

Florham

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New French-style Doors for Hennessy Hall

In an amazing display of historical synchronicity, 40 years — almost to the day — after Fairleigh Dickinson alumnus James L. Shannon’s article about the replacement of the historical doors of the mansion, the Friends’ project to replace them with more architecturally appropriate doors was finally happening. In his letters, the now Rev. Canon James described the replacement doors as “a new modern glass and aluminum product,” which he believed downgraded the mansion into the appearance of a “supermarket administration building.” As we mentioned in the last newsletter, the Friends of Florham had this on their long-term project list for several years and began actively pursuing it months ago when the board initially met with historical architect Nick Bensley. The process of replacement was complex, given the context of construction and fire codes, the period of the mansion, the size of the doors and the constant use of Hennessy Hall.

The actual installation of the two side doors in the front of the mansion started during Fairleigh Dickinson University’s spring break, and we hope it will be completed in time for the Gala on May 16. We are waiting for the arrival of additional customized hardware for the main door. The new French-style doors, as shown in early photographs and drawings, look wonderful. We are so excited by the incredible improvement even the side doors make, we wanted to share that immediately.

We were well aware that the earlier replacement of the doors in 1969 evoked more than just cosmetic issues. As Rev. Canon James and his Committee to Replace the Ugly Doors (C.R.U.D.) pointed out, the replacement was also driven by fire codes, local ordinances and economic issues, with no regard for the maintenance of a quality of life that the students wanted and passionately believed in. We are thrilled because the present improvement is indicative of the Friends of Florham’s goal of restoring the tradition of quality to the mansion and its grounds in partnership with the University.

There are several people to thank for seeing this project through to this point, especially board member Elaine Earlywine, who has met and stayed in contact with Nick Bensley, our architect, and coordinated efforts with the College at Florham Provost’s Office and Mike Holland in the facilities oversight area of the University.

Elaine is doing a great job and is learning more about hinges, openers, lintels and other door-hardware issues than she ever wanted to know. The Friends are grateful for her skills and tenacity. This project was more complicated than anticipated, but it is one of our most amazing and transformative restorations.

In addition, the Friends sincerely thank everyone who helped make it possible including those who attend our Gala and who make donations to the Friends of Florham.



New side door in front of the mansion.



President's Letter

As this newsletter goes to press, our board can look back over the past months with satisfaction. The board of Friends of Florham is composed of people who take their mission seriously. Each member brings with them a particular expertise that helps us complete each project.

Our latest renovation project, the replacement of three façade doors installed in the late '50s when the mansion, now Hennessy Hall, was turned into an academic building, was begun during spring break. This project addresses both structural wear and tear and aesthetic issues. Board member Elaine Earlywine, an FDU alumna, is supervising the architectural work and the installation.

The board has been very active in planning the March 29 lecture, "The Twomblys of Florham: The Beginning and End of an Era," the second in a series celebrating the University's 50th anniversary. Walter Savage and Arthur Vanderbilt II discussed the rise and fall of the family's fortune. Continuing with the theme of the Gild-

ed Age, its excesses and demise, the Board is also planning a similar lecture in October.

We look forward to the Annual Spring Gala on May 16. I'm especially excited to tell you that this year we are honoring an amazing and accomplished board member Audrey Parker. Audrey's generosity and enthusiastic support make our projects and activities more productive and enjoyable. We hope you will join us for a wonderful evening and take advantage of the opportunity to see our elegant Lenfell Hall and its adjacent Italian Gardens at its finest.

Following up on my June letter, I can report that we are moving ahead on the project of digitizing the Burden bequest. A request for proposal has been prepared, and we will soon be getting estimates, prior to seeking grant funding in the fall.

In closing, let me thank all who have contributed so generously by renewing their membership in Friends of Florham. Your donations go directly to the fulfillment of our mission, and we all appreciate your support.

Annual Spring Gala Scheduled for May 16

The Friends of Florham's 11th Annual Spring Gala on Saturday, May 16, will honor Audrey Parker, long-time benefactor and member of the board of the Friends of Florham. Audrey's dedicated service, boundless enthusiasm and outstanding generosity consistently assist the Friends with their various projects and activities. We are looking forward to celebrating her contributions to our achievements.

The committee co-chairs are Kathy Atencio, Dawn Dupak and Suzy Moran, and committee members include Susan Adams, Carol Bere, Natalie Best, Mary Clowney, Phyllis Conway, Emma Joy Dana, Doris Dinsmore, Elaine Early-

wine, Carol Knauff, Carole Kurtz, Caron Menger and Audrey Parker. 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 more than \$300,000 toward the restoration of Hennessy Hall, its furnishings and the gardens and grounds.

The Spring Gala is a fun evening in spectacular surroundings, attracting guests back year after year. The gardens are in full bloom, and the terrace provides the perfect venue for the seven o'clock cocktail hour, the dinner that follows always 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 will not be disappointed.

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 \$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.



Stanford White, Architect

by Samuel G. White and Elizabeth White, Rizzoli, New York, 2008; Photographs by Jonathan Wallen

“He was a personality of enormous power, a man of phenomenal force. He affected every one he met ... I always think of him as the embodiment of a particular period in New York — perhaps in American life...” This tribute to Stanford White from John Jay Chapman, a well-known writer and contemporary of the architect, heads the prologue of this elegant study, *Stanford White, Architect*, by Samuel G. White and Elizabeth White. This book is also a significant complement to earlier works by Samuel White, an architect and great-grandson of Stanford White: *The Houses of McKim, Mead & White* (1998) and *McKim, Mead & White: The Masterworks* (2003) with Elizabeth White, an editor and writer. In the earlier books, the Whites spoke of the substantial influence of the architectural partnership during the years between 1879–1912, with more than 1,000 commissions for public and private buildings — Harvard and Columbia Universities, well-known buildings such as the Boston Public Library, the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, private clubs, the Washington Arch in Greenwich Village, memorable “cottages” and stately mansions such as “Rosecliff” in Newport and “Florham,” the Hamilton Twombly estate, now the site of Fairleigh Dickinson University’s College at Florham.

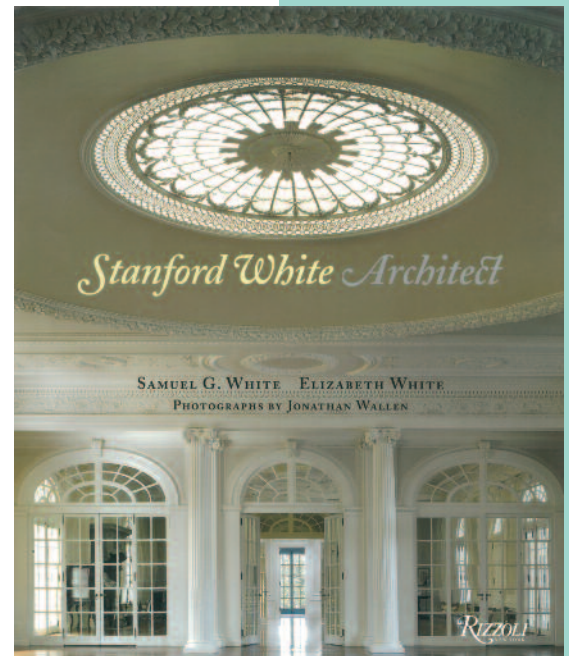
The Whites have shifted focus in this study, moving Stanford White center stage, discussing in detail his particular “genius,” while avoiding the notoriety of his later personal life. In many ways, McKim, Mead & White — and White himself — capitalized on the *zeitgeist*, a period in the U.S. economy of industrial and financial growth, when the accumulation of personal fortunes, accompanying social ambitions and the development of serious philanthropy were reported on regularly.

If I read the Whites correctly, Stanford White was not only of this time, but the perfect translator of the dreams, aspirations of the newly rich, and also of the necessary claims of universities, museums and stewards of public buildings. White was definitely an individualist. He had a large personality, enormous energy, definite views, traveled easily among the wealthy and had entrance into the “right” clubs.

There was also a certain veneration of all things European during this period of splashy growth, and here Stanford White was in his element. He had apprenticed to the well-known architect H.H. Richardson who had trained at the *École des Beaux-Arts*. He then lived in Europe well over a

year, sketching and absorbing firsthand the art and architecture and the European culture in general which he had come to respect. The Whites describe the architect as a “visionary” decorator, a rather ingenious dealer in antiquities and, among other talents, a designer of jewelry. White had initially planned to be an artist, and visual effects, the use of color and innovative use of materials, characterized his work. White’s varied use of materials and original decorative strategies — pebbles filled with glass, the mirrored Venetian room in the Payne Whitney House with woven porcelain flowers, a cornice with a frieze of scallop shells surrounding the hall of the Newport Casino Theatre or the terra cotta decoration and iron grilles at the Century Association, to name just a few — are captured in the beautifully detailed photographs by Jonathan Wallen, which accompany the text.

The book is divided into five parts — The Architect as Client, Collaboration, Houses, Architecture of Assembly and Public Buildings — and highlights White’s involvement at various stages of his career in the broad spectrum of commissions undertaken by the firm. A number of the homes and buildings have been mentioned in the previous books, but the Whites take a fresh look here and elaborate more fully on White’s specific participation in these various projects. White’s family home, Box Hill, which seemed to be a steady renovation and expansion project for the architect, is described in lengthy detail here for the first time. White’s collaborations are also discussed more fully including his work with designer and painter, John La Farge, or with the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens with whom he produced the well-known figure of Diana for the tower of Madison Square Garden. The Whites are particularly interesting on McKim, Mead & White’s signature collaboration — their work on the Villard House Complex on Madison Avenue between 49th and 50th Street in 1882 (now a part of the Palace Hotel) — which established the firm’s reputation in New York. The architecture of the building was influenced by the Italian



(continued on page 5)

A Mystery at Florham—Part 2



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A Brief Recap: Readers of our article in the fall 2008 issue of the newsletter were no doubt left, as were we, with many unanswered questions about the important discovery of the journal found on a shelf of a closet of the literature, language, writing and philosophy department offices on the third floor of Hennessy Hall. As we noted, the handwritten cover page of the journal states, “Diary European Trip — June 1843–December 1843, E.A. Thorn,” and through the detective work of Mike Holland, assistant vice president for facilities at FDU, and Karen Yates, special assistant to the College at Florham provost, E.A. Thorn was identified as Emily Almira Vanderbilt Thorn, one of the eight daughters of Cornelius “Commodore” Vanderbilt and aunt of Florence Vanderbilt Twombly of Florham. Briefly, Emily was born in 1823, married William K. Thorn (1807–1887) in 1839, had three children — Emma, William K. Jr., and Caroline — and died in 1896. Emily’s journal is essentially an account of the seven-month Grand Tour of Europe taken with her husband and others in 1843.

We raised many questions about how the journal got to Florham originally, speculated about the typing (which was certainly done long after the European trip), questioned the quixotic pagination of the journal and wondered whether the Thorns actually took two trips to Europe. And, we asked for assistance in solving the puzzles raised by the journal.

Rest assured, dear readers, we don’t have answers to all of these questions, but we have made progress, and our speculations are far more interesting. Friends board member Linda Carrington and Roz Fischell, a friend of the Friends, have become sleuths *extraordinaire* and turned up some interesting facts, and more important, connections of the Twomblys to the family of Emily A. Thorn and to the Morris County area.

The Journal Revisited

First, a second look at the journal itself for more insight into Emily Thorn and her world, and, perhaps, some answers to our questions. It’s wise to remember that Emily was only 20 at the time of the trip, but her responses often seem measured or flat — although she’s not above making brief disparaging comments about the behavior or appearance of some people and occasionally the “lower classes.” But these incidents are minor. We don’t have any sense of Emily’s husband, other than that he (or they) visited specific places, or of any of the other people on the trip. She mentions getting letters from home, but there’s no sense that she misses people or events.

Emily is clearly taken by some of the places visited and talks of the beauty of Scotland, the views of Naples, the beauty of “the gondola as it skims through the water” in Venice and the “splendid streets” of Paris, where “all is life, gaiety and bustle.” It’s amazing that for all the time that Emily spent in Paris and Italy, however, she never mentions the food, other than to say that she had a good meal.

But Emily is definitely in awe of the Emperor’s Carriage House outside Vienna; the “three brazen doors” of the Battisterio de San Giovanni in Florence, which Michelangelo reportedly claimed “were worthy to be the gates of paradise”; St. Peter’s [Basilica] in Rome; and the Coliseum, all of which are described in minute detail. The descriptions of St. Peter’s run almost four pages with vivid descriptions of statues, the doors and measurements of various parts of the church. The same treatment — minute specificity of size, shape and reported numbers of spectators — are given for the Coliseum. The puzzling question here and elsewhere in the journal is just when all of the minutiae were inserted into the journal, which frequently reads like a *Fodor’s Guide*. Were these facts gleaned from a guide, travel books or brochures, dictated by others or was Emily simply an autodidact? We just don’t know.

A Partial Solution

What we do know now is that the Thorns took a second trip abroad in 1853. We reported in the previous article that the last two pages of the journal referred to a visit to Malta and Constantinople purportedly in August 1855. Not only was the year a mystery, but in the original journal, the group would have been in Austria on the date that travel to Turkey was mentioned in the end papers. Linda Carrington discovered a history by Reverend John O. Choules, a passenger on a trip of the Commodore and many Vanderbilt family members, including Emily and William K. Thorn, and Mr. and Mrs. William H. Vanderbilt, parents of Florence Vanderbilt Twombly aboard the steam yacht, North Star, in 1853. The group traveled to several countries including England, France, Russia, Spain, Italy, Malta and to the city of Constantinople. A comment from Emily’s journal seals the deal: “We had a delightful visit in Malta but [this] does not compensate for not going into Naples and Rome, which we lost by the obstinacy of Torrence [sic] and Clark.” The passenger list for the 1853 trip indicates that the Torrances and Clarks were passengers on the yacht, and that they viewed Naples only from the ship. The Thorns did visit

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Naples on their trip in 1843. So, we're left with a major unanswered question: what happened to the rest of the journal of the 1853 trip?

Family Connections

Our research suggests that the most obvious family ties in the area — and possibly to the sources of the journal — were between Florence Vanderbilt Twombly and her cousin, Caroline Thorn Kissel, one of the three children of Emily Almira Vanderbilt Thorn, the journal writer. The women were close in age — Florence was born in 1854 and Caroline in 1858, married in 1877 and 1881, respectively, were widowed in 1910 and 1911 and died at advanced ages, Florence in 1952 and Caroline in 1949. Of particular interest, both of their parents traveled on the 1853 trip with the Commodore aboard the North Star. In our previous report, we conjectured that the journal might have been typed by a former employee of the Thorns who later worked for the Twomblys after Emily Thorn died in 1896. Another theory is that Caroline found her mother's journal — which may or may not have been typed at the time — and brought it to her cousin, Florence.

Remember, that Florence and Caroline, who was married to Gustav E. Kissel of the banking family, both had homes in New York and in the Morristown area and traveled in the same social circles. Florham was built in 1894–97, while the Kissels built Wheatsheaf Manor on Kahdena Road in 1904 (see photograph). As an aside, Caroline's brother-in-law, Rudolph Kissel, had a home, Inamere Farm, nearby on Lake Road, and Roz Fischell has a cache of letters that were among others scattered on the floor of a large barn adjacent to the Kissel house. Some of these letters were handwritten, and some were typed, which leads to another theory: could the typewriter used for some of these "found" letters be the same typewriter that was used for Emily's journal? Again, we don't know.

What is clear is that these letters and the journal offer an important glimpse of a way of life that has passed and will probably never be replicated.

FDU and the Friends

While the lives of Florence Twombly and Caroline Kissel seemed to run along relatively parallel tracks in the broadest sense — and the journal could have provided one of the connective tissues — the ultimate fate of their homes in the area differed considerably. Both estates were purchased by educational institutions: Florham by Fairleigh Dickinson University in 1958, and Wheatsheaf Manor in 1951 by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, who operated a girls' school nearby and used the building as a retreat and counseling center. Wheatsheaf was sold in the mid-1990s, even-



tually demolished, and is currently being replaced by high-end condominiums. Florence's mansion at Florham, conversely, has been preserved by the University — which understands the value of historic preservation — with assistance from the Friends of Florham, who have worked to restore areas of Hennessy Hall and the surrounding landscape and gardens.

— Carol Bere

Photograph of Wheatsheaf Manor courtesy of The Morristown & Morris Township Library.

Stanford White, Architect, continued from page 3

Renaissance, and White was at his best on this project, organizing interior design, commissioning sculpture from Augustus and Louis Saint-Gaudens and stained glass from Tiffany and La Farge and overseeing the installation of marble and other materials to complete this magnificent building.

Many of the churches, public buildings and private homes mentioned in the book are still standing, but others have been demolished, or in some cases, to use a trendy term, "repurposed." Stan-

ford White's lovely townhouse on Gramercy Park North, for example, was demolished in the 1920s, and today the rather soulless Gramercy Park Hotel occupies the site. And I'm struck every time I see the 1895 painting by W. Louis Sontag, Jr., of the original Madison Square Garden, with its 300-foot tower and the pale cream colors of the block-long building, which as the Whites remark, "revolutionized the palette of the city." There is a little question that the Whites' essential study also offers a persuasive argument for historic preservation.

— Carol Bere



The Library
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Vanderbilt-Twombly Families Topic of Savage Lecture

Friends of Florham board member and Fairleigh Dickinson University Emeritus Professor of English Walter Savage spoke on the life of the Vanderbilt-Twombly families at the College at Florham Library on the evening of October 22. Savage's lecture, which was part of the campus's 50th anniversary celebration, also highlighted the history of the campus and its heritage.

The presentation took place in the Orang erie of the library and drew a lively crowd of board members, University professors and students. Savage spoke about the history of the Vanderbilt family, life in the Gilded Age in America and Europe and the drive of various Vanderbilt family members to climb the social ladder, building larger, more impressive mansions and estates than their perceived competition for social prominence, or what Savage has referred to as their "edifice contest." And, overall, he entertained the audience with the range of his knowledge of the lifestyles of the rich and famous Gilded Age style.

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