

# FRIENDS OF Florham

Spring 2006

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## Morris County Heritage Commission Supports Burden/Twombly Papers Archival Project

In February, Friends of Florham received a grant of \$2,869 from the Morris County Heritage Commission for the second phase of the Burden/Twombly papers archival project. This grant continues the work on these papers, which was financed by the commission's initial 2005 grant of \$2,000 plus additional support from Friends of Florham.



*Eleanor Friedl, center, reference librarian, College at Florham, discusses the recent grant for the Burden/Twombly Papers archival project with Linda Meister, left, and Walter Savage, right, professor emeritus of English, both board members of the Friends of Florham.*

In order to encourage "a knowledge and appreciation of the diverse history of Morris County," the commission seeks to preserve historical information and "provides resources to increase awareness of the people, places and events that give our area a special place in the history of New Jersey and America." Funds for this grant came from the Morris County Heritage Commission's Re-Grant Program, which is in turn funded by the New Jersey Historical Commission.

*continued on page 2*

## Spring Gala 2006 Scheduled for May 20

Ruth and Ed Hennessy are honorary co-chairs of the ninth Spring Gala on May 20, 2006. The annual Spring Gala, "An Evening at Florham," the premier fund-raising event for Friends of Florham, has contributed more than \$240,000 toward the restoration of the Mansion, its furnishings, gardens and grounds.

The terrace and gardens provide a spectacular venue for the seven o'clock cocktail hour. Last year, the Italian gardens were incredibly beautiful, with many flowers in full bloom. Then, everyone moves into Lenfell Hall for dinner and dancing at 8 p.m. The menu is adapted from Mrs. Twombly's chef's recipes (see related story in this issue by Walter Savage on page 4).

During dessert, "The Ten," from the University Glee Club of New York, will again present a short concert. This group appeared at the Gala last year and received a standing ovation. It is with great pleasure that the committee welcomes them back.

A large dinner committee is working to ensure that this year's event will be as successful as previous years. The 2006 co-chairs are Phyllis Conway, Dawn Dupak, Barbara Keefauver and Linda Meister. "This is a marvelous committee," said Barbara Keefauver, "and they deserve our heartfelt thanks for the wonderful work they have done." The committee consists of Susan and Michael Adams, Kathy and Joe Atencio, Carol

*continued on page 3*



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## President's Letter

When you read this newsletter, I assume that spring will be here — or, if not — almost here. It's very cold as I write this president's letter, but in spite of the snow and the frigid temperatures, the Friends have had a good winter with some exciting projects still in the works, or, hopefully, completed. We've improved the first impression of the campus from Madison Avenue by straightening and painting the exit gates. We are also working to add a large sign to the present Fairleigh Dickinson sign to identify the campus as the "College at Florham."

One of our most exciting projects, which we have talked about for quite awhile, is the restoration of the original lamps/lanterns around the courtyard in front of the Mansion. Some of the lanterns were missing and others are in disrepair, so International Architectural Ironworks is making exact replicas and/or the replacement parts to repair the others. Our relatively new board member, Allan Kushen, has ably overseen this project.

Finally, after a great search over a number of years and in several continents, in trying to locate

the actual "Florham Lily," which won many prizes for Mrs. Twombly, our board member, Richard Simon, discovered in a Vermont nursery a beautiful yellow lily which looked very much like the pictures we have of the Florham Lily. Upon inquiry, it was learned that this lily is in fact descended from the original Florham Lily and was bred with another similar lily. We plan to plant them in the front courtyard gardens as an authentic descendant.

As reported in past newsletters, our wonderful archivist, Dr. Antonia Moser, has made a great deal of progress in getting our records and papers together and in good order. The Morris County Heritage Commission gave us a second grant to continue our Twombly/Burden archival project, so we are extremely grateful to them. Do read on for the particulars about all of these projects.

Be sure to join us for our wonderful Gala on May 20, which is a glorious way to spend a spring evening and, at the same time, lend support to our projects.

— Emma Joy Dana



Lantern in front of the Mansion

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### Archival Project, continued from page 1

In 2004, Fairleigh Dickinson University's College at Florham received a gift of family papers from Edward Burden, great-grandson of Florence Vanderbilt Twombly. This "Burden" gift, consisting of household ledgers and correspondence, was very important to the history of Florham, as little detail on the daily life of the estate was previously available. The records were a significant addition to the historical portrait of the Gilded Age in the Morris area and an important research tool for students and professional historians.

In the first phase of the project, archivist Antonia Moser organized and arranged the research papers and archival documents and prepared finding aids. One of the highlights of the collection was a group of approximately 100 vintage photographs most of them taken by Shirley Burden, Florence Vanderbilt Twombly's grandson.

Burden took most of these photographs a few weeks before the estate sale, which took place on June 15 and 16, 1955. Because there is little written detail on the furnishings and other interior details of Mrs. Twombly's home, the photographs remain the only accurate record of the interior and exterior of the house as it appeared during Mrs. Twombly's ownership.

Specifically, the second phase of the archival project will consist of professional digital documentation, analysis and storage of these pho-

tographs. According to Moser, making a digital record of the photographs will preserve the originals from the hazards of too much handling. The originals are then stored in archival sleeves and boxes, and the digital copies are kept in files for the researchers.

In addition, Moser will interview Richard Simon and Walter Savage, both long-time historians of the Mansion. She will then create a worksheet for each photograph and note Simon's and Savage's comments. These worksheets are then filed with the respective digital copy. A researcher can then develop various themes on any number of aspects of the house and gardens.

Finally, the archivist will connect the pictures and interview documentation to the letters and papers that are already archived. Thus, a written and pictorial record of life at "Florham" will be available to students, researchers and other historic institutions, particularly those institutions pertaining to the Vanderbilt family and the era in which they lived.

*The Star-Ledger* article that appeared on Sunday, March 12, 2006, by Lisa Vernon-Sparks, highlights the history of the Mansion and offers additional details about the history of the site. The Friends are grateful for the support of the local community and the Morris County Heritage Commission.

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## Book Review

# New Jersey Country Houses: The Somerset Hills, vol.

I

John H. Turpin and W. Barry Thomson

Mountain Colony Press, 2004

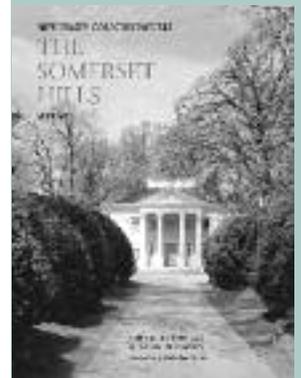
Opulent Georgian mansions such as “Florham,” the original Dodge estate and the substantial “summer” homes of Millionaire’s Mile in Morristown and the surrounding areas, are all written into the social, cultural and economic history of Morris County during the late 19th and early 20th century. Less reported — until now — was the often simultaneous and remarkable growth of country houses built during what has been referred to as the “Golden Age” of the Somerset Hills, from about 1870 until the Great Depression. In *New Jersey Country Houses: The Somerset Hills* (vol. I), John H. Turpin and W. Barry Thomson filled in this gap in our collective knowledge. Extensively researched and beautifully photographed, this elegant book offers a perceptive overview of the people, the elaborate country houses and gardens and the often-lavish life lived in these homes during those years.

The people who built these homes reflect the surge in economic wealth of the period and represented any *Forbes’* list of prominent individuals and families of the time. These names include the Stevens and Roebing families, engineering innovators; railroad financiers, Ledyard Blair and his family; John Ballentine of the brewing family; Charles H. Engelhard, Sr.; James Cox Brady; and Charles Pfizer. Working from intimate knowledge of the homes and the area, a sizable collection of interior and exterior photographs and newly discovered biographical information, Turpin and Thomson showcase these summer homes or “cottages” in Bernardsville (the largest number), Mendham, Far Hills, Peapack-Gladstone and Bedminster. They offer illuminating commentary on the homes, the history of ownership, occasional restorations and even the ultimate razing of some of these impressive houses.

The homes were designed by major architects

and landscape architects including George B. Post and his sons, leading designers of commercial buildings and private residences, and Carrère & Hastings, designers of the New York Public Library. The gardens were created by prominent landscape architects such as James Leal Greenleaf, the Olmsted Brothers and Ellen Shipman. The architectural design of the homes varied considerably: Gothic Revival homes, classic colonials, English Tudors, shingle-style “cottages,” imposing fieldstone and Georgian-style mansions were among the many homes built during the “high” period of the Somerset Hills. What does seem clear is that Post and his sons were in the forefront of architectural designers in addition to being residents in the area. Post and his sons designed banks, skyscrapers, well-known mansions in New York City and the highly praised trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Often referred to as the founding father of Bernardsville’s mountain colony, he built Claremont in Bernardsville, a neo-Federal-style structure as his family residence (still owned by family members), and with his sons, built several homes for the extended Post family and many other family homes in the Somerset Hills. Of particular interest, one of Post’s sons, James Otis, who married Dorothea Miller, the great-granddaughter of George and Louisa Macculloch, were the last couple to live in what is now Macculloch Hall Museum in Morristown.

In an era where the sound of the bulldozer and urban sprawl are business as usual, it is remarkable that many of the country houses of the Somerset Hills are still standing and are privately owned. With some expert guidance from Turpin and Thomson, one should drive through the beautiful Somerset Hills and randomly explore various roads. One will occasionally glimpse some of the country houses, no doubt appreciate the landscape and ultimately capture a sense of history, of



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## Spring Gala 2006, continued from page 1

Bere, Dorothy and David Clair, Mary Clowney, Emma Joy and Bill Dana, Doris and Don Dinsmore, Elaine and Michael Earlywine, Barbara and Jim Hughes, Nancy and John Johnston, Carole and Fred Kurtz, Natalie and Allan Kushen, Dorothy and Bill Lockett, Kay Lyall, Jeanne and Jim Manley, Nancy and James McClelland, Caron and John Menger, Suzy and Brian Moran, Barbara and Farley Moran, Susan and Neal Oldendorp, Audrey and Henry Parker, Mollie and Graydon Rogers, Anne and Chris Singleton, Ruth

and Paul Steck, Nancy and Byron Sugahara and Holly and Reid Walker.

Tickets for the Gala were still available when the newsletter went to press. Please call 973-443-8558 to inquire. The cost for a Patron is \$250 per person, and the Donor ticket is \$150 per person. Any amount over \$80 per person is tax-deductible. For those who wish to support the goals of the Gala but cannot attend, there is an opportunity on the invitation response card to contribute.

## *Remember the Twomblys and Florham*



*Thomas R. Coulter*

*“She hired a Brinks truck to bring other supplies into New Jersey, with the wine hidden in amongst them.”*

*“If you wanted more tea, you only had to nod your head and your server refilled your cup and offered additional refreshments.”*

Shortly after he began his service as assistant director of food services at FDU’s College at Florham in 1958, Thomas R. Coulter received a hurry-up call to come to the office of Dr. Samuel Pratt, campus dean, to meet a distinguished visitor. Joseph Donon was returning to Florham after a long absence. Soon after the end of World War I, Donon was lured by the Twomblys from London’s Carlton Hotel for an annual “salary of \$25,000, a separate villa, a staff of personal servants and a sailboat.” The dean asked Coulter to give Donon a guided tour, an assignment that gave Coulter an opportunity to spend about two hours in the company of the legendary culinary figure. It also offered Coulter the first of many chances to hear stories about Florham’s family, stories that Coulter has recently shared with the Friends.

During his conversation with Coulter, Donon remembered several of his experiences as executive chef for the Twomblys. One of them dealt with a small dinner party Mrs. Twombly was planning for Thomas Edison. Edison and Mrs. Twombly talked, Donon told Coulter, “about serving wine,” that, Mrs. Twombly insisted, “would have to be brought from her New York home.” Edison reminded her “that wine could not be brought into New Jersey at that time, as it was against the law to transport spirits from one state to another.” Mrs. Twombly disagreed with the inventive genius’s assertion and “made a small wager of \$5.00” with him. Mrs. Twombly, Donon’s recollections led Coulter to believe, “was the winner. She hired a Brinks truck to bring other supplies into New Jersey, with the wine hidden in amongst them.”

Walking with Donon through the original kitchen and other parts of the Mansion, Coulter asked the chef “if he enjoyed preparing these dinners.” The question caused Donon to pull himself “up to his full 5-foot-5-inch height” and state that he “never prepared the food — this was done by his staff of cooks.” His responsibility was to make sure “that all went according to Mrs. Twombly’s wishes.” Coulter then ventured a second inquiry: “I asked him if he enjoyed cooking for his wife. At that point,” Coulter continued, “he informed me that Mrs. Twombly furnished them with villas in both Madison and Newport and also supplied them with their own chef and maids.”

When Coulter and Donon reached what was “Florham’s” dining room, Donon reminisced about “the set-up for a formal dinner on a weekend. The white cloth was placed on the table, and then someone from housekeeping re-ironed it so that it was completely free of wrinkles. Then the

butler and staff set the table with whichever china and silver service Mrs. Twombly selected. Each setting had to be in proper order” Donon told Coulter, and “the gardener furnished the appropriate flowers for the center of the table. Mrs. Twombly’s secretary would then bring in the seating plan and place a card containing the name of each guest at his or her place at the table.”

What Coulter learned from Donon about Mrs. Twombly as a hostess was supplemented for him later on by other sources. Rose Nyman, campus nurse and wife of the rector of Grace Church, was one of his sources. Her account of her and her husband’s joining Mrs. Twombly and her daughter, Ruth, for tea one afternoon was recorded in the following terms by Coulter:

“The two guests arrived at the set hour of 4:00. They were greeted by the butler, who was waiting for them. He took their coats and showed them into the library to await their hostess. Because it was a chilly day, a fire was set in the fireplace. Four chairs were facing it. In front of each chair was a small table set for tea. On the rear table was the silver tea service tray containing the refreshments.

When the Twombly ladies arrived, the four sat down and at this time four staff members entered in full formal uniform and served the tea and refreshments. If you wanted more tea, you only had to nod your head and your server refilled your cup and offered additional refreshments. At a preordained time, Mrs. Twombly rang for the butler, who showed the guests out.”

Coulter’s research at “Fosterfields” provided him with Carolyn Foster’s confirmation of Mrs. Twombly’s sometimes exacting requirements to be observed by her guests. Foster recalled, Coulter said, “how wonderful the dining room looked and how she, a slow eater, had to keep the staff from removing a course before she finished. It seems that when Mrs. Twombly finished, she would signal the butler to remove the current course from all those present. Following dinner the guests gathered in the main hall for an organ program. When the program was over, the guests were assembled in a line and Mrs. Twombly moved down this line saying goodnight to each guest. At the end of the line she turned to the butler and said ‘Time,’ at which point the staff brought out coats and [the guests] were shown the way out. Some of the first-time visitors, who expected the evening to continue for several more hours, found themselves outdoors with no way of getting home, as many of their drivers had not yet appeared. Foster said she and those other guests whose carriages were waiting loaded as

many of the stranded guests as possible into their carriages and drove them to their homes. The remaining guests had to wait outside until their transportation arrived.”

Mrs. Twombly’s hands-on management of social events was, according to two other memories retained by Coulter, quite obviously matched by her vigilant supervision of the Mansion’s surroundings. Completing his account of her grand dame manner as a hostess, Coulter repeated a pair of stories told to him by staff members: “Mrs. Twombly had a groundsman whose job it was to rake a design in the gravel driveway, and when a carriage or car had used it, he had to repair the damage immediately.” And concluding his collection of comments by staff members, Coulter notes that one of them informed him that the Mansion’s middle door “was used by the family, the one on the right by the executive chef and the one on the left ... by the housekeeper.”

Ruth Twombly, the last of Mrs. Twombly’s four children to reside at “Florham,” was described to Coulter as considerably more sportive than her mother. John Anderson recalled for him his and his wife’s participation in a Playhouse costume ball sponsored by Ruth: “It was a very colorful event. Miss Twombly was dressed as Cleopatra and was seated on a litter. She had four scantily clad young men (they were members of a football squad) as her bearers, and they proceeded to carry her around ... all went well for quite a while. The guests were having a wonderful time with drinks and dancing. The four young bearers enjoyed themselves and whenever possible would visit the bar and indulge in more liquid refreshment. About two hours into the evening, as the

bearers circled the pool with Miss Twombly on her litter, her guests heard a large commotion from the pool area. The four bearers and Miss Twombly were found floundering in the pool; all you could see were their heads.”

Coulter’s memory of the other then surviving member of the “Florham” family, Florence Adele Burden, represents a peculiarly affecting final look into the past his recollections recreate. He refers to her as “Mrs. Twombly’s older daughter from California” and adds that she always stopped by for a few minutes at “Florham” whenever she came east.

Coulter was asked once more to hasten promptly to the dean’s office by Dr. Pratt in case his help was needed in greeting a visitor whose identity he learned only later. After arriving there, he follows the dean out the main entrance of the Mansion and stands with him watching a limousine glide down Mansion Road and come to a stop directly in front of the great building. A side window opens, and the dean hurries to the limousine to speak to the passenger. The exchange between the dean and the visitor is brief. The window rolls back up. The chauffeur guides the limousine at a stately pace up the driveway, over the rise designed by Olmsted to greet arrivals with the sudden stunning view of the splendor of the Mansion. Slowly, the limousine disappears, traveling the downgrade and out of sight, ending the visitor’s final short visit to her childhood home.

In all probability, that departure was the last return of any member of the Twombly family to the incomparable country estate over which the final visitor’s mother had magisterially presided for over half a century. — *Walter Savage*

*Mrs. Twombly’s hands-on management of social events was ... quite obviously matched by her vigilant supervision of the Mansion’s surroundings.*

*Mansion’s middle door “was used by the family, the one on the right by the executive chef and the one on the left ... by the housekeeper.”*

## Welcome Holly Walker to the Board

The Friends of Florham welcome Holly Walker to their board. Walker is an active member of the nonprofit community.



*Holly Walker*

After retiring from her professional career as an interior designer in northern Virginia to raise her children, she has served on numerous fundraising and charitable committees for institutions such as the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and the Washington Opera.

Walker joined the board of directors of the Starlight-Starbright Mid-Atlantic Chapter in its early years and worked closely with the foundation’s staff to develop a range of programs from hospital events for sick children, to profitable events such as wine auctions and balls that gen-

erated significant revenue used to help the foundation carry out its mission. She served as board president for two years until she moved to New Jersey.

Since moving to New Jersey, while remaining on the Starlight Board, Walker continues to focus on the arts and historic preservation. In addition to the Friends of Florham board, she is co-chairing the Arts Council of the Morris Area April Arts event and helping the Marionette Players raise funds for the Morris Museum.

Holly, her husband, Reid Walker and their two daughters live in an historic 1860s Queen Anne Victorian home in New Vernon, N.J. As Walker is fond of saying, a house isn’t a home until it is over a hundred years old, so she is certainly at home working on projects for the Twombly mansion at Florham.



## *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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