

# Fellowes Folly

CONTRIBUTED BY MIKE FARRELLY

**ONE OF THE BIGGEST** and most expensive houses ever built in Montclair was never finished. It was never lived in and was torn down. It was built by William and Ann Fellowes. It became known to the locals as “Fellowes Folly”.

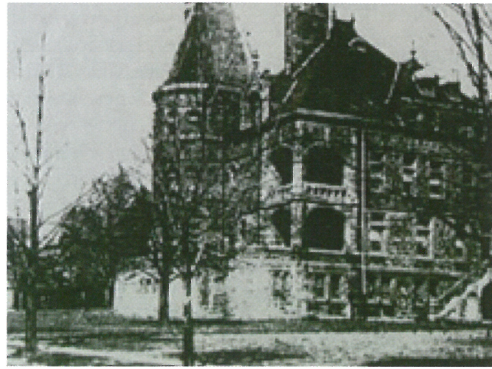
William Fellowes Jr. was born in Louisville, Kentucky. His parents were descended from colonial families and were quite wealthy. His father had a business and lived in Louisville for twenty years. He also owned a plantation in Louisiana and had a farm in Texas. He had extensive mining and railroad interests. His parents had an apartment in Manhattan and an estate on Staten Island.

William Jr. was educated in northern schools. He entered Columbia, but left during his sophomore year to work with his uncle in the cotton business. He moved to New Orleans. When the war broke out he joined the Louisiana Artillery. He took part in the first and second battles of Bull Run, Antietam, Sharpsburg, and Fredericksburg. He was captured near Washington. He was paroled. He became sick and retired to his family’s home in New York to recuperate.

He returned to the South when his health improved and enlisted in the Confederate Navy. He was in the Confederate Navy until the end of the war. After the war, he took over his uncle’s cotton business in New Orleans. In 1868 he became an agent for some of the businesses owned by Bradish Johnson. Bradish was one of the wealthiest New York industrialists in the mid-to- late 19th century. Among other things, he owned a huge distillery in New York. He owned sugar plantations and refineries in and around New Orleans. William’s duties with the Johnson businesses would have brought him to New York occasionally. He also made trips abroad. Financial scandals often hovered over Johnson and his businesses. It’s hard to say what William took away from the experience. After two years he stopped being an employee and started to invest. He was very successful.

In 1868 William and his wife, Ann, went to England. They visited Montclair on their return to the United States. In 1884 they made another trip to Europe. This time they returned to Montclair with the intention of making it their home.

They bought property at the northeast corner of South Fullerton and Union Street. They hired a well-known New York architect, F. B. Kimball, to design a magnificent home for them. It was modelled after a large French chateau. They intended it to be one of the finest homes ever seen here. It was the largest home built to date in Montclair. Construction started in 1888. It took a year for the exterior to be completed. The exterior walls were red sandstone with a brownstone trim. The stones were quarried and dressed in Scotland. They were to be laid out in an ashlar (random) pattern. Each piece was numbered so it would fit together perfectly when re-assembled in the States. The roof was granite and red tile, specially made in Spain. Montclair directories give their address while it was being built as the construction site. There is no record of where they



The house stood at the northeast corner of South Fullerton and Union Street.

actually stayed during construction.

William and Ann were Episcopalians. They wanted to be close to their church, so William bought another lot and provided a great deal of money to relocate St. Luke’s Episcopal from its original home on St. Luke’s Place to South Fullerton. The funds he provided were conditional on the congregation raising another \$40,000. The first collection to raise this money was during Easter Sunday services in 1888. William gave his daughter, Hattie, and her friend Caddie Rockwell, \$1,000 each to put on the collection plate.

After spending over \$100,000 on their house, William and Ann suffered financial reverses and ran out of money. Because of the expense involved, it was impossible to sell the unfinished house. No one ever finished it. No one ever lived in it. William died bankrupt in 1894.

Local citizens began to refer to the shell of the house as “Fellowes Folly”. It stood for a few years, but was bought by developers in 1914 for \$500 and knocked down to make way for an apartment building. They found a time capsule in

the foundation. They returned the contents to Hattie who had married and was living in Albany. The apartment building stands on the site today. The only clue to this wonderful pipe dream is a small stone square at the corner of the property, marked “WF”. ■

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