



A BRIEF HISTORY OF OUR HOME

The building and property were originally known as Thorne Oaks. The estate is located on the former site of Brightstowe, the estate of Wheeler Hazard Peckham; the last portion of Brightstowe remains as the basement's interior south wall. Designed by the renowned architectural firm of Delano and Aldrich¹, the current mansion was built in a neo-Georgian style in 1912 by Mr. Willard V.S. Thorne (1865-1920), at the purported pricey sum (for that day) of \$400,000.

Mr. Thorne purportedly made his initial fortune by standardizing railroad equipment, then maintained it through his railroad-oriented investments. While this may be true, the official record indicates that he graduated from Yale and worked in the engineering department of Great Northern Railway. He then became Vice President of the Pennsylvania Coal Company, Director of Purchasing for the Harriman railroads and a member of the boards of a dozen of the largest transportation companies. The Thorne family had a significant presence in the Central Trust Company of New York, which has since become Chase Manhattan Bank.

The property was then owned by several people, including Thomas Symington (Symington Railroad Specialty Co.) in 1920, Jacques Bramhall in 1924, Elizabeth Wallace in 1930 and John T. Mascuch in 1937². One source, Morristown's Mansions,

¹ The firm was known for being "the foremost designers of white-on-red neo-Georgian houses". It also designed the Willard Straight house in New York City, the Japanese embassy in Washington, D.C., the U.S. embassy in Paris, France, and the highly recognizable South Portico of The White House. See also www.nyc-architecture.com/ARCH/ARCH-Delano-Aldrich.htm

² According to Morristown's Forgotten Past – The Gilded Age; John Rae; 1979.

notes that Mrs. Masuch³ sold the building's contents in a three-day auction in 1952. The 1957 Daily Record article announcing our purchase of the property notes the (then) current owner as Dr. Peter DeGregorio. We do not know who may have given the 'Gateways' name to the mansion.

The building has been our home for over 50 years. While a large portion of the estate, including the carriage house, has been sold off through the years, the remainder of the lower tract is still owned by the Morristown Unitarian Fellowship and is used as our lower parking lot. The former carriage house (now in private ownership) still stands southeast of the main building, along Columbia Turnpike. Evidence of the carriage path to the main house remains via the leveled pathway and two lines of tall trees rising from the west side of the carriage house up toward the main building (Figure 6). One can also see, by a few remaining oak trees, the path to the rear of the building and from the south end of the current meeting room up toward the west corner of Normandy Heights Road.

Valley View, the former mansion of Jesse Leeds Eddy (of the New York coal firm of Eddy & Dickson) is located further down Normandy Heights Road⁴, toward Columbia Turnpike. Ellerslea, a neo-classical mansion built in 1909 by Charles Armour of the Armour Meat Packing Company, is across the street from our property, as is Edgewood⁵.

Unique features of the building and property include:

- Several original downspouts and ornate 'scuppers'. Four full sets remain along the center of the current front entrance.
- Several fake interior doors, windows and closets. This is a common feature in Georgian architecture that stresses balanced features in each room.
- Ceiling mouldings with a repeating pattern of bas-relief zodiac signs.
- A 'hidden' directional compass atop the chandelier in the Great Hall.
- A weather vane on the top roof parapet that once was connected to a statue in the Great Hall so that one could note the wind direction even while inside the mansion. While the statue remains, the connecting rods are no longer functioning.
- Many casement storm windows tucked inside the first floor's walls. While most have been stuck for several years, a recently freed panel in one room revealed stained glass. Others appear to be regular glass or wood slats, though few have been revealed.
- A photograph of the library as it appeared in the opulent days of Morristown's "Millionaire's Row" hangs above the fireplace in the library. The wall sconces, mantel and other original furnishings existing today are shown in that photograph.
- A 'whispering wall', built at the same time of the main building and located in the back of the property along Columbia Turnpike. A person can stand at one end, whisper, and be heard perfectly by a person at the far end of the wall. The wall also works as an echo amplification wall. Whispers made at a single location represented

³ The last name has appeared as both Mascuch and Masuch.

⁴ At 45 Normandy Heights Rd.

⁵ At 30 Normandy Heights Rd. and 20 Normandy Heights Rd., respectively.

by the focus of the wall's curvature are amplified back to the whisperer. This 'echo point' is now the center of a matching red brick labyrinth, constructed in 2001.

- A memorial garden, prepared in the early 1990s in the style of appropriate to the building and time period.

Photographs of many of these features are provided on the following pages. Additional historical photographs are posted at www.muuf.org/PhotoGalleries.html.

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Additional details have been uncovered since the initial preparation of this summary:

- Dr. DeGregorio appears to have purchased the building in 1955, intending to transform it into a resident clinic facility. Unable to obtain the proper approvals, he seems to have abandoned his plans, thus making it available for our purchase of it in 1957.
- The floor in the Terrace Room is not original – it was originally a parquet pattern. The existing floor was installed by the Fellowship.
- The building appears to have been built to be heated by gas. What was thought to have been the coal delivery entrance has been judged by a historical architect to be much too small and there is no evidence of a room suitable for coal storage.
- Herbert and Elizabeth Wallace lived here from 1930-1937, raising two daughters – Emmeline ('Wally') and Elizabeth (Betsy). Mr. Guy Miller, the son of Emmeline Wallace Miller, and his wife Terry visited us earlier this month. He tells us the following:
 - + Herbert Wallace was a customs attorney who had foreseen the stock market crash of 1929, divesting all stocks prior to the crash, and appears to have purchased Thorne Oaks shortly thereafter. It's not surprising that the deed was in Mrs. Wallace's name, Mr. Miller relates, as many of their former stock certificates were in her name also.
 - + Mr. Wallace secretly funded Bill Wilson's efforts to create the organization that eventually became Alcoholics Anonymous. This connection was explored in an episode of *The History Detectives* television show in February. Because of Mr. Wallace's membership in the Oxford Group, his social support efforts were never formally revealed or publicized. It only became known following the recent discovery and investigation of a thank-you letter from Mr. Wilson to Mrs. Wallace following Mr. Wallace's death in 1942.
 - + The young daughters apparently both disliked their given names. Emmeline went by the name of 'Wally'; Elizabeth preferred people call her 'Betty'. At this time 'Wally' is still living though in extended medical care facility.

See Figures 16 – 20.

The Morristown Unitarian Fellowship's building and most of its property are listed in the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places, ID# 2178 (Thorne and Eddy Estates) and NR Reference #78001783.

Figure 1

Location of Thorne Oaks – 1918 Map

(note the 180° error in the directional arrow and misspelling of Thorne's name))

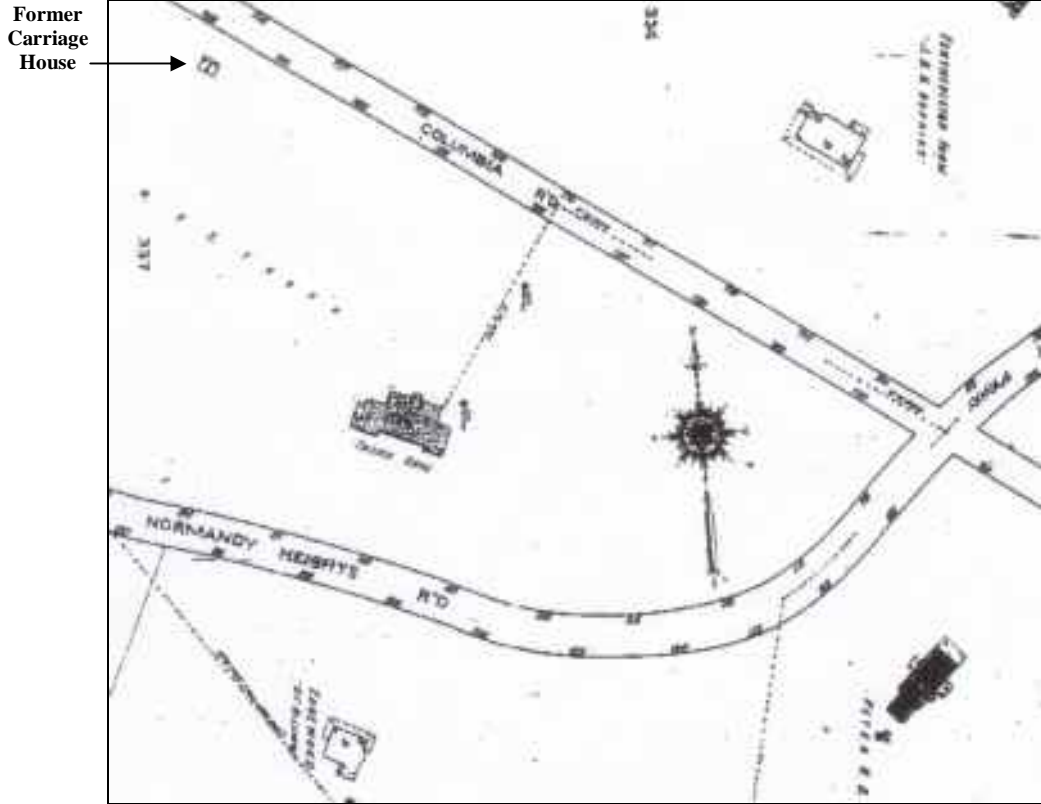


Figure 2

Former Front of Mansion

(source: Mansions of Morris County; J. W. Rae; 1999, page 63.)



Figure 3
Former Rear of Mansion (prior to the addition of the current Meeting Room)
(source: *Mansions of Morris County*; J. W. Rae; 1999, page 63.)



Figure 4
Rear of Mansion Showing Former Gardens, Fountain and Colonnade

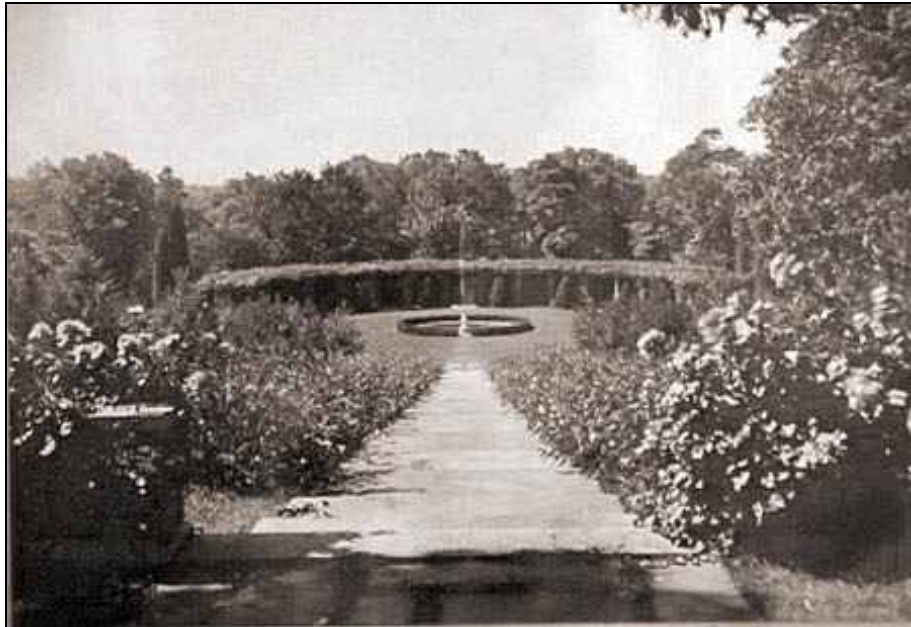


Figure 5
Original 1912 First Floor Plan

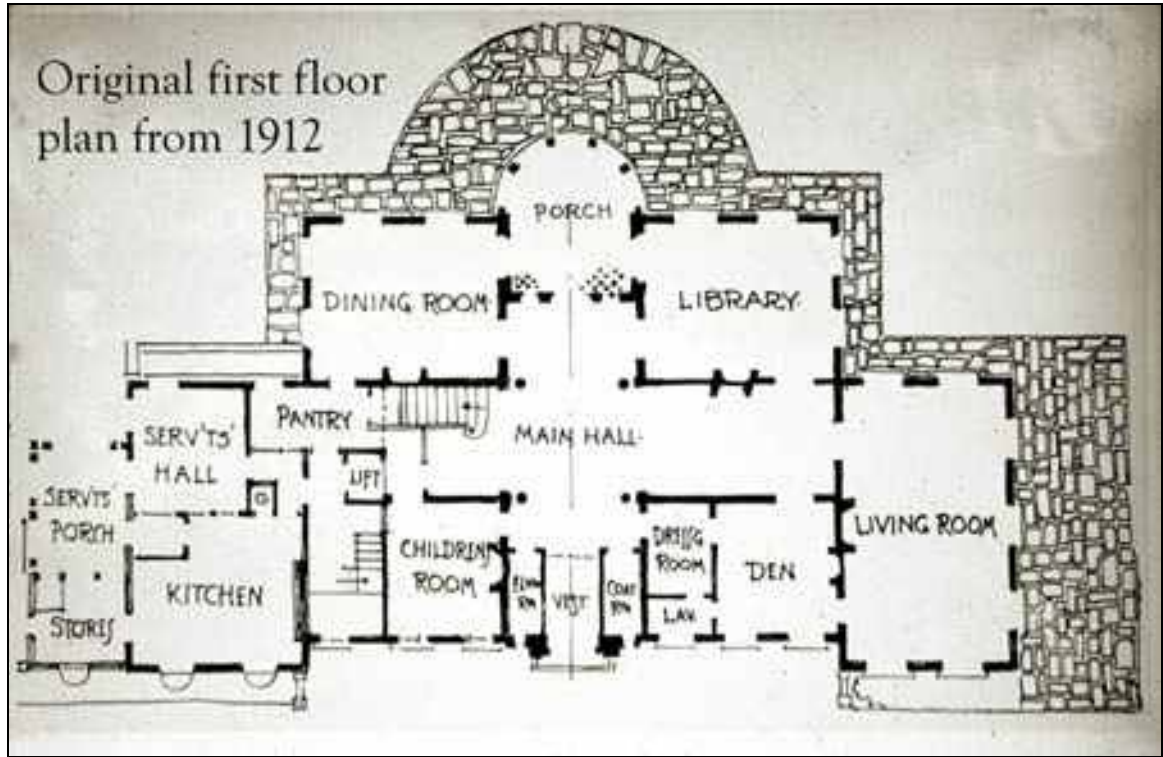


Figure 6
Former Tree-Lined Paths

From the Carriage House



To Normandy Heights Rd.



Figure 7
Original Scuppers And Downspouts



Figure 8
False Windows
Which is the real one? Which is the false one?



Figure 9
Ceiling Mouldings With Repeating Zodiac Signs



Figure 10
'Hidden' Directional Compass



Figure 11
Stained Glass Storm Window



Figure 12
Stained Glass Storm Window - Detail



Figure 13
Restored Photograph of the Library



Figure 14
Whispering Wall / Shouting Echo Point



Figure 15
Memorial Garden



Original photos by G. Aronson, S. Rice.



Figure 16. Dining Room – circa 1931



Figure 17. Second Floor Hall with Mural – circa 1931



Figure 18. South Portico – circa 1931

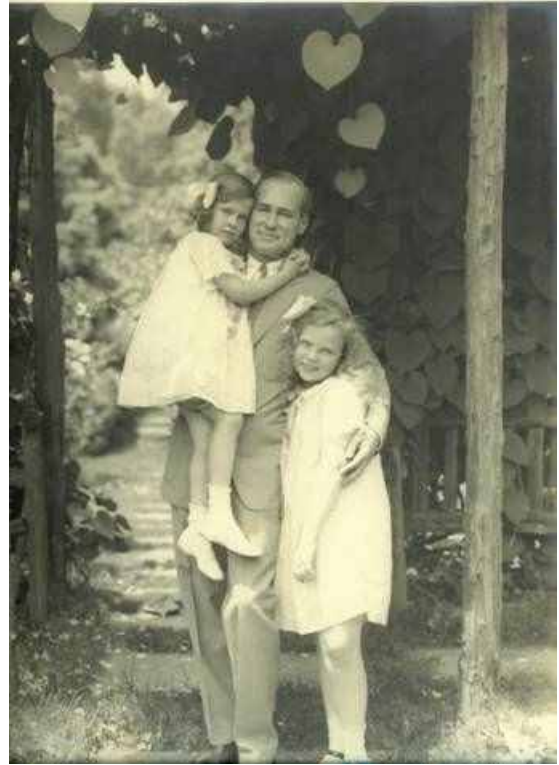


Figure 19. Herbert Wallace with Emmeline ('Wally') on right and Elizabeth (Betsy) on left. Mrs. Elizabeth Wallace not shown. Photograph believed to have been taken down by the whispering wall and fountain, facing the steps up leading up toward the building.



Figure 20. Mr. Herbert Wallace

Photos courtesy of Mr. Guy Miller (son of Emmeline 'Wally' Wallace Miller)