

THE
HUDSON
RIVER
VALLEY
REVIEW

A Journal of Regional Studies

MARIST

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From the Editors

The varied styles of architecture in the Hudson River Valley are both a visible link to our past (even our immediate past, as you will see in this issue) and a boon to tourism. From the sturdy stone dwellings of the early Dutch settlers to modern glass-and-concrete office complexes, buildings reflect the hopes and aspirations—and the dreams for the future—of their owners. Here in the Valley, we are fortunate to have many fine examples from every important phase of architecture, and are even luckier to be the place where the Picturesque style—championed by men like Alexander Jackson Davis, Andrew Jackson Downing, and Frederic Church—took root in America.

However, as you will also read within, time has not always been kind to the Valley's great buildings and landscapes: many—including noteworthy structures built less than 50 years ago—are struggling for survival, the whim of changing fortunes or tastes. Fortunately, organizations and individuals are working hard to ensure that they will stand for generations to come. As much as anything, this issue is a testament to the (sometimes uphill) efforts of these people to preserve such an important aspect of the heritage of the Hudson River Valley.

Reed Sparling

Christopher Pryslopski

Call for Essays

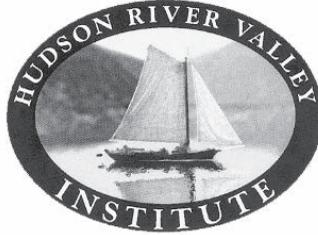
The Hudson River Valley Review is anxious to consider essays on all aspects of the Hudson Valley—its intellectual, political, economic, social, and cultural history, its prehistory, architecture, literature, art, and music—as well as essays on the ideas and ideologies of regionalism itself.

Submission of Essays and Other Materials

HRVR prefers that essays and other written materials be submitted as two double-spaced typescripts, generally no more than thirty pages long, along with a computer disk with a clear indication of the operating system, the name and version of the word-processing program, and the names of documents on the disk. Illustrations or photographs that are germane to the writing should accompany the hard copy. Otherwise, the submission of visual materials should be cleared with the editors beforehand. Illustrations and photographs are the responsibility of the authors. No materials will be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope is provided. No responsibility is assumed for their loss. An e-mail address should be included whenever possible.

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On the cover: Frederic Church’s Olana; photograph by Ted Spiegel.
Courtesy Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area



Figure 1
Court Street, 1686, pen and ink, drawing by Len Tantillo

*“Many new houses have lately been built in this city,
all in the modern style..”*

The Introduction of the Gambrel Roof to the Upper Hudson Valley

Walter Richard Wheeler

Despite their falling under the aegis of the English in the late seventeenth century, the people of the upper Hudson Valley continued to articulate their built environment using techniques and materials associated with the Dutch. The arrival of the gambrel roof, long popular in New England and possessing a powerful iconography, was precipitated by the construction of churches and public buildings by the British government during the first quarter of the eighteenth century. However, more than a generation passed before this type of roof became common to the domestic architecture of the region. Its later promulgation was directly connected to the arrival of a number of Boston carpenters during the French and Indian War. This paper will examine the influence of those builders on the local vernacular, and explore the spatial and temporal extents of the transformation that their work affected.

Introduction

I was attracted to the subject of this paper as the result of a study of regional vernaculars. It became clear during the course of this work that the “Dutch gambrel roof” had remarkably different provenance in different parts of the country—even within New York State. I have limited the subject to the upper Hudson Valley and in particular the region that was known as Albany County in the mid-eighteenth century.

In 1674, when the Dutch handed over control of their former colony to the English, European settlements in the upper Hudson Valley were largely comprised of small tenant farms and trading communities that also served as markets for agricultural products. The built culture was largely that of the Netherlands. In Albany, houses with spout or stepped gables predominated (Figure 1). The majority of the houses were constructed of wood, but most of those that survived into the era of photography were built using a composite structural system, in which a wood frame comprised of bents was encased in a brick wall. The roof structure of

these houses was arranged in parallel pairs of rafters, pegged at their apex and usually constructed without purlins (Figure 2). The gable ends were frequently decorated with *vlechtingen*, a term variously translated as “tumbling” or “braiding,” and popularly known as “mouse’s teeth” (Figure 3). This originally served a practical purpose, inasmuch as it minimized the exposure of mortar joints along the top surface of the wall. These structural details largely faded from use during the 1760s, but holdovers into the early decades of the nineteenth century are known. Using these details as a guide, it is possible to discern between the buildings constructed by carpenters and masons of Dutch cultural heritage and those with an English cultural background.



COLLECTION OF THE AUTHOR

Figure 2
The razing of the Bradt house, Schenectady, in the late nineteenth century. The bent system of framing is clearly seen in this view

Background

In the early seventeenth century, the city of Paris passed a law that taxed buildings according to their number of stories adjoining the public streets. In order to provide more living space without incurring tax penalties, attics began to affect “dormer” roofs.¹ French architect Francois Mansart (1598-1666) is said to have been responsible for this solution, but the fact that his name has been connected to it may be due to his introducing its application to state buildings in France. The term “mansard roof” has come to be synonymous with this type of roof, although in France they are known as *toit brisé*. The interconnected royal courts of the period were in part responsible for the quick dissemination of the roof type throughout Europe. One of the earliest German examples was the Pommersfelden, in Bamberg, Bavaria, by Johann Dientzenhofer (1711-1718).



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Figure 3
The south gable of the 1738 portion of the Lendeert Bronck house, Coxsackie, showing the *vlechtingen* (2002)

In Great Britain, a similar set of circumstances encouraged the development and spread of the kerb (curb) or gambrel roof, apparently independent of the mansard. A tax on windows

was enacted in 1695, initially to support a war with France, but it remained in effect until 1851. In response, windows everywhere were blocked up, and the gambrel roof was adopted. According to Francis Price, who wrote in the first part of the eighteenth century, it was also “much in use, on account of its giving so much room withinside...”² while minimizing the addition of windows.

The word gambrel comes from the old North French word *gamberel*, meaning a forked stick. It is also related to the old French word for leg—*gambe*.³ As adopted in England, the word referred to the bent portion of a horse’s hock, or back leg. Similarly, the term was first used to indicate the use of bent structural members, not necessarily (but usually) in the construction of roofs.

Structurally, these roofs are trusses supported on purlins. British architectural historian Bernard H. Johnson has said that gambrel roofs “do not appear on architect-designed buildings but are mostly confined to cottages and houses of lesser quality bearing the hallmarks of local craftsmen.” He has observed that the roof form is confined to East Anglia and South-East Britain.⁴ Johnson contrasts the gambrel with the mansard, which he says “belongs to polite architecture.”⁵ Although he cites some structural differences, his chief tool for discriminating between the two is his observation that the gambrel does not require flashing between the two slopes, and the mansard usually has dormer windows on its lower slope. By these standards, most American gambrel roofs are mansards. I’m going to avoid his classist argument and continue to refer to upper Hudson Valley examples as gambrels.

The Gambrel Roof in America

The earliest examples of the use of gambrel roofs in the American colonies were typically on government-sponsored buildings, including churches. The use of distinctly English forms had a homogenizing effect on colonial cultures, which tended to be diverse even from the beginning. Similar cultural hegemony had been exercised in the former Dutch colony by the Netherlands, and the people there held on to its signifiers long after the transfer of control to the British state.

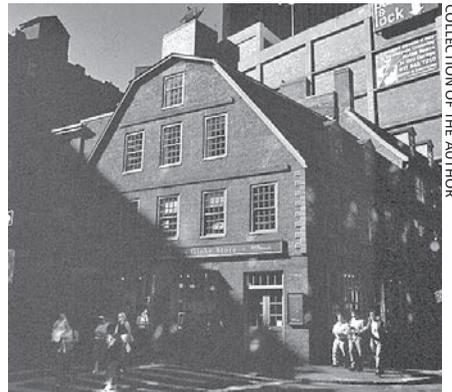


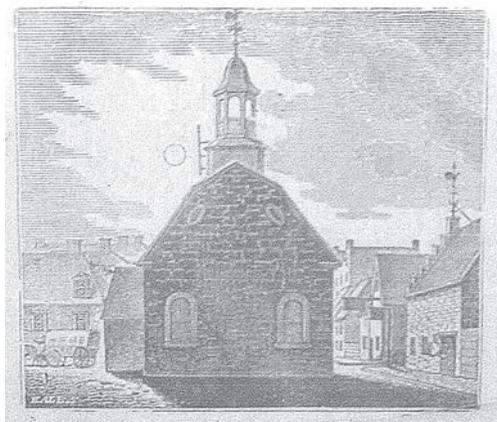
Figure 4
**Building on the corner of Washington
and School streets, Boston (2002)**

Among the first gambrel roofs in America was Trinity church in New York, finished in 1698. The gambrel roof had gained sufficient currency in Boston by 1707 to be mentioned without further comment in building contracts submitted to the city. In these documents, they are usually described as “flatt” roofs, and the upper slope, being nearly flat, was usually encircled with an open balustrade and accessible via a scuttle.⁶

A number of gambrel-roofed houses of English form survive in New England (Figure 4). Similar examples in Maryland and Pennsylvania survive chiefly in former rural areas. Additional examples, all dating to the first quarter of the eighteenth century, can be found in Delaware. The earliest use of the gambrel roof in the upper Hudson Valley was on St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Albany, constructed 1714-16 by Boston builder John Dunbar, who later moved to Schenectady. Dunbar may have been responsible for the design of Schenectady’s first gambrel-roofed building, the Dutch Reformed church of 1734 (Figure 5). Albany’s Dutch Reformed Church of 1715 was built with the consent of the Common Council and with financial support from the city. In contrast, city aldermen contemporaneously protested the construction of the English church and attempts were made to block its completion.⁷

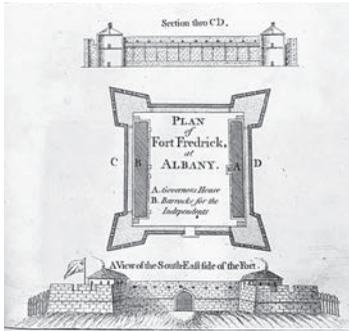
The construction of the New York and Albany English churches were turning points in the history of their respective communities inasmuch as they marked the establishment of a British cultural institution within the principal settlements of the former Dutch colony. The resistance of city leaders in Albany to the prominent siting of the English church there articulated their resistance to British cultural incursions into their community.

When Albany’s *Stadt Huis* (State House) was constructed beginning in 1740, Georgian forms were utilized, including a centrally disposed hall, a gable roof, and a cupola. After the establishment of a church, city hall, and the construction of a fort, the city of Albany once again settled into an ancillary role and was left largely on its own by the British. House forms constructed during the first five decades of the eigh-



SCHENECTADY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Figure 5
The Dutch Reformed church, Schenectady,
by J. Hall (c. 1835)



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AUTHOR'S PHOTO

Figure 6
“Plan of Fort Frederick at Albany”

Figure 7
The Philip Schuyler house, Albany (2002)

teenth century continued to follow the Dutch models of the previous century. A view of the 1730s depicts the city as overwhelmingly Dutch in its appearance.

The expansion of hostilities between the British and the French and Native Americans precipitated a new era of building in Albany and its environs during the 1750s. The upper Hudson Valley was used as a staging area for British troops, and thousands of soldiers were encamped in the suburbs of the City of Albany. The local economy benefited from the provisioning of troops, and after the cessation of hostilities in 1763 a number of soldiers remained in the area.

The work that was necessary to militarize the region was substantial, but much of it was undertaken by carpenters and builders from other locales. It was possibly a mistrust of the locals that led General John Bradstreet to retain Boston builders to accomplish this work, which included repairing and enlarging the forts at Albany and Schenectady in 1757 and the construction of a hospital and barracks at Albany. In so doing, Bradstreet extended a tradition begun in 1700, when Wolfgang Roemer came from Boston to Albany to design a new fort for the city.

Work on the fort and hospital was overseen by Captain John Montresor and authorized by Bradstreet. A section through the buildings located within the fort indicates that they had braced frames after the British tradition, unlike the bent system used by the Dutch (Figure 6). Payment for “all the New England carpenters employ’d by the Publick this way [during] this Campaign...under Mesiniers [Montresor?]” was sent by Bradstreet via courier to Boston the following year.⁸ Samuel Fuller was among these carpenters, and in 1759 he began construction of St. George’s church in Schenectady with a prominent hipped gambrel roof.

Bradstreet also oversaw the construction of the Schuyler mansion in Albany by New England carpenters, probably hiring some of the same builders who had worked on the hospital and fort (Figure 7). Among those who worked on the

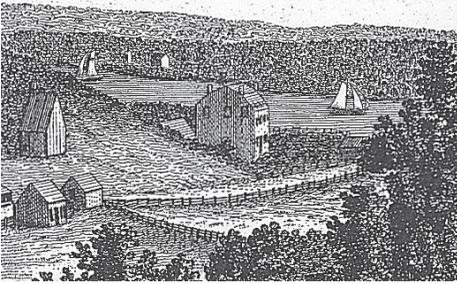
Schuyler house was master carpenter John Gaborial, who came from Boston specifically to do the work. The Schuyler house features a prominent hipped gambrel roof and was constructed using English-type framing. The brick walls of the house, unlike those of its neighbors, are solid masonry. Its center hall plan and Georgian detailing place it firmly in the British tradition of building.

Similarly, Sir William Johnson selected former Bostonian Samuel Fuller to oversee construction of his house, Johnson Hall, in 1763. It also has a hipped gambrel roof. In the contract for building the house, Fuller described the roof as “flat on the top”⁹, alluding to the shallow top slope and using the same terms as his Boston contemporaries. The plan and decorative program of Johnson Hall are similar to those of the Schuyler house.

The Patroon Stephen van Rensselaer had his house, built just north of Albany, constructed by Thomas Smith Diamond, yet another Boston carpenter, who moved to the city just after the French and Indian War (Figure 8). Built during 1763-1765, its plan and the details of its woodwork were similar to the Schuyler and Johnson houses. Its walls, built by the same masons who constructed the Schuyler house, were similarly of solid masonry, eschewing the local tradition of composite wall construction. In all of their details, these three houses proclaimed allegiance to the British. This is perhaps not surprising with respect to Sir William Johnson, who was born in Ireland, but it was a distinct statement for Schuyler and Van Rensselaer. It is of interest to note, however, that both waited to express this allegiance until the close of hostilities with the French and the sealing of the fate of the colony under the dominion of the British.

Two Building Traditions

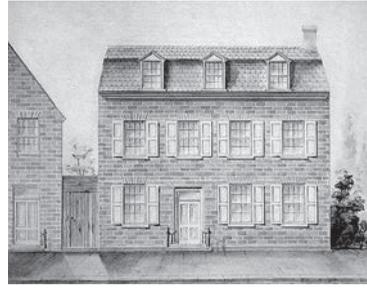
At the beginning of the French and Indian War, the Loudon census of 1756 recorded that approximately forty-three percent of Albany’s population was of British origin, the balance being chiefly of Dutch extraction. The British were under-represented in the professional and merchant classes.¹⁰ After the war, the percentage of British households decreased. In 1767, approximately thirty-four percent of the households in the city were culturally English, the balance being largely Dutch. However, among the upper classes, twenty-six percent were English.¹¹ The decrease in population is attributable to the demilitarization of the city after the close of the war. Despite the lower overall percentage of culturally English residents, a larger number of those who remained were in positions of influence and had made strategic marriages to daughters of prominent local families. These decommissioned soldiers and merchants built houses that followed the forms and spatial traditions with which they were accustomed. Older merchant



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Figure 8

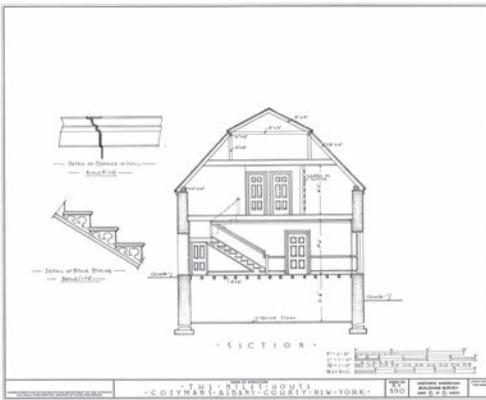
Detail showing the Van Rensselaer manor house, from “View of Rensselaerville Manufactory...” by Cornelius Tiebout (1792)



CURRENT WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN

Figure 9

Watercolor of the Pruyn house, North Pearl Street, Albany (c.1840)



HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Figure 10

Section through the Coeymans-Bronck house, Coeymans, showing the upper portion of the gambrel roof supported on queen posts



AUTHOR'S PHOTO

Figure 11

The John Hewson house, Washington Avenue, Albany, as remodeled in the 1870s (2000)

families of Dutch cultural heritage quickly adopted these forms.

Among these groups, the English-derived gambrel-roofed forms became common after 1760. This house type was typically two stories in height, and was either three or four bays in width (Figure 9). The roof structure of such buildings was of the English type with either purlins or queen posts supporting the angle of the roof (Figure 10). Only one of this type of house remains standing in Albany: the John Hewson house on Washington Avenue, which underwent substantial alterations during the 1870s (Figure 11). Nearby Lansingburgh, in Rensselaer County, is fortunate to retain at least a dozen of these houses. Brick examples are found throughout the central portion of the city; two wood examples also still stand (Figure 12).



Figure 12
513 2nd Avenue, Lansingburgh
(2001). The façade was remodeled
in the late nineteenth century



Figure 13
Hendrick van Rensselaer house (Crailo),
Rensselaer. Photograph from Jonathan Pearson's
History of the Schenectady Patent (1883)

Several prominent houses were altered or received substantial additions in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. Crailo, in Rensselaer (Figure 13); the Herkimer house in Little Falls; and the Schuyler house (known as the Flatts), north of Albany, all received gambrel roofs. The changing form of these houses demonstrates the continuing anglicization of the upper classes in the upper Hudson Valley. This trend correlated with, and was bolstered by, the spread of an international cultural aesthetic known as “anglomania,” which saw the adoption of British cultural institutions, aesthetics, and manners throughout Europe and America.

While the tenant farmers of Rensselaerswyck adopted the gambrel roof starting about 1760, there are marked differences in its construction and form. Comparison between the structural system depicted in Figure 10 and the roof structure of the Douw Fonda house in Cohoes (Figure 14) makes the differences between the two systems clear. In the latter case, the paired rafters are truncated just above the collar tie and a board is placed on the outside edge to receive the top half of the bent. In all respects excepting the insertion of the board plate and the change in slope of the upper portion of the roof, the details of this structural system are identical to that seen in earlier houses that are explicitly culturally Dutch.

The bents of the Fonda house (and others of this type) are spaced approximately three feet apart, without purlins or queen posts. The slope of the lower pitch of the roof is essentially the same as the slope of earlier houses built in the upper Hudson Valley. Vlechtingen are retained on the gable ends of the earliest of this type of gambrel-roofed house, even though the new roof form makes them unnecessary, since the tops of the brick walls are covered by the roof. The Philip



Figure 14
Detail of gambrel framing in the
Douw Fonda house, Cohoes (2004)



Figure 15
The Mathias van der Heyden house,
Vanderheyden (Troy), in a nineteenth-
century engraved view

DeFreest house in North Greenbush, the Van Der Heyden house in what is now Troy (Figure 15), and numerous other examples were all constructed in a similar manner.

In addition to retention of the Dutch framing techniques for their roof construction, houses of this type also made use of the same composite structural system (comprised of a series of wood H-form bents embedded within brick exterior walls) that had typified houses of the upper Hudson Valley for more than 100 years. This method of construction remained typical of “brick” houses through the period of the Revolution and into the first decade of the nineteenth century and was a holdover from Dutch building traditions. One of the telltale signs of such a structural system is the presence of anchor ties on the exterior walls. Another is the fact that the low walls are usually one-and-a-half stories in height since the top of the posts extend above the beams supporting the second floor.

In the upper Hudson Valley, structurally Dutch gambrel-roofed houses were most frequently constructed in the period 1750-1775 and were infrequently built after the Revolution. The H-bent continued to be used, however; residential examples of this structural system dating as late as the early 1790s have been identified in rural Rensselaer County. These late examples all have gable roofs and their builders increasingly adopted structural, decorative, and spatial elements from their English-derived counterparts until the two traditions became almost indistinguishable. The culturally Dutch structural framing system did not vanish entirely, however. The bent system of framing may ultimately have influenced the development of balloon framing and may be the progenitor of the upright-and-wing-form house. New World Dutch barns continued to utilize the bent-frame structural system even after it was no longer used for houses and were



HISTORIC CHERRY HILL

Figure 16
The Philip and Maria van Rensselaer house (Cherry Hill), Albany (1975)

constructed as late as the fourth decade of the nineteenth century.

Structurally, English gambrel roofs continued to be built until after the Revolution. Cherry Hill, constructed in 1787, is the last house documented with this type of roof in Albany and was framed using the English method (Figure 16). Isaac Packard, another carpenter from the Boston area, was the builder. The contract that he wrote for the house

contains the only known use of the term gambrel in a contract document for an Albany building.

Although largely replaced by the gable roof by the end of the eighteenth century, several structures were built in Albany and its environs using the gambrel or hipped gambrel form of roof in the 1790s. The Watervliet Shaker meeting house (1794) in Niskayuna was gambrel-roofed, and St. Mary's Church in Albany (1797) had a hipped gambrel roof.

Two acts of the New York State Legislature effectively ended the construction of gambrel roofs—and their steeper “Dutch” counterparts—on houses in Albany. An Act of 1798 mandated that roofs “shall be of an elevation exceeding five inches *on every foot*, measured horizontally between the exterior points of the rafters...” (The emphasis is mine.)¹² A subsequent Act forbade a slope exceeding 7.5-inch elevation per foot measured horizontally.¹³ Late examples, such as the McNish house in Salem, Washington County, from 1794 and a proposal for a hotel in Columbia County preserved in the Ludlow family papers at the Albany Institute of History & Art and dating to c.1800, demonstrate that the roof form continued to be built in outlying areas until the turn of the century.

Conclusion

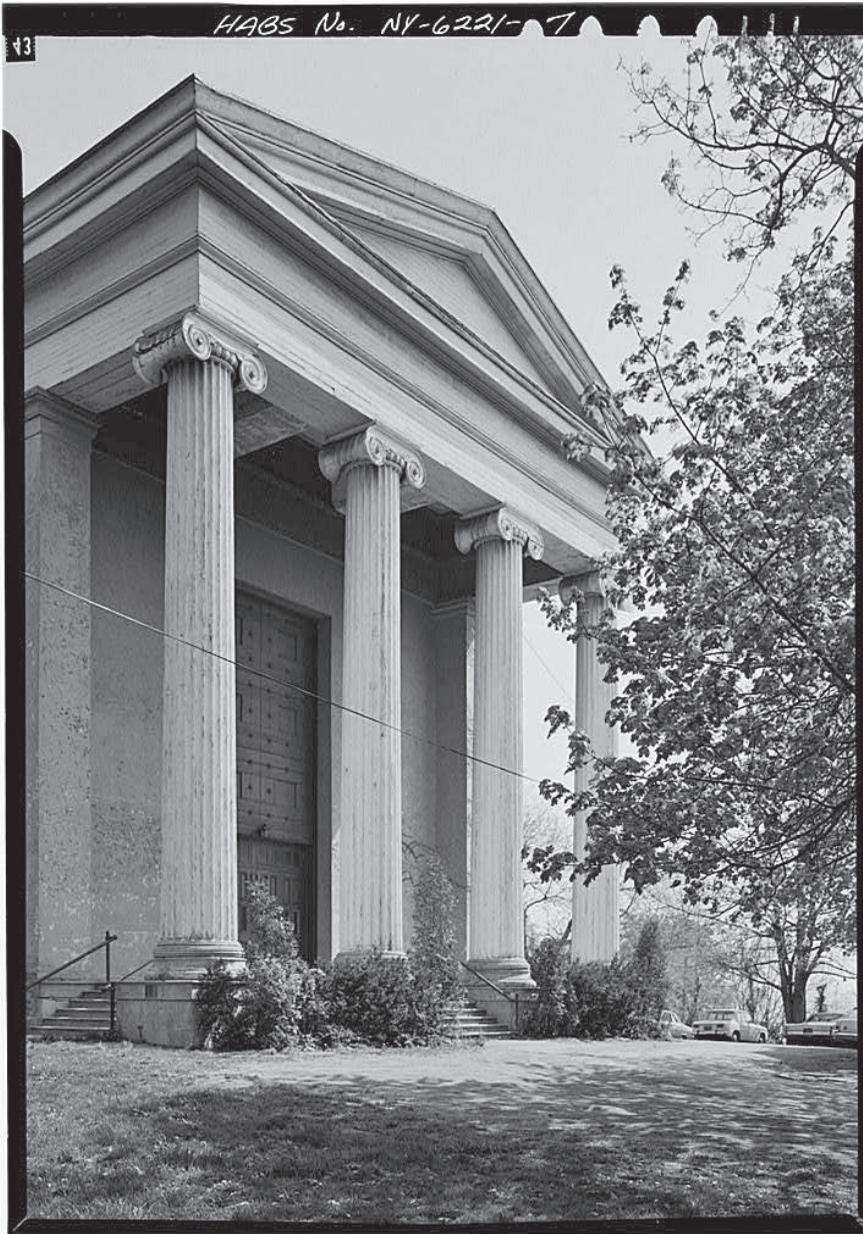
The popular adoption of the gambrel roof in the upper Hudson Valley occurred fifty years after its initial introduction to the area and was fueled by an influx of culturally English people after the French and Indian War. Its form was simultaneously adopted by the landed and merchant classes of the region, and the tenant farmers of the Rensselaerswyck Manor, but the houses constructed by these two groups differed in their structural systems and relied upon different building traditions. The selection of construction method was determined by class and cultural background.

Tenant farmers maintained the culturally Dutch system of framing even during their brief adoption of the gambrel roof form. They abandoned the gambrel roof by the Revolution while still retaining a culturally Dutch structural system well beyond that date. The Van Alen house in North Greenbush is an example of a house constructed using the bent framing system; it was completed in 1794. The persistence of these construction methods is a testament to the tenacity of Dutch culture in the upper Hudson Valley and the high esteem in which it was held in the rural districts of the region. The English structural form remained the preference for urban dwellers, who continued to construct gambrel roofs until about 1800, when they were supplanted by the gable roof.

This paper was originally presented at the Conference on New York State History, held at Bard College on June 6, 2003. It will appear in an expanded form as a chapter in a forthcoming study of the vernacular architecture of the upper Hudson Valley.

Notes

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11. 1767 Albany Tax List, transcribed in Florence A. Christoph, *Upstate New York in the 1760s: Tax Lists and Selected Militia Rolls of Old Albany County* (Camden, Maine: Picton Press, 1992), pp.1-35. Statistics are estimates based upon family and given names.
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Dutch Reformed Church, Newburgh

Conspicuous but Endangered Landmarks: Alexander Jackson Davis's Dutch Reformed Church and Plumb-Bronson House

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July 2003 marked the 200th anniversary of the birth of architect Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892), a figure of considerable interest in the cultural and architectural history of the Hudson River Valley. Many of the works that define Davis's maturation as a professional and attest to his skill as an "architectural composer"—the title he once used to describe his vocation¹—were designed for clients in the Valley. It was here that Davis embraced the opportunity to evolve his ideas regarding Picturesque-inspired domestic architecture,² which were bolstered by his visibility as a designer of considerable reputation, a fertile field of potential clientele, and an interest in new trends in domestic architecture among this group of clients. Here Davis cultivated what he termed "connexion [sic] with site,"³ the interrelationship between house and environment that formed the essence of contemporary Picturesque design philosophy and reveled in the diverse natural features that characterize the region. Heritage tourism destinations such as Montgomery Place and Lyndhurst, and privately owned resources such as the Delamater House in Rhinebeck, attest to Davis's talent as an innovator in American architectural design and his perceptible influence in the evolution of domestic architecture in the Hudson Valley of the nineteenth century. Like his informal associate Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852) and his friend Thomas Cole (1801-1848), Davis found great pleasure in the varied moods and emotive potential of the Valley landscape and here received some of his most noteworthy commissions.

There are currently two preservation projects underway in the Hudson Valley that seek to stabilize, rehabilitate, and reuse buildings designed by Davis. Newburgh's former Dutch Reformed Church and the Plumb-Bronson House in Hudson have suffered extensively from the effects of disuse and dereliction but they might, with continued persistence and well-thought vision, be reclaimed for the public's benefit and enjoyment. Indicative of their importance in Davis's body of work, both have been designated by the Secretary of the Interior as National

Historic Landmarks. These buildings can only augment our understanding of Davis, the influences that shaped his design philosophies, and the broader cultural trends current in American society during the period each was conceived and erected. They are largely irreplaceable examples of the architect's contribution to American architecture, and they are representative of the most productive and influential period of his career; their loss would clearly transcend their individual local contexts. Creating viable roles for these resources hinge on the ability of their respective preservation groups to identify and promote a vision that balances past and future—the crux of successful adaptive reuse.

While the Plumb-Bronson House represents Davis's work (and is among his earliest extant offerings) in the Picturesque vein, the Dutch Reformed Church, a monumental Greek Revival-style building, recalls the formative stages of the architect's career and his affiliation with Ithiel Town (1784-1844), his mentor and sometime professional partner.⁴ Viewed as an ensemble, the Newburgh church and the Plumb-Bronson House chronicle a transitional period in Davis's work, from the monumental civic and predominately classical designs that formed a staple of the Town & Davis firm and his early years of seasoning as the office's primary draftsman, to an independent career as a designer of domestic buildings in the Bracketed, Gothic Revival, and various Italian-inspired modes.

Alexander Jackson Davis



Alexander Jackson Davis maintained a recognizable position in American architectural practice during a period roughly spanning the Jacksonian era to the Civil War. Emerging from the New York cultural scene of the 1830s, he established himself as an architect of national visibility, working first in the prevailing Greek Revival fashion—the physical embodiment of the heightened spirit of Jacksonian America—and subsequently with the various Romantic-Picturesque styles popular at mid-century. Davis's professional association with Town and his more informal relationship with A.J. Downing were both of considerable consequence in the ongoing evolution of American architecture during the nineteenth century and helped place the designer at the forefront of his field in the antebellum period. Gifted with considerable artistic talent and a seemingly instinctive feel for design, yet possessed of an at times caustic and irascible personality, Davis left a discernable imprint on the American architectural scene during the productive years of his professional career.

“Imaginative, innovative, and influential,” to borrow the words of the preeminent Davis scholar Jane Davies, “Alexander J. Davis was an extraordinary figure in American architecture in the rapidly changing and confusing period between Charles Bulfinch and Henry Hobson Richardson.”⁵

By the late 1830s, following his association with Town and a brief partnership with the New England builder and architect Russell Warren (1734-1860), Davis was working primarily in the Picturesque vein, and in 1838 first came in contact with Downing. During the next decade, he would aid Downing in his efforts to popularize the various Picturesque styles for domestic applications while fielding commissions for his own projects, many located within the Hudson River Valley. Davis lent Downing advice and drafting services while profiting considerably from the success of Downing’s books, which recommended Davis’s services (among other architects) to prospective clients. During the mid-1830s, Davis also produced his own book, *Rural Residences*,⁶ an expensive and unfortunately sparsely distributed folio of designs that in many ways foreshadowed Downing’s better-known and widely influential publications. While Davis worked with the various styles popular among the Romantic eclectic architects of the day, he showed a particular affinity for the Gothic Revival, helping to champion its application for the nation’s domestic architecture. Davis’s design for Lyndhurst (1864-67), which evolved from an earlier villa of his design (Knoll, 1838-42), perhaps as well as any residential building erected in the United States during the period highlights the design principles and complexities of the Gothic Revival style. It remains one of the landmark works of American Gothic Revival design and a masterpiece of the native Romantic tradition. In addition to larger villas, Davis likewise produced plans for countless modestly scaled cottages, among them the Delamater House in Rhinebeck (1844), an outstanding example of the “Carpenter Gothic” aesthetic, and the classically inspired Chamberlain cottage (1849) in Red Hook.

The 1840s and 1850s were decades of great productivity for Davis, as he fielded numerous projects in New York, as well as for clients as far afield as Virginia and North Carolina. It was during this period that Davis aided Llewellyn Haskell in his vision for a planned Picturesque suburb complete with Romantic architecture and landscape design—Llewellyn Park in South Orange, New Jersey—thereby attempting to bring to fruition the rural beau ideal he shared with Downing. By the conclusion of the Civil War, however, Davis’s presence on the American architectural scene had all but faded. Although he lived into the 1890s and maintained a professional office into old age, his once-productive career gave way to limited commissions as his work and design principles fell into obsolescence. He died in 1892.

Davis and the Hudson Valley

Alexander Jackson Davis enjoyed long-standing ties to the Hudson Valley. His maternal great-grandfather, James Jackson, settled in New Windsor in 1750. His mother, Julia Jackson Davis, hailed from the small hamlet of Florida. Davis is known to have visited a favorite aunt in Florida, disembarking at Newburgh from river steamers and proceeding overland by foot or, in subsequent years, by horse-drawn carriage.⁷ A charming landscape rendered by Davis as a teenager survives to recall both the wonder of his early explorations of the Orange County countryside and the young man's artistic inclinations.⁸ Later, during his eleven-year association with Downing, Davis visited his friend and informal partner on numerous occasions at his Highland Garden estate in Newburgh. Throughout his career, Davis showed a particular fondness for the varied landscapes of the Hudson Valley. The picturesque allure of the region, which often drew comparisons to the Rhine River Valley, lent itself readily to Davis's artistic temperament and sensitivity to setting and location. Davis traveled extensively in the Valley and savored its many natural offerings, some captured in small plein air pencil and ink sketches, while visiting friends such as Downing and Thomas Cole.

The Hudson Valley provided the ideal setting for the growing strain of Romanticism in native architecture, a movement largely anti-urban and distinctly individualistic in sentiment,⁹ where the emerging Picturesque styles could play upon the varied qualities that the river, valley, and surrounding hills and mountains lent to it. American cultural figures, among them Cole, Washington Irving, and William Cullen Bryant, had already drawn inspiration from the sublime power of the Hudson River and the nearby Catskill Mountains. Davis and Downing were likewise smitten by the opportunities the Hudson Valley landscape afforded, where appropriately conceived landscape designs could establish a harmonious bridge between striking natural settings. These elements, in concert with suitably rendered houses drawing upon the endless complexities and irregular rhythms of the natural environment, provided for unified Picturesque schemes wholly removed from the earlier tradition embodied in architecture by the Greek Revival aesthetic. The growing threats of urbanism and industrial development to the quality of American life, and (as noted by architectural historian William Pierson) to individual identity, were countered by rural cottages and villas formulated to express the tastes and stature of the individual.

Alexander Jackson Davis was clearly the first professional to significantly extend these new ideas regarding Picturesque architecture into the Hudson Valley, and in doing so he is one of a core group of men—along with Downing and the latter's two English protégés, Calvert Vaux (1824-1895) and Frederick

C. Withers (1828-1901)—whose work proved seminal to a new era in American domestic design. Davis’s work in the Bracketed style for Robert Donaldson at Blithewood in Annandale-on-Hudson and Oliver Bronson at Hudson; his Gothic Revival designs for William and Philip Paulding’s Knoll at Tarrytown and Nathan Warren’s Mt. Ida in Troy; and his Italian villa for James Smillie in Rondout¹⁰ were all executed in the mid- to late 1830s and are representative of design philosophies that, though drawn from English prototypes, were nonetheless all but peerless in this country. Davis, largely “book-trained” (from his youth he was an avid reader), was among the first men in the United States to distill contemporary English publications on Picturesque architecture and landscape design for professional application, a debt he acknowledged in the introduction to his own book, *Rural Residences*. With this significant group of Hudson Valley designs, Davis was empowered to explore his expanding comprehension of site-specificity—a notion perhaps brought to its fullest development by Vaux with his design for Lydig Hoyt’s residence in Staatsburgh¹¹—and the new styles that would soon be carried into the mainstream. Even Newburgh’s Dutch Reformed Church, though a decidedly classical design, appears to have been carefully and deliberately sited to take full advantage of its lofty perch above the Hudson River; its orientation was clearly governed by the river and not the adjacent street.

Newburgh’s Dutch Reformed Church

Although Davis’s popular legacy in the Hudson Valley is most often related to his innovations as an associate of Downing and his championing of Gothic Revival domestic design, it was with his monumental design for Newburgh’s Dutch Reformed Church that he initiated his post-Town & Davis career. The church was designed in the summer of 1835, only a few months after the end of his association with Town, and in scale and design it recalled this seminal early professional partnership. Davis fielded the Newburgh commission during his affiliation with Rhode Island architect Russell Warren, with whom he had “joined interests” in a New York City-based partnership. The building campaign, fraught with significant hurdles, outlasted the two men’s brief partnership.

Begun in the fall of 1835, the Dutch Reformed Church was erected on a prominent rise above the Hudson River on Grand Street; it was dedicated for worship in December 1837. Russell Warren superintended the early phases of the project until the end of his association with Davis sometime in 1836; the project’s stonemason, Newburgh native Thornton MacNess Niven (1806-1895), went on to enjoy a productive career as an architect of regional prominence working primarily in the Greek Revival vein. Only a handful of buildings designed by Davis in the

Greek Revival style predate the Dutch Reformed Church and survive to chronicle his early work in this mode.¹² Once one of Newburgh's preeminent architectural statements and long recognized as one of the Hudson Valley's antebellum architectural gems, the church later came to embody post-urban renewal decay in the city's East End. The current effort to restore and reuse the building is therefore as much a symbolic as a practical effort: the goal is to return one of Newburgh's most recognizable historic resources to use while removing the stigma of dereliction.

The Dutch Reformed Church of Newburgh formed in the fall of 1834, following a visit to the village by Reverend William Cruickshank, who had traveled north from New York City to facilitate the organization of a Reformed congregation. Nineteenth-century historical accounts of both the city and the church have traditionally claimed that the congregation organized and the new building was given form in response to the worship needs of the village's citizens. According to these histories, Newburgh, an early Palatine German settlement with a later influx of Scots-Irish and English settlers, began to experience an increase in people of Dutch descent with Reformed leanings as the century progressed, leaving many to practice their faith with congregations outside of the village. Yet the formation of the Newburgh Dutch Reformed Church likely entailed a more complex story—one involving the aspirations of the men who promoted and backed its construction—that may well be lost now.

According to Cruickshank's own account of his Newburgh visit, offered early the next year in a letter to the new church's Consistory, he "canvassed with several influential citizens who manifested a great degree of favor toward the object." He continued:

I therefore opened a subscription for the erection of a church edifice upon a plan herewith submitted. On this plan subscriptions for the erection have been obtained to the amount of \$9,000. As the last article provides that "where a consistory shall have been organized in conformity with the rules and regulations of the Reformed Dutch Church, this subscription and all other temporal interests shall be transferred to their hands." I hereby transfer to your care, all the interests to the temporal and spiritual connected with this church whose agency I have had the charge. Praying that the Lord may guide you by his wisdom and so overrule your labors to promote his own glory and the salvation of many immortal souls.¹³

Aiding Cruickshank in his efforts to establish a Reformed Dutch congregation were several prominent Newburgh citizens. Among the men elected to the building committee were David Crawford and Christopher Reeve, both affluent

merchants involved in the Hudson River shipping trade. Isaac Belknap, one of four church Elders (along with Isaac Knevels, John Knevels, and Thomas Stansbrough), represented one of Newburgh's older families. Belknap served as an officer in the Revolution and, like Crawford and Reeve, had prospered in the river-freight business. Many of these families maintained close business and social ties with one another.¹⁴

Late in January 1835, advertisements began to appear in the *Newburgh Gazette* seeking a parcel on which to erect the contemplated church; in February the *Gazette* notified its readers of the church's formal organization. At its monthly meeting in June 1835, the Consistory noted that John Knevels had delivered a note on behalf of the church for a parcel of land on Grand Street, preparing the way for the construction of the new church.¹⁵ The deed to the parcel, acquired from Abraham Smith and Aaron Belknap and his wife at the cost of \$2,400, was recorded on May 5, 1835.¹⁶

The first known correspondence between Alexander Jackson Davis and a member of the congregation—a letter from Christopher Reeve referencing an upcoming visit by Davis and Warren¹⁷—dates to July 1835. That month, Davis noted his work on drawings for the church's design in his *Day Book*, or diary:

Ref'd D. Church, Newburgh, similar to French c. NY

went to Newburgh Plans. Basement, Principal and gallery
 Section.—front—flank with map of ground
 Height of col. 37 ft. Entabl. 9 Entablature and inside
 stucco cornice Broad 50 out to antae \$100¹⁸

Additional drawings were made the following month, one of which (the transverse section) survives in the collection of the New-York Historical Society.¹⁹ These drawings Davis specified as being drawn for Warren, then the partnership's Newburgh liaison.

By September 1835, plans for the building campaign had all but crystallized. On the first of the month, the Consistory approved the contract between Warren and the masons. Three weeks later, a similar approval came for the carpentry contract. (Original copies of both sets of specifications have fortunately survived.) In mid-October, with plans being formed for the laying of the cornerstone, Rev. Cruickshank wrote to Davis in New York: "We are making arrangements for the ceremony of the laying of the cornerstone, an account of which we intend afterwards giving in the *Christian Intelligencer*. . . . Please communicate to me an architectural description of the building—I will provide the rest."²⁰

On October 17, three days after Cruickshank wrote Davis, the *Gazette* announced the forthcoming ceremony. An architectural description of the forthcoming building and the events of the ceremony, the former furnished by Davis, appeared in the paper on November 7:

LAYING THE CORNERSTONE

At the close of the installation exercises, (which were all performed by the Rev. Mr. Bevier, the other members of the Committee of Classis being prevented by ill health) the audience formed a procession and marched to the foundation of the new edifice. . . The damps and mists of the morning had given way; so that the procession now moved under the full light of the noon day sky. The air was perfectly still and serene, and admirably calculated to harmonize and prepare the feelings for the imposing ceremonies about to take place.

Having arrived at the elevated and commanding scite [sic] of the new edifice, near the centre of the town, the exercises were commenced by the Rev. Mr. William Cruickshank, who read a brief history of the church, the names of its members, officers, &c. which, together with other papers and remembrances were deposited in a leaden box, and inserted in a recess of the cornerstone.

The Rev. Wm. S. Heyer, of Fishkill, then offered up a most fervent prayer to that Glorious Being who dwells in temples not made with hands, and most earnestly implored his blessing on the Church, the congregation, and the assembled people.

The corner stone was then laid by Gen. Isaac Belknap, a patriot of the Revolution, and one of the elders of the new church. Having fixed and settled the stone in its place, he raised his venerable hands to heaven, and in language which brought tears to many eyes, and produced the deepest sensations in every heart, besought the blessing of the triune God to rest upon them, their children, and their children's children, to the latest generation.

The Rev. Dr. Brodhead, of New-York, then ascended the buttress on which the corner stone had been placed, and delivered an address, which for beauty, strength and sublimity is seldom equaled. His tall, manly form, as he stood upon the battlement, his dignified and graceful air, the strength and melody of his voice, together with the thrilling interest of the subject, produced the most delightful effect upon the vast concourse around him . . .

A DESCRIPTION OF THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH
Now Erecting in the Village of Newburgh

This edifice occupies a commanding situation, on the northeast corner of Third and Grand Streets. There is a considerable area around it; the lot being 220 feet long, and 215 broad. The building is to be 50 feet wide, 50 feet high, and 100 feet long, including the portico. The top of the lanthorn will be one hundred feet above the ground, and 230 feet above the level of the river. Owing to the immediate and rapid descent of the ground east of the scite [sic], the basement line, or pavement of the portico is above the top of the buildings between it and the river; so that the full effect of its architecture may be seen while passing the town, and the gigantic portico, and lofty dome, surmounted by a copy of the most beautiful gem of antiquity, that triumph of art, known by the name of the "lanthorn of Demosthenes," alias, and more accurately, the "choragic monument of Lysicrates," at Athens, will henceforth serve as a conspicuous and characteristic landmark, indicative of the taste, discrimination, and sense of classical beauty, of the inhabitants of Newburgh.

The form is that of a Greek prostyle* temple, with a tetrastyle** Ionic portico. It is composed from the two acknowledged best examples of Athenian architecture: The detail from the temple on the Ilissus [sic], and the general proportion from the tetrastyle portico of the Triune temple of Erectheus, Minerva Polias, and Pandrosus, in the Acropolis of Athens.

The interior will be plain; the ceiling being formed on a low segment of a circle, passing transversely from side to side, and is to be filled with deeply recessed coffers or panels. The styles, or intervals between forming ribs, intersecting one another at right angles, to the walls enclosing the void below. A gallery, supported by bronzed columns, will be introduced in the usual manner; and a pulpit, without moulding or panel, but gravely rich, in imitation of bronze, marble, and gold. The exterior is to be, in many respects, similar to that of the French Pr'ts church in the city of New-York, designed by Ithiel Town, and Alexander J. Davis, Esqrs. The superintendence is in the care of Messrs. Russell Warren, and Alexander J. Davis, architects, New-York.

The carpenter work will be done by Alvah Whitmarsh, Esq. of Brooklyn. The masons are Messrs. Jared [Gerard] & Halsey, of Newburgh, and Thornton M Niven, Esq. of the same village, stone cutter. The whole under the direction of D. Crawford, D. Rogers, C. Reeve, D. Corwin, and J.W. Knevels, Esqrs. Building Committee.

The above enterprise was undertaken in the autumn of 1834, by the Rev. Wm. Cruickshank, then of Long Island, who by the blessing of God, in the short space of four months, succeeded in gathering and organizing a congregation—ordaining four elders and four deacons, also, raising the means to purchase the splendid lot on which the church is located, and so much more warranted as the appointment of the Building Committee, and taking the preliminary steps necessary to the erection of the edifice.

**With a portico at one end only. **With four columns in the front range.*²¹

For the exterior of the Dutch Reformed Church, Davis referenced a design developed during his association with Ithiel Town for the French Protestant Church in New York City (1831-34), described and illustrated in contemporary accounts published in the *New-York Mirror*.²² The Eglise du Saint Esprit featured a portico derived from the Temple on the Illisus, a modestly scaled Ionic-order temple known to American architects from the plates in James Stuart and Nicholas Revett's three-volume *Antiquities of Athens*,²³ and a fully developed interior inspired by Sir Christopher Wren's St. Stephen's Walbrook (1672-79). Faced with marble from the quarries at Sing Sing and surmounted by a ribbed dome and lantern, the French Protestant Church was referred to by New York City chronicler Philip Hone as "the finest specimen of Grecian architecture in



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First floor, view looking south toward balcony

the city.”²⁴ Unlike its New York City predecessor, however, which featured an elaborate cruciform interior plan lighted by the central dome and lantern, the Dutch Reformed Church displayed a rather austere interior of the traditional meetinghouse type, and relied principally on its heavy segmental-arched coffered ceiling for effect. The costly marble exterior of the French church was also not repeated, and instead the mortared rubble walls were covered with stucco (or “mastic”) painted and horizontally scored to resemble the marble ashlar of its high-style counterpart.

In April 1836 the carpenter, Alvah Whitmarsh, wrote to Davis in New York City asking for further clarification of details as outlined in the specifications and drawings:

Mr. Davis, Sir,

I have sent down the drawing on which you will see the Gallery front—and—and I find the height of it to 4½ feet just what I mentioned to you—and I am getting out the ground work (ie) the 3 Facias and the Frieze under the cornice mouldings and the plane surface above the cornice moulding as near the drawing according to the scale as I could calculate it seems to be divided (in the entablature) into 3 equal parts of 18 in. each—and I have got out the parts I have mentioned above accordingly—Altho I can work the mouldings part of the drawing—from the drawings yet I may not get them exactly as you intended. I therefore think you had better draw the mouldings and the projection of each of the 3 fascias, full size. You see the upper wide Facia (18 in. wide) is perfectly plain and the cornice moulding is only about 4 in. and the columns, if made as you gave me a sketch of, Column and Cap, will be a great deal more work than is represented, in drawing or specifications or even in my contract—for I don’t have any too much for the job, the Bronzing of the columns of course is all understood—Don’t get anything in the cornice on the lantern that is bad to work with if you can help it—it being all circular—Just send me the drawings of the mouldings above-spoken of as soon as possible—put them in the letter box aboard any boat bound for Newburgh one comes up every day at 5 o’clock PM. . .

Yours—Alvah Whitmarsh²⁵

By the early summer of 1836, tensions were developing between the Consistory and the masons, Gerard and Halsey, as the former apparently were discouraged by the progress of the building’s rubble-laid walls. Financial stresses were likewise mounting. In June, the Consistory authorized the sale of church-owned real

estate; two months later, it decided both to seek a \$5,000 loan “for the purpose of defraying the expense of the church edifice” and execute a mortgage. Additional loans were sought the following year so the project could be seen through to completion.²⁶ By October 1836, the Consistory was seeking to counter the escalating costs of construction; it instructed the treasurer “to ascertain Whitmarsh his opinion of the value of the Corinthian capitals for the dome [lantern]”²⁷ in an apparent effort to lessen its liability to him.

In the late spring of 1837, Davis made his last recorded visit to the project site, noting only that he “went to Newburgh to attend to church. Ref’d Dutch.”²⁸ In later years, while compiling a list of his executed designs, Davis noted somewhat harshly that the Dutch Reformed Church had been “spoiled by R. Warren,”²⁹ a comment likely referencing the failure of the dome. By May, the Consistory minutes noted that the carpenter Whitmarsh was fashioning the sash for the church windows, and roof sheathing in the form of tin shingles was being ordered from Bell and Rhodes.³⁰

Exacerbating the apparent financial and contractual issues with the builders—and with construction lagging considerably behind pace—came the news in July that the congregation would need to remove from their temporary accommodations at the Academy Building, where they had been conducting worship services:

Convened in consequence of an urgent request of M. Beverage and T.M. Niven [the stonemason] to our President to vacate the Academy as a place of worship. Resolved, that it is impossible for us at present to name any definite period, but that we will use every exertion in our power to the speedy completion of the basement of our church in order to vacate said Academy for their benefit. That Mssrs. Gerard and Halsey be solicited to proceed and furnish their work at the basement of the church edifice and in case of their refusal that other masons be employed to do the same at their expense.³¹

By the fall of 1837, the construction campaign was finally drawing to a conclusion. After receiving notice from Alvah Whitmarsh in early September that the carpenter would be seeking “pecuniary aid or his dues from the church” for the unpaid portion of his work, the Consistory resolved in late September to “audit the bill of the masons for labour [sic] at the east airy [light well] of the church.”³² In October, the Consistory relieved Whitmarsh “from his contract so far as respects the painting of the church” and contracted with the local firm of Farrington and Lander to finish the work.³³ Finally, with the completion of the building approaching in November 1837, the Consistory authorized a commit-

tee comprised of John Knevels and Thomas Stansbrough to “collect in the bills and effect settlements with the contractors.”³⁴ The basement of the church was first utilized for worship in November and arrangements were made for a formal dedication of the building in December. (Reverend Cruickshank, credited with “indefatigable exertions”³⁵ on behalf of the congregation’s campaign to erect the church, was forced to resign due to ill health in December, after having preached from the pulpit of the new building only once or twice.³⁶)

On Thursday, November 23, 1837, the *Telegraph* ran the following announcement:

We are requested to state that the Dedication of the Reformed Dutch Church recently erected in this Village, will take place on Thursday, the 7th of December next; service to commence at half past 10 o’clock, A.M. and the Sermon to be preached by the Rev. Doctor DeWitt, of New York. A general attendance is invited.

It is with much pleasure we make this announcement, showing that a praiseworthy but most arduous enterprise has been thus far successfully completed. The Church is a noble specimen of chaste architecture, the first structure in our village in which the rules of architecture have been at all consulted, and it now stands an ornament to the village and an honor to its projectors. It remains for our citizens to show how far they appreciate these efforts by a corresponding liberality on their part in assisting by donations or the purchase of pews to wipe off the debt remaining upon the church. It would certainly be a public loss if the Consistory, in order to discharge this debt, should be obliged to sell any part of the beautiful open Square upon which it now stands, and yet such will be the event, if a sufficiency be not realized from the sale of the seats, which we are told will take place shortly after the dedication. But we hope better things from our fellow citizens, and feel confident that they will show their munificence on the occasion.³⁷

Public munificence and the sale of pews unfortunately were not sufficient to meet the obligations associated with completing the project, and coupled with a national economic crisis, a great financial strain was placed upon the congregation. Costs associated with the construction of the church approached \$20,000; the sale of pews garnered only a few thousand dollars. In April 1839, the property was sold for debt at a public auction at the Orange Hotel; it was purchased by Daniel Farrington for \$10,053. Matthew Fowler, a member of the congregation, acquired the mortgage in trust for the church soon thereafter and held it for nearly twenty years, until May 1859, when the congregation once again gained title of

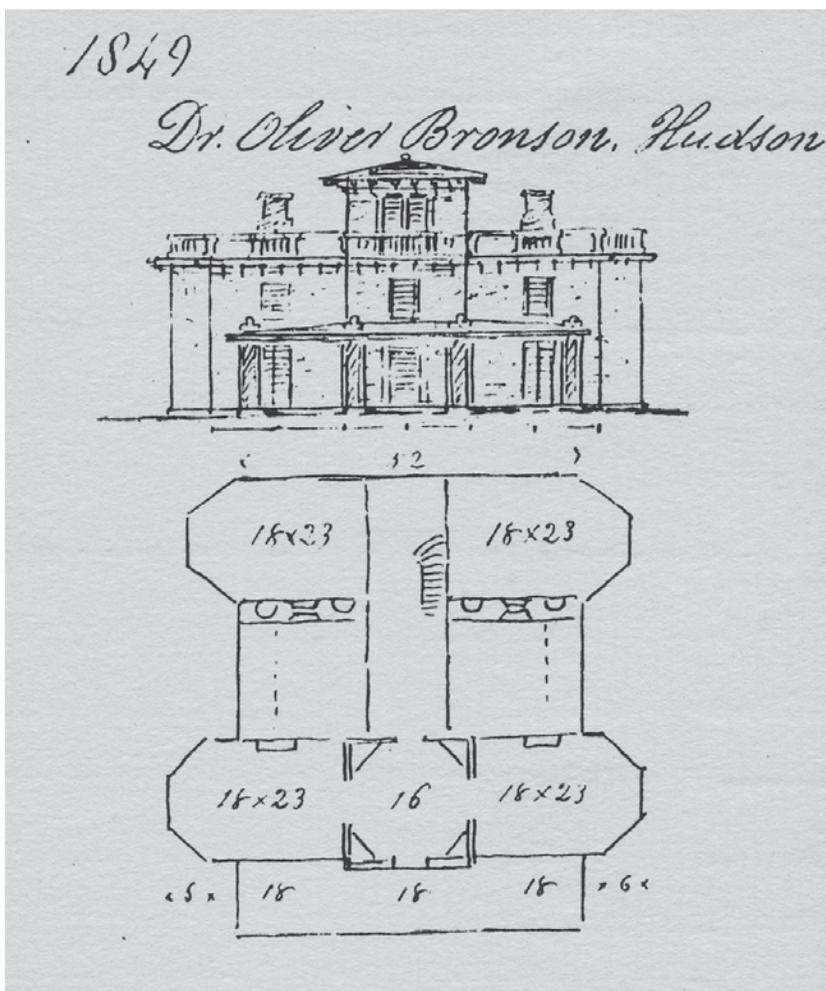
the building.³⁸

In the late-1960s, the Dutch Reformed Church made what must have been a difficult decision: to abandon its historic Davis-designed edifice for a modern building in the Meadowhill area, outside of the decaying city core. The building barely escaped the wrecking ball at that time and has since, with a few exceptions, remained vacant.

The Plumb-Bronson House

The Plumb-Bronson House was a handsome Federal-style residence that received modifications and additions designed by Davis in 1839 and again in 1849. The wood frame building, erected circa 1812 by an unidentified but highly skilled builder, is two stories in height with a one-bay gabled attic story. Its façade faces east toward present-day Route 9. The exterior of the house is embellished with both refined Federal-style details and later Picturesque-inspired alterations and additions designed by Davis. The interior is highlighted by an elegant elliptical stair (dating to the original building campaign) and other details representing both original construction and later work by Davis. The first set of alterations designed by Davis for Dr. Oliver Bronson, a relative by marriage to noted Davis patron Robert Donaldson, included a reworking of the house's eaves with the addition of ornamental brackets. At this time, drawings for a Bracketed-style carriage barn with symmetrical flanking wings were likewise furnished by the architect. The 1849 work, much more extensive in scope, included the construction of a one-story, one-room-deep addition with a three-story engaged central tower of Italian villa origin, constituting a new, west-facing façade. Both the early and later additions by Davis included the use of ornamental verandas. Documentation regarding Davis's work for Bronson is chronicled in the architect's *Day Book* and *Office Journal*,³⁹ in addition to a small number of surviving drawings.

The settlement and growth of the city of Hudson, known originally as Claverack Landing, commenced fully in the final decades of the eighteenth century. Thomas Jenkins, acting in association with other speculators, purchased extensive tracts of land bounding the east bank of the Hudson River in 1783 from Peter Hogeboom, Jr., and the Hardick and Van Alen families. A street grid was proposed the following year, and in 1785 Hudson was chartered as a city.⁴⁰ An account published in the *New York Journal* in 1786⁴¹ indicates that the settlement grew quickly, and by that year counted several wharves, warehouses, upwards of 150 dwellings, and 1,500 citizens, primarily from Rhode Island and Massachusetts. In 1811, Samuel Plumb acquired 263 acres of land bounding the southern-most portion of Hudson's street grid (and just within the city limits) from the heirs of



Plans for the remodeled Plumb-Bronson House in a sketch by Davis (1849)

Thomas Jenkins. The property, described in the deed as “a certain farm and piece of land,” is indicated on the 1799 Penfield Map of the city. Two farmhouses are delineated on the map, one likely the “Appletree” house that remains, altered, on the southern boundary of the estate.

Between 1811 and 1812, Plumb engaged an unknown architect-builder to erect for him an elegant estate house in the Federal style, finished in the finest manner with Adam-inspired details likely derived from an English source such as the works authored by William Pain (c. 1730-c. 1790). A comparison of decorative features in the Plumb house with those of the James Vanderpoel house in Kinderhook (circa 1816-1820) suggests the possibility of a single builder, Barnabas

Waterman (1776-1839). However, the Plumb house, unlike the Vanderpoel house and the majority of Federal-style residences in New England and New York, deviated from the conventional, self-contained, five-bay gable-ended or hipped-roof prototype and instead employed comparatively lively massing. Plumb's house appears in the circa-1820 William Guy Wall watercolor likely as it was completed in 1812, with the main house flanked by outlying gable-fronted dependencies with arcaded openings along their long sides and connected to the main house by fenced walkways. The watercolor captures a southwesterly view, the landscape of the estate largely open in character, with small copses of trees set immediately south and west of the house. Open agricultural fields extend into the distance and denote the early land-use patterns of the area.

In 1835, the Plumb house and associated acreage were sold to Robert Frary. In 1838, he sold the house and eighty acres to Dr. Oliver Bronson (1799-1875), the brother-in-law of Robert Donaldson (1800-1872), arguably the most important of Davis's many clients. Over the course of Davis's career, Donaldson, a native North Carolinian with business interests in New York, also proved a close friend and confidant. He commissioned Davis to redesign two Hudson River estates for him, Blithewood and Edgewater; gained commissions for Davis at the University of North Carolina; and supported Davis in his efforts to publish his book, *Rural Residences*.⁴² Earlier, he had likewise aided Town & Davis in extending their influence into North Carolina.⁴³ Donaldson acknowledged what he perceived as Davis's role in the evolution of American domestic architecture and the Picturesque movement in a letter to the architect in 1863. "Downing stole your thunder for awhile," he wrote, "but I always, on suitable occasion, claimed for you the seminal ideas which have been so fruitful."⁴⁴

Donaldson's Blithewood, a Federal-period house in Barrytown overlooking the Hudson River, was modified by Davis in 1836 in the Bracketed style with the addition of an ornamental veranda and decorative brackets to the eaves. The first residence executed by Davis in this vein, it has long since been demolished. His design for one of the Blithewood gatehouses, published in *Rural Residences* as "Gatehouse in the Rustic Cottage Style," likewise proved a seminal conception, as it presented the prototype for the board-and-batten Gothic Revival cottage that became a staple of Picturesque design and is commonly associated with Andrew Jackson Downing.⁴⁵ All that remains today of the architecture of this estate is the six-sided Bracketed-style gatehouse, which is located on the grounds of present-day Bard College.

The Bronson family had longstanding ties to America dating to the mid-seventeenth century, having originally settled in the Hartford, Farmington, and

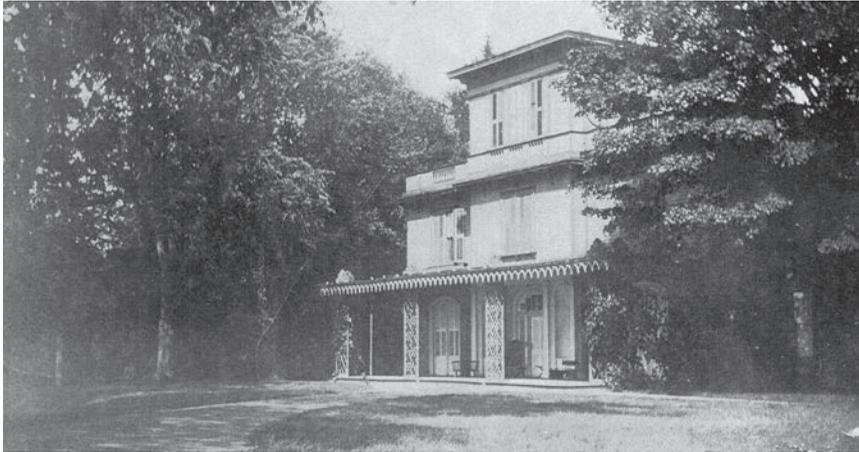


The Plum-Bronson House as modified by Davis in the Bracketed style in 1839

Waterbury areas of Connecticut. Dr. Oliver Bronson was the son of Isaac Bronson (born in 1760), a major figure in post-Revolutionary War real estate and securities speculation who amassed a considerable fortune and likewise gained note as an authority on banking theory.⁴⁶ (His money lending proved critical to the development of New York's Oneida and Jefferson counties in the early nineteenth century.) Oliver Bronson was the eldest son of Isaac Bronson and Anna Olcott, the latter also of early Connecticut lineage. He married Joanna Donaldson (1806-1876), sister of Robert Donaldson, and while in Hudson was listed as among the city's first superintendents of schools and a shareholder in the Hudson Gas Company. Like many affluent gentlemen of the period, Bronson chose to settle along the banks of the Hudson River on an estate reflecting the prevailing Romantic sentiments of the era.

Davis and Bronson were undoubtedly introduced to each other by Robert Donaldson, perhaps at Blithewood, where Bronson would have been personally familiar with the modifications Davis designed for his brother-in-law. Following Donaldson's lead, and likely at his urging, Bronson retained Davis's services in 1839 in a similar project: The modification of the Plumb house in a more appropriate and contemporary rural fashion. Davis's first recorded visit to Bronson's Hudson house was in April 1839,⁴⁷ at which time he "designed various fixtures and embellishments." He returned again in June, providing sketches for the stable, barns, and unspecified ornament.⁴⁸ Of note is a purchase made by Bronson the week prior to Davis's April visit, which indicates a transaction between Bronson and Charles and Andrew Jackson Downing.⁴⁹ This purchase undoubtedly consisted of trees and other plant materials from the Downing nursery in Newburgh, the planting of which Davis likely commented on and possibly oversaw. A notation in his *Day Book*⁵⁰ indicates that as early as 1830 Davis had begun to familiarize himself with the theories associated with English Picturesque landscape design, and, as the decade wore on, he drew increasingly from the influential work of John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843). Davis returned to stay with Bronson in early October, following a visit to Thomas Cole's house across the river in Catskill, and spent three or four days there, likely in superintendence of ongoing construction.⁵¹ No drawings are known to exist for Davis's 1839 work on the Bronson house; an entry in his *Day Book* indicates that Davis also produced a "landscape view" of the estate in late 1839.⁵²

The Donaldson-Bronson patronage was of pivotal significance to the development of the Bracketed style, of which the Dr. Oliver Bronson House is the oldest known extant example,⁵³ and Davis's early work in the Picturesque vein. After commissioning Davis to design the Gothic Revival villa that, though



The west façade of the Plumb-Bronson house as redesigned in the Italian Villa style in 1849

not built, was offered in *Rural Residences*,⁵⁴ Robert Donaldson engaged Davis for work at Blithewood. Davis was likewise commissioned by Isabella Donaldson to produce designs for a Bracketed-style country church and school in Annandale-on-Hudson (1836), similar in form to the board-and-batten “Design for a Model School House” included in *Rural Residences*. The concept of these economical yet effective designs, well suited to picturesque locales by virtue of the irregular rhythm created by the play of light and shadow and (in the cases of the domestic work) generous verandas, was later acknowledged by Downing in his *Cottage Residences* of 1842 in design V, “A Cottage in the Bracketed Mode”:

This bracketed mode of building, so simple in construction and so striking in effect, will be found highly suitable to North America. . . Indeed, we think a very ingenious architect might produce an American cottage style by carefully studying the capabilities of this mode, so abounding in picturesqueness and so easily executed.⁵⁵

Although the Bracketed style never achieved the popularity enjoyed by the Gothic Revival and the Italian styles, Davis’s work in this mode in the mid- to late 1830s was nonetheless of great consequence, informed by Romantic sentiment and the Picturesque ideals of harmony with site, variety, and irregularity. The badly deteriorated east-facing verandah of the Bronson house, part of the 1839 modifications, is likely the earliest extant example of its type designed by Davis. Though the idea of a sheltered area was not new to native architecture,⁵⁶ the concept of the veranda as a bridge between house and setting had Romantic

connotations that made it a characteristic feature of Picturesque designs carried into the mainstream by Downing's books.

Of considerable interest in the development of the estate is the possible involvement of Downing, whose Newburgh nursery is documented in 1839 as having provided Bronson with nearly 100 dollars' worth of plants for the grounds. Like Davis, Downing was in all probability introduced to Bronson by Robert Donaldson, whose Blithewood estate had captured his interest. According to William Pierson, the house led Downing to contact Davis in anticipation of his coming work, *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*.⁵⁷ Blithewood must have made quite an impression on the young landscape designer, as he included it as the frontispiece for his book⁵⁸ and offered his praises of the house, "one of the most charming villa residences in the Union."⁵⁹

Strikingly similar in layout to the Bronson Estate is a design offered in Downing's *Treatise*, Figure 20.⁶⁰ These include the alignment of the primary entrance and gatehouse, the relationship between the house and stable complex, the layout of carriage drives, the location of the pond, and the extensive tract of agricultural land located south of the property. Although it is not possible to chronicle the extent to which Downing participated in alterations made to the estate, if at all, it is likely that at the very least he consulted on the specific species of trees and plants ordered and possibly corresponded with Davis. If such communication took place, the Bronson Estate would represent one of the earliest known collaborations between the two men.

Alterations made to the Bronson landscape by Davis in the late 1830s ultimately imparted the Romantic landscape spirit first addressed at length in America in published form by Downing and drawn from the influence of Loudon, Repton, and other English sources. The estate enjoyed a tremendous vista, similar to that described by Downing while at Blithewood, with the house commanding an extensive panorama of the Hudson River framed to the west by the "tall blue summits of the distant Kaastkills." South Bay, spread out before the estate to the south and west, provided a thoroughly dramatic setting for Davis's work. Modifications likely recommended by Davis would have included the realignment of carriage drives to make them "more abrupt in their windings,"⁶¹ taking full advantage of the diverse characteristics of the land. The addition of irregularly placed copses of trees would likewise have imparted a picturesque and highly naturalistic quality. "The picturesque in Landscape Gardening," according to Downing, "aims at the production of outlines of a certain spirited irregularity, surfaces comparatively abrupt and broken, and growth of a somewhat wild and bold character."⁶² These irregular features of nature were meant to impart a feeling

of harmony and interrelationship with the newly conceived house, its bracketed eaves casting deep shadows playing upon the variegated forms of nature itself.

In the fall of 1849, Davis was again engaged by Bronson to provide alterations to his Hudson house. Entries in Davis's Day Book indicate that the architect "arranged [the new] plan" with Bronson during a visit in late September,⁶³ and a set of nine drawings and specifications were prepared in early October at the cost of thirty dollars. The new scheme, envisioned by Davis in a small pencil rendering circa 1849, reoriented the house so the façade would face west toward the river and included the addition of a one-room-deep block cast in the Italian villa or Tuscan mode. The Italian villa, with its characteristic tower and neo-Renaissance details, proved a highly popular style in the Hudson Valley that was likewise popularized by Andrew Jackson Downing. Although, according to Downing in *The Architecture of Country Houses*, the style was not "essentially country-like in character," it was nonetheless "remarkable for expressing the elegant culture and variety of accomplishment of the retired citizen or man of the world."⁶⁴ While Italian villa designs were typically asymmetrical in configuration, the Bronson addition fell partially within the restraints of the earlier Plumb house footprint and was instead symmetrically composed. It was similar in that regard to Locust Grove in Poughkeepsie, the house in the Italian villa style that Davis redesigned in collaboration with Samuel F.B. Morse.⁶⁵ This style offered an alternative to the darker and somewhat more mysterious Gothic, of which Davis proved himself an innovator for domestic conceptions. It carried, as pointed out by William Pierson, a "more respectable formality," and offered itself as a conscious continuation of the classical tastes that prevailed in America throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century.⁶⁶ Like the Gothic style, it was also inspired by English examples, as noted by Downing following his return from England, where he had viewed "spacious Italian villas, more Italian than in Italy."⁶⁷ Following the completion of the new elevation, construction of which likely began late in the fall of 1849,⁶⁸ the Bronson villa rose dramatically above the crest of the ridge on which it rested, as captured in the quick pencil sketch drawn by Davis.

The 1849 additions allowed Davis the opportunity to develop his ideas regarding interior design, albeit on a somewhat limited scale. The rectangular block of the first story was roughly comprised of three squares, the outer two lengthened by semi-octagonal extensions. The central hall, from which the outlying rooms radiated, was formed into an octagon by the addition of four angled walls; semi octagonal one-story window bays projected from the semi-octagonal ends of the flanking rooms, further playing on the form of the original Plumb house bays. The surviving sketches indicate Davis's intention to strike a

balance between the first story of the existing house and the addition, with two rectangular blocks terminated by semi-octagonal ends joined by the original rear parlors of the Plumb house. Projecting bays and generous windows framed suitably Romantic views, while Picturesque marble mantels and fine finishes lent the new first story an elegance befitting the refinement of the earlier house. Large bedrooms on the second and third stories were likewise offered the extensive western view shed of the river and mountains, and were well appointed. Davis gained internal and external harmony by repeating the sculptural niches of the west elevation in the octagonal hall, yet he provided a hint of asymmetrical tension in varying the dimensions of the bays. A second veranda provided a vital link between the new interior space and landscape.

In 1849, Bronson added an additional twenty-nine acres south of his original purchase, which reunited land originally associated with the Plumb estate that was excluded in the original sale. In 1854, following a sixteen-year residence, he sold the estate to Frederick Fitch Folger and returned to Connecticut. Folger retained ownership of the house until 1865. Early in the twentieth century the property was acquired by the New York State Training School for Girls, which was founded in the 1860s at a site southwest of the dwelling. The Bronson House served as the residence of the school's director until the 1960s, and since that time has largely sat vacant.

Conclusion

Few cultural figures in the Hudson Valley have aroused the interest and attention that Alexander Jackson Davis has received. Though some might argue that his place in the evolution of nineteenth-century American architecture has been overstated, perhaps at the expense of other architects, Davis's work in the Hudson Valley was seminal to the early flowering of the Picturesque aesthetic in the United States. The publication in the near future of the papers of the late Davis scholar Jane Davies will bring with it renewed interest in the architect's work and hopefully provide added impetus for the restoration and reuse of these two remarkable architectural resources. Both are nationally significant examples of the designer's work and worthy of extraordinary efforts to ensure their survival.

Inquiries regarding preservation efforts at the Dutch Reformed Church should be made to the Newburgh Preservation Association; those regarding the Bronson House should be directed to Historic Hudson.

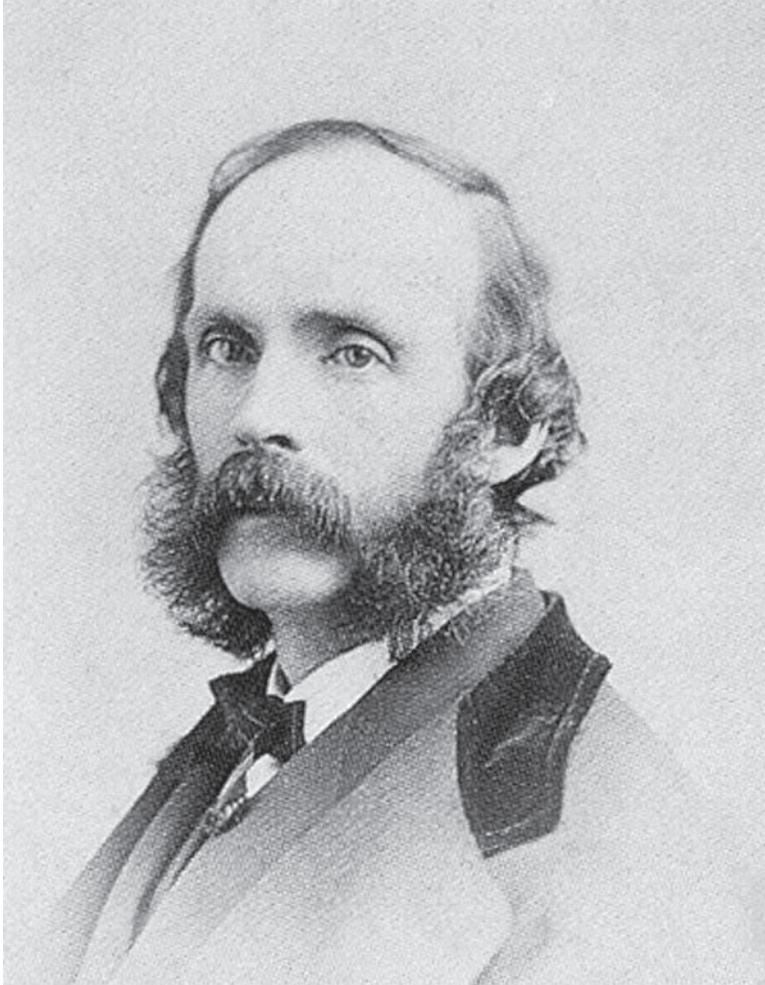
The church and the house were the featured topics of a July 2003 Hudson River Heritage Symposium—"The Temple and the Villa"—held to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Alexander Jackson Davis.

Endnotes

1. Davis used the phrase “architectural composer” on his business cards, such as those maintained in Box A-F in the A.J. Davis Collection at the Avery Architectural Library at Columbia University (Avery hereafter), and likewise in his listings in New York City directories.
2. I have used this term in describing the various styles that emerged in America beginning in the mid-1830s and were subsequently popularized in the books of Andrew Jackson Downing. These would include the Gothic Revival style, the various “Italian” styles—Italian villa, Tuscan villa, “Italianate,” etc.—and the Bracketed style, among others.
3. Davis, *Rural Residences, Etc., Consisting of Designs, Original and Selected, for Cottages, Farm-houses, Villas, and Village Churches: With Brief Explanations, Estimates, and a Specification of Materials, Construction, Etc.* (New York: 1837). The significance of this work is discussed by William H. Pierson in *American Buildings and Their Architects: Technology and the Picturesque: Vol. 2. The Corporate and Early Gothic Styles* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980), 296-298.
4. The first Town & Davis association lasted from February 1829 to May 1835. On May 1, 1832, James H. Dakin, a talented draftsman who earlier apprenticed in the office under Davis beginning in 1829, became a full associate in the firm. The firm was known as Town, Davis, & Dakin from May 1832 to November 1833, at which time Dakin left to pursue an independent career. Town and Davis were also briefly associated 1842-43.
5. Jane Davies, “Alexander J. Davis, Creative American Architect,” in *Alexander Jackson Davis: American Architect 1803-1892*, ed. Amelia Peck (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 9.
6. Davis, *Rural Residences*, see n. 3.
7. Jane Davies, “Dutch Reformed Church, Newburgh.” Unpublished typescript. City Engineer’s Office, City Hall, Newburgh.
8. Davis, “View of the Village of Florida, Orange County, New York from the Northwest,” dated 1820, drawing with watercolor, Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA hereafter), 24.66.749.
9. William H. Pierson, *American Buildings*, 356-357.
10. Smillie’s villa was begun but never completed, its construction abandoned due to cost considerations.
11. Like the Dutch Reformed Church and Plumb-Bronson House, the future of Vaux’s Hoyt House remains in serious jeopardy. The Gothic Revival-style house was constructed c. 1855-57 on a prominent site on the east bank of the Hudson River, and offered in Vaux’s 1857 book *Villas and Cottages*. The house is currently owned by New York State and located on the grounds of Mills-Norrie State Park.
12. Extant Greek Revival-style projects directly attributable to Davis that predate the Dutch Reformed Church include the Ralph Ingersoll House in New Haven, CT, 1829; the Samuel Russell House in Middletown, CT, 1829; the Aaron Skinner House in New Haven, CT, 1833-34; the LeGrand Cannon Stores in Troy, NY, 1832-35; the U.S. Custom House in New York City, 1833-42; and the Robert Johnson House in Owego, NY, 1834. These designs survive with a varying amount of integrity and most were designed in affiliation with Town; the Custom House design was altered during construction from the original Town & Davis scheme.
13. Undated letter from Cruickshank to the Consistory, transcribed as the first entry in the Consistory Minutes, vol. 1., 1835-62. Archives of the Meadowhill Reformed Church, Newburgh, New York. Xeroxed copies in the City Engineer’s Office, City Hall, Newburgh.
14. E.M. Ruttenber, *History of the County of Orange: With a History of the Town and City of Newburgh* (Newburgh: Ruttenber and Sons, 1875); E.M. Ruttenber and L.H. Clark, *History of Orange County, New York, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Many of Its Pioneers and Prominent Men* (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1881); E.M. Ruttenber, *History of the Town of Newburgh* (Newburgh: E.M. Ruttenber and Co., 1859); John Nutt, *Newburgh, Her Industries and Leading Citizens* (Newburgh: Nutt, 1891).
15. Consistory Minutes, vol. 1, entry dated June 6, 1835.
16. *Ibid*, history of church ownership chronology compiled and entered by Jacob Fowler, entry dated May 23, 1859.

17. Letter to Davis from Christopher Reeve, 29 July 1835, "General Correspondence 1828-1839," Box 1, folder 1, A. J. Davis Collection, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library (NYPL hereafter).
18. Davis, *Day Book*, 172, NYPL. Entry includes small elevation of façade showing portico and dome. All subsequent direct references to the Day Book in this piece will be referring to vol.1, 1827-53
19. Davis, "Dutch Church Newburgh," pen and ink on paper. Drawing #126, A.J. Davis Collection, New-York Historical Society. Transverse section showing pulpit, gallery, cornice, and coffer arrangement. Documentation suggests August 1835.
20. Letter to Davis from William Cruickshank, October 14, 1835, "General Correspondence 1828-1839," Box 1, folder 1, NYPL.
21. *Newburgh Gazette*, November 7, 1835.
22. *New-York Mirror* 12, no. 22 (November 29, 1834); *Mirror* 12, no. 23 (December 6, 1834); *Mirror* 12, no. 24 (December 13, 1834).
23. James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, *The Antiquities of Athens*, 3 vols. (London: John Haberkorn, 1762-1816, reprint New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968). Supplementary volume issued in 1830.
24. Philip Hone, *The Diary of Philip Hone*, 1828-1851, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1927; reprint 1969), 1:423.
25. Letter to Davis from Alvah Whitmarsh, April 16, 1836, "General Correspondence 1828-1839," Box 1, folder 1, NYPL.
26. *Consistory Minutes*, vol. 1, entries dated June 20, 1836; August 30, 1836; June 13, 1837.
27. *Ibid*, entry dated October 27, 1836.
28. Davis, *Day Book*, entry dated April 25, 1837, NYPL.
29. Davis, "A list of some of the more important buildings executed from the designs of or designed by AJ Davis, and his associates." *Day Book*, 14, NYPL.
30. *Consistory Minutes*, vol. 1, entries dated May 8 and 19, 1837.
31. *Ibid*, entry dated July 24, 1837.
32. *Ibid*, entries dated September 4 and 30, 1837.
33. *Ibid*, entry dated October 3, 1837.
34. *Ibid*, entry dated November 21, 1837.
35. Ruttenber, *Newburgh*, 220.
36. *Consistory Minutes*, vol. 1, transcription of letter from Cruickshank to the Consistory, entry dated December 28, 1837.
37. *Newburgh Telegraph*, November 23, 1837.
38. *Consistory Minutes*, vol. 1, Fowler ownership chronology, entry dated May 23, 1859.
39. Davis, *Day Book* vol. 1, 1827-53; Office Journal (24.66.1400), Alexander Jackson Davis Collection, MMA.
40. Piwonka and Blackburn, *Visible Heritage*, 74.
41. *Ibid*
42. Davis, *Rural Residences*. Donaldson also gained Davis' commission for the Sarcophagus of Judge William Gaston in New Bern, North Carolina; Gaston was the father of Donaldson's wife and was a North Carolina Supreme Court Justice.
43. Jean Bradley Anderson, *Carolinian on the Hudson: The Life of Robert Donaldson* (Raleigh: The Historic Preservation Foundation of North Carolina, 1996), 149-50.
44. Letter to Davis from Donaldson, May 12, 1863, Davis Collection, Avery.
45. The significance of the Blithewood estate is also discussed by Pierson in *American Buildings*, 300-307.
46. Grant Morrisson, "A New York City Creditor and His Upstate Debtors: Isaac Bronson's Moneylending,

- 1810-1836," *New York History LXI/3* (July 1980), 257.
47. Davis, *Day Book*, 197. Entries dated April 17 and 18, 1839. A cancelled check in Box 28, Bronson Family Papers, Manuscript Division, NYPL, indicates that Davis received thirty dollars payment from Bronson for his initial services on the 18th.
 48. *Ibid*, entry dated June 7. Davis noted he received fifteen dollars for the work.
 49. Box 28, Bronson Family Papers. A cancelled check dated April 9, 1839, in the amount of ninety-three dollars is signed by Bronson and made out to C. and A.J. Downing.
 50. Davis, *Day Book*, 101. Entry dated September 19, 1830. "Study of Repton-Whately-Marshall on landscape gardening."
 51. *Ibid*, 204.
 52. *Ibid*, 205. An entry of December 9 reads "Drawing Dr. O. Bronson's villa, H. Whitney's, J.A. Hillhouse, landscape views."
 53. Jane Davies, "Works and Projects," in *Alexander Jackson Davis*, 108-9. The Bronson house was predated by two other domestic Bracketed designs: Blithewood, and the Isaac Lawrence House in New Haven, 1836, which was patterned after the cottage orne with ornamental veranda he designed in 1835 for David Codwise and published in *Rural Residences*. Blithewood has long since been destroyed; the Lawrence House has been altered beyond recognition.
 54. See Pierson, 298-300.
 55. Downing, *Cottage Residences, Rural Architecture and Landscape Gardening* (First edition 1842, repr. Watkins Glen, New York: Century House, 1967), 89.
 56. Pierson, *American Buildings*, 301-302. Pierson also points out that Washington Irving, in remodeling his small Dutch house into an irregular Gothic cottage, employed a veranda. Both Donaldson and Davis knew Irving, and Pierson therefore surmises that the veranda at Blithewood may have been inspired by Irving's Sunnyside.
 57. Pierson, *American Buildings*, 351. Downing first contacted Davis in December 1838.
 58. Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (First edition 1841, repr. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1967), "View in the Grounds of Blithewood, Dutchess Co., NY, The Residence of Robert Donaldson, Esq.," engraved by H. Jordan after a drawing by Davis.
 59. *Ibid*, 30.
 60. Downing, *Treatise*, 94.
 61. Downing, *Treatise*, 59. I am indebted to Timothy Dunleavy of Historic Hudson for this observation.
 62. *Ibid*
 63. Davis, *Day Book*, 388, 390, entries dated September 24 and 26, 1849.
 64. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (First edition 1850, repr. New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), Design XXI, "A Villa in the Italian style," 285-86.
 65. William Rhoads, "The Artist's House and Studio in the Nineteenth Century Hudson Valley and Catskills," in *Charmed Places: Hudson River Artists and Their Houses, Studios, and Vistas* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1988), 80. The Italian style, with its associations with what Downing termed "that land of painters and of the fine arts," proved particularly popular with American artists of the Romantic school, among them Morse and Thomas P. Rossiter. Thomas Cole played with designs for an Italian villa for his own Catskill home, plans that were never realized.
 66. Pierson, *American Buildings*, 362.
 67. Downing quoted in Francis Kowsky, *Country, Park and City: The Architecture and Life of Calvert Vaux* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 32.
 68. Drawings and specifications for the new elevation were drawn in early October by Davis. It is likely that the foundation was prepared in the fall and the wood frame of the superstructure begun the following spring.



NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF PARKS, RECREATION AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION, OLANA STATE HISTORIC SITE, TACONIC REGION

Frederic Edwin Church

“The Art of the Landscape Gardener” Frederic Church at Olana

“The art of the landscape gardener has been employed,
not so much to render Olana beautiful as to make it picturesque”

—*The Boston Sunday Herald*, September 7, 1890

Robert M. Toole

The Setting

The story of Olana began in 1844 with the activities of artist Frederic Church (1826-1900), in a period when the Hudson River Valley was the epicenter of American Romanticism.

Romanticism was a broad international phenomenon that originated in Europe. Americans embraced the romantic impulse only after a long and decidedly unromantic period of colonial life on a true frontier. It was not until the frontier moved west that an artistic expression emerged that was quintessentially romantic. This expression had religious inspirations and was fired by the optimism of America’s fledgling democracy, and the cultural innocence of its society, played out in wilderness settings that had few equals in Europe. By the early nineteenth century, it was influencing the arts and forming much of the cultural foundation of the young United States. In America, international Romanticism found a worthy culmination.

So, in 1844, the conservative artistic legacy of America’s Colonial period was in the midst of a revolutionary change. Artist Thomas Cole, and others, had by then introduced Americans to romantic landscape painting. The region’s literary sources for romantic thought, notably the works of Washington Irving and the other Knickerbockers, came even earlier. In architecture, the varied romantic styles, by then well established in England, appeared in the Hudson Valley in the decades before the 1840s. The early work of New York City-based Alexander Jackson Davis in the Gothic Revival (to evolve to the indigenous “Bracketed style”) can be seen from the 1830s. At Newburgh-on-Hudson, Andrew Jackson Downing’s important writings on landscape gardening, including the romantic Picturesque style, began to appear in 1841. As will be shown, the Picturesque landscape design would find special resonance at Olana.

A.J. Downing's discussion of landscape gardening was taken directly from earlier English theorists and practitioners. This European background will be important to understanding Olana. (See the last section of this article.) Regarding landscape design, Downing was not so much an innovator as he was a transmitter of long-established design traditions. Still, the Hudson River Valley was distinctly American, and the "genius of the place"—celebrating local setting—was crucial to the romantic ideal, a point especially pertinent to landscape design. As such, America's romantic experience was unique, and its artistic expression home-grown.

In the decades before 1844, one of the Hudson Valley's important romantic venues was the village of Catskill, which served as a base for excursions into the Catskill Mountains, and to its close-at-hand escarpment—called the "Wall of Manitou"—celebrated by James Fenimore Cooper in *The Pioneers* (1823):

You know the Catskills, lad; for you must have seen them on your left [west], as you followed the river up from York, looking as blue as a piece of clear sky, and holding the clouds on their tops, as the smoke curls over the head of an Indian chief at the council fire.

The Catskills, Cooper maintained, were of spiritual importance, a place where America could find peace and from where "all creation" could be observed. From his first visit in 1825, Thomas Cole painted the mountain's lakes, hidden waterfalls, and wilderness vistas. He became enamored with the mountains, stayed to marry a local woman in 1836, and resided thereafter at her uncle's modest, Federal-era estate, Cedar Grove, at the edge of the village of Catskill.¹ In his "Essay on American Scenery" (1835), Cole described the area's landscape as "varied, undulating, and [with] exceedingly beautiful outlines—[the mountains] heave from the valley of the Hudson like the subsiding billows of the ocean after a storm." At Cedar Grove, Thomas Cole created many of the Hudson River School masterpieces that defined the artistic aspirations of a generation.

In the summer of 1844, eighteen-year-old Frederic Church entered this romantically touched and bucolic scene to study landscape painting with Cole. It was during this stay that Church first visited the site of his future home, on a hillside just across the Hudson from Cedar Grove, the property that would become Olana.

From their first correspondence, Church addressed Cole as "distinguished" and said he anticipated "the beautiful and romantic scenery about Catskill...[and] the greatest pleasure to accompany you in your rambles about the place observing nature in all her various appearances."² According to Charles Dudley Warner,

Church's friend and biographer, Cole and his Catskill home had the "profoundest influences...both artistically and in the molding of [Church's] general character." From this experience, Warner claimed that Church became an "interpreter of nature rather than a transcriber."³ At Catskill, the "mere youth"⁴ and his mentor roamed the hills in search of subject matter for their art, and Church absorbed the philosophical underpinnings that would ennoble his artistic genius.⁵

After study with Cole, Church moved to New York City, where he quickly established his reputation. In 1849, he was elected a full member of the National Academy of Design. In the 1840s and 1850s, he produced paintings that closely paralleled Cole's approach to landscape painting, including *Scene on the Catskill Creek, New York* (1847), *Morning over the Hudson Valley* (1848), *West Rock, New Haven* (1849), and *Mount Katahdin* (1853). In the late 1850s, Church completed what are today considered American masterpieces, the large exhibit pictures *Niagara* (1857), *Heart of the Andes* (1859), and *Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860). These works and others, all accomplished before Church was thirty-four years old, assured his fame.

In the spring of 1860, Frederic Church returned to a region of fond memories and artistic inspiration when he purchased a 126-acre farm across the Hudson from Cedar Grove as he prepared for his marriage that summer to Isabel Carnes.⁶ By 1860, Thomas Cole had been dead for twelve years. His widow, Maria Cole; the three Cole children; and three of Maria's unmarried sisters still lived at their farm. Their friend Church stayed with the family as he concluded his real estate purchase.⁷ Church then hired Cole's twenty-two-year-old son, Theodore, to help supervise the development of his country seat.⁸

In the decades that followed, employing his painterly background and the substantial income from his art, Frederic Church created Olana for his family, and produced a significant example of American landscape design. When substantially completed in about 1890 (when the newspaper quotation in the title of this article was published), the ornamental farm totaled 250 acres, double the size of the initial 1860 purchase. The designed landscape included the house grounds, extensive parkland, a lake, miles of pleasure drives, and a vibrant agricultural operation, achieved by an eminent artist, on an expansive scale, in a region of natural and pastoral beauty that was a focus of America's fleeting Romantic period.

Picturesque landscape gardening was to be the basis for the urban parks movement, initiated at New York City's Central Park (1858), and it was embedded in the American national park and conservation movements throughout the nineteenth century. Inspired by romantic sensibilities, these American

achievements in landscape design, preservation, and conservation celebrated the idealized harmony of settled and wilderness landscapes. In the hands of one of America's greatest landscape painters, they resulted in poetry on the land, the masterpiece of landscape gardening that is Olana.

Olana's Site History Getting Started

Theodore Cole's diary and account books document early landscape design work at Olana in considerable detail. In his role as caretaker, young Cole first visited the property in February 1860 and noted that he intended "to see about getting out muck," an initial reference to excavation of Olana's future lake.⁹ In April 1860, when Church was upriver, the two men again visited the farm and took what Cole called "quite a tramp over it."¹⁰ Cole was to make regular trips to "Mr. Church's Place" throughout the 1860s.¹¹

The farm purchased by Church had been established as a subsistent family farm in the late eighteenth century. After Church's purchase, a salaried farmer was retained to work the fields and occupy the original farmhouse. The Churches built a new, decorative "farmhouse" for themselves.¹² This was later called Cosy Cottage, and it was the Churches' *cottage ornée* at the farm for eleven years (Figure 4).¹³ One visitor suggested that Cosy Cottage had been positioned to catch "the first and last glances of the sun,"¹⁴ but its location amid the remodeled farm buildings confirmed the newlyweds' hands-on commitment to farm life. The Churches moved into Cosy Cottage early in the summer of 1861.¹⁵

During the first years, the emphasis was on getting the property's agricultural operations arranged in a way suited to Frederic Church's goals. New buildings were constructed and older structures were improved. Theodore Cole was actively involved managing the farm under Church's direction, often rowing a boat across the Hudson from Catskill on his regular visits. He kept accounts of expenses and farm income, and he interviewed and hired the salaried farmer and other workers.¹⁶

In the spring of 1861, Cole reported, "quite a number of trees were set out."¹⁷ From the beginning, trees were planted in large numbers at Olana, so that three years after the above work, in the spring of 1864, the effort was tallied at "several thousand" trees already planted.¹⁸ In addition to orchard trees, the ornamental plantings included native deciduous trees, such as sugar maples, oaks, and white birch, and native evergreens, among them pines, spruce, and especially hemlocks. Most of the deciduous trees were planted in a thirty-acre park located north and uphill from the lake excavation and Cosy Cottage. Lake dredging complemented

the planting, Church asserting, “my muck seems wonderfully adapted to trees and I give them liberal doses of it.”¹⁹ Together, the future lake and adjacent parkland extended over the entire western half of the earlier family farm.

In 1861, the family enjoyed their first full summer season. The Churches’ first child, Herbert Edwin, was born that October. In these early years, some of the Churches’ friends seemed a bit startled at the couple’s headlong pursuit of rural life. One wondered, “can it be possible that you have abandoned the exquisite field of ideality in which you have reaped so many laurels, for the sure matter-of-fact one of the husbandman?”²⁰

Expanding the Landscape and Making a Plan

In 1864, Frederic Church began the complex series of land purchases that eventually encompassed the hill to the north, which would be the main house site. Church’s real estate transactions are fascinating for the care he exhibited in assembling the landscape entity that was to be Olana. His first purchase was approximately thirty acres of the steeply wooded escarpment lying to the west of the farm.²¹ This property fronted on the public road (today’s Route 9G) that traced the base of the hill. With its steep topography, the land was not suited to agriculture. But Church knew this lot would be critical to his long-term vision. To his skeptical father (who was financing the purchase), Church argued that the lot was important in “securing fine openings for the views,” and as the site of “a suitable entrance and roadway into my place.”²² With these comments, Church revealed his plans, saying the new lot might be sold in the future if another purchase was concluded:

I understand that the piece of woods at the North of my farm on the top on the hill can be had at the price asked 3 years ago \$2,000, with that and a strip say 200 feet wide on the eastern side of the lot north of it I should have a remarkably easy and superb roadway. This strip could not cost over \$500, probably less. Of course I would not buy one without the certainty of the other.²³

The driveway Church envisioned here was the future North Road, constructed five years later as Olana’s primary, mile-long approach drive.

Before acquiring the hilltop and lands for this road, Church continued to concentrate his efforts on the farm, making further improvements to Cosy Cottage and other buildings. He built a driveway to the cottage, the first of Olana’s important carriage drives, which would evolve into an intricate, seven-mile-long system that largely defined the visual experience of moving through the Olana

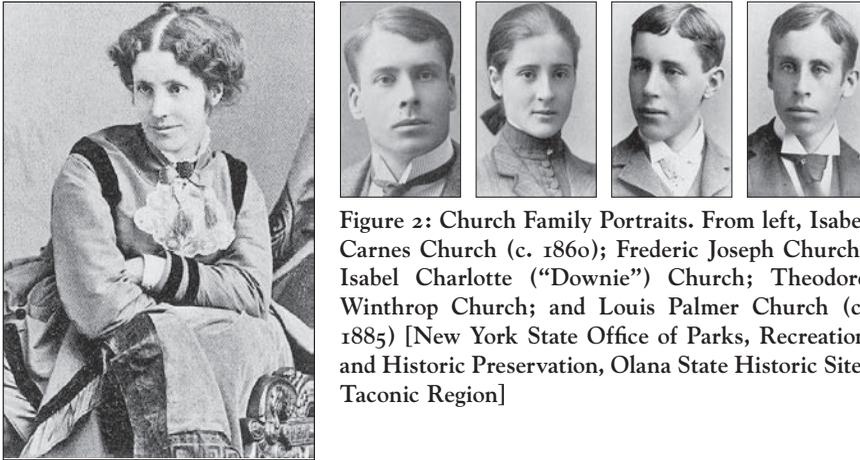


Figure 2: Church Family Portraits. From left, Isabel Carnes Church (c. 1860); Frederic Joseph Church; Isabel Charlotte (“Downie”) Church; Theodore Winthrop Church; and Louis Palmer Church (c. 1885) [New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Olana State Historic Site, Taconic Region]

landscape. Church also planted more orchard trees and hundreds of additional parkland trees. The success of the park plantings was evident, with Theodore Cole reporting eight years after Church’s initial purchase, “you are occupying the uplands with trees.”²⁴ In addition to planting new trees, areas around the lake were simply allowed to grow up into second-growth vegetation, which was then selectively managed as woodland. Evergreens were planted in selected areas, an activity that seems to have coincided with Church’s winter stays on the property, when the trees became important landscape forms.

Initially, after spending the winter in New York City, Church visited the farm in the early spring and the family moved there on or about May 1. In mid-April 1864, Church wrote to his father that he had made three recent trips to the property, and “found everything in splendid progress.”²⁵ He described the scene:

The grass was fresh and green around the house [Cosy Cottage]. The strawberries had commenced throwing out new leaves. Vines and plants were well started peas have been up some little time—about five hundred trees have been planted and about as many more will be this spring.. I found the air so invigorating there that I think it will be advantageous to take an early start [at moving up river].²⁶

A month later, Church wrote his father again with this description:

The farm looks better than ever before... The peach pear and plum trees are a sight... The apple trees are just beginning to come out... We have a coop of 15 chickens by the house and he [Church’s son, Herbert] feeds them out of his hand—He is fascinated by the horses—I have a pair of pigeons.²⁷

The Churches' second child, Emma Frances, was born in October 1864, but the following spring tragedy struck when both Herbert and Emma died of diphtheria in New York City. Devastated, the Churches spent the summer of 1865 in Jamaica. Cozy Cottage was rented.²⁸ While away, Church wrote to Theodore Cole, "I cannot think of the farm...without great longing."²⁹

The Churches returned in the autumn of 1865, and, perhaps still seeking solitude, spent the winter at the farm for the first time.³⁰ Perhaps indicative of this withdrawal from society, the most notable project in this period was the construction of a large, self-sustaining studio located in the park-like grounds on the hillside above Cozy Cottage.³¹ From this position, the Hudson River Valley and Catskill Mountains were visible to the west in a scene often sketched by Church.

After the interlude of mourning, a third child, Frederic Joseph Church, was born on September 30, 1866. There was a new baby at the cottage and spirits were restored.

The 1867 season was a busy one, with the Churches in residence at the farm from February until September, preparing for a long trip to Europe and the Middle East to commence in the autumn. In early spring, Church wrote, "my hands are busy in farm work[,] hauling muck, &c. It is delightful to see the farm alive again."³² All summer, major renovations were made. Church built a "new barn"³³ and remodeled "my old barn."³⁴ An icehouse was re-roofed. At this point, Church claimed to have constructed "ten distinct buildings, and they haven't cost much either."³⁵ Included in this total were Cozy Cottage, the cottage outbuilding, the studio, the new barn, an extensively remodeled second barn and/or stable, a structure described as "a little building to accommodate a coachman,"³⁶ the re-roofed icehouse, and several other smaller sheds and specialty buildings.

The Churches took to country life with great enthusiasm. The interest was obvious when Frederic wrote, "Mrs. C. has a digging fit. She flits about with a trowel in one hand and juvenile plants in the other all day"³⁷ On another occasion, he wrote, "I superintend my own hot bed this season and if I plant my seed right side up I may expect to see them sprout in a day or two."³⁸ Despite the self-deprecating tone, the Churches were serious about the farm operations. The farm was repeatedly characterized as "magnificent" and served as an inspiration and subject of Church's art.³⁹

Church's plans for a house at the top of the hill moved closer to reality later that year and in 1868, when two lots were acquired that Church claimed would "make my farm perfect."⁴⁰ First was the house site, eighteen acres of mature woodland purchased in October 1867.⁴¹ Then, in 1868, the long narrow "strip" alluded to in Church's comments to his father in May 1864 was acquired.⁴² This corridor,

about six acres, provided access to the north toward the city of Hudson, the region's largest commercial center. Church proclaimed it "all splendid woods"⁴³ and planned a new entrance road there. The land was subdivided from the western side of a neighboring farm that was being sold at this time. It was an intriguing purchase, with Church managing to buy only what he needed without disrupting the sale of the adjacent farm property. He had feared "that someone will buy it [i.e., the neighboring farm] who will refuse to sell such fine woods."⁴⁴ The transaction, which required a detailed survey, was finally completed in March 1868, after the Churches had gone abroad.⁴⁵

The Farm and the New House

The Churches traveled extensively in Europe and the Middle East for two years and did not return to the farm until the summer of 1869. In the 1870s, this trip inspired the Persian house design and the name Olana.⁴⁶

In November 1868, a year after their departure, Theodore Cole wrote that "the farm I think will pay all expenses this year."⁴⁷ Three weeks later, Cole confirmed that for the first time there was "a balance in your favor on my book now."⁴⁸ The 1868 season was apparently a quiet, but efficient, one. With the Churches out of the country and special projects few, there was a businesslike approach. Notably, the weather was favorable for what Cole described as "a fine crop of peaches."⁴⁹ Later, Cole tabulated the farm expenses for 1868 at about \$1,000, offset by \$850 in fruit sales and \$150 from the sale of hay.⁵⁰ Of course, these totals did not include the capital outlay and operating costs that Church had incurred in farm improvements during the previous seven years, much less his family's livelihood,⁵¹ but Church took great pride in his balanced farm books because they showed his seriousness of purpose in developing a farm property. He boasted to a friend that "the farm pays," and that this was "very soothing."⁵² Another friend replied, quoting Church's letter:

I am glad to hear that "Your Farm" financially "runs itself." I am every year more and more satisfied with your judgment and wisdom in locating and possessing, and improving, a beautiful & advantageously situated country home—particularly as I know how strongly your taste & that of Isabel runs that way.⁵³

In July 1869, the Churches happily returned to the property after nearly a two-year absence. Writing to a friend, Church enthused, "Here I am on my own farm—!...About an hour this side of Albany is the Center of the world—I own it."⁵⁴ Shortly after his return, Church added "two rooms"⁵⁵ to Cosy Cottage.⁵⁶ He

also added rooms to the old farmhouse; repaired other farm buildings,⁵⁷ including roofing an “Earth Cellar” (probably a root cellar); and built a new icehouse.⁵⁸ He asserted to a friend, “I have not been idle.”⁵⁹ Despite some subsequent changes in the staff, the farm had settled into a consistent and smooth-running operation. Church confirmed his direct involvement, soberly claiming to one friend that he was “a plain farmer,”⁶⁰ and to another that he had “a large farm to keep an eye on.”⁶¹

The hardscrabble farm Church had purchased ten years earlier had been profoundly altered.⁶² Half the acres had been given over to the ornamental development of the lake, its woodland surroundings, and the parkland north of it, which was hayed but not grazed (in order to protect the trees). On the remaining farm acres, Church plowed about twenty acres—a small fraction of what had been plowed for subsistence agriculture in the years before Church’s purchase. A large drop in grain production accompanied the reduced plowing, but Church could afford to purchase grain, and, reflecting the concerns of a landscape gardener, he commented, “[A plowed field] spoils the beauty of the scene somewhat.”⁶³

While rigorous farming was reduced, Church’s agriculture was more varied. He expanded the orchards and increased fruit production to include multiple varieties of cherries, pears, plums, peaches, and grapes; bush fruits, among them currants and raspberries; and strawberries. Church especially favored peaches. Theodore Cole boasted of “the best peach orchard in this part of the country.”⁶⁴

Church’s kitchen garden, which included cutting flowers, reflected an interest in experimentation typical of gentlemen in this period. While the documentation is fragmentary, and crops would have varied from year to year, it seems that vegetable and flower seeds were acquired from several sources, with new varieties tried over the years.⁶⁵

The total number of Church’s farm animals remained quite similar to the totals on the earlier family farm, with cows, horses, oxen, and a few beef cattle present in 1870, as had been the case earlier. One exception was pigs, with the earlier farmer’s herd of twenty reduced to two in 1870. The limited acreage for grazing put considerable pressure on pastureland, with Theodore Cole commenting that “your place needs sadly more fall pasture, we cannot of course use the front lots where the trees are [i.e., the park and lake surroundings].”⁶⁶ In 1870, with nine yearlings and only about ten acres available for grazing, Cole transported Church’s young beef cattle elsewhere, possibly to Cedar Grove, to graze for the season.⁶⁷

There is little evidence of farm development after this period, indicating that the earlier work had largely completed the improvements Church intended to

make. Theodore Cole's role was reduced as Church's attention turned to the new house and a host of related, ornamental landscape improvements.

Even before the house was started, construction of what Church called the "North Road" began, laid out in the narrow corridor he had purchased two years earlier. On October 13, 1869, he wrote a friend, "I am constructing a long piece of road to the new House site."⁶⁸ Beginning at a distinctive splayed entryway, the North Road provided Olana with its primary approach from the city of Hudson. A family friend later said the mile-long North Road had been "invented by Mr. Church to make the place seem as large and remote as possible."⁶⁹ Numerous visitors commented on its dramatic character, as with this description in 1884:

The approach to Mr. Church's house on the northern side is along a winding and wooded road, which constitutes a considerable drive in itself. The hill is very precipitous here, and one looks down at times upon this road directly below him in an almost inaccessible gulf. The expenditure of road-building, and in otherwise bringing this huge, wild, steep mass of earth into suitable shape and condition has been immense, and could not have been accomplished by the Bohemian type of artist.⁷⁰

The North Road led to the house, which, as planned, was "hardly seen till you are directly upon it."⁷¹

With the North Road completed, plans for house construction continued. During the winter of 1869-70, Church engaged Calvert Vaux, then one of America's foremost residential architects, to help with its design. The two men collaborated in preparing drawings. At the time, it was said that "Mr. Church designed the house in all its details, consulting with Mr. Vaux, the eminent architect."⁷² While Vaux's role was essential, the Persian design style and the role of the house as a primary component in the designed landscape can be rightly attributed to Church. He was also responsible for the architectural details, such as windows, the entrance porch, *ombra* (as Church called it, an enclosed porch), piazza (veranda, or open porch), tower, pinnacles and roof projections, and a host of polychromatic decorative elements so important to the house as a landscape feature (Figure 5). More than a year after Vaux's first visit, Church wrote, "I am building a house and am principally my own Architect. I give directions all day and draw plans and working drawings all night."⁷³

In the summer of 1871, a reporter described Church's estate while looking out from the Prospect Park House Hotel near Thomas Cole's home across the river in Catskill:

...upon the grandest of the hill-tops, a shiny platform shows the basement of the country house which Mr. Church is building at the summit of his extensive lands, and near the rustic lodge [i.e., Cosy Cottage] and studio he has many Summers rested, and where in secluded leisure several of his masterpieces have been finished.⁷⁴

The construction had apparently generated considerable local interest related to the “liberal ground proportions...[where] one could get lost in its cellar.”⁷⁵ Of the landscape and its occupants, it was exclaimed:

How many hundred forest trees have been set out in its parks lately, and above all, how the artist’s beautiful wife has been seen riding across those red-veined hilltops upon a milk-white donkey, brought from the Orient, and—to the open mouthed admiration of the country folks—with her baby slung in the panier.⁷⁶

The interest was confirmed in a newspaper account that called the new house “one of the prominent things now pointed out to the tourists and travellers” on the Hudson.⁷⁷

The Churches stayed at Olana from the summer through the autumn of 1871. The family was expanded in July 1871 when a daughter, Isabel Charlotte (nicknamed “Downie”) was born. During the summer of 1872, house construction continued and was substantially completed late in the autumn, when the family moved into the second floor. Detailed work on the structure lasted for several more years, as did landscape improvements close to the house, with work there still being reported in 1880.⁷⁸

In siting his house, Church selected a spot off the south summit of the hilltop so that there was higher ground and a wooded backdrop to frame and shelter the dwelling on the north. The house itself, as Church himself declared, was “a curiosity in Architecture.”⁷⁹ It was exotic—an artist’s house—described by one reporter as “a bright open-eyed house, presenting on the landscape side [i.e., south] an almost unbroken expanse of plate glass window... It is certainly no rectangle of dead walls.”⁸⁰ In the context of landscape gardening, to which Church ascribed, the house was a fitting garden feature. The landscape design close to the house included the formation of lawn terraces along the south facade. These terraces, graded out to level lawn on the east, dropped precipitously on the west. From the lawn terraces, and from the shady sitting spots on the ombra and piazza, the views south centered on the Hudson River; to the west, the Catskill escarpment rose sheer from rolling farmland. The view was said “to culminate the glories of the Hudson,”⁸¹ a fame that endures today. Church described the panorama as linking

Olana to a wider world, “of mountains, rolling and savannah country, villages, forests and clearings. The noble River expands to a width of over two miles forming a lake-like sheet of water which is always dotted with steamers and other craft.”⁸²

As a landscape feature, the house was now Olana’s primary focus. In turn, the house dictated a new landscape orientation for the property, with parkland, lake, wooded entry drives, and the dramatic viewpoints superseding the more modest agrarian associations of Cosy Cottage and its intimate farmstead.

The Finished Lake and the South Entrance

With the main house completed, the Churches were habitually at Olana from spring through Christmas before retiring to New York City for the winter months. Later, winter trips to Mexico were a common occurrence. The Churches were getting older, and the siting of the house at the top of the hill separated them to some extent from the property’s agrarian roots. Olana’s farmer moved into Cosy Cottage. With farming orderly and routine, Frederic Church turned to further ornamental landscape improvements. A reporter visiting the property in about 1876 stated, “the grounds are not yet finished in all their details,”⁸³ confirming the situation before the active work that would continue into and occupy the 1880s. In these years, rheumatism restricted Church’s painterly efforts, but his affliction encouraged design in the outdoors. These were active years of landscape gardening at Olana. In 1879, a visitor noted, “The extensive grounds...are in a constant state of arrangement under the direct supervision of the artist.”⁸⁴

There was a surge of activity on the lake before the spring of 1879. In December 1878, “Mr. George Herd” was hired to “work by the day for F.E. Church on the Pond at \$1 dollar [sic] per day.” He worked fourteen days between December 6, 1878, and January 6, 1879.⁸⁵ By May 1879, Church declared “the lake is overflowing, the birch canoe is ready”⁸⁶ (Figure 6). Earlier, Church had whimsically estimated the lake excavation as a “great quantity [of muck] not less than 5,000,000 loads.”⁸⁷

The 1879 completion of the lake seems to have been related to Church’s purchase of a nine-acre lot at the southwest corner of the property.⁸⁸ This acreage included a 750-foot frontage on the public highway (today Route 9G) south of the earlier south entrance. The land acquired allowed Church to significantly improve the interest and drama of what he later called the “South Road.” This development began when he sited the new south entrance spectacularly beside the precipitous escarpment of Red Hill, which dominated the nine-acre lot. From the entrance, the new road skirted the cliff, with an open prospect to the west. The road then turned dramatically east through a low-wooded gap that brought

it to a point overlooking the south end of the newly completed lake. (Today, this is the vehicle entrance into Olana.) Church's new South Road then continued along the west side of the lake until it linked with an older drive that continued uphill on the west side of the park. In this way, Red Hill and the lake were made prominent features on the south route, including a final distant view toward the Catskills attained after turning away from the lake when exiting. Currently, this intended arrival and departure sequence is compromised by one-way traffic and non-historic road sections built in the 1960s.

Completing the Landscape with a Flower Garden

In 1880, after experimenting with other ideas, Olana was adopted by the Churches as the property's name.⁸⁹ It was an appropriate moment for christening: with all the major land pieces in place, the original farm had evolved into a singular and expansive estate.

In this period, Isabel Church's mother, Emma Carnes, visited Olana often. Her diary from the 1880s describes a daily routine of relaxed recreation, including numerous carriage rides both within and outside Olana's boundaries, visiting with the farmer's wife and neighbors, touring the kitchen garden, and rowing on the lake.⁹⁰ In June 1884, Susan Hale, another family friend, made her first visit to Olana. Her letters reveal much about the property and life there in this period. Her impressions were ecstatic:

It is lovely here, real woodsy and wild⁹¹... The place is so large I can walk miles without going off of it. It is very pretty, great avenues of trees, a pond, nooks of shade and always the wide open view of the river and mountains.⁹²

The family was at Olana throughout the 1884 season. By autumn, Church was reporting, "five men [are] building a road... I have made about 1-3/4 miles of road this season, opening new and beautiful views."⁹³ The Ridge Road (a loop to the north end of the hilltop) and a road around the lake, both built in 1884, account for much of this road construction. They had limited practicality but were undertaken as important components of the designed landscape. The lake road is documented as under way in July 1884, when Mrs. Carnes noted, "Mr. C. & Miss Hale marked out the road around the pond."⁹⁴ Ridge Road was one of Olana's most notable carriage drives. In August 1884, Emma Carnes recorded, "Mr. C. out all a.m. at his new road, north end of the place," and a few days later, "I walked from North View seat to where new road will join Bethune road."⁹⁵ In September, Mrs. Carnes noted, "Drove on new road as far as woods [i.e., the por-

tion of the road in the meadow], very rough now, but will be beautiful in views.”⁹⁶ As part of the construction, grazing in the north meadow was eliminated along the immediate edges of the Ridge Road, with a barbed wire fence erected out of sight on the slope below the new road.⁹⁷ This restriction on grazing meant that the ground fronting the Ridge Road could be planted and/or selectively returned to second-growth, which could then be managed as parkland, a suitable foreground for the splendid views. In October 1884, it was probably the Ridge Road that prompted Church’s enthusiastic comment on landscape gardening when he wrote a friend, “I can make more and better landscapes in this way than by tampering with canvas and paint in the Studio.”⁹⁸

A year later, Church built another ornamental road, this time from the lake to the top of Crown Hill, a hillock in the southeast corner of Olana. In September, Emma Carnes reported, “Drove P.M. over the last new road which was meant for a surprise but has been suspected all along.”⁹⁹ The road began in the woods east of the lake, looped around a pocket of wooded wetland, then ascended into open agricultural fields before reaching the summit. On the hilltop, Church built a carriage turnaround. From this modest height, the view was panoramic, affording a new prospect of the house seen above the park and the impressive ensemble of Olana farm buildings fronted by the extensive kitchen garden in the middle distance. Off to the east was rolling farmland backed by the Taconic Hills.

As he had done on the Ridge Road, Church constructed a new field fence to restrict grazing close to the Crown Hill Road. This fence was located down-slope and out of sight from the turnaround. The positioning of this fence meant that about seventeen acres of former agricultural land had been dedicated to parkland fronting the new road. Church treated the area as he had others, allowing it to grow over time into second growth, which he then selectively thinned to compose the foreground vegetation and complement the more distant views. Hundreds of new trees were also planted, necessitating purchase of a hogshead mounted on a wagon for watering.¹⁰⁰ Other landscape work required selected removal of vegetation, and again Church confirmed his direct involvement, writing to a friend, “I am clearing up underbrush in places and this work requires close supervision.”¹⁰¹ Olana was a work of landscape art in constant need of artistic management.

Church was not done with road building. In June 1886, he wrote, “I have laid out a new approach to the house, which I shall go at as soon as my men get through with the haying, now more than half done.”¹⁰² This refers to the last major carriage drive built at Olana, a detour off the South Road near Church’s studio. The new drive brought carriages through the parkland studded with old birch trees on the slope immediately south of the house. It ended at the old drive-

way, at the same point where the house was first seen when traveling the earlier South Road, so that the final arrival at the house was not changed. The new road had the advantage of avoiding close contact with the service areas and stable yards north of the house, and, with the many views in the upper reaches of the park, it was a more ornamental and scenic approach.

This new approach seems to have prompted the installation of a flower garden as a feature seen from the road. The garden was a long border (about 145 feet long by nineteen feet wide) laid out on sloping ground facing south, sheltered against the stone retaining wall that traced the driveway above it. From the original plant lists and period photographs, the garden was a combination of flowering perennials and annuals in a mingled layout meant to be appreciated on foot or from the viewpoint on the nearby drives (Figure 7).¹⁰³ Critically, the flower garden could not be seen from the house, so the bold natural forms and uncluttered setting of the hilltop were left un-compromised.

While planned and first discussed in 1886, the new approach road and the flower garden were not completed for several years. As such, they are not shown on a “Plan of Olana” dated September 1886 (Figure 3). This plan, a vital historic document, was drawn by the Churches’ twenty-year-old son, Frederic Joseph.¹⁰⁴ It shows the landscape as it had been created over the previous quarter-century, including many aspects of the property not otherwise recorded, and providing the family’s names for Olana’s landscape features. For example, the plan reveals the presence of a “Summer House” located on a knoll directly south of the house, close to where the new approach road was being planned. Perhaps this is the “seat back of studio” mentioned in 1884,¹⁰⁵ but it is a structure that is not otherwise documented. Another landscape feature shown on the plan is the “North View,” a spot mentioned by Mrs. Carnes and shown located at the edge of the woods at the highest elevation of the north meadow. The 1886 “Plan of Olana” is also valuable for its depiction of the tree massing, confirming areas of open and wooded land, as well as the general layout of individual trees in the parkland south of the house and along the carriage drives.¹⁰⁶ Distinct surfaces, such as meadows, wetlands, water, woodland, and plowed ground, are differentiated by color. The kitchen garden (labeled “Garden” on the plan), as well as older hedgerows, are clearly indicated. The new fence lines installed below the Ridge Road and Crown Hill Road also appear.

Olana as illustrated in 1886, with the addition of the new approach road and flower garden, was now largely complete. In September 1890, as Frederic Church began to retire from active involvement in the day-to-day management of the property, a long and detailed article about Olana appeared in the *Boston Sunday*

Herald.¹⁰⁷ The reporter concluded that “the art of the landscape gardener has been employed, not so much to render Olana beautiful as to make it picturesque,” and noted that “the multitude of trees planted under Mr. Church’s direction a quarter of a century ago now give convincing evidence of his wise foresight.”

Later History and Restoration Efforts

After 1891, Olana’s operations were entrusted to the Churches’ youngest son, Louis (1870-1943). Even with his involvement lessened, Frederic Church was clearly the arbiter of the landscape’s management throughout the 1890s, but very few notable changes seem to have been made.

In May 1899, Isabel Church died in New York City. After a sad summer at Olana, Frederic went to Mexico in December. In March 1900, he returned to New York City in poor health, and died there on April 7. An obituary spoke of “his magnificent country home at ‘Olana’ on the Hudson River, one of the most notable houses in the United States situated in a vast park beautified by the taste of the artist.”¹⁰⁸

Louis Church [Figure 8] and his wife, Sally Good Church (1868-1964), inherited the property and became the stewards of Frederic Church’s legacy, providing a transition to the future. Even before 1900, landscape design fashion was shifting away from the picturesque aesthetic, but while Louis and Sally appreciated new ideas in horticulture and garden art, they kept Olana consistent with Frederic Church’s intentions. The property remained a farm for several decades, and the acreage was kept intact even after farming slowed during World War II, with some outbuildings removed in the 1950s. In all this period, no wholesale alterations to the site layout were made. The lake and park changed in subtle ways. Many of Church’s trees were felled by storms and never replanted. A more formal, architectonic garden (sometimes referred to as the “Italian Garden”) was added close to the house. The earlier flower garden along the carriage drive was abandoned. When Louis died in 1943, farming ended and site maintenance slackened. Notably, many open fields began to grow into woods.

When Sally Church died in 1964, the house and its contents were to be auctioned to settle her estate. A public campaign led to the preservation of the property and its invaluable collections. New York State took ownership in 1966. Today, with its lands generally intact and with a high level of design integrity remaining, the landscape is preserved as a state historic site. Enhanced by the support of an active friends group, The Olana Partnership, Olana will remain an important museum property dedicated to interpreting the life and work of Frederic Edwin Church and the romanticism of nineteenth-century America.

While protected, the Olana landscape is not adequately maintained and requires considerable restoration to bring back its nineteenth-century aesthetic. More than 60 acres of open fields are now second-growth woods, obliterating many of Frederic Church's intended views and scenic effects. Important view points are screened. The farm suffers from many restoration needs. Several farm buildings have been dismantled; others are in ruin. A public access road, installed by New York State in the late 1960s, deviates from Church's intended approach route, changing the visitors' experience while entering and exiting the property from the south. Church's featured North Road is abandoned. Many of the historic carriage drives are overgrown and require ongoing work on old drainage systems. Poison ivy runs rampant. Presented with a derelict landscape, few visitors are now willing to venture beyond the immediate house grounds.

In the early years of state operations, the landscape was considered of great importance and steps were taken to study it and restore some of its features, such as the flower garden, which was restored beginning in the early 1970s. A preliminary landscape assessment study was compiled in 1984, and this process culminated in 1996 with the completion of a "Historic Landscape Report."¹⁰⁹ Subsequently, a "Landscape Restoration Plan" (2002) has been prepared for the property. If implemented, it would return the landscape to its condition in Frederic Church's lifetime.

Historical Background

The Olana landscape, a 250-acre ornamental farm, is a masterpiece of America's Romantic period, an expansive work of landscape gardening in the "Picturesque" design mode, as that term was defined and interpreted by America's notable landscape gardener of the mid-nineteenth century, Hudson Valley native Andrew Jackson Downing.¹¹⁰

To understand Picturesque landscape design as it engaged A.J. Downing and Frederic Church, we must appreciate the role of the landscape painter in the genesis of the English landscape garden, well before Church's rendition at Olana.¹¹¹ This history began when the works of seventeenth-century European landscape painters such as Claude Lorrain, Nicholas Poussin, and Salvator Rosa, among others, guided garden designers away from older geometric forms to incorporate a house, its driveways, plantings, and features into idyllic, pastoral stage sets where cultivated and natural landscapes mingled harmoniously. This was a new form of garden, a "landscape garden." The connection to landscape painting was clear. For Alexander Pope, in the early 1700s, landscape gardening was simply "like a landscape [painting] hung up."

From these beginnings, English landscape gardening led to the Picturesque movement of the 1790s, when a truly natural garden design style emerged. Through all this period, the landscape artist was considered, as one theorist put it, “the most proper designer” of a landscape garden.¹¹²

In the Hudson River Valley, the earliest design work in the English tradition of landscape gardening is discernable by 1800. At that time, some houses along the fashionable riverfront began to be set off in naturalized, park-like surroundings, located away from the farmstead, kitchen gardens, and stable complex. Still, these early efforts in American landscape gardening relied on classical features and a polished appearance.¹¹³ Typically, there was a straight approach avenue with rows of evenly spaced trees leading to the classical, Federal-style house. Given the date, and given the setting, American landscape gardening was tentative and inordinately conservative, owing to recent settlement and the long-held preference that gardens appear in contrast to wild nature:

In embellishing on country seats in the United States, where the features of nature have as yet undergone but little change, an appearance of human labor and skills, and even of formality, produces the agreeable effect of variety, and awakens the pleasing ideas of progressive civilization and improvement.¹¹⁴

It wasn't until the late 1820s and 1830s, after the wilderness receded, that the practice of landscape gardening in America began to embrace an appreciation for the picturesque aesthetic. With this change, strikingly natural-appearing landscape gardens materialized in the Hudson Valley, where the young republic was forging its cultural identity. Picturesque landscape design was a radical change, retaining none of the earlier emphasis on geometric layouts or overt artificiality. In the 1840s, these newer gardens were identified as “Picturesque” by the era's notable landscape gardener, Andrew Jackson Downing.¹¹⁵ It is Downing's use of the term “Picturesque” (note the capitalization), and no other, that interests us in a discussion of Olana's designed landscape.¹¹⁶

Downing's “Picturesque” landscape gardening was closely related to its earlier expression in the 1790s, the English Picturesque movement. To help describe Picturesque design, Downing contrasted it with what he termed a “Beautiful,” or “Graceful,” approach to landscape gardening. Unlike the natural-appearing Picturesque, a “Beautiful” design was clearly artificial, with a polished, tidy, and unnatural appearance, often using exotic plants and formal placements. In addition, Downing included in the “Beautiful” approach more recent fashion from the English Regency period (dominant in England from the late 1700s to the 1830s),

intermixed with French influences popular in America in Downing's period. In assembling the amalgam he would call the "Beautiful," Downing also added Englishman J.C. Loudon's recently coined "Gardenesque" style, calling it "but another word for what we term the Graceful [i.e., Beautiful] school."¹¹⁷ With this compilation, A.J. Downing defined "Beautiful" landscape gardening, and, in contrast, identified American Picturesque landscape design (Figure 9) as a separate "design mode" within the larger tradition of landscape gardening.

Downing, and other Americans, believed that picturesque themes had a special affinity in the wild yet pastoral landscape of the Hudson River Valley. It was there that Thomas Cole had found the "peculiar charms" of American scenery,¹¹⁸ distinguished by "wildness [where] nature is still predominant."¹¹⁹ Cole proclaimed that in America "all nature is new to art."¹²⁰ From this perspective, the region's physical character became renowned and was perceived as a model for landscape design. When Church studied with Cole in 1844, he experienced the picturesque aesthetic at its American source. Even earlier, Downing claimed that in the choice between using the "Beautiful" or "Picturesque" mode of landscape gardening, the Picturesque was "beginning to be preferred."¹²¹ Into this regional context Frederic Church brought his exemplary artistic skills—and his wealth—to the art of landscape gardening. In 1860, the stage was set for the creation of the masterpiece that is Olana.

Church approached landscape design at Olana in a way parallel to his painterly art. His fidelity to nature is one important link to explore. As with other members of the Hudson River School, Church adhered to a near literal depiction of nature. Thomas Cole stated this principle succinctly, saying that "Imitation is the means through which the essential truths of nature are conveyed."¹²² The idea, which culminated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement to which Frederic Church has been linked, was that nature had only to be truthfully seen in its entire minutia to be provocative.¹²³ In turn, fidelity to observed fact leads to greater truth. These aesthetic principles echoed the tenets of the Picturesque movement, which glorified nature and rural life by closely imitating natural and vernacular appearances in landscape gardening. This sense that nature and place—be it on canvas or in the landscape garden—must be approached literally and reverentially was a hallmark of the artists of the Hudson River School and of Picturesque landscape gardening as defined by Downing and his English sources.

Olana's landscape design is then a simple extension of Frederic Church's art into a third dimension. It is a design nearly indistinguishable from the Hudson Valley countryside—albeit an idealized countryside—of Church's lifetime. Evident is an adherence to the supremacy of irregular, natural forms and ever-changing

design effects described by Downing and his predecessors as the crux of the picturesque approach. While Picturesque landscape gardening had an English background, its design principles insisted on finding the local “genius of the place,” thus insuring indigenous design motifs without direct reference to European models. In the Hudson River Valley, as nowhere else in America, the Picturesque was well suited to the character of the land and the independent romantic impulses of its people. This emphasis on the indigenous is unprecedented in American landscape design history. At Olana, this idea was taken to a grand and exquisite form where landscape garden, pastoral countryside, wild nature, farm fields, and the glorious display of a flower garden melded imperceptibly through the refined art of America’s foremost landscape painter.

Frederic Church’s involvement in creating one of the finest surviving examples of Picturesque landscape gardening in America is exceptionally fitting. “I can make more and better landscapes in this way than by tampering with canvas and paint in the Studio,” he declared.¹²⁴ It is a remark that confirms assertions made throughout the history of landscape gardening—early by Alexander Pope, reiterated during the Picturesque movement, and finally, for America, confirmed by A.J. Downing, who wrote: “Again and again has it been said, that Landscape Gardening and Painting are allied.”¹²⁵ Frederic Church’s role as the creator of Olana insures the property’s significance as one of the finest and most significant surviving designed landscapes in the United States.

This article is dedicated to the memory of James A. Ryan, Olana’s distinguished site manager for two decades (1979-1999).

Endnotes

1. The term “Wall of Manitou” is reputed to be of Native American origin. See: Roland Van Zandt, *The Catskill Mountain House* (Hensonville, NY: Black Dome Press), 1991. For background on Thomas Cole (1801-1848), see: Elliot S. Vesell, “Introduction,” in Louis L. Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole* (1853), (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964). Louis Noble’s biography is enhanced by his personal friendship with both Thomas Cole and Frederic Church in the period 1844-45. For background on the Hudson River School, see: John P. O’Neill, ed., *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987). For background on Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900), see: Franklin Kelly, et al., *Frederic Edwin Church* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1989), pp. 12-75, and Gerald L. Carr, *In Search of the Promised Land: Paintings of Frederic Edwin Church* (New York: Berry-Hill Galleries, 2000). For Cedar Grove, see Robert M. Toole, “Cultural Landscape Report,” National Park Service and Thomas Cole National Historic Site, 2004.
2. Letter: Frederic Edwin Church (hereafter cited as FEC) to Thomas Cole, 5/20/1844 (Cole Papers, New York State Library, Albany, NY), Box 3, Folder 5.
3. Charles Dudley Warner, “An Unfinished Biography of the Artist [Frederic Church],” in Franklin Kelly, et al., *Frederic Edwin Church*, p. 183-85.
4. Noble, p. 272.

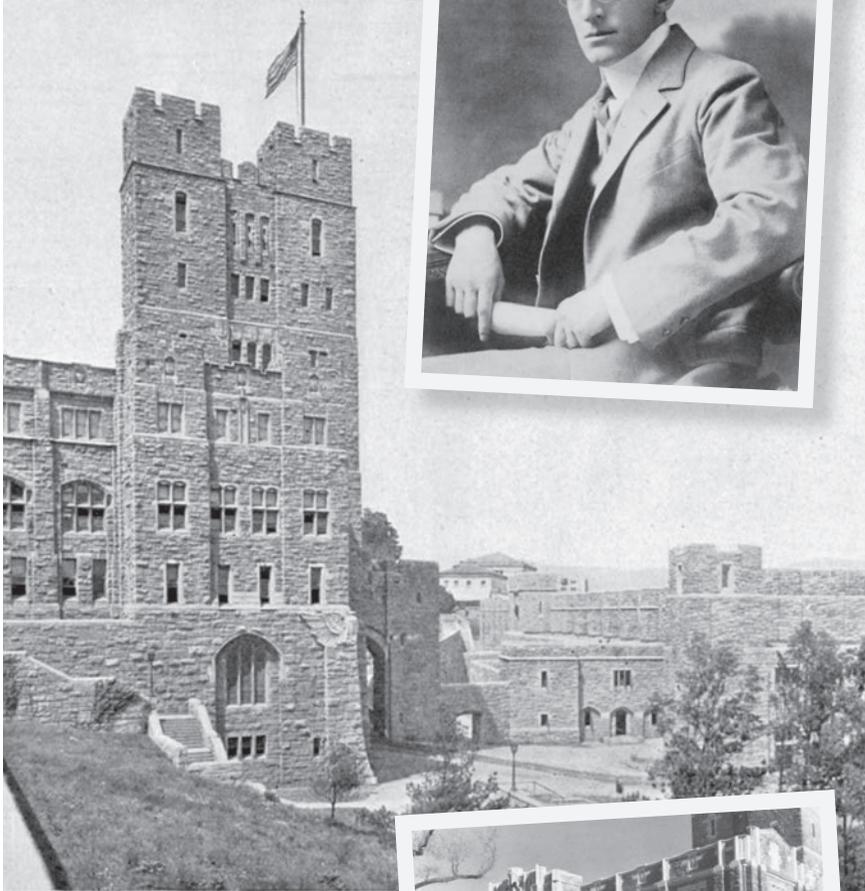
5. For discussions related to Cole's influence on Church, see: Kelly, 34-38 and Carr, 13, 45-47.
6. Columbia County Deeds (hereafter cited as CCD), Book 13, page 283 (dated 3/31/1860). All Columbia County Court records are housed at the county court house, Hudson, New York. The older farm had a hardscrabble history. Developed initially in 1794, there had been six owners prior to Church's purchase. Isabel Carnes (1838-1899) and Frederic Church were married on June 14, 1860, in Dayton, Ohio. Frederic Church's earlier knowledge of the site he purchased in 1860 is proven by a sketch he made of the scene in 1845, entitled: "The Hudson Valley from Red Hill" [Olana collection, OL.1980.1333]. Church kept the sketch throughout his lifetime.
7. Theodore Cole (hereafter cited as TC), diary entry, 3/31/1860 (Vedder Memorial Library, Greene County Historical Society [hereafter cited as VML]).
8. For Frederic Church's history with Theodore Cole, see: Raymond Beecher, "Went Over the River to Churches Place," unpublished manuscript (VML).
9. TC, diary entry, 2/28/1860 (VML).
10. Ibid., 4/2/1860 (VML).
11. Ibid., 9/21/1860 (VML).
12. Letter: FEC to A.C. Goodman, 8/20/1860 (David Huntington Archive at Olana State Historic Site [hereafter cited as DHA]). While the term "farmhouse" was initially used, "cottage" was also found in some early correspondence, e.g., letter: FEC to Joseph Church (hereafter cited as JC), 4/15/1864 (DHA). The design of the original cottage has been tentatively attributed to Richard Morris Hunt (1828-95), the important American architect. Church knew Hunt and had known links with his office. However, the evidence directly linking Hunt to the cottage design is thin. (There is a 1861 bill for \$125 from Hunt's office, and a perspective drawing that is not believed to have been by either Church or Hunt). The payment may have been for Hunt office services, possibly working on ideas conceived by Frederic Church, who could have been the primary author of the cottage design. In any event, Cosy Cottage is best understood within the long tradition of the cottage ornée, established by numerous English designers from the 1790s (see: Robert M. Toole, "Historic Landscape Report: Sunnyside, The Home of Washington Irving," *Historic Hudson Valley*, 1995, p. 14, f.n. #32).
13. The first recorded use of the name "Cosy Cottage" was in a letter: Isabel Carnes Church (hereafter cited as ICC) to Mrs. Erastus Dow Palmer, not dated, c. 6/7/1870 (McKinney Library, Albany Institute of History and Art [hereafter cited as AIHA]). In 1872 the name was used by one of Church's relatives, Henry Q. Mack, diary entry, 10/30/1872 and 11/4/1872 (VML).
14. Mack, diary entry, 11/4/1872 (VML).
15. Letter: FEC to JC, 4/15/1861; bill: H.P. Skinner (Hudson, NY) to FEC (for carpet), 3/20/1861; and bill: W. & J. Sloane (New York City) to FEC (for carpet), 5/11/1861 (DHA).
16. In addition to Theodore Cole's oversight, the salaried farmers (who lived in the original farmhouse located southeast from Cosy Cottage) handled the rigorous aspects of the farm work, including the plowing, cultivation of crops, harvesting, and barn operations. The Churches seemed to be directly involved in the kitchen garden, orchards, and the flower garden developed close to Cosy Cottage, in addition to ornamental landscape improvements. No separate gardener is mentioned in these early years. From the documentation, Frederic Church took responsibility for landscape design decisions, but it seems Isabel was influential in her husband's work.
17. TC, diary entry, 4/25/1861 (VML).
18. Letter: FEC to JC, 5/13/1864 (DHA).
19. Ibid.
20. Letter: Ramon Paez to FEC, 9/15/1862 [DHA].
21. CCD, Book 20, page 409 (dated 3/18/1864). This parcel had been owned for about a year by a friend of Frederic Church's, Dr. George W. Bethune. Church had encouraged Bethune to build

- a house on the site but its precipitous slopes made such development difficult. Bethune died in 1862 and thereafter Church added the property to his adjacent acres.
22. Letter: FEC to JC, 5/13/1864 [DHA]. Previous to this, Church had access from the public road, but for him it was unsuitable because the entry was located beside a small house and came to Cosy Cottage over an un-dramatic service route.
 23. Ibid.
 24. Letter: TC to FEC, 9/12/1868 [DHA].
 25. Letter: FEC to JC, 4/15/1864 [DHA].
 26. Ibid. Theodore Cole's diary entries and account notations confirm these activities. For example, 300 maple trees, costing \$24, were purchased on April 7, 1864 [VML].
 27. Letter: FEC to JC, 5/13/1864 [DHA].
 28. TC, diary entry, 6/7/1865 [VML].
 29. Letter: FEC to TC, 7/28/1865 [DHA].
 30. Letter: FEC to William H. Osborn (hereafter cited as WHO), 1/1/1866 [DHA]. The letter describes the winter scenery and is headed: "Siberia."
 31. Charles L. Fisher, "Archaeological Discovery of Frederic Church's First Studio at Olana State Historic Site, Columbia Co., N.Y.," OPRHP, Bureau of Historic Sites, 2/1994 [OSHS]. The Studio was about 24 feet x 24 feet, with a covered porch on the west side.
 32. Letter: FEC to WHO, 3/26/1867 [DHA].
 33. Ibid., 6/13/1867 [DHA].
 34. Ibid., 10/25/1867 [DHA].
 35. Ibid.
 36. Ibid. At a later date, this building is thought to have been converted into a garden shed or tool shed.
 37. Letter: FEC to WHO, 6/13/1867 [DHA].
 38. Ibid., 3/26/1867 [DHA].
 39. Gerald L. Carr, *Frederic Edwin Church: Catalogue Raisonné of Works of Art at Olana State Historic Site*, 2 vols. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
 40. Letter: FEC to Erastus Dow Palmer (hereafter cited as EDP), 10/22/1867 [AIHA].
 41. CCD, Book 30, page 429 (dated: 10/28/1867).
 42. CCD, Book 32, page 125 (dated: 3/31/1868).
 43. Letter: FEC to WHO, 10/25/1867 [DHA].
 44. Ibid.
 45. Letter: John Gaul, Jr. to JC, 3/25/1868 [DHA].
 46. For detailed background on the house design and construction, as well as other aspects of Olana's history, see: James A. Ryan, *Frederic Church's Olana: Architecture and Landscape As Art* (Hudson, NY: The Olana Partnership), 2001.
 47. Letter: TC to FEC, 11/7/1868 [DHA].
 48. Letter: TC to FEC, 11/29/1868 [DHA].
 49. Letter: TC to FEC, 7/14/1868 [DHA].
 50. Letter: TC to FEC, 9/12/1868 [DHA].
 51. The \$1,000 farm income and expenses can be compared with Frederic Church's artistic earnings in 1867 which totaled \$18,620 - letter: J. Gaul, Jr. to JC, 5/26/1868 [DHA].
 52. Letter: FEC to WHO, 11/30/1868 and 1/1/1869 [DHA].

53. Letter: Edward A. Weeks (hereafter cited as EAW) to FEC, 2/18/1869 [DHA].
54. Letter, FEC to EDP, 7/7/1869 [AIHA].
55. Letter: FEC to EAW, 10/13/1869 [DHA].
56. Letter: FEC to WHO, 8/31/1869 [DHA].
57. Letter: FEC to EAW, 10/13/1869 [DHA].
58. Letter: FEC to EDP, 9/22/1869 [AIHA].
59. Ibid.
60. Letter: FEC to Mr. Austin, 9/16/1869 [DHA].
61. Letter: FEC to A.C. Goodman, 7/21/1871 [DHA].
62. The comparison between Church's farm in 1870 and the previous owner in 1855 is based on census data, see: Kristin L. Gibbons, "Census Data Relating to Olana State Historic Site," OPRHP, Bureau of Historic Sites, 4/1996 [OSHS].
63. Letter: FEC to EDP, 5/3/1871 [AIHA].
64. Letter: TC to FEC, 5/24/1868 [DHA].
65. Only partial documentation survives to detail the seed and plant orders. Church consistently ordered vegetable and flower seeds from Peter Henderson & Co. of New Jersey. The earliest receipt to survive is dated 8/1878, while the last is from 11/1891. Church also ordered seeds from Jas M. Thorburn & Co. of New York City (receipt dated 2/19/1888), and Price & Reed of Albany, NY (receipts dated 8/1/1888, 3/31/1890, and 5/18/1891). Flower and vegetable seeds were also purchased locally, as for example from Rice Brothers, Hudson, NY (receipts dated 6/2/1884 and 5/1885) [DHA].
66. Letter: TC to FEC, 11/7/1868 [DHA].
67. TC, diary entry, 5/20/1870 [VML].
68. Letter: FEC to EAW, 10/13/1869 [DHA].
69. Letter: Susan Hale to Edward Hale, 11/15/1903 [University of Rhode Island, Special Collections].
70. F.N. Zabriskie, "'Old Colony Papers,' An Artist's Castle and Our Ride Thereto" (The Christian Intelligencer, 9/10/1884), p. 2.
71. Ibid.
72. "Homes of America V," *The Art Journal* (New York edition, August 1876) p. 248.
73. Letter: FEC to A.C. Goodman, 7/21/1871 [DHA]. Church later claimed: "Yes, I can say, as the good woman did about her mock turtle soup, I made it out of my own head," quoted in Frank J. Bonnelle, *The Boston Sunday Herald*, 9/7/1890.
74. "The Kaatskills, Their Attractions Enthusiastically Set Forth," unidentified magazine/newspaper article, c. 1871 [VML].
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid. The donkey rides are described by Frederic Church—letter: FEC to WHO, 7/22/1871 [Princeton University Library].
77. *The Catskill Examiner*, 8/31/1872.
78. Letter: FEC to EDP, 8/1/1880 [AIHA].
79. Letter: FEC to WHO, 7/22/1871 [Princeton University Library].
80. Zabriskie, p. 2.
81. "Homes of America, V" (1876), 248.
82. Letter: FEC to Amelia Edwards, 9/2/1877 [Somerville College Library, Oxford, England].
83. "Homes of America V," p. 248.

84. H.W. French, *Art and Artists in Connecticut* (Boston, MA: Lee and Shepard, 1879), p. 131.
85. Bill/Receipt: George Herd to FEC, 12/6/1878 [DHA].
86. Letter: FEC to EDP, 5/19/1879 [AIHA]. There is no evidence that a “birch canoe” was kept at the lake.
87. *Ibid.*, 6/22/1875.
88. CCD, Book 59, page 372 (dated: 5/1/1877).
89. Letter: Alfred L. Edwards to FEC, 2/12/1880 [DHA]; and FEC to EDP, 8/1/1880 [AIHA]. The name, Olana, refers to a specific place identified by the 2nd-century geographer Strabo, as an “elevated stronghold overlooking a fertile river valley in ancient Persia” - Gerald Carr, “What’s in a Name: The Genesis of Frederic Church’s Olana,” unpublished manuscript, 1988, p. 9 [Olana].
90. Emma Osgood Carnes (hereafter cited as EC), miscellaneous diary entries [DHA].
91. Letter: Susan Hale to Lucretia P. Hale, 6/29/1884, in, Caroline P. Atkinson, ed. *Letters of Susan Hale* (Boston MA and New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2nd ed., 1933), p. 140.
92. *Ibid.*, 7/6/1884, Atkinson, p. 142.
93. Letter: FEC to EDP, 10/18/1884 [AIHA].
94. EC, diary entry, 7/3/1884 [DHA].
95. *Ibid.*, 8/23/1884 and 8/31/1884 [DHA]. The Bethune Road was built in the 1860s to provide access up the steep western slope but was seldom used after the construction of the North and South Roads.
96. *Ibid.*, 9/4/1884 [DHA].
97. This fence line was constructed using barbed wire fitted to wood posts and was shown on the 1886 Plan of Olana.
98. Letter: FEC to EDP, 10/18/1884 [AIHA].
99. EC, diary entry, 9/7/1885 [DHA].
100. Letter: FEC to EDP, 7/8/1885 [AIHA].
101. *Ibid.*, 6/20/1886 [AIHA].
102. *Ibid.*
103. Bill: R.W. Allen to ICC, 1/1/1888 (for purchases on October 13, 1887); also, R.W. Allen to ICC, 7/18/1888 [DHA]. Thirty plants were included on the January 1, 1888, invoice. No plant names were identified on the first invoice. The July 1888 invoice was for 200 plants and included the following identifications: pansies, chrysanthemum, sweet alyssum, calceolaria, centauria, calendula, heliotrope, vinca, coleus, echeveria, salvia, aster, anthemis, lobelia, begonia, geranium and rose geranium, verbena, and lantana. Vines included cobeia, maurandia, nasturtium, and clematis. The garden is shown in eight separate historic photographs. While some individual plants can be identified, the photographs are more helpful at illustrating the general size, massing, and mix of plantings during, or after, Church’s lifetime.
104. Ink, pencil, and water color on paper (22-1/8” x 36-1/4”) [OL.1984.39] (Figure 3). Frederic Joseph Church was at the time a college student studying land surveying. Despite a proclaimed scale of “160 feet to an in[ch],” the plan is not an accurate measured survey.
105. EC, diary entry, 9/9/1884 [DHA]
106. The accuracy of Frederic Joseph Church’s plan presents interpretive issues. For example, the layout of roads is clear from the site’s existing conditions, so that the inaccuracies of the drive layout shown on the plan are not a difficulty. That the plan shows these roads as existing (or not) in 1886 is very helpful. The buildings, while misshapen, can be interpreted, while a symbol for plowed ground (a tan color), provides unique information for which there is no other source. Still, some important landscape components, for example the number of individual trees shown in otherwise open turf area, are not thought to be accurate representations.

107. Frank J. Bunnelle, *The Boston Sunday Herald*, 9/7/1890.
108. "Mr. Church Dies," undated (1900), unidentified newspaper article [DHA].
109. The Office of R.M. Toole, Landscape Architect, "Historic Landscape Report," The Olana Partnership and New York State, Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, 1996. This article is based on this comprehensive study.
110. For background on A.J. Downing (1815-1852), see: David Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste: Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-1852* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and George B. Tatum, "Introduction: The Downing Decade (1841-1852)," and "Nature's Gardener," in George B. Tatum and Elizabeth Blair MacDougall, eds. *Prophet with Honor* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1989), pp. 1-42 and 43-80.
111. For background on the English landscape garden, see: John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, eds. *The Genius of the Place, The English Landscape Garden, 1620-1820* (Cambridge MA: M.I.T. Press, 1990); and David Jacques, *Georgian Gardens, The Reign of Nature* (Portland, OR: Timber Press, 1984).
112. William Shenstone, *Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening*, 1764.
113. For an excellent review of landscape design in the Federal period, see: Therese O'Malley, "Landscape Gardening in the early National Period," in Edward J. Nygren, *Views and Visions, American Landscapes Before 1830* (Washington, DC: The Corcoran Gallery of Art), 1986, pp. 133-159.
114. Anonymous author, "Thoughts of a Hermit . . ." *Port Folio*, Vol. 6 (July 1815), as quoted in Nygren, *Views and Visions*, p. 25.
115. Andrew Jackson Downing, *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening Adapted to North America* (hereafter cited as *Landscape Gardening*) (New York, NY: George P. Putnam, 5th ed., 1854), pp. 61-84. Downing addressed the Picturesque design mode in Section II "Beauties and Principles of the Art" (the table of contents reads: "Beauties of Landscape Gardening"). Today, the word "picturesque" has come to have a broad and imprecise meaning. For this reason, the capitalized version used here is given a precise meaning, as defined by Downing and described in this paper as related to the 19th-century art of landscape gardening in the Hudson River Valley.
116. While clearly related, the picturesque aesthetic encompassed perception of natural landscapes and outdoor scenery, a different concern than is implied by the artifice of Picturesque landscape gardening as it was narrowly defined in the writings of A.J. Downing.
117. Downing, *Landscape Gardening*, 2nd ed. (1844), p. 55, f.n. Downing used illustrations to depict the differences between the "Picturesque" and "Beautiful" (Figure 9).
118. Letter: Thomas Cole to Miss Maria Cooke, not dated [October 1841], as quoted in Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole* (1853), 230.
119. Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," *The American Monthly Magazine*, New Series I (January 1836), p. 6.
120. Thomas Cole, diary entry, 7/6/1835, as quoted in Noble, 148.
121. Downing, *Landscape Gardening*, 2nd ed. (1844), p. 59. Downing said the Picturesque was in ascendancy "within the last five years," i.e., c. 1839.
122. Thomas Cole, "Lecture on Art," in, Marshall Tymn, ed., *The Collected Essays and Prose Sketches of Thomas Cole* (St. Paul, MN: John Colet Press, 1980), p. 108.
123. Linda S. Ferber, "'Determined Realists': The American Pre-Raphaelites and the Association for the Advancement of Truth in Art," in *The New Path* (Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Museum), 1985, p. 16.
124. Letter: FEC to EDP, 10/18/1884 [AIHA].
125. Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, 4th ed., 1849, p. 72.



West Point's Post Headquarters,
designed by Ralph Adams Cram



Ralph Adams Cram at West Point

An extract from the architect's autobiography

Ralph Adams Cram was one of the foremost architects of the early twentieth century—his masterworks include Manhattan's St. Thomas Church and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine—but when his Boston firm, Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson, won the commission to create six buildings (including the Cadet Chapel and Post Headquarters) for the U.S. Military Academy in 1902, he was relatively unknown. With the designs for the new buildings, done in a medieval fortress style that blended well with earlier buildings at the academy, Cram became nationally recognized and the standard bearer for America's second Gothic Revival.

In this entertaining excerpt from his autobiography, My Life in Architecture, which is reprinted from the September 1991 issue of the Hudson River Valley Review, Cram describes how his firm met the design challenges at West Point, recounts some tense moments waiting for the architectural competition to be decided, and cautions about the hazards of working for the federal government. The excerpt begins with his honeymoon.

In the ensuing year, 1900, I was married and went on my wedding trip to Italy, where this new personal association, the most fruitful of all, meant the revelation of new and even more stimulating qualities in the art of Venice, Siena, and the other cities of North Italy; returning at the end of the year, I took up once more the not very promising affairs of the office. And then, as though to signalize the end of one epoch in my life and the beginning of another of wider scope, something happened that changed the whole current of our history. Going one morning to the office at 53 State Street I opened up the limited amount of mail that lay on my desk. There was one long and unpromising envelope that bore the earmarks of an advertisement and I started to throw it, unopened, into the wastebasket, for I disliked advertising then as much as I do now. On second thought I opened it. It was a formal notice from Government officials that we had been invited to take part, with nine other architectural firms, in a competition for the rebuilding of the United States Military Academy at West Point, at an estimated cost of some seven million dollars.

Just why we had been included amongst firms of more notable status and accomplishment was at first inexplicable, and I have never found out who made

the choice. It developed later, however, that opinion at “the Point” was sharply divided as to style. The existing buildings were mostly of that type of pseudo-military Gothic that afflicted the country in the mid-nineteenth century, and these had created a tradition that most of the military and civilian authorities held in high honour. On the other hand, a few years previously, Cullom Hall and the Officers’ Mess had been built by McKim, Mead and White on the very edge of the great cliffs overhanging the Hudson, in a delicate and specifically Renaissance style. Naturally, the question was: Should the new buildings follow the lead of very conspicuous, cream-coloured classical innovations, or should these be resolutely ignored and a return made to the “gothic” precedent? There were fewer then who practised along these latter lines than there are now, moreover our churches had got to be rather well known; and so, in order that the forthcoming “battle of the styles” should be well balanced, we were included in the list, it being assumed that we should hold to our avowed principles.

The terms of the competition were excellent. Surprisingly so, in view of the parlous conditions then surrounding this matter of architectural competitions. Amongst other things, all the invited firms were ordered to report at the Point to discuss the whole question with Colonel Mills, then Superintendent, and Major Carson, Quartermaster, and to determine amongst themselves just how the competitive designs were to be presented. Naturally we had decided that it was Gothic, of sorts, for us. We knew something of the rocky and picturesque setting, and it was obvious that we could make the best showing only if we could include rendered perspectives amongst our drawings. Under the influence of the Ecole des Beaux Arts, which we knew perfectly well controlled the minds of those firms that were sure to work along the classical lines of Cullom Hall, perspectives were taboo, nor were they needed in this particular sort of work. Indeed, they very often revealed defects in schemes worked out, according to rule, in two dimensions. We suspected at once (we already had had some experience along this line) that a probable majority would stand solidly against perspectives, and I prepared to go to the conference and put up a stiff fight for what we wanted.

It was the dead of winter. I took the midnight train for New York, to change there for the other that would bring me to West Point. It was very cold, and when I woke in the morning and looked out from my berth—the train then being motionless—expecting to see the sign of the 125th Street station, I was confronted by the ominous words “New Haven.” Inquiry, desperate and insistent, elicited the information that the steam had frozen and there was no certainty when we should reach the Grand Central Station. We did however, at last, but it was then only too evident that I could get no train for the Point that would reach

there until the conference had been already two hours under way. I immediately sent off a telegram, stating the cause of the delay, and politely asking that the matter of the sort of drawings to be sent in be held in abeyance until I could arrive. With rapidly fading hopes I entered the conference room where the nine other architects were assembled; and was cordially welcomed by D.H. Burnham, who informed me that he had been delegated by the others to advise me that it had not been found expedient to accede to my telegraphic request that the question of presentation drawings had been settled, that perspectives would be excluded, and that all drawings would be made in accord with the best academic principles: plans, elevations, and sections rendered in monotone, with accurately cast shadows. What Gothic designs would look like under these conditions seemed only too clear, and from that moment it was obvious that only a miracle could save us, and we anticipated no such event.

Nevertheless, we went stubbornly on. In any case we could widen our knowledge of Gothic and so measurably broaden our outlook, for of course it was apparent from the first that the sort of thing we had been doing in church work would not apply here, except only so far as general principles were concerned. The delicacies of the English Perpendicular style were out of the question. Hitherto we had dealt only with the religious aspect of the Mediaeval ethos; as a matter of fact we had built too many churches and were getting hidebound. West Point was secular and military, it was also very conspicuously of the modern age, and these qualities had to be our guide.

Of course this brought up a new danger: the peril of archaeological affectation. Study of the castellated architecture of the Middle Ages, unless the instinctive impulses automatically were operative, might, as had been the case in the past (and was to be again a generation hence, in some of the collegiate work of the twentieth century), lead to pure artifice and "movie" theatricalism. All the same, the very site compelled a certain picturesqueness in composition; and what we had to do, and tried to do, was to pass between the Scylla of pictorial romanticism and the Charybdis of a hard utilitarianism. One thing that this meant was the elimination, as far as possible, of adventitious detail, and a dependence on mass and composition for our effects. This all helped us—it certainly did me—to realize that detail and ornament were a minor factor in architectural design.

Another thing that grew out of this experience was the consciousness that limitations, acceptance of them, and the working within them, salvation, so to speak, was to be attained. The West Point terrain was rugged to a degree, with high cliffs and crowding hills of implacable rock, while the available building area was small and further restricted by many old structures that were to be retained.

Moreover military, administrative, and disciplinary considerations were rigidly laid down and had to be obeyed. Sometimes matters of planning had to depend on the number of minutes consumed in transit from one building to another. All this was personally stimulating in the highest degree, for planning was a sort of passion with me, and we decided that even if Gothic had been handicapped by academic restrictions in the matter of presentation, we might win through if our plan was good enough.

As for this question of show drawings, we determined to make the best of it; and since neither Goodhue nor I had had the slightest experience with this sort of thing, and did not know the first rules in the game, we called into cooperation the best man we knew, who could render our designs after the best school fashion. What W.W. Bosworth did with our drawings was a wonder, no less; and what he accomplished came very close to making amends for that exclusion of perspective which in the beginning had seemed to us would be fatal in the result.

So our designs went in and we waited for week after tedious week, trying to keep the thing out of mind as best we could. At length a rumour got abroad that the Gothic interests at the Point had won and that a design in that mode would receive the award. After that, there was no possibility of peace of mind, or, for that matter, of untroubled sleep—when sleep at all could be achieved. And then came the statement that on a certain day the award would be announced. As early as possible on the fateful day (we were living in our Richmond Court in Brookline at the time) I secured a copy of the Boston Herald. The pages were vacant of information. I made my way to the office in a state of some depression, and as I opened the door was met by a rush of the few draughtsmen we had then in our employ, with Frank Cleveland at the head, who shouted in a triumphant but tremulous voice: “We have won the West Point competition!”

I sat down rather abruptly in my desk chair and remarked with severity, “Frank, you are a liar! I have seen the papers and the award had not been made!” His reply was conclusive: “You must have had an early edition. I have a late one, and the announcement is there. What are those telegrams on your desk? They may have something to do with it.” I slit open the one on top; it was from Mrs. Mills, wife of the Superintendent, and it read, “Congratulations on your splendid victory.”

The first thing I did, when I could measurable control my voice, was to call my wife on the telephone. “Oh, Bess, I think I will come home to luncheon to-day; I have something to tell you.” Evidently I had my voice under too perfect control, for her reply was, “Now please don’t be disappointed, I never counted on your winning the competition, and it is all right.” I gave her the facts in the case in as few

words as possible, called it a day, and went back to Brookline, where I found that her first reaction had been to snatch our daughter—then six months old—out of a sound sleep and convey to her the information that her father had won the West Point competition, a statement that was not received with enthusiasm.

Our own sentiments of a similar nature were in no wise dampened by the kindly warnings that reached us from numerous sources to the effect that we had best not take up the work too hopefully, but to be on our guard. We were warned that, intentionally or not, the relations of the Government with architects had usually resulted either in breaking their hearts or their bank accounts. We discounted all this, however—for were we not dealing with the War Department, rather than with the Treasury or with Congress directly? Besides, we were young and this was our first Government job. We became more wise in later years. Confidently, therefore, we signed the formal contracts, hoping for the best from some of their peculiar conditions, took over new and larger offices at 15 Beacon Street and, in accord with official demands, opened new quarters in New York where all the West Point work was to be done. Some member of the firm had to go on to take charge. New York held no temptations for me, quite the reverse; but the case was very different with Goodhue, who gladly transferred himself to the new location. Neither of us being willing to cede all rights in design, an arrangement was arrived at whereby he was to have the initiative in certain of the buildings, with full authority, while others were to be taken over by myself, yet a third lot to be carried out jointly as best we could. The plan worked well, and so, for example, the Chapel (the site of which I had picked out when I first visited the Point) stands as his individual and exclusive creation, together with two of the Cadet Barracks. I am responsible for the Post Headquarters and the Riding Hall (as well as for the designs for several other buildings never erected) and the Power Plant, while all else we did together.

And just here I want to bear testimony to the sympathy, kindness and generous cooperation of Colonel (after-wards General) Mills, and Major (now General) Carson, during the period we were working together. For all that time nothing came to cloud our relations, and these five or six years were, I think, the pleasantest professional period of our lives. When General Hugh Scott succeeded as Superintendent, though we entertained horrible anticipations as to what our lives would be under the direction of that doughty old Indian fighter, we soon found our fears were groundless; for he also understood what we were trying to do, and everything we wanted, and ought to have, we got. I shall not forget the light that later was cast on what so many, and so mistakenly, thought his hard and forbidding personality, when later it happened that he and I were to receive

honorary degrees from Princeton University. The General and I walked together in the Academic procession, and the hardy old soldier was as nervous as a girl. He appealed to me to know what he had to do and how he was to do it. Although it was the first of my degrees, I had found out about the ropes and was able to instruct and reassure him; but I fancy, even so, he would rather have gone up against a band of Apaches than walk across the platform to receive his hood at the hands of President Woodrow Wilson. He was a magnificent old type, and I came to have for him a real and lasting affection.

While our personal and professional relations at the Point were entirely satisfactory, very different was the final issue in the matter of the Government. "Now it can be told"; so here are the facts.

The Act of Congress provided that the architects successful in the competition should be paid three and one-half per cent, on the cost of the work; in addition the Government undertook to appoint one member of the firm "supervising architect" at a salary of \$5000 per year, and to pay the office expenses incurred in the operation, the total payment for commissions not to exceed five per cent., which was then the recognized charge for full professional services. We went to work on this basis but, of course, the plan worked badly. We had, in the New York office, St. Thomas' Church and a number of other jobs, in New York and elsewhere. Bookkeeping presented almost insuperable obstacles; moreover no member of the firm was ever made consulting architect, so no one of us could draw his salary. The situation finally became an absolute impasse, and at length the suggestion was made at the Point that, by means of "supplementary contracts," we should be paid a flat five per cent on the cost of the rest of the work. This was, of course, most agreeable to us, so the new contracts were drawn and executed by the Secretary of War.

Matters then went smoothly until the time came for an accounting. In the meantime, one administration had succeeded another, the partisan complexion had changed, and when our last bill was presented (it was for a very considerable sum) it was returned with a curt statement that it would not be paid. We asked why, and cited our supplementary contracts bearing the signature of the Secretary of War—and were informed that these were invalid, as the Secretary had no authority to make such contracts. Furthermore, we were told that unless we withdrew our claim, the Government would bring suit against us to recover all the amounts already paid us under these same contracts.

Of course, we refused to withdraw our claim, and for twenty years renewed it at proper intervals. Senator Elihu Root interested himself in our case and most generously did everything possible to see that justice was done us. At length even

he was forced to throw up his hands in despair.

In the meantime, formal word was sent from Washington to West Point that no further sums were to be paid us for architectural services of any sort. This of course meant that we could no longer be employed to carry out our general scheme, and other architects were engaged to do the work for which we had determined the sites and made many sketches.

Still nothing happened in the case of the unsettled claims until, in the year 1925, the Comptroller General who, in the meantime had been appointed to his twenty-year post, suddenly discovered this shocking state of affairs. He promptly brought suit against us for the sum of \$22,248.34, which was the amount that had already been paid us under the supplementary contracts before they were denounced at Washington. The case was tried in the United States District Court in Boston and a decision was handed down absolutely justifying our claim. Did this do us any good? Yes, in a way, for we were at once recalled to the Point and given another building to do, but this was the last to date, and as for collecting any money for our bill, now about thirty years old, we are as far from this as ever. Our claim has been filed from time to time, and a Bill introduced in Congress giving us what we originally claimed, but it never gets out of Committee—and probably never will. Of course, we might have gone to the Court of Claims for huge damages (everyone knew we had been expelled from the Point, but few knew the facts in the case), or we might have demanded a sum equal to what our profits would have been had we acted as architects for the structures erected in the long interregnum. And yet we asked only for the original amounts of our bill rendered nearly thirty years ago.

This is the story of the West Point affair. It is given here, in brief form, as a matter of general information and to show how wise and accurate in their diagnosis were those who, when by a miracle we won the great competition, had little to say except “Beware!”

A Thoroughly Modern Conundrum: Paul Rudolph's Orange County Government Center

"A box is the easiest thing to build. This ain't no box."

—Paul Rudolph, commenting to criticism
of the Orange County Office Building, in 1997

Christopher Pryslopski

Architect Paul Rudolph (1918-1997) first achieved international recognition in the 1940s with his "Florida Houses," residences designed with Paul Twitchell while Rudolph was attending the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Often referred to as the "Sarasota School" of architecture, they were built using modern materials and techniques, combining the International Style of architecture—which had deserted ornamentation in favor of simplified forms and open floor plans—with Rudolph's knowledge of regional architecture. As a result, these thoroughly modern structures were designed around locally developed practices for controlling ventilation and lighting in warmer climates.¹

Rudolph then moved to New England, where he began designing large-scale structures such as the Boston Government Service Center (1963). He also presided as chair of the School of Architecture at Yale University from 1958 to 1965. While there, he designed a new home for the school: the Yale Art and Architecture Building (A+A), which opened in 1964 to universal acclaim and much speculation on its pivotal role in the further development of architecture around the world.²

It was at this point in his career that Rudolph designed and built the Orange County Government Center. Retired County Executive Louis Mills, who opened the building as Orange County's first Executive in October 1970, felt that Rudolph had achieved in concrete a metaphor for the progressive, open government that was replacing the outmoded Board of Supervisors with a Legislature. This metaphor took form in the same poured, textured concrete surface that Rudolph had used on the A+A Building, and which had by then become synonymous with

the architect's work. He placed 127 windows in the building facing northeast and southwest but left the linear flank facing Main Street as an undulating, angular mass of cement. The façade opens in the center to a courtyard that is the formal entry to both the government and courtroom wings. Seen from certain angles, the building reads like a still shot of an explosion rendered by a Cubist painter—box-shaped protrusions extend out, up, sideways, and backward. Each of these protrusions is clad with a flat roof, eighty-seven in all.

The lawns and courtyard within have been maintained with plantings that are gradually maturing and ground the building's linear mass to the site. In 2000, the county added a new courthouse to the east of the structure. Although it ties in to the original building, it does not speak specifically to Rudolph's architecture, suggesting instead a brick-clad chapel.

Nearly thirty-five years after its construction, the Orange County Government Building—a celebrated monument to the idealism and progressiveness of the late 1960s—is the subject of a feasibility study that may lead to much-needed repairs and improvements bringing it into the twenty-first century, or could serve as the death knell that would relegate it to the wrecking ball as an unsustainable relic. County Executive Edward A. Diana has requested the study as another phase in streamlining county government and centralizing it in a campus-style center where the building now stands. He is neither alone nor original in his desire to rid Goshen's Main Street of this Modern monolith. However, he is the first to sidestep the issue of aesthetics and appraise the structure on purely fiscal terms: the flat roofs leak; the large, single-pane windows need to be upgraded; the electrical and ventilation systems must be overhauled; it is not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act; and it fails to meet the current industry standard for percentage of useable space (offering sixty-five percent as opposed to today's required eighty-five).³ While the validity of these issues cannot be ignored, it would be surprising to hear such fiscal reasoning lead to the destruction of the county's 1887 building, which is still in use, or the Village Hall, located in a Victorian house directly across Main Street from Rudolph's building.

Neither of these structures is the only historic property in the vicinity of the Government Center. Goshen's Main Street, and much of the surrounding village, have a Victorian character; homes and commercial buildings recall its prosperous history as the seat of a rich farming county. Unfortunately, Main Street has become an historic island in a growing sea of suburban sprawl with endless stretches of red lights, turning lanes, and big-box retail centers connecting old pastures put out to subdivision. Rudolph's Modern, even Cubist, vision of 1968's idealism is shockingly dissimilar to the 1816 Victorian Village Hall across

the street from it; however, both have a historic and architectural relevance that cannot be ignored.

It is this relevance that proponents argue should be the overriding factor in any debate surrounding the Government Center. They claim it is the only building in the county designed by an internationally renowned twentieth-century architect who has been recognized by critics and contemporaries as one of the most influential of his generation.⁴ They also fear its replacement would lack the cachet and originality of such an architect.

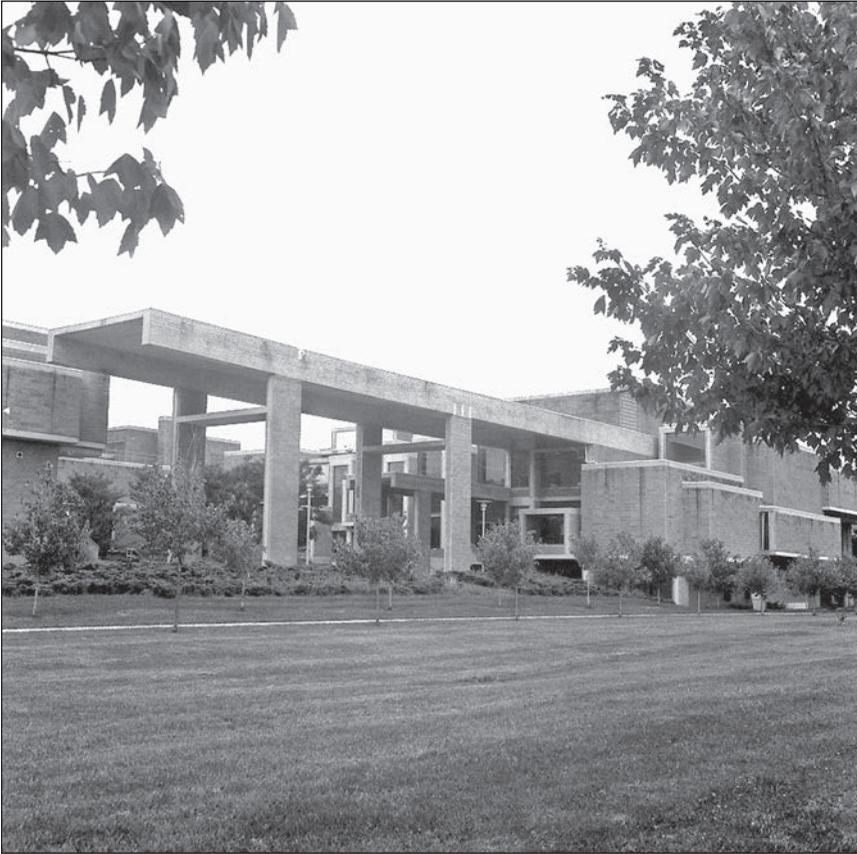
This building and the controversy surrounding it are not unlike other Rudolph legacies. Opened to international acclaim and awards in 1963, the Yale A+A Building suffered a disastrous fire in 1969 that was rumored to have been deliberately set. It was restored in such a fashion that the architect's original design was nearly unrecognizable once you entered the building. As Modernism gave way to Post-Modernism, Rudolph's architecture was attacked by critics who characterized it as superfluous and unyielding, sacrificing function to sculptural form. While he practiced internationally through the 1980s, he retreated from the architectural community in the U.S. and didn't re-enter the public's favor until the late '80s, when many of his earlier buildings had lasted long enough to be reappraised. But his twenty-odd years of obscurity and disfavor allowed for the destruction of many of his works throughout the states.

If the controversial nature of the Government Center's architect and his work bolster its opponent's claims against it, it also bolsters its proponents' pleas for cultural propriety. Advances in technology bring advances in standards, which will always place additional and higher demands on buildings as they age, but these demands rarely require the leveling of the structure in order to be met. The Government Center is in a unique situation in that it is a building of certain architectural relevance, but not yet old enough to qualify for evaluation and inclusion on either the State or National Register of Historic Places. Any building less than fifty years old cannot qualify for protection under current preservation law, but that also means that renovations would not be restricted by the same. As it investigates renovations, the county may still substitute newer, more efficient, and reliable materials that were not available to the architect in the 1960s. Of course, such improvements can be costly, and if they prove to be too expensive, the building may need to be replaced.

Whatever the eventual fate of the building, it should be arrived at through intelligent and thorough debate and an acceptance of the county's obligation to honor such a modern monument in an appropriate manner.

Endnotes

1. Christopher Domin and Joseph King, *Paul Rudolph: The Florida Houses* (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002), 24.
2. Mark Alden Branch, "The Building That Won't Go Away," *Yale Alumni Magazine*, February 1998, accessed online at http://www.yalealumnimagazine.com/issues/98_02/AA.html; 8/13/04, 4.
3. Edward A. Diana, *State of the County 2004*; accessed online at <http://www.co.orange.ny.us/org-main.asp?storyID=3&orgID=1&storyTypeID=1> ; 8/16/04.
4. Domin and King, 25.



“The County Center was...a new form of Government Building: a symbol of our modern County government.... People either love it or hate it. Critics said it was not in keeping with the Colonial or Victorian village. Goshen, however, is a mixture of styles; there are a handful of Colonial buildings and a few dozen Victorian, but that’s no reason to argue against a Modern government building. While there was some faulty work done on the construction of the building, that argument is used against it by people who don’t like modern architecture. They blame the architect for bad concrete.”

—Louis V. Mills, first Orange County Executive



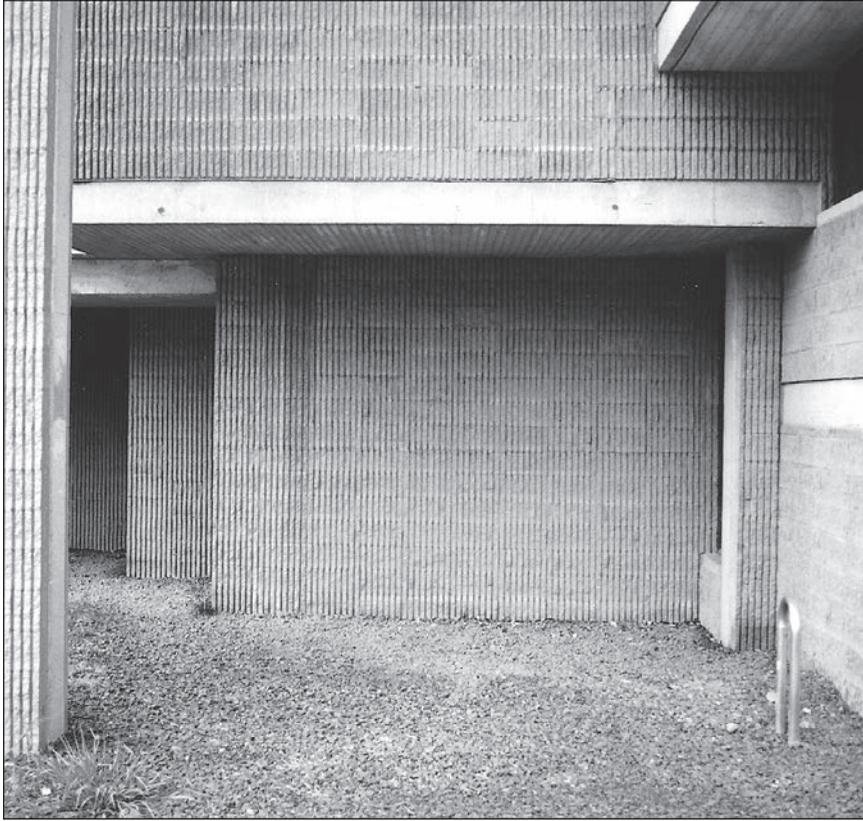
“The condition of the Government Center you sit in today continues to deteriorate and the need for major improvements or a new building grows each day... You have all seen the buckets of water collecting throughout the halls and offices of this building. This is the result of 87 individual flat roofs, all which need to be repaired or replaced. We must also replace every single-pane window, upgrade the heating and air conditioning systems, improve ADA accessibility, upgrade the electrical system and we would still be paying to heat and cool inefficient wasted space.”

—Edward A. Diana, County Executive,
March 20, 2004, State of the County Address



The fact is: many people can't appreciate modern architecture and so they rationalize about "wasted space" when in fact they never mention such flaws in the high ceilings of neoclassical civic buildings. Is space wasted if it inspires people? More to the point is that there are stewardship responsibilities when you own such a building which go far beyond individual tastes or likings. This building is a masterpiece by a giant of modern architecture. If one doesn't like a Mondrian, he is still obliged to preserve it.

—Salvatore Cuciti, R.A.; Historic Preservation Architect



When light hit the rough-cast, low-relief finishes, the ever-changing play of shadowed patterns across the surface softened the impact that the imposing concrete mass of the building had upon its surroundings...[and] the elements would weather the surface...Only much later [did he] suggest that corrugated surface “broke down the scale of the walls and caught the light in many different ways because of its texture. Light was fractured in a thousand ways and the sense of depth was increased. As the light changed, the walls seemingly quivered, dematerialized, [and] took an additional solidity.”

—Paul Rudolph quoted in
“Rendering the Surface: Paul Rudolph’s Art and Architecture Building at Yale,”
Timothy Rohan, *Grey Room* Volume 1 Fall 2000,
Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, p. 85



“Unlike any other architect of his generation, Paul managed to reinterpret all the important lessons learned from the likes of Mies [van der Rohe] and [Frank Lloyd] Wright and Corbu [Le Corbusier] and recast them in his own words... He was the most important architect of the years immediately following World War II...”

—Peter Blake, quoted in *Florida Houses*
(Princeton Architectural Press, 2002)



“Perhaps we can improve the public’s understanding of American architecture by redefining the modernist genre according to regional elements, circumstances, and contexts. Questions critical to this analysis might ask: what message did the community or client want to convey to others by commissioning this design? How did the architect interpret these desires? How did the local people of the era respond? How does this building fit within local and state contexts of the period and how is it looked upon today?”

—Chris Madrid French,
President, Recent Past Preservation Network,
letter to the author



“I am not interested in symmetry or asymmetry, per se. One characteristic of the twentieth century is that nothing is ever completed, nothing is ever fixed. We don’t think of things as being complete within themselves. A building can only be thought of in relationship to a changing setting, and at a point in time. Therefore, the design suggests the past and the future. So the whole idea of the uncompleted building which is going to be expanded in unknown ways is an obsession. I have now lived long enough to know that buildings get torn down, they get burned, they get added on to, their uses get changed, etc., so for me the temple in the park, or aligning a great avenue organized around an axis, is meaningless.”

—Paul Rudolph, in *Conversations with Architects* (Praeger Publishers, 1973)



“Rudolph probably best represents that side of the American consciousness which is always trying to identify the self. Hence, he tends to emulate and compete; architecture becomes a kind of heroic contest, an agon. The self tries to encompass the whole of things...he wants not the snappy technological package but the heroic humanistic image, that of sculptural embodiment of human force and action...”

—Vincent Scully; *American Architecture and Urbanism*, new revised edition,
(Henry Holt & Company, Inc.) 1988

Book Review

Arthur A Baker. *Wooden Churches: Columbia County Legacy*. Columbia County Historical Society, New York (2003). 95pp.

The country church is a familiar image in the rural landscape. It is often sought out for picturesque paintings and photographs, and it is frequently used as a symbol of our ideals. This image is the subject of *Wooden Churches: Columbia County Legacy*, in which Arthur A Baker presents a portfolio of sixty-three photographs of churches in Columbia County. The portfolio is limited to one building material, wood (as indicated by its title), and is a complete catalog of all of the remaining wooden churches located inside the county's borders. The photographs are accompanied by a wonderful essay by Ruth Piwonka that chronicles the development of the area through religion, and by an appendix of historical data keyed to a county map.

The book begins with a forward by Baker in which he very clearly lays out his thoughts and goals. He asserts that the variety of architectural styles and various religious denominations represented by the wooden churches in Columbia County reflect the nation's architectural and religious development in microcosm. Baker establishes that the main goal of his project is to create a complete documentation of the county's wooden churches. It is an interesting admission on his part that the project's content is secondary to this goal. The resulting content of the photographic contribution is largely a visual comparison and contrast of the churches, and has been confined by limitations on the catalog and by formatting decisions. Most of the historical and architectural content of the book relies upon its written contributions.

Baker anticipates questions about the limitations of the project by writing "Quaker and Shaker meeting places (there are no wooden synagogues) are included because of their importance within the context of the book." Although the inclusion of only one building material makes the parameters of the project neat and simple, the incomplete catalog of denominations coupled with the inclusion of the Quakers and Shakers causes such parameters to seem arbitrary. The architecture of the meeting houses differs conspicuously from the rest of the portfolio, and their sequencing as the last three images in the book causes them to seem as if they were an afterthought. The Quakers and Shakers are important to the context of Piwonka's essay, but denominational differences are downplayed by Baker. Otherwise, why exclude Judaism, which Piwonka includes with Catholicism as a late comer to the region (1860) and refers to as an "unexpected omission" from the

portfolio? Finally, one parameter that Baker does not address in his forward (and which is not addressed historically in Piwonka's essay) is "why wood?"

The historical, religious, and even architectural content of the work is subjugated to the visual by the sequencing of the images. Baker acknowledges this by stating his intention to emphasize "the church massing and silhouette rather than its religious identity, its location, period or architectural style." The churches are not ordered chronologically to heighten the historical content of the book and parallel the area's development. Neither are the churches sorted by religion to facilitate a comparison of the structural or decorative predilections of a certain denomination. Instead, churches of similar structure, and often of similar architectural classification, are paired such that visual similarities and differences can be studied. To this goal, one great strength of the portfolio is the care and consideration given to the pairings of similar church facades. Numerous differences arise even in churches of identical structure. St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Stuyvesant Falls and Hudson's Emanuel Lutheran Church provide a surprising mirror image of one another when displayed side by side, but there is still great diversity in their details. The two photographic elements that lessen these comparisons, and unfortunately so, are Baker's use of light and printing.

In his forward, Baker expresses his admiration for the work of Walker Evans and the Bechers, and his work combines elements from each. The use of typology as a comparative method, the frontal vantage point, and the isolation of the subject from its environment is born of the Bechers. The lighting and the subject matter is more of Walker Evans. This synthesis creates individually beautiful photographs but lessens the comparative potential within the pairings. Too often the sharp contrast between sunlight and tree shadow distracts from the comparison of window placement and porch design. Two of the worst offenders are the First Presbyterian Church in Ancramdale and the United Methodist Church in Stuyvesant Falls. Another difference between the work of the Bechers and Baker that lessens comparative analysis is the photographs' printing. The highly stylized printing owes a great deal to perhaps a third influence, Ansel Adams. Unfortunately, Baker fails to replicate two of the hallmarks of the Bechers, rigorous working method: their use of flat light and neutral printing. Without these qualities, Baker fails to realize fully his goal to facilitate comparative analysis. Instead, he achieves his goal of comprehensive documentation and the creation of many individually compelling images.

As for the historical data and architectural classification presented in *Wooden Churches*, it, too, is subjugated to the typology. One feature of the Bechers' books is a simple explanation of the structural components and functions of the subject.

No such explanation is given here of the parts that constitute a church. There also is no explanation of the architectural styles loosely applied to the churches in the section of historical data. The fact that the historical data is arranged by town, not by image sequence, and is segregated from the portfolio reinforces its secondary nature. For those who are knowledgeable of architecture, this collection of photographs is a valuable study in microcosm of the variations in wooden church facades, but for those who are not, the delight is in the purely visual.

Although Baker's photography compromises some of his visual goals, the project achieves a valuable visual record of wooden churches for the Columbia County Historical Society and for all those interested in the simple beauty and variation of church architecture. As a whole, *Wooden Churches: Columbia County Legacy* touches upon a variety of interests centered around the documentation of the country church. The book preserves and compiles historical information about the churches for comparison—such as the establishment date of the congregations, the date the churches were constructed, the latest denominations, and a loose architectural classification. Finally, this information and the church facades are given greater significance by Ruth Piwonka's interesting and informative essay, which is the glue for the project. Her essay establishes the roles religion and the physical structure of the church have played in the history of Columbia County, and the importance these churches possess as symbols connecting decades of change. One of the most individually compelling images of Baker's portfolio encapsulates the history these structures have endured. Created by the perhaps undesirable effects of the long rays of the sun, the shadow of a telephone pole falls across the front of the Philmont Reformed Church. Its presence combines the stark beauty of a simple wooden church in the full sun and the passage of time and change.

—*Laura Gail Tyler*

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