

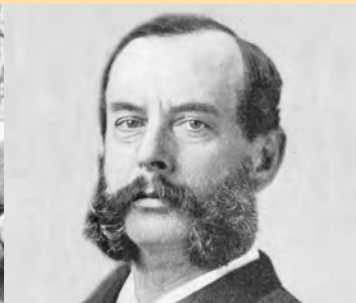
TUXEDO PARK

Lives, Legacies, Legends



Chiu Yin Hempel

Foreword by Francis Morrone



TUXEDO PARK

Lives, Legacies, Legends

Tuxedo Park, one of America's first planned communities, was for decades synonymous with upper-class living. An exclusive gentleman's club founded here in 1886 had among its early members the Vanderbilts, Astors, and Morgans. The tuxedo jacket had its debut in America in this Hudson Valley enclave. Well known for the period houses that were designed by the most renowned architects of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it is a historical community deemed worthy of preservation by the National Register of Historic Places. But more importantly, Tuxedo was home to generations of immigrants – both rich and poor – whose deeds shaped America's culture, society, and economy at the turn of the 20th century.

Indeed, it was the extraordinary legacies of these early residents that earned Tuxedo approbation in history. Women's rights in America were first asserted here by courageous pioneers such as Cora Urquhart, Maude Lorillard, Eloise Breese, Susan Tuckerman, and Adele Colgate; proper manners were encoded by Emily Post; and the look of a century was defined by Dorothy Draper. It was here that a farm boy, whose father worked as an undertaker, founded Orange & Rockland Utilities, while two well-born men came to financial ruin by pursuing a lifestyle of Gilded Age excess. It was a Tuxedo resident who funded Thomas Edison's inventions, and another who donated antique furniture that formed the cornerstone of the American Wing collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It has been said that the 1929 stock market crash was caused by a Tuxedo man, but it was also Tuxedo's philanthropists who built institutions of lasting significance both locally and nationally – from George F. Baker High School, Tuxedo Park Fire Department, and Tuxedo Park Library to Harvard Business School, the artists' retreat Yaddo, The Juilliard School, Dartmouth Library, and more. It was here that radar and the atomic bomb that helped end World War II were first conceived.

The founding story of Tuxedo Park is equally illuminating of the culture and society of the time. The community began when Pierre Lorillard IV, a fourth-generation immigrant, whose Huguenot ancestors came to America in 1760, became disenchanted with horse racing – the passion of his life. For five years beginning in 1885, the development of Tuxedo Park provided the tobacco millionaire with a diversion, before he lost interest and returned to his beloved equestrian pursuits. But one man's passing fancy offered others career opportunities of a lifetime.

It was in Tuxedo that the architect Bruce Price, a third-generation immigrant from Wales and the father of Emily Post, designed shingle houses that became the defining indigenous architectural form. But Price's artistry would have been diminished had it not been complemented by the romantic landscape crafted by engineer Ernest Bowditch. The picturesque works of both men in Tuxedo would be eclipsed by the large, European-inspired mansions built in the first three decades of the 20th century, which paid less heed to harmonizing structure with nature. The houses standing today bear witness to this change in architectural preference that took place across America.

The visions of the early generations of homeowners and the architects who worked for them – however luxurious or avant-garde – would not have been realized without the skilled labor of the thousands of Italians and Slavs, who came to Tuxedo between the 1880s and 1910s. These new immigrants – the Damatos, Mellilos, Modders, Mottolas, Venezias, and others – planted in this Orange County, New York community the seeds of their fruitful American dreams, despite the prevalence of ethnic discrimination during the 1920s. Many of them would fight as American soldiers side by side with their wealthy employers during both World Wars.

Illustrated by some 150 historical images and covering the period from 1885 to 1940, *Tuxedo Park: Lives, Legacies, Legends* introduces the reader to a group of very special Tuxedo men and women. Their lives were both fascinating and inspirational, and their legacies resonate on the national stage as well as shape the character of the local community today.

Chiu Yin Hempel is a publisher who has worked for Macmillan, Pearson, and The Economist Group. She is the coeditor of *Tuxedo Park: The Historic Houses*, which was selected by *HouseBeautiful* as one of the magazine's ten favorite books in 2007. It also won in 2008 an Excellence Award from the Greater Hudson Heritage Network. Chiu Yin has lived in Tuxedo Park since 1992.

"The author has captured the essence of many of the old family stories of Tuxedo Park. A fun read."

Christian R. Sonne, Historian, Town of Tuxedo.

Titles of related interest (available from Tuxedo Historical Society):

Tuxedo Park: The Historic Houses

Christian R. Sonne and Chiu Yin Hempel

The World With a Fence Around It

George Rushmore

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Firefighter for Life

It was April 1901. The John Greenough house had burnt to the ground. Four months earlier, at Christmas, Richard Mortimer, one of the earliest settlers in Tuxedo Park, also saw his house consumed by fire. The cause was not determined – perhaps it was a backed-up chimney or faulty electrical wiring. After all, it was only twenty-one years since Thomas Edison had founded the Edison Electric Illuminating Company (which later became Consolidated Edison) to commercialize the distribution of electric current to power light bulbs, and as recently as 1890, Llewellyn Park, where Edison lived, had opted for gas to light the roadways. But luckily there were no casualties, and some furniture and artworks were saved.

To everyone's surprise, Richmond Talbot, Jr. came forward with a plan: Tuxedo would set up a fire department. It would be comprised entirely of volunteers, drawn from residents in the Park and in the Town, as well as staff of the Tuxedo Club. Talbot was an unlikely driving force behind this initiative.

Not much distinguished this man, except that he was a tennis player and an expert golfer, who won the Tuxedo Club golf championship in 1897. He was secretary of Sanderson & Porter, a large engineering firm; it did not sound like a brilliant career. He served as Town Justice for a few years in the early 1900s, but there is no record of any insightful judicial decisions. He never married. He lived with his mother and stepfather, who had achieved much success in life. His



Richmond Talbot, Jr.

father, who died when Talbot was young, must have made quite a bit of money, too, because Talbot had an inheritance that enabled him to own a series of houseboats in Florida, where he entertained his friends in the winter. (The boats either traveled independently or in tandem. They were sufficiently well equipped to serve formal dinners on board.) Talbot's mother, Julia Marshall Talbot, was the daughter of a Pittsburgh banker. She remarried in 1893 Frederic de Peyster Foster, an influential Wall Street lawyer who was also a trustee of Central Union Trust Company, and a director of the Central Union Safe Deposit Company, Fulton Trust Company of New York, Provident Fire Insurance Company, and Royal Exchange Assurance of London. Foster was also President of the Miller Mining and Smelting Company. In

1910, the Fosters bought the house, “The Breezes”, originally built by James L. Breese.

But in the Fire Department Talbot found his *métier*:

Set up in 1901, the Tuxedo Park Fire Department was a model of community collaboration from the start. While Talbot was the head of the management team running the Fire Department, the Chief in command of all firefighting efforts was Charles S. Patterson, Superintendent of Tuxedo Park. Families from all parts of the community joined in the volunteer effort – the names Mottola, Venezia, Pell, Smith, Lorillard, Wagstaff, Bentley, Forsono, Maxwell, and many more grace the Department’s records.

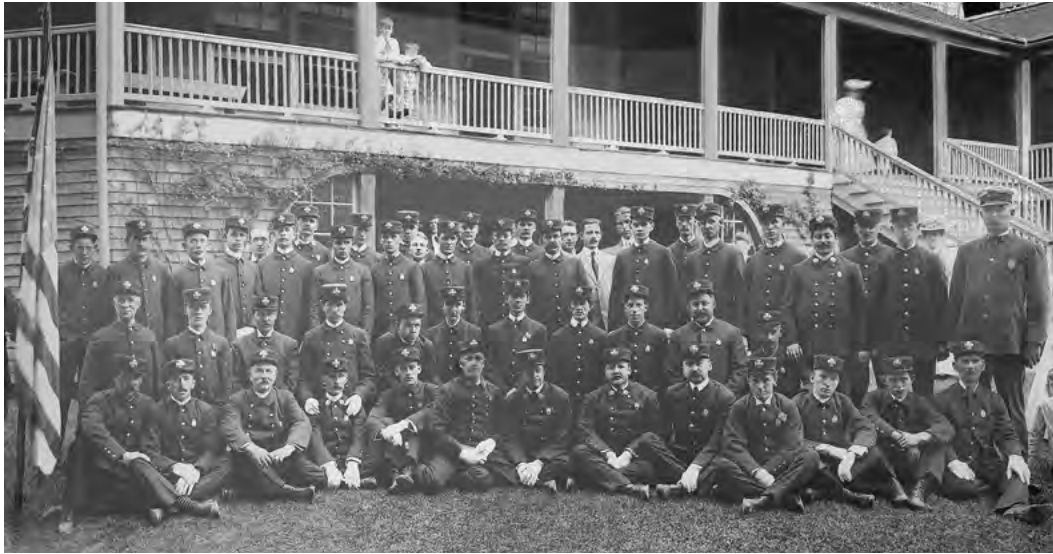
Under the joint leadership of Talbot and Patterson, the Fire Department in 1903

rented one-half of the Tuxedo Park Library building and used the space for meetings. In 1927, it relocated to the upstairs of the Storage Company Stables, at that time called the Tuxedo Garage (opposite the present-day Home Town Market). It was not until 1964, thirty-two years after Talbot died, that the Department moved to its present location on Route 17. From its inception, the Fire Department was an integral unit in the community. Every Fourth of July, the march of the firefighters from the Town to the Tuxedo Club – in full dress uniform with their fire engine sirens blaring, and accompanied by a band, the police, and the boy scouts – was the highlight of the celebration.

The first firefighting equipment was a one-horse-drawn two-wheel cart containing

*The house where
Richmond Talbot, Jr.
lived.*





*Firemen in dress blues
in front of the Tuxedo
Club, July 4, 1907.*

The first fire cart in Tuxedo.



a hand pump and just fifty feet of hose. The cart was housed in a barn on the site in the Town now occupied by the Masonic Temple (the present-day Town Hall). Several other carts were also placed in strategic sections inside the Park. It was not until 1917 that the first automotive fire apparatus – a Ford Truck converted to carry water – was deployed.

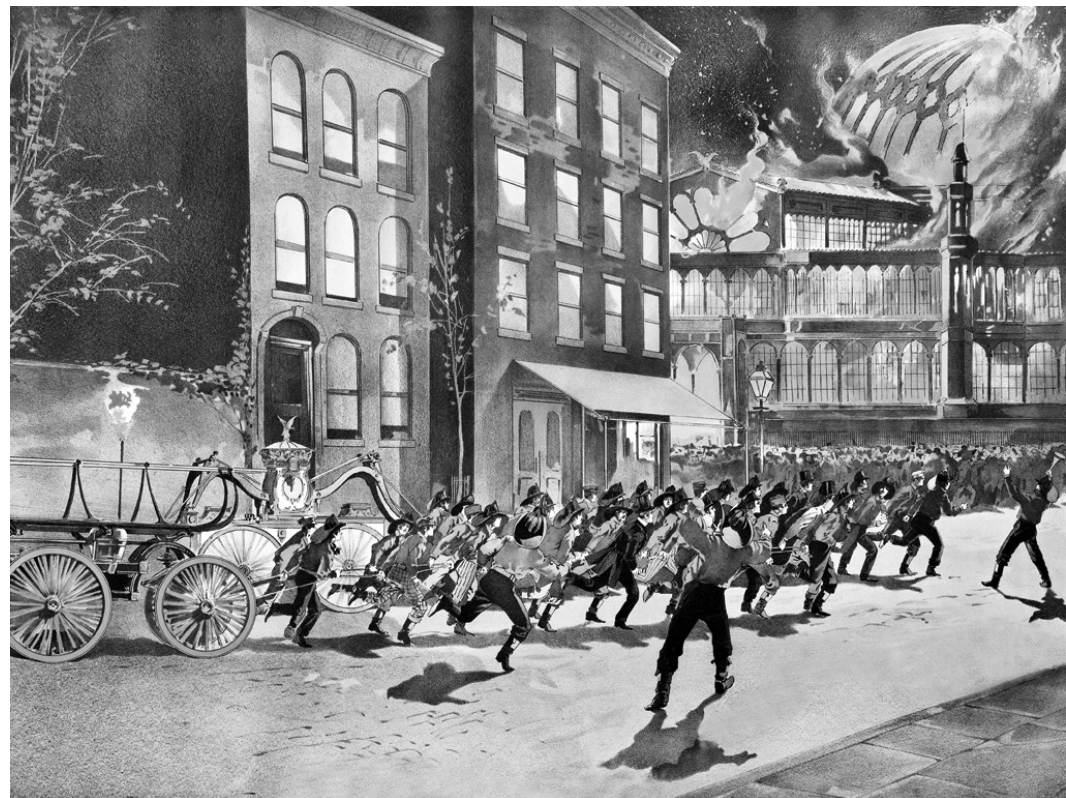
“When a house by the lake side caught fire ... Bertie Pell climbed a ladder, hose in hand, with the idea of smothering the flames from above. Quite unexpectedly water surged through the nozzle at a terrific rate and it was only Bertie’s great bulk and strength that saved him from being thrown off the ladder before assistance could reach him. When water failed, as it generally did, the firemen salvaged whatever they could and great feats were performed.” This was George

Rushmore's vivid account of one of the early firefighting efforts, before formal training was instituted and better equipment acquired.

Serving for thirty-one years as President until his death, Talbot personally responded to many fire calls, including the conflagration in 1905 when the house of J. Frederick Pierson, Jr. (the present site of "Sho Chiku Bai") was burnt to the ground. Following their efforts, the owner offered the exhausted firemen the last of the champagnes left in what had become an open-air cellar. The firefighters also responded to other types

of emergencies. The Department's 1907 annual report noted, not without humor: "There were five fire alarms: One from the Cutting Cottage, one from the Hull Cottage, one from the Lee Cottage, one from the Havemeyer Stable, and one to hunt robbers; no total losses except the robbers."

Talbot died in 1932. No record exists of what he left behind, except the legacy of the Fire Department. He was survived by his mother, who also outlived her second husband. Mrs. Foster died aged ninety in 1937, leaving an estate of \$2 million.



A drawing of a fire scene, circa 1900s.

The Sound of Money

It was a very good thing that Tuxedo had a fire department. Quite a few rich men were moving their assets into Tuxedo Park. In 1901, America had 4,000 millionaires. They represented less than one-thousandth of one percent of the population, but they owned twenty percent of the nation's wealth – wealth that had grown exponentially and in concentration in the previous several decades. By 1929, the year of the Great Crash, a *Wall Street Journal* report claimed “scores of men . . . worth more than \$50 million, dozens . . . in the \$100 million class, and one or more in the \$1 billion class”.

John D. Rockefeller was the richest of them all. He was worth \$200 million at the turn of the 20th century. He would become the first billionaire in 1913, the year that federal personal income tax was first introduced, but only at a rate of one percent rising to a top marginal rate of six percent for income exceeding \$500,000. Rockefeller's net worth in 1913 was equivalent to two percent of the U.S. gross national product at the time, or \$190 billion, when adjusted to present value, more than triple the wealth of Carlos Slim, the world's richest man in 2010. Andrew Carnegie, an out-of-work weaver's son, sold his company (which would merge with others to become U.S. Steel) in 1901 for \$300 million, while thirty-two Vanderbilt heirs shared a \$200 million inheritance.

The making of such staggering new wealth came in stages. From post-Civil War to the 1880s, fortunes were primarily made from

railroads, shipping, oil, mining, and consumer and industrial goods businesses. However, many of these early companies became over-extended and over-capitalized on a quicksand of promissory notes. The depression that began in 1893, sparked by the bankruptcy of National Cordage that rapidly engulfed countless railways, shuttered the doors of more than 15,000 companies, closed some 600 banks, and put idle one-fifth of the labor force, gave birth to the next phase of unrestrained capital accumulation: Consolidation.

In the years leading into the new century, billion-dollar corporations were being formed by shrewd financiers and their industrial clients from the ashes of failed enterprises. When the resulting economic benefits of integrating sourcing, production, and distribution became a mandate for greed, consolidation-by-necessity quickly gave way to amalgamation-by-desire. Justified by the popular theory of natural-law (survival of the fittest) economics, and spurred by few regulatory restraints, “trusts”, or monopolies, were formed in nearly every business sector, from steel (U.S. Steel) to oil (Standard Oil Company), tobacco (Continental Tobacco Company), and sugar (American Sugar Refining Company). In the area of transportation, relentless mergers of railroad businesses were exemplified by the creation of Northern Securities Company from the combination of rival Northern Pacific Railway (controlled by J.P. Morgan and James J. Hill) and Union Pacific Railway (controlled by E.H. Harriman). The combined

company came to own rail traffic in one-quarter of the United States. Freight prices rose and commodities soared as a result; likewise the bank accounts of robber barons. Corporate profits expanded in direct inverse relationship to the welfare of consumers.

This lustful money machine had to be slowed. President Theodore Roosevelt succeeded in launching a series of anti-trust prosecutions to impose what he regarded as benign federal regulations designed to save capitalism from its own excesses. By 1907, his administration had sued nearly forty companies under the Sherman Antitrust Act. Standard Oil was broken up in 1911; so was the tobacco trust that Lorillard's company merged with back in the 1890s.

However, even before these gigantic companies were right-sized, the stage had been set for the next money game: Bankers, led by J.P. Morgan, were shifting the balance of a company's securities from debt (bonds requiring regular payment of interest) to equity (returns based on company earnings). The stocks were financed, promoted as American dreams, then sold to and traded by the public, while bankers and their corporate allies reaped the benefits of such machinations. American business became reorganized – or “Morganized” – under the control of Wall Street. Many newcomers to Tuxedo Park from the mid-1890s were participants in and beneficiaries of these financial maneuvers.

Throughout this time, economic expansion was enabled by technological

inventions – from electricity and the telephone to new materials and new processes – that galvanized productivity and profits. These frantic – and heady – economic times, when translated at the individual level, meant that it was “the fashion . . . to be busy, to be overwhelmed by engagements, to be pressed for time and to be driven to death by one's social and professional responsibilities”, as observed by H. Price Collier, author, social critic, and resident of Tuxedo Park.

There was money to burn, and it had to be seen to be burnt. But the first order of business for the rich was to secure social separation from the masses. They did so, according to Collier, by adopting the trappings of an old order. Wealthy Americans traveled to Europe for their honeymoon, health, and education. They married their children to European nobility. They were particularly fond of the English ways – in the matters of sports, manners, and sartorial attire – as if the umbilical cord had not been entirely severed by the Revolution.

At home, the newly rich sought exclusivity by establishing membership-based societies, clubs, and schools. There were Sons of the Revolution, Daughters of the Revolution, Colonial Dames, Officers of the Legion of Honor, and Societies of the Dutch; there were the Knickerbocker and Union clubs; and there were the secret societies at Yale, eating clubs at Princeton, and final clubs at Harvard. Even churches became exclusive communities, where pews bore family names and could be bought and sold. Newspapers



The Vanderbilt Residence: A chateau on Fifth Avenue, New York City, 1903.

and popular magazines talked of “society women”, “club men”, and “old families”, belying the country’s democratic ideals.

Conspicuous consumption became the order of the day. In New York City, imitation French châteaux became the setting for flamboyant parties. \$200,000 was not too large a sum in 1905 for James Hyde, who owned a controlling interest in Equitable Life Assurance Society, to spend on a masked ball at which guests wore costumes evoking the court of Louis XVI.

To escape the foul air and heat of the city between June and September, the richest men transferred the site of their social competition to resorts such as Newport, where William Kissam Vanderbilt spent \$11 million building “Marble House” for his wife Alva; their sister-in-law Alice commissioned Beau-

Arts trained architect Richard Morris Hunt to construct an Italian palazzo of gilt and alabaster across Bellevue Avenue; and William Backhouse Astor spent \$2 million renovating “Beechwood” for his wife, Caroline. It was said that a society belle required at least ninety new dresses for each season – for riding twice daily in an open carriage, taking in the sun at the beach in her own cabana, lunching on a yacht moored in the harbor, observing a match at the polo grounds, and dining with select friends before finishing the evening at a ball. Later, Palm Beach was added as a second ritzy destination under the patronage of Standard Oilman Henry Flagler.

The 1909 diary of a daughter of Grenville Kane, one of the earliest settlers in Tuxedo Park, told a similar tale of idle summer pursuits for the younger set during her stay in Newport from August 14 to September 23: “Played tennis in the morning ... Oliver Iselin took me home ... we went by the Ocean Drive and got drenched ... nearly ruined my polo coat ... we all went over to the skating rink. There were crowds of people there. I did not skate but walked and talked to Jeff Newbold ... we went to a tea ... Dined at home and then went to the dance at Mrs. Masons ... nearly everybody went onto the Haggins. Julian Little and I had the whole room to ourselves as the others were all sitting out – we danced for about fifteen minutes steadily and then took a rest and then danced again – he dances wonderfully – we got home about 2:15 – I was very weary.”

Ministering to Minds

Hiram Price Collier was a literary man. He was the author of *Mr. Picket Pin and His Friends*, a novel about the Sioux Indians. He also wrote *Germany and the Germans* (1913), *The West in the East* (1909), *England and the English* (1909), and *America and the Americans* (1896) – a series of books each written from the perspective of a non-national. *The New York Times* in 1899 said *America and the Americans* offered “caustic but truthful” comments on the “social and political shortcomings” of this country. One of the observations in the book was: “The best society of Europe is success enjoying an idle hour or so; the best society here is idleness enjoying its success. . . . Society, to be permanently interesting, must be made up of idle professionals, not professional idlers.” *Germany and the Germans* also caused a stir in that country for its less than flattering comments. The author called the Germans “boors” and predicted that if Germany were to go to war against England, it would lose. The book was published about the same time as Collier and his family were in Berlin to be presented to the Kaiser and his court – one year before World War I. Collier was given royal audience by courtesy of an American university president, who gave him an introduction to the German Minister of Education.

Collier might have had a sharp pen, but he was not the most famous writer who lived in Tuxedo Park in those days. There was Allen T. Rice, editor of the *North*

American Review. There was Mrs. Katrina Trask, a poet, novelist, and playwright. There was the Reverend Dr. George W. Douglas, a Canon of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, who wrote intellectually polished sermons. There was Mark Twain, the chronicler of the Gilded Age, who summered in the W.H. Neilson Voss house in 1907. And, of course, there was Emily Post.

But Collier gave Tuxedo a lasting legacy. He was the driving force behind the founding of the Tuxedo Park Library in 1901. He was its first President, and the only man of letters on the board. He recruited an eminent board of trustees: Charles B. Alexander (lawyer), Augustus D. Juilliard (merchant and financier), George F. Baker (banker), Frederic R. Halsey (Wall Street broker and bibliophile), Amos Tuck French (banker), R. Fulton Cutting (financier, and for many years the President of Cooper Union, the free university for workers established by philanthropist Peter Cooper), Richard Mortimer (investor, and a descendant of John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the United States), Paul Tuckerman (trustee of several large estates), and Frederic de Peyster Foster (lawyer).

Collier led the fund drive to pay for the construction of the building. In all, he raised \$18,450. The nine original trustees each gave \$1,000 (except Cutting and Foster, who each donated \$500). William Rhineland Stewart gave \$3,000. The remaining donations ranged from \$50 to \$300. Since \$50 then had the same purchasing power as \$1,300 today,



Tuxedo Park Library.

*Bruce Price's boyhood home in Maryland,
which inspired the design of the Tuxedo Park Library.*



and \$1,000 was the equivalent of \$26,000, the initial support was hardly shabby.

Collier assumed responsibility for the operations of the Library. Board meetings were held in his house. He even paid expenses out of his own pocket in the initial years, when Park residents' interest was shallow – particularly during the aftermath of the 1907 financial panic, when additional donations were hard to come by. Bruce Price was hired to design the building, and the architect offered a Greek Revival plan that bore a strong resemblance to his family home in Cumberland, Maryland. The total construction cost was \$15,999.39; Price's fee was \$349.74. It was the architect's last work in Tuxedo before he died in 1903.

The original library was conceived more as a community center than a library. The building contained a bowling alley, a pool table on the main floor, a large room for social gatherings, and public baths. (The fee per wash was two cents in the 1930s.) Only two rooms were fitted with bookshelves holding 1,700 books. Indeed, between 1903 and 1927 the Tuxedo Park Fire Department held their meetings there. When Mark Twain stayed in Tuxedo in 1907, he was invited to read excerpts from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. To his dismay, only a handful of people showed up. "As it turned out," Mrs. Alfred Loomis explained some years later, "Park people thought it was for the Hamlet's



In the bowling alley at the Tuxedo Park Library.



H. Price Collier house.

[Town's] benefit, and the Hamlet thought it was for the Park residents, so neither came."

Despite the attempt by Mrs. Loomis, who became its President in the mid-1920s, to focus the Library on its knowledge competency, the community function survived. Growing up in Tuxedo in the 1950s, Bonny Damato Takeuchi recalled spending many happy hours after school in the Library with her schoolmates: "We would build a fire in the front room. We popped corn, ate half or most of it and threaded the rest into garlands for the community Christmas tree." Timothy Tocher added: "When the garlands were thrown to the bushes for the birds, we knew the holiday was over." Mrs. Loomis did, however, raise a \$25,000 endowment fund (a present-day value of \$310,000) and put the finances of the Library on a much surer footing. The

donors included George Grant Mason, who gave \$10,000 worth of stock, Frederick Kingley Curtis (\$5,000 of stock), and Preston Davie (\$2,500 cash), among others.

Collier's personal life, like his books, marked him out as a person who did not necessarily follow convention. He was the son of Reverend Robert Laird Collier, a distinguished Unitarian minister of Maryland stock. Born in Iowa, his widowed father sent him to school in Geneva and Leipzig, where he acquired fluency in French and German as well as European manners. On returning to America, he entered Harvard Divinity School from where he graduated in 1882. He took up ministry in Brooklyn at the Unitarian Church of the Savior on Pierrepont Street and Monroe Place, where Mr. Charles Albert Robbins, who made a fortune from drug wholesaling, and his wife Katharine Delano ("Kassie"), aunt of President Franklin Roosevelt and daughter of a Newburgh-based merchant Warren Delano, who sourced his wealth from selling opium to China, were his parisheners. When Mr. Robbins died of a prolonged illness and Collier's wife left him in 1891, the Unitarian minister gave up ministering to souls, resigned from his position, and married Mrs. Robbins in 1895. The Delano family, who traced its ancestry to 16th-century France, did not approve of the union. Society at large was not supportive either. Collier was savaged by *Town Topic* for living off his wealthy wife. George Rushmore recalled that Collier was blackballed by the Union Club, and his election to the Tuxedo

Club was met with violent criticisms from some members. But the couple stood their ground and made Tuxedo Park their home. They hired Bruce Price to design a Georgian-style house on a plot facing Tuxedo Lake.

Collier died suddenly in 1913 in a hunting accident on the island of Fuyin in Denmark, where he was visiting Baron Wedell Wedellsborg. He was fifty-three years old. His wife lived to be ninety-three and died of pneumonia in her house in Tuxedo Park. At the time of her death, she was the oldest living member of the community. Their daughter, Katharine Delano Price Collier, married George Baker St. George, the grandson of George F. Baker. She was elected to U.S. Congress from 1947 to 1965.

The Spirit of Life

While the Minister of Minds left behind a library that encourages learning and sustains the community locally, Spencer and Katrina Trask bequeathed an institution that benefits artists nationally. The Trasks also left behind a spirit of life.

The Trasks lived in Tuxedo for less than ten years, by which time most of the tragedies in their lives had struck. They had their first child, a son, a year after they married in 1874. Alanson died less than five years later of a sudden illness; the cause was unknown. In 1888 their daughter Christina, the apple of their eyes, aged eleven, and second son, Spencer Jr., aged four, both died of diphtheria after they caught the

*Spencer Trask
(middle, holding
a hat) and friends.*

