

# FRIENDS OF *Florham*



## Homecoming

### *Twombly Chairs Donated to Friends of Florham*

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Fifty-five years ago, on June 15 and 16, 1955, the Parke-Bernet Galleries conducted on the premises

a two-day auction of the contents of Florham. Brendan Gill, *The New Yorker's* famed writer, was there and captured what the 13,000 visitors saw: "Florham," he wrote, "is everything one thinks an English country seat should be, with the greenest of green lawns running on into groves of oak and beech, and, rising against the sky at the end of a long graveled drive, a hundred-room house of rosy brick, its roof bristling with chimneys, its many doors open to the summer air."

The auction was held on the piazza outside the Drawing Room, with 599 lots brought to the auctioneer one by one, from the famous Barberini tapestries that had graced the Great Hall to draperies to a wicker terrace table. Members of the Friends of Florham have often speculated about what happened to the contents of Florham, where pieces now are located, and whether any would someday return home.

Early in August, Friends Trustee Linda Carrington, who oversees the Friends of Florham website, found an e-mail from Mr. and Mrs. R. Layne Weggeland of Summit, N.J., expressing their interest in donating to the Friends two chairs Mr. Weggeland's parents purchased at the Florham auction. The chairs were from the Great Hall.

The next day Friends President Linda Meister went to meet Sally and Layne Weggeland to accept this wonderful gift on behalf of the Friends. Then the detective work began, examining with magnifying glass every vintage photograph of the Great Hall and every lot from the Great Hall listed in the 1955 Parke-Bernet Galleries auction. A process of elimination led to lot 575, described in the catalog as follows:

"Two carved Walnut and Oak Side Chairs: English XVII Century; Carolean carved walnut tall back side chair, carved with foliated ornament; and a Derbyshire side chair having a scrolled back carved with stylized leaf ornament."

This lot was sold near the end of the second day of the auction for \$80, which was typical for what pairs of chairs from the Great Hall were bringing that day.



*Layne and Sally Weggeland with the donated chairs.*



*The chairs restored.*

Linda Meister proceeded to have the chairs appraised, then brought the Carolean chair to an expert restorer for repair of a missing stretcher, and carefully peeled back fabric on this chair to reveal underneath the faded and fragile red silk damask that covered all the chairs in Florham's Great Hall. These chairs

were restored as a project funded by the Friends of Florham, and used in the small office we are dedicating to Walter Savage.

Sally and Layne Weggeland also donated two lovely large Chinese porcelain lamps with silk shades and a formal gold-framed portrait of Henry Ward Beecher, the prominent 19th-century Congregationalist clergyman, social reformer and abolitionist whose sister,

*(continued on page 2)*

# President's Letter

I find myself amazed at everything we have accomplished since my last letter. I am pleased to announce that the digitization of the Twombly household ledgers was completed under the direction of Brigid Burke, FDU's technical services and digital projects librarian, and board member Carol Knauff. Students as well as researchers can now access these valuable ledgers through our website. Both of these technical triumphs place Florham history in the mainstream of Gilded Age scholarship.

Speaking of scholarship, the Landscape Preservation Project undertaken in the spring by Ann Granbery, ALS, and her associate, FDU alumnus John Sulpy, met severe challenges. The purpose of the study

was to put to rest the many apocryphal versions of Florham's landscape history and to ascertain who really designed the acres surrounding the mansion. The project was to create design references for the University and for researchers. The Granbery-Sulpy team quickly compiled a list of excellent sources. Access proved another problem altogether. The Olmsted archives in Braintree, Mass., were under renovation, offering limited access to the collection. A gas leak closed the valuable Morristown Library archives. To top it off, the Library of Congress (LOC) appears to have misfiled every piece of correspondence referring to Florham. But the persistence of able FDU Research Librarian Eleanor Friedl finally paid off. At this writing, new LOC reels

have arrived, hopefully containing the much-needed information.

Our May Gala was easily the most beautiful ever. This event is certainly the most elegant fundraiser in the state of New Jersey, and the committee works hard to keep the price affordable. Thank you all for your support and attendance at our Gala. To offer a seasonal change, the Gala will next be held on October 15, 2011.

Continuing with our mission to educate our members and the community on historic preservation, Friends of Florham chose the topic of Hurstmont, one of Stanford White's masterpieces, now sadly on New Jersey Preservation's list of Endangered Historic Sites, for its fall lecture.

Finally, it is with great anticipation that the Friends of Florham looks forward to displaying donated furniture from the Weggeland family and from the estate of Walter Savage. Without the generosity of so many interested patrons, we could not continue our care for this splendid Gilded Age estate.

— Linda Meister

## Save the Date — Friends of Florham Spring Lecture

### “Art, Architecture, Scandal, and Class in America's Gilded Age”

Author and Speaker  
**Mosette Broderick**  
Sunday, March 6,  
2011, 3 p.m.

Hartman Lounge,  
Hennessy Hall, College at  
Florham, Fairleigh  
Dickinson University

\$15 at the Door, Reception Included

Copies of Broderick's  
*Triumvirate* will be  
available for purchase  
and signing by the author.

## A New Look

Welcome to our newly formatted newsletter, the result of a comment by one of our newer board members, Sam Convissor, who asked, “Why is there a lily on our masthead?” He then reminded us, “We are not a garden club.” Granted the Friends appreciate the gardens and grounds and especially identified with the Florham lily that was developed for Mrs. Twombly by her gardener, Arthur Herrington, in 1899; however, our mission includes preservation of the mansion and a celebration of its architectural heritage. And, after all these years, it is time for a new look.

The image we chose is the carving above the fireplace in the Great Hall featuring the goddess, Flora. One characteristic of McKim, Mead and White houses was that Stanford White personally commissioned for classical embellishments. The goddess Flora is the Roman goddess of flowering plants, especially fruit-bearing plants, so it seems appropriate to bring her image to the estate house of the Twombly farm.



We've used an image of a courtyard lantern as part of the return address. The restoration of the lanterns was our major project in 2007, and the Friends are particularly proud of the lanterns' visual impact and how they greatly enhance the exterior view of Florham at night.

## Twombly Chairs Donated, *continued from page 1*

Harriet Beecher Stowe, wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Those pieces were not part of the Twomblys' estate, but will make beautiful additions to the mansion.

The Weggelands' generous gift may well mark the start of other pieces from Florham being located and perhaps some returning home. Mr. Weggeland's father also purchased two Italian marriage chests which are very visible in all the vintage photographs of the Great Hall; members of his family in California and England now have these pieces. A photograph accompanying the recent *The New York Times* article featuring Wendy Burden's book *Dead End Gene Pool* showed the massive stone lions which once guarded Florham's front door now at her home in Portland, Ore.

That magnificent setting which Brendan Gill so well described in his essay on the auction remains today — the sweep of lawns, the perfect trees, the “dainty palace of an orangerie, all arched windows and glints of glass,” the “charming crisscross of gardens and paved walks, of pavilions, pergolas, urns on pedestals and grave Greek statues.” It is a hope and goal of the Friends of Florham that with the return of some more pieces auctioned at the 1955 Parke-Bernet sale, a feel for the interior of the Twomblys' home may soon be recreated.

It is likely that many of the lots sold at the auction on those beautiful June days in 1955 are within a 25-mile radius of Florham. If anyone has details on the location of any pieces from the estate, please share your information by e-mailing the website of the Friends at <http://fdu.edu/fof>.

— Arthur T. Vanderbilt, II



*The rear portico of Lenfell Hall, Hennessy Hall, elegantly draped and filled with guests.*



*Friends of Florham Board Members Emma Joy Dana, left, and Phyllis Conway, center, with guest Kay Lyall.*



*Christopher and Irene Sciales posed with "Mark 2" Jaguar.*



*Guests enjoyed refreshments in the "Great Hall."*



*Friends of Florham Board President Linda Meister addressed the audience.*



*From left, Joy and Kevin Cox enjoying the evening with Arne Kellstrom and Peter Dupak.*



*John Sulpy and Jean Barrett Connor smiling for the camera.*



*FDU President J. Michael Adams, second from left, listened as Honorary Trustee Ruth Hennessy, left, made an important point to John and Rosemary Howlett.*

# Music for Millionaires: The Residence Organ in the Gilded Age

On May 3, Friends of Florham welcomed Troy Simmons, architectural historian of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Newark, and an authority on sacred spaces in the northern New Jersey area. The title of Mr. Simmons's lecture was "Music for Millionaires: The Residence Organ in the Gilded Age."

Mr. Simmons emphasized that until the first decade of the 1900s the Gilded Age mansions had little in the way of home entertainment, as we know it today (television, movies, radio or electronic music delivery systems). Short of hiring a chamber music group or pianist, there was no way to entertain guests in these vast mansions until the Aeolian Pipe Organ Company, whose factory was situated in Garfield, N.J., started producing entire pipe organ systems, often built along with the house. The pipes stretched two or three stories high, and included echo chambers. Frank W. Woolworth had them built into his tall bedposts in his mansion in New York City so that he could enjoy music while lying in bed!

The owners themselves could play these organs or they could purchase Aeolian's self-playing cylinders, which offered popular songs or well-known orchestral pieces. But more often than not, they hired a popular "society" organist, such as the flamboyant Archer Gibson, to play for the evening. Mr. Simmons treated the lecture audience to early recordings of some of these organs. Included in Mr. Simmons' lecture were images of organ-equipped mansions such as those of Charles Schwab, Henry Frick and Frank Woolworth, the DuPont estate in Cuba, and of course, Florham, which was famous for its Aeolian Opus 1428.

At Florham, Mrs. Twombly was known for her musical evenings. She sat on a throne-like chair by the organ while Mr. Gibson played songs like "The Bells of St. Mary's" for her guests. Promptly at 11, Mr. Simmons said, Mrs. Twombly would fold her fan,

rise and ascend the grand staircase leading up from the Great Hall. The evening had ended. Mr. Gibson would exit by a "secret" door which led off the elegant "music room," now Lenfell Hall.

Mr. Simmons spoke about the dismantling of the Twombly organ. Present in the audience was Bruce Courter, owner of C&S Organ Maintenance Co. in Morristown, N.J. Mr. Courter had worked on the organ shortly after the University purchased the estate in 1958. In 1967, the Aeolian Opus 1428 was sold to Professor Fred Billmeyer of Rensselaer Polytechnic University in Troy, N.Y., and

sold again in 1984. Parts of the organ are still in existence at Boston University in the John R. Silber Symphonic Organ as well as other organs.

Although of brief duration, the residential pipe organ was the grandest form of home entertainment ever achieved. But the pipe organ occupied only a brief period of household history and was soon replaced by the radio.

A footnote to the history of the Twombly organ: The late Johnston Stewart of Morris Township was an organ aficionado, and a friend of organist Archer Gibson. As

a teenager, Mr. Stewart had worked on the Twombly grounds. Friends of Florham board members, Carol Knauff and Linda Carrington, interviewed his widow in April. Mrs. Stewart entertained them with stories of the Aeolian Company and Archer Gibson. The interview was recorded on a CD.

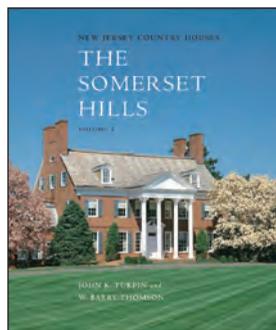
A reception followed the lecture, and Mr. Simmons answered more questions. Friends of Florham looks forward to having him as a speaker again.

— Linda Meister



Troy Simmons sharing an image of an Aeolian Pipe Organ.

## John K. Turpin, Authority on Great Estates of Somerset Hills



*Country Houses: The Somerset Hills*. Published in 2005 and 2006, respectively, these extensively researched and beautifully pho-

tographed books collectively provided a unique guide to the history of architectural and landscape design of the Somerset Hills — from about 1870 through World War I, the Great Depression, the Roaring '20s and finally to World War II.

The Friends were most pleased to offer a presentation by Jack Turpin and Barry Thomson as part of our lecture series on October 28, 2007. It is no overstatement to say that the audience was enormously interested in the talk, in the slide presentation — and, of course, in the books.

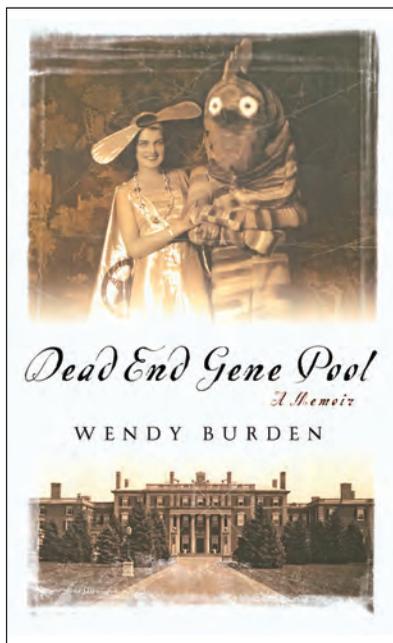
*New Jersey Country Houses: The Somerset Hills* were reviewed in the Friends newsletter issues of spring 2006 and fall 2007, which can be found on the Friends website: <http://fdu.edu/fof>.

## Dead End Gene Pool by Wendy Burden, Gotham Press, 2010

The Vanderbilt family's fortunes and misfortunes have sold books for years and as a descendant of William Burden, Wendy's tale is both sad and funny. The loss of her parents and subsequent home situations bring an ironic twist and somewhat caustic insights into the lives and lifestyles of the main characters of the Gilded Age. Florence Vanderbilt's great-great-great-granddaughter's *Dead End Gene Pool* is a racy exposé of the family branch.

In Ms. Burden's book memoir, two things are apparent: Indeed, Cornelius' money lasted only four generations, despite the effort his son, William Kissam Vanderbilt, and his grandson-in-law, Hamilton Twombly, made to increase the family fortune. Second, Ms. Burden allows only brief glimpses into any family contributions in the public sphere.

While this branch of the family has certainly been plagued by depressive illness and its consequences: alcoholism, drug abuse and unproductive behaviors, the "characters" in her memoirs, strongly accented by her hero, Charles Adams, are defined solely by their weaknesses and not by their strengths.



Clearly, Ms. Burden endured more than any child should, yet she survives these tribulations with humor and a strong sense of her own identity. Her memories tell a sometimes bizarre tale, but we realize they are memories seen through the filter of time.

On the bright side, the fourth chapter detailing her trip into the country to visit Florham allows us to see Florham through her eyes. Here her acid wit affords us a description of life at Florham as her grandfather remembered it, and a good description of the estate shortly after Fairleigh Dickinson acquired it. As Friends of Florham is grateful for any information that illuminates the history of the estate, we are in debt to Ms. Burden for her contribution and insights.

If you're looking for a description of post-Cornelius life viewed through Charles Adams' lenses, told with an intense wit, this book will inform and amuse you. If you are looking for a more analytical, well-researched portrait of the family, pick up *The First Tycoon* by T. J. Stiles, or Arthur Vanderbilt's *Fortune's Children*. There's certainly a lot from which to choose.

— Linda Meister

## The Story and Scandal of Hurstmont

The Friends Sunday, October 10, lecture — The Story and Scandal of Hurstmont: A House of the Gilded Age — was one of our best-attended lectures in the last several years. Thank you to author Barbara Brennan and historical preservationist Janet Foster who shared details about McKim, Mead and White buildings, social insights into the Gilded Age and the architectural history of Hurstmont in particular. After the lecture, our guests enjoyed a particularly beautiful autumn day in the gardens and the music of guitarist Dan Williams. Almost magical!

The Friends hope our efforts to highlight the history and current situation at Hurstmont, another historical property, will create additional interest in the restoration of the formerly fabulous property.

Hurstmont was originally built in 1886, was rebuilt for industrialist James T. Pyle and is representative of houses built for the wealthy of that era. The mansion has 30 rooms and contains more than 15,000 square feet of living space. Janet Foster showed us images comparing the interior and exterior to Stanford White's



Hurstmont as it looks today.

own house, Box Hill, and other similar properties. It was clear to everyone how sad it is to see this amazing property fall into such a deplorable state, but there is hope that someone will recognize this challenge as an opportunity.

Barbara Brennan entertained us with some details of Stanford White's social proclivities and the manner of his death. It was ironic that he was shot at a large social event held in one of his

firm's buildings. The audience was then entertained by the tale of the girl in the red swing and other salacious social details.

Hurstmont is currently one of the 10 Most Endangered Historical Sites in New Jersey because of its deteriorating condition. The current owner purchased it in 1981 with hopes of restoring it, but those dreams didn't materialize. The property is listed for sale with Debra Ross of Weichert Realtors in Bernardsville, N.J., for \$1.95 million along with the accompanying 20 acres.



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