



View of the Hudson River from Wilderstein Tower.

Wilderstein: The Creation of a Hudson River Villa, 1852-1897

by Cynthia Owen Philip

Set so high on a bluff above the Hudson River that on a clear day the rift in the headlands thirty miles to the south can be seen from its exuberant five-story tower, Wilderstein stands a resplendent example of America's Queen Anne style architecture. Its intricately framed verandahs, decorated gables and rich interiors capture the playful creativity of the 1880s. The walks and gardens, laid out by the noted landscape architect Calvert Vaux, together with the gazebos, carriage house, ice house, potting shed and Gate Lodge speak of the pleasant life that was—and still is—lived at Wilderstein.

The original dwelling was an Italianate villa, built in 1852 by Thomas Holy Suckley. He had just come into a substantial inheritance left by his father, George Suckley. George had emigrated to the United States from Sheffield, England, just after the Revolutionary War, as an agent for a manufacturer of hardware—adzes, teapots, ship's compasses, surgical instruments and even toupee pinching irons. His interests soon extended from Maine to South America

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Miss Margaret Lynch Suckley confronts herself in a mirror, ca. 1895. Born at Wilderstein on December 20, 1891, Miss Suckley continues to reside there as a life tenant, having donated the property to Wilderstein Preservation in 1983.

and included shipping as well as commerce. By the time he died in 1846 he had parlayed these enterprises into extensive holdings of real estate concentrated in New York City and in Rhinebeck, New York.

George's first wife, Hannah Lang, died shortly after their first child was born. Soon after, he married Catherine Rutsen, who had inherited extensive lands in northwestern Dutchess County from her father who was a direct descendant of the powerful Livingston clan. George and Catherine had seven children. Only two married, and only Thomas had children. Thomas's wife was Catherine Bowne of Rhinebeck. Of their three children, only the second son, Robert Bowne, survived them. Robert took possession of Wilderstein—and the family fortune—on his father's death in 1888. Within a year he had transformed it into the grand Queen Anne mansion that rises so elegantly from its spacious lawns today.

Splendid as it is, Wilderstein was built primarily as a place to raise a family. Robert and his wife, Elizabeth Philips Montgomery, also had seven children, six of whom lived to spend much of their adult life there. Friends and relatives visited frequently.

What is remarkable about Wilderstein today is the deep sense of continuity it conveys. The property has been in Suckley ownership for over 138 years. The house contains the family's bicycles, doll carriages, telescopes, opera coats, photograph albums, watercolor sketches, letters, diaries, wills and account books as well as their fine furnishings, portraits and books. Even more important, Margaret Lynch Suckley, the eldest daughter of Robert and Elizabeth, born in 1891, still lives at Wilderstein. She presides over its tea table with wit, zest and grace just as her mother and her grandmother did before her.

The Italianate Villa

When, in 1851, Thomas Holy Suckley decided to build a villa overlooking the Hudson River, he was forty-two years old, well-educated, well-traveled, recently married and wealthy enough to live the leisurely life of a country gentleman.

Thomas attended Washington College in Hartford; Connecticut. Combining family business and pleasure, he sailed around the Horn to Valparaiso, Chile, in 1834. In 1838, he travelled to the Columbia River via the Sandwich Islands, as Hawaii was then called, and, in 1848, he made the grand tour of Italy, France, Holland and Britain. When at home, he spent much of his time in New York City, living at the family house, 103 St. Mark's Place.

Thomas's marriage to Catherine Murray Bowne on June 25, 1850, united two large, landed Rhinebeck families. Indeed, they shared a grandmother, Phoebe Carmen Rutsen Sands, making them half cousins. Both had strong connections with New York City. Catherine's ancestor was John Bowne, one of the earliest settlers on Long Island. Her great uncle Robert Bowne established a stationery and general merchandize store on Pearl Street in 1775. (Bowne and Company flourishes as printers today; it is the oldest business still operating under its original name in New York City.) Equally important, both were devout Wesleyans. From the verve and affection of Thomas and Catherine's correspondence, it is evident that theirs was an exceptionally happy match; she was his "kitten" and his Kate; he was her "dear Tom."

The handsome estate left by George Suckley was diligently managed by Thomas's older brother, Rutsen, who gave him a basic allowance for everyday expenses with extra stipends when special circumstances arose. Because Rutsen, who never married, was affectionate as well as competent, this system does not seem to have caused serious friction. In 1851 Thomas could count on a respectable three thousand dollars a year.

There is no record of where the young Suckleys lived during their first year of marriage. In the spring of 1851, however, they rented Linwood Cottage from Dr. Federal Van Der Berg and staffed it with a cook and a coachman/handyman brought up from New York City. The cottage, the first in the Gothic style designed by Alexander Jackson Davis, was on the Foxhollow property, high above Vanderberg Cove in southwest Rhinebeck. Letters and journals indicate Catherine and Thomas were thoroughly delighted with their situation. Nevertheless, it was not long before they decided they should have a house of their own. Their main requirement was that it have a view of the river. The beauty of the Hudson was compelling. Moreover, to have a riverbank setting had become the height of fashion. The convenience of the new railroad that promised frequent service between New York City and Albany was an added inducement. Although Rhinebeck would continue to be his principal residence, Thomas did not intend to give up his New York City connection.

Despite the Suckleys' and Bownes' vast real estate holdings in Dutchess County, none of it overlooked the river. Thomas would have to buy. After having considered a property in Hyde Park and the old Kip house in the hamlet of Rhinecliff, he had the good fortune to be offered 32 1/4 acres situated just north of Vanderberg Cove. The land belonged to Mary Rutherford Garrettson, the only

daughter of the Reverend Freeborn Garrettson, a prominent American Methodist, and his wife Catherine Livingston Garrettson, the sister of Chancellor Robert R. Livingston, whose great estate, Clermont, was nearby in Columbia County. “Cousin Mary” was only distantly related, but the Garrettson and Suckley families had long been intimate. Their initial bond was their strong Wesleyan faith. Mary’s mother, it is said, introduced George Suckley to Catherine Rutzen; her father had died in the Suckley’s New York house. The property, referred to in the deed as Homestead Farm though later called Wildercliff, had been part of the Beekman patent that came into the Livingston family through Mary’s grandmother, Margaret Beekman Livingston. Because she was the last of her line—she was an only child and a spinster—Mary was happy to sell her north field to a trusted family friend.

The site was one of the most beautiful on the east bank of the Hudson River. It possessed all the “rich and varied charms” extolled by the great landscape architect, Andrew Jackson Downing, whom Thomas so much admired. That the land was largely ill-suited for farming, because of its steep bluff and ravines, was an advantage. It had been most recently used to graze sheep and, with the exception of some hedgerow cedars, there were few trees to obstruct the long view down the river, so wide at that point it resembled a lake. Across the river, to the northwest, rose the purple-blue Catskill Mountains and the spires of the town of Kingston. To the north and east was the well-kept estate called Ellerslie, once Livingston property but then owned by the New York City merchant, William Kelly.

On August 14, 1852, Thomas signed an agreement to pay \$4,837.50, or just over \$150 an acre for the land, a reasonable price, the practical Rutzen told him, characteristically adding: “if you have the quantity indicated, there will be comparatively little new fence to be made and kept up afterwards.”

John Warren Ritch’s Design

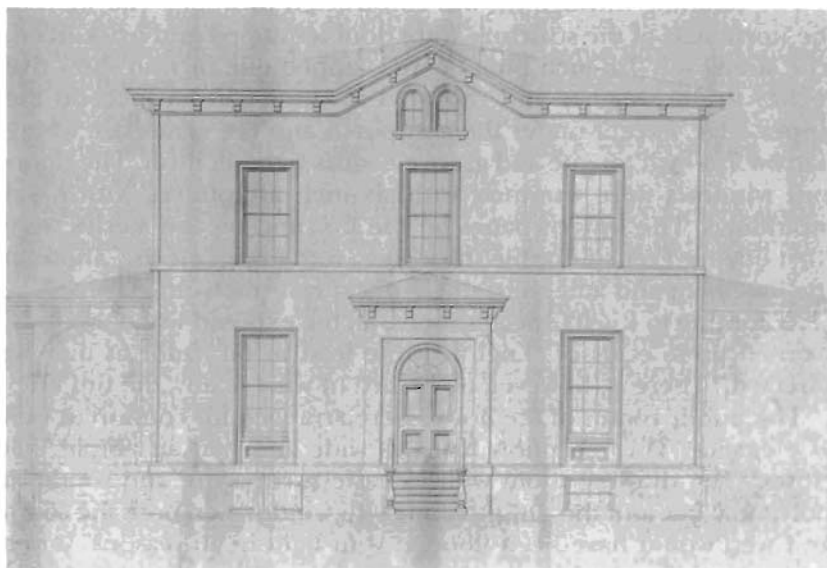
Thomas immediately engaged an architect, the young John Warren Ritch, who had made substantial renovations for Rutzen on a family owned property at 3 LeRoy Place in New York City. That Thomas chose to have an architect at all was in itself a measure of his seriousness. Excellent house plans, complete with carpenters’ and masons’ specifications, were readily available. Moreover, builders were not above pirating the designs they had worked on. There is, for instance, every indication that the Bowne’s Hill Top Farm in

the eastern section of Rhinebeck was copied from Alexander Jackson Davis's designs for the Delamater house in the Village of Rhinebeck. That Thomas chose a New York City architect, when Davis and Downing's partner Calvert Vaux was active in the area (Downing had tragically died in a steamboat disaster that July), is perhaps an indication of his reliance on Rutsen's advice. Among the fine architecture and landscaping books at Wilderstein are leaves from Ritch's pattern book, *The American Architect*, which, in imitation of Downing and Vaux, presented styles ranging from Gothic and Italian to Elizabethan and rustic.

Born in Putnam County, New York, in 1822, Ritch had been practicing architecture in New York City for six years when he was engaged to design Thomas Suckley's house. The style which Suckley chose was the Italianate, which Ritch described as "singularly appropriate for Country residences and ornate villas besides affording ample range to combine the useful and the beautiful. . . . It admits of rectilinear forms for the main parts of a Building, and of curvilinear ones for the embellishment of Doors, Windows & cornices. The Turret or Square Tower, is peculiar to Buildings of this style; and no feature can be introduced with more advantage for architectural variety." Perhaps it reminded Thomas of Italy where, his letters indicate, he admired the countryside far more than the galleries and churches. Perhaps he was influenced by Downing, who had recommended the Italianate style as "remarkable for expressing the elegant culture and variety of refinement of the retired citizen or man of the world . . . not wholly the spirit of country life nor of town life, but a mingling of both."

No paintings or photographs of the residence Ritch designed for Thomas have been found. However, Ritch's plans, elevations and specifications have been preserved in the Suckley archive. (The draftsmanship of the drawings is superb with heavier ink lines to indicate shadows and lovely pink, ochre and grey green washes.) Thomas's daybooks, account books, and checkbooks also provide invaluable information, as do the many artisans' and suppliers' bills.

Ritch's original plan for the house was a rectangle, 40'4" on the east and west sides and 43'10" on the north and south sides. At Thomas's request for more space, he extended the shorter dimension two feet so that it measured 42'4", making the plan almost square. The house was two stories high with a low "Tuscan" roof resting on moulded right-angle brackets. A broad flight of five steps on the east side led to a two-bay entrance porch with a bracketed roof, supported by square, paneled columns. The bays formed by the columns were



North Elevation of Wilderstein, 1852. Drawing by architect John Warren Ritch. Courtesy of Wilderstein Preservation.

inset with curved arches. The three-inch-thick double doors were painted and, in the fashion of the day, grained to simulate oak. Adorned with a fanlight, the doorway was balanced in the adjoining bay by a six-over-six window, a modestly asymmetrical arrangement that Ritch would have introduced to provide variety. A verandah with pillars matching those of the entrance porch, but lacking its arches, wrapped around the south and west sides of the house, taking advantage of the superb views of the river.

The service entrance was on the north side. Its porch and fanlight doorway, though smaller than the main entrance, are detailed to match it.

Fortunately, Ritch's drawing of the north elevation has survived intact, and those of the east and south elevations, though fragmented, are readable. The windows on the first floor of the south elevation extended to the floor and were double-hung with fifteen lights, six-over-nine, to give access to the verandah and the views. The windows on the second story were evenly spaced, unlike those on the first which were slightly asymmetrical. All had six-over-six lights. Above them in a low gable were a pair of small round-arched windows.

The building throughout was constructed of wood. The walls of the north half of the structure were double-framed and brick-filled. The siding was 7/8-inch pine boards, lapped one inch to show five inches to the weather and rabbeted to show half an inch on the upper edge, except under the east porch and the verandah, where narrow 7/8-inch tongue and groove boards were set flush. The doors and windows were trimmed with six-inch architraves with band mouldings. The windowpanes on the first and second stories were "first quality, French double-thick glass, free from defects." Those in the basement and attic were single-thickness American glass.

According to Ritch's specifications, all the exposed wood was to be painted three coats of "English white lead in oil, color as may be directed." There is, however, no record of what, if any, the tint was.

The public rooms of the house were arranged for comfort as well as elegance. The reception hall was wide and had an ample "hat closet." The drawing room with its eastern exposure and southern polygonal bay and the dining room with windows on both the south and west would have been flooded with light in all seasons. When the wide sliding doors were open, the space was over forty feet long. Each had a fireplace. Interior shutters provided additional protection from cold winter winds as well as from hot summer sun.

There were four bedrooms, two dressing rooms, a bathroom and linen closet on the the second floor. The master bedroom was in the southeast corner, taking advantage of morning sun. It had two windows, one over the front porch and one over the verandah roof. Doors connected it with the dressing rooms, each of which had outside windows. In the south and east walls were fourteen-inch-deep, round-arched alcoves to receive the bed and the bureau, made possible by the unusually thick exterior walls.

The southwest bedroom had three windows, two to the west and one to the south. It also had bed and bureau alcoves. The bedroom in the northwest corner had two windows facing west, and the northeast bedroom only one window facing north, the east window having been incorporated into the master bedroom's dressing room.

The bathroom was centrally positioned in the house and could be entered through the south dressing room as well as the hall. It had a bathtub and a water closet. *Deafening*—strips of wood covered with plaster—was added to the beams below so that the flowing water in the plumbing would not resound throughout the house.

Two small servants' rooms, each with one tiny window facing south, occupied two-fifths of the attic. The rest was storage space.

The kitchen was in the basement, connected to the butler's pantry

above by a three-tiered dumb waiter. This was an old-fashioned arrangement that had been out of favor for some time. The laundry was in the southwest area, its northern wall skewed to give a window to the kitchen pantry. The east half of the basement was given over to two cellars. One contained a furnace which would prove a disappointment.

Even for the “Tuscan” Italianate style, this was a subdued design. There were no towers, turrets, balconies or setbacks to heighten the effect of light and shade on the exterior walls and to give the varied skyline, so prized at that time. The decision was undoubtedly Thomas’s, for the rendering provided in *The American Architect* to illustrate Ritch’s version of that style has a splendid projecting tower and little balconies as well as an arched entrance porch, bracketed roof, paneled chimneys and floor-level first-story windows. The relative sparseness could not have been a question of economy, but rather a reflection of Thomas’s and Catherine’s more conservative tastes. Thomas would pay eighty-five hundred dollars—more than twice as much as Ritch’s more elaborate, though smaller, prototype. In fact, in floor plan it was in many ways like the Federal-style Sands and Schuyler houses, built in Rhinebeck in 1794 and 1795, which were square with slightly asymmetrical window placement. Mary Garrettsen’s Homestead Farm, built in 1799, was also a simple square house.

Building the Villa

Henry Latson, a Rhinebeck carpenter, was the builder and construction supervisor. T. Bird, originally brought up from New York City to work on Wyndcliff, a massive brick mansion on the river south of Wilderstein, was the mason, and D. Whipple the plasterer. Thomas himself contracted for the plumbing with C.N. O’Hara of Poughkeepsie and with the carpenters responsible for paneling the bath tub and fitting up the wash basin. Thomas also arranged for the installation of the house bells.

At least fourteen artisans and laborers worked on the project. The recorded costs would come to \$8,503.43—\$4,922.48 for materials (\$1,250 for the lumber provided by Albert Richards) and \$3,580.95 for labor. In those days, when only the rare skilled workman commanded three dollars a day and many received only one dollar a day, this was a substantial expenditure. However, backed by the family fortune and Rutsen’s warm approval, Thomas could easily afford it.

On September 23, 1852, Thomas wrote triumphantly in his leather-bound record book: "Commenced digging out the cellar for the new house." To assure proper drainage, a far larger hole than the building's dimensions was dug and partially packed with sand. The foundations were sixteen-inch-thick brick, plastered one inch on the interior. The timber arrived at the Ellerslie dock or the nearby Rhinecliff dock in early October. By then the cornerstone and drains were laid and the workers' shanty built. Work progressed through the winter on a barn and stable located to the east of the house, and an ice house, located to the northwest of the house, as well as on the dwelling. Thomas was pleased to record that the ice house was filled on January 31 with ice taken from the stream near Linwood Mills.

Nevertheless, Kate, who was expecting their first baby towards the end of June, had doubts that the new house would be habitable before autumn. "For all this," Thomas confidently declared in a February 24 letter to Rutsen, "I rather think the Month of May will not pass, before we are snugly stowed, perhaps in a *dressing room*." Kate was, of course, right. In early April, while visiting her mother, she consoled Thomas: "I was sorry to hear of the suspension of work for a time at the new dwelling & can imagine Mr. Latson's annoyance when he is so desirous of pushing on the work." Then she wistfully added: "It does seem an age since we left our Cottage House—but we left without regret. I wish the new place was done and that we were settled in it very nicely and all the bother of fixing, and arranging over."

Work stretched on through the summer. Rutsen Jr. was born on July 3. The wonderful event, Thomas noted in his daybook, was celebrated with biscuit and cake all around. On July 8, he bought a silver hairbrush for the "little stranger." The same day he received 440 feet of red cedar for the house closets.

Among the bills for August were: lightning rods, \$50.28; two marblized iron mantles, \$26.00; plumbing, \$400.00; and stair rail, newel, and balusters, \$49.06. In September, carpets and tapestry were ordered and 720 pounds of Jewel's pure white lead in oil, \$61.60, including cartage. Robert Thompson, a tinsmith, was paid \$390.35 for a variety of materials and tasks ranging from leaders, registers, gutters, valleys, filling walls with brick, tin roofing, and a No. 3 furnace, to mending a metal teapot, 13 cents.

At last, on November 4, Thomas noted with jubilant brevity: "Commenced Housekeeping at 'The Cedars.'" At the end of January 1854 he was equally pleased to state: "Paid Latso & O'Hara pd. in full." It was a successful winter.

No records have been uncovered that suggest Thomas sought the help of a professional landscape architect to embellish the grounds. That work seems to have proceeded informally. The soil from the cellar excavation was probably used to level and extend the south lawn and, in 1853, Thomas hired a Mr. Dunnelly as gardener at eleven dollars a month. In April 1854, he recorded having “transplanted evergreens” and “dropped a few Mountain ash seeds,” and in May he “planted the Larch, a Gift of MRC” (Mary Garrettson) to supplement the wild locusts and cedars which grew on the rugged bluff. In 1854, he ordered four sugar maples, two balm of Gilead poplars, two weeping willows and two white elms.

It was probably at this time that Kate and Thomas decided to change the name of the property from The Cedars to Wilderstein. Romantic names were then in vogue and certainly Wilderstein was more distinctive. It is mock German for “wild man’s rock” and refers to an outcrop at the water’s edge of the property on which is incised a petroglyph, perhaps of Indian Chief Ankony, and the letters *AR*, believed be those of a Dutch settler and a record of an exchange of land dating back to 1686.

In any case, Thomas’s focus at this time was on building up the farm. It would never become more than a gentlemanly hobby, but it was important to him. In 1854 he planted a long, rectangular orchard on the east-west slope south of the house that contained ten varieties of apples—among them pippins, Rhode Island greenings, northern spies, baldwins, siberian crabs and Esopus spitzenbergers—nine varieties of peaches, seven of pears, seven of plums, six of cherries, and two quince and two apricot trees. In the following years, his daybooks record such farming events as the planting of peas, beets, radishes, turnips, corn, potatoes and other vegetables, the insemination of cows and horses, the collecting of eggs, the killing of hogs, turkeys and chickens, and the leasing arrangements for several tenant houses.

Thomas’s family was also flourishing. On June 3, 1856, Kate presented him with another son, named Robert Bowne after her distinguished ancestor. Their daughter and last child, Kittie, was born on September 18, 1860. Thomas’s joy with his children (and his pleasant relationship with his brother) shines forth in a teasing letter from the elder Rutzen. “Now let me know the meaning of those cabal-like letters (*TSVP*). Do they mean Tom Suckley Vice President or Tom’s Son Very Pretty?” It is also reflected in his daybooks which, kept for business, are nonetheless sprinkled with family items—“a wheel barrow for RS, Jr.,” “a silver cup for Kittie,” and “tuition for Rutzen’s

school”—probably DeGarmo’s English and Classical Institute in Rhinebeck, which Robert and Kittie later attended.

The following charming note from Kate’s sister Caroline to young Rutsen, who was almost four years old, is typical of the affectionate visiting back and forth between relatives.

I was very glad to receive your dear little letter and to hear from you all about home. I understand you went to pay Henry Olin a visit a few days since and saw his locomotive, but it was too bad that it had no smoke. I have been making little Robert 3 yellow frocks and I should not be surprised if his mama was to give him a pair of little black shoes very soon that dear little brother will learn from Rutsen how to walk, and then how glad he will be. After that when you bring him to Hill Top, Cassie and all will get in a wagon and Sampson will give us a ride. You must have a long whip. Whip does Sampson good as he is lazy sometimes. When it gets warm and pleasant and you come to see me, we will have a hoop and run about and go in the garden and pick the raspberries. Currants, too. Give little brother a kiss and tell him that Cassie loves both her little boys very dearly.

The railroad made it easy to travel to and from New York City, and Thomas took advantage of it with fair frequency to look over his real estate holdings. Although his brother Rutsen and his unmarried sister Mary spent much of the summer in Rhinebeck, they still maintained the house at 103 St. Mark’s Place as a family center. Kate sometimes accompanied Thomas to attend the theatre and concerts or to shop or simply to visit her aunts and cousins in Brooklyn. The focus of their life, however, was Wilderstein, their myriad relatives—the Sands, Bownes, Hunts, Olins, as well as the Suckleys—and their neighbors, William Kelly and Mary Garrettson, who especially loved children; Mary was a dwarf and about their size.

During the summer of 1865, Rutsen sent Thomas a copy of Andrew Jackson Downing’s *Cottage Residences* with a note stating that he did so merely as a study bearing on an addition to the house Thomas was contemplating. The children were growing and they needed more space. That addition never came to be. On December 30, 1865, the twelve year old Rutsen was accidentally killed. Wilderstein, the font of so much happiness, became “that desolate dwelling” with appalling suddenness. “I cannot express or speak of my irreparable loss,” wrote Kate to her sister-in-law Mary, as she gave sensitive instructions about how to speak to Thomas about the tragedy.

Life, of course, continued. Robert was sent to the Hudson River Institute in Claverack, New York, easily reached by train. He wrote frequently and returned for vacations. From there he went on to

Wesleyan College, where he became a member of Alpha Delta Phi and worried his father by earning demerits for cutting classes and “making noise” in the evenings, sometimes by playing his violin. Kittie attended the DeGarmo Institute and briefly went away to boarding school. However, her health was delicate, and she was much at home where she occupied herself by painting watercolors, collecting recipes and attending to the flower gardens.

Then death struck again and again. Thomas’s sister, Mary Suckley, died in 1872 and Rutsen in 1875. Thomas had hardly adjusted to those breaks in the fabric of his life when, on January 3, 1879, Kittie succumbed to tuberculosis. Kate died in grief on September 27, 1879. Mary Garrettson also died that year.

Thomas never recovered. He went through the motions of life, sometimes with pleasure, but the shaky penmanship of his letters suggests an abiding sorrow. It was, of course, mitigated by his love for Robert. He also formed a tender relationship with Grace Sands Hunt, a cousin a few years younger than Kittie. Grace lived at Wildercliff (Homestead Farm), which Thomas had acquired after Mary Garrettson’s death and rented to her father. Thomas gave Grace Kittie’s watch and her sled. She sent him chatty notes and picked wild strawberries for him.

However, most of Thomas’s time was taken up managing and keeping records of the family property. Rutsen had left securities and real estate appraised at \$369,999.69—a fortune since, at that time, the United States was in the throes of a severe depression. Thomas did not inherit quite all of it, for some was settled on his sister Sarah, who had been confined to an institution for the insane in Pennsylvania for many years, and a small part went to his half-brother John’s four granddaughters. But the bulk of it was his to do with as he wished.

Characteristically, Thomas’s wish was to live frugally just as he always had, giving substantial sums to worthy charities and helping neighbors in imaginative ways. When the daughter of one of Rhinebeck’s doctors died, he expressed his condolences by cancelling the bereaved family’s financial debt to him. On another occasion, he sent his men to mow the playground at the small local school. He also gave money to the minister to improve the rectory of the Methodist retirement home, which had been established at Mt. Rutsen, family property in northern Rhinebeck. “Please accept thanks for larger windows, an airy room, a southern-exposure and all of which these imply of mental cheer and bodily comfort to one who is ‘shut in’ the whole year around,” wrote the minister’s grateful wife. “Sir, you have brightened all my future. Every day is a thanksgiving day.”

As the years passed, Thomas remained kind and generous, but he became more and more of a recluse, carefully tended by loyal servants.

Robert Bowne Suckley's Queen Anne Villa

After his graduation from Wesleyan College, Robert Bowne Suckley spent most of his time in New York City. He bought law books and rented an office with the idea of becoming a lawyer, but he did not practice law in earnest. He gave his father a hand with family business, and, like many young men of his background, devoted himself to the strenuous social life of the city. At Wilderstein he became a devotee of the winter sport of iceboating. When he went abroad in 1883, the occupation he listed on his passport was "gentleman." He enjoyed the varied pleasures of London, Dublin, and Paris, but, as the detailed account in his travel diary makes clear, the adventure that most exhilarated him was his ascent of Mt. Blanc from Chamonix in France. Mountain climbing—indeed, all mountain sports—would become a lifetime passion.

Soon after his return, Robert began courting Elizabeth Philips Montgomery. She was, wrote one of his aunts, "very young and very sweet." They were engaged in September 1884 and, on October 22, they were married. She was twenty years old; he was twenty-eight.

Elizabeth's father, Henry Eglinton Montgomery, had been the rector of the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation in New York City. He had died in 1874 leaving a family of nine children and a capable, strong-minded widow. Like Robert, Elizabeth could trace her ancestry to the Beekmans and the Livingstons. Her ties to these great estate-owning families were even closer. Her great-great-grandmother was Margaret Beekman Livingston, who built Clermont in Columbia County; her great-grandmother was Margaret Livingston Tillotson, whose country seat, Linwood, overlooked the Hudson just south of Wilderstein. (The Montgomerys were a Maryland family, unrelated to Janet Livingston Montgomery, widow of General Richard Montgomery, who built Montgomery Place in Annandale-on-Hudson.) It was an excellent as well as a loving match. During the summers, Elizabeth and her family often visited Lynch and Olin relatives at Glenburn, still another Livingston estate, situated south of Linwood. Robert was especially close to Elizabeth's brother Lynch, who joined him in a number of business dealings as well as in sowing some wild oats.

For their wedding trip, Bessie, as she was called, and Robert went to Europe where they stayed two years, living handsomely on the five thousand dollars a year Thomas had agreed to give them. From time



Thomas Holy Suckley, from a miniature painted anonymously. Courtesy of Wilderstein Preservation.



Robert B. Suckley, from an photograph taken in 1884, the year of his marriage to Elizabeth H.P. Montgomery. Courtesy of Wilderstein Preservation.



Elizabeth H.P. Montgomery, from a photograph taken shortly before her marriage to Robert B. Suckley in 1884. Courtesy of Wilderstein Preservation.

to time, Thomas could not resist cautioning them against extravagance, but, otherwise, their correspondence was witty, warm and frequent. To have a new daughter in Bessie was obviously a great joy to Thomas.

While they were living in Switzerland, their first child, Rutsen, was born. A second child was on the way when they returned home in the autumn of 1886. Surprisingly, instead of settling at Rhinebeck with a second home in New York City, they rented a house in Orange, New Jersey, a fashionable and rapidly growing commuting suburb. The house proved impossible to heat—a problem which occasioned many misery-loves-company letters between father and son. Just before the birth of their second child—Henry Eglinton Montgomery, born on February 18, 1887—they bought a larger and better built house just down the street at 211 Highland Avenue in Orange. It was simply “exquisite,” with turrets, balconies, and beautifully inlaid wood floors, as well as “a dear little conservatory with a fountain,” Grace Sands Hunt sighed in her diary. Grace also reported “a very swell dinner” with twelve or thirteen courses after which Robert played the violin accompanied by Bessie’s sister Nettie. Then, everyone danced.

To maintain this fine style of life, Robert needed more money than his father was willing to give him. On January 1, 1888, he obtained a franchise from the Heisler Electric Company of St. Louis, Missouri, to use their system of generation and distribution to bring electricity to West Orange. Operations began in May with his brother-in-law, Lynch Montgomery, a partner in the venture.

All this activity in New Jersey did not place a barrier between Robert and his father. Robert seldom visited Wilderstein, but they continued to meet in the city for pleasure as well as for business. They had such an appointment for February 8. Early that week, however, Thomas suffered what was either a heart attack or a stroke. Robert rushed to Wilderstein, but all he could do was keep vigil. Thomas Holy Suckley died at three o’clock in the afternoon of February 9, 1888. Robert was profoundly shaken by his father’s sudden death, but the fact remained that with the exception of the small trust settled on some cousins, he now possessed the family fortune. Conservatively estimated, his income was at least six times what it had been.

It seems that Robert and Bessie never considered remaining in New Jersey, pleasant as their life there was. Within the month they were making plans to move to Wilderstein, not, however, before the house had undergone radical alterations. With a growing family—a third baby was on its way—they desired more room and modern conveniences such as electricity, a working furnace, and adequate

servants' quarters, including a kitchen on the same floor as the dining room.

They also desired a stylish house. Too plain for the age in which it was built, Thomas Holy Suckley's sober Italianate villa was hopelessly plain for the 1880s. Tastes had changed—or rather evolved—since 1852 when the choices in vogue were Gothic or Tudor or Italianate. The new rage was Queen Anne, a highly eclectic style that combined architectural embellishments from varying traditions within a single structure. Like their house in New Jersey, the remodeled and enlarged Wilderstein would be in the exuberant Queen Anne style.

First introduced by the British, Americans' first close contact with Queen Anne architecture came during the influential Centennial Exposition, held in Philadelphia in 1876. Britain's contribution to the fair was a residence and an office building with half-timbered gables, corbelled chimneys and glittering banks of windows. The elegant buildings provided a high degree of comfort. The most striking interior feature was the residence's baronial entrance hall with its carved fireplace, rich friezes and panelling, grand open staircase and cozy nooks. Stunned by their novelty, crowds flocked to see the British buildings. Critics wrote about them, and the popular magazines printed countless pictures of them. The Queen Anne fever caught hold.

This did not mean that Americans lost respect for their own architectural heritage. On the contrary, they became even more proud of it. At the exposition, the "New England Kitchen of 1776" drew almost as much attention as the British residence and office. This revival of interest in the colonial past was not rigidly antiquarian, but rather was a stimulating and broadening revisioning of tradition.

The exposition also popularized the orientalism that had been in fashion for some time, especially in the field of interior decoration. The Japanese house and bazaar, at which objets d'art could be bought, gave an imprimatur to the delight in varied texture, color, and form that was an important facet of the new architectural sensibility.

The genius of the American Queen Anne style was its jubilant blending of seemingly disparate renaissance, colonial, and oriental elements. Although it had strong roots in vernacular architecture and in the Gothic revival, it created a synthesis that transcended all previous styles. The massing of interpenetrating forms, the layering of the materials to emphasize the play of light and shade, the sumptuous detail, the livability and the robust individuality of American Queen Anne were new and exciting.

Since the Queen Anne style was so profoundly different from the austere villa Suckley had inherited, it would not have been surpris-

ing if he had torn down the existing structure. His neighbor, Levi P. Morton (that year to become the vice-president of the United States), had just replaced Ellerslie with a grand Jacobean “cottage” designed by Richard Morris Hunt. That Suckley chose to transform rather than raze suggests it was a personal decision; certainly he could have afforded to do so.

Arnout Cannon, Jr., Architect

Unlike his father or Morton, Robert Suckley did not engage a New York City architect, but rather a local one—Arnout Cannon, Jr., of Poughkeepsie, New York. It was a sound choice, especially for a renovation, since Cannon knew architecture from the ground up. After apprenticing with his father, a mechanic, Cannon studied in New York under the architect Frederic Diaper. On his return to Poughkeepsie in 1862, he joined forces with his brothers Cornelius and George who were prominent contractors. With them he built the Vassar Brothers Home for Aged Men, Vassar Brothers Institute and Vassar Brothers Library. He is credited as architect of the Palatine Hotel in Newburgh as well as the Masonic temple and Nelson House Annex in Poughkeepsie. Among the many residences he designed in Poughkeepsie, that for steamboat owner John Brinkerhoff has been preserved. Its most striking feature is a sweeping porch with elaborately-turned posts and railings. Cannon’s own brick and shingled house and office featured a truncated tower with a dormer window in its roof and a projecting second-story bay window. The main entrance was marked by an intricately turned hood supported by brackets and decorated with carved sunbursts. The adjacent entrance had a porch with a pyramidal roof.

Cannon was, without question, a versatile and experienced architect in the Queen Anne style. Equally important, both his brothers were in the building trades. Together they could assemble a team of first-rate workmen, essential because Suckley not only expected the alteration to go swiftly, but also because, fascinated with new technologies, he was undertaking to contract the heating, plumbing and electricity himself. The creation of his house would be a complex job, requiring careful coordination.

Structural Alterations and Additions

By May 2, 1888, Arnout Cannon had completed the drawings. Although those drawings have not been found, they are not crucial

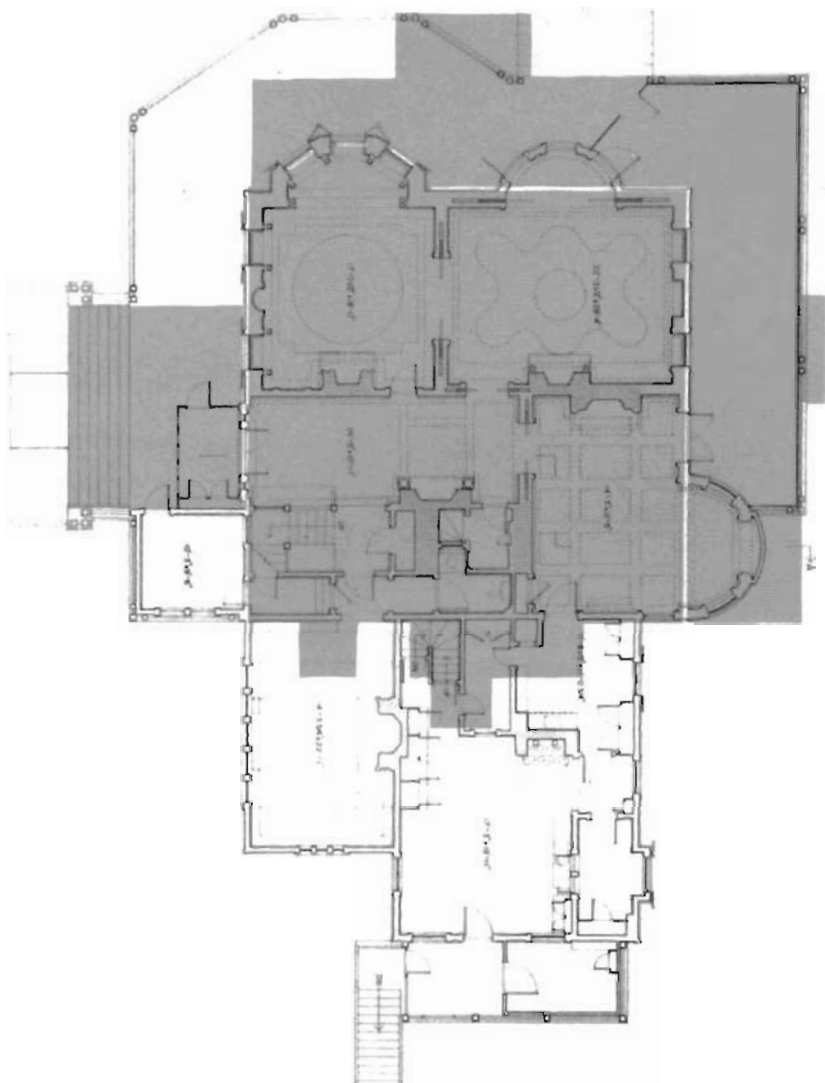
for understanding Cannon's and Suckley's intentions. With the exception of a few easily discerned modifications, the Wilderstein that stands today is the Wilderstein they brought into being in 1888.

Robert Suckley's Wilderstein is quintessential Queen Anne. It has an impressive entrance; spacious, fancifully framed verandahs; gables; textured surfaces; decorative finials; and, above all, the splendid tower which Thomas Suckley's villa so noticeably lacked. The building has lost none of the villa's solidity, yet its rich and varied profile gives it astonishing lightness. Its verticality enhances the lofty river-bluff site and is enhanced by it.

So radical were the changes, it is difficult to believe the basic structure was retained. Simply, the roof was taken off and the walls raised with an overhanging third story and gabled attic. An entrance *porte cochère*, a tower, and a service wing were added, and the verandahs extended and profusely decorated. The component parts suit each other. The scale is right. The new Wilderstein is both dignified and playful.

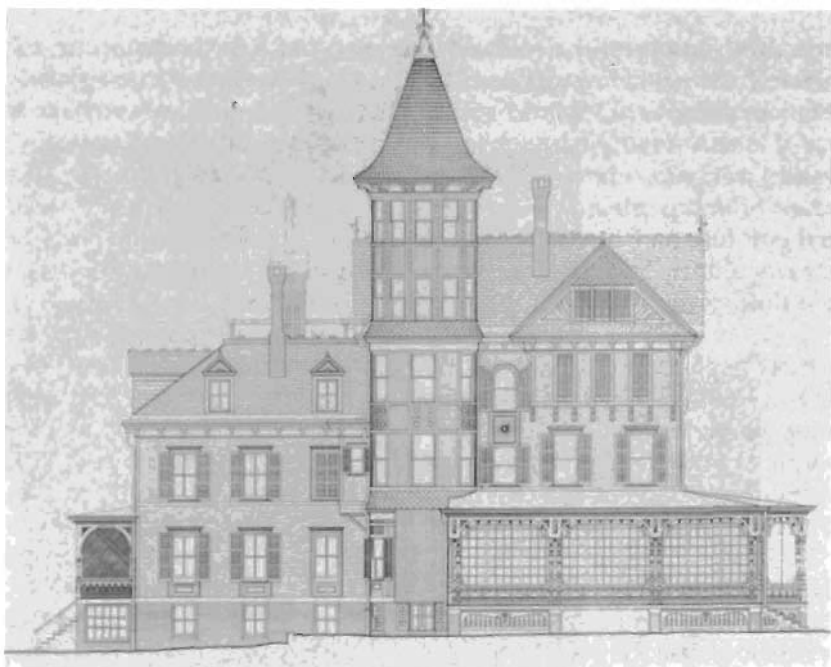
For dramatic effect, as well as for practical purposes, Cannon enlarged and extended the principal entrance with a 28'4" x 24'2" *porte cochère*. At each corner, it is supported by a cluster of three square posts that rest on flattened wood spheres suggesting the structure's weightiness. A fourth square member branches from the inner edge of the support posts, forming a half-circle arch in each bay. These are decorated with round rails suspended from the inner frame by small, turnip-shaped spindles. The corners are filled with carved sunbursts. The roof is covered with red slate shingles, clipped at the corners. Its soffits are lined with narrow, beaded-edged, varnished fir boards. The pyramidal roof culminates in a huge metal tin globe, painted to match the slates. The whole ensemble is reminiscent of a royal oriental umbrella.

Cannon replaced the original east entrance porch with a new verandah which joins the original south verandah. The widened stairs lead to massive, paneled-oak, double front doors. This handsome wrap-around verandah with three bays on the east side, five bays on the south side and three bays on the west side is a powerful unifying and enlivening architectural element. The ornamentation of the bays mirrors that of the *porte cochère* but is even more elaborate. Sunbursts and rosettes and a quill-like carving are used for added decoration. Dentils emphasize the roofline. Below the railings is a parade of wooden arches and spindles. These motifs, with variations, are repeated in the panels between the rusticated stone-topped brick piers. The broad steps which lead to the south lawn

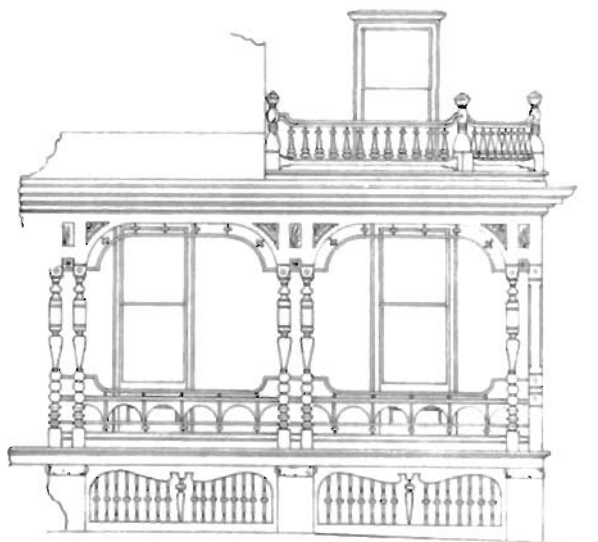


A. First floor of Wilderstein as built 1852. (shown in blue)

B. Architectural Plan, First floor of Wilderstein as altered in 1888 by architect Arnout Cannon. Drawn by Steven Parsons, Historic American Building Survey, 1975.



West Elevation of Wilderstein, 1975, Historic American Building Survey.



Porch detail.

originally had a railing with a massive carved newel post. A similar stair was removed from the west side in the 1890s when that section was glassed in. The verandah is an enchanting pavillion, forming a transition from the house to the landscaped lawns. It is used today, as it always has been, from early spring through the fall, and even on balmy days in the middle of winter.

The soaring five-and-a-half-story tower, fitted onto the north end of the western facade of the 1852 villa, is semi-cylindrical to the third floor. The fourth and fifth stories are a full cylinder. There are three large curved windows on each of the first three stories and seven smaller curved windows on the fourth story. Twelve still smaller windows surround the fifth story. From the inside it is like being in a sky-born lantern. The tower roof is a jaunty, peaked “candle snuffer” cone sitting on a cornice with radially-set paired brackets. It is covered with red slate shingles. At the pinnacle is a fanciful iron finial embellished with sunflowers at its base, scrollwork to designate the compass points midway up, and a small crown composed of flames at the top.

The tower is sheathed with vertical tongue and groove boards inset with panels that are appliqued with carved rondels and look somewhat like immense number-four dominoes lying on their sides. Between the windows of the two top stories is a vertical ladder-like band that accentuates the tower's height. Parts of the tower above the first and the third stories are covered with fish-scale shingles.

It is interesting that this imposing, exuberant addition is virtually invisible from the east and south lawns. To a first visitor to the house it comes as a glorious surprise. But from the river and the railroad, it is this fairy-tale tower that distinguishes Wilderstein from all other mansions along its banks.

The final major addition to the 1888 house was the servants' wing which extends to the north. Designed in a restrained manner, it has three stories and a gabled roof. The entrance is a high-roofed porch with ornamented bays on the north side. Appended to the eastern wall of the service wing—its somewhat awkward position a reminder of the constraints imposed on Cannon by the retention of the former building—is a one-story library. Its special architectural feature is a row of Tudoresque arched windows.

Like the 1852 house, the sheathing of the 1888 house is clapboard where exposed to the weather, and smooth tongue and groove boards where sheltered by the verandah. The windows, which have simple architraves with two-member cornices, were saved from the original villa. The multiple window lights of the original house were replaced with one-over-one sashes. The windows on the first floor of the tower,



View of Wilderstein from the southwest showing the original polychrome paint finish. Anonymous photograph, c. 1889. Woman on the porch is unidentified. Courtesy of Wilderstein Preservation.

however, have stained glass in the upper sash. The new stairwell and the library are illuminated by lavish stained glass. Photographs show stained glass in the retained second floor window of the old west stairwell and the window above it; it must have been changed to clear glass in a minor, as yet undated, renovation. Louvered shutters give added texture to the exterior walls.

Red brick chimneys, flaring at the top, rise high above the roofs. The foundations of three of the original four were strengthened, and all were heightened. The library and the service wing chimneys are new. The roof of the main block, pierced by its gables and chimneys, is supported by brackets of the same design as those used on the villa; some were, perhaps, salvaged from it. The gutters are enclosed in the box cornice. Except for the flat tin-covered space in the center, the roof is covered with red slates. The service wing roof is similar, but the cornice and brackets are on a slightly smaller scale. All the ridge lines carry crenellations of tin. The library roof, a large shed with a cross gable, is covered with red, lead-coated tin to match the red slate roofs and the red brick chimneys.

Contemporary photographs and recent paint analyses suggest that the house was first painted light apricot brown with a contrasting

dark reddish brown trim and bronze green sash, and that the background of the imitation half-timbering in the gables was painted putty color to look like stucco. A family legend relates that Bessie fainted when she saw the garish manner in which the polychrome emphasized the decorative detail. In any case, shortly afterwards the color scheme was changed to a more subdued reddish brown with dark brown trim.

So expansive and thoroughgoing was the metamorphosis Cannon wrought that the only exterior features of Thomas Suckley's villa surviving untouched are the southside's second floor windows, the vertical set of windows on the west facade that lighted the old stairwell, and the stone foundations. Transcending the constraints imposed by the original structure, he created a residence that captured the picturesque spirit which distinguished the Queen Anne style and the personal delight in new things that so beguiled Robert Suckley.

The architectural alterations to the interior of the villa were equally exhaustive. The drawing room and dining room were retained as drawing room and parlor, and the south bedrooms remained as bedrooms; but everything else was radically changed. The great hall and staircase, so essential to the Queen Anne home, occupies the space where the former entrance hall and office had been. The new stairwell, illuminated by a very large three-paneled window of pink, blue, pale green and lemon-tinted "cathedral glass" set in geometric patterns, rises through the old northeast bedroom. A short hall from the first landing of the staircase leads to the library. Off this hall are two closets. Through the one on the west is a room with a toilet and washbowl. Lighted by a clerestory window under the third story eaves, it is, in reality, a white-plastered ventilation shaft made to do double duty.

The new dining room—replacing the old hall, stair and butler's pantry—is enlarged by the semi-circular bay formed by the tower's base. A door in the north wall leads to the service wing—a pantry, the kitchen, a butler's office and the back stairs.

Cannon vastly improved the layout of the second floor by substituting a small bedroom for the east dressing room and by removing the family bathroom to the service wing. (Later, another small bedroom was wedged into the space the old stairwell occupied; it was perhaps then that the leaded glass was replaced with clear panes.) The northwest bedroom is enlivened by the tower bay. Access to the bedrooms and to the service wing is from an ample hall, which, until the second small bedroom was built, included the old stairwell window. Beyond the family bathroom are the servants' quarters, divided

into two bedrooms, a small bath without toilet, the backstairs and closets. The third floor echoes that of the second, except there is no servants' bath.

The basement area was enlarged considerably by the addition of the service wing and tower. Because of the downward slope of the land, its westerly windows are double the size of those in the old cellar, making the laundry installed there a pleasant work space. The furnaces were placed in the old northeast room with coal bins under the new library.

Executing the Changes

Robert Suckley was pleased with Cannon's design. Presented with a choice between a round tower and an octagonal tower, he quickly chose the round even though it was several hundred dollars more expensive. The minor changes he requested were, Cannon cheerfully wrote, "very easy to make." Work started immediately. In fact, according to a bill from John Lynch, the mason, dated April 27 and stating he had been on the job for eighteen days, it had already begun. (Lynch was paid the then princely wage of three dollars a day.) In early June, the carpenters were putting up the framework, and Cannon was pressing Suckley to give him the name of his plumber so that the iron drain from the cesspool to the inside of the basement wall could be laid.

As he was still living in New Jersey and was fully occupied with managing his real estate and securities and with launching the Heisler Electric Company, Suckley visited the site but sporadically and briefly. Usually he came up only for the day. However, his confidence in Cannon proved well justified. Work went so well that, in the middle of July, Cannon felt free to take a short vacation at Coney Island. Shortly after he returned, he was ready to discuss painting, which, he advised Suckley, was easier to do while the scaffolding was still up than from ladders.

Towards the end of August, Cannon's chief worry was the glazing. Apparently Suckley had urged him to reuse some of the old windows. When Cannon informed him they were too large and out of proportion, Suckley vented his disappointment by complaining about the expense of plate glass. Assuring Suckley he had specified only double-thick glass, Cannon soothingly replied, "I would not wonder at your surprise if I should go to that extreme," and sent designs for the staircase windows—"appropriate and in good color"—which could be had for five dollars a foot. Then, gently chiding Suckley for not

being more accessible, Cannon asked him for five hundred dollars and informed him he was paying necessary bills from his own account because it was “easier and in the end the same.”

The glass for the house, particularly the curved panes in the tower, was, indeed, an expensive item. Despite the architect's discount of fifty percent, one bill from the New York firm Theodore W. Morris Co. totaled \$1074.87. Still, Suckley did not have much cause for anxiety. Before the month was out, Lynch was proceeding with the chimneys, and the lightning rods were installed. On August 30, Cannon was able to report that the slating was complete, “the finial up and in place and the roof cresting nearly completed.”

Accessory Structures

Supervising this work was a feat in itself, but, at the same time, Cannon was also designing a carriage house and stable building, and a boat house for the new Wilderstein. In addition, he was responsible for contracting the surveying and construction of the road that connected them. A job-seeking Hyde Park workman captured the atmosphere well. “I understand,” he wrote Cannon, “that you are doing a big lot of work at Wilderstein.”

Cannon's creativity in planning the main house had been confined by the dictates of the original structure. In his work on the carriage house and stable building, he had the freedom to make a unique statement. Suckley was in the process of acquiring a six-seat rockaway, a three spring wagonette, a two-seat wagon, a “T” cart, a donkey cart, and a six-passenger Russian *vis-à-vis* at considerable expense, and he desired that the building housing them and his horses be handsome and large.

Cannon's design of the carriage house and stable building is Queen Anne style par excellence. The brick first story is laid with “joint mortar mixed with Spanish brown” (so as to give a uniform finish) and ornamented with bands of rusticated brownstone. Above it rises the fish-scale, shingle-clad second story, enhanced with decorated gables. A huge onion-shaped dome—the fanciful capping of one of the ventilators—dominates the massive black slate-clad roof. Its profile, seen against the background of the river and the mountains beyond, is both majestic and picturesque.

Cannon's drawings for this building, like those for the house, have not been found. The reason may be contained in a clause in the contract stating that: “The drawings and specifications are to be used for this job only, and all drawings furnished by the Architect, with

such figures, writing and explanations as are on them, are to be considered as part of, and illustrating these specifications, and when used are to be returned to the architect's office by the contractor at the completion of the contract." It is possible that Cannon destroyed them. As the inventor of a patented dumb waiter, he would have been sensitive about protecting his drawings. The specifications for the building, however, are in the Suckley archive. These, together with the building as it now stands, give a clear picture of Cannon's design.

It is a large structure, its ten thousand square feet covering some four thousand square feet of ground. The carriage entrance is on the east. Sheltering the great sliding double doors is a deep gable with a three-quarter-circle fanlight, set in a square frame. In comparison, the gable of the building itself projects only slightly, but it is rendered important by its brackets and its heavy moulded frame. In its apex is a patterned window with a shingle-covered hood similar to those Cannon designed for the main house. The pedestrian entrance is stepped back, forming a shallow ell. The rusticated stone and brick chimney is the important feature of the north facade. It is inset with two oblong terracotta plaques, one bearing Suckley's monogram "RBS" in interwoven script, the other the date, "88."

Because the land slopes away to the south, that elevation has an additional story. At ground level is a double door with a rusticated brownstone lintel and a saw-tooth-patterned brick arch. It leads to a storage area, the furnace room, and a crawl space. A great earth and brick ramp rises to the main stable door. There are two gables at roof level, one with a bank of three windows, the other with a splendid horse's head, carved in wood, three-quarter relief. Between them is the bold column of the onion-domed tower, topped by a striding-horse weather vane. (The famous nineteenth-century trotter "Black Horse" was the model.) On the main roof are a smaller octagonal turret decorated with metal flowers, and a cupola bearing a replica of a botanical cattail. These, too, are actually ventilating devices.

The west elevation is the least interesting. It was altered at a later time to increase the size of the chauffeur's apartment. The hoist to the hayloft and the sunburst-embellished gable were retained.

The textures of the exterior are masterfully orchestrated. The diamond patterns of the slate cladding on the onion-dome, the weathered fish-scale shingles, the rusticated and smooth-cut stone, the patterned brick, and the wooden doors catch the light in constantly changing ways. The building never seems twice the same.

Inside, the west half of the first floor of the carriage house and stable contains an entrance area, a tack room with glass harness cases,

as well as a five-stall stable. The east half has space for the carriages and for the carriage wash. The second floor is divided into the "main room"—a huge hay loft with a corn crib and grain chute—and a loft with hatchway and hoist where sleighs could be stored in the summertime and carriages in the wintertime.

R. Alex Decker, a builder from Rhinebeck, and Henry W. Otis, a mason from Kingston, joined forces to win the contract to erect this lordly structure. Their bid was \$16,300. They promised to begin on August 1, 1888, and to finish by November 1, 1888, and they posted a \$5,000 bond to ensure they would do so. Suckley was responsible for preparing the site by removing trees and leveling the ground. In addition, he was to build all drains and roadways and, after the walls of the building were up, to do all grading around them. He also agreed to carry off the trash. The builders would give the exterior woodwork a good prime coat of ochre and oil, but other painting, oiling, and varnishing was to be done by Suckley.

Decker and Otis worked rapidly. They must have subcontracted with George W. Cannon; for, the week ending August 31, George submitted a slip to Suckley for twenty-nine men, not including painters. (Their wages ranged from \$1.00 to \$1.25 a day.) In early October, William H. Byram, a plumber from Fishkill Landing, wrote he was ready to begin installing the stable furnace: "Nice weather for that sort of work." Decker and Otis did not quite meet their deadline; but on December 8 the stable fixtures arrived, and Decker started putting in the stable gutters.

Thomas Suckley had never developed the waterfront of Wilderstein, but by the time Robert inherited it, boating was a fashionable sport. Among Robert's first purchases was a mahogany naphtha-powered launch built by the Gas Engine & Power Co. on the Harlem River in New York City. It was thirty feet long and had silver chocks and cleats, leather cushions, and a small-figured carpet. Her name was the *Ellide* and she cost \$1659.45. Suckley still owned the ice-yacht *Grace*, built in 1882. He ordered another, to be called *Dombey*, his son Henry's nickname, from the skilled shipwright Jacob E. Buckhout of Poughkeepsie. He also ordered a skiff and was contemplating buying a sailing catamaran. For this fine fleet, he asked Cannon to design a boathouse. It was to be located on a small parcel of land, west of the railroad tracks and adjacent to the Eilerslie dock, that he leased from the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad.

On August 8, 1888, Cannon presented his plans to Suckley, complete except for the door enclosing the slip. It was rectangular in form, with the boat slip opening towards the south. From a platform



Wilderstein from west lawn. Anonymous photo, c. 1890. Robert B. Suckley is seated on left with sons Arthur, Robert Jr., and Henry. Above them to the left is Elizabeth M. Suckley. Other figures are unidentified. Courtesy of Wilderstein Preservation.



Carriage House, Wilderstein. Summer 1983. Photographed by Raymond J. Armater, Jr.



Wilderstein Boat House from the south. Anonymous photograph, c. 1890. Courtesy of Wilderstein Preservation.

beside the slip, stairs rose to the main floor—a huge room with a polygonal dressing room skewed in one corner. At the head of the stairs was a 12'x12' enclosed room; the remainder of the second floor was an open loft. Exterior details such as fish-scale shingles made it compatible in style with the mansion and the carriage house, but it was not quite so festive. Unfortunately, the boat house was destroyed by the 1938 hurricane.

The ice-yacht builder Jacob E. Buckhout sought the contract to build this structure. However, the work was given to Cannon's brother, Cornelius L. Cannon. Nevertheless, Buckhout did not hesitate to give advice. When he told Suckley the balcony must be shortened to admit the launch to the slip, despite the Cannons' objections, the balcony was shortened.

Either Cornelius Cannon or Buckhout won the contract for the 231-pile bulkhead and then subcontracted the work to William Gage, who charged seven dollars a foot to construct it. Buckhout built the floating platform that, rising and falling with the tide, made it convenient to board the boats at any time of day.

Accompanying a bill which Cornelius submitted to Suckley on December 18, 1888, is a note stating that he had put up as many as seventeen workmen at one time and "now we feed an average of fourteen good hearty eaters." He had been charging \$2.75 a head a week and felt he (or Mrs. Cannon) deserved more. The bill states that they had already put in 495½ man-days, a figure that must have included the carriage house and stable building, or even the main house, since in Suckley's checkbook is a stub with the notation: "C. L. Cannon house and boat house \$3,711.49." It may also have included the refurbishing of the ice house, since that structure had the same gable bracing details as the boathouse. C. L. Cannon obviously wore many caps.

Throughout the summer the contractors had used the Ellerslie dock for the delivery of building materials. Although the road leading to it ran along the north edge of Suckley's property and was convenient, the grade was so precipitous that the heavy loads put a terrible strain on the horses. In any case, Suckley wanted his own approach from the river. Like the outbuildings, he expected it to be picturesque as well as functional.

Cannon engaged T. F. Lawler, Civil Engineer, the proprietor of the Manhattan Bridge Building Co., Poughkeepsie, to do the survey in the middle of August. The road Lawler laid out starts at the railroad track directly inland from the Indian Rock—the "wilderstein." After a short relatively steep ascent, it sweeps southeast almost parallel to

the river, then turns in a narrow loop climbing to the carriage house site, an elevation of sixty feet.

Joseph M. Lawler (apparently a relative of T. F. Lawler) bid \$3,973 to build the road and was accepted. He subcontracted the work to a Francis Curran.

On December 1, Lawler wrote Suckley that the work was "done as well as could be considering the weather." The soil was too soft to set the culverts; what he needed was a little freeze. Furthermore, the side slopes were not as nice as he wished them, for the material kept sliding onto the roadbed after heavy rain. That, however, he hoped to fix by macadamizing it during the winter. Proud of his achievement, Lawler was hurt that Suckley had not made time to inspect the work with him. "I was surprised to learn from Mr. Cannon the Archt. on Sunday," he complained in December, "that you were in Rhinebeck Dec. 1st as both Mr. Curran and myself were all over the place and were told you were not up that day. I am sorry that we did not meet as I could have explained everything to you then."

Suckley's inaccessibility was not due to indifference. During this period he had been directing the design, purchase, and installation of the heating, burglar alarm, and bell systems for the main house. With the advice of William Byram, who put in the heating, Suckley bought a "Perfect" boiler and "Brundy" patent radiators from the A.A. Griffing Iron Company in Jersey City at a total cost of \$1,000.67 (\$385.75 for the furnace). John Simmons, a supplier in New York City, provided the pipes and other fittings.

The burglar alarm system had an indicator with a clock and a disconnecting device. The bell system included a five-inch gong in the butler's office and a five-drop indicator which posted the source of the call—the library, parlor, drawing room, dining room, or second floor bedroom and hall. Orders from the southwest bedroom were conveyed to the butler's pantry by means of speaking tube. Suckley seems to have supervised the installation himself. The Hudson River Telephone Company ran a line from the house to the stable in October, the house having been provided with service at an earlier time.

Joseph Burr Tiffany's Interiors

So far what Cannon had produced was a handsome shell. The correspondingly sumptuous wood panelling, plaster ceilings, parquet floors, mantelpieces, wall coverings, stained-glass windows and other furnishings had still to be planned. Completely abandoning

his hands-on approach, Suckley entrusted this work to Joseph Burr Tiffany of New York City, one of the specialists in the burgeoning field of interior decoration.

Born on February 13, 1857, in Hudson, New York, Tiffany had attended Cornell University, where he studied mechanical engineering and architecture from 1874 to 1877. For some time afterwards he was connected with the art departments of Tiffany and Company, Union Square, owned by his uncle Charles Lewis Tiffany. Then, early in 1888, he started a decorating business of his own. According to an announcement in the April issue of *Decorator & Furnisher*, his firm provided the "most artistic" services. "While carrying no stock, they have at all times a large variety of samples, from which designs and color may be suggested or selected, and their very handsome showrooms contain samples of elaborate and rich carvings of panels, tables, and cabinets, giving purchasers an earnest of the kind and quality of work they are prepared to furnish." His address was 20 East 21 Street, then 12 East 22 Street, just off Fifth Avenue at the north end of what was called the "Ladies Mile," New York's center of decorative arts.

In early July, Tiffany came to Suckley's office bearing a graceful letter of introduction from the Reverend Bishop Falkner of St. Mark's Rectory in Orange, New Jersey. "Permit me to introduce my friend Mr. J. B. Tiffany whom you will be pleased to know for his own sake; and if you should avail yourself of his taste and skill, in any proposed improvements in your house at Rhinebeck, I shall be happy to have had the honor of bringing you together." At first, Tiffany was "unfortunate" in not finding Suckley in, but he prevailed. In addition to Falkner's letter, Suckley may also have been swayed by the fact that Tiffany belonged to the same fraternity, Alpha Delta Phi. (That they were almost the same age, were married the same week in 1884, and both had growing families was probably less important, as their social circles did not overlap.) As far as can be determined, Tiffany had as yet no previous commissions to show as examples of his work.

On October 18, Tiffany sent Suckley a letter asking for an appointment to meet him at the Clarendon Hotel "to talk over plans etc.," and another on November 17 reporting that "the staircase problem was much more easily solved than first appeared." On November 23, he sent preliminary drawings and specifications of the ground floor family rooms. Only a few of the drawings survive, but the specifications are complete. They begin with a painted and gilded conservatory opening off the west side of the dining room. Like the one in

the Suckley's New Jersey house, described by Grace Sands Hunt, it had a fountain in the center. The dining room itself, together with the hall and staircase, was to be in the English Jacobean style, the library in the Flemish medieval style, the drawing room in the French style of Louis XVI, and the morning room "delicately panelled" American Colonial. This was the quintessential Queen Anne amalgam, popularly endorsed by the American Institute of Architects and by hundreds of homeowners, great and small.

Suckley vetoed the conservatory and insisted the work be completed in four months. Tiffany, who knew that coordinating with Cannon might cause delays, made a hurried trip to Rhinecliff to talk with him about scheduling. Finally, on Christmas Eve 1888 he delivered a new set of specifications, accompanied by a cost estimate which Suckley could accept.

The estimate was \$36,600—more than four times Cannon's total renovation costs. Moreover, it was based on the assumption that Suckley would execute all the rough carpentry, masonry, brickwork, plastering, wiring, plumbing and heating. In addition, Suckley was to assume the responsibility for problems arising from the acts or omissions of other parties he might employ in connection with the work.

For this princely sum, Tiffany would execute the work according to his designs. The scope of the work, detailed in the specifications, included:

... all hardware and cabinet finishing, all metal work, mirrors, glass work, marble and tile and stone work, all decorations within in stucco, plaster, composition, onyx, oil color, leather, tapestry or silk leaving the ground floor complete and ready to receive such furniture, curtains, carpets etc. as you may hereafter decide upon.

The hall and stairway including the hall floor to be executed in accordance with inch scale drawings in quartered oak. The mantel with marble facing, marble fender margin, tile hearth, metal lining-frame and fire dogs all in keeping with the style of the work. The first newel of staircase to be fitted with appropriate standard light and two sconce wall lights to be placed at sides of drawing room door. The entrance doors to be as shown with leaded side and fan lights in intricate design. The first five lights on stairway to be in same treatment and the windows above of a broader and simpler design. The wall surfaces on first floor above dado to be covered with stamped illuminated leather secured with nails whose heads are to be a decorative feature. The frieze above to be in relief plaster and decorated in low tones of metal and the panels of ceiling, framed by the mitred oak mouldings of the cornice to be decorated in oil and metals on the flat. The design being light, free and conventional and in sympathy with the treatment below.

The Dining Room to be executed in Mahogany including ceiling and floor and Buffet all in accordance with drawings and the walls above dado

to be hung with heavy tapestry with frieze above in relief. The upper half of all windows to be filled with leaded quarries and with heraldic jeweled centers. The fireplace with metal lining, tile hearth, marble fender margin and antique metal fire dogs. The lighting to be accomplished by means of a central chandelier with adjustable center table light, one lantern in Bay and two wall bracket sconces all in antique metal in keeping with the style of the apartment.

The Morning room to be executed in light cherry according to detail drawings. The ceiling in composition relief in delicate flowering design and the frieze to correspond, tones in oil and the highlights touched with pale gold. The walls hung with silk tapestry. The fireplace to be a field of majolica tile, tile hearth, brass frame, metal lining and basket grate and brass fender. The lights to be one central chandelier and three wall bracket sconces. The whole room to realize a complete colonial treatment.

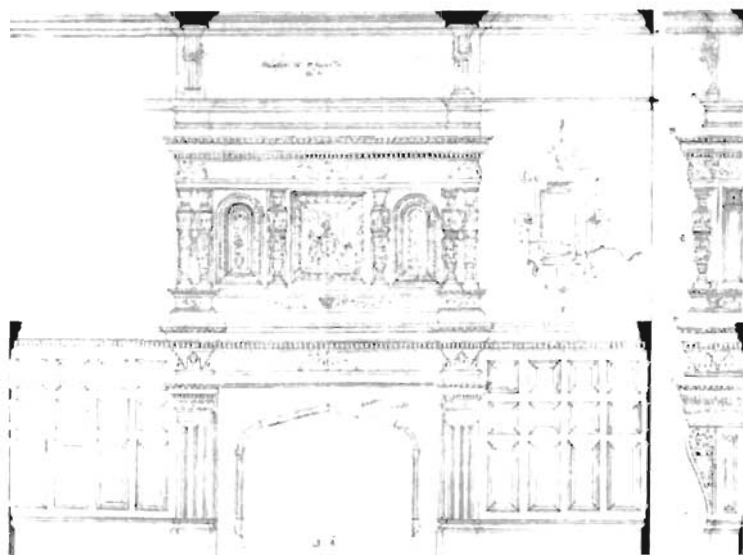
The Library to be according to detailed drawings in quartered oak wainscoting with bookcases built in. The mantel to be pierced wood showing red stone breast through and the fire place to be moulded and carved, lined in metal, stone fender margin, tile hearth and Berlin iron fire dogs. The wall either side of the chimney breast to be hung with tapestry in imitation of old Flemish work and the plaster surfaces throughout to be decorated in oil to realize the effect of a mediaeval Flemish room. The three small windows at the north end to be in jeweled leaded glass and the five windows to the East to be filled in geometric leaded quarries. The light fixtures to be one central chandelier and five standard lights on bookcases all of intricate appropriate design in Berlin Iron.

The Drawing room to be in accordance with sketches and details in ivory and gold enamel. Frieze and cornice in relief and entablatures over doors, mantel and windows and niche in elaborate relief designs. The walls covered with silk damask. The Ceiling in elaborate fresco design executed by hand from special designs all in delicate tones and enriched with reliefs. The mantel including fire place and furniture for same to be in onyx and ormolu from special designs. The lighting to be by four wall bracket sconces and one small chandelier in delicate metal ormolu and crystal lustres. The whole room to realize a complete specimen of the Louis XVI period.

In this room no hardwood floor is included as the style and treatment involves completely covering the floor with carpeting.

Suckley exhibited a great deal of faith in signing this contract, for the drawings Tiffany provided were sketchy at best. He, of course, must have discussed the plans with Bessie, but there is no indication she participated actively. In September she had given birth to their third son, Robert Bowne, Jr., and, even with servants, three children three years old and under would have been taxing. There is no record that she visited Wilderstein while work was in progress.

Tiffany and his assistant, Mr. Oakey, who would superintend the installations, went to Wilderstein immediately after the New Year to talk with Cannon and his men about the timing of the work they



Interior Elevation, Dining Room fireplace and south wall as designed and installed by Joseph Burr Tiffany. Blue line reproduction from a drawing by Joseph Burr Tiffany. Light fixture is pencilled in by Tiffany. Courtesy of Wilderstein Preservation.

were to perform. Unfortunately Oakey's first name is not disclosed. There is, however, every reason to believe that he was Alexander F. Oakey, an architect who was one of the early successful exponents of the Queen Anne style. He had built important residences at Lenox, Massachusetts; Mount Desert Island, Maine; and Montclair, New Jersey; and, at the Eleventh Annual Convention of the American Institute of Architects, had exhorted his fellow practitioners to "create confidently." In the 1880s, however, his excessive adherence to an English rather than an American architectural design sensibility had lost him clients. Between scant commissions, he might well have been happy to work for Tiffany on such a grand project.

One of their immediate concerns was the plastering. Since it did not appear that Cannon would finish his work in the salon and morning parlor in a timely fashion, Tiffany volunteered to do it at an additional cost of \$650.00, or \$4.50 a day for men and \$6.00 for foremen, plus expenses, Suckley to supply the materials and scaffolding. In addition, Tiffany pointed out, "We should warn you that, however well our work in these rooms may be performed, injury may result from carelessness in pounding on the floor above when the rooms overhead are plastered. To avoid this contingency we will

undertake to plaster these for \$300." Suckley agreed, despite the hefty fee. At the same time, undoubtedly urged by Cannon, he raised questions about the paucity of Tiffany's specifications. In his firm reply, Tiffany laid out some well-known truths about the precarious nature of renovation.

We note your reference to the lack of specifications for your alterations. We have always believed that as the work is performed by days work and, as it involves old as well as the new construction, the specific instructions given from time to time as they are needed are much more valuable than any specifications in the usual form can possibly be. In fact, in such a case as this, it is the only practical way of specifying the work viz. to meet each contingency as it arises. This we have done by verbal and written instructions to your Superintendent. If, however, he believes that it would facilitate the work to have specifications covering the whole work, we will gladly prepare them, although in doing so no provisions can properly be made to cover questions arising from the concealed construction of the old building and in those instances we should have to resort to our present method.

In the course of the work Tiffany, who had assumed the lighting would be by gas, except in the salon which was to be lighted with candles, discovered that Suckley intended to use electricity—an invention then new to cities and almost unheard-of in the country. For Tiffany, this meant that the wiring must be installed before paneling and final plastering and that fixtures must be adapted to hold sockets.

Despite incipient grumblings and the "disappointing behavior" of one of Tiffany's workmen who suddenly vanished from the job, Suckley was happy enough with Tiffany's progress to pay him five thousand dollars at the end of January, ten thousand dollars in the middle of February, and five thousand dollars on the first of April. However, he did not soften in respect to the May 1, 1889, deadline, and, on April 10, Tiffany was forced to send a desperate note to Suckley, pleading with him to prod Cannon into action. "Our carpenters are patiently waiting for your carpenters to level your floors to receive our new hard wood floors," he scolded. "The necessity for this we explained to you personally when you last called upon us."

It did not seem possible that Tiffany would meet his deadline. Yet, precisely on May 1, Tiffany notified Suckley: "We have today withdrawn our employees and removed our implements from your house at Rhinebeck and have delivered the keys to your representative—Mr. Cannon."

For the most part, Tiffany did just what he contracted to do and more. The elaborate wood paneling is of the first quality; after a

hundred years, it is as fresh and true as the day it was installed. The lavish mirrored and pillared fireplaces are full of interesting detail. For instance, the griffins flanking the Montgomery coat of arms carved over the dining room mantel are repeated as andirons in the hall fireplace. A rearing griffin holds up the globe of the stairway's newel post light. The morning room's electric chandelier has hand-blown glass bulbs etched with flowers, each one slightly different. It was probably at Tiffany's suggestion that, during the course of the work, one of the south windows was enlarged to a circular bay.

Instead of the specially designed plaster ceiling in the drawing room, Tiffany supplied a large circular painting on canvas. It was executed by the already successful easel painter H. Siddons Mowbray, who that same year painted a mural for the New York Athletic Club entitled "Month of Roses" and would later win commissions for such important structures as the Huntington mansion, the University Club and the Morgan Library in New York City, and the Vanderbilt mansion in Hyde Park. Mowbray taught at the Art Students League and became a director and trustee of the American Academy in Rome. The Wilderstein ceiling is possibly his first recorded painting of this kind. The composition is of three spritely cherubs playing in a blue sky among pink cumulus clouds. They seem to have successfully fended off a hawk attracted by their doves. The painting gives the room a loftiness and lightness that was sorely needed due to the comparatively low ceiling height of the retained 1852 structure.

The walls of the stairwell are covered with grasscloth which, when new, would have radiated a soft, golden light even more beautifully than it does today. The frieze above is a wallpaper, in the William Morris tradition, but more painterly. Its design is slightly stylized, intertwined branches of fruit—apples, quinces, or peaches—against a silver background. The ensemble is a lustrous example of the orientalism of the then popular aesthetic movement.

Tiffany had great difficulty designing the heraldic devices he was to place in the upper sashes of the dining room windows. Those for the Tillotson, Lynch, and Chew families were readily verifiable, but, after considerable research, he found none for the Suckleys and, for the Bownes, was forced to adapt a fifteenth-century Bohemian device. However, the resplendent leaded glass he supplied for the extra windows on the east and north walls of the stairwell is a triumph. The motif resembles butterfly wings. Set with rippled, crumpled, striated, and faceted opalescent glass, the predominating colors are smoky green, rose, lavender and grey. In the center of each panel is a large, milky, pear-shaped glass, rough cut to simulate a crystal. The

design fans out and is framed by a luminous brown. The glass in the sidelights and transom of the front door uses the same colors and textures, but the unifying design is of intertwined vines. Surprisingly, the stained glass in the three small windows high on the north wall of the library are different. Made up of tiny fragments of bright amber, orange, gold and yellow glass surrounded by deep turquoise borders, they have the explosive impact of fireworks.

It is extraordinary that Tiffany was able to accomplish this prodigious project in just under four months. Not only was there no central heating during the winter, but, in the spring, the west side of the house was constantly disturbed by the installation of a windmill just twelve feet north of the tower addition. Its purpose was to pump water from the old well into a raised tank to provide the new Wilderstein with a more copious and dependable water supply. In April of 1888, Suckley had ordered one of A.J. Corcoran's "Storm Defying Wind Mills," and, in March 1889, he called in Henry W. Otis to lay the foundation, causing clutter and dust that could only have been a nuisance to Tiffany's artisans.

Tiffany's speed and perseverance were not enough to satisfy Suckley. Although he sent Tiffany a check for two thousand dollars on May 2, and another for five thousand dollars on May 10, he questioned the quality of Tiffany's work and hired the architectural firm of D. & J. Jardine to appraise it. The Jardine report, dated May 20, found that, in general, the work had been "executed to the letter and spirit of the drawings and descriptions." The few exceptions were: the hall and library fireplaces lacked their marble fenders; four columns in the salon's bay window were omitted; the dining room floor seemed unfinished and its gas fixtures did not give value for \$605.00 (apparently gas as well as electric was expected there). Their most strenuous complaint was leveled at the stained glass. In the dining room, the Jardines noted that while the "heraldic jeweled centres" were neatly painted, jewels of any cost, either for ornament or representing value, were lacking; half the six hundred dollars paid for them would be excessive. The leaded glass in the morning room bay also disappointed them; it was worth, they said, no more than \$1.50 a foot. The Jardines had the grace to state that Tiffany had provided an extra light fixture in the library and an extra sconce in the morning room, but they made no mention whatsoever of the elaborate stained glass in the stairwell and library. Nor did they commend him for the delightful egg-shaped, reeded, bronze door knobs with offset shafts that he used throughout the first floor.

Tiffany composed the following manly response:

The marble fender margin is omitted because we concluded that the result would be more satisfactory in substituting a metal fender of special design which, it should be noted, cost us many times the amount for which we could have complied with the letter of our contract . . . [the library's] stone fender seemed to us to encroach inconveniently upon the already limited floor space. . . . The columns omitted in the bay of the Salon could not be placed there by any feasible arrangement, as a little study would show. . . . If any proof were needed to show that no changes or deduction in any part of the work was actuated by a spirit of economy, the proof is supplied by the instances already cited and the still more remarkable instance of the ceiling of the Salon which . . . we have covered with reliefs especially modeled and cast for this work and have furnished an original picture by H. Siddons Mowbray as the central interest so that we are actually very much the losers on this room at the price we accepted for it. We should not, however, have mentioned this fact but because we think the objections raised seem to lower the professional spirit in which we have worked. . . .

Promising to complete the punch-list items forthwith, Tiffany closed by stating that \$9,700.00 was still due on his contract. Emboldened when Suckley paid six thousand dollars on May 23, Tiffany requested a recommendation he could show to prospective clients. During the summer he finished off the details, including installation of the mock-Flemish tapestries Mrs. Suckley had ordered for the library. At the end of August, Suckley made his final payment.

Although Tiffany later tried to obtain the contract for furnishing the Louis XVI salon and offered his services as landscape architect, he did not work for Suckley again. It is doubtful that Suckley even gave him a recommendation. To advertise his talents, Tiffany had to rely on an article in the October 1889 issue of *Building* magazine that described the transformation of "the old Suckley homestead at Rhinebeck." The owner, it related, had placed this work "in the hands of Joseph B. Tiffany & Company, and trusted to his skill to preserve his traditions, while they made his home something better than the imagination of a century ago had suggested." Tiffany wrote too well to have supplied the muddled prose, but he did provide illustrations of the great hall and the dining room, complete with conservatory.

Furnishing the Villa

There is a stub in Suckley's May 1889 checkbook that says: "Orange Furniture to Rhinebeck," but it does not seem probable that the house was sufficiently finished for Bessie, the three children, and the servants the family would require to move in at that time. It is not until the spring of 1890 that existing diaries and letters reflect

her presence there. She was again expecting a child, and on March 31 Suckley sent a telegram from Rhinecliff to New York summoning Mrs. Lincoln, the midwife, to Wilderstein. On April 1, Bessie gave birth to their fourth son, Arthur Lynch. That the baby was “delicate” did not keep Suckley from his activities around the place. On April 3, he ran his new stone crusher for a few moments and, finding “the foundation was not stiff enough,” had it braced with cedar posts to the side and foundation of the house. Two days later, he triumphantly recorded, it crushed a cubic yard of stone in eighteen minutes. The same week, to prepare for the installation of an electric power plant for Wilderstein, he arranged to purchase the water rights and meadows above and below Fox Hollow bridge to the southeast on the nearby Landsman Kill. With his brother-in-law Harry, he then “leveled up from the dynamo station to a point near the little bridge.”

Perhaps as a present to Bessie, he helped her choose the furniture for the drawing room. After keeping the Herts Brothers (16 East 20th Street, N.Y., N.Y.) dangling for some time, they selected Pottier Styms & Company (Lexington Avenue at 41 Street, N.Y., N.Y.), who had been able to pare three hundred dollars off their first estimate of \$3,927.63 by making “unseen modifications.” To match the Louis XVI room decorations designed by Tiffany, the furniture would be painted in white enamel paint with trim picked out in gold. The tables and cabinets would have green onyx tops. Bessie and Robert ordered: one white and gold trimmed center table with an onyx top; two white and gold cabinets with onyx top; one white and gold sofa; two white and gold ladies’ chairs; three gilt reception chairs; one carved sofa with Aubusson tapestry back; one puff-back arm chair; one carved Louis XVI arm chair with Aubusson tapestry covering; one double pillow ottoman; satin damask draperies for the bay window and for the east windows; and one pair of plush portieres with Beauvais applique and embroidery for the sliding door between the drawing room and morning room. The order would not be delivered until the following May. The wall-to-wall carpet of Aubusson pattern, custom designed and woven to fit the irregular contours of the room, was ordered separately at a cost of eleven hundred dollars. It would not be installed until the following fall.

Calvert and Downing Vaux Plan the Grounds

With his major building projects virtually completed, Suckley had time to focus his creative energies on the landscaping. On April 19, 1890, Calvert Vaux and his son Downing came up on the 11:50 A.M.

train from New York City to view the grounds and find out in what ways Suckley cared to improve them.

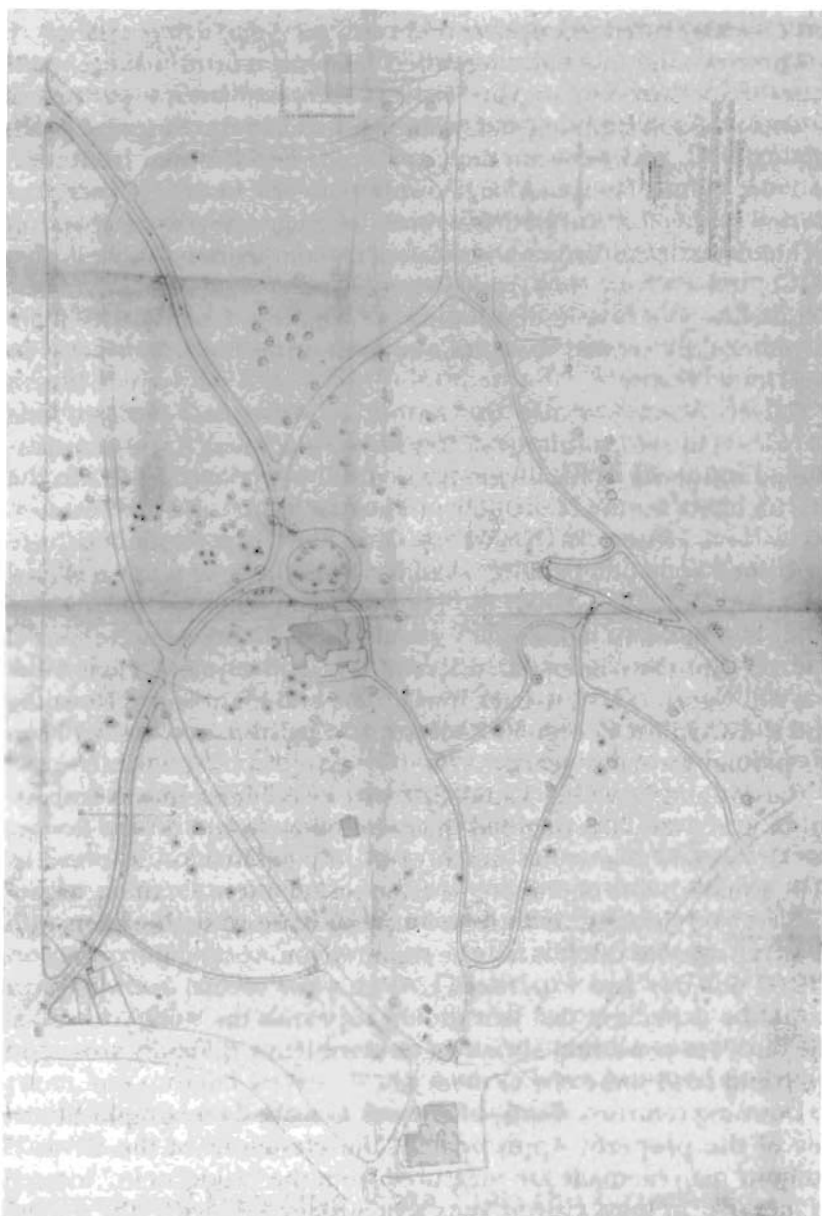
There was no more distinguished landscape firm in the United States than Vaux & Company. Calvert Vaux had been a partner of Andrew Jackson Downing and, with him, had laid out the great Washington, D. C. park between the Capitol, the Smithsonian Institution and the White House. After Downing's death in 1852, Vaux had carried on his forceful tradition, both in landscape planning and in architecture. It was Vaux who initiated the competition for the design of Central Park in New York City and persuaded Frederick Law Olmsted to join him in developing the winning "Greensward" plan. Together they created many of our most enduring urban parks in the United States.

Calvert Vaux was also the author of *Villas and Cottages*, first published in 1857, a volume of fifty house plans which was of unparalleled influence in his lifetime and is still prized today. He was the first architect for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Natural History in New York City. Frederick E. Church, the renowned romantic painter, asked for his help in designing Olana, with its panoramic view of the Hudson River valley. Vaux's myriad other commissions in the valley gave him familiarity with the special natural features Wilderstein offered. At sixty-five years of age, Vaux was still vigorous and, to back him up, he had his able son Downing and the architect George K. Radford, an Englishman who had been his partner for many years.

Calvert and Downing Vaux's first visit to Wilderstein was successful in every way. They agreed that while they would do the design, Suckley would oversee as much of its implementation as possible. "The usual routine of practice when superintendence is undertaken," Calvert told Suckley, "is to follow up the issue of such a plan with visits repeated as often as may be required and costing the owner say \$10.00 per day and expenses. . . . With your special knowledge, it would be expedient that you should supervise the work yourself at the outset as you could always let us know if any difficulty arose and we could send some one to meet it."

Downing returned shortly afterwards to make a topographical survey of the property. Appropriately, the elevations of the 25'-to-1" contour map he made are measured from the "wilderstein," located in the cove. In June, Calvert Vaux sent Suckley a design in the romantic tradition for the road and walk system.

Vaux's plan replaces the existing main entrance drive, which had come in at a right angle from the public road with a gradual approach



Landscape Plan, Road and Trail Improvements on the property of R.B. Suckley. Drawn by Downing Vaux. 1891. Courtesy of Wilderstein Preservation.



View of Carriage House and Gazebo from the south lawn. Anonymous photograph. c. 1890. Courtesy of Wilderstein Preservation.



Wilderstein Lodge, view from the northeast. Anonymous photo, c. 1891. Coachman Charles Haley, his wife and children on the porch. Courtesy of Wilderstein Preservation.

from the southeast. A second, slightly longer drive angles in from the northeast. Both join the circle that passes under the porte cochère. Existing interior roads to neighboring Wildercliff and to the carriage house and boathouse are preserved. A new narrow road loops in an irregular semi-circle across the east lawns to the cutting gardens, and an interlacing of descending walks criss-crosses the bluffs. There is a gazebo on the knoll between the carriage house and the main house and another on the promontory below the house known as “Umbrella Point” with splendid views of the river and mountains. At the intersection of the northerly approach road and the public road is a Gate Lodge.

Suckley asked for only a few minor revisions in Vaux’s design, and, while the working drawings were being prepared, he discussed plans for the Gate Lodge with Calvert Vaux. On June 10, Vaux wrote:

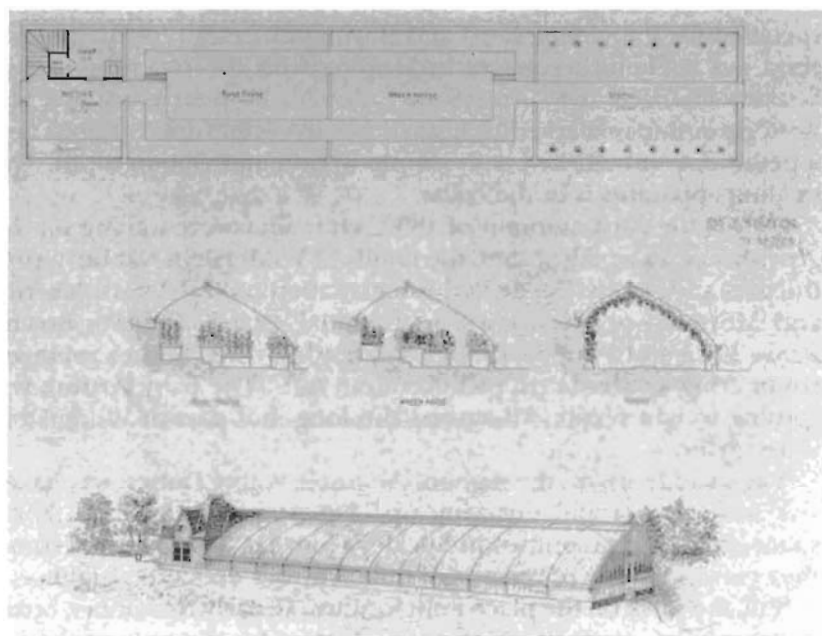
Your Gate Lodge is so related to the main entrance, in connection with the new approach road, that its plan seems to need the special treatment provided in the study now sent (by express) my desire being to get the varied skyline indicated in the perspective without complexity in the floor plans which provide the rooms you asked for in about the form we agreed on when I was last at Rhinecliff.

There will be a cellar under the building and as you intend to have some one in the lodge throughout the year you will probably wish to make provision for furnace; please advise me as to this and return the studies with any comments you wish to make.

The Gate Lodge has since been substantially remodeled, but the plans and specifications Vaux and Radford sent in the middle of July, as well as contemporary photographs, survive. It was a two-story house with a hipped gable on the north elevation and a covered entrance under the eaves of the northeast corner. A second porch sheltered by a projecting eave was attached to the west facade. The roof and siding were cedar shakes. The central chimney was banded and corbelled. The interior was more conventional. On the first floor there was a kitchen, living room and dining room, as well as an entry hall. Upstairs were three small bedrooms. “You will see that we have omitted plumbing on the specifications and plans,” Radford explained, “as we were not informed as to the question of water and drainage. This part of the work can be added as you may determine during execution.”

The Greenhouse and the Powerhouse

To have a greenhouse was the mark of a fine estate in the 1880s. None were considered more elegant than those developed by the



Design for Lord and Burnham Greenhouse constructed in 1891. The Potting Shed on the left was actually built in a Colonial Revival Style and not in the Flemish Style shown in the drawing. Courtesy of Wilderstein Preservation.

Irvington-on-Hudson firm of Lord and Burnham. Suckley contacted them in mid-March 1890, and the company recommended that he examine the greenhouse they had built for William Astor's estate, Ferncliff, twelve years previously, keeping in mind that their system was now much improved. In July they sent a man to take measurements and, soon afterwards, submitted a proposal for a greenhouse 82' 6" long and 20 feet wide. They also sent a rendering for a conservatory to be attached to the dining room as Tiffany had intended. Suckley again rejected the conservatory, but contracted for the greenhouse. The cost was \$3,850.00, including ventilating machines and heating apparatus, but not the foundation or plumbing. The glassed area was divided into three sections, so that each could be kept at a different temperature—the rose house from 50 to 55 degrees, the greenhouse from 55 to 60 degrees, and the vinery from 60 to 65 degrees. The bays were held up by wrought iron frames and braces, sheathed in wood, with the ridge line set off center to provide the maximum exposure of glass to the south. The plant tables were to

be made of Georgia pine, “neat and substantial.” Slat walks were specified for the vinery. Lord and Burnham’s design for the potting shed was a Flemish cottage. In keeping with the emerging trend, Suckley changed it to American Colonial. Its plan is square, the westerly entrance marked by a small portico with doric columns and a pediment embellished with simple wreath and ribbon motif. The heating apparatus is in the cellar.

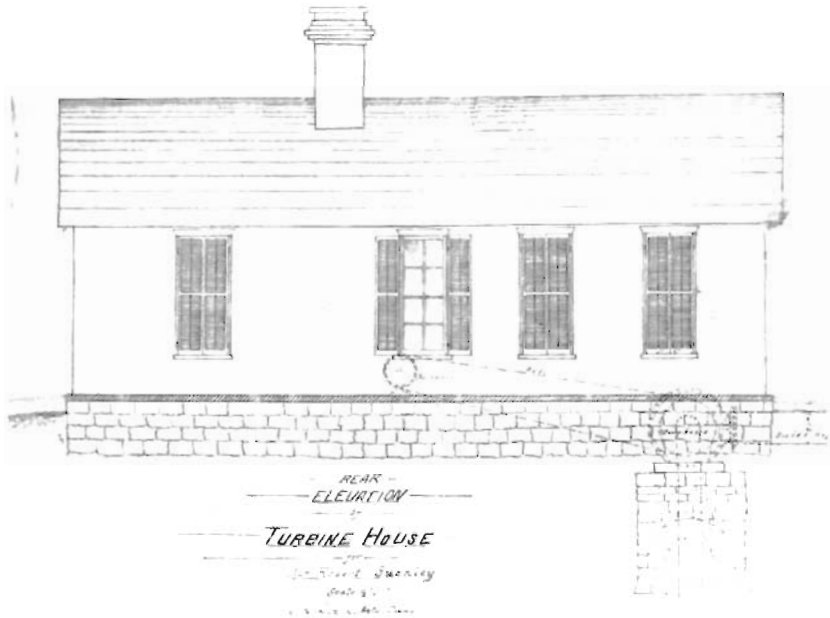
During the early summer of 1890, while they were waiting for the greenhouse to be fabricated, the family at Wilderstein was busy, productive, and happy. Bessie and Robert called on the Astors, Merritts and Mortons—neighbors with substantial estates. Robert’s Bowne aunts, Eliza and Phoebe, came for extended visits. Bessie’s relatives, summering at Glenburn, paid frequent calls. The baby, Arthur, was gaining weight nicely. All agreed the long, hot days at Wilderstein were idyllic.

Then suddenly, on the night of August 2, young Rutsen was “taken sick with nausea and throwing up.” On August 5, he died. For a space, there are no entries in Suckley’s journal. When they resume, they consist mainly of records of little Arthur’s diet and weight.

Still, the work on the place went forward. In early November, boxes of greenhouse parts began to arrive. Except for the potting shed, it was finished that month. However, the project that had the greatest power to divert Suckley’s mind from his sorrow was the building of the power plant that was to serve not only Wilderstein and its out-buildings, but also Wildercliff. The stone dam across the Landsman Kill was capable of impounding 108,000 cubic feet of water. The 650-foot pipe, 20 inches in diameter, that led to the turbine had a 25-foot fall. The turbine, which could develop more than eighteen horsepower, was of the type known as a mining wheel. The electric dynamo it drove made 830 revolutions a minute.

The power station was “a neat frame cottage standing on brick or rubble foundations.” It had two rooms, a 21’ x 12’ dynamo room and a 12’ x 12’ living room. The chimney between them provided a smoke flue to each. The entrance was marked by a simple portico with a shed roof.

S.H. Lockett & Company, Civil Engineers, built the complex, but Suckley took responsibility for obtaining the dynamo, which he bought from the Heisler Electric Company under the aegis of his Orange, New Jersey, enterprise. On January 14, 1891, the turbine wheel was put together. The lights in the house went on at 9 P.M.. It was a momentous occasion, not only for the Suckleys, but for everyone living in the area. The first electricity in the United States was



Rear Elevation of Turbine House, as designed and built by architect Arnout Cannon. Drawing by Arnout Cannon. Courtesy of Wilderstein Preservation.

installed in New York City just nine years before. In rural areas it was still regarded as a miracle.

Final Improvements

Despite the excitement of having an electrified country house, the Suckleys spent much of their time in New York City that winter. They also visited the Montgomerys, who had bought their former house in Orange, New Jersey. Especially for Bessie, it became a haven. When Henry came down with scarlet fever, Arthur and his nurse were sent there to avoid contagion; Bessie joined him for a prolonged visit as soon as she was able.

Their trips to Wilderstein were sporadic and had much of the aura of camping out. On January 21, 1891, Suckley noted in his journal that he and Bessie cooked their supper over the library fire. The heating system he had taken so much trouble with was not yet working perfectly, and the electricity was erratic, especially when there was wet snow. What drew Suckley to Wilderstein most often

was the iceboating. In his diary, he recorded that one morning, to steady the boat in a high wind, he put his brothers-in-law, Harry and Alan, on the runnerplanks and used his foreman, James Ramsey, as ballast.

By May, however, the whole family was again comfortably settled at Wilderstein. Pottier and Stymus delivered the white and gold furniture that month. The Aubusson carpet that would cover the entire floor was being woven in Boston. Both Robert and Bessie were pleased with their elegant surroundings.

Still, Suckley was not content without an architectural project, and he asked Downing Vaux to draw up plans for an office to be fitted into the verandah bay on the east facade, north of the front entrance. Access from the outside would be at right angles to the main entrance; interior access through a short passageway off the first main stair landing. This addition would interrupt the flow of the verandah and darken one of Tiffany's beautiful stained glass windows, but Suckley wanted—and perhaps Bessie insisted on his having—a special room where he could consult with workmen without impinging on the family space. The decorative elements of the verandah were retained in an attempt to make it blend in. "My idea," Downing wrote, "is that it will be better to keep the railing and ornamental screen work in place when the office is built, even if they have to be removed while the work is going on. The double floor will be necessary for warmth and I judge the interior had best be woodwork and not plaster."

Suckley also hoped to continue the great stairwell to the attic and convert part of the space under the eaves into bedrooms. Downing took measurements for the alterations and Calvert made plans. However, when it came to executing them, Suckley uncharacteristically held back.

One reason may have been that Suckley was beginning to feel he had already spent too much money. A laconic note in his journal of January 1891 states: "an impairment of capital of \$1971.61." Another reason may have been that he had contracted with Arnout Cannon to design a sheathing for the windmill attached to the west side of the house in hopes of camouflaging it. Cannon's drawings, fortunately preserved, and contemporary photographs show that the disguise Cannon fashioned consisted of ground and second story shuttered windows, siding, and decorative panels to match the house. Above the second story the sheathing was solid and plain. Although he was able to preserve the view from the house tower, the center windows and part of the north windows of the servants' wing were almost

completely obscured. Unhappily, the windmill was never a success mechanically, and sometime in the 1890s it was taken down.

~ Meanwhile, work went briskly forward on the grounds. On March 17, Calvert and Downing Vaux delivered their planting map. The species called for included: 299 spirea (three varieties); 150 barberry (two varieties); 74 quince; 10 red bud; 91 dogwood (two varieties); 121 mock orange; 66 forsythia; 64 elderberry; 38 dutzia; 10 stuartia; 4 andromeda; 28 viburnum; and 32 dwarf horsechestnuts. In addition, there were crab apple, willow, ginkgo, horsechestnut, birch, purple beech, linden, american elm, and sugar maple trees. "The selection," the specifications instructed, was "to be made from trees & shrubs that have been frequently transplanted, medium-sized, packed for shipment with plenty of wet moss and straw, taken out of packings as soon as practicable and heeled in or planted close together in a trench so as to protect tree roots, or if that impracticable, placed in a cool shed or cellar." The holes dug to receive them were to be ample and filled with rich soil, without manure. No pruning was to be done except under the special direction of the inspector.

Accompanying the plan was a letter recommending a competent man to supervise its execution; his credentials were several years' experience at Central Park. "We think it right to let you know of this opportunity as we have found such men rare," advised Vaux. "By this means you can employ some of your own men to do this piece of planting without interfering with the vegetable and other gardening work connected with the household." Whether Suckley engaged their man is not known. The planting, however, would stretch out over three years.

Most of Suckley's journal notes for the remainder of 1891 concern milk production and staff wages. He then owned eleven milking cows. An order from Peter Henderson Seedsman, relating mostly to the farm operation, includes one acme harrow, one Bullards hay tedder, one gold medal sub-soil plow, one sulky plow, a corn planter, a corn drill, grass, clover and rye seed, and 5,800 pounds of fertilizer. Six men worked the farm under Ramsey, the head man; four men tended the grounds under Charles Haley, the stableman, who also took care of the work, coach, and riding horses. The animal population was increased by two mastiffs. Bought as puppies, they were called Nora and Llewelyn. Their doghouses survive on the west lawn today.

The year 1891 came to a close with a special glory. On December 20 at 6:15 A.M., Bessie presented Robert with their first daughter.

Named Margaret Lynch after her maternal grandmother, she was beautiful and weighed a healthy eight pounds.

Throughout the 1892 and 1893 seasons, the Vauxes continued supervising the laying out of the roads and walks (the stone crusher was constantly in use) as well as the planting at Wilderstein. Downing himself spent fourteen days on the place in May 1892, boarding at the Rhinebeck Inn, now the Beekman Arms. In 1893 he spent 20½ days. He also surveyed some property that Suckley owned in Summit, New Jersey. And, when Suckley bought a house in New York City—41 East 80 Street—he was called in to work on that, too, both as an architect and a landscape architect. The correspondence between Suckley and Downing Vaux increasingly became a correspondence between friends. Suckley lent Downing his transit and tripod, which Downing told him “enabled me to do the most accurate work yet accomplished by me.” When, on September 3, 1893, Bessie was safely delivered of twin girls, Katherine and Elizabeth, Suckley included the good news in a business letter.

The office on the verandah and the bedrooms in the attic, however, did not go forward as either Suckley or Downing would have wished. Downing was anxious for the commission, but Suckley kept putting him off. Vaux & Company was responsible, in part, for the delay. George Radford had gone to England for a visit and, while there, decided to retire. Calvert Vaux was far less active than he had been. In addition, Downing was tied up with an “embarrassment” connected with their work at the State Reservation at Niagara; while building a conduit for the inclined railroad, his workmen had broken a city sewer line.

Far more critical, however, was the Panic of 1893. A severe and prolonged financial crisis, it began with deflation and the collapse of the stock market in 1890. Business was stagnant throughout 1891. Then, in 1892, the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroad and four thousand banks failed. By 1893, currency was at a premium in New York. Unemployment was widespread. The returns on Suckley’s securities fell. He had difficulty renting or selling his real estate.

The office at Wilderstein was eventually built and also a fence to screen the kitchen wing, but the “three good rooms” in the attic never came to be. With the exception of a small bathroom extension for a modern shower bath adjacent to Suckley’s tower bedroom, the architectural alterations to Wilderstein were at an end.

The financial panic did not immediately restrict the Suckleys’ social life. They spent the winters in their New York house. Suckley resigned from the Lawyers’ Club in 1894. He hardly had time for it, for he was

also a member of the Players, Choral, Racquet, Suburban Riding and Driving, and Metropolitan clubs, as well as the Central Park Casino and Wood's Gymnasium. Bessie joined the Colonial Dames and he the Society of Colonial Wars. They attended the opera, concerts and theater. He took the older boys to baseball games. With his men friends, he played pinochle, pool, poker and billiards.

At Wilderstein he supervised the farm and gardens. He became an avid bicyclist, riding point to point on his Columbian bicycle. In one year he recorded over two thousand miles, many of them accompanied by his eldest son Henry. He joined the Staatsburg Golf Club and, with Lynch Montgomery, became a dedicated, if not expert, golfer. He grew chrysanthemums in the greenhouse and exhibited them at the Annandale Flower Show. He was a member of the Dutchess County Historical Society. In winter, he waited impatiently for the river to freeze so that he could sail his iceboats with fellow members of the Hudson River Ice-Yachting Association. Should he be in the city, either the men on the place or the telegraph operator stationed at the Rhinecliff Hotel wired him about the condition of the ice.

In 1895 he bought a large, two-year-old conservatory from relatives in Flushing, Long Island. He had it dismantled and shipped to Rhinecliff. There is, however, no record he attempted to put it up. In the summer of 1896 a billiard table was temporarily installed in the drawing room, with the never-realized intention of moving it to a new billiard room to be constructed off the dining room where Tiffany had sited the conservatory.

The children flourished. They swam, bicycled, rode around in their donkey cart, and went coasting when there was snow. The older boys were companions in iceboating. On November 26, 1896, Thanksgiving Day, Suckley noted in his journal that all except the twins joined him and Bessie for dinner. Their behavior, he commented, was excellent. The visiting among the Bowne and Montgomery relatives continued. It was a special pleasure when Grace Sands Hunt and Henry Montgomery, who were married in 1893 after a long and dramatic courtship, came to live at Wildercliff.

Wilderstein seemed to be fulfilling its promise in every way. However, Suckley's financial position did not improve. The panic had made serious inroads on his income. In the spring of 1897 he decided that the most prudent solution for so large a family was to reside for a time on the Continent. He engaged multiple staterooms on the trans-Atlantic liner *Westernland*, and on April 28, the Suckley family, together with the children's nursemaids, sailed for Europe. The boys

would come back to boarding school, and Suckley would return during winter vacations to camp out with them at Wilderstein; but for the next ten years the family lived at Chateau d'Oex in Switzerland. Their love for Wilderstein never weakened, however. When they returned in 1907, it was coming home.