

Rockcliff Apartments

CONTRIBUTED BY MIKE FARRELLY, MONTCLAIR TOWN HISTORIAN,
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW WANDER

THE ROCKCLIFF APARTMENTS are situated on one of the highest points in Montclair, with spectacular views of New York to the east and beautiful sunsets over the Orange Mountains to the west. It had been the site of the Hotel Montclair, a 4 story, 102 room, long stay hotel, which was built in 1908 and operated by Frederick C. Hall from 1913 to 1937, when the Prudential Insurance Co. purchased it. Hotel Montclair closed for business on Dec 1, 1938 and was torn down. Several plans were proposed for the 4 ¾ acre site. There were plans for an 8 story apartment building, which did not get built. The Ivor B. Clark mortgage company of New York headed a syndicate that proposed 2 separate apartment buildings with a total of 602 rooms; this plan was not followed through on either. The plan that was accepted was proposed by the Rockcliff Realty Co., headed by Winston Paul. They planned to erect one building with a 6 story wing and a 7 story wing with 500 rooms, allowing for 103 apartments. The permit for the building was pulled early in 1940 and construction was expected to be complete by November of that year. It was expected to cost about \$700,000. The architect for the project was Henry Sugarman. Construction was finished on time by the RMC Corp; Robert M. Catts, President.

The Rockcliff is a luxury apartment building. It went co-operative and the apartments are now condos. Rooms have high ceilings, parquet floors, marble door sills and picture molding. There are 4 elevators, 2 in each wing; one for passengers and one for service. The cornerstone was placed on August 19, 1940 in a ceremony that included: members of Rockcliff Realty, the mayor, William Speers, the town council, the architect Sugarman, and builder Catts. Also attending were: I. Scovill Snyder, the head of the real estate board, Kenneth A. Henke, representing the Chamber of Commerce, the publisher and editor of the Montclair Times, Garvin Taylor and Clifford Bowne respectively, the building superintendent William Palfry and J. Harry Smith, foreman of the maintenance crew. Copies of the Montclair Times and several New York newspapers were sealed in the cornerstone. Winston Paul, the owner, moved into the 7 story, 11 room penthouse with his 3rd wife, Lucille Parrot Hall. Winston had been a dealer for the Frigidaire Co. He ended his career as the president of General Aniline & Film in 1965. He was chair of the NJ Committee for Constitutional Revision and very active



in rewriting the state constitution in 1947. He was affiliated with YMCA of Greater New York for many years and was the director at the time of his death in 1976.

The building has a unique feature. It was the first building in the United States to have a space between the outer walls and the brick façade. The technique was developed in England to mitigate dampness, but it adds extra warmth to the apartments in the winter and is cooler in the summer. There are murals depicting natural scenes in the foyer. They are not original. The original murals, painted by Arthur Crisp, depicted historical scenes of Essex County. These murals were donated to the Montclair Historical Society in 1971 and can be seen on the walls of the Crane House on Orange Road.

A number of notable people live, or lived, at the Rockcliff, far too many to mention here. A very incomplete list would probably be headed by former basketball star and 3-term United States senator, Bill Bradley, who ran for president in the 2000 Democratic primary. Bill and his wife, Dr. Ernestine Schlant Bradley, a college professor of comparative literature and author, relocated from Denville in 1993. Ernestine's most important work was probably *The Language of Silence* a study of how German intellectuals dealt with the Holocaust. Former

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Montclair mayor (2000-2004) and multi-term council person, Robert Russo, lived at the Rockcliff, also former Township Manager, Joseph Harnett. Zeus Soucek, VP of General Mills, and his wife, Linda, lived at the Rockcliff. Zeus graduated from the Naval Academy and became a test pilot, so did his brother, Apollo, who held several altitude records. Apollo remained in the Navy. He was the first commander of the aircraft carrier, the USS Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and rose to the rank of rear admiral. He was posthumously promoted to vice admiral. Admiral Soucek and his wife, Agnes Eleanor (O'Connor) Soucek, lived in many places during his career, but they lived at the Rockcliff for a short while. Former NJ governor, James F. Fielder, and his wife, Mabel retired to the Rockcliff. James became acting governor when governor, Woodrow Wilson, resigned to become president in 1913. James won the election for governor in 1914 and served until 1917. He spent many years as a judge after that. He and Mabel moved to the Rockcliff after living on Gates Ave. Assistant State Attorney General and long term judge in Hoboken, J. Raymond Tiffany, resided at the Rockcliff. Glen Ridge councilman Charles B. Hall moved in with his second wife, Gertrude. He was the VP of the Bank of Manhattan and had to resign from the Glen Ridge council when he moved to Montclair. Once again, the list is too long to include here. Many businessmen retired here. It seems that it is an ideal home for widows and widowers; people that have lost loved ones and no longer want to stay in the houses that they shared with their partners. ■

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](#).



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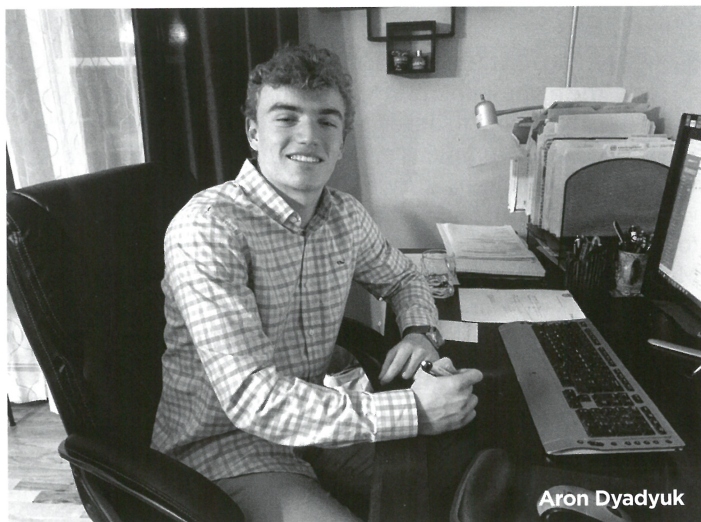


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Extraordinary Kids

BY RACHEL POST



Aron Dyadyuk

MONTCLAIR SCHOOLS MAY BE temporarily closed, but that hasn't stopped the amazing kids in this town from coming up with some extraordinary ideas. We caught up with some of them to see what they're doing.

For 13-year-old Avery Dnistrian, a student at Buzz Aldrin Middle School, it began with a conversation she had with a family friend, a nurse at St. Barnabas Hospital whose PPE was running dangerously low.

"They were really starting to reuse the paper mask and paper surgery caps over and over and it would be easier if they had fabric ones because they could just wash them," Avery said. "So, we said, 'We could help you,' because we were already making masks for my grandparents and our elderly neighbors."

After a few years of lessons at Sew Montclair, Avery is more than comfortable in front of a sewing machine. She found a design on YouTube for the caps and got to work.

"I have a room in our basement set up as a little sewing area, and when I'm sewing I can really like just shut my phone off and focus on other things which I like a lot," she said.

Avery spends the first half of her day completing her online schooling, but the rest is dedicated to sewing surgery caps and masks for the St. Barnabas nursing staff.

"I started to realize the difference we were making when we started getting pictures of the nurses in their caps smiling," said Avery.

Avery uses all of her own materials to make the caps and has been churning out about five a day.

"When we first started out, we didn't really have a system," she explained. "But once we got into the motion of making all of them, it takes probably an hour to an hour and a half to make each one. We recently tried it where I put the elastic through



Henry Dodd