

Kelly Carroll for NYPAP

Inspired by Grassroots Stories: Community Architectural Advocacy

James McMenamin and Jennifer Ochoa – Elmhurst History and Cemeteries Preservation Society

July 21, 2021

Brad Vogel: Okay, my name is Brad Vogel and I am the Executive Director of the New York Preservation Archives Project, also known as NYPAP. We are all about the history of the preservation movement in New York City. Now, a lot of people think that means that we are about buildings. We are about historic buildings and architecture. We're also about historic neighborhoods and I think most importantly, we are also about people, because so often in New York city's history, those historic neighborhoods and historic buildings would not be there if it were not for the people who actually do the work to advocate for these very special places. So tonight, it's really my pleasure to introduce a brand-new series that NYPAP is putting on and we have a lot of help in doing so, and I want to mention one person particular who's here with us tonight and that's Jeanette Lazo, who is our Jeffe Fellow. So, thank you Jeanette for all of your work and helping to put this together.

For the new series, it's called: Inspired by Grassroots Stories: Community Architectural Advocacy. Now, that's a lot of words, but what it boils down to is: this series of programs is giving you a chance to sit in a sort of unique chance to sit in on some group oral histories with neighborhood activists who have actually done this work of advocating for historic preservation at that intersection of neighborhood and community and preservation. So, that's what this series is all about and tonight we'll be hearing from some great folks in Elmhurst and they have done all kinds of things we probably won't have enough time to cover everything they've worked on, but we're really looking forward to it.

Brad Vogel: I do want to say one special thanks as well to the New York State Council on the Arts, or NYSCA, as many of you know it. They really have come through to support this series, actually being done in conjunction with another series of oral histories that you'll be hearing more about on our site, NYPAP.org, which is funded by the Gerry Charitable Trust, but that's a separate parallel track of oral histories.

I also wanted to thank Pat Reisinger who has been a great support to our efforts and really helped initiate the idea for this, and also funds our Reisinger Scholar who helps out with NYPAP in a variety of ways. Now, I also wanted to acknowledge the Historic Districts Council because HDC has done work over the years to lift up some of the neighborhoods that will be talking with in the series through their Six to Celebrate program, which is also a program that's funded by the New York State Council on the Arts, and disco so thanks to HDC for sort of helping to pave the way for this.

Tonight, there will be no direct questions because Kelly Carroll, who I will introduce shortly here, is our moderator, I am so glad to say. Kelly is just a force for preservation and for education about preservation, so I look forward to introducing her shortly, but Kelly is going to be moderating tonight. If you have questions, feel free to put them in the chat. I will then feed some of those to Kelly, and if she has time or the bandwidth if it fits in, she may ask those of our panelists tonight.

Kelly is also going to tell you more about some of the other programs that we have coming up, so you can stay tuned for when those drop us on the calendar. But, Kelly Carroll is an independent preservation consultant, she is also an instructor at NYU and as many of you know she is a proud resident of Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. So, without further ado I would love to introduce her to you: Kelly Carroll. Take it away, Kelly!

Kelly Carroll: Thank you so much Brad, and I want to thank NYPAP: you, Brad Vogel and Jeanette Lazo, who I am meeting for the first time tonight I guess on Zoom. Hello, Jeanette! for this opportunity to, you know, talk more about our history of our communities' preservation campaigns. And before we jump in tonight and speak with the Elmhurst History and Cemeteries Preservation Society, Jennifer and James have graciously joined us this evening, I do want to say that this is the first in a series of these very special talks that we're having. And there are going to be two in August, and keep an eye on your inbox. But for right now, I'll tell you that the next one is going to be on August 3<sup>rd</sup> and will be having a conversation with the East 25th Street Historic District Initiative in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, a very new historic district designated during the pandemic. And then at the end of August, on August 25<sup>th</sup>, we're going to be having a conversation with the Mount Morris Park Community Improvement Association up in Central Harlem. We'll be talking about the early campaign to designate the first historic district in that part of Harlem as well as the extension that was designated a few years ago. So, with those announcements, I will introduce Jennifer and James and then I'm going to share my screen, so that we have some imagery to look at tonight.

Jennifer Ochoa is a neighborhood activist advocating against injustices through education and preservation and James McMenamin is the vice president of both the Elmhurst History and Cemeteries Preservation Society and the Newtown Civic Association, he is a lifelong resident of Elmhurst, conducts walking tours and writes on topics of history and the community. So, I'm thrilled to have both of them here with us tonight.

I'm going to share my screen so that we can go into the beginning of the questions I have. So, actually, this is great because New York City is a big place and we should all know exactly where Elmhurst is. So, I hope everyone in the meeting tonight knows where the Empire State Building is. If you don't, another point of reference could be LaGuardia Airport, which is right here, and Elmhurst is this neighborhood right here.

So, with that, my first question for James and Jennifer is: you are a relatively new community or preservation organization, and this is your logo, which has been recently changed. There used to be an apple on your logo, can you please tell the group tonight, why you have a tree and a stream on your logo?

James McMenamin: Jennifer, would you like to begin?

Jennifer Ochoa: Basically, when we started, we were...we didn't know whether or not we should go with something very symbolic. We were looking for something symbolic of Elmhurst, and what was something typical or iconic of old Newtown was the Pippin. The Pippin apple. So, we were considering using that as our symbol of representation, but as we dug in more and more into the history of Newtown, Middleburg—to what today is Elmhurst—we decided that, since it has so much history and our job was basically not only to preserve it but to educate. And so much life has come into this into the community that the tree of life and learning just seemed more appropriate than just the apple itself.

And the little stream basically represents the Horse Brook and also it's a representation of all of the area within...the water streams within our area, which was surrounding the whole Newtown which brought in life, basically. So, that's the representation for the symbolism behind our image.

Kelly Carroll: Excellent, thank you. And, it's very...of all the neighborhood groups that I've worked with over the years, I knew of one group that was certainly dedicated to only cemeteries, but why did you all choose to specifically include cemeteries in your organization's name, instead of just the Elmhurst history and preservation society?

James McMenamain: Well, there are a number of old cemeteries in Elmhurst including St. James, the Dutch Reformed of Newtown Church, now called the Reformed Church of Newtown and, you know, dotting the landscape. So, these are landmarks of Elmhurst. People associate Elmhurst with several of the old churches and the cemeteries, even a few of the cemeteries, which have now been razed. So, we also would like to pay homage to a lot of the old settlers who began here with their families and started a farming community and businesses and including the old Newtown cemetery which is at Newtown playground right near the Queens Center Mall. And we'll be having an upcoming event—I believe it will be scheduled within the next couple of months—where we'll be depositing...reburying some bones that were discovered during the last excavation during the renovation of that park and we'll be updating signage, including, you know, more detailed signage with names of early settler families, so people that go to these locations really will get a more in-depth appreciation of what was before, and what...and learn the story. Rather than just walking through and having, "Here is the church, blah, blah, blah..." and giving certain dates, we like to give more of a thorough examination of everywhere we walk and show people during our walking tours.

Kelly Carroll: And you all have done a tremendous job at public education and all of your outreach and in the few short years that you've been an organization. So, just to back up a little bit, I've heard the name Newtown a few times now, and I do know that your current organization was created, because it was an offshoot from the Newtown Civic Association. Would you like to explain to me what events occurred that made you decide to branch off and create Elmhurst History and Cemeteries Preservation Society, and also explain to our guests why Elmhurst and Newtown is interchangeable to an extent?

James McMenamain: Can I begin with this one? Well, several years ago, we met. Jennifer grew up several blocks for me and, you know, we were part of the Newtown Civic Association which addresses a lot of community concerns...quality of life, you know, which is a bimonthly, has bimonthly meetings. However, our interests really dealt also with history and over-development and seeing a lot of structures that we loved you know, over time, walking through the neighborhood being demolished.

And Marialena Giampino is the lady who kind of spurred us on to form this group, along with James Ng. I just dove right in, I just felt so excited to be part of this because I am someone since childhood that has been collecting clippings from papers and photos, and you know, that's why I don't want to move the laptop around so you see this apartment too much, with stacks of things so, but anyway, yes. Newtown Civic Association...but there is also a group called the Newtown Historical Society, which is based in Ridgewood so the name we chose to go with this Elmhurst History and Cemeteries Preservation.

Although, Newtown...you see, the town of Newtown was very wide. I mean, modern-day Rego Park, Woodside, Jackson Heights, Elmhurst, you know, it spread out, but the actual sort of village of Newtown seemed to be centered right in modern day Elmhurst. And it began in 1652 as Middleburg right on the

area of modern-day Queens Boulevard and Broadway. So, the name Elmhurst did not come about until 1896 by a developer and his brothers Cord Meyer.

He thought it was you know, an attractive name. Elm trees and also to disassociate from Newtown Creek, and the noxious fumes of Newtown Creek, which is actually not that near Elmhurst. That borders Long Island City, Maspeth and Greenpoint, Brooklyn. But to come up with this new name, which actually at the time was controversial, from what I understand, and a lot of citizens were trying to rally against the name and wanted to keep Newtown. But now we have the two remaining...the two reminders are Newtown High School, of course, and also at the Grand Avenue train stop, underneath it says Newtown. So, that was an early name from I believe 1664 to 1896.

Kelly Carroll: Yes, so this is, not many not many neighborhoods in New York City can say they have... they're in their third century of history. And so, these bones that you all keep finding out in what was Newtown is not surprising. It's a very old neighborhood, it's a very old settlement in the middle of Queens and so, I know that one of the vestiges of this very old part of Queens where there was over remaining Dutch farm, which was last updated in the 1860s to look like this, and I know right before your organization was put together, that there were...there was a concerted effort by Newtown Civic Association, which I believe I, I know, Marialena was involved with to save the Horse Brook House. So, would you guys like to share a little bit about this, because I think when I'm looking at your timeline that this was absolutely a catalyst for the formation of your current group.

James McMenamin: Absolutely. Jennifer, would you like to start this one?

Jennifer Ochoa: You can start it off and then I'll continue.

James McMenamin: Okay, yes for me personally, luckily I had taken a few of old couple of photos of the what became known as the Horse Brook House I think in 2012 or...before everything bad happened and it was something magical. It's a gorgeous, you know something that was almost an illusion, like it didn't belong in this era and people would gaze up at it and say, "Wow, that is something out of the movies!" and really it was something precious to Elmhurst citizens—longtime citizens—because it was almost a source of pride to have this wonderful house still remaining and from our understanding it was two sisters, McCarthy sisters, and the second sister had passed, she was into her 90s, and it was the house was sold to a developer and subsequently had a fire and our hope was to have the damage repaired, to have the house restored and landmarked.

And we also dug deeper into its history, because obviously it was not a 1920 house and other documentation said 18...I believe 1852. However, you know from taking photos and since the house was a, you know, after the after the incident, you know, even the seller, I had taken photos and I guess all these misshapen stones so obviously the part of the house, or even of course the seller must have dated back to the early 18th century, because those misshapen stones and the foundation were far older. So, it really was a piercing in the heart to see this house in this condition and the fear that it would be destroyed.

So, we got together: Marialena, myself, and then you know Jennifer and a few others and we tried to have our councilman and also a senator, you know, help us and we appeared on some media and I wrote an article about the Horse Brook House and, you know, it was very devastating. But all along that side, which was the Horse Brook many of those were old, old houses and this was by far the oldest and

now there are two level brick structures with the little balconies and they're all kind of lined up right where these homes were, and it really was the last link of colonial Newtown remaining. I mean, we have obviously some of the old churches and cemeteries, but this beautiful house, the structure, no longer exists. So, it's hard to really have people come around and give links to the past for that it's still there, especially the lack of residential when we've lost, many of them within the last 40...30-40 years, and this was like the last...that you know really a hard piercing, you know, feeling, you know that happened.

Kelly Carroll: Right, there was evidence that this was...the land that this house was on had certain modifications that went all the way back to around 1700 so you're right in that this was a direct link to the community's beginnings. Jennifer, did you have anything to add about Horse Brook?

Jennifer: Yes, and like you said before, this was the catalyst that pushed us to form the offshoot of group of the history group because we thought naively that as part of the Civic and us writing letters and reaching out to the politicians that the house would be saved, because of this historic value and unfortunately it wasn't and we learned our lesson, it was a hard lesson to learn, and as we got united and we basically learned how to do things and advocate for our community, we began to learn more about the rules, how this functions, and actually it in a way it lessened that that sense of defeat and loss of not having a voice and in a way that empowered us to become more active, more actively active as activists and advocates for the community and every time we see something that, or we learn new information about our community or history or help others, it just gives us a I don't know it, at least for me it just fuels me more and it just gives me more of a push to continue and pass on this history, not just to keep it here or just you know, let people do whatever with it, we need to pass it forward and spread this knowledge.

Kelly Carroll: Yeah, a lot of preservationists are inducted because of a loss unfortunately, that's not a great way to grow our membership is it? But on a happy note, around the same time in 2015 there was a campaign to get the Old St. James Parish Hall landmarked as well, and at the Landmarks Commission said no, and then they eventually said yes in 2017. Would you guys like to tell that story, which I think is a great one? It's always a wonderful story when the Landmarks Commission changes its mind.

James McMenamin: Okay, yeah, this was a major push by the Newtown Historical Society, and we thank them so much for that. I think there might have been some inconsistency or discrepancies that the landmarks had in their report, as far as alterations because if you look at photos from 1900 early 1900s, I mean, it's...it hasn't really changed that much since that time. There had been a steeple and outfitted in the front with the little sort of porch but, as you can tell, this is the 1734 to 1735 structure that has been there—so it was old during Revolutionary times!—and, and for that reason itself, I mean...well, General William Howe who had his headquarters nearby was here and Lord Cornwallis and a future King, King William the Fourth came here when he was only 14 years of age. So, this structure, this church was the only one left unscathed by the British troops who were encamped all the way up and down Broadway into Woodside and up and down modern Queens Boulevard.

There were several thousand British troops and they used the Dutch Reformed Church across the way. They used the First Presbyterian Church—which they basically destroyed—they used a lot of the churches, you know, for kindle wood and took furniture and basically were very abusive because...they took livestock and, you know, made themselves at home. But, of course, since this was called Saint James, was part of Anglican, Church of England originally, and so they came here to worship and pay

respect, but they did not destroy or cause damage to the church. So, it is astonishing that it has lasted throughout all of this time and weathering and certainly it is a source of pride in the community.

Kelly Carroll: Absolutely, and it's also your community's newest landmark. It was designated in 2017 and it was your organization that brought this building to the attention of the Historic Districts Council, and we were part of the push to help get it landmarked. I am...I'm just happy that it's there. But, we're hoping for new landmarks in Elmhurst soon.

So, I'm going to shift gears to one of your many cemeteries. This is the African burial ground on a map, old Insurance map and then also via Google Maps satellite today. Would you guys like to talk about the importance of this and where it is in terms of its preservation stage or strategy right now?

James McMenamin: Jennifer?

Jennifer Ochoa: Ok. From its original... from I guess it would be my left side, the map shows like a triangle shape of what the original plot of land was. If I'm correct, if I remember correctly, it was a plot of land that was given or sold to at a lower price from farmers to...for African American gentleman who started a school and church on this plot of land and present day it borders basically Corona Avenue onto on the front end, runs to the back to the Long Island Railroad, and it was from one block, from one corner of a block to the other. As the...I guess with progress, and lots being sold and then with the church moving by 1930 it was already de-mapped by the city by 1930. The church moved to its present location in Jackson Heights.

Kelly Carroll: In Corona.

Jennifer Ochoa: In Corona, and the church itself no longer stands on there. You have some businesses and there was even a factory—the Peerless factory—there, but the back part, the back area was still untouched. There was still, the cemetery was there and then back in...if I'm not...help me with this James was it 2011?

James McMenamin: Yes.

Jennifer Ochoa: Yes, when the...when the developers were excavating, they found the remains of what came to be known as the Lady in the Iron Coffin. And that brought back much information. Like, it opened much curiosity and people to advocate for the preservation of this plot of land. And it's very important because it was one of the few, perhaps, one out of three in our area, aside from Manhattan and in Brooklyn of a community of vibrant African Americans who were active and who were emancipated or free, and who were active in the community and who, who had a history here, and that was back in in Newtown.

So, and this was the burial ground. Another thing that I also like to highlight also when talking about this is back then, when an African American person did not belong to a church, they were not allowed to be buried in a cemetery or a holy ground. So, this was very important for many reasons, because it's a try it's a history of the African American experience here in the United States. Also, to the people who were buried there, their lives, their history. We owe something to them out of respect and also, we have to have a more inclusive history, whether it's good, it's bad, it's ugly, it's tragic, but we need to include everything and we need to preserve the history and teach our community, our younger generations—even older generations—about it.

Unfortunately, no one in the community had remembered, recalled, or even knew that there was a cemetery there. That there had been a church there. And it came to a surprise to everyone. The majority of people had heard urban legends about ghosts being around in the area, when it was a factory. Things of that nature, but not much. All around Elmhurst, what was back then Newtown, they had family plots burial grounds, but nothing like this, like the cemetery and we also have to take into consideration that this church, the A.M.E. St. Mark's and the African American what is it, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, they had their school, the church and it was next to what later became Newtown High School. I'm...James what was the teacher, the person who taught at the...?

James McMenamain: James W Pennington.

Jennifer: Exactly, and his story on its own is it's something that we should be taught in history classes and in part of our American history and his whole rise as and helping in the African American community as well as an American in history should be taught and also with their struggle to preserve the church, many people had come to speak on their behalf, to raise funds for the church. What was the the name of the other activists, James?

James McMenamain: Booker T Washington.

Jennifer: Yes.

James McMenamain: He spoke at the First Presbyterian, on the boulevard, which was the fourth incarnation of that church, to try to drum up support and raise funds for the St Mark's and A.M.E., yes.

Kelly Carroll: Yes, so this area...there have been...There were there were burials here. The graveyard was established in 1828 and there, there are still burials in this plot of land. So that's the key factor to take away, is that there are still hundreds of people on this plot of land, and I want to know—before we move on to our last topic which is the Janta House—what was the last thing that the Landmarks Preservation Commission communicated to the group about the significance of this site?

Jennifer: So, basically, to my understanding, recollection the site itself, it was still under review and there was a situation in which they were considering the idea that much had been altered and the first study that had been done, which stated that it had, there were estimating over about 300 remains still interred in the area, but that that was not...supposedly, not an accurate estimate. And, that with the constructions that occurred throughout the decades from it being razed: the back part having private homes being built, the front side facing Corona Avenue—storefronts being put up—and then ultimately in the mid-20th century, the factory, the Peerless factory that built machine parts and stuff for World War Two, that much of the area had already been disturbed. The remains, if any, were very few and it came to a point that they were feeling that it wasn't much there since, as a community and, as a group we kept pushing for and with the help of the HDC and our council person, the church...we also addressed the church and we allied with them in order to preserve something of it or have anything done.

The church came into talks with the developer and they're holding another study and the last information that I got was that they had come to an understanding if any remains were to be found, and I think it's basically they found some around the borders, according to them, but very few. They will be put together back in the area where they were found, and they would build. They were going to

continue with the building the construction of, I think, is a three or four story building—something like that—and they were designate, I think, one floor as an educational or community center for the church.

Kelly Carroll: Got it. Yeah, I just...I think if this effort—this early of a freed African American burial ground—if it were anywhere else, would have absolutely been a landmark, especially because Brinckerhoff Cemetery in Queens not far from here does not have any extant stones and it is indeed a landmark site so...

Jennifer: Can I add some more?

Kelly Carroll: Of course, this is for you.

Jennifer: Yes, the thing is that we tend to go and we're always checking up on all our sites and our places in Elmhurst and we continue to go to the site and before it was left open and the developers had actually rented out the area to truckers, which would come and leave their trucks there and that further disturbed the area. So, they actually were damaging the area more. So, the time that we went as a group on our own to photograph, document...we found pieces, we even found flint. Original pieces of flint. Bricks from, that were over 100 years old, that we actually were able to look up online—thank goodness for the Internet—we have all this information and even pieces of china. A little piece of china that Marialena was able to find, and we just can't believe that the City would just disregard the history and the meaning behind this and just say it's not enough.

It seems that sometimes the reports change to reflect more the needs or the interests of the developers and sometimes of what really the correct things should be done—morally and ethically—and that's why one of the reasons that I wanted to participate in this was just like to give the people initiative. Sometimes it may not go and seem that it's right, but just to continue with it, and something good will come out. At least with the, with the church, even though the church congregation is divided on it, the elders wanted to maintain that as sacred soil, as a sacred lot and maintain it. The younger generation decided—and they're not that young—there are people who are between 40s and 50s decided that an educational center would be best. And, basically our council person suggested that we go and either protest on our own or let the church basically continue with what was there right because, even though the land belongs to the developers and they could do whatever they want with it, the church were the owners of the remains in the...on the land and by law, under these circumstances, the development, the developers didn't have to address the needs of the church.

So, I guess, in a way, it's a good thing that they were able to come to some kind of agreement. But, unless it's...but at least it's a learning experience for the whole community, because this should not have occurred, and this should have been preserved. This definitely should have been preserved, especially now with more awareness coming in, to the lack of the knowledge that we have as a society have our own history and coming to terms with our own past. I think this would have been very beneficial to our community and acknowledging our past and accepting the differences and the vast variety and the diversity of history and cultures within our community.

Kelly Carroll: We're going to go to the Janta House next. So, I'm going to introduce that because Jennifer just ended by saying how diverse this community is and, you know, this this area of Queens is chock full of what we call cultural landmarks and cultural landmarks are gaining more steam, I would say, as our society reflects on what we value. And sometimes what we value doesn't necessarily withstand the test



of time, and isn't going to look exactly like it was when it was built. Or sometimes, places' period of significance is associated with the person, so I would love to hear about your current campaign about the Walentyna and Alexander Janta house. Brad, if you can ask James to speak and then Jennifer?

Jennifer Ochoa: While they're doing that, I'll just give you a little...as activists, these are the things that we do in order to do the protests and rallies. And I have them up, just in case of any emergency, we can just get them and go out and do this. This is...the posters that we made with the children of the neighborhood when we did the Save Janta House rally.

You know, this is a good way of uniting the neighborhood and educating them and, and this has just been...honestly, this one project of saving the house has been, I think, the best one. In terms of really learning, like learning about history because we've gone so much, and you know, the thing of what they say about six degrees of separation? Yes. We have come in contact—my son is very he's 12 years old, and he and his father are very interested in the Second World War—we had gone to museums and you see things, and things in museums and sometimes in books seem so distant or so cold, but when you come in contact with something tangible or an individual, you become so connected with that. And that human connection is very important for the understanding and appreciation of history. And this project has made this has made history come to life.

Kelly Carroll: I like that you are able to look back on your campaigns, as a group and see how you've learned from past campaigns. That's so neat to hear about the evolution of that.

What I find very inspiring and I'm looking forward to more of is that recently the Landmarks Preservation Commission has moved forward with embracing more cultural landmark designations. They have recently designated the Truesdell House in downtown Brooklyn which was an Underground...very likely an Underground Railroad site, site of Abolitionists, and they have designated Conference House Park, which was a known burial ground of eight generations of Native American people and they are moving towards designating houses that may not be your most beautiful brownstone. They may not be the most intact farmhouse, how Horse Brook was. But with the Janta House, what we have is a cultural landmark in every sense, and the Commission did say that the house may merit preservation and when James comes back in, I'll let him speak about why this house is so important.

What was the last correspondence that you had from the Landmarks Commission, Jennifer, regarding the status of this house?

Jennifer: Yeah, the last information that we got from the Landmark was that they were reviewing... basically, that it was under review, and we're just waiting for it to be calendared, and that's basically it.

Kelly Carroll: Got it. James can you hear us?

James McMenamain: Yes, I can hear you now! I never went through that before.

Kelly Carroll: Thank you everyone for your patience. So James, Jennifer just briefed us about how the Commission said the house is under review, but I would love for you to...can you explain why this house is so important to the...not just to Elmhurst, but to our country?

James McMenamain: I would say it's so urgent to save this house. I mean, it just represents so much for this immigrant couple who were just titans of humanitarianism. And, how much they went through, how

devoted they were to their causes. Mrs. Janta—who lived to 107—this woman accomplished so much in her life, altruistically. You know, she was...I'm sure everyone can read her life story and learned about all she did with total humility.

According to her family, she was had quite a sense of humor and would kind of downplay her role in history, and until you know, perhaps the last several years of her life, she understood that she did have a legacy, you know, and it really is a tremendous, you know, piece of...not just of Elmhurst, but for anyone to learn this story, And also for Mr. Janta, Alexander Janta, who passed away in 1974. He also was a renowned international journalist who interviewed many historical figures and he did not need to be active in the war, but he was...he was wounded and was a prisoner in a camp for an entire year.

So, it shows their strength of character and their will and the determination to live for the benefit of others. And also they were political in the fact that Mr. Janta to had arranged to save I believe they're called the Wawel Treasures, which were moved to Toronto and then brought back to Poland, in spite of the political climate. It was just felt that they belonged to the Polish people, so they did everything for the Polish people, but at the same time, it was for all about...for education, they collected manuscripts and rare books and maps and that was their passion. You know, and five or four garages behind it was where they held a lot of their storage, you know.

So, this house itself dates back to 1911. It belonged to a plot that was a Christian Meyer, the brother of Cord Meyer, and you don't see examples like these anymore. I mean, now we're just looking at looking at 1930s houses and saying they're rare but here's a 1911 example, and you know, it really is a beautiful house, especially when you go inside the attic. It's an attic with a little kitchen and a sink, and downstairs and it's a huge basement and there were all little aspects of their life still remaining before it had been cleared out. So, the intentions of the developer are to demolish and we hopefully want to prevent that. We've had several rallies there, I wrote a couple of articles, we've had the media out there to bring attention to this, we've had letters of support from Poland and elsewhere, and including my sixth grade teacher, Mr. Straszinski.

Even in his health in his 70s, he came by the other day last week and was texting me, but I did I was occupied and unable to see him, but somebody drove him by. And for a man who is ill of health, he wrote a beautiful support letter a year ago, you know, in 24 hours. And that's why we say, "Come on people!" you know, if you really hear the story, you will fall in love with this story, and you will admire these great people. Write a support letter, you know, and send it to the Chair of the LPC to demand that this be further looked at and calendared before there's any further any damage or anything to this property that should be sacred ground.

Kelly Carroll: I agree with you, and it wasn't stated, but the most significant contribution of the couple was Walentyna, was at the heart of the Polish Resistance during World War Two and she translated into English, documents from the Polish underground. Jan Karski's reports—which were the first reports of the presence of concentration camps in occupied Poland—and also what was going on in the Warsaw Ghetto. Her translations into English really let the world, the Allied cause know what was really going on over there when no one knew yet. You know, both of them being of Polish extraction, we don't have any landmarks in New York City that are residential landmarks that can speak to the history of World War Two. And I can't think of a country that was more ravaged during World War Two other than Poland. Why do you think that it would be...why do you think this house should be landmarked, even despite its alterations? Do you see that as a problem?

Jennifer Ochoa: If I may say, the alterations, if any, are very few. So, I don't see that as a problem deal, the main alteration that was done was the front, and that was with the widening of the street. So, they had to modify the entrance. Aside from that, I think culturally and historically it has great significance in even in the human aspect, just as a story itself of the human, I mean of the couple. Because what they gave was not only for the Polish people, not only for the people of Elmhurst. Their sacrifices were for all the people of the world, of this world, and it should be documented what they sacrificed was so much.

You have to understand that Mr. Janta was a man who came from a very well renowned family, almost like a blue blood. Their history dates back even to, I think, the time of the Crusades. That's how far back. Mrs. Janta's family was well to do, she was well-educated. They did not have to partake in in the war, they could have escaped. They could have done so many things, but they went on.

Mrs. Janta lost her younger sister in the war and her brother-in-law. She never really got over that. Mrs Janta also, he was touring the world doing reports. He was very well known for his reports and writings. He had already gone around the world. By the time he was 40, he had gone around the world, I think, two- or three-times doing information writing, and all this stuff and he participated during the World War and they did so much.

And like you had said, with the Jan Karski, which Mrs. Janta...no one ever knew about her participation in in the war and her being the voice of the underground radio, Polish radio "Swiat", which means "dawn" and everything that she did because she was very, very humble. And she always wanted to highlight the Polish history in history. But, also the work that her husband did, she did not feel...she felt more as his support system. And she was very humble about that and she wanted to preserve his history. And that's when the more we spoke about and spoke to her—because she was my neighbor—and she saw me grow up, honestly, and when I came to the realization that it was the same person that I had met when I was a small child, it was just amazing to me I couldn't believe how, you know, her age... she was 107, and everything that she had accomplished.

What they did, they came here, they...even after the war, they kept on giving of themselves to the community at large, assisting about 40 women who had been prisoners in the concentration camps, they were able to help them rehabilitate here and give them health aide and help them set up, set up new lives here in the United States. They were able to preserve artifacts of Polish history and send them back to Poland. They were not afraid to speak out on what they thought and they felt that above all, history and the arts and culture should be preserved.

Mr. Janta had gone back to Poland, and this was during the time when Communism was rising in Poland, and he wrote about it, not in a political way, but more in the aspect of more of a humanitarian way, and acknowledging the history and the better or more positive aspects. He lost a lot of friendships and contacts because of that. But, there was always respect and that's something that we're lacking today and that we should see them as role models because of what they did during the war, how they live their lives after, and they kept continuing to give back.

And the same thing with Ms. Janta, after Mr. Janta's passing, she continued with the business and then she donated his...all of his writings to the university in Poland. Aside from that, also in his honor, a middle school was founded in New Jersey which teaches children about language and culture of the Polish language and culture. And the rest of her things, after her passing, Mrs. Janta...more books, papers, documents were sent to the to the university in Poland. I'm not I don't recall the name the exact

name of the university. And also, I think there's I think you can help me with this Kelly, I think, in SUNY there's a library?

Kelly Carroll: Yes, there's...Alexander Janta to establish the Polish Room at the university...State University...the SUNY Buffalo in Buffalo New York, which is where the couple lived prior to moving to Queens. We hope that their house will be preserved, like some of their personal, like most of their personal effects, but in the meantime, I want to thank your organization for bringing this house into the public consciousness. Otherwise, it would just be another house with siding on it in Queens that someone would walk by and not necessarily know the importance of it, and your group in general has done such a wonderful job bringing these cultural landmarks into the spotlight that otherwise had been forgotten.

So, I think we need to stop because we've gone, we've gone over, but I want to thank you both James and Jennifer for all of your hard work and for participating tonight and for all the volunteer work that you do for your community. You definitely...your group is doing amazing preservation work in Queens, and Queens is a hard place to do preservation work.

James McMEnamin: Thank you so much, Kelly. Thank you for all you do as well, and I may I say one last thing?

Kelly Carroll: Of course!

James McMEnamin: September 18th there will be a street co-naming and will be an event where the public will, can come and this and that the sign right up in front of the Janta House will be reading, I believe it's going to read "Polish Heroes Way" in honor of Janta-Polczynska, the couple, and at least we know we put that through and it's wonderful to have that unveiled on September the 18th.

Kelly Carroll: That's amazing, thank you for sharing James.