

Ms. Nacht, who is Jewish, is the co-president and longtime active member of the Englewood Historical Society. She also is an artist whose work has been shown widely; in 2017, the Jewish Standard had a cover story about her. The art she's been making for some time now uses shredded old books to make new shapes and tell new stories; perhaps not coincidentally, it's about the connections and disconnections between time, history, tragedy, change, and life.



Highly skilled workers have removed the tower from the Second Empire-style Taylor-Bliss House and prepare to drive it to its new home, two miles away. (Brett P. Thompson)

After the Bliss family sold the house, it passed through a few other families who brought up their children there, as the Taylors and Blisses had. Then, “in 1985, a contractor, Ray Flaherty, bought it, and renovated it to 1985 standards,” Ms. Nacht said. Although the surrounding area is residential, he was allowed to use it for offices, but “when he bought it, it was with a deed restriction that he couldn’t change the exterior or tear it down,” she said.

Years later, in 2003, a new Orthodox synagogue, Kehilat Keshet, bought the house, and used it as its synagogue; eventually, the growing community outgrew the building, and built a new one.

There were complications. There always are. In this case, although the house was in Englewood, the land the synagogue bought was in both Englewood and Tenafly. New Jersey has home rule; each town has its own set of rules.

The synagogue built its new building around the Taylor-Bliss house, surrounding it on three sides. The new building was designed so that once the house would be removed, the building would look natural, not as if something had been amputated. Meanwhile, the increasingly unused house increasingly fell into disrepair, so Keshet members no longer were allowed inside.

There were legal battles and ill feelings as the synagogue tried to dispose of the building. The Englewood Historical Society tried to save it, and although those two goals were not necessarily in conflict with each other, the two groups had different priorities.

The house is an example of Second Empire architecture. “It’s the only house like it in Englewood, with three stories and a tower,” Ms. Nacht said. “It’s structurally sound. We had architects and engineers look at it. We are moving something that is salvageable, but will take a lot of work to bring it back and make it relevant for today’s life.”

There were many problems that had to be solved before the building could be moved. For one thing, it is expensive. “It cost us \$350,000 to move and reassemble it,” she said; that does not include renovation, although it does include the basement that had to be built on its new home. “We still need a great deal of money to bring it back to its original glory.” The goal is to make it fully ADA-compliant, which would entail installing an elevator.

There also was the question of where to put it. “Early one morning, when I was half asleep, I realized what we could do,” Ms. Nacht said. “We could move it to Eleanor’s property.”



For years, Kesher's new building seemed to be wrapped around its old home, the Taylor-Bliss house. (Courtesy Kesher)

That was in 2019, when plans to move the building began to assume some reality.

Eleanor was Eleanor Harvey, “who was the first president of the Historical Society,” Ms. Nacht said. In 2007, when Ms. Harvey died at 97, “she deeded land to the city. The city hasn’t done anything with it. It’s supposed to be a passive park — it’s been very passive.

“We brought a new old thing to it.”

The site, on Liberty Road, comes with a parking lot, although there had been no reason to park there.

“It’s also on George Washington’s retreat route,” Ms. Nacht said. “It’s a very appropriate historical area for this house.”

Next came the practical question of how to move a house. “We found a mover — SJ Houck Construction, in Abescon. He said he’d done moves like this before. He said that he would divide the house into sections, which sounded horrifying.

“They did a fantastic job. They brought a humongous crane right up to it. When they moved it, the guys stood underneath it and moved it, like it’s not a several-ton building.”

Before the move itself began, the workers stripped everything from it, including the sheetrock. Everything that was to be saved is in storage. Then “they cut it into five pieces and fit them on two flatbed trucks.” The move and rebuilding took two days.



Neighbors came to watch the move. (Janine McKee)

The money for this initial stage came from a few sources. “We had an angel, Norman Davis, a former Englewood Historical Society president, who gave us \$100,000 in stocks that we had to match.” They did. “Kesher gave us \$100,000, and Mayor Wildes” — that’s Michael Wildes, the mayor of Englewood — got us \$10,000 from CareOne and another \$10,000 from a Korean church.”

David Braun of Leonia is the YIVO Institute's new academic advisor — its official Yiddishist — but he's also keenly interested in local history. He's a member of the Englewood Historical Society.

"We're over the moon" about the move, Mr. Braun said. Yes, there had been some ugliness leading up to this moment, "but in retrospect it all seems ridiculous, and already entirely forgotten.

"This is a victory for the perpetuation of Englewood's history," he said. "The house is saved, and in an historically beautiful way, in a park that was suffering from neglect and underuse, and was donated by the founder of the Englewood Historical Society." Ms. Harvey "was a beloved schoolteacher for decades; everyone who was in the school system while she taught there knew her.

"What we have done for Englewood is justify the existence of the park." And he loves the history that's attached to it. Not far from the park, on West Palisade Avenue, Englewood's Liberty monument marks the place where a liberty pole once stood. "It's where the locals gathered to protest British taxation," Mr. Braun said. "You can still see the sign. On old maps, you can see that the neighborhood was called Liberty Pole. We have a revolutionary city here."

The newly renamed Englewood House "will not be a community center per se," he continued. Parts of Englewood's community have been advocating for a center that can house sports, maybe a pool, and all sorts of other community activity. That would be a very good thing to create, Mr. Braun said, "but this is not that. This is orthogonal to that. This will be the home of the Englewood Historical Society. It will house its archives and exhibits, and whatever public lectures they want. Those two things — Englewood House and a community center — are not related, and they do not cancel each other out."

Mr. Braun and Ms. Nacht both thanked Michael Wildes, and Mr. Braun said that Englewood's new city manager, Robert Hoffman, "has been a delight to work with."

Elie Jacobs of Englewood is a member of Keshet who watched some of the move.



Even before the cleanup work could begin — it's done now — Keshet's full building was finally fully visible. It had been constructed to look completely natural once the house was gone. (Courtesy Kehilat Keshet)

"I drove up on Monday morning and saw a gigantic crane on the property," he said. "They just backed it in. We thought that all of the fence would have to come down, and they'd have to level the berm, but they are very good at what they do. Only a very small part of the fence came down.

"When I got there, they were lowering the tower onto the flatbed."

People gathered to watch. "They were from the synagogue, from the historical society, from the neighborhood — they were all looking at this thing slack-jawed.

"The skill, talent, and creativity it took...."

Mr. Jacobs is a grown man with a sophisticated job, “but watching this makes you feel like a little kid. You’re watching big machines doing cool stuff.”

Akiva Block is Keshet’s rabbi. He also was there, and he was affected by what he saw.

“The house really was lifted up and moved,” he said. “We have spoken about this, about the prospect of the house being moved, for so long. We all got behind the idea — but you had to see it to believe it.

“We worked with a contractor” — SJ Houck — “who we were told was an expert in the field, but how many people have ever seen this before?”



Even cut into parts, the house was an oversized load as it was driven through Englewood. (Milagros Romers-Salgado)

“Watching the pieces of house lifted up on a crane, placed on a flatbed, and driven away on a truck was one of the most remarkable things I have ever seen.”

There were practical reasons for the move, Rabbi Block said. The shul needs more space. “It’s a necessity based not only on our projected growth but on our actual growth.”

He remembers when the building that surrounded the house was put up. “I have a picture frame of me standing next to this empty hole, which was soon to be our new building, with the house standing in the middle,” he said. “This is the next chapter in our story. We are very excited about what is to come next for us as a shul, and for the broader Englewood community.”

Like Mr. Jacobs, Mr. Braun, and Ms. Nacht, Rabbi Block feels gratitude and wants to say so. “We are grateful to the Englewood Historical Society, Englewood Mayor Michael Wildes, and the elected and professional officials of Englewood and Tenafly for their unwavering attention to our community, and both its history and future,” he said. “Their support has been instrumental in achieving this positive outcome.”

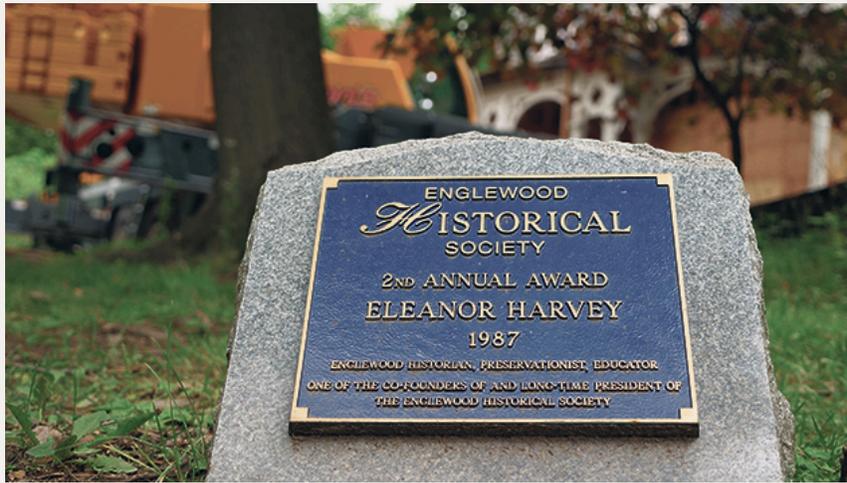
But when he watched the house being moved, he felt less abstract gratitude and more downright awe.

It’s a literally uplifting story, he said, remembering how he felt when parts of the building started to move toward the sky.

As he stood across the street staring, “it wasn’t a sentimental moment for me,” Rabbi Block said. “The sentiment was there, and we were saying goodbye to a place for which we have fond memories, but at that moment it was like I was watching God at work in the world.”

At the end of “The Little House,” the building has been moved to the country, where once again it can be surrounded by nature. In Englewood, the Taylor-Bliss-Englewood House has been moved not to the country but to its own place in the city, and now both it and Keshet can continue on their own paths, with the men and skill and machinery of SJ Houck acting as *deus ex machina*. God from the machine. Plot resolution coming from outside, gently freeing that tower from its moorings and moving it back to its old place in a new place.

“It really was a marvel,” Rabbi Block said. “God’s world is an amazing place.”



This plaque, homage to Eleanor Harvey's prescience, marks the year that Ms. Harvey donated the land to the city. (Brett P. Thompson)