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*Plans Park for the North End of Manhattan Island:*

*Gift of Mrs.[sic] Flora E. Isham Revives the Unfulfilled Dream of Andrew H. Green for Acquiring Inwood Hill So the City Would Have a Park at Each End of the Island*

The generous gift by Miss Flora E. Isham of several acres of valuable land for the extension of Isham Park near Kingsbridge, which the Board of Examiners accepted on Thursday, has brought into public notice one of the almost forgotten and still unfulfilled dreams of the late Andrew H. Green known as the "Father of Greater New York."

This dream which, Mr. Green hoped to see a reality before he died, was the acquisition by the city of the high wooded section at the extreme northern end of Manhattan Island, where the Spuyten Duyvil meets the Hudson, known as Inwood Hill and the turning of the territory into a park. The dream came near being made a reality when public attention was centered upon the locality a couple of years ago, when the Hudson Memorial Bridge over the Spuyten Duyvil was planned. The ground was surveyed and a broad avenue, which would be a continuation of Riverside Drive, was laid out as an approach to the bridge and then something went wrong. The park scheme seemed suddenly to have been forgotten.

When, last year, Mrs. Julia Taylor [sic] Isham (should be Mrs. Julia Isham Taylor) daughter of the late William Isham, presented the old Isham homestead and its broad acres at 213<sup>th</sup> street and Broadway to the city for a park, Park Commissioner Stover at once set about to see if something couldn't be done to obtain Inwood Hill. The owners of the hill, he learned, are willing enough to sell their property, but the city is not prepared to pay the price, about a million dollars. The price, according to Commissioner Stover, is not excessive considering what it would mean to the city's future generations. Within a few years the price would be much higher.

Adjoining Isham Park on the north the city had laid out a street, and Commissioner Stover was much concerned that apartment houses or factories would be erected that would completely shut out the view from the park toward the Hudson River, one of the finest views in the city. When the matter was explained to Miss Isham she gladly consented to buy this private land and give it to the city ***just to preserve the view***. The park now extends to the very base of Inwood Hill, and, if that territory is obtained it will extend from Broadway to the Hudson River. Inwood Hill is owned by Walter Burns, George Baker, President of the First National Bank, Mitchell A. C. Levy, the lawyer, Cornelius Kahlen, the McCreevy estate, and the Riggs estate. When it looked as if the city would buy the hill Mr. Levy, acting for the other property holders, obtained options on all of the property for the city and still holds them. He says he will sell the property at the same price at which it was originally offered.

"And if the city hasn't the money to spend right away," he told a Sunday Times reporter, "the property holders will take city bonds. The city, however, has a million dollars to sink in the sand or the ocean at Coney Island and this property which is far more valuable for park purposes, goes neglected."

"It is a shame if the city neglects to buy the hill," said Commissioner Stover, "it is

ideally situated for a park for, if the present roads are extended, it will complete Riverside Drive, thus furnishing a continuous drive along the Hudson as far as the Spuyten Duyvil and extending through Isham Park to Broadway. It is only a short distance down Broadway to Dyckman Street and the Speedway.

“If this property is obtained by the city it will mean there will be a beautiful park at both ends of Manhattan Island, Battery Park on the South and Inwood Park on the north. Some day the city will realize the advantage of having this arrangement, but the longer we wait the more it will cost. Something ought to be done at once.”

Inwood Hill is in practically the same primitive condition it existed in when it was discovered by Hendrick Hudson. In describing the section, Reginald Pelham Bolton of the Washington Heights Taxpayers Association and an authority on the historical region around Spuyten Duyvil, once wrote:

“The hill not only possesses the last remains of the wild woodlands which once covered Manhattan Island but within them are hidden the actual rock shelters which once formed the abodes of the original Manhattanites from which were taken only a few years ago unmistakable evidence of Indian habitation and around which may today be seen immense mounds of oyster and clam shells which formed the kitchen-middens of primeval man. When therefore, interest began to be evoked in the Tri-Centennial Celebration, attention was drawn to the fact that within the confines of the borough of Manhattan there still existed a priceless treasure of relics of by-gone times and of primeval inhabitants, which the great metropolis would feel it a duty to preserve. These were found to be directly associated with the advent of Henry Hudson by reason of his conflict with the natives then resident on the Indian stronghold of Nip-nich-sen which crowned the summit of the Spuyten Duyvil hill and in every probability also with the natives who were then resident under the shelter of the overhanging cliffs of the east side of Inwood Hill.

This interest has so far spread that a very general public demand has arisen for the acquisition by the city of such of the lands of Inwood Hill as will preserve these invaluable remains of the past as well as such of the scenic features of the wild woodland as shall preserve to all future generations a reminder of the original character of Manhattan Island. Certainly no more appropriate memorial of the great event of the discovery of this part of the world by Hudson could be found than the preservation in the form of a park of this beautiful locality.”

Isham Park itself is historical ground. Samuel Isham, the eldest son of William B. Isham, recalled some old memories of the place:

“My father,” he said, “leased the Kingsbridge place for the summer of 1862. The next year we went to Newburg, but in 1864, he bought the place. It was then very rough, much of it a tangled thicket of red cedars, but the lawns about the house had been carefully kept up. He cleared it, moved the stable from the top of the hill to its present place, regraded the whole hill from top to bottom, planted nearly all of the trees that now remain, and in fact remade the place into about what it is now. At that time the surroundings were only beginning to be suburban. The Kingsbridge Road was a good dirt country road—long regretted by us after it had been graded and widened, for the new street remained for years unpaved a waste of dust in dry weather and a slough of mud in wet. One relic we got from the operation the old milestone twelve miles from the City

Hall had stood some hundred feet below our gate and when it was thrown into the rubbish heap by the workmen, my father got it from the foreman and had it built into the wall by our gate post. It had been a well-known milestone, by the way. For many years, up to a comparatively short time before we bought the place, the old Dyckman House just beyond it had been the last stopping place of the drivers on their way to the city. The cattle pastured overnight in the meadows east of the road and the next day were driven to the Bull's Head at Twenty-third Street.

Our house, which was built I think by the Mr. Ferris from whom we bought the place, has remained almost unchanged. In fact, its peculiar plan rendered extension practically impossible. I suppose it dates from the fifties. The older traditions of the place go back to the Revolution, when, like all adjacent country, it was fought over. There were traces of earthworks toward the creek and in the grading and plowing there were cannon and musket balls turned up with old buckles and buttons. The lime kilns, which were the peculiar characteristic of the place, may have been pre-Revolutionary. From our gate up to the north end of the island extends almost the only marble formation in Manhattan. (I have the impression that there is one other.) Down by the creek there were kilns built to burn the marble into lime. The old stone building, now a barn, was used to store the lime which was shipped in sloops from a dock in the creek. This end of the place was probably its main center of activity a century ago. There was a small house there in 1862 used by the gardener, and though that was comparatively recent, there were other signs like apple orchards and the like which indicated that a farmhouse had stood there. A stronger argument is a spring of pure, cold water on the bank at the edge of the swamp. Near this spring still stands a cherry tree which must now be well over 100 years old and which shows its age. It used to yield an abundance of dark sweet cherries, and I suppose it may be the sole surviving specimen of the 'Dyckman Cherry' a species famous in its day, but now supposed to be extinct.

"My father's farm was for pleasure and not for profit but he had been born and brought up in the country and knew something about it, enough to take great delight in managing his farm. After the one of the more extensive grading operations, the hill was sown with wheat and when the crop was harvested and thrashed, he drove himself with sacks of grain to a grist mill that then stood on Spuyten Duyvil Creek near the old Kings Bridge and brought back the flour so that he could boast that he had eaten bread raised by himself on Manhattan Island."

Mr. Bolton again dug into the archives of the past and had this to say of its early historical associations:

"Isham Hill was the scene of some events of the Revolution, when in November 1776 the Hessian advance parties took possession and erected on the edge of the park looking south two redoubts. A sharp encounter took place in November 8<sup>th</sup>, when the Pennsylvania troops, ensconced in the woods of Inwood Hill, drove in the Hessian outposts and fired their quarters. The entire Hessian division moved over the park area where on November 16, 1776, the assault on Fort Washington was made."

Isham Park occupies a hill between Broadway, Isham Street, the United States Ship Canal, and 215<sup>th</sup> Street. The old mansion, still in a good state of preservation, is on the summit of the hill, about 300 feet above the water and commands a fine view of Inwood Hill, Cold Spring Hollow, and Spuyten Duyvil Creek to the west and the

Dyckman tract to the east and southeast. Between Inwood Hill and the Spuyten Duyvil the prospect extends across the Hudson River to the Palisades beyond. With Marble Hill adjoining to the north, where stands the old mansion once owned and occupied by "Boss" Tweed. It covers a space about one and a half miles in length and three quarters of a mile in width.

The ground comprising the park was the favorite haunt of the Wech-quas-keeks a local Indian tribe, and many evidences of their existence have recently been discovered. Human remains have been disinterred on the south margin of the park at Isham Street, as well as many evidences of the ceremonial---burials hard by at Cooper Street, while stone objects, tools, and weapons have been dug from the soil all over the hill. As soon as the necessary money can be obtained, those objects will be placed on view in the old mansion.

Borough President McAneny is enthusiastic over the gift made by Miss Isham, and foresees the time when the park will be a blessing to the population which is growing rapidly within easy walking distance of it. He said:

"The garden site may be utilized as a shaded playground for little children by planting clipped linden trees arranged formally with seats underneath on clean white pebbled ground as the French have done in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris. There might be a pool in the center, and shelters on the side. The old mansion however will be used as a main pavilion, with perhaps refreshment accommodations for women and their babies.

"A stairway, in circular arrangement, leads down from Seaman Avenue to the long meadow which drops to Indian Road. The water front from the bulkhead line to the Cold Spring Road, might be developed as a park dock or recreation pier with a cut-in boat basin and landings and with some covered shelters low enough, of course, not to interfere with the sight of the river from the hill.

"As the population crowds around the park in commercial and residential buildings, this breathing space of exceptional beauty, with its varied topography, will be more and more appreciated and remain a constant reminder of the generosity of the donors and the wisdom of the city officials in accepting and preserving such a noble gift for the benefit of the people of the City of New York.

"There are no other parks on Manhattan Island north of 181<sup>st</sup> Street except the precipitous cliffs alongside the Harlem River Speedway, known as the High Bridge Park, and even this park is not adapted for general public use, and is not easily accessible to the people of Washington Heights or the Dyckman tract. The streets in this territory are almost entirely bare of trees, and, except for the cool and shady retreat offered by Isham Park, there is no place where mothers and children can find relief from the summer heat.

"There is a large garden at the southeast corner of the park, elm and maple trees around the mansion, and groves of fine trees all over the ground. A magnificent avenue of elm trees border the carriage way leading into the park from the Broadway entrance; this carriage way continues up to the mansion, which is surrounded by well-kept lawns, and the grounds are traversed by numerous winding pathways. On account of the high elevation of the park, there are uninterrupted views looking in nearly every direction. Access can now be had from Broadway and 212<sup>th</sup> Street through the old iron gateway and thence by carriage road through the avenue of elms and around the westerly slope of the

hillside up to the mansion. There are large groups of maple and locust trees along the boundary lines of the extension, and these form a most beautiful natural frame or border for the Hudson River view from the hilltop.”