

Woodside of Long Ago!

Reprinted from the past 5 Woodsider Issues by Popular Demand

For more than one hundred years, Woodside has been the favorite place of residence for New York merchants and their clerks. In the first half of the last century many wealthy merchants maintained estates in and near Woodside to which they could retire after a week's hard work in Manhattan. The very name of Woodside came from the estate of John Andrew Kelley, who with his sister-in-law, Catherine B. Buddy purchased land from the Sackett family in 1826-1827. Kelley erected a large mansion on what is now Woodside Avenue, on the spot where the Roman Catholic Church of St. Sebastian now stands. Kelley names his estate "Woodside" in reference to the forests in the vicinity. In later years these same woodlands were to give to Woodside the undesirable nickname of "Suicide's Paradise." It became a custom at one time, it would seem, for persons intent upon taking their own lives, to choose the depths of the Snake Woods as a fitting spot for the act.

Upon the death of John A. Kelley, the property descended to his widow who married C. Tappen Howell. The old Kelley mansion was then called the Howell mansion. In 1869 the family decided to break up the estate and it was laid out into 1,100 building lots which sold at public auction for about three hundred dollars each.

Editor's Note: In last month's issue, we incorrectly stated that John A. Kelley erected a large mansion on what is now Woodside Avenue, where St. Sebastian's R.C. Church now stands. A reader, Barbara Kohn, points out that the R.C. Church of St. Sebastian now stands on the southeast corner of Roosevelt Ave. & 58th Street, where a movie theater used to be.

The earliest settler in the area that is now Woodside was one Joseph Sackett, who built a farmhouse on what is now the north side of Woodside between 57th and 58th Streets. The Sacketts were of Puritan stock of England, settling in Cambridge, Mass. in 1628 in the person of Simon Sackett. His grandson, Joseph Sackett, was the first to carry the family name to Newtown where he not only cultivated his Woodside acres, but threw himself with such energy into the affairs of the Town as to rise to the rank of Captain. He died in 1719 and left the farm to his two sons, John and William.

John inherited the west half of the farm and the old farmhouse, and maintained and improved the ancestral acres. By the end of the 18th century, the old house had reached manorial proportions, having a twelve foot wide hall leading to the seventeen foot square parlor and a back parlor with a huge fireplace, great closets and a spacious kitchen filled the rear of the house. The front door was of Dutch type, with a great brass knocker and not far off

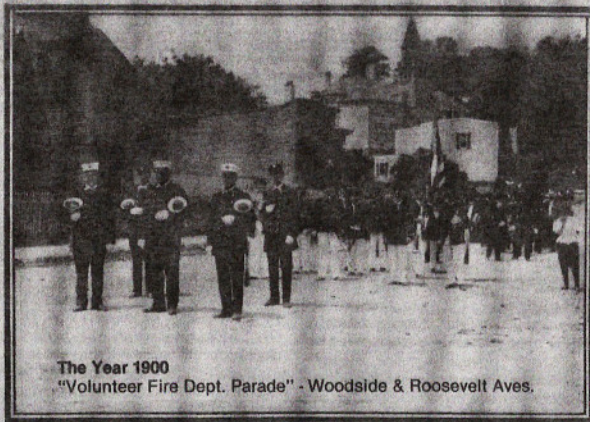
was the family well. Across the road, two or three fields broke the line of woods, while just west of the house itself stood the orchard and a long lane which ran down to the tenant houses of the Sackett slaves.

William Sackett, meanwhile built a house for himself in about 1725 at the first turn in the Train's Meadow Road, presently 63rd St. and 39th Ave. He sold this dwelling in 1756 to one William Leverich, who raised a large family there and from whom most of the later Leverichs of Newtown were descended. The old farmhouse was destroyed by fire about 1890.

About five blocks to the east of William Sackett's house, there was in colonial days another old farmhouse at about 41st Ave. and 70th Street. It was built sometime prior to 1720 on land of the Leverich family, who held title to the country east of Train's Meadow Road. In 1756, Nathaniel Woodward bought the place and farmed the tract during the Revolutionary period. In the 1850's Charles and Ellen Meyers were the owners of record, and on the death of Charles in 1864, the farm was sold to a developer. As late as 1900 the old farmhouse was still standing and occupied by a Meyers descendant.

An important milestone in Woodside's history was the construction of a road by the Hunters Point, Newtown and Flushing Turnpike Co., better known today as Northern Boulevard. In January, 1857, it was proposed to lay out a turnpike from the 34th St. Ferry direct to Flushing. The road was almost a straight line and passed through the north border of Woodside. In April 1859 work began and on July 3, 1860, the six mile avenue was thrown open to traffic. The new turnpike was the first direct route to New York superseding the former roundabout Middleburg Road and Bowery Bay Road. (Since the earliest Dutch settlement, Woodside, (Newtown) had been known as Middleburg, then Hastings by the newly arrived settlers in 1652 from the eastern seaboard and farther out on the island; finally, when the boundaries were changed prior to the Revolution, it received the name Newtown).

Still Woodside was a sleepy little village, a mere cluster of houses built of stone or logs—no sawmills existed in the area at the early time. The oldtimers were mainly of Irish and German origin, though there were traces of other nationalities such as French and English. In those days it would probably have been hard to find anywhere in the vicinity of New York, a more picturesque locality than the secluded farm of John Sackett, great grandson of Simon Sackett, the Puritan from England who settled in Cambridge, Mass. in 1628. The farm of John Sackett, upon which the larger part of Woodside is now built was entirely surrounded by forests. West of the house was its orchards, and near it a long lane



The Year 1900
 "Volunteer Fire Dept. Parade" - Woodside & Roosevelt Aves.

ran down to the tenants' houses in the fields—possibly a relic of the slaves' quarters. It used to be worth a walk of many miles to ramble through here in the early morning or evening about blossom time, when the scent of myriads of blossoms was on the damp air and the surrounding woods were just beginning to show their first tints of green. However, the old Woodside of shady lanes and leisurely living was doomed with the birth of the 1860's when Woodside started its growth.

The construction of the Long Island Rail Road through the Sackett farm in 1861-1862 was the beginning of the end of Woodside's rural seclusion. It now boasted of two railroads, each of which had its terminus in Long Island City. In 1861 the Long Island Rail Road ran to Jamaica by the way of Woodside. The station at that time, was situated on the Howell Estate, about opposite to where the Manufacturers Hanover Trust Co. now stands. Eight years later, on November 15, 1869 the Flushing and North Shore Railroad opened a second depot on the west side of 58th Street and 39th Avenue (Stryker Avenue). The Long Island Rail Road took over the Flushing Railroad Company, abandoning their original station at 60th Street and Woodside Avenue and used the station at 58th Street and 39th Avenue until 1917 when the railroad changed its line through Woodside and built the cut-off which left the old line at 58th Street and rejoined it west of old Winfield station. The Woodside station was then moved from 58th Street to 61st Street. For the first time, Woodside lay within ten minutes of the New York ferries.

In another short span of years the Village of Woodside was dignified enough to have its own Post Office which was opened in 1864 in the Long Island Rail Road Station. Other conventional public services soon followed the rapid development of Woodside after 1870.

The easy accessibility of Woodside to New York attracted the attention of an energetic real estate speculator named Benjamin W. Hitchcock (1827-1916). Having amassed sufficient capital in the music publishing business, Hitchcock approached Mrs. Kelly-Howell and induced that lady and her children to sell part of their old farm for building lots. The purchase was consummated in the fall of 1867 and in March 1868 Mr. Hitchcock put the first hundred lots on the market for \$300 each. He made real estate history by offering these lots on the installment plan, accepting payments of ten dollars a month, a novel arrangement hitherto unthought of.

The great success of Hitchcock in developing Woodside spurred other old residents to sell parts of their farms to developers, among them one Charles F. Erhard and The German Cabinet Makers' Association. Alpheus Pierson, bought the thirty acre farm of Peter Duryea. The northwestern corner of the old Kelly-Howell estate was purchased from the Howells in 1864 by Gabriel Marc, a florist and nurseryman, who bought the thirteen-acre Woodside tract as an expansion of his Astoria greenhouses at Newton Ave. and 30th St. He specialized in cultivating roses and azaleas—some of his flower catalogues are still extant. In 1872 Marc sold part of his land to Severin Dorval, another French florist. In 1869 the tract of land north of Northern Boulevard and east of Hobart Street was developed as Charlottesville by the Bricklayers Cooperative Building and Loan Assn.

In 1890 Woodside had largely taken on the street pattern as we know it today. Its population grew by leaps and bounds; 1,335 in 1875; 1,530 in 1890 and 3,878 in 1900. The coming of the trolley through 37th Avenue, 61st St. and Woodside Ave. in April 1895 greatly stimulated home building in the area. In Feb. 1896, James Marc, heir of

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Ladies Auxiliary

St. Sebastian's Post 870

The regular monthly meeting of the Ladies' Auxiliary, St. Sebastian's Post No. 870 Catholic War Veterans will be held on Thursday Evening, April 14th, 1983 at the Post Headquarters, 39-40 61st St., Woodside, N.Y. at 8:00 P.M. which marks the start of their thirty-fifth year.

After the winter's long months of dreariness, we have the promise of sunshine and light with the prospect of two special holidays observed by many of our peoples throughout the world - Easter and Passover.

In addition to the religious aspect of Easter, there are many customs that have come down through the years. The well-loved white Easter lily actually holds no historical relationship to the holiday, yet the sight of it brings to mind the joyous Season when greeting cards are embellished with its lovely form; and no florist shop can deny that this flower is their greatest seller at this time of year. The egg is another accepted Easter symbol which has evolved from the ancient Egyptians who believed that the egg represented the world. They believed that all life came from the World-Egg whose shell was considered to be the "firmament." Just as children look to the colored eggs and sweets as being a significant part of Easter, their elders look forward to a new outfit of apparel and taking part in the annual "Easter Parade;" however, today's more casual dress has, more or less, made this aspect of Easter a part of the past. The "Easter Parade" came from an old European custom of the "Easter Walk" after the observance of special church services. Townspeople would walk about the village square—greeting each other and exchanging news of the winter's affairs.

Passover in history is a very ancient festival, celebrating the freedom won by the early Hebrew slaves from the Egyptian Pharaoh. Historical records indicate however, that the Passover observance dates back even earlier to the misty dawn of civilization. Long before the Exodus, the pastoral tribes of Israel observed a festival of the shepherds offering the Paschal sacrifice in their homes in Egypt, when they were refused their freedom. Its celebration in the early spring was associated with the sacrifice of the firstlings of the flocks and herds - a thanksgiving offering to the Lord for His goodness to mankind. The departure of the Israelites from Egypt during the spring festival vested this earlier rite with a new historical significance of sparing and delivering, combining with the newer feast of Matzot or "unleavening bread" commemorating the emancipation from slavery. The destruction of the Temple in the year 70 led to the cessation of annual sacrifices and the replacement of the altar in the home as the center of proceedings, where it still serves to stimulate the people with the hope of

new life in which all men will be free to live in peace inspires the Seder ceremony.

The Seder service is marked with special concern for the children of the family; thus in order to maintain their interest and excite their imagination, the devotional Seder service is mingled with bursts of good humor, serious observations on Jewish life and comments in a lighter vein, lofty poetry and playful ditties.

At the beginning of the Seder everyone sits down to a beautifully set table bedecked with flowers and candles, and at the head of which is a special platter on which in specified order are: THREE MATZOT - in memory of the unleavened bread which the Jews ate when they were freed from Egypt. BITTER HERBS - for the bitterness of slavery. THE SHANK OF A LAMB - a reminder of the Paschal lamb. A ROASTED EGG - symbolic of the free-will offering which accompanied the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb in the temple. HAROSET - a food made of apples, nuts, cinnamon and wine mixed together to resemble the mortar which the Hebrew slaves used in their servitude. PARSLEY or WATERCRESS - now used as a token of gratitude to God for the products of the earth. A DISH OF SALT into which the parsley is dipped. A CUP OF WINE - set at the place setting of each celebrant. As in all Jewish ceremonials of rejoicing, wine is used as a token of festivity. AN EMPTY WINE CUP in the center of the table. This cup is filled as part of the Seder ceremony - it is known as Elijah's Cup, symbolizing the hope of man for the coming of God's kingdom on earth.

At the close of the Seder service the leader recites the final benediction...May the Lord lift up His countenance upon our country and render it a true home of liberty and a defender of justice. May He grant us and all mankind Peace. AMEN.

Margaret E. Brennan

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 Gabriel, sold the nursery on Northern Blvd. to the N.Y. and Queens County Trolley Co., who erected their main barns, power plant and shop on the site. This concentrated three lines of trolleys on the borders of Woodside and a fourth was added when the Northern Blvd. line was opened in Dec. 1901.

The original settlers of Woodside were mainly of Irish and German origin, though there were traces of other nationalities such as French and English many of whom had migrated from Charleston, South Carolina. While much of the Woodside area was held by the larger estates, there were smaller plots of farmland which helped to supply New York markets with fruit and produce. Enterprisers also made their appearance early in the settling of Woodside. Aside from Gabriel Marc's nursery mentioned previously, the earliest known commercial effort was the Woodside Wine Company organized in 1874 by principals with experience in the French wine fields, with the idea of processing native Long Island grapes. A second and much larger business venture was that of Riker, Hudson & Company organized in 1878 to can the garden produce raised in great quantities by neighborhood farmers. In the summer of 1878 the firm was turning out 8,000 cans of tomatoes daily.

With all this resurgence, it was now apparent that Woodside was making greater strides than ever. It was a long time since the early arrival of colonists in 1652 to start anew in the Dutch Settlement-Middleburg (Woodside) up to the Revolutionary War. A significant and unalterable fact, Woodside played an exciting and vital part in the American Revolution; a part that has long been forgotten, having been relegated to the dust laden memory of another time. As Woodsideers we must always be proud that history happened in our own back yard.

Almost as soon as the Village of Woodside developed in the 1870's public recreation facilities seem to have appeared. A turnhalle, patronized by the young men of the village, was prosperous enough to have a two-story building of its own. There were at least two amusement parks, groves with wooden tables, dancing platforms and an ever-present supply of beer: Schwartz's Park was small but Betts' Park adjoined his brewery on 58th St. south of Queens Blvd.

The conventional public services soon followed the rapid growth of Woodside after 1870. The first public school was opened in the lower portion of Alexander Reed's house on 60th St. in 1872; however, these makeshift arrangements were too inadequate for a growing village, thus District #10 School was opened in July 1878. A year later P.S. #1 (later #11) was erected on the hill at the southwest corner of Woodside Ave. and 56th St. In 1895 this building had grown too small for the expanding population and was again enlarged.

The first fire company, Hook and Ladder #3 was organized in May 1878 by William T. Cameron, great grandson of the pioneer, William Schroeder. It numbered twenty-nine members and boasted a single flat bed, horse drawn wagon with nine buckets and five lengths of ladder. The first fire house was at 61st St. and Woodside Ave., later the Company moved to the depot area between 58th St. and 59th St. on Stryker Ave. (Amer. Legion Hall) where it served until disbandment in 1913.

The spiritual development of the Village was not far behind. St. Paul's

Gothic edifice, that still stands at 39th Ave., and 61st Street was Woodside's first house of worship being erected in 1873 and dedicated on May 5, 1874.

The cornerstone of St. Jacobus Evangelical Lutheran Church located at 72nd St. and 43rd Ave. was laid on June 3, 1867. (This area at the time was designated as Winfield). The church was built on land purchased from a Mr. M. Worthington, who was paid \$800 for four lots. The original Church is still standing.

The Baptist Church on the corner of 56th St. and Woodside Ave. was built in 1876 by the unremitting efforts of James M. Post and his wife, both prominent residents of old Woodside. This edifice served its worshippers until 1924 when it was replaced by the modern Church, the Woodside Community Church located at 58th St. and 41st Avenue.

The land for the Roman Catholic Church of St. Sebastian at 57th St. and Woodside Ave. was purchased in 1894 from the Kelly-Howell family, pioneers in the settling of Woodside. Until the Church was built, Masses were offered in the then Woodside volunteer Fire Co. #3 House on Stryker Ave. After a long period of offering Masses here and there in private homes, a Church building was erected on the corner of 57th St. and Woodside Ave. and was formally dedicated on June 14, 1896, and continued to serve the faithful for the next 59 years until it gave way in 1955 to make space for future parish building programs. After this old edifice was razed, Masses were offered in a completely renovated movie theatre, the former Loews' Woodside on the corner of Roosevelt Ave. and 58th St. The only remains of the old church building still in existence is that of the Bell which called the worshippers to Mass every Sunday. This bell, once part of a Hudson River Steamer, then the firebell of the old Woodside Fire Co. #3 and finally the bell for St. Sebastian's Church, is now on exhibit on the front lawn of the Church Rectory on 57th St.

The last church to appear in Woodside, before the turn of the century, was Christ Lutheran Church. A portion of farmland property of the Holtzman Farm amidst what was known as the Lowlands at 58th St. between Broadway and Northern Blvd. was purchased for the German Lutheran Church. Before completion of the structure, their first service was held on Nov. 3, 1895 in the Woodside Firemen's Hall. Organized on Feb. 2, 1896, the Church was dedicated on Dec. 20, 1896. The original Church is still being used for worship.

Today, only a few scattered frame houses of the 1870's and 1880's remain; faded survivals of the sprightly Woodside of an earlier day.

And that's the way it was in Woodside of Long Ago!

—Margaret E. Brennan

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