

Kramer Manor: the History of a Twentieth Century Black Community

Introduction

Welcome to the Kramer Manor section of Scotch Plains and Fanwood, where there are only three ways in and three ways out.

The Kramer Manor section was built on struggle, and perseverance against racial discrimination, but also through community strength, pride, family bonds and the will to construct a strong foundation for our families. Our families were provided with opportunities to build this foundation through the unconventional vision of two brothers of Russian-Jewish heritage in the real estate business.

To our fellow Fanwood and Scotch Plains residents: Our story is also your story, a history that must be told.

The searing events of 2020 informed a greater drive to initiate, in this small block of Union County, New Jersey, long-overdue discussions and historical inquiries into our truth, so we can illuminate the ways race has shaped the history of our towns.

This initiative is both a result of a series of conversations between members of Social Justice Matters Inc. (SJM) and the Joint Committee for Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (TRHT), and the desire of residents, past and present, to trace back to our neighborhood roots and ensure we leave a legacy of truth and pride in this neighborhood. This history program is made possible in part by a 2021 HEART (History, Education, Arts Reaching Thousands) Grant awarded to Social Justice Matters from the Union County Board of County Commissioners, with additional funding from SJM.

Librarians, historians, real estate professionals, a filmmaker and an oral history expert joined with Kramer Manor residents and SJM members to realize our vision. Our town leaders supported the effort. We relied on census records, newspapers, property records, books and interviews to do this work.

May this project be a first step to preserve the inner workings of this "Exclusive Negro Community," as Kramer Realities promoted the neighborhood, and to share the history of our increasingly diverse community.

We want to pay a very special thank you to Deacon Elwood Green, Sr. He was a walking encyclopedia of the history of Kramer Manor. His memories and insights lay the basis for much of the history this project has assembled. Deacon Green passed away on July 15, 2021. May he forever rest in glory.

We hope you take pleasure in the story you read, and that you will continue to educate your fellow Scotch Plains and Fanwood friends and families about the legacy of Kramer Manor.

Ever True,

Pamela Brooks
Pamela Brownstein
Kevin Eldridge
Derek Garrett
Jill Jackson-Jones
Douglas Layne

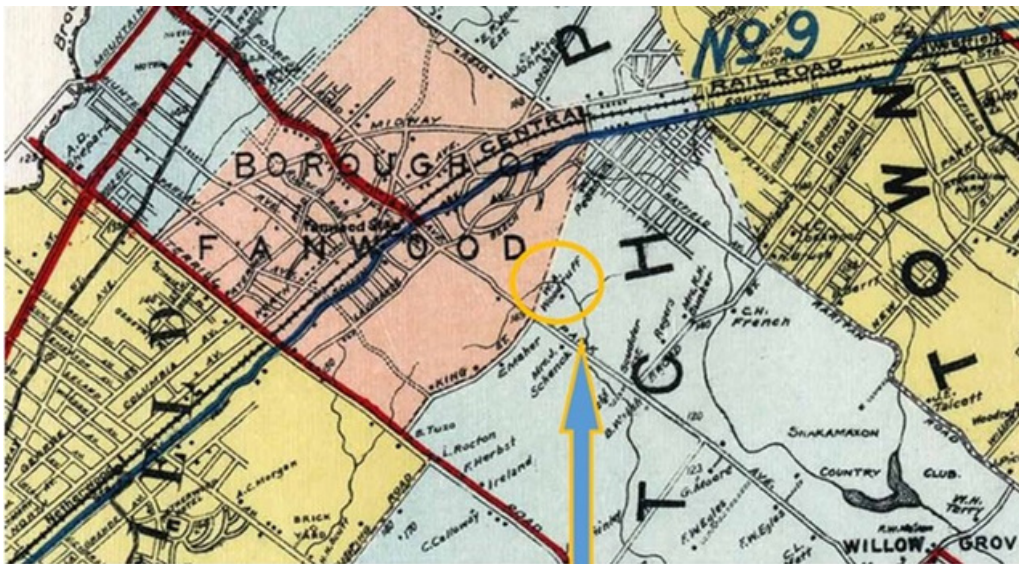
We want to extend a special thank you to the current and former Kramer Manor residents who generously shared their stories and photographs: Elwood Green; Cookie Green; William Lee, Jr.; Robert Lee, Sr.; Arnold Eldridge; Dolores Garrett; Anna B. Jones Townsend-Hendricks; Pamela Townsend; Therio Davis; Kathleen Thomas; Marlon O'Brien; Derek Jones; the Hadley Family; the Cook-Williams Family, and Juan Velazquez.

We also thank the following for contributing to our team's historical research: Michelle Willis, MLIS, library director, Scotch Plains Public Library; Nancy Piwowar, president, Historical Society of Plainfield; Sarah Hill, MSLIS, head of Local History, Genealogy & Special Collections, Plainfield Public Library; Bill Flagg, CRB, CRS, EPRO, ERA Queen City Realty; and Richard Ransom, Jr., president/CEO, Collegiate Title Corporation.

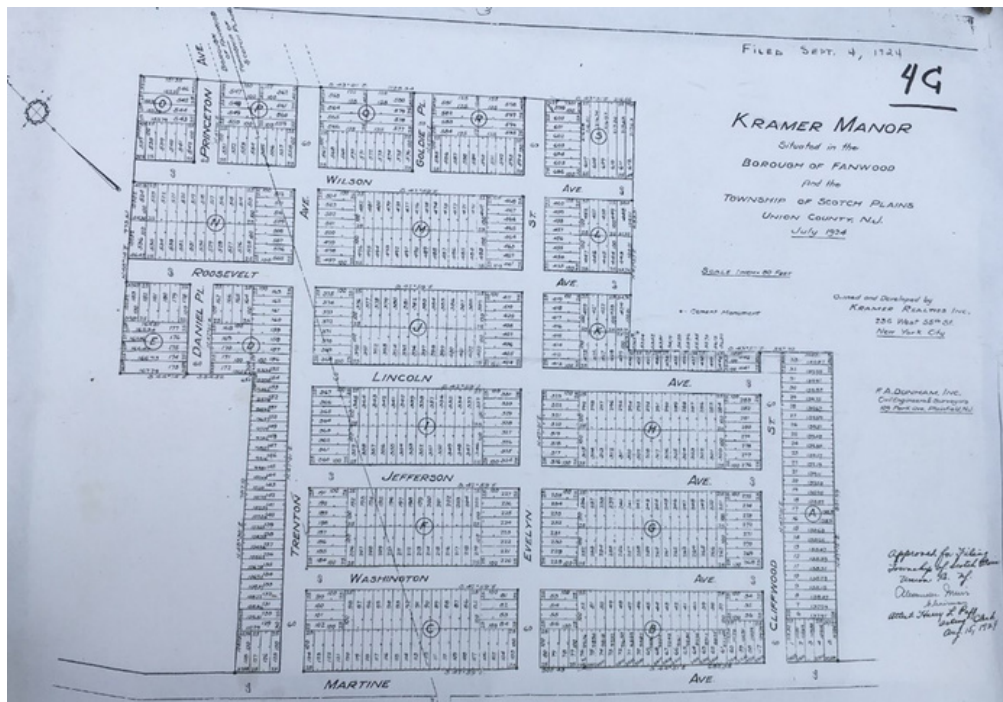
As "citizen historians," we are grateful to Dr. David Freund, of the University of Maryland, for bringing Harry D. Kramer's campaign for Federal Housing Administration (FHA) mortgage insurance to our attention and for his enthusiasm for our project. We also received encouragement to forge ahead from Dr. Walter Greason, of the University of Minnesota. We continue to be inspired by our project consultants, Dr. Linda Caldwell Epps, president and CEO of 1804 Consultants, and Ethel Washington, author of *Union County Black Americans*, for sharing their knowledge, and Melinda Allen-Grote, of A Remembered Voice, for demystifying the oral-history process for us. Thanks also to librarians Laverne Clark of the New York Public Library and James Amemasor of the New Jersey Historical Society.

The Beginnings

Kramer Manor was established in 1924 on 51 acres of land purchased for \$11,000 by New York City-based Kramer Realities, Inc. from the estate of William A Woodruff. Kramer Manor included property in both Fanwood and Scotch Plains.



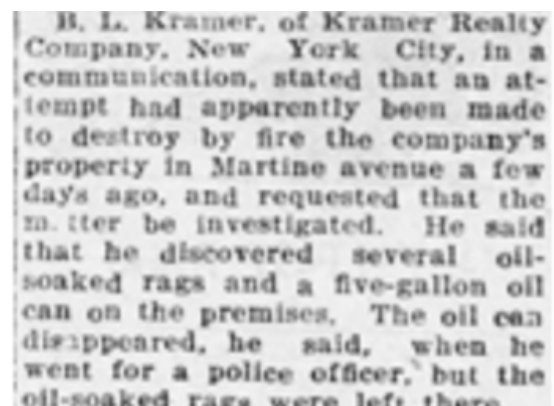
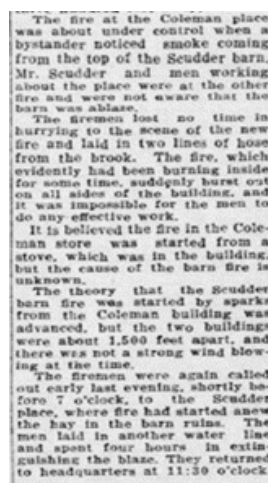
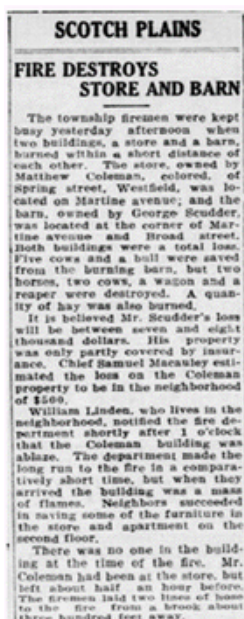
Woodruff Property 1923 Full map: https://mapmaker.rutgers.edu/UNION_COUNTY



Original Map of Kramer Manor

Representing Kramer Realities, Harry D. Kramer became a familiar presence in the growing Kramer Manor neighborhood. From the early days, Kramer Realities actively marketed it as a destination for Black families looking to build homes in the suburbs in an “ideal colored development.” Kramer Manor continued as an all-Black community of homeowners, gradually becoming more diverse in later decades.

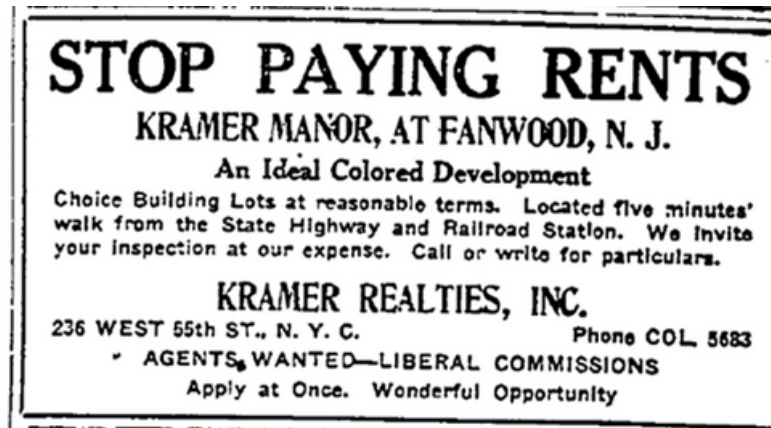
We do not know the reception Kramer’s plans received, but we are aware of two 1926 fires occurring in the Kramer Manor area in short order, the first burning down the store of Matthew Coleman, a Black resident of Westfield, and the second one involving the Martine Avenue location of Kramer Realities.



The Courier News (Bridgewater, NJ)
—October 2, 1926

The Courier News (Bridgewater, NJ)
— March 11, 1926

It is important to know that Kramer Realties was not selling houses, but simply lots of an average size of 25x100 feet, starting at \$299 (also described as \$250). In the early years, property owners joined together to build their own homes. Mortgages backed by FHA insurance were unavailable to Black residents, even those with excellent credit histories. The Kramer Manor populace boasted artisans and construction industry workers of many types, and together they worked summers and weekends to build houses and dig artesian wells. There was no running water. Paved roads, curbs, and storm sewers were not introduced in the area until the 1960s.



The New York Amsterdam News (1922-1938)--Apr 20, 1927

One early resident was Mrs. Collie Lee, who bought two lots in 1929. Born in Alabama and living as an adult in Florida, Mrs. Lee was the widow of a Spanish-American War veteran. Mrs. Lee fought for and received monetary compensation for his service from the federal government. She built what her grandsons recall being “the tallest house in the community because she had an upstairs.” Mrs. Lee lived at 48 Trenton Ave. until her death in 1962. Her children also owned houses in Kramer Manor, with her descendants figuring prominently in the community to this day...and Mrs. Collie Lee is the grandmother of an someone many of our children had the honor of interacting with in high school, All-Division SPFHS athlete, former SPFHS coach and owner of Lee Driving school. Yes, William Lee, Jr., SPFHS’ very own Mr. Lee!



1951 All-Union County Selections

FIRST TEAM	SECOND TEAM	THIRD TEAM
Black, Rahway	Lane, Roselle Park	Brown, Westfield
Irwin, Hillside	Johnson, Westfield	Cuccini, Oratory
Smith, Rahway	Hand, Summit	MacKenzie, Cranford
MacMillan, Roselle	Singer, Rahway	Strahlebrandt, Jefferson
<u>Ortiz, Scotch Plains</u>	Kling, Westfield	Zink, Westfield
Berrier, Plainfield	Snyder, Plainfield	Woolley, Roselle
Severini, Jefferson	Doty, Rahway	Saddler, Hillside
<u>Lee, Scotch Plains</u>	Holmes, Roselle	Ree, Oratory
Murray, Jefferson	McGiffin, Summit	Tallock, Piquety
Mills, Plainfield	Kelly, Hillside	Marsh, Rahway
Cambell, Plainfield		Soucek, Regional



Pictures Courtesy of William Lee, Jr.

Who Were the Kramers?



Hiram on left



Harry and wife Bertha



Hiram



Evelyn Kramer
(Hiram's daughter) on left

Photos courtesy of the Cook
and Williams Family

Harry D. Kramer and older brother Hiram (Hyman) were born in Eastern Europe around 1871 and 1860, respectively. Their country of origin is variously listed as Russia or Lithuania, a common occurrence for records of immigrants coming from the Pale of Settlement (the territories of the Russian Empire in which Jews were permitted permanent settlement), with its frequently shifting borders. Their family ultimately settled in New York City.

It appears that each brother attempted several business ventures, real estate and others during their lifetimes. The deed for the purchase of the land that became Kramer Manor lists Hyman as president, and Harry as secretary of Kramer Realities, Inc.

The motivation for the establishment of Kramer Manor remains unclear to us, but from the interviews we have conducted, starting with Mr. Elwood Green, it appears that Harry had cordial relationships with Kramer Manor residents. Perhaps historian and author David M.P. Freund's account of Harry Kramer's experience confronting discriminatory lending practices affecting Kramer Manor residents sheds some light on his intentions:

"In 1941...Harry D. Kramer, of Kramer Realities in New York City, visited the offices of the Hudson Trust Company to secure a loan in a development in Fanwood, New Jersey (Union County). He presented about a dozen applications from his buyers and "was told by the gentleman in charge that every applicant was worthy to receive a loan." "They asked me if I had F.H.A. approval. I told them NO, the reason was that it is a colored development. He then said 'I am sorry I cannot do anything for you.' On the Q.T. he said word had been passed around that no loans will be given to colored developments."

Outraged, Kramer turned to Prudential Life, which also felt that "the type of applicants that I submitted was above the ordinary, but when I informed them that it is a colored development, they told me they could do nothing unless we had the F.H.A. approval." Kramer recounted this story in a letter to Franklin D. Roosevelt that summer and appealed for help. "Knowing the feelings of Mrs. Roosevelt and yourself in this matter," he continued, "I wish to state that I represent [people] who are loyal and patriotic citizens, but any member of them are bitter in their hearts to think that this great and glorious country should discriminate against them on account of color." "Mr. President," he concluded, "is there anything you can do to assist us in getting a loan?"

(Freund, David M. *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America*. U. of Chicago Press, 2010.)

It is possible that Harry Kramer might also have been inspired to pursue this matter because of personal family experience. Hiram's daughter, Marion Goldie, had married a Black man, John Henry Cook. Around the time Kramer wrote to FDR, the couple and their infant daughter were lodging in nearby Plainfield, in the household of Dr. Clement DeFreitas, a prominent Black physician and head of the Plainfield Chapter of the NAACP. Later, their growing family lived for a while on Daniel Place in Kramer Manor.

It certainly appears that Kramer Manor made neither brother wealthy. To the contrary, Harry declared personal bankruptcy with \$15,002 in liabilities and no assets in 1945. Additionally, liens from Scotch Plains and Fanwood were often assessed against Kramer Realities for unpaid taxes, and eventually, some lots were sold at public auction. In 1950, the Scotch Plains Township Committee purchased land in Kramer Manor for sewer rights of way. The \$200 payment was credited toward delinquent taxes due on other lands owned by Kramer Realities.

Hyman Kramer was retired from the business by the time he died in 1941. Harry D. Kramer died in 1956 and was buried alongside his only child, his daughter Ruth, who had died in 1918 at the age of 19. Kramer Realities was dissolved in 1963 after a period of inactivity.



J John Henry Cook



John Henry Cook



Marion Goldie Kramer Cook
and daughter Estella



Estella Cook with parents John Henry Cook and Marion Goldie Kramer Cook



Photos courtesy of the Cook and Williams Family

So, How About the Street Names?

The origin of Kramer Manor's street names has been a question for many in our community. Our research has allowed us to draw conclusions based on facts uncovered about family connections. In Kramer Manor, street names seemed to have been based on one of two things: U.S. presidents and Kramer family members' names.

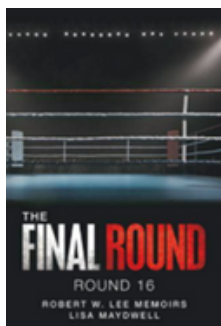
What do the main north/south streets in Kramer Manor — Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Roosevelt and Wilson — have in common? That's easy, they were all U.S. presidents, but there are many assumptions that can be made as to why these specific presidents were chosen. (In the 1960s, Wilson Avenue and parts of Roosevelt and Trenton Avenues were replaced by McGinn School.)

But what places do Goldie Place (on original plan, where McGinn School now stands), Evelyn Street, Daniel Place and Cliffwood Street have in the Kramer family story? Let's see. Golde Kramer (d. 1903) was the mother of Harry and Hiram Kramer, and Hiram went on to have a daughter named Marion Goldie Kramer Cook (b. Goldie Mary, 1906) and a granddaughter, Evelyn Kramer. Daniel Kramer was a brother of Harry and Hiram Kramer and passed away in 1911. This definitely closes the gap in our knowledge about the naming of these streets.

As for Cliffwood Street, records show that a Kramer family member, Robert Kramer, boarded in Cliffwood, NJ, and worked in Monmouth County real estate with his father, Hiram Kramer. Again, we can only assume, but this may be the origin of the street name. And there IS a Kramer Avenue in Cliffwood! Just sayin'. Trenton Avenue, maybe this was a homage to New Jersey's capital! Regardless, there was definitely some thought when naming the streets in our neighborhood!

The Community Grows

The 1930 U.S. Census lists just three families in Kramer Manor: Mrs. Lee's family, the Hadleys next door and the Abanathays. The street address for all three is given as Martine Avenue, Fanwood. The three households numbered nine adults and four Hadley children under the age of 10. Only the two youngest children were born in New Jersey. The birthplaces for the adults were listed as Florida (4 people), Georgia (3), North Carolina (3) and Alabama (1), with some having relocated from other parts of New Jersey, where they had settled previously.



"My parents William Lee and Alma Barnes migrated with their families in the early 1920s to Newark, New Jersey. They were later married and moved to Fanwood, New Jersey and lived with my paternal grandfather and aunt. My father built our house on a stretch of land between Scotch Plains and Fanwood, land that was purchased by a Caucasian man whose last name was Kramer. He sold the plots of land to the "Colored" folks that migrated to New Jersey from Florida, many of whom knew each other. The area was called Kramer Manor. The families would help each other build homes and dig artesian wells for the community. Those were the days of outhouses. There were about twenty-five homes in our small community." Robert W. Lee in (Maydwell, Lisa. *The Final Round - Round 16: Robert W. Lee Memoirs*, Authorhouse, 2020)

Kramer Manor grew in the decade from 1930 to 1940 to 17 households. Collie Lee's house and that of the Hadleys' were now assigned Trenton Avenue addresses. There were also occupied dwellings on Evelyn Street, Roosevelt, Jefferson, Lincoln, Washington, and Wilson avenues, as well as several on as yet unmarked streets. As in 1930, most adult residents of Kramer Manor originally hailed from the South, with a smattering born in other states, including New Jersey. From our team's 2021 interview with William Lee:

Kevin Eldridge: *Do you know what brought your family from Florida? Up to the area?*

William Lee: *Well, the hope for a better life, to get some things that we didn't have.*

(Our interview with William and Robert Lee, 2021)

Perhaps the most surprising resident from the 1940 Census was one Giavambattista Grandes, living on Lincoln Avenue. He is listed as a white Italian-born individual, and we have concluded that he is the man identified by Mr. Elwood Green in his 2020 interview:

Elwood Green: *...Kramer lived in the — his office was in New York. Every Saturday and Sunday Kramer would walk from the train station to my aunt's house on Lincoln Avenue. And him and Papa John would have their wine, and he would lay out his big map. And then people would come in and purchase property.*

Kevin Eldridge: *That's where you get your lots for the area.*

Elwood Green: *Right. Right. So, anyhow, at that time, the lots was 250 dollars. And I knew a lot of people, especially from Westfield, that purchased property... I purchased my property from Kramer himself. And every Sunday when I would come out of the church — Kramer's right in the front of the church — he said, "Elwood. Elwood." ...*

Elwood Green: *So sometimes I'd give him 25 cents. Sometimes I'd give him 50 cents. Sometimes I'd give him a dollar. So make a long story short, it came a long time I didn't pay him. For maybe three or four years I didn't pay nothing. So my brother said to me -- and I lost my property, so I called Kramer's office. They said my balance -- I think it was 150 dollars, so I sent the check over (inaudible) this property here.*

Elwood Green: *[As a child] I lived in Westfield. I was here more than I was [there] because my aunt fed us. She fed us. Papa John was good to us. You know what I mean? He smoked that pipe, but he was a good [Italian man?]. I don't know who was here before Papa John... I believe he had to be here before my aunt because she was living with him in his house. I don't think they got married, but he loved my aunt...*

(Our interview with Elwood Green, 2020)

Age	Sex	Name	Birth Date	Marital Status
18	M	Giavambattista, Giavambattista	5/1	W
19	F	Davis, Cora	3/1	W
20	M	Robert	1/1	W
21	F	Gordon, Jeanette	13	W
22	F	Hoane, Mary	25	W
23	M	—, 3 yrs	2	W
24	F	—, 1 yr	1/2	W

1940 Federal Census.: Household of Giavambattista Grandes



The New York Age--July 23, 1949

In 1941, Harry Kramer had attempted to find FHA backing for Kramer Manor residents who wished to build homes, even writing to President Roosevelt for help. Finally, under the Truman administration, Kramer Realties could market lots in Kramer Manor with the assertion that loans were approved by the FHA for building.

During the 1950s, the Kramer Manor neighborhood continued to grow, and a fire hydrant was installed on the corner of Trenton and Roosevelt Avenues. More lots began to be sold to non-Black individuals and entities. Neither Highland Swim Club, opening in 1953, nor Willow Grove Swim Club, adjacent to Kramer Manor, opening in 1958, admitted Black members for several decades. However, some people growing up in Kramer Manor in the 1970s remember swimming “after hours,” with either the tacit approval or ignorance of adults in charge. Robert Lee recollects:

"And they'd come down and we'd sit at the edge of the pool. And I'd let these kids swim because I can't swim, you know? But I'd let these kids swim as long as they didn't go in that deep water, you know? And they were swimming and it'd be dark. I'd ask them just keep your voice down, don't be loud. Because people in the neighborhood could hear you. (inaudible) They'd tell them. So these kids, they [had a lot of swimming then?]. And they did swim down there. And there was a couple guys who my brother know ... that turned [their] back the other way as long as I was there with the kids... You know, they let the brother swim, you know? And the reason they got them pools is because they talked about a community pool years before that. And they tell me that... [they] vetoed it because they didn't want to have a pool with Black folks in it."

(Our interview with William and Robert Lee, 2021)

Faith Community

One of the most important developments during the 1950s was erection of formal structures for several churches that were founded many years earlier. The first of these churches was Emanuel Baptist Church. Emanuel Baptist began in the late 1920s in the home of Sis. Hattie Brown. The first pastor was Rev. Smith Syrus. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, regular services were held in the homes of various members, including the garage of Sis. Collie Lee, until the church bought several lots from Kramer Realties in the late 1940s. The church initially contracted for lots on Jefferson Avenue, but later took title to a parcel at 1130 Lincoln Ave. The cornerstone was laid in 1950, and the building was completed in September 1952 under the leadership of Rev. Thomas T. Weaver.



Rev. Thomas Weaver & Mrs. I. Weaver

Fanwood Pastor Buses His Flock to Church

By GLADYS VENES

MIDDLESEX — "It's a labor of love," an expression often misused, is appropriately applied by the Rev. Thomas T. Weaver of 718 Pershing Ave. in describing his ministry and duties as a bus driver.

The Rev. Mr. Weaver has been pastor of Emanuel Baptist Church in Fanwood for almost 20 years.

For this work, which the pastor says is "my work for the Lord," he receives no salary but is occasionally given a stipend or donation. "In fact I pay my dues," he stated.

HOWEVER, HE IS employed five days weekly driving school bus for Frank Clark of Dunellen, owner of the New Market Garage in Piscataway, transporting pupils for the Piscataway Public School system.

The Rev. Mr. Weaver says his association with the youngsters has been a happy one.

And Clark has nothing but praise for the pastor.

Clark said the Rev. Mr. Weaver has been working for him for at least eight years and is "very reliable."

"HE IS DUE AT WORK at 7 a.m. but always arrives between 5:30 a.m. and 6:45 a.m. He has his bus on the road by 7:30 a.m. and travels about 80 miles daily transporting pupils," Clark said.

On Sundays he's back to the bus again. But not to transport students.

The pastor's wife drives him to the garage where he boards a bus and drives many of his church's parishioners living in Middlesex, Piscataway, Plainfield and Fanwood, to church.

His wife, driving another route, "picks up a carful," he said.

Referring to his employer's pastoral duties, Clark said, "I've been to his church several times . . . he has worked very hard building it from practically nothing."

THE REV. MR. WEAVER was born in Morgan, Ga. He was ordained in Newark in 1936. He was pastor of Emanuel Baptist from 1936 through 1942. At that time he was transferred to St. Paul's Baptist Church, Scotch Plains.

He was returned to the Fanwood parish, which still had no church of its own, in 1948. Services were held in members' homes.

In September, 1959, the Emanuel Baptist Church was built with funds raised through charity benefits, card parties, and fund drives. With the aid of free labor, the structure was erected.

TODAY, THE CHURCH boasts of many active groups and three choirs.

Mrs. Weaver has offered encouragement and enthusiastic support of all her husband's endeavors. She is active in church organizations, its Sunday School and Mission Society.

The couple's daughter, Mrs. Louise Brayley of 223 Grant Ave., Plainfield, is church pianist. Her husband, Leroy, is chairman of the Board of Deacons.

Before the pastor began driving a school bus, he was employed 31 years by the Central Railroad of New Jersey as a crossing gateman.

His work for the Lord, he said, "began a long time ago." "As a true Christian, I am honored to be God's instrument in helping others to know and love Him."

—Photos by George A. Smith

AT HOME — Rev. Thomas T. Weaver prepares a sermon at home.

AT WORK — The cleric chats with pupils during bus driving job.

News of Religion

MT. OLIVE BAPTIST CHURCH
 214 Liberty St.
 Rev. H. S. Clipper, D.D., Pastor
 9:30 A.M.—Sunday School, Holy Communion With Morning
 11:30 A.M.—Services for the People

The Courier News (Bridgewater, NJ) — March 1, 1969

The second church founded in Kramer Manor was the Warren Temple Church of the Living God, located on Evelyn Street. Like Emanuel, Warren had humble origins. Reverend Warren was also actively involved in the community, advocating for Kramer Manor.

Deplores Lack Of Services

Scotch Plains—The Rev. Arthur Warren, pastor of the Church of the Living God, recently established in the Kramer Manor section of the township, addressed the Community Association of South Scotch Plains last night in Willow Grove Chapel.

The Rev. Mr. Warren discussed the lack of municipal services for the neighborhood which his chapel serves. He said fire hydrants and street lights are needed.

James Hale Jr., chairman of the association, will name a committee which will investigate the points brought out by the Rev. Mr. Warren. If approval is obtained from the association's membership, the committee will seek assistance from the Township Committee.

The Rev. Mr. Warren was introduced by Samuel Greenhouse, program chairman. Richard Butler, chairman of the education committee, reported on school board activities. W. W. Wing, former education committee chairman, said that Eugene Novello is expected to resign from the Board of Education. Mr. Novello also is a member of the Township Committee.

Mr. Hale reported on Township Committee affairs in the absence of the chairman of that committee. James McGinley, a member of the safety committee, led a discussion on possible traffic safety precautionary methods for the southern section of the township.

The December meeting will be omitted. The January meeting will be devoted to issues and candidates involved in the February school election.

More than 100 persons attended the meeting. The social period was in charge of Mrs. Harold Apgar.

The Courier News (Bridgewater, NJ)
— November 17, 1949

Robert (Bobby) Lee and William Lee, grandsons of Collie Lee, recount the early days of Warren Temple:

Robert Lee: *Well, you know, if you look back, you will see that there were -- there was a church behind my grandparents' home at 48 Trenton Avenue. It was called COGIC, Church of God in Christ. And it used to have a little banner sitting up on the trees.*

Kevin Eldridge: *Was it in a garage, or [inside]??*

William Lee: *Garage, yeah.*

Robert Lee: *It served as a garage, it served as a meeting place and it served as a church, you know?*

Kevin Eldridge: *So that's before the churches were there. That was the first church around?*

Robert Lee: *Well now I don't know if that was the first church or whether there was another church, the Warren Temple that was on Evelyn Street.*

Kevin Eldridge: *That came after, that came later.*

Robert Lee: *There was a barn. A big barn, a big red barn. And that's where Reverend Warren held church in this big red barn. And we used to make fun of it because we said (inaudible) and the wind started blowing, that barn was going to come down. And that was before he took it down and then he built up now what we had, the Warren Temple.*

Kevin Eldridge: *And then we found out too that a lot of the same [people] that helped build Warren Temple helped build the other church. They both -- everybody all worked on the churches together.*

William Lee: *Yeah, even though it was a different religious ...*

(Our interview with William and Robert Lee, 2021)



The Hadleys' home on
Trenton Avenue



Sylvester & Estelle Hadley at
their home on Trenton Avenue

Both churches were built with strong community support that reached across denominational lines. Many of the same people who helped to build Emanuel Baptist also worked to build the Warren Temple. One of those community builders was Buster Hadley. Hadley built the home he and his family lived in on Trenton Avenue. Bobby Lee recalls: *"He always said he was a Moorish American...He would tell me he was going to temple in Newark, somewhere on Prince Street. And if you recall that Newark, that was a thriving area."*

(Our interview with William and Robert Lee, 2021)



The Hadley family
on Trenton Avenue

The story of the third religious institution, Temple Israel (now Congregation Beth Israel), began in the late 1950s. After the death of Harry Kramer on June 22, 1956, the Township of Scotch Plains sold parcels in Kramer Manor to satisfy tax arrears. In 1959, the Scotch Plains Township Committee sold a parcel with 135 feet of frontage on Martine Avenue to Sol Gold on behalf of Temple Israel for \$3,300. The congregation set about raising funds to build a synagogue on the site, subsequently purchasing a second parcel, while holding religious services in various locations in Scotch Plains. On January 17, 1964, Temple Israel held its first service in its new building.

Kramer Manor Residents Take a Stand

The 1960s were pivotal years for Kramer Manor, marked by successful community organizing, construction of an elementary school, plans for a new park, and overdue neighborhood improvements and modernization. By 1961, 55 families lived there.

In May of that year, the Scotch Plains Township Committee, predecessor to the Township Council, designated Kramer Manor as “blighted” for urban renewal purposes and created the Scotch Plains Redevelopment Agency. Initially, no Kramer Manor residents were named to the agency or to its Citizens Advisory Committee.

The agency applied for federal funding to study the redevelopment project’s feasibility. Urban renewal critics said the project was a way to drive Black residents from the community. Concerned about the “blighted” designation, the study’s preliminary proposals and the lack of community participation, residents created the Kramer Manor Civic Association.

In August 1961, the Rev. Frank W. Allen, president of the Plainfield NAACP Chapter, and Damon Brown, president of the Civic Association, insisted that Kramer Manor residents wanted “to be in the planning stage from start to finish, ... We want to know what the land we worked so hard for will be put to.”

Soon after, the Redevelopment Agency asked that the Citizens Advisory Committee be expanded to include Kramer Manor residents.

Across town the same year, the Scotch Plains Planning Board sought master plan changes to expand the partial industrial zoning of the Shady Rest area (now Jerseyland), the largest Black neighborhood in Scotch Plains. With the backing of Rev. Allen and the NAACP, residents in Kramer Manor and Shady Rest formed the Scotch Plains Civic and Protective Organization to fight the proposal.

They argued that industrial zoning would prevent families from buying or building homes, take vacant land off the residential market, reduce the largely residential area’s value and bar residents from obtaining FHA-approved financing or local building permits to renovate property or install sanitary facilities. The Shady Rest proposal was withdrawn the day after a rancorous public meeting.

Rev. Allen and Scotch Plains Civic and Protective Organization members then turned to the master plan and urban renewal proposals for Kramer Manor. Damon Brown said that for the almost 40 years of Kramer Manor's existence, residents developed their own roads, dug surface drainage, filled in lowlands and swamps, and built their homes.

Noting that it took nearly 20 years to get water mains on two Kramer Manor streets, and that some streets still lacked mains, a fire hydrant, consistent road maintenance or sewers, Brown asked for these "conveniences" and development of underdeveloped land, with existing housing brought to standard with "minor repairs."

Federal Urban Renewal Plan Abandoned, Local Plan Adopted

Federal urban renewal was doomed by a lack of available homes in other parts of Scotch Plains that would help satisfy the government's requirement for relocation of displaced homeowners in "standard" housing in the community. In addition, Kramer residents strongly opposed a public housing option that might satisfy the requirement.

In August 1963, the Redevelopment Agency's planning consultants recommended against a federal urban renewal project, and in favor of a homeowners' rehabilitation plan for Kramer Manor and Shady Rest, citing the difficulty of relocating residents.

On January 7, 1964, the Scotch Plains Township Committee endorsed the plan, to be started first in Kramer Manor. Around the same time, attention was focused on a master plan proposal for a new elementary school. Kramer Manor residents, represented by the newly formed United Civic Club, opposed the plan as it would have required demolition of 18 houses.

Agreement was reached on a second site, which involved only two homes, and their owners were willing to sell. That plan was endorsed by Club President Lucien Johnson and aided by Kramer Manor resident Robert Lee. The William J. McGinn Elementary School opened in November 1966.

That same year, Scotch Plains dissolved the redevelopment agencies that had been inactive since 1963.

Civic Associations Continue To Take Active Role

Throughout the decade, Kramer Manor residents continued to advocate for themselves and their community. The United Civic Club accused Scotch Plains of not selling municipally owned lots to Blacks and dragging its feet on the promised rehabilitation program.



Courier-News (Bridgewater NJ) September 23, 1968

Long-Awaited Sewer, Road-Paving Projects

In the mid- to late 1960s, sewer installations and road-paving projects were completed in Farwood and Scotch Plains. Homeowners in both municipalities questioned the assessments, citing long neglect of the areas until construction of the McGinn School. Many people felt that because they paid taxes for 40 years, for minimal municipal services, they should not need to pay for the work now.

Officials from both towns responded that portions of the roadways near the school were paid for as general improvements by the municipalities and the school board, not by assessments, and that taxes on unimproved lots had been lower than if they had been developed earlier.

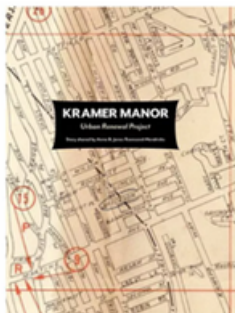
Readers Ask
HELP!

Taxes

Q.—My husband and I are property owners in the Kramer Manor section of Scotch Plains. Recently, the streets were widened and asphalt applied. Before this, they had been gravel. There are no sidewalks and storm sewers. The property owners were assessed in amounts from \$400 to over \$1,000, depending on size of property. The town had never before done anything in this section until they built McGinn School out here. Most of the people feel that because they have paid taxes for 40 years or more that they are finally getting what is their just due. The do not feel they should be asked to pay any more money. We now pay three separate bills to the tax office of Scotch Plains, property tax, sewer assessment and street assessment. Should the sewer assessment and street assessment be included in the tax bill or is the town right in sending the people three separate bills? Should the people be asked to pay for a public street directly or should this be included in the tax? I would appreciate any HELP! you could give me on these questions.

MRS. R.L., Scotch Plains

The Courier News (Bridgewater, NJ) -- June 28, 1968



For more information on the 1960s urban renewal efforts, see *Kramer Manor Urban Renewal Project*, Story shared by Anna B. Jones-Townsend-Hendricks

Come One, Come All...

Most of the early homes erected in Kramer Manor were built in whole or in part by the property owners. Homes built in the early- to mid-1960s continued to be marketed primarily to African Americans. Word of mouth through existing Kramer Manor friends, colleagues and families provided opportunities to purchase homes in a quiet neighborhood near an elementary school and with the prospect of a first-class park and recreation facility.



Robert W. Lee



Charles Knox,
Newark Police Director

Fact is, where one family is, a cousin is most likely around the corner. This "Exclusive Negro Community" attracted families from Newark, East Orange, Jersey City, Westfield and other cities, and they sought to raise their families in a closely knit suburban community. Many of these new residents worked in law enforcement in high-ranking positions such as police directors, lieutenant detectives and FBI officials, to name a few. Interestingly, Robert Lee, the first Black police officer in Scotch Plains, hailed from Kramer Manor, as did the first two Black officers in the Fanwood Police Department, Kyle McKinley Jackson and Timothy Green, Jr. Kyle recalls:

"Our family came to Fanwood from Newark in 1973. Our father was working for the Newark Police Department. Our mother was working for the Essex County Sheriff's Department. Word about the Kramer section of Fanwood had spread to Newark. There were approximately three other families with ties to the Newark Police Department prior to our arrival. There was also two or three other families with ties to other law enforcement agencies including federal."

In 1992 I had the opportunity to attend the John H. Stamler Police Academy, which is located on the same property as the Scotch Plains Vo Tech. The new Police Academy program was called the "Alternate Route." Approximately 20 of us were sponsored by the Union County Prosecutor's Office. When we graduated, we were like free agents and could apply to any police department in NJ. This saved municipalities from paying for a recruit for 6 months while they were in the Police Academy.



Kyle McKinley Jackson,
McKinley Jackson

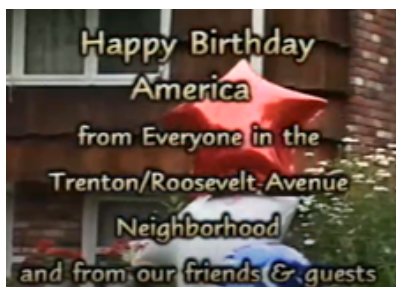


Timothy Green, Jr., Timothy Green, Sr.

[When] I graduated from the Police Academy there was an opening in the Fanwood Police Department. I was hired as the first Black Policeman in Fanwood history. At the same time, my good friend Daryl Peoples became the first Black Chief of the Fanwood Volunteer Fire Department."

Keeping our Kramer Manor Connections

Over the past 3 decades, the neighborhood has held events to keep us connected, such as the Kramer Manor Neighborhood block parties on Roosevelt Avenue, Fanwood, with fish frying, and neighbors' laughing. Local mayors and the SPF community would stop by to grab a bite and fellowship with Kramer Manor residents. This was an annual tradition and was so popular that Fanwood Community TV recorded the event, showing it in rotation. These block parties were always well attended and were organized by a formal committee of residents of Trenton Avenue and Roosevelt Avenue.



**Celebrations grew from
backyard parties to the streets
to the park!**



In 2009 a group of friends that call themselves KMPRC planned a reunion, presenting to the Scotch Plains Recreation Commission, and formally making a request to hold this event in Kramer Manor Park. The first Kramer Manor Park Reunion was held in 2010. Town council members attended to support the event, The event gave us the platform to dialogue with the young and old about our neighborhood history. This event is held bi-annually, most recently on July 31, 2021. Watch for the next one in 2023! All are welcome!

Block party images from F-TV



Images from the Kramer Manor reunions courtesy of Derek Garrett and Jill Jackson-Jones



**Our heartfelt sympathy for all
Kramer Manor Family and Friends
who have passed on.
You will be forever in our hearts.**

Our Future

Today, our neighborhood of about 100 homes is a rainbow of shades and cultures.

Our blocks are filled with a mix of longstanding residents and newer arrivals who are getting acquainted with the rich history of the neighborhood. We hope our neighbors continue the Kramer Manor tradition of nurturing strong relationships and lasting bonds. As we look to the second century of Kramer Manor's existence in 2024, let us not forget the vision of the two entrepreneurial brothers and the energy and stubborn determination of the great-grandchildren of enslaved Africans who together made this historical neighborhood possible.

Let's continue the legacy, educate and preserve. Tell everyone. It's a fascinating story.



Recordings and transcriptions of our team's interviews along with our history narrative will be available through the Scotch Plains Public Library, Fanwood Memorial Library, Plainfield Public Library, and online at socialjusticematters.org later this year.

**We Gratefully Acknowledge the Kramer Manor Family
Members Who Shared Their Stories and Photographs**

**ELWOOD GREEN
COOKIE GREEN
WILLIAM LEE, JR.
ROBERT LEE, SR.
ARNOLD ELDRIDGE
DOLORES GARRETT
ANNA B. JONES TOWNSEND-HENDRICKS
PAMILA TOWNSEND
THERIO DAVIS
KATHLEEN THOMAS
MARLON O'BRIEN
DEREK JONES
HADLEY FAMILY
COOK-WILLIAMS FAMILY
JUAN VELAZQUEZ**

With thanks for contributing to our team's history research

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