Philip Roth’s boyhood house is ugly.

It’s a three-story home in the Newark, N.J., neighborhood of Weequahic, just a couple of blocks from the local high school. The siding on the upper stories is a greenish yellow. Unlit Christmas lights are strung between the bars on the lower-story windows. A hefty iron gate covers the front door.

The gate may be there to keep out exactly the sort of crowd that trundled off three coach buses on the afternoon of March 19 to pose for photographs while fondling what was presumably once Roth’s doorbell. The buses were carrying 100-odd Roth scholars and assorted fans on a startlingly long tour of Newark in celebration of Philip Roth’s 80th birthday.

How did learning that the house in which Roth
Philip Roth Fans Take Novel Pilgrimage to Hometown

As Roth fans from around the world gathered for the annual conference celebrating Roth’s birthday, they were reminded of his own words, “The Plot Against America.”

On board our bus was the tour’s ringleader, Elizabeth Del Tufo, who explained, “Roth is a national treasure.”

The tour started at the Weequahic High School, where Roth was a student. The tour continued to the Jewish Community Center, where Roth’s ashes were interred.

On the way back, Del Tufo said, “Roth was a true New Yorker.”

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