

McKownville: News And Comment

By FRED B. ABELE

The approaching election reminds us of a part in Albany County politics once played by an obscure and secluded residence in McKownville. The house, now the SUNY chapel house, is perched high on a hill in a grove of trees overlooking the State University perimeter road near the athletics building and gymnasium.

Built about 1905, the house is the former residence of William F. (Billy) Barnes, Jr., Republican political party leader of the legendary Barnes machine which ran Albany County until overthrown by the Democratic machine of Daniel P. O'Connell in 1921.

We are indebted to that former newspaper of the Western Turnpike area, The Turnpike Record (1956-1973), and to writer Joyce Durgerian for the informative writing of two articles which appeared in that paper in December 1966 issues for facts presented about this bit of McKownville's past.

The old Barnes residence, reached by vehicle only by a private road from the end of Waverly Place, broods in silence on its hill. Barnes built it as a hunting lodge but frequently used it as a residence.

As Albany County Republican chairman he worked from an office in downtown Albany. For a time he served as State Republican Chairman and was an influential member of the Republican National Committee. Barnes' grandfather, Thurlow Weed (1797-1882), established a newspaper, the Evening Journal, in 1830 and was a well-known political editor. He sold the paper during the 1860s.

William Barnes bought back the paper shortly after his graduation from Harvard in 1888 and ran the paper for some time. Barnes

reached the height of his political career between 1910 and 1915.

Membership in the Albany Country Club may have prompted Barnes's choice of the site for his lodge, adjacent to that club. The Albany Country Club lands are now occupied by the State University campus. The Barnes' house was last owned by Donald Noord before being transferred to the Capital Area Council of Churches in 1965 for use as an interfaith center for SUNY students.

The Barnes' property as well as the Albany Country Club property were once a part of the Christian LaGrange farm which occupied land east of Fuller Road from Washington Ave. and reaching south to the former Albany city line (Bleecker Line of 1767).

Christian LaGrange was a descendant of Omie DeLaGrange who settled along the Normanskill after purchasing a portion of the controversial Van Baal Patent in 1686. This was covered in greater depth in this column in the Feb. 27, 1981 Enterprise.

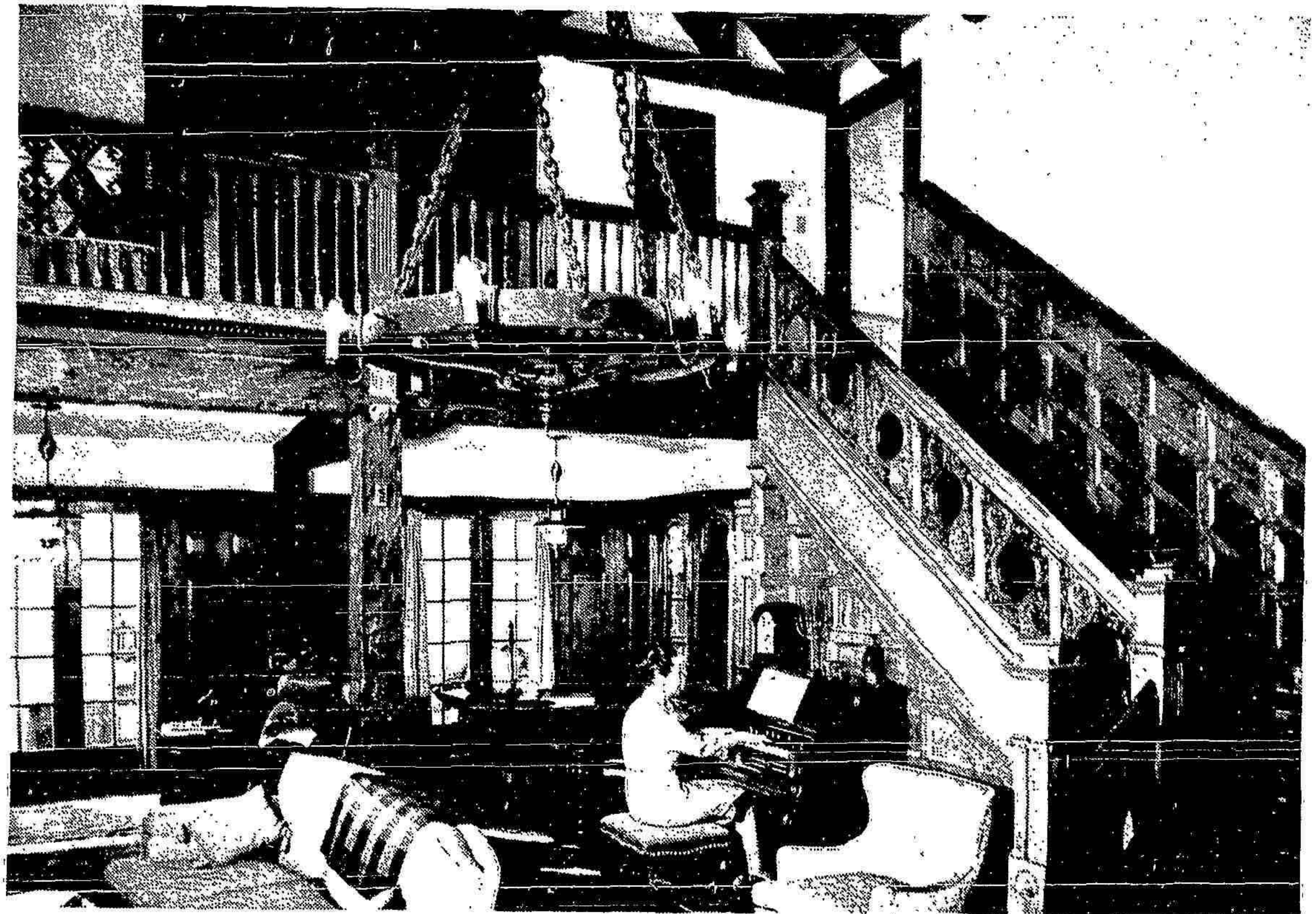
Turning from political history to current political — who, indeed, are the Concerned Republicans for Guilderland? Bearing only that name and no signature, poorly written and poorly spaced on a letter sized sheet of plain paper, the letter is clearly the work of an ignoramus. If printed on yellow paper it would have truly reflected the character of its perpetrators — too cowardly to sign their names.

It attacked Supervisor Kevin Moss, by lashing out with crude accusations, obviously untrue. It was truly wastebasket material which should not influence anyone when they enter the polls next Tuesday. As was stated in this column previously, candidates for office should depend on the

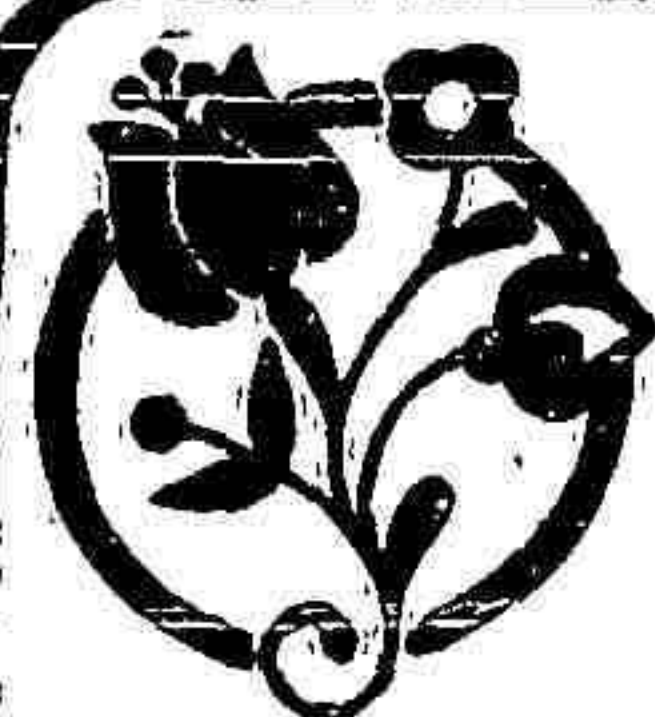
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Nestled in a grove adjoining the SUNYA uptown campus sits the onetime residence of William Barnes, once Republican political boss of Albany County. (Photos courtesy Turnpike Record file, Guilderland Historical Society.)



Interior of Barnes residence, originally designed as a hunting lodge.



The Flower Emporium

(Located next to Stewarts at Rte. 146 & Rte. 20)

Guilderland

Fresh, Dried and Silk Arrangements