



Large Brick House with Leaded Casement Windows

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

THIS HOUSE ON THE WEST SIDE of South Mountain Ave. is described in Andrew Wander's book *Stately Homes of Montclair* as a "large brick house with leaded casement windows". It was built about 1925 for George Hewitt Jr. and his wife, Marjorie (Finlay) Hewitt. George moved to Montclair as a boy. His family lived on North Mountain Ave.; then in the beautiful house, designed by Alexander F. Oakey, on Van Vleck St. Marjorie grew up on Union St. George was the president of C.B. Hewitt Brothers in New York for 24 years. It was a building supply company started by his uncles and his father. George took over when his father, George Sr., the youngest brother, retired. After he retired George Jr. was a director of the Montclair Trust bank.

George graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering from Cornell University. He was a great supporter of the university and 3 of his sons went there. A fourth son, Francis, went to the University of Vermont. Marjorie, his daughter, went to Smith. George did not go overseas during WWI, but he was in the reserves. He served in the Montclair Battalion of the NJ National Guard. He joined the reserves again during WWII. Two of his sons served in the navy during WWII. George III was killed in a training accident at Creeds Field naval airbase in 1943. Francis, who was mentioned earlier, served in the army during the conflict.

George and Marjorie (Finlay) Hewitt divorced sometime around 1936. She remarried and moved to Vermont. George then married Nadine Easter. They continued to live in the house until his death in 1960. She remarried in 1961 and became Mrs. Keim, wife of Dr. Franklin Keim of Wayside Pl. She moved to Wayside Pl. and sold the house to Malcolm C. and Beulah Vosburgh. I suppose we should mention a couple of things before we move on to the Vosburghs. In 1955 when the Hewitts still owned this house the 1st Lutheran Church of Glen Ridge offered to buy it. They had a few other sites in mind when they made the offer, and the offer was subject to the Zoning Board approving the house for religious services. They never completed the purchase. George Hewitt Jr. was the grandnephew of Abram S. Hewitt, the iron magnate who lived in the mansion at Ringwood, NJ (at the iron mines) and in New York City. Abram was a two-term US Congressman from New

York's 10th district and was the mayor of New York City from 1887 to 1888. He was the son-in-law of Peter Cooper and he helped found the Cooper Union Institute in 1859. He was involved in the creation of the city's first subway system and is often called the "Father of the NY Subways." Thanks to the fortune he left them, Abram's daughters Eleanor and Sarah put together a large collection of art which became the core of the Cooper Hewitt Museum. Abram never lived in Montclair, but he owned quite a bit of property here. When George Hewitt was young, he was allowed to bicycle up to Ringwood in the northern part of Passaic County to visit his aunts.

Malcolm Vosburgh was a telecommunications engineer who worked for the Federal Communications Lab. associated with ITT in Nutley. He had a major role in developing the Tacan Automatic Reporting and Data Link which dramatically improved ground-to-air communications for the US Navy. It was designed and built at the Federal Communications Lab. As a result of his work for the navy, Malcolm went on to join the staff of the Institute for Defense Analysis in Washington DC. Beulah Vosburgh was a librarian for the Montclair Public Schools. In July of 1963, she hosted a dinner at their house for 90 exchange students from Australia and Japan who had been visiting various places in the United States. When the Vosburghs moved to the Washington area she taught Library Science at the University of Maryland. The Vosburghs supported the arts and often hosted concerts at their home, which was big enough to accommodate them. On March 25th, 1964 they hosted a performance by Met Opera star, Jerome Hines, who featured works from an opera he had written, based on the life of Jesus Christ, called "I Am the Way". In November 1964, the Vosburghs hosted a musicale to benefit the Oratorio Society, featuring George Hoffman as a soloist. George lived in Montclair and was known locally but had performed at Carnegie Hall and with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

The next owners, Howard L. and Rena "Renee" (Rudell) Ballen moved in late 1965. They wanted to subdivide the lot. However, their appeal to the Planning Board was denied. It may have been the reason they often gave out their address as being on Hoburg Pl. instead of South Mountain. Howard was the managing partner at Goldstein, Ballen, O'Rourke and Wildstein, a personal injury law firm in Passaic. He and Renee met while he was a teaching assistant at Syracuse University Law School. Renee was an active member of the Montclair chapter of Hadassah. She organized a "bookmobile" which brought books to patients at Beth Israel Hospital in Passaic (now part of St. Mary's Hospital). Her passion was to teach children about music. She was one of the organizers of Learning to Listen, a "reachout" to schools program associated with the NJ Symphony Orchestra. The Ballens moved to Clifton in the late 1980s. They also maintained a home on Hilton Head, SC. ■

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.