

Brownsville HERITAGE HOUSE

CELEBRATING 41 YEARS OF CULTURE



BHH

Inc.

THE STORY OF HOW IT ALL GREW



BHH Vol. 1 Issue 1
August 2022

Cover Image
Nadiya Farrington

BHH Legacy

Mother Rosetta Gaston - Founder
Patricia Dean - Board Chair, Operations
Miriam Robertson - Executive Director

Stanley Kincard - Operations
Alice Crowder - Operations

BHH Leadership

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Helen King - Chair of Board
Iris Robertson - Corresponding Secretary

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AN ART & CULTURE MAGAZINE FOR
HERITAGE AND COMMUNITY

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Welcome to *Brownsville Heritage House!*

Hi everyone! Welcome to the Brownsville Heritage House (or *BHH* for short)!

Have you ever thought about how important it is to know about your culture and your community?

Well, in this 'zine (short for *magazine*) you'll read about how important BHH is to Brownsville history and its residents.





While flipping through this 'zine, you'll see how BHH and its caretakers have helped create spaces for multicultural art, education, and culture to co-exist throughout time.

This is important because it shows how BHH continues to be a place where community members can creatively connect and engage with one another and their culture.



So many people have transformed BHH into what it is today: a cultural safe space where creativity grows!

So join us as we walk through the BHH space and take a look at the impact it has had on Brownsville history!

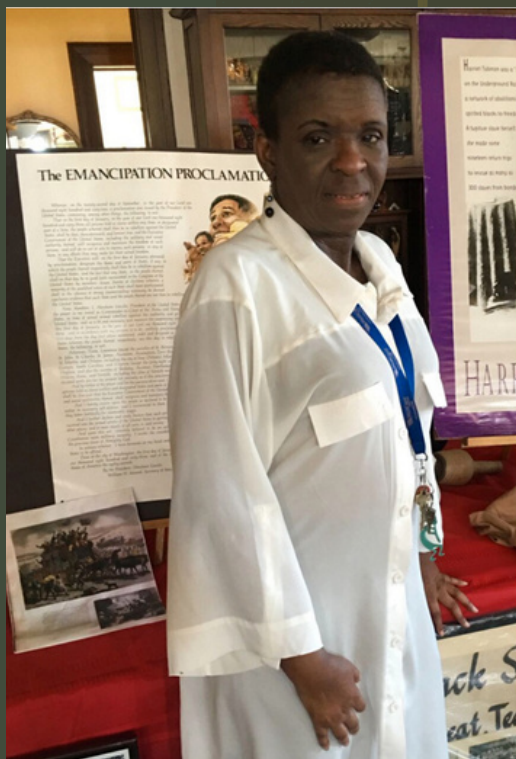
Meet our Narrator!

“I’m glad to be a part of the women who keep this place going!”

- Miriam Robertson, Executive Director of BHH



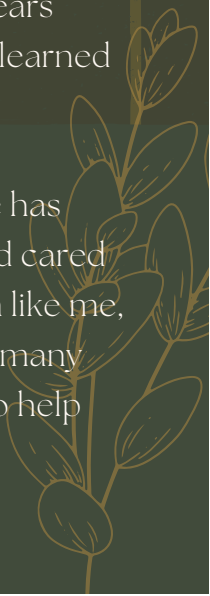
-MOTHER GASTON,
BHH Founder



-MIRIAM ROBERTSON,
BHH Executive Director

Hi everybody! I’m Miriam and I am the head caretaker of BHH. I have been in this role for over nine years now, and I’ve really learned a lot!

The Heritage House has always been run and cared for by Black women like me, and I've just met so many wonderful people to help assist me!



The women who came before me saw a big need for the neighborhood to hang onto spaces for education, culture and art in Brownsville. BHH became a place, in addition to our schools & libraries, that teaches Black history - *our* *history* - while also making room for the future.



-PATRICIA DEAN,
Former BHH Exec. Director



Keep reading to learn about our special history. We'll walk through how BHH got here, the Black women that made this place possible, and where BHH is headed.

Head to the next page, and let's keep going!



Matriarchy & Lineage

Created by Mother Gaston, activist and founder of BHH, I follow a rich legacy of women caring for and guiding the original mission of BHH, including her mentor, Patricia Dean (affectionately known as *Mama Pat*) who I followed as ED after she passed away.

Before I was the ED I sat on the BHH board with my mother, Iris Robertson, who has been an active member since 1995. While there have been many members who have supported this space, it is easy to trace the impact of women's leadership and the legacy that we continue to uphold.



Photo Source: Brownsville Heritage House

Image of Miriam Robertson at BHH



Photo Source: Brownsville Heritage House

Image of Miriam Robertson, Mother Gaston, Patricia Deans

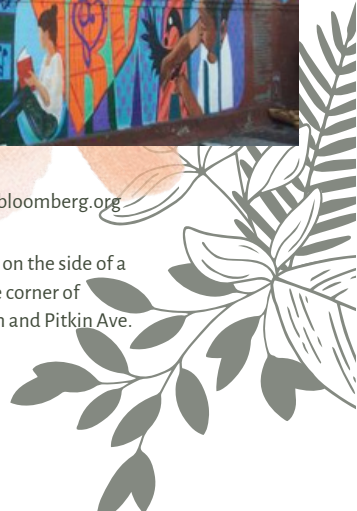
History OF BROWNSVILLE



Photo Source: [bloomberg.org](https://www.bloomberg.org)

Above

Mural painted on the side of a building at the corner of Mother Gaston and Pitkin Ave.

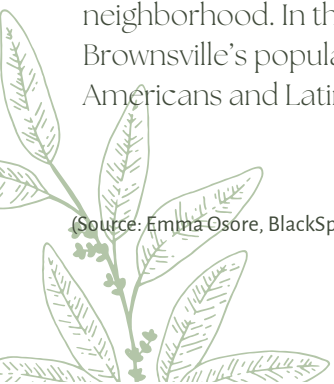


Now, what's so special about Brownsville? It is a neighborhood in eastern Brooklyn and a part of greater New York City. Brownsville is a place of many different experiences. Brownsville is a place that is very multicultural!

Before the 1930s, the first people of this land were Lenape, who were colonized by the Dutch, and then Jewish working-class people populated the neighborhood. In the 1930s, Brownsville's population of African-Americans and Latinx people moved in.

The number of Black people continued to grow larger well into the 1940s and 1950s as they fled from the Jim-Crow South, up to the Northern states like New York - finding better places to live and work, like here in Brownsville.

(Source: Emma Osore, BlackSpaces: Brownsville Codesigning Black Neighborhood Heritage Conservation, year.)



In the 1960s, Brownsville also played an important part in Civil Rights. History shows us that important groups like the Black Panthers came to Brownsville to try and make the neighborhood and schools better for the community. Because Brownsville became so diverse, housing also increased and Black business also grew to be very successful too!

Brownsville was often left out of community development opportunities by corporations and government systems. There were also difficult civil rights movements such as the Teacher's Strike of 1968 that saw the Black community in Brownsville asking for fair and equal treatment for their children's education.

Fighting for the integration of schools, families boycotted and organized to make sure their children were able to learn well and fairly. This also led people like Mother Gaston to dream of the founding of BHH as a space for the community to learn and support each other through creativity!

BHH exists to this day to protect the rich local history and to create a place where Black culture can thrive throughout time! It makes sure that Black and multi-cultural histories and culture are kept safe so that you can keep learning about it even today!



Photo By: Nadiya Farrington

Left

An image of Brownsville Public Library, home to Brownsville Heritage House

3/28/81

GRAND OPENING! BROWNSVILLE HERITAGE HOUSE



Founder
Mother Rosetta Gaston

A FIFTY YEAR DREAM COMES TRUE!

Founding of Brownsville Heritage House

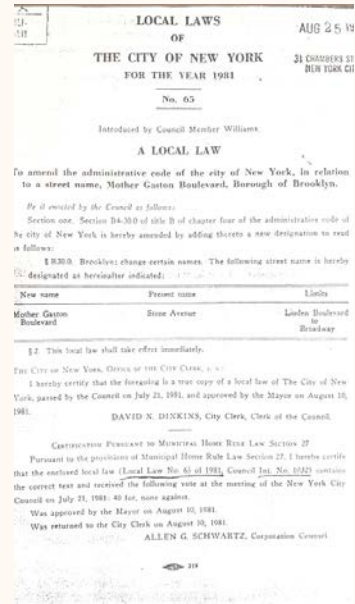
Can you imagine yourself starting a space for the community? In 1967 Mother Gaston took an idea she had for a community space for kids and started it out of her private home calling it the *Children's Cultural Corner*. She actually lived right here on Dumont Avenue which used to be called Stone Avenue! The Children's Cultural Corner, at that time, didn't have a public location.

Many different and important people in history began to notice Brownsville! They wanted to help Mother Gaston to get the support she needed to build BHH and help the community to gain recognition across the country. Because Brownsville became so diverse, housing also increased and Black business also grew to be very successful too!



Photo Source: BHH Archive
Right
The images show renamed street reregistration with the City of New York.

Photo Source: BHH Archive
Left
Brochure pamphlet celebrating the creation of BHH.







Supporters of the community gathered for a day of joy and celebration to honor the dedication and work of Mother Gaston

"...Success is measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life [but] by the obstacles which [one] has had to overcome while trying to succeed."

- Booker T. Washington



Photo Source (All 2): BHH Archive
Left
Mother Gaston being gifted with flowers and an award for being the honored guest of the night



Photo Source: BHH Archive
Right
Mother Gaston smiling and talking with guest while eating cake



Photo Source: BHH Archive
Above
Ticket announcing the scheduled celebration event at Siloam Presbyterian Church for Mother Gaston

Photo Source: BHH Archive
Left
Photo of Mother Gaston giving a speech at her celebration event




Sadly, Mother Gaston passed away in 1981 and never got to see the current home of BHH. However, soon after her passing, passionate local people wanted to find a space to honor and continue her legacy. They found an empty space at the Brooklyn Public Library - which was not using the second floor of the library at all!

With the help of a member of congress and council members at that time, they approached the Library to say, "we want to utilize the space!". In March of 1981 the doors opened to Brownsville Heritage House here at this location. We are still here 41 years later!"

"Our goal is to make sure that we keep the history of Brownsville alive & to make sure that people understand how important [and] significant Brownsville is."

-- Miriam Robertson



LANGSTON HUGHES
20 EAST 127TH STREET
NEW YORK 35, N. Y.

August 28, 1962

Mrs. Rosetta Gaston
345 Livonia Avenue
Brooklyn 12, New York

Dear Mrs. Gaston:

It is most kind of you to think of me in connection with the fund raising project for the Carter G. Woodson Building. But regrettably, I am unable to accept any speaking engagements in the foreseeable future (other than the few I already have on my schedule) since I have been away from home so much in the past year--twice to Africa among other places--that my writing has suffered greatly. I am now so far behind on book and play contracts, that I dare not leave my typewriter for several months to come. But I do thank you for considering me.

With cordial regards,

Sincerely yours,
Langston Hughes
Langston Hughes

April 14, 1975

Mrs. Alma John
c/o Black Pride
Television Station WPIX
220 E. 42nd Street
New York, N. Y. 10017

Dear Mrs. John:

How very much I enjoyed seeing and hearing Mother Rosetta Gaston on your show a few Saturdays ago!

This indomitable lady long ago made her mark on the Brownsville community and even now, having turned ninety, continues to be a vibrant and unwavering force for the betterment of her fellow man.

Your letting so many people see Mother Gaston in action, even for just a few minutes, was not alone a treat but indeed a notable public service.


Very truly yours,
Bernard Rober
Bernard Rober
Manager, Woodson Houses

"I think what Mother Gaston felt was that Brownsville was a place where [there] was community."

-- Miriam Robertson

Photo Source: BHH Archive
Top
Letter to Mother Gaston from
Langston Hughes.

Photo Source: BHH Archive
Bottom
Letter talking about Mother
Gastons impact on Brownsville.



MOTHER GASTON'S BROWNSVILLE DREAM FULFILLED

By Sandra McCollum,
Chronicle Reporter

At the opening ceremony of Brownsville Heritage House, III held on Saturday, March 28, 1981 at the Stone Avenue Branch Library in Brooklyn, "adopted children", family and friends gathered to honor the opening of the Brownsville Heritage House, III, the 50-year dream of the late Mother Rosetta Gaston. Mrs. Agnes Willis, adopted daughter of Mother Gaston, welcomed guests who came to see the "dream" become a reality.

Mother Gaston, a long time activist following the footsteps of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, noted historian and founder of the Association for the Study of Afro American Life and History (ASALH), whom she had known and loved, organized the Kipirsi Society at the Trylon Center in Harlem, the Brooklyn Branch of ASALH, the Brownsville Branch of ASALH, the Children's Cultural Corner, and the Brownsville Heritage House, III. Working faithfully in her quest to establish an educational and cultural center for youth, Mother Gaston lived long enough to see her dream come true. She died on February 27th at the age of 96.

Stanley Kinard, Director of Heritage House, III introduced himself and members of his staff who briefly stated the skills and expertise they would be bringing with them to the center. The center offers free workshops in Theatre, Video/TV, Music, Reading and Writing, Yoga/Exercise, Percussion and Music History, as well as school tutorials and special programs for senior citizens. Anyone who wishes to participate in the workshops can call the center at 385-1111 weekdays from 9:00 a. m. to 5:00 p. m.

Brownsville Heritage House III
% Rosetta Gaston
430 Dumont Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11212
346-2351

Senator Vander Beatty
670 Sterling Place
Brooklyn, New York 11216

Dear Senator Beatty:

Several months ago you indicated that our organization would be able to get funded through the State. I would like to remind you of that promise, and hope that you would discuss it with the other elected officials from the Brownsville - East New York area. As I said that day, this has been a lifelong dream of mine and I would like to see it fulfilled within the next few months.

The reason I am calling on you again is because you have been so helpful in the past. I remember how you used to escort me to places of interest and introduce me at your functions - and how I enjoyed it. Now I have reached the age when I can't go out any more, I know you will help us fulfill my dream.

Senator Beatty, please, please help me fulfill my lifelong dream.

Gratefully yours,

Mother Gaston

CHISHOLM
121, New York

ST OFFICE:
300 PARKWAY
NEW YORK 11214
796-3500

TOM OFFICE:
400 BURLING
1228-6231

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EDUCATION AND LABOR
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Congress of the United States House of Representatives Washington, D.C. 20515

MR. WESLEY MCG. HOLDER
DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVE

December 18, 1972

Mrs. Rosetta Gaston
Brownsville Branch of the Association
For Study of Negro Life and History
430 Dumont Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11212

Dear Mother Gaston:

Thanks for your letter of December 2nd, in reply to my acceptance through Senator Vander Beatty, to speak on February 3, 1973, at 1:00 p.m. at the history program of the Brownsville Branch of the Association for Study of Negro History of which you are the founder.

As I write this note I am thinking of how good God has been to you --- 88 years old and still in the firing line. You are blessed and may the good Lord keep you and give you strength to fight on just a little longer.

With warmest personal regards and very best wishes.

Daughter,

Shirley Chisholm
Shirley Chisholm, M.C.

Photo Source: BHH Archive
Above

Article snippet talking about the opening of BHH and its mission to be a cultural center for the community.

Photo Source: BHH Archive

Right Top

Letter written by Mother Gaston Senator Beatty asking for funding.

Photo Source: BHH Archive

Above

Letter written from Shirley Chisholm to Mother Gaston confirming her presence at a Brownsville event.



Photo Source: Rosetta Gaston Senior Center
 Above
 Statue awarded to Mother Gaston. Was the first ever monument of any native resident of Brownsville, NY.



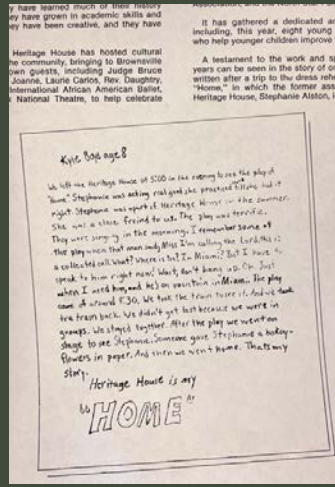
Photo Source: BHH Archive
 Above
 Article written on the artwork and statue done in honor of Mother Gaston.



Photo Source (All 3) : BHH Archive
 Above
 Mother Gaston's Mother (left) and Father (right).



Above
 Poster artwork of an event held for Mother Gaston.



Above
 Student essay about Brownsville Heritage House.

BROWNSVILLE HERITAGE HOUSE INC



DEVELOPMENT OF

"BHH!"

Now, let's take a closer look at the building and what's inside - if you look closely at the outside of the building, it is like a castle, and on top it are fairy tale characters like dragons and gargoyles carved in stone.

Did you see them before you walked in? If not, make sure to take a closer look the next time you leave the building.

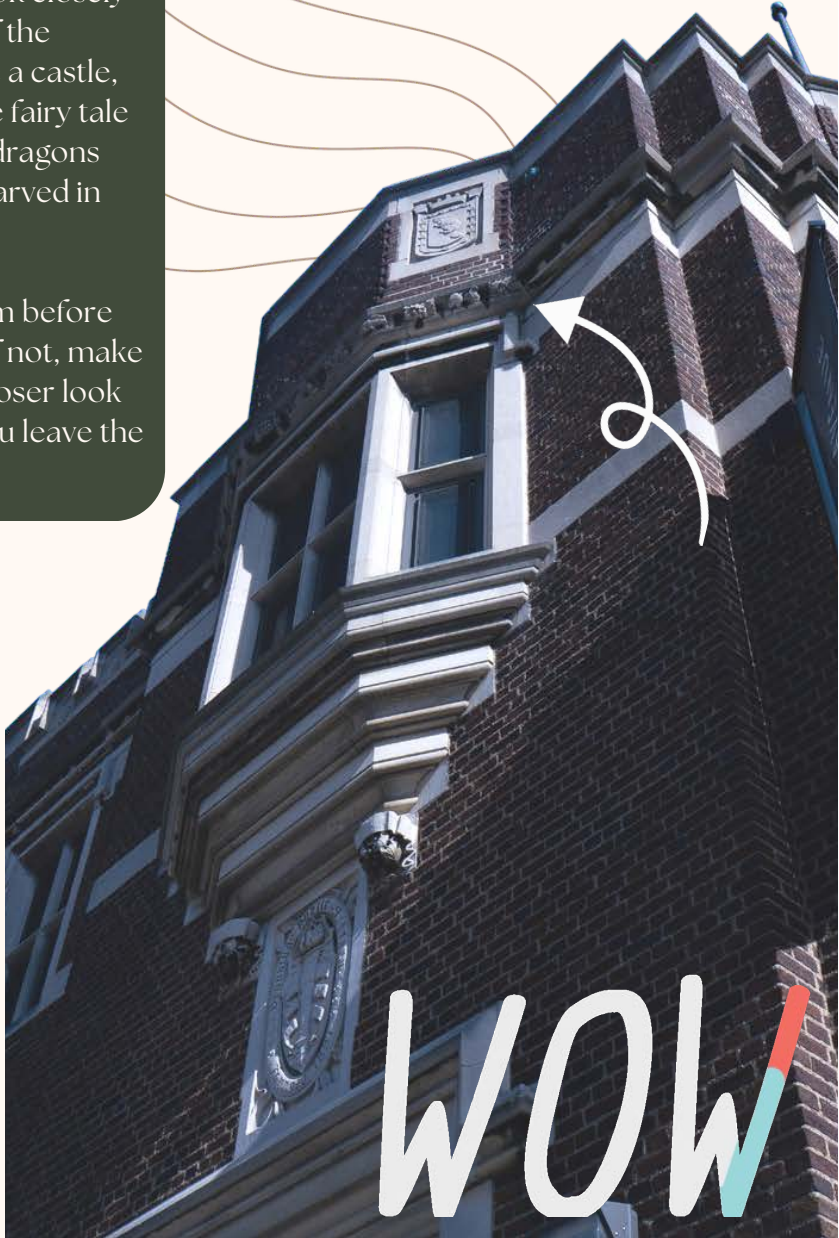






Photo Source: Nadiya Farrington

Top
The image shows the interior
of BHH with empty seating



While the building that surrounds BHH is playful and delightful, it is also a space for everyone of all ages to come together.



While children and adults alike can find the fun and whimsy, and also learn about Brownsville's culture and history -this space is especially friendly for educators and artists. Everyone can build and create together!




Photo Source : Nadiya Farrington

Left
Exterior of BHH





"Part of our mission is to make sure that we bridge gaps between the youth and our elders. That way culture and history is constantly being told."



The way we tell stories and history at BHH happens as soon as you walk in. When you enter BHH, take a look at the side walls. You'll see tall dark brown cases that almost touch the ceiling, the feeling is that history is all around you.



Each shelf is filled with hundreds of treasures that will tell you more about Black history. Each piece of art tells a story about our ancestors beginning in Africa, and how they progressed throughout time. Looking at these objects is another way to "bridge the gap".

What connection do you have to any of the artifacts that spark a story for you? How might you continue learning or teaching about your heritage through each generation?

Photo Source (All 2): BHH
Left Page
The images shows the interior of BHH with people attending meetings and events

Photo Source: BHH
Above
Image shows Ms. Miriam talking to two kids inside BHH



Photo Source: BHH

Image shows hallway entering BHH with shelves full of artifacts

Above



BROWNSVILLE



SPRING





HERITAGE HOUSE

ARTS AND CULTURE

There is an endless opportunity to learn through art of all kinds! Here you'll find sculptures that tell of legends and myth. You'll hear music of all types, see movies and plays of Black culture, and experience poetry that moves you! You'll also see paintings and photos of important political and cultural leaders of the past and present.

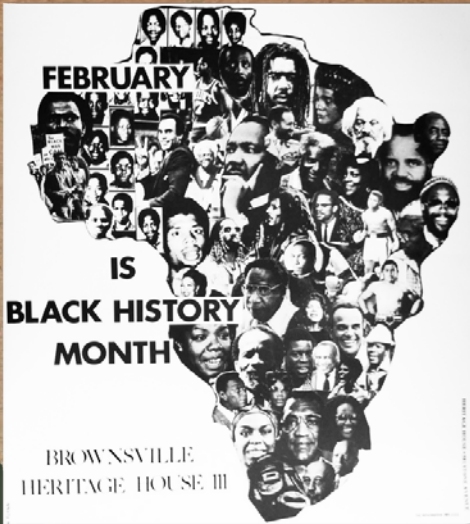


Photo Source (All 3): BHH

Top right:
All images show performance
happening at BHH

Bottom:
Posters and paintings found at
BHH





One thing that is special about our collection that might be different from others is that in this space, some objects can be touched! If you walk around - how can you tell which ones should or shouldn't be touched?





“ We all need a place to be inspired. We need a place where we can just rewind, just sit back, take a breather, think about it, and strategize.”

– Miriam Robertson

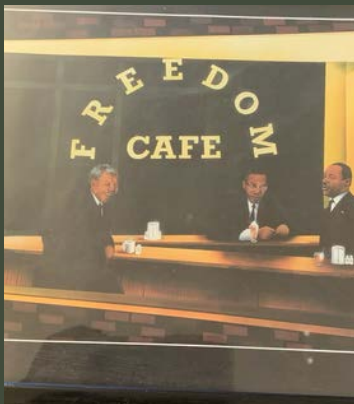
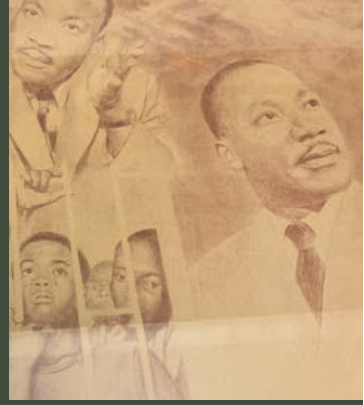


Photo Source (All 3): BHH

Top right:
All images show art shows
happening at BHH

Bottom:
Posters for events and books
found at BHH





BHH Collection Corner

4TH BROWNSVILLE
HERITAGE HOUSE
COLLECTION SPOTLIGHT

AUGUST 23 | BHH
EXHIBIT ROOM
+1-PHONE NUMBER
EMAIL@EMAIL.COM

BHH Collaborators



Thank You!



We hope you enjoyed reading and learning about the history of BHH and our community as we and strive to continue to uphold the mission of Brownsville Heritage House.

It takes a village to keep our history alive and this includes you! It takes our visitors, youth and elders to continue this legacy of maintaining all of our community, history, and heritage.

We hope you enjoyed reading and learning about the history of BHH and community. We appreciate your continued support through partnership ([link out](#)), donations ([link out](#)), and engagement with the space!

We greatly appreciate hearing from our visitors about their visits here at BHH. So, tell a friend about us about your experiences here at BHH, and we look forward to welcoming you again real soon!!



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HERITAGE HOUSE
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