

What's in a Name? For Streets in Queens, History

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Bell Boulevard, Bayside: the home of a leading merchant



Francis Lewis Boulevard, Bayside: Prestige, plunder and poverty

What's in a Name? For Streets

By Mitch Broder

Who was Van Wyck? Where was Utopia? What was run on Epsom Course?

Some of the people who use the streets and highways of Queens may wonder how the roadways got their names. Here's how:

VAN WYCK EXPRESSWAY—The Van Wyck was not named for Robert Van Wyck, the first mayor of greater New York, whose term ran from 1898 to 1901. The honor had been given long before to Abraham H. Van Wyck, who invested in real estate between East New York and Jamaica and opened the road in September, 1834. He chose the name himself.

SUTPHIN BOULEVARD—Queens history makes note of several illustrious Sutphins, but the boulevard was dedicated to John H. Sutphin, once dubbed the "Queens King." He was the president of both the Bank of Long Island and the Jamaica Savings Bank, the Democratic leader of Queens for 28 years and the county clerk for 10 consecutive three-year terms. He died in 1907. (Sutphin ancestors had settled on Long Island in 1628, after emigrating from Zetfin, Holland, which also bears a version of the family name.)

FRANCIS LEWIS BOULEVARD—Francis Lewis was a Welshman who became a wealthy merchant on Long Island at the time of the Revolutionary War. As a patriot and the seventh signer of the Declaration of Independence, he suffered cruelly at the hands of the Tories, who plundered his Whitestone home and imprisoned his wife, causing her death. He died in near-poverty in 1803.

DOUGLASTON PARKWAY—In 1835, the land for what is now Douglaston was acquired by George Douglas. Subsequently, the community was laid out by his son, William B. Douglas. But somehow, its original name became "Marathon." It wasn't until 1872 that someone came up with the present designation. Hence the name of the nearby parkway.

HORACE HARDING BOULEVARD—James Horace Harding wanted a good road between Manhattan and Long Island, so he built it himself. A wealthy businessman who lived in Rumson, N. J., Harding liked to golf in Nassau County but didn't like the four hours it often took him to get there via a pre-1920s version of Nassau Boulevard. So, in 1923, he approached Queens Borough officials with his suggestion for a new east-west highway. When informed that the highway bureau couldn't begin a study of the matter for another year and a half, Harding organized a syndicate of Queens and Nassau citizens to raise money for a private study. He hired his own engineers, whipped them along, and returned to officialdom with a set of blueprints later that same year. The final plan was submitted and adopted in 1924 and the project was authorized in 1926. When Harding died in 1929, the new Nassau Boulevard was renamed for him.

Through the years, there have been several attempts to change the name, but Horace Harding Boulevard survives to this day—at least as a service road. Since its renovation in the 1950s, most people

have referred to the main thoroughfare as the Long Island Expressway.

FRESH MEADOW LANE—Fresh Meadow Lane, originally an early colonial road that connected Flushing with Jamaica, was named for the fresh-water meadows through which it ran. The central portion later became Utopia Parkway, the part bordering on Flushing Cemetery was named Pigeon Meadow Road for the flocks of pigeons that once inhabited the meadows south of the highway, and the lower part was named Home Lawn Street—for no now-discernible reason.

UTOPIA PARKWAY—In the early years of this century, a group of Jewish residents of Manhattan's lower East Side planned to establish a cooperative colony, with stores as well as houses, somewhere in the vicinity of the present-day St. John's University. The optimism that they evidently felt about the potential of the development led to the colony's designation as Utopia. Unfortunately, their dream never materialized, but the name survives, if inappropriately, on the highway which passes through the site.

ASTORIA BOULEVARD—John Jacob Astor, the

owner of the Pacific Fur Co., invested heavily in New York real estate in the early 19th century. Through his investments, he founded the family fortune, and the Astors were once called "the landlords of New York." The original Astoria was an Oregon fur-trading post, which was established by Astor in 1811 and became the first American settlement west of the Rocky Mountains. The name ended up in Queens because Astor had a summer home in the borough, opposite Hell Gate.

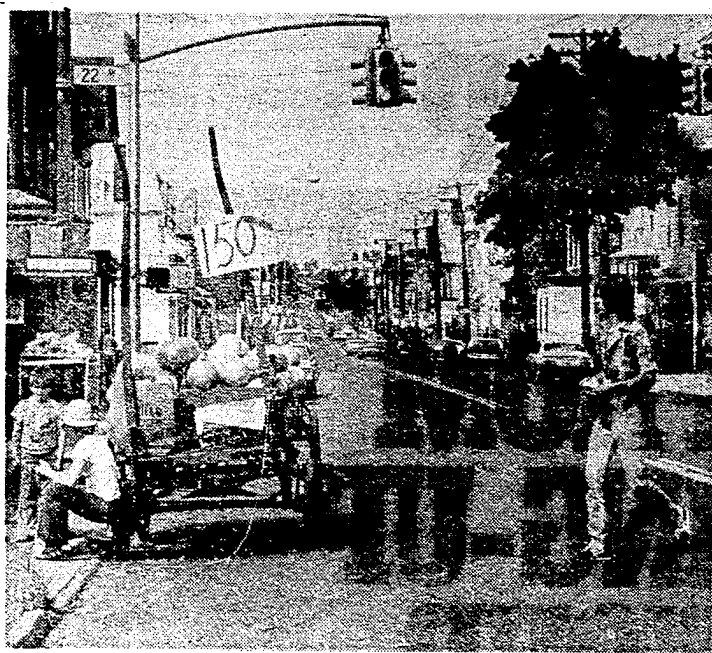
QUEENS BOULEVARD—The boulevard was established in 1919 and was, of course, named for the borough. (The borough was created Jan. 1, 1898, and named for the county; and the county was organized Nov. 1, 1683, and named for Catherine of Braganza, the consort of Charles II of England.)

JAMAICA AVENUE—The county seat was named for the small tribe of Algonquin Indians known as the Jameco, or "beaver people." The present spelling and pronunciation were probably influenced by the island of Jamaica in the West Indies.

BOWNE STREET—John Bowne was the builder



Bowne Street, Flushing: Peter Stuyvesant clapped the first resident in irons for holding Quaker meetings



College Point Boulevard, College Point: All that and still no school



Epsom Course, Holliswood: Round and round it went, for a reason

in Queens, History

and first owner of the Bowne House in Flushing In 1662, he began holding Quaker meetings there, for which he was clapped into irons by Peter Stuyvesant. He fought for and won acquittal, and the house became known as the "Cradle of Quakerism" in this country and eventually came to be regarded as a shrine to religious tolerance in general.

PARSONS BOULEVARD—Samuel and Robert Parsons, descendants of John Bowne, were owners of a well-known nursery in Kissena during the mid-19th Century. The brothers opened what was originally Parsons Avenue at their own expense in about 1878, at which time it ran from Broadway to a line about 200 feet south of Sanford Avenue. They received no inquiries about land purchases on either side for 18 years.

COLLEGE POINT BOULEVARD—College Point was named prematurely for a school that was never built. In the mid-1800s, a women's college to be named St. Paul's was planned for the area—but it remained only a plan. Nevertheless, the community kept the name. The boulevard had been called Lawrence Street after the Lawrence family of Flushing

until 1970, when the name was changed to conform to the community name.

EPSOM COURSE—Epsom Course in Holliswood is shaped like a raceway—because that's what it once was. In its heyday, Epsom Course Race Track was the scene of competition among some of the country's most respected trotters. Although bisected by Francis Lewis Boulevard, the street is a full oval and picks up on both sides of the intersections.

WHITESTONE EXPRESSWAY—Of the several theories regarding the origin of "Whitestone," the most prevalent—and reasonable—holds that the name comes from a large white rock that once stood near the shore of the East River.

HOLLIS AVENUE—The community of Hollis was developed in 1884 by Frederick W. Dunton, who named it for his former home, Hollis, N.H. The Queens Hollis had previously been known as East Jamaica (For the record, Hollis, N.H., was named for John Holles, the first Earl of Clare.)

STEINWAY STREET—Steinway Street was built in 1873 by William Steinway and his sons when they established their piano-manufacturing business on the East River waterfront. The factory is still there and the old Steinway mansion still stands, along with some row houses originally built for the workers.

KISSENA BOULEVARD—Kissena Boulevard got its name from Kissena Park; Kissena Park got its name from Kissena Lake; and Kissena Lake got its name from the Indian word *kissina*, meaning: "It is cold."

BELL BOULEVARD—The main thoroughfare through Bayside owes its name to Abraham Bell, a merchant shipper from New York. In 1824, Bell bought 226 acres of land in Bayside and settled there.

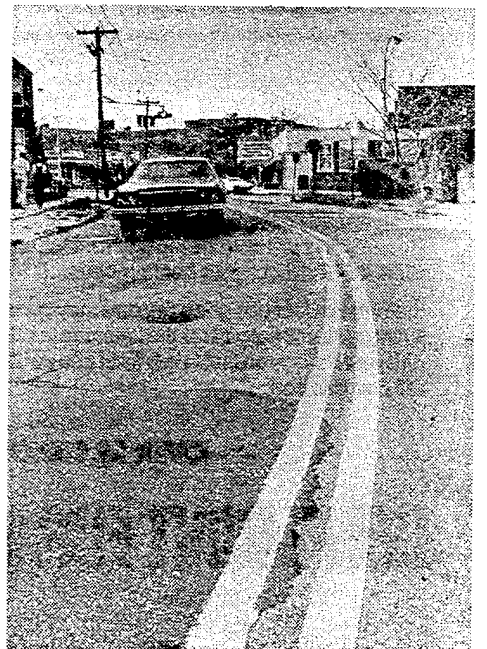
LAURELTON PARKWAY—In 1905, the Laurelton Land Co. purchased several farms in this area, and developed the land the following year. One theory says the company was so named because of the laurels that grew in the vicinity of the railroad station. A more accepted theory, however, says that there were no laurels and that it just seemed like a good name at the time.

WOODHAVEN BOULEVARD—The community was developed in 1835 by John R. Pitkin and named Woodville for the Wood family of that vicinity. At a public meeting on July 30, 1853, the name was changed to Woodhaven so that the residents could obtain a post office; there already was a post office in New York State called Woodville.

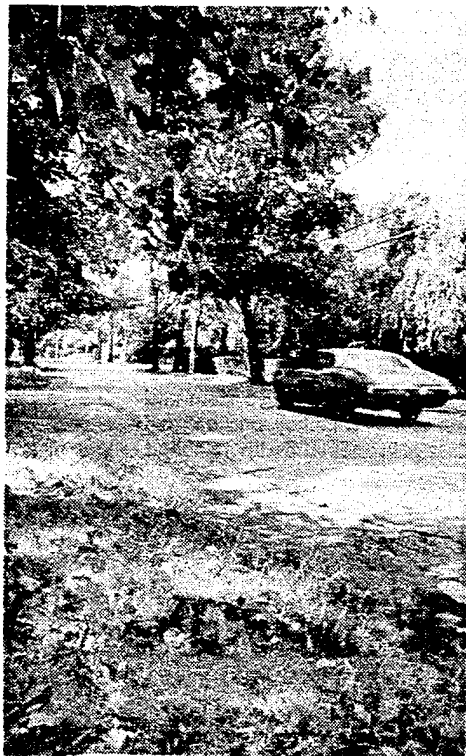
BELT PARKWAY—There have been a number of Mr. Belts in New York, all of them, no doubt, worthy of recognition. But none of them was the inspiration for the name of the Belt Parkway. The road was originally christened the Circumferential Parkway, but that title was soon changed—apparently so that drivers could read the entire name before they passed the sign. It was called the Belt because it runs around the city—like a belt.



Kissena Boulevard, Flushing: Indians found it chilly



Fresh Meadow Lane, Flushing: By sparkling waters



Douglaston Parkway Douglaston Once a Marathon

Newsday Photos by Naomi Lasdon and Dan Neville