

Addisleigh Park

Final Report for the Historic Districts Council

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November 10, 2008

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

To begin this preliminary cultural resource survey, which hopefully will lead to further funding to continue an oral history project and further research on early homeowners in Addisleigh Park, we looked for newspaper articles on activities in the

area, searched for scholarly work, and did a literature review of the area. Please see copies of articles attached. Through my research, I found two books of outstanding photos by bassist Milt Hinton who lived for over 40 years at 173-05 113th Avenue in Addisleigh Park. (See Bibliography) In February 2008, I contacted David G. Berger and Holly Maxson, who are the co-authors of the Milt Hinton books, and asked if Milt Hinton had any photos of his home or the neighborhood of Addisleigh Park. They very kindly went through slides of photos that were not in the published works and found some outstanding photos for our research. In late February, they sent me scans of the slides that are now in the files of the HDC and attached to this report. These photos include one of a party at Count Basie's home and a stunning photo of Mona Hinton in front of her home in the snow. There are also photos of members of the congregation of St. Albans Congregational Church. To have copies of these photos adds a tremendous amount of weight to our research and also reminds us of the importance of protecting the cultural history of Addisleigh Park. I would have to consider this research find the central most rewarding part of my research.



Addisleigh Park, 1964, photo by Milt Hinton

On **April 8, 2008**, I attended the Addisleigh Park Civic Association meeting at the Allen Senior Citizens Center, 166-01 Linden Boulevard. St. Albans. Lauren Belfer of the HDC drove us to the meeting where we were given a short amount of time to present the preliminary architectural research on Addisleigh Park and for me to ask for contact information on residents who might want to be interviewed about life in the area or who knew any of the jazz musicians who had lived there. I did make several contacts there for future interviews.

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

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



The Lena Horne Home

May 4, 2008



Backyard, Lena Horne Home

May 4, 2008



Noah in the backyard of his home, the former Lena Horne home

May 4, 2008



Lena Horne and Count Basie, 1940s

On **May 9, 2008**, I attended the funeral of Mona Hinton, widow of Milt Hinton, and community and church activist in Addisleigh Park for over 40 years. Her funeral was

well attended by her neighbors, some of whom had long moved out of the area but returned to pay their respects. St. Albans Congregational Church is directly across the street from the Hinton home. I attended with Frank Wess, saxophonist from the Count Basie Band and long-time resident of St. Albans, who knew many of the elders attending and also played the flute at the ceremony. I was introduced to many of the former residents of Addisleigh Park and took phone numbers for future interviews.



St. Albans Congregational Church, photo by Milt Hinton



Outside St. Albans Congregational Church, 1964, photo by Milt Hinton



On **July 8, 2008**, after months of phone calls attempting to reach Mr. Clarence Irving, a Queens historian and long-time resident of Addisleigh Park, we finally were able to arrange to meet him. We drove to Middle Island, N. Y. (Frampton Tolbert, Lauren Belfer, and myself) to pick up Mr. Irving and bring him to Addisleigh Park. We drove around the area and he pointed out homes and their history and discussed life in the neighborhood. His knowledge of African American history in Queens is extensive and he is an excellent contact for future research and a continued oral history. I made an audio tape of his conversation as we drove around Addisleigh Park which I have sent to the HDC on digital audio files. We also have photographs and video of the drive around the neighborhood. I suggest that Mr. Irving be on the Advisory Board of any further research of Addisleigh Park.

Clarence Irving, now in his 70s, establish the York College Black American Heritage Foundation's Music History Archive. He says, "See, a lot of people came from the South and they lived in the city only because they had to. When they got enough

money to get their own house, they wanted some of the trees and land they remembered from back home without going too far from the city.”¹



Former Church Rectory, July 8, 2008

On **August 25, 2008**, I drove to the St. Alban's Library to meet with Mr. Eugene Robinson, owner of the Lena Horne home who had purchased the house after Ms. Horne sold it in 1962. The Robinsons later sold the house to Camille Chin-Kee-Fatt in 2004. Mr. Robinson is a local historian of Queens and gave me articles about Addisleigh Park that I copied and am including in this report. I sent a copy of my audio interview via audio file to the Historic Districts Council for subsequent transcription. Mr. Robinson is an excellent candidate for future oral history interviews and also gave me several promising leads for long-time residents of Addisleigh Park for future interviews.

The Basie Home

The Basie home is especially significant because of Catherine Basie's involvement in civil rights and civic organizations and her many fundraisers and parties around the pool. I propose further interviews with musicians and others who were guest in the Basie home. Count Basie and his wife Catherine moved into their home at 174-27 Adelaide Road in 1946.



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

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

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



The Basie Home, July 2008



Party at the Basie's, 1961

Photo by Milt Hinton

Count Basie bought his home at 174-27 175th Street and then bought the adjacent lots adding a swimming pool, cabana, and guest house. Basie and his wife were hosts to

fabulous pool parties in the summer and famous New Year's eave parties. Mona Hinton recalled, "It was great. It was really marvelous. People would come for miles to see the Basie's place at Christmast time. She had a glassed-in porch with a mechanical Santa Claus. It looked like Toyland."²

Catherine Basie died in 1983 and Count Basie in 1984.



Charlotte Hinton in the Basie Pool, 1966

Photo by Milt Hinton

The Hinton Home

Another home that I propose to study is that of Milt and Mona Hinton at 173-05 113th Avenue. Milt Hinton was a world renowned bassist who worked in Cab Calloway's orchestra from 1936-1951. He was a photographer whose almost half-century of photographs in recording studios, bus stations, segregated hotels and living rooms captured many of the greatest stars in jazz. He died at age 90 in 2000. His wife Mona was legendary in the jazz community for assisting musicians in need and was also a pillar of her community in St. Albans. She died in 2008.



Mona Hinton outside Hinton Home, 1966

Photo by Milt Hinton

Milt Hinton was a good friend of Count Basie's and wrote in his book, "He had a fabulous place. It was built on a corner but had an extra lot attached which was almost a block long. There was an Olympic-sized swimming pool surrounded by stone statues on the lawn, and a high wooden fence kept things private. Basie loved toys, and I can still see the model train set he had. You'd get in the center to run it, and the layout and scenery were better than displays they have in department stores at Christmas."

"When he came to my place, we'd have a ball—drinking, talking, listening to music. I had a piano and a couple of projectors in my basement, and he loved to watch silent movies. He's sit down at my old upright, get himself into position to see the screen, then play just the way they did in the old theatres. He wouldn't stop, even when I got up to change reels."³



Exterior Hinton Home, 1968

Photo by Milt Hinton



Newsday Photo (above) / Ari Mintz Photos (left and below) by Milton J. Hinton
 Hinton and his wife, Mona, above, moved to Queens because "it was getting too expensive to live" in Manhattan.
 Now, friends enjoy a day at the home of Count Basie and his wife, Catherine, in Addisleigh Park in St. Albans in 1967. Below
 Charlotte Hinton enjoys a dip in the Basies' pool. At left, a map of the Queens Jazz Trail.

Milt and Mona Hinton outside their home, 1990

Conclusion

I strongly recommend to the Historic Districts Council that there is a need to do additional interviews with Mr. Irving and Mr. Robinson. I would also suggest an interview with Miss Marshall who lives across the street from the Hinton home and is in her 90s, but seems to have a very good memory and is willing to talk about her life in Addisleigh Park. I also propose to research the history of three homes—the Lena Horne house, the Milt Hinton home, and the Count Basie house. These three sites hold a special kind of memory for people and represent the cultural history of the district.

In addition, I think that short biographies of the renowned jazz artists who lived in Addisleigh Park would be helpful. Particularly if the biographies focus on the period when they lived in the area. It has been pointed out to us on many occasions that many important people, aside from jazz musicians and performing artists, lived in Addisleigh Park. However, my research as a jazz historian has focused on that segment of the residents. There is much work that could be done researching the cultural history of this important African American enclave and I look forward to working on it in the future.

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¹ Newsday, October 8, 1998, p. B7.

² Newsday, January 28, 1990, p.2.

³ Milt Hinton with David G. Berger and Holly Maxson, *Playing the Changes: Milt Hinton's Life in Stories and Photographs*, Vanderbilt University Press, 2008, pp. 170, 172.