
ALBEMARLE - KENMORE TERRACES
HISTORIC DISTRICT
DESIGNATION REPORT

1978

City of New York
Edward I. Koch, Mayor

Landmarks Preservation Commission
Kent L. Barwick, Chairman
Morris Ketchum, Jr., Vice Chairman

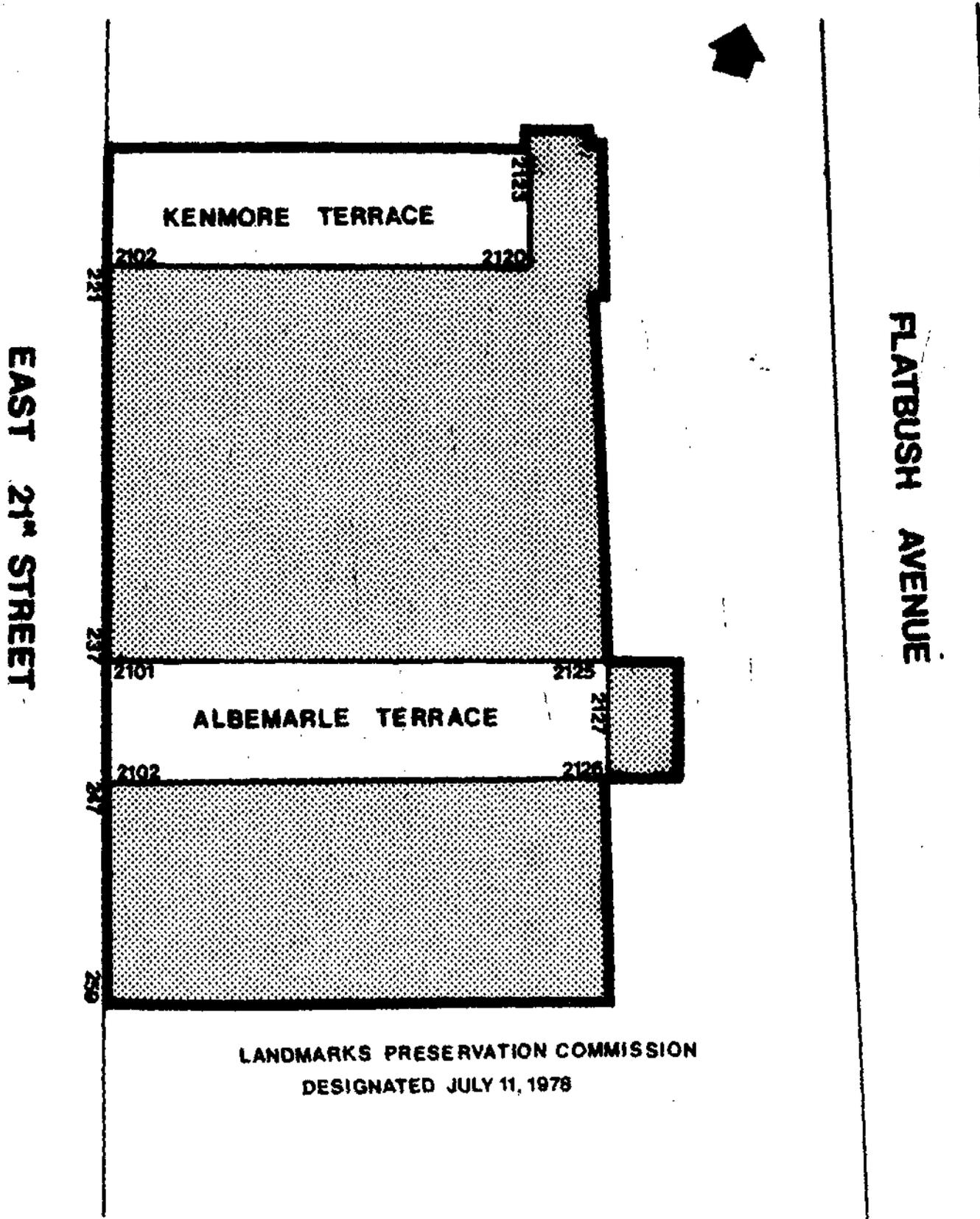
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ALBEMARLE-KENMORE TERRACES

HISTORIC DISTRICT



LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION
DESIGNATED JULY 11, 1978

Landmarks Preservation Commission
July 11, 1978, Designation List 116
LP-0989

ALBEMARLE-KENMORE TERRACES HISTORIC DISTRICT, BOROUGH OF BROOKLYN

BOUNDARIES

The property bounded by the southern property line of 247-259 East 21st Street, the southern property lines of 2104 through 2126 Albemarle Terrace, the eastern property line of 2126 Albemarle Terrace, part of the western property line of 938 Flatbush Avenue, part of the southern property line of 2127 Albemarle Terrace/934 Flatbush Avenue extending 25 feet eastward from the western property line, a line running northward from the southern property line of 2127 Albemarle Terrace/934 Flatbush Avenue to the northern property line of 2127 Albemarle Terrace/934 Flatbush Avenue, part of the northern property line of 2127 Albemarle Terrace/934 Flatbush Avenue extending 25 feet westward from the line running northward, part of the western property line of 932 Flatbush Avenue, the eastern property line of 2123-2125 Albemarle Terrace, part of the eastern property line of 2124 Kenmore Terrace, part of the southern and part of the eastern property lines of 2124 Kenmore Terrace, part of the eastern and part of the northern property lines of 2123 Kenmore Terrace, part of the eastern and part of the northern property lines of 2123 Kenmore Terrace, part of the western property line of 2123 Kenmore Terrace, the northern curb line of Kenmore Terrace, the eastern curb line of East 21st Street, and a line extending from the eastern curb line of East 21st Street to the southern property line of 247-259 East 21st Street, Brooklyn.

TESTIMONY AT THE PUBLIC HEARING

On January 10, 1978, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on this area which is now proposed as an Historic District (Item No. 10). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty-seven persons spoke in favor of the proposed designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

Albemarle and Kenmore Terraces are quiet, residential courts located in the most historic area of Flatbush. Entered from East 21st Street, just south of the Flatbush Dutch Reformed Church (1793-98) and one block west of Erasmus Hall (1786), these small, peaceful enclaves have a tranquil ambience that offers a refreshing contrast to the crowds, traffic and noise at the nearby intersection of Church and Flatbush Avenues. Their residential character is enhanced by the low scale of the buildings and by the adjacent ecclesiastical sites which distinguish them from the large apartment houses that line East 21st Street. On the south, is the handsomely landscaped Third Church of Christ, Scientist, while on the north is the tree-shaded Parsonage of the Dutch Reformed Church and beyond it, the Church's historic graveyard.

The history of the land which contains the Historic District can be traced to 1652, when a settlement was begun at Flatbush. The name Flatbush was probably derived from the Dutch 't Vlacke Bosch, meaning flat woods, an accurate description of the area's topography in the 17th century when it was a flat plain surrounded by a heavily wooded section. When the settlement was founded, Governor Peter Stuyvesant changed the name to Midwout (middle woods) but the older name of Flatbush remained the common name for the entire area.

In 1665, a plan for a new village was proposed with plots set aside for a church, a school, a courthouse and a tavern. The center of this early village was located where Church and Flatbush Avenues now cross, and the first church erected on western Long Island was built southwest of the crossing in 1662. Occupied by the Flatbush Dutch Reformed Church, this is the oldest continuously used ecclesiastical site in New York City. The courthouse was erected just south of the church within the boundaries of the present Historic District. The first public school was built in 1658 across Flatbush Avenue from the church. In 1787, the private Erasmus Hall Academy, one of the first secondary schools chartered by the New York State Board of Regents, was erected south of the public school. The Academy building, a designated New York City Landmark, still stands in the courtyard of the current Erasmus Hall High School. The Academy and the public school merged in 1802.

The area remained a quiet country village, surrounded by farmland until the first half of the 19th century when the first post-colonial development began. In 1834, several English tradesmen and mechanics bought lots and built homes on Erasmus and Johnson Streets, east of the Historic District, in a section that became known as "English neighborhood."⁵ Also in 1834, the land incorporated in the Historic District was purchased by John A. Lott (1805-1878), a prominent figure in Kings County. Lott held a number of important political and judicial positions. He also was involved in the development of Brighton Beach, serving as president of the Brooklyn, Flatbush and Coney Island Railroad Company which had its terminal at the Brighton Beach Hotel--one of the famous 19th-century resorts that lined Brooklyn's Atlantic shoreline. The land in Flatbush remained in the possession of the Lott family until 1916.

The third quarter of the 19th century saw major improvements in Flatbush. Rapid transit facilities linked the village with the City of Brooklyn, work began on Prospect Park, and in 1869 the State Legislature passed a bill which established the street grid pattern for all of Kings County. After the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883, Flatbush began to change from a rural town into a suburb of New York City. In 1886, Richard Ficken, a local entrepreneur, began construction of a development named Tennis Court which was the first of its type in Flatbush. This development of frame houses with streets enhanced by gateposts and a central landscaped mall, was the forerunner of other similar subdivisions such as Prospect Park South, Ditmas Park, and Fiske Terrace which give much of Flatbush its particular suburban character with large, comfortable frame houses along quiet, tree-shaded streets.

While much of the area was being developed in an open and suburban pattern, a large section of northern Flatbush--now Prospect-Lefferts Gardens--was being developed in an urban manner with row houses. This resulted from plans that the prominent Lefferts family of Brooklyn had established for the development of their estate. The Lefferts had restrictive covenants

entered into the deeds which governed the materials, height and placement of the houses on the lots.⁹ Albemarle and Kenmore Terraces, which also had restrictive covenants governing their use, relate more in their planning and execution to Prospect-Lefferts Gardens than to the suburban development of many other parts of Flatbush.

After the property of the Historic District was acquired from the Lott family by Mabel Bull in 1916, she hired Midwood Associates, a Brooklyn real estate firm, to develop the land with row houses for sale to middle class families. It is possible that the firm of Slee & Bryson was chosen as the architects for the development because either the owner or developer knew of the row of fourteen neo-Federal houses at 23-49 Midwood Street in Prospect-Lefferts Gardens, that was designed by the firm and built in 1915. This row is strikingly similar to Albemarle Terrace.

John Bay Slee (1875-1947) was born in Maryland and studied at the Maryland Institute from 1891 to 1893 before coming to New York. Robert H. Bryson (1875-1938) was born in Newark, New Jersey, and educated in Brooklyn. Both men worked with the Brooklyn architect, John J. Petit, who designed many of the houses in Prospect Park South. About 1905, the two men formed their own firm, Slee & Bryson, and began a long and active practice in Brooklyn. Both men served for a time as president of the Brooklyn Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. They worked extensively in various Brooklyn neighborhoods for over a quarter of a century.¹⁰

The neo-Federal style which Slee & Bryson chose for the Albemarle Terrace houses is derived from the Georgian and Federal architecture of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Interest in these styles was reawakened by the Centennial Exhibition held in Philadelphia in 1876, and first popularized by the firm of McKim, Mead & White. It was widely used by many architects and builders in New York City until World War II. Today, houses are still being designed in greatly modified versions of these styles. Basic characteristics of these styles are: red brick laid up in Flemish bond which is often accented by the liberal use of burned brick; double-hung, six-over-six windows; splayed stone lintels; slate roofs; pedimented dormers; and arched doorways with leaded glass fan lights and sidelights. All of these characteristics can be seen in the houses on Albemarle Terrace.

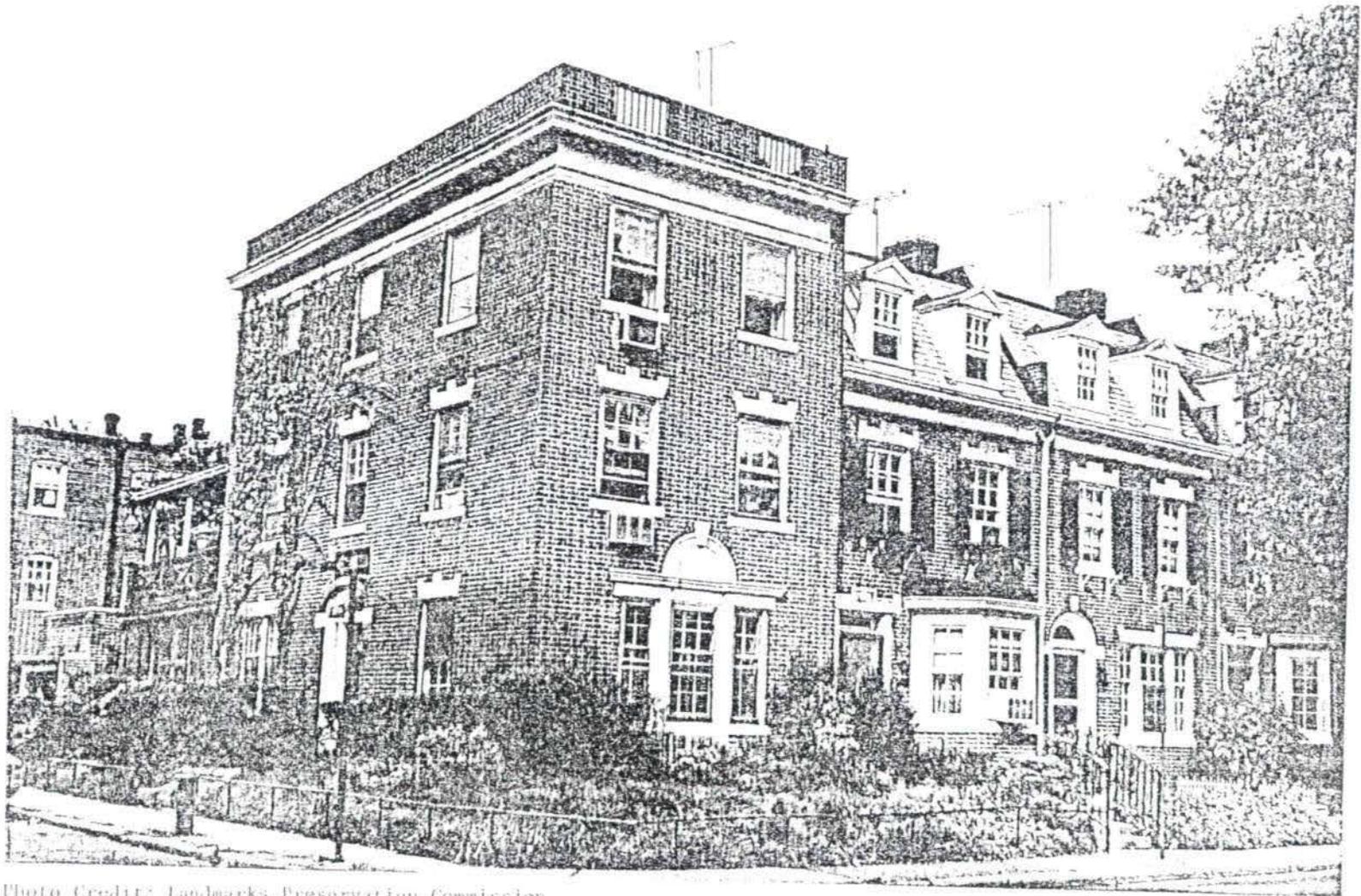


Photo Credit: Landmarks Preservation Commission

237 East 21st Street and 2103 and 2105 Albemarle Terrace

ALBEMARLE TERRACE

Albemarle Terrace is a pleasant tree-shaded court lined with neo-Federal houses raised above street level and set behind terraces or small gardens. All the houses are of brick laid up in Flemish bond; randomly placed burned bricks help give a richer color to the facade and heightens the contrast to the stone trim. Trees are planted within the gardens rather than at the curb line, visually increasing the width of the street and creating a greater sense of space. This landscaping technique was used in Prospect Park South where Slee & Bryson had worked before designing Albemarle and Kenmore Terraces. The houses on Albemarle Terrace were built in 1916-17, and all were sold by Mabel Bull in 1917 or 1918.

The two types of houses on Albemarle Terrace are arranged symmetrically in an alternating pattern. Three-story houses, which serve as the central and flanking elements of the rows, are linked by slightly recessed groups of three two-and-a-half-story houses. There is a slight variation in the northern row where there is only a pair of two-and-a-half-story houses at the eastern end of the Terrace. The architects further enhanced the unity which this pattern creates by dividing each row at the center into two groups of six houses, each group the mirror image of the other; thus 237 East 21st Street and Nos. 2103-2111 Albemarle reflect Nos. 2115-2123, and 255 East 21st Street and Nos. 2104-2112 Albemarle reflect Nos. 2114-2126.

Nos. 237 and 255 East 21st Street, facing each other at the entrance to Albemarle Terrace, are three windows wide along East 21st Street and two windows wide facing the Terrace. The elliptically-arched entrance of each, facing East 21st Street, is enhanced by sidelights, fanlights, stone impost blocks, and keystone. The windows to either side of the entrance and all the windows at the second story have stone lintels with splayed end blocks and keystones. The ground floor of each is pierced by a Palladian window on the Albemarle side. Above the square-headed windows of the third floor is an entablature crowned by a brick parapet.

Nos. 2103-2107 Albemarle Terrace are a group of three houses, two-and-a-half stories high with pitched slate roofs set with dormers. The central house of the group, No. 2105, has a brick round-arched entrance accented by stone impost blocks and keystone. The doorway with leaded glass fanlight is enframed by delicate colonnettes. At the ground floor, the triple window has a stone lintel with splayed end blocks and keystone. The two square-headed windows of the second floor have paneled lintels with vermiculated keystone and end blocks. Rising above the dentiled cornice is the slate roof pierced by two pedimented dormers with raking cornices.

The two flanking houses, Nos. 2103 and 2107, have square-headed entrances with leaded glass transoms. Pilasters at either side of each doorway support paneled stone lintels with a central lamp motif. The ground floor is enhanced by a projecting three-sided bay of brick and wood with each of the windows flanked by paneled pilasters. The second and attic stories of these houses are like that at No. 2105. The design of the other groups of two-and-a-half-story houses at Nos. 2104-2108, 2120-2124, and 2119-2121 is identical to the design of this group (Nos. 2103-2107).

Nos. 2109-2117 and Nos. 2110-2116, the central houses on the north and south sides of the Terrace, and Nos. 2123 and 2126 at the eastern end of the Terrace are of the same type. These three-story houses with flat roofs are entered through projecting vestibules with gabled roofs and round-arched doorways. These doorways are enhanced by leaded-glass fanlights and by fluted pilasters supporting triglyphs. The ground floor of each is pierced by a triple window group with a stone lintel with double keystone and splayed end blocks. At the second floors of the paired central houses, Nos. 2111 and 2115 and Nos. 2112 and 2114, are triple window groups set within segmental arches below ornamented tympana. The other six houses (Nos. 2109, 2117, 2123, 2110, 2116, and 2126) have square-headed windows with lintels with splayed end blocks and keystones at the second floor. The third story of each of the houses is pierced by two square-headed windows above which is a simplified Ionic entablature. Crowning each house is a low brick parapet.

The last building (No. 2125 in the street numbering system) on the northern side of the Terrace is a two-story addition to No. 2123 with a ground floor garage. The treatment of the second floor is like that of the

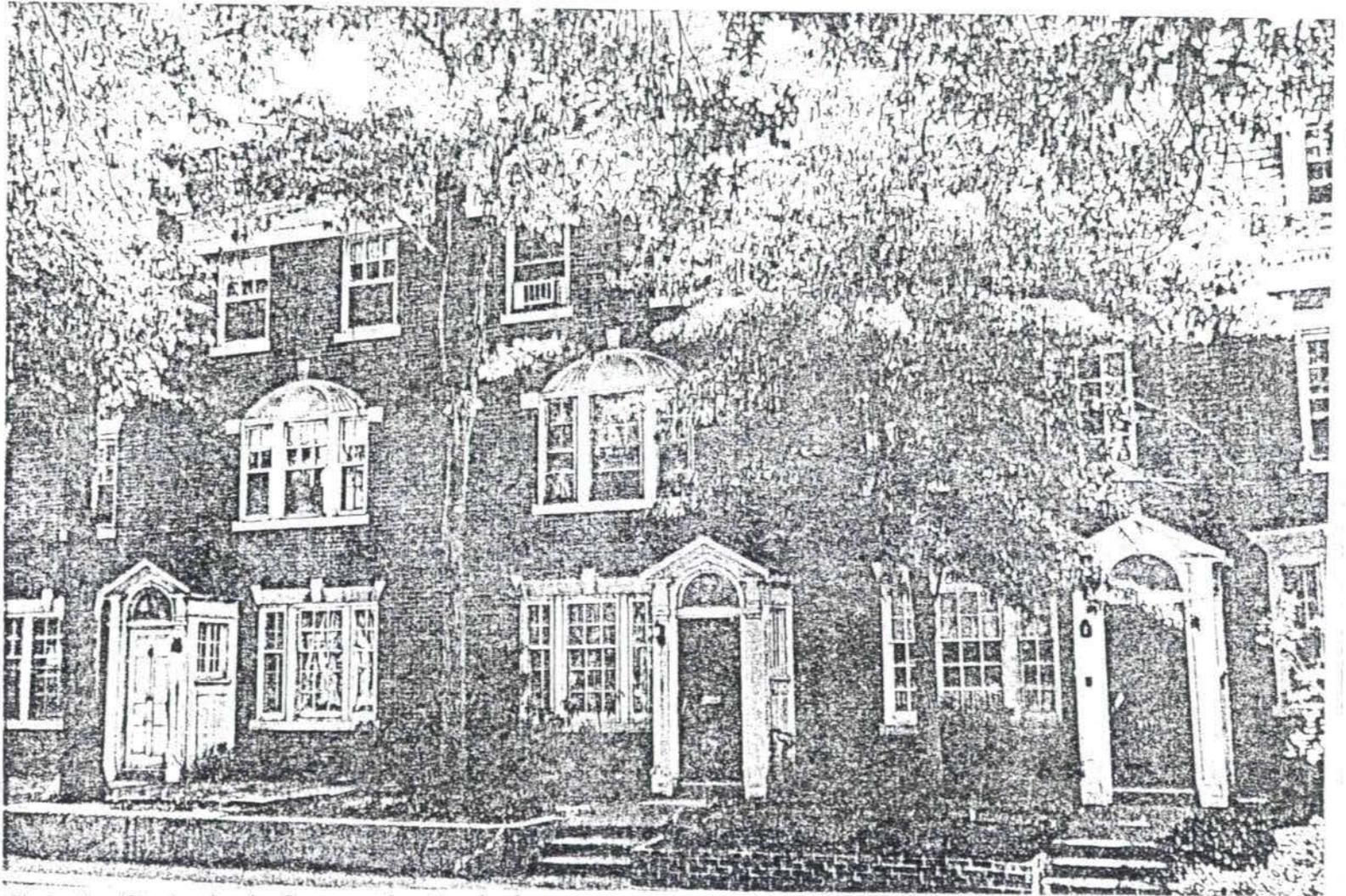


Photo Credit: Landmarks Preservation Commission

2110, 2112, and 2114 Albemarle Terrace

other houses in the row, and the addition is crowned by a low slant roof.

The ground floor of No. 2127-2128, the building which terminates the eastern end of the Terrace, was once an open arcade to Flatbush Avenue. The ground floor has now been sealed and covered with brick and stucco. Round-arched entrances lead to apartments in the upper two stories.

KENMORE TERRACE

The three-story neo-Federal house at the entrance to Kenmore Terrace, 221 East 21st Street, was designed by Slee & Bryson in 1917 and built in 1918. The use of the neo-Federal style may indicate that Kenmore Terrace was originally intended to be designed in the same style as Albemarle Terrace. The house is very similar to the three-story houses at the corners of Albemarle Terrace and stylistically it unifies the two Terraces. No. 221 is simpler in detail, but the design retains a Palladian window facing Kenmore Terrace. The entrance is enhanced by a handsome hood carried on horizontal brackets.

The six houses on the south side of Kenmore Terrace (Nos. 2104-2120) were built in 1918-19 in a style derived from English Garden City type houses and reflect a change in the way of life of the American family. The Garden City movement, which had its beginnings in England around the turn of the century, sought to combine the best features of urban and suburban development with emphasis on low scale, open space, and the segregation of industrial, commercial, and residential areas. Litchfield, a community south of London created by Ebenezer Howard and Sir Raymond Unwin in 1903, was the first product of this new philosophy.

The first major example of the Garden City movement in the United States was Forest Hills Gardens, Queens, in 1908. The houses were built in a picturesque style, and some of the more notable characteristics were asymmetrical massing of elements, dramatic roof lines, and an interaction between the building and its immediate landscape. Each group of buildings in Forest Hills Gardens was planned to provide as much open space as possible.

The growth of the Garden City movement in the United States paralleled the rise in popularity of the automobile. The automobile presented a new challenge for the architects of the day. One of the methods for dealing with this problem of roads, parking, and storage was to build rear service alleys which included space for automobiles.

Because of space limitations in building Kenmore Terrace, service alleys big enough for cars were not feasible. There is a common rear alley behind the Kenmore and Albemarle Terrace houses and another rear alley behind the houses on the south side of Albemarle Terrace, but they are narrow ones. Realizing that the automobile had become a necessity for the middle class, the architects incorporated garages into the picturesque design of the houses. These two-and-a-half-story houses were among the first to have garages placed in the ground floor and to have the doors fully exposed on the main facade. This type of design has become a standard form for row house construction in New York City. Because of the garages, the houses are also wider (26 feet instead of 17 feet 6 inches) than those on Albemarle Terrace.

Each house is planned in a shallow "L" with a gabled end facing the street and a pitched roof section parallel to the street. The two central houses (Nos. 2112 and 2114) are treated as a single unit, joined by a broad, full story gable and a shared projecting window bay on the ground floor. There are two houses on either side of this unit (Nos. 2104, 2108, 2118 and 2120), each of which has a shorter half story gable. The simple, restrained round-arched entrance to each house is composed of brick voussoirs with stone impost blocks and keystone. Handsome iron railings line the front steps. The garages, defined by shallow shed roofs, are situated to the side of the gabled section of each house. The large garage opening is spanned by a graceful segmental arch with voussoirs of alternating upright stretchers and burned headers. The original garage doors have three vertical panels, diamond pane windows, and strap hinges. These six houses were sold by Mabel Bull in 1919 upon their completion.

The two houses, Nos. 2123 and 2124, which terminate the eastern end of the street, were the last houses to be built on Kenmore Terrace. They were

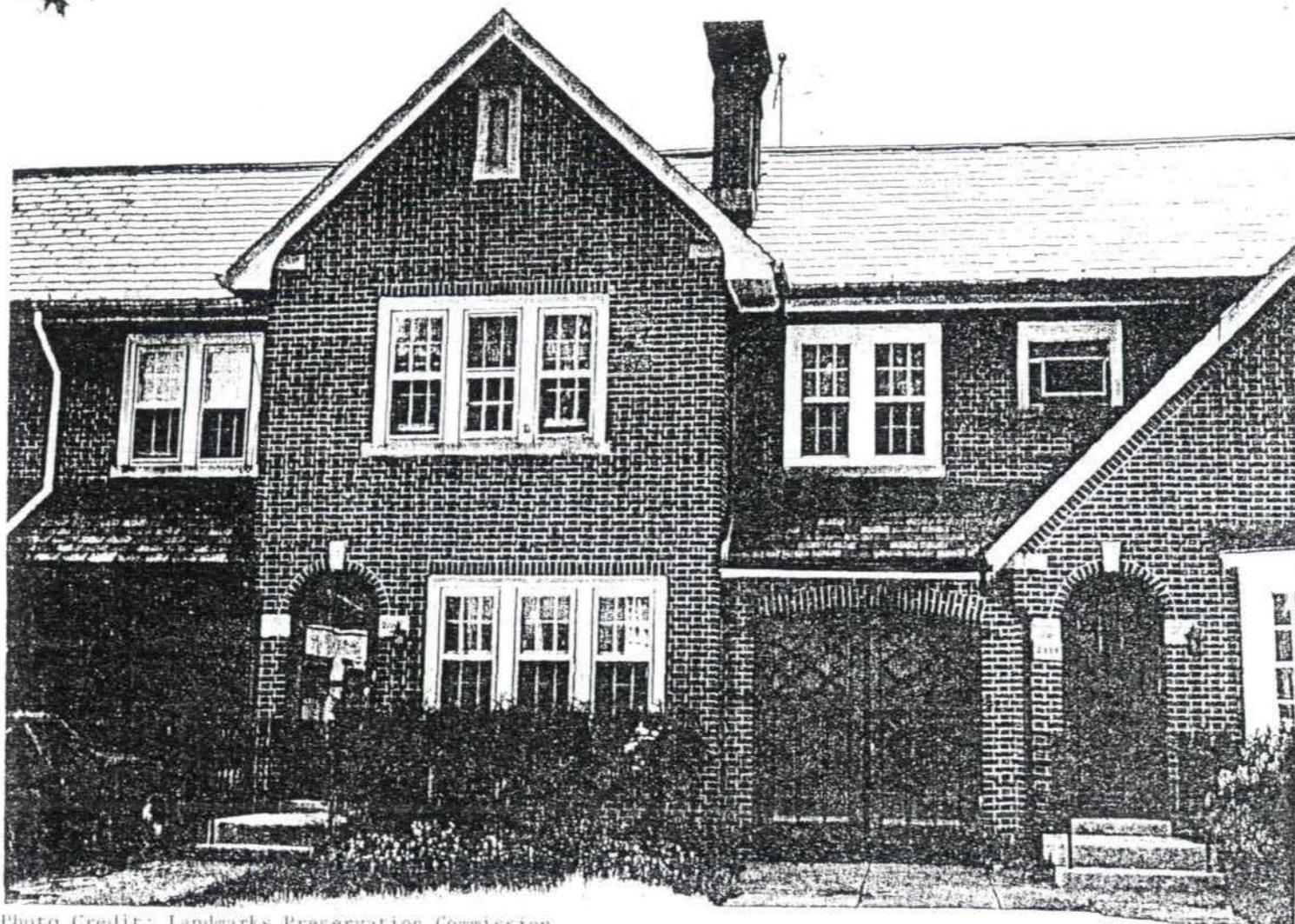


Photo Credit: Landmarks Preservation Commission

2114 and 2118 Kenmore Terrace

designed in a simplified neo-Federal style by the architects, erected in 1919-20, and sold by Mabel Bull in 1920. These two-story houses form a shallow "C" opening onto Kenmore Terrace. The northern, projecting section of No. 2123 is enhanced by brick quoins, a band course at cornice level, and a brick parapet. The entrance is marked by a projecting brick vestibule with slate shed roof and arched openings. The recessed portion of No. 2123 has a three-sided, brick and wood bay with hood. The entrance section to No. 2124 joins No. 2120 and also has shed roof vestibule. The windows of both houses are square-headed. With No. 221 East 21st Street at the entrance to Kenmore Terrace, these two houses create a frame for the distinctive row of houses on the south side of the Terrace.

FOOTNOTES

1. Maud E. Dilliard, "A Village Called Midwout," Journal of Long Island History, 2 (Autumn 1974), 6-24.
2. Dilliard, 7.
3. Abstracts for Block 5102, (Long Island Historical Society, Brooklyn).
4. Landmarks Preservation Commission, Erasmus Hall Museum Designation Report (New York: City of New York, March 15, 1966 (LP-0171)).
5. Andrew Dolkart, Prospect Park South, Flatbush and the Rise of the American Suburb, Unpubl. Typescript, (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1977), 2.
6. Henry R. Stiles (ed.), The Civil, Political, Professional and Ecclesiastical History and Commercial and Industrial Record of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, N.Y. From 1683 to 1884 (New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., 1884), vol. I, pp. 352-54.
7. Stiles, vol. I, p. 173.
8. Flatbush of To-Day, Herbert F. Gunnison, ed. (Brooklyn, 1908), p. 63.
9. Conveyances of Deeds and Real Property, Block 5034, Liber 6, Page 267, (Office of the Register, Brooklyn).
10. Architectural Record, 101 (March 1947) (Slee Obit.).
New York Times, Jan. 15, 1947 (Slee Obit.).
Sept. 11, 1938 (Bryson Obit.).
Who Was Who in America, vol. 2, 1943-50, p. 491. (Slee).
Henry F. and Elsie R. Withey, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects, Deceased, (California: Hennessy and Ingalls, Inc., 1970).

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 Albemarle-Kenmore Terraces 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 Albemarle-Kenmore Terraces Historic District is comprised of two charming residential courts lined with early 20th-century row houses; that the houses were designed by the Brooklyn architectural firm of Slee & Bryson who worked in many of Brooklyn's most handsome residential sections; that Albemarle Terrace was designed in the popular neo-Federal style; that Kenmore Terrace shows the influence of the Garden City movement new to this country; that the houses on Kenmore Terrace which incorporate garages reflect a change in the American way of life; that the row houses on Kenmore are an early example of the type of row house which continues to be built in New York City; that the Terraces are distinguished by the uniform use of materials, height and color producing a harmonious effect; that the Historic District is located in the historic center of Flatbush; and that the district is a charming and peaceful enclave in the City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly 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 an Historic District the Albemarle-Kenmore Terraces Historic District, Borough of Brooklyn, containing the property bounded by the southern property line of 247-259 East 21st Street, the southern property lines of 2104 through 2126 Albemarle Terrace, the eastern property line of 2126 Albemarle Terrace, part of the western property line of 938 Flatbush Avenue, part of the southern property line of 2127 Albemarle Terrace/934 Flatbush Avenue extending 25 feet eastward from the western property line, a line running northward from the southern property line of 2127 Albemarle Terrace/934 Flatbush Avenue to the northern property line of 2127 Albemarle Terrace/934 Flatbush Avenue, part of the northern property line of 2127 Albemarle Terrace/934 Flatbush Avenue extending 25 feet westward from the line running northward, part of the western property line of 932 Flatbush Avenue, the eastern property line of 2123-2125 Albemarle Terrace, part of the eastern property line of 2124 Kenmore Terrace, part of the southern and part of the eastern property lines of 2124 Kenmore Terrace, part of the eastern and part of the northern property lines of 2123 Kenmore Terrace, part of the eastern and part of the northern property lines of 2123 Kenmore Terrace, part of the western property line of 2123 Kenmore Terrace, the northern curb line of Kenmore Terrace, the eastern curb line of East 21st Street, and a line extending from the eastern curb line of East 21st Street to the southern property line of 247-259 East 21st Street, Brooklyn.

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