



3309 Bainbridge Avenue  
The Bronx, NY 10467  
718-881-8900

The Bronx County Historical Society, founded in 1955, is a non-profit educational and cultural institution chartered by the New York State Board of Regents. The Society is dedicated to the collection, preservation, and interpretation of the history and heritage of The Bronx.

The Society disseminates information by utilizing its collections in exhibitions, historical research, publications and documentaries, educational and cultural programming, the operation of our Research Library, The Bronx County Archives, and two national landmark historic house museums: the c. 1812 Edgar Allan Poe Cottage and the c. 1758 fieldstone farmhouse Valentine-Varian House, home of the Museum of Bronx History.

The Bronx County Historical Society is partially supported through funds and services provided by the NYC Departments of Cultural Affairs and Parks and Recreation, the Historic House Trust of New York City, The Bronx City Council Delegation, the Office of The Bronx Borough President, The Bronx Delegations of the NYS Assembly and the NYS Senate, the H.W. Wilson Foundation, the Astor Fund, The New York Times Foundation, the New York State Library, Susan Tane, the New York Community Trust, the New Yankee Stadium Community Benefits Fund, the New York Public Library, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.


# THE BRONX HISTORIAN

NEWSLETTER OF THE BRONX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

OCT. 2023–JAN. 2024

VOL. 47 No. 1

## SOCIETY UPDATES

 The annual Bronx County Historical Society Day of Golf and Charitable Giving, held on September 20, 2023 at Pelham Bay/Split Rock Golf Course, was a great success. The Society thanks the committee members, sponsors, golfers, and journal advertisers who made the event possible.

## ROOSEVELT GARDENS TURN 100

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Theodore Roosevelt Apartments, billed at the time of their construction in 1923 as the largest apartment complex in the world, with 800 units comprising 750,000 square feet. The apartments, now known as the Roosevelt Gardens, are located between 171st and 172nd Streets on the Grand Concourse, which had only recently been completed in 1909. The complex boasted lavish Iberian motifs, an enclosed Italian garden courtyard, and spacious apartments, and its developer, Logan Billingsley, was praised for his contributions to the development of the West Bronx.

The Theodore Roosevelt Apartments epitomized the rapid urbanization and burgeoning population of The Bronx in the first decades of the twentieth century, when its population increased from 200,000 in 1900 to over one million by 1930. The Roosevelt Apartments, like the Lewis Morris Apartment building at 1749 Grand Concourse, represented the primarily middle-class nature of the West Bronx at the time, in contrast to the more working-class East Bronx.

The Roosevelt's construction corresponded to the Bronx building boom between the First and Second World Wars, when the expansion into the borough of critical infrastructure such as subways and elevated trains facilitated rapid development. Once rural areas became coveted for their real estate potential after the annexation of the West and East Bronx to New York City, which culminated in the creation of Greater New York in 1898. Savvy developers like Billingsley recognized the untapped value of The Bronx and began buying up property.

Billingsley's own life mirrored the transformations of his adopted borough. Born in Tennessee in 1882 and raised by a poor farming family in Anadarko, Oklahoma, Billingsley forged a circuitous route to legitimacy as a well-regarded Bronx burgher and developer. He began his career as a bootlegger in Oklahoma, eventually running one of the largest of such operations in the United States. Oklahoma had gone dry a decade before national prohibition, in 1907. Like his smart and canny predictions for the Bronx real-estate market a couple decades later, Logan realized the vast amount of money to be made through bootlegging. His activities in numerous states led to multiple stints in prison, where he always seemed to be able to escape. He came to The Bronx after running afoul of the Sicilian Mafia in Detroit.

*Continued on next page.*

# Thanks! to our donors

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\* This is a partial list.

## New Members

Howard Altarescu

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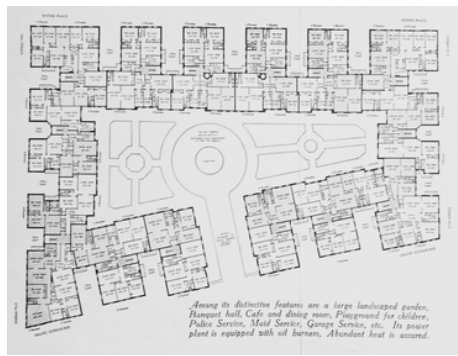
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John Sanchez

Cihan Tekay

Beatrice Thomas

\* This is a partial list.

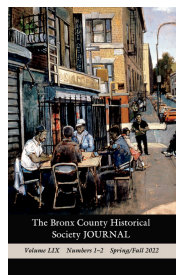


Views of a postcard announcing the opening the Theodore Roosevelt Apartments, 1923. Personal papers of the Billingsley Family.

Amazingly, Billingsley was able to keep his past a secret, at least for a period of time, while becoming a critical figure in the development of his new home. Along with significant real estate holdings—including buildings on the Concourse, Jerome Avenue, and in University Heights, and a large tract on Fordham Road—Billingsley was involved in the lengthening of the Grand Concourse from 161st Street to 138th Street, the abortive attempt to build an airport in The Bronx, and the professionalization of the Bronx Chamber of Commerce during his time as president. His other accomplishments included many additional development projects in the Greater New York Area and Miami, Florida, as well as the founding of the National Hall of Fame for Famous American Indians in Anadarko.

The Bronx County Historical Society will lead a tour exploring the legacy of Logan Billingsley's Bronx on Saturday, October 14. The tour will focus on Billingsley's properties in the West Bronx and examine architecture and urban planning in and around the Grand Concourse. The tour will conclude outside of the Roosevelt Gardens, where Logan's son Robert will briefly discuss his father's life and legacy.

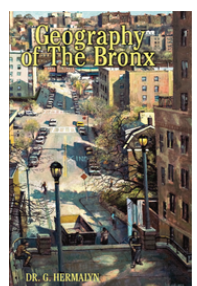
## SUBMISSIONS TO OUR JOURNAL



Since 1964, *The Bronx County Historical Society Journal* has been one of the premier historical journals in the tri-state region. The *Journal's* articles are of interest to all who enjoy scholarly studies and personal accounts of individuals, events, cultures, struggles, and triumphs in The Bronx. Submit article manuscripts as email attachments to [spayne@bronxhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:spayne@bronxhistoricalsociety.org) in Microsoft Word format (.doc or .docx) along with 2 images at 300dpi, if relevant. The manuscript should be in 12-pt. Times New Roman font and double-spaced. Be sure to include your full name, contact information, and short biography in the body of your email. Publication of submissions is not guaranteed.

## NEW PUBLICATION

Pick up a copy of the newest publication of The Bronx County Historical Society, *Geography of The Bronx*, authored by CEO Dr. G. Hermalyn. This colorful guidebook on select geographical features of The Bronx, supplemented with more than 100 photographs, maps, and other illustrations, will be of interest to educators, students, and the general public.



\$25.00

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## **Logan Billingsley Bronx Bus and Walking Tour**

**Saturday, October 14, 2023, 10:00–11:30am**

**Meet outside Bronx Community College Gould Memorial Library  
1930 Sedgwick Avenue**

The tour will explore The Bronx of Logan Billingsley, a notorious bootlegger turned Bronx burgher and developer. He developed the Theodore Roosevelt Apartments on the Grand Concourse, billed at the time of their founding in 1923 as the largest apartment building in the world. This hybrid bus and walking tour will explore Logan's Bronx properties in University Heights and the Grand Concourse. Contact [education@bronxhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:education@bronxhistoricalsociety.org) for more information.

## **AIA Walking Tour of Orchard Beach**

**Saturday, October 21, 10:00–12:00pm**

**Meet outside of the Orchard Beach Pavilion.**

**\$20 for members of BCHS and AIA/\$30 for nonmembers**

Join the American Institute of Architects Bronx Chapter and The Bronx County Historical Society for a walking tour of Orchard Beach and Hunter Island. The AIA walking tour will explore the promenade of Orchard Beach and discuss its architectural history, while situating the "Riviera of The Bronx" in its historical context—particularly, Robert Moses's urban planning of the twentieth century and its impact on The Bronx and New York City.

## **Open House New York**

**Weekend of October 21–22**

**Museum of Bronx History, 3266 Bainbridge Avenue  
Edgar Allan Poe Cottage, 2640 Grand Concourse**

The Bronx County Historical Society will once again be participating in the Open House New York Festival weekend, highlighting the cultural treasures of New York City. Both our museums, the Museum of Bronx History and the Edgar Allan Poe Cottage, will be open and free to the public. The Museum of Bronx History will be open on Saturday, October 21, 10am–4pm, Sunday, October 22, 1–5pm. The Edgar Allan Poe Cottage will be open on Saturday, October 21, 1–5pm and Sunday, October 22, 1–5pm.

## **Masque of the Red Death Halloween Celebration at Poe Cottage**

**Tuesday, October 31, 1:00–5:00pm**

**Edgar Allan Poe Cottage, 2640 Grand Concourse**

**Tickets are \$20. Free for children under 13.**

Come celebrate Halloween at Edgar Allan Poe's last home, the Poe Cottage in Fordham. The event will feature tours and poetry readings. It is also the last chance to see the Edgar and Virginia Poe Death Exhibit, on loan from the Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum in Baltimore. Gothic attire is suggested!



## **EDGAR ALLAN POE COTTAGE AT POE PARK**

*Grand Concourse & E. Kingsbridge Rd.*

Owned by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, Poe Cottage is operated by The Society. The national landmark house is a member of the Historic House Trust. Public support provided through the New York City Departments of Cultural Affairs and Parks and Recreation.



## **MUSEUM OF BRONX HISTORY**

*3266 Bainbridge Ave. & E. 208th St.*

Owned by The Bronx County Historical Society, the Museum of Bronx History at the national landmark Valentine-Varian House is a member of the Historic House Trust. Public support provided through the New York City Departments of Cultural Affairs and Parks and Recreation.





## BEQUESTS

You can support The Society's work by means of a bequest. The following paragraph is suggested for your convenience, for insertion in your will: "I give and devise and bequeath to The Bronx County Historical Society, located at 3309 Bainbridge Avenue, The Bronx, New York 10467, incorporated with the New York State Board of Regents, [insert the amount of money or describe the personal property or real estate] to be used for the general purposes of The Society."

## THE BRONX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### FACILITIES:

#### Research Library & The Bronx County Archives

3309 Bainbridge Avenue  
The Bronx, NY 10467

By Appointment:

M-F: 9am-5pm

[librarian@bronxhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:librarian@bronxhistoricalsociety.org).

#### Museum of Bronx History at the Valentine-Varian House

3266 Bainbridge Avenue  
The Bronx, NY 10467

S: 10am-4pm

Su: 1-5pm

#### Edgar Allan Poe Cottage

2640 Grand Concourse  
The Bronx, NY 10458

Group and individual tours by appointment:

[education@bronxhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:education@bronxhistoricalsociety.org).

FOLLOW US ON:



## UPCOMING EVENTS, CONT.

### Edgar Allan Poe Birthday Celebration

Friday, January 19, 2024, 9:00am-5:00pm

Edgar Allan Poe Cottage, 2640 Grand Concourse

Join The Bronx County Historical Society in commemorating the master of American literature, Edgar Allan Poe, on his birthday, January 19. Local poets will read their own poetry as well as Poe's, and tours of the Cottage will be given throughout the day.

### A SALUTE TO BRONX HISTORY DINNER FUNDRAISER

Wednesday, January 24, 2024, 6:00-9:00pm

Zero Otto Nove, 2357 Arthur Avenue

\$250 Dinner Ticket

Join The Bronx County Historical Society for a special evening of cocktails and dining at Arthur Avenue's Zero Otto Nove restaurant. The Bronx's own Chef Roberto, head chef at Zero Otto Nove, will be hosting the event. Your tax deductible \$250 contribution will benefit The Bronx County Historical Society's rich collections as well as the historic preservation, documentation, and interpretation of The Bronx for future generations. To purchase tickets, contact Teresa Brown at [tbrown@bronxhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:tbrown@bronxhistoricalsociety.org), or mail a check to The Bronx County Historical Society, 3309 Bainbridge Avenue, Bronx, NY 10467.

## COLLECTION DONATIONS

The Society's various collections provide invaluable insight into the history of The Bronx. Below is a partial list of those who have recently made donations of material and thus helped preserve our borough's history:

Peter M. Evans (June 2023): 30 volumes of law cases and pleadings from a Bronx law firm from his grandfather, Judge William S. Evans, comprising the Judge William S. Evans papers in The Bronx County Archives.

Edward Albert (June 2023): New York Coliseum Velodrome event materials and programs, including 42 items (1935-late 1950s).

Shira Silverman (June 2023): 19.95 linear ft. of archival materials containing photographs, photographic slides, newspaper clippings, administrative documents, boarding meeting notes, and DVDs from the Riverdale YM-YWHA, comprising the Riverdale YM-YWHA records in The Bronx County Archives.

Bert Schultz (July 2023): 3.9 linear ft. of newspapers, periodicals, clippings, and other documents related to the Fordham Chapter of SDS, comprising the Fordham SDS papers in The Bronx County Archives.

David Mills (July 2023): 1 copy of his book of poetry, *BONEYARN*.