

Landmarks Preservation Commission
April 12, 2016; Designation List 487
LP-2541

JOHN WILLIAM AND LYDIA ANN BELL AHLES HOUSE, 39-24-39-26 213th

Street, Queens

Built c.1873; Architect, not determined; altered 1924; Architect, Lewis E. Welsh

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 6236, Lot 18

On June 23, 2009, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Lydia Ann Bell and J. William Ahles House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. The owner's attorney testified and sent a written submission in opposition to the designation. Eleven speakers testified in favor of the designation including then Council Member Tony Avella, the president and several members of the Bayside Historical Society, Joseph Hellman, co-chair of the CB 11 Landmarks Committee who spoke on behalf of the Queensboro Preservation Council, and representatives of the Auburndale Improvement Association, the Douglaston Preservation Association, Municipal Art Society, and Historic Districts Council. The Commission also received letters of support for the designation from Borough President Helen Marshall, State Senator Frank Padovan, State Assembly Member Ann-Margaret Carrozza, the Four Borough Neighborhood Preservation Alliance, Friends of Oakland Lake & Ravine, Inc., Rego-Forest Preservation Council, and the Queens Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

On October 8, 2015 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a special public hearing on Backlog Initiative items in the Borough of Queens, including the Lydia Ann Bell and J. William Ahles House and the related Landmark Site (Item III - Borough of Queens Group, H). A representative of the owner spoke in opposition to the designation. Eight speakers testified in favor of the designation of the Ahles House, including State Senator Tony Avella, Queens Borough Historian Jack Eichenbaum, and representatives of Council Member Paul Vallone, the Historic Districts Council, Four Borough Neighborhood Preservation Alliance and Queens Preservation Council. The Chair read into the record a letter from Council Member Paul Vallone and Assembly Member Edward Braunstein in support of the designation. The Commission has also received one email and three letters of support for the designation including letters from the Aquinas Honor Society of the Immaculate Conception Catholic Academy, the President of the Sunnyside Gardens Preservation Alliance, and one individual.

In March 2016, in a meeting with senior Commission staff, the owner again expressed his opposition to the designation and submitted materials in support of his position, including a letter from a neighbor in opposition to the designation written in 2009. He submitted another letter and additional materials in opposition to the designation on April 11, 2016.



Summary

This impressive Second Empire style residence updated in 1924 with Colonial Revival style alterations is a rare reminder of 19th-century Bayside, when it was a village of suburban villas and substantial farmhouses. Now located on 213th Street in Bayside, the Ahles House was built only a few years after railroad service reached Bayside in 1866 and residential subdivisions began to replace farms. It is the only remaining example of the substantial Second Empire buildings erected in Bayside during the 1870s and 1880s. It retains the cubic form and dormered mansard roof typical of the Second Empire style as well as details such as the molded cornice and hexagonal slate shingles. Very few 19th century houses survive in Bayside, making the Ahles house a rare example of the period.

This house was constructed around 1873 by farmer Robert M. Bell for his daughter Lydia (usually known as Lillie) and her husband John William Ahles, a prominent grain merchant and officer of the New York Produce Exchange. It is located on a portion of a farm that had descended in the Lawrence family from the 17th century and was purchased by Robert Bell in 1834, a few years after his marriage to Catherine Lawrence. The Bells, and in particular Robert Bell, played an important role in the development of 19th-century Bayside and today this house is the sole survivor among the houses constructed in the 19th century by this influential Bayside family. The Ahles family also played a prominent role in late-19th and early-20th-century Bayside and this house remained in the ownership of the Ahles family until the 1940s.

The house was moved from its original site to its present location in 1924 to allow Christy Street now 213th Street to be cut through to 41st Avenue. It was then that architect Lewis E. Welsh, a prominent exponent of the Colonial Revival style who specialized in the revitalization of Victorian houses, simplified the building's façade by removing the original wrap-around porches, bay window, scroll brackets, replaced the original clapboards with stucco, and installed new features including porches and moldings that were more in keeping with the Arts-and-Crafts-infused Colonial Revival aesthetic of the 1920s. The overall effect of Welsh's alterations was to create a building that still retained the box-like cubic massing, mansard roof, and cornice of its Second Empire origins and at the same time was a fine example of Colonial-Revival/Arts and Crafts-inspired 1920s design. The relocation and alterations of the Ahles House are significant in their own right because they reflect the historical context of the transformation of Bayside to a commuter suburb in the early 20th century. Today this house is thought to be one of the oldest surviving in Bayside and is considered a significant reminder of the neighborhood's past.

DESCRIPTION

Description

The description below describes historic features from the building's two periods of significance. The term "alterations" is used for changes subsequent to the alterations of 1924. For a more detailed analysis of the 1924 alterations, see page 9.

The Ahles House is a c. 1873 free-standing three-story mansarded Second Empire style building that was moved to this site and renovated in 1924, at which time its porches and a bay window were removed and its façades were clad with stucco and modified with Colonial Revival elements. The house's main entrance is on its south façade facing the Long Island Railroad tracks. This siting reflects the building's original

orientation. In recent years over 18 of the house's windows were replaced. In addition, some historic moldings have been repaired or replaced, including the flashing and crowning molding on the mansard roof.

Street (East) facade

Historic: cubic form of building; stucco cladding; wood sill molding; four molded wood window surrounds with paneled aprons at first story; two molded wood window surrounds at second story; molded wood frieze capped by deep overhanging cornice supported by simple brackets, mansard roof with hexagonal slates; hipped dormers with molded wood surrounds and cornices, six-over-six wood sash.

Alterations: window sash replaced; flashing installed on crowning cornice; flashing on roof replaced.

Entrance (South) facade

Historic: stucco cladding; wood sill molding; central molded wood entrance surround with paneled reveals and pilasters, multi-pane transom; two molded wood window surrounds with paneled aprons at the first story and three molded wood window surrounds with six-over-six wood sash at second story; molded wood entablature with deep overhanging cornice supported by simple brackets; mansard roof with hexagonal slates; hipped dormers with molded wood surrounds and cornices, six-over-six wood sash.

Alterations: window sash replaced at first story; non-historic aluminum storm door and paneled door in entry; concrete and flagstone pavement in threshold; non-historic light fixture on wall to south of doorway; non-historic flashing installed on crowning cornice; flashing on roof replaced.

West facade

Historic: projecting full-height pavilion on east side of house; hipped-roofed enclosed entrance porch extension with stucco cladding dating from 1924; low brick basement; wood sill molding; stucco cladding at first and second story; on south side of the façade - two windows at first and second stories with molded surrounds, six-over-six wood sash at second story; single windows with molded surrounds at first story on south and west sides of pavilion; horizontal window with molded wood surround and four paired multi-light wood casements at the second story of pavilion; small vertical window with molded surround and six-light casement on south side of porch extension; mansard roof with hexagonal slates; hipped dormers with molded wood surrounds and cornices (double-width dormer with paired windows on pavilion), six-over-six wood sash.

Alterations: first-story windows replaced (except for casement on south side of extension); metal replacement bulkhead basement entry at south end of façade, small metal bulkhead for basement entry at base of pavilion removed; paneled wood door with multi-light window and storm door at porch entry; vent near window on south side of porch extension; non-historic light fixture below porch eaves to south of doorway; cornice at south end of façade water damaged; flashing installed on crowning cornice; some roof slates replaced; flashing on roof replaced; gutter and downspout replaced.

North facade

Historic: projecting full height pavilion and side of entrance porch extension at west end of façade; first and second stories house and enclosed entrance porch extension clad with stucco; square window with molded surround at center of porch wall; two windows at first and second stories with molded surrounds on north wall of pavilion; six-over-six

sash at second story; doorway with molded wood surround at first story on east wall of pavilion; window with molded wood surround at second story on east wall of pavilion; wood porch with wood pillars and cornice, wood flooring, wood ceiling, wood parapet above porch; small window with molded surround; large window with molded wood surround at eastern end of north wall at first story; smaller window with molded wood surround near doorway; two windows with molded surrounds and six-over-six sash at second story, eastern half of the façade; mansard roof with hexagonal slates, hipped dormers with molded wood surrounds and cornices, six-over-six wood sash; brick chimney projects from the center of pavilion mansard.

Alterations: stucco painted beneath porch; window sash replaced at first story; paneled door replaced; porch pillars possibly replaced; flashing installed on crowning cornice; flashing on roof replaced; light fixture on porch ceiling; electric meter and conduit at east end of facade

Site features: raised front yard with concrete steps and concrete walk to main entrance on south side of house; stone-and-dirt driveway; concrete walk along north side of house terminating at rear porch entrance; chain link fence along north lot line

Other buildings on the lot: non-historic one-story two-car garage with wood clapboard siding, non-historic doors, and asphalt-shingled gable roof.

SITE HISTORY

Early Development of Bayside and the Lawrence family¹

Prior to European settlement, Bayside was occupied by a group of Lenape, who were known as the Matinecock for the hilly landscape where they resided.² The Lenape lived in communities of bark- or grass-covered wigwams, and in their larger settlements—typically located on high ground adjacent to fresh water, and occupied in the fall, winter, and spring—they fished, harvested shellfish, and trapped animals. The local band appears to have ranged from present day Flushing, including Newtown and College Point, to Port Washington and their hunting grounds extended as far eastward as Smithtown. The footpath that connected their villages, starting at the edge of Flushing Bay and ending in Manhasset evolved into the road known as Broadway, now Northern Boulevard.

In 1639 the Matinecock conveyed the lands between Flushing and Smithtown to the Dutch West India Company, with a stipulation that they would be able to continue living on and using the land. Six years later Governor-general William Kieft issued patents for this land to a group of 18 English settlers.³ The majority of the land in the area that would become Bayside was acquired by brothers John and William Lawrence, William Thorne, and Thomas Hicks. After residing in Queens for some years where he held a number of public offices, John Lawrence moved to New Amsterdam in 1657. He was twice mayor of New York, in 1673 and 1691. His brother William settled near modern-day College Point but retained his land in Bayside and acquired other property on Long Island. A merchant as well as a farmer, with a warehouse on Broad Street in lower Manhattan, William used slave labor (both African and Native American) and indentured servants to work on his farm and in his warehouse. He became one of the wealthiest men in New York. Following his death in 1680, William's Bayside property

passed to his son Joseph (1) who settled there and probably was responsible for building the first of many Lawrence homesteads in the neighborhood.⁴

The Lawrences remained the most prominent family in Bayside until well into the 19th century. In 1775 sea captain Joseph Lawrence (2) (1741-1813), who married Phebe Townsend (1740-1816), purchased 160 acres of farmland from his father Richard Lawrence.⁵ Joseph (2) then moved to Bayside. Several sources suggest that during the American Revolution he was involved in the Culper spy ring, which reported on British activities to General Washington.⁶ Following the revolution, he was active in local politics and in 1785 served in the New York State Assembly.

Joseph and Phebe Lawrence's sons Henry (1767-1824) and Effingham (1779-1850) were both prosperous farmers on adjoining farms in Bayside. Effingham was also an attorney and the first county judge for Queens County. In 1822 Judge Lawrence built a mansion known as Stone House (demolished 1956) on 222nd Street overlooking Little Neck Bay, which incorporated timbers from the ancient Lawrence homestead.⁷ Judge Lawrence also set aside a parcel of land at his farm at 42nd Avenue and 216th Street in an area formerly known as "Pine Grove," formerly favored for family picnics, as a burial ground for Lawrence family members (Lawrence Graveyard is a designated New York City Landmark).⁸ In 1832, Joseph's granddaughter Catherine (1807-80) married Robert Moore Bell (1807-88).⁹

The Bells of Bayside¹⁰

Robert M. Bell was the nephew of Abraham Bell (1778-1856), an Irish merchant who came to this country about 1804 and formed a partnership with Robert H. Bowne and Jacob Harvey. After Bowne's death 1818 Abraham Bell formed Abraham Bell, & Co., an enormously successful trading and shipping firm based in Manhattan, which dealt in a wide variety of goods, notably Irish linens and American cotton, and transported many English and Irish immigrants to the United States, especially during the famine years. In 1824 Abraham Bell purchased a 246 acre farm in Bayside.¹¹ It extended from Little Neck Bay to modern-day 204th Street and from 35th Avenue to a little south of 39th Avenue. It was bordered on two sides by the farms of Catherine's brothers, Cornelius and Joseph Lawrence, and was divided into two parts, known as the upper and lower farms, by a lane that became Bell Avenue, later Bell Boulevard. After using a small 17th century house on the property as a summer home for almost two decades, Abraham Bell built a house for his family on Bell and Warburton Avenues in the 1840s, which later passed to his son Thomas.

Raised in Maryland and Pennsylvania, Robert M. Bell moved to Bayside at the age of 17 to take over the management of his uncle's farm. In 1834, following the death of his father-in-law Henry Lawrence, he purchased the 160-acre farm that had passed to Henry from Joseph Lawrence.¹² Robert M. Bell was active in the New York State and Queens Agricultural Societies and public affairs in Bayside. In the 1850s he was one of the investors in the Bayside & Flushing Plank Road, a toll road that ran along Broadway on the southern border of his farm. In 1864 the newly organized North Shore Railroad purchased a right of way through Robert M. Bell's farm. The railroad began operations in 1866 with a new depot on land donated by Robert M. Bell, near modern-day Bell Boulevard and 41st Avenue. By 1870 Robert M. Bell had the eastern corner of his land south of the railroad tracks mapped into streets and one street, Palace Avenue (now 42nd

Avenue), just south of the tracks, was partially opened. In 1870 his son Richard M. Bell built a store and dwelling at the corner of Palace and Bell Avenues.¹³ This and the blacksmith shop Robert Bell had built at the corner of Broadway and Bell Avenue in the 1840s were the beginnings of the development of Bell Boulevard as Bayside's principal commercial strip. During the 1870s Robert Bell also built houses on Bell Avenue near Ashburton Avenue (39th Avenue) as a wedding present for his daughter Lydia (Lillie) on her marriage to John William Ahles in June 1873 and for his son Richard M. Bell on his marriage to Julia Black in 1874.¹⁴ Robert Bell's cousin, Abraham Bell II, who took charge of his grandfather's farm in 1866, also built a new house on the southwest corner of Warburton (39th Avenue) and Bell Avenue in 1870 when he married Melissa Chambers in 1870. Perhaps the most spectacular of the Bell-related houses was Hillbright, the Shingle Style mansion erected by Annie Bell's husband Frederick Storm on the corner of Bayside and Lawrence Boulevards (221st Street and 43rd Avenue) in 1893. Today the Ahles House is the sole survivor among the houses constructed in the 19th century by this influential Bayside family.

John William and Lydia Ann Bell Ahles

In June 1873 Robert and Catherine Bell's daughter Lydia Ann (Lillie, 1848-96) married John William Ahles (Will, 1848-1915). Will Ahles was the son of George and Zoe Chairnaud Ahles.¹⁵ George Ahles was a native of Hanover who moved to New York around 1840 and established a retail drygoods business with August Sattler. In 1850 the partnership was dissolved and the Ahles family moved to Bayside where George Ahles acquired a small farm next to Robert and Catherine Bell's farm. Will Ahles and Lillie Bell grew up as next-door-neighbors until the age of 15, when George Ahles moved his family to Fort Greene, Brooklyn, presumably to be closer to Pearl Street in Lower Manhattan, where he was involved in a textile importing firm. At about that time, Will Ahles left school and found a job as clerk at the Broadway Bank of Manhattan. He worked in a broker's office on Wall Street and then became a salesman for a produce merchant. In 1877 he established his own business as a flour merchant and joined the Produce Exchange. From 1883 to about 1885 he worked in partnership with John A. Bayley and in the 1890s and early 1900s he was senior partner with Arthur B. Raymond in the firm of Ahles & Raymond Flour and Food Commission Merchants, blenders and exporters of corn products. Until his retirement Ahles remained one of the most successful dealers in grain in the city and served for many years on the Board of Governors of the New York Produce Exchange.

Ahles was also very involved with the civic life of Bayside serving as an officer in the Literary Society, as a trustee for the local public school, a warden at All Saint's PE Church, Bayside, and a member of the Queens County Agricultural Society. Like his father-in-law and brother-in-law Richard Bell, he was an avid horseman and breeder of trotting horses. The Ahles' had four children - the eldest son Richard died in childhood - the others were Robert, Gertrude, and Virginia. In 1880, probably following the death of her mother, Lillie Ahles' 75-year-old father Robert M. Bell and 74-year-old aunt Phebe Lawrence moved in with the Ahleses. According to the 1880 Federal census, the Ahles household included two female servants and a black male servant, most likely a coachman. In 1886 Robert Bell conveyed this house and its 15.5 acre lot as well as a 10 acre parcel on Whitestone Road (Francis Lewis Boulevard) to Lillie Ahles.¹⁶ He continued to live with the Ahleses until his death in 1888. By 1892 Will Ahles's parents

and sister Frances had moved in with the family. Lillie Ahles died in 1896.¹⁷ By 1910 Will Ahles was occupying the house with his daughter Virginia, sister Frances, and his African-American coachman Samuel Chapel, who had been with the family since the 1890s. At his death in 1915, Ahles established a trust that provided life-time incomes for his sister and Chapel and held the major part of his real estate, investments, and personal estate in trust for his children and their heirs.¹⁸

Bayside in the Post-Civil War Period

Prior to the Civil War, Bayside was largely a farming and fishing community. The railroad enabled businessmen to commute to Flushing and Manhattan and spurred the owners of several large farms and estates to sell their land to developers who had the properties mapped into development parcels.¹⁹ By the early 1890s certain sections of Bayside had developed as densely built up village streets. These included the section of Bell Avenue between the railroad and Broadway, which was lined with stores and mixed-use residential-commercial buildings, several built by Richard and Robert M. Bell. Two hotels, the Broadway Hotel and Fred Snell's Broadway Inn, were located at Broadway and Bell Avenue where they catered to farmers bringing their produce to market. Around 1872, Straitton and Storm Cigar Manufacturers, opened a factory in a three-story mansarded building at Bell Avenue and Park Avenue (now Bell Boulevard and 42nd Avenue). Later the first floor of that building, which was originally used for workers' housing, was occupied by a grocery store and bank. The company's owners built country houses in Bayside for themselves and "homes for some eighteen or twenty families of the skilled workmen" on First Street (now 214th Place). Residential enclaves also developed along Bell Avenue north of Crocheron Avenue, on Bayside Road north of Crocheron, along Lawrence Boulevard (43rd Avenue) and Broadway, east of Bell Avenue, and on the streets north of Crocheron Avenue. During this period Bayside also gained a number of amenities including schools, a Literary Society, which after 1874 met in its own building at 215th Street and 42nd Avenue that was used by many social, religious and civic groups, and the United Methodist Church, built 1891-93 at 214th Street and Palace Avenue (42nd Avenue) on land donated by Richard M. Bell.

Also contributing to the growth of Bayside in this period, was the presence of Camp Morgan, later renamed Fort Totten. Located on a peninsula at the northeastern tip of the neighborhood, the fort was established 1857 as a major component of the defense system of New York Harbor. During the Civil War the fort was used as a training camp and hospital. Although most of its 19th-century buildings have been replaced, a few structures remain, notably the Fort Totten Battery (1862-64, William Petit Trowbridge, engineer), the Gothic Revival style Fort Totten Officers Club (c. 1870, enlarged 1887, now home to Bayside Historical Society), and Building 211, the former Willets house (c. 1829), which was enlarged and remodeled in the Gothic Revival style, when it became the commanding officer's house in 1867-68. (Fort Totten Battery and the Fort Totten Officers Club are designated New York City Landmarks; Building 211 is within the Fort Totten Historic District.) Today, Building 211, the former Commandant's house, and the Ahles House appear to be the sole surviving houses in Bayside from the post-Civil War period.

Second Empire Style Design and the John William and Lydia Ann Bell Ahles House

The John William and Lydia Ann Bell Ahles House is the only remaining Second Empire Style building in Bayside. An eclectic architectural style based on French Renaissance and Baroque models, the Second Empire style developed in France during the reign of Napoleon III (1852-1870) and became popular in America around 1860. The style's dissemination was aided by the increasing availability of architectural publications during this period, especially architectural handbooks and builders' guides.²⁰ The style was well represented in Bayside where in addition to the Ahles House prominent examples included the Straiton and Storm factory building, Fred Snell's Broadway Inn, the Literary Society building, and the houses of Judge Robert Cornell on Little Bayside Avenue (near 26th Avenue) and 209th Street, J. T. Knight on Lawrence Boulevard and Waldo Avenue (43rd Avenue and 216th Street), the residence of Edward Arthur Lawrence on Little Bay near Willets Point, and the mansion house and carriage house at the John Taylor estate known as "The Oaks."²¹

A free-standing three-story mansarded house with an irregular plan, the Ahles House originally had clapboard siding, wrap-around porches on its north, south, and east facades, and a two-story bay at the west end of its south façade. When the house was built it was located near the north side of a wedge-shaped 15.5 acre lot and was set back about 225 feet from Bell Avenue. Its main façade faced south on to a driveway leading from Bell Avenue with a view of landscaped lawn and the railroad tracks in the distance. (This orientation was maintained when the house was moved to its present site.)

A fine example of the style with a somewhat unusual plan incorporating a number of verandas, the Ahles House was likely designed by a local carpenter-builder drawing on local models and architectural publications.²² General inspiration may have come from periodicals such as the *American Agriculturist* and pattern books like *Bicknell's Village Builder* (1872), which featured several designs for irregularly planned houses with bay windows, extensive porches, and mansard roofs. A more specific source may have been the townhouse design illustrated in Plate 1 in the *Supplement to Bicknell's Village Builder* (1871) – it features a mansard roof, molded cornice with paired brackets, and porch columns that are very close in form and detailing to corresponding elements at the Ahles House. Although the Ahles House was considerably altered in the 1920s, it still retains its boxy cubic massing and mansard roof characteristic of Second Empire style houses as well as its original molded cornice (minus its paired brackets) and hexagonal slate shingles. While there are certainly better preserved and more elaborate Second Empire houses surviving in other neighborhoods New York City, the Ahles House is the only remaining example of the style in Bayside and as such is a rare survivor.

The Suburbanization of Bayside in the Early 20th Century, Ahles Realty, and Lewis E Welsh's Alterations to the Ahles House

Queens became part of New York City in 1898. In the decades that followed, several East River links were created: the Queensboro Bridge, completed in 1909, as well as a pair of tunnels: one for the Long Island Railroad (1910), and the other, for the IRT subway (1915). These improvements cut commuting time to Midtown Manhattan in half, increasing land values in Flushing and Eastern Queens. By 1910 most of the farms surrounding the Ahles House property had been mapped into streets and house lots, with the streets paved, utilities installed, and many houses going up.²³

In 1919 New York City adopted a plan to widen and pave Bell Avenue between Crocheron Avenue and the railroad tracks. Litigation regarding the value of the property condemned for the street widening went on for some time but in March 1922 a settlement was announced with the Ahles Estate receiving the largest damage award.²⁴ One month prior to the settlement the trustees of the Ahles Estate formed the Ahles Realty Corporation to develop its real estate holdings.²⁵ In 1923 the new corporation, headed by Louis J. Snyder, husband of Gertrude Ahles Snyder, entered into an agreement with the Long Island Railroad to transfer land to the railroad for a new station with the cost of the new depot split between the railroad and Ahles Realty; it opened in 1924. In the meantime the Ahles House property was mapped into streets and lots. Snyder planned to develop the portion of the property closest to the railroad with commercial buildings with the remainder reserved “for high class residences.”²⁶

In order to open Christy Street (now 213th Street) the Ahles House had to be moved west about 40 to 50 feet to a newly created 70 x 100 foot lot at 39-24 to 39-26 213th Street. In 1923/4 Snyder hired architect Lewis Edgar Welsh for the project that included alterations to Ahles House and to the old carriage house, which was converted into a garage.²⁷

Lewis E. Welsh (1888-?) was born in Hawley, Pennsylvania and educated at Pratt Institute. From 1909 to 1913 he was employed a draftsman in the Wilkes-Barre architectural firm of Welsh, Sturdevant & Poggi, headed by his brother George Schlager Welsh.²⁸ From 1913 to 1917 he was head draftsman in the firm of Aymar Embury, one of the preeminent specialists in American Colonial Revival design. In 1917 Lewis Welsh returned to Pennsylvania to work with his brother on two projects for workers’ housing, Sawyer Park in Williamsport and Elmwood Park in Bethlehem for the Bethlehem Steel Company, which employed the most up-to-date concepts in Garden City planning and Arts and Crafts design and were widely published in the leading architectural journals.²⁹

Lewis Welsh returned to New York City in 1919 and became an associate architect in Aymar Embury’s firm with Alfred Busselle. Among the commissions Welsh worked on with Embury were alterations to Louis and Gertrude Ahles Snyder’s house in Rye, New York. Welsh began practicing on his own in 1920. During the 1920s and 1930s he was principally known for his Colonial Revival designs for houses in suburban New York and Connecticut. His commissions also included the Town Hall in Greenfield, New York (1925); a hotel in Hawley, Pennsylvania (1932); stores for J.J. Newberry Co. in various locations (1944-53); the J.J. Newberry House in Englewood, New Jersey (1952); and the Friends Meeting House in Wilton, Connecticut (1954).

In 1920 Welsh published an article in the *Architectural Forum* describing the country house alterations he, Embury, and Busselle had worked on in the past year.³⁰ He noted that in earlier times it was generally thought to be cheaper to tear down an old building rather than to make alterations but “high prices and scarcity of labor and materials” had encouraged owners and architects to renovate existing buildings. Welsh argued that the real challenge was not in recognizing the value of old masterpieces of Colonial architecture, which “is easily seen,” but in discerning the latent possibilities of Victorian buildings. By stripping away “jigsaw projections, brackets, balconies, and porches,” architects were able to reveal underlying balanced proportions and simple lines previously hidden from view. Skillfully designed additions added new spaces and

adapted the houses for modern uses; new exterior cladding and details blended the old with the new, creating a dignified and appropriate appearance.

Welsh applied these ideas in his alterations to the Ahles House. The wrap-around porches were removed from the south and east facades and replaced on the north façade. The bay window was removed from the south façade, the second-story windows at each end of the east façade facing 213th were sealed, wood panels were inserted at the base of the first-floor windows that previously opened on to the porches, and all of the doors, window enframements, and sash were replaced. This included a reconfiguration of the fenestration on the second story of the pavilion on the west façade where a long horizontal opening with four pairs of multi-light casements was added. The one-story hipped-roof enclosed porch extension at the base of the pavilion was also added then. On the north side of the house the porch was rebuilt using square posts, a simple cornice, and a plain wood parapet. All of the clapboards were removed and replaced with stucco masking the alterations to the first two stories and reflecting the 1920s Arts & Craftsman-influenced preference for simple stuccoed facades. The original crowning entablature was preserved but simplified by the removing the 1870s scrolled brackets, which were replaced by simple exposed rafters. At the third story, the dormers were also modified, with the openings changed from segmental arched to square headed, the gabled pediments removed, new wood surrounds and cornices, and multi-light window sash installed.

Based on an interpretation of historic atlases, it has been suggested that a portion of the pavilion on the west side of the building was removed as part of the 1924 alterations. Because the only evidence cited is building footprints in historic atlases that vary from publisher to publisher and the plans for the alterations do not appear to have survived, it is hard to draw a definitive conclusion on this point. It is worth noting, however, that the crowning frieze, molded cornice, and fishscale slate-shingled mansard roof on the east pavilion blend seamlessly with their counterparts on the other portions of the building. In any case this portion of the building is not visible from the public way.

The overall effect of Welsh's alterations was to create a building that still retained the box-like cubic massing, mansard roof, and cornice of its Second Empire origins and at the same time was a fine example of Colonial-Revival/Arts and Crafts-inspired 1920s design by an important architect specializing in the renovation of 19th Century houses. Moreover, the relocation and alterations of the Ahles House are significant in their own right, because they reflect the historical context of the transformation of Bayside to a commuter suburb in the early 20th century.

Subsequent History

During the 1920s and 1930s the Ahles Realty Corporation sold large portions of its holdings in Bayside and actively pushed for an expansion of the Bayside commercial zone.³¹ However, the lots between the Ahles House and the train station were left undeveloped until about 1950 leaving the occupants of the Ahles House with a clear view of the station, landscaped station plaza, and the obelisk erected in 1928 as a memorial to the men of Bayside who had served in World War I. Sometime in the 1920s or early 1930s, most likely in 1924 when the exterior of the house was being altered, the interior was also modified to divide it into a two-family house, which remained a rental property. The early occupants have not been identified but in 1935 the reverse telephone directory

for Queens listed accountant Robert E. Blessing as the occupant of 39-24 213th Street. The following year he was replaced by the family of banker Robert Crouch. Later the Crouch family moved to 39-26 and by the late 1930s-early 1940s the Crouch family was sharing the building with the family of advertising executive, Theodore (Ted) E. Callis. Later occupants included the family of Peter F. Gilbody, a New York City fireman, who resided in 39-24 from 1943 to around 1953 and elementary school teacher Margery Plimpton, who resided at 39-26 from 1944 to 1947. In 1947 Henry and Frieda Ziegler Hollmann purchased the Ahles House. Henry Hollmann was a manager at an x-ray equipment company. The Hollmanns occupied the portion of the building at 39-26 213th Street. Frieda Hollmann was very interested in history and was an active member of the Bayside Historical Society. The house passed to their son Bruce Ziegler Hollmann in 1994 and he sold it in 2007 to the present owner, who had resided there as a tenant for many years.

Report researched and written by
Gale Harris
Research Department

NOTES

¹ This section on the early development of Bayside and the Lawrence family is based on Alison McKay, *Bayside* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2008); Joseph H. Brown, *The Lawrence Family* (Bayside, NY: The Bayside Historical Society, 1989); Andrus T. Valentine, "Early Land Distribution," *Long Island Forum*, Sept. 1967, 165-167; Thomas Lawrence, *Historical Genealogy of the Lawrence Family* (New York: E.O. Jenkins, 1858); Lauren Holly Brincat, "John Bowne's Flushing: Material Life on a Dutch Frontier," (MA Thesis: University of Delaware, 2014) @ <http://www.bownehouse.org/John-Bownes-Flushing-Material-Life-On-A-Dutch-Frontier.html>; Michael K. Harris, *Bayside the Early Years*, 1995 @ <http://www.hotlink.com/~bayside/earlybay.html>, accessed July 24, 2015, 38-56, 130-148.

² John A. Strong, *The Algonquian Peoples of Long Island from the Earliest Times to 1700* (Interlaken, NY: Books, 1997), 152, 163-165; Joan Geismar and Stephen Oberon, *Stage 1-A Cultural Resources Documentary Study and Assessment of Potential Impact, Proposed Navy Yard Cogeneration Facility*, prepared for Blasland and Bouck Engineers, PC, 1993 (on file with Landmarks Preservation Commission Environmental Review Department), 15-26; "The Lenape: Westchester's First Inhabitants, Lower Hudson Valley, *Postscripts*, July 15, 2009 @ <http://notorc.blogspot.com/2009/07/Lenape-westchesters-first-inhabitants.html>, accessed July 24, 2015; "Metoac," *Wikipedia* @ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metoac>, accessed July 24, 2015.

³ After provoking a war with the Indians Governor Kieft began granting land patents on the outskirts of New Amsterdam to create a buffer zone around the city. Many of the initial settlers on Long Island, including the Flushing Patentees, were English, who had initially immigrated to New England.

⁴ The 1858 genealogy of the Lawrence family credits William with building the Lawrence homestead house in Bayside and this tradition has been repeated by a number of sources; however the inventory of William's estate published in Brincat's thesis does not list a house in connection with the Bayside property. See Brincat, 130-148; Louis H. Schneider, "William Lawrence Died Intestate," *Long Island Forum*, May 1967, 84-85.

⁵ Joseph Lawrence (2)'s career as a sea captain is documented by log books, account books, and other documents in the Brooklyn Historical Society, Archives and Manuscript Section, Lawrence Family Papers (1759-1852), Collection no. 1977.105. His purchase of this property from his father Richard Lawrence was cited in the deed for the property when Robert M. Bell purchased it from the estate of Henry Lawrence in 1834. NYC, Department of Finance, Queens County, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber HH, 3.

⁶ Samuel Townsend's son and Phebe Townsend's cousin Robert, code name Culper, Jr., was one of the chief agents in the scheme. See Harris, "Early Bayside," 6; "Culper Ring," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, updated on June 15, 2015 @ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culper_Ring, accessed Aug. 3, 2015.

⁷ For Judge Lawrence and Stone House see McKay, 33; Louis H. Schneider, "Judge Effingham Lawrence," *Long Island Forum*, July. 1967, 130-131; "Judge Effingham Lawrence," *Leon J. Podles: Dialogue* @ <http://www.podles.org/dialogue/judge-effingham-lawrence-2789.htm>, accessed March 3, 2016.

⁸ For the Lawrence Graveyard see Joseph H. Brown, *The Lawrence Family* (Queens, NY: Bayside Historical Society, 1989).

⁹ The youngest sister Esther married William Post of Flushing and following his death J. Grenville Osgood of Magnolia Plantation in Louisiana.

¹⁰ This section on the Bell family is based on McKay, 17, 72; Bill Jackson, *Ringin' True: The Bells of Trummery and Beyond: 350 Years of an Irish Quaker Family* (York, England: William Sessions Ltd., 2005), 138-149; Louis H. Schneider, "The Bells of Bayside," *Long Island Forum*, Mar. 1968, 50-52; Bayside Historical Society, Bell Family Papers and Photographs; *History of Queens County, New York* (New York: W.W. Munsell, 1882), 120; "Flushing: Mr. Robert M. Bell," *Queens County Sentinel* Aug. 6, 1888; University of South Carolina Library, "Records of Abraham Bell and Company (New York City), 1835-1841," @ <http://www.sc.edu/library/socar/uscs/1998/bell98.html>, accessed June 4, 2009; Winterthur Library, Abraham Bell & Co., Records, 1821-1893 @ http://findingaid.winterthur.org/html/HTML_Finding_Aids/COLO, accessed Sept. 18, 2015; New-York Historical Society Mss Collection, "Abraham Bell & Son Records Supplement, 1833-53," @ http://bobcat.library.nyu.edu/primo_library/libweb/action/display.do?ct=display&fn=search, accessed Aug. 5, 2015.

¹¹ Queens County, Conveyances, Liber T, p. 116.

¹² Queens County, Conveyances, Liber HH, p. 3.

¹³ "Whitestone," *Flushing Journal*, July 2, 1870, 2.

¹⁴ It seems likely that this was the house marked "Res. of R.M. Bell" on the Beers map of Long Island of 1886 located on the east side of Bell Avenue just north of the Ahles House. Later Richard Bell moved to a house at Palace Avenue and present-day 211th Street.

¹⁵ This information on John William Ahles is based on *Portrait and Biographical Record of Queens County, New York* (New York: Chapman Publishing Company, 1890); "John W. Ahles Is Dead at 67," *Flushing Daily Times*, Aug. 20, 1915, "J. William Ahles of Bayside, Dead," *Flushing Evening Journal*, Aug. 20, 1915, 1; "John William Ahles, *Brooklyn Eagle*, Aug. 20, 1915, 4.

¹⁶ Queens County, Conveyances, Liber 672, 228.

¹⁷ "Died," *New York Tribune*, May 26, 1896, 7.

¹⁸ Queens County, Office of the Surrogate, Wills Liber 97, 454.

¹⁹ These included a portion of the estate of Judge Effingham Lawrence, which was acquired by cigar manufacturers Storm and Straitton. See Joseph Laing, lith, *Map of 591 Building Lots Belonging to Mess. Straitton & Storm at Bayside Queens Co., L.I., surveyed by L. Graether, Whitestone, Nov. 1871*, Queens Library, Archives.

²⁰ These included E.C. Hussey, *Home Building* (New York: E.C. Hussey, 1875); Marcus F. Cummings and Charles C. Miller's *Architecture: Designs for Street Fronts, Suburban Houses, and Cottages* (Troy, NY, Marcus F. Cummings and Charles C. Miller 1868); *Bicknell's Village Builder* (NY: AJ Bicknell & Co., 1872); *Supplement to Bicknell's Village Builder* NY: AJ Bicknell & Co., 1871).

²¹ With the exception of the Lawrence house, all of these buildings are illustrated in McKay. An 1884 photograph of the Lawrence residence is in the collection of the Archives of Queens Public Library.

²² A newspaper article documents that Richard Bell's store and residential building which was constructed by builders Taff & Smith of Whitestone. "Whitestone," *Flushing Journal*, July 2, 1870, 2.

²³ In December 1904 the last section of the Abraham Bell farm, 95 acres just north of the Ahles property, was sold to the Bellcourt Land Company, a division of the Rickert-Finlay Realty Company. The following year the remaining portion of the Lawrence estate, just across Bell Avenue from the Ahles property was marketed as Lawrence Manor by the McKnight Realty Co. and in 1907 Richard M. Bell sold all but a small portion of his farm to the Bellaire Realty Company for subdivision into streets and suburban house lots. See *Atlas of the City of New York, Borough of Queens* (New York: G.W. Bromley, 1909) pl. 27; "Lawrence Manor" [Real Estate Sales Brochure], 1905, and "Map of the Bellcourt Improvement Co. Bayside," 1918 in the Bell Family Papers at the Bayside Historical Society; Landmarks Preservation Commission, 35-34 Bell

Boulevard Designation Report (LP-2154) (New York: City of New York, 2004), prepared by Matthew Postal; "Queens Lots Steady," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 18, 1907, 20; "Big Realty Week in Queens Borough," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Mar 9, 1907, 2; "Big Bayside Transfer," *The Evening Telegram*, May 20, 1907, 13.

²⁴ See "May Fight Plan to Widen Bell Avenue," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Dec. 15, 1919; "Court Approves \$32,000 Award to Ahles Estate," *Daily Star, Queens Borough*, Mar. 22, 1922, 3.

²⁵ "Ahles Realty Corp. v. Commissioner of Internal Revenue," 1998 @ http://ct.findacase.com/research/wfrmDocViewer.aspx/xq/fac.19340604_0040195.C02.html, accessed Oct. 22, 2015.

²⁶ "100 New Homes in Construction About Bayside," *Daily Star*, Apr. 10, 1923, 12. Snyder also built a three-story business building with a frontage of 75 feet on Bell Avenue and 87 feet on Elsie Place (Ahles Road/39th Avenue) known as the Ahles Building. See "Valuable Bayside Business Property in Bell Ave. Sold," *Daily Star, Queens Borough*, Feb. 27, 1925, 8.

²⁷ New York City, Department of Buildings, Queens, Alteration Permit 132-1924 and 133-1924.

²⁸ For Lewis E. Welsh see *American Architects Directory*, ed. George S. Koyle (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1956), 594; James Ward, *Architects In Practice New York City 1900-1940* (New York: the Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1989), 84; United States Federal Census, 1940, Westport, Fairfield County, Conn., 619.

²⁹ Lawrence Veiller, "Industrial Housing Developments in America, Part III A Development of Group Houses in Sawyer Park, Williamsport P.A.," *Architectural Record* 43 (May 1918).

³⁰ Lewis E. Welsh, "Some Interesting Country House Alterations," *Architectural Forum* 32 (May 1920), 195-202.

³¹ "Many Business Buildings Planned Near Bayside Depot," *Daily Star, Queens Borough*, Sept. 3, 1925, 10; "Valuable Bayside Business Property in Bell Ave. Sold," *Daily Star, Queens Borough*, Feb. 27, 1925, 8; "Possibility of Subway to Bayside Boosts Realty Values There," *Daily Star, Queens Borough*, Jan. 2, 1926, 4; "Bayside Civic Folk Stirred By Proposed Garage," *Daily Star, Queens Borough*, Apr. 14, 1925, 3; "Plan Homes for Queens," *New York Times*, Mar 14, 1936, 30.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the John William and Lydia Ann Bell Ahles House has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and culture characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the John William and Lydia Ann Bell Ahles House, an impressive Second Empire style residence updated in 1924 with Colonial Revival style alterations, is a rare reminder of 19th century Bayside, when it was a village of suburban villas and substantial farmhouses; that now located on 213th Street in Bayside, the Ahles House was built only a few years after railroad service reached Bayside in 1866 and residential subdivisions began to replace farms; that it is the only remaining example of the substantial Second Empire buildings erected in Bayside during the 1870s and 1880s; that it retains the cubic form and dormered mansard roof typical of the Second Empire style as well as details such as the molded cornice and hexagonal slate shingles; that very few 19th century houses survive in the Bayside, making the Ahles house a rare example of the period; that this house was constructed around 1873 by farmer Robert M. Bell for his daughter Lydia (usually known as Lillie) and her husband John William Ahles, a prominent grain merchant and officer of the New York Produce Exchange; that it is located on a portion of a farm that had descended in the Lawrence family from the 17th century and was purchased by Robert Bell in 1834, a few years after his marriage to Catherine Lawrence; that the Bell family and in particular Robert Bell played an important role in the development of 19th-century Bayside and today this house is the sole survivor among the houses constructed in the 19th century by this influential Bayside family; that the Ahles family also played a prominent role in late 19th and early 20th century Bayside and this house remained in the ownership of the Ahles family until the 1940s; that the house was moved from its original site to its present location in 1924 to allow Christy Street now 213th Street to be cut through to 41st Avenue; that it was then that architect Lewis E. Welsh, a prominent exponent of the Colonial Revival style who specialized in the revitalization of Victorian houses, simplified the building's façade by removing the original wrap-around porches, bay window, scroll brackets, replaced the original clapboards with stucco, and installed new features including porches and moldings that were more in keeping with the Arts-and-Crafts-infused Colonial Revival aesthetic of the 1920s; that the overall effect of Welsh's alterations was to create a building that still retained the box-like cubic massing, mansard roof, and cornice of its Second Empire origins and at the same time was a fine example of Colonial-Revival/Arts and Crafts-inspired 1920s design; that the relocation and alterations of the Ahles House are significant in their own right because they reflect the historical context of the transformation of Bayside to a commuter suburb in the early 20th century; that today this house is thought to be one of the oldest surviving in Bayside and is considered a significant reminder of the neighborhood's past.

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 John William and Lydia Ann Bell Ahles House, 39-24-39-26 213th Street, Queens, and designates Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 6236, Lot 18, as its Landmark Site.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair

Frederick Bland, Diana Chapin, Wellington Chen, Michael Devonshire, Michael Goldblum, John Gustafsson, Kim Vauss, Commissioners



John William and Lydia Ann Bell Ahles House
39-24-39-26 213th Street, Queens
Borough of Queens Block 6236, Lot 18
Photo: Jenna Dublin, 2016



John William and Lydia Ann Bell Ahles House
North facade
Photo: Jenna Dublin, 2016



John William and Lydia Ann Bell Ahles House
First story 213th Street facade
Photo: Jenna Dublin, 2016



John William and Lydia Ann Bell Ahles House
South facade
Photo: Jenna Dublin, 2016



John William and Lydia Ann Bell Ahles House

Porch detail

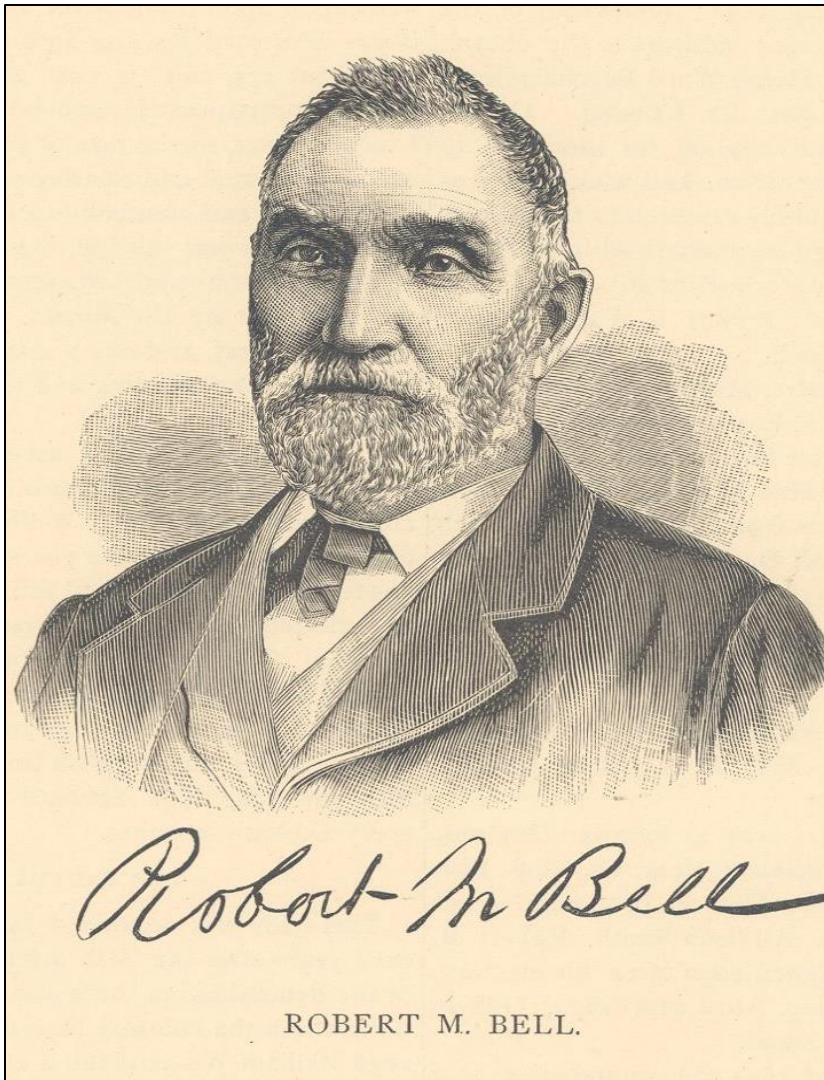
Photo: Jenna Dublin, 2016



John William and Lydia Ann Bell Ahles House
Roof detail
Photo: Jenna Dublin, 2016

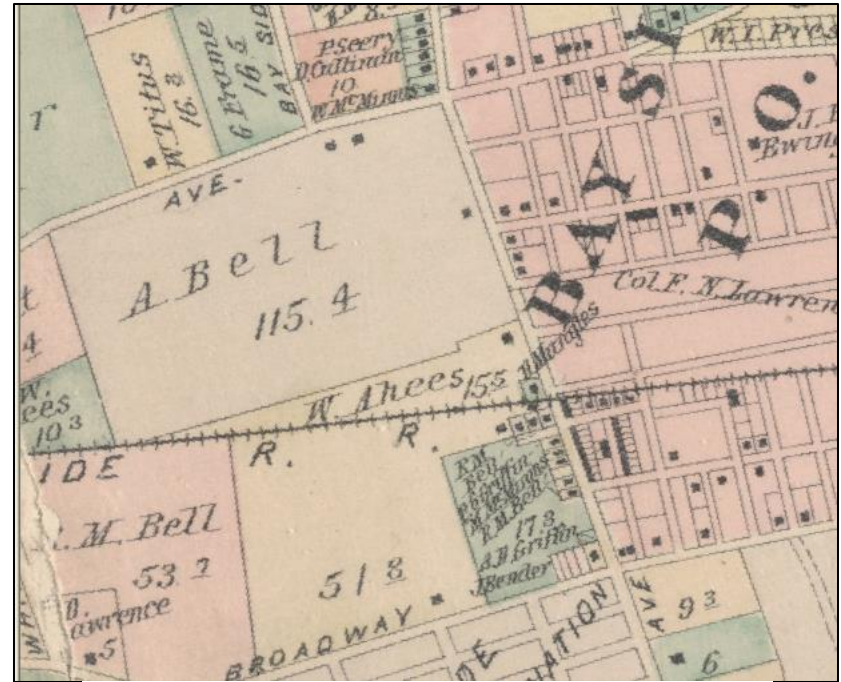


John William and Lydia Ann Bell Ahles House
After having been moved but before alterations c. 1923-24
Photo: Bayside Historical Society



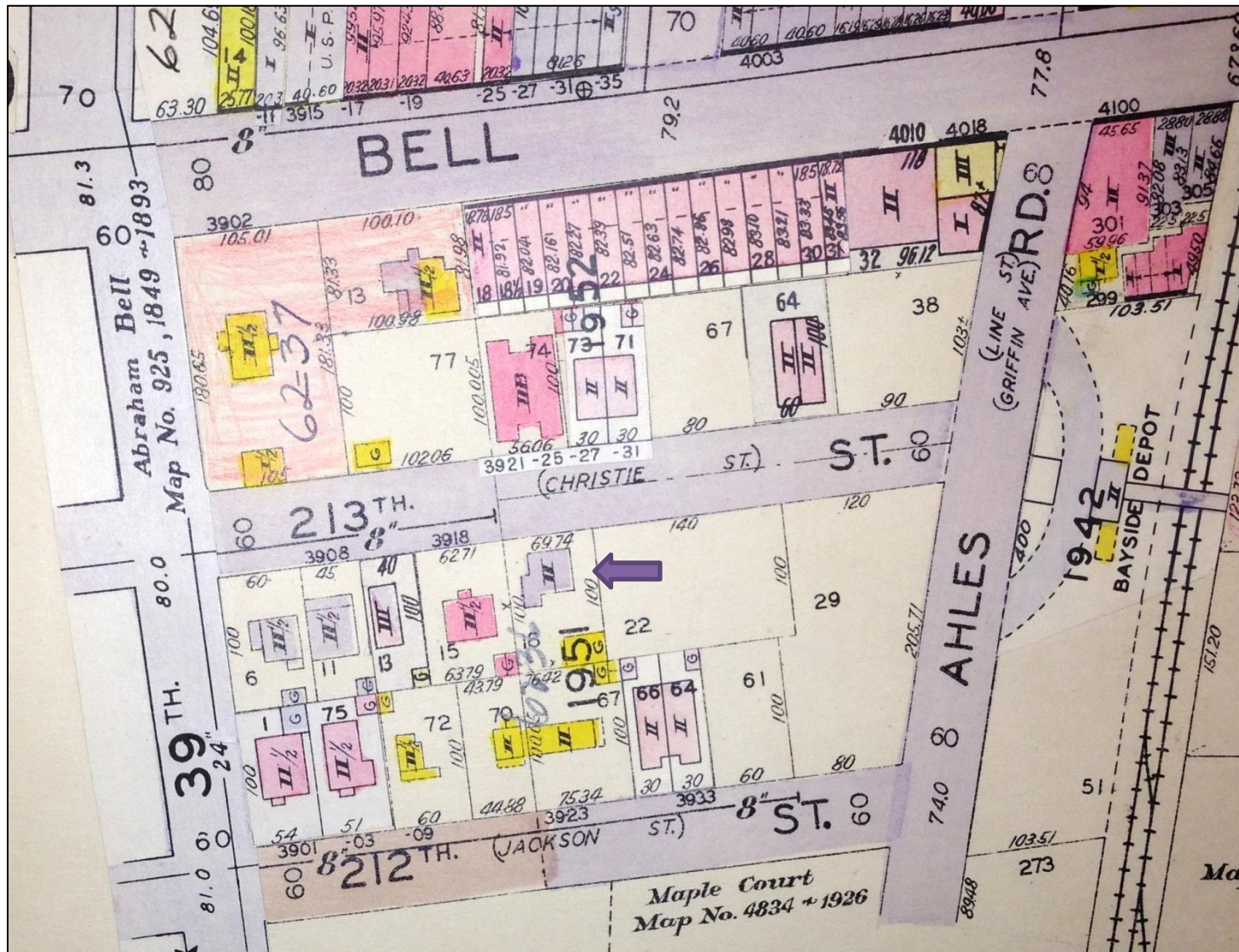
Robert M. Bell

Source: *History of Queens County*, 1882



Map of Bayside in 1891 showing the Ahles House and farm, Abraham Bell farm, Robert M. Bell farm, and the early commercial and residential development along Bell Avenue, now Bell Boulevard

Source: "Plate 29: Flushing - Douglaston - Bay Side
Atlas of Queens Co., Long Island, New York
(C. Wolverton, 1891)"



1928 atlas (updated to 1945) showing the Ahles House on its present site and the new train depot, erected on land donated by the Ahles Estate
 Source: Plate 13, *Atlas of the Borough of Queens*
 E. Belcher Hyde. 1928



John William and Lydia Ann Bell Ahles House

Photo: New York City, Department of Taxes Property Card (1957), Municipal Archive



Graphic Source: MapPLUTO, Edition 15v1, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, DHW, Date: 4.12.2016