



Harbor Hill-Clarence Mackay Estate

Boyhood Reminiscences

A Look In A Window At Harbor Hill

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It was a cold damp dark January day, probably a Saturday, in 1920 or '21. Rudy Knoll and I were exploring Mackay's Woods east of my house on the other side of the railroad tracks. Because of the dismal weather, we were particularly bold and approached to the border of the lawn on the northside of the main house. This was a huge simulation of a French chateau, known as Harbor Hill, the country home of Clarence Mackay and his children. We understood that he and his family lived in New York City in the winter, so we did not expect anyone to be home, but we realized that there were a number of servants, some of whom might be in the house.

Hiding in the shrub lined border of the lawn, we watched the house for signs of life. Watching for a long time, we saw no lights or movement of any kind and the high French-windows beckoned us. We crept out through the rhododendron bushes and ran quickly across the lawn to the side of the house, where we stood close up against the wall, believing that no one could see us from the house. We wanted to look in the window but it was too high above the ground.

We realized that if one of us stood on the other's shoulders he could see in. We drew straws and I won. Rudy stood firmly on the ground next to the wall of the house and I climbed up on his shoulders and looked in the window. I took one good look, jumped off Rudy's shoulders and ran for the woods as fast as my legs would take me.

Even after I had run through the rhododendron bushes and the dogwood trees, I kept right on running down the hillside until I was out of breath and had gotten to a familiar part of the woods. Only then did I stop—I was so frightened. Rudy, of course, was running right behind me wondering what had frightened me so. It took me some time to gain my breath and compose myself so that I could tell him what had happened.

As I had grasped the window sill and peered into the window I found that I was looking right into the tail end of a huge horse clad in horse armor and mounted by a knight holding a tall spear. As if this was not enough, there was a similiar horse and knight to the right and left of the one near me. One look was enough. Horses inside of the houses was not what a small boy was expecting to see. In fact as I write this 60 years later I have a strange feeling in my stomach and an urge to flee.

Later I learned that Clarence Mackay had a collection of medieval armor which he kept in the great hall of his house on Harbor Hill and I began to realize that what I had seen was not an hallucination. Years later on a visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, I saw a similar collection of armor on exhibit. I approached the exhibit with awe and a strange impulse to run for the shelter of the woods.