

THE
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VALLEY
REVIEW

A Journal of Regional Studies

MARIST

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Tel: 845-575-3052

Fax: 845-575-3176

E-mail: hrvi@marist.edu

Web: www.hudsonrivervalley.org

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c/o Hudson River Valley Institute

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From the Editors

Though regrettably all but forgotten today, Lowell Thomas was a titan of broadcasting, an intrepid reporter and adventurer blessed with a mellifluous Midwestern baritone that inspired trust from his millions of listeners. People of a certain age will remember his closing line: “So long until tomorrow.”

The Marist College Archives is honored to be the repository of the Lowell Thomas Papers, an enormously rich collection of scripts, letters, newsreels, posters, mementoes—just about everything related to Thomas’s sixty-year career spanning radio, television, publishing, and the movies. Two articles in this issue mine this trove to shine a fresh light on Thomas and the important role he once played in the region and around the world.

Additional articles bring to life other Hudson Valley heroes whose luster has diminished over the ages—from John Flack Winslow, who financed and spearheaded creation of the Union ironclad *U.S.S. Monitor*, to Joseph Gavit, who managed to rescue some of the most important treasures in the New York State Library nearly lost in the 1911 state capitol fire.

As always, the issue concludes with a rich array of book reviews highlighting both works of general interest and important new scholarship.

On the Cover: “Columbia Broadcasting System, INC. 485 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N.Y., Plaza I-2345; 1949: A Visit to Tibet A memorable moment in journalism took place in 1949 when CBS News Correspondent Lowell Thomas and his son penetrated the Himalayas and reached Lhasa, the forbidden city of Tibet, for an exclusive interview with the Dalai Lama. In this photo Mr. Thomas is seen with the family of the Dalai Lama with the Potala, the Dalai Lama’s palace, rising in the background.” (1582.1.4) Inset: Lowell Thomas and his home, at Pawling, N.Y.; 10/18/68. (1518.6.3)

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Call for Essays

The Hudson River Valley Review will consider essays on all aspects of the Hudson River Valley—its intellectual, political, economic, social, and cultural history, its prehistory, architecture, literature, art, and music—as well as essays on the ideas and ideologies of regionalism itself. All articles in *The Hudson River Valley Review* undergo peer analysis.

Submission of Essays and Other Materials

HRVR prefers that essays and other written materials be submitted as two double-spaced typescripts, generally no more than thirty pages long with endnotes, along with a CD with a clear indication of the operating system, the name and version of the word-processing program, and the names of documents on the disk. Illustrations or photographs that are germane to the writing should accompany the hard copy. Otherwise, the submission of visual materials should be cleared with the editors beforehand. Illustrations and photographs are the responsibility of the authors. Scanned photos or digital art must be 300 pixels per inch (or greater) at 8 in. x 10 in. (between 7 and 20 mb). No responsibility is assumed for the loss of materials. An e-mail address should be included whenever possible.

HRVR will accept materials submitted as an e-mail attachment (*hrvi@marist.edu*) once they have been announced and cleared beforehand.

Since HRVR is interdisciplinary in its approach to the region and to regionalism, it will honor the forms of citation appropriate to a particular discipline, provided these are applied consistently and supply full information. Endnotes rather than footnotes are preferred. In matters of style and form, HRVR follows *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Contributors

Kristin Bayer is an assistant professor at Marist College where she teaches Asian history classes in the History Department. She writes on nineteenth-century global capitalism and the opium trade in addition to foreign perceptions of China. Her research has been published in the *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* and *Merchants and Missionaries: Trade and Religion in World History* (forthcoming).

Benjamin Davison is a graduate student studying American history at the University of Virginia. His dissertation will explore the way public policy influenced the American diet during the twentieth century. He holds degrees from the University of Virginia, Marist College, and the Culinary Institute of America.

Roger Hecht is an assistant professor at SUNY Oneonta, where he teaches literature and creative writing in the English Department. He earned his doctorate in English from Syracuse University, and his M.F.A. in poetry from University of Arizona. His research interests focus on the intersection of politics and landscape representation in literature, and the literary products of the Anti-Rent War in upstate New York. His poetry has been published in numerous literary journals, and his books include *The Erie Canal Reader*.

Paul Mercer studied folklore in Canada at Memorial University of Newfoundland, and received his Masters in Information Science from the University at Albany. He has worked at the New York State Library since 1979, and has been a Senior Librarian in Manuscripts and Special Collections since 1986. In addition to acquiring special collections and documents for the library, he is responsible for map collections and for the library's extensive music holdings. He is co-chair of the library's Research Residency Committee. A published author of books and papers in folklore and history, he is also a current member and past chairman of the Board of Directors of the New York Folklore Society.

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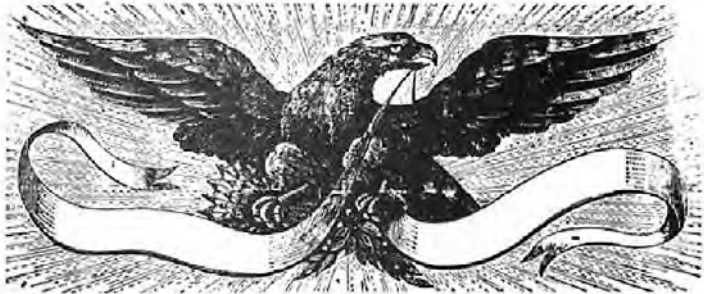
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ATTENTION! ANTI-RENTERS!

AWAKE! AROUSE!



**A Meeting of the friends of Equal Rights will
be held on**

in the Town of _____ at _____ O'clock.

**Let the opponents of Patroony rally in their strength. A great
crisis is approaching. Now is the time to strike. The minions of Patroony are at
work. No time is to be lost. Awake! Arouse! and**

**Strike 'till the last armed foe expires,
Strike for your altars and your fires—
-strike for the green graves of your sires,
God and your happy homes!**

**Meeting will be addressed by PETER
FINKLE and other Speakers.**

Broadside # 649 - New York State Library

“Rouse, Ye Anti-Renters”:

Poetry and Politics in the Anti-Rent Press

Roger W. Hecht

On a hot day in July 1845, thousands of farmers in upstate New York gathered in a field near Peter's Grove for an Independence Day rally. Like communities all over the country, these families convened to listen to music, hear patriotic speeches and sermons, and to celebrate the sixty-fifth year of the founding of their nation. These farmers and their families, however, were Anti-Renters, part of a well-organized rent strike, then in its sixth year, aimed at the major landholding families of New York. The protest was known as the Anti-Rent War. Farmers withheld rents in order to force their landlords to sell out leases that contained rent obligations and land-use and alienation restrictions that the tenants described as “feudal,” “voluntary slavery,” and “opposed to the spirit of the institution” of democracy. At its peak, the movement spread across eleven counties, gaining the support of over 50,000 tenants¹. At this particular Anti-Rent event, the farmers were entertained with parades by the infamous “Calico Indians,” the enforcers of the movement who, wearing disguises of calico gowns and leather masks, used tar and feathers and other coercive tactics to prevent the authorities from issuing warrants. The farm families heard speeches by the movement's political leaders and religious sermons encouraging farmers to resist tyranny.² The day's events were capped off by a poem, an Anti-Rent song modeled after Robert Burns's poem, “Bruce's Address to His Troops at Bannockburn”:



Hardy tillers of the soil,
Men of sweat, and dust, and toil,
Awake! No longer be the spoil
Of Patroonery!

Rally, organize anew;
Old politics keep out of view,
And stand like brothers, firm and true,
 Against Patroonery!

Doubly armed, your cause is just,
In the ballot place your trust,
And triumph, in the end, you must
 O'er Patroonery!

The reading of the poem at the rally was considered an important enough event that it was noted in the movement's news organ, *The Albany Freeholder*, and reprinted in full.

Along with grassroots organizing and political meetings, poetry played an important role in the Anti-Rent movement's efforts to communicate and maintain its message to its membership. Scores of poems and songs defining the motives of the movement, celebrating victories, and building morale were published through broadsides and via the Anti-Rent press. The two major state-wide Anti-Rent newspapers, *The Albany Freeholder* and *The Anti-Renter*, maintained weekly poetry columns featuring reprinted works by established authors and original works by members of the Anti-Rent community. Using a variety of different tones, including humor, sentimentality, and outrage, and addressing subjects from the virtue of farmers to the terror of eviction, these poems worked to establish and maintain the emotional and imaginative foundation of the movement. Anti-Rent poetry addressed both the shared aspirations and the shared fears of the striking farmers and, working alongside the more pointedly political texts (reports of meetings, political speeches, miscellaneous news, and readers' letters) shaped the ways farmers conceived of their plight and helped to direct their responses to it. This essay will discuss what I will call the "Anti-Rent imaginary"—how the farmers understood the Anti-Rent conflict and how they imagined themselves in relation to the conflict and to the landlords—and the cultural work poetry performed for the movement. First I will examine the political/aesthetic context of the poems and then explore the different types of Anti-Rent poems and how they worked to shape readers' impressions of the conflict.³

A useful way to understand Anti-Rent poetry is via another, parallel political movement for which poetry was important: the Chartist movement in Britain. Both movements emerged at roughly the same time and the cornerstone of both was land reform. Furthermore, Thomas Ainge Devyr, who founded and edited both *The Albany Freeholder* and *The Anti-Renter*, was an Irish radical and editor of the Chartist newspaper, *The Northern Liberator*, in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

Devyr fled England after the collapse of the 1840 Newcastle insurrection and found work editing a Democratic Party newspaper in Williamsburg, New York, before he dedicated himself full-time as an Anti-Rent agitator and propagandist for National Reform.⁴

Devyr's Chartist sensibilities clearly shaped the aesthetic principles that determined his selection of poetry. The Chartist movement was not only a radical, working-class political movement, it was a cultural movement in which self-educated laborers embraced literature and philosophy and created reading and debating societies to enact an intellectual emancipation that was a necessary precondition for political liberation. Chartist poetry was performed in a variety of settings, from mass political gatherings to public house meetings to spontaneous singing in prisons.⁵ According to Mike Sanders, in *The Poetry of Chartism* (2009), the Chartist poetry performed several kinds of cultural work. It affirmed "shared values and aspirations," contributed "to the debate surrounding tactics and strategy," and articulated the movement's "collective identity and consciousness."⁶ In other words, poetry participated in general ideological struggles by exposing its readers to new ideas, teaching them how to act on those ideas, and creating a community of fellowship around these new shared ideas. Drawing from both aesthetic and ideological theory, Sanders demonstrates how Chartist poetry works "simultaneously ... to make meaning (its ideological/symbolic work) and to create agency (its aesthetic function)," giving its audience the courage to engage in direct political action.⁷

This radical poetic aesthetic is clearly evident in the editorial comments Devyr published in the Anti-Rent press. In "The British Poets," Devyr establishes as his criteria for literary merit "*the amount of good, or evil effect ... works are calculated to effect on their brother man*" (italics original). Above and beyond considering whether literature inspires one's imagination, one must consider how it affects one morally (or, perhaps, ideologically):

What signifies the merit of calling forth a more refined sensation in a few already refined human bosoms. Of what consequence is the creating of fuller and more vivid images of the sublime, in minds already well up the hill of enjoyment. Though we appreciate these things, as highly as most men, yet we again ask, of what consequence are they, compared to the great, and Godlike, effort to upraise the human family from the half brute condition in which for so many dreary ages, they have been sunk?⁸

Devyr insists that establishing one human right is a greater achievement than any literary work or scientific breakthrough, and that all standards of merit

should be based on a work's ability to achieve that goal. Anne Janowitz defines this aesthetic as a "poetico-political intervention," in which the structures and conventions of traditional poems are subverted to serve the movements' cause.⁹

Another essay, "An Indication of the Times," dramatizes how transference of conventional romantic sentiment to radical politics might take place in a reader's mind. Attributed to "Equitas" (presumably a reader but possibly written by Devyr himself), the essay purports to be a transcription of an overheard conversation between two men on the steamboat *Belle* discussing the spiritual effects of poetry. One man observes poetry's aesthetic and moral effects, noting that it "carries a beauty with it that oftentimes has a tendency to play upon the finer chords of our inner being." After exchanging quotations from elegiac and pastoral verse, the second man comments, "The recital of those verses forcibly reminds one of the present unequal condition of mankind," which leads the first speaker to recite several stanzas from Oliver Goldsmith's "The Hermit" depicting "the insulting rapacity of the British Aristocracy." What is noteworthy here is how the play of poetry on "the chords of our inner being" is directed to raise political consciousness and "have a powerful bearing upon the BROTHERHOOD of the race" (capitals original). Anti-Rent poetry stirs the readers' consciousness to "forcibly" recognize "the present unequal conditions of mankind."¹⁰ Thus, the function of poetry in the Anti-Rent newspapers is to direct its power of aesthetic and moral elevation toward the purpose of political radicalization.¹¹

Devyr and his fellow Chartists were not alone in harnessing poetry to ideological causes. John O'Sullivan, in his journal *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, actively promoted a populist political literature, claiming that "the vital principle of an American national literature must be Democracy."¹² While no fan of the Anti-Rent movement, which he characterized as "lawless,"¹³ O'Sullivan promoted poetry that propagated "free principles and liberal ideas."¹⁴ In an article titled "Poetry for the People," W.A. Jones listed among "the favorite topics of the Poet of the People,"

The necessity and dignity of labor, of endurance; the native nobility of an honest and brave heart; the futility of all conventional distinctions of rank and wealth, when opposed to the innate claims of genius and virtue; the brotherhood and equality of men, . . . the equality of civil rights and political advantages".¹⁵

These principles are very much in line with the themes and concerns of the Anti-Rent poets and are strongly reflected in their poetry. The poets of the Anti-Rent movement found their best forum in the Anti-Rent press.

The Anti-Rent Press

The Anti-Rent War of the 1840s was not the first tenant farmer revolt in the state, but it was the most sustained, best organized, and arguably the most successful. The success of the 1840s movement can be attributed, at least in part, to the establishment of movement newspapers targeting a statewide audience. The *Albany Freeholder*, first issued in April 1845, was able to report on meetings and events from dozens of Anti-Rent associations and to address directly attacks by Albany and New York City press, which frequently described Anti-Rent activities in terms of “outrages.” In *The New Englander*, S.D. Low describes Anti-Rentism as a “disease” and Anti-Rent activities as “treasonable.”¹⁶ D.D. Barnard, in the *American Review*, characterizes the movement as “public licentiousness.”¹⁷ Even Southerners joined the reaction. In a defense of slavery, A.J. Roane, in *Debow’s Review*, cites Anti-Rent activities as evidence of lawlessness in the North.¹⁸ The Anti-Rent movement found some support in reform-oriented newspapers, such as Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* and George Henry Evans’s *Working Man’s Advocate*; but while these papers sympathized with the Anti-Renters’ complaints, they criticized their tactics as extreme. Nowhere in the established press were the Anti-Renters allowed unfiltered self-representations.

The *Albany Freeholder* and the *Anti-Renter*, along with a number of smaller regional papers with such titles as *The Heldeberg Advocate*, *Guardians of the Soil*, and *The Voice of the People*, aimed to represent the more favorable (and in their perspective, more accurate) view of the movement, its goals, and its actions. These newspapers were a cross between the penny press and an urban political party paper. Like the penny press, the Anti-Rent papers contained miscellaneous bits of sensational and useful news¹⁹; but more like party newspapers, the Anti-Rent press focused on resolutions from Anti-Rent meetings, political editorials, and testimonials from farmers on their sufferings at the hands of the landlords. Historian Jeffrey L. Pasley finds a strong relationship between newspapers, political parties, and reform movements. Newspapers articulated theories around which political movements could form, and “in many cases,” such as abolition and anti-Masonry, Pasley notes, “a newspaper originated a movement nearly on its own.”²⁰ Newspapers provided a degree of stability to movements whose internal structures were often ad hoc at best. According to Pasley, newspapers provided continuity to hold movements together between meetings and conventions, creating “a sense of membership, identity, and common cause” between activists and the larger community.²¹ At their peak, *The Albany Freeholder* and *The Anti-Renter* each enjoyed a circulation of over 2,000.²² Given that newspapers were likely to be shared by four or more readers, it is not a stretch to assume

a readership of closer to 10,000.

The Anti-Rent papers fulfilled several purposes. Primarily they were vehicles to convey news about the movement and reinforce the sense of common purpose amongst their readers, the basis of the Anti-Rent imaginary. The core of this common purpose were farmers' testimonials that established a coherent narrative that explained and justified the movement, beginning with the selfless sacrifice of the farmers' forefathers during the American Revolution, establishing their patriotic bona fides. This is followed by stories of the hardships endured by the farmers' fathers clearing the land, demonstrating their legitimate claim to ownership.²³ Finally, farmers narrated their own experiences of insult and degradation at the hands of the landlords or economic loss, proving their current suffering. These narratives, combined with broad attacks against the landlords and lengthy essays on theories of land ownership, helped define the Anti-Rent imaginary that the poetry would subsequently materialize and reinforce.

At the same time, the papers served as a form of public education. One criticism lodged against the Anti-Rent movement was that its leadership took advantage of farmers' ignorance. James Fenimore Cooper asserts this very charge in his Littlepage trilogy. "We have," he states in the introduction to *The Redskins*, "imputed much of the Anti-Rent feeling to provincial education and habits."²⁴ For Cooper, ignorance of history and the economy, combined with a lack of refinement and taste, drove the uneducated farmers into the arms of Anti-Rent demagogues. On the matter of the farmers' ignorance, Devyr was in agreement—though he felt that their ignorance was a product of their status as subordinates to the landlords. Education, he believed, was essential to full citizenship. A farmer could not understand his rights if he did not know his history. Devyr used his platform as editor of the Anti-Rent papers to give his readers a political education that tied intellectual and cultural enrichment to the political necessities of the movement. In his memoir, *Odd Book of the Nineteenth Century*, Devyr reflects on this purpose:

Education is the way to taste, refinement, the truest and highest development and enjoyment of life. There is no "royal road" to those attainments. But the rights and the duties of men, in rational, civilized communities, can be taught in a few very short lessons.²⁵

The education Devyr offered his readers included stories about the Revolution and American military heroes, European history, and excerpts of classical oratory placed alongside Devyr's own speeches and essays about land reform. The June 11, 1845, issue of *The Albany Freeholder*, a typical issue, includes

an editorial penned by Devyr on landownership, briefs taken from other newspapers reporting town fires in Louisiana and caves discovered in Missouri, an essay on the economic disadvantages of tenantry, a statement on workers' rights clipped from the *New Haven Democrat*, a sensational story about a wife murdering her husband, an homage to Byron's noble spirit, a petition to the English Parliament condemning land enclosures and requesting employment for paupers on common lands, a description of current court challenges to the Livingston family's land titles, and remarks on railroad land deals. The poetry presented in each issue of the *Albany Freeholder* and the *Anti-Renter* played an important role in this education.

Poems in the Anti-Rent Press

Initially, the poems published in *Albany Freeholder* were reprinted selections by major British and American poets. Just as prominent were poems taken from the radical Chartist newspapers like *True Sun* and the *Northern Liberator*. On the whole, these poems focused on a specific set of themes. They condemned the sufferings of the poor, celebrated the labors of farmers, and encouraged solidarity for the movement. Oliver Goldsmith's poems held a special place in the Anti-Rent papers. Devyr used Goldsmith's condemnation of the Parliamentary enclosures of the English commons as a motto for both the *Freeholder* and the *Anti-Renter*, adding to his contention that the New York landlords are analogous to the English aristocracy:

The man of wealth and pride
Takes up a space that many poor supplied.
Space for his lakes, his parks extended bounds;
Space for his horses, equipage and hounds.
The robe that wraps his limbs in silken sloth
Has robbed the neighb'ring fields of half their growth.²⁶

Of course, the situation that Goldsmith condemns—the wholesale depopulation of a rural village that has been incorporated into a landscape garden—does not accurately reflect the tenant farmers' concerns. Land on the New York manors had not been taken out of production to satisfy the aesthetic pleasure of a privileged few. However, the image of the landlord committed to no other interests but his own pleasure is a potent metaphor for the New York landlords who refused to negotiate relief with tenant organizations. In many ways, the Goldsmith poem also establishes the theme and tone for the original poetry by Anti-Rent authors Devyr would eventually publish.

The first issue of the *Albany Freeholder* came off the press on April 9, 1845.²⁷ By the end of June, Devyr began publishing poems by local writers. Within weeks, the poetry column consisted entirely of original poems written by Anti-Rent farmers and their sympathizers. While many of these poems might otherwise be dismissed as mere doggerel, their importance lies in the ways they speak directly to the concerns of the local farmers and movement organizers. That they are amateur work is part of the point of Devyr's selecting them for publication. In an introduction to the poetry column titled "Original Poetry," Devyr writes:

We prefer it to selected. Because we wish to give the native talent of our hills an opportunity of developing itself. Because the subjects generally will be of local interest. And because "no other paper will have the news"—till we give it to them.²⁸

Devyr's introduction is telling. While admitting that "native talent" is not as polished or poetically successful as the established authors he had been publishing, his aesthetic principles contend that "upraising the human family" is more significant than "calling forth refined sensations." However, if publication and practice can refine a poet's work while still conveying the right political message, then two goods are served. Devyr echoes the ideal W.A. Jones sets forth in the *Democratic Review*—that "the Poet of the People" gives voice to popular feeling. Only for Devyr, the people themselves are the poets. No longer will poetry be a vehicle for the educated elite; it can grow and flourish among common farmers as well. If local farmers want their own interests represented and their self-image confirmed, who can better convey the emotional and moral urgency they feel than the farmers themselves? Who can better represent the Anti-Rent cause than those who are themselves immersed in the movement?²⁹

The authors of the Anti-Rent poems remain unknown to this day. Many poems were published under pseudonyms ("Franklin," "Socrates," "The Forest Minstrel"). Other authors were designated by initials ("T.A.G." or "C.S."), or by geography ("A Sand-Laker"). Many poems were simply published anonymously. Given his enthusiasm for poetry and its value as a political tool, it is possible, even likely, that Devyr himself authored at least some of these poems. The poems penned by Anti-Rent writers generally fall into three categories. Rally songs and poems are aimed at lifting up the spirits and forming solidarity among the Anti-Renters. Complaint poems highlight the shared woes and tribulations of the disenfranchised, the difficulties of farming, and the humiliations of the manor system. Satirical poems cast a jaundiced eye toward the woes of the landlords and the hypocrisy of politics in general. Often, these purposes overlap in the

same poem: a rally poem may also highlight the farmers' complaints or satirize the authorities. Alongside the more overt political poems are pastoral lyrics that celebrate farm life, the virtue of work, and the beauty of nature. While on the surface these latter poems do not appear overtly political, they also do cultural work by contrasting a vision of the blessings of the farmer's life against the depredations of landlordism. Through these poems, the farmers develop a stronger sense of what it is they are defending.

Rally poems and songs are just that: songs that were sung at Anti-Rent meetings and rallies to encourage farmers in their commitment to the movement.³⁰ Many of these songs are based on popular music, with the lyrics revised to reflect the Anti-Rent message. Part of this message was the narrative that defined the nature of the Anti-Renters' grievances. This narrative casts the farmers, whose forebears fought the American Revolution and then cleared the forests to make the land productive (suffering terrible privations along the way), as the true patriots. The farmer/patriots are contrasted against the landlords who passed the war in relative luxury and then used deceit to trap the farmers into oppressive leases. The landlords make up an aristocracy that the Revolution should have eliminated. In this view, the American Revolution was only a partial victory that would not be completed until the leasehold system, with its restrictive clauses and quarter sales, was eliminated. The truth of this narrative is a point of faith behind much Anti-Rent poetry. "Freedom's Call," attributed to "M.," opens with a complete retelling of this narrative:

Freeman awake! The soil wherever you tread—
Reclaimed from nature, by your toil worn sires
Maintained and guarded, by their richest blood,
Poured out like water for their children's sake—
The lands yourselves have till'd and call'd your own;
Your hearth, your altars and your lov'd retreats
Are claimed as feuds, by sev'ral would-be Lords;
By virtue, as they say, of ancient deeds,
That Ann, old feudal England's Queen,
Gave to their sires, in proof of royal favor;
But which, perchance, they basely forg'd, to rob
You, Freeman, of your great inheritance.³¹

After describing the legal shenanigans the landlords used to secure their property titles and to suppress dissent, the poem admonishes its audience to live up to the name "Freemen," which their fathers "earn'd with blood and gave to

you.”

This same jeremiad recurs in many Anti-Rent poems and songs. “Oh, Happy, happy would we be,” attributed to “An Orphan Boy,”³² describes how “Our Fathers fought—the battles braved,/And sealed their steps with gore” so that their sons could be free. Despite their triumph, they lost that freedom to the hands of tyrants who, through “fraud and trickery/Enacted laws at war with right” and stole their rights to the soil. “A Native’s Inquiry,”³³ attributed to “Socrates,” demands that its audience answer a simple question: “Shall a free People live unbound:/Or, chained in tyranny?” with the farmers fulfilling the role of People and patriots, and the landlords the forces of tyranny:

Shall patriots who died to win
Posterity from worlds of sin,
Which tyrant despots bound them in,
Behold their children free?

Or, shall they see them ground to dust,
The victims of a Patroon’s lust,
Like cowards who betray their trust
And slave for tyranny?

Like other rally poems, “A Native’s Enquiry” ends with the hopeful vision that “A million hands will raise to free/The people from the destiny/Which always follows tyranny” to dismantle the manor system. However, the tone is strongly qualified—while tyranny must be destroyed, it must be done peacefully.

This song was produced during a very tenuous time for the movement. The ranks of the Calico Indians were growing and that faction of the movement was becoming increasingly aggressive in their tactics. While wanting to maintain popular momentum, the movement’s leadership sought to redirect the farmers’ energies toward electoral politics and away from direct confrontation with law enforcement. “A Native’s Enquiry” concludes with an admonition to farmers that, in their push for “their cause of equal rights,” it should be “November’s ides” that shall expel the “imps of tyranny.” In other words, using the ballot, not the bullet, is the proper strategy for the farmers to succeed. Not everyone heeded this call. A little more than a month after the rally where this song was first sung, Osman Steele, undersheriff of Delaware County, was shot and killed during a confrontation with Anti-Rent Indians attempting to disrupt a distress auction at Moses Earles’ farm in Delhi. Within days, Governor Silas Wright declared the county to be in a state of insurrection. He sent 300 guard troops to Delhi, bringing the entire force of the state down on the Anti-Rent movement.

Because of the state suppression of the movement's more aggressive tendencies, rally songs and poems worked to direct the farmers' energies toward less confrontational forms of protest and reform. After Steele's death, songs and poems urged farmers away from militant activities and toward the safer route of the ballot box. One song, also modeled on "Bruce's Address," calls out to farmers: "Rouse, ye Anti-Renters, wake!/Press your aims that you've a stake."³⁴ This song urges farmers to "spurn the wight" who thinks he'll "burst our bands," and to "shun the Ice-berg's blasting breeze" of the mainstream law and order press that would crush the movement, inspiring them with visions of the prize: "the joyous day" when "Quarter sales no more will be" and the farmers gain economic independence. A similar call to arms, "Come all true Anti-Renters,"³⁵ extols the virtues of the ballot box by mixing radical language with moderate action. The song calls on farmers to "sing a song right gaily/about the right of soil," and to "shout against oppression" and "form a noble phalanx/of men upright and bold." This phalanx was not to march in confrontation with the state, but to the voting box where they could "cast [their] trusty ballots/For friends of Anti-Rent." Yet another song, "Keep thy Spirit, swell thy faith,"³⁶ set to the tune of "Cheer up my lively lads," goes so far as to list the names on the Anti-Rent ticket:

Watson, Willet, Treadwell too,
 For Fuller and for others,
 We'll work and vote with heart and hand,
 And stick to it like brothers!
 Cheer up, &c.

The election of 1846 turned out to be a rout for the ruling Democrats, who saw their gubernatorial candidate, Governor Silas Wright, deposed by the Whig, John Young, who also ran on the Anti-Rent ticket.

Along with the rally poems, Anti-Rent papers published a number of complaint poems. While the rally poems define the narrative that explains the cause of the farmers' oppression, the poems of lament help illustrate for the farmers what is at stake. With titles like "The Ejected Tenant," "Who Are the Poor," and "What is it to be a slave," the complaint poems define and articulate the fears driving the Anti-Rent movement. Failure to pay rent could lead to distress auctions—the forced sale of a farmer's property—and eviction, the consequences of which would be certain poverty. Given that the most active Anti-Rent areas were in hilly lands with poor soil quality, many of the farmers felt pretty close to poverty in the first place. Highly sentimental and melodramatic, these poems appeal to the fear and anxiety farmers must have shared. If, through the poem, a

reader can feel the fear of the speaker, then he or she might share their outrage and anger and direct it toward ending the leasehold system.

“The Afflicted Tenant’s Appeal,”³⁷ attributed to “The Forest Minstrel,” recounts the labors and sufferings of hardscrabble farming made worse by unfeeling landlords who demand rent regardless of the season’s yield (and thus the tenant’s ability to pay). The poem is a “tale of sorrow” that could easily be any tenant farmer’s story. It begins by describing the hard, frustrating work of farming:

Tedious years pass in revision
 Months of wearisome despair.
Days of labor, hours of weeping,
 Nights of life-consuming care.

Through the solar drought o’ summer
 Through the storms of winter drear,
Heavy hearted and an [sic] hunger’d
 Thus we toil’d from year to year.

These lines suggest not only the hard labor but the huge investment of time and energy that goes into clearing “the tangled wild” of forest land and turning it into productive farmland. However, once these fields are “rescued from the forest” and “by care and cultivation” made to “smile,” the farmer’s prospects for prosperity and happiness are destroyed by “Rent, that besom of destruction.” Debt to the landlord is only one burden added to taxes, “disappointments, losses, sickness,” which conspire to undermine the farmer’s future prospects. The burden of rent, the poem argues, is one weight that could be, perhaps should be, mitigated by pity. Yet when the speaker “humbly sues” the landlord for forbearance, he is met only with scorn and a command: “Pay your rent, or leave the land.”

Here, the poem speaks to a number of important issues. One of the charges the farmers held against the landlords was that the evictions deprived them of their investments in the land. Farmers generally subscribed to the labor theory of value, believing that all value comes from human labor and anything made by labor belongs to the person who created it. Until it is cleared and made productive, land is essentially waste. Farmers felt entitled to their lands precisely because of their labor and improvements—the cleared fields and the barns and other structures they erected. If farmers are evicted because of an inability to pay rent, not only do they lose their homes, they lose their life’s investment, an investment greater than what the landlord would lose if he sold his land at a reasonable price.

Another issue that the poem addresses is the social inequality created by the leasehold system and the landlords’ pretensions toward aristocracy. In seeking

relief from an onerous rent, the speaker is not met with compassion or recognition of common humanity; he is met with snobbish disdain. In a highly melodramatic speech, the landlord proclaims:

“Don’t tell me about your losses,
Go, discharge your idle brood,
You bring your children up too tender;
Turn them out to earn their bread.”

“Your wives are far less sick than lazy;
You, yourselves, are lazy too.
You don’t half work, you live too costly,
Dainties were not made for you.”

Here the landlord essentially declares class war: the poor are poor because of their own stupidity and weakness; because of their weakness, they do not deserve humane compassion (“dainties were not made for you”). The insult is magnified because this type of aristocratic snobbery should have no place in a democracy. The speaker suffers doubly: injury from the vicissitudes of life and insult from those who hold economic power over him.

Finally, the poem addresses the violence and despair of eviction itself. The speaker and his family are “rush’d upon” by the sheriff and “Turn’d abroad without a home,” where they wander “Restless, way-worn, faint and weary” with neither friends nor a place to settle. The speaker’s friendless wandering is contrasted against the landlords’ cruel celebration of their ill-gotten wealth:

Those who rob’d us, boast of title;
Vauntingly they boast their gold,
Talk of land, and great possessions—
Then our house and lands they sold.

The pathos of the speaker’s despair is mixed with economic analysis. That is, while the reader feels for the farmer, sensing perhaps that the same thing could happen to him or her, the source of that despair has an identifiable cause that can be remedied. The redirection of fear to anger to action is played out in the final section of the poem. Now employing a radical democratic/religious discourse, the poem insists in the injustice of evictions on the grounds that it violates not just the spirit of democracy but God’s law:

Men of feeling, sons of reason,
Tell us why we should obey?

Have we not the same Creator,
Form'd erect out of the self same clay?

If we are all formed with “souls immortal” and endowed with “glorious powers” of “Wisdom, virtue, truth, and honor,” and “the love of freedom,” the poem asks, wouldn’t class divisions and abuse of economic power “thus dishonor God?” Implicit in this question is the idea that common humanity and shared Christian values should level class division, not exacerbate it. Maintaining the tone of lament, the poem concludes sentimentally. It is not a call to arms, as are the rally poems; it simply exudes despair. It moves the reader by appealing for compassion: “Is there no kind arm to save us—/No kind heart to sooth our woes?” However, the leap from compassion for the evicted tenant to anger toward the landlord is not a large one; from there it would not be difficult to move from anger to resistance.

Other poems, such as “The Ejected Tenant” and “Who Are the Poor?” strike a similar note, though without the complex economic analysis. Both poems illustrate the effects of poverty and homelessness, this time in an urban context that would excite a feeling of common purpose through common threats. The speaker of “The Ejected Tenant”³⁸ is not the tenant himself, but an observer of a family who has been evicted. The mother, “pale with grief, and weak and sad,” is “the image of despair,” while the father, brokenhearted, is driven to tears by “the anxious glances” of his children now living on the street. The tableau the speaker frames is designed to elicit the reader’s pity. “A scene like that,” we are told, “could not but melt/the most unfeeling hearts of men.” Like the “Afflicted Tenant,” the poem does not demand any action other than sympathy, but it works to establish solidarity between those who may share a common fate. In defining a common cause, these poems also establish a moral righteousness of the like-minded. They draw a target on those who do not feel for the poor, those of wealth and power who may be the cause of this poverty in the first place.

“Who Are the Poor”³⁹ takes a different tact to undermine the rich. Contrasting the lives of the wealthy and the poor, the poem declares the financially well-off to be spiritually worse off and therefore, ironically, more deserving of our sympathy. Those who “eat from gold” and inhabit “the counting-house” are subject to “rust and mould.” They suffer from a lack of love and a lack of empathy for others. They also suffer from laziness, lacking the discipline that “keeping hunger at a stand” requires. Rather than attacking the wealthy as robbers or as cold-hearted, the speaker of “Who Are the Poor” pities them for their spiritual privations. The speaker “opines” that the labor and community of the workhouse is “bliss” compared the self-indulgence of “such/poor soulless swine”

TO THE

TENANTS

OF

KNOX, BERNE, WESTERLO, AND Rensselaerville.

GENTLEMEN:
Having intimated to you that no change of terms of Release would be made without notice, we take the trouble to inform those who do not make arrangements for a settlement of arrears of rent, before the 15th day of October next, and all who contest the payment of rents, that they will be charged for their soil, a sum, which at six per cent. interest, will produce the rent, estimating Wheat at *Two Shillings* per bushel.

This change will make a difference of one quarter in our charge for Releases, but if the Tenants choose to delay to their own detriment, the fault is theirs, and they must pay for their folly.

Henceforth we shall immediately and indiscriminately sue for the collection of all Rents in arrear; those who have settled must be prompt hereafter in their payments, as we will not allow the rent to accumulate. We have refrained from prosecuting *et* until every question which honest doubts or dishonest demagogues could raise concerning the Title and rights of the parties has been settled, even to the repeated failure of well paid babbly men to get up the shallow pretence of an existing Indian claim. No further notice can reasonably be asked for, nor will it be given.

The Politicians will get through with you in November and they will probably then let the Indian Title rest until another Election. Now decide whether you will settle your rents without cost, and purchase your Releases at the lowest rate, or be fooled by politicians, pay heavy bills of cost, and 25 per cent. addition for your soil.

ISAAC VAN LEUVEN, Esq. of Westerlo, is authorized to purchase stock, in payment for rent.

Dated Albany, September 14th, 1855.

**STEPHEN VAN RENNELAER,
CHURCH & TYLER.**

who are wealthy. Worse than “the want of bread” is the “want of mouths to feed.” That is, the children and others to care for and nurture. The “self-command” that survival requires is a kind of wealth “no cash nor land” could ever buy. Against the virtues of the poor, this poem defines the rich as lonely, distant, and ultimately lacking in spirit and soul. So while the poems of lament solidify the farmers’ identities around a common suffering, they also elevate the farmers’ positions through a set of common virtues that the landlords lack.

While complaint poems valorize the poor through the virtue of their common suffering and vilify the wealthy for their lack of compassion, satirical poems turn the landlords and up-renters into fools. “The Landlord’s Lament,” attributed to “EGO,” is told in the voice of a landlord powerless against the Anti-Renters despite his resources and access to state power. Declaring that there was never “such a miserable wight as I,” the landlord bemoans the luxuries he will have to give up because the tenants won’t pay their rents. He complains of the loss of “That splendid carriage I like so well,/With which I ‘cut such a ‘lordly’ swell,” and the “Burgundy and Champagne” he will have to do without. Here the landlord is preening and immoderate, “freely spending” on self-aggrandizing luxuries. His complaints are outrageous measured against the actual privations of the farmers. He is a narcissistic fool. He is also a thief, since what he spends “never was made/

By any traffic of mine, or trade,” and his leases are illegitimate. The landlord brags that his rents come from land “I pretend/To own, without purchase or grant.” If the landlord’s power and lifestyle are illegitimate, the system that supports them must be destined to collapse. Despite the fact the landlord has sent “Sheriffs and posses” to do his bidding, “they soon came back worse off than they went,” apparently beaten back by the Calico Indians. Rather than framing the landlord as heartless, cruel, and powerful, “The Landlord’s Lament” represents them as narcissistic, weak, and easily defeated.

Unfortunately, for the Anti-Renters, the landlords were not so easily defeated. Backed by an army of attorneys working in concert with a Legislature and judiciary unwilling to void property rights, the tenants’ dreams of taking title to their farms without paying back rents were eventually crushed. However, this isn’t to say that the Anti-Rent movement was entirely a failure. The sustained rent strike did in fact contribute to the collapse of the hated leasehold system. Mounting debts from attorneys’ fees and the landlords’ failure to collect rents eventually forced the major landholding families to sell off their estates to land speculators, who in turn sold the land to those striking farmers who had the resources to pay back rents and purchase fees.⁴⁰ While the courts never supported the tenants’ charge that the landlords’ titles were fraudulent, they did outlaw many lease provisions, such as the quarter-sale, that required a farmer who sold his lease to another farmer to forfeit twenty-five percent of the sale price to the landlord.⁴¹ Not all striking farmers benefited from the sale of the manors. Those without resources turned to other ways of making a living: some held on as itinerant workers; some sought cheaper lands out West; some gravitated to the cities to find work in manufacturing.⁴² Yet the system itself was destroyed. The most “feudal” elements of the tenant-landlord relationship—the system of hierarchy and deference that offended tenants’ understanding of democracy—became a thing of the past.

If not an economic victory, the Anti-Rent movement was something of a cultural and ideological victory. Historian Reeve Huston credits the Anti-Renters with destroying “the ideological defenses of the leasehold system” and the last remnants of the pre-Revolutionary “social relations marked by deference and hierarchy” (200). This cultural shift was indeed one of the desired outcomes envisioned in the Anti-Rent Imaginary central to the farmers’ poetry. Rather than succumb to the indignities of deferring to landlords’ demands or suffering the fear and humiliation of eviction, farmers could finally enjoy the independence for which their forefathers fought. The poems of the Anti-Rent press articulated a vision of shared identity (the abused, patriotic yeoman farmer) and

shared goals (upending tyranny and finishing the job of the Revolution). They present an interpretation of the political and economic situation in which the farmers find themselves, and offer a coherent narrative that explains their suffering. The Anti-Rent poems not only construct a shared vision of how the farmers' world works—the imaginative representation of their very real world—they map out a set of actions that benefit the farmers as a class. By encouraging solidarity in resolve and solidarity in tactics—through the ballot box and legislative actions, where most Anti-Rent victories were won—the poems played a vital role in maintaining the cohesion and direction of the Anti-Rent movement. Anti-Rent poetry is not merely an artifact of a nearly forgotten moment in history; it embodies a social vision that deserves to be read alongside other reformist visions of the period, including abolition, the early labor movement, utopian communitarianism, and Transcendental idealism. These poems give eloquent voice to an important phase of America's long struggle for democracy and equality.

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"Who Are the Poor." *Albany Freeholder*. 9 December, 1845.

Endnotes

1. Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 5.
2. Christman, *Tin Horns and Calico*, 174-175.
3. I arrive at the term "Anti-Rent imaginary" by way of Mike Sanders's study of Chartist poetry. Adopting Althusser's definition of ideology: the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions, Sanders argues that Chartist poetry was a means for the movement to "articulate its own understanding" of the economic and social changes wrought by industrial capitalism, and to imagine and direct a response to these changes: to make meaning and to create agency. See Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism*, 23-26.
4. Huston, "Multiple Crossings: Thomas Ainge Devyr and Transatlantic Land Reform," 148-149.
5. Sanders, 6.
6. Sanders, 11.
7. Sanders, 28.
8. *Albany Freeholder*, 14 May, 1845.
9. Janowitz, "Chartist Picturesque," 263.
10. *Anti-Renter* 11 April, 1846.
11. The comparison to Chartists is useful to illustrate the cultural work of Anti-Rent poetry, however the goals of the two groups were not the same. While Devyr labored hard to link the Anti-Rent cause to his larger radical agrarian vision of National Reform, most farmers did not accept the link. As Reeve Huston notes, most farmers believed in individual property ownership and wanted to pass their farms on to their children, and their concerns were mostly local rather than national (Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 163-168). Nor did Anti-Rent farmers tend to define themselves as working class. Nicholas Marshall argues that antebellum farmers in the Northeast had decidedly middle-class aspirations (See Nicholas Marshall, "Rural Experience and the Development of the Middle Class: The Power of Culture and Tangible Improvements," *American Nineteenth Century History*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 2007) 1-25). Among the activities Marshall cites for entering the middle class was the composition of poetry.
12. Jones, "The Politics of Poetry: The *Democratic Review* and the Gallows Verse of William Wordsworth and John Greenleaf Whittier," 3.
13. Christman, 314.

14. Jones, 9.
15. W.A. Jones, "Poetry for the People," 268.
16. Low, "Anti-Rent Disturbance," 93.
17. Barnard, "The Anti-Rent Movement and Outbreak in New York," 577.
18. Roane, "Reply to Abolition Rejections to Slavery," 656.
19. For a general description of the evolution of the early penny press, see Huntzicker, *The Popular Press*, 1-17.
20. Pasley "The Tyranny of Printers, 9.
21. *Ibid*, 11.
22. Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 108; Huston, "Thomas Ainge Devyr and Transatlantic Reform," 158.
23. The farmers subscribed to the labor theory of value, the notion that labor creates all wealth. The farmers believed that without their "improvements" to their farms the land would be worthless and that the wealth of the land, therefore the land itself, should remain in the hands of those who labored to make it productive. See Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 111-113.
24. Cooper, *The Redskins*, 465.
25. Devyr, 162.
26. *Albany Freeholder*, 14 May, 1845.
27. Christman, 168.
28. *Albany Freeholder*, 2 July, 1845.
29. Devyr edited the *Freeholder* throughout 1845. In January 1846, Devyr was forced out of the editor's chair by the *Freeholder*'s publishers, Charles Bouton and Ira Harris, because of his vocal commitment to Free Soil agrarianism and his public role in the National Reform Association. Devyr published an alternative paper, *The Anti-Renter*, where he could freely espouse his agrarian philosophies. Despite his removal, Bouton continued to publish poems along the lines of Devyr's aesthetic principles. Following the practice he began in the *Freeholder*, Devyr published both selected and local poetry in the *Anti-Renter*.
30. Henry Christman describes one such rally in Schoharie County, which attracted over 3,000 participants, to show how poetry and song were an essential part of Anti-Rent pagentry. The rally was called to order with the firing of a cannon, followed by a parade of 1,500 "calico Indians." Speeches included fiery prayers decrying the "brutal outrages" of law and order posers, inspirational orations by Anti-Rent politicians, speeches by activists, and sermons by Anti-Rent ministers. The rally was closed with an Anti-Rent song, sung to the air of "Bruce's Address." Christman, 174-175.
31. *Albany Freeholder*, 16 July, 1845.
32. *Albany Freeholder*, 12 August, 1846.
33. *Albany Freeholder*, 2 July, 1845.
34. *Albany Freeholder*, 28 October, 1846.
35. *Albany Freeholder*, 7 October, 1846.
36. *Albany Freeholder*, 28 October, 1846.
37. *Albany Freeholder*, 23 July, 1845.
38. *Albany Freeholder*, 16 July, 1845.
39. *Albany Freeholder*, 9 December, 1845
40. Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 195-196.
41. Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 196.
42. Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 203-204.



ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF THE MARIST COLLEGE ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS. LOWELL THOMAS PAPERS

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt seated in automobile talking to Lowell Thomas, circa 1933-1939. (1428.35)

Softball and Hard Rhetoric:

Lowell Thomas and Hudson Valley Political Culture, 1933-1945

Benjamin Davison

Americans in the twenty-first century are accustomed to receiving their news from the Internet, understanding their ever-changing world through websites and blogs.¹ This is a far cry from the Radio Age of the early twentieth century, a time when a few, powerful networks and famous reporters like Edward R. Murrow were the main sources of information. Indeed, the personalities behind the news proved as critical as the content because newsmen shaped broadcasts around their own particular worldview. Americans heard highly-stylized interpretations of events in popular nightly programs broadcast coast-to-coast, often being told what to care about, who to celebrate or revile, and how to place a happening within the nation's history. In the Radio Age, this meant newsmen were responsible for introducing Adolf Hitler, worldwide depression, and thousands of other important topics to Americans for the first time, forming the opinions that still resonate in the national consciousness decades later.

One of these journalists was Lowell Thomas, the star of daily news programs on NBC and CBS, and among America's most popular and influential journalists for nearly forty years.² Born in Greenville, Indiana, in 1892, Thomas was a product of what he would later call an "America...losing her frontier innocence," profoundly changed by technological innovations like the automobile and the telephone.³ In 1900, his father, a doctor, moved the family to Cripple Creek, Colorado, the site of a gold mine drawing thousands of prospectors.⁴ In his memoir, Thomas described the mining town as a place where, "quite literally, the streets were paved with gold," populated by the sorts of miners and cowboys that the "West...would never see again," effectively marking the boomtown as one of the last outposts of the Old West.⁵ From there, Thomas launched himself into a media career, beginning as a small-town newspaperman in Colorado, and ending up in New York after stints in Chicago and Europe.

Thomas became internationally famous in New York. CBS tabbed the reporter to take over the *Literary Digest* daily news broadcast in September 1930, the only national news program on the air. At the time, CBS and NBC jointly broadcast *Literary Digest* (the limited number of radio stations and programs made this necessary), ensuring the show reached every radio in the nation and that Americans associated Thomas's voice with the news.⁶ He was so popular that his listeners marveled at his power, leading one to say, "You have the ear of America as no one has had it before. Why, with a few words, or even an inflection of your voice, you might start a revolution."⁷ Although Thomas attributed the popularity of his newscast to its time slot—immediately before the *Amos n' Andy* show—his personal style proved just as appealing to listeners.⁸ He saw himself as "not a journalist, but an entertainer, just as Bob Hope and Bing Crosby are entertainers," captivating audiences with the same vaudeville-like humor mastered by other radio personalities.⁹ At the same time, Thomas pioneered a facts-based style of reporting devoid of political partiality, unique for an era where rural newspapers printed information that was often stale and heavily biased. Moreover, because national news was a novelty, Thomas's status as America's newsman ensured his voice was the personification of modernity and progress when most other radio reporters were regionally based.¹⁰

Thomas's reputation as a world traveler and adventurer also enhanced his status as America's premier news personality. Before World War I, Thomas made a name for himself as a journalist in Chicago and a travel writer, penning a well-regarded book about Alaska in 1912 that helped him earn a professorship at Princeton teaching speech and rhetoric. After America entered into the war in 1917, Thomas used his notoriety and university connections to gain a coveted position as an official war correspondent. Unlike other reporters covering the army, Thomas brought a newsreel camera, anticipating that moviegoers would flock to documentaries about the conflict. During this assignment, Thomas discovered the story of a young British officer, T.E. Lawrence, commanding an army of Arab tribesmen against the Ottoman Turks on the Arabian Peninsula. Arranging to travel behind enemy lines, Thomas attached himself to the guerilla force, dubbing its leader "Lawrence of Arabia." Filming in nearly impossible desert conditions, he made hundreds of hours of recordings covering the campaign.¹¹ Because the operation had been kept secret, Thomas was forced to wait until after the war to popularize Lawrence, creating a traveling lecture tour in 1919 called "With Allenby in Palestine and with Lawrence in Arabia." Incredibly popular, the show played to sell-out crowds in London and New York eager to see images of the Holy Land and the bizarre Englishman who "thrills

the Arabs and wins their leadership.”¹² The tour received international acclaim and encouraged Thomas to profile other adventurers like Felix von Luckner, a German naval captain, and a group of American aviators circumnavigating the world in the winter of 1924 to 1925.¹³

With such an extraordinary life, it is odd Lowell Thomas is largely absent from historical depictions of the period when he enjoyed his greatest popularity (from roughly 1920, with his “With Lawrence in Arabia” tour, to the birth of the television age in the mid-1950s). An attempt to search for his name in the historical record reveals a few passing mentions, usually in reference to T.E. Lawrence.¹⁴ Books about the rise of radio culture typically devote a sentence to Thomas, as do others that mention Thomas Dewey’s presidential campaigns of 1940, 1944, and 1948, in which Thomas became involved.¹⁵ In 1949, Thomas and his son, Lowell Thomas, Jr., made a highly publicized two-month trip to Tibet after the country’s ruling elite invited him in hope the duo could convince Americans to help prevent an expected Chinese invasion.¹⁶ During their trip, they become the first people to photograph the fourteenth (and current) Dalai Lama and compiled one of the best documentary records of pre-Communist Tibet.¹⁷ For many Tibetan historians, the book that Lowell Thomas, Jr. wrote about the trip, *Out of This World: Across the Himalayas to Forbidden Tibet*, is an invaluable portrait of Tibetan life in its last moments before the Chinese invasion.¹⁸

An appreciation of Lowell Thomas’s historical legacy can now occur with the donation of his personal papers by his family to Marist College. Thomas saved nearly every document that entered his life, leaving tens of thousands of papers for posterity. Beyond the typical letters sent between friends, he saved the myriad newspaper articles, magazines, and handbills populating his day-to-day life. The notebooks and photographs from his adventures in Arabia, the Middle East, Germany, Southeast Asia, Tibet, the South Pacific, Afghanistan, Alaska, France, and Southern Europe are preserved as well. The papers also reveal his minor involvement in the making of Cold War foreign policy. Throughout, the collection provides an intimate portrait of life in the Radio Age from one of its biggest personalities, a product of the correspondence between Thomas and the network executives, producers, and reporters associated with his long-running news program.

The Lowell Thomas collection also offers an invaluable tool for understanding life in the Hudson Valley during Franklin Roosevelt’s presidency (1933 to 1945). Lowell Thomas brought his fame to the region in 1926, when he moved to an area called “Quaker Hill,” just outside the town center of Pawling, Dutchess County.¹⁹ He named his farmhouse “Clover Brook Farm,” and it became the cen-

ter of local social life. Involved with the church and a perpetual member of the local school board, he was very much the “patrician of Pawling,” just as Franklin D. Roosevelt, only twenty minutes away by car, was the “patrician of Hyde Park.”²⁰ Explorers, politicians, and other notables visited Thomas’s estate (a visit to his farm by Prince William of Sweden occasioned national coverage). He also convinced others to move to Dutchess County.²¹ Thomas Dewey, governor of New York and presidential candidate, became his neighbor, as did Casey Hogate, the conservative editor of the *Wall Street Journal*.²² Herbert Hoover, whom Thomas saw as an icon of American ideals, also moved among this circle.²³

In time, Thomas would become one of the Hudson Valley’s greatest proponents, promoting the region in writing and on the radio. Few documents better describe his feelings than the essay entitled “Why I live on Quaker Hill,” written for friends in 1938:

After Wandering up and down the globe for ten years, we decided that it was time to settle down. Having seen much of the world, we felt we knew exactly what we wanted in the way of a permanent home. Outside of a few months now and then on a western ranch, neither of us had ever lived on a farm. But, in our travels, particularly in Europe, and in various parts of the British Empire, we had discovered that the people who apparently got the greatest joy out of life were those who had country homes.

My work as a writer made it seem advisable that we should be within an hour or two of New York City. What we wanted was an all-year-round country home just outside the regular commuting zone, where we either could live all the time, or, where we could spend our summer and also escape for long weekends the rest of the year.

For two months we searched everywhere within a hundred miles of Manhattan Island. Some attractive localities we eliminated because of traffic problems or the none too agreeable districts that had to be passed through to get to them. Others we vetoed because of their damp, disagreeable winter climate. Some were passed up because they were too low and too hot in the summertime. And still others were eliminated because for one reason or another they had been spoiled.

At last we discovered southeastern Dutchess county, and the foothills of the Berkshires. Here, off the beaten track, we discovered Quaker Hill, a glorious, unspoiled region about which apparently few people knew—a hundred square miles of farms and forests, of trout streams and lakes filled with bass, of an average elevation of more than one thousand feet. But we wanted to

be sure. So we stayed for part of one summer, before buying a place. During that time we found that luck had been with us. We had indeed stumbled upon a place as lovely, as beautiful, and as perfect all the year round, as any place we had seen in all our world travels.

Here on Quaker Hill, near Pawling, we have lived for twelve years- each year more delightful than the last. Here, in a region of scenic beauty, rich farms and congenial neighbors, we found a spot which deserves the praise that the Mogul emperors of India gave to the fabled Vale of Kashmir:- "If there be a Paradise on Earth, it is this."²⁴

For someone with so much influence and personal relationships with ideologues like Hoover and Hogate, Thomas rarely made his own political opinions public. However, he was a lifelong conservative and a passionate opponent of the New Deal. During the 1930s and 1940s, his feelings bought into him into conflict with his neighbor, Franklin Roosevelt, turning the Hudson Valley into a battleground between dueling visions of America. Beginning in 1933 with a highly publicized series of softball games between local conservatives and FDR's staff, and ending in a series of public attacks against the president in 1944, Thomas critiqued the New Deal, liberalism, and the "patrician of Hyde Park" from his own unique post as America's premier newsman and the Hudson Valley's leading citizen. At times, Thomas used his radio program to speak against the administration, but more often the broadcaster confronted Roosevelt through the local baseball leagues, eventually describing local conservatives' victories against FDR's team as symbolic defeats of the New Deal. Because Thomas's activism was so public, it was a pivotal force in shaping the Hudson Valley's political culture during the Roosevelt administration, crystallizing voter sentiment around Thomas and others' personal opinions. Remarkably, these acts and others helped turn the Hudson Valley against its homegrown president and his New Deal agenda; in his four presidential elections, FDR never received the majority of votes from Hyde Park or its surrounding townships.²⁵ To be sure, the Hudson Valley was already a bastion of conservative ideas, populated by a self-styled gentry steadfastly opposed to Roosevelt's reforms, but Thomas's activism helped to crystallize emotions into an anti-New Deal consensus popularized through local media and social gatherings.²⁶ In this sense, Lowell Thomas was more than America's premier newsman—he also was the Hudson Valley's chief political opinion maker during the Roosevelt era.

The best place to begin is with Lowell Thomas's broadcast of October 17, 1944, which offered the typical mix of war news, describing the sweeping Allied advances through France and Poland, and depictions of the home front. The

upcoming election also featured prominently, with Franklin Roosevelt, then in his eleventh year as president, being challenged by Thomas Dewey—marking the first time two candidates ran for president from the same county.²⁷ Thomas went on to talk about something that had become a minor scandal: a fight between two drunken naval officers and a group of Teamsters in the lobby of the Hotel Statler in Washington, D.C., on September 23. Shortly before, Roosevelt had given a speech in support of labor unions and the alliance they had shared since the beginning of the New Deal era, reminding its leaders that their continued support was vital for his re-election.²⁸ The reasons for the fight are not entirely clear, although the officers were pro-Dewey and had drunkenly slandered the president, who in the eyes of many Teamsters was a hero because of his support of labor rights with the 1935 Wagner Act.²⁹ The *mêlée* led to a Senate investigation of labor's involvement with the campaign; it amounted to nothing but served to agitate Dewey supporters.³⁰ In Thomas's October 17 broadcast, he reignited the furor, alleging that Democratic supporters—especially labor—were being corrupt and violent in what was seen as a tight election. He went further, describing Roosevelt as “old and tired,” while praising the comparative youthfulness of Dewey. He also insinuated that FDR had not done enough to prepare the country to enter the war because he had been too busy pleasing labor unions like the Teamsters.³¹

For the first time in Thomas's broadcasting career, he had shown partiality for a political candidate, let alone against a popular president in wartime, leading to accusations of betrayal by listeners.³² Hundreds of pro-FDR letters were sent to Thomas, many attacking his corporate sponsor, the Sun Oil Company, owned by the anti-Roosevelt Pew family.³³ A writer from Philadelphia accused Thomas of being little more than a corporate stooge:

Though I have in the past always looked forward to your nightly broadcasts for unbiased news but since the election campaign for President has been on, myself and many friends have noticed how you are trying to put Dewey's cause across and it is quite disgusting but one can readily understand your support of this “Little Harding” as you are sponsored by the Sun Oil Company and this company is owned by Pew.³⁴ This Pew with his filthy millions will stoop to anything and hit low to defeat our beloved President Roosevelt as we here in Philadelphia know this man Pew well and his stenchy [sic] methods. Through his money he gained control of the Republican organization in Philadelphia and owns some, lock, stock, and barrel. So it is quite evident as Pew whistles Lowell Thomas dances.

No doubt you will be glad when November 7th comes and goes but Lowell many of us will have less respect and esteem of you after then.³⁵

John Sullivan, a listener from Long Island City, New York, sent a similar letter, addressed to “The Sun Oil Company, Station WEAJ.”³⁶ After Thomas slighted FDR’s dog, Fala, in his Statler-themed October 18 broadcast, “E.L.G.” in Bridgeton, New York, wrote a scathing letter:

Did you not feel like a small potato (a rotten one at that) when you went off the air last night? Are you so desperate that you have to bring a woman and of all things a man’s best friend a dog into your dirty politics. You are a black number with us.³⁷

Many of these letters were from urbanites who generally identified with the Democratic Party and saw FDR as a living hero.³⁸ Thomas’s reputation as being politically neutral was one of his biggest strengths and by publicly challenging Roosevelt, he alienated his listeners for seemingly little gain.

Thomas’s statements, though, spoke to the concerns of his own class, the country gentry of the Hudson Valley, who almost universally backed the Republican Party and repudiated the New Deal. At the heart of their distaste was that FDR had empowered labor unions and regulated business and banks. Many, like conservative icons Herbert Hoover and Pierre DuPont, believed the government had no right to legislate sweeping changes to corporate finance, relations between labor and management, and the agricultural system.³⁹ Besides Roosevelt, the great villain for the Hudson Valley gentry were the labor unions, which they viewed as unfairly empowered by the New Deal. For this smaller group, Thomas’s account of the Statler affair was a welcome attack. Hudson Valley resident Miriam Ferres wrote a letter of congratulations to Thomas:

Please accept my thanks for the fine news and valued campaign data you gave to “Our Tom’s” publicity. Especially we enjoyed your account of the Navy-Teamster brawl.

We are plugging Dewey for 1948, and all Dewey fans please keep up the spirit. My direct ancestor, Daniel Chaster owned a farm on Quaker Hill during the Revolution, and I am glad you have acquired the land, making it famous.

My husband is what is left of the old Dewey family of Johnstown. The rest of them keeled over during the New Deal. Aunt Addie lived to vote the straight Republican ticket in the morning, and died in the afternoon.

P.S. Our guest room and bath toilet, keeps running. Just like Roosevelt.⁴⁰

Ferres's jocularly hides the deep-seeded angst among New York Republicans over Roosevelt's success. Many viewed the candidacy of Dewey, a fellow New Yorker, as an opportunity to elect the sort of laissez-faire Republican who in the 1920s had given the party such success.⁴¹ Nowhere was this truer than in Lowell Thomas's home, Dutchess County, one of the most historically Republican counties in New York State.⁴² The deep-seeded Republicanism frustrated FDR, who once told Thomas, "I know I can't get ten votes on Quaker Hill." Thomas went on to add:

Years before, when he had first gone into state politics, he had driven over every one of the Hill's hundred miles of road trying to drum up support for his candidacy. But it was a traditional Republican stronghold then and remained so, as did the entire area. Not once in his long and spectacular political career had he ever carried Quaker Hill or Dutchess County, or even his own Hyde Park township. "You Know," he said wistfully, "I'd give Willkie almost any three western states if I could carry Dutchess County."⁴³

This private moment illustrates the complexity of the broadcaster's relationship with FDR. In the 1940s, Thomas publically attacked the president, but in the mid and late 1930s, the two had bonded by playing baseball, the unchallenged American leisure sport. In the first half of the twentieth century, the game was the essence of mass entertainment, transcending all levels of class and ethnicity. Stars like Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams, and Lefty Grove electrified fans and the press with their antics and play. In the Hudson Valley, there were numerous small-town clubs, like the Robin Hood Baseball Club in Hyde Park, formed by locals like "Brownie," the town's auto mechanic, and other local denizens.⁴⁴ Roosevelt himself was keenly interested in baseball and gave donations to the Hyde Park team as well as another in Poughkeepsie. He also attended games played in a field near his home.⁴⁵

Lowell Thomas shared FDR's enthusiasm, forming a local softball team in the late 1920s. Its players were a mixture of the rich residents of Quaker Hill and townspeople living below them. Fittingly, he called the group the "Debtors and Creditors." The Debtors (Quaker Hill wealthy who owed to local shopkeepers) included luminaries Casey Hogate and Thomas Dewey, along with Pawling's mayor. At times, Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, and Hamilton Fish, a New York Congressman steadfastly opposed to the New Deal, joined in.⁴⁶ Characterized by "merrymaking and mayhem," the games not only served as a social meeting place for the local gentry, but also provided a venue where participants could cultivate a unique regional identity. On the baseball diamond, Thomas and others could

look to their lives as being the archetype for living “in the valley,” a carefree, fun-loving lifestyle filled with laughter and relaxation. Of course, it helped that nearly everyone involved was white, Republican, and Protestant, but they added to this mix a distinct regional outlook shaped by their common recreation.⁴⁷

In late July of 1933, the “Debtors and Creditors” had a chance to test their lifestyle against the president, who was vacationing at his home in Hyde Park. On a particularly hot Sunday, Thomas invited some members of the White House press corps to Quaker Hill for a small get-together. However, the whole press corps, numbering over 130, along with members of the administration, descended on Thomas’s home. Eventually, as a way of providing crowd control, an impromptu baseball game commenced between Thomas’s “Creditors and Debtors,” and the journalists, Secret Service agents, and presidential staffers. The Pawling team, lead by shortstop Lowell Thomas, soundly defeated the visitors in what was described as a “a hilarious game”:

The Correspondents, many of whom hadn’t done anything more athletic than climb up a barstool in years, floundered to a 10-0 deficit. When we loaned them some of our men to even things up, ineptitude overtook *them* (sic), too, and we soon quit keeping score so players and spectators alike could concentrate on having the time of their lives watching two grown men slinging into the same base, several brilliant national affairs pundits [including *New York Times* writer Charles Hurd, fiercely unpopular for his defense of the New Deal] wandering together under a fly ball until it hit one of them on the head, and an overstuffed columnist swinging so vehemently at a third strike that he popped his belt and went down in a heap, entangled in his own trousers.

I would like to believe our laughter was heard clear across the valley at the summer White House. At any rate, the Roosevelt boys carried the tale of merrymaking and mayhem back to the President. The one-of-a-kind voice boomed back in my ear when the phone rang early the next morning: “Lowell, how come I wasn’t invited to your ball game.”

“My apologies, Mr. President. Your team could have used some extra encouragement.”

“Well, how about doing it all over again? I need a good laugh. So round up your team and come over to Hyde Park next Sunday.”⁴⁸

The time between the first and second games gave Thomas a chance to reorganize his team to include many of the local gentry (renamed the “Saints and Sinners” for the occasion) and affix a political meaning to the contest.

The day before the contest, *The Pawling Chronicle*, the local newspaper, ran the front-page banner headline, "Pawling to Make War Boldly on the White House," evoking the militant attitude of the New York Republicans toward the New Deal reforms launched by their former governor and neighbor. The game was cast as a metaphorical war between opposing political doctrines and as a chance to relieve some of the anxiety inspired by the New Deal:

PRESIDENTIAL SCRIBES LIKELY TO BE CONVERTED
BY SAINTS AND LED ASTRAY BY SINNERS

Scribes and Pharisees Prepare for Fray Tomorrow

At four-thirty o'clock tomorrow, Sunday, afternoon, on the grounds of the Pawling School, the local soft-ball season rises to a climax in the form, or perhaps formlessness, of a game between the Pawling Saints and Sinners and the political correspondents on duty at the Summer White House. Something like this has been impending for a long time. The enthusiasm for soft-ball has been hardening into fanaticism. Moreover, the citizens of Pawling are constant readers of the political forecasts, prognostications, analysis, and bum guesses so copiously provided by the newspaper correspondents who cover governmental events and so frequently discover events that never happen. The Pawlingites are a political race. In fact, the political races around here are sometimes so hot that smoke has been curling from the top of Quaker Hill, as if that elegant eminence were volcanic Vesuvius. Few are the citizens of Pawling, from Joe Cavaleri to Albert Dodge, who are not more convinced that they know more about national politics than the Washington correspondents. It was as an expression of this honorable pride and superiority that they disputed Lowell Thomas, as captain of the local soft-ball team, to challenge the horde of correspondents who bask in the Presidential presence at Hyde Park. The challenge was delivered to the headquarters of the correspondents at Poughkeepsie, and they accepted. In other words, they have stuck their heads right square into the jaws of disaster.

"Them newspaper guys," explained Munn Slocum, as he labored dangerously on somebody's car, "them newspaper guys don't know nuthin' anyway, they've been hanging out in Poughkeepsie, which will make them know still less."

The scribes, however, are said to be confident. The Parisees—we mean the Pawling team—are more confident, serenely confident, overconfident. The Scribes present a most unimpressive line-up:



President Franklin Delano Roosevelt seated in automobile, musicians in foreground, circa 1933-1939. (1428.32)

Russell Young, *Washington Star*, First base (he talks a brand of baseball that would terrify Babe Ruth, but only makes Captain Lowell Thomas sneer with his best loud-speaker irony).

Frances Stevenson, *Associated Press*, center field (what he don't know about inflation is equal only to what he don't know what to do when a fly ball comes out into center field).

Gus Terry, *Wall Street Journal*, first short-stop (watch him when his boss, Casey Hogate, hits a hot grounder down his way. It would be a fumble if he didn't fumble it).

Charles Hurd, *New York Times*, third base (he frequently arrives at baseless conclusions).

Ed Lockett, *International News Service*, substitute (he certainly can Hearst the ball).

Dick Blasdel, *Columbia Broadcasting Company*, substitute (love from NBC).

J. Fred Essary, *Baltimore Sun*, right field (he is sophisticated about NIRA but a sucker for a fast curve).

Tom Healey *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, catcher (the wrong side of the ledger).

John Herrick, *Chicago Tribune*, second short stop (celebrating the century of Retrogression).

Fred A. Storm, *United Press*, catcher and left fielder (meaning, we suppose he does not catch them in left field).

Mike Hennessy, *Boston Globe*, pitcher (an old-time big league player, we understand, but at the present writing, more suggestive of three stars than three strikes).

Edmund De Long, *New York Sun*, reserve pitcher (he'll go to the well once too often).

We understand that the softball team has two ringers, **George Descher** and **Gus Generich**, presidential secret service men, who will play their secret positions in gum shoes and green whiskers.

In contrast to the line-up of the scribes, the pharisaic roster of players presents a union of speed and power. A mere listing of the names strikes terror-into their own hearts principally.

First base- **Dan Flanigan** and **Bob Lansden**.

First shortstop-**Propser Buranelli**.

Second base-**K.C. "Casey" Hogate** and **Charles Horan**.

Second shortstop-Captain **Lowell Thomas** and **Herman Thatcher**.

Third base-**Ralph Gwinn** and **Munn Slocum**.

Left field- **Harry Holmes** and **Gordon Gwinn**.

Center field-**Emerson Ives** and **Fritz Gamage**.

Right field-**Arthur Whyte** and **Bill Whyte**.

Catcher-**Lawrence Ives**.

Pitcher- **Sherm Shalley**

Reserve pitcher-**William Brown Meloney, Jr.**

As special reserves to the Pharisees Captain Lowell Thomas has brought to Pawling Captain **Charles Scully**, Chief of the Life Saving Department of the Red Cross. Captain Scully has received the Congressional Medal of Honor for saving 400 lives. His job this week will be to save nine men on the Pawling field. In addition to Scully, Lieutenant **Leslie Arnold**, the first man to fly around the world, will be one of the players. Arnold, who circled the globe in 1924 for the Army, is expected to make several non-stop circuits of the bases for the Pharisees Sunday.

The umpires are: Colonel **Melvin McIntyre**, secretary to the President, who will miscall balls and strikes with all the dignity of the New Deal- and heaven help a Republican at the bat; on bases, **Ralph Reinhold**, publisher of journals pertaining to the, non-present, non-functioning art of architecture, which has not discovered that it is either new or a deal.

The game will be played on the grounds of the Pawling Boys School under the benign eye of **Doctor Gamage**, whose benign eye is so inclusive that he hopes both sides win. They won't, to the customary confusion of all that is benign.

The dead line for the game has been announced as four-thirty Sunday afternoon on the grounds of the Pawling School. It is believed rumored that in the interests some worthy cause, some private and anonymous charity of the Pharisees and the Scribes, an admission charge will be made 50¢, and 25¢ for children.⁴⁹

The jocularity and hyperbole of this article does more than conflate the press covering Roosevelt with his policies; it betrays the aggressive politicization of recreational activities at a time when the opportunity to socialize with Roosevelt's cohort became a reality.⁵⁰

In addition to having philosophical differences with the New Deal, the personal experiences of Thomas's social circle during the Great Depression fueled their opposition to it. Few places weathered the Great Depression better than the Hudson Valley, in no small part because it had few industries affected by the collapses in prices and credit following the stock market crash of 1929. The local economy even saw lively exchanges. In the fall of 1933, Edgar Hoag, a Pawling realtor, wrote to Thomas about a land purchase, revealing the state of local business:

As you know I own the little faded yellow house on the turn of the road just beyond your superintendent's house. I did own the other house up in the hill and was fortunate in finding desirable purchasers for it, Mr. and Mrs. Greene. I have been trying to find equally nice people for the lower house without success. There were two buyers would have taken the place but I refused the sale because they would not have fit the neighborhood.

In going over my investments I find I am carrying too much real property and am determined to get rid of some of it...It is a cheap way for you to get another tenant house and at the same time a fair speculation. There is also something to be said for the advantage in controlling this place. I of course have no intention of selling to undesirables but I cannot provide

owners to follow. It seems as though the property would be worth the price for protective purposes alone.

There is now a noticeable, increasing trend among people of means to pick up bargains in real estate. If this keeps up they will absorb all the distress sale offerings and then we will enjoy recovered values. If real estate is not ruined by tax burdens it stands a good chance of recovering ahead of stocks and other securities.

Dr. Tierney as you know has 35 acres up in back of my house including the ravine, brook and old damn. It is one of the most interesting pieces of land on the Hill. A pond up there in the woods would not cost much and would add to the kind of charm people pay well for. Dr. Tierney has asked me to sell the land for him and I believe this is the time to make him an offer. Would you care to consider it? A good many people are now adding to their estates contiguous surface property. Several have purchased parcels through my office.⁵¹

Hoag's mixing business and social obligation is indicative of how the Hudson Valley gentry saw the 1930s as a chance for personal enrichment threatened by New Deal-era reforms. Many of those who were politically active believed that the Great Depression was a natural event caused by the sort of poorly informed investing that had led to the last significant depression in 1893. They thought there was no need for Washington to become involved in reform and regulation, and that the New Deal was for a form of tyranny inspired by European socialism.⁵² Although they were removed from many of the New Deal's activities, which mostly reorganized banks and corporations while making sweeping changes to labor rights, they could escape their fear that federal activism would inflate the currency, raise taxes, and devalue their investments. For all their lives, Washington had been seen as the "forgotten place" of the pre-depression years, but now the president from Hyde Park had brought the federal government directly into the private lives of Americans.⁵³

Although politically charged, the softball game had been so enjoyable that the president planned another for the following summer, when he returned to Hyde Park for an extended period.⁵⁴ More planning went into the rematch; a makeshift diamond had been set up on a parcel of land in Staatsburg, a few miles north of FDR's home and next to a property owned by Ogden Mills, the controversial ex-Treasury Secretary under Herbert Hoover. Thomas speculated the choice of land gave Roosevelt "an extra measure of perverse delight," because Mills was a savage critic of the New Deal.⁵⁵ FDR also changed his team from the year before, treating the event as though it were a referendum on the New Deal.

Dubbed the “White Hopes,” Roosevelt’s team included Rexford Tugwell, the undersecretary of Agriculture and architect of a controversial program paying farmers to leave their fields fallow in a bid to raise crop prices. Another player was Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt’s closest advisor and chairman of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. FDR also impressed some of his children, Secret Service agents, and press correspondents in a successful defense of his administration.

Thomas’s description of the game, written nearly forty years later, displays the political tension present:

The President’s big open touring car was parked alongside first base, and from his vantage point he ran his team as though it were a Federal agency, boasting of its virtues while constantly changing the lineup. In and out of the game went a bewildering array of White House correspondents, Brain Trusters, Secret Service men and Roosevelt sons, F.D.R. exhorting them all and Mrs. Roosevelt, like some Madame Defarge of the diamond, sitting on the running board, stoically knitting.

Naturally, everything in the roistering revelry of a game was endowed with sham political overtones, and particularly by the Brain Trust, those university professors and reformers whose social and economic advice shaped the New Deal. Harry Hopkins, chasing a home run into the next field and finding himself confronted by a nettled bull, came tumbling back over the centerfield fence-to be greeted with the cry, “The capitalists revenge!”

Then F.D.R.’s starting pitcher, Professor Rexford Tugwell, ran into hot water. Flashiest and farthest left of the Brain Trusters, Tugwell had become an instant celebrity, and now extra base hits were whizzing by his ears. Finally, Roosevelt, laughing so hard he could barely get the words out, yelled, “Tugwell, you’re through!” and sent him to the showers-a secret service man taking his place on the mound.

Next day, in an editorial written by Frank Knox, publisher of the *Chicago Daily News*, the president was congratulated for his good judgment in sending Tugwell to the showers. “Now,” urged Knox, “finish the job and get him out of the administration altogether.”⁵⁶

Depicting Roosevelt as an overeager and dishonest manager and comparing Eleanor Roosevelt to the villain of Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* were common attacks on the couple, especially during the later stages of the New Deal. Thomas used this theme in his 1944 radio broadcasts. Portrayals of the “Brain Trusters” as hapless anti-capitalists also were common tropes. Newspapers

reports about the contest focused on Tugwell's disastrous pitching, comparing it to his agricultural program. Nor was the overarching symbolism of the game lost; press coverage described a victory for the New Deal.⁵⁷

Roosevelt returned to Hyde Park each summer and challenged the Pawling team to a softball game against his "White House All-Stars." The 1935 game was a sedate affair, attracting little notice by the papers or Lowell Thomas in his later writings.⁵⁸ Political tensions returned for the 1936 contest, seeing Roosevelt lose after Casey Hogate drove in the winning runs.⁵⁹ When Roosevelt made fun of the 300-pound publisher by saying, "Mr. Hogate, they tell me you have to hit a home run to make it to first base," Hogate shot back, "Yes, sir, Mr. President, that's what any American businessman has to do under the New Deal."⁶⁰ If anything, the slow success of Roosevelt's programs had only stoked conservatives' resentment and kept the rhetoric of the two sides testy.⁶¹

The yearly encounters between the Pawling team and Roosevelt's men became one of the Hudson Valley's biggest social events, drawing celebrity participants. Actress Anna May Wong served as an umpire in 1937, with Gloria Swanson behind the plate the following year.⁶² Babe Ruth, one of the most famous men in America (if not the world), played for Thomas's team against the "White Hopes" and in charity events, including a game in the late 1930s against a team led by Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., where the slugger struck out repeatedly, a defeat the *New York Herald Tribune* called "his Waterloo."⁶³ Celebrities' involvement in the games only highlighted the political symbolism for their participants, even when Thomas's teammates played against like-minded people, such as Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., who eschewed his cousin FDR.⁶⁴

In 1937, the furor surrounding FDR's scheme to augment the Supreme Court with justices favorable to his agenda compelled Thomas to change the name of his team to "The Nine Old Men," a clear "jab" at Roosevelt.⁶⁵ Thomas's explanation is revealing:

In 1937 we changed the name of our team. It was the year Roosevelt came up with his court-packing scheme, shedding crocodile tears for the nine elderly justices of the Supreme Court and their heavy burden of work. What he really wanted, as everyone knew, was to pack the high court with enough new members who shared his political philosophy so even his most controversial New Deal measures would be ruled constitutional. With the idea of giving the President a ribbing, we renamed our team the Nine Old Men. But someone leaked this to F.D.R., who could always be counted on for a trick of his own. When next his team trotted out on the field at Quaker Hill, emblazoned across their sweatshirts was *their* new name: The Roosevelt Packers.⁶⁶

By 1937, Thomas and Roosevelt had become friends, with Roosevelt sending baseball-themed jokes to the man he called “My Dear Lowell.”⁶⁷ For his part, Thomas benefitted from the relationship, receiving a commission to write a book about Colonel Jimmy Doolittle, leader of celebrated April 1942 air raid on Tokyo. Roosevelt also benefitted, using Thomas’s influence to get a free membership to the Quaker Lake Golf Club in Pawling.⁶⁸ From their correspondence, it seems as though both men had formed a friendship that, for a time, transcended politics. Undoubtedly, both men looked forward to their yearly games; after Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt sent a note to Thomas saying, “Dear Lowell, I am afraid Hitler has ended our ball games for the duration...As ever yours, F.D.R.”⁶⁹ But Thomas was not the only one with a softened opinion. In 1940, the two teams merged for a game against Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.’s Oyster Bay “Oysters.” The amalgamation included Hamilton Fish, Henry Morgenthau, Thomas Dewey, and notables like retired boxer Gene Tunney. By that time, the political divisions between the “Nine Old Men” and the “Roosevelt Packers” had softened with the gentle understanding that conservatives could do little to reverse the New Deal. Rather, it was a shared sense of community that brought them together in a common identity as men of the Hudson Valley.⁷⁰

Lowell Thomas’s 1944 anti-Roosevelt broadcasts become far more paradoxical in light of his friendship with the president and many of the “Brain Trusters.” Was it his intimate relationship with Dewey and his anti-New Deal outlook that compelled him to speak out against Roosevelt? Thomas encouraged Dewey to move to Pawling, and it is clear they spent an enormous amount of time together skiing and playing baseball.⁷¹ Thomas certainly could have made the broadcasts out of a debt of friendship, and felt confident that his message would be received as positively by the general public as it was by residents of the Hudson Valley. Given his relationship with FDR, it could not have been an easy choice. These episodes, though, show how New Deal-era conservatism was filtered through familiar mediums like baseball, radio, and commonplace social gatherings familiar to all Americans.

Moreover, the Lowell Thomas collection at Marist helps to illuminate the way that FDR related to his neighbors. The story of Roosevelt is well known, but the lives of those associates and enemies who shared the Hudson Valley with him are forgotten. As much as this article had been about Lowell Thomas, it has also been an attempt to reconstruct local life during the New Deal. The story of “The Nine Old Men” has been highlighted precisely because it connects Lowell Thomas’s life to a much larger piece of Americana—the New Deal era—and the people of that time. Just as easily, one could discuss Thomas’s adventures

with Lawrence of Arabia, in Afghanistan, or Tibet, but it is more important to understand where he fits into the larger American story. Thomas came onto the scene at a time when Americans were first embracing national media, and he brilliantly seized on the public desire for reliable information. But he also realized that media consumers wanted to hear stories of exotic and exciting places and people, leading to the creation of enduring characters like Lawrence of Arabia.

Thomas's seeming absence from history is best explained by the rise of television. He never became a star on this new medium, enjoying a minor success narrating travelogues shown as newsreels in movie theaters and on television. As his listeners became television viewers, they left behind the familiar voice of "the stranger everybody knows" for the equally recognizable faces of men like Walter Cronkite. His voluminous papers, left to posterity as the product of someone who seemingly could throw nothing away, are the entry point to a unique life, and the way that someone who called the Hudson Valley home was emblematic of a larger world.

Endnotes

1. This article could not have been produced without the collaboration of Dr. Kristin Bayer of Marist College and with the assistance of Dr. John Ansley. The author would like to thank them for the unfailing assistance and support. The author would also like to thank Olivier Zunz for his encouragement.
2. Lowell Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody: From Cripple Creek to Samarkand* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1976), 21.
3. *Ibid.* Historians have recently paid close attention to the way important technologies like the automobile gave new opportunities to rural Americans, postulating that consistent and inexpensive access to urban markets formed new kinds of communities orientated towards providing cities with the necessary staples. Hal S. Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Ronald Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).
4. The Cripple Creek mines drew multitudes of Americans looking for a chance to gain instant wealth in continental America's last gold rushes. Thomas's family was far from unique in their being drawn to the ample opportunity provided by the influx of money and hard-living miners. Elizabeth Jameson, *All That Glitters: Class, Conflict, and Community in Cripple Creek* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 2-5; Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 19-30.
5. *Ibid.*, 28-29.
6. The broadcast had a complicated history itself. In the 1930s, it was broadcast by the two networks, but a contract dispute saw the producers give exclusive rights to NBC in the late 1930s before switching back to CBS in 1946.
7. *Ibid.*, 312.
8. *Ibid.*, 311.
9. *Ibid.*, 313.

10. It should be said that Thomas had a singular devotion to only using the most recent information, so much so that he had reporters from throughout the country calling his show right up to the beginning of the broadcast. *Ibid.*, 314.
11. For a variety of reasons, the British high command kept Lawrence's operations secret until after the war. Lowell Thomas, *With Lawrence in Arabia* (New York: Popular Library, 1961), 10-11. Thomas filmed Lawrence's guerrilla army in its campaign of sabotage across the Arabian Peninsula and its eventual march on Damascus. Along the way, he joined General Edmund Allenby for his entry into Jerusalem, capturing the entire event on film. The footage survives and is available for viewing in the Special Collections of Marist College. Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 136-140.
12. This advertisement includes photos of Lawrence in Arab dress in an exotic locale. Display Ad 233, *The New York Times*, October 19, 1919.
13. An examples of Thomas's new-found notoriety can be seen in P.W. Wilson, "Four Adventures in the Gorgeous, Ancient East," *The New York Times*, November 15, 1925. Thomas's stories on aviation drew significant interest. The advertisement for the series can be found in "Front Page 1-No Title," *The Washington Post*, November 24, 1924. See also Lowell Thomas, *The Sea Devil: The Story of Count Felix Von Luckner, The German War Raider* (New York: W. Heinemann, 1938).
14. Examples of this include Richard Aldington's *Lawrence of Arabia: a Biographical Enquiry* and Ronald Florence's *Lawrence and Aaronsohn: T.E. Lawrence, Aaron Aaronsohn and the Seeds of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*. Even these mentions are passing and focused on Thomas's connection with Lawrence. This search was done using a variety of online databases, especially Google's excellent search engine through "Google-books." Thomas also receives a mention in David B. Edward's *Before Taliban: Genealogies of Afghan Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 1-9, because of his 1921 trip to Afghanistan and subsequent travel memoir.
15. Douglas Craig's *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920-1940* mentions Thomas's program but not its sweep, and Richard Norton Smith's *Thomas E. Dewey and His Times* is emblematic of depictions between Lowell Thomas and his neighbor. Erik Barnouw's *The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States 1933-1953* also discusses Thomas and his many imitators.
16. Lowell Thomas, Jr., *Out of this World: Across the Himalayas to Forbidden Tibet* (New York: Greystone Press, 1950), 29-31.
17. This footage is currently stored in the Special Collections of Marist College.
18. A. Tom Grunfeld, in his book *The Making of Modern Tibet* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe Books, 1996), 103-105, called his trip "a semi-official visit" that was perceived by the Soviets as a trip by "the traveling salesman for American weapons, posing as a radio commentator" whose "outspoken, anticommunist views" made him one of America's most outspoken proponents of Tibetan nationalism both publically and eventually in government circles. The passing mention in Thomas Laird's *Into Tibet: The CIA's First Atomic Spy and His Secret Expedition to Lhasa* (New York: Grove Press, 2002), 144-145, is more typical of mentions of Thomas' Tibetan adventures.
19. It is important to note that Thomas devoted the last 71 pages of his 1979 memoir to the Hudson Valley and its culture as seen through his eyes. Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 278-279.
20. The depth of Thomas's involvement in local affairs can be seen in appeals for Thomas's involvement in the local men's club, bank, and school, and are especially apparent in Letter, John D. Colman and Albert E. Dodge, March 20, 1933; Folder: Personal; Correspondence, 1933; Box 233, Lowell Thomas Papers, Marist College Special Collections.
21. "Prince Pays Visit Upstate," *The New York Times*, January 7, 1927. Some these high-profile visitors included Babe Ruth and Anna May Wong, very public celebrities of the 1920s and 1930s. "Softball...so what?: The Boys and Girls Club of New York Presents Lowell Thomas and His Nine Old Men vs. Bob Ripley and the Believe-It-or-Nots;" Folder: Thomas, Lowell; President's Personal File 6740; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY.

22. Hogate was especially opposed to FDR's New Deal policies. Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 333.
23. Thomas was an unabashed member of the Republican Party and shared those convictions with the vast majority of his neighbors. David Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism: The Democratic Party in Transition: 1918-1932* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), 248-249. Examples of Thomas' long contact with Hoover can be seen in Folder: Herbert Hoover, President of the United States; Box 100, Lowell Thomas Collection, Marist College Special Collections.
24. Lowell Thomas, "Why I live on Quaker Hill," Folder: Why I live on Quaker Hill; Box 387, Lowell Thomas Papers, Special Collections, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, New York.
25. However, he did win Poughkeepsie with regularity. For more on Roosevelt's troubles in the Hudson Valley, see Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left was Young: Student Radicals and American's First Mass Student Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 71.
26. As will be explained below, the Hudson Valley went through the Great Depression comparatively well in comparison to other agrarian communities like the Midwest, helping to foster New Deal opposition. The social geography of the region was split between a country gentry living in the Hudson Highlands and small farmers populating the lowlands and making a living by providing food for the local wealthy and nearby cities. There were few industrial workers outside of Poughkeepsie. This meant that unemployment was relatively low, especially with nearly one quarter of workers in New York City out of work. For more on New York during the Great Depression, see Joan Crouse, *The Homeless Transient in the Great Depression: New York State, 1929-1941* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).
27. Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 339.
28. "Officer Admits Brawl After Roosevelt Talk," *The Washington Post*, October 3, 1944.
29. A particularly good account of Roosevelt's efforts to win over and support organized labor during the New Deal period can be found in Frank Friedel, *FDR: Launching the New Deal* (New York: Little Brown, 1973), 424-435.
30. Accounts of the incident abound in newspapers. Examples of the coverage include: "Union Gathers Affidavits for Brawl Defense," *Chicago Tribune*, October 17, 1944; "Army, Navy Differ Over Fist-Fight News," *New York Times*, October 4, 1944; "Rankin Asks Inquiry," *New York Times*, October 4, 1944; "Navy Will Aid Fight Sift," *New York Times*, October 7, 1944; "Senators Indentify Teamsters in Fight," *New York Times*, October 15, 1944; "Senate Group Drops Statler Row Inquiry," *New York Times*, October 19, 1944.
31. This is taken from listener response letters, as the broadcast documents could not be found in the Thomas collection. The letters attacking the October broadcasts can be found in Folder: Political; Box 185, Lowell Thomas Collection, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY.
32. In his memoir, Thomas stated that this never happened and he maintained impartiality throughout his career. Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 322-323.
33. The full assemblage of these letters is available in the Special Collection of Marist College. Only a few, notable letters are presented here.
34. The connection between Dewey and Harding came from the oil interests seen to be linked to Dewey and the Tea Pot Dome scandal that erupted from oil bribes in the Harding administration in 1923, and only resolved by Harding's death the same year.
35. Letter, Unknown to Lowell Thomas, October 18, 1944; Folder: Political; Box 185, Lowell Thomas Papers, Special Collections, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY.
36. WEAJ was the Manhattan radio station that Thomas broadcast from. Letter, John Sullivan to Lowell Thomas, October 4, 1944; Folder: Political; Box 185, Lowell Thomas Papers, Special Collections, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY.
37. E.L.G. to Lowell Thomas, October 25, 1944, Box 185, Lowell Thomas Papers, Special Collections, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

38. "1932 General Campaign Statistics", Folder: Poll Information, Box 69, Emil Hurja Collection, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY; David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War: 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 377-378.
39. For an overview of the New Deal, see Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*. Particularly chapters 7, 9, and 12. For more on Herbert Hoover's ideas, see Herbert Hoover, *American Individualism* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Company, Inc., 1929).
40. Miriam Eaton Ferres to Lowell Thomas, November 9, 1944, Folder: Personal Correspondence; Box 234; Lowell Thomas Collection, Special Collections, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, New York.
41. An excellent account of Dewey and his beliefs can be found in Mary Stolberg, *Fighting Organized Crime: Politics, Justice, and the Legacy of Thomas E. Dewey* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995), 3-7. There has been a significant increase in recent scholarship on New Deal opposition. One of the best is Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009). Prominent businessmen (some within Thomas's circles) formed groups like the Liberty League to literally destroy the New Deal.
42. As recently as 2008, the area was described as "an area of [traditional] strength" for Republicans. Randall Lane, "A Buddy Ballot System," *New York Times*, December 15, 2008.
43. Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 338-339.
44. Letter, Robin Hood Baseball Club to Franklin D. Roosevelt, August 23, 1938; Folder: Robin Hood Baseball Club; President's Personal File 5411, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY.
45. Robin Hood Baseball Club to Franklin D. Roosevelt, May 28, 1935, President's Personal File 5411; Folder: Robin Hood Baseball Club; President's Personal File 5411, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY; A.J. Paul to Franklin D. Roosevelt, April 20, 1940, President's Personal File 5411, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY; Marion Brown to FDR, September 1, 1935, Folder: Robin Hood Baseball Club; President's Personal File 5411, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY; Robin Hood Baseball Club to Franklin D. Roosevelt, August 23, 1938; Folder: Robin Hood Baseball Club; President's Personal File 5411, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY.
46. Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 332-333.
47. *Ibid*, 334.
48. *Ibid*, 334-335.
49. "Pawling to Make War Boldly on White House," *The Pawling Chronicle*, August 5, 1933; Folder: Clippings; Box 360, Lowell Thomas Papers, Special Collections, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY.
50. The published program for a later game, which showed photos of the Roosevelt-Pawling games within, did not contain political rhetoric or mocking. "Softball...so what?: The Boys and Girls Club of New York Presents Lowell Thomas and His Nine Old Men vs. Bob Ripley and the Believe-It-or-Nots;" Folder: Thomas, Lowell; President's Personal File 6740; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY.
51. Letter: Edgar Hoag to Lowell Thomas, November 31, 1933; Folder: Correspondence, 1933; Box 192, Lowell Thomas Papers, Special Collections, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY.
52. Many argued that boom and bust cycles were natural and that government would be better served enforcing existing securities laws and promoting tariffs to revive American economy. Joel Seligman, *The Transformation of Wall Street: A History of the Securities and Exchange Commission and Modern Corporate Finance* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 2-18. Banking regulation and monetary policy became one of the more debated topics, and it is significant that the *Pawling Chronicle* mentions inflation. William Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal: 1932-1940* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 59-60, 90-94. The historiography of business

- life in Gilded Age and Progressive Era American is split between studies of the regulators and the tycoons. To understand how the clash of personalities between men like Louis Brandeis and J. P. Morgan shaped the time, see Thomas McCraw, *Prophets of Regulation: Charles Francis Adams, Louis Brandeis, James Landis, Alfred E. Kahn* (Cambridge, Ma: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984). For more on conservative ideology, see Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*, 3-52.
53. Gene Smith, *The Shattered Dream: Herbert Hoover and the Great Depression* (New York: Morrow and Company, 1970), 48.
 54. He brought with him the total weight of the troubles of the New Deal, including the problems surrounding the National Recovery Administration (NRA), the gubernatorial candidacy of Upton Sinclair in California, and the rising criticism he faced from business leaders and conservative Republicans in Congress, including Hamilton Fish. C.W.R. Hurd, "Hyde Park Again the White House," *The New York Times*, August 26, 1934. "Roosevelt Rests in Hyde Park Home," *The New York Times*, August 27, 1934; "Roosevelt Denies Sinclair Audience to Discuss Politics," *The New York Times*, August 30, 1934; Chester Manly, "Strike Feeding Is Up to Roosevelt," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 2, 1934; Howard Wood, "Bankers Find Eccles Fosters New Deal Ideas," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 2, 1934.
 55. Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 335. Mills became a lobbyist for big business in Congress after he became the president of the National Biscuit Company. Much of his time was spent accusing Roosevelt of promoting inflation through New Deal initiatives, something the Hooverites had used as a justification for their conservative monetary policy from 1930-1932. "Republicans Fighting Inflation Plan," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 22, 1933; "Inquiry on Mills Asked," *The New York Times*, April 22, 1933; "The Hoover Republicans and the Republican Party," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 26, 1933; John Bottiger, "Brain Trusters Draft Radical Plans in Secret," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 24, 1934.
 56. Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 335-336.
 57. Examples of this coverage include the mentioned *Chicago Daily News* article as well as mentions from *The New York Times* and *Chicago Daily Tribune*. "Ball Team Coached by Roosevelt; He Has to "Yank" Tugwell to Win," *The New York Times*, September 3, 1934; Chester Manly, "Roosevelt Has Week-End of Joy and Relaxation," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 3, 1934.
 58. Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 336.
 59. Charles Hurd, "Roosevelt's Team Loses Despite Aid," *The New York Times*, August 17, 1936.
 60. Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 337.
 61. During this period, Roosevelt was often called a dangerous radical. Parrish, 330-332.
 62. "Softball...so what?: The Boys and Girls Club of New York Presents Lowell Thomas and His Nine Old Men vs. Bob Ripley and the Believe-It-or-Nots," Folder: Thomas, Lowell; President's Personal File 6740; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY.
 63. This clipping is cut in such a way as the date is lost. "Babe Ruth Finds His Waterloo in Soft-Ball Game," *New York Herald Tribune*, Date Unknown. Folder: Clippings, 1930s; Box 360, Lowell Thomas Collection, Special Collections, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY.
 64. Ruth was an avowed Democrat and had campaigned for Al Smith in 1928. Kal Wagenheim, *Babe Ruth: His Life and Legend* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1974), 141; Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 339-340.
 65. An excellent account of the Court Packing Crisis can be found in Marian Cecilia McKenna, *Franklin Roosevelt and the Great Constitutional War: The Court Packing Crisis of 1937* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).
 66. Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 336.
 67. Franklin Roosevelt to Lowell Thomas, August 9th, 1939, President's Personal File 6740, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY; Franklin Roosevelt to Melvin McIntyre,

- September 10, 1934, President's Personal File 6740, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY.
68. Lowell Thomas to Franklin Roosevelt, July 15, 1940, President's Personal File 6739, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY; Lowell Thomas to Stephen Early, January 28, 1943, President's Personal File 6740, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY.
 69. Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 349.
 70. "Colonel Roosevelt Bringing Team To Play Nine Old Men on Quaker Hill," July 20, 1940, Sub Series 1.12, Box 17, Special Collections, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, New York.
 71. Lowell Thomas to Thomas Dewey, May 2, 1938, Sub Series 1.12, Box 15, Special Collections, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, New York.



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Lowell Thomas (right) and Lowell Thomas, Jr., in front of a Tibetan Buddhist Thangka wearing Tibetan hats and coats, 1949. (1534.10.2)

From Out of this World to the Cold War:

Lowell Thomas, Tibet, and the State Department

Kristin Bayer

You say you are tired of the Cold War, weary of hearing about the Communist conquest of Asia, awfully tired of hearing about strikes, spies, congressional hearings—and paying taxes? You are fed up with television, the atom bomb, and the H-bomb? Your mother-in-law has just come to spend the winter with you—and you would like to escape somewhere right out of this World? You would? Well, fasten your safety belt, come with me—lets' visit Shangri La.¹

Lowell Thomas (1892-1981)—radio news commentator, adventurer, lecturer, and entrepreneur—wrote the above text to introduce his then-latest lecture travelogue featuring his son's film footage of their 1949 trip to Tibet. The travel tour, Lowell Thomas Jr.'s 1950 book, and the 1954 movie they both produced and directed were all titled *Out of this World*. At the time, it would not be surprising to anyone in America that Lowell Thomas would “take them” to Tibet. In the middle of the twentieth century, he was the nation's most respected newscaster, the Walter Cronkite of his era. He brought the world into American living rooms via his radio broadcasts and television show *High Adventure*, and to public venues through newsreels, Cinerama films, and lecture tours.²

But Thomas was also a local fixture in the Hudson Valley; the majority of his broadcasts originated from his estate in Pawling, and his attachment to the region prompted him to bring many of his foreign acquaintances to his home and to tour the area.³ He bridged this local and worldly identity in many ways, but the Tibet trip and its subsequent publicity best illustrates Lowell Thomas's great connectedness to local and global events. In fact, his reputation and the familiarity of his name within American culture drew people to his broadcasts and lectures and gave his interpretation and analysis greater impact. Hence during the crucial early years of the Cold War, his unusual position as a broadcaster



Broadcasting from the Himalayas; Harishwar Dayal and Lowell Thomas (both seated), Gangtok, Sikkim, 1949. (1533.7.6)

and traveler, along with his political connections, allowed him to represent 1949 Tibet to America in a manner that transformed him into a quasi diplomat and unofficial participant in the unstable arena of international politics.

Lowell Thomas physically grounded himself in the Hudson River Valley, but his current presence in the region is barely apparent save for the few documents housed in the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library, at his former estate in Pawling, and in the Marist College building that bears his name. Despite the ephemerality of these works, the Archives and Special Collections section of Marist's Cannavino Library projects Lowell Thomas's impact on American society—both through the posters of his travelogues that adorn the walls and by the contents of the newly catalogued (and only recently publicly accessible) collection of *The Lowell Thomas Papers*. In addition to being an excellent resource for information related to Thomas's broadcasting career (1930 to 1976), the archive documents his travels to various regions around the world and is rich in materials about the Hudson River Valley. A particularly insightful element of the archive is the Tibet collection that focuses on the Thomases' trip to Tibet on the eve of the 1949 Chinese Communist victory. The documents, films, 35mm slides, and artifacts are extensive and relevant to many fields of research: history, communications, art, and archeology, to name a few. Since Tibet was on the verge of being incorporated into the modern Chinese state, the

film that accompanied the lecture tours is some of the most historically valuable footage of a Tibet that no longer exists. Taken as a whole, Thomas's activities in Tibet as represented in the archive are indicative of his ability to perform history in the form of radio broadcasts and, later, speaking tours. Furthermore, his own history, experience, skills, and connections, in combination with global circumstances, propelled him into Cold War politics. As a result, the collection reveals how Lowell Thomas's world and Hudson Valley history merge. The now obscure name of Lowell Thomas reemerges as the conduit between American political culture and the wider world.

The personal documents in the Thomas papers complement the Tibet materials and illustrate how Thomas, and his son also, not only informed the public about Tibet's situation *vis a vis* the Chinese but also reflexively fashioned themselves as unofficial diplomats,⁴ gathering information about Tibet and presenting it to various U.S. governmental agencies when they returned. From 1949 through the early 1950s, the era of the blossoming Cold War, Thomas navigated government policy, U.S. public opinion, and international politics as an advocate for Tibetan and American interests. His prominent position among American journalists and the popular press, in addition to his political connections,⁵ allowed him greater room for expression than established and influential



Monks on top of monastery. (1533.11.9)

Asia scholars. The American perpetrators of the 1950s Red Scare drew Asianists into their sights, resulting in limited reporting on Asia and even accusations of spying and “Communist sympathizing.” For a point of comparison, as Thomas was becoming more active in Tibet-China relations, Owen Lattimore, one of the most accomplished Asia scholars of his era and an acquaintance of Thomas, was accused of being “the top Russian espionage agent in this country [the United States]”⁶ by Senator Joseph McCarthy. Thomas’s reputation and prestige, in combination with the timing of the Chinese Communist Party success and the burgeoning Cold War, presented an opportunity for him to operate in a variety of guises impossible for most people interested in Asia to accomplish in that political climate.⁷

From Pawling to the Roof of the World

Lowell Thomas began his exploring and journalism professions in the United States. Then, beginning with World War I, he turned his attention to the international arena, launching a career that combined traveling, reporting, and presenting. He brought what interested him most—the fascinating unknown—to the American public through his travelogue lecture series.⁸ His travels, filming, and reporting on the Middle East in World War I not only gave Americans a sense of the war beyond Europe, but also brought T.E. Lawrence, as Lawrence of Arabia, to the attention of the world. From then on, as Thomas expanded his subject matter he became the voice of global events and knowledge which people experienced through his radio broadcasts and travelogues.

After his experiences in the Middle East during World War I and due to his interest in exploration, Thomas unsurprisingly became intrigued with some of the world’s most inaccessible regions, Afghanistan⁹ and Tibet in particular. Not only were both places physically remote and difficult to reach, but they were undergoing key historical and political events that were little understood and demanded global attention. As only he could, Thomas consistently managed to arrive “on the ground,” overcoming the forbidden with an incredible sense of timing. In the instance of Tibet at least, it appears that Thomas did not merely have good timing but also walked the edge of political usefulness. He gained access to Tibet right when the Tibetan government felt most vulnerable to Chinese takeover and also when American interest in the region was shifting. During World War II, the United States had supported the Chinese leader Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kaishek) and his anti-Communist Guomindang party; as the Chinese Communist Party (Jiang’s opposition) was gaining ground in the post-World War II Chinese Civil War, America was seeking its footing in a drastically

changing Asia.

Thomas had tried unsuccessfully to enter Tibet in the past, but when he was given an unusual amount of vacation time in the summer of 1949,¹⁰ he wrote to Loy W. Henderson, the American ambassador to newly independent India, asking him to pull strings for him, his son, and three other Americans to gain permission for a visit.¹¹ Both Henderson and “another friend in India,”¹² Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai, a top official in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, thought the request impossible.¹³ Nonetheless, these two influential friends, along with the scientist Charles Suydam Cutting (also famous for being the second American to visit Lhasa, Tibet) wrote to Tibetan officials on Thomas’s behalf.

Mr. Thomas is the foremost radio commentator in the United States and consequently, well known throughout the country. I know well that, should he be allowed to receive the permission he seeks, Your Holiness would find him an exceedingly charming man. If there should be anything about Tibet you would care to have him tell the American people, he is in a unique position to do so as his voice is heard by countless thousands and what he says is reliable and kindly.¹⁴

While it is reasonable to expect that Cutting’s experience in Tibet would give him significant weight with the Dalai Lama, this gesture also leads to many questions regarding Thomas’s previously denied requests to enter Tibet and the timing of his accepted 1949 request. Considering the tense state of affairs between the United States and China, overt intervention in Tibet would prove difficult, as the Communist victory seemed imminent by the summer of 1949. And yet, on July 14, 1949, Lowell Thomas was given permission to enter Tibet, but only with Lowell Thomas Jr.; the additional three Americans were denied access.¹⁵ The Tibetan limitation of the party reflects its own concerns over how the visit of Americans would be perceived by both the Chinese and the Russians at this crucial moment. As we will see, in both Russia and America Thomas’s access to Tibet prompted two pressing questions: *Why did the Tibetans let him in at this moment?* And were the Thomases given any advance preparation by the American government?¹⁶

In a tremendous whirlwind of organizing, Thomas contacted his son, who was then in Iran, and gave him the news.¹⁷ Thomas Jr. quickly organized the trip with advice from Cutting, and the Thomases set out on July, 31, 1949, from Calcutta, India. On August 5 they began their Himalayan leg of the 300-mile trek into Sikkim.¹⁸ What began for Lowell Thomas as a serendipitous opportunity to travel to Tibet during an extended vacation was clearly becoming a proj-

ect requiring more time. Therefore, CBS agreed to a transfer of venue to India and Tibet for Thomas's upcoming broadcasts. They arranged for the Thomases to travel with the most current equipment and broadcasting technology, making the event monumental. Not only was it practically miraculous that permission to enter Tibet had materialized, but the trip offered great potential for broadcasting, photography, and film.¹⁹

The trip itself, and the Thomases' interactions with both local officials along the way and the Dalai Lama himself once in Lhasa, is detailed in Lowell Thomas Jr.'s account, *Out of this World: Across the Himalayas to Forbidden Tibet*, which he published almost immediately upon return to the United States. Thomas Jr.'s book documents the routes taken; scenery, people, customs of the region; circumstances and government of Tibet; and the hazards and pitfalls of the trek



**Bearer with CBS case, fording the Kyi Chu River, tributary of the Brahmaputra;
Where the caravan route had disappeared; 1949. (1533.6.22)**

home. Yet the archival materials at Marist reveal another side to their experiences in Tibet: the heightened American interest in the region and the fine line the Thomases walked between identities as civilians and quasi-governmental representatives. Thomas recorded the first broadcast about his Tibet adventure in Gangtok, Sikkim, and it was shipped to the U.S. for delayed play.²⁰ The reporting of this historic event, from the route they would take to the expected interactions and obstacles they would face, was eagerly awaited. By the early part of their broadcasting, as they were entering Tibet, questions began to surface as to why they were allowed access to Tibet at all. In the September 2 broadcast from Tibet, Branch Rickey, the baseball executive and friend of Lowell Thomas,²¹ introduced Thomas by saying that even missionaries were not allowed in Tibet. He goes on to say, "... I wonder why they've now invited our good friend Lowell Thomas, so familiar to us ... that is something that might have an interesting explanation." He indicates that the explanation will come from the broadcasts.²² Despite this cliffhanging introduction, audiences awaited an answer that came only after the Thomases returned to the United States. While they were traveling and broadcasting, the global circumstances in Asia and the United States were changing; when Lowell Thomas returned, he found that the material that they gathered in Tibet had greater import among radio, television, and lecture audiences than originally expected. The topic of Tibet's future also raised many questions about Asia during the Cold War. Thomas then utilized his unusual position in the American media, along with his political connections, to include engagement with government policy and public politics with his otherwise ordinary activities as news commentator.

Thomas denied having been sent to Tibet by the American government, and the Tibetans also denied having "invited" him there.²³ Yet hidden beneath the surface of the reports from this unfamiliar region that had restricted visitors for so long were ambiguous hints about the nature of the visit: transcripts of the first broadcasts from Sikkim tell of a message from Tibet to the Indian Political Officer Dayal that read, "With reference to Mr. Lowell Thomas, United States national, and his son—although the Tibetan Government does not usually allow foreign visitors to come to Lhasa, in view of friendly relations between the Tibetan Government and the Government of the U.S.A.,—they have granted permission for these two..."²⁴ This first reference to governmental relations having a hand in the arrangement of the visit could suggest a sense of goodwill between friendly nations. But considering that the status of Tibet had been debated not only since the fall of the Chinese Qing dynasty in 1911 but more recently by Jiang Jieshi's Guomindang government during World War II (Jiang

refused to recognize an independent Tibet), the language takes on new meaning. Using the term “Tibetan Government” in relation to the United States has deeper implication, as Tibet was trying to establish itself as independent from the de facto Chinese government.

Once the Thomases arrived in Tibet and reached Lhasa, they came to better understand the Tibetan investment in their arrival—the hope that the American pair embodied American governmental connections. It is also the first time that we read Cold War language: [Tsepon Shakabpa, Finance Minister] “...feels his country in the new Atomic Age must enlarge its circle of friends or it will be engulfed by the Red tide that is sweeping over Asia. ...we now learned that was why dad and I are here—because he [Tsepon Shakabpa] had persuaded his government that America should know something about Tibet.”²⁵ Certainly it was clear from Cutting’s original letter and the efforts of Henderson and Bajpai that the Thomases had been allowed to enter Tibet because they carried some political value. Tsepon Shakabpa’s use of these Americans could be advantageous. Yet one must consider that the Tibetans had not randomly selected the Thomases to act as spokesmen for the Tibet independence cause. The match between Tibetan needs and American receptivity would be key; Thomas was able to conflate both his (extended) vacation time with a most significant moment for Tibet. Furthermore, his friendship with Loy Henderson gave him a political avenue of support into Tibet, and his political and media connections at home would facilitate the telling of the Tibet story.

Political discussions between the Thomases and officials in Tibet continued as more foreign ministers expressed their political situation to them in a way that put Tibetan politics in line with the Americans:

...they went on to tell us of their grave concern over the Communist sweep in China—how they were fearful of invasion from the East. In this connection the leader of the Chinese Reds, Mao Tze-Tung [Mao Zedong], had just announced his intention to—“liberate Tibet.” Surkhang Dzasa [co-head of the Tibet foreign affairs bureau²⁶] said they had been told how Americans prize ‘freedom’, therefore they hope America will help Tibet maintain its freedom and independence if the Communists strike.²⁷

The foreign ministers’ expectation of a decisive answer to their questions about American support for Tibet shows either their assumptions about or understanding of Thomas’s influence.²⁸ At the very least, the Thomases would inform America—perhaps both the public and the government—about Tibet. Reporting on their interaction over these issues, Lowell Thomas Jr. states that in response



The Dalai Lama, 3rd from Lowell Thomas, Sr. on left, 1949. (1533.4.8)

he and his father offered the advice that Tibet use its own resources: the head of the British Mission in Lhasa (Tibetan-speaking Hugh Richardson); a young, un-named English-speaking Tibetan; and another group of young Tibetans who could study in the United States to gather information about America while informing Americans about their country. Thomas Jr. noted that “They could bring back collectively a fairly broad understanding of our country. Where there would be time for all this would depend upon how soon the Reds move.”²⁹ The subtle interplay between the Thomases as non-governmental representatives and the actual members of the Tibetan government is revealing in both the expectation expressed by the foreign ministers and the way that the Thomases appear supportive but distant in their indirect advice.

Equally useful to our understanding of the historic moment is the phrasing of Tibetan concern over Chinese encroachment. While the Tibetans had indicated their desire for independence to Jiang Jieshi’s government and expressed their resistance to Jiang’s overtures to the Thomases, the focus of Thomas Jr.’s message about Tibetan sovereignty is not primarily anti-Chinese but rather is exclusively anti-Communist. While it is unclear if the Thomases’ reporting represents how the Tibetans pitched their political diplomacy and current needs, or if it is the Thomases’ interpretation of the Tibetan situation, the emphasized anti-Communist rhetoric accumulates: “Here in brief is what they told us. And it should be of special interest to Americans. For the Tibetans hate communism and say

they will never have anything to do with it. And they may play a vital role in stemming the Red tide.”³⁰ While the Tibetans were interested in the Thomases for their political usefulness, Tibet also appeared to be a potential buffer state to “stem the Red tide.” Not only is this familiar Cold War language in the form of the “Red tide,” but furthermore, the language of the American Red Scare appears quickly after: “Lhasa, wanting nothing to do with communists decided that time had come to oust all Chinese officials remaining in this country and, . . . getting rid of all who were suspected of being communist sympathizers.”³¹ While the Tibetans had been negotiating with the Chinese both inside and outside of Tibet since the end of the Qing dynasty, the proximity of “Chinese officials” to “communist sympathizers” in the above statement is suspiciously focused and even conflates the two; Chinese present in Tibet are not only *foreign* officials (indicating Tibetan sovereignty), but also potential Communists. “The foreign minister then authorized us to say that far from there having been a communist revolution [as reported occurring in Tibet by the Chinese Communists]—it was quite the opposite. That Tibet has been a completely independent country since 1912. And that this country will have nothing to do with communism.”³² Hence, the Tibetans and their conduits to the American government (and its interests) were on the same page.

In Pawling with *Out of this World*

When the Thomases were in Tibet and far from direct communication with the United States, they could theorize and exchange ideas and potential future outcomes for U.S.-Tibetan relations. As noted above, they participated in and broadcast discussions about Tibet’s future. But it was only upon their return that the implications of their trip and their involvement in the politics of that trip in regards to both the American media and American governmental circles emerged. From this tangle of quickly occurring global events—the end of World War II, the Civil War in China, the October 1, 1949, Chinese Communist victory, and (from America’s vantage point) the eve of the Korean War—another pressing question arose: “What was China’s interest in Tibet?” This question became one of the most posed and answered in Thomas’s reporting on Tibet once he and Thomas Jr. returned. Again, the answer was not direct and did not appear through American governmental channels, but rather through the Thomases’ reports to American government officials and Lowell Thomas’s written accounts of the trip that appeared in newspapers and magazines throughout the country and in a series of articles for *Collier’s Magazine*.³³

On the return trip from Tibet, Lowell Thomas fell and suffered a severe hip

injury.³⁴ He was hospitalized upon his return to the United States. Therefore, Lowell Thomas Jr. went to the White House on November 9, 1949, to meet with President Truman to discuss Tibet. According to a note written by Lowell Thomas:

Instead of waiting for me to get out of the hospital, President Truman asked for him [Lowell Thomas Jr.] to come immediately. As a matter of fact we were both surprised at this. But, the President showed a great interest in our journey, spent some time pouring over our Tibetan map, and said that he expected to be on hand when we give our combined illustrated talk... The President told Lowell that he had followed our journey... Lowell was invited to go to the State Department and the office of the Secretary of Air. For several hours they pumped him with questions.³⁵

While no record of what transpired at the meeting appears to exist,³⁶ the pressing nature of the meeting (the President not waiting for Lowell Thomas to be present) indicates the level of governmental interest in Tibet at the time and the Thomases' role as both informers and interpreters.³⁷

On the other side of their roles as unofficial government sources, the Thomases began writing and preparing lecture tours for the American public. Thomas Jr. wrote *Out of this World* when he returned to Pawling. Thomas's *Collier's Magazine* series addressed the more political dimension of their trip.



Lowell Thomas, Jr. at an *Out of This World* book signing, 1950. (I534.7.1)

“Lowell Thomas, Jr. in Washington, D.C., Nov. 9 [1949], with the Tibetan scroll he presented to President Truman... The scroll, was presented by two top officials of the Dalai Lama's government.... (I534.6.4)



Published between February and March of 1950, the articles gave a dramatic sense of the Chinese Communists' consolidation of power over the mainland and contested territories such as Tibet. The language Thomas chose mirrored that in Thomas Jr.'s account in *Out of this World*:

Almost every week the Chinese Communist radio at Peking [Beijing] announces the Reds' intention to "liberate Tibet, wipe out all traitorous elements and deliver the Tibetan people."³⁸ Once China finally falls, there seems little doubt that the Reds will try to take this Shangri-La land.³⁹

And here Thomas gives the first of his answers as to why the Chinese were interested in Tibet, an interpretation that he later expanded upon when presenting Tibet's cause to American government agencies. First, he argued that after the Communist victory, China had many idle triumphant troops, and:

If they can gain control of the Holy City of Lhasa, the Reds will wield tremendous influence over the entire Buddhist world... Tibet would make an ideal jumping-off spot all downhill for an army to invade India and gain control of its nearly 400,000,000 people. And if the Communists ever get a grip on the vast peninsula of Hindustan [India], then all Asia will be gone. Tibet is all that stands between the Red armies of China and teeming India.⁴⁰

Therefore Thomas's representation and appeal addresses the many potential ways that the Communists could conquer both Tibet and beyond. First, if the Chinese Communists claimed Tibet as part of China they could also potentially influence the rest of the Buddhist world. Either Thomas did not know, or did not expect the American public to know, of the very limited influence of Tibetan Buddhism within the Buddhist world. Furthermore, Thomas presents the possibility of accumulated (and somehow singular or monolithic) populations under Communist rule if China subsumed India. Finally, in a pre-domino theory reference, Thomas posits that once China takes Tibet, India and eventually the rest of Asia will fall. This picture of the threat of Communist China is particularly significant given the medium of *Collier's Magazine* as a popular weekly, but also because of another facet to the article. Thomas not only relays Tibet's cry for help, but also indicates who must respond to that cry: "The two foreign ministers cornered us again with a question along the same lines: 'If the Communists strike Tibet, will America help? And to what extent?' We answered that it depended upon American public opinion and Congress."⁴¹ Hence the perceived plight of Tibet is not only an American government issue, but also a cause for the

American public to tackle. Again, the medium and wording of the essay allowed the Thomases to uncover Tibetan concerns and requests without actually committing American aid to their cause.

Throughout early 1950, the Thomases became more active in American-Tibet relations. They maintained correspondence with their contacts in Tibet, reporting on progress (or the lack thereof) regarding U.S. government support for Tibet. Both the British representative Hugh Richardson and British radio-man Reg Fox,⁴² each of whom remained in Tibet, sent the Thomases appeals for information on American action for Tibet. As in their correspondence and reporting mentioned above, the Thomases were cautious in their assessment of American commitment. But in early 1950, Thomas Jr. proposed and pursued another avenue for Tibet: making a second visit that would include someone closer to the government.

My Dad and I were led to believe in our conversations with the American government in Washington, that on another trip our government would like to send along an observer—someone who would devote himself to gathering the factual material that seems to be needed by our government before going ahead with any real assistance to Tibet. This government representative need not come as such, but merely as another civilian traveler.⁴³

“Another civilian traveler”—considering the range of voice and audience of both the Thomases, this description fits them as well. The Tibetans ultimately rejected the idea of another Thomas-led visit. Reg Fox wrote to explain that the Dalai Lama was advised by monks to avoid a connection to the United States in order to negotiate better terms with the Chinese. The Tibetans felt that having not received any outside aid they had no choice but to focus on relations with the Chinese.⁴⁴

In May 1950, Thomas Jr. wrote to Tibetan dignitaries, giving further information regarding his meeting with Truman:

About the first of November it was my privilege to call on Mr. Truman, our President, and present to him the message from your government. The President asked many questions about your country... I asked him if America could supply your army with modern weapons and sufficient advisors to instruct your soldiers in their proper use. But, President Truman did not commit himself to either an affirmative or a negative answer. However, he is sympathetic with your country's problems... But, the main problem seems to be finding ways and means of lending Tibet support without precipitating a full-scale Communist movement in your direction.⁴⁵

At this point, Thomas Jr. confirms the Tibetan understanding that he was able to communicate between two governments, whether or not with official position or instructions. And he provides a gentle, and politically useless, indication that Truman was interested in Tibet: he asked many questions. Hence the disappointing turn that the letter takes does not fall too heavily. While the letter acknowledges the increasingly tense situation in Asia—the movement of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army toward Tibet, and Russian and Chinese activity on the Korean border, it appears that Truman is *not* committing arms to Tibet for its own good. It is not that the president is abandoning Tibet; rather he is avoiding an action that might lead to a full-scale invasion of Tibet. Of course, another way to read this is that any overt support for Tibet could hasten a Chinese or general Communist response that would require a level of military activity beyond that of American interest.

As another foreign conduit for Tibet interests, Reg Fox continued to correspond with the Thomases over American commitment to Tibet, and his information clicked across the concatenation of the channels of power: from Thomas Jr. to Thomas Sr. to Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

The Tibetan officials are puzzled and confused at the attitude of the western countries who in the news broadcasts and other ways continually denounce communism and promise help to all non-communist countries—yet these same broadcasts, etc., never even mention the name of Tibet—they even seem to avoid it, as if under strict orders to do so. This action by America, Britain, and others is driving this government to make terms with the communists.

p.s. If American said ‘Hands off Tibet!’ it would be sufficient I think, because they [the Chinese] do not want to be accused as aggressors [sic] at this moment!⁴⁶

This letter from Fox to Lowell Thomas Jr. eventually reached the elder Thomas’s desk. His impression of potential American involvement in Tibet builds upon Thomas Jr.’s May 1950 letter. On the duplicate of Fox’s letter, Thomas wrote to his secretary, “Elsie, I think I told about my conversation with Mr. Dean Rusk of the State Dept. relative to this letter from Fox. He said that we can’t say ‘hands off Tibet’ unless we are prepared to see that hands are kept off: and apparently the U.S. cannot take on the defense of Tibet at this moment.”⁴⁷ What is most telling is that Thomas not only passed Fox’s letter along to Rusk, but he discussed the situation with him and received a reply.

The urgency, critique, and content of this letter set in motion a more direct

flow of communication between the Thomases and the government. Dean Rusk thanked Thomas for forwarding Fox's letter and noted that it was "extremely informative and useful as firsthand information on that area. We would be glad to have any further background material of this character which you may receive."⁴⁸ The letter also found its way to Kermit Roosevelt, a senior CIA officer, who noted, "[t]he one [letter] from Reg Fox is not only interesting but quite valuable not only to us but, judging from the comments I have heard, to the Department of State. Access to material of this nature aids us immeasurably in our present rather difficult tasks."⁴⁹ At this point, the Thomases became (if they were not originally) directly involved in matters of Tibet-American diplomacy; in June 1950, the Korean War began and American governmental interest in Tibet intensified.⁵⁰ Lowell Thomas's efforts at publicizing the significance of Tibet to U.S. interests expanded to include more media outlets, and both the Department of the Air Force and Dean Rusk asked for Thomas's assessment of Tibet's position in Asia.

In the autumn of 1950, Lowell Thomas wrote in various newspapers across the country about Tibet's strategic importance. He argued that "[the north side of Tibet is] the place to hold back the Red Tide. There it could be done by a small guerrilla force, if well led and properly armed. It still isn't too late. It will take months for a Chinese Communist army to move down from the north."⁵¹ His reports continue and expand on the issue of the "tide" threat. He repeats that the loss of Tibet to the Communists would: one, domino down through Asia; two, control Buddhists' center (his estimation is that Lhasa is the Buddhist equivalent of the Vatican); and three, that if India "fell" to Communism, the majority of the world's population would be living under Communist rule.⁵²

By the close of 1950, Lowell Thomas and his son were giving secret talks to American government agencies on various aspects of Tibet—geography, characterization of the Tibetan population, the Tibetan responses or inclination to Communism, and its leaders' reaction to possible United States or United Nations intervention. The Air Force in particular was interested in the Thomases' Tibet material and asked to

... perhaps borrow for official Air Force use some of you magnificent Tibet pictures... The use proposed for this material is for the top-level intelligence publication of the Air Forces (classified Secret)... This may make it possible for you to speak more freely on some phases of Tibet than would otherwise be the case (for closed circuit readership)... I shall bring a list of specific questions and will of course be most happy to record any comments of any kind that you wish to make on this subject.⁵³

Two documents related to this correspondence from November 1950 illustrate the level of the Thomases' knowledge of Tibet for strategic purposes and the American government's expectation to utilize their knowledge: an outline for Thomas's "Proposed Talk on Tibet" and "Proposed Questions to be Propounded to Mr. Lowell Thomas Relative to Tibet."⁵⁴ While the questions section appears at first glance to be written in military terms that an untrained civilian wouldn't necessarily understand, this would not have been a foreign language to Lowell Thomas. His Middle East experiences during World War I, his interest in aviation, and his successful explorations likely provided him with the resources to respond to such questions. More interesting, though, is how the tone of the questions and outline contrasts to the published accounts of the trip to Tibet. The broadcasts and news accounts do not disclose such specific fact-finding details as are indicated in the government documents through questions such as: "What areas of Tibet are adapted to conventional military operations...?; What areas are not...but are suitable for guerrilla warfare?; What are the approaches to Tibet which can be used by military forces?; Are there areas in Tibet suitable for air-fields?"⁵⁵ Furthermore, a separate page requests information on an airfield site at Lhasa including details such as "availability of materials for runway construction, nearest fuel and oil (aviation), communications available...to make this area usable for such type aircraft as the C-47 (DC3)..."⁵⁶ As American fear of a Chinese takeover of Korea grew, so did Thomas's value as an "expert." Since his information had informed the United States of Tibet's 1949 stance on Chinese Communism, the government evidently felt that Thomas's exclusive understanding and assessment of the region could be applied to action in Korea.

Thomas was thanked by various participants in these talks for "...giving us the dope on Tibet."⁵⁷ His experiences in Tibet that made him a valuable informant and his interpretation of Tibetan relevance to American interests were taken seriously alike by his government and military audiences. "Not only was your information itself excellent, but the impact of your views, your ideas of the significance of the area, and what can be done about it made a deep impression on all who heard you. Your trip here was most timely."⁵⁸ Thomas's contributions to intelligence work also received praise. When tapes of his presentation at the Pentagon were returned to him, Air Force chief Charles Cook explained that "The recordings of the earlier briefings had to be erased, owing to their classification levels."⁵⁹ Thomas's various talks with officials were publicized in an article he wrote for *Air Intelligence Digest* titled "Why do the Reds want Tibet?"⁶⁰ The article reiterates his theories that appeared in previous publications: Tibet was strategically placed to halt the spread of Communism and could be a "spring-



The Shakabpa family and Lowell Thomas in front of country house; 1949. (1534.1.1)

board for the conquest of India and Pakistan.”⁶¹ He goes further in this article to address the Korean conflict by claiming that “[t]aking Tibet could regain face lost in the ‘Korean Conflict’ in the eyes of the Chinese”⁶² and theorizing that there might be uranium in Tibet.⁶³ His domino theory is elaborated by his comment that “the conquest of the vast sub-continent would, in my opinion, cause all of Southeast Asia to fall by default, for India is the key to Asia.”⁶⁴

Despite Lowell Thomas’s efforts, American intervention in Tibet never materialized in any meaningful way.⁶⁵ In 1954, he summed up the Tibet situation with a twist: “We arrived in Lhasa with one mystery unsolved—why had we been allowed to enter the country after so many others had tried and failed?” “...They had brought us to Lhasa to give us a message for the President of the United States. ...Tibet saw a new threat surging at its borders—the menace of Chinese Communism. They wanted us to ask America for help. Of course, when we returned to the United States we passed this message on to the President. But Tibet had realized its peril too late. The Chinese Communists moved in shortly afterward.”⁶⁶ Had Tibet realized its peril too late? From the beginning of Thomas’s broadcasts through his involvement in intelligence networks, never does he indicate that he understood Tibet to have missed its moment for American support. Rather, this representation is another example of Thomas’s choice of wording. In 1949, he was potentially as useful to the Tibetans as they were to the Americans. At that moment, his role as conduit was balanced. However, once he returned to the United States, the nature of his usefulness tipped away from Tibet and more

toward providing information to Cold Warriors. He was unable to persuade the American government to intervene on behalf of the Tibetans, but he did provide information and analysis on the situation in Tibet for other purposes.

Thomas was significantly more successful among the public and influential Asia watchers. He, and to a certain extent his son, continued to be active in Tibet affairs throughout the 1970s and participated in many Tibetan relief agencies. He founded and directed the American Emergency Committee for the Tibetan Refugees (AECTR) from April 1959 until May 1980.⁶⁷ He advised the Dalai Lama to speak to the United Nations, tried to lure the Dalai Lama to Pawling, and helped the children of his Tibetan friends navigate through American colleges and universities and the job market. Questions remain regarding Thomas's position between civilian newsman and government employee. But the role was his own: no other American of his time would have had the experience, enthusiasm, and drive to trek through the Himalayas and not only acquire so much information but also to become something of a government advisor. Perhaps Lowell Thomas as purveyor of information is his distinction in this instance. He was unable to direct the course of American involvement in Tibet, but he gave the Tibet story to the American government. And he showed his commitment to the Tibetan people by presenting their plight to the American public and establishing the AECTR. Considering the current Dalai Lama's success in conveying and translating Tibet to the world, Lowell Thomas is not obscure, but incarnated.

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Endnotes

1. Lowell Thomas, Script for lecture film *Out of this World*. Cannavino Library Lowell Thomas Papers [CL LTP] Box 472
2. Thomas was omnipresent in the lives of the American public, including being active in radio, exploring clubs, adventure clubs, television, newsreels, and his lecture tours. Later he promoted Cinerama, an earlier version of today's IMAX.
3. He tried on numerous occasions to bring the Dalai Lama to Pawling wanting him to see "how the American 'drokpas' [Tibetan nomads] live." [CLLTP] Box 96
4. Meaning that they took into consideration the global context of Tibetan and American needs.
5. For example, in addition to his relationship with Franklin Delano Roosevelt, J. Edgar Hoover was a close friend and correspondent of Thomas. They even went camping together.
6. Owen Lattimore, *Ordeal by Slander* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950), forward.
7. Thomas was certainly aware of Lattimore's situation. In addition to Lattimore's name appearing in general correspondence, see letter from the Indian Mansion, Lhasa July 16th, 1950 from Hugh Richardson (officer in charge of the British Mission) to Lowell Thomas: "It is also extremely good of Owen Lattimore to think about me when he has so much on his mind. Not that I imagine many people can take Senator McCarthy's charges very seriously." And undated letter (but post Tibet trip) "I haven't had a chance to get in touch with Owen Lattimore to find out how his Kumbum Lama is making out at John's Hopkins." [CLLTP] Box 469
8. For more on Thomas's life, see his autobiography, *Good Evening Everybody* (William Morrow and Company, Inc.: New York, 1976)
9. After several attempts, Thomas originally entered Afghanistan in 1922. See Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, chapter 10 and his *Beyond the Khybr Pass: into Forbidden Afghanistan* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, Inc., 1925). This was both a moment when Afghanistan was closed to anyone entering as Thomas did, through British India, and the era of Amir Amanullah Khan's ultimately unsuccessful modernization movement.
10. Thomas had not had a proper vacation since beginning his broadcasting career.
11. Lowell Thomas Jr., *Out of this World: Across the Himalayas to Forbidden Tibet* (New York: Greystone Press, 1950), 16.
12. *Ibid.* and Letter from Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai, New Delhi 29 June 1949 [CLLTP] Box 486
13. *Ibid.*
14. Charles Suydam Cutting to the Dalai Lama, July 5, 1949. [CLLTP] Box 468. Cutting advised the Thomas expedition on everything from how to pack what type of food to various routes to take to Lhasa.
15. The original cable announcing the permission is housed in the Lowell Thomas Papers at Cannavino Library. The photographer John Roberts was allowed to accompany them for the first half of their journey through the Himalayas but was one of the three rejected from the original request. After Roberts returned, all photographs and films were the work of Thomas Jr.
16. The Soviet Press later referred to Thomas as an American spy. Thomas responded to this in *Collier's Magazine* contradicting a Kremlin report in the Soviet *New Times* that stated Thomas was on an American government mission to make Tibet into an Anglo-American colony. *Collier's Magazine* (February 11, 1950):15-16 [CLLTP] Tibet oversized box 1
17. Thomas Jr. was working with an American diplomat in Iran.
18. Lowell Thomas Jr., *Out of this World*, 52

19. Lowell Thomas Jr., *Out of this World*, 17. Lowell Thomas Junior refers to the broadcasting decisions as made by “the sponsor” which is not identified.
20. Lowell Thomas Jr., *Out of this World*, 46
21. For more on Branch Rickey, see Lowenfish, Lee, *Branch Rickey: Baseball’s Ferocious Gentleman* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2007). He was remarkable, and in fact revolutionary, because, among other things, he integrated baseball.
22. Broadcast Script Branch Rickey, substitute. [CLLTP] Box 467
23. See Reg Fox letter, below.
24. [CLLTP] Box 464 and Thomas Jr., *Out of this World*, 46
25. Lowell Thomas Jr., from Tibet Aug 29, 1949. [CLLTP] Box 464
26. Melvyn Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: the Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 374
27. Lowell Thomas Jr., from Tibet Aug 29, 1949 [CLLTP] Box 464. While Lowell Thomas Jr. is writing here, he consistently refers to “we,” seemingly including his father with him as though they were both present and he is writing from an agreed upon or at least acknowledged shared perspective.
28. For more information on what Lowell Thomas Jr., describes as a constant repetition of the same question, see Thomas Jr., *Out of this World*, 239-242
29. Lowell Thomas Jr., from Tibet Aug 29, 1949. [CLLTP] Box 464
30. Lowell Thomas Jr., from Tibet August 31, 1949 [CLLTP] Box 464 and worded slightly differently in Lowell Thomas Jr., *Out of this World*, 178
31. Lowell Thomas Jr., from Tibet August 31, 1949 [CLLTP] Box 464
32. Lowell Thomas Jr., from Tibet August 31, 1949 [CLLTP] Box 464
33. Letter from Reg Fox to Lowell Thomas April 8, 1950: “The article in *Colliers* is very interesting and somewhat colorful, but you have some of your facts mixed!!” [He doesn’t say which…] [CLLTP] Box 468
34. This is quite an understatement as Thomas fell and broke his hip in eight places while traveling back across the Himalayas to India. The trek home is detailed in Thomas Jr., *Out of this World*.
35. [CLLTP] Box 469, undated
36. Lowell Thomas Jr. began his father’s broadcast on November 9, with a general summary of his meeting with Truman and Thomas Jr.’s presentation of a Tibetan scroll to the president. [CLLTP] Box 484
37. Prior to meeting with the president, Secretary of State Dean Acheson corresponded with Thomas, wanting to speak to Thomas Jr., about Tibet. Lowell Thomas himself met with Acheson on February 17, 1950. Dean Acheson to Lowell Thomas October 28, 1949 [CLLTP] Box 91
38. Thomas would have been able to access this information through his correspondence with the British radio expert in the service of Tibet, Reg Fox.
39. *Collier’s* (February 25, 1950): 39 [CLLTP] Box 467
40. *Collier’s* (March 4, 1950): 45 [CLLTP] Box 467
41. *Collier’s* (March 4, 1950): 45 [CLLTP] Box 467
42. Fox had lived in Lhasa for 14 years when the Thomases arrived. He ran internal radio communication for Lhasa and set up a corps of Tibetan radio operators which developed into a central communication hub for the region. “Fox brought the world to Tibet through broadcasts: BBC, Voice of America, Radio Peking, etc. and he made a daily digest of news for the Dalai Lama.” Thomas Jr., *Out of this World*, 285
43. Letter from Thomas Jr. to Reg Fox 19 April 1950 [CLLTP] Box 468

44. July 7, 1950. Extracts from letter received from Reg Fox. Monk advisors to the DL and not in favor of granting permission. "But absence of any aid caused Lhasa to try for best terms possible from Peking. Visit by American parties might prevent this." [CLLTP] Box 468
45. Letter from Lowell Thomas Jr. to Tibetan dignitaries. May 10, 1950 [CLLTP] Box 469
46. Letter from Reg Fox to Lowell Thomas Jr. 11 June 1950 [CLLTP] Box 468
47. [CLLTP] Box 468
48. To Lowell Thomas from Dean Rusk, Assistant Secretary of State July 19, 1950 [CLLTP] Box 468
49. Letter from Kermit Roosevelt to Lowell Thomas July 21, 1950. [CLLTP] Box 468
50. While the Korean War clearly played an enormous part in American concerns over and interests in Tibet, extensive attention to the war is beyond the scope of this paper. I suspect that Thomas became potentially important to American understanding of Tibet because of his previous exposure to guerilla-style warfare in the Middle East.
51. Evansville, Indian Press Oct. 27, 1950 and Tibetan clippings of scrap book [CLLTP] Box 482
52. See Tibetan Clippings Scrapbook [CLLTP] Box 482
53. Dept. of Air force. Letter October 31, 1950 from Charles H. Cooke, to Lowell Thomas [CLLTP] Box 468
54. The outline is stamped "confidential" and carries governmental designation codes: AFOIN-E/AN; CDB Lokey/cmc/76673; 2 November 1950 [CLLTP] Box 468
55. Proposed Questions to be Propounded to Mr. Lowell Thomas Relative to Tibet. Handwritten on title page, "Sonny" which would indicate that this was forwarded from Thomas to Lowell Thomas Jr. [CLLTP] Box 468
56. Final page of Proposed Questions to be Propounded to Mr. Lowell Thomas Relative to Tibet. [CLLTP] Box 468
57. E. Moore Brigadier General, U.S. Air Force 17 November 1950 (Ernest Moore) [CLLTP] Box 468
58. E. Moore Brigadier General, U.S. Air Force 17 November 1950 (Ernest Moore) [CLLTP] Box 468, As noted by John Ansley, "in the early 20th century fictional stories involving Tibet appeared in almost every form of popular entertainment, including magazines, newspapers, books, comic books, children's stories, plays, and movies. Of course, the pinnacle of this was James Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon*, which was published in 1933 and made into a film in 1937. Due to the immense popularity and pervasiveness of *Lost Horizon*, the notion of Tibet as Shangri-La became part of Western popular culture, and a powerful utopian metaphor."
59. November 27, 1950 from Charles (H. Cooke, apt. USAF Chief, Publications section directorate of intelligence headquarters USAF pentagon. [CLLTP] Box 468
60. Lowell Thomas, "Why do the reds want Tibet?" *Air Intelligence Digest* (December 1950) [CLLTP] Box 484
61. Lowell Thomas, "Why do the reds want Tibet?" *Air Intelligence Digest* (December 1950):7 [CLLTP] Box 484
62. *Ibid.*, 1
63. *Ibid.*, 7
64. *Ibid.*, 8
65. See A. Tom Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet* for more on post 1949 Tibet and its relations with the rest of the world.
66. Lowell Thomas, *New York Herald Tribune* (April 11, 1954)
67. American Emergency Committee for the Tibetan Refugees (AECTR) 28 April 1959-May 1980 [CLLTP] Box 482



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New York State Capital Fire, March 29, 1911, photo by Harry Roy Sweny

“We Were There, Charlie!”

Joseph Gavit and the 1911 New York State Library Fire

Paul Mercer

In the early hours of March 29, 1911, Harry Roy Sweny, a golf expert and “one of the best-known amateur sportsmen in the country,”¹ opened the door of his home on Albany’s South Swan Street to a horrific sight. The massive New York State Capitol, just around the corner from his house, was on fire. Fortunately for posterity’s sake, Sweny was as accomplished a photographer as he was an athlete. Camera in hand, he hurried to the steps of the State Education Building, then under construction just opposite the capitol. There, at 3:30 am, he photographed the blazing structure silhouetted against the pre-dawn darkness.²

By the time the fire was extinguished, the entire western portion of the capitol had sustained extensive structural damage. The great assembly chamber was a shambles, its *papier maché* ceiling collapsed, and the “well” at its center—now a well in more than name—covered in water three to four feet deep. The famous “Great Western Staircase” was awash with water and debris pouring from the upper floors, and clogged with fallen bricks, dust, ash, and tons of shattered glass from the massive domed skylight overhead. Remarkably, in all of the loss and destruction, there was only one fatality—watchman Samuel Abbott, whose body was not recovered until several days later.

In due course, as the debris was cleared and repairs were begun, it emerged that although the damages to the Assembly and Senate chambers and the red granite Western Staircase were considerable, the capitol was not beyond hope of recovery. More devastating, however, was an almost incalculable cultural loss. The most heavily damaged portion of the building contained the entire collection of the New York State Library, as well as the valuable collections of the New York State Museum.

Nearly a century old in 1911,³ the State Library was one of the finest research libraries in the country, home to innumerable manuscripts and printed rarities, vital documents of colonial and early state history, and unparalleled collections

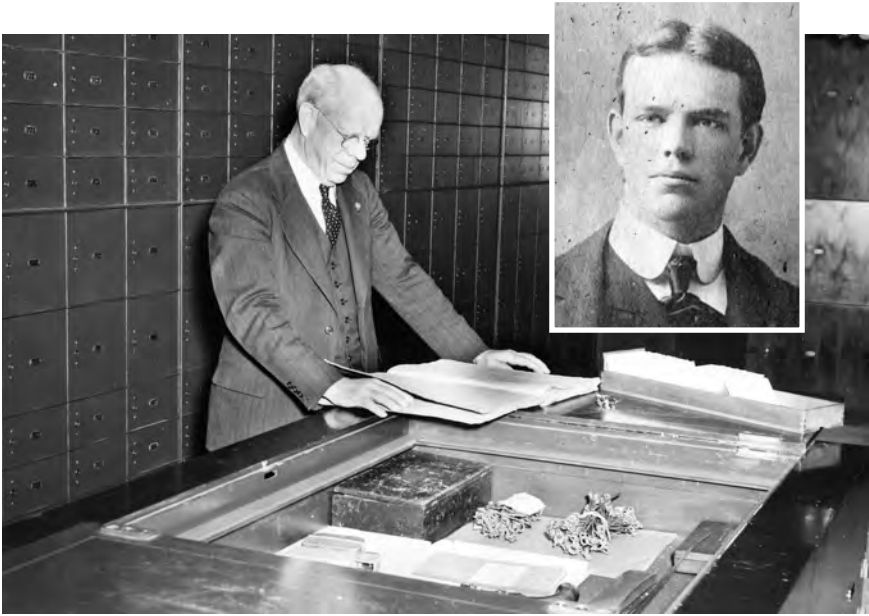
in law, medicine, government, and politics. Directly in the path of the advancing flames, the library provided a ready supply of fuel. By sunset on March 29, virtually all of its treasures were reduced to ashes. Compounding the holocaust of the library's collections was the destruction of its administrative records, catalogs, and indices, making it virtually impossible to accurately account for its loss. In a particularly bitter stroke of irony, the fire struck as the library was months away from a projected move into its new, spacious quarters in the Education Building. This would soon be judged one of the greatest library disasters of the twentieth century. James I. Wyer, the director of the library before and after the fire, said, "Few realize the extent of the disaster of 1911. The catastrophe was the greatest in modern library annals. The burning of the Kaiserliche Universitäts und Landes Bibliothek in Strasburg during the Franco-Prussian War did not destroy as many books. The fire at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Turin in 1904 destroyed only 25,000 books and 2,500 manuscripts. At Albany half a million books and three hundred thousand manuscripts burned to cinders or pulp in the course of a few hours."⁴

About an hour after Harry Roy Sweny shot his iconic photograph, Joseph Gavit, the thirty-five-year-old superintendent of the library stacks, arrived from his home a couple of blocks away. Looking at the inferno he knew instantly that the library's collections were beyond any hope of rescue: "By that time there was not a room that could be gotten into," he later recalled.⁵

Joseph Gavit joined the State Library staff in 1896 and retired in 1946, after a fifty-year career in which he rose from junior clerk to associate librarian. During and after his service, he was widely respected as an authority on the library's history and collections, and as a bibliographer, historian, and genealogist. In a career that began under the administration of library pioneer Melvil Dewey (who almost singlehandedly invented the modern profession of librarianship) and extended through two world wars and the Great Depression, Gavit was witness to many events in the library's history. By far the most significant was the fire.

In a 1940 memoir, Gavit refers to himself as "one of the few remaining relics of the Capitol fire." His well-earned reputation as an authority on State Library history—in many ways the personification of that history—begins with his intimate knowledge and ready recall of the library before and after 1911. His manuscript memoirs of the fire and its aftermath contain many details not found in official reports. His dramatic personal recollections provide the basis for this paper.

Gavit reveled in his reputation as "the official Wampum Keeper and Medicine man"⁶ of the State Library. He believed that the institutional memory



Joseph Gavit in 1946. Inset, Joseph Gavit, taken ca. 1896

he personified, beyond simple nostalgic appeal, could teach useful lessons and even point the way to needed improvements. In recounting the story of the fire, he wrote:

[I]t seems wholly fitting that such a story as this [i.e. the 1911 fire] should be made part of our permanent records...While its details may cause us regret for the things we might have done or left undone, had we foreseen, it is the trend of history in all things that out of loss and failure and mistakes and misfortunes, come the better conditions.

After the fire, Gavit's photographic memory of the labyrinthine shelving arrangements of the overcrowded library would play a major role in the rescue of important materials from the ruins. His conclusion, as early as 4:30 a.m. on March 29, that most library collections were beyond reach was based on a comprehensive and accurate understanding of how and where collections had been housed. In his 1912 draft report as shelf superintendent, Gavit summarized the fire's progression:

The fire came into the library through a wood and glass partition between Room 38 and the Assembly lavatory. Room 38 was about 80 feet long, divided into two floors by a mezzanine almost the full length of the room, from the partition westward. Once through that partition, nothing could have stopped the flames, driven by a north wind, as the only access to the



Central Reading Room before the fire

upper room was wooden stairways, one in the path of the fire, and the other inaccessible... Just around the corner—in fact just through a thickness of oak case backing, was a wooden dumbwaiter shaft running clear to the roof...[O]n the upper floors, was the only stairway at that end of the library which also ran to the roof, and surrounded at almost every landing by pine cases full of books.

But neither dumbwaiter, stairway, nor pine shelving was necessary to carry the flames upward, because wherever steam pipes went up through the *outside* walls, the chases were open ... probably full of dust, that doubtless did its work in every case. These alone would account for the awful speed of the flames in getting to the roof.

So the fire went upward through the north stack, so terrifically [sic] hot as to soften the beams in the floors, melt out the wall fastenings of the stack floors, and causing the heavy binding machinery to break through the fourth floor; and then the whole stack structure collapsed, bringing down the fifth floor with its mezzanines in a grand tangle that hung down into the main law reading room.

Gathering force and volume before the north wind, the flames swept through the law reading rooms, into the great central reading room, where



Central Reading Room after the fire

the air currents carried it across and up into the south stack, destroying as it went the two eastern galleries of the reading room, directly in its path.

I have no doubt that at the same time the flames were sweeping along the fifth floor, eating up all the records of the order and accession section, the shelf list and other library records, and causing the mezzanines above the central fifth floor rooms to collapse, together with the glass roof above them. (*But at this point the main fifth floor held.*)

From the reading room the fire entered the south stack above the fourth floor; and here again the intense heat softened girders, melted out floor fastenings and supports. So that when the southwest tower collapsed, the chimney it knocked over fell directly over this stack, carrying roof, fifth floor, stack structure, fourth floor and all beneath it, down into a great mess of twisted girders, broken stack standards, floor plates and roof trusses which filled room 34 to a depth of forty feet. A big elevator supply tank, directly under the roof in room 54 was found next morning closing the southerly entrance to room 34 from the main reading room on the third floor...

The northwest tower room (Library School)⁷ was apparently the last to burn... It had probably been burning slowly all the time,—not noticed until the woodwork near the windows burned. So perished our library..."

Helplessly watching his life's work go up in flames, Gavit's first thought was for his fellow staff members, whose loyalty and commitment might have led to a far worse outcome: "It seems a special dispensation of providence to the members of the library staff that they did not know of it earlier, for they would have been caught in the manuscript room, accessible only by wooden stairs in another room, towards the advancing fire. Or they would have been caught in the southwest tower... Or they would have been trying to get out some of the Early American newspapers, or some of the manuscript census, higher up in the same tower—the tower that collapsed. Anywhere that they would have been seeking the invaluable, their sense of duty would have held them until escape was cut off."

Although it was widely reported that the fire had been caused by an electrical malfunction, there were persistent rumors of a carelessly discarded match or cigarette as the real culprit. Although an inquiry was promised, none was forthcoming. Gavit suspected a political cover-up:

John Alden Dix, Governor at the time, guaranteed in the early hours of the 29th of March, a full investigation of the causes at least, but he was persuaded otherwise, by those who knew that the full story would be one of the worst scandals, political, and personal for many, that legislators had ever contributed to New York State history...

The fire broke out on the night of the caucus for the nomination of a United States Senator, James A. O'Gorman... It is related by eye witnesses that after the caucus, the legislators adjourned to the Assembly Library, a room known as the 'booze room,' because its many cupboards contained the elements of many varieties of drinks. There were women present, though there were no lady legislators at that date. So what was suggested the next day as "defective wiring" as a cause of the fire that started in this room at about midnight, was really a lighted match dropped into a wastebasket, or onto an alcohol soaked carpet. The details have never come out. But the Legislators came out in time to save their skins, and shut the door, to let the fire burn out in that room. That was why something over an hour elapsed before any alarm was turned in,—to give these people a chance to get well away, and the fire a chance to break out of that room...

Whatever the cause of the fire, the massive loss to the library collections was, Gavit held, almost entirely due to overcrowding in the stacks, which by 1911 were extended beyond all reasonable capacity, a jury-rigged maze of temporary shelving, mezzanines and galleries added to the original library rooms in any way possible so as to accommodate the ever expanding collections:



“This Chaos of Convenience”

The State Library was moved into the quarters in which it was destroyed about 1889 ... Isaac Perry, then Commissioner of the New Capitol, had filled all of its Public rooms with beautifully carved quartered oak, on shelving, partitions, furniture—everywhere a most elaborate tracery of varied forms and designs... The book stacks were of cast iron, with galvanized iron shelves. The stack floors were made up of squares of cast iron ... there was *originally* no wood used anywhere except the tops of the top level of the south stack and the floor under the lower levels.

In less than ten years, the library’s collection had outgrown the existing space. Mezzanines and galleries were added to existing floors, and new rooms constructed of wood and plaster extended up into the attics and eaves, wherever space allowed. Meanwhile, Education Department and legislative offices were competing with the library for what little space was available.

“But [T]he summer of 1901 found the library grown past all the builders’ expectations...1200 boxes of duplicates were sent to the McCredie Malt House⁸ in 1901, and 1000 more the following year. There were already many boxes, in various parts of the Capitol cellar and attic. But the library kept on growing, and there was no more iron shelving—no place to erect any.” In his report on the shelf section for the director’s report of 1901, Gavit wrote:

Relief from the crowded shelves was obtained by making several hundred cheap pine cases of one, two, three and four shelves, standard measure,

which like building blocks can be stacked wherever there is space enough for them to stand, They are not ornamental in our beautiful library, but they are a great comfort to the staff. . .

In his fire report he continued:

It was all of unseasoned wood. This first pine shelving was, I think, erected in room 34A3, covering every bit of wall space from floor to ceiling, to accommodate American history, in order that the iron shelving might be used for the medical serials forced out of the rooms taken by the Senate committees. . . .

In 1902, fifty four-shelf newspaper cases, of pine, were put up. . . In 1903 there were 225 cases gotten, to put on top of the iron shelving in the top level of the south stack. . . In 1904, 170 cases were used. . .

From then on, year after year, pine shelving kept on being added—on top of cases in all the mezzanines of the law library anywhere where there was room to put a case. It stopped up corridor windows, filled gaps between doorways, was built up along the railing side of galleries. . . [I]t required constant study to figure out places for them. There had even been a special framework made so that a stairwell could be utilized by placing the cases on top of the railing. . . It was to be found in broad aisles in the north stack, leaving just space enough between faces for the Pages to get through. It was cut and planed and fitted into corners, under slanting roofs, under iron stairways. Everywhere there was pine shelving—except in the public reading rooms. (*Yes, we did take down some pictures and fill arches with shelves in the main reading room*).

It was “this chaos of convenience,” as Gavit termed it, in which “every last corner was utilized for book storage; the futile storage of precious things remote from public reach, and so beyond saving when the fire came; [as well as] the very structural defects of the building itself . . . [that] while they enhanced its beauty, made its contents only an easier prey to devouring flames.”

The imminent threat of fire had long been apparent to the library staff, although the “fireproof” granite, brick, and stone structure would seem to belie the danger. As early as 1900, Melvil Dewey had advocated for the construction of a new, fireproof building, but it wasn’t until 1906 that ground was broken for the State Education Building, which would eventually house the library. Delays in construction were a constant source of concern for library and department administrators. Frustrated by the delays, Education Commissioner Andrew Sloan

Draper had several of the library's most precious documentary treasures removed and placed in a fireproof safe. This move proved especially prescient in 1911. As Gavit wrote: "In the minutes of the meetings of the Regents following the fire, is a full and detailed statement by competent authority of the efforts that had been made for some years to secure adequate fire protection in the library quarters; but all to no result. The Capitol burn? It was fire proof! It proved to be fire proof just like a furnace—what is in it will burn."

In the hours immediately after the fire was discovered, there was considerable concern for the missing watchman, Samuel J. Abbott. Local newspapers reported early on that he had died in the fire, but as days went by without any sign of his body, and rumors that he had escaped circulated in the press, there was some hope that he might yet surface unharmed. Finally, on March 31, a badly burned body was discovered near a door between the library and the Assembly chamber. Abbott was found few feet from escape, the key to the locked door in his pocket. Many speculated on Abbot's role in the fire. Gavit had his own opinions:

Much has been said as to where he was and what he was doing during the early hours of the fire. It is hardly within the scope of this report to attempt a settlement of those questions. But this I know, that had he been in the room when the fire came into the library, he would have been powerless, with only the small fire extinguishers to use where a fire engine stream would have been useless. The two ridiculously small and short lines of "fire hose" were remote from that room, and by the time the fire came within their reach, no man could have endured the heat long enough to use them, even had there been water in the pipes, which is doubtful...

So it is not for any man to say where Sam Abbott was, what he did, what he tried to do, or why he died only a few feet from safety. The rooms occupied by 500,000 volumes and the offices of all but two divisions of the Education Department were too much territory for one feeble old man to watch. That was one of the mistakes and he died in proof of it.

Following the fire, the state Legislature was offered temporary quarters in the nearby Albany City Hall. Other suddenly homeless departments and offices formerly housed in the capitol were billeted in various buildings around the city. The Education Department offices and the library staff found a temporary home in the State Normal College several blocks away. Although the once great library was now almost totally destroyed, Gavit and the library staff turned immediately to the business of salvage, rescuing what could be saved from the ruins, even as hot spots continued to burn and ashes were still hot to the touch:

At a meeting of the library staff held at the Normal College the 2nd morning after the fire, the work of salvage was ordered begun, and... [I] was designated as in charge of the work. But ... it very soon became evident... that no one man could take the time away from the actual work to be only a superintendent. The work therefore organized itself in four divisions,—manuscripts under Mr. Van Laer⁹ and Mr. Phelps-Stokes¹⁰ of New York; law under Mr. Colson; duplicates under Mr. Tolman, and the general library under the writer.

It took only a short time,—a day or two, to get out all the manuscripts that were worth saving...The manuscripts, some of them still hot and smoldering, were passed by hand along a line of laborers, into the room of the clerk of the Senate, where they were piled on tables, chairs and floor, and then carried from the building in baskets, which had been gotten by order of the Adjutant General of the State, at the writer's request.

Elaborating on archivist A.J.F. Van Laer's efforts, Gavit later remarked:

Mr. Van Laer doesn't talk about it, but he stood for seven hours, in his ordinary clothes, in a drenching downpour from the ceiling above, while the workmen above tossed him the remains, each piece of which he inspected and sent on. Then he went home, in those same wet clothes, through the freezing temperature of an early April twilight. Why he didn't have pneumonia, I don't know.¹¹

Gavit too was quick to take a personal hand in the salvage—often at considerable risk to life and limb:

The work of salvage for the general library began on April 3rd in room 35, the main reading room. The first things taken out were the War of 1812 records [now held by the State Archives]...Their discovery at this time was purely accidental, and is, I think, worth relating...The writer, with Mr. Champlin¹², had gone out onto the roof of the western approach to look at the building from that point. Every window was gone—except one, a disc of glass hardly 6 inches in diameter. That window was one of two alike in the little room where these documents had been stored for want of space in the manuscript room. Like a flash came the truth—this room was fireproof because [it was] unventilated! Securing a ladder, we made the precarious journey over the still smoldering gallery, to this room, where we found the door burned down but the contents little injured...



“The writer, with Mr. Champlin, had gone out onto the roof...”



Audubon's *Birds of America* found in the ruins by Joseph Gavit

Joseph Gavit's best-known rescue effort was the saving of the elephant folio edition of Audubon's *Birds of America*:

These volumes were kept, along with a few others of their size, in a locked closet, set into what was originally a doorway at the south end of the law library, in the wall between that room and the main reading room ... This was of course almost directly in the path of the fire, and had it not been an unventilated closet, bricked up at the back, there would have been no chance of it being saved... The end of the room where this closet was located was buried to a depth of six or eight feet with bricks, mortar, wood and paper, ashes and twisted girders. But I got two men to start digging there, and a left-over fireman (“Glory” Kearns!) was playing a hose on the still smoking debris. It was precarious work, for overhead hung the collapsed north stack, and the cooling process was constantly loosening pieces of brick which fell all around us.

My men worked as steadily as possible, stopping now and again to let the fireman wet down the smoking mass; and they had gotten within a foot of what I was after, when—the noon whistles blew, and with a promptness characteristic of the common laborer, they dropped their shovels and ran!... Well, I jumped into the hole, took one of their shovels and went on with the job, alone. Once, as I dug, a lump of bricks fell from above, landing on the edge of the hole, and undoing ten minutes work. But by the time the

men were back, I was ready to hand up the remains of the volumes. Some of the canvas was still intact, but blackened and soaked. The plates were badly burnt around the edges...They were hot when I took them out, and could not have lasted much longer, as some of the wooden shelves under and above them were still burning, charcoal fashion.

Possibly they will never be of much value, except as relics. Yet... I felt better ... knowing I had done all I could for them. They were real human things, the actual work of a man's hands!

To Gavit, it was this human quality that defined the true value of the library's holdings, the sum total of "all the many hands and brains that had loved the library in the almost completed century of his existence." Beyond any intrinsic value in the rescued collections, this was what made the dreary, dirty, and occasionally triumphant work of salvage important to him and his colleagues.

With the completion of the Education Building in 1912, the salvage and recovery efforts gave way to the more hopeful task of building "a finer collection, in quarters built expressly for storing and using such a collection." This became Gavit's mission for the remainder of his career.

Although he served twice as acting State Librarian, Gavit apparently had no desire to be in charge for any length of time. He continued throughout his long service as a dedicated bibliographer and scholar, devoted to building and caring for the library's collections—especially his beloved newspapers. From 1938 to 1940, he acted as librarian in the interregnum between the retiring James I. Wyer and the appointment of his old friend and fellow bibliographer R.W.G. Vail. To Vail, Gavit served as the reliable old boy: "quietly, modestly, and with never a hint of jealousy, helping him to learn his new job."¹³

In 1944, as Vail left to become director of the New-York Historical Society, Gavit again stepped in, until the 1945 appointment of Charles F. Gosnell as State Librarian. As with Vail, Gavit became an indispensable aide and friend to Gosnell: "When I was thinking about coming here, Vail told me that beyond all ... you would be a great help to the new-comer. You have given me a post-graduate course in State Librarianship that would be the envy of any professor. You have been both Father and brother to me..."¹⁴

It was at Gosnell's suggestion that Gavit began collecting his fire memoirs and other historical notes about the library, evidently with a view to writing a comprehensive history of the library. Approaching the task in 1945, Gavit knew that he was one of very few left to tell the tale. "No one else," according to Vail, "knows the sordid (and heroic) story of the great fire."¹⁵ In assembling his memoirs, Gavit couldn't resist adding notes, especially when he observed that the

“lessons” of history were not being heeded:

At this later date—1945—it is perhaps worth while to say for the benefit of the post war planners, that the new book stack space, expected to last at least fifty years, became inadequate in thirty years! And the conditions of crowding and fire tempting are not far away as a dream.

... in the plans of the Education Building no provision had been made for a Rare Book room or vault, the present basement vault having been an afterthought, set into what was to be the State Museum store room. Otherwise it might have been more conveniently located for library purposes.

Gavit was astonished that smoking in the library had not—even as late as 1945—been banned, or that anyone could question the wisdom of such a ban:

Perhaps it is proper here to comment on the objections that have always met the placing of “No Smoking” signs in the Education building. The writer is one of the few remaining relics of the Capitol fire, having memories of other fires in the Capitol and even in the Education Building, some of them due to negligence in the handling of cigarette and cigar stumps. A smoker himself, he yet sees that while smoking may be permissible in the official suites of commissioners and others, there are places where it is bound to cause fires again, as in packing rooms, storerooms, and other places where miscellaneous paper and scraps are allowed to accumulate. There is no question but that it is much easier to forbid smoking anywhere, than to allow it in one place and control it anywhere else. And the proof is bound to come sooner or later.

We should use every care that, knowing what can happen in another fire-proof building, smoking is not permitted in library storage rooms. We were there, Charlie!¹⁶ So it is no Munchausen fancy.

Revisiting the story of the 1911 fire through the memoirs of eyewitnesses, such as Joseph Gavit’s, is an exercise that brings an intensely personal and emotional reality to those far-off events. This is especially important for modern-day librarians who, 100 years later, still deal with the legacy of missing collections and the scattered, burned remnants of the collection that once was. Gavit was unquestionably a special person, a long-tenured “scholar-librarian” who, in his words, “loved the library” and loved to remember and recount its history. In an era when “career mobility”—progressing from job to job over time—is considered the norm, the idea of spending fifty years at a single institution seems outmoded.

Yet Gavit's memoirs speak to the value of the "institutional memory" that workers—especially those with long careers—may hold. Gavit understood there were lessons to be learned from remembering past events. Collecting and preserving such accounts is vital to retaining that memory.

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Much of the information and images presented in this paper were incorporated in the book, *The New York State Capitol and the Great Fire of 1911* by Paul Mercer and Vicki Weiss (Arcadia Press, 2011). Documents quoted, and/or cited, as well as any images reproduced herein, are all from the holdings of The New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections. The following manuscript collections and published works are especially useful in studying the 1911 Capitol Fire.

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Endnotes

1. "H.R. Sweny, Amateur Sportsman" [Obituary Notice] *New York Times* 27 May, 1914. Sweny authored two classic golf treatises, *Keep Your Eye on the Ball and Your Right Knee Stiff* (1898) and *The Big Stick and the Golf Stick* (1909). In Albany, he operated a sporting goods store.
2. Sweny's famous photograph—actually one of two shots taken from different angles, of the fire at its height—was widely published in newspapers (he received the princely sum of \$25 from the *New York American*) and magazines, as well as reprinted and sold as a memento after the fire.
3. The library was founded by Governor DeWitt Clinton in 1818, as "a library for the government

and the people of this state.”

4. *New York Post*, March 21, 1914.
5. Gavit's fire memoirs and reports form part of his Papers, ca. 1896-1959, held at the New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Accession No. SC19294. Unless otherwise attributed, all direct quotations used in this paper are from this collection.
6. R.W.G. Vail, Letter to Joseph Gavit, 29 January, 1946, Joseph Gavit Papers.
7. Melvil Dewey, the tireless innovator and acknowledged “father of modern librarianship” whose eponymous decimal classification scheme was a cornerstone of modern library science, was State Librarian from 1889-1906. When he came to Albany from Columbia University, he brought with him his school of “library economy” (as it was then known). For many years it remained quartered at the State Library.
8. The disused McCredie malt house was located on North Hawk Street at the end of the Hawk Street Viaduct, which directly faced the north side of the capitol. In Gavit's 1901 report on the shelf section, he noted that the storage space in the malt house had been secured “at a modest rent,” and, combined with the “temporary” pine shelving, greatly relieved the “urgent pressure for room.”
9. Arnold Johan Ferdinand Von Laer, the State Archivist, born in the Netherlands, came to Albany as a library school student, and stayed with the library as archivist upon graduation. Today he is remembered for his pioneer work in organizing and translating Dutch colonial records both before and after the fire.
10. Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes (1867–1944) was an American architect. He designed St. Paul's Chapel at Columbia University and several urban housing projects in New York City. By avocation he was an expert in prints and documents, renowned as the compiler of a massive six-volume bibliography of the iconography of Manhattan Island. He was quick to volunteer his expertise in the effort to salvage the precious manuscript collections of the State Library.
11. *New York Post*, March 21, 1914.
12. George R. Champlin was a reference librarian at the time of the fire.
13. R.W.G. Vail, Letter to Joseph Gavit, 29 January 1944. Joseph Gavit Papers.
14. Charles Gosnell, Letter to Joseph Gavit, 24 February 1946. Joseph Gavit Papers.
15. Vail to Gavit, 29 January 1944.
16. Charlie—i.e. Gosnell, for whom Gavit was compiling his reminiscences.

Regional History Forum

Each issue of The Hudson River Valley Review includes the Regional History Forum. This section highlights historic sites in the Valley, exploring their historical significance as well as information for visitors today. Although due attention is paid to sites of national visibility, HRVR also highlights sites of regional significance.

The Civil War: West Point Under Fire

Christina Ritter Marist '13



The United States Military Academy at West Point exists today as one of the most prominent institutions of higher education in America, and arguably the world. The academy develops leaders, strong in mind and spirit and ready to make history, as so many graduates already have. Its hallowed halls echo with the voices of Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant, George S. Patton Jr., Douglas MacArthur, Omar Bradley, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Norman Schwarzkopf, David Petraeus, and countless other men and women who forged our history. In their indelible footsteps walk today's cadets—West Point instilling in them broad scientific- and liberal arts-based curricula, while simultaneously preparing them, via an intense military and physical program, to serve upon graduation as officers in the United States Army. Situated in one of the most historically important locations in America, this towering granite fortification can be seen guarding the strategic bend in the Hudson River, where the Great Chain once lay to prevent British attempts to gain control of the valuable Hudson Highlands during the American Revolution.

An institution so steeped in historic significance, West Point as a garrison has witnessed every major conflict in the development of the United States. As the United States Military Academy, however, its first major test in homefront conflict came at the start of the Civil War. The war almost toppled the academy, stirring the political controversy that existed even prior to its founding in 1802. The Civil War forced previous accusations of elitism and development of a mili-

tary aristocracy to resurface, along with a new charge against the academy as an institution that fostered treason and disunity, breeding cadets and leaders with Southern loyalties and Rebel ideals. These attacks had the potential to devastate the institution, with members of Congress bent on decentralization of officer training and the elimination of the academy's "monopoly" on military education.

Founding Of West Point: Revolution to Rebellion

Thaddeus Kosciuszko designed the fortification of West Point at the direction of George Washington in 1778, and in 1779 it served as Washington's headquarters. The vast construct of redoubts, forts, and batteries served to protect what Washington believed was the most strategically important position in America, the Hudson Highlands. Whoever controlled the Highlands controlled the Hudson River, thereby gaining the ability to divide the Northeastern colonies from the South. Controlling the Hudson meant command of a crucial transport route from the interior of the developing nation to the coast. West Point, in essence, held the key to the nation. Despite the treasonous attempts of Benedict Arnold to sell West Point to the British, it remained in American hands throughout the war. In 1783, Washington proposed the creation of a military academy to train army officers. He was immediately met by opposition—still raw with Post-revolutionary American sentiment—that claimed an academy would create a military aristocracy, far too reminiscent of England, and that it would be in direct opposition with the newly forged American democratic ideals. Mirroring the "state's rights" debates of the time, Federalist and Republican factions feared the creation of a nationalized, government-controlled institution and were still cautious of the concept of a standing national army. Plans for the creation of a military academy were pushed aside, and the first spark of debate surrounding West Point was ignited.

In 1802, however, discussion among various legislators and military officials, such as John Adams, George Washington, and Alexander Hamilton, regarding American dependence on foreign engineers and artillerymen led to the conclusion that specialized training of American soldiers in the science of war was necessary. That same year, President Jefferson signed the legislation establishing the United States Military Academy, as well as a Corps of Engineers. At the start, the objective and governance of the academy was muddled and unstable. However, in 1817 Sylvanus Thayer became the academy's first superintendent, providing the fledgling institution with a sound core curriculum, an emphasis on military discipline, and the integration of a system of values and honorable conduct that is still observed by today's Corps of Cadets.

The “West Point Education” was first put to the test during the Seminole Wars of 1814 to 1819 and again during the Mexican War. These often glossed-over conflicts served as proving grounds for recent academy graduates, such as Robert E. Lee (Class of 1829), Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard (’38), William Tecumseh Sherman (40), Ulysses S. Grant (43), Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson (46), George McClellan (46), and Philip Sheridan (’53). These men, along with many others, gained their first combat experience and moved up the ranks to secure prominent leadership positions on both sides of the Civil War, which loomed on the horizon.

The War in Congress

Paralleling the division stirring in the country itself, in the early 1860s Congress had aligned into factions engrossed in heated debate regarding the state of the crumbling nation. The regular deliberations of the 1861 First and Second Sessions of the thirty-seventh Congress shifted to the expansion, purpose, and influence of the United States Military Academy at West Point. The sessions erupted into firestorms of debate surrounding a bill proposed by Republican Henry Wilson, chairman of the Military Affairs and the Militia Committee, to fill vacancies left at the academy by Southern cadets who had resigned, and to expand the number of appointments allowable by each state to develop a larger Corps of Cadets in the face of war. The proposition of the bill, and how the appointments were to be carried out, ignited conflict over the exercise of federal power in appointing cadets, as well as challenging the loyalty of cadets appointed from Southern states. Ohio Senator Benjamin Wade resisted expansion of the academy based on the economic burden it would place on the dismantled nation. However, it became evident that “economic concerns” served as a guise for the underlying social and political animosity toward the academy. Wade addressed Congress in response to Wilson’s expansion bill:

I am opposed to it. For aught I know, it may be a public necessity; but it is anomalous; it is at war with all the just principles of this republican government and I wish it could be entirely done away with.¹

The “just principles” to which Wade referred were based in the prevailing idea of Jacksonian Democracy at the time—giving rise to the power of the “common man.” Again, the fear of the expansion of an elitist institution and a military aristocracy came to the forefront. The secession of the deep Southern states left Congress with the problem of delegating the power of appointment from the House of Representatives of the states no longer represented in Congress. The

proposed solution to the gap left by secession was entrusting President Lincoln to make appointments directly. The result was a fierce opposition in line with the sentiments of the time—determined to limit the scope of federal power:

Mr. GRIMES: I stated that this section would give an additional amount of patronage to the Executive. The Senator from New York says that is not so; it merely substitutes the President as the appointing power in place of the Representatives in Congress who ought to be here from some seven or eight States. Well, I should like to know the difference. Here are certain southern States that are entitled, through their Representatives, to appoint certain young men as cadets at the West Point Academy. Those Representatives are not here; they therefore do not make appointments, and we confer upon the power of the Chief Executive of the nation the patronage and power to do what these men were authorized to do. Does that not increase the patronage and power of the Executive? And how long is he to exercise it? Just so long as the condition of things exists in the Southern states that exists there now. We are going to establish a precedent, not only in relation to this matter as is now exists, but we are going to establish the precedent that hereafter, whenever there shall be a vacancy at the West Point Academy, the President shall select in place of the Representative in Congress or the man who ought to be here as the Representative in Congress from a given district.

Thus we are not only giving the president the power to fill vacancies in the Army itself, but we are authorizing the President of the United States to educate an army up to his own liking for future exigencies...²

Senator James W. Grimes of Iowa seemed to imply that in allowing the President to order appointments, a precedent would be set in which, upon the absence of state governance, the federal government would assume power. Due to the immense influence of the academy, Grimes determined that with the power of appointing cadets, Lincoln would have the ability to “educate an army up to his own liking.” This played directly into the anxiety of the state’s rights debates, in essence giving the chief executive unchecked power to create a standing army—beginning with the education of its officers.

This concept of a “tailor-made” military elite was a major contributor to the trepidation of Congress in embracing the academy’s expansion. Hesitation lay not only in an increase in federal power to appoint cadets, but in the teachings and organization of the academy itself. Wade and the rest of the Congressional opposition believed that the academy created an elitist class of engineers, rather

than effective warriors. Again, the power of the “common man” prevailed as a theme in their arguments, as conveyed by Rep. Wade:

The men who will eminently distinguish themselves in this war . . . who will come forward and show themselves capable of commanding great armies in the field, will be men the scope of whose intellect has never been narrowed down to the rules of your military school.³

He was supported by Senator Lyman Trumbull of Illinois, who expressed:

Take off your engineering restraints; dismiss . . . from the Army every man who knows how to build a fortification, and let the men of the North with their strong arms and indomitable spirit, move down upon the rebels, and I tell you they will grind them to powder in their power.⁴

These men were not alone in believing that the United States Military Academy served as little more than a symbol of military aristocracy and was, in essence, ineffective in providing officers to the cause of the war. In 1861, *The New York Tribune*, one of the most popular publications of the time, made the claim that, “However imperfect the civil appreciation may be as to military science, common sense is an attribute which buttons and bullion do not alone confer.”

Much of what went on inside the academy did little to quell such arguments. Cadets were trained in etiquette and ballroom dancing, and participated in elaborate parades and presentations. Within the academy there was a strict hierarchy, still present today, based on grade level and academic and military performance. In order to limit the influence of a nationalized military institution, the concept of “decentralization” was proposed. This idea would shut down the United States Military Academy in favor of establishing institutions of military education in each state.

The Question of Decentralization

In a nation in the midst of state-based division, the proposition of training officers at state-sponsored military schools came with an array of concerns. Proponents of decentralization believed that a more effective army would be produced if each state were responsible for the education of its officers, rather than relying on a single institution. The belief existed that the United States Military Academy held a monopoly on the minds of young men destined to be officers. With this control, the academy was, in theory, instilling Rebel ideals and fostering treason against the Union; Congress noted the rate at which Southern cadets resigned from the academy to join the Confederacy, as well as cited controversial war

records of former graduates. Those in favor of preserving the academy claimed that a nationalized institution serves as a force of unity, while decentralized military education could be affected by the regional tensions plaguing the war-torn nation, dividing the officer corps even further.

Michigan Senator Zachariah Chandler spoke on behalf of the academy's opposition:

Let the young men of the several states receive a military education at home ... and very soon a spirit of emulation will spring up among the different states, and instead of having the number specified in this bill of educated military men, every state will have as many, or more, perhaps, of educated military men, and I will guaranty that they will be well educated as those men are.⁵

These ideas came in conjunction with discussions over the Morrill Land Grant Act, enacted in 1862, which provided grants to each state for the establishment of institutions of higher education. Congressmen who aimed to terminate the "monopoly" West Point had on military education hoped to include officer training in these state-run schools (much like modern-day ROTC programs). Decentralization would neutralize the federal grip over army leadership, quelling the fears of those who assumed that the academy and its teachings conflicted with Republican ideals.

Congress's fear regarding cadet disloyalty was not without warrant. Long before the first shots of the Civil War were fired, tensions at the United States Military Academy were heightening. As early as 1840, cadets were being divided into Northern and Southern companies, an action that fueled the storm that erupted at the academy after the bombardment of Fort Sumter:

Now, as they look out the windows of their rooms at the gray clouds looming over the shrouded humps of the Hudson Highlands, the post band gathered... Young men in gray filled every window as the band stamped to a halt. Scarcely missing a beat, they broke into the 'Star Spangled banner.'

At one window, a slim 20 year old Ohioan named George Armstrong Custer led a cheer for the flag ... at an opposite window, Custer's best friend, a swarthy giant from Texas, Thomas Lafayette Rosser, called for a cheer for 'Dixie.' Back and forth thundered the rival cheers until every throat was hoarse and aching."⁶

At the time of this Congressional session, as many as sixty-five cadets (out of a total enrollment of 240) had resigned from the academy to align with the

Confederacy. Many Congressmen believed that this instability among the cadets' ranks, as well as the conflict that sectional divisions were causing within the academy, could best be avoided by educating future officers with peers from their respective home states.

Members of Congress cited these resignations as evidence that the United States Military Academy planted the seeds of rebellion and treason. The sentiment was that an ambiance of superiority, akin to the idea of Southern gentry, pervaded the academy in its hierarchical organization and emphasis on tradition. Kansas Senator James H. Lane went so far in his claims against the academy as to state that should the North fall, an appropriate epitaph would read, "Died of West Point Pro-slaveryism."⁷ While much of the backlash against the academy in this light was unsubstantiated, there is evidence among the cadets of a certain Southern influence. George Custer wrote:

As the pronounced abolitionist was rarely seen in congress in those days, so was his appearance among the corps of cadets of still rarer occurrence; besides it requires more than ordinary moral and physical courage to boldly avow oneself as an abolitionist. The name was considered one of opprobrium, and the cadet who had the courage to avow himself as an abolitionist must be prepared to face the social frowns of most of his comrades and at times to defend his opinions by physical strength and mettle."⁸

While the majority of cadets at the time were moderate in political views, so as to avoid "ungentlemanly" confrontation, those with strong abolitionist views were overshadowed by the more vocal Rebel zealots. The image of the academy may have been tarnished by the minority of truly hardened "pro-slaveryites," which neglected to recognize the vast majority of silent abolitionist or moderate cadets.

While there may have existed a degree of "Rebel" leaning among the cadets, there are also a few instances in which the loyalties of academy administrators came into question. A prime example is the case of P.G.T. Beauregard, then the academy's superintendent. Hailing from Louisiana, Beauregard assumed the role of superintendent on January 21, 1861. Five days later, Louisiana confirmed secession. All eyes fell on Beauregard. Especially concerned with his reaction to Louisiana's secession were cadets from that state. When a Louisiana cadet asked whether or not he should resign, Beauregard advised, "Watch me; and when I jump, you jump. What's the use of jumping too soon?"⁹ Beauregard resigned his position on January 28, urged by letters from General Joseph G. Totten and Secretary of War Joseph Holt. The cadets followed suit. "Beauregard's superiors

were well aware of the mistake they had made in placing an avowed secessionist in charge of the impressionable boys at the nation's officer training school."¹⁰ The fears of Congress over monopolized military education and Rebel influences of the academy were validated by the influence of Beauregard's resignation.

On the other side of the spectrum stood men like Major General John G. Barnard, a former academy superintendent, who declared that "The ties formed at the Academy between youth from all sections have endured unimpaired after leaving it, and have been a powerful means of restraining sectional hostility."¹¹ Following suit, Chairman Wilson proclaimed:

If they had been educated entirely in their own section of country, I do not believe that those men today would be following your flag. I believe, sir, that their education at West Point, their association with men from other sections of the country, the ideas and sentiments imbibed there, have strengthened those men in their devotion to the flag of their country.¹²

Both men allude to the overarching sense of unity instilled within the Corps of Cadets at West Point—an allegiance not only to their fellow cadets, but to the nation they were being trained to defend. While charges were being levied against the academy as a place of "treason" because of the resignation of Southern cadets, many failed to note the number of Southern cadets who remained loyal to the Union (seventy-six percent in the Class of 1861), in stark contrast to the majority of southern students who abandoned Northern civilian universities such as Yale, Harvard and Princeton. General George A. Custer's memoirs depict a scene during the war that displays the extent to which the academy experience united even the most seemingly bitter rivals:

When one by one the states seceded the cadets appointed from those states said good-bye and parted with expressions and demonstrations of real affection. Men make few protestations of undying attachments, but it never entered our mind that war could destroy a friendship cemented by our four years of intimate association. I have found the most loyal and unchanged friendship among those of my class and many others from classes whom I have met since the war, or even taken prisoners during the war... I was serving on General McClellan's staff and heard that a Confederate officer has been captured and had said he knew me and would like to see me. I went immediately to the place where he was under guard and found to my delight it was my West Point friend [Lieutenant J.B.] Washington... After a joyous meeting... I left and went to General McClellan to ask consent to his being put on parole that he might afterwards become my guest. The request was granted...¹³

After this meeting, it is said that General Custer went so far as to procure a guard to secure Lt. Washington's wife and their Virginia home from Union Army marauders. The bond forged at the United States Military Academy, instilled in the values of cadets, ran deep enough to blur the lines between Yankee and Rebel, prisoner and captor—leaving only the comradeship of the Long Gray Line.

Conclusion

The words “Duty, Honor, Country” serve as the motto of the Corps of Cadets of the United States Military Academy at West Point. These words took on new meaning during the Civil War, leaving cadets to question to whom they should align their duty—whether it would be more honorable to defend that Union they had been taught to serve at the academy, or their homes and families in the Rebel states, and to what “Country” they should claim loyalty. These questions stirred tensions at the academy, leading to the resignation of many Southern cadets and hostility of Northern cadets toward their “Rebel” counterparts. Many in Congress saw the academy as the source of rebellion, fostering disunity among the ranks of future leaders. They believed a nationalized military education system mirrored English aristocracy and exemplified Southern ideals of elitism, classism, and a lack of democratic principles. In their eyes, the academy had to be abolished in order to preserve the newly won sense of American identity and liberty, as well as the merits of Jacksonian Democracy. This was to be done in a way that would reflect the state's rights fervor of the time—a decentralization of military education, leading to each state having the resources to train its own officers.

However, despite occasional eruptions of impassioned sentiment, the United States Military Academy has often been described as having a pervasive sense of unity, forging a brotherhood among those who attend, or even step foot on the grounds. The “spirit” of the academy, rich even then with the history and passion of an embattled fledgling nation, superseded all regional tensions to cultivate a unified force of American officers, forthright in their defense of the flag and preservation of the Union. This omnipresent “West Point spirit” is clearly evident during the surrender of Lee to Grant at Appomattox. Lee was confident that Grant would offer honorable terms of surrender, due to their teachings at the academy that claimed: “A foe is a foe during a fight but after the fight he is a foe no more.”¹⁴ In perhaps the most powerful show of reconciliation, it is said that Grant—in the midst of the joyous fervor that erupted within the victorious Union ranks—ordered his band to play *Dixie*.¹⁵

The bill proposed to expand the Corps of Cadets in the face of the Civil War spurred fierce debate over the necessity and motives of the United States Military Academy. Congress stirred with discussion of treason, elitism, dishonor; many claimed that military education need not be taught, but learned only through experience on the battlefield. The academy was threatened with legislation aimed at disbanding it altogether, in essence ridding the army of a corps of highly specialized engineers who possessed skills that proved so vital in the Mexican War and in the molding of generals and junior officers who would rise to command during the Civil War. The academy appropriations bill continued to surface in Congress, being augmented and fiercely deliberated upon until its eventual passage in 1865. The verdict stood that the United States Military Academy would survive and continue to impact the course of history.

Endnotes

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John Flack Winslow

John Flack Winslow and the USS Monitor

William Kuffner, Marist '68

Editors' introduction: This undergraduate thesis was written by Marist College student William Kuffner in 1968, before the Internet and Google. We received it along with a six-page introduction detailing the trials and travels that the author encountered in the course of his research. Originally inspired by Marist Brother Edward Cashin, Mr. Kuffner began making phone calls to strangers who were able to provide clues to sources of additional information. His research, perseverance, and luck led him to letters, monographs, and memories stored in institutional archives and people's homes—all of which enabled him to recreate this history of the Monitor's construction. The unabridged saga of his research appears along with this article online at www.hudsonrivervalley.org.

The name “Winslow” should be familiar to any student of American colonial history. Edward Winslow was one of the original passengers on board the famous voyage of the *Mayflower*, which landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620. He served this fledgling colony with great distinction as its governor in 1622, 1636, and 1644.

Edward’s brother Kenelm also came to America, in 1637, and while little is known about him, many of his descendants served their country very courageously. Richard Winslow served as a captain in the Continental Army during the American Revolution.

John Flack Winslow is less known to many, but performed a vital and integral act of heroism which contributed to the cause of the Union during the Civil War. He was the chief advocate and financier of the ironclad warship USS *Monitor* which met and defeated the Confederate ironclad CSS *Virginia*, formerly the *Merrimac*, at the Battle of Hampton Roads on March 9, 1862.

John Flack Winslow was born on November 10, 1810, the fourth of seven sons of Captain Richard Winslow and Mary Corning Seymour. He was born in Bennington, Vermont while they were on vacation. Captain Winslow worked as a ship’s captain in Albany, New York, until his retirement. John Flack had a well-rounded boyhood attending Albany’s finest schools, where he pursued finance and mathematics.

At age seventeen, he declined an offer to enter into the banking business with his brother James and instead took a position as commercial clerk at the W. & A. Marvin Company of Albany. Working diligently for four years, Winslow received a commission to go to New York City as a supervisor trainee at the City Iron Company. In early 1831, after ten months training, he ventured to New Orleans in order to establish a subsidiary company, but returned a year later due to health concerns. Upon his return he was given the position of managing agent of the New Jersey Iron Company as a reward for his brief but successful tour of duty in New Orleans.

In 1832, while at this position of managing agent, Winslow met and married Nancy R. Jackson, the daughter of William Jackson, a prominent businessman from Rockaway, New Jersey. He moved to a new position in 1833 with the Bergen and Sussex Iron Company of New Jersey, where he learned about the production of pig iron. Winslow remained at this position for approximately four years. It was during this period that he made acquaintance with Erastus Corning, who would become his business associate for over thirty years.

In 1837 Winslow and Corning returned to Albany to form the partnership of Corning and Winslow, an iron company. From this simple beginning, the partnership grew into the Rensselaer Iron Company and was soon to become

one of the largest railroad iron manufacturers on the East Coast. In 1840 a third member joined the partnership; with the addition of John A. Griswold, his capital, and his contacts, the Albany Rensselaer Iron Company became the Albany Iron Works. By 1845, it had become the nation's second leading manufacturer of railroad iron.

In 1852 Winslow traveled to Europe to learn new techniques of producing iron. While in England, he purchased the rights from the British government to manufacture and sell iron and steel using the patented Bessemer process. Upon his return to America in 1853, he was able to use this newly-acquired knowledge to push the sales of the Albany Iron Works into first place. The maneuver also made him and his associates into very influential multi-millionaires. Winslow was honored in 1860 with the position of Presidential Elector from the Albany/Troy district. Little did he know that this position would set the stage for his life's greatest accomplishment.

John Flack Winslow traveled to Washington, D.C., in March 1861 to be present at the gala affairs that succeeded the inauguration of president-elect Abraham Lincoln. He had planned to make his stay very brief, but while he was in attendance at the grand ball, he met Captain John Ericsson, the renowned engineer from Sweden. He knew of Ericsson's brilliance and was anxious to talk to him. In the course of the conversation that followed, Captain Ericsson informed him of the dismal results he had received from a Senate Sub-Committee on Naval Affairs, which had told him that his plans for an ironclad warship were much too impractical. Winslow's interest was piqued and he made arrangements to see Captain Ericsson's plans the next day.

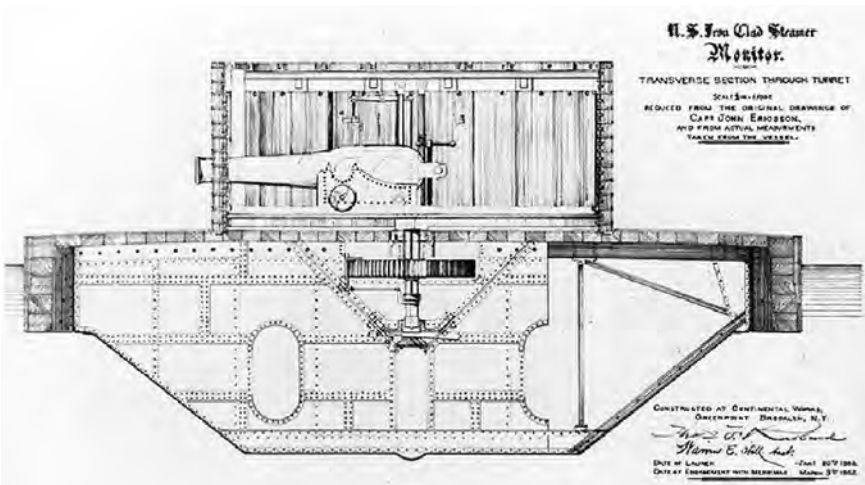
Winslow was a very liberal man when it came to business; he was constantly looking for new methods and means of improving iron and steel products. Upon seeing Captain Ericsson's blueprints for his warship, Winslow was immediately inspired by the vessel's great potential. Preliminary talks began between Ericsson and Winslow, and they both wired their associates to join them in Washington. Griswold arrived from Troy the next morning, as did C.S. Bushnell, a capitalist from Boston. Winslow and Griswold were swiftly won over to the cause of constructing an ironclad warship by Ericsson's precise explanation of each detail. After reviewing the blueprints for a week, Winslow was sure that such a ship would be an overwhelming success. He then used his newly acquired political influence to secure a new meeting with the Senate Sub-Committee on Naval Affairs for the first week of June, 1861.

During the interim from March to June, the four gentlemen returned to Winslow's country home near Troy to continue their discussion and to make

improvements on the blueprints. It was during this time that the Civil War began, just one month after President Lincoln's inauguration. The Union's plans of battle were submitted to the commander in chief and the one ultimately accepted has become known as the Anaconda Plan. This plan, proposed by General Winfield Scott of Mexican War fame, called for a three-pronged attack on Confederate positions; one would descend the Mississippi River down to New Orleans, cutting of the South's food supply. The second prong would move south from Washington to Atlanta, Georgia, and then west to meet the first. The third prong would be a naval blockade of all Southern ports in order to strangle the South and keep her from getting war materials from Europe. This third prong became increasingly important as the war continued.

In June of 1861 Mr. J.R. Mallory, the newly appointed Secretary of War for the Confederacy, was reported to have said, "a vessel of iron and steam should be constructed to transverse the entire coast of the United States to prevent the blockade and encounter with a fair prospect of success the Union Navy."¹ Ironically, Mr. Mallory had been the chairman of the Senate sub-committee that vetoed John Ericsson's plea for an ironclad warship in March of 1861.

Winslow had been able to arrange the date to meet with the Senate sub-committee for June 3, 1861. The committee consisted of Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells, US. Navy Commodore Joseph Smith, and other high-ranking navy officials. But the group of four men was to be dismissed repeatedly because the committee could not see the practicality of an ironclad ship that they felt



U.S. NAVAL HISTORY & HERITAGE COMMAND PHOTOGRAPH # NH 60660

USS Monitor (1862). Transverse hull section through the turret. Engraving published circa 1862, based on John Ericsson's drawings, and measurements taken from the ship.

would probably sink at her christening.² A determined man, Winslow decided to go over the Senate committee and arrange a private audience with President Lincoln himself.

After a month of disappointments in the Senate, and another month and a half spent attempting to gain an audience with Lincoln, he finally succeeded on September 1, 1861. Winslow described every detail of the design, the functional value, and great necessity of John Ericsson's ironclad warship. Lincoln was greatly impressed by his earnestness and sincerity and was himself persuaded of the ironclad's value. In a final meeting consisting of the President, the Naval Affairs subcommittee and Winslow, Griswold, Ericsson, and Bushnell held on September 16, 1861, the president took matters into his own hands, and said "Gentlemen, all I can say is what the girl said when she stuck her foot into the stocking; it strikes me there's something in it."³

The next step was to secure a government contract, no easy task due to Gideon Wells's skepticism. Finally, on October 4, 1861, a contract was signed by all parties concerned. It stated that Ericsson would be chief engineer in directing the construction of an ironclad vessel of iron and wood 179 feet in length, 41 feet in width and 11 ½ feet in depth. This vessel would have masts spans, sails and rigging to drive it at a sufficient speed of six knots per hour, a steam engine to produce eight knots per hour for twelve consecutive hours; a condenser to purify salt water to fresh water; provisions for 100 people for a period of ninety days, and 2,500 gallons of water. The cost of the vessel would be \$275,000, to be paid by the builders John F. Winslow and John A. Griswold. The ship was to be ready within 100 days of the signing of the contract.⁴ The terms of the contract were difficult, but did not dampen the faith of the men about to undertake these stipulations; they had complete confidence in one another's ability. However, many of Winslow's and Griswold's contemporaries thought that they were making a grave mistake, not to mention a bad investment, announcing "Winslow and Griswold have lost their heads and their business sagacity."⁵

From its very conception, the construction of the ironclad warship that would be named the *Monitor* was hampered by several setbacks. The design called for a revolving turret to be mounted amidships and armed with two eight-inch cannons. However, it had been voted by the Naval Affairs subcommittee that on January 18, 1843, the Federal Patent Office had reviewed and accepted a patent by Theodore C. Tembly of Pawling, New York, for "revolving turrets made for purposes of war of wood or steel." Even though Ericsson claimed to have no knowledge of Mr. Tembly's invention when he was designing his ship, Winslow made arrangements to pay royalties of \$5,000 for this and any other revolving

turrets manufactured by the Albany Iron Works. With all problems now overcome, he became the business manager of the project and set about arranging contracts with other companies to supply the material for the *Monitor's* construction. His own company, the Albany Iron Works, would supply the armor plating.

Additional contracts were signed with other manufacturers throughout the state and the Union. William Everett of Novelty Iron Works of Green Point Long Island constructed the hull. Cornelius H. Delamater of New York City assembled the engine machinery. Charles H. de Gancy of Buffalo manufactured the port stopper, and H. Abbott and Sons of Baltimore and Holdame and Company of New York prepared the iron plates. The Rensselaer Iron Works supplied the rivets and bars.

John Flack Winslow personally traveled to each one of these companies throughout October 1861 to secure these contracts. At the same time, Ericsson, Bushnell, and Griswold were supervising the assembly of the wooden frame of the ship at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in New York City. Within twenty-three days of the signing of the contract, the frame was completed and the parts from the other companies began to arrive in Brooklyn. Throughout the first seventeen days of construction, Winslow remained in Albany to supervise the preparation of the ship's vital armament. This was the most important aspect of the project, with each piece being precisely four inches thick and formed to fit in an interlocking pattern for floatation.

Winslow related the toll this project took on him physically in a letter to Griswold in December 1861: "I have abstained from sleeping for the past four days in order to accomplish the task that I have taken upon myself. May God give me the strength to be successful."⁶ Several days after the writing of this letter, his wife Nancy became seriously ill and died—a deep personal trauma at a time already fraught with great anxiety and need. In another letter to Griswold, Winslow wrote, "my loss has been great for I had a great love for my wife. But now with her passing into the hands of God I will devote my unfaltering resources to our task if it will be a means of overcoming deep depression."⁷

On January 30, 1862, exactly 101 days after the signing of the government contract, the ironclad warship was completed and christened the *Monitor*. Elated at this success, Winslow was given the honor of choosing her captain. He chose a Navy lieutenant from Poughkeepsie, John Lorimer Worden, who then hand-picked a crew of five men.

On the *Monitor's* trial run, the steam valves functioned sporadically and had to be replaced. On the second run, the steering apparatus became defective and also had to be replaced. The third run proved to be a success, and the



Union sailors relaxing and playing games on the deck of the U.S.S. *Monitor* on the James River in Virginia.

Monitor, upon arriving back at New York, received orders to set sail for Hampton Roads, Virginia, on March 6, 1862. It was at this time that chance became intricately involved in the *Monitor*'s destination. Five hours after she departed from New York, orders arrived that would have sent the ship to Washington to be stationed in the Potomac River as protection for that city. But those orders were never received, and the *Monitor* pushed on to Hampton Roads. The ship nearly floundered off the coast of New Jersey in very turbulent seas, but Lieutenant

Worden managed to keep his ship going at all costs.

On March 8, 1862 the Confederate ironclad *Virginia* steamed into Hampton Bay. She was commanded by Lieutenant Catesby ap Roger Jones, who quickly turned her ten-gun battery on the Union frigates at anchor in the harbor. The first salvo set the *Cumberland* afire; she soon sank with 117 casualties. One of those killed was Lieutenant Joseph Smith, son of Commodore Smith, member of the Senate Naval Affairs sub-committee. The *Virginia* then fired upon the *Congress*, hitting the ship's magazine and causing her to sink immediately. Even the shore batteries of Fort Monroe proved to be useless against the *Virginia*. After hoisting her colors, the ship eventually returned to Sewell's Point, leaving a frightened Union Navy behind. Messages sent to Washington, D.C., caused great alarm in that city, for the *Virginia* appeared to be invulnerable.

Wild rumors spread, causing a great panic and fear of what the "monster" would do after she destroyed the Union Navy. At 11 p.m. that evening, President Lincoln called a special meeting of his Defense Department to consider methods of preventing an attack upon Washington by the *Virginia*. The plan most seriously considered entailed sinking a number of barges and canal boats in the Potomac River at Kettlebottom Schools and other strategic positions to make the draft too shallow for the *Virginia*'s huge hull. The Union's largest and strongest frigate, the *Vanderbilt*, would be plated with six inches of steel and her bow reinforced with timber so she could pursue and ram her antagonist. While these and similar ideas were being discussed by high officials, the *Monitor* steamed into Hampton Bay.

Upon sighting the wrecks of the Union frigates, Commander Worden



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The Monitor and Merrimac: The First Fight Between Ironclads, a chromolithograph of the Battle of Hampton Roads, produced by Louis Prang & Co., Boston. 1886.

ordered his ship to weigh anchor adjacent to the frigate *Minnesota*, which had gone aground in an attempt to escape the guns of the *Virginia*. The time was 2:30 a.m. on March 9, 1862. At 8 a.m. the *Virginia* appeared for the second time, unaware of the ensuing battle. The *Monitor* slowly approached her foe and Lieutenant Jones reacted: “ram that floating tower sledding over the water.”⁸ But the *Monitor* remained in water too shallow for the *Virginia* and proved to have much greater maneuverability than her enemy. The *Monitor* also had quicker fire power, able to fire one round every six minutes compared to the *Virginia*’s one round every fifteen minutes. And the *Monitor* had one last, decisive advantage in that there was virtually no area, except for the turret, that could be struck by the *Virginia*’s guns. The battle began at 8:30 and raged on for three and a half hours.

In the midst of the battle, Captain Worden was temporarily blinded while commanding the ship from the lookout position and Lieutenant Dana Greene took over the *Monitor*’s command. On March 12, 1862, Lieutenant Greene gave the report to Congress: “At 8:00 a.m. perceived the *Merrimac* [sic] standing next to the *Minnesota*; have up anchor and went to quarters. At 8:45 am we opened fire on the *Merrimac* [sic] and continued the action until 11:30 a.m. when Captain Worden was injured. Captain Worden then sent me to take charge of the vessel. We continued action until 12:15 p.m. when the *Merrimac* [sic] retreated to Sewall’s Point. We went to the *Minnesota* and lay, by her.”⁹

The battle was over. The *Virginia* was severely damaged but the *Monitor* suffered very little. The *Virginia* would appear twice during the bombardment of Sewall’s Point in May of that year, but would not be engaged again in battle; she



Two men observing the light damage caused to the turret of the ironclad USS *Monitor* during her fight with the Confederate ironclad CSS *Virginia*, March 9, 1862, at the Battle of Hampton Roads.

was scuttled and burned on May 10, 1867. The *Monitor* had more than proved her worthiness. She had saved the Union fleet at Hampton Roads from inevitable defeat.

Upon hearing of the *Monitor*'s victory Winslow, Griswold, Ericsson, and Bushnell offered a toast of champagne to the success of the the *Monitor* and the Union. As a reward for their efforts, the men were awarded presidential and Congressional citations for their contributions to the Union cause. In 1866, Charles B. Boynton, D.D.

wrote in his *History of the Navy During the Rebellion*: “the genius that conceived the *Monitor* and the patriot manufacturers who perilled reputation and money in her construction were as truly among the heroes and saviors of this country as our President and his cabinet, or our Legislators or the Generals at the head of our armies or our naval officers in their victorious ships.”¹⁰

John Flack Winslow was very humble about the honors bestowed upon him as he wrote to his brother James in 1862: “This was an opportunity that a businessman could not ignore—a chance to prove his ability. But I saw it also as a chance to aid my country in a time of great peril and for this I do not deserve an honor befitting a man who gave his life for his country.”¹¹ But Winslow and his partners were to be heralded as great men by their contemporaries: as semblance of an award, the government contracted them to manufacture five more *Monitor*-class ships with a very good monetary profit involved. By June of 1863, thirty five *Monitor*-class vessels were patrolling the coast and rivers, and every one was constructed from the original plans.

After the battle at Hampton Roads, the *Monitor* patrolled in the Potomac River throughout the spring and summer months. In August of 1862, she was ordered to South Carolina, a fatal mistake. On her first cruise from New York to Hampton Roads it had become quite apparent that she was not made to cruise on high seas. On her second trip into open waters, she encountered a severe storm, floundered, and sank off the coast of Cape Hatteras.

John Flack Winslow's career through 1865 was one of great success. He was a millionaire, already famous for his achievements and soon to be awarded

once again, with the presidency of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy. He served in this position for three years with great distinction, and the John Flack Winslow Memorial Library was erected in his honor. It was begun in 1866 and completed in 1868, partially destroyed by fire on August 27, 1884, and restored by February 1, 1885.

In 1868, John Flack Winslow retired to private life and moved to Poughkeepsie, where he married his second wife, Harriet Wickes, the daughter of Reverend Thomas Wickes of the local Presbyterian Church. The Winslows lived on the Wood Cliff Estate on the Hyde Park Road, a magnificent estate which is today part of the Marist College campus. Winslow loved his property and always kept it in perfect condition. He was also a very hospitable person who was known for having many gatherings of Poughkeepsie's influential people. Every year on the Fourth of July he would fire a small cannon at the stroke of midnight to celebrate that famous day. This tradition came to a dramatic end when a shot from the cannon accidentally exploded a small tugboat sailing down the Hudson. Fortunately no one was injured, but to make reparation for this incident Winslow bought the company a new boat.

When he moved to Poughkeepsie, Winslow had intended to retire to a peaceful life, but his overpowering drive to remain active in public affairs prevented this from happening. In 1860, before he moved to Poughkeepsie, the city legislators had approved a bill to begin a railroad system. In 1871, Winslow was elected president of the Poughkeepsie and Eastern Railroad, and initiated rail service between Poughkeepsie and Stissing.

Also in 1871, a charter was granted by the City of Poughkeepsie for the purpose of "constructing and maintaining a permanent bridge, and avenues of approach thereof for the passage of transportation of passengers, railroad trains, teams, vehicles, cattle, horses, sheep, swine and other merchandise and property"¹² across the Hudson River. Sale of stock in order to obtain \$2,000,000 was sold at \$100 per share and construction was to be completed by January 1, 1876. But the construction met with several obstacles and was not opened to tariff until January, 1889. Winslow was elected to the position of president of the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge Company and served until January 2, 1872. On June 30, 1873, he was elected to the post of chairman of the Finance Committee. While holding these offices, he also was a member of the Executive Committee of the Poughkeepsie and Eastern Railroad, one of the thirteen companies making up the bridge company. Owing to a series of financial and construction delays, the first train would not cross the bridge—now the Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park—until 1888.

John Flack Winslow finally did retire to his estate in 1875, yet he remained active in philanthropic organizations. He was a member of the American Society to Revive the Bible, the American Tract Society, an honorary member of the Christian Alliance to which he was appointed delegate at the annual conference held in Florence, Italy (a position that he graciously declined). He also contributed a substantial amount of money to the Egyptian Exploration Company; archeology was one of his favorite hobbies. In 1888 Winslow was honored once again when he was elected as Presidential Elector from Dutchess County, a position that he considered to be one of his greatest honors.

John Flack Winslow died on March 10, 1892. This account is taken from the Poughkeepsie Courier Obituary Page: "Death was due to natural causes or a general breaking up of his system due to old age." This eulogy appeared in the same paper: "The death of John Flack Winslow which occurred at his home on the Hyde Park Road a short distance north of Poughkeepsie at 5:00 Thursday morning removed from earth a man whose goal, judgment and patriotism, exercised at a crucial moment during the Civil War, contributed to turn defeat into victory and in a large measure saved the Union cause." Thus a great man was recognized for living his good life.

The author would like to express his sincerest gratitude to all those who helped in the completion of this project, especially Brother Edward Cashin, who was instrumental in initiating the work, and Mr. Paul Hasbrouck who provided vital information.

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John Jay and John Jay Homestead State Historic Site

Brian J. Rees, Marist '12

If one thing can be understood about the men responsible for the creation of the United States as it exists today, it is that they were individuals of immense talent and capacity for thought. This penchant for thinking led to the development of documents such as the Declaration of Independence and later the Constitution. John Jay was one of these Founding Fathers, and he is most remembered for his position as the first Chief Justice of the United States. Yet the course of Jay's career following this role is just as important in understanding the man.

A lifetime resident of New York, Jay worked tirelessly to improve conditions in his home state, even as the Revolutionary War was being fought. His work on the first state Constitution in 1777 revealed his progressive attitudes, including his attempt to bring about the end of slavery—a proposal that was not adopted by the Constitutional Convention.¹ In 1778, Jay traveled from Poughkeepsie to Philadelphia, where he served as president of the Continental Congress, tasked with keeping these meetings in order, important due to the many and disparate personalities involved in the birth of the new nation. Serving as leader of

Congress for ten months—during a time that latter came to be known as the “Year of Division”²

Jay would go on to serve his country as Minister Plenipotentiary to Spain, a peace commissioner for the Treaty of Paris, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and first Chief Justice of the United States. He served with a degree of distinction in each of these positions. After Jay’s notable contributions to the burgeoning country, including his work on the Treaty of Paris and Jay Treaty, he returned to his home state of New York, where he continued to make important contributions to law. Jay would serve as governor for six years, from July of 1795 to June of 1801.³ A landmark piece of legislation in 1799 gave Jay his first opportunity to sign off on a law that would phase out slavery in the state, although this proved controversial at the time.⁴ His deed is an important milestone in the fight for emancipation of all slaves, his victory coming almost four decades before some form of nationwide abolition was introduced.

Today, the laws and documents drafted by great men serve as indelible reminders of their contributions to the history of the United States, but there are fewer physical reminders of their presence. In the case of the Jay family, careful preservation has allowed their homestead in Katonah, Westchester County, to remain extant.

The house and surrounding farm were designed to provide a quiet country home for John Jay in the days following his formal retirement from politics. As surviving letters show, Jay remained in correspondence with members of government, although he stopped short of making his comments public. These letters touch on subjects ranging from foreign relations to the evils of slavery and its continued existence in the country.⁵ They show Jay’s progression from his role as a statesman to his retirement and beliefs as a manumissionist.

That it is possible to see the very home in which Jay spent the final years of his life is inspiring. Typical of its time period, it is a splendid example of a sprawling country farm. (Jay had inherited the house and 750 surrounding acres from his father.⁶) The main home is elegant in its simplicity. Featuring a wide porch, the exterior is painted a shade of eggshell, with deep green shutters and door providing a traditional look.

The interior is furnished to portray the home as it may have looked during the 1820s, with care taken to illustrate everyday life. About half the furnishings are reproductions; however, some pieces, such as John Jay’s travelling bookcase, and most of the artwork are original. There are several period paintings on display—portraits of the Jays and replicas of famous works in which John Jay is depicted, most notably *The American Peace Commissioner* by Benjamin West.



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE JOHN JAY HOMESTEAD STATE HISTORIC SITE

Front Parlor

Additions that turned Jay's farmhouse into a fifty-five room mansion provide evidence of the succeeding generations who lived on the estate until Eleanor Iselin, the final surviving resident, died in 1953. The property was purchased by Westchester County, until legislation in 1958 gave the property its status as a New York State Historic Site.⁷

While the John Jay Homestead represents the achievements of a man nearing the end of his life, it also documents the maturation of another. William Jay, John Jay's second son, continued his father's fight for equality in the country as the issue of slavery became more divisive between the different economic areas of the nation. During William's occupancy of the Homestead, in which he developed into a thriving farm, New York saw its final slave emancipated.

Despite all of their efforts on behalf of America's slaves, the fact remains that Jay and his family were known to own slaves, a contradiction for any person who espoused anti-slavery beliefs. Jay's belief on the subject has been well reported in various forms over the years: "I purchase slaves and manumit them at proper ages and when their faithful services shall have afforded a reasonable retribution."⁸ Jay's attitudes reflect the complex situation at the time, in which slave labor accounted for a large part of New York's workforce.⁹

By adopting a personal policy of gradual abolition, Jay influenced an 1817 law that resulted in the freedom of slaves born before July 4, 1799. Jay was an intelligent and persuasive individual who realized that immediate changes to



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE JOHN JAY HOMESTEAD STATE HISTORIC SITE

John Jay's Library

established law would upset the delicate economic and social climate of the time. In Jay's opinion, only through gradual abolition could businesses effectively stop the use of slave labor. Some suggest Jay may have adopted this position because a stance against slavery would have been a liability during his 1792 gubernatorial run.¹⁰

While it is somewhat easy to make the argument for a political motive behind his actions, Jay had drafted a memorial to stop the exportation of slaves in 1786, long before running for governor.¹¹ Additionally, one must look at the language and culture surrounding slavery in New York during the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. At a time when indentured servitude and apprenticeship were common, many sought to change the use of the word "servant" to mean something more all-encompassing. In a society that understood what slavery meant in the context of freedom, liberty, and equality, calling a slave the more acceptable "servant" meant that individuals could feel at least somewhat more at ease with keeping a human being locked in a life with little or no choice in the matter. Those in the business of slavery were happy to blur the lines when it suited them, and often grouped slaves in with other types of servants.

Jay was well aware of this solemn fact, relenting that: "The treatment which slaves in general meet with in this state is very little different from that of other servants."¹² This fact may have colored public perception of the benefits of slavery, no doubt aided by the fact that New York did not possess an industry that

demanded large quantities of human labor. Because slavery did not account for a large portion of the economy in New York, the institution was allowed to remain for a longer period of time. Even after many states in the Northeast had outlawed slavery, New York continued to allow for its unimpeded use—until passage of the gradual manumission law in 1799 began to turn the tide against its practice in the state.¹³

The themes of John Jay’s antislavery efforts were echoed in a 2012 exhibit at the Homestead that focused on the family’s contributions to the cause. Documents and articles from the time period indicate that they were involved with multiple aspects of the anti-slavery movement.

The exhibit included a volume of William Jay’s personal compilation on slavery, which eventually filled nineteen volumes of these anti-slavery pamphlets, with a handwritten index by Jay. The displays also include information about Peter Augustus, John Jay’s father, who owned six slaves.¹⁴

The exhibit notably illustrated the shift over time in the family’s stance on slavery. John Jay’s policy of gradual manumission was eventually superseded by William’s more pointed call for immediate and total abolition. It is here where John Jay freed the final slave under his control, carrying out the wishes of the Manumission Society he had headed decades earlier.¹⁵ Perhaps more than any other, this example sets the tone for how difficult the issue of slavery was for Jay, who helped found a nation based on the ideals of freedom and equality, and struggled to find a way to achieve it himself as well.



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE JOHN JAY HOMESTEAD STATE HISTORIC SITE

Potting shed in the herb garden

The John Jay Homestead Historic Site is located at 400 Jay Street in Katonah. Beginning in April, the State Historic Site holds tours from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Saturdays through Wednesdays and during the winter months, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Tours cost \$7.00 for adults, \$5.00 for students and seniors, and are free for children up to age 12 and to members of the Friends of John Jay Homestead. It is closed on Easter and most holidays (call for information). The Gallery is available for viewing on Sundays from noon to 2:00 p.m. and Mondays from 10:00 a.m. to noon, with admission at \$2.00 per person. School and group visits are by appointment only, and the Homestead can be reached at 914.232.5651 for further information and scheduling. For further information, and a virtual tour of the Homestead, visit the Friends of John Jay Homestead's website at <http://www.johnjayhomestead.org/>.

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Evening Run Past North Lookout

The sky was near rain, grey
growing dark but holding off
as I started easy, muscle-sore
a little from a long run two days
before. Almost no one was out. Nearing
North Lookout where tall hemlocks
darken the trail, a ruckus above
sounded like rain on the trees until
out again, clear to the clouds,
no rain came, and I thought
something huge had been in the trees
to cause such a sound. Coming back
I heard voices of children ahead,
but there were none, and it was
darker now, ruckus gone. I thought,
oh, it was the children I'd heard had
shaken the tops of the trees.

—Matthew J. Spireng

BARRETT, Thomas Weeks - Painter, Des., Eng.
55 Noxon St., Poughkeepsie, N. Y.
B. Poughkeepsie, N. Y., Sept. 12, 1902.
Studied: BMFA Sch.
Member: Dutchess Count A.A.
Work: PMG; Franklin D. Roosevelt Lib., Hyde Park, N. Y.
Exhibited: PAFA, 1932, 1934, 1935.



ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF THE DUTCHESS COUNTY ART ASSOCIATION AND THE BARRETT ART CENTER

Tom Barrett in front of the porch, which has been newly restored, of 55 Noxon Street. c.1927

Notes and Documents

This essay originally appeared with the opening exhibit of the Barrett House Art Center in September 1976 and included a catalog of the thirty-nine images by Barrett then on display in his former home. It was authored by guest curators Karal Ann Marling and Helen A. Harrison and originally edited and designed by Bradley Merrithew. It appears here as a part of our ongoing efforts to document and share the many important people, places, and resources throughout our region."

Portrait of Poughkeepsie:

Tom Barrett

Karal Ann Marling and Helen A. Harrison

Shortly after that cryptic biography [caption at left] appeared in *Who's Who in American Art* for 1947, Tom Barrett was dead. The art world of New York scarcely noticed, although when the young Barrett took a studio on West 35th Street in the fall of 1926, he believed that fame and fortune in Gotham were within his grasp. "I seem now to be in sight of Utopia," he told his mother.

Nor did word of Tom Barrett's passing reach Montmartre, the artists' enclave in Paris he once longed to join. "I want too much," he confided to his diary in 1925. "Travel—that would be great! Paris and a gay life ... Next year at this time I will be there."

In the end, it was left to the *Poughkeepsie New Yorker* to pay final tribute to Tom Barrett. His obituary was front page news for November 20th, 1947. "Thomas Barrett, Jr., Dies at 45; Noted for Paintings, Woodcuts" read the headline. Perhaps it was fitting that only Poughkeepsie remembered her native son. Despite his early ambitions for travel and renown, and despite his occasional impatience with the city of his birth for "too much self-complacence, self-pride, 'keeping up with the Joneses,'" Tom Barrett's life and Tom Barrett's art were both circumscribed and nurtured by Poughkeepsie.

Like Iowa's Grant Wood, whose wit and trenchant style he admired, Thomas Weeks Barrett was an American Regionalist. Critics often denigrate the regional scene painting that was the strongest current in American art of the 1920's and the 1930's, calling it chauvinistic and provincial. But the lines between chauvinism and an urgent need to explore the roots that have nourished the American Dreams between provincialism and an authentic affection for the hidden beau-

ties of America's farms and cities are difficult ones to draw.

Tom Barrett painted Poughkeepsie obsessively—her back streets, her historic landmarks, her docks, her bridges, her residential showplaces. His localism is profound. Yet his expression of the values he discovered in the local scene never strikes a false or a strident note. Barrett's Poughkeepsie is solid: paint applied in thick, clean slabs creates a rock-hard structure that gives his views a timeless sense of endurance. Barrett's Poughkeepsie is rarely glamorous: his muted palette bathes the Hudson Valley in a mood of sober retrospection and meditation. Barrett's Poughkeepsie is, above all, a real place: he probes vistas of urban decay and industrial blight with the same honesty and curiosity he brings to the tidy Gothic halls of Vassar College.

Barrett's Regionalism left Poughkeepsie a searching, sensitive and often surprising portrait of itself. But Regionalism was not, for the artist, a detached aesthetic proposition. Tom Barrett pictured the city remarkably well, because he knew and loved it deeply. That love grew from his abiding devotion to his family, and his attachment to the family home on Noxon Street. In his maturity, it found outlet in the civic projects to which he committed himself unstintingly.

Founder and first President of the Dutchess County Art Association, Barrett organized the group's inaugural exhibition, mounted at the Luckey, Platt and Company auditorium in October of 1934. Throughout those early years, coincidental with the financial hardships of the Great Depression, DCAA shows at shops and stores, the old Hotel Campbell, and the County Fair gave artists direct, unrestricted access to a local market for the first time. "Josh" Billings, Alice Judson, Walt Killam, Amy Spingarn, Olle Nordmark, Martin Gambee and C. K. Chatterton, along with Barrett, benefitted from that exposure. But the goals of the DCAA, as Barrett articulated them, transcended mercantile expedience.

DCAA exhibitions provided a meeting ground where artists and laymen together could come to grips with the mutual pleasures and problems of life in the Hudson Valley. "An artist is a sensitive plate that records mentally and then interprets manually changing perceptions of life...he is prophetic...a leader," Barrett declared. Surely, at no time in American history was the need for a clear and prophetic vision greater than during the agonies of the Depression. Barrett and his colleagues, through their pictorial affirmation of the local scene, promised a stable future glimmering beyond the chaos of the present moment. Although Barrett began his career as a decorative artist, his work and his philosophy in the 1930's gave art a broader social mission. Dreams of a cultural democracy wherein the artist and his audience could reflect together on their heritage—a true definition of social realism—inspired Barrett's leadership of the

Dutchess County Art Association.

His faith in the concept of cultural democracy made Barrett an avid supporter of the numerous art projects established by the federal government during the New Deal era. “Art for the Millions,” the slogan of the Works Progress Administration’s Federal Art Project, describes a quest for artistic populism consonant with Barrett’s own. Subsidies for artists were, of course, designed primarily to guarantee the survival of American art in the face of collapse of the market for “inessential luxuries.” Beyond that, however, federal patronage agencies—the W.P.A., the Treasury Relief Art Project, the Section of Fine Arts—aimed to make art a real necessity rather than a luxury item. By encouraging artists to depict familiar aspects of American life on the walls of public buildings, the New Deal challenged the exclusivity of art masterpieces locked away in museums and Madison Avenue galleries. New Deal art adorned the post office and the public school. The property of every citizen, it spoke the plain language of city streets and country lanes.

Tom Barrett became a government muralist in February of 1936, under the auspices of the Treasury Department; he earned \$38.50 every two weeks while he designed, for the Millbrook Memorial School, a mural cycle on the theme of agricultural productivity. Working for the W.P.A. later that year, and during most of 1937, he undertook a complementary series on industrial subjects. Meanwhile, Barrett planned Poughkeepsie’s part in the first nationwide Art Week, celebrated at the request of President Roosevelt, from November 27th through December 3rd of 1940. He carried out protracted negotiations for placing paintings in the shop windows of participating merchants along Main, Market, Cannon and Academy Streets to encourage passersby to share responsibility for the support of local art with their government. He also competed, unsuccessfully, for a Section commission to decorate the lobby of the new Poughkeepsie Post Office.

Barrett’s preparatory studies for the Millbrook murals bear witness to his ability to create strong, simple and compelling images of ordinary people engrossed in their toil, images bearing a message of hope for the jobless and forcefully asserting the dignity of America’s working man. His post office sketches project a dazzling, almost millennial, panorama of the Queen City, alive with energy and optimism. Barrett worked hard to make those pictorial hopes into concrete realities. The final years of his life were absorbed in two dreams. One dream Poughkeepsie could not share; the city is infinitely poorer today for that failure of vision. The second survived, and flourishes.

Barrett’s first project was to build a riverfront war memorial near Kaal Rock which could serve as the focal point for the physical and spiritual rebirth of

Poughkeepsie. No melancholy monument to death, no bellicose glorification of martial might, Barrett proposed a living memorial to the future secured by the sacrifices of World War II. “Let us try to make better men so there will be no war,” he scrawled on the back of the minutes from one of a long parade of discouraging meetings that eventually doomed his plan. Barrett’s drawings show a true Civic Center—a concert hall, theaters, a municipal art gallery, athletic facilities, picnic terraces, a marina—soaring over the Hudson from North Water Street like the flight of a great, glistening dove of peace. In words prophetic of the temper of the present, Barrett insisted, after his Civic Center project was dropped, that “whenever a city plan is inaugurated, maybe even a hundred years from now, the River will be at ... the heart of it.” The artist’s eye saw the peace and beauty of the Hudson, and wept when Poughkeepsie spurned nature’s own symbolic gifts to her.

Tom Barrett’s other dream, a dream which engaged his imagination all the more tenaciously after his municipal art gallery evaporated with the Hudson River plaza that housed it, was to convert his own home into a community art center. His DCAA experiences had convinced him that local art activities and local interest in art warranted permanent facilities for instruction, for exhibitions, and for collection of Hudson Valley work. “Poughkeepsie has (over 7 years) become an Art Center. New York doesn’t know it yet ... Neither does



The Barrett House, 55 Noxon Street, when the family lived there

Woodstock . . . of Silvermine. Our Chamber of Commerce doesn't know it, and never even thought about it," he mused in a private memo.

An undated diagram, probably made in the mid-1940's, specifies what he wished to do. The spacious living and dining rooms on the ground floor of Barrett House are designated as galleries, along with the front bedrooms on the floor above. For himself and his family he retained a modest suite behind the upstairs galleries. The attic would, as always, remain a studio. The diagram also bears notations in which Barrett puzzled over ways to implement his scheme. Could an "angel" be persuaded to buy the property at 55 Noxon Street and present it to the city as a gift? Failing that, Barrett was prepared to give Poughkeepsie the house himself, providing that his family could occupy the premises rent free. His final alternative was to will Barrett House to the city or a suitable custodial institution upon his own death.

An ironic and not wholly serious Last Will and Testament inscribed on a sheet of drawing paper in the spring of 1934 alludes to the same project: "If my death should occasion any deep sympathy, it could be used to foster . . . a public-owned gallery or museum, and in that event, the entire lot of my work may go to it." On another scrap of paper, revealing an equally gloomy frame of mind, Barrett decided that, given civic propensities for footdragging, opening of such a center would probably be deferred to the impossibly distant future—perhaps to 1975. Barrett House, bequeathed by his sister Betty to the Dutchess County Art Association, is now the art center of which Tom Barrett dreamed more than forty years ago. The present exhibition, a retrospective of his work, marks the official opening of Barrett House, and thus pays special tribute to the foresight and the civic spirit of a good and generous man.

If Tom Barrett were here to read those words, however, he would probably scoff. Barrett was not averse to praise; in fact, he kept scrapbooks containing the briefest, most casual allusions to the merit of his art. But he was a complex person who took pains to conceal some of his more endearing qualities from public scrutiny, while flaunting failings that genuinely pained him. The image he presented to Poughkeepsie was of a man obscured by a bewildering layer of masks; he played, by turns, the town drunk, the crackerbarrel atheist, the crank, the eccentric. Small wonder, then, that the friends who knew Barrett best find it difficult to separate the man from the masks. "A real character," they call him.

The depths of that character Barrett chose to hide. His diaries picture a sickly youth of 22 who longed for a wife and children of his own, gazing wistfully out his window at midnight to catch a glimpse of the neighborhood belle as she returned from a date with somebody else. In later writings, drafted with

publication in mind, Barrett assumes a cynical attitude toward sex, boasting of improbable adventures and burying his courtly romanticism. Barrett fought against alcoholism for most of his adult life; stretches of his school days in Boston were squandered in a haze of bootleg gin and morning-after recriminations. Yet he recalled, for the record, that he learned “to drink like a gentleman.”

His warm feeling for Poughkeepsie is undeniable: his art and his public career provide ample proof of that. Yet his files are peppered with vitriolic denunciations of the Queen City, including several versions of a flippant “expose” whose ultimate target is obscure. In 1931 Barrett made his first headlines in the *Star* as designer of a burlesque map that christened Poughkeepsie “the seat of Dutchess Trousers,” and glorified seventeen speakeasies, while dismissing the courthouse and post office as “the two ugliest buildings between New York and Albany.” Barrett unveiled the heart he wore on his sleeve only when he spoke of his parents and his sister Betty. His love for his family shines through diaries, notes and letters, through public and private statements, with the same undiminished brightness.

Nowhere is the importance of that familial bond of affection more dramatically shown than in Tom Barrett’s notes for his autobiography, begun in 1943 and completed a year later. In writing this fascinating and often amusing document, Barrett let his hardboiled Sam Spade disguise slip at several points, revealing the real Tom Barrett. Here, exactly as it came from his typewriter, is Tom Barrett’s account of his life.

PART ONE

Since my life is very important to me, (it might be said that the whole world unfolds for the individual), of course it doesn’t, I have decided to put some of it down. Whether it prove to be only entertaining or faintly educational is beside the point. Some remarks and observations by an artist may furnish him with monies which his painting does not yet provide.

With a hasty glance at the past, I’m quite sure that any educational value there might be will prove to be on the negative side ... how not to do it rather than how to do it. The entertainment angle ... well, we will see?

Born where I now live, at 55 Noxon St. in Poughkeepsie, 41 years ago I came into a protected sphere of family care which has not diminished. Early traces of kicking over the traces were seen tho and it must have been pretty hard for my parents to keep me down to size. I narrowly missed becoming smellier than just a spoiled child. Sulky, and selfish I never got over the latter but completely lost the former.

I had a very satisfactory childhood and retain vivid clear pictures of Grandpa's farm and all the big little things that impress children so deeply. Smells and colors and other little boys and girls. Not much music for we are an unmusical family even as familys go. I had no love for anyone ... all that came much later.

Mother and Dad were both born in the county, one a few miles north in Hyde Park, the other a few south of Poughkeepsie. Father rarely mentions his family while Mother's clan is constantly present. Dad's relatives must have hurt him considerably for my sister and I know scarcely anything of them except a few names. Lawyer Weeks seems to have been the outstanding male, while several aunts and our grandmother shine in the immediate past. Of the Stoutenburghs, Emersons, Parkers and Pritchards, Hyatts and Herricks we know considerably more. Doubtless they will be spoken of again.



Tom Barrett and his mother, c. 1927

After summers on Gramp's various farms which were mostly financed by Uncle Jack (Dr. John A. Stoutenburgh, who died too early of consumption), the family sent me to the YMCA camp where I was thrown in the water and did not learn how to swim. Dad had previously tried to teach me but the bloodsuckers in the old swimmin' hole and the depth of the water made me shrink from it. Bet learned later, but I think it took a lot of will power to do it as she was, and is, more afraid of crawling things than I. Her hair still curls up at the sight of a picture of a snake...we pin together the pages in a magazine so she'll be spared the shock of coming on one unexpectedly. The only thing I remember vividly about that summer was the time 60 lbs. of hard candy arrived from Smith brothers, and it was delivered to my tent. For a short while I was king of the camp.

At Christ Episcopal Church Sunday School I learned how to match pennies with the son of the Director of the Hudson River State Hosp. for the Insane, where later on I learned other items which might have been learned in a more savoury environment, but I was to learn them anyway. Sunday School was a complete bore to me and the Bible never was brought close to me. I liked the idea of the beautiful garden but the Deuteronomies and Jobs and Acts got me all bawled up.

Around about here I was given a bicycle but it was a second-hand one and I wouldn't take it out and learn how to ride it. Seems pretty hateful as I write it, and had I been my own father I certainly would have licked the brat. When a new 40 dollar Columbia had been bought for me I learned with alacrity and was the best goal (which I pronounced 'gool') tender on the south side next to Don Schwartz. Bicycle polo raised hell with the spokes and I'd take the wheel to the repair shop frequently where I'd simply say "charge it" and forthwith bust some more. It pleased my ego to say for identification that my father was Thomas Barrett, Treasurer of the Poughkeepsie Trust Co. and hear the merchant's impressed "Oh, you're Tom Barrett's boy." That kept up for quite a long while ... far longer than it should have. Selling the *Saturday Evening Post* became my first business experience, but it didn't last long. Stamp collecting used up all the money.

I kept a diary and visited Cousin Carolyn in Brooklyn, dug a deep trench hole in the backyard, broke my nose and developed the habit of spitting into dark corners, thru my teeth.

PART TWO

Before the actual experience of coition I had the normal expanding sensations common to all the boys and was thoroly versed in the half-knowledge which our society countenances in its children. One summer when I was thirteen the family took the old Taylor residence which was outside the city somewhat and we avoided living in town where an infantile paralysis epidemic was severe. There was a maid about seventeen, countryish, who was dusting the books in the library one day when she came upon a steel engraving of Psyche. She took pains to show it to me with giggles, so I learned about contact from her. I remember sneaking up the back service stairs in the dead of night, moonlight, whitewashed walls with blue splotches. A white iron bed and then the guilty trip downstairs again. This was repeated on our return to town to the point of becoming routine. I was just plain lucky that nothing happened.

That summer we entertained our cousins, the Hyatts from Ossining. Helena was a very pretty dark girl and she did copies of magazine covers. I thought they were Art and forthwith took to doing them myself. School was ever a chore and this new activity relegated the stamp collection to second place which soon became third and which now rests forgotten in a haircloth trunk in the studio.

Several illnesses during the following years, influenza, pneumonia, kidney trouble did not leave me robust. Fourth Lake in the Adirondacks,

Atlantic City and Orient Point on Long Island were the recuperating spots, in each of which I made little sketchings having no meaning whatsoever except that I had a growing interest. School became intolerable and I connived, with Dr. Gibbon, to be done with it. Dad needed a rest and was given a leave of absence from the bank. Gramp, Mother's father, being here, Dad and I went to Florida for three months staying in St. Petersburg. My good memories of that place are few. *Passe a Grille* had a mood that remains, but the endless cafeterias, spiders and a man with walking typhoid who was drinking himself to death while courting a Miss Pouch from Hartford established definite reactions to the place. I was to go back to that state later on.

Early in the twenties I began to find out about Vassar girls. There is very little of interest to report on them as a group at that time. They seemed to have had a god called Lewis Carroll and they were nearly all perfect little Alices. One busted out because she drank too much gin, and another I knew found out about Rabelais rather early. Today these girls are far more interesting. They seem about five years older per person.

I wanted to go to art school in New York, but the family compromised and was willing to send me to Boston as it was thought by them to be less lusty. In my considered opinion Boston had and has every bit as much to offer the boy away from home as has or had New York. Jerry Schick, with whom I completed a course in 'getting about' at Vassar, etc., was to take a business course there, went on ahead and rented us a room in Gainsborough St. Then began a four year term of various applications at the Sch. of the Mus. of Fine Arts.

I made many good friends, graduated and learned how to 'drink like a gentleman'. But for one surprising interlude in an accredited Harvard looming house was fairly continent. Among my friends at this time were Sam Thai, Sanford Low, James Shute, Francis Tolman, Chas. Zimmerman, Amory Hull, Billy Cini. Sam is now teaching life drawing at the Inst. of Modern Art, Boston, Sandy is Director of the New Britain Art Inst., Jimmy I've lost track of tho surely something interesting is occupying parts, Zim gave up painting, which was sort of sad, Amory has to do with stocks & bonds, and Billy is a jeweler in Boston.

At Fran's home in Nelson near Keene, N.H. I found out about the real New Englanders and spent two happy Thanksgivings. I was to return there later on also.

Following school three of us took the Spaeth farm in Nelson for the summer and began to feel our way in paint. I had majored in design in

Boston, so was better equipped to think about my work than were the others who were just trying to turn out pictures. From that summer on I have been conscious of the intangibles in painting, particularly my own painting. To be sure at that time it was only a hint, but it grew.

POSTSCRIPT

There are so many things to do ... after fourteen years at painting and thinking co-relatively I have reached a point at which certain crystallization is apparent in my work. A group of about fifteen, paintings, drawings, gouaches, and possibly a woodcut show this to date. I have the knowledge that from now on out I can produce honest work that is entirely my own.

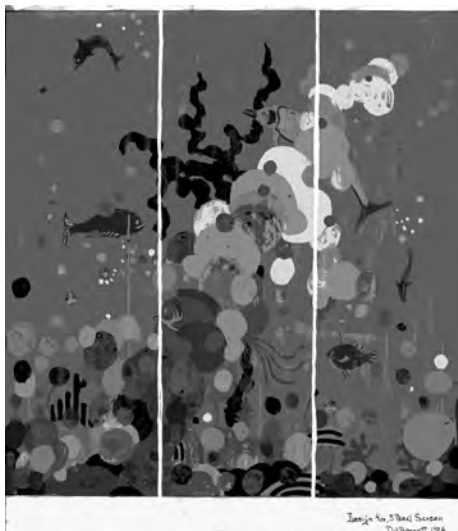
But judging from the condition only slight effort leaves me in, I begin to regret the carefree years, tho they have molded the sum of my work. I'm afraid that the quality Phillips saw in it will kill me, and that not so far off either. Too bad, for the production of a work of art gives me great pleasure and satisfaction and to have that intensity with which I do it prove my undoing is more than ironic. But I suppose that is life and I am likely to join those who should have lived longer. INTENSITY ... that's what Phillips saw, and to have him recognize it gave me my happiest moment. So perhaps soon I shall know COMPLETE intensity. Incidentally, I'm sorry to go because there are so many things to do.

Barrett is retiscent about the four years he spent at the art school of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, but the period is, in many ways, the key to his art and his personality. "Tommy" Barrett arrived at 105 Gainsborough Street on October 1st, 1922. He was chronically homesick. Enroute, he wrote two letters to his father, one from the southbound train and another from the northbound steamer. He broke out in shingles. He fretted about money. The \$65 tuition fee for the fall term staggered him in light of the senior Barrett's recent financial reverses. He began keeping meticulous records of his daily expenses. Pleas for cash and guilt about accepting it begin to punctuate his letters. "The sooner I can make some material manifestation of regard and love and thanks to you, the happier little Tommy will be," he wrote to his "Dearests" in 1928, as he waged a desperate fight to make a living as a commercial designer in New York. The phrase could as easily have come from a letter of six years before.

His weekly correspondence traces the progress of his training: "Please save [my letters] to you all, 'cause I'm not keeping much of a diary and that's all we'll have of the artist's younger years. Ha!" As a beginner, Barrett found himself in

Leslie P. Thompson's antique class, drawing from casts, or rather, parts of casts. For weeks, he toiled over a nose or an eye; with growing and ill-disguised distaste. He fell behind in color theory. Perspective bored him. But he excelled in design, the course taught by Henry Hunt Clark, future director of the Cleveland School of Art. In November of 1922, he had already committed himself wholeheartedly to that field: "Today he—Mr. C.—hung the [examination drawings] up in the lecture room and gave criticism. Didn't say very much about mine except that it was a good example, and classed it among the best...Design is the thing I like most of all—I've learned that much anyway."

Design at the Museum School was a rigorous course. As Barrett later discovered, the curriculum leaned heavily on the theories of Denman Ross, a Harvard instructor whose text *On Drawing and Painting*, published in 1912, left its mark on a generation of American artists. Ross saw art as a "scientific process," not an intuitive one. By systematizing existing aesthetic knowledge through close study of the art of the past, the artist could discover



Design for 3 Panel Screen,
T. W. Barrett, 1926

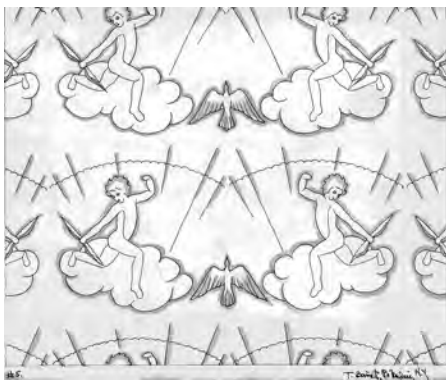
infallible rules to govern the solution of any given design problem. The result, as one of Ross' disciples phrased it, was a "rational eclecticism."

Under Clark's guidance, Barrett immersed himself in the Ross system for four years. He copied specimens of Greek pottery, details of Renaissance costumes, and samples of mediaeval ironwork in the Boston Museum. He progressed to more demanding work, and illustrated Aesop's fables and Shakespeare after days of research in the Peabody Museum and furtive glances at a curious trio of models: Walter Crane, Duccio and Aubrey Beardsley. He read Ruskin, of course, but Clark also urged his student to explore Jay Hambidge and his theory of dynamic symmetry. A list of the books Barrett admired most, compiled in 1928-1929, includes Arthur Dow's text on composition and Adolfo Best-Maugard's *A Method for Creative Design*. The crisp precision of Barrett's Poughkeepsie woodcuts and the dynamic compositional force of his mural sketches and architectural drawings reflect Clark's tutelage.

Nevertheless, Barrett's education was not without defects. His singleminded concentration on design led him to neglect other disciplines. He rarely painted, for example, unless one of his secondary instructors demanded a life study or a finished still life. His renderings of the human figure, throughout his later life, were hard and stylized, and often unconvincing. The design course afforded little scope for originality, for seeing the world through his own eyes. During summers at home, Barrett complained that he could not draw easily in the absence of the masterpieces which fuelled his imagination. His judgements on contemporary art were distorted by the decorous, Old Master bias of the Museum School. He was shocked by his first exposure to the work of the Ash Can School's second generation in 1925—"Some vigor but distasteful subjects," he wrote of the benign Eugene Speicher. Much of what Barrett learned in Boston would soon be tested and amended in his pursuit of a livelihood in art.

In 1926, the graduate designer set out bravely to conquer New York. He could not have chosen a more inopportune moment for his assault on success. Before 1929 competition was fierce, even among established designers of radios, fancy wallpapers, dressing cases, and the million other novelty items that blossomed in the Go Go years of easy credit. There was nothing left to compete for after the Crash. But Barrett had high hopes and restrained them with difficulty: "I'm trying not to build atmospheric castles until there is a tangible foundation in sight, and sometimes, tho it's hard to shackle one's fantasy, and prevent it from soaring along unaided, it seems best not to suppose too much."

Sound advice, indeed, for jobs were few, far between and not very lucrative. Using his class projects from Boston as sourcebooks, Barrett tried his hand at every conceivable design opportunity. End papers, posters for a beauty salon, trunk linings, oilcloth, scarves, shower curtains, card table tops and "Early American"



Wallpaper design inscribed "#5.
T. Barrett, Po'keepsie, N.Y."

radio cabinets poured from his drawing board. Yet his account book tells a dismal story. His design income for the years 1928 and 1929 totaled \$208. Barrett's greatest triumph was a sketch for playing cards completed for Macy's in January of 1929. Retailled in two versions—red or blue—the cards are defiantly modern in style; Art Deco had displaced the retarditaire Art Nouveau of Barrett's schooldays. A regular pattern of white polka-dots

decorates a colored ground divided by lines of unequal width into three rectangular segments. Barrett's prize-winning cover for the April 1932 issue of *House Beautiful*, probably begun during this period, also employs white dots on a blue background, and relies for visual elan upon a tense balance between rectangles of varying sizes. The circle and the straight line, it is worth noting, were among the seven basic design motifs recommended by Best-Maugard. Over 100,000 packs of Barrett's playing cards were sold, but Macy's took the profits from the sale of the design to manufacturers. The firm paid the artist \$15 for his work.

It was this disheartening interlude that turned Barrett's thoughts toward home and toward fresh horizons in art. While living in New York, Barrett seems to have made more money from sales of Christmas cards and bookplates to Poughkeepsie friends than from his ostensible profession. Thus, it was with few regrets that Tom Barrett went back to Noxon Street in October of 1929. That summer, however, he spent in New England visiting "Sandy" Low and "Fran" Tolman, his former schoolmates. And there he took up painting in earnest, relying exclusively on his own instincts, sharpened by contact with the local scene. In good weather, he worked out of doors every day. Sometimes, he sketched the mountains, or a picturesque native. Most often, he discovered the "genius loci" in spots that bore the marks of man's interactions with his environment—houses snuggled in the New Hampshire woods, the ancient wooden machinery of a saw mill clinging to the banks of a brook. "Each one I do is better than the preceding one. Feel that I am...learning a great deal."

By Christmas of 1929, Barrett had already consigned fourteen New England oils to the Anderson Gallery in New York. For several years, he was closely identified with pictures of Martha's Vineyard and Menemsha painted during the summer months and exhibited in the fall at the Pennsylvania Academy and the Society of Independent Artists. For two consecutive years, 1931 and 1932, these canvases were singled out for special notice by Edward Alden Jewell of the *New York Times*, whose remarks were reprinted by the *Poughkeepsie Eagle-News*. Although Barrett continued to paint Yankee subject matter, after his first one-man show at the Elverhoj Shop in Poughkeepsie in 1931, he gained confidence that the less familiar scenes of his home town were as worthy of depiction as the hackneyed lobster pots of Maine that every painter seemed obliged to commemorate.

Tom Barrett found his stride at last; thereafter he went his own way. The sale of which he was proudest came in 1941, when no less a figure than Duncan Phillips purchased his "Downtown Poughkeepsie," a composition of buildings on a street—perhaps Lavies Place, sloping toward the Hudson River. "When I first

began to paint after a long period of training in Boston art schools and in New York, my attention was called to a book by Mr. Phillips, *Art and Understanding* . . . Since that time, I have been greatly under the spell of Mr. Phillips' selective eye and mind."

Ruth Green Harris, commenting on Barrett's Hudson Valley regionalism in the *New York Times*, caught hold of the artist's own magic spell: "Tom Barrett, the dreamer, the poet, the skillful technician, obliges nature to assume his own mood, and demands this also of the spectator. His paintings are among the few that the spectator completely enters." "If Barrett is not heard from again," stated another critic "it will not be because of lack of talent or creative imagination." Tom Barrett's most vivid dream becomes reality as his forty two year-old association settles into its permanent home on Noxon Street. It is here that the Dutchess County Art Association is proud to present the works of its founder, energetic leader and exemplar of the community art spirit.

CATALOG ESSAY

Thomas Barrett's development as an artist can be seen as a progression from the extremes of a derivative and linear illustrative style to a highly subjective and painterly one. As he failed in his ambition to make a career in commercial art, to achieve financial independence and raise a family of his own, he succeeded in developing an art based on the observation of reality but rich in emotional content.

His earliest surviving works, dating from his entry into art school in 1922, are typical of the formal exercises required of design majors and reveal nothing of the young artist's personality. His technical facility, praised by Henry Hunt Clark and especially evident in his later illustrations and graphic designs, cannot make up for his apparent lack of creative imagination. It was not until after his failure as a commercial designer that Barrett devoted himself to direct observation and the use of oils. It was in this medium that he eventually achieved a deeply personal mode of expression.

DRAWINGS AND GRAPHICS

In his final year at the Boston Museum, Barrett produced illustrations in the moribund Art Nouveau style which are obviously indebted to the work of Aubrey Beardsley. After moving to New York, however, he turned to the more popular Art Deco mode, creating many geometric and floral designs for trunk linings, radio cabinets, shower curtains, playing cards and fabric.

After his return to Poughkeepsie in October of 1929, Barrett lived and worked at home and attempted to support himself through projects such as greet-



***Looking Down Main Street*, reproduction of original woodcut by artist Thomas Barrett, Jr. (1902-1947), a founder and first President of the Dutchess County Art Association (postcard)**

ing card and bookplate designs, lettering, posters and woodcuts, although he considered his painting the most important aspect of his work. At times, he almost seemed to take refuge in a reversion to his art school style, producing meticulous renderings of local buildings and interiors which were both more popular and less emotionally taxing than his work in oils.

Barrett had no professional instruction in woodcut technique. "I have been at it only a year," he stated in 1932, "and am doing it more or less as a relief from the painting work." His prints were exhibited widely but failed to achieve any substantial sales, and by 1935 he had given up all work in graphic media.

Barrett's interest in mural art dates from 1934, when he produced at least two designs which were not executed. In 1935, he donned white overalls to learn fresco technique at the summer workshop run by the well-known muralist Olle Nordmark at his studio in Fishkill. One of Barrett's earliest frescoes, a portable panel depicting a bricklayer, was shown in the DCAA exhibition at the County Fair in August of that year.

Barrett was given his first mural commission by the Treasury Relief Art Project in February, 1936. Working on non-relief status, he executed an uncharacteristic agricultural scene in oil on canvas for the Millbrook Memorial High School. Later the same year, he was transferred to the WPA Federal Art Project



**undated, unsigned watercolor
and pen & ink illustration
for a Post Office mural**

and began an ambitious series of four fresco panels on the subject of work, also for Millbrook High School. As a compositional aid, Barrett made paper cutouts of the figures of the workmen which he arranged to his satisfaction in the industrial landscapes; nevertheless, his awkwardness in the treatment of the human form is evident in the sketch shown. (The Millbrook murals have been removed, and are now in storage at the school.)

In 1939, Barrett was an unsuccessful entrant in the competition, sponsored by the Treasury Section of Fine Arts, for the decoration of the Poughkeepsie Post Office. His other surviving mural sketches include a grandiloquent apotheosis of the Queen City entitled "And He Shall Have Abundance," intended for execution on a scale of 14 x 44 feet but never realized.

In the last three years of his life, Barrett made a large number of drawings expressive of his increasing sensitivity to socio-political issues and his inability to influence them. These works often included statements, cryptic words and numbers, and fantastic creatures. The drawing "Man and Monuments" is, unlike most, a coherent political satire contrasting the crumbling monuments of past cultures with man's own monumental form. Notations in the composition include the artist's list of things to be attended to, nonsense words and numerical arrangements.

EASEL PAINTINGS

Barrett spent the summers of 1928-30 with fellow artists in New England, where he developed a painting style characterized by the use of broad areas of unmodulated color applied with vigorous brushwork. A three-dimensional quality is frequently accentuated by contrasting underpaying left visible between the brushstrokes.

The first solo exhibition of Barrett's oils was held in December of 1929 at the Elverhoj Gallery, Poughkeepsie. (The gallery was an adjunct to the Elverhoj arts and crafts colony at Milton, where Barrett later painted several landscapes.) A review of the show noted his change in direction:



watercolor, signed "T. W. Barrett '28"

"These subjects represent an extreme contrast compared to his former motifs. There is a far cry from the skyscraper designs ... to the soft natural contours of a New England landscape."

By 1933, Barrett had switched his concentration from rural to urban subject matter, and he became known for his unglamorized views of Poughkeepsie. His characteristic low-key palette was now more even in value, with less evident brushstrokes. His cityscapes, notable for their solid, geometric quality, prompted one critic to call him "the gifted painter of strong and simple forms."

Barrett's attitude toward Poughkeepsie can certainly be described as paternal: a mixture of pride in her strengths, despair at her weaknesses and a sense that he knew what was best for her. While he could be the least flattering of observers and the most sarcastic of critics, he was at the same time an idealistic visionary who deprecated his own deeply felt emotional commitments.

In 1935, Barrett commented on his aesthetic philosophy in the *Poughkeepsie Star*:

"Art should not remain in the studio—that is, concern itself with painters' tricks and critics' approval, but should work hand in glove with the social order...It should also show [the people] the beauty of their own environment—something vital in their own, very real, lives."

One will note that Barrett, a profoundly human artist, generally excluded other humans from his work, preferring to depict the environment rather than its inhabitants. He was, however, aware of the importance of life study, and of his own lack of training in drawing from the model. In order to remedy this deficiency, he organized a sketch class which met in his studio from 1932-35. He also did several portrait studies of his family and friends in oils and fresco.

Barrett's social and political consciousness extended from concern over incompetence in local government to an interest in housing problems, civil rights, planned parenthood and nuclear energy. He was a member of the Artists' Congress Against War and Fascism and painted a number of works on socio-political themes. He believed in human dignity, personal freedom and cultural democracy, all of which he expressed with increasing urgency as world and local events shook his fragile but tenacious idealism.

Describing himself as a "Pan-American," Barrett argued: "There should be no striving for nationalism in painting. The international viewpoint is the only sane premise," Although closely identified with a particular geographic region, he held no brief for the chauvinistic theories of Regionalism propounded by the critic Thomas Craven. "Art remains art," he averred; "politics and notions change."



COLLECTION OF RICHARD DEON

Oil Rig, oil on canvas and wood frame, 28½ x 34½ in.

Barrett's 1938 annotations to Duncan Phillips' *The Artist Sees Differently* indicate that his favorite modern painters were Rouault, Braque, Derain, Klee and, among the Americans, John Marin, Marsden Hartley and Arthur Dove. He considered the Impressionists pompous and sentimental, while praising the compositions of Cezanne and Gauguin. His notes reveal a deep respect for Marin's watercolor landscapes and Braque's hard-edged synthetic Cubism. In Hartley's *Camellias* he saw the single quality he felt to be most important to American art: "Compactness—this picture has it. One definite purpose." He read the critical works of Roger Fry and Clive Bell in addition to books on design theory and primitive art.

During the years 1935-38, Barrett divided his energies between easel and mural painting. By 1939, his work had undergone another stylistic change. His paintings became more expressionistic, with sinuous line and the frequent use of thickly applied pigment. Vigor, often bordering on frenzy, is evident in his canvases, and the human figure emerges as an important subject. After the brooding, empty landscapes and city scenes of the Thirties, the work of the following decade seems an emotional renaissance; it is, in fact, the expression of a profoundly sensitive and humanitarian spirit trapped in a self-destructive and deeply disillusioned man.

Although subjective content became increasingly dominant as his career progressed, Barrett was never unmindful of the design theory he had mastered in art school. In notes on his sketches for *Striped Pants* (cat. 40), he reminds himself:

"Each line, & the shape it takes, bears on every other—aside from its realistic meaning. In its creative impact ... Creative drawing must be controlled—it cannot be impulsive ... Your pencil has to have eyes to watch the line & shape next to it. You make almost as many mental passes as a musician does."

The highest compliment he could pay a work of art was to draw an analogy between it and music.

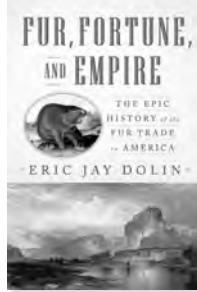
Barrett's last solo exhibition was held at the 3 Arts Gallery in December, 1946. In his critique of the show, Barrett's friend and fellow artist Vincent Walker noted: "The new paintings on view exhibit a restless and intensely individual expression ... Barrett offers us as he says, 'Ideas, and creative propulsions, rather than colored transcriptions of things seen.'"

Learn more about the Dutchess County Art Association and the Barrett Art Center by visiting them at 55 Noxon Street, in Poughkeepsie, online at www.barrettartcenter.org, or calling 845-471-2550.

Book Reviews

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

The Fur Trade and the Fall of the Beaver



Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America. By Eric Jay Dolin. W. W. Norton, 2010 and *Commerce by a Frozen Sea: Native Americans and the European Fur Trade.* By Ann M. Carlos and Frank D. Lewis. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

Employees of the Bronx Zoo first reported beaver sightings in the summer of 2006, but these were dismissed as muskrat sightings. The Bronx River, a recently reclaimed sewer and unofficial tire dump that bisects the zoo, was an unlikely habitat for an animal long since driven out of the city by trapping and development. “And then over the winter,” an ecologist with the zoo told ABC News, “some of the staff were walking around getting some exercise, and saw gnawed trees, and wondered, ‘What’s that?’”¹ A two- to three-year-old North American beaver, it turned out, had in fact built himself a lodge in the Bronx. The event was heralded as a homecoming for the species, which had last been spotted in New York City in the early 1800s.

In 1609, when Henry Hudson sailed the *Halve Maen* up what would become his namesake river, the beaver was likely the most ubiquitous mammal in North America, with a range that spanned from the Arctic tundra to the Mexican desert. Some estimate the continent’s beaver population at the time to have reached 400 million; others place the figure at 1.2 billion.² The Indians the *Halve Maen* encountered on its voyage, already hunting many of these beavers for the French, were eager to trade pelts with Hudson and his crew, too. On September 18, according to one officer’s logbook, Indians “came flocking aboard, and brought us grapes, and pumpkins, which we bought for trifles. And many brought beaver skins, and otter skins, which we bought for beads, knives, and hatchets.”³

Indians had been killing the beaver for thousands of years before Hudson’s arrival. They roasted it whole for food. They skinned it to fashion coats, mittens, and moccasins. They carved its teeth into dice. But the rates at which

they killed it were sustainable. “Precolonial trade,” the environmental historian William Cronon has written, “enforced an unintentional conservation of animal populations, a conservation which was less the result of enlightened ecological sensibility than of the Indians’ limited social definition of ‘need.’”⁴

This approach changed in the colonial era, as the popularity of the felt hat among European men made fur for North American Indians, in the words of another historian, “too valuable to wear.”⁵ The most durable felt hats were constructed from beaver felt, itself the product of compressing shorn beaver fur until it forms a tightly interwoven fabric. A seventeenth-century hatter could charge up to four pounds for a high-end beaver hat, or roughly as much as a low-skilled worker earned in three months (though the hats were bought mainly by the rich).⁶ Originally, European felt-makers sourced their beaver continentally, especially from Russia. But as the European beaver, *Castor fiber*, nearly disappeared over the seventeenth century, its North American cousin, *Castor canadensis*, assumed its place in the supply chain.

Although the two species are genetically incompatible, they otherwise differ little and share the signature characteristics of the genus. Not only is the animal considerate—with a thwack of the tail, it can alert fellow beavers hundreds of yards away of danger—but, as a sort of environmentally conscious civic engineer, it has also earned a reputation for industriousness. Families can spend years constructing thousand-foot-long dams out of branches, stones, and mud. In addition to protecting their architects, these dams control floods, serve as salmon nurseries, remove sediments, and even break down pesticides. Beavers will spend hours, sometimes in pairs, gnawing down trees as thick as three feet. Their four self-sharpening incisors compensate for constant abrasion by never ceasing to grow.

Sometimes the beaver can be the victim of its own unusual traits. If one of its teeth breaks off, the opposite tooth will grow out of control, muzzling and starving the beaver or even impaling its skull. In his biography of the French-born explorer Benjamin Bonneville, Washington Irving recounted another method of accidental suicide:

“I have often,” says Captain Bonneville, “seen trees measuring eighteen inches in diameter, at the places where they had been cut through by the beaver, but they lay in all directions, and often very inconveniently for the after purposes of the animal. In fact, so little ingenuity do they at times display in this particular, that at one of our camps on Snake River, a beaver was found with his head wedged into the cut which he had made, the tree having fallen upon him and held him prisoner until he died.”

The attributes of the North American beaver that proved to be most destructive, however, were those that made it more susceptible to extinction: its low reproductive rate and reluctance to migrate. Indeed, by the middle of the nineteenth century, these characteristics, along with its popularity in a fashion-conscious faraway continent, nearly rendered the animal extinct.



White men never did much beaver trapping themselves; the job was left to Indians, “a kind of vast forest proletariat whose production was raw fur and whose wages were drawn in goods,” as the historian Harold Hickerson called them.⁷ Killing beavers was a labor-intensive job. Indians would set traps on the land, place nets in the water, or hunt them with their dogs. In the winter (when the fur was thickest), Indians had to break through ice to drive a beaver family from its lodge before capturing and clubbing the animals—a task that got easier once they obtained ice chisels and twine from European traders. The Indians worked as free-lancers, skinning their beaver harvest and shopping around the pelts to European fur traders. These traders were either roving middlemen—most famously, the French *coureurs de bois*—who travelled by birchbark canoes into the hinterlands buying up pelts, or they were men who worked at trading posts closer to civilization. Such “factories,” as they were called, were run by government-sponsored trading conglomerates. There the pelts were inspected and a price for them set.

The way the fur trade was organized created fertile ground for fierce competition at every level—among the Indians who trapped, among the traders who sold, among the companies who bought, and among the colonial powers that granted charters. And given that each actor was competing over a limited supply of beaver, it is not surprising that the story of the fur trade in America, studiously recounted by Eric Jay Dolin in *Fur, Fortune, and Empire*, is primarily one of rivalry at the beaver’s expense.

France was the first to plant a permanent fur-trading post in North America, establishing Tadoussac, along the St. Lawrence River, in 1600. The Netherlands followed suit further south, in 1611 sending their first fur-trading expedition, led by the *St. Pieter*, up what fur traders were beginning to call the Hudson River and dispatching the *Fortuyn* there the next year. Nearly seven weeks into its voyage, the *Fortuyn* ran into another Dutch ship, funded by a rival company, that was also eager to trade with the Indians. Fearing a mutually destructive price war, the captains of the two ships agreed to fix the price of pelts and split the trade. But the truce fell apart when one captain accused the other of leaving behind a

one-man sleeper cell—a West Indian equipped with eighty hatchets—to trade with the Indians after the ships returned to Amsterdam.⁸ (He was nearly kidnapped in retaliation.) Over the next two years, the rivalry continued: a canoe full of Indians approaching a ship to trade was rammed and shot at, a ship was torched, and the crew of one ship raided another at gunpoint before fleeing to the Caribbean. Whatever hopes were left of establishing a permanent trade-sharing arrangement were dashed with the arrival, in May of 1614, of two more competing ships on the river.

Dutch merchants realized that such disputes lowered their return on investment, and banded together to found the New Netherland Company in October, 1614. The Dutch parliament granted the company exclusive trading rights along the Atlantic Ocean between the fortieth parallel and the forty-fifth—a slice of the coast from Philadelphia to Bangor now linked by I-95.

Not long after the Dutch unified their operations, however, the English were beginning to secure their own foothold in the North American fur trade. They did so through the Pilgrim settlers at Plymouth, who traded corn for pelts. The trade grew so rapidly that the area surrounding the Plymouth Colony was soon devoid of beaver, forcing the colonists to sail along the coast in search of furs. In 1625, a corn-packed barge that ascended the Kennebec River, in Maine, brought back seven hundred pounds of beaver pelts.⁹ Three years later, the Plymouth colonists had won a patent to the land on the banks of the river, where they built a small trading house. (The place later became Augusta.) They were doing brisk business in Maine, but it was not to last. In 1631, a French ship landed at their post on the Penobscot River, and its crew, acting through a Scottish interpreter, claimed the ship was leaking and lost. It was a ruse: the French stole guns off the trading post's walls, pointed them at the unarmed Englishmen, and took off with three hundred pounds of beaver pelts.¹⁰

While the French elbowed Plymouth out of the fur trade in Maine, the Massachusetts Bay Colony was squeezing it further south. By 1640, the fur trade was essentially over for Plymouth. But for the rest of New England, it was expanding. Like Plymouth's, the Massachusetts Bay Colony's local beaver population had been trapped to death. "Fur-bearing animals," Dolin writes, "were being hunted to commercial extinction over broader areas, requiring Indians to travel longer, over more tenuous supply routes, to bring furs to the scattered English trading posts." English traders thus turned their attention to the Connecticut River Valley. After edging out the Dutch there, they moved onto New Netherland's most prized trading artery: the Hudson River.

The river had belonged to the Netherlands ever since Henry Hudson

explored it for the Dutch East India Company, but the colonial balance of power was shifting toward England. In 1659, a group of Massachusetts Bay colonists received a grant for a plantation some fifty miles south of Fort Orange, near present-day Poughkeepsie, ostensibly to raise cattle. Peter Stuyvesant, the Director-General of New Netherland, was incredulous. In a September 4th letter to the directors of the colony back in Holland, he wrote, “Your Honors may easily infer, in your usual sagacity, what the consequences hereof would be, that is, to get into our beaver-trade with their wampum and divert the trade.”¹¹ By October, he had grown only more suspicious of the English adventurers, writing, “we have since been further informed . . . that their aim goes farther, as they intend to settle above, near or back of Fort Orange, without doubt to ruin and cut off our beaver-trade, as they have done, now 23 or 24 years ago, at the [Connecticut River].”¹² His fears were proven correct when the English obtained a twelve-year monopoly for trading rights around the Hudson. Even though the specific plantation Stuyvesant so feared never materialized, there was little he could do to fend off the English. In 1664, facing four of their warships, Stuyvesant surrendered his colony. New Netherland was now New York.

It would take a hundred years for the other major fur-trading power, France, to lose its North American colonies, and with them, its access to fur. French fur traders thrived around the Great Lakes in the 1630s, where they had shifted operations after depleting the beaver population on the shores of the St. Lawrence River. In 1646, New France exported 33,000 pounds of pelts—a record, it turned out, that would never be topped.¹³ The first setback was the so-called Beaver Wars, a series of clashes between the French and the Iroquois, who, running out of beaver, took to conquering the territory of French-backed tribes. The harm to the French fur trade was considerable. “Never were there more Beavers in our lakes and rivers, but never have there been fewer seen in the warehouses of the country,” began a 1653 entry in *Jesuit Relations*, a collection of field reports from French missionaries. “Before the devastation of the Hurons, a hundred canoes used to come to trade, all laden with Beaver-skins . . . The Iroquois war dried up all these springs. The Beavers are left in peace and in the place of their repose.”

As the Beaver Wars fizzled out, New France’s fur trade gradually succumbed to English competition. Having bled the fur trade dry in New England, in 1670 the British formed the massive Hudson’s Bay Company, whose charter granted it all the land draining into the Hudson’s Bay, an icy body of water where Hudson had died, adrift in an open boat, mutinied by his crew, six decades earlier. With 1.5 million square miles, the company was the world’s largest landowner, and it eventually emerged as the dominant player on the continent. The North

American offshoots of European wars from the late-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century eroded France's territory in the continent, and in 1759, Quebec fell to the English. "It makes little difference," reacted Madame de Pompadour, King Louis XV's mistress. "Canada is useful only to provide me with furs."

To the south, England continued to dominate the fur trade among the American colonies—up to and even through the American Revolution. Although the treaty that ended the war stipulated that the British would evacuate their forts and trading posts "with all convenient speed," they took thirteen years to do so, all the while still trading in the fur-rich region south of the Great Lakes. The United States' nascent domestic fur trade remained just that. Americans, Dolin writes, "had to rely largely on the furs provided by the lands in and around the thirteen colonies, which had already been depleted of animals as a result of more than 150 years of intensive hunting."



The Indians were sensitive to changes in animal populations, and evidence exists that in areas where animal populations were endangered, they stopped hunting. So why did they allow themselves to hunt the beaver to extinction? This is the puzzle examined by two economic historians, Ann Carlos and Frank Lewis, in *Commerce by a Frozen Sea*. To understand why the Indians overhunted, they argue, one must consider the incentives they faced.

Previous accounts of the trade in furs between Europeans and Indians treated Indians as "satisficers," meaning they had a desired level of income and trapped enough beavers to meet that level, and no more. If the price of furs rose, the thinking went, Indians would hold back on trapping since they could get the same number of European goods for fewer pelts. Carlos and Lewis challenge this view, presenting the Indians as sophisticated and rational economic actors who reacted to the rising price of beaver pelts as any self-interested producers would—by getting more.

To prove that the Indians adjusted their trapping effort in response to prices, the authors compare prices and returns at three different Hudson's Bay Company trading posts, each of which was positioned at the mouth of a river on Hudson Bay: Fort Albany, the southernmost; York Factory, 600 miles up the coast; and Fort Churchill, some 150 miles further. Each post received pelts from distinct hinterlands, and each kept meticulous yearly records: the number of pelts brought in, the quality of each lot, the price paid for every type of fur, and the quantity of European goods exchanged for them. From this data—the sort economic historians dream about—Carlos and Lewis construct a fur price index, an overall

measure that reflects how much traders paid Indians for furs.

Also known is the price beaver pelts fetched in the auction houses of London and Paris, which can be compared to the price index. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the company received higher and higher prices at auction in Europe, in part because of increased demand for felt hats there. But how much the company paid the Indians at each post did not always track those rising fur prices. At Fort Albany and York Factory, it did: as European felt-makers bought more pelts, the Hudson's Bay Company traders gave the Indians more goods in return for pelts. But at Fort Churchill, there was no such upward trend.

The difference is explained by the presence or absence of French competition. As the price of furs rose in Europe, French traders began competing more intensely with the Hudson's Bay Company. The *coureurs de bois* would canoe upriver, trading where the Hudson's Bay Company had no presence. This was more convenient for the Indians, who no longer needed to travel as far. When the French began intercepting the trade in the hinterland of Fort Albany, Indians were soon arriving at the post, to the disappointment of the Hudson's Bay Company traders there, "all Clothed in french Cloth."¹⁴

The company dealt with French competition by sending employees into the hinterland, where they tried to persuade the Indians to go all the way to the bay to trade. One-hundred-and-fifty miles upstream from the bay, James Isbister, the head of Fort Albany, built Henley House, "in order to Secure & preserve This Trade."¹⁵ At first, the scheme worked; the Indians made it to Fort Albany, and not in French clothing. But the French traders countered by building outposts even further upriver, and, according to Isbister, by giving "a reward of the Value of five pounds to Indians for the Scalp of every English man they bring."¹⁶ In 1755, the experiment at Henley House met its end in a conflict over the Indians' access to it. Days away from the relative civilization of Fort Albany, the outpost had developed a culture of permissiveness, with the Cree men allowing the traders to keep Indian wives in exchange for, they assumed, the right to use Henley House's amenities (particularly its English food). But when a new, stricter manager took over the post and kicked them out—while still living with their women—they retaliated, massacring all the posts' personnel.

The main strategy the Hudson's Bay Company used to deal with competition from French traders, however, was to outbid them, offering the Indians more guns, blankets, brandy, and beads. This is why the price of furs rose at the two posts where the French had made inroads, Fort Albany and York Factory. But Fort Churchill was much more remote. For the French traders, it was simply too far from Montreal. "Even a doubling of fur prices in Europe was insufficient

to induce a French trade in the Fort Churchill hinterland,” Carlos and Lewis explain. The higher prices paid for pelts, though, were enough to induce the Indians to ramp up their trapping. Although tribes did follow norms about property rights and trespassing, these rules were designed to protect large game animals that formed the bulk of Indians’ diet—not the beaver.

Knowing beavers’ natural population growth, the number of beavers killed by Indians, and the way threatened beaver families compensate for population decline, Carlos and Lewis engage in some mathematical detective work to estimate the historical beaver population in each post’s hinterland. Around Fort Albany and York Factory, where the price paid for pelts rose steadily, they find that the beaver population fell over the eighteenth century. At Fort Churchill, where the price stayed steady, so, too, did the beaver population.

James Isham, the chief trader at York Factory, wondered about the effect of trapping on the stock of beaver. In the early 1740s, he wrote, “Tts a Little strange the Breed of these beaver Does not Diminish greatly considering the many thousands that is Killd of a Year.”¹⁷ His premise was wrong, but his suspicions were correct: the beaver population was in fact falling sharply. In 1730, more than 54,000 skins were traded at York Factory, and Carlos and Lewis estimate the surrounding beaver population to have been nearly 270,000. In 1760, the population plummeted to 140,000, and even though prices paid at the post had increased 30 percent, the Indians brought in less than a third as many skins.¹⁸ The Hudson’s Bay Company soon stopped trading furs at many of its posts, and in 1821, it merged with its rival and moved into the only place left to go: the West.



As the eighteenth century neared its end, America’s fur trade matured, and it, too, shifted its focus to the west. By the turn of the century, St. Louis had emerged as the capital of the Western fur trade and the Spanish-born Manuel Lisa as the city’s most prominent trader. But the man whose name became synonymous with the American fur trade was a butcher’s son from Walldorf, Austria.

John Jacob Astor left Europe in steerage, with just five pounds in his pocket and a case of flutes to sell. Overhearing first-class passengers who worked for the Hudson’s Bay Company discuss their industry, he decided his ambitions lay there, too. Shortly after landing, in 1784, he took a job de-mothing pelts in New York, making two dollars a week plus room and board. He spent his spare time haunting the city’s docks, buying with his small savings any furs he could find. Before long, he had his own fur goods shop, and not much later, his own trading posts. Sixteen years after he had arrived in New York, Astor was worth \$250,000—the

equivalent of more than \$3 billion today.

Astor soon expanded westward, incorporating the American Fur Company in 1808. Below the Great Lakes, around the upper Mississippi, and in the Pacific Northwest it competed with Canadian traders; on the Missouri, with Lisa and other St. Louis traders; and in the Rockies, with the “mountain men” who trapped beaver themselves. The company’s strategy was simple: monopolization. To defeat small rivals, Astor’s behemoth would swoop into a region and overpay for furs until a competitor was bankrupt. What companies it could not destroy, it bought; what it could not buy, it made partners.

Once the company was the only fur-buyer left in a given area, Indians were left with no choice but to accept Astor’s prices for their pelts. Every trading post, in other words, would be a Fort Churchill—the only game in town. (It helped that, in 1816, Congress passed a law banning foreign fur traders.) Dolin quotes the frontiersman Thomas Forsyth recording how this played out among trappers: “The Sauk and Fox Indians . . . are compelled to take goods, etc., of the [American Fur Company] traders at their very high prices, because they cannot do without them, for if the traders do not supply their necessary wants and enable them to support themselves, they would literally starve.”¹⁹ The strategy worked. By the end of the 1820s the Missouri River was, as one study of the Western fur trade remarked, “the private creek of John Jacob Astor.”²⁰ By the 1830s, the American Fur Company had a virtual monopoly on the entire U.S. fur trade.

Astor’s company also bought furs from the southwest, where a small fur trade had been developing, centered around Taos, New Mexico.²¹ The region’s hot climate had created little demand for beaver pelts there (or elsewhere in New Spain), so the untrapped rivers were thick with beavers. But the climate also made the beavers’ fur thinner, and therefore less desirable. The expansion of the fur trade into the American southwest was a testament to the desperation of an industry so dependent on the population of a single animal. “As the number of trappers grew, they had to expand their search for beaver in ever-widening arcs as the areas closest to Taos were trapped out,” Dolin writes. “Later the streams and rivers of the Rio Grande and Pecos valleys were picked clean, forcing the trappers to head north and west, into the present-day states of Colorado, Utah, Arizona, Nevada, and California.”²²

The 1830s marked the denouement of the trade in beaver fur. In Europe, fashions were changing. While vacationing in Paris with his children, Astor wrote home, “I very much fear beaver will not sell well very soon unless very fine. It appears that they make hats of silk in place of beaver.”²³ In South America, pelts of another rodent, the nutria, were beginning to substitute for

beaver fur. But it was trends in North America that really caused the collapse of the industry: there were simply not enough beavers left. In 1830, the owners of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company told the War Department, “this territory, being trapped by both [the Americans and the British], is nearly exhausted of beavers; and unless the British can be stopped, will soon be entirely exhausted, and no place left within the United States where beaver fur in any quantity can be obtained.”²⁴ A fur trapper named William Gordon reported, “The furs are diminishing, and this diminution is general and extensive. The beaver may be considered as extinguished . . . [east] of the Rocky Mountains; for, though few beavers may be taken, yet they are not an object for any large investment.”²⁵ Three years later, another trapper named Ewing Young complained, “I am not catching much beaver but doing the best I can.” After cautioning that mountain men were killing too many beaver, an 1832 government report predicted, “This state of things will, before many years, lead to the entire destruction of the beaver.”

The animal on which his empire rested threatened, Astor decided to leave the fur industry altogether, selling his stake in the American Fur Company in 1834. He turned his attention to Manhattan real estate and, as the city grew, multiplied his fortune. Ironically, the land financed by Astor’s fur fortune was the same land that the Dutch bought from the Lenape tribe in 1626. The sale was part of a long-term trend of tribes relinquishing territory for goods—a trend that, at least in part, can be blamed on the Indians’ declining fur wealth. Unable to sell furs, William Cronon has explained, the Indians had to “turn to the only major commodity they had left: their land.”²⁶

When Astor died at his Upper East Side mansion, in 1848, he was worth \$20 million—the equivalent of 0.93 percent of the United States’ GDP at the time. The number of Indians in the United States numbered in the tens of thousands then, down from the millions before European contact. In Canada, meanwhile, the Indians’ way of life was under threat, too. At the height of the fur trade, Indians enjoyed a more nutritious diet than most Europeans, but by the mid-19th century, the moose and the caribou, like the beaver before them, started to disappear, and the Indians grew increasingly reliant on the Hudson’s Bay Company. No longer were they using beaver pelts to obtain European luxuries. “They began, in fact,” Carlos and Lewis write, “to trade furs for food.”²⁷

Stuart Reid, Associate Editor, Foreign Affairs

Endnotes

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27. Carlos and Lewis, 187



New Netherland: A Dutch Colony In Seventeenth-Century America, Jaap Jacobs. Cornell University Press, 2009. (344 pp.), and *Dutch New York: The Roots of Hudson Valley Culture*, Roger Panetta (Editor). Fordham University Press, 2009. (450 pp.)

Dutch New York: The Roots of Hudson Valley Culture, edited by Roger Panetta, is an accessible and informative collection of diverse essays tracing the Dutch influence on the culture of the Hudson Valley. With an introduction by Russell Shorto, this attractive volume is—not surprisingly—organized around the thesis that Dutch influence was not only important in Hudson Valley history, but lasted far beyond 1664, when the British captured New Netherland and began a long process of Anglicization. The book is divided into four sections: “The Planting” (describing the seventeenth century); “The Persistence of Dutch Influence,” (eighteenth century); “Romanticizing the Dutch,” (nineteenth century); and “Searching for Dutch Heritage” (the early twentieth century). Each section includes three nicely chosen and richly illustrated articles (though most of the illustrations are in black and white, the book also includes two glossy color inserts of large, well-reproduced images). Overall, editor Roger Panetta has produced a somewhat eclectic—but perhaps for that very reason rather fascinating—assortment of articles covering such varied fields as slavery, material culture, art, architecture, literature, and celebrations. Unlike Russell Shorto’s popular *Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan & the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America* (2004), Panetta’s collection makes no extravagant claims. Each essay stands on its own, contributing evidence of ongoing Dutch influence in a wide range of areas.

Also contrasting with *Island at the Center of the World* is Jaap Jacobs’ *The Colony of New Netherland: A Dutch Settlement in Seventeenth-Century America*. Where Shorto’s popular history of New Netherland was dramatic and novelistic, Jacobs’ study is a research tome. Anything a reader wants to know about New Netherland—its governmental and religious structure, its population, its economic base, its relationship with the mother country—is here, though you may have to search for it. Where Shorto based his work on the scholarship of Charles Gehring, Jacobs read all of the original documents and translated all of

the quotations in the book himself. Shorto, a journalist, tells a story; Jacobs, a scholar specializing in New Netherland, writes something very like a textbook. Interestingly, Shorto himself praises Jacobs's book as "essential."

Both *Dutch New York* and *The Colony of New Netherland* reflect a renewed interest in the topics popularized by Shorto, but from very different angles. *Dutch New York*, though written by scholars, feels almost like a coffee-table book, with its large format and typeface. It is possible to dip into this book, exploring different topics according to one's interests. *The Colony of New Netherland* is far denser and more exhaustive within its narrow focus. Each has significant strengths for different audiences. Jacobs's monograph answers any question you ever had about New Netherland; Panetta's collection asks and answers questions you've probably never thought of.

A single comparison: from just the introduction of *The Colony of New Netherland* (titled "A Blessed Country, Where Milk and Honey Flow") one can learn about how the Dutch viewed the colony's geography, soil, climate, flora, and fauna, and such aspects of its Native Peoples as their tribal organization, body and clothing, eating and housing, government and language, religion and character. We learn that the Mohawks were only the most important of several tribes trading furs to the Dutch; that Indian men considered facial hair so ugly that they pulled it out by the roots; that their main food was a corn mush called *sappaen*; that the Dutch had so much trouble understanding Native languages that one believed "that the Indians changed their language every two or three years" (17); and that Dutch men admired the ability of Native American women "to get back to work immediately after having given birth" (17), though they also shared with other Europeans the indignation that "The women are obliged to prepare the land, to mow, to plant, and do everything: the men do nothing but hunt, fish, and make war upon their enemies" (15). Interestingly, Jacobs concludes that the Dutch called indigenous Americans "wilden" primarily because they were thought to have no true religion—"religion, rather than race, was the defining factor" (13). In contrast, William A. Starna's essay, "American Indian Villages to Dutch Farms," in *Dutch New Yorks* focuses on one aspect of Dutch-Native interaction, the transfer of land. Here, Starna argues that, unlike other European powers, the Dutch believed "that native peoples were the true owners of the land and that possession could only be obtained through regulated purchase" (78). He finds that as furs were less available for trade, Indians began to exchange land for trade goods (cloth, axes, knives, kettles and hatchets, as well as guns, ammunition, and alcohol), goods which they had come to see as necessary to their lifestyle. Starna insists that Native Americans were not simply victims of European

trickery, but that they adapted and adjusted “to the maelstrom of change around them” (85)—at least until increasing European population created tensions over boundaries, as when European animals trampled unfenced Indian fields, or when Indian dogs attacked Dutch poultry. However, though Starna may be correct that “For a short period, there could not have been a more mutually advantageous relationship” (87), in the region of New Amsterdam this period was strikingly short, ending with William Kieft’s war of 1640 to 45, only 15 years after the peaceful “purchase” of Manhattan. Is this really so different from English relations with Native Americans in Plymouth or Massachusetts Bay? Jacobs’ view of Dutch/Native relationships is less interpretive and more factual. However, interestingly, his index has no listings for any of the Indian Wars (Kieft’s, the Peach War, the Esopus Wars).

As a distinguished scholar of New Netherland, and particularly one capable of translating early modern Dutch documents, Jacobs provides some interesting new insights into key moments in the history of New Amsterdam, such as those highlighted in Ken Burns’s *New York* documentary film. In that production, the narrator tells the story of how in 1654 the Dutch West India Company directed Peter Stuyvesant to accept Jewish refugees from the Dutch colony in Brazil recently captured by the Portuguese. The story highlights Dutch toleration and welcoming of anyone coming to New Netherland to “make a buck.” Jacobs’ careful unraveling of this episode results in a slightly different interpretation. First, he had already carefully explained that religious freedom in New Amsterdam did not include the freedom to practice any religion other than that of the Dutch Reformed Church in public—it only meant freedom of conscience. Second, he re-translates a line previously thought to mean that the Jews should be accepted into the colony not only on account of “reason and fairness,” but also because of “the large amount of capital, which they have invested in shares of this Company [that is, the Dutch West India Company]” (199). According to Jacobs, this line actually means “the large sums of money for which they are still indebted to the company” (200). In fact, the company had used Jews in their Brazilian sugar colony to collect taxes, which had not been collected because of the Portuguese revolt. Therefore, the company hoped these merchants might establish themselves in New Netherland in order to trade, generate profits, and pay the company the lump sum they had previously promised as tax farmers. As for the vaunted toleration of either New Amsterdam or its namesake in the Netherlands, Jacobs points out that Jews were not allowed to practice crafts or keep shops, and one Jacob Cohen was refused the right to open a bakery (202). In fact, he argues that “colonists, city government, the ministers, and director and council were united

in their anti-Semitism” (202).

However, the organization and flow of Jacobs’ text fails to call attention to such insights. This particular revelation appears in a chapter on “Burghers and Status,” under the subheading “Jews.” The arrangement of the book is more encyclopedic than narrative and the reader has no sense of following a story line. Some digging is required to uncover the many gems within the covers of this book. Yet, because Jacobs has such expertise in his subject, all sections of his study provide valuable information for those looking for any aspect of the history of New Netherland.

Within Panetta’s collection, some essays deserve special mention. (In particular, I am highlighting those that inspired most student interest in my *Empire State* course in New York State history.) Dennis Maika’s “Encounters: Slavery and the Philipse Family: 1680-1751” tells a complex story of the “intertwined” relationships between two generations of the powerful Philipse family and their slaves (35). According to Maika, patriarch Frederick Philipse “knew his slaves personally and chose their tasks deliberately to suit his advantage” (51). In contrast, based on their reactions to the New York “Slave Conspiracy” of 1741, Maika argues that Philipse’s descendants were either ignorant of or indifferent toward their own accused slaves, one of whom was burned at the stake (57). In the following section, “The Persistence of Dutch Influence,” Ruth Piwonka’s “‘I could not guess what she intended to do with it’: Colonial-American-Dutch Material Culture,” introduces the reader to the everyday objects found in Dutch homes between the 1640s and the mid-eighteenth century. Based on both inventories and objects in local museums, this article helps students envision how the Dutch and their descendants lived in the Hudson Valley. The next section, “Romanticizing the Dutch,” includes a fascinating essay on “Imaging Dutch New York: John Quidor and the Romantic Tradition” by Bartholomew F. Bland. Never having heard of Quidor, most readers will enjoy learning about this imaginative painter of Washington Irving’s characters. Finally, the last section of the book includes a fine description of “The Hudson-Fulton Celebration of 1909” by Roger Panetta himself, as well as Cynthia Koch’s discussion of “Franklin Roosevelt’s ‘Dutchness’: At Home in the Hudson Valley,” where we learn that FDR was the official historian of the Town of Hyde Park from 1926 to 1931.

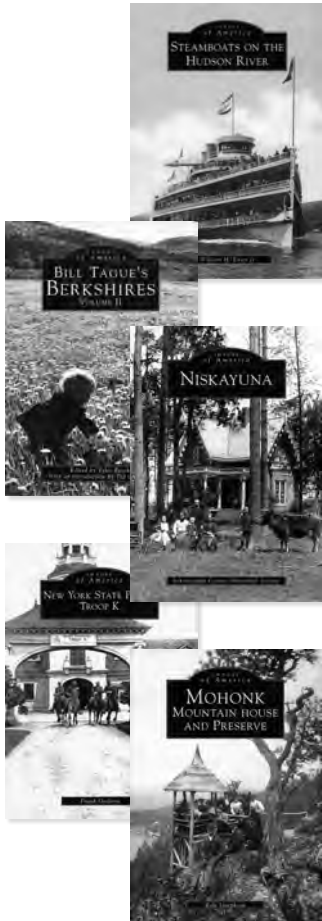
For readers whose taste for the history of Dutch New York was whetted several years ago by Shorto’s *Island at the Center of the World*, I would recommend either of these books. Jaap Jacobs’ *The Colony of New Netherland* is perfect for those interested in depth and a focus on the early years of the Dutch in the Hudson Valley, while Roger Panetta’s *Dutch New York* will be a better choice for

those who prefer breadth and are more interested in the Dutch cultural influence over time.

Susan Lewis, State University of New York at New Paltz

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

*The Hudson River Valley in the Images of America Series:
A Selection*



Cain, Richard. *Eleanor Roosevelt's Val-Kill*. 2002.

Cheli, Guy. *Sing Sing Prison*. 2003.

Cheli, Guy. *Putnam County*. 2004.

Ewen, William H. Jr. *Steamboats on the Hudson River*. 2011.

Ghee, Joyce C., and Joan Spence. *Harlem Valley Pathways: Through Pawling, Dover, Amenia, Northeast, and Pine Plains*. 1998.

Ghee, Joyce C., and Joan Spence. *Eleanor Roosevelt: A Hudson Valley Remembrance*. 2005.

Godere, Frank. *New York State Police Troop K*. 2007.

Josephson, Robi. *Mohonk Mountain House and Preserve*. 2002.

Lukacs, George H. *Poughkeepsie Potters and the Plague*. 2001.

Poll, Edward, and Karlyn Knaust Elia. *Saugerties*. 1997.

Resch, Tyler, ed. *Bill Tague's Berkshires: Volume II*. 1998.

Rittner, Don. *Albany*. 2000.

Rittner, Don. *Albany Revisited*. 2008.

Schenectady County Historical Society. *Niskayuna*. 2009.

All titles published by Arcadia Publishing, originally based in New Hampshire and South Carolina and now with offices in Chicago and San Francisco as well.

Samuel Eliot Morison, the great chronicler of the northern voyages of exploration of the New World, once blamed local historians for the lack of information on John Cabot's historic voyage to America in 1497. Morison's frustration arose in the fact that the only "proof" of the sail was a record of Cabot's departure from Bristol port on the *Matthew*, and nothing else. Since Cabot's sail constituted the

entire basis for the English claim to North America, this was a significant lapse in the historical record. Morison, however, might rather have chastised King Henry VII, on whose authority Cabot sailed, rather than blame the locals; at least they recorded when he left.

Future chroniclers of the Hudson River Valley will have comparatively little to complain about when it comes to the contributions of local and vocational historians to the overall historical record. Such a wealth of chapbooks, pamphlets, brochures, and other ephemera have poured forth from the local level—especially since the revival of local history interest during the Centennial of 1876—that the farmer's old axiom about the contentment of a Sunday meal might apply: we have such a sufficiency of materials that any more might almost constitute a superfluity. True, some of the contributions strain credulity—we have an example under review here—yet by and large serious historians should tread carefully in writing off the local contributions as unworthy. And some have been honored for their contributions—Louis A. Brennan in archeology and Alf Evers in regional history come to mind.

The publishing of these tracts is another area filled with potential pitfalls. Often the individual contributions are done on such a shoestring, or in such haste or fervor as to create errors of exaggeration that cloud their credibility. An unsuspecting author might fall prey to an exploitive printer who only sees the eager patrons waiting at the door. And there is the occasional publisher who is holier than history in the presumptions of what to include on title pages or in the bodies of the texts that are reprinted; these examples should be shunned as dangerous to reliable research. (Entropy is as degrading an affliction of this profession as of the universe itself—arising in this case from too much familiarity with the materials at hand.) On the other hand, Purple Mountain Press, Black Dome, Overlook Press, SUNY Albany, Syracuse and other university presses, Sleepy Hollow Restorations, Wilderstein Preservation and other in-house and museum publishers, and government publication arms have demonstrated just how useful and attractive the sharing of local history can be.

Local publishing is rarely a lucrative market, yet one of the more successful ventures has been Arcadia Publishing's Images of America series. Each volume represents a tight, closely structured, detailed photographic look at individual communities, counties, special interest subjects, organizations, and institutions. Arcadia contracts with and guides local historians and historical societies—official and otherwise—in pulling together huge numbers of images to fit a 128-page format that can be devilishly difficult to complete. An attractive design and reasonable prices (ranging from \$16.99 to \$21.99 per volume) make the series

desirable for collectors. The reliability of the materials depends on the authors' pedigrees and astuteness, and fortunately for this series those who create the volumes are usually adept and careful as to their choices of materials.

Of the 7,500 titles in the firm's local history series (which includes Images of America, Postcards of America, Then and Now, Black America, Campus History, Images of Rail, Images of Baseball, Images of Sports, Images of Aviation, Legendary Locals, and Arcadia Kids), 670 concern New York State subjects. Of these, 100 of the Images of America titles are on Hudson Valley subjects—yet only one of them has “Hudson Valley” in the title (the Ghee-Spence volume included here).

How well do the Images of America volumes fare? Is there a value to this kind of local input into the historical record? How much can we trust the series for veracity and historical accuracy?

In a sense, the popularity of the series gainsays the concerns, since the bulk of the sales go to the local communities and readers who know something about the history and have seen the materials already—often in family albums. The format is friendly and refreshing, even when the images are not very interesting. Overall, I found the twenty or so volumes that I perused closely (fourteen are listed here) to be somewhat uneven in provoking my interest, usually because the images or the subjects were not so appealing to me, but when they did click, I was enthralled. I ran across a few errors in fact, yet these were ones which I would term forgivable—wrong presumptions about the larger historical context, an apparent lack of access or knowledge of the latest scholarship on a subject, and the occasional bias due to local presumptions or desires. I am not an expert on all of these subjects, however, and may not have seen other errors of fact that any individual volume might contain.

Some in the series were perplexing, if not uneven. For example, Richard Cain's volume on Val-Kill was excellent and included more than 200 images, many of them published for the first time, while Joyce Ghee and Joan Spence's *Eleanor Roosevelt: A Hudson Valley Remembrance* was remarkably thin—and that was surprising given their backgrounds with the Dutchess County Historical Society and the quality of their earlier *Harlem Valley Pathways*. The readers seem to catch on, however; Cain's volume was backordered, meaning it sold well from the start.

Another good seller was Poll and Elia's *Saugerties*, which I must confess in the interest of fair play that I participated in to some extent. I served as a fact-checker for Elia and edited the captions. I also felt—and I don't think this is particularly biased—that *Saugerties* was one of the better ones that I saw in this

series. The images were quite refreshing, even for local aficionados. Like the Cain volume, it has gone through more than one or two printings.

Of course, it is hard to compare the aesthetics of a local community's contribution to books about Mohonk Mountain House or steamboats on the Hudson, where the images are so rich and diverse. Robi Josephson's *Mohonk* takes full advantage of the scenic Shawangunks and the beautiful old Mountain House setting, although I always wondered why so few Mohonk books depict the interiors of that rustic palace. William Ewen Jr.'s *Steamboats on the Hudson River* provides, in addition to great images, the history of steam on the Hudson in its various guises—the steamer as passenger and freight hauler, night boat and Day Line, excursion and ferry vehicle, and for small day boat commercial and recreational purposes.

Ghee and Spence, like Elia, make good use of images in their ramble through the Harlem Valley towns of Pawling, Dover, Amenia, North East, and Pine Plains. Here one gets a sense of the wealth of visual materials that lie in the local venues. *Niskayuna* is like that, too, its six chapters laid out in a clean, easy format that takes the reader across the geography, industry, and notable neighborhoods of the town's history; having an aqueduct that carries the Erie Canal over the Mohawk River and the site of the Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory in town certainly adds to the visuals potential. One problem with the Schenectady County Historical Society volume, however, is its number of photographs of buildings that replaced the historic buildings that are reported upon; the facts in the captions offer the only interest for these pages.

Perusing Frank Goderre's *New York State Police Troop K* tests one's attention span in its depictions of uniformed policemen on page after page. *Troop K* is not dull or boring—don't get me wrong—and certainly the last few pages depicting the worn and faded images of those who lost their lives in the service add an unforgettable poignancy. There are also images of criminals being booked, accidents investigated (including a plane crash), and some of the changing technology that brought State Police work into modern times. Yet only a few images of West Point are included (none of Highland Falls), and other areas under Troop K's purview are dealt with on a limited scale. The three pages of President Roosevelt's funeral, for example, include one striking image—the entire troop in formation in honor of the president at Hyde Park—but others of passing interest only.

Goderre spends ten pages on the East Peekskill concert riot of 1949, including a photograph of an officer securing baseball bats taken from the crowd of veterans who came to protest “peacefully,” and two of rioters being arrested. His

opening photograph shows his sympathies: a small crowd of smiling veterans (and presumably their wives) holding the notorious “Wake Up America Peekskill Did” poster that showed their pride in what they had done. Goderre states that the police agencies “made every attempt at keeping the event peaceful,” whereas most of them did nothing when the riot broke out. He does not mention the relationship of the concert-goers to several Jewish and socialist camps in the Putnam Valley area whose members were reviled by the local bigots who started the riot. Goderre adds some new information, however, or at least a different slant, in criticizing “the insensitivity of the promoters” in holding the concert at the Hollowbrook Country Club, near four cemeteries where World War II casualties were being buried. He implies that that is what riled up the rioters, who had not turned out when Paul Robeson appeared for a similar concert two years earlier.

Sing Sing Prison has an Images of America volume all its own by Guy Cheli. Here, as in the state police volume, the starkness of the subject limits the potential for spectacular photographs—no one is caught going over the wall or being Tommy-gunned from one of the scary towers (not that that ever happened)—but that does not limit the power of these images. The chapters move from the construction and early years to the tenure of Lewis Lawes and brief sections on the Rose Man and the electric chair.

The prison was built by Elam Lynds, arguably the worst prison warden in American history, by men dressed in prison stripes for the first time. Cheli’s information about these first three years is sketchy, when as many as 900 men worked on the prison under the watchful eyes of thirty armed “keepers.” The men worked with downcast eyes, absolutely forbidden to speak, and lock-stepped to and from the tent barracks where they rested. The warden’s thievery in the sale of quarry marble and granite off-site and his cutting of winter rations for sale on his own to the local market are not recorded. An image of a waterboard torture mechanism is included, but Cheli errs in dating its onset; Lynds used the device as well; it was banned before his tenure was finished and then reintroduced by the State Legislature in 1845. He was finally fired for his cruelty.

An image of Alexis de Tocqueville would have been appropriate, since he and Gustave de Beaumont visited Sing Sing (and de Tocqueville later interviewed Lynds in Syracuse) in preparing a volume on the American prison system for French readers. Two photographs from 1909, one of Hessian Lake and one of a ferry waiting at Sing Sing to transport a work crew to Bear Mountain, cover the short-lived effort to build a new prison there, but these are pedestrian pictures compared to what is likely available at Bear Mountain.

The Lewis Lawes section covers much more than the warden and his produc-

tive years—and includes only three small images of the man—and serves as a tribute to the progress at Sing Sing in the decades before World War II. The section on wife-murderer Charles E. Chapin, the “Rose Man of Sing Sing,” discusses his impacts on the look of the prison in the text but no roses stand out in the few images included. There is no picture of Lawes’ wife Kathryn, “the Angel of Sing Sing,” so beloved by the inmates that Lawes opened the south gate of the prison the night before her funeral and allowed the men to march, unguarded, to her wake and return without incident.

The electric chair was used at Sing Sing from 1891 to 1963 on 614 men and women, including the Rosenbergs in 1953. Although the chair always looks the same, Cheli is resourceful in depicting the changes to death row structures over the years.

Sing Sing is limited by the subject itself. Cheli’s better book is the *Putnam County* volume, and one of the best books in the series for depicting a small, manageable geography. He provides individual chapters for the seven towns in the county (Carmel, Mahopac, Kent, Southeast, Putnam Valley, Philipstown, and Patterson) and an excellent short introduction by then-Kent town supervisor Bil Tilipane. Cheli also makes good use of a postcard collection owned by Denis Castelli. The volume includes some haunting images of what Putnam County looked like before New York City built its northern reservoirs, and is generally much more varied when it comes to images than any of the other volumes I have seen. The Cold Spring and West Point Foundry area of Philipstown is especially well represented.

A truly odd entry in this series is the *Poughkeepsie Potters* volume, wrongly entitled because the author confuses yellow fever with the plague. This is a book that strains belief. George H. Lukacs’ claim as to the importance of stoneware pottery in the Early National period growth of Poughkeepsie begs documentation, as does his assertion of “thousands of hours of research” into the subject; no bibliography is included. There is actually no factual demonstration at all of his assertion that yellow fever epidemics in New York City in the late eighteenth century were connected with the stoneware pottery business in Poughkeepsie. He depicts one large jug dated October 6, 1798, and then makes the preposterous claim that it was made specifically to be included in the donations of goods and foodstuffs sent from Poughkeepsie to the city on that day. It’s a completely preposterous claim because the donations list includes “1 tub and 1 pot of butter” among the huge number and variety of items sent by William Emmot and James Bramble, who were members of the relief committee but not potters. The idea that this pot was actually made beforehand for this occasion, instead of coinci-

dentally on the day the donations were sent from the Poughkeepsie wharf, is a classic example of the fallacy of inductive reasoning.

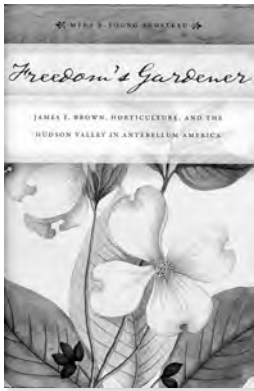
The volume is filled with claims and presumptions that are so preposterous its many beautiful images of historic pots cannot be trusted for the information the author provides concerning them. Several of the images are fillers that have no relationship to the book's ostensible subject. It is clear that Mr. Lukacs is impassioned by the subject, and that is often a problem in local history because the "historian" tries too hard to raise the subject to the level of his or her anticipation rather than accept the facts for what they are. The application of historical commissions made up of eager amateurs in local communities can, if not tempered by honesty and good sense, result in similarly overblown and far-fetched interpretations of local landmarks.

Tyler Resch's presentation of *Bill Tague's Berkshires Volume II* is included in this review, even though not about a Hudson Valley subject, as an object-lesson on what can be done with the Images in America volumes. Here is a rich snapshot of this neighbor region at a classic moment in American history, the end of the Eisenhower era. Tague was an award-winning photographer and columnist for Pittsfield's *Berkshire Eagle* in the 1950s and '60s. He was known for his "Silly Signs" images of "Berkshires sign blight," a generous selection of which is included here, and for his concern over the onset of the Dutch elm blight on his favorite trees. He also happens to have captured the diversity and beauty of this small regional neighbor of the Hudson Valley.

The Images of America books, warts and all, constitute a fine addition to the local history record. The authors are well versed in their subjects, have access to many of the best local images, and are usually judicious in the factual information they provide. The series boosts local heritage, benefits historical societies by furthering an interest in local history, and generally speaks well of our region, our nation, and the record we have amassed over the American centuries. Samuel Morison, were he alive, might approve of these lost and almost forgotten tidbits of eras soon gone, moments that once were, a people's story revealed, and secrets foretold. No John Cabot lurks within these pages, but the local record they collectively provide is a full one.

*Vernon Benjamin's The Hudson River Valley: A History
will be published by Overlook Press in 2013.*

***Freedom's Gardener: James F. Brown, Horticulture, and the Hudson Valley in Antebellum America*, Myra B. Young Armstead. New York University Press, 2012. (356 pp.)**



In *Freedom's Gardener*, Myra Armstead tells the fascinating story of a rather remarkable man. Born in 1793, James Brown spent the first decades of his life a slave in Maryland. An ambitious young man, Brown exploited opportunities to acquire skills and hire out his own time in Baltimore, where he ultimately earned enough to purchase his wife's freedom. Frustrated in his efforts to negotiate his own manumission, James fled to New York City in 1827. He found employment as a domestic in the household of Daniel Verplanck, who endeavored to assist James in purchasing his freedom. The emancipated slave originally served as waiter, coachman, and manservant but came to devote more and more time to the gardens at Mount Gulian, the Verplanck family's estate at Fishkill Landing.

Brown, however, became far more than a garden laborer. As a master gardener, James not only maintained the estate's exquisite gardens but also made purchases, marketed produce, conducted business, and supervised the estate's garden and farm staff. His income, supplemented by his wife Julia's earnings as a domestic, afforded the couple a modest but comfortable lifestyle. A property holder and taxpayer, James was among the few African-American men qualified to vote in antebellum Dutchess County.

Brown attended local lectures, popular amusements, exhibitions, and meetings, and travelled to such destinations as New York City, Buffalo, Saratoga, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. He engaged in local Whig politics and participated in a rich associational life that included membership in different religious and civic organizations. James carefully nurtured personal and professional relationships with the Verplancks and prominent white neighbors, but he also remained active in the African-American community. Brown assisted his black neighbors in their attempts to purchase property and procure a separate African-American burial ground (and supported abolitionist Gerrit Smith's program to settle free African Americans in the Adirondacks).

The Browns' personal networks extended not only to the free black community in New York City, where James and Julia maintained relationships with the prominent Varick and Hamilton families, but also to their native Maryland. By the time of his death in 1868, the ambitious master gardener at Mount Gulian

had achieved a degree of economic success and a measure of social respectability available to few people of color in antebellum America.

Most of what we know about James Brown comes from the valuable ten-volume diary Brown kept between 1829 (shortly after his arrival at Mount Gulian) and 1866. The journal itself is at once both illuminating and disappointing. The overwhelming majority of entries provide detailed insights into horticulture and the maintenance of the estate at Mount Gulian but reveal little about Brown's personal life, his political and social activities, or local events. There is frustratingly little material in the diary on black life in the Hudson Valley—or on any topic other than horticulture. The omissions in Brown's diaries can be startling; although he maintained his diary until two years before his death in 1868, Brown made not a single reference to the Civil War.

Armstead, however, very effectively places Brown's diary into its proper historical and cultural context. Despite the journal's glaring omissions, she explains how the keeping of such a diary over the course of almost four decades was fraught with meaning. Diary writing assumed tremendous cultural significance in Early America—especially for a free man of color in the antebellum North. For Armstead, the recording of the most mundane events was purposeful. Brown's voluminous record of plantings, his meticulous accounting of business transactions, and his detailed observations of weather and other natural phenomena all reveal an ambitious man demonstrating self-discipline and responsibility in his daily affairs. The very form and content of Brown's diary reflect the life a former slave committed to achieving economic success, asserting manhood, and claiming the rights of citizenship in antebellum America.

Armstead does impressive detective work to fill in the many gaps in Brown's diary. She takes the reader along on her investigation, posing questions, testing hypotheses, pursuing leads, and even acknowledging dead ends. Her expert sleuthing in local records and censuses has uncovered tantalizing bits of evidence pertaining to James's life in Maryland, including a fascinating letter he apparently wrote to his owner explaining the reasons for his flight.

Still, despite her careful reading of Brown's diary and her discovery of important documents in the historical record, Armstead must largely reconstruct the wider worlds in which Brown lived. *Freedom's Gardener* is as much a book about slavery and the African-American experience in Maryland and a study of antebellum life and culture in the Hudson Valley as it is a biography. At times, Armstead must incorporate so much to supplement the diary that Brown disappears from the narrative altogether. For example, while it is almost certainly true that Daniel and Gulian Verplanck exercised profound influence on Brown's life,

the author's detailed discussion of the Verplancks' political sensibilities and her examination of state and national politics in the decades before the Civil War contain few references to Brown himself.

Many of Armstead's conclusions are based on sketchy and circumstantial evidence and remain unavoidably conjectural. Cryptic diary references to individuals, plantings, exhibitions, purchases, election returns, civic holidays, church attendance, association meetings, fugitive slave cases, and local emancipation day celebrations are highly suggestive but hardly definitive. As Armstead herself acknowledges, at times circumstantial evidence raises as many questions as it answers. Were James Brown, Anthony Chase, and Anthony Fisher really the same person? Did James and Julia have children in Maryland? Was the "D Ruggles" who visited Brown at Mount Gulian in August 1836 the black abolitionist from New York City or the New Windsor horticulturalist? What connection, if any, was there between James Brown of Mount Gulian and James Brown of Somerset County, Maryland? Many questions remain unanswered.

At the same time, however, it is in critically reflecting on the fragmentary historical record in imaginative ways that Armstead is most provocative. For example, the notion that Mary Anna Verplanck's gift to Brown of a popular published travel account of Africa reflected a mutual antipathy to slavery is purely speculative but certainly intriguing. Moreover, by reconstructing life in the Hudson Valley during the Early Republic, Armstead gives meaning to the most mundane events recorded in Brown's diary. Brief diary references to the purchase of a Bible, payment of a newspaper subscription, and attendance at a local temperance meeting assume significance once Armstead analyzes the intimate connections between associational life and middle-class respectability, moral improvement and racial uplift, and temperance reform and abolitionism. Even a seemingly innocuous record of a watch purchase becomes meaningful once the reader is led to understand how nineteenth-century Americans were beginning to conceive of time in fundamentally new ways.

Armstead brings Brown to life best when examining his position as master gardener at Mount Gulian. By exploring the cultural and political significance of gardens and horticulture in the Early Republic, she explains the significance of the extensive record of plantings, cuttings, and seed purchases found in Brown's diary. Americans of the post-Revolutionary generation embraced agricultural improvement as a means of controlling and managing the natural world and promoting material progress. Gardening, moreover, provided men with opportunities to construct a masculine identity and demonstrate middle-class virtue and respectability.

As Mount Gulian's master gardener, James Brown became an active participant in the national agricultural movement. Although race barred him from membership in professional organizations, he cultivated close informal relationships with renowned horticulturalists such as Andrew Jackson Downing and skilled servant-gardeners throughout the region. He immersed himself in scientific and professional literature, engaged in his own botanical experiments, and participated in horticultural exhibitions. Indeed, Brown's expertise earned him access to an exclusive craft guild. At a time when the mechanization of workplace, increasing labor competition from native and foreign-born workers, and intensifying racial discrimination eroded the economic position of the vast majority of free black workers during the decades preceding the Civil War, Brown's career as "self-made man" was that much more remarkable.

The reader looking for a detailed study of free black life in the Hudson Valley in the decades before the Civil War will find *Freedom's Gardener* wanting. Brown was unrepresentative of the broader African-American experience in many respects, and too much of his life remains obscure. However, Armstead has composed far more than a simple story of a free black man in the antebellum North. By placing James Brown into wider political, economic, social, and cultural contexts, she has provided a rich and nuanced glimpse into a pivotal moment in time. Brown's fascinating life story from slavery in Maryland to freedom in the Hudson Valley provides extraordinary insights into a time and place where work, class, race, gender, freedom, and citizenship were all assuming new meanings.

There is always the risk of reading too much into a document as narrow and oblique as Brown's diaries. However, through her meticulous research, creative use of sources, and imaginative analysis of Brown's diary, Armstead has provided historians with a wonderful example of how to practice their craft.

Michael Groth, Wells College

Ulster County New York: The Architectural History and Guide,
William B. Rhoads. Delmar, NY: Black Dome Press Corp., 2011. (356 pp.)



Part of the fun of traveling around Ulster County, where I've lived for the past forty years, is discovering or rediscovering its historic or otherwise remarkable buildings—whether the early stone houses in Kingston, the state's first capital, the Catskills' picturesque mountain lodges, the ruins of its nineteenth-century canal, or the traces of its former bluestone road. But to my knowledge no one has attempted to research and gather this panoply of architecture into a single book. That is, until just recently, when William B. Rhoads, an emeritus professor of Art History at the State University of New York in New Paltz, published the result of several decades of his trips up and down the main and back roads of the county.

Rhoads' new book, *Ulster County, New York—The Architectural History and Guide*, describes 325 of his finds and contains many surprises. One of these surprises is how many buildings are likely to be unknown even to longtime residents (almost half were unknown to me). Another surprise is the sheer number of stories and amount of history of every aspect—social, economic, cultural, or political, as well as personal—that can be unearthed from a region's architecture.

Whatever has happened in Ulster County since its first European settlers arrived in 1652, it seems to have required a building. The first ones were probably very temporary, but within a short time, the Dutch settlers in present-day Kingston began to erect houses of the local limestone, some of which survive today and are amply represented in Rhoads' book. His previous book, *Kingston, New York – The Architectural Guide*, a sort of forerunner of this one, was devoted solely to the architecture of the county seat. In this new, more encompassing book, he repeats a few of the most important Kingston buildings, such as the Old Dutch Church, and adds structures not covered in his earlier book.

Unlike the eastern side of the Hudson, which was dominated by a few families with large land grants, Ulster County was home to independent farmers and tradesmen. One of these was Matthew Persen, whose stone house in Kingston, recently restored, reveals burn marks indicating that it was set on fire during the Second Esopus Indian War in 1663. The house was set afire again in 1777, when Ulster County's support for the Revolution earned the enmity of the British. Stone houses not unlike the Persen House, clustered in uptown Kingston, also are scattered throughout the county, and Rhoads finds in them many stories to tell.

During the nineteenth century, the villages of Ellenville and Rosendale grew up along the Delaware and Hudson canal, which was built to transport coal from Pennsylvania to the Hudson. Rhoads includes one of the remaining sections of canal locks in High Falls, where there is also a canal museum. As local mining, brick making, and other industries developed, owners and workers built places to live that ranged from the opulent to the humble. Rhoads includes houses that offer examples of almost every American residential style. We might mention the Federal-style house of John Sudam (circa 1812) in Kingston, home of the Friends of Historic Kingston and now a period-furnished museum, and also the Greek Revival mansion known as Aberdeen (circa 1850) that overlooks the Hudson in the Town of Esopus. The Archibald and Helen Russell House on Route 9W, also in Esopus, is a textbook example of the Italian Villa espoused in the mid-nineteenth century by such tastemakers as Alexander Jackson Davis and Andrew Jackson Downing. There are similar examples of the Second Empire, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, and later styles.

Ulster County's western part is occupied by the central and northern Catskill Mountains. In its southern part rises a smaller mountain ridge, the Shawangunks. In the nineteenth century, the Catskills and Shawangunks became popular tourist destinations and a frequent subject for the outdoor painters of the Hudson River School. Magnificent resort hotels were built and a few have survived, including the Mohonk Mountain House in the Shawangunks, to which Rhoads devotes a four-page history. The county's mountains and lower ridges also became the locale for industries in leather tanning and bluestone and cement quarrying. In the Shawangunks, a group of families lived from picking huckleberries and making barrel hoops. One of Rhoads' choices is a rare surviving shack where huckleberry pickers once lived.

Around a curve on Route 9W in Saugerties stands a small Greek temple-like church that hundreds, perhaps thousands of cars pass every day. The visitor who stops to enter the church will find a surprise—a beautiful stained-glass window designed by William Morris, chief proponent of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The window was ordered in the early 1870s, the first commission for a church window from Morris's design firm by an American client. The main glass panel was designed by Edward Burne-Jones, the most famous painter in England during the late Victorian period.

Rhoads' view of architecture encompasses all kinds of structures. Church architecture, always meant to inspire or represent some religious feeling, is well-represented, ranging from Kingston's highly visible Old Dutch Church to a Mission-style Jewish synagogue in Ellenville to an intentionally plain and

undecorated Friends Meeting House in the Town of Plattekill. Rhoads' interest stretches out to include the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge, now known as the Walkway Over the Hudson, currently perhaps the county's most famous work of architecture (if also shared with Dutchess County across the river). There are other bridges here, too, of more modest fame but still carrying traffic. There are industrial buildings, including former factories that once processed cement or homogenized milk. There are firehouses and railway depots and both large and small school buildings. There are small, jewel-like libraries and several grim and formidable prisons. There are works of landscape architecture, including Opus 40, the great bluestone landscape creation of sculptor Harvey Fite. There is a boathouse designed by Julian Burroughs, the son of nature writer John Burroughs. The more or less streamlined railroad diner, the common man's eatery of the 1930s, has survived here and there in the county, a few still in operation.

Deep in the Catskills, not far from the border with Delaware County, Rhoads came upon an unusual work of architecture. His elegiac description is provided underneath the photograph he took:

Two retired c. 1950s school buses, at least one a GMC product, were converted to serve as inexpensive housing in this remote mountain setting, much as worn-out trolley cars were made into cottages earlier in the century. Here masonry was filled in where rubber tires once turned. Stove pipes still emerge from one bus body, but the pair is slowly succumbing to the forces of nature. A similar Chevrolet school bus is preserved at The Museum at Bethel Woods to help tell "the story of the '60s & Woodstock," but its psychedelic paint job is in vivid contrast to the drab paint of the pair on Cross Mountain Road.

Rather than presenting buildings chronologically, the author has more helpfully grouped them by proximity under each of the county's individual towns. The towns are arranged alphabetically, beginning with the remote and mountainous Denning and ending with the more accessible Woodstock, historic home to a famous art colony. For each town, Rhoads provides a brief history, a feature that may appeal to readers like this reviewer, a longtime Kingston resident who is somehow unfamiliar with much of the rest of the county.

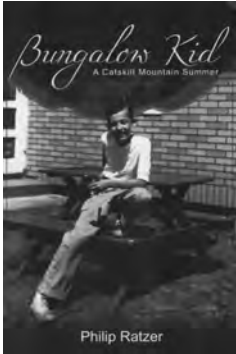
Each work of architecture is illustrated in some way with at least one image, often a recent or historic photograph and occasionally with a historic postcard or architect's drawing. In some cases, a feature of the building is shown, such as the garden. The author seems to have found an image that either best characterizes the building or provides a new insight.

Regardless of his academic background, Rhoads' careful yet witty style exudes the enthusiast and not the pedant. At the same time, the reader becomes acquainted (or reacquainted) with those architectural terms that one can never remember (is the gable part of the roof or part of the house underneath the roof?). Readers familiar with the area will want to look for their favorite buildings and there's a good chance they will find them. They are also certain to discover buildings that they never knew existed. Some of Rhoads' selections are not accessible to the public; usually because they are not viewable from any public road. These are helpfully identified with an asterisk at the beginning of the building description. And some of the buildings no longer exist, lost because of neglect or fire or some kind of redevelopment. These "no longer extants" are included as part of the county's architectural history and perhaps to provide a public record that they once existed. The number of sources and amount of research required to tell the stories of over 300 buildings is reflected in notes at the rear and in an extensive bibliography.

Ulster County, New York—The Architectural History and Guide, focusing on a geographically large and historically important county, offers a way to see one region of America as the sum of its many works of architecture and the stories that go with them. This review offers only a glimpse of the book's wealth of information and the very diversity of architectural specimens that the author has collected may make you rethink what is meant by "architecture." Like his Kingston book, this volume will give local preservationists a new appreciation for their own efforts as well as a serious weapon to use in defending Ulster County's historic heritage. For those who live farther away but within driving distance (Ulster County is less than 100 miles from New York City and only fifty miles from Albany), this book offers an opportunity for some scenic and fascinating back-road adventures.

Lowell Thing, Friends of Historic Kingston

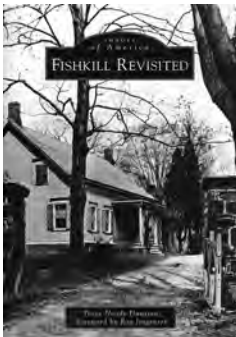
New & Noteworthy Books Received



Bungalow Kid: A Catskill Mountain Summer

By Philip Ratzler (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010).
112 pp. \$14.95 (paperback) www.sunypress.edu

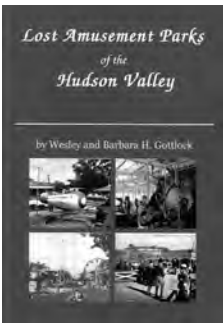
A memoir of author Philip Ratzler's experience as a city kid spending summer upstate in the Catskill Mountain village of Loch Sheldrake. Ratzler recounts his experiences throughout that summer as well as the people and places that made the experience memorable. Told with the youthful vigor of a twelve year old enjoying the last of his youthful summers, *Bungalow Kid* is a throwback to a simpler time and a nostalgia trip for any of the thousands like Ratzler who made a trip out of the city for summer vacation in the 1950s.



Images of America: Fishkill Revisited

By Tracy Nicole Dunstan
(Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012).
128 pp. \$21.99 (softcover) www.arcadiapublishing.com

The Dutchess County town of Fishkill has a rich history dating back to the seventeenth century. Using historic photographs, postcards, and even drawings, Dunstan captures the people and places that have made up Fishkill's history and continue to do so today. The latest in the ever-growing *Images of America* series, and with a forward by Fishkill Historical Society member Roy Jorgensen, *Fishkill Revisited* sheds light on the sites and faces of the town's legacy both past and present.

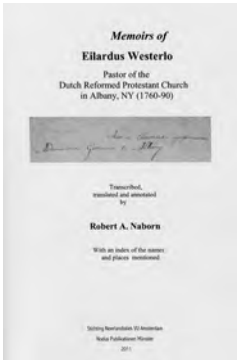


Lost Amusement Parks of the Hudson Valley

By Wesley and Barbara H. Gottlock
(New Windsor, NY: Gottlock Books, 2011).
178 pp. \$19.95 (paperback) www.gottlockbooks.com

Beginning in the late 1800s, the Hudson River Valley was home to a number of amusement parks bordering the Hudson River, starting in Manhattan and going up to Kinderhook in Columbia County. *Lost Amusement Parks* captures these now demolished parks which were once

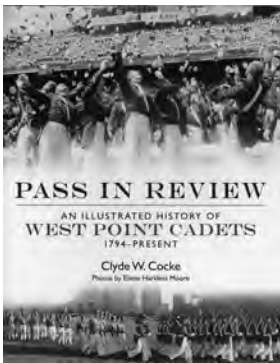
complete with giant swimming pools, trolley rides and roller coasters. Using photographs, postcards, and advertisements to enhance the story, the authors provide detailed histories of the properties that became the homes of these parks, as well as the circumstances surrounding their eventual demise. Though mostly forgotten, these smaller parks were the forerunners to the giant theme parks of today, and a unique and exciting part of Hudson River Valley history.



**Memoirs of Eilardus Westerlo:
Pastor of the Dutch Reformed Protestant Church
in Albany, NY (1760-90)**

Transcribed, translated and annotated by Robert A. Naborn
<http://dnb.ddb.de>

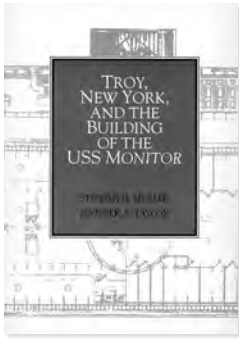
A collection of translated memoirs of Dutch Pastor Eilardus Westerlo, this book captures the unique perspective of a religious leader guiding a discordant church through the tumultuous period of the American Revolution. Through his position as a leader in the Dutch Reformed Church, Westerlo traveled throughout the area to deliver sermons, and both a proponent of and influential in the development of education for the region. Through Robert A. Naborn's research and translation, these memoirs are now available in English for the first time.



**Pass in Review: An Illustrated History
of West Point Cadets 1794 – Present**

By Clyde W. Cocke (Long Island City, NY:
Osprey Publishing, 2012) 192 pp. \$29.95 (hardcover)
www.ospreypublishing.com

To most, the image of well-dressed Cadets lined up in formation is certainly impressive. In *Pass and Review*, Cocke greatly expands on that image and provides context to the Cadet experience both historically and in the present day. Through the use of both archival images and lovely color photos by Eilene Harkless Moore, over two-hundred years of West Point history is seamlessly navigated while also filling in details that make the story both enriching and tremendously informative. From the first Cadets on the late eighteenth century, to Cadet life today, this book covers the wide array of experiences that come with attending West Point.

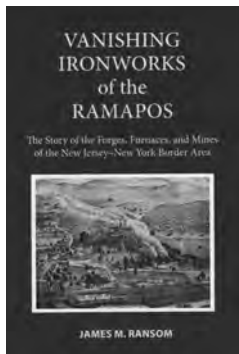


Troy, New York, and the Building of the USS Monitor

By Stephen H. Muller and Jennifer A. Taylor
(Hudson Mohawk Industrial Gateway, 2009) 36 pp.
\$8.95 (paperback) <http://hudsonmohawkgateway.org>

This slim but informative book published by the Hudson Mohawk Gateway provides essential material for students, educators, and the general public alike in regards to the invention, production, and service of ironclad ships beginning with the *USS Monitor* and *CSS Virginia*.

It also discusses the political maneuvering behind the manufacturing process, and introduces Cornelius Bushnell, John Flack Winslow, and John A. Griswold as the businessmen who staked their reputations on the development of the *Monitor*. Without their timely efforts, the historic battle at Hampton Roads would have ended quite differently, and that would have periled the Union's eventual triumph in the war. With its many illustrations, specifications, and a complete bibliography, it makes an excellent place to begin learning about all aspects of the *Monitor* and the ways in which it changed modern naval technology.



Vanishing Ironworks of the Ramapos: The Story of the Forges, Furnaces, and Mines of the New Jersey – New York Border Area

By James M. Ransom
(Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011)
400 pp. \$39.95 (paperback) www.cornellpress.cornell.edu

For over two-hundred years, iron mined and manufactured in northern New Jersey and southeastern New York made a significant contribution to the industrial development of the United States. Though little information exists regarding the specific mines in these regions,

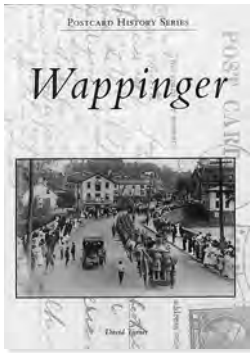
Ransom's exhaustive research provides details about the ironworks and mines that were previously unknown. Using photographs, maps and historic documents when available, this book both adds new facts to the story of ironworks and corrects misconceptions and errors from previous books on the topic. Originally published in 1966 and newly back in print, *Vanishing Ironworks of the Ramapos* is an informative book for those interested in industrial history and the contribution it made to the building and defending of the United States.



Lifeblood: Woodstock Poetry Society Anthology

Edited by Trina Porte (Woodstock, NY: Chickaree Press, 2011).
86 pp. (softcover) www.woodstockpoetry.com

These works by Woodstock Poetry Society members capture the human element within the written word. Offering a broad array of themes—from the changing seasons to the often heartbreaking nature of human interaction—the poems provide great insight into the subtleties of life.



Postcard History Series: Wappinger

By David Turner
(Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2011)
128 pp. \$21.99 (paperback) www.arcadiapublishing.com

This annotated collection of photographs dating back to the 1870s portrays the diversity of this Dutchess County town. The images capture the village of Wappingers Falls with its assortment of industries—mills, a clothing factory, and a print works—as well as the agricultural and riverfront hamlets of New Hackensack, Red Oaks, Chelsea-on-Hudson, Hughsonville, and New Hamburg. Included are photos of historic buildings and homes and the individuals who populated them.

Andrew Villani

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The Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist College is the academic arm of the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area. Its mission is to study and to promote the Hudson River Valley and to provide educational resources for heritage tourists, scholars, elementary school educators, environmental organizations, the business community, and the general public. Its many projects include publication of the *Hudson River Valley Review* and the management of a dynamic digital library and leading regional portal site.

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