

## **Addisleigh Park Preliminary Report**

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**Historic Districts Council**

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Addisleigh Park has long been identified as an important cultural component in the history of African Americans in the New York area. This small neighborhood within the community of St. Albans was home to notable African American families beginning in the 1940s including many respected professionals, athletes, musical performers, and a large number of jazz musicians. As a cultural historian specializing in the history of modern jazz, I was particularly attracted to the fact that in such a small area (roughly 60 blocks bounded by Sayres Avenue to the north, 180<sup>th</sup> Street to the east, Linden Boulevard to the south and Marne Place to the west) lived Illinois Jacquet, his brother Russell Jacquet, Milt Hinton, Brook Benton, Earl Bostic, Wild Bill Davis, Mercer Ellington, Rose Murphy, Oliver Nelson, Slam Stewart, Cootie Williams, Ella Fitzgerald, and Count Basie. One of the first African American residents of Addisleigh Park was Fats Waller who recommended that Lena Horne purchase a home there which she did. Many other musicians lived in the surrounding area (John Coltrane, Frank Wess, Benny Powell, Jimmy Heath, Roy Haynes) and often visited fellow musicians in Addisleigh Park.

To begin this preliminary cultural resource survey, which hopefully will lead to further funding to continue an oral history project and further research on early homeowners in Addisleigh Park, we looked for newspaper articles on activities in the area, searched for scholarly work, and did a literature review of the area. Through my research, I found two books of outstanding photos by bassist Milt Hinton who lived for

over 40 years at 173-05 113<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Addisleigh Park. In **February 2008**, I contacted David G. Berger and Holly Maxson, who are the co-authors of the Milt Hinton books, and asked if Milt Hinton had any photos of Addisleigh Park. They very kindly went through slides of photos that were not in the published works and found some outstanding photos for our research. In late February, they sent me scans of the slides that are now in the files of the HDC. These photos include one of a party at Count Basie's home and a stunning photo of Mona Hinton in front of her home in the snow. There are also photos of members of the congregation of St. Albans Congregational Church. To have copies of these photos adds a tremendous amount of weight to our research and also reminds us of the importance of protecting the cultural history of Addisleigh Park.



Addisleigh Park, 1964, photo by Milt Hinton

On **April 8, 2008**, I attended the Addisleigh Park Civic Association meeting at the Allen Senior Citizens Center, 166-01 Linden Boulevard. St. Albans. Lauren Belfer of the HDC drove us to the meeting where we were given a short amount of time to present the preliminary architectural research on Addisleigh Park and for me to ask for contact

information on residents who might want to be interviewed about life in the area or who knew any of the jazz musicians who had lived there. I did make several contacts there for future interviews.

On **May 4, 2008**, I drove to the home of Camille Chin-Kee-Fatt at 112-45 178<sup>th</sup> Street, in Addisleigh Park. She graciously invited me in to tour the former home of Lena Horne which she had restored to much of its original beauty. The backyard garden was also impeccable and Ms. Chin-Kee-Fatt talked about how she felt obliged to continue the legacy of the home which she had bought about three years ago from the Robinsons. I photographed the exterior of the home and those photos are on file at the HDC.

Through Ms. Chin-Kee-Fatt, I was able to contact the Robinsons and arrange an oral history interview with Mr. Robinson at St. Albans Library for Monday, August 25, 2008 at 1pm. The Robinsons lived in what is referred to as “the Lena Horne home” for over thirty years and Mr. Robinson is a local historian with quite a bit of memorabilia. I have arranged to scan some of his photos and documents during the interview.



May 4, 2008

On **May 9, 2008**, I attended the funeral of Mona Hinton, widow of Milt Hinton, and community and church activist in Addisleigh Park for over 40 years. Her funeral was well attended by her neighbors, some of whom had long moved out of the area but returned to pay their respects. St. Albans Congregational Church is directly across the street from the Hinton home. I attended with Frank Wess, saxophonist from the Count Basie Band and long-time resident of St. Albans, who knew many of the elders attending and also played the flute at the ceremony. I was introduced to many of the former residents of Addisleigh Park and took phone numbers for future interviews.



St. Albans Congregational Church, photo by Milt Hinton

On **July 8, 2008**, after months of phone calls attempting to reach Mr. Clarence Irving, a Queens historian and long-time resident of Addisleigh Park, we finally were able to arrange to meet him. We drove to Middle Island, N. Y. (Frampton Tolbert, Lauren Belfer, and myself) to pick up Mr. Irving and bring him to Addisleigh Park. We drove around the area and he pointed out homes and their history and discussed life in the neighborhood. His knowledge of African American history in Queens is extensive and he

is an excellent contact for future research and a continued oral history. I made an audio tape of his conversation as we drove around Addisleigh Park which I have sent to the HDC on digital audio files. We also have photographs and video of the drive around the neighborhood. I suggest that Mr. Irving be on the Advisory Board of any further research of Addisleigh Park.

To complete my work for on Addisleigh Park for the Historic Districts Council, I propose to do two interviews—one with Mr. Robinson that has been scheduled and one with Edna Maxwell who lives at 173-02 113<sup>th</sup> Avenue, across the street from the Hinton home and is in her 90s with a very good memory. She has lived in the area for more than 30 years and has agreed to an interview. I also propose to research the history of two homes—the Lena Horne house and the Count Basie house. These two sites hold a special kind of memory for people and represent the cultural history of the district. The Basie home is especially significant because of Catherine Basie's involvement in civil rights and civic organizations and her many fundraisers and parties around the pool. I propose further interviews with musicians and others who were guest in the Basie home. Count Basie and his wife Catherine moved into their home at 174-27 Adelaide Road in 1946.



❖ **Show Business Honors Basie:** Guest of honor at a testimonial commemorating his 20th year as a bandleader, Count Basie, with his wife, Catherine, receives congratulations from pianist Hazel Scott (l.) and singer Lena Horne (r.) at New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

In a chapter of his book, *The Jazz Life*, written in 1960, Nat Hentoff mentions Count Basie's home in Addisleigh Park though he refers to its location as St. Albans. "Another solitary avocation of Basie is a large model train development in the basement of his home. Upstairs is a further aid to relaxation, a Hammond organ. The St. Albans, Long Island, house is ample but unostentatious although it does have a swimming pool. Basie, his wife, and their fifteen year old daughter Diane have lived there for some fourteen years.

"In contrast to her husband, Catherine Basie is a brisk, energetic clubwoman who hurls herself into an astonishingly full round of activities. She is on the boards of nearly a dozen organizations, works for the Urban League and the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and is actively involved in local politics."

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