Landmarks Preservation Commission
December 12, 2006, Designation List 384
LP-2215

JAMES W. AND LUCY S. ELWELL HOUSE, 70 Lefferts Place, Borough of Brooklyn. Built c. 1854.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map Block 2019, Lot 16.

On December 12, 2006, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 5). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Eleven people spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of Councilmembers Albert Vann and Letitia James, Father Divine's International Peace Mission Movement, the Historic Districts Council, the Lefferts Place Civic Association, the Prospect Heights Action Coalition, the Society for the Architecture of the City and the Society for Clinton Hill. A representative of the owner spoke in opposition to the designation; however, the owner took no position and stated that he wanted to work with the community. The Commission has received letters from Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz and Brooklyn Community Board 2 in support of designation. In addition, the Commission has received a petition with 101 signatures from the Society for Clinton Hill and another with 60 signatures from the Lefferts Place Civic Association, both in support of designation.

Summary

In an area composed primarily of late-nineteenth century rowhouses, the wood-framed Italianate villa at 70 Lefferts Place is one of few extant remnants of Clinton Hill South's mid-nineteenth century suburban past. Constructed c. 1854 for the prominent merchant James W. Elwell, the house is one of the two oldest houses on Lefferts Place and a rare surviving freestanding house in Clinton Hill South. This neighborhood had a number of similar residences in the mid- to late-nineteenth century when new modes of transportation made Brooklyn a viable commuter suburb of Manhattan. The majority of these single family residences were demolished or severely altered during the proliferation of development that occurred in this area of Brooklyn beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century. For nearly 80 years the Elwell House was owned by members of the Elwell family; its rich cultural history was augmented by its subsequent association with the charismatic black evangelical leader, Father Divine, from 1939 to 1981. Likely derived from architectural pattern books, the Elwell House maintains many of its original Italianate characteristics, such as its cubical massing with projecting front bay, flat roof with wide projecting eaves and finely carved wood brackets, attic windows, pronounced front pediment, paired round-headed windows at the second story of the front façade and rooftop cupola. The wraparound porch at the main façade was enclosed around 1939, near the time of the sale of the house to the followers of Father Divine.

James W. Elwell, "one of the oldest and most highly esteemed businessmen in Manhattan," purchased the property on Lefferts Place in 1854. In 1838, Elwell joined his father in the commission business and in 1852 he established the freight and shipping commission firm, James W. Elwell & Company. Like many other businessmen who worked in Lower Manhattan, Elwell maintained a suburban residence and lived at 70 Lefferts Place until his death in 1899. Late in life Elwell was

known for his philanthropic tendencies; he was said to have spent more than $3 million on charitable purposes over the course of his lifetime. After Elwell's death, the property at 70 Lefferts Place was deeded to his daughter, Jane, and her husband George Palmer. 70 Lefferts Place remained in the Elwell/Palmer family until 1939, when the Palmers sold the house to followers of Father Divine. The building became an important extension of Father Divine's Peace Mission Movement, and would serve as a place of residence and worship for over 40 years, until at least 1981.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Development of Lefferts Place and Clinton Hill South[1]

The James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House is situated in an area that, within the past few decades, has come to be known as Clinton Hill South.[2] Bound by four busy commercial arteries—Washington Avenue to the west, Fulton Street to the north, Bedford Avenue to the east and Atlantic Avenue to the south—Clinton Hill South is a small residential enclave with buildings that represent two centuries of Brooklyn's architectural development.

Before about 1620, when Europeans first made contact with Native Americans on what is now called Long Island, large portions of the island, including present-day Brooklyn, were occupied by the Lenape, or Delaware, Indians. Traveling over land by foot, the Lenape used trails developed by Native Americans over thousands of years; among those near Clinton Hill South were the thoroughfares known in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as Clove Road, Hunterfly Road, and the King's Highway, or Brooklyn and Jamaica Road. These would remain important routes through the Colonial period and into the nineteenth century, but most traces of these ancient highways were lost after Brooklyn's street grid, adopted in 1835, began to transform the city's landscape as urbanization spread beyond Brooklyn's original center near Fulton Ferry.

By the 1630s, Dutch and English settlers were taking control of the western end of Long Island. In 1637, Joris Hansen de Rapalie "purchased" about 335 acres around Wallabout Bay, and over the following two years, Director Kieft of the Dutch West India Company "secured by purchase from the Indians the title to nearly all the land in the counties of Kings and Queens," according to Henry J. Stiles' 1884 history of Brooklyn and Kings County.[3] The Lenape likely saw things differently; the European concept of holding title to land was foreign to them, and they probably viewed these "purchases" as little more than a customary exchange of gifts smoothing the way for the settlers' temporary use of the land for camping, hunting, fishing, and the cultivation of crops.

In 1664, the Dutch surrendered the Colony of New Netherland, including Brooklyn and the other five towns of Kings County, to the British. By the time of the American Revolution, "a little cluster of houses" existed within Brooklyn at Bedford Corners, just east of Clinton Hill South; at that spot, the old Clove and Cripplebush roads met the King's Highway, which served as the "main highway for traffic between New York and many Long Island towns."[4] Several prominent families lived in Bedford Corners, but the village was, in Stiles' words, "especially the seat of the Lefferts family," which had substantial local property holdings.[5] Leffert "Squire" Lefferts (1727-1804), whose home was at the intersection of Clove Road and the King's Highway, was a locally significant figure, a Brooklyn freeholder for two decades who served as town clerk, as an assistant justice, and in the Provincial Congress.[6] He was also a slaveholder; before emancipation in 1827, "Dutch farmers in Kings County were so reliant on slave labor that the county exhibited the highest proportion of slaveholders and slaves in the North," according to Marc Linder and Lawrence S. Zacharias.[7] Nearly 60% of white households in Kings County held slaves in 1790; Lefferts owned seven enslaved people of color.[8]

Three generations of the Lefferts family resided at Bedford Corners in homes located at approximately the intersection of what is now Fulton Street and Arlington Place. The property that would become Lefferts Place was owned by Rem Lefferts, nephew of Squire Lefferts.

Brevoort Place, which is located just east of Lefferts Place, was the site of one of the last of the remaining Lefferts homes. This large house, which was constructed by Leffert "Judge" Lefferts in 1838, was deeded to his only daughter, Elizabeth, and her husband James Carson Brevoort. The mansion was still occupied by representatives of the Lefferts family in 1888 when it was demolished and the property divided for new development.[9] Both the Judge and Rem Lefferts kept slaves on their Brooklyn homesteads; in 1810 the Judge owned seven and in 1820 Rem owned eight enslaved people of color.[10]

In 1835, a committee was appointed to map streets in the undeveloped areas of Brooklyn. At this time Lefferts Place was laid out parallel to Fulton Street and Atlantic Avenue between St. James Place (originally Hall Street) and Franklin Avenue.[11] The first homes began to appear in the 1850s, most of which were freestanding suburban villas. An advertisement from 1857 announced the sale of "a tasteful, well built, two story frame dwelling house" at the corner of Grand Avenue and Lefferts Place, which would have been directly adjacent to the Elwell House. The advertisement described the location as being "built up with the most elegant residences," and claimed that land in the vicinity was "rapidly rising in value."[12] By the mid-1860s several additional suburban villas were erected, particularly on the north side of Lefferts Place between Classon and Franklin Avenues, and the street had become a veritable enclave of single family villas. By the end of the 1860s the construction of rowhouses had gained momentum, and the majority of the rowhouses in Clinton Hill South were constructed in the 1870s—many replacing the villas that preceded them. By the turn of the century, residential development on Lefferts Place had begun to decline; the last residential buildings from this era were constructed in 1922.[13] The area, however, has continued to evolve, and within the last 30 years a large apartment complex was constructed on Lefferts Place near Classon Avenue.

The development of Lefferts Place as a suburban enclave coincided with the increase of commuter transportation to Manhattan-bound ferry lines. Whereas in the first half of the nineteenth century most residential development in Brooklyn was centered in Brooklyn Heights and near the original ferry terminal, the proliferation of street transportation enabled residential development farther east into Kings County. By 1854, four of Brooklyn City Railroad Company's routes—the Fulton Street, Myrtle Avenue, Flushing Avenue and Court Street routes—were in operation. The Fulton streetcar line ran from the East River to Jamaica; the ride from Lefferts Place to the ferry terminal would only have taken about twenty minutes.[14]

Of the original freestanding suburban villas in Clinton Hill South, very few remain. In addition to the Elwell House, there is a two-story Greek Revival residence at 96 Lefferts Place that dates to as early as 1853. This building has been heavily modified, and of the two, the Elwell House is better preserved.[15] To this day, Lefferts Place remains a quiet residential enclave set between two commercial arteries; the Elwell House is a rare representative of the earliest surviving chapter of the history of the neighborhood.

<u>James W. and Lucy S. Elwell and 70 Lefferts Place</u>[16]

Born in Bath, Maine in 1820, James William Elwell moved to Brooklyn in 1832 with his father, John Elwell. John had relocated to New York to pursue work in the freight and commission business; soon after his arrival he established the firm, John Elwell & Co. As soon as he was old enough to work, James joined his father in the family business. After the accidental death of John Elwell on the job in 1847, James took over the business with his brother and established the firm James W. Elwell & Co., which would remain in operation well into the twentieth century.[17]

James Elwell prospered in the commission business and in 1854 purchased a large parcel of land on Lefferts Place for $20,000.[18] The original Elwell property encompassed the entire corner lot at Lefferts Place and Grand Avenue, extending through the block to Atlantic Avenue. The size of the lot allowed for the construction of a sizeable residence and an accompanying garden and flower conservatory, which Elwell spent many hours tending.[19] Elwell had his

residence constructed in the Italianate villa style, which at the time was a fashionable choice for urban professionals who could afford to construct a suburban refuge outside of the bustling city.

James's first wife, Olivia, died in 1851 at 32 years of age.[20] The couple had given birth to a daughter, also named Olivia, in 1848. In 1853 James married a young woman named Lucy, with whom he would have three more children: Lucy, Jane and James Jr. Young James passed away in 1857 at only 21 months of age.[21] The Elwell homestead included not only members of the Elwell family but also those who were hired to take care of household duties; in 1860, there were two young Irish women residing at 70 Lefferts Place as hired help.[22]

James W. Elwell was a prominent local figure in civic, commercial and philanthropic capacities. His success in the commission business enabled him to give generously to a large number of charities and institutions throughout the New York region. He was one of the incorporators of the Ship Owners' Association of New York and a Director of the Niagara and the Pacific Insurance Companies. He was a Trustee of the American Congregational Union, the Seamen's Friend Society, the Home for Friendless Women and Children of Brooklyn, the Mariner's Family Asylum on Staten Island and the founder of the Helping Hand Society. Additionally, Elwell co-founded the Brooklyn Orphan Asylum and was a member of the New York Chamber of Commerce for more than fifty years. He reportedly donated more than $3 million to a variety of causes over the course of his lifetime.[23]

James Elwell lived at 70 Lefferts Place with his family until his death in September, 1899. For almost forty years he was a familiar fixture on the Wall Street Ferry, and was said to have spent half an hour every morning in his garden picking a bouquet for his lapel. Elwell's garden and flower conservatory at 70 Lefferts Place were the pride of the block, so much so that he was fondly given the name "Bouquet" Elwell by those who knew him.[24] Soon after his death, Elwell's daughter Jane and her husband George Palmer moved into the house at 70 Lefferts Place with their son, Elwell, and Jane's unmarried sister, Lucy. In 1902 the Palmers sold the western portion of the property to developer Eli Bishop, who divided the land into three lots and constructed two rowhouses and an apartment building on the site.[25]

By 1930, Elwell Palmer, grandson of James W. Elwell, was living in the house at 70 Lefferts Place with his wife Marjory, their five children and a relative by the name of Elizabeth Quimby.[26] In the early 1930s, the Palmers moved to Sayville, Long Island and rented the house at 70 Lefferts Place for several years before finally selling it in 1939 to followers of Father Divine's Peace Mission Movement.[27]

Father Divine's Peace Mission Movement Extension[28]

On February 22, 1939, an article in the New York Times reported that "followers of Father Divine … have bought the large old-fashioned mansion at 70 Lefferts Place, Brooklyn, and will open a Brooklyn extension there in the near future."[29] Father Divine, whose full name was the Reverend Major Jealous Divine, was the leader of the International Peace Mission Movement which first became known in Brooklyn in about 1919. The movement was centered on the belief that Father Divine fulfilled "the scriptural promise of the Second Coming of Christ," and that he was "the personification of God in bodily form."[30] His legendary talent for public speaking drew large audiences, and membership of the movement grew from about 30 to 40 people in 1924 to tens of thousands in the late 1930s.

Father Divine's appeal during the Great Depression can be attributed in part to his teachings of racial equality, peace and non-violence in the midst of a difficult era. He supplied jobs for his followers at a time when employment was scarce, and would host lavish banquets of the finest food at a time when many could hardly afford a meal. According to historian Kenneth E. Burnham, Father Divine "preached a heaven on earth in which every individual has the same rights: independence, a job, and self-respect."[31] Although at first he drew a predominantly black following, by the 1930s he was attracting followers of all races. Burnham notes that the majority of his white supporters were members of the middle and upper classes, many of whom made

generous donations to Father Divine and his factions.[32] In fact, Elwell Palmer sold 70 Lefferts Place to Father Divine's followers for $5,000, which was an amount so nominal that it can be assumed that the Palmers were donating to the movement.[33]

By the late 1930s, Father Divine's movement had grown to such large numbers that multiple properties were needed to accommodate his believers. According to Burnham, "properties were rented or bought; some were called Churches or Peace Missions, others were exclusively rooming houses." He also explains that the properties were "purchased by pooling followers' funds" and that the deeds were held in their names rather than Father Divine's, although he was always consulted in the purchase of property.[34] Historian Jill Watts has this to say about life at the missions:

> While some Peace Missions operated simply as meeting halls, others were run as rescue homes where angels provided assistance to the public in accord with their leader's principles of cooperative living. All Peace Mission residents lived in sexually segregated quarters and shared work and financial responsibilities. Most missions were humble establishments, simply furnished and spotlessly clean. Pictures of Father Divine and homemade posters and banners proclaiming his divinity adorned the walls. At least once a week, the children conducted Holy Communion banquets to the public.[35]

No.70 Lefferts Place was one of nearly 100 such properties in the Northeast, and was called "Father Divine's Peace Mission Movement Extension."[36] At its dedication ceremony on October 15, 1939, Father Divine proclaimed: "Such a transformation as has taken place at this building can only be really appreciated by those who first saw it in its dilapidated, run-down condition when it was first acquired by the Followers, and the way it now looks, completely remodeled, renovated and transformed into a beautiful structure of art, glistening in its freshness and beauty."[37] The basement of 70 Lefferts Place housed the public dining hall, the first floor housed the Holy Communion banquet hall and the second and attic floors served as living quarters for Father Divine's followers. Public meals, which in the 1940s could be purchased for 10 to 15 cents, were served in the dining room every day between the hours of 6am and 11pm; it was not uncommon for a line to extend out the front door and down the block as people waited for a hot meal. The house, in the words of one of Father Divine's followers who had lived there, was "dedicated to the caring of people."[38]

Although Father Divine died in 1965, the movement is still active under the tutelage of his second wife, Mother Divine. After Father Divine's death the number of his followers declined slowly, since the center of the movement was essentially himself, as "God," rather than an immortal text or doctrine. The house at 70 Lefferts continued to be owned by his followers until the 1980s, by which point many of them had grown too old to care for the house or had passed away.

Design of the James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House[39]

Constructed in what was once a common building style, the James W. Elwell House is now a rare surviving example of a suburban Italianate villa. On Lefferts Place, it is one of the two oldest freestanding wood framed houses; of the two, the Elwell House retains a larger amount of its original characterizing features that link it to a particular style. Among these features, the wide projecting eaves with intricately carved wood brackets, rooftop cupola and round-headed windows recall the fine details of the suburban Italianate villa. On a street composed primarily of mid-to-late nineteenth century rowhouses and apartment buildings, the Elwell House is a distinctive example of the Italianate villa style—one that is rare not only in Clinton Hill South but in Brooklyn as a whole.[40]

Precedents for the American suburban villas of the early-to-mid nineteenth century included the villas that began to appear in England in the late eighteenth century and the rural

residences that had long been constructed by wealthy Americans. Like English villas—built for "those who wish to enjoy the scenery of the country, without removing too far from active life"—American villas were often located on the outskirts of towns and cities. By the middle of the nineteenth century, these "new middle-class suburban homes," frequently sited on picturesquely landscaped grounds, "came to be a middle-class expectation, the estates of landed gentry replicated in miniature on the modest suburban lot," according to architectural historian W. Barksdale Maynard. Calling the rise of the suburban country house an "example of the kind of trickle-down flow of taste that so often shaped nineteenth-century architecture," Maynard argues that it laid "the groundwork … for modern suburban life."[41]

Villas were a familiar feature of the American landscape by 1850. They were especially common around New York City, according to Maynard, who explains that "appropriate to its size, [New York] was ringed by the greatest number of suburban homes of any city on the continent, all in a diverse and attractive setting."[42] Villas were being constructed throughout the region—on Staten Island, and in Northern Manhattan, Westchester County, and other suburban areas—but they were particularly popular in Brooklyn, the country's "first commuter suburb."[43]

The Italianate villa drew upon architectural pattern books and employed the stylistic elements of the Picturesque movement. Introduced to the United States in the late 1830s, the style was popularized by Andrew Jackson Downing's pattern books as an alternative to the Gothic style and as a mode which combined patriotic classical associations with the romanticism of rural Italy.[44] In his *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, Downing refers to it as the "Tuscan, or American" style. The style was further colonized throughout the country by house patterns published in a variety of pattern books.[45] Among the most popular of these publications was Samuel Sloan's two-volume work, *The Model Architect* (1852-53). Sloan's popularity as an architect of the homes of wealthy Philadelphians fueled the success of his books; the first volume sold out before the publication of the second volume one year later in 1853. All in all the publications went through four editions and were pirated throughout the nation, often without credit given, which explains the widespread influence the books had on residential architecture of the mid-nineteenth century.

Both volumes of *The Model Architect* contained several variations on the Italianate villa.[46] Most were cubical in form with a central projecting bay or tower, although some of the larger villas had sprawling irregular plans. They featured low-pitched or flat hipped roofs with decorative brackets, wide projecting eaves, porches, round-headed windows (often paired or tripled) and rooftop cupolas. Of his Italianate villa, Sloan wrote: "It possesses very little of the rural character, and seems much more appropriate for the residence of one accustomed to city life, than one born and bred in the country. Its location, consequentially, should not be in the depths of the forest, but near some frequented highway within a few miles of a city."[47] The Elwell House does not appear to be an exact copy of any known pattern book design; however, it bears a distinct resemblance to design VIII in the first volume of Sloan's *The Model Architect*.[48] Design VIII features a symmetrical façade and cubical massing, paired round-headed windows, a central projecting bay, bracketed eaves and a pronounced front pediment—all of which are characteristics of the Elwell House. Sloan referred to this design as "a genuine Italian building," whose "high finish gives it the character of a suburban rather than a country dwelling."[49] Although the Elwell House is not an exact replica of the design, it should be noted that pattern book designs were rarely followed to the letter; as historian Daniel Reiff has observed, it was understood that they would adapt pattern book designs and details "to meet local needs and financial constraints."[50] Indeed, precise copies were the exception rather than the rule, and many carpenters and builders combined architectural features from a variety of sources.

Alterations have been made to the Elwell House, although most appear to have occurred prior to the sale of the house in 1939 to the followers of Father Divine.[51] The large enclosed porch at the front façade is the most obvious alteration. The house likely originally had a small entrance porch that stretched about as wide as the projecting central bay. The wraparound porch was

probably added to the front façade sometime near the end of the nineteenth century.[52] At the time of the sale of the house to the followers of Father Divine, an article in the New York Times mentioned the house's "large open porches," and made reference to the fact that some alterations would be made to the residence before the new owners took possession.[53] The front porch was enclosed at this time, and it appears today almost exactly as it did in 1939.

Additional alterations include the cladding of the second story exterior walls with non-historic aluminum siding and the replacement of many of the historic windows with aluminum sashes. It also appears that there was a wraparound porch, similar to that of the front façade, at the rear of the residence that was likely enclosed at the same time as the front porch. The windows and double-door at the first story of the front façade were added when the front porch was enclosed in around 1939 and have not since been altered. The house remains remarkably unchanged within the last 65 years and retains many of its most important features and characteristics, including its cubical massing with a central projecting bay, flat roof with wide projecting eaves and finely carved wood brackets, attic windows, pronounced front pediment, paired round-headed windows at the second story of the front façade and rooftop cupola. It remains a rare and excellent representative of a type and style that has all but vanished from Clinton Hill South and is increasingly rare in Brooklyn as a whole.

Description

The James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House (constructed c. 1854) is a two and-a-half story house with a basement and cupola. It is cubical in form with a projecting central bay and an enclosed wraparound porch. The body of the house is painted yellow while the window frames, moldings, doors, brackets and other trim are painted white. Historically, the house was painted a light color, while the door frames and outer window trim were painted a contrasting, darker color. The front doors and window frames were historically painted white.[54]

Main Façade: The main, or Lefferts Place, façade of the house is five bays in width at the first floor enclosed porch, which extends the full width of the facade, and three bays in width at the second floor. While the first story of the façade is clad with its historic horizontal wood clapboards, the second story is clad with replacement aluminum siding that mimics horizontal boards. The house sits on a raised brick foundation. Historically there were two horizontal basement windows on either side of the main entrance stoop; these have been covered with polished granite sheets. The wraparound porch was constructed c. 1900. It was enclosed c. 1939 and appears today almost exactly as it did then. The house's main entrance is located in the center of the façade and has its historic wood double doors. The doors are set within a wood frame and have a transom with a four-paned fanlight. The doors themselves are paneled wood and glass; each door has a round-headed seven-paned window in the upper portion with a denticulated sill. These windows are consistent in design with the upper sash of each of the first floor windows that are found on the front facade. The door to the right has a non-historic doorknob and lock, and a mail slot has been cut into the door to the left. There are non-historic metal kickplates on the doors and two doorbell buttons have been mounted to the frame to the right of the double doors.

Four pairs of identical regularly spaced windows—two on either side of the main entrance—are present on the first floor. The windows are set in tall rectangular wood frames and have wood mullions. The lower sash of each window consists of a single pane, while the upper sash consists of seven panes that form a round-headed shape in the rectangular wood frame. There are two more pairs of identical windows on either side of the wraparound porch–two on the west-facing façade and two on the east-facing façade. Vertical wood corner moldings frame the porch at either side. The enclosed porch is one story in height and has a flat roof with slightly projecting eaves. There are small regularly spaced carved wood brackets at the eaves and a wood fascia. The porch's historic wood balustrades have been replaced with iron handrails, and the brick steps have been covered with polished granite sheets. Three non-historic sconces have been

mounted to the façade—one above the entrance and one at either corner of the porch. A metal downspout is located to the left of the main entrance and pierces the overhanging eave.

The second story of the main façade features a pair of round-headed windows at the central projecting bay. These windows, which are set in wood frames, are rectangular in shape with semi-circular toplights. The historic wood sashes have been replaced with aluminum sashes. Other fenestration at the second story consists of four identical rectangular windows in wood frames—two on the side elevations of the central projecting bay and one on each of the outer bays. These windows also have aluminum replacement sashes with one pane per sash.

The attic story of the main façade features a small horizontal window in the central bay. It is positioned directly above the paired round-headed windows and is sandwiched between two wood brackets. The attic window sits in a wood frame and consists of two replacement aluminum sash sliding windows side-by-side, separated by a wood mullion. Identical attic windows are found on both side elevations of the central bay, also positioned directly above the second story windows.

The roof projects dramatically over the second story of the façade and is supported by intricately carved wood brackets. The brackets, which are original to the house, each feature a carved flower motif and a delicate curved elliptical profile. A pronounced pediment projects over the central bay; the rest of the roof is flat. A large rooftop cupola is located at the center of the roof. The cupola is square in shape; each of its four sides has a pair of windows with wood frames and segmental arched openings. These windows have historic two-over-two wood sashes and simple wood sills with brackets. The cupola is sheltered by a flat roof with projecting eaves and coupled wood brackets. The brackets are nearly identical to those at the second story eaves, except without the carved flower motif. The house has two brick chimneys, one at the eastern end of the roof and another at the rear, or southern end, of the roof. A steel turbine vent has been mounted to the roof at the western end.

West Façade: The first story of the west façade is clad with smooth unpainted stucco that appears to have been scored to imitate stone blocks, while the second story is clad with aluminum siding. The rear portion of the west façade has what appears to be an enclosed wraparound porch similar to that of the front façade. It is one-story in height and has a cornice and brackets identical to those found at the front porch. There is a secondary entrance at this façade; it is located in a recessed porch and is fronted by concrete steps and an iron handrail. There are six visible window openings at the first story of the west façade, two at the second story and two at the attic story. These windows consist primarily of rectangular wood-framed windows with one-over-one replacement aluminum sashes. There are three smaller square-shaped windows at the first story of the west façade, all of which also appear to have replacement sashes. The third window from the street on the first story is covered with metal security bars. At the second story, there is a square-shaped one-over-one window with historic stained glass in the upper sash. The attic windows have wood frames and consist of two replacement aluminum sash sliding windows side-by-side, separated by a wood mullion. The roof at this façade has the same projecting eaves and carved brackets as other the other façades. A drain pipe has been mounted to the wall and pierces the overhanging eave at the western portion of the enclosed wraparound porch, and two satellite dishes have been mounted to the west façade near the rear of the house.

East Façade: The east façade, like the west, is clad with smooth unpainted stucco at the first story and with replacement aluminum siding at the second story. The rear portion of the west façade also has what appears to be an enclosed wraparound porch similar to that of the front façade. It is one-story in height and has a cornice and brackets identical to those found at the front porch and at the rear of the west facade. Fenestration at this façade consists of six window openings at the first story, four at the second and four at the attic story. All of the windows at the first and second floors of this façade are tall rectangular windows with wood frames and one-over-one aluminum replacement sashes. All but the northernmost window at the first story are covered with metal security bars, and the third window from the front of the house is covered

with a sheet and may have been removed. The attic windows have wood frames and consist of two replacement aluminum sash sliding windows side-by-side, separated by a wood mullion. The roof at this façade has the same projecting eaves and carved brackets as the other façades.

Landscape Features: The house is somewhat elevated from street level and sits at the center of its lot. There is a concrete driveway on either side of the house, which is fronted by a flat lawn and various flowering shrubs. The property was historically fronted by a wood fence; this fence has been replaced by a cinderblock retaining wall with iron fencing and an iron gate. The gate is located at the sidewalk; from the sidewalk a path leads to the main entrance. This path is made of poured concrete and has steps with brick risers.

Report researched and written by
Kathryn E. Horak
Research Department, LPC

NOTES

[1] Sources for this section include G.W. Bromley & Company, *Atlas of the Entire City of Brooklyn* (New York: Bromley & Robinson, 1880); Andrew Dolkart, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form for the Clinton Hill South Historic District*, National Register No. 90NR01290; M. Dripps, *Map of the City of Brooklyn* (New York: M. Dripps, 1869); E.B. Hyde & Company, *Atlas of the Borough of Brooklyn, City of New York* (Brooklyn: E. Belcher Hyde, 1903); Kenneth T. Jackson and John B. Manbeck, ed., *The Neighborhoods of Brooklyn* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); William Perris, *Plan of the City of Brooklyn, L.I.* (New York: Perris & Higginson, 1855); Elisha Robinson, *Robinson's Atlas of the City of Brooklyn, New York* (New York: E. Robinson, 1886); and Henry R. Stiles, *The History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, New York from 1683 to 1884* (New York: W.W. Mundell, 1884). Portions of this section are adapted from LPC, *George B. and Susan Elkins House Designation Report* (LP-2207) (New York: City of New York, 2006), prepared by Michael D. Caratzas.

[2] "Clinton Hill South" was used to describe this area by Andrew Dolkart in his 1987 National Register Nomination for the Clinton Hill South Historic District. According to Dolkart, "The Clinton Hill South Historic District does not follow the boundaries of an old Brooklyn neighborhood; in fact, it crosses the boundary of two neighborhoods.… In recent years, residents of these streets have begun to refer to their enclave as Clinton Hill South" (Item 7, page 1).

[3] Stiles, 43-44.

[4] "Last of the Old Mansion," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 19 December 1897, 23. These roads would later be met by the Wallabout and Bedford Turnpike, which opened in 1829. See "A Famous Old Highway," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 24 January 1897, 21; "Hancock Street Houses," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 6 August 1893, 5; and "Old Brooklyn Roads," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 11 November 1894, 22.

[5] Stiles, 135.

[6] "The Lefferts Family: An Important Chapter in the History of Bedford," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 2 October 1887, 6.

[7] Marc Linder and Lawrence S. Zacharias, *Of Cabbages and Kings County: Agriculture and the Formation of Modern Brooklyn* (Iowa City, Ia.: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 81.

[8] 1790 United States Census.

[9] "The Old Brevoort Mansion: A House That Was Once Judge Lefferts' Home to be Destroyed," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 1 April 1888, 1.

[10] 1810 and 1820 United States Census records. In the 1820 Census, it was indicated that not only were there eight slaves living on property owned by Rem Lefferts, but three "free colored" individuals as well.

[11] Lefferts Place was sometimes referred to as Lefferts Street; throughout the nineteenth century the two names were used interchangeably.

[12] "To Eastern Families and Others" (Advertisement), *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 31 January 1857, 1.

[13] Dolkart, Item 8, 3-7.

[14] According to an 1857 advertisement for a house for sale on Lefferts Place, "the time to Fulton ferry, by cars, is twenty minutes." It also stated that "the city railroad cars" would pass "within a hundred feet of the house every five minutes, until after midnight." See "To Eastern Families and Others."

[15] The Greek Revival house at 96 Lefferts Place, while of a similar vintage to the Elwell House, has not been as well preserved. Other than its Ionic columned porch, 96 Lefferts Place has been stripped of its historic characteristics and has been altered in recent years. Additionally, there are three freestanding villas on Lefferts Place east of Classon Avenue; these buildings, which were constructed in the 1860s, have all been severely altered. Of the five abovementioned surviving freestanding villas on Lefferts Place, a street that at one time was home to numerous such residences, 70 Lefferts is the best preserved.

[16] Sources for this section include George T. Lain, *Lain's New York and Brooklyn Elite Directory* (New York: Brooklyn City and Business Directory, 1882-83); and United States Census Records for 1860, 1870, 1870, 1920 and 1930, available at the New York Public Library's Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Geneology.

[17] An 1847 article reported that John Elwell, "while on board a vessel yesterday afternoon at the foot of Wall Street, was struck on the head by the main boom." Elwell died five days later from injuries incurred in the accident. See "Local Intelligence," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 15 July 1847, 2; and "Died," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 20 July 1847, 2.

[18] See Brooklyn property conveyances, liber 362, page 94 (recorded May 6, 1854).

[19] According to his 1899 obituary, James W. Elwell was "an ardent lover of flowers," and "had a large conservatory on his property on Lefferts Place, and every morning he selected a large bouquet of the choicest blooms with which he decorated his coat." See "Death of James Elwell," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 4 Sept. 1899, 12.

[20] "Died," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 15 Feb. 1851, 2.

[21] "Died," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 23 April 1857, 2.

[22] 1860 United States Census.

[23] "James William Elwell Dies," *New York Times*, 3 Sept. 1899.

[24] "Death of James Elwell."

[25] See Brooklyn property conveyances, liber 35, page 382 (recorded Sept. 6, 1904).

[26] Like the Elwells before them, the Palmer family also employed the help of live-in servants; the 1930 United States Census indicates that there were four Irish servants living at 70 Lefferts Place.

[27] See Brooklyn property conveyances, liber 5684, page 151 (recorded Feb. 21, 1939).

[28] Sources for this section include Jervis Anderson, *This Was Harlem, 1900-1950* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981); Kenneth E. Burnham, *God Comes to America* (Boston: Lambeth Press, 1979); Melton Gordon, *Encyclopedia of American Religions, Religious Creeds* (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1994); and Jill Watts, *God, Harlem U.S.A* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[29] "Disciples of Divine Buy Brooklyn Home," *New York Times*, 22 Feb. 1939.

[30] Melton, 629.

[31] Burnham, 50.

[32] Watts, 104.

[33] "Disciples of Divine Buy Brooklyn Home."

[34] Burnham, 52.

[35] Watts, 102.

[36] Burnham, 146.

[37] Father Divine, "The Slum Clearance of Diverse Localities Profiteth Little Unless You Can Get That Mental and Spiritual Slum Clearance In The Hearts and Lives of Men," *The New Day*, 6 August 1966, 10. The article is a reprinting of: "Father's message given while at the banquet table, 70 Lefferts Place, Brooklyn."

[38] The description of living conditions at the Peace Mission Movement Extension at 70 Lefferts Place as written here was aided in part by testimony given by Angel Lee, a resident of the extension from the 1940s and onward. Ms. Lee gave testimony at the Landmarks Preservation Commission Public Hearing for 70 Lefferts Place, which took place on 12 December 2006 (LP-2215, Item No. 5).

[39] Sources for this section include Robert Guter and Janet W. Foster, *Building by the Book: Pattern Book Architecture in New Jersey* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Mills Lane, *Architecture of the Old South: Greek Revival and Romantic* (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1996); W. Barksdale Maynard, *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002); Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); Daniel D. Reiff, *Houses from Books: Treatises, Pattern Books, and Catalogs in American Architecture, 1738-1950* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); and Samuel Sloan, *The Model Architect* (1852-53; reprinted as *Sloan's Victorian Buildings*, New York: Dover Publications, 1980). Portions of this section are adapted from LPC, *George B. and Susan Elkins House Designation Report* (LP-2207) (New York: City of New York, 2006), prepared by Michael D. Caratzas; LPC, Gustave A. Mayer House Designation Report (LPC-1652) (New York: City of New York, 1988), prepared by David M. Breiner; LPC, *121 Heberton Avenue House Designation Report* (LPC-2120) (New York: City of New York, 2002), prepared by Gale Harris.

[40] The only Italianate villa that has been designated an individual landmark in Brooklyn is the Edwin Clarke and Grace Hill Litchfield House, or the Litchfield Villa (LP-0153). This villa, which was constructed in 1854-57 by Alexander Jackson Davis, was designated by the LPC in 1966.

[41] Maynard, 119, 139.

[42] Maynard, 125.

[43] The historian Kenneth T. Jackson bestowed this title on Brooklyn in his book, *Crabgrass Frontier*, which is cited in *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850*, 127.

[44] Andrew Jackson Downing, *Victorian Cottage Residences*, (1873; reprinted New York: Dover Publications, 1981); Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850; reprinted New York: Dover Publications, 1969).

[45] Other than Sloan's publications, some of the more common pattern books of the early-to-mid nineteenth century include: Henry W. Cleveland, et al., *Village and Farm Cottages* (1856, reprinted New York: American Life Foundation, 1976); Alexander Jackson Davis, *Rural Residences, Etc. Consisting of Designs, Original and Selected, for Cottages, Farm-houses, Villas…* (1837, reprinted New York: Da Capo Press, 1980); Andrew Jackson Downing, *Cottage Residences* (1852, reprinted New York: American Life Foundation, 1967); Henry Hudson Holly, *Holly's Country Seats* (1863, reprinted New York: Library of Victorian Culture, 1977); Minard Lafever, The *Modern Builder's Guide* (1833, reprinted New York: Dover, 1969); Oliver P. Smith, *The Domestic Architect* (1854, reprinted New York: American Life Foundation, 1978); and Calvert Vaux, *Villas and Cottages* (1857, reprinted New York: Da Capo Press, 1968).

[46] Sloan referred to these designs as "Italian Villas" or "Italian Residences."

[47] Sloan, 12.

[48] Sloan, 38-40.

[49] Sloan, 38.

[50] Reiff, 62.

[51] Conclusions here and in the following paragraph regarding the historic features and alterations of the building are based, in part, on the c. 1939 Department of Taxes photograph.

[52] The 1903 Hyde map depicts a large wraparound porch at the front façade of 70 Lefferts Place; previous maps do not show a porch of this type.

[53] "Disciples of Divine Buy Brooklyn Home."

[54] This was assessed by looking at the c. 1939 Department of Taxes photograph, and a photograph of the house that appeared on the cover of the October 19th, 1939 issue of *The New Day*, a publication of Father Divine's Peace Mission Movement (Volume III, No. 42).

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that among its important qualities, the James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House is one of few extant remnants of Clinton Hill South's mid-nineteenth century suburban past; that it is one of the two oldest houses on Lefferts Place and a rare surviving freestanding single family house in Clinton Hill South; that it predates and stands in striking contrast to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century rowhouses, flats, and apartment buildings that predominantly fill the surrounding blocks; that it is an excellent example of an Italianate villa and bears a strong resemblance to villa designs published in the mid-nineteenth century pattern books of Samuel Sloan; that it features a cubical form with a projecting central bay, a flat roof with wide projecting eaves and finely carved wood brackets, attic windows, a pronounced front pediment, paired round-headed windows and a rooftop cupola—all of which are characteristics of the Italianate villa style; that when the Elwell House was constructed, Lefferts Place was an enclave of freestanding suburban villas and was "built up with the most elegant residences;" that the proliferation of commuter transportation to Manhattan-bound ferry lines made Lefferts Place, which was only one block from the Fulton Street streetcar line, a viable commuter suburb of Manhattan in the mid-nineteenth century; that while villas were being constructed throughout the region at this time—on Staten Island, Northern Manhattan and Westchester County—they were particularly popular in Brooklyn, the country's "first commuter suburb;" that James W. Elwell, "one of the oldest and most highly esteemed businessmen in Manhattan," lived at 70 Lefferts Place from 1854 until his death in 1899; that descendants of the Elwell family owned the house for nearly ninety years, until 1939; that it was subsequently owned by followers of the charismatic black evangelical leader, Father Divine, who was the founder of the International Peace Mission Movement; that 70 Lefferts Place served as a Peace Mission Movement Extension for more than forty years, until at least 1981; that many of the alterations made to the residence, the most striking of which being the enclosure of the wraparound porch, occurred at around the time of the 1939 sale of the house to the followers of Father Divine; that since 1939, very few alterations have been made to the Elwell House and it has been remarkably unchanged within the last 65 years and maintains many of its Italianate characteristics; and that the James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House remains and rare and excellent representative of a type and style that has all but vanished from Clinton Hill South and is increasingly rare in Brooklyn as a whole.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House, 70 Lefferts Place, Borough of Brooklyn, and designates Brooklyn Tax Map Block 2019, Lot 16 as a Landmark Site.

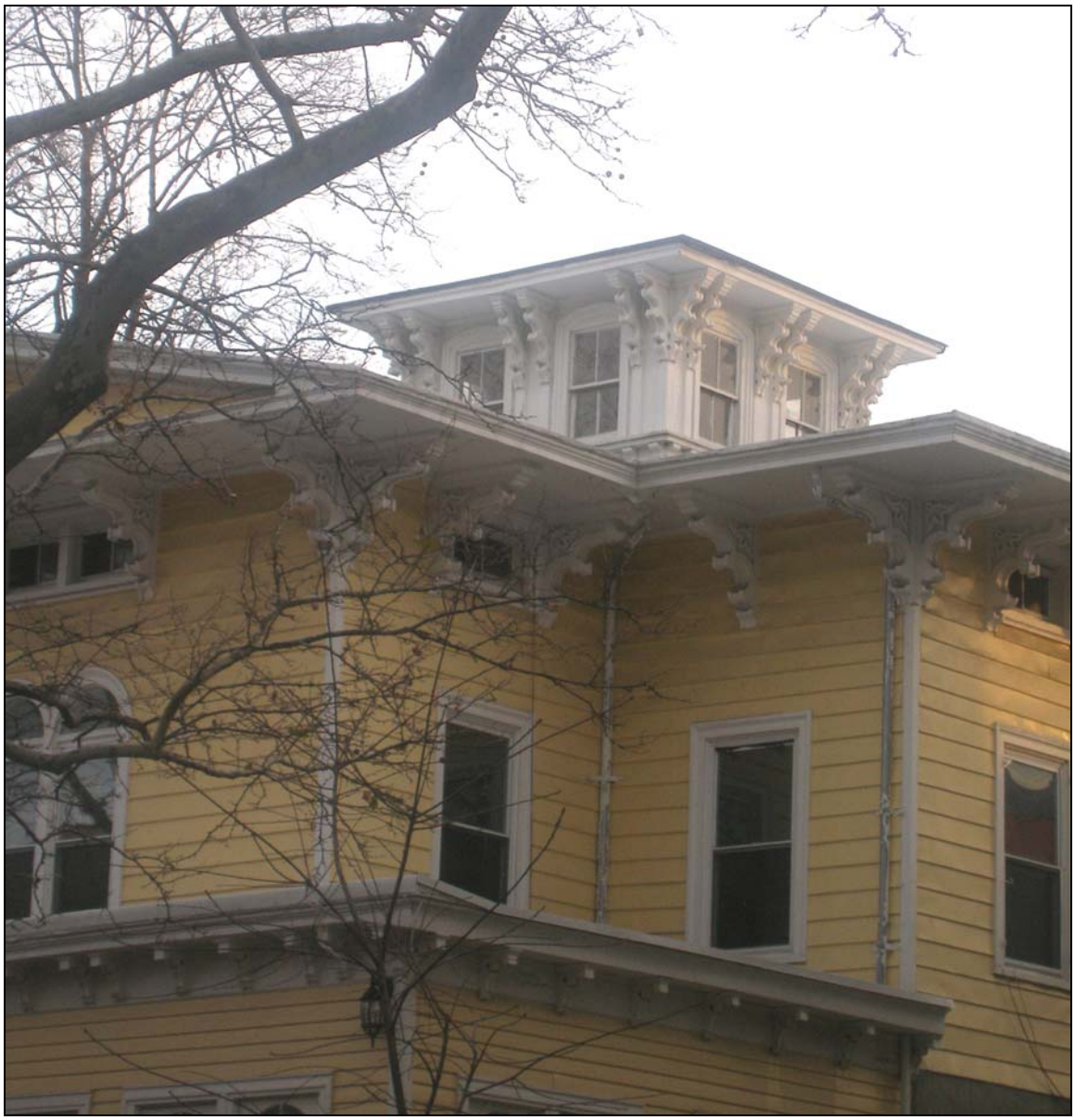
Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice Chair
Stephen Byrns, Joan Gerner, Roberta Brandes Gratz, Christopher Moore, Margery Perlmutter, Thomas F. Pike, Elizabeth Ryan, Commissioners

James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House, main (north) façade.
Photo: Kathryn Horak

James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House, west façade.
Photo: Kathryn Horak

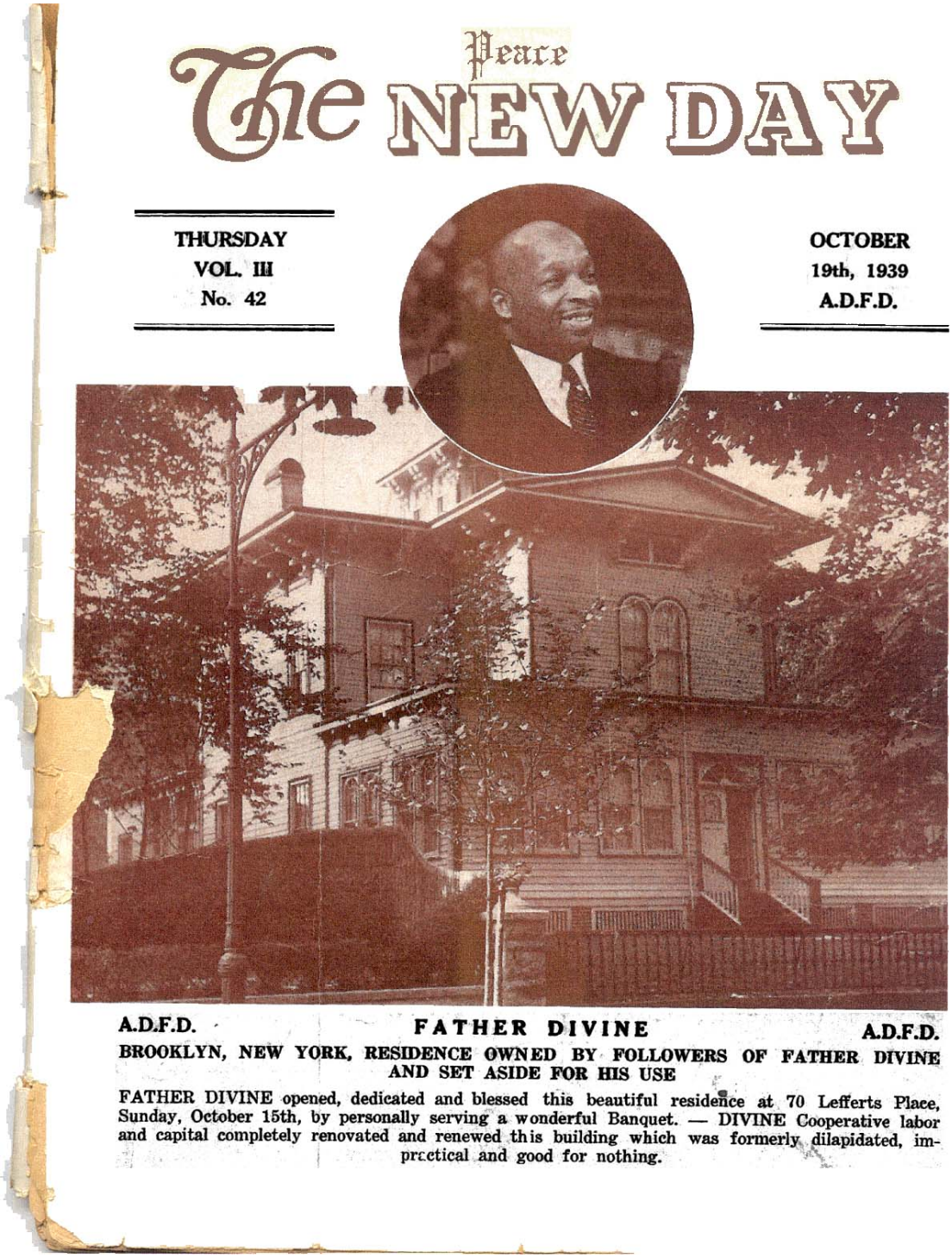
James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House, east façade.
Photo: Kathryn Horak

James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House, north and west façades, eave and bracket details.
Photo: Kathryn Horak



James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House, cupola detail.
Photo: Kathryn Horak

James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House, main entrance detail.
Photo: Kathryn Horak



Peace

The NEW DAY

THURSDAY
VOL. III
No. 42

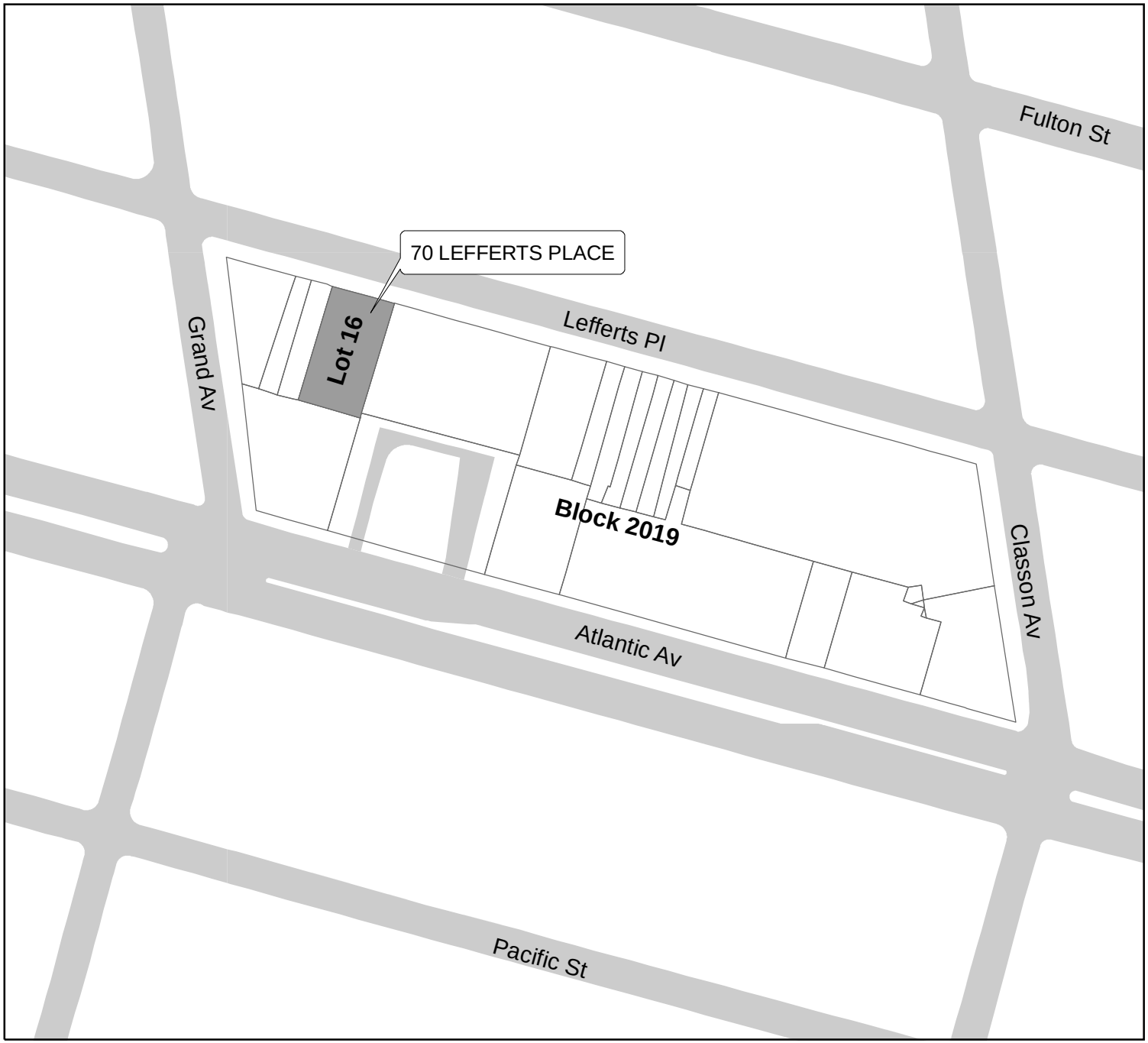
OCTOBER
19th, 1939
A.D.F.D.

A.D.F.D. FATHER DIVINE A.D.F.D.

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, RESIDENCE OWNED BY FOLLOWERS OF FATHER DIVINE AND SET ASIDE FOR HIS USE

FATHER DIVINE opened, dedicated and blessed this beautiful residence at 70 Lefferts Place, Sunday, October 15th, by personally serving a wonderful Banquet. — DIVINE Cooperative labor and capital completely renovated and renewed this building which was formerly dilapidated, impractical and good for nothing.

The New Day, October 19, 1939, Volume III, No. 42.
This issue of *The New Day*, which was a publication of Father Divine's Peace Mission Movement, featured 70 Lefferts Place on its cover. The house was dedicated by Father Divine on October 15, 1939 as one of his Peace Mission Movement Extensions.



70 Lefferts Place
Designated Individual Landmark
Borough of Brooklyn, NY
Landmarks Preservation Commission

Designated: December 12, 2006

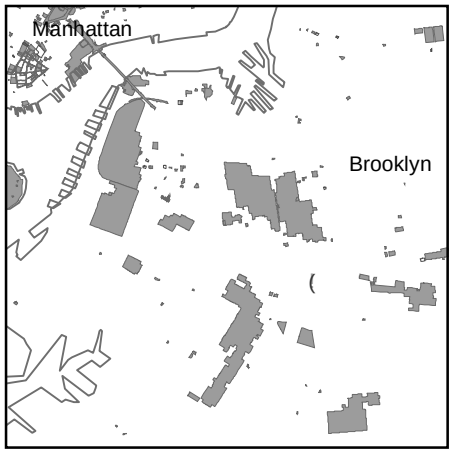
Main Map Key
Designated Individual Landmark

Inset Map Key
Previously Designated Historic Districts & Individual Landmarks
70 Lefferts Place

Date: 12.14.2006
Author: JLM

0.02 Miles

THE CITY OF NEW YORK LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION



James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House (LP-2215), 70 Lefferts Place.
Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map Block 2019, Lot 16.

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 03C, December 2003.