

Upper Mountain Avenue

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

THIS MAGNIFICENT RED BRICK HOUSE on Upper Mountain Avenue contains elements of Tudor style architecture and Gothic architecture. It was designed by Montclair architect, Francis Nelson for Robert and Lillian Anderson. It was built about 1922. Anderson was the son of Charles W. and Annie Anderson who were important in the development of Upper Montclair.

Charles was an insurance agent, one of the most successful in the country. He began as an agent for the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Co. and became the general agent for the State Mutual Life Assurance Society of Worcester, Massachusetts. He and Annie came to Montclair in 1871 and started buying property near Upper Montclair Center. They accumulated quite a bit of land. Charles donated about 15 acres to the town of Montclair, who in turn, gave it to Essex County in 1901. It is today's Anderson Park.

Robert started out in the insurance business like his dad. He was a part owner of State Mutual Life Assurance, which had reformed as the State Mutual Insurance Co. of Massachusetts. He became a director of the First National Bank of Montclair. He switched to real estate and made most of his money in the real estate field. He was very influential in developing the Upper Montclair Business Center. He eventually became an advocate for the Tudor style of architecture and is largely responsible for the Tudor feel that some of the buildings in the center have today. He suggested that the new post office on Bellevue Ave. be built in that style. The Federal Post Office closed that facility. The building now houses a branch of Coldwell Banker Brokerage.

His first project was the red brick Anderson Building at the southwest corner of Valley Road and Bellevue Ave. It was done in the Georgian Revival style. The deed was in his name and his wife's name. The first tenant was the James B. Fox department store in 1907. The Montclair Trust Company took over part of the building. Part of the façade was changed to a Classical limestone exterior, more appropriate for a bank. Amazingly the new look complemented the rest of the building, rather than battled with it.

Today the building is home to: The Learning Express, Switch,



and Uptown 596, as well as other tenants. Robert also developed the Bellevue Theater, which closed as a movie venue in 2017 and is waiting for someone to revive it.

Robert was probably better known by his neighbors for the messy divorce from his first wife, Bertha. They lived on North Mountain Ave. She accused him of having an affair with Lillian "Lilly" Lihou, a stenographer at the New York office of the John Hancock Life Insurance Co. She claimed that he and Lilly took a 3-month vacation through the South. He maintained that it was a business trip. There were legal entanglements. Bertha accused him of pressuring her to sign the deed to the Anderson Building over to her Father-in-Law in order to obtain a mortgage. She demanded that the building be sold and that she get a one third share. The court upheld her claim. Bertha moved out. He and Lilly got married. They lived with his mom and dad on Upper Mountain for a while; then moved to this sprawling beauty. ■



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