



House on the Sunny Side of Prospect Ave.

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

WILLIAM VAN WOERT was a general agent for the Berkshire Life Insurance Co. in New York. He and his wife, Alice, rented a cottage on St. Luke's Place in the summer of 1886. They liked Montclair so much that they bought the cottage and moved in. In 1905 they bought a piece of land that was to become part of Prospect Ave. While their house on Prospect Ave. was being

built, the house pictured here, they lived at the Hillside House. The Hillside House has a bit of an interesting history itself. It was built in 1855 by Rev. Ebenezer Cheever as a school for girls called the "Hillside Seminary". It was taken over a few years later by Rev. Aaron Wolfe and his wife, Laura. They ran it as a boarding school for girls, taking in students from all over the country. It closed as a school in 1872, but the Wolfes continued to run it as a summer hotel. In 1902 the Montclair Board of Education bought the property so they could put up the Hillside Public School. The building was moved across the street, renovated and reopened as an upscale boarding house. That's when the Van Woerts resided there. The 1st Church of Christian Science bought the property in 1925 and tore the boarding house down in order to erect a church that is still on the spot. On Dec. 16, 1905, the Montclair Times announced that William and Alice Van Woert had given a party the week before at the Hillside House for all the people who had been involved in building their new house on the west side of Prospect Ave., the side that catches the sun in the morning. The men in the group all got pipes for smoking. The Van Woerts loved music. Alice invited various musicians to come to their houses, including the one on Prospect Ave., and give performances. The pianist and composer, Julian Pascal gave a recital in this house in 1912, just before he moved to California; about 50 people attended. The Van Woerts often spent summers in New

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Hampshire. They were among the first patrons of the well-known MacDowell Colony for young artists in Petersborough, NH.

By 1928 David G. and Mildred (nee Batchelder) Baird had moved into this house. David started out as an insurance salesman for the Mutual of New York. He formed an insurance brokerage which became Marsh & McLennan with offices in New York City and with him as vice president. In 1940 he founded a stock brokerage: Baird & Co. He was a director, or trustee, of many hospitals and health organizations; too many to list here. He received honorary doctorates from several colleges: Franklin & Marshall, Mount Saint Mary College, NY Medical College, and the University of Vermont. His crowning achievement was his charitable foundations, which gave large sums of money to hospitals and relief organizations. The first foundation was the Winfield Baird Foundation named in memory of his brother.

Later he chose to honor his parents and his brother with the David, Josephine and Winfield Baird Foundation. Mildred was born in Cambridge, MA. After high school, she worked for the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in Boston. When she moved to Montclair she became the president of the Montclair branch of the National Society for New England Women. She was a member of the Society of Mayflower Descendants and the Eagle Rock Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The Bairds lived in this house until 1955, or so when they moved to another house on Prospect Ave.

The next residents were the Henrys. John "James" Buchanan

Henry was the great grand-nephew of the president. His great grandfather was President Buchanan's nephew and private secretary. Our James Buchanan Henry graduated from Harvard Law and was a partner in Cahill, Gordon, Reindel & Ohl with offices at 63 Wall St. NYC. James joined the Army before WWII and was assigned to some exotic posts.

He served on a small island off Alaska and in India. His wife, Eleanor, was from Texas. She worked for the Censorship Department during the World War. She spoke Spanish and French. Her first husband was killed aboard a B-17 crossing the English Channel in WWII. She was a teacher before she came to Montclair. The Henrys loved classical music. Eleanor played the

piano and James played the recorder.

Eleanor also painted. In 1967 their son, John J. Jr. aged 14, at the time, was climbing a tree. He accidentally touched a deteriorated electrical wire; was thrown from the tree and fractured his skull. The Henrys successfully sued PSE&G for negligence. It is my policy not to talk about recent residents unless it is pretty common knowledge. I am not going to say anything about the more recent residents of this house. I will say that Andrew Wander got a particularly wonderful shot of this house in the morning. ■

William and Alice Van Woert built this house in 1905

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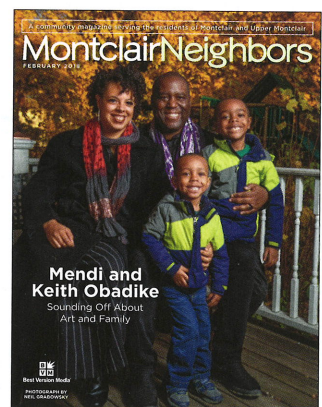
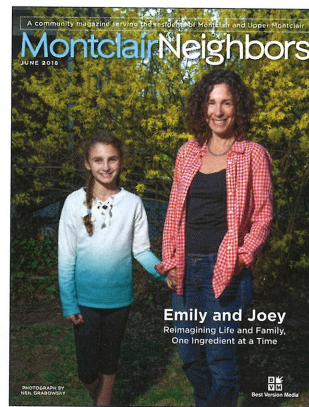
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