

## *Tour # 6: Very Victorian Flatbush and Ditmas Park*

I discovered this unbelievable enclave a few years ago, almost by chance. They were having their annual House and Garden Tour event and a flyer happened to fall into my hands. I had been to such events in Brooklyn Heights before, and have always loved them, and I had never actually been into what I considered to be almost “the heart” of Brooklyn. Immediately intrigued by the word Victorian, I decided to go and see. I was so pleasantly surprised with what I discovered, I’ve been taking visitors ever since. After doing some research, what I found in Wikipedia as an explanation of when and how this neighborhood came to be what it is, pretty much sums it all up. And I quote: *“The neighborhoods of Victorian Flatbush were developed in the early twentieth century from farmland in the former village of Flatbush, in response to the construction of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit line to Coney Island, and were some of the earliest suburbs. Developers including Dean Alvord, Lewis Pounds and particularly Thomas Benton Ackerson sold the new developments as country living, under the name ‘The Village in the City’. Utilities and the subway were buried underground, and the area was carefully laid out with tree-lined avenues and country clubs. The detached houses, many of them large and no two alike, were designed in fashionable styles including ‘Victorian, Queen Anne, shingle style, colonial revival, neo-Tudor, Spanish Mission and Georgian’, with porches and columns, and in many cases bay windows, turrets, and stained glass, and the area resembles other parts of the US more than it does the rest of New York. It is one of the largest collections of Victorian houses in the country”*.

And then there’s the Historic District of Ditmas Park, developed on what once belonged to the Ditmas family, also with big Victorian houses built around the same time, featuring some really handsome homes, all very nicely kept.

I mention them separately, although they could all be one big tour, simply because it would probably be too much to cover by foot all in one day, and also because there is a “grey zone” between one area and the other which would imply extending the walk probably too much, to no avail.

This being said, you actually *could* cover both tours by taking a train from the end of one area to the beginning of the other, just one station apart. So let me begin now with the description and then you decide what’s best for you.

Pick a day when the weather is mild, since this is mainly an all-outdoors tour, with little to no places to stop for a rest. Cortelyou Road, which divides the two areas, is the commercial street, where you can find some solace in case of need. At the corner of Cortelyou and Marlborough you will find an organic Deli Shop with a very interesting display of excellent natural food products, and they always seem to be open. Coney Island Avenue is another resourceful place where you can turn to as part of the second section of the tour. A Dunkin’ Donut or a McDonald’s store can always put you out of your misery.

### *Getting there...*

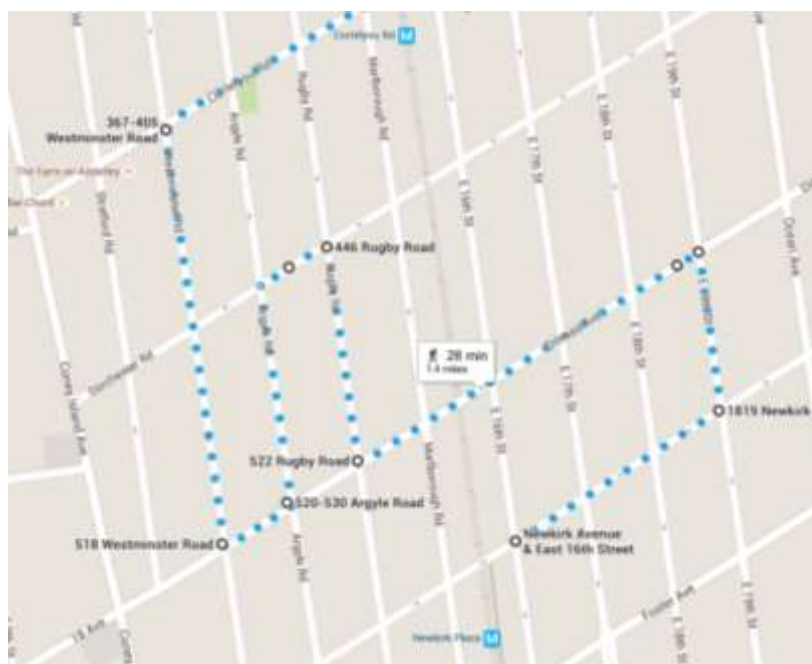
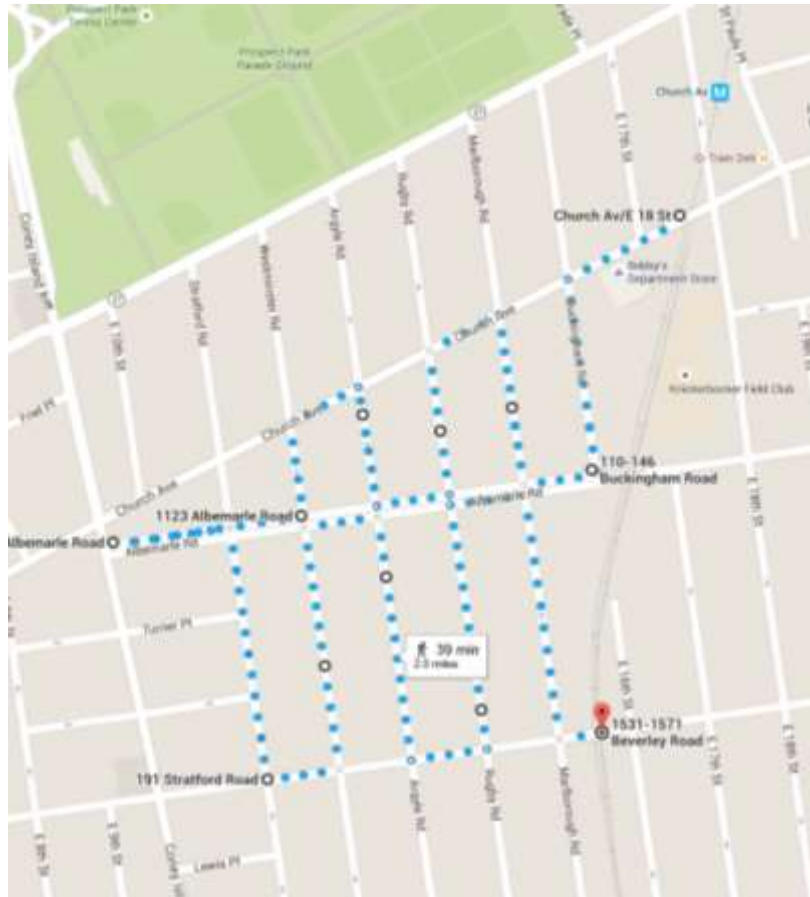
I would start with the area closer to Church Avenue, which implies around a 2 mile walk. You need to take the B or Q train to Church Avenue, a few stations past the Grand Army Plaza and the Brooklyn Museum stops. Once you get off the train, walk to your right in the same direction the train came in from, and exit on Church Avenue. You will walk to your right again, walk past 17<sup>th</sup> street, and you will now find yourself at the beginning of this tour, **16<sup>th</sup> Street and Church**.

### *What we’ll see...*

Even if we do call it Victorian Flatbush, be prepared to see many other fantastic styles too. Some of the houses are actually mansions, while others are simpler down-to-earth homes. Many are in extraordinary state of conservation, very well groomed and carefully landscaped. Others not so much, but still very interesting as a whole.

*Off we go...*

I am showing you here two different maps. The first one corresponds to the first tour (a 2 mile walk), and the second one belongs to the Ditmas tour (a 1.4 mile walk).



So let's get started now with the first section. You got off at Church Avenue and walked past 17<sup>th</sup> St, and you now find yourself at the corner of Buckingham Road. You will make a left and turn on to Buckingham Road, where you will immediately be struck by a colossal clapboard house, plus what is known as the Japanese House, 131 Buckingham Road, built around 1902, originally as an East Indian style, which ended up being built by a Japanese contractor, and landscaped by Chogoro Sugai, also Japanese.

You will now reach Albermarle Road. Once there, turn right towards Marlborough and then right again until you get back to Church Avenue. Continue turning right, left, left, right, winding up and down from Church to Albermarle, as you walk by these elegant streets boasting so royal and British names which replaced what once were numbered streets. You will do this until you've reached Albermarle and Stratford. All along, you will find unbelievably beautiful homes, set on broad leafy streets, in a very suburban zone.

Along Albemarle Road, a very wide boulevard with huge ancient trees, you will have the pleasure to find amazing houses, like number 1305, between Argyle and Rugby, a Classical Revival built in 1905 for Mr. George E. Gale, richly decorated with gables, dormers, pediments and so much more. Note the oeil-de-boeuf window on the second floor and the eye-brow shaped window at one side of the pediment.

More homes to be specially noted on Albemarle Road are numbers 1440, 1314 and 1510, also a two story white clapboard house with beautiful spider web windows and a magnificent pediment, held by impressive columns.

Rugby Road, between Church and Albemarle Roads, also has a lot to offer, with amazing dwellings such as the ones you can see in the pictures collaged in the website.

Once you have covered Albemarle Road all the way to Coney Island Avenue, you will now face the second stage of this same tour, between Albemarle and Beverly Road, where again, you will twine yourself back and forth from Beverly to Albermarle down the second section of the same Stratford, Westminster, Argyle, Rugby and Marlborough Roads. See the website to find a few pictures of some of the pretty houses I found along this path. Among these, note a beautiful Queen Anne Colonial Revival house from 1899, at 242 Rugby Road.

You will end up at the intersection of Marlborough and Beverly Roads, having covered Part 1 of the tour. A few steps away, on Beverly Road, you can catch a train back home, if you feel like it's enough for one day, or else consider the option of facing Part 2, similar to what you have just seen, and also very beautiful. In this case, you can still catch that same train but in the opposite direction, towards Brighton Beach/Coney Island, and get off at the first station, Cortelyou Road. You can also walk all the way, approximately one third of a mile, which doesn't seem like much, but it all adds up.

Cortelyou Road gives you a break, somehow. You can stop somewhere for provisions, perhaps sit at some place and catch your breath, before you start off with Part 2 (1.4 miles). As for places to actually sit down and eat, there is one by the name of The Farm on Adderley, which I don't personally know, but I hear good things; and then there is also Mimi's Hummus, for a Middle Eastern menu. Other options too. Just see for yourself.

Once you are done and ready, head for Westminster Road and walk south towards Ditmas Avenue. You will now make a left turn towards Argyle Road, and then left again, till you reach Dorchester Road. When you get there, make a right turn now, towards Rugby Road once again, and another right back to Ditmas Avenue. A little zigzag, if you will. But all those streets are worth the walk, trust me. Once you get to the intersection of Rugby and Ditmas, you will now walk all the way up Ditmas to the east, until 19<sup>th</sup> Street. This would pretty much cover the basics of the Ditmas Avenue area, although off Ditmas, as you go along, you will see many interesting homes too, so make as many detours as your legs allow. Part of this section is considered historic district, (technically bounded by Marlborough Road to Ocean Avenue, and from Dorchester Road to Newkirk Avenue), and it boasts plenty of free-standing Victorian houses, built in the early 1900's. Homes in this neighborhood feature wide front-yards and porches, so it's hard to believe how close you are to the hustle and bustle of the big city.

When you get to 19<sup>th</sup> Street, you will now turn right towards Newkirk Avenue, and then right again towards 16<sup>th</sup> Street, where you will find Newkirk Avenue station to catch the B or Q train back home. A few blocks further, at 1119 Newkirk Avenue, you can find the Milk&Honey Café, not just for coffee but for food as well.

All along this stroll, many of the houses you will find are depicted in the website. I can never stress this enough: all of this suburban beauty just minutes away from anywhere in Manhattan. It's simply amazing.