

SPRING 2008

THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

A Journal of Regional Studies



Our published cover for the Spring 2008 issue of the *Hudson River Valley Review* features a rare image of the young Herman Melville, painted by Asa Twitchell, used with the permission of the Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield, MA. Unfortunately, we are unable to publish this same image online due to use restrictions.

The image featured here instead appears in Theodore Hilscher's article about Catskill. It is a detail of a photo of Willard's Alley by Earl Cooper c. 1959 from the collection of Mark Krstovich.

THE
HUDSON
RIVER
VALLEY
REVIEW

A Journal of Regional Studies

MARIST

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From the Editors

Central Park turns 150 this year, and while it is south of our usual territory, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux each has roots and legacies in the Hudson Valley, and their work together in New York City is tied to that. Just as Olmsted and Vaux influenced generations of artists and landscape architects that followed, Washington Irving created a “school” of contemporaries and continues to influence writers today. Our article about America’s first internationally successful author explores the Gothic inspiration—in architecture and literature—he gleaned from Sir Walter Scott. From the 1800s, we jump to twentieth-century architecture and parking lots, in an examination of urban life and renewal in the Village of Catskill. We continue up the river, but back in time and again toward the Gothic, ending with a discussion of an early and unattributed work by Herman Melville. (We also publish this short work in its entirety.)

Our regional forums bookend the valley as well—stretching from Boscobel to the historic sites of Troy. But before we end with our usual book reviews and exploration of new and noteworthy books, we feature a new section, titled “Regional Writing,” which will be dedicated each issue to the publication of one poem from and/or about our region. Our spring selection is entitled “Winter: New York State.”

Reed Sparling
Christopher Pryslopski

Correction:

The image that appeared on page 5 of our Autumn 2007 issue of the *Review* was incorrectly credited. It is from the collections of The New Jersey Historical Society, Newark, New Jersey, a statewide, private, non-profit historical museum, library, and archives dedicated to collecting, preserving, and interpreting the rich and intricate political, social, cultural, and economic history of New Jersey to the broadest possible audiences. Learn more at www.jerseyhistory.org.



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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. All articles in *The Hudson River Valley Review* undergo peer analysis.

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 with endnotes, 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.

HRVR will accept materials submitted as an e-mail attachment (*hrvi@marist.edu*) once they have been announced and cleared beforehand.

Since HRVR is interdisciplinary in its approach to the region and to regionalism, it will honor the forms of citation appropriate to a particular discipline, provided these are applied consistently and supply full information. Endnotes rather than footnotes are preferred. In matters of style and form, HRVR follows *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

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THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

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On the cover:

A portrait of Melville as a young man by Asa Twitchell.
Courtesy of the Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield, Mass.

Regional History Forum

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



Boscobel in Spring

Boscobel: A House Museum of the Federal Period

Maria Zandri

“Let us step back in time to 1822.” These are the first words I heard upon entering Boscobel with my tour guide, Marie. Located in Garrison, Putnam County, this Federal-period gem is celebrating its bicentennial this year. But as fascinating as the architecture and collection of antiques in this house museum is the story of its original owners, States and Elizabeth Dyckman.

Born in the mid-1700s in Manhattan, States Dyckman had a difficult childhood filled with financial hardships; by the age of twenty-two, he had left home. While in Albany in 1776, he was seen toasting King George III and arrested for being a Loyalist. Dyckman escaped from prison and fled to New York City, where he established a lucrative job working for the Quartermaster's Department of the British army.

Dyckman's business with the department, which involved covering up the corrupt activities of his superiors, eventually took him to England at the end of the American Revolution. While there, he amassed a respectable amount of wealth from individual quartermasters—payment for his discretion about their wartime business practices. With this money, he planned to make himself a comfortable life if he was allowed to return to the newly independent United States. Over the years, States' Loyalist activities had kept him separated from his family, with whom he was very close. After a prolonged exile, he longed to return to New York and settle down. In 1789, Dyckman was able to do that, with the help of his brother Samson, who also assisted him in finding a new home, King's Grange, located on Verplank's Point.

Dyckman lived at King's Grange with his ailing mother; his sister Catalina (who was facing marital problems and a laudanum addiction); a housekeeper, Sil; and several slaves. He transformed his house into a 240-acre farm with a saw mill and cider mill. Another wealthy former Loyalist, Peter Corne, had a home nearby. A master mariner, Corne had known Dyckman in London. Now he lived with his granddaughter, Elizabeth. Soon after meeting, Elizabeth and States began a relationship. In 1794, forty-one-year-old States and eighteen-year-old Elizabeth were wed. After a large-scale redecorating effort, Elizabeth moved into King's Grange. By 1799, the Dyckmans had expanded their family with the birth of children Peter Corne Dyckman and Catalina Letitia Dyckman.

Soon after their marriage, the Dyckmans began to have financial difficulties, brought on by States' extravagant spending, which he believed helped him gain social prestige. He was forced to sell King's Grange and relocate to a smaller farm. Making matters worse, the lifetime annuity promised to Dyckman from quartermaster Sir William Erskine came to a stop when Erskine passed away and his family froze the payments. At the same time, a faulty payment from the new owners of King's Grange forced Dyckman to resell the home and move into an even smaller dwelling. States' occupation was now listed officially as dirt farmer.

After borrowing large amounts of money from Elizabeth's family, Dyckman was able to return to England to reclaim the Erskine annuity. After four years, most of which was spent working on the quartermasters' accounts, he returned

home not only with the Erskine funds, but with payments from other former quartermasters—in total, a sum approaching the modern-day equivalent of 2.85 million dollars.

Dyckman settled back into a relaxed lifestyle and took advantage of his new wealth by buying gifts for Elizabeth, Peter, and Sil (Catalina had passed away from scarlet fever while Dyckman was in Britain) and recreating the library he'd sold to redecorate King's Grange. However, much of Dyckman's new fortune was set aside to build his dream house, Boscobel. Named after the hunting lodge in Ireland where King Charles II was exiled, it served as a beacon of Dyckman's Loyalist feelings toward England and his desire to create a haven from the hostile world. Montrose Point in Westchester County was chosen as the site of the home due to its proximity to the Hudson River. Construction began in 1806.

That August 11, States Dyckman passed away at the age of fifty-one. Only the foundation of Boscobel was complete. Thirty-year-old Elizabeth now was left to raise her son and complete and decorate the home. Two years later, she moved into Boscobel with Peter and his wife, Susan Matilda Whetten, and the couple's young daughter, Eliza Letitia.

On June 20, 1823, Elizabeth passed away. A year later, Peter also died. For some time, his widow remained at Boscobel with her daughter. In 1888, the house finally fell out of the family's ownership.

In 1924, Westchester County purchased the home and surrounding land to create Crugers Park. Boscobel was not part of park plans; its administrators did not think people would want to visit the home of a Loyalist, no matter how beautiful it was. In 1941, the house was threatened with demolition; local citizens hastily formed Boscobel Restoration, Inc., to save it. The organization leased Boscobel from the county for five years, making repairs to the house. In 1945, the land at Montrose Point was purchased by the U.S. Veterans Administration; by 1950, thirty-two buildings of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Veterans Hospital surrounded Boscobel. Despite assurances to Boscobel Restoration, Inc., that the house would be taken care of, the government declared the building an "excess" the following year. It was sold for thirty-five dollars and slated for destruction.

Led by Benjamin West Frazier, the members of Boscobel Restoration, Inc., once again stepped up to rescue the house. It was taken apart, stored in sheds and garages across the area, and eventually reconstructed after a \$50,000 donation was given anonymously by Lila Acheson Wallace, the co-founder of *Reader's Digest*. The donation was used to purchase a plot of land in Garrison, fifteen miles north of the home's original location. Today, Boscobel sits across from the United States Military Academy at West Point. Its grounds offer sweeping views of the Hudson



View from Boscobel over Constitution Marsh and the Hudson River

River, Constitution Island, and the Hudson Highlands. Following Mrs. Wallace's instructions, a landscaping firm was hired to design Boscobel's grounds and interior decorators to furnish its rooms. When Boscobel opened to the public in 1961, it was more a "decorator's showcase" than a house museum.

In 1975, extensive research was undertaken to determine what Boscobel would have looked like when Elizabeth and Peter made it their home in the early 1800s. With the help of the curator of the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, it was restored to a historically accurate representation by 1977. European furnishings were replaced with American furniture. Reproduction paint, carpets, wallpaper, fabrics, and window treatments were brought in as well.

Every item in Boscobel today, except for the lemonade and gingerbread cookies offered at the end of each tour, reflect the period from 1780 to 1825. The furnishings include many pieces crafted by Duncan Phyfe, a prestigious New York furniture maker. States Dyckman had purchased several of Phyfe's pieces, and many others were added after his death. Original pieces throughout the house include export, hand-painted china depicting places States had visited in Europe and a chair that belonged to Elizabeth's grandfather. Boscobel's library contains many of States' books, each featuring his bookplate.

Upon entering Boscobel, one steps directly into the entryway, roomy enough for guests to dance after dinner. In the dining room to its left, the Duncan Phyfe table is set for a dinner party; they were held often at Boscobel. The room, which offers a gorgeous view of the Hudson River, is furnished with many original Dyckman pieces. Adjacent to it is a small butler's pantry, where food was prepared once it was brought upstairs from the kitchen. To the right of the entryway are two adjoining drawing rooms. In the rear one is an authentic 200-year-old barrel organ that still works.

The bedrooms are located up the grand staircase on the second floor. The first room to the left is a guest room. It is furnished rather plainly. Connected to it is Elizabeth Dyckman's dressing room, which is filled with wardrobes for her clothing, since dressers were not yet common. On its opposite side is Elizabeth's bedroom. Known as the "best bedroom," it affords superb views of the river, and was always warm due to the large windows and constantly burning fireplace. There is a bed and desk, a chamber pot (under the cushion of a chair), and a small table where Elizabeth could receive her meals.

Front and center on the second floor is the spacious library, which also served as a parlor during summer months. Beyond it is Peter and Susan's room, which also offered fine views. Much like Elizabeth's room, it was furnished so the couple had little need to leave it. Off this bedroom is a small room with a bathtub, although baths were a rarity in the early 1800s. The next room, located to the rear of the house, was another guest room or the room of a white servant. There were five servants in the Dyckman household—two white and five black, although none were slaves. One often was in charge of taking care of Peter and Susan's daughter, Eliza. Today, this room is known as the "nanny's room," where the white servant in charge of the baby would sleep so she could be close enough to take Eliza if she disturbed her parents at night.

A particularly interesting part of the home is the basement, where Boscobel's kitchen was located. The pine planks on the floor today came from Boscobel's attic. There is a large fireplace with many warming plates and pots. Another basement room showcases some of the small, original items that belonged to Elizabeth and States Dyckman. Displayed here are pieces of Elizabeth's monogrammed silver, the bill of sale from the candelabra States purchased (which is on display in the dining room), and a list handwritten by States describing the different locations that were hand-painted on the imported china. A brief display describing the history of the name Boscobel also is found here.

A trip to Garrison is well worth the drive to enter the life of Elizabeth Dyckman and enjoy breathtaking views from Boscobel's well-maintained grounds.

Boscobel is located on Route 9D in Garrison. It is open every day except Tuesdays, Thanksgiving, and Christmas 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. April to October and 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. in November and December. It also opens specifically for artists to explore the grounds on the second Tuesday of each month. Entrance fees are \$15 for adults, \$12 for seniors, and \$7 for children ages 6-14. Boscobel holds various educational, musical, and other programs throughout the year. For more information about Boscobel, call 845-265-3638 or visit www.boscobel.org.

Exploring Troy

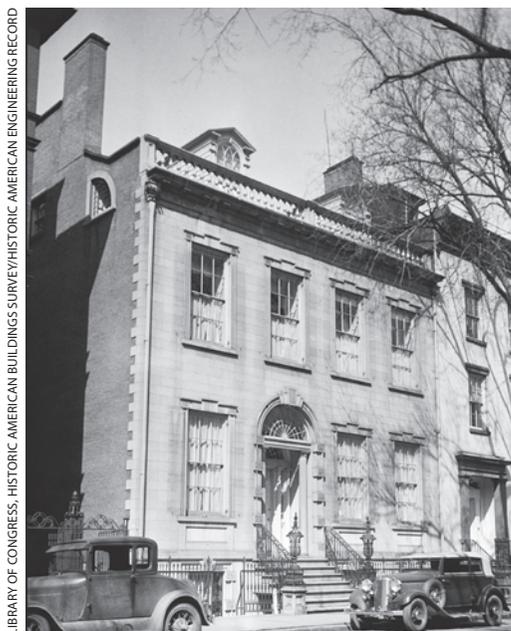
Elizabeth Vielkind

The city of Troy was founded more than 200 years ago on the banks of the Hudson River. Its history encompasses the Industrial Revolution, during which the city became a major producer of detachable collars, textiles, iron, and steel. The result of this activity is the presence today of numerous historic manufacturing sites as well as opulent nineteenth-century architecture. Historic preservation here has helped revitalize the city by providing fascinating areas to explore. The heritage of this industrial region has been maintained by the Rensselaer County Historical Society (RCHS), Oakwood Cemetery, Burden Iron Works, and the RiverSpark Visitor Center.

Established in 1927, the Rensselaer County Historical Society is a non-profit educational organization that strives to “enrich the present and advocate for the future by bringing the region’s past to life... In pursuit of this mission, RCHS collects, preserves, studies, interprets and makes accessible a broad variety of objects and documents, and conducts educational programs to inspire public enthusiasm for the past.” The museum is located in two adjacent nineteenth-

century townhouses—the historic and architecturally significant Hart-Cluett House and the Carr Building.

RCHS programs include exhibitions about Troy’s history that can be viewed in person or online. The museum has an extensive collection that includes furniture encompassing all major nineteenth-century styles, painting and sculpture, decorative arts (including major holdings of glassware, ceramics, and silver), costumes and textiles from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, household items, locally manufactured stoneware and iron-



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY/HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

The Hart-Cluett House, now RCHS

ware, and artifacts relating to Troy's contributions to American military history. (The RCHS also manages and administers the largest local library archives and research center in Rensselaer County; it is comprised of more than 30,000 items spanning three centuries.)

The museum's "Resourceful People Orientation Gallery" provides visitors and members with highlights from the permanent collection and offers an interactive tour of the county via computer. It also provides an orientation to the museum and RCHS. Guided tours of the Federal-style Hart-Cluett House give visitors a glimpse of how wealthy New Yorkers lived in the early nineteenth century.

That was when Troy's rich history began. The accumulation of wealth from local industry was used to build lavish mansions, magnificent churches, and grand public buildings. One of the grandest was the white marble townhouse that New York merchant and banker William Howard constructed for his only child, Betsey, and her husband, Richard P. Hart, an entrepreneur and president of the Troy Savings Bank. The Hart-Cluett House's architecture and decor represent the finest in nineteenth-century design and craftsmanship.

The house's second and third owners, George B. Cluett and his nephew, Albert E. Cluett, were involved in the business of manufacturing collars and shirts—and are a prime reason Troy earned the nickname "The Collar City." At its height, Cluett, Peabody & Co. employed 3,000 workers in its factories and as pieceworkers in homes throughout the city. Like the Harts before them, the Cluetts contributed to many philanthropic ventures in Troy. Recognizing the house's historic importance, Albert Cluett and his wife, Caroline Cluett, donated it to the RCHS in 1952.

Oakwood Cemetery, one of America's largest rural cemeteries, overlooks 100 miles of the Hudson Valley as well as downtown Troy. From the 1600s to the early 1800s, burials in American cities were usually in church yards or city burial grounds. As cities grew in size, these burying grounds became inadequate. Doctor Jacob Bigelow of Harvard University advocated the creation of suburban "rural" cemeteries. (A prime factor in the location of these cemeteries was the escalating price of inner-city real estate, which pushed less profitable uses to the municipalities' outskirts.) To make up for their distance from downtowns, rural cemeteries often were filled with natural or manmade ponds, trees, and shrubs." Mount Auburn, established in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1831, was America's first rural cemetery.

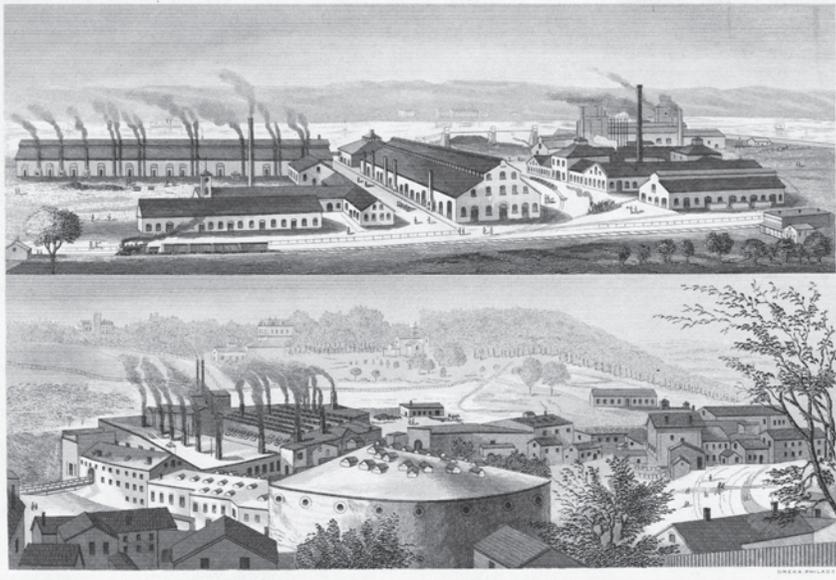
Mount Auburn's appeal was in "the romantic tradition, fitting in the gentle, informal contours of nature in a woodland setting." It inspired the creation of similar cemeteries in cities all over the United States, particularly on the East

Coast. In 1848, Oakwood Cemetery was established. It emulated Mount Auburn’s model of “resurrection-in-nature,” incorporating winding roads, ponds, waterfalls, statuary, and forests. It is a prime example of what a rural cemetery was meant to represent:

A beautiful retreat for citizens, to walk quietly in peaceful, natural surroundings while meditating on the deceased or caring for their family plots while picnicking. These rural cemeteries were the precursors and models for the large public parks... They were social meeting grounds, even serving as showcases for marriage-eligible daughters. Cities that created cemeteries as green spaces with heavy picturesque planting found that tens of thousands of visitors arrived to walk among the graves. (Troy Cemetery Association)

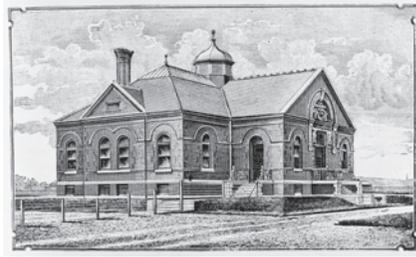
Since its inception, Oakwood Cemetery has become the final resting place for many prominent Americans, including Samuel Wilson, a prosperous meat-packer whose nickname—“Uncle Sam”—was transferred to the venerable figure personifying the United States government during the War of 1812, when Troy was an important center for assembling munitions and food for the army. In 1961, Samuel Wilson was formally recognized by Congress as the progenitor of the “Uncle Sam” icon, which has represented America around the world.

Another notable historic site in Troy is the Burden Iron Works, which once was home to the Burden Water Wheel—sixty-two feet in diameter and twenty-two



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Burden Iron Works



Burden Iron Works Office

feet in breadth. Water to turn it came from a small stream, the Wynantskill. Its inventor was Henry Burden, an engineer whose horseshoe-making machine was a wonder of technology. Burden immigrated to the United States in 1819 from Scotland. In 1822, he began working in Troy's iron industry as the superintendent of the Troy Iron and Nail factory. Burden's innovative ideas helped make the factory extremely profitable. He soon took over the factory and renamed the business H. Burden and Sons.

Although the water wheel no longer stands, Burden and Sons' office building now houses the Burden Iron Works Museum, which delves into Troy's industrial history. It contains objects manufactured in the city throughout the nineteenth century, when its "factories produced parts of the *U.S.S. Monitor*, the replacement for the Liberty Bell, and some of the world's most innovative products, including stoves, mass-produced horseshoes and railroad spikes, detachable shirt collars, fire hydrants and surveying equipment." (www.hudsonrivervalley.com)

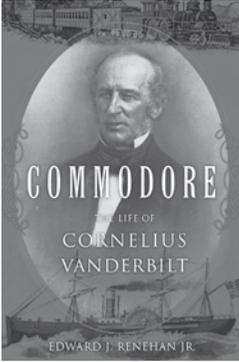
The Burden Iron Works museum is operated by the Hudson Mohawk Industrial Gateway, which also maintains downtown Troy's *Riverspark* Visitor Center. The center offers a great introduction to Troy and its rich industrial heritage. It also offers a self-guided walking tour that enables visitors to admire the city's large collection of Tiffany windows illustrating religious, historic, and pastoral themes. Among the ten sites on the tour are St. Paul's Episcopal Church, St. John's Episcopal Church, St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, and the Hart Memorial Library.

The Rensselaer County Historical Society is open noon to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, February to December 23. Admission is: \$5 adults, \$4 seniors, and \$3 youth (12-18 yrs.). Children under 12 are free. Members always receive free admission, as do students with ID. RCHS can be contacted by phone at 518-272-7232, or visited online at www.rchsonline.org. Oakwood Cemetery's Avenue Gate is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily. Additional history and virtual tours are available at www.oakwoodcemetery.org. The Burden Iron Works Museum is open by appointment only; www.hudsonmohawkgateway.org. Dates and hours of operation at the Troy's Riverspark Visitor Center vary throughout the year; call (518) 270-8667 or visit www.troyvisitorcenter.org for more information.

Book Reviews

Edward J. Renehan, Jr. *The Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt*.

New York: Basic Books, 2007. (364 pp.)



When learning about the life of Cornelius Vanderbilt, one is forgiven for wondering if Dickens already had a model for Ebenezer Scrooge when he published *A Christmas Carol* in 1843. It seems by all accounts that Vanderbilt thoroughly out-Scrooged Scrooge himself, for even Scrooge ended up seeing the error of his ways; the Commodore, however, who died an old man in 1877 as the second-richest American ever after John D. Rockefeller, gave only a paltry amount of his wealth to philanthropy, leaving the bulk of his fortune to the one son he berated the most. Bah, humbug indeed. But although he was an infamous miser, at least he wasn't a boring one: far from content to sit and count his money as it rolled in, the Commodore had an undeniable thirst for adventure. In the heat of the Civil War, for example, he not only offered Lincoln his prized ship to ram the famous Confederate ironclad *Merrimac*, but suggested he captain the mission himself.

In his new biography *Commodore: The Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt*, noted historian Edward J. Renehan, Jr., uses meticulous research to piece together the business life of one of the most notorious characters of a nascent nineteenth-century America. Vanderbilt's importance to modern American business is undeniable—New York City would be more like Teaneck or Providence today if Vanderbilt hadn't almost singlehandedly made it a crossroads of commerce—and Renehan's work gives us the first authoritative account since 1942 of the man who put the *robber* in robber baron. Vanderbilt was not alone, of course, in this exclusive club of American tycoons, but his contemporaries such as Jay Gould and Andrew Carnegie seem to have had at least some modicum of charity for their fellow man. In *Commodore*, however, Cornelius Vanderbilt is depicted as a man whose sole motivation was profit. His business acumen is clearly the focus here: through the numerous transactions and dealings that the author uncovers, we see Vanderbilt as a brilliant bully, an abusive and lonely man whose peerlessness in finance was in direct contrast to his boorishness in social circles.

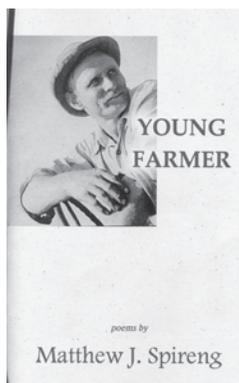
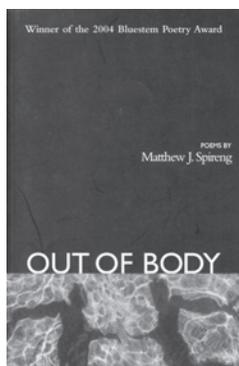
Renehan's depth of research here is nothing less than astonishing. He tracks down the smallest clues to help depict Vanderbilt's business affairs, and includes

new evidence that posits Vanderbilt's erratic behavior toward the end of his life was the result of a long deterioration due to syphilis. Renahan is known for his attention to detail, and it is formidable here; *Commodore* will undoubtedly be of great value to the serious student of American history and finance. However, at times the research piles up, making some sections of the book feel more like an inventory of facts than a crafted historical portrait. The casual reader might be looking for a more compelling story; offering a warts-and-all portrait of a historical figure is important, but at some point those warts should be attached to a face. Fans of Renahan's moving and passionate investigation of Theodore Roosevelt, the 1999 masterpiece *Lion's Pride*, might be disappointed here with the lack of a compelling narrative that made that earlier work such a pleasure to read. Of course, Vanderbilt is a less-admired subject than someone like Roosevelt, but that does not make him any less interesting: after all, here was a man who abused his family but also dabbled in spiritualism in the desperate hope of contacting his beloved son from beyond the grave. Here was an inscrutable miser who also chose to set up his favorite saloon girls on Wall Street as the first female stockbrokers. Renahan's account of Vanderbilt's business dealings is undeniably exhaustive, but one wonders if he couldn't have explored Vanderbilt's personal nature with that same vigor.

Nevertheless, Renahan's account is a valuable and commendable one. A biography of Cornelius Vanderbilt is no easy task given the fact he was largely illiterate; a lack of personal correspondence makes it nearly impossible to explore his intimate thoughts and desires. *Commodore* is a worthy complement to Renahan's previous investigation of Vanderbilt's contemporary Gould in *Dark Genius of Wall Street*. Throughout his celebrated career, Renahan's primary strength has been his ability to provide clear and valid research in uncovering new viewpoints on his subjects. In that regard, *Commodore* will not disappoint.

Tommy Zurhellen

Matthew J. Spireng. *Out of Body*. Emporia, KS: Bluestem Press, 2006. (86 pp.)
Young Farmer. Georgetown, KY: Finishing Line Press, 2007. (29 pp.)



Matthew J. Spireng is a Kingston-based writer whose poems have appeared since 1990 in a variety of little magazines and literary journals. With the publication of two collections of poetry in the past year, he has begun to earn national recognition for his work. The book *Out of Body*, winner of the 2005 Bluestem Poetry Award, demonstrates Spireng's commitment to formal simplicity as well as his close connectedness to the natural world around him. A lifelong resident of the Hudson Valley, he writes extensively about the flora and fauna familiar to him as runner, hiker, and rural householder. "Sometimes when I run," he confides, "I see things no one else has seen / before me: the great heron at the pond," for instance ("Running"). The concealed or overlooked phenomena that catch his attention may prove to be unexpectedly lovely, but sometimes dangerous or even grotesque, like the eels lurking deep in the "wet bottom ooze" of Esopus Creek ("Diving for the Bottom"). A hawk's cry as it dives toward its prey sounds "like an incoming shell— / that high-pitched whistle / before it explodes—" ("Thinking of Things That Come from Above"). Spireng manifests

empathy or admiration for a broad spectrum of creatures, not excepting the often reviled skunk. Mulling over his readings about the creature's diet and spraying capacity, he wonders why naturalists have neglected to pay homage to "the whiteness of skunks" ("Certain Reference Books"). Caught in the headlights of an approaching vehicle, "some appear almost pure / white, a plume of light," and it is this "unapproachable beauty," he insists—not "their / dark odor"—that causes motorists to "avoid striking / them."

Without heavy-handedness, the poet points frequently to the ecological implications of human technology and its intrusions. When a killdeer's nest is destroyed by a tractor, for example, he describes the female bird feigning injury, behaving exactly as she would if confronted by some natural threat: she "cried to that roar / in vain to draw it away as if it were / a predator stalking its prey" ("Killdeer After a Late Planting in Corn"). Struck by the futile desperation of her efforts, the speaker follows the bird on foot, "giving her hope, / false as it is, her birdwork is right / for this world." These lines invite readers to ponder the

radically diminished effectiveness of behaviors evolved in a pre-industrialized world. Of what use now is a strategy (“birdwork”) that enhanced the killdeer’s capacity to survive in an environment that no longer exists—an environment since supplanted and dominated by the inanimate “roar” of human engineering? Refraining from didactic or sentimental comment, the author maximizes the impact of the scene he describes.

Out of Body includes love poems and depictions of places the poet has visited, but Hudson Valley readers will find in this book abundant evidence of Spireng’s attentive affection for the local. In his most recent book, *Young Farmer*, he depicts life on a small farm located on the western side of the Hudson River, near Kingston. He assumes his adoptive father’s voice, focusing on scenes from the early part of the twentieth century. In a series of twenty-six first-person poems, he offers intimate glimpses of a physically demanding everyday routine: planting, plowing, harvesting, or clearing fields slowly and tediously with the help of a draft horse, “all day prying up and rolling rocks” (“Young Farmer Clears a Field”). A sow requires help with a breech birth; hens must be protected from foxes and hawks. The primary crop is corn, supplemented by beans, potatoes, and other vegetables. The economic well-being of the household is threatened repeatedly by vicissitudes of weather (“Young Farmer Waits for Rain”): a too-dry season (“the first / sprouts of corn withered”) frequently is followed by one too wet (“seeds / rotted in the ground”). Spireng provides a poignant and illustrative picture of the gradually losing struggle to sustain a working farm. In the years following World War II, a generation of small farmers in the Hudson River Valley began selling their land, ending a way of life. All the years of hard work are not enough in a changing economy: “Somehow it seemed the harder he’d tried / the less he’d gotten” (“Young Farmer Auctions His Farm”). The last poem in the series flatly enumerates factors leading to final defeat:

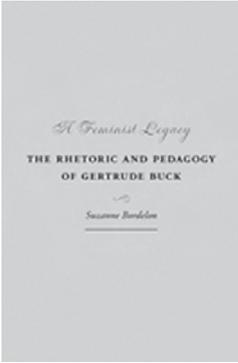
Too many losing seasons—whether timing or
weather, failed crops, or a drop in the payments
for milk. Machinery broke and before that horses
like Danny broke down...
 (“Young farmer Auctions His Farm”)

Although the trajectory of Spireng’s narrative points toward a “dreaded” conclusion, along the way readers catch glimpses of the satisfactions offered by a life lived close to the earth, in harmony with elemental forces. Resting in the haymow, enjoying “the sweet smell of dried grasses,” *Young Farmer* finds time “for dreaming” in between “mending fence or hoeing” (“Young Farmer Dreaming”).

Like Emily Dickinson, he keeps the Sabbath alone and out-of-doors rather than in a traditional place of worship: “not church,” but a “favorite place he’d go up near the spring” (“Young Farmer Observes the Sabbath”). When he experiences “a visitation” there under the oak tree, it is natural rather than supernatural—the unexpected sight of “a vixen with pups,” perhaps, “or a red elft on the moss.” An avid star-gazer, he sees a meteor one night, “a bright light arcing across / the sky,” and proceeds to interpret it from his own point of view, that of a cultivator: “imagined someone / out there near a distant star tilling / a stark soil, an odd plant blooming” (“Young Farmer Watches the Night Sky”). The voice remains convincingly that of the farmer, plain and rooted in particulars, but Spireng is adept at coaxing simple diction and syntax to yield evocative metaphor. For example, when Young Farmer suddenly realizes that he and his wife are approaching middle age, the riveting analogy that comes to his mind is pulled directly from his own experience: “youth taken fast / like a fox does a hen, / another thing come without warning” (“Young Farmer Learns He Won’t Be a Father”).

Only the dust jacket names the specific location of Spireng’s father’s farm as Lomontville, New York, but Hudson Valley residents will recognize on every page plant and animal life, climatic conditions, or geological features characteristic of the region. Unpretentious and accessible, these poems can be appreciated by a wide range of readers. Because they re-create a mode of living and a set of values now all but vanished, they offer historical and cultural insight as well as solid literary value.

Judith P. Saunders



A Feminist Legacy: the Rhetoric and Pedagogy of Gertrude Buck

Suzanne Bordelon. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007. (256 pp.)

“Same sex colleges have always been test beds for transformations among American women”—so read a recent article in the *The New York Times Magazine*. Suzanne Bordelon’s biography and analysis of Gertrude Buck’s, (and, by extension, her partner Laura Johnson Wylie’s), tenure, pedagogy, and politics at Vassar College during the Progressive Era (1890-1920)² underscores these transformations—from the Suffrage movement to how rhetoric ought to be taught, from the development of the Little Theater movement to the democratization of society.

Buck, a student of John Dewey’s concept of education as key to democracy, expanded the classroom from just conveying information to a place where students were given the tools to reform and ultimately transform the greater society. She focused an activist pedagogy—using the tools of rhetoric—basing the assignments not only on student interests but developing moral citizens (48) who would function in an egalitarian democracy. Buck democratized the teaching of rhetoric, and put forward what we would recognize today as a progressive and feminist pedagogy. She integrated her own socio-political ethics into her teachings, stressing democratic principles to writing, augmentation, and the field of rhetoric. She and Wylie also practiced their feminism in the model they put forward in governing the department of English: a decentered, democratic model in which all the faculty had a voice.

In a letter to Vassar College President Henry Noble MacCracken from November 1918, Buck explained her emphasis on educating women students so they would be “capable of a greater degree of initiative and constructive intellectual activity than heretofore.” (55) She contended that the then-current educational norms were unchanged, and replicated “the military monarchy” or external authority, not a system for training “free born, thinking, self-responsible, government-making citizens of the twentieth century.” (55-56)

Her claim that the then-current education system produces what students seek—“units” (56)—is but a distant echo of the current cry on many college campuses today. Faculty decry contemporary students who are just seeking a college education as a means to a job, who focus on their grade point average rather than challenging themselves and developing critical thinking skills.

A *Feminist Legacy* is a window into cultural history and politics not only of the college classroom, but of the greater Poughkeepsie community, and the country. The college under President James Monroe Taylor (1886-1914) sought to educate “cultured but human, not leaders but good wives and mothers, truly liberal in things intellectual but conservative in matters social,” according to President Henry MacCracken (94), Taylor’s successor.

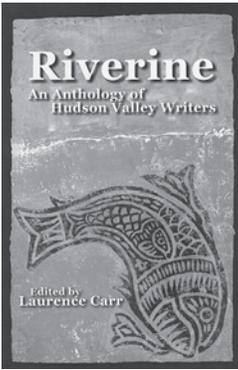
To this end, Vassar College originally sought to remove students from politics, limiting debates and lectures on issues such as the Suffrage movement which MacCracken viewed as propaganda. Vassar suffragists were prohibited from organizing and meeting on campus. Inez Milholland, then an undergraduate student at Vassar, circumvented this policy by holding a suffrage meeting in the cemetery adjacent to campus. Laura Wylie set up the Women’s Suffrage Party of Poughkeepsie shortly thereafter. Buck challenged the patriarchy herself, with the publication of two limericks, in one of which she implied that women might also participate in their own oppression, what feminist theorists today call being “internally colonized.” In the other limerick, Buck notes that male privilege is at women’s expense. Both concepts are key to feminist theory today.

Bordelon explores Buck’s development of the Little Theater movement on Vassar’s campus, which is well demonstrated by one of her most famous students Edna St. Vincent Millay. Under Buck’s guidance, Millay not only wrote but acted in various productions, a collaborative venture (149).

Buck also focused on “town-gown” issues, striving to socialize education and address social justice concerns as she tried to enrich our democracy. To this end, Buck created the Poughkeepsie Community Theatre, literally bridging the gap between the upper-middle class women attending Vassar College and the diverse community outside its gates.

A Feminist Legacy allows the reader to witness the transformations that were happening politically and socially for women not only in Vassar’s classrooms, but in the microcosm that was at that time middle America. Unfortunately, the book is more reminiscent of an academic dissertation, with far more theory and analysis than necessary. At times, I feel that Bordelon was re-iterating primary sources for the reader instead of following Buck’s own pedagogy and allowing the reader to get involved with the subject on her own. I learned a lot, but I do not think many will be willing to slog on through the dense and dry prose that belies the exciting educational, social and political life of Gertrude Buck, Vassar College, and Poughkeepsie at the beginning of the last century.

JoAnne Myers



Riverine: An Anthology of Hudson Valley Writers.
Laurence Carr, ed. New Paltz, New York:
Codhill Press, 2007. (314 pp.)

Laurence Carr, a writer who teaches Dramatic and Creative Writing at SUNY New Paltz, and David Appelbaum, the publisher of Codhill Press, have assembled a wide-ranging collection of Hudson River Valley writers for this excellent anthology. Seventy-eight Hudson River Valley writers are represented.

The first half of *Riverine* contains memoirs, short stories, microfiction, and prose poems. The second half consists of poetry, which is further divided into two sections: Hudson Valley Views and Other Realms.

In a very short Preface, Carr establishes a sense of place while extolling the Hudson River, which flows over 300 miles from the Adirondacks to New York City and claiming that it defines the region “physically, culturally, socially, and intellectually.” Not only has the Hudson River Valley been a meeting place for the world’s people, he says, but a place where words have created a powerful current of writing in both written and oral traditions.

The first two memoirs reiterate this theme. In the first selection, “How Books Changed My Life,” Da Chen recounts the importance of books and storytelling in the rural, Chinese, communist village of his childhood. The second memoir selection takes us quite literally up the Hudson River as Laurence Carr describes his move from New York City to the Hamlet of Highland. Laura Shaine Cunningham also searches for, and finally finds, “The Perfect House” in the Hudson River Valley.

The Hudson River threads through the short stories as characters leave the Valley—to fight in the Civil War, to search out happiness and turn it to confusion and fear, to move from insane asylum to group home to hospital—and return. In Jacob Appel’s “Waterloo,” a man accompanies his girlfriend to visit her sister in Waterloo and attend a dead child’s tenth birthday party, complete with cake and presents. The characters in these stories ponder inponderables: war, suicide, love, insanity, and the confusion of daily life. So often, things are not what they seem.

Guy Reed’s microfiction piece, “String Theory,” considers the cosmic nature of the Hudson River Valley as he examines the waves generated by a locomotive dropping down the slope of the Catskill Mountains toward the Hudson River. And the longest of the poems in this volume, James Finn Cotter’s “Spring Walks, Mountain Views,” describes a hike up Thomas Cole Mountain. Cotter urges the trekker to visit Artist’s Rock “to see the Hudson Valley smooth as canvas, the river

splashed on like a streak of paint.”

Other poems describe Hudson Valley flowers and trees, wildlife and birds, towns and highways. Jo Pitkin describes a photograph in “Stone House from a 1934 Walker Evans’ photograph of the Crane home, Somers, New York.” Matthew J. Spireng, in “Cutting the Oak,” describes cutting down an ancient oak tree. In “Carpentry and Gardening,” Phillip Levine describes, in exquisite and loving detail, the building of a flower box. Jacqueline Renée Ahl examines the bitterness of winter and the redemption of love in “The Laws of What Happens (*The Lefevre farmhouse, Route 32 North*).

The last section of the book, “Poetry: Other Realms,” is a wonderful wide-ranging collection. Some that stood out included “Untenanted” by Enid Dame, “Konghuin (a tune for the lyre): an excerpt,” translated by Heinz Insu Fenkl, “The Persistence of Ashes,” by Kenneth Salzmänn, and “My Mother’s Owl Collection,” by Judith Saunders. Donald Lev describes what these poets do when he says in “Twilight”: “You can hear laughter in the waves/as being is transformed into memory.”

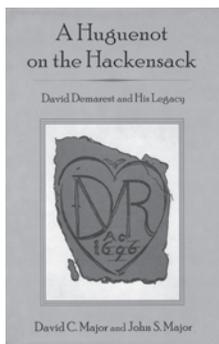
Toward the end of the book Pauline Uchmanowicz playfully asks in “Elements of Style”: “What if poets had to pick? The ocean or the stars. A reputation in truth telling or a prize in diplomacy?” In particular, the poetry in *Riverine* is hard to categorize as are the writers of the Hudson River Valley who are represented here. But this book is an excellent place to meet this diverse cadre of writers and genres.

The word “riverine” means “of the river.” Laurence Carr has assembled an anthology that goes a long way toward capturing the literary spirit of the Hudson River Valley.

Dale Flynn

New & Noteworthy Books Received

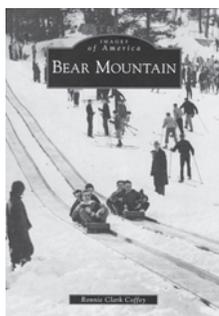
Ann Panagulias



A Huguenot on the Hackensack: David Demarest and His Legacy

By David C. Major and John S. Major (Madison and Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press). 261 pp. \$29.50 (cloth).

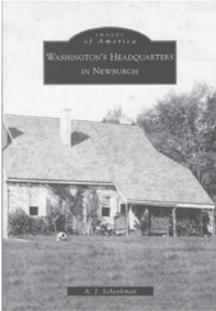
This book serves several purposes. It's a lesson in the whys and wherefores of seeking out the New World, a history of a specific region in New Jersey, and a biography of one of its most influential inhabitants. In all cases, this treasure trove is brimming with linguistic, cultural, religious, and social jewels sure to bedazzle Dutch enthusiasts on both sides of the Atlantic.



Images of America: Bear Mountain

By Ronnie Clark Coffey (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing). 127 pp. \$19.99 (paperback). www.arcadiapublishing.com

Another environmental coup conceived by women, in this case the Englewood Women's Club of New Jersey. By raising the consciousness of politicians and philanthropists alike, these ladies engendered the organization of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, which in turn spawned a spectacular park devoted to year-round recreation. The yarn unravels via vintage photos. By the looks of things, Bob Dylan seems to be the only visitor not to have gotten his money's worth!



**Images of America:
Washington's Headquarters in Newburgh**

By A.J. Schenkman (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing).
127 pp. \$19.99 (paperback). www.arcadiapublishing.com

“Images” being the operative word, the book visually traces the evolution of the structure from humble Dutch abode to haven for the Father of our Country to first building marked for preservation as a historic site. Cozily inhabiting Martha’s kitchen, one imagines her culinary treats nourishing George’s creativity for his Badge of Military Merit, precursor of today’s Purple Heart.



**Palisades and Snedens Landing:
The Twentieth Century**

By Alice Gerard (Palisades, NY: Alice Gerard). 333 pp. (cloth).

The fulfillment of a legacy, daughter honoring mother, Ms. Gerard completes the tale as commenced by her namesake, Alice Haagensen. It’s as intricately detailed, beautiful, and utilitarian as the finest handcrafted lace tablecloth. Likewise, these oral histories are passed down, lovingly preserved for a new generation of historians to tend to and appreciate. Liberally interspersed with black and white, personal photographs, it serves as a fine scrapbook of its devotedly enamored residents.

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