

# *New York Row Houses: The Gothic Revival Style*

The Gothic Revival Style emerged in the 1840's closely following the Greek Revival style. The style was a crucial turning point in New York City's architectural history. Introducing novel architectural elements that would be elaborated upon further during the Italianate period in the 1850's. The Gothic Revival style never achieved the same level of popularity as the Greek Revival or Italianate style due to the narrowness of city lots. Key components of the style such as asymmetrical massing and gabled rooflines were difficult to achieve on restrictive city lots.

While the Greek Revival period recalled Ancient Greece, the Gothic Revival style recalled the pious middle ages. It drew on the architectural elements of Gothic churches and cathedrals such as darkly colored building materials and rich ornament. Throughout the country, the style quickly replaced edifices built in the "heathen classical tradition". In New York, the first most prominent example to exhibit the style was Trinity Church, with its elaborate tracery, arched vaults, flying buttresses and medieval inspired sculpture. It was also one of the first churches to utilize the costly process of a fully brownstoned façade. As the style became the norm for religious edifices, its influence spread to row house building.

Front doorways, sills and window lintels took on several forms. Either rectangular or arched, they often protruded and possessed "hood molds". In lieu of a flat edge, these hood molds often employed Tudor arch molds at each end. Many of the more elaborate arched doorways featured an additional, horizontal "hood mold". The triangular space between the arched hood and the rectangular hood contained elaborate carvings of the Gothic motif, "trefoil," a three-sided leaf shape resembling a clover leaf shape. An extremely costly



process, carving elaborate Gothic ornament into stone was reserved for only the most expensive row houses.

Though most Gothic Revival row houses employed either a simple Greek Revival cornice or an elaborate Italianate cornice supported by brackets, a few examples of Gothic style which do exist most commonly featured a pointed arch motif or a repeating trefoil pattern carved in wood. A remaining example of this type of Gothic cornice can be found at 20 West 16th Street.

Most ironwork from the period has vanished due to disrepair and wartime scraping efforts. Prior to their dismantling in the 1950's, the three-story tall

porches of the Rhinelander Gardens at 102-106 West 11th Street displayed the finest Gothic Revival style ironwork in the city. A few houses in Brooklyn Heights and Cobble Hill still retain the Gothic Revival iron work, displaying repeating pointed arch patterns on stair rails and fences, and quatrefoil designs on balconies.

The finest examples of Gothic Revival dwellings in Manhattan which remain today are rectories of churches built in the 1840's and 1850's. A wonderful example can be found as part of the Church of the Assumption, at 7 West 10th Street. Completed in 1841, this row house demonstrates key elements of the style such as the arched dormer windows, a large chimney and the asymmetrically massed brownstone façade. Other examples include 114 Waverly Place and The Grace Church School and Rectory at Broadway and East 10th Street.

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