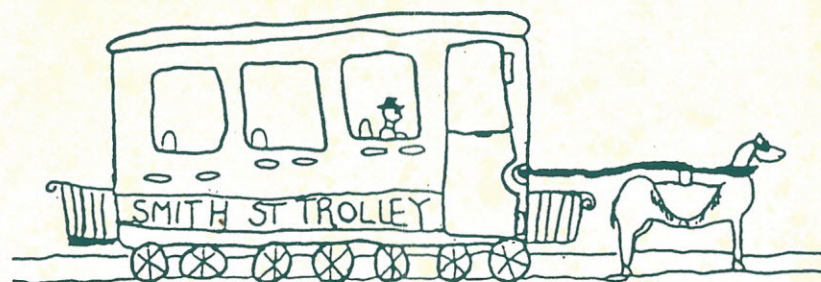


# *Discover Smith Street*



*A Walking Tour and  
Guide Book*



# Discover Smith Street

Discover Smith Street covers a time span from the Dutch settlers in the New World to the Downtown Brooklyn of the 1990's. The highlights from various eras which are captured on the posters depict not just the usual neighborhood history, but also the history of the street from a commercial point of view. The posters are arranged as a guidebook for self-guided tours.

The idea of documenting and chronicling the life story and the future of a commercial street grew from a series of happy coincidences.

The Merchants Association of Smith Street (MASS), and the faculty, students and administrators of P.S. 261 and I.S. 293, and the staff of the Prospect Park Environmental Center (PPEC) had worked together before on projects which resulted in positive experiences for all.

Then, there was the fact that a prototype existed. Developed ten years ago, it had been produced by PPEC executive director John Muir.

With the commitment of these three groups to join forces on the Discover Smith Street project came a detailed plan of action, proposal, and budget - put together by Bette Stoltz, Executive Director of MASS, Toba Zigmund, Director of the Cultural Enrichment Program at P.S. 261, and Charles Monaco, Director of School Programs at PPEC, with the invaluable guidance of John Muir, who had done it before.

We are extremely grateful that the N.Y.C. Office of Business Development recognized the value of this project. They gave it major financial support. As a documentary "anatomy" of a shopping street, the project has a general value. As a marketing tool for Smith Street, it appeals both to potential customers and to potential business people, improving the community's perception of the street.

We are also extremely grateful that the New York City Board of Education, Community School District 15, under the leadership of Dr. Jerrold Glassman, recognized the value of this project with major financial support. Approximately 110 students participated in the project. Through additional support by the Citywide Umbrella Bureau, all of them received PPEC's "Neighborhood Streetscapes" environmental education program, tailored especially for Smith Street with slide shows and walking tours. The children silk screened the poster headings and borders, word processed the texts of the posters on their school computers, wrote titles in calligraphy, took and developed the photographs, and drew, in various media, the lovely illustrations for the posters. Most importantly, they entered into the spirit of the project and improved their attitude about their own neighborhood. The project also produces a piece of business related school curriculum to be used to achieve "local studies" as suggested by the Board of Education.

Our gratitude goes to Citibank's Urban Services/Community Affairs Department which made an important contribution towards the printing of this book. We also thank our local branch of Chemical Bank for their contribution.

The Cultural Enrichment Program is a special program which owes its existence to the commitment of the P.S. 261 PTA, and a legislative grant generously provided to the school by Assemblyman Roger Green.

Discover Smith Street involved the work of about 200 people. We have endeavored to list their names on the inside back cover. But, as always in a project such as this, some people so captured the spirit of the thing that they must be specially recognized.

Toba Zigmund of P.S. 261 co-coordinated the project with me and was a true partner in the venture every step of the way from the initial planning to the final production.

Charles Monaco of PPEC, also a co-coordinator in the project, was responsible for developing and teaching the "Streetscapes" environmental education phase of the project, which inspired the students to such excellent work.

Barbara Polny, art teacher at I.S. 293, added the dimension of silk screening to the project because she wanted to give her students a new skill. She then became so much a part of every aspect of the poster production that her mark is on every single one.

John Gallagher, writer/researcher/historian, set the tone for the poster texts with his well detailed, delightfully written research.

Sylvia DeMonte-Bayard, publisher of "The Newspaper," Smith Street businessperson and resident, was enthusiastic and supportive of the project from the beginning. She donated enormous amounts of photocopying and countless hours of her technical expertise and aesthetic judgement.

Selma Abramowitz, community activist and Smith Street developer, donated many hours of her time to the layout and paste-up of the posters, both at home and at I.S. 293. She donated the Wyckoff House storefront gallery space for the first official gallery showing of the posters.

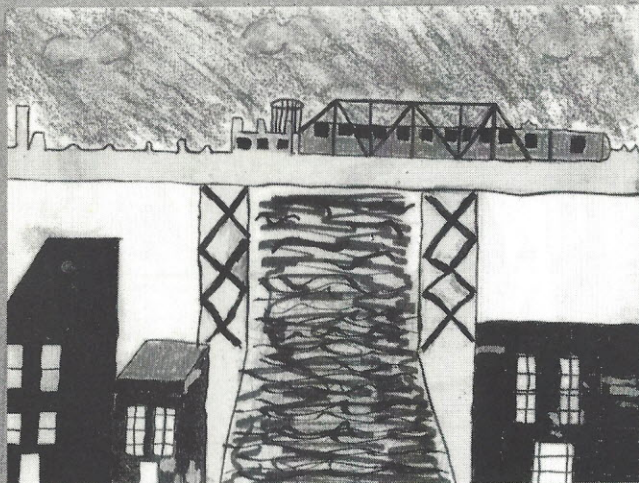
Thomas Leahy, District 15 Magnet Program Coordinator and Arthur Foresta, District 15 Resource Development and Computer Education Director were both extremely supportive of a project combining the resources of three non-profit groups. They made things work smoothly and efficiently.

Bette Stoltz - Editor/Project Coordinator,  
"Discover Smith Street"



The tour begins at Smith Street and 2nd Place in the Subway Entry Plaza.

## Discover Smith Street



**87 1/2 FEET HIGH**

Why is the IND Subway so high at 9th Street?

Most of the IND lines was built to run in underground tunnels. However, beyond Carroll Street, where the trains rise up on New York City's highest transit overpass, the engineers found problems when they tested to see if they could run a subway tunnel under the Gowanus Canal. They found the ground too spongy -- filled with water -- to easily dig or tunnel the subway line. They couldn't build a draw bridge, as exist over Union and Third Streets, as this might interfere with the train schedule. Their solution was to build the overpass, high enough, some 87 1/2 feet, so that any boat that went up the Gowanus could get through under it.

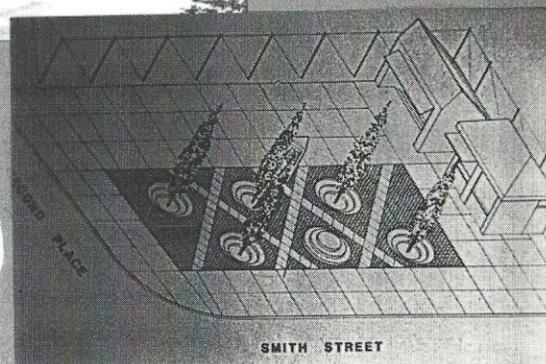
## Discover Smith Street

### THE SUBWAY



One of the first civic efforts of the Carroll Gardens Association this little plaza was designed by local architect Jack D'Acquisto and constructed by local contractors with funds raised by the community residents and businesses.

### Subway Entry Plaza



SMITH STREET

Like the rest of Smith Street it has suffered from some settlement problems but a small spruce-up effort would make a big difference.

As a Smith Street non-profit organization MASS would be happy to act as the vehicle for getting community volunteers together to meet, plan improvements, fund raise and implement them. Contact us at 215 Smith Street or call 852-0328.



## Smith Street and 2nd Place, still at the Subway Entry Plaza.

# Discover Smith Street

## GASWORKS ON 5TH STREET

Gaslight came to Brooklyn in 1848 and soon gas manufacturing plants and storage tanks dotted the Gowanus with its easy access by barge for coal, from which the gas was made. By 1860, the small private gas companies that had lined Bond Street were absorbed by Citizen's Gas Company which built a large gas plant between Smith Street and the canal, from Fifth to Ninth Streets. The area was soon known as the "gas house district," and stories were told of the "gas house gangs" of toughs who roamed this district of factories and modest housing.



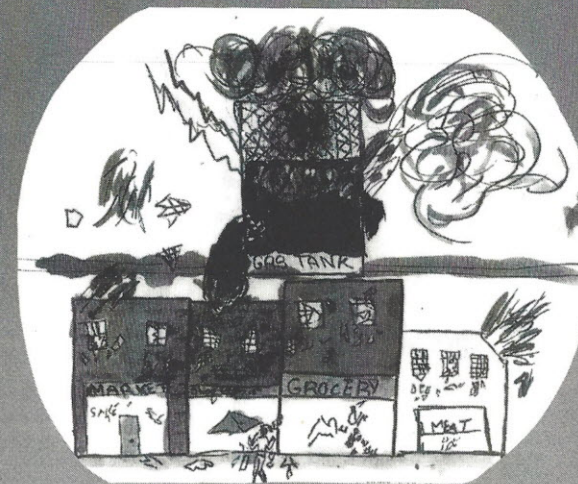
In 1895, the Brooklyn Union Gas Company took over the Citizen's plant and operated it, making gas until the mid-1960's when newly laid pipelines from the West brought natural gas to the city.

For safety, this gas works was surrounded by dirt revetments, or mounds, 15 feet high. These had been planted with grass and were regularly mowed. (Similar revetments can be seen from Union Street surrounding the household heating oil plant on the canal.)

# Discover Smith Street

## MORE GAS STORIES

In the late 1890's, gas tanks were an everyday part of life in South Brooklyn. Never out of one's range of vision, residents could see the huge gas tanks looming to the South. A local newspaper noted that there was an explosion in the 1890's when one of these tanks was hit by lightning during a summer storm. "A terrible roar was followed by a rush of air. Most every storefront (on Smith Street) was blown in. Ours was the one that escaped, probably because my father opened the door which lessened the resistance to the concussion of the blast," one eyewitness recalled. (The Newspaper, 2 May '86.)

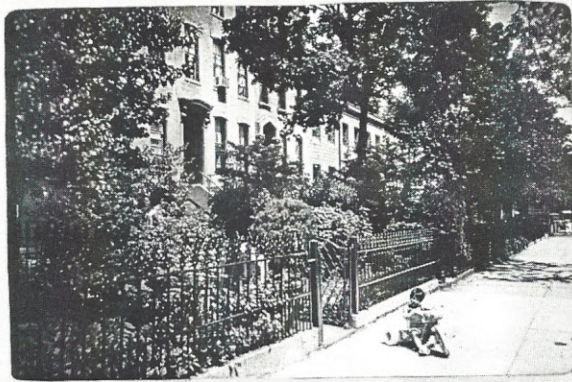


With the unavoidable sight of these gas tanks came an everpresent, heavy, unpleasant odor which drifted with the winds over South Brooklyn. Many parents believed that the fumes had curative powers, and so, even up to the 1950's, generations of children were brought to the gasworks to breathe the fumes, which they believed could open up clogged lungs and cure colds and other respiratory illnesses.



Walking along the west side of Smith Street between 1st Place and Carroll Street.

## Discover Smith Street

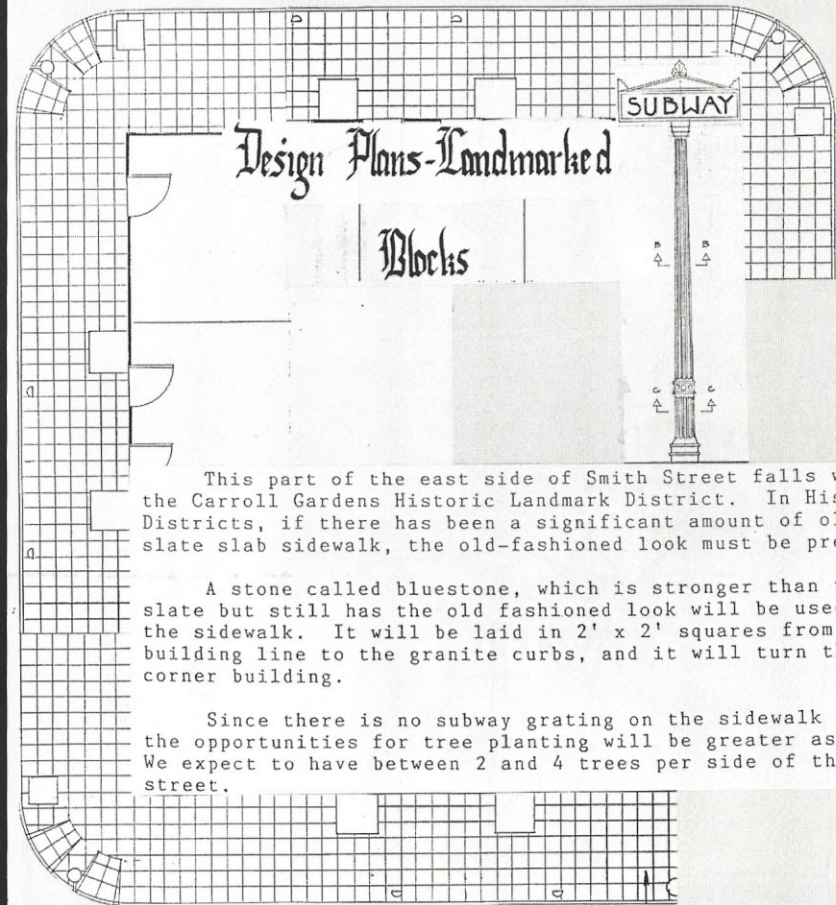


### Carroll Gardens Historic District.

A sense of 19th century graciousness and a feeling of sunny, airy openness on the streets of Carroll Gardens is the result of the foresighted, mid 19th century planning of Richard Butts, a surveyor. In his map of 1846 for the creation of the blocks from Union to Fourth Street, he provided lots of unusual depth with houses uniformly set back behind carefully tended front gardens. He gave this urban oasis a special gift of open space and quiet dignity.

Development of the historic district occurred from 1860 to 1880, the short time span giving an architectural coherence it might not otherwise have had. A spirit of cooperation existed among the builders as well, resulting in an architecturally unified approach, carefully adjusting height of stoops and roof cornice lines to the slope of the street.

## Discover Smith Street



This part of the east side of Smith Street falls within the Carroll Gardens Historic Landmark District. In Historic Districts, if there has been a significant amount of old slate slab sidewalk, the old-fashioned look must be preserved.

A stone called bluestone, which is stronger than the slate but still has the old fashioned look will be used for the sidewalk. It will be laid in 2' x 2' squares from the building line to the granite curbs, and it will turn the corner building.

Since there is no subway grating on the sidewalk here the opportunities for tree planting will be greater as well. We expect to have between 2 and 4 trees per side of the street.



## West side of Smith Street between Carroll and President Streets.

# Discover Smith Street

## Carroll Park

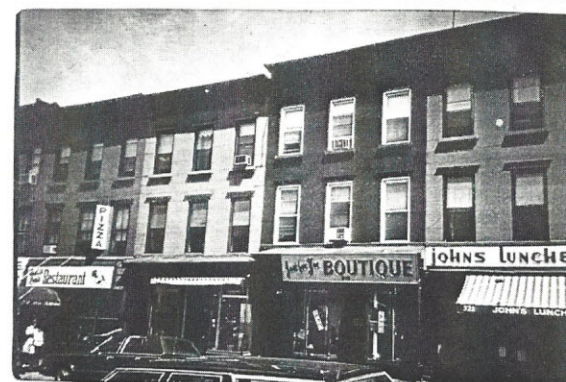
In the late 1840's Carroll Park was a private garden intended for use by the residents of brownstones facing it. It was named for Charles Carroll, Maryland signer of the Declaration of Independence, in honor of the Maryland regiment which defended the Old Stone House on 3rd Street during the Revolutionary War. Despite opposition by landowners like Nicholas Luquer, who feared increased taxation, efforts by the gardens 12 owner's to create a public park succeeded. By act of the State Legislature the slightly under 2 acre piece of land became Brooklyn's 3rd public park in 1853.

Originally in a totally unimproved state - little more than a mud hole with a fence around it; Brooklyn City Fathers began improving it in 1870. It has always been well used by the community.



# Discover Smith Street

## Smith Street Landmarked



### SMITH STREET BUILDINGS IN HISTORIC DISTRICT

(Nos. 315-353) Between Union & Second Streets. These rows of 3 story brownstone houses were built in the early 1870's by a single builder, William J. Bedell. Although they were built with shops at ground level and apartments above, they are generally in character with the houses on President and Carroll Streets.

No's 317 and 347 retain much of their original Victorian storefront detail.

Because these buildings are in the Landmark District their facades are protected and owners must obtain the approval of the N.Y.C. Landmarks Preservation Commission before doing anything which will affect their appearance.



## President to Union Streets.

# Discover Smith Street

## Early History



In the 17th century, Dutch farmers settled on a few islands of solid land in the marshy basin through which the Gowanus Creek wandered. It was a favorite place to find oysters, with some reputed to be a foot long. By the time of the American Revolution, the creek had been dammed to form a mill pond.

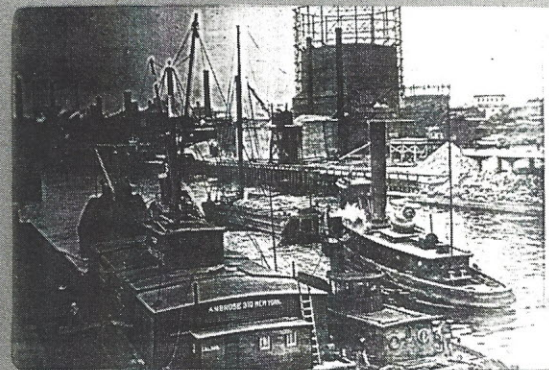
The famous "Battle of Long Island" on August 27, 1776 saw fierce exchanges and battle over the Gowanus area, centering around the "Old Stone House" on 3rd Street and 4th Avenue.

After the Revolution, the area became more settled, more farmland was claimed from the marsh and the Gowanus was deepened to a navigable waterway with coastal schooners bobbing at the docks.

The naturally protected Gowanus Bay became bustling with commerce; docks and warehouses rapidly developed.

# Discover Smith Street

## THE GOWANUS CANAL



In 1867, dredging of the swampy land westward and slightly inland from Red Hook, created a water passage to the Bay. This passage was called the Gowanus Canal, and resulted in the building of an important harbor facility and ideal industrial area.

The natural creek and sheltered waterway came into commercial use in 1884, when the Gowanus Towing Company was formed, employing just one tugboat. For the most part, this company had no competitors on the canal and by WWI, they had a dozen boats hauling up to 20,000 tons of coal a day, plus other commodities. The company is still in operation today, with two tugboats that tow all over the harbor.

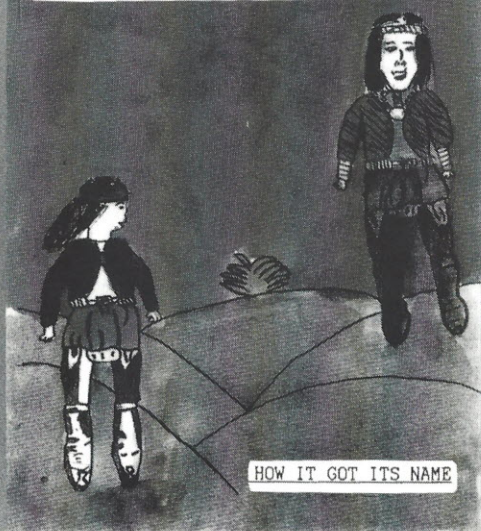
Since 1911, efforts have been made to clean up this stagnant, malodorous body of water, once called "Lavender Lake" by nearby residents. Clean-up attempts continue to this date, with current proposals including a recreational marina, a revived industrial waterway, or filling it in and building apartment towers.



Corner of Smith and Union Streets.

# Discover Smith Street

## GOWANUS



HOW IT GOT ITS NAME

Our area of Brooklyn was originally inhabited by the Canarsie Indians, one of the ten existing Indian tribes of Long Island, and led by the Indian Chief, "Gowanee." Gowanus is an Algonquin Indian word meaning "The place where the Indian, Gowanee, planted his corn." The word became attached to the Gowanus' Creek, originally a meandering waterway surrounded by marshes and fed by brooks.

A large tract of land was purchased from these Indians by the Dutch in 1638. The first house ever constructed in Breuchelen (Brooklyn) was built by William Adriaens in the lower, marshy area of the Gowanus section.

The earliest settlers navigated the waterway and used it as their major means of transportation and trade. The Indians maintained a burial ground not far from here near the head of the Gowanus Creek, but no sign of these people who named the place remains today.

# Discover Smith Street

## Brownstone/Limestone

The building material used most commonly on Smith Street was brick - however, there are many examples of brownstone and limestone buildings, particularly in the Carroll Gardens area.



The soft, close-grained sandstone was shipped by barge from quarries in the Connecticut River Valley and New Jersey's Hackensack River Valley, through the harbor and up the canal into Brooklyn. It was used to face so many houses that whole neighborhoods are called Brownstone areas. Even brick houses were commonly given "rusticated" brownstone or limestone basement walls up to the stoops and brownstone lintels, sills, carved rosettes or sunbursts as trim.

Towards the 1890's tastes were for a lighter look and limestone became more popular.



## Southwest corner of Smith and Sackett Streets.

# Discover Smith Street

## PAVING OPTIONS

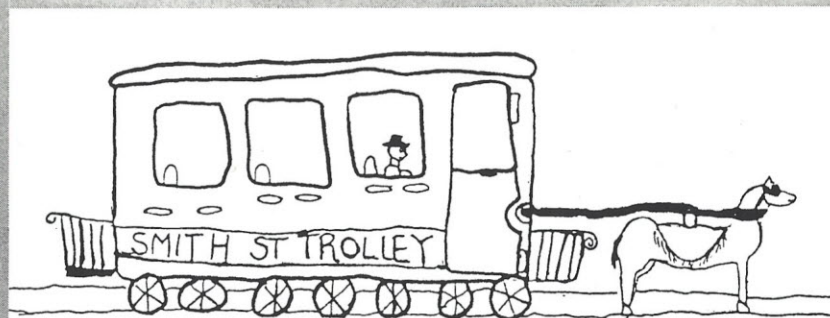
PAVING OPTIONS - Slate/Concrete/Asphalt/Cobblestones

Here and there along Smith Street the past peeks out at us in the form of cobblestones showing from under the asphalt. The steps from a bare earth street to today's network of hopefully, smooth traffic arteries follows the development of transportation technologies - from horses to today's automobiles and trucks. Only streets which were already important thoroughfares by the late 1800's were cobblestoned before paving. Smith Street was one of them.



Sidewalks also were a very "civilized" addition. When they were installed, there was no such thing yet as pouring concrete but slate could be found in nearby areas and extracted from quarries in huge flat slabs which served very well as sidewalks and still do on many blocks.

# Discover Smith Street



## TROLLEY LINES

Trolley tracks were laid in Brooklyn in the 1850's; The first horse drawn cars began running on Smith Street in 1866. These cars held only twelve passengers and were pulled slowly by one horse.

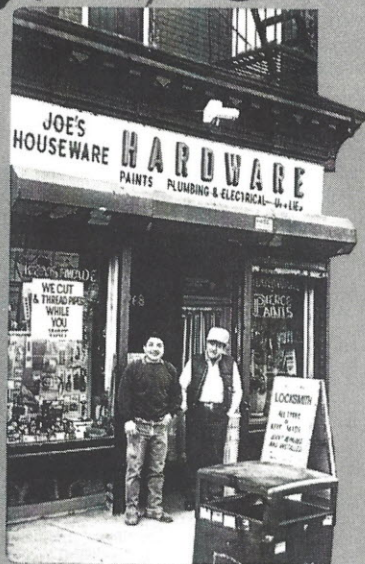
Trolleys did not come easily to Smith Street. Samuel Smith, whose property included the proposed roadway itself, fought the horse car company in the courts to keep from having tracks laid through his land. Not to be stopped, the Coney Island and Brooklyn Company quickly laid tracks over one weekend, when the courts were closed. They had gangs of men lay the tracks through Smith's land and down to Ninth Street, finishing 24 hours later.

By 1893, all the horse cars in Brooklyn had been replaced by electric trolleys. After World War II, the trolley which ran on Smith Street, following the 80-year old rails, was replaced by an electric trolley which ran on rubber tires. Around 1955, this trolley was replaced by a bus line. Old trolley tracks are still visible here and there on Smith Street.



## East side of Smith Street from Sackett to DeGraw Streets.

### Discover Smith Street



### Typical Victorian Store Fronts

The stores at 268, 259 and 174 Smith Street give us some clues to the past. Typical features of an original Victorian storefront are:

A store cornice made of wood or metal, with moldings & often with dentilles, visually separates the commercial from the residential floors and gives a profile to the building;

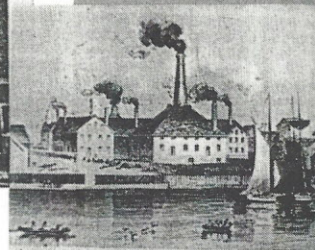
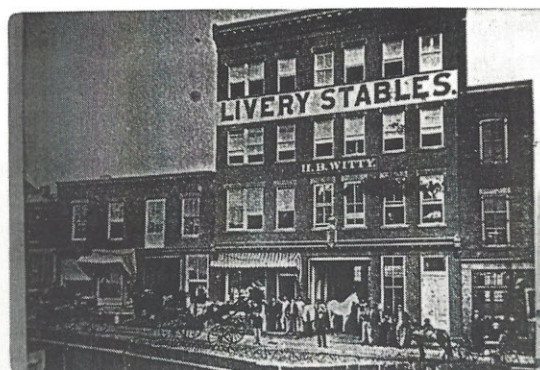
The sign band is the space under the cornice and above the show windows where the sign is meant to be installed. Canvas awnings were very common;

The storefront often has cast iron pilasters or columns which are decorative as well as structural;

The building material is usually wood - with fancy wood-working, moldings, brackets, gingerbread etc.;

The store entry door is recessed with an entry vestibule between the two show windows or, in smaller stores, on the side.

### Discover Smith Street



The Brooklyn Flint Glass Works on the waterfront near present-day Atlantic Avenue, from a business card, ca. 1830. (Courtesy Corning Glass Works Archives)

#### MID 1800's - COMMERCIAL & COTTAGE INDUSTRIES

By the 1820's Smith Street was laid out, paralleling the Gowanus and providing access to downtown Brooklyn. Small commercial enterprises and cottage manufacturing thrived. The area saw furniture making, soap manufacturing, ceramic and glassware production, hardware foundries and trade, banking and legal practices. Manufactured goods were shipped on barges to towns and villages up and down the coast.

Gaslight came to Brooklyn in 1848 and soon gas manufacturing plants and storage tanks dotted the Gowanus. By 1860, the small private gas companies were absorbed by Citizens Gas Company which built a large gas plant between Smith Street and the canal, from 5th to 9th Streets. The area was soon known as the "Gashouse District," home of the infamous young toughs "the gashouse gangs."



## Walking from DeGraw to Douglass Streets along Smith.

# Discover Smith Street

### CLUES TO THE PAST...LYONS SHOE STORE

This article from the Oct. 13, 1946 Brooklyn Eagle Newspaper talks about the Smith Street of the 1920's:

Smith Street from Fulton Street holds a lot of memories for Old Timers who have been Eagle readers for many years.

So suppose we leave Nutting's clothing store and pass the Bijou Theater and the Bijou Hotel. Let us not forget Sangerbund Hall -- many a good fight and many a good dance were held at that place.

Remember the odor of smoked meats coming from Fred Figge's place at Atlantic and Smith? We continue on past Kieselbach's paint store and Dr. Mary Eccles' pharmacy at Smith Street.

How can we forget these Old Timers such as Bleumenau's real estate office, Daly the undertaker, Liddle's bakery and Ryan's pawn shop? Then past Kurtz', Whalen's and Michaels' furniture stores and Strawgate's pharmacy at Warren Street.



As we near Butler street we recall Neilson's liquor store on one corner and Brook's dry goods store on the other. Between Butler and Douglass Streets we remember Cheap Ben's and Kelly's, both stationary stores.

As we leave Douglass street we recall Ulmer's bakery, Lyon's shoe store, Julian the jeweler (still at the same old stand), Rumpler's glazing shop, Mrs. Donovan's small candy store where we purchased a big bag of broken chocolate for a penny, the Van Denise's Pharmacy and Dawson's second-hand furniture store.

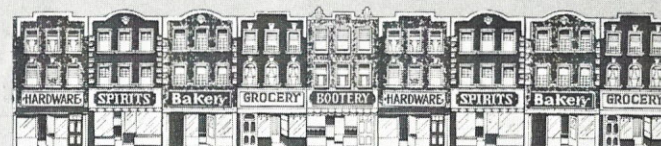
Between Degraw and Sackett Streets, we can't forget Mausau's and Cutler's cream store. Hess the hardware man, Truehold's bakery, Gitterman the butcher and Tischnor's stationary store. Annie Dunne's delicatessen, Martin Dill the grocer and Quinn's saloon.

As we near Sackett Street, we recall Pat Doherty's grocery store on one corner and Dreyer's dry goods on the other. The Dreamland Motion Picture Theater followed Dreyer's leaving there, and many Old Timers paid 5 cents to get in to see the cowboys and Indians...

# Discover Smith Street

### BUSINESS MIX - TURN OF THE CENTURY

This listing of Smith Street businesses, covering a period around 1890 - 1900 suggests an East Coast version of San Francisco's "Barbary Coast." Lots of cafes, services for people living alone, presumably seamen and laborers...



- |                               |                     |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| 2 pharmacies                  | 3 furniture stores  |
| 8 butchers                    | 2 undertakers       |
| 3 bakeries                    | 3 dry goods stores  |
| * 20 cafes                    | 1 shoe store        |
| (plus 1 cafe + bowling alley) | 1 delicatessen      |
| (plus 1 cabaret)              | 8 grocery stores    |
| 1 pool parlor                 | 1 milk store        |
| 2 candy stores                | 1 milk depot        |
| 1 public hall                 | 2 fish stores       |
| 1 real estate office          | 3 Chinese laundries |
| 3 barbers                     | 3 cigar stores      |
| 1 cobbler                     | 2 glaziers          |
| 1 plumbing shop               | 2 wallpaper stores  |
| 1 tailor                      | 1 costumer          |
| 1 livery stable               | 1 department store  |
| 1 cleaners                    | 1 clothing store    |
| 1 second-hand shop            | 1 baby shop         |
| 1 police headquarters         | 1 painter           |
| 1 notions                     | 1 photo gallery     |
| 1 soap factory                |                     |



## DeGraw to Douglass Streets along Smith Street.

# Discover Smith Street

### BUSINESS MIX -- 1920'S...

Only a scant generation later the business mix has changed to reflect the needs of families rather than single people. It is interesting to note that while there were fewer doctors, public medical care at this period there were still many pharmacies (which at that time dispensed broader health services)...

- 4 pharmacies
- 3 stationary stores
- 3 furniture stores (plus 1 used furnished store)
- 3 butchers
- 3 bakeries
- 2 motion pictures theaters
- 2 saloons
- 1 liquor store (plus 1 liquor and grocery store)
- 2 undertakers
- 2 dry goods stores
- 2 shoe stores
- 2 jewelry stores
- 2 ice cream stores
- 2 delicatessens
- 2 groceries (plus 1 liquor and grocery store, above)
- 1 candy store
- 1 public hall
- 1 pawn shop
- 1 real estate office
- 1 barber
- 1 cobbler
- 1 hardware shop
- 1 plumbing shop
- 1 glazier
- 1 paint store

# Discover Smith Street

### Business Mix- 80's



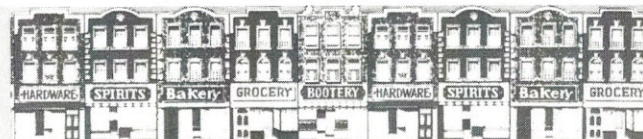
The business mix of today reflects the needs of households where all the adults are working - lots of convenience shopping - prepared foods, many personal & household services for people with limited free time.

FOOD, including 15 Grocery/Deli's, 1 Supermarket, 2 each of Produce & Fish Markets, and Liquor Stores, and 1 each of Bakery, Butcher & Gourmet Shop - plus 9 Restaurants, 3 Pizzerias, 3 Chinese Take Outs - is the major category.

PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL SERVICES - such as 5 Doctors, 3 Dentists, 3 Lawyers, 4 Pharmacies, 6 Realtors, 3 Insurance Brokers, 5 Hairstylists, 3 Barbers, 1 Nails/Facials, 2 Driving Schools, 3 Accountants, 2 Travel agents - are thriving.

HOUSEHOLD SERVICES- are also strongly represented with: 6 Dry Cleaners, 3 Laundromats, 3 Video Rental, 2 each of Appliance Repair, Shoe Repair, Car Service, Check Cash & Flowers/Plants, and 1 each of Glazier, Electrician, Carpenter, and Fuel Oil.

MERCHANDISE - is available for sale in: 5 Newspaper/Candy stores, 3 each of Furniture, Hardware, Menswear, Shoe, Womens/Childrens, Jewelry, Better Sportswear, 2 each of Gifts, Religious articles, Bookstores, Musical Instruments, and 1 each of Health/Beauty Aids, Bicycles, Greeting Cards, Designer Crafts & Scuba Shops.





Walking along the west side of Smith Street from Douglass to Butler Streets.

# Discover Smith Street

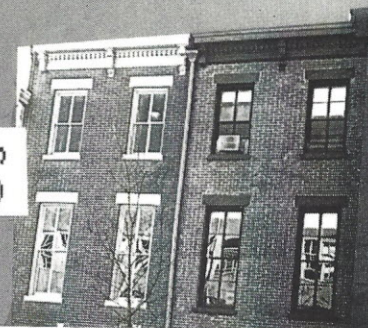
## The Masonry Genius



Unquestionably this building is the masonry masterpiece of Smith Street. It is rich in detail, combining red brick and red mortar with black brick used both as framing and in a variety of geometric patterns across the facade. To this it adds white limestone used in a variety of ways including floral engraved "eyebrow" lintels over six of the windows. Set into the limestone panels at the top, between the cornice brackets are yet another decorative element -- ceramic tiles -- whose use is repeated in diamond shaped effects, between the first and third floor windows. Finally, as if to prove to us that his talent extended to bricklaying itself he incorporated keyhole and slit shaped inserts or niches and reversed "stepped" effects into the central portion of the facade. It is as though -- in this building -- the masonry genius provided a sampler of everything he could possibly do. We are grateful to the owners for a faithful restoration.

# Discover Smith Street

## WINDOWS



### LAMENT FOR THE "TWO OVER TWO"

Until about 1865, windows were small and panes were made by blowing a bubble of molten glass against a flat surface and allowing it to cool. If you look at sash windows -- those with one window frame on top and another on the bottom which can be raised or lowered -- you will see many with four or six small panes in each of the frames (called four over fours or six over six's).

In 1861, a way was found to make large sheets of flat glass at an affordable price on Smith Street the builders chose "two over two" as the predominant style.

Nowadays when people have new windows installed we see one pane on top and one on the bottom. The quaint look of the "two over twos," "six over sixes," etc. is disappearing from our streets.





## Southeast corner of Smith and Butler Streets.

# Discover Smith Street

Before I. S. 293



I.S. 293 was built in 1967, the year inscribed in the cornerstone of the school building. Before it was built students went to school at 347 Baltic Street, now Board of Ed offices.

It was built on the spot where another institution of learning had stood. St. Francis College, a cluster of 4 - and 5 - story buildings with a small campus where the gardens would be, had been there since the 1860's.

A police precinct building was also located on Butler Street near Court Street.



# Discover Smith Street

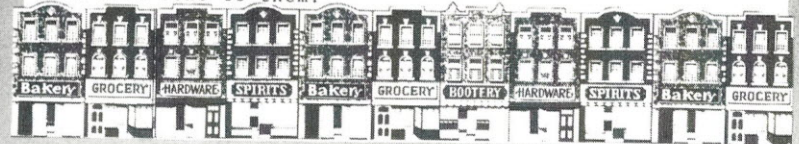
## The Roof Lines of our Logo



A logo is a visual way to establish an identity. When MASS began to think about developing a logo we wanted to get across the message that we were taking what was there already, improving it, restoring it, investing in it and making it "come alive."

How to create an image especially for Smith Street? After much thought - the answer came right before our eyes - the view we see when standing in front of our own office. The roof lines of our logo are the tops of the buildings on the west side of Smith Street from Baltic to Butler. Do you recognize them?

We are proud to tell you that of the ten buildings on this side of the street - 6 have already had major restoration work done to them.



MERCHANTS ASSOCIATION OF SMITH STREET  
**MASS**



Walking along east side of Smith Street from Butler to Baltic Streets.

## Discover Smith Street

### CLUES TO THE PAST - KEYS AT 215

The floor of the entry vestibule at 215 Smith Street has a story to tell - about what kind of store might have been there before. Embedded in the cement in a decorative arrangement that has entertained children for many years are 26 keys, and 2 which have left only their impressions.

Was 215 once a hardware store? Or a locksmith?

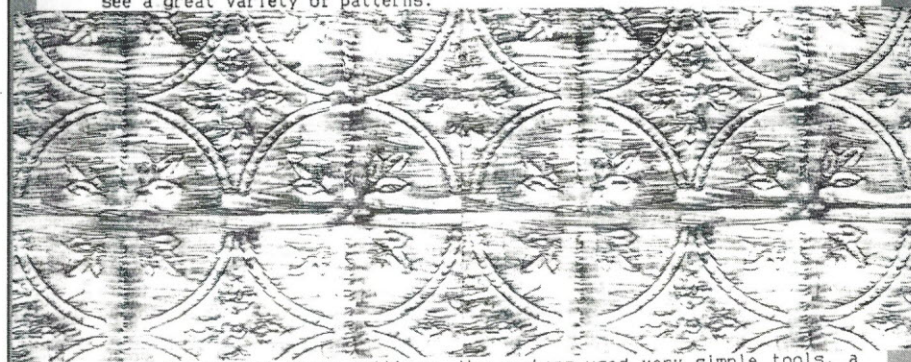


## Discover Smith Street

### Tin Ceilings

When you are in the shops along Smith Street, do you ever look up and see patterns in the ceiling? These ceilings with patterns are usually called "Tin Ceilings." They were once made of tin, but are mostly made of iron that has passed through very heavy rollers until it forms very thin sheets. These sheets measure only 1/32 of an inch thick -- half the distance between the smallest marks, 1/16 of an inch, you find on most rulers. These sheets are so thin, that workers installing the tin ceilings have to wear heavy gloves to avoid cutting their hands. The rollers have patterns on them and the patterns are repeated on these sheets of iron. This is called embossing.

Tin ceilings were very popular from about the 1860's -- when many of the buildings along Smith Street were going up -- to around 1920. If you visit a number of the stores along the street and look up, you will see a great variety of patterns.



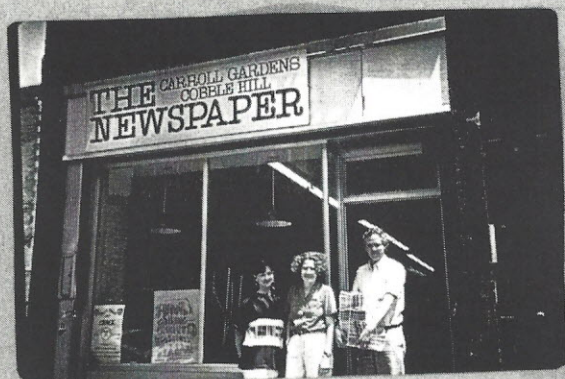
To install these ceilings, the workers used very simple tools, a hammer, tin shears, and a cord to insure the strips of metal were installed evenly. First, the worker would nail thin strips of wood, called laths to the ceiling and around the walls for a few inches down. Strips of metal would be cut with the shears to fit and then nailed to the laths. The worker would use galvanized nails, which are coated with a non-rusting metal, zinc, so they will not damage the ceiling.

Once the ceiling was covered, and this usually only took a day's work, the one who installed it would add a cornice -- a strip of patterned metal a few inches wide -- around the walls to finish the job neatly.



Still between Butler and Baltic Streets.

## Discover Smith Street



### Interview

What Do You Think Smith Street Will Be Like 10 Years From Now?

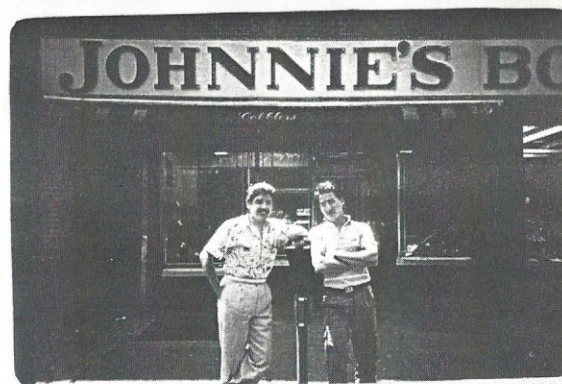
While still retaining its unique historical architectural style of three- and four-story buildings, Smith Street will be fresh and vibrant with its new patterned sidewalks, trees and streets.

Both residents and merchants will look to the revitalized street with a sense of pride in its ethnic diversity and its shops. Smith Street will combine the ambiance of a small town with the urban sophistication of specialized shops carrying merchandise from many countries.

Smith Street will serve as the commercial and social hub of the Cobble Hill, Boerum Hill and Carroll Gardens communities - it will attract shoppers, as well as walkers out for a pleasant neighborhood stroll.

Sylvia DeMonte-Bayard  
Editor and publisher of The Newspaper, owner  
of Sylvin Graphics and Smith Street resident

## Discover Smith Street



### Interview- John Verrangia - Johnnies Bootery

John grew up on Smith Street - "Most stores were family owned and they lived above. The streets were cobblestoned . . . and the trolleys ran back and forth (it was a 2 way street). Smith was the main shopping street for clothing and furniture - the other shopping streets had mostly food & convenience items."

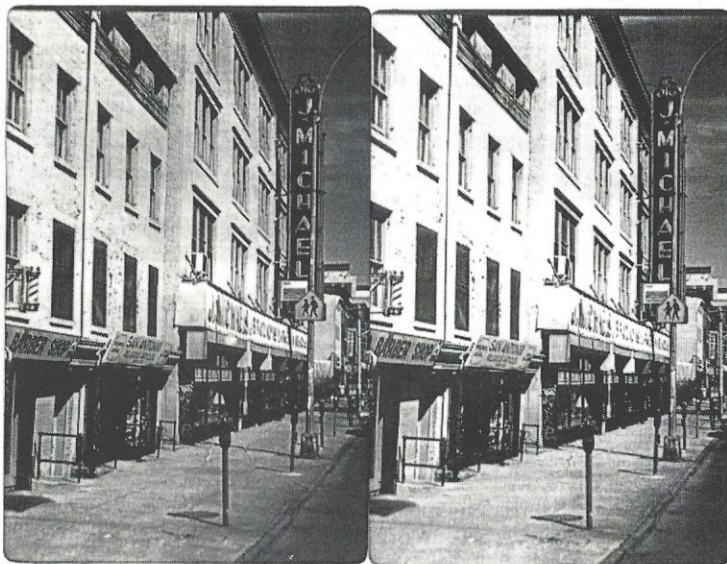
"In ten years Smith Street will play that same sort of role. Many more boutiques and especially more restaurants - the new sidewalks will be the turning point." "I personally think that the way we survived for 47 years, through good times and bad, was by maintaining a high standard."

"To a dedicated businessman - his business is first - your mind operates at all times - it's not a 9 to 5 job. You should research thoroughly before starting a business and you must be an expert in your own field - study your own business on an ongoing basis."



West side of Smith Street between Baltic and Warren Streets.

## Discover Smith Street



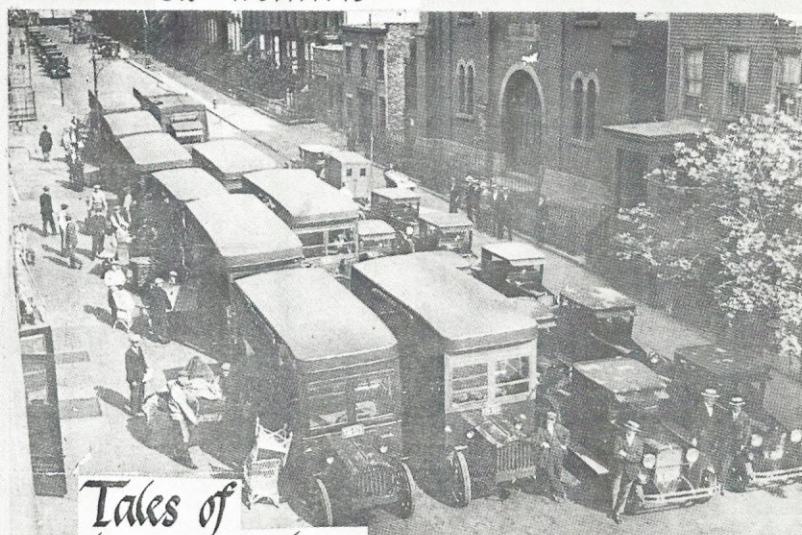
### MYSTERIES OF SMITH STREET

#### 192 - 194 - A Few Steps Down

The buildings at 192 and 194 Smith Street have shops that are a few steps below the level of the sidewalk. How did this happen? Were they built that way? Were the shops originally at street level and through new construction, the building up of the sidewalk or the coming of the subway did the sidewalk rise? Or, were they originally private houses with stoops which were removed during remodeling, leaving the entrance to the ground floor where it always was - a step or two below sidewalk level?

## Discover Smith Street

J. Michaels -



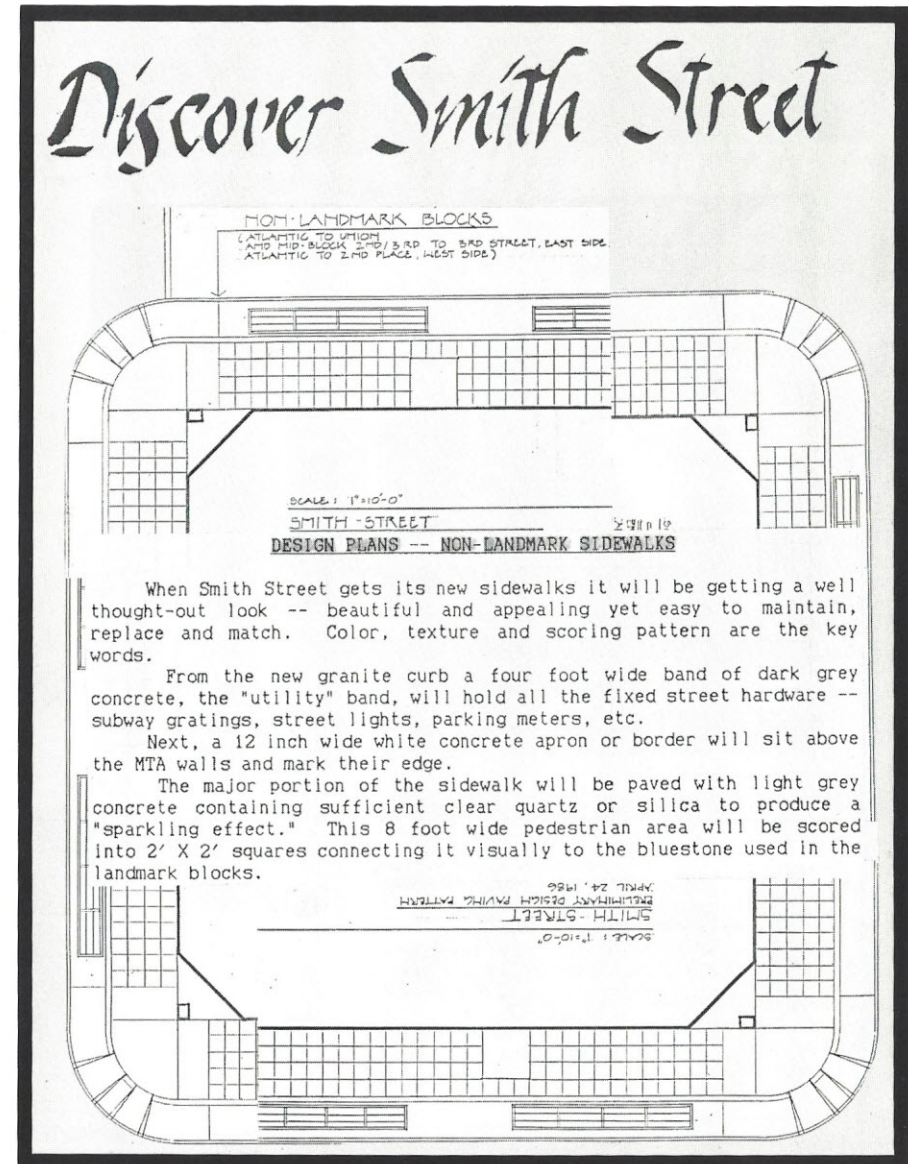
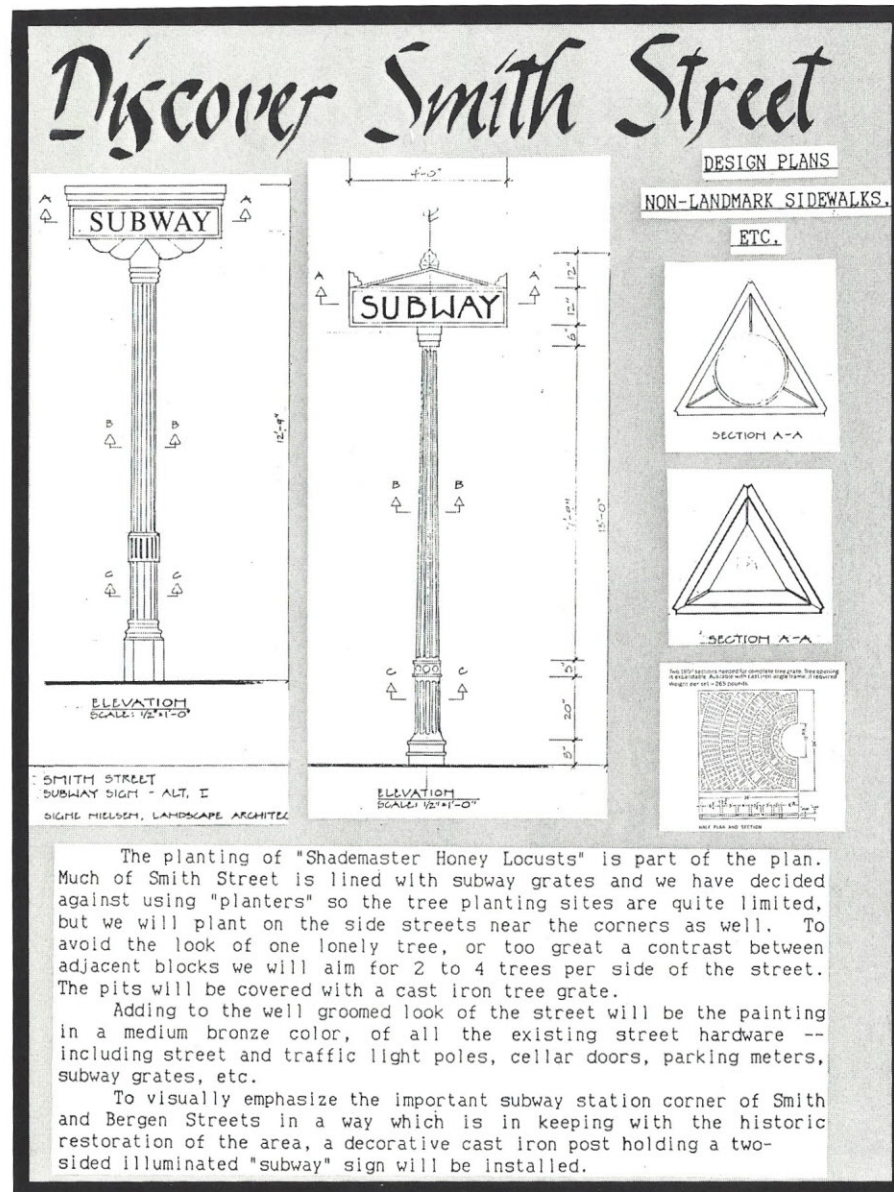
### Tales of Furniture Row

Often, when people buy expensive items, such as furniture, they pay in installments. Nowadays, this could mean paying with a credit card or going to the store each month to pay the installments.

But not too very long ago, the furniture store would have its "collectors" who would visit a family once a week and collect small sums of money, sometimes as little as 25 cents towards that suite of furniture they had bought. Usually, these collectors were young men in their first full time adult job. In stores such as J. Michaels, the collectors in the 1920's and 1930's all wore the same outfit - a dark sport jacket and lighter colored trousers, and a hat. In the summer months, and this meant from Memorial Day in May to Labor Day in September, they wore flat straw hats called boaters. They would drive around Brooklyn in their small, two-seat Ford coupes with their pocket-sized account books. Often, these visits would last for more than a year until the furniture was paid for.



## Still between Baltic and Warren Streets.





Northwest corner of Smith and Warren Streets.

# Discover Smith Street

## Cobble Hill Historic District



In the 1800's, Cobble Hill developed as a residential district of row houses in Greek, Gothic and Romanesque Revival, and Italianate styles. The area attracted well-to-do English at first, later Irish, Swedish, Italian and more recently Middle Eastern people to its tree shaded blocks.

Threatened by urban renewal projects in the 1950's & 1960's residents formed the Cobble Hill Association and fought to preserve and improve their neighborhood. They won Landmark District status for 20 blocks of Cobble Hill, including philanthropist Alfred Tredway White's. "The Tower Buildings" and picturesque Warren "Mews". N.Y.C.'s first low rent housing for workers, and a model for their time.

The Association helped create and maintain the lovely Cobble Hill Park and continues to preserve and improve the quality of life in their community.

# Discover Smith Street



## Interview

INTERVIEW  
with ROSE SANTIAGO of JAVIER DISCOUNT

"You work harder when it's your own business. We started very young. Even though our house is in another part of Brooklyn, this is our neighborhood -- our big family. We raised our children here -- they went to school here -- we stopped to give them lunch -- help with homework. We still go to church here."

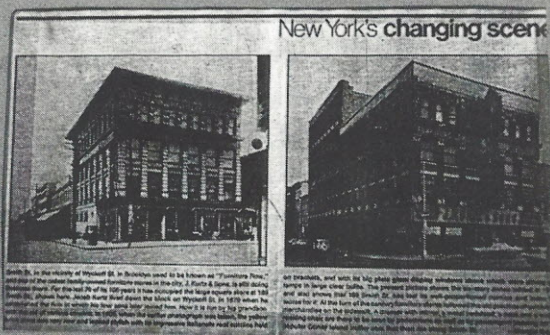
Rose thinks the area will be vastly improved in 10 years -- new people -- new incentives. They have changed their stock to carry completely new lines -- for renovators. "If we have what people want they will not go anywhere else. If you make them feel welcome they will be your customers."

"Being in business for yourself you have to push yourself. You cannot let yourself be afraid to act -- do it -- Take the chance."



## Southeast corner of Smith and Wyckoff Streets.

# Discover Smith Street



## Tales of Furniture Row

This building was once the home of the large furniture outlet owned by the Kurtz family. Jacob & Gittle Kurtz, who came originally from Germany, founded the business in 1870. They were the first to operate a furniture store on Smith Street which later came to be known as "Furniture Row."

At the turn of the century their original store burned down and the Kurtz's built this corner building in 1902/1905. The taller, rear structure went up in 1910/1912. There were lots of furniture stores on the street then - Whalen's & Michaels across the street and up near Schermerhorn - Spears & Ludwig Baumann's which went when they built the subway.

Three generations of Kurtz's ran this business until it closed in 1977.

# Discover Smith Street

## Tales of Furniture Row

### THE CORNICES

### WYCKOFF HOUSE

### A COPPER STOREFRONT




When the Kurtz Furniture store closed in 1977 the buildings stood empty for seven years. They had, at some point, lost their well-proportioned Italianate cornices and the elegant and rare cast copper storefront was beyond repair.

Fate was extremely kind to these handsome buildings. They have been newly renovated into the Wyckoff House Condominiums. The restoration was done by developers sensitive to community pride in Historic Districts. The beautiful cornices were made to order to match the original design by 20th century craftsmen.

Finding a cast copper craftsman to re-create the storefronts was yet another miracle. This restoration sets a high standard for other developers to follow.



# Discover Smith Street



## Mysteries of Smith Street - Rear Houses.

There are hidden buildings in many of the blocks between Smith and Court or Hoyt Streets. You can see them if you walk down Butler Street - houses in the center of the block, not facing on the street.

The fact that long narrow passages were left between row houses to provide access indicates that they were built before the row houses were, or perhaps simultaneously. The passages are too narrow for a carriage or horse drawn wagon. Why were these buildings put up?

Apartment living only began around 1890. Before that, single workers lived with their own families or as boarders with other families. Were these houses built as rooming houses for single workers? What is your theory?

# Discover Smith Street

## Street Reconstruction Analysis.

**LEGEND**

<b>BUILDING IMAGE</b>	<b>VIEWS</b>
[Pattern] POOR COHERENCE	[Arrow] VIEWS DOWN STREET
[Pattern] APPEAL CHARACTER	[Box] good [Box] bad
[Pattern] PORCHES	[Box] FACADE AT CORNER
[Pattern] PORCHES	[Box] good [Box] bad
<b>FACADES</b>	
[Pattern] SOFT PERIODICULAR BUILDINGS	<b>BUILDING EMPHASISMENTS</b>
[Pattern] AVENUE	[Box] PARKING
[Pattern] FIRE ESCAPE	[Box] STOREFRONT ONLY
[Pattern] BANNER/FLAG	[Box] FACADE ONLY
<b>SIDWALKS</b>	[Box] FACADE AND STOREFRONT
[Pattern] PLANTERS	
[Pattern] RETAIL DISPLAYS	

In 1989 N.Y.C. will begin reconstructing Smith Street's street and sidewalks.

In March 1985 MASS contracted with Signe Nielsen, Landscape Architect.P.C. to work with the community to design how our new sidewalks and street furniture will look.

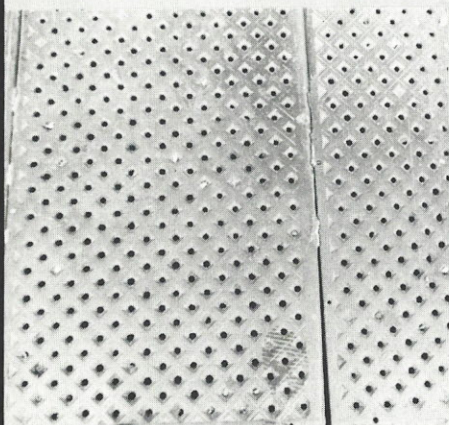
One of the first things Ms. Neilsen did as our architect was a report called a Street Reconstruction Analysis. In it she analyzes land use, trade area, traffic, parking, transportation and visual character of the street.

The visual character section lets us look at whole blocks together as groups of facades, store fronts and doorways. It points out what is good and what is bad, and suggests how we can emphasize the positives and eliminate the negatives.



## West side of Smith Street between Wyckoff and Bergen Streets.

# Discover Smith Street

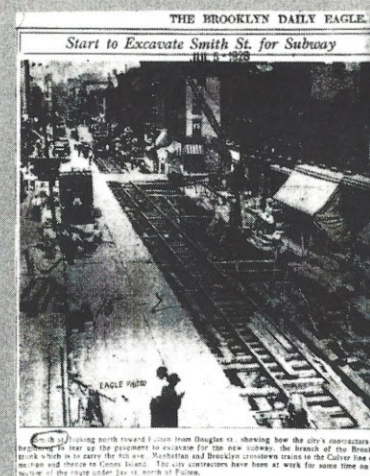


## VAULTS

When most of the buildings on Smith Street were built, in the late 1800's and early 1900's it was common to build "VAULTS", small rooms so to speak, under the sidewalk which connected by a doorway to the basements of the buildings. Coal and a wood were usually delivered into these "VAULTS" from the streets and stored there until used. Some vaults were also used as "cold storage" in pre-refrigerator days. Some vaults are easily identifiable from the street. The part of the sidewalk closest to the building has metal plates, grates, or even skylight glass over it. Others have been covered by new sidewalk put down over the years and the doorway from the basement sealed.

These vaults present problems for us in the coming reconstruction of the street. When the contractor comes along to break up the old sidewalk and pour a new one. He cannot be taken by surprise by a huge hollow space in front of a building with nothing to pour his concrete onto. Each vault must have its own roof, independent of the sidewalk, or it must be completely filled and sealed.

# Discover Smith Street



## THE BUILDING OF THE SUBWAY

In the late 1920's Smith Street, from Fulton to South of Carroll Street, looked like a mining camp. There was a trench the width of the street that went down 40 feet or more. This trench was dug in the open pit method. The builders just dug down, laid the tracks, and built the station, covering them up and repaving the street when they finished.

This was the building of the IND (Independent) subway line. The city decided, in 1928, to extend the existing IND lines along the heavily traveled route that ran down Smith Street from Fulton and then turned and ran up Ninth Street to Prospect Park. This, they decided, would give subway services to parts of Red Hook, as all the area was called at that time.

The IND subway was built and opened in section. The first service began in March of 1933, on a half mile, two-track line from Bergen to Jay Street. Other sections, including the one that connected at 4th Avenue with the BMT line, opened in October of the same year.



## East side of Smith Street between Bergen and Dean Streets.

# Discover Smith Street

## STREET NAMES

Many streets in Boerum Hill were named after public figures, heroes of the Revolutionary War or early landowners along Smith Street.

Dean Street was probably named for Col. Joseph Dean, a public servant and commander of the 64th Regiment of militia until 1823. There was also a Samuel Dean who owned property between Sackett and Union, and Smith and Hoyt as of 1864.



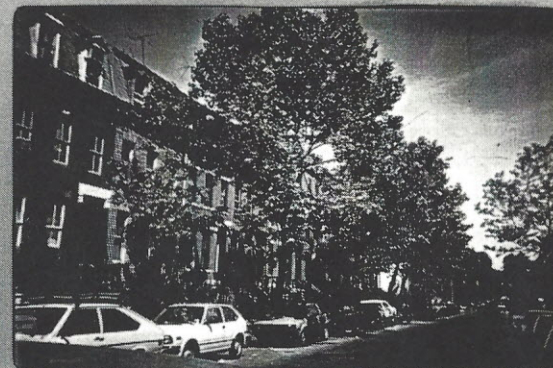
THE BERGEN HOMESTEAD

Jacob Bergen bought most of the land from Atlantic Avenue to Second Street along Smith Street in 1750. What land he didn't have was owned by George Bergen, who bought the block between Atlantic and Pacific St., east of Smith St., and the one between Dean and Bergen, east of Smith St. in 1749.

Some streets in the area, such as Warren and Wyckoff, have names that are not associated with either public dignitaries or early landowners: There was an old Warren family who resided on Long Island.

The Wyckoffs date from the Dutch period and come from Flatbush and The New Lots farther out in Brooklyn.

# Discover Smith Street



Boerum Hill is named for the family that farmed there during the Colonial period. It was a quiet neighborhood, settled by tradesmen and small businessmen. Many of them operated businesses on Smith Street, and lived down the side streets. Some of the more affluent landowners bought large, farm-size parcels of land in the area.

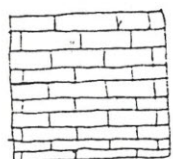
## BOERUM HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT

Through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, Boerum Hill pursued a stable course, occupied by many of the same families who had moved in when the streets were first opened and the first houses put-up. Italians and Iroquois Indians entered the neighborhood, followed by Arabs, Blacks and Hispanics; there had already been a large German-Scandinavian element. Steady waves of immigration meant that the neighborhood was not a wealthy one. Economic deterioration had the paradoxical effect of presenting to us a perfectly preserved mid-nineteenth century neighborhood; in scale with itself and presenting some of the most intact blockfronts remaining anywhere in the city.



## Walking along Smith Street from Dean to Pacific Streets.

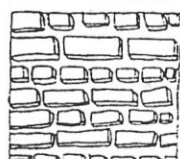
### Discover Smith Street



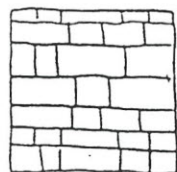
Flush joint, common bond, mid 19th century



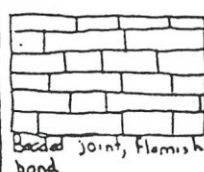
Flush joint, one-third running bond, early 20th century



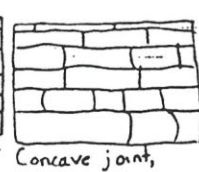
Raked joint, English bond, early 20th century



Colonial, grooved joint, Flemish bond



Beaded joint, Flemish bond



Concave joint, common bond

#### BRICKS & MORTAR

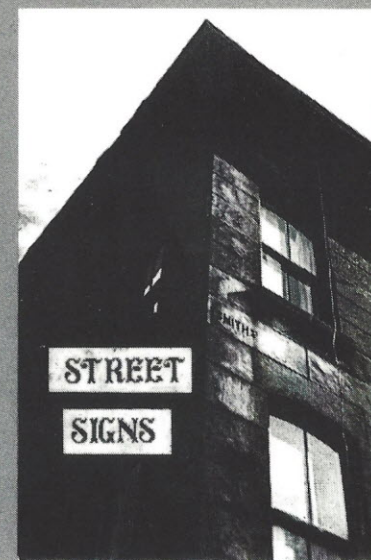
In the 19th century, to avoid threat of fire (especially in the cities), and because it was low-priced and easy to work with, brick became a popular building material.

If you look at brick walls, you will be able to see different patterns in the ways the bricks are arranged - these are called 'bonds'. Certain bonds were popular at certain times, in certain places, so that knowing the types of bonds can give you a clue as to when the building was put up.

There are four basic types of bonds: Running, Common (or American), Flemish and English. You can see the differences between them in the above illustrations. The bricks that are set lengthwise are called 'stretchers'; the ones set in the wall with the short end facing out are called headers. The headers are set this way to connect with the second thickness of brick, on the inside, to increase the strength of the wall.

Most of the buildings in the 1800's used the common, red brick. There are other kinds of bricks that became popular over the years, but most of the buildings on Smith Street were constructed with common red bricks. Look around. How many different patterns of bricks can you identify?

### Discover Smith Street



In the 19th century, the Brooklyn borough government did fewer things for its citizens than they do now. There was police and fire protection, streets were cleaned, and a school system and public health programs were begun.

But, as new streets were laid out and buildings went up, the government left such things as street lighting and signs to the responsibility of the housebuilder. This is why so many houses still have gas lanterns in front of them, and why you can still see signs on the walls of corner buildings.

On Smith Street, you can see some of these signs - on the corner of Degraw St. is a blue porcelain one, and on Sackett St. the sign is engraved.

It was not until 1907 that Brooklyn Borough President Coles bought 6000 blue and white enamel street signs to go up on intersections. For the outlying areas, he authorized the purchase of 700 wooden signs with the names of the new street stencilled on.



# Discover Smith Street

## Samuel Smith

AN OLD LANDMARK—THE SMITH MANSION, NOW BEING TORN DOWN.



In the mid-19th Century, there was a grand home near Fulton Street, between Smith Street and what used to be called Red Hook Lane. It was surrounded by stately linden trees and a fruit orchard with peaches that were said to weigh a pound each when they were ripe, which must have been very tempting to small boys living nearby. This was the house of Samuel and Eliza Smith, from whom Smith Street gets its name.

Samuel Smith was born in Huntington, L.I. in 1788. After graduation from the Huntington Academy, he was apprenticed to learn cooperage, or barrel making. At the age of 18, in 1806, his family moved to Brooklyn, and three years later, he struck out on his own as a farmer. In all, he owned 28 acres, much of it along Smith Street. To understand how large an area this is, imagine a piece of land 10 blocks long by 12 blocks wide.

This land included a family garden, orchard, and pasturage for dairy cows, with the milk being sold to families in Brooklyn village.

During the War of 1812, he was a member of the Washington Fusiliers, serving at Fort Green. After the war, he became a captain of the State Militia. During the early years of the 19th Century, he served as commissioner of highways, fence viewer -- a town officer who made sure farm fences were mended to keep livestock from straying -- justice of the peace, town supervisor, chairman of the board of supervisors, county judge, and county supervisor of the poor.

# Discover Smith Street

In 1850, Smith was elected mayor of Brooklyn on the Democratic ticket, winning over an equally famous Brooklynite, J.F.S. Stranahan, the Republican candidate. In his lifetime, Smith held more public offices than anyone else in Brooklyn and devoted his free time to service to others, to church work, and to the development of Brooklyn.

When he married Eliza, the couple lived in an old Dutch farm house located near where Fulton and Smith Streets come together. The area was a peaceful, rustic crossroads: Schermerhorn Street was a cowpath and Smith Street was unpaved; Fulton Street, or the old Road, was a Muddy highway leading to long Island, lined by the stone fences of the farms on each side. In 1840, Smith built a four-story mansion, faced in limestone, in a classic revival style. At his death in 1872, Brooklyn had expanded and the site of the Smith mansion was the center of a metropolis. The four-story home became the site of the central office and main exchange of the New York and New Jersey Telephone Company. Fifteen years later the 'phone company moved to a larger building at Willoughby and Lawrence Streets and the Smith mansion became Brooklyn Police Headquarters until 1911 when it was torn down to make room for a retail store called Balch, Price & Company.

## Samuel Smith

### A Brooklyn Institution

Dating back almost to the incorporation of Brooklyn as a village, this institution has kept pace with Brooklyn's expansion for nearly a century.

As the largest Manufacturing and Retailing Purriers in the United States, we take a keen pride both in the growth of Brooklyn and the growth of this business.

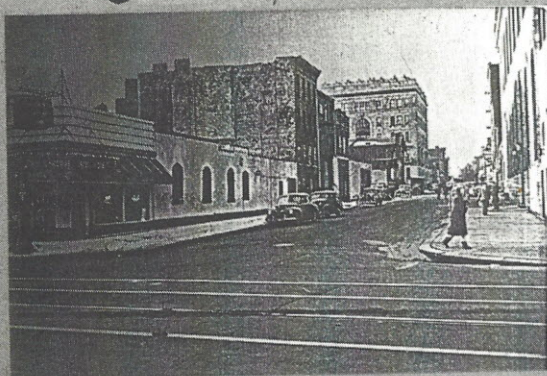


Established 1840  
**Balch, Price & Co.**  
Fulton & Smith Streets  
Brooklyn, N.Y.





## Discover Smith Street



### BEFORE THE PRISON



These two photographs were taken from the same corner, Smith & State Streets, judging from the cars parked in the older photo - some 40 years apart. The Criminal Court Building and St. Vincent's Home remain as anchors - but the "Naples Casablanca Garden Restaurant and assorted other buildings gave way to make room for the Brooklyn House of Detention.

Notice the apparent scarcity of street lighting in the older photo. Instead many of the major buildings had decorative exterior lighting fixtures attached. Notice also the trolley tracks in Smith Street.

## Discover Smith Street

### STREET NAMES



Atlantic, Pacific, and Baltic Streets. Steam-powered shipping came into use around the time these streets might have been named. Before steam, it could take a month or more for a sailing ship to reach Europe from an American port -- if the winds and weather were favorable. With the coming of steam, ships did not have to depend on the wind for power and could set regular schedules for their trips. Also, steam ships were faster than most sailing ships. These three streets start at the waterfront.

Were they named in honor of the seaport in general; or did ships crossing the Atlantic leave from Atlantic Avenue, those from the Pacific arrive at Pacific Street, or if someone wanted to ship something to the ports of the Baltic Sea, did he or she have to go to Baltic Street?



# DISCOVER SMITH STREET PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Jerrold Glassman  
Community Superintendent  
District 15

Thomas Leahy, Coordinator  
Magnet Programs

Arthur Foresta, Director  
of Special Funded Programs

## I.S. 293

Dr. Herbert Rahinsky, Principal

Harvey Seligman, Assistant Principal

Jack Rosen - Photography Teacher  
AIDP Morning Photography Class

John Culmine - Social Studies Teacher

Barbara Polny, Art Teacher

Art Students:  
Joseph Alicia  
Jason Bray  
Jose Caraballo  
John Davila  
Rivel Decoo  
Sherry Diaz  
Evangelino Gomes  
Carlton Jordan  
Jose Lopez  
David Natal  
Michael Rivera  
Mark Siton  
Russel Smith  
Juan De La Cruz  
Jason Hoke  
Luis Castro  
Robert Anthony  
Vincent Santiago  
Jean Toussaint  
Angel Rodriquez  
Manuel Morales 8c  
David Ortiz 8c  
Candice Williams 8c

Ed Redlus, Calligraphy Teacher

Calligraphy Students:  
Anthony Garcia (7A 163)  
Karen Montanez (7A 163)  
Leslie Zervos (84 316)  
Luis Velez (MIS [332:Room])  
Victor Rodriguez (84 316)

Neal Frey, Computer Teacher

Word Processing Students:

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Ernie Contes  
Chartarra Yelverton  
Fay Sinclair  
Erika Tyre  
Jeanette Serrano  
Sherie Morales  
Victor Rodriguez  
Yolanda Aviles  
Karl Bonilla

## P.S. 261

Dr. Daniel Miller, Acting Principal

Philip Goldstein, Assistant Principal

Toba Zigmund, Director,  
Cultural Enrichment Program

Class MIS III Cathie Stein, Teacher

Students:  
Maria Burgos  
Christopher Cruz  
Jad Farraj  
Raymond Febrez  
Gamy Gabbidon  
Alejandro Gonzalez  
Jason Gonzalez  
David Torres  
Chrisendat Johnnie  
Barbara Vargas  
Anthony Vasquez

Class MIS IV Ruth Daniels, Teacher

Students:  
Carlos Rosa  
Add Farraj  
Franklin Goddard  
Felix Rosario  
Migali Medina  
Carol Lopez  
Yvette Olmeda  
Damaris Rios  
Diana Rodriguez  
Brenda Roman  
Lawanda Williams

Class 5-1  
Norma Cangiano, Teacher

Students:  
Francisco Arias  
Arka Erickson  
Micah Harris  
Terrell Hutchins  
Adrian Lugo  
Marcos Morales  
Steven Padilla  
Larry Phillips  
Richard Rosario  
Jermaine Sumter  
Leslie Smith  
Raja Almontaser  
Ina Bonilla  
Shakema Caldwell  
Elizabeth Caraballo  
Desire Colon  
Elizabeth Crispin  
Maribel Cruz  
Felicia Fasullo  
Melissa Fernandez  
Florence Frazier  
Elizabeth Garcia  
Symnett Hercules  
Shawana Hester  
Smerah Kader  
Tirinda McNeill  
Veronica Negron  
Jessica Renta  
Iliana Rodriguez  
Maria Rodriguez  
Paula Rodriguez  
Shaguwana Taylor  
Jessica Vargas  
Maria Villarini

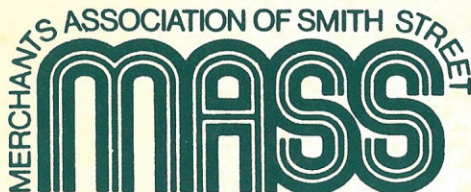
Special Thanks to the Artists:

Paula Rodriguez  
Smerah Kader  
Melissa Fernandez  
Veronica Negron  
Jessica Vargas  
Shakema Caldwell  
Jessica Renta  
David Torres  
Carlos Rosa  
Maria Burgos  
Felix Rosario  
Migali Medina



# Discover Smith Street

IS A JOINT PROJECT OF



215 Smith Street, Brooklyn, New York 11201  
(718) 852-0328

N.Y.C. Board of Education  
*Community School Board District 15*  
360 Smith Street  
Brooklyn, N. Y. (718) 330-9300



Prospect Park  
Environmental Center  
The Picnic House,  
Prospect Park  
Brooklyn, N.Y.  
(718) 788-8500

The Merchants Association of Smith Street is funded by the City of New York, Office of Business Development, "OBD".

Through its Commercial Revitalization Program, OBD works with numerous local development corporations, merchant associations, and civic groups to improve the economic vitality and stimulate private investment on neighborhood shopping streets. Its efforts include a mix of public physical improvements, financial and technical assistance and marketing and promotion activities.

**Edward I. Koch, Mayor**  
City of New York

**Alair A. Townsend, Deputy Mayor**  
For Finance and Economic Development

**Gary Kesner, Commissioner**  
N.Y.C. Office of Business Development

**Barbara Wolff, Assistant Commissioner**  
N.Y.C. Office of Business Development

**MASS Board of Directors**  
John Verrangia, President  
Sylvia DeMonte Bayard, Treasurer  
Carl Peek, Secretary



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**"Discover Smith Street"**  
**An Illustrated History and Walking Tour**

**Citibank Salutes**  
**The Creative Students of IS 293 and PS 261**  
**For Their Contributions of Artwork and Research**  
**And Congratulates**  
**Small Businesses and the Local Community**

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