

A Brief History of The Bronx

IT was in 1639 that our first white settler, Jonas Bronck, a Dane, newly-arrived from Holland, came into a community destined later to bear his name with great pride. He located on the uplands, west of Mill Brook, (now more modernly known as Brook Avenue). This was but thirty years after Henry Hudson, in the "Half-Moon," sailed up the magnificent waterway that now bears his name, and viewed with admiration the grandeur of the Palisades on the West, and the verdant expanses of what was later to be known as The Bronx on the East; twenty-five years after Adrian Block had sailed up the East River and the Long Island Sound and explored the eastern portion of The Bronx and Westchester County; and sixteen years after the actual settlement of New Amsterdam, (now New York).

The manner in which Jonas Bronck kept the friendship of the local Indian tribes is part of our National history. These friendly Indians, it is reported, saved him, his family and possessions from harm when other Indians in Manhattan went on the warpath and made their way across the Harlem River.

Bronck died in 1643, about four years after he first settled here, sincerely mourned by all who knew him, the Indians particularly.

In the early 1640's, two others, (whose names have become of historic interest), also settled in what is now known as The Bronx. They were Mrs. Anne Hutchinson, who settled near the stream that is known as the Hutchinson River (Eastchester Creek), and John Throckmorton, from whose settlement Throgg's Neck got its name.

Dutch Settlements

It must be borne in mind that during all this time of which we speak, the territory now called The Bronx was made up of Dutch settlements established beyond the northern limits of Manhattan Island (New Netherlands). Territory now comprised in lower Westchester County became the seat of one of the most noted of the Dutch Patrons, Adrian van der Donck, whose name is also linked closely with the early chronicles of our Borough.

It wasn't until 1664 that New

Netherlands was taken over by the English King Charles, who, by royal patent, conveyed the conquered colony to his brother, the Duke of York, and New Netherlands became known by the name it still bears, New York. From this time on, until the American Revolution, the English continued in possession of New York, except for a short period in 1673 and 1674, when the Dutch regained control of the Colony for fifteen months.

In 1670, the original 500 acres settled by Jonas Bronck, known as "Bronck'sland," was purchased by Captain Richard Morris for himself and his brother, Colonel Lewis Morris. Six years later, the holdings of the Morris family were increased by 1,420 acres, by virtue of a patent from the English Governor Andros, giving them a total of 1,920 acres.

This land, then known as the Manor of Morrisania, together with the Manor of Fordham, the lower part of the Manor of Philipseburg, the lower sections of Eastchester and Pelham, and the Borough Town of Westchester, now form the Borough of The Bronx and County of The Bronx.

The County of Westchester, with those of New York, Kings, Queens and Richmond, and five others up-State, was originally formed on November 1st, 1683.

New York State Organized

The War for American Independence, in 1775, practically freed our community from English domination, but it was not until the following year, on July 9th, 1776, that the State of New York was formally organized, at a meeting of the representatives of its people, at White Plains, the County seat of Westchester County.

On April 20th, 1777, the State Assembly, in session at Kingston, New York, then the State Capitol, adopted our first State Constitution, and on July 9th of the same year, elected General George Clinton, of Ulster County, the first Governor of the State.

At the same time, while our territory was still in the hands of the armed forces of England, our illustrious townsman, Gouverneur Morris, was chosen as one of the delegates of the State of New York to the Continental Congress. (It was not until 1783 that the English forces completely evacuated our community).

By Act of the State Legislature in 1788, all of the Counties of the State, of which there were then fourteen, were divided into townships. The County of Westchester, one of the ten original Counties of 1683, was divided into twenty-one such town-

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ships, following closely the lines of the ancient manors and patents. The Harlem River was the southern boundary of the County.

First Annexation to New York County

On January 1st, 1874, (by virtue of Chapter 613 of the Laws of 1873), the lower section of Westchester County, comprising the Town of West Farms, (erected from the township of Westchester in 1846), Morrisania, (erected from the town of West Farms in 1856), and the Town of Kingsbridge, (erected from the Town of Yonkers in 1872), the present westerly portion of our community, was annexed to the City and County of New York. The villages which made up this territory, all of which had their own interesting histories, were designated as follows: Mott Haven, Wilton, Springhurst, Bensonia, Woodstock, Forest Grove, East Melrose, Melrose, Morrisania, Highbridgeville, Inwood, Fordham Heights, Mount Hope, Central Morrisania, Upper Morrisania, Fairmount, West Farms, Belmont, Prospect Hill, Wardsville, Union Hill, Bedford Park, Williamsbridge, Kingsbridge, Riverdale, North New York, Port Morris, East Morrisania, Carr Hill, Grove Hill, Eltona, South Melrose, North Melrose, West Morrisania, Claremont, Morris Heights, Mount Eden, West Tremont, South Fordham, Tremont, East Tremont, South Belmont, Adamsville, Fordham, Monterey, Cedar Hill, Mount Pleasant, Woodlawn, Spuyten Duyvil, Mosholu and Mount St. Vincent.

Additional Territory in 1895

By virtue of Chapter 934 of the Laws of 1895, the Town of Westchester, one of the original townships of 1788, and portions of the Townships of Eastchester and Pelham, comprising the present easterly portion of our community, were annexed to the City and County of New York. The villages and towns comprised in this territory were: Bartow, Baychester, Bronxdale, Bronxwood Park, Cherry Tree Point, City Island, Clason's Point, Cornell's Neck, Eastchester, Edenwald, Ferry Point, Fort Schuyler, Givan Homestead, Goose Island,

Hart's Island, High Island, Hunter's Island, Jacksonville, Jerome, Laconia, Locust Point, Ludlow Island, Middletown, Morrell Park, Morris Park, Olinville, Park Versailles, Pelham Neck, Pennyfield, Rodman's Neck, Schuylerville, Seton Homestead, South Mt. Vernon, South Washingtonville, Stinardstown, Throgg's Neck, Twin Island, Unionport, Van Nest, Wakefield, Washingtonville, Westchester, West Farms, Williamsbridge and Wright's Island.

The area comprised in this district aggregates about 14,500 acres. The entire area of The Bronx is 26,500 acres.

Changes in Government

The part of our community annexed to the City and County of New York on January 1, 1874, was designated as the 23rd and 24th Wards, and the development of the territory was placed under the jurisdiction of the Department of Public Parks of New York City, which body had suc-

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ceeded the Central Park Commissioners.

At the time of annexation, the population of the 23rd and 24th Wards was about 35,000, and a speedy development of this territory was anticipated, but, unfortunately, was not realized. The new part of the City of New York was looked upon as a mere suburban locality, more to be tolerated than recognized as a part of the City.

After many years of dissatisfaction in our community over the administration (rather the lack of it) of the Park Department, property owners in the 23rd and 24th Wards joined activities in behalf of a local bureau, or department, that would prove more beneficial to them, as well as to the City at large.

The campaign bore fruit on June 7th, 1890, with the Governor's approval of a Legislative Bill creating the "Department of Street Improvements of the 23rd and 24th Wards," and transferring to the new body the

jurisdiction over the improvement of this territory, up to that time reposing in the Park Department. The new Department of Street Improvements became a functioning body on January 1, 1891.

By virtue of Chapter 378 of the Laws of 1897, the territories embraced within the annexations to the City and County of New York in 1874 and 1895, became the Borough of The Bronx, on January 1, 1898, and the Department of Street Improvements ceased to exist as an independent body, being merged with the Borough Government.

On January 1, 1914, by virtue of Chapter 548 of the Laws of 1912, Bronx County came into being, the first group of County officials, who had been elected at the November, 1913 elections, taking office.

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