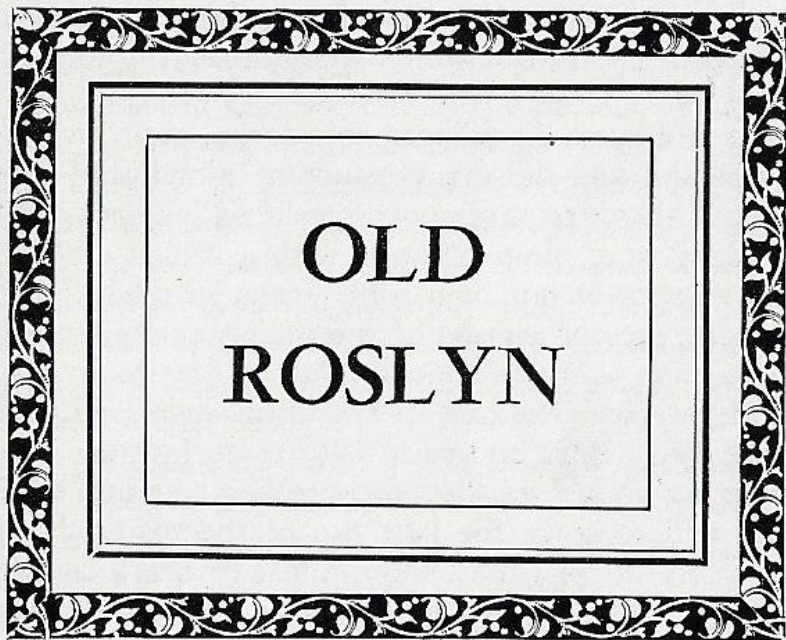


OLD
ROSLYN

A decorative border with a repeating floral and vine pattern surrounds the title. The title itself is enclosed in a double-line rectangular frame.

OLD
ROSLYN

by
PEGGY N. AND ROGER G. GERRY



Photographs by
JOHN A. PARROTT



PUBLISHED BY THE BRYANT LIBRARY

1953

The Village



The villages of the eastern seaboard of the United States often contained a deeply-rooted dignity that our more modern communities do not possess. This venerable dignity sprang from a culture which antedated the settlement of the United States and actually stemmed from a medieval tradition. The settlements of the Atlantic Seaboard prolonged the social habits and institutions which were already rapidly withering away in England.

The early settlers laid out their villages in order to attain two objectives, i. e., the culture of the soil and the maintenance of a civil and religious society. In most instances these requirements produced villages of great beauty. These early villages were often planned with as much care as the so-called modern garden villages of our own time. Irregularities in the placement of houses which today present aspects of the quaint and picturesque, represent attempts at protection, climate control, and the desire to enjoy a view or the urge to secure privacy. The care in execution, style, and proportion which the houses of the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries have in common with the mill and meeting house, was the outcome of a common spirit in the community and the will to make the best use of the materials offered locally. As the desire for comfort increased and the fear of attack ceased, the stockade was abandoned, the half-timbered houses were clapboarded over for greater warmth, and the pine panelling and sheathing were placed over the rough plaster. The village carpenter, a product of the medieval guild system, gave his best, and worked, not simply for hire, but inventively and in the best traditions of craftsmanship, just as the builders of the great cathedrals of Europe had done before him.

The desire for style in the rural dwellings of the Northeastern States was well satisfied by classic motives ingeniously adapted to details such as fanlights, pillars and porticos, eyebrow windows, mouldings, and applied decorations to sidelights and overdoors. The principles of these decorations were prevalent in rural districts from Maine to New Jersey and New York to Ohio, and in those parts of the South which were not exclusively dedicated to a plantation economy. With the development of the Romantic, or Gothic, Revival and the beginning of the machine age on a limited scale, in the second quarter of the 19th century, greater attention was given to the "jigsaw" and highly turned types of ornamentation. Nevertheless, the basic proportions and plans of the buildings remained very close to tradition. Today the serenity and harmony found in the framework of the early villages have lingered on, even though the economic reasons for its structure have in most cases been removed.

Any desire to maintain or recover the peace and community of the early villages or the beauty and independence of its great houses must be based on a stimulation of the desire to recover the standards of craftsmanship and need for community integration which produced these harmonious and appropriate forms. The quality of our architecture is a permanent record of the quality of our own lives.

*In architecture, as in all other Operative Arts,
the end must direct the Operation.*

14

The End is to build well.

*Well-building hath three Conditions, Commodity,
Firmness, and Delight.*

Sir Henry Wotton, (1568-1639)

Old Roslyn



At the very beginning Long Island was claimed by the English as a part of New England, and by the Dutch as a part of their settlement of Nieuw Amsterdam. In the spring of 1640 a group of English colonists, from Lynn, Massachusetts, under the leadership of Capt. Dan'l Howe landed along the west side of Cow Neck and made an agreement with the Indians for the possession of the land along the Sound from the west side of Manhasset to the east side of the present village of Roslyn. This effort at colonization was short-lived as within a few days of the landing, Governor Kieft of New Amsterdam forced the party to agree to withdraw.

Permanent English colonies in the vicinity soon followed, and the names of some of the original settlers, i.e., Seaman, Titus, and Willis are still prominent in this area. Most of the local lands along the Sound were originally pasturage, and in 1658, sixty families fenced in an area which included parts of what are now Manhasset and Roslyn and grazed approximately three hundred cattle in the enclosure.

While the first colonists were English, the Dutch infiltrated into the district quite early. On April 24th, 1790, President George Washington visited the village and made the following entry in his diary, "I left Mr. Young's, Oyster Bay, before six o'clock Saturday morning and passing thru Mosquito Cove, (presently Glen Cove) breakfasted at a Mr. Onderdonk's at the head of a little bay where we were kindly received and well entertained. This gentleman works a grist mill and two paper mills, the last of which he seems to carry on with spirit and profit." The profitable paper mills are no more, but one of them has been restored and is now the headquarters of the American Legion. The grist mill still stands and is still competent to mill flour. It offers more highly processed fare today as the Roslyn Mill Tea House. The site of the Onderdonk house is now occupied by the George Washington Manor, and one can spend a sunny April Saturday as Washington did, looking at "the head of a little bay".

From its very early days the village was a pleasant place. In 1843, Benjamin Thompson, the noted early Long Island historian, described it as "pleasantly situated at the head of a beautiful bay". In that year the population was about two hundred and fifty and there were about forty houses, at least a few of which were quite imposing. Thompson goes on to describe the "truly grand, extensive, and beautiful" view from the summit of Harbor Hill and adds, "The scenery from the high grounds in the vicinity is highly interesting. The minute grouping of landscape and water, hill and dale, foliage and flower, with an infinity of light, and shade, present, altogether to the admirers of nature a picture truly delightful."

Originally the village was known as "Hempstead Harbor", but in 1844, a group of citizens announced in "The Long Island Farmer" the change of name from Hempstead Harbor to Roslyn. The reason given for the change was the confusion caused by the similarity of the names of Hempstead, North Hempstead, Hempstead Branch, and Hempstead Harbor. It is interesting to note that William Cullen Bryant, the poet, publisher, and legator of the Bryant Library, was one of the petitioners for, and in fact, one of the sponsors of, this change in name. While the reason for the change in name is well documented, there seems to be quite a bit of confusion as to why the name "Roslyn" was chosen. The most popular belief indicates that the "Ballad of Roslin Castle" was a favorite marching song of the British troops billeted

here during the closing days of the Revolutionary War, and that the air became so popular with the villagers that they took its name for the name of their home. Some even feel that a local girl tried to elope with a Scottish soldier by donning kilts and trying to march off with his regiment. Romantic as all these thoughts may be, it does not seem likely that a song would remain so popular for more than sixty years that it would influence the naming of a village. There is another theory that the village resembled a beautiful village of that name in northern Scotland. Thompson, the historian quoted earlier, writing within five years of the change, also seemed to feel that the name was adopted from the Scottish "Roslin", and it seems very plausible that this impression is correct. However, there is support for the romanticists, too, as Appleton's "Homes of American Authors", published in 1857 credits William Cullen Bryant with suggesting this name because the Royal Colonists sang "Roslin Castle" when they marched out of Hempstead at the close of the Revolutionary War.

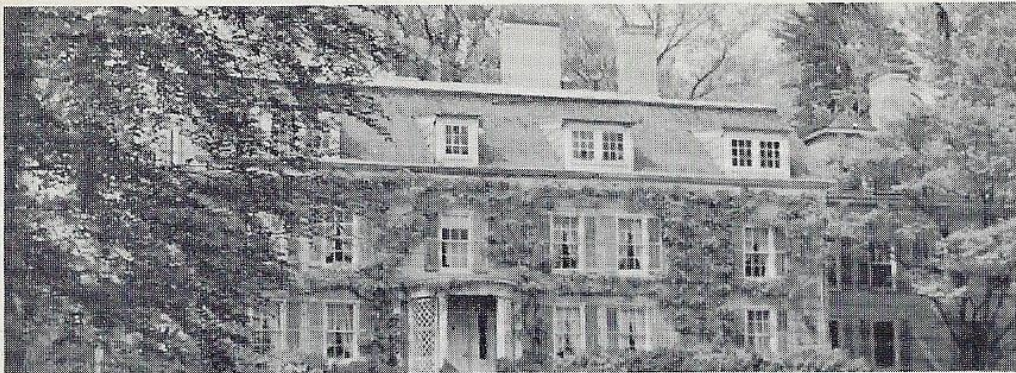
The hilly terrain may have created at least one interesting architectural variation in Roslyn. In many of the houses the ground floors are at least partially under ground, and in these, the principle living rooms are on the second floor. This problem was met by having the entry on the ground floor with a window duplicating the entrance on the second floor, or by having the entry on the second floor, and some of the bedrooms on the first. Examples of these interesting variations may be seen at Numbers 20, 105, and 180 Main Street, and at 199 East Broadway. The builder of No. 94 Main Street left no stone unturned in his solution to this problem and placed principal entries on both the first and second floors. This was probably also true originally of some of the other houses.

Many of the houses have, or had, fine mantles and doorways. It is likely that these were not made locally, but were imported from Hempstead or possibly New York. Their delicate woodwork and applied metallic ornaments may be seen in other houses of the first half of the 19th century in Hempstead, New York, and the DuPont Museum at Winterthur, Delaware, as well as locally, and are typical of the exquisite millwork of the period.

Many of the houses in Roslyn are older than they appear to be today, as during the years many changes, which were not always improvements, took place in the name of modernization, as styles changed, and increasing affluence made alterations possible. One of the best examples of this type of "progress" may be seen in the Valentine house, at the rear of the Library, which has recently been saved from almost complete decay by the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The original house was built in the late 18th or very early 19th century and was made longer and taller when the ballroom was added about the time of the Civil War. The great enclosed porch was added as recently as the early years of the 20th century. With its mansard roof and marble ballroom mantle, it looks today like a country house of 1875 and there remains only the simple stairway to indicate that it was built almost a century earlier.

This past year has not been a good one for the old houses of Roslyn. One has been torn down to make way for a parking lot, and another has been almost undermined. One of the best is located in an area which has been zoned for "light industry", and old houses so placed do not often survive. Perhaps this one may be the exception.

The houses shown on the following pages are examples of the several types of Roslyn architecture, as it developed from the early 18th to the late 19th centuries. Contemporary photographs of each house are shown. Early illustrations, when available, have been reproduced at the bottom of each appropriate page.



Willowmere

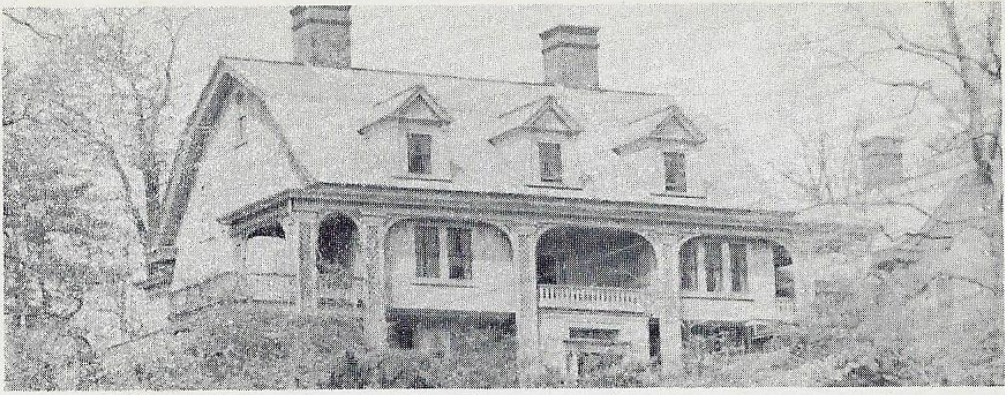
No. 1

HOME OF MRS. JAMES F. CURTIS
Bryant Avenue
Roslyn Harbor

Willowmere is reputed to have been built by Nathaniel Pearsall in 1685 and was originally known as "The Pearsall Mansion". Much of the architectural character present today is of the eighteenth century. It was purchased in 1839 by the Cairns family who made extensive alterations, especially the interior. At this time it was called "Clifton" and was illustrated in the 1843 edition of Thompson's "History of Long Island" and was referred to as the most beautiful and romantic residence in the area. With the exception of the porch and dormer windows the facade has been practically unchanged since before 1845. Admiral Aaron Ward, the donor of the Roslyn Clock Tower was one of its later owners. The grounds of Willowmere are exceptionally lovely and contain a striking collection of trees and an outstanding Rose Garden with about sixteen hundred plants including the original beds of the Mrs. Aaron Ward, Willowmere, and Admiral Ward varieties.

The interior contains so much of interest and importance that it is impossible to adequately describe it in a limited space. The various architectural innovations of the several owners are worthy of notice. The whitewood paneling and bolection mantle in the "Pine Room" are in large part of the eighteenth century and are typical of Long Island. The stairway with its rope-turned balusters of the next century are of equal importance. The earliest furniture is English and American Chippendale. The furniture of the later periods is all American. The breakfront cabinet in the living room is outstanding, and is presumably of New York origin. There are several fine paintings and prints of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. One of the miniatures over the living room mantle is of James Freeman Curtis who was a midshipman on the Chesapeake and took part in the famous battle between that ship and the Shannon. A painting of this battle may be seen in the Parrott house.





Cedarmere

No. 2

HOME OF WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

Bryant Avenue

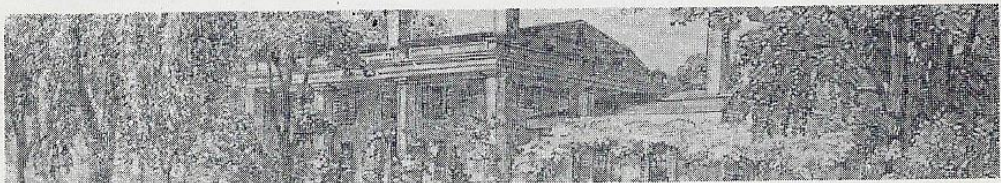
Roslyn Harbor

According to the Parke Godwin, in his "Life of William Cullen Bryant" the original farmhouse was built in 1787. It was bought by Mr. Bryant in 1843, at which time the third storey was added. The upper stories were damaged by fire in 1902 and during the ensuing restoration the present living room wing was added to the ground floor.

The library is especially interesting and has been maintained as much as possible as it was when it was Mr. Bryant's study. It contains his books and bookcases and his Victorian desk. There is a fanback Windsor chair, and several upholstered chairs which were in the room in the Bryant period, and an exceptional English Hepplewhite card table which is a more recent acquisition. The fireplace is relatively unchanged and is faced with Delft ecclesiastical tiles. The overmantle portrait of Jefferson is by Bass Otis and is contemporary with the subject.

The drawing room contains a New York Hepplewhite mantle which is faced with tiles from the Alhambra. The engraving of Mrs. Peter Bryant, William Cullen Bryant's mother is impressive as are the English Hepplewhite cupboard with Battersea pulls and a nineteenth century Gothic desk from Horace Walpole's famed "Strawberry Hill". The dining room has a frieze of water colors done by Mr. Bryant's grandson and an early nineteenth century New York mantle. This room contains an English eighteenth century sideboard with knife boxes, secretary with glass doors and eighteenth century dining chairs. There is an American breakfront and New York console table, both of the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

The grounds of Cedarmere are delightful and reflect rare appreciation of natural beauty. The Gothic mill built by Mr. Bryant still has its delicate Victorian charm, and is used today as a studio by one of his great-granddaughters.



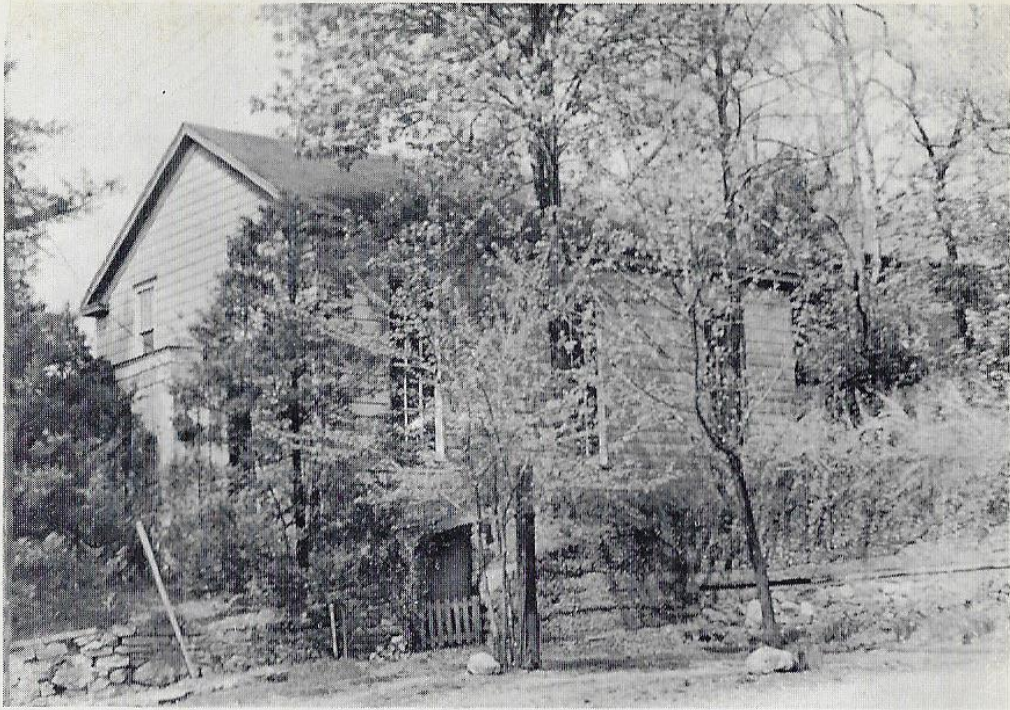


The Roslyn Grist Mill

No. 3

1347 Northern Boulevard
Roslyn

There is every reason to believe that the mill was built in the early years of the eighteenth century. Brower and McGee quote the Town Records of North Hempstead as mentioning a road from "Robinsons Mill Dam" in 1706, and further mention the sale of the mill by John Robinson to Charles Mott for one hundred pounds in 1709. It is very difficult to establish how much of the original mill still stands as there are few architectural characteristics of any period. The great oak beams and wide floorboards of the second floor definitely appear to be of the eighteenth century. Originally the grain was stored on the second floor and passed down thru sleeves to the milling equipment. The mill is still competent to mill grain, and some of the sleeves, hopper, and mill stones still remain. This is the mill mentioned by General Washington, in his diary, when he passed thru Roslyn in 1790. In 1916 the mill was donated by its owner, Isaac Hicks, to a Board of Trustees for the benefit of the Town of Roslyn. In the same year it was restored by Harold Godwin to function as a museum of the industrial arts. The Museum contains numerous domestic articles of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. There are several spinning wheels of the linen and wool variety as well as winders, counters, combers and other spinning equipment. In addition, on the main floor there is a rib angle from "Old Ironsides", several nineteenth century Connecticut clocks, a drum from the Civil War and lustre and oriental export (Lowestoft) tea services. The upper floor contains a country Empire tall post cherry bed, ca. 1840, a large cherry Kas or cabinet, British uniforms from the Revolutionary War, guns, sabres, a collection of nineteenth century boxes, and a lighting collection with betty lamps, candle moulds, etc. All-in-all there are so many interesting things to see in the mill, they cannot all be even mentioned. The view from the canal and harbor are especially impressive.



The Old Presbyterian Church

No. 4

*East Broadway
Roslyn*

The old Presbyterian Church was built in 1852, under the direction of a local carpenter, by a number of members of the congregation and their friends. In this respect, that it was actually built by the worshippers, it resembles many of the notable early churches in the United States, as the Mormon Temple at Kirtland, Ohio. It was dedicated on March 16th, 1852. It should be mentioned that not all early Long Island churches were built in this informal manner as by this time Minard Lafeyer had long since completed his magnificent "Whalers' Church" at Sag Harbor.

The building itself is a type of rural classic revival architecture and has the proportions, pediment and fenestration of this style. The building continued in its original condition as long as it remained a place of worship. Since 1928, when the new Roslyn Presbyterian Church, further down East Broadway, was dedicated the original steeple has been removed from the old church and the enclosed "porch" added.

The interior of the building is presently used as an art gallery and studio and has retained little of the form of the original church. It is interesting to note that the floor boards are higher in the center than towards the sides of the building, to better support the weight of the congregation when it was used as a place of worship.

During the Roslyn Old Houses Day, a group of paintings by Roslyn artists will be shown. Photographs of Roslyn in the late nineteenth century and other "Roslyniana" will also be on exhibit.



The Story-Bowie House

No. 6

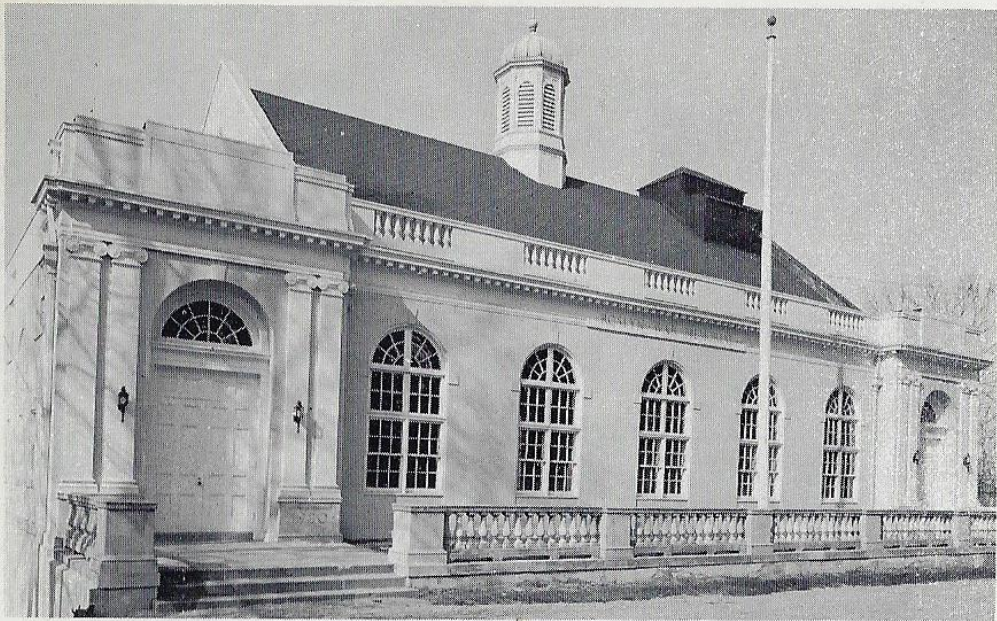
95 East Broadway
Roslyn

The rear part of this cottage, only recently acquired by the present owners and in process of restoration, was probably built first, possibly as early as the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The main part of the house was built later in the eighteenth century and some of the details, as the dormer windows and the fretwork brackets under the eaves, are quite definitely nineteenth century additions. The kitchen is located in a separate wing, and differs from the other houses in this respect.

The interior shows relatively less architectural modification over the years than does the exterior. Most of the original vertical plank panelling of the fireplace wall, in the livingroom, remains, and represents a more primitive version of the similar walls in the Williams house. The remaining living room walls were originally panelled with horizontal planking to the chair rail, and a large part of this detail remains. The living room ceiling is actually made up of the under-surfaces of the pine flooring of the upper storey, and was apparently never plastered. The great summer beam is modern, but replaces the earlier original one. Many of the original plank doors, some with later added windows, and six over six windows are still in use.

Much of the furniture is familial. The tambour secretary is unique in the Roslyn houses, and its urn-shaped inlaid keyhole escutcheons are reminiscent of those of John Seymour, the noted Boston cabinet-maker. The Hepplewhite sideboard, Sheraton dropleaf table, and Sheraton chest of drawers are more provincial work and probably originated in Maine.

The primitive paintings done in Winthrop, Maine, about 1825, represent the rural portraiture of the period. The small ink portrait of an earlier ancestor is a more sophisticated work of the late eighteenth century.



The Bryant Library

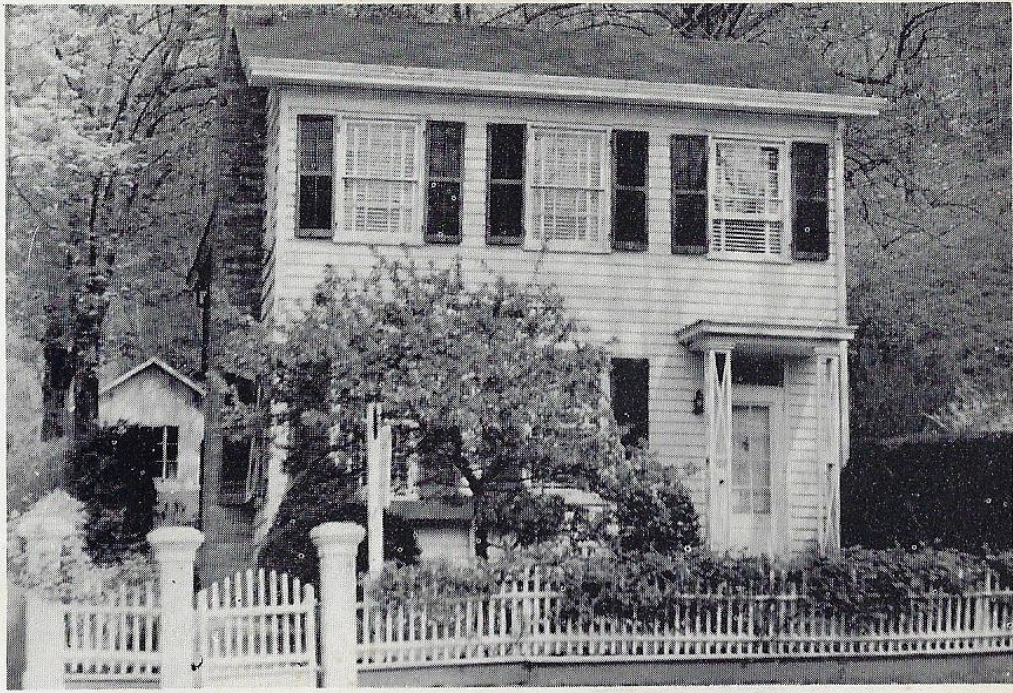
No. 7

*East Broadway
Roslyn*

The Bryant Library was founded in 1878 in accordance with the wish of William Cullen Bryant that the people of Roslyn might have a meeting place for intellectual and social improvement. The original building, a substantial Victorian house not far from the poet's home on Bryant Avenue, with a social hall on the second floor, served until 1946, when it had to be torn down to make way for the highway bridge across Hempstead Harbor. After several years in small rented quarters in the Heights, the Bryant Library moved to its present spacious building in March 1952.

This building, the Roslyn War Memorial, was erected in 1920. It served many interesting purposes in the years after the first world war: Red Cross work, young people's recreational activities, veterans' meetings, and other worthy causes. The main room was a theatre, where summer stock was enjoyed for several seasons. A company of players sponsored by Christopher Morley was a great attraction to theater-goers for a time. Funds for maintenance were inadequate, however, so the building fell into disrepair after a number of years.

The property was transferred to the Bryant Circulating Library Association in 1951 by the Roslyn Neighborhood Association. Funds for renovation and alteration to meet the purposes of a library were provided for by the sale of the old library property, supplemented by gifts and a small amount remaining from endowment funds. Plans are now being made to utilize the building to its fullest extent, finishing additional rooms at the north end, and making a community meeting room in the basement. This expansion together with a growing book collection and an ever increasing program of services, should give the people of Roslyn the type of library and community service they need.



The Wood House

No. 8

145 East Broadway
Roslyn

The Wood house is a splendid example of a small classic revival country house of the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The original front over-door windows, doors, six-over-six windows, mouldings, mantles and flooring have survived throughout the house. This house is, perhaps, the most highly "modernized" of the houses exhibited and demonstrates dramatically how liveable and convenient an old house can be without any sacrifice of the detail and patina which provide its charm. Its interior shows how attractive a house of this type can be, furnished as it is with an admixture of quite different periods of furniture.

The small living room still has its country Gothic mantle. The andirons are English ca. 1790, and have unusual double vase finials. There are two rush-seated chairs which are contemporary with the house. One of these has the early "rug-cutter" rockers. The Empire mahogany drop-leaf table is presumed to have originated in Long Island. These country pieces are pleasantly mixed with later, more sophisticated, Victorian chairs and a coffee table. There is a nineteenth century English soup tureen which is particularly pleasing.

The dining room holds an interesting display of late 18th century oriental export, and early nineteenth century English china of the "flown blue" and Staffordshire types. The origin of the painted blanket chest, decorated with cherubs is unknown, but is thought to be Dutch. The breakfast room has an "elegant", New York mahogany drop-leaf table with acanthus carvings, and four Hitchcock chairs of the same period. The kitchen is completely modern except for the retention of the old doors and wainscotted stairway which tie it to the rest of the house.



The Gerry House

No. 9

207 East Broadway
Roslyn

This house is the latest of the houses shown on the tour, and typifies the architecture of large numbers of modest Victorian country houses built during the last half of the nineteenth century. Plans for a similar "Country Residence" are shown in March 1863 issue of Godey's Lady's Book, although this house is probably at least fifteen years later. The resemblance between this and the earlier Edwards-Lowing house may easily be observed. The windows, doors, floors, mouldings, and all other architectural detail are either original or of the period.

Most of the interior furnishings are earlier than the house itself. The living room furniture is almost all Chippendale of a rural character. The wing chairs are Pennsylvania, ca. 1760, and the cherry secretary of the same date, is from Connecticut, and is attributed to Benjamin Frothingham. The walnut corner cupboard is from Pennsylvania ca. 1710.

The dining room furniture is mostly Hepplewhite and Sheraton, with the exception of the small English Chippendale chest. The sideboard is from Rhode Island, ca. 1790, and is especially small for an American sideboard. The table and chairs are English. Most of the china is of the type called "oriental export" in the Willow pattern. The Windsor chair, Queen Anne table, and "Salamander-back" chair in the kitchen are all from New England.



The Tarrant House

No. 10

221 *Main Street*
Roslyn

There is evidence of at least five major alterations and additions to this very interesting house. The extremely heavy stone foundation walls which are five feet thick in spots, and the adze-hewn beams in the cellar indicate an 18th century origin. The original long split shingles are still present on most of the original house. It is likely that the central part of the house dates from the first half of the eighteenth century. The present second story, with the "eye-brow" windows, was added when the east wing was built in the late eighteenth century. At this time the entire front of the house was clapboarded. At about the time of the Civil War the present kitchen wing was built and subsequently the west lean-to and dormer windows added. The small building in the rear was built in the early nineteenth century and was originally a private school.

The interior of the house still maintains the early horizontal and vertical plank panelling in the hallway on the main floor, and has the original wide flooring on the second floor. Most of the windows are of the six-over-six type and have classic revival mouldings. The corner fireplace in the living room is of the eighteenth century, but the mantle was added at about the same time as the window mouldings.

There are numerous pieces of American furniture of the second quarter of the nineteenth century throughout the house. Typical of these are the cherry drop-leaf table and the two small tables in the living room, the fine Sheraton drop-leaf table and Empire chest with original painted rosewood graining in the front room, and the Sheraton table and country jelly closet in the breakfast room.



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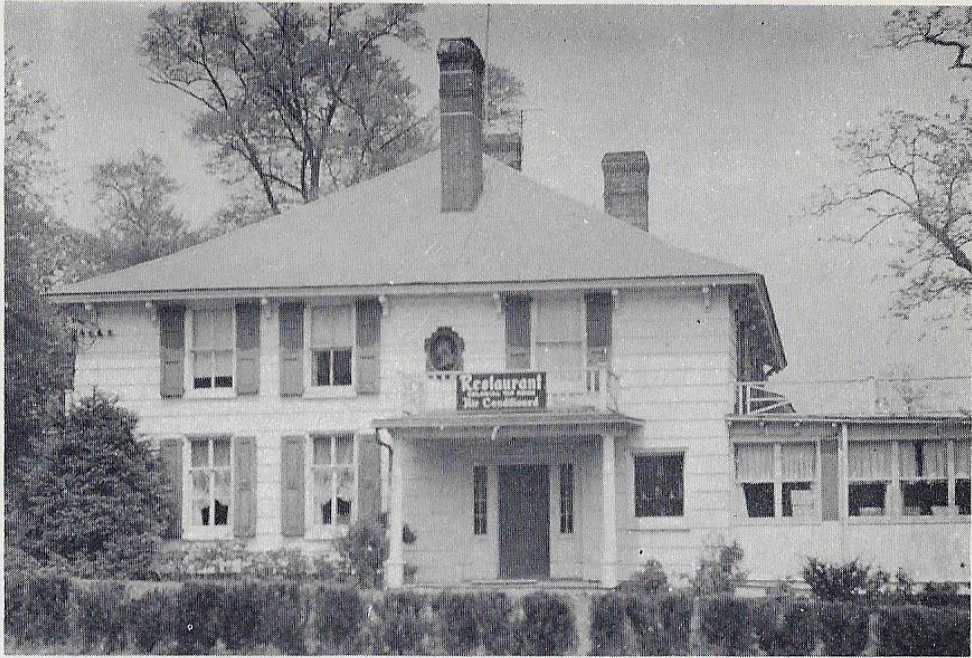
The Pagnotta House

No. 13

20 Main Street
Roslyn

It is difficult to evaluate the precise age of this very interesting house. There are many evidences of eighteenth century work, but the house as it stands today has the external characteristics of the first quarter of the nineteenth century. It is likely that the house was originally built during the first half of the eighteenth century, and was enlarged and modernized about seventy-five years later, when the present doorways, "eye-brow" windows, etc., were installed. The first floor was dug into the hillside and, as in some of the other houses, the second story hall window is a repetition of the first floor entry. Both doorway and window are typically classic revival, with sidelights. The windows, doors and mouldings throughout the house are all in the classic revival style. All the windows are six-over-six. The second floor mouldings are finer than those on the first, as the second floor was probably the more important floor originally.

The fireplaces and mantles in this house are especially interesting. There are two eighteenth century rural fireplaces on the first floor, one, in what is apparently the original kitchen, still has the original hearthstone dated 1744. One of the bricked-in ovens still may be identified in this room. The early kitchen, incidentally, still retains early nineteenth century doors, with simulated graining which was probably added at a later date. There are paired classic revival mantles, ca. 1835, in the living and dining rooms, but the fireplaces behind them are extremely deep and probably antedate their mantles.



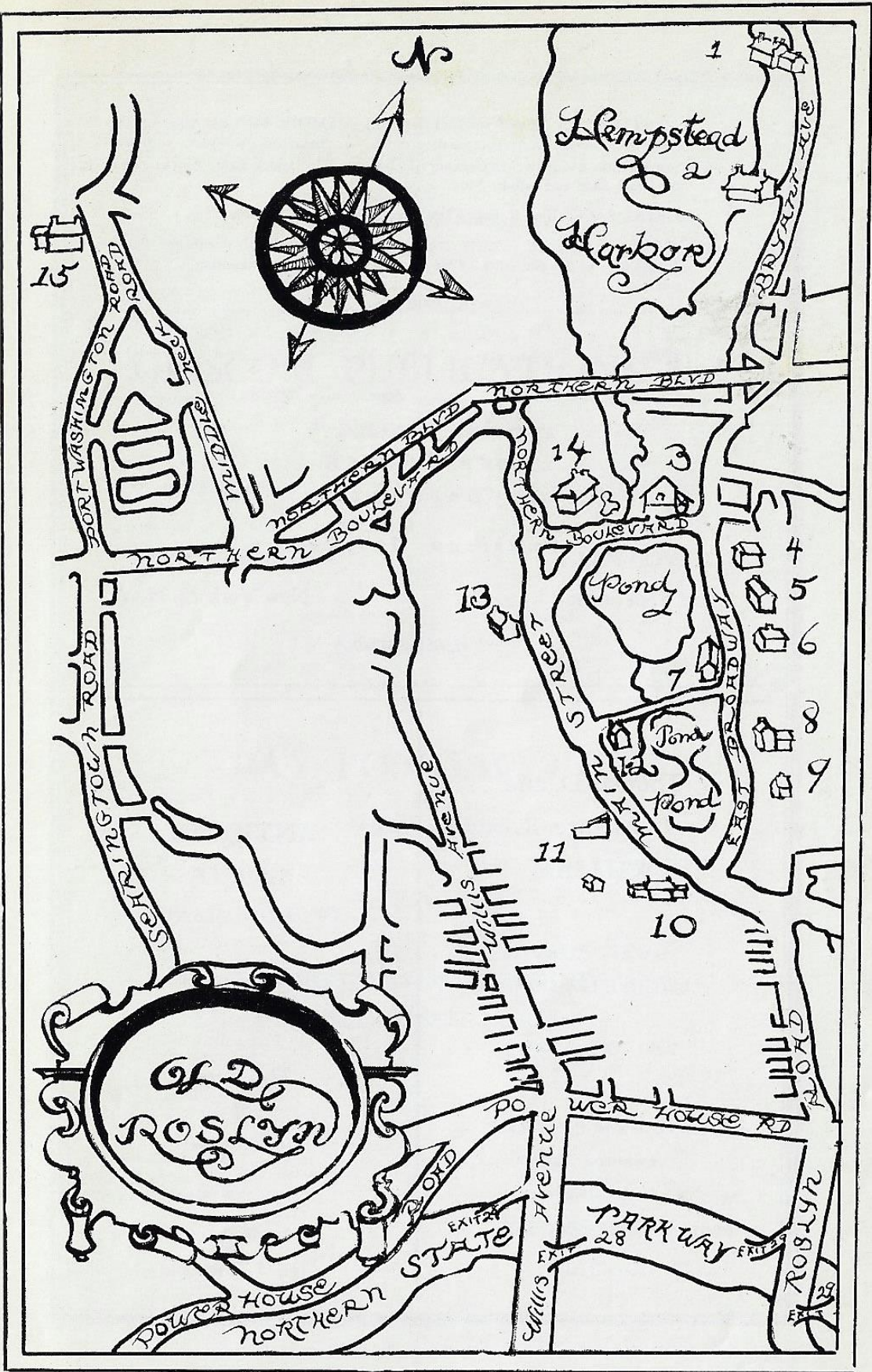
The George Washington Manor

No. 14

*Northern Boulevard and Main Street
Roslyn*

This imposing building is also very difficult to date because of the numerous changes and alterations which have been accomplished over the centuries. The house today has the external characteristics of the early part of the nineteenth century, and the interior of most of the first floor seems to confirm this impression. However, part of the building has an eighteenth century "hipped" roof, and there are many evidences of eighteenth century work in the lesser rooms on the second floor. These include some doors with the eighteenth century type of raised panels, and bearing H-L hinges, eighteen inch wide pine flooring and adze-cut board siding and beams. The cellar beams also have the appearance of having been made in the eighteenth century. It is entirely likely that this is the Onderdonk house of the late eighteenth century, in which President Washington ate his breakfast "at the head of a little bay."

While much of the most important architectural detail is of the early nineteenth century, it is of a very high order, and well worthy of observation. The east and south doorways are very fine New York work of the classic revival style, and show the typical very delicate bent wood-work with applied metallic ornaments. These are similar to doorways at Cedarmere, The Museum of the City of New York, and the Winterthur Museum. The panelled south door in the original entrance hall is contemporary with its framing and still retains its original lock. This room also retains very early flooring, but its stairway is contemporary with the Civil War.



LEGEND

1. Willowmere, Bryant Avenue
2. Cedarmere, Bryant Avenue
3. The Roslyn Grist Mill, 1347 Northern Boulevard
4. The Old Presbyterian Church, East Broadway
5. Auld Home, East Broadway
6. The Story-Bowie House, 95 East Broadway
7. The Bryant Library, East Broadway
8. The Wood House, 145 East Broadway
9. The Gerry House, 207 East Broadway
10. The Tarrant House, East Broadway & Main Street
11. The Edwards-Lowing House, 180 Main Street
12. The Parrott House, 105 Main Street
13. The Pagnotta House, 20 Main Street
14. The George Washington Manor, Main Street & Northern Boulevard
15. The Williams House, Port Washington Boulevard

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