

GEORGE B. AND SUSAN ELKINS HOUSE, 1375 Dean Street, Borough of Brooklyn. Built c. 1855-69.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map Block 1209, Lot 62.

On September 26, 2006, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the George B. and Susan Elkins House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Seven people spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of the Crown Heights North Association, the Dean Street Block Association, the Historic Districts Council, and the Society for the Architecture of the City. The public hearing was reopened on October 24, 2006 (Item No. 1). At that hearing, two representatives of the building's owner testified against designation. In addition, the Commission has received a resolution from Brooklyn Community Board 8 in support of designation.

Summary

The only-known freestanding, mid-nineteenth-century, wood country house remaining in northwestern Crown Heights, and the former home of a prominent figure in the neighborhood's early history, the George B. and Susan Elkins House is a significant link to Crown Heights' suburban past. Constructed before 1869 on the former Lefferts farm, which had been subdivided into "1,600 desirable lots" in the 1850s, this modest residence predates the hundreds of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century rowhouses, flats, and apartment buildings that fill its surrounding blocks. Today, the Elkins House stands in striking contrast to these brick and stone dwellings, a sparsely ornamented country home displaying Greek Revival and Italianate influences and a strong kinship with cottage and villa designs published in the mid-nineteenth-century pattern books of Andrew Jackson Downing, Samuel Sloan, and Henry W. Cleaveland. With a cubical form that is characteristic of both Greek Revival and Italianate residences, the Elkins House features a three-bay main façade, flat roof, wide front porch, molded entrance-door surround, and attic windows with delicate cusped surrounds, as well as a broadly overhanging and beautifully detailed wood cornice decorated with bead-and-reel moldings. Its simple ornamentation conveys the house's early history in an almost pastoral setting, where the Elkinses lived with their four daughters, and where George received prospective buyers for the "two beautiful fresh cows" that he offered for sale, in 1869, in the pages of the *Brooklyn Eagle*.



When the Elkins House was constructed, it was considered to be within the Bedford area of Brooklyn. Today, it sits within Crown Heights' northwestern section—an area roughly bounded by Atlantic Avenue and Eastern Parkway on the north and south, and by Albany and Bedford Avenues on the east and west—which developed separately from the other portions of Crown Heights, including the early African-American neighborhood of Weeksville to the east, and the area south of Eastern Parkway. Massachusetts natives, the Elkinses moved to Brooklyn by 1845; George was a merchant in Lower Manhattan through the 1850s, but by 1861, he had entered the real estate business, and by 1865, the Elkins family appears to have been living in this house. Elkins was active in Bedford's real estate trade, particularly on the blocks near his home; by the mid-1860s, his advertisements were running regularly in the *Eagle*, offering “very desirable residences” and “villa sites” and urging buyers to act “while lots are low and houses are selling at almost fabulous prices.” By 1867, Elkins was transacting business in his home, asking clients to call “at his residence, Bedford.” Toward the end of the nineteenth century, with the extension of elevated railroads to the vicinity of the former Lefferts farm, its suburban character faded as its blocks became thickly built with masonry rowhouses and multiple dwellings. Today, the George B. and Susan Elkins House stands as a remarkable survivor of its area's urban transformation and a unique link to the suburban years of northwestern Crown Heights, when freestanding wood country houses like this one were a common feature of its landscape.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Development of Northwestern Crown Heights¹

Although the George B. and Susan Elkins House stands within what is now Crown Heights' northwestern section—an area roughly bounded by Atlantic Avenue and Eastern Parkway on the north and south, and by Albany and Bedford Avenues on the east and west—the Crown Heights name dates only to around the first decade of the twentieth century.² Before about 1620, when Europeans first made contact with Native Americans on what is now called Long Island, large portions of the island, including present-day Brooklyn, were occupied by the Lenape, or Delaware, Indians.³ Traveling over land by foot, the Lenape used trails developed by Native Americans over thousands of years; among those present in and near Crown Heights were the thoroughfares known in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as Clove Road, Hunterfly Road, and the King's Highway, or Brooklyn and Jamaica Road. These would remain important routes through the Colonial period and into the nineteenth century, but most traces of these ancient highways were lost after Brooklyn's street grid, adopted in 1835, began to transform the city's landscape as urbanization spread beyond Brooklyn's original center near Fulton Ferry.⁴

By the 1630s, Dutch and English settlers were taking control of the western end of Long Island.⁵ In 1637, Joris Hansen de Rapalie “purchased” about 335 acres around Wallabout Bay, and over the following two years, Director Kieft of the Dutch West India Company “secured by purchase from the Indians the title to nearly all the land in the counties of Kings and Queens,” according to Henry J. Stiles' 1884 history of Brooklyn and Kings County.⁶ The Lenape likely saw things differently: the European concept of holding title to land was foreign to them, and they probably viewed these “purchases” as little more than a customary exchange of gifts smoothing the way for the settlers' temporary use of the land for camping, hunting, fishing, and the cultivation of crops.

In 1664, the Dutch surrendered the Colony of New Netherland, including Brooklyn and the other five towns of Kings County, to the British. By the time of the American Revolution, “a

little cluster of houses” existed within Brooklyn at Bedford Corners, just northwest of Crown Heights; at that spot, the old Clove and Cripplebush roads met the King’s Highway, which served as the “main highway for traffic between New York and many Long Island towns.”⁷ Several prominent families lived in Bedford Corners, but the village was, in Stiles’ words, “especially the seat of the Lefferts family,” which had substantial local property holdings.⁸ Leffert “Squire” Lefferts (1727-1804), whose home was at the intersection of Clove Road and the King’s Highway, was a locally significant figure, a Brooklyn freeholder for two decades who served as town clerk, as an assistant justice, and in the Provincial Congress.⁹ He was also a slaveholder; before emancipation in 1827, “Dutch farmers in Kings County were so reliant on slave labor that the county exhibited the highest proportion of slaveholders and slaves in the North,” according to Marc Linder and Lawrence S. Zacharias.¹⁰ Nearly 60% of white households in Kings County held slaves in 1790; Lefferts owned seven.¹¹

Large portions of Crown Heights remained in the hands of the Squire’s son, Leffert Lefferts Jr., who was commonly known as “the Judge,” until his death in 1847.¹² In 1854, Judge Lefferts’ heirs auctioned off his Bedford farm—the land that would become the heart of northwestern Crown Heights—as “1,600 desirable lots situated in the level, beautiful, and most desirable part of the Ninth Ward,” south of Atlantic Avenue, north of Degraw Street (now Lincoln Place), west of Troy Avenue, and east of Clove Road, which ran a crooked north-and-south path between Rogers and Nostrand Avenues. Only a few structures existed on the Lefferts farm at the time of its subdivision.¹³

By the time of the Lefferts sale, Bedford had become increasingly accessible with the development of new transportation lines. In 1836, the Long Island Rail Road began steam-train service along Atlantic Avenue, through Bedford, to Brooklyn’s South Ferry.¹⁴ By 1840, regular omnibus, or stage, service to Bedford had been initiated by Montgomery Queen, after he concluded that his real estate development plans there were being hindered by “the lack of regular and efficient communication” with Fulton Ferry.¹⁵ Queen bought an existing but unsuccessful omnibus line that had begun operating in the 1830s, and created “the first really effective line of stages in the county”; his line made Bedford a more attractive location for those seeking to build large freestanding residences, including Queen himself, who by 1854 was living in a villa in Bedford, just north of Atlantic Avenue.¹⁶ Omnibuses would soon be supplemented by horsecars which, in the mid-1850s, began operating just north of Crown Heights, along Fulton Street, from City (now Borough) Hall to New York Avenue.

By the 1860s, the area south of Atlantic Avenue, between Bedford and Albany Avenues, was taking on a suburban character. A handful of rowhouses existed there in 1869, but there were also dozens of freestanding residences, and many of them, like the Elkins House, were constructed of wood.¹⁷ Even so, large portions of the neighborhood remained sparsely developed: at the end of the 1860s, the Elkins House shared its lot with only four other buildings, and the five blocks south of the house between Brooklyn and Hudson (now Kingston) Avenues held, in total, only four structures.

Speculative development increased somewhat in the late 1870s in northwestern Crown Heights, as additional houses were constructed in anticipation of the 1883 opening of the Brooklyn Bridge.¹⁸ Transportation continued to improve; by 1880, horsecars were running through the area along Bergen Street and Nostrand Avenue. But the neighborhood’s transformation into a dense urban environment did not begin, in earnest, until the inauguration of elevated train service along Fulton Street to the Brooklyn Bridge in 1888.¹⁹ Over the next several years, hundreds of exceptionally fine brick and stone rowhouses, many of them in the Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival styles, would be constructed in northwestern Crown Heights, as large mansions rose on St. Mark’s Avenue between Nostrand and Kingston Avenues on large lots that ran through the block. Somewhat smaller freestanding homes, such as the John and

Elizabeth Truslow House (Parfitt Brothers, 1887-88, a designated New York City Landmark) at the corner of Dean Street and Brooklyn Avenue, appeared on the north-south avenues. The area's fundamental change from rural and suburban to urban was confirmed by the Common Council's decision, in 1894, to extend Brooklyn's fire limits—the area within which the construction of wood buildings was prohibited—to include the portion of Crown Heights that was west of Albany Avenue.²⁰

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the blocks of northwestern Crown Heights closest to Eastern Parkway came to be known as the “fashionable St. Mark's Section,” and were referred to as “easily the most beautiful neighborhood in urban Brooklyn.”²¹ St. Mark's was one of the neighborhoods that Brooklyn Heights' old, wealthy families decamped to as the Heights changed, in the words of one commentator, from a district of “the proudest, the most aristocratic folk of Brooklyn to a district of boarding and furnished-room establishments.”²² The urbanization of the area continued through the early twentieth century, as the St. Mark's name spread north toward Atlantic Avenue and the opening of the IRT Subway along Eastern Parkway in 1920 spurred the demolition of many freestanding mansions and the construction of middle-class, six-story elevator apartment buildings, many of them by distinguished architects.²³ By the 1930s, the Crown Heights name, which initially referred to the area south of Eastern Parkway, was being applied to the area north of the Parkway as well.²⁴

Although Crown Heights, according to the Department of City Planning, encompasses a large area extending east to Ralph Avenue and south to Empire Boulevard, it is actually an amalgam of neighborhoods, each with its own distinctive history. East of Albany Avenue is the area known, in the nineteenth century, as Weeksville; this neighborhood, whose name has been revived in recent decades, developed as a predominately African-American neighborhood after 1838, served as a refuge for black New Yorkers fleeing the 1863 Draft Riots, and was home, at its height, so several significant African-American institutions.²⁵ The area south of Eastern Parkway between Bedford and Albany Avenues likewise developed separately from northwestern Crown Heights. Home to the Kings County Penitentiary between 1846 and 1907, it remained fairly rural in the 1890s, characterized by its “piggeries and stables”; even in 1909, after the area north of the Parkway had become densely populated, the blocks around the former penitentiary site remained sparsely developed.²⁶

In 2006, the Landmarks Preservation Commission proposed, for designation, a Crown Heights North Historic District comprising several contiguous blocks south of Atlantic Avenue, north of Prospect Place, east of Bedford Avenue, and west of Kingston Avenue.²⁷ The George B. and Susan Elkins House appears to be the oldest remaining house within this proposed district. It is certainly one of the oldest structures standing within the larger northwestern Crown Heights area, and is believed to be its only remaining freestanding, mid-nineteenth-century, wood country house.²⁸ The Elkins House is a remarkable survivor of the area's urban transformation and a rare, tangible link to the area's suburban years, when wood cottages and villas like this one were a common feature of its landscape.

George B. and Susan Elkins, and Their House²⁹

A professional broker who, in the 1860s and 1870s, was actively involved in the real estate trade of what would become northwestern Crown Heights, George B. Elkins was born in Massachusetts in 1808 or 1809. In 1833, he married the former Susan Easton; in 1839, while still in Massachusetts, Susan gave birth to the first of their four daughters, Mary C. (also known as Kate), who would be followed soon after by babies Georgianna and Fanny. By 1845, the Elkinses were living on Willow Street in Brooklyn Heights, and Susan had given birth to their

youngest daughter, Ida. Between 1848 and 1859, George was listed as a merchant with an office in Lower Manhattan, and the family lived at various addresses in Brooklyn Heights.

Susan Elkins purchased the 200-foot-wide parcel on which the Elkins House sits in 1859, and by 1860, the family was living in Brooklyn's Ninth Ward, which the parcel, at that time, was within. After living on Pacific Street near Kingston Avenue in 1861, the Elkinses apparently moved to the house's location by the following year, as an 1862 directory shows their home address as "Dean near Brooklyn."³⁰ Whether or not they built the existing house at 1375 Dean Street, or whether it was constructed between 1855 and 1859 when its block, and the block to its south were under the ownership of one George W. Folsom, is unclear.³¹ Sited on a spacious lot that extended from Pacific Street through to Dean, and erected before 1869, the Elkins House may be one of the first residences to have been constructed on the former Lefferts farm property, and today, it is certainly one of the oldest remaining. The suburban, almost pastoral qualities of the house's setting during its early years were emphasized by newspaper advertisements placed by George at the end of the 1860s, offering "two beautiful fresh cows" for sale, and asking prospective buyers to call at his Dean Street residence.³²

The family's move from Brooklyn Heights to Bedford coincided with a career change for George B. Elkins. By 1861, his listed profession was "real estate," and by the following year, he had opened an office in Brooklyn, at the corner of Fulton and Clermont Streets.³³ The first evidence that Elkins was actively dealing properties in what would become northwestern Crown Heights came with an 1863 advertisement in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, in which Elkins offered "a very desirable residence with four or eight lots on Pacific Street and Atlantic Avenue, and near New York Avenue ... near the Fulton and Atlantic cars."³⁴ His ads soon became a fixture of the *Eagle*, and by 1864, Elkins was actively trading in properties in the heart of northwestern Crown Heights, as was made clear in the following advertisement, which confirms the area's suburban character:

"For Sale—very desirable residences at Bedford—on New York Avenue and Pacific Street, with four, eight, 16, or 24 lots, with stable and all modern improvements, fine forest, ornamental, shade and fruit trees, shrubs and vines, greenhouse, flower and kitchen garden, well stocked with choice flowers, fruits, vegetables, etc., etc., near two lines of cars, running to all the ferries every five minutes. Also, very desirable villa sites on Atlantic, New York, Brooklyn, Hudson, and Albany Avenues and Pacific, Dean, Bergen, Warren and Baltic streets and St. Mark's Place, in parcels of four to 24 lots.... Now is the time while lots are low and houses are selling at almost fabulous prices. Apply to G.B. Elkins, 338 Fulton Street, Brooklyn."³⁵

Elkins appears to have quickly built up a strong local business, as by 1866, he was offering one of the area's most prominent properties, "That very desirable residence on the southwest corner of St. Mark's Place and New York Avenue," which was "large and built and finished in the best manner [with] ... all modern conveniences command[ing] a fine view of the country, all the other corners having splendid mansions."³⁶ In the following year, Elkins began transacting business from his Dean Street home as well as from his Fulton Street office, advertising for prospective clients to call "at his residence, Bedford."³⁷ Elkins brokered a wide range of properties, some pricey, and some inexpensive. In one 1866 advertisement, for example, he offered "several very desirable residences on New York Avenue, St. Mark's Place and Pacific Street" selling for "\$40,000, \$35,000, \$30,000, \$25,000, \$20,000, \$1,800, \$1,200."³⁸ By 1870, the year in which Elkins was hired to build a portion of Eastern Parkway (a designated New York City Scenic Landmark), he had branched into the contracting business.³⁹ Four years later, he was hired to extend and pave a 5,000-foot stretch of Brooklyn Avenue.⁴⁰

Despite his new line of work, Elkins remained active in the real estate trade into the mid-1870s, when he was identified by the *Brooklyn Eagle* as “a gentleman pretty well known in this city.”⁴¹ In 1875, he continued to place advertisements for houses in the area—urging home shoppers that “now is the time and this is the place to buy, while money is abundant and property cheap”—and asking prospective clients to call, at his home, before 9a.m. or after 4p.m.⁴² That year appears to be the last in which Elkins advertised frequently in the *Eagle*, although his profession would continue to be listed as “real estate” in Brooklyn directories into the mid-1880s. By then, however, Elkins had hit hard times; Susan had died in 1883, and in 1884, the *Eagle* reported that George had purchased land near the penitentiary south of Eastern Parkway, but “he was not equal to the financial strain of carrying the property, which was finally relinquished under foreclosure and at a heavy loss.”⁴³ George B. Elkins died in 1886 at the age of 77, and despite having owned \$500,000 worth of real estate in 1870, he “died poor.”⁴⁴ Over the next few years, large portions of Elkins’ property holdings would be auctioned off to satisfy judgments against his estate.⁴⁵

Following their parents’ deaths, the four Elkins daughters, who never married, continued to live in the house, and they remained there through the nineteenth century. Ida and Fanny, who were teachers by profession, were also inventors: the two patented a device for “automatic fans” in 1878, and Ida invented an “apparatus for killing mosquitoes” in 1883.⁴⁶ In the 1890s, the daughters started selling off the lots adjacent to their home, and the Elkins House became increasingly hemmed in by surrounding buildings.⁴⁷ In 1910, three of the Elkins sisters remained in the house—Ida had died in 1904—but in 1918, Fanny Elkins sold the house and its property to the Rev. Joseph Cohn, who remained there, with his family into the 1930s.⁴⁸ Cohn, who would begin hosting a nationally broadcast radio show called “The Chosen People” in 1946, served from 1937 to his death in 1953 as the general secretary of the American Board of Missions to the Jews (or ABMJ, now Chosen People Ministries).⁴⁹ Cohn’s daughter, Cordelia, who had taken ownership of the house in 1938, sold it in 1942. Since then, the house has had a number of different owners.⁵⁰

George B. Elkins’ real estate activities in the 1860s and 1870s in what is now northwestern Crown Heights help illuminate the neighborhood’s suburban period—the years following the subdivision of the Lefferts farm, but before the intense urbanization that began in the 1880s. During these two decades, Elkins actively acquired and disposed of properties, particularly near his Dean Street home; in the 1860s and 1870s, George—sometimes alone, and sometimes with Susan—was listed as the grantor or grantee in approximately 190 property transactions within the area bounded by Atlantic Avenue and Butler Street (now Sterling Place) on the north and south, and by Albany and Brooklyn Avenues on the east and west.⁵¹ But all did not go smoothly for Elkins in the real estate trade. Between 1864 and 1875, for example, on the block directly south of his house, Elkins bought back undeveloped properties that he had previously sold, and hung onto buildable lots for several years.⁵² These activities, as well as Elkins’ apparently bankrupt condition at the time of his death, hint at the difficulties faced by speculators in many parts of Brooklyn that were still developing slowly at that time.⁵³ But, as shown in his advertisements and in his trading activities, Elkins encouraged the development of northwestern Crown Heights as a place for freestanding country homes like his.⁵⁴ Elkins’ work in the area in the 1860s and 1870s opens a window onto its suburban era, and the George B. and Susan Elkins House—which is significant as his and Susan’s home, and as perhaps the last remaining example of the freestanding suburban villas that were common in northwestern Crown Heights before its full urbanization—is a unique link to this period in the neighborhood’s history.

Design of the George B. and Susan Elkins House⁵⁵

Drawing upon architectural pattern-book designs and incorporating elements of the Greek Revival and Italianate styles, the George B. and Susan Elkins House is the only-known mid-nineteenth-century, freestanding, wood country house remaining in what is now northwestern Crown Heights. As such, it appears to be the last freestanding example of a building type—the wood-framed cottage or villa—that was once common to its area; at the end of the 1870s, when the neighborhood still had a suburban character, several wood villas sat on spacious lots along Pacific, Bergen, and Dean Streets. Almost all of them were destroyed, however, in the wave of urbanization that swept over the neighborhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the Elkins House appears to be the last of its type to survive there.⁵⁶

Precedents for the American country houses of the early-to-mid nineteenth century included the villas that began to appear in England in the late eighteenth century, and the rural residences that had long been constructed by wealthy Americans. Like English villas—built for “those who wish to enjoy the scenery of the country, without removing too far from active life”—American villas were often located on the outskirts of towns and cities. By the middle of the nineteenth century, these “new middle-class suburban homes,” frequently sited on picturesquely landscaped grounds, “came to be a middle-class expectation, the estates of landed gentry replicated in miniature on the modest suburban lot,” according to architectural historian W. Barksdale Maynard. Calling the rise of the suburban country house an “example of the kind of trickle-down flow of taste that so often shaped nineteenth-century architecture,” Maynard argues that it laid “the groundwork ... for modern suburban life.”⁵⁷

Villas or cottages—generally, “cottage” referred to the more modest types of country houses, although the two terms overlap considerably—were a familiar feature of the American landscape by 1850.⁵⁸ They were especially common around New York City, according to Maynard, who explains that “Appropriate to its size, [New York] was ringed by the greatest number of suburban homes of any city on the continent, all in a diverse and attractive setting.”⁵⁹ Villas were being constructed throughout the region—on Staten Island, and in Northern Manhattan, Westchester County, and other suburban areas—but they were particularly popular in Brooklyn, the country’s “first commuter suburb.”⁶⁰ These houses enjoyed a long history in Brooklyn; one account of the 1790s mentioned the many “country houses” overlooking the East River, which were rented by “wealthy New Yorkers ... during the hot season. The men go to work in the morning and return ... after the Stock Exchange closes.” By the 1850s, suburban villas were common in the city, as one observer wrote, in 1853, of visiting a Brooklyn friend who lived “in one of the prettiest rural homes by the name ‘Rose Cottage’.... From this place he drives every morning to New York, and hither he returns every evening, not merely to sleep, but to rest and enjoy himself with wife, children, and friends.” Even at that early date, however, freestanding houses like Rose Cottage in settings that were “half town, half country” were being encroached upon by Brooklyn’s “creeping urbanism.”⁶¹

The defining characteristics of the George B. and Susan Elkins House include its wide front porch, floor-length parlor windows, and dramatic, deeply overhanging cornice, which were typical features of mid-nineteenth-century country houses. The porch, for example, was rooted in English tradition, but by the middle of the nineteenth century, it “had become essential to the ideal American house,” and was commonly seen on villas throughout the United States.⁶² Often, houses with porches had, like the Elkins House, full-height first-floor openings that were frequently filled with French doors. Wide overhangs—often provided by eaves but furnished, at the Elkins House, by a deep, intricately detailed cornice that wraps the front and side facades—shaded the facades of villas and protected them from the weather. They also created shadows, which added to the picturesque qualities of the country house. “Light and shade are the happiest

instruments of design,” architect Henry Hudson Holly wrote in 1863; unlike in England, they were “most easily procured in our climate.”⁶³

If the Elkins House exhibits features that were typical, in general, of country houses of its time, this transitional residence, which was built during the waning years of the Greek Revival style and the heyday of the Italianate, also displays features that are characteristic of both styles.⁶⁴ The house’s bold cubical form and flat roof, for example, are typical of both Greek Revival and Italianate residences; rectangular attic-level windows tucked, as at the Elkins House, just below the roofline, appear on both a mid-nineteenth-century Greek Revival house in New London, Conn., and on Staten Island’s Italianate, Hamilton Park Cottage (1859-72), a designated New York City Landmark.⁶⁵ While the bead-and-reel of the Elkins House’s cornice is a traditional Greek motif, the building historically featured paired windows beneath a shared segmental arch at its second floor’s central bay, which would have been more typical of the Italianate.⁶⁶ Like this segmental arch, the delicate cusped window surrounds at the attic floor on the main façade would have been uncharacteristic of the Greek Revival’s severe aesthetic.

The design of the Elkins House, while a product of broad architectural trends, was likely influenced by the architectural pattern books of the time, which began to introduce new ideas about planning and design to the American public in the middle of the nineteenth century and were among the most important sources for villa designs. Perhaps most influential were those of Andrew Jackson Downing, who transmitted English concepts of rural design and landscape architecture to a broad audience through books that included *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1841), *Cottage Residences* (1842), and *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850). Downing, who featured the work of Alexander Jackson Davis, John Notman, Gervase Wheeler, Richard Upjohn, and Calvert Vaux, published numerous designs for farmhouses, villas, and cottages; these were largely Gothic Revival, Italianate, and Swiss Cottage in style, since Downing considered these styles’ picturesque qualities to be particularly suitable for country settings. Downing died in 1852, but his publications were frequently reprinted, and many architects, including Samuel Sloan and Henry W. Cleaveland published pattern books in the 1850s and 1860s. Although pattern-book designs were influential, they were rarely followed to the letter by the carpenters and builders who typically constructed country houses; as historian Daniel Reiff has observed, it was understood that they would adapt pattern book designs and details “to meet local needs and financial constraints.”⁶⁷ Indeed, precise copies were the exception rather than the rule, and many carpenters and builders combined architectural features from a variety of sources.

The Elkins House does not appear to be an exact copy of any known pattern book design, but several schemes for modestly ornamented, cubical, suburban homes were published in the middle of the nineteenth century that display a strong resemblance to it. Among these is a two-story “suburban cottage in the Italian style” appearing in Downing’s *Architecture of Country Houses*. Although the Elkins House differs from Downing’s scheme in some respects—particularly in its flat, rather than hipped roof, and in its execution in wood, rather than brick and stucco—the two share a center-hall plan, wide front porch, three-bay main façade, broadly overhanging cornice, and side bay window. Downing emphasized that his house was intended to be simple and comfortable, rather than ornately decorated, calling it “an attempt to redeem from the entire baldness of some examples and the frippery and ornament of others, a class of cottages very general in the neighborhood of our larger country towns.” What limited ornament the house did have gave it “the character of the Italian style”; and the front porch and bay window conveyed “at once an expression of beauty arising from a sense of a superior comfort or refinement in the mode of living.” While acknowledging that this design—in contrast, apparently, to the more elaborate villas appearing elsewhere in his book—did not have “much architectural style,”

Downing wrote that its example was “one which we should be very glad to see followed in suburban houses of this class.”⁶⁸

Other published examples abound. The design in Downing’s book was itself based upon a “Design for a Small Residence” appearing in an 1807 English book of villas by T.D.W. Deam.⁶⁹ Sloan’s book *The Modern Architect* (1852-53) included schemes for two cubical villas, one “plain” and the other “ornamented”; while these designs—best adapted to a village or suburban setting,” according to Sloan—differed in their detailing, each featured a wide front porch, three-bay main façade, tall parlor-floor windows with French doors, center-hall plan, and deep cornice.⁷⁰ Their main entrance doors sat within a simple molded surround that appears similar to that of the Elkins House. *Village and Farm Cottages*, which was published by Henry W. Cleaveland in 1856, similarly featured a cubical, three-bay, center-hall cottage with a front porch, side bay window, and segmentally arched windows that bears strong resemblance to the Elkins House. Cleaveland imagined this house as “the residence of some individual, happy in his circumstances, temper, and tastes; of one who knows how to prize the neatness and quiet and comfort of such a home, and who can find in its embellishment a constant pleasure.”⁷¹

Alterations have been made to the Elkins House and its grounds, particularly since the 1940s, including the replacement of historic doors and windows, the alteration of the central second-floor window opening on the main façade, changes to the second-floor sills and lintels, the installation of a new stoop, and the construction of a brick front wall. Despite this, the house has retained many of its most important features and characteristics—including its freestanding quality, cubical form, broad cornice with bead-and-reel molding, attic-level windows with cusped surrounds, front porch, ground-floor openings and surrounds, and bay window on the west facade—that identify it as a mid-nineteenth-century suburban house drawing upon pattern book designs and the Greek Revival and Italianate styles. As such, it remains a unique surviving example of a freestanding wood-framed suburban cottage or villa, a type of house that is believed to have all but vanished from northwestern Crown Heights.

Description⁷²

The George B. and Susan Elkins House is a two-and-one-half-story house, cubical in form, with a flat roof and wide front porch constructed between 1855 and 1869.

Main Facade

The main, or Dean Street, façade of the house is three bays in width; historically sided with horizontal wood clapboards, the façade, or portions of it, may currently be faced with horizontal boards of a substitute material. The house’s main entrance historically featured wood double doors; these have been replaced with a wood-and-glass outer door with diamond-shaped panes, and a paneled wood inner door. The main entrance doors are set within a large wood frame, which contains a mail slot and has an attached doorbell button. Above these doors is a historic, two-pane, wood transom window with a narrow vertical muntin. Surrounding the transom and door frame are a thick, beaded wood molding and a wide molded wood surround, both of which are historic. Two pairs of square-headed windows—one pair on each side of the main entrance—are present at the first floor. Each pair is set within a historic floor-length opening with historic, molded wood surround. Each of the first-floor windows is composed of three single-pane sashes; the windows are separated from each other within each opening by a wide, flat mullion. Historically, each of the two first-floor window openings was flanked by tall louvered shutters.

The Elkins House’s front porch features four square wood columns with their historic Doric capitals. The columns’ shafts have either been replaced with new shafts that are wider than the historic ones, or have been encased in wood jackets. The faces of the two column shafts

closest to the main entrance have recessed panels; the faces of the other two columns are decorated with curved and beaded jigsaw work. These columns support the historic wood, porch roof beams, the undersides of which curve downward where they meet the column capitals and engage the main façade. The porch ceiling is faced with wood planks, some of which are painted white; a glass-and-metal light fixture hangs from a metal chain from the porch ceiling, near the main entrance, and a historic wood molding extends the width of the porch ceiling at its juncture with the façade. This molding wraps the corners of the ceiling and continues along its sides, at the juncture of the ceiling and the outermost porch beams. The porch's historic wood balustrades, which wrapped the porch east and west of the stoop, have either been replaced by wood parapets, or encased in wood siding. Siding of indeterminate material covers the porch base, which historically featured grilles. The porch roof is slightly pitched, and has metal gutters and a wood fascia. Although historically, the porch roof did not span the full width of the façade, it appears to have been extended, after the 1930s, to the façade's edges.

The second floor of the main façade features three pairs of square-headed, one-over-one, double-hung windows. Two one-over-one, double-hung windows separated by a wide, flat mullion fill each of these openings. Beneath each pair of windows is a simple projecting sill with a square profile. Historically, the central second-floor opening had a segmentally arched head, and was crowned by a segmental lintel; a pair of windows separated by a wide mullion filled this opening, and the heads of the top sashes of these windows were curved to follow the top line of the opening. The second-floor windows once featured projecting lintels and bracketed sills, and were historically flanked by louvered shutters.

The attic story of the main façade features three rectangular window openings with historic cusped wood surrounds. Screens are visible behind the western and eastern surrounds, and two horizontally sliding sashes—which appear to be similar to the historic double-sash windows present within these openings around 1940—are present in the central opening. These openings are sandwiched between a wide molding and the house's deeply overhanging cornice, which is intricately detailed with two bead-and-reel moldings of different sizes. Both the cornice and the molding beneath the attic windows wrap the main façade, and extend the full widths of the east and west facades.

A masonry chimney painted a dark color, satellite dish, and television antenna are present at the western end of the roof.

West Facade

The west façade of the Elkins House is coated with stucco. A bay window, also coated with stucco and with a slightly pitched, deeply overhanging roof, clapboarded base, and square-headed one-over-one, double-hung wood window on its south face, is present at the first floor. A historic, wood bead-and-reel molding similar to those on the cornice exists at the juncture of the bay window facades and the underside of the roof overhang. A square-headed window opening—which has been filled in with stucco, and which features a historic projecting wood surround with bracketed sills and a molded wood lintel—is present at the first floor, south of the bay window; a historic bead-and-reel molding exists at the juncture of the lintel soffit and the head of the surround. Two square-headed window openings are visible at the second floor; the south opening features a simple wood surround with a projecting sill and a deep molded lintel, and the tall north opening opens on to the roof of the bay window. A metal fire escape has been installed near this opening. A metal downspout pierces the cornice near the northwest corner of the house.

East Facade

The east façade, like the west, is coated with stucco. Two square-headed window openings, both of which are filled with stucco and have molded surrounds, are present at the first

floor. The second floor has three window openings; the round-headed central opening has a molded surround with bracketed sills, and the square-headed northern and southern openings have molded surrounds and bracketed sills.

Front Yard

A concrete stoop with metal railing, and with concrete cheek walls, is present at the front of the house. Historically, the house featured a wood stoop with balustraded railings, and a metal picket fence at the front lot line. The stoop descends to a slate landing, which is met by additional concrete steps with cinder-block cheek walls that lead to the Dean Street sidewalk. A brick wall with posts flanking a metal entrance gate, and with concrete coping and a metal fence attached to the top of the coping, extends the width of the property at the Dean Street lot line. Chain-link fences are present at the east and west borders of the yard.

The body of the house is beige, and the coping, base, and metal fence of the front wall and the cinder-block cheek walls are painted white. The front stoop and steps; outer main entrance door; porch columns, beams, and base; cornice; and attic-level window surrounds and molding are painted a maroon color. Historically, the main entrance doors, transom window, and surround, and grilles at the porch base, and the shutters were painted a dark color, which contrasted with the light color of the body of the house and its other features.

Report researched and written by
Michael D. Caratzas
Research Department, LPC

¹ Sources for this section include G. W. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of Brooklyn, New York* (Philadelphia: Bromley, 1893); G.W. Bromley & Company, *Atlas of the Entire City of Brooklyn* (New York: Bromley & Robinson, 1880); G.W. Bromley & Company, *Atlas of the Borough of Brooklyn, City of New York* (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley, 1907-08); Brian J. Cudahy, *How We Got to Coney Island: The Development of Mass Transportation in Brooklyn and Kings County* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); M. Dripps, *Map of the City of Brooklyn* (New York: M. Dripps, 1869); E.B. Hyde & Company, *Atlas of the Borough of Brooklyn, City of New York* (Brooklyn: E. Belcher Hyde, 1903); Margaret Latimer, "Brooklyn," in Kenneth T. Jackson, Ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 148-153; LPC, *Crown Heights North Proposed Historic District* (New York: City of New York, 1978); LPC, *John and Elizabeth Truslow House Designation Report* (LP-1964) (New York: City of New York, 1997), prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart; William Perris, *Plan of the City of Brooklyn, L.I.* (New York: Perris & Higginson, 1855); Elisha Robinson, *Robinson's Atlas of the City of Brooklyn, New York* (New York: E. Robinson, 1886); Henry R. Stiles, *The History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, New York from 1683 to 1884* (New York: W.W. Mundell, 1884); and Hugo Ullitz, *Atlas of the Brooklyn Borough of the City of New York* (New York: Hyde & Co., 1898-99).

² The New York City Department of City Planning considers the western boundary of Crown Heights to be Bedford Avenue, with the Prospect Heights neighborhood lying to the west, according to the Community District Eight and Community District Nine maps posted on DCP's website, at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bk8profile.pdf> and www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bk9profile.pdf. The Federal Writers Project's *New York City Guide* (c.1939; reprinted New York: Octagon Books, 1970) states incorrectly on p. 496 that the Crown Heights name first came into use in 1916. In fact, the name was in use at least six years

earlier, when the *New York Times* reported on the construction of housing south of Eastern Parkway, near Nostrand and Rogers Avenues, in “what has come to be known as the Crown Heights section” (“Brooklyn’s Apartment House Development Active on the Heights and Prospect Park,” *New York Times*, August 28, 1910, p. X10).

³ Sources concerning the Lenape include R.P. Bolton, *New York City in Indian Possession* (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1975); Robert S. Grumet, *Indians of North America: The Lenapes* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989); Robert S. Grumet, *Native American Place Names in New York City* (New York: Museum of the City of New York, 1981); and Bruce C. Trigger, Ed., *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 15: Northeast* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978). The Lenape lived in settlements of bark- or grass-covered wigwams, and in their larger settlements—typically located on high ground, adjacent to fresh water—they fished, harvested shellfish, and trapped animals. No evidence has been found to indicate that a Lenape settlement existed in what is now Crown Heights.

⁴ See *Map of the City of Brooklyn, as Adopted and Confirmed by Commissioners Appointed Under an Act of the Legislature of the State of New York Entitled “An Act Authorising the Appointment of Commissioners to Lay Out Streets, Avenues and Squares in the City of Brooklyn,” Passed April 23, 1835 and the Acts Amending the Same*, in the collection of the New-York Historical Society. A small segment of Clove Road remains in the area, cutting through the block bounded by Montgomery Street, Empire Boulevard, and New York and Nostrand Avenues.

⁵ “English immigrants were permitted to settle on territory claimed by the Dutch on taking the oath of allegiance to the Dutch government,” according to *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, New York from 1683 to 1884*, p. 25.

⁶ *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, New York from 1683 to 1884*, pp. 43-44.

⁷ “Last of the Old Mansion,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, December 19, 1897, p. 23. These roads would later be met by the Wallabout and Bedford Turnpike, which opened in 1829. See “A Famous Old Highway,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, January 24, 1897, p. 21; “Hancock Street Houses,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 6, 1893, p. 5; and “Old Brooklyn Roads,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, November 11, 1894, p. 22.

⁸ *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, New York from 1683 to 1884*, p. 135.

⁹ “The Lefferts Family: An Important Chapter in the History of Bedford,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, October 2, 1887, p. 6.

¹⁰ Marc Linder and Lawrence S. Zacharias, *Of Cabbages and Kings County: Agriculture and the Formation of Modern Brooklyn* (Iowa City, Ia.: University of Iowa Press, 1999), p. 81. According to the *Encyclopedia of New York City*, “Complete abolition was not achieved until 1841, when [New York] state rescinded provisions allowing nonresidents to hold slaves for as long as nine months” (Thomas J. Davis, “Slavery,” in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, p. 1077).

¹¹ 1790 United States Census.

¹² “Judge” Lefferts, like his father, also apparently owned slaves; the 1810 United States Census shows a Leffert Lefferts living in Kings County who seems to match the Judge’s description, and who was living in a household that included ten slaves.

¹³ *Map of the Late Judge L. Lefferts Farm Containing 1,600 Desirable Lots Situated in the Level, Beautiful, and Most Desirable Part of the Ninth Ward, Brooklyn, to be Sold at Auction by Messrs. Oakley & Wright* (1854), in the collection of the New-York Historical Society.

¹⁴ Not to be confused with the location of the same name in Manhattan, Brooklyn's South Ferry was located at the foot of Atlantic Avenue. See *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, New York from 1683 to 1884*, pp. 439-441.

¹⁵ L.P. Brockett, "Travel and Transit in Kings County: Stages and Railroads," in *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, New York from 1683 to 1884*, p. 419.

¹⁶ The Montgomery Queen residence appears on the 1854 *Map of the Late Judge L. Lefferts Farm*.

¹⁷ Although the 1869 Perris *Plan of the City of Brooklyn*, which shows these houses, does not indicate whether they were of wood or masonry construction, many of them appear on the 1880 Bromley *Atlas of the Entire City of Brooklyn*, which shows that they were constructed of wood.

¹⁸ The bridge reduced commuting time to New York City since it took far less time to cross the East River by bridge than by ferry, and because bridge traffic was not affected by inclement weather. The opening of the bridge led developers to invest in neighborhoods like Crown Heights that had been considered too inconvenient in earlier decades, according to the *Truslow House Designation Report*.

¹⁹ Service on the Fulton Street Elevated was initiated between Fulton Ferry and Nostrand Avenue on April 24, 1888; on May 30, 1888, service was extended to Sumner Avenue, and on August 20, 1888, it was extended to Utica Avenue. The Fulton Street elevated was later continued east into Brownsville. See Joseph Cunningham and Leonard De Hart, *Rapid Transit in Brooklyn: A History of the New York City Subway System, Part II* (privately printed, 1977), p. 13; and "Brooklyn's New Road Opened," *New York Times*, April 25, 1888, p. 8.

²⁰ "Ordinance—Extension of the Fire Limits," *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 24, 1894, p. 8.

²¹ "Hungry Brooklyn Burglars: Feast in Victims' Homes and Take Away Silver Souvenirs," *New York Times*, June 15, 1907, p. 16; "Attractions for the Homeseeker in Brooklyn, Long Island, Westchester, and New Jersey Properties," *New York Times*, May 3, 1903, p. 31.

²² "The Decay of 'Brooklyn Heights,'" *New York Times*, June 15, 1902, p. 25.

²³ In a 1920 article, Revere Place, a short street between Dean and Bergen Streets, was described as being in the St. Mark's section. See "Believe Mrs. Lee Took Her Own Life," *New York Times*, December 22, 1920, p. 9.

²⁴ See, for example, "Student Admits to Setting 23 Fires: Brooklyn Youth, Seeking Arrest, Says 'Frustrated Love' Drove Him to Arson," *New York Times*, May 5, 1935, p. 7. This article reported that an arsonist's "Brooklyn fires," including one on Dean Street near Kingston Avenue, "were all in the Crown Heights section."

²⁵ Joan Bacchus Maynard, "Weeksville," in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, pp. 1251-52. An 1873 article in the *Brooklyn Eagle* defined Weeksville as "South of Atlantic Avenue, in that part of the city intersected by Troy, Schenectady, Utica, and Rochester Avenues" ("Weeksville," *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 30, 1873, p. 2). See also "Unearthing the Tales of a Lost Settlement," *New York Times*, April 22, 1996, p. B1.

²⁶ “Brooklyn Floaters Beware: Lawyers Retained to Prosecute Illegal Voters,” *New York Times*, October 21, 1893, p. 9. See also Ellen Marie Snyder-Grenier, “Crow Hill,” in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, which explains that the area “stretching from the hills east of Prospect Park to East New York”—that is, the area in the southern portion of what is now Crown Heights—was once known as Crow Hill. The Crow Hill name became particularly associated with the penitentiary there. See, for example, “Convicts Not Yet Idle: A Little Work Left at Crow Hill,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 14, 1889, p. 1.

²⁷ The proposed Crown Heights North Historic District was calendared on June 20, 2006 and heard on September 19, 2006.

²⁸ These conclusions are based on a review of the New Building docket records for the buildings within the proposed historic district; review of the blocks of northwestern Crown Heights on Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Brooklyn, New York* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1932, updated to 1993); and a windshield survey of northwestern Crown Heights conducted by the author of this report in August of 2006.

²⁹ Sources for this section include the 1905 New York State Census; the United States Census records for 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1910, and 1920; and Brooklyn directories for 1840, 1845, 1846, 1847, 1848, 1849, 1850, 1851, 1852, 1853, 1854, 1855, 1856, 1857, 1858, 1859, 1860, 1861, 1862, 1863, 1864, 1865, 1866, 1867, 1868, 1869, 1870, 1871, 1872, 1873, 1877, 1878, 1879, 1880, 1881, 1883, 1884, 1887, 1888, 1892, 1893, 1894, 1897, 1898, 1901, 1902, 1906, 1907, 1909, 1912, and 1913, published under various names and available on microfilm at the New York Public Library’s Humanities and Social Sciences Library.

³⁰ Although the Elkinses apparently moved to a different location on the same block for 1863 and 1864, they moved back soon afterward, and were again listed as being on Dean near Brooklyn in 1865. The Elkinses’ address continued to be listed as Dean near Brooklyn until the 1870s, when it was listed as 1275 Dean Street; this was the address of the house until a renumbering in the 1890s. (The 1886 *Robinson’s Atlas of the City of Brooklyn, New York*, consistent with the directories of the time, shows the current house as being numbered 1275.) In 1897, the house was listed under Fanny’s name as being at its current address, 1375 Dean Street.

³¹ Folsom paid \$23,880 for these two blocks in 1855. In 1857, Folsom, a merchant doing business at 164 Pearl Street in New York, had a home address of “Dean near Brooklyn Avenue,” which could have been the existing house. In 1859, his widow, listed as “Elizabeth Folsom” [sic] in J. Lain’s directory of Brooklyn, had a home address of “Dean near Hudson,” which, again, could have been the existing house. In 1859, Folsom’s executor sold three 100-foot-wide, through-block lots between Dean and Pacific Streets to Mary McKillop for \$15,000; McKillop and her husband, John sold two of these lots, including the one that the Elkins House currently sits upon, to Susan Elkins five days later for \$13,000. The discrepancy in value between the two lots sold to Elkins and the other lot (\$2,000) implies that the lots purchased by Elkins had been improved in some manner, possibly with a substantial residence. No structure was present in the Elkins House’s location on the 1854 Lefferts Farm subdivision map. See Brooklyn property conveyances, liber 387, page 144 (recorded February 23, 1855); liber 511, page 308 (recorded October 14, 1859); and liber 511, page 450 (recorded October 19, 1859).

³² “For Sale—Two Beautiful Fresh Cows” (Advertisement), *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 14, 1868, p. 3. A similar advertisement ran on page 2 of the *Eagle*’s March 13, 1869 edition. No nineteenth-century Buildings Department records are known to exist for the Elkins House, and the earliest-known photograph of the house is the circa-1939 New York City Department of Taxes “tax photo” (Department of Records and Information Services), but the pre-1869 construction date for the Elkins House is based on strong evidence. First, LPC’s *Crown Heights North Proposed Historic District* report (1978, LPC files) approximates the house’s construction date as the 1850s, based on its style and design. Secondly, the 1869 *Dripps Map of the City of Brooklyn* shows a structure matching the existing house in approximate size, location, and footprint on property owned by “G.B. Elkins.” Finally, as previously noted, Brooklyn conveyance records

and directories show the Elkinses owning the property on which the house is sited by 1859, and the family living at what appears to be the location of the house in 1862 and again, for the long term, in 1865, which would imply that the house had been constructed by the latter date. One possibility may be that, in 1862, the Elkinses lived in a previous house on the property, constructed by the Folsoms; they then moved to temporary quarters in 1863 and 1864 while the existing house was being constructed, and were living in the existing house, at 1375 Dean Street, by 1865.

³³ “Board in Bedford near New York Avenue” (Advertisement), *Brooklyn Eagle*, April 17, 1862, p. 3.

³⁴ “For Sale in Bedford” (Advertisement), *Brooklyn Eagle*, October 14, 1863, p. 4.

³⁵ “For Sale—Very Desirable Residences at Bedford” (Advertisement), *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 27, 1864, p. 1. Hudson Avenue is now called Kingston Avenue; Warren and Baltic Streets are now known, respectively, as Prospect and Park Places. A search of the “Brooklyn Daily Eagle 1841-1902 Online” website (accessed at <http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle>) turns up hundreds of real estate advertisements placed by Elkins that appeared regularly in the *Eagle* beginning in 1863.

³⁶ “For Sale to Close an Estate” (Advertisement), *Brooklyn Eagle*, March 29, 1866, p. 1.

³⁷ “For Sale—At Bedford” (Advertisement), *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 29, 1867, p. 1.

³⁸ “For Sale—In Bedford” (Advertisement), *Brooklyn Eagle*, April 23, 1866, p. 4.

³⁹ “Sackett Street Boulevard,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 14, 1870, p. 4.

⁴⁰ “The New Douglass Street Drive,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 23, 1874, p. 2.

⁴¹ “Liberal Christian,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 9, 1875, p. 4.

⁴² “For Sale—Houses” (Advertisement), *Brooklyn Eagle*, June 18, 1875, p. 3.

⁴³ “Died,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1883, p. 5; *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 5, 1884, p. 2.

⁴⁴ “Died,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, March 15, 1886, p. 3; “Elkins’ Heirs Obtain a Satisfaction Piece on Former County Land,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, February 7, 1887.

⁴⁵ See the following Legal Notices in the *Brooklyn Eagle*: February 8, 1887, p. 1; August 21, 1888, p. 1; August 23, 1888, p. 4; August 23, 1888, p. 4; August 28, 1888, p. 4; August 30, 1888, p. 4; September 4, 1888, p. 4; September 6, 1888, p. 2; September 7, 1888, p. 6; September 8, 1888, p. 6; September 11, 1888, p. 2; and September 12, 1888, p. 6.

⁴⁶ United States Patent No. 198,798 (January 1, 1878); United States Patent No. 286,407 (October 9, 1883). These patents have been posted on the Internet at the “Women Inventors Index” page of the Miami University website, accessible at www.lib.muohio.edu/epub/govlaw/FemInv.

⁴⁷ Five buildings fronting on Dean Street were constructed directly to the west of the Elkins House in 1892 (New Building Docket No. 1892-406). In 1897, Mary Elkins sold the five 20-foot-wide lots behind the house that fronted on Pacific Street to John A. Bliss, on the condition that he not erect “any buildings other than private dwellings or first-class flats or apartment houses there (Brooklyn property conveyance section 5, liber 8, page 392, recorded July 9, 1897). Bliss sold these lots later in 1897, and five rowhouses were constructed there soon afterwards (conveyance section 5, liber 8, page 486, recorded November 20, 1897;

New Building Docket No. 1897-1823). In 1905, Edward J. Maguire purchased the 50-foot-wide parcel adjacent to the Elkins House on the east, and constructed flats there designed by Axel Hedman (liber 37, page 202, recorded July 15, 1905).

⁴⁸ New York City Public School Teacher Retirement List, 1895-1915, accessed through the Ancestry.com website at the New York Public Library.

⁴⁹ For more on Cohn and ABMJ, see “Rev. Joseph Cohn, 67, of Missions to Jews,” *New York Times*, October 7, 1953, p. 29, and “Whatever Happened to the American Board of Missions to the Jews?” which is on the website of Chosen People Ministries, accessible at www.chosenpeople.com/docs/GB/Resources/Publications/Nov98NL/index.html.

⁵⁰ For the house’s ownership between 1942 and 1964, see Brooklyn property conveyances liber 6215, page 241 (recorded August 5, 1942); liber 8237, page 466 (recorded May 20, 1954); liber 8273, page 159 (recorded September 18, 1954); liber 8276, page 51 (recorded September 28, 1954); liber 8672, page 1 (recorded October 24, 1958); liber 8747, page 98 (recorded July 30, 1959); liber 9303, page 110 (recorded September 25, 1964); and liber 9303, page 120 (recorded September 25, 1964). For a list of owners since 1970, see the ACRIS online city register on the New York City Department of Finance website, accessible at www.nyc.gov/html/dof/html/jump/acris.shtml.

⁵¹ This was determined by reviewing the Brooklyn property conveyance indexes at the Brooklyn Municipal Building.

⁵² See these Brooklyn property conveyances: liber 649, page 441 (recorded December 6, 1864); liber 649, page 443 (recorded December 6, 1864); liber 655, page 324 (recorded February 20, 1865); liber 656, page 68 (recorded February 28, 1865); liber 731, page 499 (recorded November 28, 1866); liber 827, page 118 (recorded May 25, 1868); liber 840, page 253 (recorded August 1, 1868); liber 913, page 439 (recorded September 4, 1869); liber 1158, page 413 (recorded May 2, 1874); and liber 1214, page 343 (recorded September 7, 1875).

⁵³ See, for example, Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 933-37. In Brooklyn, in the years following the Civil War, Burrows and Wallace explain that “residential districts near the waterfront . . . did well,” but “interior territories near the new Prospect Park languished”; Edwin C. Litchfield, for example, owned large tracts in what would become Park Slope, but “buyers showed insufficient interest in paying the kind of prices Litchfield had in mind, so with the patience of the long-term developer, he settled down to wait,” and would “die in 1884 before prices reached a satisfactory level” (p. 933). Others involved in the real estate business, like the developers of Kensington and Brownsville, experienced similar problems during these years.

⁵⁴ For example, when Elkins sold a 100-by-50-foot parcel at the southeast corner of Dean Street and Brooklyn Avenue to Joseph Snelling in 1867, he did so under conditions favorable to the construction of a suburban villa there, stipulating that “all buildings which may hereinafter be erected upon said lots or either of them shall front on Dean Street and that no building shall hereinafter be erected on said lots or either of them within 30 feet of the front line of said lots.” Soon afterward, Snelling apparently constructed a villa there as his residence, judging by the 1869 Dripps *Map of the City of Brooklyn* and Lain’s 1871 *Brooklyn City and Business Directory*.

⁵⁵ Sources for this section include Henry W. Cleaveland, *Village and Farm Cottages: A Victorian Stylebook of 1856* (reprinted Watkins Glen, N.Y.: American Life Foundation, 1982); Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850; reprinted New York: Dover Publications, 1969); Robert Guter and Janet W. Foster, *Building by the Book: Pattern Book Architecture in New Jersey* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992); W. Barksdale Maynard, *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850*

(New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002); Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); Daniel D. Reiff, *Houses from Books: Treatises, Pattern Books, and Catalogs in American Architecture, 1738-1950* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); and Samuel Sloan, *The Model Architect* (1852-53; reprinted as *Sloan's Victorian Buildings*, New York: Dover Publications, 1980). Portions of this section are adapted from LPC, *121 Heberton Avenue House Designation Report* (LPC-2120) (New York: City of New York, 2002), prepared by Gale Harris.

⁵⁶ These villas are visible on the 1880 Bromley *Atlas of the Entire City of Brooklyn*. One once-freestanding wood house visible on the 1880 map still stands today at 1480 Pacific Street, but it now abuts a later three-story rowhouse. The house at 1480 Pacific also retains fewer of its historic features than the Elkins House.

⁵⁷ *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850*, pp. 119, 139.

⁵⁸ See *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850*, p. 119 for a discussion of the overlap between the terms “cottage” and “villa.” Both of these were types of country houses; Downing’s book *The Architecture of Country Houses* included, as its subtitle stated, “designs for cottages, farm-houses, and villas.” Although the Elkins House could be considered either a cottage or villa, it will be referred to as a villa throughout this section for the sake of consistency.

⁵⁹ *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850*, p. 125.

⁶⁰ The historian Kenneth T. Jackson bestowed this title upon Brooklyn in his book, *Crabgrass Frontier*, which is cited in *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850*, p. 127.

⁶¹ *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850*, pp. 128-129.

⁶² *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850*, p. 182; for a discussion of residential porches, see pp. 167-187 of this book.

⁶³ *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850*, pp. 149-50.

⁶⁴ The Greek Revival style, which “dominated American architecture from the late 1820s to the late 1840s,” is widely represented by rowhouses in Brooklyn’s older neighborhoods, such as Brooklyn Heights and Cobble Hill. Brooklyn also had a number of freestanding Greek Revival style farmhouses and villas, but few survive today. For more on this topic, see LPC, *Bennet-Farrell-Feldmann House Designation Report* (LP-1966) (New York: City of New York, 1999), prepared by Gale Harris. Many Greek Revival houses in the United States were constructed by builders following the drawings in Minard Lafever’s *Modern Builder’s Guide*, which was first published in 1833; like Lafever’s other influential guides, it was an “eclectic compilation intended to be of immediate use to carpenters, masons, and others in the building trades,” containing information on “practical geometry and constructional techniques, the classical ‘orders’ and decorative detail as illustrated in well-known Greek monuments, and ‘original’ designs by Lafever,” according to Jacob Landy. See Minard Lafever, *The Modern Builder’s Guide* (1833; reprinted New York: Dover Publications, 1969), p. v.

⁶⁵ *A Field Guide to American Houses*, pp. 178-195 and pp. 210-229 includes many examples of cubical Greek Revival and Italianate houses. On Hamilton Park Cottage, see Barbaralee Diamondstein, *The Landmarks of New York II* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), p. 132.

⁶⁶ The bead-and-reel motif appeared in Ancient Greek architecture, and in Lafever’s *Modern Builder’s Guide*. See Dora Ware and Maureen Stafford, *An Illustrated Dictionary of Ornament* (New York: St. Martin’s Press), p. 36; and *Modern Builder’s Guide*, plate 62.

⁶⁷ *Houses from Books*, p. 62.

⁶⁸ *The Architecture of Country Houses*, pp. 109-110.

⁶⁹ *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850*, pp. 26-27. Alexander Jackson Davis also based an 1835 design for a house in New Haven on Dearn's house.

⁷⁰ *Sloan's Victorian Buildings*, p. 55.

⁷¹ *Village and Farm Cottages*, p. 103.

⁷² Conclusions regarding the historic conditions and features of the house are based, in part, on the circa-1939 Department of Taxes photograph.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the George B. and Susan Elkins House has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that among its important qualities, the George B. and Susan Elkins House is the only-known freestanding, mid-nineteenth-century, wood country house remaining in northwestern Crown Heights; that it is the former home of a prominent figure in the neighborhood's early history; that it is a significant link to Crown Heights' suburban past; that the house was constructed before 1869; that it predates the hundreds of late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century rowhouses, flats, and apartment buildings that fill its surrounding blocks; that it stands, today, in striking contrast to these brick and stone dwellings; that it is a sparsely ornamented country home displaying Greek Revival and Italianate influences and a strong kinship with cottage designs published in the mid-nineteenth-century pattern books of Andrew Jackson Downing, Samuel Sloan, and Henry W. Cleaveland; that it has a cubical form that is characteristic of both Greek Revival and Italianate residences; that it features a three-bay main façade, flat roof, wide front porch, molded entrance-door surround, and attic windows with delicate cusped surrounds, as well as a broadly overhanging and beautifully detailed wood cornice decorated with bead-and-reel moldings; that the house's simple ornamentation conveys the house's early history in an almost pastoral setting; that when the Elkins House was constructed, it was considered to be within the Bedford area of Brooklyn, but today, it sits within Crown Heights' northwestern section, an area roughly bounded by Atlantic Avenue and Eastern Parkway on the north and south, and by Albany and Bedford Avenues on the east and west; that this area developed separately from the other portions of Crown Heights, including the early African-American neighborhood of Weeksville to the east, and the area south of Eastern Parkway; that the Elkinses were Massachusetts natives who moved to Brooklyn by 1845; that George B. Elkins was a merchant in Lower Manhattan through the 1850s who entered the real estate business by 1861; that by 1865, the Elkins family appears to have been living in this house; that Elkins was active in Bedford's real estate trade, particularly on the blocks near his home; that by the mid-1860s, his advertisements were running regularly in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, offering "very desirable residences" and "villa sites" and urging buyers to act "while lots are low and houses are selling at almost fabulous prices"; that by 1867, Elkins was transacting business in his home, asking clients to call "at his residence, Bedford"; that toward the end of the nineteenth century, with the extension of streetcars and elevated railroads to the former Lefferts farm area, its suburban character faded as its blocks filled up with masonry rowhouses and multiple dwellings; and that the George B. and Susan Elkins House stands as a remarkable survivor of its area's urban transformation and a unique link to the suburban years of northwestern Crown Heights, when similar wood country houses were a common feature of its landscape.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the George B. and Susan Elkins House, 1375 Dean Street, Borough of Brooklyn, and designates Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1209, Lot 62 as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice Chair

Stephen Byrns, Joan Gerner, Roberta Brandes Gratz, Christopher Moore, Margery Perlmutter, Thomas F. Pike, Jan Hird Pokorny, Elizabeth Ryan, Commissioners



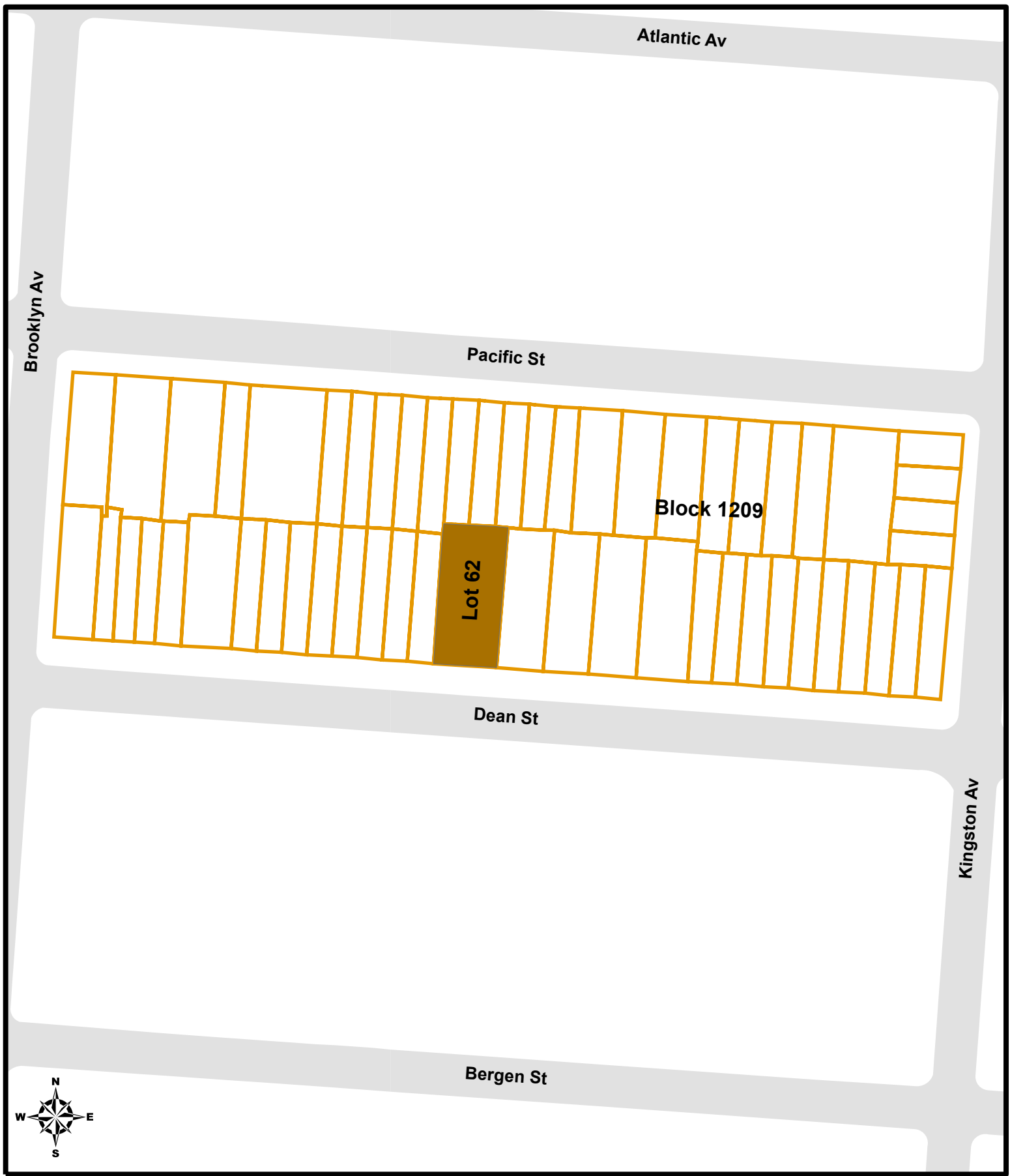
George B. and Susan Elkins House, main (south) façade.
Photo: Michael Caratzas



George B. and Susan Elkins House, main entrance detail.
Photo: Michael Caratzas



George B. and Susan Elkins House, cornice and attic window details.
Photo: Michael Caratzas



George B. and Susan Elkins House (LP-2207), 1375 Dean Street, Brooklyn.
Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1209, Lot 62.

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 03C, December 2003