

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
October 30, 2007, Designation List 397  
LP-2272

**VOELKER ORTH MUSEUM, BIRD SANCTUARY AND VICTORIAN GARDEN, 149-19 38<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Flushing. Built c.1891, architect unknown.**

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 5017, Lot 31 in part, consisting of that portion of the lot bounded by a line beginning at the southeasterly corner, extending northerly along the eastern property line, westerly along part of the northern property line to a point 75 feet from the eastern property line, southerly along a line at an angle of 90 degrees to a point 44 feet from the northern property line, westerly along a line at an angle of 90 degrees to the western property line, southerly along part of the western property line, and easterly along the southern property line, to the point of beginning.

On September 18, 2007, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Voelker Orth Museum, Bird Sanctuary Victorian Garden and its related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were four speakers in favor of designation, including a representative of State Assemblywoman Ellen Young, the Queens Historical Society, the Historic Districts Council and the President of the Voelker Orth Museum. The Commission has also received letters of support from Queens Borough President Helen Marshall, City Council Members John Liu and Tony Avella, and State Senator Frank Padavan.



### Summary

The Voelker Orth Museum is significant as one of the very few houses remaining from Flushing's early period of suburban development, the years around 1900. Its exuberantly picturesque design and large garden are typical of buildings of the late nineteenth century and recall the period when, due to newly expanding transportation networks, Flushing was transformed from a rural area to a suburban one. During the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the Long Island Railroad created numerous lines and spurs to connect Queens and Long Island with ferries on the East River for access to Manhattan. Many of Flushing's large farms, estates and commercial nurseries were purchased by developers, lots were laid out, and large, sprawling houses surrounded by trees and shrubbery filled the newly graded and paved streets. These became homes for the families of successful businessmen who traveled to and from Manhattan each day. The Voelker Orth house was constructed c.1891 as part of the development of the section of Flushing known as Murray Hill. First owned by James Bouton, this house was built on land that was purchased from the Parsons estate just to the west and was one of the earliest houses in the neighborhood. Its picturesque, eclectic style was typical of late nineteenth century architectural exuberance. The variety of materials, rooflines and angles used on a house was a way of showing the wealth and success of the owner. German immigrant Conrad Voelker purchased the house in 1899 and it remained in the same family until 1996 when Voelker's last surviving heir, Elizabetha Orth, died. At that time the house and grounds were converted to a small museum of Queens history, environmental education and a bird sanctuary, according to the terms of her will.

## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### History of Flushing<sup>1</sup>

The area that now constitutes Flushing, Queens, was granted by patent to English settlers by Governor William Kieft (along with Whitestone and College Point) in 1645. The name Flushing is an English corruption of the Dutch “Vlissingen,” a village in the Netherlands that was already marked on Dutch maps when the first English settlers arrived. The first Quakers moved to the area in 1657 and Peter Stuyvesant attempted to deny them the religious liberty he had promised earlier. Local Quakers issued the “Flushing Remonstrance” in 1657, declaring their freedom to practice their religion. This is considered one of the earliest documents asserting religious freedom in America, and a forerunner of the First Amendment. Flushing became known for the religious tolerance of its inhabitants, leading to an influx of more Quakers. A meeting house was constructed on Northern Boulevard in 1694. (The Friends Meeting House is a designated New York City Landmark).

From its earliest development, Flushing was home to white residents as well as Africans. In 1698, local deeds and registers indicated there were nineteen slaves living in Flushing.<sup>2</sup> By 1774, the Quakers of this community voted to outlaw slavery among their members, leading to Flushing becoming a center of abolitionist activity. Nonetheless, the 1790 census notes many slaves, as well as free Africans, among the local population. There was a community large enough to support the African Macedonian Church, which was founded in Flushing in 1811.<sup>3</sup> As New York State began to free its slaves, in 1827, many free blacks continued to live in the area while others moved there because of the welcome they received from the local Quaker community. Many worked as farm laborers and at other low-paying jobs,<sup>4</sup> although some were more fortunate. Among the most well-known African-American residents of Flushing was Louis Latimer, son of a freed slave who became an electrical inventor and worked with Thomas Edison as one of a small elite group of “Edison Pioneers.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1814, in response to growing concern about the lack of education among this population, several Quaker women started the Flushing Female Association, which sponsored a free school for poor children.<sup>6</sup> Its first class had nineteen students, both white and black. By 1830, 25% of the population of Flushing was African American, although very few of them attended school at that time. A successful effort was made to reach out to all families to make education more accessible.<sup>7</sup> By 1855, this school evolved into an all black school and was eventually taken over by the Board of Education. By 1881, the Flushing School Board allowed black students to enter its high school. The Community developed an “unusually high proportion of professionals in its population.”<sup>8</sup>

Education played an important role in the town’s history and Flushing developed a reputation for having many good schools. For those who could afford it, the Flushing Institute, begun in 1843, was a private secondary school for boys that attracted students from all up and down the east coast, Central and South America and Europe. A local board of education was established in 1848 to create public schools. The Flushing High School, chartered in 1875, was the only one in the Queens County for the first 20 years of its existence. Other private schools in Flushing were the St. Thomas School for Boys and the Flushing Female College.<sup>9</sup>

The Township of Flushing was incorporated in 1837 and was comprised of the villages of Flushing, College Point, Whitestone, Bayside, Douglaston and Little Neck. In spite of the large land area this encompassed, most of it was very rural, with much of the land used for farming.

### Early Families of Flushing

Early Flushing history is the history of several early landholding families, including the Bownes, the Murrays, the Parsons, and the Kings. John Bowne’s home was situated west of Parsons Boulevard (a designated New York City Landmark). The Kingsland Homestead (a designated New York City Landmark, moved to current location in 1968), was constructed by Charles Doughty, a Quaker farmer, around 1775 and was originally located near Northern Boulevard and 155<sup>th</sup> Street. Doughty’s son-in-law, Captain Joseph King, purchased the house in 1801 and named it Kingsland. King’s daughter Mary married Lindley Murray of the Murray family of Manhattan (for whom the Murray Hill area of Manhattan

is named). When her husband died in 1847, Mary King Murray moved with her four children to Kingsland. The Murray family continued to occupy the house until the 1920s. The Murray family also owned a large estate between Parsons Avenue and Murray Lane, south of Northern Boulevard (then Broadway).<sup>10</sup>

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, numerous French Huguenot families settled in the area, attracted to Flushing because of the local acceptance of various religions. The Huguenots tended to be well-educated and brought with them a thorough knowledge of horticulture. Flushing's soil lent itself to the importation and propagation of specialty trees and shrubs, and the Huguenots were the first to import several species from Europe. Over time, Flushing came to be known for its numerous nurseries. Many of the early families who settled in the area owned large farms and estates and began to grow plants commercially, including the Prince, Bloodgood (1798), Higgins (1836), Kimbers (1853), and Parsons families. Members of the King and Murray families purchased the Bloodgood Nursery in the 1830s and moved it to land next to their Kingsland Homestead.

Robert Prince began to grow specialty trees and shrubs on his land sometime after 1700. He and his son William established the first commercial nursery in the United States in 1737, in an area just north of Broadway (now Northern Boulevard), near Flushing Creek. After 1793, William's sons divided the business. "The Old American Nursery" was run by Benjamin Prince and the Linnean Gardens (named after the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus who first used Latin names to classify plants and animals) was run by William, Jr. on adjacent property. By 1866 the nursery business passed out of the hands of the Prince family.<sup>11</sup>

The Parsons family owned the land to the west of Parsons Avenue (now Parsons Boulevard) from Broadway (now Northern Boulevard) to Sanford Avenue.<sup>12</sup> Samuel Parsons (1774-1841) had first purchased property before 1806 and married Mary Bowne in that year. Beginning in 1838, he started his own nursery there, the Commercial Garden and Nursery. Parsons was the first to import exotic plants such as the Japanese maple to the United States, and was the first to propagate rhododendrons. Parson's sons, Robert Bowne Parsons and Samuel Bowne Parsons inherited the nursery and turned it into "one of the most important plant nurseries in the Northeast."<sup>13</sup> The Parsons Nursery supplied trees and plants to Frederick Law Olmsted for Central Park and Prospect Park.<sup>14</sup> Samuel Bowne Parsons, Jr. (1844-1923, grandson of the first Samuel Parsons) apprenticed at the family nursery, went on to study at the Yale Scientific School, and eventually became partner to Calvert Vaux. In this capacity, he worked for the City Parks Department and helped design projects such as Abingdon Square, the Christopher Street Park, and the placement of the Washington Square Arch and the Grand Army Plaza Arch. After Vaux's death, Parsons served as New York City's landscape architect, and a term as president of the American Society of Landscape Architects

Flushing remained mostly rural until the last decade of the nineteenth century. In 1870 the population of the town stood at only 14,650, although the number of whites moving into the area was considerably greater than the number of blacks.<sup>15</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, development came to Flushing as wealthy New Yorkers built elegant houses in this beautiful area, both as summer homes and for permanent residency. Large estates were subdivided for development as most of the nurseries went out of business. The development progressed during the following decades, with the growth of areas such as Ingleside, Broadway-Flushing, Bowne Park, Kissena, and Murray Hill. Trolley lines reached the area at this time, making it even more accessible. Flushing welcomed and encouraged the growth. An 1896 article in the *Brooklyn Eagle* mentioned that Flushing was doing the most of any Long Island town to realize the importance of good roads for development, by macadamizing all its roads.<sup>16</sup> Development continued so that between 1912 and 1922, approximately 4,000 new homes were constructed in Flushing.<sup>17</sup> The progressiveness of Flushing society continued at this time, as a group of Flushing's wealthier blacks joined in the development of the area. The *Whitestone Herald* announced in 1907 the formation of a "syndicate of colored men which started to build houses at Forest and Robinson Avenues, Flushing."<sup>18</sup>

### The Long Island Railroad<sup>19</sup>

One of the major forces for the development of Flushing was the construction of the railroad line that first provided direct service into New York from this area in 1854. The Long Island Railroad has always been a local road, dedicated to serving people traveling between Long Island and Manhattan. In the mid nineteenth century, railroads were expanding all over the country, providing transportation to existing communities and the impetus for the growth of many new ones. On Long Island, several different companies competed to provide the best and most comprehensive system of rail lines, and the system that exists today is the result of a series of business successes and failures, buyouts and takeovers.

The network that would become the Long Island Railroad began with the Brooklyn and Jamaica Railroad, chartered in 1832, and running for 10 miles from Brooklyn to Jamaica. The Long Island Railroad itself was chartered by the State of New York in 1834 to run a line from Greenport in Suffolk County to two points along the waterfront, one in Brooklyn and one in Williamsburg.<sup>20</sup> They took over the Brooklyn & Jamaica railroad as a starting point and went on to extend the line from Jamaica to Hicksville by 1837, with the line completed all the way to Greenport in 1844. This success led to the desire of other areas for more service. In the 1850s and 60s, a series of new lines were completed, mostly competing against each other for the best routes and the most passengers, as the population on Long Island soared. These included the New York & Jamaica Railroad (1857), the Flushing Railroad Company (1852), the New York and Flushing Railroad Company (1859) and the Flushing and North Side Railroad (1868). In 1874 four lines were consolidated into the Flushing, North Shore and Central Railroad Company with a continuous road from Whitestone to Hunters Point and branches from Flushing to Great Neck, Babylon and Garden City.

The Southside Railroad serving the population on Long Island's south shore wanted a new outlet at East River. They purchased the New York and Flushing Railroad in order to have some leverage to negotiate with other large railroads. This company was eventually purchased by Conrad Poppenhusen, who lived in College Point. By 1876, he and his associates bought stock in all three railroads but they did not know how to run a railroad and ended up in receivership. In 1889, the Long Island Railroad, the Long Island City and Flushing Railroad and the New York and Flushing Railroads were consolidated as the Long Island Railroad.

### Development of Murray Hill

The area where the Voelker Orth house was built was originally called Murray Hill and includes the land between Northern Boulevard and Sanford Avenue, bordered by the Parsons estate on the west and that of the Murray family on the east. It is comprised of land from both families. This section was originally developed by Frederick Dunton,<sup>21</sup> a nephew of Austin Corbin who was the first president of the Long Island Railroad.<sup>22</sup> Dunton was president of the "Bicycle Railroad"<sup>23</sup> and started developing Queens real estate in 1883.<sup>24</sup> Dunton purchased and developed many large tracts of land, including an area that became the Queens village of Dunton (now Morris Park).<sup>25</sup> Frederick Dunton began purchasing numerous lots in the Murray Hill area in 1887. Since he sat on the Board of the Long Island Railroad, he knew when and where it was expanding service through Queens and Long Island. It was common practice for developers to purchase land for development around newly established railroad stops. The Murray Hill railroad station was opened in 1889, making the area more attractive to new residents because of the ease of transportation to Manhattan. Murray Hill attracted many businessmen and families of German origin, possibly because there were already many German-Americans in Queens.<sup>26</sup>

Dunton purchased a section on the eastern part of the Parsons estate from Robert Bowne Parsons. Four lots on the corner of Lincoln and Wilson, each 25 feet wide and 100 feet deep were sold to James Bouton in April, 1890.<sup>27</sup> Bouton was a local merchant who had a store in Flushing. Bouton had the house constructed soon after his purchase, as it is shown on a map dated 1891. It appears he lived here until selling the property to Conrad Voelker in 1899.<sup>28</sup>

### Voelker and Orth Families

Conrad Voelker was born in Edenkoben, Germany in 1861 and came to the United States in 1881.<sup>29</sup> He was first employed by a New York printing firm, having learned the printing business as a boy in Germany. He started his own company in 1884, publishing a widely read German newspaper called *Der Pfälzer am Amerika*.<sup>30</sup> When his two brothers joined him in 1886, the name of the business was changed to Voelker Brothers, Inc. and they maintained offices on East 23<sup>rd</sup> Street. Expanding beyond New York, Voelker purchased two German newspapers in Cleveland, Ohio, combining them into one, and also established *The Bayonne Journal*, published in both German and English. This newspaper had a considerable political influence in New Jersey. Voelker's newspapers were among many German newspapers published in the United States, essentially American newspapers printed in German to help the numerous German immigrants acclimate to their new home.<sup>31</sup> During World War I, Voelker, like many of German origin, stopped publishing German newspapers, although he continued his printing business, from which he retired in 1928.<sup>32</sup> A successful businessman, Voelker purchased considerable property during his life, especially in Queens, and these holdings were passed on to his daughter when he died.<sup>33</sup>

Voelker married Elizabeth Maibach, daughter of German immigrant Peter Maibach, who owned a butcher shop on Ninth Avenue in Manhattan. They first lived in Manhattan before moving to this house on Lincoln Avenue in 1899. Voelker and his first wife had one child, Theresa, who was one year old when they moved to Queens. Voelker added on to the house in 1909.<sup>34</sup> The room closest to 149<sup>th</sup> Place with the flat roof and balustrade is from that alteration. Elizabeth Voelker died in 1919, and ten years later Conrad married Estelle Christ. He died in 1930.

Theresa grew up in this house and after the death of her father, she and her family moved in to it. Theresa had married Dr. Rudolph Orth, who served in the military in World War I and later worked as a surgeon with the NYC police department. When they moved into the house in 1930, Rudolph and Theresa Orth added the two-story section of the house that projects back into the garden.<sup>35</sup> It appears that the airy room at the rear of the house was used by Dr. Orth as his study.

After Rudolph Orth died, Theresa continued to live in the house with her daughter, Elizabetha Orth.<sup>36</sup> Elizabetha worked as a teacher in Queens and lived in the house until she died in 1995, at age 69. Since she had no descendants, Ms. Orth left the house and garden to three local organizations, the Audobon Society, the Queens Historical Society and the Queens Botanical Society, with the stipulation that they create a board to oversee a museum specializing in the history and environment of Queens. Since that time, the building has been restored and the garden turned into a Victorian garden. It is run as the Voelker Orth Museum and provides programming on environmental issues, tours of the house and small local exhibits, as well as a lush garden, designed and maintained as it would have been in the late 1900s that serves as a sanctuary for birds and people.

### The style of the Voelker Orth House

The Voelker Orth house is an excellent example of the picturesque eclectic styles that were common at the end of the nineteenth century. During this period, picturesque houses proliferated, with their multiplicity of roof shapes, levels, projecting rooms and windows, porches, and variety of materials. They featured a combination of spaces, colors, textures and ornament that was considered pleasing to the eye. There were no historical or value-laden associations created for this type of house: they were made to look interesting and to attest to the monetary success of the person or family who built them. They reached into different periods of the past for precedents, but took individual elements from different periods and simplified and combined them in their own unique way. They were visual statements about the high economic level of the newly rich businessmen of the time, and served to advertise and legitimize their wealth. The idea expressed was that because the owner could afford so many elements that were added purely for effect rather than for function, he must be quite rich. This was a period of expanding inequality among Americans and those who were successful wanted to show it.

The variety of materials used on the Voelker Orth house, such as clapboards, distinctively-shaped shingles, shutters, leaded and stained glass, as well as the variety of rooflines (gable, jerkinhead, flat), and

the assortment of projecting bays and wings shows this house to be firmly in this tradition. It was located on a large corner lot where this surface and structural variety could be seen to best advantage by everyone passing by. Mr. Voelker and Dr. Orth both added to this effect by extending the wings of the house to the east and north, while still maintaining the prevailing style.

This type of house could be found in any of the rapidly expanding suburbs of the United States. It appealed to people in all localities because everyone could understand it and it could function in almost any climate. They were larger and more elaborate, or smaller and somewhat simpler, depending on the client and the location. Some of them were designed by designers or builders who were responding to the time, while many more came from pattern books that were quite common then. The designer of the Voelker Orth house is not known. The streets of Queens had many such houses at this time, but very few of them remain today, making the Voelker Orth House a rare survivor of this once numerous residential type. Because this house was owned and lived in by members of the same family and well loved for approximately 100 years, this house survived in excellent condition.

### Description

The Voelker Orth House sits near the southeast corner of its large lot. This lot is the same 100 X 100 foot lot that was purchased in 1890 by Bouton. The perimeter of the entire lot is enclosed by a non-historic iron fence. Many large shrubs and trees are in the garden, but only a few are historic. These include a white hydrangea bush near the southeast corner, next to the non-historic sign. This bush and two large oak trees near the northeast corner of the lot and an American holly near the southeast corner of the education building are probably the only ones that remain from the early days of the house. The garden has been reconfigured to have a large flat lawn in the rear, surrounded by shrubbery, with a gazebo on the 149<sup>th</sup> Street side and a goldfish pond at the northeast corner of the lot.<sup>37</sup>

Along the western part of the lot is a modern driveway, built where the original used to be. Attached to the west side of the house is a non-historic wood trellis that emulates the original. There is an extensive garden under the trellis, and a small modern greenhouse is located nearby. There is also a long, non-historic ramp leading to the side door of the house for accessibility.

The Voelker Orth House is two stories high, with a variety of rooflines, materials and projecting bays and angles. The roofs are faced with wooden shingles and the walls of the first story are faced with wooden clapboards with wooden framing. The second story is faced with shingles in alternating rows of fishscale, sawtooth and chisel shapes. The windows are all wood, and are original unless otherwise noted. The stairs, balustrades and shutters are wood but are not historic. The shutters are louvered and held in place by original iron shutter dogs. The house sits on its original brick foundation.

The main part of the building is two bays wide and faces 38<sup>th</sup> Street. Over the western bay is a steeply pitched roof with deep eaves, gable end facing the street. Under the gable is a projecting bay which holds a pair of windows topped by a single transom. Each window has a single sash with three small panes above a single one. The pair of windows is topped by a small, shingled, pent roof and is flanked by shutters. Below this, on the ground story, is a projecting three-section oriel window with shingled roof. Its one-over-one sash windows have diamond-paned glass in the top sash and shutters. Below the windows, the walls are faced with beadboard. On the eastern side of this facade, there is a flat-roofed section topped by a non-historic turned, wooden balustrade. On the facade facing 38<sup>th</sup> Street this section has a pair of one-over-one windows with shutters, while the side facade has a single window with shutters. The entrance is in the eastern bay and its double wood and glass paneled door has sidelights and is reached by wooden stairs with a turned balustrade. Colored and leaded glass transoms are located over the entranceway.

A two-story cross-gable section intersects the main part of the house toward the rear. A one-story porch is located at the "el" formed by these two wings. Its roof is supported on an ionic column at the outer corner. Fixed, multi-pane windows fill the spaces between the columns. Narrow transoms above the windows have colored, leaded glass in a geometric pattern. The short walls below these windows are paneled.

The wing that faces 149<sup>th</sup> Place is also two stories tall and has a jerkinhead roof. The ground story projects beyond the second story with a flat roof forming a balcony fronted by a turned balustrade. Double wood and glass doors with narrow transoms lead out to this rooftop balcony at the second story. The first story has three slightly angled bays facing 149<sup>th</sup> Place, with a shuttered window in each. On the north façade of this wing the ground story has a pair of one-over-one wood windows with shutters while the second story has no openings.

On the rear, or north façade there is an historic addition that projects into the garden area. This is also topped by a jerkinhead roof with deep eaves and it sits on a concrete foundation. Each of the three sides of this addition has a pair of shuttered windows at the first story. At the second story of this addition, there are single windows on the east and west elevations.

On the west side, the rear of the house sets back from the addition. The steep, gable end of the pitched roof is located here. The foundation is brick and there is an iron grate in front of the basement window. At the first story, there is a pair and another single window, while there are three windows under the gable at the second story. A small, non-historic window has been inserted near the “el” formed by the rear addition.

The steep gable roof is the most prominent feature of the western façade of the house. Near the middle of the ridgeline, there is a brick chimney and there are two curved, eyebrow dormer windows just above the cornice. The glazing of these windows is small, with multi-lights and there are thick wood moldings around them. The second story on this elevation is very shallow, with no openings. At the first story, there is a pair of narrow, shuttered one-over-one windows toward the front of the house and another toward the rear. A paneled glass and wood doorway leading to the kitchen is located between the two sets of windows, with a non-historic ramp leading from it to the garden. To the north of this door is a cellar opening to the basement. A wooden trellis, a copy of the historic one, is attached to the western façade and extends into the garden on this side of the house. The area around the trellis has been thickly planted and there is also a small greenhouse nearby.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Information about Flushing comes from the following sources: “Flushing,” in *The Encyclopedia of New York*, Kenneth T. Jackson, ed. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1995), 419-20; LPC, *Flushing High School Designation Report* (LP-1798) (New York: City of New York, 1991), report written by Jim Dillon; Jim Driscoll, *Flushing, 1880-1935* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Alison Mitchell, “The Bankses of Flushing,” *Newsday* (Jan. 21, 1979).

<sup>3</sup> Henry Waller, *History of the Town of Flushing*, (Flushing: J.H. Ridenour, 1899), 174.

<sup>4</sup> Waller, 172 notes “two colored men” who rowed travelers across Flushing Creek until a bridge was constructed.

<sup>5</sup> The Louis Latimer House is a designated New York City Landmark. Information about Latimer comes from the African American Experience website that can be accessed through the Queensboro Public Library.

<sup>6</sup> The eighteen women who started the Flushing Female Society wanted “to consider upon the condition of the poor children in Flushing, especially those of the African race, who from the incapacity of their parents to give them education are growing up in ignorance.” Unidentified newspaper clipping in the “African Americans in Flushing” files at the Queensboro Public Library, dated July 14, 1945.

<sup>7</sup> Jim Driscoll, “Samuel Parsons: A Long Island Quaker and the Anti-Slavery Struggle,” *Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society* 22 (Fall, 2003), 193.

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<sup>8</sup> Carleton Mabee, *Black Education in New York State, From Colonial to Modern Times* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1979), 233.

<sup>9</sup> John G. Steele, "Flushing's Educational Background," in *So This is Flushing* (October, 1938), in the LPC research files.

<sup>10</sup> The Murray family were related to the Murrays of Manhattan, for whom Murray Hill is named. The King family were early settlers in Flushing. Captain Joseph King was the son-in-law of Charles Dougherty who originally constructed the Kingsland Homestead, a designated New York City Landmark.

<sup>11</sup> Information from the Prince family papers at the Queensboro Public Library.

<sup>12</sup> This is the area now known as Murray Hill.

<sup>13</sup> Driscoll, 196.

<sup>14</sup> The Parsons had married into the Bowne family, hence the children's names.

<sup>15</sup> Driscoll, 196.

<sup>16</sup> "Good Roads for Flushing," *Brooklyn Eagle* (Aug. 7, 1896), 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Queensboro* newspaper, Sept.-Oct, 1922.

<sup>18</sup> No title, dated December 12, 1907, in the Flushing African-American files at the Long Island Division of the Queensboro Public Library.

<sup>19</sup> Information on the history and development of the LIRR comes from Madeline B. Valles, "A History of Flushing," unpublished Master's Thesis, Columbia University, 1938, and Internet sites: [www.dunton.org/archive/LongIslandRailroad.htm](http://www.dunton.org/archive/LongIslandRailroad.htm), and [www.lirrhistor.com/indiv.html](http://www.lirrhistor.com/indiv.html).

<sup>20</sup> It was necessary to take a ferry across the East River into Manhattan.

<sup>21</sup> Duton worked with George Maure, for whom Maure Avenue is named.

<sup>22</sup> Information on Frederick Duton comes from Queens Borough Public Library Bulletin # 647 "Dunton"

<sup>23</sup> The "Bicycle Railroad" was a short-lived experiment invented by Eben Moody Boynton to try to adapt bicycle technology to the railroad. A type of monorail, with a single track below and another above for stabilizing the cars, this new device ran briefly along a 1 ½ mile track in Long Island, between the south and north shores. <http://www.scripophily.net/boybicelrail.html>

<sup>24</sup> Duton was also involved with the founding of the town of Hollis, as well as the Bank of Jamaica. He built a large residence for himself on the southern edge of Holliswood called Holliswood Hall (demolished) with views of the Atlantic Ocean, and was twice elected to the Board of Supervisors of Queens County.

<sup>25</sup> This section is located generally from Atlantic Avenue to Broadway and from Van Wyck Boulevard to 126<sup>th</sup> Street.

<sup>26</sup> According to the entry for "Queens," 968, in *The Encyclopedia of New York*, "Many Germans moved to Queens from Brooklyn...Middle Village...became almost entirely German by 1860."

<sup>27</sup> Queens County Register, Liber 818, page 309.

<sup>28</sup> Queens County Register, Liber 1210, page 409.

<sup>29</sup> US Census, 1890

<sup>30</sup> The large German immigrant community in New York read and supported a large number of German language newspapers during the second half of the nineteenth century, up until World War I when many of them were forced to close.

<sup>31</sup> The 1900 US Census showed 613 German newspapers at that time. Albert Bernhardt Faust, *The German Element in the United States*, Vol. II (The Steuben Society of America, 1909), 370.

<sup>32</sup> "Conrad Voelcker, Publisher, Dead," *New York Times* (March, 1930).

<sup>33</sup> Information from the files of the Voelker Orth Museum

<sup>34</sup> Queens Department of Buildings, Alt.139-1909.

<sup>35</sup> Queens Department of Buildings, Alt.3767-1930.

<sup>36</sup> Theresa and Rudolph also had an adopted daughter, Barbara.

<sup>37</sup> Near the northwest corner of the lot is a small building used for educational purposes. This building was constructed recently to recall the garage that used to stand on the site. This building is not historic and a section of the lot on which the building stands, 25 feet wide by 44 feet deep, has been excluded from this designation.



## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Voelker Orth Museum, Bird Sanctuary and Victorian Garden has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Voelker Orth Museum, Bird Sanctuary and Victorian Garden, constructed c. 1890-91, is a rare surviving house from the first period of suburban development that took place in Flushing in the 1890s; that this area was originally part of the estates of two large and important Flushing families, the Parsons and the Murrays, for whom it was named; that the area where the Voelker Orth House was built was called Murray Hill and was developed in the 1890s and early 1900s as a residential section that catered to wealthy businessmen who could use the new stop on the Long Island Railroad to commute in and out of Manhattan; that the Voelker Orth house was purchased from its first owner by a German immigrant, Conrad Voelker, who ran a successful publishing and printing company and who used the new rail stop at Murray Hill to commute to his business in Manhattan; that the house was designed by an unknown architect in a picturesque style that was very popular at the time; that its exuberant use of materials (including variously shaped wooden shingles, framed clapboard, colored and leaded glass and wooden roof shingles), angles, and rooflines was typical of a period of great growth and enterprise in the United States and was seen as a way of expressing an owner's wealth; that the house remained in the possession of members of the Voelker family for almost 100 years; that upon her death, Elizabetha Orth, the last surviving descendant of Conrad Voelker bequeathed the house to three local non-profit organizations to start a museum; that the Voelker Orth Museum, Bird Sanctuary and Victorian Garden was founded as a result of that bequest to preserve the house and gardens and to present programming on environmental issues and local history.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Voelker Orth Museum, Bird Sanctuary and Victorian Garden, 149-19 38<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Flushing, and designates as its Landmark Site Borough of Queens Tax Map Block, 5017, Lot 31 in part, consisting of that portion of the lot bounded by a line beginning at the southeasterly corner, extending northerly along the eastern property line, westerly along part of the northern property line to a point 75 feet from the eastern property line, southerly along a line at an angle of 90 degrees to a point 44 feet from the northern property line, westerly along a line at an angle of 90 degrees to the western property line, southerly along part of the western property line, and easterly along the southern property line, to the point of beginning.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair  
Diana Chapin, Joan Gerner, Roberta Brandes Gratz, Christopher Moore,  
Margery Perlmutter, Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



Voelker Orth Museum , Bird Sanctuary and Victorian Garden  
149-19 38<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Flushing, Queens



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Flushing, Queens



Western façade

Voelker Orth Museum

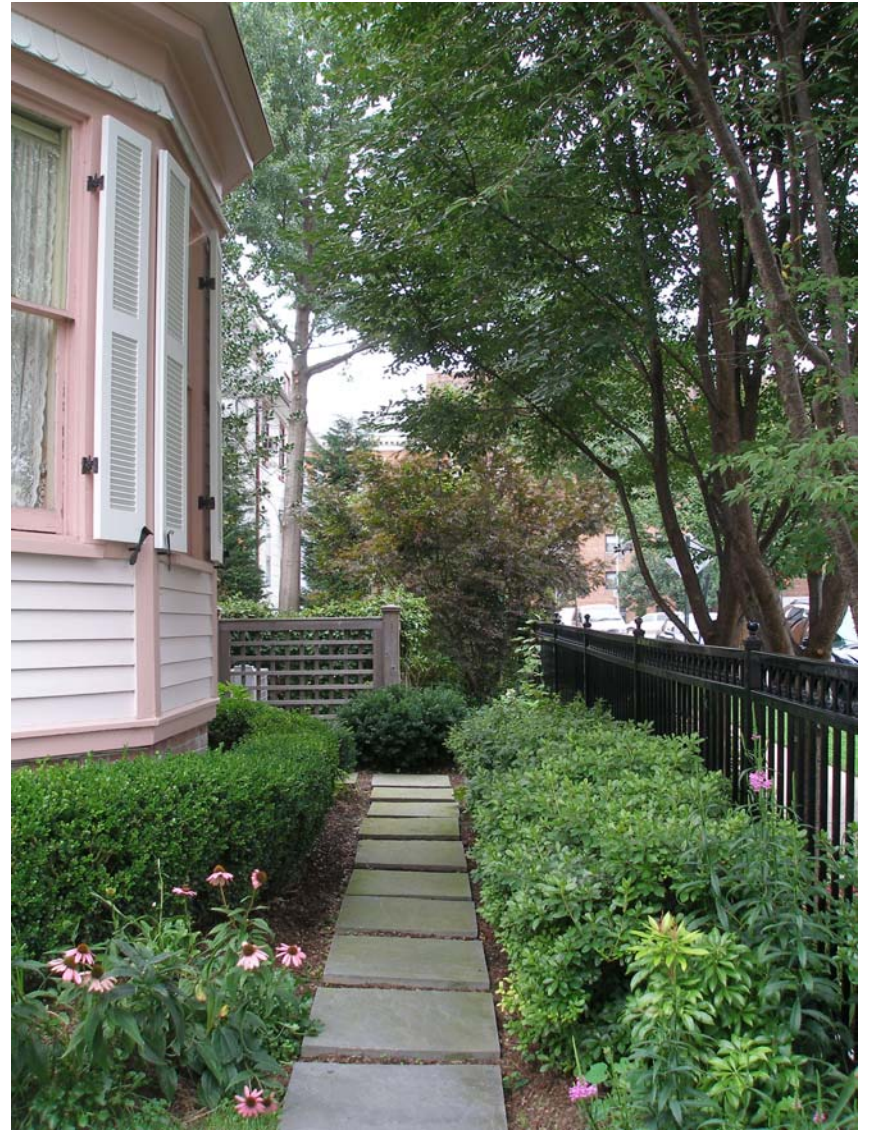
Rear facade



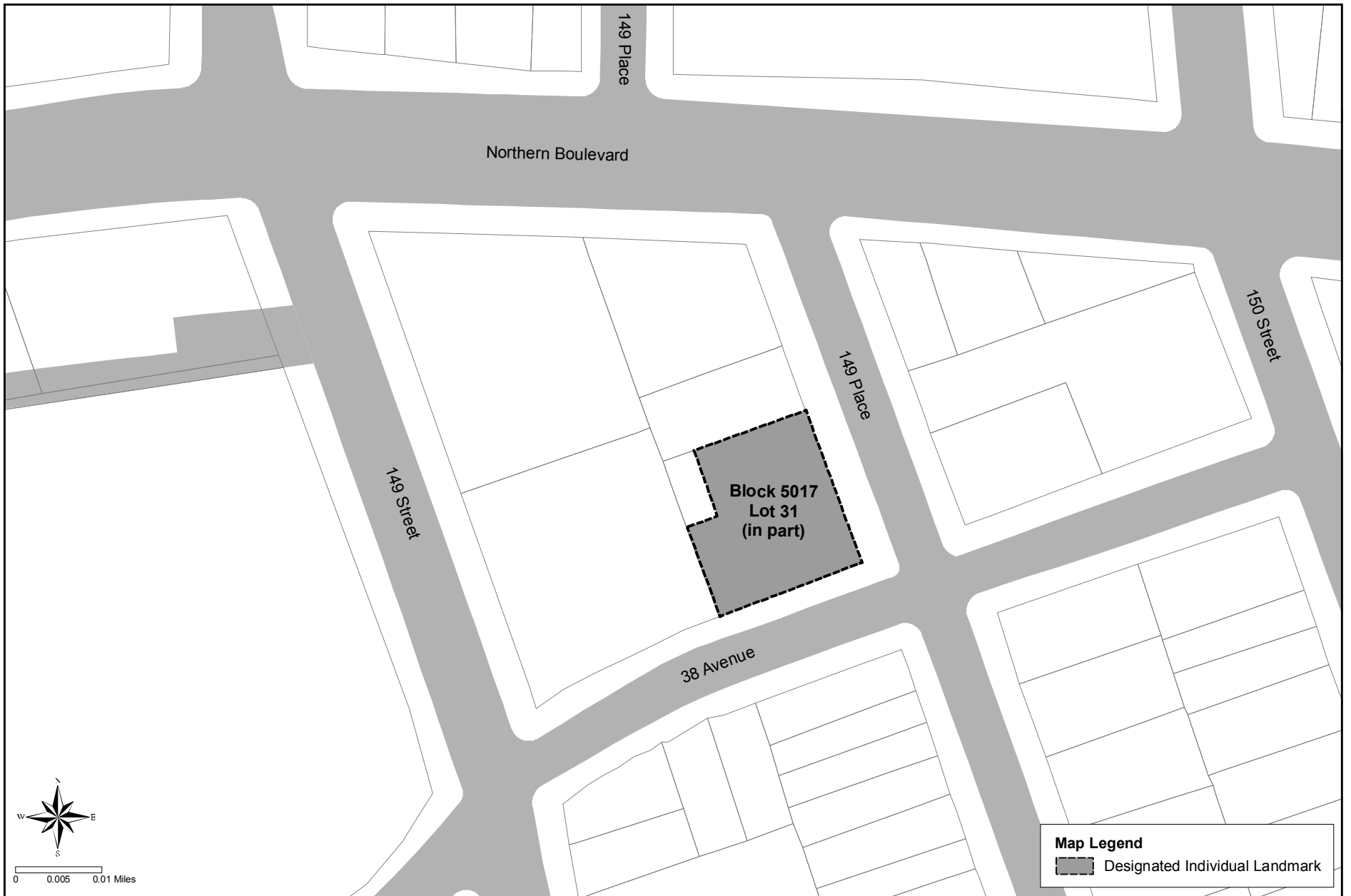


Voelker Orth Gardens





Voelker Orth Museum, Bird Sanctuary and Victorian Garden  
Details



VOELKER ORTH MUSEUM, BIRD SANCTUARY AND VICTORIAN GARDEN (LP-2272), 149-19 38th Avenue.  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Queens, Tax Map Block 5017, Lot 31 (in part).

Designated: October 30, 2007

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 06C, 2006.  
 Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM.