

MICHELLE YOUNG AND AUGUSTIN PASQUET

# SECRET BROOKLYN



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

## TOM FRUIN'S GLASS WATER TOWERS

①

*Unique specimens of one of the most iconic elements of New York's skyline*

*Various locations:*

*334 Furman Street in Brooklyn Bridge Park*

*20 Jay Street in Dumbo*

The New York City water tower is one of the most iconic and ubiquitous elements in the city's skyline. So much so that it's often used as a symbol of the city itself. And over the years, it's become much more than just the functional object it was designed as.



© Robert Banat's 'god shot' of Watertower 1

If there's one artist associated with the water tower, it is Tom Fruin. His colorful glass water towers can be seen in buildings atop Brooklyn Bridge Park and in Dumbo. You may have also seen his whimsical Danish houses, Kolonihavehus, in temporary installations at South Street Seaport, Domino Park and Empire Stores in Dumbo or his Bombora houses in the Meatpacking District. His works bring great joy to the places where they are installed - a literally rose-colored glass through which to see the city.

Fruin made his first stained-glass water tower in 2010 as part of an artistic exploration into the iconic shapes of New York City, like the water tower and the torch of the Statue of Liberty. He used scavenged, reclaimed, and recycled materials. When his wife asked him what his icon would be for Brooklyn, he said, 'Not even skipping a beat, of course: a water tower.' He says he's 'kind of a rooftop guy. If I was at a party, I'd always end up finding where the stairwell to the roof was and go out. I'm like a cat, I just love those vantage points.' More than a quarter of a century after making New York City his home, he says the views from the roofs are still 'fresh and new to me ... I spend a lot of time on rooftops and near water towers and sort of thinking about them.'

The water towers are made of salvaged glass and steel, with the shapes designed by computer and then laser-cut to fit. For the water tower atop 334 Furman Street, the locally sourced glass came from all over New York City, including scraps from the floors of Chinatown sign shops and the demolition salvage warehouse Build It Green! NYC. Other pieces came from the Dumbo studio of the artist Dennis Oppenheim.

For the Dumbo water tower, the idea originated with Fruin but he had the full support of Jed Walentas, the founder of Two Trees, the developers who revitalized Dumbo. They finally decided that the building where Fruin had his studio was perfect, with the glass water tower set to the backdrop of the city skyline and the Manhattan Bridge. Two Trees decommissioned the freight elevator and put the water tower atop the elevator's bulkhead, which acted like a pedestal.

At Brooklyn Bridge Park, Fruin was already doing the signage for St. Ann's Warehouse, a theater venue nearby, and became familiar with the people running the park. Asked to put in a submission for a work in the park, Fruin found the rooftop location exciting. He says, 'The BQE [Brooklyn Queens Expressway] snakes past it, there's almost always traffic. So I was imagining this audience of people like a conveyor belt, just moving people slowly past my sculpture. And then you can see, of course, the Brooklyn Bridge or Lower Manhattan in the background.'

## 'COMMUTER BANKING' WINDOW ⑩

*A 1960s attempt by banks to make banking more convenient*

*Brooklyn Borough Hall subway station mezzanine*

Most straphangers who pass through the Brooklyn Borough Hall subway station barely notice the two darkened windows



that are set within the blue tiling on the upper level of the station. But look carefully and you will see the faded words 'COMMUTER BANKING' at the top. On the lower part of the window, the hours are still visible: 'MONDAY THROUGH THURSDAY 8 A.M. TO 6 P.M.' as well as a small, yellowed button that would have summoned the teller.

Made by Diebold Incorporated out in Ohio, these commuter banking windows were once run by the Brooklyn Savings Bank at least through the late 1960s and likely through the 1980s until the bank closed. Untapped New York tour guide Justin Rivers believes that this section of the subway station was added in the early 1960s when the New York City Transit Authority was undertaking large capital improvements, including subway platform extensions on the former IRT line.

An advertisement taken out by the bank in a Brooklyn Academy of Music program in October 1968 lists the 'COMMUTER BANKING OFFICE: Borough Hall Subway Station Mezzanine between IRT and BMT.' There is little written in the press, past or present, about this helpful banking window, but the initiative was clearly part of a wider attempt by banks to make banking more convenient, starting in the mid-century.

In 1923, New York State passed a new banking law that allowed savings banks to open branch offices for the first time, which led to a flurry of new creative banking options. As the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission reported in the designation report from the Williamsburgh Savings Bank, 'Strategically the large savings banks saw the need to locate at regional transportation nodes in order to serve commuters,' noting that the Bowery Savings Bank was the first to exhibit such transit-oriented planning. But these observations were generally about standalone branch locations.

The Brooklyn Savings Bank was founded in 1827, operating from multiple headquarters over time in Brooklyn Heights. Its most architecturally notable and longest-standing headquarters was at Clinton and Pierpoint Streets, designed in a Neoclassical revival style around the time of the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. The granite for the building was quarried from Maine. The Brooklyn Savings Bank was located here from 1894 to 1961, when it moved to Montague and Fulton Streets.

The building was sold to Franklin National Bank, which then sold it to developers, and it met the wrecking ball thereafter. Though overshadowed by the loss of the original Penn Station, the Brooklyn Savings Bank headquarters is considered one of the city's notable lost landmarks.

## LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY BASKETBALL COURT

20

*A gym inside a historic movie theater*

161 Ashland Place  
Brooklyn, NY 11201  
B/Q/R to DeKalb Avenue



Downtown Brooklyn, around the intersection of Flatbush Avenue and Fulton Street, was hailed as the ‘Times Square of Brooklyn,’ by the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1928. This was the year that the Paramount Theatre was under construction. The accompanying map showed 12 theaters all within a few blocks, and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* called it the ‘Hub of the Largest Theatre District in the world, excepting only New York.’ When the Paramount opened on November 23, 1928, the total combined capacity of the theaters in this area was 25,000 seats. The opening was such an important one that local businesses, such as Loeser’s department store and Joe’s Restaurant, took out advertisements to welcome the new venue. In addition to movies, the Paramount hosted famous performers like Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington and Frank Sinatra.

Downtown Brooklyn has regained some of its entertainment cred with the arrival of the Barclays Center, the addition of BRIC Arts|Media House, and the continued excellence of the Brooklyn Academy of Music. But many of the old theaters are gone. One notable exception lies hidden inside the Long Island University Athletic Center. The basketball court sits amid an opulent backdrop, the auditorium of the former Paramount Theatre. The scoreboard sits in front of the grand stage proscenium and the original details of the theater are well preserved on the ornamented walls and arched, latticed ceiling. The Rococo flourishes get even more dramatic in the seating area thanks to the presence of large columns, fountains and sculptures. There is a custom-made Wurlitzer organ that still exists here and is operational.

The Paramount struggled financially, like other large theaters, during the Depression. It was sold in 1935 and again in 1950 to Long Island University. The original theater marquee and rooftop signage are gone, but the dramatic marble lobby now functions as the school cafeteria and an event space. Original details, like former elevators, decorative statues, various architectural elements, and private rooms, still abound within the building. You’ll even find a staircase that leads to nowhere, closed off in the conversion of the space.

The gym is currently being converted back into an arts and culture venue in a joint effort by Long Island University and Brooklyn Sports and Entertainment, the management company for the Barclays Center. The venue capacity would be 1,500 – far lower than the original 4000+ when the Paramount was the largest theater in Brooklyn, but it will bring the public back into this space for the first time in over 50 years.

## ABANDONED BROOKLYN NAVY YARD HOSPITAL

23

### *Hidden inside the Navy Yard*

Flushing Avenue between Williamsburg Street NW and Ryerson Street  
[brooklyngreenway.org](http://brooklyngreenway.org)  
 Can be visited for occasional art exhibits and walking tours  
 F to York Street, G to Flushing Avenue



The Brooklyn Navy Yard Naval Hospital Annex (or the Naval Annex) was built from 1830 to 1836. It was active through the Civil War (supplying almost a third of the medicine distributed to Union soldiers) and both World Wars until it was decommissioned in the 1970s. Some of the first female nurses and medical students were employed there. Dr. E. R. Squibb, leading pharmaceuticals inventor of Bristol-Myers Squibb, developed the first anesthetic ethers for use in surgery here.

As it stands, however, the hospital complex has only been accessible on rare occasions. In 2015, a photographic exhibit by Bettina WitteVeen, ‘When We Were Soldiers ... once and young’ took place inside the main building. The Brooklyn Greenway Initiative took visitors to see the hospital and surrounding areas on an annual Jane’s Walk. The architecture has remained hidden behind foliage and locked gates, but has been spotted in television productions such as *Gotham*. In 2004, Steiner Studios opened as one of the first major anchor tenants of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, with five soundstages and production facilities. Starting in 2010, Steiner Studios began the process to nearly double its facility, which today is at 580,000 square feet.

In February 2015, a development plan for the third phase of expansion of Steiner Studios was adopted, with a view to converting the abandoned Brooklyn Navy Yard Hospital Annex into a media campus by 2027. With an estimated price tag of \$137.1 million, the third phase would add another 420,000 square feet of floor area to the studio complex, already the largest outside of Hollywood. There will even be an underwater soundstage, the first of its kind in New York City.

The good news for preservationists is that the large-scale rehabilitation project would also include the renovation and stabilization of existing structures in the Hospital Annex.

The Brooklyn Navy Yard has been transforming from an active military property to industrial park and diversified manufacturing hub. The forthcoming arrival of a WeWork at Dock 77 and the transformation of the Navy Yard Hospital will solidify its place as one of the premiere work spaces in Brooklyn, if not New York City.

While checking out this site, don’t miss the last building left from Admirals’ Row further east on Flushing Avenue: a series of handsome, 19th-century townhouses that once served as officers’ quarters. Another spot to see is the Naval Cemetery Landscape at 63 Williamsburg Street NW, which was reopened to the public in 2016 for the first time in 90 years.

## TOUR OF THE NEWTOWN CREEK DIGESTER EGGS

31

*Futuristic sewage treatment plant with two honors for Excellence in Design*

327 Greenpoint Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11222  
718-595-5140

Visitor Center open by appointment only  
Tours through advance registration only  
G to Greenpoint Avenue



On special occasions, such as Valentine's Day and Halloween, the New York City Department of Sanitation hosts tours of the Newtown Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant, the largest of the city's 14 facilities. As unromantic or unfestive as a sewage treatment plant might sound, tickets for these free tours are snapped up so fast there's often a long wait list. The Newtown Creek facility has become something of a city landmark, with its eight 140-foot metallic silver digester eggs that rise from the banks of Newtown Creek, an industrial zone at the border of Brooklyn and Queens. At night, the eggs glow with a deep blue color, part of an overall scheme by lighting designer Hervé Descottes.

This shiny facility, which opened in 2010, was designed by Polshek Partners, now Ennead Architects, the firm behind renovations at Carnegie Hall, Brooklyn Museum and the American Museum of Natural History. Ennead also designed the Standard Hotel in the Meatpacking District. The Newtown Creek project was a collaboration between the community, the architects and the New York City Department of Sanitation, and is upheld as an example of collective planning at its best. As a testament, the New York City Arts Commission awarded the Newtown Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant with two honors for Excellence in Design.

New York City has a combined sewer system, which means stormwater, wastewater and sewage flow in the same pipes. During storms and heavy rains, the system gets overwhelmed and sewage gets discharged directly into rivers and bays. The digester eggs, however, process between 1.3 to 1.5 billion gallons of sludge a day in a multi-step process that eventually helps reduce the amount of sewage that flows into the city's waterways. The sludge is heated up, reducing its oxygen content, which allows bacteria to break down the waste into water, carbon dioxide and methane. Water is removed from the 'digested sludge' which becomes a solid that can be used as fertilizer. The remaining liquid is then disinfected with enough oxygen to still support marine life.

The New York City waterways are the cleanest they've been in 100 years, and the Newtown Creek plant is a big reason for that.

Tours begin in the visitors' center before heading up an elevator to the glass walkways that run between the digester eggs. You can peer down into the sludge and see the process at work while taking in the views of Manhattan and Brooklyn.

# KINGSLAND WILDFLOWERS 32

## GREEN ROOF AT BROADWAY STAGES

*A hidden green oasis atop an oil spill zone*

520 Kingsland Avenue

Brooklyn, NY 11222

Transport G subway to Greenpoint Ave

kingslandwildflowers.com

*Open seasonally April-November for educational programming, special events, or book a tour through the website*

At the northeastern tip of Greenpoint, the former facilities of Standard Oil once encompassed 50 acres of former marshland along Newtown Creek. That industrial landscape persists today – active oil and fuel storage sites, the remnants of those long gone, and new industry – despite encroaching gentrification. Several decades of mishandling resulted in a century of accumulated oil contamination and a fire in 1919 causing a loss of 110 million gallons of oil. Today we see extensive pollution of the Newtown Creek waterway in addition to an estimated 17 to 30 million gallons of crude oil resting just below the surface of fifty acres of land underneath Greenpoint, Brooklyn.



In compliance with the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1914, Standard Oil was divided into six companies, and those resulting companies are still some of the biggest players globally today. ExxonMobil is just one, and still operates here in Greenpoint. As part of a petroleum remediation agreement with New York State, ExxonMobil has been extracting oil from the ground from the many spills and fires that have roared through the refineries and oil plants over the last 150 years.

But amidst the foreboding landscape, glimpses of nature can still be found. One such place is Kingsland Wildflowers, a lush series of green roofs hidden atop Broadway Stages, one of the largest TV and film production companies in New York City. Funded predominantly by the Greenpoint Community Environmental Fund, a grant program created from the ExxonMobil settlement, and Broadway Stages, KingslandWildflowers was conceived by Marni Marjorelle, the owner and founder of Alive Structures green roofing company, in partnership with NYC Audubon and Newtown Creek Alliance. In addition to monitoring wildlife populations on the green roofs, New York City Audubon and Newtown Creek Alliance run the community programming: hosting special events, workshops, neighborhood bird walks, ecology discussions, and educational lectures.

In total, there are four green roofs, all donated by Broadway Stages, covering 22,000 square feet with a fifth roof on the way that will serve as a living learning lab and educational green roof. Kingsland Wildflowers aims to offer a habitat of native grasses and wildflowers for the birds and insects of the neighborhood, some who live their whole lives on this roof, others that use the roof as a stopover habitat. The rooftop oasis has become a hotspot for bird species like the barn swallow, red-tailed hawk, and chimney swift, European starling, northern mockingbird, and the American robin. From May through October 2017, New York City Audubon collected over 45,000 arthropods, observed 17 bird species, recorded 493 bat passes, and confirmed one species of bat, the Eastern Red Bat.

### *Stunning views*

The views, with a backdrop of the Newtown Creek Digester Eggs (see page 70) and the New York City skyline, are stunning. On the fifth floor green roof, a meandering stone path leads to a spherical water fountain that seems to be in dialogue with the otherworldly digester eggs. It's a reminder that Kingsland Wildflowers is not a naturally occurring Garden of Eden, but that nature can be found even in the most inhospitable of places.

## 'RESPECT' MEMORIAL FOR ARETHA FRANKLIN

⑦

*One of the rare permanent tributes on the New York City subway*

*Franklin Avenue subway station  
Intersection of Franklin Avenue and Fulton Street*



Transit-goers at the Franklin Avenue subway station at the Bedford-Stuyvesant/Crown Heights border in Brooklyn may wonder why there are signs with 'Respect' along the platform walls. Are they subtle reminders for people to behave while on the subway system? In fact, it is one of the rare permanent tributes on the New York City subway.

Anytime someone famous with ties to New York City dies, the city's residents take to its public spaces to express their grief. The subway system is no stranger to this, especially when a celebrity shares the name of a subway station. The Prince Street subway station was decorated when the singer, the Artist Formerly Known as Prince, died in 2016. When Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg died in 2020, the 50th Street subway station mosaics were altered to say 'RUTH ST.'

Following the death of singer Aretha Franklin in August 2018, a plethora of DIY tributes appeared in the two New York City subway stations that bear her name. To the chagrin of many New Yorkers and Franklin fans, most were swiftly removed by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) within a day. But timed to coincide with Franklin's funeral in Detroit in August 2018, the MTA installed black signs with the word 'Respect' above every FRANKLIN AVE. tiling on both platforms in the subway station on Fulton Street in Brooklyn. There are about a dozen signs in the station.

The MTA, via a spokesperson, said in a statement, 'We wanted to memorialize the outpouring of love from the community for Aretha Franklin and in consultation with local leaders, we agreed that 'respect' was a beautiful tribute and worthy message.' The signs were designed as a partnership between MTA Arts & Design and LeRoy McCarthy of Heterodoxx INC, who was responsible for the first spray-painted tributes at this station on the day that Franklin's death was announced.

The MTA also installed large 'Respect' signs inside the Franklin Street station in Manhattan.



## SECRET WRITING LAB INSIDE THE BROOKLYN SUPERHERO SUPPLY CO.

18

*A secret identity for 826NYC*

372 5th Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11215  
superherosupplies.com  
D/N/R to 9th Street, F/G to 4th Avenue



If you're 8, 18, or 80, and decide the next big step in your life trajectory is to become a superhero, the perfect one-stop shop to ensure success can be found tucked away in Park Slope on 5th Avenue between 5th and 6th Streets. Brooklyn's Superhero Supply Co., an unassuming free-standing store, is often mistaken for a hardware store. It actually houses shelves of fun things: cans of Courage, Gumption, invisibility paint, and tools to help you scale walls. A mock seriousness to the store, paired with the Willy Wonka-like fantasy world, creates a delightful place to explore and play.

The store is actually a secret identity of 826NYC, a not-for-profit writing lab that focuses on kids aged 6 to 18. Accessed via a trick bookshelf, the lab offers free after school drop-in one-on-one tutoring and fun weeknight and weekend workshops that encourage creativity and writing of all kinds: short stories, films, comics, and even Japanese Manga. 826 will also host class field trips that aid teachers in planning creative writing exercises. The organization is active in several cities through the United States; the original location, 826 Valencia in San Francisco, is fronted by a pirate store.

Beyond the basics, you definitely want to check this place out. If you're into design, the whole store is filled with examples of coherent and beautiful graphic design. Products and signs have a tongue-in-cheek playfulness that will definitely bring a smirk or a smile to your face. Don't know where to begin? Pick up the Superhero Starter Kit, which comes with a ready-made secret identity, cape, mask and blaster. But you'll soon want to upgrade, maybe with some Super X-Ray Glasses or a can of Time Travel. The 'brands' carried by the Superhero Store have fabulous names too, such as Bugayenko Laboratories and FantastiCo!, each appropriately named for the products they supposedly produce.

If you love the written word, 826 has shelves of essay and short story collections written by its students and other great modern writers linked to 826's founder, writer Dave Eggers. If you don't need any superhero supplies, you can play with several of the store's interactive exhibits: try on a cape and snap a pic for your friends at the cape testing chamber. And if you're feeling villainous, the store has a cure! A de-villainizing chamber asks you a series of questions to determine the nature of your villainy then takes cares of the problem. Even purchasing something small is an experience, as store rules require you to recite the vow of heroism with every purchase.

## PARK SLOPE ARMORY'S ABANDONED SHOOTING GALLERY

24

### *An incredible place*

361 15th Street

Brooklyn, NY 11215

In the Veterans Museum, ask the head of it to take you down there. He'll sometimes accept.

F/G to 15th Street-Prospect Park



One of the city's many armories, the Park Slope Armory encompasses an entire city block in Brooklyn, bounded by 7th and 8th Avenues, and 14th and 15th Streets. Originally built for the 14th Regiment of the New York State militia in 1893, it now houses sports facilities run by the YMCA, along with a women's shelter. But one of the building's most impressive secrets lies on the lower level of the armory. Left fallow for many years, a long shooting gallery allowed for short-range and long-range target practice. Its entrance sits behind a locked door, through a hallway long repurposed as a storage space, and down a decorative wooden staircase. It's an incredible place, silent from years of abandonment but aching for future use.

There is a dusty Victorian-style waiting room that has retained its tin walls and ceilings, green tinted paint job, and wooden wraparound bench. There was also once a wooden railing here that has since been moved to the first floor of the armory, next to the Veterans Museum, an equally unknown spot (see page 130). The words 'EASTERN DISTRICT' printed on the left refer to the militia's district within New York State.

Under a large pipe, possibly over a century old, you enter an arched brick hallway that runs alongside both shooting galleries. On the right, there are some unused spaces with crumbling wooden walls. The short range shooting gallery is located to the left. Small staircases once led to a sort of half floor, now somewhat collapsed, from which the targets would be raised into the shooting galleries themselves. Further along, the ceilings of the hallway get lower and lower until you actually have to duck through an opening to proceed.

Along this section, electrical lighting appears for the first time, hanging alongside the overhead pipes. On the right, there is a heavy metal door that leads into a small room, possibly used once as a holding cell, according to the armory historian, though this is unconfirmed. Scenes from the 1990 movie *Goodfellas*, where the character Paulie is in prison, were filmed in this abandoned area.

The long-range shooting gallery, located just to the left of this hallway, is barely lit. Standing in the dark, barrel-vaulted space, you can almost hear the voices and shots of men practicing their trade. Bullet holes still remain in large metal pieces that line parts of the ceiling and the end of the gallery.

## THE ROBOTIC CHURCH

39

*Looking at nature at the simplest level*

111 Pioneer Street

Brooklyn, NY 11231

[facebook.com/RoboticChurchNewYork/](https://www.facebook.com/RoboticChurchNewYork/)

*Open for performances a few times a year by appointment*

*F/G to Smith-9th Street or B61 bus to Van Brunt Street/Verona Street*



**T**ruly a secret gem, there's nothing at street level to suggest that there's an incredible site-specific installation and workshop inside this former Norwegian Seaman's Church in Red Hook. Metal gates are perpetually rolled down on this brick building that dates to the 1880s. Only a doorbell next to the locked alley door gives some clue: it says 'Amorphic Robotic Works'.

The Robotic Church is open for performances a few times a year – the rest of the time it functions as the workshop for Amorphic Robotic Works, a collective of artists, engineers, technicians and programmers founded by Chico MacMurtrie in 1991. MacMurtrie is acclaimed for his large-scale, kinetic sculptures and was most recently awarded a Guggenheim fellowship for the construction of inflatable bridges that can reach across the United States-Mexico border.

While inflatables are the evolution of MacMurtrie's exploration in kinetic mechanical movement, the pneumatic robots are the origin. In the Robotic Church, fifty 'humanoid performers' are positioned throughout the former church nave. There's a control tower up top, through which MacMurtrie can lead the performance. He tells us that the performance is 'a story of their evolution,' and in many ways, the evolution of humankind, 'going back to the very beginning.' A clocking mechanism sets the timing of the performance (usually between 40 and 60 minutes) and the robots communicate through rhythm using body language and sound. MacMurtrie describes the Robotic Church performance as 'looking at nature at the simplest level.'

The robots range in size from 12 inches to 15 feet. They're located on multiple levels of the church, a deliberate reference to the placement of religious saints in a chapel. One robot, attached to a rope, is imbued with the objective to reach the top. Guests sit on wooden benches, 'as if coming to church,' MacMurtrie describes.

When not activated, between three and a dozen people work in the space, testing materials and pushing the boundaries of architectural structures. In an era where popular technology is pushing ever towards virtual reality, Amorphic Robotic Works uses analog technology to explore the human condition. Instead of getting sucked into a digital world, the kinetic sculptures remind us of what it means to be alive.

## WORLD WAR II GUARD TOWERS AT BROOKLYN ARMY TERMINAL

⑤

*Towers that once protected New York*

140 58th Street

Brooklyn, NY 11220

Accessible on special tours run by Untapped Cities

N/R to 59th Street



Situated at the southern edge of Sunset Park, along the Brooklyn waterfront, the Brooklyn Army Terminal is a 4 million square foot structure built between 1918 and 1919. It was the largest concrete building in the world when it was completed. As an indicator of the importance of this complex, architect Cass Gilbert, who designed the Woolworth Building, United States Supreme Court in Washington D.C. and the U.S. Customs House in Manhattan, was hired for the project.

The facility was the main depot and supply base for the American troops fighting in Europe during the end of World War I but was most active during World War II, when 20,000 people were employed at the facility.

One of the little known secrets of the Brooklyn Army Terminal is the function of the four protruding miniature buildings atop both building A and building B. These were built as guard towers and were manned during World War II. Today, the towers are filled with pigeon carcasses and old newspapers. The rooftops are not usually open to the public, but are accessible on tours run by *Untapped Cities*, in partnership with the New York City Economic Development Corporation.

The Brooklyn Army Terminal was decommissioned in 1957. Purchased by the city in 1981, the complex began a multi-decade renovation into office space and manufacturing uses – a process that is ongoing. The most stunning space of the terminal is the multi-level atrium in building B with its staggered balconies. Cranes would pick up pallets from the trains, lift them up and drop them directly to a balcony above. A Long Island Railroad train sits on the tracks to give a sense of what the space was like when freight was driven directly into the building. Today, part of that track area has been converted into an indoor lobby.

Some of the sky bridges, which connect buildings A and B, remain in a raw, untouched state, awaiting future renovation.

Brooklyn Army Terminal originally had 96 elevators, the largest capacity for freight elevators in the world when built. It was also the largest military supply base in the world through the end of World War II and held a record in the Book of World Records for how much concrete was mixed and poured in a day.

### *Where Elvis boarded for Europe during WWII*

During WWII, the Brooklyn Army Terminal also served as an embarkation point for troops heading to Europe. The most famous of these soldiers was Elvis, who arrived by train directly onto the pier. He gave two press conferences then boarded the ship he would take across the Atlantic.

## ERASMUS HALL ACADEMY

17

### *Stained glass treasures inside a school*

911 Flatbush Avenue  
 Brooklyn, NY 11226  
 718-564-2551 or contact via website for visits  
[schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/17/K539](http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/17/K539)  
 Monday–Friday 8am–2:20pm  
 B/Q to Church Avenue

Nestled in the heart of Brooklyn is Erasmus Hall, one of New York City's most impressive yet little known treasures. This Gothic-style school, reminiscent of the colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, was founded in 1786 in an area settled by the Dutch. It is considered one of the oldest schools in the United States and was the first secondary school chartered by the New York State Regents. Erasmus Hall was funded by some of the country's most famous Founding Fathers, including Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, and counts among its alumni such figures as Mae West, Barbra Streisand and Neil Diamond. Today, five schools use the complex now known as Erasmus Hall Educational Campus, which is filled with notable art and architecture.

Beyond the exterior architecture, the interior of the school reveals the rich history of the building. The current complex was built around

an original 1786 wooden clapboard school building in 1904 by school superintendent C.B.J. Snyder, who is credited with over 400 of New York City's most architecturally notable schools. Artwork was an important part of school design during Snyder's time, with most schools incorporating site-specific commissioned artworks of various mediums.

But Erasmus Hall is special; it is brimming with stained glass. The most famous piece (along with the sculptures in the garden) can be seen from the outside. However, viewed from within the vaulted two-floor auditorium, designed much like a church, it is a sight to behold. Behind the stage, *The Life of Erasmus* opulently portrays the life of the school's namesake. All through the school, traditional stained glass motifs contrast with modern imagery, including sections depicting American industry and scientific research.

Above the main entrance along Flatbush Avenue, you'll see five panels of stained glass on the second floor behind the turreted façade – a work that was created by Louis Comfort Tiffany, the son of the famous jeweler. This stained glass gem was originally commissioned for the school library in 1919 to honor the first principal of Erasmus Hall, Walter B. Gunnison. The Neoclassical subject matter shows a figure (representing knowledge) amid a Roman scene created using a combination of painted and plated glass techniques. Due to overcrowding, the library has since been converted into two classrooms but the Tiffany piece remains in situ.



Photos by E. Frossard (left) and Stan Ries (right)



## TORAH ANIMAL WORLD

22

*One of the most off-the-beaten path museums in NYC*

1603 41st Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11218  
877-752-6286

Sunday–Thursday 9am–9pm by appointment only  
F to Ditmas Avenue



The Hasidic Jewish neighborhoods in Brooklyn can be a mystery unto themselves, with the communities staunchly holding on to time-honored traditions. The architecture of the neighborhoods adhere to standardized patterns, as do the clothing of the community members and the social norms between them. But every so often, something stands out.

In the neighborhood of Borough Park, Rabbi Shaul Shimon Deutsch runs two museums side by side on the corner of 41st Street and 16th Avenue. The Living Torah Museum (see following double page) and Torah Animal World are two of the most off-the-beaten-path museums in New York City you can find. In fact, the *Village Voice* calls Torah Animal World ‘one of the weirdest and most glorious museums this weird and glorious city has ever seen.’

Torah Animal World, filled with over \$1.5 million in taxidermied animals, aims to have every animal and bird mentioned in the Torah on exhibit. All the animals died naturally in zoos or gaming reserves and are shown in ‘true-to-life’ poses. Animals on display include lions, giraffes, a zebra, a black bear, a llama on skis, a penguin, bison, fish and much more.

There is also an exhibit of 24 birds from the Torah, many of which are displayed as if in flight. And lest we forget the smallest animals on the planet, there’s an exhibit about the Shratzim, which includes insects and lizards, and another showcasing the animals in Perek Shirah (an ancient Jewish text), in a safari-like setting.

The aim of Torah Animal World goes beyond the bizarre. Deutsch started the museum as a way to visually teach children with dyslexia and learning disabilities about the Torah. He suffered from dyslexia himself as a child but can read numerous ancient languages. He thought that if children could touch things, they would be able to remember them differently. ‘We believe that if you can touch history, history will touch you,’ he says.

There is another location of Torah Animal World, located in the Catskills in Fallsburg, New York, that exhibits the animals of the Mishnah and the Talmud.

## HARP AT FLOYD BENNETT FIELD 11

### *A hangar for aviation legends*

50 Aviation Road, Brooklyn, NY 11234

nyharborparks.org

718-338-3799

Admission free

Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday 9am–4pm

2 and 5 trains/Flatbush Av (be prepared for a very long walk, or bike the Greenway along Flatbush Avenue); bus: Q35 to the Park; car: Belt Parkway to Exit 11S, then Flatbush Avenue south to the main entrance



Floyd Bennett Field is the only area on a New York City map with nothing in it. On the ground it's a desert: wind rattles the fences, the hangars are abandoned relics with broken windows and the ghosts of military insignia fading on their faces. The airfield is vast stretches of concrete slab with orderly lines of weeds growing up through the cracks.

'No one knows about this place,' says Bill, a former World War II pilot and volunteer at the Historical Aircraft Restoration Project (HARP). 'It's a mystery.'

HARP is headquartered in the field's Hangar B, which has become a free-form aviation museum. The walls are covered with clippings, photos, and paintings of great flying feats of the past, some of which took place right here: in its day, Floyd Bennett buzzed with legends. Opened in 1930 as New York's first municipal airport, the field couldn't compete with Newark, but its modern hangars attracted daredevils looking to break records. Roscoe Turner flew here, as did Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart. Both Wiley Post and Howard Hughes started and ended fastest round-the-world flights on Floyd Bennett's runways.

Now Hangar B houses a score of restored aircraft, but the space is more than a museum: it's a sprawling workroom, with howling grinders and saws, and planes without wings, and wings without planes, and oiled engines sitting on metal stands. The principal smell is fresh paint.

'We're all volunteers,' says Sol, a HARP member. 'We come in three times a week and work on the planes, every group on a different aircraft.' Sol gives a tour of the hangar; he has technical savvy born of affection, describing the machines as though they were people. The C-47 is reliable, a hard worker. The PBY Catalina won the war in the Pacific. Bill and his project partner Joseph wheel a freshly canvassed wing from a side room; they're restoring a Stearman biplane. ('You ever see the end of King Kong?' Joseph asks. 'That one.') The men are old – Bill flew in Italy during the war, and Joseph was in training when it ended – and have lifetimes of aviation behind them. When they're finished with the Stearman, it will be given a fresh coat of bright yellow paint and added to the growing collection. 'I would fly it,' Joseph says, 'except I don't trust the spars. You don't know what a spar is? C'mere, I'll show you ...'

MICHELLE YOUNG AND AUGUSTIN PASQUET



**SECRET**

# BROOKLYN

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Cover: Robert Banat's 'god shot' of Watertower 1

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