

MOUNTAINSIDE HISTORIC
PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

Down Memory Lane

A Walking Tour of a Part of Mountainside--the Early 1920's

Before we start walking, let's do some checking. Are you wearing comfortable shoes? Are your shoe laces tied properly?

So that we all arrive at our destination at the same time, let's establish a walking gait by counting in unison to 24 as we start walking.

We did establish a good walking gait because we have already arrived at the corner of New Providence Road, Mountain Avenue, and Woodland Avenue. You know, people call this corner "Bird's Corner."

As we came around the bend on Mountain Avenue, after passing Chestnut Street, I should have called your attention to the names on the mailboxes on the left. The names are Beaman, Palmer, Coles, and O'Donnell. The O'Donnells live nearest to New Providence Road across from the Maxwell house. The Maxwell house is the last house on the right before arriving at Woodland Avenue.

Now, before we start walking down New Providence Road, let's walk down Woodland Avenue for about 100 feet to the Hamilton Farm.

When older people talk to Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, they call them "Henry" and "Minnie." Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton live in that house back past the barns.

I knew when I saw most of the cows at the fence that Mrs.

Hamilton would soon be out here. Here she comes wearing a long apron. Watch now; in a minute you will know why. See her untie the apron and put it over her head. Aren't those funny sounding hoots that she is making as she hops around?

Now watch the cows. They know just what the hoots mean. See them scurrying back to the pasture. When it is milking time and the cows are slow in coming to be milked, Mrs. Hamilton makes different hooting sounds. Again, they know just what to do. They come quickly.

Those children on their way here with milk cans are coming for their family's daily milk supply. They always come early. They like to see how the cows react to Mrs. Hamilton's hoots.

If you will turn around, you will see the cow barn across the street. Early each morning the Hamiltons open this gate here and then go across the street and open the other gate. The entire farm is encompassed by split rail fences. As the cows come out of the barn, they are guided across the street and through this gate into the pasture.

On the right, if you will turn that way, is the house that the Hamiltons rent to tenants. It was built in 1763. The family now occupying it is the Kellerman family, that is--occupying the front part of it. This side door at the back end of the house is the Hermanse entrance.

I think, because of the time, we'll forego sampling the very cold, refreshing water from Hamiltons' "Old Oaken Bucket" well here. Before we leave, though, I would like you to notice

the large, long wooden trough by the well. The Hamiltons keep it filled with water repeatedly all day long for the cows.

It was right here at Hamiltons' Farm that Mary Pickford made two of her first moving pictures in 1910. I have seen the pictures, and this "Old Oaken Bucket" well and this 1763 house are very identifiable in the pictures. The titles of the movies are "Arcadian Maid" and "Child of the Ghetto."

And now, as we are about to leave the Hamilton Farm, there is an interesting fact that I must tell you about Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, Henry and Minnie. They gave ox teams to the city of Newark, New Jersey, before the Civil War. I believe this gift is recorded in the Newark, New Jersey, historical archives.

Who knows how the generosity of this noble Mountainside couple who live right here, Henry and Minnie Hamilton, may have changed the history of Newark, New Jersey, and, or, the progress of the Civil War. Mountainside can well be proud of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hamilton.

See those children walking so slowly toward Mountain Avenue. There is a reason for their tarrying. The Clarks live in the white house next to us here. One of their daughters married into the Capone family. The children are hoping as they pass by to see Al Capone and his limousine. He visits here occasionally. Who knows? Maybe we'll see him.

Now that we are at the Clark house, let's stand and look at it for a few minutes. Notice how broad it is with the open front porch running all across it. Notice the tall windows

downstairs. They go from the floor, almost to the ceiling. The windows upstairs are quite low. At either end of the house are fireplaces. See the large chimneys. Notice, too, the wooden sidewalk that starts at Woodland Avenue and leads up to the house.

All of the families who have lived here during my childhood, the Ross Edwards, the Clarks, and the Whalens, who ran a tavern here, have always been very proud that they lived here.

It is said that this house, because of its nearness to Springfield Road, was used as a stagecoach stop in Colonial Days.

I see some of you looking at that large tent pitched in the field near Maxwells' house. I'll bet you are wondering why it is there. An evangelist is conducting services there every night this week. Many people attend the services.

Now as we cross Mountain Avenue, we pass on the right on the corner the first house on New Providence Road. It was built in 1818. It is now the home of the Edwards family (no relation to the Ross Edwards family). Because members of the Theodore Bird family formerly occupied this house at this intersection of Mountain Avenue, New Providence Road, and Woodland Avenue, early Mountainsiders always referred to this corner as "Birds Corner."

Just a short distance now on the left is Mr. Beaman's Blacksmith Shop. We'll just watch because Mr. Beaman has a customer, an elderly gentleman who brought one of his horses to be shod. He has his granddaughter with him.

Did you notice how that little girl's eyes just danced when Mr. Beaman said, "I think I'll put a horseshoe nail in the hot embers."? Mr. Beaman always makes horseshoe nail rings for all the little folks who come here with older members of the family. Also, he always shows the children how the big bellows works. (I must tell you, I am one of the little girls for whom Mr. Beaman made a horseshoe nail ring. That elderly gentleman could have been my grandfather, Mr. Karl Wentlandt.)

Now that we are outside the Blacksmith Shop, let's just stand here and keep our eyes on that barn across the street. The Peckhams keep their surrey in there. How lucky we are. Mr. Paul Peckham is leading his horse down the hill right now to hitch him to the surrey.

We children have always wondered what Mr. Peckham would look like if he shaved off all of that heavy black beard and goatee.

The horse is hitched to the surrey now. Mr. Peckham is probably going to his parents' home, which is way back in, off Hillside Avenue. Their house is large with an enormous cathedral room. This room is used as a gallery where they display works of art and treasures obtained in their travels. Also, they encourage performers in many of the arts to give concerts here. The performers who accept invitations to giving concerts are then honored guests of the Peckhams at an elaborate reception after the concert. Yes, Mr. Peckham is heading up Hillside Avenue in the direction of his parents' home.

If you will look at the hill above the barn, you will see some houses. The Platt family lives in one, the Peckhams live in one, the Ivanoskis live in one, and the Lindbergs. If this were a weekend and you were standing near the Clark house and looking over at the hill, you might see Mr. Ivanoski and his long-time friend and occasional guest, Mr. Paderewski, walking around the property.

I remember, once in the 1920's, Mr. Paderewski, when he was a guest at the Ivanoski home, played an entire concert at the Roosevelt Junior High School in Westfield. I attended that concert. Mr. Paderewski received many standing ovations for his superb piano playing. He was much heralded in Westfield's two weekly newspapers, The Westfield Standard and the Westfield Leader.

Let's go along now to the Children's Country Home. We just don't want to miss their yearly carnival and fair.

The only building on the right side of the street between Peckhams' barn and the Children's Country Home is the house near the barn occupied by the Kackelreiss family. We are now approaching the house on the corner of Hillside Avenue and New Providence Road, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Rich. There are just three more houses on this part of New Providence Road. They are across from the Children's Country Home.

Mrs. Kniffin is superintendent of the Children's Country Home. Oh, there she is now circulating among the people attending the fair.

Do you see those children over there watching the Punch and Judy show? Would you believe it? They are all eating cotton candy. Oh, those wonderful squeals of delight coming from the children riding on the merry-go-round and from the children coming down the slide!

Folks, now is your chance if you would like some lemonade. There aren't many people at the stand.

I see that some of you have purchased articles at the arts and crafts booth. The money realized at this fair does so much for the children in the Home. I know everyone is appreciative.

Now let's hike on down to Captain Cook's Farm. It is quite a walk, so let's establish another walking gait.

Again, with that good gait we have passed quite an area along New Providence Road without seeing any houses on either side of the road, and we are now ready to turn left onto Springfield Road.

The only house on Springfield Road on the left is very near the corner here, the Johanson house. The only house on the right is Rinker's house.

As we walk along from Rinker's house to Cook's Farm, both on the right, keep looking in among the trees. Peacocks could be there spreading their tail feathers into large, beautiful fans. The peacocks are allowed to roam around the farm, and they just don't wander away.

Take a good look at all the exotic birds in the large wired-in areas. See all the species of ducks swimming in the pond

on the right side of the house. What always fascinates me are those little chickens who look as if they have feather dusters around the middle of their legs.

Everyone calls Mr. Cook "Captain Cook," but he really is not a captain. People call him "Captain Cook" because he is generally off sailing to some far place searching for exotic birds and plants and treasures. He brings so many interesting things home. He invites and encourages parents to bring their children to see the things he has on his farm and the treasures he has acquired. He is away right now, so there is no chance of our seeing him.

Because the Mountainside red brick public school is on the other side of Springfield Road near New Providence Road, let's cross the street and head back there.

Mr. Cathers is both principal and teacher of the Mountainside Public School. If you peek in, you will see the older children helping the younger ones while Mr. Cathers is teaching the middle group. See if you can tell whether Mr. Cathers is wearing a wig or not. The boys and girls always say that he does.

As we leave the red schoolhouse and walk towards Bliwise's General Store, we see on the right, set quite far back from Springfield Road, a little white building that looks like a church. It isn't a church. It is really a very early Mountainside school.

In back of the school is the "Old Swimming Hole" See, there

are some boys swimming there now. It is absolutely off limits for girls.

Across the street from the little white school is a white house. Next to this house is the large Coles Memorial Home. If you listen, you can hear the children playing. They come here every summer from an orphans' home in Newark, New-Jersey.

As we approach the Mountainside Borough Hall, just before we come to Parkway, on the right, we pass three houses. I know that the Lyons family lives in one and the Herrick family lives in another. I do not know the name of the third family.

The families who live on Parkway are the Herters, the Laings, the Edwardses, the Messinas, the Longs, the Hansens, and the Fritzes.

After crossing Parkway, we are at the Mountainside Borough Hall. It houses official business chambers both upstairs and down. Court proceedings are held in the large room on the second floor. All departments of borough government are conducted from this borough hall. Even light fire department equipment is stored here.

Hanging like a swing on the lawn on the west side of the building is the large iron hoop. It looks like a large iron wheel rim without spokes. Always beneath it rests a sledge hammer. If while we are here someone rushes here and strikes the large iron rim many times with the sledge hammer, we will know that there is a fire in Mountainside. That signal, which can be heard for quite a distance, calls the volunteer firemen to duty.

Each fireman comes as quickly as possible. Those firemen in the neighborhood of the fire go directly to the fire. The fireman who arrives first at the Borough Hall, where the fire equipment is housed, mans the fire apparatus, driving equipment and firemen to the location of the fire. The volunteer firemen are truly faithful, dedicated people who perform a noble service for the community.

The business chamber upstairs is large enough for social functions. Each October the social season is started by the Volunteer Fire Department's sponsoring a masquerade dance at the Borough Hall.

On the other side of Springfield Road is the Mountainside Union Chapel, the hub of Mountainside's social life.

If today were Sunday, there would be a morning church service, Sunday school in the afternoon, Christian Endeavor for young people early in the evening, and an evening church service.

The sound of the church bell calling Mountainsiders to the services is music to their ears. The sound of the bell, too, can be heard quite a distance.

This is the approximate Mountainside Union Chapel special schedule:

New Year's Eve--a Watch Night Service

Palm Sunday--special planned services

Easter--special planned services

Children's Day (in June) Each child performs. It is promotion day.

June (after school closes)--Congregational picnic at Silver Lake (includes swimming)

July or August--Sunday School Excursion to Asbury Park by train from the Westfield Railroad Station. Most of us take picnic lunches and bathing suits.

September--Rally Day. Each child performs.

Thanksgiving--special services. Families bring food canned, etc., to be given to needy people and the Children's Homes in Mountainside.

Christmas--special services.

Children's Christmas party--held on a weekday night between Christmas and New Year's Day. Each child performs and receives a gift.

Again, if it were Sunday, police officer Boynton, or one of the force, would be out in the middle of Springfield Road operating the temporary removable turnstile stop-and-go signal. Traffic has to be halted in both directions for people to cross the street to get to church. Springfield Road is a two-lane road.

Let's go into Schoonover's on the corner before we cross Mountain Avenue to get to Bliwise's General Store. Schoonover's building is part living quarters, part taxi business office, part quick check hardware store (handling small and light hardware items), and part sub-station post office.

If you do not live along the rural delivery mail route out of the Westfield Post Office, you have to come to Schoonover's to pick up your mail. The Westfield Post Office leaves the mail here.

Mr. Charles Roff, who lives with his wife and son Firman in the small house across from where Central Avenue meets Springfield Road, performs this service for the Westfield Post Office. Mr. Roff rides a bicycle to the Westfield Post Office, picks up the designated mail, and brings it here to Schoonover's sub-station at the corner of Mountain Avenue and Springfield Road in Mountainside.

You can see as we leave the post office sub-station that Mr. Schoonover has his taxi parked on the Mountain Avenue side of the building. At train time in Westfield he is usually at the railroad station ready to serve folks who need a taxi. With so few people having automobiles, Mr. Schoonover has a very successful business.

That young lady who is picking up the small packages that have just been delivered to Bliwise's store across the street is Mrs. Bliwise's sister, Eva. Eva works in the store during the week and goes home on weekends.

Before we mount the steps into Bliwise's Store, let's watch Mr. Bliwise hand crank the amount of gasoline his customer wants put into his car.

Two steps up and we are inside the store. As you can see, the store contains a wide variety of merchandise. Its largest numbers of products are foods. The store is open 7 days a week. Quite often young folks meet and socialize outside of the store.

We are on the last lap of our walking tour. We have to walk up Mountain Avenue to New Providence Road. As we leave Bliwise's General Store, we'll pass one white house, Hodges'

house on our left and two houses on our right, the Hambackers' and the Warings', before we come to Parkway.

After we cross Parkway, we pass Murphys' house on the right. On the left, where Parkway meets Mountain Avenue, is the Watts' home, another white house. As we start climbing the incline of Mountain Avenue, we pass Groths' house on the left.

Now we are at the Nolte's Welding Shop, Bill Meyer's Store and the Noltes' residence.

Across from the welding shop, right over there, is an old house with a low, white picket fence across the front of the property. I thought we would see Mr. Smith, the man who lives here. He is usually sitting outside in a Morris chair covered with a blanket. He is not a well man. He speaks with a British accent. He must have an income because although he is unable to work, he seems to have everything he needs and can afford a full-time registered nurse. His nurse's name is Miss Naomi Ifill.

If I were on my way to Bliwise's store now and Miss Ifill needed bread or milk or some other necessary item, she would call to me so that I could bring to her the things she has listed.

Up a way, on the left, is the Doyle home, almost opposite the driveway leading up the hill to the Platt, Peckham, Ivanoski, and Lindberg houses.

The piano sounds of Rachmaninoff's Prelude are coming

from the Ivanoski home. Mr. Ivanoski's friend, Mr. Paderewski, is visiting again. As we hear this great artist's music, we are arriving at the place from whence we started, "Bird's Corner."

I hope you have enjoyed your 1920 walking tour. Perhaps we can tour more of Mountainside another time. And now, before we all disperse, I have one question I would like to ask you: Aren't you glad you wore your walking shoes?

Harriet Wentlandt Carmichael

Footnotes

1. The Central Jersey Bank and Trust Company. The red brick bank on Mountain Avenue and its property is where the Beaman house stood and the adjacent Palmer house. Cole's house was where the Central Jersey Bank and Trust Company's Mountain Avenue parking lot driveway is.
2. Maxwell's Store is where O'Donnell's house was.
3. There is a gas station--auto repair garage at the corner of Woodland Avenue and Mountain Avenue where the Clark house stood.
4. The tent was pitched where the Friendly is.
5. The Beaman Blacksmith Shop was in the parking lot directly in back of the Mountainside Pharmacy, which is at the Mountain Avenue, New Providence Road corner. The blacksmith shop was almost across from the barn.
6. The barn is now the Book Barn.
7. The Children's Country Home for underprivileged and crippled children is now the Children's Specialized Hospital.
8. Springfield Road is now Highway 22.
9. The first house on New Providence Road, built in 1818, is now the real estate office of Barrett and Crain, Inc.
10. The red brick Mountainside Public School is now the offices of the Mountainside Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools.

11. The little white schoolhouse in front of "The Old Swimmin' Hole" on Springfield Road is now the Christian Science Church near the corner of Midway Place and Park Avenue in Fanwood. It was purchased by a Fanwood group and moved there in the 1930's.
12. The Mountainside Community Pool is in the area of the "Old Swimmin' Hole."
13. The Mountainside Borough Hall is now the office of Gene M. Lord Insurance Agency.
14. The Bliwise General store is now the Bliwise Liquor Store. It was moved across the street where Schoonover's dwelling, taxi office, light hardware store and post office substation building was.
15. Silver Lake was renamed Surprise Lake by the Union County Park Commission.
16. The Mountainside Union Chapel is vacant and owned by the State of New Jersey Transportation Department. It is now the Mountainside Gospel Chapel at 1180 Spruce Drive.