

Sunnyside Shines

ADVERTISING SUPPLEMENT

Sunnyside: Touring a History of Housing Reform

In a city with a past as dynamic as this one, it's no surprise that New Yorkers are accustomed to overlooking historical and architectural foundations of their neighborhoods. Yet, in this regard, a visit to Sunnyside, Queens has much to offer. Its buildings tell the story of a city's measured response to the astonishing population boom that occurred after the turn of the century.

Sunnyside grew rapidly in the two decades after the opening of the Queensboro Bridge in 1909 and completion of the Flushing line along Queens Boulevard in 1917. It was a time of phenomenal expansion; between 1900 and 1930, the borough's population grew from 153,000 to nearly 1.1 million.

Many of the new residents were fleeing the notoriously overcrowded tenements in Manhattan. Across the East River. They found new homes with indoor plumbing,

— buildings specifically designed to prevent the historic squalor of overcrowded urban spaces, usually incorporating communal green spaces.

The complex built by Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in 1922 — found on 48th Street and 47th Avenue — was one of several intended to create comfortable living for families of moderate income. The apartments in the freestanding, u-shaped buildings feature windows in every room, overlooking a landscaped inner courtyard, a relatively new feature at the time. The architect, Andrew Thomas, based the design on his earlier work in Jackson Heights, the first garden apartments in the city.

From 1904 into the 1930s, the G.X. Mathews Company erected hundreds of three-story multi-unit buildings in Ridgewood, Astoria, Woodside, Elmhurst and Sunnyside.



Metropolitan Houses

PHOTOS BY LAURA HEIM



Sunnyside Gardens

hot water, electricity and generous light and air—all within walking distance of transit lines. New home owners also enjoyed the benefit of 10-year property tax exemptions. In Sunnyside, private developers embraced the opportunity to construct the latest designs in model housing. The result is Sunnyside's architecture you see today

side. With their distinctive yellow and orange brick facades (the brick came from the Kreisler brickworks on Staten Island), Mathews Model Flats provided new apartments at affordable rents. In 1915, the company exhibited their model flats at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco to great acclaim.

Most famous, of course, is Sunnyside Gardens, built between 1924 and 1928 by the City Housing Corporation, which can be found in the blocks north of Queens Boulevard. This was the first project in the country to follow the example of the garden city movement in England. Designed by architects Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, with landscape architect Marjorie Cautley, and infused with the ideas of Lewis Mumford, the modest brick houses surround landscaped courtyards. Many one-family houses have charming front porches, while others enjoy back porches overlooking the central gardens. In 2007, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designated Sunnyside Gardens as a historic district, further protecting the original design of the neighborhood.

Adjacent to Sunnyside Gardens stand the Phipps Garden Apartments. The Society of Phipps Houses had built model tenements for working-class tenants



Phipps Garden Apartments

earlier had constructed model tenements on the East Side in Manhattan. A group of six-story apartment buildings, now referred to as Celtic Park, rose on the site, again surrounding a beautiful landscaped courtyard providing residents a cool and verdant environment.

To walk through Sunnyside and experience this extraordinary housing built in the 1920s and 1930s is a wonder. Often overlooked, they were some of the first successful attempts at creating mass housing that offered modern amenities, dignified design and, not incidentally, affordability. On your next visit to Sunnyside, take a moment to notice the human scale, the abundant greenery and the understated design, which offer a stark contrast to the frenzied pace and massive scale of Manhattan.

— Laura Heim



Celtic Park



Mathews Model Flats

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