



# Florham

## *Friends Celebrate Tenth Anniversary*

Almost to the day, as I write these lines, the Friends of Florham are celebrating ten years of growth and accomplishment. We began quite modestly on April 26, 1990, when what was then called "The Cultural Affairs Board" held its first meeting. Total membership of that group was the Board's fifteen trustees. Today, our list of members exceeds one hundred, and our mailing list goes to more than one thousand potential supporters.

From our first meeting on that day ten years ago, our mission has been to preserve and restore the historically important buildings and grounds of the Florham-Madison campus of Fairleigh Dickinson University, the combined work of the architects McKim, Mead & White and the landscape architectural firm of Frederick Law Olmsted. Fulfilling that mission has been a truly exciting and rewarding undertaking. We have restored the Clowney Garden, the Italian Garden, and, just a year ago, the

beautiful Twombly Withdrawing Room, now known as Lenfell Hall.

Our future goals are equally exciting. Our next project is the restoration of the Great Hall in the Mansion, and we hope to complete the Italian Garden's peripheral walks and give back to the statues the heads they have lost.

Many of what were merely dreams ten years ago are now impressive realities, thanks to the generous support we have received in the past from the University and all of our friends. As we begin our second decade, we are still full of plans, full of hope, and full of gratitude to all who have joined us in this wonderful adventure of preserving some special treasures of the past.

Emma Joy Dana  
President, Friends of Florham

### *Board of Friends of Florham*

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## *From the Florham Archives*

### "COSTLY ORNAMENTAL GARDENS"

These words began an article in *The Jerseyman* newspaper of July 31, 1908, on the construction of the gardens around the "Florham" Mansion. In late November of the previous year, it was announced that the English landscape architect Alfred Parsons had been engaged by Hamilton Twombly to

plan the gardens adjoining his residence. "...[T]he completed garden will be one of the finest in the country," *The Jerseyman's* readers were informed.

This 1908 article, recently located by Trustee Richard C. Simon, describes in some detail the implementation of the garden plan: the massive walls, the ornamental



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## *Friends of Florham Spring Gala*

The Gilded Age meets the twenty-first century at the Friends' Spring Gala on May 20, 2000. Enjoy cocktails on the terrace of the historic Mansion overlooking the gardens. Music for dinner and dancing in the newly restored Lenfell Hall will be provided by the highly regarded Keyser Jazz Group. In what has become a tradition, Mrs. William Y. Dear will once again be Honorary Chairman of the Benefit Committee. The initial, extensive redecoration of Lenfell Hall in 1958 was made possible by the generous gift of Leonard Dreyfuss, Mrs. Dear's stepfather, and the

Twombly Drawing Room was renamed in appreciation. Once again, the gala will be ably chaired by Barbara Keefauver, Phyllis Conway, and Linda Meister, assisted by fourteen hostesses.

Plan to participate in the Friends' third black-tie ball, which will begin with the cocktail hour at 7:00 pm, followed by dinner and dancing at 8:00 pm. Proceeds of the Spring Gala will be directed toward the restoration of the Great Hall of the Mansion. Ticket prices are \$150 per person, or \$250 for Patrons, including the usual tax-deductible portion. As seating is relatively limited, the Friends suggest early responses to the Spring Gala invitations.

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## *From the Florham Archives* (continued from page 1)

pools and stairways, and handsome gazebos which still adorn this impressive garden landscape.

Here is the article as it appeared in *The Jerseyman*:

**COSTLY ORNAMENTAL GARDENS**  
Improvements on the Twombly Estate will add to its beauty.

The largest piece of work now going on in the building line in this vicinity is the new garden for H. McK. Twombly, on which Sturgis Bros. have a considerable force of men employed, while laborers are busily moving the large amount of earth necessary for the completion of the plans.

Sturgis Bros. are putting up a terrace wall which will require about eighteen hundred yards of concrete. The wall at the highest point, including foundation, is twenty-six feet high, and at the bottom the concrete is seven feet wide. It is built on a batter, the forms being constructed of worked lumber with the face oiled to give a better surface to the wall.



In addition, there are two handsome garden houses of brick and cut stone at either end of the upper terrace and two ornamental pools are also being constructed ornamental stairways and gates adding to the effectiveness. The east garden has been remodeled and considerable new cut stone put in, and at present masons are engaged in laying a large amount of concrete walk. A.S. Pierson is superintending the work.

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## Spotlight on Jack Fritz

Meet Jack Fritz: vice president of the Friends, former professor of history at Fairleigh Dickinson University, volunteer extraordinaire, lifelong promoter of equestrian sports in the United States, and major recipient of awards. Within the last six months alone, Jack has been inducted into the U.S. Combined Training Association's (USCTA) new Hall of Fame in recognition of his role in developing the sport of eventing in the United States; cited by the leading equestrian magazine, *The Chronicle of the Horse*, as one of fifty individuals who have had the greatest influence on American equestrian sports in the twentieth century; awarded the Sportsmanship Award for the Walter B. Devereux Trophy by the American Horse Show Association (AHSA), the national equestrian federation of the United States; and presented with the Governor's Cup as the 1999 Horseman of the Year by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture Equine Advisory Board.

The reasons for Jack's growing, impressive chronology of honors are self-evident: he has been a founder and officer of several organizations, volunteer with other groups, and has officiated at many events—in fact, there are virtually no areas of the U.S. equestrian world which have not been the beneficiaries of Jack's substantial, creative efforts and influence. Jack founded the USCTA in 1959, helped Bob Cacchione



form the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association in 1967, and also founded the United States Dressage Foundation. He has been a leader of the Board of Directors of the United States Equestrian Team (USET) for over three decades, member of the team's Board of Directors since the early 1960s, and has served as an officer since 1974, including a role as USET executive vice president. As a judge, Jack has also operated on an international stage, serving on the ground jury at the 1984 Olympic Games and 1987 Pan American Games.

The Friends have also benefited from Jack's energies. An original member, he serves as Chair of the Nominating and Bylaws Committee. Retirement is clearly not a word in Jack Fritz's vocabulary.

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## Family Ties: "The Whitney Women"

The Vanderbilt and Whitney families not only built great houses, they built the renowned Whitney Museum of American Art. On May 25, 7:30 p.m. at Macculloch Hall Historical Museum in Morristown, Flora Miller Biddle, author of *The Whitney Women and the Museum They Made* (1999), and great-great-niece of Flor-

ence Vanderbilt Twombly, will talk of the history and continued involvement of generations of Whitney women in the museum founded by her grandmother, the talented, visionary Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. A book signing and reception will follow the talk. The public is encouraged to attend.

## Noted Author Views “Florham” and the Twomblys

On April 9, John Foreman, a distinguished architectural historian, was the second of the Friends of Florham lecturers in the organization's spring series arranged by Trustee Richard C. Simon. Mr. Foreman is also the author of *The Vanderbilts and the Gilded Age: Architectural Aspirations, 1879-1901*, a handsome and broadly researched but brightly readable book lavishly illustrated with photographs by his co-author, Robbe Pierce Stimson. The book offers its readers—as Mr. Foreman's lecture offered its listeners—a richly informative account of “Florham” and the memorable people who created it.

Mr. Foreman's characterization of Florence Vanderbilt Twombly emphasizes her “cool and imperious manner” that “produced an image of autocratic terror that few dared to contradict.” Though she “was just a slip of a woman, barely a hundred pounds,” he reminds us, she “was a glacial grande dame who bothered little to dispel her intimidating image.”

The most proper and enduring of the daughters of William H. Vanderbilt, Mrs. Twombly had firmly fixed views of what was and what was not acceptable, Mr. Foreman says. She was one of the most generous of hostesses: “...invited guests could have anything they wanted (one hypochondriacal weekender gave a list of medicines to be stocked in his bathroom cabinet) and were coddled with every conceivable luxury and fashionable diversion.”

Virtually every Friday in the spring and fall, “between twelve and thirty” guests

arrived at “Florham” to take advantage of this legendary hospitality, but “sometimes the parties were far larger. The guests arrived with their own chauffeurs, maids, and valets, at teatime on Friday and stayed until after breakfast the following Monday morning. Really big dinners might include one hundred and fifty guests. On nights like this, Florence might hire Archer Gibson to come out from New York and play the organ during dinner.” (Arthur T. Vanderbilt, II, adds, in *Fortune's Children: The Fall of the House of Vanderbilt*, that for his “short concert” during such parties Mr. Gibson was paid \$750, and that sometimes, as he played the organ that had “8,000 pipes, several thousand miles of wiring and was bigger than the one in Radio City Music Hall,” Mrs. Twombly sat to his left on a throne-like chair.)

But given what Foreman calls her “mixture of intolerance and indulgence,” whoever visited “Florham” “had to do things Mrs. Twombly's way,” a generalization illustrated with numbers of examples like these from Foreman's pages:

“[She] was among the few in her set to serve cocktails before dinner. But *one* was everybody's limit, and that one

drink had to be taken, standing up, in Florham's long marble hall. Never could it be taken into the gilt wood and tapestry-filled drawing room.”

“...At Florham, nobody was ever late, nothing was ever amiss, and everything invariably happened as planned. Even



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**Noted Author** (continued from page 4)

loud coughing was forbidden, and Florence on more than one occasion exiled her husband from the dinner table to the foot of the stairs until such time as his throat was clear. . . .” The four children “were forbidden to enter their mother’s bedroom under any circumstances, except [by] specific invitation.”

“She was fussy too. During a visit to her sister Lila Webb at Shelburne, Florence asked the butler for a shawl. Her bags were packed in anticipation of the return trip to New York. Mr. Woodgate brought her one of Lila’s shawls. Sweet-tempered Lila Webb looked as if she dressed in thrift shops. Florence glanced once at the proffered shawl and snarled, ‘I’m not that cold.’ ”

Such traits apparently earned her a reputation for a certain crustiness. They also, undoubtedly, contributed to her capacity to survive for ninety-eight years whatever blows dealt her by a fate much less fastidiously well-organized than her own affairs. When Mr. Twombly died in 1910, Mr. Foreman notes, she did “not mourn for years or sequester herself. She was a woman who lived for entertaining and had three magnificent houses that were built expressly for that purpose. Her own \$10 million inheritance hardly had been touched during her marriage. When Twombly died, he left her another \$75 million [and his death] signaled a new era of Florence’s hospitality and the real beginning of Florham’s heyday.”

What we learn about Mr. Twombly in *The Vanderbilts and the Gilded Age* . . . makes more than a little astounding his submitting to his wife’s order to leave the dining room during a coughing fit. A “blue blood” who brought to his 1877 marriage much more money than his wife had, he is called by Mr. Foreman “a talented money manager and inspired venture capitalist.” It was his exceptional investment skills that not only attracted the attention of Florence’s

father and led to his marriage to her but also became centrally important to the health of much of the Vanderbilt holdings.

“Eventually,” Mr. Foreman continues, this man of at least occasional surprising domestic docility more than tripled his own inheritance and “sat on the boards of fifty-nine different corporations, including the New York Central, the Mutual Life Insurance Company, the Depew Improvement Company, Western Union, the New York Mutual Gas Light company, and multiple railroads. His real genius lay in picking long-shot investments.” One of those investments was in the Texas Gulf Sulphur Company, a corporation that was during the depth of the Depression to provide his widow with an annual income of \$3,000,000.

One leaves Mr. Foreman’s pages convinced that it was Twombly money, rather than Vanderbilt money, that may have given “Florham” its “special charm [as] . . . a sort of never-never land of architectural and horticultural perfection . . . in maintenance as well as design.”

The Twomblys chose the Morristown area as the site for their magnificent country house, Mr. Foreman says, because along with its “growing grandeur” at the time it preserved for its inhabitants the sort of “curious anonymity” that appealed strongly to Hamilton Twombly and his crowd-shy bride. Quoting social historian Dixon Wecter’s observation that “to the old aristocracy notoriety is a type of social nudism,” Mr. Foreman points out that Cecilhurst, which the Twomblys first rented from and then purchased from George H. Danforth, was an ideal location for the sort of people who believed that “tooting one’s horn was vulgar.”

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## 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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