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# Brooklyn Heights' Architectural Styles

## Brooklyn



In recent years, Brooklyn Heights has charmed visitors to New York City in unprecedented numbers. This is a reflection of Brooklyn's changing reputation in the public's conscious. The neighborhood has long been a stunner, as its charm is primarily geographic and historic. The neighborhood offers some of the best views of Lower Manhattan, as well as some of the finest and best preserved examples of several architectural styles, including:

### Classical Revival

Also known as Neoclassical, this architectural style pays tribute to ancient Greek architecture through its columns, facades, and porticos. St. Anne's Preschool on Willow Street, just off the Brooklyn Heights Promenade, offers a well-maintained example of the Classical Revival style.

### **Greek Revival**

405 buildings in the Brooklyn Heights Historic District were built in the Greek Revival style, a major architectural movement in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Characterized most heavily by Doric and Ionic columns, Greek Revival buildings are strikingly impressive. The Dime Savings Bank at Bond and Dekalb, a 10-minute walk from [NU Hotel Brooklyn](#), is a great example.

### **Italianate**

Bracketed cornices, bell towers reminiscent of those rising above Florentine churches, and adjoining arched windows are defining characteristics of the Italianate architectural style. Several of Brooklyn Heights' brownstone row houses evoke this style.

### **Romanesque**

Structures built in the Romanesque architectural style tend to have tall, round-arched windows and templed roofs. Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Cathedral at Henry and Remsen, the Hermann Behr Mansion at Henry and Pierrepont, and the US Post Office in Cadman Plaza epitomize the Romanesque and Romanesque Revival architectural styles. All are within 10 or 15 minutes' walk of NU Hotel Brooklyn.

### **Victorian Gothic**

Two blocks east of NU Hotel Brooklyn on State Street stands one of New York's finest examples of Victorian Gothic architecture. St. Nicholas Antiochian Church, with its gabled pediment and dormer windows, is worth a visit if you're into Gothic architecture. The single rose window is particularly striking.

In 1965, Brooklyn Heights became the first NYC neighborhood to be designated a National Historic Landmark. This is good news for architecture buffs looking to admire examples of the styles discussed above. If that's you, make sure you get to Brooklyn Heights on your next visit to New York.

### **Middagh Street**



A two-and-a-half-story clapboard frame house resides at 24 Middagh Street, on the corner of Willow. Like 68 Hicks, its front door is flanked by Ionic colonnettes. A rear carriage house on Willow Street is connected to the main residence by a screen board wall that also encloses a small garden.

The Federal-style is probably one of the oldest in Brooklyn Heights, built around 1790 to 1829.





## The Early Years

This house has a large wood frame home with a gambrel roof, shutters, and two boot scrapers at its front entrance — was built sometime in the early to mid 1820s. This would have been after Middagh Street was laid out in the early 1800s, Brooklyn was incorporated in 1816, and the small waterfront community began to flourish.

The 1790 date and tales of the origin of the house as a tavern were perhaps perpetuated by Genevieve Beavers Earle, a Brooklyn Heights Councilmember who, according to a 1982 article in the Brooklyn Paper, gave a 1930s radio address about the house. She described the tavern as an attraction, with travelers coming “from all points on the coast” to try a menu of “Welsh rarebit and a mug of ale.” Where she found the details of the supposed menu are unclear.



A detail from a circa 1845 view of Brooklyn Heights. Lithograph by E. Whitefield via Library of Congress

Neither of the two early maps of the area, the 1816 Village of Brooklyn nor the 1827 Hooker's Pocket Plan of Brooklyn appear to show the house, but neither map is necessarily a building by building account of the town's development.

As for the later date in the 1790 to 1829 stretch, it probably derives from Clay Lancaster's "Old Brooklyn Heights, New York's First Suburb" which doesn't date the house but does document that it appears in the 1829 city directory for Brooklyn. Incidentally, the address also appears in the 1823 directory, but we can't be certain it's the same house standing there today.





Some of the early owners of the property included Peleg Back, a builder, and Adam Dotter, who had a porter house, or tavern — but it seems doubtful that it is this house.

### **The House in the Victorian Era**

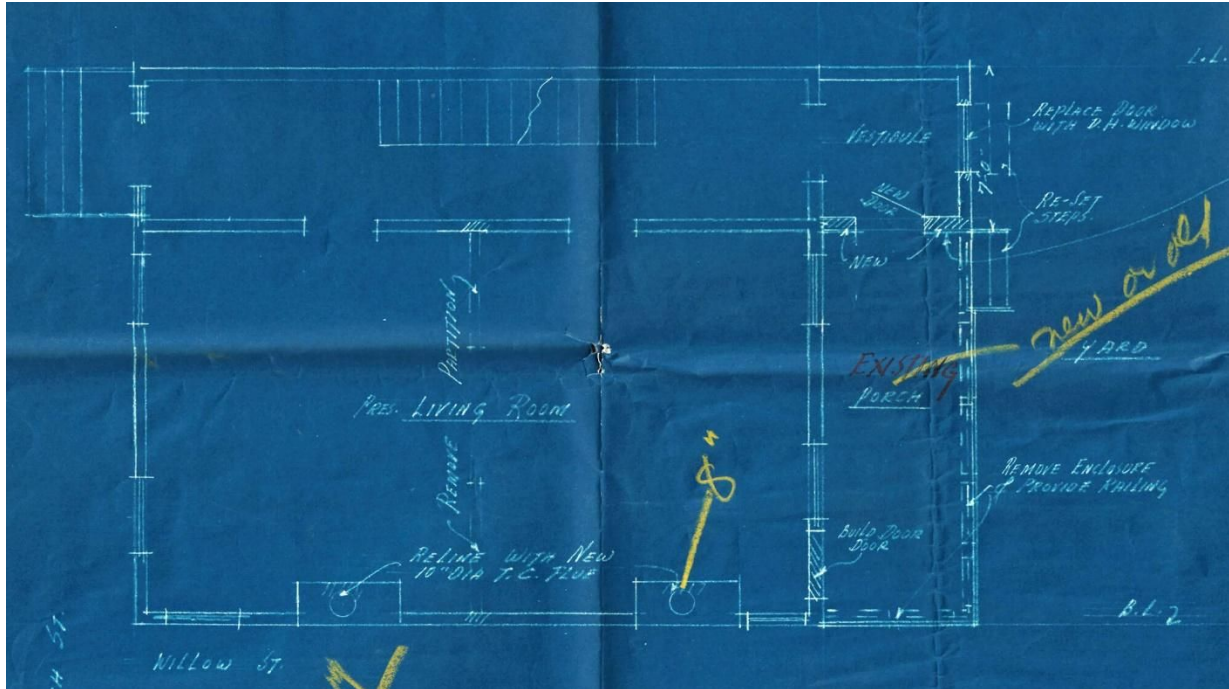
Adding to research, the street was renumbered around 1871. The house would have originally been known as 42 Middagh.

Before and after photos of the entrance to 24 Middagh from 1938. Photos from *House & Garden* magazine courtesy of the Weisman family.

They hired architect Sidney Daub for the remodel. Daub, based in Manhattan, was known for modernizing row houses.

On the exterior, Daub proposed enlarging the attic windows on the rear of the house and removing part of the rear porch to erect a new vestibule, according to the application filed with the Department of Buildings.

On the interior, Daub applied to eliminate the wall separating the front and rear parlors on the first floor and, on the lower level, proposed removing the wall separating the hallway and dining room.



Plans by architect Sidney Daub from the DOB show the proposed removal of the wall between the two parlors. Photo by Susan De Vries

The spruced up Fitz Randolph home was profiled in a 1938 photo piece, “Tavern Into Home,” in *House & Garden* magazine, with interior and exterior photographs and brief descriptive text. While the article notes that “in restoring it, little was done to the exterior except painting,” a look at photographs of the house from the 1920s and 1930s reveals much more significant work was done around this time.

The bracketed cornice, lintels and door hood on the Middagh Street facade were all replaced, new railings were added to the stoop, shutters were installed on all the facades, and the iron fence was removed and a wooden picket fence put in its place.

Whether or not the elaborate carved detail with foliate blocks surrounding the front door is original to the exterior is unclear. (It could have originally decorated the opening between the parlors and been moved when the wall there was demolished.) Alas, historic photos don’t give a good view of the front door and Department of Building records uncovered make no mention of it.

For the interior, the Fitz Randolphs favored modern conveniences with a touch of the colonial spirit. They left in place, according to *House & Garden*, some original mantels but added wallpaper, carpets and chintz upholstery along with some antique furniture.

A 1922 view of the existing carriage house at 24 Middagh. Photo via [New York Public Library](#)

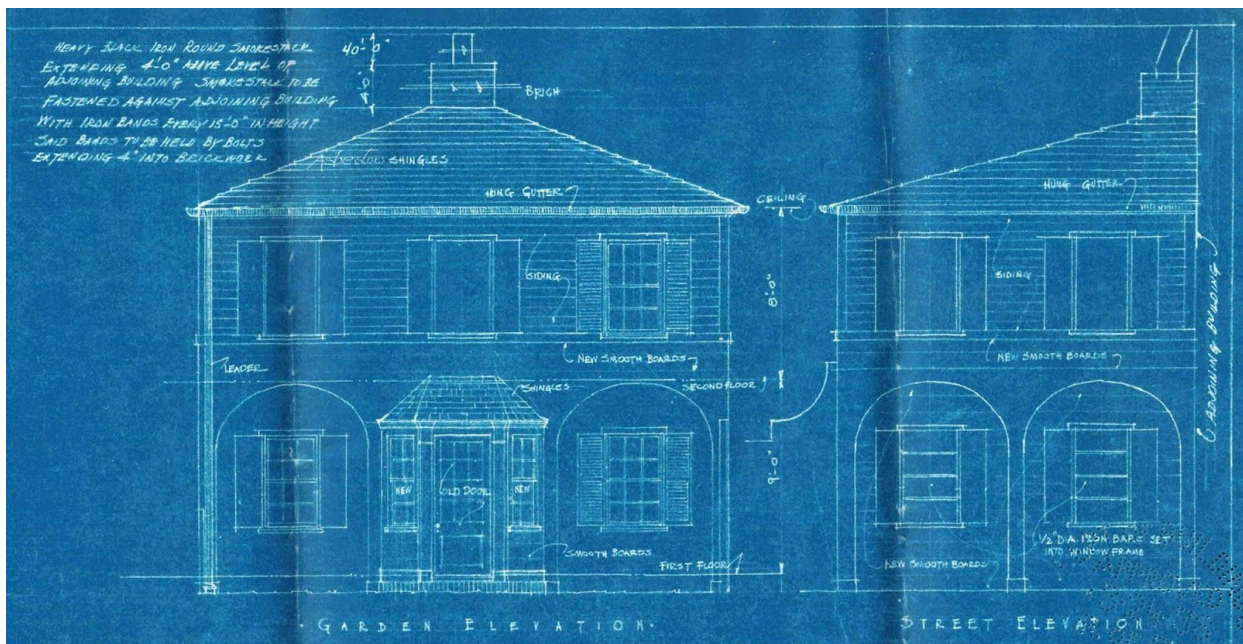
The Fitz Randolphs completely overhauled the garage at the rear of the property. An outbuilding shows up on maps as early as 1855, but 1920s photographs of the site reveal a fairly modest 1 or 1.5 story frame building, significantly different than the Colonial Revival carriage house now on site.

The Fitz Randolphs hired Manhattan architect William F. Schorn to convert the two-car frame garage into a separate dwelling in 1938. Department of Buildings applications for the project and the building blueprints show that Schorn raised the roof and added heat and plumbing for a bathroom and kitchen. Carolyn Fitz Randolph's mother lived in the carriage house for a short time.

### The Brownstoners of Brooklyn Heights

The Fitz Randolphs were early brownstoners of a sort — couples who moved into big old houses in the city to raise a family rather than decamp to new suburbs — and that trend continued through the next two owners in the 20th century.

Carolyn Fitz Randolph was credited, at least by the Brooklyn Eagle, with starting a “back-to-the-homestead movement among the younger set.” According to an Eagle [article from 1940](#) while the older generation was settling into apartments in the neighborhood, the “younger married folk of prominent families” were buying up the old houses, “restyling and redecorating them,” and raising their families in the neighborhood.



Plans by architect William F. Schorn for the remodeling of the carriage house in the records at the Brooklyn office of the New York City Department of Buildings. Photo by Susan De Vries



The Fitz Randolphs spent just about 10 years in the house, and sold it to the Duffield family in 1946. Thankfully for future historians, they started a tradition the next several owners continued: mailing packets of information about the house to the next owners. Everything from blueprints to newspaper clippings were saved as part of the unofficial archive of the house.

Materials sent by the Fitz Randolph family to the new owners, the Duffield family, in 1946.

The Duffield family sold the house to the Dublin family by the early 1950s and they in turn sold the house to Eli and Tomi Weisman in 1958. The packets of information sent by the Fitz Randolphs and the Dublins ended up in the hands of the Weismans, who safeguarded them for the next 60 years.

Perhaps the Weismans decided to move to Brooklyn Heights from the West Village because they wanted to buy a house “and that’s what you did in those days,” speculated their daughter, who, along with her brother, now owns the house.

#### Reference

<https://www.brownstoner.com/real-estate-market/brooklyn-homes-for-sale-in-brooklyn-heights-2-4-middagh-street/>