



THE DOUGLASTON AND LITTLE NECK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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



A gambrel-roofed Dutch Colonial at 15 Shore Road was designed by the architect George H. Hardway. The Japanese katsura tree in the front garden is one of the oldest in New York.

HELEN'S HOUSE

It was a beautiful summer evening fifty years ago. At 15 Shore Road, where the road bends just before meeting West Drive, a cocktail party was in full swing. The women wore brilliantly colored floor-length summer gowns; the men, blue blazers.

They mingled on a cantilevered deck supported by huge, horizontal I beams—no columns—overlooking Little Neck Bay. Blissfully unaware of the structural tour de force holding them up, the partygoers seemed to levitate above the landscape, poised as if they were on the prow of a boat, cocktails in hand, to watch the sun set. I was a teenager. I wanted to be at that “adult” party.

This was Helen Kahn’s house. It would be another thirty years before I would meet Helen, by then in her early eighties, and stand on that deck with a drink in hand to watch the sun set. Helen was witty and gracious, and also right to the point. When my wife Alex and I met her, she said, “Dears, at my age, I have to keep making new friends, because all of my old friends are dead.”

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A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Welcome back to all lovers of history, and in particular, the history of our own Douglaston and Little Neck communities!

It has been a difficult and momentous year living with the Covid-19 pandemic. At DLNHS, we have been doing our best, not only to cope, but to take advantage of this unique moment in time to explore new arenas. We are planning educational events for spring and summer, both virtual and live when possible, organizing our archives, and expanding and building our audience digitally.

This summer we will revive a live-and-in-person local Garden Tour, with five magnificent gardens to visit. We will follow CDC guidelines, of course, to ensure everyone's safety. Our Annual Meeting in May will feature our neighbor Walter Mugdan speaking on Environmental Sustainability. With climate change, our long history of preserving our local wetlands, and our increasingly fragile coastline, this is a hot topic. So we have also invited Sergey Kadinsky to give a virtual talk based on his book, *Hidden Waterways of New York City* (2016), as a follow-up to his two previous walking tours.

As part of our ongoing efforts to preserve our archives and to reach a larger audience, DLNHS has partnered with Urban Archive, a non-profit dedicated to "historic research and discovery." The Urban Archive website has an interactive map with historic photos, and includes short histories. This is an ongoing project and DLNHS will continue to build our presence on the site. You can see some of the Douglaston and Little Neck photos posted at www.urbanarchive.org.

Happy (Historical) Trails!

—Pamela Broderick

THE TALE OF THE ZIP CODE AND NEIGHBORHOOD OBLITERATION

For those of us who have tried to convince vendors that our home address is Douglaston, NY, and have been told that only "Little Neck" is acceptable to the post office, we can offer an explanation—not a wholly satisfactory one, alas.

When home mail delivery started in 1905, before the Douglaston/Little Neck area was fully developed, all you needed to give as your address was your name followed by Douglaston, or Little Neck, LI, NY. Soon after, you needed to supply a street name, and some years later a house number. In the 1940s, postal "zones" were invented to help with the sorting and delivery of mail. So now your address would need to include both a town and a zone: Douglaston or Little Neck followed by 62 or 63.

SEE IN THIS ISSUE:

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- The Tale of the Zip Code
- Remembering Mary Breden
- The Morgan Homestead

With further centralization and technological development, in 1963, the "zip code," which would help "zip" your mail to its destination, was invented: a five-digit code, the first three digits of which indicated a general post office domain—113 indicated the larger unit of Flushing—and the last two digits, often but not always,

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MARY BREDEN (1919-2011), LITTLE NECK RESIDENT AND COMMUNITY ACTIVIST: A REMEMBRANCE

Mary Gruber Breden was born on May 1, 1919, and was raised on a farm in Connecticut. She developed a connection to the outdoors as she worked and played on the farm, collecting eggs from the hen houses, feeding the chickens and pigs, and driving the tractor to put up bales of hay.

When it was time to go on to college, Ma Gruber gave Mary a sum of money that a boarder or itinerant worker had given their family before he died. That, along with money she got from picking walnuts, enabled her to go NYU. She was always finding ways to earn money.



Glenwood Landing Park—“Stone Park”—a favorite place where Mary Breden brought her children to play in the 1960s, and returned to take care of as a volunteer in the 1980s after her children had left home.

Mary entered NYU in 1937, obtaining a degree in Physical Education, and Ohio College in 1941, obtaining a Master’s degree. She then taught at schools in Kansas, Alabama, and elsewhere, finally returning to New York.

On December 16, 1950, she married Herman Breden, the “handsome police officer from New York City” as her friends recalled him. During Mary’s teaching years, Herman was serving our country in World War II, but no matter where Mary was, he would always send her flowers.

After their first son was born in 1951, Mary and Herman moved to a garden apartment on Little Neck Parkway in Glen Oaks, and later, in 1959, to a house in Little Neck. From 1951 to 1955, Mary gave birth to five babies in all, including two sets of twins: a “small army.”

Mary loved Little Neck and ultimately came to devote herself to acts of community service. As her children grew, Mary decided to try to maintain the small triangle-shaped park near the train station. She and Herman raked the leaves, mowed the grass, and picked up the litter. She planted lots of flowers. Their children, now teenagers, sometimes hung out there.

They called it “Stone Park” because of the prominence of stone benches and stairs. The park had fallen into disrepair. Walls and cement benches had been damaged. Mary constantly called the NYC Parks Department to ask them to clean it up. Finally, after years of requests, the Parks Department repaired the damages.

In the 1980s, she would revisit the park with her granddaughters, only to find the once-charming park had fallen into disrepair and was further victimized by vandals. To some it might have looked like a lost cause, but Mary saw it as a park to be rescued. Armed with trowels, shovels and shears she labored tirelessly to bring this park back to its original charm and splendor.

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HELEN'S HOUSE, *continued*

And made friends she did—devoted friends of all ages who doted on her and enjoyed her company until the very end of her life. Even in her nineties, Helen continued to host wurst parties and pizza socials, serving a devastatingly rich homemade pepperoni pizza. Her secret weapon was a gelatin dessert for which she would not reveal the recipe.

She made it a weekly ritual to “go to the City” for the opera, ballet, theater, movies, and jazz. She was the first to ask, “What have you seen lately that you liked?” A curious traveler, she visited the far corners of the globe. And she was an animal lover. Most recently she mooned over Sebastian, a British shorthair who resembles the Cheshire Cat from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.



Light spills over the railing of the elegant main stair.



A portrait of Helen, ca. 1940

Helen came to the Manor from Manhattan as a young adult with her widowed mother, and first lived with her at 207 Shore Road. She married Albert Kennerly—known to all as Kennerly, never Albert—in 1939. He was an architect. As an associate partner for Skidmore Owings & Merrill (SOM), he oversaw the construction of large projects all over the world, ranging from the former International Arrivals building at Idlewild Airport (now JFK), to the Istanbul Hilton Hotel in Turkey.

Kennerly and Helen bought 15 Shore Road in 1954, and he designed the unusual cantilevered deck. He also fitted out the screened porch with huge sliding glass panels that opened to panoramic views of the Bay. Helen later added a swimming pool.



From the west side, the house is a full four stories including the attic.

Helen eventually divorced Kennerly. She often said that her “true love” was her second husband, Bernie Kahn, whom she met when she worked at the legendary Grey Advertising Agency where Bernie was a creative director. They had an apartment in Manhattan, and 15 Shore Road became their weekend retreat. Bernie liked to garden, and he designed the stepped down gardens that face the Bay.

Helen died on February 22, 2020, just before the pandemic shutdown. She was 102. After a memorial service, close friends hosted a party at their house on Shore Road. Impromptu stories were told, some touching, some funny. We had drinks, toasted Helen, and watched the sun set over Little Neck Bay.

—Kevin Wolfe, AIA



The view from the deck, looking west. A rope and steel railing gives the deck a nautical air.

The house was built in 1911 and had all the earmarks of an upper-middle-class house of the Edwardian era—three maids rooms in the attic, a separate garage for a chauffeur-driven car, a sequestered kitchen that was the domain of servants, a formal dining room, four family bedrooms, five fireplaces, and a light-filled 32-foot-long living room facing the Bay.

Shortly before it was to be completed, the walls having just been plastered, vandals stripped the house of all its copper plumbing and set it on fire. The new house burned completely to the ground.

“The police of the entire city have been asked to help run down the firebug that set fire to the \$20,000 residence of Nathaniel Doyle, at Douglas Manor...” the Brooklyn Eagle reported. “I have been twenty years getting ideas together preparatory to building this house,” the exasperated 49-year-old Doyle told the paper. The house was rebuilt.

THE TALE OF THE ZIP CODE, *continued*

your old postal “zone.” And so zone 62 became zip code 11362, and zone 63 became 11363. In 1983, four more digits, called the “plus 4,” were piled on.

The numbers had begun to outweigh and diminish the words in our addresses, which were flavored by developers who used the names of streets that summoned up English villages, or parklands, or well-liked dignitaries. The streets named Glenwood or Arleigh or Grosvenor were redolent of old England; those named Willow, or Cherry, or Poplar suggested country lanes bordered by rows of just those sorts of trees; and those named Van Zandt, Morgan, Barrows, Van Nostrand, or Douglas commemorated the landowners whose properties, when subdivided, became the places we now live.



The Douglaston Post Office was located in the Tudor style buildings at the northeast corner of Douglaston Parkway and Northern Boulevard that were completed in 1926. The Post Office was reached by an alley, just to the left of the Douglaston Liquors sign in this early 1950s photo.

Worse, as mass mailing systems developed to answer the needs of large retail operations, the post office ignored those lyrical, local names and designated any neighborhood at all within the 113 zip region as “Flushing.” If you haven’t noticed, the use of local neighborhood names in addresses (some of which are based on nineteenth-century villages) is strictly a Queens thing. Mail to the other boroughs goes only to “Brooklyn,” “New York,” “Staten Island” or the “Bronx”—no neighborhood names are ever used.

When the Post Office decided to eliminate neighborhood names in Queens addresses in 1995, Queens-ites cared so deeply about those local names that they revolted. A three-year battle ensued. Then-Congressman Gary Ackerman managed to get “Flushing” replaced by “Little Neck” for our 11362 and 11363 areas on the grounds that the existence of an actual brick-and-mortar post office in Little Neck legitimated our distinctive identity. But not Douglaston, or Douglas Manor, or Westmoreland, or Beech Hills: all were now rolled into Little Neck—although Little Neck, its dignity elevated only by its physical post office, has no greater legal status as a neighborhood than any of the others.

To complicate matters, parts of the neighborhoods that we currently call “Douglaston” and “Douglas Manor” occupy the peninsula originally known as “Little Neck” (and sometimes even “Little Madnan’s Neck,” but that’s another story) bordered by “Little Neck Bay.” The name “Douglaston” arose when William P. Douglas gave a small farm building to the North Shore Railroad of Long Island (today’s Long Island Rail Road) to serve as a station on the condition that the stop be called “Douglaston.” Later, when the Rickert-Finlay Realty Company purchased and subdivided the Douglas estate for residential housing, it called that area “Douglas Manor.” And so, ironically, the “historic” name of the peninsula is really Little Neck, and the Post Office has gotten it right after all—the plot thickens!!

But there is a happy ending to this story. You MAY include “Westmoreland” or “Douglas Manor” in your address. Precisely because the post office looks only at numbers, it will deliver mail to you however you spell your neighborhood name so long as you give the correct zip code.

You can view an interactive map of Douglaston and Little Neck neighborhoods on the DLNHS website at <http://www.dlnhs.org/neighborhoods/>. Clicking on any of the illustrated neighborhoods will take you (in most cases) to more information and historic photos.

—Mike Gannon and the editors

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BREDEN, *continued*

In Mary’s golden years, she began to dedicate her time to a most worthwhile venture: the Little Neck-Douglaston Memorial Day Parade. Mary became "Chief Fundraiser" for the parade. She continued to pursue her annual fundraising, even as she approached the tender young age of 92, with a travel oxygen tank and an iron determination.

Mary Breden was one of a kind, a woman who left everything she touched in far better shape than she found it. Little Neck was lucky to have her.

This portrait of Mary Breden is condensed from the biography written by her granddaughter, Pamela Primi, a member of the DLNHS.

—Margaret L. King



“Stone Park” is characterized by a sweeping stair and extensive stone retaining walls that originally provided an overlook to Little Neck Bay beyond, when the Park was built for the Westmoreland subdivision in 1907.

**DOUGLASTON AND LITTLE NECK
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**
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CURRENT RESIDENT OR

THE MORGAN HOMESTEAD

The old Morgan homestead, pictured at right, was probably built before the Revolutionary War. It is the “old house” of Old House Landing Road fame which is today’s Little Neck Parkway from Northern Boulevard north to Little Neck Bay.

The original portion of the house is the 1 1/2-story section shown on the left. A Dr. Morrel, who owned the house in the late 1700s, built the 2-story addition on the right. In 1869, the 20-acre farm was sold to George C. Morgan, whose family continued to live there after his death in 1917. In 1921, the family sold off all but one acre of land. Several owners who followed the Morgans added modern improvements and restored the house, keeping the original structural lines. Sadly, by the 1960s, it had declined to a state of disrepair. In the early 1970s, it was torn down and the lot subdivided for development.

—Mike Gannon

