

Editorial

Flushing Remonstrance Gave Us Religious Freedom

On Dec. 27, 1657, 30 English settlers in the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam in a letter told Peter Stuyvesant, the colony's governor, that they could not in conscience "lay violent hands" on members of the religious sect known as the Quakers. Although Stuyvesant under the "patroon" policy of the colony's establishing body, the Dutch West India Company, had extensive powers as governor and imprisoned four of the signers of the document, known as the Flushing Remonstrance, the spirit of religious tolerance continued to grow in the colony. Five years later, Stuyvesant exiled another English settler in the colony, one John Bowne, to Holland for daring to allow Quakers to hold their religious services, known as meetings, in his house. Bowne appealed to the board of directors of the Dutch West India Company, citing the guarantees of religious liberty contained in the Flushing patent of 1645 granted by then Governor William Kieft. The directors came down firmly on Bowne's side, advising Stuyvesant in 1663 to end religious persecution in the colony. One year later, in 1664, New Amsterdam fell to British control and the British maintained religious tolerance.

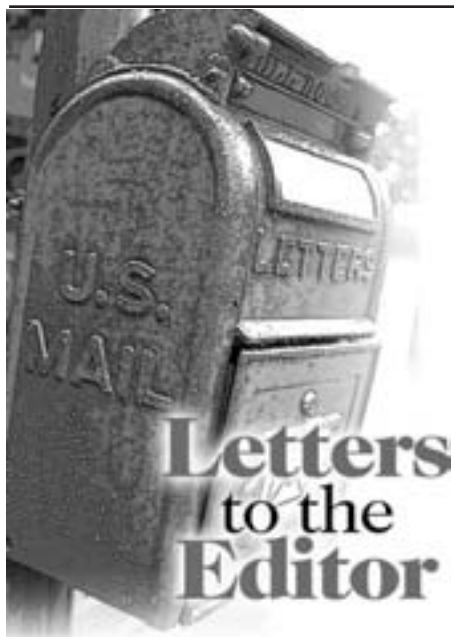
The Flushing Remonstrance remained in the American consciousness. One hundred thirty years after the Flushing 30

called for acceptance of other forms of religion—including Catholics, Lutherans, Quakers and "Jews, Turks and Egyptians, as they are considered sons of Adam"—the drafters of the United States Constitution in Article VI specified that no religious test could serve as a qualification for office. They went further in the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercising thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

It is difficult for contemporary Americans who have always known an atmosphere of religious tolerance to understand the significance of the Flushing Remonstrance and the First Amendment. Not long before the British took over the colony of New Amsterdam, England had been wracked by a bitter civil war between Cavaliers, who wanted to keep the Church of England under royal control, and Oliver Cromwell's Puritan Roundheads, who sought to impose their own kind of worship on the country. The Middle Ages and the Renaissance saw those considered heretics burned at the stake, often after undergoing unspeakable tortures by those who considered their version of a just and

loving God the only acceptable path of faith. Even today in some parts of the world, there are those who believe that theirs is the only true religion and anyone outside their particular circle does not deserve to exist. Those first forays into religious tolerance exercised by the Dutch at home and in their colonies gave rise to the Remonstrance and the guarantees of freedom of religion written into the United States constitution. Somewhere the Flushing 30 are smiling.

The Queens Borough President's office and the Bowne House Historical Society are searching for descendants of the Flushing 30. On Dec. 27, 2007, the 350th anniversary of the signing of the Remonstrance, the document will be brought down from Albany, where it has been in storage, and a celebration will be held to mark the occasion with as many descendants of the signers as possible present—between 30 and 50 people have come forward so far. We hope that many more will join them. We hope, too, that wherever we and our readers find ourselves on Thursday, Dec. 27 2007, we will take a few moments to salute the Flushing 30. We can worship as we choose—or not at all—because they opened the door. Honor to their memory. May their spirit prevail.



We Think So, Too!!

To The Editor:

Because of all the pedestrian traffic fatalities that occur there, Queens Boulevard has become known as the "Boulevard of Death". But I have a different name for it.

Every day I take a morning walk on Queens Boulevard, from 71st Avenue in Forest Hills to the Long Island Expressway in Rego Park and back. During my perambulations, I typically observe many seniors with walkers and canes making their way down the avenue. Some of the seniors that I see are in wheelchairs and others are hunched over, barely able to put one foot in front of another. But they all have one thing in common. They

are out and about, away from their houses and into the day. And because they are on the street, and because they refuse to just sit at home and lament over their various disabilities, I have come to think of Queens Boulevard as the "Boulevard of Hope".

Sincerely,
Martin H. Levinson
Forest Hills

Where's The \$

To The Editor:

A few years back, I read an article in a paper about money that was allocated for repairs on the section of 49th Street & Astoria Boulevard, an incline that has been very bad on traffic. Also, in the same article money was also allocated to build a roller hockey rink in one of the parks between 37th & 38 Streets. What I'd like to know is why these repairs were never made and where is the money that was to be used for such repairs and hockey rink.
Clifford Zorn
Astoria

MTA Has Short Memories

To The Editor:

Many years ago (maybe 30) the MTA (formerly known as the NYC Transit Authority) had a problem which was similar to the one the LIRR is having with gaps at some of their stations. The gap occurred at the Brooklyn Bridge station on the IRT Line (as it was known then) which curved, leaving a big space between the platform

and the train because the train was straight and the station was not. The solution was to have a movable plate which automatically closed the space, making it safe for passengers. Either the MTA has short memories or the solution has become buried in their files.

While I am picking on the MTA, what happened to the 2nd Avenue subway which was started a while back? Second Avenue was dug up, starting at 125th Street for about 10 or 15 blocks and then filled in. Is the same thing going to happen now?

Sidney J Rubin
Forest Hills

Debt Raises Questions

To The Editor:

Why is it that our public officials on a bipartisan basis at the city, state and federal level all seem to avoid talking about the long-term consequences of our ever increasing government public debt? It is only periodically in the editorial pages of the *Queens Gazette* and other newspapers that this critical issue is ever raised.

Consider that the current New York City municipal debt is now \$55 billion. Each resident is responsible for \$6,800, making the Big Apple number one nationally. Being number one in total and resident municipal debt is nothing to be proud about.

New York state is number two nationally among the 50 states, with each resident responsible for \$3,115 of the \$50 billion total debt. Uncle Sam's national debt is

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