

FEATURED HOME

Understated Beauty on Irving Street

CONTRIBUTED BY MIKE FARRELLY, MONTCLAIR TOWN HISTORIAN



Photo courtesy Mike Farrelly

SOMETIMES MONTCLAIR HOUSES are not famous because of their size or stunning architectural features. They are famous because of the people who lived in them.

This is one of those houses. Dr. John A. Kenny, who is one of the most inspiring characters who ever lived in Montclair, lived in this house in the 1920s and 1930s. Many people lived in it before and after Dr. Kenny lived there. No one seems to have stayed in it very long except for the Jett family who lived in the house for more than 50 years (along with other people). This article will not be able to cover everyone who lived in the house.

This house was built by the Andrew Doremus (Construction) Co. of Glen Ridge in 1908 and sold to Hannah E. Harris. Hannah owned it for the next 16 years or so, but she never lived here. The first person to live here was Clifford L. Weston and his sister, Grace (Weston) Cornell, and his brother-in-law, David C. Cornell. Clifford had worked for the George R. Read (Real Estate) Co. in New York until he formed a partnership with Howard

Haselhurst and went into the real estate business for himself. David Cornell had been in the banking business but was working in the real estate business in 1916. Clifford, David, and Grace only lived in the house for a couple of years. In 1916 Ozro B. Phillips, his wife, Sally (Cox) Phillips and their children lived in the house. Ozro held a wide variety of jobs in his lifetime. A 1910 census noted that he was a "gold prospector". In 1916, when he lived in Montclair, he was an agent for a munitions firm. A few years later he was a "campaign director" for various progressive causes. He ended up in the oil business with a few wells in Louisiana. Ozro and Sally only lived here for a couple of years.

In 1923 Hermina Wilhemina Auguste Maria "Anna" (Hasenbalg) Snead moved in. Anna was born in Hamburg, Germany. She was the widow of Charles Snead who was an

executive in the iron foundry started by his father in Louisville, KY. They moved to Montclair when he was attached to the Snead offices in New York. They had lived in Erwin Park and on Rockledge. Anna moved here briefly after Charles passed away.

Around 1925 Mary S. Hannah bought the house and lived in it for a short while. Mary was the widow of Rev. Henry K. Hannah who had been the rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Concord, MA. Mary had been the church organist. Mary only lived here for a short while. She moved into various houses in Montclair with her adult children.

Around 1926 Dr. John A Kenny and his wife Frieda (Armstrong) Kenny bought the house. Dr. Kenny had been the personal physician to Booker T. Washington in Tuskegee, AL. He was instrumental in setting up a clinic at the Tuskegee Institute. In 1923, when he was asked to join the (white) staff of a VA hospital in the city of Tuskegee, the KKK burned a cross in his front yard. He immediately brought his family North for their safety. He found that New Jersey hospitals would not allow African American doctors to treat their patients once they were admitted. African American doctors had to turn their patients over to white doctors (Montclair's three hospitals included). With his own money he founded the Kenny Memorial Hospital in Newark to honor his parents and to serve the African American community. It was the first hospital in New Jersey to be staffed by African American doctors and nurses. His commitment was total. He ran the hospital, served as chief physician and at night washed the sheets and towels. Frieda ran the kitchen. Dr. Kenny founded the National Medical Foundation and published the Journal of the NMF to keep African American doctors up to date with current medical practices. Dr. Kenny returned to Tuskegee in 1939 and turned the hospital over to representatives of the local

Newark community, who renamed it Community Hospital. The building that housed the hospital is now a church on W. Kinney St. John and Frieda's sons, John Jr., and Howard both became doctors. Ironically, Dr. Howard Kenny became the chief of staff at the VA hospital where the KKK tried so hard to prevent his father from working. Their daughter, Harriet (Kenny) Quisenberry worked with Dr. Bousfield who took over the National Medical Foundation after Dr John Kenny Sr. retired. Their son, Oscar, became one of the famous Tuskegee Airmen. He was killed during WWII. Frieda graduated from the Sargent School of Physical Education. In so doing, she became one of the first African American women to graduate from Boston University. John and Frieda came back to Montclair in 1944 but moved into a house on Madison Ave.

In the early 1940s John M. and Lillian Ragsdale lived in the house. John was a baggage handler for the Delaware Lackawana & Western Railroad at Pier 68 in New York harbor. He was active in the "Colored" YMCA that was on Washington St. The Charles Bullock School stands on the site now. By the late 1940s George W. and Rosha (Tutman) Ward lived in the house. George had a number of jobs throughout his career. Most of them were clerical. Somewhere around 1955 the Jett family bought the house. James and Theresa Jett occupied the house until their deaths. Their son, Steven, continued to live in the house.

James was an attendant at the Essex County Hospital (Overbrook) in Cedar Grove. Theresa stayed at home. She was very active in the Elks Club. The Jett family owned the house until 2010. ■

*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**, and several local libraries.*

REAL ESTATE

MAY 2023 Montclair Homes for Sale

SOURCE: GSMLS



140 Haddon Place
\$1,050,000 5 beds 4 baths



164 S Mountain Avenue
\$1,075,000 5 beds 4 baths



31 Woodmont Road
\$1,349,000 5 beds 4 baths



27 Fairfield Street
\$1,450,000 6 beds 5 baths



27 Alexander Avenue
\$1,550,000 4 beds 5 baths



50 Franklin Place
\$1,149,000 7 beds 4 baths



32 Cloverhill Place
\$1,199,000 5 beds 4 baths



124 Christopher Street
\$1,299,999 5 beds 5 baths



54 Melrose Place
\$1,929,000 7 beds 7 baths



15 Sutherland Road
\$1,950,000 5 beds 6 baths



63 Melrose Place
\$2,199,000 8 beds 6 baths

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