A History of College Point

The earliest known history of College Point begins with the woodland Indians, the Matinecocks, which were a part of the Algonquin Nation. Their main village stood near where the College Point Nursing Homes are on 119th Street and Graham Court. It was in the 1930's when Captain Graham's house was being demolished that the Native American village became evident. Famed archeologists Carlyse Smith and Ralph Solecki supervised this excavation. A multitude of artifacts were unearthed at that time, which are now in the archives at Poppenhusen Institute in College Point, and at Rochester Museum and Science Center.

The following is a brief time line on the critical milestones in the development of this community:

- 1600's, William Lawrence receives a land grant of more than 900 acres from Dutch Director General Kieft, and in 1645 builds the family homestead at what is now 129th Street and 14th Ave. The house was removed to Bethpage Restoration Village on Long Island in the 1970's.

- 1839, Rev. William Augustus Muhlenberg, Rector of St. George's Church in Flushing, establishes St. Paul's College on Lawrence Neck (where MacNeil Park Playground stands today). (Reverand Muhlenberg's great grandfather of Pennsylvania established the first Lutheran Church in America, Uncle Frederick Augustus Muhlengerg, was the first Speaker of the House, and was also a signer of the Bill of Rights, Uncle Peter was in the Continental Army and was close friends of George Washington.)
The college lasted just a little more than a decade. After its closing, it served as a grammar school, boarding house as well as the College Beach motel.

All that remains of the college today is the name of the community as well as a large white stone from the college boat dock, which now rests in the corner of the yard at Poppenhusen Institute.

- Early 1850's - Real estate developers, including John Flammer, James Wehrli, and Peter Longley promote the area, then known as Strattonport, Flammersberg, and College Point, as the affordable place to live. A model cottage served as an example for prospective buyers to consider for their new property. It stood at 15-14 College Point Blvd. Newly arriving German and Irish immigrants flooded to the area to pursue the American dream.

- 1854 Whalebone manufacturer, Conrad Poppenhusen arrives. Born in Hamburg, Germany in 1818, Poppenhusen arrived in America in the 1840's. He first settled with his family on Henry Street in Brooklyn Heights, (that house still stands) soon establishing his whalebone business in nearby Williamsburg. In 1854, upon hearing of the rapidly growing village of College Point, Poppenhusen and College Point linked hands in a common destiny. The College Point factory would now produce hard rubber products since whales were being over-hunted and Charles Goodyear had recently invented the process of vulcanizing of rubber. Hard rubber items such as telescopes, collapsible cups, utensils, buttons for sharp shooter jackets were supplied to the Union forces during the Civil War. Other items produced were bowling balls, marbles, combs and brushes.

Poppenhusen's arrival in College Point would bring many changes including the arrival of other manufacturers such as silk industrialist Hugo Funke. Upon obtaining his financial success, Poppenhusen, unlike the robber barons of the times, chose to give back to the people of the village.

Some of his contributions:

- Built a cobblestone causeway to Flushing.
- Donated land for the first schoolhouse of College Point to be built. It stood on Old 5th Street. (today 115th St.)
- Provided health and death benefits for his workers in the hard rubber company.
- Brought in fresh drinking water (the reservoir was near Kissena Park area.)
- Brought the railroad into College Point, was the founder of the Northside Railroad
- Served as the Justice of the Peace, president of the Board of Education, member of audit Board, and pres. of village Board of Trustees.
- Donated 30,000 in land to the First Reformed Church
- Built the Poppenhusen Institute at a cost of $100,000 and then gave another $100,000 as an endowment.
- Established the First Free Kindergarten in the United States at Poppenhusen Institute on July 1, 1870.

Poppenhusen truly left his mark on College Point.

College Point, being surrounded on three sides by water, was a prime area for summer resorts and beer gardens. The population of the village would double as both the rich and the less prosperous factory workers would flock to the area for respite each weekend.

Virtually all of the summer resorts met their demise as the horseless carriage (the automobile) and prohibition entered the picture. The last remainder of the beer garden days standing in the area was Witzels, which was later to be called Flessels. It was razed in 1999. (Beer Gardens were abundant in the metropolitan area at one time. Bohemian Hall in Astoria is the only Beer Garden still operating.)

Today the community of College Point is a multi-cultural neighborhood with the new immigrant population making its way here to try their hand at pursuing a better life.

Although progress has brought with it many changes that are disheartening, such as overcrowding and over-development, those that reside here still hold fast to their small town values and traditions. They dedicate themselves to preserving their neighborhood for future generations and are still proud to call College Point their home.

For additional information or to find out about historic walking or trolley tours, please call Poppenhusen Institute, which is located at 114-04 14th Road. (718) 358-0067.

Filename: A_History_of_College_Poin1.doc
Directory: C:\Documents and Settings\13543\Desktop
Template: C:\Documents and Settings\13543\Application
    Data\Microsoft\Templates\Normal.dot
Title: A History of College Point
Subject:
Author: Faye P. Graham
Keywords:
Comments:
Creation Date: 4/8/2009 2:34:00 PM
Change Number: 6
Last Saved On: 6/24/2009 2:41:00 PM
Last Saved By: 13543
Total Editing Time: 43 Minutes
Last Printed On: 6/24/2009 2:47:00 PM
As of Last Complete Printing
    Number of Pages: 2
    Number of Words: 850 (approx.)
    Number of Characters: 4,851 (approx.)