

HISTORIC JAMAICA

We hope that you will take a walk through Jamaica's history and discover our architectural treasures. Jamaica is a community that is proud of its past, and excited about its future — a vibrant downtown characterized by the energy, diversity, and entrepreneurship of its residents, workers, businesses, and leaders.

King Manor Museum

150-03 Jamaica Ave.

The finest 19th century manor house remaining in New York City, King Manor was the home of Rufus King — a signer of the U.S. Constitution, U.S. Senator, and outspoken opponent of slavery. Today, it is a museum dedicated to Rufus King. In Federalist tradition, decoration is modest and proportions are solid. A pedimented window on the second floor and a handsome columned portico give the Manor's entrance an elegant character. ■ ●



1



2

Grace Episcopal Church

155-15 Jamaica Ave.

Built in 1862, Grace Episcopal Church is an outstanding example of English Gothic Revival architecture. Although comparatively small in size, it is strikingly bold in appearance. The broached spire, making the transition from its square buttressed base to an octagon, has great nobility and dignity. The Church contains several WPA murals painted during the Great Depression. The open church-yard forms a pleasant contrast to the commercial character of Jamaica Avenue. ■ ●

La Casina

90-33 160th St.

Built in 1934, the former La Casina is a rare Queens example of the streamlined Moderne Style. Its zigzag facade and projecting neon sign once called attention to its use as a night club and restaurant. Restored in 1993, it is today the home of the Jamaica Business Resource Center. ■

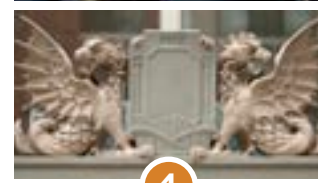
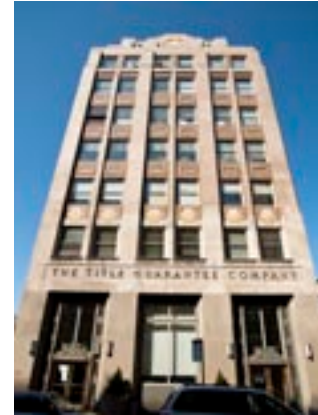


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Title Guarantee

90-04 161st St.

Completed in 1928, the Title Guarantee Building is characteristic of many small Art Deco office buildings constructed in New York City during the Jazz Age. It at once gives the impression of soaring vertically at the top, and at the base, strength and durability. Rene Paul Chambellan, one of Art Deco's greatest sculptors whose work includes the Daily News Building and Radio City Music Hall, designed the exterior ornamental reliefs. ■



4

The Firehouse

89-56 162nd St.

The Jamaica Firehouse, completed in 1925, is a fine example of Classical Revival architecture. Its three bays once accommodated one hook and ladder and three engine companies. The Firehouse closed in the 1960's when more modern replacement facilities were built. In 1990, this unique historic structure was renovated for commercial re-use. ★



5

Valencia Theatre

165-11 Jamaica Ave.

Designed by John Ebersson and constructed in 1929, the Valencia was one of the several atmospheric "Wonder Theatres" built across the country. The interior, with its star-lit ceiling, pools, niches, and exotic decoration, creates the impression of a stunning Spanish plaza. The Theatre is now the Tabernacle of Prayer. ■



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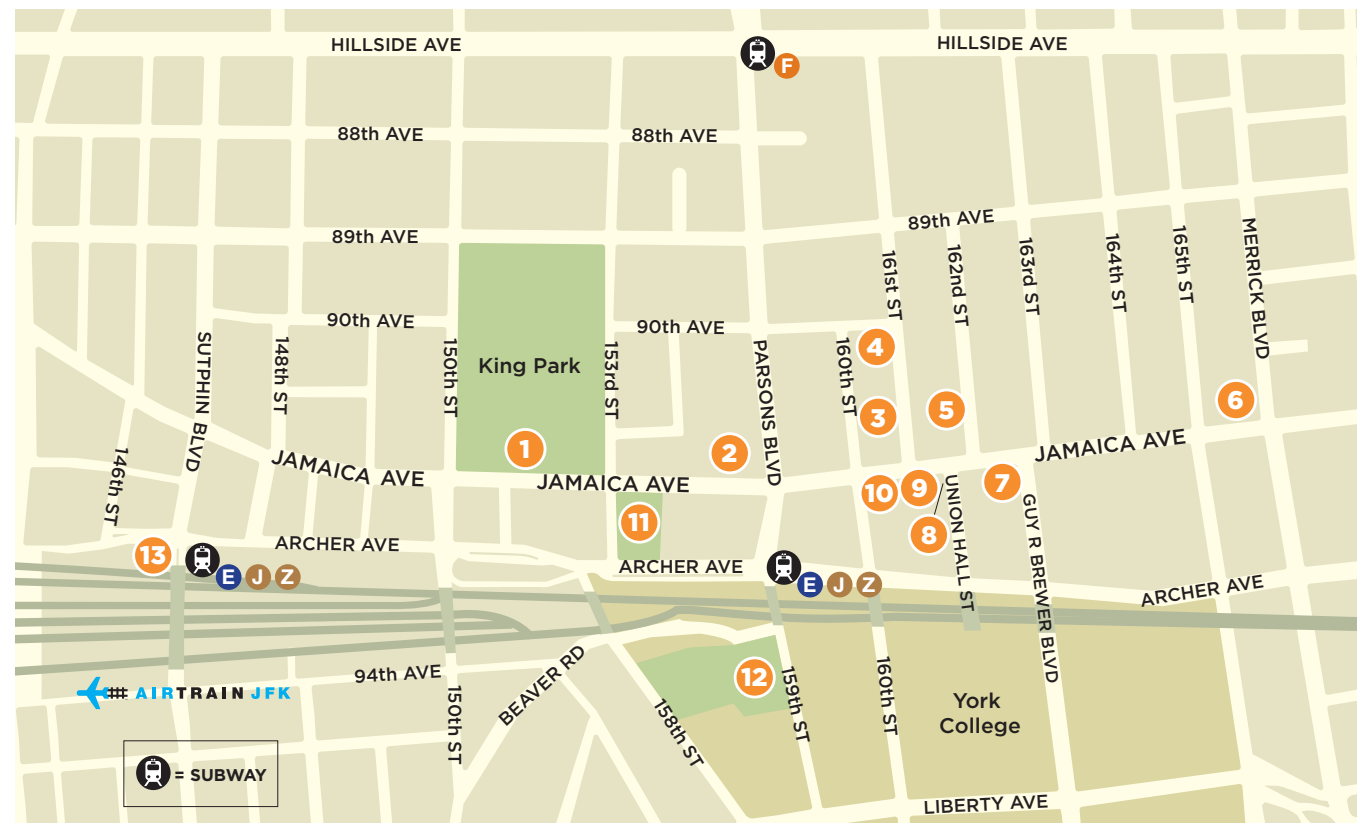


13

Long Island Rail Road Jamaica Station

Archer Avenue and Sutphin Boulevard

The LIRR Jamaica Station was constructed in 1913, and currently serves as the general offices of the Long Island Rail Road. The station is five stories tall and has a rectangular form. It is faced with stone on its lower two floors, painted white, with red brick above. Each facade features large bays of windows with metal enframements and panels, some featuring a central diamond pattern. The stunning AirTrain Terminal, completed in 2003, is next door. ●

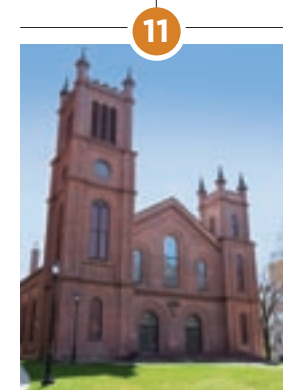


12

Prospect Cemetery

Beaver Rd./159th St.

Established in 1668, Prospect Cemetery is the oldest cemetery in Queens County and served as the burial ground for many prominent families living in Jamaica. The Chapel was recently renovated and dedicated to Illinois Jacquet, a world-famous jazz musician. It will be re-used for community events, meetings, and educational purposes in conjunction with York College. Restoration work to the Cemetery is expected to begin in 2009. ■



11

First Reformed Church

153-16 Jamaica Ave.

Built in 1859, the church was designed and constructed by Jamaica master carpenter Sidney J. Young, with assistance from master mason Anders Peterson. It is among the finest examples of Early Romanesque Revival Style. The City recently completed a \$22 million restoration of the now landmarked building, which will be operated by the Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning as a premier performing arts center and multipurpose venue. ■ ●

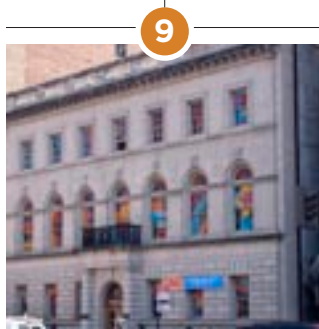


10

Former Jamaica Savings Bank

161-02 Jamaica Ave.

Built in 1898, this landmarked structure is the finest Beaux Arts building in Queens. The sensual decoration and delicate iron work are a pleasant contrast to the stern but elegant Register Building next door. The facade is united by two architectural devices — symmetrical pilasters rising two floors, supporting a defined cornice and pediment, and two ornamental balconies focusing attention on the entrance. ■



9

Former Register Building

161-04 Jamaica Ave.

Built in 1898, the Register served for 76 years as the County Registry for title deeds in Queens. Its Neo-Italian Renaissance facade makes a unique contribution to the Jamaica Avenue streetscape. The imposing rusticated masonry work on the ground level contrasts strongly with the smooth surfaces, restrained moldings, and large arched windows on the second level. Now a New York City landmark, it is today home to the Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning. ■

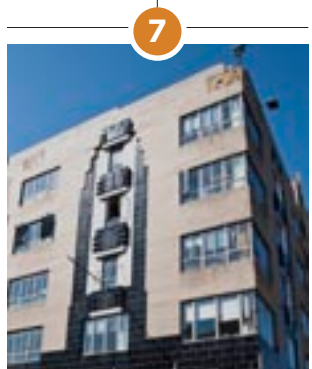


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Sidewalk Clock

Union Hall St.

Originally erected in 1900 and located at 161-11 Jamaica Avenue, this is a fine example of a virtually extinct street amenity, and was designated a New York City landmark in 1981. It is double-faced with a cast-iron paneled base, fluted column post, and splendid acroteria motif crowning the clock face. It was restored and moved to its present location on Union Hall Street in 1989. ■



7

Former Kurtz Store

162-24 Jamaica Ave.

This former furniture store is a fine example of Art Deco Style. The material and forms give the building a smooth, streamlined appearance. They suggest a futuristic vision of the twentieth century: a positive view of the technology, speed, light, and space which was prevalent in the 1930's. ■

FUTURE JAMAICA

Jamaica is a growing Downtown with a unique blend of historic buildings that both preserve its rich past and provide the context for new development and growth. This rendering shows the former Queens Family Court building, with its ornate Italian Renaissance-style facade, being integrated into a new mixed-use project currently under development by the Dermot Company that will feature new housing and high-quality retail space. Restoring such historic landmarks to productive use creates new focal points of community and civic activity, and significantly adds to the renewed sense of energy and quality of life that is driving sustainable growth and revitalization in Downtown Jamaica.



Russell Design NYC

Greater Jamaica Development Corporation is a community-building organization that plans, promotes, coordinates and advances responsible development to revitalize Jamaica and strengthen the region.

Marshalling the resources of the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors, the Corporation's work expands economic opportunity and improves quality of life for the ethnically and economically diverse residents of Jamaica and for the region, which benefits from rational, well-planned, and sustainable metropolitan growth.

Greater Jamaica Development Corporation
90-04 161st Street
Jamaica, New York 11432
718-291-0282
www.gjdc.org

■	New York City Designated Landmark
●	National Register of Historic Places
★	Landmark Quality

VISIT JAMAICA

Jamaica, Queens is a dynamic urban center and regional transportation hub characterized by the energy and entrepreneurship of its people — a downtown on the way up. Jamaica has numerous government and institutional anchors serving the New York City region. The City's recently approved rezoning plan for Jamaica is stimulating sustainable development in one of the region's most transit-rich environments — a vibrant "airport village" adjacent to the AirTrain/LIRR Jamaica Station hub. In this brochure, you will learn about the history of Jamaica, and the vibrant uses of its historic structures that enhance the quality of life for this community, the borough of Queens, and New York City as a whole.

—The Honorable Helen M. Marshall, President, Borough of Queens

Jamaica is a notable example of the importance of Queens to the cultural and historic richness of New York City. This guide vividly explores the many historically and architecturally significant buildings in Jamaica, the oldest downtown in Queens. Designated landmarks such as King Manor, the Jamaica Performing Arts Center, Grace Episcopal Church, and Prospect Cemetery are just a few of an impressive array of buildings that await your discovery.

—The Honorable Robert B. Tierney, Chairman, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

A Brief History of Jamaica

Jamaica Avenue was an ancient trail for Native American tribes from as far away as the Ohio River and the Great Lakes, coming to trade skins and furs for wampum. In 1655, early settlers paid the Native Americans with two guns, a coat, and some powder for the land lying between the old trail and "Beaver Pond." Dutch Governor Peter Stuyvesant dubbed the area Rustdorp. The English, who took it over in 1664, renamed it "jameco," the Carnarsie word for beaver. And so, Jamaica was born.

By 1776, Jamaica had become a trading post for farmers and their produce. For over a century, horse-drawn carts plodded along Jamaica Avenue, then called King's Highway. Rufus King, a signer of the Constitution and advocate for the abolition of slavery, came to live here in 1805. He added to a modest 18th century farmhouse to create a Federalist-style manor that still stands today as a museum dedicated to his life and work. The Village of Jamaica was incorporated in 1814. By 1834 the Brooklyn and Jamaica Railroad Company had a line into Jamaica. Jamaica Avenue, then Fulton Street, was, in 1850, a plank road with a toll gate; in 1866 the tracks were laid for a horse car line. Twenty years later those tracks were the first in the state to be electrified.

In the years following the Civil War, Jamaica grew rapidly. The 1875 population of 780 jumped to 3,922 five years later. By 1898, the year Queens was incorporated into New York City, 6,500 people lived in Jamaica. By 1910, that number topped 58,000. Business and residential development accelerated in the 20th century, with the 1918 extension of the elevated transit lines (with a nickel fare!), which enabled people who worked in Manhattan to live in Jamaica. The Long Island Rail Road Station was completed in 1913. By the 1940's, Jamaica's commercial district included fine department stores, the first modern supermarket, and a Spanish Baroque movie palace — the Loew's Valencia Theatre. The 1937 opening of the IND Subway under Hillside Avenue linked Jamaica with Manhattan and Brooklyn.

Today, Jamaica is one of the most vibrant urban communities in the United States. It has numerous institutional anchors that include two Federal buildings serving multi-state regions, the \$1.8 billion AirTrain rail link to JFK Airport, and new court facilities establishing Jamaica as a regional center of judicial and legal activities. Jamaica is home to significant civic assets that include the Queens Borough Public Library, York College, Rufus King Park, historic King Manor Museum, and the recently completed



Jamaica Avenue 1830



Jamaica Avenue 1944



Jamaica Avenue 2009

Jamaica Performing Arts Center — housed in a landmarked former Dutch Reformed Church building completed in 1858. Thousands of employees, residents, entrepreneurs, and commuters are creating a renewed sense of energy. Along with a core African-American community, today's population includes households from the Caribbean, Central America, and South Asia. Jamaica is the quintessential New York City community, reflecting its reputation as a tolerant, diverse "melting pot" of peoples and cultures.

Architectural Styles

Here is a quick guide to architectural styles that you can find in historic Downtown Jamaica.



Colonial/Federal

Circa 1725-1825. Primarily wood frame, sometimes brick structures. Stylistically derived from English Georgian architecture; later, more directly from Classical Greek. Columns, dentil moldings, and small-pane windows are typical. Windows and doors may have pedimented or arched lintels. Roofs are usually peaked or gambrelled. Building forms are simple.

Examples: King Manor Museum, Jamaica, NY
Gracie Mansion, Manhattan, NY



Gothic Revival

Circa 1850-1880. This style finds expression mainly in church architecture, but is sometimes found in Manhattan and Brooklyn brownstones. The pointed Gothic arch is typical, as are buttresses, lattice screens, and statuary. These elements are combined to give a strong sense of verticality and lightness.

Examples: Grace Church, Jamaica, NY
St. Patrick's Cathedral, Manhattan, NY



Romanesque Revival

Circa 1860-1890. Building forms are usually massive, with an emphasis on the depth and expanse of solid surfaces. Rounded open arches are used to dramatize entrances or important interior spaces. Ornamentation is derived from Byzantine, Coptic and Celtic architecture. Mythological figures and symbols are sometimes incorporated into the decoration.

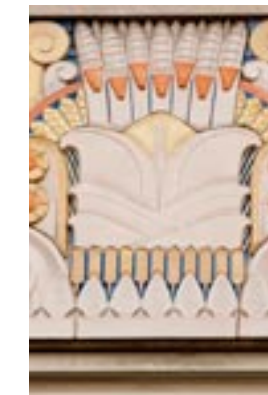
Examples: First Reformed Church, Jamaica, NY
Jefferson Market Courthouse, Manhattan, NY



Free Classical

Circa 1890-1920. The building plan and façade are usually arranged symmetrically. Interior volumes are large, monumental, and strongly articulated around a central axis. Decoration is free and eclectic, with elements and motives drawn from Classical Greece, Rome, and the Renaissance creating richly embellished façades.

Examples: Old Jamaica Savings Bank, Jamaica, NY
Grand Central Terminal, Manhattan, NY



Art Deco

Circa 1920-1930. Building forms are simple and solid. Quite often, the profile is staggered, diminishing toward the top, heightening a sense of verticality. Ornamentation is abstract, polychromatic and three-dimensional, applied lavishly around doorways, parapets, columns, or in horizontal bands between floors.

Examples: Title Guarantee, Jamaica, NY
Radio City Music Hall, Manhattan, NY

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WALKING TOUR AND GUIDE

