



Newsletter of the Middletown Township Historical Society

VOL. VII NO. 3

JUNE, 1991

SHADOW BROOK FARM

ITS HISTORY AND THE LIFE AND TIMES OF DR. ERNEST FAHNESTOCK

Continued

The farm produced a large quantity of crops and dairy products which were shipped by rail to the family during their residency in the city. Surplus production was given to staff.

The house was large and formal, but not known to be an active center of social life.

Dr. Fahnestock's ties to his communities embraced varied acts of giving. He was a major patron of the Monmouth Memorial Hospital, (now Monmouth Medical Center), serving seventeen years on its board of governors, the last ten as president. Other local organizations aided by his generosity included the Shrewsbury Fire Department, the Red Bank Police Department, both of which made him an honorary member, the Monmouth County Organization for Social Services, the Shrewsbury Child Welfare Organization, Christ Church, Shrewsbury, St. George's Church, Rumson, and the Long



Dr. Ernest Fahnestock



Mrs. Ernest Fahnestock

Branch Catholic Church.

He also gave to many New York organizations. Dr. Fahnestock was interested in the work of the New York Police Department, was an honorary police surgeon, and gave the Ernest Fahnestock gold medal, presented annually for police valor.²⁹

Ernest Fahnestock died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound at his New York house on April 5, 1937.³⁰ The police initially reported the death as an accident, perhaps as a favor to the family, in consideration of Fahnestock's close relationship with the department. His Certificate of Death, No. 8932, declared the death a suicide. Fahnestock was reportedly ill with cancer.

THE SALE OF SHADOW BROOK

Georgette Fahnestock stayed at Shadow Brook for five years after her husband's death. It is not known how long the house was on the market, but it is clear there was little demand for large estates during the depression. Shadow Brook was sold in 1942. Lovett's Nursery of Little Silver bought sixty-one acres on the east side of Broad Street in July.³¹



Terrace (now closed-in)



Farm buildings, now private residences

Ray H. Stillman was a noted Eatontown real estate broker who specialized in country estates and farms. He bought the house, the farm buildings, and fifty acres in November.^{32 33} The purchase price was \$25,000.³⁴ He planned to live in the superintendent's house (the old remodeled Stilwell farmhouse) and develop the property.

Mrs. Fahnestock purchased 101 Ridge Road, Rumson, a colonial revival house built in 1928 by Edward Dean Adams, who was planning to sell his famed adjacent estate, "Rohallion". The house at 101 Ridge is now owned by the Rumson Country Day School. Mrs. Fahnestock remained a Rumsonite for the remainder of her life. She maintained a tie to Monmouth Memorial Hospital, serving on its Board of Governors and making a major contribution in 1949 to memorialize Dr. Fahnestock. Georgette DeGrove Fahnestock died in 1957 at age eighty-three.

FROM SHADOW BROOK TO SHADOWBROOK

THE RESTAURANT YEARS

Frederick Thorngreen was a noted restaurateur in southern Monmouth County. He owned the Squankum Inn on the Farmingdale-Lakewood Road, now County Highway 547, about two miles south of Farmingdale. It was redecorated in early 1942. Plans were made for it to re-open on April 1, 1942, but the Squankum Inn was destroyed by fire March 9, 1942.³⁵

Frederick Thorngreen bought the Fahnestock main house and about ten acres in August 1943.³⁶ He opened a restaurant, retaining the farm name, calling it the Shadow Brook Inn..

The World War II years were not an opportune time to open a restaurant. Supply problems marred Thorngreen's early years. He claimed he was compelled to close the restaurant for a time in 1944, citing an inability to secure adequate supplies of meat.³⁷

A side note of local interest is how Shadow Brook Farm became the single word Shadowbrook. The earliest known usage of the one word name is an October 31, 1946 *Red Bank Register* advertisement. It is not known if the words were linked by forethought, typesetter's error or the need to fit a space.

The Thorngreen era lasted ten years until the 1953 sale to Shadowbrook, Inc.³⁸ It was then owned and operated by Gerard "Rod" Keller, Sr. Keller was a Spring Lake summer resident and northern New Jersey restaurant owner. The restaurant's name was at times simply "Shadowbrook" or "Rod's

Shadowbrook". A culinary honor was achieved that year by Shadowbrook Inn's selection by the Gourmet Society of New Jersey for its autumn dinner, an event reported in the local press.³⁹

The Keller years marked a major expansion of the dining room. Although the exterior lines of the classic residence were significantly altered, the interior addition to the former Fahnestock living room is compatible with the original construction. The proportions of the restaurant dining room dwarf the former living room. The interior finishing is identical to the former house making it difficult for the casual observer to notice where the old room ended and where the expansion began.

The piazzas were enclosed during Keller's years. The house was never air-conditioned and was hot in the summer. Dr. Fahnestock claimed sea breezes could be felt on the porches.⁴⁰ However, the additional usable area of enclosed spaces was more practicable for a restaurant.

Sidney Zweben bought the Shadowbrook in 1971, beginning the third and current family of ownership. The building has been elevated to a level of elegance overwhelming its classic colonial revival origins. A chandelier from the Grand Ballroom of the Hotel Biltmore now graces the Shadowbrook. Wall sconces from the Paramount Theater illuminate the Regency Room while the Paramount's banisters mark the lower stair.

One decorative addition with a Fahnestock tie are ceiling panels mounted in the front dining rooms. They were removed from New York's Villard Houses, a McKim, Mead & White landmark, now the entrance to the Helmsley Palace Hotel. They had been Madison Avenue townhouses running the block from Fiftieth to Fifty-first Street. Harris Fahnestock owned the house on the corner of Fifty-first, which adjoins the hotel entrance and is now the home of the Municipal Arts Society. Although it is not known from which Villard unit the Shadowbrook panels were removed, the Fahnestock connection fascinates, while the panels enhance the halls.

The Fahnestock house made a comfortable conversion to its restaurant role. The former living room is now the expanded, richly dark-paneled Oak Room, while the library on the west is the cocktail lounge.

The numerous second story bedrooms have been well-adapted to Monmouth's premier restaurant-banquet operation. The master's bedroom, dressing room, and private bath form the spacious Club Room chapel.

The Fahnestock linen closet was of walk-in proportions. One can still enter it, now to use the telephone.

The Empire Room is the second story dining facility. It was once two children's rooms, while an adjoining former bath now services it as a small bar.

The spacious nursery is the Bridal Suite while another child's room on the south front is an office. The Banquet Office occupies the top-of-the-stairs guest room.

The family's dining room west of the hall is now the Victorian Suite. Its walls are decorated by paper illustrating "Les Courses de Chevaux", hand colored and printed from pear wood blocks carved in 1837 by Zuber & Cie. The house's

kitchen is a dining room. It is within the service area of a bar, which is housed in the former servants hall.

The present entrance is expanded beyond the house's exterior and incorporates a permanent canopy. The canopy has a segmental arch pediment, replicating the one built over the original entrance door.

Current needs have curtailed the vast plantings from the great age of American landscaping, but the gardens north of the house still provide a rich sylvan setting, enhancing a popular Monmouth County wedding site.

The preservation purist prefers to see a significant private residence remain one. The demand for large country estates diminished after the depression, stemming largely from changed tax and domestic help environments. Many were demolished for tract housing.

Adaptive use saved others from destruction. The Fahnestock house of Shadow Brook Farm was virtually forced to adaptive use during difficult times. Shadowbrook has enhanced the pleasure of its many guests by placing them in country house grandeur while providing similarly high achievements of food and service.

R.G.

N.B. The Society thanks the Shadowbrook and The Zweben family for permission to adapt for this article a historic property report they commissioned.

Thanks to the Shrewsbury Historical Society for the portraits of Dr. and Mrs. Fahnestock.

²⁹ National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, Volume 30, op. cit.

³⁰ *New York Times*, April 6, 1937

³¹ *Red Bank Register*, July 23, 1942

³² *Monmouth Deeds*, Book 1907, p. 314, dated October 10, 1942, recorded November 28, 1942

³³ *Red Bank Register*, December 10, 1942

³⁴ The consideration was specified in the deed. Stillman reaffirmed the purchase price in an undated interview with the Jerseyana Club of Shrewsbury School, related in a conversation with J. Louise Jost, the Club's faculty adviser.

³⁵ *Freehold Transcript*, March 13, 1942 and *Asbury Park Press*, March 10, 1942

³⁶ *Monmouth Deeds*, Book 1944, p. 149, dated August 31, 1943, recorded December 20, 1943

³⁷ *Red Bank Register*, September 14, 1944

³⁸ *Monmouth Deeds*, Book 2411, p. 433, dated April 8, 1953, recorded April 9, 1953

³⁹ *Red Bank Register*, October 22, 1953

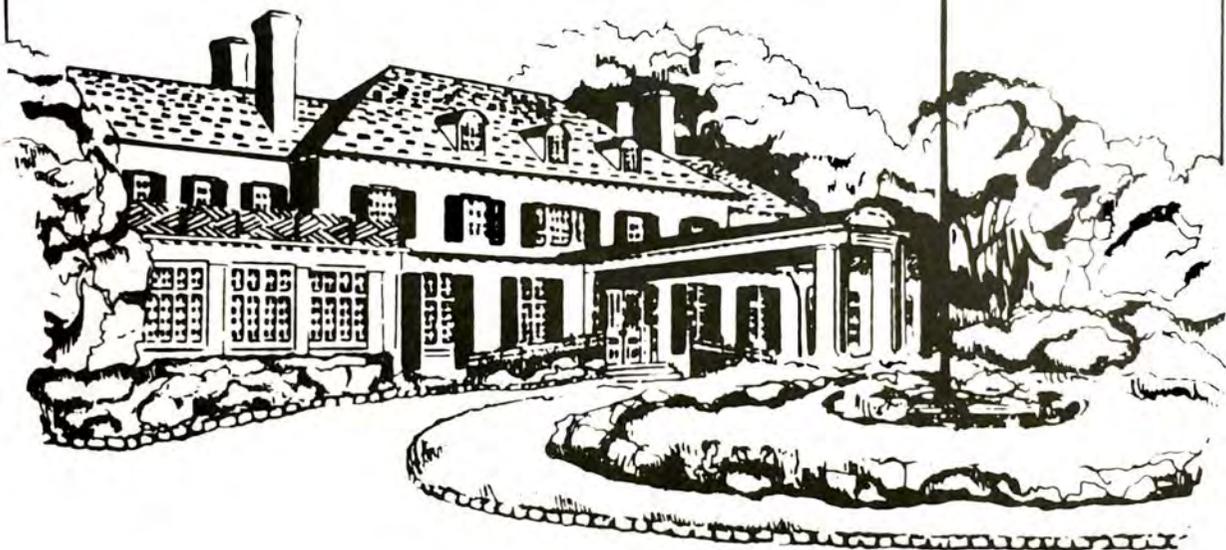
⁴⁰ Perry, op. cit.

THE SHADOWBROOK TODAY



Shadowbrook

The Zweben Family



P.O. BOX 434
MIDDLETOWN, NJ 07748
PHONE: 291-8739 during museum hours.
EDITOR: RANDALL GABRIELAN

DEDICATED TO RESEARCHING, COLLECTING AND EXHIBITING THE
HISTORY OF MIDDLETOWN TOWNSHIP.

Museum: In the main building at Croydon Hall on Leonardville Rd. between Chamone
and Bellevue Aves. in the township's Leonardo section. Open Saturdays & Sundays.

Meetings: 8:00 PM at the museum, generally on the fourth Monday with occasional
exceptions for major holidays.

Donations of historical materials: Please see a museum guide or write to the Society.



MEMBERSHIP DUES PER CALENDAR YR.

Individual — \$5.00
Family — \$10.00

Dues for new members
joining after Oct. 1 in-
clude following year.