

MAPLEWOOD HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Designation Report for Historic Landmark

Landmark # D 007-06

September, 2006

- 1. Historic Name of Property:** Headley /Zellers House
- 2. Street Address:** 36-40 Burnett Avenue aka No. 38 Burnett Avenue
- 3. Tax Map Information: Block:** 48.47 **Lot:** 140
- 4. Description at time of designation, including size and placement on lot, outbuildings, etc.:**

The Headley/Zellers farmhouse is a 2½ story single-family house. It is one of the oldest remaining buildings on Burnett Avenue. A post-Civil War structure, it is a vernacular building with Gothic Revival influences. The house is L-shaped in plan with a clapboard exterior. The roof of the main block has a cross gable -- the front gable and façade face west on Burnett Avenue, and the side gable faces north. The roof has overhanging eaves and exposed decorative rafters. The entire roof is covered in asphalt shingle.

The front façade has three-bays. All of the windows in the house are two-over-two, double hung wood frame and are predominantly original. Most are protected by vintage aluminum storm windows. The lower story windows are larger in scale than those on the second story. The second story windows consist of three single windows across the front façade, lined up over the lower façade windows and door. There is also a window over the secondary door in the side gable. The window trim of these windows is simple, with a small projecting cornice across the top. A single two-over-two arched window sits under the peaks of the front and the side gables and may have at one time existed below rear gable.

The foundation of the original portions of the building is coursed rubble of local red sandstone with larger cut sandstone blocks at the corners. A two-story extension on the rear of the house is original, as attested to by foundation and the windows. It may originally have had a shed roof. A small shed, which serves as a pantry and a back entry, was attached to the extension, perhaps in the first quarter of the 20th century. It is constructed of narrow vertical boards and has two small square four-paned windows on each side. An extension added to the second floor of the back of the main structure sits very close to the peaked roof of the extension below. The window of the extension has a different scale and flatter moldings than those in the rest of the house. A one-story flat roofed sunroom addition on the south side of the house, possibly dating to the turn of the century, is recessed from the front and rear of the structure. There are two windows on the west and east sides and three on the south side. Its foundation is made of rock faced

concrete and the trim of the windows differs from those of the original sections of the building.

A wrap around porch extends along the main façade to the ell. Most original detail is in place. There are two front entrances from the porch into the house. The main entrance is located on the north side of the front. The original wood door is split center. Each side has a rectangular raised panel at the base topped by a long narrow opening filled with bevel edged glass. The secondary entrance, located where the porch meets the ell, has a wood door with two rectangular panels at the base and a square beveled glass window at the top. Both doors are covered by vintage aluminum storm doors.

The porch retains its low railing of slender posts and brackets, its tongue and groove wood floorboards, turned posts (with additional center supports at the porch opening) and original ornate cut, flat brackets. Most of the latticework panels are present between the porches' wooden supports. A large simple wooden trellis is in place to the north of the front steps. The house sits low to the ground with only two wooden steps up to the porch. Industrial style pipe serves as a handrail on the south side of the steps.

Exposed decorative rafters at the porch roof junction are repeated at the roof wall junction. A tall narrow brick chimney rises from the front of the roof at the south side of the house. On the interior there are at least two fireplaces outfitted with marble mantles. There are cast iron covers in the center of the fireplace openings. The marble mantles have flat incised decorative panels and at the top an emblem in the Gothic or Eastlake style.

The basement has an earth floor. A small closet or cold cellar, probably used for the storage of fruit or other food, sits between two brick columns that may have served as a hearth cradle for the fireplace in the center of the main block. The basement walls are local somewhat coursed sandstone.

The house is currently being used as a two-family. The front hallway has been converted to a separate entrance.

Setting:

The house sits between Tuscan and Vermont Streets on Burnett Avenue, set back from the road on a level lot about half an acre in size. Lots 141 and 142 were originally part of the property during the ownership of the Sears Headley and Joseph Zellers, but were subdivided off when the Zeller heirs built houses on each lot after 1910. The original front walkway, constructed of large square and rectangular pieces of bluestone, leads the long span from the concrete sidewalk along Burnett Avenue to the main entrance. Paw paw bushes or saplings are planted adjacent to the front porch on either side of the walk. The parent tree that dated back to the early part of the 20th c., was apparently cut down within the last decade or so. [Paw paw are extremely rare in the wild, but were originally a widespread native tree. They produce tasty fruit, often referred to by Americans during the Depression as “the poor man’s banana”]. A large sycamore or sycamore maple tree frames the house on the south side. On the north side of the house a gravel driveway

leads to the backyard. A fenced rear lot that formerly was part of lot 140 has been subdivided from it. It is used for commercial automobile storage and is no longer accessible from this property.

Burnett Avenue is a two-lane street in a quiet residential neighborhood of Maplewood Township, New Jersey. The area is southwest of Springfield Avenue and the intersection of Tuscan Road, two of the oldest roads in town. Springfield Avenue is a busy commercial thoroughfare, and while this tributary street is quieter by comparison, its proximity is felt in part because it provides access to Rt. 78E to the south in Union. The street has paved sidewalks and the houses are only slightly set back from the sidewalk on small lawns. The houses in the neighborhood are generally single-family homes, two stories plus an attic in height, dating from the late 19th or early 20th century. Some of the houses are multi-family, including several “triple-deckers.” The houses generally have side driveways and detached garages and there are a few old growth trees in the neighborhood. The Maplewood Recreation Center is several blocks to the south in De Hart Park, the former fields of the prominent local farming Becker family

5. Ownership History of Property:

Eleazer C. and Polly Townley 1842 – 1873

Sears Roberts Headley (Sr.) 1873 – 1890

Sears Roberts Headley, (Jr), Tillie Headley, his wife, Mary M. Headley and
Minnie I. Headley, his sisters 1890 – 1897

Joseph Zellers 1897-1910

Heirs of the Joseph Zellers estate ending with Louise Zellers

Lee H. and Nancy W. Horner 1975

History

The first European settlers in what is now Essex County came to Newark from the New Haven Connecticut Colony, led there by Robert Treat in the mid-seventeenth century. By 1678, the outer limits of the Newark Colony stretched to the top of the First Watchung Mountain. Early roads from Newark were surveyed, often along old Indian trails, two of which eventually became South Orange and Clinton Avenues. Settlers from the Newark Colony, in search of land to farm or to develop early industry, moved west along these roads. They established farms where they grew wheat, rye, Indian corn and fruit trees, raised cattle and set up grist and saw mills. Early families such as the Balls, the Crowells, the Baldwins, the Beachs, the Browns, the Smiths, and the Heddens, bought large plots of land and eventually members of these extended families owned property throughout the area. Because those who settled here were primarily of English descent, their farmhouses generally followed English traditions and were built close to these main arteries.

Over the course of the early eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, small settlement developed in the western and eastern parts of what is now Maplewood. These settlements took on local names—that in the west eventually took the name of Jefferson Village. The

southeastern settlement was North Farms. A few local roads developed creating links between towns and farms in the area, including Ridgewood, Elmwood, Valley, Tuscan, and Burnett. Boyden Avenue was known as “the road to the Harbor”, a port on the Elizabeth River convenient to the eastern settlement. An important artery, the Newark-Springfield Turnpike, was incorporated in 1806 and soon cut through the North Farms area, spurring its growth.

The Headley/Zellers farmhouse was built in the latter 19th century as American towns such as North Farms and Jefferson Village were growing and becoming less isolated through greater development of cities, roads and modes of transportation. With this growth, North Farms became known as Middleville and subsequently, in 1880, was renamed Hilton. This house represents the highpoint of the period (1875-1915) when the southeastern section of Maplewood flourished as the independent village of Middleville (subsequently named Hilton in 1880). The house stood a block from the Newark/Springfield Turnpike, an important highway connecting Newark with Morristown. The owner and probable builder of the house, Sears Headley, was the successful middle class merchant/owner of the area’s general store. The store was the town’s social and commercial center on a stretch of the turnpike that contained a shoe store, a butcher, a carriage factory, and several hotels that served truckers as well as travelers seeking the diverse recreation of the area: fishing, hunting, bicycle races and a popular nearby amusement park. Within two blocks of the house on Boyden, Burnett and Tuscan Avenues there were also two churches and a schoolhouse (first one-room and after 1880 two story to accommodate a growing population).

The area surrounding this stretch of the turnpike was primarily used for rural truck farming and was occupied by a number of small and large farms and dairies that served the Newark and New York markets. A major landholder, Timothy Burnett, who owned a farm of 100 acres facing No. 38 Burnett Street, grew wheat and fruit until his death in 1904. The large Van Ness farm off Boyden Avenue specialized in peaches. Several members of the Becker family also farmed large plots. Most smaller farmers, like Sears Headley and Joseph Zellers raised and sold crops on a small scale. Undoubtedly they both produced the lucrative “Hilton” or “Boyden” strawberries for which the area was famous. (Newark inventor Seth Boyden who had lived on a farm a block to the east of 38 Burnett from 1855 until his death in 1870 had perfected a large sweet variety that became extremely popular among local farmers. Until the crop played out around 1915, strawberries from the area farmers were trucked daily into New York hotels as well as famous restaurants like Delmonico’s.

As the 20th century progressed, the western and northern sections of Maplewood with greater access to the train took on more importance as they became suburban developments. The Hilton area retained its own personality with a limited amount of farming continuing into the 1960’s. Eventually however, much of the land was gradually sold and divided into smaller building lots. A freight line and scattered industry also located near the houses on Burnett Avenue. No. 38 Burnett, no longer retains its barn, but still retains the sense of its early role as a modest farmhouse and residence.

At age 19 Sears Headley (1832-1890) is listed in the 1850 Census as being a “carpenter.” By the 1860 Census his occupation at age 29 was “shopkeeper.” This is corroborated on page 118 in the genealogical record book by Rev. A.J. Fretz , sic, “About 1854 Mr. (Andrew) Headley in company with his brother Sears R. Headley purchased a grocery store from James Judson at Hilton, NJ. One year later he sold out his interest to his brother Sears R....” Twenty years later at the age of 44, according to the December, 1875 edition of *Every Month*, the publication of the Middleville Union Church diagonally opposite No. 38 Burnett, Sears built a new house at the same time as he built a new store, sic, “long-established merchant, Mr. Headley, who is building a new dwelling and store...”. We surmise that the “new dwelling” was 38 Burnett Street, just two blocks from the location of the new general store.

The Headley store stood on the Newark Springfield Turnpike between Boyden and Burnett Avenues at the commercial and geographic center of the village of Middleville. [There is now an abandoned gas station at this site.] As was typical of general stores throughout rural America at this time, not only did it supply provisions and other necessities, it was also the focus of the news and social activity of the village. In *Maplewood Past and Present* (p.84), “The Hilton Section ” by Mary Oakley Dawson states, “at the corner of Springfield and Burnet Avenues, stood Headley’s General Store. Besides offering for sale or barter a bewildering array of clothing, food, shoemaker’s supplies, wash-tubs, spelling-books, and chewing tobacco, Headley’s store was a social center for all the men in the community, and to some extent for the women.” The December, 1875 issue of *Every Month* reported that “Mr. Headley’s warm, genial manner has made his store the headquarters of the village.” The April, 1875 issue notes that the store had “the best of everything in his line.” In 1880 a first class post office was established in the store.

The 1870 Census notes “general store” by occupation for Sears Headley (1st/Sr.). By the 1880 census, he is listed as a “farmer”, indicating he may have become retired or semi-retired. The Orange, NJ Directory of 1887-90 says: “Burnet Ave. n. Hilton” under the listing for Sears R. Headley. The entry under Sears R. Headley (2nd/Jr.) has the same address and lists the business name: Stewart and Headley. This may simply indicate that Sears (2nd/Jr.) may have worked at the general store or that his father had passed on its ownership to him. Anecdotally we know that the store was later sold to Charlie Stewart (whose wife was Hannah Headley, a niece of Sears (1st/Sr.). Perhaps before this, Charlie Stewart had become a partner.

Sears Headley Sr. and his second wife Juliaette Dean raised their five children (three of whom survived) in the house at 38 Burnett Avenue for fifteen years. He and Juliaette died intestate within days of each other in 1890. Sears Sr. was 58 and Juliaette, 48 years of age. Their living children were Sears Robert (s) Jr. (sometimes referred to as Robert Sears), age 24, Mary M., age 17 and Minnie Dean, age 14. Presumably, the children continued to live in the house on Burnett Avenue for a period of time. On September 3, 1897 (recorded in May 1898), Sears Robert (2nd/Jr.), his wife Tillie (nee Mathilde Sprotte), and his sisters Mary and Minnie, sold the “homestead property late of Sears

Headley” to Joseph Zellers. They were already living in West Covina, California where Sears Jr. established the first hardware store in the area and a citrus orchard.

Sears Roberts Headley Sr. was descended from a number of original families who settled the Newark and Elizabeth areas. His namesake (and perhaps ancestor) Sears Roberts from nearby Camptown (later Irvington) was a Revolutionary War soldier who fought at the Battles of Trenton, Princeton, Connecticut Farms and Springfield. The name Headley was so prevalent in nearby Union that it was first called Headleytown. Other branches of the Headley’s settled in Irvington near the Middleville/Hilton section of Maplewood (where there is a Headley Terrace) and in the Ridgewood section (where there is a Headley Place). Sears’ father was Davis Headley Jr., whose mother was a Townley, another early family. Sears’ mother was Susan Ball, whose great grandfather was Ezekial Ball, the builder of Tuskin Hall on Tuscan Road.

Joseph Zellers Sr. (1849-1910) purchased 38 Burnett Avenue upon his retirement in 1897 (recorded in 1898) and moved his family to the village of Hilton, later the Hilton section of Maplewood. Mr. Zellers established a fruit growing and selling business on the property. His endeavor was representative of that of dozens of other residents who were “truck farmers” in the area. Some had other professions and grew produce on their property to supplement their income. His great grandson, Joseph Zellers says that Joseph Zellers Sr. sold vegetables and strawberries from a small wagon pulled by a donkey throughout the local neighborhoods. Upon Joseph Zellers, Sr’s death in 1910 his children subdivided the land and built two more homes (44 and 48 Burnett Avenue) to the south. The family continued to live in all three structures through the latter part of the 20th century. Joseph Zellers (in 2006) recalls that his Aunt Louise (Lulu) who lived in the house until 1970 grew a rambler rose on the trellis; that there were huge hydrangeas by the driveway and a paw paw tree in the front.

6. Statement of significance, incorporating criteria for designation:

According to the criteria set forth in Section 7 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance of the Township of Maplewood (#2166-01), the Headley/Zellers house is eligible as a Maplewood Historic Landmark under criteria (1), (2), and (7). The house possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials and workmanship. It stands at its original position close to one of the early main arteries of the township. It also retains its original stone foundation, clapboard and chimney.

1) Of particular historic significance to the Township of Maplewood by reflecting or exemplifying the broad cultural, political, economic, or social history of the nation, state, or community:

The Headley/Zellers house reflects the broad economic and social history of the town. It was constructed in the latter part of the nineteenth century when the town of Middleville was a thriving population center on the Turnpike between Newark and Springfield. Its owner Sears Headley, Sr. contributed to the economy and the sense of community of the

area with his general store that also served as a community center. Mr. Headley was also representative of the many truck farmers who maintained small farms in the area in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, supplying fruits, vegetables and flowers to the residents of the local area and of Newark and to hotels and restaurants in New York City.

The house was purchased in 1897 by Joseph Zellers who continued to operate a small farm on the property, just like many of his neighbors at the time. Over the course of the twentieth century, the large properties associated with the houses on Burnett Avenue have been sold off for development. The town of Hilton became the Hilton section of the Township of Maplewood, but its development history is unique. The Headley/Zellers house is one of the few in this busy neighborhood that still reminds one of the farming activity that was so prevalent in this area a hundred years ago. As such, its preservation is especially important as it helps to create a specific identity for this neighborhood.

2) Associated with an historic personage(s) important in local history:

Sears Headley, Sr. (1832 –1890), who probably built No. 38 Burnett Avenue and owned the property from 1873-1890, was a well-regarded merchant in Middleville, later Hilton (currently the Hilton Section of Maplewood.) His store was an important economic and social hub for the community and later housed a post office as well.

The Headley family was very important in the Newark and Elizabeth areas. The town of Union was first called Headleytown because there were so many members of the family there. The family was also important in the early history of Maplewood, indicated by the presence of Headley Terrace near the Hilton section and Headley Place in the Ridgewood section of the town. Members of the Headley family fought in the Revolutionary War. Sears Headley was also descended from the Townley family who also were early settlers in the area. His mother was Susan Ball, a descendent of Ezekial Ball, a family with many important early ties to this Town.

7) Able or likely to yield information important in prehistory or history:

Its early date renders the Headley/Zellers house likely to yield information important in the nineteenth century settlement history of Maplewood and Essex County, through both archaeological and architectural investigation. Due to the long use of this building as a farmhouse and a residence, the structure, including the earth basement, and surrounding site are likely to hold significant archaeological artifacts and care should be taken any time excavations, removals, demolition or renovations are undertaken. Such study may produce valuable information about the agrarian life and economy of the Hilton section in the late nineteenth century.

Sources:

Directories of the Oranges (various years)

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And Illustrated with Portraits and Other Illustrations, Milton, New Jersey,
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Herman, Beatrice, The Trail to the Upland Plantations, Worrall Publications,
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