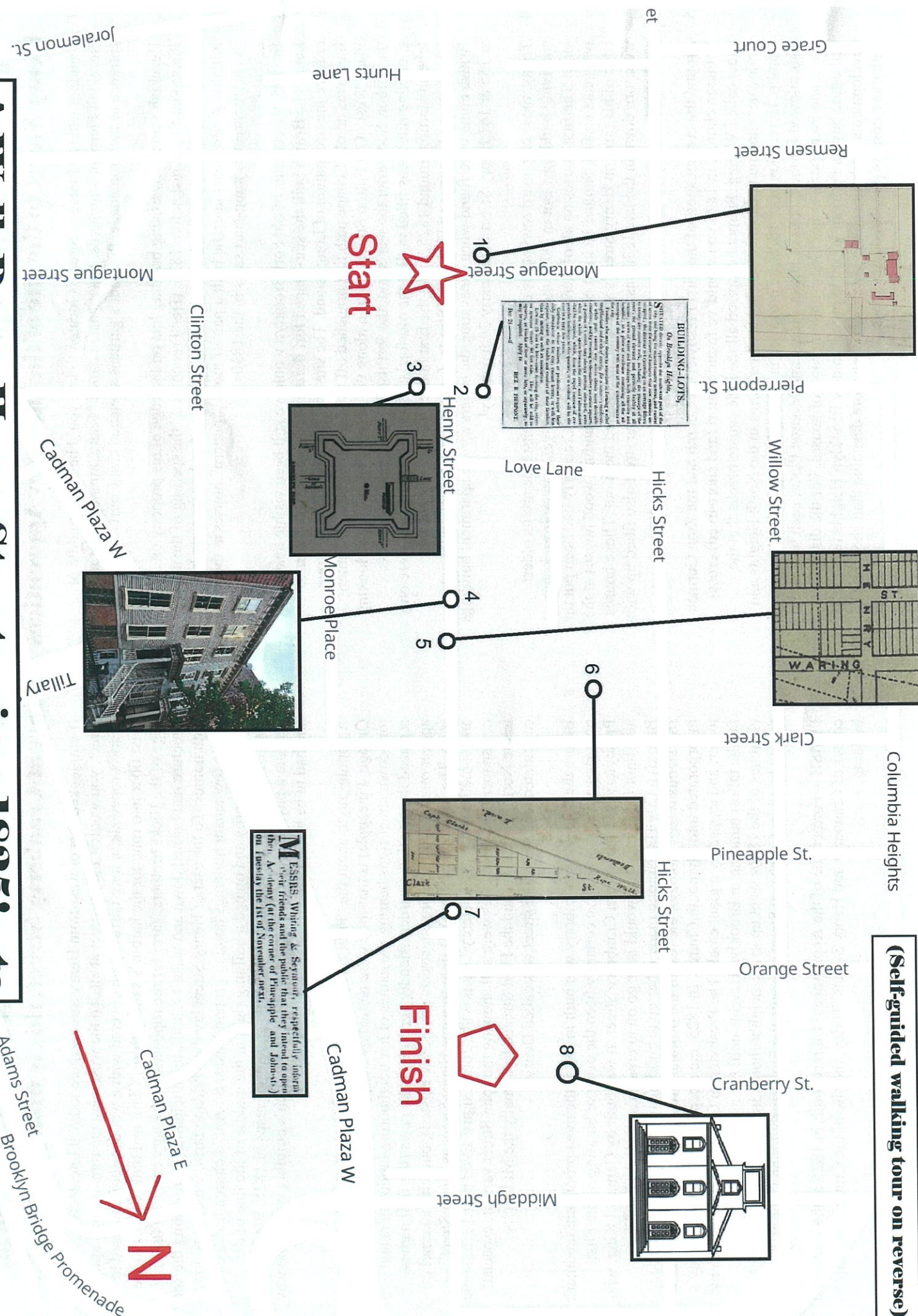


A Walk Down Henry Street – circa 1825! – to the Former Site of the Apprentices’ Library



BROOKLYN
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Self-Guided Walking Tour – Map Key

In 1825 Brooklyn Heights, if you were to start at this spot at Montague Open Streets and walk north on Henry Street to the site of the then-new Apprentices' Library at Cranberry Street, this is what you'd find...

- 1 Standing where Montague Street is located today, you'd be in the middle of Hezekiah Pierpont's orchards. His mansion called "Four Chimneys" sat near the entrance to the Promenade. Pierpont's gardens stretched east Court Street.
 - 2 Hezekiah started advertising building lots on the edge of his property on Pierrepont Street just before 1825. (He "Frenchified" the spelling of the street name to sound fancier!) But he was in no rush. Only a few houses were built initially. A few years later, he built a pair of model "pattern" houses at the corner of Henry Street to jump-start sales in the 1830s.
 - 3 In 1825, the remains of old Fort Brooklyn would've still been visible near Love Lane. The British built the star-shaped fort during the Revolutionary War to enforce the occupation of Long Island. The site was strategic, because Love Lane was an old Lenape path that branched off from the ferry road (Cadman Plaza West / Old Fulton Street) and ran along the ridge of the bluff overlooking the harbor. Soon after the war's end, the fort itself was torn down, and its encircling ditch was filled in. But the old fort's high earthen ramparts were only leveled starting around 1825, when the first houses were put up near the intersection of Henry and Pierrepont Streets. Legend has it that colonial-era British coins were found when excavating the cellars for the apartment buildings at 155 & 161 Henry Street in the early 20th century!
 - 4 Today, these clapboard rowhouses on Henry Street's east side are its oldest surviving buildings. But in 1825, they were still a few years away from being built! The first houses on all of Henry Street south of Cranberry had been put up two years earlier. Samuel Jackson erected three freestanding wood houses at the edge of his farm on Henry Street's west side and rented them out. Those houses were torn down in the late 1830s as the west side of the street also filled up with rowhouses.
 - 5 Around the current spots of the First Presbyterian Church and the Zion German Lutheran church, in 1825 you would've found a short (and short-lived) cross-street called Waring. Pierpont despised all the little square blocks that the landowners had mapped when carving up their farms in the North Heights and Dumbo. Here, soon after 1825, he prevailed in getting Waring Street de-mapped. This allowed for the blocks of Hicks, Henry and Monroe Place, each between Clark and Pierrepont, to be filled with long rows of houses. For the discerning real estate buyers Pierpont hoped to attract to new Brooklyn Heights residential developments, he believed the long rows were more desirable than short blocks with more corners populated with shops.
 - 6 If you looked east or west from Henry Street where today it intersects Clark Street, you wouldn't see a street at all. To the west were the remains of Capt. Clark's ropewalk, a long narrow path covered with a wooden roof and used to twist fiber into rope for the harbor's sailing ships. Clark had rented space at the edge of the Hicks brothers' farm for the ropewalk in the very early 1800s but the structure had burned down and wasn't rebuilt, in anticipation of re-filling the site with homes. To the east of Henry Street lay the Middagh farm, which was dotted with a few tenant buildings holding ground leases. St. Ann's church had their cemetery nearby and owned a building right in the middle of the line of the future road. Clark Street existed only on the pages of maps in 1825. When it became a physical street in the early 1830s, the church's building was in the way and had to be hauled off.
 - 7 A popular myth about the "Fruit Streets" in Brooklyn Heights (Cranberry, Orange, Pineapple) is that they were named by a supposed Lady Middagh who tore down street signs bearing the names of her neighboring landowners and replaced them with the garden-friendly versions. Fake news (the fruit names appear on maps long before the streets physically existed), but with a kernel of truth. The Middagh family DID fight to name Henry Street as "John Street" – and sometimes replaced "Henry" signs with "John" signs! Even past 1825, some newspapers and directories were still showing the John Street variant, especially in the North Heights around the Fruit Streets. Eventually the Middaghs capitulated, and the entire street was called Henry.
 - 8 Before the Apprentices' Library was built in 1825, the most prominent landmark near Henry Street would've certainly been the original building of the First Presbyterian Church down Cranberry Street. It was built by Gamaliel King, who also built the library and would later go on to create the final design for Brooklyn City Hall among many other civic buildings. Much of its front facade still stands today, although the rest of the original structure has been rebuilt and incorporated into Plymouth Church. In 1825, the steeple was taller than today's tower, and topped by a giant clock. The Presbyterian Church would've been by far the tallest building in Brooklyn Heights until the great Gothic Revival churches of the 1840s went up in the neighborhood. In 1824, Walt Whitman's family lived on Cranberry Street opposite the First Presbyterian Church.
- * FINISH – Former site of the Apprentices' Library, built in 1825 at the southwest corner of Cranberry and Henry Streets. Today, the site of the Cranlyn apartment building.