

Not Necessarily a Distinct Style But Absolutely Georgious

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

NANDY WANDER'S BOOK *Stately Homes of Montclair* this house on Stonebridge Rd. is described as "Georgian" but with a few unusual characteristics such as an off-center entrance, "highbrow windows" and "unusual dormers". The Junior League Preservation Survey of Montclair calls it a "French Chateau".

It was built in 1925. The Marchini & Martich (Construction) Co. applied for the permit; anticipating that the house would cost about \$18,000. Rudolph Martich was a life-long building contractor who lived in Montclair and built several homes here. It is not so clear who Marchini was. Two possible candidates were: Attilio and Hugo Marchini who lived in Montclair at the time. However, neither of them stayed in the construction business, neither of them stayed in Montclair. Rudolph Martich was still the owner according to the 1926 Tax Map. Directories shown him as living on Howe Ave. in 1926.

According to a handwritten note on the 1928 Tax Map "Swenson" was the "Tenant" on the lot (Map 54, Block A, Lot 66) but contemporary directories show Swen Swenson as living elsewhere. In 1930 Edmund Osborne Jr. and his wife, Anne, rented the house (possibly sub-leasing from Swen). Edmund Jr. was the son of businessman and state senator, Edmund Osborne and his wife Jessie, who owned 80 acres in this vicinity, often referred to as "Osborne's Woods". Edmund Sr. and Jessie lived in a grand house on Stonebridge which was covered in a previous issue of *Montclair Neighbors* in an article entitled *Wynnewood* as they called their mansion. Edmund Jr. studied at Cornell. He served in the Naval Aviation Corps during WWI. He became an executive in one of his father's printing companies, American Colortype, which had its main plant in Clifton. Edmund Jr. was somewhat of an inventor who pioneered the use of photo electric devices in color printing, developed several new processes for offset lithography and created an efficient way to print on metal.

Between 1933 and 1936 Swen Swenson his wife, Jean, and their children actually moved into the house. Swen later had a house built on Upper Mountain Ave. which we covered in an article entitled *Hidden Gem on Upper Mountain*. Swen was listed as a "cattleman" in some directories and as a "banker" in others. He was the son of Eric Swenson who was the CEO of City National Bank (later Citi Bank) and the grandson of Texas rancher, Swante M. Swenson. Swen became a director of City National and co-chair (with his brother) of one of the largest ranches in Texas; actually a conglomeration of five ranches,

was the round trip to Asbury Park, a distance of 186 miles in one day. And local bicycle outings, called "tours," were popular, traveling a pre-set route while enjoying the attention of the residents who would come out to watch and applaud their cycling neighbors passing by.

Shops that sold and maintained bicycles sprang up in town. At 397 Bloomfield Avenue from 1885 to 1886 a roller skating rink had opened featuring skating sessions and traveling skate artists to entertain. By 1888 the rink had turned into the Montclair Opera House, an all-purpose venue, which had its name changed to the Montclair Bicycle Agency by local entrepreneur Philip Young who was a painter turned Opera House manager, auctioneer, bicycle salesman and riding instructor. Young sold bikes, repaired them, ran a bicycle school offering lessons to aspiring riders with "lessons in private" for the ladies, held estate auctions, hired entertainers, and sold fireworks from his bicycle store for the Fourth of July celebrations. He opened a branch



On June 13, 1891, townsfolk bicycled from Newark to Philadelphia in the Great Century Run.

store on Bellevue Avenue in the late 1890s.

While Young may have been the first, other bicycle shops quickly followed. In the 1894 City Directory, two bicycle shops were listed: Lindsley and Rutan at 383 Bloomfield Ave. and Philip Young at 299 Bloomfield Ave. By 1897, that number had grown to five.

Montclair's loving relationship with the bicycle was just as strong nearly a century later when we hosted two bike tours in the 1980s. On September 25, 1983, approximately 900 cyclists registered for a 19-mile loop tour of the town, starting and ending at Edgemont Park and passing 11 historic sites. Organized by Spokes, Inc., headed by Karen Young and Ginna Lyons Ohlmuller, and supported by many businesses in town, the 1983 tour drew riders from all over, 400 more than were anticipated. A featured rider was Montclair's Nicholas "Mickey" Franciose (1918-2004), champion track racer and Olympic hopeful in 1936 and 1940. Recovered from WWII wounds to his leg that almost ended his competitive cycling hopes, Franciose went on to establish The Olympic Shop in Upper Montclair. The eldest rider was 95-year old J. Frederick "Champ" Marble (1889-1993). The following year 1,500 riders registered for the September 30 tour of 25 miles and again Fred Marble, then 96, biked the route again.

Today Bike & Walk Montclair, founded in 2002, advocates for cyclists, educates people about bicycle safety, and organizes tours much as the original Montclair Wheelmen were doing back in 1880. We have come (pun intended) full cycle! ■



all started by his grandfather. The ranches spread out over 300,000 acres in 12 counties.

Around 1937 Ralph Drury Jennison and his wife Lucille (Ballard) Jennison lived in this house. They only lived here for a couple of years. Ralph was the chairman of the New York State Board of Utilities.

In 1940 Ormand N. and Helen (Harrington) Birkland moved into the house. Ormand grew up in Texas where he started working for SH Kress & Co., a chain of “five and ten cents” stores known for ornate “downtown” buildings. Ormand was the sales manager for the chain when he lived on Stonebridge. He became president of the chain a few years later when the couple moved to Briarhill Rd. Unfortunately, SH Kress fell into some “bad press” in the 1960s when some of their southern stores refused to seat African Americans at their lunch counters; becoming the focus of some consequential Civil Rights actions. After a few tumultuous years, SH Kress fully integrated all their stores. Ormand and Helen later moved to Denver where Helen became a state champion amateur golfer.

In 1945 John J. and Janet (McKercher) Redfield moved in. They lived there until the mid-1960s. John was a New York lawyer with the firm of Wickersham and Taft. Both he and Janet were active in the Montclair Red Cross. He served as president of the

organization for two years in the early 1950s. He was also president of the Montclair Golf Club – twice (2 two-year terms). Helen joined the Junior League and was involved in many of their activities.

The final residents we are going to talk about were the Hochmans: Charles B. and Fredrica Hochman. They lived in the featured house from the late 1960s to the 1990s. Charles was a senior partner at Stroock, Stroock & Lavan, a large NY law firm that was founded in 1876. Fredrica was an advocate for early childhood education in Montclair. She was vocal in her support of taking money from the Federal Emergency School Aid Act when funding for early childhood education was starting to dry up in 1973.

Not everyone thought it was a good idea. As it happens with so many Federal Programs, the money came with strings attached. The act was set up to impose certain desegregation rules. Fredrica often wrote the news blurbs for early childhood education that appeared in the Montclair Times and continued to be engaged with every aspect of her children’s education. She didn’t want the School Board to close the Southwest School in 1977. ■

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](#).