

On Kinderkamack, the str

By MAUREEN NEVIN DUFFY

I LIVE in Westwood, a nice little Bergen County hamlet with a downtown about three blocks long, its own movie theater, and a little park to honor the veterans, all situated a respectable distance from the interstate. But to sit in my backyard on a summer evening, you'd think you're in the aviary house of the old Bronx Zoo.

Lording it over everybody are the crows, some big enough to ride to work. They caw loudly whenever I intrude by venturing out to my gazebo, which is perched on a little hill above the Pascack Brook. The squirrels also resent my presence and set up a racket as they chase each other across the canopy of giant elms and oaks. I tell them to shut up frequently and the squirrels always register surprise. They stop what they're doing, cock those tiny ears of theirs, and strut back down the branch for a closer look at the human. They stare. I stare back.

And of course there is the honking, by day, of the Canada snow geese, who either no longer remember where Canada is or have lost their fascination with it.

Ah, but by night the real honking begins. For this, we move to the front yard. The imagination does strange and wonderful things with the emanations from Kinderkamack Road, that ubiquitous thoroughfare that supplies the grease to the gnashing gears of commerce from Hackensack all the way to Rockland County. Behind room-darkening shades, one tosses in bed, envisioning Mad Max in "The Road Warrior," the chase scene from the "French Connection" and — if you're old enough — the drag race from "Rebel Without A Cause."

It is only a two-lane road, but its travelers reach top speeds, although I admit my observation is based solely on the duration of whooshes,

Maureen Nevin Duffy, a freelance writer who lives in Westwood, is often seen trying to pull out of her driveway.



screeches, and the receding roar of motorcycle engines. I try stuffing my ears with little barrels of foam rubber, only to awaken at 4 a.m.

It is off in the distance but I hear it and feel its vibration in my chest. What is it? It has to be huge. An 18-wheeler dragging the torn and twisted wreckage of its second trailer behind it? I wait for the mangled mass to rout our first floor and level the house.

Mustering courage, I stagger to the window and pull back the shade. Under the glare of the streetlight, the hulk of gleaming white metal slowly rolls onto center stage, dragging massive scrub brushes. A street cleaner from hell.

Of course I want clean streets, and I love this house. I could suffer through if it were for antiquity; if this Kinderkamack Road were actually a relic of times past, a grand old lady caught in the rush of progress.

It must be an old stagecoach road. Having the road smack up

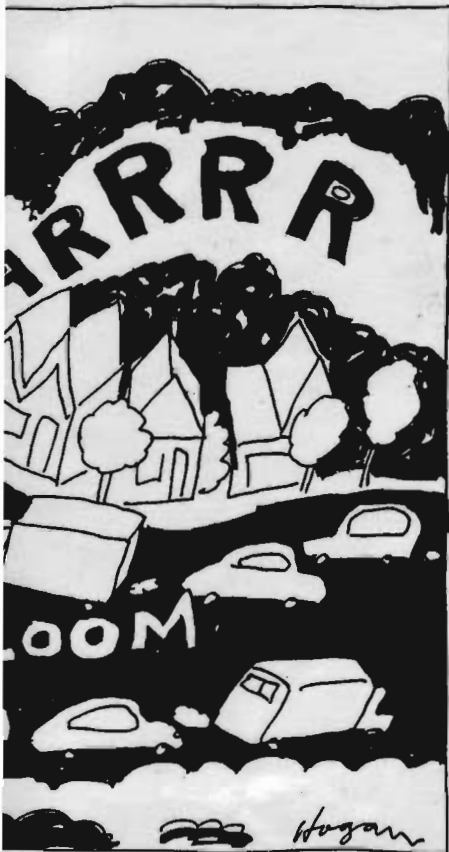
against the house must have made it easier for weary travelers to get to their lodgings. It's certainly long enough for a stage road, running through nine towns: Hackensack, River Edge, Oradell, Emerson, Westwood, Hillsdale, Woodcliff Lake, Park Ridge, and Montvale. Still, I'd feel better if the name sounded more native. What does "Kinderkamack" mean anyway?

When we first moved here, a sarcastic friend whispered into the phone, "I'm sorry to tell you that you've moved to a street that means child abuse." "Kinder" is German for children. But what about the rest. What is a "kamack"? I decided to ask my neighbors.

My shoemaker, Michael Ando, thought we were being misled by the word "kinder." "Forget children — it stands for kindle, flame. It was probably an old fire road built for access to remote houses in the town." OK, but what about the "kamack"?

Some responses were clearly in-

Street where I live



should have a gift for language. After much contemplation, Carolyn Valensi, as she arranged a pair of silk shorts in her shop window, concluded, "It's an Indian ritual for children upon reaching puberty. Yes, that's it. They have to go through 'the kamack.'" However, her inspiration fell short on the ritual details.

Exhausting my verbal historical resources, I finally looked it up. But the printed explanations were even less convincing. For example: Trainmen many years ago mispronounced the town of Emerson as Kinderkamack. *What?*

Try this: A rooster gave away the presence of marauding Indians and henceforth the place was called, "Kinderkamack, the place where the cock crowed." Unsatisfying.

I persevered, actually going as far as pulling a book off my own shelf. Ah-ha. "Kinderkamack" goes back to Revolutionary War times, when in addition to being a road, it was also a section of the low Dutch country, according to Adrian C. Leiby's excellent work, "The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley, The Jersey Dutch, and the Neutral Ground, 1775-1783." Our author even unearthed a quote about the area a little south of here, "along the ridge that parallels the Kinderkamack Road on the west about two miles north of the road over the Old Bridge." River Edge, by my reckoning. A British artillery officer encamped there noted, "It's a delightful country; Milton's delineation of paradise does not exceed the beauties of it." Despite the author's note that the observer's comments could have been colored by some "milk punch" he was drinking, I am satisfied to settle back in my noisy hamlet steeped and soothed in history.

Oh, I almost forgot. Dutch friends recently straightened me out on Kinderkamack. "Kinder" means children, all right. But "kamack" is probably a distortion of "gemak," meaning at ease, at play. Children at play. Today, of course, that translates to: "Hey kid, why don't yah go play in some traffic."

fluenced by personal interests. Warren Boroson, The Record's financial columnist, saw treachery. "The original settlers," said Boroson, "were terrible, manipulative, lawyer-like people. So the name is actually a warning. It means loosely, 'Trust everybody, but cut the cards.'"

Jocelyn Crane, who works at Maze Office Supply, where I make my photocopies, said, "I don't care what it means. It means it's the main street that gets me where I have to go."

Her boss, John Baleki, obviously envisioned a letterhead. "It has been an intrigue to me," he said. "'Kinderkamack' is probably a proper name — like Knickerbocker. The name of a person or tribe." The helpful hardware man at Volz agreed. "Maybe it means original people," he ventured. Still, the prospect of a tribe named Kinderkamack seemed pretty remote.

Anyone who would name a dress shop L'Amitie (French for friendship)