

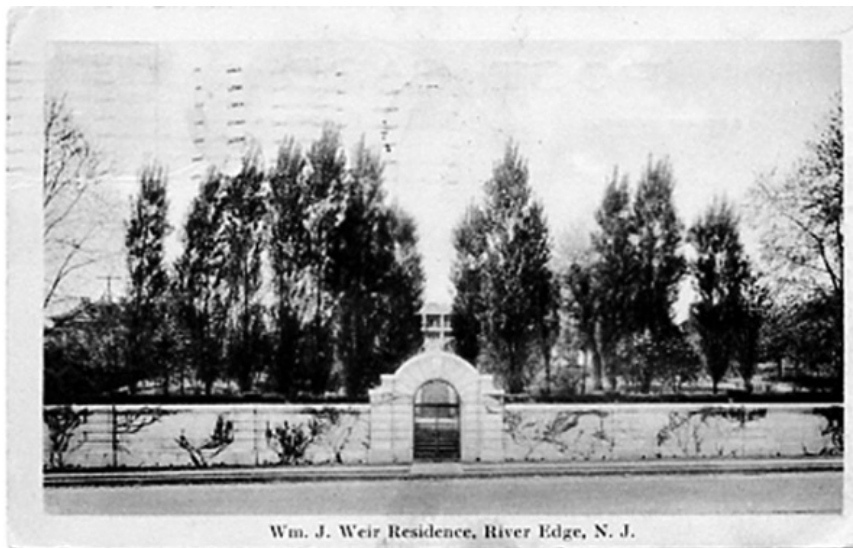
## NOTABLE SUBURBAN ARCHITECTURE: WEIR'S EDGECROFT at RIVER EDGE

Were it not for a strangely confessional postscript to his life, only William John Weir's elegant suburban residence and terraced gardens at River Edge—now a century old—would survive to invite curiosity about their maker. So perhaps we should dismiss it as merely the artifact of frustrated literary affectations from an amateur playwright and poet, who earned a small fortune manufacturing shoe lasts. Or perhaps it addresses some particular failing, otherwise concealed from posterity. We will never know. But the first item in William John Weir's last will and testament is fairly unusual—at least in my experience as a researcher. On April 2, 1925, nine months before his death, he wrote:

Who was William J. Weir and how did he come to build such a fine house on River Edge Heights? In memory of Anthony Leonard "Bud" Korteweg, we celebrate a cynosure of suburban architecture on its centennial.

Who was William J. Weir and how did he come to build a mansion on River Edge Heights? In recognition and memory of Anthony Leonard "Bud" Korteweg, we celebrate a wonderfully preserved cynosure of suburban architecture on its centennial.

*"In the lives of most of us there have been a great many mistakes. Happy are we, if their effects have not extended past ourselves. I have tried to arrange my affairs with judgment and fairness to those immediately connected with me. Death is a great Deliverer and one should be resigned in contemplation of the inevitable end. When the great seal of silence has passed over me, I trust some few will remember the good which I have accomplished and allow Oblivion to banish all rancor arising from any error I have committed."*



Wm. J. Weir Residence, River Edge, N. J.

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William John Weir, shoe last manufacturer, was born in New York on December 16, 1856, to Irish immigrants, William George Weir, a cabinetmaker, and his wife Mary (Spence), a dressmaker. William G. Weir was born in Unagh, near Cookstown, County Tyrone, about thirty-five miles west of Belfast, in 1825. Fleeing en Gorta Mór, or the Great Potato Famine, he immigrated to New York in 1849, where he married Mary Spence on September 9, 1852. The family moved to San Francisco by 1860,

where their offspring, Sarah (1853-1944), William (1856-1926), George (1859-1924), Mary Emma (1863-1889), Margaret Catherine (1865-1938), Rachel Estelle (1869-1945) and Robert James Angus (1871-1954), were educated.

By 1880, William J. Weir worked in a shoe-last factory in San Francisco. His father died September 4, 1882. After living in California for 26 years, William John Weir returned to New York. By 1900, he and his widowed mother resided on Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn. In that year, the Federal census listed him as proprietor of a shoe-last factory. By 1910, William Weir moved to 159 Underhill Avenue, Brooklyn, with his widowed cousin, Josephine Halloran, and her two daughters, Olive and Maud. William's mother, Mary, returned to San Francisco, where she lived with her youngest daughter, Rachel, wife of William H. Hartwell, and their children, William, Fred and Robert Hartwell. Mary Spence Weir died there on December 27, 1910.

On October 12, 1901, William J. Weir, of New York City, filed a patent application for "for an Improved Last," which he described as "a hollow divided last ... especially useful as a filler and shoe-tree for the use of shoe salesmen." Hollow lasts were both light and durable, but Weir's improvement employed a new cost-saving method of manufacture to create a last that was "divided in a peculiar way, as a result of which its strength is enormously increased and the two parts of which it is made up are also organized and associated together in such a fashion" so that "the heel part swings clear of the forward part when the heel part is lifted on its hinge."

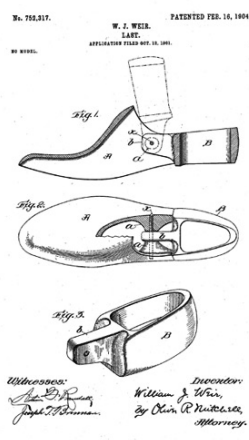
### The Move to River Edge Heights

With a considerable demand for houses at River Edge and but one vacant house in town, A. Z. Bogert employed contractor Benjamin Whittaker, of Tenafly, for \$750 in September 1900 to open streets and grade a ten-acre hilltop tract on the heights above the River Edge train station, which he had purchased of Justice John G. Webb in 1897. In 1905, A. Z. Bogert joined Mayor Joseph Brohel, William Martin and several other local investors in organizing the River Edge Land Company to develop about fourteen acres of the former Webb and Demarest farms, opening streets, laying cement walks and curbs, and subdividing the tract into lots with a street frontage of 25 feet, but varying in depth from 145 to 175 feet. To promote the development as "a high-class restricted property," the River Edge Land Company refused to sell to specu-

lators and always "sold exclusively for home sites, so that this feature should appeal strongly to those who wish to be assured of an exclusive class of neighbors." They finished laying out the Webb farm into building lots in January 1911 and houses soon began to sprout in the new subdivision.

The River Edge Land Company conveyed the 50-foot strip, known as Lincoln Avenue, to the Borough of Riverside on March 2, 1910. F. Wm. Barthman and others also conveyed the 50-foot strip known as Summit Avenue to the Borough of Riverside on the same day. Lincoln Avenue was accepted and dedicated as a public thoroughfare in May 1911. A special election was held in River Edge on October 9, 1911, to authorize a bond issue for \$4,000 to grade, macadamize

and drain Summit Avenue between Continental and Midland Avenues. Only 43 votes were polled; the question being approved: 33 in favor, 8 against, and 2 ballots rejected. At this time, the Kline Realty Company started developing the neighboring Wales' farm, clearing away brush and having surveyors mark out streets. On November 22,



1911, a special school meeting was held in Borough Hall to decide the location of a new school. Four potential sites were submitted to voters for their choice: (1) on the east side of Riverside Avenue (Kinderkamack Road), opposite the Congregational Church; (2) on the west side of Riverside Avenue, south of the Church; (3) on the northwest corner of Continental and Summit Avenues; and (4) a lot running 175 feet on Summit Avenue and 250 deep and fronting on the east side of Grand Avenue (Bogert Road?). Only 45 votes were polled and Site No. 3, at the northwest corner of Continental and Summit Avenues, won with 35 votes.

### Edgcroft

The River Edge Land Company sold four lots to William J. Weir in May 1910. On April 6, 1911, the same real estate company sold another eight lots at the intersection of the north line of Washington (Webb)

Avenue with the east side of Grand Avenue, to William J. Weir, of Brooklyn, New York, who contemplated building in the near future. On June 22, 1911, Weir sold four lots, situated southwest of the intersection of Summit and Washington (Webb) Avenues, back to the River Edge Land Company.

Finally, on March 12, 1912, the River Edge Land Company sold Lots #1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12 in Block G, measuring 360.84 along the north side of Lincoln Avenue by 125 along the east side of Summit Avenue by 100 feet along the west side of Riverside Avenue (now Kinderkamack Road), to William J. Weir, of Brooklyn, New York.

In an early attempt at zoning, the River Edge Land Company placed restrictions upon building lots in deed covenants: "not more than one house shall be erected on any two of the said lots and the same shall be for dwelling purposes only. No house shall be erected upon said lots, which shall cost less than \$5,000 or which shall stand nearer the fence line than 40 feet on Riverside Avenue (Kinderkamack Road) and 30 feet on Summit Avenue. No house commonly known as a double house, Flat house, Apartment house nor one with a flat roof and no building known as a bungalow shall be constructed upon any of said lots. No building on said lots shall be used as a brewery, tavern, beer or other saloon, slaughter house, blacksmith shop, foundry or factory of any kind or for business or employment that is dangerous, noxious or offensive in any way. No cesspool or vaults shall be constructed upon said premises. No fence shall be erected on any lot within 40 feet of the front line of the lots."

William J. Weir occupied his fine new mansion on Summit Avenue in River Edge Heights in June 1912



and was building an Italian garden, extending from the rear of his residence down to Linden Avenue (Kinderkamack Road). According to a local newspaper, it would become "one of the show places in River Edge when the work is completed." Another local correspondent reported the Italian garden in front of William J. Weir's new residence on Riverside Avenue was nearing completion at the end of July 1913. On March 20, 1912, Weir sold a tract with 150-foot frontage, on the east side of Summit Avenue, being lots #71, #73, #75, #79 and #81 to the River Edge Land Company. In 1917, Herringshaw's City Blue Book of Biography lists W. J. Weir as First Vice-President of the United Last Company, manager of the Stewart & Potter branch of the United Last Company, and secretary and treasurer of the Worth Company. Never married, he lived in River Edge with his cousin, Josephine Halloran.

On August 23, 1923, William J. Weir published "*A daughter of old Spain and other plays and Une des malheureuse (One of the unhappy) and other plays* (San Francisco, John Kitchen, Jr., 1923). He published another book of poetry, called *Random Verse and Sketches at Odd Intervals*. William Weir died January 4, 1926, and is buried in the San Francisco Columbarium.

In his last will and testament, composed on April 2, 1925, William John Weir ordered that his body be cremated and placed in a suitably inscribed urn, "to be deposited in the mausoleum in the Odd Fellows Cemetery of San Francisco within the niche where rest the ashes of my father and mother..." William Weir left his apparel and keepsakes, household furnishings, books, pictures, paintings, works of art, musical instruments, and silverware, "used in connection with my house on Riverside, Lincoln and Summit Avenues, River Edge, Bergen County, New Jersey," to Josephine Halloran, "excluding there from the billiard table with its accessories, three-piece living room suite, three-piece reception room suite, sideboard and serving table, dining room table and chairs, large living room table, three rugs on the main floor, library table and chair and fire screens, all of which is to be considered a part of the equipment of said house, or in the discretion of my executor, may be sold separately." He ordered his executor to dispose of his automobiles.

He divided his estate among his brother Robert J.



Weir, Robert's wife, Estelle, and son Burnell; his sister Margaret and her husband, George Metcalf, and their children, Will Weir and Doris Hodges; and his sister Ray Hartwell and her husband, Will Hartwell, and their sons, Will, Jr., Fred and Robert Hartwell. He left two shares of his estate to his sister Sarah "as a token of my esteem as she is amply provided for." He placed fourteen shares of his estate in a trust fund for his cousin Josephine Halloran and ordered his executor to pay her \$2,000 upon his death and \$2,600 annually in equal monthly installments. When she died, this trust was to pass to Josephine's daughter, Josephine Bonfield, of Brooklyn, to her son, Clifford Bonfield, and to Josephine's other daughters, Olivet Paul, of New York City, wife of Richard Paul, and Maud Crowder, wife of Robert Crowder. He left eight shares each to Josephine Bonfield, wife of Alfred Bonfield, to Olivet Paul, to Edna Wannach, Maud Crowder, and to Maud's son, Robert Crowder.

Josephine Halloran was born in New York City on February 25, 1867. She resided with William Weir on Underhill Avenue, Brooklyn, in April 1910 with her daughters, Olivet M., aged 24 years, and Maude M., aged 18 years. She listed her parents as Canadian (English). Whereas, in 1910, she was listed as William Weir's "cousin," in 1920, when she resided with Weir in River Edge, she was identified as his "niece." In February 1912, she and her daughters, Olive and Maude, sailed with William Weir to Bermuda aboard the S. S. Arcadian.

Upon his death, William Weir bequeathed his dwelling house at 159 Underhill Avenue, Brooklyn, together with its contents, including household furniture, books, pictures, paintings, works of art, musical instruments and silverware, to his cousin Josephine Halloran. He gave his heavy gold watch and platinum chain and locket to Robert J. Weir; his diamond ring to Fred Hartwell, of San Francisco; his tourmaline pin to Will Metcalf, of San Francisco; his three-diamond pin to Burnett Weir, of San Francisco; his grape pearl pin to Jones Weir, of San Francisco; his solitaire pin to Josephine Halloran, his opal pin, surrounded with diamonds, to Mrs. Anna Wannach; his ruby pin, surrounded with diamonds, to Mrs. Richard Paul; and his horseshoe pin to Clifford Bonfield. He left all of his

minor pieces of jewelry to Josephine Halloran to be distributed according to her wishes to Maud Crowder and Mrs. Albert Bonfield. He left all of his tools to Alfred R. Bonfield, of 238 Albany Avenue, Brooklyn. He bequeathed all his manuscripts and writings to his brother, Robert J. Weir, "to be disposed of by him as he shall deem best."

He named the People's Trust & Guaranty Company of Hackensack to be his sole executor. Lastly, Weir requested his executor to sell the house and lot in River Edge as soon after his decease as could be done, having in mind the best interest of his estate. According to his inventory, William Weir's estate, excluding real estate, was worth \$445,357.56.

The furnishings of William John Weir's office in Room #1729 in the Syndicate Building in New York City comprised a mahogany roll-top desk (\$15), oak filing cabinet, with mahogany stain (\$5), mahogany table (\$3), mahogany chairs, safe cabinet, 14-inch electric fan, desk lamp, Emeralite desk light, Peerless Junior Protectograph (a mechanical check protector), mahogany typewriter desk and Underwood typewriter. His household and personal effects in River Edge comprised: Reception Room, two rugs, domestic, 9' x 12' (\$45); oak carved library table (\$35); three-piece oak parlor suite, upholstered in leather (\$110); oak chair, carved, brass studded (\$15); three-piece suite, consisting of sofa, rocker and chair, fully leather upholstered (\$120); one pair andirons and set of fireplace tools (\$25); brass screen (\$6). The Library at Edgcroft was furnished with Mission-style oak desk and chairs (\$18); Mission oak armchair (\$5); oak Victrola (\$75); 100 standard novels (\$25); and 75 volumes of standard reference works (\$60). The Dining Room was outfitted with a carved oak dining room suite, consisting of buffet, serving table and six chairs (\$350); oak extension dining table with claw legs (\$50); a rug, domestic, 8' x10' (\$15); one pair of andirons (\$3); and a fire screen (\$3). A Wallace Nutting print (\$25) decorated the Upper Hall. Furniture in the den comprised a mahogany desk, badly damaged (\$10); swivel chair to match (\$5); buck rocker (\$2); brass bridge lamps (\$10); mahogany telephone table (\$3); iron safe (\$5); rug (\$1); leatherette upholstered sofa (\$2); and twelve pipes (\$10). Six reed chairs (\$9) and a canvas porch

swing (\$2) were stored in the attic. A glass aquarium with its cast-iron stand (\$2) stood in the East Hall. The Master Bedroom was furnished with a brass bed, single, (\$30); mahogany wardrobe and chiffonier to match (\$65); mahogany book case (\$10); small library table (\$10); two chairs and one rocker, mahogany, (\$15); and a brass hat rack (\$5). There was an oak settee (\$5) in the Back Hall. The basement furnishings included a Brunswick-Balke pool table with oak cue rack and balls, 4.5' x 9', (\$150); an oak sideboard (\$10); and prints (\$5). The cellar held Seven tons of coal (\$105) and about a cord of wood (\$10). His automobiles comprised a Packard Sedan, 1925, model 3-33, six cylinder, 29 horsepower, (\$2,000); Stevens-Duryea Touring Car, model G-1924, (\$7,500).

On October 29, 1926, the People's Trust & Guaranty Company of Hackensack sold Edgescroft to William M. Roethel, of the City of Hackensack, for \$50,000. William Martin Roethel was born in Palmyra, Jefferson County, Wisconsin, on March 15, 1893. He first appears as a clerk in the 1912 *Hackensack Directory*, but soon formed a partnership with Bertha Mattejetscheck in a men's clothing store in Hackensack around 1912. He boarded at Martha Allaire's house on Sussex Street, Hackensack, in 1920. He married Edythe Graham Bratt on June 21, 1921, in New York City. In 1930, Roethel, a men's clothing merchant at 213 Main Street, and his wife, Edythe, resided on Spring Valley Avenue in the City of Hackensack with their five-year-old daughter Margaret. Edythe Roethel worked in the Wright Aeronautical Plant #3 in Fair Lawn. He died in New York City on June 25, 1952.

## Renewal

On April 6, 1962, Katherine L. Spiegelglass, widow of physician Abraham B. Spiegelglass, residing in Englewood, sold the former William J. Weir estate at River Edge to 800 Summit Avenue, Incorporated. On April 17, 1967, this corporation sold Edgescroft to Anthony L. and Virginia Korteweg, who were already

residing on the premises. Over the past half-century, the late Anthony Leonard "Bud" Korteweg and his wife, Virginia, have thoughtfully and tastefully restored *Edgescroft* and its terraced gardens beyond their original glory. Ten years ago, the gardens became part of the National Garden Conservancy of America. Open to the public for one day each June, more than 5,000 people have visited River Edge to view these special gardens, where the nine waterfalls lace three koi (ornamental carp) ponds, which Anthony Korteweg carved out of the hill. The garden overlooks a rare cobblestone street that he fought to preserve in the late 1970s. Virginia Korteweg also relates another interesting but nearly forgotten chapter in Edgescroft's history—the lily pond and terraced gardens, with a hundred marble steps, served as the backdrop for several movies, featuring such silent screen legends as Tom Mix and Pearl White.

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Ask yourself—Just how valuable are the lessons of history? If you enjoyed this article, then please consider joining the Bergen County Historical Society, a non-profit, 501(c)(3) volunteer organization, founded in 1902. We are dedicated to preserving important evidence of the past and promoting historical literacy through interesting programs and publications.

We don't receive public operating support or grants the way other groups do, but rely entirely upon private donations, membership dues and volunteer contributions of time and talent. We are presently raising funds to construct a first-rate historical museum building for Bergen County on the Society's property at Historic New Bridge Landing, 1201 Main Street, River Edge, NJ 07661. For further information or membership application, visit: [BergenCountyHistory.org](http://BergenCountyHistory.org)

Just a timely reminder—Please respect privacy and private property whenever enjoying Bergen County's historical attractions and natural wonders. When on public lands, leave no trace!