

STATEN ISLAND

# The way it was, on display



ROBERT SPENCER

**DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH,** which, in 1877, stood alone at Flatbush and Church Aves., awes kids at Brooklyn History Fair Day. Jacqueline Simmons regales young audience. Old Bensonhurst is displayed by Barbara Giurdanella (below). Diver Gene Ritter displays bottle from Civil War era found under Verrazano Bridge. At right, storyteller Abike Jotayo recalls Bedford-Stuyvesant history.

By JOYCE SHELBY

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**S**PORTING 1998 WORLD Championship Yankee caps and clutching black-and-white composition notebooks, youngsters from across the borough descended on the main branch of the Brooklyn Public Library on Wednesday to learn about their roots.

One of the first stops for many of the 2,000 students was the exhibit of Ron Schweiger, who was eager to set the record straight:

Before the days of Derek Jeter, David Wells or Bernie Williams, Brooklyn had its own championship team, which beat those old Yanks in the World Series of 1955.

"Oooh! Jackie Robinson!" exclaimed fourth-grader David Han, from Public School 192 in Borough Park, as he leafed through Schweiger's collection of photographs.

Schweiger, who teaches at Public School 219 in East Flatbush, told the youngsters about growing up at Ebbets Field and seeing Robinson and all the other Dodger greats play before the team

Coney Island, menus from Lundy's in Sheepshead Bay — where in the 1930s a lobster dinner cost \$2.50 — and an 1865 tax bill from the town of Flatlands.

The bill for a piece of farm property for the year was just \$2.60.

Borough Historian John Manbeck said, "Kids think the past is dead. But with hands-on exhibits for kids to feel, look at and admire, it's very exciting."

The fair was sponsored by Borough President Howard Golden and Manbeck, in cooperation with the Brooklyn Public Library, the Brooklyn Historical Society and the Brooklyn Coordinating Council for the Preservation of Neighborhood History.



defected to the West Coast at the end of the 1957 season.

"They played fantastic ball," said Schweiger, who displayed his own blue Dodger baseball cap.

Young David was impressed. "They're cool," he said. "But not better than the Yankees and Paul O'Neill. He's my favorite."

Okay, so it's the '90s and ancient rivalries between the Bronx Bombers and the Brooklyn Bums are unfamiliar to the youngest citizens of Kings County. But so are a lot of other things.

That was exactly the point of the fourth annual Brooklyn History Fair Day at the central branch of the library: To put children in touch with their rich historical past.

Last Wednesday's six-hour extravaganza spotlighted Brooklyn's neighborhoods.

Schweiger focused on Flatbush, home of Ebbets Field. "Technically, it was in Crown Heights," he conceded, "but everyone considered it Flatbush."

His collection also included tickets to Steeplechase Park at

Robert Makla of the Friends of Prospect Park was one center of attention with his 1880s penny-farthing, an early two-wheeled bicycle.

Denise Gordon of the Old Stone House Interpretive Center in Park Slope captured the children's attention with stories of the Battle of Brooklyn, which the colonists lost.

"When the Americans retreated, they ran straight past where this library is now," she said. "And eventually, they won the American Revolution."

Barbara Giurdanella of the Friends of Historic New Utrecht used a diorama to show what the area now known as Bensonhurst looked like as farmland in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Bob Tycenski, dressed in Union Civil War regalia, showed off his rifle and bayonet and told youngsters about the Brooklyn 14th Regiment, based in Brooklyn Heights.

And Barbara Muniz of the Black American Roots Society dressed youngsters in World War I battle gear.

Among the organizations represented were the Canarsie Historical Society, the Fort Hamilton Historical Society, the Friends of Marine Park-Gerritsen Creek, the Leferts Homestead and the Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant.

"There is a lot of history here," said Akilah Touré, a fourth-grade teacher from PS 130 in Kensington, as she and her class of 24 finished touring.