

THISTLE



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FOLKLORE IS FUN

Sunday, October 24 2:00 p.m.
Millburn Public Library

"Foot stompin' music and rib ticklin' yarns" will be the order of the day at the Society's opening meeting of the new season. The Millburn-Short Hills Historical Society and Friends of the Millburn Library are co-sponsoring this appearance of Jim Albertson, professional folklorist from Mauricetown, N.J., who will present a program of New Jersey folk songs and stories for people of all ages. History, music, dancing, jokes, riddles, story-telling are all a part of folk lore, and Jim delightfully demonstrates the richness and variety of our state's folk heritage. Make this a family affair by bringing the children. Refreshments will be served following the program which is free and open to the public.

NEW TRUSTEE - Bernadette Wagner has been appointed a Society Trustee to complete the term of Natalie Furth who will be moving with her family to Washington, D.C. We thank Natalie for the many ways in which she has supported and served the Society, and we welcome Bernadette who has already become involved in Society activities as one of the volunteers who are indexing back issues of The Item.

HISTORY ON CALL - Trustee Colleen McCullough is now in charge of presenting the Society's slide shows - "Millburn Through the Millenia", "Roads to History", "Our Town", "The Battle of Springfield" and "Gardens of Old Short Hills". Succeeding Jane Reidel, Colleen will be aided in her presentations by Charlene Lamberto. To schedule a slide show for your organization, call Colleen at 376-3123.

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EENIE, MEENIE, MINIE, MO - If that is the way you come to a last ditch decision about the color you paint your house, the Millburn-Short Hills Historical Society may be able to help. Trustee Dick McDonald will be at work during the winter months collecting and taking photographs of Victorian houses with an eye to their paint colors. Ultimately his photographs will be gathered in an informal scrapbook to be consulted by those of you who want to paint your older home attractively and authentically. Call Dick at 376-6944 if you have suggestions or suitable photographs of your own to add to the collection.

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ATTIC TREASURE GIFT TO SOCIETY - Mr. Don Reutlinger recently presented the Society with one of Stewart Hartshorn's famous roller shades from the attic of his parents' home at 100 Meadowbrook Road. This New Groove Tin Roller, as it is labelled, measures 74½" in length and was used with a canvas shade on a porch rather than an interior window.

The label on the tin roller mechanism has a facsimile of Stewart Hartshorn's signature and trademark registrations dated Feb. 26, 1895 and March 22, 1900. That would make it a much later and possibly improved model than the original roller which Hartshorn developed in 1864. The Society is indebted to Mr. Reutlinger for this archival addition. We wonder what further treasures some thorough house-cleanings will turn up.

Lest you think that the invention of the roller shade was a minor accomplishment, of interest only to those of us who live here, N.J. Bell included it in their compilation of New Jersey "firsts" for the May, 1982 Tel-News.

JOY WHEELER DOW
1860-1937

Owners of older homes in Short Hills are fond of boasting that their house was designed by Stanford White, the famous architect who came to an untimely end. To share in the White ambiance certainly adds interest to a house and some of those claims may be true, but we urge a healthy skepticism the next time you hear one. In the course of the Society's historic structures survey, no proof was found that White designed a single structure still standing in the town. We will probably not have any hard evidence on the subject until the day that the records of McKim, Mead and White are indexed. On the other hand, there are at least eleven Township homeowners who could accurately claim a house designed by the architect, Joy Wheeler Dow. Alas, such a claim might be met by the rejoinder: "Joy Who? Never heard of her!"

To begin with, Joy Wheeler Dow was a "him", not a "her". Born John Augustus Dow in New York City in 1860, he discarded his given name at the age of 21 in favor of one he considered more elegant. About ten years later, after an unsuccessful attempt to accomodate himself to a career in the N.Y. financial world, he designed and built his first house right here in the Wyoming section of Millburn. The remainder of his life was devoted to architecture as practitioner, critic and author of articles and books on the subject. Lacking formal training as an engineer or architect, Dow confined himself primarily to domestic architecture, and he became widely known for his designs of good substantial houses for the middle and upper classes. The interesting features and unique details on these houses set them apart from the majority of those being constructed at the time. Happily, many examples of Dow's work are still extant in Millburn and Summit, in Connecticut and Michigan. His most ambitious and well known building is the Unitarian-Universalist Church in Summit, on the corner of Waldron and Springfield Avenues.

It was through the persistence of Society President Elizabeth Howe that a meeting was arranged several years ago with some of Dow's descendants. A son, John G. Dow, who has served as a U.S. Congressman from New York and who is currently a member of the Carey Administration in Albany, brought his wife, son and daughter to

Millburn. They were accompanied by Joy Wheeler Dow, Jr., the second son of the architect. The Dow sons had abundant memories of their talented father and of their childhood days in Wyoming. A tape was made of the afternoon's conversation, a transcript of which is now a part of the Society's oral history collection. Society archives also contain copies of some of the many articles that J.W. Dow wrote for so-called "shelter" publications such as The Architectural Record, The American Architect and House and Garden. From these sources much has been learned about this architect whose numerous buildings in Millburn make him significant for us.

The Wyoming section of our town was a newly opened and accessible commuting area when J.W. Dow, his sister and widowed mother moved there from New York about 1882. Before the railroads, this area was farm country, but with the arrival of fast transportation, residences mushroomed. The Dows moved into one at 78 Chestnut Street which they called Rose Cottage. At that time Dow was a clerk in the New York Mining Exchange, but he was interested in making a career as an architect. So in 1890, with a little of the money left from his father's estate, he built a house of his own design on a lot behind Rose Cottage, at 234 Sagamore Road, which he named "Greylingham". This small stone house with covered entry porch has on one side an interesting triple window with stained glass portions, but is of no specific style. A few years later Dow built the house next door at 232 Sagamore which has Dutch and English farmhouse motifs. He named this house "Princessgate" and was fond of using it in his articles and books as an example of practical American adaptation of European styles. By setting "Princessgate" at right angles to the street, he assured greater privacy on the terrace and in the garden front of the house.

According to John Dow, his father would build a house, move in, build another, sell the first, and move into the latest one he had built.

"In this way he was able to finance the houses and go on to something better. In each case he was very enthusiastically involved and deeply committed in an emotional way to his next house, because each one was different and each one was a new venture for him."

J.W. Dow lived at "Greylingham" and "Princessgate", but "Eastover",

which stands above them on the steep curve of Sagamore Road, was designed and built in 1898 for John Goodchild, a New York stockbroker. It was Elizabeth Goodchild, one of the daughters of the family, who became J.W. Dow's wife in 1904. Perhaps their romance was kindled on the grand terrace and sloping gardens of "Eastover".

Next door to "Eastover" rose the Callaway house which Dow designed as an adaptation of the Carlyle House in Alexandria, Virginia, while the Sparrow House in Ipswich, England was the admitted inspiration for the handsome "Rabbit House" at 80 Cedar Street. The Dows lived in "Rabbit House" at the time their sons, John and Joy, Jr., were born, and both sons remember the house - with its charming rabbit insignia in many of the ornamental details - as an elegant one. It fully illustrates Dow's theory that all four elevations of a house should be attractive and interesting. No matter, then, which side of the house faces the street; the "Rabbit House" is another of Dow's designs where the front does not.

During these years J.W. Dow built a variety of houses in Wyoming - one for his sister on Linden Street, a house on Myrtle Avenue, several on Wyoming Avenue, and a Short Hills model on Hillside Avenue. "Lynn Tepper Regis" at 397 Wyoming Avenue is an excellent example of Dow's eclectic style, and its romantic name was typical of the climate he tried to create when he built a house. In 1910 J.W. Dow moved with his family to a new house he had built in Summit. It was during his ten years in our neighboring town that Dow designed the Unitarian Church which his sons consider his finest work. From Summit Dow moved to New England where he remained actively building and writing until his death in 1937.

The domestic architecture of J.W. Dow was sufficiently distinctive that "shelter" magazines would feature his latest houses or publish his own articles about them, yet he never made very much money at his profession. His sons remember more than one time that money was in short supply at the Dow home and attributed this partly to lack of popular appreciation for the architect's uncommon designs and partly to his personality. They described him as "unbending", "a loner", "an eccentric." Dow's refusal to compromise his artistic principles to suit a client sometimes cost him a commission. Said John Dow:

"We would say 'Father, put the window where they want it,

but get the job.' He would walk up and down the living room and beat his breast and say, 'I'm Joy Wheeler Dow and I won't compromise my art!' Well, you know, what Father needed was a business manager. I think in some of the great architectural firms like McKim, Mead and Whiteone man was the salesman and another the artist, but he (Dow) didn't have a partner to go out and get the business."

J.W. Dow himself seemed philosophical about his lack of financial acumen, writing in 1918: "My father - the late Augustus F. Dow - could not help making money any more than I can help NOT making it."

We can sympathize today with Dow's insistence that a house should be designed with four attractive sides and a floor plan related to the site on which the house is built at the same time that we note how few builders have utilized these principles. Less acceptable, perhaps, is his theory that municipalities ought to exempt from taxation those houses in their town which are of superior architectural design. In 1907 Dow wrote:

"The U.S. Government offers certain free grants of land to pioneers in the wilderness to encourage them to settle and cultivate farms and build homes. Why not extend some concessions to those who in the wilderness of bad cottage architecture (and that means nearly everywhere in the country) conscientiously try to improve the landscape with architectural embellishment which is suitable to it, and which tends to idealize the picture rather than commercialize it."

Reminders of Joy Wheeler Dow are with us today in the memorial window to his mother, Sarah Benden Dow, at St. Stephen's Church and in the progression of his homes that still grace our community. He was not an innovator like Frank Lloyd Wright or a tastemaker like Stanford White, but he was an architect who believed that traditional architectural designs could be applied to small suburban homes to give them distinction and beauty without sacrificing practicality.

If you are one of the lucky few who live in a house designed by Joy Wheeler Dow, boast away!

ORAL HISTORY - Jenks Schacter has done an outstanding job of arranging interviews with long time residents of the Township and has also accomplished wonders in organizing and transcribing more than two dozen tapes. Her successor, Margaret Coffey, plans to continue interviewing Township residents who recall "the way it was", for their memories are a rich source of information. Please telephone Margaret (467-2197) if you would like to be an interviewer or - better yet - the subject of an interview. We are also looking for people who can transcribe tapes.

One of the first interviews the Society taped was with Mr. and Mrs. Paul Shackleton in 1976. They moved to Wyoming in 1920 and have lived in the same house ever since. Jan Weisblat was the interviewer. This brief excerpt may serve as an example of the way oral history recreates times gone by :

"When we first came, Wyoming Avenue went as far up as Mountain Avenue . . . Cows were pastured in South Mountain Estates, and there was a large farm on upper Wyoming Avenue at what is now Clinton or perhaps Mountain Avenue . . . This was a wonderful community, warm, friendly, quiet. There was no violent traffic at that time. Where Lord & Taylor is now located was the lovely old home of the Whittinghams. It is said that a Civil War underground railway station was located in this old home. Our present home was at one time a girls' school under the direction of a Miss Brown, I believe. Wyoming was such a lovely quiet place with wonderful trees - so quiet in fact that friends from New York spending a weekend with us were unable to sleep. What a contrast to today!"

SAVE NOVEMBER 16
for next meeting of MSHHS
when Mary Virginia Kiehl
will speak on "PORTFOLIO OF
HOUSES IN AMERICA AND EUROPE"



Grandfather in 1882

CALENDAR

- Sept. 26 - "Century of Revivals: 19th Century American Furniture" exhibit opens at Newark Museum
- Oct. 24 - MSHHS Membership Meeting. "Folk Songs and Stories for People of All Ages" by Jim Albertson. 2:00 pm at Millburn Public Library.
- Oct. 28 - Annual meeting of Friends of the Millburn Library. Slide presentation and talk by Joseph Noble, Director of the Museum of the City of New York, on "Modern China: It's Archeology and Art." 7:45 pm at Millburn Public Library
- Oct. 30 - Re-opening of Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn
- Nov. 16 - MSHHS Membership Meeting. Mary Virginia Kiehl presents a slide lecture "Portfolio of Houses in America and Europe." 8:00 pm at Millburn Public Library

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