



Florham

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Reflections on Florham: Past, Present and Future

by Arthur T. Vanderbilt, II

The Friends sat down to lunch with Arthur T. Vanderbilt, II, at Hennessy Hall recently, and after tempting him with some wonderful and authentic chicken à la king, a Twombly family favorite, we “persuaded” him to write an article for the newsletter. We had many questions for Arthur, an author



From left, Carol Bere, Friends of Florham board member; Arthur Vanderbilt, II, author, lawyer and resident of Summit, N.J.; and Emma Joy Dana, Friends of Florham president, discussed Florham.

of several books, a practicing lawyer and resident of Summit. We asked him about the impetus for writing his book on the Vanderbilts, his research and what he would still like to know about the family and about Florham itself. We wanted to hear his thoughts on the restoration of the mansion and grounds, and his recommendations for some immediate activities that the Friends might consider. And, finally, we asked Arthur to dream, to suggest further restoration projects that could be set in motion in an ideal world — one in which the University’s need for space was not a preeminent concern. Enjoy!

Many readers of my book *Fortune’s Children: The Fall of the House of Vanderbilt* (1989) assumed I wrote it as a family history. This was not the case. By chance, I was in Newport for
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New Front Doors for the Mansion

With spring now upon us, the Friends of Florham are continuing their tradition of restoration work. Our latest project is the replacement of the front doors of Hennessy Hall. This is a long-awaited restoration goal, and we are excited for the work to begin.

Nick Bensley, a well-known Morristown architect, is coordinating the fabrication and installation of the new doors. Bensley met with several Friends of Florham board members last spring to look at the present main front door.



Nick Bensley, right, Morristown architect, met with Friends of Florham board member Elaine Earlywine, left, and Michael Holland, center, FDU assistant vice president for facilities, to discuss the new front doors.

While looking at the front of the mansion, it became apparent that the two other front entrances — the entrance to the President’s Office and the other entrance closest to Lenfell Hall — should also be consistent with the original architectural concepts.

The original main front door was a very large solid wood door similar to the interior doors in the Great Hall. It was replaced by the current institutional-style door many years ago and “stored.” The Friends
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President's Letter

Once again, I greet you in the spring as we look forward to the warm weather when our campus becomes even more beautiful. It's so exciting to observe the lawns and gardens and spring flowers, especially in the Italian Gardens. I am also looking forward to the spectacular Florham Lilies in the courtyard in front of Hennessy Hall.

In my last newsletter, I mentioned that we were hoping to replace the front door of the mansion, and we are thrilled because that will soon become a reality. The work is planned for this summer. As a matter of fact, we are not only replacing the main door with one more in keeping with the beautiful Stanford White architecture, but at the suggestion of our excellent architect, Nick Bensley, we will also replace the other two doors in the front of the building to be more consistent with the main door.

Our "Fall Event" on October 26 will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the College at Florham campus of Fairleigh Dickinson. We will feature the wonderful and popular musical group, "The Ten," who have sung at our Galas several times. This time we'll have an afternoon program with "The Ten" performing, among other selections, songs from the '50s and thereabout.

To end on a very unhappy note, we are so saddened by the death of our honorary board member, Shannie Doremus, who was with us since the beginning of Friends of Florham. Shannie was a most generous and valuable member of our group, and we will miss her tremendously.

I want to thank everyone who contributed so generously to our membership drive and invite you to drive through the campus to see the restored lanterns and our other completed projects. Your support enables us to continue our projects and we are so grateful.



— Emma Joy Dana

Sharon M. Doremus: In Memoriam



Sharon M. Doremus

The story of "Florham" begins over 100 years ago. These are some of the opening words of the elegant and informative brochure that Sharon "Shannie" M. Doremus wrote for distribution by the Friends of Florham several years ago. Well-researched and artfully produced, "Florham: The Country Estate of Florence Vanderbilt and Hamilton Twombly (1895–1955)" will be a lasting reminder of the late Shannie M. Doremus' dedication to the presentation of important historic material, historic preservation and of her long-time efforts to promote the restoration work of the Friends.

Shannie was a member of the Friends' board from the beginning of the group's work, and within the last few years, shifted to honorary board member status. Her involvement with FDU, however, predates her board membership. Shannie and her husband, Richard, were members of the Provost's Committee, an important and supportive campus entity. Significant family involvement also established a precedent for

Shannie's work with the Friends. Shannie's mother, the late Josephine M. Margetts, a Republican assemblywoman in New Jersey (1967–1973), was a trustee of FDU in the 1980s and an important benefactor of the University. This tradition was reinforced recently when the Margetts Foundation, headed by Shannie's brother, W. Thomas Margetts III, gave the initial contribution in Shannie's honor to the Friends' most recent project, the restoration of the 16 original lanterns in the courtyard of Hennessy Hall in 2007.

The restoration projects of the Friends were a natural extension of Shannie's 30-year dedication to historic preservation. She was also a member of Friends of the Frelinghuysen Arboretum and Historic Speedwell and was chairwoman of the Morris County Heritage Commission for 12 years. And Shannie's long-term interests in local history translated impressively into her published books: *Shorebirds and Sea Grapes*, a centennial history of the Island Inn, 1895–1995, Sanibel Island, Fla., and *The Country Club of Harrisburg*, 1896–1996.

The Friends appreciate Shannie's long-term work as a board member, and extend their condolences to her husband, Richard, and her family.

Reflections (continued from page 1)

the day in the summer of 1985 and had time to tour The Breakers and Marble House. These mansions spoke to me. A lot of visitors on the guided tours can be heard saying things like “Man, this is so over the top” or “How could anyone really live here? This is bizarre!” I probably shouldn’t admit this, but my thoughts were: “How great would it be to live here!”

As an author, I wanted to find out the human stories behind the mansions and began doing a little research. Early on I discovered Consuelo Vanderbilt’s memoirs. Her passage about being — at age six — almost scared to death to climb at night the limestone staircase of her family’s New York City mansion to her bedroom struck home with me. Here was a real person, here was a real story, and so I began researching the four-generation saga of the rise and fall of this family dynasty.

The early stages of my research focused on the dramatic parts of the story — the Cornelius and William Vanderbilt branches of the family and their Fifth Avenue palaces and Newport “cottages.” It wasn’t until later in my work that I focused on nearby Florham.

I’ll never forget the tour Campus Provost James Griffo gave me. It was a Saturday morning in the spring of 1987. I met him at the Gatehouse and it seemed we were the only two on the campus. Decades rolled away as he led me on an enthusiastic tour of every room in the mansion, through the Carriage House, the Playhouse and the Orangerie. Through his eyes, through his descriptions, the life of Florence and Ruth Twombly, this slice of the Gilded Age that, amazingly, had remained intact well into the 20th century, right in the midst of suburbia, came alive. I saw immediately that their story was an integral part of, and the perfect coda for, my book.

Since then, whenever I’m in the area, I find myself driving in past the Gatehouse and wandering around the grounds. Whatever the season, whatever the weather, I wander in awe, drinking in the beauty of the campus with a historian’s eyes; it always seems that Mrs. Twombly is there, too, enjoying this magical, serene oasis. And in such reveries, thoughts and ideas begin to percolate.

Invitation to the Hunt

It’s been 53 years since the gates were opened for that famous Parke Bernet auction of the contents of Florham. Anyone doing any serious buying at that auction probably was at least 35 years old, more likely at least 40, which would make them today in their late 80s or 90s. No doubt they have downsized; perhaps their children and grandchildren have no interest in what they bought at the

auction. Many valuable pieces, including three signature chandeliers, were purchased for Macculloch Hall Historical Museum by W. Parsons Todd, founder of the museum and former mayor of Morristown. But there were many other significant objects included in the auction. Perhaps some of these pieces could be located and donated to the University or acquired by the Friends of Florham. A notice of the University’s interest in such pieces could be advertised to the trade in such likely publications as *The Magazine Antiques*. A feature article in *The Star-Ledger*, the *Daily Record* and *New Jersey Monthly* may help spread the word. Most of the contents of the auction probably ended up within a 25-mile radius of Florham. Perhaps an industrious FDU student interested in the University’s heritage could be recruited to see what can be traced and tracked down through the Internet.

A recognized authority in tapestries no doubt knows exactly where the great Barberini tapestries that graced the Great Hall and Drawing Room of Florham now hang; it may not be possible to have any return home, but perhaps color photographs of each of these magnificent tapestries could be added to the University’s collection.

The Parke Bernet catalogues of the 1955 sales featured just a tiny percentage of the contents of the mansion. Members of the family took what they wanted before the auctions; there was an informal sale of pieces of lesser value, and loyal staff members were given keepsakes. But still — over a half century of living in a home — bits and pieces of the Twomblys’ life must still wait to be found. The recent discovery of an early 19th-century diary of one of Florence Vanderbilt Twombly’s relatives in the recesses of a closet on the third floor, now part of the English, communication and philosophy department, proves the point. How wonderful to find an old croquet set, a piece of silverware that had fallen behind a radiator, a cache of old letters, a leather bridle, a secret hiding place. In those days, for a house in the wilderness, there had to be hiding places to secrete valuables. After being injured in a car accident in Newport in 1947, Florence Twombly never returned to Florham. She died in 1952 at the age of 97. Her daughter, Ruth, died unexpectedly in 1954. I often wonder what secrets of Florham died with them?

How great would it be to organize a thorough search of the mansion, from attic to basement
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Hennessy Hall at the College at Florham.

to subbasements, of the Carriage House, the Orangerie, the tunnel between the mansion and Orangerie, the grounds, to catalogue just what remains and to see what can be discovered? Were we starting today with developing a university on the grounds, such an inventory no doubt would be a mandatory requirement. Perhaps there is a member of the faculty and a group of students who would be interested in undertaking the task as part of a course requirement. History, archaeology and a good dose of detective work is a combination that certainly would have caught my interest as an undergraduate.

Some Thoughts on the Friends

At the conclusion of my chapter on Florham, written in 1988, I noted how the mansion was showing its age — the paint in the Great Hall peeling, some of the glass panes of the massive outdoor light fixtures broken, the Olmsted gardens overgrown. And then, *mirabile dictu*, appeared the Friends of Florham. And under the inspired, enthusiastic, energetic leadership of Emma Joy Dana, step by step, project by project, the impossible started happening, and the glory of the estate began to shine once again.

If ever there was a win-win situation, it is the partnership between the University and the Friends of Florham: a one-of-a-kind historic site, truly a national treasure, is being preserved, and, the University's buildings and grounds, its stature, are being enhanced by a dedicated group of volunteers.

May I step boldly and innocently where perhaps angels fear to tread and give some thoughts on how this partnership may move forward? If Florence and Ruth had died today, it's likely that historic preservationists would have moved in to prevent any use of the estate other than as a historic site, a site which well preserved what is now recognized as a unique slice of American history. In England, a country estate like this would be a major tourist attraction. Certainly today, Florham Farms never would have been demolished as it was when Esso took over that back portion of the estate in 1957; certainly Monsieur Donon's kitchen in the basement of Florham never would have been dismantled and surely the bulk of the thousand acres never would have become an office park as was the fate of the fabled Dodge estate across the street. Florham was blessed when FDU took it over. Perhaps by intent, more likely at the time by chance, the hundred acres of

grounds around the mansion still retain their feel as the day Frederick Law Olmsted laid them out, and the mansion and main buildings of the estate remain intact. I would submit today that this core area of Florham is an integral part of the University, a core part of the uniqueness of FDU, for which students, their parents, alumni, faculty and administration feel a justifiable pride.

The Ultimate Restoration Vision

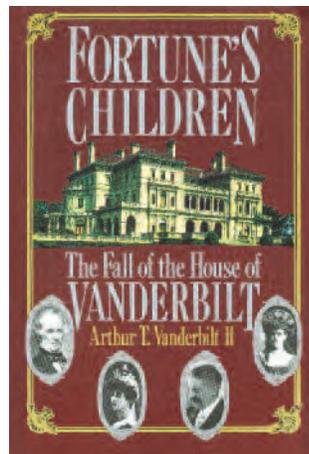
Now blissfully stepping in with some thoughts for the future: wouldn't it enhance this treasure of the University to restore a little more of the mansion to the way it was? To restore Mrs. Twombly's bedroom and bath at the back of the mansion, or Ruth's at the front, to the way they were, with the original furnishings and décor? To have one of the servants' rooms returned to the way it was? OK, ready? To restore the dining room with the original Twombly furnishings to be used as a dining room for special University formal dinners? The University deserves this; it needs this. The dining room is there; all of the irreplaceable architectural details remain in these main rooms. What a great opportunity to return the Library or Salon to the way they were when Mrs. Twombly received guests there. In sum, my proposal is, I think, a modest one, but one that would continue on with the great work already done by the University and the Friends: work to carve out just a comparatively small amount of the interior of the mansion to return to its Florham look, both for use by the University for special functions and for visitors eager for a glimpse into the Gilded Age.

One more thought: great things have already been done by the Friends with the grounds. As more information comes to light about the original gardens, it would be a fairly simple matter to replicate that look. A squad of students and Friends volunteers, with proper guidance, could probably in a few hours accomplish miracles in restoring a garden bed, digging in azaleas and perennials, pruning and planting to recreate just what Florence and Ruth saw from their windows and what dazzled their weekend guests as they were

driven past the Gatehouse and along the winding drive to the lion-guarded front door of gleaming mahogany.

May it be so.

Fortune's Children: The Fall of the House of Vanderbilt by Arthur T. Vanderbilt, II, was a Selection of the Book of the Month Club, the Reader's Digest Series, Easton Press Series, One Hundred Best Books of American History; published in foreign editions, and currently under option for a television series.



Friedlander Photo Exhibit

One of the current New York Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibitions, running from January 22 to May 11, has a special appeal to Florham's friends. Presenting about 40 black-and-white photos by Lee Friedlander, one of America's outstanding photographers, is an exhibit titled "A Ramble in Olmsted Parks." As the title indicates, Friedlander's "ramble" is through some of the memorable landscape creations of this country's preeminent landscape designer, Frederick Law Olmsted, whose magically informed vision created the sculptured contours of the Twombly-Vanderbilt estate that is now the College at Florham.

Although none of the photos on view at the Met's readily accessible Internet site (http://www.metmuseum.org/special/lee_friedlander/olmsted_images.asp) is of "Florham," two of them, in particular — of Prospect Park and Central Park — seem instantly familiar to anyone who walks down the campus's Gatehouse Road.

The exhibit commemorates the 150th anniversary of Central Park, designed by Olmsted and Calvert Vaux in 1857 and opened a year later in its earliest version, a creation later considerably enlarged. It also, inevitably, represents one more homage to the memory of Olmsted, whose landscaping achievements remain truly staggering in the vastness and beauty of their number.

Astonishing as Central Park is, so is his completion of parks in other cities throughout the country, including incomparable Prospect Park in New York City, the "Emerald Necklace" in Boston and the World's Columbian Exposition of 1903 in Chicago. Among Olmsted's largest undertakings for private clients like the Twomblys was his design of Biltmore's grounds for Florence Vanderbilt Twombly's brother, George Washington Vanderbilt.

We are all amazed that he was able to complete a continent-wide canvas of earth-art, found a magazine like *The Nation*, serve as leader of what was later to become the Red Cross (the Sanitation Commission during the Civil War), and, as a journalist, write forcefully and influentially against the evils of slavery. It seems almost as hard to believe as the magnificence of his landscaping which still inspires wonder in all who view "Florham" more than a century after he oversaw the planning of its grounds.

— Walter T. Savage



The Frederick Law Olmsted Cutleaf Maple Garden, located on Dreyfuss Road, next to the Rutherford Hall parking lot.



The Italian Gardens located to the right of Hennessy Hall.

Spring Gala

The Friends of Florham's 11th annual Spring Gala on Saturday, May 17, will honor Emma Joy Dana, founder and president of the Friends of Florham. Under Emma Joy's capable leadership, the Friends have completed a myriad of projects around the former Twombly Estate. The Friends are delighted and honored to publicly acknowledge her many achievements.

A large dinner committee is working to ensure that this year's event will be even more successful than previous years. The committee co-chairs are Dawn Dupak, Linda Meister and Suzy Moran, and committee members include Susan Adams, Kathy Atencio, Carol Bere, Natalie Best, Mary Clowney, Phyllis Conway, Doris Dinsmore, Elaine Earlywine, Nancy Johnston, Carol Knauff, Carole Kurtz, Kay Lyall, Caron Menger, Audrey Parker and Ann Singleton. Once again, Ed and Ruth Hennessy have graciously agreed to serve as honorary co-chairs. The Friends are grateful to the co-chairs and committee members for their continued dedication and service. Working

together, over the years, dedicated volunteers have raised nearly \$300,000 toward the restoration of Hennessy Hall, its furnishings and the gardens and grounds.

The Spring Gala is a fun evening in a beautiful environment, drawing guests back year after year. The terrace and gardens are always spectacular for the seven o'clock cocktail hour. The dinner that follows features a menu in the Twombly manner, and John Saleeby and his orchestra provide music that inspires couples to dance the night away! Please come and join us, we promise you a great time.

Tickets for the Gala were still available when the newsletter went to press; please call 201-692-7008 to inquire. The cost for a Patron is \$250 per person, and the Donor ticket is \$175 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.



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New Doors, continued from page 1

of Florham searched for the old door but it wasn't found. The other two entrance doors were originally French doors.

Working from an original photo of the front of the mansion with a very good view of all three original doors, Bensley drew up plans to create the new doors. He was also aided by original architectural drawings of the mansion, which were discovered at the New York Historical Society by Michael Holland, FDU's assistant vice president for facilities.

The design for the three new doors will be as close to the originals as possible, allowing for current fire codes and safety regulations. Certain modifications for hardware, heavy usage and the large size of the doors were taken into consideration. However, the plans reflect great attention to the style and detail of the period when Florham was the spring and fall residence of the Twomblys.

As the campus celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, it will be wonderful to see the front of Hennessey Hall regain more of its original elegance with the addition of the new doors.

— Elaine Earlywine

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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