

Learning Places Spring 2016

MIDTERM REPORT

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Why were there so many changes in the names of Streets in the Brooklyn community?

It is said that the story of Brooklyn began long before Christopher Columbus sailed to the new world. The first inhabitants of Brooklyn were a group of American Indians known as the Lenape or the Nayack and Canarsee. They lost their land through poor business transactions and inadequacy to the Dutch who were their neighbors in Manhattan. The American Indians were not smart or business oriented. After the American Indians were driven out of their neighborhood the Dutch moved in and developed the neighborhood in many different ways. They founded many villages in Brooklyn and started to claim their land by naming streets and avenues in Dutch. At one point in history, Brooklyn was known as a Dutch community with all the Dutch names in every neighborhood. However, after they were taken over and captured by the British in 1674 many of these Dutch names of streets and avenues were then changed to English names. The Irish at one time had also found settlement in Brooklyn and they also had their own Irish community. One neighborhood in Brooklyn, Vinegar Hill, got its name from the Battle of Vinegar Hill, during the Irish Rebellion of 1768. In Ireland, Vinegar Hill means "hills of the berries". If someone were just passing through they might think that Vinegar Hill it got its name from vinegar.

For someone doing an in depth research on the history of Brooklyn they would benefit greatly by reading a book call "Brooklyn by Name" written by Leonard Bernado and Jennifer Weiss This book explain in details exactly how the neighborhoods, streets, parks, bridges and many more places in Brooklyn got their names. This book also has colorful illustrations of maps with the location of each street, avenues and neighborhood and the history of its name. There are many amazing stories behind every single landmark in Brooklyn. Some say that the identity of Brooklyn came about by various cultures and associations of its landmark names. Areas such as Coney Island, Prospect Park, Fulton Street, and Ebbets Field are some of the most common popular landmarks that are known by many. With so many inhabitants like the American Indians, the Dutch, The English and the Irish, it's no wonder there were so many changes over a period of time in the names of streets in the Brooklyn community.

Why are there so many empty and vacant spot in the Brooklyn Community?

Brooklyn has seen many changes from the 1600's until now. The Whiskey War in 1870 has left Brooklyn in ruins. Some say Brooklyn never fully recovered from the trampling of the Army raiding and breaking their neighborhood in pieces in search of whiskey. The government just left the Irish community to fend for themselves after the army destroyed their property. Throughout the years and until now Brooklyn had acres of abandoned lots. There are blocks of dirt, patchy grass areas and fences with chain and barbed wire around them, old run down power plants, broken pavements and old warehouses. Not far from here there's Hudson Avenue, where used to be very lively in the 1800's. The majority of these properties are owned by the city and city officials refuse to do anything with them because of lack of funding. After many residents fought for the right to build housing on those empty lands, they were constantly turned down. However in May 2011 a group known as 596 Acres started to advertise these abandoned lots giving organization a chance to obtain license to build on these empty lots. At first many organization were granted license but during this process the city decided that they will eventually have use for these empty lots by building housing projects. They set a future goal to obtain enough funds to build affordable housing on these empty lots. Therefore they stop allowing organizations to obtain license for these empty lots and this is why there are so many empty and abandoned lots in Brooklyn. Until the city decides what to do with them, they will remain abandoned.

What used to be a lively neighborhood, with entertainment for sailors and workers who worked in the Brooklyn Navy Yard looks like ghost town. This is really sad to see such an overpopulated community with so many empty lots. After doing some more research into this topic I found out that many buildings are being foreclosed because the residents cannot afford to pay their mortgage due to the recession and the economy. This is why some buildings are chained up because new landlords cannot afford to clear up all the violations before purchasing the abandoned building. And the city does not make it easy, they require new landlords to clear all violations and liens on a property before they purchase. With all these laws and restrictions the Brooklyn community longs for a renewal.

How did urban renewal help the Brooklyn Community?

Urban Renewal did a lot of good for the Brooklyn community. From years and years of ruins there were many new office buildings and also retail buildings. Robert Moses, a city planner made a tremendous contributions to the urban renewal of Brooklyn and the New York area. He was in charge of overseeing the construction of the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel that connects Brooklyn to Lower Manhattan. Brooklyn was in serious need of more housing projects. At one point many residents in the Brooklyn community experienced tremendous housing shortage during 1950. Many families had to double up in one living space and some had to put off marrying or having children. At that time Federal funding was not available to build housing and apartments for families.

Some residents in the Brooklyn community said that urban renewal destroyed their neighborhood. Many neighborhoods were torn down to build highways. The federal government's plan was to tear down much of the run down neighborhood in Brooklyn and sell them to private investors who would then build affordable housing. There were also expensive houses, businesses and restaurants, library, hotel and theatre that was build during the urban renewal, changing the appearance of the Brooklyn community forever. The urban renewal in some ways was good for some and bad for others. Many housing apartment was built which meant more housing for residents in over populated areas. Urban renewal also offered jobs for many people in the community who were homeless or without jobs.

Was constructing the Farragut Housing Project good for the Brooklyn?

The construction of the Farrago Houses eliminated most of Hudson Avenue's route. Part of this renovation included a shortcut to redirect traffic to Navy Street. Hudson Avenue, which was originally named Jackson Street was extended from the East River to Fulton Street, but its geographic area had since changed in the 1940s because of the construction of the Farrago Houses, Brooklyn Queens Expressway, Innersole Houses, University Towers Houses and Long Island University. The Farragut Housing Project was part of the urban renewal development to provide more housing for residents in the Brooklyn community. With the enormous growth in population within the Brooklyn Community and not enough housing for residents, The Farragut Hosing Project was able to house and shelter many homeless people.

The Farragut Houses was originally built to clean out areas of many homeless people in the Brooklyn community. The area surrounding the Farragut Houses consists of industrial development, waterfront piers, warehouses, industrial buildings and the Brooklyn Queens Expressway. The residents of the Farragut Houses experiences isolation by being blocked in by the gated Brooklyn Navy Yard and the Brooklyn Queens Expressway. The only down side for residents of the Farragut Houses is there are no supper markets or convenient stores around. Residents have to travel out of the neighborhood for grocery and other shopping needs.

Conclusion

To sum it all up, Hudson Avenue has experience a lot of geographic changes throughout the years, mostly because of changes within the community from culture to religion, wars and rebellions. The neighborhood was once a bright and lively community full life and entertainment. After years of struggle, battle and war the community was left in ruins. It was transformed to abandon lots that looked like ghost town. Urban renewal had new renovation plans for the Hudson Avenue neighborhood. The neighborhood was either torn down or shrink and was replaced by highways and housing projects. These highways and housing projects gave the community a better appearance and a new out look for modern times.