

Jamaica Estates Historical Plaque Dedication

A cast bronze plaque was unveiled April 23, 2010 on the Midland Mall, by students of The Aquinas Honor Society of the Immaculate Conception School and by Senator Frank Padavan who provided the funds for the creation of the permanent marker.

The ceremony included many of the students from the Immaculate Conception School, their band, chorus and faculty. Among the faculty were Mr. Carl Ballenus, history teacher and adviser to the students, Ms. Dorothea Breen, ICS Principal, Ted Musco, Associate Superintendent, and Father Jed Sumampong. Also attending were members and officials of the Jamaica Estates Assoc. including Howard Fried, President, and Michael Bookbinder, Chairman of the Board.

JEA helped in the ceremony by working with the Parks Department on the planting of trees and site planning for the event.

The student chorus sang “ Stand Up for America “ a song written by Bob Saffer, the father of Susan Zigman, a long time resident of Jamaica Estates.

In his dedication speech, Senator Padavan said “ honoring and recognizing our heritage and history is very important” and that the plaque would be “ a lasting reminder of generations of residents who worked day in and day out to make Jamaica Estates a magnificent place to live”.

The students have researched the extensive history of Jamaica Estates, preparing the material for a book published by Arcadia Publishing, which is now available at book stores including Barnes & Noble. They felt that a permanent historical marker would be an important addition to their efforts and knew it would be welcomed by the community.

They created the copy for the plaque which is shown here in upper case letters. (The supporting copy in lower case type is for additional detail).

JAMAICA ESTATES - A RESIDENTIAL PARK

Jamaica Estates was created to be like a park where homes would be built taking advantage of the scenery and protecting the large forest of trees.

IN 1907, REAL ESTATE DEVELOPERS ERNESTUS GULICK AND FELIX ISMAN PURCHASED 500 ACRES OF LAND NORTH OF THE COLONIAL VILLAGE OF JAMAICA,

Gulick and Isman are the founding fathers of Jamaica Estates. They were very wealthy developers. Gulick wrote in 1908 that the physical joining of Manhattan Island with Long Island by tunnels and bridges must cause a rise in values which no financial depression can possibly stop. Isman also believed in the value of real estate and this is reflected in his famous doctrine, “You can be 75 percent wrong and still make money in Manhattan

real estate.” The village of Jamaica is a unique historical town established in a petition by Peter Stuyvesant in 1656 making this village 354 years old this year.

HERE THEY ESTABLISHED THE JAMAICA ESTATES CORPORATION. THEIR PURPOSE WAS TO ERECT AN AFFLUENT RESORT WITH AN ENGLISH FLAVOR.

Gulick and Isman wanted to create another Tuxedo Park which was an upstate New York resort for the rich the financial, industrial, and social leaders of New York society.

EARLY PARTNERS INCLUDED LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR TIMOTHY L. WOODRUFF AND NYC ENGINEER AND CONTRACTOR MICHAEL J. DEGNON.

Timothy Woodruff was promised the vice presidential nomination when William McKinley ran for president in 1900 but it was given to Theodore Roosevelt instead. Had he been selected he would have become president when McKinley was assassinated. Michael Degnon had created one of the largest construction companies in the United States. They built five sections of the New York City subway in 1904 including the City Hall to the Battery section. He purchased 16 acres of Jamaica Estates property and built a large home in 1910. In 1924 he sold the property to the Passionist fathers and the Immaculate Conception Parish was established.

AN IMPOSING ENTRANCE, WITH AN ELIZABETHAN STYLE LODGE AND GATEHOUSE, WAS DESIGNED BY CELEBRATED ARCHITECT JOHN J. PETIT.

Architect Petit and his firm of Kirby, Petit and Green designed the famous Dreamland amusement park at Coney Island in 1904. He designed the Jamaica Estates Gatehouse that is a landmark to our community and now 102 years old.

THE STREET SYSTEM, WITH MIDLAND PARKWAY AS THE CENTERPIECE, WAS DESIGNED BY WELL KNOWN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT CHARLES W. LEAVITT.

Architect Leavitt designed Belmont Racetrack in 1904. He also was responsible for the town planning of Garden City, New York, and West Palm Beach, Florida.

JAMAICA ESTATES IS DISTINGUISHED FOR ITS TUDOR STYLE HOMES AND BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPES.

When Jamaica Estates was first developed it had an English country estate flavor. Even the names of the streets like Tudor, Aberdeen, Wexford etc. relates to that beginning and many of the houses had the typical half timber English design but from the start other styles developed and you can find houses with Italian Classical and Spanish features with white stucco walls and red terracotta tiled roofs. Today Jamaica Estates is a multicultural and vibrant community.



Students from the Aquinas Honor Society with ICS Principal Dorothea Breen, JEA Pres. Howard Fried, Senator Frank Padavan and JEA Chairman Michael Bookbinder.