

THE DOUGLASTON AND LITTLE NECK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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



Van Nostrand Court, Little Neck, as it appears today

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A Fantasy Conversation Revisited

In our fall issue, in a “fantasy conversation” held in 1925, the developers Ogden and McBride had come to a decision after a lengthy and somewhat heated discussion about the property they would develop as Van Nostrand Court! It was decided that 30 semi-attached and attached affordable homes were to be constructed in Little Neck, 24 of them would be directly on Van Nostrand Court and six of them would face Glenwood Avenue. While they were of modest size, approximately 1,000 to 1,200 square feet, they would have three or four bedrooms, there would be two large parks, one with a playground, and a private, well lit, court road.

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A Letter From Our President

The Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society has another fantastic newsletter for you to dive into. Take a look at the story behind the naming of Little Neck's PS 94Q and the fascinating man it is named after, who played a major role in our Civil War history. There is follow up piece on Little Neck's historic Van Nostrand Court, and the "fantasy conversation" the developers of that charming enclave might have had a century ago! In the current conversation about affordable housing, one has to ask: why don't developers build places like this today? If you are a local architecture buff, like new board member Todd Tarpley, read the first in a series of stories Todd has written on the work of local architect Norman McGlashan. I want to thank our writers and editors who are so creative with featuring these thoughtful topics. And a special thanks too, to our Executive Director, Susan Mathisen, who continues to successfully find grants to fund DLNHS's yearly education and outreach programs and events!

Our 2022 Fall and Winter events were again a great success, with DLNHS hosting tours and lectures and partnering with other local neighborhood organizations. The Open House New York tour at the Douglaston Club last October was again sold out. DLNHS partnered in November with the Westmoreland Association at the Glenwood Landing Park clean up and planting. In December, DLNHS celebrated the holidays at the Douglaston Local Development Corporation's Winter Festival at Douglaston Village,

Please keep a look out in the Spring for our yearly Membership Letter for upcoming events, including the DLNHS Annual meeting in May with a guest lecturer. None of these projects could have been accomplished without your generous support! Thank you!!

Pam Broderick

David Dixon Porter American Hero and Namesake of P.S. 94Q

At the intersection of Little Neck Parkway and Marathon Parkway sits a building that's a memorial to one of America's greatest Civil War heroes. Located at 41-77 Little Neck Parkway is the copper-trimmed stucco edifice of P.S. 94Q, also known as The David D. Porter School. But who was David Dixon Porter and why was this award-winning elementary school named for him?

Porter's name was given to the Mediterranean style school built in 1914 to honor his role as Civil War naval hero, as the commander of all Union naval forces on the Mississippi River. He, and his adopted brother, Admiral David G. Farragut, were instrumental in securing the surrender of New Orleans to Union forces. Shortly thereafter, Porter took charge of Mississippi River naval operations to capture Vicksburg, 200 miles north of New Orleans.

No study of the Civil War is complete without a full understanding of the capture of Vicksburg. President Lincoln and General Ulysses Grant knew that taking control of the entire Mississippi River not only split the Confederacy, but it also ensured that supplies could not be imported to service rebel troops. Control of the river meant a Union ironclad, the Indianola, had to be recaptured first if the Union troops could control the Mississippi to Vicksburg.

Admiral David Porter devised a plan to either retrieve the captured Union ironclad, or at least to scuttle it. The Admiral instructed his men to build a full-size model of the new ironclad line, but he had it made out of wood. He stacked old barrels to mimic smokestacks and used large logs to mirror the size and shape of the guns. He covered the boat in tar and other flat black materials, and in February of 1863, when the river was at flood stage, he launched this raft at night just north of Vicksburg. Porter hoped that he could use the darkness and the flood currents of the Mississippi to fool the Confederate soldiers who would see the outline of this large vessel, and think that it was another massive ironclad boat.

Architectural Appreciation Part I – Norman McGlashan and 4 Ridge Road

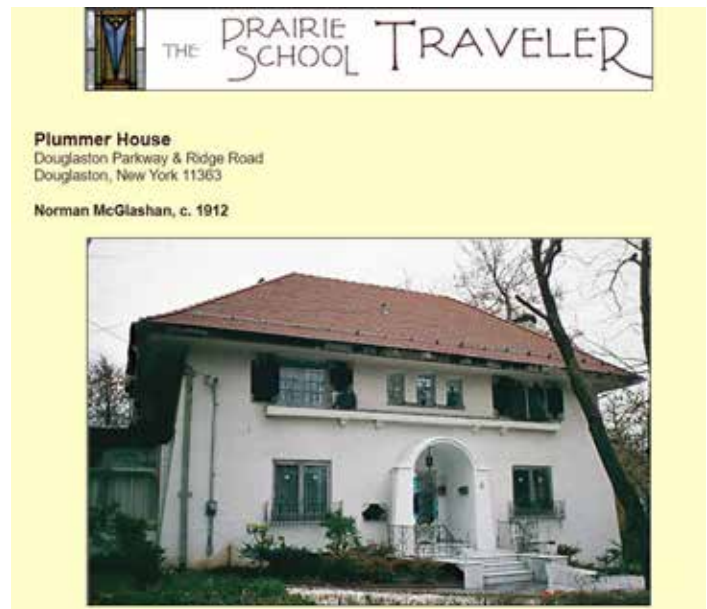
Driving through Douglas Manor for the first time is likely to induce whiplash; every house makes one do a double-take. It certainly is the case with this wonderful old house at the corner of West Drive and Ridge Road, which the author now passes by every day but still slows down to admire. Built in 1911, 4 Ridge was one of the earlier homes in Douglas Manor. An example of English Arts & Crafts style, its architect was a 31-year-old Douglaston resident named Norman McGlashan.

The house was built for Walter Plummer, a purchasing agent, and was featured in ads in several architectural magazines in 1913. It has several distinguishing features, most notably, its stylistically flared outer walls, combined with its broad red tiled roof and horizontal planter box ledge across the front of the second story which gives it a slightly “squashed” appearance as if some giant, invisible hand pushed down on it just a bit better to anchor it into the ground. This earned its inclusion on The Prairie School Traveler website, one of only eleven structures included from New York State, seven of which were designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Good company!

The Plummer family did not stay long at 4 Ridge. By 1913, the home appears to have been occupied by Dr. Nathaniel Breed and his family whose address was noted in the 1913 Harvard Alumni Directory “as Ridge Road and West Drive.” Dr. Breed was a graduate of Harvard Medical School, a member of the Douglaston Club, the Zion Episcopal Church, and the only practicing physician in Douglaston as late as 1925.

By 1934 the occupant was Homer N. Calver. An MIT graduate and WWI vet, Calver was a health educator who oversaw the medical exhibit at the 1939-40 World’s Fair, which was visited by over 11 million people. By 1938 the Calvers had moved to Long Island.

There was a large lot attached to 4 Ridge which included a carriage house modeled on the main house, gardens, and a koi pond crossed by an arched bridge. These were all torn down when the lot was sold around 1970, and a new house was built there.



Open House New York 2022 at The Douglaston Club

The Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society and the Douglas House Trust co-hosted a successful Open House NY event on Saturday, October 22, 2022, drawing people from the City's five boroughs for a tour of the recently renovated Douglaston Club. DLNHS board members Kevin Wolfe and Victor Dadras, both architects, showed our guests the results of the Club's \$2 million renovation that was completed just before the pandemic.

Kevin and Victor started the tour with an historic overview on the lawn of the 1819 mansion, and had a perfect blue sky autumn day to do it. Once inside, visitors were treated to seeing the historic restoration of some of the mansion's grandest first floor entertaining rooms, harking back to the days when the house was the domain of, first, the Van Zandt family who built it in 1819, and later the Douglas family, who owned the house until 1904. The mansion became a hotel in 1906, and was used by the Rickert-Finlay Realty Company to host prospective buyers thinking of buying lots in what was then Long Island's latest suburban subdivision, Douglas Manor. The Club bought the building in 1921, moving from their first home, the historic 1735 Van Wyck farmhouse on Alston Place.

Longtime DLNHS board member Maura Wrynn and our newest board member, Todd Tarpley, greeted guests on the porch, while an OHNY volunteer signed them in. Guests also saw the Club's newly configured and renovated ballroom space on the second floor, which has long distance views of Little Neck Bay. This popular space is now used for Club events and member parties. The tour ended with guests gathering for coffee, cider, and pastries on the front porch overlooking the Club's sweeping lawn, as the leaves of the Club's spectacular sugar maple were just starting to turn yellow and red. Many thanks to the Douglaston Club for partnering with us for this wonderful autumn event, which has now become an annual tradition!



Volunteers for the OHNY tour from left to right Dan O'Byrne, Mary O'Byrne, an OHNY volunteer, Kevin Wolfe, Victor Dadras, and Todd Tarpley



DLNHS President Pam Broderick welcomes OHNY guests on the front porch of the Douglaston Club for a tour of the 1819 building



We Help Beautify Our Community

On Saturday, November 19th, a cold but sunny day, the Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society, aided by a grant from Con Edison, joined with the Westmoreland Association, for an annual fall cleanup and planting in Glenwood Landing Park in Little Neck. It was a special event in which Pam Broderick and Peter Reinharz, representing DLNHS, and Walter Mugdan from the Westmoreland Association, were joined by many students and their parents from PS 94, MS 67, and Divine Wisdom Catholic Academy, and The Douglaston Garden Club in cleaning up the park, and putting in plants that are native to our area. Local resident Kristofer Doerfler instructed the volunteers in the importance of indigenous plants, and also talked about how we should be aware of invasive plant species. He helped the volunteers who also planted some of these indigenous plants in the park, and also helped distribute seed kits to volunteers so they could grow indigenous plants at home. Refreshments were served and everyone had a great time beautifying this lovely space!



*Walter Mugdan
Westmoreland Association*



Con Edison provided funding to help make this Community event possible



Kristofer Doerfler instructed about indigenous plants



Pam Broderick, Chair of DLNHS with two enthusiastic volunteers



A Fantasy Conversation Revisited *cont'd from p. 1*

The building of Van Nostrand Court was started in 1925 and completed in 1926; three and four-bedrooms homes were constructed, and yards landscaped, in what was advertised as a “Garden Community.” There was a private road with pillars at each end, electric streetlights illuminated the roadway, two large, private gardens with playgrounds for the children to be able to play in were installed. The asking price was \$7,700 to \$9,020, affordable for working class families. Families immediately began to move in.

It is almost one hundred years later, so let’s look at what happened as a result of this “fantasy conversation.” One thing that is immediately noticeable when entering Van Nostrand Court is that very little has changed. Yes, the siding and roofs are different, most often not cedar, the individual gardens have been replaced occasionally by wood decks and stone patios, but the homes look pretty much the same and have been well maintained. Unfortunately, Ogden and McBride did not make provisions for the maintenance of the Court Road, the pillars at either end, the parks, or the four street lights, but by some miracle, over the years, residents have always stepped up and repaired things. The parks were abandoned several times for short periods; residents returned to keep them beautiful and blooming with perennials. The Court lights have been repaired over the years, with one resident actually piecing together new glass in each one. The brick columns have been fixed and painted many times, and the road was resurfaced several times by residents, and recently reluctantly completely repaved by Con Edison with donations added by residents to repave the entire roadway. In addition to the volunteer efforts by some residents, there is an association supported by the homeowners that pays for Court repairs, electricity, and some garden maintenance.

There has also been stability of the population in the Court; at the moment over a third of the residents are over sixty years old, and have spent most of their adult life as residents there, three of them growing up in the same house they live in presently. Four of the houses are owned by members of the same family, and one residence is home to its third generation. Some of the other residents have lived in the Court for years and raised their children there.

Ogden and McBride, the Van Nostrand Court builders, were on to something when they designed the Court almost one hundred years ago. They proved that you can create small communities, reasonably priced, that are safe, well built, and attractive, They also created a “fantasy community”. Van Nostrand Court is charming during the day, but walking through the Court at night is a whole other experience. The street lights are winking at you, and one can almost feel the Court come alive and whisper stories of its past residents to you, as you walk through the magical Court roadway!



Van Nostrand Court looking east



Van Nostrand Court has beautiful gardens in the summertime



Become a Member of the Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society
It's the best way to receive the latest news and learn more about local history

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

Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society
 P.O. Box 630142
 Little Neck, New York 11363

We All Had Fun On Halloween at Zion Episcopal Church

There were scary spooks about, but that just added to the fun at Zion Episcopal Church's Annual Halloween Drive-Thru on Sunday, October 30th. Representing us at this extremely well attended event were two intrepid cowgirls, Pam Broderick and Carole Cox, who gave out Halloween candy and cheer to the children (and some adults) who all seemed to be having a great time! Pam, especially, is to be commended for her bravery for continually driving off a particularly pesky witch!



Pam Broderick and Carole Cox handing out goodies



Boo to you too!

Douglaston Winter Festival Saturday, December 10th

The year is not complete without the Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society's participation in the Douglaston Winter Festival. President Pam Broderick, and Board members Carole Cox, Mary O'Byrne, Anne Ronan, and Maura Wrynn were on hand to sell cookies, homemade banana and pumpkin breads, and Christmas ornaments at this fundraiser. The hot chocolate was a hot seller on this chilly day!



Left to right Helmut Beron, Carole Cox, Anne Ronan & Pam Broderick

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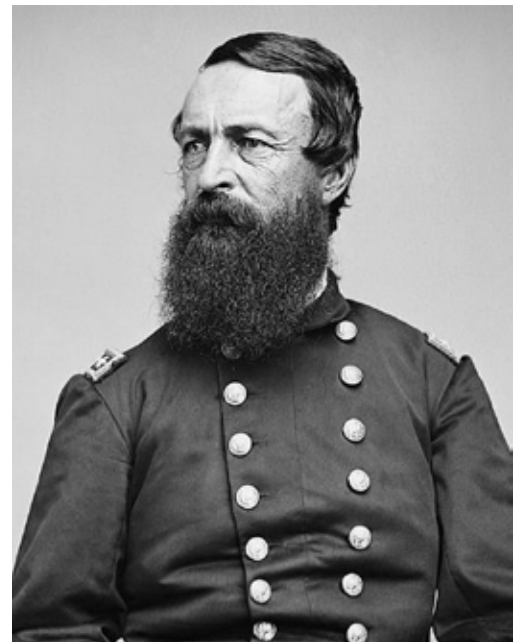
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David D. Porter *cont’d from p. 2*

He hoped that this image in the darkness would cause the Confederate troops to abandon their posts. Porter’s plan worked. The imitation ironclad traveled downriver and startled men on the Confederacy’s smaller vessels. In fear of the approaching vessel, rebel sailors fled, leaving the Indianola unguarded. The Indianola was retaken by Union soldiers from the west bank of the river. So effective was Porter’s hoax, that Confederate naval operations on the Mississippi generally came to a close after the ruse.

Porter’s successes in the Civil War earned him the rank of full admiral – only the second full admiral to be appointed in the U.S. Navy. He later served as Superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy, Secretary of the Navy (under President Grant) and wrote several books. He lived in Little Neck briefly hoping the climate would cure his daughter, but she died unfortunately, and Porter moved back to Washington, DC where he spent his remaining days.

Many of us have children who attended the David D. Porter School. The school has long been recognized for its academic successes, but the achievements of its namesake have been lost for too long. The next time you pass by that stucco façade facing onto Little Neck Parkway, stop and say thanks to the man for whom the school is named. David Dixon Porter is, and always will be, an American hero!



*David Dixon Porter,
a Civil War Naval hero*