

# The Information Window

## The Mystery Church

*By Gary Hammond, Trustee*

If you have ever driven on Jerusalem Avenue between Wantagh and Bellmore you probably noticed and wondered about the history of the brown-shingled/white-clapboarded church - surrounded by strip malls, the Temple B'Nai Torah, North Shore Farms, and 20th century houses.

The 115-year-old Saint Matthias Church is the only surviving original building from the first attempts by the Episcopal Diocese to include "colored" from Queens and Nassau Counties into the church. Exhibiting shingle style architecture, the building appears to be the second oldest surviving African-American religious structure in Nassau County, following the 1833 Lakeville AME Zion Church, located in Manhasset.

This building survives in remarkably original condition, retaining its original 1904 cornerstone, half clapboard, half shingle exterior, topped by a wooden bell tower. The lower course of the shingles is highlighted with a saw-toothed detail. Another feature is the diamond paned gothic style windows which complements the matching large circular window over the front entrance. More remarkable is that the interior still retains its original beadboard wall and ceiling covering.

Through the efforts of many concerned local residents and professionals in the field, along with the support of the Wantagh Preservation Society, on 2019 February 26, the Town of Hempstead Landmarks Preservation Commission recommended designating the Saint Matthias Church as a Town landmark. This nomination now must go before the Town Board which hopefully will approve the designation.

This building served as the religious and social focal point for the local African American residents who inhabited the area known as "the Brush". As early as 1835 the Quakers had built a school for the local "black" children, this being the earliest organized attempt to help the local African American residents of Jerusalem (now Wantagh). Ten years later the local AME Zion Church would have 47 members. After that building was destroyed by fire, the current Saint Matthias Church was built on the property with funds donated by local white residents. In 2018 the congregation then occupying the church and nearly one acre of property were evicted by the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island which now has the property up for sale. The fate of the building is threatened by possible demolition and redevelopment of the property, which aerial photos clearly show as the last surviving unaltered piece of the now forgotten home of this free African American community. Complementing this designation is three other previously landmarked African American sites located within walking distance of Saint Matthias. The 1830 Lawrence home was owned by three generations of a free black family; the Harold Avenue Cemetery where African American members of the Jackson family are buried; and the former "Old Burying Ground", where at least 108 residents, including four members of the Civil War "US Colored Troops" are buried. This was the site of the former AME Zion church, and where well into the 20th century the members of Saint Matthias continued to be buried.

Learn more about this historic Church and "the Brush" community at the April 30th meeting of the WPS when Trustee Gary Hammond will give a PowerPoint presentation on the subject. 📖



*See page 3 on becoming a WPS member!*



*Saint Matthias Church viewed from Jerusalem Avenue*



*Saint Matthias Church viewed from the back*

### Upcoming Events:

- ◆ Trustee Meeting, April 2, 7:00 PM at Wantagh Museum
- ◆ General Meeting, April 30, 7:00 PM at Wantagh Library, All are Welcome, Program: "Looking Back at the Saint Matthias Church"
- ◆ Trustee Meeting, May 7, 7:00 PM at Wantagh Museum
- ◆ General Meeting, May 28, 7:00 PM at Wantagh Library, All are Welcome, Program: "Long Island a Go-Go (1964-1967 LI pop culture)"

### Wantagh Preservation Society

1700 Wantagh Avenue (Museum Location)

PO Box 132 (Mailing Address)

Wantagh, Long Island, New York 11793

516.826.8767

[museum.wantagh.li](http://museum.wantagh.li)



# Wantagh Preservation Society

## Elected Officers

*President:* Tom Watson  
*Vice President:* Bob Meagher  
*Recording Secretary:* Open  
*Treasurer:* Wayne Wagner

## Appointed Officers

*Curator:* Carol Poulos  
*Newsletter Editor:* Jim Colotti

## Trustees

Bob Cook  
Ellen Cook  
Mary Corrigan  
Gary Hammond  
Fred Parola  
Claire Reisert  
Barry Rivadue  
Paul Sigler  
Matt Susco  
Mary Wagner  
Elaine Yarris

*The Information Window is the official newsletter of the Wantagh Preservation Society, and is published approximately six times each year. Please obtain written permission from the individual authors before using material contained in this publication.*

*We hope you enjoy our newsletter. Your comments, ideas and suggestions are welcome!*

[wps@wantagh.li](mailto:wps@wantagh.li)



*The WPS participated the Wantagh Saint Patrick's Day Parade. Please see last page for more on the inaugural event.*

***Museum is now  
closed but  
will be reopen Sunday  
April 28***



***More renovations are  
underway!***

## Wantagh Preservation Society Receives “Organization of the Year” Award

*By Tom Watson, WPS President*

The Wantagh Chamber of Commerce awarded the Wantagh Preservation Society with the Organization of the Year award for 2018. Society President Tom Watson and Trustee Matt Susco accepted the award on behalf of the Society at the Chamber's Installation dinner on 2019 January 17. Outgoing Chamber President, Patrick Benot presented the award. The event was held at the Riviera restaurant in Massapequa, Long Island. 📖





## It's Official: The Wantagh Museum is "Fun"

*By Jim Colotti, Editor*

In a recent edition of Newsday's Lifestyle/Family publication, the Wantagh Museum was officially listed as one of the "Fun Long Island places for kids who love trains".

The article lists the many places in Nassau and Suffolk counties for train enthusiasts. Along with the Wantagh Museum, the article also includes venues featuring miniature train rides, real historic locomotive cars and model railroad clubs. 📖



Scan or click the QR  
code to read the  
complete Newsday  
article



*The Wantagh Museum Photo Featured in the Newsday Article*



*Become a WPS member  
- scan or click the QR  
code or mail in the  
coupon below - and  
thanks!*

## Are You a Member?

*By Mary Wagner, Membership Chairman*

Our membership drive for 2019 begins on January 1 and ends on December 31. The money raised through membership is used for maintenance of our museum and grounds, as well as the post office and Jamaica parlor car restoration projects. Our latest project is recreating the World War I memorial at the Long Island Railroad Station where it originally stood. You are not just joining the society - you become a supporter of history by enabling the society to continue its work to educate residents, especially children, on Wantagh's past.

Please join us by paying your dues for 2019. We also invite you to become an active member of the society. Please also let us know if you have any old Wantagh photos, old Wantagh newspapers, or any other historical Wantagh artifacts. Thanks! 📖

### ***We Need You! Join or Renew Your Membership in 2019!***

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Street: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Town: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ New ☐ Renew ☐  
 Email: \_\_\_\_\_

I'd like to help with:

- |   |   |   |                                      |
|---|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening & Planting       | <input type="checkbox"/> General Meeting Planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Construction             | <input type="checkbox"/> Publicity   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hosting museum on a Sunday | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Event Planning   | <input type="checkbox"/> Publication & Newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Restoration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____                |   |   |                                      |

Check Membership Level: ☐ Individual \$15 ☐ Family \$25 ☐ Friend \$35 ☐ Patron \$50 ☐ Fellow \$100

**Please Make Checks Payable To: Wantagh Preservation Society PO Box 132 Wantagh, NY 11793**



## WPS Presents Citation to Boy Scout of Troop 96

*By Tom Watson, WPS President*

Society President Tom Watson and Trustee Fred Parola presented Michael Silverman of Boy Scout Troop 96 with a citation in honor of his achievement of attaining the rank of Eagle Scout. Michael's Eagle Scout ceremony was held on 2019 February 23 at the Wantagh Memorial Congregational Church.

Michael's Eagle Scout project was conducted at the museum grounds and included installation of a new gravel path, the addition of gravel where needed on existing paths, the installation of a new signpost, clearing out an overgrown section, and painting and refurbishing the outhouse. 📖



*Michael Silverman (center) accepts citation from Tom Watson (left) and Fred Parola (right)*

## WPS Participates in Wantagh's First Saint Patrick's Day Parade

*By Jim Colotti, Editor*

The Wantagh Preservation Society participated in Wantagh's inaugural Saint Patrick's Day Parade on a bright, unseasonably warm Sunday last month. Organized by the Wantagh Chamber of Commerce, the event exceeded expectations with more than 51,000 spectators according to the Chamber.



Trustee Matt Susco drove his vintage 1947 Chevy Fleetmaster adorned with the WPS banner, while Carol Poulos, WPS Curator, rode shotgun. Other organizations participating in the event included the Wantagh Board of Education, Wantagh Volunteer Fire Department, Wantagh Knights of Columbus, Brownie Troops, Cub Scout units, Boy Scout units, Wantagh Lions Club, Wantagh-Levittown Volunteer Ambulance Corps, Bideawee, Wantagh Chamber of Commerce and many others. 📖



*For more parade photos scan or click the QR code*



*For the Herald parade article scan or click the QR code*

