

Reflections of a Bygone Era “Laurelton Hall” (part one)



BY ORIN Z. FINKLE

Well, where to commence this writing? Ah, here's some facts that come to mind.

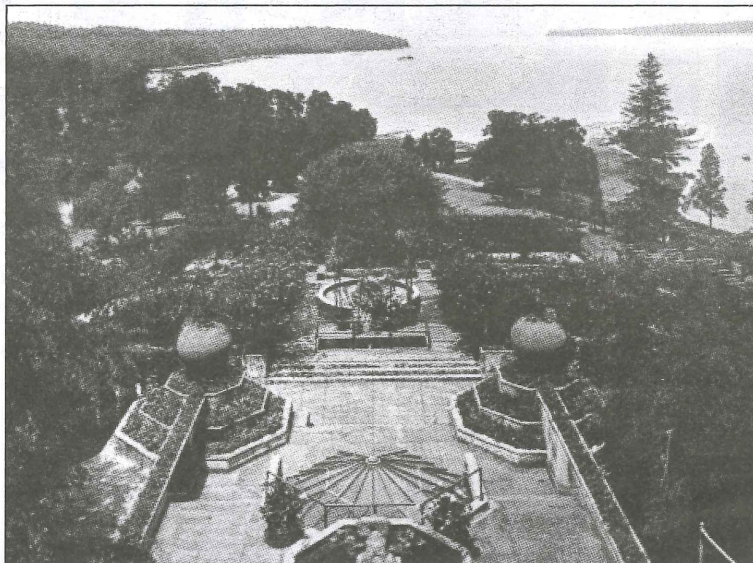
Mr. Tiffany's magnificent country domain has been long gone and probably forgotten, or maybe never even heard about these days! It's fully demolished, as gloomily were numerous, fabulous neighboring "roaring twenties", one of a kind mansions. Laurelton Hall, the once impressive, artistic gem of Long Island's early 1900s grand estates had stood unprotected and alone for years. The place was vandalized and devastated by fire decades ago. Louis Comfort

Tiffany's beautiful masterpiece, remaining vacant for years, had desolately continued on in ruins until finally leveled. To the younger generation of today, I'm sure that this slice of history never existed. I guess local history, is a mystery.

However, this free flowing, intended spiritual-like structure and a truly significant contribution to the imaginative and architectural world, will linger in memorial through the ages, if reported about and well documented. Books and articles have been written attempting to maintain serious public awareness of Louis Tiffany, his family, his inspirational creativity and of course, his beloved Long Island country estate. The following script features relatively brief highlights of Tiffany, as it re-counts a very noteworthy piece of antiquity featured in this two part piece.

"Laurel Hollow, L.I., March 07, 1957 – The former Tiffany mansion, one of the palatial landmarks on the Long Island North Shore, was destroyed by a fire that started last night.

It is believed that the showplace had been set ablaze by a fire left by vandals in one of the fireplaces." This news report quoted from The New York Times sadly marked the finale of Laurelton Hall after a relatively brief fifty two years of existence. The estate was probably the most discussed and yet secluded property ever developed along the North Shore. I honestly believe that if Louis Comfort Tiffany's innovative property had some-



Circa 1914. Laurelton Hall terrace view overlooking the gardens, and the Long Island Sound.

how managed to survive intact through the present time, it would have become one of the most prestigious museums in our country.

I am currently enveloped in peaceful surroundings within the silence of my office, hoping, for a while anyway, to not have any interruptions. Just at work rummaging through selected period files comprised of society magazines, early 1900s architectural books, mid 1900s auction catalogs, Gatsby period photos and tales of beautiful Laurelton Hall. With some intense concentration, the magical estate s gradually appears to spring back to life once again. I can visualize the finalized 1905 cream colored, Moorish style country residence, boasting eighty four rooms and twenty five baths that was entirely the dream and yearning of Louis Comfort Tiffany.

Surely this devoted formation was his greatest effort as a gifted artist. The files contain photos of Mr. Tiffany motoring up the winding road leading to the huge residence and a sepia toned photo showing a smiling well-dressed family casually posing by the front columned entrance. I notice several guest artists captured on film while painting, sculpting, dining and walking past the colorful large fountains spread upon the acres of terraced garden hues leading down to the blue waters of Oyster Bay. I view the huge round, red toned flower pots which contained tree like plantings placed along garden stairways appearing to dwarf a nattily garbed Mr. Tiffany as he casually strolls in the direction of the surrounding bay far below. It was a quiet time for free thinking artists to be encircled by natural beauty, allowing for total relaxation within originality.

Unhappily, the collection also contains photos of Tiffany's charred mansion immediately following that devastating fire. The tragic blaze occurred about sixty five years ago, at a time during my youth when I was not aware that Long

Island even had a coastline made of gold or a "Gold Coast". However, browsing through memorabilia permits the mind to vividly wander, offering the satisfying aura of actually being at the scene, experiencing a real setting and appreciating glorious moments surrounding the heyday of Laurelton Hall's presence.

Louis Comfort Tiffany, one of six children, was born in New York City on February 18, 1848. His parents were Charles Lewis Tiffany, the noted jeweler

and Harriet Olivia Young Tiffany, the sister of his business partner, John Young. When Mr. Young retired in 1853, Charles formed the successful enterprise of Tiffany & Co. which of course, remains renowned, worldwide. When Charles died in 1902, a few years after his wife passed away, he thereby surrendered a large estate valued back then of over thirty five million dollars.

The talented Louis C. Tiffany originally set out to be an artist and during his lifetime had essentially painted hundreds of works using oil on canvas and watercolor on paper. Many images were prepared while touring at length through North Africa, Europe and numerous Mediterranean villages. He was especially smitten with the color spectrum and painted various brilliant scenes from his adventures in Asia and numerous Moorish architectural locations. To date, a number of original vibrantly colorful works have become quite valuable and hopefully will remain in a professionally preserved state. Tiffany's works have been associated with the Art Nouveau and Aesthetic movements. They are treasured in private collections, at times are on loan to quality art galleries and displayed in upscale museums, worldwide.

However, Louis Tiffany opened his first glass factory during 1892 on 43rd Avenue in Corona, Queens, New York. He named the plant the Tiffany, Glass and Decorating Company. He became fascinated with the highly skilled and unique art of glassmaking. In 1894 he designed a patented iridescent art glass that he called Favrite, which was continuously manufactured until his due to pneumonia in January of 1933. It consisted of pouring richly diverse combinations of liquid colors into molten glass in order to get them entirely embedded. He derived this name from the French word "febrile" basically meaning handcrafted. His firm was widely known for this artistry with the distinctive ingrained color process utilized in manufacturing high quality mosaic lamp shades, beautiful leaded-glass pieces and other treasured products.

Getting back to the subject of Laurelton Hall, at age fifty four, during 1902, Tiffany spent a few million dollars

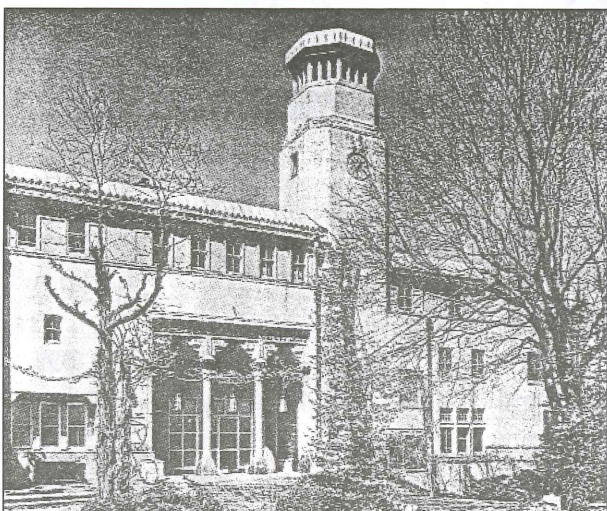
of his inheritance to purchase land where he would create his long time envisioned enclave. The property encompassed almost six hundred waterfront acres overlooking Cold Spring Harbor, just a few miles distant from the town of Oyster Bay. Unfortunately, in 1904, during the midst of the estates construction, his wife, the former Louise Knox passed away. His first wife, Mary Goddard had died twenty years prior. Tiffany had fathered eight children, four with each spouse.

To provide a bit of background on his purchase, when he originally acquired the Oyster Bay area property, Tiffany became aware that the scenic North Shore was a haven for many charming resort hotels scattered along the rugged coastline of the Long Island Sound. A portion of Tiffany's property occupied the former site of the once popular Hotel Laurelton. By 1926 this entire neighborhood was to become the Village of Laurelton, which later was realized to be the exact name of a section in Queens, New York City. Therefore, during 1935 another modification took place. The area was incorporated and became recognized as "Laurel Hollow".

Tiffany's intention was to bring fourth an everlasting legacy while remaining true to personal ideals of defining space for constant expansion, as additional thoughts continually embraced his mind. The country mansion, gardens, conservatories, fountains, tennis courts and stables would eventually require more than three years to complete but of course, there would be numerous modifications occurring during the remainder of his lifetime. Even the ornate Byzantine inspired chapel that he personally designed for the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition was carefully transported in sections to the Laurelton Hall estate grounds. It was accurately repaired and prudently re-assembled as a free standing structure which added to the unique charm of the country compound.

A guest of Mr. Tiffany, invited to attend one of his many well published costume fetes held upon the estate grounds, commented to the media "To me the house, half hidden in the native woods of Cold Spring Harbor, is notable for many things and they can be briefly expressed in three words, modernity, utility and beauty". Everything about Laurelton Hall was formed to impress upon a visitor the unequalled grandeur of fine architecture, nature and the cultivated methods of his interpretation. Tiffany took great pleasure in presenting to guests the beauty of his property while dramatically detailing ongoing developments and logic behind his imaginative, creative design outlines.

Save this article for future continuity and the conclusion (Part 2) which will soon appear in an upcoming issue. Wishing a healthy and hopefully happy year ahead, considering the present fluctuating pandemic issues and the insane state of many global matters.



Circa 1913. Laurelton Hall front facade.