



FORT GREENE ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

HISTORIC FORT GREENE BROOKLYN

APRIL/MAY 2012

Our Local History Shines at the Navy Yard

BY DANIELLA ROMANO

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The Fort Greene Association

is devoted to historic preservation, neighborhood and park enhancement, as well as cultural, economic and housing advancement throughout the neighborhood of Fort Greene, Brooklyn. To find out more, become a member, renew your membership or to volunteer, visit historicfortgreene.org.

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Save the Date!

FGA NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING AND MIXER

Monday, April 16, 2012
7:00–9:30 pm

Living Green in Fort Greene:
Learn about Fort Greene's
green community programs.



On Veterans Day 2011, the Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation (BNYDC) opened the Brooklyn Navy Yard Center at BLDG 92, the unique exhibition and visitors center that celebrates the Navy Yard's past, present and future, and promotes the role the Yard and its tenants play as an engine for sustainable urban industrial growth.

The architectural project is an adaptive reuse of the 1858 U.S. Marine Commandant's residence, designed by fourth architect of the US Capitol Thomas U. Walter, one founder of the American Institute of Architects. The adaptive reuse of Building 92, its modern extension and exterior landscaping were designed by architects Beyer Blinder Belle and workshop/apd.

BLDG 92 is the Yard's first LEED® project designed to achieve Platinum standard, the highest designation of the U.S. Green Building Council. This design is integrated into an exhibition visitor experience. Sustainability Scavenger Hunt stations throughout the complex identify some of its "green features," including green roofs, a geothermal system for heating and cooling, captured rainwater for the building's plumbing, an adaptively reused 19th Century sewage tunnel as a rainwater holding tank, solar-heated fresh water, recycled construction waste and use of recycled materials in construction.

As a reflection of BNYDC's commitment to local sourcing and job creation, over 20 percent of the construction dollar

value went to local contractors, over 40 percent of the work was performed by minority- and women-owned firms and over 20 percent of the construction workforce came from the surrounding communities. The modern, modular extension was manufactured inside the Yard. Close to twenty other Yard businesses provided services including metal fabrication, exhibit creation, woodworking and manufacturing of the recycled glass countertops.

With exhibits primarily housed in the 1857 U.S. Marine Commandant's Residence, the modern extension is home to Space for Art and Industry, ConstructionKids coming soon, the BNYDC Employment Center and Ted & Honey Café at BLDG 92.

BLDG 92 is open Wednesday to Sunday from 12:00 to 6:00 pm, free. School programs, offered free this year, are booking up quickly. BLDG 92 Talks are offered once a month on a range of topics in its "Tools and Talent" and "History in YOUR Back YARD" series. *New York* magazine just named Navy Yard tours (\$18-30) "Best of New York" in its March 2012 issue.

Publicly accessible and visitor-friendly, BLDG 92 is located on Flushing Avenue between Carlton and Adelphi along the Brooklyn Greenway Initiative's bike and pedestrian path. A free weekend shuttle picks up on the hour in downtown Brooklyn. See more information about visiting and upcoming events at BLDG92.org.

The Saga of St. Felix Street

BY HOWARD PITTSCH



St. Felix Street, April 1916

Once a metal sliver sliced the thorax from the cranium of Marie Antoinette in 1792, one of her trusted aides, Renane St. Felix, felt it prudent to depart from France expeditiously. He hied it to Haiti, rendered assistance to Toussaint L'Ouverture in overthrowing Napoleon's forces to win Haitian independence, and at the same time made a bale of money. When the French returned to Haiti in 1802, however, to banish L'Ouverture, Renane again felt it best to split swiftly with his money and résumé, this time to America. Here he sired several children, one of whom he named Mary Antoinette St. Felix. She married a Navy lieutenant, but died in 1843 at her home in Jay Street, Brooklyn, at the mere age of 23.

From an earlier point in the 1830s, applications arrived frequently at the Common Council of the City of Brooklyn (then in its own right) to open up more streets in the still-farmlands of our borough. Building lots could therefore be divvied up to satiate the nouveaux arrivistes from Manhattan.

In those 1840s, Mary Antoinette St. Felix's brother, John Renane St. Felix, an importing merchant with a business in Hicks Street, had bought property from the heirs of John Jackson—who had lined his own pockets in 1801 by selling land to President John Adams' government for the Brooklyn Navy Yard. This former farmland was west of the present Fort Greene Park in the areas of Raymond and Canton Streets—now Ashland Place and St. Edward's Street respectively. The land was near Myrtle and DeKalb Avenues, approximately where the Brooklyn Hospital buildings are today.

As Fort Greene's land sales advanced southward in the mid-1840s, streets were expanded or newly opened; among them—you guessed it—St. Felix Street. At first it ran from DeKalb Avenue to Fulton Street, and by the early 1850s from Fulton to Hanson Place. Only after 1861 was an application made for the street's extension from Hanson to Atlantic Avenue, the footage now superseded by Atlantic Terminal.

The St. Felix family lived on into the nineteenth century, with one obituary indicating that Felixine Marie Antoinette St. Felix, a daughter of John Renane, died in 1897 as an aged spinster at her home, 41 Ashland Place (now the site of Brooklyn Hospital). Felix itself is an old name — long before the Cat — there being a provincial governor Felix cited in the Good Book of Acts. Yet just where Renane St. Felix, his forebears and ancestors, got their own name is open to conjecture.

Fort Greene's poor little St. Felix Street, and its residents over the years, have known both heaven and hell. With the block from DeKalb to Fulton laid out in 1844 on former farm land, there were a number of Italianate style homes. There were also many carriage houses and stables, from which horse manure's prickly stink vexed the neighbors, who complained that

the stalls were not being cleaned out by 6:00 am as prescribed by law. As the Fulton to Hanson Place block's development followed in 1852, virtually nothing but houses were erected, many of them with front porches to cool residents in the days before air conditioning.

Methodists built a church seating 800 in 1857 at the corner of St. Felix and Hanson Place. The congregation outgrew its pews for 800, but fire laws prevented an expansion of the building, so it was torn down. A second Romanesque-style church by John Mumford followed in 1874, only to have its east wall crack perilously later on.

Meantime, the mighty Brooklyn Academy of Music by Herts and Tallent arose in 1907 at the side of St. Felix, as did Emille Perrot's building in 1921 for the Boyerton coffin factory at the east corner of St. Felix and Lafayette. To grant grace upon the caskets in the showroom, the east wall was sanctified with a set of Gothic-arched clerestory windows—still fitting, perhaps, for the principal's office when the structure was converted to a Seventh Day Adventist School in 1974.

All hell broke loose on St. Felix Street in April 1917. A new tunnel for a subway line 60 feet under the street was shored up with timbers resting on the unstable sands of the old glacial moraine (gathering of prehistoric debris). Kaboom! The entire façade of the east corner house at St. Felix and Hanson Place came sliding down into the cavern, bringing with it Marguerite Shephard, a young Irish woman who had been upstairs stitching shirts at a laundry. And the second Methodist church's walls were so aggravated by this hole-y mess that they ultimately bulged out, necessitating complete destruction of the edifice in 1927. The present building, an Art Deco-Gothic marvel by Lessing Whitford Williams, then arose in 1929.

In 1977 a water main in St. Felix broke, creating an 18-foot lake that flooded BAM, ruining all of its seats and costly stage mechanicals. In 1996, another break made a literal swimming pool in the basement of the Hanson Place Church.

Relentlessly, another main break a year later riled St. Felix residents to profane rage. The street sank in places by some two feet; stoops broke away from doorways; the façade of one house came crashing down; and a void under No. 145 had to be force-fed with concrete grout to prevent its demise. The entire block had to be trenched down about seven feet in a most expensive way, with the subway tunnel recovered by a geotextile grid (imagine a waffle iron slathered with concrete).

Let's hope it all holds!

Dave Dyson: Remaining Connected to the Community

BY NAOMI DICKERSON

Reverend David Dyson (Dave, as he likes to be called), pastor of the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church for eighteen years, created a town hall and center for spiritual support and continued the human rights legacy of the church that adopted him in 1993.

What lead you to the ministry?

I grew up in a sleepy little township just south of Pittsburg that had two primary institutions: football and the Presbyterian church. During high school, seminary interns would come out for training. They were post-grad college types, they played guitars and they sang civil rights songs. This was integrated politically and culturally with church work. It was a breakthrough for me. These were socially conscious role models playing guitars. They taught about the work and ministry of Martin Luther King Jr. I had heard his name, but had not gotten into the roots of non-violent resistance to decades of repression. This captured my imagination as nothing else ever had in my rather sheltered life.

While in my first year of college, Dionne Warwick gave a concert of Burt Bacharach songs. I loved Burt Bacharach. At the end of the concert I was told that Martin Luther King was shot. I had been influenced enough by King to consider the Christian ministry as a vocation. But now I was completely subsumed by the event of his death. Furious when a southern frat brother made a racist remark about his death, my revenge was to commit myself to King's cause and also to his profession. Pittsburg had one of Pennsylvania's seven seminaries, so I enrolled there and at the University of Pittsburg to get a joint Masters in Theology and Public Administration. I was then ordained in 1973.

What were some of the important experiences for your development from that point?

While in the seminary, I got involved in the United Farm Workers movement. Chavez was there and real farm workers were recruiting people to picket grocers who were selling grapes. King had been a big endorser. Delores Huerta, who was a co-founder of the union with Chavez, said to me: "You're not happy here, come to California and work with me and Caesar." I did, I joined the farm workers—went to California as a driver and body guard to Chavez. Driving through the mountains and valleys of California was formative. We worked together intimately for three years and Chavez became like a second father. He was a deeply spiritual Roman Catholic disciple of Ghandi as King was and used the tactics and philosophy of non-violence. From the farm workers I was recruited to the textile workers and stayed twelve years—was on the road with them as strike support, PR, community organizer, union organizer—it was draining work. At the end I wanted to settle down. I had missed a lot of my daughter's growing up.

How did you come to establish your ministry at LAPC?

The legacy of the church was appealing. I am only the seventh pastor since the Civil War. The promise and prospect of this place resurrected me from the desk job at Riverside Church. LAPC was my Garden of Gethsemane, I met Richard Burlage, Selma Jackson and many others. This has been a great group of people—we can go to dinner or a movie. They accepted my involvement in union organizing. Whatever I've done in these forty some years, I've considered it all forms of ministry. Chavez, textile workers, farm workers—this was all forms of ministry.

Was there a time when you felt you had made a wrong choice?

I admired William Slone Coffin, the Yale Chaplain who was an anti-Vietnam war activist and supporter of Dr. Benjamin Spock. He was my mentor during the Vietnam years. I felt the Presbyterian ministry made a mistake in the battle against gay ordination. I thought about going to another denomination, The United Church of Christ, as my mentor did and urged me to do. Last year, President Obama changed this policy. I'm glad this happened before my retirement. Why are we always behind the curve and not ahead of it?

Why is this the case?

This is due to a fundamental misunderstanding about what Christianity is about, worship versus following Christ in his manner of reaching out and being inclusive. For me, the Sermon on the Mount is the Gold standard. The Sermon on the Mount had not a word about what to believe in, only what to do. Three centuries later, the Nicene Creed had not a word about what to do, only what to believe. My ministry has been about taking us back to the Sermon on the Mount and the values and tone adopted in the introduction to the sermon in which Jesus established a preference for the poor, for those who mourn, for the "meek who shall inherit the earth." Jesus was not about starting a religion, but a way of life. LAPC is an example of a new movement within the American Protestantism, the "Emerging Church," that accepts this critique and consists of those who are more interested in what they can do with their lives than in being dictated to.

What leads you to retire at this time?

Keeping up with all responsibilities requires full commitment. I was here eighteen years. The national average is ten. Eighteen years is long enough. I would like to spend time with my grandson, and travel with my wife, Sally. But I will keep some commitments. I'm still on some boards. I chair the Worker's Defense League board. It helps people with unemployment insurance cases. And I work with the Riverside Adult Language Center. This is the largest English language school in the city. I'm on the board of PACC. I'm fond of the Women's Press Collective. It helps low income women develop media skills. I will keep close with labor connections, unions are under attack. I spent time in Central America but I'd like to go to South America. I will be back for some weddings and some baptisms. There is no lack of things to do.



Dave Dyson is the recipient of many awards including the Letelier-Moffit Human Rights Award (1989) shared with the National Labor Committee, the Jose Tomas Mazariego Award, honoring a slain Salvadorian unionist (1991), The Martin Luther King Jr., (1994), the Witherspoon Society award for pastoral leadership (1997), the United Farm Workers of America award (2000), an award from the Cooperative Culture Collective/Juneteenth Committee (2007), and from the Pratt Area Community Council (2010).



FORT GREENE ASSOCIATION

HISTORIC FORT GREENE BROOKLYN

NEXT FORT GREENE ASSOCIATION NEIGHBORHOOD MIXER & MEETING:

Monday, April 16, 7:00-9:30 pm

Ronald Edmonds Learning Center (MS 113)* • 300 Adelphi St. bet. Lafayette and Dekalb

Please visit historicfortgreene.org for meeting detail updates

Topic: **Living Green in Fort Greene**

Learn about the various green programs taking place in Fort Greene, their impact in the community, and how you can benefit from them.

Confirmed Participants Include:

- DK Holland, Bee Hive Host
- Sean Meenan, Owner, Habana Outpost
- Gary Oppenheimer, Founder, AmpleHarvest.org
- Gwen Schantz, Founder & COO, Brooklyn Grange Farm
- Rob Shepherd, Market Manager, Fort Greene GrowNYC

Also meet the members of Fort Greene's Community Gardens: Carlton and Rockwell Brooklyn Bears, Farragut, Greene Garden, Ingersoll, and Walt Whitman

* Why the new locations for Neighborhood Mixers and Meetings? This year the FGA is holding meetings at various locations to give residents the opportunity to explore buildings they may pass all the time but haven't been inside.

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New Scenes

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FIVE GUYS • Fulton Street, corner of Flatbush
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BUFFALO BOSS, 554 Fulton Street bet. Flatbush and Rockwell Place
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ESTATE JEWELS BY GEORGE AND RAF • 111 Lafayette Ave. at S. Oxford
Owners George Yzquierdo and Rafael Medrano carry a wide range of vintage and antique jewelry. Tues-Sun 12-7pm; closed Mondays; at the Brooklyn Flea Sat & Sun 10am-5pm • 917.030484 • estatejewelsbygr.com.

BROOKLYN KIDS • 741 Fulton Street between S. Elliott and S. Portland
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Giving Back

GENEROSITY FROM OUR NEIGHBOR, THE NU HOTEL

Our friends at the NU Hotel had been saving gently used linen taken out of the hotel's rotation but still too good to just throw away; waiting to be put to good use. This March, FGA collected nine large boxes of linens (comforters, blankets, towels, and sheets) for local Fort Greene shelters and residents in need. Special thanks go to Fort Greene SNAP for helping to distribute the linens, and to the NU Hotel for their generous donation. Please visit nuhotelbrooklyn.com and fortgreenesnap.org to learn more about our supporters.

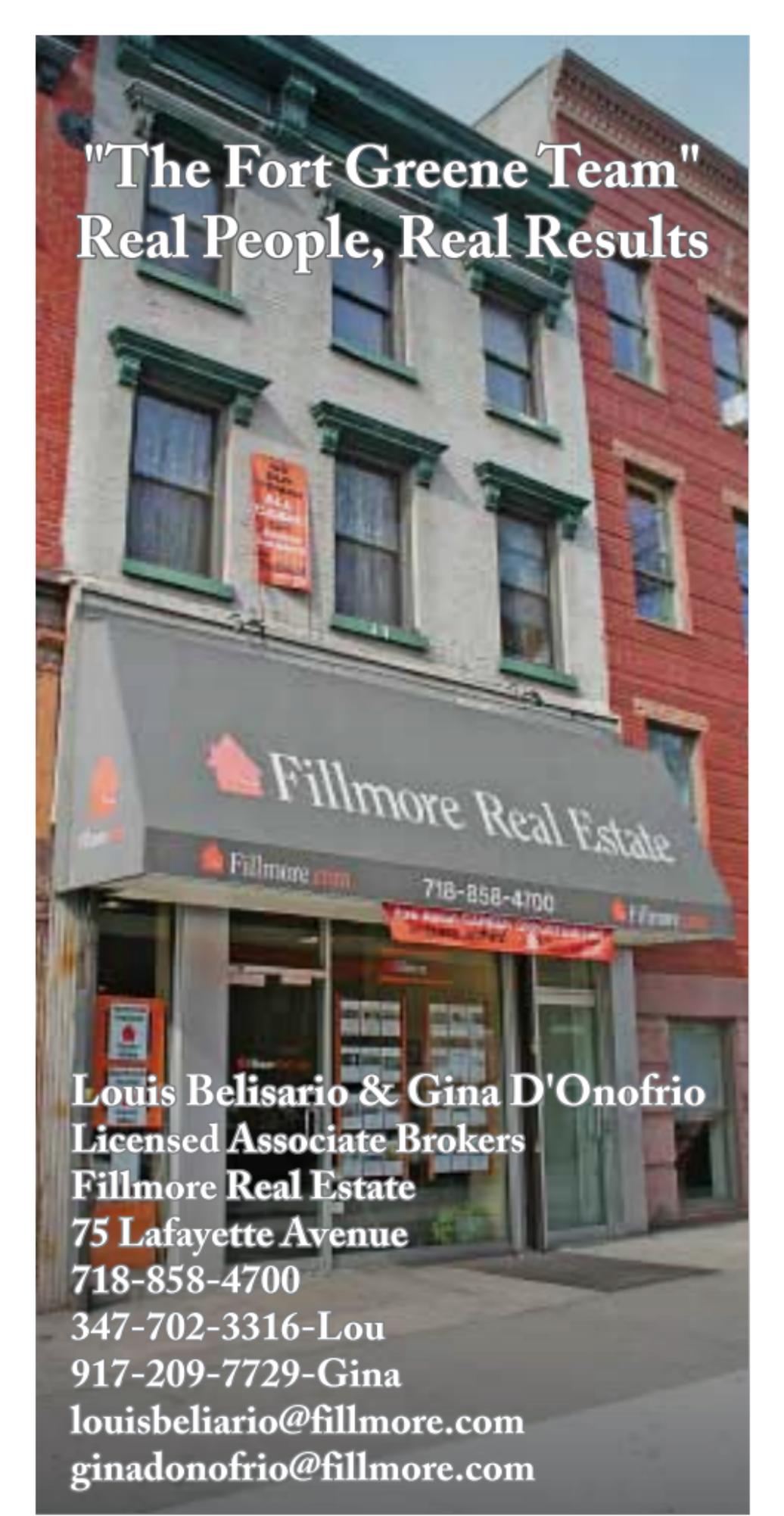
DONATE TO THE BROOKLYN PROM & SCHOLARSHIP PROJECT

Have any black tie or cocktail attire that you won't wear again? Or some gently used accessories? Please consider donating these items to provide financially-challenged teens in Brooklyn with prom attire. To donate your special occasion dresses, suits, shoes, accessories and unopened beauty products, or to make a monetary donation for tuxedo and suit rentals, please contact 877.329.9953 or info@brooklynpromproject.org.

MALE GUEST SPEAKERS NEEDED FOR MENTORING PROGRAM

The Young Men's Initiative at Ingersoll Community Center is a mentor program for young men. Saturdays 1pm-3pm, March 17th to June 30th, for 5th to 9th graders. The program consists of community service, workshops, trips and an engineering project of building go-carts, with the goal of achieving a mindset that anything is possible if they set their mind to it. If interested in speaking about your experiences, please contact Samantha Johnson at 718.522.5051 or sjohnson@universitysettlement.org.

For more about the FGA's giving back initiatives, please visit historicfortgreene.org. While there, please take a moment to become a contributing member of the FGA, or renew your membership. Your financial support is needed—we can't do it without you!



"The Fort Greene Team"
Real People, Real Results

Louis Belisario & Gina D'Onofrio
Licensed Associate Brokers
Fillmore Real Estate
75 Lafayette Avenue
718-858-4700
347-702-3316-Lou
917-209-7729-Gina
louisbeliario@fillmore.com
ginadonofrio@fillmore.com



The Fort Greene Association House Tour

May 5, 2012

Advance Ticket Sales Only

house tour select

visit www.HistoricFortGreene.org for details



LEE SOLOMON

Senior Vice President, Director

Licensed Associate Real Estate Broker

718-399-4105

lsolomon@bhsusa.com

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d: 718.210.4015

f: 212.415.6029

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65 Lafayette Avenue, Brooklyn NY, 11217

The Brooklyn Real Estate Specialist