

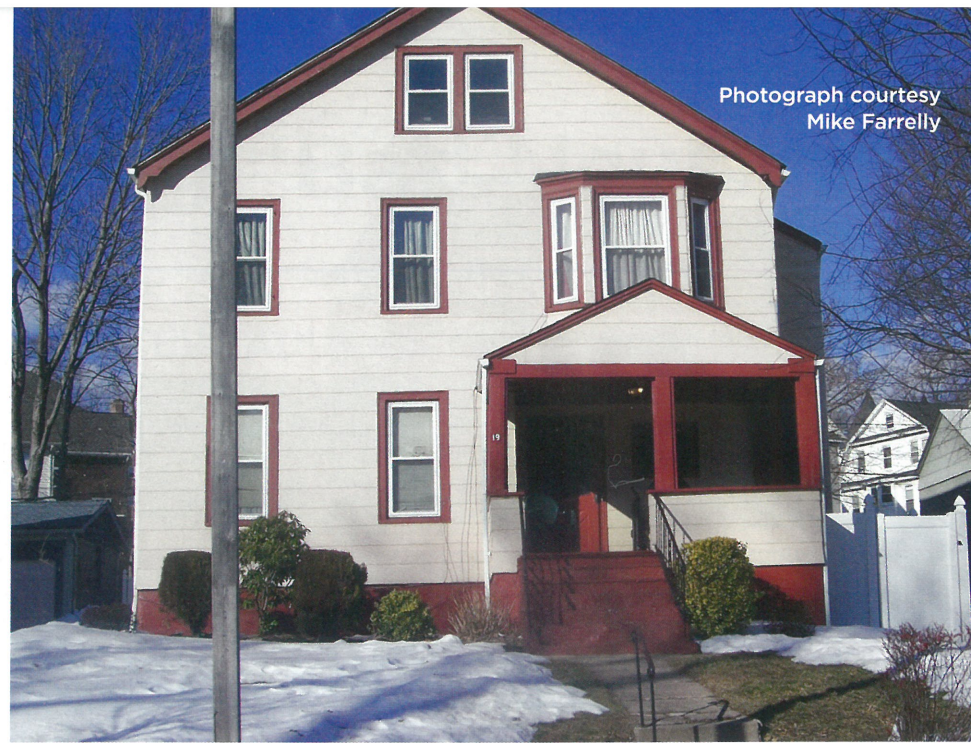
Regular Old Houses

CONTRIBUTED BY MIKE FARRELLY, MONTCLAIR TOWN HISTORIAN

IN THIS SERIES WE OFTEN end up talking about the large, magnificent houses that Montclair is famous for. Interesting people lived in all kinds of houses in Montclair, not just the big ones. Today's featured house is a normal home, not particularly flashy. It is on Gates Ave. near Bloomfield Ave.

The house was built on part of a plot purchased by Hugh and Anna (Campbell) Alexander around 1899. The Alexanders divided their plot up into smaller lots. By 1902 they had built a house for themselves and had given a small lot to their daughter, Jessie, and her new husband, William T. Ropes. Jessie and William built the house around 1902. William was a real estate broker with the Horace S. Ely firm in New York. Jessie Ropes was involved with several important activities and is really the one we want to talk about here.

Jessie was born in Chicago but grew up in Brooklyn. She was an accomplished amateur singer. Right after she married William in 1899 she started a (Brooklyn) town improvement association. When she came to Montclair, she discovered that doctors who practice alternative medicines were not allowed to practice at Mountainside Hospital. She founded the Homeopathic Society of Montclair with the intention of opening the hospital up to all practitioners. Shortly thereafter, she founded the Montclair Federation of Women's Organizations which welcomed women from every women's organization in Montclair and was deeply involved in social work. That led to her joining the State Federation of Women's Clubs where she served in various leadership roles, including the presidency from 1913 to 1915. Later that year she became a founder and the first president of the Montclair Women's Club. She was active in the Montclair Dramatic Club and performed in its first major production, "The



Photograph courtesy Mike Farrelly

Late Mrs. Castello" in 1904. She became the Montclair Dramatic Club's first "lifetime" member. The town council chose her to be a "special policewoman" with a focus on teaching women road safety. She was active in the foundation of Camp Nyoda for the Campfire Girls. She was active in the foundation of Douglass College for Women (now part of Rutgers University) and happened to be an expert on parliamentary law and regularly gave lectures on the subject. She often helped out at the Workroom in Orange, created to aid the handicapped, run by the Essex County Association for Aiding the Physically Handicapped. In addition, she was very active in local politics and was the vice-chair (from the 3rd Ward) of the Montclair Republican Committee.

William passed away in 1924. Jessie continued to live in the house; at first, by herself (with children), then she took on tenants. John and Josephine Priapi were the first tenants. John was a buyer for Hearns Department Store in Newark. He later became a superintendent for the Prudential Insurance Company. Charles L. and Harriet Crosskill became tenants and lived in the house with Jessie until the mid-1930s. Charles was a NY lawyer.

In 1936 (during the Great Depression) the house was sold in a sheriff's sale and Jessie moved to Roosevelt Pl. The house reverted to the Montclair Savings bank. The bank continued to rent the house out. The tenants were Anthony D. and Sybil (James) Appice and Byron C. and Elizabeth "Bettsy" (Schaibley) Grimes. Anthony Appice was a lawyer who had a private practice on Bloomfield Ave. when he lived in our featured house. He ran unsuccessfully for town council in 1937 and was considered for a judgeship in Essex County in 1940. He and Sybil moved to another house on Gates Ave. Athony eventually became a lawyer with the NJ Dept. of Labor and industry. Byron Grimes was called a "book agent". He sold books for a couple of different publishing companies in NYC. He later moved to Louisville and became a partner in his own publishing company.

Around 1942 William Marra and his wife, Tecla (Caponigro) Marra bought the house from the bank. William Marra was a barber with a shop on Bloomfield Ave. William and Tecla took on tenants, Samuel P. and Sarah Katz. Samuel ran a used furniture store on Glenridge Ave. In 1947 Donato and Antoinette (Papaleo) Caponigro moved in as tenants. Donato and Antionette became the owners of the house. Donato was a gardener. The Marras

moved to Church St. Donato Caponigro passed away and Antionette continued to live in the house with her son, Rocco. Donato and Antionette's daughter, Josephine, had married Edward J Howell when the Caponigros still lived on Maple Pl. Edward and Josephine became tenants. Edward was a bartender when the Howells lived in our featured house. In the mid-1950s all the Caponigros moved to Verona where Edward went into the real estate business. Antionette's son, Rocco, joined Edward's firm.

Around 1955 William McLeod and his wife, Theresa (Burke) McLeod bought the house for their daughter, Beryl, and her husband, John H. Wheaton. William and Theresa were born in Jamaica and were one of the founding

families of Trinity Presbyterian on Orange Rd. when Rev. C. Lincoln McGee bought the old South Presbyterian church in 1949 and moved his congregation from Bloomfield to Montclair. John Wheaton's family came up from Maryland and settled in Jersey City. John graduated from NYU and completed a master's degree there. He became a physical therapist first at St. Giles Orthopedic Hospital in Brooklyn, then in Newark. He taught physical therapy in the Paterson School System. He was an active member on the Housing Committee of the Montclair NAACP. Beryl graduated from Montclair High and Seton Hall. She studied nursing at Mercy Hospital in Philadelphia. She served as a school nurse in Newark and in the Montclair School system. John and Beryl split up and moved out about 1969. ■

In 1936, during the Great Depression, the house was sold in a sheriff's sale

Homes For Sale in Montclair

SOURCE: GSMLS DATA



REAL ESTATE

14 Elizabeth Road
\$1,599,000
5 beds 4 baths



29 Afterglow Way
\$1,450,000 6 beds 6 baths



7 Cloverhill Place
\$1,249,000 5 beds 4 baths



540 Upper Mountain Avenue
\$1,175,000 5 beds 3 baths



329 Orange Road
\$1,100,000 4 beds 4 baths



397 N Fullerton Avenue
\$979,000 4 beds 2 baths



92 Edgemont Road
\$789,000 4 beds 3 baths

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