

# Through The Ages In Montclair

CONTRIBUTED BY MIKE FARRELLY, MONTCLAIR TOWN HISTORIAN

**T**HIS BUILDING ON Orange Rd. near Washington Ave. began as a private residence in the mid-19th century. It is difficult to say how much of the original house remains, but there is a house behind the more modern storefronts. It becomes easier to see when you look up from street level or take a walk around behind the building. I didn't pick this building because of its architectural majesty. I chose this building because it provides a window on some of the changes Montclair has gone through over the years. Many people have lived or worked in this building. We won't be able to talk about all of them, or even most of them.

The original house was built by Calvin and Harriet B. (Hayes) Taylor some time before 1850. They came to Montclair in the early 1830s and appear in the 1840 Census but it is hard to say if they lived in the house at that time. The 1850 Map clearly shows them in the house, the only house on the block back then. Calvin was a shoemaker, who ran his business out of his home. At the time he died in 1893 Calvin was the oldest living person in town. Harriet had passed away in 1874. Calvin was living with his son, George, on Claremont Ave. and renting the house out.

George Bartlett rented the house in 1886 while he was building a new house on Cedar Ave. A few years later his mom came to own the featured house but she didn't live there, although she did live in Montclair. Elvina J. (Cutts) Bartlett, George's mom, had recently become the widow of David W. Bartlett who ran an oil store in New York. Elvina was descended from Lord William and Lady Ursula Cutts who were among the principal settlers of Maine in the 17th century. In 1894 Elvina wrote a novel called Doctor John Sawyer which focused on spirituality and the new



Photograph courtesy Mike Farrelly

clan still living in Montclair today. The DiGeronimo families moved out in the early 1940s but they maintained their tailor shop in this building until the 1950s. In 1924 there was a fire that broke out in late December, while they were still living in the building.

The 1923 Directory shows that Maud Hastings and her sister, Mabel Hastings McKean (widow of John McKean), also lived in the building. They also lived through the fire in 1924. In January of 1925 they wrote a joint letter to the Montclair Times thanking the Fire Department for their service and noting that most of the damage was to the interior.

Michael Calabro, a shoemaker who lived in Newark, operated his business from this building in the 1920s. In the early 1930s Maud Hastings was still living here but her sister had moved to Elm St. The DiGeronimo tailor shop (South End Tailors) and the families were still here.

In the 1930s and 1940s the occupants of this house and the business owners were largely Italian or of Italian descent. Vincenzo Papaleo owned a shoe repair shop here. He and his wife, Antionette, lived on Sherman St. Joseph F. Miscia, grandson of Vincenzo DiGeronimo, and his wife, Mary, lived here for a short while. Joseph was an ophthalmological technician and was involved in several eye glass concerns throughout his career, but when he lived here, he worked at a gas station. He eventually came to own his own gas station, Miscia Shell Service on Park St.

In the 1950s the neighborhood started to change. Several new businesses sprung up during the decade. In 1952, Eugene Holt, an African American from Alabama, bought the South End Tailor Shop. He and his wife, Dorthea (Brown) Holt ran it for 30 years after that, but they lived on Franklin Pl. Horace Burnett, whose mother came from the Barbados, lived on Monroe Pl. He operated a radio and TV repair shop here (Precision Radio & TV). Dorothy (Boyer) Upperman, an African American from Pennsylvania, lived and operated a beauty salon here. Dorothy's Beauty Shop moved around a lot. It had been on Watchung Ave., Bloomfield Ave. and other locations on Orange Rd. She and her husband, John, lived on Greenwood Ave. Deborah (Page) Young and her husband, John, moved to Montclair from Newark.

They lived here until the 1970s. For a short while she ran a clothing store out of one of the storefronts (Debra's Shop). The changes this building has gone through mirror some of the changes that Montclair has gone through and will continue to go through as we head into the future.

**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, and several local libraries.**

science of psychology. It was on sale at Madison's Book Store on Bloomfield Ave. for 65 cents a copy.

In 1913 Elvina sold the house to Angelo and Rosina Dispenzere. Angelo and Rosina came to the United States from Italy in 1894 along with his brother, Joseph. Angelo and Joseph started a grocery store in Lackawana Plaza which moved to Orange Rd. in 1911. The brothers saw a future in developing the South End. Angelo bought our featured house and built the storefronts that sit in front of it. Angelo and Rosina lived on Cedar Ave., but he operated the real estate company that he started with his brother, Joseph, (South End Realty) out of one of the storefronts until 1932.

Around 1920 the DiGeronimos, Vincenzo and Donato, bought the house and store fronts. They lived in the back and operated a tailor shop in the front. Vincenzo and Donato were brothers from Lacadonia, Italy. Both had large families and probably took up most of the space but a couple of other people also lived here. Vincenzo married Maria "Mary" Sandora who was born in Newark and came to Montclair when she was 10. They had 15 children. Donato married her twin sister, Rosa, and they had 13 children. There are many descendants of the DiGeronimo



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## What are Montclairians Reading and Watching?

Below are the most borrowed titles from the Montclair Public Library in July 2023

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### ADULT FICTION

*Heart Bones*  
by Colleen Hoover  
*Hello Beautiful*  
by Ann Napolitano

### ADULT NONFICTION

*Crying in H Mart*  
by Michelle Zauner

### ADULT MEDIA

*Everything Everywhere All at Once* (Lionsgate)

### TEEN FICTION

*The Hate U Give*  
by Angie Thomas

### CHILDREN'S FICTION

*Llama, Llama Red Pajama*  
by Anna Dewdney

### CHILDREN'S NONFICTION

*The Beetle Book*  
by Steve Jenkins

### CHILDREN'S MEDIA

*Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules* (20th Century Fox)

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