

A Brick Masterpiece On Upper Mountain

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

THIS HOUSE ON UPPER MOUNTAIN AVE. was built in 1908, for Edwin and Mariana Bradley. The large bushes on either side of the house make it seem as if the house isn't quite as large as it actually is when viewed from the street. Edwin owned a building material company, Bradley Currier Ltd., which employed over 600 people. It was based in New York City but did business all over the world. The Bradleys were very active at St. Luke's Episcopal Church and active in the Episcopal Diocese of Newark. Edwin was a founder of the Montclair Club, a social organization, which stood about where the Crescent Parking Deck is today. He was a founder of the Montclair Athletic Club. The Athletic Club site on Valley Road was taken over by the MKA Middle School. Edwin was active in the local YMCA and became president of the board of trustees. The Bradleys built several large houses in Montclair and owned a large amount of property along the mountain ridge. The first house they built was at the corner of Upper Mountain and Van Vleck. Then they built a large house on South Mountain which they called "Hillhurst". They built this house on Upper Mountain. Around 1918 they retired to Florida although Edwin often returned to Montclair to visit his children who stayed here. He would stay at the Hotel Montclair, which stood about where the Rockcliff Apartments are today.

In 1920 it became the home of Joseph and Emma Bower. Joseph was an Executive VP with Chemical Bank. Joseph was born in Denver. His father passed away when Joseph was 11. He worked as a clerk in a store to help support the family. He went to school at night, eventually graduating from Detroit Business University. He became a junior clerk at the Detroit Trust Company. He was industrious; within 9 years he was promoted to the vice presidency of Detroit Trust, while he studied law at

night and passed the bar. He moved to Philadelphia and became the president of Hale & Kilbourne, a steel fabricating company. He also set up the first company in America to finance automobile purchases. In 1917 he and Emma moved to Montclair. He became the vice president of Liberty National Bank in New York. Later that year, Chemical Bank bought Liberty. Joseph started working in Chemical's Securities Division. From that position, he became an executive vice president with Chemical. Not that an executive vice president's salary is anything to sneeze at, Joseph supplemented his income with an incredible idea. He and a partner, John Austin, decided to build a bridge from Detroit to Windsor, Ontario. They overcame many obstacles. Detroit mayor John "Johnny" Smith opposed the bridge even though the rest of the city council was in favor. When Johnny came up for re-election the people of Detroit showed that they were in favor too. Because they were dealing with agencies in two countries Bower and Austin had to get approval from a mountain of authorities. They built the bridge using the latest technology, heat-treated cables, which tested at a very high tensile strength. After the bridge was built and was about to open, a similar bridge that was being built in Rhode Island developed stress fractures in its heat-treated cables. Joseph ordered that the cables be replaced with trusted cold drawn cables. The heat-treated cables were taken down and the bridge was rebuilt. Amazingly, they were still ahead of schedule when the bridge opened In November of 1929. The Ambassador Bridge

was the world's longest suspension bridge when it opened. Bower's son, Robert, and then his other son, Joseph, managed the bridge while their father remained Chairman of the Board. It was held by the Bower family until 1979 when Joseph Sr. died. It was bought by the Moroun family and is still a privately owned bridge. In 1942 Joseph Sr. ran unsuccessfully for the US Senate as a Republican candidate from NJ.

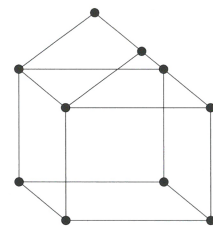
In the 1950s the house became the home of Edward and Florence Oliff. Edward's father, Julius, opened a pawnshop chain called The Dollar Pawnbrokers with stores in Newark and New York. Edward continued to run his father's business. They often invited noted personalities to their home to give lectures. In 1961 they hosted Zui Kolitz the Israeli movie producer and author. They would host political figures without regard to political affiliation. In 1961 they had Judge Richard J. Hughes, a Democrat, speak on tax reform. Hughes became the 45th governor of NJ from 1982 to 1970. After serving as governor, he was Chief Justice of the NJ Supreme Court. In 1968 they hosted Ann Rockefeller Pierson, daughter of Republican, Nelson Rockefeller. In 1964 Edward served as co-chair of the United Jewish Appeal in Essex County. ■

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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