
Adaptation

Williamsburg is a neighborhood in northwest Brooklyn. Originally part of the Dutch neighborhood Boswijck, the area was chartered in 1660, and settled by a number of Dutch, French and Scandinavian farmers and African slaves. Williamsburgh was named after Jonathan Williams, the area’s surveyor. The Village of Williamsburgh was incorporated in 1827 and dropped the “h” from its name when it consolidated with Brooklyn in 1855.

Williamsburg became a fashionable suburb for industrialists and professionals of German, Austrian, and Irish decent. There were hotels, beer gardens and exclusive clubs. Docks, shipyards, factories, distilleries, taverns, mills, and foundries stood along the waterfront where some of the largest industrial firms in the nation were built: the Pfizer Pharmaceutical Company (1849), Astral Oil (later Standard Oil), Brooklyn Flint Glass (later Corning Glassware), and the Havemeyers and Elder sugar refinery (later Amstar), once the largest businesses of its kind in the world.

After the Williamsburg Bridge opened in 1903 thousands of Jews from Eastern Europe moved to the neighborhood from the Lower East Side. Lithuanian, Polish, and Russian Orthodox communities also developed, as did the Italian one between Bushwick and Union avenues. Coldwater flats and six story tenements replaced brownstones, and by 1917 the neighborhood had some of the most populated blocks in the city. Jewish communities continued to grow and a large number of refugees escaping Nazism moved in and formed Hasidic synagogues and schools. Manufacturing, which employed more than a million people in 1950, attracted many Puerto Ricans during the following decade.

About this time scores of decaying buildings were demolished to make way for enormous public housing projects. In 1957 the construction of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway bisected the neighborhood and destroyed more than 2200 units of low-income housing. Looting and arson left blocks of abandoned buildings and manufacturing employment decreased sharply. Artists and musicians started moving to Williamsburg along the L train stop at Bedford Avenue as early as the 1970s. The Hasidim continued to dominate the southernmost section; Latinos, the Southside and East Williamsburg; Polish, the Northside; and, Italians in Northeastern Williamsburg.

Today, legacies of the waterfront’s heavy industrial past still remain and numerous waste transfer stations continue to line the East River. However, the city’s 2005 rezoning plan to reclassify some of Williamsburg’s industrial areas to residential has contributed to a great number of people moving to the neighborhood. Unfortunately, increasing rents and new construction have also worked to displace some longtime residents.
Document 1 - “Seal of the City of Williamsburgh.” Brooklyn Collection, Brooklyn Public Library.
1. List 3 objects shown in DOCUMENT 1:


2. Choose 2 of the objects you identified. What do you think these objects represent?


3. Why do you think Williamsburg made this seal?


4. Brainstorm what objects best represent the neighborhood today. Draw a present day seal for Williamsburg:
1. DOCUMENT 2 is a map. List three companies you see listed on the map in DOCUMENT 2:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. What did these companies make?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. Why do you think the companies chose this section of Williamsburg for their factories?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. List 2 things on the atlas you recognize from today. List 2 things from the atlas that you don’t recognize from Williamsburg today:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

1. What type of document is DOCUMENT 3? How do you know?

2. Between what years was this document created?

3. Observe what DOCUMENT 3 shows us. List three observations:

4. What do you think the artist who designed this document wanted to convey about the Hecla Iron Works?

1. What event does DOCUMENT 4 advertise?

2. Was the event portrayed positively or negatively? Use evidence from the document to explain your reasoning.

3. The Williamsburg Bridge connects the Lower East Side of Manhattan and the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn. Why do you think this location was chosen for the bridge?

4. Imagine the first ten years after the bridge was built. How do you think the neighborhoods connected by the bridge changed as a result?
SOME OBSERVATIONS

I think from what I have now said, you will better understand why you see some of those imposing bank buildings still standing in Williamsburg. They are relics of a better day.

[ 19 ]
1. DOCUMENT 5 is a printed copy of a speech. Infer what the speech was likely about from the title of the document.

2. The speaker is a trustee of the bank. Why do you think a trustee was chosen to write this speech?

3. Who do you think attended this event on September 27, 1960? How do you know?

4. The speaker referred to the old banks of Williamsburg as “relics of a better day.” What do you think he means by that?
1. Observe DOCUMENT 6. Infer what you think the illustrator wanted to convey about Brooklyn from this document:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

2. Locate Williamsburg and list 3 things you see around its name:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

3. Why do you think these things were chosen to represent Williamsburg?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

4. What would you add to this drawing based on your knowledge of Williamsburg today?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

1. Observe DOCUMENT 7 and list four things you see in this image:

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

2. This image was taken of a specific community in Williamsburg. What community do you think it represents? Explain your reasoning.

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

3. One sign in the window reads, “Separate Room for Ladies.” Why do you think there was a separate room for ladies?

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

1. Is the person who wrote Document 8 American or British? How do you know? List three similarities between DOCUMENT 8A and DOCUMENT 8B:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. List three differences between DOCUMENT 8A and DOCUMENT 8B:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. What do you think this festival celebrates? Name three objects in either picture that support your guess.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. What community in Williamsburg do these documents correspond to?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Where Sugar Once Ruled, a Face-Off Over the Future

The bright yellow Domino Sugar sign next to the Williamsburg Bridge is among the most distinctive features of the Brooklyn waterfront.

Now, the sign may point the way to the borough's next big historic preservation fight.

Last month, the Waterfront Preservation Alliance of Greenpoint and Williamsburg formally asked the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission to consider the old sugar factory for landmark status.

A plan for a project combining market-rate and low-income housing at the site is being drafted by the partnership that bought the property shortly after the factory closed in 2004. It consists of the Community Preservation Corporation, a nonprofit organization, and Isaac Katan, a private developer.

The preservationists, supported by the local City Council member, David Vassky, want any development to conform with the factory's 1860s Richardsonian Romanesque Revival structure that dates to the late 19th century and recalls an era when New York was the nation's leading sugar producer.

Mr. Vassky, a historic preservationist, says the plan for the Domino Sugar factory is more significant. "It's an icon," he said. "It's a landmark in the popular sense of the word. When I talk to people in Queens or Manhattan about that part of the city, I say it's right by the Domino Sugar factory, and they know where that is."

Vassky, a member of the waterfront alliance, said the group's efforts had benefited from the rapid development that followed the comprehensive rezoning of the local waterfront in May 2005. "People," he said, "can see what's disappearing."

The developers, who have yet to unveil concrete plans, warn that too much preservation could jeopardize their project and the construction of the area of low-income housing.

"We certainly support preservation," said Lloyd Kaplan, a spokesman for the project's owners. But he added, "Our priority is affordable housing, and we want to achieve a balanced plan."

The Rev. Jim O'Shen, president of Churches United for Fair Housing, made a similar point. "If you look at it in human terms," he said, "how many families do you want to knock out of housing in the community, at what price, and what are you preserving?"

There may be room for compromise. Mary Haberstrott, president of the listing figure of the national Society for Industrial Archeology, said that she would like to see more kept intact than just the distinctive Domino sign.

Some of the old factory's equipment, if preserved, could tell the story of the refining industry that once thrived along the waterfront, she said.

But she, along with Mr. Vassky and Ms. Stich, says that preservation and housing are not incompatible. "There have been too many industrial buildings put to other uses, including residential," Ms. Haberstrott said. "It just demands creativity and openness."

JAKE MOONEY

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Where Sugar Once Ruled, a Face-Off Over the Future
By Jake Mooney

The bright yellow Domino Sugar sign next to the Williamsburg Bridge is among the most distinctive features of the Brooklyn waterfront.

Now, the sign may point the way to the borough’s next big historic preservation fight.

Last month, the Water Preservation Alliance of Greenpoint and Williamsburg formally asked the city’s Landmark Preservation Commission to consider the old sugar factory for landmark status.

A plan or a project combining market-rate and low-income housing at the site is being drafted by the partnership that bought the property shortly after the factory closed in 2004. It consists of the Community Preservation Corporation, a nonprofit organization, and Isaac Katan, a private developer.

The preservationist, supported by the local City Council member, David Yassky, want any development to conform with the factory, a hulking brick Romanesque Revival structure that dates to the late 19th Century and recalls an era when New York was the nation’s leading sugar producer.

Mr. Yassky angered local preservationists last year by helping to override the landmark designation of a nearby warehouse. The Domino plant, he said is more significant. “It’s an icon,” he said. “It’s a landmark in the popular sense of the word. When I talk to people in Queens or Manhattan about that part of my district, I say it’s right by the Domino Sugar Factory, and they know where that is.”

Ironically, Alice Rich, a member of the waterfront alliance, said her group’s efforts had benefitted from the rapid development that followed the comprehensive rezoning of the local waterfront in May 2005. “People,” she said, “can see what’s disappearing.”

The developers, who have yet to unveil concrete plans, warn that too much preservation could jeopardize their project and the construction in the area of low-income housing.

“We certainly support preservation,” said Lloyd Kaplan, a spokesman for the property’s owners. But he added, “Our priority is affordable housing, and we want to achieve a balanced plan.”

The Rev. Jim O'Shea, president of Churches United for Fair Housing, made a similar point. “If you look at it in human terms,” he said, “How many families do you want to knock out of housing in the community, at what price, and what are you preserving?”

There may be room for compromise. Mary Habstritt, president of the Roebling chapter of the national Society for Industrial Archeology, said that she would like to see more kept intact than just the distinctive Domino sign. Some of the old factory’s equipment, if preserved, could tell the story of the refining industry that once thrived along the waterfront, she said.

But she, along with Mr. Yassky and Ms. Rich, says that preservation and housing are not incompatible. “There have been lots of industrial buildings put to other uses, including residential,” Ms. Habstritt said. “It just demands creativity and openmindedness.”
1. What two groups are “facing off” according to DOCUMENT 9?

2. What are the two groups arguing about?

3. What does the Waterfront Preservation Alliance of Greenpoint and Williamsburg want? What does the developer want?

4. Would you support the Waterfront Preservation Alliance, the developer or a compromise? Why?
1. Examine both documents. Describe what is different in DOCUMENT 10B compared to DOCUMENT 10A.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. What year was DOCUMENT 10A taken? What kind of store is depicted in the image?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. What year was DOCUMENT 10B taken? What kind of store is depicted in the image?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. What changes can you infer happened in Williamsburg from these documents from the 1990s to 2010s?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

GLOSSARY

Bisect: To divide into two parts

Charter (v): To make official via documentation

Coldwater Flats: An apartment with no running hot water

Consolidate: To join or combine

Convey: To show or to tell

Decay: To rot; to decrease

Hasidic: A branch of Orthodox Judaism

Inference: A guess using evidence or reasoning

Nazism: Political and economic ideas popular in Germany from 1933-1945, a huge factor in the start of World War II

Surveyor: Someone who examines or measures land

Tenement: A large building with apartments or rooms for rent, often in a poorer part of a city

Trustee: A person, usually part of a group of many people, selected to run the affairs of a company, institution, etc.