural monuments of the ancient and medieval worlds, including the pyramids, Solomon's Temple, the Roman aqueducts, and the medieval cathedrals. This inheritance rests not so much in the monuments, but in the philanthropic, democratic and charitable principles these early builders espoused. The founders of Freemasonry, opponents of the abuses of the divine right kingship, were attracted by the freedom the ancient craftsmen protected and cherished. Early members included the philosopher Voltaire, President George Washington, and the composer Mozart. The symbols of Freemasonry - the right angles, the calipers and the ceremonial trowel - find their source in the tools of the ancient craftsmen.

Modern-day Freemasonry's activities in the United States are fraternal and philanthropic. Members progress within the organization by degrees. Freemasonry grew tremendously in the United States beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century almost every city and town in the United States, and many neighborhoods in New York City, had at least one Masonic Lodge.

Interest in fraternal organizations declined after the Vietnam War as a result of societal changes, aging rosters, and a diminishing interest in fraternal societies among the younger generations. Membership in the Free and Accepted Masons has fallen by at least half since 1980; the Knights of Columbus, Moose, Shriners, and Elks have suffered similar declines.

Although early American Freemasonry had no explicit policy prohibiting the admittance of African Americans as members, in practice, they were rarely approved for membership by most lodges. The requirement that members be "free born" was interpreted by many lodges to also exclude both freed slaves and free descendents of slaves. In 1784, an African American named Prince Hall and 14 other African Americans formed their own lodge after being denied membership in other lodges in Boston. Other African American lodges were later formed, and this movement came to be known as Prince Hall Masonry. Racial discrimination and segregation in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries made it difficult for African Americans to join non-Prince Hall lodges or for Prince Hall lodges to be recognized in many jurisdictions. The civil rights struggles of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century have led not only an increased acceptance of Prince Hall Masonry, but also to the admittance of African Americans into most Masonic lodges and the opening of Prince Hall to all men regardless of race. Generally, the degree of acceptance of African Americans into Masonic Lodges has reflected the prevailing attitudes of local populations toward racial and ethnic minorities. Today, racism in Masonry still occurs in pockets around the country.<sup>5</sup>

The ethnic makeup of the Bushwick neighborhood at the time of the opening of the Ridgewood Lodge was largely German, as were most of its members according to newspaper articles. It is not known to what degree the lodge may have diversified in later years as the neighborhood's demographics changed.

### Fraternal Architecture<sup>6</sup>

Fraternal architecture as a building type did not achieve recognition in the architectural press until *Architectural Forum* published an issue devoted to this topic in 1926.<sup>7</sup> The introductory piece, "The Architecture of Fraternal Buildings," was by the architect Harvey Wiley Corbett, who himself was a mason.<sup>8</sup> He wrote about the opportunities that designing fraternal buildings afforded to architects, stressing that these buildings were often large and prominent with the large wall surfaces that architects like to work with. He added that fraternal buildings provided architects with the chance to find interesting prototypes for the designs, mentioning specifically in the article the possibilities provided by Masonic heritage and iconography.

In a series of articles about fraternal architecture in the *Architectural Forum* in 1929, the architect R.R. Houston, a member of the firm George Post & Sons, discussed the great antiquity of the Masons (Egyptian and Greek) and their affinity with the building trades.<sup>9</sup> The well-known architect, Herbert Greene, wrote, "With the exception of mosques for the Mystic Shrine, which often and appropriately follow the motifs and details of the Saracenic style, fraternal buildings are generally designed in the Classical or Gothic styles or modifications thereof."<sup>10</sup> The Masons and the Shriners are best-known for the designs of their buildings among the fraternal orders in

the United States, but the Odd Fellows, the Knights of Columbus, and other groups are often also well-represented by their architecture.

The classically-inspired Ridgewood Masonic Temple, based upon ancient Greek and Roman architecture, follows the design formula common in the planning of fraternal buildings, whereby monumentally-scaled buildings are placed on prominent sites, in this instance a large corner lot on what was a prestigious neighborhood street at the time of its construction. Today, the Ridgewood Masonic Temple maintains a commanding presence along Bushwick Avenue.

#### Koch & Wagner, the Architects<sup>11</sup>

Arthur R. Koch (1874-1952)<sup>12</sup> and Charles C. Wagner (1876-1957)<sup>13</sup> formed a partnership named Koch & Wagner in 1910; the firm remained in practice until 1951. During that period, they were responsible for the designs of numerous industrial, commercial and residential properties, primarily in Brooklyn and Queens. Both men were born in Brooklyn and graduated from Pratt Institute, and both men served terms as president of the Brooklyn chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Previous to 1910, Wagner worked for several years on the design of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. In addition to architecture, Koch helped found and then served on the board of the People's National Bank. He was also a director of the East River Savings and Loan Association and the Bohack Realty Corporation, and a member of the Free and Accepted Masons. Mr. Wagner served as a director of the Bay Ridge Savings and Loan Association. Throughout their long careers, Koch & Wagner designed many bank buildings throughout Brooklyn, including several for the People's National Bank, and others that were developed by the Bohack Realty Corporation. They had a long and productive career, and seemed to specialize in commercial designs for urban environments. The firm also designed the Ralph Bunche House in Kew Gardens, Queens, a designated New York City landmark.

#### Ridgewood Masonic Temple<sup>14</sup>

The Ridgewood Lodge No. 710, Free and Accepted Masons was issued a charter from the Grand Lodge of New York State on September 28, 1870, following the submission of petitions by local members belonging to existing chapters to establish a lodge in the Bushwick area, which was developing rapidly at that time. The section of present-day Bushwick located south of Myrtle Avenue was then known as Ridgewood and its boundaries extended across the county line into Queens. The new lodge was appropriately named for its location, and retained the name after the surrounding area came to be considered a part of Bushwick, Brooklyn, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>

The new lodge first met on September 28, 1870 at 943 Gates Avenue, about two blocks to the south of the location of the present club house with Henry R. Turner serving as Master. The Ridgewood lodge moved at least four times in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century before settling into leased quarters at Hart's Hall, 1028 Gates Avenue near Broadway, where it remained until moving to its newly-completed building on Bushwick Avenue in 1920.<sup>16</sup> The lodge's membership grew significantly in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as the surrounding neighborhood continued to develop and the need for a new club house resulted in the construction of the present building. The club acquired land at the southeast corner of Bushwick and Gates Avenues for the new lodge and retained the architects Koch and Wagner to design the new meeting hall. At the time, Bushwick Avenue was a major thoroughfare and prestigious location, containing several impressive freestanding houses, many of them built for prosperous German and German-

American owners of nearby breweries, but also for doctors and politicians. There were also other social clubs, churches, and a Carnegie library along Bushwick Avenue.

The new building plans were filed with the Department of Buildings in 1919, the cornerstone laid on July 17, 1920, and the building was completed by the end of the year.<sup>17</sup> The Bushwick Avenue building continued to serve as the lodge's headquarters and meeting rooms for several decades until the Ridgewood Lodge disbanded and joined the Astoria Lodge in College Point, Queens, in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For a time, the building was used as an event space for musical performances and other activities. It is currently vacant.

### Description

*Site:* L-shaped lot at the southwest corner of Bushwick and Gates Avenue; main façade set back from Bushwick Avenue with a concrete-paved areaway enclosed by historic wrought-iron railing on low curbs; historic wrought-iron fence at basement stairwell with non-historic wrought-iron gates at the top of the steps.

*Historic Features:* Limestone ashlar base with projecting portico on paired Ionic columns topped by a balustrade; cornerstone; paneled doors and transom light with metal grill; two-story arches with multi-pane sash and casements, paneled spandrels, brick architraves, and scrolled keystones; terra-cotta panels with triangles and compasses at the end bays; central terra-cotta panel with the lettering "Ridgewood Masonic Temple;" deeply-recessed fenestration and marble panels at the fourth story; terra-cotta cornice with dentils and egg-and-dart molding; brick parapet topped by terra-cotta coping blocks; granite steps and sidelights with grills at the north Gates Avenue entryway; graystone steps at the south Gates Avenue entryway; flagpole on the roof; two-story rear wing.

*Alterations:* Door panels at the Gates Avenue entryways; wrought-iron security grilles at the basement and the first story; second-story sash on the Gates Avenue side modified to accommodate air-conditioning units; wrought-iron gates to basement stairway; security cameras and lighting with conduits; historic light fixtures removed from both facades.

Report researched and written by  
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### **NOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> This section is adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *Public School 116 (The Elizabeth Farrell School) Designation Report* (LP-1975), (New York: City of New York, 2002), prepared by Donald Presa, Research Department and LPC, *Engine Company 252 Designation Report* (LP-1931), New York: City of New York, 1995), prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart, and includes the following sources: Eugene L. Armbruster, *Brooklyn's Eastern District* (Brooklyn, 1942); Brooklyn Daily Eagle, *Bushwick* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Daily Eagle,

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c.1947); Henry Isham Hazelton, *The Boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens Counties and Suffolk Long Island, New York 1609-1924* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1925); Henry Styles, ed., *The Civil and Ecclesiastical History and Commercial and Industrial Record of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, New York from 1683 to 1884* (New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., 1884), and the following additional sources: LPC research files; LPC, *Public School 86 (Irvington School) Designation Report* (LPC-1808), (New York: City of New York, 1991); and Elizabeth Reich Rawson, "Bushwick," *Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth W. Jackson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 171-172.

<sup>2</sup> Henry R. Stiles, *History of Brooklyn*, cited in Amy P. Schlagel, "Nineteenth Century Brewery Architecture in America, With Specific Reference to Brooklyn, New York," M.S. thesis (Columbia University, 1976), 20.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Cunningham and Leonard DeHart, *A History of the New York City Subway System, Part II, Rapid Transit in Brooklyn* (New York: 1977), and 9-13.

<sup>4</sup> This section is adapted from the following sources: LPC, *City Center 55<sup>th</sup> Street Theater/formerly Mecca Temple Designation Report* (LP-1234), prepared by Charles C. Savage, Research Department (New York: City of New York, 1983) and LPC, *Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, Lodge Number 878 Designation Report* (LP-2086), prepared by Donald G. Presa, Research Department (New York: City of New York, 2001); and includes the following sources: William Bunch, "The Moose, Elk and Mason May Not Be Long For This World," *Newsday* (Aug. 17, 1985), 2; Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 151; Maryanne Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 123-124; W. Fred Milliken, "Racism in Freemasonry," *MasonicDictionary.com* [www.masonicdictionary.com](http://www.masonicdictionary.com), 2008); and William D. Moore, *Masonic Temples: Freemasonry, Ritual, Architecture, and Masculine Archetypes* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Milliken.

<sup>6</sup> This section is adapted from the following sources: LPC, *City Center 55<sup>th</sup> Street Theater/formerly Mecca Temple Designation report* (LP-1234), prepared by Charles C. Savage, Research Department (New York: City of New York, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> *Architectural Forum*, 46 (Sept. 1926), 129ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 129-136.

<sup>9</sup> R.R. Houston, "The Interior Architecture of Fraternal Buildings," *Architectural Forum*, 45 (Sept. 1929), 137-140.

<sup>10</sup> Interiors of the clubhouses were no less impressive, often based on exotic styles, such as Egyptian, Moorish, or Oriental. A club building was expected to be dignified and inviting, in keeping with its environment, functionally appropriate to the needs of the organization, and expressive of the club's desired public image. Herbert Greene, "The Planning of Fraternal Buildings," *Architectural Forum*, 45 (Sept. 1929), 141-144.

<sup>11</sup> This section was adapted from LPC, *Ralph Bunche House Designation Report* (LP-2175), prepared by Virginia Kurshan, Research Department (New York, City of New York, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> "Arthur R. Koch, 77, Architect for 50 Years and Bank Director," *Brooklyn Eagle* (Jan. 11, 1952).

<sup>13</sup> "Charles Wagner, an Architect, 81," *The New York Times* (Dec. 20, 1957).

<sup>14</sup> This section is based on the following: *Brooklyn Eagle* (Jul. 24, 1887), 2; (Jan 11, 1892),1; (Apr. 30, 1893), 22; (Mar. 31, 1900), 16; (Sep. 21, 1901), 13; Ward Dennis et al, "Bushwick Avenue A Preservation Plan," (Columbia University, GSAPP, Historic Preservation Studio II, Spring 2011), 63-64; <http://ridgewoodlodge.page.tl/History-of-Ridgewood-Lodge.htm>; New York City Department of Buildings, Borough of Brooklyn (NB 9101-1919), (PA 389-1944); *New York Times* (Apr. 16, 1881), 8; Jan 23, 1920), 4; (Mar. 4, 2007), 28; *The Sun and New York Herald* (March 21, 1920), 9;

<sup>15</sup> The portion of Queens just beyond the county/borough line remains known as Ridgewood.

<sup>16</sup> Two of these earlier locations were on Gates Avenue, south of Broadway, in the present-day Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood.

<sup>17</sup> The site was previously occupied by a large house.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of the building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Ridgewood Lodge No. 710, Free and Accepted Masons (also known as the Ridgewood Masonic Temple) 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 Ridgewood Lodge No. 710, Free and Accepted Masons, completed in 1919-20, was designed by the Brooklyn architectural firm of Koch & Wagner; that the Free and Accepted Masons, one of the oldest fraternal and benevolent organizations in the world, was founded during the middle ages; that freemasonry grew tremendously in the United States beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, almost every city and town in the nation, and many neighborhoods in New York City, had at least one Masonic Lodge; that the classically-inspired Ridgewood Masonic Temple follows the formula common in the design of fraternal buildings, whereby monumentally-scaled buildings are placed on prominent sites, in this instance a large corner lot on what was a prestigious, neighborhood street at the time of its construction; that Koch & Wagner were a noted architectural firm that also designed the designated Ralph Bunche House in Kew Gardens; that the Ridgewood Masonic Temple is a freestanding brick building with a rusticated stone base and terra-cotta details; that its symmetrical main façade is organized along a tripartite theme, dominated by two-story arched bays containing multi-pane sash; that its entry portico features paired, Ionic columns, paneled doors, a frieze with dentils, and a surmounting balustrade; that masonic symbolism is found at various locations on the facade, such as the terra-cotta panels at the third story and at the recessed spandrels above the second story; that the façade is topped by a terra-cotta cornice decorated with an egg-and-dart molding and dentils below a brick parapet with terra-cotta coping blocks; that the Gates Avenue façade continues the design theme of the main façade for one bay, with the remainder of that façade featuring a simpler design of brick rustication at the base, large recessed wall sections, molded terra-cotta banding, and decorative brick panels; that the Ridgewood Lodge No. 710, Free and Accepted Masons (also known as the Ridgewood Masonic Temple) is remarkably intact, including many of the original window sash; and that the Ridgewood Masonic Temple maintains its commanding presence along Bushwick Avenue.

Accordingly, pursuant to provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Ridgewood Lodge No. 710, Free and Accepted Masons, also called the Ridgewood Masonic Temple, and designates Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 3339, Lot 19 as its Landmark Site.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair  
Frederick Bland, Diana Chapin, Michael Devonshire,  
Michael Goldblum, Margery Perlmutter, Commissioners





**Ridgewood Lodge No. 710, Free and Accepted Masons**  
1054 Bushwick Avenue,  
Brooklyn Block: 3339, Lot: 19  
*Photo: Christopher D. Brazee (2014)*





**Ridgewood Lodge No. 710, Free and Accepted Masons**

1054 Bushwick Avenue, Brooklyn

Block: 3339, Lot: 19

*Photo: Christopher D. Brazee (2014)*



**Ridgewood Lodge No. 710, Free and Accepted Masons**

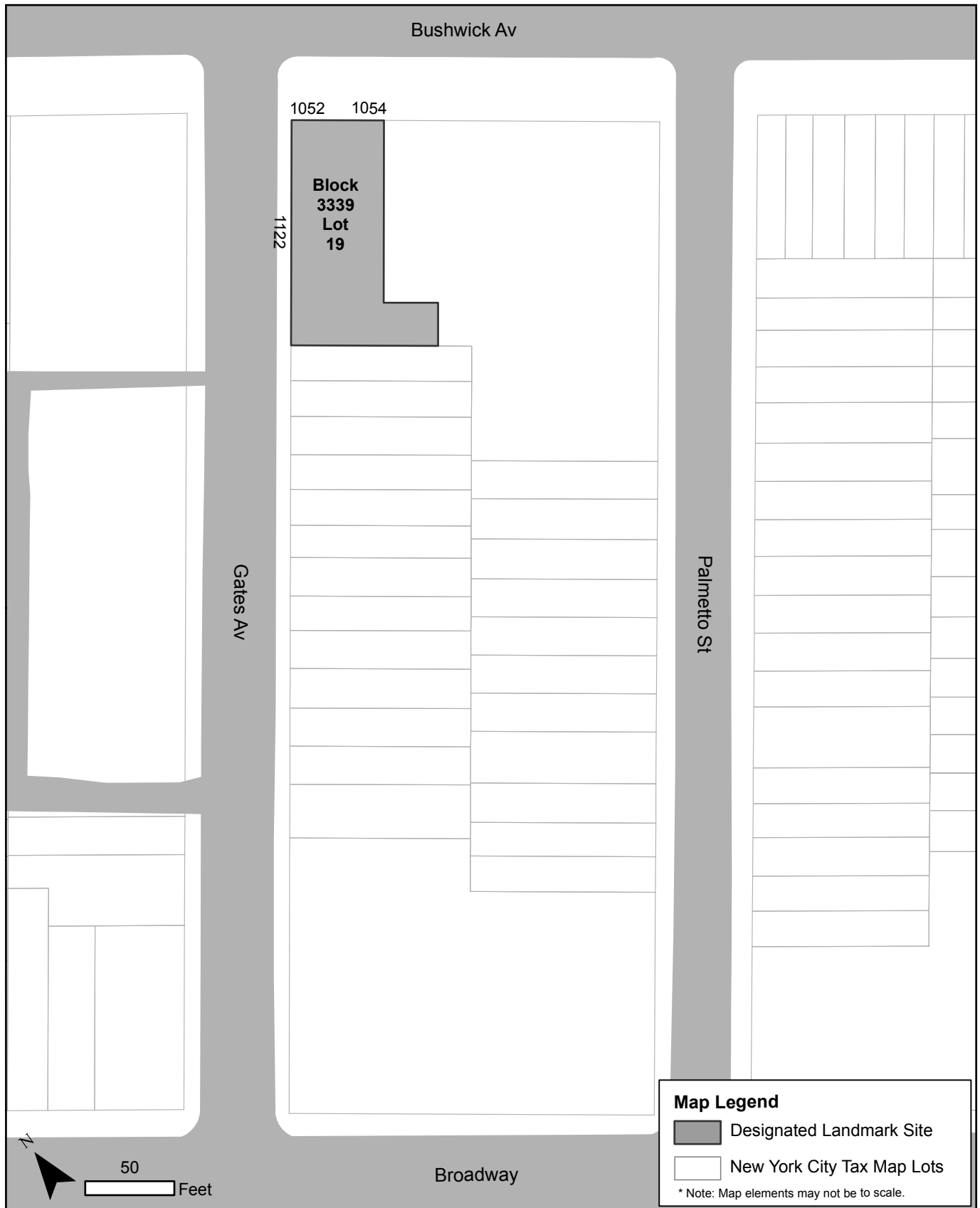
1054 Bushwick Avenue, Brooklyn

Block: 3339, Lot: 19

*Photo: Christopher D. Brazee (2014)*



**Ridgewood Lodge No. 710, Free and Accepted Masons**  
1054 Bushwick Avenue, Brooklyn  
*Photo: New York City, Dept. of Taxes (c. 1940), Municipal Archives*



RIDGEWOOD LODGE NO. 710, FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS (LP-2541)  
1054 Bushwick Avenue (aka 1052-1054 Bushwick Avenue; 1122 Gates Avenue)  
Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map Block 3339, Lot 19

Designated: July 22, 2014