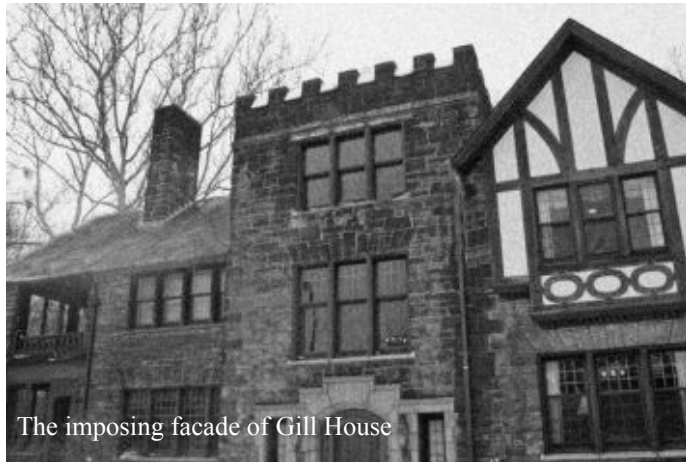


A Visit With Mr. and Mrs. Kermod Gill

HOLIDAY 1941



The imposing facade of Gill House

Thursday, July 3, 1941

It was with great delight that my wife and I received the invitation from Kermod and his lovely wife to join them at their home in Cleveland Heights for the weekend. It had been years since we last visited them at their magnificent home in the Ambler Heights neighborhood.

Kermod's family are the men behind John Gill & Sons, with Kermod the current president, the builders who

oversaw the construction of the Hanna building, the Allen Theatre in Playhouse Square, the Federal Reserve Bank and the Terminal Tower, among others. Kermod oversaw the construction of his own home three decades ago in 1911, with none other than Frank Meade, Cleveland's former dean of architects, designing the space.

We arrived at 2178 Harcourt Drive early in the morning, standing in the shadow of its stone tower and castle-like crenellated parapets. We were greeted by the first floor maid and promptly escorted to the morning room, where we were offered tea and biscuits, and met with members of the Gills' extended family. I'm certain my wife was smitten with the room, with its esoteric green marble floor detail, hand-sponged ceiling with summer sky motif and ornate stenciling. Through the adjoining screened-in porch, I could hear the flowery ruminations of Mrs. Gill and her Ohio Garden Society friends as they walked through the formal gardens. As my interest in the present company's conversation faded with my post-trip exhaustion, I hoped the hosts would soon welcome us.



(l, r) Mrs. Gill's impressive garden, Mrs. Gill welcomes a guest [images courtesy of Special Collections, Cleveland State University Library]

Kermode was the first to join us, welcoming us for the weekend, and advising the second floor maid to begin carrying our luggage to the guest quarters. At that time, and to the delight of my wife, Mrs. Gill let it be known that we'd be staying in the master guest bedroom. My wife remained composed, the model of civility, but I knew her heart was aflutter.

Climbing and chatting our way up the three flights up stairs, it was hard not to appreciate the forest of beautiful woodwork that enveloped the grand foyer and detailed staircase. The guest room was as large as our master bedroom at home. The wall frescos created the illusion of staying in an Italian villa - complete with a removable piece in the ceiling to let in the summer sky.

After a long rest, we met our hosts and the other guests in the sizable living room, with large windows that looked out onto the multi-acre property's gardens. Mrs. Gill - a Christian Scientist who refuses medical treatment for her cataracts - showed us her RCA Victor radio - it even had a remote! I imagine that in the winter the fireplace is large enough to warm the neighborhood, and I hate to think of the weight of the andirons.

We took dinner at around 6 pm, and judging by Mrs. Gill's not-so subtle tapping throughout dinner, she was not too pleased with the pace at which the staff were serving guests. She should visit my home, where there is no chef or waitstaff. I thought everything was excellent, as did my wife, though she was somewhat preoccupied with the room's solid silver light fixtures and coffered ceiling.

After dinner, the gentlemen retired to the library for an after-dinner cocktail and a smoke. The conversation centered around the War, then neighbors, past and present, including the Halles and the Zerbies. I retired for the night shortly thereafter.



We were politely asked by the second floor maid to join company in the breakfast room. The octagonal room is something else, and even I must admit that jealously got the better of me, as I wished it was my own. The brass fixtures opened panoramic windows that, combined with the homes placement atop Cedar Glen, had vistas of Cleveland that were unparalleled.

My wife was whisked away with the other ladies, as Mrs. Gill insisted on proudly showing her the admittedly impressive growth of peony, wisteria and hydrangea. I later learned that they spent an impressive amount of time gossiping in the property's tea house.

The men and children spread out beside the 25-yard by 25-foot swimming pool, which the grandchildren are

[pictured: *The view down the stairs from outside the main guest room*]

understandably fond of. A bathhouse provided a nice bit of refuge from the hooing and hawing coming from the excitement created by a high board and a low board. When the ladies resurfaced, they thought to take a dip, so the men moved to the lower porch, where Kermode offered Zane Grey novels and the waitstaff brought lemonade.



[pictured: *The grand foyer*]

As my wife and I later got dressed for the evening's festivities, I learned that she had seen the Gills' master bedroom, and its private screened-in porch. There were his and her bathrooms, and my wife is now quite insistent that she have a soaking tub and I a needle shower. Mrs. Gill's private office was also immensely appealing, I've learned. The children's bedrooms each had their own bath, and I was lovingly told that I need to make more money. At least we share a sense of humor.

By the time we made our way back downstairs, the house had been transformed. A maid directed us to the ballroom, where we found Chinese lanterns strung about throughout, including the veranda, sunken garden and more formal upper garden that ballroom opened into. A large crowd quickly gathered, and rumors immediately began spreading as to who would make it. Jerome Zerbe, who'd made quite a name for himself as a photographer for *Town & Country*, was hoping to make the evening's soiree, but was booked to cover an event in

New York City. However, a tall blonde by the name of Kay Halle did make a guest appearance, and despite her social fluttering, I was unable to secure a moment with her. Instead, I was left holding sparklers for the children. I won't bore with too many more details, but the party was suitably festive, and I'd say everybody enjoyed themselves.

Editor's note: This is a fictional account of a weekend at the Gill home. However, details of the home and neighbors are factual, and gathered through research and conversations with the current owner, Jim Herget. To read more about the home today, click [here](#).