

THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

A Journal of Regional Studies

MARIST



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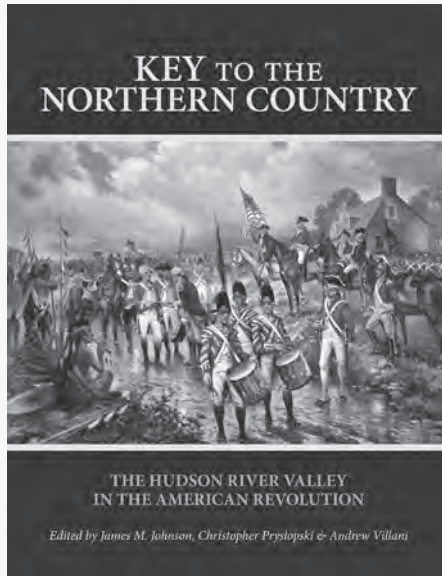
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KEY TO THE NORTHERN COUNTRY
The Hudson River Valley in the American Revolution

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

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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.



The Hudson River Valley Institute

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

Call for Essays

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

Submission of Essays and Other Materials

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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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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.¹

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.² 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.³ 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 2014.⁴ 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.⁵ The remainder of the estate was split between William Henry’s two younger sons, Frederick and George, and his four daughters.⁶ Although Frederick Vanderbilt did not receive the

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.⁷ 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."⁸ The legacy of Parmentier's naturalistic

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.⁹

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.¹⁰ Adhering to their wishes, the Pavilion was thrown up in a prompt sixty-six days;¹¹ it would later become the guesthouse for their

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.¹²

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.¹³ They received on average \$1.50 per day, then a generous wage for construction laborers.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

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.”¹⁸ 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.”¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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 staff²¹—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.²²

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.²³ 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-

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.²⁴

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.²⁵

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.²⁶ 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.²⁷

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.²⁸ 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

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.²⁹ 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."³⁰

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 308,447 patrons in 2014. In total, the site has welcomed 20,494,517 visitors in its seventy-five years of existence.³¹

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

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.³² 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.³³

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 2016.³⁴

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."³⁵ 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."³⁶ 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

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

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.”³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰

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.”⁴¹ 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.

37. “A Call to Action.”

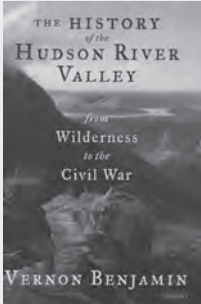
38. Ibid.

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.

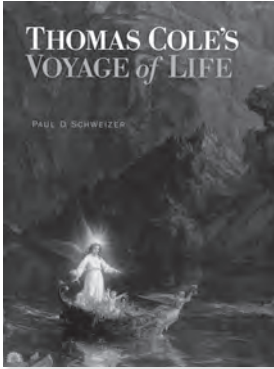
Her other exceptions to my tale are more personal than factual—she disapproves of “curiously dated” (yet accurate) depictions of Walloons and the Dutch language, interprets the meaning of “wilderness” out of context, and dislikes what I wrote about Irving and Cooper’s reception among women readers (which 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.

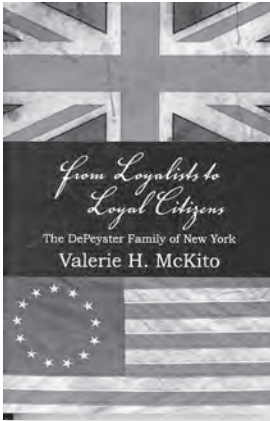
The heart and soul of *Thomas Cole’s Voyage of Life* move beyond the descriptive and illuminatory to discuss and analyze this famed series both as art and historical artifact. In doing so, a fair amount of Schweizer’s discussion focuses on Cole’s personal life and the man who commissioned the series—banker 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.

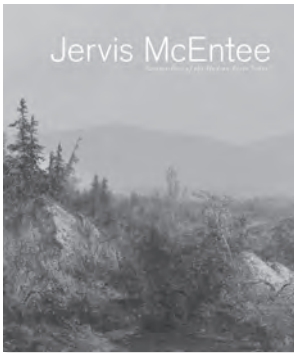
Just as the Canadian chapter sheds some new insights on the political operation of that colony, the book's sixth chapter shows how the DePeysters remained connected to the Atlantic world in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Historians—and history classes at all levels—usually focus on the 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, subtitled 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.

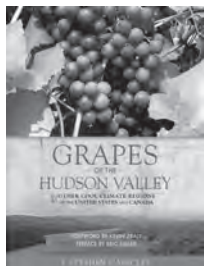
The author devotes a chapter to exploring the origins of the term "Big Apple" for New York City, leading into a discussion of slavery and African-American history, which do not appear germane to the book's subject. It would have been more helpful had the author discussed the role of African-American 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

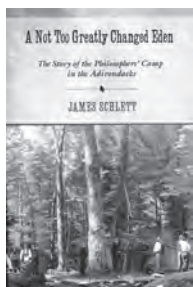
New & Noteworthy Books Received



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

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

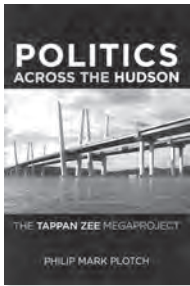
In the summer of 1858, artist-editor William James Stillman led some of the nation's greatest thinkers to Follensby Pond in the Adirondacks for several days of group discussion and reflection in nature. *A Not Too Greatly Changed Eden* recounts the trip, dubbed the Philosophers' Camp, as well as the 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

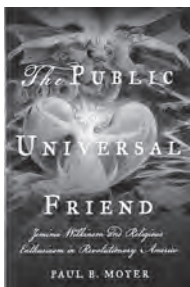
For many early and mid-twentieth-century New York families, “taking a vacation” equated to packing up their cars and driving up Route 17 to resorts in the Catskill Mountains. Midway along the journey sat the Red Apple Rest, a family-run restaurant that became iconic in its own right. Written by the daughter 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

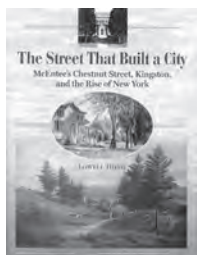
In *Politics Across the Hudson*, Plotch describes the complicated challenges invested parties faced throughout the thirty-year process of planning, reviewing, and ultimately settling on a final design to replace the Tappan Zee Bridge, the three-mile-plus-long span crossing the Hudson River between Westchester 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

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

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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