

Art Gallery (Maybe) With A Spectacular View

CONTRIBUTED BY MIKE FARRELLY, MONTCLAIR TOWN HISTORIAN, PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW WANDER

THIS MONTH'S HOUSE HISTORY deals with a house at the intersection of Lloyd Rd. and Undercliff, where Union St. joins them. Photographers often take pictures of this house from the side or the back, rather than from the front. One of the main rooms in the back is a large room with a semi-circular window wall, which provides one of the very best views of New York City and surrounding area. This "observation deck" is probably the most prominent feature of the house.

The house was built in 1902 for Nils and Lydia Hersloff. Nils was the treasurer of the Inter-Ocean Oil Co. but was better known as a world class art collector. To be completely honest the provenance of some of the paintings he owned is not available publicly or, at least, not fully available. There is some speculation as to whether he owned them when he lived in this house and no certainty that they ever hung on its walls.

One of the paintings that may have hung on the walls of this house was *An Old Woman Dozing Over a Book* painted by Nicolaes Maes in 1655. Maes had been a student of Rembrandt. He struck out on his own and became one of the leading portrait painters of the 17th century. Maes was known to have a stern moralistic outlook on life. Several of his paintings praise diligence, hard work and attention to religious matters. This painting scolds the old woman because she is ignoring her chores, as evidenced by the keys to all the rooms in her house that hang undisturbed on the wall behind her (she wasn't opening the doors and cleaning the rooms). The book she is leaning on while she sleeps happens to be the Bible. She is ignoring that too thus drawing criticism from the artist. Nils owned the painting when he lived in this house but felt compelled to sell it in 1930. He offered it to the Duveen Brothers Gallery.

Duveen wasn't interested in paintings by Maes at the time and the painting passed through several galleries over the next few years. M. Knoedler & Co., one of America's oldest galleries, agreed to show it in 1935. It is now part of the Andrew Mellon Collection at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

The Hersloffs moved to Verona in 1908; eventually ending up in Llewellyn Park in West Orange. Nils came to possess a



couple of Rembrandts when he lived in West Orange, including Rembrandt's last painting *Simeon Holding the Christ Child* (1699) and a Florentine masterpiece from the 14th century called Profile Portrait of a Lady, which most experts agree is from the height of the Italian Renaissance but, since it isn't signed, cannot agree on who painted it.

The next owners of the house were Henri and Florence Emetaz. They had lived in a house on South Mountain which we covered a few months ago (Italian Baroque Treasure on South Mountain Ave.) Henri was not an art collector, but Florence was the daughter of American painter, Eugene Meeks. Her father's paintings probably graced the walls at some point. Eugene was born in New York. He began his studies there; then went abroad to complete his education. He lived and worked in Florence, Italy for most of his career. Henri Emetaz and Florence met in Italy.

Unfortunately, Henri left his wife and adult children, remarried and moved to New Mexico. Florence stayed in the house with her daughter-in-law, Ilda. Ilda married Henri and Florence's son, Maurice, who passed when he was only 33. Florence and Ilda shared the house for many years. Ilda continued to live in the house until her death in 1989. Ilda studied at the Paris Conservatory of Music and received her doctorate in music from the Conservatory in 1922. She went on to further study under the famous pianist Alfred Corot and became a well-known concert pianist herself. She performed often and toured Europe several times. In America she taught piano in Montclair and at settlement schools in New York City. Settlement schools were set up for students with outstanding artistic abilities but not much in the way of funds. She often gave benefit performances, especially for the Metropolitan Opera Fund.

In 1959, Ilda donated the Madonna of Humility painted by Giovanni del Biondo to the Montclair Art Museum. Biondo painted several versions of the Madonna and Child during his lifetime. Experts are not sure when he painted this one, but they know that he lived in Florence from 1355 to 1399. Where and how Ilda came to own this painting is not readily known. It may have hung on the walls of this house.

One last thing, Ilda commented on music along with the modern composer, John Cage, on April 5, 1951. They appeared together on a once-monthly radio broadcast which originated from the Montclair Public Library. They spoke over the air waves of WVNJ a local Newark station. WVNJ no longer exists in the AM format. It is now a Spanish language station with different call letters. The FM affiliate is now part of the Relevant Radio Network. The library no longer broadcasts on a regular basis. John Cage never lived in Montclair. His parents retired to Montclair and lived on Grove St. and (later) on Orange Rd. ■

If you'd like to see more images of Montclair homes, they are featured in the book, *Stately Homes of Montclair*, which can be found at Montclair Booksellers, several local libraries and the Stately Homes of Montclair Facebook page.

Meet with an Access Navigator

CONTRIBUTED BY ANDREW NG

IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR personalized help with improving your digital literacy, working toward new employment, or developing new skills in general, meet with Montclair Public Library's Access Navigator.

As a skilled trainer, the Navigator will be available every Thursday from 10am to 4pm at the Main Library to work with patrons on defining and reaching their goals. Anyone who would like to participate in the program will begin with a guided assessment to develop a plan with the Navigator. For a complete schedule, visit montclairlibrary.org/events.

The Montclair Public Library is one of 12 public libraries selected to participate in the New Jersey Library Association's Access Navigators Program. The libraries were selected following a rigorous application process and cover nine counties around New Jersey.

Navigators rotate through the 12 participant libraries, to provide individualized assistance to persons seeking employment, job training, or digital competence. The program also

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provides training in computer-based applications; assistance with resumes and job searching; and electronic learning aids and resources to teach and enhance digital literacy skills. Entrepreneurs seeking to launch their new businesses will also receive help from the Access Navigators, among other needs.

The full list of participating libraries is: Butler Public Library, Elizabeth Public Library, Keyport Public Library, Long Branch Free Public Library, Montclair Public Library, North Bergen Free Public Library, Pennsauken Free Public Library, Princeton Public Library, Wanaque Public Library, Warren County Library, West Deptford Free Public Library, and Wharton Public Library.

Access Navigators is a pilot program funded through the American Recovery Plan Act, received by the New Jersey State Library through the Institute of Museum and Library Services. ■

ABOUT THE LIBRARY The Montclair Public Library is located at 50 South Fullerton Avenue (Main Library) and 185 Bellevue Avenue (Bellevue Avenue Branch). The Library's mission is to change lives every day, through words, ideas, and community building. Its vision is to provide unlimited opportunities for lifelong learning, discovery, and community engagement. Visit montclairlibrary.org for current hours of operation and services.