

## My Years in Short Hills

By Alexander Farnham

What prompted me to write the following was a review I wrote of Thomas J. Collins' book about the artist William Rowell Derrick (1857-1941), who during his thirty-five year friendship with Stewart Hartshorn visited Short Hills annually and painted numerous canvasses of the area.



(Alexander Farnham in 1943 at rear of 24 Hillside,SH)

Short Hills was home to me for the first twenty-seven years of my life, and it was a wonderful place in which to have grown up. During my early years the town was far less built up than it is today, with sections where one could walk considerable distances without seeing a single dwelling. My family lived in a red brick house at 24 Hillside Avenue, almost a mile from Millburn Center, to which I often walked to spend my weekly dime allowance buying comic books and attending Sunday afternoon moving picture shows. Both the Millburn and Short Hills railroad stations were about a mile from my house and I spent many an hour watching steam locomotives pulling trains in and out of the stations. My sister, Susan, and I would roller skate down to the Short Hills station where we would skate in the tunnel under the tracks.

Year round we found things to do for entertainment, but during our summers we spent most of the time at the Short Hills Club swimming in the pond, which in earlier years was a clay pit. There was a stone structure just

below the surface of the pond and we would often swim between the window bars even though we feared getting stuck. One day, when through swimming and on my way home, I noticed an elderly gentleman sitting among the birches at the edge of the pond, painting a picture. Since I had ambitions of becoming an artist, I stood fascinated watching him work. In 1946 I met that gentleman at an exhibition of his paintings at the Paper Mill Playhouse. He was Edward Dufner (1872-1957), one of America's leading impressionists. He and Mrs. Dufner invited me to visit them at their house at 16 Wyndham Road in Short Hills. The Dufners and I became close friends and I visited them often, gaining a great deal of valuable knowledge about painting and drawing from our conversations. Despite the difference in our ages, Edward Dufner and I had many things in common. Though some fifty years apart, we had both attended the George Bridgman and Frank Vincent DuMond (1865-1951) classes at the Art Students' League of New York. Both of us were members of the Salmagundi Club and The National Arts Club in New York. Our paintings were exhibited in one-man shows at both the Paper Mill Playhouse and Silbersher's Inc, 304 Millburn Avenue, where for many years our work was hung. One of Edward Dufner's finest paintings was donated by him to the Millburn Library, where I believe it still hangs over the fireplace in the lounge. (Editor's note: The fireplace was in the old library, but that

painting, and another by Dufner, can be seen at the present library. Beautiful pictures of both can also be seen through the library's Web site at <http://www.millburn.lib.nj.us/> Click on "About Us", then "Library History" on the next screen, then the names of the paintings, "Around the Fire" and "Mother and Children in a Meadow" in the text.)

I was an early member of the Millburn-Short Hills Art Center and for many years was on their board of directors and taught classes for them. Among the members was Miss Cora Hartshorn, whose family for many years welcomed William Rowell Derrick and his wife into their household during the warmer months. Early in my career, Miss Hartshorn purchased one of my paintings and I spent part of an afternoon discussing art with her. As far as I can remember, Derrick's name never came up in our conversation, so until I read Thomas Collins' book about the artist, I was unaware of how many of our experiences were similar. We both were in the Bridgman anatomy class, he in 1898 and I in 1942. We exhibited in many of the same galleries and museums, though some years apart, and our paintings are included in the permanent collections of the National Arts Club in New York and Newark Museum in New Jersey. Among the scenes we both selected to paint were the landscapes of Pownal, Vermont and those of Short Hills, including the North Pond.

Few places that Edward Dufner, William Derrick, or I could have chosen to paint would have been as pleasant or peaceful as we found in the Millburn-Short Hills area.

## Recent Acquisitions

The society is very grateful to receive local artifacts and memorabilia from generous residents and/or members. We are happy to be able to preserve, share and use for reference these relics of Millburn-Short Hills history.

As we develop our registration sheets (to record donations), we may have forgotten to include a donation here, so please contact us and tell us if we neglected to include your donation. We need the information for our records in addition to making sure we don't forget to thank you! Our sincerest thanks to the following people for enriching the lives of all residents by their donations:

- From Betty Cunliffe, courtesy of Owen Lampe, 1928 Millburn High School Father/Son event program
- From Nancy Armstrong Wick of Bryan, TX, 1937 Wyoming Hi-Ho Review program
- From Gail Engelschjon, 1950s Short Hills Pack One cub scout uniform and Gruning's bag
- From Community Congregational Church, box of "Looking into Millburn-Short Hills" posters and books of local, historic interest
- From Larry Smith and Tom Schaeffer of Short Hills Citgo, memorabilia from Short Hills Exxon/Citgo and the station's 1916 brass cash register.
- From James Land, box of historical society memorabilia
- From David Ehrlich (of the family who owned The Clothes Horse), Wyoming School memorabilia
- From James and Judy Adams, twelve reprint maps done by the Racquets Club and assorted other photocopies of early maps



## The Romance and Tragedy of a Widely Known Business Man of New York (Part Two)

*In the last edition of the Thistle, William Ingraham Russell's life in Short Hills in the 1880s was introduced through his book "The Romance and Tragedy of a Widely Known Business Man of New York", in which he recalls his prosperous business ventures, followed by darker days, when he felt his Short Hills friends abandoned him. At the point at which part one ended, the Russells had purchased "Sunnyside", the house which they had been renting, at 39 Knollwood Road. As his business and family thrived, Mr. Russell began to consider building a larger home in Short Hills:*

"So successful was the business from the start that with the help of those last two months of the year my income in 1880 was twenty-one thousand dollars, and this notwithstanding the fact that I had lost two months through my illness. It was really the result of but ten months' business.

On the ninth of November when I returned from the city it was to find that our family circle had again widened, and at "Sunnyside" all hearts were open in joyful greeting to another little girl.

My wife as she returned my caress and exhibited to me this fourth jewel in her crown, noticed that I was agitated, and with a smile and the intention of calming me with a joke, said, "Darling, are not two pair a pretty good hand?" we neither of us play poker, but I could appreciate the joke.

What a joyful holiday season we had that year! As we drank at our Christmas dinner a toast to the health, happiness, and prosperity of all our friends, we felt that we ourselves were getting our full share.

My wife, beloved by all, had become a sort of Lady Bountiful to the poor of a neighboring village, and the thought of the many others we had made happy that day added zest to our pleasure."

In Chapter XVI, Russell considers the necessity of moving into a larger home in Short Hills:

"Sunnyside" had become too small for us. Our life had been so happy there we could not bear to think of leaving it. I had an architect look the house over and prepare plans for an extensive addition.

This was done, though he strongly disadvised it. I could not but admit the force of his argument that it was foolish, regarded from an investment point of view, to expend on the place the amount I contemplated. Far better to sell and build a new house was his opinion.

Then we talked of moving the house to another plot and building on the old site. To this there were two objections. The site was not suitable for the style of house I wanted and there was too little land, with no opportunity to add to it as the land on either side was already occupied.

The matter was settled by the appearance of a buyer for "Sunnyside," at a price that paid me a fair profit, and I made the sale subject to possession being given when the new house was completed.

Within a stone's throw of "Sunnyside" was a plot of land, a little less than two acres in extent, that we had always admired. I bought the land for five thousand dollars and the architect commenced at once on the plans.

We thought that the new house was to be our home for the rest of our days and naturally the greatest interest was taken in every detail. The first plans submitted were satisfactory, after a few minor changes, and ground was broken on. July 2, 1881. How we watched the progress.

From the time the first shovelful of earth was taken out for the excavations until the last work was finished, not a day passed that we did not go over it all.

"Redstone," taking its name from the red sandstone of which it was built, was and is today a fine example of the architecture then so much in vogue for country houses.

The Matthews house on Riverside Drive, New York City, so much admired, was designed by the same architect and modelled after it.

Standing on a hill its three massive outside chimneys support a roof of graceful outlines and generous proportions. From the three second-story balconies one gets views near and distant of a beautiful country. The fourteen-foot wide piazza on the first floor, extending across the front and around the tower, with its stone porte cochere and

entrance arch is most inviting. With grounds tastefully laid out, driveways with their white-stone paved gutters, cut-stone steps to the terraces, great trees and handsome shrubs the place was a delight to the eye, and at the time of which I write there was nothing to compare with it in that section.

Through a massive doorway one enters a hall of baronial character, thirty-three feet long, eighteen feet wide and twenty-one feet high, finished in oak with open beam ceilings and above the high wainscot a rough wall in Pompeian red.

Two features of the hall are the great stone fireplace with its old-fashioned crane and huge wrought iron andirons and the stained glass window on the staircase, a life-sized figure of a "Knight of Old." This hall was illustrated in Appleton's work on "Artistic Interiors."

On the right is the spacious drawing-room in San Domingo mahogany and rich decorations in old rose and gold, and back of it the large library in black walnut with its beautifully carved mantel and numerous low book-cases. Then came the dining-room in oak and Japanese leather and a fountain in which the gold fish sported---but enough of description. This was our home and when we had completed the appointments they were tasteful and in keeping.

We moved in on April 28, 1882. Here then we were settled for life, so we said. If a new painting was hung or a piece of marble set up we had the thought it was there to remain.

We loved the house and everything in it. We loved the friends we had made. Our life was all that we would have it-peaceful, happy, contented."

In the next chapter, Russell begins to crack open the door into his distress for what he felt was betrayal by his former friends, as he introduces some of his Knollwood neighbors:

"When we moved to "Redstone" we had been residents of "Knollwood" three years, long enough to become thoroughly acquainted with the characteristics of each individual in our social circle. While with all our relations were cordial, it is essential in this narrative to refer only to the three families with which we formed a close friendship. These were the

Woods, Lawtons, and the new owners of "Sunnyside," the Slaters. Frank Slater was a partner of Mr. Wood. Without exception he was the most attractive man I have ever met. Possessing in a high degree every attribute of a true gentleman, he had withal a genial, winning way that was peculiarly his own and made everyone who knew him his friend. We were drawn to each other at once and soon became most intimate. His wife, a woman charming in every way, became my wife's intimate friend. Charlie Wood was rather a queer combination. That we were fond of him and he of us there is no doubt, but he was a man of moods. Intellectual, a good talker, and an unusually fine vocalist, his society as a rule was very enjoyable, but there were times when in a certain mood he was neither a, pleasant nor cheerful companion.

Perhaps a remark which he made to me one day at "Sunnyside" will show better than anything I can write the true inwardness of the man.

We were discussing some business affair of his, over which he was feeling blue. I was trying to cheer him up, when he said, "I tell you, Walter, I could be perfectly contented and happy, no matter how little money I had, if everybody around me had just a little less."

Mrs. Wood was the least attractive of the ladies, not in appearance, for she was regarded as a pretty woman; but in her the spirit of envy and selfishness was too well developed to make her lovable to her friends.

George Lawton, a jolly, good-natured fellow, was liked by everybody, and his wife, a pleasant, cheerful, good-hearted little woman, was equally popular.

The Lawtons were the least prosperous of any of our little circle. George was always just a little behind in his finances, but so constituted that this did not worry him.

The time will come in this narrative when the author will be upon the defensive and he deems it necessary that his readers should fully understand certain relations existing within this circle of friends, even though, that they shall do so, he is compelled to violate the scriptural injunction, "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."\*

(\*Under ordinary conditions the author would never think of advertising to the world the good that he has done. Before the conclusion of this narrative there will be much that is far removed from the ordinary. Errors to atone for, misunderstandings to explain, false innuendoes and charges to

indignantly deny and disprove. It is the narrative of a life and the good in that life is certainly a part of it. In later chapters, when certain matters are set forth, my readers will be good enough to bear this in mind.)

The Woods and Lawtons came to Knollwood together. They were intimate friends before that time. Not one detail of the affairs or life of one but was known to the other. It was the same as one family only under two roofs.

George Lawton was always in need of money. His expenditures exceeded his earnings year after year and he borrowed to make up the deficiency. Wood was as well able as I to loan him the money and as a closer and an older friend should have been the one to do it.

On the train one day, when sitting together he said to me, "Walter, how much does George owe you?" To which I replied, "Oh, a small matter." It was at that time nearly six hundred dollars. "Well," he said, "I am glad you can help him out, but he don't get into me more than two hundred dollars; that's the limit, for I doubt if he ever pays it back."

I went on with my loans just the same, and when, some years later, the family left Knollwood he owed me more than two thousand dollars that had been borrowed in small amounts.

At one time George was fortunate in getting an interest in a patent motor for use on sewing machines. He told Wood all about it and of one weak feature in connection with the battery, which, however, he thought was about overcome.

Without telling George, Wood at a small expense employed a man who succeeded in perfecting the battery, then going to George, said: "You cannot use your motor without my battery. I will turn it over to you for half your interest."

There was no escape, and though George made some thousands out of his interest his profits were cut in half by the shrewdness of his friend. He never said much about it, but his mother, who resided with him, was very outspoken on the subject.

In 1883, in connection with my business, I established a trade journal. After running it a few years I could no longer spare the time. It was then paying about eighteen hundred

dollars a year profit and was capable of doing better. I offered it to George Lawton, telling him if he ever felt he could pay me a thousand dollars for it, to do so.

The day I turned it over to him I gave him a few hundred dollars, remittances for advertising received that morning. In a few years he sold the paper, and in one way and another he secured twelve thousand to fifteen thousand dollars out of it.

He never paid me one dollar for the property, nor did I demand it of him."

*The story of the Russells' stay in Short Hills will continue in the next edition of the Thistle, when their famous party in the barn is described by him, as well as their eventual move from Redstone.*

*Redstone, which is no longer standing, was at Wells Lane and Knollwood Road. It succumbed to fire in 1934.*

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING REMINDER

ON FRIDAY, JUNE 8<sup>TH</sup> AT 7:00 PM  
AT THE SHORT HILLS CLUB  
OUR GUEST SPEAKER WILL BE

NEWARK HISTORIAN  
**CHARLES F. CUMMINGS**

INTRODUCING

**"NEWARK: OLD AND NEW"**  
The glory of old Newark and  
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Light refreshments  
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### Searching for...

The historical society regularly gets requests for information related to Millburn and Short Hills. It is hoped that some of our readers may also have information about the queries. If you do, please call 564-9519 and we'll pass on the information...

**Meeker** – R. Craig Kemmerer wrote to the society: "Dr. Lewis E. Meeker (1851 - 1918) was a famous Meeker genealogist who spent more than 40 years accumulating Meeker information. Upon his death in Brooklyn, NY, it was found that the whereabouts of his collections was unknown. This past summer, while doing research at Alexander Library at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, I uncovered, in the Charles Henry Meeker collection (belonging to the Genealogical Society of NJ) of more than 45 years of Meeker correspondence, letters dated in 1940, that a lady from Short Hills, NJ DAR chapter had discovered Dr. L.E. Meeker's collection in the attic of a descendant and, with their permission, was copying the entire collection for historical preservation. I checked with DAR archives for the entire state of NJ in the Alexander library and they have nothing of Dr. L. Meeker. The Short Hills DAR chapter is disbanded and their information is at Rutgers in the collections that I surveyed. National DAR in Washington, DC has no Dr. Meeker collection or data. A great granddaughter of Dr. Meeker's, who is very interested in genealogy, has no knowledge of what happened to the collections. Does anyone have any clue as to the information and/or other descendants of Dr. Meeker?"



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