

MAPLEWOOD HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
(Former) Maplewood Women's Club Building Designation Report

Landmark # D012-13
July, 2013

1. Historic name of property: The Woman's Club of Maplewood
(aka 60 Woodland Road)
2. Street Address: 60 Woodland Road
3. Tax Map information: Block 12.3 Lot 127
4. Current owner (name, address, phone):

The Township of Maplewood
574 Valley Street
Maplewood, NJ

5. Description at time of designation, including size and placement on lot, outbuildings, etc.:

The Woman's Club of Maplewood Clubhouse is a large, wood-framed building, T-shaped in plan. The primary façade faces north onto Woodland Road and a residential area. The rear, nave-like section of the building extends to the south at a lower level as the land steps down from the street. A stair tower with a secondary entrance is located between the two sections. In front of the building, a small lawn extends along the street. There are mature oak trees at either end and several varieties of shrubs abut the building. The entrance is reached by a rectangular brick and stone stoop with two steps and non-historic iron railings. A pair of mature cedar trees flanks the entrance. A stone path extends to the public right-of-way. Set in the ground at the west side of the stoop is a sandstone millstone inset with a bronze plaque, presented in September 1930 along with a flagpole (now missing) and a flag by the local Watch Tower Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR).¹ A large asphalt-covered parking area is located on the eastern side of the lot and extends to the rear of the building. Areas of the building that are surfaced with original wood shingles have been faced with aluminum siding. The roof is surfaced with Vermont slate shingles. Windows throughout are original wood double-hung sash with 15/15 on the first floor and 8/12 on the second floor.

The main façade of the building is five bays wide and two stories with a side gable roof. The main plane of the front has two bays on each side of a prominent, projecting entrance. The windows on the ground floor are large, while those at the second story are smaller and are

¹ Both the Ridgewood and Upper Montclair Woman's Clubs have similar millstones.

topped by small pediments that extend above the cornice line. Vertical wood siding flanks the windows of the second story. A denticulated cornice extends across the façade and gabled front. A deep brick water table extends across the entire front of the building.

At the center of the front façade, the two-story, front facing gabled entrance projects from the main plane of the building the width of one bay. This section is framed by wide, paired Doric pilasters that support the eave returns. The main entrance has double paneled wood doors (not original) topped by a multi-light transom set within a surround composed of narrow Doric pilasters topped by a swan's neck pediment with an urn at the center. An iron light fixture (added at an unknown date) is attached to the frieze over the door and there is a Palladian window above the pediment.

The side elevations of the front section of the building are painted brick. There are two painted brick end chimneys at the ridgeline of the roof. A prominent brick stringcourse is located at the level of the sill on the first story. Each side is two bays wide, with wood double-hung windows set deeply in each bay and on each story. Two quarter-round windows are located near the top of the gable. Two cellar windows with non-historic metal grilles are partially visible near the ground line and have concrete window wells in front of them. The ground slopes down toward the rear of each side.

The east-facing elevation of the rear section of the building incorporates a two-story tower with an open cupola, originally surrounded by a wood railing (removed ca. 2003). The cupola is crowned by a bell-shaped roof. A stringcourse separates the two stories and serves as a sill for the second story Palladian window. The ground floor, facing the parking lot, has an entrance composed of double wooden doors (not original) with a transom with tracery under a portico supported by paired, wood columns. Non-historic iron railings extend from the doorway across a stone landing. A small oculus window with tracery and radiating keystones is located above the portico. The southern elevation of the tower has a single, round-arched window facing the rear on the second story and a single, double-hung rectangular window on the ground story.

The large nave-like auditorium extends south as the ground continues to slope away from the street. This section is five bays long and one double-height story tall, with a massive, gabled roof that runs perpendicular to the street. Although obscured by aluminum siding, each bay was designed with arched multi-paned operable windows above a wood tri-partite door. The doors open out to what is now the parking lot. They consist of wood panels below multi-paned glass. A wood keystone is located at the top of each arch.

An extension to the rear of the auditorium is set back on each side and has a gabled roof that is slightly lower than the main roof. This section is also faced with horizontal aluminum siding. The rear of the building has a steeply pitched roof. A central doorway is reached by concrete stairs to a small stoop that is edged by a non-historic iron railing. A rectangular metal grille is located above the doorway and a single, small, double-hung window is located in each side bay. These windows are covered by non-historic metal grilles. There is a shallow concrete foundation with basement windows visible near the ground. The parking lot continues around to face this side of the building.

The west elevation of the building essentially mirrors the east. The auditorium portion has the multi-paned arched window configuration that is now covered with aluminum siding as on the east elevation. The section opposite the tower is one bay wide with a gable roof. The ground slopes severely at this point revealing a full basement level. The basement level is clad in painted brick with a central door flanked by two rectangular windows. The upper stories of this section are clad in aluminum siding.

The Maplewood Woman's Club retains a high degree of original fabric. While the building was surfaced with aluminum siding (ca. 1980), obscuring the shingled surface and the ornate arched windows, this is a reversible condition.

6. Ownership history for property:

The Township of Maplewood May 2013 - present
The Woman's Club of Maplewood 1923 - May 2013

History of the Club and Clubhouse:

In the decades following the Civil War, women (primarily middle and upper class) had more leisure time and organized clubs around common interests, with lofty goals, such as helping the poor and improving their communities. In November 1916, under the leadership of journalist Etta Gould Lee (Mrs. Clayton Lee), 40 Maplewood women formed the Woman's Club of Maplewood—a volunteer service organization and part of the New Jersey Federation of Women's Clubs International. The purpose of the club was to “bring women together for mutual help, fellowship and service.” The founding of the Maplewood Woman's Club fits into a nationwide trend of voluntary organizing of women in the period following the Civil War through the 1920s. Besides the community service aspect of the organization, many women sought “self-improvement” through the study of literature and the arts, and current events.

The club met initially at the old “Field Club” on Baker Street—now the Maplewood Country Club, and other school and church venues. With the entry of the United States into World War I, the Club participated in the local Liberty Loan drives and purchased Liberty Bonds as the start of a fund to acquire land for the construction of a clubhouse. Fundraising efforts included benefits, sales and member pledges, and by 1922 the club had amassed more than \$3000 for the building fund. By this time, there were 700 members, and the Club was referred to as the “mushroom club” because of its rapid spike in membership. That same year the Club began publication of its own magazine *Members Chat*.

Through the establishment of various committees, such as the “Education and the Legislation Department” and the “Social Welfare Committee,” the Club provided service to the community. Members organized the Maplewood Red Cross during the First World War and later actively volunteered at the Essex Mountain Sanitarium, the Ivy Hill Alms' House, and the Vauxhall Well-Baby Clinic, established by the Club in 1923. In 1923 they also purchased 1.1

acres of land on Woodland Road as the site of a new clubhouse and they continued to raise funds through dramatic presentations and an annual village fair.

Like other women's clubs in New Jersey, the older generations sought to sustain their growth and relevance by establishing a junior membership category. In 1927 the "Junior Woman's Club" was organized with the intent to attract young women from 18 – 25 years of age. A large meeting room on the second floor of the clubhouse was devoted to the active use of the "Juniors" as they were known. The Juniors disbanded in 2007—a harbinger of a decline in membership due to social changes and the increasing demands of modern life.

In April 1928, the Club voted to construct a clubhouse and to limit membership to 1000 plus a waiting list. After a wide search for an architect, the board of trustees chose Clifford C. Wendehack, referring to him as "the best in the country" and selected Adams and Faber as the building contractor. To gain ideas for the design of the clubhouse, the Building Committee visited every woman's club in New Jersey and many social clubs in the northern part of the state. In 1929 the Club held a movie benefit for the building at the Roth-Maplewood Theater, followed by a groundbreaking on October 11. Construction was completed in October 1930, the same year the Maplewood Memorial Park was dedicated and the Maplewood Municipal Building was in pre-construction planning.

Wendehack designed the Woman's Club of Maplewood clubhouse with two distinct sections that reflect the different functions of the Club. He cleverly combined elements of Georgian Revival residential architecture for the portion of the building that houses the formal areas and meeting space, with a New England meeting house form that houses a large auditorium. A tower with cupola marks the junction between these two parts of the building and the location of an interior stair. The Georgian character of the two story front portion of the building blends with the surrounding residential architecture, while the larger, nave-like structure of the auditorium recalls New England church and civic architecture and serves as a transition to the commercial core of the village. Barnett Phillips, decorators of New York City, among others, provided interior furnishings to the specifications of Wendehack.

During the 1940s, at the height of World War II, the Club raised funds and purchased War Bonds to defray the costs of a Grumman Hellcat, which was presented to the U.S. Armed Forces. The Club supported the state ambulance fund and helped to furnish the recreation rooms at Fort Dix and the Newark Airport. Members also volunteered to be civil defense wardens. The Clubhouse was also registered for emergency use by the Maplewood Defense Council and the third floor was used by the Red Cross.

By 1941, Maplewood was the largest woman's Club in New Jersey. During the 1950s, the Club donated funds and equipment for a Music Listening Room at the new Memorial Library and the Civics-Legislation Department initiated the Township Murals project for the Municipal Building. Beginning in the 1970s, the Club funded the participation of a young woman attending Columbia High School in a career institute at the Douglas College campus of Rutgers. The Woman's Club established another membership division, the "Evening

Membership Department,” in 1963 as more working women sought the enrichment, socialization and service opportunities offered by the Club on evenings and weekends.

In 1978, the First Annual Flea Market raised funds for the State Eye Institute project. In 1979, the Evening Membership Department Community Project helped to establish the Durand-Hedden House & Garden Association and became a charter member. In 1992, the Club held their Diamond Anniversary – celebrating 75 years of service and community commitment. By this time membership was dwindling and the Club was finding it increasingly difficult to continue as they had been. Following a change in tax status, the Club was left with no alternative but to sell the clubhouse. In May 2013, the property was purchased by the Township of Maplewood.

7. Statement of significance, incorporating criteria for designation:

The Woman’s Club of Maplewood is

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 Maplewood Woman’s Club has played a vital role in Maplewood and beyond, from fundraising for student scholarships and activities, and the establishment of a community house and well-baby clinic, to raising money for a fighter plane during World War II. The organization’s birth and tremendous growth in membership occurred during Maplewood’s rapid development as a railroad suburb in the first half of the 20th century. Maplewood Mayor John DeHart, a visionary in the planning of the township at this time, noted that the Woman’s Club was “always at the forefront of community activities.” The conscious choice of a design for its clubhouse that reflected the colonial history of the country, as well as that chosen for the civic buildings of Maplewood, expressed the Club’s intent to be an important force in the community. As a purpose built clubhouse, the building is a tangible expression of the changes in the life of American women from the early 20th century to the 21st century, and their aspirations.

The clubhouse was built with the express purpose of being used not only by the Club but also by the local and larger community. Over its 80 plus year existence, countless theater performances, concerts, lectures, dance lessons, recitals, fairs, wedding receptions, evening dances, civic meetings, fundraisers, celebrations and other gatherings have taken place within its auditorium and meeting rooms. An article in the November 1925 *Members Chat*, “What Does the Club House Mean to the Community?” notes that for the club, “it will be a locus for their learning, fellowship and service.” But for the community, “...it would be a living monument to civic pride, the materialization of the keen vision of far-sighted women who have worked faithfully and given bountifully, unbiased in its views, where all are welcome.”

The Maplewood Woman’s Club embodies community service and community involvement—attributes that continue to be associated with Maplewood to this day. The building represents the nationwide trend of women’s club organization in the decades following the Civil

War. As more and more American women entered the workforce in the decades following World War II, there were further changes in American domestic life. The Maplewood Woman's Club responded to these changes by offering different types of membership and ways to be involved. By the latter part of the 20th century, fewer women were joining women's clubs. The demands of work and other activities left more women with less time. While the impetus to volunteer in one's community remains strong, today the opportunities are many and varied, and not focused on a single organization.

4. An embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of architecture or engineering.

Wendehack designed the Woman's Club of Maplewood Clubhouse with two distinct sections— that of a New England Meeting House combined with a Georgian Revival style house. This design reflected two important aspects of community life for American women—home and church. The design expressed a contemporary interest in the history and architecture of our colonial beginnings and fit seamlessly with the surroundings. The building functions as a transition from the commercial core of the village to the surrounding neighborhood. Designed specifically as a clubhouse, the building includes formal and meeting spaces, a large kitchen and pantry, an auditorium (designed to seat 700) with stage and dressing rooms for performances, a men's and women's lounge, and a caretaker's apartment. The Maplewood Woman's Club is unique as the largest wood frame building in Maplewood, for the many functions the building houses, and for the large auditorium with barrel-vaulted ceiling.

5. Representative of the work of an important builder, designer, artist or architect.

Clifford C. Wendehack (1884 – 1948) was a prominent designer of country club buildings, clubhouses and residences. Wendehack lived in Upper Montclair, New Jersey and had an office in New York City. He had a Beaux-Arts education in Europe and New York and early in his career worked at the New York studio of Donn Barber. Wendehack published a primer on how to design and build clubhouses for sports and social clubs in 1929 that has been used for eighty years, as well as wrote a series of instructive articles on aspects of club house design that appeared for over a decade in *Golf Illustrated*.

Wendehack designed clubhouses for many of the most prominent golf and country clubs in the northeast, including Winged Foot, Beth Page and North Hills in New York; Rock Spring, Ridgewood, Forsgate and North Jersey in New Jersey. Like other architects of the period, Wendehack was well versed in a variety of historical styles and his design reflects a broad knowledge of historic influences. For clubhouses, his primary influences were Tudor and Norman, Colonial Revival and Spanish Revival.

Sources

The Woman's Club of Maplewood: A Century of Service to Country and Community, an exhibition of the Durand-Hedden House and Garden Association (November 21, 2010 – December 3, 2011 (Susan Newberry, Marilyn White et al.)

The Woman's Club of Maplewood newsletters *Members Chat* 1922 – present, a short history, scrapbooks and clippings file.

Bates, Helen B. , editor, *Maplewood Past and Present, a Miscellany* (Princeton: Princeton University Pres, 1948).

Clubhouses of New Jersey's Women's Clubs: National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, Trenton.

Wendehack, Clifford C., *Golf and Country Clubs: A Survey of the Requirement of Planning and Construction and Equipment of the Modern Clubhouse* (New York: William Helburn Inc, Publisher, 1929).

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