

Twomblys left lasting legacy in Summit

By Patricia E. Meola

She became known as Summit's "Mother of Recreation," while he was a noted New York attorney and football hero during his days at Yale who later prided himself on his civic activism.

Frances Doane and Henry Bancroft Twombly may not be among Summit's most widely known former residents, but they left an indelible mark on the city...and not just because a street is named for them.

Frances Doane Twombly

Mrs. Twombly was a Boston native born on Aug. 12, 1860, whose father, Thomas, was described in a newspaper account as "a pioneer engineer and railroad builder." He constructed the Hoosac Tunnel in North Adams, Mass., and the C. B. & Q. Railroad across Nebraska, where he founded Doane College.

She married Henry Twombly on Sept. 12, 1889, and the couple moved to Summit. In 1901 the pair resided at 32 Woodland Ave. In 1908 they built a home at 226 Hobart Ave., known as being the site during the Revolutionary War of Signal Beacon #10, built by General George Washington's soldiers to warn of British troops advancing by way of Elizabeth and Springfield towards Morristown. Today, a plaque embedded in a stone in the home's front yard serves as a reminder of what once took place there.

Mrs. Twombly quickly became involved with volunteerism in Summit, where she was active at Central Presbyterian Church, a charter member of the Fortnightly Club, helped create the Neighborhood House and founded the Town Improvement Association, for which she served as president for 17 years. A number of T.I.A. initiatives were eventually taken over by the city, including the removal of snow, ashes and garbage. In addition, she served on Summit's Playground Committee, a volunteer group that preceded the organization of the Board of Recreation Commission. Mrs. Twombly became known as the "Mother of Recreation" because of the major role she played in the creation of Soldiers' Memorial Field on Ashland Road.

Always concerned about those less fortunate, her obituary noted, Mrs. Twombly for some time knitted an estimated 50 sweaters each year "for the overseer of the poor for distribution

to needy families."

Upon her March 1942 death, Mrs. Twombly's friend Clausine M. MacNeille penned a memorial essay for a Summit newspaper. It noted the city had lost one of its "most valuable and most loved citizens," and paid tribute to Mrs. Twombly having "early identified herself with various civic movements, which was an independent act in those days."



'MOTHER OF RECREATION' — Frances Doane Twombly (1860-1942) was known as Summit's "Mother of Recreation" because of the role she played in the creation of Soldiers' Memorial Field. She was also active with the Fortnightly Club, the Neighborhood House and the Town Improvement Association.

Mrs. MacNeille wrote of her departed friend, "Whatever she undertook she did thoroughly, and she used to drive around town in the early morning when Summit first had its sidewalks clear of snow by city ploughs to make sure that it was done in time for the commuters."

In addition, she wrote, during World War I Mrs. Twombly rented a farm where she grew vegetables to be canned and



ATTORNEY, VOLUNTEER —
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distributed “where they were needed.” And in 1909, she was part of a small group that organized and ran a playground in town. Additional playgrounds were constructed in Summit, recalled Mrs. MacNeille, and Mrs. Twombly used “to drive around to each playground every day during the summer and so became acquainted with the work and the people connected with it — children, supervisors, workers, policemen, parents and all.”

But, she wrote, “Her greatest talent, perhaps, was a gift for friendship. Her devotion and loyalty to her friends was beautiful, and she made friends wherever she went. Anyone, in any kind of trouble, or in need of counsel, could go to Mrs. Twombly for advice and help, and no one went away without receiving a sympathetic hearing, encouragement and assistance of some sort. Perhaps this was her most valuable contribution to the welfare of this city,

which she loved so much, and for which she has done more than we shall ever know. She will be missed acutely.”

In 1939 the Twomblys had celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, and upon her death three years later at home after what was described as “a short period of illness,” Mrs. Twombly was survived by a son, Edward, and three grandsons, Doane, Gilmer and Edward Jr., in addition to her husband.

Henry Bancroft Twombly

Born in 1862 in Albany, N.Y., to a family that traced its lineage to settlers to came to the new world aboard the Mayflower, Mr. Twombly’s parents were the Reverend Alexander Stevenson Twombly and the former Abigail Bancroft, both Boston natives.

The senior Mr. Twombly (1832-1907) received his B.A. from Yale in 1854 and his B.D. in 1858 from Andover Theological Seminary. Ordained in 1859, his first assignment was as pastor of a Presbyterian church in Cherry Valley, N.Y., after which he moved to State Street Church in Albany, from 1862-67, when he and his family relocated to Stamford, Conn., while he served as pastor of First Presbyterian Church there. Then it was on to lead a congregation in Charlestown, Mass., before earning his D.D. at Yale in 1883, which was followed by a year at Central Union Church in Honolulu.

It is noted in the archives at the Summit Historical Society that a folder at Yale’s Divinity Library Special Collections contains letters written by the reverend and his wife during their time in Hawaii that include writings about geography, climate, people and social and political conditions on the island at the time.

Abbie Quincy Bancroft was also born in Boston. And in addition to Henry, she and her husband had four other sons, Alexander Hamilton, born in 1866; Clifford Gray, born in Stamford in 1869; Howland, born in about 1877; and Edward Lambert, a member of the Yale Class of ’81 who also graduated from Harvard Medical School. (It is interesting to note that the boys

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were nephews of Hamilton McKay Twombly, who was married to Florence Adele Vanderbilt, granddaughter of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt. It is from Hamilton and Florence that the town of Florham Park gets its name. Their former home and grounds now comprise the Morris County campus of Fairleigh Dickinson University.)

Clifford likely gained his middle name in honor of one of his great grandfathers, Capt. Robert Gray, a Continental Navy officer credited with discovering the Columbia River, which he named for his ship. The captain was the first U.S. Navy officer to carry the American flag around the world. The family's other ancestors included Ralph Twombly and Capt. William Perley, who both fought in the Battle of Bunker Hill.

Henry Twombly was a sports star, the celebrated quarterback of what his New York Times obituary described as "the famous Yale varsity teams of 1881, 1882 and 1883." In the latter year the team won all eight of its games, gaining headlines from coast to coast for rolling up 476 points to its opponents' total of two.

After graduation he headed to Harvard for law school and earned that degree in 1886, at which time he began his career as an assistant corporation counsel in New York. By 1892 he was with the Manhattan law firm of Putney & Bishop, and eight years later he became a partner of William Putney and son Edmonds Putney in a firm that evolved to be known as Putney, Twombly, Hall & Skidmore, at 165 Broadway. Upon his 1952 retirement Mr. Twombly was the senior partner, and had served as counsel to firms that included the International Salt Company, Broadway National Bank and Valvoline Oil. He participated in the incorporation of both GE and Otis Elevator.

By the time of Mr. Twombly's death at home of a heart attack in 1955, at age 92, his son Edward was the firm's senior partner.



NATIVES OF NEW ENGLAND – Alexander H. Twombly Sr. and his wife, the former Abbie Quincy, were the parents of five sons. Henry and Alexander H. Jr., pictured in the front row with their parents, were both Summit residents.



FAMILY CELEBRATION – When the Twomblys celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 1939, they were residents of the home they had built at 226 Hobart Ave. The couple were parents of one son, Edward, and he and his wife, the former Mildred Hadra, had three sons.

According to the obituary in Summit papers, among Mr. Twombly's claims to fame were that he was the last living Yale graduate to have played with the legendary Walter Camp. In addition, the writer noted, Mr. Twombly was well-regarded in Summit for his "keen interest" in civic affairs. Most recently, he had found himself interested in the proposed Beacon Hill Club, "and attended all hearings on the subject, during which he spoke on behalf of the club."

In addition to having served as superintendent of the CPC Sunday School from 1893-1901, Mr. Twombly acted in the same capacity for the Neighborhood House from its founding until 1945. He was described as "active in the affairs" of Summit's Lincoln YMCA and during World War II headed Summit's Community Victory Garden project. As donor of a trophy for local police marksmanship, the obituary writer penned, Mr. Twombly "often attended police pistol shoots held at the municipal range."

In 1949, Mr. Twombly had garnered a distinct honor from the Lackawanna Railroad upon the beginning of his 61st year as a regular commuter. Rail officials presented him with gifts, as did his "club car companions," it was noted.

Upon his death he was credited with being Yale's oldest living alumnus, and it was noted he had ranked third in his class at both Yale and Harvard, after being named captain of Boston Latin School's football team in both 1878 and 1879. Other sports honors included being elected honorary chairman of the Touchdown Club of New York.

In addition to his son, Edward, Mr. Twombly was survived by his grandsons.

Edward Bancroft Twombly

The Twomblys' only child left his own mark on the city. Born in February 1891 in the then-township, he married Mildred Hadra in 1917 after graduating from Yale in 1912 and Columbia Law School in 1915.

He was considered a pioneer in the investment and trust fields, but before entering the business world, he rode as a corporal with the N.J. Cavalry (known as the Essex Troop) on the Mexican border in 1916 and then served with the 77th U.S. Expeditionary Force in France in 1918 and 1919, by which time he was a major in the Infantry Reserves. He earned a Silver Star for bravery in action. By the time he retired from the Army Reserves in 1938, Edward had achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel.

A local newspaper account on May 12, 1919, was headlined "Capt. Ed. B. Twombly Cited for Bravery," with the subtitle "Summit Man in 77th Division Returning With Splendid Record of Heroism." The story provides details of the citation presented to the soldier by the commander of the 77th Division, Major General Robert Alexander, and notes that as a member of the 304th Machine Gun Battalion, in taking his ammunition cars "through to his guns, which were established west of St. Perremont," Edward was pursued and fired on by four enemy airplanes. Then, as he approached town, he was fired upon by enemy machine guns while the planes continued to fire.

"Without regard to his own personal safety," according to the citation, the Summit soldier "had his men take shelter in the cellar of one of the buildings while he reconnoited to see how he could get through." When enemy artillery began "to shell the town heavily," at the first lull Edward "instructed his men that each car would make a dash for it separately, each man coming from his shelter when he heard the motor of the previous car cranked." The cars

were riddled with bullets, but all of the men got through unharmed.

Major Gen. Alexander noted, "By his coolness and bravery he was an inspiration to his men, and his good judgment undoubtedly saved their lives."

In Summit, a newspaper published on July 11, 1919, reported thousands had gathered in town to cheer as veterans marched through town along "gaily-decorated streets," while bands played. The procession was led by Major Edward B. Twombly on horseback.

He served as a member of Common Council from 1921-29, including a term as president, and was elected mayor for a two-year term in 1930.

He was a ruling elder at Central Presbyterian and served for 10 years as president of the Berkshire Home for Boys in New Canaan, Conn., described in his obituary as a "rehabilitation camp for young lawbreakers." Since the time of his military service, he had been known to friends as "Colonel."

By 1957 Edward relocated from Fernwood Road to Minnisink Road in Short Hills, where he resided until his death at age 78 on June 7, 1969, after a fall at home. Upon his death, flags were lowered to half-staff in the city. In addition to Edward's wife, he was survived by three sons, Gilmer of Summit, Doane of Short Hills and Edward B. Jr. of Montclair, and eight grandchildren.

A local obituary noted his last "public appearance was on April 12," when he took part in the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Summit becoming a township.
