

# IN MONTCLAIR'S MIDST

By FLORENCE WHITFIELD

## Francis A. Nelson

The Montclair of 1934 is not the Montclair that Francis A. Nelson came to in 1913—that much is certain. And it is also certain that the Francis A. Nelson who came to Montclair in 1913 has not been sitting back with folded hands, watching the town grow. He has, rather, lent an artistic and capable hand to its growth, and among the architectural achievements of a long and successful career he lists such local public buildings as the Upper Montclair Woman's Club, the Montclair Free Public Library, the Upper Montclair Post Office, St. James Church, and a private residence on Park Street, a Georgian brick house, of which he is especially proud.

Mr. Nelson was born in Honolulu, the son of a navy medical director. He came to the United States (Maryland) when he was one month old. He was educated at St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire, and Columbia University. After his graduation from the School of Architecture of Columbia University, he went to Paris, where he attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. While there he was awarded the Columbia University McKim Fellowship upon which he traveled extensively through England, France, Spain and Italy, making drawings and studies of various types of architecture.

In 1906 he returned to New York City with the "Architect Diplome par le Gouvernement Francaise" tucked away in his steamer trunk along with some exquisitely executed water color sketches of architectural subjects which today hang in his living room, a tell-tale date, 1900, neatly pencilled in their lower right hand corners. Of these, Mr. Nelson mur-



FRANCIS A. NELSON

—murs—lightly, with characteristic modesty, "a few small things done during my student days in Paris."

### The Columbia Plates.

Directly after he returned from Paris Mr. Nelson formed the partnership of Nelson and Van Wagoner, and opened offices in New York City. He was instructor in design at the School of Architecture of Columbia University from 1906 to 1915. Two years ago the Alumni Federation of Columbia requested him to act as chairman of a committee to design a plate for exclusive sale by the federation.

"We went back to the old Staffordshire plate for inspiration," said Mr. Nelson, "designing twelve plates and using a different view of the university for the center of each. The orders, however, were all alike, depicting the three sites of Columbia—King's College, Columbia College and the present university. The plates were manufactured by Wedgwood and I was sent to England to super-

vised the work. We sold over 3,000 dozen and the plates of the first edition were signed by Nicholas Murray Butler."

And it is the conclusion of one who has many times served as committee chairman that the plate was designed actually by Mr. Nelson, without benefit of committee, and that the "we" of his statement is but further evidence of the aforementioned Nelson modesty.

### Building for the Future.

As chairman of the Citizen's Committee of the Town Planning Board of Montclair, Mr. Nelson has this to say about town planning:

"I believe distinctly in the value of town planning. It works out for economy and will be of real advantage in the future. It is hard, perhaps, to appreciate its value as it is going along, but the benefit to future generations is incalculable. It is a board that every town should have.

At present there is a great interest throughout the country in that sort of thing and I am happy to see it."

### Spare Moments.

When he is not bent intently over a T-square with compasses and sharply pointed pencils at his finger tips, Mr. Nelson goes in for "light reading," boating, golf and tennis. He has reconstructed two early American houses at Saybrook, Connecticut, where he and Mrs. Nelson, a son and a daughter, do much of their vacationing.

Mr. Nelson is a member of the American Institute of Architects, the Beaux-Arts Society, the Society of Columbia University Architects, the Century Club of New York and was former president of the Alumni Association of the School of Architecture of Columbia University. He is also a recently appointed member of the Board of Adjustment of Montclair.

# To Head Board

Nelson Francis A.

## Elected at Adjustment Unit Session—Four Appeals Win Approval.

In a busy session Thursday night, the Board of Adjustment elected Francis A. Nelson as chairman to succeed George R. Beach, granted one appeal, recommended to the Town Commission that three others be granted and approved an application for a two-weeks adjournment of an appeal for permission to construct a garden apartment development on Gordonhurst Avenue.

Mr. Nelson, formerly vice chairman, had been acting chairman since (Continued on Page Nine)

Montclair  
Francis Nelson  
on T. Feb 23/52

### Named Chairman



FRANCIS A. NELSON

the resignation of Mr. Beach several weeks ago. Penn Harvey was elected vice chairman to succeed Mr. Nelson.

The board gave Robert W. Nevins, owner, permission to build a one-car garage under an existing porch with a setback of 10 feet along a side street in lieu of the 15 feet required by law.

It recommended Commission approval of the Kimberley School, owner, and Katharine Gibbs School Inc., purchaser, plan for use of Plymouth Street property for use of the latter organization as a school. Under the law such permission is necessary if the school is to have thirteen or more students.

Also recommended for approval was the appeal of Dr. Anthony P. Caggiano and Mrs. Caggiano, owners, for permission to continue use of a portion of the first floor of 137 Grove Street as a physicians office. The third recommendation was on the appeal of Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Sulzberger, owners, and Cities Service Oil Co., lessees, for permission to install an additional 2,000-gallon capacity gasoline tank at a service station at 525 Valley Road.

Adjournment of the appeal for permission to erect the garden apartment on the DeForest-Cole Estate on the north side of Gordonhurst Avenue, between Valley Road and Park Street, was made on motion of Ernest P. Keer Jr., counsel for the owner and prospective purchaser.

Mr. Nelson, who lives at 303 Highland Avenue, has been a member of the Board of Adjustment since April 19 1934. Previous to his appointment, he was chairman of the Citizens Advisory Committee to the Town Planning Board.

An architect and graduate of Columbia University, he is a former president of the Alumni Association of the School of Architecture of Columbia University. He holds membership in several architectural organizations and designed or helped to design several public buildings in Montclair as well as elsewhere.

In addition to his studies at Columbia, he studied abroad and for several years was instructor in design at

Nelson, Francis A.

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# Francis Nelson, Architect, Dies

Prominent Architect

### Designed Library, Woman's Club and Other Buildings in Montclair.

Francis A. Nelson, architect, Board of Adjustment chairman and designer of many Montclair public buildings, died suddenly yesterday morning at his home, 303 Highland Avenue, Upper Montclair. Funeral services will be held at 11 o'clock tomorrow morning at his home and will be conducted by the Rev. Orrin F. Judd, rector of St. James Episcopal Church, Upper Montclair, of which Mr. Nelson was a member. Interment will be in Greenwood Cemetery, Brooklyn.

A resident of Montclair for thirty-eight years, Mr. Nelson was the architect for many public buildings, including churches, banks, libraries and private residences. Among the buildings he designed in Montclair and Upper Montclair are the Woman's Club of Upper Montclair, the Montclair Free Public Library, the Upper Montclair Post Office, and St. James Church. He had reconstructed two early American houses at Saybrook, Conn., where the Nelson family maintained a Summer home for many years. Mr. Nelson served as chairman of the Citizens' Advisory Committee to the Town Planning Board, before his appointment to the Board of Adjustment on which he served 16 years. He succeeded George R. Beach as chairman of the Adjustment Board.

Mr. Nelson was born in Honolulu 72 years ago, the son of Henry Clay Nelson and Adelaide Margaretta Thompson Nelson, and was brought to this country when a month old.

He was educated at St. Paul's School in Concord, N. H., and Columbia University where he received a Bachelor of Science degree from the School of Architecture in 1909. Following his graduation from Columbia, Mr. Nelson went to Paris where he attended L'ecole des Beaux Arts.

While there he was awarded the McKim Fellowship from Columbia in 1903, upon which he traveled extensively through England, France, Spain and Italy, making sketches and studies of various types of architecture. Returning from Europe in



FRANCIS A. NELSON

1906 with the Architect Diplome par le Gouvernement Francaise, Mr. Nelson organized the firm of Nelson and Van Wagonen, with offices in New York City, which he maintained until 1929. Since then he has carried on the business from his home. He was instructor in design at the School of Architecture of Columbia University from 1906 until 1915.

In 1932 the Alumni Federation of Columbia requested him to act as chairman of a committee to design a plate for exclusive sale by the Federation. This resulted in the designing of a dozen plates each with a different view of the University. More than 3,000 dozen of the plates were sold. The plates were manufactured by Wedgwood and Mr. Nelson was sent to England to supervise the work.

Mr. Nelson was a member of the American Institute of Architects, the Beaux Arts Society, the Society of Columbia University Architects, the Century Club of New York, and was twice president of the Alumni Association of the School of Architecture of Columbia. He was a member of Alpha Delta Phi fraternity.

As a form of relaxation, Mr. Nelson enjoyed "light reading," boating and golfing. Mr. Nelson is survived by a daughter, Mrs. Donald M. Clayton of Providence, R. I.; a son, Francis A. Nelson Jr. of the Upper Montclair address; four grandchildren and a sister, Mrs. Laura W. Menocal of New York City.

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## Francis A. Nelson

FEW Montclair men will be remembered as long as FRANCIS A. NELSON, noted architect, who died suddenly last week. As standing tributes to Mr. NELSON's memory are the Library, Woman's Club of Upper Montclair and St. James' Church.

In his work, however, Mr. NELSON sought to serve rather than to acquire fame. His houses were designed for comfortable living, his buildings for public service. No man to lay down the tools of his trade simply because he had passed an arbitrary retirement age, Mr. NELSON remained active until the end of his life and on the day he died some of his newest designs were on view at a local bank.

In public life, Mr. NELSON served faithfully and diligently on the Board of Adjustment, the local zoning commission, for sixteen years. Only five weeks before he died he had become its chairman. Montclair owes Mr. NELSON a long-term debt of gratitude.