

NOMINATION REPORT

24 UPPER MOUNTAIN AVENUE

BLOCK 405
LOT 1



Prepared By:
The Township of Montclair
Mayor and Council
205 Claremont Avenue
Montclair, NJ 07042

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This report has been prepared in accordance with **Montclair Code Section 347-135B(1)**.

347-135B(1):Nomination Proposals. The party proposing for designation under this section shall prepare and submit to the Commission a nomination report for each proposed property, site or district. For individual landmark designations, the report shall include one or more photographs, the tax lot and block number of the property as designated on the Official Tax Map of the township and a physical description and statement of significance and proposed utilization of the site.

I. Executive Summary

The Township of Montclair Historic Preservation Commission was created by ordinance in June of 1994. The Historic Preservation Commission is charged with accomplishing the protection, enhancement and perpetuation of especially noteworthy examples or elements of the township's environment in order to:

- (1) Safeguard the heritage of Montclair by preserving resources which reflect elements of its cultural, social, and architectural history
- (2) Encourage the continued use of historic and/or noteworthy buildings or structures
- (3) Foster civic pride in the history and architecture of the Township
- (4) Promote the economic welfare of the township through the preservation of historic sites and landscapes
- (5) Enhance the visual and aesthetic character, diversity continuity and interest in the township and its neighborhoods
- (6) Discourage the unnecessary demolition or other destruction of historic resources
- (7) Encourage beautification and private investment in the township
- (8) Promote the economic welfare of the township through the preservation of its historic sites and landscapes

As per **Montclair Code Section 347-135A**, criteria for designation, "the Commission shall consider as worthy of designation those buildings, structures, objects, sites and districts that have integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association and that meet one or more of the following criteria:

- (1) Are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- (2) Are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- (3) Embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; that represent the work of a master; that possess high artistic values; or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
- (4) Have yielded or may be likely to yield information important to prehistory or history.
- (5) Are otherwise of particular historic significance to the Township of Montclair by reflecting or exemplifying the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, region or community."

II. Property Fact Sheet

Address: 24 Upper Mountain Avenue
Block: 405
Lot: 1
Year Built: Circa 1900
Style: Colonial
Zone: R-2 Two Family Zone; the proposed utilization of the site

Physical Description:

- 14 rooms
- 9 bedrooms
- 3 baths
- 2 Car Garage
- 5,000 square feet
- .43 acre (18,145 square feet) property

Exterior Finish: Clapboard

Roof: Asphalt Shingle

Architectural Significance: Built in 1900 on the Northwest corner of Upper Mountain Avenue and Claremont Avenue of the finest material and architectural specifications, this stately Center Hall Colonial is one of the Fathers of Montclair.

The Historical Significance of 24 Upper Mountain Avenue Montclair By Frank Gerard Godlewski 2006

Historically, Crane's Gap just above 24 Upper Mountain Avenue was a major Native American mountain pass that then became a means of passage from the western farmlands to ports at Newark and Hoboken and the Morris Canal. Crane's Gap is a low point of First Mountain when seen from Manhattan and the Meadowlands. Locally, it is found at the intersection of Claremont and Bloomfield Avenues at the Newark - Pompton Turnpike.

The original old road and primitive path is Claremont Avenue. Israel Crane built Bloomfield Avenue around 1800 as a toll road to facilitate agricultural transport for a fee. There were 4 stagecoach arrivals and departures to and from the ferryboats at Hoboken from historic stagecoach house, just below Crane's Gap. The farmlands or "lea" below Crane's Gap were extremely important during the Abolitionist period thanks to the elevated moral and intellectual culture of the local community. Major Nathaniel Crane gave an extremely desirable six-acre property to a John Howe an African American former slave in 1831. This property, just below Kip's Castle has a 1400ft test bore train tunnel, running under Crane's Gap that probably served as a safe passage for many people. Then this area became populated with private academic institutions and "climatic station" hotel structures.

One of the most remarkable gestures in our local history was that of Major Nathaniel Crane, whose family built Bloomfield Avenue and founded our town. He gave an extremely valuable 6-acre property, today resulting in MKA's playing field on Upper Mountain, 24 Upper Mountain and the adjacent "Freed Slave House" property on 369 Claremont Avenue to James Howe, who he legally freed from slavery in 1831. Nathaniel Crane's vast properties on Upper Mountain Avenue became extremely sought after by suburban developers and the rich to build mansions. This gesture seems to express Major Crane's desire for the abolition of slavery and respect for the concept of American Democracy. This gesture is emblematic to our Montclair community.

The following paragraph is from Edwin B. Goodell's "Montclair - The Evolution of a Suburban Town" 1934 Pg. 11 (The old road is Claremont Avenue and the property mentioned is the intersection with Upper Mountain) The present 24 Upper Mountain Avenue House was built in 1900 on property belonging to John Howe among the "small cluster of mean houses" mentioned in the following 1934 paragraph.

"The old road (for we cannot capitalize it at this point) now runs pretty directly up the hill to the top of the gap, where it again touches the turnpike and passes almost immediately to the right and up over the very summit. But let us pause again for a moment about half way up to look at a small cluster of mean houses standing on the north of the road. They are occupied by Negroes. The origin of this little settlement lies in the Last Will and Testament of the late Major Nathaniel Crane, who died a bachelor some twenty years before we are taking our walk. Among other things in this will, he

left “six acres to James Howe, a colored man, late a slave, whom I manumitted.” This little settlement is destined to remain, in part at least, in the possession of James Howe, his heirs and assigns, much longer than some of the white people that are about to come to this hillside will desire, for it occupies one of the most eligible sites in town.”

Architecturally, the house is a fine example of the Americana Revival style. This style is generally achieved by a composition of American vernacular elements that create the volumetric form of the building. In the case of this house, the most noticeable compositional elements are the Dutch Colonial barn form, the superimposed neo classical rotunda on the side façade and the neo classical entry, window composition and symmetrical chimneys. The neo classical base of the house is achieved in local Crane brownstone, excavated from the basement itself, a practice typical of our area in that period. Similar houses are featured in the 1902 Scientific American.

Historically and architecturally, what is most significant is that the house was not built as a suburban residence, but as a mountain resort house when Montclair was identified as a resort and climatic station. There were several fine hotel structures in the neighborhood as well as other such resort houses like 10 North Mountain Avenue and 46 Lloyd Road. These resort houses were built as weekend or vacation retreats for people who had their main residences in the nearby cities. There were ample living and sleeping porches but relatively small reception rooms since they were designed for outdoor living and not for entertaining. The main hall was not used for a ballroom or for parties, but instead for keeping the porch furniture when the house was not in use or for the winter months. There are many bedrooms for the family members, guests and staff. The windows found in the bedroom closets were designed to air out and store mountain clothes and gear so they would be fresh for the next visit to the beautiful Montclair mountainside.

**"From hills that hide the western sky,
And throw their shadows o'er the lea,
I downward turn the enamored eye,
And see thee stretching toward the sea.
On slope and knoll and spreading vale,
On lawns that kiss the summer gale,
In rustic ease or princely guise
I see thy home of beauty rise,
I see the throng at close of day
Escaping from the city's din,
By stage or train, as best they may,
And disappear those homes within:
By stage or train, they little care,
Who once have snuffed our mountain air."**

(from Carrier's Address of the Orange Journal 1859)