

# Queens

**NYC**  
Emergency  
Management



# A Brief History of Queens

Queens was first seen by European explorers in 1614, when a member of the Dutch East India Company passed through Hell Gate into the East River.

On November 1, 1683, Queens officially became a county.

With the exception of Newtown, the majority of Queens residents supported the British during the American Revolution. Queens County refused to send any delegates to the first or second Continental Congress.

During the 1890s, the idea of a Greater New York grew. This involved the merging Manhattan, the Bronx, Staten Island and western Long Island (Brooklyn and Queens). A non-binding vote occurred on November 6, 1894 in which Manhattan, Long Island City and the towns of Jamaica and Newtown (all in Queens), voted for consolidation. Brooklyn and the town of Flushing voted against it. In March 1896, the Consolidation Bill was passed and signed by Governor Morton on May 11. On December 31, 1897 the old towns of Queens ceased to exist and on January 1, 1898 Greater New York (this was never a legal designation) was born.

Portions of Queens not included in the consolidation plan: North Hempstead and Oyster Bay and the major remaining part of the Town of Hempstead, continued to be part of Queens until they seceded and formed Nassau County on January 1, 1899.

# What's the deal with the streets in Queens?

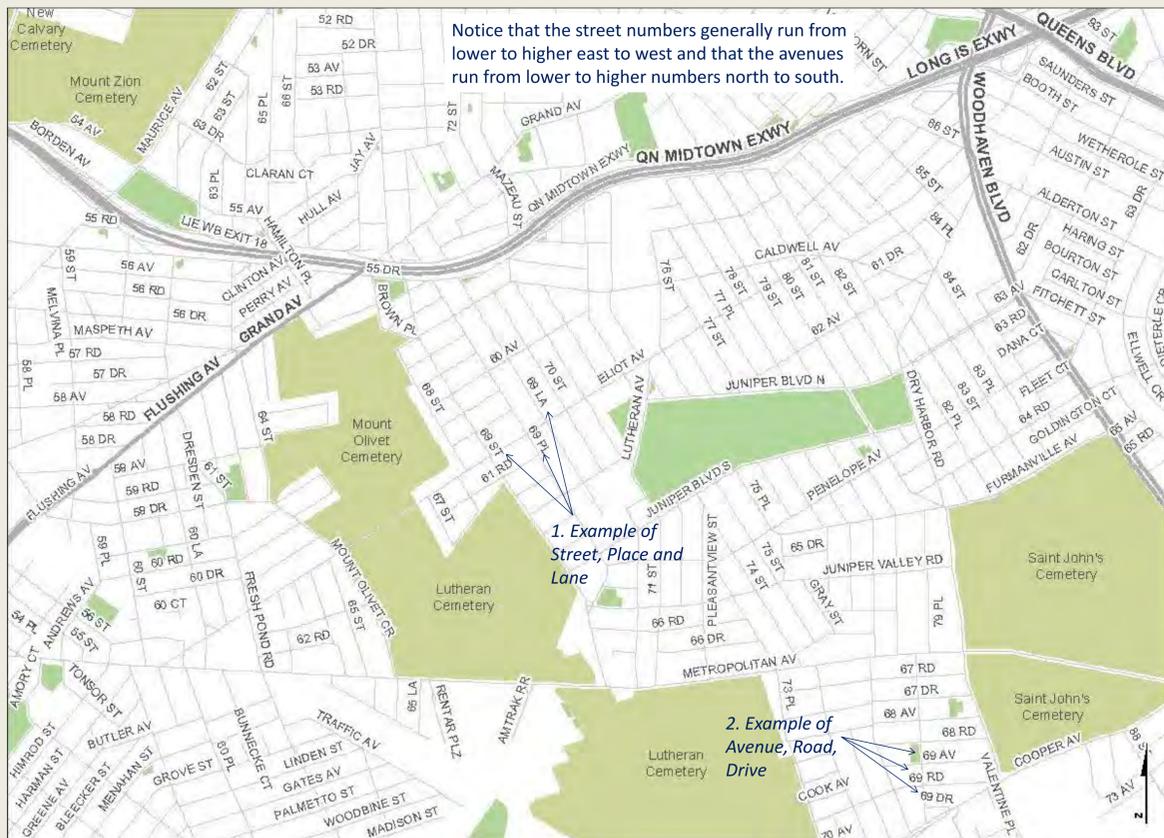
Before consolidation, Queens had been a territory occupied by approximately 60 villages, each with its own street name and house numbering system. They were connected by country roads and had continuity in the street plan in only two sections.

Duplicate street names were a problem when the former villages were brought into the borough of Queens. There were 10 highways called Main Street and dozens of streets and avenues named after President George Washington.

In 1911 Maurice E Connolly was elected Borough President and he directed the Topographical Bureau to make a thorough study of the problem of connecting the street systems, to widen and straighten the old highways and to assign appropriate street names which would also help identify which part of the borough the highway was in.

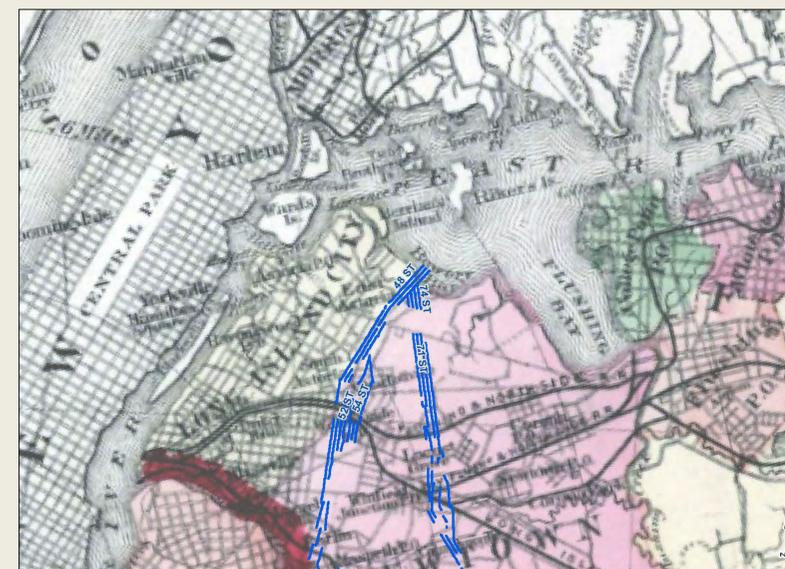
In the 1920s Queens copied the street grid pattern and numbering system used in Philadelphia. About 75% of all of the streets needed to be renamed.

Right about now you may be wondering how, with a mass renaming of the streets in Queens, we ended up with three parallel streets named, for example, 21 Av, 21 Rd and 21 Dr, or with 164 St followed by 164 Pl. And what, exactly is the point of the hyphenated house numbers? Believe it or not, there is a method to the madness, which is explained below.



## Street Names

- Street was used for roads running north to south, or at right angles to the avenues. They were numbered consecutively from 1 St to 271 St. First St starts in the western portion of Queens.
- Where two different street systems meet, there may have be one or more short streets between two consecutively numbered streets. The naming convention when this occurred was as follows, using the example of one or more streets between 20<sup>th</sup> St and 21<sup>st</sup> St (see #1 on map to left):
  - First street – 20 Place
  - Second street – 20 Lane
- Avenue was used to designate roads running east and west. They were numbered consecutively from 1 Av to 162 Av, with 1 Av in the northern section of Queens. The naming convention for roadways running between consecutively numbered avenues was (see #2 on map to left):
  - First street – Road
  - Second street – Drive
- Where there were short, curved streets the streets are named Terrace, Crescent or Court.
- Where a road was sufficiently broad or important, it was given the suffix of Boulevard. A boulevard can run in any direction and cross any other street or avenue.
- Some roads, such as Jericho Turnpike, wind or cut across numbered streets and avenues, making it impossible to give them numbered names. Others had historic significance, were identified with the former villages or had been named after someone (e.g. Steinway St). These names were kept wherever possible.



## Some facts about streets in Queens:

- The renaming of streets and renumbering of houses took 17 years to complete.
- Faced with opposition to the naming convention, Charles Underhill Powell, a chief engineer in the Topographical Bureau who designed the system, mailed out a jingle, written by the humorist Ellis Parker Butler who was a resident of Flushing, in an effort to clear things up. We're guessing it didn't.
 

In Queens, to find locations best  
Avenues, roads and drives run west;  
But ways to north or south 'tis plain  
Are street or place or even lane.
- The following two lines finish the verse, but were not included in Powell's mailing.
 

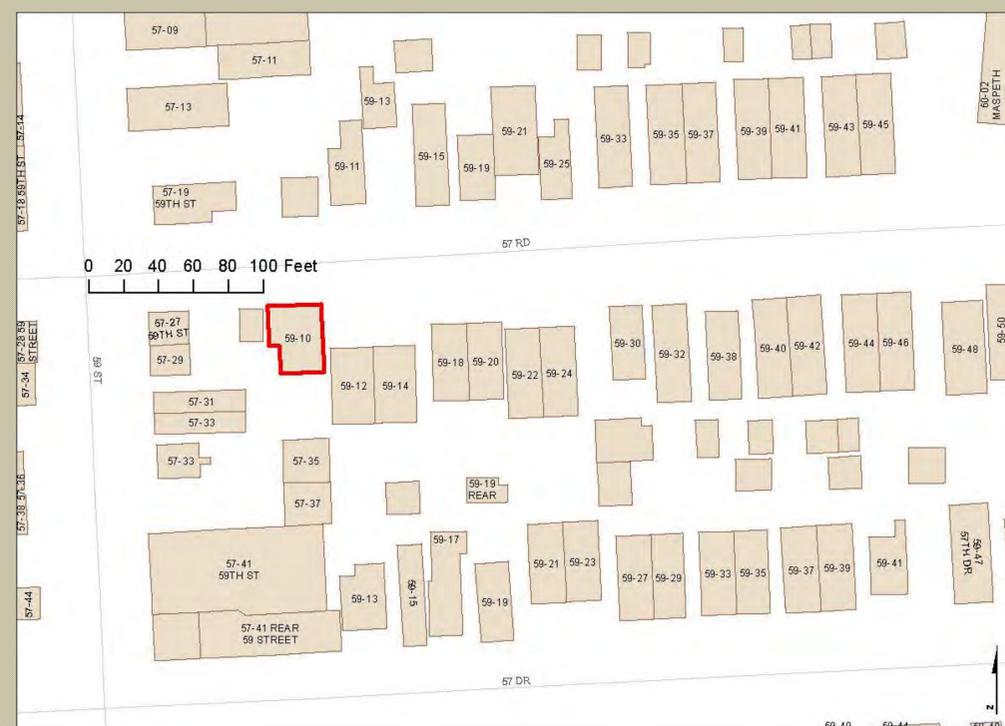
While even numbers you will meet  
Upon the west and south of the street
- To avoid confusion in the Rockaways, street numbers are preceded by Beach, short for, you guessed it...Rockaway Beach.
- The task of compliance in obtaining new house numbers was helped along thanks to cooperation from the Borough Building Department in Queens, in the form of withholding permits for new buildings until the builders obtained the new building numbers from the Topographical Bureau. The same was true of the utility companies, both phone and gas.
- During the changes, the number of dealers in house numbers became so great that the Topographical Bureau had to step in and curtail their activities.
- The naming of roadways that run east and west avenues and roadways that run north and south streets is the opposite of Manhattan.
- Some places resisted the name changes, which is why there are still so many named streets in Queens. In 2012, residents of Douglaston (in northeastern Queens) successfully pushed to have a half-dozen numbered roads in the Douglaston Hill historic district returned to their former names. The change cost over \$3,000 because DOT needed to replace signs. Not everyone was so nostalgic about changing the names back to their early 20<sup>th</sup> century designations. One 86-year-old woman was quoted in a New York Times article as saying, "Seems like a waste of time to me."

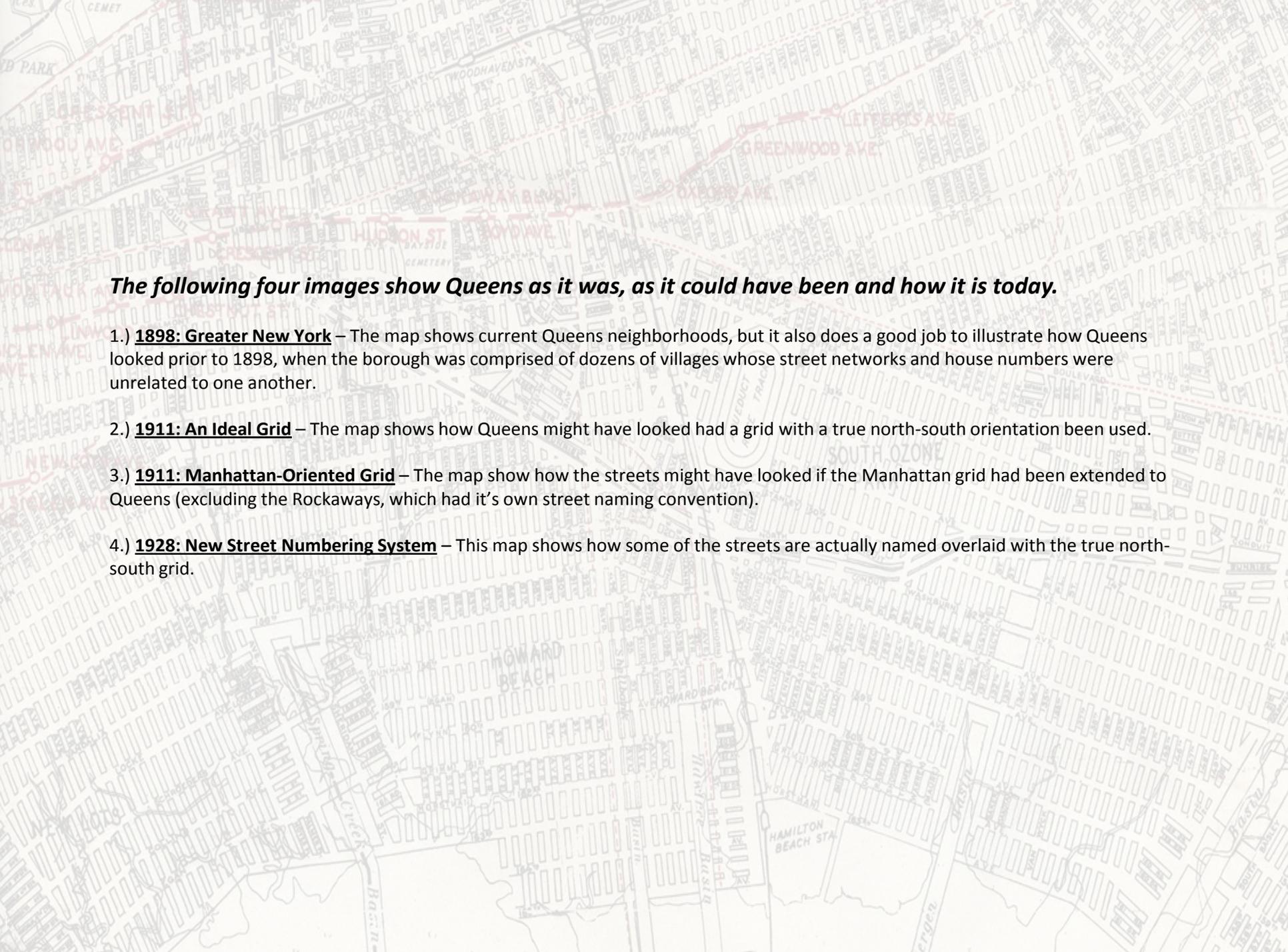
## House Numbers

Queens is the only borough in the city that uses a hyphenated numbering system which gives a descriptive coordinate of the location. For this example, let's use 59-10 57 Rd, outlined in red in the picture to the right.

- The number before the hyphen are the lower of the nearest cross street or avenue, in this case, 59 St.
- The numbers after the hyphen, 10 in this case, are based on a numbering system and represent the distance, expressed in lot intervals, between the street corner and the house. So many feet are one lot (it was assumed to be 20 feet per lot), which is given a unique house number. For wide lots a number was skipped every so often. Looking south, odd numbers are to the left, even numbers to the right, in ascending order.

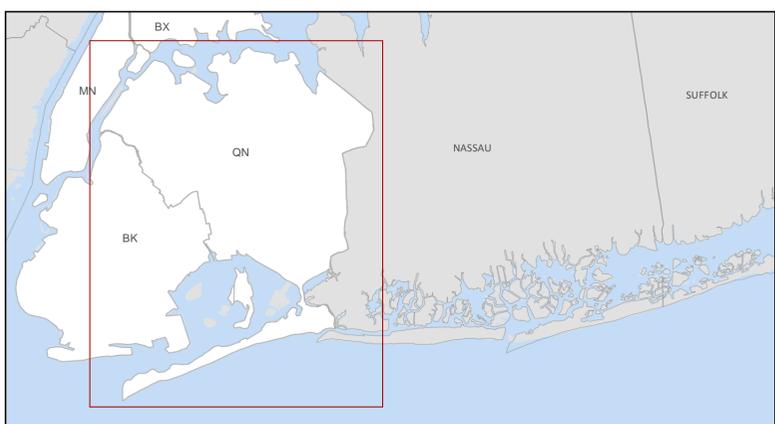
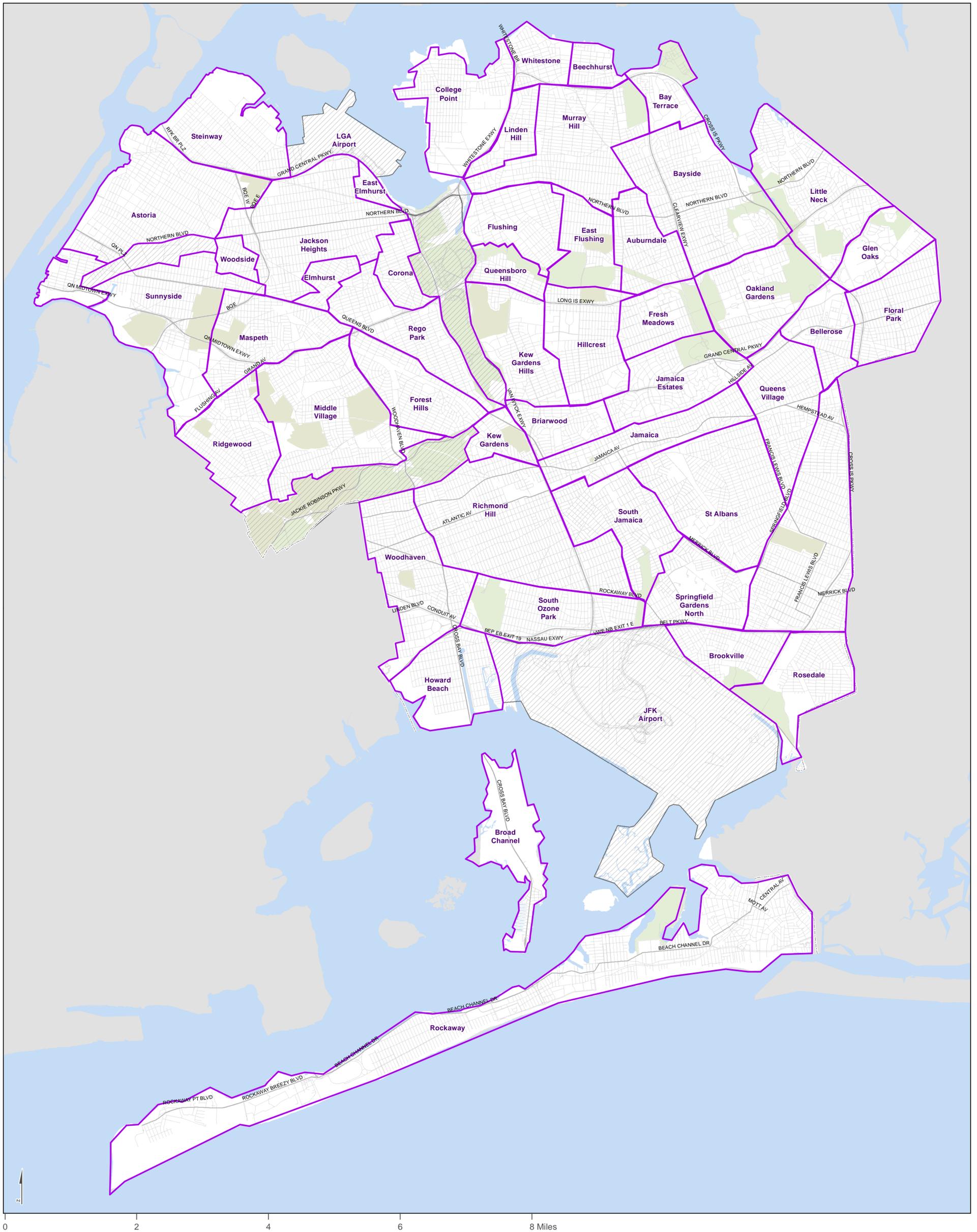
Back to this example, for 59-10, the number 10 would be divided by 2 (because half the number of lots would be on one side of the street, the other half would be on the opposite side), giving us 5. That's five lots from the corner and, since we assume each lot is 20 feet, we'd multiply 5 by 20, which equals 100.





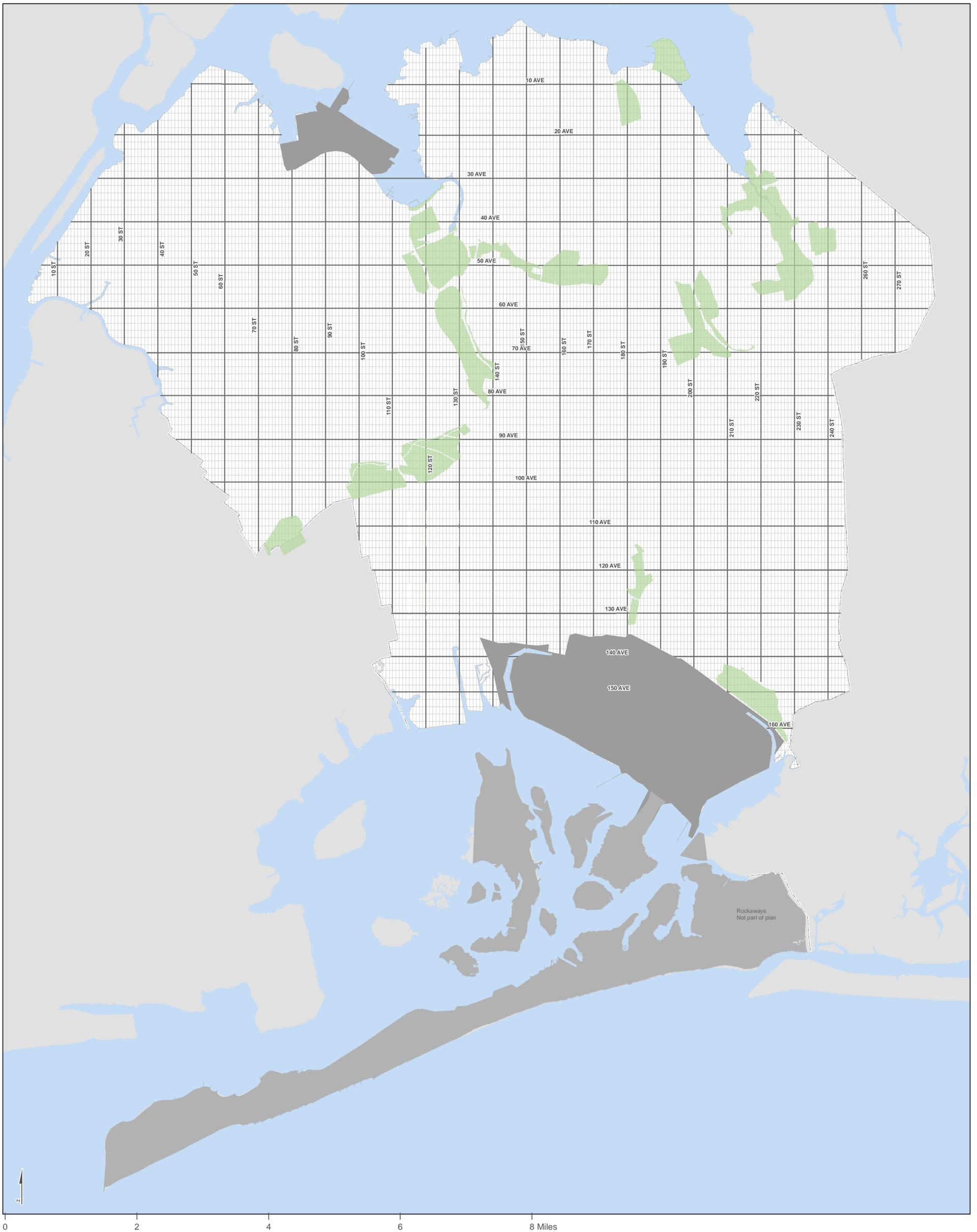
***The following four images show Queens as it was, as it could have been and how it is today.***

- 1.) **1898: Greater New York** – The map shows current Queens neighborhoods, but it also does a good job to illustrate how Queens looked prior to 1898, when the borough was comprised of dozens of villages whose street networks and house numbers were unrelated to one another.
- 2.) **1911: An Ideal Grid** – The map shows how Queens might have looked had a grid with a true north-south orientation been used.
- 3.) **1911: Manhattan-Oriented Grid** – The map shows how the streets might have looked if the Manhattan grid had been extended to Queens (excluding the Rockaways, which had its own street naming convention).
- 4.) **1928: New Street Numbering System** – This map shows how some of the streets are actually named overlaid with the true north-south grid.



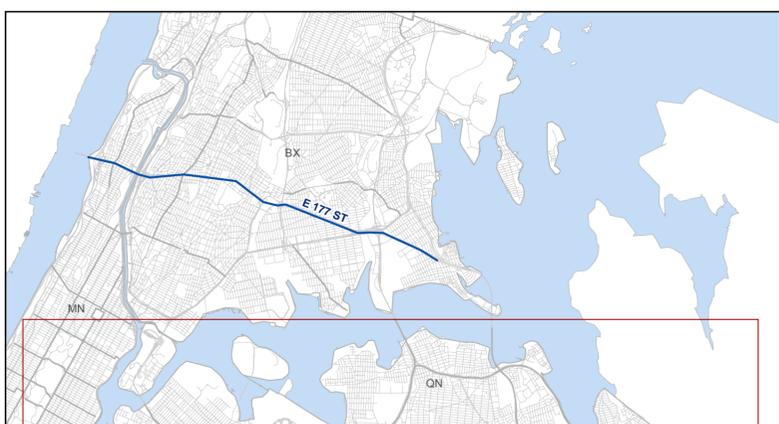
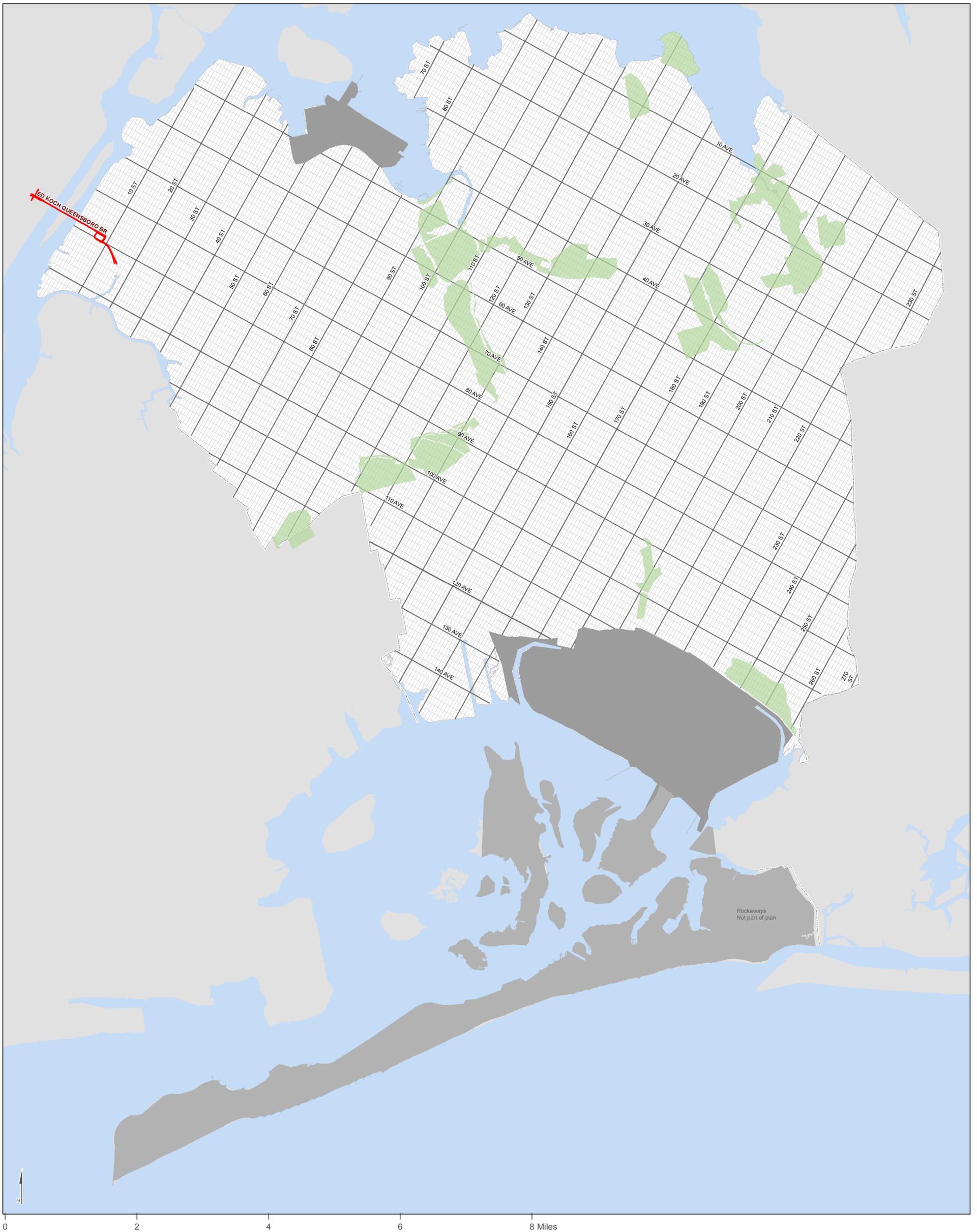
In 1898, the city as we know it today (Greater New York) was formed. It included Manhattan, the Bronx, Staten Island, Brooklyn, and approximately half of Queens County. Queens County included the towns of Hempstead (except for the Rockaway peninsula), North Hempstead, and Oyster Bay which did not join New York City. These towns and their associated villages became part of the newly created Nassau County in 1899.

## 1898 : Greater New York



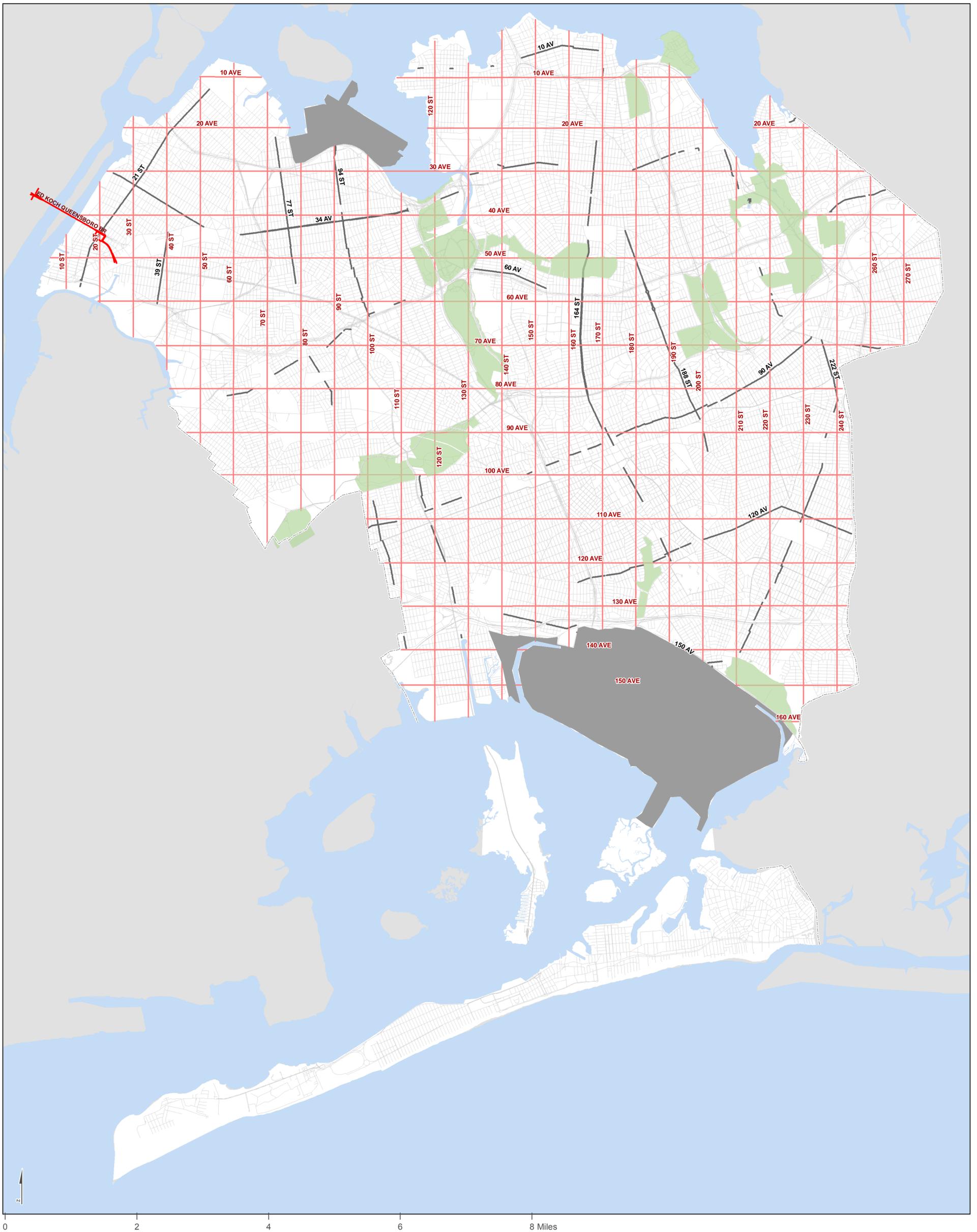
In 1911, the borough president of Queens, Maurice Connelly, directed his Topographical Bureau to make a thorough study of the problem of connecting the divergent existing road systems of the 60 former villages. Duplication of street names and numbers was a particular problem. One stated goal was for an observer to be able to visualize the location of any street or avenue by its number. An idealized grid was imagined with street numbers ascending from west to east and avenue numbers ascending from north to south. A true north south orientation of such an idealized grid is shown here.

## 1911 : An Ideal Grid



A grid aligned with the Manhattan grid could have been the ideal instead of the true north-south orientation. The Queensborough Bridge (built 1909, now the Edward I. Koch Bridge) was already an extension of the Manhattan grid (East 59th Street) into Queens (in fact, it is alternately known as the 59th Street Bridge). Earlier, when the western Bronx (1874) and the eastern Bronx (1895) were incorporated into New York City, a similar effort was made to extend Manhattan's grid numbering system into the Bronx, leaving such far-flung anomalies as East 177th Street in the heart of Throgs Neck in the eastern tip of the borough.

## 1911 : Manhattan-Oriented Grid



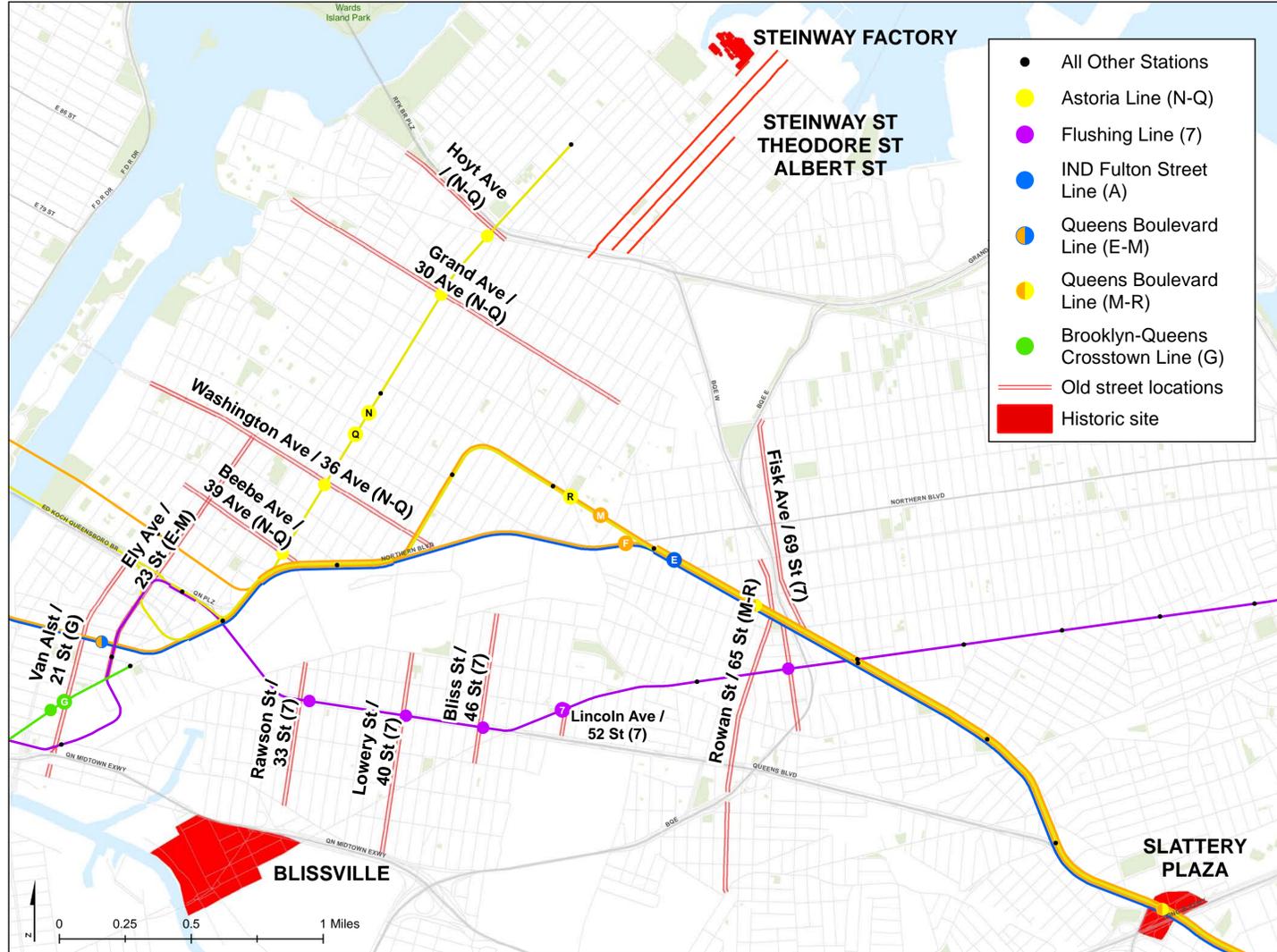
By 1928, most of the street naming (and house numbering) had been converted to the new system. Old timers continued using the old names for several more decades, e.g., saying “Grand Avenue” instead of “30th Avenue.” The old names survive in some subway station names (e.g., the 46 St – Bliss St station in Sunnyside is not at the intersection of 46th and Bliss but rather indicates that Bliss Street was the pre-1928 name of 46th Street). Even though the ideal grid could not replace the actual layout of the streets as built, the logic behind it was able to be superimposed. And the goal was for an observer to be able to visualize the location of any Queens street or avenue by its number has been achieved.

## 1928 : New Street Numbering System

# Old Names, New Stations

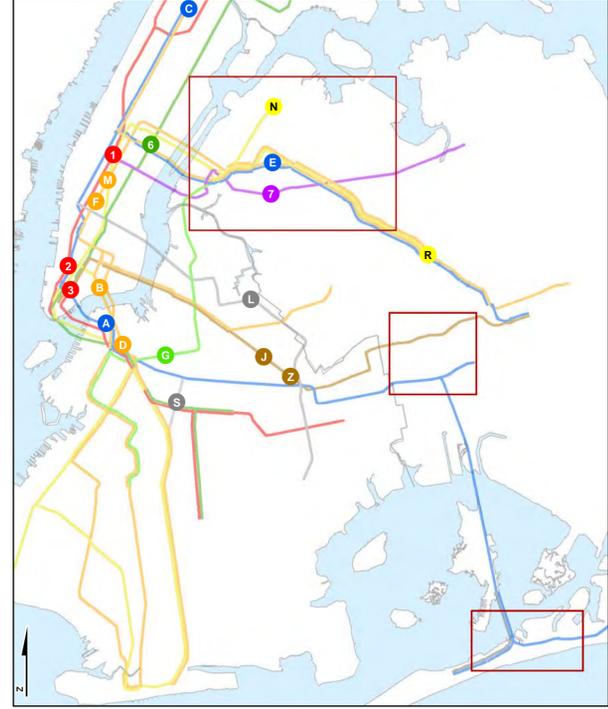
Although many of the subway lines and stations extending into the borough of Queens were built after the borough's street name overhaul, many still retain the old names of streets, and in doing so, a part of Queens' history.

Source: OEM GIS



The Steinway St station (M-R), shown left, was named after the renowned piano factory located at the end of Steinway St in present day Astoria. The factory, Steinway & Sons, was founded in 1853, but the Astoria factory (which is still in use today) was not built until the late 1870s. A professional community, "Steinway Village" was also established surrounding the factory grounds, and included a free library, churches, local transportation, and an amusement park. In addition to "Steinway Street", two streets were named after founder Heinrich Steinway's sons Albert and Theodore (present day 41 St and 42 St).

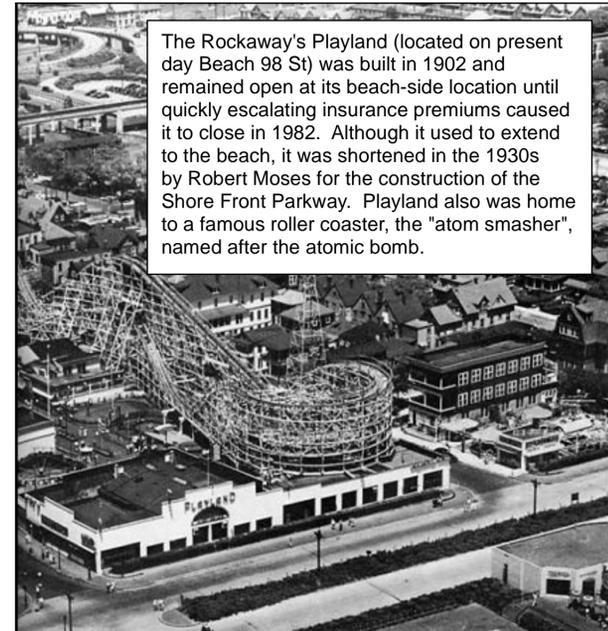
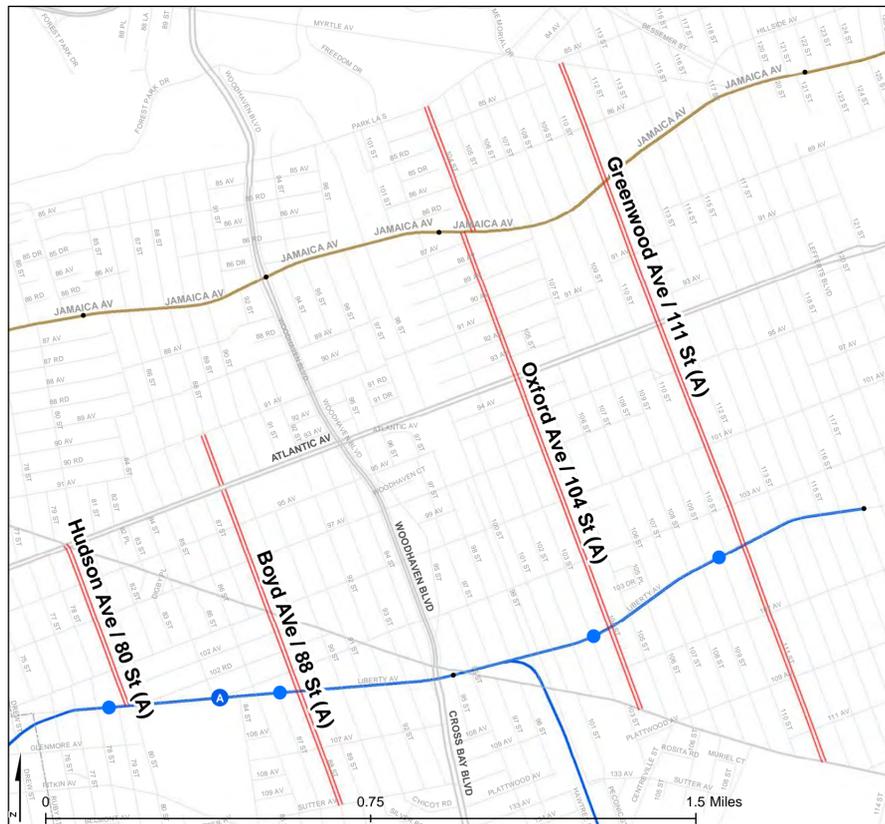
The 46 St/Bliss St station (E-M-R) is named for Nezhiah Bliss, a prominent ship-builder and real estate developer of the 19th century. Bliss initially made his fortune in the steam boat business, learning from Robert Fulton and establishing Novelty Iron Works in 1827 in Manhattan. Most of the steam boats in NYC were built using a Novelty engine. He is responsible for establishing NYC's first ferry system (1850), first drawbridge, as well as the majority of the development in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. The community of Blissville (see left) was established by Bliss in the mid-19th century in present-day Long Island City. Bliss St/46 St retains both signs.



The Woodhaven Boulevard/Slattery Plaza station (see above, right) (E - M - R) was named after Army Engineer John Slattery (1877 - 1932). Slattery Plaza was located in the area where Eliot Ave intersected with Horace Harding, Woodhaven, and Queens Boulevards intersected, and used to house a cluster of stores until it was demolished for the Long Island Expressway construction in the 1950s.



The Beebe Ave/39 St station (N-Q) (see above) was named after George W. Beebe (mid 1800s), a Wall Street banker who lived in the area from 1850 - 1885. The house pictured right was located on Long Trains Meadow Road, and was owned by a member of the Beebe family in the 18th century. Long Trains Meadow Road was one of the first roads built in the Queens area. It led from Western Queens to the village of Newtown, and was used by the Hessians during the Revolutionary war.



# An Aerial View of Queens: 1924 - 2012

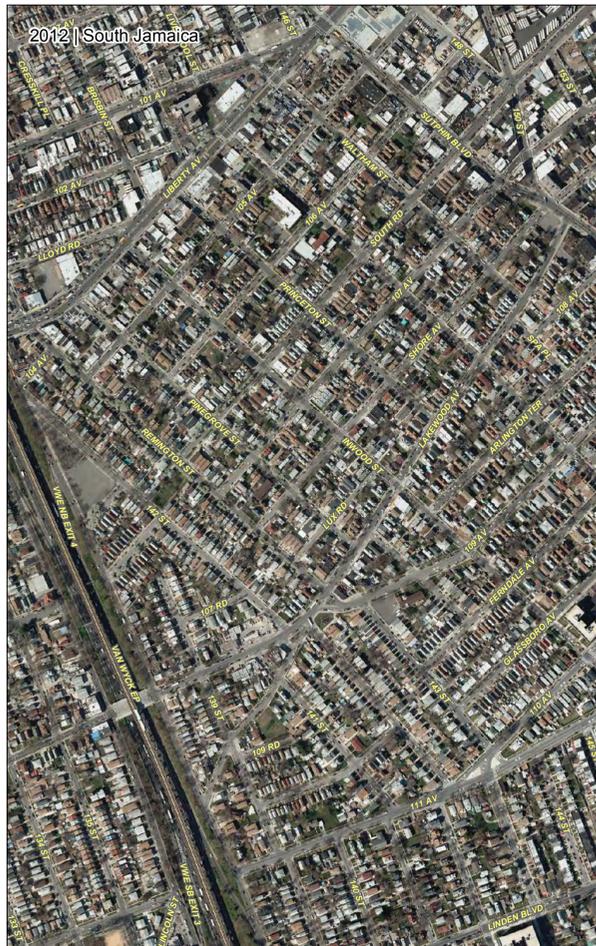
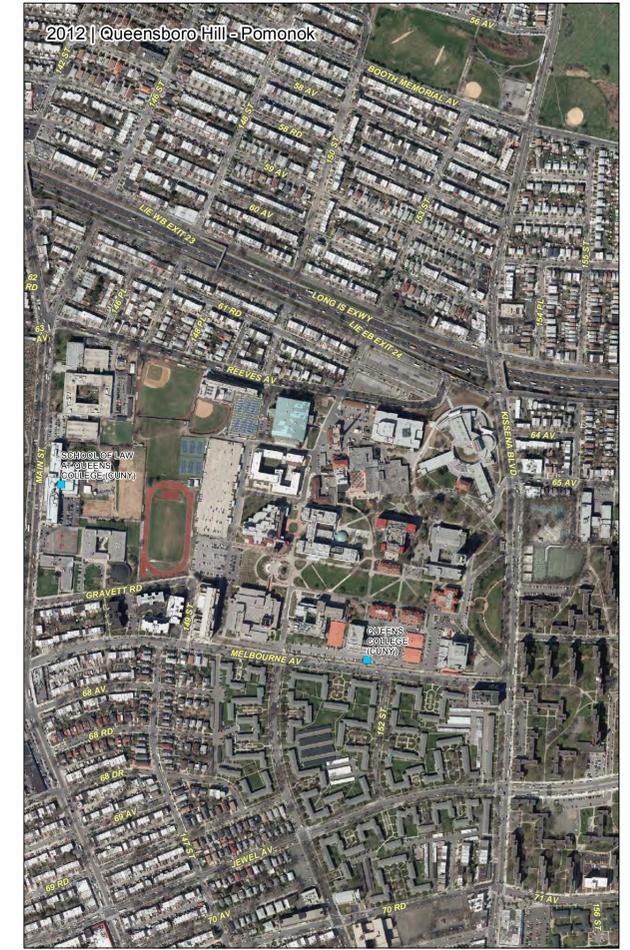
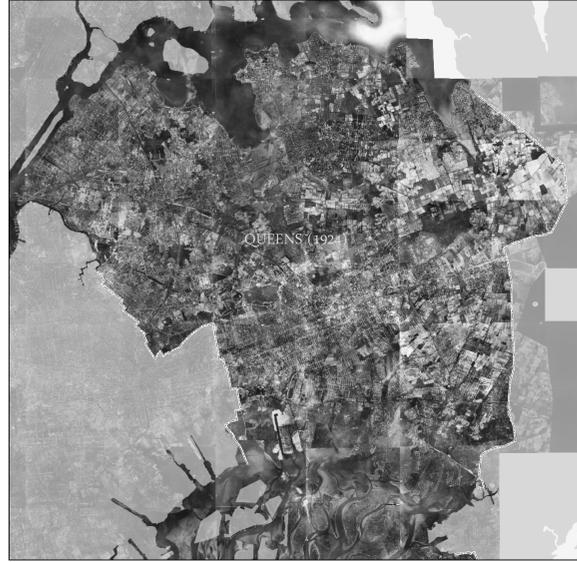
A view of Queens from the air in 1924 reveals a landscape still very much in transition. Some of the urbanized areas we might recognize today are visible 90 years ago, but large portions of the borough were still being used as farmland. Using aerial imagery captured in 1924 and 2012, this display highlights three sections of Queens that represent different stages of the transition from a more rural environment to the borough we know today.

**Queensboro Hill – Pomonok:** The first pairing, centered on the present day Queens College campus, highlights an area that has been totally transformed. Much of the visible area was farmland in 1924. On the site of what would become Queens College in 1937, Jefferson Hall is visible (the easternmost of the four larger buildings on the future campus site). In 1924, this was the administration building for the Parental Home for Boys. To the northwest sits a one room schoolhouse where Walt Whitman once taught.

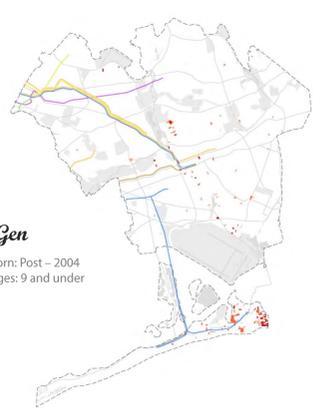
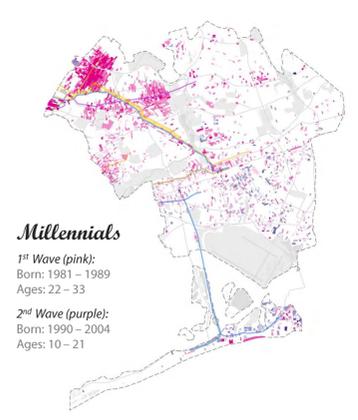
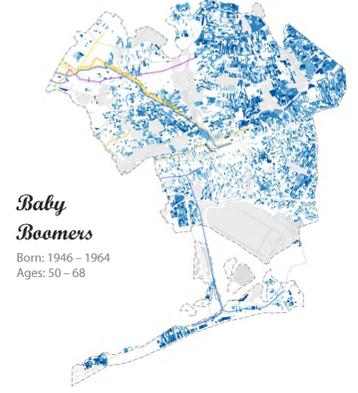
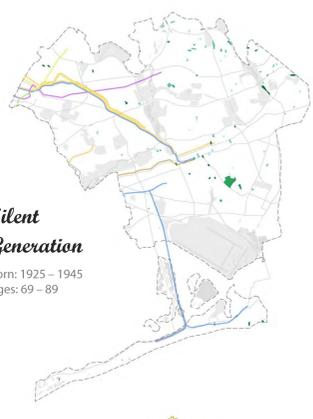
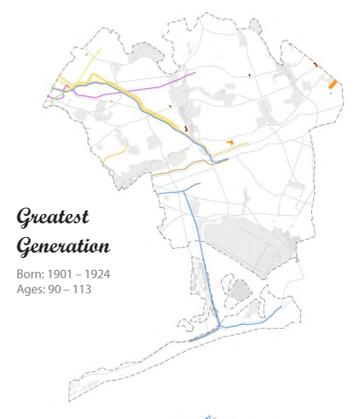
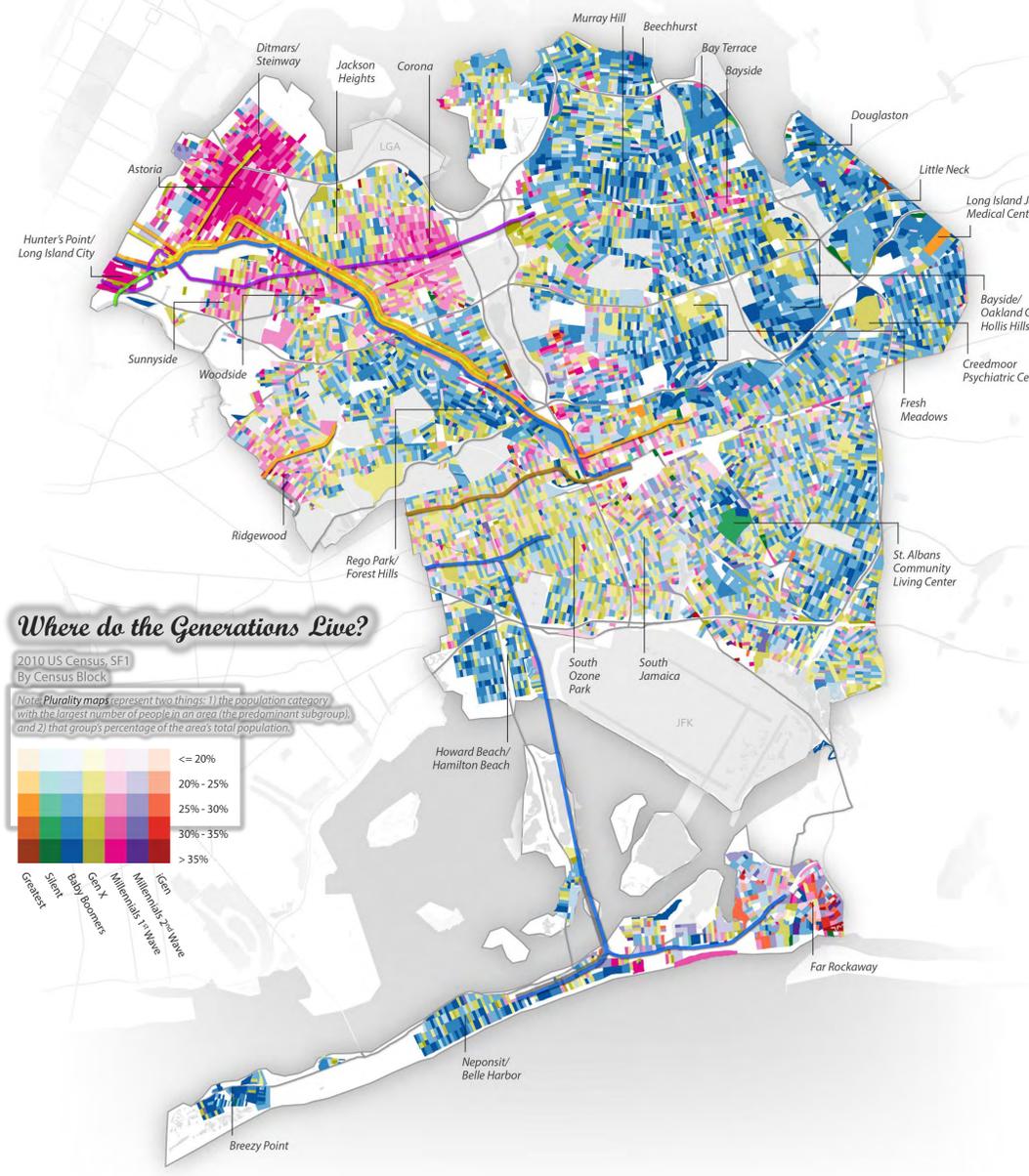
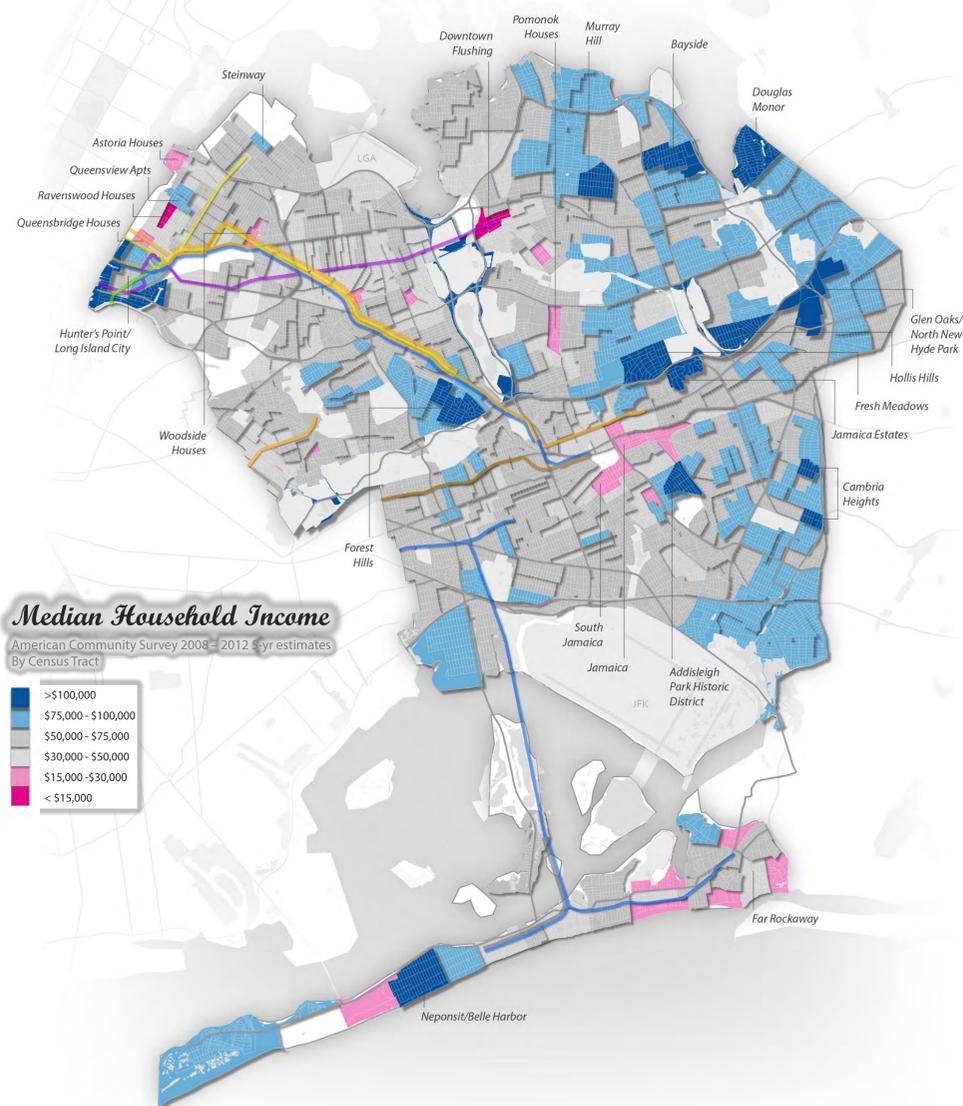
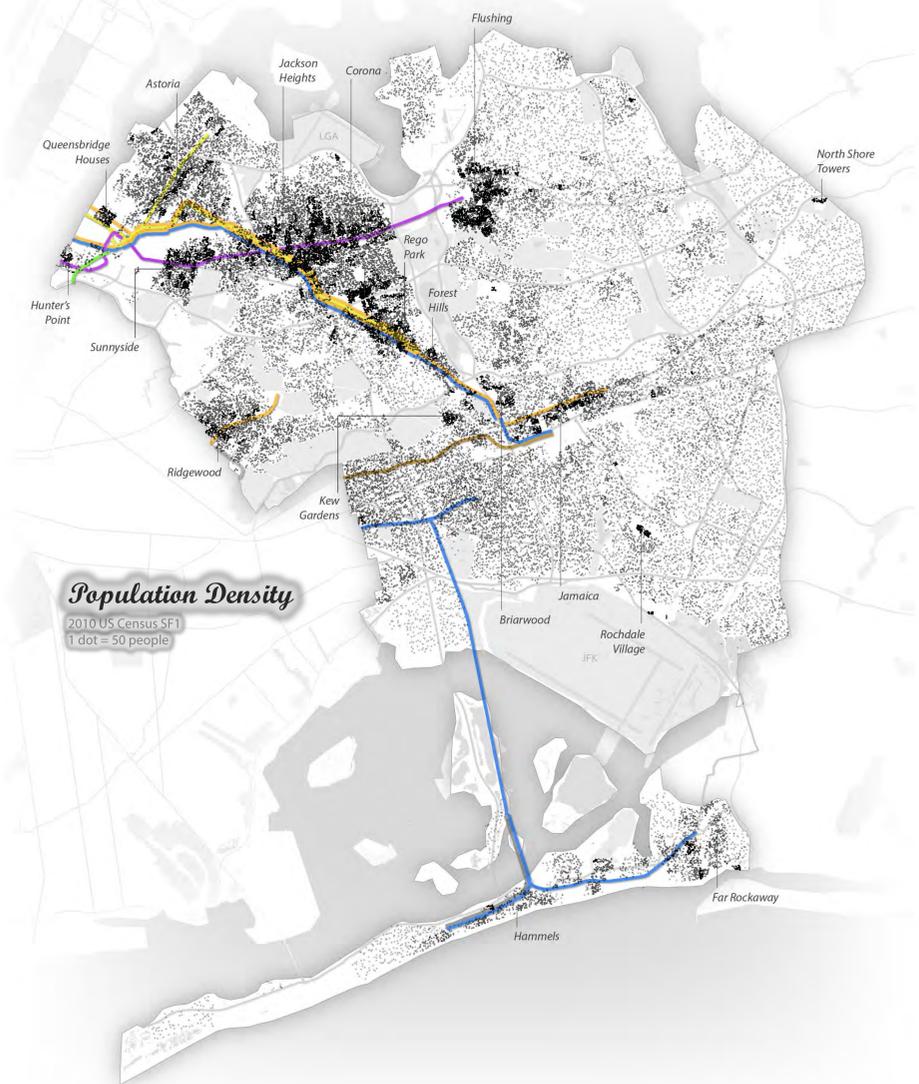
**South Jamaica:** The second pairing in southern Queens shows an area in transition. The Van Wyck Expressway, visible in the current imagery, would not appear in its current form until many decades later. However, the 1924 landscape shows that the current street grid was already laid out, and a stroll down the streets of this neighborhood would take you past some houses that are still standing today.

**Long Island City – Astoria:** The final pairing represents a neighborhood that retains many similar features from 90 years ago. While the demographics and much of the physical landscape have changed drastically in the intervening decades, the 1924 view shows many significant features that remain today. Focusing on the transportation infrastructure, one can see the Sunnyside Rail Yard as well as the BMT Astoria line (current N & Q). In 1924 the present day N/Q stations had been in operation for seven years.

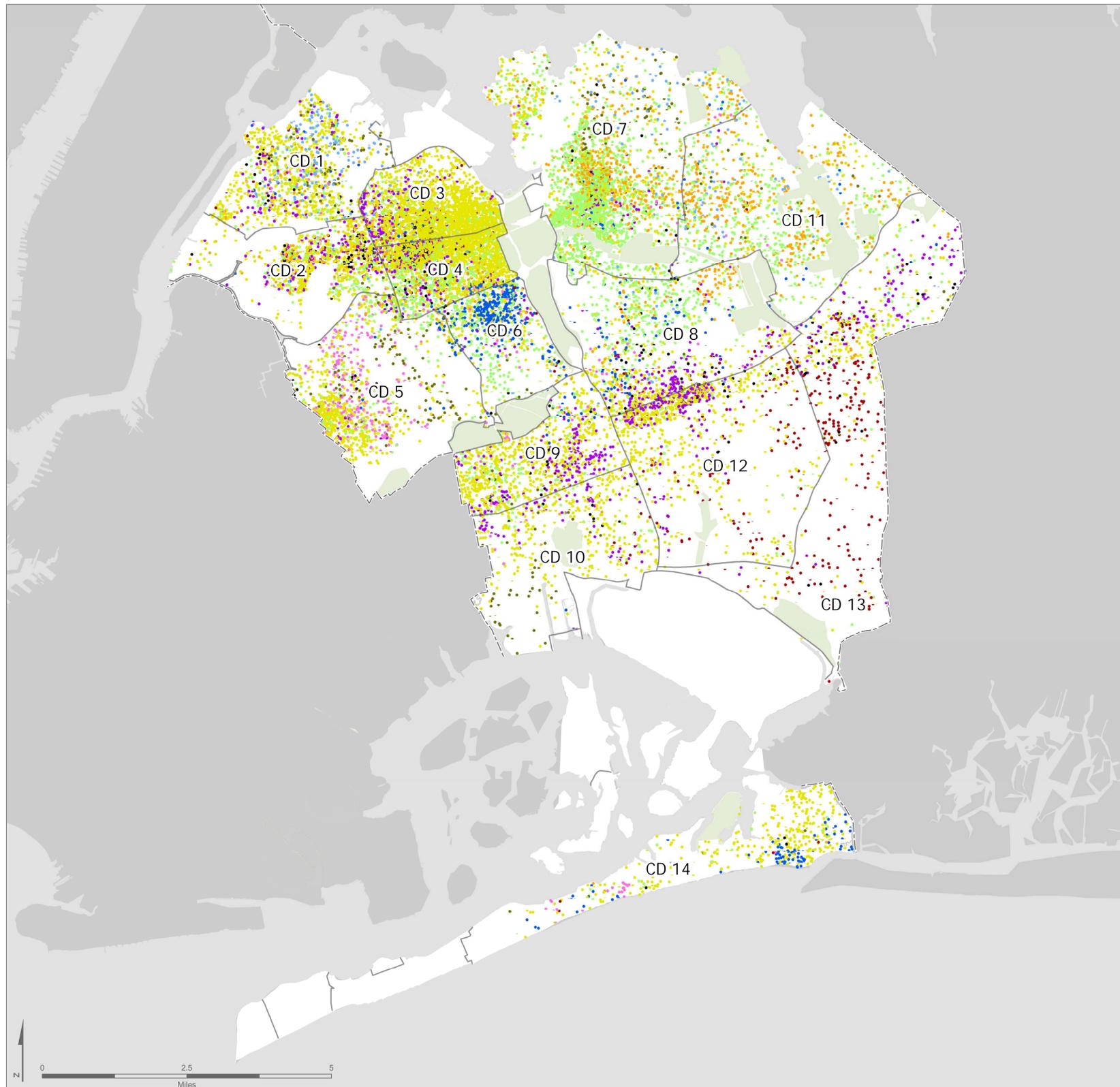
Imagery credit: NYC Department of Information Technology & Telecommunications (DoITT)



# Queens Demographics



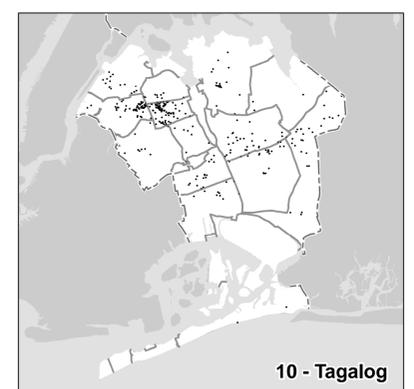
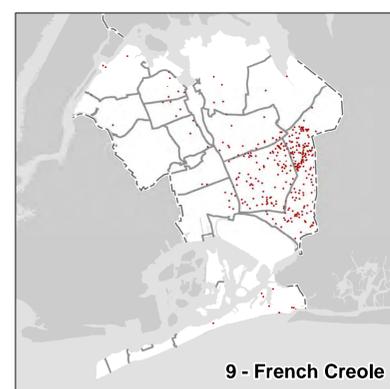
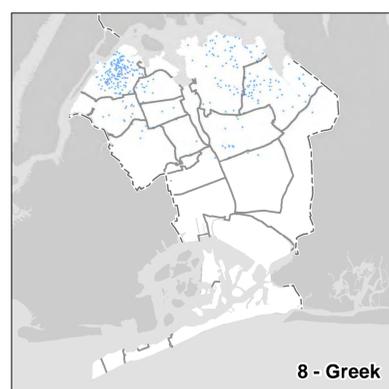
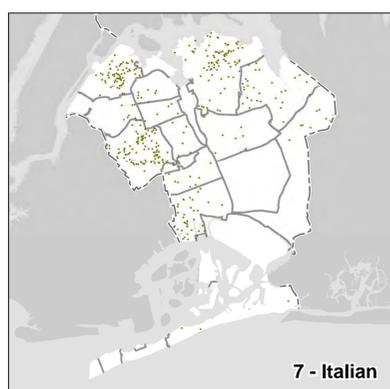
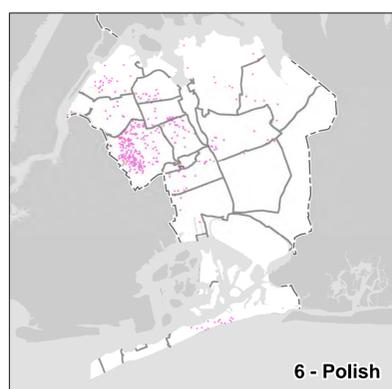
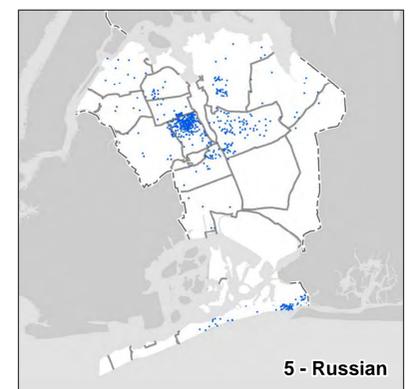
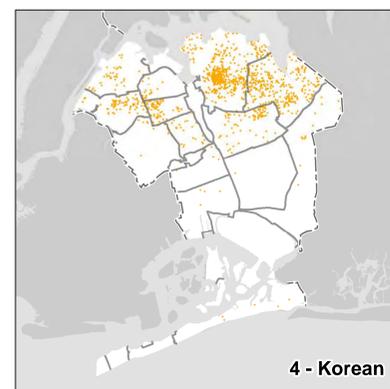
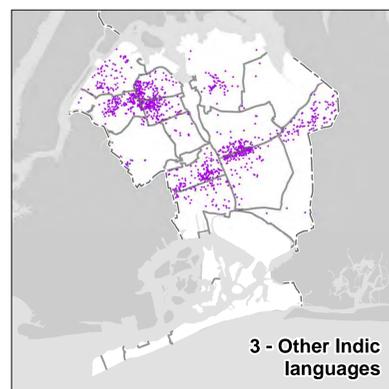
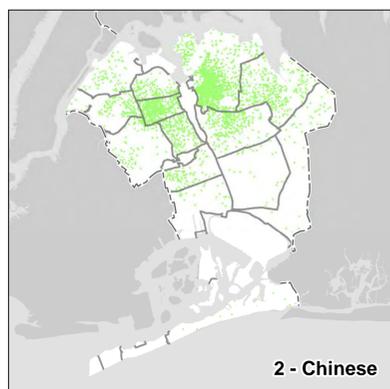
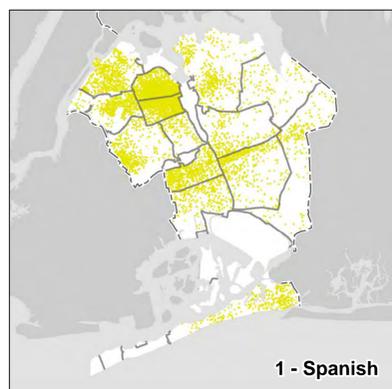
# Non-English Speakers in Queens



Data shown on this map are the languages spoken at home by residents aged five years and over who speak English less than "very well".

Spanish	251,948
Chinese	117,765
Other Indic languages	39,384
Korean	37,660
Russian	19,164
Polish	12,112
Italian	11,695
Greek	10,683
French Creole	10,547
Tagalog	9,791

1 Dot = 30 Residents



Produced: 10/31/2014

Source: 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B16001