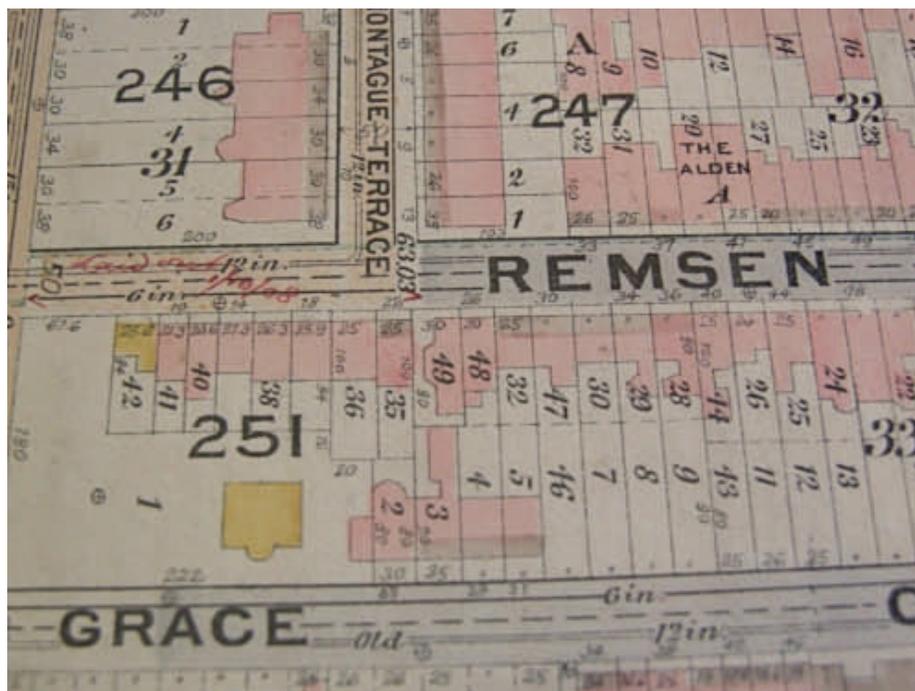




24 Remsen Street: A Legacy of Success and Innovation

24 Remsen Street is a large beautiful Renaissance Revival townhouse, built at the beginning of the 1890's. Although the architect's records have been lost, the details of the house are reminiscent of famed Brooklyn architect Montrose Morris' work, although there is no record of this being a Morris design. Other well known and successful architects also designed in this style for upper class clients. Morris' work at numbers 17 and 19 Prospect Park West also features similar Italian Renaissance style limestone parlor floor facades, with light colored brick upper floors, colonnade framed windows, and classical ornament. 24 Remsen Street's most arresting feature is a delicate third floor oriel supported by a carved corbel with foliate trim at its base. This house is the only house, mid-block on Remsen, to be semi-detached, with a side service entrance, and enough room on the lot to allow for a side bay, as well. The presence of this side entrance and bay also helps to date the home. The address does not appear in the 1890 census, so the lot was not built on until after the census was taken. The 1893 Atlas for Brooklyn clearly shows a building on this lot with a side bay, which takes up almost the entire lot. A much clearer copy of the Atlas for Brooklyn, from 1893, illustrates this even better. The style of the house dates it for at least 1890 or '91, as well. Although most of our Renaissance Revival homes in Brooklyn date after the Chicago Worlds Columbia Exhibition, held in the summer of 1893, the style had already started to appear in the homes of the wealthy in both Manhattan and Brooklyn. Renaissance Revival architecture is a stark departure from the brownstone and dark brick styles of the previous Italianate, Queen Anne, and Romanesque Revival architecture seen throughout Brooklyn Heights, and the rest of Brooklyn. The use of light colored building materials such as limestone, light toned brick and marble helped give rise to the name "White Cities", which characterized not only an architectural style, but a social mindset towards grand building and the place of architecture in society, as well.





The First Owners: James H. Oliphant, and Family

The house was built for wealthy stock broker James Oliphant. He was a lifelong Brooklyn resident, and in 1890, at the time 24 Remsen was being built, he lived in Clinton Hill, at 333 Washington Avenue, in a large Italianate brownstone. He was a partner in the Wall St. trading firm of Anthony, Poor and Oliphant, having been admitted to the Exchange in 1883. The firm later changed to Latham, Smith and Oliphant, and in 1898, he partnered with Alfred L. Norris to form the firm of James H. Oliphant and Co, at which time, he transferred his seat on the Exchange to his son, James, known as J. Norris. James Oliphant, senior, was a governor of the Stock Exchange for twenty years. Back in Brooklyn, he and his wife Helen, and J. Norris were active in Brooklyn's busy social life.



Both Mr. and Mrs. Oliphant appeared often in the society pages of the *Brooklyn Eagle* beginning in the 1880's, and continuing throughout their lives, attending and organizing events for charities, as well as the for purely social events. A long-time member of the Crescent Athletic Club, Oliphant became twice elected president of that organization in both 1898 and 1899. He also belonged to the Chamber of Commerce, the Riding and Driving Club of Brooklyn, the Union League Club, the Long Island Historical Society, the Hamilton Club, the Downtown Association, and the New York Yacht Club, and the Thousand Islands Yacht Club. He was a member and trustee of the Lafayette Avenue Congregational Church, serving as secretary to the Trustee Board. He was also a director of the Lafayette Fire Insurance Company, and a Trustee of the Title Guarantee and Trust Company of New York. A Cornell man, J. Norris was also active in many of the same clubs and organizations.



The First Owners: James H. Oliphant, and Family

In addition to their Remsen St. home, the Oliphants also had a summer home in Alexandria Bay, in the Thousand Islands, called Neh-Mahbin. It was one of three homes on a private island, with several acres of land. The *Brooklyn Eagle* chronicled their summer trips there, where they were often joined by other prominent Brooklyn society elites. On May 20th of 1901, the *Brooklyn Eagle* wrote that James Oliphant had just taken possession of his new yacht, an 80' schooner rigged steam yacht called the *Mahbin*. He planned to leave the next day for his island, sailing up the Hudson to the Erie Canal, to the St. Lawrence. His captain reported the trip would take seven or eight days, and Mr. Oliphant would be accompanied by his son James and a friend. This notice listed the Oliphant address as 24 Remsen Street, the first mention of them at this address.

Sadly, the next listing in the paper, at this address, was an announcement of the death of Helen Oliphant, in November of 1901, the funeral took place at the home. Oliphant would remarry before his death.



In February of 1902, James Oliphant and 24 Remsen made the society pages of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, when Oliphant had a squash court constructed on the top of his house. The paper explains:

Men of means, with good sized city houses, would do well to follow the example of James H. Oliphant, who has constructed a squash racket court at the top of his house, 24 Remsen St. It is as good fun as billiards and much better exercise, while the cost is hardly greater, yet it would seem that so far, Mr. Oliphant's is the only squash court in the borough. The most approved dimensions are 35x17 ½ feet length and breadth, and 16 feet in height, and the cost of such a court built of the best material is estimated at a maximum figure of \$2,000.

James Oliphant did not enjoy his squash court for very long, as he sold his house to Philip Ruxton in April of 1903. The Oliphant family moved to a large free-standing house at 415 Clinton Ave, in Clinton Hill, at that time, still one of the most fashionable neighborhoods in Brooklyn.



The First Owners: James H. Oliphant, and Family

On December 20th, 1907, Dr. Charles Geiger, of Beaufort, South Carolina, walked into James Oliphant's office at 20 Broad Street and asked to see him. He was one of the firm's clients, and he hadn't been doing well with his money, losing most of his \$75,000 portfolio through bad trades and investments. After a lengthy and loud discussion with Oliphant in his private office, Dr. Geiger pulled a gun out of his coat and shot James Oliphant in the stomach. He then turned the gun on himself and pulled the trigger. The bullet missed, going into the woodwork, but Geiger tried again, and succeeded in killing himself with a bullet to the head. Oliphant was seriously wounded, but remained conscious long enough to tell the police what had happened. J. Norris had been out of the office, but arrived right before the ambulance that took Mr. Oliphant to Hudson Street Hospital, where he died the next day. The bullet had pierced his stomach, grazing his liver and lodged close to his spine. The doctors were not able to find or retrieve it. His death was a shock to the city, and to the Wall Street community. Oliphant had been a well liked, popular man, and his office, right next door to the Exchange, was soon mobbed with well wishers and the curious. The police found Dr. Geiger's hotel room, with few personal possessions, and a notebook filled with entries penned in a cramped hand, chronicling his stock market and investing history of losses. He blamed the Oliphant firm for not stopping him from bad investments, and for not allowing him to continue trading, as he owed the firm \$5,000 in fees. In his meeting with Oliphant, he had unsuccessfully argued that he should have been allowed to recoup his lost money, and when Oliphant refused, he shot him. James Oliphant was 54 years old.

J. Norris Oliphant continued the work of the firm, over the following years forming new partnerships and mergers. The firm was to again make the news only a year after James Oliphant's death, with the conviction of an accountant for embezzling thousands of dollars. J. Norris died of pneumonia on January 23, 1927. The firm continued through the Depression, and was a prominent name in finance until it closed its doors in 1977.



The Second Owners: Philip Ruxton, and Family

James Oliphant sold 24 Remsen Street to Philip Ruxton in 1903. Ruxton was a fellow member of the Crescent Athletic Club, and they traveled in many of the same social circles, often listed at the same social and charitable events in the *Brooklyn Eagle*. Philip Ruxton was an ink man. He was a successful manufacturer of printing ink, with offices at 290 Broadway in Manhattan. On May 19th, a year before he bought 24 Remsen, the factory building housing Philip Ruxton Co. Inc, and the American Ink Company was gutted by fire. The building was located at 31-33 South Fifth Street, in Williamsburg, directly across from the ramp to the then, brand new, Williamsburg Bridge. The fire was seen by the watchman for the bridge. Ruxton's company occupied the second and third floors, and both ink manufacturers employed over fifty people. The fast moving fire was fueled by the chemicals used in ink manufacturing, and explosions rocked the building as the fire spread. The building had a 1,500 gallon tank of water built for use in case of fire, but it proved useless as the fire had started at night when no one was around to operate the system. It took all of the fire companies in the area over 5 hours to control the fire. Fortunately, only one of the firemen was injured, and no civilian casualties resulted. The fire wiped out over \$50,000 work of stock, and stopped business for over a month, while new facilities were secured.

This setback did not stop Ruxton from going on to become one of the most well known and respected ink manufacturers in the US. He is often quoted in trade magazines and books, and published several pamphlets and books about the craft and business of printing, and the history, composition, and chemical properties of the inks involved in both historic and modern printing. In 1927, he built a new plant at 432-434 West 45th Street, in Manhattan, for his International Printing Inc. Company, the result of his merger of Philip Ruxton Co, with the American Ink Company. That building, on a 50x100' lot, still stands. He went on to establish headquarters at 350 Fifth Ave, where he ran his business, becoming the president of the Ink Association of America, a position he held for many years.



The Second Owners: Philip Ruxton, and Family (continued)

The Ruxton name comes up frequently in the society pages of the *Eagle*. The Ruxton's had two daughters, Francis and Louise, both of whom had their weddings to prominent New Yorkers announced in the *Eagle* and the *New York Times*. Mr. and Mrs. Ruxton were very active socially. Mrs. Louise DeWitt Ruxton was an active member of the Brooklyn Philharmonic Association, and various charity boards, while Mr. Ruxton spent his time at the Crescent Athletic Club, and other popular clubs and business associations. Born in 1866, the son of a successful New England tea merchant, Philip Ruxton was a direct descendant of Governor Bradford of the Plymouth Colony and as such, belonged to the Mayflower Society and the Sons of the Revolution. He was also a member of the Lambs Club and Players Club. The family often summered in Bass Rocks, Massachusetts, and later settled down in a summer home in East Hampton, where they were very active in society there, as members of the Maidstone Club of East Hampton.

Their time in 24 Remsen must have been pleasant. The 1910 census shows Philip Ruxton, 44, his wife Louise, 41, and daughters, Louise, 16 and Frances, 11 living in the house with three live-in servants; Kurguro Tamaka, the 31 year old Japanese cook, Irish maid Rita Marguerite Fahy, 21 and German born waitress Emilia Schlierman, 32. There was no entry for this address in 1920's June census, perhaps because the family was summering in the Hamptons. In 1921, the family becomes one of the favored few to buy into one of the new luxury co-ops to be built on Park Avenue, between 49th and 52nd Streets. They joined Henry F. DuPont and twenty other prominent occupants at 280 Park Avenue, between 48th and 49th Street, in the first wave of wealthy people making that part of Park Avenue an extremely desired address. The house was sold on to Sarah Stapleton in 1923. Philip Ruxton died on January 8, 1945, after a long illness. He was 78 years old. He left his wife Louise, who died in 1948, their two daughters, and sons-in-law and three grown grandchildren.



24 Remsen: Those Who Followed

Sara Stapleton was the next owner of the house, taking possession in 1923. She may have either divided the house, or rented rooms to boarders. In 1931, Florence Kinsey is listed in the *Eagle* as a registered teacher for NYC summer school. Her address is 24 Remsen St. In 1936, Sara Stapleton dies and the house is inherited by Eunice Stapleton. On April 13, 1939, one C. Dudingston Lucas, a WPA engineer living at 24 Remsen, files for bankruptcy, listing no assets and debt of \$3,258, according to the *Eagle*. Census records for 1940 and later are not accessible to the public, so records are spotty here. The house has had multiple owners for the last fifty years. Eunice Stapleton sold it to Haig Management in 1951, Haig selling to Irving Honigsberg in 1953. Mr. Honigsberg and his wife owned the house until 1979, making them the longest owners of 24 Remsen. He was a prominent real estate lawyer. From the Honigsberg's, the house passed on to several other owners, until being purchased by Brennan Real Estate, LLC. The house's new beginnings, at this time in the 21st century, may not have the larger than life personalities of James Oliphant and Philip Ruxton, but the investors in this property will bring to 24 Remsen their own stories and successes, although perhaps not a squash court this time around.

Suzanne Spellin

May 11, 2010

for MyHome, Brooklyn, LLC

Donald Brennan



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Brooklyn Heights History

Brooklyn Heights was New York City's first suburb, settled by wealthy bankers and merchants who did business in Manhattan, their farmlands becoming the streets of houses and businesses that would take their names - Pierrepont, Remsen, Livingston, Middagh and Hicks. Robert Fulton's steamboat, invented in 1814, enabled people to have quick passage between Fulton St. piers in both Manhattan and Brooklyn, and it wasn't long after, starting in the 1820's, that Brooklyn Heights started to grow, and grow quickly. Most of Brooklyn Heights was subdivided into large 25x100 foot lots, which give this part of Brooklyn the stately grandeur and wealthy grace the neighborhood carries to this day. By the mid 1900's, the streets that overlooked the water, such as Columbia Heights, were among the most desired streets in Brooklyn Heights. They afforded residents a spectacular view of the harbor and lower Manhattan, while being high enough to avoid unpleasant sights or odors from the shore. In the days before the Promenade, the houses on the north side of the street had grounds that swept down the hill, and stairs and a small bridge, called the Penny Bridge, for the toll charged for crossing, enabled people to reach the lower grounds from Montague Street.

As the homes for the wealthy grew by the mid-19th century, so too did the need for service establishments. For many years, 183 Columbia Heights was a stable, with rooms to let on its upper floors, usually to local servants, or those looking for work as such, in the area. In 1872, the stable belonged to Mr. John T. Martin. He boarded people as well as horses, offering two rooms to let, and several advertisements in the Brooklyn Eagle were posted by people looking for work as domestics, who were boarding, or at least getting messages, at the stable. In 1880, an ad is posted specifically for two rooms to let for boarders, while also advertising the services of the stable.

By the late 1890's, most of Brooklyn Heights had been built up, and the Heights was still one of the wealthiest parts of Brooklyn, still home to Brooklyn's "old money". Newer fashionable sections of Brooklyn, like Park Slope, Clinton Hill and St. Marks were expanding with mansions and expensive homes, but the Heights was still home to the most influential and important people in the city. Nearby Montague Street was a microcosm of the growth of the area. The southern part of the street was dotted with successful banks and trusts, housed in magnificent and impressive buildings. Their boards of directors lived in the neighborhood. Further up Montague were the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and the Mercantile Library, as well as the exclusive Crescent Athletic Club, and the Casino Club. Heights residents could worship at several magnificent churches in the area, including Holy Trinity on Montague. The Long Island Historical Society, in its terra-cotta grandeur stood on nearby Pierrepont St, and the Packer Collegiate School was home to elite Brooklyn's young ladies. So too, was something new: the luxury hotel and apartment building.



Brooklyn Heights History (continued)

In 1885, the architectural firm, Parfitt Brothers, built the Montague, Grosvenor and Berkeley apartment buildings on Montague Street. Two years later, Montrose Morris built the Arlington at the end of the street. All of these buildings were to accommodate the large numbers of people who desired to live in Brooklyn Heights, but could not find, or did not desire an entire house. Although popular in the capitals of Europe for centuries, apartment living was not approved of by the American middle and upper classes of the late 1800's. The apartment was too reminiscent of a tenement dwelling, and a societal taboo about living too close to strangers made apartment buildings a tough sell. In order to combat this, the new upper class apartment boasted the finest features and materials, the newest modern conveniences, and large, spacious layouts. These apartments were huge by today's standards, usually at least seven rooms, with reception areas, parlors, library and dining rooms, several bedrooms, modern bathrooms, a serving kitchen, and maid's room. The Montague offered rooms for live-in staff in the attic of the building, and, like most high class buildings, had laundry rooms and large kitchen facilities in the basement. Food was prepared and brought to the apartment by dumbwaiter, and served from a small butler's pantry kitchen. Along with the luxury apartment building, the luxury residential hotel also became popular, and by the late 1890's, Brooklyn Heights saw many new buildings rising on Hicks and Pierrepont Streets, Clark and the other streets near the St. George Hotel. The grand Hotel Margaret, at 93 Columbia Heights, designed by Frank Freeman, and built in 1889, was the tallest building in Brooklyn Heights, and was an elegant and popular venue, with dining and entertainment high on the roof, with an excellent view of Manhattan.

To all of this development and change in Brooklyn Heights comes a determined and entrepreneurial developer named Louis J. Horowitz, of Manhattan. In October of 1899, he pays twelve thousand dollars to the estate of stable master John Martin, for 183 Columbia Heights, with the intention of erecting a seven story luxury apartment building on the site. The building would be the first single seven story apartment building with an elevator to be built in Brooklyn. Each floor would contain one nine room apartment, with two bathrooms. The Brooklyn Eagle notes on October 15, 1899, that the news of this apartment building would cause "considerable perturbation among the society circles of Columbia Heights", as it was also the first apartment building to be built on that street, at that time. Through negotiations with his broker, Venette F. Pelletreau of Remsen Street, Louis Horowitz was able to persuade his neighbors that the building would be of the highest quality, with the highest quality occupants. The good folk of Columbia Heights were satisfied with the new plans, and building permits were issued within five days, and building began in 1889.

Suzanne Spellen
for MyHome, Brooklyn, LLC
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Donald Brennan, principal

Donald has a fine appreciation of real estate from design, financing and construction perspectives, making him extremely effective at both identifying potential redevelopment opportunities and orchestrating successful deals.

A native New Yorker and longtime resident of Brooklyn Heights, Donald first became intrigued with historic and distinctive properties from an architect's perspective. After his undergraduate studies in the field, he spent two years at an architectural firm in Ireland, then returned to the States to earn his Masters of Architecture from the University of Michigan, College of Architecture and Urban Planning. Donald's subsequent years as a practicing architect with his own firm set the stage for other positions that would further fuel his market expertise. Over the next few years, he served as an analyst at a major NYC commercial real estate appraisal firm, and as a financial analyst in a high-profile investment banking environment where he was responsible for the acquisition, development and management of multi-million-dollar property portfolios for the nation's largest investment manager of pension fund assets.

All the while, Donald simultaneously developed a passion for buying, rehabilitating, selling and managing buildings in both Manhattan and in Brooklyn. By witnessing his own investments appreciate in value, he felt compelled to provide his expert knowledge and results to clients who share his same pride and vision. Donald additionally obtained his MBA in Finance from New York University, Leonard N. Stern School of Business to optimize his financial savvy.

As principal of Brennan Real Estate, LLC, Donald combines his unique assembly of skills that have distinguished him as a highly proficient practitioner in his field. Complementing his keen understanding of how properties are acquired and rehabilitated is an in-depth knowledge of the process of reconstructing buildings, of the financing that comes into play, and of the intricate measures involved to ensure approval from such governing entities as neighborhood associations, community boards and the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Since founding Brennan Real Estate, LLC, a full-service real estate development company that specializes in acquiring and rehabilitating properties that are in or adjacent to landmark districts, Donald has served a diverse and select clientele of property investors and owners in the purchase, renovation and management of their prized real estate assets.