

Sisterly love in Jamaica

Restored from ruin, a 19th century chapel comes back to life

BY NICHOLAS HIRSHON

CATE LUDLAM knelt at the door of a tiny, gray stone edifice in Jamaica and rummaged through her pocketbook. Her hand emerged with a key, but as she twisted it in the hole, the door didn't open easily.

"Unfortunately, the locks are one of the things that still have to be fixed," Ludlam said to a dozen history buffs following her every move on a recent Saturday.

They came for a rare glimpse of the Chapel of the Sisters, restored by a \$700,000 project to its glorious, circa-1857 self after years of neglect.

They marveled at the Bible passages on the

walls and bright stained-glass windows.

A century and a half ago, Nicholas Ludlum — an ancestor of Cate's, though the surname spelling changed over the years — commissioned the chapel to memorialize his three daughters, who died at ages 1, 13 and 21.

The chapel was deemed so unique that the city landmarked it in 1977 — along with the adjacent Prospect Cemetery, where Nicholas Ludlum, his wife Sarah and their daughters are buried.

But by the late 1990s, decades of neglect had left the land in disrepair. Pews rotted in the chapel, layered in pigeon and rat dung. Outside, chest-high vegetation towered over tombstones

dating as far back as 1728.

"You couldn't even walk," recalled Rose Tibaldi, 70, of Sunnyside Gardens, who had last visited the site about five years ago.

"You didn't even know where to put your feet."

Only now does the future of the 4.5-acre plot seem bright, thanks to a rehabilitation led by Ludlam and funded by the New York Landmarks Conservancy and city and state agencies.

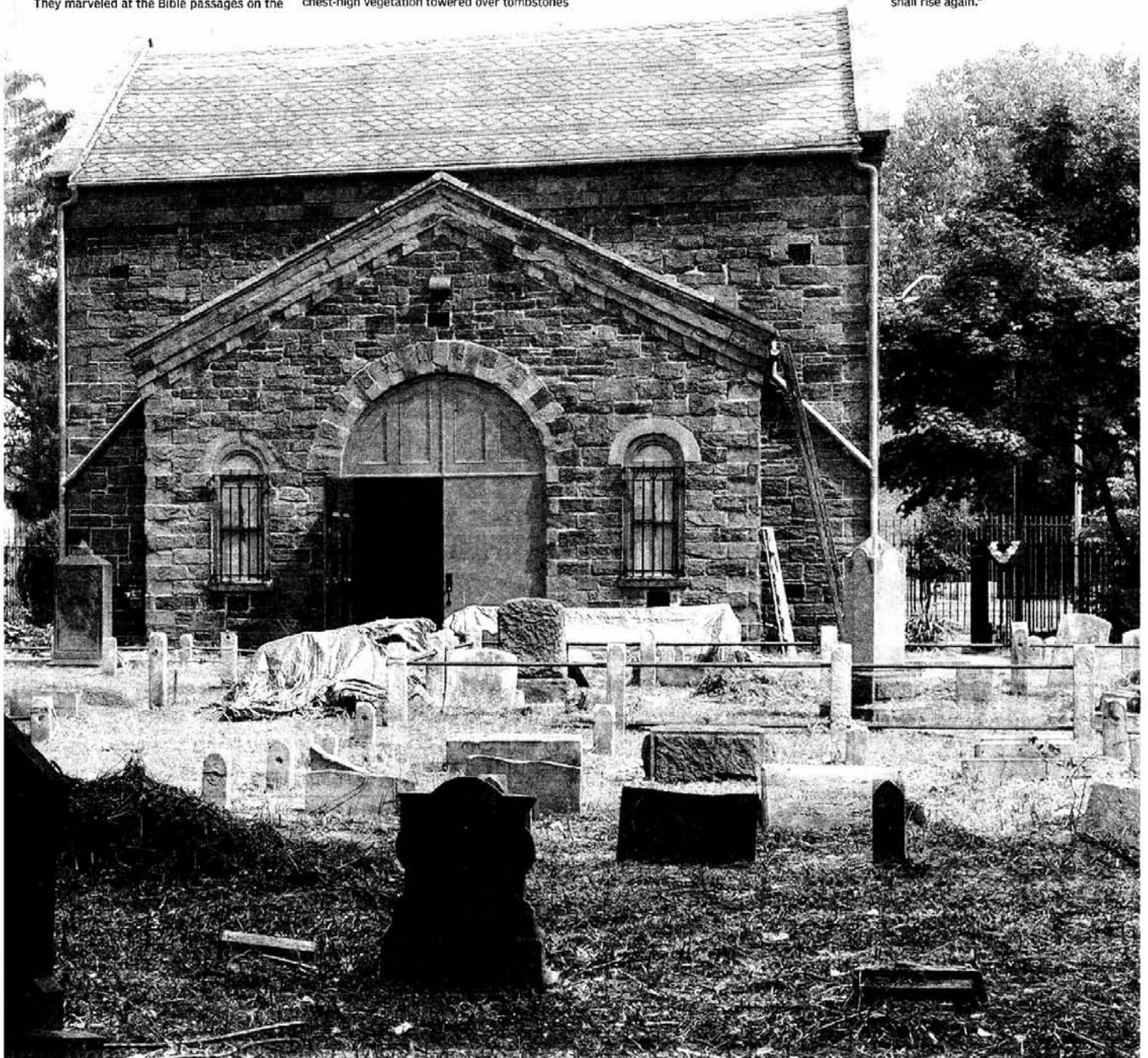
A ceremony today at the Romanesque Revival chapel on 159th St. between Archer and

Liberty Aves. will usher in the next chapter of its history.

The land — owned by the city Parks Department — sits on the campus of CUNY's York College, which plans to use the chapel for classes, faculty meetings and a music performance space, said college spokesman Nate Moore.

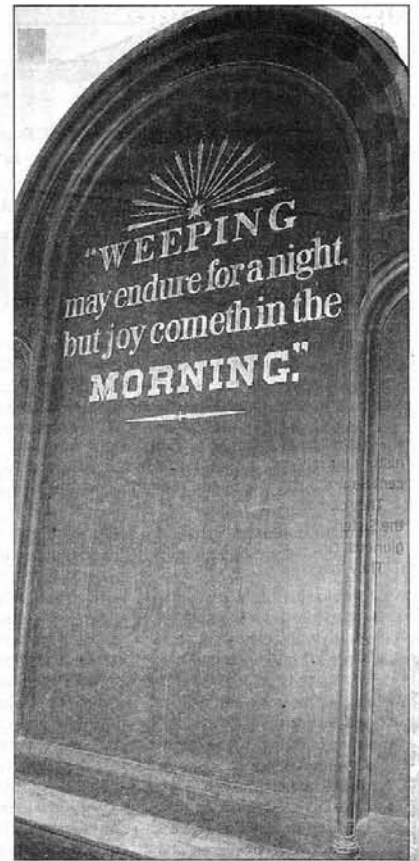
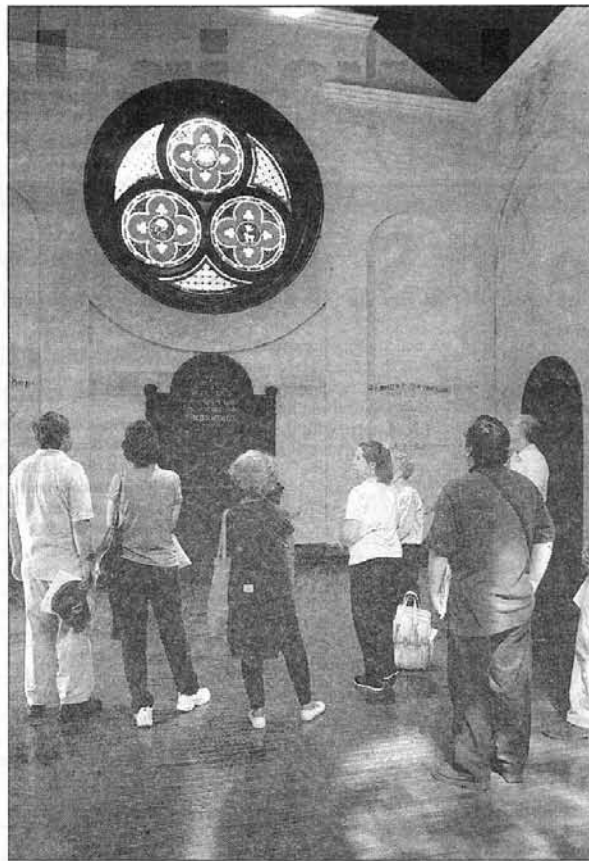
Ludlam's husband, Dick Frankenheimer, wondered if the city would make good on its promise to maintain the grounds.

But for now, at least, the revitalization seems in step with a Book of John passage emblazoned on one of the chapel's walls: "Thy brother shall rise again."





Light and life have returned to the Chapel of the Sisters in Jamaica after a \$700,000 restoration project renewed the once-forlorn structure (see next page) as well as an adjoining cemetery. Visitors recently inspected the chapel's renovated interior, which includes stained-glass windows (right), a memorial plaque for Nicholas and Sarah Ludlum (above) and a number of panels with biblical quotations (far right). The chapel was built by Nicholas Ludlum to honor three daughters who died at ages 1, 13 and 21. CUNY's York College plans to use the chapel at 159th St. between Archer and Liberty Aves. for classes and as a performance space.



Photos by CHRISTIE M. FARRIELLA

