

Photo History of Bronxville



When New York City's population spilled north of Manhattan during the 19th century, one of the country hamlets in its path was Bronxville, which offered a few scattered structures near the Bronx River, a stop on the New York and Harlem Railroad.

In the ensuing decades, the Village evolved from a tiny settlement of farm, orchard, estate and factory land to become one of the nation's premiere metropolitan suburbs.





FIRST WHITE SETTLERS

Although local Indian tribes deeded the region to British colonists in 1666, the earliest settlers are believed to be the Underhill and Morgan families who arrived here in the first half of the 18th century.

Both families farmed and tended orchards, but the Underhills also established the first local factory – a saw and grist mill where today's Pondfield Road West crosses the Bronx River. They built a wooden bridge over the River inspiring the settlement's first name, Underhill's Crossing. Their mill was the first of several factories sprung up along the River. Manufacturing was part of the Bronxville scene for almost two centuries, until 1922 when the last factory, the Kraft leather tannery, vanished in a spectacular blaze.



The Morgans are remembered by the oldest surviving house in the Village, the Abijah Morgan House, built sometime before 1811 when a company of militia mustered there during the War of 1812.



EARLY 19TH CENTURY FAMILIES

It was almost a century after the arrival of the Underhills and Morgans before the next modest influx of settlers would make their mark. Alexander Masterton, a prosperous stonecutter from Scotland, was lured by quarries of fine white marble that were discovered in nearby Tuckahoe in 1822. Masterton eventually supplied stone for Greek Revival buildings from Boston to New Orleans, including Washington D.C. capitol buildings destroyed during the War of 1812.

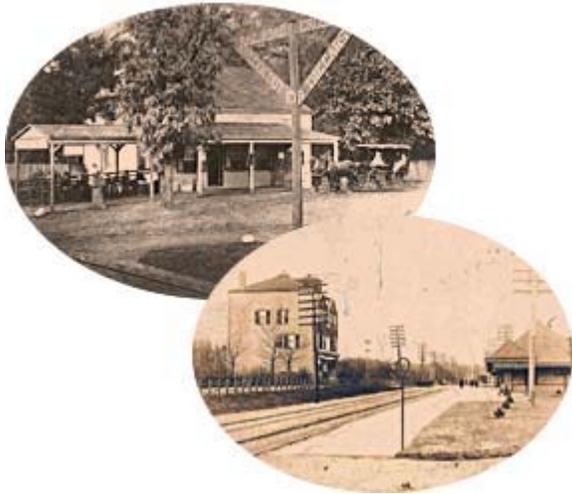
In 1835 Masterton built a neo-classical wooden home called Ridgcroft for his wife and six children. The house is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It remained in the family until the 1959 death of Masterton's granddaughter Amie Dusenberry, who like many of her Masterton and Dusenberry ancestors, was a vital force in Village life.



The year after the Mastertons moved to White Plains Road, the other side of the Village became home to another large family, the Rev. and Mrs. Robert Bolton and their 13 children. An American, Bolton had taken an English bride and spent his married life in Liverpool. Looking for a new start, he spent \$14,000 for 150 acres of land and an Underhill house, developing Brook Farm, a model Homestead and orchards.

Although the Boltons liquidated their holdings after only a decade and a half, they left a lasting legacy. In 1849 they donated two acres on the crest of a hill to a fledgling religious group that build a Dutch Reformed church. This pre-Civil War congregation recently celebrated its 150th anniversary in their much larger 1926 stone building.





THE RAILROAD ARRIVES

Despite their short tenure in Bronxville, the Boltons witnessed the most significant event in Village history – the coming of the railroad from Manhattan. In 1844 the Harlem Railroad reached Underhill's Crossing on its way to White Plains. New settlers soon followed, even though the train would not make regular stops for a few more years.

New York City merchant James Prescott Swain purchased the old Underhill mill in 1844 and established a water-powered stone factory making screws and axles and grinding grist. He built a mansion near the river and bought swathes of land on both sides of the train tracks where he pastured a herd of cattle.



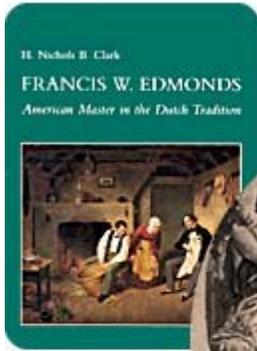
At about the same time, the settlement attracted another family who would stay on to become long-time residents. Alfred Ebenezer Smith built an axle factory on the Bronx River across from the Underhill mill.

Smith married into the Morgan family and soon built a house on Pondfield Road. One of his sons, David Smith, married James Swain's daughter and became Bronxville's first doctor. Son Alfred, Jr., was instrumental in Bronxville's incorporation in 1898 and became the first Village Attorney.





Five years after the train tracks were laid, Swain's father-in-law, James M. Prescott, moved nearby, buying much of the Bolton land in 1849. Within months of the Prescott purchase, a New York City financier named Francis W. Edmonds began buying up adjoining property. In 1850 both men built imposing stone mansions perched on hills on the opposite sides of Midland Valley. Prescott's Italianate stone Manor House is now part of the Lawrence Park Historic District and Edmonds' Crow's Nest has evolved into an ornate Gothic stone mansion.



FIRST RESIDENT ARTIST

Something of a Renaissance man, Edmonds was both a prominent banker who laid the ground work for our modern-day check clearing system and a respected artist who painted in the Dutch genre style. Edmonds was a precursor of later Bronxville inhabitants. He was the first established artist to take up residence in the Village; several dozen leading painters, etchers and sculptors would follow suit half a century later.



1850's TRANSFORMATION

The 1850's was a time of drastic change in the Village. Underhill's Crossing changed its name to Bronxville, as the Underhills sold off most of their remaining land. In 1850 Benjamin Horton established a grocery store next to the train tracks and Lancaster Underhill, grandson of the original colonial settler, was ensconced as the first station master and postmaster.

His house, which stood beside the railroad, also doubled as the train station and, from 1852, as the community's first post office.





The first commuters arrived in the 1850's, including the DeWitt brothers, several of whom practiced law in the Wall Street area. While the DeWitt's primary seat was in Yonkers, by 1855 one brother had built a house on Elm Rock Road, and the DeWitts owned more than 100 acres of the land eventually incorporated as Bronxville Village.

The road to Tuckahoe, now Sagamore Road, was laid out by the DeWitts in 1860. The growth of the 1850's was not sustained, however, in part because of "malarial vapours" rising from stagnant water along the Bronx River.



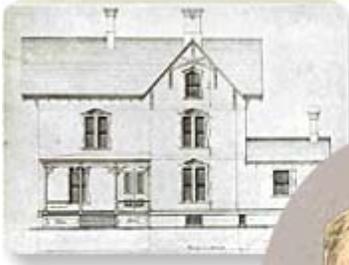
FIRST PUBLIC SCHOOL

Although the first local schools were funded privately, Bronxville's first public school was built in 1870 on land donated by the DeWitt brothers.

This one-room, wood-frame structure was replaced in 1906 by a larger brick building.



Less than two decades later, Bronxville's rapid growth required a substantially larger school. In 1922 work began on the first two wings of today's beautiful K-12 public school on Pondfield Road facing the Reformed Church.



1898 INCORPORATION

Most of the homes built in the 1860's and 70's have since given way to other construction. An important exception is Dogwood Cottage which was built in 1870 by Francis Bacon, a New York City piano manufacturer. Shortly after Bronxville's incorporation as a separate Village in April 1898, Bacon, as the first Village President (today Mayor), hosted the first meeting of the Village Trustees at his home. More than a century later, Bronxville continues to be governed by local residents who serve as unpaid Trustees and Mayor.



VICTORIAN NEWCOMERS

Following the national economic reverses of the 1870's, new blood began to discover Bronxville. Much of the old estate land had been broken up into smaller parcels purchased by new men and women who would become prominent residents. They included a German leather manufacturer, Frederick W. Kraft, who purchased 13 acres on the Bronx River in 1880, where he built a tannery that became nationally known for fine leather products. On what is today's Kraft Avenue, he also built homes for himself and his two sons, both of whom would serve as Village Trustees.

The family would later donate the land for St. Joseph's Church, opened in 1928.





In 1884, a cosmopolitan couple from Brooklyn, Harriet Rockwell and her husband, moved into one of the old Masterton homes on Elm Rock Road.

Within three years, they had acquired 80 acres of prime land and developed a natural spring which would operate for several decades as the Gramatan Spring Water Company. After her husband's death, Mrs. Rockwell began subdividing her land in the early 1900's.



In 1888, Frank and Kate Chambers moved into Crow's Nest. He would be the second mayor of Bronxville and remembered for his life-long contributions to the Village as the "first citizen" of the Village. From his extensive property holdings, Chambers also generously donated land, free of charge or at cost, for projects ranging from a trolley line, the current school grounds, today's Boy Scout Field and the Bronx River Parkway.

Chambers' generosity also played a major role in forming Bronxville's Four Corners – today's civic center of the Village where the public school and Reformed Church are joined by the Bronxville Public Library and Village Hall, both built in 1942.



BIRTH OF LAWRENCE PARK

The history of the modern suburb of Bronxville begins in earnest with the 1890 purchase of Prescott farm by William Van Duzer Lawrence, a rich drug manufacturer who set the scene for the creation of what would become a vibrant, well-planned residential community.

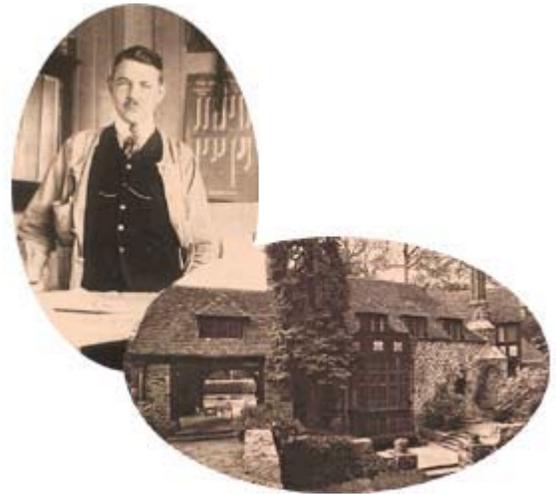
The transformation, however, was arduous. Lawrence laid out his first streets and home sites in the new Lawrence Park along cowpaths weaving among huge old trees and massive granite outcroppings.





In the beginning, Lawrence built three or four houses a year, calling on the talents of his friend and fellow Michigan native, architect William A. Bates. Bates was the first of several architects active in Bronxville who set a standard for well-designed and gracefully-sited homes.

Several dozen Bates-designed buildings survive today; architects Penrose Stout, Lewis Bowman and George F. Root, III, designing primarily in the 1920's, would be nearly as prolific.



Lawrence Park soon gained a national reputation, both for its romantic design and the celebrity of its early inhabitants. Prominent writers moved in first, including several women: Alice Wellington Rollins, Kate Douglas Wiggin (who later wrote "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm"), Ruth McNery Stuart and Elizabeth Custer, the General's widow.

Edmond Clarence Stedman, "the poet of Wall Street" was the most prominent man of letters in the country when he settled at Wellington Circle in Lawrence Park in 1896.



LAWRENCE PARK ARTISTS COLONY

An influx of well-established artists soon eclipsed the literary contingent. The Lawrence Park Art Colony began by happenstance: William H. Howe, an artist best known for his cow paintings, saw the Village as he passed by on the train.

He was soon joined by other then-prominent artists, including illustrator, etcher and painter Otto Bacher; engraver Lorenzo Hatch; muralist Will Low; illustrator and portraitist William Smedley; muralist and interior designer Herman Schladermundt; still life painter Milne Ramsey and writer-lawyer-artist Tudor Jenks.



Today Lawrence Park is a National Historic District, still distinguished by its narrow, meandering streets, wildly irregular building plots, an eclectic mix of large homes, some of which seem to grow out of the granite bedrock, and a close-knit neighborhood.



WORLD-CLASS HOTEL

In the late 1800's, real estate developers often attracted potential home buyers by building a hotel in their residence parks. William Lawrence followed suit, first with the 1899 Gramatan Inn, built atop Sunset Hill, high above the train station. When it burned, the much grander Hotel Gramatan arose in its place.

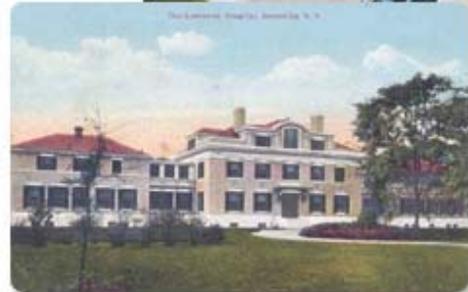
The 300-room Hotel Gramatan became a fashionable vacation spot for New Yorkers and travelers from all over the world. Before it was torn down in 1972, it had been one of the most exclusive suburban hotels in America, visited by famous Americans such as Greta Garbo, the Barrymores, Gloria Swanson, Theodore Dreiser and Eleanor Roosevelt.



VILLAGE INSTITUTIONS

In 1906 Lawrence joined forces with Frank Chambers to give Bronxville its first Village Hall which sat on the site of the old blacksmith shop at the junction of Pondfield Road and Kraft Avenue. An all-purpose municipal building, it housed the fire department (and their horses), the library, the post office, a swimming pool, bowling alley and government offices. It was demolished in the late 1930s.

In the early years, Lawrence also founded another Village institution, which continues to thrive today – Lawrence Hospital. It had its genesis in the near-fatal appendicitis attack suffered in 1906 by Lawrence's youngest son. His desperate ride to New York in the baggage car of a passing New York Central train easily persuaded William Lawrence that Bronxville needed better medical facilities. The original buildings opened in 1909.



Over the years, they have been replaced and the replacements have been substantially remodeled and enlarged. Today Lawrence Hospital Center is a busy up-to-date community hospital affiliated with New York-Presbyterian Hospital.

One institution that arrived in Bronxville in 1909 still thrives in the Village – Concordia College. A prep school junior college Lutheran boys seminary when it moved to its 23 acre site along White Plains Road, it has been transformed into a co-ed four-year liberal arts college with a student body of about 1,000. From its first three buildings, designed by Edward L. Tilton, architect of Ellis Island, the campus now counts numerous classroom buildings, along with dormitories, a library, gym and sports center, music center, auditorium and other facilities.



Although nearby Sarah Lawrence College, founded in 1926 by William Lawrence to honor his wife, has a Bronxville postal address, it is actually located in Yonkers.



**MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING:
A VILLAGE HALLMARK**

The 1910's brought suburban growth to several other areas of the village and ushered in two additional forms of residential construction – the suburban apartment building and community houses, which are imaginative row houses, today known as town houses.

Apartments above retail shops also made their appearance. Lawrence built most of the early apartments in Bronxville, including Gramatan Court and the Alger Court complex.



Designed by William Bates, the apartment buildings matched Lawrence Park's single family homes in size and architectural interest. The first town houses in Westchester County and among the earliest in the country, Lawrence conceived of Kensington Terrace as an ideal way to offer the pleasures of suburban living without home-owning duties and domestic cares.

Lawrence's vision continues to give Bronxville's one-square mile an unusual mix of housing stock, ranging from rental studio apartments to million dollar mansions.



ROARING TWENTIES

The modern suburb of Bronxville came of age in the years between the two world wars as hundreds of homes along new streets were carved from estate and farm land.

A retail and professional district solidified its presence along Pondfield Road, Kraft Avenue and the connecting side streets. On the west side of the train tracks, Palmer Avenue and part of Parkway Road also saw commercial development.





PROTOTYPE SUBURB

Only one square mile in area, Bronxville Village embodies characteristics that city planners now recognize as crucial to the successful community: pedestrian scale, house and street placement guided by topography, a mix of housing from studio apartment to mansion, a cohesive shopping area, and public transportation. Almost fully developed in the early decades of the 20th century, Bronxville benefited from a sustained standard of architectural design and quality.

The result is a community of graceful homes and streets, virtually all within walking distance of a train station 28 minutes from the heart of Manhattan. Throughout its century of official existence, Bronxville's residents have maintained a vibrant community dedicated to the generous support of its public school, churches, hospital, library, college and municipal government.





PROMINENT FORMER RESIDENTS

Prominent individuals who have made Bronxville their home over the years include:

The Joseph P. Kennedy Family Residents of Bronxville from 1928 to 1941, Rose and Joseph P. Kennedy and their nine children, including future President John F. Kennedy, Senator Robert F. Kennedy and Senator Ted Kennedy, owned "Crownlands," a now demolished mansion on Pondfield Road in the vicinity of today's Crown Circle.

Brendan Gill – The long time New Yorker film, theater and architecture critic and his family called 26 Prescott Avenue home from 1946 to 1986.

Eddie Rickenbacker – The famed World War I fighter pilot, and later president of Eastern Airlines, lived with his family at the Lawrence Park "Manor House," 8 Prescott Avenue, from 1931 to 1938.

Elizabeth Custer

The widow of General George Armstrong Custer was a life long friend of William Lawrence, the founder of modern Bronxville. From the early 1890s through the mid-1920s, Libbie Custer was a frequent visitor to Bronxville's Lawrence Park where she owned 20 Park Avenue and later 6 Chestnut Avenue.



Courtesy of Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Ford C. Frick – The third Major League Commission of Baseball and his family made their home at 16 Edgewood Lane from the mid-1940s until his death in 1978. During Frick's tenure as National League President, Jackie Robinson became the first black player in the major leagues.

Jack Paar – The legendary host of NBC's The Tonight Show lived at 32 Studio Lane with his family from 1955 to 1974.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti – As a child living at 42 Parkway Road for five years in the early 1930s, the future Beat Generation poet was the ward of William Lawrence's oldest daughter, Anna Bisland.

Chuck Scarborough – A long time NBC television news anchor in New York City, he lived at One Governor's Road with his family for about a decade beginning in 1974.



Roy Chapman Andrews

A prominent explorer for the American Museum of Natural History, he led many expeditions to Mongolia, one of which discovered the first fossilized dinosaur eggs. Often said to be the model for Indiana Jones, he lived at 59 Valley Road with his wife and son between expeditions, in 1913-1915 and 1916-1918.

Robin MacNeil – One of the first newsmen on the scene of President Kennedy’s assassination, he is famous as a television news anchor on PBS’s MacNeil/Lehrer Report. He and his family moved into 51 Valley Road in 1978 and lived there for several years.

William R. McAndrew – President of NBC News and a major force in expanding network television news, he is best known for pairing Chet Huntley with David Brinkley. He and his family made their home at 1 Northway from 1952 until his premature death in 1968.

Ed McMahon – The long time sidekick of late night television host Johnny Carson, and a television host in his own right, he lived with his family from 1965 to 1973 at 233 Pondfield Road.



Jerome Kern – Kern wrote scores for several Broadway hit musicals at 10 Avon Road, which the composer and his wife Eva rented from 1916 to 1918, before moving to nearby Cedar Knolls in Yonkers.

Joe Raposo and Pat Collins – This accomplished couple resided at 376 New Rochelle Road in the 1980s. He was the musical director for Sesame Street and composed some of the best known Muppet songs as well as music for a wide range of movies. A television film and theater critic on “Good Morning America” and My9News in New York, she won three Emmies.

Donald J. Herbert – Known to many as “Mr. Wizard,” he hosted television shows about science aimed at children, which aired on NBC and Nickelodeon. His home from 1955 to 1972 was 9 Northway.

Harriet Hubbard Ayer
A flamboyant pioneer of the women's cosmetics industry, she was involuntarily committed in 1893-1894 to Bronxville's insane asylum, Vernon House. It operated in a now demolished mansion located near 4 Fordal Road.



Robert Saudek – The television producer of "Leonard Bernstein Conducts," "Omnibus" and "Profiles in Courage" made 15 Northern Avenue his family's home from 1956 to 1972.

Frank Cashen – The General Manager of the 1986 World Series Champion New York Mets, he lived in an apartment at 9 Midland Gardens in the 1990s.



William J. Burns – The famous founder of the Burns Detective Agency, and director of the FBI's predecessor organization, rented 20 Tanglewylde Avenue in the mid-1910s, at a time when he was considered "America's Sherlock Holmes."