



# **HISTORIC BURIAL GROUNDS OF QUEENS PUBLIC PARKS**





This project was created by Aimee Lusty  
for a public history course at  
CUNY Queens College  
taught by Dr. Jonathan Thayer  
December 2020

In collaboration with the  
Olde Towne of Flushing Burial Ground Conservancy  
(<http://otfbgconservancy.org/>)  
&  
Queens Memory Project  
(<https://queensmemory.org/>)

Historic photographs courtesy of the  
Municipal Archives of the City of New York  
&  
the Archives at Queens Public Library

The project uses StoryMapJS  
developed by the  
Northwestern University Knight Lab



## HISTORIC BURIAL GROUNDS OF QUEENS PUBLIC PARKS

This virtual tour and interactive map features ten historic burial grounds within public parks of Queens County, New York. The tour tells the story of historic cemeteries that have undergone transformations into sites of recreation after purchase by the New York City Parks Department. The sites include community potter's fields, public town burial grounds, and small family farm cemeteries. The tour aims to educate the viewer of the history of these parks as burial grounds and to address challenges these sites have with recognition as cemeteries and places of historical significance. It intends to promote reclamation of the sites as cemeteries through proper naming, the inclusion of historical signage, placing limitations on renovations and excavations, and including the sites in state and national registers of historic places.

[Start Exploring](#)

(Image: Opening page of the interactive narrative story map.)

## HISTORIC BURIAL GROUNDS OF QUEENS PUBLIC PARKS

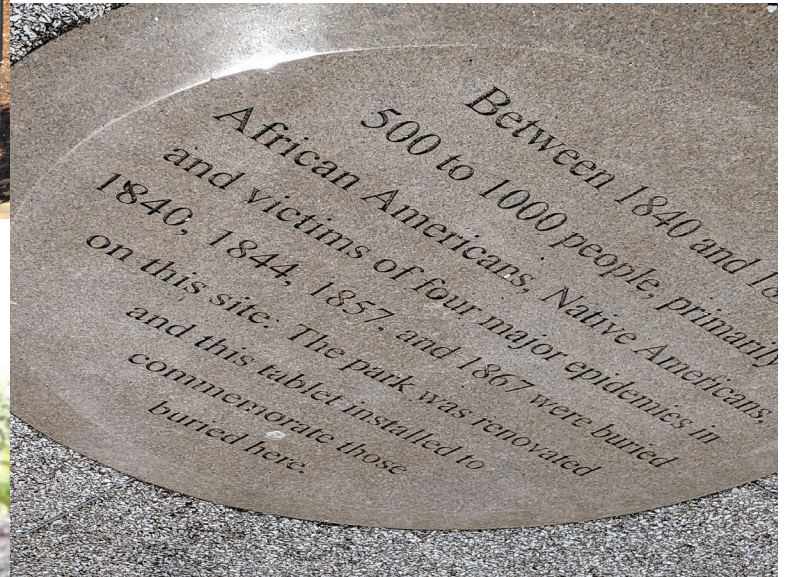
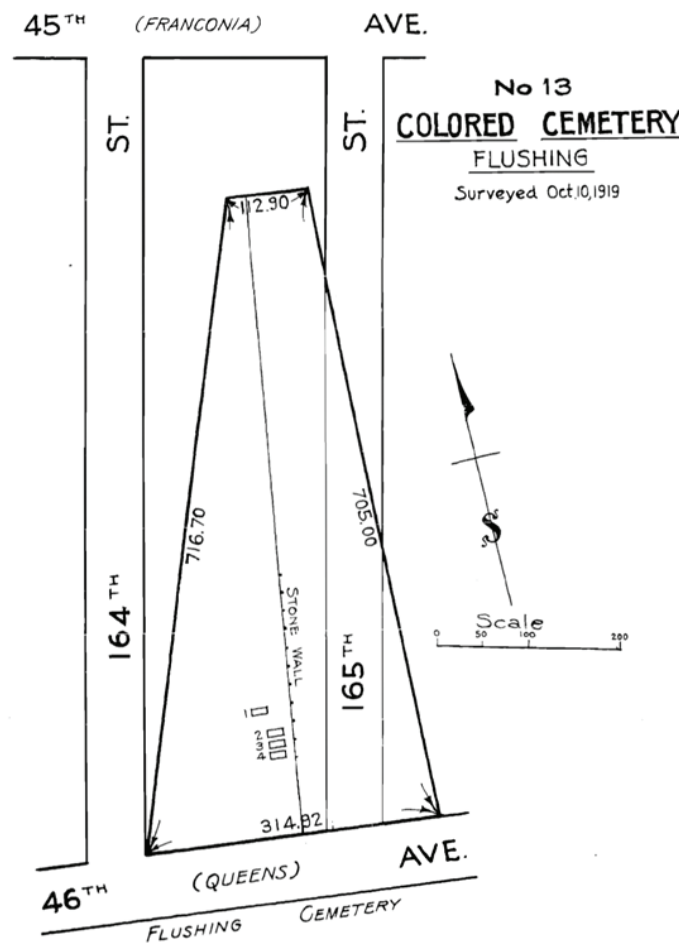
The following pages document the images and writing included in the Historic Burial Grounds of Queens Public Parks interactive narrative story map.

The virtual tour and interactive map features ten historic burial grounds within public parks of Queens County, New York. The tour tells the story of historic cemeteries that have undergone transformations into sites of recreation after purchase by the New York City Parks Department. The sites include community potter's fields, public town burial grounds, and small family farm cemeteries. The tour aims to educate the viewer of the history of these parks as burial grounds and to address challenges these sites have with recognition as cemeteries and places of historical significance. It intends to promote reclamation of the sites as cemeteries through proper naming, the inclusion of historical signage, placing limitations on renovations and excavations, and including the sites in state and national registers of historic places.

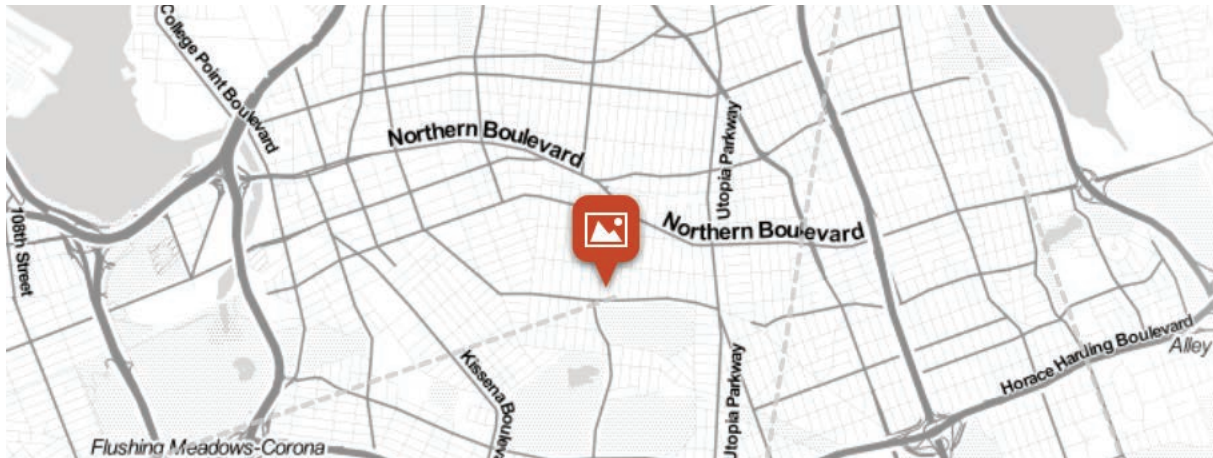
Contents:

- The Olde Towne of Flushing Burial Ground
- Newtown Burial Ground
- Alsop Family Burial Ground
- Pullis Farm Cemetery
- Remsen Family Cemetery
- Sunnyside Plot at Maple Grove
- Southside Burial Ground
- Cornell Burial Ground
- Old Queens Village Public Burial Ground
- Thorne-Wilkins Cemetery









# OLDE TOWNE OF FLUSHING BURIAL GROUND

Location: 46th Ave. & 164th St. & 165th St, Flushing, NY 11358

Dates Active: 1840 - 1898

Description: The Public Burial Ground of Flushing was established in 1840 and remained an active community cemetery until 1898. Over 1000 graves occupy the site, with a majority representing African American and Native American residents. The cemetery also interred poor whites and wealthier individuals who died during cholera and smallpox epidemics in the second half of the 19th century, who were considered too contaminated for churchyard burial. The site was transferred to the New York City Parks Department in 1914 and utilized as a town commons. In 1931 the city changed its name from the Pauper's Burial Ground to Martin's Field, in honor of a tree conservationist. In 1936, under the leadership of parks commissioner Robert Moses, a portion of the site was desecrated and developed into a playground. Workers Progress Administrator workers found evidence of the site's previous use as a cemetery, including coins in the eyes of the burials, which reportedly they sold for profit.

The site went through a rediscovery in the 1990s as a result of planned park renovations and the advocacy work of community activists. Reclamation of the site is marked by renovations and the installation of a memorial in 2006. It was renamed The Olde Towne of Flushing Burial Ground in 2009. The site has since been registered as a National Historic Landmark. The Olde Towne of Flushing Burial Ground Conservancy continues to advocate for its reclamation and is integral in the installation of historical signage, the development of a memorial installation to be installed in 2021, and improved landscaping to honor those interred.

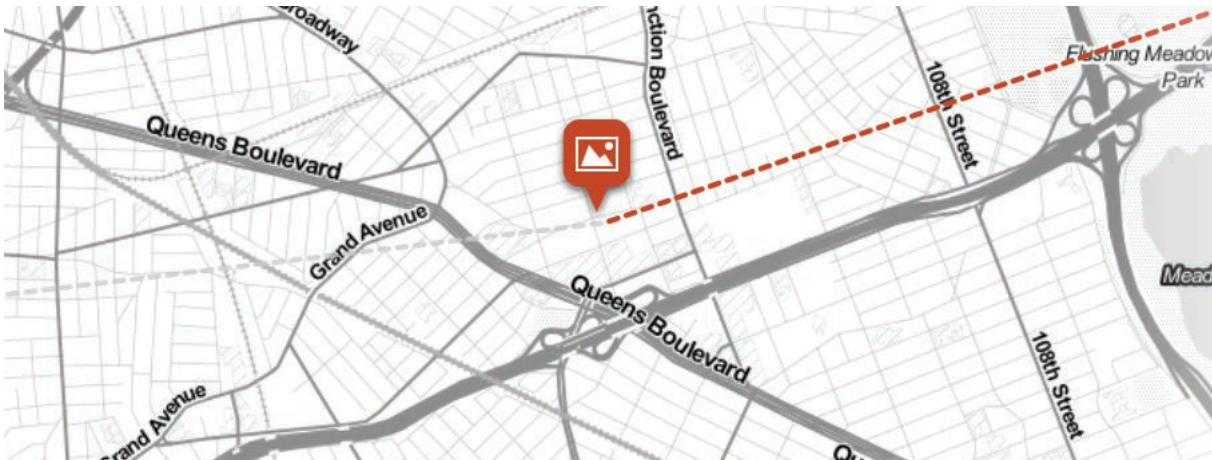
## Image Credits:

Historic photograph: Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1910. Map: Courtesy of Queens Public Library  
Color Photographs: Rudy Hartmann, 2016, Queens Memory Project Collections, Queens Public Library / Olde Towne of Flushing Wikipedia: photography by CaptJayRuffins, (CC BY-SA 4.0)

## References:

NYC Parks Historical Signs Project. (2020). *The Olde Towne of Flushing Burial Ground*.  
<https://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/the-olde-towne-of-flushing-burial-ground/history>  
Stone, L. (1996). *Report on phase 1A, Archaeological Documentary Research in Advance of the Reconstruction of the Martin's Field Playground*. New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.  
Burial Ground History. (2020, November 30). *Olde Towne of Flushing Burial Ground Conservancy*. <http://otfbgconservancy.org/history.html>





# NEWTOWN BURIAL GROUND

Location: Newtown Playground, Elmhurst, Queens, 11373

Alternate Names: Newtown Town Burial Ground, Old Newton Cemetery

Dates Active: 1730 - 1880

Description: The Newtown Burial Ground lies beneath the Newtown Playground in Elmhurst, Queens. In 1652, following the settlement of Newtown, the town set the land aside as a public cemetery. Some of Newtown's most prominent residents were buried there, including members of the Fish, Fox, Moore, Titus, and Waldron families. During the 19th century, the site was used by the town as a potter's field, adding countless unmarked pauper graves occasionally over the older burials. Around 1880, the burial ground fell into abandonment and neglect, the Presbyterian Church paid to exhume several burials and moved them to other cemeteries. The land surrounding the cemetery was developed and threatened encroachment. The City of New York acquired the burial ground in 1898 and transferred it to the parks department in 1917. As many as 86 headstones were laid flat and covered with soil to make way for the installation of a playground and drinking fountain. Newspaper articles from the time report that several unclaimed gravestones were broken to pieces and mixed with cement to form a layer over the cemetery. The burials were further disrupted following park renovations in 1935 under parks commissioner Robert Moses's initiatives. After renovations, in 2019, the parks department installed seating areas, paths, and plantings to honor those buried beneath, though no signage or information on the site's history accompanies this installation.

Image Credits:

Map: Courtesy of Queens Public Library

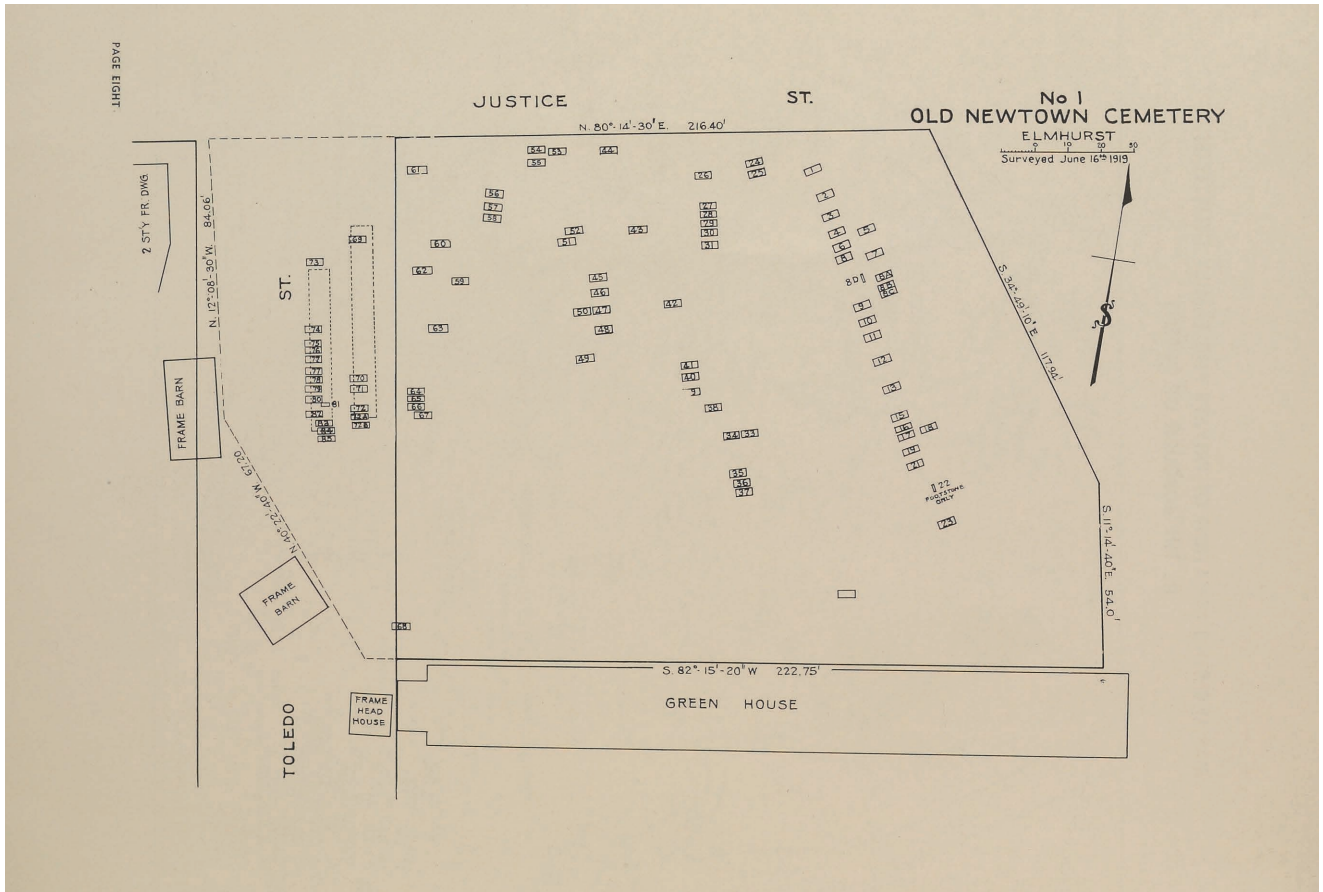
Color Photographs: ©Aimee Lusty, 2020.

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Pickman, A. (1995). *Archaeological Documentary Study: Reconstruction of Newtown Playground 56th Avenue and 92nd Street, Elmhurst, Queens*. New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. [http://s-media.nyc.gov/agencies/lpc/arch\\_reports/1722.pdf](http://s-media.nyc.gov/agencies/lpc/arch_reports/1722.pdf)

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# ALSOP FAMILY BURIAL GROUND

Location: Calvary Veterans Park, Maspeth, NY 11378

Dates Active: Alsop Family Burial Ground, approximately 1691-1889

Civil War Union Burial 1863-1909

Description: The Alsop Family Burial Ground comprises 33 marked graves of descendants of the Alsop family, as well as unmarked graves of enslaved individuals that worked the family's farmlands. The Alsops were a prominent family of Newtown. Richard Alsop inherited the land from his uncle Thomas Wandell following his death in 1691 and subsequently passed the land down to his descendants. The site continued as an active burial ground for generations of Alsops until 1889. In 1848 the Trustees St. Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan, purchased 100 acres of land from Alsop's decedents to extend the Calvary Cemetery. The burial ground remains intact within a gated fence, but much of the other features of the farm, including the mansion, was demolished. The City of New York purchased a portion of the land from the Trustees in 1863 and granted jurisdiction to the parks department to designate the site burial ground for Civil War Union soldiers that died in New York hospitals. The site now features a monument to Civil War Union soldiers.

Image Credits:

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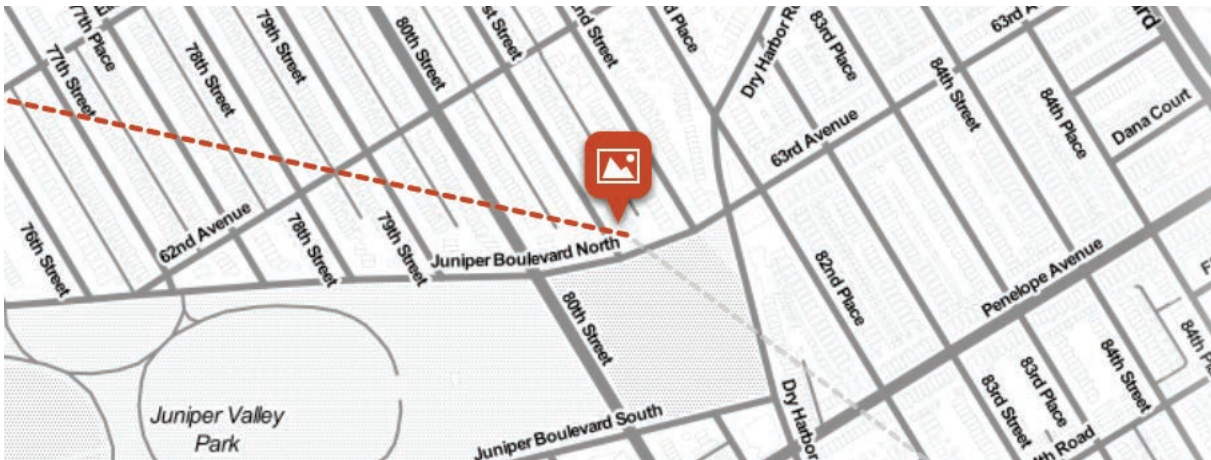
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A landmark gone: Destruction of the Alsop house. (1880, March 28). *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/2420295/a-landmark-gone-destruction-of-the/>





# PULLIS FARM CEMETERY

Location: Juniper Valley Park, Middle Village, Queens

Dates Active: 1846-1854

Description: The Pullis Farm Cemetery, located within the Juniper Valley Park on North 63rd Avenue near 81st Street. Thomas Pullis, Sr. purchased 32 acres of farmland in Middle Village in 1822. The family cemetery was established in 1846 with the burial of a child. The site inters nine members of the Pullis family, with three marble headstones marking graves. Thomas Pullis, Sr. passed the lands onto his sons following his death in 1854. His grave was the last burial on the site. He left instructions in his will to prohibit the sale of the cemetery, and that it must be marked and protected. In the 1940s the City of New York acquired the farmland and surrounding Juniper Valley Swamp. Shortly after, the Works Progress Administration transformed the land into Juniper Valley Park. The familial cemetery remained intact and undisturbed. By the 1990s the cemetery suffered decades of erosion, neglect, and vandalism. Local residents sparked initiatives to clean up the cemetery, by installing signage to honor the site, improving landscaping, and establishing the cemetery as a historical landmark. The nearby Lutheran All Faiths Cemetery donated a new gravestone, a statue, and other adornments to honor the Pullis Family. Today the cemetery resides behind a locked fence and is regularly maintained by a group of volunteers.

Image Credits:

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References:

NYC Parks Historical Signs Project. (2020). *Juniper Valley Park*. <https://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/juniper-valley-park/history>

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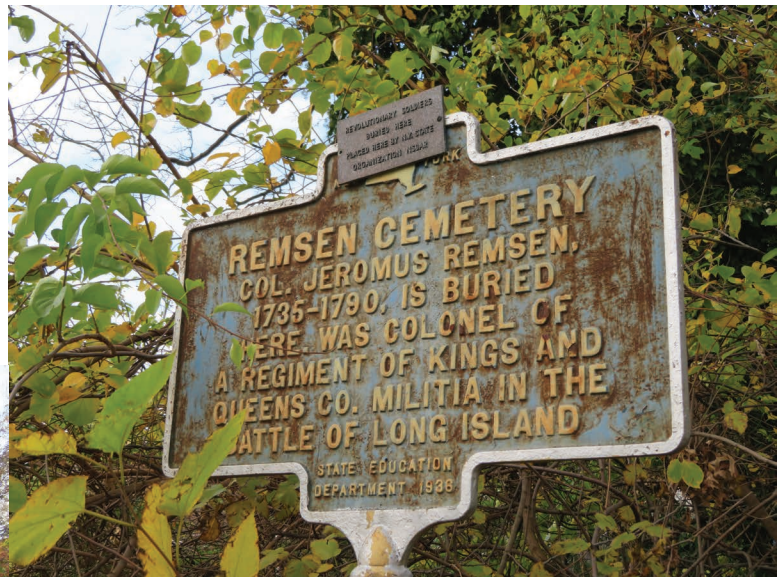
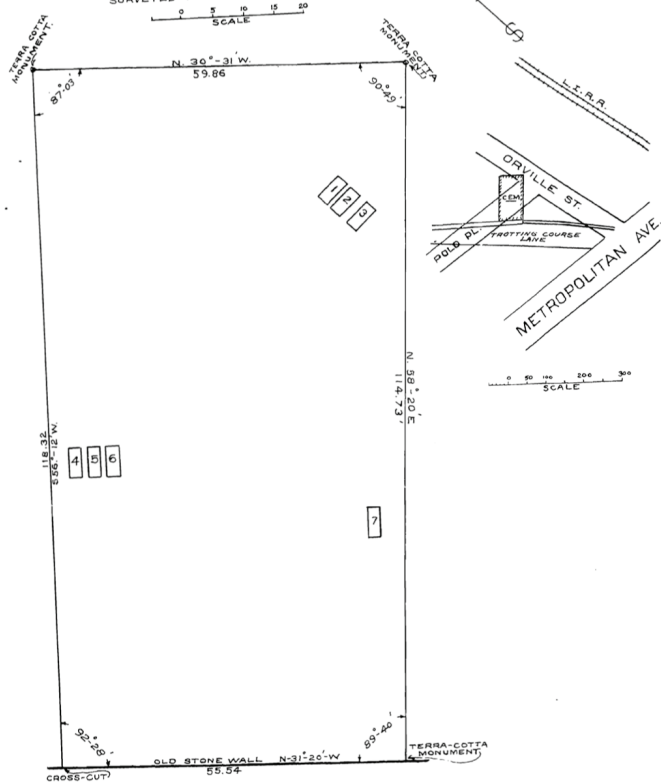


# No. 18. REMSEN CEMETERY

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# REMSEN FAMILY CEMETERY

Location: Remsen Family Cemetery, Rego Park, 11374

Dates Active: 1790-1819

Description: The Remsen Family Cemetery inters eight members of the Remsen family, with the oldest grave of Jeromus Remsen from 1790. The Remsen family immigrated to America from northern Germany in the 17th century. They were one of the first settling families and developed farmland in the surrounding area, then known as Hempstead Swamp. The cemetery occupied a small parcel of land between the old Remsen house and the neighboring Suydam homestead, neither of which remain. Family members served in both the French and Indian War and the American Revolutionary War. In the 1980s, commemorative gravestones were donated by the local Veterans Administration and the Remsen Park Coalition to honor Col. Remsen, Major Abraham Remsen, and two brothers who were also Revolutionary War officers. An additional memorial was erected to honor the community's efforts in World War I. In 1981 the Remsen Cemetery was designated as a New York City Landmark. The cemetery was assigned to the Department of Parks and Recreation in 2003, which now owns and maintains the site. Markers, memorials, descriptive signs, and a chain around the cemetery designate it as a historic site and educate park visitors of its significance.

Image Credits:

Map: Courtesy of Queens Public Library

Historic Photographs: Courtesy of the Archives at Queens Public Library, The Eugene L. Armbruster Drawings and Photographs.

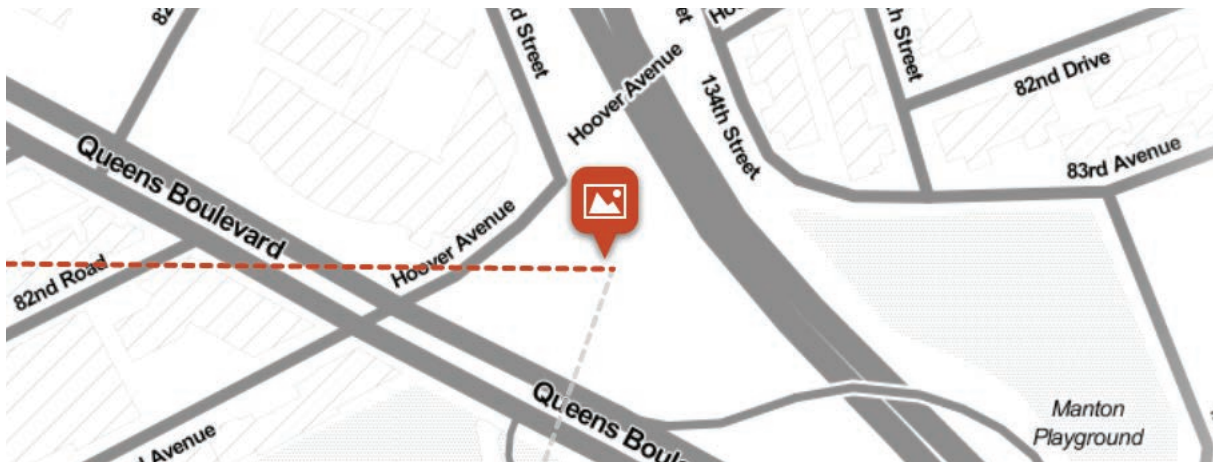
Color Photographs: ©Aimee Lusty, 2020.

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*Designation List 144, LP-1177*. (1981, May 26). Landmarks Preservation Commission. <http://s-media.nyc.gov/agencies/lpc/lp/1177.pdf>

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# SUNNYSIDE PLOT

## MAPLE GROVE CEMETERY

Location: Maple Grove Park, Hoover Ave, Jamaica, NY 11435

Dates Active: 1875 – 1930s

Description: Maple Grove Park occupies 1.5 acres between Queens Boulevard and the Van Wyck Expressway. The parkland was originally part of the Maple Grove Cemetery, a nondenominational burial ground established in 1875 to ease overcrowding in Jamaica's Prospect Cemetery. An aerial map from 1924 shows landscaping and developed paths crossing the site. In 1934 the City of New York purchased a portion of the cemetery land known as the Sunnyside Plot for the construction of the Van Wyck Expressway, completed in 1950. It is unclear whether any graves were exhumed and relocated during the construction of the expressway. The park was named Maple Grove Park by Commissioner Stern in 1997. The existing portion of the Maple Grove Cemetery is visible across Queens Boulevard. The park features a tree-lined seating area comprised of oaks and maples. There is no signage in the park interpreting its history.

Image Credits:

Map: Historic Maps from 1924 & 1951: <https://maps.nyc.gov/then&now/>.

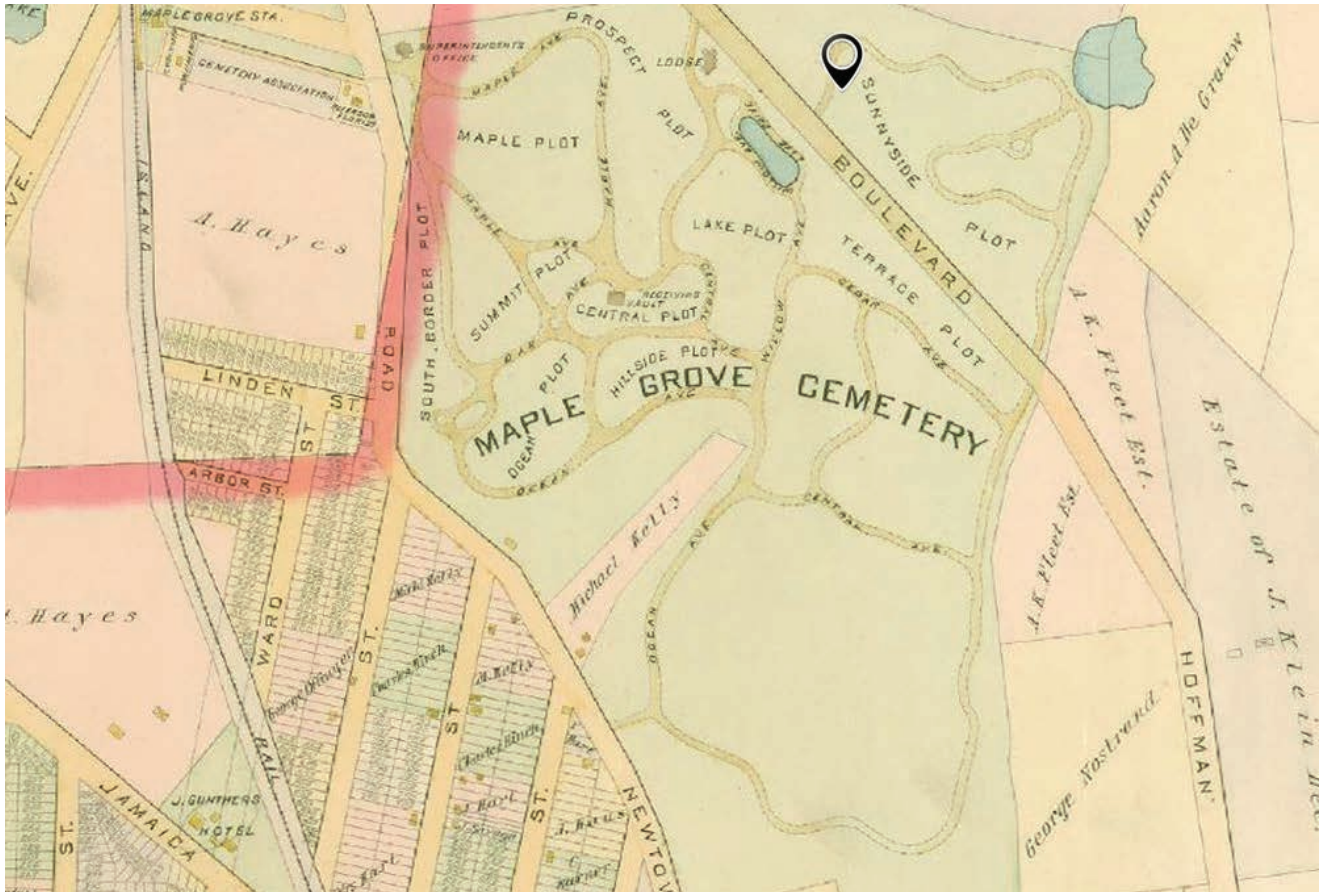
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References:

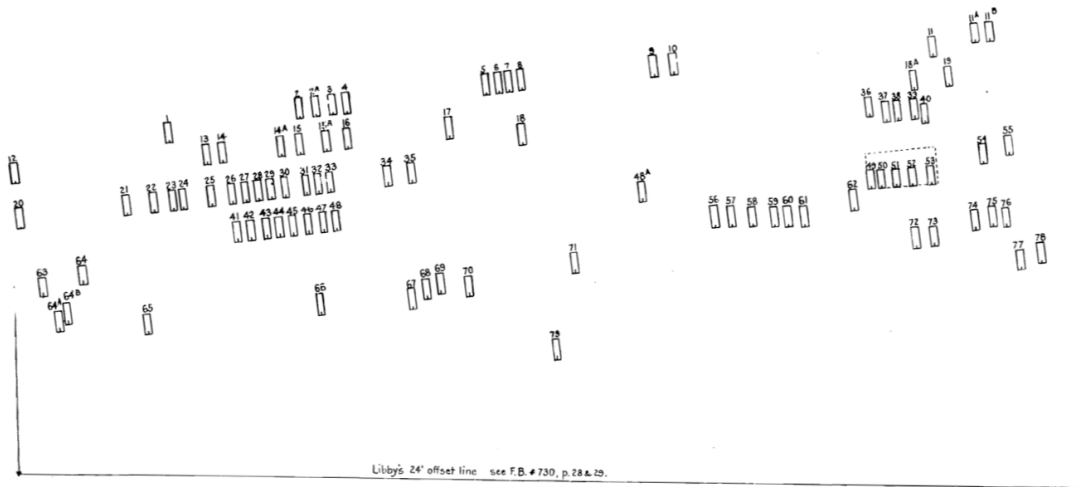
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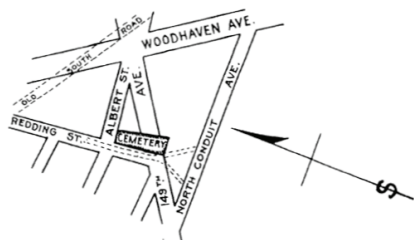








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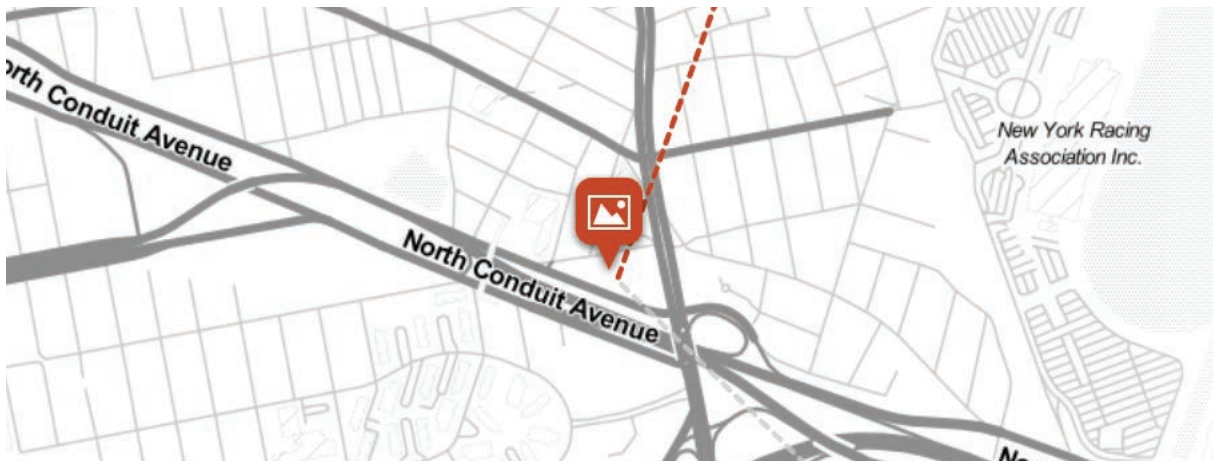
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# SOUTHSIDE BURIAL GROUND

Location: 139-03 Redding St, Vito Locascio Field, Ozone Park, Queens

Dates Active: 1681 – 1919

Description: The Southside Burial Ground was a community cemetery donated by the Van Wicklens in 1681. Neighboring farmers including the Durlands, Fredericks, Ryders, Stoothoffs, and Van Wicklens were allotted shares for family burials. Burials continued through the 18th and 19th centuries, with the latest recorded in 1919. During its latter years, some of the plots had been buried over. A survey from 1919 identifies 79 burials, more than half of which were marked with marble, granite or brownstone headstones. The rest were identified with wooden stakes or as raised mounds of earth. Alternate names for the site include Van Wicklen Cemetery, Aqueduct Cemetery, and Homestead Cemetery.

During the housing boom of the 1920s, developers destroyed much of the site. The plot was divided and further desecrated by the construction of 149th Avenue. The city purchased the surrounding plots for water supply purposes and further street building. It was later transferred to the parks department. In the 1930s concerned citizens fought to advocate for protection and cleanup of the site. Today, the remnant portion of the northern section of burial ground lies behind a locked chain-link fence. Only four headstones remain toward the center of the site, all of which have since toppled. Signage on the outside of the fence commemorates the site's history.

## Image Credits:

Map: Courtesy of Queens Public Library

Historic Photographs: Courtesy of the Archives at Queens Public Library, The Eugene L. Armbruster

Drawings and Photographs / Courtesy Municipal Archives, City of New York.

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## References:

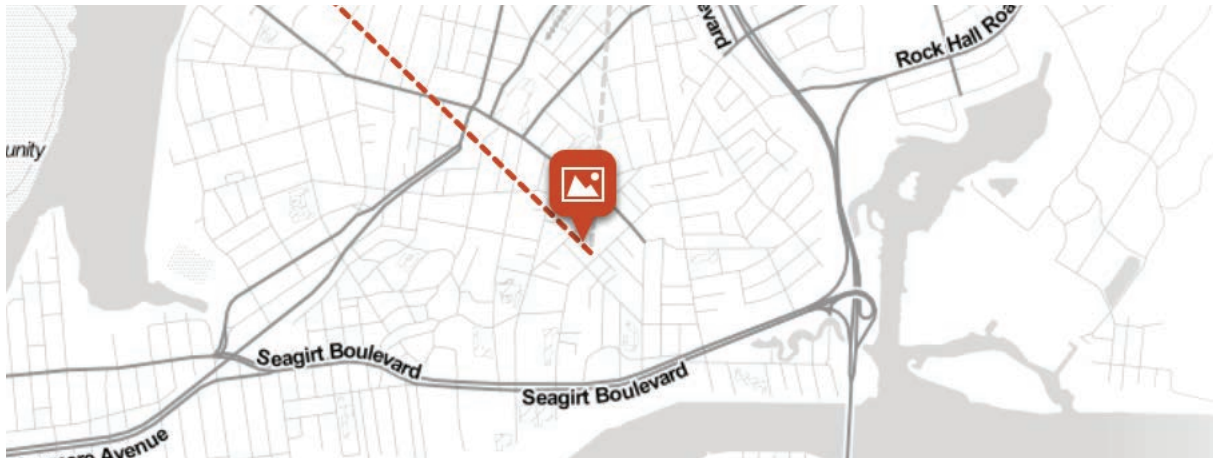
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# CORNELL BURIAL GROUND

Location: Caffrey Ave, Cornell Burial Ground, Far Rockaway, 11691

Dates Active: 1694 - 1821

Description: The Cornell Burial Ground, also known as the Richard Cornell Graveyard, was a private cemetery for the Cornell family, the first European settlers in Far Rockaway. Richard Cornell (1625-93) was an English settler and ironmaster, who purchased most of the area now known as Far Rockaway in 1687. His family established their homestead in 1690 near Beach 19th street. Several members of the Cornell family are buried in the cemetery, it is estimated that the last interment was in 1821.

In 1970 the cemetery was designated as a historical landmark by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. The cemetery fell into disrepair in the 1980s. In 1991, concerned citizens in collaboration with the Queens Historical Society formed the Cornell Cemetery Corporation, cleaned up the area, and initiated an archeological excavation of the site. In 1992 the New York City Parks Department purchased an adjacent lot to serve as a sitting area and entranceway to the cemetery. Today, the preserved cemetery is inaccessible and hidden behind the overgrowth of the adjoining lot, the original signage at the park entrance has since been removed.

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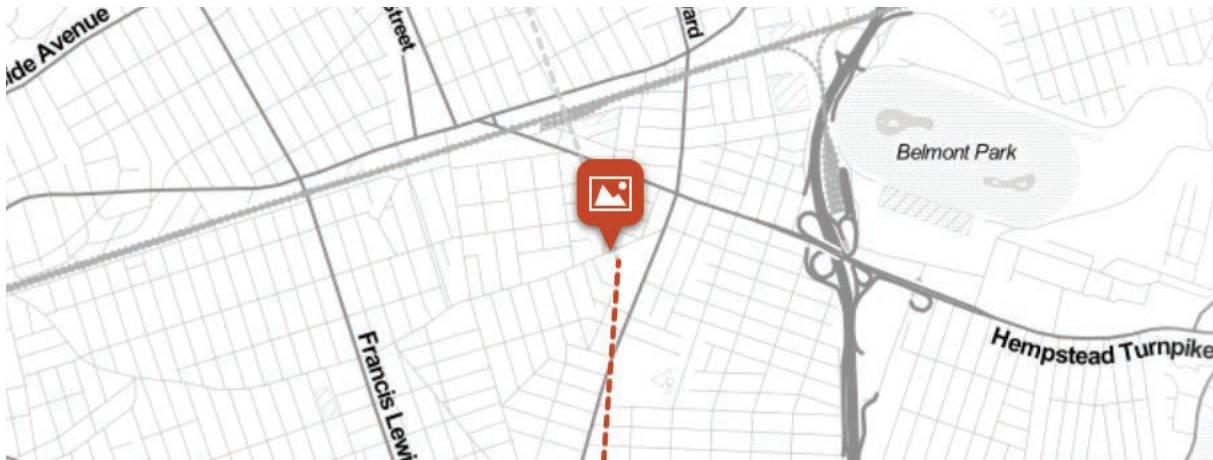
Color Photographs: ©Aimee Lusty, 2020.

References:

NYC Historical Signs Project. (2020). *Cornell Burial Ground and Lot*. <https://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/cornell-burial-ground/history>

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# TOWN OF JAMAICA POTTER'S FIELD

Location: 217-60-217-72 Hollis Ave, Wayanda Park, Queens Village, 11429

Dates Active: 1844 - 1898

**Description:** The Town of Jamaica Potter's Field was established in 1844 after the town's burial ground at Prospect Cemetery became overcrowded. The site comprised 3.14 acres and was set aside as a free burying ground for those in need. The site interred paupers, asylum inmates, poorhouse residents, and unidentified persons from Flushing, Newtown, Hempstead, North Hempstead, Oyster Bay, and Jamaica. The cemetery was segregated with separate sections for whites and persons of color. The use of the Potter's Field ceased in 1898 when Queens County and its towns became incorporated into the City of New York. The Board of Education and New York City Parks Department built a playground on the site in 1911. By that time little trace of burials remained. The ground was simply smoothed over and no attempt at disinterment was made.

The site was known as the Pauper Burial Ground until 1912 when the first Queen's park commissioner changed it to Wayanda Park. The name is derived from the Algonquin word for "the place of happy hearts" which is said to reference the site's history as a burial ground. The park was further renovated in 1950 by Park commissioner Robert Moses to include a comfort station, sandpits, softball field, and playground. With the renaming, the site's history became obscured and forgotten, until 2002 when parks' department contractor, the Quigg Development Corporation, began renovations on the park and uncovered fragmented remains of a human skeleton. Excavations were paused and the group consulted the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. This action resulted in the first cultural resource survey by a qualified archeologist in 2003. The contractor was allowed to continue excavations later that year in consultation with the report. There is currently no historical signage in the park and no further action has been taken to preserve or recognize the site as a burial ground.

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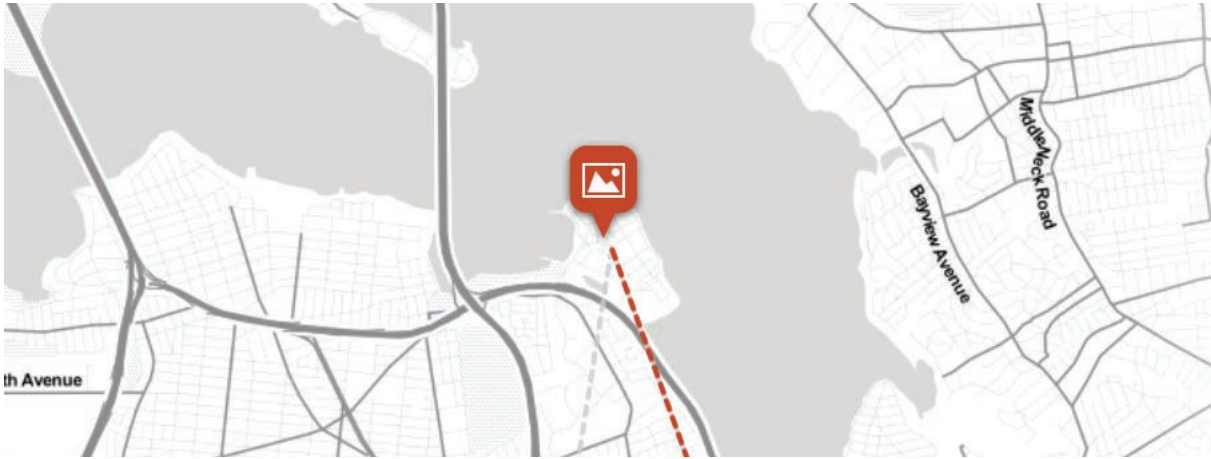
**References:**

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[http://s-media.nyc.gov/agencies/lpc/arch\\_reports/601.pdf](http://s-media.nyc.gov/agencies/lpc/arch_reports/601.pdf)  
 NYC Parks Historical Signs Project. (2020). *Wayanda Park*. <https://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/wayanda-park/history>









# THORNE-WILKINS CEMETERY

Location: Totten Ave. &, 15th Rd, Fort Totten Park, Bayside, 11359

Dates Active: Mid-17th Century -1833.

Description: The Thorne-Wilkins Cemetery is a family burial ground dating to the mid to late 17th century. In 1645 William Thorne Sr., an English immigrant, settled the point of land and established farmland naming it Thorne's Neck. The property was passed down through six generations of the Thorne-Wilkins family until it was purchased by Charles Willets in 1829. Charles Willets was the last burial in 1833. In 1857, descendent James Thorne, Jr. visited the burial ground and identified five badly weathered tombstones dating back to 1709.

The United States Government purchased the land between 1857 and 1863 to develop military services and a Civil War fortress. A portion of the land was acquired by the New York City parks Department in 2001, preserving portions of the historic fortress and making the grounds publicly accessible. In 2016 decedents of the Thorne-Wilkins family advocated for the cemetery's renaming and reclamation from the Willets Cemetery to the Thorne-Wilkins Cemetery. The formerly identified tombstones no longer remain, and it is unclear whether the Thorne-Wilkins graves were exhumed during the site's development. Charles Willets gravestone is the only marker of the site, although records show his body was relocated to Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn, in 1855. Signage recognizes???

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References:

Geismar, J. H. (2016, June 27). *Thorne/Wilkins/Willets Cemetery, Fort Totten, Queens*. [Report]. New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. [http://s-media.nyc.gov/agencies/lpc/arch\\_reports/1745.pdf](http://s-media.nyc.gov/agencies/lpc/arch_reports/1745.pdf)

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