

## A History of Pine Hills



**Drafted in 1977, Author Unknown**

Until the turn of this century, the Pine Hills district of Albany (an area bounded by Manning Boulevard, Lake, Woodlawn and Washington Avenues) was a sparsely settled region. Fifty years earlier the chief development and activity in the area centered on "The Point"; the intersection of Madison and

Western Avenues, and the Great Western Turnpike. It was at "the Point" in 1831 that this country's first scheduled passenger train boarded for the Albany-Schenectady run.<sup>11</sup> After 1841, when the depot was moved to downtown Albany, "The Point" became less important. The Great Western Turnpike (now Western Avenue), a plank-covered toll road chartered in 1799<sup>2</sup> and connecting Albany and New York City with the West, was also a significant transportation route. This road carried many travelers, including cattlemen of western New York State, who drove their animals to the port facilities of Hudson River for shipment downstate. To accommodate the turnpike and locomotive traffic, the Rising Sun and Sloan's Hotel, among others, were built along these lines.<sup>3</sup> Overall, a rural landscape with a scattering of buildings characterized the area.

By 1871, only 1 shop and 8 wooden dwellings stood along entire south side of Washington Avenue between Quail and Allen Streets, while Madison Avenue was a little more densely settled; 33 buildings and 1 church along the same distance. Most of these buildings were located on the large farms that predominated regionally. The major institution in the area was a school for orphaned boys founded by Christian Brothers in 1853 on the side of the present-day LaSalle School.<sup>4</sup>

Soon after the American Civil War, construction of Washington Park was undertaken.<sup>5</sup> The reasons given for building the park included the beliefs that "cleanliness, fresh air, the presence of vegetation are essential to health; ... that a beautiful park in any city is a great moral power and does more than any criminal courts or policeman to repress crime."<sup>6</sup> According to one city official it was done because "a park would greatly benefit our city and contribute to the enjoyment and comfort of our citizens while it would be evidence that our city is embedded with some of the spirit of progress that is necessary for it in order to become a rival of other municipalities and offer inducements encouraging instead of repelling emigration."<sup>7</sup> By February of 1871, the appointed Washington Park Commissioners realized a need for the "bringing of the north, south and center of the city into easy and intimate approach to the park grounds when completed."<sup>8</sup>

center of the city, into easy and intimate approach to the park grounds when completed."<sup>8</sup> From among several studies commissioned for this purpose, they ultimately adopted a plan for a boulevard, which was to encircle much of the city. For various reasons, the only portion of this drive to be completed was the section of Manning Boulevard located within Pine Hills. (This roadway was originally called Northern Boulevard; it was later renamed for Daniel Manning, a former park commissioner and Secretary of the Treasury under President Grover Cleveland.)<sup>9</sup>

Construction of the Northern Boulevard began on January 1, 1876.<sup>10</sup> The Mayor and Chief of Police submitted the names<sup>11</sup> of "men needy and in positive want" who would otherwise have been "a charge of the city poor fund, with no labor performed to show for it" to the Park Commissioners<sup>12</sup> from these lists they hired work crews. The men were paid a "living wage" of \$1.50 per day<sup>13</sup> and entire crews were frequently changed "to insure a more general distribution of the work and a more equable distribution of the funds."<sup>14</sup> Such changes often caused the suspension of all roadwork for several days.<sup>15</sup> Despite these delays, a mile-long section of the thoroughfare was completed in 1878. The width varied from 66 to 150 feet; the street was bordered by trees, paved sidewalks and bridle paths.<sup>16</sup>

At about the same time and in response to the long-standing complaints and petitions of the property owners about the condition of the plank road, the commissioners decided to transform Western Avenue into a grand approach to the park.<sup>17</sup> The 40 feet wide turnpike was paved with granite block; water, gas and sewer mains were installed; and Norway maples were planted at intervals of forty feet. The Park Commissioners retained responsibility for street cleaning and tree-trimming;<sup>18</sup> to aid them, laws were passed prohibiting the hitching of horses to trees and the driving of animals along the road or sidewalks.<sup>19</sup>

Although these road improvements attracted pleasure drivers and horse racers, they did not spur any immediate population growth in Pine Hills. An ordinance of 1878 prohibiting land owners on Western Avenue from permitting "any cattle, sheep, pigs, geese, hens or ducks ... to run at-large upon the same (Western Avenue),"<sup>20</sup> was indicative of the rural character of the area. The major portion of Albany's population remained settled below Eagle Street.<sup>21</sup>

As a result of the development of Washington Park and expanded transportation lines, new construction after 1875 centered on the park and continually moved westward.<sup>22</sup> In 1875, the horse car line, Albany's "rapid transit system" (similar to a trolley but drawn by animals), was extended up Madison Avenue between Lark and Quail Streets. Eleven years later the line reached Partridge Street, indicating some demand for service in the area. However, the trip was so long and difficult because of the rough terrain, that it required over an hour of time and several changes of horses.<sup>23</sup> By 1886, the horsecar line passed by the newly developed "Brady Row" and "Paigeville", rows of wooden structures located on Madison and Western Avenues (near Ontario Street) which housed the working-class families of the West Albany railroad shops.<sup>24</sup>

A more fashionable residential area above Partridge Street began to develop in the 1880's. One example of the changes then taking place was the growth of the area bounded by Partridge Street, Western, Madison and Main Avenues. This land was once called "Twickenham", the farm of Andrew E. Brown, a well-known citizen of Albany. Each spring Brown moved his family of ten children from their home at #2 Clinton Place to their "country" residence. Brown commuted to his downtown office through the summer.<sup>25</sup> In the 1880's following Andrew Brown's death, his heir subdivided Twickenham and sold the smaller lots. Rapid development took place; eight new residences were constructed along Madison Avenue (#943-979) between 1884 and 1889.<sup>26</sup> These homes were freestanding and rather good examples of the Queen Anne-style then in vogue. They were built by families such as the Goodes, Hagamans and Keelers, prominent in Albany business circles. These people were attracted to the rural quality of the Pine Hills where it was still possible to meet with neighbors at Keeler's Lake for hockey, ice skating and tobogganing on the nearby hills.<sup>27</sup>

About 1889, two lawyers, Gaylord Logan and Lewis Pratt, attempted a rather farsighted development scheme. Borrowing \$100,000 from a local bank, they purchased the McIntyre and Hawkins farms, roughly the area bounded by Allen and Cortland Streets, Washington Avenue and Manning Boulevard. They subdivided the land into generous lots of 50' x 200' each; mapped out streets; planted trees; paved roads with Trinidad asphalt; laid flagstone sidewalks; installed tile drains, water and gas mains.<sup>28</sup> The transportation to the area was improved in 1890 as the trolley lines were electricity to Partridge Street.<sup>29</sup> By 1891, the Albany Land Improvement Company (Pratt & Logan) were ready to auction "villa lots at Pine Hills" for \$840 each.<sup>30</sup> Pratt and Logan were the first to designate this area as Pine Hills, named for several groves of pine trees on the hilltops of Western Avenue.<sup>31</sup> The extensive promotional material for the area stressed its street improvements, healthful surroundings, available rapid transit, the villa residences, and its covenants "which will forever prevent the use of the property for business purposes or the sale of intoxicating liquors."<sup>32</sup> With these restrictions, Pratt and Logan were the forerunners of the concept of zoning in Albany. Unfortunately for the lawyers, the country slid into a depression in 1893. Demand for land and new homes dropped, the bank foreclosed on the mortgage, leaving the two entrepreneurs' property-less. The bank later sold the land at prices much lower than the actual value.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the personal failure of the two promoters, the Pine Hills future as a fashionable semi-suburban area had been established. "Detached villas" built from the plentiful wood supply of the Adirondacks<sup>34</sup> continued to go up, now at an accelerated pace. By 1900, there were 31 wooden and 3 brick structures on the south side of Madison Avenue between Partridge and Allen Streets: 16 wooden, 4 stone and 2 brick buildings on the north side. Similarly, on Western Avenue the total number of structures between Partridge and Allen Streets had jumped from 6 in 1890 to 27 in 1900.<sup>35</sup> Other improvements in the growing neighborhood included the construction of Engine House #10 at the "The Point" in 1891 and School #4 at Madison Avenue and Ontario the following years.<sup>36</sup>

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The less prosperous sections of Pine Hills had also grown: Brady Row consisted of 21 wooden row houses in 1890; Paigeville had 17 wooden and 2 brick dwellings.<sup>37</sup> The predominantly Catholic families who inhabited these areas founded St. Vincent's Church (now Albany's largest Catholic Parish) in 1887. The congregation met in a wooden structure on the southwest corner of Madison Avenue and Partridge Street, which had been purchased from a Baptist group.<sup>38</sup> In 1897, St Andrew's Episcopal Church was erected at the south corner of Main and Western over objections by some members that the site was too remote.<sup>39</sup>

By the end of the century a fair-sized community populated the Pine Hills. In 1900, concerned citizens gathered to form the Pine Hills Neighborhood Association; their aim was to improve the area and foster a community spirit.<sup>40</sup> "Improvements" included the solution to problems such as "the dumping of dead horses to lie unburied just west of (Manning) Boulevard."<sup>41</sup> A serious "problem" was the encroachment upon the areas by institutions considered undesirable by the majority of Pine Hills' residents. In 1902 the Aurania Club was founded in direct response to the proposed buildings of the Hospital of the Incurables in the area. The club vigorously raised the necessary funds, purchased the disputed site from the hospital and built a clubhouse on the property. This response was similar to that taken against an attempt to construct a school for the deaf and dumb at North Pine Avenue and Lancaster Streets in the 1890's. At that time, the citizenry had successfully opposed the idea, citing the school as commercial in character.<sup>42</sup> The Pine Hills residents evidently meant to adhere to the restrictions on the use of the area originally proposed by Pratt and Logan.

However, commercial enterprises were not kept out entirely. In 1902, Matthew Tiernan, began operating the Pine Hills Pharmacy<sup>43</sup> at #1116 Madison Avenue.<sup>44</sup> Within a few years, Johnston and Linsley's Grocery was established.<sup>45</sup> Public facilities were expanded in 1906 with the construction of School #16 on North Allen Street<sup>46</sup> and the extension of the trolley car line to Manning Boulevard.<sup>47</sup>

By 1910, many of the sand hills that had formerly been used for winter sports activities had been terraced into lawns of residences along Allen, Morris and Yates Streets in addition to Main and South Pine Avenues.<sup>48</sup> Madison Avenue was rather densely built-up on both sides of the street between Quail and Allen Streets. Western Avenue contained 56 structures and 1 church on its south side and 59 buildings plus the boy's asylum on the north side (Quail to Allen Streets). Washington Avenue, however, remained rather sparsely settled with only 26 structures on both sides of the street and the over the same distance. Here, cemeteries and large tracts of vacant land prevailed.<sup>49</sup>

The war years slowed the growth of the Pine Hills although St. Vincent's elementary school was founded in 1917.<sup>50</sup> The post-war boom years were the great stimulus to expansion. In 1921, Vincentian High School was established.<sup>51</sup> Four years later, a new speculator to the area, William Kattrein of the Watervliet Tool Company, purchased the farmland near Marion Avenue. Kattrein proceeded to build and sell homes on the development.<sup>52</sup> In the same year, buses replaced many of the trolley lines in the area, although the trolley west of Allen Street remained in operation until 1945.<sup>53</sup> The two

although the trolley west of Allen Street remained in operation until 1945.<sup>53</sup> The two decades from 1910 to 1930 had seen continued construction and growth along Madison and Western Avenues. Washington had experienced a building boom; over 100 structures lined it in 1930, where only 26 had stood in 1910.<sup>54</sup>

A new element entering the area was the College of St. Rose. Founded in 1920 as a "small, independent, liberal arts college: for women, the school began with only 19 students and one building, #979 Madison Avenue. However, the school steadily expanded. A history of the college states that:

"... The accumulation of extensive property was gradual. Sometimes it was acquired through necessity which meant an expenditure in excess of its worth ... Other pieces were acquired when neighbors (not always congenial) sought location elsewhere; then there was the rare occasion when a real buy in the real estate presented itself. Not always were the administrators of Saint Rose able to acquire this property and many purchases were sponsored by the Provincial House of the Sisters of St. Joseph at Troy, N.Y."

The college also began to undertake entirely new building programs; in 1923-24, St. Joseph's Hall (# 983 Madison Avenue) was constructed as a classroom-laboratory facility. In later years, other classroom and dormitory buildings would be constructed, occasionally at the expense of older buildings existing on the property.<sup>55</sup>

Today, ten of thousands of automobile pass by the "The Point" each day.<sup>56</sup> Commercial establishments are common, even predominant, along some sections of Madison Avenue. Many of the former "villas" have been converted to multi-family dwellings housing over 15,000 persons, including 5,000 families in the area. Although they have lost the battle of retaining an exclusive, fashionable suburb, the Aurania Club and the Pine Hills Neighborhood Association remain active. Furthermore, the College of St. Rose, now coeducational, appears to be flourishing, having recently undertaken several major building projects. Unfortunately, the influx of students (from various local colleges) seeking off-campus housing is causing some of the Pine Hills' residents to look for homes elsewhere.<sup>57</sup> The Pine Hills has few pine trees left and is no longer remote. The suburb has become part of the city and now faces all the challenges attendant upon urban life.

## Endnotes

1 *Times Union*, February 16, 1964, p. c-2

2 Howell and Tenney, *History of the County of Albany from 1609 to 1886*, New York, 1886, p.311

3 *Times Union*, April 19, 1945

4 Assessors, *City of Albany Assessment Rolls*, 1871, Ward 14, p.3, 4, 8, 9

- 5 *Proceedings of the Board of Commissioners of the Washington Park of the City of Albany 1869-76*, The Argus Company Albany, 1876, p. 84
- 6 Reynolds, *Albany Chronicles*. J.B. Lyons & Co. Albany 1906, p.666
- 7 *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of Albany*, Vol. 72, 1869-1879, p.30
- 8 Ibid, Vol. 74, p. 207
- 9 *Knickerbocker News*, September 16, 1976
- 10 Reynolds, *Albany Chronicles*. J.B. Lyons & Co. Albany 1906, p.666
- 11 *Proceedings of the Board of Commissioners of the Washington Park of the City of Albany*, 1876-1878, The Argus Company, Albany, 1879, p.150
- 12 Ibid, p.126
- 13 *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of Albany*, Vol. 91, 1885-1976, p.33
- 14 *Proceedings of the Board of Commissioners of the Washington Park of the City of Albany*, 1876-1878, The Argus Co, Albany, 1879, p.150
- 15 Ibid, p.65
- 16 Howell & Tenney, *History of Albany County from 1609 to 1886*, W.W. Munsell & Co, New York, 1886, p. 518
- 17 *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of Albany*, Vol. 90, p.476
- 18 Egerton, *The Public Parks of the City of Albany*, N.Y. Weed, Parsons & Co., Albany, 1892, p.39
- 19 *Proceedings of the Board of Commissioners of the Washington Park of the City of Albany*, 1876-1879, The Argus Co., Albany, 1879, p.215
- 20 Ibid
- 21 *Knickerbocker News*, September 16, 1976
- 22 Radko, *Building in the City of Albany, 1870-1890*, unpublished paper
- 23 *Knickerbocker News*, December 14, 1951
- 24 Assessors, *City of Albany Assessment Rolls*, 1883-1890

- 25 *Knickerbocker News*, September 16, 1976
- 26 Assessors, *City of Albany Assessment Rolls*, 1900, Ward 19
- 27 *Times Union*, December 10, 1960, "Pine Hills," by C.R. Roseberry
- 28 *Times Union*, February 16, 1964, p. c-2
- 29 *Knickerbocker News*, December 14, 1951
- 30 Ibid
- 31 Ibid
- 32 Sampson, Murdock & Co., *Albany Directory*, 1892
- 33 *Knickerbocker News*, December 14, 1951
- 34 *Knickerbocker News*, September 16, 1976
- 35 Assessors, *City of Albany Assessment Rolls 1900*, Ward 19 pp. 24, 25, 27, 29; Ward 18 pp. 25-27. 47-51
- 36 *Knickerbocker News*, December 14, 1951
- 37 Assessors, *City of Albany Assessment Rolls 1900*
- 38 *Times Union*, February 17, 1964
- 39 *Sixtieth Anniversary of St. Andrews Episcopal Church 1897-1957*, Albany, N.Y. (pamphlet)
- 40 *Times Union*, January 18, 1940
- 41 *Knickerbocker News*, September 16, 1976
- 42 *Times Union*, February y 17, 1964
- 43 *Times Union*, December 10, 1950, "Pine Hills" by C.R. Rosenberry
- 44 Sampson, Murdock & Co., *Albany Directory 1903*, p.428
- 45 *Times Union*, December 10, 1950, "Pine Hills" by C.R. Roseberry
- 46 *Knickerbocker News*, December 14, 1951

47 Ibid

48 *Times Union*, December 10, 1950, "Pine Hills" by C.R. Roseberry

49 Assessors, *City of Albany Assessment Rolls 1910*, Ward 19 pp. 25-27, 31-33; Ward 18 pp.34-36, 54-61

50 *Times Union*, February 17, 1964

51 Ibid

52 Ibid

53 *Knickerbocker News*, December 14, 1950

54 Assessors, *City of Albany Assessment Rolls 1930*, Ward 19 pp. 18, 25-30; Ward 18 p.132-137, 151-153

55 Soulier, *A History of the College of St. Rose, 1920-1950*, Albany, 1951, p.9

56 *Times Union*, February 17, 1964, p. 7

57 *Knickerbocker News*, Sept. 16, 1976, "Pine Hills: Rural Elegance Goes Urban," by J. Crupi