

# Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved People's Burial Ground



# Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved People's Burial Ground

## LOCATION

Borough of the Bronx  
Oak Point Avenue, Longfellow Avenue,  
Hunts Point Avenue, and Drake Park South

## LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

## SIGNIFICANCE

Containing two separate colonial-era cemeteries for the area's early settler families and for the people they enslaved, Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved People's Burial Ground provides a remarkable window into the underrecognized history of enslaved people in the Bronx and New York City.



**Hunts Point Enslaved People's Burial Ground, c. 1910**  
Museum of the City of New York

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# Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved People’s Burial Ground

Oak Point Avenue, Longfellow Avenue,  
Hunts Point Avenue, and Drake Park South  
The Bronx

## Designation List 535

LP-2674

**Built:** c. 1720-1865; c. 1910-1953

**Landmark Site:** Borough of the Bronx,  
Tax Map Block 2772, Lot 170

**Building Identification Number (BIN):** None

**Calendared:** August 15, 2023

**Public Hearing:** November 14, 2023

On November 14, 2023, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved People’s Burial Ground as a New York City Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Six people spoke in favor of the proposed designation, including representatives of the Bronx Borough President’s Office, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, Hunts Point Slave Burial Ground Project, Historic Districts Council, New York Landmarks Conservancy, and Loving the Bronx. There were no speakers in opposition to the proposed designation. The Commission also received 71 written submissions in favor of designation, including 38 sent by students of Public School 48. The Commission received no written submissions in opposition to the proposed designation.

## Summary

### Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved People’s Burial Ground

Located in the Hunts Point neighborhood of the Bronx, Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved People’s Burial Ground is a New York City Park that contains two colonial-era cemeteries within its bounds: the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery for those descended from, and associated with, these three early settler families; and an enslaved people’s cemetery, for those forced to labor for these families. These cemeteries faced each other across the old Hunts Point Road, which was demapped and buried during the building of Drake Park c. 1910. The survival of this once-typical arrangement—with the enslaved people’s burial ground close to, but separate from, that of their enslavers—in a public place is remarkable in New York City, providing an important window into an underrecognized history. This designation memorializes enslaved people who were central to the area’s early history, recognizes the site’s colonial-era history and establishment as a park in the early 20th century, and protects the historic physical features of both cemeteries, including burials and below-ground archaeological resources.

Prior to European contact, Hunts Point was the home of the Munsee-speaking Siwanoy people, who were displaced following the 1663 “sale” of the area to English settlers. Both New York City and Westchester County, which Hunts Point was then part of, were slavery strongholds, with Westchester containing several large agricultural plantations as well as dozens of smaller farms using enslaved labor. During the 1700s, the Hunt, Willett, and Leggett families came to dominate the area. By the 1720s, a

cemetery was established on Hunt family land on the north side of Hunts Point Road in which members of all three families would be buried. These families enslaved African people, and at least one of these families also enslaved people of Indigenous descent. Among the known enslavers buried in the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery are Cornelius and Elizabeth Willett, who enslaved 12 people at the time of Cornelius’ death in 1781, and Thomas Hunt, a Revolutionary War hero who enslaved ten people in 1790. Both were likely among the largest enslavers of the time in Westchester County. The cemetery’s most famous grave is that of poet and Hunt relative Joseph Rodman Drake who died in 1820. Drake Park was created specifically to preserve his grave and the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery from Hunts Point’s early-20th-century urban development; this cemetery remains the park’s dominant visual feature today.

It is likely that the enslaved people’s cemetery just to its south was also established by the early 1700s. Unlike the burials in the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery, those in the enslaved people’s cemetery are anonymous; no visible markers remain, and no records documenting their names or burials have been found. The visual absence of the enslaved people’s burial ground in the landscape of Drake Park results from the removal or burial of its markers, likely after the park’s opening. In 1913, the enslaved people’s cemetery was still said to contain “a good many irregular shaped headstones,” which apparently survived in place at least until 1920.

After 1920, published references to the enslaved people’s burial ground stopped appearing, and it was largely forgotten until new research in the early 21st century led to a state grant-funded professional archeological study that engaged students of nearby Public School 48 in its research. The study included a ground-penetrating radar survey that found four likely human burials in the section of the park identified as the enslaved people’s burial ground, south of a park pathway separating it

from the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery as the old Hunts Point Road once did. The study also identified the potential for archaeological resources associated with a c. 1864 wood-frame house adjacent to the eastern perimeter of the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery.

Drake Park's design and appearance have changed since its early years. The current system of pathways, including the path between the two cemeteries, is likely the result of a 1952-53 renovation. As the park has evolved over time, so has its meaning. Reflecting new research and community input, the park was renamed Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved African Burial Ground in 2021. The Landmarks Preservation Commission's name for the site builds upon additional research to be more inclusive and reflects the documented enslavement of Indigenous people by the Leggett family, and their likely burial here alongside people of African descent. Originally created to commemorate Drake and the area's colonial-era landowners, this site now recognizes enslaved people whose history in the area, and final resting place within the park, long went unrecognized, and remains a tangible reminder of the centrality of enslaved people to the early history of the Bronx and New York City.

## Description

Joseph Rodman Drake Park and  
Enslaved People's Burial Ground

### Site Description

The Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved People's Burial Ground encompasses a New York City Park of approximately two and a half acres in size bounded by Oak Point Avenue on the north, Drake Park South on the south, Longfellow Avenue on the west, and Hunts Point Avenue on the east. It opened in 1910 as Joseph Rodman Drake Park and was renamed Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved African Burial Ground in 2021. The park contains two colonial-era cemeteries: the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery, for those descended from, and associated with, these three early settler families; and the enslaved people's burial ground, for those enslaved by these families. Only the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery remains visible on the landscape.

The Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery is located near the center of the park. In the 18th and 19th centuries, this cemetery sat on the northern side of the old Hunts Point Road, which has since been demapped. The enslaved people's cemetery sat across from it, on the southern side of old Hunts Point Road, and now lies on the southern side of the southern park pathway that generally follows the path of the historic road.

Both cemeteries were historically surrounded by marshland, which was transformed into dry land using tons of fill in the early 20th century. Although the park opened in 1910, much of this infilling in the park and surrounding area occurred over a subsequent period of several years. As this was happening, the park's surrounding streets were also raised so that the park now seems to sit in a bowl, and the rise on which the Hunt-Willett-Leggett

cemetery was sited is less apparent. Although gravestones of the enslaved people's burial ground apparently remained in place until at least the 1910s, they seem to have been removed, relocated, or buried during this infill work.

The basic plan of the park is a trapezoid, wider at the south side, with a system of curving paved pathways surrounding the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery and extending outward to the corners of the park. The current arrangement of paths appears to be the product of a 1952-53 renovation of an earlier, more linear pathway plan. There are two east-west pathways—one north of the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery and one south of it—and three north-south pathways—one to the west of this cemetery and two to its east. Although this path arrangement is not considered significant, and the paths themselves are paved with non-historic concrete and asphalt, the presence of the southern east-west pathway in the general location of the old Hunts Point Road recalls the historically significant spatial relationship between the Hunt-Willett-Leggett and enslaved people's burial grounds and is significant in that respect. Four non-historic Parks Department signs stand on wood supports near the park's four corners. Although no benches remain in Drake Park, two non-historic concrete pads for benches remain in each of the following locations: on the west side of the western pathway, the west and east sides of the central north-south pathway, the east side of the eastern pathway, and the south side of the southern east-west pathway. Three non-historic concrete pads of indeterminate function are located between the central and eastern north-south pathways and near the southeast corner of the park. Mature trees grow throughout the park.

### Hunt-Willett-Leggett Cemetery

Located near the park's center surrounded by an iron fence and gate installed in 1962, the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery is the park's dominant visual

feature. It contains approximately 25 dressed-stone headstones, about half of which are marble and the other half brownstone. The earliest documented marker is from 1729, and the last known burial was in 1865. The most notable monument in this section is that of the poet Joseph Rodman Drake, after whom the park was named. The remaining base of Drake's monument, and the pedestal of the monument of his sister Caroline Tillou, are surrounded by an elliptical iron picket fence apparently installed between 1912 and 1915.

Clustered toward the southern end of this cemetery are approximately 15 roughly worked, mostly buried stones that may be early Leggett family headstones. As they resemble the headstones formerly standing in the enslaved people's burial ground, it is possible that some or all could instead be enslaved people's markers that were moved to this site, although the history of these stones has not been conclusively determined. Beneath a mature oak tree at the southeast corner of the cemetery is a granite marker placed by students of P.S. 48, likely during rededication ceremonies for the park in 1962.

Following the last documented burial in this cemetery in 1865, it fell into neglect. The condition of the monuments today reflects this as well as subsequent vandalism and repair efforts by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks Department) and others.<sup>1</sup> Vandalism apparently continued until the early 1960s, when a hedge and gate installed by the Parks Department surrounding the cemetery by the 1930s were replaced with the seven-foot-high iron picket fence standing today (the fence is not considered a contributing element). The cemetery entrance gate is on its northern side; a non-historic informational sign is attached to the north side of the fence, east of this gate. Many of the gravestone inscriptions are no longer legible, and many are damaged. Restoration efforts put into effect by the late 1940s are evident, including the enframing of damaged headstones with

concrete. Both the obelisk and inscribed pedestal of Joseph Rodman Drake's monument were removed at an unknown time, and a short, angled plinth with a commemorative plaque was installed on its base (the plaque has since been removed). The obelisk of his sister Caroline Tillou's monument has also been removed, although its pedestal remains in place. At the time of designation, the obelisks for Drake's and Tillou's monuments were being stored offsite by the Parks Department; Drake's pedestal appears permanently lost.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Enslaved People's Burial Ground**

The enslaved people's burial ground lies south of the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery, in a grassy area on the south side of the curving pathway near a mature willow tree. There is no above-ground evidence of its existence. The only known photograph of this cemetery is a circa-1910 image in the collections of the Museum of the City of New York showing approximately four or five roughly worked headstones and what appear to be two disused gateposts. It is believed that the infill work undertaken by the Parks Department starting in the 1910s to turn the park's marshland into dry land resulted in the removal, burial, or possible destruction of these stones. According to a 2016 archaeological study using ground-penetrating radar, four burials in a north-south orientation likely remain approximately four to six feet below the surface in the enslaved people's burial ground. The ground-penetrating radar also identified possible buried headstones and/or footstones.

### **Archeological Sensitivity**

Three areas of archeological sensitivity have been identified in the park, associated with the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery, the enslaved people's burial ground, and a 19<sup>th</sup>-century frame cottage that stood just east of the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery until at least the 1930s. These areas are shown on the map at the end of the report.

## History and Significance

Joseph Rodman Drake Park and  
Enslaved People's Burial Ground

### Indigenous History of the Area<sup>3</sup>

Before Europeans settled Hunts Point in the 1600s, it was the home of the Munsee-speaking Siwanoy people, who called the area *Quinnahung*, meaning “long, high place.” The Siwanoy were part of the Wappinger confederacy, which extended northward along the east side of the Hudson River to present-day Dutchess County. The Siwanoy primarily lived along the Long Island Sound shoreline between the Harlem River and Norwalk River in Connecticut; they shared Hunts Point with a smaller Wappinger tribe, the Weckquaesgeek, whose main territory was located along the Hudson River in what is now Westchester County. At the time, Hunts Point's geography was drastically different, consisting mostly of brackish inlets, salt meadows, tidal marshes, and higher ground used as tobacco and corn fields. Two small peninsulas west of the Bronx River surrounded a small bay that would later be filled in as Hunts Point urbanized in the early 20th century.

*Quinnahung* offered proximity of woodlands to fresh and saltwater fisheries and an abundant supply of oysters and other shellfish. Several Indigenous sites have been identified in the area, which was the terminus of a major trail running along the west bank of *Aquehung* (the Bronx River) and through the Kingsbridge Heights area, where it met another trail linking it with the main Weckquaesgeek territory to the north. Archeological evidence of the presence of Indigenous people in the area includes six projectile points and a celt, or stone tool, found near the former site of a freshwater spring just west of Drake Park; shell pits found about one

block north of the park, near the intersection of Hunts Point and Randall Avenues; and voluminous shell deposits along Hunts Point's southeastern shoreline, where the Hunt family would later build a large house called the Grange.

### European Settlement of Hunts Point<sup>4</sup>

In 1641, Jonas Bronck, a Scandinavian immigrant to the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, became the first recorded European settler of the present-day Bronx when he “purchased” a 500-acre tract from local Indigenous people. While Europeans viewed contracts such as this as purchase agreements, scholars have noted that at this time, Indigenous Peoples did not perceive them the same way, understanding them more as temporary tenancies.<sup>5</sup> Bronck's settlement, which became known as Broncksland, extended eastward from the Harlem River to a stream called *Sacrahung* by Indigenous people and Bungay Creek by later English settlers. *Sacrahung* rose within marshland near present-day Crotona Park and flowed southward, roughly along the line of Intervale Avenue, into the East River near Port Morris. Bronck built a stone house near the Harlem River in what is now the Mott Haven neighborhood.

In 1663, the area east of Broncksland between *Sacrahung* and the Bronx River, including present-day Hunts Point and extending northward to *Sacrahung*'s headwaters, was “sold” by Indigenous people to John Richardson and Edward Jessup, who had come to the area from Connecticut. The deed was signed by eight Wappinger sachems including the powerful Weckquaesgeek leader Shonarocke. This started the removal of Indigenous people from the area as colonists began settling and farming the land.<sup>6</sup> In 1664, the English captured New Amsterdam and renamed it New York, and the following year Jessup was appointed a delegate to the Hempstead Convention, which was convened by the new governor, Richard Nicolls, “to settle good and known

laws” through an assembly of “the most sober, able and discrete persons” in the colony.<sup>7</sup>

In 1666, Nicolls granted Jessup and Richardson a patent for their land, establishing the Manor of West Farms in and around present-day Hunts Point. Soon afterward, Jessup died, and by 1668, his wife Elizabeth had remarried. In that year, she and her new husband sold to her son-in-law Thomas Hunt Jr. “all those hoeing lands and accommodations that were formerly Edward Jessup’s ... that [he] and John Richardson purchased together.”<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hunt Jr. (c. 1639-after 1719), after whom Hunts Point would be named, was the son of Thomas (before 1627-c. 1695) and Cicely (before 1627-1694) Hunt, who had emigrated to the New Haven Colony from England. Thomas came as an indentured servant, and Cicely as a teenager during the Puritan Great Migration of the early 1600s. By the 1660s, the two had settled on a large parcel called Grove Farm on Throckmorton’s (now Throgs) Neck.

Before Hunts Point took its present shape through extensive infilling, it consisted of two smaller peninsulas, or “necks,” with a bay between them. By 1695, the western peninsula, including the area later named Barretto Point opposite Rikers Island, was referred to as Long Neck, and the eastern peninsula adjoining the Bronx River was called Planting Neck. After initially building a house on Long Neck inland from the shoreline, Thomas Hunt Jr. constructed a large wooden house, called the Grange, at the southern tip of Planting Neck.<sup>9</sup> The Grange was accessed by a cartway, earlier an Indigenous trail, called Hunts Point Road, which linked the two necks, mostly traversing marshland and crossing the creek that separated them. Richardson’s house also sat along this road, near Hunt’s earlier house, on Long Neck. Between the two dwellings along Hunts Point Road, a family cemetery, and likely the enslaved people’s burial ground, were established by the early 1700s on Hunt

property within what is now Drake Park.

Following the deaths of Richardson and his wife Martha, their house passed to Gabriel Leggett (c. 1635-1700) and his wife Elizabeth (c. 1656-1724), the Richardsons’ daughter, in 1695. The Leggett and Hunt families began intertwining through marriage by around 1698.<sup>10</sup> During the 1700s, the Leggetts were joined on Long Neck by Cornelius Willett (1710-1781) and his wife Elizabeth (née Oakley, 1720-1792) whose ancestors had settled in Flushing during the 1600s, and by 1703 on Cornell’s Neck (now Clason Point) across the Bronx River from Planting Neck. A 1781 map shows Willett family members then residing on both Cornell’s Neck and at the tip of Long Neck, near present-day Barretto Point, and members of the Hunt and Leggett families spread across more than ten separate farms throughout West Farms and the Town of Westchester within southern Westchester County.<sup>11</sup>

Some members of the Hunt family were significant figures in colonial New York. Thomas Hunt Jr. was a delegate to the colony’s first General Assembly, in 1683, at which he voted for the Charter of Liberties and Privileges. This document, which briefly served as the colony’s legal framework, embraced principles later espoused by the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution, including the election of representatives; trial by a jury of one’s peers; and prohibitions against taxation without representation, the quartering of troops in private homes, and the seizure of property without due process. During the Revolutionary War, his great-grandson Thomas Hunt was active “in all matters pertaining to the separation of the colony from the mother country.”<sup>12</sup> He was one of three Town of Westchester residents on the countywide committee that selected delegates for the First Continental Congress held in Philadelphia in September of 1774. A confidant of George Washington, Hunt helped organize the West Farms

and Fordham Company of Minutemen and fled with his family to Dutchess County after the Grange was bombarded by British troops. Hunt returned to the Grange after the war to serve as Westchester Town Supervisor and was a leader of St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Westchester.<sup>13</sup> Both Hunts, as well as other members of their family, and of the Leggett and Willett families, were enslavers.

### **Slavery in New York<sup>14</sup>**

Slavery existed for more than 200 years in New York and was central to its history. It began in 1625 when the Dutch West India Company brought 11 enslaved men to the settlement of New Amsterdam at the southern tip of Manhattan within New Netherland colony. Most of these men were from Angola on the West African coast, but others, such as Simon Congo and Pieter San Tomé, likely came from the places of their surnames, and another man, Jan Fort Orange, was probably brought from the Dutch colony of that name in Brazil. Enslaved people performed crucial work including clearing land and building the settlement’s earliest houses as well as canals, mills, roads, warehouses, and the settlement’s citadel, Fort Amsterdam. They labored alongside white artisans; cooked, cleaned, spun, sewed, and cared for settlers’ children; and took up arms against Indigenous people for colonial authorities. Without their agricultural labor, the settlement would have faced starvation. As historian Christopher Moore explained in 2005, “It was doubtful the colony would have survived without its slaves, for they provided the labor that ultimately transformed the colony from a shaky commercial outpost to a permanent settlement. Slaves stood at the core of New Netherland’s labor force.”<sup>15</sup>

For most of New Amsterdam’s history, enslaved people were the property of the Dutch West India Company. Despite this, they enjoyed some rights, including those of owning property, testifying in court, and attending the Dutch Reformed Church,

which sanctified their marriages and baptized their children. In 1644, a group of enslaved soldiers who had petitioned for emancipation were granted “half-freedom” for themselves and their wives—but not their children—and farms in the vicinity of present-day Greenwich Village. Their farms, which spread over 130 acres on the outskirts of New Amsterdam, were intended by colonial authorities to provide a buffer between the expanding settlement and Indigenous people, who had been warring with the colony following attacks by the Dutch. By the 1650s, Black farmsteads were central to the settlement’s growing free Black community. They were crucial in aiding freedom-seekers, who sometimes left New Amsterdam entirely to join nearby Indigenous communities. During this decade, slavery expanded dramatically after colony director Pieter Stuyvesant, facing continuing difficulties in attracting and retaining European settlers, opened the colony’s slave trade to private merchants. The first private vessel brought enslaved people to New Amsterdam in 1655; many of its captives would be put to work clearing land for Manhattan’s second Dutch settlement, New Haarlem, in 1658.

When the British seized New Netherland from the Dutch in 1664, New York City had approximately 1,900 people, including 300 enslaved people and 75 free Black residents. New York went on to become a center of the colonies’ slave trade with the encouragement of the Duke of York—after whom the colony was named—as overseer of the Royal African Company, which controlled English trade, including that of enslaved people, in West Africa. More enslaved people were subsequently sent to New York from Ghana, the company’s African trade center. Only about half survived the voyage, packed shoulder to shoulder in ship holds, across the Atlantic’s Middle Passage. Despite the increase in enslaved people from Ghana, most enslaved people brought to New York during the early 18th century came not from Africa but from Caribbean islands

with long-standing trade ties to the City, including the “sugar islands” of Jamaica, Antigua, and Barbados. Enslaved people were as diverse as the city’s European immigrants, coming, in Moore’s words, from “all corners of the Atlantic world,” places with an extensive range of language, cultural, and religious traditions. In 1711, the City Council established a market for trading enslaved people at the foot of Wall Street.

Starting in 1702, colonial authorities enacted a series of “slave codes” primarily aimed at restricting the movement and gathering of enslaved people and preventing a revolt. After such an uprising happened in 1712—in which dozens of enslaved men and women set fires and killed nine white colonists—these laws were tightened further. They made it illegal for enslaved people to travel at night, or gather in numbers of greater than three, without express permission; granted enslavers broad latitude over physical punishment; imposed high fees on those seeking to free their enslaved people; and declared that “No Negro, Indian, or Mulatto hereafter made free shall enjoy, hold, or possess any houses, land, tenements, or hereditaments in the colony.”<sup>16</sup> By the 1740s, about 20% of the city’s residents were enslaved people, living in about half of the city’s households. New York’s enslaved population was the largest north of Virginia, and New York City was second only to Charleston, South Carolina in its concentration of enslaved people in an urban environment. Few enslavers were concerned with the humanity of the people they enslaved, freely selling children away from parents and spouses away from each other when it suited their economic interests or labor needs. They also used the prospect of retribution against loved ones, either through punishment or sale, as a deterrence against seeking freedom.

Despite its incompatibility with the principle that “All men are created equal,” slavery remained legal in New York State for more than five decades

following the Declaration of Independence. During the Revolutionary War, approximately 1,000 enslaved people in New York State were emancipated after the British offered freedom to “any Negroes that deserted the rebel stance,” and built new lives in England, Sierra Leone, and Nova Scotia.<sup>17</sup> Although John Jay—who later founded the New York Manumission Society, though himself an enslaver—proposed that New York’s new constitution provide for abolition in 1777, this was not done and the city’s enslaved population increased after the war. New York would not take its first concrete steps toward abolition until 1799, when a new state law declared that all children born after July 4 of that year would be free when male children turned 28, and female children 25; those already enslaved would remain so. In 1817, the state passed a second law declaring all enslaved people held in bondage by New York State residents, including those not covered by the previous act, free on July 4, 1827.<sup>18</sup>

### **Rural Slavery in Westchester County<sup>19</sup>**

As in New York City, slavery was widespread in both the Town and County of Westchester, within which Hunts Point was located.<sup>20</sup> In 1687, the Town of Westchester passed an ordinance targeting, in part, freedom-seekers and those who sheltered them, requiring residents to notify town officials of “strangers” residing with them, including “servants runing [sic] from their masters.”<sup>21</sup> At the end of the 17th century, about 11% of Westchester County householders enslaved people. Slavery in rural Westchester differed in significant ways from that of New York City. Some enslaved people labored on expansive plantations engaged in large-scale agricultural production for sale and international export, mostly to the Caribbean.<sup>22</sup> Lewis Morris, whose Morrisania estate encompassed the former Broncksland west of Hunts Point, enslaved 60 people in 1691, and Frederick Van Cortlandt, whose

mansion within present-day Van Cortlandt Park is a designated New York City Landmark, listed 11 or 12 enslaved people in his 1749 will. Van Cortlandt's will documents the continuing enslavement of Indigenous people long after its official outlawing by British authorities, describing one enslaved man, Caesar, as Indigenous. Advertisements seeking the capture and return of freedom-seekers around New York City confirmed the enslavement of Indigenous people, and those of mixed Indigenous and African descent, well into the 1700s.

In rare instances, such as on Adolph Philipse's large agricultural and milling complex in present-day Sleepy Hollow, where at least 15 men and women, and eight children, were enslaved in 1749, enslaved people lived in separate quarters near the main house.<sup>23</sup> But on the overwhelming majority of Westchester farms, as in New York City, enslaved people slept in attics or basements, under the same roofs as their enslavers. Most rural enslavement in Westchester County took place on small farms primarily engaged in subsistence farming and the sale of excess produce in local markets. Unlike the plantation slavery of the South involving large teams of people growing and harvesting a single product, enslaved people in Westchester generally carried out a diverse range of tasks typical of those needed on a small farm. In the 1755 provincial *Census of Slaves*, few Town of Westchester households had more than four enslaved adults, with the majority, as in New York City, having one or two.<sup>24</sup> The Census counted 55 enslaved men and 37 enslaved women in the town. These numbers underscore the relative isolation of rural enslaved people, as well as a gender ratio weighted heavily toward men; girls and women were frequently sold to enslavers in the city, where their domestic skills were more valued.

Enslaved people in Westchester County and other rural areas in and around New York City worked constantly, constructing and repairing houses, barns, churches, and fences; clearing fields;

planting and tending gardens and orchards; growing and harvesting field crops; haying and winnowing grain; raising, butchering, salting, and barreling livestock; carting manure; milking cows and collecting eggs; breaking, training, and caring for horses and oxen; felling acres of trees and hauling and splitting firewood; and picking wild fruit. Enslaved men sometimes did the work of carpenters, blacksmiths, or boatmen, or accompanied their enslavers on hunting and fishing expeditions. Enslaved women cooked, spun, sewed, darned, knitted, and kept house; carried water and maintained the fire; and collected, hauled, and churned milk into butter. On many farms, enslaved women assisted in producing "all of the household's food, clothing, and such necessities as soap and candles from scratch," which included baking bread, preserving fruits and vegetables, picking and carding wool, spinning wool into yarn, and making curtains, bed linens, and clothing.<sup>25</sup> They also cared for their enslavers' children, even as their own children were often sold off to other enslavers after early childhood.

### **Enslavement by the Hunt, Leggett, and Willett Families<sup>26</sup>**

From the 1600s to the 1800s, people of African and Indigenous origin were enslaved by members of the Hunt, Leggett, and Willett families, with some rivaling large landowners like Frederick Van Cortlandt in the numbers of people they enslaved. The 1694 will of Thomas Hunt of Grove Farm mentioned "my Negro man Mingo," who was to be set free seven years after Hunt's death, as well as "the Negro child Sarah which was born in my house," whom he bequeathed to his son Joseph and was to be freed upon reaching the age of 25.<sup>27</sup> In 1700, his son Thomas, after whom Hunts Point was named, sold to his daughter Abigail an enslaved African woman named Hannah on the condition that Abigail permit her "to wait upon me and my wife Elizabeth ... so long as either of us liveth if so that

one or either of us do require it.”<sup>28</sup> In 1755, the Revolutionary patriot Thomas Hunt (1727-1808) enslaved five people—named Abram, Titus, Tobe, Lillie, and Gin—and by 1790, ten people whose names were not recorded.<sup>29</sup> In his will, Hunt directed his executor “to sell all my stock on the farm of every kind, also my Negroes” with the proceeds to be divided among his four daughters.<sup>30</sup> His son Richard, who inherited his house and farm, enslaved six people in 1810. Ten years later, with abolition on the horizon, Richard’s household included one enslaved woman, as well as three free Black children and two free Black adults.<sup>31</sup> Richard and his father, as well as Thomas’ two wives Millicent and Hannah, and Richard’s wife Elizabeth, are all buried in the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery within Drake Park.<sup>32</sup>

The will of Gabriel Leggett, who acquired his extensive Hunts Point property through marriage to John Richardson’s daughter Elizabeth, was probated following his death in 1700. He left his three houses to his eldest sons John, Thomas, and William, and bequeathed to his daughter Margaret an enslaved boy.<sup>33</sup> Five years later, Elizabeth gave her daughter Mary two enslaved children, Abram and Jenny, born of “Hannah my Negro woman” and “Robin my Indian slave.”<sup>34</sup> Gabriel and Elizabeth’s grandson John (1700-1777)—the son of John Leggett and Cecily Hunt, and husband of Anna Hunt—enslaved at least ten people who would be listed in his will alongside farm and household property. They included three men, Dick, Sharp, and Tite; three women, Bett, Lill, and Bell; and four boys, Ben, Harry, Lew, and Jo. All of the men were bequeathed to his sons, and two of the three women to his daughters, likely for domestic work.<sup>35</sup> In 1744, John’s youngest brother Gabriel placed an advertisement in the *New-York Gazette* for the capture and return of James, a “servant man of the darkest hue, being half Indian, half Negro ... about 28 years of age ... has somewhat of a hitch in his walking ... had on a brown jacket and breeches, a

tow-cloth shirt, but poor shoes, and an old hat; his hair is cut off.”<sup>36</sup> In 1780, Gabriel and Elizabeth’s great-grandson John bequeathed to his son Ebenezer an enslaved boy named Jim.<sup>37</sup> Ebenezer (1763-1833) and his wife Mary (1769-1851), who enslaved six people in 1790, and one in 1810, are both buried in the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery.<sup>38</sup>

Likely among the largest enslavers in Westchester County, Cornelius (1706-1781) and his wife Elizabeth Willett (1720-1792) are also both buried in this cemetery. Cornelius’ will left to Elizabeth an enslaved woman, Caroline, as well as three men named Robert, Israel, and Andrew, and a boy named Harry, who were to be allowed “to choose their own masters at whatever time they are disposed of.” Another enslaved man, Phillip, as well as three boys named Joseph, Robert, and Henry, and three girls named Nanny, Nally, and Hannah, were left to various children and grandchildren.<sup>39</sup> The presence of a man and a boy with the same name, Robert, may indicate that they were father and son, as it was more common for enslaved family members to live together on rural estates than in the urban context of Lower Manhattan.<sup>40</sup> These families were often split up through the death of their enslaver. In 1790, Elizabeth’s household included six enslaved people.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Hunt-Willett-Leggett Cemetery<sup>42</sup>**

Many New York families maintained private burial grounds on their properties in the 18th and 19th centuries. By the 1720s, the Hunts established a family cemetery on the north side of old Hunts Point Road (which has since been buried and demapped) linking Long Neck, the Leggetts’ primary home, with Planting Neck, where the Hunt residence, the Grange, was located. The Hunt cemetery was situated on the north side of this road, on high ground, mostly surrounded by marshland of the kind that characterized much of the area before Hunts Point, and Drake Park, were extensively infilled in

the early 20th century. Although established on Hunt land, the cemetery became identified with the three major families whose members were interred there. By the early 20th century, a flat stone inscribed “Private cemetery for the families of Thomas Hunt, Cornelius Willett, and John Leggett” (marker 4.11 on the gravestone map following this essay) was installed just inside of what was then the main gateway on the cemetery’s south side.<sup>43</sup>

Many headstones have likely been lost over time. Today, the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery contains approximately 25 dressed-stone grave markers—about half of which are marble and the other half brownstone—including the cemetery’s earliest-identified monument (marker 5.5) marking the burial site of Elizabeth Gardner Hunt (d. 1729). She was the wife of Capt. Thomas Hunt (1666-1739)—the son of Thomas Hunt Jr. and Elizabeth Jessup—whose simple gravestone nearby (marker 5.7) is barely legible. Perhaps the cemetery’s most artistic headstone (marker 5.10) is that of her daughter-in-law Christian (1708-1749), with its sinuous lettering and carved cherub’s head typical of a New England churchyard. Elizabeth Gardner Hunt was the grandmother of Thomas Hunt the Revolutionary War hero and enslaver, whose brownstone monument (marker 5.4), though partially spalled, reads:

He possessed the Cardinal  
Virtues in an eminent degree.  
He was temperate, brave, patient,  
and just.  
The solid rock shall sink be-  
neath the iron hand of time  
but virtue dwells  
with immortality.

Three of the daughters of Thomas and his first wife Millicent—Sarah (1761-1831), Margaret (1770-1850), and Elizabeth or Eliza (1774-1864)—are

buried together near a marble shaft (marker 4.8) with their names. Eliza’s burial, one of the cemetery’s last, occurred six years after she sold 69 acres of Hunt land surrounding the cemetery. The grave of Thomas’ second wife Hannah (1740-1812) is marked with an eared brownstone monument (marker 5.2), intricately inscribed with her name, birth date, and age, and crowned by a rosette. Other notable monuments include a marble shaft (marker 2.2) marking the graves of enslavers Ebenezer and Mary Leggett, and of their children Cornelia, Anna (“Nancy”), and Robert; and the gravestones of enslavers Cornelius and Elizabeth Willett (markers 4.9 and 4.10). Both of the Willetts’ markers are damaged, although Cornelius’, now mostly buried, retains some of its inscription.

The most famous grave in the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery is that of poet Joseph Rodman Drake, after whom Drake Park was named. Born in New York City in 1795, he was related to the Hunts through his mother, Hannah Lawrence Drake. After Joseph’s father died, Hannah remarried and moved with her three daughters to New Orleans. Young Joseph subsequently spent much of his time with Hunt relatives at the Grange on Planting Neck. While Drake was in medical school in the 1810s, he met the poet Fitz-Greene Halleck, who soon became his closest friend. The two would collaborate on “The Croaker Papers,” a series of satirical poems published in the *Evening Post* in 1819. Drake died the following year of tuberculosis, survived by his wife Sarah (née Eckford) and daughter Janet. Halleck composed Drake’s epitaph: “Green be the turf above thee/Friend of my better days/None knew thee but to love thee/Nor named thee but to praise.”<sup>44</sup>

Although Drake had instructed that his poems be burned upon his death, Janet collected and published them in 1835 as *The Culprit Fay and Other Poems*, which included the title work as well as two other favorites, “The American Flag” and “Bronx.” The following year, Edgar Allen Poe

observed that “at this particular moment, there are no American poems held in so high estimation by our countrymen as the poems of Drake, and of Halleck.”<sup>45</sup> Drake’s work would be widely admired into the 20th century. “The Culprit Fay” inspired a series of panels by Albert Pinkham Ryder, executed c. 1882-86 and now in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art; “The American Flag,” memorized by generations of schoolchildren, was the basis for an 1893 cantata by Antonin Dvorak. Drake’s burial in the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery reflected his wish to spend eternity by his beloved Bronx River, the subject of his 1818 poem “Bronx,” which ends:

Yet I will look upon thy face again,  
My own romantic Bronx, and it will be  
A face more pleasant than the face of men.  
Thy waves are old companions, I shall see  
A well-remembered form in each old tree,  
And hear a voice long loved in wild minstrelsy.

Drake’s gravesite (marker 6.5), formerly crowned by an inscribed pedestal and obelisk, is next to that of his sister Caroline Tillou (d. 1825), within an elliptical iron fence installed between 1912 and 1915.<sup>46</sup>

Clustered toward the southern end of the cemetery, east of Drake’s gravesite, are about 15 roughly worked, mostly buried stones that may be grave markers for unidentified burials. They may be early Leggett family gravestones, described in 1913 by Rev. Theodore Leggett as “rough slabs” which he “first ... thought ... were without inscription of any kind, but after several visits ... found that sunken beneath the surface of the ground were initials rudely carved.”<sup>47</sup> These stones also resemble contemporaneous descriptions of the roughly worked grave markers of the Hunts Point enslaved people’s burial ground, which were apparently removed from their original location during or soon after the

construction of Drake Park. While it is possible that the enslaved people’s headstones were buried or discarded, it is also possible that they were relocated to this location in the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery, along with the burials beneath; and that at least some of these stones, instead of being Leggett family markers, could be from the enslaved people’s burial ground. Additional research on this issue is needed.

### **The Hunts Point Enslaved People’s Burial Ground<sup>48</sup>**

Drake Park is rare in New York City in that it contains two surviving colonial-era cemeteries—one with burials of European-descended settler families, and the other with burials of people they enslaved. Likely around the same time that the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery saw its first interments in the early 1700s, a separate burial ground for enslaved people who labored for these families was established about 25 feet to its south, on the south side of old Hunts Point Road. Although a ground penetrating radar study suggests that some burials remain today in this burial ground, it is invisible on the landscape; no markers remain to memorialize the enslaved people buried here, unlike the stately monuments of the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery. This discrepancy in the treatment of the two burial grounds demonstrates the erasure of enslaved people from the city’s history and the elevation of their enslavers in the public realm.

Separate cemeteries established by colonists for the burial of those they enslaved were common in New York, where free and enslaved Black people were generally banned from church cemeteries including that of Trinity Church, which resolved in 1697 that “no Negro’s be buried” within its “bounds and Limits.”<sup>49</sup> Such burial grounds were especially prevalent in rural areas, where they often existed near, or within a reserved section of, the enslaving family’s plot. In 1920, the avocational archeologist William L. Calver wrote:

It was a custom, more forcible than law—though laws there were, too—that the servant could not be consigned to consecrated ground. For further proof of this one need only stroll out the Hunt’s Point Road to where that thoroughfare first reaches the Sound, and there where rest other ancient lords and masters of the soil in the ‘Hunt and Leggett burial ground’ may be seen the usual adjunct—a slave plot—just across the roadway.

Calver went on to note the “irony” of excluding and segregating Black people from the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery, as it contained the final resting place of “Joseph Rodman Drake, one of freedom’s best friends.”<sup>50</sup>

The only known photograph of the enslaved people’s burial ground is a circa-1910 image in the collections of the Museum of the City of New York labeled “Slave burying ground/Hunts Point Road” (page 3 of this report), showing a small group of roughly worked gravestones standing behind what appear to be two disused gateposts.<sup>51</sup> Its existence and survival to, and beyond, Drake Park’s 1910 opening are supported by several seemingly firsthand descriptions. These include a 1913 account by Theodore Leggett of “the burying place of the slaves of the Leggett family and other families, containing a good many irregular shaped headstones”; a description, also of that year, by historian Harry T. Cook of “a small enclosure in which the slaves of early residents were buried” existing “directly opposite the Hunt burying ground”; and Calver’s previously quoted description in 1920.<sup>52</sup> Following these accounts, all visual evidence of the enslaved people’s burial ground was erased from the landscape. Calver’s was the last-known published reference to the enslaved people’s burial ground until its rediscovery in the 21st century.

One of the greatest challenges in researching enslaved individuals is the lack of documentation of their lives and deaths, especially compared with their enslavers’. Most surviving information about enslaved people comes not from their own accounts but from those of their white contemporaries and from evidence pieced together from enslavers’ wills, property inventories, bills of sale, and advertisements for the capture of freedom-seekers.<sup>53</sup> Enslaved people’s remains and artifacts from their graves, such as those exhumed from Manhattan’s African Burial Ground National Monument, have provided valuable insight into free and enslaved people’s geographic origins, the hardships they labored under, and the endurance of their cultural and religious traditions. No solid information has been found regarding who specifically was interred in the Hunts Point enslaved people’s burial ground. Although it seems likely that at least some of the enslaved African and Indigenous people named in wills and other documents of the Hunt, Willett, and Leggett families were buried here, we will probably never know for certain. It is also possible that free Black people who remained with these families following their individual manumissions or after the 1827 statewide emancipation, were also buried here.<sup>54</sup>

The decline of enslaved people’s burial grounds like this one coincided not only with the end of slavery and decline of large rural estates around New York City but with the growth, starting in the late 1700s, of churches and other institutions founded by free Black New Yorkers that provided burial places comparable to those for white residents.

### **The Creation of Joseph Rodman Drake Park<sup>55</sup>**

Although it is unclear how long the Hunts Point enslaved people’s burial ground remained active, the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery continued to have burials into the mid-19th century. In 1858, Eliza Hunt sold 69 acres surrounding the cemetery to Paul

N. Spofford while retaining ownership of the cemetery itself, where she would be buried next to her sisters in 1864.<sup>56</sup> The last documented burial in the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery occurred the following year.<sup>57</sup>

Long before that time, fans of Joseph Rodman Drake had begun seeking out his grave in remote Hunts Point. Just two years after *The Culprit Fay and Other Poems* was published, a correspondent for the *New-York Mirror* wrote, in 1837, of reaching on foot the “eminence” on which the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery sat—with its commanding views of the East River, Throgs Neck, and “the green hills of Long Island”—and of its pastoral setting:

It is a grassy knoll, unenclosed beside the road, rising from a smooth meadow; around and upon it were a few scattered trees, and ranged across it some half-sunken, moss-covered tomb-stones, marking the resting-place of the fathers of the hamlet.... It is a quiet spot, far from the bustling world; a place a poet would love to muse upon, and where he would choose to lie ... far from the city’s noisy strife.<sup>58</sup>

Following Eliza Hunt’s death, the cemetery became increasingly neglected. In 1881, a *New York World* reporter found the cemetery surrounded by “a dilapidated picket fence ... on three sides, while the fourth opens into a poultry yard. No signs of care are visible. Some of the tombstones are broken, and nearly all are covered with moss and hidden in the underbrush.”<sup>59</sup> By this time, Drake’s gravesite on the highest point of the knoll was enclosed with an iron fence; by 1891, his monument lay heavily damaged. In that year, a local literary group, the Brownson Literary Union, arranged for the monument to be transported to a Manhattan marble yard where it was repaired, re-lettered, and polished before being

reinstalled that July. Within the monument’s pedestal, the Union placed a lead box containing newspaper articles related to Drake’s gravesite as well as documents about the organization and a description of the repair work.<sup>60</sup>

In 1874, the town of West Farms—which included Hunts Point—and the adjacent southern Westchester County towns of Morrisania and Kingsbridge were annexed by New York City.<sup>61</sup> By 1887, a street grid was proposed for the area, which included five streets named for poets—Bryant, Longfellow, Whittier, Drake, and Halleck—running roughly north-south in the vicinity of the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery.<sup>62</sup> The central street, named for John Greenleaf Whittier, was planned to run directly through the eastern half of the cemetery between Drake’s grave and a small wooden house, apparently built by Paul Spofford by 1868, then existing just to the cemetery’s east.

Following the sale of more than 300 acres in Hunts and Barretto Points to the East Bay Land and Improvement Company in 1890, development seemed headed toward this still-rural corner of the Bronx, and concern among civic leaders and early preservation advocates over the future of Drake’s gravesite intensified. In September of 1903, a plan was announced to disinter Drake’s remains and bury them next to Fitz-Greene Halleck’s in Guilford, Connecticut. This would be carried out by Halleck’s friend and editor James Grant Wilson, who claimed that Halleck had once told him that this would be his wish “should anything happen to the grave of his friend Drake.”<sup>63</sup> The *New York Times* responded with outrage, proposing a park to protect Drake’s gravesite and arguing that “it would be more reasonable to bring Halleck to lie beside Drake in the Borough of the Bronx.... As to the removal of Drake’s body and monument—that is out of the question.”<sup>64</sup>

One month later, in October of 1903, the Local Board of Morrisania, and Bronx Borough

President Louis Haffen, recommended the creation of a small park 200 feet square on the site.<sup>65</sup> This proposal would have allowed for the construction of Whittier Street as previously planned, just barely preserving Drake’s gravesite to its west but destroying the eastern portion of the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery. By this time, it had already been decided that the old Hunts Point Road adjoining the cemetery on the south, and separating it from the enslaved people’s burial ground, would be demapped and replaced with a new Hunts Point Road (now Avenue) running diagonally east of the cemetery.

In September of 1904, the prominent Bronx businessman, real estate broker, politician, and West Farms native James L. Wells appeared before the New York City Board of Estimate on behalf of several groups, including the local business organization the North Side Board of Trade, the New-York Historical Society, the Westchester Historical Society, and the Society for the Preservation of Historical Places and Objects. Wells argued that such a small park would fail to adequately protect Drake’s grave, which lay so close to the proposed Whittier Street that it could be undermined by the street’s construction. Just as important to Wells was the need to preserve the rest of the cemetery, with its graves of Revolutionary War veterans and others significant in the area’s early history. “The mutilation of any part of this historic cemetery,” he said, “would be vandalism of the worst kind and a lasting disgrace to the City of New York.”<sup>66</sup> While the park as proposed at that time would not have protected most of the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery, it would have contained the enslaved people’s burial ground then apparently still visible on the landscape south of Drake’s grave. “It must have been an oversight,” Wells bristled, “to designate as a public place or park the land on the southerly side of the old Hunts Point Road, where rest ... the slaves of the colonists, while no provision was made to preserve the graves of the noble patriots

who did so much to make freedom for all the fundamental principle of our Republic.”<sup>67</sup>

Wells’ solution was to expand the park, keeping its northern and western boundaries as Eastern Boulevard (now Oak Point Avenue) and Longfellow Street, but extending them eastward, past the new Hunts Point Avenue to Halleck Street, and southward to East Bay Avenue. Following a few years of back-and-forth between the city and advocates of this larger park, the Board of Estimate settled on a compromise scheme with the same northern and western boundaries, but with the eastern boundary as the new diagonally running Hunts Point Avenue, and the southern boundary as a new street—now Drake Park South—located 200 feet north of East Bay Avenue.<sup>68</sup> By this time, Hunts Point was rapidly urbanizing. As one observer noted in 1907:

Four or five years ago one could repair to this place and be as far removed from the noise of the city as though a hundred miles away.... Now all is changed. The ... Subway on Westchester Avenue has brought many people into this section, and the value of land has greatly increased. Many of the large trees have been cut down; the old mansions are being wrecked; modern houses are in the process of erection, and the fields are being cut up into building lots. There is now a continuous blowing of whistles and chugging of steam drills.<sup>69</sup>

The City acquired the land for the 2½-acre park by condemnation in 1909, and it was dedicated to Drake on Memorial Day of 1910.<sup>70</sup> As the dedication approached, the *New York Times* reported that Drake’s “neglected” grave was “being restored to a semblance of neatness.” Bronx Park Commissioner T. J. Higgins stated that he was “having the paths repaired, a number of shrubs and trees planted, and brambles cut out, and all of the old tombstones ...

straightened ... many which have been prone on the ground for a quarter century or more have been put in place.”<sup>71</sup> Drake’s monument itself was “renewed” leading up to the dedication, which included an address by Borough President Cyrus Miller as well as recitations of Drake’s poems by local schoolchildren, who laid wreaths upon his grave.

## The Development and Evolution of Drake Park<sup>72</sup>

In 1911, the Parks Department declared that “Joseph Rodman Drake Park, long an unsightly and neglected spot, has been restored to decency and maintained in a manner fitting the final resting place of the young American poet.”<sup>73</sup> After the City concluded, in 1915, that the park had never been officially named, a rededication ceremony was held in which a flagpole and bronze plaque (both since removed) were installed at Drake’s grave. On May 29, the day of the rededication, a plaque inscribed with the final stanza of his poem “Bronx” was installed by the Bronx River in the New York Botanical Garden, where it remains today.<sup>74</sup> By that time, the elliptical iron fence still surrounding Drake’s gravesite appears to have been installed.<sup>75</sup>

When Drake Park opened, the site’s topography was mostly as it had been since the 1700s, with the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery sitting atop a knoll with wide-ranging views, surrounded by low-lying marshland. Much of the City’s work in turning the property into a park would involve transforming the marshes into dry land using tons of fill, much of it city refuse. This work apparently began by around 1912, when a photograph was taken showing mounds of fill piled near the park’s northern border.<sup>76</sup> It continued in 1916, when the Parks Department reported that “one thousand cubic yards of fill were received and put in [the] swamp hole” at the site.<sup>77</sup> Since infilling likely caused the visual erasure of the enslaved people’s burial ground from the landscape, at least some of it

may have occurred after 1920, when William L. Calver’s account of the “slave plot” on the site was published. As this work occurred, similar infilling was taking place throughout the neighborhood, including the raising of streets surrounding the park so that Drake Park now seems to sit in a bowl, with its bordering streets rising above it.<sup>78</sup>

In 1924, Drake Park apparently remained largely undeveloped, with Drake Park South (then still unnamed) yet to be cut through.<sup>79</sup> By 1934, the old Hunts Point Road was removed and the park achieved a more formal appearance, with a hedge surrounding the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery and straight cinder paths bringing pedestrians from the park’s four corners directly into its center. Still standing in the park, just east of the cemetery, was a one-story frame house that had stood since at least 1868, with a grape arbor to its east and a garage and tool shed, apparently added by the Parks Department, to its north.<sup>80</sup> The entirety of Drake Park was surrounded by an iron pipe railing that has since been removed.<sup>81</sup>

The hedge proved ineffective in keeping intruders out of the cemetery, which suffered repeated bouts of vandalism after World War II. In 1949, the Bronx Board of Trade reported that the Parks Department had “repaired all disintegrated stones or those broken by vandals, by removing them to its plant and pouring cement in new molds and setting the broken parts therein.”<sup>82</sup> In 1952, Drake Park’s declining condition drew the attention of the New York Community Trust, which raised \$5,000 towards its improvement.<sup>83</sup> The following August, the Parks Department began work on a \$19,000 upgrade, which replaced the gate and hedge surrounding the cemetery and installed new benches and walks; the current winding system of pathways, including the curving path now separating the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery from the enslaved people’s burial ground to its south, appear to date from this renovation.<sup>84</sup> By this time, the 19th-century wood-

framed house and its ancillary structures had been removed; archaeological resources associated with it may include buried foundations, a well and/or cistern proximate to the house, and a privy to the north of the house near the lot boundary.

Less than a decade later, the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery was again extensively vandalized, with the *New York Times* reporting in 1961 that the hedge enclosing it was “almost gone” as “vandals ... made a sport of uprooting headstones and knocking down obelisks and columns over the graves in the old burying ground.”<sup>85</sup> The Parks Department again repaired broken monuments and replaced the hedge with the seven-foot-tall iron-picket fence that surrounds the cemetery today. In 1962, the park was rededicated at a ceremony attended by more than 1,000 students of nearby P.S. 48, the Joseph Rodman Drake School.<sup>86</sup>

Repair work on the cemetery fence and other minor work in the park occurred in 1980. Although the cemetery has remained relatively undisturbed since the fence installation, the condition of its monuments reflects its long history of neglect, vandalism, and repair. Most of the historic gravestones have been consolidated in the manner begun by the Parks Department in 1949. Joseph Rodman Drake’s monument above its base has been removed, as has the obelisk of his sister Caroline Tillou’s adjacent monument; the obelisks of both monuments remain in Parks Department storage.

### **The Rediscovery of the Hunts Point Enslaved People’s Burial Ground<sup>87</sup>**

Much about the Hunts Point enslaved people’s burial ground is unknown. Although its gravestones were likely buried, relocated, or discarded during the infilling of Drake Park, no official records of this work have been found.<sup>88</sup> Nor has any documentation been found regarding the possible discovery of burials during this process. The silent erasure of the burial ground from the landscape of Drake Park

reflects a denial of the humanity of enslaved people and an eagerness at the time to ignore or downplay New York’s central role in the history of slavery in the United States and its existence here for more than two centuries.<sup>89</sup>

Following William Calver’s 1920 account of the burial ground, it was largely forgotten until around 2012, when a Department of Education official, Philip Panaritis, encountered a photograph labeled “Slave burying ground/Hunts Point Road” on the Museum of the City of New York’s website. The photograph, annotated with a c. 1910 date, piqued the interest of Panaritis, leading him to research the site and the local history of enslavement in further depth, to develop educational programming related to the enslaved people’s burial ground with teacher Justin Czarka at nearby P.S. 48, and to co-found with Czarka the Hunts Point Slave Burial Ground Project. Their advocacy led to a state grant funding an archeological study by Dr. Jessica Striebel MacLean. As part of her research for the study, elementary-age students of Czarka helped survey monuments in the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery. This sparked classroom discussions about remembrance and burial traditions within their own families, whose origins extend across the globe.

Completed in March of 2017, the archeological study encompassed primary- and secondary-source research establishing the general location of the enslaved people’s burial ground within Drake Park and presented the results of two surveys using ground-penetrating radar (GPR), a non-invasive method for identifying subsurface features. The GPR surveys, conducted by Edwin Muñiz of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, were analyzed and interpreted by Dr. Lawrence B. Conyers of the University of Denver and his associate Shayleen Ottman. It identified four likely burials, as well as possible buried headstones or footstones, in the documented location of the

enslaved people’s burial ground. The likely burials are in the vicinity of a mature willow tree on the south side of the pathway separating this burial ground from the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery as Hunts Point Road once did, below both the original ground surface and the layer of fill that raised Drake Park, and nearby Drake Park South, to their current level in the early 20th century.<sup>90</sup>

Unlike most 18th- and 19th-century interments in New York, the likely burials in the enslaved people’s burial ground are oriented north-south. This differs from the traditional east-west burials of Christians in colonial churchyards and graveyards, including the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery. Among the few known north-south burials of this period were those found in Washington Square Park, site of the city’s early-19th-century potter’s field, where this divergent orientation may have denoted their otherness.<sup>91</sup> Although no conclusions for the difference in burial orientations between the two Drake Park cemeteries have been reached, MacLean notes that the north-south orientation might mark an unconsecrated death or be emblematic of a specific burial tradition of the enslaved people of African or Indigenous descent. “What is clear,” MacLean states, “is that there is a difference in the orientation of the Anglo-American families buried in Drake Cemetery from those individuals, presumably of African and Indigenous ancestry, buried in the adjacent slave burial ground, individuals whose burials were set apart in location and orientation.”<sup>92</sup>

Recent years have seen increasing acknowledgment of Drake Park’s enslaved people’s burial ground, and of the history of slavery in the area. In January of 2021, the Parks Department installed new signs announcing the park’s new name: Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved African Burial Ground. At that time, the department’s Bronx Borough Commissioner, Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, expressed the “hope that these new signs, which ...

honor the enslaved Africans buried in the park, will spur reflection, remembrance, and a pursuit for greater knowledge and understanding for all who visit the park in the future.”<sup>93</sup>

Set among warehouses in an industrial section of Hunts Point, Drake Park today serves as both a vital greenspace and as a site of remembrance of enslaved people whose history in the area, and on this specific land, long went unrecognized. Originally created in remembrance of Joseph Rodman Drake and the area’s European settlers, Drake Park is now a place where the lives and final resting place of enslaved people who contributed to the history of Hunts Point, the Bronx, and New York City can be recognized and commemorated.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Detailed condition assessments of the extant monuments in the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery, completed in 2016 by archeologist Jessica Striebel MacLean, are retained in the Designation File for this site at the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

<sup>2</sup> Email message from Sybil Young, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, to Kate Lemos McHale, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (November 14, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Sources for this section include Jessica Striebel MacLean, *Hunts Point Burial Ground, Drake Park, Bronx, New York Phase 1A Documentary Study and Ground Penetrating Radar Survey* (March 2017), 4; Reginald Pelham Bolton, *Indian Paths in the Great Metropolis* (New York: Museum of the American Indian, 1922), 105-111; Historical Perspectives Inc., *New York City Department of Correction: Phase 1A Archaeological Assessment Report* (Riverside, Connecticut, 1989), 4-7; and Chrysalis Archaeological Consultants, Inc., *Phase 1A Historical Documentary and Archaeological Assessment Report for Project: HP-238-DES Hunts Point WWTP–New Anerobic Digester, Bronx, Bronx County, New York* (2013), 13-16.

<sup>4</sup> Sources for this section include MacLean, 5-8; John G. Hunt, *The Descendants of Thomas Hunt, Sr., Who Deceased at the Grove Farm, Westchester, New York, February, 1695* (Unpublished manuscript, 1936); Theodore A. Leggett, *Early Settlers of West Farms, Westchester County, N.Y.* (1913); and Evelyn Gonzalez, *The Bronx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 1-40

<sup>5</sup> While Indigenous Peoples signatories were included in these documents, scholarly interpretations of early land contracts between Europeans and the Munsee people suggest that the Indigenous Peoples participants likely viewed them more as easements or tenancies rather than a sale. Archaeologist and author Anne-Marie Cantwell argues that the “Munsee did not yet realize that they were perceived as selling the land in the European sense, that is permanently alienating themselves from it. Rather, they thought they were simply allowing the Europeans to use it for a while.” This conflict of perception explains why Indigenous Peoples may have signed contracts that did not include fair compensation for their land. Anne-Marie Cantwell, “Penhawitz and Wampage and the Seventeenth Century World They Dominated,” from Meta F. Janowitz and Diane Dallal, eds., *Tales of Gotham: Historical Archaeology, Ethnohistory, and Microhistory of New York City* (New York: Springer, 2013), 7–30, cited in Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Aakawaxung*

*Munahanung (Island Protected from the Wind) Archaeological Site Designation Report (LP-2648)* (New York: City of New York, 2021), prepared by Amanda Sutphin, Jessica Striebel MacLean, and MaryNell Nolan-Wheatley, n64.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to these land transactions, Indigenous people were weakened by European diseases introduced by the colonists. Scholars have estimated that between 50% and 91% of the Munsee population died from diseases such as influenza, measles, and smallpox. See Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Aakawaxung Munahanung (Island Protected from the Wind) Archaeological Site Designation Report (LP-2648)*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Ross, *A History of Long Island from its Settlement to the Present Time, Volume I* (New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1902), 64.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Jenkins, *The Story of the Bronx* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1912), 42-43. Hunt was the husband of the Jessups’ daughter Elizabeth.

<sup>9</sup> George T. Fish and Mitchell J. Hunt, *Some Descendants of Thomas and Cecelia Hunt of Stamford, Connecticut and Westchester, New York* (Willow Grove, Pennsylvania: Mitchell J. Hunt, 1987), 42.

<sup>10</sup> That was the approximate year in which Leggetts’ oldest son John (c. 1677-1707) married Cecilia Hunt (before 1682-1732), the daughter of Thomas Hunt Jr. and Elizabeth Jessup Hunt.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Skinner and George Taylor, *A Map of the Country Adjacent to Kingsbridge* (1781). This map, in the collections of the University of Michigan’s William L. Clements Library, is reproduced on page 39 of MacLean’s Drake Park archeological report.

<sup>12</sup> James L. Wells, *Joseph Rodman Drake Park: Address of James L. Wells, September 16, 1904* (New York: Kiesling Brothers, 1904), 11.

<sup>13</sup> St. Peter’s present church built in 1855, as well as its chapel and cemetery, were designated in 1976 as a New York City Landmark.

<sup>14</sup> Sources for this section include Vivienne L. Kruger, *Born to Run: The Slave Family in Early New York, 1626 to 1827* (Dissertation in History, Columbia University, 1985), accessed online at <https://newyorkslavery.blogspot.com/>; Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 118-166; Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in*

*New York City, 1626-1683* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1-71; Christopher Moore, “A World of Possibilities: Slavery and Freedom in Dutch New Amsterdam,” and Jill Lepore, “The Tightening Vise: Slavery and Freedom in British New York,” in Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris, eds., *Slavery in New York* (New York: The New Press, 2005), 29-56 and 57-89; and Lesley Topping and Barbara Shay MacDonald, “Slavery in New York and Scarsdale,” Scarsdale Historical Society website (<https://www.scarsdalehistoricalsociety.org/slavery-in-new-york-and-scarsdale>), accessed October 25, 2023.

<sup>15</sup> Moore, 38.

<sup>16</sup> Topping and MacDonald.

<sup>17</sup> Topping and MacDonald.

<sup>18</sup> According to Patrick Rael, “The final nail in the coffin of slavery was not hammered in until 1841, when the state finally revoked the right of travelers to reside in New York for up to nine months with their slaves.” Rael, “The Long Death of Slavery,” in Berlin and Harris, Eds., 133.

<sup>19</sup> Sources for this section include Kruger; Margaret L. Vetare, *Philipsburg Manor Upper Mills* (Tarrytown, New York: Historic Hudson Valley Press, 2004); H. Arthur Bankoff and Frederick A. Winter, “The Archaeology of Slavery at the Van Cortlandt Plantation in the Bronx, New York,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* (December 2005), 291-318; Lloyd Ultan, *Blacks in the Colonial Bronx: A Documentary History* (Bronx, N.Y.: Bronx County Historical Society, 2012), 1-22; Topping and MacDonald; and Dan Weinfeld and Susan Seal, “Enslaved People at the Odell House,” Friends of Odell House Rochambeau Headquarters website (<https://www.odellrochambeau.org/enslaved-people>), accessed October 25, 2023.

<sup>20</sup> Hunts Point remained part of Westchester County until 1874, when, along with other areas of southern Westchester lying west of the Bronx River, it was annexed by New York City.

<sup>21</sup> Westchester Town Board of Trustees Minutes (April 18, 1687), cited in Ultan, 42.

<sup>22</sup> “Plantation” was the term used, including by these farms’ owners, to refer to them at the time. Both the Van Cortlandts in the present-day Bronx, and Adolph Philipse in present-day Westchester County, exported milled and other farm products to the Caribbean.

<sup>23</sup> Vetare notes that a building referred to as “the Negro House” appeared in various documents related to the Philipsburg Manor Upper Mills by the 1750s.

<sup>24</sup> E. B. O’Callaghan, *The Documentary History of the State of New-York, Vol. III* (Albany, N.Y.: Weed Parsons & Co., 1850), 853-54.

<sup>25</sup> Kruger, Chapter 3, np.

<sup>26</sup> Sources for this section include MacLean, 5-13, 19-24; Hunt; and Leggett.

<sup>27</sup> Will of Thomas Hunt, Record of Wills, Office of the Surrogate of New York County, libers 5-6, pp. 73-74 (October 7, 1694); cited in Lloyd Ultan, *Blacks in the Colonial Bronx: A Documentary History* (Bronx, N.Y.: Bronx County Historical Society, 2012), 54.

<sup>28</sup> Bill of Sale (February 28, 1700/April 24, 1701), Town of Westchester Records vol. 54, Bronx County Historical Society Research Library; cited in Ultan, 60.

<sup>29</sup> MacLean, 21.

<sup>30</sup> Will of Thomas Hunt (July 11, 1808), New York Wills and Probate Records, 1659-1999, Ancestry.com.

<sup>31</sup> MacLean, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Despite the loss of many of the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery’s grave markers in the 20th century, many burials without extant markers were documented by earlier genealogical surveys. Although Richard and Elizabeth’s exact burial location within the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery is no longer marked, they were buried there, according to MacLean, 20.

<sup>33</sup> Leggett, 16-17.

<sup>34</sup> Leggett, 18.

<sup>35</sup> Leggett, 36-37.

<sup>36</sup> Advertisement, *New-York Gazette*, July 30, 1744. In 1762, Leggett advertised for the return of another freedom-seeking man named London, who was about 30 years old (*New York Mercury*, January 18, 1762). In 1772, his son Isaac advertised for the return of Claus, “about 18 years old . . . Had when he went away a white hat about half worn, a brown jacket without lining, tow shirt and trousers and an old pair of shoes; he speaks good English and Dutch” (*New York Gazette*, September 14, 1772).

<sup>37</sup> Will of John Leggett (October 24, 1780), New York Wills and Probate Records, 1659-1999, Ancestry.com.

<sup>38</sup> MacLean, 22.

<sup>39</sup> Will of Cornelius Willett (June 21, 1781), New York Wills and Probate Records, 1659-1999, Ancestry.com.

<sup>40</sup> For example, the presence of two pairs of men and boys with the same name—Caesar and Dimond—in the records of Philipsburg Manor Upper Mills has led to speculation

that the elder and younger Caesar, and elder and younger Dimond at Philipsburg Manor may have been father and son.

<sup>41</sup> MacLean, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Sources for this section include MacLean, 10-11, 20-24; “Drake, Joseph Rodman,” in Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., *Dictionary of American Biography, Volume III* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959), 431-32; and Patrick Raftery, *The Cemeteries of the Bronx* (Elmsford, N.Y.: Westchester County Historical Society, 2016), 37-52.

<sup>43</sup> Leggett, 6; a circa-1912 photograph of this stone is reprinted in MacLean, 48. The stone is now mostly illegible.

<sup>44</sup> Raftery, 39.

<sup>45</sup> Joseph Slater, “The Case of Drake and Halleck,” *Early American Literature* (Winter 1974), 285.

<sup>46</sup> Photographs provided to LPC by Sybil Young of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation show that the Department has the obelisks of both Drake’s and Tillou’s monuments in storage. The pedestal of Drake’s monument is unaccounted for.

<sup>47</sup> Leggett, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Sources for this section include MacLean, 11-13; and Kruger, Chapters 3 and 9, np.

<sup>49</sup> “Unearthing Our Past,” Trinity Church Wall Street website (<https://trinitywallstreet.org/stories-news/unearthing-our-past>), February 4, 2004, accessed October 26, 2023.

<sup>50</sup> W. L. Calver, “Slave Burials in New York,” in Henry Collins Brown, Ed., *Valentine’s Manual of Old New York* (New York: Valentine’s Manual Inc., 1920), 153-55.

<sup>51</sup> This image is reprinted in MacLean, 52.

<sup>52</sup> Leggett, 7; Harry T. Cook, *The Borough of the Bronx 1639-1913* (New York: Self-Published), 101.

<sup>53</sup> This dearth of information about enslaved people is evident at Philipsburg Manor’s Upper Mills in Sleepy Hollow, where the history of decades of enslavement is largely reconstructed from a single 1749 probate document listing (as property) the enslaved people there, their names, genders, general ages, skills, and fitness for work. Combining this information with contextual research and other records related to the site and its owner Adolph Philipse, historians have been able to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the everyday lives of the enslaved people there and their possible relationships to each other.

<sup>54</sup> For example, Calver relates the story of a formerly enslaved woman named “Aunt Rose” who was reportedly freed by the Leggetts but buried “in the slave plot at Hunts Point” in the 1840s. This has not been confirmed, and appears to be contradicted by an 1888 Leggett family memoir stating that Rose was buried at Thomas Leggett’s “feet by his request” in the Quaker cemetery at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Westchester Square (MacLean, 25).

<sup>55</sup> Sources for this section include James L. Wells, *Joseph Rodman Drake Park: Address of James L. Wells, September 16, 1904* (New York: Kiesling Brothers, 1904); Raftery, 27-52; and MacLean, 6-9.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Findlay’s 1858 “Map of Hunts Point,” showing the land included in the sale with the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery marked as “Reserved,” is reproduced on page 41 of MacLean’s report.

<sup>57</sup> According to Raftery, the last marked burial in the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery is that of William Farrell, dated 1865.

<sup>58</sup> “Description of the Engraving: A Poet’s Grave,” *New-York Mirror*, March 4, 1837, 14, 36.

<sup>59</sup> “A Poet’s Neglected Grave,” *New York World*, November 1, 1881, 7.

<sup>60</sup> “Drake’s Grave,” *New York Sun*, July 28, 1891, cited in Raftery, 41. The pedestal has since been lost.

<sup>61</sup> Gary D. Hermalyn and Lloyd Ultan, “Bronx,” in Kenneth T. Jackson, Ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), 144.

<sup>62</sup> E. Robinson and R. H. Pidgeon, *Atlas of the City of New York, Volume 5* (New York: E. Robinson, 1887), 21.

<sup>63</sup> “To Exhume Drake’s Body,” *New York Times*, September 19, 1903, 2.

<sup>64</sup> “Drake’s Tomb in the Bronx,” *New York Times*, October 11, 1903, 6.

<sup>65</sup> *City Record*, October 22, 1903, 8839.

<sup>66</sup> Wells, 6.

<sup>67</sup> Wells, 12.

<sup>68</sup> Although the Board of Estimate approved the ultimate boundaries of Drake Park on March 17, 1905 (*City Record*, March 17, 1905, 2358), the North Side Board of Trade and Borough President Haffen continued to push for the larger park extending eastward to Halleck Street, and southward to East Bay Avenue, until 1907 (*City Record*, January 2, 1907, 1-2; *City Record*, March 8, 1907, 2433). The adoption of the park’s current boundaries followed

the conclusion of the City's Chief Engineer, Nelson P. Lewis, that "the object sought by the original petition to preserve the grave of the poet Drake has been accomplished by the plan already adopted; to urge a further extension of this park on the ground that such extension is still necessary to insure a permanent preservation of this grave is a perversion of the facts, and appears to be simply an attempt to use the name of the poet and the sentiment attached to his burial place to justify the demand for further park area, which in my judgment is entirely unneeded" (*City Record*, January 2, 1907, 2).

<sup>69</sup> Harry A. Guiremand, "The Proposed Park at Hunt's Point," *New York Times*, September 29, 1907, 8.

<sup>70</sup> "To Dedicate Rodman Drake Park," *New York Press*, May 29, 1910, 8; "In Memory of Rodman Drake," *New York Times*, May 31, 1910, 18.

<sup>71</sup> "Higgins Restores Rodman Drake Park," *New York Times*, May 15, 1910, 20.

<sup>72</sup> Sources for this section include MacLean, 8-9; Raftery; and New York City Parks Department topographical, survey, construction, and planting drawings X-T-15-100 and X-T-15-101 (October 1934); X-L-15-100 through 102 (June 1952) and X-L-15-152 (October 1952); X-15-153 Nos. 1 through 5 (September 1953); X-15-162 Nos. 1 through 3 (May 1962); and X-15-179 Nos. 1 through 4 (February 1980).

<sup>73</sup> *City of New York Department of Parks Annual Report for 1910* (New York: M. B. Brown, 1911), 64.

<sup>74</sup> Kristine Paulus, "Poetry on the River: Joseph Rodman Drake, the Bard of the Bronx," New York Botanical Garden website (<https://www.nybg.org/blogs/plant-talk/2018/04/history/poetry-river-joseph-rodman-drake-bard-bronx/>), April 5, 2018, accessed October 27, 2023.

<sup>75</sup> Photographs reprinted in Raftery, 42 and 45, show different fences at Drake's gravesite in 1912, and the taller iron fence that still surrounds the gravesite present at the May 29, 1915 rededication.

<sup>76</sup> This circa-1912 photograph from the collections of the Westchester County Historical Society is reprinted in MacLean, 45.

<sup>77</sup> *City Record*, April 10, 1916, 2744.

<sup>78</sup> The work is shown in a circa-1920 photograph in the collections of the Museum of the City of New York, reprinted in MacLean, 46.

<sup>79</sup> New York Public Library 1924 New York City Aerial Set, 6B.

<sup>80</sup> The house is present on the 1868 Beers map. The 1921

Bromley map shows the house but not the ancillary structures, implying that they were added under Parks Department oversight between 1921 and 1934. F. W. Beers, *Atlas of New York and Vicinity* (New York: F. W. Beers, 1868), 8; *Atlas of the Borough of the Bronx* (Philadelphia: G. W. Bromley, 1921), 35.

<sup>81</sup> New York City Parks Department topographical, survey, construction, and planting drawings X-T-15-100 and X-T-15-101 (October 1934); MacLean, 28.

<sup>82</sup> New York City Parks Department Letter to Donald Darcy, Bronx Board of Trade, September 24, 1949.

<sup>83</sup> "Park Group Spurs Drive for \$25 City Fine on Parents as a Curb on Young Vandals," *New York Times*, December 12, 1952, 32.

<sup>84</sup> "Park Improvement Set: Drake Facility in Bronx to Get New Gate, Hedge and Walks," *New York Times*, August 12, 1953, 28.

<sup>85</sup> Farnsworth Fowle, "Poet's Graveyard in Bronx Torn Up," *New York Times*, August 14, 1961, 8.

<sup>86</sup> "Park Rededicated in Bronx to Drake for Poem to Flag," *New York Times*, April 17, 1962, 36.

<sup>87</sup> Sources for this section include MacLean, 14-18; Lisa Foderaro, "South Bronx Students May Have Found Site of Slave Burial Ground," *New York Times*, January 25, 2014; Chasity Fernandes, "Students Get a Lesson in Archeology," *Hunts Point Express*, May 3, 2016 (<https://huntspointexpress.com/2016/05/03/students-get-a-lesson-in-archaeology/>), accessed October 25, 2023; Helene Stapinski, "Honoring a Hidden Slave Burial Ground," *New York Times*, November 14, 2017; Jason Cohen, "Parks Honors Enslaved African Burial Ground with New Signs in Joseph Rodman Drake Park," *Bronx Times*, January 27, 2021 (<https://www.bxtimes.com/parks-honors-enslaved-african-burial-ground-with-new-signs-in-joseph-rodman-drake-park/>), accessed October 25, 2023.

<sup>88</sup> MacLean, 12 quotes an 1881 *New York World* article that reported: "On the opposite side of the [Hunts Point] road was, until recently, the burial plot of the slaves of the Hunt estate. Their remains were transferred some time ago to the same ground as that occupied by the bodies of their masters. The curious headstones, with the roughly cut initials of the servants, were also preserved." This is the only-known written account stating that the enslaved people's headstones and remains were moved to the Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery. Given the circa-1910 photograph of the enslaved people's burial ground and several accounts describing it as surviving in its original location into the 1910s, the 1881 report seems questionable.

<sup>89</sup> As Margaret Vetare stated in 2004, “In the aftermath of the American Civil War, northerners tended to deny or downplay their long involvement in American slavery. Only recently have museums and historic sites throughout both the North and South started to acknowledge the vast social, cultural, political, and economic significance of race-based slavery in this country.” Vetare, 17.

<sup>90</sup> According to MacLean, 17, the original 18th- and 19th-

century ground surface before the area was infilled in the early 20th century was identified between approximately two to three feet below the ground surface.

<sup>91</sup> MacLean, 18.

<sup>92</sup> MacLean, 18.

<sup>93</sup> Cohen.

## Findings and Designation

Joseph Rodman Drake Park and  
Enslaved People's Burial Ground

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved People's Burial Ground has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City, state, and the nation.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved People's Burial Ground and designates Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 2772, Lot 170 as its Landmark Site, as shown in the attached map.



**Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved People's Burial Ground, from northeast entrance**  
Michael Caratzas, LPC, December 2023



**Enslaved People's Burial Ground in vicinity of willow tree, Joseph Rodman Drake Park**  
Michael Caratzas, LPC, December 2023



**Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery**  
Michael Caratzas, LPC, December 2023



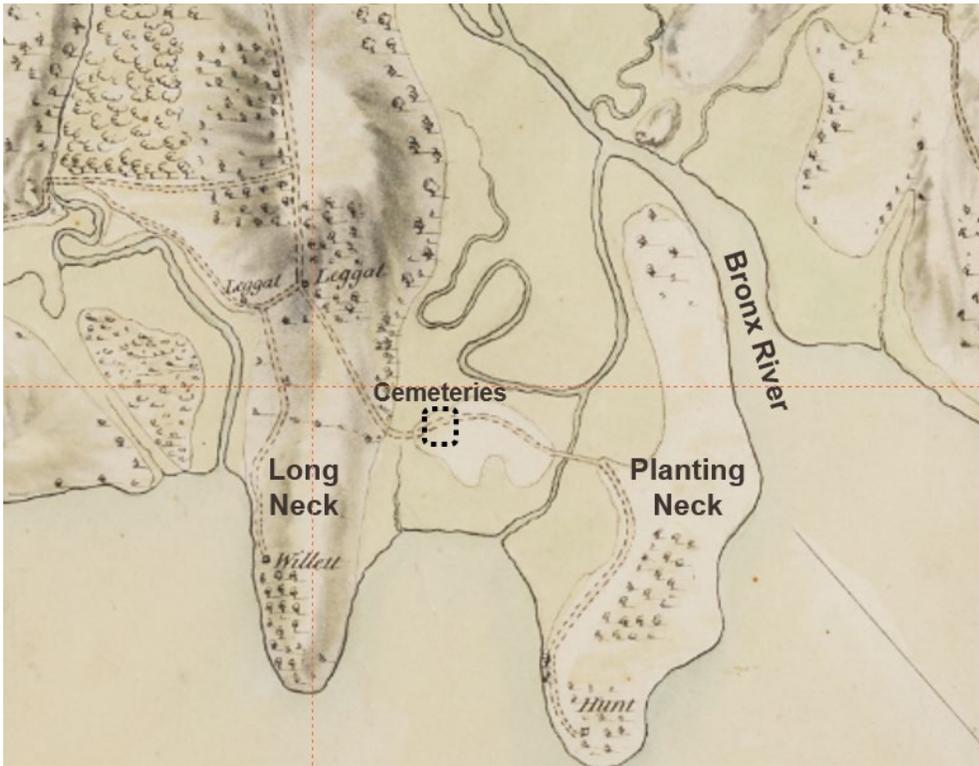
**Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery**  
Michael Caratzas, LPC, December 2023



**Cherub's-head gravestone of Christian Hunt (1708-1749)**  
Michael Caratzas, LPC, December 2023



**Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery, with monument originally inscribed "Private cemetery for the families of Thomas Hunt, Cornelius Willett, John Leggett" in foreground; Drake gravesite at left within elliptical fence**  
Michael Caratzas, LPC, December 2023



Andrew Skinner and George Taylor, *A Map of the Country Adjacent to Kingsbridge* (1781), with annotations showing approximate location of Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery and Enslaved People's burial ground along the old Hunts Point Road

William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

Salt meadow now in my possession <sup>together</sup> with all my Horses, Cows and Stock of creatures of every kind and all the Tools and Utensils of Husbandry upon or belonging in any wise to my s<sup>d</sup> Farms, as also all my plate, Linnen, Beds and Household furniture, and all my Negs not herein particularly mentioned to be disposed of otherwise — Item I give and Bequeath unto my s<sup>d</sup> wife Elizabeth for and during her natural Life my Negro man Robert, Israel and Andrew and Boy Harry, and I do hereby Will and direct my Executors or the Survival of them to permit my s<sup>d</sup> Slaves, Robert, Israel, and Andrew, to Chuse their own Masters at whatever time they are disposed of. Item I give and Bequeath unto my Beloved Wife Elizabeth, as her own property and to be at her own disposal, my Negro woman Cordine, my Cook worked Chair, Large Looking Glass, a Feather Bed, and Curtains with a Bedsted and Bedding for the same, six large silver Table spoons, a Silver a Silver milk pot & Pepper box and all the Pictures hanging my parlor, Item I give and bequeath unto my Daughter Rachel Keviland, my Neg Grl named Hammy, Item I give and bequeath unto my Daughter Mary Graham my Negro man named Phillips. — Item I give and Bequeath unto my Daught<sup>r</sup> Martha Willett my Negro Grl named Nelly, Item I give unto my Daughter Sarah Willett my Negro Boy named Joseph — Item Give and bequeath unto my Grand-

Excerpt from Will of Cornelius Willett (1710-1781)

New York Wills and Probate Records, 1659-1999, Ancestry.com



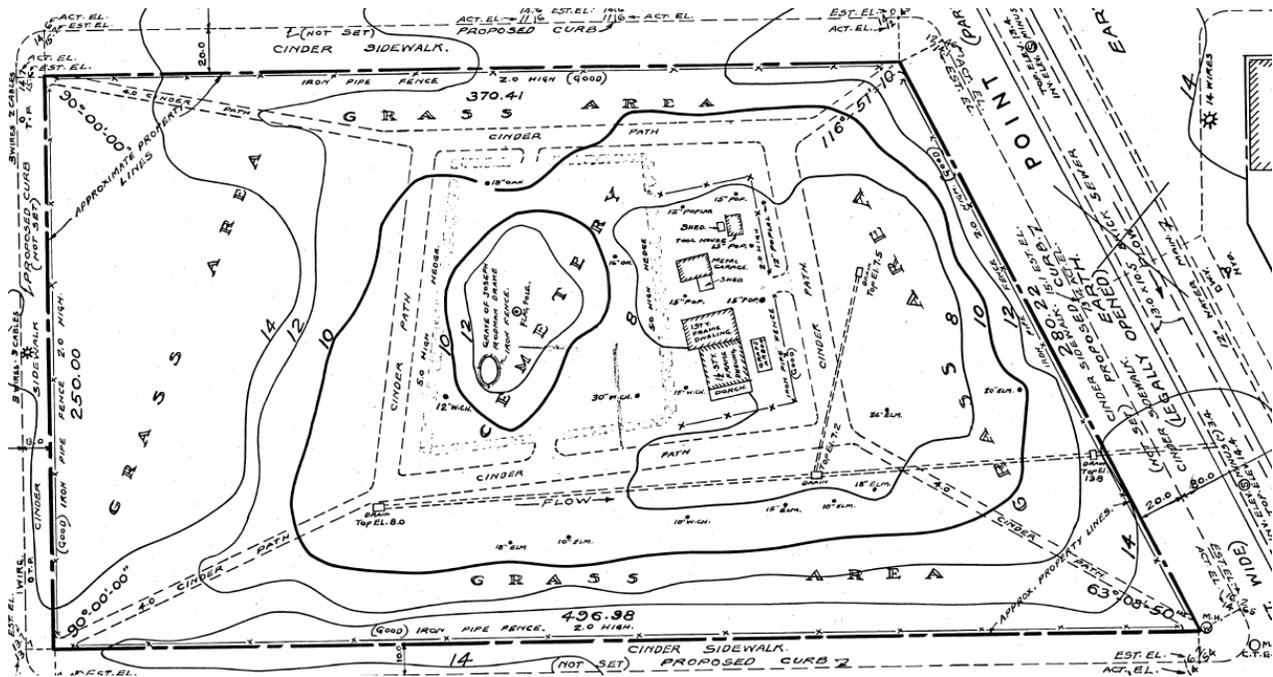
Looking northward across old Hunts Point Road toward Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery, 1905  
Westchester County Historical Society



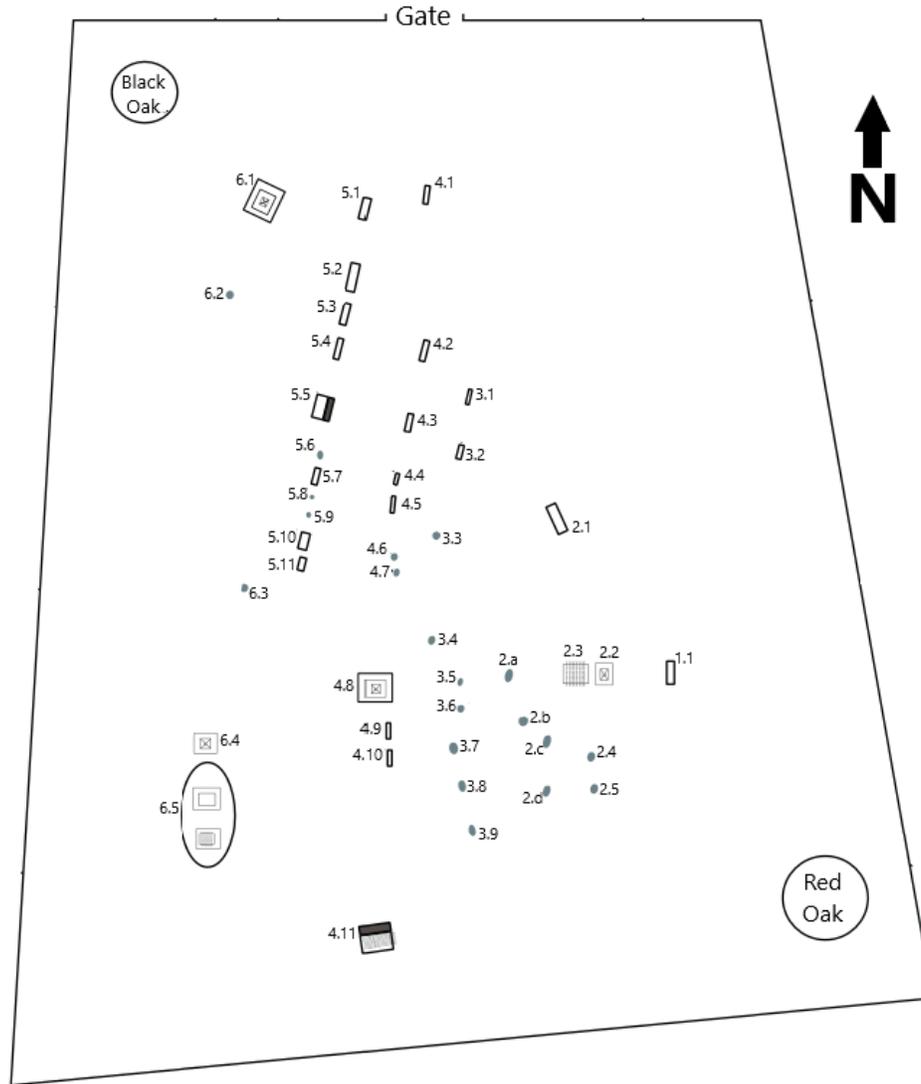
Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery, looking west-southwest, 1912  
Westchester County Historical Society



View northwest from old Hunts Point Road toward 19th-century cottage and Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery, c. 1915  
 Museum of the City of New York



Map of Joseph Rodman Drake Park, 1934  
 New York City Department of Parks, Topographical Division, Drawing X-T-15-100



- Key:
-  Tablet Commemorative Plaque (in ground)
  -  Carved Tablet Marker
  -  Unworked Fieldstone Markers
  -  Footed Obelisk or Columnar

**Map of Grave Markers, Hunt-Willett-Leggett cemetery**

Adapted from Jessica Striebel MacLean, *Hunts Point Burial Ground, Drake Park, Bronx, New York Phase 1A Documentary Study and Ground Penetrating Radar Survey* (March 2017), 60 (report contains a full listing of burials associated with these markers)

**Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved People's Burial Ground | LP-2674**  
**Archaeologically Sensitive Areas**



Graphic Source: MapPLUTO, Edition 22v2, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, DHW, Date: 12/8/2023.



Graphic Source: MapPLUTO, Edition 22v2, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, DHW, Date: 11/28/2023.