

Poggioriodente on Upper Mountain Ave.

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

THIS HOUSE on the lower side of Upper Mountain Ave. was built in 1905. The architect was Alfred F. Norris, a local, who designed it to match villas in Florence, Italy. In February of 1905, the architect presented a watercolor of the planned home, which was under construction, to a group of his associates at the Architecture League of New York. The watercolor was done by well-known Montclair artist, Harry Fenn. The house was commissioned by William and Eliza Couper. William was a world famous sculptor who was also a member of Montclair's well known art colony. William studied in Italy under Thomas Ball. Thomas was a much-touted monument sculptor from Massachusetts who decided to go to Italy in 1844 and stayed there for many years, although he often returned to the United States. William traveled to Italy in the 1870s, studied under Ball, and stayed there for 25 years. He married Thomas's daughter, Eliza. They lived in Florence. Their children were born there. William, Eliza, their children, and Thomas came back to



America in 1897. He and Thomas bought a 3 story brick building on 17th Street and opened up a studio together in New York. For a while, they all lived at Ball's house on South Mountain Ave. In 1905 William asked Alfred Norris to design a house like the ones he and Eliza had fallen in love with in Florence. They called it "Poggioriodente" which means "Laughing Knoll" in Italian. It had 6 bedrooms and 5 baths (at that time). There was a large music room with a 15 ft. high ceiling. Music was important to the family. Son, Thomas Ball Couper, was born in Florence and studied violin in Europe. He performed concerts all over the world, but also in the music room in this building. He gave violin lessons here. Son, Richard, became an artist, but his wife, Mildred (Cooper) Couper was a world-famous piano player, who also played all over, but sometimes performed and gave lessons at this house.

Father-in-law, Thomas, had been a professional singer in his younger days, as well as a sculptor. He sang the lead role in Mendelssohn's oratorio Elijah at its American premiere in Boston in 1848. There was a very large central fireplace imported from Italy. There was a little, illuminated, stained glass scone of villas in Florence on the first floor. In his later years, Thomas Ball stayed with the Coupers.

William is probably best known for his statue "Crown for the Victor" which stands near the entrance of the Montclair Art Museum. He produced many other fine works such as the "Coming of Spring" which sold at Christie's of London for \$194,000 in 2015 and the "Woman with Necklace" at the Newark Museum. He produced busts of many famous scientists which stood at the entrance of the Museum of Natural History in NY. The busts have been loaned out to other museums from time to time. William was one of the founders of the Montclair Art Museum and was active as a trustee for years. In 1913 he retired from sculpting and took up painting. William and Eliza lived at Poggioriodente until 1925 when they moved to Berkeley Place.

The next residents were Toney A. Hardy and his wife, Mabel. Toney was a lawyer who practiced law with his brother, Lamar, at 149 Broadway in NYC. They lived here until about 1939 when they moved to Arizona. Toney took up real estate in Arizona.

In 1940 an ad appeared in the Montclair Times - the house was for sale at an estimated price of \$10,000. If not sold, it could be rented for \$105 a month unfurnished, or \$125 a month furnished.

Another NY lawyer bought the house in 1940: Ethan D. Alyea and his wife, Dorothy. Ethan graduated from Princeton, studied law at Harvard and got his master's degree in law from Princeton. He became a senior partner at Dewey, Ballentine, Bushby, Palmer, and Wood in New York City. He was a director of many firms and a trustee of many organizations. He was a trustee of the Montclair Library and the head of the Montclair Adult School from 1946-48. He was president of (the Essex County) Council of Social Agencies. Both he and his wife were deeply involved in Planned Parenthood.

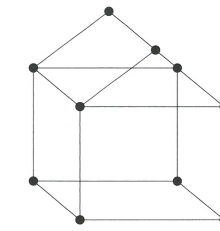
Dorothy Alyea graduated from Wellesley. She loved gardening and poetry. At different times she won 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes for poetry at the Poetry Society of America and was a fellow at the MacDowell (art) Colony in Peterborough, NH. Among her better known, published works are "All My Argument" and "Beach Fire". Ethan and Dorothy moved to Highland Ave.

This house on the somewhat shaded side of Upper Mountain Ave., with its Old World charm, truly is a laughing knoll. It has brought joy to all its owners throughout the years. ■

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