



The Gilded Age: Natirar Estate in Peapack/Far Hills, New Jersey

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UPDATE:

The Mr. Local History Project is SOOOO excited to introduce the expansion of our Historic New Jersey Historic Cat's Meow Village, the Natirar Estate in Peapack and Far Hills, New Jersey. Only a limited number will be produced.



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[Natirar Estate](#) – Peapack, New Jersey, is one of the most iconic estates in New Jersey. Welcome to the New Jersey Historic Keepsake collection

UPDATE:

The Pendry Spa at Natirar has opened.



A mixed-use development combining the past and the future. Natirar and Pendry joined forces that opened in 2024.

[Learn more.](#)



The Gilded Age: Natirar Estate in Peapack/Far Hills, New Jersey

Take a look at this stunning property in Peapack, New Jersey. This 5-minute video features photos from the past, present, and future.

Catherine “Kate” Macy and Walter Graeme Ladd began acquiring property in the Somerset Hills in 1905. Macy was a Quaker heiress to a whaling/oil/shipping fortune; her father’s business partner was John D. Rockefeller.



Walter Graeme Ladd was born on September 20, 1856, and died on May 21, 1933 (76). Catherine Kate Macy was born April 6, 1863, and died August 27, 1945 (82).

Kate was born in New York City, a descendant of Thomas and Sarah Macy, Massachusetts settlers in the late 1630s. She was a granddaughter of Captain Josiah Macy, originally of Nantucket, who founded a firm that became New York’s first oil refinery in the 1860s (later sold to the Standard Oil Company). In 1659, Thomas Macy and nine other men purchased Nantucket Island (then a part of New York) to seek religious freedom.

Walter Graeme Ladd was born in Throgs Neck, in the Bronx. He was a lawyer, the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad principal, and a yachtsman. He loved his 165-foot schooner E’tak, which crossed the Atlantic from Germany once in 1930.



Walter Graeme and Kate Macy Ladd married in 1883 and rented property in Bernardsville on Mine Mount Road from Heley Fiske (1903) as they acquired small local farmsteads until their estate spread over 1,000 acres throughout Peapack/Gladstone, Far Hills, and Bedminster. The Ladds hired Boston architect Guy Lowell to design the Tudor-style mansion, which was completed in 1912 with a sprawling 40-room, 33,000-square-foot footprints. Situated alongside the Raritan River atop a 200-foot high mountain, they named it Natirar, an anagram for Raritan spelled backward. It was said over 300 men under the direction of Shanley & Co. of Newark.

Early Years

Suttons, Tigers, Hortons, Belchers & Ladds

Over the past two centuries, the land has changed hands before the Ladds acquired over 1,000 acres.

In 1837, Christopher Tiger purchased a 120-acre farm along the east side of the Peapack-Far Hills Road from the estate of Levi Sutton. At some point, he built his homestead on or near the site of what is now 44 Main Street.



Zachariah Belcher’s “Sunnybranch” property. The Ladds purchased this piece in 1905, and the residence served as their residence during the eight-year construction of Natirar. MLH is in search of a 1905 property survey to



confirm the location of this building and Maple Cottage.

In 1887, Barabas Horton's son, William Halloway Horton, purchased the farm after Christopher Tiger's death. Christopher Tiger's third wife was Catherine Lane, a descendant of the Nevius / Lane families who owned the adjacent farm. The Nevius/Lane farm became a prominent part of the Natirar consortium. The Nevius/Lane homestead was on the site of the present parking lot to the southwest of the Natirar barns. Christopher Tiger was the great uncle of Ellis Tiger, who, in 1921, founded the Peapack-Gladstone Bank.



From 1905 until 1912, when their new brick and limestone, slate-roofed Tudor-style mansion was completed (the extant primary "Natirar" residence), Kate and Walter Ladd resided in a large framed house on the property. That house had been constructed circa 1895 by Zachariah and Kate (Fuller) Belcher, the previous owners of the nearly 200-acre tract called "Sunnybranch Farm" that would form the core of the "Natirar" estate. The Belcher house was demolished shortly after the Ladds' new residence was completed.

The Maple Cottage

In 1901 William Horton sold his farm to Chandler White Riker, a Newark lawyer from Riker. Riker and his wife Mallie sold a 120-acre tract to the Ladds. By 1907 they had converted the farmhouse into Maple Cottage. There was also a separate cottage for the superintendent. And finally, in 1908 Kate initiated her first convalescent home for women.

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The home operated from 1908 until her death in 1945, when the convalescent home was relocated to the main Natirar mansion. The main home operated from 1948 until 1983. The Maple Cottage was demolished in the 1980s. Kate Macy and her husband, Walter Graeme Ladd, are both buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, New York.



Thanks to B.P. for sending this photo of Kate and Walter at their final resting place.



The Natirar Mansion



Natirar C1912, just after completion, originally had oak paneling, carved ceilings, a solarium, a veranda, and a greenhouse. Natirar once spread over three towns, Peapack-Gladstone, Far Hills, and Bedminster, but is now officially only part of Peapack, New Jersey.

Many people don't know that the 40-room Natirar was modeled after Wroxton Abbey in Warwickshire, England. And what a coincidence that Wroxton Abbey is now owned by Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey.



England's [Wroxton Abbey](#) inspired Walter and Kate's Peapack Natirar estate. Wroxton Abbey is a Jacobean house in [Oxfordshire](#), England, constructed in 1727. It is now the English campus of [Fairleigh Dickinson University](#) in New Jersey after the North and Pope families gave the lease to Trinity College, Oxford, in 1932. Take a virtual tour of the inspiration behind Ladd's Natirar.

The Ladds selected Boston-based architect and landscape architect Guy Lowell (1870-1927) to design their new residence and principal outbuildings and lay out the estate's English park-like landscape. A few years before, Lowell had designed the Ladds' other residence "Eegonos" (now called "East of Eden") located on Frenchmans Bay at Bar Harbor, Maine. Lowell was associated with the design of "Natirar" by New York architect and nearby Bernardsville, New Jersey resident Henry Janeway Hardenbergh (1847-1918).



Natirar painting

Philanthropy

The Ladd's philanthropic life was focused on helping people. They had no children. Mrs. Ladd spent most of her adult years in a wheelchair with severe arthritis, and her work evolved to helping women in distress. In 1908, she turned their nearby Maple Cottage into a convalescent home for "deserving gentlewomen who are compelled to depend upon their own exertions for support shall be entertained without charge." The house opened on May 1, 1909, with what was referred to as "21 inmates" in the Bernardsville News. The previous year, there were almost 70 patients. Mrs. H.E. Dudley was the superintendent and stated, "This is Christianity in action."

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She's also remembered as an American philanthropist who founded and endowed an additional foundation called the [Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation](#) in 1930 in honor of her father. That foundation is playing a critical role in a COVID-19 world as it works to **"Improve health by advancing the education and training of health professionals."**



has meant so much to Berry - has always brought such beautiful gifts and lovely remembrances, and your words of encouragement have helped me through years of struggles at Berry.

I am so glad that you and Mrs Ladd could have lunch together at Christmas time. I can picture you with your face all lit up with your beautiful smile. I feel so near that I could be almost with you! When I come to New York next I want to come out to see you. There are so many things I want to say to you personally.

Your dear brother, Mr. Macy, has meant so much to Berry and has been so closely associated with us that he seems one of us. I think often of him and pray that he may be restored to health. As I grow older I believe more and more in prayer. There is greater power there than we can ever know.

I wish Mr. Macy would come to see us. We have a pleasant guest house and he could be so quiet and not troubled with the affairs of the school. It has been my earnest wish that you will come back to Berry. Dr. East promised me that he would bring you. Please tell him that I am expecting him to keep that promise.

We had a wonderful Christmas and your candy added much to the happiness. Some of the boys and girls are finding words to tell you how I appreciate all you have done for me.

The new school year is starting off well. I wish you could see the boys and girls. Just now I met a number of them going into the library and one of them said: "O, if Mrs. Ladd could only know how we enjoy this beautiful library."

Please give my affectionate regards to Mr. Ladd and tell him that every one at Berry rejoices over his recovery.

Everyone sends best wishes for the New Year and hopes that it will bring a visit from the Ladds. Remember me to all your household.

With a heart full of love,

Your friend,

Martha Berry writes on January 6, 1928 that she was delighted to receive a letter in Ladd's own handwriting. Berry thanks Ladd for her friendship and contributions. She speaks of the library that they donated and boxes of candy that they sent. She wishes recovery and good health for Mr. & Mrs. Ladd.



Even Mr. Local History has ties. That's my wife and her family in 1969 at Kate Macy Ladd.

Walter established a fund to ensure the continuation of convalescence after he died in 1933, with an endowment of over \$13 million. The foundation would move the convalescent home from Maple Cottage to Natirar after Kate died in 1945. The foundation provided women from Newark and NYC with an all-expense paid two weeks to help them recover from an illness, receive medical treatment, or recuperate. Fifty years after Walter's death, his will stated that Natirar should close. In 1983, the convalescent home completed the Ladd mission, and Natirar was put up for sale. King Hassan II of Morocco bought the estate for \$7.5 million.

The ladies were expected to come down to breakfast in their robes but wear nice outfits for lunch and dinner. They were assigned to tables in groups of 4 to 8 and were offered several delicious



meal choices depending on their dietary needs. The tables were always set with fresh pastel table clothes for breakfast and lunch and white clothes for dinner. Mealtime was relaxed and leisurely. New guests, especially ones who might still be in pain from an operation, would arrive in the dining room anxious or stressed at first, but as time passed, you could see the change in them as they recuperated and made friends.

The ladies would spend their time sitting on the patio in the sun, or under the shade of a tree. They could use the vast library or get a treat at the little soda shop counter. They were encouraged to get their hair done once a week at the on-site beauty shop and could participate in occupational therapy (crafts) or physical therapy if needed. Visitors were only allowed on Sunday afternoons because they wanted the ladies to convalesce undisturbed.

Diane Hilmer Ludlow – Worked at Kate Macy Ladd 1974-1975

Meryl Carmel from nearby Chester spent 10 years researching the philanthropist for her book, *Finding Kate*. Carmel said Ladd's efforts at Natirar served more than 20,000 women. "She wanted others' lives to be happy and fulfilled," Carmel said. She said about 50 convalesced at the estate at one time in 21 bedrooms of various sizes that could accommodate two to four women.

Convalescent Home Closes and Estate is Sold to a King



According to Walter Ladd's will, the property would be sold 50 years from the day of his death, but a number of suitors were pursued. The boro negotiated with the nearby United States Golf Association to purchase the property as they were searching for a new national headquarters. [The USGA ended up at the former Frothingham House](#) just down the road. A park or condos were also considered.

Malcolm Forbes, a nearby Bedminster resident and friend of King Hassan II, introduced His Majesty to the property close to Princeton University, where his sons attended college. King Hassan II bought the estate from the Ladd's estate, and the proceeds went to five medical schools: Johns Hopkins, NYU, Hampton Institute in Virginia, Tuskegee College, and Berry School in Rome, GA. The asking price was \$ 8.5 million. The property and estate were sold in 1983 for \$7.5 million, and the closing date was set at May 21, 1983.



King Hassan II of Morocco was riding with President Ronald Reagan in Virginia in 1982.
Source: White House Gallery & Arcadia Books



For the next 20 years was owned by the King who never spent a night there. Following King Hassan II's death in 1999, the King's son, **Mohammed VI**, sold the Jersey estate for \$22 million to Somerset County.

The Somerset County Parks Commission bought the 491-acre estate in 2003 for \$22 million with the intent to preserve this crown jewel as an open space where it now serves as a public park, including businesses in the preserved estate.



The Ladd's neighbor to the north was none other than C. Ledyard Blair, owner of the famed Peapack's Blairsden. Painting by David Henderson

The Blairsden Association, although not successful in its efforts to acquire "Blairsden," had nevertheless developed what was considered by many to be an effective model for a public-private partnership for such a project. As a result, the Association — which was renamed the Natirar Association — was asked by the Somerset County Park Commission to assist in the county government's ultimately successful efforts to acquire "Blairsden's" neighboring estate, "Natirar." The Association was later dissolved.

W. Barry Thomson, Local Historian and writer



While most memorable is the razed Maple Cottage, there was also an Elm Cottage (3 stories, 5,817 sq ft), Oak Cottage (2 floors, 2,100 sq. ft), and Ash Cottage (2 stories, 2,934 sq ft). Also referenced are the Fleming/Tiger House Sites I&II. Source: Somerset County Parks Commission Master Plan – 2005

Natirar Estate Development



Mr. Local History and Robert Wojtowicz, with his son, met and discussed the project. While many challenges have presented themselves, he remains optimistic about seeing the project through to completion. With the 90 Acres restaurant, the farm, the Natirar Club, and the main mansion complete, in 2020, they will move forward with the villas, spa, and hotel. We heard there might be a need for a gift shop. (Inside joke).



Natirar is two separate entities owned by Somerset County. The first is the park system managed by the Somerset County Parks Commission. The other is a 90-acre section not under the green acres funding and is a leased partnership with Pendry Hotels. Pendry is one of the most bespoke hotel management companies in the country. Pendry Hotels is a division of Montage International, the luxury hotel management company. In addition to adding the Pendry Natirar hotel, the property will include a luxury residential development located on a new private street within Natirar named Abby Road, after Bob Wojtowicz's first granddaughter.

The restored mansion and new ballroom serves as the centerpiece of a singular new resort and private club complex. Designed to become one of the nation's finest resorts, the reimagined property will ultimately include private residential villas, a boutique hotel and spa in conjunction with the existing pool, tennis courts and fitness and wellness center, surrounded by 400 acres of riding, walking and biking trails.



Warren Township resident Robert Wojtowicz, the founder of the Natirar community. "Pendry Residences Natirar will provide owners their own customized experience, with the ability to immerse themselves in a community focused on sustainable living, wellness, and connection to nature – all accompanied by the personalized services and amenities of the Pendry Hotels & Resorts brand." Source: Courier News 2020



Ninety Acres features a 12-acre sustainable [farm](#), state-of-the-art [Cooking School](#), and world-renowned restaurant.



The Club at Natirar offers many types of [engaging events](#), including members only, members with guests, and prospective members as well. Source: The Club at Natirar.

The Natirar property boasts one of New Jersey's most acclaimed restaurants, Ninety Acres. Built-in the estate's restored carriage house, this exceptional facility includes a cooking school, a private club, and a 12-acre farm that supplies fresh, organically produced vegetables, herbs, and berries, as well as lamb, pork, and egg-laying chickens for the restaurant. The stylish and striking interiors were designed by the Rockwell Group, the acclaimed architecture and design firm headed by the award-winning architect David Rockwell. Rich woods, brick walls, high ceilings, Palladian windows, wrought iron accents, and original wood sculptures and artworks made from trees on the property provide both drama and warmth, in keeping with the building's history, bucolic setting, and commitment to sustainability.

Construction began in Spring 2020 on 24 homes next to the Ninety Acres restaurant on the historic Natirar estate.

Prices begin at \$2 million each, and the 24 residences range in size from 2,400-square-foot Farm Villas to the larger Estate Villas at more than 3,600 square feet. In addition to the homes, the development will include a hotel adjoining the mansion and the Spa Pendry with a fitness center, swimming pool, tennis courts, and outdoor activities. The hotel will feature 68 guestrooms and suites. Something we learned: There is also a "Club" at Natirar.

While National Register listing may present certain constraints, it also represents opportunities, particularly with regard to funding for preservation projects. For example, in order for a project to be eligible to apply for a grant through the New Jersey Historic Trust, the property in question must be listed on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places. National Register listing also provides a baseline level of recognition of historic significance for other preservation funding opportunities. National Register listing would also enhance the prestige of the site in the public's perception and can thus enhance outreach and marketing options in heritage tourism.

Somerset County Parks Commission – 2005 Master Plan



Go visit the Natirar Park!

Have a Story to Share?

Feel free to share a story below or feel free to drop us an [email](#).



Additional Information

Sidebar: The Sheptocks



Rudy and Joanne Sheptock of Peapack are surrounded by 13 of their 29 children. Seven natural children were not enough for the born-again Christians. Courier-News Photo By E. G. Offenberg

SIDEBAR STORY: The Sheptocks are a great story and part of the history of the Natirar story. 29 children in all: Mary Grace, 30; Shawn, 21; Ruthie, 21; Rudy, 20; for family, Peapack are surrounded by 13 of their born-again Christians. Mary Ann. 18; Mary Frances, 17; Robert, 16; Bob. 16; Steven. 15; Mary Elizabeth. 15; Lori, 14; David, 13; Michael, 13; Benjamin. 12; Rosie, 12; Patty, 12; Eric. 11; Mary Margaret. 10; James, 10; Michele, 10; Matthew, 8; Mary Christine. 8; Michael, 8; Mary Claire, 7; Martin, 7; Bobby, 7; Jon, 4; Timothy, 3; and Samuel, 2. The Sheptocks have never accepted food stamps or welfare and employ no outside help, although they do 14 to 16 loads of laundry every day. Source: Courier News 1980.

In August 1975 we moved from Chester, NJ to Peapack, NJ – The mansion we moved into was over 100 years old at the time and had been the library of the Kate Macy Ladd Convalescent Hospital. It had three above-ground floors and a basement and sat on five acres with a barn and a corral. It had a large foyer, two fireplaces, a grand staircase overlooked by a chandelier, 13 bedrooms, seven bathrooms, a library, a parlor, two dining rooms and a three-car garage. over the years we had ponies, goats, sheep, dogs, hamsters and gerbils. My parents had as many as 28 kids with them at one time, due to the age range. As many as 13 were teenagers at once.

Joanne Elizabeth (Tedesco) Sheptock and Rudolph Peter Sheptock, Sr raised 37 children at Maple Cottage.



Kate Macy Ladd established the [Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation](#) in 1930 to honor the memory of her father. Ladd intended the Foundation to devote itself to promoting health and the ministry of healing. Ladd's father, Josiah Macy Jr., was an eighth-generation descendant of Thomas Macy, who emigrated from England in 1635. In 1659, Thomas Macy and nine other men purchased Nantucket Island (then a part of New York) to seek religious freedom.



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[Look inside Kate Macy Ladd](#) in this 1975 brochure.



Meryl Carmel from Chester,NJ spent 10 years researching the philanthropist for her book, [*Finding Kate: The Unlikely Journey of 20th Century Healthcare Advocate Kate Macy Ladd*](#). She interviewed Ladd family members and gained access to diaries, letters and photographs, even learning that a great-aunt of her college roommate worked at Natirar. Carmel also tracked down the relatives of Natirar employees, interviewing some of them in Canada and Ireland.