

# Where did St. James Park Get its Name?



PHOTO: JUAN CABRERA

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Many people visit St. James Park, on 192nd street between Jerome and Creston Avenues in the Bronx, but surprisingly, very few know the origin of its name.

"I really don't know a thing about the park's background," admitted John Swogiar, a retired 60-year-old man who sat in the park with his wife Wendy. According to Swogiar, people in the park seem too busy to pay attention to anything someone has to say. "I don't think people have time to find out about the origin of the park's name."

Although most of the people who visit the park know its name, very few realize that the park has the name of a saint. "The park already had its name when I moved to this neighborhood, I know St. James was a saint but nothing else", says Daniel Cabrera, a retired 60-year-old man who sits on the park almost everyday to listen to music or meet with his neighbors.

"People from different races come here and all get along," says Cabrera. This Dominican immigrant, who moved to the Bronx 20 years ago, and has been visiting the park for the last 18 years, describes it as "a picture of the Bronx," because of its diversity.

According to Cabrera, there are different age ranges through out the day: mostly senior citizens the morning, although truants can also be found in the handball and basketball courts, and, a younger crowd takes over in the afternoon filling the playground on all corners.

The park was named after St. James Episcopal Church, on Jerome Avenue and 190th street, because of their proximity to each other. Built in 1865, this church was named after James the Greater, one of the twelve disciples who, according to the Bible, leaves everything behind to follow Jesus and is later executed because of the faith he professed.



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In April 2000, St. James Park was recently featured in Norwood News, a local newspaper. Hannan Adaly reported on the renovation of the tennis courts, pavement and lawn in the park. These renovations and the installation of a fence around the park in 1998 were made possible thanks to a \$750,000 grant awarded to the park by president of the borough, Fernando Ferrer, and the City's Parks Department.

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According to some residents, installing a fence around the park has been a major factor in the added security. Unlike other parks in district seven, such as Poe and Devoe, St. James can not be visited at all times of the day, it opens at 7 AM and closes at 10 PM.

"Friends of St. James Park are the eyes and ears of the park," says Anthony Martinez, coordinator of parks partnerships for the City's Parks Department. Friends of St. James Park is a group of community members who have been meeting once a month for five years in an effort to improve park safety.

Since then, the group and along with the Recreational Center have organized many activities such as Egg Hunting Day, Feast Day, Clean-Up Day and others. Santiago Milland, for example, is one of the six devoted members who coaches a Basketball Team for the park's Recreational Center.

St. James Park was founded in 1897. In 1903, a music pavilion was added for concerts and community activities. From 1935 to 1937, the park went through a period of reconstruction and a playground was added.

Years later, in 1974, a recreational center for senior citizens was built in the park and named St. James Golden Age Recreational Center. This center, now called St. James Recreational Center, includes activities such as arts and crafts workshops, readings, concerts, tennis lessons, after-school tutoring, among others, which cater to children and young adults.

According to Martinez as St. James Park is continually renovated, safety improves and more events will be scheduled. However, visitors remain clueless as to the origin of the park's name. "I took tennis lessons in the Summer," says Marina Melendez, a 46 year-old social worker, "but I have never thought about the origin of the parks name".