

NY City - Bronx
**The Bronx
In History**

By JOHN McNAMARA

Joseph
**Francis Rodman Drake, Local Poet,
Sang of (Then) Lovely Bronx River**

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Old Hunt's Point Road was a wandering rural lane that had scarcely any connection with the modern, straight avenue of the same name, and it led through a region of unspoiled natural beauty. A young poet named Joseph Rodman Drake used to stroll along its length, sometimes to explore the (then) clear and beautiful Bronx River. Although he was an accredited physician, he leaned more to literature and was part of a writers' group that included Fitz-Greene Halleck. The two men were fast friends.

It is said that Drake's poem

"The Bronx River" was written to refute a charge that the local streams could not measure up to the storied rivers of Europe. Another poem from his pen, little known today, was dedicated to "The American Flag."

Joseph Rodman Drake died in 1820, aged only 25, and he was laid to rest in the still-existing cemetery where modern straight Hunt's Point Ave. crosses the original Hunt's Point Road of long ago. The epitaph engraved on the tombstone above Drake's grave was written by his friend Halleck who voiced the wish that when his

death occurred, he would rest beside his friend.

Fate deemed otherwise. Fitz-Greene Halleck died many years later in Guilford, Conn., and was buried there. Some half-century later, in 1903, a move was made to have Drake's body disinterred and transported to Guilford, but strong protests from Bronx literary societies and the North Side Board of Trade spiked these plans.

Today the friends' graves are far apart but, by design, Halleck St. and Drake St. run side-by-side through what was once the pleasant countryside of Hunt's Point.

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