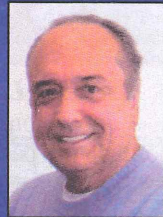


Reflections of a Bygone Era "Laurelton Hall" (part two)



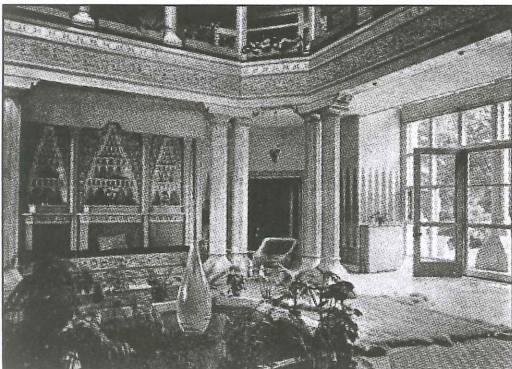
BY ORIN Z. FINKLE

This "Reflections" article continues, concerning Louis Comfort Tiffany's whimsical and wonderful country estate, Laurelton Hall. Hope you retained part one of this piece from a few weeks ago in order to refresh ye ole memory. So once again, let's look back upon this attractive Laurel Hollow, Long Island grand estate.

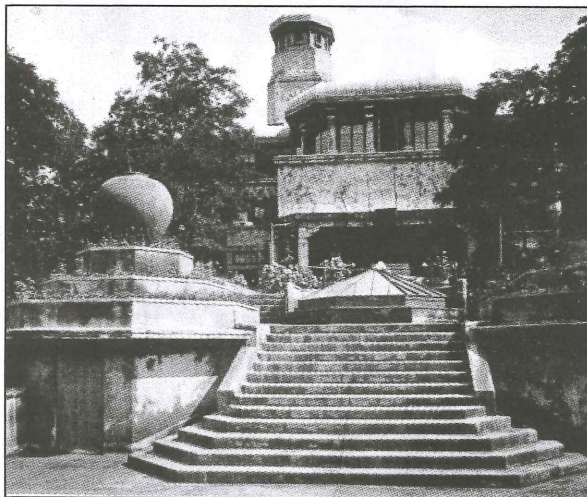
As soon as Mr. Tiffany embarked on his imposing project of creating an imposing Laurelton Hall during 1902, he was determined to personally oversee every aspect of its execution. Because he designed and individually planned all of the intricate details, Tiffany looked forward to inspecting the project as it came together exactly in the manner that he had desired. From the architectural strategies to the interior scheme and constant flowering landscape requirements, all was to be blended and organized in a pure state of natural harmony. The formation would consume three years of continuous labor, assembly with constant design changes to complete the basic cream colored stucco Moorish mansion and entrance gatehouse road which commenced the long winding drive. The natural contours of the countryside and landscaping were artfully crafted in establishing the master plan for the property, while taking full advantage of the sites magnificent, unique vistas.

Besides the multitude of garden flora blooming from early spring through vibrant autumn, the exterior stucco walls of the mansion reflected daylight in shades ranging from gleaming white, appearing in the morning sun, to a muted gray as dusk approached. The beautiful shimmering stained glass windows presented the interiors with various hues as the sun rose and later as sunset began. Tiffany was quite focused on the color shadings of all surfaces, from floors to high ceilings utilizing complex patterns derived from natural, historic and strong Native American influences. The grand rooms at Laurelton Hall, contained museum quality display cases meant to fascinate people by presenting the finest examples of Favrile glass pieces as well as his vast collection of rare antiques and ceramics which he carefully brought back from trips to China, Italy and North Africa.

One of the various interior highlights of Laurelton Hall was the Fountain Court, which served as the distinctive and imaginative interior entrance centerpiece. This large space, three stories in height,



Circa 1907. The fountain court displaying the central glass creation & upper balcony.



Circa 1914. "Laurelton Hall" view of terrace leading to gardens and Cold Spring Harbor.

was constructed to highlight a central water fountain which made its way through an exclusive four foot tall Favrile glass vase sitting in an octagonal tiled pool. The continuously flow spouting from the vase was illuminated by a diverse array of colored lights reflecting subtle mood patterns. The pool was encompassed by arrangements of seasonal plantings, some which extended to the upper marble columned balconies. A violet toned leaded glass dome above the court, cast numerous shadings throughout the Court all day long. The living and dining rooms, located directly off the centrally positioned Fountain Court, provided open picturesque views of the Long Island Sound and Tiffany's multiple terraced gardens.

In 1913 a pamphlet was published by Tiffany's firm entitled "Character and Individuality in Decorations and Furnishings". It summed up his rudimentary feelings and ideals about Laurelton Hall as well as the pure direction of his life's work. "Every really great structure is simple in its lines, as in nature. Every great scheme of decoration thrusts no one note upon the eye. The charm of homes of refinement is in the artistic blending that is revealed when everything has its place and purpose and when every detail unites to form one perfect and complete whole".

By 1918 he established the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation by appropriating a base sum of about 1.5 million dollars. He legally set aside a 62 acre portion of the estate for his personal art collection to be displayed and this endowment was used to manage the foundation. He chose young, very talented artists to reside within the peaceful confines of the estate grounds for months at a time. The surroundings would afford the ideal free spirited atmosphere conducive for concentration and would bring fourth to the surface an artist's creative thoughts and ideas. Tiffany converted the characteristic stables and additional outbuildings into individual art studios and a dining facility to house, feed and care for these gifted young artists. They would be trained to hone their skills, reside and work in peace during the warmer months and upon request

present a periodic review of their progress to Mr. Tiffany.

This was a means of preserving his legacy, personal artistic style while searching for interesting new directions within the art world. Laurelton Hall was to be, as he mentioned "a place where students could find a stimulus in the surroundings and provide contact with other "fellows" and accomplished artists." They were encouraged to work at their art but given no specific approach except to consider close collaboration with each other. After their stay, students were to leave at the estate, a selected piece of their work as an example of their accomplished studies. Eventually, the Foundation endowment investment fell on hard times due to the 1929 stock market crash. Tiffany made all financial attempts possible under difficult circumstances in order to keep the organization viable.

Following Tiffany's death in January of 1933, and burial at the family plot at the well-known Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn, the Foundation was able to bestow some grants and gain a tax exempt status as an educational institution. Just to note, some others interred at this cemetery include Leonard Bernstein, Horace Greely, DeWitt Clinton and Louis' father Charles Lewis Tiffany.

But by 1942 the Research Committee of the Council of National Defense utilized the property for anti-submarine warfare research. Laurelton Hall was returned to the Foundation after the war, but maintenance costs continuously proved to be extremely high. By 1946, most of Tiffany's amassed personal art collection was sold by Parke-Bernet Galleries at auction. In later years the gallery was known as Sotheby's. Some art work and personal effects were divided amongst family members and various estate land parcels were sold off to developers, with any profits used to maintain the Foundation. Sadly, some sections from Tiffany's beautiful creation, the re-assembled chapel building was disposed of in order to raise funds. The remainder of the Laurelton Hall property was sold for a mere \$10,000 in 1949 to a couple wishing a large summer cottage. Now, that must have been some grand "summer cottage"! But, the devastating 1957 fire, as exposed in part one of this article, brought final closure to by then, a run down and rapidly decaying estate compound.

Soon after the fire, Hugh and Jeanette McKean were invited to view the remains of Laurelton Hall and Chapel, by Tiffany's daughter. She was aware of

McKean's long time admiration for her father. Fortunately, Hugh McKean, a man of means, had once been a youthful "fellow" artist at Laurelton Hall during 1930 and was able to salvage many of the remaining original stained glass windows, numerous artifacts and portions of the unique interior decoration from the abandoned estate. He donated them to the Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art, at Winter Park, Florida, just outside of Orlando.

The superb and unique museum currently contains the most comprehensive collection of Tiffany's work to be found anywhere in the world. He also bequeathed the exceptional four columned front loggia of Laurelton Hall to the MET. A love of nature and beauty had connected Mr. McKean to Louis Comfort Tiffany and his unforgettable stay at Tiffany's country estate had been a great inspiration to his future career.

Mr. McKean passed away in 1995, shortly after narrating an interesting and informative documentary concerning Tiffany's life, works, desires and talents. I'm proud to say that I made a contribution with rare period photos utilized from my archive relating to Tiffany, his family and his Laurelton Hall property, for this film. Most of Tiffany's glorious dreams, ideals and projects will survive forever, thankfully not abandoned and remaining to be buried and forgotten amongst the scattered ashes of Long Islands once



Circa 1914. Laurelton Hall dining room decorated in subtle Chinese themes.

vibrant grand estate compounds.

This sadly is another chapter of our Long Island local history, where a grand mansion was solidly constructed in order to endure hundreds of years, merely survived fifty. It appears that overall, senseless manor house destruction trends continue annually. Many classic, historic properties still remain unprotected. I'm sure that we will witness perpetual Gatsby estate departures in future years. New and unfeeling generations will most likely observe future actions.

Anyway, hoping you all continue stay safe, be strong and remain healthy in today's very bizarre and frightening world. "God bless America"! So glad that over the decades, our nation has, for the most part, thankfully evolved into a loving, caring great country with many "real", concerned and down to earth people. Till next time!

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