

Magical Queen Anne On Porter Place

CONTRIBUTED BY MIKE FARRELLY, MONTCLAIR TOWN HISTORIAN



THIS CAPTIVATING QUEEN ANNE style house on Porter Place was built in 1896 by Otis and Mary “Amelia” (Phelps) Corbett. They had been living on Union St. when they decided they wanted to build a new house for themselves. Otis was in the furniture business in New York. A few years before he built our featured house, Otis bought out his partner, William Doremus, to become the full owner of the company started by his father-in-law, William Phelps. On Dec 3, 1892, the company, which was located on 23rd Street, suffered a disastrous fire. The building was left standing, but all of the furniture was destroyed. The Spring Garden Insurance Co. stated that they would only honor the claim if the entire building had burned down. Otis took legal action against the insurance company and eventually won, but the process took years in the courts. The Otis Corbett Furniture Company closed as a result. Otis became a partner at another furniture company, the Aimone Co., which imported fine European furniture and sold it at their galleries on 22nd and 23 Streets. They later started making their own furniture. Otis and Amelia moved to Plainfield around 1908 where Otis went into yet another business. He bought the Commercial Mills and Elevator Co., a poultry feed supply.

In 1909 Gerard B. and Helen (Houghton) Townsend moved in. Gerard graduated from New York University in 1887 and NYU Law School in 1889. He served in the Navy during the Spanish American War. At the war’s end he was a lieutenant. He stayed in the Naval Reserve until 1913, retiring with the rank of commander. He then went full-time into the legal profession. He was

a partner at Einstein, Townsend, Guiterman and Shearn until Clarence Shearn left to go into politics (Shearn ran for governor and ended up on the NY Supreme Court). The firm reorganized as Townsend, Guiterman and Wilson. Gerard was a longtime member of the Montclair Dramatic Club, and a club called the Colonial Club which met at what had been a private residence on Harrison Ave. until it dissolved in 1928. Gerard passed away in 1931 while vacationing in the Barbados B.W.I. Helen, his wife (mom of Gerard Jr. and Helen), was also a staunch member of the Montclair Dramatic Club. She was active in the Montclair Golf Club and in the Montclair Red Cross. It is said by some that she was the first woman in New Jersey to get a driver’s license, although others claim that the first woman to get a driver’s license in NJ was Alice Huyler Ramsey. Helen stayed in the house with her son, Gerard Jr. and his wife, Violet (Ramsay).

Gerard Jr. graduated from Princeton in 1923 and went into a career in finance. He started in the corporate underwriting department of Lazard Freres, one of the world’s largest asset management firms. He became interested in railroads when he worked for the railroad department at the Union Trust Co. in Pittsburgh. He ended up as the treasurer of the Erie Railroad at their headquarters in Cleveland. He and Violet moved to Ohio in 1938.

Helen, Gerard Jr.’s mom, remained in the house. Her daughter, Helen, and Helen’s husband, Edgar L. Albright, moved in with her. Edgar was born in Ohio. He graduated from Ohio State University and the Columbia School of Architecture then went to work for York and Sawyer, a well-known New York architectural firm, famous for banks, hospitals, and large buildings like the headquarters of the New York Athletic Club in Manhattan. Helen, Edgar’s wife, attended the Kimberly School (now part of MKA) and Miss Master’s School in Dobbs Ferry, NY. As an adult she was on the board of the Kimberly School. She was treasurer of the St. Luke’s (Episcopal) Churchwomen. Like her mom, she was active in the Montclair Red Cross and the Golf Club. She was also a member of the Junior League. She passed away in 1960. Edgar stayed in the house a couple more years, then moved to Verona. Helen, Gerard Sr.’s wife and Helen Albright’s mom,



Photograph courtesy Mike Farrelly

moved to Barbados, where she stayed at the elegant Marine Hotel.

Around 1962 a new family moved into the featured house: Rev. Dr. Duncan MacBryde and his wife, Ann (Campbell) MacBryde. Duncan’s grandfather (also Duncan) was a minister in the “Old Bluffs” church circuit, founded in the 1750s to serve Scottish congregations in North Carolina, and pastor of the Sardis Presbyterian Church built in 1816 in Linden, NC. Our Duncan went to Davidson College (NC) and Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, VA. He went on to further studies in Europe and was granted a PhD in New Testament Studies from the University of Edinburgh in 1940. During World War II our Duncan served as a military attaché to Syria and Lebanon, retiring from the army with the rank of Lt. Colonel. He joined the State Department and worked as a public information staff officer for Western Europe until 1954 when he came back to the United States. He was pastor at the Winnetka Congregational Church in Illinois, at the First Presbyterian Church in Mooresville, NC. and a church in Tarrytown, NY. In 1962 Duncan became the associate executive director of (lay) Churchmen Overseas for the National Council of Churches. He resigned that position to become an associate professor of social sciences and philosophy at Essex County College in Newark. He was in demand as a speaker and gave many lectures about religion, philosophy and life abroad in the Montclair area. Ann was the daughter of a minister, Rev Edward Campbell, pastor of the Pleasantville (NY) Presbyterian Church. She graduated from a Presbyterian oriented college, Wilson College, in Chambersburg, PA. She met Duncan when he was the pastor of the First Reformed Church in Tarrytown, NY. Ann was active in Montclair’s social life. She was on the board of the Montclair Tenants Organization and was involved with the (Fair) Housing Coalition. She was the president of the North Essex YWCA when they were building a new facility on Glenridge Ave. The MacBrydes moved to North Carolina in 1976. ■

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What are Montclairians Reading and Watching?

Below are the most borrowed titles from the Montclair Public Library in September 2023

CONTRIBUTED BY ANDREW NG

- **ADULT FICTION**
Heart Bones by Colleen Hoover
- **ADULT NONFICTION**
Educated: A Memoir by Tara Westover
- **ADULT MEDIA**
Scream VI (Paramount)
- **TEEN FICTION**
Blink by Malcolm Gladwell
Flowers in the Gutter by K.R. Gaddy
- **CHILDREN’S FICTION**
Hello, Fall! by Deborah Diesen
- **CHILDREN’S NONFICTION**
Little Kids First Big Book of Dinosaurs by Catherine D. Hughes
- **CHILDREN’S MEDIA**
Prehistoric Playground! (Findaway World)

Here is My Kingdom edited by Charles Sullivan
Silent Spring by Rachel Carson

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