



Half-Timbered House On Gates Avenue

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

THIS MARVELOUS HALF-TIMBERED HOUSE on Gates Avenue was designed by the firm of Van Vleck and Goldsmith in 1914 for Samson and Amelia Hirsch. Samson and Amelia came to Montclair in 1901. They lived in several places and had just built a very large house for themselves on South Mountain Ave. However, before they moved in, a very rich woman, Nancy Stewart Leeds, made them an offer they couldn't refuse for their house on South Mountain. Nancy wanted the South Mountain house for her father, William Stewart and his new wife. Samson and Amelia decided to take the money and build this house on Gates Ave. After her father passed away Nancy gave the large house on South Mountain to her sister, Margaret Greene, and moved to Europe permanently. "Nancy" which was short for Anastasia, married Prince Christopher of Greece and became Princess Anastasia.

Samson and Amelia grew up in Richmond. Amelia was a member of the powerful Millhiser family. Samson managed one of their dry goods stores in Virginia. He came north to manage Millhiser banking concerns in New York City. He remained with the bank until he was in his 70s when he went into business with his son-in-law, Coleman Merriweather, one of the founders of the Lock-Joint Company, a cement pipe manufacturer in East Orange. Coleman lived with the Hirsch family in our featured house. Samson ended up as a vice president of Lock-Joint. Samson and Amelia's son, Allan Hirsch, also joined the Lock-Joint Co., eventually becoming president. Allan had been a star catcher for the Yale baseball team in the late 1890s. Although Allan never went into professional sports he will be remembered as the composer of the famous Boola Boola fight song. Allan moved to South Mountain Avenue, then to Clinton Ave. His sisters: Florine and Estelle, continued to live in our featured house.

Florine married Coleman Merriweather. They divorced. He married his secretary. Florine then married Frederic W. Kettle, an Englishman, who migrated to the American South. He had been a reporter for newspapers in St. Augustine, Florida and in Baltimore before moving to Montclair in 1917. Florine passed

away in 1938. Frederic lived in the house with Estelle until he passed away in 1942.

Estelle married Dr. William Deutsch in 1899 and moved into his home in St. Louis. William listed himself as a general practitioner, but often gave lectures on orthopedic surgery. He passed away at the age of 46 in 1917. Estelle moved back in with her parents and sister. Estelle continued to live in our featured house until her death in January of 1956.

In 1957 Dr. Leland Gilchrest DDS moved into our featured house with his sister, Daisy (Gilchrest) Knott. The Gilchrest family hailed from Maine. Their father, Emerson Gilchrest, was a master mariner who spent most of

his life at sea. Leland and Daisy had originally moved to Montclair after their mother, Cora, passed away in 1910.

Unfortunately, Captain Gilchrest perished on a trip to Puerto Rico when the schooner he commanded sunk during a storm. In 1953 Daisy married businessman and politician, David H. Knott, and moved to New York. Sadly, their marriage was short-lived because David passed away a year later. David had been the chairman of the Knott Brothers Corp, which was a hotel chain that had 35 hotels based in Greater New York Metropolitan area and was, at the time, one of the largest hotel chains in the world. Their flagship hotel was the Hotel Judson on Washington Square. The Judson started as the Hotel Earle in 1902. The Knott family took it over and renamed it. It fell into disrepair even though it had been home to such notables as Ernest Hemingway and Dylan Thomas. It has been fully renovated and is now the Washington Square Hotel. David served as a New York state assemblyman. He was head of the New York County Democratic Committee and a presidential elector. In 1918 he replaced Al Smith (who became governor of the state) as New York County sheriff. After David's death Daisy moved back to Montclair to be with her brother. Leland retired to the Rockcliffe Apartments on Crestmont Rd. He sold the house to Alexander and Elisabeth Kasser around 1963.

Alexander, who was Swiss, worked with Raoul Wallenberg to save thousands of Hungarian Jews during The Holocaust. He was the president of the Technopulp Corp., which produced chemicals for the pulp and paper industry. You can still see the Technopulp sign on the building that had served as their office: 26 Park St. Alexander and Elizabeth had two children: I. Michael Kasser, who earned two PhDs and runs an international real estate investment and management firm, and Mary (Kasser) Mochary, now an attorney, who became the first female mayor of Montclair in 1980. Mary and Michael gave \$4 MM to Montclair State University to honor their father. His legacy is the Alexander Kasser Theater for the Performing Arts, a prominent feature on campus. ■

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