

Behind The White Picket Fence

Part 2 of 2

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IN PART 1 WE TALKED about how the featured house was built in 1801 by Jacob and Elizabeth Garrabrant. In 1844 John and Eliza Ann Clearwater bought it. In 1859 it was purchased by Richard and Elizabeth Green. The Green family owned it from 1859 to the 1920s.

Around 1922 Frederick “Fred” G. and Marguerite (Fellows) Melcher moved into our featured house. They had lived on Valley Rd. since 1918. They continued selling off parcels of the original 16 acres. According to the 1926 tax map, all that remained of the original farm was the front lot with 170’ along Grove St. Fred was a publisher who became the president and CEO of R.R. Bowker, a publishing firm that dealt mainly in reference material. Bowker published the trade journal, *Publisher’s Weekly*, which released info on every book that was printed in the USA that week and related news about everyone and everything involved in publishing. It was considered “bible” of the publishing industry. Fred was in love with books and did everything he could to encourage reading and writing. He was involved in almost every publishing association in existence.

Fred was born in Malden, MA and grew up in Newton Center, MA. (where he met and married Marguerite). He intended to go to MIT but illness in the family and poor economic conditions following the “Panic of 1893” forced him to go to work. His grandfather was a part owner of the building that housed the famous *Estes & Lauriat* Bookstore on Washington St. in Boston. He asked if there might be a position for his young grandson. Fred started in the mail room of *Estes & Lauriat* for \$4 a week in 1895 at the age of 16.

Estes & Lauriat and its successor, *Dana Estes & Co.*, also published books. Dana Estes was a dynamic leader who continually sought to grow in the publishing business. He hired promising young editors and publishers to run the various departments and the company became somewhat of a “school” for the industry. Fred became a salesman for *Estes*; then the head of their children’s book department. In 1913 he and Marguerite moved to Indianapolis where he became the manager of the *W.K. Stewart* Bookstore. In Indianapolis Fred met the poet, *Vachel Lindsay*. ➡



This year’s submission from *The Little Daisy Bake Shop* in Upper Montclair (above) and *Bangz Salon & Wellness Spa* (below).
Photograph by Elizabeth Arenberg



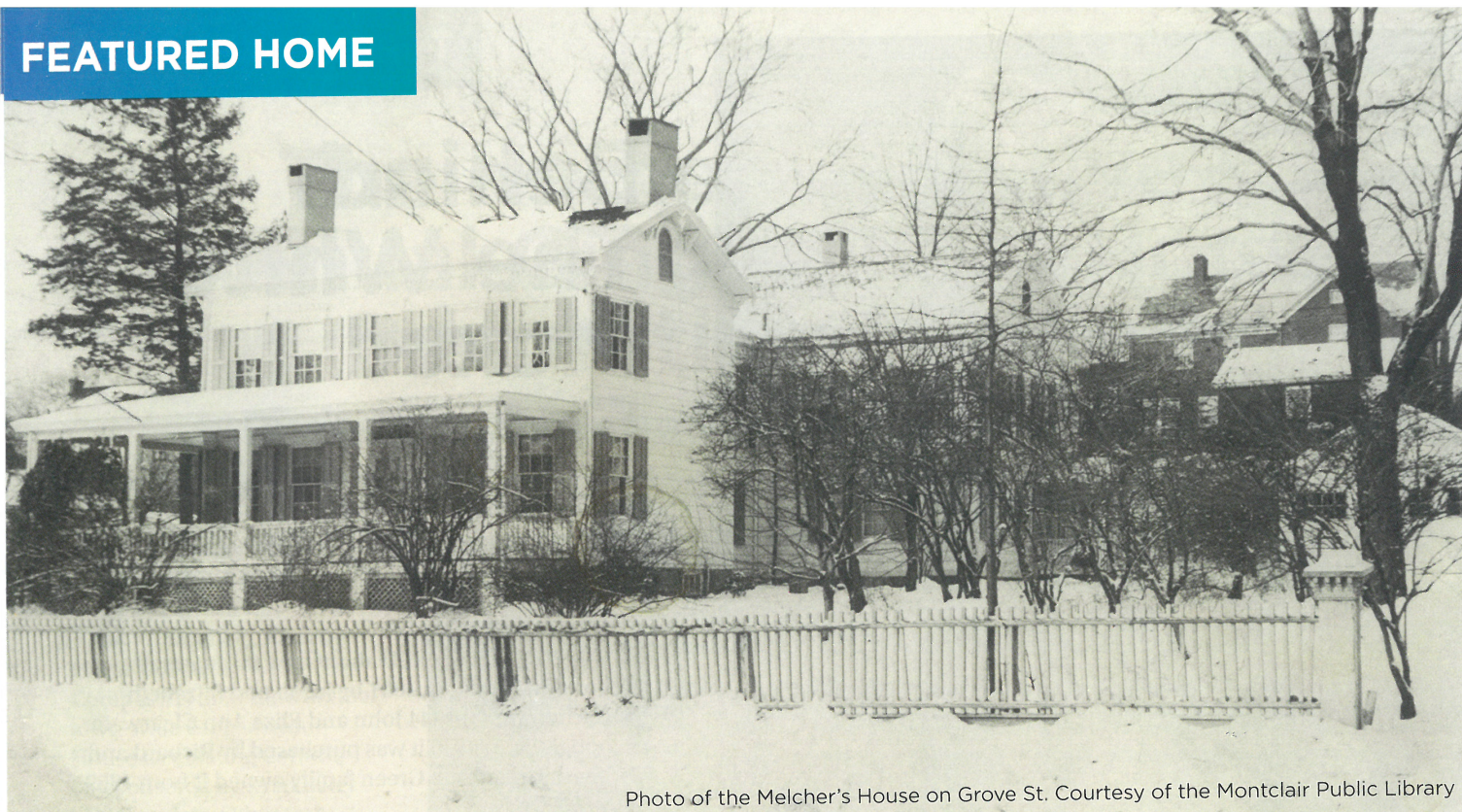


Photo of the Melcher's House on Grove St. Courtesy of the Montclair Public Library

The two became good friends and Vachel visited the Melcher home on Valley Rd. a few times, as did Fred's other friends: Carl Sandberg and Robert Frost. In 1918 Fred answered an ad in *Publisher's Weekly* looking for an editor at the R.R. Bowker Co. in NYC. Fred got the job and the couple moved to Montclair

In 1922 Fred was the main force behind the Newberry Medal which is awarded to the author of what is considered the best children's book of the year. A few years later (1937) Fred was the driving force behind the Caldecott Medal which honored the best children's book illustrator annually. Shortly after the end of World War II Gen. Douglas McArthur asked Fred to come to Japan to serve as a special consultant to help rebuild the publishing industry in that country. Fred always involved himself in Montclair civic affairs. Among the many organizations he belonged to was the advisory committee of the Planning Board. He was a trustee of the Montclair Art Museum and served on the school board for 15 years. If it had anything to do with a library, Fred was a supporter.

Marguerite was an author and playwright. A graduate of Smith College, she became one of the leading authorities on the "Shaker Movement". The Shakers are almost non-existent today. They were a Christian sect known for their simple, communal lifestyle. They practiced celibacy, pacifism and believed in the equality of the sexes. Marguerite wrote many children's books. She was active in the League of Women Voters, and in the Montclair Democrats for Good Government. She was a staunch Democrat and was a long-time committeewoman in the Essex County Democratic Committee.



Fred and Marguerite's son, Daniel, and his first wife, Peggy, lived in the house after his mom and dad passed. Daniel went to work for his father at Bowker. He took three years off during WWII to serve in the War Finance Department and the National Committee for Atomic Information. He returned to Bowker and worked his way up to being president. In 1968 Daniel and the board sold Bowker to the Xerox Corporation. He remained president of the new company for a short while, then started his own company, Gail

Research, which publishes text books and develops curriculums for school age children.

Peggy, who had been a children's librarian passed away in 1967. Daniel remarried (to another librarian). He and his second wife, Margaret (Saul), moved to Charlottesville in 1973.

The next owners were Sanford and Hortense (Cohen) Jacobs. When they came to Montclair, Sanford was a senior writer for the *Wall St. Journal*. Hortense had been a teacher in California. She founded an early childhood education school in Passaic, the MacAdie-Bairn School and its successor, the New Bairn School, in Clifton. "Bairn" is a Scottish word for youngsters. From 1989 to 1993 Sanford was the chief editor of the *Montclair Times*. In 1993 Sanford went to work for Dow Jones, the parent company of the *Wall St. Journal*. Around 2005 Sanford and Hortense moved to Alabama. A few years later they moved to North Carolina. ■

If you'd like to see more images of Montclair homes, they are featured in the book, *Stately Homes of Montclair*, which can be found at Montclair Booksellers, several local libraries and the Stately Homes of Montclair Facebook page.