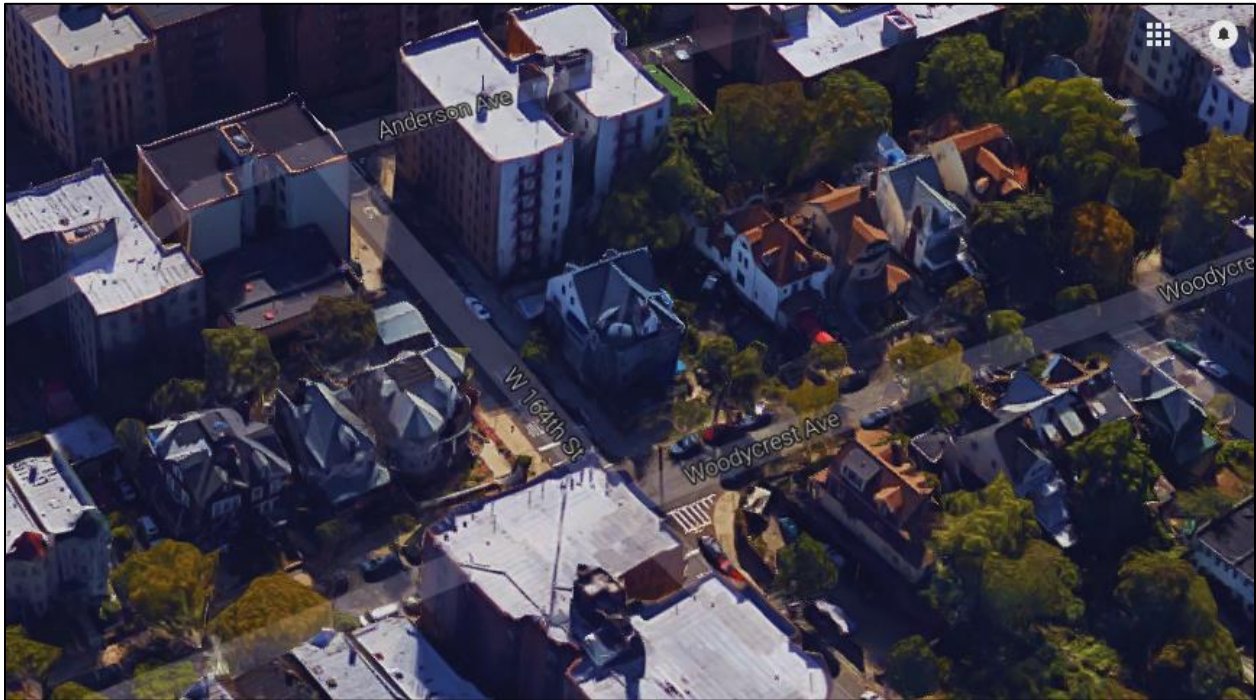


## *Victorian Woodycrest Historic District, The Bronx.*

*Submitted by Theo Mackey Pollack, Esq., M.C.R.P.*



*Image 1: An aerial view of Victorian Woodycrest. Image: Google.*

Much of the area that now makes up the West Bronx represents an organic extension of Manhattan's 19<sup>th</sup>-century urbanism. During the period from 1874 to 1898, the City and County of New York were geographically coterminous, and consisted of today's borough of Manhattan, in its entirety; and that portion of today's borough of the Bronx that lies west of the Bronx River. It was during this period that many of the present-day development patterns of Upper Manhattan and the West Bronx were established. Today, the urban fabric of these neighborhoods is primarily made up of apartment buildings and attached row houses.<sup>1</sup> While detached houses remain common in the north and east Bronx, only a very limited number of detached houses remain extant in the urban neighborhoods south of Fordham Road – where such development was once concentrated. **Within this small, remaining stock, the parcels in the proposed Victorian Woodycrest Historic District ("Woodycrest") comprise a unique subset, because they include the largest remaining cluster of detached, Victorian-style houses in an area of the**

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<sup>1</sup> The northwest Bronx was the least densely populated part of the City and County of New York at this time, and today this area includes neighborhoods in which detached houses are common (e.g., Riverdale, Fieldston, Kingsbridge, Spuyten Duyvil). However, no significant clusters of large, Victorian-style mansions exist today in these neighborhoods; and these areas were mostly sparsely developed during the period in question.

**Manhattan-West Bronx street network.**<sup>2</sup> Current market forces pose an immediate threat to the few remaining examples; legal protection is urgently required.

*New York City: 1874-1898.*

Between 1874 and 1898, the City of New York was the largest of several municipalities in southern New York State. Its neighbors included the independent cities of Brooklyn and Long Island City, and the numerous villages and townships of Kings, Queens, Richmond, and Westchester Counties that, in 1898, would be consolidated into the modern, five-borough City of Greater New York. However, during the period that preceded this consolidation, the area that now comprises the West Bronx was already an integral part of the City and County of New York. Its development patterns extended elements of the street grid from Manhattan (e.g., street numbering, house numbering) across the narrow Harlem River and into the steep hills of the mainland.<sup>3</sup> Spurred by the city's rapid population growth in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and supported by an intense and growing rail infrastructure that included streetcars, elevated lines, and subways, high-density development would ultimately take over nearly every block in this large swath of the city. But before the land was covered with apartment buildings and row houses, an earlier iteration of development had resulted in a wave of large, detached houses, some of which exhibited the characteristics of late Victorian, or Queen Anne-style house architecture, with houses on large lots having elements such as wrap-around porches, turrets, cones, and other fanciful geometric components; and tree-lined streets. Although other examples of similar houses remain elsewhere in the five boroughs, this cluster represents the only example of such architecture that was situated within the proper street grid of the City of New York (i.e., Manhattan and the West Bronx). Evidence of this period of New York City's urbanism has now largely vanished. The proposed historic district – a mix of such houses and more typical detached houses – represents a small but unrivalled example of contiguous urban fabric that persists from this development period in New York City's past.

*Evidence of the uptown development patterns represented by Victorian Woodycrest.*

A pre-consolidation perspective map, produced in 1897 by the Department of Street Improvements for the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Wards, adds valuable context to the relevance of the Woodycrest houses.<sup>4</sup> Offering a bird's-eye view of the urban fabric that surrounded the

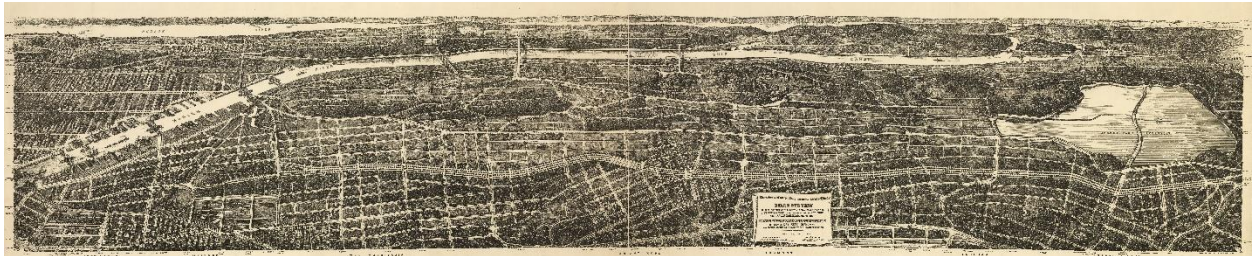
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<sup>2</sup> Although similar neighborhoods exist in other portions of today's five boroughs (e.g., Prospect Park South, in Brooklyn; Stapleton, in Staten Island), these neighborhoods were developed as parts of independent municipalities that were later incorporated into the City of Greater New York. By contrast, the detached, late Victorian homes that remain in the vicinity of Woodycrest Avenue represent the last remaining evidence of this type of development that was completed *within* the City of New York, itself.

<sup>3</sup> Modern day evidence of this history can be found in the continuation of the sequence of Bronx cross-street numbering from that originating in Manhattan;<sup>3</sup> the continuation of several major north-south thoroughfares from Manhattan into the Bronx (e.g., Third Avenue, Park Avenue, and Broadway); a lack of overlap in house numbering or former postal codes; and a near-absence of named streets whose appellations are duplicated between Manhattan and the West Bronx.

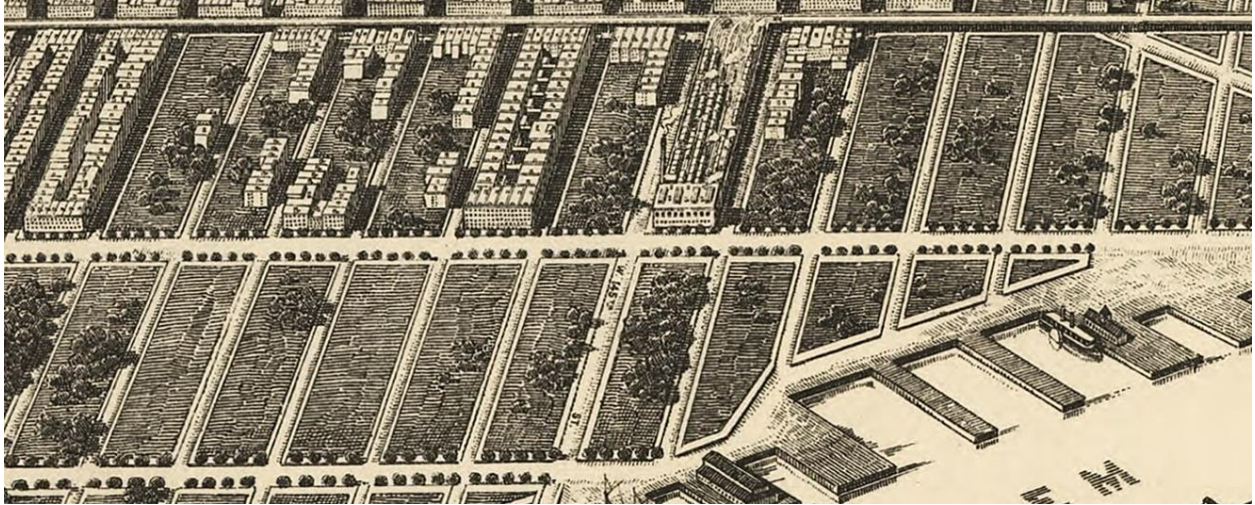
<sup>4</sup> *Bird's Eye View of that portion of the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Wards of the City of New York....*

proposed district, including the then-developing Grand Concourse, the perspective map provides an accurate depiction of the geography, topography, street pattern, and a number of specific landmarks (e.g., the Croton Aqueduct; the Broadway Bridge; the water tower in High Bridge Park). It would be impossible to know without significant further study precisely how accurate the totality of individual details in this image were at the time of its publication. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to conclude on the basis of its ascertainable accuracy that it provides a fairly accurate snapshot of the city in 1897. In addition, its source at The Department of Street Improvements would indicate a factual bent to the subject matter.



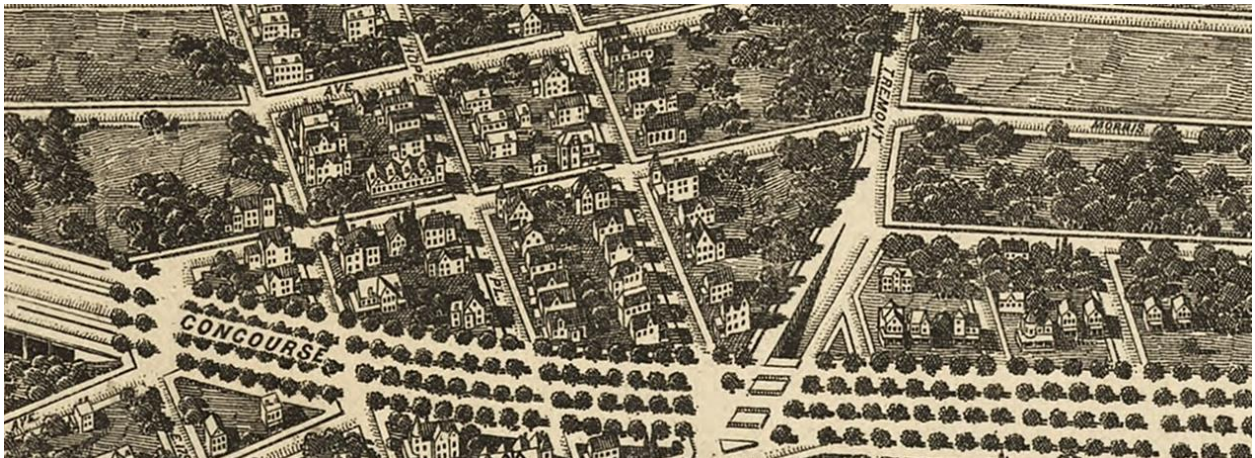
*Image 2: A depiction of the North Side from 1897, by the Commissioner of Street Improvements for the 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> Wards.*

The image offers a unique view of the city's development at the end of the Victorian period. The core of Manhattan (to the south) is out of sight; it would lie far to the left of the framed perspective. The land in the foreground is the West Bronx. The wide Grand Concourse meanders horizontally across the scene. The narrow strip of water that runs parallel behind it is the Harlem River. Beyond that are the bluffs of upper Manhattan, and in the far background, the New Jersey Palisades rise above the Hudson River. This image shows the northern frontier of New York City's urbanism at the end of the Victorian period. In Harlem (the gridded blocks at the far left, beyond the Harlem River), one can see that boxy, attached row houses and apartment buildings are beginning to fill in the landscape. Rapid development may be indicated by the completely vacant land that is being gobbled up by sudden density. That is, it doesn't look as if there was ever a phase of detached house development in these blocks. Instead, the image shows what appears to be a direct transition from greenfields to attached homes. For example, here's a close-up of Seventh Avenue at 145th Street:



*Image 3: A close-up of the 1897 image, showing Central Harlem, in the vicinity of Seventh Avenue and West 145<sup>th</sup> Street.*

By the 1920s, the level of density that characterized new development in 1897 Harlem would come to cover nearly the entire scene of this drawing. But as of the time of this image, as one's focus moves to the right (i.e., northward), a landscape of trees, fields, and detached houses remains predominant. Today, most of the components of this low-density scene are gone, but at the end of the 19th century they were still typical of uptown New York City, on either side of the Harlem River. This close-up view of development along the Grand Concourse near Tremont Avenue is illustrative:



*Image 4: A close-up of the 1897 image, showing Tremont, in the vicinity of the Grand Concourse and Mount Hope Place.*

This depiction provides an interesting context. Many of its houses, especially those in the foreground along East 177<sup>th</sup> Street and Mount Hope Place, appear to have been ornate, turreted, large homes. This abiding low density in 1897 is consistent with research findings showing that many of the large apartment buildings above City College (viz., approximately Broadway/West 137<sup>th</sup>) were built after 1900 and, especially, in response to the expansion of subways and elevated rail lines that took place in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The entire uptown scene depicted in this image might have remained an ideal setting for

low-density, suburban development if the population pressures had not borne down on the uptown neighborhoods as quickly and persistently as they did; and if the absence of formal zoning had not left the character of those neighborhoods to be determined almost entirely by the market forces driven by that growth. Today, only a handful of structures remain to represent the first wave of development in this part of New York City. Through the Victorian Woodycrest Historic District, we propose to preserve the largest remaining example of this type of urban fabric within the street numbering plan that flows from the Commissioners' Plan of 1811.

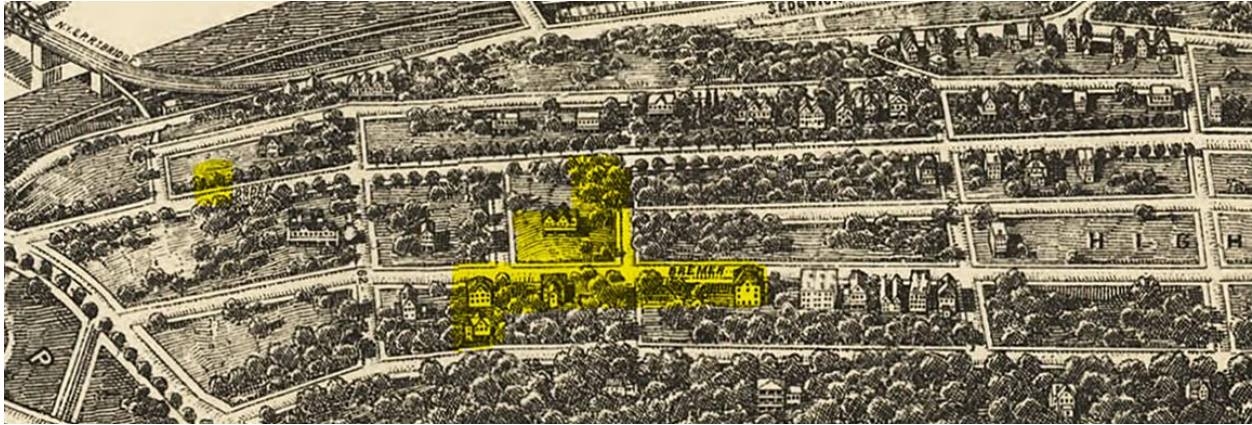


Image 5: A close-up of the 1897 image, showing Highbridge, in the vicinity of Ogden Avenue and West 164<sup>th</sup> Street. The proposed Victorian Woodycrest Historic District is highlighted. Macomb's Dam Bridge is in the upper left corner. Note that Woodycrest Avenue is labelled Bremer Avenue. However, a resolution to change the name to Woodycrest was [tabled in 1896](#).

### *Characteristics of Queen Anne-style Victorian House Architecture*

The type of detached house most closely associated with the Victorian era in American urbanism is the Queen Anne style, which (though borrowing certain elements from the 18<sup>th</sup> century period for which it was named) was a native architecture of the late Victorian period. The iconic painted ladies of Alamo Square in San Francisco may be America's most well-known example of Queen Anne-style architecture; but their style was idiosyncratic, because it was adapted to narrow, urban building lots. Houses situated on larger lots, with space enough for asymmetrical floor plans and fanciful details, were a more typical application of the concept. Such structures often included towers; bay windows; conic turrets or domes; porches that wrap around at least one corner of the structure; patterned shingles and gables; and so-called gingerbread ornaments, to enrich the texture of flat surfaces.<sup>5</sup>

Such houses once characterized the Bunker Hill section of downtown Los Angeles. Many of the old town squares of New England, Upstate New York, [New Jersey](#), and Pennsylvania are rich with such architecture. Clusters can be found, closer to home, in the Tompkinsville section of Staten Island; along the Hudson River in Westchester County; in Brooklyn, south

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<sup>5</sup> *Architectural Styles*, by Carson Dunlop, Carson Dunlop & Associates (2003), and other sources. Two diagrams, from Carson Dunlop & Associates, have been added in Appendix C, illustrating the most typical details of Queen Anne-style houses.

of Prospect Park; and throughout the older neighborhoods of the metropolitan region's rail-linked suburbs. Throughout the United States the locations of extant Queen Anne-style houses are consistent with their history. The streetcar suburbs of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – built to house the growing, affluent population of America's first great industrial heyday – were their most typical setting. Notably, in sharp contrast to its present-day urbanism, the West Bronx was characterized by such development in the late Victorian period.

Rarely was the housing stock of any given neighborhood comprised exclusively of Queen Anne-style detached houses. That is to say, such houses were often built in locations that had already begun to urbanize. Their settings were often characterized by relatively large building lots; a proximity to higher-density urbanism and rail corridors; and the presence of other types of houses (either of contemporary or various construction dates). As a result, not only the examples of such architecture, themselves, but also the surviving structures that complete the urban context in which such architecture took root, are of historical value. This is especially true in settings, such as Woodycrest, where the context of detached houses that gave rise to such development has all but disappeared – supplanted by denser forms of urbanism in the eleven decades since the late Victorian period ended.

#### *Current Threats to the Proposed District*

Presently, none of the houses in Woodycrest has been optimally preserved, and a few are in advanced states of disrepair. The extent to which original details remain intact varies from house to house. However, the basic architectural elements of a number of the structures in the proposed district remain largely intact; and incentives could likely be provided to the current owners and/or future buyers to facilitate the appropriate restoration of superficial details that have been lost to modification or neglect.



More substantially, a new development project is approaching completion in the Woodycrest district whose scale and design represent sharp departures from the urban context that deserves to be preserved. A six-story, zero-lot-line building, with 48 housing units for disabled veterans, the [new development](#) is undoubtedly a necessary and welcome addition to the limited stock of affordable and supportive housing in New York City. However, its construction in this particular location, including its approval with plans that show no architectural consistency with the immediate surroundings, indicate that the significance of the Woodycrest area is not yet recognized by community leaders.

Most concerning is the probability that the existing low density of this cluster may actually present an enticing development opportunity, especially as the West Bronx continues to experience growth in investment and rising land values. **A failure to protect the remaining parcels of Woodycrest from dense, new development – a conversion that today's competitive real estate market could support – would represent the permanent loss of a unique piece of New York City's urban history.**

*Proposed Victorian Woodycrest Historic District*

We are proposing that the following parcels form the initial footprint of Woodycrest:

Blk-Lot	No.	Street	Property Image
<a href="#">2507-07</a>	966	Woodycrest Avenue	 <p><i>Relevant architectural details asymmetric façade; rounded windows; dormer window; deep setback; stone wall.</i></p>
<a href="#">2507-11</a>	972	Woodycrest Avenue	

<p><a href="#">2507-12</a></p>	<p>976</p>	<p>Woodycrest Avenue</p>	 <p><i>Relevant architectural details include dormer window; possible modified line of windows; possible modified wrap-around porch; deep setback; large chimney.</i></p>
<p><a href="#">2507-14</a></p>	<p>978</p>	<p>Woodycrest Avenue</p>	 <p><i>Relevant architectural details include wrap-around porch; row of windows; unique, large rounded bay.</i></p>
<p><a href="#">2507-15</a></p>	<p>984</p>	<p>Woodycrest Avenue</p>	<p>Demolished &amp; <a href="#">Redeveloped</a> 2016</p>



<p><a href="#">2507-18</a></p>	<p>990</p>	<p>Woodycrest Avenue</p>	 <p><i>Relevant architectural details include asymmetric façade; a cylindrical tower with domed turret; street-facing gables; varied façade materials; dormer windows; bay windows; steep roofs; probable former large porch.</i></p>
<p><a href="#">2507-19</a></p>	<p>992</p>	<p>Woodycrest Avenue</p>	<p>Structure shown above (2507-18) also occupies this lot.</p>
<p><a href="#">2507-32</a></p>	<p>959</p>	<p>Anderson Avenue</p>	 <p><i>Details include asymmetric façade; cylindrical tower with domed turret.</i></p>

[2508-1](#)

1000

Woodycrest Avenue

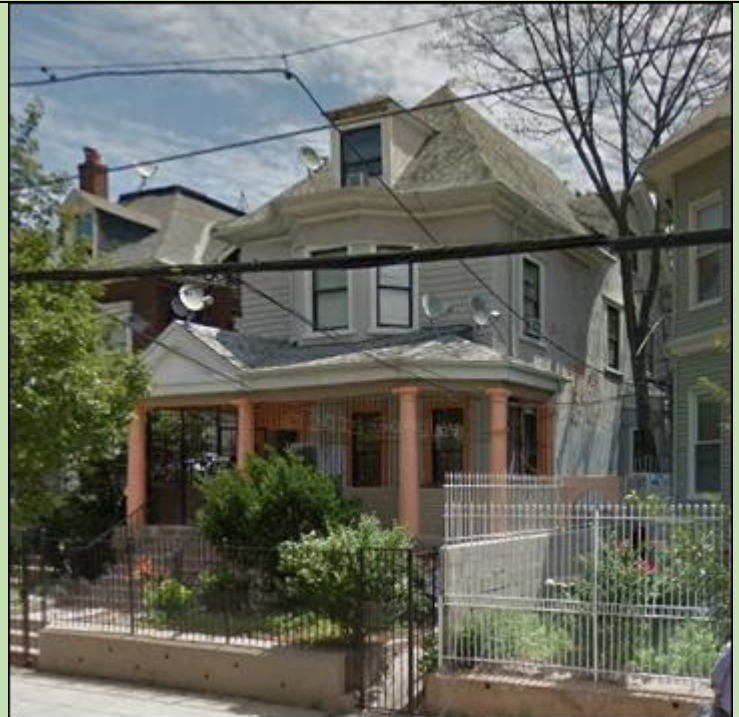


*Relevant architectural details include asymmetric façade; unique, semi-circular porch; octagonal tower with turret; dormer windows.*


[2508-3](#)



1004



Woodycrest Avenue




*Relevant architectural details include large porch; bay window; dormer windows; steep and varied roofline.*

<a href="#">2508-5</a>	1008	Woodycrest Avenue	 <p><i>Relevant architectural details include asymmetric façade; street-facing gable; varied façade materials; dormer windows; bay windows; row of windows; steep roofs; deep setback.</i></p>
<a href="#">2508-6</a>	1010	Woodycrest Avenue	Parking lot associated with the above structure (2508-5)
<a href="#">2511-85</a>	992	Ogden Avenue	Parks and Recreation
<a href="#">2511-86</a>	994	Ogden Avenue	Parks and Recreation
<a href="#">2511-87</a>	996	Ogden Avenue	Parks and Recreation
<a href="#">2511-88</a>	998	Ogden Avenue	Parks and Recreation
<a href="#">2511-90</a>	90	West 164 <sup>th</sup> Street	Parks and Recreation
<a href="#">2511-95</a>	985	Woodycrest Avenue	Side yard of structure shown below (2511-96)

<p><a href="#">2511-96</a></p>	<p>985</p>	<p>Woodycrest Avenue</p>	 <p><i>Relevant architectural details include decorative shinglework; street-facing gable; porch; shutters; rounded windows; dormer windows; stone wall.</i></p>
<p><a href="#">2511-98</a></p>	<p>981</p>	<p>Woodycrest Avenue</p>	 <p><i>Relevant architectural details include wrap-around porch; street-facing gable; varied façade materials; bay windows; row of windows.</i></p>

<p><a href="#">2511-99</a></p>	<p>977</p>	<p>Woodycrest Avenue</p>	 <p><i>Relevant architectural details include asymmetric façade; street-facing gables; varied roofline; possible tower; bay windows; façade masonry.</i></p>
<p><a href="#">2511-100</a></p>	<p>975</p>	<p>Woodycrest Avenue</p>	<p>Structure shown above (2511-99) also occupies this lot.</p>
<p><a href="#">2511-101</a></p>	<p>971</p>	<p>Woodycrest Avenue</p>	 <p><i>Relevant architectural details include shingle work; street-facing gable; large porch; shutters; rounded windows; bay windows; stone wall.</i></p>

<p><a href="#">2524-25</a></p>	<p>915</p>	<p>Ogden Avenue</p>	 <p><i>Relevant architectural details include asymmetric façade; row of windows; porch; bay windows; stone wall. Note zero-lot line with large, later-era apartment building, illustrating how such houses were supplanted.</i></p>
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<p><a href="#">2524-26</a></p>	<p>911</p>	<p>Ogden Avenue</p>	 <p><i>Relevant architectural details include clapboard siding; large, decorative chimney; large porch; dormer windows; bay windows.</i></p>
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*Map of the proposed Victorian Woodycrest Historic District.*



Map 1: Parcels that would comprise the proposed district. Source (basemap and parcel data): The City of New York.

Appendix A: Tax maps of the proposed Victorian Woodycrest Historic District.



Map 2: Tax map showing the main portion of the proposed district, including block-lot numbers, and surveyed dimensions.





Map 3: Tax map showing the lower Ogden Avenue portion of the proposed district, and its relation to the main portion.

*Appendix B: Examples of Queen Anne-style houses that once stood in the West Bronx.*



*Image 6: 2082 Washington Avenue. From The Great North Side (1897).*



*Image 7: Two Queen Anne-style houses in Mount Hope vicinity. Source: The Great North Side (1897).*



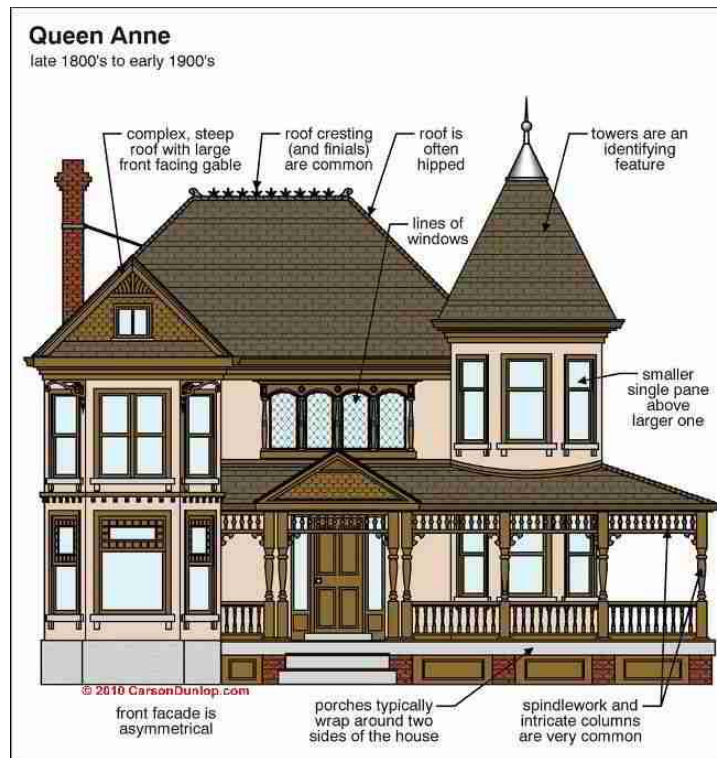
BRONXWOOD PARK COTTAGES.

Image 8: A sample page from *The Great North Side* (1897), showing a variety of detached houses in the West Bronx.



Image 9: Another sample page from *The Great North Side* (1897), showing a variety of detached houses in the West Bronx.

*Appendix C: Examples of Queen Anne-style Victorian architectural elements.*



*Image 10: Basic elements of Queen Anne style Victorian houses. Source: Carson Dunlop (fair use).*

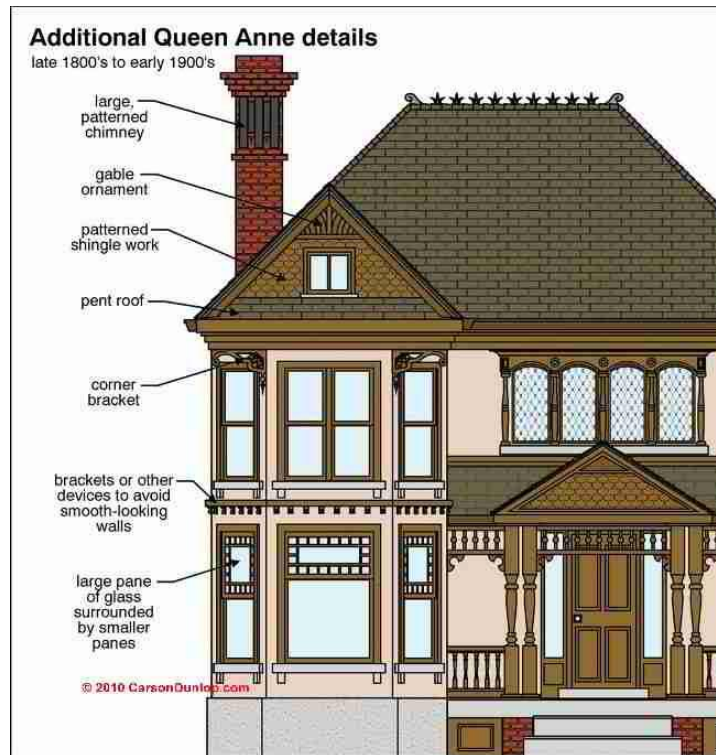


Image 11: Additional elements of Queen Anne style Victorian houses. Source: Carson Dunlop (fair use).