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The Big Apple Greeter Guide to

Victorian Flatbush

THE FLATBUSH SECTION OF BROOKLYN CONTAINS THE LARGEST concentration of lavish, sprawling Victorian homes in the United States. The term Victorian architecture refers to a number of architectural styles from the Victorian era including Colonial Revival, Tudor, Queen Anne, Arts and Crafts, and Greek Revival. Seven- and eight-bedroom single-family homes, rarities in New York City, are common in Victorian Flatbush.

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ALBEMARLE ROAD

ERASMUS HALL HIGH SCHOOL



GREETER'S SECRET: The current Beverley Road subway stationhouse and below-grade platforms were completed in 1907. The stationhouse is on the National Register of Historic Places and features artwork by Patsy Norvell called *Garden Stops* featuring etched images of leaves on the inside glass windows.

Where is Victorian Flatbush?

Flatbush is in Central Brooklyn, bounded by Prospect Park to the north, Avenue H to the south, New York Avenue to the east, and Coney Island Avenue to the west. Prospect Park South, a typical example of Victorian Flatbush, is bounded by Church Avenue to the north, Coney Island Avenue to the west, Cortelyou Road to the south and Ocean Avenue to the east.

About Victorian Flatbush

Established as a town in 1652, Flatbush derives from the Dutch *vlakke bos* meaning flat woodland. Flatbush remained primarily farmland until the 1880s when the new railroad lines provided access between the then-separate cities of New York and Brooklyn to commuters. Flatbush became part of Brooklyn in 1894, just four years before Brooklyn became part of New York City. In the 1890s, real estate developer Dean Alvord bought a large tract of land south of Church Avenue which was eventually named Prospect Park South. His goal was to create a suburb for "people of intelligence and good breeding," according to his original prospectus. While other parts of Brooklyn were building rowhouses, Alvord wanted detached homes built under careful restrictions. He installed all utilities and paved all the streets before selling one plot of land. He required that fences, hedges and plantings not extend beyond the house lines

so that the front yards would combine into a unified majestic sweep. He planted carefully chosen Norway maple trees for permanence, alternating every twenty feet with Carolina poplar trees for immediate shade, reasoning that the poplars would die out as the maples reached maturity. Gateposts engraved with the initials "PPS" were installed at the entrances of many of the streets; most are still standing. He also renamed the numbered streets to the more elegant names **ALBEMARLE, RUGBY, BUCKINGHAM** and **WESTMINSTER**. Prospect Park South was designated an historic district by the New York City Landmarks Commission in 1978.

It's Easy to Get to Victorian Flatbush

M BY SUBWAY: Q train to Church Avenue, Beverley Road or Cortelyou Road. B train to Church Avenue.

BY BUS: Bus lines that service Flatbush include the **B23, B35** and **B41**.

Things to See and Do in Victorian Flatbush

1 THE FLATBUSH REFORMED PROTESTANT DUTCH CHURCH at the corner of Flatbush and Church Avenues was built in 1796 and features Romanesque arches and many original Tiffany windows depicting the homes of

old Flatbush families. A large graveyard in the back has tombstones from the 18th and 19th centuries. The original church at that site was built in 1654 under the direction of Governor Peter Stuyvesant and included a stockade for protection against marauding Indian bands.

Tucked away in the back, behind the graveyard, is the parsonage, built in 1853. Like many Flatbush buildings, it is a combination of styles: a Greek Revival house with Corinthian columned verandah and Italianate details. The parsonage opens onto Kenmore Terrace, a small street with nice brick rowhouses.

2 ERASMUS HALL ACADEMY at 911 Flatbush Avenue at Church Avenue is a Federal-style wooden building inside the courtyard of Erasmus Hall High School.

Established as a private academy in 1786, Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr both contributed to the building fund before their famous duel. If you peek through the gate, you can see a statue of Desiderius Erasmus, the Dutch Renaissance philosopher. Generations of students have thrown pennies into his open book. Legend has it that if the penny stays in the book, the lucky student will pass his exams.

GREETER'S SECRET: Barbra Streisand and Neil Diamond both attended Erasmus Hall High School during the same time period and sang together in the school choir.



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ARGYLE ROAD



DRESSED UP FOR THE HOLIDAYS

3 **FLATBUSH TOWN HALL** at 35 Snyder Avenue between Flatbush and Bedford Avenues is a Gothic-style building erected in 1875 for use before Flatbush became part of Brooklyn.

4 Dean Alvord created **ALBEMARLE ROAD** as his main boulevard, with a planted strip extending down the middle of the street. This strip, called the Flatbush Malls, is lined with a mixture of pine and oak trees, holly bushes, and other trees and shrubs, as well as seasonal flowers that grace the intersections. Albemarle Road also boasts some outstanding houses. The Queen Anne white clapboard house at **1305 ALBEMARLE ROAD** near Argyle Road was built in 1905 for a Mr. George Gale. It has a large two-story portico with porches on either side and has over 20 rooms.

5 Further along Albemarle Road near Marlborough Road, see the Colonial Revival house at **1440 ALBEMARLE ROAD** with a huge temple front and Doric columns. The nearby mansion at **1510 ALBEMARLE ROAD** near was built in 1900 and includes a conservatory and a stable. It was once owned by Captain James P. McAllister of the McAllister Brothers Tugboat Company.

6 The streets crossing Albemarle Road have similarly eclectic and beautiful houses. Consider the block of Buckingham Road between Albemarle

Road and Church Avenue. The neo-French Renaissance house at **100 BUCKINGHAM ROAD** was built in 1908 by Arthur Harmon, architect of the Empire State Building. The Victorian shingle house with the bell-capped tower at **115 BUCKINGHAM ROAD** was built in 1900 for M. G. Gillette of razor fame. The unusual house at **131 BUCKINGHAM ROAD** has Japanese-style details painted in contrasting shades and was built by Dean Alvord as a promotion for his Prospect Park South development. “Oriental style” was in vogue among the upper class of the late 19th century, but usually just one room in a house was decorated this way. Alvord advertised the house in *Country Life in America* magazine. The 1903 advertisement emphasized its “dainty” beauty but added it was “thoroughly practical,” complete with a porcelain

Roman bathtub. On the market for \$26,500, it took three years to sell.

7 On Rugby Road near Church Avenue, see the Spanish Mission style house at **94 RUGBY ROAD** and the Swiss chalet at **100 RUGBY ROAD** that is currently painted blue and white. The house at **101 RUGBY ROAD** achieved fame as the boarding house where Meryl Streep and Kevin Kline lived in the movie *Sophie's Choice*. It was painted pink for the filming.

8 The Colonial Revival house at **136 STRATFORD ROAD** near Turner Place with a temple front was built in 1905.

9 On Argyle Road near Albemarle Road, see a good example of Georgian architecture at **141 ARGYLE ROAD** and a large Tudor house at **183 ARGYLE ROAD**.



BUCKINGHAM ROAD



THE JAPANESE HOUSE



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SHOPPING ALONG CHURCH AVENUE



MIMI'S HUMMUS

10 THE FLATBUSH-TOMPKINS CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH at 424 E. 19th Street near Dorchester Road was built in 1900 in the neo-Georgian style. The churchyard includes a parish house and a parsonage.

Shopping

11 THE FLATBUSH FOOD COOPERATIVE at 1415 Cortelyou Road near Marlborough Road is a community-owned, full-service natural foods store specializing in organic products, including cosmetics and toiletries. To learn more, see their website at <http://www.flatbushfoodcoop.com>.

GREETER'S SECRET:

The northbound platform of the Cortelyou Road subway station is less than 600 feet from the Beverley Road station platform. This is the shortest distance between stations in the entire subway system. It is possible for a full-length train to successfully use both platforms for an emergency exit with the first car at one station and the last car at the other.

When It's Time to Eat

12 THE FARM ON ADDERLEY at 1108 Cortelyou Road between Stratford and Westminster Roads was named after a street in Cape Town, South Africa. This upscale restaurant features fresh, seasonal ingredients and recently began serving breakfast. There's a nice garden in the back and children are welcome. To learn more, see their website at <http://www.thefarmonadderley.com>.



13 PICKET FENCE at 1310 Cortelyou Road between Argyle and Rugby Roads is a nice, casual choice that is open seven days a week for lunch and dinner. To learn more, see their website at http://www.picketfencebrooklyn.com/51421_5619.asp.



Culture

The Flatbush Development Corporation offers an annual **FLATBUSH VICTORIAN HOUSE TOUR**. To learn more, see their website at <http://www.fdconline.org>. It also sponsors the Flatbush Frolic, an annual street fair that takes place along Cortelyou Road. To learn more, see the website at <http://flatbushfrolic.org>.

The free annual **FLATBUSH ARTISTS STUDIO TOUR** lets you see artists at work and buy artwork directly from the artist. To learn more, see the website at <http://www.flatbushartists.org>.

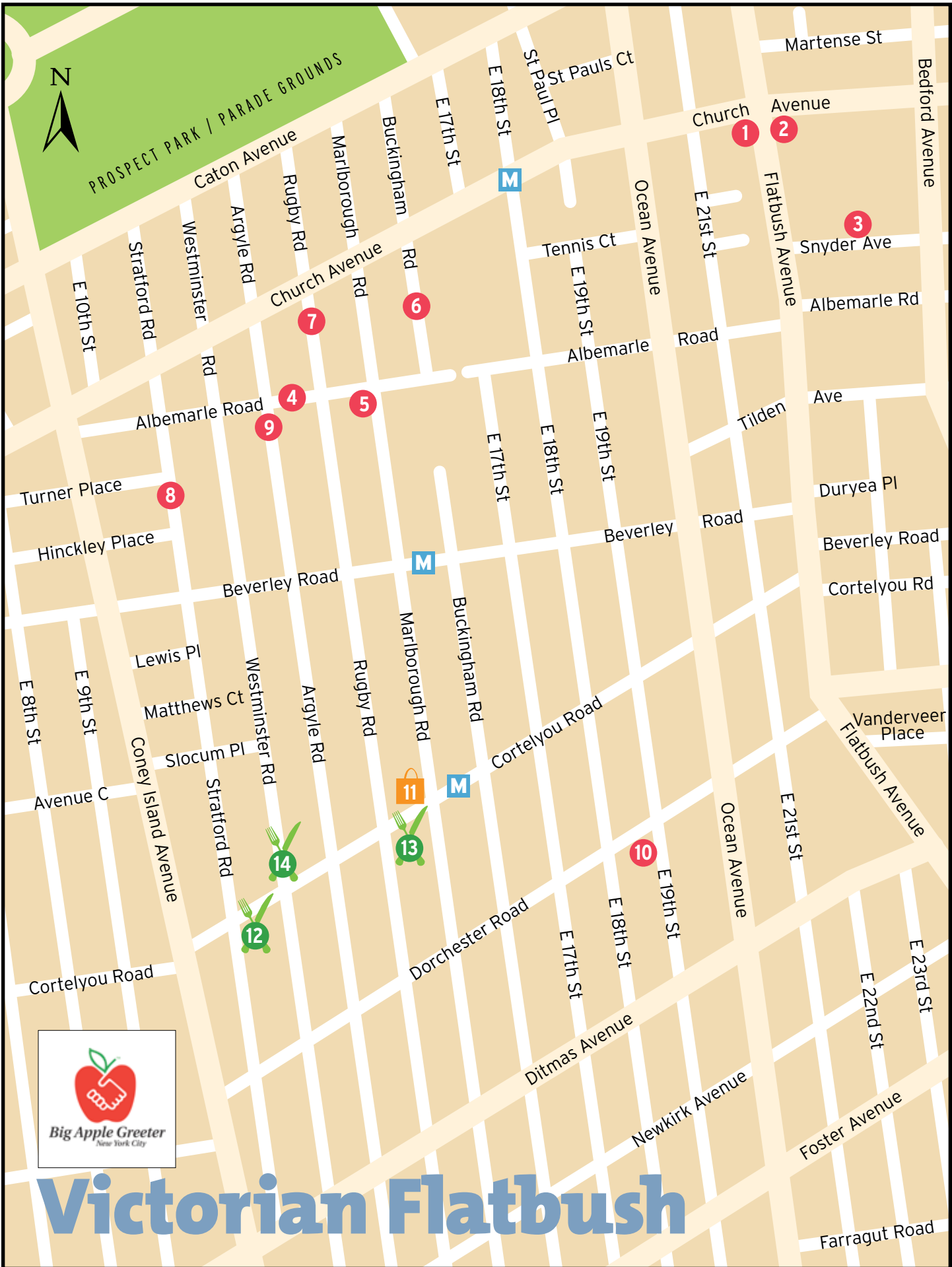
14 MIMI'S HUMMUS at 1209 Cortelyou Road near Westminster Road offers excellent hummus and Middle Eastern/Israeli cuisine.

About Big Apple Greeter Founded in 1992, Big Apple Greeter's mission is to enhance New York City's worldwide image while enriching the city experience for its visitors. Connecting with business and leisure travelers from all over the US and the world, Greeters take visitors on informal, unscripted walks through one or more neighborhoods in any of the five boroughs, promote tourism throughout the city, and help visitors discover the ease of using public transportation. Over 300 volunteer Greeters speak collectively almost 25 languages and enjoy giving their time and energy back to their hometown. Since its founding, Big Apple Greeter—a free public service—has welcomed over 90,000 visitors and been featured in thousands of newspapers, magazines, and television and radio programs all over the world, reaching an audience of over one billion potential visitors to New York City. Big Apple Greeter is proud to partner with NYC & Company, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and the Make-A-Wish Foundation® of Metro New York.

About the Global Greeter Network Big Apple Greeter is proud to be part of the Global Greeter Network, a voluntary association of welcoming programs around the world, all based on the Big Apple Greeter model: free and open to all visitors; offer greeter services as an individual or very small group experience (no more than 6 visitors); and are characterized by enthusiastic, local residents who love their home city, love to meet people from around the world, and volunteer to conduct these visits.

The Global Greeter Network currently spans seven countries on four continents and includes the following members: Cicero-nes de Buenos Aires in Argentina; Adelaide Greeters and Melbourne Greeter Service in Australia; Tap in TO! (Toronto) in Canada; VisitBrighton Greeters and Kent Greeters in England; Paris Greeter, Les Greeters de Nantes, Greeters62 (Pas-de-Calais), Lyon City Greeters and Marseille Provence Greeters in France; Den Haag Greeters in the Netherlands; Big Apple Greeter (New York City), Chicago Greeter, and Houston Greeters in the United States.

You may learn more about Big Apple Greeter and its many services on our website: www.bigapplegreeter.org or by emailing us at information@bigapplegreeter.org



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