

HISTORY OF THE DOUGLASTON TRAIN STATION

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The North Shore Railroad* from Long Island City ran east only as far as Flushing until 1866, when it was extended through Douglaston to Great Neck.^{1,2} Extended train service began on October 27, 1866. At that time the Douglaston peninsula was referred to under a variety of names including Little Madnans Neck, Little Neck and the Village of Marathon. Early timetables listed the stop at Main Ave. (now 35th St.) as Little Neck.² Within a year William Douglas, owner of the estate at the northern end of the peninsula, either paid for the construction of a depot or moved one of his buildings to the railroad for use as a depot, provided it was called “Douglaston”.² The June 26, 1869 *Flushing Journal* already referred to the depot as “now called Douglaston”. Timetables, however, continued to list the depot as “Little Neck” until June 1870, when another depot was constructed further east at Little Neck Parkway, assuming the name “Little Neck”.² Thereafter Douglas’s depot became known as “Douglaston”.

On May 29, 1886, the *Flushing Journal* reported on plans to build a new depot at Douglaston. The article stated, “The ground on which the new building is to be located was donated by Mr. William P. Douglas. Mr. Douglas gave \$2,000, Mr. A.S. Robbins \$500, the Long Island Railroad Company \$1,000 towards the cost of construction and the remainder was subscribed by residents of the place.” However, it is not known that Mr. Douglas owned any property at the location of the train station.

The Queen Anne Style station, shown in photograph 1, was constructed by a contractor named Ryan, otherwise unidentified, and completed in June 1887 at a cost \$4,000.⁴ The two-story 25 by 50 foot building presumably had a ticket office and waiting room on the first floor and the stationmaster’s residence on the second. George Hutton and Son, possibly owners of a paint supply store in Little Neck, decorated the building.^{4,5} Albert Benz, a German immigrant, locally successful horticulturist, and landowner performed the landscaping at a cost of \$1200.^{4,5} His residence was north of the train

* now the Long Island Railroad

station and is now the site of Public School 98. The June 18, 1887 *Flushing Journal* reported, “The grounds surrounding the depot, too, deserve mention for the pleasing symmetry of the paths and roadways and the beauty of the flowers and plants, that adorn the artistically arranged flower beds, all surrounded by a neat wire fence.”

The station was moved back about 15 feet in 1907 to accommodate a second track which necessitated widening the Marathon cut between Douglaston and Little Neck.⁶ Electric lights were installed at the depot in 1910,⁷ although the line was not electrified until 1912.¹ The Main Ave. grade crossing at the station was eliminated by 1930 when the Douglaston Parkway overpass was constructed.¹

During this time the stationmaster performed a variety of functions besides just selling tickets. His duties included stationmaster, freight agent, telegraph operator, express agent, postmaster and general information agent. A rail siding was located on the south side of the tracks, at the present location of the parking lot, for freight cars with locally ordered merchandise to be picked up. Mail was not delivered to homes in those days, but was picked up at the train station. Newspapers would list mail for pick-up.

By the mid 20th century, the stationmaster no longer lived at the depot and many of his functions had disappeared. Without the need to maintain such large building, the elegant depot was demolished and replaced by the existing building in 1962, the same year that it was decided to demolish Pennsylvania Station in Manhattan. The new station, shown in Photograph 2, was designed by a local architect A. Gordon Lorimer to efficiently and cost effectively provide for its more limited functions. But recently the building was recently described as a “mundane brick and glass structure”.⁸ Was this another unfortunate historical loss in the interest of “progress”. Today, half a century later, I believe that an imaginative reuse of the Queen Anne building would have been devised.

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References

1. “*The History of Little Neck*” by the Little Neck Community Association, 1952
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3. “*Through the Years in Little Neck*” by George C. Fowler and Ernestine H. Fowler, 1963
4. *Flushing Journal*, April 9, 1887
5. *Flushing Journal*, June 4, 1887
6. *Flushing Journal*, June 8, 1907
7. *Flushing Evening Journal*, Jan. 29, 1910
8. “Images of Long Island Rail Road Stations” by David D. Morrison and Valerie Pakaluk, Acadia Publishing, Charleston, S.C. 2003