

FRIENDS OF

# Florham

## FRIENDS CELEBRATE 25 YEARS AT FLORHAM



FROM LEFT: ELEANOR FRIEDL, ANN WELLBROCK, LISA MCNAIR, WALTER CUMMINS, PETER WOOLLEY, DAWN DUPAK, SUSAN GARRUBBO, GARY DARDEN AND KARIN HAMILTON STANDING BENEATH FAMILY PORTRAITS

More than 60 people participated in the Friends celebration of 25 years of dedication to their mission of working with the University to preserve the historic elements of the former Florham estate. Hartman Lounge was filled to capacity for the first event of the evening, an interesting, informative talk by Laura Overbey, collections manager at Biltmore, the legendary Asheville, N.C., estate built in the 1890s by George Vanderbilt, Florence Twombly's younger brother. Ms. Overbey spoke about the Vanderbilt siblings, their various influences on New York society, as well as their various architectural enterprises. She also linked the Twomblys to the Vanderbilt story

wherever possible, mentioning that Florence Twombly attended the opening of Biltmore on Christmas Eve, 1895.

We moved to the Great Hall for a museum-quality display of 12 posters and a timeline of the various Friends accomplishments, thanks to the efforts of Friends Trustee Susan Garrubbo. We celebrate the substantial progress that the Friends have actually made — and how these various projects have contributed significantly to the preservation and sustained beauty of the Florham Campus.

The Friends' most recent publication *FLORHAM: An American Treasure*, as well as Arthur Vanderbilt's earlier book, *For-*

*tune's Children*, were offered for sale in the Great Hall.

Then it was on to Lenfell Hall, where Friends President, Dawn Dupak, welcomed the group and Gary Darden, Chair of the Social Sciences/History Department, spoke about the Friends' Portrait Project, which he is spearheading. The project's first phase included portraits from Biltmore and the Twombly-Burden Room at Columbia University. These nine portraits are hung in the Great Hall and in Lenfell Hall, along with existing portraits from the Florham art collection. As Darden noted, "these portraits bring together five generations of the

(continued on page 4)

### FALL 2016

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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



FROM LEFT: PETER WOOLLEY, DAWN DUPAK AND REP. RODNEY FRELINGHUYSEN AT THE 25TH



JENN JOHNSON AND CHEF JEFF GORLEY AT THE TIFFANY TABLE

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the Friends of Florham Fall 2016 newsletter. We've been very busy since we published our spring newsletter.

Our spring fundraiser, "A Tiffany Table," was a wonderful success, raising friends and funds. Congratulations and thank you to the event chairs, Danielle Lindner and Jenn Johnson, and their committee, and my personal appreciation to the people who attended. We plan to hold our next event on May 18, 2017. Save the date and stay tuned for additional details.

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In September, we marked our 25th anniversary with a celebration at the Florham Campus. The event included a lecture by Laura Overbey, collections manager at Biltmore, and the unveiling of the first two phases of our Portrait Project in Lenfell Hall, followed by Chef Jeff delighting us with a demonstration and sampling of two of Mrs. Twombly's favorite recipes. The Great Hall was the perfect venue for the beautifully designed gallery of posters created by Susan Garrubbo that commemorated the first 25 years

of Friends' projects; food and beverage stations; and our Florham store featuring the Friends' recently published book, *FLORHAM: An American Treasure*, and *Fortune's Children* written by Arthur Vanderbilt.

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It was a grand celebration and my special thanks to the committee — Jenn, Susan, Karin, Eleanor, Gary and Lisa.

Sadly, I must note the passing of Henry G. Parker, beloved husband of Audrey Parker, in July. Henry and Audrey were staunch supporters of the Friends, and we will miss Henry's warm smile and enthusiasm for all our projects. Audrey remains a valued honorary member.

Filming by NJTV on the Florham Estate for the documentary "Treasures of New Jersey" has been ongoing since the spring, and the NJTV people recently joined a trustee meeting to capture additional footage. We are looking forward to viewing the new series, which is expected to air in 2017, and will feature the Vanderbilt-Twombly Estate as the first episode.

We've started preliminary work on the next classroom renovation in Hennessy Hall. Ruth Twombly's former bedroom, now classroom M-11, will become the Governor Brendan Byrne Room. Seed money from the Friends and The Dodge Foundation has been committed. If you'd like to contribute to the Friends specifically for this project, please contact Karin Hamilton, Director of Special Projects, University Advancement, at [hamilton@fdu.edu](mailto:hamilton@fdu.edu).

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*It was a grand celebration and my special thanks to the committee — Jenn, Susan, Karin, Eleanor, Gary and Lisa.*

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As winter approaches and you consider ways to shake off its chill, you may want to plan a visit to Florham. Stop by the Provost's Office to pick up a guide of the portraits. To access a downloadable audio tour go to [www.fdu.edu](http://www.fdu.edu) and type Mansion Audio Tour in the search box.

By now, you should have received our annual membership appeal letter. Your continued support is very much appreciated, and crucial in making our restoration projects possible.

— Dawn Dupak

# A MEMORABLE RETURN TO THE TIFFANY TABLE

On Friday, May 20, our enthusiastic guests participated in “A Return to the Tiffany Table,” the second successful fundraising luncheon organized and hosted by the Friends of Florham in partnership with Tiffany & Co. Lenfell Hall was highlighted by a backdrop of Tiffany blue boxes, while the overflowing tables in the Great Hall displayed a variety of enticing auction items.

We credit much of the success of the event to the hardworking committee chaired by Danielle Lindner and Jenn Johnson and comprised of Valerie Adams, Christine Adrignolo, Dawn Dupak, Ann Wellbrock and Karin Hamilton.

The luncheon, catered by Gourmet Dining, was excellent. Tiffany donated 99 boxes, each containing two wine glasses. One special box also contained a gold and diamond bracelet, which



FROM LEFT: YVETTE TOSADO, MARISA SPAGNOLETTI, KARIN HAMILTON AND THEN FDU PRESIDENT SHELDON DRUCKER

was raffled off among the “mystery boxes.”

Other auction items ranged from tickets to the Morris Arts “Giralda” concert featuring the New Jersey Symphony, an evening bag ensemble from Lucy’s Gift in Morristown and gift cards from The Chatham Sandwich Shop and Café Beethoven. The live auction included, among

many enticing items, donated Jets and Giants tickets and an at-home dinner catered by Chef Jeff.

We were thrilled that the 2016 Tiffany Table was a memorable event enjoyed by all who attended. Look for announcements of our next event on May 18, 2017, at which the Friends will join forces with a new and equally exciting partner.



GUESTS GATHER TO ENJOY THE SILENT AUCTION.



JENN JOHNSON WELCOMES THE GUESTS.



STEVE AND DANIELLE LINDNER



THE SALES AND MANAGEMENT TEAM FROM TIFFANY & CO., SHORT HILLS, N.J.



# FRIENDS CELEB



GARY DARDEN POINTING OUT THE PORTRAITS



LINDA MEISTER AND REP. RODNEY FRELINGHUYSEN

Vanderbilt-Twombly-Burden families to better tell the historical narrative of the legendary American family who made Florham a home for six decades.”

Still to come, among various portraits on the project “list,” are reproductions of two of Florence’s brothers, Cornelius Vanderbilt II from the Breakers in Newport, R.I., and George Washington Vanderbilt from Biltmore, and the reproduction of the portraits of members of the design team, Charles Follen McKim and Stanford White. Darden concluded his presentation with a sur-

prise find, an 1877 lithograph of the wedding portrait of Florence and Hamilton Twombly, which was on the cover of *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* (December 8, 1877). He is donating the gift to the portrait collection; the framing was also a gift from Express Frames in Morristown, N.J. The portrait will ultimately hang in the Great Hall.

Next up, literally on the menu, Chef Jeff Gourley demonstrated and served two of Chef Joseph Donon’s famous recipes, which everyone agreed were delectable. Chef Jeff has graciously

shared the Chef Donon recipe for Crabes a la Diabie, which can be found on page 7.

Throughout the celebration, and on the other side of the room, the film of Florham shot by Joseph Donon in the 1930s (and digitized by the Friends) ran continuously.

It was a thoroughly enjoyable evening. Our thanks to the committee (Dawn Dupak, Gary Darden, Eleanor Friedl, Susan Garrubbo, Karin Hamilton, Jenn Johnson and Lisa McNair), who worked to make this wonderful evening a spectacular celebration.



CHEF JEFF GOURLEY OFFERING HIS DISH



FROM LEFT: LAURA OVERBEY, DAWN DUPAK, GOV. BRENDAN BYRNE, SAM CONVISSOR AND PETER WOOLLEY

# ORATE 25 YEARS



CORNELIUS  
"COMMODORE" VANDERBILT



HAMILTON MCKOWN TWOMBLY



ALICE VANDERBILT  
TWOMBLY



RUTH VANDERBILT TWOMBLY



FLORENCE TWOMBLY BURDEN

# INSIDE FLORHAM WITH CHEF DONON



CHEF JEFF GOURLEY

*The New Yorker* called him “probably the richest and most famous private chef in the world,” and there is every reason to believe that Mrs. Twombly’s beloved French chef, Joseph Donon, was just that.

## CRABES A LA DIABLE (DEVELOPED CRABS)

### Ingredients:

Meat of 1 dozen hard-shell crabs  
(about 1 ½ pounds meat)

1 tablespoon butter

½ tablespoon flour

2 cups hot milk

1 onion, chopped

½ cup fresh bread crumbs

2 tablespoons cream

1 teaspoon chopped parsley

*Melt the butter, stir in the flour and cook the roux for a minute, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon. Add the hot milk and the onion, chopped, and cook for 10 minutes, stirring from time to time. The sauce should be thin. Add the cream, a little salt and pepper to taste, bread crumbs, crabmeat and parsley. The mixture should be thick enough to hold its shape. If necessary, add more bread crumbs. Fill prepared crab shells or individual scallop dishes with the crab mixture, mounding it high. Mix some dry mustard to a paste with water and brush the filled shells with it. Sprinkle with bread crumbs and with melted butter and brown quickly in a hot oven. Serve bubbling hot.*

Those of us addicted to “Down-ton Abbey” know that the staff is always the key to finding out what is happening in a great manor

house. We would know very little about life at Florham, about Mrs. Twombly and her daughter, Ruth, were it not for an incredible treasure trove of primary source material — the reminiscences of Chef Donon. After the death of Mrs. Twombly in 1952 and Ruth in 1954, Donon retired at the age of 67 with the help of a generous bequest from Mrs. Twombly. In retirement he realized how extraordinary it had been what he had witnessed in his career at Florham, a way of life gone forever, and set out to record his memories in a draft memoir he dictated to a friend and in several interviews with *The New Yorker*, including a lengthy profile. “It was an epoch! It was a special time, and the way those houses were run should not be forgotten.”

Slight in stature and youthful in appearance when he was hired by Mrs. Twombly in 1917 at the age of 29, Donon was as tough and savvy as they come. When the Italian chef he replaced threatened him, Donon told him that he had fought for France and killed Germans in the war and would not hesitate to kill him. A senior staff member who tried to give him orders in matters pertaining to the kitchen found herself dismissed by Mrs. Twombly the next day. He replaced the kitchen staff and hired his own workers who were intensely loyal to him and stayed with him for decades. When, for instance, Donon wanted fruit from the Orangerie, rather than telling the head gardener he gave his order to the Twombly’s New York City Office, which then instructed the gardeners what to bring to him and when. He had no budget and his expenses were never questioned. His mission was to fulfill Mrs. Twombly’s sole request: “The only thing that Mrs. Twombly asked for is that we give her the best of the best.” And that he did for 38 years.

Do not picture Chef Donon toiling over hot stoves in the basement of Florham. He had a core staff of five, each with a special-

ized function: a pastry chef, a cook who prepared all the vegetable dishes and a man in charge of the equipment and machinery. There were always five footmen in the pantry who “wore the court livery just like they had at Buckingham Palace — only in maroon color, the Vanderbilt color.” It was Chef Donon’s job to oversee and run what was called the “department” which was the core of Florham: dining.

Every day his kitchen prepared meals in two shifts — for the staff of 32 who worked inside the mansion, and the staff of 80 who worked outside.

“In mid-April I was given the schedule for Florham — so many dinners, so many ladies’ luncheons and so many weekend parties.”

Every week when Mrs. Twombly was at Florham there were luncheons and dinners for 20 to 30 guests. Every Tuesday she would invite two dozen friends from the Morristown area for a ladies luncheon followed by bridge and tea. Lunch was always at 1:30 and “dinner was eight o’clock sharp! We heard that if a guest was late by just five minutes they might not be invited again for months — or years!” Chef Donon would begin to prepare three to four days in advance for the large weekend parties of 125 to 150 guests, which often included midnight suppers, which continued on into the small hours of the morning.

As Chef Donon noted: “Mrs. Twombly knew cooking, and she knew wines; entertaining was her life, and she lived for it. Mrs. Twombly’s desire to please her friends was touching.”

Serving the “best of the best” began with the best ingredients, almost all available on the thousand acres of Florham. From the Florham farm there were Guernsey cows and their own dairy, vegetable gardens “on the hill near Convent Station,” greenhouses for all kinds of grapes

*(continued on page 7)*

CHEF DONON: (continued)

and melons. Donon asked for a cave to be built where he grew mushrooms and celery “white as snow and very crisp.”

“From our greenhouses we could get melons the size of a small beach ball and grapes the size of my thumb — one bunch would be a foot long! In the Orangerie we had every fruit — oranges, lemons, figs — everything. Mrs. Twombly told me that she only enjoyed vegetables at home. Even those at the Ritz Hotel in Paris were not as good as what we had at Florham. We got them fresh in the morning — right to the kitchen door. If I wanted something special or something changed, I would work through our office in New York and they would tell the gardener what to grow. Mrs. Twombly had a big greenhouse just for flowers; she really loved orchids — that was her flower. She had them on the table every day. During the second war, we raised steers and lambs on the farm, so we could be sure of our supplies.” Before Prohibition, the Florham base-

ment was filled with so much wine and liquor that vast quantities remained after the deaths of Mrs. Twombly and Ruth.

Chef Donon remembered Mrs. Twombly fondly. “Once a week, at nine o’clock in the morning, Mrs. Twombly would ring for the butler, Frederick Berles, who would come for me, and we would go to see her about our schedules. Every few days though, she would call me to her sitting room [now Campus Provost Peter Woolley’s office] to talk about special things, like a birthday cake or something like that. I would sit down with her, and she enjoyed that talk — she spoke to me like a mother! She seemed very happy. Occasionally she would ask, “Are you happy, chef? Would you like a raise?” She had one party after another — that was her life! Oh, she really enjoyed life, her daughter too! Mrs. Twombly was quiet; she ate simple, not too much. She was like a queen. Once a week she would come to the kitchen to see me and said ‘good morning’ to everyone. She

wanted to keep in touch with all the help. She was very nice; very humble for her place. She wanted to say a few words to all my staff.”

Running the Florham food service department was nonstop work, but Chef Donon had a day off every week, rested for several hours each afternoon in a bedroom for his use and took two months’ vacation each year. Mrs. Twombly paid for the trips he and his wife took all over Europe and the United States, and when he would submit all his vacation expenses upon his return, he would receive a check for what he had spent.

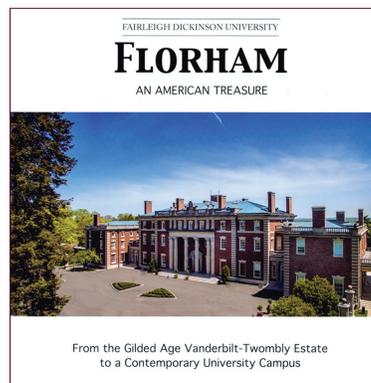
“Mrs. Twombly was wonderful to me. At Christmas she would give me something special. The office would send me a check, but it was she who would give me the gift — all the time. That last Christmas, in 1951, I remember that I was the only one of the staff she had upstairs. I got in line with all her family and friends — she lined us up! — and she gave me a silver service.”

— Arthur T. Vanderbilt II

## FLORHAM: AN AMERICAN TREASURE

Friends of Florham is pleased to announce the publication of *FLORHAM: An American Treasure*, which was conceived, written and produced by four members of the Friends of Florham — Carol Bere, Samuel Convisser, Walter Cummins and Arthur Vanderbilt. This beautiful new book is full of vintage photographs of the estate taken by famed photographer Shirley Burden, one of Mrs. Twombly’s grandsons, as well as gorgeous color photographs taken this past spring and summer by photographer/artist Mark Hillringhouse, whose work captures the beauty of Florham in ways we’ve never seen before, including spectacular shots using a drone.

*FLORHAM* traces the history of this special estate, explaining why Hamilton Twombly and his wife, Florence Vanderbilt, began



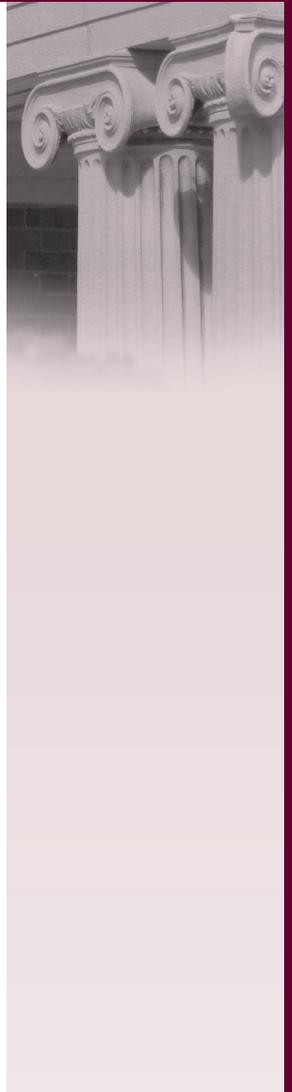
in the 1880s to acquire the 1,200 acres in this area; how they retained famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted to lay out their estate, and the most prominent architectural firm of the day, McKim, Mead & White, to design the country home that they would use for two months every spring and two months in the fall; and what life was like at Florham — first for the Twomblys and their four children, and

later, after the death of Hamilton Twombly and two of their children, for Mrs. Twombly and her unmarried daughter, Ruth.

The authors have mined many contemporary sources to tell this story, and provide quotes from the Twombly’s grandchildren; their famous French chef, Joseph Donon; and other members of the staff of 120 who for so many years kept Florham running like a “Downton Abbey” type of estate. In doing so, the authors provide fresh insights into the lives of the family who lived there. It is an extraordinary story of one of the most fabled Gilded Age estates, which perhaps longer than any other, continued well into the 20th century to be run just as it was when first created.

*FLORHAM* goes on to tell the story of the famous auction of the contents of the estate, the

(continued on page 8)





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## Florham Campus

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### FLORHAM BOOK: *(continued)*

purchase of the property by Fairleigh Dickinson University and the remarkable transformation of the estate into a university campus. The work and projects of the Friends of Florham since 1990 to raise funds and assist Fairleigh Dickinson University on projects to restore and preserve the historic elements of the campus is recounted in text and accompanying photographs.

One hundred percent of the proceeds from the sale of this book will be used by the Friends to further their work renovating the mansion and its grounds. What a wonderful gift to your family and friends interested in Florham, in FDU or in the Gilded Age!

*Copies of FLORHAM may be purchased for \$20 at Amazon.com or via these options:*

- Directly from Friends of *Florham* by sending a check for \$25.00, which includes the cost of shipping, to:

Karin Hamilton  
c/o Friends of Florham, FDU  
1000 River Road, H-DH3-13  
Teaneck, New Jersey 07666

- Online via credit card courtesy of the Fairleigh Dickinson University Alumni Association website at [www.myfdû.net/fofbook](http://www.myfdû.net/fofbook)

- Online from the Florham Campus Bookstore, [www.fdushop.com](http://www.fdushop.com), or purchase directly in the bookstore.

## BECOME A FRIEND

Join the Friends of Florham. Participate directly in our efforts to preserve the architectural history of Florham, and support our informative program series. Your support will make a difference.

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