

The story of ‘**THE MANSION-Florham,**’ the centerpiece of the Florham-Madison Campus of Fairleigh Dickinson University, youngest of the three campuses, began over 120 years ago. The name given to the estate by its original owners is a combination of both their first names: Florence and Hamilton Twombly. The estate’s owners were Heiress Florence Adele Vanderbilt, favored granddaughter of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, renowned as one of the richest tycoons in America and her husband financier Hamilton McKown Twombly, a member of an old New England family. The area’s exclusive atmosphere of “Millionaires Row” and the rural charm of Morris County countryside appealed to them. They married in 1877 and had four children, three girls and one son.

## Historic Landscape and Architecture

In 1890 the couple purchased 1,200 acres to fulfill their dream of a fancied English-style country mansion in a stately part setting. *Florham*, one of the America’s finest Gilded Age homes was the result. The foremost landscape architect of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Frederick Law Olmsted, designer of New York’s Central Park, was commissioned to transform about 150 acres into a park of lawn, terraces and formal gardens with fountain behind *The Mansion* and the Italian Gardens with pergolas and parterre alongside the *Mansion*. In 1894 they commissioned the renowned architectural New York firm of McKim, Mead with their partner, the flamboyant Stanford White, the architects of many neo-Gothic and Renaissance structures in America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to design *The Mansion*.

*The Mansion’s* brick trimmed with Indiana limestone originally contained 110-rooms, 23 bathrooms and many fireplaces, was completed in 1897. Its Georgian Revival design, inspired by the Christopher Wren’s wing of Henry VIII’s Hampton Court Palace, was sited to overlook the 150 acre park and nearby valley. Most of its interior decorations (such as staircases, columns, floors and fireplaces) are in Italian Carrara marble, by Italian immigrant craftsmen (600). Thomas Edison, a friend of Hamilton, designed the heating system. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *The Mansion*, centerpiece of the park, was one of the great houses of America with the grounds laid out like those of an English country estate, employing 125 servants including grounds keepers with 25 living in *The Mansion*.

The Twombly’s resided at ‘*Florham*’ during the spring and early Fall, spending the summer in their other homes in Newport, Rhode Island, and the winter in New York City. The greater part of this estate, over 900 acres behind the Mansion, was developed into a working farm and 18 hole mini golf course. *The Farm* where Hamilton raised a world-renowned herd of Guernsey cattle, extended across what is now Park Avenue and where currently the Exxon Research Center, BASF headquarters and the New Jersey Jets’ Training Park are located. The town of Florham Park took its name from the estate.

## ‘Florham,’ The Court of a Country Society Led by Mrs. Twombly

In its early years *The Mansion-Florham* was the epitome of architectural splendor and the undisputed center of the Morris County’s social life of not less than 200 millionaires. This represented the ‘Golden age’ of bygone days of the ‘Great Gatsby era’ in which the Twombly’s represented wealth and power.

Florence Vanderbilt Twombly’s passing in 1952 at the age of 98 was acknowledged by social commentators as the uncrowned dowager queen of American society. She held America’s last Court for three quarters of a century, considering herself the ‘real’ Mrs. Vanderbilt, and as such reigned as *grande dame* of the family. She upheld the Vanderbilt legacy through two World Wars and two depressions. Her death was noted as the last great lady of New York’s old ‘Four Hundred,’ and the final passing of the ‘Old Order.’ Hamilton died much earlier, 1910 at age 60, grief stricken shortly after deaths of his only son in 1906 and a daughter in 1896. In 1953 the splendor of *Florham*, and its Vanderbilt mystique ended as the Twombly home when the unmarried daughter died and *The Mansion’s* lavish contents were sold at public auction in 1955.

## FDU Purchases its Third Campus -Florham

Florham Park solidified its reputation as a college town when Fairleigh Dickinson University purchased 187 acres in 1958, including the splendid *Mansion* and related buildings; the academic campus opened in the same year after the original Rutherford purchase in 1942 by Dr. Peter Sanmartino who became the first Dean, then Teaneck. The College at Florham bridges the towns of Florham Park and Madison.

In the *Images of America* series, historian John Cunningham refers to the Mansion as “the most opulent ‘old main’ in higher education history.” FDU has replicated its historical architectural designs in its newer added facilities carefully sited to preserve specimen trees and original vistas of *The Mansion*. In 1957, 650 acres of the Twombly *Farm* was purchased by Esso Research and Engineering Company.

## The Mansion Today

*The Mansion’s* magnificence faded, the current 100 rooms and its outer buildings were converted to academic purposes to meet today’s needs of the University. *The Mansion’s* first floor now houses the administrative offices of the President, Provost and other Deans’ offices. The Great Hall with marble ionic columns capped in gold leaf on marble tiled floor remains. The chestnut-paneled Hartman Lounge (former billiard room), Sullivan Lounge (family breakfast room) and Lenfell Hall, centerpiece of *The Mansion* (ballroom and drawing room) accommodates 240 people, is now used for meetings and special events. The second floor contains classrooms, lounges and other formal meeting rooms. The Basement, contained the main kitchen, food storage and servants’ lounge, now has administrative offices. The Outbuildings included an Orangerie (now the Monninger Center with Library and auditorium), greenhouses, gate lodge at the Main Gate (Credit Union), and Carriage House (Science Building) are alive for University activity.

## The Restoration of The Mansion by Friends of Florham and FDU

The recognition of the historical significance of *The Mansion* began with its restoration starting in 1994 and continues to the present by the organization of the *Friends of Florham* in conjunction with the University. Lenfell Hall, was renovated in 1999, The Great Hall of the grand McKim interior was restored in 2001 to reflect its former elegance and offers a striking “first impression” of the mansion and university. Later in 2004, family paintings were cleaned and rehung in Lenfell Hall. The Hartman Lounge, 2012. Its mahogany-paneled walls and moldings were enhanced with new blue and red draperies, Chippendale-style sofas and Persian-style carpet. The herringbone floors, an element in McKim, Mead and White’s work, were left partially uncovered. Their drawings were re-matted in navy and mounted on the walls, calling attention to the history of the room. Italian Garden, located on the side of the Mansion, was restored in 1998

...Joan Del Giudice compiled this history from several of FDU’s links and *Friends of Florham* book “*Florham –The Lives of an American Estate*” available online and FDU’s Library.

## From OAF website

### Opera at Florham in residence at Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, NJ

“Opera at Florham (OAF),” founded in 1982 at the College of Florham, Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, NJ, Campus, was initially an extension of its Music Department under the guidance of its Chair, Charles Del Rosso. In addition to providing Musicales in the lovely drawing room, Lenfell Hall, in The Mansion, OAF also performed two Operas annually during those early years at the Campus Theater, Dreyfuss. These Operas involved FDU students in singing roles and as members of the orchestra performing alongside professional artists, locally and from NYC opera houses. Later, OAF became a separate, incorporated, non-profit, 501 c 3 organization in residence at the University. Over the years, OAF has garnered a reputation of providing stellar operatic and other musical performances. Currently, OAF presents four Musicales annually, concerts, the annual Violetta DuPont Vocal competition and an Opera. (is honored and privileged to be continued in residence at FDU, Madison, NJ and perform its Musicales in Lenfell Hall.) Since the OAF’s Company’s inception in 1982, Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, NJ, has provided office, meeting and performance space in Lenfell Hall in the Mansion, and Opera performances in Dreyfuss Theater, in addition to numerous other support services.

### Hennessy Hall (The Mansion)

The Mansion (Hennessy Hall), the centerpiece of the campus, is a 100 room Georgian-style masterpiece designed in the 1890’s by the noted architectural firm of Charles McKim and William Mead with their partner, the flamboyant Stanford White. It was completed in 1897 and became one of America’s finest Gilded Age homes as a result. Most its interior decorations (such as staircases and fireplaces) are in Italian marble, worked by Italian craftsmen. The Mansion also holds the chestnut-paneled Hartman Lounge (the former billiard room) and Lenfell Hall, then a ballroom and drawing room, now used for meetings and special events. Today, Hennessy Hall contains classrooms and administrative offices.

Frederick Law Olmstead, the designer of New York City’s Central Park, created the 100 acre Italian gardens surrounding The Mansion. The Mansion, its gardens and surrounding historic buildings are being preserved through the fund raising efforts of the volunteer organization, **Friends of Florham**, who assist the University officials in restoring and preserving historic elements of the campus.

The original owners of the Estate, Florence Vanderbilt, the granddaughter of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, renowned as the richest man in America, and her husband, financier Hamilton McKown Twombly, named the estate “Florham” as a combination of their first names, Florence and Hamilton.

### Fairleigh Dickinson University

In 1942, Dr. Peter Sanmartino and his wife, Sylvia, founded Fairleigh Dickinson University (FDU), and named it for its early benefactor, Fairleigh S. Dickinson. Dr. Sanmartino remained as its Chancellor until his retirement, 1967, and served as honorary chancellor until his death in 1992. In 1958, FDU purchased 187 acres of the property from Esso Research, including The Mansion and related buildings, for its Madison campus, now the College at Florham, which opened that fall.

For more information about FDU and The Mansion, go to [FDU.edu](http://FDU.edu) to get more details about the history of FDU.

## The History of The Mansion

‘Florham,’



## A Masterpiece of the Gilded Age