A Personal Perspective by Bob Marvin

The PLG House Tour Has Evolved Along with the Neighborhood

The annual Prospect Lefferts Gardens house tour started in 1969, but I came to it late. My wife and I went on our first PLG tour in 1974, when we were actively looking for a house to buy. That tour changed our life. We stopped looking in other neighborhoods and closed on our Midwood Street house four months later. I’ve worked on every tour since 1975, as has my wife, Elaine, because the house tour is so important to us. This year’s tour will be the 49th annual outing and my 49th and not 48th because the tour skipped one in the 1980s.

The house tour was started by PLGNA just a year after that neighborhood organization was founded. The neighborhood was just recovering from the wave of blockbusting that had been a plague in the late ’50s and early ’60s when there was increasing racial integration and unscrupulous real estate people exploited the fears and prejudices of white homeowners in an attempt to drum up business through panic selling. Fortunately, blockbusting here was not successful in re-segregating our neighborhood. PLGNA was started with an aim toward making our neighborhood attractive to people of all races and Brenda Sealy, who lived on Maple II, came up with the idea of a house tour to show off the newly named Prospect Lefferts Gardens part of Flatbush as a means of achieving that goal.

She was assisted by PLGNA co-founder Bob Thompson, a community activist who campaigned for a more diverse and affordable neighborhood. Now in his early nineties, he still lives with his wife, Jane, in their home on Lefferts III.

Soon after moving into our house, I took a New School class on the brownstones of New York, taught by Everett Orrtner, the Park Slope brownstone guru and founder of the Brownstone Revival Committee, which encouraged middle-class families to buy and renovate historic row houses in NYC. Orrtner thought it was imperative to publicize our neighborhood or, as he put it, “don’t hide your light under a bushel.” With that in mind, I volunteered to organize a PLGNA publicity committee and that also made it logical to become a member of the house tour committee. I’ve worked on every tour since then and our house has been on tour five times, possibly a record, first in 1979 and most recently last year.

The first tour I worked on was something of a disaster, with only about 60 tickets sold, probably because it was held on the same day as the more popular Park Slope tour, which had been started ten years earlier than ours. That disappointment led me to volunteer to represent PLGNA at meetings of the Brooklyn Brownstone Conservancy and organization of neighborhood groups that, among other things, tried to coordinate tour dates—no small feat because there were at least a dozen tours, most in the spring.

The tour was intended to publicize PLG. Fund-raising was also a goal, but we were usually lucky to break even. Attendance improved in the late ’70s (continued on page 12).

Energized by Past Momentum, New LMA President Is Ready For a Vibrant Future

By Pia J. Raymond, LMSW

The “shriek” sound of bus brakes, the rhythmic knock of dollar bills against the metal of change contribute to the soundscape that is the lifeblood of our community, Flatbush Avenue. To a visitor, this bustling Brooklyn neighborhood seems too busy to navigate. To those of us who call this home, we find excitement in our anchoring avenues and comfort on our beloved blocks.

As we celebrate the centennial year of the Lefferts Manor Association, I have a flood of fond memories from the last few decades. LMA, as we affectionately abbreviate it, continues to be a bridge to connect neighbors and a foundation to support the perpetuity of landmarked one-family homes.

Driveway hopscotch, backyard barbecues, and sidewalk chalk masterpieces enliven childhood pleasures on tree-lined streets. Vibrant maples, robust oaks and verdant pines summon the sun and cultivate environmental awareness in the heart of an urban niche.

The ornate architectural splendor decorates our homes, imprinted a historical snapshot into the album of our Lefferts Manor experience. But most important, we celebrate the impact of the people, the relationships that have lasted a lifetime and those yet to grow. We bloom in spring with the LMA’s flower barrel planting, enjoying the aromatic oak of whisky barrels filled with tulips. We look forward to the annual gathering to beautify our blocks bringing old friends, new neighbors, children and seniors together.

Our house tour is a spotlight on the magnificence of our beloved community while giving an opportunity to appreciate the richness of our shared experiences. We culminate the year adorning doors with a holiday wreath to bid good tidings.

For more information, please contact Milford Prewitt at milfordprewitt@aol.com. The Echo reserves the right to edit or omit articles submitted. We thank the contributing writers, photographers, graphic designer Ken Diamond, and copy editors Marie von Mehren and Renee Michael Prewitt for their help creating this issue.

©2019 Lefferts Manor Association
Personal Perspective: House Tour Has Evolved

(continued from page 1) when the NYC Commission on Human Rights started to pay for advertising for tours in neighborhoods like ours, as a way to foster racial integration throughout the city.

Over the years the tour became less central to PLGNA, which concentrated heavily on tenant organizing. Nevertheless, PLGNA remained the sole tour sponsor, even though most tour organizers, including Carole and I, were on the Lefferts Manor Association board. When I was LMA president in the early 1990s, I was initially unable to get the board to co-sponsor the tour. Then, in 1993, we had a Lefferts Manor-only tour to celebrate the centennial of our single-family covenant. LMA took over sponsorship of the house tour a couple of years later, when PLGNA, facing difficulties, went on hiatus.

Under LMA leadership our tours continue to represent the entire PLG neighborhood, with tour houses and apartments throughout the area. Tour volunteers are equally diverse. The number of Brooklyn house tours has dwindled with only PLG, Park Slope, and Bedford-Stuyvesant retaining annual tours and a few neighborhood tours having tours every other year. At the same time attendance at our tour has increased with over 600 people attending last year. I expect that the Prospect Lefferts Gardens House & Garden Tour will continue for many years to come.

What’s On View

A Colonial Revival frame house designed by Axel Hoyman in 1906 that has been carefully renovated to create a bright, spacious modern home that still keeps its period detail. A Roman brick and limestone row house designed in 1909 by William M. Miller is one of the earliest homes built in the Manor. It has beautiful woodwork and a delightful glass block–floor LED light to the back garden off the parlor level.

A very cool side backyard with modern patio furnishings and plantings where you can relax to live jazz entertainment and enjoy complimentary drinks and goodies donated by local businesses and residents. Stop by at the wine and spirits store Drink, 492 Flatbush Ave., (across from Planet Fitness) where sponsored by Voices of Lefferts, a community writing and publishing project. Learn more about the people who make up this great neighborhood.

And get a glimpse of houses tours past. At the coffee house The Chameleon, 150 Flatbush Ave., there is a display of vintage PLG House Tour posters from the '70s and '80s. Two examples are on the left.

All the photographs for the Echo’s 2019 PLG House & Garden Tour feature by Martin Friedman.

Family’s Patience and Persistence Restore Neglected Maple I Doctor’s House

by Kendall Christiansen

Like a number of the large free-standing brick houses on Maple I, the Leon family’s home had a sad history of neglect, disrepair and a years-long estate dispute before they rescued it from further decay. Unfortunately, the damage was done. Not only was the mini-mansion dilapidated, but squatters—both human and animal—had taken it over for shelter.

Earlier owners Arthur and Balia Cele- donia, who relocated to a Park Slope co-op in 1982, finally noticed the house’s heritage. It was built by the owner of a lumber yard who had access to the best wood and woodworkers. The interior of the house lavishly shows off the well-appointed use of wood detailing, especially in the stairwell marquetry and the dark-paneled upstairs office.

Like several of the homes on the block, a doctor who had his medical office in the front parlor sold the house to the Celedonias, with the stipulation that his office remain. Three years after first making their first offer to buy it, Alex and Linda persevered and closed in 1977. They personally led the design aspects of a ten-month renovation. Only the kitchen and master bath were gut-renewed. New mechanicals were also installed.

Their eye for renovation will be aimed at the backyard this spring: pavers and an outdoor kitchen. And just over the horizon, their basement awaits conversion into a theater room and home gym.

The Leons, a financial advisor who was born and raised in Prospect Heights, and Linda, a real estate agent originally from New Jersey, have been together for 18 years. They started a family back in their previous Crown Heights brownstone. Their son, Alexander, is now 12 and his sister, Ava, is 10.

The Leons have become active in the community since moving to PLG. They are involved in their block association and are a show host of their block’s annual progressive dinner. Their home is clearly a wonderful place to entertain.

Carlene Braithwaite is an LMA board member who lives on Maple II for 30 years.

PLG House Tour

2019

The 2019 house tour guidebook will be a departure from the guides of recent years and promises to be special. In addition to a new easier-to-read layout, the guidebook will feature vintage photographs of Lefferts Manor. There will also be reproductions of real estate advertising from the first two decades of the 20th century promoting Manor homes. Nearly all tours when their desire to become homeowners led them to the Brooklyn Brownstone Fair.

The fair was hosted by Brooklyn Union Gas at their offices on Montague Street and co-sponsored by the Brownstone Revival Committee of New York (publisher of the Brownstones) and the Brooklyn Brownstone Conference.

PLG homeowners participated, hosting open house and sending current homeowners to speak to potential homebuyers about the neighborhood. It was there that Tom, a math professor, and Emilie, a psychiatric social worker, met Bob and Elaine Marvin, who then (and now), live on Midwood II.

At the Marvin’s suggestion, Tom remembers attending the PLG house tour. That began an earnest look in the neighborhood, which led to the Lincoln II home they were destined to buy in 1977.

In 2017, Tom and Emilie Jambois were living in a Manhattan apartment on Riverside Drive and had a long-term friendship with the prior owners. They were there that Tom, a math professor, and Emilie, a psychiatric social worker, met Bob and Elaine Marvin, who then (and now), live on Midwood II.

The story of the Jamboises’ experience on Lincoln II is the story of how one family’s home restoration journey brought them closer to the community and their neighbors. For example, they delayed their closing date so that the owners’ children could finish the school year. In return, the owners let Tom and Emilie stay in their Fire Island beach house for a couple of weeks. This sparked a long-term friendship with the prior owners and an annual June getaway to Fire Island—a tradition that lasted for over 20 years.

Tom recounts that another neighborhood tradition started when Tom offered to host dinner for a family on the block when their kitchen was under renovation. That neighbor relocated and soon it became a tradition once a month the neighbors host dinner for one another at their respective homes. The Jamboises’ home has been impeccably restored with an exacting eye to the details.

Emilie passed in 2020, but Tom has kept busy with a steady stream of improvement projects. He has restored both his first-floor kitchen, which is bathed in light and showcases a large center island, installed custom cabinetry, sliding doors to the garden and updated the breakfast nook. Of particular note is the period gas light fixtures installed in the dining room and in the parlor on the middle floor. Tom purchased the antique fixtures and had them wired for electricity.

Tom likes the changes he sees in the neighborhood and is glad to see younger people moving in. He is pleased by the upturn in commerce, especially the new restaurants. He remains close to his neighbors, and notes that he stays in the neighborhood out of his love for the area and those who live in it.

He is struck by what he sees as his good fortune since his arrival on Lincoln II, a place where those from the years, “so much has gone right,” Tom says.

Carlene Braithwaite is an LMA board member. She recently retired from her career as a lawyer for the Port Authority.

‘So Much Has Gone Right’ For 40-Year Lincoln II Homeowner

by Carlene Braithwaite

In 2017, Tom and Emilie Jambois were living in a Manhattan apartment on Riverside Drive and had a long-term friendship with the prior owners. They were there that Tom, a math professor, and Emilie, a psychiatric social worker, met Bob and Elaine Marvin, who then (and now), live on Midwood II.

At the Marvin’s suggestion, Tom remembers attending the PLG house tour. That began an earnest look in the neighborhood, which led to the Lincoln II home they were destined to buy in 1977.

But the blight didn’t dis- may Alex and Ashlinda (Linda) Leon. Experienced homeowners and renovators who years earlier had revived a Crown Heights brown- stone, the couple was actual- ly attracted to the eyesore. (They also admit a major turn-on was the two-car garage.)

Already attracted to PLG, the Leons saw poten- tial and beauty when they discovered this house in 2014. A charmer in the making with its center stairwell, brick-arched windows and slate roof, the house had extraordinary wood- work, much of which escaped water damage from a leaking roof.

Linda said the relative good condition of the woodwork was the best surprise in finding the house. (The worst surprise? A sewer-buster Viking stove and exhaust system that mysteri- 

ously disappeared just before the final walk-through.)

The Leons have become active in the community since moving to PLG. They are involved in their block association and are a show host of their block’s annual progressive dinner. Their home is clearly a wonderful place to entertain.

Carlene Braithwaite is an LMA board member who lives on Maple II for 30 years.
**Art Consultants Open Their Rutland II Gem for the Third Time**

by Milford Preucisc

Sonnet Takahisa has lived in Prospect Lef- ferts Gardens twice. The first time was in the 1990s when she was just two years old and her bohemian parents moved from a small Greenwich Village loft to a more traditional abode in a Hawthorne Street apartment building to accommodate their growing family.

The second time was 40-plus years later in 2004 when she and her husband, Hollis Headrick, bought a two-story limestone on Rutland II.

Fortunately, the infrastructure and interior styling of their new home did not require major updating, though even every few years, the family has taken on modest improvement projects to fit their lifestyle. That included a new landscaped, backyard garden.

This outing marks the third time Sonnet and Hollis—who have the enviable advantage of working from home as successful and high- ly respected art educators, consultants and philanthropy advisors—are opening their home for the house tour.

During Sonnet’s first incarnation here as a toddler, PLG was hardly the welcoming or culturally inviting neighborhood it has become.

Because her mom was a Russian-American Jew and her dad was Japanese-American, neighbors actually floated a petition around the neighborhood to keep them out.

Although the family moved in anyway, it decamped to Canarsie three years later.

Fast forward a few decades later and Son- net and Hollis—both of whom met in the art world as educators and consultants—married in 1998 and started a family.

Hollis is also a multi-talented musician and is a co-president of PLG Arts.

At the time they met, he was a program officer at the New York State Council of the Arts and she ran the School Youth and Fami- lies Department at the Brooklyn Museum.

Ironically, Sonnet noted, the home they ultimately bought would be two blocks directly north of the Hawthorne Street apartment building where she spent her toddler years.

But unlike the first time she lived here, they found a different neighborhood. Diverse and welcoming, it was full of creative people who worked hard on community building and valued inclusion, not exclusion.

“I didn’t realize till I was walking down the street and remembered somehow that our address had been on Hawthorne and there was such a familiarity to it,” she says. “But I hadn’t been back here since I was a toddler. It was a weird sort of recollection.”

Today she and Hollis work together in a home-based business, Arts and Cultural Strategies, which fosters partnerships with the city’s museums, arts organizations, and schools, to develop plans and evaluate pro- grams in museum learning, performing arts and grant making.

Their son, Tyler—a big collector of Japane- se anime figurines (a part of whose collection will be on display tour day)—was the linchpin that brought them to PLG. He had a close classmate who lived on Rutland II and that’s how they learned about the neighborhood.

It brought back wistful memories of Son- net’s first incarnation here.

**Using a Real Estate Agent’s Edge to Find Her Dream House**

by Roberta Wolfington

It was 1996 and Carol DeFreitas was ready to say goodbye to apartment living. Sharing walls coupled with the pounding footsteps of running children above had become trying.

She loved her place near Brooklyn College and the fact that it came with parking was hard to beat, but she was unhappy with the building’s management and maintenance.

So she decided that it was time to buy a house.

Disappointed with the properties a real estate agent was showing her, Carol—who works in finance for the city—decided to become a real estate agent herself in order to have immediate access to all of the listings.

After a six-week course and passing her exams, Carol became a licensed real estate agent and started working part-time for a neighborhood broker.

Carol took her time waiting for the right house to come along. But little could she have expected while working from home one day in 1998 that an unpleasant encounter with a noisy neighbor would speed up her timetable.

She went to the office the next day to search for homes, determined to buy the first one that fit within her budget limits. She had pay dirt when she found a bank-owned prop- erty on Rutland Road that had been sitting empty for a year.

The location was great as it cut in half her commute time to work. But having grown up on Clarkson Avenue, she knew the area and was a bit wary.

But that caution melted into attraction when she rounded the corner from the chaos of Flatbush Avenue onto Rutland Road. She remembered it feeling like an old medieval English village with the rows of Tudor style homes flanking both sides of the street.

The house she was there to see was one of these homes. The neighbors had tended the flower barrels and kept the front stoop clean and tidy.

They initially thought Carol was looking for someone. But when she shared that she was interested in buying the vacant house, Joyce encouraged her to do so. Joyce said some of her friends were departing to Florida, but she loved the neighborhood too much to ever leave.

Carol took Joyce’s endorsement to heart. Despite no dedicated parking, Carol commit- ted to buying the first house she saw that day.

She moved in September 1998. Carol said she couldn’t have made a better choice than if she had meticulously planned it.

By sticking to her guns, not only did she buy the first house she saw that day, but it also turned out to be her dream house.

Roberta Wolfington is the secretary of the LMA board and co-coordinator of the 2019 house tour.

**New LMA President Ready for a Vibrant Future**

(continued from page 1)

Last holiday season, we mourned the passing of the esteemed long-term LMA president Eben “Ben/Eddie” Edwards and we emerged in 2019 celebrating his life as a community.

I am deeply honored to be the newly elected president of the LMA. I look forward to an impactful year of honoring the service-filled spirits of Ben Edwards and Caroline Schaffer.

Long lines and ticket number counters bring instant memories of Vinnie’s Prime Meats, a city and state agency, elected officials and other state and city stakeholders.

I am excited that we are galvanizing around our Leferts Manor Association centennial. My vision is that it truly marks the reuptake of our collective Leferts Manor experience. In years past the threat of crime kept many indoors and children shuffled out of the community.

Driveways separated more than houses, but rather impeded encounters. At this moment in time, we have endured, cultivated and nourished our special enclave and now it’s time to express that story collectively and individually.

Tell your Leferts Manor story, connect with neighbors, stroll through the tour and have fun along the way. Stay tuned for the Leferts Manor Association Centennial Gala on Saturday, September 14, 2019. See you around the way!
by Malford Prewitt

The New York City Department of Transportation is planning to fit a new crosswalk and a new traffic signal in the Flatbush Avenue corridor bounded by Beekman Place and Maple Street, spokespersons for the agency confirmed.

That short section of Flatbush is where a pickup truck struck Ben Edwards, the longtime president of the Lefferts Manor Association, on December 10, 2018. He was crossing Flatbush from the east side to the west and died from his injuries on December 12.

Meanwhile, the police say they are finished with their investigation, noting that the driver was not charged.

“DOT takes every fatality on our roadways seriously, and has a proactive program of redesigning streets to reduce tragedies like this one,” a spokesperson said. “As with all locations where a fatal crash occurs, DOT evaluated the design of the street and the circumstances of the crash in order to improve the safety of that location.”

The study led to the decision to improve pedestrian safety with a new crosswalk and traffic light.

“At the intersection of Flatbush Avenue and Maple Street, DOT plans to install a traffic signal to improve pedestrian safety in the area,” the spokesperson continued.

When finished, Flatbush between Beekman Place and Maple will have three crosswalks and three traffic signals covering about 400 feet.

DOT traffic statistics show that from 2012 to 2018 there were 10 serious, but nonfatal injuries within the corridor. Ben Edwards’s death was the only fatality in that time frame.

Despite the number of injuries, the Flatbush corridor from Beekman Place to Lincoln Road is not considered a Vision Zero high priority corridor, a special designation the DOT gives to select corridors and intersections with a high rate of pedestrian fatalities or injuries.

Vision Zero is an ambitious citywide plan to reduce pedestrian fatalities to none. In its recently released annual survey of pedestrian safety, the report documented that in the five years before Vision Zero was established, 28 pedestrians were a year or seriously injured (KSI) on high priority corridors in Brooklyn.

In total, 17 pedestrians were KSI in Brooklyn in 2018, a 40 percent drop from the 28 pedestrians killed or injured the year prior.

Joyce L. Johnston, Rutland Rd. Neighbor for Half a Century, Dies at 89

by Milford Prewitt

Joyce Louise Johnston, of whom it was said summer didn’t start until she held court from the stoop of her home, died New Year’s Day, just one week shy of her 96th birthday.

A beloved neighbor with wide ranging interests, culturally engaged, and politically perceptive, Mrs. Johnston had been battling COPD for years, said her daughter, Laura E. Johnston.

For 53 years, she lived with her family in one of the iconic Tudor townhouses that marks the unique architectural character of a quarter of Rutland Road.

For all of her working life, Mrs. Johnston was a laboratory technician in the blood banking industry, retiring in 1994 as a Blood Bank Supervisor at Kings County Hospital.

She was born January 3, 1929, in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. When she was four, she was sent to Jamaica, West Indies to live with an aunt and a grandmother. She attended high school there and graduated with a high school degree from Hunter College; met the love of her life, Vincent Llewelyn Johnston; and moved to Brooklyn.

Joyce and Vincent would marry in 1958, living at first in Crown Heights. They would also produce two children, Laura and Glenn F. Johnston.

The family moved to Rutland Road in 1967. Vincent, a train dispatcher for the MTA, was dubbed “The Mayor of Rutland Road” for his block association involvement and for being a block watch volunteer.

He died in 1998.

Funny and quick-witted, Mrs. Johnston loved television crime shows, going to the movies, reading mysteries, and trying new restaurants. The Brooklyn Public Library and the Botanic Gardens were virulently obsessions of hers.

She was spotlighted in an article in the Metro section of the June 19, 2004 New York Times about her membership in the “Wedding Watchers,” a group of women who showed up to watch wedding parties being photographed and who offered emergency stitching and sewing assistance to bridal party gowns needing fixing.

In her retirement years, she enjoyed traveling and spending her summer afternoons socializing with neighbors.

Besides Laura and Glenn, Mrs. Johnston is survived by a daughter-in-law, a granddaughter, two step-granddaughters; and a host of nephews, nieces, cousins, friends and neighbors.

Mrs. Johnston is interred at Plain Lawn Cemetery in Hicksville, N.Y.

Ben Edwards’s Accident Results in Safety Improvements at Flatbush and Maple

Prospect Park’s Fam ed Concert Pavilion to Get $2M Makeover

The historic Concert Grove Pavilion, designed by Prospect Park co-creator Calvert Vaux in 1874, is going to get a $2 million restorations, thanks in no small measure to former City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and the Brooklyn City Council delegation. Restorations plan to enhance the Waidea, Chinese, Moorish and Egyptian motifs and strengthen the eight cast-iron columns supporting the stained-glass skylight. The surrounding pathways, lighting and landscaping will also be restored. The scheduled completion date is 2020.

The pavilion is located on the west side of the park between the Audubon Center and the LeFrak Center.