



BROOKLYN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

Brooklyn Historical Society
128 Pierrepont St.
Brooklyn, NY 11201
718.222.4111
www.brooklynhistory.org

Media Contact: Allison Auldridge
347.381.3703
aauldridge@brooklynhistory.org

For Immediate Release
June 8, 2010

The Leon Levy Foundation Grants Funds for the Brooklyn Historical Society to Conserve Lefferts Family Papers

Brooklyn, NY – Thanks to a grant from the Leon Levy Foundation, the Brooklyn Historical Society will be able to process, conserve, digitize and make accessible to the public, an extraordinary collection of family materials that were generously donated to the Historical Society in January 2010 by the Lefferts Historic House/Prospect Park Alliance.

The Leon Levy Archives Project for the Lefferts Family Collection will initially focus on the conservation of the materials, after which the collections will be catalogued and digitized, with select images made available to the public on the BHS website (www.brooklynhistory.org). The original artifacts will be available to scholars and the public in the Othmer Library and Archives, and high quality facsimiles will be made available to the Lefferts Historic House for exhibitions and education programs.

The donation from the Prospect Park Alliance includes a variety of significant materials including beautiful examples of early Dutch Bibles and Catechisms from the 1600s and 1700s that contain important hand written genealogical information for the Lefferts Family; unique 19th century photographs such as daguerreotypes, tin types and carte de visites of the Lefferts Family and their homes; 1660s land deeds signed by Peter Stuyvesant; an inventory of the estate of John Lefferts from 1778 listing all of his possessions upon his death, which included items from feather beds and pewter pitchers to oxen and land holdings.

“We are extremely grateful to The Leon Levy Foundation for its support of this conservation and digitization effort, which will allow for a deeper, richer contextual understanding of the Lefferts materials,” said Deborah Schwartz, President, Brooklyn Historical Society. “The Lefferts family came from Holland in the 17th century, and owned vast amounts of land in Brooklyn. By the 18th century the Lefferts family was one of the largest slaveholding families in the county. These papers contain remarkable information about Dutch life in Brooklyn, and about the economic and social structure of Brooklyn in the 17th and 18th century. This collection is a welcome addition to our collection of unique materials related to early Brooklyn history.”

The donated materials complement another sizable manuscript collection, as well as books, maps, and photos of Lefferts Family related material already held at BHS. Descended from Dutch

settlers of New York, family members include Pieter Leffert, a farmer, army lieutenant and judge, who in 1783 built a farmhouse in Flatbush that currently stands in Prospect Park and houses the Lefferts Historic House. Gertrude Lefferts Vanderbilt, Pieter's granddaughter, wrote about her family, her community and the house in her 1881 book, *The Social History of Flatbush*.

The genealogical information will be an asset to both scholars and genealogical researchers who rely on BHS' Othmer Library's vast Brooklyn-related holdings. The project will also benefit the Lefferts Historic House. High quality reproductions of the digitized materials will be made for Lefferts Historic House to use in their exhibits and educational programming, while the originals are maintained at BHS.

Shelby White, Founding Trustee of the Leon Levy Foundation, said, "As a child growing up in Brooklyn, I always walked past Lefferts Historic House. Now, I am delighted that the Leon Levy Foundation, as part of its effort to make it easier for everyone to research important archival records, will assist the Brooklyn Historical Society in preserving the Lefferts family papers."

Brooklyn Historical Society holds the world's most comprehensive collection of Brooklyn-related materials. In 1993, the U.S. Department of Education designated its library as a "major research library" under the Higher Education Act.

The mission of the Brooklyn Historical Society is to connect the past to the present and make the vibrant history of Brooklyn tangible, relevant, and meaningful for today's diverse communities, and for generations to come. Founded in 1863, BHS is a nationally recognized urban history center, comprised of a museum; scholarly research library; and educational center dedicated to preserving and encouraging the study of Brooklyn's extraordinary 400-year history.

www.brooklynhistory.org

The Leon Levy Foundation (<http://www.leonlevyfoundation.org/>), founded in 2004, is a private, not-for-profit foundation created from the estate of Leon Levy, a legendary investor with a longstanding commitment to philanthropy. The Foundation's overarching goal is to continue the tradition of humanism characteristic of Mr. Levy, by supporting scholarship at the highest level, ultimately advancing knowledge and improving the lives of individuals and society at large.

###