

# THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

*A Journal of Regional Studies*

## MARIST



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KEY TO THE  
NORTHERN COUNTRY



THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY  
IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

*Edited by James M. Johnson, Christopher Pryslopski & Andrew Villani*

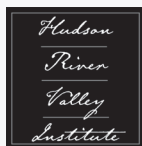
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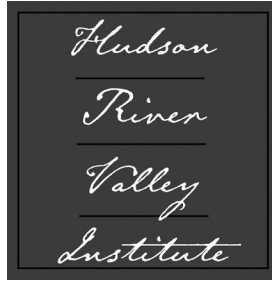
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## From the Editors

Articles in this issue pay tribute to two of the Hudson Valley's most popular historic sites—Olana and Vanderbilt Mansion. Olana is celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of its preservation by a small group of people who understood the significant role it plays in understanding America's cultural history. At the same time, Vanderbilt Mansion is part of the National Park Service, which is marking the centennial of its establishment. Another article illustrates some of the unusual ways Hudson Valley residents took part in festive occasions in their communities, while two others shine lights on lesser-known aspects of history in and around Albany—its colonial forts and the impact of World War I on Jewish residents of the Capital District. As always, these insights into the region's heritage are accompanied by book reviews and other regular features.



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*On the cover:*  
*View from across the Lake looking towards the Main House at Olana*  
Photo: ©Larry Lederman, 2010, All rights reserved

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*Governor Nelson Rockefeller signing the Lane-Newcombe Bill at Olana, June 27, 1966, which authorized New York State to buy Olana and open it as a public site.*

*Left to right: Assemblyman Clarence Lane, Senator Lloyd Newcombe, Governor Nelson Rockefeller, and Alexander Aldrich, president of Olana Preservation (courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center, Tarrytown, N.Y.)*



# Saving Olana

David Schuyler

“Olana is the essence of the Hudson River school of painting, one of the most important American contributions to the history of art.”

—*The New York Times*, editorial, June 10, 1966

“Do you know that Mrs. [Sally Good] Church has died?”<sup>1</sup>

When in September 1964 David C. Huntington heard these words from Stuart P. Feld, then a curator in the Department of American Paintings and Sculpture at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, he contemplated an ominous development—the sale and possible destruction of Frederic Edwin Church’s magnificent Persian-inspired dwelling (p. 8), the subdivision and development of the handsome landscape the artist meticulously created on approximately 250 acres, and the dispersal of the contents of the house.<sup>2</sup> Huntington was a forty-two-year old art historian then teaching at Smith College who was a scholar of Church, then largely forgotten but today generally considered the greatest of the Hudson River School landscape painters. Alarmed, Huntington contacted Charles T. Lark, Jr., Mrs. Church’s nephew and a New York City attorney who was one of the heirs to the estate, as Sally Church and her late husband Louis were childless. Lark had decided to sell the property, he told Huntington, because he had four children and “needed money to send them through college.”<sup>3</sup> In speaking with Lark, Huntington made two requests: that he be able to document Olana prior to its sale, and that he have time to organize an effort to purchase and preserve Olana.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., oral history interview with David C. Huntington, 1988, typescript copy, p. 15, David C. Huntington Papers, Series 6, Olana Archives, Olana State Historic Site, Greenport, N.Y. All page numbers in the citations below refer to this copy. The original is in the Oral History Series of the Papers of Charles Bridgham Hosmer, National Trust for Historic Preservation Library Collection, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD. A letterpress edition of the interview, edited and printed without Hosmer’s questions, was published by Dorothy Heyl as *The Campaign to Save Olana: An Oral History by David Huntington* (n.p., 2009). Mrs. Church’s maiden name was misspelled Goode in the typescript, and I have silently corrected it. Huntington’s statement in the oral history continued, “and that the contents of Olana are to be auctioned off?” Stuart Feld recalls that at the time he contacted Huntington he did not know that the estate would be sold and its contents auctioned off. Feld, telephone conversation with David Schuyler, June 22, 2015.
  2. Stuart Feld, email to David Schuyler, June 17, 2015.
  3. Huntington, oral history, p. 16.
  4. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.
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Huntington had been doing research at Olana for his Yale dissertation since 1953, and during his first visit was stunned at how intact the house was in the half-century since Church's death. He later recalled:

I was absolutely staggered in the attic, just the abundance of material that was still there, hundreds of drawings by Church, scores and scores of oil studies by the painter, and cancelled checks, journals, prints that the artist had had, photographs (hundreds upon hundreds of photographs), some paintings by other artists, paintings by the artist himself stored in the attic, and so forth and so on.<sup>5</sup>

Huntington was "absolutely bewildered" by what he saw, "not at all expecting such a relic of the 19th century, almost virtually untouched, unchanged since the 19th century"<sup>6</sup> (p. 10 top and bottom). Huntington immediately recognized what a remarkable resource Olana was, and as his admiration for Church and the place he created increased he became more deeply invested in the artist's career.

Olana was, from 1860 until 1964, a sprawling enterprise. Church had acquired much of the property in 1860, months before his marriage to Isabel Carnes, and then began construction of a dwelling, Cosy Cottage, designed by architect Richard Morris Hunt. Seven years later, Church acquired an additional eighteen acres that included Sienghenbergh (or Long) Hill, which he had undoubtedly visited during his two-year apprenticeship with Thomas Cole, the first important Hudson River School painter, and where, beginning in 1870, he would erect a spectacular house of his own design, with architect Calvert Vaux as a consultant, that he described as Persian in inspiration.<sup>7</sup> As the house was nearing completion, Jervis McEntee, who had studied painting with Church, visited the house and recorded his impressions in his diary: "It is certainly a beautiful house and commands one of the finest views of river & mountain in the country. Church devotes nearly his whole time to building his house, and with his peculiar talent has produced a satisfactory result. The color of the house on the outside by the judicious use of colored bricks with the stone is very harmonious and agreeable. It looks like an artist's work."<sup>8</sup> The estate Church and his wife named Olana was a house and ancillary buildings, a working farm, a carefully designed landscape, and woodlands—a

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5. Ibid., p. 8.

6. Ibid., p. 7.

7. The authorship of the design of the hilltop house at Olana is complicated, as the surviving documentary evidence is inconclusive. Church told a writer for the *Boston Sunday Herald* that he had designed the house: "I made it out of my own head." Vaux prepared a preliminary design for the exterior, as well as a floor plan, but the house as built is significantly different from Vaux's study. Vaux's biographer, Frank Kowsky, convincingly argues that the cross-axial floor plan, centered on the Court Hall, is surely the architect's contribution to the design. Less convincingly, he speculates that the "most enduring contribution of Vaux to Olana" was his role in "orchestrating architectural space and outdoor vistas." Church is quoted in Frank J. Bonnelle, "In Summer Time on Olana," *Boston Sunday Herald*, Sept. 7, 1890. See also Francis R. Kowsky, *Country, Park, & City: The Architecture and Life of Calvert Vaux* (New York, 1998), pp. 206-14.

8. Jervis McEntee diary, July 22, 1872, Jervis McEntee Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

total environment on which the artist lavished enormous time and money (pp. 12-13). As Church scholar Franklin Kelly has explained, Olana is the “last great work” of Church’s life and “a thing of astounding complexity in its details, but remarkable harmony in its whole.”<sup>9</sup> Church’s productivity as a landscape painter declined in the 1870s, as the taste of the art-buying public shifted away from Hudson River School paintings to ones by European or European-trained American artists,<sup>10</sup> and when he was increasingly restricted by rheumatoid arthritis. In his late years Church poured his energies into Olana. “I have made about 1¾ miles of road this season, opening entirely new and beautiful views,” he wrote his friend, sculptor Erastus Dow Palmer, in 1884. “I can make more and better landscapes in this way than by tampering with canvas and paint in the studio.”<sup>11</sup> Ridge Road, one of the carriage drives constructed in 1884, was built on the additional fifty acres Church had acquired in 1878. The end result of all his efforts, the totality that is Olana, is surely the greatest artistic creation of Church’s life.

Olana at the time of Sally Church’s death in 1964 was remarkably intact from the years of Frederic and Isabel Church’s residence. To be sure, the house had been electrified and other systems upgraded. Louis Church, the artist’s youngest son, had donated a cache of 2,028 drawings (almost 800 with additional drawings on the reverse) to the museum of the Cooper Union (today the Cooper-Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum) in 1917 and gave away several paintings to family and close friends. But Olana was otherwise much as the artist has designed it: the house, the Church-designed landscape, the working farm and orchards, the carriage drives, and the lake remained. So did all of the furnishings in the main house, including thirty-two of Church’s studio oils, twenty-three framed oil studies, and twenty-seven unframed oil studies, as well as paintings by fellow Hudson River School artists, including Thomas Cole, Thomas Doughty, Worthington Whittredge, Jarvis McEntee, and a stunning orchid and hummingbird painting by Martin Johnson Heade, as well as approximately forty “Old Masters” the artist had collected. There were also approximately 300 wash drawings, pen and pencil drawings, and gouache created as Church refined his vision for the house (p. 7), fifteen notebooks and approximately 500 drawings, the library of almost 2,000 volumes, decora-

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9. Franklin Kelly, “Frederic Church’s Olana: An Introduction,” in James Anthony Ryan, *Frederic Church’s Olana: Architecture and Landscape As Art* (Hensonville, N.Y., 2001), p. 11. Ryan’s handsomely illustrated book is largely a new printing of his essay in the National Gallery of Art’s 1989 exhibition catalog, *Frederic Edwin Church*. See also the chapter on Olana in David C. Huntington, *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church: Vision of an American Era* (New York, 1966), pp. 114-25.

10. On the declining interest of the picture-buying public in Hudson River School paintings, see my chapter on Jarvis McEntee in *Sanctified Landscape: Writers, Artists, and the Hudson River Valley, 1820-1909* (Ithaca, 2012), pp. 110-32, and Eleanor Jones Harvey, “Tastes in Transition: Gifford’s Patrons,” in *Hudson River School Visions: The Landscapes of Sanford R. Gifford*, ed. Kevin J. Avery and Franklin Kelly (New York, 2003), pp. 75-89. See also Doreen Bolger Burke and Catherine Hoover Voorsanger, “The Hudson River School in Eclipse,” in John K. Howat, et al., *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School* (New York, 1987), pp. 71-90.

11. Church to Erastus Dow Palmer, Oct. 18, 1884, McKinney Library, Albany Institute of History and Art.

tive objects from around the world, and almost 6,000 photographs.<sup>12</sup> As Huntington compared the interior with photographs taken in the 1890s he was astonished at how little had changed in the years since Frederic Church's death.

Huntington realized that he had to move quickly to organize an effort to preserve Olana because, as he put it, "One of the most spectacular and most miraculously preserved monuments of nineteenth century American culture is at this moment in danger of vanishing before our eyes."<sup>13</sup> He knew that earlier in 1964 the paintings, artifacts, and furnishings of Cole's Cedar Grove, directly across the river from Olana in Catskill, had been auctioned off from the porch of the house.<sup>14</sup> But Huntington may not have been aware of how immediate the threat to Olana was. The executors of the estate were determined to end the ongoing expense of maintaining Olana "by turning the property into cash at the earliest possible moment," art historian E. P. Richardson wrote to critic Russell Lynes. "They plan to bring the works of art to New York to be sold at auction, auction the contents of the house on the site, and put the property up for sale." In early November 1964, Richardson urged Lynes to visit Olana within the week, as it might be gone soon thereafter.<sup>15</sup>

Huntington made phone calls and sent telegrams to academics and museum professionals throughout the United States, met with members of prominent families in the mid-Hudson Valley, and worked mightily to educate the public about Olana's significance. Together with Frederick Henry Osborn; Carl J. Weinhardt, director of the Gallery of Modern Art in New York City; and Robert Wheeler, of Sleepy Hollow Restorations, on November 11, 1964, Huntington met with Lark and Russell Sigler of Banker's Trust, which was responsible for liquidating the Church estate. They proposed what amounted to a stay of execution—a three-month reprieve during which time they would organize a group and raise money to purchase the estate. By that day many of the paintings had been moved to New York City for cleaning prior to sale, and items in the house were tagged for sale by a local auctioneer.<sup>16</sup> Several major cultural figures, including architectural historian Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., champion of modern architecture Philip Johnson, and ballet impresario Lincoln Kirstein, had pledged their support, each promising to pay a month's rent for the property as fundraising continued.<sup>17</sup> When

*continued on page 14*

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12. David Seamon and Karen Zukowski, "Afterword: Olana After Frederic Church," in Ryan, *Frederic Church's Olana*, p. 74.

13. Huntington, "Threatened Monument of Millennialist America," *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* (Winter 1966): 81.

14. Betsy Jacks, email to David Schuyler, July 16, 2015; Seamon and Zukowski, "Afterword: Olana After Frederic Church," p. 70.

15. E. P. Richardson to Russell Lynes, Nov. 5, 1964, in Russell Lynes Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. I am grateful to Dorothy Heyl for bringing this letter to my attention.

16. Huntington, oral history, pp. 22-23.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-25. When Russell Lynes visited Olana in late autumn (probably early November) 1964,

## Color Plates



Frederic E. Church, wash drawing of east façade, Olana, c. 1870  
(courtesy of Olana State Historic Site)

Next page: Olana, south façade (courtesy of Olana State Historic Site)













Robert and Emily de Forest, Court Hall, Main House at Olana,  
October 11, 1884 (courtesy of Olana State Historic Site)



Peter Aaron, Court Hall, Main House at Olana, photograph, 2010  
(©Peter Aaron/OTTO)





Entrance to the exhibition of Frederic E. Church's paintings,  
National Collection of Fine Arts, February 1966.  
Note the two cranes from the Court Hall  
(courtesy of Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.)









F. J. Church, Plan of Olana, September 1886 (courtesy of Olana State Historic Site)





Frederic Edwin Church, *Twilight in the Wilderness*, 1860, oil on canvas, 40 x 64 in.  
 The Cleveland Museum of Art, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund, 1965.233  
 (image copyright The Cleveland Museum of Art)



*Olana*, photograph by Henry Dauman published as the title page of the article  
 "Must this mansion be destroyed?," *Life*, May 13, 1966  
 (copyright Henri Dauman/Dauman Pictures.com/Life Magazine All rights reserved)

continued from page 7

Lark and Sigler agreed, *The New York Times* announced that a “movement to preserve as a national monument the 92-year-old Italian-Moorish home of Frederic Edwin Church... began formally yesterday.”<sup>18</sup> A small group of supporters—a self-described “ad hoc committee for the preservation of Olana”—met at the Gallery of Modern Art on November 18, 1964. Present were James Biddle, then head of The American Wing of The Metropolitan Museum of Art and later president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation; Louis C. Jones of the New York State Historical Association; William Gerdts, a historian of American painting; Frederick Osborn; Henry Hope Reed; and Huntington, among others. The group took on the challenge of promoting public awareness of Olana’s significance, with the goal of raising the money necessary to purchase the estate and its contents and determining its future.<sup>19</sup>

Historic preservation in New York was more than a century old at the time: the Hasbrouck house, George Washington’s headquarters in Newburgh during the waning months of the American Revolution, had been acquired by the state in 1850 and was the first building in the United States preserved for its historic significance through public funds.<sup>20</sup> To be sure, the demolition of McKim, Mead, and White’s iconic Pennsylvania Station beginning in October 1963, which was extensively covered in and denounced by *The New York Times*, gave a major impetus to preservation,<sup>21</sup> as did the wanton destruction of the historic fabric of cities nationwide as a result of urban redevelopment in the 1950s and 1960s and the impact of construction of the interstate highway system in urban areas. These events contributed to the creation of New York City’s Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1965. But the challenge of preserving Olana was different and especially daunting. It had been privately owned and was largely unknown even to historians of American art and architecture. Church, whose reputation as the greatest of American landscape painters had declined during the final thirty years of his life, was largely forgotten. And Olana’s location, 120 miles north of Manhattan, in rural Columbia County, surely contributed to the difficulty of raising its profile and the money needed to acquire the site. Thus the first steps Huntington and supporters of Olana took were to spread awareness of its significance. Huntington invited academics, including Yale architectural historian Vincent Scully and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, an architectural historian then teaching at Smith College; cultural figures such as Russell Lynes, managing editor of *Harper’s Magazine*; and individuals

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he noted that “Everything in the house had a white tag on it—pictures, pieces of furniture, bits of bric-a-brac, cases of butterflies, caftans, rugs, mirrors, a collection of sombreros.” Lynes, “Persia on the Hudson,” *Harper’s Magazine* 230 (Feb. 1965): 32.

18. “Fund Drive Is Begun to Save Estate on Hudson: Olana, Italian-Moorish Home of U.S. Artist of Mid-1800’s, Sought as Monument,” *New York Times*, Nov. 12, 1964.

19. Minutes, Ad Hoc Committee for the Preservation of Olana, Nov. 18, 1964, Olana Archives.

20. David Schuyler, “The American Revolution Remembered in the Hudson River Valley,” *Hudson River Valley Review* 30 (Autumn 2013): 3-17.

21. Hilary Ballon, *New York’s Pennsylvania Stations* (New York, 2002), pp. 103-5.

who might be interested in supporting Olana, to tour the site.<sup>22</sup>

Another challenge was that the large house at Olana was a unique and exotic high Victorian building. Preserving colonial or early national buildings was widely accepted, but Victorian was still largely dismissed as a regrettable episode in American taste. To be sure, Lewis Mumford's *The Brown Decades* (1931) had argued that "we have already destroyed much that was precious" in the architecture and art of the post-Civil War years. He added, "unless we rapidly recover a little common sense we shall doubtless destroy much more." While he conceded that there was "something pitifully inadequate, indeed grotesque, in the post-bellum scene,"<sup>23</sup> Mumford nevertheless found in those years the beginnings of modern American civilization. More recent books by Scully, Hitchcock, and John Maass also presented a more sympathetic understanding of the era, but to the public in general Victorian was simply ugly. A fit subject for Charles Addams' *New Yorker* cartoons, perhaps, but Victorian was hardly a beloved style. One notable preservation success was the Jefferson Market Courthouse, which had been designed by Frederick C. Withers and Calvert Vaux and erected 1875-77: New York City decided that instead of demolition the building be converted into a public library, which opened in 1967.<sup>24</sup> Such successes were rare, as Lynes observed in an article advocating Olana's preservation: "The buildings built between 1860 and 1885, and especially houses of that vintage, have long been considered to be catastrophic in their vulgarity, their nonsensical ornamentation, and artistical pretentiousness. They were assumed to be products of the dark ages of taste..."<sup>25</sup> Sadly, many important buildings erected in the second half of the nineteenth century were being demolished, sometimes to be replaced by colonial revival structures. For example, the Jayne Building in Philadelphia, a mid-nineteenth-century antecedent of the skyscraper, was demolished in the 1950s to make way for Independence National Historical Park.

Thus publicity was key. Volunteers organized tours and teas to acquaint the public with Olana, and the ad hoc group, which took the name Olana Preservation Committee in December 1964, began organizing a major event to be held at the New-York Historical Society on January 19, 1965. Huntington spoke on that occasion, as did Lynes and Scully. Lynes, who had first written about Olana in *The Tastemakers* (1954), produced the first important national article about Olana in the February 1965 issue of *Harper's*. At a time when the house was largely unknown, he wrote affectionately of Olana: "Delight in detail, an enchantment with bright colors and the exotic, and a determined pursuit of the romantic are all built stone by stone and tile by tile into Olana." In the article, accompanied by a modern photograph of the south façade and a line drawing

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22. Huntington, oral history, pp. 22, 34.

23. Mumford, *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America 1865-1895* (1931; New York, 1955), pp. 50, 20.

24. See Francis R. Kowsky, *The Architecture of Frederick Clarke Withers and the Progress of the Gothic Revival in America after 1850* (Middletown, Conn., 1980), pp. 109-15.

25. Lynes, "Persia on the Hudson," p. 30.

of the Court Hall, Lynes was attentive to Olana's uniqueness. There were, he noted, "few nineteenth-century interiors of such unabashed authenticity still in existence." He also praised the way in which "Church carefully rearranged the landscape and greatly enhanced the magic of its vistas."<sup>26</sup> The article was a powerful statement of Olana's significance and a clarion call for its preservation. Scully published an article, "Palace of the Past," in the May 1965 issue of *Progressive Architecture*. At Olana, he wrote, Church "tried to see through the flux of the seasons, the permanence of the world. His soul has entered into the place, which he brought into focus for our eyes. It was his last and most enduring work, the ultimate justification for his art."<sup>27</sup> Art Institute of Chicago curator and critic Katharine Kuh subsequently published "Castle Under Siege" in the *Saturday Review* and Huntington contributed "Olana—the Center of the World" in *Antiques*. As Kuh explained in her article, with specific reference to Lady Bird Johnson's highway beautification efforts, "Our real enemies are not billboards but bulldozers, not urban realities but the heedless demolition of our man-made heritage." Huntington described Olana as Church's "perfect microcosm" and argued that it "is richly deserving of posterity's care and regard."<sup>28</sup>

Olana Preservation was incorporated at a meeting on March 23, 1965. Elected trustees were Alexander (Sam) Aldrich, a cousin of Governor Nelson Rockefeller and a member of his staff; James Biddle; Albert S. Callan; Huntington; Donald H. Karshan; Raymond C. Kennedy; Frederick H. Osborn; Mrs. William H. Osborn; and Carl Weinhardt (Mr. and Mrs. Lammot DuPont Copeland, Henry Francis DuPont, and Frank W. McCabe were elected trustees at the meeting of May 4, 1965). The trustees placed the board's finances in the hands of treasurer Biddle and the account in First National City Bank.<sup>29</sup> Betty Cunningham served as the office manager for Olana Preservation. She worked closely with Aldrich, Biddle, and Huntington and coordinated the efforts of all board members. She worked hard on publicizing Olana and organizing events there and elsewhere as well as on fund-raising.<sup>30</sup>

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26. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-34. See also Lynes, *The Tastemakers: The Shaping of American Popular Taste* (1954; New York, 1980), p. 99, and Lynes to The Honorable Nelson A. Rockefeller, May 18, 1966, which is included in the bill jacket of the Newcombe-Lane Act, New York State Archives, Albany, N.Y.

27. Scully, "Palace of the Past," *Progressive Architecture*, May 1965, pp.184-89.

28. Kuh, "Castle Under Siege," *Saturday Review* 48 (Nov. 27, 1965): 46-47; Huntington, "Olana—the Center of the World," *Antiques* 88 (Nov. 1965): 656-63. See also Hennig Cohen, "The Romantic of Olana," *Reporter* 34 (Apr. 7, 1966): 51-52, a review of the exhibition of Church's paintings at the National Collection of Fine Arts and Huntington's 1966 book, *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church*. "At Olana," Cohen concluded, "within this world of his own creation, Church remained—in the Emersonian phrase—of the party of hope" (p. 52).

29. Olana Preservation, Inc., Minutes, Mar. 23, 1965, Apr. 1, 1965, May 4, 1965, Olana Archives. This was an impressive group. Mrs. William Osborn's spouse and her brother-in-law Frederick were grandsons of Church's friend and patron, William H. Osborn; Lammot DuPont Copeland was son of the CEO of the DuPont Company; Henry Francis DuPont had established the Winterthur Museum on his estate north of Wilmington, Delaware; Donald Karshan was a talented former public relations executive; Frank McCabe was an Albany banker and chair of the Hudson River Valley Commission; Callan and Kennedy were newspaper publishers in Columbia County.

At the next meeting, held on April 1, 1965, the trustees elected the following officers: Aldrich, President and Chairman; Osborn, Honorary Chairman; Mrs. Osborn, Vice Chairman; Huntington, Vice President; Kennedy, Secretary; and Biddle, Treasurer. The board then initiated steps to gain tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service and to appoint an accountant or firm to audit its finances. Aldrich announced that Lark and Bankers Trust had halted plans to liquidate the estate and had instead agreed to sell Olana—house, outbuildings, land, and all of the contents of the house—to Olana Preservation for approximately \$500,000, the sale to be consummated by April 1, 1966. The trustees authorized Aldrich to negotiate the terms of the arrangement with Lark and Banker's Trust and to hire appraisers to determine the precise value of the holdings.<sup>31</sup>

The trustees finalized their arrangement with Lark and Banker's Trust at the next meeting. They agreed to a purchase price of approximately \$470,000 and to rent the property for \$2,000 per month as well as pay the cost of maintaining the property—taxes, utilities, salary for the caretakers, maintaining the buildings and grounds. The trustees further authorized Aldrich to sign a purchase option and pay the estate \$20,000, which would be deducted from the sale price if the option were exercised. They also organized a fundraising committee, headed by Aldrich and Mrs. William H. Osborn, and charged its members with approaching foundations for support, as well as a local hospitality and house committee to organize group and individual access to Olana.<sup>32</sup>

Other meetings followed, and the trustees demonstrated commendable zeal in promoting the preservation of Olana. During the summer of 1965, Huntington recalled, there were numerous receptions, “and thousands of people by then were visiting Olana, going through, and for the fund-raising campaign.”<sup>33</sup> The trustees' meetings were held in the prominent law firm Milbank Tweed's satellite offices in Rockefeller Center. Several partners prepared the incorporation documents for Olana Preservation and advised the trustees on important matters. James Hamilton, an associate at Milbank, regularly attended the trustees' meetings and often recorded the minutes. Hamilton and several Milbank partners strongly supported Olana Preservation, and Hamilton dealt with Charles Lark when there were misunderstandings or disagreements with the trustees. He eventually drafted the Newcombe-Lane bill that ensured New York's involvement and brought Olana into the state system of historic sites.<sup>34</sup>

Columbia County leaders were also strongly supportive of the preservation campaign. Two trustees of Olana Preservation were locals: Raymond Kennedy, the owner of the *Hudson Register-Star*, and Albert S. Callan, owner and publisher of the *Chatham*

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30. Betty Cuningham, email to David Schuyler, July 12, 2015.

31. Olana Preservation, minutes, Apr. 1, 1965, May 4, 1965.

32. *Ibid.*, May 4, 1965.

33. Huntington, oral history, p. 34.

34. J. Winthrop Aldrich, “Olana Talk,” Feb. 3, 2015, copy in the author's possession; information on Milbank, Tweed provided by Dorothy Heyl in an email to David Schuyler, June 4, 2015 and by Richard T. Sharp, July 13, 2015.



*Courier*, used their newspapers and their contacts in the community to support Olana's preservation. Huntington met with the Columbia County Board of Supervisors at Olana, and they too supported the cause, (despite concern that as a historic house museum it would be taken off the tax rolls), as did the local chamber of commerce. Most influential was Lloyd Boice, a realtor and insurance agent who had overseen the management of Olana during the years of Sally Church's decline (and would continue to do so until Olana Preservation acquired the property). Huntington describes a chance meeting with Boice, whom he overheard while Boice was giving a tour of the house to the director of the Taconic Park Commission, probably Howard Davis, who was then chairman of the commission. He was impressed by how much Boice appreciated Olana's history and significance. When the park commissioner left, Huntington and Boice "sat down in the kitchen and began planning a strategy."<sup>35</sup> Boice may also have persuaded Lark and Sigler to delay the sale of the estate and its contents.<sup>36</sup> At their meeting of January 19, 1966, the trustees of Olana Preservation adopted a resolution praising Boice and expressing "their sincere appreciation of the generous spirit, interest, time and talents which he had faithfully devoted to the careful preservation of Olana." Also important was Mary Mazzacano, who organized the women's committee that guided the thousands of visitors who toured Olana during 1965 and 1966. Olana Preservation minutes indicate that the Columbia County committee was "swamped with volunteers" and that there was "tremendous local enthusiasm."<sup>37</sup>

In February 1965 Mahoud Foroughi, the Iranian ambassador to the United States, visited Olana and described it as "an invaluable collection" of early Persian art. Church, he stated, had "truly created the feeling of a Persian home of a century ago right here in the Hudson Valley."<sup>38</sup> Olana was designated a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior in June 1965. According to Alexander Aldrich, the survey team that visited the site pronounced Olana as being "of exceptional value."<sup>39</sup> One especially prominent visitor, August Heckscher, who had been a special consultant on the arts for President John F. Kennedy and later served as New York City's parks commissioner, gave an address at Olana on January 22, 1966. "In its completeness, its perfection of detail and its capacity to evoke an era," Heckscher stated, "Olana is an important element of our cultural heritage. If this collection should be dispersed or this architecture destroyed, the blow would be severe—an impoverishment of the present and a betrayal of the past."<sup>40</sup> Another important visitor was Edith Saville, a close

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35. Huntington, oral history, pp. 18-19, 26.

36. Seamon and Zukowski, "Afterword: Olana After Frederick Church," p. 71.

37. Olana Preservation, minutes, Jan. 19, 1966, Dec. 16, 1964.

38. *Hudson Register-Star*, Feb. 4, 1965. Several other articles describing the ambassador's visit are preserved in the Olana Archives, but they are undated and only one, from the *Poughkeepsie Journal*, is identified by source.

39. Aldrich is quoted in "Olana's Historic Site Designation To Help Campaign, Aldrich Says," *Albany Times Union*, June 24, 1965.

40. The Heckscher quotation is in Olana Archives, as is a videotape of his remarks.

associate of the Rockefellers. According to Huntington, “she fell in love” with Olana but cautioned that Governor Rockefeller would not: his preference was for modern, not Victorian, but she believed that the governor would be interested in helping to preserve the site.<sup>41</sup>

Impressive as were the accomplishments of Olana Preservation in its first ten months, the biggest problem was that money was only trickling in. In September 1965 treasurer Biddle reported that three individuals had given \$1,000 or more, and the Edgar J. Kaufmann Charitable Foundation had made a donation of \$12,000. He also stated that two corporations and four individuals had pledged a total of \$17,000. With less than seven months remaining on the option, Olana Preservation had raised less than ten percent of the purchase price. The following January Aldrich reported that Olana Preservation had raised approximately \$100,000 and had been granted an extension to June 30, 1966, to exercise the option and acquire the property.<sup>42</sup> Finally, in March 1966 a young couple, Stephen and Audrey Bruce Currier (Mrs. Currier was a granddaughter of Andrew Mellon and the daughter of Ailsa Mellon Bruce, each of whom was a major benefactor of The National Gallery of Art), pledged \$100,000 to Olana Preservation. Huntington recalled: “And that, really, then released—I mean, a lot of other people just—they were just waiting for some one big critical donation, I think. And then a lot of other people began pitching in, and money built up pretty fast.”<sup>43</sup> Even so, as the deadline neared Olana Preservation had raised, after expenses, \$307,703.58, a significant sum in a short period of time but far from the \$470,000 needed to acquire the property. Even if the trustees took out a mortgage of \$120,000 (presumably all they could obtain from three different banks), they would still be well short of their goal.<sup>44</sup>

Three events in early 1966 proved crucial to the preservation of Olana. First was the opening of a major exhibition of Church’s paintings, oil sketches, drawings, and personal memorabilia (p. 11) at the National Collection of Fine Arts (today the Smithsonian American Art Museum), which subsequently traveled to the Albany Institute of History and Art and M. Knoedler & Company in New York City. This was the first significant showing of Church’s work since a memorial exhibition organized at The Metropolitan Museum of Art shortly after the artist’s death in 1900. Richard Wunder, the curator of American paintings at the Smithsonian museum, had long been familiar with Church’s work from his former position at the Cooper Union, which held the collection of Church sketches Louis Church had donated in 1917. The exhibition included forty-three paintings, fifty-seven oil studies, eighty-one drawings and sketches,

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41. Huntington, oral history, p. 19.

42. Olana Preservation, minutes, Sept. 9, 1965; “\$100,000 Is Raised to Prevent Destruction of Olana Mansion,” *New York Times*, Jan. 31, 1966.

43. Huntington, oral history, p. 38.

44. Confidential Financial Report: Olana Preservation, Inc., June 9, 1966; Agenda, June 22, 1966, both in Olana Archives.

and personal memorabilia (surely from Olana, though the latter are not listed in the published catalog). The exhibition presented many of Church's most famous paintings, including *Hooker and Company Journeying Through the Wilderness from Plymouth to Hartford in 1636* (1846), *New England Scenery* (1851), *Mount Ktaddn* (1853), *Niagara* (1857), an oil study for *Heart of the Andes* (1858), *Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860) (p. 14), and *Cotopaxi* (1862). In the preface to the catalog, Wunder noted that Olana's fate was very much at risk and expressed hope that the exhibition would further the preservation effort: "The urgent need at this time is to bring Frederic Edwin Church to the attention of the public," he wrote. "The interest stimulated by the present show could be a major factor in the preservation of this unique segment of our national cultural heritage."<sup>45</sup> In his introductory essay Huntington described Olana as "a domestic cathedral of the Transcendentalist mystique of American destiny: the New World as the meeting of East and West, civilization and nature."<sup>46</sup> When the exhibition opened in New York, Knoedler charged a \$1.00 admission fee, with all receipts going to Olana Preservation.<sup>47</sup> At the request of the Biddles, Jacqueline Kennedy agreed to serve as honorary chair of the opening benefit at Knoedler.<sup>48</sup>

Second was the publication of Huntington's *Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church: Vision of an American Era* in February 1966. Huntington had completed his Ph.D. dissertation, "Frederic Edwin Church, 1826-1900: Painter of the Adamic New World Myth," in 1960. In recalling his dissertation work, Huntington confessed that he had struggled to come up with a thesis that would explain Church's significance until colleagues and mentors recommended that he read several now-classic works in American Studies, including Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950) and R. W. B. Lewis's *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1955), as well as D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923). These and other books enabled Huntington to relate Church to the Transcendentalists, especially Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and to present an interpretation of the artist's paintings as an expression of what he termed a millennialist vision of Manifest Destiny. Church's popularity during the 1850s and '60s, he argued, resulted from the degree to which the public identified with this ideological vision.<sup>49</sup> Huntington's publisher, George Braziller, rushed the book to press both to take advantage of the publicity generated by the effort to preserve Olana and

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45. Wunder, "Preface," *Frederic Edwin Church* (Washington, D.C., 1966), pp. 12-13.

46. Huntington, "Introduction," *ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

47. "A Dollar for the Garden of Eden," *The New York Times*, June 19, 1966. It is not clear why the New York City venue for the Church exhibition was in a private gallery, though Knoedler had previously hosted benefit exhibitions. It seems likely that the exhibition came together so quickly that the city's major museums had already fixed their exhibition schedules.

48. "Benefits Planned To Make Shrine Of Upstate Home: Cruise and Preview to Aid Olana, Estate of the Artist Church," *New York Times*, May 17, 1966.

49. Huntington, oral history, p. 11; Huntington, *Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church*, pp. ix-xii, 34-39, *passim*.

to support the cause.<sup>50</sup>

Huntington concluded the introduction to *Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church* by highlighting the effort to preserve Olana as a museum and park, and described it as “a living island of the spirit of our not-so-awful-after-all Victorian past.” As Lynes and other writers had done, perhaps as a result of Huntington’s prompting, Huntington expressed admiration for the ways Church had designed the house with the landscape as a singular expression of its creator’s understanding of the human relationship with the natural world: “This great house, exposed to cosmic nature by plate glass windows, porches, loggias, and decks, and surrounded by three hundred landscaped acres, guaranteed Church a way to live in an eternal Genesis.” Perhaps most important was his grasp of Olana’s relationship to Church’s art: “at Olana one is suddenly surprised to discover himself living in Church’s paintings. Olana is a never-ending Church.”<sup>51</sup>

Third was the publication of a nine-page handsomely illustrated article, “A century-old refuge of art and splendor: Must this Mansion be destroyed?” in the May 13, 1966, issue of *Life* (p. 14, bottom). Huntington recalled that Aldrich’s father was a friend of Henry Luce, the publisher of *Life*, and had pressed Luce to publish something in support of the campaign to save Olana, though Sam Aldrich denies this.<sup>52</sup> The article began with a banner headline, “Only quick action by Americans can save the exotic home of the celebrated 19th Century landscapist F. E. Church.” It described Olana’s interior as “still aglow with Oriental treasures, tropical butterflies and sunlight warmed by amber windows.” As had others who wrote about Olana, the *Life* reporter noted how Church, who as an artist achieved “spectacular effects of light,” had “put light to dramatic use in his home. He contrasted cool light falling through clear glass with the golden hues diffused by amber glass.” The article unabashedly stressed the importance of Olana’s preservation and observed, “Only the interest and contributions of many Americans can save this unique and splendid domain of an artist’s fancy.”<sup>53</sup>

Even as the exhibition of Church’s paintings and the publication of Huntington’s book and the *Life* article raised the artist’s profile among the public, fundraising continued to lag behind expectations. The extension of the option to June 30, 1966 that Aldrich had negotiated was essential, both to allow paintings from Olana to be displayed in the New York City venue of the exhibition and to continue the fundraising campaign.<sup>54</sup> At the March 1, 1966 meeting of Olana Preservation, Aldrich “expressed the gravest doubt that he would be able to raise sufficient money to save Olana prior to the June 30, 1966 deadline.”<sup>55</sup> While the trustees preferred that Olana be operated as a private museum,

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50. Huntington, oral history, p. 35.

51. Huntington, *Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church* p. xii.

52. Huntington, oral history, p. 39; telephone interview with Phyllis Aldrich, June 10, 2015.

53. “A century-old refuge of art and splendor: Must this mansion be destroyed?” *Life* 60 (May 13, 1966): 64-80.

54. Olana Preservation, minutes, Jan. 19, 1966.

55. *Ibid.*, Mar. 1, 1966.

which would give them greater control of its destiny and enable them to hire a curator, Aldrich requested that, “as a last resort, he be authorized to take steps to obtain a bill in the New York State Legislature which would enable the state to acquire Olana and perhaps include a community college on a portion of the property.”<sup>56</sup> The executors of the Church estate were as dubious as Aldrich about the success of Olana Preservation’s efforts. Stuart Feld recalls that in early 1966 he was asked by his Metropolitan Museum of Art colleague James Biddle to view the Church paintings, which were already at the Day Meyer Murray and Young warehouse in New York City, where they were tagged with numbers in preparation for auction by Parke-Bernet.<sup>57</sup>

On March 23, 1966, State Senators Robert Watson Pomeroy and Lloyd Newcombe and Assemblyman Clarence D. Lane introduced bills, written by James Hamilton, to allow the state to take ownership of Olana and operate it as a museum and park. According to Hamilton, Whitney North Seymour, Jr. was also important in gaining legislative approval of the bill, as was the staff of Senator Robert F. Kennedy’s office. If enacted, the State Education Department would become the steward of Olana. Church’s estate would be “preserved for the benefit of the people of the state of New York as a historic landmark for educational and recreational purposes.”<sup>58</sup> The bills also proposed the transfer of land acquired by Louis Church to the supervisors of Columbia and Greene counties as the site of a new community college. Huntington had initially expressed hope that a preserved Olana would be turned over to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, but that would have required Olana Preservation to raise about \$1,500,000 above the purchase price to provide an endowment.<sup>59</sup> By purchasing Olana and turning it over to the state as a historic site, the state would be responsible for covering its operating expenses. On June 10, 1966, as the state Legislature was considering the Newcombe-Lane bill, *The New York Times* strongly endorsed its adoption. Describing Olana as “this Xanadu on the Hudson with its exotic fantasies of space, light and view,” *The Times* called it “the authentic esthetic expression of a unique monument in art and time.” With its eye surely focused on Pennsylvania Station and other recent preservation losses, *The Times’* editorial writer (probably Ada Louise Huxtable) concluded: “It seems incredible that this opportunity for public enrichment should slip away, and yet experience has proved that we Americans are quite capable

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56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

57. Stuart Feld, email correspondence with Evelyn Trebilcock, June 9, 2015 and telephone conversation with David Schuyler, June 22, 2015.

58. New York (State), Assembly, “An Act to provide for the acquisition and preservation of the historic site known as Olana . . .,” Mar. 23, 1966, New York State Archives, Albany. There is a copy of the Senate bill in Olana Archives. I have also drawn upon a telephone conversation with James Hamilton, September 20, 2015.

59. Until Olana Preservation, Inc. received tax-exempt status from the IRS, it directed that contributions to Olana should be sent to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. See, for example, “Drive On To Save Artist’s Mansion,” *New York Times*, Jan. 20, 1965.

of destroying the most valuable repositories of our heritage. This country's vaunted cultural explosion is a very small bang indeed if it cannot secure the preservation of one of America's great cultural monuments."<sup>60</sup> When the state Legislature met on June 22, 1966, to consider the Newcombe-Lane bill, there was a copy of the issue of *Life*, published six weeks earlier, that described the significance of the house in text and stunning photographs, on the desk of every state legislator.<sup>61</sup> According to James Hamilton, Laurance Rockefeller worked diligently behind the scenes to ensure that brother Nelson supported the bill in the legislature, and it passed unanimously. Governor Rockefeller signed the Newcombe-Lane Act at Olana on June 27, 1966 (frontispiece). In his brief remarks Rockefeller praised those who had worked so hard to save Olana: "Because of the efforts of those who are here present, that this unique spot, this truly beautiful spot will be available to citizens of the state and future generations to come and enjoy."<sup>62</sup>

Important as it was, the Newcombe-Lane bill was not a final act. Most of the approximately \$300,000 Olana Preservation had raised was still in the form of pledges, and Aldrich worried that at least some donors, who promised to give to a private non-profit historic house museum, might not feel obligated to fulfill their pledges if Olana were to become a state-owned property.<sup>63</sup> And the Newcombe-Lane bill, while authorizing the state to acquire Olana, would not have enabled the state to release the money and complete the purchase by the end of the month. As a result, the trustees of Olana Preservation borrowed \$189,000 in anticipation of receipt of state dollars and purchased Olana on June 29, 1966. On December 13, 1966, when the state Legislature finally released the \$189,000, Olana Preservation transferred ownership to the New York State Historic Trust, a division of the State Conservation Department.<sup>64</sup> In a remarkably short period of time, twenty months from the initial meeting of the ad hoc committee in November 1964 until June 1966, and as a result of the dedication of

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60. "Olana," *New York Times*, June 10, 1966.

61. The statement about there being a copy of the issue of *Life* on every legislators' desk comes from Phyllis Aldrich, wife of Sam Aldrich, in a telephone conversation of June 10, 2015. Neither Assembly nor Senate records of the discussion of the Newcombe-Lane bill have survived, so this account is from Huntington's oral history, p. 39, probably based on information provided him by his friend Whitney North Seymour, Jr., who was then a state senator.

62. Seamon and Zukowski, "Afterward: Olana After Frederic Church," p. 73. Rockefeller's remarks are available at [www.cbs6.albany.com/contact\\_us/features/birth/stories/june-27-1966-preservation-olana-42](http://www.cbs6.albany.com/contact_us/features/birth/stories/june-27-1966-preservation-olana-42). The bill jacket that went to Rockefeller prior to his signing the act includes an assessment by Paul Anderson of the Committee on Rules, which stated: "The home contains one of the few remaining 19th Century interiors which remain perfectly preserved. It is an unusual architectural design and it has been designated by the National Park Service as eligible for status as a National Historic Site." The bill jacket also contains numerous letters strongly urging the governor to support the Newcombe-Lane bill, including ones from important art historians such as Jules Prown of Yale University and Sherman Lee of the Cleveland Museum of Art, as well as from Russell Lynes and numerous private citizens (New York State Archives)

63. Olana Preservation, minutes, May 25, 1966.

64. Seamon and Zukowski, "Afterward: Olana After Frederic Church," p. 73.

many individuals, especially Huntington, Aldrich, and Biddle, whom Aldrich stated was “critically important in saving Olana because of his reputation in the art world and his influence within New York City society at that time,” Olana had been saved. Columbia County supporters, other preservationists, and numerous donors were also essential to the effort. Olana opened to the public on June 3, 1967, and has since become the crown jewel of New York State’s system of historic sites.<sup>65</sup>

But in the early years the state was hardly the ideal steward supporters of Olana’s preservation hoped it would be. At the behest of James Biddle, James Hamilton visited the property in the spring of 1968 and found conditions there dismal. The state had widened and paved many of the carriage drives, but spent almost nothing on building repairs and restoration. Several of the stained glass windows were broken, and the main house was suffering from serious water damage, even in the principal rooms on the first floor. Olana, Hamilton concluded, was “on the brink of disaster.”<sup>66</sup>

Olana Preservation had ceased to operate, but in 1971, when Richard Slavin, Olana’s first site administrator, organized the Friends of Olana, a number of its members, especially Sam and Elizabeth Aldrich, became strong supporters of the Friends. The Friends became a significant source of political and financial support in the restoration of Olana and the conservation of its contents, as has its successor organization, The Olana Partnership.<sup>67</sup>

The preservation of Olana was an epic battle, fought against a deadline. If it failed, in all likelihood the house would have been razed, the landscape subdivided, and the house’s contents scattered as the auctioneer’s gavel fell. It was one of the first great preservation successes in the aftermath of the demolition of Pennsylvania Station, and an early (if not the first) instance of a private-public partnership working effectively to rescue a threatened historic site. The crusade to save Olana undoubtedly contributed to other successful preservation efforts as well. As Huntington stated in remarks he presented on the occasion of the signing of the Newcombe-Lane bill, “The preservation of Olana has been an achievement of the American community.”<sup>68</sup>

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65. *Public Opening of Olana as a New York State Historic Site*, Hudson, New York, June 2, 1967 (n.p., n.d.); Merrill Folsom, “Castle on the Hudson Is Opened to the Public,” *New York Times*, May 28, 1967; “Hudson Home to Be Opened As a Historic Site Today,” *ibid.*, June 3, 1967; “State Will Operate an Artist’s Mansion as a Museum,” *ibid.*, June 29, 1966. Sam Aldrich’s assessment of James Biddle’s role in the preservation of Olana was conveyed in an email from Phyllis Aldrich to David Schuyler, June 22, 2015.

66. James Hamilton to James Biddle, May 10, 1968, courtesy of James Hamilton.

67. Schuyler, telephone conversation with Richard Slavin, June 10, 2015; Friends of Olana was incorporated on May 28, 1971. Certificate of Incorporation, issued by the State Education Department, in the files of The Olana Partnership; James A. Ryan, “A Brief History of the Formation of Olana State Historic Site & The Friends of Olana,” Aug. 14, 1980, copy in the files of The Olana Partnership. Friends of Olana became The Olana Partnership in 2000.

68. Huntington, remarks on the occasion of the signing of the Newcombe-Lane bill, copy in Olana Archives.



In May 1967 Governor Rockefeller presented Olana Preservation with an award from the New York State Council on the Arts “for contributions to enhancing the state’s artistic condition.”<sup>69</sup> It was that, and more. Saving Olana helped bring nineteenth-century American landscape painting to its deserved place in the canon of American contributions to the arts. And it preserved a uniquely personal place that conveys a remarkable man’s vision of the human interaction with the natural environment. As Olana celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of its preservation in 2016, it shares that milestone with the fiftieth anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act, which became law on October 15, 1966, only four months after Olana Preservation acquired the Church property. The small but determined group of individuals who organized Olana Preservation did more than save Frederic Church’s house and estate: They contributed to the public’s appreciation of historic preservation and provided a model that other groups would follow. Olana belongs at center stage as we reflect on the preservation movement of the 1960s and beyond.

## Acknowledgements

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*This publication honors J. Winthrop Aldrich, whose life has been devoted to New York’s history and the preservation of its architectural heritage.*

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69. “Governor Makes 13 Arts Awards,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1967.





William Hogarth's depiction of a riot in eighteenth-century England

*Charivari on the Hudson:*

# Misrule, Disorder, and Festive Play in the Countryside, 1750-1900

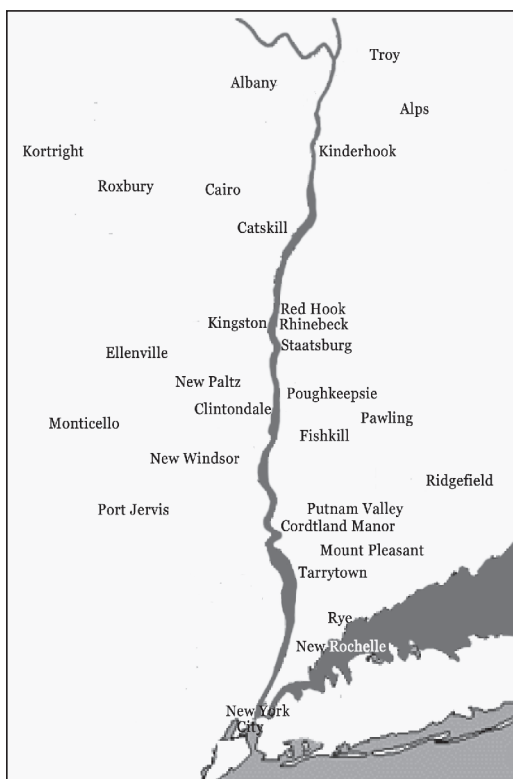
*Thomas S. Wermuth*

The parade began around sunset on March 14, 1822. "Between thirty and forty" men strong, the procession wended its way through the streets of the village of Kortright "formed in a line two abreast." The parade's participants played "their insterments of music"—horns, drums, and fiddles, with the added cacophony afforded by the ringing and jangling of bells and the banging of pots and pans.

The first section was armed with a fife and drum  
 Second section with horse fiddler  
 Third section with sea shells and tin horns  
 forth sec(tion) with cow Bells /fifth sec(tion) with Goose Quills  
 Sixth section with Pans / Seventh sec(tion) with guns.

The procession was led by "their Captain," chosen by this motley assemblage as their leader for the day. At the end of the long line was a man "blowing a ram's horn" and another "crowing like a rooster whose voice echoed thru the village decently."<sup>1</sup>

1. "Letter from B. Gerow, Kortright, to Mr. Daniel Gerow, Plattekill, Ulster Co., April 3, 1822," published in Julia Hull Winner, "A Skimeton" *New York Folklore Quarterly*, 1964.



**Map of reported Charivaris, Skimmingtons, and other incidents of disorder throughout the region**

The purpose of this unseemly procession in this small village nestled in the foothills of the Catskill Mountains? A holiday celebration? Some sort of grotesque militia training session? A fictional occurrence? No. This was a “skimeton,” sometimes called a “charivari,” a theatrical and carnivalesque parade, simultaneously celebratory and mocking, aimed at some noteworthy community occurrence or event. The immediate target of this skimeton was a wedding: the marriage of Peter Tripp and Abby Lyon. After the rag-tag marchers reached the site of the newlyweds’ reception, they surrounded it and continued to perform “music” on their “instruments” and then proceeded to pelt the home with stones “wich broke out 24 or 25 lites.” To conclude matters they set a “dish of

gun powder feathers and Brimstone” “on fire at [the] door step,” which “made no small smells” and compelled members of the wedding party to vacate the house.<sup>2</sup>

Many skimetons took place at weddings, often in response to “second” marriages, which seems to have been the reason for the rituals’ “performance” here in Kortright. A skimeton was also an opportunity for the young men of the community to celebrate, drink, carouse, and, as was often the case, end their evening in a fight or brawl, as this event did several hours later, when annoyed members of the wedding party came out of the house to battle the uninvited revelers. Its larger social context was a form of community policing, the method by which the community provided its imprimatur—on a marriage or some other noteworthy event, or, conversely, admonished those folks who violated some community norm. Little did the participants here probably realize that they were reenacting a theatrical form several hundred years old, originally “performed” in medieval Europe.



2. “B. Gerow to Mr. Daniel Gerow, April 3, 1822.”

About twenty years earlier, in 1803 Albany, “a large procession of the most distinguished and illustrious characters,” mostly African-American, some drumming, some singing, and many dancing, followed the ceremonial ruler of their annual spring celebration, “King Charles,” an African-American slave, as he paraded through the city streets on “a superb steed, of beautiful cream color.” The “royal” entourage carried flags and banners “on which significant colors are displayed” as “his majesty” was “conducted in great style to *The Hill* already swarming with a multifarious crowd of gasping spectators.” This Lord of Misrule, who was “master of the ceremonies,” was dressed in “a British brigadier’s broadcloth scarlet jacket, covered in bright gold lace,” with blue stockings, well-polished shoes and silver buckles, “and a three-cornered cocked hat trimmed with gold lace.”<sup>3</sup>

The meaning of this seemingly improbable parade? The opening of the African-American celebration of Pinkster, a Saturnalia-like holiday that witnessed the suspension of the traditional social order, where slaves were given license to sing, dance, play games, feast, and drink, what a contemporary white observer described as “a kind of chaos of sin and folly, of misery and fun.” Not only African-Americans, but white men and women also participated in these days of carnival held in towns and communities up and down the Hudson, and paid deference to “his majesty,” offering King Charles and his followers gifts and money. Those who refused, white or black, were “banished” from the celebration by the King, “whose authority is absolute, and whose will is law during the Pinkster holiday.”<sup>4</sup>



A quarter of a century earlier, in September 1775, some twenty miles south of Albany in the village of Kinderhook, an unidentified “young Fellow” publicly criticized the Continental Congress and the recently begun Revolutionary War. A group of village residents listened to his argument but, after growing “exasperated at his Impudence, laid hold of him” and, in a mock trial, found him “guilty” of being an “enemy to the liberties of America.” The crowd then “stripped him Naked to the Waist” and tarred and feathered him. This poor victim of vigilante-like justice in Kinderhook was so unremarkable that his name was not even recorded. The most noteworthy aspect of this action was the composition of the “crowd” that was responsible for the violence: “a Number of young Women” who, finding themselves without tar or feathers, used molasses and flowers instead, leaving their victim physically unharmed but publicly humiliated. According to the contemporary account, the young ladies “coated him well.”<sup>5</sup>

These three episodes, taking place in various parts of the Hudson Valley, cross class, race, and gender lines, and offer a window into an alternative world, a culture of misrule, sometimes festive and playful, at other times violent and threatening, that

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3. Shane White, “‘It was a Proud Day’: African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1781-1834,” *Journal of American History* Vol. 81, No.1 (June 1994), p.22.

4. *New York Daily Advertiser*, June 29, 1803.

5. *New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury*, October 2, 1775.

structured life among rural residents for more than 100 years. It reveals what historian Natalie Zemon Davis referred to, when writing about “misrule” in Europe, as a kind of “second life, a second reality for the people, separated from power and the state but still public and perennial.”<sup>6</sup> Misrule, disorder, and festive-play revealed itself in many different guises, but they generally served as a counter to traditional authority, where the people of the community, particularly those with limited power, could, however briefly, suspend the normal social and political order and turn the power relationship of their world upside down, asserting their own judgment and authority in the breach.

Historians, sociologists, and folklorists have long studied the meaning and purpose of misrule and festive play. First and foremost, these days of disorder were entertaining and fun. This was carnival, with music, dancing, drinking, and feasting. There were parades and street theatre, with spectacle and revelry in which many participated, whether as active players in the performances and the folly or as spectators. The processions with floats and effigies, parades with makeshift “instruments of music,” boys and girls begging for coins, and mock coronations of “lords of misrule” and “kings of fools” all provided a festival-like atmosphere that allowed neighbors to celebrate together while strengthening community bonds and reinforcing their common identity.<sup>7</sup>

Scholars studying these rituals of misrule have tended to see more involved in these celebrations than mere merrymaking, however, and have interpreted deeper layers of meaning and purpose. Many of these holidays, both official and unofficial, such as Pentecost, Christmas, or All Saints Day, occurred seasonally and were often connected to religious observances and liturgical events, while others were related to specific life-cycle events, such as births, marriages, and funerals. Some researchers have interpreted the misrule that accompanied these celebrations as a form of a social “safety-valve,” allowing the politically and economically powerless to unleash restrained frustration and challenge traditional authority, even if only temporarily.<sup>8</sup>

Others have argued that this type of disorder and play actually strengthened social order. Richard Trexler argued that these rituals and performances in Renaissance Florence helped organize and formalize public life, structuring community order and normalizing behavior. Finally, other interpretations view carnival as not only a safety-valve for the powerless, but also an act of liberation, helping to transform the society in

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6. Natalie Davis *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, (Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 102-103.

7. Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 98-99; Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1978), pp. 180-200; Paul Gilje, “Republican Rioting” in William Pencak and Conrad E. Wright, eds., *Authority and Resistance in Early New York* (New York Historical Society, 1988), pp.207-208. On “mock coronations” see Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, pp. 97-99, and Peter Shaw, *American Patriots and Rituals of Revolution*, (Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 188, 201.

8. Keith Thomas argues for the “safety-valve,” where the politically powerless were able to challenge existing authority and release pent up social and political frustrations. See his “Work and Leisure in Pre-Industrial Society,” *Past and Present* 29 (December 1964) 53-55.



Image depicting a charivari (Hullabaloo) in Canada, by Edmond-Joseph Massicotte, 1928, *L'Almanach du Peuple*, 1928

which it is operating. Natalie Davis, in her path-breaking studies of European popular culture, has argued for misrule's transformative nature, a process that both strengthens and guarantees "certain values of the community," while identifying and challenging problems in the "political order."<sup>9</sup>

This study will examine this culture of "misrule" in the Hudson River Valley. First will be an exploration of the role of the skimeton and charivari. There were many variations to this street-oriented ceremony, sometimes festive albeit mocking, while at other times, a form of community policing and vigilantism. Second, the African-American celebration of Pinkster, where traditional relationships of authority and power were reversed as slaves were given license to celebrate and folly, while slaveholders, however briefly, paid deference to the very people they owned. This study will conclude with an examination of gender inversion, where the women of the valley, acting in organized groups, usurped positions of leadership and authority usually under the jurisdiction of men. These women did so to resolve problems and challenges that threatened their communities, challenges ranging from price-gouging merchants to abusive husbands. In general, the "disorder" examined here involved groups whose access to power was limited and restricted: the young men who composed skimeton gangs had generally not yet married or acquired property; people of color, both free and slave; and women, who possessed limited political and legal rights.



Of the various forms of misrule, the skimeton was the most enduring and the most versatile. Tracing its origins to medieval Europe and known by multiple names (skimington, scimmelton, scimerton, charivari, among many others), it could be found

9. Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. xxiii-xxiv; Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, p.97, 102.



throughout Europe and, by the eighteenth century, in North America as well. Its forms ranged from the festive to the more serious condemnation of some misbehavior that threatened the community.

The foremost scholars of the skimmington or charivari, Natalie Davis, E.P. Thompson, and Alfred Young, have described its origins and goals. In its earliest recorded forms in Europe, it was most often associated with marriages between an older man and younger woman. The participants in the “charivari” were usually the remaining, unmarried young men in the village who were expressing their resentment at the dwindling marriage pool, but also aiming their displeasure at someone they might perceive to be an illegitimate groom. They did so by demonstrating with street theater, parades, processions, mocking verse and songs, and the playing of horns and banging of pots and pans.<sup>10</sup>

In early modern Europe, rural charivaris usually targeted second marriages. Although a significant difference in age between the bride and groom tended to cause the most alarm, any second marriage might raise concerns. In seventeenth-century France, the charivari aimed at the remarriage of a widow or widower was drawing attention to the fact that children from the first marriage, if there were any, had to be economically provided for. Also important, many unmarried men and women resented the removal of an eligible marrying partner by an older widow or widower, which might, particularly in small towns and villages, make it more difficult for them to find a spouse of a comparable age.<sup>11</sup>

If charivaris in the countryside were aimed at marriages, those in the cities were “used to mark other affronts to the sense of order or justice of the neighborhood.” Although an occasional charivari might be against a real crime or criminal, such as a thief, pickpocket, or petty criminal, more often they were against people who threatened community standards, such as prostitutes, price-gougers, vagrants, and the like. More common though, at least in France and England, were those against “domineer-

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10. For the European background to “rough music” see E.P. Thompson “Rough Music,” in his *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1993) pp. 476-478; Alfred Young, “English Plebeian Culture and Eighteenth Century American Radicalism,” in Margaret D. Jacob and James R. Jacob, eds., *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984), pp. 185-212; David Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985); Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 98-99; Martin Ingram, “Ridings, Rough Music, and Mocking Rhymes in Early Modern England,” in Barry Reay, ed., *Popular Culture in Seventeenth Century England* (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1985). Bryan Palmer, “Discordant Music: Charivaris and Whitecapping in Nineteenth Century North America,” *Labour/Le Travailleur* (1978) pp. 5-61, provides an excellent overview of the American charivari. See also Loretta T. Johnson “Charivari/ Shivarree: A European Folk Ritual on the American Plains,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 20:3 1990, 371-387, for the rituals’ continuance in the Plains states through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

11. Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 100-103; Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, p.106.

12. Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* pp.116-117; Robert Darnton *The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), pp. 96-99; Thompson, “Rough Music,” p. 478.

ing wives.” The “cuckolded” husband and his “scold of a bride” were long the scorn of early modern cities, as E.P. Thompson described in his studies of seventeenth and eighteenth century England.<sup>12</sup>

By the eighteenth century, in both Europe and North America, skimmingtons and charivaris had grown to include protests and processions against a variety of misbehaviors and persons, including the strolling poor, abusive husbands, prostitutes, and others perceived as threatening community standards and order. The form remained generally the same, with the playing of “rough music,” people banging pots and pans and blowing horns, and a crowd, occasionally disguised, either physically or psychologically threatening or abusing the perpetrator of the deviant act through theatrical performance or rioting.<sup>13</sup>

The types of skimmingtons that occurred in the Hudson Valley mirror their European counterparts and extended across a continuum of activities and targets. At one end of the spectrum were the annoying, rambunctious, and occasionally violent serenading of newlyweds on their wedding nights, the early modern precursor to the “shivaree.” Toward the other end of the spectrum, however, was a form of community policing and popular justice that included public humiliations of community “deviants” to far more threatening and violent attacks on those perceived to be challenging community standards. In the valley, the terms “skimmington,” “skimeton,” and “charivari” were used by contemporaries to describe both types of actions, although in Europe, a much more nuanced and precise level of classification and identification existed.<sup>14</sup>

A contemporary account of an 1821 skimmington in the village of Madison (near Catskill) provides a description of the carnival-like ritual.

a practice, vulgarly called *Scimmelton*, has prevailed in the village of Madison. When a marriage is to be solemnized, a gang of men and boys meet in the evening, and parade through the village with drums, fifes, bells, tin pans, kettles, horns, &c. to the great annoyance of the citizens generally, and particularly to the company assembled for the above mentioned purpose.<sup>15</sup>

In style and form, the skimmington remained remarkably consistent across different parts of the valley and over many years. In 1751 Poughkeepsie, a group “unlawfully routously [sic] and in a noisy and turbulent manner wickedly did ride Skimmington

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13. Gilje, “Republican Rioting,” p. 210; William Pencak, “Introduction: A Historical Perspective,” in Pencak, Mathew Dennis, and Simon Newman, eds., *Riot and Revelry in Early America* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), pp. 5-6.

14. The term “shivaree” (a linguistic variation on “charivari”) was used to describe similar occurrences in the western United States and Canada, and also in western New York around the Great Lakes region. Charivari was used in Canada, Maine, Louisiana, and other places settled by the French, but was also used with increasing regularity to describe “skimetons” in New York and New Jersey in the mid- to late- nineteenth century. I have not come across the use of the term “shivaree” in the Hudson Valley. See Hull Winner, “A Skimeton,” p. 135. On European distinctions see Palmer, “Discordant Music: Charivaris and Whitecapping in Nineteenth Century North America,” pp. 14-17.

15. Martin Bruegel, *Farm Shop and Landing: The Rise of a Market Society in the Hudson Valley, 1780-1860*. (Duke University Press, 2002), p.187

about the house of Isaac Mark.” At a 1754 skimmington at Cortland Manor, the crowd played “Fiddles French Hornes & making hideous and umber noises” and “rode skimmington” for three hours. In 1765, the “wedding people” composed of “mostly young people” went “riding Skimmington” at the home of Elizabeth Clarke in Fishkill, and “after throwing stones at the house” they “Jingled Bells blowed horns and went away,” but returned twice more that night to repeat these activities. Compare this to the 1821 Madison event, where “a gang of men and boys” paraded through the town banging kettles, pots, and drums, ringing bells and blowing horns. The local newspaper recounted that when this “scimmelton” reached the wedding reception that was its target, they surrounded it and continued to “play” their instruments. After apparently receiving no acknowledgment from the members of the wedding party in the form of refreshments or bribe, the group “paraded the streets with their instruments of discord and confusion.”<sup>16</sup>

Skimmingtons continued to occur up and down the Hudson Valley throughout the nineteenth century with little noticeable variation in form. An 1825 “scimilton” in Greene County, included men banging drums, ringing bells, and blowing horns, while an 1857 skimminton in New Rochelle included 200 revelers playing “rough music.” According to a newspaper account, an 1874 “skimmelton party” in Ulster County “kept up at a lively din with tin horns and pans, shot guns, etc.,” while an 1878 skimmington in Westchester included “fifty to one hundred men and boys” who “surrounded the house, ringing bells, blowing horns, and firing off guns and pistols.” The *New York Sun* described an 1881 ‘skimmelton’ as “a semi-barbarian form of serenading a newly married couple by the hammering of tin pans, blowing of horns, firing of charges of powder from anvils and guns, scraping of horse fiddles (made by running rosined ropes through holes bored in dry goods boxes), and choruses of demonic yells,” although an 1884 “skimminton party, which had been organized for duty,” was dispersed in Tarrytown when the expected wedding celebration was called off at the last moment.<sup>17</sup>

A contemporary account of a 1897 skimmington in Sullivan County described it as “a party of villagers called to pay their compliments to the bride and groom,” and offer “a reception tendered to the newly married couple, in which under the cover of night, the neighbors with pans and drums, and tinkling brass and sounding cymbal, and horse fiddlers and horns, assemble at the home,” and depending on one’s perspective, helped

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16. The 1751 Poughkeepsie skimmington and on Cortland Manor, see Steven J. Stewart, “Skimmington in the Middle and New England Colonies,” in Pencak, et. al., *Riot and Revelry in Early America*, pp. 48-54; The 1765 Fishkill event at Elizabeth Clarke’s can be reviewed in Deposition of John Vandervoort, 11/08/1764), in Jacob Tabor Kempe File, Box 13, fld YY ; NYHS. The 1821 Madison skimmington is recounted in Bruegel, *Farm Shop and Landing*, pp. 187.

17. The scimilton is described in the *Albany Argus*, June 13, 1826, while the event in New Rochelle is in *The Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Va.), January 12, 1857. The Ulster County skimmelton is recounted in the *Lake Village Times*, July 4, 1874 and the Westchester (Mt. Pleasant) event is in the *Lowell Daily Citizen*, August 12, 1878. The 1881 scimmelton can be found in the *New York Sun*, January 8, 1881, and the one in Tarrytown in the *New York Herald*, January 15, 1884.



“fill the lambient air with a varied assortment of noises” or created an “infernal din.” In short, “to give the newly married couple a ‘skimmington.’” After the “concert,” the bridegroom was expected to come to the front of the house, “clad in the airy garments of the night,” offer a humorous speech, and “Cigars, hard cider and cake are then given to the self-invited guests.” Perhaps most telling, as late as 1897 this newspaper account still referred to the practice as “customary” in this region of New York.<sup>18</sup>

Hudson Valley skimmingtons associated with weddings could range from fairly simple affairs to much more elaborate performances. In February 1822 in Delaware County at the wedding of Edmund Lamb to Mrs. Eliza Munger, “the Skimeton arrived” around 4 p.m., consisting of “one man mounted up on a white horse haveing a home made pung slay behind him with an intoxicated man on it and was furnished with something like eight or ten Cow Bells...” Or, in 1822 Catskill, where “the Skimeton which was commenced by one man armed with one goose Quill and went squacking into the house and saluted the wedding guest and returned without any further interruption.” One in 1821 Poughkeepsie was described as simply two men “riding Skimeton, at a wedding.”<sup>19</sup>

Many skimetons were more elaborate, however. In Putnam Valley, about forty miles northeast of New York City, Lucas Barger recounts that the “skimetonians” chose their “chairman” from among the group who would lead the “boys” for the night. They then paraded to the home of the newlyweds on the wedding night, “blowing horns and conch shells” while carrying an “old cannon” with them. The revelers “had their coats turned wrong side out, and their faces marked with burnt cork or paint” to elude recognition. The chairman would go to the door and deliver the gang’s demands to the groom, which usually required some reward or payment of cakes, meats, or hard cider. They might also request the new bride come to the door so the gang could “serenade” her. If the newlyweds satisfied the crowds’ demands, no violence would occur, but some annoying “rough music” would likely be performed before “the boys” would depart. If their “requests” were ignored, there “will be a lot of damage done.” The cannon would be fired to give “fair warning.” Windows might be broken or property destroyed, fences torn down, and outbuildings dismantled.<sup>20</sup>

Although the atmosphere during a skimeton was generally festive and carnival-like, the event was essentially meant to embarrass or humiliate the newly married couple, and, as stated above, often concluded with the victims offering a gift of food or money. Even if most skimetons ended peacefully, there were always several other possible outcomes since the newlyweds targeted might respond in ways which could, and occasionally did, change the direction of the ceremony. Most often, the victims

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18. *New York Tribune*, Dec. 21, 1897; *Trenton Evening Times*, Dec. 24, 1897.

19. “B. Gerow to Mr. Daniel Gerow, April 3, 1822;” Both men were jailed for their participation in the Poughkeepsie skimeton. See *Westchester Herald*, November 20, 1821.

20. Lucas Barger, *Life on a Rocky Farm: Rural Life near New York City in the Late Nineteenth Century*, (State University of New York Press, 2013) pp. 133-135.

offered the bribe that was expected of them and these events usually ended peacefully, albeit with some noise and rough music. Sometimes, the targets of a skimeton simply ignored the revelers. This may have resulted in the destruction of some property, but it usually avoided personal physical violence, although it often led to additional skime-ton over the next several days until the expected tribute was finally paid. Less often, the victims of a skimeton, feeling their own honor questioned, chose to challenge the crowd, thereby escalating the event. The results of this last response were, as one can imagine, sometimes violent.<sup>21</sup>

Much of what we know about skimetons comes from court records and newspaper accounts detailing those rituals that veered from the ritualized script. A skimeton that ended peacefully with little property destroyed and no unusual or noteworthy violence might become a story passed down within families, but was rarely formally recorded. The reason we know as much as we do about the subject is because of those events that ended in violence. Sometimes the violence was accidental, such as an 1883 skimeton in Clintondale, Ulster County, where twenty-one year-old Samuel Coulter was killed when an anvil being loaded with gunpowder exploded.<sup>22</sup>

More often, violence, when it occurred, was a result of the tense standoff, the excessive consumption of alcohol, and the fact that some members of skimmington gangs were looking for a fight. The 1822 celebration in the village of Kortright developed into a large brawl when, after the revelers set a fire and tossed rocks at the house, members of the wedding party came out of the house and “got a fighting with one of the skimeton boys.”<sup>23</sup>

In 1832 Catskill, members of the wedding party opened fire on the skimmington crowd surrounding their house, wounding some. Much the same thing happened in 1897 Monticello when a “crowd of villagers” visited the home of the bride’s father “to give the newly married couple a skimmington.” The bride’s father demanded that the crowd leave his property, and when they ignored him, he shot and killed a young “serenader.” Similarly, at a 1907 charivari in Red Hook, in northern Dutchess County, violence erupted when the groom refused to make “his bride go out and make her bow to the boys.” He “discharged a shotgun loaded with birdshot” on the revelers, hitting several of the crowd, each of whom, somehow, escaped serious injury. In an unusually tragic turn of events in 1874 Ellenville, a young bride was shot in the face by a member of the “skimmelon party” nearly killing her.<sup>24</sup>

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21. Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 99-102.

22. The Clintondale tragedy is in *Troy Times*, Dec. 27, 1883.

23. “B. Gerow to Mr. Daniel Gerow, April 3, 1822.”

24. The Catskill shooting is in Bruegel, *Farm Shop and Landing*, pp.187-189. The shooting in Monticello is described in the *New York Tribune*, Dec. 21, 1897 and *Boston Daily Journal*, December 22, 1897; the Red Hook “charivari” is described in the *Tuscon Citizen* April 20, 1907; the attack in Ellenville is in *Lake Village Times*, July 4, 1874.

Skimeton were not conducted against people unknown to the revelers. The crowds were generally composed of young men who usually knew at least one of the newly married couple and probably both. Some skimeton were little more than friendly serenading, while others were intentionally provocative, desiring to incite violence. The type of response the crowd received usually set in motion the next act—the crowds' response. The action in a skimeton was fluid and organic and, to quote historian Edward Muir in his analysis of European charivaris, "the perpetrators may have neither known exactly what they wanted to achieve nor anticipated the outcome."<sup>25</sup>

Historians have considered the meaning of the skimmington and charivari to the community, what it said about marriage and the relationship of each married couple and new family to their town or village. On the one hand, the purpose of this noisy and chaotic ritual was to define a relationship between the existing community and the new household. Residents of the town or village were, in effect, "welcoming" the newly married couple, more or less granting the community's imprimatur. Nevertheless, the approval was not being offered by an official committee of the town leaders or a delegation of household heads in any civil fashion, but was being done as a form of misrule. As Natalie Davis has argued, the charivari and scimeton were a "carnival treatment of reality, with an important function in the village."<sup>26</sup> The community was both identifying the "new" family as one of them, but also more or less defining its expectations of the new household's responsibilities and relationship to the community.

Although the examples of skimmingtons presented thus far have been of those aimed at newlyweds, there existed another variant of this type of crowd action, also called a skimmington by contemporaries. This form of street action was from similar origins as those performed at weddings, however these were not aimed at newly married couples, but against those who demonstrated socially unacceptable or deviant behavior, or violated local custom or the community's trust.<sup>27</sup>

These street demonstrations and rituals served important purposes in the early Hudson Valley, as they did in other parts of North America and Europe. In a society with limited policing agencies, communities regularly enacted a vigilante-style justice against those who challenged its standards or norms. For example, Hudson Valley town leaders publicly condemned the fathers of children born out of wedlock and threatened them with "trouble" if they did not assume their responsibility for, and obligations to, their children and the children's mothers. Vagrants and the strolling poor were "warned out" of town and expected to remove themselves from town limits. When folks did not abide by the warnings, they might be dealt with more dramatically, and in a society that emphasized form, theatrically as well.<sup>28</sup>

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25. Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, p. 103.

26. Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, p. 106.

27. Pencak, "Introduction: A Historical Perspective," pp. 5-7.

Residents of the Hudson Valley, much like the people of Europe, were accustomed to using crowds, street theater and vigilantism as a policing force, whether threatening local shopkeepers suspected of price-gouging, husbands who abused their wives, vagabonds, prostitutes, or even a government official who had incurred the community's displeasure. These stylized and ritualized crowd actions were usually meant more to intimidate and humiliate than to inflict physical harm. Crowds pulled down fences and destroyed property; women and men rioted against price-gougers and hoarders; and crowds sometimes went in disguise and costume to intimidate residents whose misbehavior or perceived deviancy had incurred the community's disapproval.<sup>29</sup>

Although the form employed by participants in these more violent skimmingtons was the same as those aimed at newlyweds—crowds or parades making noise with makeshift musical instruments composed of everyday tools and utensils—these skimmingtons tended to be far more threatening and vicious attacks on those perceived to be challenging community standards. For example, Hezekial Holdridge's return to his hometown of Rye in 1758, several years after abandoning his wife and children, led his neighbors to employ "rough music." A violent, daylong assault on Holdridge ensued, which included his fellow townspeople beating him, burning his hair, and concluded with an embarrassing parade through town while being ridden on a rail.<sup>30</sup>

These more violent skimmingtons could be loosely organized and spontaneous, or they could be elaborate and ritualistic. During the 1751 skimmington at the home of Poughkeepsie's Isaac Marks, a crowd surrounded his home, tore down his fences, and "did ride skimmington" around the property. The crowd at the home of Joseph Smith in Cortland Manor in 1754 were "armed with Clubs, and Staves" and "rode skimmington" in the middle of the night, causing a "great disturbance."<sup>31</sup>

A particularly violent assault occurred in 1765 Fishkill at the dwelling of Elizabeth Clarke, a suspected prostitute. The attack on Clarke, a widow, apparently began earlier in the afternoon of October 31 as a more traditional festive "skimmington" at the wedding reception of her neighbor, James Higby, who was married that day. At Higby's the wedding guests celebrated and drank, but then planned some sort of "skimmington"

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28. Examples of Hudson Valley fathers being ordered to assume responsibility for children born out of wedlock and of impoverished vagrants (and sometimes entire families) being "warned out" of towns can be found in Thomas S. Wermuth *Rip Van Winkle's Neighbors: The Transformation of Rural Society in the Hudson River Valley, 1720-1850* (State University of New York Press, 2001), chapter 3.

29. Riots aimed at price-gouging shopkeepers, and vigilante actions against "vagrants" can be reviewed in Wermuth, *Rip Van Winkle's Neighbors*, pp. 77-80, 26-27; Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760-1790* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1982), pp. 169-170, describes the 1775 arrest of a Hudson Valley judge by a local crowd.

30. Thomas J. Humphreys, "The Anatomy of a Crowd: Making Mobs in Early America," *Journal of Early American History* 5:1 (2015), pp. 74-75; Stewart, "Skimmington in the Middle and New England Colonies," pp. 52-53.

31. For the skimmington at Isaac Marks and at Joseph Smith's, see Stewart, "Skimmington in the Middle and New England Colonies," pp. 48-57.

at Clarke's home.<sup>32</sup> The "wedding people," composed mostly of "young people," rode to Clarke's house with horns blowing and bells jingling, mimicking many other skimmingtons, and after throwing stones at the house and realizing she had a male guest there, "in the most Voliant[sic] Manner did brake open her door and forced into the said house" and "tore her clothes and struck her several times and did abuse her in a most Groce Manner." Her male guest went to defend Mrs. Clarke but "was pursued then they rode skimmington." The gang of men pulled him "out of this House, and kicked and beat and Horsewhipped him."<sup>33</sup>

The people who composed the "skimeton crowds" were usually characterized as "boys" or "young men." Various reported skimmingtons were the work of the "Newburgh Boys," the "Kortright Boys," the "boys of Staatsburg," or just the "skimmerton boys." A contemporary account in Putnam County noted that the "skimmerton boys" included men as old as sixty, so to some degree the term was all-inclusive. On the other hand, evidence seems to support that the primary participants in the revelry were young men. This conforms to research on the skimmington in Europe, where research has pointed to young, unmarried men serving as the core of the group, particularly in those activities aimed at weddings, with the activities serving as a kind of "rite of passage" or coming of age.<sup>34</sup>

In Europe, organized charivaris were often the work of elaborately structured youth groups—abbeys with officers, rules, codes of behavior, and jurisdiction. These youth groups and abbeys served the needs of their village or city in which they were formed. The abbeys provided a form of social organization for the young men who were members, and they elected "kings" and "abbotts" or, like the neighborhood Abbey in 1571 Lyon, a "Captain" to govern the neighborhood and "keep peace and amity" among its residents. As Natalie Davis observed, these organizations "had jurisdiction over the behavior of married people—over newlyweds, over husbands dominated by their wives, sometimes over adulterers."<sup>35</sup>

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32. Testimony of Jacobus Vandewater in *The King against Abraham Lent*, Peter Johnson, Andrew Mich, John VanKleeck, Karab Myers, James Wytheth and Daniel Hasbrouck, Kempe File, Box 13, fld YY, NYHS. Along the road to Clarke's house the "wedding people" crossed paths with John Vandevooort, who attempted to dissuade them from continuing and told them that "Mrs. Clarke would not countenance riding Skimmington." The crowd verbally abused Vandervooort, and "damned him and called him a Damned drunken Rascal and said they had a commission to do it."

33. Clarke oath to William Humphrey, Nov. 3, 1765, Kempe File, Box 13, fld.3; NYHS. *Affadavit of Elizabeth Clark of Fishkill*, 11/06/1764; Deposition of John Vandervooort, 11/08/1764 *The King against Abraham Lent*, Peter Johnson, Andrew Mich, John VanKleeck, et al. See *The King against Isaac Lent*, Peter Johnson, James Higby, Andrew Mich, et al. Several members of this crowd were later found guilty of property destruction and forced to pay restitution.

34. See Gerow's description of the "Newburgh Boys" and "Kortright Boys" in Winner, "A Skimeton," p. 135; "skimmerton boys" are found in Barger, *Life on a Rocky Farm*, p. 133; "boys of Staatsburg" in *The Boston Herald* January 18, 1909. The view that the skimmington or youth gang action is a "rite of passage" can be found in Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, pp. 107-109; Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 27-31; Shaw, *American Patriots and Rituals of Revolution*, pp.187-88.

35. Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, pp. 104; 105-108; 115.

The Hudson Valley had few examples of the youth groups that characterized European cities and villages that carried out skimmingtons there, although urban areas like New York City, Philadelphia, and Boston did have fairly organized fraternities of young men. These groups of apprentices, journeymen, and laborers who worked in the warehouses and on the docks enforced codes of conduct and behavior among their members, participated in elaborate parades and street theater, and had a hierarchy of officers, including captains, lieutenants, and pursers. In these places, young men joined together on holidays, such as New Year's Day, the King's Birthday, and Pope's Day, to participate in celebrations that included parades, effigies, begging for donations, and leaders ritualistically "crowned" in mock coronations.<sup>36</sup>

The closest parallel in the Hudson Valley to the youth abbeys of early modern Europe or the "gangs" of northeastern cities, were probably the "calico Indians" of the 1830s and 1840s. To be clear, the "Indians" were not Native Americans at all, but white tenants on Hudson Valley landholdings. The "Indians" were first and foremost part of a larger political movement of thousands of Hudson Valley tenants challenging the property claims of powerful landlords that erupted on the vast Rensselaer and Livingston estates, old remnants of the patroonships and manors of the colonial period.<sup>37</sup> "Tribes" of "braves" participated in scimetons and charivaris that targeted landlords, their agents, and sheriffs who were attempting to foreclose on tenants, force land sales or drive tenants off their leaseholds. While doing so, the "Indians" created a carnival world of an alternative society, what Roger Abrahams has described as a "consciously invented voluntary community," replete with costumes, masks, initiation rites, a structured social hierarchy, and secret languages and codes. In short, they formed a parallel line of authority often more powerful than the "official" authorities of their towns and the state.<sup>38</sup>

Most of the "braves" were young men under the age of thirty, few of whom owned property, and many, if not most, were unmarried. In this way they shared many of the characteristics of those who composed the rural youth abbeys in Europe. Although the

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36. On the behavior and actions of urban eighteenth century youth groups see Shaw, *American Patriots and Rituals of Revolution*, pp.187-88. For young, organized crowds in New York City see Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834* (University of North Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 25-30; for Philadelphia see Steven J. Ross *Worm Arms Country and Class: The Philadelphia Militia and the Lower Sort During the American Revolution* (Rutgers University Press, 1989), especially chapter one; for Boston see J.L. Bell, "From Saucy Boys to Sons of Liberty: Politicizing Youth in Pre-Revolutionary Boston," in James Marten and Phillip J. Greven, *Children in Colonial America* (New York University Press, 2006), p. 206.

37. Reeve Huston *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York* (Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 116-129; David Maldwyn Ellis, *Landlords and Farmers in the Hudson Mohawk Region, 1790-1850* (New York, 1945) pp. 8-9; Henry Christman, *Tin Horns and Calico* (1945; reprint Cornwallville, N.Y., 1978) pp. 73-75.

38. Roger D. Abrahams, "Calico Indians: Festive Play in Acts of Resistance," in *Voices: The Journal of the New York Folklore Society* 32 (2006), pp. 2-6; Phillip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (Yale University Press, 1998).

organizing factor for these young men was primarily a challenge to the existing system of land control, with their elaborate and colorful costumes, richly choreographed rituals, and complex organization, they went far beyond the rebellion and served as a form of social and community organization.<sup>39</sup>

Skimeton was carried out by the “braves” on both sides of the upper Hudson while disguised in their colorful, homemade calico costumes and masks. Characteristic was the 1844 skimeton of a deputy who braves captured while attempting to serve writs of eviction near the town of Alps in Rensselaer County. During a “trial” characterized by rough music with the blowing of tin horns, banging of pots, and muskets fired in the air, the braves held a mock court and, upon judging the deputy guilty, stripped him of his clothes and coated him with tar and feathers. That same year, an agent of the landlords was similarly treated on the other side of the Hudson near Roxbury, where “a band of Indians came skelping, rank and file” and led him “to a spot selected for the ceremony, mounted him on something like a soap box, and served him out with tar and feathers.”<sup>40</sup>

While this and many other such skimetons were clearly political, aimed as they were at the authorities attempting to evict tenants, the braves became the de facto policing force of their communities, drilling about town in full costume, participating in community events, performing at holiday celebrations and solemn days of observance, and, like their less political counterparts in other parts of the valley, engaging in playful skimetons and demanding food or rewards from households who found themselves the object of their “antics.”<sup>41</sup>

Braves joined for different reasons. Some were motivated by the anti-rent movement, were renters themselves, and found this to be the most effective way to advocate for their cause. Nevertheless, many of the younger braves, some of whom were field hands or laborers, might be motivated by more social interests, much like their counterparts in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe who joined youth groups and abbeys. Twenty-year-old farmhand Barbour Stafford from Bovina joined up when his friend convinced him that “it was nothing but fun and almost every boy was joining it.” Other young braves would wear their disguises in more playful skimetons, not just those aimed at sheriffs and landlords. Some joined simply to participate in the “antics” and “for fun,” as William Sherwood and Jotham Scudder later described the reasons for their participation.<sup>42</sup>



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39. Reeve Huston has found that 56% of the “braves” were young men under the age of 30 and most of whom were “laborers.” See his *Land and Freedom*, pp. 116-117.

40. For the Rensselaer skimeton, see Henry Christman, *Tin Horns and Calico*, p. 86; For Roxbury, See Dorothy Kubik, *A Free Soil—A Free People: The Anti-Rent War in Delaware County, New York* (Purple Mountain Press, 1997), p. 51.

41. See Huston, *Land and Freedom*, pp. 122-124; Kubik, *A Free Soil—A Free People*, pp. 40-43; Christman, *Tin Horns and Calico*, pp. 80-87; Abrahams, “Calico Indians: Festive Play in Acts of Resistance,” p. 3.



If the various skimetons and charivaris echoed the carnivalesque world of early modern Europe, the African-American celebration of Pinkster embodies most clearly the celebration of “carnival,” with its parades, festivals, singing, dancing, drinking, and ritualized role reversal. Nevertheless, Pinkster drew on African festivals as much as European ones. Originally a Dutch holiday—the Christian holy day of Pentecost (Pinksteren)—Pinkster was transplanted to North America and evolved into something markedly different from the original religious celebration in Europe. The celebration was unique to areas of Dutch settlement, in Manhattan, northern New Jersey, western Long Island, and, most prominently, the Hudson River Valley.

Although Pinkster was celebrated in the seventeenth century, it was not until the mid-eighteenth century that a clear African-American infused celebration began to emerge. The prominent role African-Americans played in Pinkster in the Hudson Valley was apparent as early as the 1730s, when whites and blacks were already celebrating the holiday together. Albany, which had the largest African-American population in the valley, hosted the biggest and most elaborate celebration, but towns like Kingston, New Paltz, and other river communities had their own, albeit smaller, celebrations as well. The holiday reached its zenith in the years after the American Revolution and was quite popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>43</sup>

On the one hand, Pinkster, occurring when it did in late May or early June, can be seen as a fairly traditional celebration of the emergence of spring. The carnival atmosphere, the dancing and music, the competitions of strength and agility were characteristic of many societies’ celebrations of the end of winter and the symbolic emergence of new life with spring. Nevertheless, Pinkster was infused with many different meanings since it began as a celebration overseen by Dutch slaveholders with their slaves, increasingly became a biracial celebration, but by the late eighteenth century had clearly become a celebration overseen by African-Americans, both slave and free. Although many whites participated, they did so under the watchful eye and authority of their African-American hosts, who oversaw a celebration that was now heavily influenced by African and African-American culture. In this way, a celebration that both acknowledged, yet challenged, the existing social order, began to emerge.<sup>44</sup>

By the time Pinkster Carnival reached the height of its popularity in the late eighteenth century, African-Americans, the vast majority of whom were slaves, composed

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42. Kubik, *A Free Soil—A Free People*, pp. 45, 40; Huston, *Land and Freedom*, p.123.

43. Donna Merwick, *Possessing Albany, 1630-1710: The Dutch and English Experiences in New York* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.75-76; David Steven Cohen, “In Search of Carolus Africanus Rex: Afro-Dutch Folklore in New York and New Jersey,” *Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society* 5 (1984), pp. 148-168. An article in the *New York Weekly Journal* March 7, 1736 contains a satirical account that seems to be about Pinkster and clearly highlights the central role African-Americans played in the festival being described, although historians disagree about whether the account is actually a description of Pinkster. Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African-Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 85-88; White, “African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1781-1834,” pp.18-19.



between five and ten percent of the Hudson Valley population. Unlike the Southern United States, where large numbers of enslaved people worked in a plantation-like environment as field hands, most slaves in the Hudson Valley lived with their masters on small family farms. Slaves usually worked side by side with their white owners in the fields, house, or barn; ate meals with them at their tables; and slept in their homes. Further, a large number of Hudson Valley slaves were skilled artisans and craftsmen, and many were bilingual, speaking both English and Dutch.<sup>45</sup>

During Pinkster, slaves and free blacks were afforded what one contemporary referred to as an “unusual liberty to enjoy themselves according to their own ideas.” They were relieved of work responsibilities, given anywhere from three to six days off, and allowed to travel great distances to see family and friends. Yat, a Schenectady slave, in addition to time off at Christmas, New Years, and Easter, was allotted three days at Pinkster. Recently freed Hudson Valley slave Sojourner Truth considered returning to her former master’s home to celebrate “Pingster” with her former companions and “enjoy with them, once more, the coming festivities.”<sup>46</sup>

Much like the ancient Roman Saturnalia, the medieval “Feast of Fools,” as well as other cultural festivals of African origin, a “Lord of Misrule” was chosen to oversee the festivities. Pinkster was unusual, however, and different from other slave festivals such as Election Day and Jonkonnu, since in these other celebrations slaves and free blacks may or may not include whites but were generally performed under the gaze of white slavemasters. They usually took place on, or very near, the plantation. Even if some license was given to blacks, control of the celebration was shared or, at the very least, compromised, by white oversight. Through the early eighteenth century this seems to have been the case with Pinkster, but over the following decades African-Americans increasingly took greater control of the celebration, infusing it with more African rituals, music, and dance, so that by the late eighteenth century, what was once, as Shane White describes, “a complex syncretization of African and Dutch cultures forged on the Hudson River within the context of American slavery” was now a celebration that was

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44. Linda Pershing, “Representation of Racial Identities in a Contemporary Pinkster Celebration,” in Myra B. Young Armstead, ed., *Mighty Change, Tall Within: Black Identity in the Hudson Valley*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 191-195; White, “African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1781-1834,” p. 21.

45. On size of the enslaved population, see A. J. Williams-Myers, *Long Hammering: Essays on the Forging of an African-American Presence in the Hudson River Valley to the Early Twentieth Century* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1994), pp. 4-5; Michael Groth, “Laboring for Freedom in Dutchess County,” in Armstead, ed., *Mighty Change, Tall Within*, pp. 58-73; Myra Armstead, “A Geography of Slavery and Freedom in Antebellum Ulster County and New York City: Isabella Van Wagenen and Her Family,” in *Mighty Change, Tall Within*, pp. 6; 81-82. Although a handful of Hudson Valley farms or estates had a large number of slaves, this was unusual. Most Hudson Valley white families did not own other people, but those who did, owned about one or two African-Americans. See Dennis Maika, “Encounters: Slavery and the Philipse Family: 1680-1751,” in Roger Panetta, ed., *Dutch New York: The Roots of Hudson Valley Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009) pp. 52, 69.

46. White, “African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1781-1834,” p. 23-24; *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, edited by Olive Gilbert. (Boston, 1850), pp 61-63.

firmly under the control of Hudson Valley African-Americans, both free and slave.<sup>47</sup>

Most Pinkster celebrations were modest in size. Eighteenth-century Kingston's celebration seems to have been a rather small affair held on a farm on the road to Hurley. It was overseen by "Prince Terry," who local legend described as a seven-foot-tall black man and the son of a British officer. Sojourner Truth quite possibly participated in the Kingston celebration. Towns and villages on Long Island and in northern New Jersey hosted Pinkster festivals, and a larger one in Manhattan was referred to by a contemporary as the "great Saturnalia of the New York Blacks."<sup>48</sup>

Probably the largest and certainly the best recorded celebration, however, took place in Albany. Albany Pinkster was held on "the Hill," a sprawling, rough-hewn, open area a few blocks from the center of the city. The locus of the festival was the open air "Amphitheatre," which was surrounded by food stands, tents, and booths, and the royal arbor where King Charles, the "Lord" of Pinkster, and his entourage resided. The arbors and booths were constructed the week before the Celebrations' start, using stakes, cross sticks, and the pine bush that grew on the hill. These natural wooden booths were mixed with tents to create an arcade. According to a contemporary observer, it "assumes the appearance not of art but nature, and forms a beautiful contrast with the forbidding nakedness of the surrounding hills."<sup>49</sup>

Pinkster commenced on the Monday morning after Pentecost with a large group of singing, dancing, and drumming participants parading behind "King Charles," who was clothed in a British brigadier's scarlet coat "reaching almost to his heels." By this time thousands of blacks and whites, "together with children of all countries and colours," had assembled on the Hill awaiting King Charles and his entourage to arrive. Once there, Charles inspected the tents and assessed a levy on their owners—one shilling for blacks and two shillings for whites. If anyone refused to pay, their tent would be "instantly demolished" by an edict of the King.<sup>50</sup>

Once begun, sports and competitions "commence in the different camps where parties collect according to their different tastes to amuse and be amused," while spec-

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47. White, "African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1781-1834," p. 21; William D. Pierson, "African American Festive Style and the Creation of American Culture," in Pencak, ed., *Riot and Revelry in Early America*, pp. 258-59; A. J. Williams-Myers, *Long Hammering*, pp. 87-88. White outlines a somewhat more complex route by which Pinkster became a primarily African-American celebration in his "Afro-Dutch Syncretization in New York City and the Hudson Valley," *Journal of American Folklore* 102 (1989), pp. 68-75.

48. Marius Schoonmmaker, *The History of Kingston, New York: From Its Earliest Settlement to the Year 1820* (New York, 1888), p. 427; Alf Evers, *Kingston: City on the Hudson* (Overlook Press, Woodstock, 2005), pp.184-85. David Steven Cohen, "In Search of Carolus Africanus Rex," pp. 148-151; Thomas F. De Voe, *The Market Book: Containing a Historical Account of the Public Markets in the Cities of New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Brooklyn* (New York, Thomas f. De Voe, 1862), 1:344.

49. *New York Daily Advertiser*, June 29, 1803.

50. White, "African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1781-1834," p. 22; *New York Daily Advertiser*, June 29, 1803; A.J. Williams-Myers notes that King Charles and his entourage did not process onto the Hill until Tuesday, while Monday was the day for whites as well as blacks to attend. See his *Long Hammering*, p. 89

tators and participants partook of “fruit, cakes, cheese, beer and liquors of various kinds.” Competitions of physical strength and wrestling, and performances of verse, storytelling, and dancing, among others, were popular. Center stage, though, was in the amphitheater, where singing, drumming, and improvised dance was performed in front of King Charles’ “royal tent.” At “the entrance of the tent sits their chief musician,” who according to a contemporary observer was “dressed in a horrid manner—rolling his eyes and tossing his head... at the same time malling with both hands upon the hollow sounding Guinea drum,” while “Two imps, one on each side decorated with feathers and cow tails” played “two similar but smaller instruments” creating “sounds of frightful dissonance.”<sup>51</sup>

Participants danced in the “African style and free from the formalities” that characterized European-style dancing and in which this contemporary white observer could detect “no regular movements in the dance.” In fact, much of the dancing and drumming was improvised and, as Michael Pierson has observed in his study of early African-American festive play, “improvisation and stylistic embellishment were the necessary marks of artistry” in African-American celebration. Although a good deal of the dancing and singing was mainly African in background, some Dutch influence was in evidence, and the “African style” described by the contemporary white observer was, itself, an amalgamation of the multiple and diverse backgrounds of New York African-Americans.<sup>52</sup>

Like other forms of African-American festival, Pinkster subtly challenged the existing social order that defined relations among the classes, the races, and the free and unfree. One of the most notable aspects of this challenge was the relative freedom enjoyed by African-Americans during its celebration and the fact that they enjoyed roles of authority, not only over other African-Americans, but over whites as well. Judgments and rulings were made by “King Charles,” “Prince Terry,” and other “royal” leaders of local Pinkster festivals, decisions concerning who could or could not participate in the festival; what a vendor was expected to offer as tribute or payment; and judgments on the champions of sport and dance. Much like the slave revelers of the ancient Saturnalia, Pinkster celebrants had authority in the nearby streets of the community during the carnival. King Charles not only “toured the festival grounds with his entourage” and maintained “absolute” authority, he and his followers “patrol the principal streets” of Albany going house to house “demanding tribute.”<sup>53</sup>

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51. *New York Daily Advertiser*, June 29, 1803; Claire Sponsler, *Ritual Imports: Performing Medieval Drama in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 42-66

52. Pierson, “African American Festive Style and the Creation of American Culture,” pp. 256-259; William Myers, *Long Hammering*, pp. 20-21; Shane White, “Pinkster in Albany, 1803: A Contemporary Description,” *New York History* 70 (April 1989), p. 198; Pershing, “Representation of Racial Identities in a Contemporary Pinkster Celebration,” in *Mighty Change, Tall Within*, p.195.

53. *New York Daily Advertiser*, June 29, 1803.

Furthermore, the dancing and performances challenged the sensibilities of some white observers who found the gesticulation “lewd” and “without reserve” and “free from the formalities and reserves with which the squeamish modesty of civilized life has invested the gyrations of the ball room.” The very freedom of the dance and music stood in stark contrast to the enforced servitude these people lived in. Even some of the verse that was recited in performance during the celebration challenged slavery itself, although usually indirectly, noting the dignity of the enslaved.<sup>54</sup>



Not only men participated in skimmingtons and charivaris; so, too, did women. Hudson Valley women, acting in organized groups, harassed and punished abusive husbands, ridiculed prostitutes, and raided stores and shops owned by price-gouging merchants, seizing goods and occasionally physically assaulting their targets as well. Women engaged in theatrical protests and processions with political, economic, and social meaning. Further, like their counterparts in the male-dominated skimmingtons, their protests were sometimes violent. Generally, women’s participation in skimmingtons, was aimed at correcting or punishing some type of misbehavior—not those connected to marriages and weddings, at least not in the eighteenth century.

Women often took the lead in punishing abusive husbands. On the far eastern reaches of the Hudson Valley, in Ridgefield, Connecticut, it was a group of women who punished William Drinkwater in 1733 for abusing his wife. The women seized him, tied him to a cart, and whipped him in front of his neighbors. A few weeks later, a humiliated Drinkwater moved with his family across the Hudson to Orange County, where, it was reported, he “proves a good Neighbor and loving Husband. A remarkable Reformation arising from the Justice of the good Women!” One of the leaders of the particularly raucous 1751 skimmington in Poughkeepsie, where rioters donned disguises, was a woman, Elena Hunt, and another woman, disguised in blackened face like the other rioters, participated in a skimmington in Westchester in 1754. The crowd that attacked prostitute Gertrude Wilson in 1754 New York City was composed primarily of women (although some were dressed as men), and Fishkill baker Elizabeth Clarke, also a suspected prostitute, suffered physical attacks as well as verbal assaults from neighboring women who disparaged her as the “Old cake Whore.”<sup>55</sup>

It was a group of “young women” who assaulted a suspected tory in Kinderhook, stripped him and coated him with a symbolic “tar and feathering” of molasses and flowers, and some Poughkeepsie women participated in the dramatic 1775 attack on

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54. *New York Daily Advertiser*, June 29, 1803. On the spoken word, poetry, and verse performed at Pinkster, see Williams-Myers, *Long Hammering*, pp. 92-95.

55. *The New York Weekly Journal*, December 31, 1733; the 1751 Poughkeepsie skimmington and Westchester crowd action see Stewart, “Skimmington in the Middle and New England Colonies,” p. 50; the attack on the New York City prostitute is discussed in Humphreys, “The Anatomy of a Crowd: Making Mobs in Early America,” pp. 74-75; Clarke Deposition Kempe File, Box 13, NYHS.

Dutchess County Judge James Smith and “very handsomely tarred and feathered him.” Smith was put on a cart and paraded several miles throughout the countryside for the people to see “this villainous retailer of the law.” The next year a crowd of more than twenty women assaulted Poughkeepsie shopkeeper Peter Messier in his own store. Accusing him of price-gouging, they seized him “by the Throat, and push’d him down” and threatened him with a broadsword.<sup>56</sup>

New Windsor women participated in at least four riots at village stores in the late 1770s, leading one observer there to declare “the women! in this place have risen in a mob.” Accusing storekeeper William Ellison of price gouging and engrossment, a crowd of women and men seized Ellison’s supply of salt, leaving him only one bushel for his household’s needs. Women also challenged female shopkeepers like Mrs. Lawrence, arguing she violated the town price caps on goods by forcing customers to purchase a paper bag at an additional charge in order to carry the items out of the store. The women of New Windsor also revealed a unique market mentality since they not only seized goods for themselves, leaving the customary “just price,” they sometimes took it upon themselves to resell the items they had seized, as one person complained about New Windsor women “now selling a box of tea of yours at 6s per lb.”<sup>57</sup>

Fishkill women raided the store of shopkeeper Alderman Lefferts in August 1776 after learning that he had stocked a substantial amount of tea in his store “to make a prey” of his customers “by asking a most exorbitant price.” A crowd of women came to the store and, when the purchase price they offered was refused, they detained the three men that were present and delegated a “committee of ladies” to seize the tea. The women appointed a “Clerk and Weigher,” seized a considerable portion of the shopkeeper’s stock, and, much like the crowd in New Windsor, resold the tea at their own price, the profits of “which the Lady Committee intended to remit to the General Committee of the County.”<sup>58</sup>

Women raided Peter Messier’s Poughkeepsie store not once, but three times in the spring of 1777. Claiming that he was selling tea and other items above the Committee of Safety’s established price maximums, twenty-two women, many of whom were known to Messier, used their own “Hammer & Scales and proceeded to weigh as much as they chose to take” and to distribute the goods among themselves. The women, accompa-

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56. *New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury*, October 2, 1775; the assault of Judge Smith is in Peter Force, ed., *American Archives*, 3:823; Poughkeepsie women assaulting Peter Messier is recounted by the shopkeeper himself in “Deposition of Peter Messier” in *Minutes of the Committee and of the First Commission for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies in the State of New York*, Collections of the New York Historical Society 57 Part I (1924), pp.301-303. See also Jonathan Clark, “The Problem of Allegiance in Revolutionary Poughkeepsie,” in David D. Hall, John M. Murrin, and Thad W. Tate, eds., *Saints and Revolutionaries: Essays on Early American History* (New York, 1984), pp. 306-07.

57. Correspondence of John Hathorn, Dec. 2, 1776 in Rutenber, *History of New Windsor*, 67-68; James H. Kip to James Caldwell, New Windsor, 14 July 1777, *Journals of the Provincial Congress*, 1:506; Force, *American Archives*, 5:635; 638-39.

58. *The Constitutional Gazette*, August 24, 1776.

nied by two Continental soldiers, offered Messier's wife "their own price," which was considerably lower than the shopkeeper's selling price. During the next several days, the women returned twice more. On their second visit, following a verbal altercation about the price of his goods, they seized and assaulted Messier and threatened him with further violence if he continued to interfere.<sup>59</sup>

On their third visit to the shopkeeper's store two days later, the crowd was stopped by Messier at the front door, which he had fastened to block their entrance. Although he asked them to go away, the crowd stated that "they had orders from the Committee to search his house." When Messier demanded to see the warrant, they broke open his door and forced their way into the store once again. On this raid, some twenty women were joined by about a dozen men. Once in the house, they "broke open the Cellar Door," seized various items, "& Drew his Liquors and Drank of them." As they were leaving "they went into the yard & beat (his) Servants."<sup>60</sup>

During the economic crisis of the Revolution, shortages of necessary items, particularly salt, tea, and flour, were blamed on "ingrossing jockies" such as Messier, Ellison, and Lefferts. As early as 1776, women in Kingston, Fishkill, Poughkeepsie, and New Windsor had begun raiding stores to gain "necessities" that were either in short supply or in the eyes of the rioters unfairly priced. Matters had grown so desperate that the authorities in the mid-valley appealed to the New York Assembly for help, declaring that "we are daily alarmed, and our streets filled with mobs."<sup>61</sup>

Although men regularly participated in these crowd actions, a majority of the rioters frequently were women. Women tended to exert a public voice around those issues in which the needs of the domestic sphere crossed those of the public. The ability to get "necessities" at affordable prices fell firmly within the socially and culturally constructed gender roles of eighteenth-century America. Like their counterparts in the French Revolution, women's political action usually formed around issues of family and domestic concerns, particularly access to food and supplies. Historians have generally agreed that women's participation in food riots was based on their socially constructed gender roles as being responsible for providing food for their families. As Barbara Clark Smith has observed, women were primarily responsible for marketing, most sensitive to price fluctuations, and would probably detect subtle price changes or questionable marketing practices and were more likely to act on them.<sup>62</sup>

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59. "Deposition of Peter Messier" in *Minutes of the Committee and of the First Commission for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies in the State of New York*, I, pp. 301-303.

60. "Deposition of Peter Messier" in *Minutes of the Committee and of the First Commission for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies* I, pp. 301-303.

61. "Ulster County Committee to New York Convention," Nov. 18, 1776, *Journals of the Provincial Congress*, 2:229-30; Barbara Clark Smith, "Food Rioters and the American Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., LI, (January 1994), p.15

62. Smith, "Food Rioters and the American Revolution," p. 28; Countryman, *A People in Revolution*, pp. 180-82.

The action of women in relation to rising prices and shortages was not confined to seizures and crowd actions. These women also made it clear they were prepared to use their power as wives and mothers to obstruct political and policy initiatives if certain measures were not taken to regulate the economy. In the most dramatic example of this, Kingston women paraded to the meeting place of the town government during the Revolutionary War, surrounded their chambers, and threatened that “their husbands and sons shall fight no more” if the food shortages and rising prices were not resolved.<sup>63</sup> In this way, these riots were not only protests against the economic situation but had clear political implications as well. The site of the women’s action was not the Kingston public market, nor a shopkeeper’s warehouse, but the meeting house of the town’s political authorities. These women were warning political leaders of serious consequences for the war effort if their demands were not met. Much like the 1789 “march of the fishwives” from Paris to Versailles, or the 1863 Richmond Bread Riots on the steps of the Confederate Capitol at the height of the Civil War, Hudson Valley women engaged in theatrical protests and processions with political, economic, and social meaning.<sup>64</sup>

In other parts of the Northeast, rioters sometimes cross-dressed when they engaged in skimmingtons and riots. In Northeastern New Jersey, a group of men called the “Regulators” “dress themselves in Women’s Cloaths, and painting their Faces, go in the Evening to the Houses of such as are reported to have beat their wives.” In New England, men occasionally disguised themselves “in women’s Cloaths” when engaging in crowd actions, and New York City women sometimes disguised themselves as “boys” when attacking suspected prostitutes.<sup>65</sup> Cross-dressing was much more common in charivaris in Canada and the American West. I am not aware of evidence of cross-dressing in the Hudson Valley, although both men and women sometimes went in disguise.

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63. New York Convention Proceedings, Aug. 1776, in Peter Force, *American Archives*, 5th Series, 1:1542-43.

64. William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1990); Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). See also Wermuth, “The Central Hudson Valley and the American Revolution,” in Joseph Tiedemann and Eugene Fingerhut, eds., *The Other New York: The Revolution Beyond New York City* (State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 138-141.

65. For New Jersey “Regulators” see Brendan McConville, “The Rise of Rough Music: Reflections on an Ancient New Custom in Eighteenth Century New Jersey,” in *Riot and Revelry in Early America*, pp. 87-88; for New England cross-dressers see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage, 1991), p. 195. For New York City women disguised as men see Stewart, “Skimmington in the Middle and New England Colonies,” pp. 49-50; Humphreys, “The Anatomy of a Crowd: Making Mobs in Early America,” pp. 74-75. For examples of cross-dressings at 19th century charivaris in Canada and the American west, see *The American Beacon*, July 24, 1817.





This essay has examined several different varieties of misrule in the Hudson Valley during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ranging from the generally innocuous festive play focused around weddings to the more threatening and sometimes violent attacks aimed at community miscreants. Further, female-led riots against abusive husbands and price-gouging shopkeepers, and the topostic challenges to the social and political order evidenced in African-American Pinkster carnival, demonstrate the persistence of a vibrant world of popular culture and misrule existing and operating outside normal channels of power and authority.

Scimetons and charivaris served many different functions. On the one hand, they were festive and carnivalesque celebrations that allowed the young men of the village an opportunity to drink, parade, and make “rough music.” These rituals also served as a safety-valve of sorts through their cathartic challenge to traditional and “official” authority, albeit a challenge clothed in celebration and frolic. And much like their European counterparts, skimetons served as a “rite of passage” for those participating as well as a symbolic passage for the newly married couple, highlighting their new role and relationship to the community.

Pinkster carnival offers a dramatic instance of misrule’s potential subversive nature by reproducing an alternative world replete with kings, royalty, rules, and laws clearly at odds with the existing authorities, and even arts and dance that challenged traditionally accepted cultural standards. Further, during the period of carnival, Pinkster’s African-American “royalty” held power not only over other blacks, but over whites as well.<sup>66</sup>

Women rioted in many parts of North America in the eighteenth century, so this activity—women taking to the streets against shopkeepers, publicly punishing or shaming abusive spouses, prostitutes, or other perceived threats to the community—was not unique to the region. However, much like with skimetons, the Hudson Valley appears to have had more than its share of these events. Barbara Clark Smith’s detailed analysis of food riots during the Revolutionary War reveals thirty-seven documented crowd actions across eight different states, from Massachusetts to Virginia. More than one-quarter of these riots occurred in the Hudson Valley, and sixty percent of all crowds either led by or including women occurred in the valley. Clearly, the region took a lead in both rioting and the participation of women in these riots. The food or price riot was, of course, only one form of crowd action, but the pivotal role played by Hudson Valley women seems to distinguish the region from other areas.<sup>67</sup>

What happened to the skimeton and other forms of misrule? By the late nineteenth century, although the ritual continued in rural areas, at least one New York City news-

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66. *New York Daily Advertiser*, June 29, 1803; Williams Myers, *Long Hammering*, pp. 90-99.

67. Ten of the thirty seven riots (10/37) took place in the Hudson Valley. Six of the ten riots that identify women participants were in the Hudson Valley, and four of these riot were led by women. See Smith, “Food Rioters and the American Revolution,” pp. 35-36.



paper felt it was necessary to explain what a skimeton was to its urban readers whom, the paper's publishers apparently believed, might not even recognize the term. An 1893 account of a skimeton in the *New York Herald* described a recent occurrence of the ritual as a "unique" relic of the past. But skimetons continued more regularly than this newspaper apparently realized, so much so that some observers began calling for their abolishment. In 1903, a newspaper editorial argued that a recent "skimmerton" where two wedding guests were seriously injured "differ from an ordinary riot only in degree." Skimertons, the article continued, "had been abolished in civilized communities for many years, and they should be forbidden by law." In fact, although there were no laws against skimetons in the Hudson Valley, there were laws and prosecutions against illegal activities that occurred at the ceremonies.<sup>68</sup>

The last recorded skimmington I have come across in the Hudson Valley is from 1909 Staatsburg, a few miles north of Poughkeepsie. Although the participants were outfitted with the normal array of musical instruments, the event was a rather tame affair that ended quickly with a payment of a "bribe," which "the boys" then took to the village tavern to offer toasts to the new couple. Although variants of skimetons—such as charivaris, shivarees, and "horning"—continued in upstate New York, Canada, and the western United States with some regularity, if they continued to occur in the valley they seemed to have caused little notice or concern among residents.<sup>69</sup>

Pinkster was more short-lived. The celebration remained popular through the first few decades of the nineteenth century, but in some places, like New York City and northern New Jersey, the celebrations simply declined in popularity. In other places, such as Albany, white leaders began to limit and control the festival with ordinances and regulations about where and when it could be celebrated. By the 1820s, the observance of Pinkster was in decline and was replaced with other celebratory forms such as parades and processions that did not so overtly challenge white dominance.<sup>70</sup>

Was the Hudson Valley unique? Yes and no. As described above, charivaris and skimetons had a long tradition in Europe, were transplanted to the Americas, and occurred all over the United States and Canada. On the other hand, it is also clear that the Hudson Valley region seems to have had an unusually large number of these occurrences. Since ethnic background does not seem to have played a part in the

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68. *New York Herald*, June 25, 1893; *Trenton Evening Times*, June 16, 1903.

69. The Staatsburg skimeton is recorded in *The Boston Herald* January 18, 1909. A "skimerton" was planned for a wedding in the Port Jervis area, on the far western reaches of the Hudson Valley, in December 1913, but was called off. See the *Bridgeport Evening Farmer*, December 24, 1913. Additional skimmingtons and charivaris may have occurred in the valley after this date, but I have not seen any recorded. "Horning" in upstate New York (Buffalo region) is discussed in Winner, "A Skimeton," pp.135-136, while 20th century Canadian charivaris are examined in Pauline Greenhill, *Make the Night Hideous: Four English-Canadian Charivaris, 1881-1940* (University of Toronto Press, 2010). Shivarees in the American west are discussed in Loretta T. Johnson "Charivari/Shivaree: A European Folk Ritual on the American Plains," pp. 371-387.

70. Shane White, "Pinkster: Afro-American Syncretization in New York City and the Hudson Valley," *Journal of American Folklore* 102 (March 1989) pp. 71-72.

event's occurrence (skimingtons seem to have been performed by, and against, every cultural and ethnic group in the valley, with little apparent ethnic malice at work), the reason for the seemingly high rate of occurrence in the region awaits further analysis. Although some historians posit that New York may have simply kept better records on this subject, therefore providing more information for study, the evidence for that is not compelling.<sup>71</sup>

What is evident is that the people of the Hudson Valley in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries enjoyed a vibrant popular culture, what Natalie Zemon Davis has referred to as a veritable “second life” that existed just beneath the surface of everyday life and outside the domain of official or legal authority. Their celebrations—skimington, charivari, Pinkster, among others—while festive and carnival-like—were often imbued with deep meaning about the nature of community, the relationship between individuals and the villages in which they lived, and the role of custom and ritual in defining identity. What the ceremonies meant varied from group to group, but in addition to their playful and festive nature, they helped to define community identity, while sometimes challenging or even inverting traditional authority and power relationships. Further, although mostly forgotten today, these rituals and forms of play were certainly important to the thousands of Hudson Valley residents who participated in them, helping to define community order and identity.

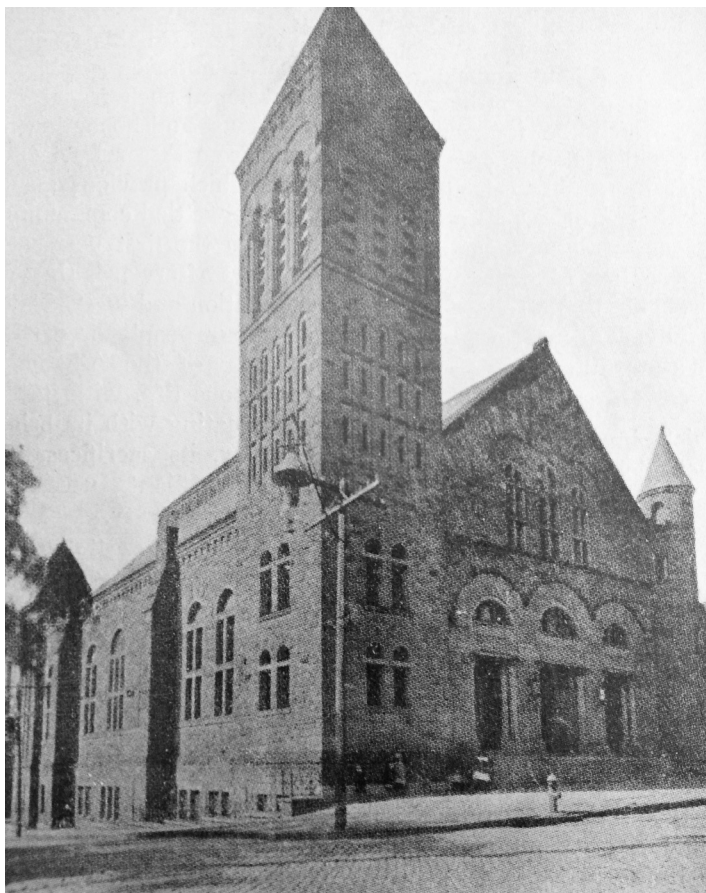
## Acknowledgements

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71. On the large number of skimmingtons in New York and the Hudson Valley in particular, see, Palmer, “Discordant Music,” pp. 22-23, and Pencak, “Introduction: A Historical Perspective,” pp. 6-7. Pencak notes that New Yorkers may simply have kept better records on the subject, but most of the skimingtons I have reviewed come from newspaper accounts which are not necessarily biased to New York.



Temple Beth Emeth building from about 1890-1954,  
courtesy of the archives of Beth Emeth, Albany

*“To Aid Their Unfortunate Coreligionists”*

## Impact of World War I and the Jewish Community in Albany

*Harvey Strum*

What impact did World War I have on immigrant communities? This becomes a significant question on the 100th anniversary of the war, and it adds to an understanding of how immigrants adjusted to their new country. Historians have focused on one immigrant community, Germans, because of the negative experiences Germans

encountered in the United States during the war. For the most part, historians have not studied how other immigrant groups fared during World War I. The Great War broke out just after the decade of heaviest immigration to the United States in American history. During the decade from 1905 to 1914, 10.1 million immigrants arrived. The country had a total population of 92 million in 1910.

Jews comprised one the largest immigrant groups to arrive in the United States from 1880 until 1924, when Congress closed the gates to large-scale immigration for forty years through passage of the National Origins Act. It was intended to limit Jews, Italians, Poles, and other immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe considered racially inferior and unfit to become Americans. Driven out of the Russian Empire by the pogroms of 1869, the pogroms of 1881 to '82, May Laws of 1882, the expulsions of 1891, and the pogroms of 1903 to '05, one third of the 6 million Jews in Russia left for America in search of religious tolerance, economic opportunity, and to escape Russian captivity. Pogroms in Jassy, Romania, in 1899 and in fifty Moldavian towns in 1907 led half of Romania's 300,000 Jews to leave for America. Draconian laws on Jewish economic activities in Romania dating from the 1880s further spurred their departure. Because of limited economic opportunities, starvation, and population growth, 500,000 Jews—about one-quarter of the Jewish population of the Austro-Hungarian Empire—immigrated to the United States between 1880 and 1924. A smaller movement of Jews fled Russia, Romania, and Austro-Hungary by heading east to Palestine, starting the Zionist movement. However, the vast majority of Jews who left Eastern Europe preferred the promised land of New York City, Chicago, and Philadelphia.

World War I devastated the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe and created food shortages for Jews in Palestine. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were uprooted by the war in Eastern Europe. The armies of Russia, Romania, Germany, and Austro-Hungary treated local Jews with great cruelty as they fought each other in the regions of Eastern Europe, where there was the highest concentration of Jews. World War I decimated scores of Jewish communities; many were impoverished by the war and actions of the belligerent powers. From 1914 to 1917, the Russian government and the tsar's armies forced 600,000 Jews from their homes, causing them to lose not only their property but their livelihoods. Jews suffered economic losses totaling \$400 million during the war. At the war's end, the devastation of Jewish communities continued as roving Polish, Soviet, White, and Ukrainian forces fought each other and attacked Jews. Up to 250,000 Jews died or were killed in Ukraine and White Russia (now Belarus) and 40,000 were killed in Poland due to the Russian Revolution and Civil War and the Polish-Russian War. These were the worst atrocities suffered by Jewish communities in 300 years.

How did American Jews and Jewish immigrants respond to the plight of their fellow Jews in Europe and Palestine? During World War I, immigrants to the United States still identified with their family, friends, and communities in their former homelands. New York City alone contained over 3,000 associations, known as *landsmanshaftn*, mutual aid societies based on the villages, towns, and cities in Eastern Europe where

the Jewish immigrants came from. Only a relatively few historians have written about the impact of World War I on the communal loyalties of immigrants. During World War I, Jewish immigrants, whether in New York City or Troy, continued to feel a sense of commitment to their former hometowns and the people they left behind in the old country. How did Jews in the United States seek to help their brethren in Europe and Palestine displaced by the war? The Jewish population of the United States consisted primarily of the children and grandchildren of immigrants from Germany and Central Europe who arrived between 1815 and 1870 and the much larger wave of recent arrivals from Eastern Europe and their children who had arrived since 1880. Did the different Jewish communities divided by ideology, denominational differences, and countries of origin unite to help those abroad? In fact, the war created an outpouring of philanthropy by wealthy Jews and those of modest means that bridged internal differences for the common cause of helping Jews impacted by the war.

The plight of European Jewry raised another question for American Jews—what refuge could be found for Jews displaced by the war and the postwar massacres in Eastern Europe? Before World War I, a small Zionist movement existed in the United States. However, the impact of the war led to a mass expansion of the Zionist movement within the American Jewish community. The announcement of the Balfour Declaration on Palestine by Great Britain and President Woodrow Wilson's endorsement of a Jewish Homeland boosted the Zionist movement.<sup>1</sup> By 1918, a majority of Jews in the United States supported Zionism, but a division emerged within the Jewish community. Some wealthy or prominent Jews of German origin and some recent Jewish immigrants from Russia who held socialist beliefs remained non-Zionist. Other prominent Jews associated with Reform Judaism were hostile to Zionism. One of the questions to be looked at is how did this debate over Zionism within the Jewish community play out at the local level, for example within the Jewish communities of the Capital District of New York?

Studying World War I explores both the unity and divisiveness within the Jewish community created by the war. It also raises questions about how different segments of the American Jewish community interpreted the meaning of their Jewish identity and the vision of their loyalty to the United States. This forms part of the larger question of how immigrants negotiated their sense of ethnic identity and Americanism at a time when nativists and even former President Theodore Roosevelt accused immigrants of dual loyalty and condemned hyphenated Americans.

During the first three years of World War I, the United States remained neutral and the issues of support for Jews abroad and Zionism took place within the context

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1. The Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, consisted of a letter from British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Walter Rothschild for transmission to the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland assuring the Jewish community in Great Britain that the British government would support the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, then part of the Ottoman Empire, after the war. President Woodrow Wilson endorsed the goals of the Balfour Declaration and the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

that the war did not have an immediate impact on Jews living in the United States. In April 1917, the United States entered the war and the question that immediately developed was did Jews support the war effort? Looking at the local impact of the war on the Jewish communities of the Capital District adds to an appreciation of the problems faced by Jews and immigrants during the war. How did Jews in the smaller communities of Albany, Schenectady, and Troy show their support for the war effort? Did the war lead to the acculturation of recent immigrants? For example, in the Capital District, World War I reduced the appeal of Orthodox Judaism and the use of Yiddish, leading to the expansion of the more Americanized Conservative congregations and a decline in the use of Yiddish in synagogue minutes. Like other immigrants, Jews had to decide how to relate to their ethno-religious identity and Americanism. Could Jews be good Americans in a predominately Christian population where they remained a small part of the population? This issue became especially important in the smaller Jewish communities of upstate New York. World War I brought these issues to the forefront at home and in the service.

Looking at what happened to Jews in the Capital District during World War I provides another view of how immigrants navigated between assimilation and retention of ethno-religious loyalties.

Because the largest Jewish community in the United States developed in New York City, where Jews made up about twenty-nine percent of the population by 1914, historians have concentrated on Jews in New York as representative of the American Jewish immigrant experience. For the most part, they have not studied the impact of the war on Jews residing in smaller cities like Albany. Studying the impact of the war on these upstate residents leads to a more nuanced understanding of immigrant communities outside of the largest cities. It reveals how Jews in smaller communities identified with their brethren abroad and how World War I confronted these immigrant populations. To what degree did Jews across the income, ideological, and religious spectrum cooperate for foreign relief, how did they support the war effort, and how did they relate to Zionism?

Living in cities with smaller Jewish populations, did they reach out to non-Jews for financial and political support? What were the internal conflicts and did they mirror the divisions in New York City and nationally? By concentrating on the Jews of the Capital District and how they responded to the plight of European and Palestinian Jewry, historians can gain insight into how immigrants—Jews, Italians, Serbs, Poles, Irish, etc.—balanced their American identity with their loyalty to their family, friends, towns, and homelands abroad, and how World War I altered this balance.

When World War I broke out, American Jewry organized relief efforts for Jews displaced by the war and aided Jewish settlements in Palestine. American Jews established the American Jewish Relief Committee that became part of the Joint Distribution Committee, established to distribute aid to Jews abroad. Jewish communities had a long history of contributing to Jews in Palestine and immigrant aid associations. During



the anti-Jewish pogroms in Kishinev in 1903 and other parts of Russia from 1903 to 1905, American Jewish leaders like Jacob Schiff, Louis Marshall, and Oscar Straus led campaigns to raise relief funds that included donations from the Capital District Jewish communities. Members of these Capital District communities joined with their co-religionists in New York City and other parts of the country during the Russian pogroms and later during World War I to solicit aid for their brethren in Europe.

As one example, Jews in Schenectady gathered in November 1905 in a mass meeting of Jewish congregations “to aid of their unfortunate co-religionists in Russia.” Speakers included the president of the “Russian congregation,” a Yiddish-speaking congregation of recent immigrants; the rabbi of the Reform congregation where German was still spoken; and the American-born Louis King, city clerk from 1899 to 1902. A reporter observed “it was inspiring and touching to see men, very poor in the world’s goods, rush forward with their hard earned dollars to contribute the relief campaign organized by Jacob Schiff.”<sup>2</sup> Women’s auxiliaries in each synagogue in Schenectady joined the fundraising effort. Helping the victims of Russian pogroms united Reform and Orthodox Jews, American-born as well as Jews of German, Russian, and Hungarian origin. According to historian Mark Raider, “Kishinev marked a turning point in American Jewish history,” as Jews of all religious backgrounds, ethnicity, “and political attitudes reacted with horror to the brutal treatment” of Jews in the Russian Empire.<sup>3</sup> A decade later, the war relief movement grew out of this tradition of helping fellow Jews. Also, Jews contributed to American movements for international relief, like the Great Famine in Ireland in 1847, the Little Famine in Ireland in 1880, and Russian relief in 1892. American Jews donated not only to Jewish causes but joined with their fellow Americans in a number of voluntary efforts in international philanthropy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

According to historian Joseph Rappaport, “the war relief movement exhibited the degree to which American Jewry was willing and able to contribute to the victims of the conflict.”<sup>4</sup> Divided before the war, the relief campaign “produced the most sustained period of Jewish unity up to that time.”<sup>5</sup> Also, as Daniel Soyer, another historian of Jewish organizational life, concluded: “the war crisis brought an unprecedented degree of

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2. *Schenectady Gazette*, November 20, 1905. Also, see *New York Times*, November 26, 1905.

3. Mark Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 18.

4. Joseph Rappaport, *Hands Across the Sea: Jewish Immigrants and World War I* (Lanham, Maryland: Hamilton Books, 2005), 81. For Jewish contributions to general American international philanthropy in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, see: Merle Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 84, 105, 110-111. Curti covers the campaign for war relief during World War I, 199-258. For an example of Jewish contributions to the Great Famine, see: Harvey Strum, “Pennsylvania and Irish Famine Relief, 1846-1847,” *Pennsylvania History* 81:3 (Summer 2014): 278, 284, 294-5, 299. For the war relief campaign, also see: Oscar Handlin, *A Continuing Task: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1914-1964* (New York: Random House, 1964), 19-33.

5. Christopher Sterba, *Good Americans: Italian and Jewish Immigrants During the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 25.

unity among previously hostile segments of the Jewish community.”<sup>6</sup> In New York City, uptown and downtown Jews of German and East European origin, respectively, worked together for war relief. Jews divided by religious differences, Reform and Orthodox, joined to aid their fellow Jews in Europe. Conservatives, radicals, and professional communal workers all agreed to place the plight of European Jewry and their Palestinian brethren as their primary concern. In the smaller Jewish communities of the Capital District (Schenectady, Albany, and Troy), Jews put aside similar differences and concentrated their efforts on war relief. Like their co-religionists in New York City and other major cities, Jews of the Capital District divided along German-Eastern European and Reform-Orthodox lines. Branches of radical movements existed in upstate New York, but as in New York City the war created a sense of unity because of the need to coordinate fundraising for the Jews of Europe. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee donated \$20 million by 1918 to assist fellow Jews in Europe, purchasing clothes and medical supplies and sponsoring soup kitchens and schools. Additional funds were raised to assist Jews in Palestine. The American Jewish Relief Committee succeeded in persuading President Wilson to allow the shipment of relief supplies to Palestine aboard the collier *Vulcan* in March 1915. It landed at Jaffa bearing 1,000 tons of food. Jews of the Capital District had contributed to this shipment. Whether or not they supported the Zionist movement, American Jews united in fundraising for Jews facing food shortages or wartime displacement in Palestine. When it came to aiding Jews in Europe and Palestine, American Jews put aside their religious, ethnic, and ideological differences to help those in need. According to Daniel Soyer, “overseas relief work” as a result of the efforts to help Jews abroad during World War I became “a defining characteristic of American Jewry.”<sup>7</sup> Aid from Jewish immigrant communities to Jews in Europe during World War I helped foster a feeling of Americanization. By the end of the war, immigrant Jews were increasingly seeing themselves no longer as merely an extension of their old European hometowns transplanted to a foreign land, but as American Jews distinct from their brethren abroad.

Initially, members of the Orthodox community saw the need for unity in soliciting donations for relief to Jewish communities in Europe and organized the Central Relief Committee (CRC) in 1914. German American Jews who supported the American Jewish Committee created the American Jewish Relief Committee (AJRC), which combined with the CRC to form the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Joint). Labor and socialist groups active since 1914 in relief joined together in the summer of 1915 to form the People’s Relief Committee (PRC) and later united with the Joint. While each of the three committees appealed to different segments of the American Jewish community, the Joint fulfilled the need of Jewish leaders for an organization that efficiently delivered aid with a minimum of duplication. Since it represented all Jewish

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6. Daniel Soyer, *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880-1939* (Cambridge, MA. and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 162.

7. *Ibid.*

relief campaigns in the United States, the Joint served as the clearing house for the collections and unified the Jewish campaign for overseas relief. The Jewish tradition of material support to Jews in need found a concrete expression in the relief campaign to help Jews in Europe and Palestine.<sup>8</sup>

In the Capital District, relief campaigns began in each major city. Local efforts got a boost from the White House when President Woodrow Wilson declared January 27, 1916, Jewish Relief Day to highlight the needs of Jews in Europe. Jewish residents of Troy established the Troy Jewish Relief Committee, a branch of the American Jewish Relief Committee that became part of the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Starting in January 1916, the Troy Committee (which included a separate Ladies Committee chaired by Mrs. Charles Laub) solicited donations from Jews and non-Jews. They appealed not only to residents of Troy but to the Jewish community in Hoosick Falls, in northern Rensselaer County, as well as to Jewish farmers in Nassau and Schodak, in the southeastern part of the county. According to the Troy Jewish Relief Committee, "we have met with very encouraging success from all, regardless of race or creed," and Troy's Jews "feel deeply appreciative for the generous assistance offered them by their neighbors."<sup>9</sup>

Members of the Reform and Orthodox congregations joined in support of the effort, including, for example, Rabbi Hyman Lasker, leader of two Orthodox synagogues and an immigrant, and Isabella Hess, a leading member of the Reform congregation Berith Sholom, who later wrote the history of Reform Judaism in Troy on the sixty-fifth anniversary of the synagogue in 1935. Reform and Orthodox Jews worked together in Troy to solicit donations for European relief. Giving the effort an element of ecumenicalism, Troy Mayor Cornelius Burns and Irish Catholic priest, John Walsh supported the Jewish relief campaign. To further highlight the plight of European Jews, Rabbi Lasker later called on the Jews of Troy to gather at the Orthodox synagogue Sharah Tephilah on December 4, 1916, and pray for the suffering of 9 million Jews in Europe. Lasker also asked local Jews to fast on December 4 so they would feel the hunger of their brethren in Europe.



Rabbi Hyman Lasker,  
an Orthodox and  
Zionist rabbi from Troy

Renewed efforts to solicit donations for Jewish war relief began in early 1918 in response to an appeal from Henry Morgenthau, former U.S. ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, which appeared in the December issue of the *Jewish Chronicle*, the local Capital

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8. *Ibid.*, 165; Rappaport, 81.

9. Troy Jewish Relief Committee, January 22, 1916 in Abraham Karp, *The UJA in the Shaping of the American Jewish Community to Give Life* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), 53. *Troy Times*, January 22-29, 1916.

District Jewish newspaper. Morgenthau wanted American Jews to continue to send funds and medical supplies to Jews in Europe and Palestine. In the second round of fundraising in 1918, Rabbi Lasker led these efforts in the Orthodox congregations in Troy, and Reform Berith Sholom joined in soliciting donations. Over the next year, residents of Troy donated \$23,000 for Jewish war relief. Fundraising for war relief continued into 1919 to help Jewish victims of war-devastated Europe.<sup>10</sup>

The Albany committee was headed by notables from the German Jewish community like Rabbi Max Schlesinger of the Reform congregation Beth Emeth, Albert Hessberg, Benjamin Mann, and Leonard Waldman. Members of Beth Emeth assumed leadership of the fundraising drives in Albany, raising \$10,000. However, all members of the Jewish community contributed to war relief, including members of Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox congregations as well as members of Socialist and socialist Zionist organizations. Contributions came in from the Yiddish working class and socialist Local 320 of the Workmen's Circle, socialist labor-oriented Zionist Poale Zion, the working-class Hebrew Tailors Association, and the middle class Washington Lodge of Masons, predominately Jewish. The diversity of support in Albany for Jewish war relief suggests the willingness of Capital District Jews to unite to aid brethren in Europe and Palestine suffering from displacement and hunger produced by World War I.<sup>11</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the war, Albany Jews participated in another round of fundraising to aid Jews who suffered during World War I. Throughout the war, the Albany Jewish community donated to war relief; by February 1918, their donations totaled \$60,000. According to the congregational history of Beth Emeth, "every congregation, Orthodox and Reform, and every organization without exception participated in the Drive" that netted \$109,000.<sup>12</sup>

Workmen's Circle initiated the first campaign for war relief in Schenectady in 1914. Activities of the Schenectady chapter preceded the formation of the Jewish Peoples Relief Committee of labor and socialist groups nationally. Workmen's Circle organized the first mass meeting in Schenectady in October 1914. Other Schenectady Jewish groups joined the movement for war relief and attended mass meeting held at Orthodox synagogue Agudat Achim. By September 1915, the Schenectady community organized a relief program in conjunction with the establishment of a local chapter of the American Jewish Congress. This led to "a house to house canvass...twice a month" for the remainder of the year.<sup>13</sup> After President Wilson's declaration of Jewish Relief Day in 1916, Schenectady Mayor George Lunn, a socialist, declared Thursday, January 27, as a day for raising funds to succor "the destitute Jews in the war stricken

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10. *Jewish Chronicle*, December 1917.

11. *Albany Times Union*, January 16-19, 1916; Knickerbocker Press, January 23-28, 1916; *Albany Evening Journal*, January 22-28, 1916.

12. Congregation Beth Emeth Beth Emeth Yearbook, 1914-1922, (Albany, Beth Emeth, 1922) 73-76. Copy in Beth Emeth Archives and Albany Public Library.

13. "Jewish War Relief," *Tri-City Jewish Chronicle*, February 11, 1918, 92.

countries of Europe.”<sup>14</sup>

Members of the Jewish community attended a mass meeting held on January 26 and donated \$700. The *Schenectady Union-Star* observed: “the gathering was of the Jewish of moderate circumstances, which makes the sum given more appreciated.”<sup>15</sup>

This analysis reflected the reality that in 1916 Schenectady’s Jewish community consisted primarily of immigrants of modest means.

Jews in the Capital District communities of Albany, Troy, and Schenectady as well as in the smaller neighboring communities of Cohoes, Hoosick Falls, Nassau, Glens Falls, Amsterdam, Gloversville, and Saratoga Springs were primarily Jewish immigrants who had arrived since 1880 from Central and Eastern Europe. The larger cities of Albany, Schenectady, and Troy contained an older Jewish community of German Jews and their American-born descendants who belonged to Reform congregations. They were middle class and dominated leadership roles in the community. However, a majority of Jews in those cities were recent immigrants of modest means who had arrived from Eastern Europe since 1880 and joined Orthodox congregations. By 1914 there was only one Conservative congregation, formed in 1911, in the Capital District, located in Albany. Many of the recent arrivals supported Socialism. The Jews of the Capital District, like their brethren in New York City, were split by income level, degree of assimilation, political perspective and religious affiliation.

As a result of the January 16 mass meeting, contributions came in from individuals, Jewish businesses, and organizations, including Workmen’s Circle, the Polish Orthodox synagogue Ohab Sholom, Moriah Zionist Association, and the recently formed chapter of the women’s Zionist group Hadassah. Speakers included Orthodox and Reform rabbis from Schenectady and Troy, a representative of Mayor Lunn and Father John Reilly of the city’s St. John’s Catholic Church, who consistently showed up at Jewish events from 1916 until his death in 1945. By the time the relief campaign ended, 200 members of the community had solicited over \$2,000 in donations.

Relief efforts continued throughout the war. The community sponsored a dance and concert in May 1916 to raise funds. Over the summer of 1916, Jacob Kaplan and William Siegel—“two of the foremost relief workers”—reorganized the local relief campaign. In cooperation with the national organization, of the PRC, Rabbi Joseph Jasín, the new rabbi at Reform Gates of Heaven, assumed leadership of the United Jewish Relief Committee, organized in December 1916. All the Jewish organizations and synagogues in Schenectady agreed to cooperate. They elected Rabbi Jasín president; Louis Golub, a grocer and socialist, financial secretary; and Mrs. Myer Mann, a member of the Reform congregation, treasurer. On February 4, 1917, Jewish residents filled Van Curler Theater for another mass meeting chaired by Rabbi Jasín.

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14. *Schenectady Union-Star*. January 26, 1916.

15. *Ibid*, January 27, 1916.



**George Lunn, Socialist (then Democrat) Mayor of Schenectady, was an advocate for creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. From the George Grantham Bain Collection (Library of Congress)**

Mayor Lunn gave one of the main speeches, showing the support of the secular political leadership.<sup>16</sup> Whether in Troy or Schenectady, local politicians endorsed the campaign for Jewish war relief. For the Jewish community, the presence of local political leaders demonstrated that Jews had become accepted parts of the community and furthered the Americanization of the Jewish immigrant community. By February 1918, the total sum raised in Schenectady since 1914 reached over \$12,000. However, Rabbi Jasin felt the community should have done more, so in February 1918 he wrote a headline story in the *Tri-City Jewish Chronicle*, the Capital District's Jewish weekly, entitled "The Shame of Schenectady Jews."<sup>17</sup> Rabbi Jasin expressed his concern that poorer Jews in the community contributed beyond their means to Jewish relief while "wealthier Jews of Schenectady are earning for their community an unenviable distinction among American Jewish centers by their ungenerous response" to the needs of Jews in Europe and Palestine.<sup>18</sup>

The national and local Jewish community continued to solicit funds for war-ravaged Jewish communities of Europe and Palestine through 1919. By November 1919, Schenectady's total of wartime aid reached \$30,000. Smaller Jewish communities just west of Schenectady also pitched in, with Jews in Gloversville donating \$17,000 and those in Amsterdam contributing \$10,000 for war relief by 1919. Appeals for war relief did not end with the armistice, as the Russian Civil War led to a renewed appeal to help Jewish victims. Another relief effort chaired by businessman Albert Levi and former Schenectady City Clerk Louis M. King began on February 9, 1922, as Jews met at a local high school. Reform Rabbi Goodman Lipkind of Gates of Heaven gave the prayer, "impressive and eloquent in its appeal."<sup>19</sup> Money donated went to aid Jews in Poland, Lithuania, and the Soviet Union. Once again, Jews of Schenectady came to the aid of their co-religionists abroad. Among Gentile contributors, the donations of Father Reilly and his sister stood out. The roles of Albert Levi and Louis King, sons of Jewish immigrants, revealed the change in Jewish leaders as the American-born generation assumed leadership in the Jewish community. Jews in Troy and Albany joined in this effort; once again, members of the Capital District Jewish community aided Europe's war-weary Jews.

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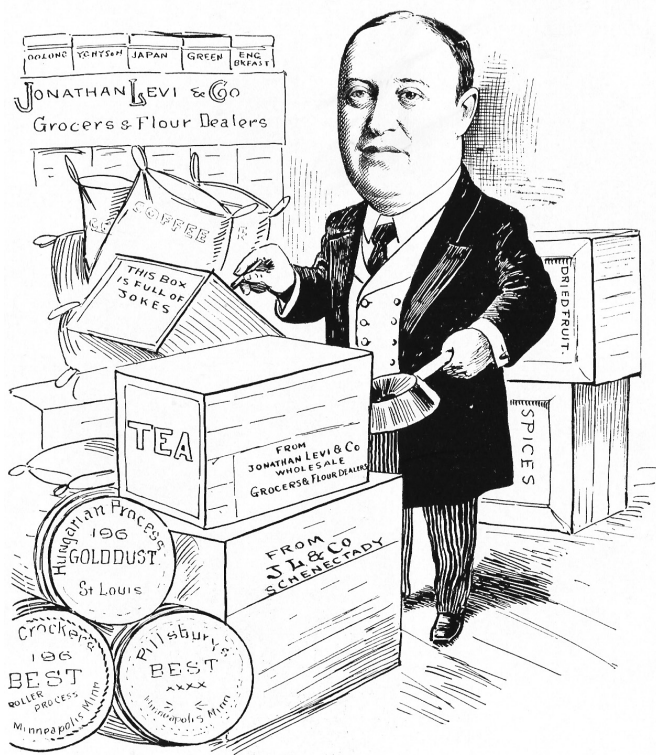
16. *Ibid*, February 3, 1917; *Schenectady Gazette*, February 3, 5, 1917.

17. Joseph Jasin, "Shame of Schenectady Jews," *Tri-City Jewish Chronicle*, January 1918, 11. Copies of the paper are available on microfilm at the New York State Library in Albany and the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

18. *Ibid*.

19. *Schenectady Gazette*, September 3, 1919, February 9-10, 1922.





Albert Levi, a Jewish businessman from Schenectady active in war relief efforts for displaced Jews in Europe and Palestine during and after World War I (courtesy Schenectady County Historical Society)

## Zionism

The plight of the Jews of Europe during World War I stimulated the growth of American Zionism. According to historian Christopher Sterba, “relief efforts and hopes for security in the postwar future pointed increasingly to Palestine.”<sup>20</sup> Memberships in American Zionist organizations grew from 15,000 in 1914 to 200,000 by November 1918. Support for the Zionist movement came from Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and from many Orthodox Jews. In New York City, many of the uptown German Jews and non-Zionist radicals and socialists within the immigrant community ended their opposition to Zionism because they also shared the view that Zionism provided a refuge for European Jewry. Labor groups like the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU), previously hostile to Zionism as false nationalism, embraced Zionism for the same reason. Jews were suffering in Europe from the impact of World War I. A Jewish homeland in Palestine would become a refuge, especially if a proposed Jewish state could be built around Socialist principles. The ILGWU embraced the Socialist

20. Sterba, 170.

Labor Zionism of Poale Zion. Of course, not all radicals would make the leap to Labor Zionism; some still hoped for a new international order without nationalism.

Assimilated American Jews like Louis Brandeis, the first Jew appointed to the Supreme Court, endorsed Zionism as leading to a democratic and progressive society.<sup>21</sup> American Jews would not go to Palestine, but it would become the refuge for oppressed Jews from Europe. With President Wilson's endorsement of aid to Palestinian Jews and the Balfour Declaration, American Jews felt safe from the charge of dual loyalty, another reason support for Zionism rose during World War I. Speaking before a meeting of Reform Jewish leaders in New York City in 1915, three years before the Balfour Declaration, Louis Brandeis argued that no conflict existed between Zionism and American patriotism: "Let no American imagine that Zionism is inconsistent with Patriotism... Every American Jew who aids in advancing the Jewish settlement in Palestine... will be a better American for doing so."<sup>22</sup>

Zionist movements in the Capital District began twenty years before the Balfour Declaration with the formation of the Schenectady Zionist District in 1898 and similar Zionist groups at the same time in Troy and Albany. Representatives from the Troy, Albany, and Glens Falls chapters attended the Third Annual Convention of the Federation of American Zionists in New York City in 1900. This included female delegates representing the Daughters of Zion chapter in Troy. Albany Zionists actively pushed the sale of Jewish National Fund stamps. The influx of new immigrants increased membership in Zionist groups in the Capital District. Just before the war Schenectady Jews established a second Zionist group, Mount Moriah Zionist Association, in 1913, and representatives of it attended the June 1914 meeting of the Federation of American Zionists.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, Jews in Albany expanded "intensive and widespread Zionist activities" via the Sons and Daughters of Zion.<sup>24</sup> Religious Zionists formed a branch of Mizrachi in Albany in 1914 after national Mizrachi leader Rabbi Meyer Berlin visited Albany. Originally formed in the United States in 1902, Mizrachi combined Zionism with religious tradition. Chapters of Mizrachi developed in other upstate Jewish communities like Troy and Buffalo. Local Zionists attended the Twentieth Convention of the Federation in June 1917; delegates pledged "whole hearted support of all American Zionists to our government and the successful prosecution of the war."<sup>25</sup> Zionists in the Capital District and at the national convention wanted to make clear their patriotism and support for the Allies in World War I. Agreeing with Brandeis, they saw Zionism as not only expressing Jewish nationalism but also American patriotism. For immigrant

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21. *Ibid*, 170-171.

22. Rappaport, 76-77. Rappaport makes many of the same points as Sterba about the growth of Zionism in the Jewish community.

23. Miss Bertha Pool, Seventeenth Annual Convention of American Zionists, June 30, 1914, *The Maccabean*, 1914, 25.

24. Louis Silver, "Jews of Albany, N.Y., 1655-1914," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* (1954), 245.

25. Rappaport, 112.

Jews from Eastern Europe, Zionism allowed them to identify with a Jewish nationalist movement and eased their adaptation to becoming Americans.

By November 1915, a women's Zionist organization, Hadassah, established a Schenectady chapter.<sup>26</sup> Originally established by Henrietta Szold in 1912, the women's branch of American Zionism grew rapidly during the war years, organizing chapters throughout Jewish communities in upstate New York like Buffalo, Syracuse, and Rochester.<sup>27</sup> By the 1920s, Jewish women organized chapters of Hadassah in Albany, Troy, and Gloversville. The organization solicited money to support Jewish institutions and enterprises in Palestine and promote the Zionist movement in the United States. Hadassah became the most effective and largest women's Zionist organization in the nation.

In 1917, a Socialist Zionist group, Poali Zion (Workers of Zion), the Socialist Labor Party organized a local branch. Originally organized in Europe, Dov Borochoy and Joseph Barondness brought it to New York City. Upstate branches were established in communities like Buffalo and Syracuse.<sup>28</sup> Poali Zion especially appealed to working-class Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe because it combined Socialism and Zionism. The Schenectady chapter sent a representative, William Siegel, to the annual convention of Poali Zion in December 1917. The war stimulated the growth of the Zionist movement in the Capital District and spurred Jews to contribute to Zionist causes and call for the restoration of a Jewish homeland in Palestine as a refuge for European Jewry. Capital District Jews, like American Jews elsewhere, did not see Palestine as a homeland for American Jews or the immigrants who arrived in the United States from Eastern Europe.

Support for Zionism got a boost locally in December 1917 when Congressman George Lunn, the former Socialist mayor of Schenectady, introduced a resolution in Congress endorsing a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Throughout 1918 and 1919, the *Jewish Chronicle* reported on Zionist activities, meetings, and fundraising in Schenectady and other Capital District Jewish communities. In Schenectady, the two Reform rabbis who served at Gates of Heaven during the war years supported Zionism. Schenectady Jews attended a Capital District Zionist meeting held in Albany in March 1919. The speakers included Reform Rabbi Jasin, former rabbi at Gates of Heaven, and Catholic priest Father John Reilly of Schenectady.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, Jews in Schenectady formed a chapter of the Zionist Organization of America and donated to the Palestine Restoration Fund. By February 1919, local Jews donated over \$5,000 for Palestine. Contributions came

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26. Report forms of the Schenectady chapter of Hadassah, 1916-27; *Hadassah Bulletin*, November 1915, June 1916. Hadassah Archives, New York City.

27. Bernard Rudolph, *From Minyan to a Community: A History of the Jews of Syracuse* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1970), 230-31; Selig Adler and Thomas Connolly, *From Ararat to Suburbia: The History of the Jewish Community of Buffalo* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960), 300; Stuart Rosenberg, *The Jewish Community of Rochester* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 230-31.

28. Rudolph, 150-51; Adler, 217; Rosenberg, 231-35.

from individuals, businesses, and Jewish organizations. Some of the most interesting donors were the bris party of Benjamin Dulub, the bar mitzvah party of Sam Dworsky, and the Levine-Greenblath wedding party. To further the Zionist cause, congregation Ohab Zedek held a memorial service in July 1919 for Theodore Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism.<sup>29</sup> In May 1920, Jewish residents held a special meeting at Orthodox synagogue Agudat Achim to support a Jewish homeland in Palestine. At least four rabbis took an active role in the meeting, including Reform Rabbi Kaufman of Gates of Heaven and Orthodox Rabbi Wolkowitz of Ohab Zedek, Rabbi Hinden of Adath Israel, and Rabbi Bielsky of Ohab Shalom. Later in 1927, when leading Zionist Chaim Weizman spoke in Albany, members of the Schenectady Jewish community participated in the meeting to promote Zionism.<sup>30</sup>

In the wake of the failed Russian Revolution of 1905, the first Poale Zionists immigrated to Albany and established a chapter of the labor Zionist group in 1906. Although small in numbers, its members actively campaigned to spread the labor Zionist message in the Capital District while maintaining contact with fellow labor Zionists across the United States and abroad. In 1912, Poale Zion started to organize a fraternal order—the Farband Labor Zionist Order. When the chapter was formed in Albany, it included some recent immigrants from Russia who identified with Socialists-Territorialists, willing to settle for a Jewish homeland outside of Palestine. The Albany branch succeeded in organizing the First Convention of Farband Labor Zionists, which met in Albany on December 30-31, 1912, and January 1, 1913. Farband was a mutual aid society that reached its peak nationally in 1914 with 30,000 members, including chapters in upstate New York communities like Rochester and Buffalo. Both Poale Zion and Farband succeeded in establishing chapters in the other Capital District Jewish communities. Farband advocated Yiddish language secular education; the Albany Farband founded one of the first Yiddish language Socialist schools for children in the United States.

The relative success of Poalei Zionists' wartime activities proved that the Labor Zionist message "could attract broad American Jewish interest and support." Their radical Socialist message worried mainstream Zionist groups. By the end of the war, American Zionism could not ignore Labor Zionists and they emerged as a "new pressure group within American Zionism."<sup>31</sup> The message of Labor Zionists would win over American Jews. By the 1930s, rabbis from Reform and Conservative Judaism endorsed Labor Zionism.<sup>32</sup>

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29. *Tri-City Jewish Chronicle*, January 1918, 5; *Schenectady Gazette*, July 26, 1919; *New Jewish Chronicle*, February to July 1919.

30. *Schenectady Gazette*, November 6, 1919, May 6, 1920, March 5, 1921; *Albany Knickerbocker Press*, January 17, 1927.

31. Silver, Albany, 246; Howard Sacher, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Random House, 1992), 259; Raider, *American Zionism*, 40-41.

32. Raider, 66-67.

One problem for Labor Zionists in the Capital District was the competition of the non-Zionist chapters of the Socialist Party and the Workmen's Circle. Albany hosted two chapters of The Workmen's Circle, founded in 1904 and 1907; other chapters existed in Troy and Schenectady. When the Farband in Albany ran out of funds to support the Yiddish language secular school, the Workmen's Circle established its own school and successfully ran it until the late 1930s. These groups competed for the same constituency of secular, Socialist-oriented Jewish immigrants, and the 1921 and 1924 immigration laws that restricted the flow of Yiddish-speaking Jews from Eastern Europe limited the growth of Labor Zionists and non-Zionist Yiddish Socialist groups in the Capital District.

Meanwhile, the Federation of American Zionists created a youth group, Young Judea, in 1909. By World War I, it had organized 175 chapters in cities across the United States, including Albany, Schenectady, and Troy. Young Judea appealed to Jewish boys and girls ages eleven to eighteen. The organization encouraged teens to take an active role in supporting Zionist activities. Chapters met in local YMHAs and later Jewish Community Centers. During World War I, members participated in fundraising for war relief for the Jews of Europe and Palestine. Members graduated into Collegiate Zionist chapters that Jewish college students started at local colleges or the Sons and Daughters of Zion.

Enthusiasm for Zionism also led to the creation of a Hebrew School in Albany in the fall of 1919 by a group of young people who wanted to study Hebrew as an expression of their Zionism. A few young people went further: Several local Jewish boys joined the British-sponsored Jewish Legion as part of the 2,000 American Jews who served in Palestine during World War I. The British openly recruited Jewish immigrants and established recruiting offices in major cities like Philadelphia and New York. In fact, one local Jewish boy, sixteen-year-old Russian immigrant Meyer Cramer, left his home in Cohoes (near Albany) to defend Jewish settlers in Palestine before joining the U.S. infantry during the war.<sup>33</sup>

World War I, combined with the Balfour Declaration and President Wilson's approval of Zionism, produced the growth of Zionist activities in Capital District communities. The local Jewish newspaper kept tabs on the many Zionist-related events and activities that Capital District Jews engaged in, especially fundraising for the Jews of Palestine. In 1917, for example, Reform Rabbi Jasin of Schenectady delivered an impassioned Zionist appeal in Yiddish in the neighboring Mohawk Valley community of Amsterdam. Later, in May 1918, Albany Jews contributed to the Palestinian National Fund during the Fifth Annual Flower Day for Palestine. In Troy, Orthodox Rabbi Lasker led a fundraising campaign in February 1919 for Palestinian Jewry, and the Jewish communities of Troy, Albany, and Schenectady joined in a collection of clothes for the Palestine Restoration Fund sponsored by the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA). Throughout 1918 and

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33. *Albany Times Union*, November 11, 1993.

1919, Jewish communities of the Capital District participated in fundraising for Jews in Palestine and to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Local Jews invited prominent Zionist speakers to the Capital District. Louis Lipsky, executive chairman of the Federation of American Zionists, spoke at the home of a Jewish family in Schenectady in March 1918. In November 1919, Lipsky returned to the region and gave an impassioned appeal for the Zionist cause at School 14 in Albany. His presence led to several mass meetings by Albany Zionists in 1919. Another prominent Zionist, Jacob De Haas, an English Zionist and close associate of Theodore Herzl (and later Executive Secretary of the ZOA), spoke in Albany in November 1919. By that year, the enthusiasm for Zionism led to the formation of chapters of the ZOA in Albany, Schenectady, Troy, Hudson, Glens Falls, Amsterdam, and Gloversville. Representatives of the Capital District ZOA branches attended a regional conference of the ZOA in Syracuse in 1919. The ZOA succeeded the Federation of American Zionists; in 1919, it had 140,000 members nationally, while the women's auxiliary Hadassah had another 35,000 members.

During World War I, the Reform rabbis in Schenectady supported Zionism. The two leading rabbis in the Capital District most supportive of Zionism were Reform Rabbi Jasin of Schenectady and Orthodox Rabbi Lasker of Troy. However, the rabbinical leadership of the oldest congregation in the Capital District, Beth Emeth in Albany, vigorously opposed Zionism. The most famous local confrontation between Zionists and anti-Zionists took place just after World War I. It reflected the division in Albany between German Jews and Eastern European Jews. While both groups worked together to protest Russian pogroms in 1905 and for Jewish war relief for Europe and Palestine during World War I, Zionism produced a split in the community. The leading rabbis at Beth Emeth and some of its prominent congregants signed a public statement against Zionism. However, they did not speak for all members of the congregation, since many took part in pro-Zionist meetings in the late 1920s. Julius Kahn, an influential Republican



**Anti-Zionist Rabbi  
Max Schlesinger**  
(courtesy of the archives  
of Beth Emeth, Albany)

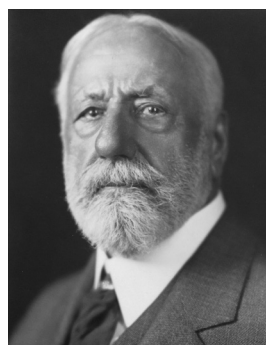
Jewish Congressman from California, sent a petition with the names of 300 leading American Jews to President Wilson at the Paris Peace Conference at Versailles to obstruct American recognition of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. In March 1919, Kahn joined with Professor Morris Jastrow of the University of Pennsylvania in a "Memorandum of Conscience" urging repeal of the Balfour Declaration and the end of American support for it. It got widespread publicity because Adolph Ochs of *The New York Times* signed it. Other signees included Bernard Baruch and Henry Morgenthau. Eleven members of Beth Emeth also signed the anti-Zionist petition, among them the current Rabbi Eli Mayer and semi-retired Rabbi Max Schlesinger, the most prominent rabbinical



figure in Albany. A former rabbi, Samuel Goldenson, who served as rabbi at Beth Emeth from 1907 to '18 before taking a pulpit in Pittsburgh, also signed the document, making his anti-Zionism public. His famous line was "My Palestine is Palestine, Texas." Leading Beth Emeth congregant Simon Rosendale, a historian, lawyer, and former Attorney General of New York, did what he could to block Zionist activities in Albany. Other major signers were Benjamin Mann and Charles Stern, trustees of the synagogue, and influential congregants Bertram Aufseesser, Henry Hirschfeld, Henry Stern, Albert Hessberg, and David Muhlfelder.

The Albany chapter of ZOA responded by calling a mass meeting for March 16, 1919, in Chancellor's Hall at the State Education Building. A lively debate developed when Rabbi Eli Mayer demanded the right to defend the anti-Zionist position. Mayer argued that "no Jew can be a good American and a Zionist at the same time," repudiating the position taken by Louis Brandeis. The dual loyalty charge emerged as the chief weapon anti-Zionist Reform Jews in Albany used for the next twenty years to try to silence supporters of Zionism. Lil Cohen, a Schenectady Jew, remembered that her husband Joe, born in Palestine and an active Zionist, ran into these charges years later in Schenectady. Rabbi Mayer's charge of dual loyalty reverberated for decades after 1919 in Jewish communities in the Capital District as anti-Zionist Jews led by Simon Rosendale would repeat it.

When Mayer made the charge of dual loyalty in 1919, the audience responded with "It's a lie." However, Mayer kept at it, saying: "Which flag will you serve, the Jewish flag or the American flag or will you stand by your country." Zionist speakers like Major Joseph Bondy of Syracuse, New York City lawyer Morris Rothenberg, and Louis Lipsky of the ZOA responded in defense of Zionism. Governor Al Smith sent a telegram to the meeting endorsing Zionism and Schenectady's Father John Reilly spoke in favor of Zionism, as did a local Baptist minister. Father Reilly told the audience that the American Catholic Church and the Papacy supported the Jewish claim to a homeland in Palestine. Reform Rabbi Jasin also spoke in favor of Zionism. Two months later, the New York State Legislature passed resolutions endorsing Zionism.<sup>34</sup>



**Simon Rosendale,  
Attorney General  
of New York, member of  
Beth Emeth, Albany, and  
a leading Anti-Zionist  
(courtesy of the archives  
of Beth Emeth, Albany)**

The confrontation in Albany suggested that while the majority of Jews in the Capital District (including many Reform Jews) supported Zionism, the leadership and prominent congregants in Albany's Beth Emeth saw Zionism as a threat to their

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34. *New Jewish Chronicle*, March 19, 1919. Thirteen Albanian Jews signed the petition. *Albany Knickerbocker Press*, March 17, 1919. Both contain accounts of the meeting; *New York Times*, March 5, 1919. Sacher, *Jews in America*, 259; Melvin Urofsky, *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975), 230.

American identity. Less publicly, some Reform Jews in Schenectady and Troy agreed with the opposition to Zionism, and the Reform-based National Council of Women's chapters in the Capital District also did not support it. This division in the Jewish community remained until the rise of Hitler. Kristallnacht convinced the anti-Zionist segment of Reform Jews that Palestine and Zionism could provide the only refuge for Germany's Jews, because restrictive American immigration laws limited the number of German and Austrian Jews able to enter the United States.



Group of unknown soldiers, from the collection of Hershel Graubart  
(courtesy Schenectady County Historical Society)

## Kaddish for President Harding

One of the major elements in the history of Jewish communities in the Capital District and in American Jewish history was the desire of Jewish immigrants and American-born Jews to prove they were Americans. When major events took place, whether wars or national tragedies, Jews joined with other Americans to show their loyalty to their adopted country. Jews from the Capital District fought in the Civil War or performed services aiding the war effort. When Abraham Lincoln was killed, Jews in all Capital District Jewish communities mourned the martyred President's passing. In Troy, for example, "the synagogue of the Jewish congregation, Anshe Chesed, was draped in mourning" and all of the city's Jews, along with many non-Jewish Germans, joined in a special tribute to the fallen leader. In 1881, special services were held in area congregations in Troy, Albany, and Schenectady when President James Garfield was shot, and again in 1901 after the death of President William McKinley.<sup>35</sup>

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35. Citizens of Troy, *Tribute of Respect by the Citizens of Troy to the Memory of Abraham Lincoln* (Albany: J. Munsell, 1865), 157; *Troy Press*, September 27, 1881; *Troy Daily Times*, September 20, 1901.

World War I brought the same response from Capital District Jews, who rallied to support America's role in the war in 1917 and '18. At least 338 Jews from Albany served in the military, with seven dying during the war. Several of the men in the military belonged to the YMHA baseball team and kept in contact through the Albany branch of the Jewish Welfare Board, an organization formed three days after American entrance into the war to assist Jewish men in the military.<sup>36</sup> Private Julius Friedman, stationed in Georgia, missed the sounds of "our club Victoria," while Jacob Patlen, also stationed in Georgia, rejoiced that the Albany YMHA baseball team defeated the Schenectady team. "I would like the box score," Jacob wrote. "because my heart is in the old game."<sup>37</sup> Using baseball terminology, Morris Barash, serving on the frontlines in France in the summer of 1918, wrote that German airmen, "Jerry pays us his daily visit with his deadly bombs, but we all pretty good baseball players so we should worry."<sup>38</sup>

Symbolizing the identification of the Jewish community with the war effort, Rabbi Samuel Goldenson of Beth Emeth draped an American flag "over the Pulpit and [it] remained there until peace was effected."<sup>39</sup> The YMHA and YWHA joined together in the Welfare Board to help Jewish Albanians stationed in other parts of the United States or in Europe. They also assisted Jewish men stationed in the Capital District. As men left for service, the Welfare Board honored them with comfort kits and sweaters, and a reception at the Hebrew Educational Institute.<sup>40</sup> Congregations raised money to buy war bonds and participated in patriotic activities to show support for the war, such as Rabbi Goldenson's participation in a citywide event to send off a group of 371 Albany men to military service.<sup>41</sup> When the war ended, Temple Beth Emeth held a joint Thanksgiving service with the First Unitarian Church, starting an ecumenical tradition of the Reform congregation.<sup>42</sup> The congregation also joined with the Second Presbyterian Church in a Joint Victory Service.<sup>43</sup> All the Jewish congregations and organizations held a joint memorial service in May 1919 to honor the seven Jewish men from Albany who died in the war.<sup>44</sup> In 1921, Memorial Day services honoring those who died during World War I included the "reading of Catholic, Protestant and Jewish religious rituals."<sup>45</sup> These public events recognized Jews as Americans, reassur-

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36. Beth Emeth Congregation, *Beth Emeth Yearbook*, 1914-1922, 65-77; Sterba, 77.

37. A.P. Lewis to Dear Brother, July 11, 1918, Albany Branch of the Jewish Welfare Board, Private Collection of Rabbi Israel Rubin, Congregation Shomray Torah, Albany, New York. For additional information on the Welfare Board see Mary Snyder to brother, April 6, 1918, Harry Cutler to A.P. Lewis, August 25, 1919, Minutes, Welfare Board, June 26, 1918 in the Collection of Rabbi Rubin.

38. *Ibid*; Albany Knickerbocker Press, November 30, 1918.

39. Congregation Beth Emeth, Congregation Beth Emeth, 1838-1938 (Albany: Beth Emeth, 1938), Beth Emeth Archives and New York State Library.

40. *Albany Knickerbocker Press*, April 5, 1918.

41. *Ibid*, June 27, 1918.

42. *Albany Evening Journal*, November 27, 1918.

43. *Ibid*, November 16, 1918.

44. *Albany Knickerbocker Press*, May 28, 1919.

45. *Ibid*, May 27, 29, 31, 1921.



**Bernard Graubart (left), from Schenectady, and another soldier, c.1917-18, from the collection of Hershel Graubart (courtesy Schenectady County Historical Society)**

ing Albany's Jews of their place in American society, with the 1919 memorial service reinforcing the community's identity as both Jews and Americans.

Similarly, the local Jewish newspaper printed the listings of every Jew in Albany, Schenectady, Troy, Amsterdam, Cohoes, and Gloversville who volunteered or was drafted for service. Schenectady and Troy Jews each organized a chapter of the Jewish Welfare Board to provide aid to Jewish soldiers from the area. In Schenectady, the Welfare Board also provided assistance to Jewish men from outside the Capital District stationed in a military camp in South Schenectady. The board also kept up correspondence with local boys stationed in army camps around the United States and in France. The Troy branch and the YMHA did the same, providing patriotic service to aid Jews in the Army and Navy. Because of the war-related activities of the YMHA movement, President Wilson blessed it, reassuring American Jews always concerned about their acceptance within American society.<sup>46</sup>

Boys from Schenectady missed the competitions with their Albany co-religionists in baseball games sponsored by the YMHAs. The *Tri-City Jewish Chronicle* reported when boys left for military service and when they arrived home on leave. Synagogues in Schenectady and Troy followed the lead of Albany's Beth Emeth by putting up service flags to represent men from their congregations in service during the war. The Jewish Welfare Board in Schenectady arranged send-offs for men called up and "bid our boys goodbye." At the end of the war, it documented the local men who lost their lives in

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46. *Troy Times*, February 24, 1918; *Troy Record*, February 13, 1918.

service to their country. At the request of President Wilson, all the congregations in Schenectady, Troy, and Albany joined in a national day of thanksgiving for the end of the war. In Schenectady, people gathered at Agudat Achim, the Orthodox synagogue of Russian immigrants. Rabbi Zorch Bielsky of the Orthodox congregation Ohab Sholom of Polish Jews led the memorial prayer, the kaddish, for the men who died in battle, while Reform Rabbi Joseph Jasin of Gates of Heaven delivered the sermon.<sup>47</sup> The commemorations in Troy, Albany, and Schenectady reinforced the sense that Jewish immigrants and their children had become Americans, and service in the war proved their patriotism and acceptance into American society.

Five years after the war, President Warren Harding died of natural causes in 1923. His death provided another opportunity for the Jewish community of the Capital District to prove their loyalty and patriotism. Jews in each of the Capital District communities held special prayers for the late President. For example, all the congregations in Schenectady gathered at Agudat Achim for a joint service. Similarly, in Troy Rabbi Lasker organized a memorial service and Jews from the city's four congregations met at Sharah Tephilah. Lasker blessed Harding for his endorsement "that we, Israelites should be recognized as a nation with a claim to our ancient home, Palestine."<sup>48</sup> In his tribute, Lasker demonstrated that Jewish immigrants to the United States could be both American patriots and Zionists, the point made by Brandeis in 1915. World War I provided an opportunity for American Jews and Jewish immigrants to show their loyalty to America. As historian Christopher Sterba observed: "baseball and the diaspora, shtetl migrants and the United States Army, John Phillip Souza and Theodore Herzl, the war brought these disparate elements together, for the time being they were able to work together toward a common goal."<sup>49</sup>

## Pogroms' Aftermath

News of pogroms in the Ukraine and Poland and continued anti-Semitic outbursts in Romania led the Jewish communities of the Capital District to organize, protest, and request the intervention of the American government to stop attacks on Jews in Eastern Europe. Jewish war veterans returning to New York City organized marches against these pogroms on May 21 and November 24, 1919. Thousands of Jews were killed in Poland and Romania. At least 120 Jewish communities were attacked, but the magnitude of the killings in Ukraine exceeded any known in the twentieth century until the Holocaust. At least 40,000 were killed initially and as many as 250,000 died during attacks by White Army, Red Army, Polish Army, and Ukrainian nationalists. Western Allies ignored the killings of Jews in the immediate postwar period. The pogroms in Europe led to the "Mourners" Parade in New York City, with 200,000 to

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47. *Tri-City Jewish Chronicle*, 1917-18; *Schenectady Gazette*, November 27, 1918.

48. *Schenectady Union Star*, August 1, 1923; *Troy Record*, August 10, 1923.

49. Sterba, 172.



500,000 marchers. New York City's Jews attempted to raise public awareness of events in Europe. Another 100,000 Jews there took to the streets on November 24 for a "Day of Sorrow" protesting the genocide in Ukraine.<sup>50</sup>

In Schenectady, 600 Jews held a mass meeting on May 14, 1919, to "indignantly protest against massacres in Eastern Europe and particularly Poland." Resolutions adopted at the meeting denounced the repeated massacres in Poland "in order to destroy Jewish population" and urged Secretary of State Robert Lansing and President Woodrow Wilson to protect the rights of Jews in Poland and Romania.<sup>51</sup> Speaking at the meeting were representatives of the different Jewish congregations, including Rabbi Israel Wolkowitz of the Hungarian congregation Ohab Zedek and Rabbi Solomon Hinden of the Russian congregation Adath Israel. Father John Reilly showed the support of the local Roman Catholic community. However, some Polish Catholics dissented; they sent a letter to one of the city's newspapers denying that any pogroms against Jews ever took place in Poland.<sup>52</sup> In reaction, Jews organized a self-defense organization and umbrella association for Schenectady's Jews, the Jewish Citizens Committee. Following the example of New York City Jews, the Jewish Citizens Committee encouraged a Capital District protest against the Ukrainian pogroms. On December 7, 1919, Jews of Schenectady, Troy, and Albany met at the Palace Theater in Schenectady to protest the pogroms in Ukraine. Speakers included Samuel Rolnick, chair of the Citizens Committee; Rabbi Max Kaufman of the Reform Gates of Heaven; and Maurice Graubart, a prominent jeweler and community leader. Schenectady Mayor George Lunn sent a telegram of support. Resolutions adopted at the meeting led to telegrams being sent to Congress and President Wilson to protest the anti-Semitic atrocities in Ukraine. These events showed that like their counterparts in New York City, Jews in Troy, Albany, and Schenectady supported international Jewish concerns—relief for Jews in Europe and Palestine; Zionism; and the plight of Jews in Poland, Romania, and Ukraine. Problems of Jews abroad unified Jewish communities, whether in New York City or Schenectady. While national political leaders did not necessarily respond to the concerns of upstate Jews, local politicians, especially mayors, endorsed these Jewish causes.

The problems of Jews in Palestine would bring a sense of unity to the Capital District's Jewish communities and the support of non-Jews to the tragedy of Jews in other lands. Arab riots that turned into pogroms against Jews broke out in Palestine in August 1929, leading to the deaths of sixty Jews in Hebron and forty-five Jews killed or wounded in Safed. The Arab riots led to widespread protests in the United States. At least 17,000 Jews participated in a protest in New York City. In the Capital District, Jews organized protests in Saratoga Springs, Troy, Albany, Schenectady, and Nassau.

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50. *Ibid*, 207-09; Soyer, 171.

51. United Jewish Community of Schenectady to Secretary of State Robert Lansing and President Woodrow Wilson, May 16, 1919, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

52. *New Jewish Chronicle*, June 1919, 156, November 1919, 282. *Schenectady Union Star*, May 15-16, December 8, 1919.

At a mass meeting of Jewish farmers in Nassau held in September 1929, Jews from three congregations serving Jewish farmers donated funds to help victims of the Arab pogroms.<sup>53</sup> In Albany, representatives of the various Jewish organizations (including Poale Zion, Mizrachi, and the ZOA) and synagogues met in late August to denounce the Arabs' conduct in Palestine and the British government's failure to stop the attacks. Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt endorsed the meeting and sent a representative (he was attending a similar protest in New York City). Several of the Jewish men who attended the meeting had served in the Jewish Legion with the British army during World War I. The meeting drafted resolutions and sent them to Secretary of State Henry Stimson and the British ambassador to the United States.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, the four congregations in Troy met and adopted similar resolutions condemning the violence and sent telegrams to Stimson and the British ambassador.<sup>55</sup> These protests and fundraising for the victims of the Arab riots suggested that when Jews faced violence or privations abroad, the Jews of the Capital District would join with Jews in major cities like New York to help—as the Jews of the Capital District did during World War I.

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53. *Nassau Town News*, September 20, 1929.

54. *Albany Knickerbocker Press*, August 27-29, 1929.

55. *Troy Record*, August 29-30, September 4, 1929.

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## Notes & Documents

*As a part of our ongoing efforts to document and share the many important people, places and resources throughout our region, articles appearing in Notes and Documents may present new resources or research as well as republications of rare and out-of-print materials.*

# The Forts and Fortifications of Colonial Albany

*Michael G. Laramie*

On a brisk fall day in 1609, a small ship cleared a spit of land known as Sandy Hook and entered what is now lower New York Harbor. Its captain, an Englishman in Dutch service by the name of Henry Hudson, was looking for the elusive Northwest Passage. Working his way up the East Coast, he had tried Chesapeake Bay and the Delaware River before arriving at the body of water soon to be called the North River, and later to bear his name. With the tide at their back, the crew of the Half Moon passed through the narrows formed by Staten Island and Long Island into the well-sheltered reaches of the upper harbor. From there they glided past a number of small islands and carefully made their way down the length of the main channel along the west shore of Manhattan, noting the entrances to the East River and Harlem River as they sailed by.<sup>1</sup>

By September 17, Hudson and his crew were well into the upper Hudson Valley and were quickly approaching the limits of their craft, having encountered a shoal in the middle of the river that drove them so far toward the shore in search of water that they twice ran aground.<sup>2</sup> The next day the crew navigated the shallow waters and carefully picked their way north past the outlet of Kinderhook Creek and a dozen small islands, finally anchoring in the vicinity of modern day Albany. Over the next few days, the ship's boat was sent ahead to test the waterway. At first there seemed promise, but as they pressed further they "found it to be at an end for shipping," having "found but seven foot water, and unconstant soundings." For Hudson there was no other conclusion: He had reached another dead end. With little else to be accomplished, he and his crew occupied the next few days trading for beaver and otter pelts from the Mahican tribe

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1. The three small islands were Governor's Island (formerly Nut Island or Black Tom), Ellis Island (formerly Gull or Oyster Island), and Liberty Island (formerly Bedloe's Island).

2. This area, above the outlet of Rondout Creek or Rondout Kill, is known as "The Flats." It is a shallow shoal that extends several miles down the center of the river. Such hazards are by no means unique on this waterway, but are far more prevalent as one travels farther north.

who controlled the region. The *Half Moon* and its famous captain departed shortly thereafter, never to return to the great North River, but news of their discoveries and the promising, profitable fur trade was enough to draw a number of Dutch vessels to this spot over the next few years. Not being military men by training, it is unlikely that any of these crews foresaw the long-term strategic value of the location or the future fortifications that would arise to secure it.<sup>3</sup>

In 1614, a post named Fort Nassau was constructed on Castle Island<sup>4</sup>, from which this lucrative trade could be continued on a more permanent basis. The region's first fort was an unassuming structure built like many of the early forts in North America, by men with little or no formal training in the art of military fortification. The site was cleared of debris and then a series of deep ditches were dug that traced out the position of the fort's walls. Freshly cut logs were placed vertically in the ditches, lashed together, and the trenches then filled in with burnt earth and gravel to support the entire structure.<sup>5</sup> In its completed form the stronghold was nothing more than a square palisade, measuring fifty feet to a side with an eighteen-foot-wide moat dug about its perimeter, and a drawbridge at the main gate. Inside this stockade sat a thirty-six by twenty-six-foot trading house. It contained not only the trade goods, but acted as the living quarters for the dozen or so traders who occupied the post. A pair of light cannon sat within the fort's parade ground for defense, while eleven *pierriers*, small swivel guns designed to fire rock projectiles, lined the structure's walls. As it was, Fort Nassau's days were numbered. While seemingly an excellent defensive choice, low-lying Castle Island was subject to the annual ravages of the Hudson River. In the spring of 1617, the fort was so badly damaged by floodwaters that its occupants were forced to abandon the structure and build a new one on the west bank of the river a few miles to the south.<sup>6</sup>

In 1624, the second Fort Nassau was replaced by a larger structure to better accommodate the burgeoning fur trade. Fort Orange, as it was called, was moved back up the river almost opposite the old Fort Nassau on Castle Island. A four-bastioned structure,

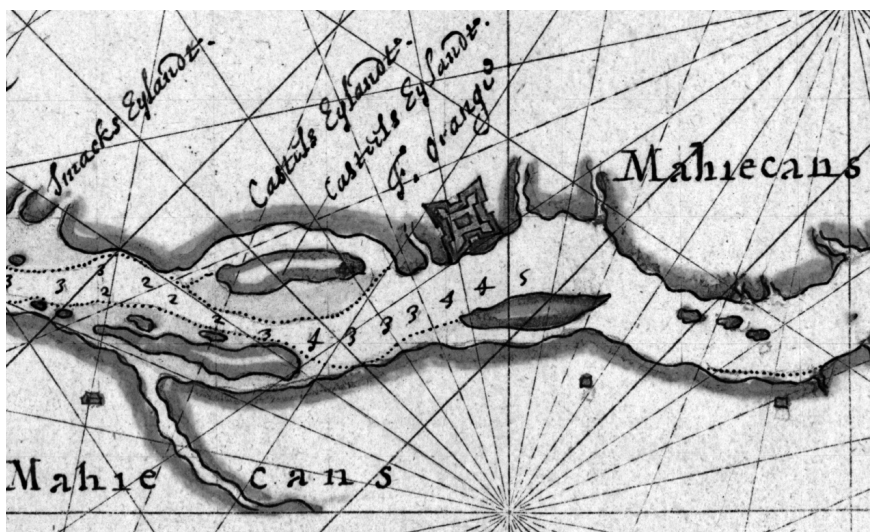
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3. J. Franklin Jameson, ed., *Narratives of the New Netherlands, 1609-1664*, (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1909) 21-23. Emanuel Van Meteren in his 1611 A.D., *History of the New Netherlands* states that Hudson's farthest penetration up the river was 42°40' N., which is close to the position of modern day Albany. (*Narratives of the New Netherlands, 1609-1664*, 7).

4. West Island.

5. The burnt earth and gravel would harden like concrete when water was added, providing a solid footing.

6. *Narratives of the New Netherlands, 1609-1664*, 47-48; E.B. O'Callaghan, *History of the New Netherlands*, (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1855), I, 76-78. The fort's first commander was Jacob Jacobz Elkens, who remained in this post for four years. (O'Callaghan, *History of the New Netherlands*, I, 76.) In the spring of 1639, David de Vries, spending time at a farm on Castle Island, left an account of the flooding issues that forced the abandonment of Fort Nassau a generation before. "There came such a flood upon the island on which Brand Pijlen dwelt (my host for the time being) that we had to abandon the island, and to use boats in going to the house, for the water stood about four feet deep on the island, whereas the latter lies seven or eight feet above ordinary water. This high water lasted three days before we could use the houses again. The water came into the fort. We had to resort to the woods, where we set up tents and kept great fires going." (*Narratives of the New Netherlands, 1609-1664*, 207.)



A Dutch map from 1629 showing the location of Fort Orange along the North (Hudson) River. The remains of Fort Nassau can be seen on the northern edge of Castle Island just to the left of Fort Orange (LOC Map Division)

measuring 150 feet to a side, the fort was of earth and wood construction. Two fifteen-foot parallel walls (made in the same fashion as Fort Nassau's) were erected to trace out the fort's perimeter. The walls were then braced with cross members at regular intervals, with the intervening space between filled in with earth, most likely taken from the moat that surrounded the fort on three sides. A rampart or walkway was then fashioned in the area between the two walls by placing planks on horizontal cross members, which were then secured to the palisades on either side. It is not clear how thick the walls of Fort Orange were made, but given that one citizen living within the fort petitioned to cut a door in the curtain wall to allow easier access to his home, one suspects they were thinner rather than thicker.<sup>7</sup> Protruding, diamond-shaped bastions were placed at each corner of the structure. They allowed the defenders to sweep the walls with gunfire and

7. In fortification and siege craft terms, a curtain wall is a wall that connects two bastions, which for the purposes of this article also constitutes the outer wall of a fort. Other fortification terms encountered in the article are; Bastion—These were angular fortifications, often diamond-like that connected curtain walls. By protruding out from the curtain walls it allowed defenders to fire down the length of the curtain walls at an attacking enemy. Casemates—These were also called bombproofs, and were typically constructed underneath the fort's bastions to protect the garrison and their stores from enemy mortar fire. Ravelin—A ravelin is a detached triangular fortification placed in front of curtain walls for additional protection. They are typically connected to the fort via a drawbridge. Ditch—This is an obstacle designed to slow down an infantry attack bent on scaling the fort's walls. Oftentimes the ditch contained a row of wooden spikes to present a second obstacle. Such an arrangement was known as a *cheval-de-frise* and was often used as a field fortification to protect against cavalry attacks. For additional terms and definitions the reader is directed to Sebastien Vauban, *A Manual of Siegecraft and Fortification*, (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1968).



served as firing platforms for the fort's eight large, stone-firing guns.

Given its construction, the new fort was clearly an improvement over Fort Nassau, but earth forts had inherent drawbacks and these plagued Fort Orange from the outset. Foremost, earth forts constructed in this and similar fashions tended to lose the earth packed between the walls through the space between the vertical logs that made up the palisade. On top of this basic problem, the palisades themselves tended to rot away after a few years. Seasonal extremes and substantial rainfall, both of which occurred at Albany, only accelerated this process. If the builders were not careful in sealing the structure, leaks could result in standing pools of water that only magnified the problem. This last issue was typically more pronounced within the casemates under the bastions. That's where the garrison stored their powder, munitions, and foodstuffs—all of which in turn suffered. These shortcomings were summarized over a century later by a British General, John Campbell, Earl of Loudoun. He wrote a colleague about Fort William Henry, also an earth fort, located on Lake George:

In the works that were carried on there last year, that the timber has already suffered; and in the Casemates there, where the Water has Soaked through; but the great Logs, from not being sufficiently secured with Oakum, are very much Rotted; and even the People here, agree that the Timber of this Country, rots much sooner than the Timber in Europe does; but indeed there is no Justice done to it here, for it is cut when wanted, and directly put to use, whatever the Season of the Year is; For which reason, whenever there is occasion to build a Fort, that probably will remain, if there is Stone & Lime near, I should advise it's being built of them.<sup>8</sup>

It seems likely that the forty or so traders and soldiers who garrisoned Fort Orange quickly discovered the structure's shortcomings over the intervening years, but with limited resources many of the problems were simply overlooked. This led one observer in the late 1640s to refer to the location as the "miserable little fort called Fort Orengé, built of logs."<sup>9</sup>

The positioning of Fort Orange also proved problematic. Although it was conveniently located and protected by the Hudson on one side, it was still susceptible to flooding when the river jumped its banks, which it frequently did. In 1648, one such flood nearly washed away the structure. After assessing the damage, Dutch Governor Peter Stuyvesant attempted to rework the fort on a more solid footing. It appears that the moat was faced with stone at this time, no doubt in an attempt to prevent it from filling with earth, and that a stone-faced ravelin was added to guard the south curtain wall. Facing the fort itself with stone, which would have greatly increased its strength and more importantly solved some of the maintenance issues that plagued the structure, was never undertaken, in part because there was a dispute about the ownership of the stone being quarried for this task. This last issue was exacerbated by Stuyvesant's attempts

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8. Stanley Pargellis, *Military Affairs in North America*, (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1936), 266.

9. Jogues, Father Isaac, "Novum Belgium," in *Narratives of the New Netherlands, 1609-1664*, 261.

to render Fort Orange more secure by demanding that all structures within cannon shot (and later musket shot) about the fort be removed, and that no further structures be erected within this buffer zone. This ordinance was hardly out of order with basic military planning. Any attacker could use these buildings as cover, putting the fort at risk of being seized by a *coup-de-main* or, at the very least, forcing the defenders to raze the structures in the event of an expected siege. The problem was that Fort Orange was more a trading post than a military post, which made the buildings close to the fort lucrative assets and their owners reluctant to comply with Stuyvesant's dictate. A long-running feud between the governor and the patroon who claimed ownership of this land led to little being accomplished in the way of improving the fort's security. However, efforts were made to construct the buildings that now lined the interior walls of the fort with brick. Strangely, this made the interior dwellings of the fort more weatherproof and stronger than the fort itself.<sup>10</sup>

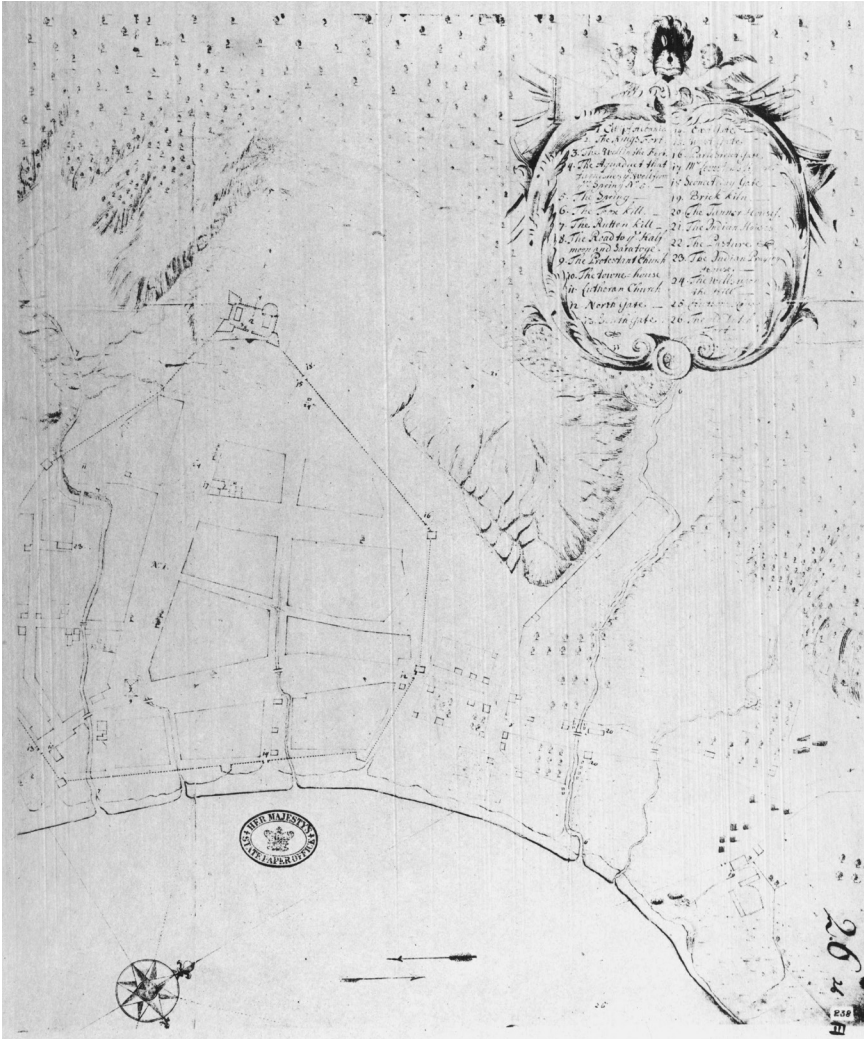
Although Fort Orange was a questionable fortification by European military standards, it proved adequate enough to support Dutch trading efforts for forty years. Much of this stemmed from the economic relationship that developed between the Dutch of Fort Orange and the Mohawk of the Iroquois Confederacy. Stinging from their encounters with New France and these colonists' northern native allies, the Mohawk of the upper Hudson Valley eyed the establishment of Fort Orange as an opportunity. Their traditional northern enemies had established direct trading relations with the French, but until now the Mohawk had only indirect means by which to obtain European goods. These means included either going through Susquehannock middlemen, who traded with the English in Virginia, or through the Mahican, who traded with both the Dutch of Fort Orange and the English of the more distant Massachusetts Bay Colony. The politically savvy Mohawk leadership understood the long-range ramifications should they not develop a direct connection to European traders, but as was typical with the Iroquois, they saw beyond the immediate need of obtaining access to this trade. Denying other tribes' access to the Dutch, particularly their traditional enemies, was just as important. Such an arrangement would not only set the Mohawk up as middlemen in any transactions with Fort Orange, but would have the additional benefit of weakening their enemies by limiting their trading options. To enact this plan, in 1624 the Mohawk leadership launched the tribe into a four-year struggle with the Mahican to obtain control of the upper Hudson Valley.<sup>11</sup>

It was during this Mohawk-Mahican War that Fort Orange faced one of its greatest threats. Although the Dutch remained neutral for the first two years of the conflict, in 1626 the commander of Fort Orange, Commissary Daniel van Krieckenbeeck, responded

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10. *History of New Netherlands*, II, 74-79; George Howell, Johnathan Tenney, *The Bi-centennial History of Albany*, (New York: Munsell & Co., 1886), 57-66.

11. Bruce G. Trigger, "The Mohawk-Mahican War (1624-1628)," *Canadian Historical Review*, 52, (Sept., 1971), 278-279; George T. Hunt, *The Wars of the Iroquois*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1940), 32-33.



A late 1690s map of Albany by British Engineer Wolfgang Romer. The abandoned Fort Orange can be seen in the lower left-hand portion of the map, while the position of Fort Albany can clearly be seen at the town's northwest. The map also shows a picket wall supported by blockhouses that was erected around the perimeter of the town to discourage French and Indian raiding parties (Hulbert, *The Crown Collection of Photographs of American Maps*, Series III, 1915)

to a Mahican request for aid against the Mohawk. Gauging that the Mahican would win the war, Krieckenbeeck agreed to help. Along with six others, he joined a Mahican war party. The expedition had traveled only a few miles before it was caught in a Mohawk ambush. Dutch muskets proved to be of no help as the party was decimated and put to flight. A number of Mahicans, Krieckenbeeck, and two other traders were killed

outright, while another Dutchman was subjected to the horrors of Iroquois captivity before being put to death. The three remaining traders, one of whom had an arrow lodged in his back, scurried for the safety of Fort Orange and sounded the alarm. Such was the peril that the dozen or so families living in or about the fort were immediately sent downriver to New Amsterdam. The remaining sixteen traders peered out of the fort's loopholes waiting for the impending Mohawk attack, but it never came. Instead, a company trader by the name of Pieter Barentson bravely set off to visit the Mohawk a few days later. When he arrived at the Mohawk village, he found the latter quick to apologize for the incident. They informed Barentson that they had no ill intentions toward the Dutch and had only attacked Krieckenbeeck and his men because they had meddled in Mohawk affairs. Their explanation was accepted and relations between the two parties were quickly repaired, simply because it was in the mutual interest of both to do so. The victorious Mohawk had no intentions of destroying the object of their long conflict, and the Dutch traders of the fort had no intentions of closing down shop simply because the source from whom they obtained their goods had changed.<sup>12</sup>

The conclusion of hostilities in late 1628 left the Mohawk in firm control of the area about Fort Orange, and from that point on bound to the Dutch in the region. The economic relationship between the two provided the Iroquois with the goods they wanted, especially firearms, while for the garrison and settlers about Fort Orange it offered not only economic benefits, but security as well. Although over its history the Dutch colony of the New Netherlands fought several draining wars with tribes along the southern portion of the Hudson River, the citizens of Orange (as the town began to be called), lived in relative peace for the simple reason that none of these tribes wished to embroil themselves in a conflict with the Iroquois Confederacy, who would certainly protect their trading interests with a vengeance.

In 1664, Fort Orange faced its only real test. In late September, a British frigate carrying Colonel George Cartwright dropped anchor before the fort and demanded its surrender. Cartwright's appearance was not wholly unexpected; news had already reached the garrison that a British task force had captured New Amsterdam. Outgunned,

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12. *Narratives of the New Netherlands, 1609-1664*, 84-85. The Dutch position during the Mohawk-Mahican War may have precipitated Krieckenbeeck's ill-fated decision. Earlier in the year, the secretary of the New Netherlands, Isaack de Rasiere, wrote that if the Mohawk would not grant the right-of-way for Algonkian traders to deal their goods at Fort Orange, the Dutch should go to war with them to force the issue. Rasiere seems to have correctly deduced Mohawk intentions, but was unable to convince his superiors on the point. Associates of Krieckenbeeck, however, in pursuit of this philosophy had made overtures toward the Algonkian in an attempt to entice them to break their treaty with the Mohawk and join the Dutch and Mahicans in a war against the former. They had little success in this regard, but Krieckenbeeck's knowledge and support of these efforts may have colored his decision to side with the Mahican. Although the directors of the New Netherlands saw no merit in Rasiere's suggestion, when he learned of attempts to form an Algonkian-Mahican-Dutch alliance, Champlain, fearful that such an arrangement would result in the loss of control over his native allies, threatened to intervene militarily on the side of the Mohawk! (Trigger, "The Mohawk-Mahican War (1624-1628)," 279-280.)

with a decaying stronghold around him and no prospects of relief, Fort Orange's commander wisely chose to accept the Englishman's terms. He surrendered the fort without firing a shot.<sup>13</sup>

With the change of ownership came a reassessment of the town of Beverwyck and its fort. The former was renamed Albany in honor of James II, Duke of Albany, while the latter, after a decade of occupation, was abandoned in favor of another stronghold better positioned to protect the growing town. Constructed in the spring of 1676, Fort Albany was placed on a hill to the city's northwest. From this new vantage point, the fort's cannon could cover the town, its main approaches, and the river. High ground to the west called the position of the fort into question. Still, it was unlikely that cannon could be dragged through the wilderness to take advantage of this weakness, so it had little influence on the fort's construction.

Fort Albany's main walls were constructed of fifteen-foot-tall pine trees anchored and lashed together in a typical stockade fashion. A second, shorter, and more widely spaced row of vertical logs backed the main walls and acted as supports for the platforms and walkways that circled the inner perimeter. Bastions were added at each corner and planked over to allow for the mounting of five or six small cannons. The northwestern bastion was later rebuilt in stone and acted as the fort's magazine. Within the compound, two long, three-story buildings were constructed along the north and south curtain walls, both tall enough that their second-story windows overlooked the main walls. To provide protection against a surprise attack, a ditch backed by sharpened stakes circled the stronghold on three sides.<sup>14</sup>

Garrisoned by 100 men and armed with twelve light cannons, Fort Albany was sufficient protection against French and Indian marauders, but it failed to address the town's need to protect itself from similar attacks. To deal with this problem, work turned to enclosing the town within a stockade supported at key points by log blockhouses. Benjamin Wadsworth, a Massachusetts representative who traveled to Albany in the early 1690s, left a description of this work:

Ye town is incompass'd with a fortification, consisting of pine-logs, ye most of y m a foot thro, or more; ye are hewed on two sides and set close together, standing about 8 or 10 foot above ground, sharpened at y e tops. There are 6 gates; 2 of ye east to ye river, 3 north, one south; ye are five block-houses; 2 north, by two of ye foremention'd gates, and 3 south.<sup>15</sup>

Although simple and expedient, the wooden Fort Albany, like Fort Orange, suffered the wrath of the elements in the years following its construction. The horizontal planks that made up the flooring for the bastions were particularly vulnerable and had

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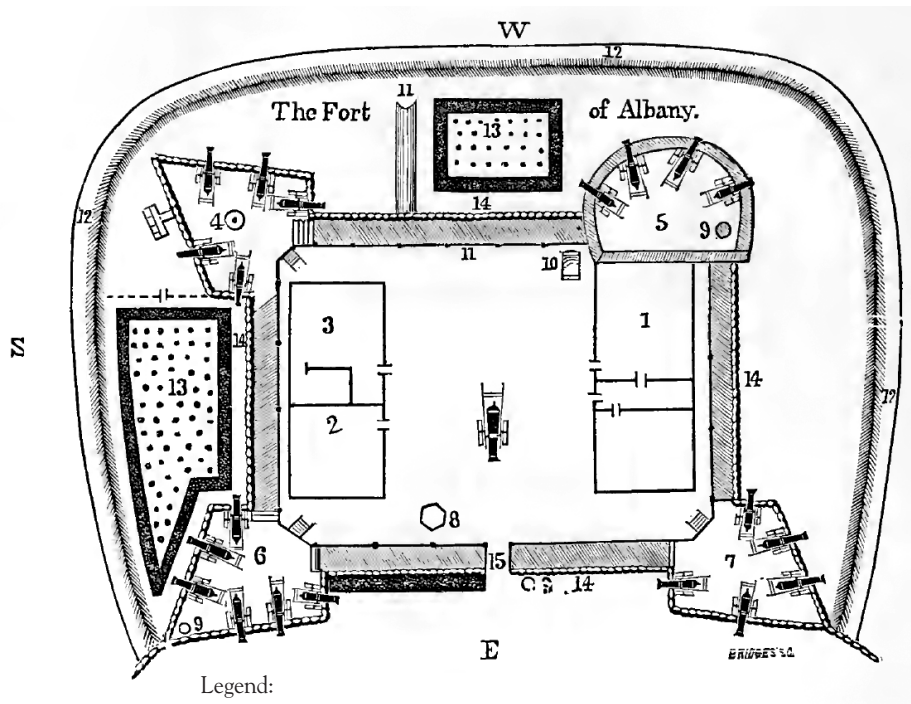
13. O'Callaghan, *History of the New Netherlands*, I, 86-87, 100; *Narratives of the New Netherlands, 1609-1664*, 261; Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 112.

14. John R. Brodhead, (ed.), *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, (Albany: Weed, Parsons & Co., 1853), III, 255, 260. (Hereafter NY Col. Doc.).

15. "Wadsworth's Journal," *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, series 4, #1 (1852), 105-106.



A plan of Fort Albany in 1695  
(Miller, *A Description of the Province and City of New York*, 1695.  
Reprinted: Albany, 1862)



Legend:

- |                                    |                           |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. The Governor of Albany's house. | 9. The centry boxes.      |
| 2. The officer's lodgings.         | 11. The Sally port.       |
| 3. The soldier's lodgings.         | 12. The ditch with stakes |
| 4. The flag-staff and mount.       | 13. The gardens.          |
| 5. The magazine.                   | 14. The Stockado.         |
| 6. The Dial mount.                 | 15. The fort gate.        |
| 7. The Town mount.                 |                           |
| 8. The well.                       |                           |

to be replaced just a few years after their installment. The rest of the fort soon followed. By 1687, Governor Thomas Dongan was writing to England that:

At Albany there is a Fort made of Pine Trees fifteen foot high & foot over with Batterys and conveniences made for men to walk about, where are nine guns, small arms for forty men four Barils of Powder with great and small shott in proportion. The Timber and Boards being rotten were renewed this year. In my opinion it were better that Fort were built up of Stone & Lime which will not be double the charge of this years repair which yet will not last above 6 or 7 years before it will require the like again whereas on the contrary were it built of Lime and Stone it may be far more easily maintained.<sup>16</sup>

16. NY Col. Doc., III, 391.

Dongan's request to see the fort rebuilt in stone went unanswered, as did similar requests by the next two governors.<sup>17</sup> However, some relief was available, at least in terms of manpower. With France and England at war during the first seven years of the 1690s, King William III dispatched several independent companies of regulars to help with the defense of the colonial frontiers. A pair of these companies, augmented by New York troops, occupied the deteriorating defenses of Albany throughout most of the conflict. But requests for a military engineer to help organize and lay out the defenses of Albany went unheeded, primarily because the Crown's resources were stretched thin due to the War of the League of Augsburg (or King William's War as it was known in America). At the conclusion of the conflict, however, the vulnerable state of colonial defenses in North America came before the Ordnance Office. With the freeing of resources brought about by the cessation of hostilities, it was agreed to dispatch an engineer to North America to address these concerns.<sup>18</sup>

Veteran engineer Colonel Wolfgang Romer accompanied Richard Coote, Lord Bellomont, the new governor of New York and New England, to the colonies in 1698. One of Bellomont's first assignments for Romer was to conduct a survey of the defenses along the New York frontier. Romer spent a good deal of time at Albany seeing to this task. He was quick to see the importance of the area as a launching pad for French forces looking to strike against New York, New England, and even New Jersey. In his opinion, the French might succeed in this plan given that the current defenses were a dismal assortment of halfhearted measures laid out without guidance or thought to the actual security of the frontier. "It is a pity, and even a shame, to behold a frontier neglected as we now perceive this is," he informed Bellomont in one of his early reports.<sup>19</sup>

Of the locations surveyed, none were more important than Albany. Romer recommended that the poorly laid out wooden fort be replaced with one of stone. "Its situation is very irregular and difficult," he informed Bellomont, "though with a trifling expense I could put it in a state of defense against every enemy." Within a few weeks, the engineer had prepared and transmitted plans for a new stone fort at Albany occupying the same ground as the original structure.<sup>20</sup>

Romer's plans would languish for four years until the arrival of Bellomont's replacement, Edward Hyde, Lord Cornbury. By now, war had broken out again with France, heightening concerns with Albany's crumbling defenses. In the spring of 1702, Romer marked out the ground for a new fort, but pressing commitments regarding the construc-

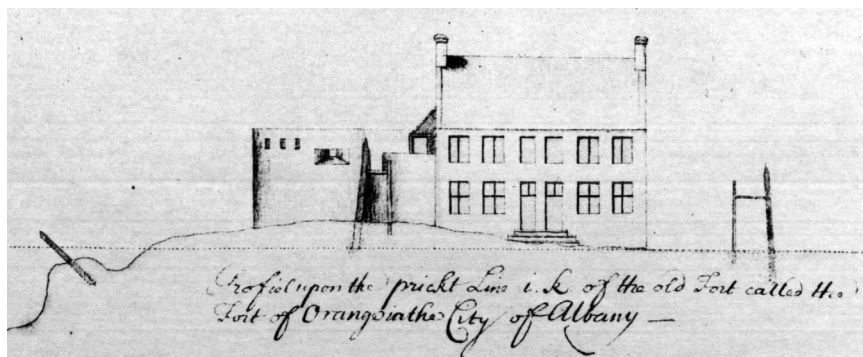
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17. J.W. Fortescue, (ed), *Calendar of State Paper: America & West Indies*, (London: Public Records Office, 1903), vol 14, 13, 141. (Hereafter *Cal. State Papers*).

18. Whitworth Porter, *Royal Engineers*, (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1889), I, 137-138.

19. *Cal. State Papers*, vol 16, (Oct 1697-Dec 1698), 223; O'Callaghan, *NY Col. Doc.*, IV, 328-330. Romer was perhaps understating the state of the fortifications. Bellomont, who personally viewed the works at Albany and Schenectady in June, wrote the Board of Trade that, "The Forts of Albany and Schenectady are so weak and ridiculous, that they look like pounds to impound cattle in, rather than Forts." (*NY Col Doc*, IV, 608).

20. *NY Col. Doc*, IV, 329-330, 440-441. Romer estimated that a new stone fort would cost £4,000.



A profile of Fort Albany circa 1698 by Wolfgang Romer showing the northwest bastion, the Governor's house, a section of the fort's curtain wall, and the *cheval-de-frise* that circled the fort. It is interesting to note that Romer refers to the fortification as the Fort of Orange; although incorrect, this may speak to how the town's inhabitants referred to the fort at the time (Hulbert, *The Crown Collection of Photographs of American Maps*, Series III, 1915)

tion of Castle William in Boston Harbor drew the engineer away before any more work could be done. Governor Cornbury agreed to delay the project until Romer's promised return in late June, but in August he received news from the engineer that he would be required in Boston until September. Viewing this as too late to start the project, Cornbury travelled to Albany and took matters into his own hands. He was appalled at the fort's condition. "The stockades," he informed the Board of Trade, "are almost all rotten [sic] to that degree that I can with ease push them down; There is but three and twenty guns in the fort most of them unserviceable the carryages and several of them so honey-combed (with rust) that they cannot be fired without danger."<sup>21</sup>

Questioning Romer's positioning of the fort, Cornbury shifted the entire structure (which he christened Fort Anne) slightly northward. With assistance from Romer unlikely and the season slipping away, Cornbury ordered work to start on the stronghold's foundation. He later claimed to have laid out two-thirds of this when Romer arrived at Albany four days after the first stone was placed. The irate governor immediately demanded an accounting of the £200 advanced to Romer for the work he had done on the fort, and appointed two independent auditors to conduct the task. (Cornbury eventually would be removed from office because of financial malfeasance.) The accusations, which proved to be unfounded, did not bring the fort any closer to completion. Three years later, in 1705, a memoir on the defenses of New York stated that, "The old fort is repaired and new palisades set round it and round the whole city, and blockhouses repaired," but work on a new stone fort had stalled for lack of funds.<sup>22</sup>

21. Ibid., 968.

22. *Cal State Papers*, vol 22, 371-372.



twenty-foot ditch circled the structure, and a pair of two-story buildings slightly higher than the fort's walls ran down the length of two sides. These twin structures served as barracks, storehouses, workshops, and the commandant's quarters. Armed with two dozen cannons and garrisoned by nearly 100 men, Fort Frederick was a powerful addition to Albany's defenses. Reverend Samuel Chandler recorded his impressions of the fort when his regiment passed through Albany in October 1755:

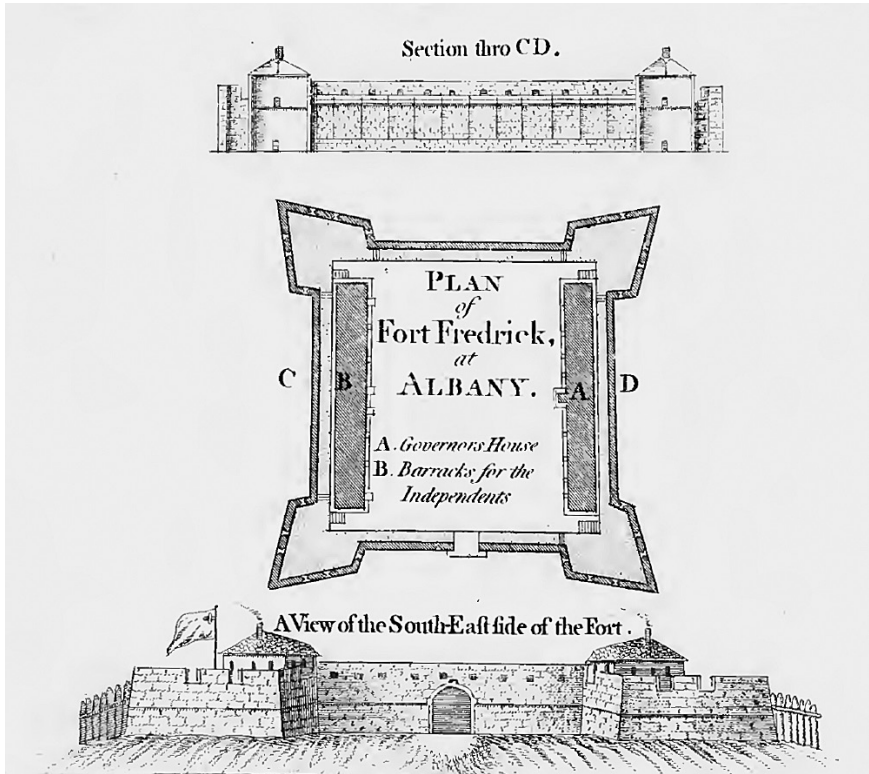
The Town or City is picadoed, abt two miles round on the west side, on a High Eminence is a Fort or Citadell: Stone and Lime. Four Bastions acute Angles abt 45°. Two handsome buildings or Barracks. Brick fences but stone on back side. Abt 14 guns, 2 before the Gate; Garrisoned by an independent company of 100 men. Captain Rutherford 15 men mounted upon guard the east side of the fort next the town, abt 24 loop holes upon the parapets.<sup>24</sup>

At the start of the final French and Indian War in 1755, prospects of a French attack on Albany lessened as a series of British and colonial expeditions pushed north along the Hudson River toward the headwaters of Lake George and Lake Champlain. In support of these expeditions, Albany soon became the anchor point for a chain of forts and a supply line that stretched north to the base of Lake George. Although navigation for larger vessels ended at Albany, smaller craft could still thread their way north along the river, impeded only by the need to circumvent a few intervening rapids. Supplies heading north were loaded into canoes at Albany and sailed ten miles upriver to Van Schaick Island near the lower confluence of the Mohawk River. Here, at a location called Half Moon, the water became so shallow that the canoes had to be brought ashore and carried overland to a storehouse built on a peninsula formed by the junction of the Mohawk and Hudson rivers. The supplies were loaded onto wagons and carried twelve miles north to Stillwater, where the army had built a palisade fort. Here the cargo was placed back into boats and taken eighteen miles upriver to a point called the First, or Little Carrying Place. A set of shallow rapids at this location often forced the crews to drag their canoes through armpit-high water to reach the staging point on shore. The vessels were unloaded and their contents carried 700 yards around the intervening rapids. The cargo was loaded into another set of canoes and transported four miles to the Second Carrying Place, above which Fort Miller was constructed to protect this operation. Once again, the crews emptied their vessels and dragged their contents 800 yards around a pair of shallow rapids. The supplies were then loaded into a final set of canoes and sent sixteen miles upriver to the Great Carrying Place, along the east bank of the river, where the army had built Fort Edward in 1755. From there, wagon teams carried the supplies a final twelve miles up a road hacked out of the swampy wilderness to the base of Lake George, where Fort William-Henry and

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24. "Diary of Rev. Samuel Chandler," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 17 (1863), 346-354. The number of guns in the fort was something of an illusion. Governor Hardy reported to the Board of Trade in early 1756 that "it was with some difficulty I could furnish Fort Edward with the few now there from the Fort at Albany, and those left in it are not safe in Firing." (*NY Col. Doc.*, VII, 2-3.)





A plan of Fort Frederick from Mary Rocque's *A Set of Plans and Forts in North America, Reduced from Actual Surveys*. London: M.A. Rocque, 1763.

From this plan it can be seen that the final form of of Fort Frederick is along the lines of those suggested by Romer a generation earlier

later Fort George were erected.<sup>25</sup>

Maintaining this supply line was a daunting task that required the daily effort of several thousand men. The sheer strain on the few serviceable teams, combined with the summer heat, killed horses faster than they could be replaced. Not that it mattered, given that the existing wagons were rendered unserviceable by the stump-strewn roads they plied. In many instances, the army was forced to drag most of its supplies overland on sleds pulled by hand, or in some cases on the backs of soldiers. A dry summer made it difficult on the canoe crews, forcing them to pull their craft through the water in places normally passable. A wet summer was actually worse, turning the trails into a quagmire of mud and causing up to quarter of the perishable provisions to be lost to the moist conditions. None of this takes into account theft and graft, which a New Jersey

25. McCully, "Catastrophe in the Wilderness: New Light on the Canada Expedition of 1709," *WMQ*, #11, July 1954, 441-456.

officer in an early expedition claimed accounted for up to half of the lost provisions.<sup>26</sup>

When one considers the grueling conditions, it was remarkable that this logistics chain, which Albany anchored, was able to cope. As an example of what was asked, Colonel John Bradstreet, Quartermaster-General of Abercromby's 17,000-man expedition against Fort Carillon in 1758, estimated that it would take 1,000 bateaux, 800 wagons, and 1,000 oxcarts to move the army's provisions from Albany to Lake George in three weeks' time. Bradstreet never came close to obtaining these resources, but through nothing short of a Herculean effort on the part of his men, often forced to drag cannons and supplies by hand over the muddy portage roads for the lack of draft animals, the task was accomplished in two months.<sup>27</sup>

The influx of manpower and supplies to support these expeditions and the daily operations of the northern supply route tested Albany's dockyard facilities. Given the lack of serviceable roads, and for obvious cost and timing reasons, the primary mode of transport to Albany was via small sloops and schooners that plied the Hudson River in a steady stream until winter bound the waterway in ice. To cope with this maritime traffic, there were three docks for the town, the lower (or King's Dock) as the southernmost one was known, the middle, and the upper dock. Traditionally, arriving vessels did not moor alongside these docks; doing so not only proved tricky in the confined waters but also restricted access to the wharves. Instead, vessels anchored a short distance away. Their cargoes were transferred to shore on a platform placed atop canoes lashed together.

Functionally this approach was slow, and like the fortifications of the town subject to the season's perils. Spring in particular was a dangerous time for the dockyards. In March 1818, a denizen of the city recorded a frequent occurrence: "The water rose to a great height in the river in the night of the 3d March, so that several families in Church St. would have perished if they had not been rescued. The water was two feet deep in the bar room of the Eagle Tavern, on the southeast corner of South Market and Hamilton streets. Sloops were thrown upon the dock, and the horse ferry boat was driven about half way up to Pearl Street." Some years later, another chronicler described a similar event: "The ice which broke up in front of the city became obstructed a few miles below, causing a rise in the river, which submerged the docks, and damaged goods in the storehouses."<sup>28</sup>

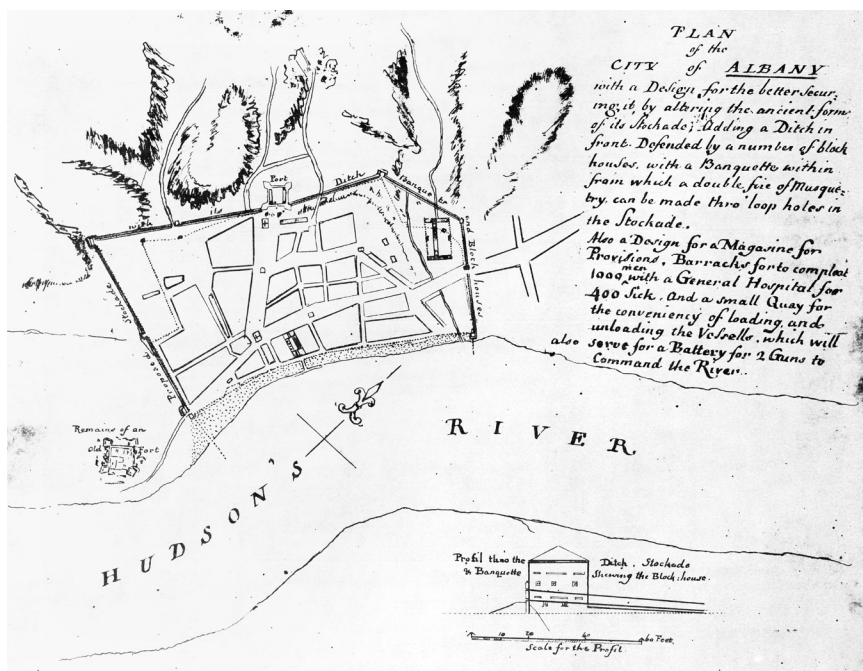
With the capture of the French Forts Carillon and St. Frederic on Lake Champlain in 1759, Albany's security was assured.<sup>29</sup> The town's strategic position would become

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26. "Captain John Harrison Letters," in William Whitehead's, *Contributions to the Early History of Perth Amboy*, (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1856), 86-88. Additional details as to the nature of this supply line and the difficulties in maintaining it can be found in numerous French and Indian War journals of this time.

27. Stanley Pargellis, *Lord Loudoun in North America*, (New haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1933), 298-299; John M. Cardwell, "Mismanagement: The 1758 British Expedition Against Carillon," *FTMB*, #4 (1992), 254; Perry, *Recollections of an Old Soldier*, 9.

28. Joel Munsell, *The Annals of Albany*, (Albany: J. Munsell, 1870), II, 331, IV, 128.



A plan of Albany in 1756 showing the outer palisade defenses, the position of Fort Frederick and the ruins of Fort Orange to the south of the city (Hulbert, *The Crown Collection of Photographs of American Maps*, Series 1, vol. 2, 1907)

apparent again during the American Revolution, but by that time the city's defenses had fallen into disrepair. Lack of money and the lack of a threat from New France had led to Fort Frederick being abandoned in 1765. Although discouraged by the town council, area residents slowly began cannibalizing the structure. When the American Revolution began in 1775, the fort was of no military use; what remained of it was converted into a prison for local Tories. Upon conclusion of the conflict, there was no more need for the structure. In 1785, the town council agreed to raze the fort. The site later became the location of St. Peter's Episcopal Church.<sup>30</sup>

The demolition of Fort Frederick brought an end to Albany's fortifications. For over 150 years, this frontier town lay at the crossroads of North American history, and its series of forts rank among the most influential ever built along the New York-New England frontier. Throughout this period, there was criticism of what was built, endless

29. General Jeffery Amherst captured Fort Carillon (Ticonderoga) on July 26, 1759, and Fort St. Frederic at Crown Point a week later on August 4. Facing superior numbers, the French blew up both forts and retreated down Lake Champlain. (John C. Webster, *The Journal of Jeffery Amherst*, (Toronto: University Press, 1931), 146-151.)

30. *The Annals of Albany*, I, 286; Cuyler Reynolds, *Albany Chronicles*, (Albany: J.B. Lyon Co., 1906), 364-365.

funding delays, and a general lack of resolve to carry through with the works proposed at this strategic location. This often left the growing town in a vulnerable position, but as fate would have it, although Albany would be at the center of four colonial wars and the American Revolution, the town's defenses were never tested. This was certainly the best possible outcome the architects of Albany's early fortifications could have asked for.

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## Regional History Forum

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



The Vanderbilt Mansion in Hyde Park, courtesy of the National Park Service

*100 Years in the Making*

# A Look at Vanderbilt Mansion in the Context of the National Park Service Centennial

*Erin Kane*

This summer marks 100 years of history for the United States National Park Service. Inaugurated with President Woodrow Wilson signing of the Organic Act on August 25, 1916, the National Park Service has a longstanding history of preserving the rich beauty and culture the nation has to offer. It began with only thirty-five parks, among them such marvels as Yellowstone National Park, Sequoia National Park, and Mount



Rainier National Park. It has since grown to encompass 409 National Park Service sites.<sup>1</sup>

The Organic Act sought to unify the various departments that loosely managed sites recognized as worthy of preservation. Prior to 1916, the array of parks and monuments were maintained across many sectors, including the Department of the Interior, the War Department, and the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture.<sup>2</sup> However, no overarching federal body existed to oversee the numerous sites effectively. The Organic Act, which states its primary mission “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations,” created the National Park Service as a single bureau under the Department of the Interior.<sup>3</sup> It was responsible for the care of all established sites and those to join their ranks in the future.

The National Park Service has far and away succeeded in its mission. Beginning with one million visitors to all its parks in 1920, the rapid expansion and growing popularity of the sites produced a sharp increase in public interest, raising visitation to 292.8 million in 2014.<sup>4</sup> The parks cover an expanse of over 84 million acres spread across the country. Of this number, the Hudson River Valley contributes nearly 5,000 acres, including the Saratoga National Historic Park, the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, and Saint Paul’s Church National Historic Site. A crown jewel among these sites, and indeed among all of the National Park Service locations, is the lone Gilded Age mansion to achieve such status: Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site.

The Vanderbilt family offers a great illustration of the nineteenth-century American success story. Their fortune began with Cornelius Vanderbilt, colloquially dubbed “Commodore” due to the ferry and shipping business he established in 1810 and ran between Manhattan and Staten Island (still operating as the Staten Island Ferry). While enormously successful, and very quickly making impressive earnings, the Commodore was urged to invest in railroads by his eldest son, William Henry Vanderbilt. The Commodore took his advice and rapidly grew the family’s wealth. Seeking to keep intact his \$105-million fortune (worth \$2 billion today) and to establish an everlasting family dynasty, the Commodore passed nearly all of his wealth to William Henry, who in turn left his fortune largely to his eldest sons, Cornelius II and William Kissam.<sup>5</sup> The remainder of the estate was split between William Henry’s two younger sons, Frederick and George, and his four daughters.<sup>6</sup> Although Frederick Vanderbilt did not receive the

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1. “National Park Service Overview,” *National Park Service*, last modified July 13, 2015, <http://www.nps.gov/aboutus/upload/NPS-Overview-2015-update-11-16-15-2.pdf>

2. “History,” *National Park Service*, 2015, <http://www.nps.gov/aboutus/history.htm>.

3. “National Park Service Overview,” *National Park Service*, last modified July 13, 2015, <http://www.nps.gov/aboutus/news/upload/NPS-Overview-2015-update-7-13.pdf>.

4. *Ibid.*

5. John Foreman and Robbe Pierce Stimson, *The Vanderbilts and the Gilded Age: Architectural Aspirations 1879-1901* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 9.



Entrance Hall to the Vanderbilt Mansion, courtesy of the National Park Service

lion's share of the family fortune, he carefully and wisely invested his share and soon became a financial tycoon as well as a famed name throughout the Hudson River Valley.

One day in May of 1895, as he was sailing up the Hudson River aboard his yacht to visit the Ogden Mills estate in Staatsburg, Frederick first laid eyes on what would become the great Vanderbilt Mansion estate. At the time, the property in Hyde Park was owned by the estate of Walter Langdon, Jr., who had died the previous year. Over the course of 150 years, the property had undergone a great deal of renovation and revitalization under various owners, including George Washington's physician, Dr. John Bard.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the estate had witnessed the construction of one mansion, its destruction in a fire, the rebuilding of a new palatial home, the division and reunification of the property, and perhaps most notably the keen touch of landscape design implemented by André Parmentier. Parmentier's influence was certainly a lucky gift to Frederick when he acquired the land. The Belgian landscape architect had been hired in 1828 by then-owner and botany enthusiast Dr. David Hosack to plan and construct the "park, roads, paths, and garden of the estate."<sup>8</sup> The legacy of Parmentier's naturalistic

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6. Charlotte Ofca School, introduction to *Vanderbilt Mansion*. ed. James B. Patrick (Little Compton: Fort Church Publishers Inc., 1998), 10.

7. *Ibid.*, 7.

8. *Ibid.*



The Gardens, courtesy of the author

designs was deeply treasured by subsequent owners, who considered themselves avid horticulturalists. (Today, the estate still boasts over forty-three different tree species.) In awe of the property's position above the river and its spectacular foliage as he voyaged past, Frederick immediately discovered that the estate was for sale and purchased it on the spot. For \$125,000, he received a mansion, several outbuildings, the expanse of Parmentier's gardens and greenhouses, and a farm, all sitting on 600 acres of land that, though neglected, held great potential.<sup>9</sup>

Upon Frederick's purchase of the Hyde Park land, he and his wife Louise, quickly began to renovate the decrepit mansion. The couple initially planned to fix up the existing home, but upon inspection by their lead architects, they learned that the structure was compromised by rot and foundational problems and would need to be torn down. Though disappointed, Frederick and Louise resolved to build the mansion anew and committed themselves wholeheartedly to the endeavor.

Demolition of the former mansion was completed in September 1896. Highly invested in their new project, Frederick and Louise insisted they have a residence established immediately on the premises so they could oversee construction of what would become their truly magnificent new home. Being the last house that Frederick and Louise bought, and one of the few they built themselves, they wanted to pay close attention to every detail and decoration.<sup>10</sup> Adhering to their wishes, the Pavilion was thrown up in a prompt sixty-six days;<sup>11</sup> it would later become the guesthouse for their

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9. Ibid., 6

10. Allan Dailey (Supervisory Park Ranger) in discussion with the author, December 3, 2015.

11. Ofca School, introduction to *Vanderbilt Mansion*, 8.

bachelor visitors and today serves as the information center for visitors.

Construction of the great mansion then began in earnest. Architects from the prominent firm McKim, Mead, and White of New York drafted the building's design. They determined that the new home would be modeled after the original structure, but with significant interior improvements. Indeed, every aspect of the new mansion incorporated the latest innovations available at the time. First and foremost, the building was designed to be virtually impervious to rot and fire through the use of a limestone exterior, brick core, and interior layers of plaster and marble. Structurally, it became one of the first private residences to use steel I-beams as the main supportive feature. It was the first home in Hyde Park to run on hydroelectric power; electricity did not come to the rest of the town until 1908. The house also had central heating and indoor plumbing, with hot and cold water as well as flush toilets—all extravagant amenities for the period.<sup>12</sup>

Construction was carried out by Norcross Brothers of Boston. Two crews worked tirelessly in two separate, twelve-hour shifts (one during the day and one throughout the night), and were well compensated by the Vanderbilts for their labor.<sup>13</sup> They received on average \$1.50 per day, then a generous wage for construction laborers.<sup>14</sup> Building ceased only during the coldest months; even with this hiatus, the majority of the home was constructed by the winter 1898. However, it took 300 European craftsmen until April of 1899 to put the finishing touches on the detailed carving and molding of the marble and plaster that adorned the mansion. Once construction was complete, furnishing began. Esteemed decorators Ogden Codman and Georges A. Glæzner were hired for the job. They did not hold back in designing according to the Vanderbilts' lavish taste.<sup>15</sup>

At the mansion's completion after a quick twenty-six months, it stood proud in its extravagant Italian Renaissance design, boasting elements imported from all over Europe.<sup>16</sup> The entire ceiling of the dining room, with its highly intricate carvings, was brought to the home from an Italian palace. Italian marble adorns the reception hall on the first floor, and several of the mansion's fireplaces also were imported from Italy. Frederick's bedroom consists of a combination of Italian, Spanish, and French influences, while Louise's boudoir was decorated in the French style. Frederick requested European tapestries to decorate the large halls, in addition to the many imported antique furnishings presented throughout the home for the purpose of being exhibited, rather than used.<sup>17</sup>

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12. Gail Lennox, *Mrs. Frederick W. Vanderbilt* (New York: Independent Publisher Services, 2011)/Ofca School, introduction to *Vanderbilt Mansion*.

13. Allan Dailey (Supervisory Park Ranger) in discussion with the author, December 3, 2015.

14. Ofca School, introduction to *Vanderbilt Mansion*, 8.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Allan Dailey (Supervisory Park Ranger) in discussion with the author, December 3, 2015.

17. *Ibid.*





Reception Room, courtesy of the author

The mansion consisted of fifty-four rooms, of which fourteen were bathrooms, ten guest rooms, and many more servants' quarters. The cost for construction alone was approximately \$660,000. With furnishing included, the total cost rose to an astonishing \$2.25 million. However, the practice of sparing no expense was not unique to the Vanderbilts. The Gilded Age was filled with wealthy families constructing palatial mansions for themselves. According to John Foreman and Robbe Pierce Stimson, "The



houses these people created were purposely intended to fill a gap in American culture or, if you will, a blank in the American landscape. Whereas there had been palaces in Europe for millennia, there was at that time not a one in America . . . this was a situation that needed to be addressed.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, one’s house voiced a clear declaration of one’s social standing, a symbol of power and wealth. Such homes functioned as lavish settings for the luxuries Gilded Age families indulged in and could show off, such as “The extravagant dinners and balls, the gleaming equipages and liveried servants, the aura of luxurious women and powerful men.”<sup>19</sup> And in true Gilded Age socialite fashion, Vanderbilt Mansion was declared finished and ready to host its first party in May 1899.

Louise and Frederick Vanderbilt certainly fit neatly into their Gilded Age role. Take, for instance, the design of Louise’s bedroom. It was modeled precisely after Marie Antoinette’s bedchambers at Versailles, matching in all ways the luxury of the Sun King’s palace. For example, the bedrail surrounding Louise’s bed mirrors the one on the French Queen’s bed that courtiers gathered around for morning levees. Furthermore, the furnishings adorning Louise’s room are modeled after Louis XV-era pieces. These include a curio case designed specifically for Louise’s collection of French fans. In addition, several French paintings decorate the walls, contributing to an accurate replication on the Hudson of the renowned Versailles bedchamber.<sup>20</sup> The couple further displayed their taste for luxury through the immense staff needed to maintain their home: a permanent workforce of thirty-five to forty groundskeepers and gardeners in addition to a seasonal staff of another twenty to twenty-three household servants. The latter included the Vanderbilt’s personal staff<sup>21</sup>—their valet, French maid, secretaries, chef, first cook, second cook, and kitchen girl—who traveled with the couple as they migrated from house to house.<sup>22</sup>

Aside from the Hyde Park mansion, Frederick and Louise showed they were products of the Gilded Age by enjoying hobbies and lifestyles consistent with those common to people of their social status and times. Frederick owned and sailed multiple steam yachts, while Louise was partial to taking daily drives during which she recited meticulously all of the U.S. Presidents and monarchs of England, forward and backward, to keep her mind polished. The couple’s other homes included properties in New York City, Newport, Bar Harbor, and the Adirondacks.<sup>23</sup> They kept up with the social practices of the elite by rotating through these homes as the seasons changed, often traveling to Europe for the summer, and hosting extravagant parties with the most esteemed guests, particularly in Hyde Park. The guest list there often included princes from a variety of nations, including Belgium and Denmark, as well as dukes, duchesses, counts, sena-

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18. Foreman and Pierce Stimson, *The Vanderbilts and the Gilded Age*, 7.

19. *Ibid.*, 4.

20. Lennox, *Mrs. Frederick W. Vanderbilt*, 10.

21. Allan Dailey (Supervisory Park Ranger) in discussion with the author, December 3, 2015.

22. Lennox, *Mrs. Frederick W. Vanderbilt*, 9-10.

23. *Ibid.*, 5.

tors, notable architects, designers, inventors, and even neighbors Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, who lived just down the road.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of such lavishness, Frederick and Louise were seen as immensely generous and were very well liked within the Hyde Park community. The forefront of their generosity began with the employment that Vanderbilt Mansion provided, which benefited the local economy tremendously. As employees, the Vanderbilt staff was well cared for by their employers. They received pay of between one to two dollars per day plus medical care, well above the fifty- to seventy-five-cent salary most servants of Hyde Park earned per day. Each Thanksgiving, Frederick and Louise rewarded single men on their staff with five dollars and married men with a turkey, while at Christmas they provided male staff members with monetary bonuses and female employees with fine presents. Specifically, these gifts included fifty dollars to any married staff member with children, fifty dollars to each male mansion servant, ten dollars to each grounds worker, and gifts such as glass eggs and ceramic figurines to female servants.<sup>25</sup>

The Vanderbilts' connection to the community extended beyond a mere business relationship. They personally knew every resident of Hyde Park and made sure to keep informed of any difficulties they faced.<sup>26</sup> Upon learning of trouble, Mrs. Vanderbilt would visit the afflicted individual, sending doctors to those who were ill, and coal and groceries to those facing poverty. The Vanderbilts also regularly held New Year's parties, river cruises, and picnics to which they invited the entire community.<sup>27</sup>

As Christmas approached, Louise collaborated with the local Sunday schools to ensure each child in Hyde Park received proper clothes and presents. Come Christmas day, she distributed the gifts while riding through the village on the Vanderbilts' Romanov sleigh. Mrs. Vanderbilt also established the Red Cross movement in Hyde Park, founded an activities club to keep young men out of trouble, and paid the full cost for several young women to attain a complete education. Together, the couple brought many other innovations to their beloved town, including educational lectures, a motion picture projector so residents could enjoy movies, and the first stone bridge.<sup>28</sup> All in all, Frederick and Louise Vanderbilt were greatly admired and appreciated for serving the community surrounding their favorite home.

Even in death, the Vanderbilts aimed for generosity. Louise passed away in 1926, twelve years prior to her husband, but Frederick ensured that following his own death their \$77-million fortune would be distributed benevolently. In his will, every employee who had served the Vanderbilts for at least ten years received a bequest. (In fact, fifty-three out of the fifty-seven people listed in the will were Vanderbilt staff members.) The minimum inheritance was \$1,000, which could purchase a comfortable home and

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24. Ibid., 11

25. Ibid., 13, 44

26. Ibid., 13

27. Foreman and Pierce Stimson. *The Vanderbilts and the Gilded Age*, 211.

28. Lennox, Mrs. *Frederick W. Vanderbilt*, 13-14.

property in Hyde Park at the time, while the maximum, \$250,000, went to a single, cherished employee, Herbert Shears, superintendent of Vanderbilt property, responsible for the operation of the estate's farm and maintenance of the mansion and grounds.<sup>29</sup> Varying amounts also went to educational institutions and Frederick's four nieces and nephews.

The remainder of Frederick Vanderbilt's estate was bequeathed to his wife's niece, Margaret Louise Van Alen. The great Vanderbilt Mansion and the property on which it sits were much too large for her to maintain, so she resolved to sell them. However, she had great difficulty finding a buyer. The estate was originally listed at \$350,000, but after receiving no offers, the price was reduced to \$250,000. A Greek Orthodox Church then considered acquiring the property, as did prominent spiritual leader Father Divine, but Margaret was not very keen on selling to either group. She also nobly refused to compromise the property by dividing it up or liquidating it. After two years, the estate remained unsold.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt admired the Vanderbilt estate for its magnificent trees and gardens and recognized the need to preserve such a profound example of Gilded Age history. At his suggestion, Margaret ultimately decided to donate the Vanderbilt Mansion property to the National Park Service. In 1940, it was officially declared the Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site and opened to the public as a monument to Frederick and Louise Vanderbilt and the striking impression they left on American history. As Roosevelt remarked, "I have always thought of the Hyde Park place with the greatest interest and affection, because...it is the only country place in the north which has been well kept for nearly two centuries...It would be a wonderful thing to have the maintenance of it assured for all time."<sup>30</sup>

Today, Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site remains a premier property in the National Park system. It now functions under the umbrella of the Roosevelt-Vanderbilt-Van Buren National Historic Sites, which also includes the Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site at Val Kill, Top Cottage, and the Martin Van Buren National Historic Site. The popularity of Vanderbilt Mansion alone has grown steadily over the years, beginning with 15,274 visitors in 1941 and rising to an impressive 398,447 patrons in 2014. In total, the site has welcomed 20,494,517 visitors in its seventy-five years of existence.<sup>31</sup>

The impact this National Historic Site has had is therefore monumental. It has reached an astonishing number of people through the many programs and services it offers. These include an array of tours, such as standard guided tours of the mansion

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29. "Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site: Monument to the Gilded Age," *National Park Service*, <http://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/78vanderbilt/78vanderbilt.htm>.; Foreman and Pierce Stimson. *The Vanderbilts and the Gilded Age*, 212.

30. *Ibid.*, 213.

31. "Vanderbilt Mansion NHS," *National Park Service*, last modified December 15, 2015, <https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/Reports/Park/VAMA>.



**View northwest from the lawn, courtesy of the author**

led by National Park Service rangers, seasonal Christmas tours in which one can view the mansion decorated for the holidays, “Servant and Steward” tours that offer a peek into the lives of the mansion staff, and self-guided cell phone and podcast tours of the grounds. To take in the fantastic natural aspects the site has to offer, one can explore the grounds—from the revered Italian gardens to hiking trails that wind around the estate. Vanderbilt National Historic Site utilizes community outreach to connect with and make a difference in the lives of Hudson Valley residents. Programs include a partnership the site has developed with the Frederick W. Vanderbilt Garden Association, which assists in maintaining the estate gardens, and participation in a free “Music in the Parks” concert series each summer.

Through all of these efforts, Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site contributes to the National Park Service's Find Your Park campaign, which aspires to afford more people the opportunity to discover personal connection to America's parks.<sup>32</sup> Vanderbilt Mansion succeeds in offering something for everyone, from gardening gurus to history lovers to hiking enthusiasts. In addition, the site continues rethinking how to tell the story of the estate from other points of view and through the lenses of the many different people who partook in its history—so it can provide more stories for more people.<sup>33</sup>

Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site, in conjunction with the Roosevelt-Vanderbilt-Van Buren National Historic Sites, is making special strides in reaching out to the community in celebration of the National Park Service's centennial. One way is through the nationally sponsored "A Class Act" program. As outlined by the National Park Service, the program's goal is to:

Help students develop a deeper understanding of park resources and the relevance of parks in their lives through a series of park education programs. To do so we will adopt a class of 2016 graduates (grade school, middle school, or high school) at every national park and develop a series of fun, educational, and engaging activities culminating in the NPS Centennial in 2016.<sup>34</sup>

In this endeavor, the Roosevelt-Vanderbilt-Van Buren National Historic Sites have jointly adopted a class from Shaker Junior/Senior High School in Latham, near Albany. Since the adoption of the class in 2012, "Each year, the students have visited the park learning about the NPS, park service careers, and about the life of Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt, and the Vanderbilts."<sup>35</sup> The program has been well received by students and teachers alike.

The National Park Service also is celebrating its centennial in the way it knows best—by serving the people. As one park ranger at Vanderbilt Mansion put it, the parks "belong to the citizens."<sup>36</sup> It is with this sentiment in mind that the National Park Service is marking this special occasion by setting goals for the future of its parks centered on the best ways to serve people and their local communities. Deemed collectively as "A Call to Action," these objectives are divided into four categories: Connecting People to Parks, Advancing the NPS Education Mission, Preserving Special Places, and Enhancing Professional Excellence. Many of the goals are focused on appealing to, engaging, and serving a younger population in order to revitalize interest in the national parks. Some of the endeavors include creating "deep connections between a younger generation and parks" by partnering with educational facilities and youth

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32. Allan Dailey (Supervisory Park Ranger) in discussion with the author, December 3, 2015.

33. Ibid.

34. "A Call to Action," *National Park Service Centennial*, last modified August 25, 2015, [http://www.nps.gov/calltoaction/PDF/C2A\\_2015.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/calltoaction/PDF/C2A_2015.pdf)

35. Susanne Norris, email message to author, November 16, 2015.

36. Susanne Norris (National Park Service Education Specialist) in discussion with the author, October 22, 2015.



groups, creating digital national park experiences to better appeal to youth, and creating “a new generation of citizen scientists and future stewards of our parks [through] educational biodiversity discovery activities in at least 100 national parks.”<sup>37</sup> These goals spread across a breadth of issues, ranging from preserving dark skies as a natural resource to reducing the National Park Service’s carbon footprint to connecting urban communities to National Park Service sites.<sup>38</sup> The National Park Service also has selected more than 100 Centennial Challenge Projects targeting specific improvements to parks through a combination of Congressional appropriations and volunteer partnerships.<sup>39</sup> For example, one challenge involves restoring a grove of sequoia trees in Yosemite National Park while another consists of rehabilitating Bright Angel Trail in Grand Canyon National Park.<sup>40</sup>

The National Park Service has served America proudly over the last century by preserving naturally and historically significant sites, allowing citizens to celebrate the beauty and accomplishments of the nation. As it moves forward into its second century, “the National Park Service must recommit to the exemplary stewardship and public enjoyment of these places... We must use the collective power of the parks, our historic preservation programs, and community assistance programs to expand our contributions to society in the next century.”<sup>41</sup> Through the National Park Service as a whole and through the Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site, we can see this commitment to excellence shining brightly.

*Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site is open year-round for guided tours of the mansion that last approximately one hour. Tickets are free for children fifteen years and younger, as well as for local college students. Tour times vary seasonally. The grounds are open daily from sunrise until sunset and are free to all. For more information on the Vanderbilt National Historic Site, visit <http://www.nps.gov/vama/index.htm> and for further information about how the National Park Service is celebrating its centennial, see <http://www.nps.gov/subjects/centennial/nps-centennial-challenge-projects.htm> and [http://www.nps.gov/calltoaction/PDF/C2A\\_2015.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/calltoaction/PDF/C2A_2015.pdf).*

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37. “A Call to Action.”

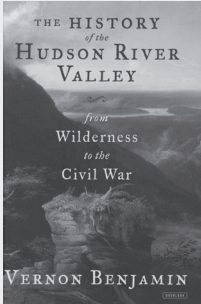
38. Ibid.

39. “NPS Centennial Challenge Projects,” *National Park Service*, last modified December 14, 2015, <http://www.nps.gov/subjects/centennial/nps-centennial-challenge-projects.htm>

40. “FY 2015 Centennial Challenge Project List,” *National Park Service*, <http://www.nps.gov/subjects/centennial/upload/FY15-NPS-Centennial-Challenge-Project-List.pdf>

41. “A Call to Action”

# Scholarly Forum



***The History of the Hudson River Valley  
from Wilderness to the Civil War*, Vernon Benjamin.  
New York, NY: Overlook Press, 2014 (560 pp.)**

The Hudson River Valley Review invited Roger Panetta and Susan Lewis, who have studied the region, to critique Vernon Benjamin's *The History of the Hudson River Valley from Wilderness to the Civil War*. The author's response follows.



## ROGER PANETTA

The Hudson River has attracted the interest of artists, historians, and writers for four centuries. It spawned an American landscape school of painting that informed emerging notions of national identity. Many find the roots of the modern environmental movement in the battles over Storm King Mountain. Indeed, the frequently used designation as America's River represents the canonization of the Hudson as a central element in our national story.

One of the byproducts of this river-centric view is the marginalization of the history of the Hudson River Valley as a distinct entity and its problematic relationship to the river. While their interdependence is an a priori assumption, the operational details of that connection are more elusive and imprecise. The terms Hudson River Valley and Hudson River have become permeable, allowing one to flow easily into another and further blurring the distinction. Indeed one may argue this is as it should be, and that any distinction represents a false dichotomy, for they are inextricably linked and their functional relationship is generally understood.

The term watershed, increasingly used to embrace the symbiotic relationship between river and valley and the region that drains into the river, while widening the scope of our general understanding, is not a term synonymous with valley.

But help is on the way. Vernon Benjamin has tackled this problem head on in *The History of the Hudson River Valley from Wilderness to the Civil War*, a well-researched and engagingly written work in the tradition of the grand historical narrative. In spite of its scope, the work has a compelling quality that holds the reader and draws you into a series of local stories populated with individuals and ideas that had regional and national consequence. I think of myself as a close student of the river and the valley and was pleasantly surprised by sparks of new knowledge that testifies to the breadth and depth of the research. I do not use these words lightly, but given the span of time

and place, the level of research, and the felicity of the writing, this is a tour de force.

In 500 pages Benjamin provides the reader with dozens of portraits, indeed more like landscape paintings, of key moments in the history of the Hudson River Valley. They are compact and efficient and yet with a sense of immediacy that insures they will become the standard reference source. Benjamin's work will serve as a narrative encyclopedia of the valley—the starting point for reading and thinking about the region.

The issue of framing the Hudson River Valley occupies the first section of the book, and Benjamin, who is not insensitive to the intellectual conundrum of the term river valley, concedes “the dilemma in fixing on a hard and fast definition of the Hudson River Valley” and “the parameters of the Hudson River Valley are elusive to pin down” (9-11). Nelson Greene dealt with the issue directly in the title of his 1931 four-volume work, *History of the Valley of the Hudson River*, and reinforced that approach early on with a map of the Hudson River counties. Greene's history is a river-centric frame from which Benjamin hopes to liberate us, and whatever ever the quarrels one has with his indeterminate approach, this work is a critical first step in parsing the two domains.

He also recognizes the place of New York City in the narrative of the valley and returns to this connection in small ways throughout the text. I continue to argue for the centrality of the city to the history of the region. But this work is not about that, for like all new history it establishes a base line of understanding filled with interpretative teases and new questions.

The exclusion of footnotes is a real disappointment given the richness of the narrative, which opens so many new lines of inquiry—I want to follow Benjamin's intellectual journey and explore his impressive research effort. This was a doubly unfortunate decision for it compels the author to explain this omission and to elaborate on the canons of research he adhered to as a way of justifying the book's scholarly credentials. This put me on my guard for no good reason. Quickly one senses the author's skill and professional handling of source materials and all uncertainty dissipates. He talks about “the company he hopes to keep” and his debt to Alf Evers. This work can stand alone on an equal footing with the work of not only Evers and Carl Carmer but also the long list of academic historians who have been mining this vein. A note to the publisher—restore the footnotes, increase the meager selection of faded maps, and provide the visual support this first rate text calls for.

The chronological frame move us from the geologic age to the archaeological and to the coming of the *Wilden* and the encounter with Henry Hudson. Benjamin's discussion of New Netherland and especially the treatment of Rensselaerswijck is representative of his approach to each of these key events—detailed yet concise, descriptive and not labored, set in a narrative that has momentum and captures the sense of a historical unfolding. Many of these narrative landscapes are constructed from primary sources that are animated by the author's energetic and accessible language. I found this approach one of the most compelling elements in the work, and in spite of its length, it holds the promise of a broad readership from scholars to students.

Among the best sections is Benjamin's discussion of Revolution and Federalism, where he lucidly unpacks the political philosophy and machination of New Yorkers. These chapters underscore not only their singular contributions but instill a renewed appreciation for the way the Hudson River Valley served as an incubator for so much of our early political life. Here Benjamin's description stays within his narrative frame but leaves the reader wondering about the nexus of ideas and place. In what ways did the valley cultivate this critical mass of political movers? Throughout the text, one is compelled to reflect on these personalities and their work and the ways the regional environment fostered such an effort. The implication of Benjamin's history, like any good work, opens the door to not only new questions but ones that begin to grapple with a more self-conscious examination of what makes this place special. This is an important byproduct that underscores the importance of footnotes as lead lines for further research.

In a detailed chapter entitled "By Water and Rail" the author provides a succinct review of the role of sail and steam in creating local transportation networks. The discussion of Robert Fulton is a dynamic rendering of his character and ambitions. But again the narrative challenges us to go further—what is the underlying relationship between time and space that is developed here and how do these innovations shape the valley's history and especially the powerful connection to New York City? Indeed, was the spirit of innovation in the air, and if so, why in this place?

This sixth section of the book is dedicated "The Romantics" and provides a solid grounding in the basic literature of the subject. From Irving to Cole, we are given full renderings of the key players. The treatment of Poe is taut and filled with pathos. These are among the strongest and most richly documented chapters. One can intuit the emerging sense of national identity being forged by these writers and painters. Again we are compelled to reflect on the implications of what Benjamin writes and we recall David Schuyler's *Sanctified Landscape*, which organizes these ideas into a powerful argument about the national import of the Hudson River Valley and engages with the sense of place in a direct way. This comparison is helpful because it delineates Benjamin's commitment to the narrative—recounting the stuff of history in a disciplined and coherent manner that I think is a prerequisite to any new interpretive examination of the valley. He has given us a trustworthy foundation that will serve as a lodestone for all students of the region.

Later chapters examine the regional economy, the political struggles of the 1840s, and the rent battles of the Calico warriors. He leads us through the "Rising Fury" and into the abyss of the Civil War and leaves me eager for the next volume.

This work will make its way not only to library bookshelves but into our classrooms and research centers, and will instigate new scholarship. Benjamin has remarkably bridged the gap between reference work and historical narrative in providing us with the first scholarly treatment of the Hudson River Valley.

Roger F. Panetta, *Fordham University*



## SUSAN LEWIS

*The History of the Hudson River Valley from the Wilderness to the Civil War* is a somewhat misleading title for Vernon Benjamin's massive, attractively designed and produced volume, described by the author as "the first comprehensive, narrative, critical history of the early Hudson River Valley, New York" (xi). Benjamin provides a compendium of local tales, a treasure trove of detail about people, places, and events associated with the valley. Who knew that John Jay coined the verb "Americanize," that Washington Irving came up with "the almighty dollar," or that James Fenimore Cooper was the first writer to use the word "pioneer" to describe American settlers (234, 326, and 332, respectively). Yet the book often reads like a collection of notes, pieces of a half-finished giant jigsaw puzzle that have yet to be integrated into a coherent image. On the whole, it is more a collection of interesting stories than a narrative or analytical history.

In his preface, Benjamin states that "A synthesis such as this requires such an intense focus on the specific topics covered that it is inevitable that some matters are overlooked, discarded, or simply missed..." (p. xi) "Yet I would argue that an effective synthesis also requires an overarching analysis that drives the narrative and selection of topics, and that Benjamin's overly intense focus on specifics makes it difficult for the reader to discern both the narrative flow of his history and the critical framework he hopes to convey. In his desire to share so much, the author overwhelms the reader with miscellaneous facts that don't seem to add up to a bigger picture. A typical example of such extraneous details would be biographical information about Nathaniel Pendleton, Alexander Hamilton's second in his duel with Aaron Burr. Do we need to know the name of his wife, or that Pendleton later died "in a freak accident" in Poughkeepsie? (238). In a description of Robert Fulton's successful steamboat trial up the Hudson in 1807, do we need two paragraphs on the "immensely handsome" Fulton's engagement and marriage to the "plain in appearance" Harriet Livingston, including her refusal to join his previous menage a trois with a Philadelphia couple (303)? Or, in a two-page entry on the obscure literary sisters Susan and Anna Warner, is it necessary to include the fact that when Anna died (in 1915) eight West Point cadets were her pallbearers (342)?

Ideally, I believe, this *History of the Hudson River Valley* should be enjoyed with a glass of wine in front of a roaring fire, with a raging snowstorm outside and a nice stretch of time ahead. In this mood, I would suggest skipping the rough going of some of the early chapters, which deal primarily with geology and lack any visual aids (maps or other illustrations) that would help the reader understand the material presented. Beginning with Chapter 5, Benjamin introduces humans to the valley, and we encounter the author's discursive style of telling stories. The chapter mixes a discussion of archeological finds of the late twentieth century with information about the Paleoindians themselves; information about these people and their lifestyle are interspersed with the names and discoveries of various archeologists. At one point we learn that "A casual



review of projectile points that a farmer's wife in Glasco shared with an Ulster County historian in 1997 suggested a 7,000 year history of man's activities there" (27)—a snippet of information that is difficult to evaluate in terms of importance. Later, we are told that, among the Indians of the Woodland period, "the lifespan of the average male remained under 35 years, and less for a woman, who worked harder" (29). What their work consisted of, or why hers was harder, is not explained.

The book includes some quirky descriptions, and at times offensive stereotypes. For example, Benjamin describes the Native inhabitants of the Hudson Valley as "a handsome people, swarthy to black in complexion" (39)—without any quotation marks or attribution. One assumes that this was a European observation from the colonial period, yet the sentence presents this strange observation as an unqualified fact. Later, in describing problems at Fort Orange, the author claims that the Walloons "acquired lazy habits that were out of character for these thrifty and hard-working people" (61)—a characterization that seems curiously dated, as does a later description of Dutch spoken in the Hudson Valley as a "quaint and colorful language." The reference to "wilderness" in the book's title might be forgiven, since the history starts before human habitation, but Benjamin is still calling the Hudson Valley a "wilderness" in 1710 (108). Most contemporary historians eschew such characterizations, which suggest that the valley lacked culture, civilization, and settlement before the European arrival.

Of equal concern are errors of fact that can only be described as "bloopers." Certainly, in a volume this epic in scope there will be errors. Yet to identify the William of Orange who assumed the crown of England in the Glorious Revolution of 1689 as the husband of James II's sister Mary, when he was in fact the son of James's sister Mary and husband of James II's daughter, also named Mary (William and Mary were cousins), suggests confusion about the basic facts of British history (101). Similarly, to claim that Benjamin Franklin wrote "his friend John Quincy Adams" in 1776, when John Quincy (born 1767) was only ten at the time, reveals that the author has confused John Quincy with his father, John Adams (162), or that the editor was asleep at the helm. In a mistake less likely to be noticed by the casual reader, Benjamin identifies Fanny Fern as the wife of Nathaniel Parker Willis, though Fern was actually the penname of Willis's estranged sister Sara (344). Such mistakes suggest a lack of fact-checking by the editors of this volume that is troubling in a book so dense with information.

In other places, one is unsure whether Benjamin is mistaken or simply promoting a new interpretation of history. For example, the standard explanation of the Election of 1800 is that Aaron Burr was chosen by the Democrat-Republicans as Jefferson's Vice President, accidentally received the same number of votes in the Electoral College, but refused to step aside. In contrast, Benjamin claims that "Burr fashioned a strong ticket and was expected (in New York at least) to win the presidency from the incumbent, John Adams..." (237). Perhaps this interpretation is correct, but it is stated without any suggestion that others in the historical community might disagree. Later, in his discussion of Irving and Cooper, Benjamin claims that "neither author was a great

favorite among women.” His evidence consists of a couple of quips from British reformer Harriet Martineau, plus his own observations that Cooper “was not averse to making disparaging remarks about women” (not proof that women disliked his writing) and that “Irving’s humor was ill-fitted to lady readers at the time” (333-334). Considering the popularity of both Cooper and Irving, and the large female literary audience of the period, and lacking better evidence, one remains skeptical of the conclusion that women did not enjoy their work.

Unfortunately, although I suspect that this volume may delight local history buffs, it would be impractical to assign it in the classroom. In addition to the problems noted above, Benjamin assumes a basic knowledge of New York State history, making this a book for a reader who is already familiar with those basics, rather than a student or novice. For example, he speaks of David Pietersz de Vries as the only patroon to visit America in the 1630s without explaining who or what a patroon was (64). Nor does the index include the term patroon, so it is difficult to discover whether it is defined elsewhere.

There are many stories in this book that would provide a great source for adding life to one’s classes. Benjamin’s descriptions of Revolutionary battles for control of the Hudson, as in Chapter 27, “The Phoenix and the Rose,” are detailed and exciting. Unfortunately, the index makes finding appropriate anecdotes a time-consuming task. Instead of the subject listings one might expect, the index is largely a list of individual names. Thus one can find an entry for Nathaniel Pendleton, but not for a major topic such as slavery or women, or even the Revolution (or War for Independence) or individual battles. The volume also would benefit from maps that clearly locate the many geographical features Benjamin describes.

It is disappointing to report that a book that is so obviously a labor of love fails to live up to its promise. Vernon Benjamin is clearly passionate about history, and one suspects that in person he must be a wonderful storyteller. Unfortunately, Overlook Press did the author no favors by failing to adequately edit and fact-check what they present as “one solid, all-purpose history of the Hudson Valley” (back cover). Nevertheless, for those who simply love stories about the Hudson Valley, this book provides a wealth of entertaining anecdotes.

*Susan Ingalls Lewis, Associate Professor of History,  
State University of New York at New Paltz*



## RESPONSE BY VERNON BENJAMIN

The reviews of my book by Roger Panetta and Susan Ingalls Lewis are like a coin with two sides, one a “heads up” of approval and one a “tails” of rejection. I love it, and I applaud the *Review* for publishing both and providing me with this opportunity to comment. I also have a high regard for both authors as educators and historians, and understand that I am treading on difficult ground in approaching Hudson Valley history as an independent scholar interested in tapping into a popular readership.

Panetta takes a top-down approach in opening his review by evoking the attention given to the Hudson River in historical accounts. Indeed, more than twenty books have been written about the river, yet only one previous valley history exists, Nelson Greene’s, which Panetta notes was within “a river-centric frame” compared to my valley-centric approach. Greene put together what local community leaders reported under a single editorial style, adding three heavy tomes of fawning (and worthless) biographies of those leaders. My book, in contrast, is the first *critical* history, and by that I mean each fact was corroborated by other sources and the overall scheme and outline arrived at through a rigorous evaluation designed to drive the narrative forward in a comprehensive, chronological manner.

That’s what I thought history books did, and Panetta affirms my approach by placing it “in the tradition of the grand historical narrative.”

I appreciated his acknowledgment that my book “establishes a base line” on the history, which was a goal of mine, “warts and all” as I say in my follow-up volume coming out this spring. And both he and Lewis identify my American Revolution chapter as the best, an estimation with which I agree even though I love them all. I also share their mutual disdain for the lack of footnotes and maps, and, in Lewis’s review, the skimpy index that my book provides. I was particularly distressed over the index, since I had only a single weekend to take a shot at it and make it better.

My first chapter had 270 footnotes. I knew I could not sustain my readership at that rate, and I also felt that the history was so huge that I could legitimately forego that level of documentation in return for the extra space it gave me. To compensate, I included every single source in my bibliography. I know that doesn’t meet the text of proper scholarship, but the corroborations behind the facts are all in there.

I also applaud Panetta for seeing how I interwove aspects of the history, wherever relevant within the narrative, and created what he calls “interpretative teases and new questions.” I thought I would be called out on my interpretations more than I have been, because I did not hesitate to challenge accepted interpretations. That may yet happen as my work is taken into consideration in future Hudson Valley studies; Panetta suggests that my book “opens the door” to new questions.

Regarding Susan Ingalls Lewis’s review, I see more of the academic in her words than a genuine historian of the region (as Panetta is). She seems to have been overwhelmed by the level of anecdotage that I provided—a problem with the only other negative

review that I have seen—and to have missed the forest for the trees. That happens immediately when she digresses in the opening paragraph and waxes effusive about a few word coinages that I reported, all the while trying to get to her assessment of my book as “more a collection of interesting stories than a narrative or analytical history.” The Table of Contents alone should have disabused her of that notion.

I think Carl Carmer was my model when it came to the stories. I cannot imagine a history of the Hudson River Valley without them—“warts and all”—and insist them on the reader as a manifestation of what I call the power of the small, how the momentary and at times miniscule (but never arbitrary) fact reflects the whole. Not only is the history illuminated by the inclusion of the anecdote, but a fuller sense of place is established, and only in the place, the geography, does the history exist. One reviewer threw up his hands at reading about the arrival of the first piano in Hudson—why bother with such nuisance facts!—without having comprehended the narrative within which that representative fact was recorded. Without that piano, the story, and the history, fell flat.

Lewis doesn't just dismiss my anecdotes as unnecessarily intrusive, but also questions why I included this fact or that in relating them. Who cares if Nathaniel Pendleton, Hamilton's second, died in a carriage accident in Hyde Park (not Poughkeepsie)? Why speak of “handsome” Robert's marriage to “plain” Harriet in the steamboat section? Here we get to the heart of the “local” aspect of a regional history, the need to place in a fuller, *local* context the larger events that are transpiring. Pendleton and Hyde Park (among other facts) tie the valley to Hamilton, and Fulton's marriage reflected his close relationship with Harriet's uncle, Robert Livingston. I was not interested in simply retelling the famous stories, but always looked for the new fact, the unreported information, the colorful tie to my valley and its geography. My guide in that pursuit was a Charles Olsen quote: “Know the new facts first.”

Lewis rightfully chides me for errors that I make, although my interpretation of egregious may be different from hers. Okay, I did get William of Orange's marriage wrong—but Lewis's confusing description of who his wife was doesn't clear that up for me. She's right about the John Quincy Adams error—my bad—but missed some worse ones. Didn't she notice that I killed Richard Montgomery in Montreal, not Quebec, and had Abraham Lincoln attending a play of a different title than the one he was at when shot? My only excuse for such errors, and it is a tongue-in-cheek one to be sure, is that none of that happened in the Hudson Valley! Find me those errors, please.

Lewis turns out to be completely wrong in what she calls “the standard explanation of the Election of 1800.” In her version, Aaron Burr ascends to the Vice Presidency as the candidate chosen by the Democrat-Republicans as Jefferson's mate. She apparently did not remember that there were no Vice President candidates in the early years; that office was awarded to the person who came in second, in this case Aaron Burr. He almost won; the electoral college vote was a tie.

She also managed to misread the book jacket by disingenuously criticizing my publisher, Overlook Press, for “presenting” my book as “one solid, all-purpose history of the Hudson Valley.” That was the statement made by J. Winthrop Aldrich, the retired Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation in New York and an authority on the region. Had Lewis spent more time in challenging that claim instead of nitpicking a few of the thousands of facts my book contains, her review would have benefited and I might have been spared such indignities.

Her other exceptions to my tale are more personal than factual—she disapproves of “curiously dated” (yet accurate) depictions of Walloons and the Dutch language, interprets the meaning of “wilderness” out of context, and dislikes what I wrote about Irving and Cooper’s reception among women readers (which I got from my sources)—apparently preferring to “remain skeptical” rather than offer sources defending her views. That’s fine, as long as the reader doesn’t think that I made these observations up.

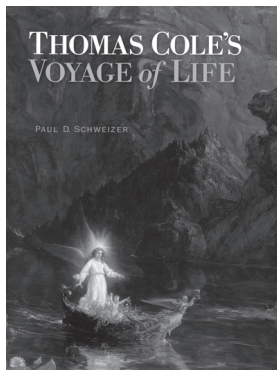
Finally, the SUNY New Paltz professor dismissed my book as “impractical” for a classroom. I am an adjunct lecturer, not a true academic by any means, yet I used the material of the book in teaching Hudson Valley history for twelve years at Marist College. A seventh-grade teacher who looked through my Table of Contents declared it was “exactly” the area he was teaching his students that year. The book was also used, in part, in a classroom at Columbia-Greene Community College. Nevertheless, she is right. I did not write a textbook and have never put it forth as one, so I am not sure where that criticism is coming from.

I understand that modern historians prefer writing histories that follow a new theme or interpretation of some aspect of history, and I applaud those books even though I always look with caution on any new claims as to how history evolved as it did. I think Russell Shorto threaded the thematic approach very well in *The Island at the Center of the World*, where he focused on the role New York, compared with New England, played in the formation of our nation. Those are legitimate histories, yet I also feel that the old style, the traditional approach giving the properly vented facts in context and chronology, is necessary for a work like this.

Vernon Benjamin



# Book Reviews



**Thomas Cole's *Voyage of Life*, Paul D. Schweizer.**  
Utica, NY: Munson Williams Proctor Arts Institute,  
2014. (73 pp.)

In *Thomas Cole's Voyage of Life*, author Paul D. Schweizer presents a plethora of valuable research and analysis pertaining to the life of the famed American landscape artist and perhaps his most renowned series of paintings. This volume, a rather short one at only seventy-three pages, is one of eight in a series executed by the Munson Williams Proctor Arts Institute in Utica, New York. Each page of Schweizer's work is brimming with beautiful color illustrations—

some small, some large, some covering two pages. These not only delight the eye but also are specifically organized to enhance the academic discussion the author attempts to foster. While being tremendous pieces of art unto themselves, Cole's *The Voyage of Life* series has experienced an awesome yet sometimes tumultuous journey as historical artifacts. This remarkable volume traces the beginnings of *The Voyage of Life*, how the paintings were exhibited, and why they captured the “American imagination” (1).

In art history, there are four main points of discussion: the structure of the paintings (line, form, shape, color, etc.), the ideas represented, how the historical viewer might have seen or interacted with the paintings, and the larger historical context. Rather than discussing these individually, Schweizer incorporates each topic into a seamless narrative. To head each section, he uses, for the most part, striking and memorable quotes that are later found in the text. These headings, such as “The Finest Work I Have Executed” and “Something Different, but Not Worse,” focus and intrigue the reader on what is to come (14, 44). It is with great attention to detail and love of the minute that Schweizer in each section provides rich descriptions of color, line, shape, and object. Accompanied by grand illustrations, one gets a true sense of what the author means when he describes Cole as wanting to depict “a more terrifying view of the water's vertiginous descent” (30). Schweizer notes the smallest elements in Cole's series, whether it be the “traditional emblem” of the shell in *Childhood* or the angels “descending from the sky” in *Old Age* (20, 36). Each of these fine details, he accurately points out, are crucial to understanding the meanings of individual paintings and the series as a whole.

Each of the paintings in *The Voyage of Life* represents a different aspect of life: *Childhood*, *Youth*, *Manhood*, and *Old Age*. According to Schweizer, Thomas Cole wanted to examine three themes within these paintings: that “life is a pilgrimage”; life “evolves through four stages”; and that life can be shown metaphorically as a “journey on a river” (9). Indeed, it was not Cole's goal merely to paint pretty pictures—he wanted to infuse

*The Voyage of Life* series with a “kind of moralizing rhetoric” (5). Much already is known within academic circles about Cole’s attempt to moralize his art, particularly within the framework of his famous conversion to Transcendentalism. However, Schweizer does add a tremendous amount of detail and intrigue to the everexpanding historiography of Cole’s life and work. He highlights the connection between specific aspects of Cole’s *The Voyage of Life* series and the work of famous artists such as Dürer and Rembrandt. Schweizer also attempts to use Cole’s journal entries and letters to grasp the artist’s reconciliation between the landscape and subject matter—for instance, when he notes that the compositional *Childhood* landscape represents both the “joyful innocence” as well as the “narrow experience” of childhood (17). *The Voyage of Life* was Cole’s attempt to present an overarching moral message, while also uniting the shared natural and human experience.

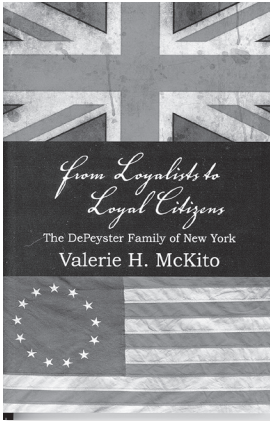
The heart and soul of *Thomas Cole’s Voyage of Life* move beyond the descriptive and illuminatory to discuss and analyze this famed series both as art and historical artifact. In doing so, a fair amount of Schweizer’s discussion focuses on Cole’s personal life and the man who commissioned the series—banker and art collector Samuel Ward. Through the lens of Schweizer’s extensive research, the reader better understands how Cole’s struggle to formulate a working artistic contract with Ward, Ward’s untimely death, and the subsequent bickering over how and where to exhibit the series all played major roles in the series’ remarkable journey (12, 16, 38-39). The author uses the writings of Cole and Ward, newspaper articles, political cartoons, and secondary scholarship to present a nuanced and detailed analysis of the famed series. Schweizer also pairs the original *The Voyage of Life* series with a second *Voyage* series painted by Cole when he visited Europe, as well as numerous oil sketches he used to practice and prepare for his final American version. This effectively demonstrates that while art can sometimes seem “fixed” in a certain historical state, there is actually much fluidity over time. Cole planned the series, changed the series, altered the series, and repainted the series. Indeed, as changing circumstances in Cole’s personal life forced him to adapt, he was always looking ahead toward the ultimate goal of painting a “noble work of art” (26).

It is also a credit to Schweizer that he continues the historical narrative beyond Thomas Cole’s unexpected death in 1848. Cole’s *The Voyage of Life* series would go on to become his “most admired paintings” in American culture (53). Some of these images would be used in religious books as a means to communicate certain messages about faith, America, and spiritual journeys. Many of *The Voyage of Life* paintings lived on in print form, taking refuge in the homes of average Americans. The series continued to have a “psychological impact” on the American psyche, sparking “a variety of responses” to the series’ core message some years after it was painted (40, 61). Indeed, the very series that was so popular experienced its own voyage: continually passed down, exchanged, and sold to various exhibitions and patrons.

*Thomas Cole’s Voyage of Life* is an example of historical writing at its finest: great research, a narrow focus, while also making sure to expand on the broader historical

context. While this book could be read by anyone, the focus is primarily academic and scholarly. However, the book lacks an in-depth discussion of Cole's prior paintings and where this series fits into his oeuvre. Additionally, one might sense an absence of argument within its pages, although this does not diminish in any way the amount of effort, time, and research that must have been devoted to creating this succinct and interesting volume. Schweizer sums up his writing perfectly by quoting "art detective" Charles Sarnoff, who said, "*The Voyage of Life* had a life of its own" (63).

Jacob Chaires, University of Maryland, College Park



Valerie H. McKito, *From Loyalists to Loyal Citizens: The Depeyster Family of New York* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015) 260 pp.

After centuries on the margins of the historiography of the American Revolution and Early Republic, loyalists are drawing the attention of historians for their role in the years following independence. Major works in this field, like Maya Jassanoff's *Liberty's Exiles* and Alan Taylor's *The Civil War of 1812*, have traced the role of personal and family connections in determining people's loyalties during the Revolution and followed the results of their subjects' choices into the years following the American

War for Independence. Valerie H. McKito brings a new angle to this conversation by tracing the DePeyster family, particularly *paterfamilias* Fredrick DePeyster, through the American Revolution, into exile in Canada, and back to New York City during the Early Republic. By law and most conventional wisdom, such a journey should have been impossible: Every male of military age in the DePeyster family served in loyalist military units during the War of Independence, and as such were legally excluded from American citizenship. McKito argues that the DePeysters overcame this proscription by skillfully navigating a web of personal and economic connections to reestablish their family among New York City's elite within forty years of American independence.

As is customary for a family history, McKito begins the book by tracing the DePeysters' origins back to the first Dutch colonists in New Amsterdam. While this section could have been a boring slog through generations of genealogy, McKito gives it life by focusing on traits she found recurring in the DePeyster family: a relentless push for advancement of both self and family, and the role that chance and luck played in determining family members' fortunes. Rather than errata better consigned to an appendix, this survey of the family gives a sense of how the subjects of the book saw themselves in the world.

McKito is at her best when tracing the trans-Atlantic connections and contours that made up the economy of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Despite

the distances involved and the slow speed of communication, the world of Atlantic merchants was small, and individual merchants depended on kinship networks and personal recommendations to succeed. In the DePeyster family, McKito finds both positive and negative examples. She credits Fredrick DePeyster's ability to make and maintain contacts, often through his British and Canadian in-laws, for his rise from fourth son to head of the family. It was these contacts that made Fredrick DePeyster attractive to New Yorkers. In the aftermath of the Revolution, the United States found itself cut off from former colonial trade networks and scrambled to find ways back into the global market. A man like DePeyster, with contacts in Canada, Britain, and the Caribbean, offered so many tantalizing opportunities that New Yorkers were willing to ignore the DePeyster clan's opposition to the Revolution.

McKito is most engaging when following the kin and economic networks of her subjects around the Atlantic basin. Her second chapter examines the DePeysters' brief exile in Canada, and paints an engaging picture of the social, economic, and political struggles of this frontier colony in the 1780s. This is one of the few times class conflict clearly appears in the book, which is an angle McKito could have explored more. Most of the DePeyster brothers served as officers in loyalist military units during the Revolution, but one, Joseph Reade DePeyster, was an enlisted man. That a wealthy and presumably learned man served as a lowly private is highly unusual, and Joseph Reade's experiences in the ranks seemed to color his politics in later life. McKito describes Canadian politics as being split between small farmers—generally, poorer people and enlisted men whose service entitled them to small plots—and merchants, often men who served as officers during the war. McKito shows that Joseph Reade DePeyster aligned himself with the small farmers, but she cannot explain why he found himself in that position in the first place. In a book about the power and utility of family connections, this is a relatively unexplained counterpoint, and a missed chance to delve further into the relations between military and civilian society.

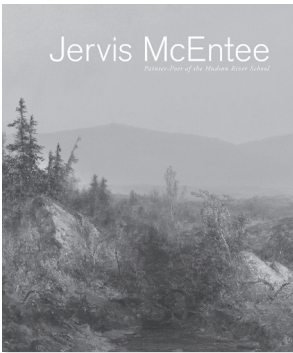
Just as the Canadian chapter sheds some new insights on the political operation of that colony, the book's sixth chapter shows how the DePeysters remained connected to the Atlantic world in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Historians—and history classes at all levels—usually focus on the westward expansion and early industrialization of the United States during this time. McKito instead shows how American goods found their way to markets in the Caribbean, South America, and Europe, and how commodities from those regions, particularly sugar and cotton from the Tropics, still played an important role in the American economy. This serves as a useful reminder that the Atlantic approach to American history does not need to end with the War of 1812.

Despite being a family story, there is not always a clear sense of the personalities who are McKito's subjects. Again, this is likely the fault of the sources: Eighteenth-century diarists and bookkeepers were generally not effusive in their personal insights. Indeed, McKito does a commendable job squeezing some humanity out of the deeds,

wills, and bills of sale that make up much of her primary source base. Still, the book could have been improved by incorporating a few more quotes from letters in the text's main body, rather than consigning the voices of her subjects to the endnotes.

*From Loyalists to Loyal Citizens* is a promising first effort by McKito. By examining one family with microscopic detail, she discovered a number of new insights into the histories of the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean after the War for American Independence. This is a book that can be appreciated by professional historians and history buffs alike, and is a successful merging of genealogy and academic inquiry. McKito's work will hopefully inspire others to look at loyalist attempts to reintegrate into the United States, and her methodology can serve as a base for other historians to explore areas outside of New York City.

Michael Diaz, Temple University



Lee A. Vedder, David Schuyler, et al., *Jervis McEntee: Painter-Poet of the Hudson River School*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015) 130 pp.

In 2015 the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art at the State University of New York at New Paltz organized “Jervis McEntee: Painter-Poet of the Hudson River School,” the first museum exhibition to focus solely on this artist, and the first to cover the full breadth of his career since the Debra Force Fine Art gallery in New York City mounted “A Diary Illuminated: Oil Sketches by Jervis

McEntee” in 2007. The Dorsky’s sweeping and visually arresting exhibition contained over eighty works of art and ephemera, drawing from over thirty public institutions and private collectors, and representing every period of the artist’s four-decade career. The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue (SUNY Press) with essays by Lee A. Vedder (independent art historian and exhibition curator), David Schuyler (Professor of Humanities and American Studies at Franklin and Marshall College), and Kerry Dean Carso (Associate Professor of Art History at SUNY New Paltz). The Dorsky’s exhibition overlapped with a smaller and more intimate show at the Friends of Historic Kingston Museum entitled “Jervis McEntee: Kingston’s Artist of the Hudson River School,” which included a small catalogue with essays by Lowell Thing and William B. Rhoads and published by Black Dome Press. Collectively, these exhibitions and publications, most particularly the catalogue for the Dorsky show, re-assert McEntee’s accomplishments as an important and unique Hudson River School painter through impressive new scholarship and a rigorous examination of his artistic oeuvre.

While Jervis McEntee (1828-1891) has long been recognized as a member of America’s first truly native art movement, the Hudson River School, he has, as essayist David Schuyler aptly points out, been “relegated to the rank of second tier painter by most historians.” In addition, McEntee’s penchant for painting late autumnal landscapes



has often resulted in the perception that he was summarily depressed and gloomy. Yet McEntee works, infinitely more diverse, can be found in almost every major collection of nineteenth-century American art, both public and private—even if they are not always displayed on the museum wall. Significant exhibitions and published scholarly surveys of the Hudson River School routinely include McEntee, and his diaries (preserved at the Archives of American Art) have been a vital resource for decades by anyone seriously conducting a study of this period of American art and culture. He has been ever-present, but in shadow, and the writers of *Jervis McEntee: Painter-Poet of the Hudson River School* seek to turn a bright light on this talented and engaging artist. Largely they succeed. Readers are provided with new insights into McEntee's works, while the thought-provoking essays connect the artist to larger contemporary issues, including art patronage, literary influences, industrial expansion, and the American Civil War—all largely told through the specific narrative of McEntee's biography.

The catalogue opens with a complete reprint of McEntee's own artistic credo as expressed in a letter to critic George William Sheldon in 1879. Among other things, he states that through landscape painting "you can tell a certain kind of story." This becomes a departure point for the first essayist, Lee Vedder, who immediately links McEntee and his entire career to his love of literature, asserting that his artistic evolution is a visual expression of poetic and emotive impulses. If McEntee expressed that paintings should tell a story, then Vedder is tasked with telling several parallel stories as she embarks on the first comprehensive discussion of this artist and his work. This is a daunting task, which she manages to balance quite successfully overall—relating biographical details, immersing us in the world of the Hudson River School painters, and conducting formal discussion of the artwork.

Vedder arranges her essay chronologically, subtitling various sections with decade designations so the reader stays grounded. Throughout, she weaves in McEntee's own words and those of contemporary sources—critics, newspapers, colleagues, friends, and family. She is able to enrich her writing, using these words from the past to strengthen her arguments, rather than having her thoughts subsumed by them. By tracing poet Henry Pickering's childhood influence on McEntee, as well as the painter's own lifelong commitment to writing, Vedder successfully illustrates his close connection with these two modes of artistic expression. Reading about McEntee's extensive travel, service in the Civil War, and his close friendships, we come to understand how these varied experiences influenced his paintings. We also gain a greater sense of the man behind the art. Vedder has doggedly mined McEntee's extensive diaries and identifies for the reader important paintings now unlocated. There are funny anecdotal stories of papers strewn about the studio, along with deeply personal admissions of artistic blockage, resulting in a well-rounded presentation of McEntee. Vedder debunks the long-held notion that McEntee's autumn landscapes convey despondence, citing his own view of these works and the season they represent as "restive" and "contemplative." Her arguments relative to the paintings themselves are persuasive.

The essay also relates the shift towards European models of landscape painting, which individual Hudson River School painters would confront by embracing it, resolutely rejecting it, or adapting it to varying degrees at different times as they felt comfortable. Vedder asserts it is this third mode that accounts for the vast array of style one encounters when looking at this unprecedented amount of McEntee works. Vedder makes a compelling argument that McEntee manages this balance on his own terms. One of the wonderful connections made by Vedder is the link between McEntee's arresting *Danger Signal* and *Rain, Speed and Steam* by the great British landscape genius J. M. W. Turner, which McEntee encountered at the newly formed Metropolitan Museum of Art. Links such as this illustrate Vedder moving beyond an admittedly much-needed biography of McEntee into deep artistic discovery and analysis that will change how we look at this painter—a marked accomplishment of this essay.

Kerry Carso is an art historian and professor who consistently examines American artists through an interdisciplinary lens, drawing connections to wider contemporary influences in new and interesting ways. Once again she achieves this via her contribution to this catalogue. One learns that McEntee was likely named for engineer John B. Jervis, with whom McEntee's father worked. John B. Jervis was responsible for the Delaware and Hudson Canal (1828), which brought anthracite (stone coal) from Pennsylvania mines to the New York market via the canal that terminated in Roundout village—McEntee's lifelong home. Carso presents McEntee's love and dedication to unspoiled nature in the context of the reality of urban expansion he witnessed in his everyday life. A highlight of the essay is the illustration and discussion of a drawing of New York's Central Park in its early stages of development, which reminds the reader that the later and seemingly naturalistic result is a complete construct that obliterated the original landscape. Carso thoughtfully touches upon the Hudson River School painters' uneasy relationship between Romantic nostalgia for the American wilderness and the industrial "progress" rapidly supplanting it. Carso recognizes that McEntee and his personal experience of witnessing the transformation of his charming hometown to bustling city within his lifetime provides a unique opportunity to explore tensions felt by artists and Americans in this era. Her final comments concerning the re-examination of Hudson River School artists in relation to early conservationist ideas remind the reader that McEntee and his colleagues continue to be relevant to new modes of scholarly discourse.

David Schuyler's shorter and summarizing essay concentrates on succinctly distilling several major conclusions that his colleagues Vedder and Carso have fleshed out in more detail. His first is that McEntee distinguishes himself from other painter colleagues by regularly depicting "intimate views of nature" rather than the sweeping panoramic vistas often associated with Frederic Church, Albert Bierstadt, and McEntee's dear friend Sanford Robinson Gifford. Even when rendering views of some distance, McEntee captured an intimacy not present in the works of these contemporaries, without resorting to faithful transcription typically associated with the other painter of "interior scenes," Asher Durand. The second contribution is that McEntee creates

an entire body of work that focused on late autumn and winter scenery completely distinct from the bombastic fall foliage of Jasper Cropsey and the snow-clad winter wonderlands of Walter Launt Palmer—fellow artists not mentioned in Schuyler's essay. Helped by McEntee's own words of intent with these scenes, Schuyler and his fellow writers convincingly dispel previous readings of this work as gloomy and unimaginative. Drawing from contemporary sources, Schuyler emphasizes again the respect McEntee garnered from colleagues and critics, both here and abroad, throughout his lifetime. Perhaps the most compelling point Schuyler makes is that McEntee was the sole Hudson River School painter who was born and remained in the Hudson Valley, his connection running deeper than any in his circle. Schuyler reminds us that McEntee's artistic devotion to capturing the beauties of the valley landscape was indeed a "choice" of this well-traveled and highly intellectual, curious man, and that today's art lovers benefit from his desire to stay "local."

All three writers are to be commended on managing to cover a great deal of intellectual ground relative both to McEntee's specific career and the emergence of a commercial and critically successful American landscape painting tradition largely created through the efforts of the painter and his peers. McEntee serves as a wonderful collective representative of these artists' links to literary colleagues, their struggles to react to emerging European artistic influences, and their ambivalent relationship to rapid industrial expansion.

These essays pave the way for additional critical examination of McEntee's extremely varied and shifting style relative to aspects of artistic influence, imitation and experimentation. This reader hopes that references to McEntee's lack of commercial success may prompt discussion of the underlying reasons as to why he did not benefit from the robust patronage enjoyed by many of his artist friends. McEntee's personal experiences serve as a departure point for continued exploration of tensions created by the fact that "Captains" of industrial advancement were often the very patrons who supported the painters' professional efforts.

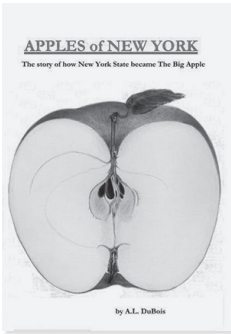
The catalogue is punctuated by fifty-four beautiful, full-color pages of McEntee artworks from the exhibition, largely arranged chronologically. Their inclusion (one per page) informs the essays and definitively proves the sheer variety of McEntee's artistic style—a major assertion of Vedder's essay. It also allows the reader to make artistic comparisons while flipping through the vibrant pages. Many of these works are not on public view and are reproduced here for the first time anywhere. Given that, there is some disappointment that catalogue entries for each work were not undertaken, as it is likely this was a unique opportunity for in-depth scholarship of this scope for some time to come.

The back of the catalogue features reprints of touching period commentary by McEntee's colleagues and friends, including actor Edwin Booth and painter Frederic Church, written on the occasion of his death in 1891. The inclusion of John Ferguson Weir's memorial address is a fitting bookend to McEntee's own words, which both

begin the catalogue and are liberally dispersed throughout the essays. The inclusion of these items allows the novice or casual reader a rare glimpse into the primary source documents that form the bedrock of any professional historian's work. The catalogue concludes with three poems written by McEntee, successfully re-enforcing each essayists' fundamental assertion that his art was both painting and verse, each medium informing the other—or, as Schuyler concludes, "His paintings were poems."

Jervis McEntee has become inextricably linked with his home on the Hudson, but he and his art are more complex than that singular association, as the catalogue poignantly illuminates. This book is an easy but informative read for anyone interested in art of this period, for both the seasoned Hudson River School scholar and those discovering McEntee and his fellow painters for the first time.

Valerie Balint, Associate Curator, The Olana Partnership



***Apples of New York: The Story of How New York State Became the Big Apple*, Ann L. DuBois, author, Mitch Wright, editor (New Place Press, 2015) 192 pp.**

If you love apples, this well-illustrated and odd little book is for you. Twenty-five color plates by illustrator-author Ann. L. DuBois provide a colorful look at the varieties of apples grown in New York, filling a void for apple fanciers since Spencer Beach's illustrated book on the topic in 1905. If reading about apples makes you hungry, don't worry: Ms. Dubois includes about twenty recipes for apple-based dishes—from apple risotto to apple cheddar panini. In addition, the book offers a list of a couple of dozen apple orchards and farms in New York State, along with phone numbers, addresses, and email addresses. This list is especially helpful because the description of each orchard includes the varieties of apples grown there.

A good part of this book is devoted to the history of apples in America and New York State. Both apples and the honeybees that pollinated them immigrated to the Western Hemisphere from Europe. Fortunately for apple lovers, Native Americans failed to construct a border fence to keep out these illegal immigrants and they became anchor fruits leading to the multiplication of their descendants—apple butter, apple relish, apple vinegar, apple sauce, apple juice, and your reviewer's favorite, apple cider. Settlers depended on apples' multiple uses for survival. For some early Americans, apples became as important for sustenance as corn did for Native Americans. Cider mills dotted the landscape of colonial America as people discovered that they could leave barrels of cider outside, let it freeze, skim off the ice, and increase the remaining alcoholic content thirty to forty percent to make apple jack, the apple's most potent "anchor baby."

Ms. DuBois could have given us a fuller account of the Livingston family's role in promoting the development of New York's apple varieties. While the author provides a history of the family over several generations, their importance to the development of apples remains understated and lacking in details. Just telling us that some Livingston family members improved their valuable orchards does not tell us enough about how apples actually developed and spread throughout the state. Tenants of the Livingstons are mentioned, but what role did they play? Were Palatine Germans important in spreading the cultivation of apples in the Hudson and Mohawk valleys? Likewise, the history of the development of commercial apple orchards in the nineteenth century is summarized in a couple of sentences. And how did cider mills get established, and what markets did they find in the nineteenth century?

For those unacquainted with the story of apples, a fuller description of the spread of their cultivation outside of New York would have provided context regarding cultivation in this state relative to the country as a whole. What is unique about apple development in New York compared, for example, to Washington, California, or Virginia? The author mentions cider production and hard cider briefly, leaving the reader with a lack of information to compare the importance of the production of apple juice, apple cider, and apple jack to New York's economy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries compared to today.

The author devotes a chapter to exploring the origins of the term "Big Apple" for New York City, leading into a discussion of slavery and African-American history, which do not appear germane to the book's subject. It would have been more helpful had the author discussed the role of African-American agricultural workers in apple orchards and farms and the use of temporary migrant workers brought into New York from Jamaica to pick crops at harvest time. Similarly, the author mentions that New York lost its primacy as the nation's leading apple producer after 1945. How did suburbanization contribute to the decline of farms in the state? Did new techniques of commercial farming elsewhere in the country worsen the problems of New York's apple growers? Did the increasing importation of apples and apple juice from abroad make it difficult for New York producers to compete?

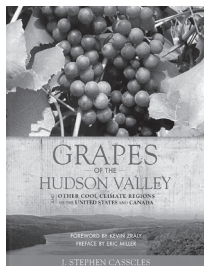
While the author provides a detailed list of orchards and farms, she also should have cited cider producers, wineries that bottle apple wine, microbrewers of hard cider, and micro-distillers of apple jack. For example, in a walk through one farmers' market in Troy, this reviewer encountered a cider maker, a company based in the Finger Lakes that produces hard cider, a Hudson Valley winemaker selling apple wine, and a micro-distiller making apple jack. In other words, New York is bustling with local producers of apple products, and this book should have included them all.

I would recommend this book for the illustrations alone; the author is an excellent illustrator. However, for anyone interested in a comprehensive study of New York's apples, the reader must go back to the Beach.

*Harvey Strum, Sage Colleges*



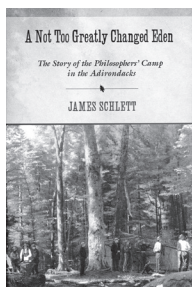
# New & Noteworthy Books Received



## **Grapes of the Hudson Valley and Other Cool Climate Regions of the United States and Canada**

By J. Stephen Casscles (Coxsackie, NY: Flint Mine Press, 2015)  
272 pp. \$29.99 (softcover) [www.flintminepress.com](http://www.flintminepress.com)

For centuries the Hudson River Valley has been a major contributor to the development and advancement of winemaking. *Grapes of the Hudson Valley* is an extensive handbook for anyone interested in the region's winemaking—from the varieties of grapes grown and the styles of wine made from those grapes to the genetic makeup of the grapes themselves. Highlighting the history of the winemaking process, as well as key innovators of the region, Casscles provides a well-organized guide for would-be winemakers and wine enthusiasts alike.



## **A Not Too Greatly Changed Eden: The Story of the Philosophers' Camp in the Adirondacks**

By James Schlett (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015)  
256 pp. \$29.95 (hardcover) [www.cornellpress.cornell.edu](http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu)

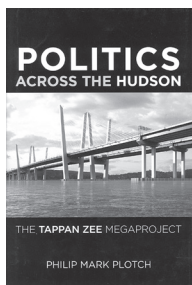
In the summer of 1858, artist-editor William James Stillman led some of the nation's greatest thinkers to Follensby Pond in the Adirondacks for several days of group discussion and reflection in nature. *A Not Too Greatly Changed Eden* recounts the trip, dubbed the Philosophers' Camp, as well as the events preceding it and the dramatic change in the environmental and political landscape that followed in its wake. Schlett traces the relationship between nature and society from intellectualism to industrialism and ultimately to conservationism and how it manifested itself within all facets of the story and ideals put forth in the Philosophers' Camp.



## **Stop at the Red Apple Rest: The Restaurant on Route 17**

By Elaine Freed Lindenblatt (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2014)  
265 pp. \$19.95 (softcover) [www.sunypress.edu](http://www.sunypress.edu)

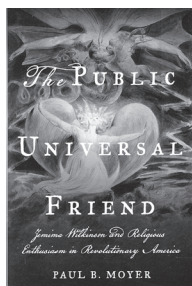
For many early and mid-twentieth-century New York families, "taking a vacation" equated to packing up their cars and driving up Route 17 to resorts in the Catskill Mountains. Midway along the journey sat the Red Apple Rest, a family-run restaurant that became iconic in its own right. Written by the daughter of the eatery's founder and operator, Reuben Freed (and complete with her personal photographs), *Stop at the Red Apple Rest* cements the legacy of an establishment that served the needs of millions of travelers for more than half a century.



### **Politics Across the Hudson: The Tappan Zee Megaproject**

By Philip Mark Plotch (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015) 272 pp. \$34.95 (hardcover) [www.rutgerspress.rutgers.edu](http://www.rutgerspress.rutgers.edu)

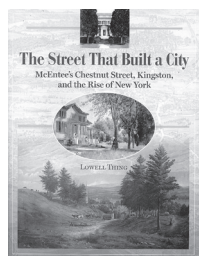
In *Politics Across the Hudson*, Plotch describes the complicated challenges invested parties faced throughout the thirty-year process of planning, reviewing, and ultimately settling on a final design to replace the Tappan Zee Bridge, the three-mile-plus-long span crossing the Hudson River between Westchester and Rockland counties. Along the way, he focuses on the many missed opportunities—lost funding sources and dissolution of needed improvements caused by a lack of political consensus. His critical analysis sheds new light on why the bridge project faltered the way it did and why the final result will fail to satisfy the region's needs.



### **The Public Universal Friend: Jemima Wilkinson and Religious Enthusiasm in Revolutionary America**

By Paul B. Moyer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015) 272 pp. \$27.95 (hardcover) [www.cornellpress.cornell.edu](http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu)

The period of the American Revolution was one of great social and cultural transformation that allowed for an assortment of radical beliefs to gain traction. It was in this environment that the Public Universal Friend, a self-proclaimed prophet formerly known as Jemima Wilkinson, established the Society of Universal friends, a religious sect operating under the premise that the apocalypse was imminent. Moyer follows the sect's development from inception to Wilkinson's travels across the Northeast and the group's permanent settlement in Central New York. By highlighting the many internal and external challenges faced by Wilkinson and her followers, the book shines new light on a neglected bit of history while also framing the religious experience in post-Revolution America.



### **The Street That Built a City: McEntee's Chestnut Street, Kingston, and the Rise of New York**

By Lowell Thing (Delmar, NY: Black Dome Press, 2015) 332 pp. \$35.00 (softcover) [www.blackdomepress.com](http://www.blackdomepress.com)

The nineteenth-century origins and early days of Kingston's Chestnut Street are unlike most streets, nor were its first residents ordinary. Laid out by D & H Canal engineer James McEntee, the street provided a home for many people who played important roles in New York City's development, influencing everything from transportation to various elements of construction. Complete with myriad color photographs (including over a dozen paintings by McEntee's son, Hudson River School painter Jervis), the book captures the unique identity of the street from its beginnings through the present day.

*Andrew Villani, Marist College*

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