

# MAPLEWOOD HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Maplewood Municipal Building  
Designation Report for Historic Landmark

Landmark #D010-09  
December, 2009

## **Boundary Description:**

Maplewood Municipal Building Historic Landmark site consists of Block 23.04, Lot 235 of the Township of Maplewood

## **2. Current owner (name, address):**

Township of Maplewood  
c/o Township Administrator  
574 Valley Street,  
Maplewood, NJ

## **3. Description at time of designation:**

The Georgian Revival style Maplewood Municipal Building dating to 1930 is the crown jewel of the Township and of the civic center. Visible from many points in the Township, the dominant feature of the municipal building is the white wood cupola and impressive limestone Doric colonnade with full entablature. The building sits on a broad lawn facing Valley Street and Memorial Park. There is a wide slate walkway with steps leading to the main entrance, numerous old trees and shrubs on the lot and a flagpole on the northern lawn in front of the building. A pyramidal stone memorial to war veterans is located on this lawn as well. Behind the building are a large parking area, an open lawn and the town greenhouses. The lot covers the entire block between Park Road and Oakview Avenue and extends east in the center of that block most of the way to Mountain View Terrace.

The Maplewood Municipal Building is rectangular in plan and consists of a central, two-story block with one-story wings at the north and south ends. All the roofs have side gables, surfaced in slate, while the main block is edged with side walls with stone coping. There are double-end wall chimneys at each side of the main block, with three windows in each gable end, a central, round-headed double hung window flanked by two quarter windows. The building is symmetrically arranged around a grand, full stone pediment carried on limestone columns. The pediment is framed by a full entablature with dentils and a broad stone frieze bearing bronze letters with the words "Maplewood Municipal Building." There is a carved stone figure of an eagle between wheat sheaves in the pediment. The main entrance is centrally located within the colonnade and consists of a round-arched marble opening with double, non-historic doors under a leaded glass fanlight. There are five bays under the colonnade. The windows to each side of the entrance on the main story are double-hung, 6/6 light wood windows. The five windows on the second story are double-height, rectangular openings fronted by decorative wrought-iron balconnettes. They have 6/9 double-hung wood sash. To each side of the colonnade, are two

bays, each with two stories of rectangular windows with 6/6 wood sash and plain limestone spandrel panels between the floors. The wings are each five bays wide and one story high. Fenestration in the wings consists of round-arched openings framed by brick arches springing from plain limestone blocks. Slightly recessed within these arches are double-height windows with 6 over 6 double-hung wood sash topped by fanlights.

Centrally located along the ridgeline of the roof is a large wooden cupola. It consists of an Ionic colonnade topped by a full entablature capped by urns. The drum is enhanced by a relief of garlands interspersed with ocular windows. The shallow dome is crowned by a finial spire.

## **6. History of property:**

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Maplewood (the more rural part of the Township of South Orange) began to attract wealthy city dwellers leading to the development of large new houses along the streets near the village. During the first decade of the century, an average of 50 new houses was constructed annually.

Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the number of commuter trains running to Newark from Maplewood increased. The railroad had run through Maplewood, from Newark to Morristown, since 1838, hauling freight and passengers. In 1869, the Morris & Essex Railroad, specializing in passenger transport, became a division of the growing Delaware, Lakawanna and Western Railroad. In 1901-03 the Maplewood tracks were elevated and the present structure at the top of the hill, on the eastern side of the tracks, was substituted for the earlier station, at the base of Lenox Place. Improved transportation helped attract many new residents to the town. The population of the Township expanded rapidly during the 1910s and was further enhanced as soldiers returned from World War I. Here, as in the rest of the country a housing shortage prompted a huge construction boom. Farms throughout the community were purchased by developers who graded the land and sold lots for new houses. The development process was added by the adoption of a zoning ordinance in 1922, regulating the location of industries, residences, etc. and separating areas according to use, allowing for more careful planning.

The Village of South Orange had separated from South Orange Township in 1904 and to prevent confusion, the official name of the town was changed to the Township of Maplewood in 1922. During these early years, community leaders set out to establish a civic center that would define the developing Township. The idea of a central civic center had become an important asset to municipalities during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the ideas of the City Beautiful movement became popular throughout the country. In Maplewood, this civic center, including the park and the municipal buildings, was to be established near the center of the community, on the farmland that was adjacent to the East Branch of the Rahway River and the railroad tracks. .

Beginning in 1913, the town had begun to purchase property in the low-lying land around the East Branch of the Rahway River, an area that had always been the location of various early industries, mills and manufacturing, as well as farming and grazing. The Township Clerk recorded purchases from the estates of Henry S. Smith and Samuel P. Brown for park purposes at this time. A series of purchases from the Smith and Trimpi properties as well as the donation of

land by Albert J. Knoll, Albert J. Knoll Jr., Edward Guliek and J.C. Osman resulted in a large tract being developed for a central town park.

In 1920 playgrounds were set up in the area north of Oakview Avenue. A large park in this section included separate play areas for girls and boys, a football field, tennis courts, a skating rink, a shelter house. Plans for an expanded public park began to be formulated in 1922, when the Township hired the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm, one of the most prominent in the field and the designers of numerous parks in Essex County, including the South Mountain Reservation.

At this time the Municipal Building and other town services were housed in buildings on the western side of the train tracks. As the community's needs increased, these buildings ceased to be sufficient. In December 1925 more money was authorized by the Township Committee to purchase new tracts of land from the Lackawanna Realty Company, Albert Knoll Sr. and Albert Knoll Jr. to extend the Memorial Park site, including more land on Dunnell Road. An ordinance concerning the acquisition of land for use in the establishment of municipal buildings and other municipal uses passed the Township Committee in the spring of 1926.

Expanded services were required for the growing town. In 1924-25, the Township Committee issued municipal bonds in the amount of \$100,000 for the construction of a new building for the fire station on the west side of Dunnell Road. The Township desperately needed a new police building, as well as a new town hall. Early discussions of the Township Committee focused on a single municipal building that would house both. This building was to be located on the east side of Valley Street across from the new park. This area had been the site of several residences, and a store and shoe manufactory that had been owned by the Crowell and Smith families in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. As shown in several Essex County maps and atlases (1859, 1881, and 1890) during the second half of the century the store was owned continually by W. H. Smith. Residences to the south of the store were owned in 1881 by Fanny G. Freeman, Annie G. Ball and the estate of J. Trenchard and by 1890, by Mr. W. H. Iderstine and Mr. Baldwin.

As discussion about a new municipal building proceeded, public pressure soon altered the plans. Maplewood citizens were concerned about the high costs of the proposed municipal building (this was during the Depression) and about locating the jail near other municipal functions and within a residential district. The local newspaper, *The Maplewood News* advocated for a new building and suggested that a new Police Department be constructed on Dunnell Road near the Fire Station.

During the discussion of a police headquarters in the 1920s, the Township Committee also re-visited the need for a new municipal building. They cited President Hoover, who stated that in spite of the difficult economic conditions, municipalities should continue with municipal projects, as they would provide work for the un-employed. The Township Committee, led by Mayor John S. DeHart selected the prominent Newark architectural firm Guilbert & Betelle, Architects, to design a new municipal building. (Guilbert & Betelle also designed Columbia High School and several elementary schools in the district.) The building was dedicated in 1931 to the "promotion of good government and civic consciousness."

## **7. 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 Maplewood Municipal Building is intact and eligible as a Maplewood Historic Landmark under criteria (1), (4), and (7).

### **(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 Municipal building is significant because it represents a critical period in the history of the Township and the ideal of an identifiable civic center. It lies near the physical center of the Township in a valley between two ridges. The building was designed and constructed in the early 1930s and its grand classical style and formality represent the then-popular city beautiful movement. This building serves as the main governmental focus and representative of the town.

In 1922, as the Township's population soared and its character changed from rural to suburban, the name of the municipality was changed to the Township of Maplewood and the town leaders set out to create a distinct identity for the community. The governing body, aware of the dramatic changes that were occurring, moved to create the community we see today, purchasing land for large parks and numerous schools to serve the growing population. They purchased property near the center of town from local residents and hired the Olmsted Brothers firm, one of the most prominent landscape designers in the county, to create a picturesque park. Although the Olmsted Brothers initially designed the park and laid out a planting program, another prominent landscape architecture firm, Brinley & Holbrook, was hired to implement the design, following the general outlines of the Olmsted plan and developing it further. The park was located along the eastern side of the tracks of the railroad that had bisected the town since 1838. An existing historic passenger station, constructed in 1902, was already extant at the top of a small hill adjacent to the park. The commercial section of town was located on the western side of the tracks and originally the governmental functions of the town were housed in a large building there. In the 1920s, as the town grew and new demands were placed on the government, the municipality purchased additional property to be used for a series of new municipal buildings that were constructed over the course of the next decade around the area already set aside for the park. Several buildings were constructed along Dunnell Road and the Municipal Building was constructed in 1930 on Valley Street facing the park from the other side and overlooking the broad expanse of the park, which serves as its grand lawn.

### **(4) An embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of architecture or engineering:**

The Maplewood Municipal Building was designed in the classical revival style typical of popular architectural styles during the 1920s and 30s in the United States. Most of the houses in the Township were constructed during this time in a variety of historical revival styles that were popular throughout the country. The municipal buildings around the park were designed

primarily in classical revival styles. There is a hierarchy to the design, from the grand scale of the Municipal Building to the more modest Police and Fire stations. These buildings represent the classical revival styles that, because of the popularity of the ideals of the City Beautiful during this period, were considered the most appropriate style for government structures. The Municipal Building was designed by important architects, Guilbert & Betelle, a firm that had previously designed Columbia High School and several other local schools.

**(7) Able or likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.**

Potential archaeological deposits located on the lot of the Maplewood Municipal Building are likely to yield important historical information on early settlement, the agrarian era in Essex County. This property held a variety of residential and commercial structures in the early years of settlement of the township.

**Sources**

Clerk's Minutes, Township of Maplewood, various years.

Essex County Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances.

*The Home News*, clippings and document files, photographs, and maps, Maplewood and Newark, NJ public libraries

"The Operating Railroad Stations of New Jersey, An Historical Survey" performed by Heritage Studies, Inc. of Princeton, New Jersey, 1981 for New Jersey Transit, Inc.

*Maplewood Past and Present, A Miscellany*, Edited by Helen B. Bates, Maplewood, NJ (1948).

Bausmith, John, *Maplewood*, Images of America Series, Arcadia Publishing (1999).

Report submitted by Virginia Kurshan and Jon Stout  
November, 2009

Public Hearing: December, 2009