

## The Personalities and Culture of Lefferts Place 11238

The land that is now Lefferts Place was part of a large farm owned by Rem and Maria Lefferts, who had his house nearby on what is currently Fulton Street. In the 1830s, Rem started selling off the land in smaller parcels-- 96 Lefferts is most likely the first house built on the land. By the 1860s building on Lefferts Place was in full swing, and the location was appealing to the affluent upper middle class due to the access to transportation and the quality of the homes, each designed to comfortably accommodate a single family and their servants. Most were row houses, but several freestanding frame houses and suburban villas were built. Although architecture as a profession was in its infancy, Lefferts Place is home to several buildings by prominent architects, such as George L. Morse who designed the Temple Bar Building (Court & Joralemon Streets), the Franklin Trust (Montague & Clinton Streets), and the Old First Reformed Church on Carroll Street & 7th Avenue.

[http://www.oldfirstbrooklyn.org/pages\\_mission/ourgifts\\_architecture.html](http://www.oldfirstbrooklyn.org/pages_mission/ourgifts_architecture.html) Morse was President of the Department of Architecture at Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences (the forerunner of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Academy of Music, and the Children's Museum). Another famous architect was also a resident—John S. Frost at 96 Lefferts Place, who was also Grand Master Mason of the Brooklyn Masons, President of the Bricklayer's Union, agent for the Democratic machine for communications with the Navy Yard, and member of the Atlantic Avenue Rapid Transit Commission.

Right from the beginning the residents of Lefferts Place were a civic-minded, politically and socially active group, deeply involved with all the issues of the day facing their neighborhood, city and state. They were clearly the movers and shakers of Brooklyn society, from the 1870s until the 1920s. The society pages were full of events on Lefferts Place attended by Civil War generals and others important to the history and culture of New York City and Brooklyn, including grand balls, raffles, card parties, and meetings of charitable organizations. In the summers they retreated from the city heat to their getaways on Long Island, the Catskills, Connecticut and Maine and returned each fall initiating a new flurry of civic-minded activity.

One of the most notable residents during this time period was Charles Dow-- inventor of the Dow Jones industrial average and co-founder and Editor in Chief of the *Wall Street Journal*. Mr. Dow, along with his partner Edward Davis Jones, was committed to reporting the notable events on Wall Street without bias. At the time other reporters could be bribed into reporting favorably on a company to drive up stock prices, but Dow and Jones refused to manipulate the stock market. Dow also devised the “Dow Theory” which believed that the relationship between stock market trends and business activity served as indicators of economic shifts. His achievements are still very relevant to today’s global economy. Mr. Dow died in his home on Lefferts Place in 1902.

Other notable Lefferts Place residents included: David Babcock, President of the New York, Providence and Boston Railroad; Commander Gustavus C. Hanus USN; Reverend Edwin A. Nichols of Emmanuel Episcopal Church; William Urwick Goodbody, a Director of the Marconi Wireless Telegraph & Signal Co.; John Boyle, a Trustee of historic Plymouth Church in Brooklyn Heights and a member of the firm Boyle & Co.; Colonel Henry Patchen Marten, Commander of the 71<sup>st</sup> Regiment at Bull Run; Richard J. Cortis, President of the charitable organization St. George’s Society and General Agent and Manager for the White Star Line; John S. Frost, Architect, Grand Master Mason of the Brooklyn Masons, President of the Bricklayer’s Union, Agent for the Democratic machine for Communications with the Navy Yard, member of the Atlantic Avenue Rapid Transit Commission; Thomas Nelson, lawyer and retired Chief Justice of the Oregon Supreme Court appointed by Millard Fillmore; Ezra A. Tuttle, well-known lawyer, nominee for State Supreme Court Justice in 1897 and State Attorney General in 1898, member of the New York State Food Investigating Commission, helped establish Farmingdale State College; and Dr. William McCollom, a 40 year-resident of Lefferts Place, President of the Kings County Medical Association which was started to assist with public health issues, establish standards of medical practice and credential physicians.

Between 1907 and 1922 the neighborhood was getting more apartment houses. A newspaper ad for the newly built Palmyra located at 56 Lefferts described the street as “one of the finest blocks in the city.” The apartments were eight and nine rooms with two toilets and bath, and they provided “hall boy” service. They were appealing to “those persons who have always lived in private houses and who have been driven by the servant problem to seek refuge in apartments.” (Clearly Lefferts Place still had “snob” appeal!).

In 1922 the two apartment houses at 89 and 105 were built on land from a large estate called “Rusurban” that had stretched from Lefferts Place to Fulton Street. The property had belonged to Colonel Henry Patchen Martin, commander of the 71<sup>st</sup> Regiment up until the time of his death in 1906. The house was described in the New York Tribune as “one of the oldest in Brooklyn, and for years has been one of the show places of that borough.”

The block was losing some of its exclusivity and becoming more affordable for people of more modest means. There began an influx of energy from new residents from different cultures and backgrounds. Whereas it had previously been mostly white Protestants from New England and New York, more and more immigrants from other countries were settling here, and the area started to see its first African American residents.

The stock market crash hit the neighborhood hard, with so many of the residents in the world of finance and industry. The population on the block increased, not only with the apartment houses but the brownstones were now being converted from single family homes into rooming houses. The 1930 census shows a marked change in the occupations of the residents of Lefferts Place, which became even more dramatic by 1940. Few lawyers and bankers remained, and the occupations were now predominantly blue collar-- domestics, caretakers, laborers, clerks, mechanics, messengers, cooks and chauffeurs. Lefferts Place had an abundance of morticians and embalmers as well, as the Fairchild Funeral Chapel at 86 Lefferts provided reliable jobs in a tight economy. Musicians, performers, writers and artists were now making their home here, the most notable of which was novelist Richard Wright, who lived on Lefferts Place between 1938 and 1941 and did the bulk of his work on *Native Son* during that period. He initially resided at 101 with the Newtons, a family he knew from his days working as communists in Chicago. He subsequently moved to 89 Lefferts Place with his wife Ellen Poplar, where he completed *Black Boy*.

The motivation for charitable works and political activity was as strong as ever among the residents of this community. Between 1914 and 1915 Father Divine made his residence at 70 Lefferts. He was an evangelical leader who headed the International Peace Mission Movement and later established a "Peace Mission Extension" at 70 Lefferts Place. This building served as a public dining room which served as a soup kitchen during the Depression from 1930s through to the 1950s.

It is sometimes very easy to look back to see the grandeur of an earlier era and ignore the present day activists who have helped shape our block. By the 1980s Lefferts Place was in distress with the influx of drugs and violence that had been building during the 1960s and 1970s throughout New York City. There were many unsung heroes who believed in keeping the neighborhood a safe place to raise families and protected the integrity of the historic architecture before there was the overwhelming momentum there is now. David Conrad spearheading the effort to landmark 70 Lefferts and the intense community support is a shining example. Khalilah Caicedo, long-time resident and community activist, has worked extensively with seniors, and established "Grandparent's Appreciation Day" to recognize the often overlooked contributions made by grandparents to raising their families. One of the residents we can all be most proud of is Aminisha Black, author, activist, community leader, educator and parenting columnist. Listing her good works here would only embarrass her; a quick Google search will show how involved she has been and how many lives improved because of her tireless work.

Lefferts Place has always been a strong community with a distinct character. Whether it is because of its physical situation of being only three blocks, the neighborhood has always felt cohesive and strong, even in its most challenging decades. There is a sense of unity, tolerance, and respect found in very few places with such diversity of backgrounds, income and status. Lefferts Place residents become passionate about being here; there is too much of intrinsic value to allow it to be dismantled by developers.

## Neighborhood Historic Overview

### 7 Lefferts Place

1902 - Commander Gustavus C. Hanus USN, Superintendent of the Schoolship St. Mary's, graduated from Annapolis, member of the New York Boundary Commission to settle disputes over water boundaries with New Jersey, Superintendent of Marine Transportation at the Chicago Exposition, Chief of the Ordnance Department at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

### 8 Lefferts Place

1861 to 1888 - Reverend Edwin A. Nichols of Emmanuel Episcopal Church, grandson to Abigail Lefferts. Reverend Nichols was married to Eliza Jones Wood Nichols. In 1892 their son, Civil War Lieutenant George Gideon Nichols, moved back to the house and became a stockbroker. He sued in a widely publicized case concerning tainted meat being served to jurors and the conditions they had to suffer while being sequestered. He was represented by John Lefferts.

### 15 Lefferts Place

Mrs. Parker founded the Parker Academy, a French-German School.

### 28 Lefferts Place

J.K. Butler, a political artist, created WWII cartoons that appeared in the "Heaving Line" which was published for the Maritime Service Station at Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn during WWII.

### 29 Lefferts Place

Mrs. Henry Phillips, Regent of the Daughters of the Revolution, Alice Adams Chapter.

### 33 Lefferts

1901 - William Urwick Goodbody, a director of the Marconi Wireless Telegraph & Signal Co, good friends with Marconi. Mr. Goodbody was living on Lefferts Place when they transmitted the first trans-Atlantic signals. He supposedly was also one of the first people to see the Loch Ness Monster!

### 42 Lefferts Place

Lady Minnie Stevens, an American-Anglo socialite and volunteer activist, was the daughter of Paran Stevens a prominent financier. Lady Stevens was an international marital agent who introduced eligible American heiresses to British noblemen. Lady Stevens served as a marital agent for Nancy Astor, who became the first woman MP to take up her seat in the House of Commons.

56 Lefferts

Mrs. F.H. Boyd, Associate member of the NYC Federation of Women's Clubs

65 Lefferts

Mrs. Robert H. Goodwin, Alumnae Packer, 11th A. D. Woman Suffrage Party, associate member of the NYC Federation of Women's Clubs.

70 Lefferts

1914 to 1915 - Father Divine residence. "Peace Mission Extension" later established here by Father Divine from the 1930s through 1950s. The public dining room at the Peace Mission Extension served as a soup kitchen during the Depression.

71 Lefferts

1905 - John Boyle, a Trustee of historic Plymouth Church, and a member of the firm Boyle & Co.

73 Lefferts

Mrs. C. Swezey, Associate Member of the NYC Federation of Women's Clubs; School and Home for Girls.

83 Lefferts

1972 - present - Aminisha Black, author, activist, community leader and educator.

89 Lefferts (The estate called "[Rusurban](#)", demolished for the apartment houses 89 and 105)

Pre-1863 - E. T. Blake and family

Pre-1863 - Patchen family

1863 to 1906 - Colonel Henry Patchen Martin, commander of the 71<sup>st</sup> Regiment at Bull Run, member of one of the oldest families in Brooklyn. In 1849 he was a member of the Washington Continental Guards which eventually became the State Troops. He was among the first officers from New York to go to the front in the Civil War. He was a member of the Veteran's Association of the 71<sup>st</sup> Regiment, GAR, and of St. Luke's Episcopal Church. There is a Tiffany stained glass window in his memory in St. Luke's Episcopal Church.

c.1940-41 - Richard Wright, controversial and groundbreaking writer. He did the bulk of his writing of *Native Son* while living on Lefferts Place (here and at 101 Lefferts Place).

96 Lefferts

1864 - Edward and Susan A. Bray. Mr. Bray was a firearms dealer. Their daughter Susan Bray was a doctor, member of the Brooklyn Board of Health, a medical missionary for two years in China and an early advocate for animal rights.

1870 - James McKee, builder, lived here with wife Mary and seven children.

1878 to 1887 - Richard J. Cortis. President of the charitable organization St. George's Society; General Agent and Manager for the White Star Line in New York from 1874 until 1887. Mr. Cortis helped secure the passage of an act to stop swindling by ticket agents.

1888 to 1908 - John S. Frost. Architect of 100, 102, and 226 Lefferts Place, and 544 Franklin Avenue; Grand Master Mason of the Brooklyn Masons; President of the Bricklayer's Union; agent for the Democratic machine for communications with the Navy Yard; and member of the Atlantic Avenue Rapid Transit Commission

1913 to 1940s - Walter E. Werner, lawyer, lived here with his wife Clara, son Walter E. Jr. and his aunt Marian White, an Osteopath.

100 Lefferts Place

Built 1892. Architect John S. Frost. John Frost lived next door at 96 Lefferts.

1910 - John Garrett Underhill, author and agent of literature and drama and stage producer. Mr. Underhill translated the works of Jacinto Benavente and other Spanish authors. He received his Ph.D. from Columbia University. He was also a representative for the U.S. and Canada of the Society of Spanish Authors. He was married to Louisa Wingate Underhill, daughter of General George Wingate.

101 Lefferts

c.1937-40 - Richard Wright, controversial, groundbreaking writer. Did the bulk of his writing of *Native Son* while living on Lefferts Place (here and at 89 Lefferts Place).

104 Lefferts

Mrs. George A. White, associate member of the NYC Federation of Women's Clubs, Daughters 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

106 Lefferts

Mrs. Ell. A. P. Chase, Women for Home Missions, Associate member of the NYC Federation of Women's Clubs.

108 Lefferts Place

Built 1876 - Architect George L. Morse. Morse was architect for 106-112 and 185-191 Lefferts Place. He also designed the Temple Bar Building (Court & Joralemon Streets) and the Franklin Trust (Montague & Clinton Streets), and the Old First Reformed Church on Carroll Street & 7th Avenue [http://www.oldfirstbrooklyn.org/pages\\_mission/ourgifts\\_architecture.html](http://www.oldfirstbrooklyn.org/pages_mission/ourgifts_architecture.html) He was President of the Department of Architecture at Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences (the forerunner of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Academy of Music, and the Children's Museum). He was a judge for the design of the Brooklyn Museum of Art building.

1878 - William M. Cole President of the Brooklyn Life Insurance Company. He was part of a delegation lobbying President Cleveland for an ambassadorship for Alonzo Slote.

1907 to 1910 - William H. Chase, banker, lived here with his wife Lillian.

1920 - Charles M. Forst, banker, lived here with his wife Grace and two daughters.

127 Lefferts (now the Lefferts Hotel)

1882-1907 - Thomas Nelson, retired Chief Justice of the Oregon Supreme Court appointed by Millard Fillmore. Thomas Nelson was working as a lawyer and living on Lefferts until his death in 1907.

Maud Alice E. Pearson, associate member of the NYC Federation of Women's Clubs, Long Island Society D. R.

130 Lefferts

1907 - The headquarters for the Dickens Fellowship, a literary group helping charitable organizations for children, such as the Children's Aid Society.

Elizabeth Loxergax, associate member of the Federation of NYC Women's Clubs, Chicago Woman's Club, Woman's Press NY.

135 Lefferts

1908 - Robert E. Donnolly, drama critic, playwright and song writer.

152 Lefferts

1919 - Frank Pearne Adams, lumber magnate, member of Long Island society, member of the Republican County Committee, Regent of Amaranth Council, Royal Arcanum, and a member of Brooklyn Lodge, No. 288, Free and American Masons. Mrs. Adams was Treasurer of the Woman Suffrage Club of the 11th Assembly District, organized in 1912 to advance the legal, industrial and political rights of women and to secure suffrage.



153 Lefferts

Mrs. Charles Preller, associate member of the NYC Federation of Women's Clubs, Kosmos, New England Women Colony No. 8, YWCA.

155 Lefferts

Mrs. Henry Nesmith, associate member of NYC Women's Clubs, New England Women, YWCA.

161 Lefferts

1870-1885 Captain David S. Babcock, wife, daughter and six sons; one son was a naturalist, one a colonel. He was the President and General Manager of the New York, Providence and Boston Railroad. He was described in the NY Times as "one of the most widely known and respected of the steamboat men of this city".

1896 to 1902 - Charles Dow with wife, two daughters and extended family. Dow was Editor-in-Chief and Co-founder of the *Wall Street Journal* and founder of Dow, Jones and Co. He invented the Dow Jones Industrial Average and a series of principles for understanding and analyzing market behavior which later became known as Dow Theory, the groundwork for technical analysis of stocks. Mrs. Dow was active politically, an associate member of the NYC Federation of Women's Clubs. She continued to live at 161 until her death in 1918.

Mrs. Frederick B. Maerke, associate member of the NYC Federation of Woman's Clubs, Illuminati Brooklyn.

171 Lefferts

1907 - W. W. Hallock head of the Western Newspaper Union, an early newspaper syndicate.

172 Lefferts

1921 - William J. Northridge, described as "one of the first master painters and decorators in Brooklyn". He was also a master builder, and erected many buildings in our area of Brooklyn. Mr. Northridge created the original painting of the Brooklyn Bridge. The WJ Northridge Company was founded by his grandson.

181 Lefferts

Mrs. John Wilson, associate member of the NYC Federation of Women's Clubs, Maine Women's Club

191 Lefferts

Cora Barber, Associate member of the NYC Federation of Women's Clubs

193 Lefferts

1898 - Ezra A. Tuttle, well-known lawyer, nominee for State Supreme Court Justice in 1897 and State Attorney General in 1898, member of the New York State Food Investigating Commission, helped establish Farmingdale State College.

195 Lefferts

1869 to 1909 - Dr. William McCollom, a 40 year-resident of Lefferts Place, President of the Kings County Medical Association which was started to assist with public health issues, establish standards of medical practice and credential physicians.

202 Lefferts

Julia Nightingale Perkins, associate member of the NYC Federation of Women's Clubs, Unity child Welfare, Woman Suffrage.