Inside Plaques: Sandy Schlen Public Living Room, Juanita Rodriguez-Orengo Dining Room (see also 4), Caroline Papallo Kitchen.
Outside Plaque: Geraldine Miller Conversation Corner

Geraldine Miller (see also 12) founded the Household Technicians Union to ensure equal rights for women working as maids, nannies and cooks. She was president of the NCNW and ran a program for Project Open Doors that brought to light similarities and shared concerns of homemakers and household workers, breaking down the barriers of class and race.

2 Leonard Library (81 Devoe St)
Ann Giordano graduated from the NW College Program. In 1978 she became the coordinator of the same program, helping grassroots women attend college in the neighborhood and become community leaders. Ann led the fight against the closing of Leonard Library by organizing a petition to preserve the library, which resulted in the Brooklyn Public Library reversing its decision.

3 Swinging Sixties Community Center & Small World Day Care Center (211 Amster St)
In 1969, under the guidance of Jan Peterson (see also 10), the Conselyea Street Block Association founded the center to bring services to children, parents and seniors in the community. Tilde Tarentino (see also 7) was its Executive Director for over 30 years.

4 Former Eastern District High School (820 Grand St)
In 1982 after a student got stabbed in the head, Juanita Orengo-Rodriguez organized a boycott at the school. Parents and students gathered for three days outside to demand better conditions. Juanita and the PTA achieved to relieve overcrowding, and to increase security, number of teachers and counseling programs. She also worked for a decade as Director of the NCNW’s You Can Community School.” With Juanita’s guidance it became the number one Offsite Education Services School. Juanita graduated from the NW College Program.

Since 1974, the National Congress of Neighborhood Women (NCNW) has been working to build a social change movement of grassroots women living in poor and working class urban and rural communities. At the heart of all NCNW efforts is the belief that a critical and usually overlooked area to improve life in neighborhoods is to enhance and expand participation by women in local development, connect them with allies from outside the neighborhood, and build an effective force for their visions and values in local, state, national, and international policy formation.

NCNW achieved consultative status at the United Nations in 1985 and helped initiate GROOTS International, a global network to support grassroots women’s organizations to collectively forge and consolidate grassroots women’s presence and perspective. In 1996 Neighborhood Women members participated in the founding of the Hualo’ru Commission, a global membership and partnership coalition that encourages grassroots women’s organizations to enhance their community development practice and to exercise collective political power at the global level. The NCNW, GROOTS International and the global secretariat of the Hualo’ru Commission are all located at the NW House in Williamsburg-Greenpoint.

The NW Legacy Project is supported by the NCNW, St. Nick’s Alliance, Office of Councilwoman Diana Reyna (2012-2013) and the Office of Councilmember Antonio Reynoso.

Photographs courtesy of the NCNW. All black and white photographs by Janie Eisenberg. All color photographs by Rafael Gamo.

The National Congress of Neighborhood Women (NCNW) has been dedicated for more than 30 years to empowering poor and working class women to become community leaders. The NCNW works to give grassroots women a voice, and to raise their consciousness of their own power so they can begin to address the problems they face in their communities. In 1974 Neighborhood Women members decided that the office for the NCNW would be located in Williamsburg-Greenpoint, where it has remained until present. This neighborhood became the testing ground to develop programs that would later be replicated at a national and international level.

The Neighborhood Women Walking Tour highlights the role of grassroots women’s leadership in the historical development, growth and transformation of their communities. It also honors at an individual level the work of NW activists and attracts and inspires Williamsburg-Greenpoint residents to actively participate in the community. Though the work of Neighborhood Women is invisible in the built environment of Williamsburg-Greenpoint, their biggest impact has been in the perception of women had of themselves and the many lives they continue to transform in the community through their leadership.

The Neighborhood Women (NW) Walking Tour will help you discover how these grassroots women leaders and activists transformed Williamsburg-Greenpoint! Some of their accomplishments include a day care and senior center, a living and learning center and affordable women’s housing.

 approximate duration: 1 hr
distance: 1.6 miles

find the NW plaques at the different sites to find more about each woman’s experience and accomplishments.
Margaret Carnegie Playground

The playground, located in Cooper Park, honors public housing leader Margaret Carnegie (see also 5 and 8). She succeeded in bridging differences between ethnic groups in Williamsburg-Greenpoint by being involved in several neighborhood organizations throughout her life. Carnegie dedicated over forty years to address the basic necessities of a strong neighborhood: public housing, the strengthening of family relations and better quality of life for seniors. Grandparents Avenue, located along a section of Kingsland Avenue, earned its name in recognition of her work.

Cooper Park Houses
Margaret Carnegie (see also 5 and 6), Mildred Johnson (see also 8) and Mildred Tudty (see also 10) moved to Cooper Park Houses in 1952. They were the founders of the Cooper Park Houses Tenant Association.

7-12 Neighborhood Women Houses

In 1962, the NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) closed the 67-year-old Greenwich Hospital (GH). The Department of Housing and Preservation converted the GH into a men’s homeless shelter, ignoring plans that the community board had presented for redevelopment of a nursing home and senior housing. The HHC moved 1200 homeless men without consulting the community. The result was neglect of the men, along with a profound disturbance to the quality of life in the neighborhood. A coalition of five neighborhood groups formed the Greenpoint Renaissance Enterprise Corporation (GREC), the majority of those involved were women, members of NW. After protesting the hospital closing, and trying to limit the numbers in the homeless shelter, GREC presented its vision for a positive reuse of the eight abandoned buildings to the Community Board. They voted in favor and Neighborhood Women received three hospital buildings to convert into thirty-three units of housing. These are the Neighborhood Women Houses.

Marie Leanza and Tillie Tarantino Bldg (29 Devoe Ave)

Marie Leanza and Tillie Tarantino (see also 3) are grassroots women activists who have demonstrated an abiding commitment to the betterment of Williamsburg. Marie and Tillie, lifelong Williamsburg residents, became involved in 1975 with the NCNW through the Neighborhood Women College Program. Marie worked for over three decades at St. Nick’s Alliance specializing in senior housing. She led the fight against redlining in Williamsburg and was key to the establishment of the Building Survival Fund. Tillie co-founded the Conseleyes Street Block Association to bring services to parents and seniors in the community. She was a founder of Small World Day Care Center and served as Executive Director of the Swinging Sixties Senior Center for over three decades.

11-12 Elizabeth “Betty” Marrero Garden and Mary Alice Richardson and Geraldine Miller Committee Room

The NW Houses garden honors woman leader Betty Marrero for acting as a social link that brought together the community, and for the energy and passion she demonstrated throughout her volunteer work. The community room honors Geraldine Miller (see also 1) and Mary Alice Richardson, who was president of NWG and pioneered work in economic development as the first director of a Community Action Program in the 1960s.