

BENSONIA CEMETERY HISTORY EXCERPTS FROM NY TIMES ARCHIVES

(Sorry No Specific Cites – Will attempt to source at a later date)

Bensonia Cemetery, although now a neglected, barren tract of land known on the City Map as the "Public Place at Rae Street," was once a picturesque burial ground, in a lovely section of Morrisania, densely shaded by elms, poplar and evergreen trees. The land was purchased in 1853 by Robert H. Elton, who laid out what he termed the "House Territory of Bensonia." About three years later it came into the possession of James L. Parsball who enlarged its boundaries so that it extended from Rae Street on the south to Carr Street on the north.

In 1868 the trustees of Morrisania forbade further interments within its limits, and henceforth the cemetery has been neglected. A new street, St. Ann's Avenue, was laid out so as practically to cut the burial ground in two, and the bodies thus unearthed were removed to other cemeteries.

The extreme southeasterly section of Bensonia Cemetery was bought half a century ago by the Sons of Liberty, and here rest over 150 of its members. But the brave soldiers of the Civil War who were buried have not a tablet to indicate their resting places.

In his police history, Inspector Byrnes states that the ghouls who robbed the grave of A. T. Stewart temporarily hid/ his remains in this sequestered spot, and no one can accurately say whether his body rests under his costly mausoleum at Garden City.

Efforts have been made to have the City convert the Bensonia Cemetery into a public park, but as yet without success. It is hoped that in the near future the tract known as the "Public Place at Rae Street," will be transferred into a beautiful breathing place.

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Abandoned Cemeteries on the North Side. One of the results of the rapid spread of the metropolis northward, and of the attempt to assimilate the fifteen or so scattered villages that were contained in what has long been known as the Annexed District, was the abandonment of all the village and

churchyard cemeteries. After Woodlawn was laid out and the district began 'to put on metropolitan airs' as well in the disposal of their dead as in the sale and improvement of their acre properties, the little burying grounds were left to their fates. Once in a while one of them turns up in the path of some needed improvement and the serenity and repose of its ancient sleepers are rudely disturbed. This happened only a short time ago, when ia [cutting through German place, between Rose and 15t>th streets, west of and parallel with St. Ann avenue, the workmen uncovered a lot of decayed coffins and scattered bones and skulls. After this ghastly discovery work was stopped, and Chief Engineer Louis F. Risse, of the Department of Street Improvements, pored over the records and looked up the traditional history of the district until he found that it was the old Bensonia cemetery that they had invaded. It was not one of the oldest, by any means, one of the older coffin plates showing that the interment had been made in 1860. As far as possible word was sent around to the descendants and relatives of the deceased persons to remove their remains, as far as they could be identified, to some other place of interment, but no response was made to this notification, and after waiting a reasonable time the authorities went on with the work, scooping up the fragments of skeletons when they came to them and putting them into bags without trying to keep them separate, and sending them to the nearest Police Station, whence they were sent to the morgue. The excavation left some of the graves only partly disturbed, so that some of the fragments of former citizens of Bensonia still repose in the places of their interment, while other portions have been sent through the morgue to Potter's Field, a fact which, if the Angel Gabriel will make a note of it, will probably save him some embarrassment on the last day, when in response to his last blast the former residents of Bensonia Cemetery come together in fragments that may require some of his assistance to properly sort and arrange before they can be properly rearticulated.

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No. 3172^.

The Committee on Parks, to whom was referred the annexed ordinance in favor of laying out as a public park Bensonia Cemetery, in the Borough of The Bronx (page 1108, Minutes, April 30, 1501), respectfully

Report:

That, having examined the subject, they believe the proposed improvement to be necessary They therefore recommend that the said ordinance be adopted.

An Ordinance to lay out as a public park Bensonia Cemetery, in the Borough of The Bronx.

Be it Ordained by the Municipal Assembly of The City of New York, as follows:

That, in pursuance of section 436 of the Greater New York Charter, the following resolution of the Board of Public Improvements, adopted by that Board on the 24th day of April, 1901, be and the same hereby is approved, viz.:

Resolved, That the Board of Public Improvements of The City of New York, in pursuance of the provisions of section 436 of chapter 378, Laws of 1897, deeming it for the public interest to alter the map or plan of The City of New York by laying out as a public park the land known as Bensonia Cemetery, in the Borough of The Bronx, City of New York, does hereby favor and approve of the same so as to lay out as a public park the aforesaid land as follows:

Beginning at the intersection of the northerly line of Rae street with the easterly line of German place; thence running northerly along the easterly line of German place for 401.15 feet to the southerly line of Carr street; thence easterly along the southerly line of Carr street 234.57 feet to the westerly line of St. Ann's avenue; thence southerly along the westerly line of St. Ann's avenue 403 feet to the northerly line of Rae street; thence westerly" along the northerly line of Rae street 195.98 feet to the point of beginning.

JAMES OWENS, WILLIAM J. HYLAND, BENJAMIN J. BODINE, JOHN J. MURPHY, Committee on Parks.

Board Of Publ1c Improvements—C1ty Of New York, No. 21 Park Row, Borough Of Manhattan,
New York, April 25, 1901.

To the Honorable the Municipal Assembly of The City of New York:

Sirs—In pursuance of the provisions of section 436 of chapter 378, Laws of 1897, and by direction of the Board of Public Improvements, I herewith transmit to you, for your action thereon, a resolution adopted by the said Board, at a meeting held on the 24th day of April, 1901, approving of and favoring a change in the map or plan of The City of New York by laying out as a public park the land known as Bensonia Cemetery, in the Borough of The Bronx, City of New York.

The said resolution was adopted by the said Board of Public Improvements on the petition of property-owners and on the recommendation of the Local Board of the Borough of The Bronx and on the report of the Chief Topographical Engineer of this Board.

No objections were offered at a public hearing in the matter given by the Board.

Should the resolution receive your approval, I enclose a form of ordinance approved by this Board for your adoption. Very respectfully,

JOHN H. MOONEY, Secretary.

The following Resolutions were adopted by the Board of Public Improvements on the 74th

day of April, 1901.

Whereas, At a meeting of this Board held on the 3d day of April, 1901, resolutions were adopted proposing to alter the map or plan of The City of New York by laying out as a public park the land known as Bensonia Cemetery, in the Borough of The Bronx, City of New York, and for a meeting of this Board to be held in the office of this Board on the 24th day of April, 1901, at 2 o'clock P.m., at which meeting such proposed laying out would be considered by this Board, and for a notice to all persons affected thereby of the aforesaid time and place at which such proposed laying out would be considered, to be published in the City Record for at least ten days continuously, exclusive of Sundays and legal holidays, prior to the 24th day of April, 1901 ; and

Whereas, It appears from the affidavit of the Supervisor of the City Record that the aforesaid resolutions and notice have been published in the City Record for ten days continuously, Sundays and legal holidays excepted, prior to the 24th day of April, 1901 ; and

Whereas, At the aforesaid time and place a public hearing was given to all persons affected by such proposed laying out who have appeared, and such proposed laying out was duly considered by this Board; now therefore be it

Resolved, That the Board of Public Improvements of The City of New York, in pursuance of the provisions of section 436 of chapter 378, Laws of 1897, deeming it for the public interest to alter the map or plan of The City of New York by laying out as a public park the land known as Bensonia Cemetery, in the Borough of The Bronx, City of New York, does hereby favor and approve of the same so as to lay out as a public park the aforesaid land as follows:

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Resolved, That the foregoing resolution, approving of the above-named proposed change in the map or plan of The City of New York by laying out Bensonia Cemetery as a park, adopted by this Board, together with a statement of its reasons therefor, be transmitted to the Municipal Assembly for its action thereon.

[seal.] JOHN H. MOONEY, Secretary.

Which was referred to the Committee on Parks.