



DOROTHEA'S HOUSE

Casa Di Cultura Italiana

120 John Street, Princeton, NJ 08540

August 1, 2014

Editors: For more information

Contact Maria LoBiondo: lobiondo@dorotheashouse.org

Dorothea's House: A Living Memorial

On October 7, 1914, Dorothea's House opened, a living memorial to a vibrant woman who sought to ease the transition of recently arrived Italian immigrants to their new home in Princeton.

As a volunteer social worker, Dorothea van Dyke McLane assisted Italian stonemasons, gardeners, laundresses, and many other immigrant families as they settled around what is now 120 John Street. But Dorothea heartbreakingly died in childbirth at age 23. In her memory, her husband, New York City stockbroker Guy Richard McLane, and father, Princeton University professor, poet, and diplomat Henry van Dyke, established an endowment, gave the land, incorporated the Dorothea van Dyke McLane Association, and had this house built to serve Princeton's growing Italian community.

Within these walls, friendships have flourished in language classes, clubs, team sports, and cultural activities. Weddings were celebrated here, and memorial services held. As families grew and moved beyond the surrounding streets, the activities of Dorothea's House have shifted; Italian classes are held here today instead of those in English, and college scholarships are awarded now that citizenship classes are no longer needed. Club meetings have given way to a lively series of Italian cultural programs. Ties to the larger Princeton community are nurtured in office space shared with several other nonprofit organizations and in annual contributions to numerous others.

Similar Italian culture centers exist in metropolitan areas across the United States, but Dorothea's House is a rare example of an ethnic settlement house that still thrives today. It now serves community members, regardless of their background, as an Italian-American cultural institution.

One hundred years after its founding, the Dorothea van Dyke McLane Association's core mission at Dorothea's House remains the same: to be a place of fellowship and an enduring testament to a remarkable woman.

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