

Florham

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On the Trail of Alfred Parsons

The link between the Friends and Alfred Parsons, the landscape gardener responsible for the design of the Italian Gardens to the east of the Mansion, has been reinforced by independent and coincidental investigations conducted by two members of the Friends board of trustees.

The story begins in 1997. At that time, trustee Richard C. Simon, seeking information about the Mansion gardens, began his researches into the role of Parsons as an important contributor to "Florham's" landscape. His earliest searches resulted in his corresponding with Cynthia Zaitzevsky, Ph.D., one of the authors of a publication entitled "Cultural Landscape Report for Vanderbilt [Hyde Park] Mansion."

Dr. Zaitzevsky had shortly before this



time purchased Nicole Milette's leaflet, *Parsons, Partridge, Tudway. An Unsuspected Garden Design Partnership.* Her correspondence with Mr. Simon led her to suggest to Ms. Milette that she get into touch with Mr. Simon for some on-the-spot information about Parsons. Ms. Milette, a French Canadian working on Parsons as the subject of her Ph.D. program at the University of York, therefore wrote to Mr. Simon asking him for help with the details of Parsons' work at Florham, identified in a footnote of her leaflet only as "A garden in America' for Vanderbilt's Brother-in-law New York?" Mr. Simon sent her a copy of an item in *The Jerseyman* for November 29, 1907: "H. McK. Twombly is having a fine Italian garden constructed adjoining his residence at Florham from plans by an English

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Return of Friends' Lecture Series

There's always a story behind an elegantly restored historic home, public building, or garden. Leslie C. DeGeorges will let you in on "The Secrets of Historic Restoration from Scalamandr ," the New York-based premier manufacturer and wholesaler of elegant textiles, wallpapers, and carpets, at the Fall lecture

presented by the Friends on November 18. Ms. DeGeorges, Director of Restoration and Archives at Scalamandr , will talk about approaches to restoration, with emphasis on historic sites such as the White House, Mount Vernon, Monticello, and the Preservation Society of Newport. A well-known lecturer, Ms.

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**FAIRLEIGH
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President's Letter

Although it is difficult to find the appropriate words, the Friends want to convey our heartfelt sympathy to all those who have lost loved ones in the recent terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. The photographs of the disaster continue to remind us of the transience of life, yet continuing to work with purpose may be the most effective response.

For the Friends as a group, purpose continues to reside in our efforts to restore the elegant Mansion and gardens of this beautiful campus. I recently took a friend to see the campus and was struck by how very much the Friends have accomplished since our formation eleven years ago. In the Mansion, with important help from the University's administration, we have restored Lenfell Hall to its original splendor and, more recently, the Hall of the Mansion. All that remains is finding suitable furniture for the center hall visitors'

reception area. Our efforts to preserve or restore the landscape have also been fruitful: we have restored the area around the lower fountain behind the Mansion, now known as the Clowney Gardens; restored the pergola and its rose plantings; and planted holly trees in front of the Mansion. We are also glad to see that period lighting is being installed on the drive to the Mansion—a project that the Friends have encouraged for some time.

We have also revitalized our lecture programs, and we hope you will attend the first presentation of this series by Mrs. Leslie DeGeorges, director of restoration and archives at Scalamandré, on November 18. [See page 1] In the meantime, we want to thank you again for your continuing interest and support.

Emma Joy Dana
President, Friends of Florham

Historic Auction at "Florham"

The hammer came down at 5:00pm on June 16, 1955. After a spirited two-day auction managed by Parke-Bernet Galleries of essentially all of the furnishings from the estate of the late Ruth Vanderbilt Twombly at "Florham," the sale netted about \$141,415. Along with \$200,000 from an auction in New York in January of that year, which had also included furnishings from Ms. Twombly's New York home, the total came to \$341,415. Not exactly memorable numbers by today's inflated standards, but translated into current figures, the Vanderbilt-Twombly estate sale would have brought in somewhere between \$1.8 and \$2 million.

Yet the sales figures are only part of the story. The longer-term significance of the "Florham" auction was that it marked the twilight of a way of life that will probably never be replicated in the U.S. There's little doubt that this "sense of an ending" motivated many of the 1,000 people—curious local residents, window-shoppers, wealthy socialites, and determined dealers—who swarmed the grounds



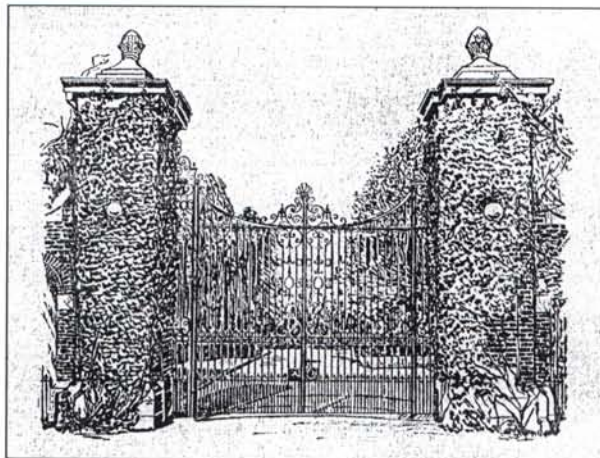
Paris Pre-Gobelins Tapestry "Armida discovers the sleeping Rinaldo, c.1640.

and Mansion of "Florham," which was open to the public for the first time since the turn

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of the century, for a two-day pre-viewing of what was arguably one of the finest collections of furnishings of its time. Among the objects to be auctioned were a variety of Renaissance, Chippendale, other Georgian and Dutch furniture, Oriental and Persian carpets, oil paintings, valuable 18th-century English colored mezzotints, period chandeliers, decorative objects such as carved jades and Chinese porcelain, and legendary tapestries. Yes, the very rich also slept, and complete bedroom accoutrements including Georgian-carved mahogany beds, matching dressers, bedspreads, and window "treatments" were also on the auction agenda.



The back story is clear-cut: Ruth Vanderbilt Twombly, one of two surviving daughters of Florence Vanderbilt Twombly and Hamilton McK Twombly, died in December 1954, and the auction had been ordered by the executors of her estate. In addition to "Florham," the Twombly's grand scale of living was reflected in homes in New York and Newport. By the time of the auction, however, inheritance taxes had gutted the \$12 million left by the widowed Florence V. Twombly, who had died three years earlier, to the point where—exclusive of the \$10 million trust fund left to her daughters—the remaining estate was valued at \$1 million, and many of the planned bequests to churches and hospitals could not be honored.

While the almost 600 objects put up for auction could provide an exemplary case study of the Golden Age, the size and scale of most of the furnishings dictated that many homes could not accommodate these pieces, with the result that a fair number were sold at far lower prices than the appraised value. A spectacular gilded bronze and cut-crystal chandelier, eight feet high with a six-foot diameter, for example, was purchased for

\$1,500 by the Sheraton Hotel chain for use in one of its hotels. The centerpiece, and most valuable objects in the auction, were two superb series of pre-Gobelins tapestries—executed in the royal ateliers of Paris during the mid-seventeenth century—which hung in the Great Drawing Room and Hall of the Mansion. The first set of ten auctioned were the

magnificent Louis XIII Barberini-Ffoulke "Rinaldo and Armida" series, which were a gift of the King to Cardinal Barberini. This set, which was auctioned on the first day, details the romance of Rinaldo and Armida, the crusader and the Saracen princess,

from the famous epic, *Jerusalem Delivered*, and hung in the Barberini Palace in Rome for over 250 years. The second series, sold the following day, comprises eight tapestries, depicting the story of Amintas and Sylvia. The sale of these tapestries offered the most persuasive evidence, perhaps, that an age had definitely passed: the tapestries were purchased initially by the Twomblys for \$179,000; at auction, each set sold for \$15,000.

Still, not all of the furnishings from "Florham" have left the area. Among the local beneficiaries was Macculloch Hall Historic Museum, whose founder, former Morristown mayor W. Parsons Todd, spent about \$10,000, including an earlier purchase at the January auction, for select objects from the Twombly estate. Among the choice pieces purchased by Todd for the Museum were two Chinese Chippendale chairs, a painting by the 17th century Dutch artist, Melchior D'Hondecoeter, and three chandeliers, including the beautiful Louis XV-style so-called "Skinny Sister," one of three striking chandeliers that hung in Lenfell Hall.

Return of Friends' Lecture Series (continued from page one)

DeGeorge holds a B.A. in Art from Hartwick College, an M.A. in Education from Penn State, and Certificates in Appraisal Studies and French.

Historic restoration is a many-faceted, complex activity, and lecture attendees will have the opportunity to learn from Scalamandré's extensive knowledge and expertise, in particular, about textiles and wallpapers used in the restoration of historic buildings. A variety of textiles will be highlighted—hand prints, damasks, and brocatelles—and Ms.



*Leslie C. Degeorges,
Director of Restoration and
Archives, Scalamandré*

Degeorges will also present a slide presentation of the actual mill processes to demonstrate how textiles are reproduced.

For the Friends, this is a particularly warm occasion. Scalamandré, our partner in our

Mansion restoration projects from early days to the present, created the historically faithful fabrics for the draperies in Lenfell



*Victorian wallpaper by Scalamandré from Lindenwald,
Martin Van Buren's home, c.1840*

Hall in the Mansion. Following the lecture, therefore, the Friends will present Scalamandré with an Appreciation Award. The company will be represented by Mary Beth Brown, New Jersey residential account executive, who worked tirelessly with the committee.

Join the Friends on November 18, at 3 pm in Lenfell Hall of the Mansion. Admission is \$3 for members; \$5 for non-members. Light refreshments will be served following the lecture. Also, look for future announcements of another interesting lecture presented by the Friends in the spring.

On the Trail of Alfred Parsons (continued from page one)

architect, Mr. Parsons. The work will approximate \$50,000 in cost, and it is expected that the completed garden will be one of the finest in the country.”

That item allowed Ms. Milette to pinpoint Parsons' only creation in America as the Twombly Mansion's Italian Gardens. It also led to Ms. Milette—Dr. Milette upon the completion of her thesis, *Landscape-Painter As Landscape-Gardener: The Case of Alfred Parsons, R.A.*—to include in the thesis information provided to her by Mr. Simon the excerpt from *The Jerseyman* and his revelation that “Olmsted had had a falling out with his client Twombly in late 1892 or early

1893...” She also acknowledged Simon's help by including in her expression of thanks to “People related to the gardens for their wonderful and warm generosity,” the final phrases, “and Richard C. Simon, a friend of ‘Florham’, New Jersey.”

Former trustee Anne Granbery's re-connection with the Parsons theme came about somewhat serendipitously. While she was still a Friends board member, she was directly involved in the restoration of what was then widely and incorrectly called the “Grecian Gardens.” She had studied the Parsons site plans and had drawn upon her own landscape design expertise to achieve the historically accurate redesign

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featuring the pergola and parterre. During a February, 1998, visit to the Royal Horticultural Gardens, Mrs. Granbery met one of its chief officers who was also the mentor to Nicole Milette in her dissertation researches. He showed Mrs. Granbery the same leaflet that had provided the link between Dr. Zaitzevsky and Mr. Simon. The leaflet, in turn, deepened her long-standing and lively curiosity about Parsons, and she resolved to hunt for further information about him.

Time constraints having limited her search on that visit to Britain, she returned again to the hunt on a return trip in June of 2001, when she visited the University of York to spend

several days going through Dr. Milette's two-volume thesis. Although she took a large number of notes from her readings, she came back to America regretting that she was unable to obtain a copy of the thesis for future reference.

This article represents an opportunity for the Friends of Florham Newsletter to offer to Mrs. Granbery the happy—and probably quite surprising—news that the dissertation she is eager to have another, more leisurely, chance to consult is quite close to home for her: on the shelf of Mr. Simon's library, where it has been since Mr. Simon sent for it soon after Dr. Milette completed it.

Friends' Spring Gala a Success. We could have danced all night

An idyllic spring evening, lovely music, the tinkle of glasses, and delectable food—just a brief snapshot of “An Evening at Florham with Mrs. Twombly,” the Friend's fourth annual gala on May 19 in Lenfell Hall of the Mansion. Fundraising is the objective of this now traditional event, and 130 guests helped the Friends to raise almost \$22,000, topping the figures raised at previous balls. All proceeds from the gala have been directed toward completion of the Hall of the Mansion, the Friends' most recent project.



Ball Committee Members and Escorts—L. to R.: Phyllis Conway, Granville Conway; Barbara Keefauver, Thelma Dear, and William Keefauver



Ball Guests l. to r.: Louis Schelling, Susan Adams, Joseph Atencio, Kathleen Atencio, and Dr. J. Michael Adams, President, Fairleigh Dickinson University

Undaunted, the intrepid committee chairpersons for this event—Barbara Keefauver, Phyllis Conway, and Dawn Dupak—will stage a return engagement on May 18, 2002. Remember the date, and stay tuned for more details about the Friends' fifth annual fundraising gala.

Become a Friend

Join the Friends of Florham. Participate directly in our efforts to preserve the architectural history of Florham, and support our informative program series. Your support will make a difference.

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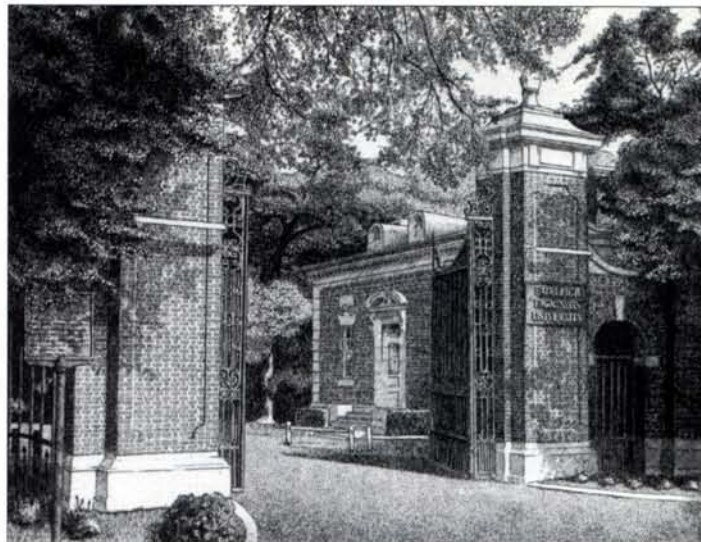
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This drawing of the Gatehouse at FDU is one of a series of the historically important structures on the campus drawn by Professor Floyd Gellerman, Department of Visual and Performing Arts, FDU-Madison.

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Co-editors:

**Carol Bere and
Walter Savage**

