

## Narrative of the Krueger-Scott Mansion Project: Constructing Newark History

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*Newark, New Jersey's once proposed Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center (KSAACC) tells a story of history, economy, race, built environment, and much more. The Center's development mirrors other urban stories with regard to race, preservation, urban failure, and memory, while also offering a unique understanding of Newark's own history. The story of the 1990s Krueger-Scott project adds chapters to urban study as a whole, and to the study of Black cultural sites around the country.*

*The KSAACC was met with and has continued to receive resistance from some of Newark's citizens as well as local journalists and ultimately the very politicians who had at first supported the idea. The ongoing financing of what seemed to some a less than urgent project in a city that had so many pressing needs at the time became a source of tension and ultimately splintered the community.*

*Matters such as these speak to some larger questions concerning the value and place of public history, oral history, and historic preservation in urban environments. This paper is about the creation of African-American historical knowledge and the ways America sees fit to make it public knowledge.*

The National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) opened on the National Mall in September 2016. It would be the first Black national museum, long overdue.<sup>1</sup> Originally authorized by an act of Congress in 1929, seventy-four years later a law was finally

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<sup>1</sup> Terminology here will include both *Black* and *African American* in referring to the history, culture, and people of African descent. Many scholars utilize multiple terms for this particular descriptor when they do not consider one more favorable than another. As well, I capitalize *Black*, as I do *White*, to differentiate a racial term from that of a color.

enacted which supported federal funding of the Museum.<sup>2</sup> Thirteen years after that, it finally opened. As Mabel O. Wilson points out in her recent book *Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums*, the NMAAHC reflects numerous relevant historical and cultural narratives. From fears that it might set a precedent for other marginalized groups to call for their “own” museums, to arguments against its prime location on the national mall, the NMAAHC has been a site of complicated and contentious narratives reflecting American society’s continued unease with African-American historical commemoration – and race in general.<sup>3</sup>

Newark, New Jersey’s once proposed Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center was also charged with telling stories of history, economy, race, and more through Black historical commemoration. The Cultural Center’s location in Newark - a city known as one of Renaissance or hopelessness, depending upon whom one asks – is a lens with which to view America’s complicated history when it comes to race, preservation, urban renewal, and memory. The story of the Krueger-Scott project adds to the study of Black cultural sites and of the cities within which they are housed. Though much smaller in scale, the Krueger-Scott site battled some of the very same issues as did the National Museum, even as the latter was supported by the venerable Smithsonian Institution. The common thread? Black cultural and historical commemoration and the discomfort that surrounds it.

The Krueger-Scott story begins with Gottfried Krueger, a German immigrant who came to Newark a poor man. He soon opened an eponymous beer company and not too long afterwards became a very rich man. Among the Krueger brewery’s claims to fame was its invention of the

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<sup>2</sup> According to the NMAAHC’s newsletter, the idea of the Museum “languished” from 1929 until 1988 when Representative John Lewis submitted new legislation to create the Museum. Every year thereafter he re-introduced the legislation until 2003 when President George W. Bush finally signed it into law. In 2012 the Museum broke ground.

<sup>3</sup> Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012) 1-18.

beer can.<sup>4</sup> The brewery was a financial success. With all of his newfound wealth, in 1888 Mr. Krueger built himself an opulent Victorian home at 601 High Street.<sup>5</sup> There were forty-three rooms in his “castle on the hill,” some with leather-covered walls. The home included a bowling alley, a Bavarian style tower, a copper roof, the first elevator in a Newark home, and a carriage house. The Krueger family lived in luxury.<sup>6</sup>

In 1914 beer baron Krueger returned to Germany for a visit and was caught behind enemy lines as WWI unfolded. Unable to return to America until 1919, his family held down the fort – both home and business – while he was gone. In 1925 Herr Krueger, now 88 years old, and his “invalid” wife decided that the family would move permanently to their summer home in Allenhurst, New Jersey. The opulent High Street house was sold to the Valley of the Scottish Rite Freemasons. Gottfried Krueger died the following year.<sup>7</sup>

The Scottish Rite Masons proudly held their meetings in the magnificent Mansion. Their promotional literature boasted of its setting, worthy of the important members and moral undertakings of their association.<sup>8</sup>

*(Please scroll for graphic.)*

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<sup>4</sup> Newark was known for its breweries, taking advantage of the city’s proximity to what was then considered some of the best water available. Other famous brewers included the Feigenspanns, the Ballantines, and the Henslers. See John T. Cunningham’s *Newark* for some brief historical information and several photographs regarding the industry.

<sup>5</sup> High Street’s name was changed to Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard in 1983.

<sup>6</sup> A wonderful documentary made by my colleague Dr. Samantha Boardman showcases the mansion’s physical attributes as well as its history. See “Castle Newark: The Krueger-Scott Mansion,” Clementine Productions, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8W9nY1OUfk>

<sup>7</sup> See James S. Allen, “Act 1: The Ocean Smell (1624-1938),” (November 2010), [http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=histcw\\_pp](http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=histcw_pp)

<sup>8</sup> According to *scottishrite.org* the Scottish Rite is a Masonic organization that operates in the open and holds public events. The Scottish Rite degrees originated in France and were based on legends that came from Scotland.



*Reception Room*

Joining Newark Valley, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, will be a momentous step in your life, one that you will cherish all the years to come. Because the Scottish Rite will give you a fuller life, rich in Masonic understanding and happiness.

Cognizant of the fact that "time" is an important commodity in the lives of busy men, Newark Valley sets aside two days in each year—usually a Saturday in the Spring and a Saturday in winter—when all 29 degrees are conferred during an all-day communication.

The communication begins in the morning and lasts through late evening, with time out for luncheon and dinner which are served in the Cathedral dining room.

Inquire of the Secretary or any member of the Consistory for the date of the next all-day Communication.

Figure 1. From Masons' "Newark Consistory," courtesy Samantha Boardman.

But the physical structure of the Mansion was no longer receiving the same kind of attention as it had from the Krueger family. The magnificent home needed constant upkeep, without which it began to fray around the edges. The Masons had already begun eyeing property in the suburbs, anyway. Membership was declining and the organization hoped that, with more acreage and a location outside the city walls, they might entice new degree-seekers.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Here we witness two examples of what could be termed "White flight." Both Krueger and the Masons decided that the city was no longer for them and took their resources elsewhere. The term is not necessarily limited to a mass exodus of Americans of European descent from city centers due to their fear, hatred, and/or anxiety surrounding people of color. More complicated, the concept was in play much earlier than sometimes acknowledged in urban crisis scholarship. As with other immigration streams, there was both a push and a pull to White flight.

Enter Louise Scott, Newark's own Madam C.J. Walker - beauty culture entrepreneur and millionaire.<sup>10</sup> Mrs. Scott, born in 1905, was a part of the First Great Migration, that stream of African-American migrants from the South to the North. Scott left a small town in South Carolina in 1936 and, as with so many African-American women, began earning money doing "days' work" in New York City.<sup>11</sup> She worked as a domestic by day, but by night Scott attended the Apex Beauty School, from which she graduated in 1937. In 1938 she moved to Newark's Barclay Street and in 1940 she opened the Scott Beauty Salon, just down the street from her home. Scott subsequently opened four more salons and began training stylists as well. She also started her own line of beauty products, once again emulating Madam Walker. Over the next ten years she added the Scott Hotel and the Scott restaurant to her business empire.<sup>12</sup>

Scott had already become a recognized leader in the Black community. Before she had even purchased the Mansion Madam Scott was feted at a gathering that took place at the popular Terrace Ballroom, a downtown establishment frequented by Newark's upwardly mobile African Americans. At a testimonial dinner, community leaders and politicians lauded her work as an advocate for the Black community and a successful businesswoman. Progressive New Jersey Republican Senator Clifford P. Case spoke that night of "racial progress" while also lamenting the weakness of the newly adopted Civil Rights Bill and the "caste system" still all too present in the U.S.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Madam C.J. Walker, born in 1867, was said to have been the first African-American female millionaire and was an icon to many African Americans of her time. Walker made her money in "beauty culture," a popular means of income for African-American women throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Scott, as Walker, gained her wealth in the beauty business and was said to have been the first African-American millionairess in Newark.

<sup>11</sup> The name of her hometown has been reported differently depending upon the source. Most likely she was born in Florence, S.C.

<sup>12</sup> Some information from *The Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center*, a 1997 brochure published by the City of Newark giving a brief overview of the planned Mansion restoration.

<sup>13</sup> "Case Predicts Caste System Destruction in Newark Talk," *Newark Evening News*, October 8, 1957.

Looking for an opportunity to centralize her business and community work, Mrs. Louise Scott finally purchased the Krueger Mansion from the Scottish Rite Masons in 1958 – with cash.<sup>14</sup> Within the Scott Cultural and Civic Center Madam Scott established a beauty school, a day care facility for her students' children, and a hotel. From the auditorium, radio shows, such as Bernice Bass' political *News and Views*, were aired in front of a live audience. In 1961 Scott established the Good Neighbor Baptist Church on the Mansion grounds. She was a pillar of the African-American community, an inspiration to Black residents of the city, and an advocate for those in need.



Figure 2. "Krueger Mansion November 12, 1979," Courtesy Newark Library. Note the sign reading "Scott's" above the entrance.

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<sup>14</sup> Much is made about the fact that this single woman was able to purchase such a large home with cash. Her daughter claims that the Masons did not want to sell the place to an African American and only acquiesced once cash was offered. Louise Scott Rountree, phone conversation with the author, March 28, 2016.

This is where a few stories begin to collide, as historical narratives often do once more than one voice is uncovered. The stories surrounding the fabled Louise Scott and her mansion intersect and weave together into a grand narrative of Newark's old Third Ward and the familiar tale of contested city space. The Ward was, by the time Scott arrived, an area where African Americans were clustered together due to racial segregation. On High Street Black professionals lived next door to working class neighbors. Doctors, teachers, morticians, and civil servants populated the neighborhood. Race transcended economics in the city and African Americans at all economic levels continued to be restricted to certain places and spaces. These were still Jim Crow times.

The Krueger-Scott story begins to take shape around 1966, when the City of Newark initiated a tax action against Louise Scott. Financial issues were clearly arising; that same year Madam Scott sold the auditorium that the Scottish Masons had built.<sup>15</sup> The city's motives behind the tax action may well have been related to the pressure they were receiving to build more "middle income housing" as part of a Third Ward urban renewal initiative. One proposal put forth by the St. James AME Church, a neighbor of the Krueger-Scott Mansion, would have the Church sponsoring the construction of a high-rise apartment complex on the Mansion's site. Already people were eyeing the valuable land upon which the fading Krueger-Scott Mansion sat.

The population of Newark decreased by about 30,000 people between 1950 and 1960. By 1966 the city was majority African American. Industry was waning and those who once worked the factories and other manufacturing sites now had less to spend on their rents and mortgages. In addition, new African-American arrivals to the city could not attain the kinds of employment that would afford them decent housing, due to ongoing racist hiring practices.

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<sup>15</sup> It was purchased by the religious organization known as Range's Temple, whose congregation later became the Mount Olive Church of God.

Absentee landlords, especially in the primarily Black Central Ward (previously the Third Ward), did little to maintain their properties; they were waiting for a piece of the urban renewal pie. Buyers were paying a lot more money than properties were worth and then selling them for even more. Urban renewal looked more like “Negro Removal,” according to many urban Black residents of the time. Fueling this trend were federal funds being made available to subsidize public housing projects such as the one proposed by the St. James AME Church.<sup>16</sup> Newark was a microcosm of the post-industrial urban experience nationwide. This complicated time ended up creating some strange bedfellows; preservationists, politicians, activists, and “ordinary people” would spend the next forty years battling over the life of the Krueger-Scott Mansion, over the High Street area, and over the right to the city itself.

The Mansion was a “monstrosity,” declared Lou Danzig, Newark Housing Authority Director. At one particularly contentious public hearing on November 2, 1966, J. Stewart Johnson, curator at the Newark Museum and president of the Victorian Society of America, argued for the protection of the Mansion out of respect to the city’s early history, bemoaning the fact that “...we are destroying the 19<sup>th</sup> century here as fast as we possibly can.”<sup>17</sup>

Longtime Newarkers once again saw the writing on the wall. They “knew the drill.” First the city would “blight” an area, then without any public discussion it would negotiate a plan with a contractor. Only afterwards would those in the affected area learn of the plan and by then it was usually too late.<sup>18</sup> Edna Thomas, secretary of the Scudder Homes Association - a housing project in the High Street area that was ultimately demolished in 1987 - attended that November 1966

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<sup>16</sup> Some information from John T. Cunningham, *Newark*, Newark: The New Jersey Historical Society, 1988.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth McFadden, “Aesthetic vs. the Practical on Fate of Krueger House,” *Newark Evening News*, November 3, 1966.

<sup>18</sup> Consider the building of the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry in the University Heights area in 1967. There is much published on this project, the battle that ensued, and the resulting Newark Agreements. See for example a piece the author wrote entitled “Over My Dead Body,” *The Newest Americans* (Newark: Rutgers University), Winter 2016, available at <http://newestamericans.com/over-my-dead-body/>



public hearing. She had already tried to warn her home-owning neighbors over on High Street about the city's plans to buy them out. In a 1996 interview Mrs. Thomas remembered:

They tried to steal it from them about thirty years ago...The Housing Authority. The Mandelbaum Associates wanted to buy it. I went and knocked on the doors to tell them who was going to sell it. They were going to take their property. So I told them don't say anything, come to a meeting tomorrow, and wear old clothes and just don't say anything. So they came. And they sat there at the Housing Authority right with me and listened to what was planned for their house. And they were utterly shocked. And they did not sell their property.<sup>19</sup>

In 1967, Madam Scott became Mrs. Scott-Rountree, marrying the Reverend Malachi Rountree. This was a union many opposed, as the young husband's motives were suspect. Rev. Rountree and his family members would later be accused of "stripping and selling" valuable parts of the Mansion's interior, as well as stealing rent monies intended for tax payment.<sup>20</sup> No official complaint was ever lodged, but Scott divorced Rountree in 1975. After Madam Scott's death, Rountree and his family reappeared, presenting themselves as heirs to the property and the Mansion's contents.

In 1968 Madam Scott, under the aegis of the Scott College of Beauty Culture and the Good Neighbor Cathedral, announced a fundraiser to open "a free school of music and art for underprivileged Newark young people." The school was to be housed at the Mansion. The dinner was held at the Robert Treat Hotel Ballroom with approximately 1,000 people in attendance. There is no further evidence of that proposed school.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Edna Thomas, interview by E. Alma Flagg, *Krueger-Scott Oral History Project*, October 7, 1996, <http://dev7-ks.libraries.rutgers.edu/>. Mrs. Thomas used "it" to refer to the property of one particular family she had mentioned earlier in the interview. Thomas probably directed the owners to dress down as they were well-off and might have given the impression that relocation would not be such a hardship.

<sup>20</sup> Douglas Eldridge, email message to Samantha Boardman, June 24, 2008. Eldridge was executive director of the Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee at the time. This suspicion of the Rountree family was also expressed by Louise Scott's daughter in a phone conversation with the author.

<sup>21</sup> "Mrs. Scott to Be Feted," *Newark Sunday News*, March 10, 1968. It is somewhat surprising that such an event occurred at the Robert Treat at this time. According to a number of the oral histories in the Krueger-Scott collection it was a segregated hotel - if only unofficially - through the 1960s.

In 1972 the Krueger-Scott Mansion was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Madam Scott, alongside J. Stewart Johnson from the Victorian Society, initiated the application to the National Register. It is one of the reasons that so much of the publicity material surrounding the Mansion renovation credited Scott as saving the Mansion from certain ruin. As Margaret Mandhart of the Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee noted in 1981, “Mrs. Scott is to be admired for holding onto the mansion for so long...”<sup>22</sup>

Aside from Mr. Johnson, Scott did not enjoy all that much support in her restoration efforts. The urban preservation movement had not yet hit its stride; it was not until 1973 that the Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee was formed. In November of that year the Committee first convened under the direction of Donald T. Dust. Mayor Ken Gibson, the city’s first African-American mayor, spoke to the fledgling group at the historic Plume House, the oldest building in Newark.<sup>23</sup> The importance of the history of Newark’s built environment was beginning to sink in.

*(Scroll for image.)*

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<sup>22</sup> Edna. M. Bailey, “Once and Future Glory,” *Sunday Star-Ledger*, March 1, 1981.

<sup>23</sup> “Twenty Years Only the Beginning,” *Yesterday’s News*, The Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee, Winter (1993-94):1. The Plume House, the author has been told, continues to receive more attention than the Krueger-Scott Mansion because its history is less “complicated.” It was constructed by the early settlers of Newark, around 1710.



Figure 3. "The Krueger Mansion," November 12, 1979, *New Jersey Newsphotos*.

In 1979 the Mansion was still in good condition but in need of some improvements. The following year the City of Newark made its first investment in the structure's preservation, approving a \$50,000 grant for "emergency repairs." The Mansion had finally made its way into the conversation already surrounding other historic preservation projects, such as the Plume House and the famed Ballantine House, another Beer Baron's stately home.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Bailey, "Once and Future Glory," *Sunday Star-Ledger*, March 1, 1981. (This same article reports that the Scott Beauty School was "temporarily closed" at that point). The Ballantine House ended up faring much better than

On April 21, 1983, Madam Louise Scott passed away. Her funeral made the headline of the *New Jersey Afro-American*, displacing the death of famed jazz pianist Earl “Fatha” Hines. Scott lay in state in the Great Hall of the Krueger-Scott Mansion where “hundreds of citizens” attended the viewing. Gottfried Krueger’s body had also lay in state, in the drawing room of the Mansion, some fifty-seven years before.<sup>25</sup>

The ensuing year became one of logistical and financial chaos for the historic site. The initially private bickering and negotiating between family members and the city as to who was responsible for the Mansion’s upkeep finally made its way into the public arena. Newspaper articles and gossip abounded. Occupants remained at the Mansion’s Scott Hotel, which in 1984 the *Star Ledger* was calling an “unlicensed boarding home.” Their rent was to have defrayed the property taxes but apparently no monies had made their way to City Hall for some time. In fact, the city had foreclosed on the property in 1982, but citing various reasons – including respect for Madam Scott – it had not yet followed through. Eventually, twenty tenants were evicted from the property and the city finally took possession of the house in March of 1984.<sup>26</sup>

Time passed and vandals – of one ilk or another - had their way with the place. While squatters began making their homes in the grand structure, the city of Newark was unresponsive. At the same time local historians, preservationists, and members of the community were still pushing for action. That year, representatives of several interest groups toured the site with a photographer from the *Star Ledger* newspaper. Photos were published of the visitors stepping over piles of fallen concrete and eyeing stairways with missing bannisters.

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Krueger-Scott, ultimately taken under the wing of the Newark Museum. See <http://www.newarkmuseum.org/ballantine-house> for a brief history of the house.

<sup>25</sup> Bob Queen, “Funeral Services for Louise Scott, a Legend,” *The New Jersey Afro-American*, April 30, 1983.

<sup>26</sup> Frederick W. Byrd, “Newark Seizes Landmark Mansion, Ousts 20 Amid Family Feud,” *The Star Ledger*, March 29, 1984.



*Figure 4. "Krueger Mansion, Newark. June 17, 1984," from the Star-Ledger Archives; Courtesy Newark Library. Left to right: Ulysses Grant Dietz, curator of the Newark Museum; Elizabeth Del Tufo, Chair of the City of Newark Landmarks and Historic Preservation Commission; and Richard Grossklauss of Integrity House, a substance abuse treatment center. The latter was involved in facilitating a renovation project that would employ workers from recovery programs and juvenile detention centers.*

Frustration was setting in for both those who wanted to save the place and for those who just did not want to have to look at it anymore. The system seemed broken. Lights were needed in order to start the proposed clean-up work, but no one could seem to get the city to turn them on.

Each time members of the community went to City Hall to enquire about the Mansion, and to offer help, they were shepherded from office to office. It was always somebody else's responsibility.<sup>27</sup>

But slow progress towards the restoration of the Krueger-Scott Mansion was being made, if only in word for the moment. In February of 1985 the *Star Ledger* published a brief update on the Mansion with a number of people expressing their plans for related projects going forward. This seems to be the first time that the idea of a specifically African-American cultural center was put forward. Edna Thomas, identified in this particular article as "the director of a drug rehabilitation program," claimed that she had submitted "a package" that proposed the site be devoted to Black history and culture. However, City Council President Ralph Grant said in the same article that he had seen no "hard data" on any proposed project. Things were moving at a glacial pace.<sup>28</sup>

In fact, a plan had been written up that the city was in receipt of, in some way or another. "A Plan to Restore the Krueger-Scott Mansion into The Newark Library & Museum of Black Culture" was drafted in August of 1984 by The Central Ward Coalition of Youth Agencies, of which Edna Thomas was Chair. A copy of the document (in the author's possession) has a handwritten circle around the date with the annotation, "5 ½ years old." In the Coalition's proposal, the merits of Black cultural institutions as promoters of self-esteem in Black youth are argued. The theory put forth was that through the introduction to young people of the history and culture of their people - so often absent in the classroom and mainstream media - positive behavior and community responsibility would be fostered. In a city that was at this point 62% African American

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<sup>27</sup> Frederick W. Byrd, "Newark Red Tape Knots Historic Mansion Repair," *Star Ledger*, July, 26, 1984.

<sup>28</sup> Byrd, "Community Groups Still Work to Resurrect Dilapidated Krueger Mansion," *Star Ledger*, February 4, 1985.

and whose population's median age was 27, the Coalition argued that a Black cultural institution would make a powerful impact on the people and on the city as a whole.<sup>29</sup>

In the spring of 1985 an "emergency" City Council meeting was called regarding the Mansion. This action was probably due in part to the increasing number of African Americans in local political power. Sharpe James, a big believer in the promotion of Black business and culture, was now South Ward Councilman. The next year he would become mayor. While an African-American mayor was already in office, Ken Gibson was not known as one especially outspoken on the subject of race. He wanted to be known as the mayor for all and was not eager to align himself with causes that might seem Afrocentric – perhaps such as a Black Cultural Center. At this council meeting business administrators, community leaders, and politicians argued about who was doing what - and when. Reviewing the archives, it becomes painfully clear why the Mansion project moved so slowly; every time an idea was put forward it seemed to meet with an immediate dead end. There were a lot of "I'm waiting to hear back from him" sorts of moments, in the meeting minutes and in various interviews surrounding the Mansion restoration plans.<sup>30</sup>

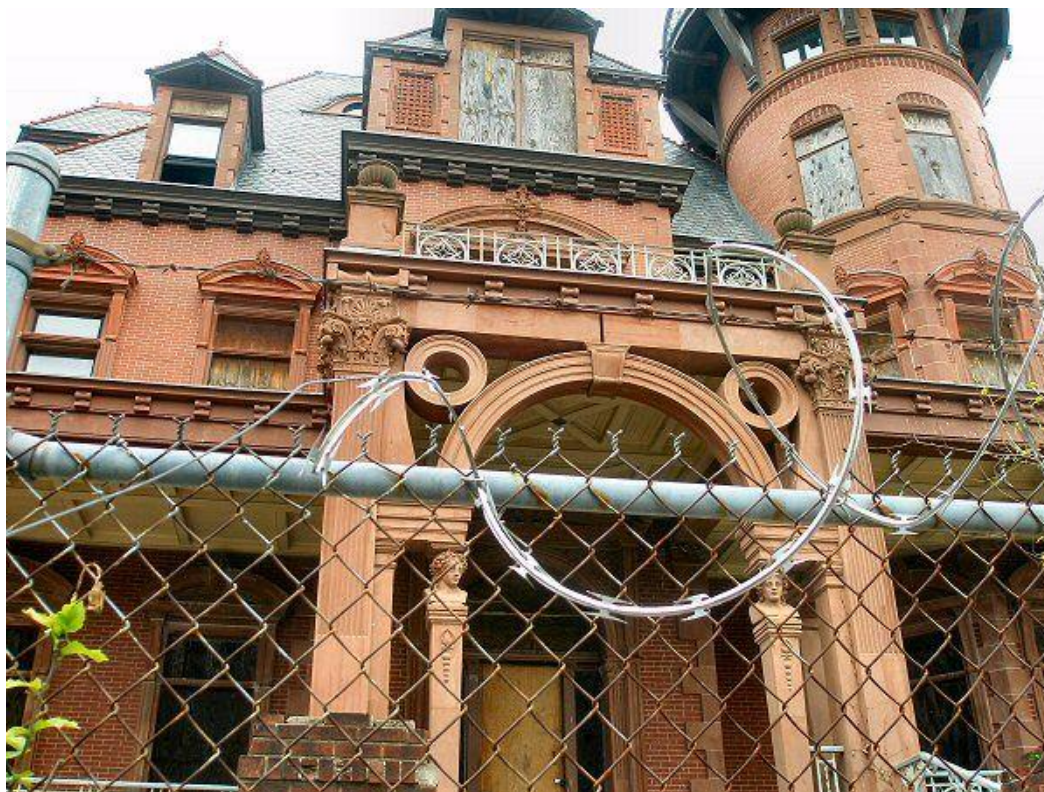
In 1986 a chemical analysis was performed on the house masonry and an architectural firm was finally employed. The City Council had voted to invest one million dollars in the Mansion's restoration and to employ Grad Partnership architects to perform a study of the structure. That same year, Grad published a full architectural analysis regarding the possibilities of restoration and renovation for the Krueger-Scott Mansion. The cost of the report itself was \$200,000. The estimate for all of the work and materials required to restore and renovate the Mansion came in at

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<sup>29</sup> Central Ward Coalition of Youth Agencies, "A Plan to Restore the Krueger-Scott Mansion into The Newark Library & Museum of Black Culture," August, 1984. There is much research that supports this theory; for example, Joy DeGruy theorizes this subject with her work on Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.

<sup>30</sup> Byrd, "Official Vows Fast Action on Repairs for Vandalized Krueger Mansion," *Star-Ledger*, May 22, 1985, 25.

around five million dollars. Previous studies had estimated the cost at closer to eight million.<sup>31</sup> And then, seemingly inexplicably, everything came to a standstill once again. The city put up a fence around the property to deter vandals, and the “Castle on the Hill” seemed destined to remain a relic of its past.



*Figure 5. Krueger-Scott Mansion circa 1986. Photo by L. Craig Schoonmaker.*

Tension between several groups within the city was mounting and may well have contributed to the project’s halt. It seems that once the idea for an African-American cultural center was proposed, the subject of the Mansion’s repurposing became a bit more emotional. Because the Central Ward was the geographical location within which the majority of African Americans lived— and because many in that community felt they were already neglected for exactly that reason — the Mansion project became directly attached to issues of race and class as well as housing.

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<sup>31</sup> Byrd, “Hope is Crumbling for Victorian Castle,” *Star-Ledger*, October 22, 1989.



According to an article from August of 1986, Edna Thomas' proposal had apparently been reviewed by the City Council. Thomas told the journalist that she did not want to give any details but that she "had some pledges as relates to financing." Thomas also expressed concern that Elizabeth Del Tufo and her Landmarks and Preservation Committee (a majority White organization) were trying to dictate the Mansion's use. Del Tufo responded in the same article that she was simply concerned that whatever group ended up in the Mansion be able to afford the "financial responsibilities" involved.<sup>32</sup>

In May of 1988 yet another proposal by the St. James A.M.E Church was submitted with regard to the use of the Krueger-Scott Mansion property. In a seventy-seven page application the group laid out a plan to convert the Mansion into a "Restaurant, a Historical Black Museum, Senior Citizens Day Care, a Center for Performing Arts, Job Training Center, and Office Space..." Included in the package was also a "Letter of Interest" with regard to a possible subsidy from the Newark-based Whitney Houston Foundation. St. James Church indicated that they were also in communication with Newark's largest employer, the Prudential Insurance Company, who was "favorably inclined toward financial support" of the project.<sup>33</sup> There is no more mention of this particular proposal in subsequent communications and reports.

1989 brought another tenuous year for the Mansion. Emotions and facts were in disarray. Councilman George Branch, who would later become involved with the Oral History Project attached to the proposed Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center, reported in October that the Council had solicited proposals for the Mansion but that none were deemed acceptable.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Byrd, "Krueger Cleanup Continues...As Does Dispute Over Mansion's Future," *Star-Ledger*, August 23, 1986.

<sup>33</sup> St. James Social Development Corporation, "Proposal for Renovation and Reuse of the Krueger Mansion," May 1988.

<sup>34</sup> One proposal put forth was by Kastl Associates Architects of Jersey City in February of 1989. Their estimate of basic repairs came in at just under two million dollars. It is not evident why this proposal was not considered. Kastl Associates, PC, Architects, *Krueger Mansion Report*, February 24, 1989.

Elizabeth Del Tufo argued that had the city acted sooner in favor of past proposals that the restoration costs would not have been so high at that point.<sup>35</sup> There was a lot of construction activity throughout the city at this period of time. That same year, Newark's Planning Board approved the construction of One Penn Center, a 33-story tower to house retail and office space as well as a hotel. A nearby historic building from 1907 would be refurbished and included in the project. Another proposal passed was that of a twenty-seven story Gateway Center building, the fifth of its kind at the Gateway complex. Renewal and restoration was certainly on the top of the city's to-do list, as long as it was occurring downtown.<sup>36</sup>

By Mayor Sharpe James' second term in office, it seems the city of Newark was fully committed to building an African-American cultural center within the Mansion. James believed that the project would prove symbolic of "what Newark can become if we all work together." In October of 1990, a *New York Times* article waxed dramatically of the almost-fall and now potential rise of the Mansion. Describing the High Street community as "raw-boned" and claiming that the home had fallen prey to roosting pigeons and "packs of wild dogs," Anthony DePalma reported that the site would indeed be one dedicated to Black culture - thanks to a state grant, the City of Newark, and "private interests." DePalma had attended a rededication ceremony the month before and was shown around the house by Louise Scott's daughter. It was the first time "Little Louise" had been back in the house for seven years. It was a painful experience to see her childhood home in shambles, she told the reporter.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Byrd, "Hope is Crumbling ..." *Star-Ledger*, October 22, 1989.

<sup>36</sup> Richard D. Lyons, "Postings: Building Up Newark, 33-story Tower," *New York Times*, April 2, 1989.

<sup>37</sup> Anthony DePalma, "About New Jersey," *New York Times*, October 28, 1990. That same year Hanscomb Associates, Inc. came in with a yet another project estimate of approximately three-and-a-half million dollars. It is not clear who solicited this particular report and how Hanscomb was associated, if at all, with past architectural groups such as Kastl and Grad.

The biggest news of 1990 was that Catherine Lenix-Hooker had been hired from New York City's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture as the executive director for the Mansion restoration project. According to one publicity piece, Lenix-Hooker's job would be to oversee "the transformation of the mansion into a major African-American educational and cultural facility."<sup>38</sup> Soon thereafter, Lenix-Hooker would be asked to perform tasks that seemed to her – and many others – outside the purview of her job description as Executive Director.<sup>39</sup> A redevelopment plan was approved by the city planning board on December 17, 1990.<sup>40</sup> Book parties, teas, and grant proposals followed in hopes of both funding the project and encouraging interest and good will around the Mansion. In 1991 the New Jersey Historic Trust granted Krueger-Scott over \$600,000 towards renovation. (In 1996 the "Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center" project would initially receive another 1.1 million dollars from the Trust, "the maximum grant award given to a landmark building." However, it would later be rescinded.)<sup>41</sup> Of course, any funding from a historic agency required that specific guidelines in terms of materials and workmanship be followed. This proved to be one of the greater devils in the details.

The next few years brought varied donations for the Mansion project - from individuals and private organizations - and five million dollars in bonds from the city of Newark itself. This period also brought grumblings. In 1992, as separate plans for the rehabilitation of the Mansion's auditorium were being reviewed, Lenix-Hooker was already forced to defend the project's timeline. "People ask me, 'Why is this project taking so long?' They don't realize the long process

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<sup>38</sup> "Grandeur in the Central Ward," *Newark Arts*, 1, no. 3, November/December 1990, 22.

<sup>39</sup> There was a press release out of the Mayor's Office in October of 1990 that described Lenix-Hooker's job as one to "oversee the restoration of the building, as well as its fundraising and development efforts. She will work with the advisory board in planning long-range activities and events." Pam Goldstein, "Director Named for Krueger-Scott Mansion," *Office of the Mayor of the City of Newark*, October 24, 1990.

<sup>40</sup> City Architect, "Krueger/Scott Redevelopment Plan," *City of Newark*, 1990.

<sup>41</sup> Carol DeSenne, "Newark High Street Mansion Receives Maximum Award from Historic Trust," *Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center*, Media Release, 1996.

that goes into a project like this,” she explained to a reporter. At this time she estimated the bulk of the work on the ground floor would be completed in October of 1993.<sup>42</sup>

In 1993 the New Jersey Preservation bond program granted the project over \$400,000, funds that would be matched by the City of Newark. Lenix-Hooker said in February that thanks to this funding the first floor renovations of the Mansion would now be completed by the end of 1994, approximately a year later than last estimated.<sup>43</sup> By July of 1993 the project had suffered a nine month work delay for various reasons, including an extended quest for suitable bricks in keeping with the Mansion’s historical requirements. Fits and starts ensued over the next few years.

During this same time an oral history project that was to have been housed within the cultural center had commenced. Beginning in 1997 interviews were implemented with over one hundred senior Newark residents. Most had come north from Southern homes but others of the participants were lifelong residents of the city. A questionnaire designed by two local historians, Dr. Clement Price and Giles Wright, tasked the peer interviewers with pursuing discussion on everything from travel, to food, to racism, to church. Pastors, senators, council members, and factory workers shared their stories.<sup>44</sup>

Newark native Philip Roth’s 1997 novel *American Pastoral* includes the character Swede, a Newarker, looking back upon his city during a 1995 high school reunion. Swede says, “Newark used to be the city where they manufactured everything, now it’s the car theft capital of the world ... there was a factory where somebody was making something on every side street. Now there’s a liquor store on every street — a liquor store, a pizza stand, and a seedy storefront church.

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<sup>42</sup> Towanda Underdue, “Krueger-Scott Restoration,” *Star-Ledger*, 1992 (n.d.).

<sup>43</sup> “Krueger Mansion Gets Funds for Renovation,” *Star-Ledger*, February 23, 1993.

<sup>44</sup> These oral histories have been the basis of much of the author’s work for the last five years. The cassette tapes of the interviews - stored in shoeboxes at various local institutions - were rediscovered by Dr. Samantha Boardman in 2010. Along with others of the Rutgers community, the author has helped with their annotation and summary in order to create a finding aid for research and public use. The collection has now been fully digitized and is available through Rutgers University Community Repository, see <http://kruegerscott.libraries.rutgers.edu/>.

Everything else is in ruins or boarded up.”<sup>45</sup> This is the kind of perception that much of the nation was holding about Newark, New Jersey at this time. The national imagination continues to run in this direction today.

Meanwhile, back downtown, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) had just reached completion at a cost of 180 million dollars. This was a project that Mayor James had also campaigned tirelessly for and some felt it had been depleting resources from other renewal projects, such as those slated for the various surrounding neighborhoods. Another large downtown construction project, One Newark Center - home to Seton Hall University’s Law School and Penn Plaza East office buildings – was completed in 1992. It seemed to be all about improving the downtown and refurbishing the city’s image to outsiders - including those employed within the city who made a bee-line out of Newark once the work day was done. Amiri Baraka, native Newarker and community activist-artist, was one of many Newarkers who spoke out against the funneling of money to the downtown area. He was apparently a supporter, in word at least, of the Krueger-Scott Mansion initiative.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, the Krueger-Scott organization was requesting two million dollars just to get the project back off the ground in a Central Ward neighborhood that most visitors would never even see. At this particular historical moment in Newark, New Jersey some in the city were just not as concerned about lifting up their ancestral history as they were about creating jobs and revising the city’s tarnished reputation as “the stolen-car capital of the country.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Philip Roth, *American Pastoral* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 24.

<sup>46</sup> Amiri Baraka repeated his frustrations for decades at most any public venue available. His views were not kept private and he elicited much agreement from the crowd when sharing his opinions on matters of urban renewal. Magaline Little, director of the KS oral history project, claimed Baraka was supportive of the KS project but that it was hard to get him to stay in one place long enough to be interviewed about it. Magaline Little, interview with author, May 31, 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Evelin Nieves, “Joy Ride Turns Deadly in New Jersey,” *New York Times*, September 21, 1993.

By 1998 the Krueger-Scott project began to suffer from a major lack of attention. Not surprisingly, costs had turned out to be greater than anticipated; more than the seven million dollars that had already been spent by 1995. Essentially no construction had taken place during the last year. The New Jersey Historical Trust was forced to withdraw their most recent grant because the city had neglected to spend the matching funds as stipulated. More diversion for the Mansion project plan came in the form of the ongoing High Street/MLK Boulevard neighborhood development initiative. Lenix-Hooker was asked at one point to organize a community center that would be housed within the Mansion as a component of a proposed 800-unit subsidized townhouse development next door.

As in so many cities at this time, there was much discourse surrounding the demolition of high-rise projects that had sprung up in the urban industrial boom post-WWII. These housing projects were a response to the influx of workers, many a part of the Great Migration, coming to the northern cities for jobs. Multi-level, low-income apartment buildings had been hastily constructed. A few decades later, as the industry jobs disappeared and those employed were hard-pressed to secure new work, it was clear that the “projects” were not an effective solution to “urban crisis.” For various and complicated reasons these buildings actually encouraged crime and poverty and an all-around sense of disaffection for those who resided there. Low income apartments throughout Newark, such as the Christopher Columbus Homes on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, were razed throughout the 1990s in order to erect more attractive (read suburban-looking) subsidized housing. In Newark at that moment the demolition talk surrounded the Hill Manor projects located next door to the Mansion. They would need to be imploded in order to build the proposed 800 townhouses.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Clifford J. Levy, “4 High-Rises Torn Down by Newark,” *New York Times*, March 7, 1994.

In a June 1998 memo to Mayor James, Lenix-Hooker seemed to be responding to past discussions though none were referenced directly in the correspondence. She began by expressing her disappointment at the departure of Newark Housing Authority director Harold Lucas. The project had an ally in him, she wrote, and there was concern with the lack of progress made since the Interim Director was installed. Lenix-Hooker also alluded to the negative perceptions surrounding the present aesthetics of the Mansion. For example, all of its windows had been boarded up for some time and the feeling reflected in newspaper editorials and talk on the street was that if so much money had already been spent, why did the place still look like just another abandoned building? Lenix-Hooker reminded the Mayor that the boards were there to protect the newly installed windows from the continually delayed Manor Hill demolition project, at that point scheduled for the coming fall. And as far as people asking when the Mansion would be open for business, Lenix-Hooker informed the mayor that with another three million dollars the site could be open to its first tenants in the next nine to twelve months.<sup>49</sup>

In July of 1998, Lenix-Hooker wrote another memo to Mayor James stating that the Mansion would “open the doors” the following summer. The “grand opening” of the first floor was slated for September of 1999. As well, she reported that the Mansion project had finally been granted tax-exempt status which she explained “opens the doors” for corporations to contribute to the cause.<sup>50</sup>

Ms. Lenix-Hooker received a note in August of 1999 from the New Jersey Historic Trust. The correspondence was concerning “easements” – the right to the use of the Krueger-Scott

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See, among other books on this complicated subject, Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles against Urban Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

“Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center Planning Meeting,” June 30, 1998. Minutes.

<sup>49</sup> Catherine J. Lenix-Hooker, memo to Mayor Sharpe James, June 16, 1998. Lenix-Hooker also mentioned towards the end of the memo that the oral history project had conducted “over 102” interviews. There exist 107 today.

<sup>50</sup> Catherine J. Lenix-Hooker, memo to Mayor Sharpe James, July 17, 1998.

Mansion property. The tone was friendly and the Executive Director of the Trust signed off with, “good luck in your new career.” Apparently by the time of this note, the Krueger-Scott project had already been transferred to the aegis of the Newark Housing Authority. It would not be until the following year that Ms. Lenix-Hooker’s “new career” would be public record.<sup>51</sup>

In June of 2000 the *Star-Ledger* reported, “Newark Trying Anew to Repair 1888 Mansion.” In a somber tone, Mary Jo Patterson wrote of the demise of the Krueger-Scott project and yet a glimmer of hope for its future. Patterson listed numerous obstacles faced by the project in the past, such as the further destruction of the roof by the \$80,000 scaffolding built to give passers-by the sense that work was truly being performed. Also noted in the article was the lengthy search for the elusive bricks and the ultimate termination of Lenix-Hooker’s position. “The money to complete the work just wasn’t there,” Lenix-Hooker explained to Patterson.

The “hopeful” part of the article reported that the Newark Housing Authority was currently in discussions with regard to the Mansion. Several Newark residents interviewed for the article expressed enthusiasm that the “restoration may get back on track.” But there was nothing concrete, if you will, within the article indicating that anything specific was actually in the works.<sup>52</sup> In a show of how truly slow the wheels of city government can turn, the Hill Manor housing project was finally razed later that year, approximately five years after its demolition was originally scheduled. The boards on the windows of the Krueger-Scott Mansion could have finally been removed at that point, had anyone been around to do so. To this date there is still much discussion surrounding possible scenarios for the Mansion. No action has been taken.

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<sup>51</sup> Lenix-Hooker, letter to Ms. Hawkins, August 17, 1999.

<sup>52</sup> Mary Jo Patterson, “Newark Trying Anew to Repair 1888 Mansion,” *Star-Ledger*, June 5, 2000.





*Figure 6. Krueger-Scott Mansion in 2007. Photo by Richard Perry, courtesy of The New York Times.*

The history of the urban built environment includes more than that which exists; it must also take into account those spaces that no longer exist – as well as those that have tried but failed. The evolution of any one particular Black historical site, from the local Krueger-Scott Mansion to the National Museum of African American History and Culture, can be used as a lens through which to regard our societal attitudes. Some established locations of African-American historical memory provide too little information on their place-making and much more on the celebratory aspects of the final results. History cannot be tied up neatly with a bow – or a ribbon cutting ceremony. History includes what is inside - and what is missing from - the proverbial box.

Utilizing this particular line of inquiry can increase our historical understanding of African-American urban citizens and the culture within which they dwell. This analytical model can in turn be adapted to interrogate over-all urban issues present in our country since the emancipation of enslaved African Americans. Interrogating sites of African-American historical commemoration – and the attempts to create them – offers yet one more path in the forest of racial dialectics.

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