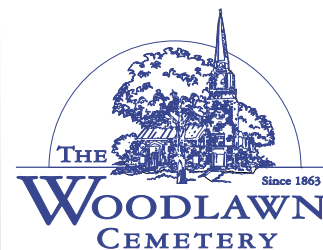


# SPRING 2005 NEWSLETTER



## Woodlawn Heights

by Brian G. Andersson

Woodlawn Heights, spurred into development by a number of factors which included the development of the great cemetery, is a vibrant community in the north-central Bronx.

Geographically unique, it is bordered on the north by the City Line with Yonkers, Westchester County. Yonkers is the 4th largest city in New York State. On the East, the Bronx River forms a natural border between Woodlawn Heights and Wakefield. To the west, Van Cortlandt Park, the third largest park in the City of New York, forms yet another natural border to the neighborhood, although the Major Deegan Expressway which bisects the park from north to south is probably a more defined boundary. On the south is the cemetery from which the neighborhood takes its name.

In the 140 years since the first burial at "Wood-Lawn" (January 14, 1865), the community has continued to grow. First, from a rural Westchester area populated by the early families of Van Cortlandts, Varians, Valentines, Tiers and Bussings, the Harlem Railroad running along the Bronx River spurred the inevitable growth outward from Manhattan. The founders of the cemetery recognized the attractive factors of the area when planning a rural setting for the new cemetery.

The 1870s saw the number of houses, mainly those of the old original families, grow to a few dozen. These were primarily those of the artisans, stonemasons, and florists that had businesses dependent on the flourishing cemetery. Land speculation, most successfully practiced by Edwin K. Willard, brought interested buyers into the area. (note: East 235th Street was named "Willard Avenue" for a period of time). The area became part of the City of New York in an 1874 annexation and part of New York County. In 1914 Woodlawn Heights, and all the mainland portion of New York County, became part of Bronx County. The Borough of The Bronx had been brought into existence in the 1898 consolidation of Greater New York.

The first church, school, and grocery store came into existence in the mid-1870s as the increasing population took hold and began to put down permanent roots. Construction of a second Croton water pipeline for the City through Van Cortlandt Park brought a new wave of settlement into the area, solidifying the "neighborhood." The Woodlawn Heights Taxpayers and Community Association was formed in 1895 and continues to this day, one of the oldest civic associations in the City.

Today, the community bears some resemblance to the original, although the stream that ran from the Mclean estate down Katonah Avenue only shows itself in the occasional sink-holes in the roadway. Young, primarily Irish, immigrants and growing families owning their first homes populate a vibrant community. Many of the original settlers have long since moved. But the sense of well-being, being far enough and yet close enough to New York City, and the benefits of a thriving commercial area have contributed to the area of Woodlawn Heights being a very desirable place in which to live.

### About the author:

*For generations, the neighborhood known as Woodlawn Heights has been home to many cemetery workers, stone carvers and businesses associated with the cemetery. Brian G. Andersson is a native and resident of Woodlawn Heights.*

*Mr. Andersson is the Commissioner of New York City's Department of Records & Information Services, having been appointed to that position by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg in 2002. He had served in the Guiliani Administration for 8 years, part of that time as Assistant Commissioner. To find out more about the Department of Records, you can go to their website at [www.NYC.gov/RECORDS](http://www.NYC.gov/RECORDS).*

*Mr. Andersson is a historian and genealogist of note. His area of specialty is immigration documentation and the period of the mid- to late-19th century, focusing on Port of New York arrivals (Castle Garden 1855- 1890, the Barge Office 1890-1991, and Ellis Island starting in January 1892.) He has served as the Executive Director of the Ellis Island*

