

# THE DOUGLASTON AND LITTLE NECK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Preserving and protecting the historical significance of Douglaston and Little Neck and adjacent nature preserves*



A TRAIN APPROACHES THE SNOWY DOUGLASTON LIRR STOP AS SEEN IN 1962

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**IT'S A WRAP! OPEN HOUSE NEW YORK**

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## THE UNTOLD STORY: "QUEENS MODERN" ARCHITECTURAL TALK APRIL 25, 2020

Architectural historian Frampton Tolbert will speak on "Queens Modern" at the Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society Annual Meeting on Saturday, April 25th at 2pm, in the parlor of the Community Church of Douglaston, 39-50 Douglaston Parkway, Douglaston. The talk will be followed by a question answer session and refreshments.

Tolbert is an expert on Modernist architecture in Queens County, an often overlooked topic. More Modernist style buildings were built in Queens than any other borough in New York City in the mid to late 20th century, but few New Yorkers appreciate—or even know about—this most recent architecture.

Tolbert hopes to change that, and his talk will focus on what makes these buildings special. This sometimes bare and spare style of architecture is found all around us in Queens, yet it has never been studied or documented, and is increasingly disappearing.

*(continued on page 3)*

## A Letter From Our First Vice President, Pamela Broderick

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*About the cover photo...*

*This photo taken in 1962, shows the old station house at the Douglaston LIRR stop, still sporting the earthy paint colors that were popular when it was built in 1888. The photo was taken shortly before the station house was demolished. A poster for Noel Coward's show "Sail Away" is seen in the foreground. The musical starring Elaine Stritch opened in October, 1961 and closed in February 1962.*

*Photo by Dave Keller*

Hello again to all of our DLNHS members, and a friendly welcome aboard to our new members and others who are residents of our historical neighborhoods in Douglaston and Little Neck!

I am so excited to be part of this wonderful organization and wanted you, the reader, to know that DLNHS has been busy throughout 2019 with a steady array of celebrations, public events and advocacy. Our goal in all these activities is to pursue our mission of educating residents about local history and architecture, as well as to preserve our historic neighborhoods. We are getting ready for another action-packed calendar of events for 2020!

I hope you will enjoy this newsletter, which gives some highlights from 2019. I want to thank our Executive Director, Susan Mathisen, whose grant writing and expert guidance has steadily advanced our mission.

We had several key events last year. Top of the list was a wonderful festive celebration in October for our 30th Anniversary Garden Party, hosted by board member Maura Wrynn and her husband Jim in their lovely garden. More than one hundred guests attended, enjoying a live band, wine, and passed hors d'oeuvres, in a tented party space magically transformed for nighttime by board member and professional lighting designer, Rob Cangemi. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped make this event a great success, and a big thank-you to the Wrynn family for their gracious hospitality!

Two sold-out walking tours in 2019 captivated visitors, many of them first-timers who had never before seen our Douglaston and Little Neck neighborhoods. In May, amid monsoon-type rains, board member and architect Victor Dadras led more than thirty intrepid newbies, who had come from all five boroughs, on the annual Jane's Walk through the historic Westmoreland neighborhood in Little Neck. The walk ended with a tented reception at Van Nostrand Court (VNC), designed in 1924, a private enclave of thirty historic attached houses around a beautiful landscaped courtyard. Board member and VNC resident Karen Dinegar organized a very special reception.

In October, board member and architect Kevin Wolfe led the Open House NY tour from the Douglaston Railroad station through Douglas Manor. The tour culminated at the 1819 Douglas mansion, now the Douglaston Club, which was celebrating the building's 200th anniversary. The Club was just completing a whole house renovation and restoration, and OHNY guests were treated to a tour of the newly renovated and restored spaces, followed by refreshments in the Presidential Room and on the porch. This sold-out event—the third year in a row with OHNY—was a big success!!!!

During the end-of-the-year holidays, DLNHS participated in the Douglaston Local Development Corporation (LDC) festivities at historic Douglaston Village, setting up shop with an informational table in Station Plaza. This third year of LDC's Winter Festival attracted more than one thousand visitors, despite inclement weather and high winds. A special thanks to LDC's Executive Director Rebecca Gellos who put the event together against all (weather) odds and stuck to it—we were so happy to be there!

I hope you will take a look at our new website [www.dlnhs.org](http://www.dlnhs.org) which is packed with information. The members of our Web Committee, Mary O'Byrne and Rob Cangemi, led by its creative Chair Pia Thompson, worked hard to get the new website up and running last year, and continue to add to it. A new neighborhood section still under construction will include all seventeen Douglaston and Little Neck neighborhoods. If you have historic images or materials you would like to contribute, we would love to hear from you!

Thank you to our Publications Committee. Our newsletter never looked so good, thanks to the efforts of our talented board member Nicole Schorr, who designs and lays out the newsletter, and the work of our editors: Anne Ronan, Margaret King, and Kevin Wolfe.

Cheers to Historic Preservation!

—Pamela Broderick

*Annual Meeting (Continued from Page 1)*

American Martyrs Church, Bayside, designed by architect John O'Mailey, 1968.

For many, these buildings are a familiar "wallpaper" background to life in the borough. But few think about them, even though some of them are arresting in design.

Several architects of Modernist style buildings in Queens were well-known in their time, like the celebrated architect Ulrich Franzen. But most are not well-known, and have been largely forgotten, even though some of the architects were quite prolific. For example, Douglaston's own Gordon Lorimer, the architect who designed the Douglaston LIRR station (1962) and the Heliport at the 1964-1965 World's Fair (today's Terrace on the Park), and who, as Chief Architect of New York City, was responsible for designing many civic buildings remains unknown.

A Brooklyn resident, Tolbert realized there was a treasure trove of Modernist buildings waiting to be explored and documented in Queens. He started researching the topic several years ago, and eventually received two grants to do a comprehensive study of this mid-century style of architecture.

Queens had lots of open farmland that wasn't developed until after World War II. While the population of Manhattan, the Bronx, and Brooklyn declined or remained steady, the population of Queens doubled during the 1920's and continued to grow dramatically from 1940 to 1970. After World War II, whole new communities were developed, such as Rochdale Village, Electchester, and Fresh Meadows.

Tolbert started looking at the Queens Chamber of Commerce Building Awards Program, which started in 1926, and found many Modernist style buildings the Chamber honored over the decades. He hopes that by raising awareness of these buildings, more people will come to appreciate them for their importance in the history of the city's architecture, and that more of them will be preserved and restored.

Tolbert is an architectural historian whose focus is on vernacular and regional Modernism, primarily in New York City. He has created two online databases, Mid-Century Mundane and Queens Modern, that examine this work. Queens Modern (<https://queensmodern.com>) delves into the careers of two dozen architects of regional prominence who worked in Queens.

Tolbert is currently Deputy Director at the Center for Urban Pedagogy, an award winning non-profit, whose mission is to use the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement.

He was previously Deputy Director of the Historic Districts Council. He serves on the boards of Docomomo New York Tri-State, the Victorian Society in America, and the Society for Clinton Hill. He received his BA in Historic Preservation from the University of Mary Washington (Fredericksburg, Virginia.)



Frampton Tolbert will speak on "Queens Modern" on April 25th.

--Kevin Wolfe

## THE DLNHS 30TH ANNIVERSARY GARDEN GALA CELEBRATION



On Thursday, October 2, the temperature in Douglaston and Little Neck reached 93 degrees; by nightfall on October 5, it had plunged to 57 degrees, and was heading lower. But undeterred, the one hundred attendees—a sold out event!—of the thirtieth anniversary celebration of the DLNHS, with sweaters tucked under blazers and shoulders wrapped in shawls, came out in force to the stunningly illuminated, graciously spreading gardens at 8 Hillside Avenue, the home of Jim and Maura Wrynn.

The setting was perfect: two rows of bagged candles guided guests past the charming house to the garden gala, the entry marked by two trees decked out in colored lights. Beyond, the darkness was brightened by lights set in the pathways and hung in the huge tent erected on an ample grass terrace, raised a few steps above the patio where wine, beer, and the signature drink of the night, vodka martinis, were served. Under the tent, ample platters of hors d'oeuvres were available, supplemented by plates of delicacies passed around by an eager staff of young people, to whom a special thank-you is owed: Arianna Brattoli from Sacred Heart Academy (Hempstead); Nora Burke and Kirsten Sweeney from St. Mary's High School (Manhasset); Jacqueline Carty from The Mary Louis Academy (Jamaica Estates); Ioanna Georgantonis and Tatiana Rao from St. Francis Preparatory School (Fresh Meadows); and Luca Mucciardi from Chaminade High School (Mineola). Iavarone Bros. (Lake Success Center) provided platters of cheese, antipasto, and hummus, plus paninis and dessert shots, while our hostess Maura Wrynn generously supplied tomato and mozzarella skewers, a chocolate fountain, and her matchless squash soup, laced with a special cream. Topping off the festivity was a wine toss, and several lucky ring-throwers went home with their hard-won bottles of wine.

Throughout the party, a 98-item slideshow (created and mounted by DLNHS board members Peter Reinharz and Victor Dadras) depicting the history of Douglaston and Little Neck played continually, giving both studious viewers and casual walkers-by an opportunity to understand the experience of the community in which we live. It opens with a 1929 aerial view of Little Neck Bay between Douglaston and Saddle Rock (Great Neck, Nassau County), showing the natural contours of land and water before the last ninety years of construction (slide #5). Another early photograph, from October 20, 1931, depicts the excavation of a Matinecock Native American cemetery (slide #65), a reminder of the native peoples who were the inhabitants of these neighborhoods before the arrival of the Dutch and English colonists.



A delicious sheet cake celebrating DLNHS's 30th anniversary!



Hostess Maura Wrynn (right) welcomes guests to the party under the tent.

Also impressive are three images of the Douglaston dock after its devastation by the 1938 New England Hurricane, still the worst recorded in modern times, that made landfall in Long Island on September 21 of that year (slides #9-11). Several slides commemorate various open houses, walking tours, and workshops hosted by the DLNHS with other partners. Typically lasting two or three hours, and featuring refreshments at participating homes, the Community Church of Douglaston, and the Douglaston Club, these include an Open House on October 14, 2018 (slide #23); Jane's Walks (so-called after urbanist Jane Jacobs, author of the influential 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*) on May 5, 2018 and May 5, 2019 (slides # 44 and 53); a Neighborhood Architecture Day on May 25, 2019 (slide # 82); and a Historic Preservation Workshop on researching, maintaining, and preserving historical homes, held on April 13, 2019 (slide # 70).

*30th Anniversary (Continued from Page 4)*

The slideshow illustrates only a few moments of the thirty-year history of the DLNHS, founded in 1989 with the mission, as announced on its website, "to publicize, preserve, and protect the historical significance of Douglaston and Little Neck, adjacent nature preserves, and those other sections or buildings of the two neighborhoods worthy of preservation through the collection, research, and dissemination of historical information to the public." Its members have worked assiduously to execute that mission, supporting the designation by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission of the Douglaston Historic District (Douglas Manor) in 1997, and the Douglaston Hill Historic Districts in 2004, as New York City Historic Districts. Both the Douglaston and Douglaston Hill Historic Districts are listed on the National Register of Historic Places (as of 2000 and 2005 respectively).



Celebrants enjoy a tasting of hostess Maura Wrynn's superb squash soup!

The DLNHS has also gathered a large collection of photos, maps, and memorabilia, many of which are now part of the archival collection of the central Queens Library in Jamaica. These and other items are being digitized and cataloged for greater public access. For the next thirty years, the DLNHS will continue to seek the designation of other Douglaston-Little Neck neighborhoods as Historic Districts—and plan more gala celebrations.



Guests enjoyed live music.

From the DLNHS to those who organized and executed the thirtieth-year gala on October 5—especially Pamela Broderick, Robert Cangemi, Mary O'Byrne, Anne Ronan, and Pia Thompson—and above all to our hosts, Jim and Maura Wrynn, our heartfelt gratitude.

—Margaret King

## DOUGLASTON VILLAGE WINTER FESTIVAL

On Saturday, Dec. 14, the Douglaston Local Development Corporation (LDC) held its Third Annual Douglaston Village Winter Festival. As in past years, the event took place at the Douglaston Train Station Plaza next to the LIRR station at 234th Street and 41st Avenue.

Those participating included artists, authors, crafts merchants, the local fire department (and firetruck!), the PS 98 5th Grade and PTA, the Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society (DLNHS), and of course many other individuals and groups from the local community.

The event started at noon but ended a bit earlier than the scheduled 4 PM due to inclement weather, though this did not dampen the spirits of those attending, who, covered by large white tents, enjoyed numerous activities, including ice skating at the LDC's holiday ice rink, a snow slide, a giant snow globe, live music and dance, and free children's activities in the village square. Vendors filled the square with crafts, baked goods (awesome pumpkin muffins!), hot drinks, warm soup (shout out to Maura Wrynn's butternut squash!) and other items.

Event sponsors included Councilman Paul Vallone and the New York City Department of Transportation. Several other local organizations made the winter festival possible, including the Douglas Manor Environmental Association, the Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society, Udalls Cove Preservation Committee, Alley Pond Environmental Center and local churches. Local politicians Paul Vallone, Ed Braunstein, and John Liu also attended.

—Alex Latzer



Top: LDC Executive Director Rebecca Gellos (left) visits with volunteers from the DLNHS manning our table at the Winter Festival. Left to right: Pam Broderick, Mary O'Byrne, Karen Dinagar, and Nicole Schorr.

Bottom: And the band played on!

## HIDDEN GEMS AROUND THE TOWN: THE VAN NOSTRAND HOMESTEAD



The Van Nostrand Homestead, ca. 1940.

Did you ever walk around your neighborhood and wonder "What is going on with that house?" It may look out of place, or be turned away from the street or just different from the others around it. I have passed one such house for years. It sits on the northwest corner of 254th Street and Pembroke Avenue in Little Neck and it turns out to have an amazing little story.

The house is not in its glory now, but I can see it has great "bones." Originally located on Northern Boulevard where the former Little Neck Movie Theater was next to La Grotta restaurant, it was a grand house with a circular driveway. It was called The Old Oaks because of the magnificent oak trees that once surrounded it. The home must have been well-loved for someone to save and move it.

According to *Through The Years in Little Neck and Douglaston*, published in 1963 by George C. and Ernestine Fowler, this well-known house was built in 1860 and moved to its current location in the 1920s when the theater was built.

The house may be even older than the Fowlers estimated. The earliest part—buried in later additions—appears to be a typical Long Island farmhouse from the 1830s–40s and likely was added on to several times over the years, reflecting changing architectural styles of the 19th century.

The original home was owned and named by sea Captain Valentine Peters, who also ran a general store on the property to accommodate the many travelers who used Northern Boulevard (known variously as the Flushing and North Hempstead Turnpike and Broadway until the 20th century), which in itself is an historic story. Peters sold the property to a Mr. Titus in 1874. Titus held it until only 1875 when he sold it to David L. Van Nostrand, who owned a good amount of property along Northern Boulevard and southward to property which now includes the Van Nostrand Court Neighborhood.

D.L., as he was known, was a popular and prosperous Little Neck resident who sold coal, feed supplies, and farm equipment. He also owned the post office and was a prominent member of local government. Eventually, the Old Oaks became known as the Van Nostrand Homestead. Even though the Van Nostrands weren't the original owners, the stately home became associated with them due to their status in town.

D.L. sold the house in 1905 to his brother William H. Van Nostrand. William owned the house until 1930 and orchestrated the relocation of the home when the theater was built in 1929. William also added a second turret that can be seen in the 1940 photograph and in the current one.



The Van Nostrand Homestead today.

Inside, some of the ceilings are a mere six and a half feet high, while others are nine feet high, reflecting the different time periods of the various additions. William was the one who sold the southerly part of his property to the McBride Ogden Construction Company in about 1925, which is still known as Van Nostrand Court.

In the 1930s, the house was home to the Old Oaks Community Club. In the 1940s, it was made into apartments. According to local residents, there was a sewing factory in the basement in the 1960s. Since the 1970s, it has been owned by long time Little Neck residents, the Katselianos family, who manage the three apartments and who love the history of the home.

—Karen Dinegar with contributions from Michael Kurucz

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**Membership Category (check one)**

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**The Society has 5 active committees and welcomes your interest and participation**

- Research and Archives
- Architecture
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**Join at [www.DLNHS.org](http://www.DLNHS.org)**

**Or, detach and mail this form with your check made payable to:**

The Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society  
 P.O. Box 630142  
 Little Neck, New York, 11362

**TREASURE FROM THE SEA-  
 A CENTURY LATER!**

DLNHS board member Michael Gannon (also the Douglas Manor Association president) and Michael Starcic, a DMA board member, were checking out damage to the Manor's seawall recently, when Starcic discovered these street signs wedged into the rocks at the bottom of the seawall between West Drive and Bayview Avenue.

The rust encrusted porcelain signs are from Hanford Street and Carolina Road some 1 1/2 miles from their original home., and were mounted perpendicular to each other in a cross. Gannon says porcelain was preferred by the City for its durability. Because the Hanford Street sign also shows its original name, Forest Drive, it's thought the signs may date to the 1920s, when it was believed the name was changed.

This style of blue porcelain sign was installed in Queens and Staten Island between 1910 and the 1930s; Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx had a design variant in blue porcelain called the "humpback" to show the intersecting street above on one sign. Queens and Staten Island marked the intersections with a perpendicular "cross" using two separate signs.



Douglas Manor residents Mike Gannon and Michael Starcic discovered these ancient signs while checking the Manor's seawall. Who put them there? Hooligans from a century ago?



**ITS A WRAP!** DLHNS volunteers kick back with cider and cookies in the newly restored Presidential Room at the Douglaston Club at the end of the Open House New York (OHNY) tour. More than 30 OHNY guests took the mile-long walking tour from the historic Long Island Railroad Station Plaza and through the Douglaston Historic District. The tour concluded at the Club to view the \$2 million restoration and renovation of the interior of the Van Zandt-Douglas Mansion, built in 1819 as a private house and owned by the Club since 1921. *Left to right: Treasurer Mary O'Byrne, Executive Director Susan Mathisen, volunteer Alex Wolfe, and Vice President Pam Broderick.*

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SAVE THE DATE  
**APRIL 25, 2020**

*Please join us for our Annual Meeting as we learn about Modernist Architecture in Queens County. A must for Mid-century Modern enthusiasts! This year's guest speaker is architectural historian Frampton Tolbert, Deputy Director of the Center for Urban Pedagogy and creator of the online databases Mid-Century Mundane and Queens Modern.*

The Douglaston LIRR station house, designed by Douglaston architect Gordon Lorimer, 1962.