

THE BLAUVELT NEWS

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The Mansion on the Hill



Can It Be Saved?

This well known landmark in Oradell, New Jersey is in jeopardy. It is feared that it will be sold, knocked down and the land subdivided. This home was originally built in 1896 for Kimball Chase Atwood, a native of Buckfield, Maine. In 1872, at age 10, he came to this area to make his fortune, which he did. His only son, Kimball Chase Atwood, Jr. was born in 1892 in Clifton, New Jersey. The mansion was designed by the noted architect, Fred W. Wentworth of Paterson, New Jersey.

Atwood raised harness race horses on the estate he named "Northland." He drove them as amateur gentleman racer. He made his fortune by founding the Preferred Accident Insurance Company of New York. His pioneering innovation in the insurance industry was paying out for lost hands, feet, limbs or eyes.

He was also involved in overseas shipping from the East and West coasts. In 1895, he started to develop what would become the largest grapefruit grove in the world and is thought to be the father of the Florida grapefruit industry. He introduced grapefruit across the United States and pink grapefruit was discovered in his grove.

Atwood sold the house to a local man named Lozier in 1917, who in turn sold it to Hiram Blauvelt. Hiram, an ABD President from 1933 - 1935, lived in

this 14,000 square foot home on 4½ acres until his death in 1957. Hiram called his home "Bluefield." The house remained empty for twenty years.

Hiram's wife, Claire, who worked with the Blauvelt-



Hiram Bellis Demarest Blauvelt holds two pieces of a large collection of curios he gathered traveling 30,000 miles in Africa as liaison officer for the British-American Ambulance Corps.

Demarest Foundation, donated a large section of the land, a caretaker's cottage and the stables to the Foundation to establish the Blauvelt Wildlife Art Museum which includes artifacts from Hiram's hunting adventures. This fascinating museum now focuses on artwork representing wild life.

*Please see **Mansion** on Page 60*

Mansion from Page 49

The Blauvelt Mansion entertained many well known celebrities such as Gloria Swanson, and Tom Mix.

The home was sold to Raymond and Betty Wells in 1979 for \$225,00. "People offered twice as much, to turn it into a restaurant," said Wells. "Someone else wanted to subdivide the lot and build thirteen new homes. But the Blauvelt-Demarest Foundation sold to us because we offered to keep it as one residence." Ray operated his architectural firm from one wing of the home. The Wells family is a large family. They have six children and fourteen grandchildren, so they certainly made good use of the twenty-four room house. Shown is one of the nine bedrooms in the house. The house is a superbly maintained Victorian



Courtesy of The Sunday Record

mansion, complete with an awesome double stairway leading to the second floor, two fireplaces on the first



Courtesy of The Sunday Record

level, a stone porch and beautiful woodwork. The kitchen cupboards line the walls of the butler's pantry.



Courtesy of The Sunday Record

Ray Wells' son, Jeffrey and wife Bonnie, then bought the house from his parents. They are now looking to sell it as they would like to downsize at this point in their lives. The home is on the market for \$2.5 million.

It is hard to believe that in this many years the Mansion has not been listed on the Historic Register. Most of our membership is very familiar with Hiram Bellis Demarest Blauvelt, ABD Member #201. He was one of Bergen County's most prominent residents. He was a past president of the Bergen County Historical Society, Hackensack Valley Civic Music Association and the Holland Society of New York. He was a life member of The National Geographic Society, the Hackensack B. P. O. E., the Explorers Club, the Overseas Press Club of America and the Sons of the American Revolution as well as many other distinguished organizations.

He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa at Princeton University, class of 1920. He also attended Oxford University in England.

He was president of the Comfort Coal-Lumber Company of Hackensack and the Demarest Foundation. He was a trustee of Fairleigh Dickenson University and a director of the Hackensack Trust Company and New Jersey and New York Railroad.

While serving as liaison officer during World War II, he became close friends with Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, and with General Jan Smuts of South Africa. He also served a dual role with the British troops in the ambulance corps and as a foreign newspaper correspondent with the Herald Tribune.

He was a notorious big game hunter. Many of his prized hunting trophies and collections are exhibited at the Blauvelt Wildlife Art Museum in Oradell.

Bonnie and Jeff Wells have said they will not sell to anyone planning to tear down this historical mansion. Staying to this objective has been difficult as considerable costly exterior renovations are needed. Hotel developers have attempted to purchase the property and even someone who wanted to build a mosque, but the mansion would have been destroyed, so, no sale. Currently several options are being considered. There is a controversial proposal to build a sixty-eight bed nursing home facility in

front of the mansion specializing in Alzheimer's Disease. There is strong opposition to this from an active local citizens group for fear that the residential nature of the neighborhood will be compromised.

The best option has come to our attention from Jim Bellis, ABD Member #2471 and Executive Director of the Blauvelt-Demarest Foundation, that Bergen County is thinking of purchasing the mansion and land with the intention of housing the Bergen County Historical Society there. We think this would be a tremendous asset to the community and all of Bergen County.

Since the devastating floods from last year's Spring "Nor'easter," the Bergen County Historical Society has been seeking a safe museum environment where they can professionally preserve, research and exhibit their entire Bergen County Dutch collection of over three thousand artifacts, not including documents, for public viewing.

We would like to encourage all members of the ABD and especially those residing in Bergen County to contact the County officials to support this matter.



What a wonderful compliment these two adjacent properties would be for the entire Bergen County community and all the Tappan area.

Please make your voices heard and your opinion known. Don't allow this opportunity to save this historic site to slip through the cracks. Help to preserve the rich history of both Bergen County and the Blauvelt Family.

By Doris and George Blauvelt

Please Help Save Our Beloved Mansion on the Hill!

Call or write to:

The County Executive
Dennis McNerney
(201) 336 - 7300

One Bergen County Plaza
Floor 5, Room 580
Hackensack, NJ 07601



Left to right: Hiram B. D. Blauvelt, representative in Africa of the British American Ambulance Corps of New York; the Crown Prince of Ethiopia; the Duke Harrar, and two secretaries. holding an autographed portrait of Emperor Hallie Selassie and a Coptic cross of ancient design. Photo taken in Abyssinia.

