

**The House at 145 Glenwood Avenue**  
by Kelly Nelson

*Miss  
any old  
photos of  
Am. Legion?  
Pictures  
to lay on  
tomorrow, please*

Walking along the streets in Deering area neighborhoods at evening time, one can glance in a lit window and see a small piece of the lives inside -- photos on a mantel, a vase of flowers, a piano, a kitten playing with the curtains. But there are many people who, when they pass the house at 145 Glenwood Avenue, have memories of actually being inside that house. Memories of dancing and playing beano, of firing pistols and practicing the bugle in that house. That's because that house, nestled in among other large, quiet residences, served as an American Legion post for 45 years.

**One of the Finest Homes**

The house was built in 1909 and 1910. Portland architect Frederick A. Tompson designed the three-story home. Tompson (1857-1919) designed many prominent buildings in the Portland area including the Armory in the Old Port (now the Regency Hotel), Wilde Memorial Chapel in Evergreen Cemetery and the Libby Building that stood where the Portland Museum of Art is now. Tompson also designed many homes around Portland and various buildings in other parts of the state such as a fraternity house at Bowdoin College, a school and library in Westbrook, and a town hall in Rumford.

Tompson was hired to design the house at 145 Glenwood Avenue by Charles A. Bennett. Bennett was a successful insurance man who was an agent for a Middle Street insurance company in 1901 and president of his own company only three years later. When Bennett was having the house built in 1909 and 1910, he was living in the house right next door. He shared the house with a traveling salesman named James Rankin and his widowed mother Martha. When construction started the Portland Sunday Telegram took note. In October 17, 1909, this note appeared: "Charles A. Bennett, general manager of the Maine Insurance Company, is building a house on Glenwood Avenue. This will be one of the finest homes in the Deering District."

A fine home indeed. Walking through the house today, one can still get a sense of the grandeur, particularly on the first floor. A wrap-around staircase sweeps upwards from the front vestibule. Stained glass windows filter the light coming into the stairway. The large living room, parlor and sun room on the first floor are ornately decorated with woodwork, especially around the windows. Servants' quarters were built in the back of the house near the kitchen and laundry room. Two lifts, hard wood boxes able to lift 100 pounds each, were installed in the kitchen and pantry to raise food and other items to the upper floors where the bedrooms and bathrooms were.

Bennett lived in the newly-built house in 1911. Curiously, Bennett lived there for only one year before moving to Boston. Over the next 29 years, seven different families lived there and the house stood vacant for three years. No one family lived in the house for more than three years. There was an oil company owner, a butcher shop manager, a National Biscuit sales agent, an insurance agent, a dry goods store owner and a bowling alley and theater manager who lived in that house with their families. Though these men were probably fairly prominent members of the community, one of the people who lived in this house stands out from the others.

### **From the Blaine House to Glenwood Avenue**

Carl E. Milliken, Maine's 48th governor, called 145 Glenwood Avenue home from 1925 to 1927. Milliken, born in Pittsfield, Maine in 1878, graduated from Bates College and was elected to the Maine House of Representatives at age 27. From 1905 to 1914 he served as a state legislator and senator and then served as governor from 1917 to 1921. He was the state's first full-time governor and the first to live in the Blaine House in Augusta.

After serving as governor, and while living on Glenwood Avenue, Milliken worked as customs collector of Maine. One of his five daughters, Nelly, was a teacher at Deering High School during this time. After three years on Glenwood Avenue, Milliken moved to New York City where he joined Will Hays and the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA), a trade association that regulated the new and booming movie industry. Milliken took over the MPPDA public relations department. Raymond Moley, in his 1945 book The Hays Office, wrote that Milliken's charm, shrewdness and political experience made him well suited for handling public relations for this movie industry association.

While Milliken was still referred to as Governor when he worked at the MPPDA, he never reentered politics but remained in the film business. Milliken suffered a stroke in 1958 at the age of 70 and spent his last three years in a nursing home in Massachusetts where he died in 1961, leaving behind his wife Emma and six children.

### **The House Becomes a Home**

While Carl E. Milliken may have been the most well known person to live in the house at 145 Glenwood Avenue, it was the occupants who moved in in 1932 who would make the place a home. It was the Ralph D. Caldwell American Legion post that made that house into their post home for 45 years.

The Ralph D. Caldwell post was born in 1922, three years after the American Legion was officially formed to assist World War I veterans and their families and to preserve the principles and ideals fought for during the war. There already was an American Legion post in Portland, but some Deering area veterans wanted a post of their own. In 1921, five men formed the Deering Army and Navy Club which, within a year, became an American Legion post.

The post was named after Ralph Dillingham Caldwell, a 1916 graduate of Deering High School who joined the Navy and went down with a torpedoed ship in 1918. Caldwell was 19.

In 1923, a post auxiliary, the female arm of the American Legion, formed. Both groups thrived. The auxiliary had 100 members at the end of its first year, 200 members three years later and boasted the largest auxiliary membership in the state during the last years of the 1920s.

The post membership also ranked number one in Maine during the late 1920s with 412 members. When the Caldwell Post was first formed it was housed in a brick building in Woodford's corner. In 1932, the post moved into the house at 145 Glenwood Avenue and both groups continued to be very active. There were holiday parties and dances, variety shows done at high schools, prisons and hospitals, bean suppers in the basement, beano games, rummage sales, blood drives, food drives.

The first floor rooms were used as sitting rooms. The second floor had meeting rooms and game and card rooms. The third floor, for a time, was a rifle range. The basement had a small kitchen to serve suppers out of and was the place for dances, beano games and other large events. An apartment at the back of the house was the home of the post home caretakers. Perhaps the most remembered caretakers were Fred and Eleanor Moore. They lived at the post from 1935 to 1961 cleaning the post and helping cook suppers.

The building at 145 Glenwood Avenue also houses many of the memories of post members today. Arthur Cobb Jr. clearly remembers being a small boy and going to the Glenwood Avenue post with his father when the rooms were filled with games and seemingly hundreds of people. Cobb, who became a Legion member after World War II, also remembers rehearsing with the drum and bugle corps in the basement at 145 Glenwood, practicing for a parade appearance.

Cliff Quinney is one of the four Caldwell Post members who rose up through the ranks to become state commander. While Quinney has been very active on the state and national level, his fondest memories are of the post at 145 Glenwood Avenue. He recalls the minstrel shows he was in for a dozen years and he still has his drum and bugle corps jacket hanging in his garage.

The post home at 145 Glenwood is where Marcia and Donald Farr met. Marcia, who served in the medical corps during the Korean war, joined the American Legion in 1953 in Van Buren, Maine. When she moved to Portland, she joined the Caldwell Post in 1955. Donald Farr, who was in the Air Force for eight years, joined the post in 1970. They were both working at a beano game in the basement of the post home one night in the early 1970s when some friends of theirs kind of nudged them into going on a post-sponsored sleigh ride together. Romance was in the air as the sleigh ride took place around Valentine's day in 1973. Four years later they married.

### **A Lot of Memories There**

Marcia and Donald Farr are still together but the days at the post home on Glenwood Avenue are now long gone since the house was sold in the late 1970s. "Many people were really disappointed when we sold it," says Donald Farr. "There are a lot of memories there."

Members cite a number of reasons why the house was sold. Membership was down. The house was too expensive to maintain and heat. It wasn't handicapped accessible. The house couldn't expand to hold larger dances and beano games.

But it was more complicated than that. The World War II veterans wanted to build a new post home. As Cliff Quinney tells it, the post had a chance to build on a site on Warren Avenue and expand the hall to have a family recreation hall, a large space for dances and possibly a bar. But it was a group of World War I veterans who governed the post and they wouldn't release the money to build a new home. "When papa controls the purse strings, there's nothing junior can do about it," Quinney says, characterizing the struggle between the founding fathers and the younger generation of veterans. While Quinney looks up to many of the World War I veterans as positive role models, he also blames them for the post stalling out by not expanding in the 1970s. "Otherwise, I believe the Caldwell Post would be the largest in Maine," he says.

The Caldwell Post, which numbered nearly 800 after World War II, now has just enough members to hold on to its charter. The auxiliary still meets once a

month but only about a dozen women attend. "The American Legion is far from dead in Maine but the Caldwell Post has had its hard times," says Arthur Cobb Jr. "Once you sell a post home like that and don't build a new one, you lose your members," echoes one auxiliary member. However, the remaining post members are still dedicated and place some 600 flags beside the graves of service men and women in Evergreen Cemetery every Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

The house at 145 Glenwood Avenue has changed hands several times since the American Legion sold it. It's currently owned by Marlene Handcock. There are still signs that the house was once a post home. There are two flagpoles-- one to the right of the house, another over the front porch. On the inside of the front door is one of those horizontal bars that is pushed down to open the door that's seen in many public buildings but rarely in private houses. Handcock says when she moved in there was a men's bathroom and a women's bathroom. The beano board still hangs on a wall in the basement.

The house at 145 Glenwood Avenue is now 82 years old. And if the walls of that house could talk, there would be a lot of stories to tell.

*Any former Caldwell Post Drum and Bugle Corps members interested in attending a reunion should call Warren McCubrey at 775-1220.*