

VALLEY STREAM GREW FROM STRAGGLING
HAMLETS IN THE LATE SEVENTIES
TO ITS PRESENT PLACE AS
ONE OF NASSAU'S BEST
RESIDENTIAL
SECTIONS

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Valley Stream may now proudly raise its head as one of Nassau's foremost residential areas, but it had best keep the family album tucked away out of sight. It has a skeleton in the closet. It was once the south shore's most straggling village, with scattered portions spread all over the maps, some so sparsely and poorly settled they became the butt of other communities' jokes.

ALL FARMS: In the late seventies, there was no such community as Valley Stream, either in name or form. All was farmland and a good part of what is now the Merrick Road business section was not even that, but wild woodland.

The northwest section, approaching where Elmont is now, was known as Foster's meadow. It was the main farming section then and old Valley Stream developed from that point. On the extreme southwest, approaching Jamaica Bay, was Hungry Harbor, so called because it was largely a squatter's settlement and the squatters went hungry a good part of the time.

MORE NICKNAMES: Other fancy names were given to other sections of the community later on by the "uppity" inhabitants of Pearsall's corners and Near Rockaway, later Lynbrook and East Rockaway. The northeast section got the name "Tigertown" and later on when five hotels and four residents comprised the business section where Rockaway Avenue joins the railroad now, they named it "Rum Junction."

A section northwest of the corner of Hendrickson and Corona avenues got the name "Cookie Hill." It was a squatters' community, too, and had a racy reputation, due partly to the fact that several ladies of doubtful virtue, who have come down to posterity as "Black Sue," "Speckled Elsie" and others, lived there.

Except for Foster's meadow and the nicknames, the farmland was known generally as "between Near Rockaway and Jamaica" and Jonas Hall when he married in 1850 and brought his bride to live on the old Hall homestead where Corona Avenue and Beverly parkway is today, gave his address on the wedding certificate as Near Rockaway.

VILLAGE GETS DIGNITY, NAME AS PAGAN GIFT.

Valley Stream got dignity and a name with the arrival of Robert Pagan, a canny Scot who made his way from New York city to Foster's meadow, shortly after emigrating to this country. He built himself tiny, one story home on a sizable plot he bought between two brooks north of Hendrickson avenue and opened up a general store. It was the village's first store and it prospered.

Pagan enlarged the place after a few years and built the house that was later remodeled into what is now the Fairchild home at Hendrickson avenue near Henry street. Pagan put forward the idea of a local postoffice to save the local people from going to Hempstead for the mail and when the postal authorities wanted a name that wouldn't conflict with other stations, he gave them one. He took the valleys of the hilly sections in the north end of the village and the streams that cut through to the south end and put them together. It is the only village by that name in the United States.

CHURCH STARTED: Pagan's wife, Helen Madoul, started the first religious services the community knew. Tiring of traveling miles over rough road to the Old Sand Hole church in Lynbrook, Mrs. Pagan started services in her home.

A Methodist minister on the Long Island circuit was secured for periodic stops and the church going population of Valley Stream met

each Sunday in the living room of the Pagan home. The room is still intact. It was about this time that Pagan, because the neighbors thought his name sounded "heathenish" for a man who had the name changed to Payan, the name borne by descendants of the family and a street named after him.

A chapel called "Sinners Hope" was established by the tiny congregation later where School 13 now stands. From the chapel was formed the congregation of the present Grace Methodist Episcopal Church.

THE OLD TIMERS: There were perhaps a score of farms in the whole section when Pagan arrived. The Cornell and Hall families owned most of the land from where the Hempstead branch of the railroad now, west to Miller's brook. The Hendricksons and Pflugs were further west. Joseph Mott, Captain Carter, Edward Eldred, Samuel Stillwell, Albert Hendrickson and the Cammon family owned farms on the north. Farms in the southwest section were owned by the Wright, Lindner, Rasweiler and Shaw families. The Nostrand farm was about where the main business section is today. The old Nostrand homestead is still standing on Roosevelt Avenue, then called Rockaway road.

Adjoining Nostrand was Abram F. Foster and Daniel Hewlett had the land across Rockaway avenue. Further south along Rockaway avenue were the Schreiber, Horton and Doxsey farms. On the west close to Hungry Harbor, was the farm of Remson Hendrickson. The Reising and Reisersts were comparatively recent arrivals.

ROADS FEW: With no Merrick road in existence, Valley Stream inhabitants used Hempstead turnpike, a plank road, to get to Jamaica and the city. They reached the turnpike through Corona avenue, then called Mill road, or Dutch Broadway, now Hempstead avenue, and Central

Avenue, then known as Sand street. Merrick road was put through as a plank road from Lynbrook to Jamaica in 1853 and it was then the tide began to turn toward the present business section. The railroad definitely settled the issue.

To reach Lynbrook and points east, it was necessary to travel south along Rockaway avenue to the junction of Broadway, from there to East Rockaway and back over Ocean avenue to Lynbrook.

INDUSTRIES SPARSE: Practically the only early industries with the exception of farming were the saw and grist mills that cut up the farmer's timber and ground his grain. True, there was a soap factory for a time at Hungry Harbor, but it was a fly-by-night affair.

The factory was started by two Jamaica men, Ned and Charles Hearst and flourished for a time getting its biggest boom when an epidemic of black measles attacked Long Island hogs, killing them by the thousands. The Hearst boys bought up the dead hogs for a song and made enough money to retire. They kept most of Hungry Harbor's population employed until the hogs developed immunity to measles and business petered out.

The Wright family owned two saw mills, one at Corona avenue, opposite Morris parkway and the other at the Mill pond south of the railroad. They sold to the Fowlers and the upper pond, now dried up became known as Fowler's pond. The Cornells had a grist mill on Corona Avenue, about where it now turns into Franklin avenue. The family consisted of David, Horton and Pearsal or "Passwell" Cornell. Matthew Cornell, son of Pearsall, sold the mill and went into farming. Another sawmill was located at Merrick road and Watt's pond, the State Park lake.

The grist mills passed out of business 70 years ago. The saw mills lasted slightly longer. The Fowler family conducted a steam mill for a time later on their property adjoining Merrick Road.

PLENTY OF TAVERNS: With German immigrants thickly sprinkled among the early Valley Stream farm group, the community early achieve the reputation of being among the south shore's best "elbow benders."

Smith Combes, whose son Thedwell, lives on Carpenter street today, is credited with starting one of the first taverns on Corona avenue in the present James Hay home. Anton Bruns opened up a grocery store and saloon in his farmhouse at Central avenue and did such a good business he was later able to build a large hotel in the new business section as the nucleus of "Rum Junction," Bruns' original saloon and farmhouse is still standing as a two family house at 201 Central avenue.

FIRST SCHOOLHOUSE: With a church, a tavern and store clusterin in the Corona avenue area, Valley Stream completed its first business section with the erection of a one-room school building just west of Sinners' Hope chapel. Marshall C. Dibble, Pagan's son-in-law, and father of the present Robert M. Dibble, received \$600 a year for teaching school. He was school master when the Civil war broke out.

Before District 24 was organized, school was kept in a one room building about where Fourth street is now. It was a poor building and hard to heat. William P. Horton, a trustee, had to act in the double role of janitor during cold spells to keep the stove functioning properly.

RUFUS BROWER: One of the old school masters was Rufus (or Rulus) Brower, whose brother, Abe, is still living in Woodmere, Rufus had a game leg, but it didn't stop him from becoming a widely known Democratic politician. He was one of the earlier justices of the peace and undoubtedly Valley Stream's most popular schoolmaster. A poker player of some renown, the students often got an unscheduled holiday when Rufus saw the makings of a good poker game in the offering. And it was taken for granted there would be no school when a Democratic convention was in session.

First called the annex to District 14 of Woodmere and Hewlett, District 24 was organized as a separate district in 1894. The first officers were James Payan, Robert Pagan's son; Abram F. Foster and Frank J. Armstrong, with R. M. Dibble as clerk and David W. Horton, collector of taxes.

MERRICK ROAD BEGAN SHIFT TOWARDS SOUTH: The coming of Merrick road as a plank road in 1853 definitely gave the village a shift toward the south, splitting the farms in that section and giving the community direct connections with Jamaica and the city. The road cut through James Payan's farm and crossed the land of James and Matthew Cornell, Joseph Wright, owner of large parcels of land in the Merrick road area, was one of those interested in opening the road. It was planked from Jamaica to Merrick and the toll was $1\frac{3}{4}$ cents a mile, total of 27 cents for the stretch.

NEW STORE BEGUN: One of the first business enterprises in the new section was a general store, James Fletcher started at the northeast corner of Merrick road and Central avenue. The section was

growing fast with the coming of the stage coach lines along the plank road, and Fletcher had a prosperous business.

Andrew Wilson, who worked for Fletcher, ran the business for Mr Fletcher when her husband died, until Joseph F. Felton bought it. Felton, born in Foster's meadow, made the business a still greater success and aided in turning the trend of business southward. He later aided in organizing the Lynbrook National bank.

FIRST SMITHY; Even before the plank road went through, Joseph Golder, whose son, Elbert, is now a village assessor, had a blacksmith shop at Merrick road, west of Central avenue. Golder had a far-flung reputation as an expert shoer and farmers from many miles around brought their horses to him. He was one of the village's most popular citizens, a typically good-natured smithy who sang at his work and joked with the children who collected at the shop door. A gas station now stands on the site of his shop. His son, Elbert, started a store 46 years ago at Rockaway avenue near Hawthorne avenue.

There were few shops in those days, Mathew Fuhrer opened the first butcher shop in the late eighties, William Smith had a large tailoring establishment just about where the Pavillon Royal is now. He brought goods in bolts from the city and scoured the countryside in a wagon, taking orders for Sunday suits.

RAILROAD ARRIVES: The coming of the railroad in 1864 boomed the price of land, farmers getting from \$50 to \$150 an acre then, while they figured themselves lucky to get \$20 when the plank road was cut through. There was not a station at Valley Stream and passengers signaled with a pocket handkerchief when they wanted to get aboard. The stop was made where Franklin avenue is now.

Valley Stream got another "break" when the Rockaway beach division was put through. There was plenty of competition between Pearsalls Corners and Valley Stream for the junction. Geographic decided the issue, Valley Stream being the natural turning-off point, and the junction was established there. It put Valley Stream on the map. A spur line was later built to Hempstead.

BRUNS MOVES: About 1878, Anton Bruns saw the writing on the wall and left his place at Central avenue to build a new hotel opposite the railroad station. The building is still there, at the east side of the street. There were long waits for train connections and business got so good a man named Riley started a hotel across the street. It is now Pitney's hotel. Three other places quickly followed, giving rise to the nickname "Rum Junction." Adam Landgrabe had a hotel where the First National bank building is today, his brother Henry, had a smaller place where the Sunrise highway is now, and Peter Lucas opened a hotel at Merrick road and Rockaway avenue, which is still standing.

FIRE DEPARTMENT: When there was a fire prior to 1893, they just watched the building burn. The largest fire in village history destroyed a bakery where the Capie building now stands, and it took a month for 30 tons of coal in the basement to burn out. That started the fire department, and Elbert Golder was the first foreman.

A ladder and bucket hand-drawn truck was bought from Canarsie for \$150 and the Nassau Hook and Ladder company was organized. It was a bucket brigade organization. They still were unable to do much more than wet down adjoining buildings if a blaze got much of a start, but they served in good stead until the coming of modern apparatus.

BUILDING DEVELOPMENT: After its spurt of the fifties, Valley Stream did little in real development until the past 12 years. Several land developments were started earlier, but they were unsuccessful. The Abrams, Horton and other farms were subdivided, but no intensive residential development began until 1924. R. M. Dibble and Arthur McDermott aided in development of the Rockaway Parkway section north of Merrick road and the High-class Gibson development to the south aided greatly in boosting the business district recently.

MANY IMPROVEMENTS BOASTED BY PRESENT THRIVING VILLAGE SHOW
MARES OF THEIR HANDS

Payan and Felton Gave Long and varied public service in many ways
fields before deaths--Dibble Still Carrying on.

Some half a century after Valley Stream emerged in the early eighties from a group of farm hamlets to a village with a name and the rudiments of a business center, it entered on a second period of growth. And it was in this second metamorphic period, when the village was taking on the habiliments of a modern community, that the figures of Robert M. Dibble, James Payan and Joseph F. Felton stood out prominently along with perhaps a half dozen others.

The coming of the Montauk division of the Long Island railroad fed new blood into all the south shore communities and as the Gay Ninety era was ushered in, we find many communities, among them, Valley Stream, sounding the cry for improvements. Better schools, churches, roads, and fire fighting facilities were on the early demand list.

Leaders arose to organize community sentiment in all these matters and in that connection we find Mr. Dibble aiding in school betterment, Mr. Felton guiding the reins toward an efficient fire department and Mr. Payan a leader in both educational and religious development.

FARMERS DISSATISFIED: While the old type of German farmers who accounted for a good part of Valley Stream's early settlement were willing to go along without much change, satisfied to get a good living out of their farms, their sons and daughters were not content to stand still.

While they had a healthy respect for the calling that lifted their ancestors from the precarious position of immigrants in a new land, they looked with envious eyes at the accomplishments the newcomers brought into the community in increasing numbers as rail and road transportation got better.

Agitation for better schools and other early improvements found them generally in a receptive state of mind, and they made considerable sacrifices to install adequate churches, the first social center of all rural areas. It was not until later, when the cry for improvements was boomed by the demands of commuter groups with established incomes, that the farmers, fearful of losing their holdings through high taxation, turned back and fought further expenditures.

While they were criticized as re-actionaries and ridiculed by the newer residents of many villages, the old-timers' fear of living beyond their means municipally had been recognized in the past few years of the depression as good judgment rather than stiff-neckedness.

When the matter of school improvements came up, Dibble was well qualified to understand them, inasmuch as his father, Marshall C. Dibble, had taught school in the one-room village schoolhouse on the site of the present school in district 13 building as far back as 1859. Mr. Payan was similarly well qualified, as the elder Mr. Dibble was related to him by marriage and a close friend.

Mr. Payan was the son of Robert Pagan, early Hendrickson avenue general store keeper, who gave the village its name of Valley Stream, and changed his own name later to clear up any doubts about him being a sincere Christian. Mrs. Marshall Dibble was one of Robert Pagan's daughters.

QUEENS MANDAIDED: The way for new school districts in Valley Stream and many other south shore districts was paved by the activity of John B. Merrill, school commissioner of Queens County, of which Nassau was then a part.

Merrill was a thorough believer in education as the savior of the masses. Although a lawyer with a wide practice, he found time to make frequent trips to the rural areas in his county and do missionary work among the more upstanding citizens of the communities, advocating more and better schools.

Merrill would often of his own volition ask trustees of a district with few school facilities to call a meeting for the edification of the hearers on the need of better education for their children. While many of his audience would be unable to read or write themselves they listened to his talks with interest and a large part of the "Schoolmindedness" that has had its sequel in the many fine buildings erected throughout Nassau in recent years may be traced to his early crusading.

Although Merrill was defeated finally by Dr. James S. Cooley a school commissioner, his work lived after him, and on September 11, 1894, we find a score of Valley Stream's good citizens getting together at a meeting to organize anew school district.

DISTRICT 24 FORMED: The meeting was held in what was called the annex to district 14 of Hewlett and Woodmere. The building was a new structure, one story high, and without a single article of furniture. A table, a few dozen chairs and kerosene lamps were borrowed to conduct the meeting.

Both Dibble and Payan took an active part in the proceedings and the meeting ended with most of the 48 voters of the district casting their ballots in favor of forming the new district. Payan was elected chairman of the board, and Dibble clerk. The other two trustees were Abram F. Foster and Frank J. Armstrong. The main argument advanced for the new district was the distance to the main school of district 14 at Hewlett.

UNION FREE SCHOOL: Although the common practice then was to form a common district school, the Valley Stream group were advised by Dr. Colley to form a union free school district under a different law, as it would give the board of education greater power, permitting them to bond the district for one or more buildings, according to necessity and float the bonds for a longer period.

To make the change, Payan called a new meeting on January 2, 1895 and the union free school district was organized. The next question was buying a site and that was accomplished shortly after at a special meeting.

A large plot, including 22 lots in all, was bought from Anton Bruns, the village's first tavernkeeper. Interested himself in the cause of education, Bruns sold the lots to the district at \$50 each for a total of \$1,000, throwing in the two extra lots for good measure.

A new two-story building was later built on the plot, it was a comparatively elaborate structure, with a hall in the center, a classroom on each side, and two more class rooms upstairs. At that early date, there were no legal objections to a school official participating in a contract. The districts were glad to have their own men,

whom they could trust, do work wherever possible. Therefore, when the firm of Abrams and Dibble bid \$18 lower than their nearest competitor they were awarded the contract for the new building along with the gratitude of the district. On August 2, 1898, Mr. Dibble was elected trustee to succeed Abram F. Foster, who refused to run for re-election.

DISTRICT GREW FAST: The population of the district jumped rapidly in the next few years, and by 1907, the question of more school facilities was again before the public. A new eightroom brick building was decided on as the best investment. Some of the farmers were beginning to buck mounting taxes by then, and the proposition, although carried, had opposition-the vote being 98 to 20.

The new building cost \$30,000 and was erected by Charles A. Schiffmacher. It was one of the first structures in the village to have steam heat. By that time, Mr. Dibble was the only one of the original district officials left. James Payan had given way to Christopher Schreiber as board president, and his son, Wallace Payan, was clerk. Edward Miller was the third trustee. The school built in 190 was added to in 1913 and served the district until 1925 when the Franklin avenue school was opened.

THORN TO OFFICIALS: One of the early thorns in the sides of school officials was a Valley Stream weekly newspaper, "The Register" published by a whimsical journalist named J. C. Emerson, who later became affiliated with various weekly publications in other south shore villages.

Emerson paid close attention to school affairs and officials charged him with trying to run the district through his newspaper. He

went in heavily for rhyming and was given to informing the public in meter of how much the board members would make on contracts.

ACTIVE REALTOR: Besides his activities in the school district, Mr. Dibble was active through his business as a real estate operator in opening several sections for home developments that ultimately boomed the village as a residential section.

As far back as 1907, he negotiated the sale of 120 acres of farmland including the Wright, Muller, Langdon and William J. Hall properties to a Brooklyn concern for development purposes. It was cut up into 2000 lots and sold mostly to city residents for investment at high prices. It was bought in at foreclosure in 1917 for \$66,000 and sold to the Valley Stream Land corporation.

In 1924, Mr. Dibble and Arthur McDermott bought 1,000 lots back and started a residential development. It built up rapidly after running water, fire protection and other improvements were secured and became one of the Village's best residential areas.

After Valley Stream was incorporated in 1924, Mr. Dibble was elected Village trustee. He advocated a program of gradual improvement with new roads and other necessities budgeted over a period of years to avoid any sharp rise in taxation.

He fought the provision inserted in village law permitting the village trustees to vote certain expenditures without putting them before the people and included in his election platform a provision that all propositions involving public expenditure be settled by public ballot.

FELTON ACTIVE: Besides his work in boosting the Merrick road business section of Valley Stream through operation over a long term of years of one of the finest general stores on the south shore, Joseph S. Felton drew the appreciation of the community through his activity in modernizing the fire department. The adequate fire protection accorded to the village through up-to-date apparatus resulted in lowered insurance rates and was an asset in bringing outside residents into the village.

From the first bucket brigade company with a hand pumper of which E. H. Golder was foreman and Mr. Dibble assistant foreman, the department rose in a few years to a regular district with a board of commissioners. The district was formed after running water was installed in the village and Mr. Felton was a member of the first board of commissioners.

Mr. Felton, along with Dr. J. M. Foster, president, worked actively for the purchase of the Merrick road firehouse site and floated bonds for the erection of a firehouse. It was the first firehouse paid for by the district as a whole.

Three years later, Mr. Felton succeeded Dr. Foster as president of the board and Mr. Dibble was elected a member. Both saw the advantages of motorized apparatus, generally considered a fad in those early days, and worked among their neighbors in the district in advocating its purchase.

Two trucks were finally bought, one to be kept in the Corona avenue firehouse and the other in the Merrick road building. Several

Trucks were added later and a fire alarm system installed. The original 63 hydrants were added to continually until a total of 200 was reached and the adequacy of the volunteer department became one of the realtors' best talking points.

After giving up his general store, Mr. Felton became a prominent banker. He joined with Hamilton W. Pearsall and other Lynbrook men in forming the Lynbrook National bank, a boon to the business men of both Lynbrook and Valley Stream, who, prior to its formation were obliged to go to Rockville Centre for their banking.

Mr. Felton succeeded Mr. Pearsall as president of the institution, and office he held until his death recently.

PAYAN AS CHURCHMAN: Besides his civic activities, James Payan was distinguished as one of Valley Stream's most prominent churchmen and during his entire life was active in promoting religious activities within the village.

From the time the first Methodist-Episcopal group of worshipper got together in the living room of the Robert Pagan home at Hendrickson avenue, (the present Fairchild residence), James Payan was an earnest worker for the church cause.

He was among the group that organized the Sinners Hope chapel, the first church group in the village and he remained one of its steadfast supporters for years. Because the chapel was a considerable distance from the Merrick road section, a group of the congregation, among them Mr. Payan, were given permission in 1904 to found Grace Methodist Episcopal Church in the central part of the village.

They raised \$6,000 and built a church at Franklin and Fairview avenues. It was the first real religious institution the village boasted. Payan was a trustee until his death in October, 1917 at the age of 87, and treasurer during most of that period.

ACTIVE REPUBLICAN: Mr. Payan was a prominent Republican and active for many years at county and town conventions. He was a town committeeman for the greatest part of his life and held the office of town assessor and town auditor for several terms each. His main business, however, was farming which he conducted on an acreage running north from his home at the north side of Merrick road at Fletcher avenue, part of the original Pagan holdings.

As early as 1890, Mr. Payan, was active in starting the Valley Stream Improvement company, the village's first civic association. He was active in opposition to the old Williamson lighting district plan in which a Jamaica man attempted to sell current for street lights to a large district embracing Valley Stream, Lynbrook and the Branch, at rates which the taxpayers claimed exorbitant. It was later abandoned