THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

A Journal of Regional Studies

MARIST

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From the Publisher

The Hudson River Valley Institute is proud to present "Edith Wharton in the Hudson River Valley," our autumn 2006 issue of *The Hudson River Valley Review*. This issue includes articles that were originally presented as papers at the 2005 conference of the Edith Wharton Society, which was held at Marist College and celebrated the centenary of the publication of Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. The Hudson River Valley influenced a good deal of Wharton's writing, and her fiction displays a subtle understanding of the region's elite and their values at the turn of the 20th century. The authors of the best papers were invited to revise their works into articles and submit them to the *Review* for possible publication. The essays presented here represent those that were selected by the editors and guest editors for publication. Special thanks to guest editors Judith Saunders and Donald Anderson, both members of the Wharton Society, for this special issue.

Thomas S. Wermuth



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The Hudson River Valley Review is anxious to consider essays on all aspects of the Hudson Valley—its intellectual, political, economic, social, and cultural history, its prehistory, architecture, literature, art, and music—as well as essays on the ideas and ideologies of regionalism itself.

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Rose De Angelis is associate professor of English and director of honors at Marist College. She was editor of the book series Anthropology and Literature from 1996 to 2001. She has published articles on Thomas Hardy, Toni Morrison, and others and has edited a volume of essays entitled *Between Anthropology and Literature: Interdisciplinary Discourse*.

Dale Bachman Flynn teaches at the University of California, Davis. Her doctoral dissertation is a study of Edith Wharton's short stories, and she has served for many years as membership director of the Edith Wharton Society. Her recent writings are interdisciplinary in focus, addressing literature and medical science.

Sharon Kim is associate professor of English at Judson College in Elgin, Illinois. Her essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *American Literature, Studies in the Novel*, and *The Journal of Modern Literature*. She is currently working on a book on literary epiphany in the British and American novel from 1850 to 1950.

Judith Saunders is professor of English at Marist College. Her published commentary addresses a variety of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary figures and includes a number of articles on Edith Wharton. She is the author of *The Poetry of Charles Tomlinson: Border Lines* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003).

THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

Vol. 23, No. 1, Autumn 2006

Edith Wharton and the Hudson Valley
Donald Anderson and Judith Saunders, Guest Editors 1

Finding the House of Mirth in the Hudson River Valley
Dale Bachman Flynn 7

Edith Wharton's Dialogue with Susan Warner
Sharon Kim 15

Lily Bart at Bellomont: Beauty on the Battlements
Donald Anderson and Rose DeAngelis 25

Regional History Forum

The Constitution Island Association
Jessica Campilango, Marist '06 56

Staatsburgh, the Mills Mansion
Sarah Gunner, Marist '07 65

Hidden In Plain Sight: A Brief History of Fore-Edge Painting and the George M. and Alice Gill and George M. and Frances L. Gill Fore-Edge Painting Collections
John Ansley 69

Book Reviews

New and Noteworthy Books Received 82

On the cover: Detail of Edward Harrison May, Edith Jones, 1881.
Collection of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York City



COLLECTION OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND LETTERS, NEW YORK CITY

Edward Harrison May, *Edith Jones*, 1881

Edith Wharton and the Hudson Valley

Donald Anderson and Judith Saunders

When she summoned up one her earliest recollections of the Hudson Valley, Edith Wharton's memory would be drawn with a perceptible shudder to one of the darker blots upon the landscape: the mansion of her Aunt Elizabeth Schermerhorn Jones, which towered above the river at Rhinecliff. The shell of Wyndclyffe still stands there today, uninhabited since the 1960s, and still projects the stony grimness that chilled the young Edith Jones. In *A Backward Glance* she would comment on the "intolerable ugliness" of this "dour specimen of Hudson River Gothic" (28). She regretted the Victorian excess of such architecture not least because it tended to overwhelm the natural beauty for which she cherished the region. She would recall, for example, the visit to the Tom Newbolds in Hyde Park on the day after the unsuccessful opening of the stage version of *The House of Mirth* in 1906, when the bitterness of newspaper reviews could be assuaged by the "wonderful colors of foliage" on that October day (quoted in Lewis 172). Her familiarity with local landscapes, both cultivated and uncultivated, no doubt was enhanced by weekend excursions she and her husband undertook as members of the elite "Coaching Club."

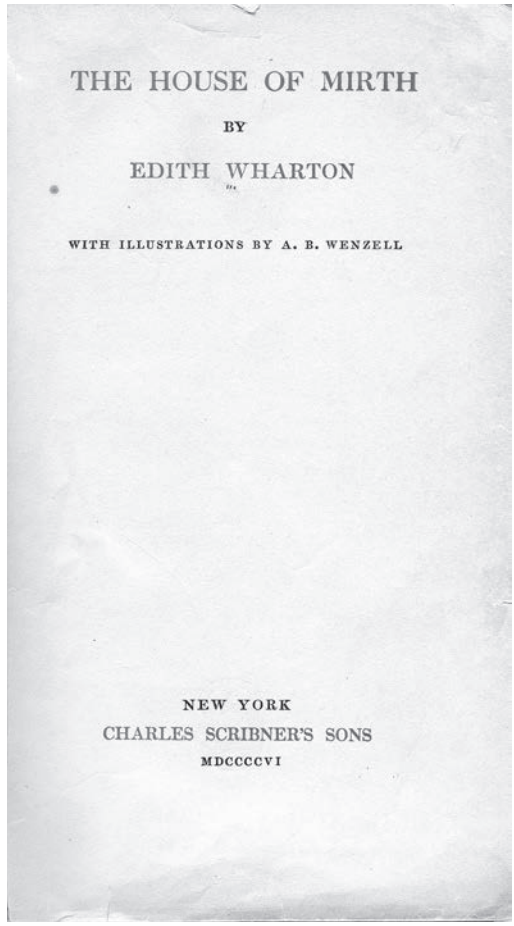
In her fiction Wharton clearly affirms her connection to the Hudson Valley. Her most extensive portrait of its landscape and architecture can be found in her 1929 novel *Hudson River Bracketed*. She locates the fictional town of Paul's Landing north of New York City, a journey of about one and half hours by rail. "A long crooked sort of town on a high ridge," it resembles countless small communities hugging the Hudson, with "turfy banks sloping down" toward "lustrous… water spreading lake-like to distant hills" (39). Featuring horse-drawn vehicles and dilapidated houses, the place appears rather shabby and out-of-date, but it exudes an old-fashioned charm, nonetheless, with its flower gardens, trellis arbours, and shade-trees. Larger, costlier residences are "throned on the mountain side" above the village, where they offer spectacular views: "the precipitate plunge of many-tinted forest, the great sweep of the Hudson, and the cliffs on its other shore" (72).

The architecture and history of the old homes gracing "the feudal Hudson" are nearly as impressive as the views they command (77). Readers are reminded that these structures, some more than two hundred years old, are among the oldest in the United States, constituting an important part of the nation's cultural legacy. One particular house exemplifying the "indigenous" Hudson River Bracketed style contributes significantly to plot as well as to setting in the novel (69). Contrasting Paul's Landing, as a whole, to the suburban environment of the fast-growing Midwest, Wharton extols the Hudson Valley's "soul-sufficing" natural loveliness and rich human history (77). She rejoices in its escape from the twentieth-century mania for "a standardized world," founded on worship of the new for its own sake and a mechanistic, assembly-line sameness (221).

In this context, Wharton also points out that the Hudson River landscape has inspired some of America's finest writers, including Bryant, Irving, and Whitman. The country rising from behind the river composes a variegated tableau: hills, mountains, forests, and meadows, with brooks that leap over rocky ledges "in a drip of ferns and grasses" to form delicious woodland pools (100). One of the novel's most memorable scenes depicts in elaborate detail a sunrise viewed from "tree-shadowed" mountainous heights, a nearly overpowering "streaming of radiances" (98, 221). Generous space is devoted as well to recording the distinct intensity of seasonal change. In early autumn, for instance, "when their foliage was heaviest," the woods are "already yellowing a little here and there, with premature splashes of scarlet and wine-colour on a still-green maple" (221). Later, during winter, "the snow clung to the hemlocks, rolled blinding white over meadow and pasture, gloomed indigo-blue on the edges of the forest, flashed with prismatic lights where a half-caught brook fringed it with icicles"; "how each shoot of bracken, each bramble and dry branch glittered and quivered with white fire!" (299) As such examples illustrate, Wharton's rendering of elemental phenomena, of flora and fauna, is characterized by passionate enthusiasm and detailed familiarity.

Hudson River Bracketed is unusual in the intensity of its focus on the Hudson Valley. More typically, Wharton shows us characters traveling to or through the region, seeking recreational and social opportunities. In the 1911 story "Autres Temps…," for instance, the major action takes place east of the Hudson Valley proper, in the Berkshires near Lenox. A minor character in the story must travel from the Lenox house party to another in Fishkill: she makes this journey through the middle portion of the Hudson Valley by rail, readers learn, on a line running south from Albany. In *The Age of Innocence*, Wharton's 1920 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, the Valley figures prominently as a setting for holiday and weekend social occasions. A number of characters own country homes in the Rhinecliff-Rhinebeck

area, although Manhattan brownstones generally constitute their primary residences. Characters give and receive invitations to these rural retreats, traveling north by train from New York City to enjoy country air and outdoor activities. Newland Archer visits the Reggie Chiverses' "house on the Hudson," for example, where a party of guests engages in "coasting, ice-boating, sleighing, long tramps in the snow" (115). The Henry van der Luydens' property in nearby Skuytercliff is remarkable for its "Patroon's House," a four-room stone house built in 1612 by the first Dutch Patroon. Favored visitors are invited to visit this charming and historically interesting building, whose "squat walls and small square windows" are "compactly grouped about a central chimney" (118 The "homely little house" house assumes emotional importance, furthermore, in the love triangle dominating the novel (119). It serves as the setting for an important romantic scene between Archer and Ellen Olenska and also, ironically, for Archer's honeymoon with May Welland because plumbing problems at their intended destination—the home of the "old du Lac aunts at Rhinebeck"—necessitate a last-minute change in plan (160).


THE HOUSE OF MIRTH

BY

EDITH WHARTON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. B. WENZELL

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
MDCCCCVI

Title page from the 1905 edition of *The House of Mirth*. Courtesy Bard College Library

The House of Mirth (1905) similarly depicts the mid-Hudson region as a rural retreat from New York City. The socio-economically elite characters at the novel's center leave their home-base in Manhattan during the summer months, seeking cooler, fresher air at manor-houses along the river-banks, or at "the elaborate rustic simplicity of an Adirondack camp" (378). Several of the larger estates serve as settings for weddings or house parties, allowing portions of the action to move forward in non-urban environments. Wealthy land-owners like

the Trenors or the Van Osburghs seek respite at their own second residences "on the Hudson," while poorer members of the group accept invitations to make protracted stays in desirable locations (139). Even Gerty Farish, who is pitiably poor by the standards of her social community, spends August with an aunt on Lake George. In the second part of the novel, when Lily Bart ceases to receive invitations to out-of-town house parties, she is forced to endure the oppressive heat of the city instead; her exclusion from the community's seasonal pattern of movement to Hudson Valley destinations serves as an important measure of her damaged social reputation.



A.B. Wenzell illustration from the 1905 edition of *The House of Mirth*. Courtesy Bard College Library

The novel famously begins in Grand Central Station, as its heroine prepares to travel by rail to Rhinebeck for an extended visit with friends. Readers can follow the train's northward path as it pauses to take on more passengers "at Garrisons" (35). Bellomont, the manor-house at which Lily Bart joins a party of socially prominent guests, is large and imposing. Its terrace, great-hall, and library (complete with family portraits) are almost overshadowed, nevertheless, by its extensive grounds: the house is surrounded by "a landscape tutored to the last degree of rural elegance" (77). The Hudson River features prominently in the many lovely views the grounds command: "through a long glade, the river widened like a lake under the silver light of September" (77). Wharton describes arbours and garden paths, wooded hills and meadows. Tellingly, nearly every prospect is provided with a "rustic seat" from which to admire its splendors (97). The most important romantic episode in the novel takes place in this setting. As Lily Bart and Lawrence Selden mount a "glossy verdure of shaded slopes" and reach "an open ledge of rock," he speaks to her of his "republic of the spirit," and they come to grips with the essential problems of their lives (101, 108). Gazing at "the sun-suffused world at [their] feet,"

they dream—briefly—of a possible future together (102). Here, as in *Hudson River Bracketed*, Wharton locates a crucial encounter between her central male and female characters high above the Hudson in a landscape whose splendors she describes in enticing detail.

At the June 2005 conference sponsored by the Edith Wharton Society at Marist College, a group of scholars gathered to commemorate the centennial of the publication of *The House of Mirth*. Exploring the historical and cultural context of the novel, they gave particular attention to Wharton's complex and enduring relationship with the Hudson River Valley. This issue of the *Hudson River Valley Review* seeks to sustain that focus. It begins with Dale Flynn's photo-essay, an illustrated tour of regional sites important in Wharton's life and writing. Sharon Kim examines Wharton's fiction for possible allusions to the work of local novelist Susan Warner, who lived on Constitution Island and produced popular fiction for the generation of Edith Wharton's mother. Jessica Campilango's feature on the Island provides further background on the place and the two sisters, Susan and Anna, who made it an important part of the region's history. Donald Anderson and Rose DeAngelis offer a detailed analysis of suggested connections between Bellomont (from *The House of Mirth*) and the Ogden Mills Estate in Staatsburg. The journal's editors hope in future to publish the results of new research by scholars who continue to probe the many-faceted connections to the Hudson Valley manifest in Wharton's work.

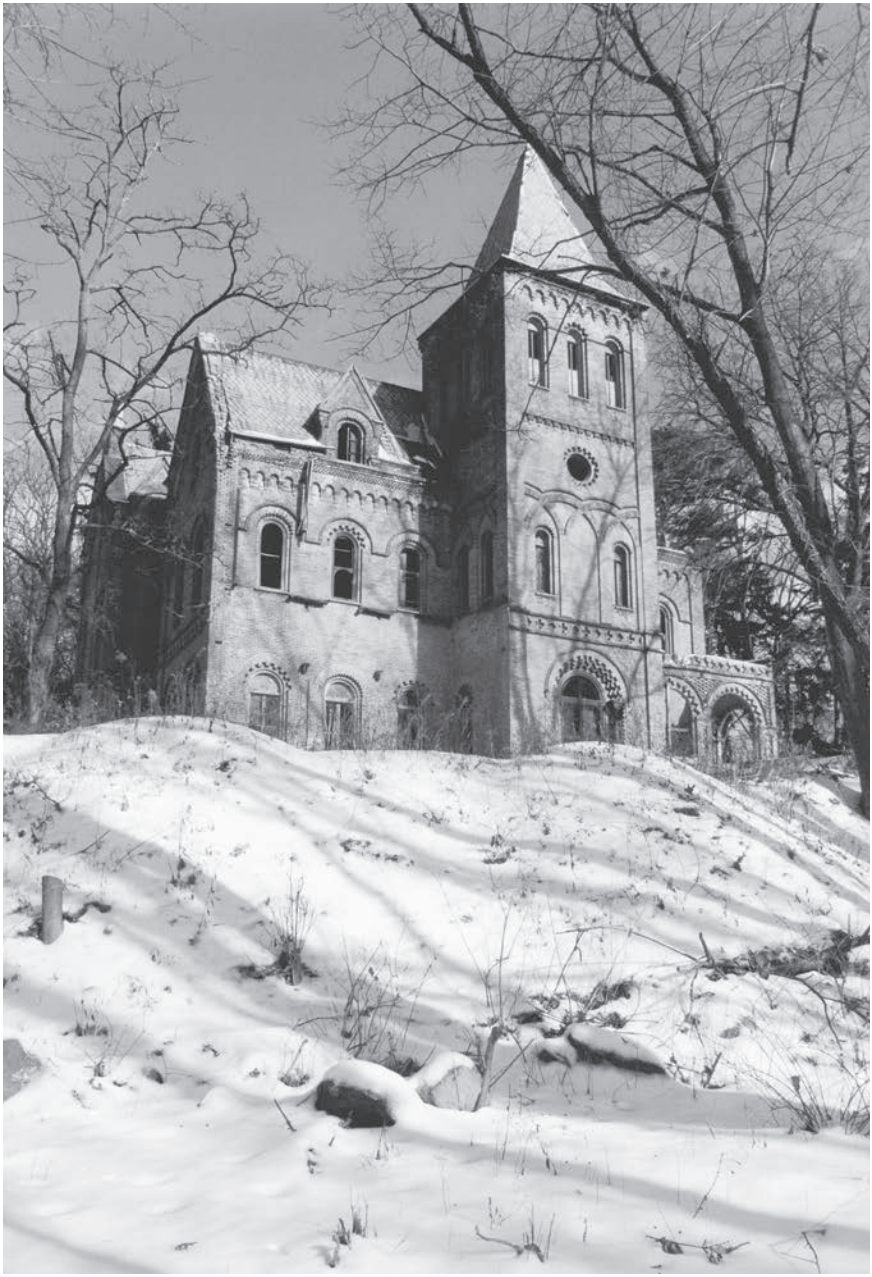
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The ruins of Wyndclyffe, presently being restored as a private residence

Finding the House of Mirth in the Hudson River Valley

Dale Bachman Flynn

When Edith Wharton wrote her 1905 novel *The House of Mirth*, she set the action in a place she knew well: the Hudson River Valley. Her father had first taken her to Rhinecliff when she was a toddler, to visit his stern, unmarried sister, Elizabeth Schermerhorn Jones, a cousin of Mrs. William Astor of Ferncliff (*Backward Glance* 275, Zukowski and Stimson 180). Before this time, most of the Hudson River traffic consisted of steamboats and ferries. In 1863, Cornelius Vanderbilt began buying up railroads, so Wharton and her father were able to travel conveniently by train.

Edith Wharton's aunt lived in a house called Wyndclyffe, a mansion on the Hudson River that had been built for her in 1853. Constructed in Norman style, this "truly monumental" home was grander and more ornate than others in the region. From its four-story central tower, it "commanded views up and down the river, with the Catskills as a panoramic backdrop" (Zukowski and Stimson 180). The obviously enormous outlay of wealth required to construct such a home, it was said, gave rise to the expression "keeping up with the Joneses" (180).

In *A Backward Glance*, Wharton remembered the house like this:

> The effect of terror produced by the house at Rhinecliff was no doubt due to what seemed to me its intolerable ugliness. My visual sensibility must always have been too keen for middling pleasure; my photographic memory of rooms and houses—even those seen but briefly, or at long intervals—was from my earliest years a source of inarticulate misery, for I was always vaguely frightened by ugliness. I can still remember hating everything at Rhinecliff, which, as I saw, on rediscovering it some years later, was an expensive but dour specimen of Hudson River Gothic: and from the first I was obscurely conscious of a queer resemblance between the granitic exterior of Aunt Elizabeth and her grimly comfortable home. (28)

Henry Winthrop Sargent, who owned Wodenethe in Beacon and was thus a fellow resident of the Hudson Valley, spoke of Wyndclyffe in far more laudatory terms. Genuinely enthusiastic about Hudson River Gothic, he characterized Aunt Elizabeth's mansion as a "very successful and distinctive house with much the appearance of the some of the smaller Scotch castles" (quoted in Zukowsky and Stimson 180). Wharton herself must have retained *some* favorable impressions of the place, for she portrayed it (renamed "The Willows") in a largely positive light in her 1929 novel *Hudson River Bracketed*.

Wharton undoubtedly knew many other mansions along the Hudson River in addition to her aunt's. For example, Ellerslie in Rhinebeck had been built for Levi Parsons Morton and his wife, Anna Livingston Read Morton (Zukowski and Stimson 181). In 1879, Edith Wharton's debutante ball had been held in the Mortons' ballroom on Fifth Avenue (Lewis 33).

Having sold his Newport mansion in 1885, Levi Morton arranged for his friend Richard Morris Hunt to design an elaborate residence for him near Rhinecliff. Called Ellerslie, this mansion sat on a 1,000-acre estate. It consisted of two-and-a-half stories: "a first-floor elevation of stone was followed by a second story and gables fashioned with Tudor-style half-timber work" (Zukowski and Stimson 181). Exterior features, such as verandas, pavilions, projecting bays, and a porte cochere, added to the impressive effect of the whole (181).



ALL PHOTOS DALE BACHMAN FLYNN

Newbold carriage house

In the 1880s, Wharton's Uncle, Thomas Newbold, built a home on a thirteen-acre estate in Hyde Park, on land he had acquired in 1861. Eventually named Fern Tor, the Newbold mansion commanded a southern view of the Hudson River. The estate included formal gardens, summerhouses and greenhouses, a manmade pond, and a carriage house ("Fern Tor"). There is evidence that Edith Wharton sometimes stopped in Hyde Park on motor trips between New York and Lenox (Lewis 172-73).

What remains of Fern Tor was acquired by Marist College in 1997. The carriage house, which had been transformed into a private residence, is the only structure still standing and has been rechristened St. Ann's Hermitage ("St Ann's Hermitage").



Hyde Park train station

Steeped as she was in scenes of the Hudson River Valley, it is no surprise that Edith Wharton drew voluminously on her memories of the place in her fiction. *The House of Mirth* opens in the afternoon rush of Grand Central Terminal as Lily Bart is about to board the Hudson River Line—the same line that Wharton took as a child—for a weekend in the country.

After a fateful side trip to Selden's apartment, Lily Bart boards the train to Rhinebeck and Bellomont, the estate of her friends Gus and Judy Trenor. Although the original station at Rhinebeck was demolished long ago, several of the original Hudson Valley stations remain. The station at Hyde Park, for example, is typical of a destination station for a country weekend along the Hudson. It is the station that Wharton probably would have used to visit her Uncle Thomas Newbold. The Hyde Park Station has been restored, but is no longer in use.

Although there are other contenders, Louis Auchincloss suggests that Wharton modeled Bellomont on the country estate of her friends, the Odgen Millses (68). In 2005, the docents at the Mills Mansion responded to that suggestion by setting up several of the rooms to conform to descriptions from *The House of Mirth*. Whether or not Wharton had this particular mansion in mind, the Mills estate serves as an elegant example of the great homes built by America's financial and industrial leaders during the Gilded Age, as stated in John Zukowsky and



The front façade of Staatsburgh

Robbe Pierce Stimson's *Hudson River Villas* (164-67), and it certainly fits the tone of Wharton's novel.

The Millses' house had originally been built as a twenty-five-room Greek Revival structure in 1832 by Morgan Lewis and his wife, Gertrude Livingston, replacing an earlier residence that had burned down. Ruth Livingston Mills, wife of financier and philanthropist Odgen Mills, eventually inherited the house and, in 1895, the couple commissioned the prestigious New York City architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White to redesign and enlarge it. The house was transformed into a Beaux-Arts mansion of sixty-five rooms and fourteen bathrooms. Its exterior included "a white stucco façade enhanced with floral swags, pilasters, and fluted columns" (164).

The interiors were equally elaborate, "finished with ceilings of molded plaster, marble fireplaces, natural oak paneling, and parquet flooring" (164). To Auchincloss and many other readers, several of the rooms in the Millses' mansion suggest settings Wharton employed in *The House of Mirth*. The drawing room, of course, provided a principal setting for evening activities. On her first night at Bellomont, for example, Lily assembles there with the other guests to play cards.




Drawing room at Staatsburgh (left) and bridge table

After playing bridge into the small hours and losing a considerable amount of money, Lily lingers on the stairs looking down into the hall below:

> The hall was arcaded, with a gallery supported on columns of pale yellow marble. Tall clumps of flowering plants were grouped against a background of dark foliage in the angles of the walls. On the crimson carpet a deerhound and two or three spaniels dozed luxuriously before the fire, and the light from the great central lantern overhead shed a brightness on the women's hair and struck sparks from their jewels as they moved.
>
> There were moments when such scenes delighted Lily, when they gratified her sense of beauty and her craving for the external finish of life; there were others when they gave a sharper edge to the meagerness of her own opportunities.(22)

The library at the Mills Estate resembles in some respects the library at Bellomont, another important setting in Wharton's novel. She loved to parody the libraries of the wealthy—or, in any event, the uses to which the wealthy put their libraries.

> The library was almost the only surviving portion of the old manor-house of Bellomont: a long spacious room, revealing the traditions of the mother-country in its classically-cased doors, the Dutch tiles of the chimney, and the elaborate hobgrate with its shining brass urns. A few family portraits of lantern-jawed gentlemen in tie-wigs, and ladies with large head-dresses and small bodies, hung between the shelves lined with pleasantly-shabby books: books mostly contemporaneous with the ancestors in question, and to which the subsequent Trenors had made no perceptible additions. The library at Bellomont was in fact never used for reading, though it had a certain popularity as a smoking-room or a quiet retreat for flirtation. (48)



Staatsburgh, west lawn as seen from below the terrace

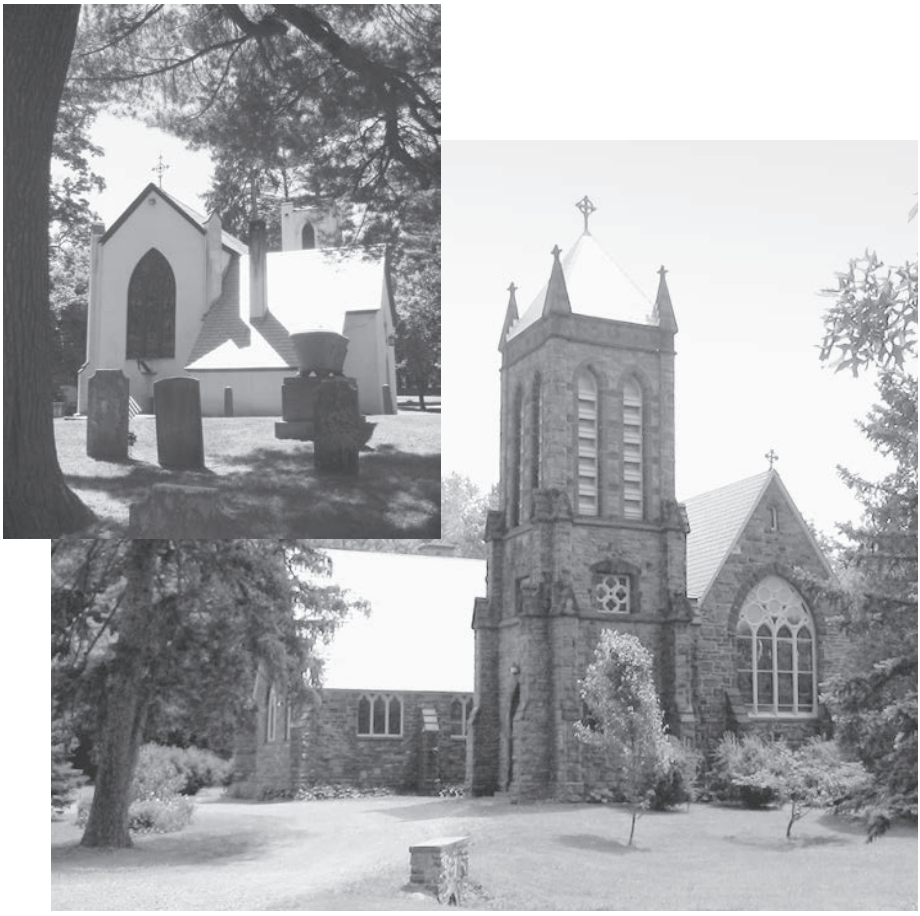
Moving to the grounds of Bellomont, Wharton continues to evoke the landscape of the Hudson River Valley. On the terrace, Lily affects a pose to capture the attention of Percy Gryce:

> The terrace at Bellomont on a September afternoon was a spot propitious to sentimental musing, and as Miss Bart stood leaning against the balustrade above the sunken garden, at a little distance from the animated group about the tea-table, she might have been lost in the mazes of an inarticulate happiness. (39)

Lily does capture Gryce's attention and promises to attend church with him on Sunday morning. But Lily never makes it to church. Instead, she takes a walk, hoping to run into Lawrence Selden.

> Higher up, the lane showed thickening tufts of fern and of the creeping glossy verdure of shaded slopes; trees began to overhang it, and the shade deepened to the checkered dusk of a beech-grove. The boles of the trees stood well apart, with only a light feathering of undergrowth; the path wound along the edge of the wood, now and then looking out on a sunlit pasture or on an orchard spangled with fruit. (51)

The great manor houses along the Hudson frequently included their own churches. Within walking distance of the Mills Mansion is the very picturesque St. Margaret's Episcopal Church. Across from the Vanderbilt mansion in Hyde



St. Margaret's Church, Staatsburgh. Inset: St. James Church, Hyde Park

Park is St. James Episcopal Church. When Lily's cousin, Jack Stepney, marries Miss Van Osburgh, Lily attends the wedding near Peekskill in a church such as one of these:

> The Van Osburgh marriage was celebrated in the village church near the paternal estate on the Hudson. It was the 'simple country wedding' to which guests are convoyed in special trains, and from which the hordes of the uninvited have to be fended off by the intervention of the police. (69)

Lily, of course, is not destined to enjoy such a wedding herself. If Lily Bart had had a paternal estate on the Hudson instead of a father named Hudson, her fate would have been far different. Instead, Wharton uses Lily rather like one of those

Dutch mirrors that she likens to Mrs. Peniston's mind:

> She had always been a looker-on at life, and her mind resembled one of those little mirrors which her Dutch ancestors were accustomed to affix to their upper windows, so that from the depths of an impenetrable domesticity they might see what was happening in the street. (32)

Through Lily, Wharton takes us on an intimate tour of the life of the wealthy on the Hudson River, revealing as she does the greed and vacuity at the heart of that society. Wharton took the title *The House of Mirth*, of course, from Ecclesiastes: "The heart of fools is in the house of mirth." Wharton's earliest memories of such houses started in the Hudson River Valley.

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Edith Wharton's Dialogue with Susan Warner

Sharon Kim

Far from the drawing rooms of Old New York lived a woman who would wake up at 4:30 in the morning, then write for hours to make ends meet. Her farmhouse sat atop the ruins of a Revolutionary War barracks on the Hudson River, scant of luxury though rich in history and natural beauty. Mostly forgotten today, her novels seem as different from Edith Wharton's as the farmhouse differs from a mansion. Yet Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) shows a distinct engagement with this writer, Susan Warner. Elaine Showalter, Jeanne Boydston, and Hildegard Hoeller have studied different angles of Wharton's relation to sentimental fiction, whether in subversion, affinity, or dialogue. Hoeller, for example, discusses Wharton's simultaneous dialogue with the limits of both realism and sentimentalism in her works. This dialogue explored by Hoeller assumes particularly precise focus in *The House of Mirth* through Wharton's consideration of Susan Warner. Wharton's portrayal of two characters, Lady Cressida Raith and Gerty Farish, represent Wharton's interaction with the religious vision and sentimentalism of Warner's writing.

Susan Warner was the literary celebrity of Wharton's mother's generation. Born in 1819, she grew up in New York amidst "crimson cushions and tall mirrors" (A. Warner 171). Her father was a successful lawyer; her mother came from one of the prominent families in fashionable Hudson Square (Foster 20). After 1837, however, the Warners suffered financial losses similar to those of the Barts in *The House of Mirth*. They sold their mansion on St. Mark's Place and began to live in an old farmhouse on Constitution Island, near West Point. The change in their lives was a hard one. As her sister Anna recalls: "From waiter and coachman and cook to the skill of our own hands (chiefly) was a broad step; oars and saw and hatchet succeeded our frisky black ponies; while from dainty silks and laces, we came down to calicoes, fashioned by our own fingers; and from new bonnets with every turn of the season, to what headgear we could get" (176). For the young Susan who enjoyed society, a harder loss soon followed, according to

Anna: "If you have 'nothing to wear,' few want you; while some think it kind not to invite you, because of course (in such case) you cannot want to come! And for a good while we had little to do with visits or visitors" (177). In such social and geographical isolation, Warner became a devout Christian and wrote her first novel, *The Wide, Wide World*, which scholars have discussed as the "Ur-text" of the sentimental novel.[1]

Published in 1850, *The Wide, Wide World* tells the story of ten-year-old Ellen Montgomery, whose dying mother must send her to live with a mean aunt on a farm. Ellen is taken from home and placed in a harsh setting for which she is unprepared. Yet she soon meets Alice Humphreys and her brother John, who encourage her through various problems and adventures, teaching her how to grow into a woman and become a true Christian. Ellen's story follows the pattern identified by Nina Baym in her seminal study, *Woman's Fiction* (1978). Avoiding the label "sentimental," Baym explains the recurrent plot line of woman's fiction, in which a young girl, often orphaned, loses her normal supports but still manages to overcome hardship. In her essay "Reclaiming Sentimental Literature," Joanna Dobson also identifies the affectional bond as a central feature of sentimental fiction, with "separation" as the principle tragedy (267; 263-88). The importance of the affectional bond, along with the grief of separation, certainly characterizes Warner's novel.

The Wide, Wide World was one of the first run-away bestsellers, second only to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Baker 54) in the nineteenth century. And this was at a time when people from good homes, like Lucretia Rhinelander (Wharton's mother) and Warner herself, weren't always allowed to read novels. Warner's second novel, *Queechy* (1852), also met with success, even finding its way into the libraries of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot. In fact, among young girls polled in 1886, Warner's novels were read more often than those of Eliot, Thackeray, and Charlotte Brontë (Salmon 528). All told, Warner wrote nearly thirty novels, many of which went into more than ten editions. Warner did not really profit from them, however, having signed away her rights for needed cash. She never regained her status within New York society. She never married. She lived with her sister on Constitution Island until her death in 1885, mending her own clothes, chopping her own wood, and holding Bible studies for cadets at the United States Military Academy across the river.

Critics praised Warner for her skill as a regionalist writer, capturing the landscape, dialect, and manners of the Hudson Valley.[2] Like the Hudson River School of painters, Warner depicted places along the Hudson in works such as *The Wide, Wide World*, *Queechy*, *The Hills of the Shatemuc* (1856), *Daisy* (1868),

and *Pine Needles* (1877). Warner also shares with some of these artists a tendency to use Biblical typology to locate a spiritual reality within a specifically American context. The hills along the Hudson River, for example, invoked the presence of God as seen in passages from the Bible, such as Psalm 121, quoted in *The Wide, Wide World* (443): "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth" (Ps. 121:1-2). In common with visual artists inspired by the same region, Warner portrayed the fulfillment of a Biblical type within the particularities of the Hudson River landscape.[3]

As a well-read woman, Edith Wharton couldn't help but know of Susan Warner. In fact, Wharton's satire occasionally targets Warner's writing, providing indirect confirmation of her familiarity with the earlier novelist's work. In the short story "Full Circle" (1909), Wharton titles the best-seller of a mediocre, verbose novelist *Diadems and Faggots*, a jab at Warner's *Sceptres and Crowns* (1874), and in "Expiation" (1904), she names another sentimental writer "Mrs. Fetherel," a diminishing of Warner's pen-name, Elizabeth Wetherell. In *The House of Mirth*, Wharton may satirize Warner through her pen-name again, when she writes: "The Wetheralls always went to church.…and Mr. and Mrs. Wetherall's circle was so large that God was included in their visiting list" (43).

Wharton's more detailed response to Warner begins in *The House of Mirth*, however, with Lady Cressida Raith, a houseguest of the Trenors. Lady Cressida embodies in compressed form all the traits of a Warner character: an unusual name, a love of botany, a connection to the aristocracy, a clergyman husband, and a life of mission work among the poor. No single Warner heroine has all of these traits, but the satire clearly targets the ideals distinctive to Warner's works.[4] *Queechy*, for example, has a religious heroine named Elfleda, who marries into the English aristocracy and also has an impressive knowledge of flora indigenous to New York State, marine plants in distant oceans, and more than twenty-three varieties of roses. The same qualities compressed into Wharton's portrait of Lady Cressida appear in such Warner novels as *The Old Helmet* (1863), *Diana* (1877), *My Desire* (1879), *The End of a Coil* (1880), *The Letter of Credit* (1881), and *Nobody* (1882). Wharton also shows her familiarity with this character type when she has Lady Cressida express surprise that the party will take an omnibus to church instead of walking across the park. After glancing at her companions' heels, however, Lady Cressida agrees to be driven. This glance at the others' impractical shoes, while not a direct allusion to Warner, aptly recreates a Warner-style point of view. A Warner narrative often contrasts a fresh, practical heroine with the various victims of wealth and fashion. True to Warner's independent and active

heroines, Lady Cressida won't wear fashions that hinder her freedom of movement or exertion. She's refined but not a priss. She walks about in the fresh air, Liberty silk and ethnological trinkets and all.

While everyone respects Lady Cressida's title, her interests are so alien to those of Lily's set that she becomes something of a nuisance. What can be done with a woman who has the right blood but chooses to live her life in such an idiosyncratic way? She's an aristocrat, but she is also, as Judy Trenor puts it, "a clergyman's wife, who wears Indian jewelry and botanizes!" (35). She thus presents a constant culture shock. She doesn't just wear *Indian* jewelry; she overturns the cultural expectations for how a relative of the Duchess of Beltshire should behave. She actually wants to go to church on Sunday morning. While touring the greenhouse, she actually takes an interest in the plants. When she decides to walk home from church, the others are forced to walk with her (53). She thus disrupts the smooth social machinery of the Bellomont set. Since it's impossible to eject her, Judy Trenor can only complain:

> But she is boring all the men horribly. And if she takes to distributing tracts, as I hear she does, it will be too depressing. The worst of it is that she would have been so useful at the right time. You know we have to have the Bishop once a year, and she would have given just the right tone to things. I always have horrid luck about the Bishop's visits" (36).

Through Lady Cressida, Wharton imagines what would happen if a Warner character would show up in New York society. Such a personage would look comic. Her name says it all, Lady Cressida Raith—archaic, spiritual, spooky, weird. Wharton's satire, however, is a double-edged sword. Lady Cressida's oddness highlights the impoverished values of Lily's set. Judy Trenor's complaint reveals a world where people don't care about God, just the social duty of entertaining a bishop; where people don't take an interest in learning about the natural world, just the pride of having greenhouses; and where people invite others to stay with them not because they like them but because they want to make use of them, or at least snatch them away from their social rivals. Originally, Judy invites Lady Cressida purely for the triumph of getting her away from the Van Osburghs.

Through Lady Cressida, Wharton considers the religious and cultural ideals of Warner's work. To focus on the moral and sentimental dimension, Wharton turns to Gerty Farish, who, perhaps like Warner, comes from the right class but is "fatally poor and dingy" (71). The name "Gerty" may come from the heroine, Gerty Flint, of Maria Cummins' *The Lamplighter* (1854), which scholars have identified as a direct descendent of *The Wide, Wide World*. Just as Gerty Farish is

a far more nuanced character than the eccentric Lady Cressida, Wharton seems to find more to take seriously in the moral and sentimental aspects of Warner's fiction than in its conceptions of religion and class.

Gerty Farish demonstrates the moral perspective central to a Warner narrative. It is not just that she won't gossip or cut a friend (175). She has a "theory of values" (205) in which virtue is better than money, and caring for others is better than self-seeking. In Gerty's world, as in Warner's, hardship leads to a moral awakening that transforms the individual, a dream Wharton describes as "renovation through adversity" (205). In *The Wide, Wide World*, Ellen's sufferings in the countryside lead her to look to a God beyond her local context. For many of Warner's characters, the awakening is often a religious conversion seen in a change of heart. Ellen, for example, recognizes the authenticity of her faith when she can see the "change" (352) that her heart, mind, and actions have undergone. In *The Old Helmet*, another character describes her conversion: "I was cold at heart to religion. I was not happy.… One night I sat up all night, and gave the whole night to thoughts of it.… And the dawn came into my heart. I cannot tell you how—I seemed to see everything at once. I saw what a heaven below it is to know the love of Christ" (576). In the Warner novel, wrongdoing comes from moral blindness, so once the eyes are opened the character finds renewal. Warner's characters show increasing concern for others, including those of another class or race.

Gerty has similar views. When Lily begins to visit the Girls' Club, "She [Gerty] supposed her beautiful friend to be actuated by the same motive as herself—that sharpening of moral vision which makes all human suffering so near and insistent that the other aspects of life fade into remoteness." As Wharton further explains: "Gerty lived by such simple formulas that she did not hesitate to class her friend's state with the emotional 'change of heart' to which her dealings with the poor had accustomed her; and she rejoiced in the thought that she had been the humble instrument of this renewal" (119-120). Wharton's description of Gerty echoes the language common to this religious sentimentalism, from the phrase "change of heart" highlighted in quotation marks to words like "humble instrument," indicating that the person was used by God and refuses to take credit for any good accomplished. This humility, as well as the rejoicing in being such an instrument, also appears in Warner's work. In *The Wide, Wide World*, for example, when Ellen shows how deeply she appreciates Alice, Alice is quick to shift the credit to God: "If I have done you any good, don't forget it was he brought me to you yesterday afternoon" (167). With Gerty, however, Wharton is not focusing on the religious aspect of inner change. She's focusing on the individual's altered moral horizons and her relationship to others. Warner's perspective includes the

idea that suffering leads to moral renewal and that moral awakening leads to sympathy and compassion for others. But Wharton describes these as "simple formulas," primitive, reductive ways of understanding the world. Whereas both Warner and Gerty believe in the universal applicability of that moral vision, Wharton distinguishes between Gerty's psychology and Lily's, which she describes as "incapable of such renewal" (119). Lily's eyes are opened to her faults, but what she sees does not change or redeem her character. It simply makes her afraid to sleep at night.

As part of its moral perspective, the Warner narrative often involves a test of character in which the protagonist must choose between a strong personal desire and what is morally right. In *Diana*, for example, the heroine must renounce a passionate love in order to remain faithful to her husband. She shows her heroism by making the right decision no matter how painful it is. In *The House of Mirth*, Wharton brings Gerty to a similar test. Gerty is in love with Selden but realizes that Selden loves Lily. She thus begins to hate Lily. But when Lily comes to Gerty in tears, confessing her debasement and asking if Selden would understand her situation and help her, Wharton writes: "[Gerty] knew the hour of her probation had come, and her poor heart beat wildly against its destiny. As a dark river sweeps by under a lightning flash, she saw her chance of happiness surge past under a flash of temptation" (132). Gerty could say "no," thus crushing Lily's hope and keeping her away from Selden. But Gerty speaks what she thinks is true. Her assessment of Selden isn't entirely accurate, but she believes it to be: "'Yes: I know him; he will help you,' she said" (132). And though Gerty still feels the pain of disappointment, she offers Lily the compassion and the warm, enfolding arms that Lily needs (118;133). This compassion is Gerty's dominant trait, part of the sentimental tradition she imports into the novel. She's full of heart and likes to show that she cares. When they were children, Lily rebuked Gerty for showing too much affection, but it's Gerty's tenderness, loyalty, and concern that makes her a comfort to Lily when all her other friends abandon her. Although Gerty doesn't have to work, she spends her time helping women of the lower classes. And when poor Miss Jane Silverton loses her money because of Ned's gambling, who does she go to for help—Gerty.

As Carrie Fisher puts it, "Gerty's a trump, and worth all the rest of us put together," but neither Carrie nor Lily wants to be so plain, dingy, and poor (181). Lily views Gerty as hopelessly unmarriageable and can't imagine how anyone of their class could succumb to such bad interior décor. Several times her thoughts on Gerty contain the adjective "irritating," and she seems to view Gerty as limited (71, 205): "Dear Gerty, how little imagination you good people have!" she

exclaims (176). Lily is convinced that Gerty could never really understand her true situation, that Gerty, by virtue of being Gerty, would be cognitively incapable of understanding it. Wharton, to be fair, sees more to Gerty than Lily does. Gerty is capable of perception and growth. She recognizes, for example, the naïvete of her simplistic view of Lily: "Gerty could smile now at her own early dream of her friend's renovation through adversity: she understood clearly enough that Lily was not of those to whom privation teaches the unimportance of what they have lost" (205).

Yet despite these concessions, Wharton never lets Gerty become the ideal in *The House of Mirth*. She is not recreating the Warner novel. As Wharton writes, "perhaps only a friendship like Gerty's could be proof against such an increasing strain. Gerty's friendship did indeed hold fast; yet Lily was beginning to avoid her also" (230). Wharton does not question the reality of Gerty's friendship or the sincerity of her values, but she shows how Gerty is simply inadequate to the needs of Lily's personality, which craves a high degree of splendor or cultural fineness. Whereas in Warner's novels, virtue coincides with beauty, refinement, insight, happiness, and true friendships, Wharton's novel denies that wholeness. Wharton presents Lily with a choice: "To be herself, or a Gerty Farish." Her fate is clear from the very beginning (23).

Ultimately, Lily must reject the life that Gerty has chosen: to live frugally, independently, and philanthropically. In rejecting Gerty, however, Lily also must forfeit the female independence, affectional community, and chance at rehabilitation that Gerty provides and which was the hallmark of sentimental fiction. Feminist critics have already explored these aspects of the sentimental tradition, some in direct connection to Warner. Tompkins, for example, writes of the strong communion between Alice, Ellen, and the elderly Mrs. Vawse, whose mountaintop house provides a space of female independence—material, emotional, and spiritual—in *The Wide, Wide World* (*Designs* 163-67). Gerty could help Lily live in way that would free her from the house of mirth. Yet while Lily does acknowledge that Gerty is "free" and that she is not, Lily knows that she cannot be a Gerty Farish (8). She wants the freedom and the friendship, but she has to have the splendor too. Although Wharton displaces Gerty from the central principles of *The House of Mirth*, something of her does rub off on Lily. Toward the end of the novel, Lily arrives at an excruciating test of character, in which she, like Gerty, makes the difficult but right decision: she repays her debt to Gus Trenor, even though she thereby impoverishes herself. Unfortunately, she ends up dead. Unlike the Warner orphan, Lily finds no help, no grace, no redemption.

Through Gerty Farish and Lady Cressida, Wharton reconsiders different

dimensions of Warner's ethos and narrative patterns. Through Gerty, Wharton acknowledges the strong affectional center of the sentimental tradition, which supports the moral vision of virtue over wealth, renewal through trials, and female independence. Yet she finds these virtues inadequate to the refinement and brutal complexity of turn-of-the-century New York society. Through Lady Cressida, Wharton notes the oddness of Warner's mixture of overt, evangelical Christianity, botany, aristocracy, and social work. Yet she also uses this satire to mock the social values that would construe Lady Cressida as odd. In *The House of Mirth*, Wharton is engaged in a multileveled dialogue with her predecessor Susan Warner and with the tradition Warner represented, a dialogue commensurate with the precision with which she worked out her own theory of fiction and her relation to other writers. By creating a space within her novel for Warner's character types and ideals, Wharton moves beyond the literature of a previous generation while maintains with it a respectful, though sometimes ironic, continuity.

Notes

1. Jane Tompkins calls it the "Ur-text of the nineteenth-century United States" (Afterword 585), and Nine Baym discusses it as one of the original patterns for woman's fiction. I believe that Warner doesn't quite fit into the category of sentimentalism, but Wharton would have understood her primarily as a sentimentalist. Wharton does not name Warner directly in her writings.
2. The Warner House Collection, housed at the Constitution Island Association at West Point, includes a scrapbook of such reviews, compiled by the Warner sisters along with copies of letters written to the Warners. For more recent remarks on Warner's depiction of particular landscapes, see Foster.
3. For a more complete discussion of Warner and typology, see Kim.
4. This satire is of a sophisticated order, since it aims at the deep, often implicit ideals in Warner's works, such as the linkage of social and spiritual nobility.

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ALL PHOTOS: ROSE DE ANGELIS UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED



One half of the double staircase leading from the terrace to the lawn at Staatsburgh

Lily Bart at Bellomont: Beauty on the Battlements

Donald Anderson and Rose De Angelis

In Book I of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth,* Lily Bart, a well-wired accessory of the New York aristocracy, walks into a place and situation she assumes she can manipulate to her benefit but ends by suffering her first unwitting loss in a work of accelerating losses. The place is Bellomont, a Hudson River estate somewhere near Rhinebeck, to which Lily will journey by train from Manhattan, in order, among other things, to secure a more predictable and affluent future for herself—or so she would like to imagine. While she believes her training will assure her an easy win, Lily Bart, a gambler by nature, is willing to test the very hands of Fate even as she battles to retain a final hold on a vital part of her*self* that lies somewhat beyond the discernible rules of the aristocratic game plan. From the beginning, Lily Bart's actions reveal the "pitfalls of using masquerade as a means of asserting a personal identity" (Hovet and Hovet 349); and she navigates between two: one that will free her from the confinement of her gender and her class and one that will concretize her place in New York society at the expense of her agency. While her actions will finally reveal "how impossible it is for her to negotiate actively or articulately between the two images" (Hovet and Hovet 349),[1] the Bellomont chapters offer a brief, vibrant glimpse into the possible.

Appropriately, Lily's story begins in September, at the cusp of autumn, the Hudson Valley's most spectacular but poignant season whose very power, like Lily's, is in its momentary glory. Visitors to Bellomont must capture the moment and revel in it, for its transitory splendor metamorphoses. As Nancy Von Rosk writes, "Bellomont's visual delight is calculated and contrived to achieve just the right effect" (336), and for Lily Bart, staging the right effect might allow her to succeed if only she were able to break outside of contrivance, however beguiling. In this aching season, each moment that passes changes the aesthetics and refashions the recognitions and responses, and so for Lily, as for Bellomont in its autumnal glory, time and appreciation are of the essence lest the moment is gone forever.

Lawrence Selden inadvertently links Lily herself to the contrived impressions of Bellomont as they stroll together towards his flat at The Benedict in the novel's opening chapter.[2] "Everything about her was at once vigorous and exquisite…. [S]he must have cost a great deal to make…. [It was as though] a fine glaze of beauty and fastidiousness had been applied to vulgar clay. Yet the analogy left him unsatisfied, for… was it not possible that the material was fine, but that circumstances had fashioned it into a futile shape" (5). Bellomont and Lily become centers of spectacle and, at times, the spectacle itself. However, as Frances L. Restuccia reminds the reader, while Selden and others would like to depict Lily as an "aesthetic commodity," unlike Bellomont, her repeated oscillations between the demands of external reality and the desires of her inner self reveal her to be, like the colorations of autumn, as much of a natural work in progress as a work of art (406). "If Wharton invites us to apprehend Lily as an analogue of art, we must take care in constructing the parallel, avoiding the traditional legalistic tendency to ascribe univocal meanings to things, to wash away their ambiguity—in this case to regard Lily as an art object, or in other terms as a 'work'" (Restuccia 407). Lily's constant reconfigurations of herself, in fact, underscore her unwillingness to be simply a replica of an old manor house, like the Trenors' house, where books are on display but never read. If she is going to be a cultural marker, Lily wants to be one where the intellectual, the moral, and the social interconnect for a greater purpose than just to be gazed upon or to serve as a prop. Lily knows that "beauty is only the raw material of conquest and that to convert it into success other arts are required" (36). Unfortunately, while Lily tries to control her own agency and take charge of what others see as an "aesthetic commodity," bringing to it her own brand of clever design, she is also unlike the monolithic Bellomont in that, "for all the hard glaze of her exterior," she is, like the coloration of foliage, "inwardly as malleable as wax" (55), and it is this malleability which will eventually lead to Lily's destruction, for she can neither fully mold herself to her own design nor hold herself to society's blueprint. The ambiguities—even those merely sensed—are ultimately too compelling.

Significantly, then, the name *Bellomont* suggests the dynamic of outer and inner at work in the place and the person: the word *Bellomont* is comprised of roots that intimate both "beauty" and "battle."[3] The opening scene of the Bellomont section interfuses both connotations. We find Lily gazing down from the mansion's main stairway upon the card table and those around it in the great hall below. Wharton stunningly captures the external attractions of the setting:

> Tall clumps of flowering plants were grouped against a background of dark foliage in the angles of the walls. On the crimson carpet a deer-hound and

> two or three spaniels dozed luxuriously before the fire, and the light from the great central lantern overhead shed a brightness on the women's hair and struck sparks from their jewels as they moved. (26)

It is almost, and not for the last time, as if Lily Bart has momentarily lost herself within the brushwork of a painting. This is, we are told, one of those moments that could "[gratify] her sense of beauty and her craving for the external finish of life"—but not at this juncture, for she has just lost a preliminary skirmish of the battle that will intensify throughout her days at Bellomont (24). As she observes a seemingly intimate grouping of ladies of wealth before the fire, we learn that she has just lost a great deal of money (by Lily's standards) to these women, and their apparent closeness only amplifies her distance from them and their world. Lily's disconnect allows her to reflect upon the precariousness of her life as compared to theirs. In this instance, therefore, the external beauty of the scene below her merely gives "a sharper edge to the meagerness of her own opportunities" (26). In the last moments of her own life, Lily's mother had warned her, "Don't let [dinginess] creep up on you," and shortly, as Lily looks at herself in the candlelight of her room, she notices two lines have crept onto her mouth. For the already frustrated Lily Bart, "[I]t seemed an added injustice that petty cares should leave a trace on the beauty which was her only defence against them" (29). As one who has spent much of her life in the company of those with the means she has not, her inability to refuse what for her is a high-stakes game of cards intensifies her need to find her way into the presumed certainties of wealth if she is to avoid the "dinginess" that killed her mother. Unlike Bellomont, where the weathering of age will bring distinction and prestige, the early wrinkles will diminish Lily's value and raise the stakes. In fact, time is one more thing with which Lily's beauty must battle, and Lily has little time left, for she has been on the market for some years and has to secure the deal before it is too late. Lily "found herself actually struggling for a foothold on the broad space which had once seemed her own for the asking" (40). Her visit to Bellomont, as we learn even on the train ride to Rhinebeck, is calculated to close the deal that will allow her at last to assume her rightful place in society, where she can practice a mastery of the societal games she seems initially equipped for in every way but financially.

That the novel should begin at Grand Central Station, an urban nexus, far from the seemingly pastoral solace of Bellomont, is only too ironically appropriate. People come and go at the train station, making temporary connections; social interactions are irrelevant here unless they facilitate better ties. Grand Central Station marks the beginning of Lily's journey toward what she thinks will be the "bright pinnacles of success" and of a series of "slippery surface[s]" that will inop-

portunely pop up to prevent her from achieving that desired "success" (40). Lily and Selden meet at the station, where the omniscient narrator qualifies Selden as "spectator" to Lily's spectacle, one Selden enjoys watching (4). The encounter underscores Wharton's thematic interest in the relationship between Lily and her surroundings, between people and places. In fact, Lily herself connects the train station with another site of spectacle, a social spectacle—a cotillion—where people come and go in search of connections, some temporary and others permanent; and it is Lily who brings in the aesthetic judgment on those people who are both spectators and spectacle, saying to Selden, "It isn't hotter here than in Mrs. Van Obsburgh's conservatory—and some of the women are not a bit uglier" (4).[4]

Grand Central is, in fact, the architectural prologue to the Bellomont section of the novel. It is here, as Mark Bauerlein notes, that "Lily Bart appears in all her beauty and incompetence[; that] Selden mystifies the stranded woman into a strategist[; and that we see] the interpersonal dynamic that will drive them to amusement, reproof, love, disappointment, and, finally, his skepticism and her suicide" (3). It is here that we, as readers, first encounter the word "dinginess," and it is here that we learn from the narrator that Lily had eluded this stigmatizing quality that defined the "average section of womanhood" (5). Lily stands out in Grand Central as the spectacle within the spectacle, for, as the narrator notes, "Miss Bart was a figure to arrest even the suburban traveler rushing to his last train" (3). The semiotic significance of Grand Central as a locus of cultural conduct and as a marker for Lily's impetuosity which will lead to her ruin is clearly present in the behavior of and exchanges between Lily and Selden: "[S]tandards of deportment are binding and unforgiving, and Lily Bart is in danger from the moment of her appearance" (Bauerlein 9). Lily initiates the proposal to go for "a cup of tea," accepts Selden's invitation to "come up and see" his apartment even though she knows it is inappropriate, something made clear by the char-woman's stare as Lily comes down the stairs and flinches at the perceived "odious conjecture," and finally lies to Simon Rosedale when he questions her about what she is doing at The Benedict as she leaves the building (4, 6, 14).

The opening scene in Grand Central reflects both Lily's penchant for disregarding the rules of conduct and for relying on them, and during the train ride to Rhinebeck, we will see Lily continue to flout propriety and gamble just as she did when she answered Selden's invitation to his apartment: "'Why not?… I'll take the risk'" (6). On the train, Lily demonstrates that she has learned how to play the game of the wealthy, that she knows the ins and outs of the mode and manner of its workings. Lily has learned "the mediated and socialized forms of power, power that women enjoy and that they use skillfully and sometimes brutally"; she has



A.B. Wenzell illustration from the 1905 edition of *The House of Mirth*. Courtesy Bard College Library

learned that "power resides in the ability to define the terms of exchange, to make one thing 'equal' to another" (Dimock 378). When she realizes that Percy Gryce is seated close by, she establishes her power play by positioning herself as predator: "She began to cut the pages of a novel, tranquilly studying her prey through downcast lashes while she organized a method of attack" (18). Lily has been marketing herself for years—ever since her father's death and her mother's warning

that her beauty was "the last asset in their fortunes, the nucleus around which their life was to be rebuilt" (35). A marriage to Percy would redefine the terms of her existence, make her equal to the others, and give her access to place, position, and power. Lily is skillful at crafting the means for the vastly rich but bashfully uncertain Percy Gryce5 to arrive at the certainty of proposing to her. She has, Wharton tells us, "the art of giving self-confidence to the embarrassed"—in this case to an opulent but mind-numbing mama's-boy who will "do the honor of boring her for life" when they are married (18, 27). As she later tries to convince herself, marriage to Percy Gryce would put an end to her "vulgar cares" and leave her a level playing field on which to engage in societal contests such as those that will eventually destroy her (51). Yet, even as she painstakingly refashions herself from the bold and unconventional woman who takes risks to the innocent, domesticated female who gains Percy's admiration for preparing tea on a "lurching train" and provokes "a delicious sense of exhilaration in him," Lily connects once again with the instability of her surroundings, the train ride that reels and rolls unexpectedly; as the narrator notes, "[D]angerous theories as to the advisability of yielding to impulse were germinating under the surface of smiling attention…to her companion" (19, 21). As her own personal architect, Lily reconstructs herself as needed, but she cannot sustain the structured performance nor free herself from the censorious gaze of public scrutiny that will seal her fate.

The embattled Lily Bart wants more than what she is so obviously equipped to manage. Bellomont is, after all, a marketplace for social parasites like Lily and Carry Fisher and for social piranhas like Bertha Dorset. Lily, on the one hand, understands and participates in the matrimonial market, as she makes quite clear when she responds to Mrs. Trenor's counsel to "*go slowly*" with "'Why don't you say it, Judy? I have the reputation of being on the hunt for a rich husband?'" (47). At the same time, Lily does not want to be purchased, to be "the one possession in which [Percy] took sufficient pride to spend money on it" (51). Her days at Bellomont are in part an internal battle between her willingness to find her place among "people whom she had ridiculed and yet envied" and her desire for something beyond those sometimes "brutal and self-engrossed" people with such carefully crafted rules and expectations wound around them (65-66). If Lily is to be an investment for someone with capital, as Selden suggests during their earlier tête-à-tête, then she seems to be looking for a different kind of currency, one that the enigmatic Lawrence Selden whose arrival at Bellomont provides as an apparent alternative to a mercantile world that she simultaneously covets and eschews. Whether it is social relations, friendships, or love interests, the language and the politics at Bellomont are those of dollars and cents; and while Selden, as Lillian

S. Robinson notes, is a "man with the sensitivity to see through and beyond the world of Bellomont… and the façade Lily herself maintains," he survives the "double standard that destroys Lily" and becomes an "ironic parallel" to Lily (351-352). The only difference between them is that a lack of inheritance and the concomitant power/social status that comes with it does not become what Robinson calls "a fatal liability" for Selden (358). He can play both sides of the game, losing at most a match.

Before Selden arrives, the evocative powers of Bellomont's external beauty continue to reveal the ebb and flow of Lily's own conflicted feelings, the consequences of which will be concretized in her inauspicious walk on the morning she is supposed to meet Percy for church. Standing on the terrace facing the river and leaning against the balustrade, Lily is once again at a distance, observing others, including Percy Gryce, at afternoon tea. The shapes, smells, and visual textures of the landscape unveil the preliminary tinges of the coming autumnal season:

> Seating herself on the upper step of the terrace, Lily leaned her head against the honeysuckles wreathing the balustrade. The fragrance of the late blossoms seemed an emanation of the tranquil scene, a landscape tutored to the last degree of rural elegance. In the foreground glowed the warm tints of the gardens. Beyond the lawn, with its pyramidal pale-gold maples and velvety firs, sloped pastures dotted with cattle; and through a long glade the river widened like a lake under the sliver light of September. (50)

For Lily, however, this "tutored" beauty doesn't fully reach within her. As Wharton tells us, given the surroundings, "[S]he might have been lost in the mazes of an inarticulate happiness[, but i]n reality, her thoughts were finding definite utterance in the tranquil recapitulation of the blessings in store for her" (48). Lily "cannot appreciate the charms of nature"; for Lily, "nature is [simply] another stage set, another theatrical scene in which to perform" (Von Rosk 342). The beauty of her surroundings is just a backdrop for her next performance; in fact, as Percy casts "agonized glances" in her direction, she uses nature's charm to "sink into an attitude of more graceful abstraction," having "learned the value of contrast… [and] fully aware of the extent to which Mrs. Fisher's volubility was enhancing her own repose" (49). She creates the spectacle of the indifferent lover and enacts one more stratagem in the service of securing the life she says she desires. While the architectonics of a now clearly-blueprinted future overwhelm any poetic or painterly sensations of the moment, they will be fully endangered at last by the arrival of Selden, who, like most men at that time, does not have to calculate and contrive; he can choose to invest or not to invest in Lily.

Selden appears as if on cue to remind us of the predestined outcome of Lily's battle to reconcile a constructed life of comfort with the challenge of a life built upon some deeper but indefinable instinct. Selden is the "slippery surface" that will ultimately precipitate Lily's losing a "foothold" that would have "gained [for her] the bright pinnacles of success" (40). Wharton never makes it clear whether Selden's arrival is the work of chance, whether he follows Lily to Bellomont deliberately, or whether in fact he has responded to a telephone summons from Judy Trenor. In any event, his arrival puts him squarely within Lily's line-drawing of her life with Percy Gryce. At the conclusion of her staged terrace reverie, Lily assumes it is Percy whom she hears walking behind her, "and she smiled at the significance of his coming to join her instead of beating an instant retreat to the fire-side"—as if her very constructions have drawn him to her and as if her own battle plan is proceeding as anticipated (52). Instead, as "[s]he turned to give him the welcome that such gallantry deserved," her "greeting wavered into a blush of wonder" (52). Lily's calculating design is altered by two variables—Selden's unexpected but perversely welcomed arrival and Bertha Dorset's cunning manipulation of a game she has little chance of losing. Bertha has what Lily has not—an attendant influence, which, the narrator notes, "in its last analysis, was simply the *power* of money (emphasis ours). Bertha Dorset's social credit was based on an impregnable bank account" (274). Later, a scorned and abandoned Lily will remind the reader of the connection between money and credibility when she answers Gerty's plea to tell "'the whole truth'": "'The whole truth?'… What is truth? Where a woman is concerned, it's the story that's easiest to believe. In this case it's a great deal easier to believe Bertha Dorset's story than mine, because she has a big house and an opera box, and it's convenient to be on good terms with her" (235-236).

On the next morning in the Bellomont library—a place with "so ambiguous an atmosphere," not unlike Lily's own sustained misgivings, making her "like a water-plant in the flux of the tides"—Lily begins a Sabbath battle with a fate she has consistently tempted (53, 55). Having thought about her longing for the trapped luxury of the "great gilt cage" of society and the allure of living outside it, Lily is drawn into the quiet, comfortable respectability of the library at the end of the house, a space "that is almost the only surviving portion of the old manor-house of Bellomont: a long spacious room, revealing the traditions of the mother country in its classically-cased doors, the Dutch tiles of the chimney, and the elaborate hob-grate with its shining brass urns" (56, 61). However, it is, for the most part, a "library" in appearance only, whose "pleasantly shabby books" are remnants of earlier owners, and there is little sense the Trenors have added much if anything to these holdings. In fact, we are told, "The library at Bellomont was

never used for reading, though it had a certain popularity as a smoking room or a quiet retreat for flirtation" (60). As Von Rosk notes, the Bellomont library is "rather a stage for performance" (337). And so it turns out to be on this morning, as Lily comes upon a private exchange between former lovers Lawrence Selden and Bertha Dorset at the far end of the room. Selden *does* have a book in his hand, for whatever it signifies: a sign that he is "outside the cage," an excuse for a rendezvous, or a prop for his own participation in the theatrics of the day (57). Lily's question to the annoyed Bertha, who views Lily's intrusion as a personal affront, and the bemused Selden—"Dear me, am I late?"—has its own ambiguities: a simple question about having missed the church-going party and a chance to win her hand (or rather Percy's hand) in marriage or a veiled comment on a pattern of mis-timings that will run throughout the novel and lead to her death at the end (62). At least, Wharton tells us, "The sight of [Selden's] composure had a disturbing effect on Lily, but to be disturbed was in her case to make a more brilliant effort at self-possession" (61). Certainly, she is able to cast herself into another of those well-constructed moments for which the shelves of unread books seem aptly placed. Yet, while Lily thinks she has staged a good performance and kept them from reading her "cover," it is obvious from Selden's "puzzled amusement" and Bertha's later recreation of the truth for Percy that she has been well read (62).

In fact, Lily's day with Selden will test the limits of her performance as she reaches a high point both emotionally and topographically. Selden's appearance has had a way of "readjusting her vision," and Lily has already begun recasting the players at Bellomont and her own role in the performance (57). "How different [her friends] had seemed to her a few hours ago! Then they had symbolized what she was gaining; now they stood for what she was giving up. She closed her eyes… and the vacuous routine of the life she had chosen stretched before her" (57). Wharton will follow both the sinuous path of Lily's "vision" and the contours of the land surrounding Bellomont in an upward movement that takes Lily and Selden to where they will momentarily achieve a beauty of recognition well above the contrived attractions of the social world fronting the Hudson with seeming imperceptibility. The movement to that hilltop begins with Lily leaving Selden and Bertha Dorsett and moving out through the glass doors of the library. She moves along the garden walk, seemingly headed in the direction of the church that stands at the gates of the estate, presumably with some intention of belatedly joining Percy Gryce and the rest of the group at services. But as she walks, she wonders about Selden's reasons for being at Bellomont: "Was it possible, after all, that he had come for Bertha Dorset?" (63). She dismisses the possibility that Selden simply came "to spend a Sunday out of town" and instead sees the situation

as one shaped around triangulated desire, in which she, and not Bertha, is the object of Selden's affection and Bertha is her rival: "Lily was not easily disconcerted; competition put her on her mettle, and she reflected that Selden's coming, if it did not declare him to be still in Mrs. Dorset's toils, showed him to be so completely free from them that he was not afraid of her proximity" (63).

Her thoughts carry her away from the possibility of making it to church before the close of the service, and she opts instead to "sink into a rustic seat at a bend of the walk" (63). For a moment, she sees herself ornamentally as she is taken by the graspable beauty of where she is: "The spot was charming, and Lily was not insensible to the charm of the spot or to the fact that her presence enhanced it; but she was not accustomed to taste the joys of solitude except in company, and the combination of a handsome girl and a romantic scene struck her as too good to be wasted" (63). After waiting a half hour, however, without the fulfillment of her certitude, she experiences a "vague sense of failure" in some ways more acute than that following her loss at cards. For one who, as we have heard, prefers pleasant "solitudes" in the presence of others, she experiences "an inner isolation deeper than the loneliness about her" (63). It is not enough to be an ornamental part of an ornamental place if there is no one to observe the beauty of her adornment.

But Selden does arrive, of course, and immediately their chemistry is palpable and puts them in sharp contrast to the contrived friendships and exchanges at Bellomont. While giving the initial impression of gamey control, their banter has a freshness, a spontaneity, which is candid and intimate—a verbal ascension that anticipates the physical climb they will soon make:

> "How fast you walk!" he remarked. "I thought I should never catch up with you."
>
> She answered gaily: "You must be quite breathless! I've been waiting under that tree for an hour."
>
> "Waiting for me, I hope?" he rejoined, and she said with a vague laugh: "Well—waiting to see if you would come."
>
> "I seize the distinction, but I don't mind it since doing the one involved doing the other. But weren't you sure that I should come?"
>
> "If I waited long enough—but you see I had only a limited time to give to my experiment." (63-64)

She explains the general outline of her former plan for the day—with the clear implication that she has been working to land a suitable partner. And yet, when Selden informs her of his desire to undermine the necessary rendezvous

(not yet understanding her reference to Gryce), Lily willingly relinquishes what Ruth Yeazell calls the ornamental "position of leisure-class marker" (719): she "received this with fresh appreciation; his nonsense was like the bubbling of her inner mood" (64). They banter on, experiencing there in the woodland pathway "the same luxury of enjoyment that they had felt in exchanging absurdities over his tea-table" on the day she had taken the train to Rhinebeck, for they both respond to and enjoy the aesthetic forces (64). Lily can revel in the momentary luxury just as she revels in the evanescent beauty of the autumn day. Heightening the contrast of the moment is the return of the churchgoers, including Percy Gryce. Lily's game plan becomes transparent, for Selden sees with clarity Lily's blueprint for her future and where their talk about Americana fits within her grand scheme of capturing the obsessive collector Gryce. Battling the confusion of the moment—and clearly her own struggle between inner and outer, between securing her role as "leisure-class marker" and rejecting it—Lily rallies herself by telling Selden disingenuously, "That was why I was waiting for you—to thank you for having given me so many points" (65). Appreciating her performance, as he makes quite clear a few moments later when he says, "[Y]ou're such a wonderful spectacle: I always like to see what you are doing," Selden invites Lily, even as Gryce approaches, to walk with him that afternoon so she can thank him "at her leisure" (68, 65). Lily accepts, and she and Selden move on to unearth a possible "republic of the spirit" in the hills above Bellomont (70). Giving up "control over the terms of her selfexposure [sic]" puts Lily at the mercy of public scrutiny (Moddelmog 345). In a world of speculative activities where a woman's reputation (or lack thereof) makes or breaks the deal, Lily's disregard for appearances gives Bertha Dorsett the opportunity to redefine her as a bad investment and, as such, a liability for an institution like marriage.

As they walk from Bellomont—on a "perfect" afternoon—Wharton's description of what they see becomes even richer and more vivid to amplify the now *un*tutored natural beauty around them (66). The surroundings will almost free them from the constructs they have been battling at the mansion. Walking eastward, Lily and Selden cross the "high road," reaching a meadowy "zone of lingering summer," before their path "dipped into a lane plumed with asters and purpling sprays of bramble, when, through the light quiver of ash leaves, the country unrolled itself in pastoral distances" (66). As they move upward along "shaded slopes," the trail becomes more forested: "The boles of the trees stood well apart, with only a light feathering of undergrowth; the path wound along the edge of the wood, now and then looking out on a sunlit pasture or an orchard spangled with fruit" (65). Wharton will remind us here that "Lily had no real intimacy

with nature, but she had a passion for the appropriate and could be keenly sensitive to a scene which was a fitting background of her own sensations" (66). Lily finds "something of herself" here in nature's "calmness, its breadth, its long free reaches"; the "landscape outspread below her seemed an enlargement of her present mood" (66). If this is a kind of stage set for Lily, then her performance will be less guarded than the one she has staged at Bellomont; it will be a performance just for Selden.[6] Wharton tells us that "[t]here were in [Lily] at the moment two beings, one drawing deep breaths of freedom and exhilaration, the other gasping for air in a little black prison-house of fears. But gradually the captive's gasps grew fainter" (67). The idyllic landscape brings with it the momentary cessation of the push-pull of Bellomont, invisible even from their elevated position.

Here, well above the world of "negotiable securities," Lily feels a "sense of lightness, of emancipation" (67), and her connection to Selden is unlike the "manacles chaining her to her fate" at Bellomont, but rather like the "link[s] of the chain that [would draw] them together" as equals (7, 68). Selden was the "richest man she had ever met," but his riches could not be measured in the marketable realities of the world they had left behind (68). The "September haze veil[s] the scene at their feet" and allows them to contemplate Selden's idea of success—"personal freedom"—what he calls entering the "republic of the spirit" (67, 70-71). As they discuss the multiple freedoms Selden's republic would offer, Lily sees the soullessly utilitarian future she has crafted for herself, imagines reconfiguring the blueprint, and asks him, "Why do you make the things I have chosen seem hateful to me, if you have nothing to give me instead?" (74). His response, "No, I have nothing to give you instead," awakens her from the momentary reverie that had brought her a reprieve from the mercantile world she simultaneously hungered for and reviled (75). As captives of the natural world, Lily and Selden become partners in a game of their own creation. Almost willing to tempt fate, they play an intense match of emotional chicken.

> "Do you want to marry me?" she asked.
>
> He broke into a laugh. "No, I don't want to—but perhaps I should if you did!"
>
> "That's what I told you—you're so sure of me that you can amuse yourself with experiments." She drew back the hand he had regained, and sat looking down on him sadly.
>
> "I am not making experiments," he returned. "Or if I am, it is not on you but on myself. I don't know what effect they are going to have on me—but if marrying you is one of them, I will take the risk."
>
> She smiled faintly. "It would be a great risk, certainly—I have never concealed from you how great." (76)

Wharton writes, "She leaned on him for a moment, as if with a drop of tired wings," but the sound of a "giant insect," a motor car reminding them of the world they left behind, undoes the "spell of a perfect afternoon" and returns them both to their roles of spectator and spectacle (76, 67). As spectator, Selden takes no risks, but Lily's participation, even momentary, in his "republic of the spirit" seals her fate; and the phrase "Let us go down" is prophetic for Lily, for, unlike Bellomont, she will lose her market value forever and begin a descent from which she will never recover (77).

Part Two: Locating Bellomont

There have been various attempts to identify Bellomont as an actual Hudson Valley estate. The most notable pronouncement was that of Louis Auchincloss, in his introduction to *The Selected Writings of Edith Wharton*, who suggests the connection of Bellomont and the Ogden Mills Estate in Staatsburg, a few miles south of Rhinebeck.[7] Eric Homberger, among others, links Judy Trenor, hostess at Bellomont, to Mrs. Ogden Mills (156). The fact that such linkages have risen almost to the status of truisms makes them no more possible to substantiate than Lily Bart's assumptions about her ability to master the games played within estates like Bellomont.

Given the visual and thematic richness of the Bellomont episode, one can approach its actuality in at least one of two ways: 1) Since the interplay of setting and action is so impelling, Bellomont *must* be based upon an actual setting or composite of actual settings; or 2) Conversely, since the interplay is so impelling, one is better off to assume much of it is the work of Wharton's imagination, interfusing bits of the tangible with bits of the intangible. In either case, the text remains the same, and the implications for Lily are unaltered. However, given the suggestions of the Bellomont-Staatsburgh connection, it seems a worthwhile investigation to put the assertion to the test.

Wharton in the Hudson Valley

While it is easy enough to infer that Edith Wharton spent a good deal of time in the Hudson Valley, it is difficult to determine exactly how much and with what sense of pleasure. Her childhood memories of visits to her Aunt Elizabeth Schermerhorn Jones are notably, if briefly, recalled in the 1934 reminiscence *A Backward Glance* as being a source of great unease. She thought back to Wyndclyffe, Aunt Elizabeth's Rhinecliff mansion, as a place of "terror"—an impression produced, she writes, by what seemed to her the mansion's "intoler-

able ugliness" (28). She adds, as part of her anti-idyll, "I can still remember hating everything at Rhinecliff, which, as I saw on rediscovering it some years later, was an expansive but dour specimen of Hudson River Gothic; and from the first I was obscurely conscious of a queer resemblance between the granitic exterior of Aunt Elizabeth and her grimly comfortable home, between her battlemented carps and the turrets of Rhinecliff" (28). When she paid this return visit to Wyndclyffe Wharton unfortunately does not say. R.W.B. Lewis's biography of Wharton includes a brief mention of a visit "with the Tom Newbolds at Hyde Park, rejoicing in 'the wonderful colours of foliage'" (172). Ironically, the visit took place on the afternoon following the opening of the stage version of *The House of Mirth* on October 22, 1906.[8]

However, there is not much more in the way of concrete evidence of when and where Wharton stayed in the Hudson Valley. Nor can we prove that Wharton ever paid a visit to the Mills Mansion either before or after it was renovated in 1895—the significance of which we will speculate about later on. The closest we can come is via inference. For example, we know that Edith and Edward Wharton were members of the same "coaching club" as the Millses. A history of the club shows them on the same outing at least three times;[9] however, the official record of the club indicates that the Whartons were only on such outings around the Newport area. As far as the Mills-Bellomont connection is concerned, as Allen Weinreb concludes, based upon his research, "While there is no documentation to prove that Wharton ever came to Staatsburgh, it is likely she was entertained there at some point as part of a gathering of the local gentry" (94).[10] That, however, is a close as we can come to being definitive.

The Ogden Millses and "Society"

Ogden Mills was the son of a man who was one of the great beneficiaries of the California Gold Rush in the mid-19th century. The father, Darius Ogden Mills, made his fortune as a merchant and banker, capitalizing directly on the wealth generated by the gold fields. By the 1880s, he had become one of New York City's wealthiest entrepreneurs and one of the city's most prominent philanthropists. In many ways, his son Ogden was overshadowed by Darius and, later, by his wife Ruth. As Weinreb notes, "It is regrettable there is a fair amount of literature written on D.O. Mills, very little has been written about his son…. Ogden Mills, whose fortune was largely inherited, and so less spectacularly acquired, did not attract as much popular attention" (32). Nonetheless, Ogden was certainly a man of affairs, serving on boards of a large number of corporations and continuing his father's philanthropic activities. On the other hand, one could suggest that his

most notable accomplishment was his marriage to a rather remarkable wife.

Ruth Livingston Mills seems to have been the more aristocratic partner of the Mills marriage. As Weinreb suggests, "To the world beyond his friends, family, and associates, Ogden Mills lived his life largely in the shadows cast by his famous father, and to a lesser degree, by his socially ambitious wife" (33). Following her marriage to Mills in 1882, Ruth began a lifelong quest to be the next Mrs. Astor—to become, that is, the undisputed leader of New York society. Her husband's great wealth combined with her notable early American family pedigree put her in a position to make the run at social supremacy. Eric Homberger refers to her as one of society's "ultra-fashionables" (216) who not only had her own ballroom in her Manhattan mansion but could boast to some effect that she could host a dinner for a hundred persons without putting on extra help (Amory 175). The opportunity to become the leader of Society would beckon throughout the 1890s and into the new century as the health of Mrs. William Backhouse Astor declined, leading to her death in 1908.[11] Well before that, challenges to Mrs. Astor had come from Alva (Mrs. William K.) Vanderbilt and Mrs. Oliver Hazard Perry Belmont[12] (Homberger 270-272). However, according to Daisy Chanler,[13] the final and primary challenge to Mrs. Astor came from a new source: "Mrs. Ogden Mills was the other leader; she was much younger and her house was the centre of the inner, smarter circle, without in the least detracting from Mrs. Astor's social supremacy" (*Roman Spring* 235). With her refurbished mansion on the Hudson, in addition to those in Manhattan and Newport, Mrs. Mills was well equipped to accelerate the competition.

Several have suggested that Mrs. Mills was used by Wharton as the model for Judy Trenor, heightening the case for the Staatsburgh-Bellomont connection. Eleanor Dwight asserts unequivocally that Mrs. Ogden Mills was, after Mrs. Astor, "a younger social leader and a model for a difficult society hostess [presumably Mrs. Trenor] in Wharton's novel *The House of Mirth*" (39); however, she offers little support for this assertion. Eric Homberger also asserts that Mrs. Ogden Mills "was unflatteringly portrayed as Judy Trenor in Wharton's *The House of Mirth*" (156)—but once again without elaboration. Weinreb offers a similar take, suggesting his own view of Wharton's strategies in depicting both the Millses and their estate. "The physical details of the house are changed, enough to disguise it minimally and protect the author from charges of infringing on the Millses' privacy." In discussing the reason fellow aristocrat Winthrop Chanler did not recognize the Millses in the novel,[14] Weinreb suggests, "Changing details again, both to protect herself and to advance the intrigues of the plot, Wharton depicted Judy Trenor as a tall blond and Gus Trenor as a lecherous dullard." The Millses' contemporary

Elizabeth Drexel Lehr placed Mrs. Mills at the head of a "cult of rudeness," a label that could be applied to several of the society women in *The House of Mirth*, and may be motivated in Lehr more by personal animus than descriptive accuracy.[15] On the other hand, a diary entry of Florence Adele Sloane[16] from 1894 indicates that while she may have heard unnerving things about Mrs. Mills, a visit to Staatsburgh showed any fears about the woman to be unfounded. In describing an evening boat ride, she notes, "It could not have been nicer, and Mrs. Mills was a revelation to me. It shows what a terrible mistake [it is] to judge of people only by hearsay" (176). Any correspondence between the understated Ogden Mills and the boorish Gus Trenor beyond the question of wealth and association with a Hudson Valley estate seems outside the bounds of even the most basic query.

The History of Staatsburgh

What was to become the Mills estate involved property initially settled in the 1790s by future New York governor Morgan Lewis after his marriage to Gertrude Livingston in 1779. The initial structure was a brick farmhouse on 1,600 acres built to serve as a summer home (Zukowsky 164). The house was enlarged in 1816 to accommodate a growing family, including daughter Margaret and her husband Maturin Livingston and was called "The Staatsburgh House." The house was rebuilt in the Greek revival style after a fire in 1832 and was passed on to Maturin Livingston II, who named it "Enderkill Farms." Finally, in 1890, it was inherited by Maturin's daughter Ruth, already the wife of West Coast magnate Ogden Mills. The mansion was enlarged and remodeled in 1895 under the guidance of Stanford White of McKim, Mead, and White along neoclassical, Beaux Arts lines for the then lofty cost of about $350,000. As Weinreb has written, the similarity of the east elevation of the redesigned mansion to the north elevation of the White House in Washington was no accident.[17] Weinreb suggests that "[i]n attempting to remake Staatsburgh into Society's version of the White House, Ruth Livingston Mills and Stanford White gave what may be the fullest architectural expression of the concept of `American aristocracy'—in all its glamour and paradoxes—found at any house from America's Gilded Age." A piece in the *New York Times* of January 12, 1896, described it as "a home which, in furnishings and appointments, will equal any mansion in New York City" ("Homes of Millionaires" 25).

The same *Times* article also stressed that the mansion was a fusion of old and new: as much as its new guise was a forward-looking gesture to the societal potentials of the coming century, it retained a rootedness, a justification even, in things ancestral. The article notes, "In building the new mansion, Mr. Mills has respected the historical associations of the site which it occupies by leaving

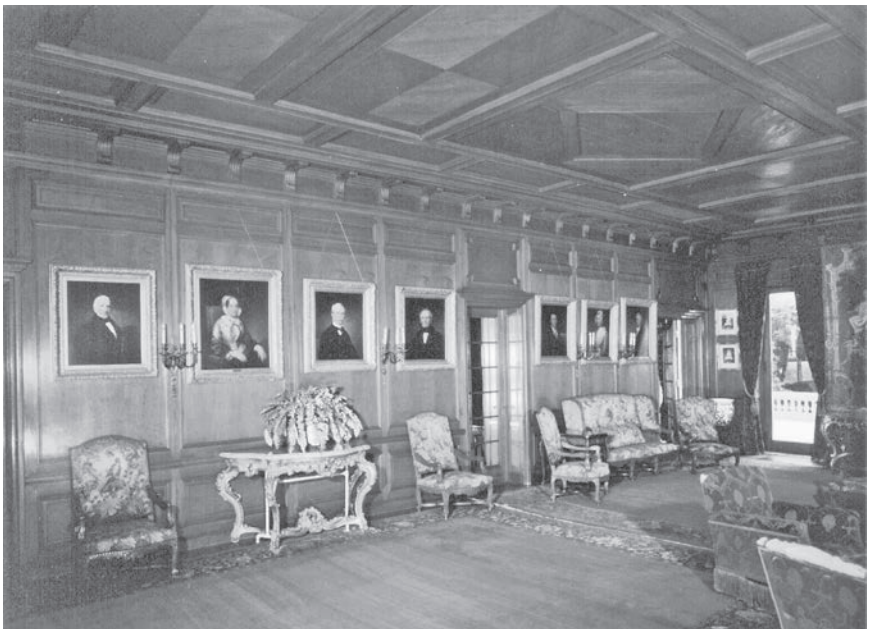
untouched the walls of the old house in which his wife, Maturin Livingston's daughter, was born, and which had been in her family for many years." As a result, "The Livingston house occupies the central part of Mr. Mills's new home. The old rooms retain their original shape, but, of course, have been decorated to conform with the new part of the house. The old walls have been so completely inclosed [sic] and adapted to new conditions that nobody would suspect their existence." The reporter, true to his period, refers to the house as "Mr. Mills's new home," unaware of or overlooking the fact that the house belonged to Ruth Livingston Mills and that she was undoubtedly the driving force behind the final form the mansion was to take. Ruth Mills, in fact, had been deeded ownership of the mansion by her mother in 1890 (Weinreb) and would to a great extent be co-designer of the renovated showpiece. As Allen Weinreb writes of her working relationship with Stanford White, "His charm and diplomacy probably served him well when dealing with the proud and always particular Mrs. Mills" (60). White's collaborative skill was essential in allowing Mrs. Mills to retain a strong sense of the ancestral past, particularly as it would be encoded in the Great Hall. A perceptive visitor to the mansion might detect that

> [a] long beam spanned the stairwell of the grand staircase where a load-bearing wall had to have been before. More obvious was the presence of two 1832 window apertures adjoining the lowest run of the staircase, such that the more northern window opened beneath a landing, a situation not even as adventurous an architect as Stanford White would allow if designing the house from scratch. Compromises like these… were an implicit reminder that Staatsburgh was an altered "Colonial" house. To a Gilded Age sensibility, such architectural quirks may well have seemed "quaint." (77)

Such "quirks" may also have been Mrs. Mills's reminder to her societal peers that she was not only moneyed but blessed by important roots in the American past. This, as we shall suggest, may ultimately have some significance to Wharton's rendering of Bellomont as we begin a "tour" of the fictional estate with an eye to the assumption by many that it is the country place of the Ogden Millses. We will start with the interior of the mansion.[18]

The Main Hall

Any attempt to link this area of the house to the Mills Mansion seems initially to be met with failure. The hall at Bellomont is described as being "arcaded, with a gallery supported on columns of pale yellow marble" (24). A "great central lantern overhead" lights the hair of the clustered women below and, significantly, "struck



STAATSBURGH STATE HISTORIC SITE

Staatsburgh, family portraits in the main hall



STAATSBURGH STATE HISTORIC SITE

The main hall in 1905

sparks from their jewels as they moved" (24). These architectural features are not a part of the great hall of the Mills mansion as we enter it today. There are no yellow columns; there is no arcading. Still, it was an area for card-playing and the arrangement of the space for the centennial of *The House of Mirth* in the spring and summer of 2005 allowed one to imagine with little difficulty the sight of the Lily Bart, the loser at cards, gazing down upon the ironically glittering scene below.

Lily's Bedroom



One of the guest bedrooms for single women

As explained by Staatsburgh Site Director Melodye Moore, if Lily Bart had been a guest staying at the Mills Mansion around 1905, she would have stayed in the area reserved for single women on the second floor, in the center section that was a reworking of the original mansion. Areas in the north and south wings would be reserved for married couples; single men would have stayed in the "bachelor area" of the ground floor, conveniently located near the billiard room that now serves as the admissions center and gift shop for the mansion. We see only a couple of brief glimpses of where Lily is quartered during her stay at Bellomont. Her room seems to face eastward at one point and westward at another. On the morning she receives the summoning note from Judy Trenor on her breakfast tray, "The windows," we are told, "stood open to the sparkling freshness of the September morning, and between the yellow boughs she caught a perspective of hedges and parterres, leading by degrees of lessening formality to the free undulations of the park" (41).[19] A small fire simmers in her fireplace, and its light "contended cheerfully with the sunlight which slanted across the moss-green carpet and caressed the curved sides of an old marquetry desk" (41). For the sunlight to enter at that time of day, the room would have to face eastward or, at least, southeastward.

Later, on the fateful Sunday morning when she will quietly rebel against going to church with Percy Gryce—and, in a sense, to a life of going to "the most expensive church in New York" (59) with him—the view from the room where she stays seems to feed these subversive desires. "And who could consent to be bored on such a morning?" her author asks (60). The disturbing age lines of the

night before seem to have vanished from her face, and the room itself seems to have moved to the other side of the mansion:

> And the day was the accomplice of her mood: it was a day for impulse and truancy. The light air seemed full of powdered gold; below the dewy bloom of the lawns the woodlands blushed and smouldered, and the hills across the river swam in molten blue. Every drop of blood in Lily's veins invited her to happiness. (60)

To see the hills across the river—and indeed there are prominent hills, including the distant Catskills, across from the Mills Mansion—Lily would have to be looking westward. To confuse the issue further, she hears the sound of the omnibus that is to take the worshipers, including Lily, to church. She leans behind her shutters to catch a glimpse of the vehicle, which presumably has come up the drive at the front of the mansion, orienting herself to the east again. These two passages create problems in terms of the locations of the formal gardens and the "park" (a term Wharton uses several times during the Bellomont section). One is drawn to conclude that, from her room, these landscaping details form the middle distance between the mansion and the river with its hills beyond. The complication comes from the presence of the morning sun falling across the floor of her room and the sight of the omnibus below—both suggesting an eastward orientation. We will see, too, how these factors further complicate correspondences between the fictional Bellomont and Staatsburgh as we follow Lily out onto the terrace.

The Library

While one is first struck by the long library at the south end of the Mills mansion as a possible model for the room Lily enters, not everything works to link it with that of Bellomont. It is certainly a fine place for a brief and relatively private Sunday morning rendezvous between Laurence Selden and Bertha Dorset. The way the Library is set today provides a barrier between the larger north end of the room and the relatively cozier area near the fireplace. One can easily envision Lily Bart coming into the library from the drawing room (as one would in the Mills Mansion) to discover the meeting taking place at the far end of the room. The description of the Trenor library as a place "little used for reading" certainly applies to that of the Millses'. The Trenor library, we are told, "was almost the only surviving portion of the old manor-house of Bellomont" (61)—a fact at variance with the Mills library, which was a part of the additions to the original manor-house added during the renovations of 1895. The Mills library also has none of



STAATSBURGH STATE HISTORIC SITE

Staatsburgh library

the Dutch touches noted by Wharton. There are no "classically cased doors," no "Dutch tiles of the chimney," and no "elaborate hob-grate with shining brass urns" (61).[20]

Nor are there "family portraits of lantern-jawed gentlemen with tie-wigs and ladies with large head-dresses and small bodies" (61).[21] At the same time, one can find portraits somewhat in the manner of Wharton's description in the reception hall of the current Mills Mansion. They are hung along the paneled south wall of the hall: seven of them, male and female, Lewises and Livingstons. In their portraits, both Margaret Lewis and Margaret Beekman Livingston wear a large cap of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, though it would be difficult to argue either is small-bodied.[22] Judge Robert Livingston wears a tie-wig of the late eighteenth century. Whether he or any of the others are lantern-jawed would be up to the eye of the beholder. Opposite them, too, in front of a non-working fireplace are andirons with small brass urns worked into them. Are we to make anything of these "misplaced" objects? Probably not, although they are reminiscent of the fusion of old and new that was part of Mrs. Mills's strategy in the redesign of the mansion. Did they exist in a pre-1895 version of a "library" now fused into the new one by Wharton? Did Wharton combine a recollection of earlier visits to the house with later ones? Or are they coincidental? Not only do

we have no direct evidence of Wharton's visiting the house at any period of her life, but there are no known descriptions, photographs, drawings, or floor plans of the pre-1895 mansion. So we are left to speculate. Nonetheless, Wharton has captured part of what Ruth Livingston Mills was in fact trying to convey through the redesign of the mansion—that parts of the interior should speak of present status reinforced by ancestral approval. Faced with such a potent combination of forces, such a place stands in stunning contrast to the precariousness of the essentially "orphaned" Lily Bart trying to play her way back into a flow of time worthy of her presumed managerial skills.

* * *

Exterior elements of Bellomont provide Lily Bart with opportunities to free herself from the pressure of matching herself to the expectations of others. The beauty here is often that of a different sort from the carefully articulated interiors. From the window of her room, as we have seen, she has glimpsed alternatives to the boredom of succeeding at the game of social manipulation. The forces outside are, of course, generally natural ones, or the fusion of man and nature. But even in the presence of tailored nature, something more instinctive works within Lily. It will, of course, be part of her undoing because of her inability to read the text of freedom correctly. Again, too, there are a number of elements that link this compelling exterior of Bellomont to Staatsburgh, but one can only carry the correspondences so far.

The View from the Terrace

As she sits on the "upper step" of the terrace at Bellomont, Lily Bart could well be looking at the Hudson from the terrace at Mills Mansion. The terrace at Staatsburgh is balustraded and provides a view with some of the elements Lily sees. The balustrades move from the upper terrace down a double staircase toward the great lawn, like a cupping pair of parentheses. Standing on the terrace today, one still can see Wharton's description of the way the "river widened like a lake" (49) at the bottom of the lawn. A map of the Staatsburg area will show the lake-like elbow-joint called Vanderburg Cove nudging the shoreline. Just south of that is a smaller double cove providing the Mills Estate with its own lake-like vista. Not surprisingly, it is now called "Mills Cove"; at the time of the house's renovations, however, a feature article in the *New York Times* referred to it simply as "the bay at Staatsburg" ("Homes of Millionaires" 25). Vanderburg Cove could be seen from many of the Victorian mansions, including Wyndclyffe, the despised house of Wharton's Aunt Elizabeth Schermerhorn Jones. But Wyndclyffe loca-



View to the west from the terrace stairs

tion overlooking the northern shore of the cove would have given it a decidedly more oblique perspective and flattened any sense of its being lake-like. Of interest, however, is the description from the same *New York Times* article and its accompanying illustration. According to the reporter, "Looking from the west windows of the mansion the Hudson is hedged in by wooded hills and mountains, so that to all purposes it is a lake, and northward the blue peaks of the Catskills mark the horizon. Smooth lawns stretch from the house almost to the river's edge." It is Wharton without the grazing cattle, and if Edith Wharton in fact never did set foot on the Mills estate, she could easily have replicated this aspect of it from a simple newspaper clipping. The same article would even have provided her with a mention of the balustrades bordering the "broad marble landing"—the terrace—on the west side of the mansion.

At the same time, there is the question of the cattle Lily sees grazing on the sloping pastures between her and the river (50) and "the sunken garden" (48) a short distance from the tea-taking group on the terrace. In addition, as she continues to muse about her future from her place on the terrace, she is able to see "the long avenue beyond the garden" and "the flash of wheels" from a horse-drawn carriage upon it (52). For the visitor to the Ogden Mills Mansion today, the view of the road with approaching guests upon it would be more appropriate from the eastward-facing front of the mansion. [see diagram]. As far as we can tell, Lily is still upon a step coming down from the terrace, since she hears the breaking up of the tea party on the terrace behind her. As for the gardens, those of the last century would have been to the south and southwest of the mansion, and any

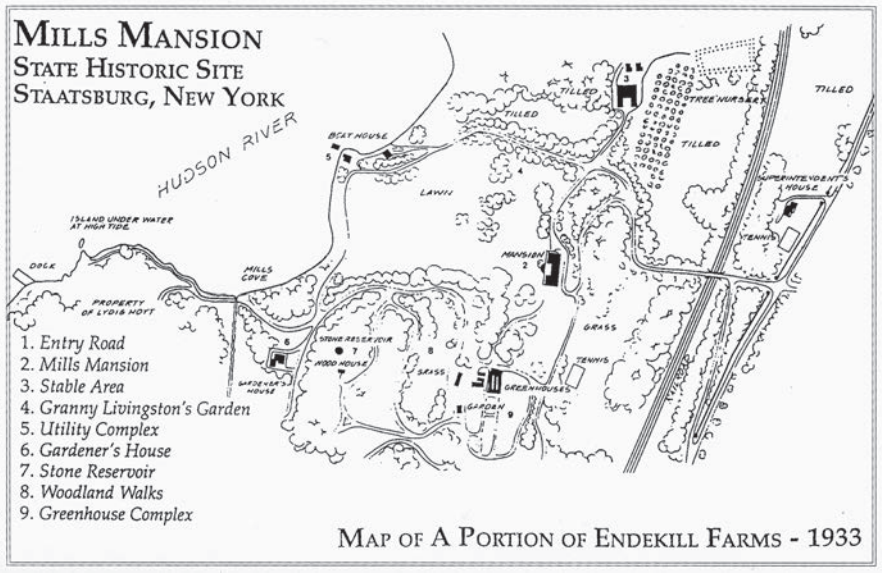


Figure 1. Map of Portion of Endekill Farms—1933. (From "Guide to Grounds of Mills Mansion State Historic Site," n.d.)

STAATSBURGH STATE HISTORIC SITE

"long avenue" beyond the gardens would probably have been invisible to her (if, by long avenue, we might imagine the road to the neighboring Hoyt House.) Nor would the road have provided direct carriage access to the house. [see diagram]. As to whether cattle grazed on pastures sloping toward the river before 1905, there is no indication of this in either written or oral accounts.

Eleanor Dwight suggests one simple solution to what Lily sees from the terrace: that she is in fact looking out over the grounds of the Mount. She writes, "In *The House of Mirth*, which Wharton wrote at Lenox when the garden was in its first stages, several scenes describe the landscape at the Mount and show her attitude toward nature" (114). The sunken garden, she suggests, is in actuality the one recently designed by Wharton; earnings from *The House of Mirth* would allow her to add stone walls to it (7). The lake-like view of the Hudson could, she implies, be Laurel Lake as viewed from the Mount, with the Berkshires beyond. Dwight, however, does little physical detailing beyond this and supports Auchincloss by affirming simply that Bellomont "was modeled after the country estate of the Ogden Mills family, friends of the Whartons" (8).[23] She additionally cites the letter by Wharton friend Winthrop Chanler to his wife Daisy after reading the novel that Laurence Selden was most likely based on Walter Berry and the Millses were among those easily recognized in the novel—presumably as the Trenors (7). In any event, the "problem" with the view of the gardens below the terrace could as easily be explained by Daisy Chanler herself, who wrote with some authorial

insecurity of Wharton's garden at her villa Ste. Claire le Château in the south of France: "She [Wharton] could do it so much better herself, but I doubt if she would try to describe it. It would be telling something too intimate, for her garden is somehow an image of her spirit, of her inmost self" (*Autumn in the Valley* 114). It might be asking too much of Wharton to expect the gardens at Bellomont to be too identifiable and too detailed.

Church

On the fateful Sunday at Bellomont when Lily Bart consciously or subconsciously rebels against a life of the best pews in the best places of worship with Percy Gryce, we are told that the "smart" omnibus carries the worshipers "to the little church at the gates" of the estate (53). That the church is also in walking distance—an option Lily briefly considers after missing her means of transport—also reinforces its proximity to Bellomont. This would certainly be a good match for St. Margaret's Episcopal Church, built in Staatsburg in 1892. It was initially a "mission" of St. James of Hyde Park, a church that stands at the gates of the Vanderbilt Mansion, or the "Hyde Park Estate" as it was then known. In some ways, one would imagine the Gus Trenors worshiping at a tonier church such as St. James; in fact, Ruth and Ogden Mills were both laid to rest in a mausoleum in the St. James graveyard. On the other hand, the Millses' daughter, Gladys, was married at St. Margaret's in a major society wedding to Henry Carnegie Phipps in 1907. And Ogden Mills donated stained glass from Chartres to St. Margaret's as a memorial to Ruth. Whichever (if either) church Edith Wharton had in mind, we once again can never know. What she *has* established by its location near the gates of Bellomont, of course, is a Gilded Age juxtaposition of wealth and worship, a convenient reinforcement of religion as a social rather than a spiritual imperative. As Wharton says about the "smart omnibus" that would arrive to convey family members and guests to church, "Whether any one got into the omnibus or not was a matter of secondary importance, since by standing there it not only bore witness to the orthodox intentions of the family, but made Mrs. Trenor feel, when she finally heard it drive away, that she had somehow vicariously made use of it" (53).

It is not without reason, however, that Lily Bart avoids the church on this particular Sunday. While it is outside the gates of Bellomont, it is still an extension of the estate and its opulently constructed guests. On this one day her spiritual hungers will drive her further afield, beyond the dignified beauty of a church building to where she can feel her own breathing and pulsations, and a beauty beyond crafting.

The Journey Upward

In *A Backward Glance*, Edith Wharton describes her indifference to most fairy tales and things of the imagination when she was a child:

> My imagination lay there, coiled and sleeping, a mute hibernating creature, and at the least touch of common things—flowers, animals, words, especially the sound of words, apart from their meaning—it already stirred in its sleep, and then sank back into its own rich dream, which needed so little feeding from the outside that it instinctively rejected whatever another imagination had already adorned and completed. There was, however, one fairy tale at which I always thrilled—the story of the boy who could talk with the birds and hear what the grasses said. Very early, earlier than my conscious memory can reach, I must have felt myself to be kin to that happy child. I cannot remember when the grasses first spoke to me, though I think it was when, a few years later, one of my uncles took me, with some little cousins, to spend a long spring day in some marshy woods near Mamaroneck, where the earth was starred with pink tailing arbutus, where pouch-like white and rosy flowers grew in a swamp and leafless branches against the sky were netted with buds of mother-of-pearl… (4-5)

Wharton allows a grown but childlike Lily Bart a similar opportunity—in this case on an autumn day of exceptional reach. Physically, it is a journey one could have as easily made from Staatsburgh as from Bellomont. The movement from the mansion to where Lily Bart and Lawrence Selden enact their "republic of the spirit" scene takes them on an ascending (and finally descending) journey that is rather "mappable" in terms of the Mills Mansion and its environs.

The gardens to the south of the mansion (at least as they were laid out in 1905) would have provided Lily with a relatively formal way to begin her physical movement away from the mansion. She is, after all, still theoretically committed to finding her way to church on foot. While her movement from the library seems to carry "her rustling grace down the long perspective of the garden walk" (62), it seems to place the gardens once again in front of the terrace. However, at any estate on the eastern shore of the Hudson, walking westward to get to church—unless it is on the edge of the river itself—would be impossible. The layout of the Mills gardens, to the south of the mansion **(see diagram),** certainly makes more sense. The garden walk would then bring her through the gate at the south end to what is today more of a "wood-path" than it was then—a narrow roadway to the Hoyt House. But it did lead through a heavily wooded area to the Old Post Road, where it would provide the shortest route to St. Margaret's if one were going

on foot. From there, Lily and Selden might have crossed the Post Road and—in our imaginations, at least—across the newly-built golf course[24] (which, of course, is not mentioned in *The House of Mirth*), or slightly to the north, along pasture lanes. They would then have climbed the rise of ground beyond where Route 9 runs today, reaching a hilltop that will allow them to look both east and west—to where they can see the moon rise over the valley of the Crum Elbow Creek and the car on the Post Road between them and Bellomont. As importantly, they are situated to see the Currier and Ives-like images of orchard, field, and steeple below (and were they where we have placed them, they would have perceived these images in both directions). Such an omni-directional location, with its virtual republic of images, is an apt place for imaging a republic of the spirit—which, of course, Lily and Selden will leave upon the hilltop as they descend back to Bellomont with its aristocratic topography. But, then, a similar journey could have been taken from several other nearby Hudson River estates.

* * *

What are we to conclude then about the Staatsburgh-Bellomont connections? Anyone who enters the Mills Mansion or walks upon its grounds would have little difficulty imagining the Trenors and their guests, including Miss Lily Bart, playing out their gilded games there. The beauty of the Mills estate on a cloudless September afternoon can even now be blinding in its intensity. Add to this natural landscape bejeweled men and women, mirrored doorways, the blaze of self-congratulatory artificial lighting upon gilt walls and ceilings, and the shimmer of crystal glasses, and one gains an appreciation for the challenges that Lily Bart fails to negotiate.

While our investigations anticipated the appearance of a "smoking gun" that would show that Wharton to some degree had Staatsburgh in mind for her Bellomont, such a discovery never revealed itself. There may be a number of reasons for this:

- The absence of published letters or other writings by Wharton herself indicating a direct knowledge of the Livingston-Mills property in either its pre- or post-1895 manifestations—or the writings of any others.
- The lack of floor plans, photos, or other resources that could give a clear sense of what the house was like prior to 1895. If Wharton was drawing partly from pre-1895 visits to the house, the variations between novel and the mansion as we know it now could be attributable in part to her recreating a place of memory. But even if we had such plans, we have no evidence of such visits at any time.

- The lack of paper evidence in the Mills family that Wharton was a familiar visitor to their estate or more than a distant social acquaintance. Most of the Mills family papers were destroyed, probably, Allan Weinreb conjectures, at the time the family turned over the estate to New York State in 1938.[25]

As the *New York Times* clipping of January 12, 1896, demonstrates, Edith Wharton could have used elements of the Mills Estate without ever having seen it. The clipping could have served as crib notes, allowing her to twit the Millses (or persons like the Millses) from afar, without feeling she had violated acts of hospitality. If, in some way, she wished to speak to or of Ruth Livingston Mills and her rivalry with Alva Smith Vanderbilt Belmont[26] by naming the estate "Bellomont," we can imagine the possibility—but we cannot go beyond that.

All of these speculations, however, do nothing to diminish the brilliant power of either *The House of Mirth* or the Mills Estate then and now. If nothing else, our investigations here may help to soften one of those small but persistent literary certitudes. If one wishes to continue building upon the proclamations of a sure Bellomont-Staatsburgh correspondence based upon a few unsupported statements, one apparently does so with a wish or a sense of unearned ease rather than fact.

Endnotes

1. Notes Hovet and Hovet write that the "last name Bart points to the ultimate price of 'bartering' between the two images" (349).
2. Suzanne W. Jones writes that Wharton often depicts tensions between persons and places, but it is in *The House of Mirth* that she "does a better job… of sustaining a thematic interest in the relationships of the characters with their surroundings" than in other works (188).
3. Latin and Italian guide the eye and ear as one considers the name of the estate. The "bellom" in Bellomont is a close-enough homophone to the Latin *bellum*, which means war or battle, and the name also brings together two Italian words *bello*, which, in general, means "beautiful," and *monte*, which, when used as a noun, means "mountain or hill." The translation "beautiful mountain" is certainly an apt description of the estate's location. What makes the name more interesting to our discussion, given its Latinate connection, is the use of the Italian word *monte* in phrases like *mandare a monte* or *che va a* monte. The former meaning "to mess up," and the latter meaning "to go against the grain." Bellomont becomes the perfect place for Lily to battle against the grain.
4. In the short story "After Holbein," Wharton once again makes a similar connection between two seemingly disparate spectacles: the dining table of one of New York's elite hostesses and "a railway buffet for millionaires" (478).
5. The name "Gryce" might well have been chosen by Wharton to echo the Bryces who were a part of the Astor set at the end of the 19th Century, just as "Bellomont" could also be a suggestion of the Belmont family sired by August Belmont earlier in the century. Lloyd Stevens Bryce was at various points in his life Minister to the Netherlands and editor of *The North American Review*. Of particular interest to Wharton may have been Carroll Bryce, the brother of Lloyd Stevens, whose reclusive ways parallel the retiring Percy Gryce; their names not only rhyme but rhythmically connect. The obituary for Carroll Bryce in 1911 notes that "[h]e was a familiar figure in

Fifth Avenue. He never spoke to any one at the Gotham [the hotel where he maintained his apartment] except to give necessary directions" ("Carroll Bryce Dead" 13).

6. See Cynthia Griffin Wolff's article "Lily Bart and the Drama of Femininity" for a full discussion of Lily as performer in a societal drama. Wolff writes, "Too virtuous to enact the society drama, she is not virtuous enough to reject the role, nor is she original or brilliant enough to invent a role for herself" (216).

7. See *The Edith Wharton Reader*, p. 44. He is, however, not dogmatic about the connection, noting that "'Bellomont,' the remodeled manor house of the Trenors on the Hudson, might be Staatsburg." In the commentary he provides for the diary entries of Florence Adele Sloane's *Maverick in Mauve* he is equally tentative, noting that the Mills Mansion was "reputedly the model for the Trenors'… in *The House of Mirth*" (175). It is important, too, to note a spelling discrepancy between the village of "Staatsburg" and the name of the estate itself, which adds an "h" at the end, a confusion to which Auchincloss falls victim. The Millses reverted to the original spelling of the estate and the village going back to the late 18th Century, perhaps providing a slight disconnect from the village (and its "modernized" spelling) of the 1890s.

8. Wharton co-wrote the stage version with prominent American playwright Clyde Fitch, but the run was a brief one of only fourteen performances. The beauty of the Hudson Valley must have been some solace for Wharton after reading reviews like that of the *New York Times*, which felt the play collapsed under its own cynicism: "… but three hours of that sort of amusement must have been a bit wearing, even on the most cynical" ("'The House of Mirth' a Doleful Play" 9).

9. Susan Walker and Patricia Lamers of The Staatsburgh Historic Site led us to the book *The Coaching Club*, a possession of the site. The privately printed volume of the club's history indicated the Whartons sharing various carriages (but not that of the Millses) in 1889, 1890, and 1892.

10. Weinreb was former Site Assistant at The Staatsburgh Historic Site. His history of the Mills family and the site is richly detailed and annotated but, at this time, exists only in manuscript form. He is, at the time of this writing, Interpretive Program Assistant at the John Jay Homestead State Historic Site near Bedford Village in Westchester County.

11. Wharton provides her own haunting rendering of Mrs. Astor's declining years in her 1928 story "After Holbein." In the story, "[p]oor old Evelina Jaspar" (477) exists in a demented state where she still imagines herself hosting magnificent dinners abetted by the fretful attentions of a complicit household staff in its own state of decline. Justin Kaplan notes how Mrs. Astor herself at one point "joked that she had begun to spice up her usual dinner guest list, long on bloodlines and bloated bank accounts and notably short on wit and intellect, by inviting a few 'bohemians' off the street. She said she had in mind J.P. Morgan and Edith Wharton" (32).

12. The naming echo in Bellomont is, of course, tempting, but then one needs to contemplate beyond our ability into the kind of game Wharton might have been playing.

13. Mrs. Winthrop (Margaret) Chanler was not only a perceptive reader and participant in the "Society" of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries but also a close friend of Edith Wharton. Although each was initially hampered by shyness from developing a close friendship well into adulthood, Mrs. Chanler said of Wharton, "She was more than kind to me and I cannot count the good times I have had under her hospitable roof" (*Autumn in the Valley* 110). In this same reminiscence, she notes with some pleasure how "[i]t was said of Edith Wharton and Theodore Roosevelt that they were both self-made men; she was pleased with the saying and repeated it to me; there was a good deal of truth in it" (110).

14. See RWB Lewis, pp. 151, 153—Chanler recognized Walter Berry in the character of Lawrence Selden but failed to see a possible Mills-Trenor connection.

15. Lehr 148. Weinreb suggests that Mrs. Mills's hauteur may have been more ad hoc than "cultish": "It is unclear how rudeness was a reaction to particular individuals, and how much may have been an expression of bitterness over her failure to capture Mrs. Astor's position" (41). Still, it is of some interest in trying to piece together the character of Ruth Mills when one comes across

items like that on the front page of the December 13, 1901 *New York Times*, headed "Protest from Skaters: Staatsburg People Want the Right to Use Mill Pond to Which Propriety Rights are Claimed." According to the article, Mrs. Mills, "in her anxiety to keep any possibility of contagion from scarlet fever away from her beautiful mansion, has forbidden the young people of the village to skate on an arm of the Hudson River adjacent to the house" (1). The same article also notes that "Mrs. Mills has asked the Board of Education to have the books used in the public schools burned" (1)—presumably also from her fear of scarlet fever contamination.

16. The great-granddaughter of Commodore Vanderbilt on her mother's side and the daughter of carpet tycoon William Douglas Sloane, Adele Sloane (1873-1960) was a candid observer via diary entries from 1893 to 1896 of the social world of the rich. Louis Auchincloss would marry her granddaughter Adele Lawrence in 1957 and would provide the commentary for the 1983 edition of the diary.

17. The porticos of each highlight the similarity. A journalist covering the 1907 wedding of Gladys Mills to Henry Phipps remarked how "[t]he residence of Mr. and Mrs. Mills at Staatsburg…. bearing proof of its pedigree in every window and door, reminds the visitor of the White House in Washington" (Weinreb 103-4).

18. One can, by the way, get a useful virtual tour of several of the rooms discussed here: The Main Hall, the Library, and a woman's guest room by going to the web site of the Staatsburgh Historic Site http://www.staatsburgh.org/photo.php.

19. A *parterre* is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "[a] level space in a garden occupied by an ornamental arrangement of flower beds."

20. Nor, according to the staff of the Staatsburgh Historical Site, does the inventory of the books in the house include anything by Edith Wharton. Also, according to Weinreb, "It is unknown what Ogden and Ruth Mills's opinions were of *The House of Mirth*" (96).

21. Under "lantern-jaws," the Oxford English Dictionary has the following: "Long thin jaws, giving a hollow appearance to the cheek."

22. Margaret Beekman Livingston (1724-1800) was the great-great-grandmother of Ruth Livingston Mills and wife of Judge Robert Livingston (1718-1775). Margaret Lewis (1780-1860) was the only daughter of Morgan and Gertrude Livingston Lewis (daughter of Margaret and Judge Robert), builders of the original Staatsburgh House in the 1790s. Maintaining an interconnection of family bloodlines, she married distant cousin Maturin Livingston in 1798.

23. Similarly, in her lavishly illustrated study *A House Full of Rooms,* Theresa Craig provides vivid photos of the Mills Mansion then and now—and makes the connection to Bellomont without proof. She writes, "Wharton was… familiar with the Mills Mansion near the Hudson in Staatsburg" but fails to establish the nature of that familiarity (62-63).

24. Ogden Mills was one of the driving forces in creating a nine-hole course that now constitutes the south nine of the Dinsmore public golf course. As the New York State Parks website notes, "It is the third oldest golf course in the country. Built as a private nine-hole course in the 1890s, it was an amenity to the estates of the Dinsmore, Hoyt and Mills families."

25. Allan Weinreb recalls, via oral histories of the estate, the account of a bonfire consuming personal items before the handover of the estate, perhaps under the direction of Gladys Mills Phipps. He sees such an action as being totally consistent with a family traditionally noted for maintaining a strong grip on the details of its private life.

26. See, for example, one rather vivid version of the rivalry in the memoir of Elizabeth Lehr, *King Lehr and the Gilded Age,* pp. 147-48.

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Regional History Forum

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



ALL PHOTOS: JESSICA CAMPILANGO, MARIST '06

The Warner House, seen from the yard

The Constitution Island Association

Jessica Campilango

Military science and literature are usually considered separate, independent entities. One is rooted in maneuvers, battles, and weaponry, the other in concepts, abstractions, and ideas. However, it is possible for military science and literature not only to coexist, but to reach a synergy. Constitution Island is a prime example of where such a convergence takes place.

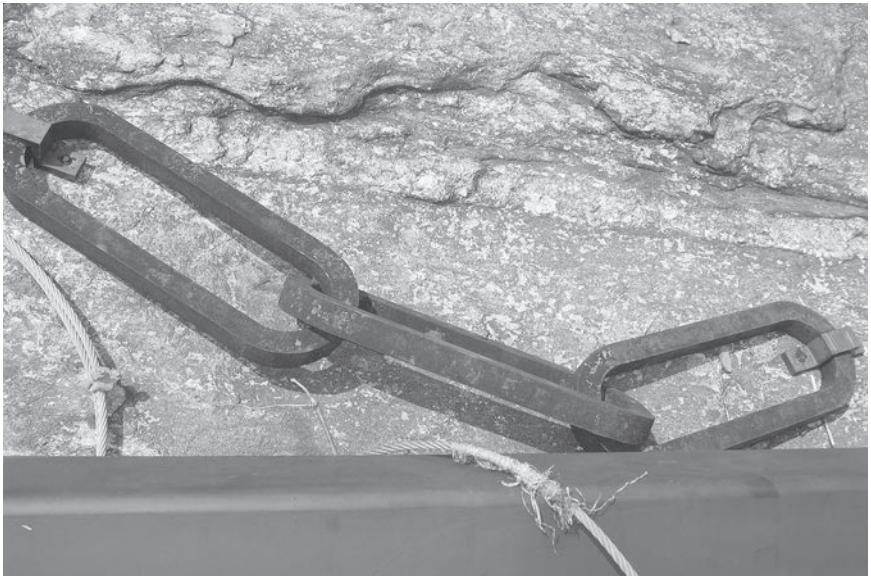
Constitution Island is a 280-acre island located south of Cold Spring, close to the eastern shore of the Hudson River. It is part of the United States Military Academy and has roots that can be traced to the founding of our country. Originally called Martelaer's Rock, Constitution Island served as a home to soldiers of the Continental Army and local militia during the Revolutionary War.

As soon as the war commenced, British and colonial generals grasped the significance of the Hudson River. In order to acquire control of the waterway, Colonel James Clinton and Major Christopher Tappan began looking for tactical areas that would be ideal for fortification. Martelaer's Rock was strategically located on a sharp, S-shaped curve. Colonel George Washington, a member of the Continental Congress, knew this curve would be a navigational nightmare for British ships, which would have to stop and adjust sails in order to maneuver around it.

The Continental Congress directed the New York Provincial Congress to carry out the fortification of Martelaer's Rock. The Provincial Congress hired Bernard Romans, a Dutch engineer, to construct a large fort, which was to be called Fort Constitution, in honor of the unwritten English Constitution. Work began in September 1775, then came to a halt when the Continental Congress tried Romans for failure to complete the job in a timely, economic, and effective fashion. The focus then shifted to building Forts Clinton and Montgomery downriver. After the British succeeded in capturing these posts in October 1777, New York and the Continental Army again focused on fortifying Constitution Island and West Point.

Colonels Louis De la Radière and Thaddeus Kosciusko began work on Fortress West Point in January 1778. Engineer Captain Thomas Machin proposed that an iron chain be strung across the river from West Point to Constitution Island. (James Clinton and Christopher Tappan had made the same suggestion in 1775.) This would be Machin's second attempt to construct a chain strong enough to withstand a British warship. The original chain, strung between Fort Montgomery and Anthony's Nose, had proven ineffectual in stopping the British when they took Forts Montgomery and Clinton on October 6, 1777. They captured the forts by circling around on land and attacking from the west, and destroyed the chain. In January 1778, the New York Provincial Congress decided that West Point would be an ideal location for the second chain.

The new chain was to be similar in construction to the original, but much larger. A two-foot link from the first chain weighed about sixty-five pounds; a link in the new one would weigh ninety-five pounds. Work on it began in February 1778. Noble Townsend and Company Ironworks completed it in less than three



Remnant of the chain at West Point

months. Creating something this immense in such a short amount of time was a real technological feat for eighteenth-century workmen.

The chain was floated from West Point to Constitution Island on April 30, 1778. Every fall thereafter, the West Point garrison removed the obstacle from the river to minimize damage to it incurred by ice floes. The chain was last removed from the Hudson in the fall of 1782. When it was not placed back in the river the following spring, the American army considered it a sure sign that victory was at hand.

After the Revolution, Constitution Island lost its importance as a military post. Information is scant regarding what transpired there during the next forty years. For example, it is believed that its barracks building may have been used as a hospital for a brief period of time, specifically for quarantining those with infectious diseases such as smallpox.

The island remained in a state of desuetude until it was bought in the early 1830s by Henry Whiting Warner, a prominent New York City lawyer. Warner, his wife, and their daughters, Anna and Susan, spent summers there in a home they named Good Craig. Losses Warner incurred in the financial crash of 1836 forced the family to take up permanent residence in the house. Henry Warner quickly faded from society; Susan and Anna quickly stepped into their new roles as family breadwinners.



Ruin of the greenhouse

Born into wealth, Anna and Susan had acquired a classic Victorian training, with lessons in mathematics, foreign languages, and the arts. The girls reveled in the luxuries placed at their disposal. Had their father not lost his fortune, the sisters most likely would have married into other prominent families and taken their places among New York's social elite. It's also likely the women would never have become such prolific writers.

Life on Constitution Island was a major change for the sisters. They had left the hustle and bustle of New York for a pristine, natural environment to which they felt instantly connected. The sisters never looked at their financial plight as a handicap. Instead, they used it to make significant contributions to the community.

At first, they indulged in many of the luxuries they'd enjoyed in their old home. Though there was no electricity or running water, the Warners managed retain their comfortable standard of living. But this standard slowly diminished. By the late 1840s, they had no choice but to declare bankruptcy.

For Susan and Anna, day-to-day life on the island was long and arduous. The sisters awoke around 4:30 a.m. and immediately kindled a fire. Then, believing the best time to write was during the early hours, they set to work for at least a couple of hours. Afterwards, they completed routine chores, such as tending to the house, the animals, the garden, and the needs of their father.



The Warner House from the dock (top); the restored boathouse





The harbor (top); memorial plaque commemorating the placement of the Great Chain



In order to try to provide for the family, Susan Warner had been urged by her aunt, who had come to live with the family shortly after their mother passed away, to "put her pen to financial use." Providing the necessities of survival became the Warners' biggest challenge. It was a week-to-week struggle that never subsided. Overcoming adversity would become a reoccurring theme throughout Susan's writings. This continuous struggle led to the concept of her first book, *The Wide, Wide World*.

The Wide, Wide World was a story about the moral progression of a young orphan named Ellen. Susan published it under a pseudonym, Elizabeth Wetherell, primarily because as a woman she doubted it would have much success. The book was rejected by numerous publishing companies. Finally, George P. Putnam agreed to print it because of his mother's unwavering belief in the novel. *The Wide, Wide World* became one of America's first bestsellers, and the first book by an American author to sell more than one million copies, earning Susan a place in literary history.

Susan's writings encapsulated the Romantic Era. Here novels were sentimental, and their main characters continually grappled with morality. After *The Wide, Wide World*, she published *Queechy* in 1852. This novel also was about a young orphan who sold flowers and produce to support her family. Susan went on to write at least twenty-eight other books for both children and adults.

Susan Warner's writings strongly correlate to her own life on Constitution Island, acting as a mirror to her personal thoughts, beliefs, and experiences. Providing for herself and her sister was a constant pressure that never became less burdensome, no matter how hard she worked. Even The Wide, Wide World did not provide much financial stability. Despite the book's enormous sales, Susan did not receive many royalties from it; she had given up those rights to Putnam in a desperate attempt to acquire immediate cash.

Anna also spent her life making literary contributions, most under the pseudonym Amy Lothrop. She also channeled her love of God into hymn writing. Her most popular hymn was "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know," which first appeared in the novel *Say and Seal*, coauthored with her sister. In the book, a Sunday school teacher sings the hymn to a dying boy. "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know" continues to be popular. The hymn, as well as others written by Anna, were frequently sung during Bible classes the sisters conducted for young West Point cadets—a labor of love they undertook for 40 years.

Although Anna focused on hymn-writing, her most notable book, *Gardening by Myself* (1872), was a detailed account of keeping her island garden. It was written in journal form and recounts a year's worth of labor, from January to

December. The book was groundbreaking—the first devoted to gardening for pleasure. It urged women to pick up the tools and do the work themselves.

After Susan's death on March, 17, 1885, Anna continued to live alone on Constitution Island. Her love of its natural beauty and deep respect for its history led her to turn down numerous offers by developers to purchase the island. The Warner sisters had hoped that one day it would become part of the West Point reservation, protected forever. In 1908, the island was bought by American philanthropist Margaret Olivia Slocum Sage, who eventually fulfilled the sisters' dream by transferring ownership to the United States Military Academy. Anna was allowed to live on the island until her death.

Anna passed away on January 22, 1915, with a strong belief that Constitution Island and its legacy would be safeguarded. The following year, a group of concerned citizens (including J.P. Morgan and his wife) founded the Constitution Island Association. The formation of the association was not only a way to preserve the island but to honor the Warner Sisters for their contributions to society and their long-time protection of this special place.

The Constitution Island Association, Inc., is a 501(c) (3) non-profit corporation chartered by the New York State Board of Regents. It is the oldest governmental non-profit organization in the United States. However, the association must raise its own operating funds: They are not provided by the government.

The Constitution Island Association interprets both the military and literary importance of the island. It accomplishes this through the preservation of the Warner house as well as the Revolutionary War fortifications scattered around the island. The house is filled with the family's furnishings, books, and other objects from the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The Constitution Island Association is interested in working with scholars on collaborative projects. Its most recent endeavor was the book *Jesus Loves Me, This I Know: The Story Behind the World's Most Cherished Children's Hymn*, by Robert J. Morgan, published in March 2006. The Association is also developing plans for a Constitution Island Education Center, which will serve as an on-site classroom for West Point cadets and community members.

Constitution Island is open from June 25 to September 25. Guided tours leave West Point's South Dock on Wednesdays and Thursdays at 1 and 2 p.m. Tours focus on the Warners' house; a replica of Anna's garden, which has been recreated by the Constitution Island Association; and the Revolutionary War fortifications. For additional information, visit www.constitutionisland.org.



KRISTIN MILLER, MARIST '04

Front drive (top); carriage road looping around the west lawn



Staatsburgh State Historic Site

Sarah Gunner

Staatsburgh State Historic Site, also known as Mills Mansion, was donated to New York State in 1938 by Gladys Mills Phipps. Bordering the Margaret Lewis Norrie State Park, it is located in Staatsburg. The estate embodies a significant amount of history among its beautiful Beaux Arts architecture and picturesque grounds, and it tells the fascinating story of a wealthy family who lived during the Gilded Age.

The house was originally built in 1832 as a twenty-five-room Greek Revival structure by New York Governor Morgan Lewis and his wife, Gertrude Livingston. Lewis is perhaps best known for his role in the American Revolution, during which he served as second in command to Major General Horatio Gates. After the war, Lewis became a lawyer and was elected a member of the state assembly from Dutchess County. In 1792 he became chief justice of the state supreme court and served as governor from 1804 until 1807. He lived at Staatsburgh from 1807 to 1812; while there, he devoted much of his time and energy to agriculture. In 1812 he accepted the post of Quarter Master General to the United States Army; a year later, he was made Major General. He died in New York City in 1844, leaving Staatsburgh to his daughter, Ruth Livingston Mills, and her husband, Ogden Mills. Ogden and Ruth left their indelible mark on Staatsburgh. It is the Gilded Age estate they created that is currently standing and interpreted by the staff.

Ogden Mills inherited his vast fortune from his father, Darius Ogden Mills, who became wealthy from investments made during the California Gold Rush. Ruth and Ogden had three children: a pair of twin daughters, Gladys and Beatrice; and a son, also named Ogden. Ogden Livingston Mills became a very successful politician, serving in the New York State Senate and eventually as Secretary of the Treasury under President Hoover in 1932 and 1933.

Not much information is known about the Millses because the family was extremely private and either took or destroyed almost all of their personal papers upon leaving Staatsburgh. However, it is known that Mrs. Mills was an avid bridge player and was noted for the house parties she threw for the specific purpose of

playing bridge. That Mrs. Mills was a keen bridge player is not surprising given the fact that she was a high-society lady during the Gilded Age. Lasting from roughly 1870 to 1900, this was an era of American opulence in which many people made huge fortunes by investing in industries such as railroads and steel. The time of Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, and Carnegie, the Millses were also considered part of this elite class. The Gilded Age ushered in many advances in technology, so the wealthy were able to experience such luxuries as electric lighting, indoor plumbing, and telephones. The epoch is characterized by its extravagance: hosting huge parties and owning several large houses were considered the norm by many of the wealthy who lived during this time.

During the Gilded Age, America's nouveau riche wished to impress upon European high society that they too could live like royalty. This brought about the "Beaux Arts" style of architecture. Beaux Arts, which means "fine art" in French, was a highly popular style of building that was used for many public buildings and mansions during the Glided Age. It is noted for its use of symmetry, formal design, and elaborate ornamentation. Many of the structures built in the Beaux Arts style feature columns, balustrades, grand staircases, large arches, and highly decorated façades. Grand Central Terminal, the main branch of the New York Public Library, Vanderbilt Mansion in Hyde Park, and Staatsburgh are all excellent examples of the style and the ideals that the Gilded Age embodied.

In 1895 the Millses decided to enlarge the existing home and hired the prestigious architecture firm of McKim, Mead, and White, which had already designed the nearby Vanderbilt mansion. Stanford White was the primary architect of the house. Upon its completion in 1896, Staatsburgh boasted sixty-five rooms, including forty-seven bedrooms, fourteen bathrooms, and twenty-three fireplaces. The house has not undergone any major renovations since—inside or out—so when a visitor approaches Staatsburgh, it is nearly the same experience that Ruth Livingston Mills enjoyed when arriving home from an outing.

However, there is one unfortunate difference between the appearance of the house as it looked in 1896 and today. In the 1950s, after the state inherited the house, it was decided that the exterior should be sprayed with gunite for preservation purposes. A form of concrete, the gunite dulled the exterior from its original brilliant white, making it appear gray. Restoration efforts are under way to remove the gunite and resurface the exterior with stucco, with which it was originally covered. Thus far, the south façade and terrace have been restored. The restoration process is very costly and takes time because gunite contains asbestos, which forces the restoration team to proceed with caution so it does not contaminate itself or others.

Almost all of the interior furnishings, including artwork, are those chosen by the Millses. One major exception to this are the upholstery silks in Mrs. Mills's bedroom, They were recently replaced with new silk made to match the originals. Mrs. Mill's bedroom is the quintessential Beaux Arts room. The walls are covered in an intricate, rich, deep-pink silk, which also happens to be the color of the room's upholstery and carpet. The furniture itself is a cream color and lavishly decorated with carvings. Discerning the room's original colors required some detective work. The wall hangings were replicated after discovery of a scrap of original silk remaining on the wall. The color of the carpet was determined after examination of the floor beneath the small stage on which Mrs. Mills's bed was mounted.

While perhaps not as striking as Mrs. Mills's room, the rest of the house is a beautiful example of Gilded Age design. Throughout the house there is not a single room—from the library to the massive dining room—that is not elaborately decorated. Even the maids had their own individual bedrooms, each with a window, heat, and electric light. A visitor could wander through the house for hours, absorbing the rich details of the intricately carved furniture, the book-filled shelves in the library, and the numerous paintings, many of Livingston ancestors.

The grounds are also very well planned. They are designed in the Picturesque landscape fashion, a style of landscape architecture that emulates nature, with many rolling hills, clumps of trees, and small bodies of water. When the Millses inherited the land, there were 334 acres. By 1911, the couple had begun purchasing adjacent land. When Ogden died in 1929, the estate had grown to more than 1,600 acres.

Strolling through the grounds of Staatsburgh is aesthetically pleasing. There are many winding paths, with openings through the trees that reveal views of gently sloping hills leading down to the Hudson River. Some of the land at Staatsburgh was used for farming when the Millses lived there, and it is easy to imagine Mr. and Mrs. Mills watching cows graze in their pastures as they walked to the nearby St. Margaret's Church for services. The road a visitor takes while leaving Staatsburgh is perhaps the most attractive; after snaking through the landscape it ends at two beautifully constructed stone pillars.

Staatsburgh offers many tour options. During the holiday season, there is a "Gilded Age Christmas Tour" that runs almost every day from late November to Christmas. During the summer, visitors flock to Celtic Day, held on the lawn, where they enjoy Celtic music and dance. There are also golf tournaments, a tennis tournament, environmental education programs, and numerous outdoor concerts.

The staff at Staatsburgh also offers themed tours every year. The most recent was based on Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. It allowed visitors to see what life would have been like for Lilly Bart, the novel's main character, and plays off the idea that Wharton may have based her description of Bellomont, where much of the action in the novel takes place, on some aspects of Staatsburgh. Themed tours are offered from the beginning of April to the end of October.

There are also many opportunities for school trips to Staatsburgh, and the staff has created programs for children of all ages. These range from a look at a servant's life on a large estate during the Gilded Age to environmental programs where students learn to identify animals by their tracks and scat. Through these programs, the youngsters receive valuable, hands-on lessons that build upon the New York State curriculum. These tours and programs are offered year-round Staatsburgh.

Staatsburgh is a place where time has been suspended; the visitor is allowed a glimpse into the life of Mr. and Mrs. Mills. The estate is extremely well maintained, and the restoration efforts that are underway will help return the home's exterior to its original splendor. It is a valuable historical site in the history-rich Hudson River Valley, and well worth a visit for anyone interested in the life of the wealthy or the Gilded Age.

Staatsburgh State Historic Site is located on Old Post Road in Staatsburg. It is open 11 a.m.–4 p.m. Sunday from January–March and Tuesday–Sunday from April 1 to October 31. It is also open daily throughout the holiday season from Thanksgiving to Christmas. Admission is $5 for adults; $4 for seniors, students, and groups; $1 for children ages 5–12; and free for children under 5. For more information, visit www.staatsburgh.org or phone 845-889-8851.



A fore-edge painting can refer to any "decoration on the fore-edge of the leaves of a book, such as was not uncommon in the 15th and early 16th centuries, especially in Italy" (Carter 104). (Scott, Walter. *The Lady of the Lake: A Poem*. Edinburgh: James Ballantyne and Co., 1814.) From the George M. & Alice Gill Collection.

Hidden In Plain Sight: A Brief History Of Fore-edge Painting

John Ansley, M.A., M.L.S.

This paper is intended to introduce the unfamiliar to the delightful art of fore-edge painting. In particular, it will discuss the development of the "hidden" fore-edge painting, for which the term fore-edge painting is most commonly used. The following narrative features examples from both the George M. and Alice Gill and George M. and Frances L. Gill Fore-Edge Painting Collections, which are held in the Marist College Archives and Special Collections in Poughkeepsie. Mr. George M. Gill generously donated his collection of thirty-six fore-edge paintings to Marist College in 1996 in memory of his late wife, Alice Gill. In 2005 Mrs. Frances Gill donated her collection of eighteen fore-edge paintings in memory of her late husband, George M. Gill.

The Gill Collections represent one of the pinnacles in the history of book decoration and book binding, and are the highlights of our Rare Book Collection. The collection consists of fifty-four volumes (forty-four titles) that were published between 1798 and 1909 in England, the United States, and France.

Introduction

After seeing a fore-edge painting for the first time, one truly understands John Carter's statement in *ABC for Book Collectors* that a "bibliomaniac is a book collector with a slightly wild look in his eye" (Carter 38). While there is no substitute for seeing a fore-edge painting in-person, the above illustration may prove useful.

The term "fore-edge painting" is generally used for an English book-decora-

tion technique that was commonly practiced in the second half of the seventeenth century in London and Edinburgh. In the eighteenth century, the Edwards family of Halifax brought fore-edge painting to new levels of execution and popularity. The Edwardses revived the practice "whereby the fore-edge of the book, very slightly fanned out and then held fast in a clamp or vise, was decorated with painted views or conversation pieces. The edges were then squared up and gilded in the ordinary way, so that the painting remained concealed (and protected) while the book was closed: fan out the edges and it reappears" (Carter 104).

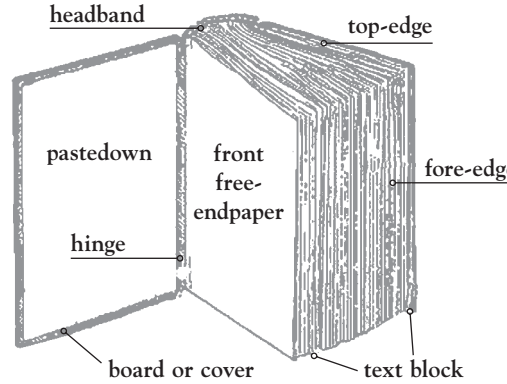
Two main theories concerning the development of fore-edge painting have been put forward: the "library-position" and the "craftsmanship" (Swan 14). The former dates back to the Middle Ages, when the pages of books were made of parchment or vellum and tended to be large and cumbersome; because of this, they were often shelved flat on their sides, with the edge of the text block facing out. (The relatively thick parchment and vellum pages allowed bookbinders to fold the full sheets of the quires only once, thus creating a folio volume.) This practice of shelving the books horizontally with the page edges facing out offered the owner or librarian a convenient space to place a mark of ownership or the title of the volume. As papermaking developed and it became practical for use by bookmakers, this new and more malleable material allowed them to create smaller volumes, which meant that their owners could shelve the books vertically. The spine of the book then became the logical place for the title, and the fore-edge lent itself as a place to identify the volume's owner. Simple name-writing developed into more elaborate decorations, including family mottoes, coats of arms, royal monograms, and crests. When applied, the decorations were painted or stamped onto the edge with a hot tool (Weber 21-22).

The "craftsmanship" theory was put forward by Cyril Davenport and "assumes that the painting of book-edges is the natural outgrowth of the desire of the bookbinders to decorate the whole book" (Swan 15-16). Considering that some of the earliest examples of books were decorated, it is not unreasonable to assume that some bookbinders felt that leaving the fore-edge of the text block blank meant their work was unfinished. Perhaps a combination of these theories explains the origin of fore-edge decoration.

Technique

The artists who executed these unusual paintings were intimately involved with the book-binding process. They tended to prefer working with smaller volumes, as this produced a better effect when the picture was revealed. The text block was positioned so the fore-edge was to the right if you were holding the book as if to

read it. This is considered the "right way" of positioning the book before the fore-edge painting was applied (Weber 60). Before the fore-edge painting was started, the book was already in "boards," meaning that the text block (the pages of the book) had been stitched together with the cover (see diagram). At this point, the text block had also been ploughed (or trimmed) and burnished. So out of necessity the binding process was started but not completed (Swan 82).



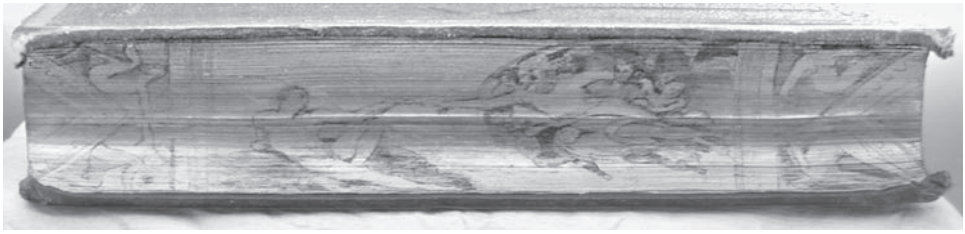
The next step was to slightly fan the pages of the text block and then securely clamp them together. The text block had to be held very tightly, otherwise the watercolor paint used to execute the fore-edge painting would bleed or run and mar the pages of the book. Watercolors also had a tendency to run along the page lines of the text block, so it was necessary for the artist to use as dry a brush as possible while applying the paint with perpendicular strokes (Swan 83). Only watercolors could be used to create a fore-edge painting, as they would be absorbed by the paper and not cause the pages of a book to stick together, as would happen if oil paints were applied. Another advantage of using watercolors is that they can handle being fanned repeatedly, while oil paints would crack and crumble.

The fore-edge painting was allowed to dry completely before the gilt (gold leaf) was applied to the edges of the text block. The gilding process had to be completed carefully to prevent the painting from running. Once the painting was completely dry, it was released from the clamp or vise and the text block was squared up again. Then the text block was clamped very securely once again to avoid marring the painting during the multi-step gilding process. At this point, the fore-edge of the text block may have been scraped and burnished again; then sizing (diluted egg-white solution or gluten from boiled parchment or vellum) was applied with a fine brush or sponge to allow the gold leaf to adhere; next, the gold leaf was cut to size and applied with a brush; finally, it was burnished again when everything was completely dry (Hughes 602). If the gilt was not properly applied, the painting would show through even when the book is closed. In some instances, the fore-edge of the books were marbled. This was a less expensive way to treat the edges than gilding (Swan 87).



PHOTOS FROM THE GEORGE M. & ALICE GILL COLLECTION.

An example of gilding that "hides" the fore-edge painting.
(Tennyson, Alfred. *Idylls of the King*. London: Edward Moxon & Co., 1867.)



An example of gilding that poorly conceals the fore-edge painting.
(Figuier, Louis. *Les Races Humanes*. Paris: Librairie Hachette et cie, 1872.)

Origins

To whom was fore-edge painting first attributed? This is a difficult question to answer. The Edwards family of Halifax, England, had the greatest impact on the development of fore-edge paintings, but they did not invent the technique. William Edwards (1723-1808) was practicing the art of fore-edge painting as early as 1775; however, there are examples of paintings dating to 1651 by London bookbinders Stephen and Thomas Lewis. Unfortunately, little is known about the Lewis brothers other than they were the sons of a London stationer and worked in the city at least until 1664 (Weber 52-53). Other early examples came from the bookshop of Samuel Mearne, stationer and bookseller to King Charles II of England (Swan 22). Mearne held the office from 1660 until his death in 1683, and his bookshop has been attributed with producing many elegant bindings that are highly sought after by collectors. After Mearne's death, the art of fore-edge painting was practiced infrequently until William Edwards took an interest in it (Swan 27).

The Edwards Family of Halifax

William was the patriarch of the Edwards family. He and his five sons were successful binders as well as booksellers and publishers. They had three specialties, examples of which are still highly popular with today's rare book collectors. William Edwards is believed to have developed, or at least was a master, of the Etruscan style of decorating books bound in leather made from the hide of a

calf. This decorative technique used acid to stain classical ornaments (e.g. Greek vases or palmettes) on the bindings. A second family specialty (patented by James Edwards in 1785) was a process for making vellum transparent, which allowed an artist to paint or draw a design on the underside of the skin (Jackson 5). After the vellum binding was completed, the image was safely protected from everyday wear. Their third specialty was fore-edge painting, a technique that was revived by William and perfected by Thomas.

William Edwards worked in Halifax for thirty years. In 1783, he bought up the libraries of three or four local collectors. Realizing that he could not profitably sell this recently acquired inventory in Halifax, he opened a new bookshop for his sons James and John in London (Pall Mall) in 1784. Their Richard opened another shop in Bond Street in 1792. (A few years after their Pall Mall bookshop opened, John died in France. It is rumored that he was guillotined, but this is uncertain. However, he would not have been the first man to have been executed during the French Revolution for being an educated man, and therefore an aristocrat (Weber 28-29).) The Edwards family effectuated all three of their specialties in their Halifax and London bookshops. Today's collectors tend to attribute any binding of the period that imitates any of the three specialties to the Edwards family (Carter 87).

James Edwards became a celebrity of sorts when he outbid King George III for a *Book of Hours* (known as the *Bedford Missal*) at an auction in London in 1786. Queen Charlotte was scandalized when the king's librarian informed them that the book might go for as much as 200 guineas. To keep his wife happy, the king told his librarian, George Nichol, not to bid higher than 200 guineas. James won the book for 203 guineas (Weber 4).

When William Edwards died in 1808, his son Thomas inherited his Halifax shop and maintained the business there until 1826. It is not entirely clear why Thomas focused on fore-edge paintings, but he was the biggest proponent of this technique in the Edwards family. When Thomas died in 1834, it marked the end of a thirty-year period (1774-1834) in the era of fore-edge paintings.

Fore-Edge Styles Change

The earliest hidden fore-edge paintings were floral designs, fleur de lys, and scrolls. Biblical scenes were also popular. Then in 1768 a forty-four-year-old parson named William Gilpin published *An Essay Upon Prints: Containing Remarks Upon the Principles of Picturesque Beauty, the Different Kinds of Prints, and the Characters of the Most Noted Masters; Illustrated by Criticisms Upon Particular Pieces; to which are Added, Some Cautions that may be Useful in Collecting Prints.*



The fore-edge painting on this book is directly representative of its subject matter. The painting shows a courtroom scene with wigged judges and barristers, witnesses, and other lawyers. The painting and gilt were most likely added by an expert, as the painting is vivid and detailed but entirely hidden by the gilt when the book is closed. (Maine, Henry Summer. *Early History of Institution*. London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1897.)



A "picturesque" highlighting a pleasing, natural scene. (Walton, Izaak. *The lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, Mr. George Herbert, and Dr. Robert Sanderson*. London: John Major, 1825.)

Gilpin was already well known for an earlier book, *A Dialogue upon the Gardens of the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Cobham, at Stow*, in which he criticized the highly structured landscaping then in vogue and expounded on the virtues of natural scenery. Both works were tremendously popular and were the first of their kind to examine landscaping and natural beauty from an artistic point of view. In his works, Gilpin coined the term "picturesque," defined it as something that was capable of being pleasingly illustrated in painting. Gilpin's works were so influential that many other books were published on similar topics. Apparently, William Edwards was also influenced by this new trend in popular literature. In 1769 his shop began producing many copies of Gilpin's works, and other works on similar topics, with "picturesque" fore-edge paintings (Weber 70). As Gilpin and others published new books, new fore-edge paintings were crafted to illustrate scenes from the books, giving birth to a tradition in fore-edge painting. Even after Gilpin died in 1804, he and his writings largely forgotten,

picturesque scenes of one kind or another remained the predominant style of fore-edge painting.

William Edwards seemed to understand what his customers wanted, but he also painted what he was interested in (Weber 70). His early examples of fore-edge painting, when he was learning the technique, included floral designs. But scenes from the Bible were also favorite subjects. Early examples of fore-edge paintings by William Edwards and others tended to be fairly monochromatic, but as the picturesque became popular the fore-edge paintings became more vivid.

It was apparently common for booksellers to have folios of samples from which their artist or artists worked (Swan 35). Therefore, a fore-edge design was frequently copied from another work and the same design might appear on several different books.

The "Last Supper" may have been painted on various editions of the Bible. Also, scenes from famous works of art were chosen that seemed appropriate to a book and that the booksellers thought would be popular with their customers. Fore-edge paintings of the birthplace of the author of the book started appearing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Weber 85).

Thomas Edwards (1762-1834), the youngest of William's sons, is the best-known member of the Edwards family for promoting the fore-edge painting (Swan 31).

He seemed to have a particularly good sense for what his customers wanted. He responded to the public's interests in poetry, history, sports (hunting scenes were very popular), and novels by producing editions of popular books with appropriate fore-edge paintings. He would also do the same for books such as Greek classics. By the time Thomas died, the art of fore-edge painting had been brought to new artistic levels.

The influence of the Edwards family was widely felt, especially among booksellers in London. Faulders, another publisher and printer, was a contemporary of Edwards and imitated his style, as did the binders in Taylor and Hessey's

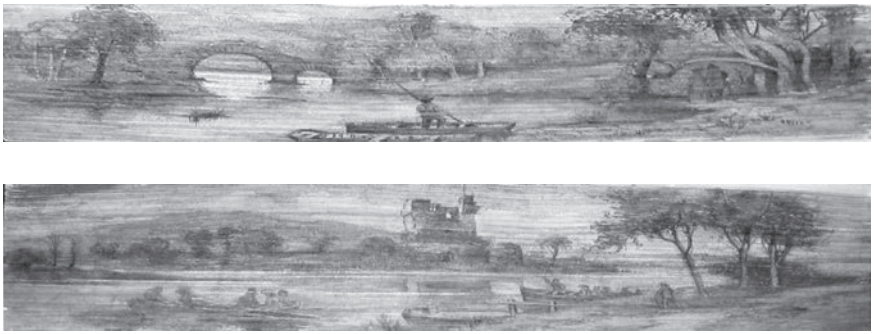


The two volumes of Sturm's Reflections on the "Works of God" are excellent examples of monochromatic fore-edge painting. The artist used a single color to depict religious themes on the fore edges of both books (Volume one shown). (Sturm, C.C. Sturm's *Reflections*. London: G. & W.B. Whitaker, 1823.)

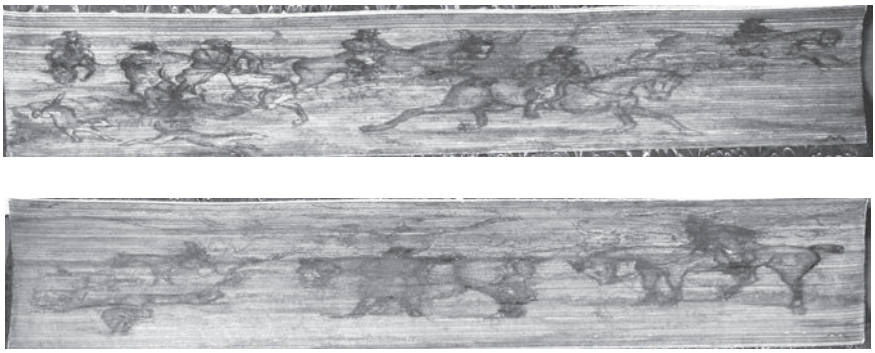
shop (Weber 106). Artists who created fore-edge paintings for the Halifax family or any other bindery are almost completely unknown. It is believed that in most cases the binder and painter were not the same person. Thomas Gosden (1780-1840) is apparently an exception to this rule. The artists tended not to sign their works, but there are a few records indicating that both men and women practiced fore-edge painting. One man who did occasionally sign his work was Bartholomew Frye. It is also known that he worked for William and Thomas Edwards (Weber 114-115).

Double Fore-Edge Paintings

Double fore-edge painting is one of the rarer styles of the genre. As the name suggests, if you fan the text block of a book one way you can view one scene; if the text block is fanned in the opposite direction, you see another scene. This technique apparently dates back to the mid-eighteenth century—at least that is when a date can be positively assigned to one. Additionally, the scenes on the oldest existing double fore-edge paintings have landscape and picturesque scenes, not the floral designs that would date them to an earlier period. The most productive time for double fore-edge painting was between 1785 and 1835. The difficulty in creating a double fore-edge is the most likely reason that there are so few of them. Perhaps two or three percent of existing volumes with fore-edge paintings are doubles (Weber 99).



This copy of Lalla Rookh boasts a double fore-edge painting. When fanned to the right, the pages reveal a painting of Ross Castle. When fanned to the left, they show a beautiful painting of Old Weir Bridge in Killarney, Ireland. (Moore, Thomas. *Lalla Rookh: An Oriental Romance* London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1826.)



(*The Duke of Beaufort and Mowbray Morris*. Hunting. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1886.)

Two-Way Paintings

Two-way paintings are also very unusual examples of fore-edge craftsmanship. The edges of the book were decorated when the pages were opened in the middle.In order to see each image clearly, the text block needs to be fanned up and then down, or to the right and then the left, depending on the orientation of the painting.



Above, a two-way painting is shown fanning both paintings in a single direction. Note that the bottom painting is clearly visible, while the top image in indistinct.



Above, a two-way painting showing one of its two paintings.



This is a fine example of a two-way fore-edge painting. When the book is opened in the center, two paintings appear—one on either side of the divide. Each of the two sides is also a split painting, leaving the full painting divided into four separate quarters. Each quarter depicts a scene from the book and an accompanying portrait inlay. On the left, the first quarter shows the Ploughman from the "Georgies" of Virgil and a portrait of Virgil himself. The second quarter shows Cicero addressing the Senate, inlaid with a portrait of Cicero. The right side depicts the destruction of Pompeii with a portrait of Pliny in one quarter and the crossing of the Alps with an insert of a portrait of Hannibal in the other. So this unique work actually contains eight paintings! (Browne, R.W. *A History of Classical Literature*. London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1884.)



This two-way painting depicts Christopher Columbus and George Washington. (Richardson, Abby Sage. *The History of Our Country: From Its Discovery by Columbus to the Celebration of the Centennial Anniversary of Its Declaration of Independence*. Boston: H.O. Houghton and Company, 1875.)



The American Influence

The period Carl J. Weber identified as the "American Blight" occurred during the latter half of the nineteenth century. It refers to a period in the history of fore-edge painting when the scenes painted had nothing to do with the content of the book (Weber 125). For example, a book of poetry by Sir Walter Scott might have

a scene of Fort Sumter on its fore-edge. This was done purely to sell books to American tourists. Apparently Americans preferred buying their books abroad; there are many more examples of fore-edge paintings depicting American scenes on books by English authors or printers than anything else. This period also saw the quality of the paintings go down while prices went up. It is also worth noting that books chosen for decoration tended to be unimportant volumes. British booksellers had found a successful and profitable means of unloading their overstocked and slow-moving titles.

Amateurs

There were a number of amateurs who took an active interest in fore-edge painting. For example, John Beer was an amateur fore-edge painter in the late nineteenth century. He apparently painted hundreds of volumes (Swan 39). One of the most interesting aspects of an amateur's work is that it is much more likely to be original. These artists were doing it for their own amusement, without thought of selling their works. Another feature of amateur fore-edge paintings is that the edges are typically not gilt, although there are some amateurs that purchased older books with the gilt already applied and then added their fore-edge.

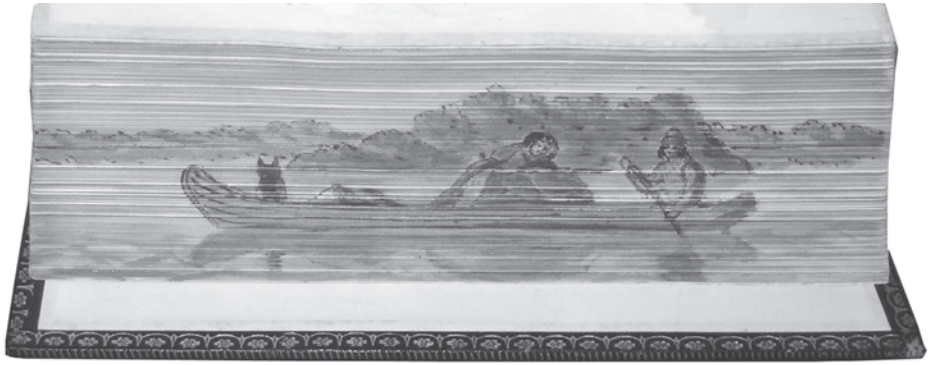
Fore-Edge Painting Continues

Although fore-edge paintings are not as popular as they once were, there are many examples of edge decoration from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. One of the more talented artists during the early part of the twentieth century was C.B. Currie, who decorated more than 131 edges (Swan 45). She signed and numbered her work and preferred to work with books that were fifty to 100 years old.

Another interesting chapter in this history took place in China. There are many Chinese fore-edge paintings



This is a beautiful example of a hidden vertical fore-edge painting. The painting depicts two golfers, whose names, Allen Robertson and Tom Morris, are actually titled in the painting itself. Notice that the subject of the painting does not reflect the subject of the text. This was common practice in the late nineteenth century, and usually an attempt to appeal to customers. (Scott, Walter. *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1869.)



A simple scene of two people and their dog in a canoe. The image appears very choppy, as if painted after the book was bound. (Stanley, Arthur P. *Historical Memorials of Westminster Abbey*. London: John Murray, 1876.)

that date from 1936 to 1942. The first example was apparently brought over by an American who taught in Beijing. The idea caught on and artists began applying edge decoration to modern European books. They quickly turned to older books as well as volumes published in China and Japan. Biblical scenes were predominant, no matter what the subject of the book. Landscapes were also common; these were often painted vertically rather than horizontally. The books tended not to be gilt-edged.

Although many beautiful examples made their way to America, World War II put an end to books from China being exported to the United States (Weber 161).

Today, there are still artists who know the techniques and are highly regarded in the field of rare books. Martin Frost is probably the best-known and most talented contemporary artist practicing this book-decoration technique. He is also the most prolific, having completed over 3,000 fore-edge paintings.

A final unusual feature worth noting is that it is often difficult to determine if a fore-edge painting is actually contemporary with the binding of the book. Some clues to look for include: gilt edging that appears too bright or new for an old volume (this is an indication that the painting was recently added and new gilt applied); colors that appear too bright or intense; the use of hues that were not available when the painting was executed; or an uneven, or choppy appearance. Fore-edge paintings that are contemporary with the bindings tend to be the most sought after by collectors. However, when well-executed, old books with new paintings are also highly desirable and a joy to behold—assuming the buyer is aware of what he is purchasing.

Conclusion

Fore-edge paintings followed the trends of the times. As the "picturesque" theme became popular, it was emulated in fore-edge paintings, turning away from symmetrical designs. Scrolls, floral designs, and biblical scenes were replaced by William Gilpin's inspirations.

In general, the artists executing fore-edge paintings were copying other works. Painting popular works or imitating styles helped sell books. In fact, many books may have sold for the painting rather than the content. We also know that paintings were not always contemporary with the book; for example, Thomas Edwards may have added scenes to promote the sale of certain books after he had them in his shop for a few years.

Typically, very little is known about the painters. A painting may be signed or we may know that an artist worked for a particular binder but usually little beyond that.

Books by English poets were the most popular to apply painting to, especially works by Sir Walter Scott, William Cowper, and John Milton. Bibles, Greek and Latin classics, books dealing with travel, and sports were also popular. Fore-edge painting reached its most productive time during the early nineteenth century, from 1800 to1825, which coincides with the peak of Thomas Edwards' career, forever linking the popularity of fore-edge painting to the Edwards family of Halifax.

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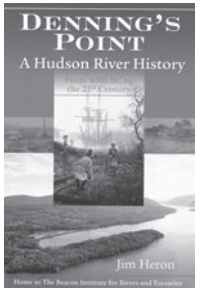
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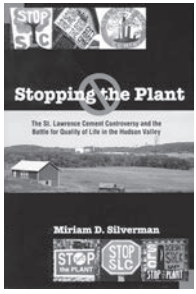
New & Noteworthy Books Received



Denning's Point: A Hudson River History from 4000 BC to the 21st Century

By Jim Heron (Hensonville, N.Y.: Black Dome Press Corp., 2006). 228 pp. 114 maps $17.95 (paperback). www.blackdomepress.com

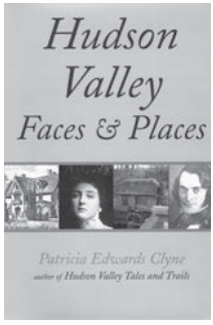
An ambitious and meticulous history of the sixty-four acre peninsula in Beacon, researched and written by the project historian for the Beacon Institute for Rivers and Estuaries (which is being developed on Denning's Point). The book contains a forward by John Cronin, the institute's executive director, and a prologue by Pete Seeger.



Stopping the Plant: The St. Lawrence Cement Controversy and the Battle for Quality of Life in the Hudson Valley

By Miriam D. Silverman (Albany, N.Y.: State University New York Press, 2006) 194 pp. $44.50 (hardcover), $14.95 (paperback).

A chronicle of St. Lawrence Cement's proposed coal-fired cement facility in Greenport, Columbia County, and the fight by environmentalists to halt its construction. In addition to examining the controversy over the plant, the book places the battle in a regional context of cultural and individual identity.



Hudson Valley Faces and Places

By Patricia Edwards Clyne (Woodstock and New York: The Overlook Press, 2006) 370 pp. 66 b/w illustrations, $26.95 (hardcover).

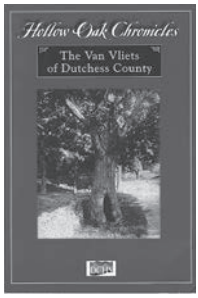
A new volume of Hudson Valley lore by the author of Hudson Valley Tales and Trails. It recounts the lives and exploits of some of the region's most interesting (and oft-forgotten) entrepreneurs, inventors, artists, women, celebrities, soldiers, "oddities," and places.



F.D.R. at Home

Edited by Nancy A. Fogel, (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: The Dutchess County Historic Society, 2005). 206 pp.

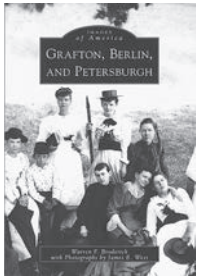
A collection of essays about Franklin Delano Roosevelt as a resident, historian, and gentleman farmer of Hyde Park and Dutchess County. It includes articles written by regional historians as well as staff at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library and the National Park Service.



Hollow Oak Chronicles: The Van Vliets of Dutchess County, (Dutchess County Historical Society Yearbook 2003-2004 Vol. 84)

Edited by Nancy A. Fogel (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: The Dutchess County Historical Society, 2005). 136 pp. $15.00 (paperback).

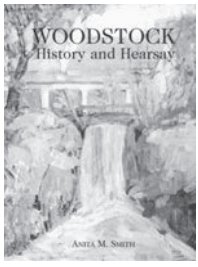
The latest installment of the historical society's Yearbook traces 300 years of the Van Vliet family. The seven essays rely upon a donated archive of family letters, diaries, photographs, and maps.



Grafton, Berlin, and Petersburgh

By Warren F. Broderick (Charleston, SC; Chicago, IL; Portsmouth, NH; San Francisco, CA: Arcadia Publishing, 2006) 127 pp. $19.99 (paperback). www.ArcadiaPublishing.com

A new title from Arcadia's "Images of America" series, the book is primarily a photographic tour of these three communities in eastern Rensselaer County. The photographs are reproduced from the James Emmett West Collection in the New York State Library. The author has added an introduction and captions providing background information about each image.



Woodstock; History and Hearsay

By Anita M. Smith (Woodstock, New York: Woodstock Arts, 2006) 335 pp. $37.50 (hardcover). www.WoodstockArts.com

A second printing of Smith's classic 1959 history of the town and the many characters who have populated it. The updated edition includes an author's biographical timeline and nearly 200 art reproductions as well as maps, photographs, endnotes, and an index.

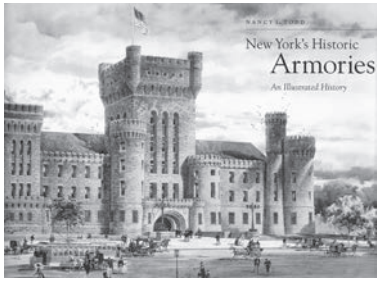


Hudson Valley Ruins: Forgotten Landmarks of an American Landscape

By Thomas E. Rinaldi and Robert J. Yasinsac (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2006) 337 pp. $35.00 (hardcover). www.upne.com

An exciting new volume from the creators of www.hudsonvalleyruins.org, the book is one part travel guide (though no directions are provided) and one part encyclopedia of our region's greatest ruins—houses, factories, even a railroad car. In addition to color and black and white photographs, the author/photographers offer short histories of each ruin and a compelling discussion of the history and future of ruins in the Hudson Valley.

New York's Historic Armories: An Illustrated History



By Nancy L. Todd (State University of New York Press, September 2006). 322 pp. $50.00 (hardcover).

A pictorial overview of the New York State Army National Guard and its 120 arsenals and armories built during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. The author writes that these buildings, built "between 1799 and 1941… represent the oldest, largest, and best collection of pre-World War II era armories in the country." The book is filled with color and black and white illustrations and photographs.

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

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