



Rock the Bricks: L'Amour/Bensonhurst, Brooklyn - by Larry Ross

April 20, 2021 - Front Section



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This month we feature legendary music venue L'Amour, formerly located at 1546 62nd St. in the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn. It originally opened as a disco in 1978 and was converted into a rock club in 1981, in a rough area that was occupied by auto body shops and salvage yards. The venue, which could hold north of 3,000 people, hosted many of hard rock and heavy metal's biggest bands, including Kiss, Quiet Riot, Iron Maiden, and Metallica. It was also a launching pad for many other underground acts from around the world and featured performers such as Blue Oyster Cult, Cheap Trick, Guns N' Roses, Motorhead, Robin Trower and Twisted Sister, a band I saw perform there.

Adjacent to the neighborhoods of Dyker Heights, Borough Park, Bath Beach, and Gravesend, Bensonhurst derives its name from the Benson family, who in 1835 began buying farmland that formerly belonged to the Polhemus family. James Lynch, a New York real estate developer purchased the farmlands in the mid-1880s, and by 1888, began selling private lots in an area dubbed as Bensonhurst-by-the-Sea, which is now called Bath Beach. The construction of new homes in the area attracted middle class families. Bensonhurst had a couple of popular clubs, such as New-York Canoe Club and Bensonhurst Tennis Club, that attracted visitors to the area and held several events such as yachting, canoeing, and dancing. The wealthy New York City residents were attracted to the sailing facilities at Bensonhurst and Atlantic Yacht Clubs and built summer homes along the shore.

Despite a wave of commercial development in the 1980s, some land had remained relatively undeveloped. After rezoning in the 2000s, many smaller two and three-family single-family homes were replaced by six-story brick apartment buildings and condominiums. Traditionally, it is known as the Little Italy of Brooklyn due to its large Italian American population. Lenny's Pizza made famous by John Travolta in the opening scene of movie Saturday Night Fever is still in operation and a popular tourist destination. Prior to World War 2 there was a large Jewish population and would ultimately become a truly diverse and tight-knit community with increasing numbers of immigrants from Russia, Mexico, and the Middle East. It is also home to the largest population of Chinese born people of any neighborhood in New York.

The original L'Amour, which closed in 2004, remained a relevant part of the rock-metal-hair band scene for almost 25 years. Several different versions opened subsequently in Queens, Long Island and Staten Island. The approximately 16,000 s/f building was built in 1931 and was most recently home to the Red Wolf Lounge.

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