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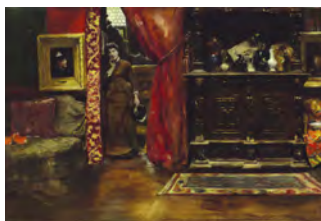
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Rosalie Gill, *The New Model*,  
c. 1884.  
The Baltimore Museum of Art.

## Contents

- 3 **An Aesthete's Lair**  
The F. Holland Day House  
*Libby Bischof and James F. O'Gorman*



- 8 **"Shocking Scenes  
of Dissipation"**  
Artists' Studios and  
Cultural Backlash  
*Karen Zukowski*



- 16 **William Pretyman, Designer**  
*John Waters*



- 26 **Aspiration and Obsession**  
Henry Clay Frick and the  
W. H. Vanderbilt House  
and Collection  
*Melanie Linn Gutowski*

## Departments

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 31 <b>Preservation Diary</b><br>Cleveland's Model<br>Preservation<br>Assistance Program<br><i>Warren Ashworth</i>                           | 38 <b>Victorian<br/>Innovation</b><br>American Patent<br>Models<br><i>Charles Robertson</i>        | 45 <b>Contributors</b>  |
| 34 <b>Local Focus</b><br>Symbols of Slumber<br>Children's Funerary<br>Sculpture in Norfolk's<br>Elmwood Cemetery<br><i>Jaclyn Spainhour</i> | 41 <b>The Bibliophile</b><br><i>Brian Coleman</i><br><i>Jean Arrington</i><br><i>Roberta Mayer</i> | 46 <b>Milestones</b><br>Ruskin and the<br>Stones of Lucca<br><i>Sally Buchanan Kinsey</i> |



F. Holland Day's private library, Day House, Norwood. F. Holland Day photo, c. 1895. Norwood Historical Society.

# An Aesthete's Lair

## THE F. HOLLAND DAY HOUSE, NORWOOD, MASSACHUSETTS

LIBBY BISCHOF

and JAMES F. O'GORMAN

The headquarters of the Norwood Historical Society are located in a large, many-gabled historic house museum on the corner of Day and Bullard streets in the old industrial town of Norwood, Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> It was formerly the home of Lewis Day, a Boston leather merchant, his wife Anna, and their son Fred, now better known to historians by the more formal name of F. Holland Day (1864-1933), antiquarian, bibliophile, collector, publisher, pioneer of the evolving Arts and Crafts style of the 1890s, and world-renowned pictorialist photographer: in short, a leading member of the Aesthetic Movement. While Day's seaside summer retreat at Little Good Harbor, Five Islands, Georgetown, Maine, designed 1910-11 by Louis Chapell Newhall in collaboration with Day, has received much deserved attention from recent historians, the house in Norwood, a thorough remodeling and redecorating of a mid-century structure in 1890-92, has surprisingly remained little known to architectural history.<sup>2</sup> As we shall see, such neglect is not deserved.

Fred Holland Day was educated by private tutors and then at Chauncy Hall in Boston.<sup>3</sup> Early on he developed a love for reading and a desire for collecting. The only child of wealthy and philanthropic parents, he had the means and the support for his various eccentricities, and dabbled in his many interests at will. Although accused by some historians of being a gadfly, what stands out in Day's life is his ability to synthesize his diverse interests *within* whatever discipline he chose. The two great passions of his life however, the ones that secured his professional reputation and his place in cultural history, were literature and photography.

Day remained a bibliophile throughout his life, at times an obsessive one. His passion for reading, collecting, and

studying was apparent even in his teenage years. Literature was his most successful subject at Chauncy Hall, and at graduation he received the gold medal for the best scholarship in English Literature. Thereafter he was largely self-taught. His interests were broad, ranging from American history and English and French literature to Greek mythology and Transcendentalism – although he did prefer some authors over others: the names of Keats, Balzac, and Shakespeare appear most frequently in his bills for books of the 1880s. These receipts also give clues to Day's later fascination with religion, the supernatural,

and photography. And he helped found the Club of Odd Volumes and the A-T Club in Boston, groups dedicated to the discussion of writing and books among young men and women, as well as the promotion of the art of the book.

Day had many aesthetic-minded friends during Boston's bohemian days of the 1880s and '90s: architects Ralph Adams Cram and Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, poets Louise Imogen Guiney, Bliss Carman, and Richard Hovey, and other young illuminati. These men and women worked on small artistic and literary magazines such as *The Mahogany Tree* and *The Knight Errant* and belonged to secret societies such as the "madder and more fantastic" Visionists.<sup>4</sup> In 1893 (just after the Days moved into the Norwood house) Fred joined Herbert Copeland, a Harvard graduate and editor at *The Youth's Companion*, to form a partnership dedicated to publishing finely designed and printed books in the Arts and Crafts style, heavily

influenced by William Morris's Kelmscott Press in England.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time that Day was adding to his ever-growing collection of rare publications and first editions,



Jacques et Cie., portrait of F. Holland Day, Paris, 1890. Norwood Historical Society



he began to experiment with the camera. Some of his earliest photographs were taken to extra-illustrate his books, but in 1887 he also started photographing friends such as Louise Guiney, and by 1889 she was writing him of his “new camera miracles.”<sup>6</sup> Day joined the Boston Camera Club in that year. Throughout this period, while the Norwood house rose anew, he had little trouble balancing his interest in books, bookmaking, and photography, but as his pictures became increasingly well known at home and abroad, his focus began to shift from publishing to photography. After producing nearly a hundred volumes of poetry, prose, and literary criticism, all now eagerly collected, Copeland and Day disbanded in 1899. In the same year Fred served as a judge for the Photographic Salon in Philadelphia along with other pictorialists such as Clarence H. White, Gertrude Käsebier, and Henry Troth. And for the next several years he led the new photography movement in Boston.

Although it is difficult to limit Day’s prints to a specific genre of photography, he associated with the pictorialist movement that began in England in the 1880s and quickly spread across the Atlantic. Pictorialists were important participants in the debate about whether photography could be considered a legitimate medium of fine art. “The pictorialists aspired to meaningful personalized images, not the mass-produced portraits or views of the professional, nor the sentimentalized imagery of the amateur.”<sup>7</sup> Or, as Day himself wrote in 1897, “that the camera properly guided, is capable of art – real art – is now no longer a doubt.”<sup>8</sup> Day and others strove to demonstrate the infinite capabilities of the camera, to prove that the instrument could create a new image, not just record an existing one. Although until recently often overlooked in contemporary accounts, he, along with Alfred Stieglitz, spearheaded the movement for the legitimacy of fine art photography in America and abroad.<sup>9</sup>

Fred Day lived through the first third of the twentieth century but he eventually abandoned photography and the center of his summer activities at Little Good Harbor



F. Holland Day, sketch for furnishing a guest room, 1890. Norwood Historical Society.

in Maine, returning to the Norwood house whose remodeling his father had commissioned years earlier and with whose design he had had much to do. There are idiosyncrasies especially in the interior of the house that can best be described as the reflections of Fred Day’s aesthetic life.

Lewis Day was the nominal client for the “alterations and additions” at Norwood, although one vintage account says, with only some exaggeration, that “its design was left largely to Mr. Day Jr.’s taste.”<sup>10</sup> Fred’s friendship with both Ralph Adams Cram and Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue would begin a little later, so in 1890, with or without his input, Lewis picked the Bostonian J. Williams Beal (1855-1919), then in his mid-30s, as the architect. Lewis Day had already engaged Beal to direct the rebuilding of the local Universalist church, a family philanthropy. Beal’s training was the best available in his day outside of the Parisian Ecole des Beaux-Arts. He graduated from M.I.T. in 1877, worked in the offices of Richard Morris Hunt and McKim, Mead & White in New York, then decamped for a grand tour of European architecture.<sup>11</sup> Opening his office in Boston in the mid-1880s, he began a locally distinguished career that encompassed public, private, and domestic commissions in all the period’s expected fashionable styles from the Richardsonian to the English Colonial Revival.

The elder Days had lived at Bullard Farm in Norwood since their wedding in 1859 in a four-square, clapboarded Italianate house with mansard roof topped by a cupola located on a large corner lot, and that was where Fred was born.<sup>12</sup> This house would be transformed into the updated and enlarged structure. Planning the extensive updating to the older structure began after New Year’s of 1890, with Fred writing in March that the existing house would be “utterly torn in pieces this summer,” and that it would “be a great improvement when we get back again.”<sup>13</sup> The entire project could have been his idea, for an Italianate box must have seemed passé in style to the Boston bohemians. When the work actually began Fred was in Europe but keeping a long-distance eye on all the proceedings through correspondence. In March his father wrote to him that Beal had promised to have “a set of plans for me to shew [sic] you.” Further documents (letters and sketches) confirm that Fred was mainly but not exclusively concerned with the layout and furnishings of his particular library and bedroom suite. From Paris in August, for example, he wrote that he had “come to the conclusion the big south room can be made very attractive with french [sic] bed and hangings.”

By the end of the year it seems that the main reconstruction of the building was finished, although work continued on the interior (including the installation of electric wires in the plasterwork because “the town is sure to have electric lights,” as Lewis wrote to Fred), and it was not until early 1892 that Beal sent the bills to Lewis. His presentation of such dreaded documents was very clever, for although he conceded up front that “they greatly exceed my expectations . . . , when carefully looked over [they] are not large from the am[oun]t and quality of



J. Williams Beal, F. Holland Day House, Norwood, Massachusetts, remodeling 1890-1892. Author photo, 2011.

work done.” And, he continued, “No one realizes more fully than I do the disappointment of having the cost so exceed any first estimate, and I realize now that I tried to do too much for the sum given.” It is a familiar story in building projects. This one cost more than his estimate, he admitted to Lewis, but it was worth it.

(Look what he got for the money!) Beal at least was reassuringly happy with the work: “Altogether,” he wrote to Fred, “I regard the house as quite a success.”

Beal’s remodeling of the exterior perched two stories of stucco and half-timber walls, bays, overhangs, gables, and dormers opened by diamond-paned windows and framed by tall chimneys on top of a Roman brick ground story.<sup>14</sup> The woodwork is oak, “put through a certain process in order to have the appearance of ‘ancient of days,’” according to Beal. It is all in all a rather standard, if somewhat early example of the soon to be very popular Tudor Revival style. The most striking external element is the deep veranda that fronts the ground floor of both street elevations. It ends in a porte cochère, a feature that, as shown on the surviving blue prints, was to have juxtaposed a sturdy Richardsonian stone arch with a bold wooden cantilever soon to become the hallmark of Frank Lloyd Wright. The intended archway vanished in design revision; the cantilever survives.<sup>15</sup> The veranda sports

carved stone heads and leaf ornament that anticipate the Arts and Crafts Movement soon to be popular in Boston.<sup>16</sup>

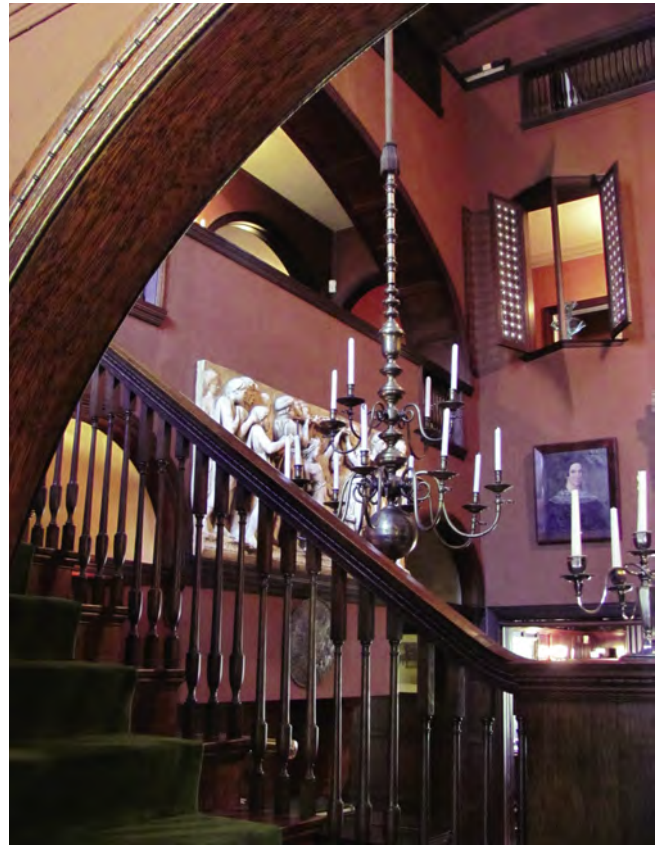
If the exterior is more or less as expected for a large house of this era, the spatial organization of the interior, while not unknown in contemporary design, is nonetheless striking. Multi-storied halls with dramatic stairways were fairly common in high-end domestic architecture of the period, as a glance through Appleton’s *Artistic Houses* of 1883 will confirm. But the Days’ staircase hall seems to have a distinctly personal touch. It is there, in the richly interwoven series of forms and spaces, that we find one of the structure’s principal interests and a major aspect of its extraordinary character. A low reception hall off the small entrance vestibule to the south leads into a soaring three-story space whose stucco walls rise thirty-three feet to a shallow, lightweight, paneled, segmental vault seemingly floating beneath the roof. At ground level a massive fireplace supporting a plaster cast compounded from Luca della



Unidentified sculptor, carved head on the veranda, Day House, Norwood, c. 1891. Author photo, 2011.

Robbia’s marble reliefs for the Cantoria of the Cathedral of Florence looms just off axis with the entrance and draws in the visitor.<sup>17</sup> To the right are parlor and dining room, to the left the grand staircase. Services are out of sight, in the wing beyond, as are the rooms of the elder Days on the floor above. The walls and ceiling of the





A gathering of costumed Visionists in the staircase hall, c. 1894. Staircase hall, Day House, Norwood. Author photo, 2011.

dining room are paneled in oak. There a brick and sandstone fireplace of Richardsonian heft and carving stands recessed within an alcove beyond a broad Tudor archway. The set of large leaded windows once looked out upon well-tended lawns and gardens.

It is in the spatial organization of the staircase hall that Beal's skill is to be found. There is no need to think of Moorish architecture here, although one understands why it has been so called. The tall central void filters out through recessed galleries at three levels that provide vistas up to the vault or down to the floor, as do the many angled, multi-paned casements that open from different levels. Arches of varying diameter spring from different levels as well, so that from changing viewpoints below a series of them leaping and arcing in different directions and at different heights creates a domestic version of the richness of curving forms and intertwined space to be found more dramatically envisioned in Piranesi's *Carceri* engravings. A later, slightly romanticized remembrance of the house by Jane White, wife of Fred's photographic colleague Clarence White, recalled that, on entering it,

the impression is of spaciousness and then one of mystery. This is given by the great hall. . . [with its "Moorish" windows] through which the light is filtered by vari-colored glass, giving a mysterious, soft quality of light. . . . This quality of color, and light and mystery prevails throughout the house, leading to the repeated surprises in number, size, and location of the charming rooms.

In the early days, hall and staircase formed a perfect setting for gatherings of Fred's many bohemian friends, especially of the costume parties of the Visionists.

Although this was a reshaping of his indulgent parents' house, it was to be Fred's home until his death, and he took special interest in influencing the arrangement and appointments of the interior, especially that part of the interior that was to be his private lair. The little documentation that survives includes letters from Fred in Europe concerning primarily the decorative arts, furnishings, colors, materials, and such, but also criticizing early designs for his library and chamber or bedroom, a letter from Lewis to Fred about construction progress, and one from Beal. In late September and early October 1890 Fred wrote to the architect complaining about the location of the window in his bedroom, and about changes made to his placement of the entrance, partitions, and windows of his library. "My whole scheme . . . is utterly thrown out," he charged, and he would have to find new places for his favorite books. Beal quickly wrote back to reassure him that "most of the changes you mentioned have been carefully followed out." Fred was certainly calling the shots from abroad, and Beal seems to have been an extraordinarily accommodating designer, for he continues: "We now have your study arranged as you want it, with alcove, also the place for the bed [in his upper bedroom] is all right and closets are made on each side of the large window in each chamber." And finally:

“If you have any suggestions please be good enough to give them to me, for I shall be too glad to carry out any ideas you may have.” Lewis may have been the nominal client (Anna is never mentioned in the available documentation), but Fred was certainly the proactive one where his own accommodations were concerned.<sup>18</sup> As is often the case, notable results were the product of the interaction between a good architect and a client who knew what he wanted.

In the organization of Fred’s private domain Beal reacted creatively to his client’s exact directions. To reach it one climbed up the main stair to the first gallery then turned back across the hall beneath large windows past a reproduction of the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*. He entered Fred’s two-storied, self-contained sanctum through a small doorway into a suite totally separate from his parents’ private rooms on the other side of the house. It was a bibliophile’s secluded den. The visual richness of the staircase hall complex, the layering of spaces and levels, repeats itself here but in cozier dimensions, with the study studded with bookcases, alcoves, niches, recesses, nooks, changes in floor levels, hidden compartments let into the paneling, bric-a-brac, and so on, and a smaller, open stair that rises in two flights to a walkway in front of tiers of books that led to his bedroom. The ensemble was subtly belted with a miniature Parthenon frieze. It is impossible to photograph this interior adequately; one must lounge within it or wander through it. On the accessible level above is the “Colonial Room” off the staircase hall decked out with a Delft tile fireplace, where Fred kept his collection of early American furniture, and where he spent the greater part of his last years.

The imaginative play of variously changing levels that marks the more important spaces of the house echoes in a minor way in several smaller rooms that Jane White was surprised to find beyond the staircase hall. One enters each on a plane higher than the floor and steps down from an entrance podium lined with balustrades. Although Day seems to have preferred Balzac, traversing the interior of the Norwood residence reminds the visitor of Dickens’s description of Bleak House in Chapter 6 as “one of those delightfully irregular houses where you go up and down steps out of one room into another, and where you come upon more rooms when you think you have seen all there are.”

Only a series of skillfully drawn sections through the building could come near explaining its complex spatial relationships, but best of all is a visit. The house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and fortunately, as the headquarters of the Norwood Historical Society, it is open to the public. It deserves to be much better known.



### Notes

1. For Norwood and the Day house see Bryant Franklin Tolles, Jr., *Norwood: The Centennial History of a Massachusetts Town*, Norwood, Mass.: Norwood Printing Company, (1973), and Patricia J. Fanning, *Norwood: A History*, Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia, (2002).
2. For the Five Islands house see Patricia Berman, “F. Holland Day and His ‘Classical’ Models, Summer Camp,” *History of Photography* 18 (1994), 348-67, Patricia J. Fanning, *Through an Uncommon Lens: The Life and Photography of F. Holland Day*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008, Chapter 8; Libby Bischof and Susan Danly, *Maine Moderns: Art in Sequinland, 1900-1940*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. Ms Fanning’s cooperation has been indispensable in the preparation of this article. For Louis Chapell Newhall (1869-1925) see Henry F. Whitney and Elsie Rathburn Whitney, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects*, Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Co., 1956.
3. For various studies of Day’s life and work see Fanning, op. cit.; Estelle Jussim, *Slave to Beauty: The Eccentric Life and Controversial Career of F. Holland Day*, Boston: David R. Godine, 1981; Verna Posever Curtis, ed., *History of Photography* (Fall 1994) devoted to Day; and Verna Posever Curtis and Jane Van Nimmen, eds., *F. Holland Day: Selected Texts and Bibliography*, New York: G. K. Hall and Co., 1995.
4. Fanning, *Uncommon Lens*, 26. For the Visionists see Douglass Shand-Tucci, *Boston Bohemia, 1881-1900*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995, Chapter 10.
5. For information on the publishing house of Copland and Day and its catalogue see Joe Kraus, *Messrs. Copland and Day, 69 Cornhill, Boston, 1893-1899*, Philadelphia: McManus and Co., 1979.
6. Guiney to Day, 11 April 1889. Papers of Louise Imogen Guiney, Library of Congress Manuscripts Division.

7. Verna Posever Curtis, “Actors and Adolescents – The Idealized Eye of F. Holland Day,” in Pam Roberts, ed., *F. Holland Day*, Amsterdam: The Van Gogh Museum, 2000, 41.
8. F. Holland Day, “Art and the Camera,” as cited in Curtis and Nimmen, 42.
9. Until the 1970s Day’s contributions were largely forgotten in favor of Alfred Stieglitz’s founding of the Photo-Secession in 1902. He was brought back to history with Ellen Fritz Clattenburg’s 1975 catalogue of an exhibition of Day’s work she mounted at Wellesley College that year. See also the works cited in note 2 here.
10. Jane Felix (Mrs. Clarence H.) White in an unpublished memoir, as cited in Bischof and Danly, 159, and Fanning *Uncommon Lens*, passim.
11. Information on Beal from the files of the MIT Museum courtesy of Gary Van Zante, Curator of Architecture and Design.
12. Fanning, *Uncommon Lens*, Chapter 1.
13. This and following quotations from Fred and Lewis Day and the architect are from letters in the files of the Norwood Historical Society, quoted here by permission.
14. There is in the archive at Norwood a rough preliminary sketch of one of the half-timbered elevations that is more likely from Beal’s hand than Day’s.
15. Now propped up to keep it from sagging. In general the exterior of the house needs attention.
16. One immediately thinks of John Evans as the possible carver of such work, but Ann Clifford, expert on the man’s career, has no information about such a commission and thinks that at best it might have been the work of his firm.
17. I owe this identification to Lilian Armstrong.
18. In the archives of the Norwood Historical Society are many bills from workmen and furniture suppliers, as well as an 1893 inventory of the contents of the house, all of interest to students of the decorative arts.





William Merrit Chase, *Interior of the Artists' Studio* (also known as *The Tenth Street Studio*) 1880, oil on canvas. St. Louis Art Museum.



# “Shocking Scenes of Dissipation”

## ARTISTS’ STUDIOS AND CULTURAL BACKLASH IN THE GILDED AGE

KAREN ZUKOWSKI

In 1879 journalist John Moran described the newly-established studio of artist William Merritt Chase:

One is struck on entering by the restful sense of harmony in color, by the deep and mellow tone, by the apparently fortuitous arrangement of line, drapery and grouping, which never suggests awkwardness. You cannot tell, you do not want to tell, how the effect has been arrived at. It is there, and that is enough.<sup>1</sup>

In *Interior of the Artists’ Studio*, Chase portrays himself in his own studio, in a discussion about art, with a lady visitor. The artist leans forward and his dog puts his paw possessively on the lady’s dress. Both man and dog are self-assured, in easy intimacy with the visitor.

As soon as he returned to America after his training in Germany, Chase established a studio in the 10th Street Studio building, a bastion of the artworld. The studio was a storehouse of antique furniture, rich textiles, glowing brasswork, diverse bric-a-brac, and artworks – his own paintings and those by friends, as well as old masters he had collected. In this studio Chase sketched and painted, taught his students, conducted business with patrons, and held receptions and entertained countless visitors. His studio immediately became a flagship for the new generation of art and artists of Gilded Age America. Chase painted images of this space at least a dozen times in the 1880s.

In fact, a lavishly furnished studio was a marker of the new generation of American artists who were European-trained and cosmopolitan in outlook.<sup>2</sup> They established these studios in America and abroad, starting in the late 1870s. Unlike the prior generation of American artists who produced panoramic landscapes, ennobling portraiture and other extroverted artworks, this generation looked inward. They painted the mood of the landscape, the soul of their sitters, and still lifes that revealed the poetry of everyday objects. This generation

worked and interacted with each other indoors. Like Chase’s, these studios held far more than the utilitarian supplies and props needed to make art. And the artists proudly produced images of these evocative spaces.

Why were these studios so elaborate? In truth, only “artistic” studios could provide appropriate and sufficient surroundings for such a creative generation. The studios represented every facet of the artist. Studios demonstrated that artists were connoisseurs, gentlemen and ladies, hard-working craftsmen, and business people who knew how to make a deal. Most of all, studios showed that artists could harness creativity – they were magicians, concocting art out of the rarified air of studios. This was a process like alchemy that, as John Moran noted, should not be examined too closely.

But, over two days in January of 1896, Chase auctioned off the contents of his 10th Street studio and closed it for good.<sup>3</sup> Although he kept elaborate studios elsewhere, notably at his summer home near Shinnecock, on Long Island, he rarely painted the studio motif after this. Similarly, other artists increasingly ceased to paint images of their studios.

What had happened? In retrospect, it seems that a kind of cultural backlash had taken place against the idea of artists as alchemists. A new view had emerged, of the studio as a dangerous place, where uncontrollable forces lurked, especially unbridled sexual activity. Over a few short years, centering around 1895, a series of events occurred that planted seeds of mistrust in the public imagination. In the prior cultural climate, things that had been taken as evidence of divinely-inspired creativity suddenly became suspect. The result was that artists abandoned the motif of the studio.



Robert F. Blum, *My Studio* (also known as *Studio of Robert F. Blum*) 1883-1884. Pastel on paper. Cincinnati Art Museum.

### Paintings of Studios – Themes and Variations

From the late 1870s until the early 1890s, dozens of American artists depicted their studios. The artistic studio became a distinct theme, on view in prestigious venues such as the National Academy of Design, and in more avant-garde exhibitions, such as those of the Society of American Artists. Engravings and photographs of these paintings also appeared in the burgeoning illustrated magazines and newspapers.

Variations on the theme of the artistic studio can be detected. First among these is the depiction of the studio as a world apart, a place to contemplate beauty. Viewers entering this world are insulated from quotidian concerns. In these paintings the pure, formal qualities of objects are lovingly depicted: colorful textiles, the shine of reflective metals and highly-polished wood, the light cast by colored glass. Often, a woman is the centerpiece. Sometimes she is clothed (as in most of Chase's studio paintings), but sometimes she is nude.

Robert Blum's *My Studio*, a large-scale pastel of 1883-84, proclaims the studio as a workshop for aesthetic contemplation. This is an image about how to render lovely objects, as well as how to look at them. Blum celebrates his virtuoso handling of the difficult medium of pastel. This artwork is a portrait of many things: the patina on a bronze incense burner, the contrast between gilt-embroidered tigers on the dull-green ground of the portiere, a chalky-white Tang-style figure of a lady, a round blue bowl, the curves of cloth draped around a woman with a curved spine. Blum is portraying sensual color and texture. The woman's body is no more and no

less sensual than the blue jug; they are both beautiful objects. To underscore the point, Blum foregrounds the bentwood chair pulled up to an easel. The viewer is put in the position of the artist, surrounded by and depicting beauty.

The studio was also shown as a site of active creativity and collegial interactions. Many artistic studio paintings show the artist in serious conversation with visitors. In Chase's *Interior of the Artist's Studio*, the painter, palette in hand, pauses in his work to talk with the lady, surely about the artwork she holds in her hand. In other studio paintings, artists critique each other's works, converse over tea, or play music. In Stacey Tolman's *The Musicale of 1887*, a trio performs Haydn (the composer's name is visible on the cover of the sheet music). There is so much creativity in the charged atmosphere of this studio that it bubbles over into music-making.

Another theme within studio paintings captures the sense of mystery inherent in the process of artistic creation. In Henry Grinnell Thomson's *Chase's Tenth Street Studio* of 1881-1882 a large half-completed painting of the studio is the most prominent object depicted. This self-referential canvas is an eerie Alice-in-Wonderland subject. We cannot see the entire studio being depicted, so we must wait for the canvas to be finished for the intriguing room to be revealed.

Finally, a few paintings hint that the studio could be a site for challenging the rigid conventions that governed the relationships between the sexes. Rosalie Gill's *The New Model* of about 1884 shows a woman in street dress pausing as she enters an elaborately furnished studio.<sup>4</sup>



Her body leans against the doorframe and her fingertips rest against her cheek – this is a posture of thoughtfulness. She looks directly out of the canvas, as if to make an inquiry. If she is “the new model,” she must be interrogating the artist, who has hired her. This is a bold turn-around; the model examining the artist. With the back-story, the plot thickens. The artist, Rosalie Gill was a student of William Merritt Chase, who indeed conducted lessons in his 10<sup>th</sup> Street Studio, shown in Gill’s painting. Chase taught women during an era when the large numbers of women studying art threatened the male domination of the profession. So, the female student is depicting herself entering the realm of the master, in frank and direct terms. The painting stops this side of suggesting any improper relationship between artist and model, or student and teacher, but the canvas undeniably reveals an uncommon intimacy between the model and the painter.

The motif of the artistic studio showed various facets of the artist. The studio was a vessel of beautiful objects, a fit dwelling for an artist. The studio was a site of collegial creativity. The studio was a plausible site for the mysterious process of artistic creation. All these themes demonstrate that the studio is a place where the normal conventions of the Victorian world were suspended. The motif of the artistic studio established the new generation of American artists as creative geniuses, as alchemists, turning the leaden raw materials of paint and canvas, clay and marble, into the gold of art.

### The Events of 1895 and Thereabouts

That wonderful golden image held for a decade or so, but then it began to dull a bit, even tarnish. In fact, the events of the mid-1890s made some wonder whether or not the gold was genuine.

First, several works of art showing the nude became controversial.

In October of 1891 Augustus Saint-Gaudens’s *Diana* appeared atop the tower of Madison Square Garden, New York City’s premiere entertainment center.<sup>5</sup> The eighteen-foot tall statue was illuminated by electric spotlights, and it was the highest point on the New York skyline. Saint-Gaudens portrayed the figure nude, balanced provocatively on one toe, holding her bow and arrow up to make a shot, her drapery blown back behind her. The sculpture shows Diana the huntress, whose most famous prey was King Acteon, shot down after he witnessed Diana in one of her ritual purifying baths that restored her virginity. The statue thus shows a fearless virgin goddess carrying on her hunt high above the city. Newspapers reported nursemaids hustling their charges out of the park below the statue, as well as an increase in men lounging on benches gazing upwards. There were a few editorial grumblings about the appropriateness of the statue. A few realized that the head of Diana was modeled after an earlier bust of the goddess for which Saint-Gaudens’ mistress and model Davida Clark had posed. By then she had borne him a son, and Saint-Gaudens maintained them in their own household.



Stacy Tolman, *The Musicale*, 1887, oil on canvas. Brooklyn Museum.



Frederick William MacMonnies, *Bacchante and Infant Faun*, 1893-1894, bronze. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Frederick MacMonnies used Eugenia, a well-known Parisian model, for his statue *Bacchante and Infant Faun* completed in 1894.<sup>6</sup> The bronze was too realistic for some, who saw it not as an episode from Greek myth but

as a real woman celebrating drunkenness and nakedness and revelry. The statue was a gift to architect Charles McKim, who gave it to the recently-completed Boston Public Library, which he had designed. Harvard professor and tastemaker Charles Eliot Norton, along with the Women's Temperance Union, protested. In the resulting fallout, the gift was returned to McKim, who arranged for an enthusiastic Metropolitan Museum of Art to accept it, even amid protests in New York City from the American Purity League and the Social Reform League. Paris' Luxembourg Museum ordered a replica. Over these years, 1894-1897, the statue became a bone tugged back and forth between the forces for artistic freedom of expression and the forces for temperance and women's purity.

A second factor eroding the image of artists and their studios was a debate conducted in the media in the 1890s about the imminent decline of modern civilization.<sup>7</sup> American author Brooks Adams published *The Law of Civilization and Decay* in 1895. They argued that the materialism and corruption of the modern age was the result of the cyclical nature of civilizations, claiming that the world was in a state of decline. The debate was carried into the sphere of the arts by the publication in English in 1895 of Max Nordau's book *Degeneracy*. Nordau blended Darwinian evolution, theories of criminology, and the nascent science of psychology to question the nature of genius. He believed that brilliance was merely uncontrolled neural activity, and that genius was a shade away from neurosis. Inspiration must be tempered with discipline and acceptance of social order. Artists *might* produce work that bettered society, but some art was

dangerous, symptomatic of genius run amok. Decadent art, of course, could lead society astray.

As if to confirm the theories of cultural decay, in May 1895 Oscar Wilde was convicted in a London courtroom of "gross indecency," the legal charge for the crime of homosexuality.<sup>8</sup> Wilde was sentenced to two years' hard labor, which broke his spirit and his health. The event had repercussions in America. Wilde had spent most of 1882 here on a cross-country tour, explaining how the new artistic ideas could benefit Americans, especially as they went about decorating their homes. His stature in the literary, theatrical and visual arts was widely acknowledged, and he had many friends in the United States. Utterly condemned by the press on two continents, he became a social pariah. His conviction cast a pall over all artistic enterprises in America.

A third factor came into play. Americans began to be suspicious of a central practice of the new art – the presence of nude female model in the studio. Saint-Gaudens's long-term affair with Davida Clark, his mistress/model, has already been mentioned. In fact, there was a small faction of New York artists who, in their own words, chose to "do as we darn please."<sup>9</sup> Their activities often took place in studios, or places called "studios," and involved young models, actresses and others in the *demi-monde*. This circle of artists centered on Stanford White, the architect, and included Saint-Gaudens and painter Thomas Wilmer Dewing. During the late 1880s the so-called "Sewer Club" met at the all-male Benedict Building which had many studios, and later at the Holbein studio building. Some knew that in the tower of Madison Square Garden (the pedestal for Saint-Gaudens's *Diana*) were "studios" used by White to entertain; among his guests were the teenage girls who became his lovers, including Evelyn Nesbit. White's affairs, the meetings of the Sewer Club, and the illicit liaisons other artists conducted were certainly clandestine, but it is known that Saint-Gaudens's and Dewing's wives, anyway, were aware of some of what was going on. Exactly who knew what, when, will probably never be pieced together, but this all must have sown seeds of suspicion beyond the limited family circles.

An etching by Anders Zorn of 1897 showing Saint-Gaudens and a model in his studio is especially revealing. Zorn apparently completed the etching plate on the spot in Saint-Gaudens's studio, while the model rested. There is no evidence that Saint-Gaudens and the model, recently identified as Hattie Anderson, were ever lovers, but Zorn certainly has caught some



Anders Zorn, *Saint-Gaudens and his Model*, 1897, etching and drypoint. Metropolitan Museum of Art



of the innuendo circulating around the artist. Even though Saint-Gaudens called it a “masterpiece,” it was more or less suppressed by his family, who wrote his official, sanitized biography.<sup>10</sup>

To make matters worse, the tabloid press began to present evidence of the base – even bestial – nature of artists. On May 20, 1895, Henry W. Poor, a Wall Street banker, gave a dinner on the occasion of the 10th wedding anniversary of John Elliott Cowdin, a polo player.<sup>11</sup> The dinner was held in the studio of portrait photographer James Breese. Tellingly, Cowdin’s wife was absent. The majority of the guests were artists, and the only women guests were models. The souvenir menu was headed with a Latin inscription, *IN MEMORIAM DECENNII SUB JOGO HODIE PERFECTI*. This was a double-entendre that could be translated as either celebrating the marriage bond or disparaging the bondage of marriage. After the typical over-the-top Gilded Age banquet, a giant pie was brought into the studio and cut with a silver knife. Out popped a 16-year old girl, model Susie Johnson, wearing a filmy black negligee and a stuffed blackbird on her head. The guests recognized their cue and struck up “Sing a Song of Sixpence” as more champagne flowed.

By October of 1895 this same Susie Johnson had gone missing, and the *New York World* ran an exposé of the so-called Pie Girl dinner. Now, the article said, “the amusements of wealthy men-about-town are beyond the reach of police or of municipal reformers. Safely screened in the luxurious studios of artist friends, the shocking scenes of dissipation are carefully kept from the knowledge of the public.”<sup>12</sup> The article speculated that Susie was even then hidden away, against her will, in some luxurious artist’s studio.

Over the course of the 1890s, then, a cascading set of incidents cast suspicion on artists and their studios. Artworks depicting the nude became controversial. New theories posited that artistic brilliance was dangerously close to pathology. Some believed that the practice of using nude models inevitably corrupted artists’ sexual and moral character. All together, the standing of artists and their artworks were questioned by society.

### **Backlash: The Carmencita Episode**

This climate of rumor and suspicion produced backlash. One instrument of the reaction was a dancer named Carmen Dauset, who used the stage name Carmencita. She became a lightning rod attracting the attention of both bohemian artists and those who questioned their lifestyle.

In the spring of 1890, J. Carroll Beckwith hired Carmencita to dance in his studio for an audience of the artworld, at midnight, presumably after her stage performance.<sup>13</sup> The premise was innocent enough – it was a surprise birthday present for his wife. Other performances in Chase’s studio followed, these organized by John Singer Sargent and Chase himself, as entertainment for an art crowd that included Isabella Stewart Gardner, whom Sargent hoped might be interested in his resulting portrait of the dancer. Both



Frederick or Mary MacMonnies, *Atelier at Giverny*, 1896-1897, oil canvas. Terra Foundation for American Art.

artists produced images of Carmencita, so her performances also acted as a kind of sitting. But, at least one magazine writer thought Carmencita’s dances in studios were inappropriate. It is important to realize that in any context Carmencita would have called up references to Carmen, the heroine of Bizet’s opera, a well-known symbol of lawless passion. Undoubtedly the writer for *Town Topics* connected Carmen and Carmencita and artists and studios, and reacted this way: “On stage, the torsal shivers and upheavals indulged in by Carmencita might be allowed to pass for art, but in the privacy of a richly furnished room, with innocent eyes to view her, nothing but the fatal earthiness of the woman’s performance could make any impression.”<sup>14</sup>

Then, in July of 1894 Charles Dudley Warner’s novel *The Golden House* began its serialization in *Harper’s New*



William Merritt Chase, *A Friendly Call*, 1895, oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art.

*Monthly Magazine*.<sup>15</sup> The book opens with a performance, around midnight, of a Spanish dancer in a famous New York City studio. A crowd of the fashionable experienced “the titillating feeling of adventure, of a moral hazard bravely incurred in the duty of knowing life, penetrating to its core.”<sup>16</sup> The hero of the book, Jack Delancy, is a likeable fellow who, over the course of the novel, almost comes to ruin over money and women, until he regains his moral compass – his wife, Edith. Tellingly, she would not accompany Jack to the studio to see the Spanish dancer – she felt the performance was not “under proper auspices.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, the studio and the dancer stand as a symbol of the beginning of Jack’s downward slide.

So, the “Carmencita episode” played out over the period of 1890 to 1895. Artists staged events for multiple purposes: innocent entertainment, aesthetic inspiration, to impress a potential patron. But those events were replayed by cultural commentators under unflattering limelights.

### Later Studio Paintings

Was there true cultural backlash, or are there other explanations? Reporting on Susie Johnson and Carmencita could be characterized as fabricated sensationalism designed to sell newspapers. Perhaps editorializing about Oscar Wilde was just a convenient ploy to convince readers that their local paper stood ready

to defend what we would now call “family values.”

But how did artists respond to all this publicity?

Notably, artists did not abandon the artistic studio itself. Although Chase sold the contents of his famous 10<sup>th</sup> Street studio in 1896, he did not give up elaborately furnished studios altogether.<sup>18</sup> By 1897 he had re-established himself in several studios in New York (if less elaborately furnished ones). He kept a studio in his summer home in Shinnecock on Long Island, in Philadelphia where he taught, and in a fifteenth-century Tuscan villa he purchased in 1910. The roster of artists with elaborate studios is long: Sargent kept one in London until at least 1920, and in 1924 painter Gari Melchers built a studio furnished with his own work and collections of furniture and antiques.<sup>19</sup>

What artists did change was the way they depicted their studios. First, there were far, far fewer studio paintings in this era. And among the ones that did exist, there are similarities.

There are many perfectly respectable self-portraits set in studios. The studio of Mary Fairchild MacMonnies is depicted in *Atelier at Giverny* of about 1897. The canvas shows a maid and a governess quietly mending, while two-year-old Berthe looks out from her highchair. Evidence of the painter’s productivity and success hangs on the wall, including studies for her mural, *Primitive Woman*, executed in the Woman’s Building of the 1893



World's Columbian Exhibition. Scholars have recently debated the authorship of this canvas; it may have been painted by Mary Fairchild MacMonnies – or her husband Frederick MacMonnies, who was working as a painter as well as a sculptor during this period.<sup>20</sup> As discussed above, just a few years earlier Frederick MacMonnies's sculpture *Bacchante and Infant Faun* had caused a scandal. Whichever artist produced the canvas, the point is the same. This is an image of prosperous bourgeois family, of respectable artistic domesticity.

The nature of Chase's studio paintings also changed. *A Friendly Call* of 1895 is set in his Shinnecock studio, which was part of a summer home designed for Chase and his family by White. Chase was the magnet that attracted hundreds of budding artists to Long Island each summer from 1891 until 1902, to attend his Shinnecock School of Art.<sup>21</sup> In *A Friendly Call*, the woman at right is dressed in an at-home gown; this is Mrs. Chase. She receives a lady caller, whose status is evident from her dress; she still wears her veiled hat and carries a parasol. The caller leans towards Mrs. Chase, her gloved fingers splayed on the couch to emphasize her point. Mrs. Chase reacts with concern. Is this, in fact, a friendly call? In the studio, a proper, etiquette-bound encounter plays out, rigid postures maintained by both ladies.

These images are a far cry from the 1880s images of studios, with their arrays of sensuously beautiful objects, of music-making artists, of sexually charged images of models.

So, in the end, the artists of the Gilded Age realized that their art was dependent upon pure aesthetic excellence for its effect. Unlike the art of the previous generation, the

new art had few moorings in history or the glorious New World landscape. The new art rarely proclaimed ennobling sentiments and often maintained only the thinnest of narrative threads. The premise of the new generation and the new art – “art for art's sake” – was too important to endanger by associating it with sites where artistic genius could so easily mutate into messy indiscretion.

The next generation of artists rejected the studios of their fathers, sensing the dangerous associations of artistic studios. Painter Robert Henri, in a 1915 speech before the Art Students League asked, “Why should a studio be a boudoir, a dream of oriental splendor...and rarely a good and convenient workshop for the kind of thought and work that the making of a good picture demands?”<sup>22</sup> Henri and other realists did not want to be represented by “a boudoir” – they wanted a workshop! The era of artistic studios and studio paintings was over.



This article is adapted from a paper given by the author at a symposium entitled “Artists in their Studios,” co-sponsored by Archives of American Art and the Graduate Center, City University of New York, September 5, 2007. Both article and paper are based on the author's dissertation, “Creating Art and Artists: Late Nineteenth-Century Artists' Studios,” for the City University of New York, 1999.

## Notes

1. John Moran, “Studio-Life In New York,” *Art Journal* (New York) 5 (1879), 344.
2. The phenomenon of “artistic” studios is examined in the author's “Creating Art and Artists: Late Nineteenth-Century American Artists' Studios” (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1999).
3. Barbara Dayer Gallati, *William Merritt Chase* (New York and Washington: Harry N. Abrams and National Museum of American Art, 1995), 49-50.
4. The title is confirmed in the catalog entry on the work. See Sona K. Johnston, *American Paintings 1750-1900, from the Collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art* (Baltimore Museum of Art, 1983), 68-70.
5. John H. Dryfhout, *The Work of Augustus Saint-Gaudens* (Hanover, N.H. and London: University Press of New England, 1982), 194. See also pages 205-210 for information on the second version of the statue, which was slightly smaller and which was erected in November 1893. For information on the cultural impact of *Diana* see Elizabeth Lee, “The Electrified Goddess: Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Stanford White and *Diana* at Madison Square Garden,” *Nineteenth Century* 31, 1 (Spring 2011) and Burke Wilkinson, *Uncommon Clay: The Life and Works of Augustus Saint-Gaudens* (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 209-218.
6. For the reception of MacMonnies's “Bacchante,” see Wayne Craven, *Sculpture in America* (Newark, Del., and New York: University of Delaware Press and Cornwall Books, 1984), 423-4.
7. For theories of cultural decay see Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 80-86.
8. For Wilde's influence in America see Karen Zukowski, *Creating the Artful Home: The Aesthetic Movement in America* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith Publishers, 2006), 30-34 and 158-159. For his downfall see Burns, 89-100.
9. For information on the Sewer Club see Susan A. Hobbs and Barbara Dayer Gallati, *The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing* (Washington and London: Brooklyn Museum and Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 9-10 and 68-69.
10. For more on the etching and the suppression of it after Saint-Gaudens's death by his family, see William E. Hagans, “Saint-Gaudens, Zorn and the Goddesslike Miss Anderson,” *American Art* 16, 2 (Summer, 2002), especially 85-87.
11. The Pie Girl dinner and its aftermath are described in Burns, 86-88, and Paul Baker, *Stanny: The Gilded Life of Stanford White* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 250-251.
12. “The Story of an Artist's Model ... A New York ‘Trilby,’” *New York World*, October 13, 1895, 29; quoted in Burns, 87.
13. John Davis describes Carmencita's studio performances in “Our United Happy Family: Artists in the Sherwood Studio Building, 1880-1900,” *Archives of American Art Journal*, 36, 3-4 (1996), 6-7.
14. Quoted in Trevor J. Fairbrother, “Notes on John Singer Sargent in New York, 1888-1890,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 22, 4 (1982), 31.
15. Zukowski, “Creating Art and Artists,” n. 161.
16. Charles Dudley Warner, *The Golden House*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1895; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint, 1969), 1.
17. Warner, 13.
18. For a discussion of Chase's later studios see Gallati, *William Merritt Chase*, 50-53.
19. Zukowski, “Creating Art and Artists,” 95.
20. The attribution issue is discussed in the catalog entry published by the Terra Foundation, owner of the canvas. See <http://collections.terraamericanart.org> ... , accessed February 19, 2012.
21. For the Shinnecock School of Art, see Ronald G. Pisano, *William Merritt Chase: A Leading Spirit in American Art* (Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, 1983), 121-135.
22. Quoted in Christopher Gray, “Portrait of the Artists,” *Avenue Magazine*, February 1988, 110-1.



Glessner House Parlor. Photo by William Tyre. Courtesy of Glessner House Museum.



# William Pretyman, Designer

JOHN WATERS

On June 19, 1892, Frances Glessner wrote in her journal, “Mr. Pretyman called yesterday to consult about paper for the rooms.”<sup>1</sup> The result of this call was the creation of an elaborate stenciled wallcovering for the parlor of her house. But this was not just *any* house. Indeed, it was one of the most remarkable residences in America – H. H. Richardson’s innovative edifice on Prairie Avenue, Chicago, designed in 1885-86 for the farm machinery magnate John Jacob Glessner and his wife. With its exaggeratedly rough stone, minimal ornamentation, and strongly horizontal façade, it looked like no other. It was not universally admired at the time; sleeping-car tycoon George Pullman, whose mansion was across the street, remarked, “I do not know what I have ever done to have that thing staring me in the face every time I go out of my door.” But today it is considered a masterpiece of American architecture.

The house, a National Historic Landmark, still stands at 1800 South Prairie Avenue and is under the stewardship of Glessner House Museum. For decades its parlor wallcovering was obscured by layers of mid-twentieth century paint. The room’s recent restoration, including the recreation of the wallcovering, has revealed a significant example of Aesthetic Movement design. It has also spurred research into the life and work of the wallcovering’s designer, artist and decorator William Pretyman.<sup>2</sup>

As it turns out, Pretyman was the designer of a number of significant interiors in the Midwest during the 1880s and 1890s, although his work has largely been lost to demolition or remodeling. In addition to residential design, such as he did for the Glessners, Pretyman’s work also included public spaces, such as church interiors and the decoration of prominent spaces for buildings designed by his close friend John Wellborn Root of the architectural firm Burnham and Root. In fact, the one interior of his known to survive intact is a commercial one, the banking room for Burnham and Root’s Society for Savings Building in Cleveland.

William Pretyman was born in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, England, in 1849,<sup>3</sup> the son of the Rev. John R. and Amelia Pretyman. John Radclyffe Pretyman,

vicar of St. Mary’s Church, Aylesbury, at the time of William’s birth, was a member of a family that included a number of Anglican clerics. The elder Pretyman was an author as well as a clergyman, writing on church and social issues. While nothing is known of William’s formal education, it seems likely, given his family background, that it was a respectable one.

William began traveling the world at an early age. By the mid-1870s, according to poet Harriet Monroe, who would later become a good friend, the artist was in Egypt when he met a young woman named Jenny Remington, the daughter of Samuel Remington, son of the founder of the Remington Arms Company. William and Jenny fell in love. However, Monroe writes, her parents objected, “...not only because of her youth and his poor prospects, but they felt a certain British stubbornness and intolerance which they feared would not bend to an American girl’s habits of mind.” A separation ensued, and it would be seven years before the couple married. During those years Pretyman traveled, and for a period represented the British government in Borneo, where he reportedly performed feats of great heroism.<sup>4</sup>

By 1881 Pretyman was in America. In 1882 a *New York Times* article noted that he had settled in Albany, New York, and paired him with architect R. W. Gibson, a graduate of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts: “Mr. William Pretyman has already done a good deal of decorative work



Glessner House wallcovering detail.



Society for Savings, interior, Banking Room. Burnham and Root, architects. William Pretzman, interior designer, 1887-1890. Historic American Buildings Survey.

in Boston and Albany. He is one of the much traveled Britons, and has made with a practiced and rapid hand a long list of water-colors during journeys in the Orient and the Malay Archipelago.<sup>5</sup>

On June 26, 1883, Pretzman married Jenny Remington at All Saints Chapel, Larchmont, New York.<sup>6</sup> Harriet Monroe, in her autobiography, remembered the young Jenny Pretzman as the most beautiful woman she had ever known, “something angelic from within shown in her radiant smile and lustrous dark eyes.”<sup>7</sup> Settling in Albany after the wedding, their daughter Margaret Amelia was born in 1884.<sup>8</sup>

While Pretzman’s decorative work from this period has yet to be traced, we do have a significant example of his figurative artwork in a portrait of New Yorker Walter Howe.<sup>9</sup> The painting, signed “Albany – W. Pretzman – 1885,” shows the redheaded Howe sitting in a high-backed chair. The chair is upholstered in a reddish-brown material, and Howe is wearing a heavy brown fur-collared coat. The chair back and fur coat work together to diminish the depth of the space rendered. In fact, Howe’s face appears to pop from a single plane of texture and color – created by the chair back’s plant-like pattern and Howe’s fur collar, intensified by the portrait’s limited red-brown palette. The portrait is saved from being simply a decorative exercise, however, by the intensity of Howe’s blue eyes and the carefully chosen orientation of the chair’s back. By exposing the edge of the back and its over-sized upholstery nails, Pretzman has given the plant-like decorative work surrounding Howe a clearly identifiable source in the chair’s upholstery.

By 1887 the Pretzmans had moved to Chicago, where they lived in a “roomy old boarding house” at 15 Walton Place (now 18 West Walton Street).<sup>10</sup> Here the Pretzmans

met and became friends of Harriet Monroe, who lived nearby with her family. The Pretzmans’ choice to move to Chicago may have been based on both practical and family considerations. Jenny’s aunt Mary Carver was married to Levi Z. Leiter, former partner of Marshall Field and one of the richest men in Chicago.<sup>11</sup> While the Leiters had given up permanent residence in Chicago earlier the 1880s, this connection would likely have given the Pretzmans entrée into the upper echelons of Chicago society. After moving to Chicago, it may have been through Monroe that Pretzman became a close friends of her brother-in-law, John Wellborn Root.

In 1888 the *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean* described Pretzman’s studio in the Bay State Building at the corner of State and Randolph Streets. According to the newspaper article, the studio formed “a perfect oasis in the dus[t]y, busy shopping Sahara of the business part of town.” Its reception room was “filled with curios and bits of old furniture picked up all over the

world.”<sup>12</sup> As Doreen Bolger Burke has pointed out, the use of the studio as a means of display became more common during the Aesthetic period.<sup>13</sup> Indeed a “new type of artist, the artist-decorator, emerged, soon to become active beyond his own specialized milieu.”<sup>14</sup> While we do not have record of specific societies and organizations to which Pretzman belonged, he was clearly a man who was very much a part of the social world, interacting with potential patrons and taking opportunities to discuss artistic concepts with them.

Pretzman’s own residence fitted the aesthetic-movement model as well. In 1888 Burnham and Root designed a house for the Pretzmans in the newly developed Chicago suburb of Edgewater. The first floor of



Society for Savings, wallcovering detail. Interior designer, William Pretzman, 1890. Photo by Jim Morrisette.



the two-and-a-half-story house was built of brick, while the frame second and attic stories were sheathed to give the appearance of half timbering infilled with plaster. The plaster infill was covered with patterns undoubtedly designed, and possibly executed, by Pretzman himself. "Mr. William Prettyman's [*sic*] cottage at Edgewater... is like an old English house in Lincolnshire. Its cross-timbered walls are of yellow plaster, worked into a pattern where Tudor roses largely figure."<sup>15</sup> While living in Edgewater, the Pretzmans' two sons, Maurice William and Franklyn Remington, were born, Maurice on August 12, 1889, and Franklyn on February 17, 1891.<sup>16</sup>

In this house, on Chicago's far north side, Monroe feared the Pretzmans "lived too much apart from the world."<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, she remembered:

Their home was unlike any other; its two story studio, full of precious old masters and other heirlooms, was dear to me as the most beautiful room I had ever seen, and they invited me often for overnight and weekends. Their talk there took high and deep ranges; my mind was opening to many aspects of life and thought.<sup>18</sup>

Writer Maud Howe Elliott also described her association with the house:

As soon as they had moved into their new home, these generous people invited us to share it with them ... To reach the great living room two stories high we went down a flight of stairs. In one corner stood the table spread for dinner, in another Pretzman's easel and drawing stand, opposite were Jennie Pretzman's grand piano, her work basket, and bookcase. There was an enormous open fireplace where logs of silver birch blazed and crackled on a pair of ancient andirons.<sup>19</sup>

Another important guest was English artist and designer Walter Crane. In 1891-92 Crane and his wife made a nine month journey across America that would take them to Boston, Chicago, California, Florida and New York. In mid-December the Cranes left Boston for Chicago, stopping overnight at Niagara Falls.

Leaving Niagara in the morning, we arrived at Chicago at nine at night, and were met by our host, Mr. William Pretzman, an Englishman, who lived about seven miles out, at Edgewater. Mr. Pretzman had been settled there some time, and had married himself a New York lady and had built himself a charming house and studio on the lake shore. He was a decorative artist, and I had done some designs for panels in various schemes of decoration he had in hand, while I was in England. He and his charming wife now welcomed us in the most hospitable way into their home so that we had an English welcome in the great Western city instead of the cold comfort of an hotel. The Pretzmans even had English servants, which were very rare in America. We spent Christmas at Edgewater and kept it up with masquerading in old-fashioned style.<sup>20</sup>

A block north of the Pretzman House in Edgewater was the Episcopal Church of the Atonement. The family's involvement with the church began shortly after its founding on June 17, 1888; by August of that year the Pretzmans had become members. First meeting in a commercial hall, the congregation soon began the process

of building itself a permanent home. Pretzman was on the building committee and is given credit in church histories for architect Henry Ives Cobb's invitation to present plans for the new church. Cobb's design was accepted and, as early church records state, "Mr. Prettyman [*sic*] was very active in forwarding the church building, and himself designed and executed the very fine mural decoration on the chancel end and side walls of the church."<sup>21</sup> The edifice was built in the style of an Early English parish church, with randomly laid, rough-cut red sandstone walls and a massive stone tower on the northwest corner. Unfortunately nothing remains of Pretzman's decoration, as the church was completely remodeled in 1919-20. The only clue we have to the appearance of his work is a photograph of the church's main altar taken between 1912 and 1919. Portions of stencil work appear on the east wall behind the altar and reredos.<sup>22</sup> What we can see of the design is an interpretation of Gothic motifs including geometric patterns at the base and stylized floral patterns surrounding the window above.

It is not known why Pretzman preferred Cobb to his friend John Wellborn Root as designer of the church, but Pretzman's work on Cobb's Perry Smith house may indicate a connection between the two. The Smith House, situated on the northwest corner of Astor and Schiller Streets, was built in 1887. In this house Pretzman collaborated with another English artist, John Elliott. Pretzman first became aware of Elliott's work while dining at the home of dry goods merchant Potter Palmer and his wife, society leader Bertha Honoré Palmer. In the dining room of the Palmers' Lake Shore Drive mansion (also designed by Cobb), he admired the ceiling and frieze painted by Elliott.<sup>23</sup> The work so impressed Pretzman that by early 1888 he had persuaded Elliott to come from Rome to Chicago to work with him. But the partnership would only last eighteen months. As Maud Elliott remembered years later,

Among the compositions of the time is the Progress of Love, a series of decorative panels painted for the house of Mr. Perry Smith. Pretzman designed the room in Adam style, while Jack [Elliott] painted panels under Pretzman's eye. I also remember a large decorative panel of Fortune and have a faint memory of several other canvases, executed under the lash of Pretzman's strong will and finished little to Jack's satisfaction. The two men did the utmost to make the partnership work but after more than a year of earnest effort they both realized that they could not work together.<sup>24</sup>

Affirming Monroe's story of Pretzman's time in Borneo, Maud Elliott recounted:

Pretzman had been an adventurous youth. He had gone out to Borneo as British Representative and single handed had established order in this wild corner of the earth. His experience with the head hunters of Borneo developed the aggressive side of the man. He was first of all a soldier and administrator. Jack [Elliott] was a sensitive artist with more of poetry than of business in his makeup. He wanted to serve and help Pretzman, but he was paralyzed by the very weight and intensity of the other man's personality.... But however much they might

disagree about work in the studio, they were in sympathy in the pursuit of Beauty. Long walks hunting for shells along Lake Michigan and over the prairies in search of wild flowers on Sundays and holidays did much to smooth out the misunderstandings of working days at the studio.<sup>25</sup>

On Lake Shore Drive, at the corner of Schiller Street, a block west of the Perry Smith house, stood the home of Franklin and Emily MacVeagh. The house was built in 1886-87 to a design by Boston architect H. H. Richardson. By January 1888, Pretzman's involvement in the interior decoration of the house is recorded.<sup>26</sup> On the first floor his work included the dining room, where large curving garlands of acanthus leaves circle the upper portion of the room. Pretzman demonstrates his understanding of the context for his work by scaling the garlands to compete with the heavy furniture in the room and the tapestries that cover much of the wall surface. Along with his work in the dining room, he wrote specifications for the drawing room decoration and acted as contractor for other rooms.<sup>27</sup>

In 1892 the MacVeaghs called on Richardson's successor firm to build out the third floor of their house as a music room. As noted in the press at the time:

Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge are completing a beautiful music room in the residence of Franklin MacVeagh on Lake Shore drive. When Mr. Richardson built the house this was left unfinished. It will occupy the whole top floor of the house being about 22 x 45 feet. The walls will be beautifully decorated with painted panels and the pilasters and ceilings will also be painted under the supervision of William Prettyman [sic]. The cost is placed at \$10,000.<sup>28</sup>

For this dramatic space, under the house's sloping roof and overlooking Lake Michigan, Pretzman looked to the French Renaissance for inspiration. Strap-work patterns filled the coffered ceiling panels and balcony parapet. To reinforce the French allusion, a pattern of fleurs-de-lis flanked the monumental fireplace at the north end of the room. In this room the scale of the decorative elements is modulated from the larger-scale coffered ceiling with its prominent modillion cornice down to the more intimately scaled painted panels which surround the room at seating level.

Frances Glessner noted in her journal entry for February 27, 1887: "Friday I went to meet my committee on Design at the Dec. Arts rooms [at the Art Institute of Chicago]. I invited Mrs. (Ellen) Henrotin to meet us – she not only did so but invited her whole committee and Mr. and Mrs. Pretzman to go too. I was much annoyed. Mr. P. is an English artist who has just come here – very intelligent and apparently refined."<sup>29</sup> Though the Pretzmans do not appear to have been a part of the Glessners' immediate social circle, they would likely have become familiar with the artist and his work through mutual acquaintance with the MacVeaghs, as well as John and Maud Elliott.<sup>30</sup>

Compared with the spaces Pretzman designed for the



William Pretzman, *Portrait of Walter Howe*, watercolor on paper. Courtesy of Ann Mandeville Howe, Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

MacVeagh House, the Glessner parlor, at 18 feet by 20 feet, is a relatively intimate room, where the wallcovering is visible close up. The design Pretzman created for the Glessners is an intricate one, heavily influenced by William Morris. It is made up of sets of mirrored birds, one set with their bodies facing toward each other, the other facing away, a common motif of the period. Between the birds are vegetal forms including what appear to be abstract seedpods. Movement is implied by all the forms, from the intertwining garlands to the birds whose bodies face each other but whose heads face the opposite direction. This motif can be found in several William Morris designs, particularly the Strawberry Thief. Especially significant is the similarity with Morris's Peacock and Dragon design, since the Glessners used this pattern for portieres between the parlor and living hall. These portieres would have been in place when Pretzman visited the house in 1892. Clearly Pretzman would have sensed the Glessners' interest in Morris's work and his design seems to have taken that into account.

The recent recreation of the room's wallcovering by Denver-based Grammar of Ornament has thrown light on his process of production. Examination of surviving fragments has revealed that each panel of wallcovering was created in place on the walls of the parlor. The base for the wallcovering was coarse burlap, covered with sizing and grey paint. A layer of silver metallic paint then covered the entire panel and gold metallic paint was



painted over the silver in a mottled fashion. A dark violet paint was then stenciled to create a base for the copper metallic design, producing an overall reddish copper color. A second stencil was used for the detail and silver metallic paint was finally added by hand for highlights.<sup>31</sup> The medium and technique employed by Pretymán accentuated the sense of movement in the design. The wallcovering's reflective quality would have worked well both by day with the south light which entered through the room's three windows and by night reflecting the light from the room's Morris-designed sconces. The mottled quality of the application of color to the burlap would have enhanced the sense of fabric. The attention to the surface qualities of the wallcovering, such as the coarse burlap texture and the shimmering metallic paint, all reflect qualities of Aesthetic Movement design.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to the Church of the Atonement, Pretymán provided decoration for two churches in the Prairie Avenue vicinity near the Glessner house. In 1888, he designed windows for the newly constructed St. Paul's Universalist Church at 3007 South Prairie Avenue. The same year he designed an extensive decorative program for the Second Presbyterian Church at 1936 South Michigan Avenue. Here curvilinear plant-like forms, which cover much of the surface of the interior, are contrasted with more rectilinear pattern in the spandrel below the clerestory windows and the diagonal repetition of discrete plant-like patterns in the west end of the church.

The whole interior glows with tender tints, which melt into each other like the blending hues of an opal.... Nothing in the whole beautiful interior is finer than the Gothic design, entirely painted by hand, which enriches the spandrels of the nave arches. It is at once bold and tender, rich in color, and as original in design as an artist working in the period of the late twelfth century could afford to make it. Above this there is the ornamentation of the clerestory in blue, brown, and gold delicately combined, and again over the clerestory a piece of cunningly-planned scroll work which marries the rich, tender colors of the new decoration with the harsh tones of the glass, which is of the inferior quality of twenty years ago.<sup>34</sup>

At Second Presbyterian Church Pretymán interpreted two-dimensional Gothic imagery in a fashion similar to his work at the Church of the Atonement. Particularly prominent in the photograph are what appear to be circular garlands of abstracted floral

decoration. This type of decoration is similar to the acanthus garlands seen in the MacVeagh House dining room, though of a more abstracted form, as is appropriate to the larger space. We also see this sort of circular decoration in Pretymán's design for the banking room of the Society for Savings Building.

The banking room of the Society for Savings Building on Cleveland's Public Square is the only Pretymán interior known to have survived relatively unaltered since its creation. It is one of several spaces Pretymán designed in buildings by the architectural firm Burnham and Root. His work on the banking room was not completed until 1890, but the planning of the building was under way by November 1887, not long after the Pretymáns arrived in Chicago.<sup>35</sup> The prominence of the space may have led Burnham and Root to engage a decorative consultant early in the design process.

The room fills much of the first floor of the building. The large rectangular space is broken into three sections



MacVeagh House ballroom, Chicago, Illinois, 1892. William Pretymán, interior designer. Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.

by two rows of free-standing columns carrying the inner walls of a light well above. In the center a large continuous teller's counter forms a rectangular enclosure that extends from the larger central section of the room into the smaller sections flanking it. All of this leads to a more complex space than a simple rectangular room, but the complexity is rational and is clearly derived from the building's overall form. Pretzman adds to this complexity by using different patterns in separate zones of the walls. The banking room's walls and ceiling are densely covered with stylized garlands in shades of gold on fields of green and red. The repetition of the garland patterns creates discrete sections on the room's surfaces, but the warm tone of the garlands gives those surfaces a unified texture.

As noted in the *Chicago Tribune*,

The banking-room, which is the chief feature of the interior, is noble and dignified in its proportions, thus offering an admirable opportunity to the decorative artist, William Pretzman, also of this city. Mr. Pretzman has used much yellow in its color scheme, and the great room is like a golden burst of sunlight. Yet the yellows are not obtrusive; they do not glare; they are softened and toned by the varied play of kindred colors upon the central motive. The rendering of the melody is by no means monotonous, although true to its key; and the effect of the whole is beautifully joyous and serene.<sup>36</sup>

Set amid Pretzman's wall decorations were two paintings by Walter Crane. Well-known as an illustrator of children's books as well as for his paintings and design work, his theme for the panels in the banking room was, appropriately, Aesop's fable "The Goose That Laid the Golden Eggs."

In 1890 Pretzman provided decoration for retail spaces in the Reliance Building at the southwest corner of Washington and State Streets in Chicago, which was being designed by Burnham and Root. As described in the *Chicago Tribune*,

The mural and ceiling decorations have been intrusted [*sic*] to William Pretzman of Chicago, who, in many private houses in this city and New York, in the superb banking-room of the Cleveland Society for Savings, and in numerous other works, has proved himself a decorative designer and painter of preeminent ability, prepared for his profession by exhaustive study and thorough training. Mr. Pretzman has studied his profession in all parts of the world and in all its historic aspects; the decorative art of India and Persia is as familiar to him as that of France, the medieval Gothic style as the modern English pre-Raphaelite; and, as a result, his work possesses that perfect harmony and consistency which can come only from perfect knowledge.

Love of color, with a fine instinct of its rightful use is perhaps the distinguishing trait of this artist. He is not in the least afraid of color, and yet in the splendor of gorgeous hues which he often gives there is never a discordant note. In his artistic philosophy there is no trace of the doctrine which has been followed of late in certain prominent places in Chicago that the solution of a difficulty lies in the avoidance of it, that beautiful decoration lies not in a royally generous use of color, but in its banishment. In decoration nothing can be worse than lack of color except false use of it. Its right use undoubtedly requires rare delicacy of artistic instinct, and many a decorator tries to conceal his own shortcomings by talking of white and gold, or working upon the theory that harmony of tone means monotony of tone.<sup>37</sup>

A third major space for a Burnham and Root building was Willard Hall in the Women's (or Temperance) Temple, located at the southwest corner of LaSalle and Monroe Streets. The building was designed for the Women's Christian Temperance Union; Willard Hall, on the building's ground floor, was to be a meeting hall for the organization. Ready for use in January of 1893, the hall was an irregular space on the interior corner of the twelve story building. Approximately sixty feet square, six



Pretzman House, Chicago, Illinois, 1888. Burnham and Root, architects.



Second Presbyterian Church interior, Nave. James Renwick, architect, 1874. William Pretzman, interior designer, 1888.



columns interrupted the space, including two columns which carried the south wall of the main portion of the building. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, "When the architects, Burnham and Root, turned Willard Hall over to the decorating artist, William Prettyman [*sic*], it was simply a cave of brick and iron, which was enough to paralyze the decorative genius of Michel Angelo."<sup>38</sup> The *Tribune* credits Prettyman for complete control of the design of the room, including locating a balcony in an alcove on the north side of the space and placing lavatories below the balcony.

Throughout Prettyman's work we see a constant awareness of the context in which the work was to be placed: for instance, the large spaces of the MacVeagh house called for bold patterns with allusions to grand traditions of royalty; in the Glessners' parlor, a more intimate design was keyed to their strong interest in William Morris's work. Prettyman's public work shows the same attention to context. Unlike the complexity of the Society for Savings banking room, which appears rational and planned, the irregular space of Willard Hall appears to be the result of leftover space. In Willard Hall the complexity needed to be mitigated, not accentuated. Here Prettyman used classical decoration. To the users, the regular spacing of the columns around the room was both a familiar decorative motive and a unifying one.

The decoration of Willard Hall included two paintings by Prettyman's collaborator on the Society for Savings banking room, Walter Crane. Each painting included two allegorical figures, the four figures representing Purity, Temperance, Justice, and Mercy.<sup>39</sup> Crane worked on these murals during his trip to America. After visiting the Pretymans in Chicago, the Cranes traveled to California, Florida and the Mid-Atlantic states, making their way to Wauwinet, Nantucket, where they stayed in the beach-front home of the Pretymans, known as "The Wreck," a "charming cottage, with studio," Crane remembered. "Wauwinet was a most remote little place, consisting of an inn and a few scattered timber dwellings along the sandy shore." Here Crane made use of Prettyman's studio to work on the panels for Willard Hall.<sup>40</sup>

In January of 1891 John Wellborn Root died of pneumonia and Prettyman acted as a pallbearer at his good friend's funeral. After Root's death, Daniel Burnham nominated Prettyman as Director of Color for the World's Columbian Exposition. On May 5, 1891, Burnham wrote Prettyman notifying him that the nomination was approved by the Building and Grounds Committee.<sup>41</sup> For the exposition project Prettyman made experiments with staff, the plaster-based material to be used for the exterior of the temporary buildings of the fair. His studies led him to favor tinting the material instead of painting it. As described in the press:

For the different structures near the Grand Avenue a uniform tone of yellow has been selected. This is like old alabaster when disintegration has begun in the surface. A different scheme of color begins as the series approaches the irregular lines of the lagoon and island, where the buildings cease to be thickly grouped.<sup>42</sup>

In Monroe's words, Prettyman's scheme "would have made the buildings a string of opals. They were not to be painted, but stained, so that the beautiful quality of the staff surface would not be impaired by the opaque shininess of paint."<sup>43</sup>

But it was not to be. Burnham's memory of Prettyman was different:

I had selected as Director of Color William Prettyman, largely on account of his great friendship with John Root. He was to have charge of the decoration; and knowing that staff was to be used he had begun to work out a general coloring. He concluded that ivory would be the best color. The eastern crowd came out when [Solon S.] Beman's building was nearly finished. I was urging every one on, knowing it was an awful fight against time. We talked about colors, and finally the thought came, "Let us make it perfectly white." I don't recall who made the suggestion. It might have been one of those ideas that occurs to all minds at once, as so often happens. At any rate, the decision was mine. At the time Prettyman was in the East, and I had Beman's building made cream white. When Prettyman came back he was outraged. He said that so long as he was in charge I must not interfere. I told him I saw it differently. He said he would get out, and he did.<sup>44</sup>

The role of Director of Color of the "White City" (as the Exposition came to be known) must have seemed sadly pointless to Prettyman. This was not simply a question of "ivory" versus white as he presented it years later. The application of a translucent stain implied a process that would have been both time- and skill-intensive. Given the extremely tight schedule that Burnham faced his preference for smoothly and quickly applied paint is understandable, but his dismissal of Prettyman's work at the fair in his final report on the Fair seems harsh:

Mr. William Prettyman of Chicago was made Director of Color in April 1891, and remained on staff until about the same time in the following year when he resigned to attend to his own private work, and before much had been done in his department of the fair.<sup>45</sup>

As Maud Howe Elliott recounts it,

Prettyman drew up his scheme [for decoration of the fair] on the lines of the Russian Fair at Nijni-Novgorod, where bright colors were used. When the idea was brought forward of making the Fair a White City Prettyman opposed it with might and main. There was no yielding in this man, and when he found that the sentiment of the majority was against his plan, he resigned his position as color director, and in so doing lost the chance of being associated with one of the truly ideal efforts of his time.<sup>46</sup>

Soon thereafter, in the mid-1890s, the Pretymans left Chicago for Asheville, North Carolina, to seek a healthier climate for Mrs. Prettyman.<sup>47</sup> In letters to Harriet Monroe during their stay there, the Pretymans refer to the most prominent architectural landmark of Asheville, George Vanderbilt's huge mansion, Biltmore. Prettyman writes Monroe, "I quite understand why George Vanderbilt did not want you to write about his house (on the inside) he is his own decorator, and oh it is terrible in its results."<sup>48</sup> Though their stay in Asheville appears to have been

relatively short, Pretzman did exhibit 70 watercolors from North Carolina and Florida at O'Brien & Son Galleries in November 1896.<sup>49</sup>

By 1901 the family was living in England. They kept two addresses there, one in Bournemouth and another at 13 Rutland Court, London.<sup>50</sup> In 1910 the Church of the Atonement's newsletter, *The Clarion*, reports that "Mr. Pretzman of London, formerly a vestryman of this parish," sent the church two large paintings, one, a work of his own, a large altar painting, the other, according to Pretzman, was by the 16th-century painter Garofalo. As he wrote to the congregation: "It is a great source of gratification to Mrs. Pretzman and myself that these two pictures have a home in the little Church we loved so well."<sup>51</sup>

Keeping his studio, "The Wreck," on Nantucket, until at least 1914, Pretzman continued to travel and to paint.<sup>52</sup> In 1912 his work was shown in the first private exhibition of the Newport Art Association. The watercolors on display were made during Pretzman's travels to Cuba and the construction site of the Panama Canal. According to an article in the *Boston Herald*, "Mr. Pretzman in addition to the sympathetic insight of a painter has the training of a world traveler and is apparently a true cosmopolitan and finds himself equally at home in England, Nassau, in mid-ocean, or in Panama."<sup>53</sup> In November 1913, Dudensing Galleries in New York City exhibited Panama Canal water colors by Pretzman. The *New York Times* noted,

The topographical character has been scrupulously preserved by the painter, while he has also succeeded in giving his sketches the spontaneity of work done on the spot. The brilliant tropical color is reproduced without garishness, and the series forms a most interesting record of the aspect of the canal before it was filled with water.<sup>54</sup>

After the outbreak of World War I in 1914, no record has been found of Pretzman's exhibiting in the United States. Tragically, his two sons died in the war, and Pretzman himself soon after, on August 31, 1920.<sup>55</sup> Harriet Monroe offers a sad summation of her friends' lives:

He was a very able decorative designer and mural painter, and had important orders. But his code was too exacting and he could not forgive any infraction of it, so clients fell away. He was appointed by Burnham chief of color of the Fair, but they quarreled and he resigned, and the buildings became white instead of iridescent. His genius was betrayed by lofty and indomitable traits of character which could not yield or compromise. And so his life was a tragedy of inconsequence. And hers? – Well, she loved him always – through difficult years in England, through the war which killed their two young sons, through his last days and death, and the lonely years of widowhood. To her he was the hero immaculate, the genius supremely gifted. If it was difficult to live up to that code, she wept sometimes, but she did not complain.<sup>56</sup>

But is this a fair summation? Monroe wrote this over forty years after the Pretzmans left Chicago and after much of his work had been lost to the bulldozer. The "White City" had become a seminal event in Chicago history and Pretzman had no part in its story. Likewise he could not be easily assigned a stylistic label. His work responded to the situation at hand, and while he clearly had conviction regarding his designs, he, unlike his friend John Root, did not fit into the art historical narrative that was being written about Chicago. Now, at the distance of over a century, we look back at a growing amount of evidence that his career, for a brief time, was of great significance. And in two of his interiors of very different scale, the Glessner House parlor and the Society for Savings banking room, we can experience for ourselves the work of this talented designer.



## Notes

1. Frances Macbeth Glessner and John J. Glessner, "Journals (1879-1921) of Frances Glessner, with Occasional Entries by Her Husband, John J. Glessner," Chicago Historical Society.
2. I would like to thank Tina Strauss, VSA president, William Tyre, executive director and curator of Glessner House Museum, as well as the members of the House and Collections Committee of Glessner House Museum, for their support of my research. Thanks also to Sidney Robinson, Eric Nygren and Mary Devlin for their comments on this article.
3. William Pretzman, born Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, is listed in the British censuses of 1861 (age 11) and 1901 (age 51). He was the second of at least three children. Records of The Church of the Atonement, Chicago, record his birth year as 1849.
4. "Sabah Archives Building Unsafe," Daily Express, Independent National Newspaper of Eastern Maylasia, (March 6, 2009) n.p.
5. "Art Notes," *The New York Times* (Feb. 19, 1882), n.p. From *Albany Architects: The Present Looks at the Past* (Albany, Historic Albany Foundation, fall 1978),

10: Robert W. Gibson (1851-1927) arrived in Albany 1881. "In his first years in Albany (1882-1885) Gibson worked as a partner of William Pretzman, an interior decorator and designer of stained glass." Gibson left Albany after seven years for New York City.

6. "Wedding at Larchmont Manor," *The New York Times* (June 27, 1883), 8. This article confirms that the groom, an artist in Albany, was born in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire.
7. Harriet Monroe, *A Poet's Life, Seventy Years in a Changing World*, (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1938), 101.
8. J. Carson Webster, *Erastus D. Palmer, Sculpture – Ideas*, (New York, The Associated University Presses, 1983), 236. Webster includes an illustration of a portrait of Mrs. William Pretzman by Palmer and confirms Pretzman's listing in the Albany city directories from 1881 to 1885.
9. For information on his career as lawyer, businessman and politician see, "Death of Walter Howe," *The New York Times* (August 23, 1890) n.p.
10. See note 29 below, Frances Glessner notes meeting the Pretzmans in her journal entry for February 27, 1887.



11. Maud Howe Elliott, *Three Generations* (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1923), 222, describes Jenny Pretyman's close relationship with her cousin, Mary Leiter, later Lady Curzon and Vicereine of India.
12. "Boston Life," *The (Chicago) Daily Inter Ocean* (July 28, 1888), 12.
13. Doreen Bolger Burke, *In Pursuit of Beauty*, "Painters and Sculptors in a Decorative Age" (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art-Rizzoli, 1986), 322.
14. *Ibid.* p. 296.
15. "Our Homes and Theirs," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (November 23, 1890), 34.
16. Birth dates for the Pretyman children come from baptismal records, The Church of the Atonement, Chicago.
17. Edgewater was incorporated into the city of Chicago in 1889. The house, now demolished, was located on the northeast corner of Hollywood and Kenmore Avenues, was illustrated in *Inland Architect and Building News*, XVII, no. 3. Sale of the south 15 feet of lot 15, block 6, in Cochran's addition to Edgewater by S.H. Austin, Jr., to J.R. Pretyman is noted in "Chicago Real Estate," *The Chicago Daily Tribune* (September 23, 1888), 30. Project lists in Charles Moore, *Daniel Burnham, Architect, Planner of Cities*, list the client for the project as Mrs. J.R. Pretyman.
18. Monroe, *A Poet's Life*, 102.
19. Elliott, *Three Generations*, 221.
20. Walter Crane, *An Artist's Reminiscences* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1907), 376. Crane dates the preface of his book, *The Claims of Decorative Art*, "Edgewater, Illinois, 1892." No doubt this was completed during his stay with the Pretymans.
21. From The Episcopal Church of the Atonement, Chicago, membership record books. Hand-written membership records in the church's archive include this early church history.
22. The chancel of the church was enlarged in 1910 by moving its back wall further east, so the wall in the photograph is not in the location that it would have been when Pretyman decorated the church. Pretyman's practice of using a fabric substrate for his decoration, as at the Glessner House, and the peeling of the decoration in the photograph to the right of the reredos, indicate that the decorative work could have been moved. Also, the general style of the decoration that is visible appears to be consistent with Pretyman's work.
23. Maud Howe Elliott, *John Elliott, The Story of an Artist* (Boston and New York, The Riverside Press, 1930), 28-29.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 36. The Perry H. Smith House still stands at 1400 N. Astor Street, Chicago, but the interiors have been altered. Elliott's work on the house is corroborated by a *Chicago Tribune* article (October 7, 1888), 32, which states Elliott is "now engaged in some fine decoration" of the Smith house. Pretyman is not mentioned.
25. Maud Elliot, *John Elliott*, 36, describes the studio: "Jack painted in the Chicago studio which was one of a suite of rooms in an office building where Pretyman had done his best to create an artistic atmosphere in the heart of the business quarter." In spite of their difference in temperament, John Elliott's feelings toward Pretyman remained warm. At the time of the unveiling of Elliott's *The Triumph of Time* in the Boston Public Library in 1901, Maud Elliott noted, "Of all the letters received none pleased Jack more than that of his old friend and associate of the Chicago days, William Pretyman." (p. 135).
26. In *Great Houses of Chicago*, (New York, Acanthus Press, 2008), 157, Susan Benjamin and Stuart Cohen note that Pretyman was responsible for the decoration of the first floor rooms. MacVeagh papers housed at the Library of Congress indicate that Pretyman's role included acting as contractor for decorating additional rooms in the house. The MacVeagh House was demolished in 1922.
27. MacVeagh Papers, Library of Congress, bill from S.A. Maxwell to William Pretyman, 1/11/88.
28. "Building Department," *The [Chicago] Economist* 8, 4 (July 23, 1892), 148. Included in the MacVeagh papers is a record of payment to Pretyman for \$700 "a/c decoration of Music Room" (February 15, 1893) and from Pretyman, a "statement to date re Music room work" (April 3, 1893). Thanks to Mary Alice Malloy for this information on the MacVeagh House.
29. Frances Glessner, "Journals," February 27, 1887. Thanks to Mary Alice Malloy for drawing my attention to this.
30. See "The Story of a House," a 1923 letter from John J. Glessner to his children, reprint: Glessner House Museum, 2011, p. 14. In addition to the connections noted above, Mrs. Glessner knew Jenny Pretyman as a fellow member of the Fortnightly (see Glessner journal entries for November 5 and 29, 1891). On November 10, 1890, the Glessner Journals record that: "Mr. Elliott went out to see his friends Mr. McDonald and Mr. Pretyman [sic]." Thanks to Robert Irving for alerting me to this connection.
31. As discussed by Grammar of Ornament's Ken Miller in notes to Glessner House Museum executive director William Tyre. The original parlor wallcovering has been retained and stored to allow for future research.
32. For a discussion of Aesthetic movement design see, Doreen Bolger Burke, *In Pursuit of Beauty*, especially, Catherine Lynn, chapters 2 and 3.
34. "A Church's Prosperity," *Chicago Tribune* (September 8, 1888), 12. It is also noted in "Boston Life" in the *Daily Inter-Ocean*, that the decoration "is now being built." The Tribune article notes Pretyman was "ably assisted by F.E. Chandler and F. Scott." No doubt the first name refers to Joseph Everett Chandler, who worked with Pretyman in 1888. Chandler would go to become a Boston architect specializing in the Colonial Revival. Thanks to Timothy Orwig, whose Boston University doctoral dissertation focuses on Chandler. For more on Chandler see also, Timothy Orwig, "Joseph Everett Chandler," *Historic New England* (Winter/Spring 2011). Pretyman's interior decoration was destroyed in a March 1900 fire which gutted the sanctuary.
35. Donald Hoffman, *The Architecture of John Wellborn Root*, (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1973), 117.
36. "Notes on Current Art," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (July 13, 1890), 15.
37. "The Fine Arts," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (December 14, 1890), 36. It is not known how long this decorative work remained in place. An article in the *Chicago Tribune* "Informal Opening of 'The Reliance'" (March 16, 1895), 8, describes the opening of the upper floors of the Reliance Building. It indicates that the ground floor premises of Carson, Pirie, Scott were undisturbed during the construction of the floors above. Renovations may have occurred when the company relocated to the Schlesinger and Mayer building on south-east corner of Madison and State Streets in January 1905. By the time an historic structures report for the building (dated July 11, 1994) was submitted by the McClier Preservation Group almost nothing of the original fabric of the first floor remained.
38. "In Their New Home," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (January 8, 1893), 12. For a discussion of the WCTU's involvement in the Women's (or Temperance) Temple see, Pamela Young Lee, "The Temperance Temple and Architectural Representation in Late Nineteenth Century Chicago," *Gender & History* (Vol. 17, No. 3, November 2005), 793-825. Thanks to Janet Olson and Mary McWilliams of the Frances Willard Memorial Library and Archives, Evanston, IL, for their assistance in my research.
39. Donald Hoffman notes that these paintings are in the style of Edward Burne-Jones. Indeed, they bear a striking resemblance to Burne-Jones's "Angeli Laudantes," which portrays two angels standing against a leafy background with the title of the work written on a scroll unfurled above the figures. Crane had at one time been an assistant and was a long-time associate of Burne-Jones.
40. Crane, *Reminiscences*, 405. How Pretyman and Crane met has yet to be traced.
41. Burnham, Daniel, to William Pretyman, May 5, 1891, Ryerson-Burnham Library, Art Institute of Chicago.
42. "Columbian Exposition Decoration," *Harper's Weekly* (vol. XXXVI, no. 1847, May 14, 1892), 478.
43. Harriet Monroe, "Frisco Fair Buildings Abound in Color," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (September 28, 1913), B5.
44. Charles Moore, *Daniel H. Burnham, Architect, Planner of Cities*, Volume I (Boston & New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), 50.
45. Daniel Burnham, *The Official Report of the Director of Works of the World's Columbian Exposition* (New York & London, Garland Publishing, 1989), 15.
46. Maud Elliot, *John Elliott*, 37.
47. Harriet Monroe, *A Poet's Life*, p. 102.
48. Letter from William Pretyman to Harriet Monroe in the Harriet Monroe Modern Poetry Collection, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago, dated, "Friday, Asheville."
49. "In the Art Studios," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (November 22, 1896), 34. Also there is a notice from this exhibit in the Harriet Monroe Modern Poetry Collection, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago.
50. Pretyman is listed at this address in telephone directories for 1911, 1912 and 1913.
51. "Gifts to the Church," *The Clarion* (March 1910), 10. Neither of the paintings has been found in the church's collection.
52. His last permanent residence is listed as Massachusetts. The Nantucket directory of 1914 lists Pretyman, of Bournemouth, at The Wreck.
53. "Pretyman's Art Attracts Many," *Boston Herald* (August 3, 1912), page unknown. Clipping from the archive of the Newport Art Association. Thanks to curator Nancy Grinnell for calling it to my attention.
54. "Art Notes," *The New York Times* (November 21, 1913), 8.
55. "Deaths," *The Times*, (London, September 2, 1920), 1, columns A. Pretyman is listed as "son of the Rev'd John Radcliffe [sic] Pretyman, of Richmond Lodge, Bournemouth."
56. Monroe, *A Poet's Life*, 103.



640 5th Avenue, circa 1892. Museum of the City of New York, Byron Co. Collection.



# Aspiration and Obsession

## HENRY CLAY FRICK AND THE W. H. VANDERBILT HOUSE AND COLLECTION

MELANIE LINN GUTOWSKI

The house at 640 Fifth Avenue, New York City, was the site of the intersection of the lives of two “eminent Victorians.” One was a scion of wealth; the other, a farmer’s son who spent his evenings doing bookkeeping standing up. The men were from two different generations of Gilded Age prosperity. These were William Henry Vanderbilt (1821–1885) and Henry Clay Frick (1849–1919). While it is not common for two men of such different backgrounds to move in the same circles, these two crossed paths due to Frick’s admiration for Vanderbilt’s house, collection and position.

William Henry Vanderbilt, the second son of Cornelius “Commodore” Vanderbilt, was known as “the richest man in America...probably the richest man in the world,”<sup>1</sup> according to the *New York Times*. He hadn’t always been so: Vanderbilt had spent the early years of his adult life making his own living in business and later, due to health issues, living on a farm on Staten Island. Vanderbilt’s turn as a titan of the Gilded Age came thanks to his father’s belief in male primogeniture.

The Commodore had left his eldest son the bulk of his estate – \$90 million – in 1877, at which point the younger Vanderbilt promptly began making up for the long years of eking out his own modest living. He began amassing a spectacular collection of art, with the help of art dealer Samuel Avery. He bought paintings by mostly European artists, a fact for which he was criticized in the American press, favoring genre paintings and Barbizon landscapes. Meissonier, Turner, Tissot and Bouguereau were all represented, as well as the rare female artist, Rosa Bonheur.

Vanderbilt’s art needed a home. His wife, Maria Louisa Kissam Vanderbilt, is said to have begged him “to add a wing to the old house to provide the space he needed for his growing collection of paintings,” but Vanderbilt stood firm.<sup>2</sup> He commissioned the decorating firm of Herter Brothers, who collaborated with architects John B. Snook and Charles Atwood to design and furnish a new residence. The resulting mansion located at 640 Fifth Avenue, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and East 51st Street, became known as “the Triple Palace.” Although listed in the popular press as a double house, 640 was actually three homes in one; Vanderbilt occupied one section,

while the other section was divided into two dwellings for his daughters, Emily (Mrs. William Douglas Sloane) and Margaret (Mrs. Elliott Fitch Shepard).

Vanderbilt’s portion was elaborately – some would say ostentatiously – decorated, with each room in a completely different style from all the others. The design was centered around an art gallery whose three-story height culminated in a large skylight. Oil paintings were hung salon-style, but despite the enormous size of the room, Vanderbilt quickly ran out of space for his collection, necessitating the addition of a smaller gallery,

which he used for watercolors and drawings.

Though often confused (perhaps wishfully so) by contemporary scholars with the more spectacular 660 Fifth Avenue – the châteauesque-style house of William Henry’s son William Kissam Vanderbilt and his wife Alva – 640 was the stuff of Henry Clay Frick’s dreams.

Frick, for his part, was something of a social climber. He had maneuvered his way from being the son of a



The art gallery in 640 Fifth Avenue, New York City. Courtesy Carnegie Mellon University Libraries, Posner Memorial Collection.

farmer in rural western Pennsylvania to a hardworking businessman spending his evenings doing bookkeeping standing up to becoming a self-made millionaire and member of the upper class – if *nouveau riche*. He had managed to marry a woman, Adelaide Howard Childs, who had been groomed to be an upper-class man’s wife and he had been able to shower her and their four children with the finer things in life: modern household conveniences, carriages and automobiles, Tiffany & Co. baubles and gowns from Worth. For Frick, 640 Fifth Avenue represented the essence of what it meant to be a respected member of the upper class and he spent his adult life striving toward that goal.

Frick first encountered 640 in the summer of 1880 while en route to his first trip to Europe with his closest friend, banker Andrew Mellon. Biographer George Harvey recounts that the two men, both then bachelors, came across the Triple Palace, then under construction, while on a drive up Fifth Avenue. “That is all I shall ever want,” Frick is said to have remarked of the place.

Frick spent the intervening twenty-five years forming his own art collection and growing his coke and steel empire, all the while dreaming of Vanderbilt’s holdings. In 1884 and 1885, he purchased four volumes of *Mr. Vanderbilt’s House and Collection*, the privately published ten-volume catalog of Vanderbilt’s portion of the Triple Palace. The books, printed in a numbered, limited edition of one thousand copies, included color plates of the home’s rooms and possessions, including five volumes devoted solely to artworks. In addition to these book purchases, Frick paid for a set of twenty satin photogravure reproductions of Vanderbilt’s paintings, hanging several of the facsimiles at Clayton, his Pittsburgh home. One imagines Frick dreaming of Vanderbilt’s collection, hanging prints of it on the walls of his home the way young boys today plaster their rooms with posters of cars they someday hope to own.<sup>3</sup>

It is fair to say that Vanderbilt’s collection influenced the one Frick was just beginning when he purchased his copies of Vanderbilt’s catalog. Eventually, the two collections had many artists in common, including

Turner, Breton, Millet, Diaz de la Peña and Bouguereau. But Vanderbilt and Frick differed widely on what should be done with these collections following their deaths. Frick knew he wanted to leave his collection as his legacy to be enjoyed by the public; his eventual decision to move permanently to Manhattan in 1905 was the result of many years of careful consideration of where best to locate his gallery. In contrast, Vanderbilt thought it was enlightening enough simply to bring his art to the city and give it a grand showcase, albeit a restricted one. In *Opulent Interiors of the Gilded Age*, the authors expound on the implied, though not quite executed, benevolence of Vanderbilt’s having brought his vast trove of cultural gems to the city. The house and collection were regarded as “proof and promise of national artistic growth...a private museum promoted as evidence of cultural progress about which the public, banned from its doors, could feel proud.”<sup>5</sup> Once per week, Vanderbilt did invite certain individuals to view his collection, but the treasures remained more talked of than seen for many years.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, Vanderbilt intended for his collection always to remain private. He attempted to set forth terms in his will that would keep both his house and art collection in family hands in perpetuity. Vanderbilt willed 640 Fifth Avenue to his wife and then to his youngest son, George Washington Vanderbilt, since all the young man’s other siblings had already built or purchased houses of their own by the date the will was executed. The will stated that if George died without a male heir, the house should pass to one of the patriarch’s grandsons. The will further directed said grandson to will the collection in its entirety to another male relative. His intention was that his “present residence and [his] collection of works of art be retained and maintained by a male descendant bearing the name of Vanderbilt.”<sup>7</sup>

Though Vanderbilt’s wealth had been inherited, he proved to be just as shrewd as the self-made Frick; in the eight short years between his inheritance and his sudden death at age sixty-four in 1885, Vanderbilt had more than doubled his father’s estate. The fortune was beyond anyone’s comprehension at the period: \$200 million

dollars (\$5.17 billion in 2012 dollars). The sum made Vanderbilt one of the richest men in the world. The house at 640 Fifth Avenue passed as intended to Maria Louisa Kissam Vanderbilt and then, at her death in 1896, to their son George.

By that time, George was twenty-three and already owned a townhouse.<sup>8</sup> He had no use for 640 and its vast dark interiors and unfashionable stylings.



(L to R): “Spring Flowers” by Jean-Louis Harmon, as seen in “Mr. Vanderbilt’s House and Collection.” Courtesy Carnegie Mellon University Libraries, Posner Memorial Collection. Satin photogravure of “Spring Flowers” hanging in Clayton’s yellow guest room, left of dresser. Courtesy Frick Collection/Frick Art Reference Library Archives.





Henry Clay Frick, circa 1884. Courtesy Frick Collection / Frick Art Reference Library Archives. Henry Clay Frick house, 1 East 70<sup>th</sup> Street, circa 1914. Courtesy Library of Congress.

He did attempt to make over the property to his liking, removing some of the flourishes on the façade and replacing the iron balustrade surrounding the house's modest yard with stone and installing baroque-style lanterns along it.<sup>9</sup> In 1902, he began construction of a porte cochère in front of the house, though the City of New York cited a violation of zoning ordinances and forced its destruction.<sup>10</sup> In any case, George was far too preoccupied with Biltmore, his enormous country estate in North Carolina, to worry further about his father's house, now becoming something of an albatross since it could not be sold. George, who appears to have been somewhat more altruistic than his father, lent 135 paintings from the 640 collection to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The works were to be exhibited to the public for one year, a period that was extended many times. The choice of which works would go to the museum was explained somewhat derogatorily in the press as those pieces "believed to represent most satisfactorily the painters for whom Mr. [W. H.] Vanderbilt had a predilection, if indeed there was any particular predilection in one whose taste in art was a distinctly catholic one."<sup>11</sup>

By 1903, Frick's business interests "had taken on Vanderbilt proportions," writes Martha Frick Symington Sanger, his great-granddaughter.<sup>12</sup> After divesting himself of his stock in Carnegie Bros. Steel, Frick reinvested in railroads, singlehandedly becoming the industry's largest private stockholder. Sanger posits that "the 640 Fifth Avenue residence, built by William H. Vanderbilt, 'Railroad King' of 1880, became, therefore, the perfect home for the burgeoning art collector and 'Railroad King' of 1905."<sup>13</sup>

When Frick was approached by Douglas Robinson of the Robinson, Brown & Co. real estate company in January 1905 regarding the availability of 640, it was inevitable that he would take the place. Perhaps Robinson knew of his client's earlier obsession with the house, or perhaps he was just a persuasive and dogged salesperson, but in either case he wrote Frick "to call your attention to

Mr. George Vanderbilt's house on the corner of Fifty-first Street and Fifth Avenue, in case you have in mind, in the near future, renting a house in New York."<sup>14</sup> But Frick played hard to get, obliging Robinson to write him again the following month, using the time-tested sales tactic of "another applicant" for the property to urge Frick along. By March 24, a lease had been executed guaranteeing Frick ten years and the furnishings of the house, with George to get a yearly rent of \$50,000, paid in quarterly installments.<sup>15</sup> The public was enthralled by these negotiations, with rumors flying in the press of Frick's supposed "enormous annual rental, said to be in the six figures."<sup>16</sup>

It was ironic that Frick had so coveted 640 in his youth; it was widely regarded to be architecturally inferior, especially when compared with the homes of Vanderbilt's own children. Likened to a "gigantic knee-hole table"<sup>17</sup> and "brown-stone packing boxes"<sup>18</sup> among other unsavory things, the façade and design of the Triple Palace seemed to have more detractors than fans.

Frick himself always consulted with the preeminent architects of the day for his building work, with he and his wife contributing their opinions at all stages of the design process. It is unsurprising, then, that the Fricks immediately began extensive renovations to their new home, overseen by Hunt & Hunt, George's architectural firm of choice. The press reported that Frick was "putting in electric lights, modern baths, and other improvements that the millionaire of a generation ago knew nothing about."<sup>19</sup> Frick was especially concerned about "electric plugs in galleries,"<sup>20</sup> and both owner and architects agreed to make the "picture lighting in the North and South Galleries"<sup>21</sup> conform to his needs. While advanced technology had always been important to Frick, picture lighting in particular had always been at the forefront of his concern. The paintings at Clayton had always been expertly lit to better show off his collection. In all, the Fricks spent nearly \$100,000 on improvements to the structure and décor of their new home.<sup>22</sup>

The family moved to 640 in the fall of 1905. Although Frick finally had attained what he had admired for so long, the residence itself still was not enough. He had his eyes on an even bigger prize: Vanderbilt's art collection. Frick suggested to Hamilton McKown Twombly, George's brother-in-law, that he would like some of the paintings that had been lent to the Metropolitan to be returned to the house. Twombly wrote to George, who was firm in his reply. "This I would not be willing to do," George wrote. "It is a pleasure to me to feel that my father's collection is on view to the public at all times and performing its educative function."<sup>23</sup>

Frick had to be satisfied with displaying his own collection with the remainder of Vanderbilt's. To Frick, art represented his entire future, both while living and after his death. It is perhaps symbolic that he wanted his daughter Helen's 1908 society debut to take place in the art gallery at 640 as Sanger claims, though the event took place in Pittsburgh instead.<sup>24</sup> The residence at 640 was a place that had influenced Frick's earliest forays into art collecting and would spur him to create a building to rival it that would preserve his own legacy.

It is a testament to the strength of Frick's aspirations to W. H. Vanderbilt's position that he eventually tried to buy 640 despite its criticisms. Archival evidence indicates that Frick seriously contemplated purchasing the home and property, provided Vanderbilt's heirs gave him what he deemed a good price. "I would not care to entertain the property at more than \$1,500,000.00," Frick wrote to his agent, Howard Taylor. "If you think it is hardly worth while to take it up on that basis we will drop it." Frick had already secured land for his own house and museum shortly after settling in New York in 1906, so his desire to purchase 640 can be seen either as the crowning achievement of his aspiration or as a practical investment. However, given the terms of W. H. Vanderbilt's will, George was not permitted to sell 640, and so the negotiations went no further.

Construction began on Frick's new house, which would become the Frick Collection, in 1913. Designed by Carrère and Hastings, it was nearing completion when tragedy

struck. In March 1914, George Vanderbilt died suddenly a few days following an appendectomy. He was survived by his wife, Edith, and one child, a daughter, Cornelia, meaning his heirs would not inherit 640. The house passed to the next grandson in line, Brigadier General Cornelius Vanderbilt III, who allowed Frick ample time to vacate the house. In June of that year, the Frick family left 640 and moved twenty-one blocks to their new home at 1 East 70th Street, where they remained until Mrs. Frick's death in 1931, at which time it became a public museum.

Though W. H. Vanderbilt's will stated his intention for his home and art collection to always remain within the family, the law in 1885 did not allow him to place restrictions on property inherited by a grandson. Thus, in 1940, his heir, Brigadier General Cornelius Vanderbilt III, sold the property to the William Waldorf Astor estate, stipulating that his wife, Grace, be allowed to remain in the house for one year following his death. Cornelius died in 1942; three years later, his widow put her grandfather-in-law's famous art collection up for sale.<sup>25</sup> The fabulous collection of Millets, Meissoniers and Corots sold for a somewhat disappointing sum of \$323,195—a far cry from the millions W. H. Vanderbilt had spent to acquire it.

The Triple Palace finally met its demise in 1947, when it was torn down and replaced by commercial buildings. Though the razing of 640 was lamented in the press, it was seen as inevitable. Robert King and Charles O. McLean write of the sad event, "By the time of its demolition, the building had long been an anachronistic remnant of a former age."<sup>26</sup>

While W. H. Vanderbilt's collection was dispersed and his home demolished, Frick was able to ensure that his legacy would remain intact. Though additions have been made to its founding bequest, The Frick Collection remains as one of the few cohesive reminders of an era when stately homes with fantastic collections of fine and decorative arts lined Fifth Avenue.



## Notes

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4. Earl Shinn [Edward Strahan, pseud.], *Mr. Vanderbilt's House and Collection* (Boston: George Barrie, 1838–1886).
5. Lewis et al., 116.
6. "W. H. Vanderbilt's Pictures on View," *New York Times*, May 4, 1902.
7. William Vanderbilt, "Last Will and Testament," [n.d.], Henry Clay Frick Papers, Series 640 Fifth Avenue.
8. Robert B. King and Charles O. McLean, *The Vanderbilt Homes* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 25.
9. Michael Kathrens, *Great Houses of New York 1880–1930* (New York: Acanthus Press, 2005), 332.
10. King and McLean, 25.
11. "W. H. Vanderbilt's Pictures on View," *New York Times*, May 4, 1902.
12. Martha Frick Symington Sanger, *Henry Clay Frick: An Intimate Portrait* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998), 298.
13. Sanger, 298.
14. D. Robinson to Henry Clay Frick, 9 January 1905, Henry Clay Frick Papers, Series 640 Fifth Avenue.
15. George Vanderbilt, Lease Agreement for 640 Fifth Avenue, 24 March 1905, George W. Vanderbilt Papers, Biltmore Company Archives, Asheville, NC.
16. "Frick Remodeling Vanderbilt Mansion," *New York Times*, April 16, 1905.
17. Jerry Patterson, *The Vanderbilts* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 108.
18. *The Century*, February 1886.
19. "Frick Remodeling Vanderbilt Mansion," *New York Times*, April 16, 1905.
20. George Vanderbilt to Henry Clay Frick, 12 April 1905, Henry Clay Frick Papers, Series 640 Fifth Avenue.
21. Hunt & Hunt to Henry Clay Frick, 2 May 1905, Henry Clay Frick Papers, Series 640 Fifth Avenue.
22. "Vanderbilt Home Bows to Business," *New York Times*, August 11, 1944.
23. George Vanderbilt to Henry Clay Frick, 20 October 1905, Henry Clay Frick Papers, Series 640 Fifth Avenue.
24. Sanger, 444.
25. "Vanderbilt Home Being Torn Down," *New York Times*, 18 September 1947.
26. King and McLean, 27.



# Preservation Diary

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## *Cleveland's Model Preservation Assistance Program*

WARREN ASHWORTH

If someone approached you on the sidewalk and said, "Pssst – want a 1.4% home improvement loan with no points, no closing costs and only a \$125.00 origination fee?" you might think they were daft and give them a wide berth. But if that sidewalk were in Cleveland you might say, "Sure, thanks!"

The charitable organization that brokers just such loans for the lucky owners of historic houses in Cleveland, Ohio, was granted a Victorian Society of America Preservation Award in 2011. While normally these annual awards honor individual preservation projects, this past year, in addition to five individual winners, the Cleveland Restoration Society was singled out in recognition of its remarkable preservation activism.

Founded by three individuals in 1972 when Cleveland's downtown, along with much of the rest of urban America, was being ground down to rubble by bulldozers, the Cleveland Restoration Society has had a remarkable life.<sup>1</sup> First it functioned as an advisory and advocacy group of committed volunteers many of whom are still actively engaged with the organization. It has grown tremendously and now offers the city the Heritage Home Program, sponsoring free advice and low cost loans to historic home owners; a stewardship program for taking over abandoned historic properties; the Sacred Landmark Program for protection and illumination of religious buildings; and extensive advocacy and public education programs.

The way the Heritage Home Program works is an American preservationist's dream come true. The goal of the program at its inception was to encourage Cleveland homeowners to make architecturally sensitive repairs to their historic homes, many of which were built prior to the First World War. Trained members of the CRS staff would visit the residence and meet with the owners educating them about the history of the home and neighborhood and discuss not only restoration but often the undoing of prior inappropriate modifications. These volunteers offered advice on issues ranging from complex undertakings such as the removal of an entire wing of a house down to simpler modifications such as window and door replacement or house painting with period-appropriate paint colors. So far, 3,843 homeowners have received technical advice and specifications on how to

preserve their homes through the initiative.

Starting in 1987, when the Restoration Society hired its first full time executive director, the organization began to focus on providing financial assistance to homeowners prepared to make historically accurate improvements. With assistance from the city of Cleveland and a local bank, CRS instituted the Preservation Loan program in 1992. To date a total of 923 families or individuals have been granted loans amounting to 33.1 million dollars.<sup>2</sup>

The house on Murray Hill Road pictured here is home to just one such family. When Anthony and Tracy Vitantonio purchased this Queen Anne house in 1999, it had been altered in a number of ways that were completely inconsistent with the history of the house or the spirit of the style. After consulting at length with members of the Cleveland Restoration Society staff, they settled on a two-phase approach. With an initial CRS-sponsored loan of \$26,000 they replaced the leaking roof and upgraded the electrical system.

With the building stabilized and safe, they moved on to the next phase. Using a second CRS-backed loan of \$20,000.00 and with the help of historic photographs provided by CRS staff, they hired a contractor to rebuild the front porch to match the pictures; they replaced the front door and transom with double-leaf doors similar to the originals; and they were able to buy back and re-install a stained glass window that the former owner had removed and sold. In the third year they had enough money left from the loans to remove all the aluminum siding and repair and repaint the wood siding.

The loan program starts with the homeowners meeting in their house with a representative of the Cleveland Restoration Society. These staff members all have either an architectural background and/or restoration and preservation training. Together they decide what work needs to be done to the house, what is practical, attainable and appropriate. The preservationist then prepares a set of specifications for the work. If the work is more complex an architect from the society's roster of preservation specialists is brought on board. Once specifications are ready they are sent to several contractors who prepare estimates for the work. After those bids are gathered the homeowner meets with a bank officer and fills out a preservation loan application. The maximum rate for



(L) 2097 Murray Hill Road in the Franklin-West Clinton Historic District of Cleveland before restoration. (R) The Murray Hill Road house in the final stages of restoration.

loans within the city limits last year was 3.5% and for 2012 it has been reduced to an astonishing 1.4%.<sup>3</sup> Outside the city limits in Cuyahoga County it has been reduced from 3.5% to 2%. The manner in which these low cost loans are made available is a unique and excellent lesson in a creative partnership between public, private and not-for-profit entities.

The Preservation Loan Program is funded as follows: The City of Cleveland provides linked deposits for preservation projects approved by the Restoration Society. These linked deposits are held, interest-free, by a local private bank and used to “buy down” the rate of interest on the homeowner loan. This results in an interest rate well below market. According to Tom Jorgensen, chief operating officer for CRS, an important safeguard in the loan contract is that

the loan proceeds are escrowed until the preservation work is completed according to CRS specifications. This feature ensures that the loan proceeds are used strictly for the planned restoration and that the contractor’s work was of acceptable quality. This feature also allows the bank to compute the allowable amount of the loan based upon the improved value of the property after the work is complete. This makes the CRS Preservation Loan more accessible to many homeowners who do not have sufficient equity in their homes to otherwise support the loan.

In the early 1990s the Heritage Home Program concentrated its efforts on three waning inner-city neighborhoods in Cleveland. However, in the intervening years its exceptional success has allowed it to grow such that it now serves most of the City of Cleveland, Cuyahoga County and many of the suburbs beyond. Outside of the city limits the Heritage Home Program is supported with linked deposits from state entities, the Ohio Housing Finance Agency and the Treasurer of the State of Ohio as well as county treasuries.

Along with governmental support, CRS credits part of the success of the program to their largest for-profit partner, KeyBank of Ohio. In these days when banks are

often seen in a dubious light, usually facilitating the very developments that undermine historic preservation, KeyBank has been instrumental from the start of the program in making the Heritage Home Program feasible. To quote Michael Fleenor, director of preservation services for the Cleveland Preservation Society, “KeyBank is the only bank we work with. They have a very good record of meeting their Community Reinvestment Act obligations. They have also been accommodating to our organization over the years when we’ve needed to adjust the program in order to help homeowners. They have also helped in other ways such as the cost of underwriting brochures.”<sup>4</sup>

Two measures of the success of the program speak volumes. The first is a study published in 2008 by Cleveland State University on the economic effect the Heritage Home Program has had on the subject houses and their neighborhoods. According to CRS’s Jorgensen, the study found that “the values of houses that had made preservation-sensitive improvements utilizing a Heritage Home Loan had increased in value in excess of the cost of the improvements and to a greater degree than comparable homes that had not made such improvements.” Further, the study was able to establish that homes in the vicinity of Heritage Home projects also appreciated in value when compared to homes that were not near a Heritage Home project. The second impressive measure of the Cleveland Restoration Society’s loan initiatives is the loan default rate. At a time when the typical home loan default rate in Cleveland is about 15%, KeyBank reports that only two of the Society’s 923 sponsored loans went to a foreclosure filing. That is a default rate of two-tenths of one percent!

Among other initiatives instituted by the Cleveland Restoration Society are their stewardship activities and its Sacred Landmark Program. The Stewardship Program is one that many in the preservation field envy. CRS has, on a number of occasions, acquired threatened properties as either owner or as guardian under Ohio’s receivership statute. Once the organization becomes steward for the property it will do a complete renovation or at least a



partial stabilizing renovation, depending on the circumstances, and sell it to a preservation-inclined owner. The sale will be accompanied by a preservation easement to protect the building in the future. A typical case is illustrated here. A Lutheran Church was about to demolish an abandoned Gothic Revival house at 2515 Vestry Avenue to enlarge its parking lot. CRS acquired the building with its own funds and moved it to a lot on an adjacent street. It then engaged in a major restoration of the main house and construction of a replacement rear addition. The house was then sold and is currently occupied.

The Sacred Landmark Assistance Program was set up to work with Cleveland-area religious organizations unable to maintain their buildings. Often built in the nineteenth century, these are typically large and complex buildings whose upkeep can be a tremendous financial obligation. Churches and temples were regularly abandoned in the past when their congregations migrated to new neighborhoods. The neglect of these empty architectural icons infects their neighborhoods with a feeling of degradation. The Sacred Landmark Assistance Program works with the groups that own these buildings in a wide variety of ways, from providing technical assistance for upkeep to bringing together architects, land use attorneys, developers and contractors to help craft adaptive reuse programs that will keep the buildings occupied, vibrant and useful to the local population. An aspect of the Sacred Landmark Assistance Program beloved by Clevelanders is the steeple-lighting initiative, which seeks to illuminate prominent spires, towers and domes in the city. To date CRS has been responsible for illuminating seventeen such architectural features, greatly enhancing the nighttime cityscape.

The founders of the Cleveland Restoration Society, executive director Kathleen Crowther, her staff and the organization’s committed volunteers have quietly put together an extraordinary and unique preservation program that services thousands of preservation-worthy buildings and one that could be a model for urban centers all over this country. But, as of yet, it has not been imitated. Michael Flenor notes that “we remain a unique organization, as most preservation-based loan programs are revolving funds with much less capacity than we have.”

This extraordinary program is a model worth replicating in the effort to preserve the living history of our cities and towns.



### Notes

1. Originally called the Downtown Restoration Society.
2. These rates and participation rates are as of January, 2012.
3. The loan terms are 5 to 12 years, the minimum loan is \$3,000.00, the maximum loan is based on the applicant’s qualifications, base loan rates are fixed. There is a nominal fee levied out of the loan proceeds for the support of the Cleveland Restoration Society structured as follows: loans under \$10,000.00 pay no fee; loans between \$10,000 and \$25,000.00 pay a 1% fee; loans over \$25,000 pay a



2515 Vestry Avenue in Cleveland when it was purchased under the Stewardship Program of the Cleveland Restoration Society.



The house on its way around the corner.



The Gothic Revival house in its new location after moving and a complete restoration by the Cleveland Restoration Society.

- 2% fee. Stipulations are that projects must be completed within 18 months, contractors must be licensed and apply for all appropriate municipal permits. Failure to follow the program parameters can result in the loan reverting to a full market interest rate loan.
4. KeyBank is one of a minority of large banks in the United States that have consistently received the highest possible ranking from the Federal government regarding performance within the guidelines of the Community Reinvestment Act.

## Local Focus

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# *Symbols of Slumber* *Children's Funerary Sculpture* *in Norfolk's Elmwood Cemetery*

JACLYN SPAINHOUR

In the mid-nineteenth century, an era enthralled with domesticity, nature, and death, the concept of the park cemetery became increasingly popular. Most Victorians viewed death as a natural process that resulted in acceptance into a welcoming afterlife. Essentially, heaven was thought to be a pristine extension of earthly life, a comforting place where families were reunited with loved ones and the imperfections of life on earth faded away. These conceptions of family and domesticity were readily transferred into the burial grounds of the mid-nineteenth century. Family cemetery plots became areas where individuals, specifically women, could fulfill their social duties while promoting familial values. Most women seem to have willingly accepted the role of preservationists; they considered tending their family plots a natural extension of their domestic duties. Subsequently, many women chose to bring their children along on visits to cemeteries to clean the headstones of the departed and bask in the splendor of the surrounding landscape. By tending to the graves of family members, children were thought to be instilled with integrity, respect, and responsibility.<sup>1</sup> The family plot, then, offered a perfect place for women to fulfill their domestic roles and create virtuous, family-oriented children. In contrast to the bleak and forbidding burial grounds that characterized the earlier half of the nineteenth century, the later Victorian park cemetery offered families a tranquil escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, as well as a perfect place for contemplating heaven and the majestic afterlife it promised.

Following the Gothic revival of the 1840s, these perceptions of death became easily recognizable in the icons depicted on headstones, footstones, and other statuary in a wealth of local public cemeteries.<sup>2</sup> However, a visit to historic Elmwood Cemetery in Norfolk, Virginia,

as well as others, suggests that attitudes towards death perceptibly shifted during the early twentieth century and that widespread observance of mourning customs suffered as a result. Through analysis of the iconography on the grave markers, one can only conclude that by the 1920 the perception of heaven as a perfect home was swiftly declining and that the ideals and customs of the Victorian Era consequently had largely fallen out of favor. Elmwood Cemetery, a stunning example of the quintessential park cemetery of the Victorian Era, is located in a busy part of Norfolk. Built in 1853, Elmwood offers visitors a quiet oasis with its beautiful landscape and inviting park benches.<sup>3</sup> Today, visitors can easily transport themselves back a century and a half as they imagine the horse-drawn carriages trotting down the pathways, filled with entire families eager to spend the day together contemplating heaven and bringing their family plots to life. Unfortunately, not all families would have had the luxury of visiting their loved ones in this cemetery. Records indicate only Caucasian families are interred on the property, all of whom were either Protestants or Catholics.<sup>4</sup> In typical mid-Victorian fashion, the presence of scattered individual plots in Elmwood is uncommon. This and other cemeteries like it were designed for families as a way to ensure they stayed together in both this life and the next; therefore, inclusion of individual plots was unusual.<sup>5</sup> The majority of plots are organized by family, several of them enclosed with fencing installed by the families themselves.

By taking a closer look at these family plots, we can develop an appreciation for the beauty within them. The smoothly engraved stones and bed-like markers tell the stories not only of the occupants of the graves, but of the social customs of the Victorian era. From all directions, symbols of mourning take shape in artistically articulated

epitaphs, carved figures, and sculpted representations of nature and slumber. Amidst the general splendor of the adult graves in the cemetery, the tiny bed-like markers and petite sculptures associated with children are easily overlooked and subsequently underappreciated. In point of fact, children's graves provide some of the richest accounts of prevalent mourning practices and ideas surrounding death during the nineteenth century. Using Elmwood Cemetery as a case study, this article seeks to illuminate the theoretical shift from the characterization of death as sleep to death as loss by examining the graves of young children and the evidence of mourning their families left behind.

Death was an expected and frequently-experienced phenomenon during the Victorian era. In fact, it played a role in determining an individual's social success or failure. This was certainly the case for women as they became wives and mothers seeking to fulfill their natural domestic roles. As dictated by society, strict limitations were placed upon a woman's movements following the death of a loved one. From dress to behavior, every movement she made was regulated by a higher social code. Following the death of a family member or friend, each mourner took on his or her assigned role to avoid being ostracized by the community. There are few situations in which this role-playing is more evident than in the mourning process for deceased children.

Casting any conflicting feelings aside, women were expected to bury their children under strict social guidelines and grieve accordingly. The symbols present on children's graves exhibit some of the emotions mothers were unable to express personally during their expected mourning periods, such as guilt or extreme sorrow. This is especially true of mothers who lost younger children, typically infants. Childbirth was a common cause of death among women and their infant children during the period due to the then prevailing state of medical knowledge. When a mother lost a child during birth, it is difficult to believe she did not have feelings of guilt and personal responsibility towards the death. These feelings are sometimes conveyed in the symbols the families chose to incorporate into their children's grave markers.

Symbolic of slumber, bed-like markers are a common

sight in the family plots at Elmwood. The short distance between the headstones and footstones readily suggests the interment of a child. The innocence of the child is often indicated by a sculpted lamb, one of the more popular symbols found among the children's graves here.



Above: Statue of "Little Willie" and (below) photograph that was used as the model.

Parents who wished to view their children as experiencing a peaceful sleep often chose to use these bed-shaped stones. Additionally, families often incorporated angels or mourning figures into their children's markers, each of which represents a different attitude towards the deaths of the children. The most optimistic of the choices, the Guiding Angel often points heavenward as a joyous reminder of the ideal home the child occupies in heaven with God.<sup>6</sup> The comfort represented by the Guardian Angel also acted as a symbol of peace for the family. Often depicted covering the child's stone, the Guardian Angel reminded the family of the protection and safe haven heaven offered the dead.<sup>7</sup> For some families, the Recording Angel may have offered a more suitable message. Commonly situated with a book in hand, the Recording Angel reminded families that their children were only small parts of a larger group of people whose names were recorded in the Book of Life.<sup>8</sup> Choosing the Recording Angel likely indicates that these families viewed death as something not only natural, but expected. Moreover, not only was death expected, but premature or untimely death was among normal anticipations. While use of the Recording Angel reveals realist attitudes toward untimely death, the employment of mourning figures suggests more pessimistic attitudes. Void of the majestic wings of the angels, mourning figures tower over the small graves of children with solemn faces. Whether positioned clutching a cross or standing with downcast eyes on a rocky marble shore, mourning figures portray the antithesis of the welcoming presence

of the Guiding Angel. Unlike the religiously-inspired angel, the mourning figure is not a biblical symbol. Representative of mercy, the figure appears in poetry and music as well, for instance in the hymn "Rock of Ages."<sup>9</sup>

The analysis above of mourning figures and angels is an indication of the wide spectrum of attitudes surrounding death during the nineteenth century. But if



*I never more shall press my lips to thine  
Asleep within thy lonely resting place  
Thou will not wake for any words of mine*

*Farewell my son; I leave you in God's keeping  
Tis well for thee at rest from all earth's cares  
I would that by your side I now were sleeping  
Farewell my Willie, farewell my darling*

Inscription on the footstone of "Little Willie."

external expressions of grief were closely regulated by society, the sorrow a mother or father experienced internally was not so easily controlled. Parents intentionally chose certain grave markers for their children based on their attached meanings; perhaps choosing particular icons as an act of defiance against the strict behavioral guidelines they were forced to recognize. While many individuals may have found comfort in structured mourning practices, this was not the case for all. The deeper, more individualized feelings of parents can partially be decoded through analysis of the choices they made surrounding the final resting places of their beloved children.

There are numerous types of symbols besides angels and mourning figures incorporated into the grave markers of children. Like the statuary discussed above, these symbols were chosen purposely and meant to convey a specific meaning. These often included a reference to nature, either depicted alone or in conjunction with other symbols. On a simple level, ferns provide the deepest indication of true lamentation as they represent mourning and sorrow in its basic form. Ivy is often incorporated as a reference to eternity, while wreaths indicate the belief that the child has conquered death. Additionally, the pure nature of the child is indicated by the presence of lilies, a common sight amongst the stones in Elmwood.<sup>10</sup> Sheaves of wheat and images of seashells suggest a deep-rooted acceptance of Christianity as they symbolize the divine harvest and resurrection, respectively.<sup>11</sup>

Each of these symbols suggests information about how families wished to remember their children. After all, cemeteries are created for the living, not the dead.

Not all iconography on children's graves is expressive of nature, however. Broken columns are a usual spectacle amongst the more elaborate headstones. Rooted in classical mythology, broken columns suggest a life cut

short, an allusion to the premature death of a child. A moderately used yet highly recognizable icon is the depiction of a sleeping child. Primarily shown resting in a peaceful curled-up position, the figure of the child represents the soul of the departed child awaiting Judgment Day and the Final Resurrection.<sup>12</sup> But the depictions of sleeping children, when employed, are rarely done in the physical likeness of the interred child. Rather, they simply act as a reminder of the tranquil slumber the souls of children are believed to experience while awaiting reunion with their Heavenly Father.

An exception is Elmwood's "Little Willie," an artistically designed and professionally crafted sculpture commissioned by the mother of a deceased child. The statue is done in the physical likeness of the boy, which makes it a very rare piece of cemetery iconography for the Victorian era. A few feet away is his footstone, inscribed with a poem his grieving mother wrote for him. The brevity of her loss is felt in the lamenting tone of her words. Her poignant phrasing relays the message that she misses her young son and longs to be near him, but knows this cannot happen in the physical world. "Little Willie" is seen holding a flower, a choice undoubtedly made by his mother, as an indication of his purity and innocence. On the base of the headstone, the span of his life is documented as a mere two years.

The story of "Little Willie" goes beyond what can physically be viewed at Elmwood. Tim Bonney, president of

the Friends of Norfolk's Historic Cemeteries group, has related some of the difficulties that this monument and the family associated with it have endured. Like so many precious cemetery artifacts, "Little Willie" has fallen victim to vandalism. A jagged edge near his knee is the only surviving evidence that a Bible used to rest there. The glass case the statue used to reside in is entirely gone; no



The statue of "Little Willie" that stands in Elmwood Cemetery, Norfolk.

trace of the encasement is readily visible today. As president of the Friends group, Mr. Bonney decided to seek out descendants of “Little Willie” in order to alert them to the vandalism and suggest repairs. He was successful in locating some of them and was able to gather details about the boy and his grieving mother. As the story goes, the boy’s mother was utterly distraught as a result of her son’s death. She vowed to remain in mourning for the rest of her life. To the best of the descendant’s knowledge, the mother upheld her promise until her last breath, when she could finally be reunited with the only child she ever had.<sup>13</sup>

A second atypical funerary sculpture carved in the likeness of a deceased child could once be found at Elmwood, but no longer. For nearly a century the statue of little Marie McKay stood innocently holding the ends of her dress filled with flowers. At the age of three, she supposedly fell victim to food poisoning after eating her favorite fruit, strawberries. The statue of the little girl depicted her in an angelic pose with downcast eyes, gathering flower blossoms. Unfortunately for anyone wishing to visit her, the only surviving image of the grave marker is a small photograph. Vandals stole the statue and removed it from the cemetery not once by twice. The first time it was recovered from a pawnshop; the second disappearance has not been solved.

While there was no social proscription against the commission of such reality-based funerary statuary such as those of “Little Willie” and Marie McKay, this type of work is exceedingly rare and highly individualistic. In a period when communal ties provided the backbone to social success, such focus on the individual may not have been a type of behavior that was met with universal approval. Inclusion of the images of the Bible and flowers, however, may have offset any mixed feelings towards these types of monument. The desire to conform to accepted ideologies and the need to grieve in a selfish manner often conflicted. Under the guise of accepted Victorian symbolisms, grieving parents could merge their individualistic attitudes towards the death of their children with the expected responses to it imposed by society.

### Notes

1. Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong, *A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America* (Stony Brook, N.Y.: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980), 26.
2. Harvey Green, *The Light of the House* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 174.
3. Tim Bonney, President, Friends of Norfolk’s Historic Cemeteries, interview by author, Elmwood Cemetery, Norfolk, Va., December 7, 2011.
4. There has, however, been some discussion of the possibility of a Jewish family being interred on the property, but this has not been entirely confirmed. While this family is buried on the property, their adherence to Judaism is debatable. For more information on Elmwood Cemetery, please contact Tim Bonney with the Friends of Norfolk’s Historic Cemeteries.

As stylistic preferences in general moved away from the very ornate, the iconography in the cemeteries followed suit. There is a clear shift from the elaborate system of grave symbolism during the height of the Victorian era to less varied and complex iconography in the early twentieth century. The previously vast array of symbols used on children’s grave markers diminished and was replaced by fairly simple symbols of hands praying and fingers pointing upward. This shift in iconography appears to reflect an ideological shift in attitude towards death and the customs surrounding it. In contrast to the generally accepted idea of death as peaceful sleep that was adopted during the late nineteenth century, death began to be viewed as a very deep and real personal loss. Children’s stones in Elmwood from the early twentieth century are almost entirely void of angels, mourning figures, and elaborately sculpted symbols. Instead, the graves of children are marked by small, simple headstones that merely indicate a name and a life span. There are no more beds; there are no more symbols of purity and innocence. Death became an occasion



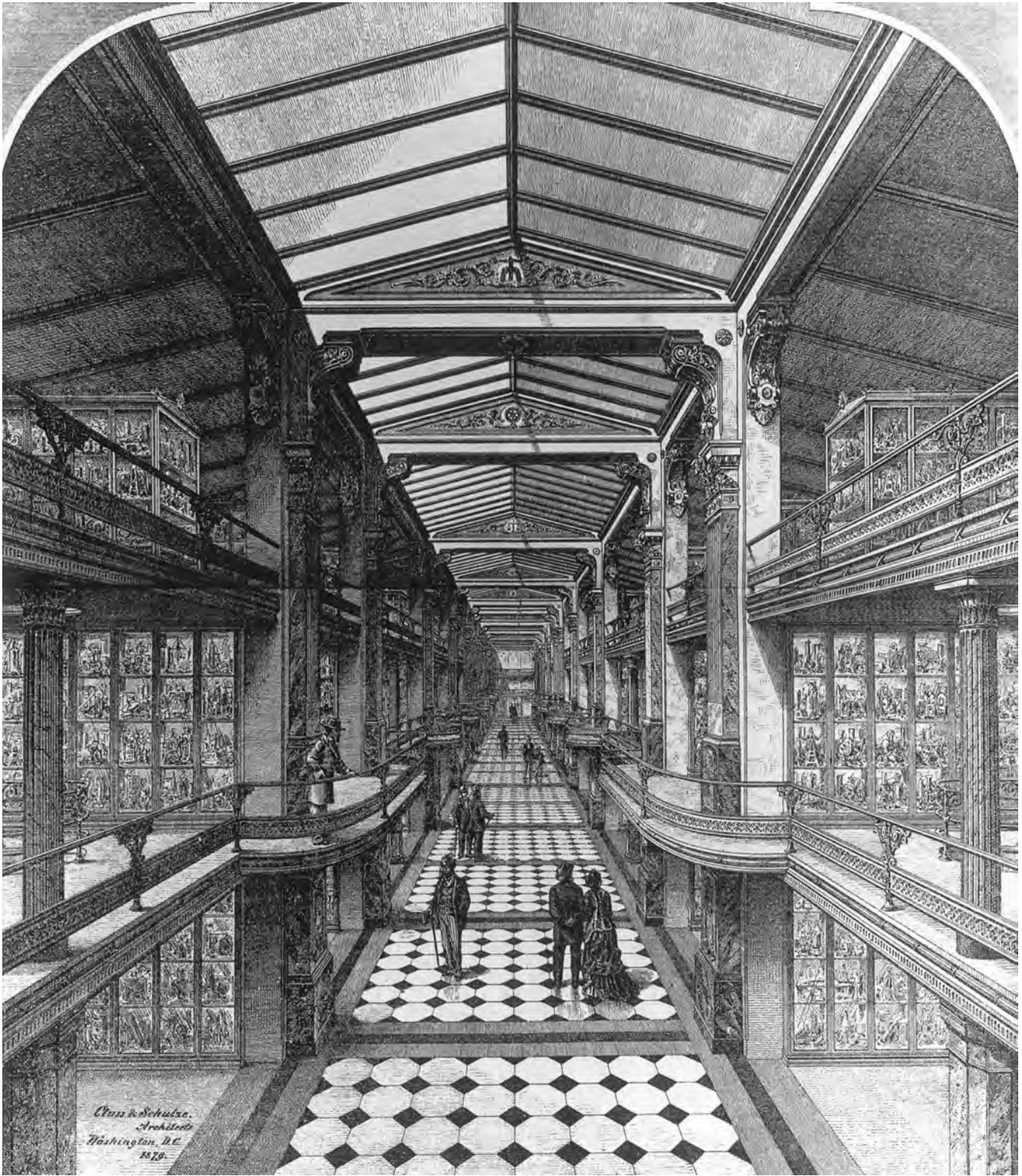
Statue of Marie McKay that previously stood at Elmwood Cemetery.

void of ornamentation and symbolic slumber; death became a sad and regrettable personal loss.

A systematic survey of the funerary sculpture at Elmwood Cemetery, then, demonstrates the rise and fall of Victorian mourning customs through visible changes in iconography. The ideas surrounding death are readily evidenced in the graves of children, specifically, which document the shift in perspective that occurred from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Like other historic cemeteries around the nation, Elmwood offers insight into the variety and breadth of classic Victorian funerary icons, from the ornate to the simple, from the conventionalized to the personal. By examining the graves of children, we can begin to understand the depth of the losses felt by parents as they guided their deceased children into what they believed would be an eternity of peaceful slumber.



5. Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*, (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1995), 130.
6. Maureen Delorme, *Mourning Art and Jewelry* (Atglen, Pa.: Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 2004), 252.
7. Delorme, 252.
8. Delorme, 252.
9. McDannell, 123.
10. Delorme, 251.
11. Delorme, 253.
12. Delorme, 252.
13. Tim Bonney, interview.



West Model Hall of the Patent Office Building. Photolithograph, 1879. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. Gift of Norman Evans.



# Victorian Innovation

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## *American Patent Models*

CHARLES J. ROBERTSON

Congress in 1790 enacted legislation for the granting of patents. The law required the submission of a narrative description, a drawing, and a model of the invention to be patented. Unlike England and other countries, the United States was unique in mandating not only the submission of models but also their public display. In those early years, America lacked the scientific and technical expertise to evaluate an invention without a model.

During the law's first year, only three patents were granted, but the number increased exponentially over the ensuing decades, and by 1880 over 25,000 patents were being issued annually. Eventually, many highly skilled model making shops grew up around the Patent Office Building in Washington to meet the demand for ever more sophisticated inventions. The models increasingly reflected the mechanization of labor and the industrial revolution that was sweeping the country during this era.

Though not specifically mandated, the size of the models was traditionally no larger than one cubic foot. They were not required to be working models but only to demonstrate the feasibility of the patent requested. The large majority of the patents, however, were not deemed practical for actual commercial production. A patent only assured that the invention was unique and theoretically useful, but commercial manufacture, advertising, and sale of a finished product was quite another matter.

Many of the models represented improvements of earlier inventions. Labor-saving domestic and farming devices, such as sewing machines, washing machines, stoves, and plows, were especially subject to constant attempts at improvement because they were marketable.

The law was modified in 1870, and the submission of models became optional, although many inventors continued to provide them. By 1880 the submission of models was prohibited unless they were requested by the Commissioner of Patents. By this time a professional corps of specialized patent examiners was fully capable of approving patents on the basis of detailed drawings and descriptions alone.

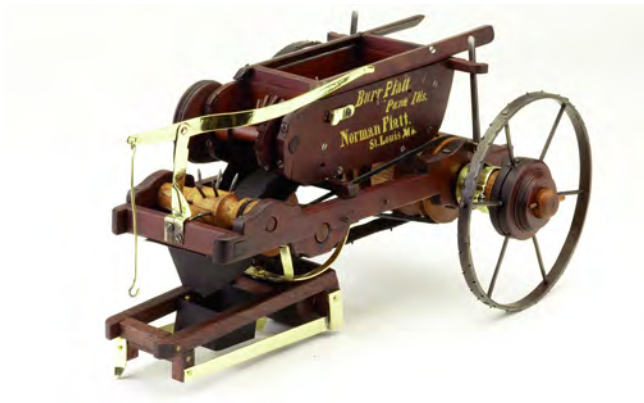
At its zenith in 1877, the Patent Office Building in Washington displayed over 200,000 patent models in cases nine feet high on two levels in enormous galleries of the top floor constructed for this purpose. As the models became obsolete, they were placed in off-site storage by



Governor for Steam Engines, 1870. Joseph Bell, Cincinnati, OH.

the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After a Congressional investigation on the waste of funds to store “useless models,” the Patent Office in 1924 decided to dispose of all of its models. Some were returned to the inventors or their families, and some were offered to any museum that wanted them. The Smithsonian Institution was given first choice of any models if wanted, and it acquired some 2,500 models for its collection.

The bulk of the models, however, was purchased by Sir Henry Wellcome, founder of Glaxo Wellcome Pharmaceuticals, who planned to establish a patent model museum in New York City. The 1929 crash ended his plans, and after his death the models were sold over the decades in private sales and at auction, often for modest amounts. Fifteen thousand were lost in a disastrous fire.



(Clockwise from top left): Windmill, 1880. Sylvester Ament, Aurora, IL; Paper Bag Fabricating Machine, 1881. Edgar Stocking, Washington, D.C.; Sewing Machine, 1875. Israel Rose, Brookhaven, NY.; Cotton Seed Planter, 1865. Burr & Norman Platt, St. Louis, MO.

Today the models have become highly collectable, and they turn up periodically on Ebay and antique fairs. The largest private collection, of 4,000 models, is currently owned by Alan Rothschild of Cazenovia, New York, who has opened a museum at his home, available for visitation by appointment.

These often intricately crafted models, each of which is unique, survive as a testament to America's creative imagination and entrepreneurship. They are also a testament to the amazing skill of the craftsmen who produced them.



*The exhibition Inventing a Better Mousetrap: Patent Models from the Rothschild Collection, curated by Charles Robertson, is on view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum through November 3, 2013. For more information about the exhibition and the patent models in it, see [www.AmericanArt.si.edu](http://www.AmericanArt.si.edu), click on "exhibitions."*

# The Bibliophile

## *Frederic Crowninshield: A Renaissance Man in the Gilded Age*

Gertrude De G. Wilmers and Julie L. Sloan. University of Massachusetts Press, 2010.

One of the reasons the Victorian era is so attractive to me is its focus on art and design – good design was paramount in nineteenth century society and considered not only aesthetically important but morally essential to lead a good life. In the United States, from the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876 until World War I, private and public buildings were “properly fitted” with ornate interiors, many with murals and stained glass. A new group of artists arose for these projects, including Frederic Crowninshield (1845-1918). A contemporary of Louis Comfort Tiffany and John La Farge, he was not only a successful artist, creating murals and stained glass, but a teacher and author as well. His book *Mural Painting* (1886) was the definitive study on the subject for many years. Crowninshield’s stained-glass windows and murals decorated churches and public buildings throughout New York, New England and the Midwest in the later part of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth century.

Surprisingly little has been written about Crowninshield until now. Gertrude de G. Wilmers, the great-granddaughter of the artist and an art historian and researcher, and Julie Sloan, an author and stained-glass consultant, spent years researching Crowninshield’s work, visiting and photographing existing examples, interviewing descendants and researching archival material related to his work. The result is an outstanding, extensively-referenced and scholarly book, certainly the definitive work to-date on this talented artist.

I like the way the book is divided into two parts. The first is a chronological account of his life and work, from growing up in an affluent family in Boston, to studies at Harvard, teaching in Boston and travels in Italy. Crowninshield moved from Boston to New York in 1885, opening a studio near Union and Washington Squares, where many artists had their ateliers. Aside from a two-year sojourn to Italy in 1889, he remained in New York for the next two decades creating many of his most famous stained-glass windows and murals during this period. Crowninshield was appointed the Director of the American Academy in Rome in 1909 and spent two years there, returning to the United States in 1911. He would spend his remaining years in Stockbridge in the Berkshires, where he built a new home, “Konkaput,” amongst the community of fellow artists who lived there, such as Daniel Chester French. Engagingly written, it is easy to follow Crowninshield’s life as he moved within the artistic circles of late nineteenth-century America and

Italy and to understand the sociological factors that influenced his work. Illustrations of his paintings, watercolors and stained glass windows make for an enjoyable read.

The second section of the book, focusing on Crowninshield as an artist, was the most interesting for me. Three chapters in this section trace his stained glass designs, his murals, and his paintings in oil and watercolor. Crowninshield was part of the revolution in the design and manufacture of stained glass that took part in the latter part of the nineteenth century. He saw stained glass as an extension of mural painting and was one of the first to incorporate opalescent glass in his windows after Tiffany and La Farge. Crowninshield would design spectacular windows for many churches, as well as three pairs of windows for Harvard’s Alumni (now Annenberg) Hall of properly inspirational subjects: Pericles and Leonardo (1882), Shakespeare and Sophocles (1883), and “The Parting of Hector and Andromache”(1888). He was particularly known for his winged angels, their forms outlined in black lead came with a flatness and linearity similar to the work of children’s book illustrators of the time, such as Walter Crane (Crowninshield knew him from Italy in the 1870s) and the popular Prang greeting cards. One of his most detailed windows and my favorite is “Pilgrim’s Progress” a large, three-lancet design created in memory of his mother who died in 1897. Presented to the Emmanuel Church in Boston in 1899, it depicts a multfigured scene in a lush and colorful landscape inspired by Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

The development of murals in American buildings was one of the most important contributions of the American Renaissance and Gilded Age and Crowninshield was at the forefront. Murals grew in popularity after the World’s Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893, where many artists were hired to decorate buildings. Soon public institutions from the Library of Congress to city libraries were decorated with murals – considered “proper” embellishments for public spaces. In his book *Mural Painting*, Crowninshield explained that murals were the ultimate democratic art, one that could play a role in improving the human condition as they uplifted everyday experience. Crowninshield painted murals for churches from Princeton University’s Chapel to Cleveland’s United States Court House (Old Federal Building) as well as for the homes of several wealthy individuals including Henry Marquand (a founder of the



Metropolitan Museum of Art). Illustrations of murals still existing in Cleveland's Federal Building show Crowninshield's expertise in color and form in classic depictions of "Persuasion" and "Knowledge," subjects celebrating peace and justice that were appropriate for a courthouse setting. The saddest part is that few of his murals have survived; the Cleveland Courthouse's is one of the best extent examples.

The last chapter details Crowninshield's paintings in oil and watercolor. He was fond of depicting classic, Italian scenes of ruins in the countryside, such as the Roman Forum with St. Peter's in the background. He also painted the rural beauty of the Berkshires countryside, where he spent his final years. He adopted a broader,

looser style of brushwork similar to that of the Impressionists, meant to "represent accurately vivid impressions and passionate feelings for the time and place," as the book's authors explain. The Boston Museum of Fine Arts has works of Crowninshield on view.

The book concludes with comprehensive appendixes on dates and locations of Crowninshield's stained-glass windows, mural paintings and associated designs; unfortunately not much of his original work remains. Comprehensive notes, a glossary and a bibliography nicely round out the book.

*Reviewed by Brian Coleman*

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## *The Chicago Schoolhouse: High School Architecture and Educational Reform, 1856-2006*

Dale Allen Gyure. The Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2011.

The Progressive Era saw the public-school system in the United States come into its own. By the turn of the 20th century, government responsibility for providing free, quality education had become a given, no longer open to debate. Schools were front and center during the great reform decade of the 1890s, seen as the key for improving the lot of immigrants and the poor. They became a standard component of civic improvement, extending the City Beautiful Movement beyond downtowns into the neighborhoods where people actually lived. Many of these splendid, imposing schools from the glory days of public education still stand, often still the centerpiece of a neighborhood.

Yet architectural historians have paid scant attention to public schools. Perhaps this is because we've come to take our public-school system so for granted that the buildings themselves are almost invisible to us, or perhaps because public schools tend to carry the stigma of dull, under-financed, utilitarian structures whose many specified requirements leave the architect little room for creativity. Scholarly books trace the history of public libraries, insane asylums, college campuses. But that most ubiquitous and widely-experienced architectural type (outside the residential) — public schools — are the least studied. They aren't even mentioned in Nicholas Pevsner's handbook *A History of Building Types* (Princeton, 1976). "The comprehensive critical history of school buildings in the United States remains to be written," says Marta Gutman in the *Encyclopedia of*

*Children and Childhood* (McMillan, 2003); Dolores Hayden shows how urban schools are particularly ignored (*The Power of Place*, MIT Press, 1995).

So, in this context, kudos to Dale Allen Gyure and the Center for American Places for the handsome, readable, thoroughly-researched, and well-illustrated *The Chicago Schoolhouse* (2011). After a "Beginnings" chapter on the post-Civil-War American high school, two main sections follow. The three chapters of the "Transformation" section are the intellectual and emotional heart of the book, showing how from 1890 to 1920 the modern high school was created; more change occurred in those 30 than in the 90 subsequent years. The "Development" section looks at schools after the 1920s, which basically continued a less-ornamented version of the pattern that had been established. Gyure's arguments are clarified and bolstered throughout by floor plans and period photographs. Though focused on a century and a half of Chicago high schools, the book, as its subtitle "High School Architecture and Educational Reform 1856-2006" suggests, uses those schools to exemplify the larger history of public high schools in the United States.

Boston, our city of educational firsts, opened this country's first public high school in 1821, the Boston English Classical School. Chicago opened a public high school in 1856. Most major cities had them by the 1880s. New York was the laggard; the first public high school didn't open in Manhattan until 1902.

Most of the pre-1890 high schools, for the children of

the well-to-do, offered strictly academic curricula, a pedagogy of memorization and recitation intended to train the mind. The design of the schools reflected the homogeneity of the academic experience – three or four floors of same-sized classrooms stacked one over the other, with a principal’s office and sometimes a top-story assembly room.

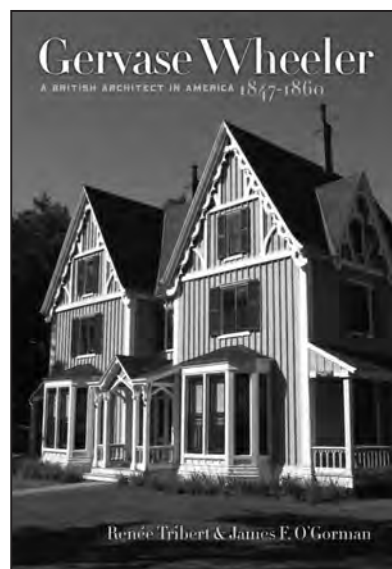
This “egg-crate” template was disrupted toward the end of the 19th century, when the school population increased dramatically. The increase, estimated at 25,000 children per year in New York City alone, resulted from several factors: staggeringly high immigration, the introduction of compulsory-education and child-labor laws, and the population movement to cities that transformed this country from agrarian to urban. In response to this major societal shift, Gyure demonstrates, our modern school – the school as we know it today – came into being and was already fully-developed by 1920. For one thing schools made a huge jump in size. Gyure states that the whole of Chicago’s 1856 Central High would have fit inside the gymnasium alone of the 1930 Senn High School.

For another, because the student body had changed, the old scholarly curriculum was insufficient. Educational reformers of the 1890s argued for practical, hands-on types of learning and introduced manual-training and vocational courses, which required specialized types of classrooms. Another new space different from the traditional academic classroom, the gymnasium, became standard fare as society came to believe that play contributes to a child’s moral sense.

The simple 19th-century “schoolhouse” morphed into the complex 20th-century “school building,” with its numerous differentiated spaces such as gymnasiums, shop and domestic-science rooms, auditoriums, laboratories, study halls, libraries. This process begot a new type of architect, one who specialized in school architecture – Edmund Wheelwright of Boston, Charles B. J. Snyder of New York, William Ittner of St. Louis, Dwight Perkins of Chicago. They and others produced “monumental palaces designed to hold thousands of students, to allow large numbers of assorted courses, and to proclaim loudly the institution’s newly important status to the public.” The grandeur of schools dignified students and reinforced their worthiness. Additionally, since high schools were still a new claimant of tax dollars, their historicist, august styles worked to confirm their legitimacy. Something like cathedrals in medieval Europe, high schools in this country represented a community’s cultural and educational status.

A school architect also needed engineering expertise in order to utilize new technologies. Recently introduced steel-skeleton construction allowed double the window space of the older masonry buildings. Light and air were the central, across-the-board concern of reformers, in these days when tuberculosis was our number-one cause of death, with widespread artificial lighting still in the future and early skyscrapers plunging streets into shadow. Other concerns included fireproofing and

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## Gervase Wheeler

### A British Architect in America, 1847–1860

Renée E. Tribert and James F. O’Gorman

Gervase Wheeler was an English-born architect who designed important American buildings and was perhaps best known as the author of two influential architecture books—*Rural Homes* (1851) and *Homes for the People* (1855). This study sheds new light on the course of Wheeler’s career in the states, and brings critical issues to the fore—the international movement of ideas, the influence of architectural publications on popular taste, and social history as expressed in the changing nature of the American house. The book is lavishly illustrated with building plans and historical photographs.

“The definitive study of an important figure in the history of American architecture.”—Michael J. Lewis, author of *Frank Furness: Architecture and the Violent Mind*

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mechanical heating and ventilation, both technologies in their infancy.

The Chicago Schoolhouse is a fascinating look at how the aspirations and attitudes of society determined both the nature and appearance of our public high schools.

May this book open the way for a study of that even more ignored building type – the public elementary school.

*Reviewed by Jean Arrington*

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## *The Vintage House: A Guide to Successful Renovation and Additions*

Mark Alan Hewitt and Gordon Bock. W. W. Norton & Company, 2011.

*The Vintage House: A Guide to Successful Renovations and Additions* will be enthusiastically welcomed by those who want to enjoy twenty-first-century comfort at the same time that they want to live in a beautiful old home that retains the architectural integrity of its original design. In addition, I suspect that this book may also have been inspired as an antidote to the “tear-down and rebuild” trend that has simply destroyed many lovely old houses over the past two decades. For those with the impulse to bulldoze the past, this book offers a pleading compromise – if you can afford a fine, vintage house in an upscale neighborhood, then you can certainly afford a knowledgeable architect and engage in a thoughtful remodeling project. This volume aims to educate and inspire those who have old houses, but have no desire to live in a house museum.

The two authors of *The Vintage House* are renowned in the field of historic architecture and interiors – Mark Alan Hewitt is a practicing architect and author of numerous books and articles, and Gordon Bock is easily recognized as the longtime editor of *Old-House Journal*. In this collaborative, ten-chapter volume, they swiftly cover a lot of ground, first offering a definition of the “vintage house,” and then exploring the concepts of architectural function, evolution, style, energy consumption, and context. As they consider both urban and rural dwellings, they point out sympathetic and holistic approaches to redesign and remodeling. They show how renovations, additions, and re-imagined outbuildings can embrace modernization at the same time that they honor the past.

In using the term “vintage” the authors were free to select a range of houses and styles from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries to exemplify their definition of successful renovation projects. Most of the examples selected were located on the East Coast, and most were easily recognizable as fine and handsome houses that seemed generally well-maintained before any work was undertaken. For devotees of *Nineteenth Century*, there

are plenty of Victorian examples in the mix. As the authors note, houses such as these have survived and aged well because they have intrinsic value as cultural artifacts.

At the same time, the authors offer reassurance to modern dwellers by suggesting that these vintage homes need not be frozen in time and overly-burdened with historical authenticity. Their approach is one of balancing the old with the new. They embrace appropriate and respectful architectural change and showcase a variety of additions and renovations that are sensitive, interesting, and sometimes quite clever. In addition to numerous color photographs, some projects are accompanied by “before” and “after” floor plans. The authors also provide a straightforward primer on materials and methods, together with valuable compilation of experienced architects and resources for various materials.

Although the book is clearly aimed at a contemporary American audience, the authors find support in their methodology by referencing significant historical architects who successfully worked on old houses. The 1905-1912 additions that Edwin L. Lutyens (1869-1944) made to a late-sixteenth-century castle in Lambay, Ireland, and his 1906 and 1912 additions to Folly Farm in Sullingstead, England, are inspiring. Likewise, there is an enlightening discussion on Sir John Soane (1753-1837) and the evolution of his remarkable London townhouse. There are indeed lessons to be learned from the past.

*The Vintage House* will no doubt be of interest to architects who know old houses and clients working through plans and ideas for renovations and additions. It will be most important to those who buy property for “location” and feel inclined to raze the vintage house only to replace it with a superficial, soulless investment. One can only hope that *The Vintage House* finds its way into the hands of those who truly need to know what they have before attempting to change it.

*Reviewed by Roberta A. Mayer*



# Contributors

## JEAN ARRINGTON

has been researching C. B. J. Snyder since 2006. She teaches English at Borough of Manhattan Community College and mentors student teachers through Long Island University.

## WARREN ASHWORTH

an architect in New York City, specializes in the adaptive reuse of historic structures.

## LIBBY BISCHOP

assistant professor of history at the University of Southern Maine, is a cultural historian who focuses on 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century United States history.

## BRIAN COLEMAN

a psychiatrist practicing in Seattle and frequent contributor to *19th Century* and other magazines, writes on decorative arts and interior design.

## MELANIE LINN GUTOWSKI

a writer and researcher, lives in Pittsburgh. She is a docent and museum educator at the Frick Art & Historical Center and holds a master's degree in professional writing.

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former editor of *19th Century*, is professor emerita of fashion and textile design at Syracuse University.

## ROBERTA MAYER

who teaches art history at Bucks County Community College in Pennsylvania, is the author of *Lockwood de Forest: Furnishing the Gilded Age with a Passion for India*.

## JAMES F. O'GORMAN

was recently awarded an American Philosophical Society research grant on the subject of the iconography of 19<sup>th</sup>-century American architects' portraits.

## CHARLES J. ROBERTSON

former deputy director at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, is curator of the exhibition *Inventing a Better Mousetrap: Patent Models from the Rothschild Collection* currently on view there.

## JACLYN SPAINHOUR


is a graduate teaching assistant at Old Dominion University, where she is studying for a master's degree in history. She currently volunteers as a museum docent at the Hunter House Victorian Museum in Norfolk, Virginia.

## JOHN WATERS

is a practicing architect in Chicago. He serves on the House and Collections Committee of Glessner House Museum and the Funding and Easement Committee of Illinois Landmarks.

## KAREN ZUKOWSKI

is an independent writer, specializing in the visual culture of interiors. The article in this issue stems from her dissertation, "Creating Art and Artists: Late Nineteenth-Century American Artists' Studios."



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# Milestones

## Ruskin and the Stones of Lucca

SALLY BUCHANAN KINSEY

On a sun-splashed autumn afternoon in Florence in 1874, John Ruskin (1819–1900), the cranky but brilliant art historian, Oxford’s distinguished Slade Professor of Fine Art, was vexed.

He (and his scribes) had completed the exhaustive notes for *Mornings in Florence*, which delineated in exquisite detail the Italian Renaissance treasure houses of that famous city. Now, aesthetic fatigue had beset him. All those smoke-and-ivory striations, so .... *gaudy* in the unrelenting Tuscan sun. Was familiarity breeding contempt?

And the tourists! They were everywhere: overdressed zealots brazenly flourishing their weapons – parasols, walking sticks, Baedekers – in the name of art, while gazing trance-like at the trophies before them. But were they really *comprehending*? Ruskin thought not.

So the great man decamped for the cool bowers of the Apennine foothills and his favorite Tuscan town, Lucca. There, in a more serene atmosphere he could appreciate the nuances of his enduring architectural love, the Romanesque. Not that there weren’t tourists, but they were of a different temperament, often scholars prone to contemplating, say, the animal friezes of the twelfth-century church of San Michele in Foro (built atop the ruins of a Roman forum) or the austerity of San Frediano, Ruskin’s favorite. Its stark façade of Carrara marble, c. 1100, was enhanced in the thirteenth century with a dazzling mosaic depicting an *Ascension* theme, possibly by a local artisan, Bonaventura Berlinghieri. This was the church where, years before, Ruskin as an intense university student on his first tour of Italy had welcomed a calling to the arts. In a letter to his father he wrote, “Absolutely for the first time I now saw what medieval builders were and what they meant ... and thereon literally began the study of architecture.”

Lucca’s origins are buried in prehistory. It was known to the Etruscans and then became a thriving Roman market town. Christianity was established early. In medieval times, Lucca, because of its proximity to the Ligurian Sea and hence the Mediterranean for trade with the East, became a renowned silk-weaving center, competing with Florence and Venice. It is said that at one time Lucca had a hundred churches. Not that many survive, but thanks to civic pride and careful conservation the extant ones have changed little since Ruskin’s day. Nor has the Victorian intellectuals’ favorite watering spot, Caffè di Simo, founded in 1846 (as Caffè del Caselli), it



(L) John Ruskin, frontispiece of *Mornings in Florence*, commemorative edition, 1900.

(R) San Frediano, Lucca. Photograph by Dick Kinsey, 2011.

retains its nineteenth century art gallery atmosphere. This was Giacomo Puccini’s favorite destination, perhaps Ruskin’s too, for an *aperitivo* and conversation – and then on to dine at the superior Buca di Sant’Antonio, famous since 1782 for its traditional Lucchese cooking.

And no Ruskin-Tuscan sojourn would be complete without a stroll on Lucca’s ancient ramparts. Built in Roman times, reconstructed in the Middle Ages and yet again in the sixteenth century, the thirty-foot-high walls are crowned by a public park and the Passeggiata delle Mura, a wide roadway for pedestrians and bicyclists that encircles the city for two and a half miles. Visitors can enjoy bird’s-eye views of churches, villas, gardens and the colorful Piazza Anfiteatro, formerly a Roman amphitheater, restored in the nineteenth century with shops, cafes and housing. It is easy to imagine Ruskin and his companions descending for a late-night libation to be quaffed among these centuries of stones.



Ruskin’s letter is quoted by Marina Belozerskaya in *The Arts of Tuscany* (New York: Abrams, 2008), 217. Many of John Ruskin’s drawings and watercolors are in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford University. Some are reproduced in various editions of his epic *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1848). Recommended for further reading: *The Pursuit of Italy* by David Gilmour (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2011).

# GLESSNER HOUSE AT 125: *Richardson's Urban Residential Masterpiece Reconsidered*



In honor of the 125th anniversary of the completion of Glessner House in December 1887, an examination of the architect Henry Hobson Richardson, the furnishing and decorating of the house, and its rescue in the mid-1960s at the start of the preservation movement in Chicago. Co-sponsored by Glessner House Museum and the Victorian Society in America.



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**OPENING RECEPTION  
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2012  
6:30 p.m. - Reception  
7:15 p.m. - Lecture**

**Ken Breisch**

*Assistant Professor, School of Architecture,  
University of Southern California*

"Situating the Glessner House: Late Richardson and the Romanesque Revival in the American West"

For a short period of time at the end of the nineteenth century, from Chicago to Dallas and Seattle to Los Angeles, the Richardsonian or Romanesque Revival style came to represent the new American architecture, but it was also transformed by local conditions in order to represent the specific regional needs and aspirations of a rapidly growing American West.

**SYMPOSIUM NOVEMBER 10, 2012  
9 A.M. - 4 P.M.**

**9 a.m. - Breakfast**

**9:30 a.m. - Welcome**

**William Tyre**

*Executive Director and Curator,  
Glessner House Museum*

**9:45 a.m. - Keynote Speaker**

**James F. O'Gorman**

*Professor Emeritus, Wellesley College*

"Herkomer's Portrait of Richardson in Iconographical Context"

A look at the place of the likeness in the history of portraying nineteenth-century American architects. A large heliotype copy of the Herkomer portrait displayed in the main hall is one of the few items to remain in Glessner House continuously since the late 1880s.

**10:30 a.m.**

**Mary Alice Molloy**

*Architectural Historian*

"Richardson's Web: A Client's Assessment of the Architect's Home and Studio"

An analysis of how Richardson used his home and office to encourage his clients to accept his ideas for their projects, based on a first hand account of John and Frances Glessners' visits with the architect during the planning phase for their home on Prairie Avenue.

**11:15 a.m.**

**Kevin Harrington**

*Professor Emeritus of Architectural  
History, Illinois Institute of Technology*

"Mies visits Glessner House: What Was He Thinking?"

When Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, an influential architect, first arrived in America in 1938, he considered conducting his new architecture curriculum in Chicago at the influential Glessner House. This examination provides valuable insight into the relationship between two seemingly different architects.

**12:00 p.m.**

**Lunch**

**12:45 p.m.**

**Elaine Harrington**

*Former Curator, Glessner House Museum*

"Colors, Patterns, and Seasons in the Glessner House"

The Glessners and Richardson used many themes in this significant work of architecture and decorative art, blending them into a cohesive fabric responding to the life within. The colors and patterns of design and life that resulted from the weaving together of these themes created this outstanding seasonal urban home.

**1:30 p.m.**

**Rolf Achilles**

*Curator, Smith Museum of Stained Glass  
and Adjunct Professor, School of the Art  
Institute*

"Neugotik (New Gothic): A springboard to Modern in American furniture and interior design"

An examination of the Glessners' evolving tastes during the 1870s and 1880s, from the new Gothic masterpieces designed for them by Isaac Scott, to

later furniture by Charles Coolidge and Francis Bacon specifically commissioned for their new home on Prairie Avenue.

**2:15pm**

**Monica Obniski**

*Assistant Curator of American Decorative  
Arts, Art Institute of Chicago*

"The Impact of William Morris on the Arts and Crafts Movement in Chicago"

This talk will locate several examples of William Morris's influence - through his ideals and his designs - in Chicago at the turn of the 20th century, including Glessner House, one of the earliest.

**3:00p.m.**

**Ted Hild**

*Illinois state historic preservation  
official 1972-2007*

"Historic Preservation in Chicago at Mid-century"

A description of principles and practices of historic preservation in Chicago in the mid-20th century in order to place the preservation of the Glessner House in the context of the 1960s.

**3:45 p.m.**

**Concluding Remarks**

**4:00 p.m.**

**Optional tours of Glessner House  
Museum**

**WALKING TOUR OF PRAIRIE AVENUE  
SUNDAY NOVEMBER 11, 2012 • 10 a.m.**

**William Tyre**

*Executive Director and Curator, Glessner  
House Museum*

This walking tour will place Glessner House in the context of other architecturally significant sites in the surrounding Prairie Avenue Historic District, including Second Presbyterian Church, with its important 1901 Arts and Crafts interior and windows by Edward Burne-Jones and Tiffany Studios.



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