

Addisleigh Park:

- Enclave of Greats in African-American History?
- Wholly Intact 20th Century Garden City Suburb?
- Site of Important American Housing History?

ALL OF THE ABOVE

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INTRODUCTION

Addisleigh Park is a small, little-known enclave located within the St. Albans section of Queens, in the historic town of Jamaica. While its name may be recognizable to only a relatively few New Yorkers, it is a neighborhood that possesses remarkable cultural and architectural history. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Addisleigh Park is that its name is not commonly known.

A first-time visitor to Addisleigh Park will encounter lovely and ample single-family homes. The eclectic revival styles of the 1920s and 1930s—when the bulk of development occurred--such as English Tudor, Prairie, Neo-Colonial, and Neo-Classical, predominate. The neighborhood is cohesive, and displays an obviously recognizable “sense of place,” due to a consistent scale of two or three stories, and the common use of brick, stucco, wood, and stone. Homes are set on large lots (some as large as 80’ X 40’) and the principles of the Garden City movement are evident. Homes are largely intact, with relatively few alterations or additions.

Thus, a stroll along Murdock Avenue, the neighborhood’s principal spine, would reveal Addisleigh’s abundant physical charms, yet it would do nothing to uncover a picture of its rather remarkable past. (Figure 1) It is a past that can count among its participants Count Basie, Lena Horne, Ella Fitzgerald, W.E.B. DuBois, Roy Campanella, Illinois Jacquet, Slam Stewart, James Brown, Milt

Hinton and many others. These world-famous people were all residents of Addisleigh Park, many at the same time. Many lived there at the height of their fame; some lived there until their deaths. They lived in Addisleigh Park because it was a neighborhood that embodied the ethos of the American dream: home ownership. To these prominent African-Americans (and hundreds of other African-Americans who followed who were not household names), Addisleigh represented a community that was welcoming; it was a break from the hustle and bustle of New York City; it was a place where they could raise their children with a backyard and a lawn, in a peaceful, safe community; and it presented an opportunity to reap the rewards of suburban living without leaving the boundaries of New York. During the mid-twentieth century, when home-owning opportunities for African-Americans were severely limited, Addisleigh Park represented a goal for which to strive. Within the African-American community, Addisleigh is recognized as one of the premier black communities in New York. What is most remarkable, then, is that Addisleigh developed as an exclusively white community, and originally, its homes and land carried restrictive covenants that barred blacks from purchasing homes in the area. The story of Addisleigh's transformation is fascinating.

This report is to be viewed as an initial and general review of the area's history, development, and architecture, with special attention paid to homes that African-American stars called home. It has been sponsored by the Historic Districts Council, in partnership with the Addisleigh Park Civic Organization, with funding from the Northeast Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and Preserve New York, a grant program of the Preservation League of New York State and the New York State Council on the Arts. The aim is to serve as a jumping off point for further research toward a variety of goals. Among these goals is designation of a local historic district; listing on the state and national register of historic places; and/or providing the Addisleigh Park Civic Organization with historical information about their community to publicize in the manner in which they deem most appropriate. In preparing this report, general research on the history and development of Addisleigh Park was conducted, while special emphasis was placed on the homes that belonged to prominent African-Americans (Table 1). For the homes that appear in Table 1, primary source records such as the NYC Department of Buildings and the NYC City Register were consulted.

ADDISLEIGH PARK DEVELOPMENT

Forming a more or less triangular enclave with hard and very clear boundaries, Addisleigh Park is defined by the tracks of the Long Island Railroad roughly to the east, Linden Boulevard roughly to the south, Sayres Avenue roughly to the north, and Marne Place roughly to the west. (Figures 2, 3) Like much of suburban Queens, Addisleigh Park (and its parent community, St. Albans) were carved out of former farms and large estates. The advent of the Long Island Railroad's St. Albans station in 1898, along with other improvements in transportation infrastructure such as the completion of the Queensborough Bridge in 1909, opened up large swaths of previously inaccessible land for development.

Although Addisleigh did not develop all at once, and is not the work of one massive speculative building project, it maintains its identity for several reasons. The building lots are large, and real-estate land maps indicate that even the earliest developments—those that took place before World War I—were set back on their lots. Thus, the streets in Addisleigh have an open, graceful, sweeping appearance. Although there are some row houses (particularly along 180th Street), the vast majority of the homes are freestanding. The first wave of

speculative development that occurred in Addisleigh Park was soon after the turn of the 20th century. A second wave occurred in the years after World War I. By that time, the ideas of Sir Ebenezer Howard, father of the Garden City movement, were widely known. His book, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow* had been published in 1898 and the principles of the Garden City movement had spread throughout England as well as the United States. While there is no hard evidence to suggest that the early builders in Addisleigh were disciples of Howard, it is clear that in setting the buildings back on the lot so as to ensure ample front lawns, in building (nearly) exclusively freestanding homes, and in choosing building styles that were evocative of the English countryside, Garden City ideas had filtered through to Addisleigh, and contribute to its character. With its total lack of commercial enterprises, the area adheres to another Howard idea, that of the complete separation of residential, commercial, and industrial districts.

In order to understand the pattern of development in Addisleigh Park, one must first study the development of St. Albans. A committee consisting of the area's prominent landowners, including A.N. Everitt, J. Remsen, and Benjamin Carpenter, named the area in 1899 for the village of St. Albans in Hertfordshire, England.¹ In keeping with the English connotations of the name

¹ Long Island Daily Press, "St. Albans Got Name from London Suburb," April 13, 1936.

‘St. Albans,’ its new developments were of a decidedly English character. Until the first decades of the twentieth century, St. Albans consisted primarily of farmland. The first building boom in St. Albans occurred in 1904 when the St. Albans Park Land Company developed the land north of Farmers Boulevard. This boom did not last long, however, and went bust by 1907.² Another boom affected the landscape again around the time of World War I. It was during this period that the St. Albans Golf and Country Club was constructed. The 125-acre club, opened in 1915, was bounded roughly by Baisley Boulevard, Merrick Road, Linden Boulevard, and the Valley Stream division of the Long Island Railroad.³ It was developed by Edwin H. Brown, a local attorney-turned real estate developer who was responsible for the first wave of development in Addisleigh.⁴ The club, today the site of the U.S. Veterans Affairs Department, was an important amenity for the St. Albans and Addisleigh Park communities. In promotional material and advertisements, Addisleigh’s proximity to the golf course was highlighted.

The initial building boom in St. Albans largely ignored the enclave that was to become Addisleigh Park. The 1909 Belcher-Hyde land map

² Long Island Daily Press, “St. Albans History,” January 30, 1938.

³ “Course is Babe Ruth’s Favorite,” unidentified publication in clippings file of Addisleigh Park folder of the Long Island Division, Queens Public Library, December 30, 1935.

⁴ An online biography of Brown, <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/jkonvalinka/brownhom.htm>, which is part of the genealogy page of Jon Konvalinka, claims that Brown named Addisleigh, although the Long Island Daily Press refutes that.

reveals only a handful of structures in the area. The few that do exist are wood-framed buildings. Some roads, while indicated on the map, were probably not cut through, as some of the structures straddle streets. By 1918, the streets of Addisleigh Park had been mapped and cut through, although not paved. It was then that the first wave of speculative development hit the area, with about two dozen stone, wood, and concrete buildings appearing in the southeastern portion of the neighborhood, on the blocks between 114th Avenue and Linden Boulevard, and from 178th to 180th Streets. It appears that one of the earliest speculative developers of Addisleigh Park was the Burfrey Realty Corporation, which subdivided and built sixty-one “high-class half-timber English homes of individual design”⁵ in 1926. These lots were also in the southeastern section of Addisleigh, adjoining the Golf Club. A 1926 *New York Times* article about the sale of building lots in Queens, notes that “Addisleigh, together with St. Albans Golf Club, was laid out under the personal direction of Edwin H. Brown, and carries a land and house restriction of the highest type.”⁶

Over the next decade, Addisleigh Park, along with large swaths of suburban Queens, boomed and took on the appearance that is largely apparent today. Although an examination of deed conveyances for some of the lots in Addisleigh Park indicates a number of developers such as Priscilla Homes, Ross

⁵ “Queens Lots Lead Suburban Sales,” *New York Times*, Feb. 6, 1926, p. 26.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Homes, and Majestic Homes, purchasing lots in Addisleigh Park in the late 1920s, it appears that one of the largest developers of Addisleigh Park (after Burfrey Real Estate) was a concern called Addisleigh Homes or Addisleigh Homes Company.⁷ Property records indicate that the Addisleigh Homes Company began buying lots in the western section of Addisleigh Park from the mid-1920s and continued through the early 1930s. Sometimes these conveyances appear under the name “Addisleigh Homes,” while at other times Rodman & English or Ringhoff & English are the purchasers⁸.

The Addisleigh Homes Company⁹ seems to be a spin-off venture of the Rodman & English Company. These builders were Gerald C. English, and his partner, Alexander Rodman. The two started as plumbing and heating contractors, but eventually turned to real-estate development. By the time of English’s death at 47 in 1936, he had built more than 1,700 homes in Queens.¹⁰ It appears, for several reasons, that it was these builders, Gerald English and Alexander Rodman, who largely shaped Addisleigh. First, their firm, under the name Rodman & English (which later became Ringhoff & English) published, in

⁷ Another developer whose name appears frequently in *New York Times* articles about the building in St. Albans is Frank Droesch. This researcher did not examine the city records for every structure in Addisleigh Park, and his name was not encountered on the records examined. Nonetheless, A *New York Times* photo spread on p. RE1 of July 19, 1931, features “Two of a large groups of homes being erected by Frank Droesch, Inc. at Addisleigh Park, St. Albans, L.I.” Further research would have to be conducted to determine for how much of Addisleigh Park Frank Droesch is responsible.

⁸ Block and Lot conveyance records of the NYC City Register, Queens County for only the following blocks were examined: 10282, 10283, 10287, 10288, 10289, 10292, 10296, 10301, 10302, 10303, 10305, 10310, 10311. There are a total of 29 blocks within the boundaries of Addisleigh Park.

⁹ In some sources the company is listed as “Addisleigh Homes, Inc.”

¹⁰ “Gerald C. English, Queens Builder, Dies,” *New York Times*, November 22, 1936, p. N8

1930, a 16-page, full-color marketing brochure entitled “Addisleigh Homes.” (Figure 4) Additionally, the name Addisleigh Homes, or that of Mr. English or Mr. Rodman appeared on many of the city records examined by this researcher. For example, deed conveyance records for the blocks examined listed Addisleigh Homes, or Rodman & English. Furthermore, during the early 1930s, newspaper ads and promotional articles for “Addisleigh Homes” begin to appear in the local press. The names English, Rodman, and Ringhoff are often listed in these advertisements. Interestingly, (as is often the case), English lived in his development, in a home in Addisleigh, at 175-01 114th Avenue. (Figure 5)

As promoted by the Addisleigh Homes Company, the houses built by Rodman & English (or Ringhoff & English) were of the “English cottage” type, and featured numerous modern appliances and conveniences. A large display advertisement featuring Rodman & English’s logo that appeared twice in the *New York Times* in 1930 sings the homes’ praises by describing their line, color, and harmonious effect. They were available for \$17,500.00. In 1937, the *Jamaica Jinjer*, a local newspaper, ran what can only be called an “advertorial” proclaiming the new homes being constructed in Addisleigh Park as “one of the most attractive home developments in the Greater Jamaica District.”¹¹

¹¹ “Addisleigh—A Delightful Residential Section,” in the *Jamaica Jinjer*, Nov. 1937, page unknown.

While these ads give a clear sense of the architectural aspects of the Addisleigh Homes development, it is Rodman & English's marketing brochure, entitled "Addisleigh Homes," that provides a treasure trove of information about the construction of the homes, as well as insight into the lifestyle that Rodman and English wished their development to connote. The booklet, with a stylized illustration evocative of a London suburb, announces "Addisleigh Homes, built by Rodman & English."¹² The brochure opens with an introductory page entitled, "Where there is beauty, there is happiness ..."¹³ Every room of the house receives an entire page of coverage, complete with a dated and somewhat puffed-up description, as well as a photo. Most important, though, for the historian, is the description of the physical aspect of the houses. The brochure talks at length about the fact that Addisleigh is already well developed, and that the new developments have been designed very carefully to fit into the community. The authors write: "Addisleigh offers one of those opportunities which we so longingly and so rarely find. It is already well developed, consisting of homes that are admirably created, designed on the principles of an exclusive residential park. ... The underlying policy is to build only what will blend harmoniously in the completed development. ... Addisleigh is unique in that it does not have that raw, artificial appearance of a new development; but it

¹² Rodman & English, *Addisleigh Homes*, cover, 1930.

¹³ *ibid*, p. 3

has that charming atmosphere of a beautiful, old established community, due to the quality of the construction of the houses, built among the sturdy, sheltering trees”¹⁴

Apparently, Rodman and English developed six types of homes that would be available. They are all illustrated. (Figures 6, a - f) All could be described as being of the English Tudor (or English Cottage, as the brochure calls them) style and feature varied rooflines with prominent gables and a variety of textures due to the use of stone, stucco, and brick. The designs achieve a picturesque effect. In keeping with the ideas of the Garden City, the homes will be set back on the building lot, and, the brochure notes, “They have been built low to the ground and nestled among the trees which enhances the appearance of age and stability.”¹⁵ This connection to and emphasis on nature is also a tenet of the Garden City movement. Drawings for Addisleigh Homes structures from the files of the New York City Department of Buildings list the architects as Frank J. Shea, David J. Cohan, and Gerald English.¹⁶ Sadly, with the exception of English, Shea and Cohan appear to have been relatively obscure architects with no written information (to date) found on them. In the brochure, much is made of the modernity of these homes, in spite of their traditional architectural

¹⁴ *ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 5

¹⁶ NYC Department of Buildings record, NB9221-28 and NB-9222-28, for block 10305 and lot 120, aka 175-12 Murdock Avenue.

vocabulary. “The houses are built of the best materials available and they embody the latest ideas in decoration, ventilation, sanitation, weatherproofing, insulating, heating, and mechanical features.”¹⁷

Of course, the purpose of this brochure was to sell homes, and it is full of salesmen’s rhetoric. It is easy to overlook the bombast, though, and find a particularly interesting two-page spread that is devoted to the neighborhood. Rather than striving to make an individualistic design statement with Addisleigh Homes, Rodman and English aimed to have their development blend as much as possible with the existing building stock. “The homes offered by Rodman and English take their prideful place among homes already built there. We have illustrated on these two pages some of our neighbors. You may readily see that, though larger and differing in details of design, they are delightful companions to those that are suggested by the builders. A community of such homes nestling in a parklike terrain will surely grow in charm and value.”¹⁸ This conscious design decision has ensured the cohesion and stability that Addisleigh has maintained for its entire history.

From the mid-1930s through the end of the decade, Ringhoff & English (the successor firm to Rodman & English) continued to build many homes in Addisleigh Park, though not of the “Addisleigh Homes” type. A May 30, 1937

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 8.

New York Times article proclaimed that, “Harry Ringhoff of the building firm Ringhoff & English announces the completion of the seventeenth home on Adelaide Place, near Linden Boulevard, in the Addisleigh Park section of St. Albans. The houses were designed by Frederick Burmeister and are in the \$10,000 price range.”¹⁹ In 1935 and 1936, announcements regarding the construction of Ringhoff & English homes in Addisleigh (also designed by Burmeister) appeared in the *New York Times* as well.²⁰ So prominent and prevalent were the Ringhoff & English homes, that General Electric, in 1935, sponsored an air-conditioned demonstration home (furnished with GE Appliances) in Addisleigh Park.²¹ Yet Ringhoff & English were not alone. In the late 1930s, other developers were on the Addisleigh scene as well, as developer A. Ambrosio put up several detached homes on 180th Street near Linden Boulevard to the designs of Robert Schnetter,²² and Hamilton Communities was responsible for four dwellings adjoining the St. Albans golf course.²³

By the late 1940s, Addisleigh was nearly completely built up, and, with some exceptions, appeared much as it does today.²⁴ Indeed, in 1939, commenting

¹⁹ “Building Planned for Queens Area,” *New York Times*, May 30, 1937, p. 141.

²⁰ “Building Plans Filed,” *New York Times*, April 4, 1936, p. 32; “Plans for Buildings Filed by Architects,” *New York Times*, October 26, 1935, p. 31.

²¹ “Residential Areas Expand in Queens; Fair Speeds Plans of Home-Builders,” *New York Times*, October 6, 1935, p. 177.

²² “Winter Building Pressed in Queens,” *New York Times*, November 7, 1937, p. 207.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 207.

²⁴ A visual survey of the neighborhood reveals a few examples of teardowns and modern replacements. The site of what used to be Count Basie’s swimming pool, part of his property, at 174-27 Adelaide Road, was developed with new three new homes called “Basie Estates” in the 1980s.

upon the completion of his Addisleigh project, developer Anthony La Parulo stated, “We have sold 12 houses and if only 1 percent of those who did not buy return we will be well on the way to a complete sell-out before the first of the year. After that our Addisleigh Park operations will come to an end because there are no more lots in this desirable section to be had.”²⁵

WELCOMING, BUT NOT TO ALL

For all of its charming and delightful architecture, bucolic setting, stately trees, and picturesque character, Addisleigh Park had another feature, one that was quite ugly. Although marketed as an ideal, warm, and homey community, the neighborhood was bound by racial covenants that restricted ownership to whites only. In veiled (and often not-so-veiled) language, it is obvious from the printed record that Addisleigh was a neighborhood that was off-limits to African-Americans. “The St. Albans golf course is but across the road and guarded with the same restrictions insures the continued quality of the neighborhood,”²⁶ states the *Jamaica Jinjer*. Earlier, during the wave of development that occurred in the mid-1920s by the Burfrey Real Estate Company, the *New York Times* noted that, “Addisleigh, together with the St.

²⁵ “Plan New Operation for Addisleigh Park Section,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 22, 1939, page unknown.

²⁶ “Addisleigh—A Delightful Residential Section,” *Jamaica Jinjer*, Nov. 1937, page unknown.

Albans Golf Club, was laid out under the personal direction of Edwin H. Brown, and carries a land and house restriction of the highest type.”²⁷ Property records reveal the restrictive agreements that property owners signed.

In 1942, Mr. And Mrs. Henry M. Neely of 112-29 175th Place contracted to sell their home to an African-American. This was in violation of the covenant they had signed, or so claimed many of the neighbors. The case, *Dury et. al. v. Neely et. ux.*, was tried at the State Supreme Court, Trial Term. The Neelys claimed several points in their defense. First, that the covenant “violated the State and Federal Constitutions and contravenes public policy”;²⁸ second, that “fraud induced the defendants (i.e., them) to sign”²⁹ and third, “that the agreement has lapsed by its terms.”³⁰ In his opinion, Justice Cuff concluded that the first point was untenable. He goes on to state:

“People may mutually limit their powers of alienation of their property. The ‘race, color and creed’ provisions in our Federal and State Constitutions place inhibitions upon the nation, the states and their municipal subdivisions; they have no application to private transactions.”³¹ On the second and third points, Justice Cuff wrote that an alleged fraud did not occur. The alleged fraud turned on the notion that the Neelys understood that the covenant would not

²⁷ “Queens Lots Lead Suburban Sales,” *New York Times*, Feb. 6, 1926, p. 26.

²⁸ *Dury et. al. v. Neely*, 69 N.Y.S. 2d 677

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

become binding until it was “100% signed”³² and that “nearly all residents had signed at that point.”³³ (Thus the Neelys claimed that the covenant was null because at the time they signed, it was not “100% signed.”) Another point had to do with the Neelys’ understanding of the word “block,” and whether the property in question fell within or without the demarcation line of the properties covered by the covenant. On these points, Justice Cuff found that fraud did not exist and thus the covenant was not null. In this, the Dury case, Justice Cuff found for the plaintiffs and enjoined the defendants, the Neelys, from selling their home to an African-American. Justice Cuff’s reasoning and opinion are astonishing and disheartening, especially as America was in the midst of fighting for the principles of freedom and democracy in World War II. Addisleigh’s history teaches us that bigotry, ignorance, hatred, and intolerance could be enshrined in law.

The decision discusses the fact that the covenant contained a so-called “escape clause,” whereby the covenant would become a nullity if a non-Caucasian became an occupant (except as an employee) for more than four months.³⁴ The opinion states that the house in question had indeed been occupied by an African-American family for more than four months. (It is not clear whether they were renters or owners at that point.) Although the court

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

decision found for the plaintiffs, it appears that the facts on the ground began to change the racial make-up of Addisleigh Park. While the Neelys were enjoined from selling their property to an African-American, since this family was already in residence, the process of white flight began.

Five years later, in 1947, another court case reached the Supreme Court of Queens County, Special Term. In this case, *Kemp et. al. v. Rubin et. al.*, the defendant, Sophie Rubin, was sued by her neighbors for selling her home to an African American. Like the defendants in the Dury case, Sophie Rubin contended that the restrictive covenants were a violation of the 14th Amendment of the Federal Constitution and a rejection of New York State's public policy. Justice Livingston, while clearly sympathetic to the inherent injustice of the restrictive covenant, notes that law binds him in his opinion; the covenant did not violate the Constitution. Indeed, Justice Livingston quotes Justice Murphy in *Hirabayashi v. United States*: "Distinctions based on color and ancestry are utterly inconsistent with our traditions and ideals. They are at variance with the principles for which we are now waging war. We cannot close our eyes to the fact that for centuries the Old World has been torn by racial and religious conflicts and has suffered the worst kind of anguish because of inequality of treatment for different groups. There was one law for one and a different law for another. Nothing is written more firmly into our law than the compact of the

Plymouth voyagers to have just and equal laws.” Justice Livingston goes on to add, “At the same time, however, and regardless of what its sentiments may be, this court is constrained to follow precedent and govern itself in accordance with what it considers to be the prevailing law.”³⁵

This case garnered considerable interest. Among the groups who filed amicus curiae briefs on behalf of the defendants (Rubin, et. al.) were: The American Jewish Congress; the American Civil Liberties Union; the National Lawyers Guild; the New York State Industrial Union Council; the Greater New York Industrial Union Council, C.I.O.; City Wide Citizens Committee on Harlem; the Social Action Committee of New York City Congregational Church Association, Inc.; and the Methodist Federation for Social Service.

The facts of the case were fairly simple. The defendant Sophie Rubin had signed a restrictive agreement, along with 17 other property owners on 177th Street between 112th and 114th Avenues, in 1939. The agreement was to remain in effect until December 31, 1975, and stated that “no part of the land now owned by the parties hereto shall ever be used or occupied, or sold, conveyed, leased, rented or given, to Negroes or any person or persons of the Negro race or blood or descent.”³⁶ Sophie Rubin had contracted to sell her property to Samuel Richardson, a black man. (Richardson was also a defendant in the case.) The

³⁵ Kemp v. Rubin, 69 N.Y.S. 2d 680

³⁶ Ibid.

plaintiffs, Harold Kemp and others, sued to enjoin Ms. Rubin from making this sale. The court found for the plaintiffs.

Again, while the court upheld the legality of the restrictive covenant, it appears that the facts on the ground no longer reflected these covenants. The demographic changed, and, covenants or no covenants, Addisleigh was no longer exclusively white. Justice Livingston noted in his opinion that 45 homes in Addisleigh already belonged to African-Americans. Thus, in the five years since the Dury case, change was afoot in Addisleigh. The intolerance and stupidity of bigotry was so virulent that by 1952, a mere five years after the Kemp case, *Our World* magazine (a periodical that catered to African-Americans) ran a twelve-page photo spread about “Tiny Addisleigh, swanky suburb [that] is home of nation’s richest and most gifted Negroes.”³⁷ Addisleigh had become nearly exclusively black.

The transition was not smooth. An August 1, 1946 article in the *New York Times* reported that Charles A. Collier, Jr. executive secretary of the City-Wide Citizens Committee on Harlem (the gentleman who delivered the amicus brief in the Kemp case), and a resident of Addisleigh, found a note under his door that read “District of St. Albans. Warning to Negroes entering St. Albans. Beware.

³⁷ “St. Albans New York’s Gold Coast, *Our World*, September 1952, page unknown.

Signed. Klu Klux Klan.”³⁸ The very next day, the *Times* reported that the note turned out to have been perpetrated by three thirteen-year-old boys (two of whom were taken into custody), and that no connection to the Klan was established.³⁹ Nonetheless, the incident is evidence of the anxiety and fear that swept through Addisleigh as its racial composition changed. During the period of transformation, some whites refused to sell to African-Americans, while others did, at prices of \$10,000 - \$20,000 over their value. These white homeowners realized stunning profits as they fled the neighborhood.

THE RICH AND FAMOUS (AND THE NOT-SO-RICH AND FAMOUS)

In 1946, William “Count” Basie, the world-famous jazz pianist, organist, arranger, and orchestra leader purchased a home at 174-27 Adelaide Road in Addisleigh Park. At that time, Basie’s fame was renowned, and he was at the height of his career. The Count Basie Orchestra contained some of the era’s most legendary performers, including Lester Young, Buck Clayton, Jo Jones, and many others. Prior to moving to Addisleigh Park, Basie lived at 1274 Fifth Avenue (at East 109th Street), in Harlem.⁴⁰ While no hard evidence exists to explain the Count’s move, one can only surmise that his reasons were the same as anybody who chooses to move to the suburbs: space, greenery, solitude, peace, and

³⁸ “FBI Acts on Klan In Seven States,” *New York Times*, August 1, 1946, p. 14.

³⁹ “Two Boys, 13, Held in Klan ‘Warnings,’” *New York Times*, August 2, 1946, p. 15.

⁴⁰ New York City Property Records, 174-27 Adelaide Road deed, liber 5293, p. 391.

privacy. “After rugged road trips, performances before thousands, they love to return to the privacy of home. There they become just ordinary American citizens with families, hobbies, and problems,” notes *Our World* magazine, speaking of some of Addisleigh’s famous residents, in a 1952 article about the neighborhood.

Another 1946 arrival to Addisleigh was Lena Horne. Before this she lived in St. Albans just over the Addisleigh border at 173-13 Sayres Avenue.⁴¹ The singer, star of stage and screen, winner of eight Grammy awards, lived in Addisleigh Park until 1962.

Count Basie and Lena Horne appear to have been trend-setters, as subsequently many lights from the fields of entertainment, sports, and politics were attracted to Addisleigh Park. Some of the notables who arrived in Addisleigh included Roy Campanella (1948); W.E.B. DuBois and his wife, Shirley Graham (1947); Jackie Robinson (1949); Mercer Ellington (1948); Illinois Jacquet (1950); Ella Fitzgerald (1949); and Cootie Williams (1947).⁴²

From the late 1940s onward, Addisleigh certainly developed a reputation as the African-American Gold Coast in New York. Yet, much like Strivers’ Row in Harlem, not *all* of the residents of Addisleigh were rich and famous. *Our World* magazine, in its portrait of Addisleigh points out that, “The bulk of

⁴¹ New York City Property Records, 112-45 178th Street, liber 5261, p. 411.

⁴² All of these dates are derived from an examination of the conveyance records for the blocks 10305, 10288, 10303, 10302, 10301, 10289, and 10310 of the City Register, Queens office.

residents are not well-to-do Negroes who ignore price tags when shopping. They are hard-working, thrifty Americans who saved enough money to desert the high rent of Harlem and Brooklyn ghettos. Civil service workers, carpenters, bankers, building contractors, fashion designers, barbers, beauticians, teachers, and liquor salesmen are among its versatile population. Incomes vary from \$1,500 post office employees to \$100,000 executives and entertainers and all have homes.”⁴³ Many of the celebrities did indeed move to Addisleigh from Harlem.

Today, Addisleigh Park remains a desirable, stable, and beautiful area. Contrary to the fears of its early white homeowners, that African-American ownership would lead to plummeting property values, Addisleigh has retained its status.

There are neighborhoods in New York City that, because of their incredible culture and fascinating histories, have become household names. Among these are Harlem and Greenwich Village. Certainly, Addisleigh Park—while small—possesses history and significance to rival these two storied areas. With its history of residents who were legends in their respective fields; the story as to why these individuals chose to live in Addisleigh; the painful and ugly segregationist past; along with the fact that the area is largely intact

⁴³ “St. Albans New York’s Gold Coast,” *Our World*, September 1952, page unknown.

architecturally, make for a remarkable community. Its story should be known, its houses should be admired, its history deserves to be preserved and celebrated. Addisleigh Park has managed to remain mostly immune to the scourge of tearing down. In the year 2008, on the heels of the hottest real-estate market in two decades, Addisleigh appears quite original. Some alterations are apparent, but they are not overwhelming, and are mostly cosmetic. Historically inappropriate alterations and additions are at a minimum. Addisleigh's history is unique, and because so much original fabric exists, the community is in an enviable position. Its history can be experienced first hand. Visitors can walk the same streets that all of the greats did. Addisleigh residents have long been extremely proud of their neighborhood. It is a neighborhood that all New Yorkers would be proud of, if only they knew about it. It is hoped that this report will begin to change that.



(Figure 1) Homes along Murdock Avenue.

Figure 2, Addisleigh Park boundaries

Figure 3, Addisleigh Park context map

Figure 4, "Addisleigh Homes" brochure, published by Rodman & English



Figure 5, home of Gerald English, builder, at 117-01 114th Avenue.



Figure 6 a, b, c, d, e, f: Illustrations of different types of Addisleigh Homes, as illustrated in the “Addisleigh Homes” brochure.



