The Great War Centennial: The Bronx and World War I

World War I was a four-year conflict that altered the world, and yet at the centenary of one of the largest wars in modern history, many Americans today are unfamiliar with its details. Through no fault of their own, this war was mainly fought overseas with American forces only in the war from April 1917 to November 1918. However, in our backyard we had one of the largest National Guard mobilization camps in New York City in Van Cortlandt Park. In the original park plans, there were specifications for a parade ground solely for use by the National Guard of New York. Throughout the next three decades, the parade ground would go from National Guard polo ground to training and mobilization camp for one of the largest wars ever fought.

The National Guard had, throughout this time, conducted mock battles in the park as a way to keep up with their training. On September 25, 1915, ten thousand guardsmen conducted a large public display with events such as foot, flag, and machine gun drill and explosion of land mines. From 1916 to 1917, the Guard used Van Cortlandt Park’s parade ground to assemble troops going down to the Mexican border in search of Pancho Villa. When America declared war on Germany in April 1917, the parade ground was used to assemble the 22nd Engineers, 23rd Regiment, 71st Regiment and others from southern New York State.

From August 1917 to November 1918, the park was a revolving door for guard troops making their way down to rendezvous at the camp at Spartanburg, South Carolina before leaving for Europe. As the war effort wound down, New York gave the final push to collect money for the war effort. April 1919 was Van Cortlandt Park’s last sham battle of the war, which included digging trenches, chemical warfare demonstrations and fireworks.

There are facets of Bronx history, which still need research and study. The role of Bronx parks during World War I was paramount and there is still much to learn. For example, Pelham Bay Park was also utilized as a training ground during the war. As the centennial of the war continues throughout 2019, The Bronx County Historical Society will continue to remember by having exhibitions, walking tours, and lectures dedicated to one of the most important wars in modern world history. Our spring exhibition, Over There: America & The Great War will exhibit the items and memories of those who witnessed this conflict.

1st Cavalry being mustered before going to the border, 1916. Photograph courtesy of the New-York Tribune.


National Guardsmen takes a lunch break while preparing for duty at the Mexican border. Van Cortland Park, 1916. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The 1st Field Artillery preparing to leave for the Mexican border, 1916. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Photograph courtesy of the New York Herald.
COLLECTIONS DONATIONS

The Society's research library, object, and archival collections are a great resource. We thank those who recently made the following donations (partial list):

- Parker Gambino: 6 ironstone plates commemorating the 100th anniversary of North Side Savings Bank and highlighting Kingsbridge, Riverdale and Spuyten Duyvil history (1951).
- Gloria Jones: Three cigarette lighters (1940s) and a World War II Japanese bayonet with sheath (1943-1944).
- Robert A. Simpson: Five-point metal star that may have once been part of a medal or decorative military or patriotic element to be worn as a pin or medallion (19th or early 20th century).

FINANCIAL DONATIONS

Cash donations help The Society fund programming, publications, equipment purchases, and build endowments. To double your donation, check with your employer for any available matching gift programs. We are grateful for the following contributions:

$10 - $99
- Sandra Cardinali
- Clean Jeans Dry Cleaners
- Burton Cohen
- Michael B. Collins
- EarthShare NYC Gives
- Evelyn Isaac
- Arthur Kahn
- Paul G. Kelly
- Harvey Mate
- Patricia Mattson
- Edward McLoughlin
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- Alice Golbert
- Sidney Horenstein
- James J. Houlihan
- Automotive Industries
- Joanne Mastropolo
- Norbert Sander

$1,000 - $4,999
- The New Yankee Stadium Community Benefits Fund
- Lloyd Ultan

SUBMISSIONS FOR THE BRONX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL JOURNAL

Since 1964, the BCHS *Journal* has been one of the premier history journals in the tri-state region. The *Journal’s* articles are of interest to all who enjoy accounts of people, business events, mercantile gain, defending the nation’s interest, or the love of The Bronx. As an ongoing tradition for Bronxites to share their personal experiences, The Society is accepting articles for its *Journal*. Do you have a Bronx story to share? Kindly send in your article in Microsoft Word format along with 2-4 images at 300dpi as email attachments to administration@bronxhistoricalsociety.org. Make sure you include your contact information and a short bio.

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.”
Celebrating Our Future Bronx Leaders!
The Bronx High School Valedictorian Awards Program at the Museum of Bronx History
Sunday, June 4, 2017 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Join us for another opportunity to accentuate the positive in The Bronx and to meet and honor our future leaders. The Society’s annual program honors valedictorians of different Bronx high schools at the national landmark Valentine-Varian House, home of the Museum of Bronx History.

The program begins at 1:00 PM with entertainment and tours of the Museum of Bronx History, along with refreshments. At 2:00 PM the awards ceremony will commence. Each honoree will receive an embossed certificate and a package of books about our historic borough, published by The Society. Please call (718) 881-8900 for more information or sponsorship opportunities.

EXHIBITIONS AT THE MUSEUM OF BRONX HISTORY
3266 Bainbridge Avenue & East 208th Street
The Bronx, New York 10467
(718) 881 - 8900
Museum Hours: Sat. 10AM - 5PM / Sun. 1PM - 5PM
(Group Tours Mon.-Fri. By Appointment)

Now through April 2nd
REMEMBRANCE OF PEARL HARBOR
THE BRONX GOES TO WAR

THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY ★★★
POLITICS & THE BRONX

SPRING EXHIBITION OPENING RECEPTION
APRIL 5TH - 4:30PM – 7:00PM

Over There
America & The Great War
April 5 - October 1, 2017

For further information, and to RSVP for the April 5th reception, please contact The Society
(718) 881-8900
ADMINISTRATION@BRONXHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG
Historic St. Mary’s Park & Its 17th Century Roots
Saturday, March 4, 2017 - 11:00 AM
The community surrounding St. Mary’s Park has roots deep in Bronx history – it was once part of the Jonas Bronck farm, settled in 1639. The park is important: it is one of six original Bronx parks, described by environmentalist John Muir in 1887 as “miniature loveliness.” BCHS Program Director Angel Hernandez will show trekkers the park, the site of such lost landmarks as the Janes & Kirtland Iron Works, Bensonia Cemetery, and the original Lebanon Hospital, and will end at the national historic landmark St. Ann’s Church. Tour will start at the northbound side of the Jackson Avenue #2 train station on Westchester Avenue. Take #2 or #5 trains or Bronx Bus #4 to Jackson Avenue.

Historic Woodlawn Heights
Saturday, April 22, 2017 - 11:00 AM
Woodlawn Heights was a village that was laid out in 1873 by George Opdyke on a part of the former Gilbert Valentine farm. It was later extended northward to the Yonkers line. The neighborhood took its name from the historic Woodlawn Cemetery and now holds a rich collection of various architecture, historic neighborhood memorials, and an Irish tradition that goes back many generations. BCHS Educator Vivian Davis will start the tour at the northeast corner of E. 233rd Street and Webster Avenue (BP gas station). Take #2 or #5 train to 233rd Street, Metro-North from Grand Central to Woodlawn, or Bronx buses #16 or #31 to E. 233rd Street and Webster Avenue.

In the Footsteps of Edgar Allan Poe: A Walk from Poe Cottage to High Bridge
Saturday, May 20, 2017 - 11:00 AM
Although the American poet Edgar Allan Poe has been gone for many years now, his home and High Bridge continue to serve as reminders of his beloved walks in The Bronx. Join BCHS Program Director Angel Hernandez on a 3-mile walk from Poe Cottage to High Bridge via Aqueduct Avenue. The tour will meet at the Edgar Allan Poe Cottage in Poe Park on the Grand Concourse and E. Kingsbridge Road. Take the D or #4 train to Kingsbridge Road or take Bronx buses #1, #2, #9, #22, #28, #34 or MTA express bus BxM4 from Manhattan.

FREE PUBLIC LECTURE SERIES
The following lectures (except for April 29th) will be held at The Bronx County Archives located at 3313 Bainbridge Avenue, The Bronx, New York 10467. For directions, call (718) 881-8900.

Before the Fires
Saturday, February 4, 2017 - 1:00 PM
Join Bronx authors Robert Gumbs and Fordham University’s Professor Mark Naison as they present their book Before the Fires: An Oral History of African American Life in the Bronx from the 1930s to the 1960s, along with the research that was done during the process. The authors will have copies of their book for sale and signing.

Noted Bronx Women
Saturday, March 18, 2017 - 1:00 PM
BCHS Educator Vivian Davis will offer a presentation on various women who have contributed to Bronx history throughout the years. The presentation will be illustrated and guests are encouraged to share their own accounts about women in Bronx History.

Gouverneur Morris Visiting Scholars Program Presents
Celebrating the Historic Legacy of St. Ann’s Church
Saturday, April 29, 2017 - 1:00 PM
St. Ann’s Episcopal Church, built and donated by Gouverneur Morris Jr. in 1840, has stood the test of time. Once a modest community church, St. Ann’s is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is designated as a New York City historic landmark. Continuing the celebration of its 175 years in operation, BCHS Educator Vivian Davis will chronicle the Morris family’s history and activism in The Bronx that contributed to the church’s surviving legacy. This lecture will be held at St. Ann’s Episcopal Church, located at 295 St. Ann’s Avenue Bronx, NY 10458, For directions, please call (718) 585-5632

Historic Houses of The Bronx
Saturday, May 13, 2017 - 11:00 AM
There are many historic buildings still standing in The Bronx. While some have been highlighted in the borough, others have yet to be honored. In celebration of Bronx Week, BCHS Program Director Angel Hernandez will highlight our borough’s historic house legacy with an illustrated presentation.