

**August 17, 2021**

**Report of the Ossining Village Historian**

**RE: Honorary Street naming application for Mr. James Lewis Bason Jr  
submitted by his niece, Christine Bason.**

My research into the contributions made to the village by James "Jimmy" Bason Jr was conducted by consulting the following sources: Telephone and in-person interviews with the applicant and niece of James Bason, Christine Bason and his sister Jean; Online memorial posted on [legacy.com](https://www.legacy.com); Telephone interviews with Louise Young, Cousin; Hope Dance, Jernigan Singer, and friend; Shaye Speller, friend; Sandra Pitt, friend; Carl McIver, Jernigan Singer, and friend. Written statement by Denise McIver, friend. I referenced several articles written about Mr. Bason since the age of six. The following is a summary of my findings.

**RESIDENCY IN OSSINING:** James Bason Jr. was a lifelong resident of Ossining, Affectionately called "Jimmie." He was born in the Ossining Hospital (now the site of Star of Bethlehem Baptist Church on Spring Street) on October 14, 1944, to parents James and Gloria Bason. James was educated in the Ossining School District and graduated from OHS in 1962. His childhood homes were located at 4 South Street and 109 State Street. At his passing on November 19, 2017, Jimmy was still an Ossining resident.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND VILLAGE CONTRIBUTION:** James L. Bason Jr.'s contributions to the Village of Ossining started at a very young age. Many in the Village (individuals, churches, local organizations, the Ossining School District, civic organizations, social organizations) called upon him for his incredible musical talents.

Jimmy started playing the piano at 2.5 years. Although his mother was a piano teacher, he was never formally trained; he played by ear. In an article, his mother was quoted and said, "I just let him do his thing. He can play anything he hears someone hum, sing or whistle". Mr. Bason's musical talents were requested throughout the community. He performed, directed performances, and/or was hired by the Ossining School district, local radio, VFW, local theatre, Ossining social clubs, and other venues throughout Westchester County, NJ, and CT.

He became a member of the Star of Bethlehem Baptist Church at age 7 and served the Lord faithfully there for the duration of his life. As the musical director of many choirs and Chorus of the Church, he led with immense talent and passion. In the interviews conducted, all boasted of his beautiful and giving spirit. How he was a voice of comfort to many, and they looked forward to seeing his bright smile. Many that were under his direction in the choirs spoke of the positive impact he had on their lives. They all spoke of him with palpable reverence.

- He requested and sang at the weddings and funerals of numerous Ossining residents.
- Member of the famous Jernigan Singers. A gospel-singing group consisted of members of Star Bethlehem Church and St. Matthews Methodist Church traveled to perform all over, including the south.
- He was a member of the Ossining branch of the NAACP.
- Performed musical numbers for the community at the Ossining Village Fair

- He participated in events to raise money for the Cooperative Scholarship Fund of Ossining.
- Jimmy represented Ossining in numerous popular TV talent shows, including Ted Mack and The Original Amateur Hour and Amateur Night at the Apollo, and won over 10 times.
- He (and Wayne Sharrock) earned a professional recording contract with Music World Records at the age of 19 and recorded two songs. Their most popular song is "You Better Believe It."

The sentiment echoed the same throughout the community - Jason "Jimmy" Bason was love. His love for the church and community was unparalleled. He cared for the community as if we all were his family. They all said, "He has left us all too soon, it is not fair." Denise McIver, MAAM, MLS former Ossining resident, sent the following statement via e-mail.

A Short Tribute to Jimmy Basin....With Love!

"I always enjoyed Jimmy Basin's seriousness as he accompanied the choir of Star of Bethlehem Baptist Church. I loved his dedication, musicianship, and his pleasure in applying his impassioned musicianship to the soaring voices of that faithful congregation.

But what I loved about him most was his humility, kindness, and genuineness. I don't think Jimmy Basin had a harsh response to anyone...ever. He loved God; he loved his people, and he also loved me.

I was a gangly, insecure 12-year old who so desired the affirmation of others. Jimmy provided that to me. He thought I was Beautiful, and he honored me always with his broad and generous wide smile that told me: *"I see you. I know who you are."*

I am delighted that a street in my hometown will be named after him. He should be so honored because he was special, kind, and loving. His hallmark was his heartfelt generosity to others. That's what I remember and will always remember about him.  
May he forever rest in peace."

#### **VILLAGE OF OSSINING AWARDS/CITATIONS**

- **Monday, September 29, 2014** - Proclaimed James Bason Jr., Day by former Mayor William R. Hanauer
- **November 27, 2017** - The Westchester County Board of Legislators adjourned the meeting in honor and memory of James L. Bason, Jr. (Resolution presented to family)
- Scholarship established (shortly after his death) at Star Bethlehem Church in his honor for children seeking to pursue a career in music.

#### **SIGNAGE HISTORY OF PROPOSED STREET**

Currently, there is no honorary street signage at the proposed street (corner of South Street and State Street). The applicant requests the honorary street name be **"James L. Bason Jr. Way."**

Below is a chronological account of some of the vast contributions and life events made by Mr. Bason to the community and/or representing Ossining.

Year	Event
1946	Started playing piano by ear (2.5 yrs. Old)
1948	Performed at Gloria Bason Talent Show (Musicians Employment Bureau-Starling Building)
1950	Piano debut 6 years old in front of 20 guests. Park School kindergarten student
1952	Stars of Tomorrow Talent Show-Ossining (hosted by his mother)
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1952	Performed at the sisterhood of Temple Israel in Cortlandt
1957	Westchester County Center (Little Theatre) featured pianist for Variety Talent Show.
1957	NAACP membership committee.
1958	Sang with Veltones at 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Sock Hop
1959	Member of Ossining NAACP (served on membership committee)
1959:	Performed with Veltones at 26 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Edmund C. Genet Post 1041, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)
1959	Performed on the radio in Westchester, NYC, CT, and Ossining Community
1962	Winner of Mashed Potato dance contest (Junior HS gym)
1963	Record deal came as a result of winning Amateur night at the Apollo in Harlem. They won their first contest and kept winning for 8 weeks straight (not achieved by any act since the 50s). managed by Gene Redd
1963	Promotional tour – part of contractual obligation to promote the song "Better Believe It." 2 shows a day in Wilmington, Delaware, Washington, Richmond, Philadelphia, and NJ with headliners: Marvin Gaye, Martha and the Vandellas, Stevie Wonder, and Gladys Knight (large review). They were in the group "Interludes" for years but only a duet for five months at the time they recorded. "We have seen a lot," Jimmie said
1963	Performed at OHS for Rock n' Roll show offered by the Bandstand Committee
1964	Performed at the Boys Scout Troop 51 "Platterama of 1964" at the Roosevelt School Gym.

1964	Recorded a Rock&Roll record with Music World with Wayne Sharrock. "You Better Believe It"
1968	Jernigan Singer (traveled to Virginia & NC)
1971	Performed with Jernigan Singers at St. Matthews Homecoming Festival
1972	Performed singing acts at Cooperative Scholarship Fundraiser at Colonial Terrace in Cortlandt
1972	Pianist for Community Dr. King Program. The whole community was involved and provided support.
1979	Director of music – Star on Peekskill radio show

## STAGE APPEARANCES

- Victoria Theater
- Apollo won (8 times) representing Ossining
- Stars of Tomorrow (featured pianist)
- Hal Jackson Television Show (Kiddie talent show)
- County Center Little Theatre (featured pianist)

## MUSIC GROUPS

- Beltone's (Joyce Edmonson, Ernestine Bolling, Wayne Sharrock, Vance Ruff, James Bason) managed by Charles Suggs.
- Jernigan Singers
- Jimmie & Wayne
- Director of Music Star of Bethlehem Baptist Church
- Interludes (trio)