

*The following is an early history of the Upper Washington Avenue Neighborhood. The history was written by Pauline Winkler, probably in the 1970s. Pauline was Secretary of UWANA in the early 1980s. Many thanks to Frank Benoit for sharing this bit of history with the neighborhood.*

*Text added within <brackets> provides updated information current to 2003.*

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## EARLY HISTORY OF THE UPPER WASHINGTON AVENUE NEIGHBORHOOD

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The section of Albany along upper Washington Avenue between Manning Boulevard and the State Office Campus is now primarily residential.

According to an 1817 map of the area, the land was divided into large sections. Among the owners were William James, William Humphrey, Thomas Bridgen, Jesse Buel, and John B. Visscher. Later owners included Frederick Danker, Jacob Leanoard and Margaret O'Brien.

It is doubtful whether these owners lived on their properties. It was far from the center of the city and the land was too sandy for farming. It was overgrown with scrub pine and in character was similar to the Pine Bush.

The oldest house still standing in the area belongs to Max Gordon at 7 Croswell Street. It was built sometime between 1817 and 1836 (records are vague), possibly for James McKown on part of the property owned by John B. Visscher. It was on a hilltop site set on 38 acres facing Washington Avenue and was approached by a driveway bordered by elms.

Its owner from 1835 to 1845 was John Willard, deputy treasurer for New York State and later a member of the New York State Supreme Court. At that time, the residence was called Strawberry Hill and probably was a summer home. During the 19th Century the house had at least 13 owners, including Andrew Colvin and his son, Verplanck Colvin, who was the superintendent of the New York State Land Survey. Probably few of the owners actually lived there although records show Samuel and Nathaniel Holmes were residents in the 1850's.

In 1929, the house was owned by realtor Edward Weeber. When the city decided to cut through Croswell Street, he moved the house to its present site on the east side of the street.

<Mr. Andy Rooney of NBC's 60 Minutes spent some of teenage years at 7 Croswell St.>

In the 19th Century Rosemont was called Tompkins; Clermont was Seymour and Danker was Greeley. Clermont originally was drawn to extend across Washington. Eileen was called Colvin and was shown as an extension of that street. There was a public slaughter house on Brevator Street. Gypsies camped on what is now a vacant lot on the southwest corner of Washington and Manning. <That vacant lot is now home to an apartment building.>

By 1905, there were several residences on upper Washington Avenue. The Speedway Hotel was located at Washington and Manning. (Its name probably derived from the races held on the bridle paths on Manning, cutter in winter and sulky in summer.) Many people were boarding in houses at or near the intersection of Colvin and Washington. However, this street lagged in

development behind Western which had the tollgate, and Central, which benefited from the industry and stockyards in West Albany.

There was little formal development of the upper Washington Avenue area until the 1920's. In 1924 Washington Avenue was paved from Manning to Homestead with a parkway in the middle. The conduit for the city water ran from the Reservoir on Clinton Avenue (now Bleeker Stadium) up Manning, across the lot on the corner of Washington and Roosevelt, under Washington and through Winthrop and Homestead on to the 6-Mile Water Works. George Winkler built the first house at the corner of Washington and Roosevelt in 1924, and from then expansion was gradual but steady. Pavement on Washington was extended to Colvin in a few years.

Buell and Croswell were cut through in the late 1920's. Brevator had houses by 1930. (Before the State Campus Doris Street ran from Hawkins to Washington one block above Brevator. There were nine houses. Some of the owners had their houses moved when the State took the land for the State Office Campus.)

Van Buren, Verplanck, Danker and Rosemont grew quickly in the 1930's. Victor and Jermain developed in the 1940's, and it was not until the 1960's that most houses were built on Hawthorne, Edgewood, Fairlawn, and Terrace.

Some of the streets, such as Winthrop, Homestead, Eileen and Clermont, were built from Western and had houses in the 1920's. However, Winthrop and Homestead were not extended to Lincoln until the late Thirties.

For those who lived in the area, recreation could be drawn from the surrounding property which had not been urbanized. There was the Hackett Riding Academy at Lincoln and Colvin which later became the Ranch Riding Academy. If you wanted to rent a horse and ride out Washington Avenue on the site of the Best Western Thruway Motel <now numerous new motels>, there were plenty of trails. Washington came to an abrupt end with the sand dunes at the Six-Mile Water Works.

There were Schafers' Ponds on Colvin Avenue for skating. <This is the area of the current Westland Hills Park.> And there were the Alexes' Ponds off Homestead near Melrose for those in that area. While ice was being cut on one pond, skaters used the other. Children went sledding and tobogganing at Danker at the site of Danker Village.

In the 1930's there was a Westland Hills Neighborhood Association which held block parties on a blocked-off side street. A band played and refreshments were served. Dancing was the main feature. <What ever happened to that neighborhood association? I like their attitude! And this is another reason it makes sense to keep the park Westland Hills Park!>

Grocery shopping in the early 1930's could be done at Sherman's or the WGY Store, both at corners at Colvin and Washington. Later, Jacob Freedman took over the WGY which is now the site of the Trading Port <which has since closed and is currently an upholstering store.> Those who lived near Manning often walked to Schnurr's at Allen and Manning. The only public transportation in the early years was the Albany Transit Co. bus which came up Washington, over Allen and down New Scotland. A trolley ran up Madison to Manning and another up Central. These were operated by United Traction Co.

The quiet residential character of the neighborhood has been maintained, although there is constant change. The erection of the State Campus and the State University with the extension of Washington Avenue has added a new dimension of growth to this area which has been

developing and improving over many years. Colvin Avenue is now commercial. CDTA bus lines go up Washington to the Campus and some go beyond to the Teresian House and Daughters of Sarah Nursing Home on Washington Avenue Extension. <and Crossgates Mall!> With the residential development in the Pine Bush, the Upper Washington Avenue Neighborhood will no longer be part of the Western frontier of the city.