

Joseph Rodman Drake Park

[View Map](#)

Oak Pt. Ave. bet. Hunts Pt. Ave. and Longfellow Ave.

Bronx, 10474

Directions via [Google Maps](#)

Joseph Rodman Drake Park

This text is part of Parks' [Historical Signs Project](#) and can be found posted within the park.

The property of Joseph Rodman Drake Park in the Hunts Point area of the Bronx was once the site of a Weckquaesgeek Indian village called Quinnahung, meaning "a long high place" or "the planting neck." During the Revolutionary War, George Washington's continental troops passed through this plot in their retreat from Long Island. In the late 17th century, Thomas Hunt (for whom the Hunt's Point neighborhood is named) acquired this property and built his stone mansion, the Grange.

The Hunt mansion served as a childhood haven for Joseph Rodman Drake. Born on August 7, 1795, Joseph Rodman Drake was a descendant of Sir Francis Drake, a 16th century navigator who was the first Englishman to circumnavigate the globe. Joseph Rodman Drake was a gifted young poet who praised the natural beauty of the Bronx in his verse. In 1813 Drake abandoned a career in business and began studying medicine with local doctors. That year he met and immediately befriended fellow poet Fitz-Greene Halleck. From March to July 1819, they collaborated on "The Croaker Papers." This series of humorous poems lampooning City officials was published in the New York Post.

Although he worked as a physician, Drake is best known as the celebrated author of poems including "The Culprit Fay" and "The American Flag." When he died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-five on September 21, 1820, Drake was laid to rest in the Hunt family burial ground at the Grange. Halleck wrote the epitaph on Drake's tombstone: "Green be the turf above thee; Friend of my better days; None knew thee but to love thee; Nor named thee but to praise." Drake's daughter compiled and published his works in October 1835.

The burial ground of the Hunt mansion consists of about fifty markers including names such as Hunt, Leggett, and Willett--all families associated with the settlement and development of the Bronx. The streets near the cemetery are named for prominent poets including Drake, Halleck, (John Greenleaf) Whittier, and (Henry Wadsworth) Longfellow. In 1905 the cemetery was saved from destruction by local literary enthusiasts. Four years later, Parks acquired the property.

The park was named in honor of Joseph Rodman Drake in 1915. That year the Bronx Society of Arts and Science installed a seven-foot marble shaft inscribed with Halleck's words to mark Drake's grave. The Society placed another tablet in Drake's honor near the Lorillard Snuff Mill in the New York Botanical Garden. A 1934 survey at the site shows a stone dwelling, a metal garage, and a tool shed standing in the vicinity of the burial ground in 1934. These features were no longer in place when a major renovation was undertaken in 1953. At that time, an iron picket fence was installed around the cemetery, benches were placed along the paths and cinder sidewalks were built along the perimeter. In 1962 the timber curbs around the cemetery were replaced with concrete. Even as the surrounding neighborhood has grown more industrial, the pastoral beauty of the Joseph Rodman Drake Park endures.

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- **Description:** Monolith on square pedestal, with plaque
- **Materials:** Bronze, marble
- **Dimensions:** H: 8' W: 2' D: 2'; Plaque H: 2' W: 1'3"
- **Dedicated:** 1915
- **Foundry:** Tiffany Studio

- **Donor:** Gift
- **Inscription:** SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF JOSEPH R. DRAKE M.D. WHO DIED SEPT. 21, 1820, AGE 25. NON KNEW HIM. BUT TO LOVE HIM NOR NAMED HIM. BUT TO PRAISE HIM.

RENOVATED BY THE ROWSON LIBRARY UNION JULY25,1891.

JOSEPH RODMAN DRAKE
1795-1820
GREEN BE THE TURF ABOVE THEE FRIEND OF MY BETTER DAYS
NONE KNEW THEE BUT TO LOVE THEE
NORNAMED THEE BUT TO PRAISE
FITZ-GREENE HALLECK

ERECTED BY / THE BRONX SOCIETY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES / MAY 29, 1915 /

Please note, the NAME field includes a primary designation as well as alternate namings often in common or popular usage. The DEDICATED field refers to the most recent dedication, most often, but not necessarily the original dedication date. If the monument did not have a formal dedication, the year listed reflects the date of installation.

For more information, please contact Art & Antiquities at (212) 360-8143