

“Gentleman’s Residence” On North Mountain

CONTRIBUTED BY MIKE FARRELLY,
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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW WANDER

THIS HOUSE WAS BRIEFLY for sale in 1921. The ad in the Montclair Times described it as a “Gentleman’s residence with 8 bedrooms and 4 baths for \$75,000”. It was designed by Van Vleck and Goldsmith in 1902. Joseph Van Vleck was a Montclair architect, who designed several well-known buildings in Montclair. Probably the best known is the Van Vleck Mansion on Van Vleck St. He partnered with Goldwin Goldsmith; their office was in New York City. Their most important collaborative work was probably the main store for Saks 5th Avenue. They designed several prominent works, in Montclair, other than this house: the 1st Methodist Church on North Fullerton with its round sanctuary, the Madison Building on Bloomfield Ave. and the Grove Street School.

The original owners of this house were John R. and Marianne Emery. John was the treasurer of the Belding Brothers Silk Co., known for its high-quality thread, which was sold door-to-door. They had plants all over the country, yet they maintained their largest presence in their home town of Belding MI, settled in 1838, but renamed Belding in 1871 to honor the Belding family. The silk company had 4 mills in Belding alone. They moved their headquarters to New York as many companies did and still do. John may have attempted to sell this house in 1921, but he lived there at the time of his death in 1925. Marianne continued to live in the house until 1933.

Around 1935, James Emery (not a relation, at least not a close relation) moved in with his wife, Annie (Comer) Emery. James was an engineer. He was the vice president of Ford, Bacon, and Davis, famous for their work with electrified railroads and transit systems. James later worked for the TVA, setting up electrified light rail systems in Alabama. Katherine D. Emery, James and Annie’s daughter, was an actress. She received rave reviews for her Broadway debut as “Karen Wright” in Lillian Hellman’s *The Children’s Hour*. This was also Lillian Hellman’s Broadway debut. Katherine starred in several other Broadway plays; then went into film. She played “The Aunt” in the 3D horror classic *The Maze*, directed by William Cameron Menzies. She played “Mrs. St. Aubryn” opposite Boris Karloff in *The Isle of the Dead* and was made to appear very old when she played “Nokomis”, Vincent Edward’s grandmother, in the 1952 film *Hiawatha*. Katherine married actor Paul Eaton and moved to California; they had a daughter, Rebecca Eaton, who became a long-time producer for Masterpiece Theater on PBS. James and Annie’s other daughter,



Katherine Emery

Grace, married Kirby Fisk, the CEO of the Allied Chemical Corp. Under Fisk’s direction Allied Chemical moved away from chemicals and started buying and selling other companies. Allied itself merged with the Signal Corporation in 1985 to become Allied Signal. Allied Signal acquired Honeywell in 1999 and took on the Honeywell name. James passed away in 1949. Annie stayed in the house until 1951.

In 1952 Lawrence and Elizabeth (Christy) Higgins moved in. They both came from Montclair families. Lawrence grew up on Llewellyn Ave. Elizabeth grew up on Highland Ave. It is difficult to ascertain exactly what Lawrence did for a living. For many years he was listed in the directories as a “salesman in Jersey City”. Neither Montclair nor Jersey City directories, give out much more information than that.

His obituary states that he was a “private investor”. Perhaps he was something like a “day trader” who worked for himself. Elizabeth was very involved with the Montclair Garden Club and the Montclair Art Museum. Lawrence and Elizabeth stayed in this house until the early 1970s.

Around 1972 Robert and Paula (Shaplo) Marasco were the owners. Robert was the VP of a Bloomfield insurance company: Crowell, Johnston, Marasco. He had been a captain in the 101st Airborne, 5th Special Services Group during the Vietnam conflict; the “Green Berets”. He had been part of a team under the command of Colonel Rheault that was involved in the killing of a South Vietnamese citizen, Thai Khac Chuyen. Chuyen was a translator assigned to the American Army. He had been suspected of being a double agent. Col. Rheault’s team interrogated him. Afterward, the Army decided to prosecute the team. The story gained national attention. NJ Congressman Peter Rodino publicly declared that they were acting under orders. Famed attorney F. Lee Bailey offered to defend them. When the Army found out that the CIA was involved and that these men probably were acting under orders, they dropped the case. Otherwise, Marasco’s service was exemplary. He was honored by the NJ state assembly. Both Robert and Paula were active in local politics. They both served as members of the Essex County Republican committee. They stayed in the house until the 1980s. We choose to end the house history here in order to protect the privacy of current owners. ■

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.