

Tour # 1: Brooklyn Heights and its one-and-only Promenade

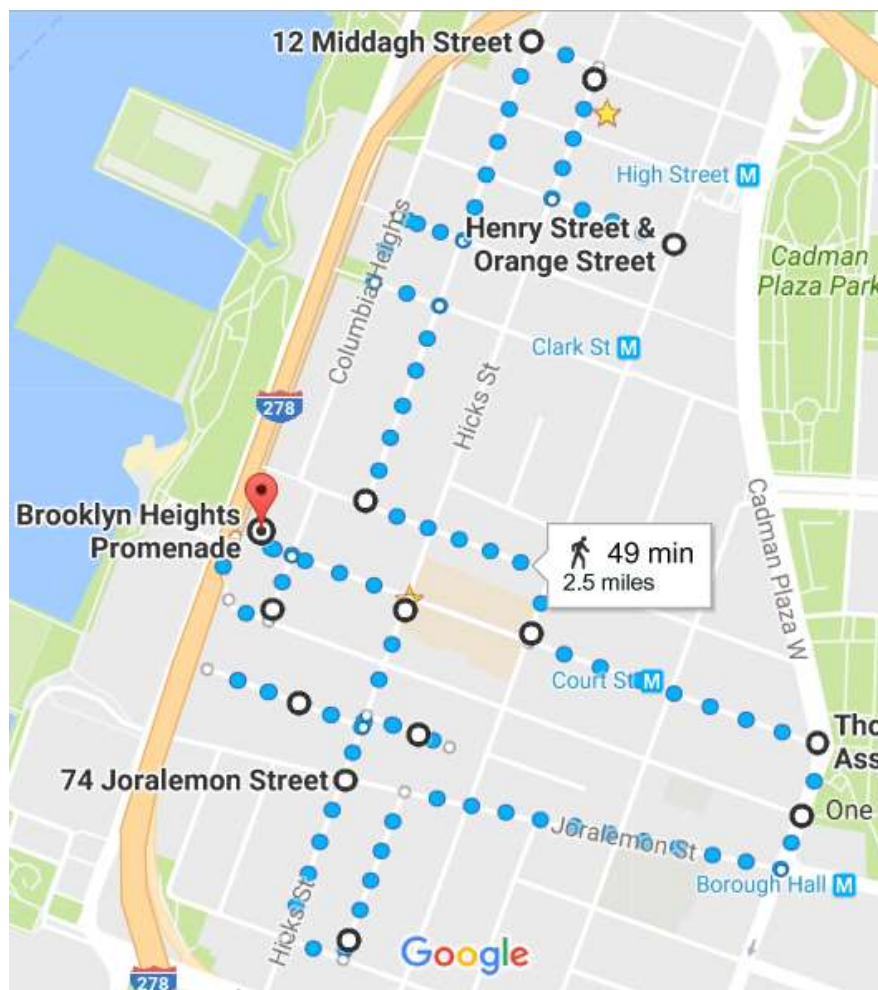
A stone's throw away from the most bustling financial center in the world —literally a twenty-minute walk across the Brooklyn Bridge— step into this centennial neighborhood full of authentic period brownstone houses, the city's first historic district. Think sepia.

Join me in this 2.5 miles' tour around a residential, family-friendly enclave, which boasts a unique array of original brownstone town houses dating back to mid-19th century, coexisting quite harmoniously with the earlier clapboard houses from the 1820's and the later brick houses from the 1830's. In many blocks you can see a sequence of wonderful examples of each style and decade, while in others you will just see entire rows of different types of brownstone houses, which keep attracting many film-makers because of the authenticity of their architecture and their incredible state of preservation. Some streets still feature gas lighting which evokes bygone days, and will really take you back a century.

Neighbors take pride in making their houses look always beautiful, and decorate their stoops and windowsills with seasonal flowers, hydrangeas in spring, mums and pumpkins in autumn...

Getting there...

No matter where you come from, getting there is a no-brainer. The A-C train will take you to High Street Station, the 2-3 train will drop you off at Clark Street, and the 4-5 is another option, which will take you Borough Hall, a good destination too. You can also walk or bike through the Brooklyn Bridge, no more than a 20-minute walk and an even shorter ride.



What you'll see...

A broad sampler of many architectural styles all combined in a very small historic neighborhood, incredibly well preserved and in mint condition. Anything and everything from colonial clapboard, shingles, brick, brownstones, Queen Anne's, Italianates, Greek Revivals, Federal, Gothic Revival, to gorgeous stained-glass windows, mansard roofs, enchanting turrets, bay windows, and more. All of this along tree-lined streets, not to mention the unparalleled views of Downtown Manhattan. So what's not to like?

Off we go...

Your starting point should be the corner of Orange and Henry streets, few steps away from High Street Station (A-C train), where you want to start walking west down Orange towards the waterfront. At the corner of Orange and Hicks, Plymouth Church and School rise handsomely.

Abraham Lincoln is said to have attended services in this Congregational Church, founded in 1847 by New Englanders. Abolitionist Henry Beecher was its first preacher. Beecher's sister, Harriet, is the author of the anti-slavery novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin, a best-selling book in the 19th century, second only to the Bible.

At the corner of Hicks St, turn right/north towards Middagh St. As you walk down Hicks, you will see an array of architecturally and historically interesting houses, such as Nos. 72, 70, 68, 57, 60 and 58, built in the early 1800's. In just two blocks you see examples of colonial clapboard houses, shingle houses and brick houses. Notice No. 57 which features a mansard roof added many years later, as was the fashion around the French Second Empire era. You will see these mansard roofs once and again when you do the Park Slope tour.

Once you've reached Middagh St, turn left/west and walk just one block. On both sides of Middagh there are also plenty of fascinating historic middle-class houses. Not to be missed is the house right at the corner of Middagh and Willow, the oldest house in the Heights.

You will now turn on to graceful Willow St and walk up to Pierrepont, almost half a mile of mesmerizing houses, one just after the other. All different, all unique, all marvelous. Here is when you start to see some of the lavish brownstones and Queen Anne's which give the street its aristocratic flair.

As you walk, perplexed, down Willow Street, I do recommend two small detours, which are certainly worth the while: first one is at the corner of shady Cranberry St, where you might want to turn right/west just a few yards and take a peek at the pretty houses on both sides of the street. You will also be getting a first partial glimpse of downtown Manhattan's skyline, but tantalizing as this sounds, I ask you to bear with me and return to Willow. You'll get to see those dramatic views shortly. Promise.

The second detour is at the corner of Pineapple, where you want to turn right/west towards the waterfront, and then left/south on to Columbia Heights. Admire the handsome houses on this block of Columbia Heights, with their backs right on the one-and-only Brooklyn Heights Promenade!

70 Willow St used to be Truman Capote's temporary home, recently sold for \$ 12 million and currently under serious renovations. He didn't actually own the place but rather lived (from 1955 to 1965) in its basement, as a permanent guest of award-winning Broadway stage set designer Oliver Smith's (West Side Story, On The Town, My Fair Lady). Capote once invited Jackie Kennedy to have lunch at 70 Willow, and tried to conceal the fact that Smith was the real owner. Whether he got away with it, remains unknown...

Once you've reached the corner of Clark St, make a left/east turn and get back to Willow, ready to face its longest block. Each and every one of the houses on both sides of Willow is magnificent in one way or another —some of them are identified as landmarks of New York. Just take your time and admire this real sight for the sore eyes! Anything from Federal style to Queen Anne's, to Greek Revivals, is depicted to perfection in this gem of a street.

You will now turn left/east on Pierrepont St, and walk among gorgeous Greek Revival style mansions and impressive town houses, reminders of a glorious past, until you reach Henry St. At this corner stands the notable

Romanesque Revival terra-cotta and sandstone Herman Behr Mansion. Built in 1888 as the Behr family house, it then became a hotel of questionable reputation; later on, it served a more noble purpose, when occupied by Franciscan monks, to be finally transformed into rental apartments. It was last sold in 2008 for circa \$11 million. In 2013 massive restoration work was done on the façade, and this is how it looks today. The only inexplicable addition is the awning one could say is there to protect the entrance, but perhaps if you manage to squint a little, you might avoid seeing it. Or maybe not...

You will now turn right/south on Henry towards the commercial, lively, fun Montague Street. There is still more to see on the South side of Brooklyn Heights, so we're not heading to the Promenade just yet. Thus, take another leap of faith and turn left/east now on Montague, where you will find all sorts of places to sit for coffee, or have a bite or a more serious meal, whatever soothes your soul at the moment. Anything from the ever-reliable Starbucks to the fancier Le Pain Quotidien, plus a lot of alternative diners and cafes. Another possibility is to enter the wonderful Fresh Start Food—a deli market which until very recently operated under the name of Garden of Eden and was very worthy of its name—and grab any of their gourmet salads or snacks to go. If you feel like you could use a restroom at this point in time, Starbucks and Le Pain are always there for you.

As you keep walking up Montague St towards Court St, to your left you will see a magnificent national historic landmark, the Church of St. Ann and the Holy Trinity, a dark red Gothic Revival building profusely ornamented with stained-glass windows, which beautifies the corner of Montague and Clinton, together with the other two also striking buildings on Montague on the other side of Clinton St, which happen to be two of the banks of the neighborhood. At the very corner, Chase operates in what used to be the Italian Renaissance Brooklyn Trust Co. building, modeled after a great palazzo from Verona. Do step in even if you don't need any banking services, if only to admire its rich architecture and the magnificent view of the huge arched windows which face St. Ann's Church across the street. As you see, everything in the Heights needs to be splendid in some way. Before you continue on Montague Street, at that corner of Clinton St, walk a short block back on to Pierrepont St, to find the Brooklyn Historical Society and Museum, a Queen Anne style building which dates back to 1881 and houses the largest collection of Brooklyn historical documents in the country.

You will keep walking up Montague St till you reach the corner of Court St, where you now want to make a right/south turn. Ahead of you is the massive Greek Revival Borough Hall marble building, the Municipal Building and others which form part of the civic center of the borough. Keep walking on Court St, past Remsen St, until you find yourself at the corner of Joralemon St—another Starbucks store at that corner, in case of need.

It is now time to make another right/west turn on Joralemon. As you start walking, on your left, you can appreciate the Packer Collegiate Institute, a wonderful Gothic Revival building. Also interesting, the house at 135 Joralemon which nowadays appears to have been dwarfed by the other large buildings of the block, such as the yellow brick mansion at No. 129.

Facing the house at 135, you might like to make a short detour on Sydney Place to admire St. Charles Borromeo Church, beautiful for its simplicity. A good example of how less can be more

Keep walking down Joralemon, and as you reach Henry Street, observe what was once a family home, on your right, across Henry, which still boasts gas street lighting, reminiscent of the early 1800's. Walk a little further until you see Garden Place open on your left. Enter this quaint, almost exclusive short street, and take a while to look at some of its elegant brownstones. The entrance door of No. 10—not a brownstone—is simply adorable, and you might note it has a smaller version of the same door to its right, behind that gate. So neat... No. 19, very different, also to be noted.

When you reach the end of Garden Place, make a right/west turn on State Street and another right/north turn on Hicks Street.

A very singular block this one of Hicks, which features a row of former carriage houses, some spectacular Queen Anne's, plus the magnificent Beaux Arts building, Engine 224.

You will now continue strolling up Hicks street one more block, until you walk past Grace Church and its stained-glass windows —three of them by Louis Comfort Tiffany—, to reach the very gracious Grace Court on your left and then Grace Court Alley, on your right. One of the singularities of Grace Court is that you get to see the gardens of the heavenly beautiful Remsen mansions, better appreciated from this angle than from the proper Remsen Street itself. Grace Court ends right there, on the waterfront, but gives you no access to the Promenade, where we will be getting in no time. Enter Grace Court first, not necessarily all the way to the end, but at least a few yards to admire, on your left, a row of classical brownstones adjoining the Church, one of which boasts this superb stained-glass window, which strikes me in awe every time I see it.

On your way back to Hicks, look at the north side of the street now, to see the rear side of some of those Remsen mansions and their nonchalant gardens.

Continue now on to Grace Court Alley, another hidden and very private gem in the area. An entire row of former carriage houses, evolved into stylish and one-of-a-kind duplex apartments.

Return to Hicks St now and make a right/north turn, which will take you back to Montague Street. Once you reach the corner of Hicks and Montague, even if we will now be turning down left/west, do take a few minutes to admire to your right the grand Bossert Hotel building, with its Italian Renaissance Revival exterior, currently under serious renovation after having been occupied by the Jehovah's Witnesses community, who maintained it beautifully for many years.

Opposite to the hotel, you can see two marvelous examples of Queen Anne red brick and terra-cotta apartment buildings. Once you've indulged yourself with this sudden flash of the grandeur of Montague St, finally turn left/west one block, up to the corner of Montague Terrace, which will be the last little detour you'll make before stepping into the Promenade. On your way, to your right, admire the pretty Heights Casino building, and to your left do stop and look at No. 62, another outstanding example of red brick Queen Anne and Edwardian style building, better appreciated from the other side of the road. Do look all the way up.

Once you find yourself at the corner of Montague Street and Montague Terrace, turn to your left/south for one short block, which will take you to elegant Remsen Street. From that corner, get a glimpse of the magnificence of some of those town houses and their splendid entrances.

Now, turn away from the stately Remsen and make a right, to access the entrance to the Promenade, while you walk past a huge brownstone and brick mansion with very pretty gardens. Follow the path and step into the world-famous Brooklyn Heights Promenade. Stroll your way along breathtaking dramatic views of Downtown Manhattan skyline to one side, and lavish homes with the best backyard someone could ever dream of, to the other side. Ahead of you in the distance, three icons of New York City: The Brooklyn Bridge, the Empire State Building, and the prettiest of them all, the glittering Chrysler Building. Behind you, far far away, you will see the impressive Verazzano-Narrows Bridge, which connects Brooklyn with Staten Island.