

Elegant & Imposing Entrance On Upper Mountain Ave.

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

ANDREW WANDER'S BOOK *Stately Homes of Montclair* draws attention to the "elegant and imposing" entrance to this house on Upper Mountain Ave. The entrance figures prominently in the accompanying photograph.

Sometimes it is difficult to pinpoint the exact date a house was built in Montclair. Public records are not always readily available. Abram L. and Irene (Von Fliedner) Burbank are shown as the owners of the lot on the 1918 tax map. They are shown to be living on Staten Island in a 1915 New York State census and do not appear in the 1916 Montclair Directory. However, a 1918 New York City Directory shows Abram as working in NYC and living in Montclair. We can safely say that the house was standing on this spot in 1918.

Abram was born with salt water in his veins. His grandfather was a fisherman who fished the waters in and around Staten Island. His uncles were sea captains. His father was actually born at sea, although, he didn't remain a seaman. His father held a variety of jobs during his career. Abram started his career with the A.H. Bull Company, the British shipping conglomerate with offices on the docks in New York City. Bull built ships and arranged the transport of cargo all over the North Atlantic Ocean. Abram had worked his way up to the vice presidency of Bull. In 1928 he started his own shipping company, the A.L. Burbank Co. they owned and operated their own ships. They arranged shipments for other shipping companies. Abram was also a director of Knoll Shipping Ltd. of London and a member of the Maritime Association of the Port of New York. His son, Peter, took over the company when Abram retired in 1955. By that time, Abram

and Irene had moved to Long Island.

In 1934, when the Abrams lived in our featured house, there was a water main break in the street. The cellar was completely flooded, and the lawn was covered with rocks and bits of pavement.

In 1949 the owners were Wilfred C. and Elizabeth Cooper. They didn't live here long. In 1954 they moved to Cedar Grove. Wilfred graduated from Colgate University in 1920 and went to work for the food provision company, the Frederick B. Cooper Co., founded by his father in 1911. Wilfred became president after his father retired. Elizabeth graduated from the Mt.



Vernon Seminary in Washington DC and was a deaconess at the Union Congregational Church. She was a director of the Community Hospital (formerly on Harrison Ave.) and very active in the Montclair Red Cross.

In 1955 the owners of the house were William and Margaret (Price) Wilson Jr. William graduated from Syracuse University with a degree in engineering. He started working with metals early in his career and in 1947 he founded the American Light Alloy Co., a company that cast metal parts from specialty alloys such as aluminum and magnesium. William's company had a couple of hundred employees in Little Falls, near the border with Woodland Park (then known as West Paterson). William loved to golf. He was a member of several country clubs and once hit two separate "holes in one" in the same year.

Margaret had been married before and brought a son, Clifford "Clipper" Edwards II into the relationship. She was a graduate of the Art School at Cooper Union, a small college for exceptional students in New York. At the time, all the students (known as "professionals in training") were given full scholarships and did not pay tuition. She did not follow a career path into art but was Art Chairwomen of the Glen Ridge Women's Club. Margaret was a very active volunteer with the Montclair Public Library. William and Margaret also had a beach house on the Gulf of Mexico in Florida. They moved to Connecticut in 1970.

In 1958, when the Wilsons owned the house, a fire broke out on the second floor. The Wilsons were in Florida at the time. The fire did some damage but it was repairable.

The next owners were John H. and Jutta (Willman) Griffith II. John was another "old salt". During World War II he served in the merchant marine. He often sailed the exceptionally dangerous "Murmansk Run". The "Run" consisted of a total of 41 convoys which typically sailed from New York or Halifax, Canada, bringing supplies to the Russian ports of Murmansk or Archangel. What made the run so dangerous was that they usually sailed during the frigid winter to take advantage of the almost total darkness. As the ships neared the coast of Norway the Germans would attack with every available submarine and airplane. The "Run" was so dangerous that ship were ordered "never to stop" not even to rescue drowning sailors. In all, 1600 sailors lost their lives trying to supply our Russian allies. John graduated from the Merchant Marine Academy in 1945. He then went to work for the United States Lines, where he was one of the developers of what is now almost universal, "container shipping". In 1971 John became the CEO of Norton Lilly (shipping brokers), a company founded by fellow Montclairian, John J. McMullen a Navy veteran who later became the owner of the NJ Devils (hockey) and the Houston Astros (baseball). In 1994 John Griffith was inducted into the Maritime Hall of Fame.

In 1977, when the Griffiths lived there, the house suffered yet another fire which damaged the second and third floors. That damage was remediated. ■

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