

Factory building where Grosjean and Lalance turned out cooking utensils starting in 1863. It brought influx of Frenchmen experienced in stamped tinware production.

News photos by Dennis Caruso

Old Woodhaven Village built around pot factory

By WILLIAM NEUGEBAUER

THE GROWTH and development of Old Woodhaven Village, now a part of Ozone Park, ran parallel with that of a pots-and-pans factory and serves as a prime example of the "factory town" that heralded this country's emergence as the world's leading industrial power.

The expansion was said to have

begun in 1863, when the Lalance and Grosjean stamped-tin factory began operations in an old chisel factory building on a site bordered by what are now Atlantic and 95th Aves. and 91st and 92d Sts. It was during an era when the American hardware market was dominated by manufactured goods from Europe.

Florian Grosjean and Charles Lalance opened a business in 1850 in New York City, importing sheet metal and cooking utensils. Struck with the possibility of manufacturing similar goods in the United States, they established a pioneer plant in Manhattan. Business prospered so much that they needed larger quarters, and they came to Woodhaven Village in 1860.

Single-piece stamping

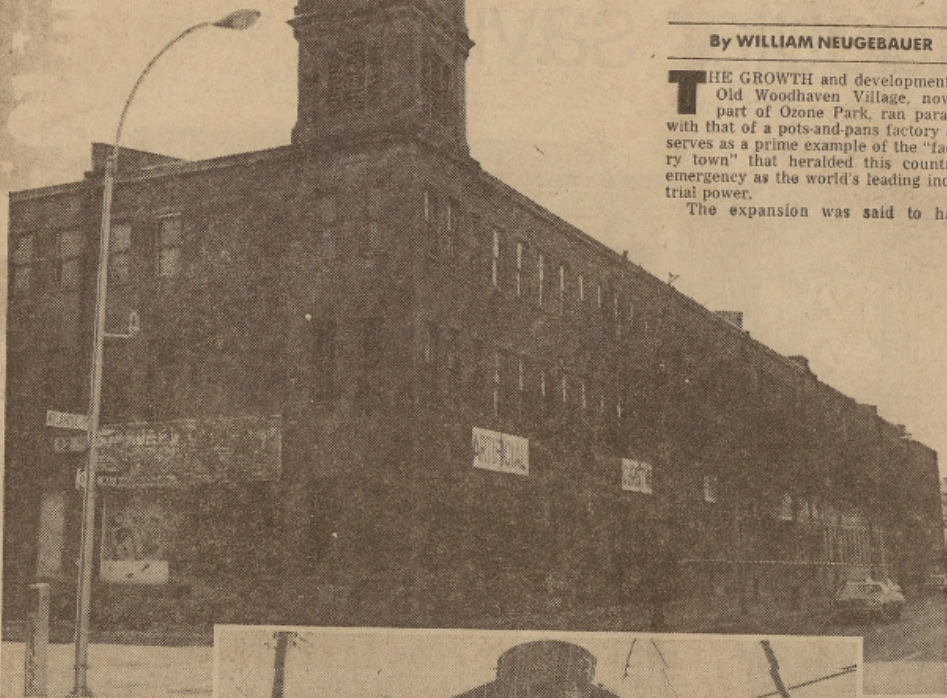
The two men specialized in metal kitchen ware and housewares that could be stamped out of tin and iron sheets in a single piece. An 1890 catalog includes spoons and forks, plates, kettles, milk cans, lanterns, pails, washstand sets and candlesticks, among other items.

Grosjean, who was thought to be Swiss, apparently induced a number of Frenchmen experienced in stamped tinware production to locate in Woodhaven. Historians say this settlement of craftsmen brought about a sizable French-speaking population that augmented the village's rather sparse population.

Shortly after the factory began operations, Grosjean began building about 100 workers' houses on land he had purchased close to the plant. A row of these two-story flat-roofed buildings stands today at numbers 85-02 through 85-20 95th Ave.

As the factory grew, so did the community. Hotels, shops, churches and a market sprang up in the community.

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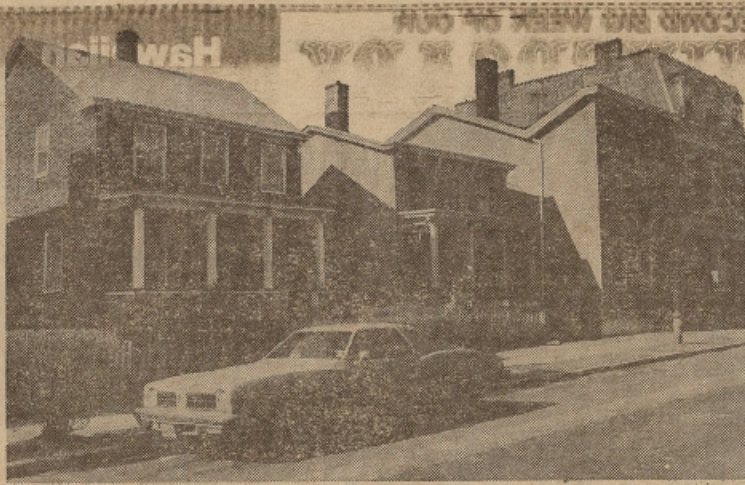
Wyckoff Building, 93-02 95th Ave., is another landmark of old Woodhaven Village. It is considered a figurehead of old village.



Stores on 95th Ave. (Old University Place) are relics of a Victorian style of life of over 100 years ago.



Pot workers houses of typical company town of that era still stand on 85th St.



These 19th century Victorian buildings still remain at 92d St., between 95th and 97th Aves.



Elias Jones house, 95-20 93d St., an attractive 19th century house.

Woodhaven built around pot factory

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with the expanding factory serving as the hub of the village.

In 1876, a fire devastated all but one of the wooden buildings, but the courageous owners promptly rebuilt and expanded the plant even more so that by 1882 the pot factory regularly employed 500 workers.

Suddenly, 6,000!

At the time, the village of Woodhaven comprised about 175 houses with a population of 1,122. Eleven years later the population had soared to 6,000.

At the peak of its growth in 1899, the factory boosted the number of its employes from 1,300 to 2,100, thus triggering the largest expansion of the village's population. At the same time, large estates in the village began to flourish and loomed as showplaces near a thriving shopping district.

In the 1920s, however, changes in Lalanc and Grosjean's production line brought corresponding shifts in the local population, with employes moving to less crowded areas farther east as the workers' "colony" began to disintegrate.

The firm produced stainless steel for the Navy during World War II, reverted to production of its Crusader Ware line after the war and went out of business in 1955, although most of the old factory complex remains in use today.

In its forthcoming book, "Owl Woodhaven, a Victorian Village," the Queens Historical Society observes:

"One must not dismiss the old brick buildings as merely another old industrial complex. In the case of Woodhaven Village, the factory is the only reason for the development of the area during the Victorian period. It was the heart of a thriving, hopeful, industrious community...."

How it all began

According to the society, a 41-year-old New York drygoods merchant named John R. Pitkin took the first step in making Old Woodhaven a village in 1835 when he began purchasing "East New York" real estate and laid out a town plot that he called "Woodville."

A formal survey and map of Woodville made by Martin C. Johnson was filed in the Queens County clerk's office on April 15, 1852. At that time, the existing street patterns were well established.

The following April, John Sharpe of Brooklyn bought 10 lots at the northeast corner of today's Atlantic Ave. and 92d St. from Richard C. McCormick. The latter built a chisel factory in a stone building. Another man named Phineas Walker built a house east of Woodhaven Blvd.

Pitkin himself is said to have built two houses, and by 1859 the village had 20 buildings, including the chisel factory,

general store, bindery, church and a school.

When Woodville sought to establish a post office in 1853, it was revealed that an upstate town was already called by that name, so the inhabitants agreed to call their village "Woodhaven."

The chisel factory seemed to be Woodhaven's principal industry in 1853, but it failed to succeed and the property changed hands a few times before Grosjean acquired it.

Now part of Ozone Park

The Queens Historical Society, in its

work, points out that the name "Woodhaven" has come to suggest the residential area north of Atlantic Ave., while actually the original Woodhaven Village is now included in the area called Ozone Park.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the society said, the land that now is Woodhaven and vicinity was bisected by roads following the course of today's Jamaica Ave., Woodhaven Blvd., Rockaway Blvd. and Liberty Ave., east of Woodhaven Blvd.

Old Queens families with such names

as Lott, Lefferts, Van Wyck and Ditmas owned tracts of farmland ranging from 20 to several hundred acres.

"With effort and research," the society contends, "this old village district could easily recapture its distinctive former identity, realizing its potential as an historic region of the borough, and thus increasing its style and attractiveness."

In 1872, Old Woodhaven Village was concentrated between today's 95th and 97th Aves., Woodhaven Blvd. and 85th St., and within the compact centers scores of beautiful 19th-century Victorian buildings still remain.

Wyckoff Building was 'symbol of future'

BRICKED TIGHTLY SHUT, its windows boarded, the Wyckoff Building at 93-02 95th Ave. remains today the visual figurehead of Old Woodhaven Village and one of its most ambitious architectural structures.

The Queens Historical Society maintains that a community cultural group could renovate the handsome four-story building under state grants and use the interior as an arts center, for a dance group or for some other cultural purpose.

Society officials say the building, opened in 1890 as the home of Wyckoff and Co., a Woodhaven real estate exchange, apparently was built as "a symbol of the future," with Woodhaven's development peaking.

Late Victorian tone

The structure is designed in a late Victorian tone showing Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival and Moorish-Oriental influences. The walls are of machine-pressed brick in a soft, red color. Extended bays and an elaborate Moorish-type onion dome with scrolled finial. The extended bay on 95th Ave. had an octagonal, peaked cap with finial and the 93d St. bay was crowned with a balustrade centered by a solid panel emblazoned with the date 1889.

According to the society, the danger of the building's being demolished is apparent, but with the exception of bricked-in ground-floor windows and the loss of turrets and domes, "its exterior is as fine as it was when the building was new."

Jonas House survives

Another handsome surviving structure of Old Woodhaven is the L-shaped Elisha U. Jones House at 95-20 93d St.



News photos by Dennis Caruso

The house is Greek Revival in general form but Italianate in some surviving details.

The residence was built by Elisha U. Jones after 1856 and its two-story south ell is original to the house as it appears drawn in atlases of 1859, 1873 and 1891.

"It is easy to imagine the charm and elegance this dwelling could impart if it were restored as part of the village effort," a society spokesman said.

—William Neugebauer

Wyckoff Building figurehead, 93-02 95th Ave., is representative of old Woodhaven Village.