

# SECRET BROOKLYN



MICHELLE YOUNG AND AUGUSTIN PASQUET



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

## LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY BASKETBALL COURT

⑥

*A gym inside a historic movie theater*

161 Ashland Place  
Brooklyn, NY 11201  
Transport B/Q/R to DeKalb Avenue



Downtown Brooklyn, around the intersection of Flatbush Avenue and Fulton Street, was hailed as the “Times Square of Brooklyn,” by the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1928. This was the year that the Paramount Theatre was under construction. The accompanying map showed twelve theaters all within a few blocks, and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* called it the “Hub of the Largest Theatre District in the world, excepting only New York.” When the Paramount opened on November 23rd, 1928, the total combined capacity of the theaters in this area was 25,000 seats. The opening was such an important one that local businesses, such as Loeser’s department store and Joe’s Restaurant, took out advertisements to welcome the new venue. In addition to movies, the Paramount hosted famous performers like Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington and Frank Sinatra.

Downtown Brooklyn has regained some of its entertainment cred with the arrival of the Barclays Center, the addition of BRIC Arts|Media House, and the continued excellence of the Brooklyn Academy of Music. But many of the old theaters are gone. One notable exception lies hidden inside the Long Island University Athletic Center. The basketball court sits amid an opulent backdrop, the auditorium of the former Paramount Theatre. The scoreboard sits in front of the grand stage proscenium and the original details of the theater are well preserved on the ornamented walls and arched, latticed ceiling. The Rococo flourishes get even more dramatic in the seating area thanks to the presence of large columns, fountains and sculptures. There is a custom-made Wurlitzer organ that still exists here and is operational.

The Paramount struggled financially, like other large theaters, during the Depression. It was sold in 1935 and again in 1950 to Long Island University. The original theater marquee and rooftop signage are gone, but the dramatic marble lobby now functions as the school cafeteria and an event space. Original details, like former elevators, decorative statues, various architectural elements, and private rooms, still abound within the building. You’ll even find a staircase that leads to nowhere, closed off in the conversion of the space.

In 2015, it was announced that the gym would be converted back into an arts and culture venue, a joint effort by Long Island University and Brooklyn Sports and Entertainment, the management company for the Barclays Center. The venue capacity would be 1,500 – far lower than the original 4000+, when the Paramount was the largest theater in Brooklyn, but it would bring the public back into this space for the first time in over 50 years.

## ABANDONED BROOKLYN NAVY YARD HOSPITAL

22

### *Hidden inside the Navy Yard*

Flushing Avenue between Williamsburg Street NW and Ryerson Street

Transport: F to York Street, G to Flushing Avenue

Open: Can be visited for occasional art exhibits and walking tours

[www.brooklyngreenway.org](http://www.brooklyngreenway.org)

The Brooklyn Navy Yard Naval Hospital Annex (or the Naval Annex) was built from 1830 to 1836. It was active through the Civil War (supplying almost a third of the medicine distributed to Union soldiers)



and both World Wars until it was decommissioned in the 1970s. Some of the first female nurses and medical students were employed there. Dr. E. R. Squibb, leading pharmaceuticals inventor of Bristol-Myers Squibb developed the first anesthetic ethers for use in surgery here.

As it stands, however, the hospital complex has only been accessible on rare occasions. In 2015, a photographic exhibit by Bettina WitteVeen, “When We Were Soldiers... once and young” took place inside the main building. The Brooklyn Greenway Initiative took visitors to see the hospital and surrounding areas on an annual Jane’s Walk. The architecture has remained hidden behind foliage and locked gates, but has been spotted in television productions such as *Gotham*. In 2004, Steiner Studios opened as one of the first major anchor tenants of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, with five soundstages and production facilities. Starting in 2010, Steiner Studios began the process to nearly double its facility, which today is at 580,000 square feet.

In February 2015, a development plan for the third phase of expansion of Steiner Studios was adopted, with a view to converting the abandoned Brooklyn Navy Yard Hospital Annex into a media campus by 2027. With an estimated price tag of \$137.1 million, the third phase would add another 420,000 square feet of floor area to the studio complex, already the largest outside of Hollywood. There will even be an underwater soundstage, the first of its kind in New York City.

The good news for preservationists is that the large-scale rehabilitation project would also include the renovation and stabilization of existing structures in the Hospital Annex.

The Brooklyn Navy Yard has been transforming from an active military property to industrial park and diversified manufacturing hub. The forthcoming arrival of a WeWork at Dock 77 and the transformation of the Navy Yard Hospital will solidify its place as one of the premiere work spaces in Brooklyn, if not New York City.

While checking out this site, don’t miss Admirals’ Row further east on Flushing Avenue – a set of handsome, 19th century townhouses that once served as officers’ quarters. Long abandoned, only one house will be saved in the forthcoming redevelopment of this stretch. Another spot to see is the Naval Cemetery Landscape, at 63 Williamsburg Street NW, which was reopened to the public in 2016 for the first time in 90 years.

## FARM INSIDE DOMINO SUGAR FACTORY SITE

25

### *Hidden waterfront farm to table spot*

320 Kent Avenue

Brooklyn, NY 11249

Transport: F to York Street, G to Flushing Avenue

Open: Tue–Sun 11am–8pm

[www.northbrooklynfarms.com](http://www.northbrooklynfarms.com)



Inside the construction zone at the highly anticipated Domino Sugar Factory redevelopment site on the Williamsburg waterfront is an organic farm that exists due to a special community partnership between the developer, Two Trees Management Company, and the neighborhood.

Formerly located in a vacant lot across the street from the Domino plot, North Brooklyn Farms moved to be directly along the waterfront in May of 2015. Beneath the imposing structure of the former sugar refinery building grow flowers and produce, sold through a weekly Community Shared Agriculture program. A shipping container is used as a mushroom farm. The food grown here, cultivated and cared for by volunteers, is also used for events and dinners hosted on site. How's that for farm to table? From the picnic tables, you can literally reach over into the produce beds.

But mostly, this is a green public space for the community and a welcome respite from the flurry of construction and development in Williamsburg. There are rounded grass craters that function as “seats for humans” along the edge of the space and there's also a state-of-the-art outdoor skate park.

When the original location closed, neighborhood children were visibly upset, waiting at the entrance of the formerly empty lot, which is now another Williamsburg development. Two Trees worked with North Brooklyn Farm and Ride Brooklyn to relocate the farm onto the Domino property itself, opening this portion of the waterfront up to the public for the first time in 150 years.

Almost none of this can be seen behind the barricades of the construction site, but it's a true jewel of a spot most people miss on a visit to Williamsburg, and a great place to take in views of the East River, Manhattan, and the Williamsburg Bridge.

Anybody can volunteer to work here, just sign up on the North Brooklyn Farms website. They have two volunteer days a week, one on weekdays and one on the weekend. You have to be at least 18 years old, but the farm encourages urbanites to come and get their hands dirty. Volunteer activities also include event planning, and giving farm tours. North Brooklyn Farms also hosts private events.

## TONYA HARDING NANCY KERRIGAN 26

### 1994 MUSEUM (THNK 1994)

*A secret museum built into the hallway  
of a Williamsburg apartment*

*Secret, undisclosed apartment in Williamsburg*

*Transport: L to Lorimer Street*

*Open: Accessible by appointment*

*www.thnk1994.com*



Children of the '80s will probably remember one of the most dramatic rivalries in '90s sports history – between champion figure skaters Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan. Since 2015, a secret museum built into the hallway of a Williamsburg apartment has been celebrating this pop culture moment, one that produced both some of the most memorable and darkest moments in figure skating history.

The competition between the skaters culminated in a brutal attack on Kerrigan after a practice session at the 1994 U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Detroit, Michigan. On national television, riveted viewers watched as Kerrigan was clubbed in the right knee with a police baton. She repeatedly cried, “Why? Why?” The answer, as it was later discovered, was that Harding’s ex-husband had plotted the attack with three other men.

Both Kerrigan and Harding would compete for the United States at the 1994 Olympics in Lillehammer a month later, where Kerrigan won the silver medal, placing behind Russian skater Oksana Baiul. Harding placed eighth and was banned from the sport shortly afterwards. Then for the most part, Harding and the thugs fell back into obscurity. That is until the 2014 ESPN documentary, *The Price of Gold*.

One night, Brooklyn comedians and roommates Matt Harkins and Viviana Olen watched the film on the two skaters “and became obsessed,” they tell us, and were “honestly pretty shocked there wasn’t one already.” The museum focuses on the attack and the media response, but also delves into the personalities of the skaters themselves – “Everyone is either a Tonya or a Nancy,” they proclaim. Through humor, the museum challenges some of the commonly held conceptions about the two athletes.

As testament to the popular response, 150 backers gave over \$2,000 to bring the Tonya Harding Nancy Kerrigan Museum to life, far above the \$75 the duo had planned to use “to go to Duane Reade and blow up pictures very big.” The museum is full of artifacts, many supplied by Lois Elfman, a figure skating journalist, a friend of Harding. Other items were donated by the public or found on eBay. People even created artwork inspired by Kerrigan and Harding.

The collectors’ items are displayed as a timeline along the dark walls of the long hallway, which has a Tonya side and a Nancy side. Each begins with the skaters as children. There are trading cards, original tabloids, tickets, backstage passes, autographed photos, mounted iPads showing the Olympic performances and more.

Contact Matt and Viviana through the THINK 1994 website to book an appointment. The best part of the visit is a walkthrough by the two comedians themselves (it is their apartment after all).

## TOUR OF THE NEWTOWN CREEK DIGESTER EGGS

30

*Futuristic sewage treatment plant with two honors  
for Excellence in Design*

327 Greenpoint Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11222

Transport: G to Greenpoint Avenue

Open: Visitor Center open by appointment only

Entry fee: Tours through advance registration only

Tel: 718-595-5140



On special occasions, such as Valentine’s Day and Halloween, the New York City Department of Sanitation hosts tours of the Newtown Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant, the largest of the city’s 14 facilities. As unromantic or unfestive as a sewage treatment plant might sound, tickets for these free tours are snapped up so fast there’s often a long wait list. The Newtown Creek facility has become something of a city landmark, with its eight 140-foot metallic silver digester eggs that rise from the banks of Newtown Creek, an industrial zone at the border of Brooklyn and Queens. At night, the eggs glow with a deep blue color, part of an overall scheme by lighting designer Hervé Descottes.

This shiny facility, which opened in 2010, was designed by Polshek Partners, now Ennead Architects, the firm behind renovations at Carnegie Hall, Brooklyn Museum and the American Museum of Natural History. Ennead also designed the Standard Hotel in the Meatpacking District. The Newtown Creek project was a collaboration between the community, the architects and the New York City Department of Sanitation, and is upheld as an example of collective planning at its best. As a testament, the New York City Arts Commission awarded the Newtown Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant with two honors for Excellence in Design.

New York City has a combined sewer system, which means stormwater, wastewater and sewage flow in the same pipes. During storms and heavy rains, the system gets overwhelmed and sewage gets discharged directly into rivers and bays. The digester eggs, however, process between 1.3 to 1.5 billion gallons of sludge a day in a multi-step process that eventually helps reduce the amount of sewage that flows into the city’s waterways. The sludge is heated up, reducing its oxygen content, which allows bacteria to break down the waste into water, carbon dioxide and methane. Water is removed from the “digested sludge” which becomes a solid that can be used as fertilizer. The remaining liquid is then disinfected with enough oxygen to still support marine life.

The New York City waterways are the cleanest they’ve been in 100 years, and the Newtown Creek plant is a big reason for that.

Tours begin in the visitors’ center before heading up an elevator to the glass walkways that run between the digester eggs. You can peer down into the sludge and see the process at work while taking in the views of Manhattan and Brooklyn.

## PARK SLOPE ARMORY'S ABANDONED SHOOTING GALLERY

16

### *An incredible place*

361 15th Street

Brooklyn, NY 11215

Transport: F/G to 15th Street-Prospect Park

Open: In the Veterans Museum, ask the head of it to take you down there. He'll sometimes accept.



One of the city's many armories, the Park Slope Armory encompasses an entire city block in Brooklyn, bounded by 7th and 8th Avenues, and 14th and 15th Streets. Originally built for the 14th Regiment of the New York State militia in 1893, it now houses sports facilities run by the YMCA, along with a women's shelter. But one of the building's most impressive secrets lies on the lower level of the armory. Left fallow for many years, a long shooting gallery allowed for short-range and long-range target practice. Its entrance sits behind a locked door, through a hallway long repurposed as a storage space, and down a decorative wooden staircase. It's an incredible place, silent from years of abandonment but aching for future use.

There is a dusty Victorian-style waiting room that has retained its tin walls and ceilings, green tinted paint job, and wooden wraparound bench. There was also once a wooden railing here that has since been moved to the first floor of the armory, next to the Veterans Museum, an equally unknown spot (see page 106). The words "EASTERN DISTRICT" printed on the left refer to the militia's district within New York State.

Under a large pipe, possibly over a century old, you enter an arched brick hallway that runs alongside both shooting galleries. On the right, there are some unused spaces with crumbling wooden walls. The short range shooting gallery is located to the left. Small staircases once led to a sort of half floor, now somewhat collapsed, from which the targets would be raised into the shooting galleries themselves. Further along, the ceilings of the hallway get lower and lower until you actually have to duck through an opening to proceed.

Along this section, electrical lighting appears for the first time, hanging alongside the overhead pipes. On the right, there is a heavy metal door that leads into a small room, possibly used once as a holding cell, according to the armory historian, though this is unconfirmed. Scenes from the 1990 movie *Goodfellas*, where the character Paulie is in prison, were filmed in this abandoned area.

The long-range shooting gallery, located just to the left of this hallway, is barely lit. Standing in the dark, barrel-vaulted space, you can almost hear the voices and shots of men practicing their trade. Bullet holes still remain in large metal pieces that line parts of the ceiling and the end of the gallery.

## SECRET WRITING LAB INSIDE THE 20 BROOKLYN SUPERHERO SUPPLY CO.

*A secret identity for 826NYC*

372 5th Avenue

Brooklyn, NY 11215

Transport: D/N/R to 9th Street, F/G to 4th Avenue

[www.superherosupplies.com](http://www.superherosupplies.com)



If you're 8, 18, or 80, and decide the next big step in your life trajectory is to become a superhero, the perfect one-stop shop to ensure success can be found tucked away in Park Slope on 5th Avenue between 5th and 6th Streets. Brooklyn's Superhero Supply Co., an unassuming free-standing store, is often mistaken for a hardware store. It actually houses shelves of fun things: cans of Courage, Gumption, invisibility paint, and tools to help you scale walls. A mock seriousness to the store, paired with the Willy Wonka-like fantasy world, creates a delightful place to explore and play.

The store is actually a secret identity of 826NYC, a not-for-profit writing lab that focuses on kids aged 6 to 18. Accessed via a trick bookshelf, the lab offers free after school drop-in one-on-one tutoring and fun weeknight and weekend workshops that encourage creativity and writing of all kinds: short stories, films, comics, and even Japanese Manga. 826 will also host class field trips that aid teachers in planning creative writing exercises. The organization is active in several cities through the United States; the original location, 826 Valencia in San Francisco, is fronted by a pirate store.

Beyond the basics, you definitely want to check this place out. If you're into design, the whole store is filled with examples of coherent and beautiful graphic design. Products and signs have a tongue-in-cheek playfulness that will definitely bring a smirk or a smile to your face. Don't know where to begin? Pick up the Superhero Starter Kit, which comes with a ready-made secret identity, cape, mask and blaster. But you'll soon want to upgrade, maybe with some Super X-Ray Glasses or a can of Time Travel. The "brands" carried by the Superhero Store have fabulous names too, such as Bugayenko Laboratories and FantastiCo!, each appropriately named for the products they supposedly produce.

If you love the written word, 826 has shelves of essay and short story collections written by its students and other great modern writers linked to 826's founder, writer Dave Eggers. If you don't need any superhero supplies, you can play with several of the store's interactive exhibits: try on a cape and snap a pic for your friends at the cape testing chamber. And if you're feeling villainous, the store has a cure! A de-villainizing chamber asks you a series of questions to determine the nature of your villainy then takes cares of the problem. Even purchasing something small is an experience, as store rules require you to recite the vow of heroism with every purchase.



## THE ROBOTIC CHURCH

30

*Looking at nature at the simplest level*

111 Pioneer Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11231

Transport: F/G to Smith-9th Street or B61 bus to Van Brunt Street/Verona Street

Open: Performances a few times a year by appointment

[www.facebook.com/RoboticChurchNewYork/](http://www.facebook.com/RoboticChurchNewYork/)



Truly a secret gem, there's nothing at street level to suggest that there's an incredible site-specific installation and workshop inside this former Norwegian Seaman's Church in Red Hook. Metal gates are perpetually rolled down on this brick building that dates to the 1880s. Only a doorbell next to the locked alley door gives some clue: it says "Amorphic Robotic Works".

The Robotic Church is open for performances a few times a year – the rest of the time it functions as the workshop for Amorphic Robotic Works, a collective of artists, engineers, technicians and programmers founded by Chico MacMurtrie in 1991. MacMurtrie is acclaimed for his large-scale, kinetic sculptures and was most recently awarded a Guggenheim fellowship for the construction of inflatable bridges that can reach across the United States-Mexico border.

While inflatables are the evolution of MacMurtrie's exploration in kinetic mechanical movement, the pneumatic robots are the origin. In the Robotic Church, fifty "humanoid performers" are positioned throughout the former church nave. There's a control tower up top, through which MacMurtrie can lead the performance. He tells us that the performance is "a story of their evolution," and in many ways, the evolution of humankind, "going back to the very beginning." A clocking mechanism sets the timing of the performance (usually between 40 and 60 minutes) and the robots communicate through rhythm using body language and sound. MacMurtrie describes the Robotic Church performance as "looking at nature at the simplest level."

The robots range in size from 12 inches to 15 feet. They're located on multiple levels of the church, a deliberate reference to the placement of religious saints in a chapel. One robot, attached to a rope, is imbued with the objective to reach the top. Guests sit on wooden benches, "as if coming to church," MacMurtrie describes.

When not activated, between three and a dozen people work in the space, testing materials and pushing the boundaries of architectural structures. In an era where popular technology is pushing ever towards virtual reality, Amorphic Robotic Works uses analog technology to explore the human condition. Instead of getting sucked into a digital world, the kinetic sculptures remind us of what it means to be alive.

## WORLD WAR II GUARD TOWERS AT BROOKLYN ARMY TERMINAL

⑤

*Towers that once protected New York*

140 58th Street

Brooklyn, NY 11220

Transport: N/R to 59th Street

Open: Accessible on special tours run by Untapped Cities



Situated at the southern edge of Sunset Park, along the Brooklyn waterfront, the Brooklyn Army Terminal is a 4 million square foot structure built between 1918 and 1919. It was the largest concrete building in the world when it was completed. As an indicator of the importance of this complex, architect Cass Gilbert, who designed the Woolworth Building, United States Supreme Court in Washington D.C. and the U.S. Customs House in Manhattan, was hired for the project.

The facility was the main depot and supply base for the American troops fighting in Europe during the end of World War I but was most active during World War II, when 20,000 people were employed at the facility.

One of the little known secrets of the Brooklyn Army Terminal is the function of the four protruding miniature buildings atop both building A and building B. These were built as guard towers and were manned during World War II. Today, the towers are filled with pigeon carcasses and old newspapers. The rooftops are not usually open to the public, but are accessible on tours run by *Untapped Cities*, in partnership with the New York City Economic Development Corporation.

The Brooklyn Army Terminal was decommissioned in 1957. Purchased by the city in 1981, the complex began a multi-decade renovation into office space and manufacturing uses – a process that is ongoing. The most stunning space of the terminal is the multi-level atrium in building B with its staggered balconies. Cranes would pick up pallets from the trains, lift them up and drop them directly to a balcony above. A Long Island Railroad train sits on the tracks to give a sense of what the space was like when freight was driven directly into the building. Today, part of that track area has been converted into an indoor lobby.

Some of the sky bridges, which connect buildings A and B, remain in a raw, untouched state, awaiting future renovation.

Brooklyn Army Terminal originally had 96 elevators, the largest capacity for freight elevators in the world when built. It was also the largest military supply base in the world through the end of World War II and held a record in the Book of World Records for how much concrete was mixed and poured in a day.

### *Where Elvis boarded for Europe during WWII*

During WWII, the Brooklyn Army Terminal also served as an embarkation point for troops heading to Europe. The most famous of these soldiers was Elvis, who arrived by train directly onto the pier. He gave two press conferences then boarded the ship he would take across the Atlantic.

## ERASMUS HALL ACADEMY

11

### *Stained glass treasures inside a school*

911 Flatbush Avenue

Brooklyn, NY 11226

Transport: B/Q to Church Avenue

Open: Mon–Fri 8am–2:20pm

Tel: 718-564-2551 or contact via website for visits

<http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/17/K539>

Nestled in the heart of Brooklyn is Erasmus Hall; one of New York City's most impressive yet little known treasures. This Gothic-style school, reminiscent of the colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, was founded in 1786 in an area settled by the Dutch. It is considered one of the oldest schools in the United States and was the first secondary school chartered by the New York State Regents. Erasmus Hall was funded by some of the country's most famous Founding Fathers, including Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, and counts among its alumni such figures as Mae West, Barbra Streisand and Neil Diamond. Today, five schools use the complex now known as Erasmus Hall Educational Campus, which is filled with notable art and architecture.

Beyond the exterior architecture, the interior of the school reveals the rich history of the building. The current complex was built around

an original 1786 wooden clapboard school building in 1904 by school superintendent C.B.J. Snyder, who is credited with over 400 of New York City's most architecturally notable schools. Artwork was an important part of school design during Snyder's time, with most schools incorporating site-specific commissioned artworks of various mediums.

But Erasmus Hall is special; it is brimming with stained glass. The most famous piece (along with the sculptures in the garden) can be seen from the outside. However, viewed from within the vaulted two-floor auditorium, designed much like a church, it is a sight to behold. Behind the stage, *The Life of Erasmus* opulently portrays the life of the school's namesake. All through the school, traditional stained glass motifs contrast with modern imagery, including sections depicting American industry and scientific research.

Above the main entrance along Flatbush Avenue, you'll see five panels of stained glass on the second floor behind the turreted façade – a work that was created by Louis Comfort Tiffany, the son of the famous jeweler. This stained glass gem was originally commissioned for the school library in 1919 to honor the first principal of Erasmus Hall, Walter B. Gunnison. The Neoclassical subject matter shows a figure (representing knowledge) amid a Roman scene created using a combination of painted and plated glass techniques. Due to overcrowding, the library has since been converted into two classrooms but the Tiffany piece remains in situ.



Photos by E. Frossard (lft) and Stan Rice (right)



## TORAH ANIMAL WORLD

17

*One of the most off-the-beaten path museums in NYC*

1603 41st Street  
 Brooklyn, NY 11218  
 Transport: F to Ditmas Avenue  
 Open: Sun–Thur 9am–9pm by appointment only  
 Entry fee: \$10 per person  
 Tel: 877-752-6286



The Hasidic Jewish neighborhoods in Brooklyn can be a mystery unto themselves, with the communities staunchly holding on to time-honored traditions. The architecture of the neighborhoods adhere to standardized patterns, as do the clothing of the community members and the social norms between them. But every so often, something stands out.

In the neighborhood of Borough Park, Rabbi Shaul Shimon Deutsch runs two museums side by side on the corner of 41st Street and 16th Avenue. The Living Torah Museum (see following double page) and Torah Animal World are two of the most off-the-beaten-path museums in New York City you can find. In fact, the Village Voice calls Torah Animal World “one of the weirdest and most glorious museums this weird and glorious city has ever seen.”

Torah Animal World, filled with over \$1.5 million in taxidermied animals, aims to have every animal and bird mentioned in the Torah on exhibit. All the animals died naturally in zoos or gaming reserves and are shown in “true-to-life” poses. Animals on display include lions, giraffes, a zebra, a black bear, a llama on skis, a penguin, bison, fish and much more.

There is also an exhibit of 24 birds from the Torah, many of which are displayed as if in flight. And lest we forget the smallest animals on the planet, there’s an exhibit about the Shratzim, which includes insects and lizards, and another showcasing the animals in Perek Shirah (an ancient Jewish text), in a safari-like setting.

The aim of Torah Animal World goes beyond the bizarre. Deutsch started the museum as a way to visually teach children with dyslexia and learning disabilities about the Torah. He suffered from dyslexia himself as a child but can read numerous ancient languages. He thought that if children could touch things, they would be able to remember them differently. “We believe that if you can touch history, history will touch you,” he says.

There is another location of Torah Animal World, located in the Catskills in Fallsburg, New York, that exhibits the animals of the Mishna and the Talmud.

## HARP AT FLOYD BENNETT FIELD 11

### *A hangar for aviation legends*

50 Aviator Road, Brooklyn

[www.nyharborparks.org](http://www.nyharborparks.org)

718-338-3799

Admission free

Open Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays 9 am – 4 pm

Transport: 2 and 5 trains/Flatbush Av (be prepared for a very long walk, or bike the Greenway along Flatbush Avenue); bus: Q35 to the Park; car: Belt Parkway to Exit 11S, then Flatbush Avenue south to the main entrance



Floyd Bennett Field is the only area on a New York City map with nothing in it. On the ground it's a desert: wind rattles the fences, the hangars are abandoned relics with broken windows and the ghosts of military insignia fading on their faces. The airfield is vast stretches of concrete slab with orderly lines of weeds growing up through the cracks.

"No one knows about this place," says Bill, a former World War II pilot and volunteer at the Historical Aircraft Restoration Project (HARP). "It's a mystery."

HARP is headquartered in the field's Hangar B, which has become a free-form aviation museum. The walls are covered with clippings, photos, and paintings of great flying feats of the past, some of which took place right here: in its day, Floyd Bennett buzzed with legends. Opened in 1930 as New York's first municipal airport, the field couldn't compete with Newark, but its modern hangars attracted daredevils looking to break records. Roscoe Turner flew here, as did Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart. Both Wiley Post and Howard Hughes started and ended fastest round-the-world flights on Floyd Bennett's runways.

Now Hangar B houses a score of restored aircraft, but the space is more than a museum: it's a sprawling workroom, with howling grinders and saws, and planes without wings, and wings without planes, and oiled engines sitting on metal stands. The principal smell is fresh paint.

"We're all volunteers," says Sol, a HARP member. "We come in three times a week and work on the planes, every group on a different aircraft." Sol gives a tour of the hangar; he has technical savvy born of affection, describing the machines as though they were people. The C-47 is reliable, a hard worker. The PBY Catalina won the war in the Pacific. Bill and his project partner Joseph wheel a freshly canvassed wing from a side room; they're restoring a Stearman biplane. ("You ever see the end of King Kong?" Joseph asks. "That one.") The men are old – Bill flew in Italy during the war, and Joseph was in training when it ended – and have lifetimes of aviation behind them. When they're finished with the Stearman, it will be given a fresh coat of bright yellow paint and added to the growing collection. "I would fly it," Joseph says, "except I don't trust the spars. You don't know what a spar is? C'mere, I'll show you..."