Cover Photo:
Drawing of Hudson River, showing the Palisades along the Hudson River at the confluence of Spuyten Duyvil Creek, from *Picturesque America*, 1874.
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Business Leaders of the Year
Honoring those in business who support the humanities and arts.
Postcard showing fall foliage around the 9th Building of the Amalgamated Housing Co-operative, 2000. Courtesy of The Bronx County Historical Society Research Library.
COMMUNITY BUILDING AT AMALGAMATED HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE

Janet Butler Munch

Amalgamated Housing Co-operative is located north of the Jerome Park Reservoir in The Bronx. Sponsored by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union (A.C.W.U.), this development opened in 1927 under the New York State Limited Dividend Housing Law of 1926.¹ Built as affordable housing for moderate-income workers, the limited dividend housing legislation granted tax exemptions to the co-operative for a period of 20 years. Its residents were “co-operators,” not tenants, who would own shares for their apartments in the development. Now in its ninth decade of operation, the Amalgamated is the oldest limited dividend housing development in the country and has been a successful prototype for other non-profit co-operatives, especially in New York City.

Background

The Amalgamated Housing Co-operative grew out of the Jewish labor movement and the A.C.W.U., which was founded in 1914. From 30,000 members in its early years, the A.C.W.U.’s enrollment grew to almost 175,000 by 1920.² The Union achieved shorter hours and pay increases for its largely immigrant workers, provided English instruction, set up special funds for the sick and disabled, and pioneered social reforms like unemployment insurance.

Abraham Kazan (1889–1971), later to be known as the “father of co-operatives,” left the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (I.L.G.W.U.) in 1918 to work at the A.C.W.U., becoming director of the records department. He also volunteered to work on the Amalgamated Credit Union, which was a sort of “poor man’s bank,” first as secretary-treasurer and then as president. Housing was an urgent and recurring topic of conversation among members. Kazan personally knew the crowded and unhealthful conditions workers endured on the job and in their housing. Post-World War I material shortages and high interest rates halted most new construction. Landlords took advantage of tenants, raising rents at will. With city apartment vacancies at an all-time low, tenants had little recourse but to pay the increased rents. As their tenements were sold off, many were priced out of their homes with unsustainable rent increases. This led to mass protests

¹ New York Session Laws 1926 Ch. 823. In addition to exemptions from state and municipal taxes for a period of 20 years, the law had an eminent domain provision that granted condemnation for the assemblage of properties for non-profit housing. The corporation was subject to state housing guidelines on rent ceilings. Later, income caps were also imposed. For co-operators earning above certain amounts, a surcharge in monthly maintenance would be required. The co-operators whose housing benefitted from public subsidies could not sell shares for their apartments for profit on the open market. The corporation bought the shares back from them if they deceased or moved out.

and rent strikes—but laws favored the landlords.³

From Small Beginnings

Kazan felt that there had to be a better way for workers. He was familiar with the Rochdale co-operative movement⁴ and in fact had experimented earlier at the I.L.G.W.U. with co-operative distribution at cost of products such as sugar and matzos. He had even set up a full co-operative grocery store for I.L.G.W.U. members who enjoyed its reduced prices. Kazan believed that co-operative activities could be further extended into housing. He thought that workers needed to break away from dependence on landlords and become owners-in-common of their homes. From a nucleus of active A.C.W.U. Credit Union members, the A.C.W. Corp., originally formed by Kazan to buy coal at member savings, turned its attention to exploring a co-operative housing enterprise and what this would entail. Most people, including the A.C.W.U. leadership, felt that Kazan’s idea of co-operative ownership for its workers was highly speculative and unattainable. Workers living in substandard tenement housing hoped otherwise.

The A.C.W. Corp. managed initially to secure $5,000 from the workers, which was used as a deposit on an ideal countrified Bronx property, with Van Cortlandt Park, the third largest park in New York City (1146 acres), immediately to the north, the Jerome Park Reservoir just to the south, and the leafy Mosholu Parkway to the east. The neighborhood also had subway lines, albeit at a long walk from the property, that could take workers downtown to Manhattan. Kazan estimated that the total cost of creating housing for 300 families would be nearly $2,000,000, and he wanted a commitment from 200 people to proceed with his plan. By 1925, the A.C.W. Corp. had $10,000. By year’s end, however, some original supporters withdrew their money, and prospects for success dimmed.

At this point, New York Governor Al Smith, who had grown up in Lower East Side tenement housing, persuaded the legislature to pass the State Housing Act of 1926 encouraging low-cost housing construction. This law would provide tax abatements for a period of twenty years on large-scale developments of affordable housing if the builder would agree to a limited dividend of 6% on investment and improvement to the land. With the passing of the favorable new state law, A.C.W.A. president Sidney Hillman (1887–1948) was persuaded that the union should officially sponsor the co-operative housing project, with Kazan as president. The A.C.W. Corp. was reorganized as Amalgamated Housing Corp., becoming a limited dividend company capable of selling stock in the co-operative apartments. Hillman kept Kazan on salary and even offered the services of

⁴ Rochdale was an early co-operative of weavers in Rochdale, England, who combined their resources to establish a co-operative store and distributed the profits to its members. They espoused voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training and information about co-operatives; co-operation among co-operatives; and concern for community.
Amalgamated attorneys for all legal matters.⁵

**Initial Offerings**

Apartments were initially offered to co-operators with a deposit of $500 per room in equity (for instance, $2,000 for a four-room apartment) plus ongoing monthly carrying charges of $11 per room. *The Jewish Daily Forward*, a widely read Yiddish-language newspaper, announced the co-operative housing plans. A firm supporter of the Jewish labor movement, the paper pledged $150,000 credit to the Amalgamated Bank to cover co-operative equity. Amalgamated’s bank and credit union could then loan half the amount required and offer ten years for co-operators to repay. Hillman also successfully convinced Metropolitan Life Insurance Company to grant a mortgage of $1,200,000 for twenty years, at a favorable 5% interest rate, under the proviso that the union would guarantee completion of the construction. Metropolitan generously waived all usual real estate fees. When unanticipated expenses at the co-operative site occurred, the *Forward* again stepped in to cover a shortfall of $125,000.⁶ The Amalgamated groundbreaking was held Thanksgiving Day, 1926, and co-operators moved into their apartments starting on November 1, 1927.

Under the Amalgamated Housing philosophy residents were owners in the development by virtue of their equity investment. Membership in the co-operative was non-discriminatory and each apartment owner had one vote for their democratically elected representatives. Shared responsibility, mutual respect, and the greater good—as opposed to individual gain and selfishness—were cornerstone standards for life at the co-operative. Since the co-operative was not-for-profit, a member’s share on an apartment could not be sold on the open market and their equity would be returned upon death or departure.

**Amalgamated Housing Buildings and Daily Life**

Architects Springsteen and Goldhammer designed Amalgamated’s earliest linear buildings at the east perimeter of the site. These were five-story walk-up buildings,⁷ in mock neo-Tudor manor style. They faced inward around a large interior garden courtyard that maximized sunlight and air. Gateways positioned at either ends of the block led to the interior courtyard. The apartment buildings took up just 51% of the site. To assure resident privacy, only two or four apartments opened onto each floor landing. All apartments had hardwood floors, high ceilings, and cross ventilation. Units were generously sized: living rooms were twelve feet by seventeen, bedrooms eleven by fifteen, and kitchens eleven by twelve.⁸ Many co-operators who had only known railroad apartments were

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⁵When the Jerome Park Reservoir (immediately to the south of Amalgamated) was constructed in 1906, the boulders dug up were dumped on what would become the Amalgamated construction site. Clearing these boulders entailed unexpected additional effort and cost.

⁶R.C.A. Corp., on the adjoining plot, was carrying out experiments and feared that the elevators in Amalgamated buildings would interfere with their electrical work.

thrilled with their sunlit, airy homes and pastoral setting.

With no nearby stores, co-operators needed convenient access to food stores. Zoning restrictions did not allow for grocery stores but would permit an onsite commissary for Amalgamated use. The commissary could neither serve area neighbors nor display outside signs. Fortunately, the apartment buildings had room for the co-operative grocery, which gave residents substantial food savings and sometimes even rebates. Other Amalgamated stores were added: a kosher butcher, tailor, barbershop, shoe repair, as well as a tea room where co-operators could meet with neighbors for discussions. Amalgamated outsourced wet-wash services and arranged for the delivery of fresh milk and eggs, at reduced price, from a co-operative farm. In time, Kazan even had a power plant built at Amalgamated to supply electricity at a lower rate than Con Edison.

Other spaces were devoted to games and clubs. A library, too, was created at the initiative of a co-operator. Before the construction of an auditorium, the library also served as a social and cultural center featuring music, art, and lectures. In time, studio space was set aside for artists, musicians, and craftsmen, who might also offer to teach the children. Children also had an active summer camp featuring outdoor swimming at a nearby pool, hiking, and performances. On rainy days, arts and craft activities were held in space provided by the co-operative.

A co-operative nursery, initiated by the Women’s Club, became a staple at the co-operative and one of its longest-running and most important services. Longtime resident Fannie Weinstein recalls that the nursery was established as the Workmen’s Circle Nursery School:

The deal was that we would teach Yiddish culture and traditional activities [and] they would support the Nursery School. The mothers were organized. We held meetings. The development rented us a very large room. It had a piano. We had bazaars to raise money.9

An Education Director coordinated all social, cultural and educational activities at the Amalgamated. These offerings became the glue that brought groups of people together and created bonds, fostering a sense of place and strong identification with the co-operative, in addition to creating a dynamic and interesting living environment for all ages. A community newspaper, originally in Yiddish and English, kept co-operators informed about events, their neighbors, and life in the co-operative.

Since Amalgamated was not within close proximity to public transportation, residents asked for and approved the purchase of a bus that they helped fund. The bus took adults to the subway lines and children to the closest elementary school, P.S. 80. Both the subway lines and school were about a mile from Amalgamated.

9 Fannie Weinstein, interviewed by Tabitha Kirin, March 3, 1987, Bronx Institute Archives Oral History Project #295, Special Collections, Lehman College, CUNY.
Community Building at Amalgamated Housing Co-operative

Earliest Residents

In 1931 the State of New York surveyed the standard of living of Amalgamated families. By then there were seven co-operative apartment buildings in the complex. Of the residents surveyed, we learn that they previously lived in:

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<td>The Bronx</td>
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<td>Manhattan</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
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</table>

That such a high percentage of co-operators came from The Bronx is not surprising considering that by 1930 some 130,000 Jews lived most notably in the East Bronx, among whom could be found widespread commitment to socialist, anarchist, communist, Bundist, and other ideologically diverse groups on the Left of the first half of the twentieth century. (All of these groups had some representation among Amalgamated’s earliest residents). Also, like Manhattan, parts of The Bronx and Brooklyn were experiencing dismal tenement living conditions. Its residents were vocal and organized in their rent strikes and eager for improved housing options.

In terms of ethnicity, the 1931 New York State profile additionally revealed that 91.1% of the fathers and 89% of the mothers at the Amalgamated were born outside the United States, while 91.8% of their children were native-born. The parents were overwhelmingly from Russia (60.3%) followed by Poland and Austria (11.4% and 10.6%, respectively).

To the surprise of the A.C.W.U., the main occupations of the chief breadwinner in the family were in the following industries:

- Clothing trades 30.6%
- Professional services 10.0%
- Building trades 8.3%
- Shopkeepers/jobbers 8.1%
- Salesmen 6.1%
- Clerks 4.6%
- Printing trades 4.3%
- Millinery trades 2.8%
- Post office employee 2.5%
- Fur trades 2.3%
- Union officials 2.0%
- Leather goods trades 1.5%
- Metal trades 1.3%
- Other 15.5%
Asher Achinstein, the compiler of the State profile, includes an insightful observation about life at Amalgamated for its residents at that time:

In place of the indifference to one’s neighbors that exists in the usual apartment house in our large cities, there has developed a social consciousness among the 500 families comprising the Amalgamated community which expresses itself in all kinds of communal activities.  

The Great Depression

The Amalgamated Housing Co-operative in The Bronx was initially hailed as a great success and was fully occupied by 1928. Many more families wanted to move in, and there was a waiting list. Co-operators overwhelmingly voted to continue with construction, and by Spring 1932 another building had opened. This brought the total number of buildings to eight, comprising 629 families.

At the same time, with the onset of the Great Depression, the economy was rapidly worsening. Those in the clothing industry, who made up 30.6% of residents, were particularly hard hit. Fortunately, there were residents employed in other industries not suffering the same fate. Overall, though, some 60% of Amalgamated’s residents were unemployed during the Depression. The House Committee worked case-by-case with co-operators who were months’—or even as many as two years’—behind on their maintenance payments. Committee members recognized that their neighbors had put their life savings into the co-operative and were reluctant to see their neighbors put out.

A shortage of money, however, left many co-operators with little alternative than to leave and ask for the return of their equity—all of which Amalgamated eventually repaid. In March 1933, Kazan recommended that in cases where there was “no chance of collection of rent” that “more drastic measures should be taken. Make them vacate their apartments and pay them some of the income in rent of their apartments for their investment.” Most Committee decisions on co-operators in arrears were “case deferred,” or “decided to wait.” There were at least two clear cases in which residents made no attempt to pay anything. The decision on their status was “must vacate her apartment” or “disposed.”

Kazan persuaded the bank to delay mortgage amortization, and co-operators contributed to a special fund to help their neighbors. Some families moved to smaller apartments or less desirable upper-floor walk-ups. For a time, apartments were even rented to tenants—but at a higher rent than co-operators.

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15 Reminiscences of Abraham Kazan, 39.
16 Reminiscences of Abraham Kazan, 39.
17 Kazan not only was President and Manager of Amalgamated Housing Co-operative. He lived there 1927–1961 and knew the residents personally. They were his neighbors.
18 Amalgamated Housing Corporation Minutes, March, 1933, Special Collections, Lehman College, CUNY.
19 Amalgamated Housing Corporation Minutes, December 27, 1933 and April 25, 1934, Special Collections, Lehman College, CUNY.
Community Building at Amalgamated Housing Co-operative

paid in maintenance. The excess charge could be applied to their required equity should these tenants decide at some point to become co-operators, and many later joined. With stringent management of resources and the co-operation of its residents, Kazan managed to steer the Amalgamated away from bankruptcy with its reputation intact. Other Bronx co-operatives, such as “The Coops” (located at 2700 Bronx Park East) and the nearby Sholem Aleichem Houses, were not so fortunate.

Expansion and Professionalization

Responding to elderly residents who could no longer cope with their walk-up buildings, Amalgamated constructed two-story buildings during the period 1940–1941. Additional construction after World War II included one four-story and four twelve-story buildings. This doubled the size of the community. Realizing that it was no longer economically practical to maintain the five earliest walk-up buildings, plans were made for their demolition and replacement with two high-rise towers. By freezing rentals at Amalgamated and nearby affiliates Park Reservoir and Mutual Housing, the five buildings were vacated over a three-year period. By 1969 and 1971, respectively, both modern towers were occupied. Amalgamated Housing Co-operative today has eleven buildings and 1,435 apartments on fifteen acres.

As housing operations increased in complexity, Amalgamated took advantage of technical and management services provided by Consumer Services, Inc., then a subsidiary of the United Housing Foundation that was founded by Kazan. These included centralized auditing, payroll and rent collections, engineers to supervise boiler operations, and skilled technicians for repairing equipment. Amalgamated benefited from innovation, improvement, and cost-cutting methods. All of this helped keep down operating costs for the corporation and stabilize the fee for co-operator monthly maintenance.20 Rents from a variety of Amalgamated stores in proximity to the development also improved the bottom line. Energy costs, inflation, and reduction in tax exemptions have been continuing concerns over the years. The co-operative now deals with multiple regulatory bodies and strives to keep maintenance affordable.

Voices from Amalgamated

Interviews with longtime residents of the development offer personal insight into what it was like to live in Amalgamated. Four representative samples from the Bronx Institute Archives Oral History Project, housed at Lehman College, are provided below.

Beatrice Simpson

“I moved into the Amalgamated Houses at the age of four [1927]. We quickly met our friends and neighbors because everybody moved to this new area . . . mainly coming from the East Bronx, [and] downtown. . . . We were not people of means, these were people who worked, and mostly immigrants who had struggled and tried very hard to save the money to put down their investment of $500 per room . . . after living through railroad flats. The Depression hit the building very much. My family personally was hit. My father died. I was nine years old. My mother had a store in the building . . . a dry good store. It closed. My mother just couldn’t think of leaving, so they were very nice and allowed us to live off our investment, with the promise that when things would be better . . . she would be able to pay it back which would then bring back her investment. It was the most meaningful and wonderful thing of the co-operative to know that you were not thrown out of your apartment because you did not have any money to pay your rent.”

Reflecting on her interactions at Amalgamated over the years, she noted: “It was just amazing as to the insight that these people had for humanism—without social workers, without the psychiatrists . . . of knowing how they had to pull together to help one another. None of our friends outside Amalgamated experienced the kind of family feeling that we had gotten here. [I’m] still friendly with friends from four years old—our bond was so great.”

Rosalind Rothman

“We moved into the Seventh Building in 1929 [at five years old]. We were the first co-operators in the building. We were bused to PS. 80 [almost a mile away]. P.S. 95 [the elementary school that eventually opened nearby] was empty. The Board of Ed. did nothing. Mothers got disgusted and got together. We were told we were going to go on strike. It was the beginning of our unionism to get together and get some action. We stayed out of school [two months]. Trucks came loaded up with old chairs and seats. The auditorium had no seats, so we sat on our black and white notebooks for assembly. We won the strike.

“What I remember in general about the whole Amalgamated thing is the richness of what I experienced and learned and developed . . . singing, dancing, music, piano—in touch with cultural things, tickets to downtown concerts . . . reading, writing. Jewish songs and dance at the schule; day camp swimming, arts and crafts, putting on shows, writing skits . . . being a counselor and learning about children—I became a teacher. I saw small things growing . . . little things to big groups. Van Cortlandt Park was our back yard—the lake, riding a bike, sleigh riding, nature walks.”

21 Beatrice Simpson, interviewed by Sara Lewittes, March 10, 1982, Bronx Institute Archives Oral History Project #15, Special Collections, Lehman College, CUNY.
22 Rosalind Rothman, interviewed by Tabitha Kirin, November 2, 1987, Bronx Institute Archives Oral History Project #316, Special Collections, Lehman College, CUNY.
Community Building at Amalgamated Housing Co-operative

Lou Garbus

Amid a post-World War II housing shortage, a veteran, who was later to become the co-operator photographer, wrote a letter to the Amalgamated: “My wife and I had just come out of the War. She was in the Navy and I was in the Army. So I wrote a letter asking somebody here at the Amalgamated [saying], ‘This is just another letter from another veteran, looking for an apartment, perhaps in vain.’ Almost by return mail [the reply was], ‘Come down, somebody just pulled out.’ Sure enough, we came down and there was this brand-new building with an elevator in it. It was going to be ours. My wife and I sat in the park across from the apartment house, and she started to cry and cry. We were living before in this Second Avenue apartment with the toilet in the hall, which we shared with a neighbor. [They also had the bathtub in the kitchen.] That was in 1948. We moved in in 1949, and our son was brand new, he was just born. It was the tenth floor in Building Fourteen facing Van Cortlandt Park South. You have to imagine the excitement of moving into a brand-new apartment for $68, for three and a half rooms, with gas and electricity. There we were. This was a golden wagon for us, especially Amalgamated, which allowed us to start our new marriage with an excitement and a new apartment. The neighbors were so friendly, it wasn’t just an apartment house. The [neighbors] had one particular purpose of living with each other in a kind of peaceful harmony. And all without a landlord. We were partners in this. What I call a dream, and it worked.”

Asked about the many cultural activities, Mr. Garbus noted that Mr. Kazan created the role of the Education Director. This person, Herman Liebman, was responsible for bringing in “artists and musicians and started all kinds of little clubs. He started a club and wanted you to become involved. You want to be a chairman of a club, then he would back off, so that the club had its own entity. It either lived or died on the basis of its necessity, and the most important thing was the nursery.”

Hyman Bass

Another post-World War II era co-operator, who later became the Amalgamated president, 1977–1984, tells us: “I first came to The Bronx in August of 1946, when I married a Bronx girl who was residing in the Amalgamated Housing Corporation. The apartment . . . was located at 74 Van Cortlandt Park South . . . and now the oldest building in the co-op . . . and then moved . . . into Tower 1, which was one of two buildings, which took the place of five walk-up buildings—the first buildings constructed.”

He continued by explaining the difficulties of getting more favorable mortgage rates for the buildings, undertaking building renovation on all but the newest Tower buildings, and getting satisfactory tax abatement on the buildings. As he stated, “Our co-op is unusual from all the other co-ops, in that the buildings

23 Lou Garbus, interviewed by John Duffy, January 25, 1991, Bronx Institute Archives Oral History Project #348, Special Collections, Lehman College, CUNY.
were constructed at various times... so that their real estate taxes [under limited dividend or limited equity] do not expire at the same time." Not to have extended real estate tax-exemption raises “translate[s] to higher apartment carrying rates. The Amalgamated successfully argued that [it] was the most stable community... but two miles away... deterioration was commencing. The city was afraid that there might be this creeping deterioration... [and] our position was, we are a bulwark for The Bronx... and if we did not receive tax exemption, you might have the destruction of the northwest Bronx. We were able to negotiate [a] twenty-year tax exemption for all the buildings, including the buildings that had gone off the real estate tax exemption... [for a] savings of $3,000,000 for the Amalgamated.”

**Amalgamated Today**

That Amalgamated survived the Depression and is still an affordable co-operative today is remarkable. In large measure this is due to the vision, skill, and dedication of its leadership. Amalgamated residents have longevity. Three and even four generations of the same family have called Amalgamated home. Many have even remained for decades. Today those 65 and older represent a high 25.3% of the population, compared with the overall New York City percentage of 12.1%. In 1995 Amalgamated was even designated a “NORC” (Naturally Occurring Retirement Community) and with the help of state, city, and foundation funding, provides information and referrals on benefits and services for seniors.

The co-operative is also much more diverse today both in terms of population and occupations. The earliest co-operators were primarily blue-collar workers with many employed in clothing and other trades. Most residents from the 1930s to the 1950s were Jewish and explicitly identified with various left-wing political philosophies and causes, whereas many later residents did not. By the 1980s, 47.2% of co-operators were white-collar, 18.2% identified as professionals, 16.1% were blue collar, 12.7% teachers, and the remainder were civil servants, self-employed, or other. A similar occupational profile persists today. In 2010 the Amalgamated’s census tract showed 3,794 residents, of which 40.8% were white, 37.7% Hispanic, 15.9% Black, 3.5% Asian, and 2.1% other. Residents claim ancestry in more than 30 countries.

The community remains vital, and residents value the many social, cultural, and educational offerings at Amalgamated. They recognize that Amalgamated is more than just a housing site and that they share in its rich history and traditions. They contribute their time and talents as they can, while balancing the day-to-day concerns of work and child rearing.

As we reflect on New York City’s current crisis in affordable housing it is well to consider Kazan’s vision and how co-operative housing evolved at

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24 Hyman Bass, interviewed by Tabitha Kirin, December 4, 1986, Bronx Institute Archives Oral History Project #293, Special Collections, Lehman College, CUNY.
25 *Community News*, Fall 1984, Special Collections, Lehman College, CUNY.
26 *Community News*, March 1983, Special Collections, Lehman College, CUNY.
27 2010 Demographic Profile: Census Tract 281, *NYC Census FactFinder*, New York City Department of City Planning.
Amalgamated. Too many city residents are seeing zoning changes that cater to private developers more interested in profits than social well-being. We are also witnessing gentrification and the effects of rising prices in our neighborhoods. The Amalgamated Housing Co-operative offers an inspiring example of what can happen with the enactment of thoughtful government housing policies, and when people work together co-operatively. As Kazan said: “Where all personal gain and benefit is eliminated, greater good can be accomplished for the benefit of all.” 28

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ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA SORORITY, INC.®: A RICH LEGACY OF SERVING THE BRONX COMMUNITY

Donna Joseph and Saudah Muhammad

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.® (AKA) is an international service organization that was founded on the campus of Howard University in Washington, D.C., in 1908. The sorority had its humble beginnings as the vision of nine college students on the campus of Howard University during the 1907–1908 academic year. Its founders were among the fewer than 1,000 Black women enrolled in higher education institutions in 1908 and the 25 women who received Bachelor of Arts degrees from Howard University between 1908 and 1911. Since then, the sorority has flourished into a globally impactful organization of nearly 300,000 college-trained members, bound by the bonds of sisterhood and empowered by a commitment to servant-leadership that is both domestic and international in its scope.

As Alpha Kappa Alpha has grown, it has maintained its focus in two key areas: the lifelong personal and professional development of each of its members; and galvanizing its membership into an organization of respected power and influence, consistently at the forefront of effective advocacy and social change that results in equality and equity for all citizens of the world.

Eta Omega Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.® was chartered on May 23, 1964, at Luigi’s Restaurant on Westchester Avenue in The Bronx. Former North Atlantic Regional Director, Alocita Flood, officiated the Chartering of twelve members: Nearlene Bertin, Olga G. Chellis, Gwendolyn B. Bland, Joan S. Drane, Thora L. Dudley, Jacqueline L. Everette, Mary O. Harris Hope, Bessie M. Johnson, Mae Tate Jones, Gladys B. Simms, Marietta J. Tanner, and Irma D. Wilson. Two of our charter members are still alive today, Sorors Jacqueline L Everett (Jacqueline Everette Brown) and Marietta J. Tanner. The chapter is one of seventeen exceptional graduate chapters in Cluster III of the North Atlantic Region and one of two chapters in The Bronx.

Eta Omega Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.® celebrates a rich history of service, philanthropy, and scholarship for The Bronx community. From its inception, programs of service were implemented to enhance the quality of life for Bronx residents. Specific emphasis was placed on youth, developmentally disabled children and adults, and the elderly. One of the first programs of the

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1 This article was written by Donna Joseph, chapter president, and Saudah Muhammad, chapter historian, to memorialize the recent creation of the Eta Omega Omega Bronx Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.® records in The Bronx County Archives at The Bronx County Historical Society Research Library.
chapter was a Garden Project for developmentally disabled adults at the Southeast Neighborhood Center. A Big Sister program was also among the early projects that the chapter executed. The chapter’s signature program is the Rites of Passage Program, which provides high school girls with yearlong intensive workshops on such critical areas as personal development, ancestral history, interpersonal relations, etiquette, and goal setting. Since 1991, this program has guided young women towards their transition into womanhood, fostering responsibility, sisterhood, and self-pride.

Eta Omega Omega chapter members continue to exemplify the ideals that Alpha Kappa Alpha was founded on well over 110 years ago. Through the direction of our 30th International President, Dr. Glenda Glover, the chapter has implemented the 2018–2022 International Program under the theme: “Exemplifying Excellence Through Sustainable Service.” The International Program includes five program targets designed to advance the mission of Alpha Kappa Alpha with excellence and underscore the sorority’s commitment to sustainable service.

The five program targets for 2018–2022 are:
1. HBCU for Life: A Call to Action
2. Women’s Healthcare and Wellness
3. Building Your Economic Legacy
4. The Arts
5. Global Impact

Group shot of Eta Omega Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.®, 2020. Courtesy of the authors.

2 HBCU, that is, Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
To highlight the organization’s collective impact in program target areas, Eta Omega Omega members implement the following International Community Service Days annually: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service (January); Pink Goes Red for Heart Health Day (February); AKA Global Impact Day (April); AKA International Day of Prayer (August); AKA HBCU Day (September); Breast Cancer Awareness Day (October); and AKA Caregivers’ Day (November).

On June 25, 1983, Eta Omega Omega chartered the only undergraduate chapter on a City University of New York: Xi Xi (Lehman College). In 1994, Eta Omega Omega established a not-for-profit corporation for educational and charitable purposes within Bronx County, Wheeler Wilson and Johnson Community Projects, Inc. The corporation has supported programs to foster a healthy interest in the civic affairs of The Bronx community and develop good citizenship while increasing the motivation of youth.

Eta Omega Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.® has received national and international accolades. On a regional level, several chapter members have been recognized for their outstanding service in leadership. In the words of our chapter president, Donna Joseph, “In 2021, we will celebrate the 113th anniversary of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated and the 57th anniversary of Eta Omega Omega. We approach these milestones with a renewed commitment to fulfilling the legacy of our founders through perseverance and in perpetuity.”
The Bronx County Historical Society’s Museum of Bronx History, open to the public since 1968, is in the historic landmark Valentine-Varian House. The museum’s long-term and changing exhibitions are often drawn from The Society’s extensive collections and focus on the history and heritage of The Bronx and its people. The Museum of Bronx History provides a venue for cultural and educational programming for public and school audiences, as well as for an extensive Museum Store.

Isaac Valentine, a prosperous blacksmith and farmer from Yonkers, built this vestige of Colonial New York about 1758 along the post road that was once the only land route between New York City and Boston. The house survived the Revolutionary War, occupied throughout the conflict by both British and American forces. But the war caused financial ruin for Valentine, who was forced to sell his home and the 260-acre property. Isaac Varian, a successful butcher and farmer, bought the holding in 1792. The Varian Family kept the house for three generations; one of Isaac’s grandsons (also named Isaac) served as New York City’s 63rd Mayor (1839–1841). With increasing urbanization, William F. Beller acquired the fieldstone farmhouse in a 1905 auction, and his son, William C. Beller, donated it to The Society in 1965, when it was moved to its present location by Williamsbridge Oval Park. It is operated as a museum by The Bronx County Historical Society and is a member of the Historic House Trust of New York City.

**DIRECTIONS:**

**Subway:** Take the D train to Bainbridge Avenue & East 205th Street in The Bronx. Walk north on Bainbridge Avenue.

Take the Lexington Avenue-Woodlawn 4 train to Mosholu Parkway in The Bronx. Walk north, then east on 208th Street to Bainbridge Avenue. The Museum of Bronx History is located across the avenue, on the right.

**Bus:** Use Bronx bus lines #10, #16, #28, #34, #38 and MTA express bus BxM #4 from Manhattan.
FROM THE ARCHIVES: LOOKING BACK AT AN OLD BRONX HOME IN 1941

Virginia Lynch

There it stands, sadly weather beaten, on the corner of Morris Avenue and 142nd Street, just a plain old frame house, placidly viewing the tides of life that swirl about it. It reminds one of the little group of twigs that often remain calmly suspended in the vortex of a stream while the mad current dashes by. Perhaps you know Edwin Arlington Robinson’s lines:

We tell you, tapping on our brows,
The story as it should be:
As if the story of a house
Were told or ever could be.

So the story of this village home, undistinguished from thousands of other gray and shabby old houses all over the land, could hardly be told as it should be were we to tell it from the standpoint of the human element, which is the vital element in the making of a home. We ponder on the lives ushered into being under its protecting roof; we grieve as one or another departs on “The Long, Long Trail”; we feel the heart throbs and the passionate emotions, the hopes and joys and sorrows that surge and beat like the ceaseless tide upon the anchorage we call “Home.” Echoing footsteps come and go and die away; they pass into the lives of countless others and carry far to Arctic snows, to the jungle of Mindanao, to the walls of Pekin. They even are heard through the roar of mighty guns on the grisly heights of Montfaucon.

About 90 years ago, James Lynch, yielding to the urge to get away from the blasting and digging incident to the laying out of a new park, Central Park, sold his brick house and the surrounding acreage in the near vicinity of the spot where today Sherman forever rides proudly to victory and the green lawns of the park feed the starved eyes of the city dweller. Three thousand dollars was the price received for the house and land, a fair price for that time.

Northward the Lynch household trekked to the rustic solitudes along the Harlem, where a new village called Mott Haven was coming into being. There James Lynch built his simple home. Friendly trees guarded it from intrusion and lifted their green arms skyward. Often flocks of wild ducks and geese, flying over

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1 This article comes from a manuscript that was read by Archie B. Morrison during a meeting of the Bronx Old Timers Association on May 19, 1941. The Bronx Old Timers Association records, The Bronx County Archives at The Bronx County Historical Society Research Library.
the marshes along the river, were a fair mark as the Lynch boys took aim from their porch. Wild birds no longer frequent the shores of Harlem; the porches of the old house have gone; the gardens are but a memory. The footsteps of four generations have echoed in the narrow halls; and often, on quiet eve, these echoes, dim echoes of far off times and long vanished personalities, seem to sound softly above the whir of a passing motor or a Morris Avenue trolley.

Third Avenue was then dirt road, shaded by trees, with low hills and green woods stretching away to the Sound and the Harlem. The horse car line arrived, the famous “Huckleberry Line,” linking Mott Haven with West Farms. A well-founded legend asserts that the traveler might dismount in casual fashion, regale himself on the huckleberries, which grew beside the road, and then catch the car at his pleasure. In winter the long trip from West Farms was made a bit more bearable by straw on the floor and a little stove that occasionally “took a tumble.”

When the steamboat arrived, life in The Bronx became a wild rush; for the sleepy villages along the Harlem furnished a fair quota of folk who went daily to their offices in the big city. Think of travelling by horse car, from West Farms to the old Third Avenue Bridge, where a steamboat, perhaps the Shadyside or the Morrisania, lay waiting to carry freight and passengers to Peck Slip; Franklin Lunch, as a lad, traveled afoot to the old bridge and thence by boat to the city where he was employed in the office of Edgar Irving, nephew of Washington Irving, who carried on a commission business. This firm, continued under the name of Tice & Lunch, is perhaps the oldest custom-house brokerage business in New York.

Far away and long ago there was a connection between The Bronx and the splendid court of Versailles; and that link was an old house, well remembered by the writer, which was standing, until 1905, near the Southern Boulevard and 133rd Street. The network of the tracks of the New Haven terminal, like a giant python, enmeshed the house and crushed it in a devastating embrace, and The Bronx thereby lost the honor of protecting what should have been a national landmark.

In this fine old house, known as Morrisania Manor, which had been built by Lewis Morris on land granted by the British Crown, lived Gouverneur Morris, son of Lewis. Gouverneur Morris was the first ambassador from the infant American republic to the Court of France. An intimate friend of the King and Queen, Morris tried to help them; and had Marie Antoinette followed his advice, fate would have destined her for a less romantic but also a less tragic end.

In this house, Washington, Livingston, Jay, Hamilton, Louis Phillippe, and his royal brothers were hospitably entertained. The fine parquet floors brought from France, the walls hung with gorgeous fabrics, the rich furniture, the beautiful views out over the shimmering Sound, and the wooded park breathed less the air of a democracy than of an old aristocracy. Once Madame de Stael proposed coming to America. To her Morris wrote, on the desk given him by the ill-starred Marie Antoinette, which he had used all through the Terror: “As soon as you arrive you will come to Morrisania, partake of what our dairy affords and refresh yourself.
In the beginning of July, you shall set out to visit your lands and the interior country and return by the middle of September to repose after your fatigues, to gather peaches, take walks, make verses, romances—in a word, do what you please.

I wonder what The Bronx would look like today had Congress, in 1790, adopted Lewis Morris’s plan to make Morrisania the capital of the United States! One of his cogent arguments was that “there [were] more fighting men within a sweep of thirty miles around Morrisania than perhaps within the same distance around any other place in America.” Congress decided that Morrisania on the Harlem was too far north, so the site on the Potomac was chosen as the national capital instead.

In April 1861 the sleepy village on the Harlem stirred to Lincoln’s call to arms. James Lynch, the father of the house, marched away with the 13th New York Artillery. The story of that regiment, Wheeler’s Battery, is the story of the Civil War, for it took part in thirty-eight engagements. After Gettysburg a joyous welcome awaited the father when he returned for a brief two-week furlough. A Virginia creeper, which the soldier brought back from Gettysburg Field, long shed its green and crimson glory over the old picket fences and the porch.

Then came Sherman’s march to the sea. Every afternoon, the village folk gathered in a store to hear the war news read from the New York Herald, which someone each day made the long trip to the city to get. Little Caroline Lynch, wide-eyed, heard one memorable day the ominous list thus begun: “Killed in action: James Lynch.” Back she sped to tell the grievous news to the bereaved mother and children. A simple stone in Woodlawn Cemetery records briefly the story: “Killed at Peach Tree Creek, Georgia, July 20, 1864.” Only echoes of his sturdy step returned; but they seem to have followed on into the lives of his grandsons and great grandson, for the tradition of military service to the county still persists.

Oh, the varied footsteps that echo and re-echo! There are the hasty steps of an impulsive boy leaving the house hurriedly in a fit of anger. Pride at first forbids his return. Later, when he would return, he cannot. Seven long years he serves as a sailor before the mast, with interruptions ashore. He pulls on ropes attached to harpoons until his hands run with blood; in Arctic seas, in fierce storms around the dreaded Cape, in strange sunlit harbors of the Azores, the echoes of the grieving father’s slow steps and a saddened mother’s gentle tread ring on the boy’s ears. Life on the bark Rose Poole was hard for the sailormen. Alabama had driven our shipping from the seas. Finally, in the port of Callao, Peru, he is able to sign up on a vessel bound for New York. Strange stories he tells when he reaches home, a startling figure in sombrero, earrings, wide trousers and sash, like the movie hero of today. Nothing on the screen could eclipse in wild adventure the life of the sailor of that day. It was a rough, hard life, but it developed the fearless type, which made possible our long-held supremacy on the sea.

After George Lynch went to sea, his brother and chum William tried to join the Union Army. He was in Washington. The war at last had reached its weary end. One midnight, returning from Alexandria over the Long Bridge that spanned...
the Potomac, the lad was halted by a peremptory order from the leader of a troop of cavalry galloping over the bridge. Two pistols dangerously near his eyes brought a sudden response. After many rapid questions and brief but satisfactory answers, they rode on, explaining: “The president has been shot and the assassin has just escaped over this bridge.”

And how the echoes resound as the hurrying feet march away to the Big War! Colonel James A. Lynch, wounded at Montfaucon, in the Meuse-Argonne, sends a reassuring cable message to cheer the anxious kin in the old home. Sarah Lynch’s grandson, Colonel Francis Fielding Longley, wins honors from four governments for his efficient services as an engineer. And young William Lynch and other sons and daughters of the house serve their country in various ways and kinds.

Alevia Van Pelt Lynch, who was, until her death a few years ago, the mistress of the old home, remembered well the Gouverneur Morris of her childhood. She remembered, too, when she, a little girl of six, wearing a white tulle dress and a green wreath on her black curls, sang, with other children who belonged to William Bradbury’s singing classes in New York, with Jenny Lind in Castle Garden. The Swedish Nightingale trilled as the children sang the refrain. What wondrous tones have echoed from the walls of the old Aquarium!

And she remembered a long, long walk down to the City Hall to see the face of the dead Lincoln as he lay in solemn state. And she often pictured her great uncle, Dr. Peter Van Pelt, in the knee breeches and buckled shoes of the Dutch colonial Dominie, a link between two eras. He made the address of welcome to Lafayette on his visit to New York in 1824; he served in the War of 1812; he consoled Aaron Burr in his pitiful old age and officiated at his funeral.

This is just part of the story of an old Bronx house. It is just a simple story of plain everyday right living; of just doing the day’s work. But from such homes, all over the country, went out of influences, which developed this great land. They taught and fought, lived and died, not greatly, but as nearly right as they knew how. It is just that simple story of an American home.
SECOND BLACK FAMILY
ON EAGLE AVENUE

Ronena N. Solorzano

I was born in Harlem Hospital in April 1951. My father was from Trujillo, Honduras, and my mother was from Wake Forest, North Carolina. I am the eldest of four children. My parents, my two brothers, and I lived in the St. Nicholas Housing Projects until two months after my fourth birthday. My younger sister was the only one who was born in The Bronx, at Lincoln Hospital.

In June 1955, my parents bought a home at 860 Eagle Avenue, near the bridge at 161st Street. They were the second African American family to buy a home in that neighborhood. The first Black home-owner was Mrs. Dinery. She was an elderly Jamaican woman whose husband had died decades before we moved to Eagle Avenue.

Next door to us lived a six-year-old German girl named Jeannie. Her grandmother owned the home and Jeannie’s parents and sister Carol also lived there. My mother would allow my brother and me to play in the yard while she watched us from the window. Not long after we moved to our home Jeannie unlatched our gate, walked into our yard, and started talking to me. She told me that this had been her yard but now that we moved in the yard didn’t belong to her anymore. Jeannie taught me how to unlatch our gate and get on to the sidewalk, without assistance, and how to yell and scream when I didn’t get my way. (My mother was not having it!)

My parents moved to The Bronx because they wanted my siblings and me to be in a place where we could receive a better education. In September 1956 I started kindergarten at P.S. 10. Part of the old building had already been demolished, and the portion that was still standing was used for the younger children. Within the year, the new P.S. 140 was finished. P.S. 140 was brand new, spotless, and everything in it was sparkling. I started school at P.S. 140 in September 1957. I really liked the new school. It was half a block from our home, and we didn’t have to cross any streets to get there. I attended P.S. 140 only in the first grade, and then my mother was informed that P.S. 140 was no longer in our school zone.

Our new school zone dictated that we now attend P.S. 51. The school was three blocks south and two blocks east of where we lived. There was never a crossing guard at any of the streets. Many days my brother and I had to walk to school alone because our mother was caring for her ailing mother, my grandmother, who lived with us. P.S. 51 was located on Trinity Avenue and 158th Street. Those who had the power to determine school zones apparently didn’t care
about the children on Eagle Avenue. I hated attending P.S. 51. The school was dark and dirty, and it always smelled like spoiled milk and an overflowing toilet.

At about this same time, the white families in our neighborhood began to move to Westchester and other northern counties. My friend Jeannie left too. This was the beginning of white flight in our neighborhood.

I complained about P.S. 51 so much that my mother asked her friend if we could use her address instead, which was located within the P.S. 140 school zone. I attended the fifth and sixth grades at P.S. 140. When I was in the sixth grade, my teacher was Miss Margolis. I vividly remember reading *National Geographic* and saying to my classmate, “One day I am going to Hawaii.” Miss Margolis said, “You’ll be lucky if you ever get out of The Bronx.” Another time Miss Margolis asked the class what they wanted to be when they grew up. I said that I didn’t know what I wanted to be but that I knew I wanted to attend Howard University. Miss Margolis said, “You’ll never go to college because you’re not college material.”

Miss Margolis didn’t only say terrible things to me. She said terrible things to other students too. At any rate, I have a bachelor’s degree in Speech from City College, a master’s degree in Speech from New York University, a master’s degree in School Administration and Supervision, and I even was enrolled in a PhD program in Linguistics at Columbia University. I’ve indeed been to Hawaii, as well as many African countries and several European countries. I guess Miss Margolis was wrong!
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STUBBY KAYE: A BRONXITE KING OF MUSICAL COMEDY

Jay Becker

Bronxites who have family and friends from Brooklyn have likely heard boasting of the many famous people who were born or lived in that borough. They will attribute this to the distinctive culture of Brooklyn, or even something peculiar in the water. Many prominent people were born or spent a significant amount of time in The Bronx, as well, but for some reason Bronxites rarely feel the need to brag about it. Over the years, popular publications like Back in The Bronx have listed a few: George Carlin, James Baldwin, Martin Balsam, Red Buttons, Hank Greenberg, Ed Kranepool, June Allison, Bess Myerson, Jennifer Lopez, Lauren Bacall, Edgar Allan Poe, Geraldo Rivera, Anne (Italiano) Bancroft, Calvin Klein, and Chazz Palminteri.

Another noteworthy Bronxite is Stubby Kaye, who is not well known today but was very popular in the ’50s and ’60s and is still a recognizable name to entertainment afficionados and older folks. Stubby lived on the hill on Mt. Eden Avenue in The Bronx and graduated from DeWitt Clinton High School before he started his Broadway and film career and entered the ranks of Hollywood celebrities. Like many Bronxites, Stubby was a staunch Yankees fan and knew many of the members of the teams in the 1950s personally. Most important to me, however, he was a friend of my family, having dated my aunt, Doris Kalman, in the early 1950s. Because of this, he was an occasional guest in my family’s Parkchester home. When I was young, he and my aunt even took me to Yankee Stadium, where I received an autographed baseball with the signatures of Allie Reynolds, Joe DiMaggio, Vic Raschi, Yogi Berra, Hank Bauer, and Phil Rizzuto. One of the ushers hand-delivered the ball to me after the dugout learned that Stubby was in attendance.

Born Bernard Solomon Kotzin on November 11, 1918, Stubby was married twice, first to Jeanne Watson and later to Angela Braceweb. Stubby was a rotund, friendly-looking guy who got his start on the Major Bowes Amateur Hour before moving on to Vaudeville. He later performed for U.S. troops, representing the U.S.O. This fine singer-comedian is most famous for his Broadway roles, especially his performance as Nicely-Nicely Johnson in Guys and Dolls. He played the same role in the movie adaptation of the musical, released in 1955. Throughout his career, Stubby also appeared in multiple additional films and Broadway productions, including Taxi (1953), Li’l Abner (1959), Cat Ballou (1965), Sweet Charity (1969), The Cockeyed Cowboys of Calico County (1970), and Who Framed Roger Rabbit (1988). As television became increasingly popular, Stubby played

Stubby Kaye, an asset to The Bronx legacy of thriving people, died on December 14, 1997, at the age of 79. The style of musical comedies that he helped shape has largely been phased out, except for periodic revivals, but Stubby’s vital contributions to U.S. popular culture, along with the contributions of many other Bronxites like him, should always be remembered.
VISIT THE BRONX

Edgar Allan Poe, one of America’s greatest writers, spent his last years (1846–1849) in what is today The Bronx, a part of New York City. The historic landmark Poe Cottage, built about 1812, is typical of the working-class homes that once populated the area. In this simple farmhouse, Poe wrote some of his most memorable works, including “Annabel Lee,” “The Bells,” and “The Cask of Amontillado.”

Poe moved there in the spring of 1846 with his wife, Virginia, and his mother-in-law, Mrs. Maria Clemm. He rented the house, in the rural village of Fordham thirteen miles north of the city of New York, from its owner, John Valentine, for an annual $100 rent. He hoped the country air would help his wife, who was suffering from tuberculosis. She died in the cottage in 1847; Poe continued living there until his death on October 7, 1849, in Baltimore. Soon after news reached her, Mrs. Clemm left Fordham.

Within 25 years of his death, visitors to Poe’s home made it a literary landmark; individuals and groups such as the Shakespeare Society of New York pressured city officials to save the house from encroaching urbanization. In 1902, Poe Park was created and in 1913, New York City purchased the house and moved it into the north end of the park, opening it as a historic house museum.

Restored in 2011, Poe’s Cottage interprets Poe in 1840s New York and the community as it transformed from rural to densely urban. Poe’s enduring literary influence remains strong. It is owned by the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation and operated as a museum by The Bronx County Historical Society. It is a member of the Historic House Trust of New York City.

DIRECTIONS:
Subway: Take the D train to Kingsbridge Road in The Bronx. Poe Park is right outside the station.

Take the Lexington Avenue-Woodlawn 4 train to Kingsbridge Road in The Bronx. Walk east to Grand Concourse. The cottage is located across the boulevard, on the right.

Bus: Use Bronx bus lines #1, #2, #9, #12, #22, #28, #34 and MTA express bus BxM #4 from Manhattan.
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A LISTING OF PIANO MANUFACTURERS IN THE BRONX

Harvey Lubar

Harvey Lubar, “An Overview and History of the Bronx Piano Manufacturing Industry” originally appeared in The Bronx County Historical Society Journal 49 (2012) without its Appendix, which is a listing of all known piano manufacturers in The Bronx. The editors have decided to publish this Appendix in full below. It will give the reader an idea of the varied locations and fates of the many piano manufacturers that once occupied the borough during the first half of the twentieth century.

1. American Player Piano Co. (Est. 1902)

This company, located at 705–707 Whitlock Avenue, was owned and operated by the Bjur Bros. Co., a larger manufacturer. Approximately 3,000 of these player pianos were built between 1902 and 1918. These pianos are considered some of the finest of that time period and have an international reputation today. The 1918 edition of Presto Buyers’ Guide called it first-class quality and perfectly safe to purchase. They went out of business in 1923.

2. Bacon Piano Co. (Est. 1789)

For a short period of time during the First World War this famous company had a factory located at 138th Street and Walton Avenue. They produced grands, uprights, upright players, and grand player pianos. The factory produced about 6,000 pianos a year, which is very high compared with most. The company was founded by John Jacob Astor, and their pianos were considered an unusual value at moderate prices.

3. Bliley Piano Co. (Est. ?)

This company, located at Whitlock and Leggett Avenues, was owned by the Bjur Bros. Co. They only made upright pianos that were guaranteed by the Bjur Bros. Their pianos were considered an extraordinary value for the money. They went out of business in 1929.

4. Behning Piano Co. (Est. 1861)

5. Bjur Bros. Co. (Est. 1887)

This company, located at 705–717 Whitlock Avenue, produced approximately 4,500 pianos per year. They featured a large line of pianos: uprights, upright players, and baby grands. They owned patents for pin block construction (five-ply veneer exposed), pedal arrangement, and their sliding fall board. Their pianos were known for their tone—full and resonant while the carrying power was still ample. The makers, William and Robert Bjur, were considered piano experts by their peers. In 1918, the company had a capital of $50,000 with $200,000 surplus. They owned and operated many other companies: Gordon & Son, Bailey, Stultz & Co., Mellotone, and American Player Piano. They were still in business as late as 1950.

6. The Bogart Piano Co. (Est. 1898)

This company, located at 9–11 Canal Place, produced 1,000 pianos annually and 30,000 during the period 1898–1918. The owner was Edwin B. Bogart, who headed the company 1905–1945. He was born in Passaic, New Jersey, and died in White Plains, New York, on April 22, 1947 at the age of 79. His partner for some time was Jacob Christie, who was called one of the pioneers of the piano industry. Their instruments are said to have a tone and construction that would rank them among the standard instruments. They made uprights, upright players, and grand pianos featuring an automatic tracking device, accentuating bellows, and adjusted pedals. Other companies they owned were Christy & Co. and Cromwell.

7. Cambridge Piano Co. (Est. 1909)

Located at 89 Southern Boulevard, this company produced 2,000 pianos per year, consisting entirely of uprights and upright players. Robert Oppenheim was president and X. A. Coleman vice-president. This piano was known for its durable character. The company was owned by Ricca & Sons.

8. Christman Piano Co. (Est. 1865)

This firm, located at 597–601 East 137th Street, produced about 3,000 pianos per year, including grands, grand players, uprights, and upright player pianos. Between 1865 and 1918 approximately 30,000 pianos were produced. Their pianos featured an especially patented item called “The Ammon Piano Action.” This action did away with bridle tapes, wires, and back checks. In addition, they made their own grand player actions. The company was run by George, John, and Henry Christman, and they owned and controlled the Lockhart Piano Co. and The Worthington Piano Co. Due to the onset of the Great Depression, the company closed down in 1929.
9. Francis Connor (Est. 1877)

The Connor Piano Factory was located at 134th Street and Cypress Avenue and produced upright, grand, and player pianos. Mr. Connor (born June 19, 1843 in Ardee, Ireland) came to New York in 1860 and after his apprenticeship spent a number of years in the southern part of the U.S. as a piano tuner and repairman. He then moved back to New York and established his business in The Bronx, making him one of the first to move here.

10. Decker & Son Inc. (Est. 1856)


11. E. S. Dobson & Co. (Est. 1882)

This small company was located at 3649 Third Avenue. There is little known about this company except that they produced approximately 300 pianos per year. By 1918 upright pianos only were produced.

12. Jacob Doll & Sons Piano Co. (Est. 1871)

13. **Ebe Piano Co., Inc. (Est. 1916)**

Ebe is the “goddess of youth” in Greek mythology, and this corporation, located at 168–172 Southern Boulevard, joined the piano manufacturing competition at a rather late date. Despite this drawback, their production was up to an amazing 3,000 pianos per year by their third year of operation. They only produced upright and upright players.

14. **Elbridge Piano Co. (Est. ?)**

This company, operated by Winter & Co., was working out of 721 East 137th Street. Their piano was considered well made, attractive, and moderately priced.

15. **Electrova Co. (Est. ?)**

Located at 125 Cypress Avenue, they produced coin-operated pianos only and were affiliated with Jacob Doll & Sons.

16. **Estey Piano Co. (Est. 1864)**

Estey was one of the very famous “name pianos” that were produced in The Bronx. Located at 112–114 Lincoln Avenue, they produced approximately 5,000 pianos per year (by 1918), and there were 50,600 Estey pianos made between 1869 and 1918. They made grand, grand player, upright, and upright players. This piano was noted for its excellence and favored around the world. Exporting was a large portion of their business, and their pianos were endorsed by numerous musicians of that era. Their factory was considered a landmark, and many companies would send representatives to study their production line. The piano was noted for its high-grade construction and excellent tone qualities. The company did not go out of business until 1965.

17. **Faber Piano Co. (Est. 1912)**

Located at 347/349 Rider Avenue, this firm produced only upright and upright player pianos. They were owned by E. Gabler & Brother, Inc., and went out of business in 1922.

18. **Frederick Piano Co. (Est. 1887?)**

This firm, which went out of business in 1928, was located at Southern Boulevard and Cypress Avenue. At their peak of production, they manufactured approximately 3,000 pianos per year.
19. *E. Gabler & Brother, Inc. (Est. 1854)*

Run by Earnest Gabler and his son, Emil, this firm, which was located at 347/349 Rider Avenue, once produced upwards of 2,500 pianos per year. Their production, however, was limited to upright and upright player pianos. Ernest Gabler personally ran the final inspections, but the company went out of business in 1931.

20. *Gordon Piano Co. (Est. ?)*

Owned by Bjur Bros. and located at 705–717 Whitlock Avenue, this company produced upright and upright player pianos only.

21. *W. P. Haines & Co, Inc. (Est. 1889)*

This firm had their offices at 113 East 138th Street and a factory at Fifth Street and Walton Avenue. They produced about 1,200 pianos each year, including grand, upright, and upright grand pianos. The pianos were considered a good value and of high craftsmanship.

22. *Heinzman Piano Co. (Est. ?)*

Operated by Otto Heinzman, this small factory was located at 751 East 135th Street and produced upright and upright player pianos.

23. *James & Holmstrom, Inc. (Est. 1860)*

Located at 132nd Street and Alexander Avenue, this company produced grand, grand player, upright, and upright player pianos. Their motto was: “The Small Grand with the Big Tone.” The company went out of business in 1914.

24. *Janssen Piano Co. (Est. 1901)*

This company, founded by B. H. Janssen, was located at 12 Browne Place. The company produced grand, grand player, upright, and upright player pianos, each one inspected by Mr. Janssen personally. In addition to his business concern, Janssen was an excellent pianist and wrote over 200 pieces for the piano. The firm once received the largest single order of pianos up to that time, from Wilcox & White, a large sales firm. Before they even had a chance to complete the order, Wilcox & White decided to double it. The firm survived the Depression and was still producing pianos as late at 1950.
25. *Lawrence Kirchhoff (Est. 1901)*

Located at 254 East 139th Street, the company produced approximately 1,000 pianos per year. Mr. Kirchhoff was rather well known because he was the head foreman for the cabinet-making department at Steinway & Sons for five years. He was one of the few manufacturers who were able to make casings right from the outset of business. He also operated another company, Lennatz, which he named after his second wife.

26. *Andrew Kohler (Est. 1913)*

This firm was located at 347/349 Rider Avenue and produced upright and upright player pianos until going out of business in 1931. It is not known if they were affiliated with E. Gabler & Brother Inc., with whom they shared the building.

27. *Kohler & Campbell (Est. 1896)*

This Manhattan-based firm had a number of factories, one of which was located along 163rd Street in The Bronx and was capable of producing approximately 4,000–5,000 pianos each year. Their line of pianos included grand, grand player, upright, and upright player pianos.

28. *Krakauer Brothers (Est. 1869)*

With executive offices at 191 Cypress Avenue and the factory at 136th–137th Streets and Cypress Avenue, they produced approximately 2,500 pianos per year, including grand, grand player, upright, and upright player models. The Krakauers were a family of musicians. The founder, Simon, was a violinist and conductor in Germany until he moved to New York in 1869 at the age of 54. He left the business to his three sons who were also musicians.

29. *Kroger Piano Co. (Est. 1854)*

Although their main offices were in Connecticut, this firm had a large factory on Alexander Avenue and Southern Boulevard for many years. The firm was run by C. B. Garrison, who was considered a financial wizard in business circles. He turned the company around with his business innovations and actually raised the quality of the piano at the same time. While highly regarded by fellow capitalists, workers had another opinion. On February 3, 1904 employees were notified that they were all to be discharged without any explanation. The next morning, certain key employees were offered their jobs back in secret, but they refused. The union position was that no one would return to work unless all the workers were rehired. By the end of the day, all workers were back on the job.
30. The Laffargue Co. (Est. 1896)


31. Lawson Piano Co. (Est. 1906)

This company had their offices at 372 East 149th Street and their factory at 2572-2574 Park Avenue. They produced 1,500 pianos per year totalling 18,500 pianos by the time they went out of business in 1919. They produced only upright and upright players and were run by three Lawson brothers: Charles, William, and Arthur. Charles had previously been in piano making for 40 years, 30 of which were with Wheelock Piano Co. and Weber Piano Co.

32. Ludwig & Co. (Est. 1888)


33. Mansfield Piano Co. (Est. 1900)

Located at 749 East 135th Street, this company produced approximately 2,500 pianos per year. They also operated Albert pianos, Concertina player pianos, and Musicale player pianos. They went out of business in 1929.

34. Mathuscheck Piano Mfg. Co. (Est. 1863)


35. Newby & Evans Co. (Est. 1884)

Located at 136th Street and Southern Boulevard, this firm produced upright and upright player pianos at the rate of 2,000 per year. They closed in 1927 but reopened and closed again a few times in the late 1930s and 1940s. Their upright piano won a high award at the Atlanta Exposition of 1890.

36. Pease Piano Co. (Est. 1844)

This firm moved to The Bronx in early 1908 from Manhattan and produced approximately 5,000 pianos a year. The factory, located at Barry and Leggett Avenues, produced grand, grand player, upright, and upright player pianos. In 1903 the firm fired all their workers and immediately brought in an entirely new crew. No reason was ever provided, though see the entry for the Kroger Piano Co. above.
37. *Regal Piano (Est. ?)*

Located at 93 Southern Boulevard, this company produced approximately 2,000 pianos per year but went out of business in 1924.

38. *Ricca & Son (Est. 1891)*


39. *Rudolf Piano Co. (Est. 1903)*

Located at 731 East 137th Street, this piano company produced about 3,000 pianos per year. Their pianos were considered the top of their class and had a well lasting tone. The company was affiliated with Winter & Co. They produced pianos through at least 1950.

40. *Schencke Piano Co. (Est. 1892)*

Located at 245–249 East 137th Street, they produced approximately 2,000 pianos per year. They only produced upright and upright player pianos. The company was run by John Chiesen, Sr. and Jr., until the company went out of business in 1926.

41. *Schubert Piano Co. (Est. 1885)*

Operated by Peter Duffy, Sr. and Jr., this firm was located on 139th Street. Before going out of business in 1939, they produced grand, grand player, upright, and upright player pianos. The company also owned Amplex and the Luxanian Piano Companies.

42. *George Steck & Co. (Est. 1857)*

Located at 605 East 132nd Street, Steck is one of the old fine names in piano making. They specialized in grand pianos, and they were known for great volume, brilliant and pure sound, and especially for great carrying power. Their grand won the gold medal in Vienna in 1873 and in Philadelphia in 1876. In fact, Wagner composed *Parsifal* on a Steck grand piano and fully endorsed it. In 1904 the company was bought by the Aeolian Co. and had player attachments added to some models. Steck was in business as late as 1950.

43. *Stodart Piano Co., Inc. (Est. ?)*

Owned and operated by Jacob Doll & Sons, they had a factory at Southern Boulevard and Trinity Place that produced approximately 3,000 pianos per year. Production stopped in 1931 except for their grand, which was manufactured until 1934.
A Listing of Piano Manufacturers in The Bronx

44. Strich & Zeidler (Est. 1889)

45. Stultz & Co. (Est. ?)
Owned by the Bjur Bros. and located at 703–751 Whitlock Avenue, they produced upright and upright player pianos as late as 1950.

46. Sturz Bros. (Est. 1871)
This small factory, operated by Hugo and Arthur Sturz, produced about 300 upright and upright player pianos per year. They were located at 142 Lincoln Avenue.

47. Wellsmore Piano Co., Inc. (Est. ?)
Owned by Jacob Doll & Sons, this company had its factory at 117 Cypress Avenue. They produced about 2,000 pianos per year, but in 1930 they ceased manufacturing everything but grand pianos, which were produced through 1933.

48. Wheelock Piano Co. (Est. 1877)
Located at 605 East 132nd Street, this company was founded by William Wheelock, a well-known piano maker in his time. He entered the trade in 1873 at the age of 21. His business grew so quickly that his factory needed twenty-one city lots to be built. He bought out Weber Piano Co., which was world-famous, as well as a medium-class company, Stuyvesant. Each had its own factory but under Wheelock’s centralized management and control. Many other large companies followed Wheelock’s ideas about buying other companies. He was also the first president of the U.S. Association of Manufacturers, 1890–1893. In the early 1900s Aeolian bought him out of all of his companies, but he joined their board of directors. The company ceased production in 1941, but started up again in 1946.

49. Wilbur Piano Co. (Est. 1890)
Located at Leggett and Rand Avenues, this company produced approximately 2,000 pianos per year. Owned by Pease & Co., they went out of business in 1924.

50. Wilfred Piano Co. (Est. 1913)
Located at 156th Street and Whitlock Avenue, they produced upright and upright player pianos before going out of business in 1922. They also operated Henry Keller & Sons.
51. Winter & Co. (Est. 1901)


* * * * * * * *

Besides all of the piano manufacturers listed above, there were many others operating in The Bronx during the first half of the twentieth century. Some appear on maps simply as “Piano Factory,” while for others whose names are known, no additional information is readily available. These include Hertlein & Schlatter (148th Street and Brook Avenue), Cameron Piano Co. (137th Street and River Avenue), the Technola Piano Co. (132nd Street and St. Ann’s Avenue), Bell Piano Co. (607 Bergen Avenue; went bankrupt in 1906), and Wasle & Co. (also known as Wassell & Co.; operated between 1908 and 1914). It is possible that Weber Piano Co. had a factory in The Bronx for a short period of time.
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About the Authors...

Jay Becker
Jay Becker grew up in Parkchester during the 1950s and writes about his family’s relationship with Stubby Kaye.

Janet Butler Munch
Janet Butler Munch is Associate Professor and Special Collections Librarian at Lehman College and writes about the history of Amalgamated Housing Co-operative.

Donna Joseph
Donna Joseph is current chapter president of the Eta Omega Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.® and writes about the history of the chapter in The Bronx.

Harvey Lubar
Harvey Lubar, who has published a number of articles in the Journal, provides a list of piano manufacturers functioning in The Bronx during the first half of the twentieth century.

Virginia Lynch
Virginia Lynch came from a family with deep roots in the borough going back to the nineteenth century and wrote about her family and their Bronx home in 1941.

Saudah Muhammad
Saudah Muhammad is current chapter historian of the Eta Omega Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.® and writes about the history of the chapter in The Bronx.

Ronen N. Solorzano
Ronen Solorzano writes about her experience growing up as part of the second Black family to buy a house on Eagle Avenue in 1955.
As librarian and archivist at the Society, I am always looking for striking reminiscences of life and culture in The Bronx. Willie Estrada’s *The Dancing Gangsters of the South Bronx* is one of the most compelling memoirs on “growing up Bronx” during the 1960s and 1970s that I have encountered. Willie throughout interweaves difficult memories of coming of age Boricua in a South Bronx increasingly devastated by structural and individual racism, capital flight, heroin addiction, gang violence, arson and housing deterioration, and urban renewal schemes, on the one hand, with tactile recollections of the joy and community he was able to find in music and dance—in spite of the desolation around him—on the other. Willie’s periodic analyses of the structural and individual factors that shaped his adolescence and young adulthood in the South Bronx are piercing, and his occasional personal asides add complex layers of texture to his reminiscences.

Most importantly, Willie provides unique historical insight into a period of South Bronx culture that is often overlooked: the years immediately before the emergence of hip hop. Traditional narratives often give sole credit to early hip hop—in the dynamic sense of the mosaic of artistic expressions, musical experimentation, and cultural fusions that emerged in the South Bronx of the late 1970s—with ending, for a period of time, internecine gang violence in the...
borough. Willie challenges such a straightforward periodization by drawing attention to a slightly earlier moment in the vibrant, multiethnic musical and dance cultures of The Bronx. It was, Willie convincingly insists, the relatively short-lived but nonetheless momentous dance jams at St. Mary’s Recreation Center that first brought peace to the borough during the early 1970s (even if this peace did not last). These dance jams were also instrumental in the elaboration and formalization of the Latin Hustle, which before this point in time was a less developed set of dance steps practiced primarily by Boricua teens at house parties and in small basement clubs in the South Bronx.

Willie’s memoir persuades, therefore, that the dances at St. Mary’s Recreation Center, organized primarily by teenage Boricuas, deserve a far more central place in the history of cultural developments in The Bronx of the 1970s than they have hitherto received. Willie’s narration of his dance, personal, and professional life after the St. Mary’s jams is simultaneously poignant and inspiring. All in all, Willie’s is a top-notch memoir that labors with both painful and exuberant memories, some of which are worked and reworked from various angles, and gives readers a palpable sense of what it was like to come of age struggling, laughing, fighting, dancing, and loving as a Boricua in the “burning” South Bronx.

Steven Payne

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