

**September 10, 2024**

**Landmarks Preservation Commission Testimony Before the New York City Council Subcommittee on Landmarks**

Good afternoon Chair Hanks and Council Members. My name is Lisa Kersavage, I am the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on our recent designations.

**Willoughby-Hart Historic District**

The Willoughby-Hart Historic District, which was designated on June 25, consists of two blocks of cohesive historic streetscapes with rowhouses built between the early 1870s and 1890s, representing the early development of the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood in the late 19th century.

The Willoughby-Hart Historic District is located in the northwest corner of the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, in the vicinity of the Clinton Hill and Bedford-Stuyvesant Historic Districts. It was identified by LPC in various surveys over many years, and after having designated larger historic districts in the neighborhood, LPC restudied the area and prioritized it for designation. In addition to our internal studies, LPC received a Request for Evaluation from two Block Associations for a historic district encompassing the area that we had found to merit designation.

The district is bounded by Nostrand Avenue to the East, Marcy Avenue to the West, Willoughby Avenue to the North, and Hart Street to the South.

LPC held three owner information sessions in advance of calendaring and after. At each one, we provided an explanation of why the historic district is significant and answered questions about our review process for typical alterations, including rear yard extensions. We also offered and held many one-on-one meetings with individual property owners. We also responded to concerns about timing by postponing two public meetings.

Throughout the designation process, and at our public hearing on Tuesday, June 11, the Commission received written and verbal testimony from property owners both in support and opposition of the historic district. Elected official support included Council Member Osse, State Senator Brisport, and New York State Assembly Member Zinerman. Organizations supporting the district included Brooklyn Community Board 3, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, Historic Districts Council, Save Harlem Now, and others. I will note that full reporting of the testimony is included in the historic district's designation report.

The Willoughby-Hart Historic District was historically part of a community known as Cripplebush, which developed in the mid-17th century along the historic Cripplebush Road that connected the settlement of Bedford Corners to Newtown in Queens (which we see in this 1886 map), and the land immediately within the district was later a part of Henry Boerum's property.

Development started slowly in the 1870s, with one group of houses on Willoughby that are still mostly intact. The rest of the row houses in the district were designed, constructed, and planned by a small group builders, owners, and local Brooklyn architects such as Thomas E. Greenland, Arthur Taylor, and Isaac D. Reynolds. By the mid-1880s the blocks had been nearly fully developed and by 1898, all the buildings in the district were constructed.

The district is characterized by long, consistent rows of preserved row houses. Many of the early inhabitants of these houses were Jewish immigrants from Russia, many of whom were also local business owners. The homes were owner-occupied until the 1920s, when most were split between multiple families who rented space. By the mid-20th century, the African American community grew here as it did in the larger Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, and in 1969 of the 250,000 people living in Bed-Stuy, 80% were Black and 10% were Puerto Rican.

In the 1960s, the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council lobbied Senator Robert F. Kennedy to visit Bed-Stuyvesant and worked with his staff to form the first federally funded Community Development Corporation in the country, the Bedford Stuyvesant Development and Service Corporation, which focused on restoration largely carried out by local men learning skilled trades. No. 485 Willoughby Avenue and the five adjoining row houses were restored as part of this program.

Shown here is our analysis of building dates and styles represented in the district. All the row houses were built during the last three decades of the 19th century during a time of transition from farmland to dense residential development.

The most common architectural style is Neo-Grec, seen throughout the district, employed throughout the phases of development. Row houses featuring a combination of neo-Grec and Second Empire stylistic features are among the earliest buildings constructed, and a row of Romanesque Revival and Queen Anne style houses on Hart Street are among the latest. The consistency in age and style creates a distinctively cohesive streetscape.

Here you see examples of the Second Empire, Neo-Grec and Romanesque Revival Styles.

After calendaring, there was permitting activity at DOB that LPC monitored, including resurfacing, rear and rooftop additions, and facade repair. In voting to approve the district, the LPC commissioners were apprised of and considered those permits. Today, the district has good integrity overall, with consistent historic streetscapes, and minor alterations to some properties that do not detract from the strong historic architectural character, streetscape integrity, and sense of place consistent with similar historic districts.

Thank you, I am happy to answer any questions.

### **Brooklyn Edison Building**

Thank you for the opportunity to present our recent designation of the Brooklyn Edison Building.

The Brooklyn Edison Building is a distinguished Renaissance Revival style office building designed by McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin for the Brooklyn Edison Company and built between 1922-1926. Highly



visible from Adams Street, Columbus Park and Fulton Streets, the monumental building is a notable landmark in the civic and commercial center of Downtown Brooklyn.

At the public hearing on June 4, 2024, three people testified, including the representatives of the Downtown Brooklyn Association and Historic Districts Council, who spoke in favor of the designation. The owner of the commercial condo did not oppose the designation but emphasized their concerns about the flexibility in making necessary changes to the commercial storefronts. The Commission also received two letters in support of the designation, including from Council Member Restler and a representative of Brooklyn Heights Association.

The Brooklyn Edison Building is located at 345 Adams Street, on the corner of Willoughby, Pearl and Adams Streets.

The Edison Electric Illuminating Company of Brooklyn was established in 1889 to provide electricity to the homes and businesses of Brooklyn. After a merger in 1919, the company was formally reorganized as Brooklyn Edison Company. After the completion of the subway lines in the 1920s, growth in residential development increased the demand for additional electricity capacity in Brooklyn. To answer this demand, the Brooklyn Edison Company required a larger building as its headquarters and commissioned one of the most prominent architectural offices of the era, McKenzie, Voorhes & Gmelin, to design it.

Located on the prominent corner of Willoughby and Pearl Streets, The Brooklyn Edison Building was designed and constructed in two phases. The first phase took place in 1922-1923, and the building expanded northwards in 1926, doubling its footprint. Designed in the Renaissance Revival Style, the building features a tripartite configuration, with a rusticated stone base, brick and stone middle section and the double set back crown, responding to the requirements of the 1916 Zoning Law. It is richly ornamented with Renaissance Revival style elements, particularly focused at the street level and at its roofline.

Originally located on the southeast corner of its block, during the construction of the Brooklyn Civic Center and the expansion of Adams Street in the 1950s, the western half of the block was removed and the urban setting changed. Following demolition of the adjacent buildings, the ground floors of the Brooklyn Edison Building's west façade became exposed.

The building was adapted to the changing streetscape by moving its main entrance to Adams Street in the mid-1960s. In 2009, commercial owners Muss Development LLC created retail spaces, with new storefronts along Adams Street that interpreted and replicated historic features on Willoughby and Pearl Street with modern materials, activating the street frontage facing the civic center. LPC recognizes that these new storefronts are non-historic, which allows for flexibility in the future.

Despite the change to the city grid around it and changes on the lower stories of the west façade, the building retains its historic form and character. Highly visible from many vantage points, its monumentality and prominent massing incorporating highly intact Renaissance Revival Style elements is further emphasized after the change in the urban fabric of Downtown Brooklyn.

Recently, a comprehensive restoration of the building facades was completed under the ownership of the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services. The building continues to serve as an office building with commercial activities on its first and second floors.

The Brooklyn Edison Company Building was central to the borough's electrification and stands as a testament to the transformative impact of technological advancements in electricity production on Brooklyn's urban development. The architecturally and historically significant building continues to provide a monumental backdrop to Brooklyn's civic center, with an elaborate design and set back massing that recall the time of its construction. Thank you.



September 10, 2024

**New York City Council Subcommittee on Landmarks,  
Public Sitings, and Dispositions**

**Willoughby-Hart Historic District**

Willoughby Avenue and Hart Street between Nostrand and  
Marcy Avenue, Brooklyn

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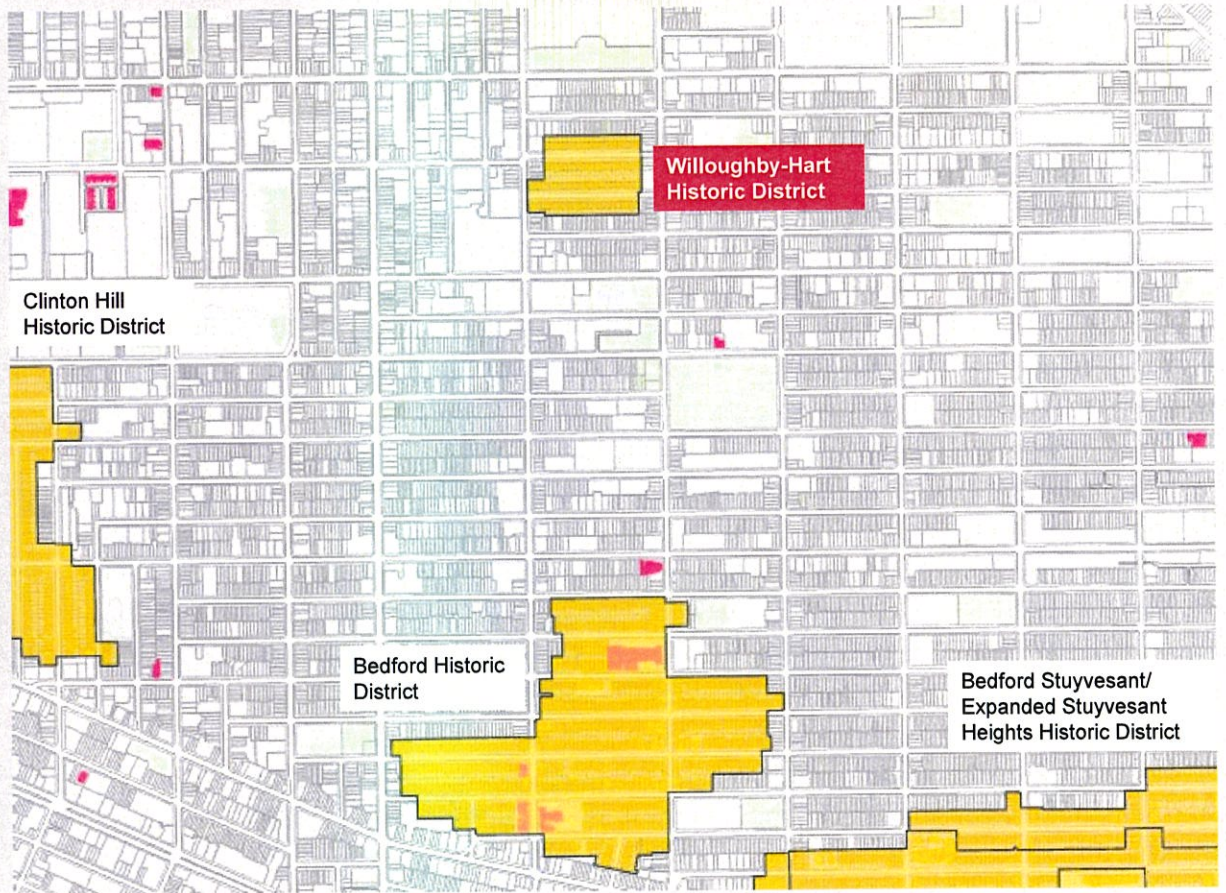
## Willoughby-Hart Historic District

Willoughby Avenue and Hart  
Street between Nostrand and  
Marcy Avenue, Brooklyn

Designated June 25, 2024





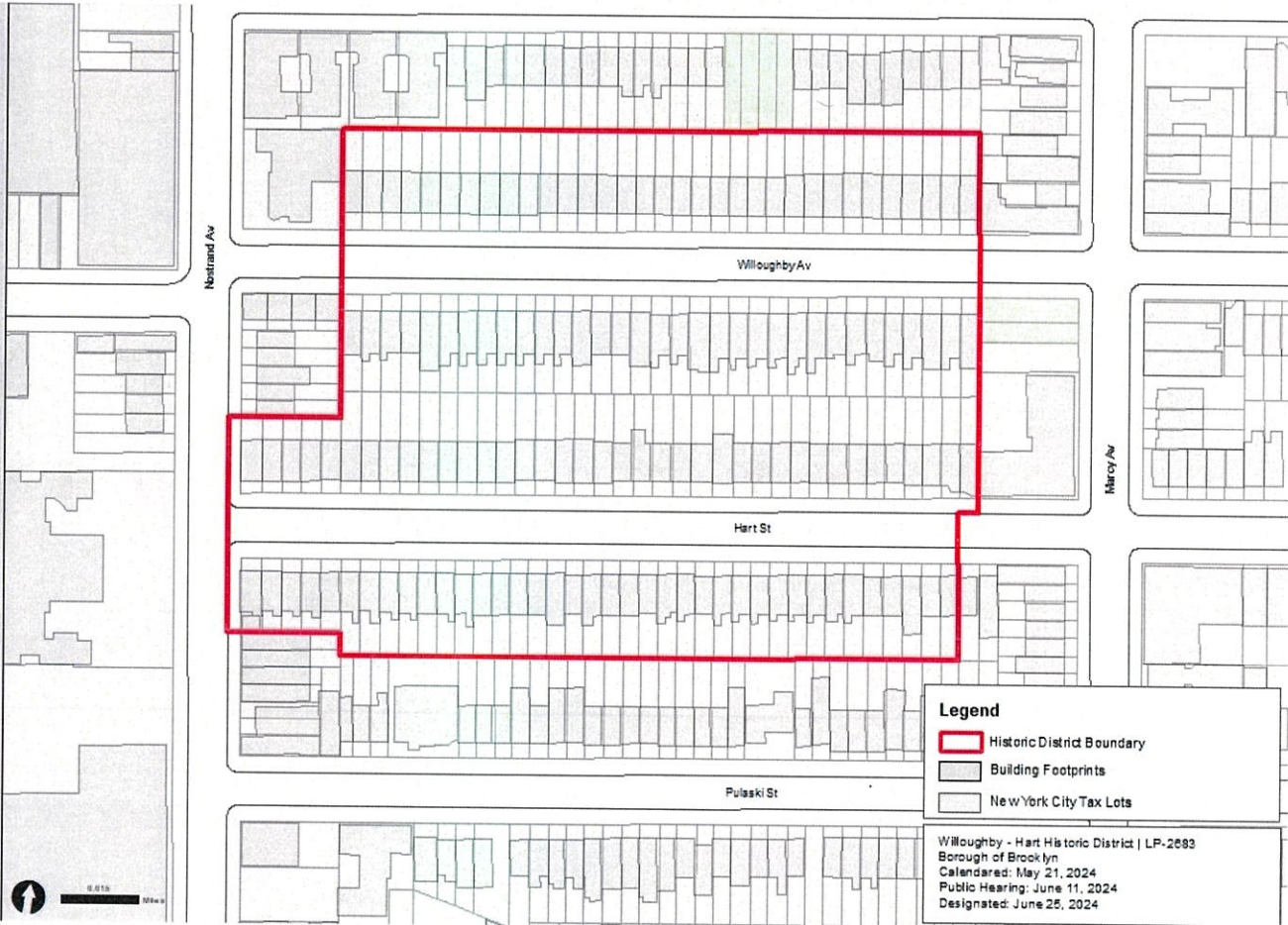


Historic District Context Map

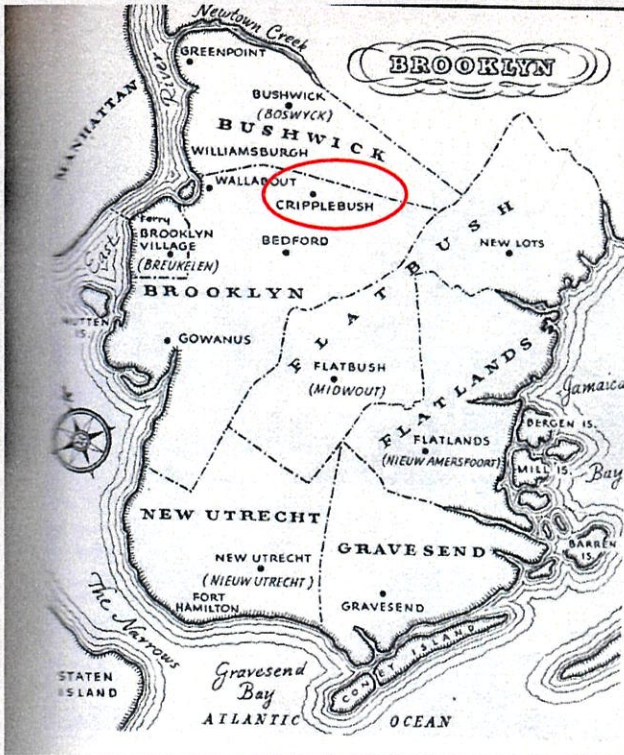


# Willoughby-Hart Historic District

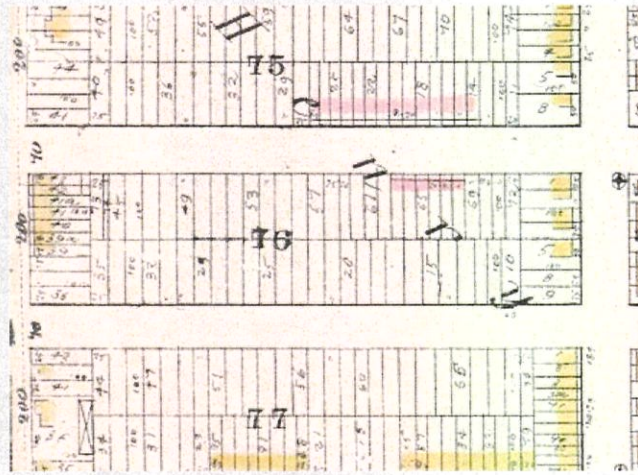
Historic District Boundary



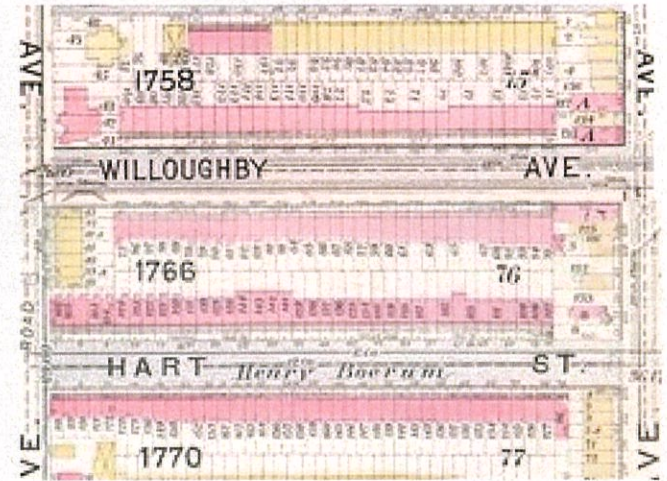




Map and Plan of  
Brooklyn, 1886, NYPL



1880, Bromley, NYPL



1898, Hyde, NYPL

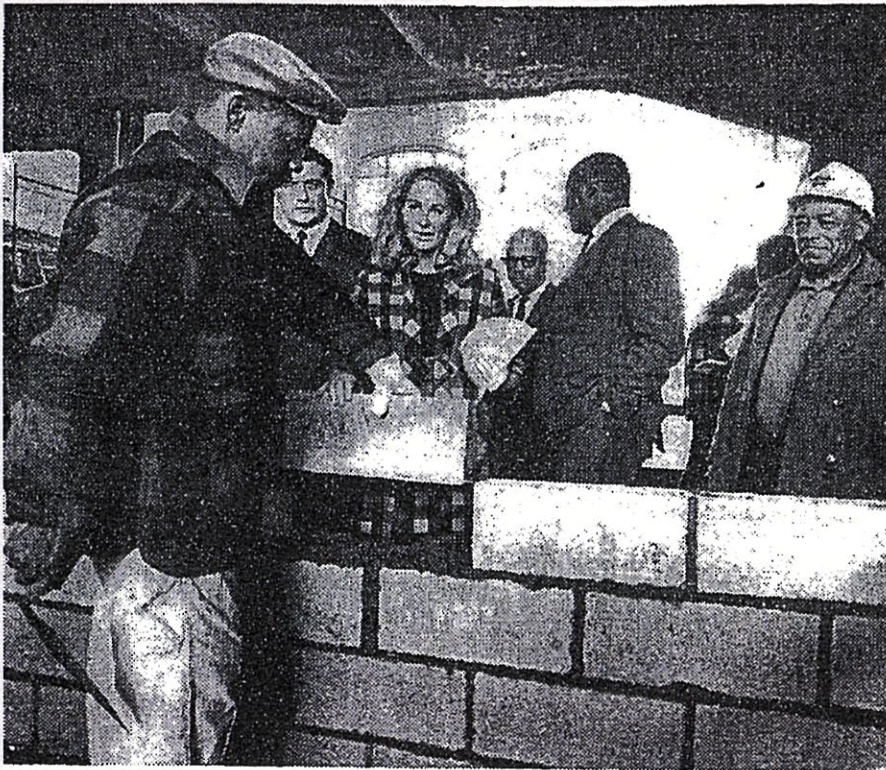




Willoughby Avenue, c. 1940, NYC DOF  
Willoughby Avenue, 1914, NYC DEP







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Joan Kennedy & Franklin A Tomans, President of Bed-Stuy  
Development and Service Corporation, NY Times, 1969

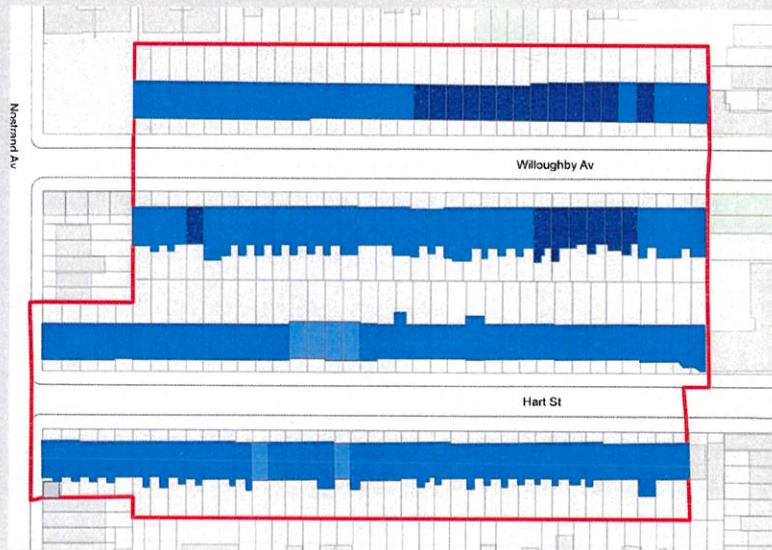


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485 Willoughby Avenue, c. 1940, NYC DOF

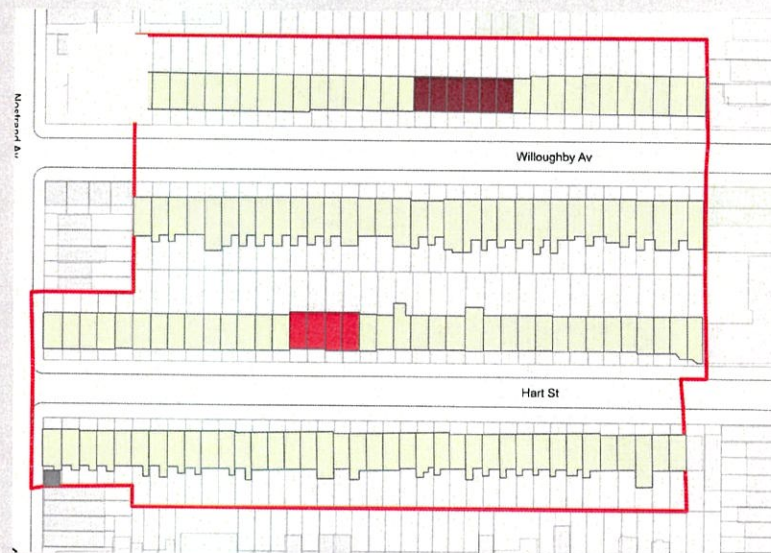


## Date of Construction



- 1870-1879
- 1880-1889
- 1890-1899

## Architectural Style



- Neo-Grec
- Neo-Grec/Second Empire
- Romanesque Revival/Queen Anne





**Second Empire Style**

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483-487 Willoughby Ave



**Neo-Grec Style**

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445-449 Willoughby Ave



**Romanesque Revival Style**

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31-35 Hart Street





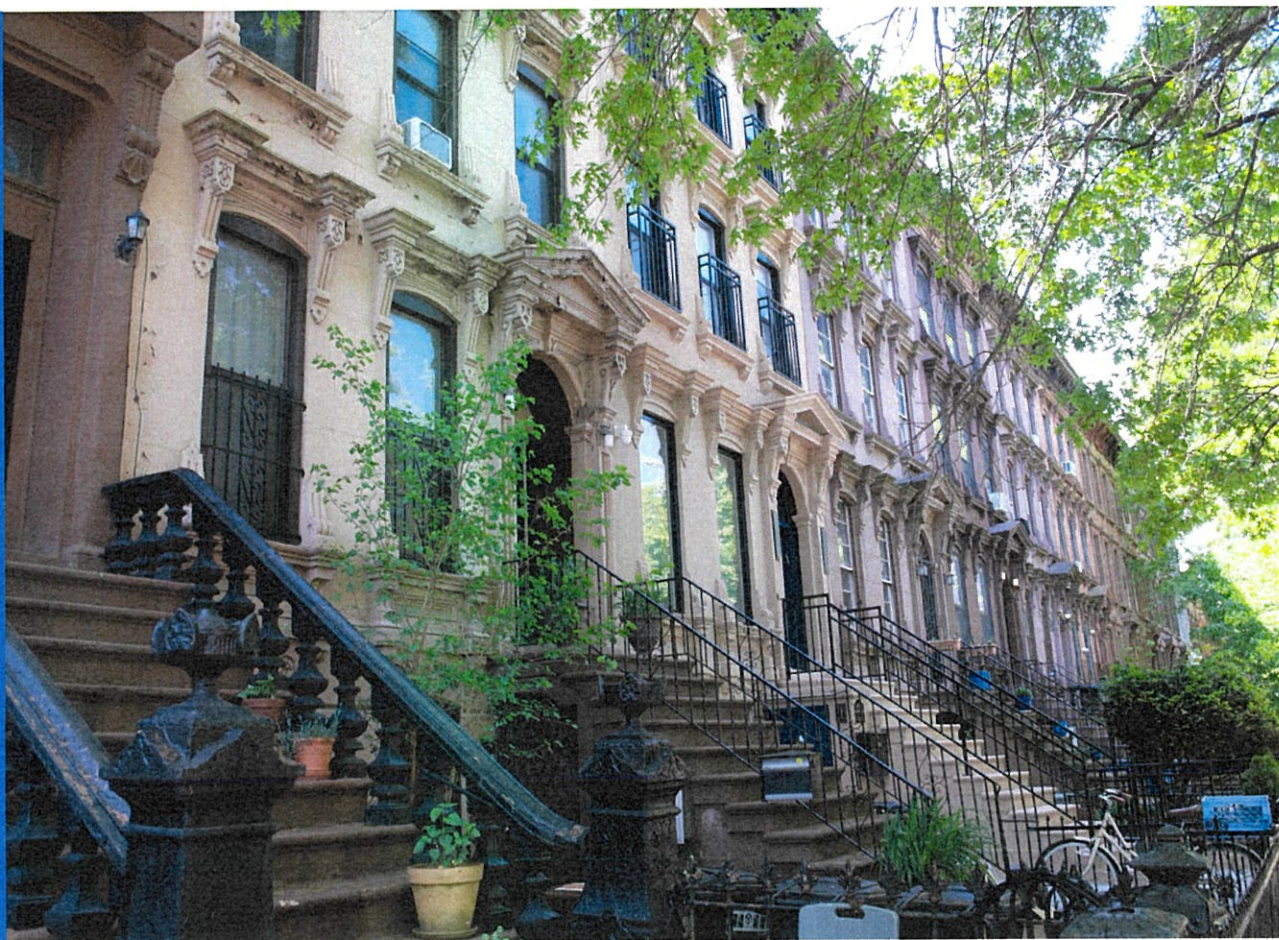
**445-449 Willoughby Ave**  
LPC, 2024



**1-11 Hart Street**  
LPC, 2024



# Willoughby-Hart Historic District





September 10, 2024

## New York City Council Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Sitings, and Dispositions

### **Brooklyn Edison Building**

345 Adams Street (aka 372-392 Pearl Street, 11-17  
Willoughby Street), Brooklyn

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# Brooklyn Edison Building

**Address:** 345 Adams Street  
(aka 372-392 Pearl Street, 11-17 Willoughby Street)

**Borough of Brooklyn**  
**Tax Map Block 140, Lot 7503 (formerly Lot 123)**

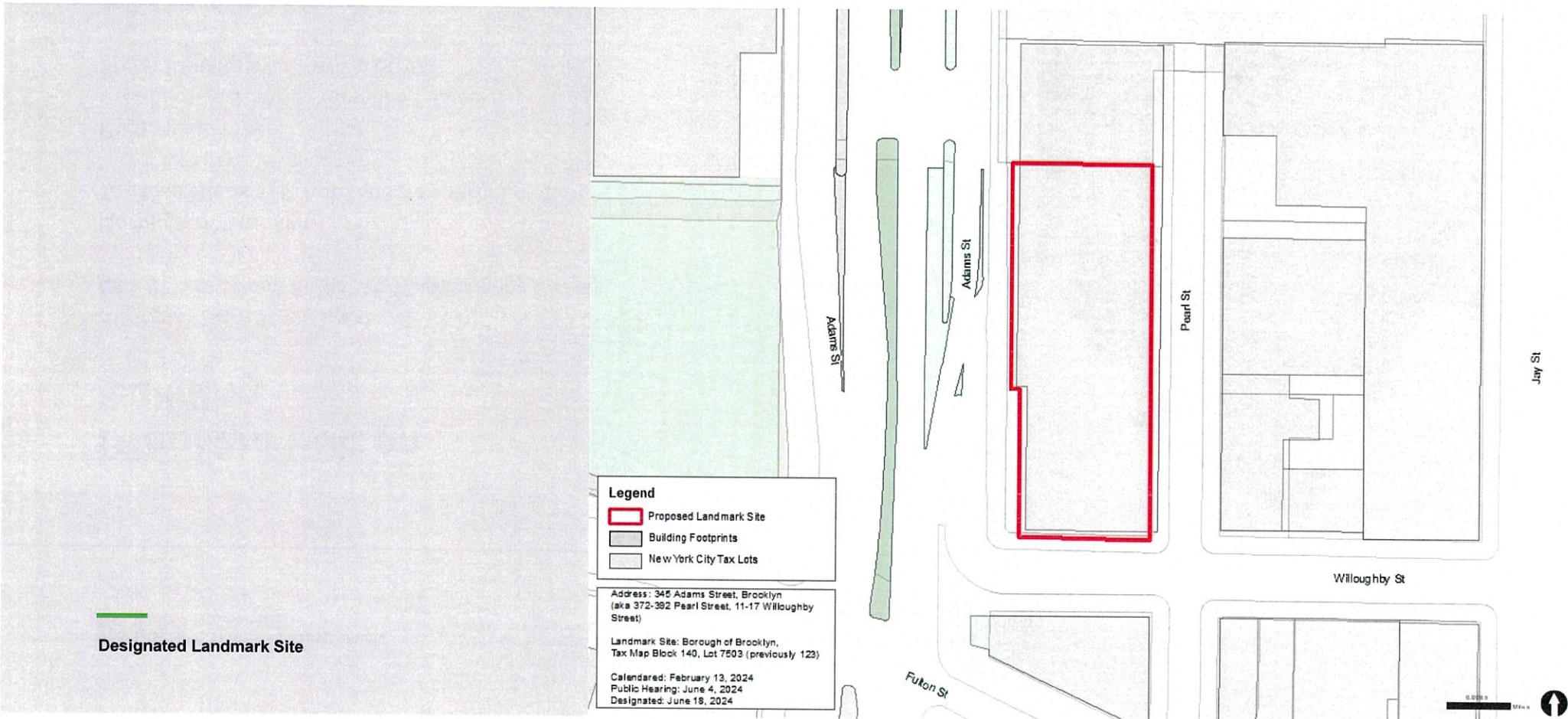
**Built:** 1922-1926  
**Architect:** McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin  
**Style:** Renaissance Revival Style

**Item Calendared:** February 13, 2024  
**Public Hearing:** June 4, 2024  
**Designated:** June 18, 2024

**Photo:** LPC, 2024



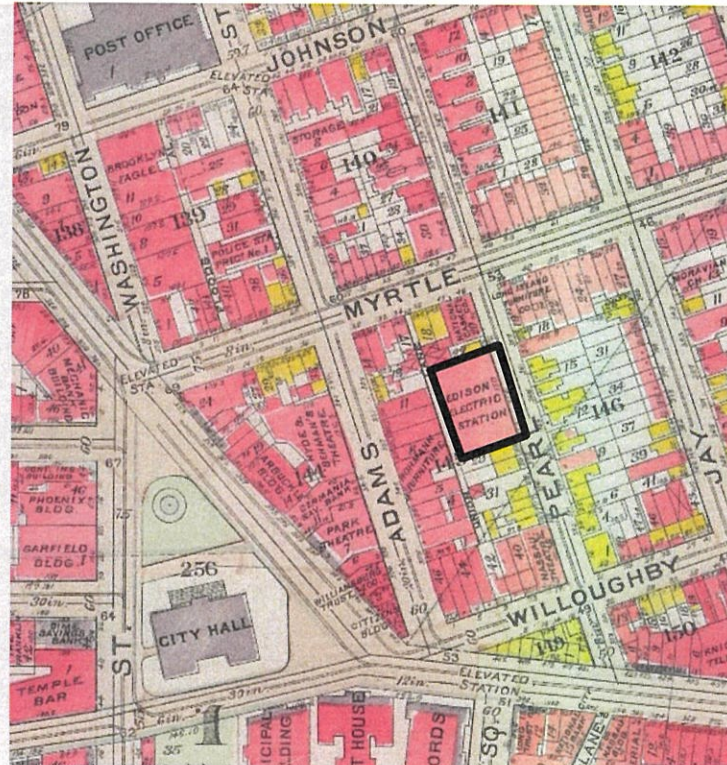








The first station of Edison Electric Illuminating Company of Brooklyn at 360 Pearl Street, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, via IEE Power and Energy



Location of first station of Edison Electric Illuminating Company of Brooklyn, 1908 Bromley, NYPL

**Edison Electric Illuminating Company**  
OF BROOKLYN.

ETHAN ALLEN DOTY, President. EDWIN PACKARD, Vice-Pres't. R. C. PHABODY, Sec'y and Treas. W. S. BANSTOW, Gen'l Sup't.

**General Office, 358, 360, 362 Pearl Street.**

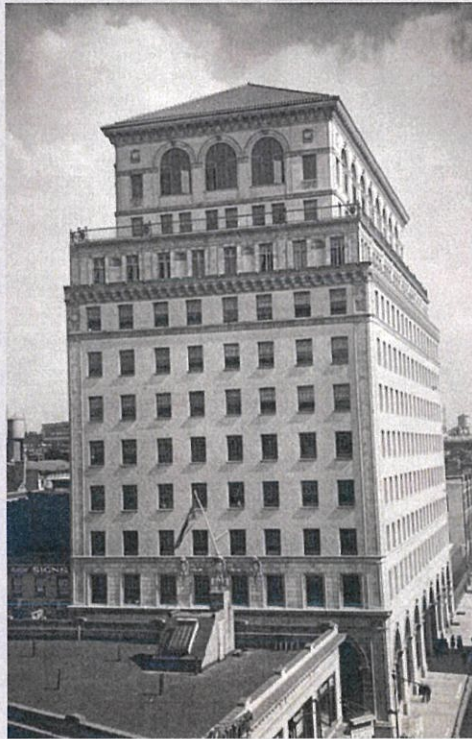
**LOW TENSION ELECTRIC CURRENT FURNISHED**  
FOR  
**INCANDESCENT LIGHTING,**  
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All the lines of this company are underground (conforming to the State law and to the general demand of public opinion). All circuits are less than 250 volt pressure, thus being absolutely safe, sure and economical. All customers pay for only the actual amount of current used, by an accurate meter. The presses of the "Brooklyn Citizen" are run by electric motors from the Edison underground system.

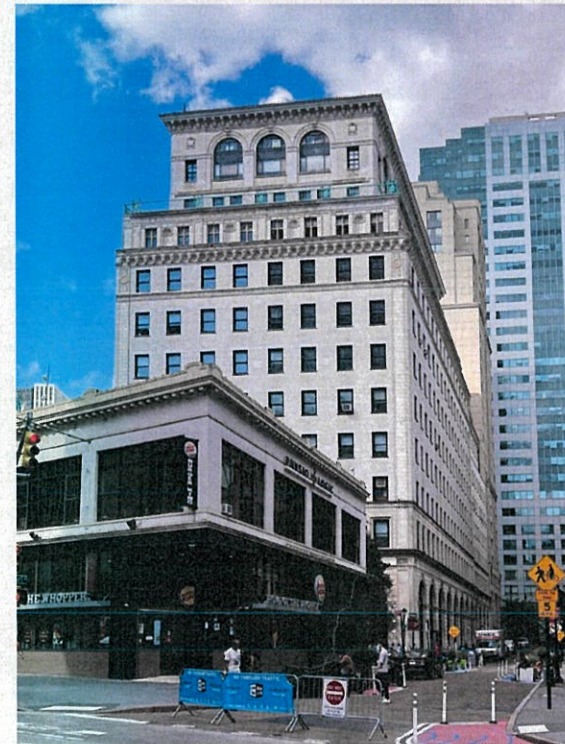
For terms and information call at the office of the  
**Edison Electric Illuminating Company of Brooklyn.**

Advertisement of Edison Electric Illuminating Company of Brooklyn, 1892, Brooklyn Citizen



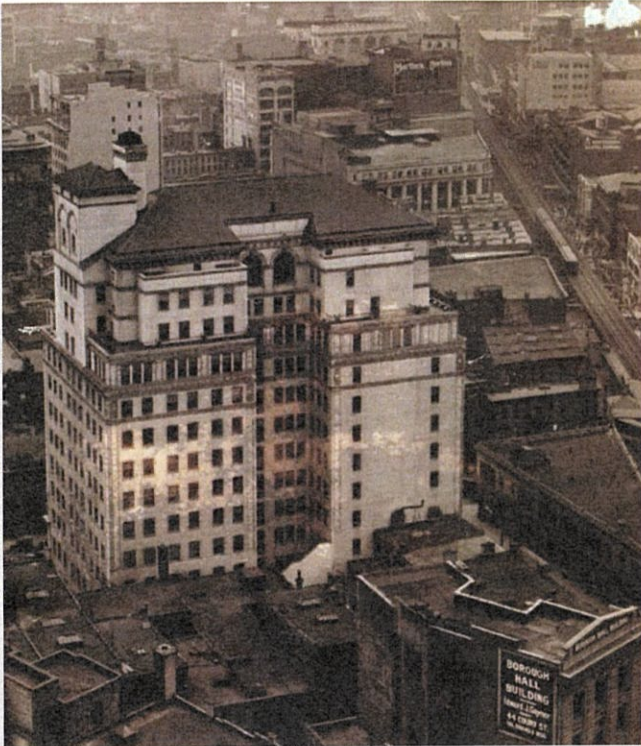


**The Brooklyn Edison Building, c. 1923,**  
HWL Collection, Avery Drawings & Archives



**The Brooklyn Edison Building,**  
2024, LPC





The Brooklyn Edison Building West Facade,  
1926, NYPL

The Brooklyn Edison Building West Facade,  
1955, Brooklyn Public Library

Top: The Brooklyn Edison Building West Facade, 2009, Google  
Street View; Bottom: West Facade, 2024, LPC





The Brooklyn Edison Building West Facade,  
1924, Brooklyn Museum



The Brooklyn Edison Building,  
c.1932, Library of Congress



Brooklyn Edison Building,  
2024, LPC



# Brooklyn Edison Building





**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor     in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LISA KERSAVAGE

Address: 1 CENTRE 9TH FL

I represent: LPC

Address: 1 CENTRE 9TH A



Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor     in opposition

Date: 9/10/24

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Name: STEVEN THOMPSON

Address: 1 CENTRE ST.

I represent: LPC

Address: \_\_\_\_\_



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