

Al Qalam Historical Sign: Original and Revised Text

Paragraph-by-paragraph comparison. Original-only wording is shown in red strikethrough; revised or added wording is shown in blue underline. Unchanged wording remains black.

Original-only wording	Revised or added wording	Unchanged wording
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1. Origins and neighborhood identity

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The first Arabic-speaking community in the United States took root just steps away from this plaza. Between 1880 and 1945, immigrants from Greater Syria, which encompassed modern-day Lebanon, Syria, and historic Palestine, settled on Washington Street between The Battery and Albany Street. The vibrant neighborhood, known as “the Syrian quarter” or “Little Syria,” was home to about 1,200 Syrians. Their homes were crowded tenements that had been carved from single-family residences built in the early nineteenth century. Like their Irish, German, and Eastern European neighbors, the Syrians endured life with no indoor plumbing and no access to fresh air or light.	The first Arabic-speaking community in the United States took root just steps away from this plaza. Between 1880 and 1945, immigrants from Greater Syria, which encompassed modern-day Lebanon, Syria, and historic Palestine, settled on Washington Street between The Battery and Albany Street. The vibrant neighborhood, known as “Little Syria,” was home to about 1,200 <u>immigrants</u>. Their homes were crowded tenements that had been carved from single-family residences built in the early nineteenth century. Like their Irish, German, and Eastern European neighbors, <u>they</u> endured life with no indoor plumbing and no access to fresh air or light.

2. Community institutions and early publishing

ORIGINAL	REVISED
Most peddled goods when they first arrived, but by 1900, Washington Street boasted shops, factories, restaurants, four chapels, a Syrian school to teach adults English and children American history, and a half-dozen Arabic newspapers. Musicians and poets were respected members of the community, performing impromptu at weddings, baptisms, and social gatherings. Poetry was regularly published in local newspapers and by the early twentieth century, the Syrians had begun to publish books and magazines in both Arabic and English.	Most peddled goods when they first arrived, but by 1900, Washington Street boasted shops, factories, restaurants, four chapels, a school to teach adults English and children American history, and a half-dozen Arabic newspapers. Musicians and poets <u>performed</u> impromptu at weddings, baptisms, and social gatherings. Poetry was regularly published in local newspapers and by the early twentieth century,, <u>immigrant writers</u> had begun to publish books and magazines in both Arabic and English.

3. Named writers and national origins

ORIGINAL	REVISED
Among these writers were Elia Abu Madi, Naseeb Arida, Kahlil Gibran, Nadra Haddad, Mikhail Naimy, and Ameen Rihani, who were instrumental in the formation of a writers' association called al Rabitah al Qalamiyah (The Pen Bond). There were also many respected members of the literary community who were not members of al Rabitah, including 'Afifa Karam, Agabia Malouf, and Abbas Abu Shakra.	Among these writers whose work is reflected in this artwork are Elia Abu Madi, Kahlil Gibran, Mikhail Naimy, and Ameen Rihani from Lebanon , and Naseeb Arida and Nadra Haddad from Syria , who were instrumental in the formation of a writers' association called al Rabitah al Qalamiyah (The Pen Bond). Also represented in this artwork are recognized writers who were not members of al Rabitah, including 'Afifa Karam, Agabia Malouf, and Abbas Abu Shakra from Lebanon .

4. Rabitah description and literary impact

ORIGINAL	REVISED
Formed first in 1916 and reconstituted in 1920, al Rabitah al Qalamiyah produced works of fiction, poetry, and visual art that imagined new ways of being Arab and American. Their most famous member was Kahlil Gibran, author of The Prophet, published in New York in 1923. Their writing played an important role in the literary renaissance in the Middle East--radically transforming the Arabic language, inspiring generations of later writers in the United States and the Middle East and creating innovative forms of Arabic literature.	Formed first in 1916 and reconstituted in 1920, al Rabitah al Qalamiyah produced works of fiction, poetry, and visual art that imagined new ways of being Arab and American. Their most famous member was Kahlil Gibran, author of The Prophet, published in New York in 1923. Their writing played an important role in the literary renaissance in the Middle East--radically transforming the Arabic language, inspiring generations of later writers in the United States and the Middle East and creating innovative forms of Arabic literature.

5. Displacement

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The community was displaced by development in the financial district, which was claimed by eminent domain and razed to construct the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel in the 1940s.	The community was displaced by development in the financial district, which was claimed by eminent domain and razed to construct the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel in the 1940s.

6. Commission and artwork description

ORIGINAL	REVISED
Washington Street Historical Society commissioned Al Qalam: Poets in the Park in Elizabeth H. Berger Plaza to celebrate the literary legacy of New York's first Arabic-speaking community. The Moroccan French artist Sara Ouhammadou was selected through a competition held by the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs. Ouhammadou designed a sculpture and mosaic panels that display excerpts from the works of Syrian writers in her own abstract alphabet. Ouhammadou treats language like architecture and deconstructed lines of poetry into glass and mosaic for al Qalam. The resulting forms are intentionally illegible, allowing the works to be accessible to all without translation.	Washington Street Historical Society commissioned Al Qalam: Poets in the Park in Elizabeth H. Berger Plaza to celebrate the literary legacy of New York's first Arabic-speaking community. The Moroccan French artist Sara Ouhammadou was selected through a competition held by the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs. Ouhammadou designed a sculpture and mosaic panels that display excerpts from the works of those writers in her own abstract alphabet. Ouhammadou treats language like architecture and has deconstructed lines of poetry into glass and mosaic for Al Qalam. The resulting forms are intentionally illegible, allowing the works to be accessible to all without translation.