

# Grand Concourse

**NYC** Landmarks Preservation Commission

## Grand Concourse

The celebrated Grand Concourse is a limited access 11-lane boulevard, stretching more than four miles through the Bronx, from East 138th Street to Moshulu Parkway, near East 206th Street. The historic district, which covers the blocks between East 151st Street and 167th Street, as well as sections of Gerard and Walton Avenues, was designated in 2011. Construction of the "Grand Boulevard and Concourse" began in 1897 and was completed in 1909. The Grand Concourse, as it became known, was extended south to East 138th Street in the mid-1920s. Consisting of a broad central roadway, service roads and landscaped malls, the concourse also incorporates submerged transverse roads. Designed by Louis Aloys Risse, a French-born immigrant who worked for the short-lived Department of Street Improvements, his innovative street plan drew inspiration from various sources. Often compared to the Champs Elysees in Paris, it also seems to have taken ideas from Olmsted & Vaux's design for Central Park, which introduced underpasses and sunken roadways to separate pedestrians and vehicular users, as well as Eastern and Ocean Parkways in Brooklyn, which feature a similar division of lanes and service roads.

Cover Image | Bronx County - Mario Merola Building. Image courtesy of the Landmarks Preservation Commission



From start to finish, the tour lasts approximately 90 minutes. Start on north side of East 161st Street, between the Grand Concourse and Walton Avenue



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## 1 Joyce Kilmer Park

When the Grand Concourse opened in 1909, the south end of what would become Joyce Kilmer Park was known as Concourse Plaza. Originally bisected by a diagonal roadway that began on East 161st Street near Walton Avenue, the park contains two prominent sculptural features: a white marble fountain dedicated to the romantic German poet Heinrich Heine (Ernest Herter, 1899) and a bronze statue of Louis J. Heintz (Pierre Fietu, 1905), who as the borough's first commissioner of street improvements conceived this "grand boulevard" in the early 1890s. Acquired by the parks department in 1924, the nearly seven-acre park was renamed for the poet and journalist Joyce Kilmer in 1926. Famous for his 1913 poem "Trees," Kilmer perished while serving in France during the First World War. The park's current symmetrical configuration, which extends to East 164th Street, mostly dates to 1936.



Grand Concourse, c. 1966. Image courtesy of the New York Times

## 2 Bronx County - Mario Merola Building

Commonly called the Bronx County Courthouse, this nine-story building is one of the most impressive in the historic district. Set on a raised ballustraded terrace, reached from broad stairs, it contains various court rooms, as well as the office of the Borough President and other public agencies. Constructed during the early years of the Great Depression, the architects were Max L. Hausle, who designed several courthouses in the Bronx, and Joseph H. Freedlander. Dedicated in 1934, the understated elevations are enlivened by gilded spandrels and sculptural reliefs. While the rusticated base features an elegant frieze by sculptor Charles Keck depicting labor, the spacious terrace displays pink Georgia marble figurative groups symbolizing the virtues of government. The monumental sculptures that flank the stairs on East 161st Street, "Civic Government" and "The Majesty of Law," are credited to George Snowden, a student of the noted sculptor Adolph A. Weinman who supervised the building's sculptural program. Designated a landmark in 1973, it was renamed for Bronx District Attorney Mario Merola in 1988.

*Cross to the opposite side of East 161st Street and ascend the stairs. Turn right and continue onto the west terrace, stopping to view Walton Avenue*

## 3 West Terrace + Walton Avenue

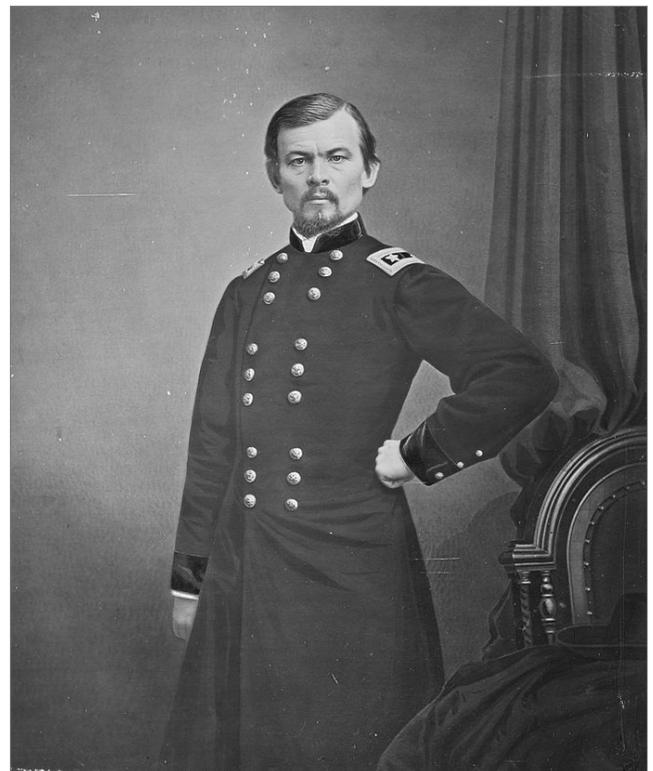
Gerard, Walton and Morris Avenues are named for various members of the Morris family, who were major land owners in the Bronx prior to the 20th century. On Walton Avenue, many six-story apartment buildings were erected in the late 1920s, following the start of subway service to 161st Street in 1917 and the opening of Yankee Stadium in 1923. Designed in variants of the Renaissance Revival style, these mainly beige brick buildings have H- and U-shaped plans with recessed entrances. The Bronx County Building's west terrace displays two sculptures by Joseph Kiselewski: "Victory and Peace" and "Loyalty Valor and Sacrifice."

*Continue onto the south terrace, overlooking the park on East 158th Street*

## 4 South Terrace + Franz Sigel Park

Directly to the south of the Bronx County Building stretches verdant Franz Sigel Park. The land for this 16-acre park was acquired from the Walton family in 1885. Briefly known as Cedar Park, it was renamed for Sigel, who immigrated to the United States in the early 1850s and served in the American Civil War, in 1902. Sigel, who died that year, is likewise honored by an equestrian statue in Manhattan's Riverside Park, at West 106th Street. The park's rugged stonework and picturesque layout mostly date from the first years of the 20th century when Samuel Parsons, Jr. headed the parks department. The Bronx County Building's south terrace features two sculptures by Edward F. Sanford, Jr., "Triumph of Government" and "Genius of Administration."

*Descend the left (east) stairs and proceed towards the Grand Concourse, pausing at the northwest corner of East 158th Street*



Major General Franz Sigel, c. 1863. Image courtesy of Creative Commons

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## Thomas Garden Apartments 840 Grand Concourse

The Thomas Garden Apartments, between East 158th and 159th Streets, were built in 1926-27. Commissioned by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. this U-shaped complex is named for its architect Andrew J. Thomas, who pioneered the development of the "garden apartment." Like his Dunbar Apartments in Harlem, a concurrent Rockefeller-Thomas project, these low-rise buildings were planned as non-profit cooperative residences and feature generous common areas. The brick elevations are enlivened by occasional and colorful Mediterranean Revival details, while the central courtyard features Japanese-style lanterns. Some entrances contain interesting brickwork, such as a peacock displaying its tail feathers on 158th Street.

*Cross East 158th Street and continue walking until you reach the southeast corner of East 161st Street.*

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## 888 Grand Concourse

The Grand Concourse is justly famous for its Art Deco-style buildings. Following construction of the IND subway, which opened in 1933, many new apartment houses were constructed in the area. Distinguished by streamlined forms and industrial materials, these new residential buildings were promoted as stylishly modern. 888 Grand Concourse was designed by the noted Hungarian-born architect Emery Roth. This is his only commission in the historic district and features an eye-catching corner entrance with a projecting circular canopy and curved walls embellished with delicate mosaics. The following year, Roth would design a similar entry for the Normandy Apartments, a New York City Landmark, at 140 Riverside Drive in Manhattan.

*Cross the Grand Concourse to the northwest corner of East 161st Street and look back towards 900 Grand Concourse, between East 161st and 162nd Street.*



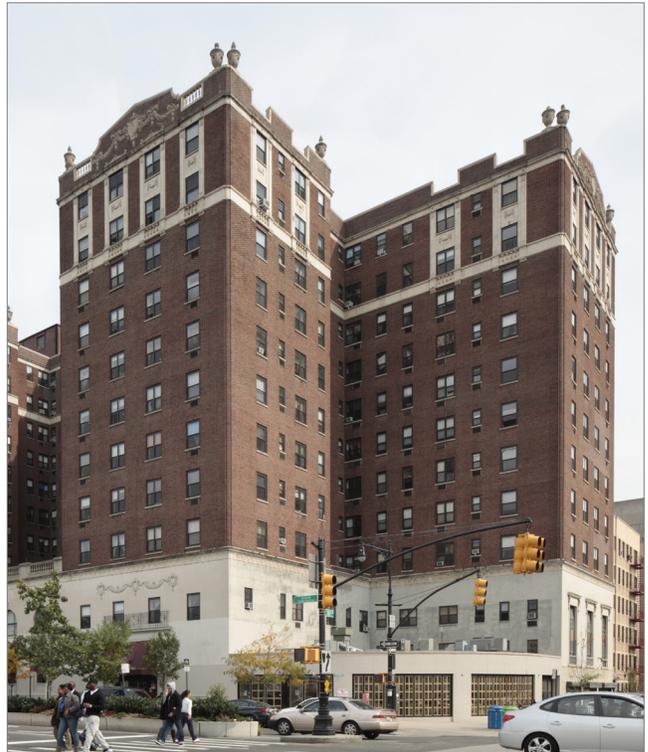
Front entrance, 888 Grand Concourse. Image courtesy of Landmarks Preservation Commission

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## 900 Grand Concourse

Built as the Concourse Hotel, this 11-story red brick building was completed in 1923 – the same year Yankee Stadium opened. Designed in the Colonial Revival style by Maynicke & Franke, in its heyday this hotel hosted numerous public events and multiple generations of legendary Yankee sluggers, from the Bronx Bomber "Babe" Ruth to center fielder Mickey Mantle. Many notable presidential candidates stopped to campaign here, including Franklin Delano Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. In addition, the banqueting rooms have frequently hosted business luncheons, wedding receptions and bar mitzvahs. Following a long period of decline during the 1960s and 1970s, the hotel was purchased by New York City and was converted to senior citizens housing in 1982.

*Continue walking north along the edge of the park, pausing between 163rd and 164th Streets.*



900 Grand Concourse. Image courtesy of the Landmarks Preservation Commission

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## 940 + 960 Grand Concourse

This block contains two nearly-identical six-story apartment houses: Concourse Gardens South and Concourse Gardens North. Designed by Springsteen & Goldhammer, both date to 1927. As with much of the firm's work, residents enter through modestly-landscaped courtyards. In the case of 960 Grand Concourse, at left, the raised common area contains a simple stone monument. Designed in the Mediterranean Revival style with simple neo-classical details, these buildings are typical of the kinds of historicist structures erected along the Concourse (and throughout the Bronx) before the Art Deco style gained popularity.

*Walk one block north, stopping between 164th and 165th Streets.*

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## Executive Towers

1020 Grand Concourse

Designed by Philip Birnbaum, who built an estimated 300 apartment buildings during his career, the Executive Towers complex was completed in 1963. Not only was it the most recent apartment house constructed in the historic district but promotional literature described it as “the first luxury skyscraper in the Bronx.” More than twenty-stories tall, this glazed white brick tower features a rather grand entrance pavilion with a semi-circular driveway and a saw-tooth roof embellished with gold mosaics and blue fleur-de-lys. Flanking the entrance are monumental gilded figures, one male and the other female, that recall the work of the American sculptor Paul Manship and the heroic neoclassicism popularized by the 1939-40 World’s Fair in New York.

*Cross to the east side of the Grand Concourse at East 164th Street, stopping in front of the Bronx Museum of the Arts, between 164th and 165th Streets.*



Entrance detail, 1020 Grand Concourse. Image courtesy of Landmarks Preservation Commission

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## Bronx Museum of the Arts

1040 Grand Concourse

Established in 1971, the Bronx Museum of the Arts was originally located in the rotunda of the Bronx County Building. It moved to 165th Street, formerly the Young Israel Synagogue (Simon B. Zelnik, 1961), in 1985. Following construction of a modest corner lobby in 1988, a major addition by the firm Arquitectonica, featuring an irregular fan-fold facade of aluminum and glass, opened in 2006. This expansion doubled the museum’s size. At present, admission is free.

*Cross to the west side of the Grand Concourse, go right, stopping at No. 1125.*

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## Andrew Freedman Home

1125 Grand Concourse

Built for elderly “gentlefolk” who had once been affluent, this palazzo-like building was financed with a bequest from businessman Andrew Freedman, former owner of the New York Giants baseball team. Nearly four hundred feet long, it was built in two stages during 1922-24 and 1928-30. Designed by Joseph H. Freedlander – who also worked on the Bronx County Building and the Museum of the City of New York – and Harry Allan Jacobs, the Freedman Home once housed as many as 130 men and women (including married couples) who lived here at no charge. The facility closed by 1983 and was designated a New York City Landmark in 1992. Today, it serves various community functions and includes a 10-room hotel that operates as a hospitality training center.

*Continue to the south corner of McClellan Street and look east, facing No. 1188 and 1130 Grand Concourse.*



Andrew Freedman Home. Image courtesy of Landmarks Preservation Commission

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## Bronx Housing Court

1118 Grand Concourse

Opposite the Freedman Home stand two dissimilar but nonetheless monumental institutional structures. On the right is the Bronx Housing Court, built in the 1990s by the Uruguayan-architect Raphael Vinoly. Clad with gray sandstone and matching brick, the structure’s lower volume contains 13 courtrooms, while the glazed upper floors are marked by a distinctive wedge-like window that illuminates the court’s law library. Vinoly’s firm also designed the widely-discussed Bronx County Hall of Justice (2007) on East 161st Street, between Sherman and Morris Avenues.

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## Bronx Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

1130 Grand Concourse

At left is the former home of the Bronx Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. This Classical Revival style building was erected by the architects Raldris & LaVelle in 1926. It has an elaborate double dog-leg staircase that provides entry to the lower floors. Sold to the Girls Club of New York in 1980, it is currently occupied by Bronx Works, a social service organization.

*Cross the Grand Concourse and turn left (north), stopping in front of 1150 Grand Concourse, at the northeast corner of McClellan Street*



1130 Grand Concourse. Image courtesy of Landmarks Preservation Commission

## 14 1150 Grand Concourse

Strikingly colorful mosaics flank the entrance to this six-story apartment building. Featuring oversized representations of Moorish idols, triggerfish, plankton and various marine plants, these curved iridescent murals give the 1937 structure a somewhat exotic and tropical air, making it one of the most recognizable on the Grand Concourse. Shaded by a ribbed aluminum awning, the memorable "fish" artwork is framed by a grid of pinkish stone in which the individual squares are highlighted by green glass reflectors. Horace Ginsbern, who designed many apartment houses in the Bronx, including Noonan Plaza on West 168th Street, collaborated with Marvin Fine on the building's handsome Art Deco-style design.

Walk north towards 167th Street, noting the overlapping elevations of 1166 and 1188 Grand Concourse.



1150 Grand Concourse. Image courtesy of Landmarks Preservation Commission



Mosaic detail, 1150 Grand Concourse. Image courtesy of Landmarks Preservation Commission

## 15 1166 + 1188 Grand Concourse

Faced with bands of orange and red brick, these beige apartment buildings are enlivened by multiple corner windows. Viewed from the side, this vertical arrangement produces an overlapping pleated effect that may have served as inspiration for the 2006 fan-fold addition to the Bronx Museum of the Arts, visited at stop #10. Jacob M. Felson, who was the architect of both buildings, designed eight apartment houses in the historic district.

Walking tour concludes in the vicinity of the 167th Street subway station.

## Farther afield...

From 167th Street, take the IND subway five stops north to Fordham Road

### Loew's Paradise Theater

2403 Grand Concourse, west side, near 187th Street

An individual and interior landmark, the Paradise is an Italian Baroque confection. Designed by John Eberson in 1928-29, this legendary "atmospheric" movie theater features an elaborate terra-cotta frontispiece and seating for nearly 4,000 people. Of particular note is the lavishly-decorated auditorium, which recalls a Mediterranean piazza, as well as the wood-paneled grand lobby, with ceiling murals by Andrew Karoly and Lajos Santos. Though the theater was divided into a multiscreen cinema in 1973, the interiors were restored in 2005 to host live performances.



Loew's Paradise Theater interior. Image courtesy of Landmarks Preservation Commission

### Dollar Savings Bank

2516 - 2530 Grand Concourse, east side, near Fordham Road

Constructed in three stages between 1932 and 1952, the former Dollar Savings Bank is one of the most impressive buildings on the Grand Concourse. This individual and interior landmark was designed by bank specialists Halsey, McCormack & Helmer. The impressive, mostly Art Deco style, banking hall dates from 1932-33 and 1938-38 and features five large murals by Angelo Magnanti that depict the early history of the borough. A ten-story office tower, incorporating a prominent four-sided clock, was added in 1949-52. If you arrive during banking hours, be sure to take a look inside.

## Acknowledgements

This walking tour was prepared by Matthew Postal, an architectural historian at the Landmarks Preservation Commission. The layout and mapping was designed by Daniel Watts, also of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Support was generously provided by the New York Landmarks Preservation Foundation, which fosters the activities of the Commission and provides funds for educational outreach programs.



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