

1970

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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LP-0732, LP-0733

HOUSES ON HUNTERFLY ROAD, 1706-08 BERGEN STREET, Borough of Brooklyn. Built about 1830; architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1356, Lots 28 and 127.

On June 23, 1970 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the building at No. 1706-08 Bergen Street (Items No. 27 & 28). 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."

1706-08 Bergen Street is a one-and-a-half story frame house at the southern end of the enclave. The front and sides are faced with shingle. The rear and a small extension in the rear are covered with clapboard. The building is divided into two units, each of which on the ground floor is three bays wide. The upper story of each unit is lit by a window at the side, a skylight at the front and a dormer window at the rear. The two units share a common chimney set in the center of the house at the crest of the steeply pitched roof. The eaves at the front of the building are supported by scroll-cut brackets.

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.

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