

# UC Berkeley

## UC Berkeley Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

Something of an Architect: Thomas Cole and the Country House Ideal

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/68s611cz>

### Author

Coleman, William Lavine

### Publication Date

2015

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

Something of an Architect:  
Thomas Cole and the Country House Ideal

By

William Lavine Coleman

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History of Art

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Margaretta M. Lovell, Chair

Professor Elizabeth A. Honig

Professor Andrew M. Shanken

Spring 2015

Copyright 2015, William Lavine Coleman  
All rights reserved

## Abstract

Something of an Architect: Thomas Cole and the Country House Ideal

by

William Lavine Coleman

Doctor of Philosophy in History of Art

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Margaretta M. Lovell, Chair

The Anglo-American artist Thomas Cole is now firmly established in the canon for his landscape paintings and allegories but it has not been adequately understood how deeply he was invested in architecture. This dissertation seeks to remedy that oversight by studying archival evidence that shows his sophistication as a painter, designer, and critic of buildings and his participation in intellectual currents of the time through the built environment. What discussion there has been of Cole's little known work in architecture in the past has treated the episodes under discussion as anomalous or peripheral to his core work. On the contrary, "Something of an Architect: Thomas Cole and the Country House Ideal" demonstrates the extent to which many of his best known paintings were the product of practical architectural endeavors with which he was involved in the same years, and that he approached the built environment pictorially.

The three chapters study three distinct but related elements of his response to architecture. Chapter One focuses on Cole's writings about public architecture, including the Washington Monument, the Ohio Statehouse, and an essay he called "Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture." These documents, most of them never before published, demonstrate a preoccupation with architecture as a force for harmony, unity, and permanence in a fractious society that sorely needed all three. Chapter Two studies Cole's little known "house portraits": paintings of the country houses of three patrons. These seemingly topographical views have been largely disregarded as regrettable concessions to financial necessity that have little to tell viewers about the concerns of an artist better known for grand allegories like *The Course of Empire*. However, considering them in relation to new evidence of his architectural thought shows these enigmatic images to be participants in a vibrant contemporary discourse about country houses as ways of civilizing and inscribing the wilderness with history and about the place of aristocracy in a republic. Chapter Three studies Cole's extensive plans for an Italianate villa of his own that would put his study of architecture in general and the country house in particular into practice. While most of these designs were unexecuted due to his financial circumstances, they testify to his participation in this moment of national literal and metaphorical investment in country life. This context urges a rethinking of much of the oeuvre of "the father of the Hudson River School" and of the ideologies with which country life and its representations were fraught in the antebellum era.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| List of Figures.....   | ii  |
| Acknowledgements.....  | xi  |
| Introduction: The Painter-Architect in the Early Republic.....   | 1   |
| Chapter One: “In Accordance with True Taste”: Cole’s Writings on Public Architecture.....              | 6   |
| I. The Washington Monument.....  | 9   |
| II. The Ohio Statehouse.....   | 12  |
| III. Cole’s “Letter to the Publick”.....   | 26  |
| Chapter Two: Thomas Cole and the House Portrait.....   | 30  |
| I. Painting the “Baronial Castle”: Featherston Park.....   | 34  |
| II. The Villa as Public Good: Monte Video.....   | 51  |
| III. Feudal Nostalgia: The Van Rensselaer Manor House.....   | 63  |
| Chapter Three: Cedar Grove and the Villa Ideal.....  | 77  |
| I. Artists’s Houses in America before Cole.....  | 80  |
| II. From Thomson Place to Cedar Grove.....   | 88  |
| III. “A Sort of Italian Looking Thing”: Cole’s Designs for Cedar Grove.....                            | 93  |
| Conclusion: The Domesticated Landscape in America.....   | 104 |
| Figures.....   | 108 |
| Works Cited.....   | 180 |
| Appendix A: Cole’s Writings on the Washington Monument.....  | 193 |
| Appendix B: The Correspondence of Thomas Cole and William Apthorp Adams<br>on the Ohio Statehouse..... | 196 |
| Appendix C: “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture”.....                                | 220 |

## LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1 *Palace on the Hudson in the Year 2500*, T. Cole Architect, late 1830s or early 1840s. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.519
- Fig. 2 *The Course of Empire: Consummation*, 1836. Oil on canvas, New-York Historical Society
- Fig. 3 *The Architect's Dream*, 1840. Oil on canvas, Toledo Museum of Art.
- Fig. 4 Detail: *Youth* from *The Voyage of Life*, 1842. Oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art
- Fig. 5 *A View of the Mountain Pass Called the Notch of the White Mountains (Crawford Notch)*, 1839. Oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington
- Fig. 6 Sketch for the Ohio Statehouse, c. 1838. Chalk on panel (verso of Fig. 5) National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
- Fig. 7 Front Elevation for St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Catskill, NY, c. 1839-40. Ink over pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.535
- Fig. 8 Detail of *The Return* (Fig. 82), 1838. Oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection, National Gallery of Art
- Fig. 9 Pierre Charles L'Enfant, *Plan of Washington* (detail with Point A, "President's house" and "Congress house" circled), 1887 facsimile of 1791 original. United States Coast and Geodetic Survey Office. [Reproduced in Savage, "Self-Made Monument", p. 228]
- Fig. 10 Sketch for the Washington Monument, 1835. Pencil on paper, New York State Library, Cole Papers 4a.1
- Fig. 11 *The Course of Empire: Destruction*, 1836. Oil on canvas, New-York Historical Society
- Fig. 12 *The Course of Empire: Desolation*, 1836. Oil on canvas, New-York Historical Society
- Fig. 13 Detail of Fig. 2, *The Course of Empire: Consummation*, 1836. Oil on canvas, New-York Historical Society
- Fig. 14 Second Design for the Washington Monument, late 1835 or earlier 1836. Ink on paper, New York State Library, Cole Papers 6.5
- Fig. 15 Robert Mills, *Sketch of Washington National Monument*, c. 1840. Ink and watercolor, National Archives. [Reproduced in Savage, "Self-Made Monument", 234]
- Fig. 16 John Russell Pope et al. *The Jefferson Memorial*, 1938-43. Washington, D.C.

Fig. 17 First design for the Ohio Statehouse, 1838. Ink on paper, New York State Library, Cole Papers 2.8

Fig. 18 Undated early plan and elevation for the Ohio Statehouse. Ink on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts, 39.508

Fig. 19 Thomas Jefferson and Charles-Louis Clérisseau, Virginia State Capitol, Richmond, 1785.

Fig. 20 Maison Carée, Nîmes, France. Circa 16 b.c.e.

Fig. 21 Undated Statehouse elevation. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts, 39.504a

Fig. 22 Undated Statehouse elevation. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts, 39.505

Fig. 23 Undated Statehouse perspective. Pencil and gray wash on paper, New York State Library, Cole Papers 8.1

Fig. 24 Alexander Jackson Davis, *Plan by T. Cole, Esq. For the Capitol of Ohio* (redrafted from Cole's original submission, now lost), c. 1839. Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 25 Alexander Jackson Davis, *Plan by H. Walter, Esq. For the Capitol of Ohio* (redrafted from original submission, now lost), c. 1839. Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 26 Ammi Young and Thomas Silloway, Vermont State House, Montpelier, 1833.

Fig. 27 Alexander Jackson Davis, *Plan by M. Thompson, Esq. For the Capitol of Ohio* (redrafted from original submission, now lost), c. 1839. Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 28 William Apthorp Adams, after Thomas Cole, Plan approved by the Commissioners of the Ohio Statehouse, June 21, 1839. New York State Library, Cole Papers 2.9

Fig. 29 Thomas Cole et al., The Ohio Statehouse, Columbus. 1839-1861.

Fig. 30 *The Past*, 1838. Oil on canvas, Mead Art Museum, Amherst College

Fig. 31 *The Present*, 1838. Oil on canvas, Mead Art Museum, Amherst College.

Fig. 32 *Portage Falls on the Genesee River*, 1839. Oil on canvas, Seward House Historic Museum [pending deaccession]

Fig. 33 Detail of Fig. 32: Hornby Lodge

Fig. 34 *Hornby Lodge*, 1839. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.337

Fig. 35 Peter Paul Rubens, *Autumn Landscape with a View of Het Steen in the Early Morning*, 1636. Oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, London

Fig. 36 William Birch, “Montibello, the Seat of Genl. S. Smith, Maryland” in *Country Seats of the United States of North America* (Philadelphia: William Birch, 1808).

Fig. 37 *View of the Featherstonhaugh Estate Near Duanesburg, New York*, 1826. Oil on canvas, The Featherstonhaugh Trust.

Fig. 38 *The Woodchopper, Lake Featherstonhaugh*, 1826. Oil on canvas, USC Fisher Museum of Art

Fig. 39 *Landscape, the Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance*, 1826. Oil on canvas, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Fig. 40 *Lake with Dead Trees*, 1825. Oil on canvas, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College

Fig. 41 Anon., Carte-de-visite of George William Featherstonhaugh, ca. 1856. Albumen print, Minnesota Historical Society

Fig. 42 Detail of *The Woodchopper, Lake Featherstonhaugh* (Fig. 38) Author photograph

Fig. 43 Colen Campbell, “The Elevation of Richard Rooth Esqr. his House at Epsom in Surrey” from *Vitruvius Britannicus, or the British Architect* Vol. II (London: Colen Campbell, 1717), pl. 49.

Fig. 44 *The Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance* (1 of 2), 1825-6. Pen and ink over pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts, 39.252.A

Fig. 45 *The Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance* (2 of 2), 1825-6. Pen and ink over pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts, 39.252.B

Fig. 46 “Observations on the Lake below Mr. F’s” from the Duanesburg Sketchbook, 1826. Pencil on paper, New York State Library, Cole Papers 8.3

Fig. 47 “A suitable sky for the lake scene, just after sunset,” from the Duanesburg Sketchbook, 1826. Ink over pencil on paper, New York State Library, Cole Papers 8.3

Fig. 48 *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*, 1836. Oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 49 View of Featherstonhaugh Lake near the mansion’s site, 16 December 2012. Author photo



Fig. 50 *Catskill Mountain House*, 1827. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts, 39.258

Fig. 51 *A View of the Two Lakes and Mountain House, Catskill Mountains, Morning*, 1844. Oil on canvas, Brooklyn Museum

Fig. 52 John Constable, *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*, 1816. Oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Fig. 53 The Frost Homestead, Duaneburg, NY, 2009. Courtesy of Howard C. Ohlhaus

Fig. 54 The Frost Homestead's Historical Marker, Duaneburg, NY, 2009. Courtesy of Howard C. Ohlhaus.

Fig. 55 State of New York marker at the boundary of Featherstonhaugh State Forest, Mariaville Lake, NY. December 16, 2012. Author photo

Fig. 56 Daniel Wadsworth, *Wadsworth Residence, Geneseo, New York*, c. 1825. Oil on panel, Connecticut Historical Society.

Fig. 57 John Trumbull, *Jeremiah Wadsworth and His Son Daniel Wadsworth*, 1784. Oil on canvas, Wadsworth Atheneum

Fig. 58 *Kaaterskill Falls (Second Version)*, 1826. Oil on canvas, Wadsworth Atheneum.

Fig. 59 *View of l'Esperance*, 1826-8. Oil on canvas, private collection.

Fig. 60 John Trumbull, *View on the West Mountain near Hartford*, c. 1791. Oil on canvas mounted on wood, Yale University Art Gallery.

Fig. 61 J. Martin and T. Higham, *Fonthill Abbey: View of the West & North Fronts*, copperplate from John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey* (London: Charles Knight & Co., 1823), pl. 11.

Fig. 62 Daniel Wadsworth and John Trumbull, *Monte Video*, c. 1805-1809. Photograph by Wayne Andrews c. 1949

Fig. 63 George W. Bourne, *The Wedding Cake House*, Kennebunk, ME, orig. 1826, ornament 1855.

Fig. 64 Horace Walpole, *Strawberry Hill*, Twickenham, Greater London, begun 1749.

Fig. 65 *Monte Video, Summer Residence of Mr. H. C. Judd* from J. Hammond Trumbull, *The Memorial History of Hartford County* (Boston, 1886), Vol II, p. 3 Reproduced in Saunders, *Patron of the Arts*, 17.

- Fig. 66 Daniel Wadsworth, *Monte Video, near Hartford, Conn.*, n.d. Pencil on paper, Connecticut Historical Society.
- Fig. 67 Daniel Wadsworth (?) Site plan and cross-section of Monte Video, n.d. Connecticut Historical Society 2012.312.240a
- Fig. 68 Daniel Wadsworth (?), Site plan and cross-section of Monte Video, nd. Connecticut Historical Society 2012.312.240b
- Fig. 69 “Profile 1” from Fig. 67
- Fig. 70 “Profile 2” from Fig. 67
- Fig. 71 “Profile 3” from Fig. 68
- Fig. 72 After Daniel Wadsworth, from Silliman, *Remarks on a Short Tour...*, 1824. Frontispiece
- Fig. 73 After Daniel Wadsworth, from Silliman, *Remarks on a Short Tour*, 1824. Facing p. 16
- Fig. 74 Daniel Wadsworth, *Monte Video*, before 1824. Watercolor, Connecticut Historical Society 1953.3.1
- Fig. 75 *View of Monte Video, the Seat of Daniel Wadsworth, Esq.*, 1828. Oil on wood, Wadsworth Atheneum
- Fig. 76 Detail of Fig. 75
- Fig. 77 After Thomas Cole, *Monte Video*, 1830. Steel engraving in Hinton, *History and Topography*, opposite page 481
- Fig. 78 After Alexander Jackson Davis, *Home of S. Russell, Middletown*, 1830. Steel engraving in Hinton, *History and Topography*, opposite page 482
- Fig. 79 William Adams & Sons, Plate with Cole’s View of Monte Video, c. 1835. Transferware, Connecticut Historical Society
- Fig. 80 *The Gardens of the Van Rensselaer Manor House*, 1840. Oil on canvas, Albany Institute of History and Art
- Fig. 81 *The Van Rensselaer Manor House*, 1841. Oil on canvas, Albany Institute of History and Art
- Fig. 82 *The Departure*, 1837. Oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection, National Gallery of Art
- Fig. 83 *The Return*, 1837. Oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection, National Gallery of Art

Fig. 84 Map of colonial manors and patents of the Hudson Valley with c. 1840 county boundaries. From Reeve Huston, *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 15

Fig. 85 Matthew Dripps, Map of Albany, 1852. Engraving, New York State Library

Fig. 86 Detail of Fig. 85

Fig. 87 Francis Pruyn, *The Old Van Rensselaer Manor House*, c. 1839. Lithograph of an ink on paper original in the Albany Institute of History and Art. Published in Cuyler Reynolds, ed. *Albany Chronicles: A History of the City Arranged Chronologically* (Albany: J.B. Lyon, 1906), facing p. 68

Fig. 88 Detail of Fig. 81

Fig. 89 Richard Upjohn et al., North Façade of the Van Rensselaer Manor House as redesigned and expanded, 1840-3. Albumen print by an unknown photographer, c. 1860-73. Albany Institute of History and Art.

Fig. 90 Uppark, c. 1690, restored 1989.

Fig. 91 Unknown, Wallpaper from the Van Rensselaer Manor House, c. 1768. Tempera on paper, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Author photo, February 2015.

Fig. 92 Frederic Diaper, Beverwyck Manor as St. Anthony-on-Hudson Seminary, c. 1839. Rensselaer, NY. Photo from Historic American Buildings Survey, 1936.

Fig. 93 B. Brenell, *View of the Great Pass on the Helderberg Mountains, with the Lines of March in Service, December 1839*, 1840. Oil on panel, Historic Cherry Hill. Reproduced in Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 96.

Fig. 94 Preparatory sketch for *The Gardens of the Van Rensselaer Manor House*, c. 1839. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.188a

Fig. 95 Preparatory sketch for *The Van Rensselaer Manor House*, c. 1839. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.187a

Fig. 96 Detail of Fig. 80. Author photo.

Fig. 97 Detail of Fig. 81. Author photo.

Fig. 98 William Birch, *The View From Springland* (Frontispiece to *Country Seats*), 1808. Hand-colored engraving, Collection of Lea Carson Sherk

Fig. 99 William Birch, *View from the Elysian Bower, Springland* (from *Country Seats*), 1808. Hand-colored engraving, Collection of Lea Carson Sherk.

Fig. 100 William Birch, *Site Plan for Springland*, c. 1800. Ink and wash on paper, Collection of Lea Carson Sherk.

Fig. 101 William Birch, *Springland*, c. 1800. Watercolor, Collection of L. Alan Talley

Fig. 102 William Birch, *The Chapel and Smokehouse for Springland*, c. 1800. Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper, Collection of Lea Carson Sherk.

Fig. 103 Charles Willson Peale, *Cabbage Patch, the Gardens at Belfield*, c. 1815-16. Oil on canvas, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

Fig. 104 Charles Willson Peale, *View of the Garden at Belfield*, c. 1815-16. Oil on canvas, Private Collection.

Fig. 105 John W. Hill, *Otsego Hall*, before 1860. Watercolor, Fenimore Art Museum.

Fig. 106 Currier and Ives, *Sunnyside on the Hudson*, c. 1857-71. Hand-colored lithograph, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 107 Cedar Grove, Catskill, NY. 1815. Author photo, August 2013

Fig. 108 Plan of Cedar Grove landscape c. 1848, from *Thomas Cole National Historic Site: Draft General Management Plan/ Environmental Assessment* (Boston: National Parks Service, Northeast Region, 2004), p. 13

Fig. 109 Charles Herbert Moore, *Cedar Grove*, 1868. Oil on canvas, Thomas Cole National Historic Site

Fig. 110 *View on the Catskill—Early Autumn*, 1837. Oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 111 *Maria Bartow Cole*, c. 1838. Pencil on paper, Albany Institute of History and Art

Fig. 112 The storehouse at Cedar Grove, a.k.a. The Old Studio, 1839. Author photo, August 2013.

Fig. 113 John Mackie Falconer, *Thomas Cole's First Studio*, 1881. Oil on canvas, New-York Historical Society

Fig. 114 Attributed to Thomas Cole but possibly Alexander Jackson Davis, *Perspective of an unknown house*, Date unknown. Ink on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.540a

Fig. 115 Early elevation for Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Ink on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.532.

Fig. 116 Andrea Palladio, Villa Saraceno at Finale, 1540s. Image from Andrea Palladio, *The Four Books on Architecture* eds. and trans. Robert Tavernor and Richard Schofield (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p. 134.

Fig. 117 Elevation and plan for Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Ink on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.510

Fig. 118 Side elevation for Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.511

Fig. 119 Detail of Fig. 118

Fig. 120 Detail from a sheet of plans for the initial five-bay front of Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9, pencil on paper. Detroit Institute of Arts 39.557b

Fig. 121 Plan for the three-bay, forty-five foot format of Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Ink on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39. 512a

Fig. 122 Elevation and Plans for Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.513a

Fig. 123 Section of the eastern façade of Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Pencil on paper, DIA 39.509

Fig. 124 Perspective of Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Pencil on paper, DIA 39.557a

Fig. 125 Basement plan of the final state of Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Ink and watercolor on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.549

Fig. 126 Second floor plan of the final state of Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Ink and watercolor on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.553

Fig. 127 Elevations for the New Studio, c. 1846. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts, 39.515a

Fig. 128 Elevation for the New Studio, c. 1846. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.515b

Fig. 129 Anon. The New Studio from the North with Emily Cole, c. 1900. Photograph, Greene County Historical Society.

Fig. 130 Anon, Interior of the New Studio with Emily Cole, c. 1900. Photograph, Greene County Historical Society.

Fig. 131 Frederic Church, *Cedar Grove*, 1848. Pencil on paper, Olana State Historic Site.

Fig. 132 *The Temple of Segesta with the Artist Sketching*, c. 1842. Oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Fig. 133 Andrew Jackson Downing, *An irregular villa in the Italian style, Bracketted*, engraving in Andrew Jackson Downing, *Cottage Residences...* (New York and London: Wiley and Putnam, 1842), opposite p. 124

Fig. 134 John Notman, *A Cottage in the Italian, or Tuscan Style*, engraving in Andrew Jackson Downing, *Cottage Residences...* (New York and London: Wiley and Putnam, 1842), opposite p. 164

Fig. 135 *Home in the Woods*, 1847. Oil on canvas, Reynolda House Museum of American Art

Fig. 136 Frederic Church with Calvert Vaux, *Olana*, Hudson, N.Y.

Fig. 137 Jasper Francis Cropsey, *Cole's Studio*, 1850. Charcoal, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Fig. 138 Jasper Francis Cropsey, *Summer Cottage, Front Elevation II*, 1867. Watercolor over graphite, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Fig. 139 Sanford Gifford, *Hunter Mountain, Twilight*, 1866. Oil on canvas, Terra Foundation for American Art

Fig. 140 Anon, *The Gifford Home in Hudson, N.Y. showing Sanford Gifford's c. 1870 Rooftop Studio built*, n.d. Albumen silver photograph, Albany Institute of History and Art

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The committee that has guided me throughout my time at Berkeley has been all that a doctoral student could hope for and more. By complementing each other's strengths and generously giving of their time and ideas, both in person and over multiple years of long-distance mentorship, these three have made a stressful and potentially isolating endeavor into a richly rewarding passage of life that sends me onward, ready for what may come. To Elizabeth Honig, I am grateful for many productive conversations about Rubens and country houses and for an inspiring model of how to teach I will not soon forget. To Andy Shanken, I am grateful for the good-humored guidance and imposing knowledge of architecture that allowed me to take on this interdisciplinary project without feeling like an interloper. Margaretta Lovell has quite simply been the ideal adviser. Her generosity, insight, creativity, and practicality have been of incalculable value in developing this project and in contending with matters of professional development that are all too often relegated to an inferior role in graduate education. I will follow her example when I am in a position to mentor others and hope my work honors her belief in me.

This dissertation has been supported by funding from the Jay D. McEvoy, Jr. Endowment and a Mellon Discovery Fellowship from the Townsend Center for the Humanities at Berkeley, a Robert R. Wark Fellowship at the Huntington Library, a Visiting Scholar Award at the Yale Center for British Art, a Research Fellowship at the Winterthur Library, and a Predoctoral Fellowship at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. I am grateful to the employees and fellows of all these institutions for building enriching communities in which to read, think, and write. To Elaine Yau and the other members of the Berkeley Americanist Group, Zirwat Chowdhury, Xiao Situ, and Zach Stewart, I'm thankful for feedback and friendship. Conversations with Ann Bermingham, Kathy Foster, Eleanor Harvey, Bruce Robertson, Bill Truettner, and Alan Wallach saw my research through some dead ends and suggested productive new questions. Nancy Sojka of the Detroit Institute of Arts and the reading room staff of the New York State Library were particularly indulgent during extended correspondence and numerous visits over multiple years. Tammis Groft of the Albany Institute of History and Art, Kathryn Wayne of the Berkeley Art History and Classics Library, Nancy Finlay of the Connecticut Historical Society, Ariadni Liokatis of the USC Fisher Museum of Art, Eugene Gaddis and John Teahan of the Wadsworth Athenaeum, James D. Featherstonhaugh, and Howard Ohlhous all provided valuable suggestions that have shaped this project. For their timely research assistance, I am grateful to Anna Kowalchuk of the Livingston County Historical Society, Jenny McElroy of the Minnesota Historical Society, Joseph Ditta of the New-York Historical Society, and Melissa Tacke of the Schenectady County Historical Society.

It has been my profound good fortune throughout this process to have the unconditional support of a family of artists and academics that understands and empathizes with the difficult path I have chosen. At the end of my formal studies in art history, I think in particular of the lives of my two grandmothers, Harriet Rosen and Mary Irwin, in music and art and wish I could share this moment with them. Frequent conversations with my grandfather, John R. Coleman, about my work and his own academic journey have been a precious source of camaraderie and insight. Most of all, I am filled with gratitude for the love, support, and enthusiastic interest of my parents, John and Susan, along this journey and for my sister, Anne, who has become my most valued friend during these years.

## INTRODUCTION

### The Painter-Architect in the Early Republic

On February 21st, 1837, Theodore Allen wrote to his friend Thomas Cole with a request: “If all goes well with me, I may want in the course of the summer a plan for a country residence. And as you have succeeded so well in your architecture, I venture to tax one of your leisure hours if you have any.”<sup>1</sup> Allen, the son-in-law of Cole’s most important patron in these years, Luman Reed, proceeded to list the dimensions of rooms he had in mind and to sketch the proposed site in Hyde Park, New York, along with a possible floorplan in the hope that the artist could do a better job than the best “my poor head can produce.”<sup>2</sup> While no reply from Cole survives, this episode is tantalizing evidence of twin facts seldom remarked upon in the Cole literature: that this canonical landscape painter was a serious and skilled student of architecture, and that he was known in particular for his attention to the question of how best to live in the country. That this artist to whom so many epithets have been applied, most prominent among them “father of the Hudson River School,” is so rarely discussed as a “painter-architect,” an important category in Western art that has received increased scholarly attention in recent years, is an oversight that this dissertation seeks to correct, while also endeavoring to place his wide-ranging work in architecture in the context of social currents of the time.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the opinion of peers like Allen, there is substantial evidence that shows that Cole liked to think of himself as an architect. Allen had every reason to have faith in Cole’s abilities in building because the artist had served an “architectural consultancy” to Luman Reed in the construction of his famous picture gallery.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, in a letter of May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1838 to a regular correspondent that is discussed in greater detail in Chapter One, he writes “Do you know I am something of an Architect?” lending this dissertation its title in the process.<sup>5</sup> An especially intriguing trace of the artist’s architectural identity is to be found amidst the thousands of Cole drawings in the Detroit Institute of Arts: an image of a grandiose structure on the side of a hill above a waterway that, with its twin towers and the grand flight of stairs that rises to the entrance, mimics Trinità dei Monti’s position atop the Spanish Steps in Rome. (**Fig. 1**) In Cole’s hand, a title appears at the lower right corner: “Palace on the Hudson in the Year 2500, T. Cole Architect.” While this was just a fleeting fancy, the sheer number of architectural drawings of

---

<sup>1</sup> New York State Library, Cole Papers [henceforth NYSL], Box 2, Folder 7 [henceforth in the form 2.7] While little else is known of Allen beyond his lively correspondence with Cole, he was an honorary National Academician and did eventually live at Hyde Park, as is evident from the fact that he is cited as a resident of that place in his third prize mention for “Best Butter” from the New York State Agricultural Society at Poughkeepsie in 1844. *The Cultivator* (Albany: Luther Tucker, 1844), p. 326. An enigmatic, highly finished perspective of a house by Cole that is different from any the artist is known to have hoped to build for himself may be what Cole produced in response to this request, but this is only supposition. See Chapter Three and Detroit Institute of Arts accession number 39.540a.

<sup>2</sup> Reed was the patron of *The Course of Empire*, among numerous other works. On his importance to Cole and to the art world of the early republic, see William Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* [orig. 1834] eds. Frank Bayley and Charles Goodspeed (Boston: C. E. Goodspeed & Co., 1918), pp. 156-159.

<sup>3</sup> Elliott Vessell, “Introduction” in Louis Legrand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, ed. Elliott Vessell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), xv; See for example: Piet Lombaerde, ed. *The Notion of the Painter-Architect in Italy and the Southern Low Countries* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Earl A. Powell, III. *Thomas Cole* (New York: H. Abrams, 1999), p. 70. On Reed and his gallery, see Ella M. Foshay, ed. *Mr. Luman Reed’s Picture Gallery: A Pioneer Collection of American Art* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> NYSL 1.3



varying degrees of finish and feasibility that join this one throughout his papers show how persistent was this interest. Cole went so far as to list himself as an architect in various New York City directories in the 1830s and seriously considered launching a joint architectural practice with his nephew, William Henry Bayless.<sup>6</sup> In the words of Reverend Louis Legrand Noble, Cole's pastor and first biographer, "Profound in all the science necessary to be an accomplished builder he was not. To be so he had neither time nor occasion. But in all that raises architecture from mere science to an art he was a very fine architect."<sup>7</sup> All evidence points to the conclusion that Cole took his identity as designer and critic of architecture seriously.

What attention there has been to Cole's work in architecture largely focuses on the spectacular fictive buildings in many of his grand allegories. This is understandable because the visionary cities of *The Course of Empire* and *The Architect's Dream* and the "cloudy palace" of *Youth from The Voyage of Life* cry out for attention as manifestations of the artist's intellectual aspirations.<sup>8</sup> (Figs. 2-4) However, treating these works as artifacts of a poetic sensibility alone or as products of the political climate of the period occludes the fact that Cole's architectural paintings operate simultaneously as allegories and as direct products of his involvement with a variety of projects for public buildings in the same years.<sup>9</sup> The styles and forms he was thinking through for the purposes of the Ohio Statehouse and St. Luke's Church in Catskill New York are recognizable in these canvases, and his writings about built projects make it clear that even his most fanciful of painted structures bear an important relationship to a studied practice of architectural draughtsmanship for buildings to be realized in bricks and mortar. This dissertation begins by studying a corpus of previously unpublished writings by Thomas Cole about public architecture including, in addition to an extensive correspondence about the Ohio Statehouse, his thinking about the Washington Monument and an intriguing essay he titled "Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture." These documents, in conjunction with his surviving architectural drawings, describe a coherent theory of architecture as a public good that, by means of its visibility and accessibility, has a rare power to change taste and shape behavior in a way that painting could not rival.

Cole's "Letter to the Publick on the Subject Architecture" is not only a document of principles for public architecture. The final section of this rich document turns from larger matters of styles and their uses to a statement of principles for building on the domestic scale in particular. In so doing, it invites a shift in this study to the examination of Cole's application of the architectural values his writings expressed in representing the houses of three different patrons and in making designs for new Italianate buildings at the estate of his wife's relations, Cedar Grove. These materials have received little scholarly attention, the "house portraits" being dismissed as regrettable topographic images born of straitened circumstances, and the Cedar Grove drawings overlooked because the structure they describe was never executed as designed.<sup>10</sup> However, these traces of the artist's evolving concept of the country house ideal are

---

<sup>6</sup> See for example *Longworth's American Almanack, New-York Register, and City Directory* (New York: David Longworth, 1834-5), p. 201. His proposed architectural venture with Bayless is mentioned in NYSL 1.4, transcribed as Appendix B.20.

<sup>7</sup> Louis Legrand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, ed. Elliot S. Vesell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 197.

<sup>8</sup> NYSL 6.1

<sup>9</sup> For a recent political reading of *The Course of Empire*, see Ross Barrett, "Violent Prophecies: Thomas Cole, Republican Aesthetics, and the Political Jeremiad" *American Art* 27.1 (Spring, 2013), pp. 24-49.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Franklin Kelly calls Cole's Van Rensselaer house portraits "purely topographical paintings" and Ellwood Parry describes Cole's "first attempts to escape the restrictions of painting purely topographical views late

important sources of insight into a conception of wilderness civilized and domesticated by habitation that is at work across his multidisciplinary oeuvre. Moreover, they reveal Cole's participation in a national discourse that centered on houses as indices of the health of the nation and as sites of identity formation.

Andrew Jackson Downing, perhaps the most influential writer on houses, landscape, and gardens of the antebellum era, wrote that "a good house... is a powerful means of civilization" and claimed "the individual home has a great social value for a people."<sup>11</sup> Recent work in literary studies and architectural history has established how widespread were notions like Downing's. As W. Barksdale Maynard has written of the first half of the nineteenth century, "To an extent that is difficult to appreciate, development, then called 'improvement,' seemed a matter of tremendous collective urgency, given the vastness of the landscape to be tamed and made habitable and fruitful. House building played a key role in this national drama."<sup>12</sup> Adam Sweeting has categorized this national attention to houses in the antebellum United States as "the cult of domesticity, the broad cultural program which helped direct the nation's moral and aesthetic energies toward the home."<sup>13</sup> But this homeward gaze was not monolithic nor inherently conservative; Laura Romero has shown that the home was a vital site of discussion and conflict over issues of gender, class, and race in these years.<sup>14</sup> Duncan Faherty has persuasively argued of this period that "the design and construction of houses became a locus for debating broadly shared concerns about cultural development... The house is not a realm removed from a larger public world, but the lens through which Americans of both genders and from a variety of different political and social orientations, a host of counterpublics, sought to examine the state of the Republic."<sup>15</sup> Faherty's discussion of the debate about domesticity in the period is as suited to prominent city houses as it is to country places of the sort Cole depicted and aspired to for himself. The visibility of architecture as a medium made it the basis of a vibrant discourse about taste, class, and progress, and country houses were no exception. In addition to claiming ownership and imposing order on an unruly landscape that seemed to cry out for civilization on a European model, houses like George Washington's Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello were sites of eager public visitation before widespread access to art in museums and places for the formation and discussion of ideas of cultural nationalism. However, the dynastic ambitions and explicitly English sphere of reference inherent in stately mansions amidst grounds planned for both pleasure and productivity compounded the issues implicit in houses in general in the period with heightened concerns about social class construction in the young republic and the persistence of cultural allegiance to Great Britain, even after political ties were severed.

---

in 1826 and into 1827," leaving little doubt of his opinion of the Featherstonhaugh views Cole made late in the winter of 1825-6. Franklin Kelly, Joint catalogue entry for *The Gardens of the Van Rensselaer Manor House* and *The Van Rensselaer Manor House* in Tammi K. Groft and Mary Alice MacKay, eds. *Albany Institute of History & Art: 200 Years of Collecting* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1998), p. 92.; Ellwood C. Parry III, *The Art of Thomas Cole: Ambition and Imagination* (Newark, DE, 1988), 45.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1850), xix.

<sup>12</sup> W. Barksdale Maynard, *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Adam W. Sweeting, "'A Very Pleasant Patriarchal Life': Professional Authors and Amateur Architects in the Hudson Valley, 1835-1870" *Journal of American Studies* 29.1 (Apr., 1995), p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> See Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Duncan Faherty, *Remodeling the Nation: The Architecture of American Identity, 1776-1858* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press 2007), 7.

These tensions were especially acute in the commissioning of one English émigré to depict the estate of another, as occurred in Cole's first house portraiture commission for George William Featherstonhaugh at Featherston Park. Both patron and painter were intimately acquainted from birth with the ideal of the English country house and their fractious relationship reveals the struggles to forge a concept of the American country house as a site not of aristocratic decadence but of republican virtue and public-spirited enterprise for the good of the nation by means of landscape painting. The final painting of the four Cole made for Featherstonhaugh shows the result of their compromise, with the stately house reduced into its setting with the patron's livestock breeding efforts literally foregrounded in place of the vignettes of aristocratic leisure that populate so many English house portraits. Cole's personal and political identification with the aristocracy from which he drew his earliest patrons has been remarked upon previously, but the central and complex role that the country house played in this identification has not.<sup>16</sup> This commission was not the only time Cole made house portraits for this class of patrons; he was also commissioned to paint Daniel Wadsworth's "Monte Video" in 1828 and the Van Rensselaer family's manor house in 1839. In contrast to the isolated "baronial castle" model of Featherston Park, Monte Video was a very public country house, the grounds of which were open to the public, and it is represented as such with a foreground visitor enjoying the view. The Van Rensselaer paintings, made on the eve of the dissolution of that family's almost feudal rule over a vast tract of prime land near Albany, speak of nostalgia more than ambition, with an empty rocker, discarded knitting basket, and forgotten cut flowers waiting in vain for their owner to return. Each painted vision of ideal country life expresses distinctly different resonances of the country house, but as a group they constitute a significant category in Cole's oeuvre that joins with his better known images of ideal log cabins in the wilderness to demonstrate the extent to which the artist was thinking about the many forms of domesticity throughout his career.

There were precedents for the representation of country houses in America, most importantly William Birch's 1808 *The Country Seats of the United States of North America*, another example of an English émigré transporting an English model of architectural representation to the United States, but Birch found rather less success in this effort than did Cole, as is discussed in Chapter Two. Birch was also an important model for Cole in building and representing a country house of his own, "Springland", that figured prominently in his *Country Seats* and in his self-promotional efforts. Birch was a rare, early example in this country of an artist making architecture central to his practice alongside painting and printmaking; Cole's many designs for new construction at Cedar Grove in Catskill, New York speak to similar ambitions. The highly developed plans and elevations for a new house that he called "a sort of Italian looking thing" on a small plot of land he had purchased on the site, the subject of Chapter Three, are artifacts of the lessons learned from his travels in Italy and his aspirations to use country life as a tool for artistic and social advancement. The plans of the so-called "New Studio," the one element of the concept that was, in fact, built to Cole's specifications, are especially precious survivals now that the structure has been destroyed.<sup>17</sup> Cole's plans for Cedar Grove envisioned the realization in built form of ideas about architecture as an index of the

---

<sup>16</sup> See for example Alan Wallach, "Thomas Cole and the Aristocracy" *Arts Magazine* 56, No. 3 (Nov. 1981), 94-106.

<sup>17</sup> As will be discussed later, the Thomas Cole National Historic Site is now in the process of re-constructing the New Studio on the basis of these plans, albeit with a markedly different interior that includes "museum quality exhibition and program space" and meets Americans with Disabilities Act requirements: R.M. Toole and Elizabeth B. Jacks, *The New Studio* [Campaign Brochure] (Catskill, NY: Thomas Cole National Historic Site, 2013), p. 15.

health of the republic that he had expressed in his writings and his paintings of the houses of his patrons. That his financial circumstances allowed few of his designs to be executed is a great loss, but the surviving materials show a painter-architect at work, thinking through the missions with which architecture in general, and domestic architecture in particular, were charged in the antebellum era.

In considering a wide range of seemingly disparate evidence – paintings of buildings both real and imagined, drawings for structures both built and unexecuted, private correspondence, public essays, houses, and gardens – this dissertation is methodologically grounded in recent work in the growing field of Landscape Studies that calls for a heterodox approach to the processes of meaning making that inhere in landscape across media. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels have shown that “A landscape park is no more real, nor less imaginary, than a landscape painting or poem,” urging the study of built landscapes in conjunction with their representations as equal participants in the construction of landscape ideals.<sup>18</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell’s work has shown that landscape is best treated not as a genre of any one art but, rather, as a transdisciplinary medium that gains its pervasive power from its very dispersal.<sup>19</sup> In Thomas Cole’s work, the country house is just such a transdisciplinary art form around which coalesce many of the major preoccupations of his career, including landscape aesthetics, republican citizenship, Christian virtue, and, not least, architectural style.

---

<sup>18</sup> Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, “Introduction: Iconography and Landscape” in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape” in *Landscape and Power* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 5

## CHAPTER ONE

### “In Accordance with True Taste:” Cole’s Writings on Public Architecture

The introduction has suggested that Cole participated in a historical moment in which building on the domestic scale was implicated in national social and political discourses, and later chapters will return to ideas of house and home in earnest and will study the ways in which Cole thought about the social value of country life. However, the artist’s little-known work in the realm of public architecture makes explicit a vision of building as a social good and a force for order that is present throughout Cole’s engagement with architecture. Accordingly, this understudied aspect of his career deserves closer attention before turning to his paintings of the houses of his patrons and his designs for an Italianate villa of his own. In addition to the visionary cities Cole was shaping in oil on canvas in *The Course of Empire* and *The Architect’s Dream*, archival evidence shows that this landscape painter aspired to have an influence on the building practices of his adoptive country in the realm of brick and mortar as well.

In turning from the seemingly narrower resonance of private, domestic architecture to the explicitly wider range of address of public buildings, there may seem to be a substantial shift in focus. However, the evidence that houses also served as public statements of taste, class, and political values in this period serves to break down a dichotomy between private and public buildings that feels fixed and immovable in the twenty-first century in ways it did not in the eighteenth and nineteenth. Presidential houses are perhaps the most visible examples of ways in which houses, too, served public roles as icons of republican virtue in an era before the landscape was populated with monuments made for the purpose of public spectatorship alone. As Duncan Faherty has written, “Mount Vernon and Monticello were popularly imagined as among the first ‘public’ institutions in the new Republic, a status that influenced both Washington and Jefferson’s design decisions.”<sup>1</sup> Such houses were prominent examples for the architects of the early nineteenth century of the ways in which both private and public architecture can instruct a populace in citizenship and stewardship. Just as Thomas Cole’s paintings of the country houses of his patrons speak to a wider audience about the ways private wealth and power can be employed for the good of the nation, so does the artist’s work in the medium of public architecture convey a vision of the built environment as an index of, and shaping influence on, the political health of the republic.

Further evidence that there is an important link to be drawn between Cole’s seemingly disparate work in public architecture and his painted visions of ideal domesticity comes from an object in the collection of the National Gallery that brings together these two poles of his architectural thought within a single frame. *A View of the Mountain Pass Called the Notch of the White Mountains (Crawford Notch)* of 1839 depicts a snug white-painted house and small barn, illuminated by golden sunlight, tucked in amongst imposing peaks and dark stormclouds. **(Fig. 5)** This view is a characteristic example of a prominent category of Cole’s work that will recur throughout this dissertation, in which a rural house conveys meaning, order, and civilization within an otherwise wild landscape. Built houses, like the one depicted here, alternate with fictive cabins in lending a focus to views otherwise uninscribed with the material evidence of long habitation on which a European landscape painter could draw, a topic Cole addressed in his “Essay on American Scenery.” In oft quoted lines, Cole discussed the “want of associations” in

---

<sup>1</sup> Duncan Faherty, *Remodeling the Nation: The Architecture of American Identity, 1776-1858* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007), p. 9.

the American landscape by comparison with the view over Rome from Mount Albano, “peopled with the gigantic associations of the storied past.”<sup>2</sup> Less often mentioned is the artist’s suggested alternative to this sense of cultural vacancy: recognizing and taking pleasure in “those neat dwellings, unpretending to magnificence” that are “the abodes of plenty, virtue, and refinement.”<sup>3</sup> Just such an unpretentious dwelling is depicted here.

On the reverse of this same domestic idyll, the artist made use of the original wooden stretcher to make a chalk sketch of a building that does indeed “pretend to magnificence” with a high dome surmounting a grand colonnade on a high platform. (**Fig. 6**) In this most unexpected of contexts, Cole has jotted down a design for the Ohio Statehouse, a project much on his mind in the late 1830s. The public competition to design the new capital building in Columbus was the most complex architectural endeavor in which the artist was ever involved and his multi-year focus on that effort makes it an especially important expression of his thinking about the uses of architecture. Together, Cole’s view of an isolated house in rural New Hampshire and his design for a building that would be both literally and politically central to the city of Columbus combine to make a single, eloquent object that testifies to the breadth of this artist’s architectural interests and the important links between even his most disparate representations of buildings.

Another case study that testifies to the strong links between Cole’s work in paint and his engagement with public buildings in this period is his involvement with the design of St. Luke’s Church in Catskill, New York. When his local parish church burned on September 11, 1839, Cole was appointed to the building committee and would eventually become the architect of the new church.<sup>4</sup> While the structure he designed has now been destroyed as well, his design survives in a number of plan, elevation, and section drawings now in the Detroit Institute of Arts that evidently pertain to the building. In these drawings, Cole studied not only the overall effect of the building from the street but even such practicalities as the arrangement of the altar and pews, sightlines from the balcony, and the precise geometry of its vaulting.<sup>5</sup> While he contemplated a Greek Revival design at an early stage of the project, the final structure was a minimally ornamented Gothic with three lancet windows and two small towers at either side of a triangular roof.<sup>6</sup> (**Fig. 7**) This building bears a distinct resemblance to the church that serves as an example of the Gothic in *The Architect’s Dream*, an image on which he was at work in precisely the same period. (**Fig. 3**) This blending of imagined and built structures shows just how grounded in the study of architectural practice that fantastical composition was. Perhaps even more closely related in design to the elevation for St. Luke’s is the church that is central to *The Return*, an image that will be discussed in Chapter Three, with its small turrets framing the roofline with an identical trefoil cross at the peak. (**Fig. 8**) Even before St. Luke’s burned, it seems, Cole was working out principles in his paintings that would be applicable to a built project when the opportunity arose. While not strictly a public building in the same way as a

---

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Cole, “Essay on American Scenery” *The American Monthly Magazine* I (January 1836), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Cole, “Essay on American Scenery”, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Ellwood C. Parry, III, *The Art of Thomas Cole: Ambition and Imagination* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1988), pp. 242-3.

<sup>5</sup> His plans reflecting the arrangement of pews and the furnishing of the altar are DIA accession numbers 39.536, 537, and 541. The section showing sightlines is 39.538. His studies of vaulting are 39.533 and 534.

<sup>6</sup> The Greek Revival design is DIA 39.541. A late nineteenth-century photograph of the building as constructed shows that these distinctive windows were indeed executed, but that a central belfry was added that changed the appearance significantly from Cole’s elevation. Collection of the Green County Historical Society, reproduced in Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 242.

statehouse or national monument, Cole's design of St. Luke's is further evidence of the artist's efforts to transfer the principles he expressed in paint and in writing to the civic sphere.

Cole's growing engagement with architecture over the course of his career seems to have been the product of rising frustration with the possibilities of painting as a way to participate in public discourse. In a letter of January 29, 1843, the artist said "It is my impression that pictures do not have the influence on society that they did have some years since—they are too quiet for these times of excitement."<sup>7</sup> While paintings could be overlooked by the surging, industrializing nation, architecture seemed an antidote in the visibility that made it the subject of widespread conversation in the period, as has been documented in recent scholarship.<sup>8</sup> This was especially true of public buildings, which became not only prominent sources of civic pride but sites of productive dialogue about aesthetic values and cultural relations with Europe for a wider public that never came to the painting exhibitions that were beginning to occur as a feature of public life in New York.<sup>9</sup> In addition to its accessibility and the existing public interest that made it seem a national concern in a way painting was not, architecture was compelling to Cole for its relative permanence and the excuse it offered to think at the scale of centuries. For this reason, it seemed a welcome respite from what he perceived as the base concerns of the materialistic present. As he wrote in concluding an 1844 essay for *The Knickerbocker* on "The Architectural Antiquities of Sicily":

The history of the people whose noble works I have endeavored to describe, should in the first place teach us how noble a thing it is to construct works of beauty and utility, not only for our own gratification, but for the benefit of posterity also. The selfish and unreflecting, even the modern utilitarian, will perhaps laugh at the thought, and say: 'What folly to undertake such labors for the benefit of posterity! We will labor for ourselves.' I would ask such persons, what would have been our state if the ancients had entertained such groveling notions? Do they not know that most of the elegant as well as the useful, is the rich bequest of these ancients whom they affect to despise?<sup>10</sup>

The chief lesson Cole took from his encounter with the built remains of ancient civilizations was that his own time and place could benefit from a similar concern with what it would leave behind centuries later and what values those remains would convey. While the artist's own desire for immortality and for commissions certainly colored his views, the importance of building with an eye to permanence instead of being guided by the short-sighted economies of the present becomes something of a leitmotif Cole's writings about public architecture.

This chapter's subsections discuss, in what appears to be chronological order, three case studies of the forms Thomas Cole's architectural thought took from the mid 1830s to early

---

<sup>7</sup> NYSL 4.2

<sup>8</sup> Steven Conn and Max Page have collected a variety of documents from the early nineteenth century that show the extent to which architecture became the most public art-form in the period: *Building the Nation: Americans Write about Their Architecture, Their Cities, and Their Landscape* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.) Appropriately, and perhaps inevitably, Cole's *The Architect's Dream* is their frontispiece.

<sup>9</sup> On early nineteenth-century exhibition culture, see Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Cole, "Sicilian Scenery and Antiquities: Number Two" *The Knickerbocker* 23 (Mar., 1844), pp. 236-44, reprinted in Thomas Cole, *The Collected Essays and Prose Sketches* ed. Marshall Tynn (St. Paul, MN: John Colet Press, 1980), p. 47.

1840s, the period of his most sustained engagement with building practices of all kinds. These examples are accompanied by appendices in each instance that make the previously unpublished documents available. Cole's ideas for the Washington Monument, his lengthy correspondence about the Ohio Statehouse, and his "Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture" show a painter conceiving of himself as a public man of arts and letters, aspiring to a wider influence on his society than oil on canvas could offer and valuing architecture as an art form uniquely suited to shaping civic behavior. It is significant that these revealing traces of architectural thought come from a period in which the artist was also telling the story of the rise and fall of a classical civilization in paint by means of its architectural choices in *The Course of Empire*, building palaces of cloud in *The Voyage of Life*, and making perhaps the most eloquent image of the eclecticism of nineteenth-century civic architecture in *The Architect's Dream*. Intriguing parallels between the visionary cities of these efforts in paint and the principles for American architecture Cole expressed in writing will become apparent. As Robert Harbison has argued, even the most resolutely unpictorial of public buildings strives toward the possibilities inherent in painting, that "the solider of these two spatial arts has an unfulfilled need of the other."<sup>11</sup> Just as Harbison has shown the distinction between painting and architecture not to be as fixed and immovable as is commonly assumed to be the case, so do painting and building exist as kindred enterprises in Cole's oeuvre through the common medium of drawing. Cole's diverse practice of draughtsmanship for public and private buildings shows the links between his efforts in painting and architecture and his desire to find a more fulfilling role as artist-intellectual than painting alone could offer in the Early Republic. Together, the documents this chapter analyzes describe a coherent theory of architecture as a public good and a positive influence on society that, by means of classical rigor and symmetry, Cole suggests, can and should guide public behavior and private virtue.

### **I. The Washington Monument**

Monuments were central to Pierre Charles L'Enfant's plan for the District of Columbia as a means of structuring the city, making its ordering principles legible, and expressing the values of the republic to its citizenry. As Kirk Savage has shown, "nowhere were L'Enfant's elegantly interlocking metaphors more evident than at point A, reserved for the most important monument of all—an equestrian statue of George Washington as military commander of the Revolutionary Army."<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 9) The chosen location made the form of the monument especially consequential because it would be permanently in view not only to the populace below but also to the White House and the Capitol Building. The original conception as an equestrian statue, as approved by Congress in 1783, proved infeasible because of a financial downturn, and decades of dissent about how to honor the memory of George Washington and to make use of the designated spot ensued.<sup>13</sup> After it was decided in 1832, the centennial of Washington's birth, that his body would not be moved from the grounds of Mount Vernon to be housed within the monument, the effort to build a permanent memorial gained new direction and momentum now that it was clear the

---

<sup>11</sup> Robert Harbison, *The Built, the Unbuilt, and the Unbuildable: In Pursuit of Architectural Meaning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 131.

<sup>12</sup> Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the controversy and the vicissitudes of the project before and after Cole, see Kirk Savage, "The Self-Made Monument: George Washington and the Fight to Erect a National Memorial" *Winterthur Portfolio* 22.4 (Winter, 1987), pp. 225-242.



form of the structure would not be dictated by a need to double as a mausoleum.<sup>14</sup> Amidst these circumstances, the Washington Monument Society was formed to solicit proposals and donations for a suitable monument to Washington at last.

The issue of *The New-York American* for October 10, 1835 carried a notice of the efforts of the new Society, whose commissioners included President James Madison and Librarian of Congress George Watterson. According to the announcement:

It is proposed that the contemplated monument shall be like him in whose honor it is to be constructed, unparalleled in the world, and commensurate with the gratitude, liberality, and patriotism of the people by whom it is to be erected....[It] should blend stupendousness with elegance, and be of such magnitude and beauty as to be an object of pride to the American people, and of admiration to all who see it. Its material is intended to be wholly American, and to be of marble and granite brought from each state, that each state may participate in the glory of contributing material as well as in funds to its construction.<sup>15</sup>

**[Appendix A.1]**

This rather vague concept piqued Thomas Cole's interest, as is evident from an entry in his journal the same day:

As to the design of such a monument, I would say, let it not be a statue; for however great its size, its many parts and projections would render it less durable than something more simple: time would destroy the original beauty of the sculpture of a statue. I would not have a column for that is only an architectural member, and not a complete whole. Although it were crowned with a statue, it would not appear to me either consistent or in good taste. A pyramid would answer in durability of structure; but that is unmeaning. To my mind a colossal altar would be the most appropriate, and the most capable of uniting beauty of form with durability. Let it be hundreds of feet in height; let a fire burn upon it perpetually; let it never expire while the nation recognized Washington as the Father of his country. Morning, noon, evening and midnight, let its flame rise in the heavens a symbol of his glory, and a Pharos to light the children of freedom to deeds of virtue and greatness for ages to come.<sup>16</sup> **[Appendix A.2]**

Cole's attention to durability and the effects of time, even at this early stage in his thinking, shows how important that value was to his work in public architecture. While this placement of priorities might lead one to expect a simple, sturdy structure, Cole instead envisions a design that depends for its meaning on continuous maintenance of its perpetual flame, a concept not especially well-suited to the timescale of centuries and civilizations. Immediately after this journal entry, Cole made a pencil sketch of the colossal altar he envisioned. (**Fig. 10**) Both in medium and in quality, this drawing is unusual amidst the hundreds of pen jottings one finds in the artist's surviving papers. Because it does not proceed from the same pen that wrote the initial reflection, as do most of the drawings in his papers, the artist must have been serious enough

---

<sup>14</sup> Savage, *Monument Wars*, 49.

<sup>15</sup> The transcription of this announcement, which was standard nationwide, was made from the version that appeared in the *Albany Argus* on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1835, page 2, column 5. I am grateful to Joseph Ditta of the New-York Historical Society for his assistance in locating this elusive announcement that inspired Cole.

<sup>16</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 4a.1. The full text can be found in Appendix A.

about the project to take up a more suitable tool in thinking about formal options. Amidst trees in park-like grounds, Cole has imagined a most imposing structure that dwarfs hastily indicated figures at its base. A cloud of smoke billows toward the heavens from atop a four-sided, tapering tower, with sculptures of winged beasts guarding the four corners.

As outlandish as Cole's initial concept for the Washington Monument seems, it does resonate with his work on *The Course of Empire* in the same period. The artist rejects works of monumental sculpture, like the lunging, shield-bearing figure of *Destruction*, as too delicate to age well, as indeed that headless sculpture has not, and rejects the use of solitary columns, like that in *Desolation*, for their illogicality without a structural justification. (Figs. 11, 12) While he concedes that the characteristically Egyptian form of a pyramid, like the one that looms in the distance of *The Architect's Dream*, has been proven to stand the test of time, Cole argues that such structures are "unmeaning" in an American context. (Fig. 3) The "colossal altar" he envisioned also has a precedent in his painted work, bearing a resemblance to those in the distance of *Consummation*. (Fig. 13) However, in contrast to the fleeting vanity of that vision of imperial decadence, Cole's monument uses its colossal scale to celebrate virtuous citizenship in a simple, relatively unadorned form. The guiding principles of Cole's initial plan are permanence and symbolic power in order that the monument should serve both as a lasting testament to the departed leader's qualities and a guide to the emulation of that virtue in the citizenry.

A second notion that Cole developed for the Washington Monument, described and hastily sketched in plan and elevation, is preserved in a folder of undated miscellany at the New York State Library. [Appendix A.3] This vision is far different from the first but equally colossal. (Fig. 14) Cole calls for "A circular Temple building – having 13 Columns of 100ft high of the humble doric.... This building to be placed on a base 50 ft high. This base composed of a circular flight of steps with four pedestals of 30ft high." In contrast to the rather fine pencil sketch of his first design, in this instance he has used the same ink as the text to think through the form of the building, with one earlier plan crossed out in between as he attempted to work through the problem of distributing the odd number of columns to represent the original colonies. This colonnade recalls the form of the distant altar in *Consummation* and anticipates, in part, the structure of the Robert Mills plan that would, in fact, be approved by the Washington Monument Society in 1845, with its conception of a colonnaded base to surround the final obelisk, and even the stepped, round form of the Jefferson Memorial that would be built a century later.<sup>17</sup> (Figs. 15, 16) These similarities, while purely coincidental, show that Cole's vision for the project was, despite its grandiosity, not as far out of touch with the desires of the commissioners as might initially seem to be the case. Nevertheless, he suggests that the eternal flame could be preserved atop the monument if a sculpture of Washington himself were not preferred.

Cole was sufficiently interested in the efforts of the Washington Monument Society that he wrote an intriguing letter to the Secretary of the Society, George Watterston requesting further information on the selection process, seemingly with a view to submitting a design for consideration.<sup>18</sup> [Appendix A.4] The form of this letter that is preserved in the New York State Library is an unsent draft and it is not known whether Cole ever did post a letter to Watterston, or if he received a response. Nevertheless, this letter is valuable as what seems to be his first work of architectural writing that he intended to share with anyone else. The artist begins by asking the question on everyone's minds – whether Washington would be entombed within the monument –

---

<sup>17</sup> Savage, "Self-Made Monument", 233-4

<sup>18</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 1.2

not having heard word of the decision in the negative three years earlier.<sup>19</sup> He argues that “the principles of the design ought to be simplicity and beauty.” (All emphasis in the original.) In language that suggests a structure more complex than the one he has sketched, he suggests the design the commissioners select should “combine the durability of the Egyptian pyramid with the elegance of the pure Doric Temple,” avoiding at all costs superfluous ornament. This description is uncanny for its resemblance to the Mills plan that would be adopted, with its Doric colonnade and Egyptian obelisk. Although there is no reason to believe that Mills was aware of Cole’s letter, and it is even less likely that Cole could have been aware of Mills’ proposal because of the artist’s confusion over the issue of Washington’s body, the parallel between the two proposals is striking and shows that he was very much in tune with the architectural thinking of his time. Cole’s notion of combining the distinctive geometries of Egyptian and Greek architecture in the same time and space reappears four years later in *The Architect’s Dream*, with its cloudy pyramid pictured in conjunction with structures that could have been taken from Luxor, Rome, and Athens. (**Fig. 3**) The painting and the letter do not simply advocate for eclecticism but rather for attention to the specificity of past architectures and their creative reuse. There is a degree of presumption in his cautioning of Watterson to avoid any “notion of new orders of Architecture or mixtures of orders...for such are assuredly the results of ignorance of the true principles of Architecture.” He excuses his opinionated missive with concluding lines that serve as a summation of his vision of the goals of public buildings: “As an Artist, I am anxious that the monument should be worthy [of] the admiration of the world. I feel that it ought to call forth the highest taste and genius of the people, and I sincerely hope that it shall not be a perpetual example of our bad taste.” Cole’s designs and writings for the Washington Monument express a conviction that architecture is an art-form of unique powers, equally capable of inspiring the best in a society when it is guided by good taste and of producing corruption when in bad taste, high stakes that are born of its visual availability to a broad public.

## **II. The Ohio Statehouse**

State capitol buildings have been called “America’s unique contributions to monumental architecture,” alongside skyscrapers.<sup>20</sup> In addition to aesthetic functions, Charles T. Goodsell has described the state capitol as a site of political identity formation that represents the state to itself and “shapes political attitudes and practices in and about it.”<sup>21</sup> As dramatic new capitols rose in New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont, and elsewhere in the early years of the nineteenth century that served these roles admirably, Ohio desired a suitably impressive building of its own.<sup>22</sup> On January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1838, Ohio’s state legislature passed an act “To provide for the erection of a new State House at the seat of Government” and called for the appointment of three commissioners who would oversee a competition for the design of the new building.<sup>23</sup> One of those who

---

<sup>19</sup> Savage, “Self-Made Monument”, 233

<sup>20</sup> Henry Russell Hitchcock and William Seale, *Temples of Democracy: The State Capitols of the U.S.A.* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976), p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Charles T. Goodsell, “Political Meanings of the American State Capitol” *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 10.4 (Winter, 1993), p. 295.

<sup>22</sup> On these buildings, see Hitchcock and Seale, *Temples of Democracy*, 55-58, 70-74, 104-6.

<sup>23</sup> *Acts of a General Nature, passed at the First Session of the Thirty-Sixth General Assembly of the State of Ohio*, (Columbus: Samuel Medary, 1838), pp. 13-14.

received the call was William Apthorp Adams of Zanesville, an attorney and serious amateur artist who would later be named an honorary member of the National Academy of Design.<sup>24</sup>

Adams had a long established friendship with Thomas Cole that dated back to the latter's early years in Ohio, during which the two young men went on regular sketching trips. They had maintained a lively correspondence ever since about art, politics, and fossil collecting. This coincidence, that the project to construct the most important public building in a state where Cole had spent a significant portion of his youth would be overseen by a close friend of the artist, produced a body of substantial, thoughtful, and sometimes emotional letters between the two men on the subject of the Ohio Statehouse that constitutes a major new source for the study of architecture not only in the career of Thomas Cole but for the Early Republic in general. While small selections from certain of the letters have appeared in print before, most have never been published and the complete surviving corpus is deserving of transcription and study. **[Appendix B]** Over eight years and nearly 14,000 words, Adams and Cole discussed the form that a great public building should take, struggled with questions of materials, budgets, and politics, responded to major architectural controversies of the day, and discussed the progress of architecture from a hobby for gentlemen to a trade for professionals. These letters show a side of Thomas Cole that is rarely seen in the literature of "the father of the Hudson River School": a thoughtful architect, confident of his own ability in this medium and capable of sophisticated discussion of style, form, and use. In contrast to the Washington Monument, where his involvement most likely remained at the level of fantasy and never rose to the submission of a plan, Cole's active participation in the Statehouse competition and the degree of success he found in that effort mean there is a larger body of visual evidence to accompany his written reflections on the building, images that range from doodles to highly finished elevations that show the evolution of his thought about the structure, including surprising links to his paintings of the period.

The only time Cole's involvement in the Ohio Statehouse competition has come in for serious scholarly attention was in a valuable 1948 typescript by Abbot Lowell Cummings, intended for publication as a book: "Ohio's Capitols at Columbus, 1810-1861."<sup>25</sup> His pioneering labor to piece together the process of the competition from study of the submitted plans and construction records led him to conclude that Cole's design was "the most influential single factor in the evolution of the final [ground] plan" of the Statehouse and that "we find an even stronger influence of Thomas Cole's original design" in the exterior elevation, "particularly in such features as...the blank spaces between the two outermost pilasters, and the drum and dome, which follow the Cole design with practically no variation at all."<sup>26</sup> Clearly, this episode differed in fundamental ways from the artist's more general architectural writings; Cole moved from the realm of theory to practice and designed a building that was built largely to his specifications that remains standing in Columbus today as a testament to the depth of the artist's dedication to architecture and a potent rebuttal to any who would claim that he was only a fantasist or philosopher of buildings. Because Cummings has shown that the strongest links between the finished structure and Cole's plan are in the exterior, this section will focus on that aspect of the design rather than on the incomplete evidence of the interior layout Cole envisioned. While

---

<sup>24</sup> For more on Adams, see Kevin J. Avery, *American Drawings and Watercolors in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Volume I* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), p. 290.

<sup>25</sup> Abbott Lowell Cummings, "Ohio's Capitols at Columbus, 1810-1861" (Typescript, Ohio Historical Society, 1948).

<sup>26</sup> Cummings, "Ohio's Capitols at Columbus," 33-4.

Cummings laid the groundwork for further study of this episode, it remains to place this project in the context of Cole's broader architectural thought and of contemporary concepts of architecture as a public good. To this end, a body of correspondence and drawings to which Cummings did not have access at the time of his study will be of value.

The Ohio General Assembly's efforts to build a new Statehouse to replace the rather cramped, two-story structure currently serving the job were the product of a combination of desires: for more space for legislators, for fireproof document storage, and, not least, for a more impressive structure to convey to the nation the rising stature of the state.<sup>27</sup> The act they passed to answer these needs called for the advertisement of an invitation for submissions in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., including a promise of premiums of five hundred dollars for the first-place plan, three hundred for the second, and two hundred for the third. In the use of a public competition, they followed a procedure that was, by this time, well-established, dating back to the competitions for the Capitol Building and President's House in Washington in 1792 and followed at the state and local level for "capitols, college and university structures, court houses, city halls, and other public buildings."<sup>28</sup> Convict labor was to be provided to reduce costs and the only substantive comment the legislature made about the design was that the building should be "of the most substantial materials and workmanship."<sup>29</sup> All other details were left to the appointed commissioners, who were, in addition to Adams, Joseph Ridgway, Jr. of Franklin County, an engineer who worked on the Ohio & Erie Canal and who would later become a state representative, and William B. van Hook of Butler County, a builder and current member of the legislature.<sup>30</sup> Adams, the amateur painter who was the only member of the body without professional experience in construction, seems to have been included as a voice for matters of artistry rather than engineering. The correspondence reveals that he served that role forcefully and that he was an astute student of architecture with firm ideas about the imperatives of the project.

Upon learning of the competition and seeing that his friend Adams was at the heart of it from a notice in a New York newspaper, likely the same *New-York American* from which he had learned about the Washington Monument project, Cole raised the subject in his ongoing correspondence with Adams on other subjects. This first Statehouse letter of May 26, 1838 establishes the terms of his involvement in the project, raises a number of important issues, and lends this dissertation its title along the way so it will be worth quoting at length:

I was much pleased to receive the paper containing the Advertisement to Architects and still more pleased to find your name on the list of Commissioners. I commend the choice and truly hope that the building to be erected will be an honour to the State and to yourselves. Do you know I am something of an Architect? My nephew, I believe you were informed when here, was studying under Mr. [Ithiel] Town, he is now with Mr. [Isaiah] Rogers who is erecting our great exchange. He is the first American Architect who has had an education expressly for the purpose and my hopes are great. I state this that you may not be surprised if we send you a Design. If we do and it

---

<sup>27</sup> Cummings, "Ohio's Capitols at Columbus," 22.

<sup>28</sup> William Elton Green, "'A Question of Great Delicacy': The Texas Capitol Competition, 1881" *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 92.2 (Oct., 1988), p. 247

<sup>29</sup> *Acts of a General Nature*, 13.

<sup>30</sup> Anon., *History of Franklin & Pickaway Counties, Ohio*, (Philadelphia: Williams Brothers, 1880), p. 583; Bert S. Bartlow et al., eds. *Centennial History of Butler County, Ohio* (B.F. Bowen, 1905), pp. 984-5.

should happen to be worthy it perhaps will not be the less prized for having been made by one who almost considers Ohio his own state and by one who is actually a native of Steubenville Ohio. [B.1]

This is a valuable document of the changes in the practice of architecture in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Cole voices his insecurity about being at the fringes of an establishment that, increasingly, prized formal education over the autodidacticism and training via the study of design books or apprenticeship that had prevailed for a previous generation.<sup>31</sup> While the subsequent correspondence shows Cole to have been well read in architectural theory and conversant with contemporary style debates, he understood that such credentials were not adequate to the job as they had been in a previous generation for Thomas Jefferson in the design of the Virginia state capitol building, a project with which, it will become clear, Cole was acquainted.<sup>32</sup> In addition to emphasizing his suitability for the project as an Ohioan, Cole clarifies that he would be assisted by his nephew, William Henry Bayless, who had both the cultural capital and technical drawing skills to compete. Bayless' legitimacy came of his current employment with the New York architect Isaiah Rogers, best known for his Merchant Exchange on Wall Street.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Bayless' association with the especially learned architect Ithiel Town, (best remembered for the stylistic heterodoxy of his domestic and ecclesiastical buildings in New Haven,) not merely as an apprentice but as a participant in a formal course of study was a major credential.<sup>34</sup> Ithiel Town was friendly with Cole and the direct source of some of the artist's own architectural education; Cole received architectural books from Town's library in partial payment for *The Architect's Dream*.<sup>35</sup> (Fig. 3) Cole used this association with Town to place Bayless under his instruction, as the original apprenticeship contracts demonstrate.<sup>36</sup> Cole's claim that this training made his nephew "the first American Architect who has had an education expressly for the purpose" doesn't stand up to scrutiny, but it is significant that Cole thought it important to say so and speaks to the rising stakes of professionalization in the period.<sup>37</sup>

Adams replied promptly and encouragingly to Cole's initial inquiry about the competition, sending on June 7<sup>th</sup> the official guidelines document with the full particulars of the rooms that would be required and specifics of materials and budget for the purpose of drafting estimates [B.2] In cryptic language that can't have been very helpful to the competing architects, the commissioners state "There has been no sum fixed for the cost of the State House; but we

---

<sup>31</sup> Mary Woods traces this shift largely to the influence of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, whom she calls "the first professional architect and engineer to practice in the United States." Her book as a whole is a valuable account of the tensions that are evident in this letter: *From Craft to Profession: The Practice of Architecture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> On this project, see Mark Wenger, "Thomas Jefferson and the Virginia State Capitol" *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 101.1 (Jan., 1993), pp. 77-102.

<sup>33</sup> Isaiah Rogers has received woefully little attention for one of the major architects of the century so James O'Gorman's new book comes as a welcome development: *Isaiah Rogers: Architectural Practice in Antebellum America* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015).

<sup>34</sup> On Town, there has been no comprehensive study since Roger Newton's *Town & Davis, Architects: Pioneers in American Revivalist Architecture, 1812-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).

<sup>35</sup> Only one of the books Cole acquired from Town is known for certain: Jean Nicholas Louis Durand's *Receuil et parallèle des Edifices de tout genre anciens et modernes...* (Paris, 1800). Ellwood C. Parry III, "Thomas Cole's Imagination at Work in *The Architect's Dream*", *American Art Journal* 12.1 (Winter, 1980), pp. 42-3.

<sup>36</sup> NYSL 6.6

<sup>37</sup> While Cole's phrasing is ambiguous, he cannot have been referring to Rogers because the latter had very little education to speak of. See O'Gorman, *Isaiah Rogers*, 16-19.

believe that in the general style, convenience, and durability of her Capitol, Ohio does not wish to be second to any State in the Union. The Grecian Doric Order is suggested; but not with a view of governing exclusively in the choice.” In the letter he wrote directly on the reverse of this document, Adams shared some of his thoughts on public building in general and some hints on principles that might be appropriate in this instance. He writes: “it seems to me that the great defect in modern architecture is the want of unity in the designs. The simple majesty of the Greek Temples it is true must in some measure be sacrificed to attain the purpose for which our public buildings are erected, but we surely can avoid the deformity of two or three stories of windows, of columns supporting nothing, and arches performing no office. I dislike exterior arches, but a dome... may be shown to great advantage in our State House.” He also cautioned Cole on budget matters, rather contradicting the encouragement of grandiosity in the official guidelines, writing “In making the estimates let them be as low as possible. We must avoid the charge of extravagance.” Cole would incorporate many of these initial suggestions by his final design, including Adams’ hints on budget concerns, which would later become a bone of contention. Cole responded on June 18<sup>th</sup> with hearty agreement that what Adams had written was “in accordance with my views & I believe with True Taste.” [B. 3] While the correspondence here takes a learned excursus into the recent discovery that many Greek buildings had originally been not pure white but adorned with polychrome ornament, defining “true taste” in architecture and its social value is a constant undercurrent throughout, along with Cole’s overarching concern with making buildings that would stand the test of time.

After Cole’s reply of June 18<sup>th</sup>, he embarked upon a period of intensive architectural draughtsmanship, while continuing with his other painting projects, and did not write to Adams again until he had settled on a final design in September. Without accompanying letters or journal entries to date the loose drawings that survive from this burst of creativity, ordering the production of these months is a challenge. However, visual, rather than textual, evidence indicates a progressive development of his thinking about the Statehouse project from opulence to relative simplicity as he worked out a proposal worthy of submission in collaboration with his nephew. The precise nature of their collaboration on this project is undocumented, but the elevations all appear to be in Cole’s hand, so it seems safe to conclude that the artist was largely concerned with the exterior appearance of the building, while William Henry Bayless used the greater practical training the artist had celebrated in his initial Statehouse letter to work out matters of execution and interior arrangements.<sup>38</sup> Cole’s designs for the Statehouse demonstrate familiarity with major examples of public architecture, both ancient and modern, and consciousness of the financial factors that would dictate the selection of a design in a nineteenth-century democracy, much as Cole might lament these limitations.

Adams’s letter of June 7th on the back of the guidelines document continued onto a second sheet, leaving some blank space in which Cole made the first of his many designs of widely varying degrees of finish for the Statehouse as he worked steadily towards the submission of his final plan on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September, 1838. (Fig. 17) In contrast to Adams’ hints about the desirability of the “simple majesty” of the Greek Revival, the artist’s first instinct, in this hasty plan and elevation, was to follow the basic composition of St. Peter’s in Rome, with its large central dome between two smaller ones. This idea for the project seems only to have been a

---

<sup>38</sup> While a handful of sketchlike groundplans for the Statehouse are included amongst Cole’s papers, the lack of any as finished as his many elevations supports the conclusion that he was primarily concerned with the exterior effect of the building while Bayless was responsible for the plans. The few plans in Cole’s hand are DIA 39.505, 506, 507, 508 and NYSL 2.9.

fleeting fancy with few if any traces of it surviving to the final version. The same is true of another evidently early loose plan, in which Cole has followed Thomas Jefferson's work on the Virginia state capitol building by modeling the central portion of his structure on the Maison Carrée in Nîmes, France, one of the best preserved of Roman temples.<sup>39</sup> (Figs. 18-20) The possibility of a central dome remains in a faint pencil outline, with which the artist compared the effect the two possibilities would have in a frontal view. The aforementioned chalk design on the stretcher of *Notch of the White Mountains* seems to be next in order as an incremental step closer to the final design. (Fig. 6) While the chalk outline is indistinct, this state maintains the broad, colonnaded terrace with outer pavilions from his Maison Carrée concept but begins to show by this stage some elements that would survive to the final building, including the central dome supported by a pilastered drum. A related pencil sketch makes this state of the concept clearer, with its broad, low portico and framing pavilions. (Fig. 21) It is another small step to a more highly finished elevation that makes clear the colossal scale of the vision and the great expense of executing it. (Fig. 22) Here, the ground story colonnade is replaced by high steps that rise to stately entrances on all four sides, framed by sculptures on high pedestals, in the manner of Palladio's Villa Rotonda.<sup>40</sup> Cole hewed more closely to Adams' cautions about budget in what is likely to be the next state of his design: a striking perspective in gray wash that has long been overlooked in a box of miscellany at the New York State Library. (Fig. 23) Here, the artist has scaled back the ornament of his previous version and the dome has come to be more of a barrel cupola, but he also elaborates upon the four Palladian temple fronts and includes strong horizontal relief that was only a faint indication in the previous state. Cole's final submission to the competition is preserved only in a reliable copy made the next year by the New York architect Alexander Jackson Davis, who was called in to assist the commissioners. (Fig. 24) As Abbott Lowell Cummings has described, this elevation shows many features that would appear on the building as executed, especially the succession of pilasters and columns with relatively little horizontal relief, and reduces the cost yet further.<sup>41</sup>

Cole resumed his correspondence with William Adams on September 10<sup>th</sup>, by which time he had completed the design to his satisfaction and Bayless was in the process of making the final drawings for submission to Cole's specifications. [B.5] Once arrangements had been made for the transportation of the drawings to Ohio, Cole sent Adams more extensive comments on his efforts in a letter of September 25<sup>th</sup>. This entry in the correspondence includes indication that Cole had been disappointed by his nephew's professional architectural draughtsmanship, on which he had relied for legitimacy in the competition, and felt the need to take more of the project on his own shoulders by completing replacement drawings at the last minute on his own. While he expressed only modest hopes for his proposal at this stage, he asserts that at least on the level of practicality his project could not be bettered: "We have certainly offered nothing that cannot be executed with facility & nothing that we did not consider necessary & fit. We have really studied our design." [B.7] His emphasis on the study involved can be understood as an

---

<sup>39</sup> On the Virginia State Capitol, see note 32; Jean-Charles Balty, *Etudes sur la Maison Carrée de Nîmes* (Brussels: Latomus, 1960). While Jefferson's building was the most influential of this design, Ithiel Town built another, smaller building of very similar, some might say derivative, composition for New Haven in 1833, when it was the alternate capital of the state. See Hitchcock and Seale, *Temples of Democracy*, 83-6.

<sup>40</sup> On the Villa Rotonda, also known as Villa Capra and Villa Almerico, see Giovanni Giaconi, *The Villas of Palladio* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), pp. 128-31. Another elevation for this state of the design with a slightly narrower cupola, perhaps an intervening step in the transition to the more economical final proposal but one that maintains the full breadth of the ground story, is on DIA 39.506a

<sup>41</sup> See note 26.



outgrowth of the same professional insecurity that caused Cole to proclaim Bayless' educational credentials and suggests the labor to engage with other public buildings, both in the United States and abroad, that the drawings also reveal. Another piece of evidence of his consciousness of movements in public architecture is the artist's mention that he has heard Michigan is also in the process of building a statehouse.<sup>42</sup> Of the man the commissioners had brought in for consultation, Alexander Jackson Davis, Cole had only the highest opinion, calling him "one of our best Architects." While Davis was certainly deserving of the appellation, his own later involvement in the Ohio project would give Cole reason to regret this enthusiastic endorsement in a few months' time. A final intriguing detail of this letter is an indication that Cole had submitted a perspective of his design "in oil & Turpentine," an object that has, sadly, been lost. While Cole concedes that this technique is "not very favourable for the precision of line desirable in architectural drawings," the haste with which he could execute the medium with which he was most comfortable as the deadline loomed was desirable. This elusive object speaks to the role of painting in his architectural process and to his painterly conception of buildings in space, further evidence that his architectural work should not be understood as anomalous or peripheral but as a core part of his commitment to the built landscape.

Although surviving records of competition entries and the commissioners' deliberations are regrettably scanty, Adams' subsequent letters to Cole offer the best available insight into the way the decision was made. Already on October 1<sup>st</sup>, well before the commissioners were to meet on October 18<sup>th</sup>, Adams expresses dread about the deliberations to come:

I apprehend that we will have some difficulty in adopting [your] plan for I already foresee such various influences about [to] be exerted upon our decision, both before and after it is made, that I fear the object I have in view may be entirely defeated. I aim at the erection of a structure which as a work of art, shall excite the admiration of posterity. To accomplish this we must steer clear of the whirlpool of politics, & the rock of utilitarianism, to do which in these times will require a skillful pilot. For we have hosts of economical politicians who are wholly ignorant of art, [and] consequently [have] no feelings to gratify but the glory of saving a few dollars to the State. **[B.8]**

The uncannily similar language in which both Adams and Cole wrote about the necessity of building with attention to the perceptions of later generations and to the possibility of public buildings as sources of inspiration and guidance rather than concessions to the numerical concerns of reviled "utilitarianism" shows the extent to which the two friends agreed on matters of architecture, and helps to explain the extent to which Adams would later go in advocating for Cole's proposal. Adams' fears appear to have been based largely on the rippling economic consequences in Ohio of the Panic of 1837, which would have an impact on many of Cole's architectural endeavors in the final decade of his life.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Adams' concern would prove to be built upon a foundation as solid as that of the future statehouse. Adams wrote again on October 25<sup>th</sup> with an update. **[B.9]** He told Cole "There are over fifty plans submitted and among them, of course, a great deal of taste, but there are upwards of twenty designs of great merit and

---

<sup>42</sup> On the Michigan Capitol, see William Seale, *Michigan's Capitol: Construction and Restoration* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

<sup>43</sup> On the Panic of 1837 and its aftereffects, see Jessica M. Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

many of the drawings most beautifully executed. We have been engaged for the last two days in reducing the number from which we intend to select those entitled to the premiums. We have reduced the number today to eight and your design is one of the eight and is the only one in the whole collection whose author is known to me...the hand writing and the style of the oil perspective were not to be mistaken.” While this must have gotten the artist’s hopes up, Adams did also include stern words about Cole’s design, despite the fact that he had made it safely to the semifinals, writing “I think very highly of it but I fear that the Style is too chaste and rigid for the taste of the region. My fellow Comrs. object to the recess porticos but my own opinion is that with the exception of the dome we have no design that would so well endure the test of criticism. There is a degree of dignity and repose in the composition seldom seen.” The prevalence of words like “harmony,” “unity” and “dignity” is impossible to overlook throughout these letters, suggesting not only the concept of building in balance with its site and within itself but, moreover, the ideal of a judiciously chosen architecture that both describes the state to itself and instructs the citizenry in political conduct. This “behavioral meaning” of architecture, in Charles Goodsell’s terms, is enacted by ceremonial spaces that both facilitate and constrain interaction between citizens and their elected representatives.<sup>44</sup> Despite his concerns about the form of Cole’s proposed dome, Adams appears to concede that the artist’s design is well conceived with regard to this most important of the building’s divergent missions.

The knowledge that things had reached a crucial juncture in Columbus caused Cole to write back swiftly on October 31<sup>st</sup> with a lengthy letter that mounted a spirited defense of his plan and criticized those of others in no uncertain terms. **[B.10]** He returns time and again to the importance of “unity & Harmony of parts” and the hope that the commissioners would not overlook the more subtle aspects of his proposal in their haste to come to a decision. Of the rigidity of his design, Cole said it was the product of the same economic concerns that Adams had led him to believe were paramount. He argues, in language that is, by now, familiar, that “the loftiness & harmony of the whole could be wonderfully improved” by the minor adjustments of changing the architectural order that supports the dome and suggests that the versatility of his design in this regard could be among its redeeming characteristics. Confirming the impression that the drawings themselves provide, Cole clarified that he had been responsible for the exterior while William Bayless had largely handled the ground plan, in which he had great confidence and which he hoped would carry the day despite whatever other shortcomings might be in evidence. This letter is intriguing for the tension it expresses between the arts of drawing and architecture. Rather contradicting what might have been expected of an artist involved in his first architectural competition, he writes “I could if my intention had been to make a picture have made a design much more beautiful, but I should have neglected the necessities of Construction.” While the resonances between his painted and built architecture are many, this indicates that he made a conscious effort to think practically, rather than pictorially, in this project and that he had somewhat come to regret doing so because of the impression Adams had given of the preference of the commissioners for buildings that made a pretty picture on paper. By way of concluding this letter, Cole launched into an attack on what he believed to be the plan the commissioners were favoring at this stage, which had been published in a New York newspaper, and dismissed it as “a great heap without harmony of parts or fitness of purpose.” Here, again, the language in which a building is found wanting carries dual meaning, alluding both to its structure and to its value as a political tool.

---

<sup>44</sup> Goodsell, “Political Meanings of the American State Capitol,” pp. 300-1.

Cole urged Adams to consider the redeeming features of the ground plan and interior appointments for which Bayless had been largely responsible in the time that remained before the commissioners decided. When Adams wrote again on November 14<sup>th</sup>, with the final decision not yet made, he had done as requested and had stern words for the shortcomings of the interior fittings Cole and Bayless had suggested to spare the budget, sharply contradicting the artist's notion that this was among the strongest aspects of his submission. In words that harshly echoed Cole's own insistence on the importance of permanence in building, Adams writes "we wished to erect an edifice to be admired hereafter....I cannot agree to stud partitions, 1 1/2 inch pine doors, inch pine stairs, and carved wooden posts for stone columns in the rotunda." [B.11] He appears to have hoped Cole would join him in battling the utilitarian impulse by offering an artificially low estimate for a richly appointed building rather than by actually calculating how to make an affordable but impressive building in a time of financial crisis, as Cole had successfully done. Indeed, he informed Cole that his estimate was the lowest in the competition "except three or four made by mechanics." Cole did not succeed in navigating the professionalization of architecture in this period by providing an estimate as honest as a carpenter's rather than by deceiving his client, as, apparently, a true architect could be expected to do. Adams admitted partial culpability for misleading Cole into economy above all and clarified that it was not only his own opinion that the interior appointments were inadequate, but also that of a "visitor whose taste is to be relied on." This appears to have been the same Andrew Jackson Davis who Cole had praised heartily in a previous letter and who would make transcriptions of the prize-winning designs in a standard format, the only way the submissions have been preserved. Adams soothed the wound of this bad news by saying "I liked the exterior of your design better than any we have." Because this part of the project was Cole's own handiwork, rather than that of Bayless, this was significant praise indeed. He enclosed with this message a sketch of the favored design by one of these professional architects to whom he had alluded in his last letter, which turned out to be the work of Cincinnati-based Henry Walter, and asked for Cole's thoughts.<sup>45</sup> (Fig. 25) This was, predictably, an invitation for Cole to dispense some of his harshest architectural criticism.

Cole was clearly disappointed at the reception of his proposal when he wrote again on November 27<sup>th</sup>, but he assured Adams that "I do not place my hope on 'frail Brick and Mortar.'" [B.12] He suggested that the concern over the cheapness of the materials his nephew had indicated in the interior arrangement, which, Cole claimed, "was almost entirely his," and suggested that shortcomings could be remedied by a simple change of materials rather than by any fundamental alteration of the design. Of the Walter design, Cole had very little good to say. While the artist was able to muster that he admired the "simplicity and loftiness of effect" of Walter's plan, the praise stops there. Even this loftiness was the product of insufficient attention to the topography, in Cole's opinion, because the site was "a Natural Terrace," which rendered Walter's needless embellishment "a very needless appurtenance." This sheds some light on the progress of Cole's own designs, of which a terrace had also been a feature at the early stages. Evidently Cole discarded it not out of economy alone but out of study of the particularities of the site, as described in the published guidance to architects and in Adams' letters. Of Walter's dome, Cole was especially critical. He wrote:

---

<sup>45</sup> Little scholarship has appeared on Walter, other than brief mentions in overviews of Cincinnati architecture. The most important building built to his plans, unlike the Statehouse, was the Catholic cathedral of Cincinnati, Saint Peter in Chains.

The Dome, if Dome it can be called which Dome is not, is as poor and meager as can well be, and if executed will appear to have no more Connexion with the rest of the Building than a Bird Cage would if hung out of one of the windows, with this difference that the Bird Cage is put out for an agreeable object and cannot appear likely to break down the Building. The Dome on the other hand will appear to crush or be crushing in the roof where it has been placed by some Wicked Genius.

Despite his evident awareness of the capitols of Virginia and Michigan, he appears not to have known, or not to have approved of, the successful precedents for a dome rising from a peaked roof in Massachusetts and the recently completed Vermont State House, writing “I am persuaded that no Dome can spring with good effect from a peaked roof or roofs—it is in fact at variance with all laws of Composition.” (Fig. 26) Above all else, Cole was concerned that the Walter design “wants unity,” again underlining this key value, both aesthetic and political, for buildings made with an eye to “true taste.”

After occasionally heated discussions amongst the commissioners, Adams reported the result to Cole on December 2<sup>nd</sup>. [B.13] The first premium of \$500 went to the Henry Walter plan, as anticipated. The \$300 second premium was given to Martin Thompson of New York for a plan with a broad, squat dome. (Fig. 27) Cole won the third premium of \$200, a result with which he seems to have been contented, especially after he had concluded his previous message with morose lines about his prospects: “When you have done with my Design, I would wish it returned to me if there is a suitable opportunity. It will probably be more useful to me than anybody else, if it only reminds that a design for a State House requires more study & opportunity than a Modern Painter can well have.” Adams indicated that even third prize was not the end of the road, requesting revised estimates for higher quality interior appointments because the Legislature could still choose to build any of the three designs and that the plan they preferred would not be known for some time yet.

No letter from Cole to Adams survives from the early months of 1839. However, Cole gained some insight into the process from an anonymous letter from a correspondent in Columbus dated January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1839 that was published in the *New-York American*, whereupon Cole circled the item in black ink, cut it out, and saved it in a clippings file, where it remains today.<sup>46</sup> The writer describes the progress of the city, including the new Lunatic Asylum, Court House, and Asylum for the Blind, and claims “Every thing is advancing except politics and public men.” The evocation this letter offers of the tempestuous condition of the state legislature in this period, in which “Both parties seem striving to outdo each other in the lowest tricks of the demagogue,” provides useful context for the Statehouse project and clarifies the stakes of building a capitol that conferred harmony and unity on its occupants. Indeed, these terms recur in the letter to the extent that one wonders if Adams himself wrote it, despite the writer’s claims to be “a stranger...in this place some days” who compares its practices to “the business habits of our eastern cities.” Cole mentioned the item in a letter of March 11<sup>th</sup>, calling it “perhaps too flattering,” after a long silence on Adams’ end. [B.14] Adams’ reply to Cole on March 20<sup>th</sup>, confirmed that he had read it when it was republished in his local paper and gives no inkling that he might have been the author. [B.15] The parallelism may be only coincidence and a sign that the language of aesthetic and political values in which Cole and Adams corresponded was on many tongues in these years. Another possibility is that the speaker could be Andrew Jackson Davis because of the focus on public buildings in general and the Statehouse in particular.

---

<sup>46</sup> NYSL 6.10

However, the letter's unequivocal praise for Cole's submission as one that would produce a building "not surpassed any where" conflicts with Davis' previously expressed concerns about the interior of the Cole/Bayless submission, so this attribution of the letter seems unlikely. The anonymous correspondent criticizes the economies evident in building the Lunatic Asylum largely in brick despite the beauty of local stone and mirrors the concern of both Adams and Cole with taste and permanence in the process: "A great State is erecting its public buildings, and should not plead the differences of cost." Likewise, the Court House, a building that needed it most of all, was "without unity". The final sections of this letter are devoted to the Statehouse project and will be worth quoting at length for the evidence they offer that one apparently neutral observer found Cole's design to be by far the best of the lot:

A new State house is to be erected here, designed to accommodate the Legislature and all the public officers.

The Committee appointed last winter to effect this, have reported three plans to the Legislature, taken from a great variety furnished them from all quarters of the Union. I spent some time in the room where the designs are exhibited, and had full opportunity for examination. I think the Committee have selected the three best plans in the collection, but that they have committed a great blunder in deciding upon their relative merits, and should be glad to learn that the plan to which they have given the lowest premium, had obtained their final preference. Unity of purpose, a graceful serenity, an awful magnificence characterize this plan. The calm grandeur of the head of Shakespeare or Newton, are the rapid and fitting association. 'Tis small matter to say there is nothing like it in the United States: it is not surpassed any where. It is a parallelogram of three hundred and twenty, by about two hundred feet, with a large recess of about one hundred and fifty feet on the longest sides, within each of which is a portico. There are two entrances on the other sides, in recess porticos.

There are no pediments, but the whole is surrounded with an unbroken entablature; perfectly plain, and the centre is surrounded by a large dome, supported by pilasters and entablature, in good keeping with the great mass below. The order is Grecian Doric. This design is understood to be by Mr. Cole.

The letter continues to discuss the first premium Walter plan, which is praised for its "very simple and noble style" and criticized for the way "its unity is broken by the projections of the pediments, and what is intended to be the dome is without a horizontal base—a radical defect." This mirrors so precisely Cole's own criticism of Walter's dome that a reader's suspicions are again raised. Could Cole himself have sent this letter to support his own case? There is no evidence that he ever visited Columbus, at least not since his boyhood, to acquire firsthand knowledge of the other public buildings described and the finer points like the shift in stone to brick at the Asylum that could have been hard to decipher from print sources and there seems no way for Cole to have known the pseudonym "Mansfield" of a Gothic plan celebrated in a final passage. This same plan was praised in a previous letter by Adams [B.9] so the most likely explanation is that this was an elegant bit of subterfuge by William Apthorp Adams to support his own side as deliberations amongst the commissioners became increasingly acrimonious. Regardless of the writer, it is a vivid evocation of the reception of Cole as a serious architect whose plan made a powerful effect, and evidence that this reputation was published widely in

papers around the nation. In addition to its description of the “unity of purpose” and “graceful serenity” of Cole’s design, values much needed in housing for a dysfunctional legislature, this discussion is especially rich for the striking simile at its center: that the design reflects the same “calm grandeur” as “the head of Shakespeare or Newton.” While I argue that Cole’s work in architecture can be understood as a part of his overarching concern with the built landscape in oil as in brick and mortar, the correspondent has portraiture in mind instead and reads the building physiognomically, or even phrenologically. The proportions of this mass of masonry, it is implied, bear a resemblance to the high brow and aquiline nose characteristic of representations of the two great English men of letters. In Adams’ letter of March 20<sup>th</sup>, he made the political analogy even clearer by stating “I would have said the ‘heads of Washington & Newton’ rather than ‘Shakespeare & Newton’ for surely there is more of that calm, heroic virtue in [Gilbert Stuart’s] head of Washington than in the conventional head of what we call Shakespeare.” **[B.15]** Adams suggests that the building bears a stronger resemblance to the head of the father of the nation, high praise indeed for an artist who had previously engaged in a project to commemorate Washington and for whom the values of harmony, dignity, and unity for which Washington stood in politics were guiding principles in architecture. In concluding this published letter from Columbus, the writer expresses the hope that “Even the ferocious spirit of party may stand rebuked before the works of genius,” a clear statement of the power of public architecture to inform and shape behavior, not only of the wider populace but of politicians as well.

The lavish praise Cole received in this anonymous letter in the newspaper must have raised his hopes that better outcomes might still be hoped for despite his ostensible loss in the competition. On March 20<sup>th</sup>, Adams clarified that things were still in flux in Columbus, with Thompson’s plan falling by the wayside, despite its second premium, and continuing debate over whether to build to the Cole or Walters proposal. **[B.15]** The choice between the two and the choice of how to modify them in final execution was returned to the original commissioners, exacerbating tensions between the three that were already brewing. Adams told Cole, “It was not without difficulty that I obtained the consent of my brother Commissioners that your design should be one of the three, to be reported to the Legislature, and I was on the eve of coming out with a “minority report” when they consented to award to your plan the third premium. I shall use all my skill & influence to have the House built after your plan but I may fail; if I do fail, it will be owing to the pride of opinion of the other Commissioners.” Adams’s strenuous efforts on his friend’s behalf seem to have had some effect by April 12<sup>th</sup>, when he told Cole that “I believe my associates are now convinced that if your design is not the best, it is better than the one to which we gave the first premium, and that it is equal to any of the others...” **[B.16]** This letter also indicates that the commissioners planned to travel east to consult with distinguished architects, including Ithiel Town, Benjamin Strickland, Thomas U. Walter, and Alexander Jackson Davis and, rather unethically, suggests that Cole should curry favor with each of these men without delay. Cole and Adams must have met and spoken in New York because Cole’s next letter in June expresses regret about not having the chance to talk more about his concerns with Davis’ level of involvement in the final deliberations. **[B.17]** It appears from this letter that the commissioners gave Davis an extended period of time with the drawings to consider them and make the transcriptions that are now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the only surviving records of the final proposals. Cole’s concern was that this famous architect would take advantage of this privileged access to take the best of each plan for himself and to convince the commissioners to give the job to him instead.

The design was finally chosen by the legislature later in June of 1839. [B.18] Confirming the judgment that Abbott Lowell Cummings had made on the basis of visual analysis alone, because he did not have access to these letters, Adams tells the artist that “We retain three of the fronts of your original design and in place of the recess in the west front we have made that front with a projecting portico of eight columns after the Parthenon, thus” followed by a sketch of the plan with cardinal directions indicated.<sup>47</sup> (Fig. 28) Just as Cole had feared, Davis seems to have been responsible for the modifications and to have been in the process of taking credit for the design. After all his maneuvering for a favorable outcome even after the awarding of premiums, Cole was outraged that his plan would be adopted without any additional compensation to himself or his nephew and replied tersely to Adams on July 29<sup>th</sup>:

On the subject of the State House I have little to say. I find that my plan is the one adopted with slight modifications. The plan of advancing a central portico from the main Building you know is mine, though that that portico should be a copy of part of the Parthenon never entered my thoughts. You know my opinions with respect to the Pediment and I believe you are agreed with me on that point, but I suppose your fellow labourers were determined to have one. I cannot but think that as the first premium was given to one whose Design is not adopted that I ought to have some pecuniary compensation for what my plans have done since, and I do not know but I shall send you on a Bill, but I will hear what you say. [B.19]

After a delay of three months, long enough in this regular correspondence to suspect that some coolness could be behind it, despite excuses about “constant business engagements,” Adams firmly rebuffed any notion that Cole could expect further compensation for his efforts: “I must address you, as you did me, not as my friend Thos Cole but as an architect should be addressed by a Commissioner. In this capacity I must say your claim cannot be allowed. The Commissioners have no power to make any compensation to those whose plans obtained the premiums other than that provided by the law, under which we act.” [B.20] In happier news, he was able to report that the foundation was nearly complete and very well built, but the specter of a problem appears in the fact that the commissioners are reliant on annual appropriations to continue work amidst a political climate hostile to spending. Cole seems relieved to have gotten a reply from his once and future friend at last and replied immediately to this letter on October 30<sup>th</sup>. [B.21] Among the most intriguing contents of this letter is the indication that Cole’s engagement with built architecture in the Statehouse competition had caused him to consider going into architectural practice with William Bayless. He writes “it is probable that an arrangement will be made between Mr Bayless & myself by which we shall be connected as Architects” adding, with perhaps more modesty than was warranted after the praise the elevation he had designed himself while Bayless’ interiors had been roundly criticized, that Bayless would be “the practical man” and Cole himself would chiefly contribute “my little influence.” To this venture, he thought publicizing his work on the Statehouse could be useful so he hoped to obtain revised designs for the final building from Adams. A cryptic notation elsewhere in his papers seems to indicate that he considered giving a public lecture on the subject of the Statehouse to the same end of improving the prospects of himself and his nephew for architectural commissions, but it is not known whether that talk ever took place.<sup>48</sup> Despite these growing

---

<sup>47</sup> Cummings, “Ohio’s Capitols at Columbus,” 33-4.

<sup>48</sup> NYSL 6.5

ambitions, he assures Adams “I am not going to abandon my first love for all the blandishments of an Architectural mistress.” This letter shows another direct product of his success, mixed as it was with frustrations, on the Statehouse. He writes, “I am about building a house. It will be a sort of Italian looking thing.” The project he alludes to is the villa he hoped to construct on land he owned on his wife’s family’s property in Catskill, New York, the subject of Chapter Three. This juxtaposition makes it evident that that endeavor, his major architectural exercise for the final years of his life, emerged directly from the confidence he gained as an architect from the critical approval he found in Columbus.

Alas, from here the path to the construction of Cole’s design for the Ohio Statehouse became even more challenging and progress stalled in Columbus, largely because of the requirement for annual appropriations amidst economic pressures of the period. Adams told Cole on January 21, 1840:

I have been here [Columbus] more than a month fighting with the Goths and Vandals and other hosts of barbarians. I am sorry to say that I have not yet conquered them, nor have they vanquished me. They show some symptoms of giving way, and I believe I shall eventually triumph. I shall not give up the contest until all hope is lost of making the exterior of our building after your design. The matter now in dispute is, whether the two main fronts shall be after your design, or whether they shall be cut up and deformed by projecting a portico within the recess....I engaged in this business in the ardent hope of accomplishing something grand in the department of the arts, but the obstacles are truly discouraging and they seem to be multiplying as we advance. For besides the combined powers of conceit and ignorance, intent and knowing, we have now to meet the formidable foe of poverty. **[B.23]**

These later parts of the Statehouse correspondence make abundantly clear how much Cole’s level of success in the project was dependent on Adams’ political skill and tireless efforts. The Goths and Vandals to whom he alludes were legislators who worked to stop the building or even to make another city the capital of the state. Shortly after this letter, these rebel legislators succeeded in repealing the Statehouse Act on March 10, 1840, and all building stopped for six years.<sup>49</sup> The building that was finally constructed, a fusion of previous submissions with later designs, owed the strongest debt to Cole’s design, as a final letter from Adams on the subject in April of 1846, less than two years before the artist’s death, made clear. **[B.24]** He wrote: “The Legislature last winter ordered the building of the State House....The exterior will be your design.” While the ground story of the building that now stands in Columbus does bear a strong relationship to Cole’s third premium design, with its procession of pilasters the recessed porticos on the western and eastern fronts, the awkward barrel cupola in place of the dome that all three prize-winning designs called for shows the risk of designing by committee and the challenges of making ambitious works of public architecture in a democracy. **(Fig. 29)** Indeed, this awkward “vertical element at odds with the horizontal proportions of the building below” calls to mind Cole’s own criticism of Henry Walter’s dome as a kind of “Bird Cage” that seems insufficiently connected with the rest of the building.<sup>50</sup> **[B.12]**

Despite the many frustrations of his near decade of involvement in the effort to construct a new Statehouse in Columbus, this endeavor gave Cole greater confidence in his architectural

---

<sup>49</sup> Cummings, “Ohio’s Capitols at Columbus,” 41-3.

<sup>50</sup> Hitchcock and Seale, *Temples of Democracy*, 120.



abilities, both as designer and critic. He put this confidence to use in his later paintings of country houses and in conceiving a villa of his own. The extensive correspondence he conducted about the Statehouse with William Apthorp Adams was an opportunity to refine his own ideas about the ideologies of the built environment and to hone in on core values that were both aesthetic and political. Cole's writings on the Ohio Statehouse describe a concept of public architecture as a source of unity and harmony and a beacon of lasting values, rather than fleeting economies, for a society. While his architectural attentions would focus more intently on the domestic in the remaining years of his life, the Ohio Statehouse competition invited Cole to think about buildings at the scale of the city and gave rise to grand visions of architectural possibility in which persist ideas of styles and forms that had their genesis in the Statehouse project.

### **III. Cole's "Letter to the Publick"**

Cole brought his thinking about the Washington Monument and the Ohio Statehouse to bear in writing a statement of principles for public building titled "Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture" that is preserved in draft form amidst the Cole Papers at the New York State Library. [Appendix C] Although undated, references to churches, statehouses, and villas within indicate that it is the product of the accumulated architectural study that this chapter has described and was most likely written, or at least the final section of it, in the early 1840s, when he moved on from the frustrations of the Ohio Statehouse and the estate of Cedar Grove came to the fore as the chief laboratory for his architectural ideas.<sup>51</sup> The title makes it clear that some form of dissemination was envisioned, but the circumstances of its creation and distribution, if any, are unknown. Nevertheless, this document, which has been mentioned on occasion in the Cole literature but never published in full, is a valuable trace of an ambition to be a public voice on matters of building and, at just over 1,800 words, a relatively succinct statement of the values that informed his own architectural practice, including the ability of architecture to inspire the best in a citizenry and the risks of building without adequate attention to the perceptions of the future.

"Letter to the Publick" begins by acknowledging that the imagined audience might find him a rather unexpected, or even unqualified, architectural writer and states that his goal is only to stimulate even those who might disagree with him "to a more general study of the principles of architecture." Quickly, it becomes apparent that the artist is most comfortable when dispensing harsh criticism of the work of others and on rather less secure footing when offering new ideas of his own. Before describing any of the good that architecture can do, he cautions that "an ugly thing is a curse forever" and "a costly church or any other publick building destitute of grandeur or beauty, brands bad taste on the brow of the community." While a final section of the letter turns to the domestic scale, he makes clear here that he is mainly concerned with "publick" architecture in the essay because of the risks and opportunities that come of its visibility and accessibility. He works himself to a fevered pitch, bemoaning that "thousands yet unborn will turn away with disgust from those piles of masonry whose architects have been destitute alike of the sense of the truly beautiful and the Knowledge of those principles of Art & Nature from

---

<sup>51</sup> Ellwood Parry has offered the most sustained treatment of this essay to date, quoting from it at length in *The Art of Thomas Cole*, but both the text and his discussion are abridged. (Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 206-7.) His dating of it to the late 1830s may be correct for the opening section but the final passage on villas is much more likely to be from the early 1840s because of its connections to the artist's 1844 writings about his Sicilian travels: Thomas Cole, "Sicilian Scenery and Antiquities" *The Knickerbocker* 23 (Feb., 1844), pp. 103-13; "Sicilian Scenery and Antiquities: Part Two" *The Knickerbocker* 23 (Mar., 1844), pp. 236-44. Both have been reproduced in Thomas Cole, *The Collected Essays and Prose Sketches* ed. Marshall Tynn (St. Paul, MN: John Colet Press, 1980).

which emanates all that is excellent in Art.” However, amidst the pleasurable outrage and creative invective in which he here indulges, he remains convinced of the potential for American buildings. Good architecture, according to Cole, is “a benefaction to society” and “the humblest citizen as he walks beneath the shadow of some noble structure feels his soul expand, his thoughts take a loftier flight.” One thinks of the experience of walking past a Statehouse, likely the encounter between citizen and public architecture he had in mind. Cole seems to compare good, implicitly stone, buildings to sculpture, celebrating the way in which both have “adapted the most obdurate materials to man’s wants & given them expression.” Although Cole had little involvement with sculpture, his engagement with the medium for the Washington Monument and the “Letter to the Publick” show it to have been a part of his thought process in a more general way. It can also be taken as a suggestion that this painter-architect was aware of the Italian Renaissance *paragone*, in which the relative merits not only of painting and sculpture but also architecture were weighed and evaluated.<sup>52</sup> One senses a degree of envy in his celebration of architecture as a means of embodying the best in a society and working as a force for good in a way that paintings struggled to do because of the greater limitations on public access to them and because they were harder to justify within a system that seemed, to Cole, hopelessly utilitarian. Good architecture is also important to Cole on the level of international rivalry, because “the patriot views it with pride & the traveller when meandering in foreign lands calls it to mind & loves his country more than ever.”

Moving from general principles to a brief discourse on historical modes and the so-called “dilemma of style” that confronted the nineteenth-century architect and patron, Cole describes Greek architecture as “perfection” because of its symmetry and completeness, which causes it to rise to the level of “Lithic Philosophy.”<sup>53</sup> In language that recalls the succession of architectural possibilities reflected in *The Course of Empire* and *The Architect’s Dream*, he imagines how long and how arduous must have been the path of development to the lofty heights of Greek design from “the rude column of unknown stone such as formed the druidical structures through the stupendous portals of Egyptian Art.” If there were any doubt about how Cole felt about the distinctly Roman decadence depicted in *Consummation*, it is answered by his assertion that “Roman Architecture is but depraved Greek.” (Fig. 2) The final stop in his tour of styles is the Gothic, which he argues is a fusion of the ancient and the Christian taking all that was good in the former and going yet further. Gothic architecture, for Cole, “opens a world beyond the visible in which we dwell” and “appeals to the imagination.” In what seems a reflection of the visionary architecture of *The Voyage of Life* and the language he used to describe *Youth* from that series, which he described as “a cloudy palace, a castle of the air that rises in the sky, the baseless fabric of a day dream of youth” he celebrates the Gothic cathedral for the way “its towers & pinnacles climb towards the clouds like airy fabricks.”<sup>54</sup> (Fig. 4)

While this text is certainly valuable as a key to the interpretation of Cole’s architectural paintings, it is also a clear statement of values for public building in general. The aesthetic conservatism evident within might lead a reader to expect Cole to advocate a mere archaeological, revivalist architecture, but he does offer a route forward for modern architecture:

---

<sup>52</sup> On architecture in the context of the *paragone*, see Alina Payne, “The Sculptor-Architect’s Drawing and Exchanges Between the Arts” in Michael Cole, ed. *Donatello, Michelangelo, Cellini: Sculptor’s Drawings from Renaissance Italy* (exh. cat.) (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2014), pp. 57-73.

<sup>53</sup> On style debates in the nineteenth century, see J. Mordaunt Crook, *The Dilemma of Style: Architectural Ideas from the Picturesque to the Post-Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>54</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 6.1

applying classical orders and styles to new forms as long as function and reason predominate. While he allows a place for the Greek in contemporary life, he laments that “the country is bespattered with Grecian absurdities without attention to the different climate.” In this criterion, he anticipates the work of Andrew Jackson Downing, for whom specific local circumstances of climate and topography, in addition to use and economic class, were to be the chief determinants of form.<sup>55</sup> A significant amount of space is devoted to choice of materials as well. Referring to wooden houses that adopt Greek forms, of which Mount Vernon was the most famous example, instead of styles to which that material is better suited, Cole writes “nothing can be more absurd than the Grecian orders, as they are commonly rendered, in wood.” There is intriguing evidence in this section of the extent to which Cole’s architectural thought moved beyond the ideal to engagement with matters of engineering. He makes a compelling argument, surely based in part on his readings of architectural texts like those he is known to have received in compensation for *The Architect’s Dream* from Ithiel Town, that the classical orders were created for the medium of stone and make little sense in wood, a medium that is not to be scorned out of hand but has other valuable properties.<sup>56</sup> A concluding line that has been crossed out is rather more negative about the potential of wood, claiming that “a wooden town is a preposterous thing,” but he seems to have thought the better of including it in the version he hoped to make available to the public. However, Cole is clearly skeptical of the use of wood for colossal public buildings because of its relative impermanence in comparison with masonry and because of the artifice inherent in mimicking classical forms in a far lighter and more flexible building material. This context sheds some light on the dilemma of Cole’s overuse of wood in the interior of the Ohio Statehouse for reasons of economy; he went against his own best instincts and stated principles on the advice of William Apthorp Adams to prize thrift above all and paid the price for doing so.

A final passage of the “Letter to the Publick” shifts from large public buildings to the discussion of the selection of styles for American country houses. Despite his own English upbringing, he rejects the English cottage as a model for American houses because the snug interiority, born of dreary English weather, that is characteristic of that building type doesn’t take adequate advantage of the American climate, for which a more fluid blending of interior and exterior spaces is called for. To this end, he advocates an “American Villa Architecture” that looks more to Italy than to England. Such buildings would be characterized by “Large Piazzas,” by which he means porches, “deep recesses” and “projecting Roofs.” The rather grander scale and broader possibilities that come of emulating Italian villas, he argues, would suit the vast American landscape better than compact cottages, nestled in forest glens. Indeed, as Chapter Three will show in greater detail, Cole took his own advice in making plans for an American villa at Cedar Grove.

\*

\*

\*

Cole’s writings and designs for public architecture describe a vision for the medium as a means of encouraging harmony, unity, and permanence in a disorderly and increasingly fractious republic. His vision is in many ways a conservative one, fearful of the judgments of posterity and most admiring of the canonical achievements of the past. However, within the formal architectural language he so admires he does offer a route forward for a new American architecture that applies old motifs and styles to new uses and materials, as long as choices are

---

<sup>55</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (New York: D. Appleton, 1850).

<sup>56</sup> Parry, “Architect’s Dream”, 42-3.

made with judicious attention to structural realities, climate factors, and social suitability. From the many resonances between his painted and architectural work that appear in these pages, it is evident that he thought about architecture pictorially, and that he often conceived of buildings as images in the landscape. Moreover, in the same years he was writing and designing for the Washington Monument, Ohio Statehouse, and “Letter to the Publick,” he was making paintings that expressed the same principles visually like *The Architect’s Dream*. This confluence of ideals, this evidence that Cole’s work in public architecture is inseparable from his far better known paintings and crucial to understanding them, is especially clear from the fact that in precisely the same summer months of 1838 that Cole was intensively making designs for the Statehouse and worrying about selecting one that would stand the test of time, he was making a pair of paintings that quite explicitly explore the same concern: *Past and Present*.<sup>57</sup> (Figs. 30, 31) With this context in mind, these paintings, which figure prominently in the next chapter, can be read not only as representations of “Feudal power and splendor” and its decline but as images of an architecture that was chosen judiciously to stand the test of time with materials that were selected for permanence and grandeur rather than economy.<sup>58</sup> In painting and drawing, if not in bricks and mortar, Thomas Cole’s own architect’s dreams reached their apogee.

---

<sup>57</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 212-14.

<sup>58</sup> Description from the catalogue of the memorial exhibition arranged by Cole’s friends: *Exhibition of the Paintings of the Late Thomas Cole* (New York, 1848), p. 16. Quoted in Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 213.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Thomas Cole and the House Portrait

Thomas Cole's commissions to depict the very different houses of three very different patrons afforded the artist some of his earliest opportunities to study architecture as a subject for art and to think about the ways judiciously chosen buildings can civilize and domesticate the wilderness. The case studies that are the subject of this chapter range from the very beginning of his career to its later years and encompass vast, remote estates and houses that brought ideals of country life rather closer to the city. While these images have received limited attention in the past because of the challenges they present to received narratives about Cole's rejection of topography in favor of allegory, they are complex and revealing objects that negotiate the transatlantic identities of patrons and painter alike. The paintings he made of the houses of George William Featherstonhaugh, Daniel Wadsworth, and William P. Van Rensselaer should not be understood as topographical anomalies, but rather as key participants in the formation of one of Cole's most prominent themes: the meeting of civilization and wilderness. In addition, this chance to study the country houses of a class of patrons with which he identified strongly, despite his own more modest circumstances, contributed to his thinking about the form of the country house he hoped to build for himself.<sup>1</sup> As a group, Thomas Cole's house portraits are statements of a country house ideal and visual arguments about the role of private wealth and privilege in a republic.

The images Cole made for Featherstonhaugh, Wadsworth, and Van Rensselaer were not the only instances in which he depicted existing rural houses in his paintings. His large view of Crawford Notch was discussed previously as an example of the confluence of private and public architecture in his work because of the sketch for the Ohio Statehouse that appears on its stretcher. (Figs. 5, 6) This view depicts the so-called "Notch House" of Ethan Crawford, which Cole had sketched on a trip with Asher B. Durand in July of 1839, a striking subject because of the structure's precarious position, nestled amidst steep cliffs.<sup>2</sup> Because the image was not made for the house's owner, it cannot be called a house portrait but it is evidence of Cole's interest in the subject of the house in the landscape, whether it be a fictive cabin, an existing structure that provided visual interest in the making of a landscape painting, or a structure the artist was commissioned to represent for a particular owner.

It is intriguing to note that the next major painting Cole made after *A View of the Mountain Pass Called the Notch of the White Mountains* was another landscape that featured an existing country house. *Portage Falls on the Genesee River* was the product of a commission from William Ruggles, one of the commissioners of the project to build the Genesee River Canal.<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 32) Ruggles hoped to document the dramatic river gorge before his own project despoiled the scene, and to curry favor with Governor William Seward by loaning this image to him, in Ruggles' words, "as a specimen of the physical difficulties which Governor Seward and his followers are compelled to encounter, in extending the benefits of cheap and easy intercourse

---

<sup>1</sup> On Cole's identification with the American aristocracy, see Alan Wallach, "Thomas Cole and the Aristocracy" *Arts Magazine* 56.3 (Nov., 1981), pp. 94-106. On Cole's plans for a country house of his own, see Chapter Three.

<sup>2</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 218-9. Durand's sketch of the view is in the New-York Historical Society. Cole's is in the Princeton University Art Museum.

<sup>3</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 221-2. Elizabeth Honig has suggested in conversation with me that this painting bears a marked resemblance to the characteristic subject matter and compositions of Allart Van Everdingen. It is possible that Cole could have seen examples of his work in English collections but further research is needed on this possible connection.

into the sequestered parts of our commonwealth...”<sup>4</sup> Cole’s view certainly showed the dramatic topography with which the canal commissioners would have to contend, but Cole devoted substantial attention to another aspect of the scene: a fantastical log palace that crowned the gorge, Elisha Johnson’s “Hornby Lodge.”<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 33) A detail of the large painting shows how precisely the structure was painted, and a drawing in the Detroit Institute of Arts indicates the study that went into making it.<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 34) Cole went so far as to include an evergreen atop the house, perhaps a remnant of the topping-out ceremony and an indication that the sketch documents the period of this intriguing structure’s completion.<sup>7</sup> While this expenditure of artistic labor is strong evidence for Cole’s fascination with country houses and domestic architecture and the episode is in need of further study, this, again, cannot be called a house portrait in the sense this chapter uses the term because the painting was not made for the house’s owner.<sup>8</sup>

Tim Fulford has written of the ideologically charged genre of house portraiture that “views of the landscape owned by gentlemen became representations of the legitimacy of their power and the benefits it brought the nation.”<sup>9</sup> This category of landscape art has long roots in the frescoes of Medici villas by Giusto Utens and the garden views of the Low Countries, with Peter Paul Rubens’s 1636 *Autumn Landscape with a View of Het Steen in the Early Morning*

---

<sup>4</sup> Samuel B. Ruggles to William H. Seward, 24 July 1841, University of Rochester Library. Transcribed in Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 222. It is an intriguing coincidence of history that this painting of a country house by Cole was literally hanging in the Executive Chamber in Albany at the same time that Seward was the first politician to take the side of the anti-renters against the Van Rensselaer family, whose Cole house portraits are the subject of the third section of this chapter. See Reeve Huston, *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 94-5. Seward liked the painting so much that he kept it at the end of his term and took it home to Auburn with him, where it remains in the Seward House Historic Museum, at least for the time being. Sadly, that institution is, at the time of writing, preparing to sell the painting, which they claim is too valuable to insure. There has been massive public outcry and it is to be hoped that the sale and the loss of this precious context for the image may still be avoided. See Robin Pogrebin, “Painting’s Removal Stirs Outcry” *New York Times* (March 17, 2013), C1. Online at [www.nytimes.com/2013/03/18/arts/design/sale-planned-for-thomas-cole-landscape.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/18/arts/design/sale-planned-for-thomas-cole-landscape.html) [Accessed 30 March 2015]

<sup>5</sup> On the history of this building, see Tom Cook and Tom Breslin, “A Glimpse of Hornby Park” in *Glimpses of the Past: People, Places, and Things in Letchworth Park History*, Online: <http://www.letchworthparkhistory.com/hornby.html> [Accessed 30 March 2015] This somewhat unreliable source, which confuses the story of the painting’s commissioning and may have other facts wrong, suggests that Cole actually stayed at Hornby Park while painting *Portage Falls*. I have found no evidence of this elsewhere but it is worthy of further investigation.

<sup>6</sup> Cole has written on the Detroit drawing “Hornby Lodge: A Log Building Erected on a romantic spot near the Falls of the Genesee near Portage. It was built for the use of the Engineer Commissioner etc. of the Genesee Canal, which is to pass about 100 feet beneath this building by means of a Tunnel. It was designed by Mr Elisha Johnson & constructed under his superintendence.”

<sup>7</sup> Conversation with Margaretta Lovell

<sup>8</sup> There remains one other potential house portrait that cannot be discussed here because the image in question has been lost. The third to last page of Cole’s 1829 journal of his travels in England has a list of commissions with the entry “For Mr James King a view from his place large size.” This appears to be a reference to James Gore King, whose country house “Highwood” in Weehawken, New Jersey is most famous as the site of the dueling ground at which Aaron Burr killed Alexander Hamilton. See W. Jay Mills, “Highwood, Weehawken” in *Historic Houses of New Jersey* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1902), pp. 52-60. A number of views of the buildings and grounds, some signed by a T. A. Ayres, are now in the New-York Historical Society: accession numbers 1928.100, 105, 106, 109, 110, and 114. A view of the grounds of this house by Cole would be a most intriguing addition to the story of his house portraits but the trail has gone cold.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty, and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics From Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.

being perhaps the supreme example of the art-form.<sup>10</sup> (Fig. 35) This painting partly engendered the rise of a deep and varied British house portraiture tradition with its migration across the channel to the collection of Sir George Beaumont, where it was available not only to the many view painters who have been salvaged for posterity only in the pages of John Harris's magisterial *The Artist and the Country House* but also to the likes of John Constable and J.M.W. Turner.<sup>11</sup> Tim Barringer has rightly suggested certain similarities between the house portraits of Turner and Cole but this emphasis on the canonical painters of each nation leaves unremarked other crucial aspects of the complex process of exchange that saw house portraiture transplanted to America.<sup>12</sup> While an overarching study of house portraiture in America on the model of Harris's invaluable work on the house portraitists of Great Britain has yet to be written, recent studies of plantation paintings and early American garden views have shown just how widespread this tradition was.<sup>13</sup> Most of all, Emily Cooperman's groundbreaking work in collaboration with Lea Carson Sherk has greatly added to our understanding of the range of representational possibilities for country house views, and the difficulties these images faced in finding a market, in the early-nineteenth-century United States. Their account of the most important precedent for Cole's work in this vein, William Birch's 1808 *The Country Seats of the United States of North America*, reveals the pressures on a maker of American country house views, and the stark difference of the strategies Cole adopted.<sup>14</sup>

A British émigré to America of a generation before Cole, Birch was born in 1755, trained as an enamelist in Birmingham, and arrived in Philadelphia in 1794, where he remained until his death in 1834. Although it is not possible to document contact between Birch and Cole, they did overlap in Philadelphia: Cole was there from late 1823 through the spring of 1825, studying from casts and canvases at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, where, according to an account he gave to William Dunlap "his heart sunk as he felt his deficiencies in art when standing before the landscapes of Birch," by which he meant William Birch's son Thomas, a collaborator in the *Country Seats* project.<sup>15</sup> Birch was the first to publish a book of views in the United States, his 1800 project *The City of Philadelphia*, which was a great success that required four editions in Birch's lifetime to meet demand.<sup>16</sup> The *Country Seats* attempted to replicate this triumph by applying to an American context a publishing model well established since Androuet du Cerceau's influential *Les Plus Excellents Bastiments de France*, issued between 1576 and 1579, and in Britain since Jan Kip and Leonard Knyff's *Britannia Illustrata* of 1707. These books had

---

<sup>10</sup> On Giusto Utens, see Daniela Mignani, *The Medicean Villas by Giusto Utens* (Florence: Arnaud, 1991).; On Netherlandish garden views, see Erik de Jong, *Nature and Art: Dutch Garden and Landscape Architecture, 1650-1740*, Ann Langenakens, trans. (Philadelphia, 2001).; On *Het Steen*, see Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 150-1.

<sup>11</sup> On Sir George Beaumont and his collections, see David Brown and Felicity Owen, *Collector of Genius: A Life of Sir George Beaumont* (New Haven, CT, 1988).; John Harris, *The Artist and the Country House: A History of Country House and Garden View Painting in Britain 1540-1870* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> Tim Barringer, "The Englishness of Thomas Cole" in Nancy Siegel, ed. *The Cultured Canvas: New Perspectives on American Landscape Painting* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2011), 20-23.

<sup>13</sup> John Michael Vlach, *The Planter's Prospect: Privilege and Slavery in Plantation Paintings* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001); Therese O'Malley reproduces many salient examples in her essay "Landscape Gardening in the Early National Period" in Edward J. Nygren and Bruce Robertson, eds. *Views and Visions: American Landscape before 1830* (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1986), pp. 133-160.

<sup>14</sup> Emily T. Cooperman and Lea Carson Sherk, *William Birch: Picturing the American Scene* (Philadelphia, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> William Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* [orig. 1834] eds. Frank Bayley and Charles Goodspeed (Boston: C. E. Goodspeed & Co., 1918), p. 148.

<sup>16</sup> Cooperman and Sherk, *William Birch*, 76.

a very simple business strategy: copying or commissioning drawings of great chateaux and country houses, making high-quality engravings from those drawings, and selling the finished product back chiefly to the owners of the houses represented on a subscription basis to minimize the risk of so costly undertaking. Birch himself had had an earlier success with this strategy before leaving England in his 1791 *Delices de la Grande Bretagne*, which found a ready audience of 240 subscribers who purchased around 348 copies of the book.<sup>17</sup>

The buildings Birch depicted in the *Country Seats* were not chosen for subscription reasons alone but as contributions to an argument that becomes clear from the texts in which he described the merits of each house. Birch hoped to build an American culture of refined country life by celebrating houses that embraced polite pleasure gardens rather than utilitarian agriculture in their surroundings.<sup>18</sup> The houses Birch prized, and in the appreciation of which he guided his reader, effaced labor from their surroundings and presented an appearance of untroubled leisure. An example of the kind of view included is his plate of Montibello, the country house of General Samuel Smith. (**Fig. 36**) The house is shown starkly and centrally without any overlapping vegetation. In this effort to convey useful information about the styles of building and landscape architecture Birch favored, he made use of what William Ivins has described a key contribution of the print medium: its ability to make and disseminate “exactly repeatable pictorial statements” for purposes of information transmission.<sup>19</sup> Nowhere is there any indication of the sources of the wealth that enabled the construction of this imposing edifice. There is no effort to naturalize the power of the house and its owner. It looms over bald grass, white and new. Birch badly misjudged his audience. Cooperman has documented Birch’s “failure to find as many subscribers as had his earlier sets of views,” attributing this struggle to the impermanence of mercantile wealth in the young republic and underinvestment in country houses, with the view to dynastic formation that such investments often imply.<sup>20</sup> In his unapologetic emphasis on leisure over productivity, characteristic of English efforts in the medium, Birch did not allow for the reconciliation of aristocracy and republicanism.

In the three house portrait commissions that are the subject of this chapter, Cole did not make the same compositional mistake as Birch. The artist focused on reducing the houses into their settings to make satisfying landscape paintings of the resultant canvases. While these commissioned paintings involved lower risk than did Birch’s speculative collection of printed views, Cole was similarly attuned to the demands of an audience beyond the owners of the houses he depicted because many of his views were exhibited in New York. Moreover, his representational choices show his efforts to justify the place of country life on so grand a scale in the young republic. In the Featherston Park paintings, he celebrates the estate as a place of improvement for the good of the nation by highlighting the agricultural and geological endeavors of its owner. In his view of Monte Video, he proclaims a different kind of noblesse oblige on the part of Wadsworth by emphasizing the generous open grounds policy that made it a popular destination for outings from nearby Hartford in the person of the foreground tourist enjoying the view. The Van Rensselaer Manor House presented the starkest challenge, as a place not only of run-of-the-mill aristocratic aspiration but as the focal point of that family’s near feudal rule over a vast swath of northern New York. Cole’s own conservative politics show through in the potent

---

<sup>17</sup> Cooperman and Sherk, *William Birch*, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Cooperman and Sherk, *William Birch*, 139.

<sup>19</sup> William Ivins, *Prints and Visual Communication* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1953), xxviii.

<sup>20</sup> William Birch, *The Country Seats of the United States of North America*, ed. Emily T. Cooperman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 33-4.



aura of nostalgia for a waning American aristocracy and the passing of a class of patrons that had provided crucial support throughout his career.

### **I. Painting the ‘Baronial Castle’: Thomas Cole at Featherston Park**

In December of 1825, just months after his first success in New York, a twenty-four-year-old Thomas Cole arrived at Featherston Park, the estate of George William Featherstonhaugh in rural Duanesburg, New York, and remained there until late March of the next year, painting in exchange for his room and board and a small stipend.<sup>21</sup> In addition to a pair of views on the nearby Schoharie River, Cole was commissioned to paint four landscapes that depict the grand mansion that loomed over the vast grounds, three of which survive.<sup>22</sup> (Figs. 37-39) The house burned a few years later, destroying the fourth painting in the process and leaving this formative period of Cole’s career in undeserved obscurity. While the episode is easily summed up in these few sentences, Cole’s Duanesburg period proves, on closer examination, to be richly revealing of a range of issues at work in the Early Republic, including the formation of a gentry ideal, the country house as a site of meaning-making, and the important role of architecture in the career of a now-canonical artist.

Scholars have taken little note of Cole’s Duanesburg period, mentioning the episode, when it is discussed at all, as an insignificant venture into topographical painting between the artist’s triumphant arrival on the New York scene and the production of the canonical *Kaaterskill Falls from Below*.<sup>23</sup> For example, Ellwood C. Parry III dates Cole’s “first attempts to escape the restrictions of painting purely topographical views late in 1826 and into 1827,” leaving little doubt as to his opinion of the importance of the productions of the Duanesburg period.<sup>24</sup> When conceived as essays in mere topography, the Featherston Park paintings are inconvenient for the pervasive mythology of Cole dating back to Louis Noble’s 1853 biography: that the artist’s major contribution and that which makes him “the father of the Hudson River School” was the case his life and work made for American landscape painting as an intellectual art that could

---

<sup>21</sup> The moment that is usually cited as the “discovery” of Thomas Cole was the display of three pictures at the shop of picture dealer William Colman that were quickly purchased by Colonel John Trumbull, William Dunlap, and Asher B. Durand. A less frequently cited account of this oft-told story can be found in Philip Hone, *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851*, ed. Bayard Tuckerman (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1889), 339-40. The town was at the time spelled “Duanesburgh” but I use the current spelling. The grounds of the former estate are now within the boundaries of the town of Mariaville Lake, NY. That Cole was commissioned to make four views of Featherston Park is known from a note in an 1825 journal in the Detroit Institute of Arts, accession number 39.558b.

<sup>22</sup> George William was nicknamed “Featherston” in childhood and the name seems later to have been the one most regularly used to describe the estate, although “Featherstonhaugh Park” does show up in some sources: Edmund and Dorothy Smith Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh: First U.S. Government Geologist* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 5.

<sup>23</sup> See Ellwood C. Parry III, *The Art of Thomas Cole: Ambition and Imagination* (Newark, DE, 1988), 32. Another monograph that does not mention the Featherstonhaugh pictures at all is Earl A. Powell’s *Thomas Cole* (New York, 1990); The current location of this picture remains unknown since its 2011 sale by the Westervelt-Warner Collection of American Art, now the Tuscaloosa Museum of Art. Staff at the museum were unable to provide contact information for the current owner so it is not possible to reproduce this important painting here. A color plate of it serves as the frontispiece to Alan Wallach and William Truettner, eds. *Thomas Cole: Landscape Into History* (New Haven, CT, 1994), ii.

<sup>24</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 45.

aspire to the condition of history painting by means of literary allusions and currency with fashionable European aesthetic philosophies.<sup>25</sup> As Noble and others would have it, Cole rejected the reproductive labor of topographical view painting, as it had been practiced by Francis Guy or Joshua Shaw, and gave birth to an American school of landscape art in the process.<sup>26</sup> For such a narrative, the Featherstonhaugh paintings can be little more than regrettable juvenilia: concessions to financial pressures and evidence that the young artist had not yet found his footing. Discussion of this chapter of Cole's career has been further complicated by the troubling accounts that Noble and William Cullen Bryant gave of it shortly after the artist's death. Both men presented a vision of the Duanesburg months as a time of great tension between the painter and patron and have left historians unsure how to deal with the surviving canvases that are the product of this conflict. It is no great surprise, then, that these commissions have been relegated to so minor a role in the Cole literature.

A preliminary encounter with the last and most accomplished of the Featherston Park paintings, *Landscape, the Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance*, shows the range of challenges these works present.<sup>27</sup> (Fig. 39) At first, it appears to have much in common with his *Lake with Dead Trees* of a few months earlier. (Fig. 40) The compositional similarities are many, with foreground animals and dead trees, water in the middle distance, and dense forests in the background. However, the resonance of the view is changed considerably by the presence of the "country seat" of the title. The tiny white house is silhouetted against distant, misty hills, illuminated by a beam of sunlight and no less the subject of the picture for its diminutive size. Dark clouds whirl past overhead, dappling the foreground with shadows. A flock of sheep graze amidst boulders and blasted stumps, while one gnarled tree that has clung on to life rises nearly to the top of the canvas. It is a skillful image that is difficult to dismiss as juvenilia or topography, and yet it seems the basest of artistic tasks to flatter a rich man by painting his possessions, difficult to reconcile with our comfortable image of Cole as an artist outside the market, working tirelessly to create a taste for landscape art and for painting as a poetic art-form where there had been neither. How, we might wonder, can the depiction of an estate in the service of its owner—a mercenary artistic task if ever there was one—be reconciled with the allegorical landscapes for which the artist is better known?

Answers to the many questions prompted by the Featherston Park paintings come from an array of new archival discoveries and from placing these enigmatic paintings in the context of contemporary transatlantic exchanges. By studying the various accounts of Cole's Duanesburg months in the context of evidence of the importance of country houses, and paintings of them, in the period, I argue that the Featherston Park views should be understood not as anomalous digressions from the artist's core ideals but as cases in which the young artist encountered a number of the major concerns of his career and found novel solutions to certain of the problems of portrayal with which visual culture was charged in the period. Thomas Cole's paintings of the Featherstonhaugh estate describe the processes of identity formation in which houses were implicated during the artist's lifetime and show Cole thinking about ways of rendering the

---

<sup>25</sup> This epithet has been used many times, but one instance is in Elliot Vesell, "Introduction" in Louis Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, Elliot Vesell, ed. (Cambridge, MA, 1964), xv.; For this reading of Cole's contribution, see for example Powell, *Cole*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> On landscape and topography in the generations before Cole, see Edward J. Nygren and Bruce Robertson, eds. *Views and Visions: American Landscape before 1830* (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1986).

<sup>27</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 30

encounter between civilization and wilderness and the meanings of domestic architecture, constant themes across his allegories and his “purely topographical views.”

### Featherstonhaugh before Cole

Like Cole, George William Featherstonhaugh (1780-1866) was born in the north of England and came to the United States as a young man, carrying with him distinct notions, forged by a European patronage structure, of the work that art can do. (Fig. 41) Despite the similarity of their paths, the patron and the painter diverged sharply in their understanding of the social role of the artist, the root of a disagreement that becomes clear from the discussions of this complex relationship that appear in the writings of William Cullen Bryant and Louis Noble. Featherstonhaugh was a singularly complex figure, deeply involved in the intellectual, agricultural, technological, and political life of his period and controversial in some circles because of this. His diverse pursuits shaped the values he brought to the construction of Featherston Park and to the commission of representations of it and are crucial to understanding these images. Edmund and Dorothy Smith Berkeley have done a great service by laying the foundation for the study of Featherstonhaugh by the archival labor of their 1988 book *George William Featherstonhaugh: The First U.S. Government Geologist*.<sup>28</sup> However, as the title and its entry in a series on the “History of American Science and Technology” suggest, their interest is primarily other aspects of the life of this polymath than his patronage of art and architecture, which get only passing mention in the book’s nearly four hundred pages. Nevertheless, the path-breaking work of the Berkeleys permits a fresh account of Featherstonhaugh’s relationship with Cole.

After a boyhood in Scarborough, Yorkshire, and a broad education in classical and modern languages, Featherstonhaugh embarked on extended travels around the Mediterranean as an agent to the merchant Richard Courteen. His employer’s bankruptcy in 1802, leaving Featherstonhaugh unpaid and in debt for the first of many times in his life, precipitated first his return to Britain and then his move to the U.S. in 1806 at the age of 26.<sup>29</sup> He quickly established himself in New York and, two years after his arrival, made a very good marriage to Sarah Duane, daughter of the late James Duane, a former mayor of New York, federal judge, and wealthy Schenectady-area landowner. Judge Duane had bequeathed his daughter 1,000 acres near the town that was named for him.<sup>30</sup> Featherstonhaugh took full advantage of the chance to position himself as a gentleman farmer and added to the lands until they were managing an estate of 1,500 acres that made good use of its impressive setting, as the description of the site that appeared in Horatio Spafford’s 1813 *Gazeteer of the State of New York* evokes:

Lake Maria, a beautiful sheet of water, 2 miles in circumference, near the N.E. corner of Duanesburgh, and on the height of land there, is most charmingly situated in the grounds of Featherston Park, and abounds with small fish. On the margin of this Lake, is the elegant residence of G.W. Featherstonhaugh, Esq., on an eminence of about 500 feet above the waters of the Hudson. This is one of the most

---

<sup>28</sup> See note 22.

<sup>29</sup> Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, 9-10.

<sup>30</sup> Correspondence with Duanesburg Historian Howard Ohlhous, 10 May 2012. Joshua Fisher of Arkansas Tech University is at work on a project on the life of Duanesburg in this period that promises to add much to our understanding of the circumstances in which these paintings were created.

commanding prospects in the State, comprising a view of near 100 miles around the compass. The Catskill mountains, with those of Vermont and Massachusetts form the horizon on the S., N.E., and E.; and the wild tops of the ‘Royal Grants’ hills, give a view in that direction, variously studded, as picturesque as indefinite: while in the plains below, you trace the devious course of the Mohawk, and discern the majestic Hudson with the naked eye.<sup>31</sup>

The “elegant residence” that was at the heart of this impressive scene was completed in 1810 at so grand a scale that one friend jestingly called it Featherstonhaugh’s “Baronial Castle.”<sup>32</sup> Although no plans of the house survive, it does appear in survey charts from the period and is known to have measured 140 by 60 feet.<sup>33</sup> The paintings themselves are the best evidence of its structure and appearance. (Fig. 42) That the mansion was in good English Neopalladian style befitting a gentleman, although rendered in wood rather than masonry, is apparent from comparison to a plate in Colen Campbell’s definitive statement of that architectural movement: *Vitruvius Britannicus, or the British Architect*.<sup>34</sup> (Fig. 43) Much like the house Campbell designed for Richard Rooth, the Featherstonhaugh mansion is shown to have consisted of a high central hipped-roof section with many windows to take in the view and lower wings with pyramidal roofs on either side.<sup>35</sup> A prominent entryway in the elegant front seems to offer a dramatic second-story balcony looking out over the grounds, lake, and forest. The strong relationship to pattern-book images indicates that the house was most likely constructed by local builders from such models rather than with the involvement of any architect, so it is perhaps no surprise that formal plans do not survive.<sup>36</sup>

The paintings also point to another key aspect of the estate: that the mansion house was at the center of an ambitious, modern agricultural enterprise. The animals that populate Cole’s canvases are clearly the prize-winning Bakewell-Merino sheep and Holderness cattle that Featherstonhaugh is known to have bred from stock he imported from England.<sup>37</sup> His innovative breeding program earned Featherstonhaugh a national reputation and led to a diverse correspondence with other agriculturalists. Another result was his appointment as founding secretary of the New York State Board of Agriculture after he played a central role in the passage of the legislation to create that body in 1820. This role was far more than symbolic: it was George William’s responsibility to edit the society’s annual report, an ambitious publication

---

<sup>31</sup> Horatio Gates Spafford, *A Gazeteer of the State of New York*, (Albany: H.C. Southwick, 1813), pp. 178-9. I thank Howard Ohlhous for bringing this source to my attention.

<sup>32</sup> Peter DuPonceau to GWF, 21 May 1809, Featherstonhaugh Family Papers microfilm at American Philosophical Society (hereafter FFP), Reel 2, 331-2.

<sup>33</sup> See Frost Papers D58-001, Schenectady County Historical Society. I thank Melissa Tacke for her research assistance.; Correspondence with Duanesburg Historian Howard Ohlhous.

<sup>34</sup> The most comprehensive study of Campbell’s architecture and *Vitruvius Britannicus* is Howard Stutchbury, *The Architecture of Colen Campbell*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

<sup>35</sup> Another precedent for the form of the house closer to home is the 1806 Gore Place in Waltham, Massachusetts. Although it is not possible to demonstrate specific links to that structure or print sources that could have made it available, it demonstrates that Featherston Park’s massing was not unusual for the Early Republic. This connection was suggested in conversation by Margaretta Lovell.

<sup>36</sup> On the uses of pattern books in America, see Daniel D. Reiff, *Houses from Books: Treatises, Pattern Books, and Catalogs in American Architecture, 1738-1950: A History and Guide* (State College, PA: Penn State Press, 2000).

<sup>37</sup> Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, 18-19. That this image can be understood as a document of agricultural innovation has been noted previously in curator Kathy Foster’s wall label for *Landscape, the Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

envisioned as a collection of correspondence from different parts of the state on new practices and technologies. A shortage of submissions in the first year of the report's existence caused Featherstonhaugh to fill out the five hundred page volume with a lengthy essay, "Principles and Practices of Rural Economy."<sup>38</sup> Throughout the 1820s, Featherstonhaugh remained deeply involved in the work of the Board of Agriculture. Clearly, Featherstonhaugh was no mere gentleman dabbler in agriculture but took the development of best practices across the state and nation extremely seriously. These circumstances must have played a role in his desire for paintings of the estate that was the basis of his growing fame.

When not experimenting with agriculture and writing widely on the subject, Featherstonhaugh was also a railroad pioneer. Evidence suggests that he was one of the first to see the potential of public, inter-city transportation of passengers and goods by rail in the United States, writing an essay on the subject as early as 1820.<sup>39</sup> Featherstonhaugh successfully petitioned for the construction of a railroad linking Albany with Schenectady in the state legislature, which would later become in time the New York Central.<sup>40</sup> However, Featherstonhaugh did not see the benefit of his efforts; he was forced to sell his one-fifth interest in what was then the Mohawk and Hudson Railroad nearly at cost because of financial pressures that came of the construction of his stately home and all of his other ambitious endeavors. The situation became so dire that, when he commissioned Cole to paint the house, he was considering fleeing his creditors to England and selling the house there, so one potential use of the canvases was to entice buyers abroad.<sup>41</sup> However, by the time of Cole's arrival all plans of leaving the country had been set aside for the time being so this vague scheme did not dictate the form of the paintings. All these pressures must have been much on Featherstonhaugh's mind in December of 1825, when Cole came to the estate, as was the death of the family's daughters, Ann and Georgina, the past March.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Making of the Featherston Park Paintings**

In addition to the evidence of the paintings themselves and the testimony of Cole's friends, to be discussed in the next section, the best documentation that survives of Cole's experience at Featherston Park comes from a small group of letters between the artist and the patron immediately before and after the period in residence, a rather more candid letter that Cole wrote to Col. John Trumbull during his stay, and some surviving drawings that show the evolution of his compositional ideas. There are signs that Featherstonhaugh was a demanding employer even before Cole's arrival at Duanesburg. The first surviving letter from Cole to Featherstonhaugh of December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1825, in which he gratefully accepted the patron's offer to winter at Featherston Park, concludes with the postscript "I have disposed of your letters as you wished."<sup>43</sup> This by itself is hardly unusual for the period, but takes on greater significance in the context of the tensions that Bryant and Noble discuss and a rather larger request in Featherstonhaugh's reply to Cole of December 12<sup>th</sup>, in which he confirmed his readiness to welcome Cole and assured the artist "We have fine weather and clear atmospheres every day. The Line of the Mountains is beautifully distinct." Featherstonhaugh also wrote "My Italian

---

<sup>38</sup> Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, 26-7.

<sup>39</sup> Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, 36.; George William Featherstonhaugh, "Principles of Traction for Railroads and Canals", FFP Reel 6, 414-28.

<sup>40</sup> Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, 76.

<sup>41</sup> Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, 36

<sup>42</sup> Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, 37.

<sup>43</sup> Cole to GWF, 5 December 1825, The Featherstonhaugh Trust, as quoted in Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 28

Servant Luigi has left me without any sort of notice, so that really I have hardly a person about me who can wait at Dinner” and requested that Cole go in search of “a very nice Irish Boy, named Hugh” to bring with him to Featherston Park as a replacement.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the roots of the discord that becomes apparent from the writings of William Cullen Bryant and Louis Noble, that seems to have centered upon Cole’s discomfort at being treated as a servant instead of an intellectual equal, lies with impositions like these. After his time at Duanesburg, Cole wrote again on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1826, “anxiously waiting for the letter” Featherstonhaugh had promised him regarding the prospect of exhibiting *Landscape, the Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance* (**Fig. 39**) and one other Featherstonhaugh picture, which Parry suggests might have been *View of the Featherstonhaugh Estate near Duanesburg* (**Fig. 37**), at the May exhibition of the American Academy.<sup>45</sup> Featherstonhaugh replied promptly and apologetically, promising the pictures would indeed make it to the exhibition.<sup>46</sup> Featherstonhaugh clearly appreciated Cole’s work: a letter to Stephen Van Rensselaer III of January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1826 praised the “fine things” Cole had already painted by that date.<sup>47</sup> In the final surviving letter between Cole and Featherstonhaugh of November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1826, we see what came of Featherstonhaugh’s mention of Cole to this very promising potential patron, whose near feudal rule over tenant farmers on hundreds of thousands of acres of the upper Hudson Valley as the tenth and final Patroon of Rensselaerswyck made him one of the richest men in the country.<sup>48</sup> George William writes “General Van Rensselaer has not recd the paintings I requested of you for him, nor heard from you. I really wish you could find time to attend to that Commission, as I am persuaded it would be to your advantage.”<sup>49</sup> George William finally succeeded in bringing Cole into the orbit of the Van Rensselaer family, a relationship that would prove of great value to the artist, producing numerous commissions over the course of his career, including another enigmatic set of country house views rarely discussed in the Cole literature that are the subject of the final section of this chapter.

Four preparatory landscape drawings for the Featherston Park paintings have come to light in total.<sup>50</sup> Two, in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts, have long been recognized as pertaining to this period of Cole’s career (**Figs. 44, 45**) while others have been newly discovered in an overlooked sketchbook that has been filed with miscellany amidst the New York State Library’s vast Cole collection. (**Figs. 46, 47**) Because of their scale, subject matter, and similar level of textual inscription, it is safe to conclude that the Detroit sheets were forcibly parted from the same sketchbook in Albany at some point in their history, a regrettable act of vandalism that has made it possible to overlook the fact that this unassuming little book, with its references to a “Mr. F,” is Cole’s Duanesburg sketchbook. When considered as a group, these drawings show a patient working out of compositional possibilities, light angles, and coloristic

---

<sup>44</sup> GWF to Cole, 12 December 1825, Cole Papers, New York State Library, Albany (hereafter NYSL), box 2, folder 1.

<sup>45</sup> Cole to GWF, 4 April 1826, The Featherstonhaugh Trust.

<sup>46</sup> GWF to Cole, 7 April 1826, NYSL, box 2, folder 1.

<sup>47</sup> GWF to Van Rensselaer, 14 January 1826, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, as quoted in Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, p. 39

<sup>48</sup> Alan Wallach, “Thomas Cole and the Aristocracy” *Arts Magazine* 56.1 (Nov., 1981), p. 98. The Van Rensselaer family and the title of “Patroon” are discussed in greater detail in Part III of this chapter.

<sup>49</sup> GWF to Cole, 8 November 1826, NYSL, box 2, folder 1.

<sup>50</sup> This tally does not include various tree studies that may be from Duanesburg and animal studies that certainly are. See for example his drawing of sheep in the Detroit Institute of Arts, accession number 39.104B, not previously recognized as relating to the Featherston Park period.

ideas. It is significant that the house features in none of these drawings. The artist's instinct seems to have been to study the effects of nature first before turning to the works of man. The sketchbook shows Cole's struggles in making worthy paintings of the rather modest terrain. On a page of text opposite "A suitable sky..." Cole has written an extended description of the view that clarifies the challenges of depicting it. He laments that "This view is rather of a soft character. The mountains gradually sink away into one another, presenting no strong lines, therefore the correctness & beauty of the picture will depend upon the skillful management of the Aerial perspective."<sup>51</sup>

A letter in the collection of the Winterthur Library uses some of the same language as the Duanesburg sketchbook in expressing a degree of dissatisfaction with the time at Featherston Park. Cole wrote to John Trumbull from Duanesburg on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1826 in frank and intimate terms, perhaps hoping to smooth over any hard feelings the by-then former president of the American Academy might have harbored about Cole's association with the rival National Academy:<sup>52</sup>

I have closely applied myself this winter but I have not painted many pictures. I sometimes wish that I had remained in N York. The scenery from which I have been painting here is certainly fine, extensive but not of the character that I delight in – and I find it much more difficult to make a picture of such a soft scene than of those that possess more character – and they cannot inspire that vivid feeling that I believe it is necessary an artist should have and by which he is able to work with spirit and effect.

This season is unfavorable in her more dreary features, but much may be done now. The trees are divested of their rich foliage, but then they toss their fantastic branches in the wind, naked and unincumbered. [sic] I really believe the contemplation of them in their nakedness, affords me a higher pleasure than it does when they 'bear their blushing honors full upon them.'<sup>53</sup>

Posterity has confirmed Cole's opinion that his best canvases are those that feature sublime heights and depths, for example the aforementioned *Kaaterskill Falls from Below* and *The Oxbow* (**Fig. 48**), rather than gently rolling forests without extremes of topography like Featherston Park.<sup>54</sup> A visit to the grounds of the former estate, now open to the public as Featherstonhaugh State Forest, at the time of year when the artist was in residence can confirm that, rather in contrast to the rosy image of Spafford's *Gazeteer*, it could be a dreary place and that bare trees, rather than any extremes of topography, dominate the landscape. (**Fig. 49**) However, Cole's vivid personification of the surrounding forest makes it clear that painting Featherston Park was not all hardship and that he found the time to study the trees, surely an important source of material for future work.

---

<sup>51</sup> NYSL, box 8, folder 3. (Duanesburg Sketchbook, unnumbered page facing figure 11)

<sup>52</sup> See Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 30-1.

<sup>53</sup> Cole to Trumbull, 24 February 1826, Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts & Printed Ephemera, Winterthur Library. Cole slightly misquotes *Henry VIII*: "This is the state of man. Today he puts forth/ The tender leaves of hopes; tomorrow blossoms./ And bears his blushing honours thick upon him..." act 3, scene ii, l. 352-4. On the two academies, see Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, *American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union: Introduction, 1816-1852* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1953).

<sup>54</sup> See note 23 on *Kaaterskill Falls from Below*.

After reading Cole's comments to Trumbull on his study of trees, it is no surprise to find that they figure prominently in each image and heighten the drama of the gentle terrain of the Duaneburg area. He also put to use the studies he made of Featherstonhaugh's famous livestock.<sup>55</sup> Each canvas shows the Bakewell-Merino sheep amidst the grounds and all but the Philadelphia image include the Holderness cattle as well. Instead of the muted tones and naked branches of December and January, Cole has chosen to show the estate in the richer colors of autumn, which contributes to the aura of harvest and celebrates the bounty of nature. While the house is central to none of the images, it is no less the subject of all of them and the source of a panoptic gaze that surveys a broad sweep of the landscape, taking in the harvesting of wood and the grazing animals beneath its high windows. Despite its grandeur, the house nestles harmoniously into its setting as a noble adjunct to nature rather than an intrusion upon it. These paintings portray the social class, power, and enlightened husbandry of Featherstonhaugh, but they do so in quite a novel way.

The only one of the Featherstonhaugh paintings that has remained in the family seems also to be the first of the three from the evidence of the composition itself.<sup>56</sup> *View of the Featherstonhaugh Estate near Duaneburg, New York* (**Fig. 37**) includes the same foreground group of trees as *The Woodchopper, Lake Featherstonhaugh* (**Fig. 38**), but in the latter the worker of the title is beginning to take apart the fallen tree while in the former it remains intact. Both of these images prominently include the sheep and cattle for which the estate was renowned and the house looms in stark relief against the sky at left. The brushwork is thick and awkward so the difference between these and the Philadelphia Museum of Art painting, *Landscape, the Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance* is all the more stark. (**Fig. 39**) This is a far more satisfying painting that seems less obviously to be the product of the patron's demands for the prominent portrayal of house and livestock and a more compelling representation of a landscape capable of appealing to broader audiences, which we know from the cited correspondence was among Cole's goals for the picture. Indeed, the view is much more wild than the previous images, with the house absorbed into its surroundings instead of perched atop them and the cleared lands that are visible are presented as naturally occurring water-meadow rather than lawns created by man. No laborers here show this as a place in the process of being civilized. But for the tiny house, this could be a view of wilderness that has much in common with Cole's other production of these years, most obviously the *Lake with Dead Trees* of a few months earlier. (**Fig. 40**) Like that painting, the lake of *Landscape, the Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance* now crosses the canvas and the cattle have been removed, leaving only the Bakewell-Merino sheep in foreground and middle distance. The trees are significantly more naturalistic and the composition as a whole more balanced.

The same journey up the Hudson in the summer of 1825 that gave rise to *Lake with Dead Trees* also gave Cole an opportunity to make sketches of another subject that bears comparison to the Philadelphia painting: the Catskill Mountain House.<sup>57</sup> Although he would not paint the view until the 1840s, a drawing from that trip shows a strong compositional relationship to *Landscape, the Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance*. (**Fig. 50**) In both, the structure

---

<sup>55</sup> See note 37

<sup>56</sup> Author correspondence with James Duane Featherstonhaugh, 8 August 2012.

<sup>57</sup> This trip was supported by another of Cole's early benefactors, George W. Bruen. See: Dunlap, *History*, 359.; On this trip, see Tracie Felker, "First Impressions: Thomas Cole's Drawings of his 1825 Trip Up the Hudson River" *American Art Journal* 24.1/2 (1992), pp. 60-93; For a fuller discussion of history and significance of the hotel, see Roland Van Zandt, *Catskill Mountain House: America's Grandest Hotel* (Delmar, NY: Black Dome Press, 1997).



stands alone in roughly mirrored positions in the view as a source of meaning and order amidst hostile nature. A final version of the composition makes clearer the role that *Landscape, the Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance* played in his structural thinking about this similar subject. (Fig. 51) Here, the Mountain House takes on the precise location in the composition of the Featherstonhaugh mansion and both buildings give focus to a vista otherwise seemingly devoid of human interventions. This visual rhyme is evidence of the persistence of Cole's interest in the subject of the house in the landscape throughout his career, and of the ways the Featherstonhaugh paintings served as an earlier encounter with some of his major concerns, rather than standing apart as aberrations.

Cole's Featherston Park paintings offer an innovative solution to the problem of how to portray the country houses of the élite in a nation for which such structures carried quite different meanings than they did in Great Britain. The introduction to this chapter has argued that the image of the country house was endowed with particular significance in this period as a site of nation formation, but was also fraught with associations with decadent British aristocracy. Cole did not make the same mistake that had caused William Birch's *Country Seats of the United States of North America* to be a financial failure, namely, depicting the taste and leisure of the privileged few as best practices for the nation without couching such practices in justificatory gestures toward productivity and industry at the houses he celebrated. Cole's strategy in departing from the established Birch model of American house portraiture was twofold: first to reduce the house into its setting in order to naturalize it and to make a more satisfying landscape painting and, second, to depict the estate as a place of virtuous republican citizenship by foregrounding the industrious spirit of inquiry and improvement that made Featherstonhaugh's private wealth public spirited.

Cole's striking reduction of the Featherstonhaugh house into its landscape is not itself without British precedent: John Constable's *Wivenhoe Park, Essex* is a useful comparison in the way it radically obscures the house that is its subject. (Fig. 52) However, while Constable absorbs the Slater-Rebow house into a scene of pure leisure from which active labor has been stripped away, the Featherston Park paintings naturalize the estate as a place built not on leisure but on republican virtue and agricultural science.<sup>58</sup> The house stands out as a beacon of urbanity conveying wisdom and grace to a dark land of writhing stumps and untold dangers. The intelligently bred livestock on which the reputation of the estate rested supplant the effortless and inevitable Arcadian staffage of so many English house portraits, a tradition well described by Ben Jonson's vision of Edenic bounty in *To Penshurst*, in which "the painted partridge lies in every field,/ And for thy mess is willing to be killed."<sup>59</sup> While Wivenhoe Park nestles into its setting with an air of dynastic ease and inevitability, the crisp, white form of Featherstonhaugh's "Baronial Castle" declares its recent vintage without pretensions to permanence. While Wivenhoe Park is free from the taint of labor, the hard and ongoing work that has hewn civilization from sinful wilderness at Featherston Park is literally foregrounded in *The Woodchopper, Lake Featherstonhaugh* as a sign of the respectability and acceptability of the place. In Cole's vision of it, Featherston Park is the country seat not of an American decadent but of an intellectual leader whose private wealth is justified by the republican virtues of inquiry and improvement for the good of the nation

---

<sup>58</sup> On the labor of Constable's landscapes, see John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>59</sup> Ben Jonson, "To Penshurst", (c. 1616), l. 29-30.

## Featherstonhaugh and his Detractors

No discussion of the Featherston Park paintings would be complete without some attention to George William Featherstonhaugh's involvement in American politics after Cole's visit to the estate, because these circumstances have played a prominent, if unacknowledged, role in critical discourse about the paintings since Cole's death. The debts and hardships that we have seen Featherstonhaugh had begun to suffer before Cole's visit to Featherston Park only worsened after the artist's departure in March of 1826. Featherstonhaugh's wife, Sarah, died in May of 1828 and the family's financial difficulties progressed to the point that the estate was soon on the verge of repossession. One of his creditors, William H. Harrison—no relation to the president—wrote to the Duanesburg surveyor James Frost on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1829 in no uncertain terms:

I now request you to take actual possession of that part of the house west of the eastern or true line of Duanesburgh & in case of refusal of possession return the papers you have to me with an affidavit of the demand & refusal etc. in order that I may make an application to the court in the matter. I am sure Mr. Featherston can have no improper feeling against you in regard to your agency in this business. You were employed in your regular business, certainly without the least solicitation by you or in your behalf, & you have not volunteered anything beyond the strict line of your duty.<sup>60</sup>

Featherstonhaugh seems to have succeeded in fending off this challenge from his creditors, but the good fortune was short-lived. A vivid newly discovered letter from Frost to another of the many parties to whom Featherstonhaugh owed money, John T. Champlin of Farmer's Loan and Trust Company, recounts what happened in May of the same year:

I have this moment returned from viewing the smoking ruins of Mr. Featherston's Mansion house, which is totally consumed by fire, together with most of his furniture and all his Books papers, etc! Mr. F. gave me the following account of the fire—Yesterday his youngest son, who had been some time from home, came to see his father, and as the bed rooms, in consequence of not being occupied, had become damp, it was thought necessary to enkindle a fire in the one in which the son was to sleep, and as the chimney was probably very foul, it must have taken fire and from thence the fire was communicated to the roof. Mr. F. says that about 4 O'clock this morning he was awakened from his sleep by what he at first supposed to be a loud knocking at the front door, and on rising up in his bed he Discovered the room to be perfectly light, he then sprang out of bed and discovered his house to be in flames and that the noise he had heard was, in fact, the falling in of the roof of the east wing. He alarmed his servant having but one in the house, and they proceeded to the bed room of his little son and with considerable difficulty they rescued him from the flames, some neighbours soon assembled with whose assistance, they secured some part of the furniture etc. Thus in a short time, this spacious mansion is levelled with the Earth and at this moment presents nothing but its smoking ruins to the vision of the beholder, a sight at which the heart sickens and turns away in silent agony.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> William H. Harrison to James Frost, 23 March 1829, James Frost Papers, Schenectady County Historical Society.

<sup>61</sup> James Frost to John T. Champlin, 7 May 1829, Quoted by kind permission of Ken Jones, Historian of Esperance, NY.

Contradicting Harrison's claim in the earlier letter that James Frost could be accused of no personal interest in the matter, the building materials that could be salvaged from Featherston Park were repurposed for Frost's own house in downtown Duaneburg. The historical marker in front of the Frost house and the designation of the former grounds of Featherston Park as Featherstonhaugh State Forest are the only signs that this grand estate ever existed.<sup>62</sup> (Figs. 53-5)

Amidst all this adversity, George William seems to have thrown himself into the study of geology at this time as a part of his duties to the New York Board of Agriculture. This would lead to his appointment as "Geologist to the U.S.," or de facto founder of the United States Geological Survey, in 1834 and he conducted federal surveys throughout the Louisiana Purchase for much of the next four years until he moved back to Great Britain in 1838, taking at least two of the Cole paintings with him.<sup>63</sup> This was not the end of his public service, however, only of his service to the United States. Because of his knowledge of his adopted country, Featherstonhaugh was drafted by Lord Palmerston for a British survey expedition to settle the disputed border between the U.S. and Canada.<sup>64</sup> This work would lead to the Webster–Ashburton Treaty of 1842, which did not endear Featherstonhaugh to American detractors like Bryant but did result in his appointment as British Consul at Le Havre, France, where he would remain until his death in 1866.<sup>65</sup>

While his role in the resolution of the border dispute in Britain's favor earned Featherstonhaugh few American admirers, one of his many publications provides a more direct explanation for the harsh treatment he would receive at the hands of William Cullen Bryant and Louis Noble: *Excursion through the Slave States* of 1844. As Featherstonhaugh noted in the third-person introduction, the controversy the book would produce was not altogether unexpected: "It was remarked to [the author], that however sincerely he might wish to avoid giving umbrage in any quarter, yet that the work contained some opinions, and the relation of some incidents, which could not at that time fail to irritate a powerful interest in the United States, and might set him at variance with many esteemed friends."<sup>66</sup> Featherstonhaugh waited to publish the book until he was back in Great Britain, safe from the "tyranny of self-adulation" that would have forbidden the publication of so critical a text.<sup>67</sup> While much of the charmingly written book consists of humorous incidents and geological observations, it is peppered with anecdotes that put the young nation in quite a harsh light. To cite one example of many, he devotes a chapter to an account of the boarding of his Mississippi steamer by a group of local ruffians, who terrorized the ship with "pistols and knives, expressly made for cutting and stabbing, eight inches long and an inch and a half broad; noise, confusion, spitting, smoking,

---

<sup>62</sup> Correspondence with Duaneburg Historian Howard Ohlhous and historical marker at the Frost Homestead. Because Frost did benefit directly from the fire and because Featherstonhaugh's circumstances were so dire and so little remained to tie him to Duaneburg, there is an intriguing possibility that the burning was an act of insurance fraud in which Frost and Featherstonhaugh conspired, but not enough evidence has come to light to prove this.

<sup>63</sup> On the importance of geology to Cole and this facet of Featherstonhaugh's many intellectual pursuits, see Rebecca Beddell, "Thomas Cole and the Fashionable Science" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 59, no. 2/3 (1996), pp. 348-378.; Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, 114; Written account of Featherstonhaugh's grandson, also named George William, now in the collection of the Featherstonhaugh Trust transcribed for me in correspondence with a descendant, 8 August 2012.

<sup>64</sup> Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, 218-19.

<sup>65</sup> Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, 255, 271.

<sup>66</sup> George William Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion through the Slave States, from Washington on the Potomac to the Frontier of Mexico; with Sketches of Popular Manners and Geological Notices* (London: John Murray, 1844), v.

<sup>67</sup> Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion through the Slave States*, vi.

cursing and swearing, drawn from the most remorseless pages of blasphemy, commenced...<sup>68</sup>  
The anecdote concludes with an account of the frontier justice that finally dealt with these marauders when the citizens of Vicksburg, Mississippi could bear no more:

Shriving time was not allowed to these miserable wretches; a gallows was instantly erected, and the extraordinary spectacle exhibited of the whole population of a town, headed by the leading inhabitants, many of whom were magistrates, conducting five men to execution—one of whom was desperately wounded—before any preliminary step whatever had been taken to bring them to a trial by the laws of their country. Such are the excesses to which the people of these climes abandon themselves when their passions are roused—never stopping to consider consequences but madly sacrificing human life, and incurring the gravest responsibilities, upon the impulse of the moment!<sup>69</sup>

*Excursion through the Slave States* presents scenes like these as perfectly ordinary parts of American life, so the strong objections the book produced are understandable. It also made abundantly clear George William's loyalty to Henry Clay, to whom Featherstonhaugh had been an important political ally during his 1824 presidential campaign and subsequent service as Secretary of State under John Quincy Adams. An 1825 letter in the collection of the Huntington Library, in which Clay thanked Featherstonhaugh for sending some of his essays on agriculture and asked for help obtaining Bologna Kemp seed, shows the beginnings of their association.<sup>70</sup> The two men proceeded to conduct a decades-long correspondence about agriculture and it appears that Featherstonhaugh's staunch loyalty to Clay was born of the politician's support of his campaign for protective tariffs for farmers.<sup>71</sup> As we will see, this history was unforgivable for Bryant, who used his platform as editor of the *New York Evening Post* to write vehement denunciations of Clay during his second campaign for the presidency in 1844. Featherstonhaugh's involvement in the intellectual and political life of his time is a crucial context for the paintings he commissioned.

The harrowing account that William Cullen Bryant gave of Cole's Duanesburg period in his 1848 funeral oration for the artist has taken on outside importance as an overview of the circumstances and source of insight into the revealing tensions between the patron and the painter.<sup>72</sup> This version of events was an important source for Louis Noble, who seconded Bryant's harshly critical take and supplemented it from his own conversations with Cole. From their accounts, it becomes clear just how complex was the relationship between Featherstonhaugh and Cole and how their views on the class power that Featherston Park conveyed to its owner and its audiences differed. A far more sympathetic account of the patron's attitudes and actions is given in Edmund and Dorothy Smith Berkeley's biography of Featherstonhaugh. But as voices from the period, Bryant and Noble offer useful, if not unbiased, perspective on a singular patron-painter relationship and the negotiations of social class in the early nineteenth century.

---

<sup>68</sup> Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion through the Slave States*, 135.

<sup>69</sup> Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion through the Slave States*, 138.

<sup>70</sup> Clay to GWF, 21 January 1825, The Huntington Library.

<sup>71</sup> Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, 34.

<sup>72</sup> For a good discussion of Bryant's oration and his views on patronage, see Alan Wallach, "Thomas Cole: Landscape and the Course of Empire" in Wallach and Truettner, eds. *Thomas Cole: Landscape Into History*, 33-4.

Thomas Cole and William Cullen Bryant were first brought in contact by their association with the National Academy of Design from its earliest days. Cole was among the initial group of thirty artists and architects who met on November 8, 1825, shortly before his departure for Featherston Park, to discuss the sorry state of training for artists during John Trumbull's presidency of the American Academy of the Fine Arts, an organization that had come to be dominated by wealthy amateurs whose chief interest in the arts was as a means to gentility.<sup>73</sup> The group of disaffected artists decided to secede from the American Academy to form the National Academy of Design on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1826 and Cole was shortly thereafter elected as an associate of the new academy while he was still at Duanesburg.<sup>74</sup> Bryant—known at the time as a poet and budding newspaper editor—was named one of the new National Academy's first professors on the basis of his critical writings and he lectured there regularly in subsequent years.<sup>75</sup> While the early textual record of their contact is sparse, Bryant's sonnet "To Cole The Painter On His Departure For Europe" testifies to their closeness as early as 1829, when the artist first traveled as an adult to Great Britain and the Continent. It is significant that domestic architecture plays a role in Bryant's cautions to Cole about forgetting the pleasures of America. He writes "Fair scenes shall greet thee where thou goest—fair,/ But different—every where the trace of men,/Paths, homes, graves, ruins, from the lowest glen,/to where life shrinks from the fierce Alpine air. Gaze on them, till the tears shall dim thy sight,/But keep that earlier, wilder image bright."<sup>76</sup> Bryant also published in December 1832 a favorable notice of the paintings Cole made during his first travels in Europe in the *New York Evening Post*, of which Bryant had commenced his long editorship in the year Cole went abroad.<sup>77</sup> This association grew into a deep friendship that was famously commemorated by Asher B. Durand's *Kindred Spirits*.<sup>78</sup>

Shortly after the artist's death in 1848, Bryant gave a memorial lecture on Cole to the members of the National Academy. As is evident from the published text of the *Funeral Oration*, Bryant devoted a disproportionate amount of his time to an outraged disquisition on Featherstonhaugh's shoddy treatment of Cole, seemingly on the basis of conversations with the artist that have not come down to us in other records. This section is too long to quote in full, but the opening serves to illustrate the role social class played in the tensions at Featherston Park:

It was the fate of Cole, at this period of his life, to meet with a patron. When his pictures first attracted the public attention, as I have already related, a dashing Englishman, since known as the author of a wretched book about the United States, who had married the heiress of an opulent American family, professed to take a warm interest in the young painter, and charged himself with the task of advancing

---

<sup>73</sup> On the arts as a means to gentility in the early United States, there is still no better source than Richard Bushman's *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York, 1992).

<sup>74</sup> See note 52.

<sup>75</sup> Parke Godwin, *A Biography of William Cullen Bryant, with Extracts from His Private Correspondence* (New York: D. Appleton & co., 1883), I. 224-5.

<sup>76</sup> William Cullen Bryant, "To Cole The Painter On His Departure For Europe" in William Cullen Bryant, Robert Sands, and Gulian Verplanck, eds. *The Talisman for 1830* (New York: Elam Bliss, 1830), p. 336.

<sup>77</sup> Unsigned editorial, *New-York Evening Post*, December 6, 1832. p. 2. Quoted in Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 128.

<sup>78</sup> *Kindred Spirits* was specifically painted as a tribute to Bryant's funeral oration for Cole at the commission of Jonathan Sturges. For more on this painting and its context, see James T. Callow, *Kindred Spirits: Knickerbocker Writers and American Artists, 1807-1855* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1967).

his fortunes. He invited him to pass the winter at his house, on his estate in the country, and engaged him to paint a number of landscapes, for which he was to pay him twenty or thirty dollars each, a trifling compensation for such works as Cole could even then produce, but which I have no doubt seemed to him at that time munificent. It would hardly become the place or the occasion were I to relate the particulars of the treatment which the artist received from his patron, the miserable and cheerless apartments he assigned him, the supercilious manner by which he endeavoured to drive him from his table to take his meals with the children of the family, and the general disrespect of his demeanour.<sup>79</sup>

The “wretched book” Bryant refers to is clearly *Excursion through the Slave States*. Bryant describes Featherstonhaugh as an aspirational snob who had married up and had the audacity to treat Cole as a social inferior as a result. The description of Featherstonhaugh’s “supercilious manner” and the “general disrespect of his demeanour” was calculated to raise the hackles of the oration’s audience of artists, for whom this was an uncomfortable reminder of the continuing battle for acceptance as practitioners of a gentlemanly, intellectual profession, rather than a manual one.<sup>80</sup>

Bryant’s diatribe harks back to a pervasive literary, musical, and artistic trope: that of genius suffering and persevering through harsh and unappreciative circumstances to success and appreciation. One might think of Giorgio Vasari’s life of Pietro Perugino, in which the author claims his subject “never took heed of cold, of hunger, of hardship, of discomfort, of fatigue, or of ridicule, if only he might one day live in ease and repose.”<sup>81</sup> But this is not only the project of a learned man, conversant with the tropes of artistic biography and employing them in the service of the mythology of a friend to whom he was devoted. The *Funeral Oration* should be understood as one entry in a longer series of Bryant’s attacks on Featherstonhaugh to which Cole was incidental. Bryant and Featherstonhaugh had deep political differences not previously recognized in the literature on Cole that call for a more critical reading of the *Funeral Oration*.

Bryant’s earlier comments on Featherstonhaugh in the pages of the *New York Evening Post* show the roots of the cutting portrait of him in his eulogy for Cole. First, on June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1844, Bryant took a preliminary shot on the basis of early notices of the negative portrayal of the United States in Featherstonhaugh’s *Excursion through the Slave States*. Bryant writes:

Mr. Featherstonhaugh, who travelled through this country several years since as a Geologist, has been writing a work about the United States, which is said by the English journals to surpass in virulence of abuse the famous works of Trollope, Maryatt, Hall and Dickens.... This Featherstonhaugh, if we remember rightly, when in the United States, did not have a very high reputation, and was known to have

---

<sup>79</sup> William Cullen Bryant, *A Funeral Oration, occasioned by the Death of Thomas Cole, delivered before the National Academy of Design, New-York, May 4, 1848* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1848), pp. 11-12. The Duanesburg months occupy fully three pages of the forty-two page format in which the *Funeral Oration* was first published, a ratio of nearly a page per month while entire productive years of Cole’s career are treated in only a sentence.

<sup>80</sup> On the evolving social position of American artists in this period, see Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years, 1790-1860* (Chicago, 1982).

<sup>81</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors & Architects*, Gaston DuC. De Vere, trans. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1912-14), IV, 33.

been involved in some mean and rascally tricks. It is certain that he is a very superficial man, altogether unqualified to write a trustworthy book on any subject.<sup>82</sup>

For William Cullen Bryant, this is a fairly gentle riposte. A patriotic newspaper editor rejects the authority of a foreigner who would depict less savory aspects of American life. Prior knowledge of the way this “superficial man” treated Cole is useful ammunition for the character assassination. However, it was not the only cause of their differences. In July of the same year, Bryant learned of the depth of Featherstonhaugh’s association with Bryant’s own political opponent, Henry Clay. Bryant was predisposed against Featherstonhaugh from Cole’s complaints, but when he saw that a Whig journal had used Featherstonhaugh’s encomium to Clay from *Excursion through the Slave States* as political propaganda, all circumspection was set aside:

It is natural that Englishmen with strong national prejudices and violent antipathies to our country and its institutions should praise [Clay] and desire his success. Such a man is Featherstonhaugh, who has published an outrageously abusive book on this country, and who as might be expected is very enthusiastic in his commendations of Mr. Clay.... When Featherstonhaugh’s stupid book was first published here, we thought it a little remarkable that several whig [sic] papers, while admitting, as they were compelled to do, that it was very malignant, insisted almost unanimously that it was very entertaining, hinting in a knowing manner that there was a certain irresistible attraction about it, which would cause it to be universally read. We begin to perceive the reason. The spiteful and awkward exaggerations of the book are seasoned with praise of Mr. Clay.<sup>83</sup>

Clearly Bryant’s description of Featherstonhaugh as an abusive patron was rooted in a longstanding political disagreements, which requires careful scrutiny of his widely accepted version of what transpired at Featherston Park.

The other major source of knowledge about Cole’s Duanesburg period is the first biography of Cole, published by the author’s friend and pastor Louis Noble five years after the *Funeral Oration*. *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole* follows a model familiar to readers of other nineteenth-century artist biographies such as Charles Robert Leslie’s 1843 *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable*: interspersing some commentary from personal knowledge and conversations with the artist with edited selections from the artist’s correspondence that make up the vast majority of the text.<sup>84</sup> Although no public political disagreement can explain the harshness of his words, Noble is hardly any easier on Featherstonhaugh than Bryant. Admittedly, Noble relies heavily on Bryant’s account, citing from it directly in places, but he also adds additional details that make it clear that Cole had complained about his treatment at the hands of

---

<sup>82</sup> William Cullen Bryant, “More about America”, *New York Evening Post*, (June 21, 1844), p. 2. This and the following editorial were referenced but not quoted by Louis Noble in *Life and Works*, p. 315.

<sup>83</sup> William Cullen Bryant, “Another Chapter on English Fashions”, *New York Evening Post*, (July 16, 1844), p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> See Charles Robert Leslie, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable, composed Chiefly of his Letters* (London: J. Carpenter, 1843).; The title of the first edition of Noble’s book was the rather more ungainly *The Course of Empire, Voyage of Life, and other Pictures of Thomas Cole, N.A., with Selections from his Letters and Miscellaneous Writings: Illustrative of his Life, Character, and Genius*. The above title is from the third printing, identical to the first but for some minor corrections: Noble, *Life and Works*, xxxvii.

Featherstonhaugh to him as well. Under the sub-heading “Cole the dupe of an unworthy patron”, Noble writes:

...he was lured away by fine promises to the upper waters of the Hudson, there to toil, through the solitude of the cold months, for a person who had neither the mind to appreciate, nor the honesty to reward the ability he had entrapped into his service. To this cruel injustice his heartless employer added the grossest insult. He caused his apartments to be rendered cold and cheerless, and not unfrequently embarrassed, and mortified him at table. For the kind of picture which Cole then delighted to paint he affected a contempt, and advised him to turn his pencil to the bullocks of his farm-yard.<sup>85</sup>

The specificity of Noble’s reference to Featherstonhaugh’s request that Cole include the famous cattle of his farm in the paintings the artist was making has the ring of truth, and hardly sounds unreasonable in the context of what is known of Featherstonhaugh’s reputation as a husbandman. While Noble’s biases in favor of the hero of his book are clear enough, the accumulation of evidence in these two accounts makes it reasonable to conclude that Cole bridled at being treated as a social inferior by Featherstonhaugh, and that the wealthy landowner likely behaved as he believed befitted his class: treating Cole as subordinate instead of an independent genius to be flattered and nurtured.

The account of Cole’s stay at Featherston Park in the only full-length biography of Featherstonhaugh is useful as a way of tempering the vitriol of Bryant and Noble. It is productive to be reminded by writers whose concern ranges far beyond the visual arts to the other realms in which Featherstonhaugh was an innovator that there might well have been a good explanation for his disregard of Cole, if disregard there was, during the artist’s stay at Duanesburg. According to Edmund and Dorothy Berkeley:

While still in New York, Featherston had noticed some interesting landscapes of the Hudson River displayed in a shop and met the artist, Thomas Cole, a young Englishman who had come to the United States with his family in 1821. [sic] Featherston suggested that Cole spend some time painting views of Featherston Park and its surroundings, for he wanted to have a few pictures of his home to show friends in England. He would pay twenty to thirty dollars for each painting, and of course, the artist would have no living expenses. Cole was still struggling to establish himself. He had sold but four pictures that summer, none for more than twenty-five dollars and one for considerably less. He was, therefore, very interested in the proposition. After the Featherstonhaughs returned home in November, they made definite arrangements for Cole’s visit around 1 January. Featherston, to his regret, saw little of Cole during his stay, for he was forced to spend much of January and February in Albany on business.<sup>86</sup>

In this telling, George William Featherstonhaugh—the authors use his childhood nickname—is a sympathetic character. Amidst his many ambitious entrepreneurial ventures, their cultivated hero

---

<sup>85</sup> Noble, *Life and Works*, 37.

<sup>86</sup> Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, 38-9. The stated January 1 arrival date is erroneous because correspondence makes it clear that Cole arrived around the 15<sup>th</sup> of December.



found the time to recognize a talented young artist and to offer him a much-needed commission at a fair market rate. Clearly the truth lies somewhere in between these starkly opposed versions.

With all the evidence that the Duaneburg months were productive and that Cole received important support from Featherstonhaugh, including a referral to the powerful Van Rensselaer family that would produce a number of important commissions, it is difficult to know how to understand the laments to Bryant and Noble that must lie behind their versions of events. Another incident in which the artist complained to a friend about his treatment as an artist in undiplomatic terms and came to regret it may shed some light on this. In reply to a request for some biographical information for a proposed survey of American art, Cole sent William Dunlap a lengthy, bitter letter supposing it would be off-the-record background for the project. Dunlap published the letter in full in his 1834 *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*. With the memories of his first glimpse of the London art world fresh in his mind, Cole was dismissive of the artists he had encountered, claiming, for example, that “The English have a mania for what *they* call generalizing; which is nothing more nor less than the idle art of making a little study go a great way, and their pictures are generally things ‘full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.’”<sup>87</sup> This was rather awkward because Cole had many artist friends in London who were tarred by this intemperate swipe, born of a moment of pique. As an unpublished fragment in the collection of the New York State Library makes clear, Cole quickly drafted an apology to the most important of these friends, the Anglo-American painter Charles Robert Leslie, begging his forgiveness and explaining that he himself was to blame for his unhappy time in England. Cole wrote, “The truth is I was in a very melancholy mood when I was in England, my means low and rapidly sinking, almost without a friend and with that few acquaintances, and with the consciousness of my deficiencies in the Art.”<sup>88</sup> Just as his hasty description of the sorry state of British art belied insecurities and general unhappiness, so Cole’s characterization of his time at Featherston Park to Bryant and Noble probably overstated the differences between himself and Featherstonhaugh.

The patron-painter conflict that gave rise to the Featherston Park paintings speaks to the ways social class was defined and contested in the Early Republic. Cole’s house portraits show an Anglo-American artist working to accommodate a seemingly archaic, feudal, and inherently European art-form to democratic values and arguing for a place for private fortunes, justified by the public spirit of their owners, in a republic. The Featherstonhaugh paintings serve as important early evidence of the artist engaging with the house in the landscape as a subject for painting and thinking through the uses of architecture and country life, all of which would become major preoccupations throughout his career. Long before his well-known fictive buildings in *The Architect’s Dream* and *The Course of Empire*, the commission to depict not a visionary but a built structure afforded a chance for Cole to study how a house is put together, how it relates to its surroundings, and the social meanings it conveys. He would return to this subject in his house portraits for Daniel Wadsworth and William P. Van Rensselaer and in his dozens of drawings for the redesign of his own house, Cedar Grove, later in his career, although each project involved a distinctly different facet of the meanings of country houses in the antebellum United States.

---

<sup>87</sup> William Dunlap, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (New York: G. P. Scott & Co., 1834), II, 362.

<sup>88</sup> Cole to Leslie, undated draft fragment (1834) NYSL, box 1, folder 6.

## **II. The Villa as Public Good: Monte Video and its Afterlives**

Thomas Cole's second house portrait commission came just two years after his first, but the two jobs could hardly have been more different. George William Featherstonhaugh's Featherston Park was a private and palatial testament to its owner's power and entrepreneurial spirit, isolated on over a thousand acres of dense northern New York forest. In contrast, Daniel Wadsworth's Monte Video atop Talcott Mountain was a decidedly public country place, just five miles from Hartford, Connecticut with grounds that were open to visitors for scenic day-trips from the city. A distinction that dates to the writings of Columella in the first century c.e. seems apt here: "villa rustica" versus "villa urbana." Whereas the former was defined by its ability to be self-supporting with productive lands, a necessity because of its distance from the city, the villa urbana was a place of temporary refuge, smaller in scale of land and architecture, and usually closer to a city.<sup>89</sup> Featherston Park was a descendant of the villa rustica and Monte Video was more closely related to the villa urbana tradition. While Wadsworth's estate did have modest gardens, it did not rise to the scale of the vast agricultural enterprise to which George William Featherstonhaugh's "Baronial castle" was central and was primarily a landscape of leisure. Moreover, Featherstonhaugh proved to be one of the most difficult patrons Cole would be confronted with in his career while Wadsworth was the polar opposite: a loyal and generous supporter with whom the artist enjoyed a close friendship built upon a mutual respect that is evident from their extensive correspondence. While some of the Featherston Park paintings did move with their itinerant owner and were seen at exhibitions in New York, those images never received the far wider public that Cole's views of Monte Video did as engravings for both American and British audiences. Most importantly, the Wadsworth views show a concept of ideal country life that is revealingly and productively distinct from that of the Featherston Park paintings, and far closer both in architectural style and ideology to Cole's vision for a villa of his own at Cedar Grove, as will be discussed in Chapter Three. By studying new archival evidence that adds to the accounts previous scholars have offered of this episode and by foregrounding the unusual afterlives of Monte Video in print, this section will show that Wadsworth's country place was useful to Cole as a prototypical republican villa that put the private wealth of an enlightened owner to use for the good of the nation with its fluency with European design trends, its public spirit, and in the instruction it offered in landscape taste for the Early Republic.

While the differences between Featherston Park and Monte Video are many, a happy similarity between the two is that both their owners have been of interest to historians for reasons other than their patronage of Cole so there is a small but useful body of generalist scholarship on each as a result. While Featherstonhaugh's diverse intellectual pursuits have earned him the attention of historians of science, the Wadsworth literature centers on his legacy as an important early American patron of the arts, most visibly in the founding of the Wadsworth Atheneum, an institution that has honored its founder with sophisticated archival practices since the nineteenth century, for which modern scholars are greatly indebted, and a sustained research program that has filled in many gaps in our knowledge of his life and work.<sup>90</sup> In addition, all the surviving correspondence of Thomas Cole and Daniel Wadsworth has been published in an edited

---

<sup>89</sup> Malcolm Kelsall, *The Great Good Place: The Country House and English Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 12-13.

<sup>90</sup> See especially Richard H. Saunders and Helen Raye, *Daniel Wadsworth: Patron of the Arts* (Hartford: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1981).

collection, a valuable resource for research.<sup>91</sup> Most importantly, the work of Alan Wallach on connections between Monte Video and notions of panoramic vision has established the prints and paintings as subjects deserving of serious inquiry rather than as topographic anomalies.<sup>92</sup> This previous scholarship makes it possible to place Cole's painting of Monte Video in the context of Wadsworth's wider body of patronage, while recent work on the dissemination of Cole's images in print provides background on the unexpected paths that the Monte Video views took after their creation.<sup>93</sup> With help from some newly discovered images and documents, this section will ask just why Wadsworth's villa proved so ripe for reproduction and will propose some answers.

## Wadsworth and Cole

Daniel Wadsworth was born in Middletown, Connecticut in 1771, making him thirty years Cole's senior. His was one of the richest families in the state with ties to the first settlers of Hartford.<sup>94</sup> His father, Jeremiah, was Commissary-General for the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War and, subsequently, for allied French troops stationed in the United States. This position, with oversight of the provision of food and stores to the armed forces, came with emergency seizure powers and gave ample opportunity for self-enrichment to an entrepreneurial occupant of the post.<sup>95</sup> Jeremiah's predecessor in the role, Joseph Trumbull, was removed and prosecuted for corruption but never convicted, although he died in disgrace.<sup>96</sup> Jeremiah conducted his affairs with equal rapacity but greater discretion and managed to emerge from the war unscathed and with enough capital to serve as the seed of an array of investments in manufacturing and banking. These dealings would develop into an estate of \$125,767 that, upon Daniel's inheritance in 1804, secured the younger Wadsworth's ability to focus on living the life of, according to one source of the period, "a private gentleman" little interested in public affairs.<sup>97</sup> However, a more hostile source attributes this retreat from business and politics to his "weak constitution and lackluster disposition."<sup>98</sup> Rather confirming the impression of those who considered him a bit precious or effete for the time, Wadsworth's gentlemanly leisure centered upon a serious amateur pursuit of art. This is evident not only from his many surviving drawings and watercolors but in one surviving oil painting, traditionally identified as an image of a family mansion at Geneseo, New York but more likely taken from an English print source.<sup>99</sup> (**Fig. 56**) In search of landscape subject matter for his pen, Wadsworth traveled widely after his father's death made him financially independent, including trips not only to well-established tourist sites

---

<sup>91</sup> J. Bard McNulty, ed. *The Correspondence of Thomas Cole and Daniel Wadsworth: Letters in the Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, and in the New York State Library, Albany, New York* (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1983).

<sup>92</sup> Alan Wallach, "Wadsworth's Tower: An Episode in the History of American Landscape Vision" *American Art* 10.3 (Autumn 1996), pp. 8-27.

<sup>93</sup> Nancy Siegel, *Along the Juniata: Thomas Cole and the Dissemination of American Landscape Imagery* (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College Museum of Art, 2003).

<sup>94</sup> On the family's history, see Alden Hatch, *The Wadsworths of the Genesee* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1959).

<sup>95</sup> Hatch, *Wadsworths of the Genesee*, 32-3.

<sup>96</sup> See Jonathan Trumbull, "Joseph Trumbull, The First Commissary-General of the Continental Army" *Records and Papers of the New London County Historical Society*, Vol. II, Part III, (1897), 321-47.

<sup>97</sup> Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, *American Paintings before 1945 in the Wadsworth Atheneum*, Vol I. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 5.; Thomas Day, *A Historical Discourse Delivered before the Connecticut Historical Society and the Citizens of Hartford, 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1843* (Hartford: Case, Tiffany and Burnham, 1844), 33.

<sup>98</sup> Hatch, *Wadsworths of the Genesee*, 35.

<sup>99</sup> Saunders and Raye, *Patron of the Arts*, 73.

like Virginia's Natural Bridge and Niagara Falls, but also more pioneering expeditions to the wilder parts of the White Mountains. The latter experience would prove useful when he advised Thomas Cole on the itinerary for a similar expedition.<sup>100</sup> On these journeys, Wadsworth is known to have worked to apply the principles of picturesque tourism in the British model, of which the most prominent advocate was Reverend William Gilpin, to American scenery and made extensive notes and many sketches along the way.<sup>101</sup>

Another important connection to the art world was Daniel's close association with John Trumbull, a brother nineteen years the junior of former Commissary-General Joseph Trumbull commonly referred to by his own military rank, Colonel. John Trumbull's history paintings like *The Signing of the Declaration of Independence* are well known but he also painted the earliest image of Daniel Wadsworth, a 1784 portrait with Jeremiah. **(Fig. 57)** This image marks the start of an important friendship that took shape amidst an unusually close alliance between their two families over the generations and that would have major implications for the development of Monte Video. Trumbull married Wadsworth's sister Harriet in 1790 but she died just two years later from consumption. In 1794, Wadsworth, married Trumbull's niece Faith, further cementing their bond as members of one aristocratic family with wide influence on the affairs of the nation.<sup>102</sup> It was through Trumbull that Wadsworth first came into contact with Cole. In an oft-quoted anecdote published shortly after the event and widely disseminated, Trumbull is said to have gone to the New York shop of bookseller and picture dealer William Colman in November of 1825 to ask after funds due to him for some of his own pictures that had been sold there. He stumbled on the three paintings Cole had also consigned to Colman – *Lake with Dead Trees*, *View of Fort Putnam*, and *View of Kaaterskill Falls* – and inquired as to the identity of the painter.<sup>103</sup> On hearing that the artist was an unknown 24-year-old from the provinces, Trumbull is supposed to have exclaimed “This youth has done at once, and without instruction, what I cannot do after 50 years' practice.”<sup>104</sup>

Wadsworth saw the painting his former brother-in-law and current uncle-in-law had acquired, *View of Kaaterskill Falls*, and was so impressed with the young artist's ability that he commissioned a copy of the same subject that is the only surviving record of the composition now that Trumbull's version has been lost. **(Fig. 58)** The painting we have today was made despite the artist's concerns that no mere copy would satisfy a new patron who already had an established reputation for knowledge of the arts. In a letter of July 6, 1828, Cole told Wadsworth that he had made many sketches for the canvas “but I am not quite pleased with it.” He hoped instead to convince Wadsworth to accept a different view of the Falls “from several hundred yards below.”<sup>105</sup> In this plan, he seems to be envisioning the composition that he would later paint for New York merchant William Gracie, *Kaaterskill Falls from Below*, perhaps the most successful painting Cole made before his first visit to Europe in 1829.<sup>106</sup> While Wadsworth's

---

<sup>100</sup> McNulty, *Correspondence*, 7-9.

<sup>101</sup> Kornhauser, *American Paintings*, 6.

<sup>102</sup> Saunders and Raye, *Patron of the Arts*, 12.

<sup>103</sup> *Lake with Dead Trees* is now in the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College (Fig. 34) and *View of Fort Putnam* is a promised gift to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Trumbull's view of Kaaterskill Falls is now lost but the composition is known from the copy Cole would make of it for Wadsworth. See Fig. 58.

<sup>104</sup> “American” (William Dunlap) writing in *The New-York Evening Post*, 22 November 1825, p. 2.

<sup>105</sup> McNulty, *Correspondence*, 1.

<sup>106</sup> This painting, late of the Westervelt-Warner Museum of American Art, was deaccessioned recently and staff of the museum were unable to provide its current location so I am unable to reproduce it. A high-quality reproduction

reply is not preserved, its contents are evident from Cole's next letter of November 20<sup>th</sup>, in which he informed Wadsworth that he had complied with the patron's request and completed a canvas that preserved the composition of Trumbull's original, but was far from happy with the result. Cole writes, "I am sorry to say that I have not pleased myself in it, and am afraid you will be disappointed – I have labored twice as much upon this picture as upon the one you saw: but not with the same feeling. I cannot paint a view twice and do justice to it."<sup>107</sup> Despite Cole's concerns about satisfying his prominent buyer with a mere copy, he need not have worried. Although the next letter from Wadsworth is also missing, a reply to it from Cole on December 4<sup>th</sup> of the same year expresses the artist's thanks for "the good opinion which you entertain in your kindness of the pictures I sent you" and further gratitude for a subsequent commission to paint a subject of the artist's choice.<sup>108</sup> *Kaaterskill Falls* would be the first of eight paintings Wadsworth acquired from the artist during his lifetime, with more to join the Atheneum's collections after Wadsworth's death. For our purposes, it is significant to note that one of these paintings serves as another link between the Featherston Park and Monte Video periods. An image Cole had commenced while in residence on Featherstonhaugh's estate but little known since because it remains in a private collection, *View of l'Esperance*, was among this group of Wadsworth's earliest purchases from Cole. (Fig. 59)

### John Trumbull and the Making of Monte Video

Before Trumbull and Wadsworth joined in supporting Thomas Cole at the outset of his career, the two collaborated in a series of land purchases throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century that would make Monte Video possible, albeit through a circuitous process that has been described elsewhere.<sup>109</sup> Briefly, it appears that the idea to develop Talcott Mountain, then known as West Mountain, was Trumbull's in the first place, dating to his first visit to the site in May of 1791.<sup>110</sup> Trumbull produced a painting of the scene later the same year that gives a sense of the commanding prospect and shows the lake that would form the center of Wadsworth's estate. (Fig. 60) The property seems to have fired Trumbull's imagination with its potential to serve as the site of one or more country houses, whether for himself or others. He and Wadsworth both purchased portions of the mountain while it was determined how to proceed. In an intriguing episode that has received insufficient attention in the scholarly literature, the two men considered selling their holdings and Trumbull acted as an envoy to the English novelist, designer, and art collector William Beckford and tried to convince him to purchase the mountain as a whole, pitching it as "a place more calculated to make a delightful and magnificent Country residence like what he has here than any thing I had ever met with either in America or Europe."<sup>111</sup> Trumbull is referring to Fonthill Abbey, the colossal Gothic

---

can be found as the frontispiece to William Truettner and Alan Wallach, eds. *Thomas Cole: Landscape Into History* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, 1994).

<sup>107</sup> McNulty, *Correspondence*, 4. This claim is rather contradicted by his multiple views of Catskill Creek later in his life. See Alan Wallach, "Thomas Cole's *River in the Catskills* as Antipastoral" *Art Bulletin* 84.2 (Jun., 2002), pp. 334-350.

<sup>108</sup> McNulty, *Correspondence*, 6.

<sup>109</sup> See Wallach, "Wadsworth's Tower", 14-16

<sup>110</sup> Wallach, "Wadsworth's Tower", p. 14.

<sup>111</sup> John Trumbull to Jeremiah Wadsworth, 20 September 1798, Trumbull Papers, Yale University Library. Quoted in Bryan Wolf, "Revolution in the Landscape: John Trumbull and Picturesque Painting" in *John Trumbull: The Hand and Spirit of a Painter* ed. Helen A. Cooper (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982) p. 220.

The fullest account of this episode is in Theodore Sizer, "William Beckford and his American Property" *The Yale University Library Gazette* 39.1 (1964), 42-5.

fantasy palace that Beckford built around a central tower 175 feet high, as can be seen from a plate in John Rutter's 1823 *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*.<sup>112</sup> (Fig. 61) In a letter to Jeremiah Wadsworth, Trumbull claimed that Beckford "was struck with the description and desired to know how much it might cost an Acre..."<sup>113</sup> However, when the business interests of the man often called "the richest commoner in England" recovered, with a rise in the value of the sugar on which his fortune was founded and a resultant decline in his desire to leave the country, Beckford decided not to make the purchase, but his influence on the site did not end there.<sup>114</sup> It seems that just as Trumbull convinced Wadsworth to think of the mountain as a site for a country house, Beckford's example convinced him to think of building a Gothic viewing tower as a key feature of the site.

After the failure of the sale to Beckford and the inability of the two men to decide on a division of the mountaintop for two different country houses, Wadsworth bought out Trumbull's share and collaborated with him on designing a structure that is a claimant to the title of "earliest Gothic revival house in New England," which was completed by 1809.<sup>115</sup> The mansion at Monte Video was not the first building project with which Trumbull and Wadsworth were involved. Surviving evidence indicates that both men had a serious amateur interest in architecture that rivaled that of Cole. Sir John Soane's 1793 *Sketches in Architecture* was listed among the contents of Wadsworth's library and both Trumbull and Wadsworth played important roles in the design of the Congregationalist churches in their Connecticut hometowns, Lebanon and Hartford, respectively.<sup>116</sup> Edmund Burke himself urged Trumbull to turn his attentions to architecture. According to Trumbull's autobiography, Burke told the young artist, then in London, in 1784:

You are aware that architecture is the eldest sister, that painting and sculpture are the youngest, and subservient to her; you must also be aware that you belong to a young nation, which will soon want public buildings; these must be erected before the decorations of painting and sculpture will be required. I would therefore strongly advise you to study architecture thoroughly and scientifically, in order to qualify yourself to superintend the erection of these national buildings—decorate them also if you will.<sup>117</sup>

Although Trumbull did not take Burke's advice in studying architecture "thoroughly and scientifically," he did read widely in the subject and left a variety of architectural drawings for public buildings, for Yale, and for country houses.<sup>118</sup> It is not surprising that Wadsworth and Trumbull were accorded commissions for churches and colleges as people of known taste in the

---

<sup>112</sup> John Wilton-Ely, "The Genesis and Evolution of Fonthill Abbey" *Architectural History* 23 (1908), 42

<sup>113</sup> Wolf, "Revolution in the Landscape," 220.

<sup>114</sup> For an example of the use of this common epithet, see Albert Ten Eyck Gardner, "Beckford's Gothic Wests" *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 13.2 (Oct., 1954), p. 41.

<sup>115</sup> Saunders, *Patron of the Arts*, 19

<sup>116</sup> The attribution of First Congregational Church of Lebanon to Trumbull rests on oral tradition and is commemorated on a plaque there today. Wadsworth's involvement in the design of First Church of Christ Congregational is more securely documented in archival records in the Connecticut State Library: First Church of Christ Records 1684-1930, vol 1.

<sup>117</sup> John Trumbull, *Autobiography, Reminiscences and Letters by John Trumbull from 1756 to 1841* (New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1841), pp. 90-91. Quoted in Egon Verheyen, "John Trumbull and the U.S. Capitol: Reconsidering the Evidence" in Cooper, *Hand and Spirit*, p. 260.

<sup>118</sup> See Cooper, *John Trumbull*, 276-86.

arts in an era before architecture had become standardized and professionalized.<sup>119</sup> Wadsworth's papers abound with architectural drawings of a variety of Greek Revival structures, detailed floor plans for Monte Video, and a perspective of a Gothic cottage he constructed later in Hartford.<sup>120</sup>

Although none of Monte Video's original buildings remain standing on Talcott Mountain and the site is not open to the public today, a photograph shows the appearance of the house before its destruction and make clearer what the variety of surviving prints and paintings depict. **(Fig. 62)** The central house was evidently a fairly standard piece of wood-frame construction with bolted-on elements that allow it to be called "Gothic" including pointed moldings around some of the windows and a bit of tracery parapet on the roofline. The ornament anticipates that of "Carpenter Gothic" confections of a later date like the famous "Wedding Cake House" of Kennebunk, Maine, at which a profusion of tracery was attached in 1855 to a stout federal house of 1826 in order to bring the appearance of the structure up to date.<sup>121</sup> **(Fig. 63)** Evidently Wadsworth envisioned his house as a tribute to the most influential Gothic Revival house of all, Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill, and did the best he could with wood instead of masonry, both for reasons of costs and the logistical difficulties of the mountaintop site. **(Fig. 64)** Significantly, Trumbull had also visited Horace Walpole at his iconic Gothic villa during his English travels, so this is another instance in which he served as a crucial architectural intermediary for Wadsworth and contributed his traveler's perspective not only to the pseudo-Beckford tower but also to the pseudo-Walpole house.<sup>122</sup> Although the structure looks somewhat ridiculous to contemporary eyes in close-up, a late nineteenth-century print shows that it did present a rather romantic prospect from a distance in relation to the lake. **(Fig. 65)**

The effect of the main house was complemented by the variety of other structures on the site that were completed by the time of Thomas Cole's first visit to Monte Video in July of 1827. The other buildings the artist would have encountered there included, according to a period source, a tenant's cottage, summer house, barns, bathing house, grape house, bee house, ice house, ornamental gate, and the fifty-five foot hexagonal wooden tower, all of these structures Gothic.<sup>123</sup> A previously unknown drawing by Wadsworth himself in the collection of the Connecticut Historical Society gives the best available idea of the appearance of the distinctive tower, since destroyed.<sup>124</sup> **(Fig. 66)** The structure would have presented a commanding prospect, as the account Wadsworth's brother-in-law, Yale chemistry professor and man of letters Benjamin Silliman, describes:

---

<sup>119</sup> See Mary Woods, *From Craft to Profession: The Practice of Architecture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999).

<sup>120</sup> CHS 1913.5; 1954.16.17; WA 1946.249

<sup>121</sup> William H. Pierson, Jr. *American Buildings and their Architects, Vol 2: Technology and the Picturesque, The Corporate and Early Gothic Styles* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 386. A parallel example in the Greek Revival is Nicholas Biddle's "Andalusia" north of Philadelphia, where the addition of a portico to a plain, colonial structure obstructed some of the windows in pursuit of fashion. See Nicholas Biddle Wainwright, "Andalusia, Countryseat of the Craig Family and of Nicholas Biddle and His Descendants" *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 101.1 (Jan., 1977), pp. 3-69.

<sup>122</sup> Sizer, "William Beckford", 44.

<sup>123</sup> Maria Trumbull Silliman to Mrs. Benjamin Silliman, Wadsworth Atheneum Archives. Quoted in Saunders, *Patron of the Arts*, 20. A surviving estimate calls for the tower to be built in stone, but this was not done for reasons of expense: CHS Wadsworth Papers Box 2, Folder 3.

<sup>124</sup> Wallach, "Wadsworth's Tower," 16-19.

The diameter of the view in two directions, is more than ninety miles, extending into the neighboring states of Massachusetts and New York, and comprising the spires of more than thirty of the nearest towns and villages. The little spot of cultivation surrounding the house and the lake at your feet, with its picturesque appendages of boat, winding paths, and Gothic buildings, compose the foreground of this grand Panorama.<sup>125</sup>

Alan Wallach, in an article that was, in part, inspired by that resonant final word, has offered a compelling account of the way the unusual tower functioned as a tool for landscape spectatorship that bore a strong relationship to the contemporary culture of urban panoramas and other popular visual entertainments. While all three country houses Thomas Cole depicted were exercises in the cultivation of a bourgeois taste for landscape in America, Monte Video made the performance of that taste an explicit part of the estate's function by including a structure the only purpose of which was to enable the contemplation of landscape. Wallach suggests that Trumbull could have served not only as an architectural intermediary to Beckford's tower but also as an emissary to the popular panoramas of London who could have reported back to Wadsworth about those entertainments.<sup>126</sup> While this must remain speculative, it is certainly the case that Monte Video was a country house that made the act of looking at landscape unusually central to its function. As a result, it presented particular challenges and opportunities to an artist.

Another valuable source for an understanding of the interrelationship of the buildings at Monte Video has come to light recently in the holdings of the Connecticut Historical Society: a pair of large estate drawings, fully two feet by three, that render the full property both in plan and in an extended cross section that shows the location of the various structures positioned in relation to the valley below.<sup>127</sup> (**Figs. 67, 68**) They seem to be in Daniel Wadsworth's own hand and provide new evidence of the precise layout of the estate and of the owner's conception of it in relation to his other real estate holdings. While these images are difficult to decipher in reproduction because of their faint draughtsmanship and their scale, it should be apparent that they function as indexes of two kinds of power: location and elevation. The plan identified as 2012.312.240a is the more useful of the two, with two intriguing "profiles," or cross-sections, at the bottom that include precise elevation data with an explanatory key (**Figs. 69, 70**):

#### Explanation of Profile No. 1

- A. Surface of the water in the Lake.
- B. North rock—138.79 feet above the surface of the Lake.
- C. Base of the Tower 156.89 feet above the surface of the Lake.
- D. Tower 55 feet in height.
- E. South rock 100 feet above the surface of the Lake.

#### Explanation of Profile No. 2

- G. Surface of the water in the Lake [Sic, there is no F.]

---

<sup>125</sup> Benjamin Silliman, *Remarks Made, on a Short Tour, Between Hartford and Quebec* (New Haven: S. Converse, 1820), 15. On Silliman, see Chandos Michael Brown, *Benjamin Silliman: A Life in the Young Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

<sup>126</sup> Wallach, "Wadsworth's Tower," 15.

<sup>127</sup> Nancy Finlay, Curator of Graphics at the Connecticut Historical Society, was the first to recognize that these intriguing objects pertain to Monte Video and I am grateful for her permission to publish them.



- H. Base of the dwelling house—46 feet above the surface of the Lake.
- I. East rock—26 feet above the Lake.

2012.312.240b shows the whole estate as a tiny indication in relation to the vast spread of the Farmington Valley. (**Fig. 71**) The key reads:

Profile No. 2

- K. [Illeg.]
- L. Summer house on the Wood's River
- M. [Illeg.] At the elevation 167.70 feet above Conn. River at Hartford.
- N. Surface of the Lake—740.51 feet above Conn. River at Hartford
- O. Tower—958.40 feet above Connecticut River at Hartford
- P. Dwelling house—792.51 feet above Con. River at Hartford
- B. Surface of the water in Farmington River at Avon Bridge—143.72 feet above Connecticut River at Hartford.

The two site plans describe the visual logic of Wadsworth's estate, mapping the relationship of the buildings and paths and making apparent the drama of the site on a relatively narrow ridgeline. These representations emphasize the use of the place for leisure rather than productivity by prioritizing the elements of pleasurable tourism like the lake and tower over the small but significant agricultural efforts that were in process there. In their colossal scale, the objects themselves make Wadsworth's 250 acres seem vast, a kingdom in the clouds that looms over Hartford below. The "profiles" underline the relationship between this "villa urbana" and the city itself by showing the relatively short distance but great difference in elevation between the two. The repeated representation of the tower and the measurement of precisely how much higher it was than the Connecticut River at Hartford to the hundredths decimal place was not inevitable. It was a conscious choice to depict the power of Monte Video's prospect in relation to Hartford, the visual pleasures that were to be had there, and, not incidentally, to clarify its proximity to, and accessibility from, the city.

Benjamin Silliman was one of the visitors who took advantage of the proximity to Hartford for a visit to Wadsworth's estate. His 1824 book *Remarks on a Short Tour between Hartford and Quebec*, an account of a journey he made with Wadsworth, gives the most substantial account of the overall effect the estate made on a visitor, beginning with an extended discussion of the charms of Monte Video and, as one expects from a distinguished man of science, the particularities of the surrounding topography and geology. Silliman described the process of gradual revelation on approaching the mountaintop by a steep and winding route that terminated at the Gothic gate and tenant's cottage, at which point dense forests gave way to open views into the valley below. At this point, the tower came into view for the first time about a half mile away, looming over all. He described the land around the central lake as "a scene of cultivation, unenclosed, and interspersed with trees, in the center of which, stands the house."<sup>128</sup> One wishes for more information about precisely what Wadsworth was growing on this open cultivated land, (beyond the reference to a "grape house" in a previously cited account), but no documentation survives of this. In addition to his previously cited account of the prospect from the top of the tower, Silliman was struck by the contrasts that were visible from the windows of the main house itself. He writes:

---

<sup>128</sup> Silliman, *Remarks on a Short Tour*, 11.

Every thing in this view, is calculated to make an impression of the most entire seclusion; for, beyond the water, and the open ground in the immediate neighbourhood of the house, rocks and forests alone meet the eye, and appear to separate you from all the rest of the world. But at the same moment that you are contemplating this picture of the deepest solitude, you may without leaving your place, merely by changing your position, see through one of the long Gothic windows of the same room, which reach to a level with the turf, the glowing western valley, one vast sheet of cultivation, filled with inhabitants, and so near that with the aid only of a common spy-glass, you distinguish the motions of every individual who is abroad in the neighbouring village...<sup>129</sup>

This is a rich account of the scene that lends credence to Alan Wallach's reading of Monte Video as the direct product of an aristocratic desire for visual control.<sup>130</sup> Albert Boime's concept of "the magisterial gaze" seems pertinent as well.<sup>131</sup> Silliman's language suggests the almost voyeuristic pleasure of the mountaintop site that granted equal visual access to civilization and wilderness. For an artist like Cole, for whom the meeting of the two would become a recurrent trope, most famously in *The Oxbow*, it is easy to imagine how compelling the estate would have been in contrast to the somewhat oppressive wildness of Featherston Park. (**Fig. 48**) The windows of the house acted as frames, selecting salient parts of the view for attention, just as the winding paths that led Silliman up to the hilltop framed and gradually revealed the buildings waiting there. There is a tension between the sense of privacy and privileged remove Silliman describes and what we know of the site as a major tourist destination. Indeed, there are even signs that tension arose between Daniel and Faith Wadsworth because of this. The latter complained "It seems some times as if all [Monte Video's] beauties were devoured by strangers" and on some days her children counted more than fifty people tramping through their flower beds from the windows.<sup>132</sup> Monte Video gave its owners a powerful sense of command over the surrounding populace, but in granting that populace open access to the grounds out of a sense of noblesse oblige, the Wadsworths were victims of their own popularity.

### Monte Video in Paint and Print

Benjamin Silliman's *Remarks Made on a Short Tour between Hartford and Quebec* is not only significant for the accounts it offers of the visitor's experience of Monte Video shortly before Thomas Cole's visit to the estate but also for featuring the first two images of Monte Video to appear in print, engravings after sketches by Wadsworth himself. (**Figs. 72, 73**) So important did Silliman consider the estate that one of these prints is featured as the frontispiece to the book. The compositions are only slightly different, showing a shift in distance rather than any great change in perspective. For both, the tower is the focal point with the house at left and lake at right. Wadsworth's original watercolor from which the second print was made has been preserved. (**Fig. 74**) It is striking that the Gothic house is shown from an angle that makes its innovative design features invisible, while the battlemented top of the tower is visible even at this small scale. That this was Wadsworth's preferred perspective on his country house and that his view prioritized the tower to the detriment of the house is important to keep in mind when

---

<sup>129</sup> Silliman, *Remarks on a Short Tour*, 14.

<sup>130</sup> Wallach, "Wadsworth's Tower", 18.

<sup>131</sup> Albert Boime, *The Magisterial Gaze: Manifest Destiny and American Landscape Painting, c. 1830-1865* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

<sup>132</sup> Wallach, "Wadsworth's Tower," 10

considering the quite different perspective that Cole selected for his canvas of Monte Video. In addition, there is intriguing evidence that Wadsworth had previously commissioned no less than four paintings of Monte Video, all of them now lost, from Alvan Fisher between 1822 and 1825.<sup>133</sup> Whether in Wadsworth's own hands or in the representations of others, this American country house was widely represented from its earliest days.

After their previous correspondence about *Kaaterskill Falls* and the artist's tour in the White Mountains, Thomas Cole finally visited Monte Video in July of 1827.<sup>134</sup> His papers are sparse that summer, but a sketchbook in the New York State Library in which he has written "1827" without any month does include a mention on the inside front cover of "Pictures Ordered—Three for Mr. Wadsworth."<sup>135</sup> The first explicit indication of a commission to depict the estate comes in a letter of December 4<sup>th</sup> of the same year, in which Wadsworth writes in a postscript, "I shall be glad to have the *View from the Mountain—Montevideo* done the next in succession."<sup>136</sup> Evidently there had been some previous discussion of the commission in person or in lost correspondence. There is no mention of the painting again for the intervening year until Cole writes on December 1, 1828, saying "The pictures will be sent by the Steam Boat that starts this afternoon. One is the view of Monte Video, and I think it has as much truth in it as any picture I have ever painted and I hope it will be satisfactory to you."<sup>137</sup>

The resultant painting shows not a view of the tower but the view from the base of the tower, a striking difference from all other existing portrayals of the scene.<sup>138</sup> (**Fig. 75**) Like the Featherston Park views, the house is miniscule but no less the focus because of its illumination by golden sunlight. On closer examination, Cole has indicated the distinctive Gothic parapet of the house and the pointed windows, as well as two figures walking nearby, standing in for the visitors who were key to the experience of the place. (**Fig. 76**) Another far more prominent figure sits in the foreground with a sun hat by her side, enjoying the view from the high point on which the tower rested with the summer house by the lake just visible beyond. J. Bard McNulty has fancifully read Cole's emphasis on the word "truth" in his description of the painting to indicate that the foreground figure should be understood as an allegory of truth.<sup>139</sup> It seems much more likely that Cole was simply celebrating the fact that he felt he had been faithful to the appearance and spirit of the scene. The similar foreground figure that appears also in John Trumbull's view of the site suggests that this was a trope of landscape representation into which it's risky to read too much. (**Fig. 60**) It is enough to say that this prominent figure models the landscape spectatorship that was central to the house's function. The warm, golden palette, openness of the ground, and presence of a figure engaged in leisure rather than hard labor give this house portrait a distinctly different effect than the harsh wilderness of the Featherstonhaugh paintings, against which the house was not a pleasant place of leisure but an isolated bastion of

---

<sup>133</sup> Saunders and Kaye, *Patron of the Arts*, 25.

<sup>134</sup> See note 100; McNulty, *Correspondence*, xiv.

<sup>135</sup> NYSL 8.4

<sup>136</sup> McNulty, *Correspondence*, 25

<sup>137</sup> McNulty, *Correspondence*, 50. The other picture Cole sent on the same steamer was *View on Lake Winnipiseogee*, painted after a drawing by Wadsworth, also now in the collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum. The latter was not altogether pleased with the coloring, but it is intriguing to note that the two canvases may have been conceived as pendants, further evidence of the prevalence of this compositional principle in Cole's work. See Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 83.

<sup>138</sup> In offering the mirror image of Wadsworth's own composition, Cole may be thinking of the experience of viewing a diorama, a popular entertainment of the period. See Wendy Ikemoto, "A 'higher style' of looking: Thomas Cole and popular media" *The Burlington Magazine* CLVI (June, 2014), pp. 385-90.

<sup>139</sup> McNulty, *Correspondence*, 50. This interpretation was repeated in Wallach, "Wadsworth's Tower," 23.

civilization. The difference in how Cole felt about Monte Video from how he felt about Featherston Park is apparent not only from comparison of his paintings of each place but also from another letter. Three and a half years after the completion of this commission, while surrounded by the attractions of Italy, Cole was still thinking about the pleasant time he had spent at Monte Video and told Wadsworth as much in a letter from Florence of July 13, 1832. He writes “I am anxious to learn—Is Monte Video as beautiful as ever? it *must* be so, nature is not so changeable....I anticipate the pleasure of seeing with you another sunset from the Tower.” This letter also includes the first mention of a contemporary project to have one of his sketches of Monte Video engraved for inclusion in a history of the United States for British audiences, an intriguing episode that gives further insight into the meanings the estate held for its various audiences.

Monte Video is unusual as an American country house that saw its image widely distributed in the print medium from its earliest days. The striking reproduction of two different images by Wadsworth of his own house in Silliman’s book, one of them as the frontispiece, has already been noted. Although the author was biased by his familial relationship with the proprietor, Silliman could as easily have included the view from Monte Video that his words evoke so eloquently instead of showing its buildings. As perhaps the first Gothic house in America, and one with grounds that were, in a move that Wallach has called “unprecedented,” open to visitors, the place must have seemed a worthy scenic destination for a traveler’s account. However, Silliman’s “little accidental work” of travel literature did not find a wide audience at the time.<sup>140</sup> Thomas Cole’s fascination with Monte Video led to prints that were far more widely distributed, not only on paper but as transferware ceramics. That there was any market for images of Monte Video was itself the product of the estate’s outward orientation and the distinctive features of the site, but the prints also participated in Wadsworth’s project of making the estate open and public.

When Cole made his first trip to England as an adult in 1829, he brought with him his sketchbook of possible subjects in hopes of furthering his nascent career.<sup>141</sup> Fortunately, the artist came in contact with John Howard Hinton, a prominent English Baptist preacher and abolitionist, who was at work on an ambitious two-volume project he called *The History and Topography of the United States of North America*.<sup>142</sup> This book, which would be published in London and Philadelphia in 1830, was largely a compendium of previously published geographic, demographic, and historical information about the whole of the United States, the first such effort, but not novel in the information it contained. What was unusual and was original was the book’s substantial commitment to newly commissioned illustrations. The title page of the first London edition proclaims the book to be “Illustrated with a Series of Views, Drawn on the Spot, and Engraved on Steel, Expressly for this Work.” The preface underlines this aspect of the publication:

---

<sup>140</sup> Brown, *Benjamin Silliman*, 320.

<sup>141</sup> Nancy Siegel, *Along the Juniata: Thomas Cole and the Dissemination of American Landscape Imagery* (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College Museum of Art, 2003), p. 45.

<sup>142</sup> On Hinton, see Timothy Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality: Nonconformist Politics in Mid-Victorian England* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 1999).

It is with pleasure that reference can be made to the plates by which this history is illustrated. They exhibit to the eye, in no inferior style of art, a more extended series of American views than has hitherto been given to the public in any form, and tend more to familiarize the mind of a foreigner with American objects and scenery than the most accurate verbal description.<sup>143</sup>

Hinton was in dire need of American artists who could give him images ready for engraving of the promised characteristic “objects and scenery,” so Cole’s trip could not have been more perfectly timed. The penultimate page of the artist’s 1829 journal records the progress of the commission and the subjects required:

*21 Guineas in Cash or Bill at two months. The other 11 G in the work of two plates on Folio paper, 3 plates for each part.*

*Agreement with JH Hinton for furnishing seven views in U S America. The Pictures to be returned to me after being Engraved.*

*Nov 8<sup>th</sup> Mr Hinton has had three views, A View of Ticonderoga, A View of the Falls of Kaaterskill, A View of Lake George*

*Nov 16 two views: one a View in the Alleghany Mountains, the other a View of the White Mountains*

*Dec 4<sup>th</sup> one view, a View near Conway N Hampshire*

*Jany the Falls of Niagara*

*All the pictures completed & gone to Mr Hinton*

*Four more pictures to be painted for Hinton:*

*A View from the Summit of Mt Washington*

*A Timber Raft on L Champlain*

*A View of Hartford*

*A View of Monte Video*

*All these are finished & sent home<sup>144</sup>*

These notations indicate that Monte Video was not included in Hinton’s initial order, but it is surprising that the subject was included in this company at all. Cole’s subjects are representative of the contents of the book as a whole: famous scenic and historic sites and important civic buildings predominate. Monte Video is one of only two private houses represented in the book, the other being the very next plate in the Connecticut section, the Ithiel Town-designed Greek Revival home of Samuel Russell in Middletown in an image by Cole’s antagonist in the Ohio Statehouse project, Alexander Jackson Davis. (**Figs. 77, 78**) While the house fills the frame in

---

<sup>143</sup> John Howard Hinton, *The History and Topography of the United States of North America, Vol. I* (London: Fenner, Sears & Co., 1830), vi.

<sup>144</sup> NYSL 4a.2 Because no such paintings survive, it seems most likely that Cole used the word “painted” to mean simply “drawn” or that he was referring to the more fragile medium of watercolor.

the latter image as a means of transmitting information about the stylish architecture of the new country, the equally fashionable Gothic of Monte Video is occluded by showing the rear of the house, in a drawing by Cole that was based on Wadsworth's preferred perspective instead of the one he had adopted for the painting. He has kept the intermediary tourist figure to emphasize the use of the place for landscape spectatorship and, in this case, the tower is plainly visible, silhouetted against the sky. Because so little of the house is visible, the tower was presumably the feature that made the site sufficiently interesting to be included in a collection of noteworthy American scenes for a British audience. Hinton succeeded in his mission, thanks in part to Cole's assistance, and the book went through numerous editions, both in Great Britain and the United States, until the eve of the Civil War.<sup>145</sup>

The use of Monte Video as a distinctive American subject did not end with its inclusion in Hinton's book. Cole's print also became a subject for transferware ceramics produced by the Staffordshire firm of William Adams & Son in their "American Views" series.<sup>146</sup> A Monte Video plate from this line in the sepia color option, (pink was also available), shows how the print was deformed by the medium. **(Fig. 79)** The tower that gave the print its purpose has become stubby and inconsequential, barely higher than the treetops, and the house is scarcely visible over a strange hill that has risen in between. However, the tourist figure remains largely intact, modeling the spectatorship that was to be practiced in this place. That there was sufficient demand for the image of Monte Video to be disseminated in this way—from initial watercolor to Silliman prints to Cole's painting to Cole drawings for Hinton prints and ceramics after them—shows the success of Daniel Wadsworth's mission to make a public-spirited country house.

### **III. Feudal Nostalgia: The Van Rensselaer Manor House**

Thomas Cole first came in contact with the Van Rensselaer family through the exertions of George William Featherstonhaugh, shortly after the conclusion of the artist's time at Featherston Park in 1826.<sup>147</sup> This link between the first of Cole's house portrait commissions and the last is a reminder that the artist's views of the houses of his patrons have important commonalities despite the many differences between them. When it came time to paint his two large views of the Van Rensselaer Manor House and its grounds from 1840 to 1841, Cole approached the project not as a somewhat unwilling employee of another aristocratic patron but as an architectural thinker preoccupied, from his readings and travels, with the same European ideals of country life that had shaped the house he depicted. Moreover, the paintings he made of the Manor House participated in his efforts to design a country house of his own in the same period that reflected similar values and architectural styles. *The Van Rensselaer Manor House* and *The Gardens of the Van Rensselaer Manor House* are now little known and little studied, but they are deserving of closer attention as manifestations of an increasingly conservative vision of country life that is palpable across the final decade of the artist's short career. **(Figs. 80, 81)** Although

---

<sup>145</sup> Siegel, *Along the Juniata*, 45

<sup>146</sup> Siegel, *Along the Juniata*, 77.

<sup>147</sup> See note 49. The first result of this connection is indicated by an undated "List of Pictures Painted by me," which includes one he titled *View near Catskill* that listed "Genl. Van Rensselaer" as the owner. (NYSL 6.2) I believe this to be the 1827 painting now in the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco as *View near the Village of Catskill*, accession number 1993.35.7.

there is no evidence that the grounds of this country house were open to a wide public, as was the case at Monte Video, Cole's images of the estate served as a means of expressing and preserving the ideologies at work in this practice of country life. By placing the house portraits in dialogue with another strongly related pendant commission for the same member of the Van Rensselaer family of a few years earlier, *The Departure* and *The Return*, this section will argue that these images operate within a framework of feudal nostalgia, lamenting the decline of a class of patrons from which Cole had drawn important support and expressing concern about the contemporary Jacksonian ascendancy. (Figs. 82, 83) In the process, these images of a passing mode of unabashedly aristocratic country life also envision a future in which the highest values of the republic were preserved from the whims of populism in the country houses of enlightened citizens.

Just as Alan Wallach looms large in any account of Cole's *View of Monte Video*, so too does his work on Cole's relationship to the Federalist aristocracy serve as a foundation for this section.<sup>148</sup> Here, Wallach's work is joined by that of Wendy Ikemoto, whose pioneering account of the role of pendant painting in the artist's career offers insight into his two pairs of pendants for William Paterson Van Rensselaer.<sup>149</sup> While the house portraits merit only footnotes in her research, her account of *Departure* and *Return* is extensive and definitive. Ikemoto offers a compelling argument that the history of panoramas and similar public entertainments is an important context not only for the paintings on which she focuses but for all of Cole's pendants. This section will build on the work of Ikemoto and Wallach by adding the evidence of Cole's diverse work as a painter-architect to the story in order to offer a more complete account of the social, political, and architectural associations of these canvases.

### The Van Rensselaer Family

Before turning to the two pendant commissions for William P. Van Rensselaer, some background on this powerful family will be useful as context for Cole's paintings. While Featherstonhaugh had built an aspirational "Baronial castle" and Wadsworth conceived a public-spirited villa that followed the model of Horace Walpole's suburban villa, the Van Rensselaer family has been called "a landed and baronial aristocracy," and constituted one of the most literal embodiments of that model of class relations the United States ever saw.<sup>150</sup> Accordingly, it is only appropriate that the so-called Manor House that was the spiritual and economic center of their vast landholdings was said to have "the effect of a palace."<sup>151</sup> From the granting of the patent to the Manor of Rensselaerswyck to Kiliaen Van Rensselaer by the Dutch West India Company in 1629, the family's rule over approximately 750,000 acres of fertile land on both sides of the Hudson River, comprising much of present day Rensselaer and Albany Counties, can only be called feudal.<sup>152</sup> (Fig. 84) Although the terms they offered to their thousands of tenants

---

<sup>148</sup> Alan Wallach, "Thomas Cole and the Aristocracy" *Arts Magazine* 56.3 (Nov., 1981), pp. 94-106.

<sup>149</sup> See "Chapter Two: Taking a Contemplative Look: Visual Devotion in Thomas Cole's *Departure* and *Return*" in "The Space Between: Paired Paintings in Antebellum America" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2009), pp. 84-134, and "A 'higher style' of looking: Thomas Cole and popular media" *The Burlington Magazine* CLVI (June, 2014), pp. 385-390.

<sup>150</sup> Daniel Barnard, *A Discourse of the Life, Services, and Character of Stephen Van Rensselaer* (Albany: Hoffman and White, 1839), p. 17.

<sup>151</sup> Marcus T. Reynolds, "The Colonial Buildings of Rensselaerswyck" [sic] *The Architectural Record* IV (July 1894-July 1895), 416; Martha J. Lamb, "The Van Rensselaer Manor" *Magazine of American History* XI.1 (Jan., 1884), 1.

<sup>152</sup> Paul R. Huey, "Early Albany: Buildings before 1790" in Diana S. Waite, ed. *Albany Architecture* (Albany, NY: Mount Ida Press, 1993), 24. It is significant to note that this was the second instance in which Cole represented a

varied in strictness and generosity over the years, what did not vary was the family's cultivation of gentility, built upon the performance of benevolent lordship, and of grateful subservience on the part of their tenants.<sup>153</sup> How this worked in practice is revealed by Daniel Barnard's 1839 memorial discourse for General Stephen Van Rensselaer, III, rich in vignettes of divinely ordained aristocracy and admiring peasants. For example, Barnard has this to say of the 1785 celebrations of the landlord's twenty-first birthday, the date of legal majority for the leadership of Rensselaerswyck:

his tenants...were not to be restrained from offering, on this event, the testimony of their joy, and their affection for his person, as if he was still, instead of being simply a contracting party with them in regard to their lands, as much their Patroon and feudal Superior, as his ancestor was of their fathers in the time of Petrus Stuyvesandt.<sup>154</sup>

It is somewhat surprising to learn that financial and social relationships like these ever existed in the United States, least of all in the post-Revolutionary years when the threat of a nation that formalized these kinds of class relationships was so recent. Indeed, this episode calls to mind not so much the models of republican country life embodied by Mount Vernon or Monticello or, indeed, Featherston Park, so much as it does the vision of ideal lordship best expressed by Ben Jonson in his 1616 "To Penhurst":

And though thy walls be of the country stone,  
They're reared with no man's ruin, no man's groan;  
There's none that dwell about them wish them down;  
But all come in, the farmer and the clown,  
And no one empty-handed, to salute  
Thy lord and lady, though they have no suit.<sup>155</sup>

Just as Jonson described Penhurst Place as a country house founded upon Edenic bounty and natural, inevitable power relations, so is the Van Rensselaer Manor House in Barnard's vision of it.

Barnard's account is also useful for its mention of the title the Van Rensselaers could claim, one that became freighted with feudal associations: Patroon. When that honorific was bestowed upon Kiliaen Van Rensselaer by the Dutch West India Company along with the grant of Rensselaerswyck, it carried the authority to maintain a fort, complete with cannon and a private army, and the power to make judicial decisions within the boundaries of his patent, while also requiring all residents on his lands to swear an "oath of fealty and allegiance to him" and to provide military service on demand.<sup>156</sup> While these entitlements had been stripped away by Cole's lifetime, the word continued to convey weighty associations, both positive and negative,

---

colonial patent. Duanesburg, of which Featherstonhaugh's estate consisted of around a sixth of the total lands, was another. See E. B. O'Callaghan, *Documentary History of the State of New York IV* (Albany: Charles Van Benthuyzen, 1851), p. 645.

<sup>153</sup> On ideas of gentility in early America, see Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

<sup>154</sup> Barnard, *Discourse*, 33-4.

<sup>155</sup> Ben Jonson, "To Penhurst" (1616), l. 45-50.

<sup>156</sup> Lamb, "The Van Rensselaer Manor," p.11; Barnard, *Discourse*, 19.



as is evident from frequent references to General Stephen Van Rensselaer as “The Good Patroon” and from the invocation of a menacing “Patroony” by the organized opposition to the family in the 1840s.<sup>157</sup> Clearly, when Cole was commissioned to represent the house that was the epicenter of the Van Rensselaers’ power, he engaged in the most direct way he ever did with the problem of aristocracy in a republic and the practices of country life that cemented and projected that power.

### **The Architecture of Feudal Power in Early America**

The Van Rensselaer family owned various structures known as the “Manor House” over the centuries on a site approximately a mile north of the modern center of Albany on the west bank of the Hudson. (Fig. 85, 86) Little is known of the first structure that served Jan Baptiste Van Rensselaer in his role as the agent of Kiliaen, the first Patroon. It seems to have been a fairly humble building with a thatched roof, and it was destroyed entirely by a flood in 1665.<sup>158</sup> However, by that date it was no longer in use as the seat of the Van Rensselaers because a far more substantial structure that was the first to deserve the appellation of Manor House had been completed in 1658. The only surviving image of it, a drawing by Francis Pruyne made shortly before the structure was demolished in 1839, shows it to have been a long, low single-story structure in brick, a material that is thought to have been imported from the Netherlands as ship’s ballast.<sup>159</sup> (Fig. 87) Its stout construction reflects the defensive purpose it had to serve because of its placement beyond the protection of nearby Fort Orange, with which the family had tempestuous relations over the years.<sup>160</sup> In this, it bears a relationship with contemporary Irish, English, and Dutch country houses for which, as Hanneke Ronnes has shown, a degree of fortification, whether merely residual or functional, that blurred the distinction between “castle” and “country house” was characteristic.<sup>161</sup> Even if it was not as ambitious as the house Cole depicted in its style and scale, it was clearly a solidly built structure; it remained standing until its demolition in 1839 for a road project and would have had a symbolic power as the center of Rensselaerswyck that outweighed its aesthetic modesty.

The second, far grander Manor House, the work of an unknown designer, was completed in 1765 at the bidding of Stephen Van Rensselaer II, superseding the humble prior structure, which would henceforth be used by the Patroon’s agent.<sup>162</sup> The building has been called “the handsomest residence in the colonies” and is credited with “wide influence over the architecture of the more ambitious buildings in the neighborhood.”<sup>163</sup> While archival photographs of the building at a later date show its appearance after the addition of side wings, quoins, and other superficial elements designed by Richard Upjohn that radically transformed the appearance of the building in the early 1840s, Cole’s paintings have been useful to architectural historians as

---

<sup>157</sup> This title is commemorated in “The Good Patroon Award,” given annually since 1988 by the Albany Roundtable, a “civic luncheon series.” <http://albanyroundtable.blogspot.com/2014/09/all-over-albany-named-new-patroon.html> Access date: 14 March 2015. An example of the pejorative use of “Patroony” can be found in a circa 1845 anti-rent broadside in the collection of the New York State Library, which says “Let the opponents of Patroony rally in their strength.” Reproduced in Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 109.

<sup>158</sup> Reynolds, “Colonial Buildings of Rensselaerswyck”, 417.

<sup>159</sup> Huey, “Early Albany,” 30

<sup>160</sup> Lamb, “The Van Rensselaer Manor”, 16-17.

<sup>161</sup> Hanneke Ronnes, “Martial Meanings of ‘Castle’” in *Architecture and Elite Culture in the United Provinces, England and Ireland, 1500-1700* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press/ Pallas Publications, 2006), pp. 27-33.

<sup>162</sup> Reynolds, “Colonial Buildings of Rensselaerswyck”, 417.

<sup>163</sup> Reynolds, “Colonial Buildings of Rensselaerswyck”, 424.

rare documentation of the building, or at least the north façade that faced the gardens, in its original form.<sup>164</sup> (Figs. 88, 89) The rather simpler structure that Cole encountered when he made his views of the building and grounds bears a strong resemblance to English country houses of the previous century like Uppark in its proportions, projecting central pediment, and four dormer windows. (Fig. 90) The construction was no less stout than the residual fortification impulse evident in such English examples, with heavy bricks fully nine inches by four inches by two and a half lending it a powerful presence, especially in contrast to the wooden buildings of the region.<sup>165</sup> The most distinctive feature of the house was a gracious fanlight in the central pediment that was preserved in the Upjohn redesign. In its impressive size, currency with recent European architectural fashions, and the permanence of its construction, the 1765 Manor House was a powerful statement of the Van Rensselaer family's influence and ambition.

The resemblances between the exterior of the house and Uppark may be more than coincidence because of the Van Rensselaers' sustained relationship with George William Featherstonhaugh. Because of the latter's imagined relationship to the Featherstonhaugh Baronets of Uppark, he is known to have arranged a visit to the house on his travels in England in 1827 and could have inspired the redesign project of the 1840s that made the resemblance between the two structures stronger than ever.<sup>166</sup> However, the influence of Featherstonhaugh on the Van Rensselaers was not limited to matters of architecture and artistic patronage. On the contrary, Sarah Duane Featherstonhaugh's fortune allowed George William to become a key partner of General Van Rensselaer in a variety of entrepreneurial endeavors. The two were partners in the incorporation of the Mohawk and Hudson Rail Road Company, which was approved by the legislature in April of 1826, and shared a deep interest in agricultural improvement and geological inquiry.<sup>167</sup> One example of this common ground is General Van Rensselaer's sponsorship of *A Geological and Agricultural Survey of Rensselaer County in the State of New York* in 1822.<sup>168</sup> However, Van Rensselaer's interest in getting a better understanding of the lands of his demesne was far from selfless. Projects like the *Geological and Agricultural Survey* were instrumental in his aggressive efforts to encourage settlement and development of his lands by tenant farmers in the period. So successful was General Van Rensselaer in this endeavor that the feudal leasehold system that seems a relic of early Dutch settlement grew exponentially in the early nineteenth century, and was made only harsher by a transition from long-term to annual leases and a change in policy that made any improvements on the land the property of the landlord rather than the tenant.<sup>169</sup> Similarly, the Patroon's involvement in the railroad project was due to other incentives than civic spirit. As members of the Turnpike Company argued in the legislature and in the press, despite their own transparent biases, Van Rensselaer ensured that the railroad's route would improve the value of his landholdings to the detriment of the city of Albany.<sup>170</sup> The myth of the Good Patroon who was followed by rapacious sons does not stand up

---

<sup>164</sup> Reynolds, "Colonial Buildings of Rensselaerswyck," 425. A plan and elevation for wings by Upjohn is preserved in the Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University: NYDA.1000.011.01380. I am grateful to Zach Stewart for sending an image of this sheet.

<sup>165</sup> Reynolds, "Colonial Buildings of Rensselaerswyck", 425

<sup>166</sup> Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, pp. 66-8.

<sup>167</sup> Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, pp.

<sup>168</sup> Anon, Review: *A Geological and Agricultural Survey of Rensselaer County in the State of New York. Taken under the Direction of the Honorable Stephen Van Rensselaer* (Albany, 1822), 70pp. in *The North American Review* 14.35 (April, 1822), pp. 378-81.

<sup>169</sup> Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 78.

<sup>170</sup> Berkeley and Berkeley, *George William Featherstonhaugh*, 40.

to scrutiny. General Van Rensselaer's actions precipitated the civil unrest that was to follow after his death.

While the exterior appearance of the house that was at the center of the Patroon's power is known chiefly through the artist's image of the structure, rather more is known about the interior, thanks to the preservation of woodwork, furniture, and wallpaper from the great hall, the building's most spectacular space, in museum collections. This room was twenty-four feet wide with a twelve-foot ceiling and extended the full depth of the house, approximately forty-seven feet.<sup>171</sup> Although the experience is fundamentally different today, the current installation of woodwork and wallpaper from the Great Hall in the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art gives an idea how imposing the space must have been for a visitor, all the more so if that visitor were a tenant bearing a petition to the Patroon. Of particular interest is the English painted wallpaper, which depicts Italian landscapes of ruins and castles, subject matter that seems wholly appropriate to the Van Rensselaer's exercise of feudal power in this space. **(Fig. 91)**

### House Portraiture and Rural Unrest

When General Stephen van Rensselaer died in January of 1839, he left the family \$400,000 in debt, and required his two eldest sons, Stephen the Fourth and William, to undertake the difficult task of collecting precisely that amount in rents due.<sup>172</sup> A nearly equal division of lands and responsibilities was made between the two men, with Stephen getting the West Manor, which included the Manor House, and William having to move to the East Manor, which began its own considerable compass on the opposite bank of the Hudson.<sup>173</sup> A map that shows the size of the estate circa 1840 makes it clear that the holdings for each son were significant even after the division. **(Fig. 84)** While having to vacate his childhood home must have been wrenching for William, evidence suggests that he was deeply interested in architecture, so the move also presented a welcome opportunity to commission a new house. This was not a first for William; he had previously built a pair of Greek Revival townhouses in Albany, one for himself and one on speculation, in 1834. According to Paul Huey's account of those buildings, "William...evidently had high architectural standards and took an interest in the minutest details."<sup>174</sup> After his father's death, William began work on his most important piece of architectural patronage: Beverwyck Manor just across the river from the Manor House in what is now the town of Rensselaer.<sup>175</sup> **(Fig. 92)** The house later became St. Anthony-on-Hudson Seminary and still stands today, vacant since the closing of that institution in 1988, as a massive and stolid statement of William's own architectural values.<sup>176</sup>

---

<sup>171</sup> Huey, "Early Albany", 50.

<sup>172</sup> Stephen IV was the only child of the last Patroon's first marriage to Margaret Schuyler. In addition to William, he had four other sons and two daughters with his second wife, Cornelia Paterson. See Florence Van Rensselaer, *The Van Rensselaers in Holland and America* (New York: Published privately, 1956), pp. 54-8. While the cited pedigree appears reliable, the introductory essay of this source is plagued with plagiarism of the work of Martha Lamb and should be used only with caution.

<sup>173</sup> Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 85

<sup>174</sup> Huey, "Early Albany", 76

<sup>175</sup> Hanns Weber, "Beverwyck: Wm Paterson Van Rensselaer House, Rensselaer, New York" *Historic American Buildings Survey Report 5-A-10* (1936). Andrew Jackson Downing has lofty praise for this house and its extensive grounds in his *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening...* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1841), p. 51.

<sup>176</sup> Craig Brandon, "St. Anthony-on-Hudson to close as seminary" *Albany Times Union* (May 7, 1988), D1.

As William prepared for his move across the river to Beverwyck Manor, the first hints of resistance to the brothers' rent collection efforts began to be felt. Stephen and William were studies in opposite responses to the crisis, and crisis it was. The debt was so pressing, and the rents so slow in coming, that Stephen was forced to mortgage the Manor House for \$35,000 before the end of 1839.<sup>177</sup> This caused him to take an unyielding stance in relation to tenants on the West Manor, including extensive legal proceedings against tenant farmers who could ill afford representation, and refusal even to speak with delegations sent to meet with him at the Manor House.<sup>178</sup> His actions precipitated events that have come to be known as the Helderberg War, for the newly settled villages of the Helderberg Escarpment sixteen miles southwest of the Manor House, where the fiercest resistance to Van Rensselaer power began. Using civil disobedience, threats, and property destruction, accompanied by a sophisticated network of sentries and signals, the Helderbergers foiled Stephen's rent collectors at every turn. The standoff was only ended by the deployment of the state militia, as is documented by a vivid folk painting from the period.<sup>179</sup> (**Fig. 93**) William's situation in the East Manor was similarly precarious. With creditors at the door shortly after his father's death, he was forced to sell gold from an emergency reserve to pay bills because no new credit could be obtained.<sup>180</sup> In later months, he had greater success than did his brother by applying a form of soft power: avoiding legal proceedings against his tenants whenever possible and working through his diplomatically adept agent, Caspar Pruyn, to organize loyal tenants and subvert would-be organizers from "the infected district" of the West Manor through procedural means rather than by show of force.<sup>181</sup> Nevertheless, the stress would become so great that William abandoned Beverwyck in 1843 for a quieter life on Long Island, leaving estate affairs in the more than capable hands of Pruyn.<sup>182</sup>

In this tense environment, William managed to set aside \$500 to offer Cole a most welcome commission.<sup>183</sup> In a letter of July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1839, he writes:

If it is in your power just now and will not interfere with other engagements, I should be pleased to give some employment to your pencil. My Mother and Sisters intend in the autumn giving up the Manor House as their residence and they naturally would like to take with them some representation of the home scenes with which they have become so familiar and which are so endeared to them. I know of no one who can do justice to nature like yourself and if you can soon visit Albany, that is before the season changes, and take some half dozen sketches you will confer a favor.<sup>184</sup>

This letter makes explicit the nostalgic mission of the commission as a gift to his mother and sister that would document a chapter of the family's life that was coming to an end. Little did William know that he would soon be leaving not only the house but the region as well because of the pressure he was under. This letter emphasizes the use of the commission as a document of home life rather than of estate business, and his desire to capture the setting in its full summer

---

<sup>177</sup> Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 87

<sup>178</sup> Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 88-9.

<sup>179</sup> Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 92-4

<sup>180</sup> Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 87.

<sup>181</sup> Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 96.

<sup>182</sup> Writers Program of the Works Progress Administration, *New York: A Guide to the Empire State* (Cooperstown: New York State Historical Association, 1940), p. 563.

<sup>183</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*,

<sup>184</sup> NYSL 2.9

glory, instead of the too-poignant overtones of death and loss that come with the autumn. Cole replied from Catskill the very next day that “It will give me great pleasure to make the sketches of which you speak...I feel gratified that you should wish to employ me, for it seems a proof that what I formerly did for you has not ceased to give pleasure.”<sup>185</sup> While little other documentation of the commission survives to make clear whether the idea of making pendants was Cole’s idea or Van Rensselaer’s, two final preparatory sketches the artist made later that summer that closely resemble the compositions of the paintings are preserved in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts that give some idea of the development of the commission. **(Figs. 94, 95)**

Although the drawings suggest that Cole had completed much of the compositional labor at an early stage, he delayed somewhat in making the canvases, as correspondence from the sister mentioned in William’s initial letter indicates. Cornelia Paterson Van Rensselaer, Jr. writes on April 11, 1840:

As several months have elapsed since you made a sketch of the mountain scene at the Manor House, I presume the landscape is nearly, if not quite, completed. We expect to embark for Europe in the coming months. As I am very desirous of seeing your picture before my departure you will oblige me by sending it...<sup>186</sup>

While it is intriguing that she refers only to a single painting, the one now known as *The Gardens of the Van Rensselaer Manor House*, with its distant view of the foothills of the Green Mountains to the northeast, this letter is not sufficient to conclude that she did not know about the plan to represent the house itself, or that the house was added to the commission at a later date.<sup>187</sup> **(Fig. 80)** The similarity of the preparatory drawings to each other and to the finished canvases leaves little doubt that Cole envisioned pendants from an early stage in the project. It may be the case that Cornelia did not know of this but it is more likely that she simply wished to see the garden view first. This would be appropriate, because that was the work of the two Cole made as a particular tribute to her, as becomes apparent from closer study.

Cole obliged Cornelia Van Rensselaer and completed the view of the Manor House’s grounds first with an 1840 date, while *The Van Rensselaer Manor House* is dated 1841. **(Fig. 81)** The gardens in the first view are said to have been “among the most beautiful and extensive in all of America, with elegant lawns, flower beds, ponds, and majestic trees.”<sup>188</sup> One is tempted to imagine the cultivated hill in view as the Helderberg Escarpment, the site of the family’s greatest success in building new sources of income by encouraging settlement of its empty and unproductive lands and of its greatest frustrations at the hands of anti-rent protestors, but this does not appear to be the case. While that topographical feature is only eleven miles from the

---

<sup>185</sup> William Paterson Van Rensselaer Papers, McKinney Library, Albany Institute of History and Art. Quoted in Tamms K. Groft and Mary Alice MacKay, eds. *Albany Institute of History & Art: 200 Years of Collecting* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1998), p. 92.

<sup>186</sup> NYSL 3.7

<sup>187</sup> While one is tempted to read the cultivated hill in view as the Helderberg Escarpment, the site of the family’s successes in encouraging settlement and its recent frustrations, this is unlikely. From comparing the paths in the painting to those that are still visible in the 1852 map in Figure 80, it appears that Cole made his view from the northwestern corner of the house looking towards an opening at the northeastern boundary of the grounds.

<sup>188</sup> Franklin Kelly, Joint catalogue entry for *The Gardens of the Van Rensselaer Manor House* and *The Van Rensselaer Manor House* in Tamms K. Groft and Mary Alice MacKay, eds. *Albany Institute of History & Art: 200 Years of Collecting* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1998), p. 92.

Manor House's site, it is to the south and west. From comparing the paths in the painting to those that are still visible on an 1852 map, it appears that Cole made his view from the northwestern corner of the house looking towards an opening at the northeastern boundary of the grounds. **(Fig. 86)** It is a quiet, late summer scene with lengthening shadows and a heavy air of nostalgia, not unexpected considering the circumstances. This is reinforced by an abandoned basket of cut flowers that have been left in the middle of one of the paths near the point where it meets another to form a cross, which may be more than happenstance. **(Fig. 96)** From what is known of the commission's intended audience, William P. Van Rensselaer's mother and sister, it is safe to conclude that the flowers were intended as a gesture towards a favorite pastime of Cornelia Jr.<sup>189</sup> *The Van Rensselaer Manor House* is similarly quiet and heavy with dreamy nostalgia. No figure marks the scene but, in a gesture to the pursuits of an older woman, Cornelia's mother, who would die three years after the picture was made, a chair and discarded blanket sit in the grass with a knitting basket visible under the chair. **(Fig. 96)**

It is striking that Cole's images of the Van Rensselaer Manor House and its grounds present the structure as a country house, with no other habitation or human presence visible. This required careful selection of perspectives by 1839, with the Erie Canal passing close by the house's eastern wall, a bustling lumber district growing on the opposite bank, and an expanding Albany encroaching from the south and west. **(Fig. 85)** The combined effect of his quiet, unpeopled views, stripped of the industry and unrest that surrounded them in reality, is to present to the viewer a vision of aristocratic privilege and leisure before the intrusion of contemporary events.

### **Cole and the Architectural Pendant**

In a previously quoted letter to William Paterson Van Rensselaer accepting the house portrait commission, Cole noted that this request seemed "a proof that what I formerly did for you has not ceased to give pleasure."<sup>190</sup> The paintings the artist had in mind were another pair he had made for the same patron in 1837: *The Departure* and *The Return*. **(Figs. 82, 83)** Although the two commissions seem diametrically opposed – the first pair fanciful medieval allegories and the second "purely topographical paintings" – there are important links between them.<sup>191</sup> By examining the values at work in *Departure* and *Return* in conjunction with another pair they directly and explicitly inspired, *The Past* and *The Present*, it becomes clear that Cole had established a reputation as a purveyor of feudal nostalgia to the New York aristocracy. **(Figs. 30, 31)** Just as these allegorical canvases made use of architectural imagery to lament the passing of an age of castles and the powerful families who ruled from them, so did the Van Rensselaer house portraits imagine the manor house as a nostalgic site of American feudalism.

William P. Van Rensselaer made his first contact with Cole in a letter of December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1836, inspired by "a small painting by you representing an evening scene" that he had seen in the collection of a Mr. Wilkins in New York.<sup>192</sup> From Cole's "List of Pictures Painted by me", this appears to be one he titled *View on the Arno—Sunset*, an unlocated earlier version of the

---

<sup>189</sup> Franklin Kelly suggested this possibility in a general way in his joint catalogue entry for *The Gardens of the Van Rensselaer Manor House* and *The Van Rensselaer Manor House* in Groft and MacKay, *Albany Institute of History & Art*, 92.

<sup>190</sup> See note 185.

<sup>191</sup> Kelly, *200 Years of Collecting*, 92.

<sup>192</sup> NYSL 2.6

composition that is now in the Worcester Art Museum.<sup>193</sup> Van Rensselaer requested “two pictures somewhat larger representing morning and evening.” and made reference to another source of his interest in Cole’s work in a concluding line: “With great admiration of the high genius exemplified in the ‘Course of Empire’ . . .”<sup>194</sup> These indications of Van Rensselaer’s taste may partially explain why Cole gravitated to a golden, Mediterranean light and architectural subject matter. Cole’s letter accepting the commission has been lost, but Van Rensselaer wrote again on June 26<sup>th</sup> of 1837 to request an update on the progress of the paintings.<sup>195</sup> In a reply of July 8<sup>th</sup>, after his return from a sketching trip in the Adirondacks accompanied by Maria Cole, Asher B. Durand, and the latter’s wife, Mary, Cole asked his patron to excuse the delay in writing because of the extensive study the project had inspired.<sup>196</sup> He assured Van Rensselaer “your pictures are on the easel” and gave a broad outline of the subject: “Sunrise and Sunset will be the seasons of the pictures. I shall endeavor to link them in one subject through means of story, sentiment, and location.”<sup>197</sup> While he avoided specifics at this stage, the full narrative contained in the twin canvases had taken shape by October 15<sup>th</sup> of the same year, at which time Cole offered Van Rensselaer a fuller account of the subjects he could expect to see. Cole described “a fiction of my own . . . supposed to have date in the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>198</sup> Architecture is prominent in his account of the canvases. In *The Departure*, he tells Van Rensselaer, “a dark and lofty castle stands on an eminence” above “a Gothic bridge, conducting to the gate of the castle.” Knights in armor cross this bridge, led by “the Lord of the Castle.”<sup>199</sup> Of *The Return*, Cole says “the spectator has his back to the castle. The sun is low: its yellow beams gild the pinnacles of an abbey, standing in a shadowy wood.”<sup>200</sup> The artist acknowledged that the second canvas’s depiction of the lord “borne on a litter, dead or dying” could be perceived as “a melancholy subject” but he hoped that Van Rensselaer would see the pleasure in contemplating this painted drama.<sup>201</sup> From Cole’s own account of the project, it is evident that the buildings within these large canvases, fully five feet wide, were crucial to conveying the twin moods of glorious possibility and melancholy loss.

In response to Cole’s explanation of the concept, Van Rensselaer expressed cautious optimism:

...my first impression on reading your letter was that I did not like the 13<sup>th</sup> century & the knights; upon reflection I am much pleased with the general idea of the piece and I know I shall not be disappointed. The agreeable impression made by a picture depends upon the artist entirely. I remember an old painting very much admired & prized representing a man at work or a cow on another’s and so I have read a fine

---

<sup>193</sup> NYSL 6.2; accession number 1991.179. The Worcester Art Museum’s research suggests that Cole made four images of the view from the Florence house of Bostonian Horace Gray. Wilkins’s painting would have been a similar composition but perhaps more modest of execution than the spectacular Worcester painting. <http://www.worcesterart.org/collection/American/1991.179.html> [Access date 12 April 2015]

<sup>194</sup> NYSL 2.6 The painting by Cole that belonged to General Stephen Van Rensselaer III would have also contributed to this first overture to Cole. See note 49.

<sup>195</sup> NYSL 2.7

<sup>196</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 194.

<sup>197</sup> NYSL 1.3

<sup>198</sup> Noble, *Life and Works*, 181.

<sup>199</sup> Noble, *Life and Works*, 182.

<sup>200</sup> Noble, *Life and Works*, 182.

<sup>201</sup> Noble, *Life and Works*, 182.

poem abounding in beautiful passages on a buckwheat cake. I intended to make you a visit at Catskill [sic] but I am prevented by my father's illness...<sup>202</sup>

While Cole must have appreciated this vote of confidence in his ability to make an admirable picture of even an unpromising subject, the skepticism that is evident in the first sentence gave cause for concern. This letter is also useful as an indication of the melancholy of the patron's own life in the period, with the Last Patroon's death looming, which made the somber subject matter all the more appropriate. While there is no record of a visit by Van Rensselaer to Cedar Grove, the evidence that Cole discussed Catskill with his patron and extended an invitation for a visit is intriguing as an additional point of contact between their visions of country life in the period when Cole was dreaming of a villa of his own and Van Rensselaer was beginning to think about his own move from the Manor House to Beverwyck as his father's health declined.

Any apprehensions Cole might have harbored about Van Rensselaer's approval were assuaged by a subsequent message of November 1<sup>st</sup>, in which the latter clarified that "You need entertain no fears that I shall be disappointed with your creations for I have such confidence in your taste & judgment that I am determined to be pleased with what they have ordered."<sup>203</sup> With freedom to complete the project as conceived and assurances that the promised \$2,000 for the pair was his, Cole delivered the finished paintings by early December of 1837 to hang in Van Rensselaer's parlor in New York.<sup>204</sup> The canvases made an impressive pair. In that intimate setting, their size, at roughly 40 by 63 inches, would have been even more imposing than in a spacious museum gallery. Architecture is literally central to both, with the castle and bridge Cole described the focal point of the first image and the illuminated church beckoning the viewer's eye in the second. Wendy Ikemoto has written of how the 180 degree rotation of the view from *The Departure* to *The Return* can be understood as a critique of the passive entertainment to be taken in contemporary moving panoramas. In contrast, Cole's pendants shift "the burden of making the transition from one image to another onto the audience."<sup>205</sup> This transition between the two images models a moral shift in the narrative, from the belligerence of the first, represented by the castle, to the chastened tone of the second, for which the church and the promise of eternal life it offered serves as a beacon.<sup>206</sup> However, the obvious resonance of the subject matter with Cole's own devout Christian faith does not preclude identification with the aristocratic social order his paintings glorified.<sup>207</sup> Cole's brief description of *The Departure* and *The Return* as "two pictures illustrative of feudal times" is especially suggestive when one considers what is known of the Van Rensselaer family's own feudal power.<sup>208</sup> While Catskill

---

<sup>202</sup> NYSL 2.7. Van Rensselaer is referring to Henry Pickering's mock heroic *The Buckwheat Cake: A Poem* (Boston: Carter, Hendee & Babcock, 1831). It has been claimed that the poem was, in fact, the work of William Cullen Bryant but this claim is based on wishful thinking rather than any evidence. Gilbert H. Muller, *William Cullen Bryant: Author of America* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), pp. 98-9.

<sup>203</sup> NYSL 2.7

<sup>204</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 198.

<sup>205</sup> Wendy Ikemoto, "A 'higher style' of looking: Thomas Cole and popular media" *The Burlington Magazine* CLVI (June, 2014), p. 386.

<sup>206</sup> Ikemoto, "Thomas Cole and popular media", 389.

<sup>207</sup> There is abundant evidence of the depth of Cole's religious faith, especially in the final decade of his life. In addition to his work to design a parish church for his congregation in Catskill, his numerous depictions of not just moralizing but explicitly biblical subjects speaks to this. See for example *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* in the MFA Boston, *Landscape Composition, St. John in the Wilderness* in the Wadsworth Atheneum, and the largely forgotten *The Dead Abel* in the Albany Institute of History and Art, among countless others.

<sup>208</sup> From Cole's "List of Pictures Painted by me", NYSL 6.2



was far enough away from their lands that the nature of their relationship with tenants was remote for Cole, and the worst of the Anti-Rent Wars were still five years in the future, the fact that these feudal fantasies were made for a patron who represented American feudalism is unavoidable.

When the pictures were displayed at Van Rensselaer's house in New York, he shared them with certain friends and journalists.<sup>209</sup> The anonymous critic of the *New-York Mirror* was one of those granted access to *The Departure* and *The Return* in this private setting. He concluded that Cole had "as far as the subjects would admit, *outdone himself*, and produced two more perfect works of art."<sup>210</sup> Another visitor was Peter Gerard Stuyvesant, a fellow member of the colonial Dutch aristocracy.<sup>211</sup> In a letter of December 15, 1837, he requested a picture or pictures of his own of a subject of Cole's choice and mentioned that "Mrs. S & myself were much pleased with the paintings of Mr V Rensselaer & I have much pleasure in adding that they are universally admired."<sup>212</sup> Cole evidently talked Stuyvesant into the idea of pendants, and a subsequent letter from Stuyvesant made more explicit the desired link to Van Rensselaer's paintings, asking for the images to be precisely the same size but leaving the subject to Cole's judgment.<sup>213</sup> Cole replied with gratitude for the expansion of the commission from one picture to two and said of pendants in general, "They give more scope for poetical invention, and are, perhaps, more capable of sentiment than subjects requiring only a single canvass."<sup>214</sup> However, he cautioned Stuyvesant about the greater labor required and that a substantial waiting period was likely.

The pendants Cole produced for Stuyvesant, after a delay of a year due to his work on the Ohio Statehouse and other projects, were *The Past* and *The Present*, another medieval fantasy centered upon architecture. (**Figs. 30, 31**) While their precise completion date is unknown, it is clear that they were included in a public exhibition in New York in December of 1838.<sup>215</sup> The two images, of roughly the same size as *The Departure* and *The Return*, depict, first, a well-populated tournament taking place in front of a castle, from the solitary tower of which flies a pennant in the summer breeze and, second, the aftermath of the scene centuries later, with all fallen to ruin and light streaming through vaulted windows that recall that of *The Return*. Parry focused on identifying the source imagery of these canvases, including the work of Peter Paul

---

<sup>209</sup> Wendy Ikemoto assumes that the pictures had to have been displayed at the Manor House and bases her reading of them on the specific spaces in which they might have hung in the Great Hall on either side of a doorway. In her dissertation, she writes "I can find no evidence to suggest that the paintings hung elsewhere" and, by the final article form of her project, their location in the Manor House has become a fact that does not require citation. While it is a distinct possibility that the paintings traveled to the Manor House, all that is known for certain is that they were displayed in William P. Van Rensselaer's lodgings in Manhattan from the letter of Peter G. Stuyvesant and the account of the *Mirror* critic who saw them there, as cited in this paragraph. Wendy Ikemoto, "Taking a Contemplative Look: Visual Devotion in Thomas Cole's *Departure* and *Return*" in "The Space Between: Paired Paintings in Antebellum America" (Harvard University Ph.D. dissertation, 2009), n. 38 on p. 99. Ikemoto writes "The paintings were commissioned...to hang in the Van Rensselaer family's manor house in Albany" without citation in Ikemoto, "A 'higher style' of looking", 390.

<sup>210</sup> Anon, *New-York Mirror* (December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1837), p. 203. Quoted in Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, p. 199.

<sup>211</sup> He was the great-great-grandson of Peter Stuyvesant, the last Director-General of New Netherland and the major antagonist of Kiliaen Van Rensselaer in those early days. Time heals all wounds. Edwin G. Burrows, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 378.

<sup>212</sup> NYSL 2.7

<sup>213</sup> 1 February 1838, NYSL. 2.8

<sup>214</sup> Noble, *Life and Works*, 187.

<sup>215</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 215.

Rubens, John Martin, J.M.W. Turner, and John Constable.<sup>216</sup> He does not, however, discuss the air of feudal nostalgia that had obvious personal resonance for a member of the colonial Dutch elite. In the contrast they offer between past glories and present romantic decrepitude, this commission is the product of the conservative worldview that Cole and his patrons shared.

The strong ties that bind *The Departure* and *The Return to The Past* and *The Present* and to ideas of feudalism has been recognized in the past. Alan Wallach, as usual, is the most thoughtful of Cole commentators and has written of them as allegories “of aristocracy in decline, idealizing aristocratic strength and authority while at the same time mourning their passing. They thus provided their audience with ways of coming to terms with feelings of loss and defeat.”<sup>217</sup> This is quite perceptive, but what has not been recognized in either account is how closely these aristocratic fantasies in architecture related to Cole’s work in house portraiture. These commissions make explicit the desires and regrets that were implicit a few years later when it came time to paint his views of the Van Rensselaer Manor House. Although no knights joust in that garden north of Albany nor do heraldic pennants flap in the breeze, the Van Rensselaer house portraits are equally images of feudal nostalgia.

\* \* \*

Thomas Cole’s house portraits for George William Featherstonhaugh, Daniel Wadsworth, and William Paterson Van Rensselaer participated in his overarching concern with the uses of country life in a republic. Despite the many differences between the three structures, the artist’s representations of the houses of these patrons worked to find ways to make satisfying landscape paintings of a topographical endeavor, and to justify the place of private wealth and country life on so grand a scale in a republic. The evidence of his own deep interest and real ability in the practice of architecture colors our understanding of these images. Cole understood how buildings work and the meanings they can convey as a participant in national discourses about domesticity in the period.

In addition to the ideological links between the three distinctly different commissions, another similarity is that all three buildings have been destroyed since Cole’s day so the paintings stand as valuable evidence of their original appearance and of the meanings with which not only painter but patron imbued them. The circumstances of Featherston Park’s destruction have been discussed already. Featherstonhaugh State Forest commemorates the original owner, but no trace of the original building remains. Monte Video was destroyed far more recently by twentieth-century owners, who do not grant access to the site.<sup>218</sup> However, Wadsworth’s tower inspired the construction of Heublein Tower on a neighboring property in what is now Talcott Mountain State Park.<sup>219</sup> As the Van Rensselaer Manor House became a less pleasant place to live, with the encroachment of railroads and the expanding Albany lumber district, the structure was first abandoned circa 1870 and then disassembled for reconstruction as the Sigma Phi

---

<sup>216</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 211-12.

<sup>217</sup> Wallach, “Landscape and the Course of American Empire”, 98. Andrew Shanken has suggested in conversation that A.W.N. Pugin’s *Contrasts*, published two years before Cole made *Past* and *Present*, would have been an obvious precedent for this approach as well.

<sup>218</sup> Conversation with John Teahan of the Wadsworth Atheneum, 4 June 2014.

<sup>219</sup> “Talcott Mountain State Park, Simsbury,” webpage of the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection: <http://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2716&q=325272> [access date: 13 April 2015]

fraternity house at Williams College in 1890.<sup>220</sup> Eventually even that much different structure was removed after the abolition of fraternities at that institution. Cole's paintings of the three houses document a mode of country life that was, even in the antebellum era, already passing out of view, to the regret of patrons and painter alike.

---

<sup>220</sup> Matthew Jeffers, "Van Rensselaer House (1895-1973)" Williams College Archives and Special Collections webpage, <http://archives.williams.edu/williamshistory/sawyerlibrary/rensselaerindex.php> [access date: 13 April 2015]

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Cedar Grove and the Villa Ideal

Throughout the years when Cole was studying public architecture, depicting the houses of his patrons, and traveling amidst the villas and country houses of Europe, he was also developing plans for a country house of his own. In this effort to apply his architectural skills to a structure that would express his taste and standing, the artist was a conscious participant in a tradition of artist's houses with both American and European precedents, in addition to a broader tradition of rural architecture that has been studied in greater detail elsewhere. While few of his designs for expressly Italianate new construction at Cedar Grove were executed, the plans and elevations he produced are eloquent documents of his concept of the country house ideal in the final decade of his life, of his own ability as an architect on the domestic scale, and of his oft-thwarted ambition to become the social equal of his patrons on the basis of his talent. This chapter will explore the history of Cedar Grove and Cole's projects there and will make briefer reference to the afterlife of the estate as a historic attraction and a site of inquiry into the artist's architectural thought in recent years. Other chapters have emphasized Cole's connections with English architectural and painting traditions. This section will also provide an opportunity to explore another aspect of his architectural thought, a strong thread of Italophilia that is prevalent across his later work of which his surviving drawings for Cedar Grove are important evidence.

While many impulses gave rise to Cole's desire for a sophisticated country house, including expressing his architectural achievement to the world, social ambition, and an understandable desire to move his family out of rooms rented from his wife's family, not least among these drives was the model of certain European artists who, in previous centuries, had made intellectually and artistically rich houses key participants in the personas they presented to the public. Cole is known to have been acquainted with the painter Giorgio Vasari's *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* from references in the archival record to the vivid biographies that made up that influential book.<sup>1</sup> Because of this familiarity, it is very likely that Cole would have been aware of Vasari's own work as a painter-architect, especially at his house in Arezzo, an impressive example of an artist's house as testament to its creator's talent and ideals.<sup>2</sup> Although no definitive proof that Cole visited this house survives, it is a distinct possibility because it would not have been far off the route he took between Rome and Florence. Whether he made the detour or not, the reputation of the elaborate painted ornament that caused the interior spaces to resemble a chapel more than a private house must have reached Cole.<sup>3</sup> While his plans for Cedar Grove focused on exterior design rather than interior decoration, Vasari's solution to the question of what an artist's house should look like marks one extreme of the options available to Cole

Another key factor in Cole's ambition to construct a stylish country house of his own would have been the example of Peter Paul Rubens, a prototypical painter-architect for the generations that followed Vasari.<sup>4</sup> Chapter Two argued that Rubens' *Landscape with a View of*

---

<sup>1</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> On the so called Casa Vasari, the most artistically significant of Vasari's houses, see Serena Nocentini, "Nuovi studi sulla casa di Giorgio Vasari ad Arezzo" *Artibus et Historiae* 32.64 (2011), pp. 81-103.

<sup>3</sup> For an overarching study of the decorative program of Casa Vasari, including reproductions of many of the paintings therein, see Liana Cheney, *The Homes of Giorgio Vasari*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Scholars have only just begun to give adequate attention to this aspect of Rubens's work. Among other useful essays in the volume, see in particular Carolien De Staelen, "Rubens: The Ingenious Master as an Architect?" in Piet

*Het Steen* was an important model of the possibilities of house portraiture for Cole. (Fig. 35) While he would have had access to the image in print sources, there is every likelihood that the artist saw the original painting on one of his visits to Great Britain because of his friendship with John Constable and identification with the values of that artist's most important patron, Sir George Beaumont, who owned the picture at the time.<sup>5</sup> In addition to its value for Cole as an example of the ways a house portrait could be satisfactory as a landscape painting and not just as a topographic exercise by partially occluding the house that is its subject and shunting it off to the periphery of the view, this image is also important as a document of another artist's house. Rubens's Castle of Steen, the acquisition of which conveyed to the artist the title "Lord of Steen," marks the supreme example of an artist's social rise on the basis of talent and of the ways the practice of country life could be responsible for such an ascent. This model must have been an ideal toward which Cole aspired, because of his own well-documented identification with the American aristocracy.<sup>6</sup>

However, *Het Steen* was not the only house Rubens owned, nor the one upon which he exercised the most extensive transformation. While his concept of *Het Steen* as a place for the pursuit of Neostoic leisure and the enjoyment of landscape was expressed most clearly in oil on panel, Rubens's house in the heart of Antwerp saw an extensive building program at the artist's direction, including an intellectually rich series of exterior frescoes and an elaborately ornamented sculptural portico leading into a compact formal garden.<sup>7</sup> This exterior decorative program was available to Cole in prints and served as an example of another model of artist's house: one that projected the artist's intellectual attainments to the visitor and potential patron by its strategic deployment of outdoor spaces as much as indoor ones.<sup>8</sup> Visitor accounts from Rubens's lifetime describe the impact this decoration made on them and the aura of intellectual sophistication the artist succeeded in conveying with his architectural decisions, among other means.<sup>9</sup> Here was an example of an artist's house that emphasized the use of the exterior design to convey certain clear messages about the work being done within the walls, and a demonstration of the spectacular success that could be had in raising an artist's profile by means of strategic deployment of architecture.

An important link between the efforts in domestic architecture of Vasari, Rubens, and Cole is that all three artists divided their energies between city and country houses. Vasari had not only the house in the small town of Arezzo but another more modest "Casa Vasari" in

---

Lombaerde, ed. *The Notion of the Painter-Architect in Italy and the Southern Low Countries* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 237-264.

<sup>5</sup> On Sir George Beaumont and his collections, see David Brown and Felicity Owen, *Collector of Genius: A Life of Sir George Beaumont* (New Haven, CT, 1988). Ellwood Parry was the first to publish intriguing evidence of the friendship of Cole and Constable, and of Cole's identification with the Beaumont circle. See Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 99, 103-4.

<sup>6</sup> See Alan Wallach, "Thomas Cole and the Aristocracy", *Arts Magazine* 56.3 (Nov., 1981), pp. 94-106

<sup>7</sup> I am currently at work on an article on Neostoic elements of this image with the working title "Rubens and the Neostoic Landscape".

<sup>8</sup> See Ulrich Heinen, "Rubens' Garten und die Gesundheit des Künstlers" *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 65 (2004), pp. 71-82.

<sup>9</sup> The Danish physician Otto Sperling's account of his 1621 visit to the Antwerp house includes a vivid anecdote of the intellectual aura Rubens constructed there. He describes the artist at work in his ornamented studio building, painting while simultaneously dictating a letter, being read to from Tacitus, and fielding questions from the visitors: M. Rooses and C. Ruelens, *Correspondance de Rubens et documents épistolaires concernant sa vie et ses œuvres* II (Antwerp, 1887-1909), p. 156.

Florence proper.<sup>10</sup> This is not strictly a contrast between country and city but certainly the two environments would have been sharply different then, as they are today. Rubens built a great deal at his house in Antwerp but seems to have left Het Steen largely as he found it and to have expressed his concept of the structure in paint, rather than in brick and mortar. Similarly, Cole spent much of the year at his sister Ann's house at 1 Laight Street in New York and listed this as his address in professional directories, but it was Cedar Grove most of all that fired his creativity and served as the chief laboratory for his thinking about domestic architecture for the final decade of his life.<sup>11</sup> It was not due to lack of opportunity alone that Cole seems to have been little interested in the forms of urban domesticity. He had occasion to think about the design of town houses by building one in Manhattan as an ultimately frustrating act of speculation with his nephew, William Henry Bayless, but there are no surviving drawings for that structure, nor any evidence that this project received anything like the sustained attention that Cedar Grove did.<sup>12</sup> It is understandable why the projects for Cedar Grove proved a readier stimulus to his creativity; the generous surroundings allowed the painter to think of the house pictorially, both as an object in the landscape and as a way of framing the views beyond its walls.

Because of Cole's own well-documented literary ambitions, it was not only European painters but writers, too, whose houses inspired his work at Cedar Grove.<sup>13</sup> Prominent among these was Sir Walter Scott's "Abbotsford." Cole mentions Scott in his letters on numerous occasions. For example, in a letter to Maria of December 16, 1846, he writes "I wish to know how many volumes of Scott's novels we have; I wish to get the remainder."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the artist writes in a journal entry of June 24, 1835:

I have been reading Irving's 'Abbotsford.' It gave me great pleasure. What a healthful genius was Scott. No mawkishness, no morbid sensitiveness, no feverish fancies. But a sound heart, a grasping, a creative, an all powerful mind & an herculean body.<sup>15</sup>

Cole is referring to Washington Irving's *Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey* of 1835, an account of visits made to the country houses of Scott and Lord Byron in 1817 and 1824 respectively.<sup>16</sup> This passage shows the popular image of Scott and the role that Abbotsford played in that image. As Cole must have known from widely distributed prints that often appeared in early-nineteenth-century editions of Scott's works, some of them after drawings by J.M.W. Turner, the author's monumental Gothic fantasy palace in the Scottish Borders, completed in 1824, contributed to the

---

<sup>10</sup> See Cheney, *The Homes of Giorgio Vasari*, 25-7.

<sup>11</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, p. 187.

<sup>12</sup> This intriguing and unstudied episode rears its head throughout Cole's correspondence in the 1840s, for example in a letter of January 21, 1844 to Maria at Catskill from New York, in which Cole writes "Henry [Bayless] is going on with the House. It draws a great deal of money from me & I feel anxious to be able to carry it through." (NYSL 4.3) Ross Barrett tells me he is at work on a project on artists and speculation in which he expects this story to figure.

<sup>13</sup> Marshall Tynn has done an important service by collecting Cole's efforts in poetry and prose in two edited volumes. See *Thomas Cole's Poetry* (York, PA: Liberty Cap Books, 1972) and *Thomas Cole: The Collected Essays and Prose Sketches* (St. Paul, MN: John Colet Press, 1980).

<sup>14</sup> NYSL 4.4

<sup>15</sup> NYSL 4a.1

<sup>16</sup> Washington Irving, *Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey* (London: John Murray, 1835).

author's persona as a purveyor of Highland romanticism.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, William H. Pierson, Jr. has claimed that "Scott's impact was as great in arousing in this country a taste for the Gothic house as the writings of the *Ecclesiologist* were to be in the creation of the American Gothic Revival church."<sup>18</sup> While the houses of Vasari and Rubens at Arezzo and Antwerp made a strong impression on visitors and found some wider reputation in written descriptions and engravings, Abbotsford represented perhaps the supreme example of the use of a house as a key aspect of a creative figure's personal "brand" that justified the writer's claim to a mythic Scottish past and proclaimed the social standing his talent had won him, including the title of Baronet. Perhaps the villa for Cedar Grove that survives only on paper should be understood as a gesture toward this European precedent as well: a vision of a house that stakes a claim to Catskill scenery while simultaneously celebrating the taste and refinement Cole's Italian travels had won him.

While the examples of Vasari, Rubens, and Scott showed the potential value of the artist's house as a means of professional and social advancement, there were also a small number of pertinent examples on this side of the Atlantic that shaped Cole's thinking about the possibilities for Cedar Grove. This chapter will begin by studying the influential houses of two painters and two writers whom we know to have been important to Cole for the ways they may have contributed to his designs for his own country house. Next, the history of Cedar Grove itself will be discussed in the context of the village of Catskill, New York in Cole's day. After establishing these circumstances, the small but significant corpus of surviving plans and elevations for the villa and "New Studio" at Cedar Grove will be discussed in the context of Cole's contact with the ideal of the Italian villa on his travels, as his own description of the house as "a sort of Italian looking thing" urges one to do.

### **I. Artists' Houses in America before Cole**

While Cedar Grove has since come to enjoy a national reputation as an early example of a model of country life for an American artist that would produce many followers and imitators, it was not the first such structure in this country to be identified with the practice of the creative life in rural surroundings. In addition to the European precedents, there were a few significant country houses of artists and writers in America that preceded Cole's designs for Cedar Grove and would have contributed to his thinking.<sup>19</sup> In roughly their chronological order, Charles Willson Peale's "Belfield," William Birch's "Springland," James Fenimore Cooper's "Otsego Hall," and Washington Irving's "Sunnyside" each offered distinctly different models of a house that put artistic ideals into practice and provided a setting for creative pursuits. In the process, they modeled the possibilities toward which Cole aspired for his new house at Cedar Grove.

---

<sup>17</sup> For example, Turner was the source for a steel engraving by H. Le Keux that appeared in the 1833 edition of Scott's *Poetical Works*, Vol 12. See Gerald Finley, *Landscapes of Memory: Turner as Illustrator to Scott* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 10. For a broader account of the distribution and reception of the image of Abbotsford, see Iain G. Brown, ed. *Abbotsford and Sir Walter Scott: The Image and the Influence* (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> William H. Pierson, Jr. *American Buildings and Their Architects, Volume 2: Technology and the Picturesque, the Corporate and Early Gothic Styles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 291. On the Cambridge Camden Society and the effect of their journal, *The Ecclesiologist*, on church architecture in America, see Arthur Channing Downs, Jr. "America's First 'Medieval' Churches" *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 45.2 (June, 1976), pp. 166-176.

<sup>19</sup> Another important artist's house, albeit one that presents rather different issues because of its urban setting, is John Singleton Copley's house on Boston Common. See Margaretta Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution: Painters, Artisans, and Patrons in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

William Russell Birch has been discussed previously for the evidence his 1808 *The Country Seats of the United States of North America* offered of the tropes of American house portraiture before Cole. That collection of engraved views included two views from the artist's own "country seat" of Springland near Philadelphia, a country house that anticipated Cole's Cedar Grove both in its ambition and in the financial difficulties that caused few of his plans to be executed. (Figs. 98, 99) As an explicitly instrumental endeavor that was, according to Emily Cooperman, "intended to further his career by demonstrating his abilities as a landscape artist (in the contemporary sense of both place- and image-maker)," Birch's Springland envisioned the artist's house not only as a statement of aesthetic principles but as an overtly commercial endeavor.<sup>20</sup> Despite its location on the western bank of Neshaminy Creek, seventeen miles to the northeast of Philadelphia, rather than to the northwest on the more fashionable Schuylkill River, which was already established as the first American villa district by Birch's time, it did enjoy wider influence in the pages of his own book.<sup>21</sup> Because of Cole's training at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts at the beginning of his career, which coincided with the end of Birch's, it is very likely that Cole would have been aware of the house and the example it offered.<sup>22</sup>

The story of Birch's Springland mirrors and anticipates some of the complexities of ownership that dictated the nature of Cole's work at Cedar Grove. With the proceeds of some surveying work and high hopes for his first American engraving project, *The City of Philadelphia* of 1800, Birch purchased the four-acre Springland property in 1798.<sup>23</sup> He hastily erected "a Green Lodge for shelter" on the site that was intended to be only temporary accommodation "til I could form a plan for building and forward the work of my Philadelphia views"; a former toll house on the Neshaminy's bank served him as a studio while he commenced a more ambitious building program.<sup>24</sup> However, after overextending his resources in making numerous improvements to the site, creditors repossessed it in 1805. At this point, the new purchaser demolished the buildings that were under construction but Birch's family seems to have continued to reside in the Green Lodge as tenants.<sup>25</sup> Birch re-purchased Springland for the 1805 selling price when his circumstances were more secure in 1813 and sold it for the final time in 1818, at three times his cost, in order to move into Philadelphia for his final years.<sup>26</sup> This means that in 1808, when he his views of "the spot chosen by the artist for the exercise of his

---

<sup>20</sup> Emily T. Cooperman, "Belfield, Springland, and Early American Picturesque: The Artist's Garden in the American Early Republic" *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes* 26.2 (April-June, 2006), p. 118.

<sup>21</sup> William Russell Birch, *The Country Seats of the United States of North America*, ed. Emily T. Cooperman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 80; W. Barksdale Maynard, *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 132-4. Although the site he chose was remote from the more fashionable Schuylkill River villa district, he was not alone in building a country place near the meeting of the Neshaminy and the Delaware. Another was Andreas Van Braam's "China Retreat," included as plate 19 in the *Country Seats*, an intriguing document of early American Orientalism that is deserving of further study. Birch explicitly states that proximity to that villa contributed to his choice of the site: Emily T. Cooperman with Lea Carson Sherk, *William Birch: Picturing the American Scene* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 202. Another nearby and even more famous country seat not mentioned by Birch was Nicholas Biddle's "Andalusia". See Nicholas B. Wainwright, "Andalusia: Countryseat of the Craig Family and of Nicholas Biddle and His Descendants" *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 101.1 (Jan., 1977), pp. 3-69.

<sup>22</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Cooperman and Sherk, *Picturing the American Scene*, 75.

<sup>24</sup> Cooperman and Sherk, *Picturing the American Scene*, 215, 204

<sup>25</sup> Martin Snyder, "William Birch: His *Country Seats of the United States*" *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 81 (July, 1957), p. 234.

<sup>26</sup> Snyder, "William Birch," 234.



taste in retirement,” as his explanatory text described it, it was not actually his property.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the landscape reflected his taste and choices.

The buildings that Birch hoped to construct at Springland survive in a site plan and watercolors in a private collection, in addition to his extensive writings about the place. (**Figs. 100-102**) The images show a proposed fashionable Gothic house that was to grow alongside the extant Green Lodge depicted at left and a separate building that, rather blasphemously, was to house both a chapel and a smokehouse. (It is worth noting that these Gothic plans precede by a decade Monte Video and its claims to be “the earliest Gothic revival house in New England.”)<sup>28</sup> A “Kitching Garden” [sic], “Farm-yard,” “Potato Garden,” and “Sheep Pen” are indicated in the hope that, like many of the houses he depicted in the *Country Seats*, the grounds would be able to produce a modest income in support of the leisure to be enjoyed there.<sup>29</sup> Extensive waterworks are depicted, including a winding canal, two fish ponds, and a feature he called “Neptune’s Garden.” At least one of these water features does seem to have been executed, as is evident from his plate of “the Elysian Bower” in the *Country Seats*. (**Fig. 99**) The exercise of taste was not limited to the grounds, however. Inside the humble Green Lodge there was what he called “a small, but very fine collection of paintings by some of the first masters,” works he claimed constituted “one of the finest collections of Flemish pictures in the country.”<sup>30</sup> This gallery, the contents of which are known from archival records, sought to develop taste, and patronage, for painting just as the grounds would develop a market for landscape architecture.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to his images of the site, Birch wrote a poem, modeled on Richard Payne Knight’s *The Landscape*, on the subject of Springland.<sup>32</sup> This intriguing text, which is deserving of further attention than it is possible to offer in this context, performs cultivated landscape taste by careful attention to the visual pleasures to be taken from a certain plot of earth, with language that ranges from the Edenic to the scientific. Of his first encounter with the site, Birch writes:

A few steps within a spacious covert, awak’d my Soul;  
My astonished Eyes beheld a second Paradise in View;  
High groups of massy Chesnut [sic] grew;  
Here and there, a lawn of Grass, uninterrupted grew;  
Amidst a General Shade.<sup>33</sup>

He continues from initial awe at finding a landscape garden made by God rather than man to a delineation of its dimensions and topography in verse.<sup>34</sup> Birch evokes the burbling spring that

---

<sup>27</sup> Birch, *Country Seats*, 80.

<sup>28</sup> Richard H. Saunders and Helen Raye, *Daniel Wadsworth: Patron of the Arts* (Hartford: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1981), 12. An even earlier American Gothic country house that may have inspired Springland is included in the *Country Seats*: Benjamin Henry Latrobe’s *Sedgeley* on the Schuylkill for William Cramond. Birch, *Country Seats*, 70-1.

<sup>29</sup> Birch, *Country Seats*, 32.

<sup>30</sup> Birch, *Country Seats*, 80; Snyder, “William Birch”, p. 233.

<sup>31</sup> See Appendix E, “List of Paintings Exhibited by William Birch at Green Lodge” in to Cooperman and Sherk, *Picturing the American Scene*, 278-84; Birch, *Country Seats*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Payne Knight, *The Landscape: A Didactic Poem* (London: W. Bulmer, 1795). This connection was first drawn by Cooperman in “Belfield, Springland, and Early American Picturesque,” 121. The full text can be found reproduced in Cooperman and Sherk, *Picturing the American Scene*, 205-216.

<sup>33</sup> Cooperman and Sherk, *Picturing the American Scene*, 205.

<sup>34</sup> On the persistence of the trope of America as a naturally occurring garden, see Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

gives the place its name and the animal life to be found there. Not least, the poem participates alongside the prints in his overarching goal of making Springland a place that advocated for minimal intervention in the landscape and expressed his own abilities in hopes of changing taste and encouraging garden commissions.<sup>35</sup> He envisions this as a place “where the new Magic is to rise, by Art,/ to sporte with nature’s charmes.”<sup>36</sup> [sic] A clear statement of the style of landscape gardening he favored follows in the poem’s final section, headed “Springland Improved As A Lesson On Landscape Gardening”. Birch proclaims “Let Nature be your god; she has charms with all her/ Falts that Art can never give; with cautious steps and/ Anxious care preserve her sweets.”<sup>37</sup>

Birch’s images of Springland and his writings about it articulate a vision of the American landscape as one of naturally occurring pleasures that required only minor interventions, informed by correct landscape taste, to make sophisticated gardens. He evidently hoped to make Springland into quite an unusual model of the artist’s house: one that not only supported and defined his work but could serve also as, according to Cooperman, “a sort of American academy of the picturesque.”<sup>38</sup> With its gallery of landscape paintings and the landscape taste his views of, and writings about, the place expressed, Birch pushed against the utilitarian spirit of the early republic and hoped to benefit himself, and rise to the position of his aristocratic patrons. Cole’s work at Cedar Grove three decades later was similar in important respects: in its realization chiefly on paper and in the social ambition from which it is inseparable.

Charles Willson Peale’s Belfield was another artist’s house near Philadelphia created as a “demonstration” and accompanied by visual and written records.<sup>39</sup> However, the differences between the two places are many. Peale seems to have been primarily interested in agricultural and botanical endeavor and the architecture of the structures he constructed on the site was incidental to the moral meanings that were literally inscribed upon them. Belfield bears a stronger resemblance to the houses of Peter Paul Rubens in this didactic mission and as the house of a painter who became a kind of public intellectual on the basis of history painting and portraiture, but for whom the acquisition of a country house encouraged the creation of some of his only landscape paintings. From what is known of Cole’s participation in the Philadelphia art world at the beginning of his career and of his acquaintance with Charles Willson’s son Rembrandt, Belfield is another model of an American artist’s country house that Cole would have known, and one that suggested quite different possibilities for Cedar Grove than did Springland.<sup>40</sup>

Charles Willson Peale acquired the 105 acre farm that became Belfield, six miles directly north of the center of Philadelphia between the Schuylkill and Delaware villa districts, in 1810.<sup>41</sup> His writings about the site express far more utilitarian concerns than do Birch’s evocative descriptions of Springland. For example, in a letter to Rembrandt describing his hopes for the site, he suggests that a stream would be useful in “beating homony, washing cloaths & churning

---

<sup>35</sup> Cooperman and Sherk, *Picturing the American Scene*, 133.

<sup>36</sup> Cooperman and Sherk, *Picturing the American Scene*, 211.

<sup>37</sup> Cooperman and Sherk, *Picturing the American Scene*, 213.

<sup>38</sup> Cooperman and Sherk, *Picturing the American Scene*, 133.

<sup>39</sup> Cooperman, “Belfield, Springland, and Early American Picturesque,” 118.

<sup>40</sup> In a letter home from London on July 10, 1830, Rembrandt Peale writes “Last evening I drank tea with Mr. Cole, the N. York landscape painter.” Another of August 22<sup>nd</sup> says “Mr. Cole has sold some of his Landscapes & is gone on an excursion into the Country.” Both letters in the Quaker & Special Collections, Haverford College. Quoted in Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 105.

<sup>41</sup> Cooperman, “Belfield, Springland, and Early American Picturesque,” 125.

of butter...perhaps the Idea may be extended to some cotton manufactory or such like labour saving works.”<sup>42</sup> [sic] Therese O’Malley has argued that another fundamental motivation for his acquisition of the farm was his desire to create a living museum of plants on the model of his pioneering natural history museum.<sup>43</sup> After finding the yard of Independence Hall inadequate for this purpose and from the conviction that the making of botanical gardens was a “national object” of the highest importance for the progress of science, he acquired this substantial piece of land so close to the center of town that it now falls within the expanded city limits of Philadelphia.<sup>44</sup> While Birch exercised a light hand at Springland, seeking to highlight the best of nature without drastic interventions, Peale brought to bear the same rational, ordering project that had given rise to his museum in forming his estate into an ambitious agricultural endeavor where little was left untouched. Peale’s membership in the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture encouraged growth by experimentation rather than by a single overarching aesthetic vision.<sup>45</sup>

While Charles Willson Peale seems to have been primarily concerned with mechanical inventions and agricultural improvement at Belfield and was content to leave the pre-existing gabled main house as it was, this did not preclude certain aesthetic enhancements in the grounds in the form of a variety garden buildings. These included a path that terminated at an obelisk inscribed with “mottoes extolling Christian virtues and the Protestant work ethic,” a temple-like gazebo, and a shed on which was painted a pantheon of American iconography. Here, according to Peale, “an emblem of Congress is placed upright as that body ought to be, with wisdom its base, designated by the owl,” in addition to a beehive and children, all “supported on one side [by] Truth and Temperance, on the other Industry.”<sup>46</sup> [sic] The model for this allegorical garden is likely to have been the influential landscape garden of Stowe House in Buckinghamshire, with its Wolfe Obelisk, its Temple of British Worthies anticipating the allegorical shed, and its Temple of Ancient Virtue rather resembling the form of the gazebo.<sup>47</sup> The artist was unwilling to have his high-minded allegories misunderstood by visitors to the estate, of whom there were so many that he jestingly referred to Belfield as “the Vaux-Hall of Gemantown” and was forced to close the grounds to the eager public on Sundays, so he added didactic texts on the painted pedestals of each item.<sup>48</sup>

In the absence of the detailed site plan and poetry that speak eloquently of Birch’s conception of his country place, the paintings Peale made of Belfield take on particular

---

<sup>42</sup> Charles Willson Peale to Rembrandt Peale, 9 February 1810 in Lillian Miller, ed. *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and his Family* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). 5. Quoted in Cooperman, “Belfield, Springland, and Early American Picturesque,” 125.

<sup>43</sup> Therese O’Malley, “‘Your Garden Must be a Museum to You’: Early American Botanic Gardens” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 59.2/3 (1996), pp. 208-9.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Rathburn, “The Columbian Institution for the Promotion of Arts and Sciences,” *United States National Museum Bulletin* 101 (1971), pp. 37-9. Quoted in O’Malley, “Early American Botanic Gardens,” 207. Much of the property is now part of the campus of La Salle University, where the gabled main house that they call “Belfield Mansion” still stands. See <http://www.lasalle.edu/commun/history/articles/pealeweb.htm> [Access date 19 April 2015]

<sup>45</sup> Cooperman, “Belfield, Springland, and Early American Picturesque,” 126.

<sup>46</sup> Lillian B. Miller, ed. *The Collected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and his Family*, microfiche (Millwood, NY: Kraus Thompson, 1980), pp. 391-2. Quoted in Cooperman, “Belfield, Springland, and Early American Picturesque,” 126.

<sup>47</sup> On the Stowe landscape garden, see John Martin Robinson, *Temples of Delight: Stowe Landscape Gardens* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Pitkin Publishing, 1994).

<sup>48</sup> Cooperman, “Belfield, Springland, and Early American Picturesque,” 126.

importance. (Figs. 103, 104) For an artist better known for portraiture, these images are highly unusual and seem to be reflective of the same genre shift that country life encouraged for Peter Paul Rubens upon his move to Het Steen.<sup>49</sup> The choice of perspective in *Cabbage Patch, the Gardens at Belfield* emphasizes this landscape's role as a place of production rather than leisure, but the gazebo is visible at the right before a distant view of cultivated fields stretching off to the distance. The canvas known as *View of the Garden at Belfield* shows roughly the opposite perspective, making the same pivot that Cole did in his images of the Van Rensselaer Manor House and in *The Departure* and *The Return*. The gabled main house is visible in this view behind more furrowed fields. In addition to the gazebo, here silhouetted against the sky, another ornamental feature of the grounds is now visible: a small pond with a fountain at the right. These images frame Belfield as a place defined by agricultural endeavor, but one that also contemplated aesthetics and moral instruction. Accordingly, Peale's paintings of Belfield present the estate as the product of the same overarching concern with the meeting of science and art that gave rise to his museum.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, they anticipate the American fashion for the *ferme ornée* that would arise later in the century.<sup>51</sup> For Thomas Cole, Belfield served as a model of a country house as a very public expression of intellectual, technological, and artistic endeavor.

Just as Cole's own efforts in poetry and prose made the example of Sir Walter Scott's Abbotsford a touchstone of artistic country life, so did certain American writers who responded to Scott and to Abbotsford produce country houses closer to home and closer to the period in which Cole was at work on Cedar Grove that served as compelling models for that project. Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper worked with the constraints of existing structures on relatively modest acreage to produce sophisticated country houses in the mid-1830s that reflected the major concerns of their work. Their houses are worth discussing in concert because the paths that led to their development are so similar. Both writers made extended visits to England and the Continent, from which they returned in 1832 and 1833 respectively. On those travels, both men are known to have paid visits to Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill, among the most influential and accessible case studies of the domestic Gothic thanks to its location in Twickenham, just outside London, while only Irving made the much longer trip to Abbotsford in the Scottish Borders.<sup>52</sup> Upon their return, both writers commenced building work for Gothic houses of their own. Not least, the work of both Cooper and Irving was important to Cole. Among other evidence, the artist represented multiple scenes from *The Last of the Mohicans* and seriously considered undertaking a major commission from Charles Heath of London to illustrate passages from Irving's *History of New York* and *The Sketch Book*.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, the choices

---

<sup>49</sup> For evidence of Rubens' shift to landscape painting with his move to Het Steen, see Christopher Brown, *Rubens's Landscapes: Making and Meaning* (London: National Gallery Publications, 1996).

<sup>50</sup> O'Malley, "Early American Botanic Gardens", 208.

<sup>51</sup> On the *ferme ornée* in America, see Clive Aslet, *The American Country House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 148.

<sup>52</sup> Kerry Dean Carso, *American Gothic Art and Architecture in the Age of Romantic Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), p. 77.

<sup>53</sup> See for example Cole's *Scene from Last of the Mohicans* in the Fenimore Art Museum. Cooper is also known to have commissioned a picture from Cole, now lost. See Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 85. Cooper wrote a lengthy tribute to Cole upon the latter's death. See Louis Legrand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole* ed. Elliott Vesell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 166-74. For an extended study of the relationship between Cole and Cooper, see Walter Levy, "Thomas Cole and James Fenimore Cooper: A Study of Contrasting Attitudes toward the Use of American History in Literature and Art" (Fordham University Ph.D. Dissertation, 1978). On the Irving illustration project, which did not pan out, see Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*,

that Cooper and Irving took in making their country houses are revealing for the similarities to, and not less for the significant differences from, those of Cole.

James Fenimore Cooper began work on the transformation of his father's 1797 federal Otsego Hall into what he called "a mongrel of the Grecian and Gothic orders" in 1834, one year before Irving commenced work on Sunnyside.<sup>54</sup> The building that stood on the three acre site in Cooperstown when Cooper began work was plain but imposing, as "the first brick structure in the county and the largest private residence west of Albany."<sup>55</sup> By adding two acres to the grounds and a number of other improvements, with consultation and design assistance from Samuel F. B. Morse, Cooper enhanced the effect dramatically.<sup>56</sup> In his own third-person words in *The Chronicles of Cooperstown*, he writes:

...the walls of the building were raised four feet. On these were placed battlements and heavy cornices in brick, that added altogether eight feet to the elevation of the building....Much ornamental brick work has been added, and the effect has been altogether advantageous. All the floors of the second story have also been raised, giving to the principal rooms a better height than they formerly possessed, while those above have been improved in the same way, by the addition to the general height of the building. Appropriate entrances have been made on both fronts, that are better suited to the style of architecture and to the climate than the ancient stoops, and two low towers have been added to the east end....The grounds have also been enlarged and altered, the present possessor aiming at what is called an English garden.<sup>57</sup>

A watercolor of the house in the form in which Cooper left it at the time of his death in 1851 shows a rather stronger resemblance to Strawberry Hill than to Abbotsford, in the way its bolted on accessories are not fully successful in transforming the appearance of a pre-existing structure into one that has grown by vernacular accretion over centuries. (Figs. 105, 64) Nonetheless, it would have cut an impressive figure in a part of the state where few other Gothic buildings were in evidence, at least until Cooper brought his passion for the style to bear as a member of the building committee of Christ Church in Cooperstown, which was remodeled and expanded into a proper Gothic parish church in 1839 in accord with the principles of the Cambridge Camden Society.<sup>58</sup> The final line of Cooper's description of the house is intriguing evidence of circumstances otherwise unknown: that he aspired to follow English Gothic Revival houses not only in architecture but in their characteristic landscape design. The Gothic was a logical choice for a writer who admired Scott and who cultivated a distinctly similar romantic aura in his own work.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, in his choice of this English fashion over the Greek Revival, predominant in the United States as an expression of democratic principles in the period, so the story goes, Cooper asserted citizenship in an international republic of letters.

---

162. Irving's reply to Cole on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1835, declining due to other demands on his time is in NYSL 2.5. Calling cards from both Cooper and Irving are preserved in the envelope of calling cards in NYSL Box 7.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Calder Loth and Julius Trousdale Sadler, Jr. *The Only Proper Style: Gothic Architecture in America* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), p. 44.

<sup>55</sup> Carso, *American Gothic Art and Architecture*, 70.

<sup>56</sup> Morse is credited in particular for the design of the two towers. Carso, *American Gothic Art and Architecture*, 72.

<sup>57</sup> James Fenimore Cooper, *The Chronicles of Cooperstown* (Cooperstown: H. & E. Phinney, 1838), pp. 83-4.

<sup>58</sup> Carso, *American Gothic Art and Architecture*, 73.

<sup>59</sup> Carso, *American Gothic Art and Architecture*, 75-6.

Because of Washington Irving's kindred concern with a pre-industrial, mythic American past and his own deep affection for Scott and for Abbotsford, as is evident from his aforementioned authorship of *Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey* in 1835, it comes as no surprise that he also chose a kind of Gothic for Sunnyside. (Fig. 106) However, this project, which Irving commenced in the same year as that book, applied its Gothic features with great freedom and fancy to a Dutch vernacular house and chose to accentuate the attributes of that distinct aesthetic tradition. Another important difference between Otsego Hall and Sunnyside was that the former was far less accessible to Cole and it is unlikely that he had the chance to see it after Cooper's improvements, whereas Sunnyside, near Tarrytown, was right on the steamboat line Cole took regularly between Manhattan and Catskill so there is every likelihood that the artist was one of the many eager visitors that made the house, according to one guidebook of the period, "the great attraction of tourists from all parts of the world."<sup>60</sup> Because of this and because of the evidence that Cole admired Irving's work and hoped to collaborate with him on a book, the example of Sunnyside was especially pertinent to Cole's work to design a country house of his own, and the stark differences of conception between the two projects are especially revealing.<sup>61</sup>

Without the benefit of a family house like Cooper's to make his own, Irving purchased a small stone structure with a central chimney, then known as the Van Tassel cottage, in what is now the town of Irvington, and set to work transforming it into "the ideal residence for a writer of stature" it became.<sup>62</sup> In this work, he had assistance from the Anglo-American watercolorist George Harvey, who had succeeded in building a country house of his own called "Woodbank" on twenty acres in nearby Hastings-on-Hudson in 1834.<sup>63</sup> The choice of this structure for radical transformation seems to have hinged on a yearning for history, both personal and national. In addition to Irving's own boyhood in the area, the Van Tassel cottage was estimated to date from as early as 1656, a date he emblazoned on a plaque: "Founded 1656—Improved by Washington Irving 1835—George Harvey, Master-BUILDER."<sup>64</sup> Among many other modifications that made the original structure nearly invisible, the roof was heightened and covered with red tiles, the gables stepped to emphasize the Dutch connections, two porches were added, and the most distinctive addition of all was a tower that "combined Gothic elements with pagodalike Chinese influences."<sup>65</sup> If there were any doubt of the importance of Sir Walter Scott to Sunnyside, Irving effaced it with a living link: he transplanted ivy to Sunnyside from Melrose Abbey, a structure three miles from Abbotsford that Scott had celebrated in poetry and from which he had taken building materials for Abbotsford.<sup>66</sup> This ivy has thrived and so covered the structure that it is now a crucial component of the house's ornament. Adam Sweeting has written eloquently of the vegetal kinship this gesture represents: "with one clip of the pruning shears, a remarkable associational web involving Scottish history, Dutch legend, Robert the Bruce, and Katrina von

---

<sup>60</sup> Miller's *New York As It Is, or Stranger's Guide to the Cities of New York, Brooklyn, and Adjacent Places...* (New York: J. Miller, 1866), p. 125. Quoted in Carso, *American Gothic Art and Architecture*, 93.

<sup>61</sup> See note 53.

<sup>62</sup> Richard Greenwood, National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form: Sunnyside, (U.S. Department of the Interior, 1975), p. 2; Adam W. Sweeting, "'A Very Pleasant Patriarchal Life': Professional Authors and Amateur Architects in the Hudson Valley, 1835-1870" *Journal of American Studies* 29.1 (Apr., 1995), p. 37.

<sup>63</sup> Roberta J. M. Olson, "George Harvey's Anglo-American Atmospheric Landscapes" *The Magazine Antiques* 174.4 (Oct., 2008), p. 113.

<sup>64</sup> Greenwood, NRHP Nomination of Sunnyside, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Greenwood, NRHP Nomination of Sunnyside, 2.

<sup>66</sup> Carso, *American Gothic Art and Architecture*, 79, 90.

Tassel were forever linked by a vine, the artistic and literary roots of which were to be dug up, grafted, and transplanted by dozens of imitators on both sides of the Atlantic.”<sup>67</sup>

The landscape of Sunnyside was as significant as the “perversion of Gothic”, in Irving’s own words, that characterized the architecture.<sup>68</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing held up the grounds as a model in his 1841 *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, proclaiming Sunnyside as “almost the beau ideal of a cottage ornée” and praising “the charming manner in which the wild foot-paths, in the neighborhood of this cottage, are conducted among the picturesque dells and banks.”<sup>69</sup> In addition to the naturalistic landscape gardening Downing found most noteworthy, Irving is known to have planted formal, geometric flower and kitchen gardens and an apple orchard so there was also a productive element to the twenty-seven acre site.<sup>70</sup> Despite the intrusion of the Hudson River Railroad at the edge of the property during Irving’s lifetime, the result of all these efforts was what William Makepeace Thackeray, on a visit to the site in 1855, described as “a very pleasant patriarchal life,” a comment that conjures the air of gentlemanly leisure Irving sought to evoke.<sup>71</sup>

In these houses of artists and writers that inspired Cole, there are a number of commonalities. Birch, Peale, Cooper, and Irving all worked with the constraints of existing buildings and either did not aspire to build new houses from the ground up or did not succeed in doing so. Shaping of the landscape around their country houses seems to have been as important as architectural endeavor for most of these figures. For those artists and writers who did engage with architecture, allusions to the Gothic were widespread as a means of claiming affinity with international aesthetic developments. Great ambitions and thwarted realizations of the kind Cole encountered at Cedar Grove was not unusual for artists of lesser financial success than Irving and Cooper. All of these factors help to frame the choices Cole made, and the struggles he encountered, in building a country house of his own.

## **II. From Thomson Place to Cedar Grove**

Unlike the artists’ country houses that were Cole’s inspirations, Cedar Grove never belonged to the artist alone and was never, as a result, his own canvas on which to execute his architectural ideas. Although he came to own a few acres of the larger property by the end of his life and worked diligently toward the goal of constructing a villa of his own on that plot, he lived out his days as a tenant in the main house that belonged to his wife’s family. Because of the model of artists who followed their understanding of Cole’s Cedar Grove in building country houses of their own like Frederic Edwin Church, Albert Bierstadt, and Jasper Francis Cropsey, it is difficult to picture Cole living with his in-laws and painting in a rustic storeroom for over a decade, rather than happily ensconced in a private country place that would better befit our notion of “the father of the Hudson River School.”<sup>72</sup> The story of Cole’s work at Cedar Grove is one of ambition, negotiation, and frustration, and rather less about execution. Only on paper did

---

<sup>67</sup> Sweeting, “A Very Pleasant Patriarchal Life,” 39.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Hugh Rowell, “The Interior Architecture” *American Collector* XVI (Oct., 1947), p. 16.

<sup>69</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening...* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1841), p. 51.

<sup>70</sup> Greenwood, NRHP Nomination of Sunnyside, 5, 7.

<sup>71</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray to Anne and Harriet Thackeray, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1855 in Gordon N. Roy, ed. *The Letters of William Makepeace Thackeray*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), p. 511. Quoted in Sweeting, “A Very Pleasant Patriarchal Life,” 38.

<sup>72</sup> Elliot Vesell, “Introduction” to Louis Legrand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), xv.

he realize his dreams of an ideal country house. The so-called New Studio that was constructed two years before his death is an isolated trace of a much larger vision.

The estate that we now call “Cedar Grove” seems to have acquired that romantic name from trees on the site during Cole’s period there, whether it was bestowed by the artist or his family, to replace another older moniker that survives in the accounts of a local Masonic lodge and indicates the structure’s history: “the Thomson Place.”<sup>73</sup> The main house was constructed in 1815 by Thomas T. Thomson, a merchant who returned home with a substantial fortune from trading in “rum, molasses, textiles, horses and fish” in the West Indies.<sup>74</sup> Not mentioned in this laconic library record is the fact that these industries were premised upon slave labor, that Thomson had a reputation as a particularly cruel and unscrupulous businessman, and that he brought back to Catskill two men, formerly slaves, known as Caesar and Josephus, who are known to have outlived Thomas Thomson and may have still been resident at the house as freed servants in Cole’s day.<sup>75</sup> The fact that the estate was built upon ill-gotten gains and that the taint of slavery clung to it even in the artist’s lifetime adds quite a different perspective to the meanings of the place, and one that needs further attention in future work at the historic site.

The stout, Federal house that Thomson built was at the center of a 110-acre working farm that extended from modern Spring Street all the way down to the Hudson so it would have made quite a different impression than the six acre parcel that has been preserved, with unobstructed views not only to the White Mountains to the east, as is still the case today, thanks to the house’s elevated site, but also over its own open fields to the Catskill Mountains in the west. **(Fig. 107)** In addition, the house itself presented a prominent object in a view from the opposite bank of the Hudson, as period accounts document.<sup>76</sup> The main house was built in brick, in the manner of local farmhouses, but small flourishes of ornament in the exterior woodwork give a hint of some aesthetic ambition, or, at least, conspicuous consumption, from the local grandee Thomson, including the patterned balustrade on the second story, the arches of the basement level, the simple pediments that surmount the prominent windows, which extend fully from floor to ceiling on the first floor, and a substantial windowed surround for the front door. A generous porch wrapped around the south and west of the house to take full advantage of the views and a range of outbuildings dotted the land, including numerous barns and a separate cottage, as a reconstruction of the grounds at the end of Cole’s life documents. **(Fig. 108)** This plan shows the eponymous grove of cedars and how close upon the house were kitchen gardens and an orchard,

---

<sup>73</sup> James D. Pinckney, *Reminiscences of Catskill: Local Sketches* (Catskill, NY: J.B. Hall, 1868), p. 7. This information is preserved in a Masonic collection because Thomas Thomson was himself a Mason, as was Cole. On the artist’s connections with Freemasonry, see David Bjelajac, “Thomas Cole’s *Oxbow* and the American Zion Divided” *American Art* 20.1 (Spring 2006), pp. 60-83. Bjelajac does not seem to be aware of the Thomson connection to the Masons, a context that strengthens his argument that this is key to the interpretation of Cole’s work.

<sup>74</sup> *New York State Library: One Hundred and Eighteenth Annual Report* (Albany: The University of the State of New York, 1936), p. 43

<sup>75</sup> Pinckney, *Reminiscences of Catskill*, p. 7

<sup>76</sup> National Parks Service, *Thomas Cole National Historic Site: Draft General Management Plan/ Environmental Assessment* (Boston: National Parks Service, Northeast Region, 2004), p. 30; David Seamon, Exhibition Texts from “Thomas Cole and Cedar Grove” (TCNHS, opened June 2000), p. 15. Archived online at [http://www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon/Thomas\\_Cole.htm](http://www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon/Thomas_Cole.htm) [Access date: 28 March 2015]. For an account of the view of Cedar Grove from the opposite bank of the Hudson, see Sanford Gifford’s remembrance in John I.H. Baur, ed. *The Autobiography of Worthington Whittredge*, (New York: Arno Press, 1969), p. 56. This passage will come in for fuller discussion later. I am grateful to Erin Corrales-Diaz for bringing it to my attention.



in addition to the small flower garden. This was a landscape organized around productivity rather than leisure.

Thomas Thomson died in 1821, only six years after completing his Thomson Place, and bequeathed the house to his bachelor brother, John Alexander Thomson. The latter was a local shopkeeper specializing in stoves and crockery and enjoyed a reputation as a horticulturist, which suggests he is to be credited for the plantings that are still visible in Charles Herbert Moore's image of Cedar Grove in 1868 and have been confirmed by archaeological investigations.<sup>77</sup> (**Fig. 109**) Lawsuits over Thomas Thomson's sizable estate demanded much of his brother's energy and resources in the 1820s and the family was deprived of "almost an entire county in Tennessee," among other legal losses.<sup>78</sup> John Alexander could not blame his brother for subsequent entanglements in unhappy real estate speculations and in stock of the Canajoharie and Catskill Railroad, both of which plummeted in value in the Panic of 1837, leaving his circumstances much reduced at his death in 1846.<sup>79</sup> "Uncle Sandy," as he was often called, was the head of a household that included one unmarried sister and, later, the four daughters of another sister who died in 1830.<sup>80</sup> This large family's somewhat straitened circumstances encouraged the taking in of tenants, as they did when Thomas Cole came looking for a base for summer painting around the Catskills in June of 1834.<sup>81</sup>

Cole had visited the village of Catskill on his first sketching expedition up the Hudson in the summer of 1825, before his stay at Featherston Park, and is likely to have passed through again in the summers of 1827 to 1829.<sup>82</sup> He enjoyed the area so much that he returned for a longer stay through the summer and fall of 1833, the first American summer after his trip to Europe.<sup>83</sup> His decision to rent a cottage on the Cedar Grove property, visible at the top of the National Parks Service site plan, from John Alexander Thomson the following year was the product of these previous encounters. The artist had every opportunity to scout the area on his walks along Catskill Creek, which meets the Hudson only a mile from Cedar Grove. Indeed, the house was strategically located for this reason: ideally positioned between Hudson steamer lines and the scenery he painted repeatedly in these years, for example in *View on the Catskill—Early Autumn*.<sup>84</sup> (**Fig. 110**) Cole's great fondness for Cedar Grove is evident from a short poem that dates to November of 1834, at the end of his first period of residence there:

O Cedar Grove! whene'er I think to part  
From thine all peaceful shades my aching heart  
Is like to his who leaves some blessed shore  
A weeping exile ne'er to see it more.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> TCNHS *General Management Plan*, 24.

<sup>78</sup> *NYSL 108<sup>th</sup> Annual Report*, 43.

<sup>79</sup> Alan Wallach, "Thomas Cole's *River in the Catskills* as Antipastoral" *Art Bulletin* 84.2 (Jun., 2002), p. 349.

<sup>80</sup> Seamon, "Thomas Cole and Cedar Grove", p. 15.

<sup>81</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 151.

<sup>82</sup> Tracie Felker, "First Impressions: Thomas Cole's Drawings of His 1825 Trip up the Hudson River" *American Art Journal* 24.1/2 (1992), p. 71; Seamon, "Thomas Cole and Cedar Grove", 15.

<sup>83</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 137. Seamon inadvertently gives 1832 as the date of his return to Catskill.

<sup>84</sup> On Cole's repetitions of this subject near Cedar Grove, see Alan Wallach, "Thomas Cole: Landscape and the Course of American Empire" in *Thomas Cole: Landscape into History* eds. William Truettner and Alan Wallach (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, 1994), pp. 70-74.

<sup>85</sup> Marshall Tymn, ed. *Thomas Cole's Poetry: The Collected Poems of America's Foremost Painter of the Hudson River School* (York, PA: George Shumway, 1972), p. 73.

Another advantage of staying at Cedar Grove in 1834 and 1835 that may have contributed to this grief on departure was the pleasure of proximity to the youngest of Uncle Sandy's nieces: Maria Bartow. She is said to have left flowers by Cole's easel and to have read to him while he painted.<sup>86</sup> In return, Cole brought her gifts from New York and sketched her on occasion, as in a slightly later drawing in the collection of the Albany Institute of History and Art. (**Fig. 111**) Cole recounts pleasant walks in the area with "Miss B" in diary entries and, in November of 1836, they married and Cole made Cedar Grove his permanent residence.<sup>87</sup>

Cole's happiness at Cedar Grove in this period made him a zealous advocate of country life. He advised other artists to follow his lead in leaving the city and its intrigues, as indeed many artists did in the years to follow. In a letter to Asher B. Durand of September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1836, shortly before the wedding, Cole counseled his friend on a period of low spirits:

I am of the opinion that in the City more excitement is necessary than in the country and particularly so for artists like ourselves. In the city we are surrounded by our fellow men. We feel their presence. We labour for their approbation and require that stimulant frequently. But in the country we labour under more healthy influences: the desire to produce excellence feeds the flame of our enthusiasm and I believe the product will be worthier than that which is wrought out to the approbation of the many around us. In the country we have necessarily to defer the reward of the approbation of our fellows and have time to examine entirely our own work and form a judgment of our own that cannot be jostled out by that of every new observer.<sup>88</sup>

Later in the same letter, he urged Durand to come and "pitch your tent near me." Cole's rejection of the booming New York City art world was striking for the period and became a key component of his public persona. William Cullen Bryant's "Funeral Oration" for Cole is evidence of this. Bryant claims:

He could not endure a town life; he must live in the continual presence of rural scenes and objects. A country life he believed essential to the cheerfulness of his own works. . . . In the retirement of the country he held that the simple desire of excellence was likely to act with more strength and less disturbance, and that its products would be worthier and nobler."<sup>89</sup>

In the contentment of his early marital life, Cole proclaimed the virtues of country life far and wide and made ample use of his distance from gossip and academic politics to produce works that required long labor and study, most of all *The Course of Empire*.

The domestic arrangements after the wedding to Maria sound rather uncomfortable, but they remained fairly constant for the remainder of the artist's life. Thomas and Maria Cole occupied one of the bedrooms on the second floor of the house. Uncle Sandy had a room on the

---

<sup>86</sup> Seamon, "Thomas Cole and Cedar Grove", 15.

<sup>87</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 377

<sup>88</sup> NYSL 1.2

<sup>89</sup> William Cullen Bryant, *A Funeral Oration, Occasioned by the Death of Thomas Cole, delivered before the National Academy of Design* (New York: D. Appleton, 1848), p. 39. My attention was drawn to the relevant section by David Schuyler in "Pencil and Pen in Defense of Nature: Thomas Cole and the American Landscape" *The Hudson River Valley Review* (Autumn 2014), p. 21.

ground floor, opposite the sitting room. The remaining three unmarried Bartow sisters shared the other single bedroom on the second floor. Cole was asked to contribute to the household costs in lieu of rent after the marriage, which must have felt like being a boarder rather than having a home of one's own.<sup>90</sup> While he had the use of an unidentified farm building for a studio in these early years so he didn't have to paint in the house, the sleeping quarters quickly became cramped with four children who survived to adulthood. Despite these evident hardships, financial insecurity alone does not seem adequate to account for his decision to live as a tenant at Cedar Grove for more than a decade. While the housing arrangement seems unusual, it did carry distinct advantages beyond economy, most importantly the freedom it would have given him to travel for his art without guilt about abandoning his wife and children thanks to the knowledge that they would be comfortable and cared for in this large household. Nevertheless, a development in 1839 that gave him a proper painting space outside the house would have come as a great relief, as he described in a letter to Asher B. Durand on December 18<sup>th</sup> of that year:

Do you know that I have got into a new Painting Room. Mr. Thomson has lately erected a sort of Store-house & has let me have part of it for a temporary painting room. It answers pretty well and is somewhat larger than my old one & being removed from the noise & bustle of the house is really charming. What I shall be able to produce in it heaven knows. The walls are of unplastered brick with the beams & timbers seen on every hand; not a bad colour this pale brick & mortar. I am engaged upon my great series...<sup>91</sup>

This building, now known as the Old Studio, remains standing on the site, restored to its original form. **(Fig. 112)** His relief at having a bit of space away from the clamour of the family is evident, and his comments on the materials have been useful to restorers. The fact that he used this humble storehouse to produce *The Voyage of Life*, the “great series” to which he refers, has become a part of the artist's mythology, as is apparent from John Mackie Falconer's incredulously titled 1881 painting *Thomas Cole's First Studio*. **(Fig. 113)**

Sarah Burns has written of the sense of rootlessness and even emasculation that being a tenant in someone else's house for the final twelve years of his life might have produced:

In this ménage, Cole in a sense assumed the dependent position once occupied by his father, though of course the artist by that time was hardly empty-handed. Destitute of a place to call his own, he lacked patriarchal power and authority in the household, even to the extent of being required to pay boarding expenses. As the lone younger male, he was decidedly outnumbered, if not overwhelmed.<sup>92</sup>

Burns may be right that Cole's lack of a home to call his own conjured unhappy memories of the itinerancy that had been required in the artist's own youth by the numerous failures at business of his father, James, and the resultant inversion of the natural order that required the young artist to support his impoverished parents.<sup>93</sup> However, the financial

---

<sup>90</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 187

<sup>91</sup> NYSL 1.4

<sup>92</sup> Sarah Burns, *Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 38

<sup>93</sup> Wallach, “Landscape and the Course of American Empire”, p. 25.

woes of another came to work in the artist's favor at Cedar Grove. Amidst the panics of 1837 and the legal battles over Thomas Thomson's estate, John Thomson was forced to mortgage Cedar Grove and to sell two acres at the southern boundary of the property to Cole to raise funds for his brother's creditors and for ongoing legal proceedings.<sup>94</sup> Although this sale came with a burdensome provision that could permit John to repurchase the land at a later date, when his circumstances had recovered, holding this title was the impetus for Cole to start making designs for an elegant country house of his own.<sup>95</sup>

### **III. "A Sort of Italian Looking Thing": Cole's Architecture at Cedar Grove**

In one of Cole's final letters to William Apthorp Adams on the subject of the Ohio Statehouse, mailed from Catskill on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1839, shortly before he took up his new painting room in the storehouse, the artist segues from the frustrations of public architecture to share the happier news that he had begun a new private building project at Cedar Grove:

I am about building a house. It will be a sort of Italian looking thing. If times are favourable I expect to finish it next summer. There is a room in it that Mrs Cole & I have set apart (in our minds for you) so I hope that you will pray that the house be finished soon but I trust that you will not defer visiting us until that room is ready for we can find one at any time for you that will be a thousand times better than any imaginary apartment can be.<sup>96</sup> [Full text in Appendix B.20]

This letter is among the only pieces of evidence that helps in dating a variety of surviving plans and elevations for a house Cole hopes to build on his plot at Cedar Grove. Because the works of paper architecture this section discusses were made on loose sheets, without the benefit of neighbors in a sketchbook to establish chronology, and were not labeled or dated by the artist because of their use as instrumental objects rather than aesthetic ones, it is harder to determine the precise trajectory of his thought in this project than it is for the Statehouse. Certain basic facts are clear. First, this was not a passing fantasy that was always bound to remain on the page. From letters like this one to Adams, already envisioning playing host in the new building, there is no doubt that Cole believed he would complete this building, and soon. Second, much of the design work must have taken place in roughly the same years as his Statehouse efforts if he could say in October of 1839 that he expected to have the building finished within eight months. It is safe to assume that this confluence is not coincidence: the degree of approval Cole found from members of the architectural establishment in Ohio likely gave him the confidence to dare to undertake this project on his own, seemingly without any assistance this time from his nephew and collaborator on the Statehouse, William Henry Bayless. Third, from his suggestive description of the project as "a sort of Italian looking thing," one is prompted to consider the relevance to the proposed design of his Italian travels in general and of the villa ideal in particular. Fourth, and finally, it is clear that Cole's great hope was to build a true family house

---

<sup>94</sup> On the Panic of 1837 and its aftereffects, see Jessica M. Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Raymond Beecher, "John Alexander Thomson (1778-1846), Catskill Merchant" *Greene County Historical Journal* 7.2 (Summer 1983), p. 14

<sup>95</sup> Raymond Beecher, "Cedar Grove—The Thomas Cole Residence" *The Crayon: Olana State Historic Site Newsletter* XII.1 (Spring 1980), p. 7.

<sup>96</sup> NYSL 1.4

on the property, and that the New Studio that was the only built result of his domestic architectural efforts was mere consolation rather than a long envisioned outbuilding that would have accompanied the villa. This section will begin by studying the surviving plans and elevations for the villa, will turn to the textual evidence of his frustration in the effort to get the house built, followed by elevations and historic photographs of the New Studio he did build and enjoy for the final year of his life, and will conclude by considering briefly what it meant to Cole, and to the Early Republic as a whole, to make an “Italianate” building.

Florence Cole Vincent, Cole’s granddaughter, made the decision to divide Cole’s papers into two groups for sale in the late 1930s: material she considered primarily artistic or visual, which ended up in the Detroit Institute of Arts, and items she considered primarily historical or textual, and thus better suited to a state archive like the New York State Library, where they reside today.<sup>97</sup> It was Vincent’s decision that the plans and elevations for Cedar Grove belonged in the first category. As a result, twenty-four plans or elevations for the house Cole hoped to build at Cedar Grove are now in the Detroit Institute of Arts, and I know of no others elsewhere.<sup>98</sup> While occasional sketchlike plans that could relate to Cedar Grove are indicated on scraps of correspondence in the New York State Library, it is impossible to say with certainty that they are for this project and their far less developed state makes them of less value anyway.<sup>99</sup> Two elevations for the New Studio have been preserved in Detroit as well but no plans.<sup>100</sup> However, it becomes apparent from studying this archival evidence that the studio needed no new plan of its own for a good reason. The studio building that was, in fact, constructed in 1846, which is commonly considered to be a wholly separate architectural effort than the grand villa of which Cole had once dreamed, was identical in layout to the final, most modest phase of floorplans for the villa, except with the upper story, domestic functions, and the distinctive porch that had persisted to the last finally stripped away by financial necessity.<sup>101</sup> This modest structure was the end product of a continuous process of distillation and disappointment in which existing plans were made progressively more modest as the artist’s prospects narrowed. Thus, Cole’s drawings for Cedar Grove are artifacts of eight years of frustrated efforts to follow the model of successful practitioners of the creative country life like Washington Irving, but also of resiliency and creativity in the face of trying circumstances.

When Cole began to make elevations for a new house on the two acres he owned at Cedar Grove, he appears to have honed in quickly on the idea of an Italianate villa of fairly consistent form. However, two anomalous designs in Detroit, so highly finished that they do not seem to be mere fantasy sketches, do not fit with this trajectory and may be early stages of his thought process or may even pertain to other projects entirely. One wonders if a perspective of a rustic, bracketed house of a distinctly different layout and style than any subsequent Cedar Grove

---

<sup>97</sup> The New York State Library acquired their eight boxes of materials from Vincent in 1935. Although one sketchbook is included in their holdings, this is an anomaly. The vast majority of items are letters and clippings, with a few notebooks for good measure. See the Finding Aid to the Thomas Cole Papers, available online at <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/msscfa/sc10635.htm> [Access date: 29 March 2015] The Detroit Institute of Arts acquired the drawings in 1939 for the princely sum of \$1000, surely one of the great bargains in collecting history, including no less than seventeen sketchbooks and hundreds of loose drawings. See Amy Ellis McDaniel, “Works on Paper by Thomas Cole in the Detroit Institute of Arts” *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 80.1/2 (2006), pp. 16-27.

<sup>98</sup> Accession numbers 39.509-513, 39.532, 39.540, 39.542-557b

<sup>99</sup> For example, a series of hasty plans on the back of a letter Cole received dated October 12, 1839 in NYSL 3.7

<sup>100</sup> Accession numbers 39.515a-b

<sup>101</sup> For an example of the accepted wisdom that holds the New Studio to be a wholly separate project rather than the end result of a continuous process of architectural thought, see Francis Morrone, “Thomas Cole the Architect and the New Studio” *Thomas Cole National Historic Site Newsletter* (Fall 2013), pp. 5-6.

proposal might be the artist's missing response to the query from Theodore Allen with which this dissertation began, in which the son-in-law of Luman Reed asked for help with drawings he was making for his own country house at Hyde Park.<sup>102</sup> (**Fig. 114**) Another elevation that could, at least, be called "a sort of Italian looking thing" bears a passing resemblance to the central portion of Andrea Palladio's Villa Saraceno at Finale. (**Figs. 115, 116**) In its symmetry and flat roofline, it does not, however, bear much resemblance to any other design for Cedar Grove and would not have been a very practical proposal for the severe winters of Catskill. It is safe to conclude that it was an early idea for Cedar Grove because of the five bays of this southern façade, a notion that continues in the next state of the design, and because of the emphasis on the porch, a component that is important to all of Cole's designs until the studio phase. After these outliers, the elevations become fairly consistent in concept: a villa that would harmonize with the main house at Cedar Grove in its orientation to the south, arrangement of columns and windows, and its similar use of an L-shaped porch, which he called the "piazza." The most distinctive feature of the house was to be a tower with three stories above ground that would have offered commanding, three hundred and sixty degree views from the White Mountains to the Catskills.

As was the case with the Statehouse project, it seems safe to conclude that the most elaborate designs came first and that a steady process of reduction and simplification began once the artist's persistent economic insecurity intervened. Elevations of the front (south) and side (west) of an elaborately ornamented villa of broad and stately proportions appear to show the next state of the exterior concept after the Palladian design. (**Figs. 117, 118**) The broad porch, which wraps fully around the western side of the building to embrace the view of the Catskill Mountains in that direction, includes an ornate balustrade topped with urns from which plants sprout. The artist has struggled to create a sense of balance in these early thoughts. The five bay structure of both facades depicted leads to a tenuous rhyme on the second story when seen from the south, in which the far narrower windows of the tower do not sit comfortably with those of the main building. The view from the west is especially awkward, where the three bays of the tower and the five bays of the ground floor make the second story look oddly narrow and imbalanced. On the plan that is shown on the front elevation, Cole has granted himself a generous "Painting Room," fully twenty feet by twenty-five, that takes advantage of northern light from an upper story. In a touching detail, Cole shows Maria with one of their children in her arms in the side view, already envisioning this luxurious building as a happy family home.<sup>103</sup> (**Fig. 119**) Only one other sheet of plans survives for this state of the building, readily identifiable by the five-bay structure of the southern façade, a holdover from the initial Palladian concept. (**Fig. 120**) In contrast, no less than fourteen plans exist for simpler states of the design. This suggests that the most lavish concept for the villa was quickly abandoned for reasons of economy and that Cole devoted the largest part of his design efforts to more feasible structures. The plans on this sheet do not show the tower at all, as is also true of a subsequent plan that seems to be the next development, with the same forty-five foot width but three bays instead of

---

<sup>102</sup> NYSL 2.7. This design seems to resemble not only the work of Alexander Jackson Davis, Blithewood for example, but also his draughtsmanship so it may be the case that this is a drawing that was given to Cole. This would certainly account for its outlier quality in the artist's architectural oeuvre. Further study of the paper might provide some answers but this was not possible on my visit to Detroit because of severely limited staff time to supervise the prints and drawings study room.

<sup>103</sup> If only he'd shown sufficient detail for the gender of the babe in arms to be determined, the images could be dated more securely on this basis. Theodore, known as "Theddy," was born on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1838 and Mary was born on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1839. I believe this luxurious early state of the villa dates to 1838, in which case it would be Theddy.

five on the southern side of the building. **(Fig. 121)** The existence of plans without any tower while all of the elevations include it, apart from the anomalous seemingly early ones, suggests that Cole's method was to work out the form of the main domestic spaces first before adding on a more frivolous part of the structure, the precise use of which does not seem to have been thought through from the evidence of the plans. It seems that the tower's value was chiefly rhetorical: not only in giving the house a romantic silhouette but also as a means of asserting connections to the towered country houses of Washington Irving, Daniel Wadsworth, William Beckford, and even Peter Paul Rubens, whose "Het Steen" was famous for the medieval tower that survived on the grounds, as is visible in the artist's own painting of the estate. **(Fig. 35)**

The next state of the plans and elevations maintains the tower's position at the northeastern corner of the building, the right side of the drawings, but the dimensions grow smaller, the ornament more simple, and the five-bay structure of the southern wall is discarded in favor of the three bays that would persist for all future designs. In addition to this evidence that economic factors were intruding upon the envisioned country house at this stage, Cole shows himself to be thinking about ways to save money in a pencil notation on the previously mentioned three-bay, towerless plan. Next to the eastern wall, Cole has written "By lengthening this side to 50 feet might get all the living part of the house on one floor & have no Basement." **(Fig. 121)** No plans that extend the footprint in this way have been preserved so he appears not to have gone any farther with this notion. Instead, he reduced the width and depth to forty feet, not including the porch or tower, as is evident from one sheet that shows plans of the basement, first floor, and second floor, along with a front elevation. **(Fig. 122)** The ornamental balustrades atop the porch and at the front of it have been discarded in this design, as has the elaborate door surround. In addition to a number of other plans for this state with the northeastern tower and full page elevations of this front design and the eastern elevation, Cole also made an unusual section from the east that shows what appears to be a rather surprising bathtub near the top of the tower.<sup>104</sup> **(Fig. 123)** Indeed, a plan of the second floor includes the notation next to the tower "Bath Room over this with Fire Place."<sup>105</sup> The distant view of the White Mountains from this aerie would have made for quite a pleasant bath, although it would have been a rather less pleasant fancy for the person who had to haul the water to this perch.

Because the view of the Catskills was to the west of Cedar Grove, it is somewhat surprising that Cole did not put the tower at the northwestern corner of the building from the beginning, whether for a bather's pleasure or to afford the painter a privileged perspective on his favored scenery. However, it was not until the penultimate phase of his designs that the tower made that shift to the left side of the drawings. In addition to three plans unlabeled with dimensions or uses and a front elevation identical to the previous in all respects save the location of the tower, Cole also made a perspective of this state of the design.<sup>106</sup> **(Fig. 124)** While this drawing depicts a building that maintains the full depth of the previous state, even more drastic economies apparently became necessary in the next. A final phase of the villa designs maintains the northwestern tower but reduces the depth of the building to a single room. No elevations survive of this greatly reduced state of his thinking, only plans in which the tower and L-shaped porch are still in evidence, but with far less interior space between them. **(Fig. 125)** While this

---

<sup>104</sup> In addition to this plan, the other plans and elevations of this state of the design (three bays, northeastern tower) are DIA accession numbers 39.545, 546, 548, 551, 552, 555, and 556.

<sup>105</sup> DIA 39.547A.

<sup>106</sup> The elevation and plans not reproduced here of this state of the design (three bays, northwestern tower) are DIA accession numbers 39. 543, 544, 550, and 554.

design is more modest than the first phase of his thinking, it appears still to be a gracious house with ample space for his small family and, as a plan of the second floor shows, a spacious painting room with a large, northern window. (Fig. 126)

From this last phase of Cole's thwarted ambition to build a home for his wife and children on the land he owned at Cedar Grove to the studio building he did finally succeed in constructing in 1846, it is a very small step. Since the time of the first biography of Cole in 1853, the New Studio has been conceived as a standalone architectural endeavor without any relation to his thwarted designs for the villa. In that book, the artist's pastor, Louis Noble made passing mention of the building as "a matter of much interest to Cole" in 1846 but he did not discuss the villa project itself.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, Ellwood Parry's extensive archival labor caused him to be one of the only scholars to make reference to both villa and studio, but he did not draw connections between them.<sup>108</sup> Part of the problem may be the absence of evidence of a drawing program for the studio as sustained as that of the villa that would have made the connections clearer; only two sheets with hasty elevations that pertain to the New Studio have survived. (Figs. 127, 128) In the absence of plans specific to the studio, a circa 1900 photograph of the building, which stood, decaying, until its regrettable demolition in 1973, is the best evidence of the fact that the building was, in fact, the final stage in a continuous process of architectural development, or even devolution, from his earliest and most lavish villa plans through the most simple.<sup>109</sup> (Fig. 129) Comparison of this image to his final villa design shows the persistence of the same oversized northern window and the same twin windows on the eastern wall. The covered entryway at the northwestern corner of the building takes advantage of precisely the same imagined gap in the northern wall that would have granted access to the tower; indeed, the projecting entry pavilion is revealed by this comparison to be a residual tower, all that remains of the most distinctive feature of Cole's architectural efforts at Cedar Grove. Contrary to previous claims that the New Studio was an unrelated project after the villa had been abandoned, Cole repurposed his final villa concept as his studio building by reducing the tower and excising the porch and second floor, but maintaining the footprint and arrangement of bays from that previous structure.

It remains to account for what transpired between the initial, lofty ideas for Cole's villa at Cedar Grove and the much reduced concept he eventually achieved. A handful of surviving letters and journals that pertain to this episode will help to fill in some additional pieces of the story beyond the eloquent account of frustration and disappointment the drawings give on their own. After the optimistic letter to William Apthorp Adams of October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1839 with which this section began, in which the artist said he was "about building a house" that he hoped to have finished by the following summer, the next mention of the project appears in a letter of January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1840. Writing to the lumber merchant D. B. Henry of South Durham, New York, Cole showed just how serious he was about the construction of the villa by placing an order for the timber he would require, both for the house itself and for a chestnut and hemlock picket fence to surround the two acres he owned at the edge of the larger Cedar Grove estate. He writes, "The Fence stuff I shall want as early as possible; the Timber for the House must be delivered before the 1<sup>st</sup> of May next."<sup>110</sup> However, the artist's circumstances had changed dramatically by the next surviving letter to Henry, dated February 22<sup>nd</sup>:

---

<sup>107</sup> Noble, *Life and Works*, 279.

<sup>108</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 250, 325.

<sup>109</sup> Morrone, "Thomas Cole the Architect and the New Studio," 6.

<sup>110</sup> NYSL 1.4



I am a little surprised that you should have commenced sawing & preparing logs. I wrote for you to come to Catskill in order to make definite agreement as to the price & the quantity & size of the Timber. I had previously informed you it was likely I should make some alteration in the plan which would require the Timber to be cut differently....I am much more disappointed in the circumstances that induce me to delay the building than you can possibly be in the fact that I cannot order the Timber at present. I am extremely sorry if I have put you to any inconvenience & assure you that when I build you shall have the preference. I may possibly want the Timber delivered next Fall but I cannot now give you an order for it. The deranged state of the times has interfered with my plan of building at present.<sup>111</sup>

It appears most likely that the major change in the month between these two drastically different pieces of correspondence was a deterioration in his extended correspondence with the estate of Samuel Ward about the fate of his series *The Voyage of Life*. This commission, which was to have been the richest Cole ever received at \$1,250 each for four allegorical canvases illustrating the path of a Christian from birth to death, gave the artist sufficient reason for confidence in his financial circumstances to plan a country house.<sup>112</sup> When Ward died before the completion of the series in November of 1839, there was, at first, no reason to suspect the commission would be withdrawn but, by early 1840, it appears matters had grown quite delicate as the estate tried to negotiate a reduced fee to extricate themselves.<sup>113</sup> Amidst these trying circumstances and the lingering national depression that followed the Panic of 1837, Cole was forced to shelve his idea of building a country house for the time being.<sup>114</sup>

Cole's correspondence about architecture with William Apthorp Adams also includes the next mention of his hopes for Cedar Grove. In a letter of April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1841, Cole writes:

I have not built my house yet; but you know we are not roofless. Hard times. A remark which a knowing friend of mine uttered -- "Fools build houses & wise men live in them" -- entered my soul like a two edged sword. So I am playing Fabius & hope to conquer by delay. Do come. Although the New-House is not built the old one is here. And we can take our cakes and ale although we are grown prudent. And when we are filled we can go and see the site of the New House and say "how magnificent it is to be: that you know is not expensive & I really begin to think these kind of enjoyments are about as substantive as any others."<sup>115</sup>

His frustration is evident in these lines, but it's clear that he still fully expected to build his villa in time. He mentions only a "New House" and never a dedicated studio building. By his reference to "Hard times," it appears financial circumstances were still to blame for the delay and not, as has been suggested by Raymond Beecher, that the right to repurchase included in the original sale of the two acres to Cole by John Alexander Thomson held him back.<sup>116</sup> Clearly that clause was not a factor in January of 1840, when Cole was preparing to purchase building

---

<sup>111</sup> NYSL 1.4

<sup>112</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 227.

<sup>113</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 234-6.

<sup>114</sup> See note 94.

<sup>115</sup> NYSL 1.5

<sup>116</sup> Beecher, "Cedar Grove," 7.

materials, but Beecher is right to note that what construction Cole did finally achieve on the site did not begin until Thomson's death in July of 1846. In a journal entry of Christmas Day of the same year, Cole is able to write "I am now sitting in my new studio. I have promised myself much enjoyment in it, and great success in the prosecution of my art."<sup>117</sup> He died less than fourteen months later.

Louis Noble's 1853 biography of Cole has been useful to scholars not only as a document of reception history but, moreover, as a primary source based on extensive conversations with the artist and posthumous access to his papers, some of which are preserved nowhere else. This book gives an extended account of the New Studio that will be worth quoting at length:

A matter of much interest to Cole...was the building of a new studio. It is constructed somewhat in the Italian villa style, and with reference to a spacious gallery, soon to have been built for the large works he contemplated painting. Its situation commands a view of vale and mountain of the rarest beauty. At a distance of ten miles, a portion of the Catskills, fronting the Hudson, for some thirty miles in extent, rise abruptly to the height of three and four thousand feet, having an outline along the sky of exceeding grace, and presenting, in Cole's own words, a very good resemblance to the base of Mount Aetna....Along the flowing outline of the mountains are seen, now behind one summit and then behind another, as the season changes, some of the finest sunsets; at one time rivaling those of Italy in tenderness, at another, inexpressibly wild and gorgeous.<sup>118</sup>

The echoes of Cole's own 1839 account of his plans for the new house at Cedar Grove "a sort of Italian looking thing" are unavoidable in Noble's description of the studio as "somewhat in the Italian villa style" and hint at the strong links between the structures, although Noble does not seem to be aware of the original concept.<sup>119</sup> His claim that the building was made "with reference to a spacious gallery, soon to have been built" suggests the existence of another architectural project imagined for Cedar Grove, of which nothing else is known. It may be that Noble simply misunderstood Cole's comments made in conversation about the New Studio, which, as a rare photograph of the interior of the structure shows, had the lofty dimensions of a gallery and would have allowed space for the creation of his largest canvases and, simultaneously, for the display of them. (**Fig. 130**) Noble's lofty claims about the prospect the studio commanded may be somewhat embellished, but a drawing of Cedar Grove in the year of Cole's death shows the studio did indeed have an unobstructed view to the Catskills from the twin windows on its western wall, even without the assistance of the desired tower.<sup>120</sup> (**Fig. 131**) This drawing also shows the relative scale of the studio; it appears to have risen at least half the height of the main house with quite a presence of its own on the Cedar Grove property from the direction of the road. Noble's claim that Cole himself said the rising Catskills visible from the studio present "a very good resemblance to the base of Mount Aetna" is further evidence of the persistence of an Italian sphere of reference in the design of this "Italian looking thing." Noble

---

<sup>117</sup> Noble, *Life and Works*, 281.

<sup>118</sup> Noble, *Life and Works*, 279.

<sup>119</sup> See note 96.

<sup>120</sup> Because of the color notations on this sheet, it appears that this was Frederic Edwin Church's first thought for a memorial picture for his former teacher. Church did end up making a very different memorial painting for Cole: see J. Gray Sweeney, "'Endued with Rare Genius': Frederic Edwin Church's *To the Memory of Cole*" *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 2.1 (Winter, 1988), pp. 44-71.

continues this link by suggesting that the sunsets visible from the site often resembled those of Italy. With all the evidence that Cole considered both his villa ideas and the studio that was their end product to have been somehow “Italianate,” the significance of this stylistic decision for Cole and for his period becomes a pressing concern.

The fact that Cole aspired to an Italianate villa is somewhat surprising for a few reasons. All evidence suggests that the dominant mode for an artist or writer who wanted a house that would evoke their preoccupation with values that were not provincial but international was the Gothic. William Birch, James Fenimore Cooper, and Washington Irving all designed new or renovated country houses in this style that were important to Cole. Sarah Burns has shown that, like Cooper and Irving, Cole identified with the literary and painterly Gothic, so it might have been expected that he would follow the model established by Horace Walpole, with *The Castle of Otranto* and Strawberry Hill, in making a house that reflected this aspect of his aesthetic world.<sup>121</sup> We also know that Cole admired the Gothic from his writings about Abbotsford, his affectionate depictions of Gothic buildings as sites of Christian virtue in *The Architect’s Dream* and *The Return*, and, not least, his Gothic designs for his parish church in Catskill.<sup>122</sup> **(Figs. 3, 7, 8)** Unlike Cooper, who participated in the creation of a Gothic church near his own country house as a kind of companion building, Cole did not aspire to a Gothic pairing of his own.<sup>123</sup> To apply architecture intended for a Mediterranean climate to the more extreme weather of Catskill went against the contemporary discourse of stylistic fitness. For example, Andrew Jackson Downing wrote in 1842 “In a high northern latitude, where it is evident colonnades and verandas would be unsuitable for most of the year, the Italian or Grecian styles should not be chosen...”<sup>124</sup> Perhaps because of his experience with the veranda of the main house at Cedar Grove, successful as the defining feature of the building despite the severe winters of the region, Cole went against established precedent and advice in envisioning a building that referred not to the climactically and romantically suitable architecture of England, the country of his birth, but rather to Italy, which took on greater importance for the artist in the latter years of his career.

Cole visited Italy on two occasions: from June 1831 to August 1832 and again from November of 1841 through May of 1842.<sup>125</sup> In an account of the first trip he sent to William Dunlap for publication in the latter’s 1834 *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, Cole wrote “what I believe contributes to the enjoyment of being there, is the delightful freedom from the common cares and business of life—the vortex of politics and utilitarianism, that is forever whirling at home.”<sup>126</sup> This suggests that Italian buildings had powerful associations as an architectural antidote to the Jacksonian politics with which he was

---

<sup>121</sup> Sarah Burns, “Gloom and Doom” in *Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 1-43.

<sup>122</sup> See note 15.

<sup>123</sup> See note 58.

<sup>124</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, *Cottage Residences...* (New York and London: Wiley and Putnam, 1842), p. 31

<sup>125</sup> Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 375-8. On Cole’s time in Italy, there is some older scholarship but a fresh approach is needed beyond what this dissertation can provide. See Oliver Larkin, “Two Yankee Painters in Italy: Thomas Cole and Samuel Morse” *American Quarterly* 5.3 (Autumn 1953), pp. 195-200 and Otto Wittmann, Jr. “The Italian Experience: American Artists in Italy, 1830-1875” *American Quarterly* 4.1 (Spring 1952), pp. 2-15. For a more recent overview, see Charles Eldredge, “Italy: Images and Ideas” in *America: The New World in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Painting*, ed. Stephan Koja (Munich: Prestel, 1999), pp. 234-240.

<sup>126</sup> William Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* [orig. 1834] eds. Frank Bayley and Charles Goodspeed (Boston: C. E. Goodspeed & Co., 1918), p. 154. In contrast, he found England cold and off-putting, not only in climate but personal relations. This may, in part, explain why he was not as quick to adopt English models of building as his peers. See pp. 150-1.

disaffected, perhaps a contributing factor to his design choices at Cedar Grove. On these trips, he made many paintings with architectural subjects, of which *The Temple of Segesta with the Artist Sketching* is an especially rich example for its insistence on the artist's diligent study of the built environment.<sup>127</sup> (Fig. 132) That he studied the architecture he found on these travels is also evident from a two-part essay he published in *The Knickerbocker* in 1844 on "Sicilian Scenery and Antiquities," the second part of which was entirely devoted to "the Architectural Antiquities of Sicily."<sup>128</sup> The very first sentence of the first essay evokes "the grandeur of [Sicily's] architectural associations" and, within, he discussed stylistic variation from place to place, laments the state of less populated regions where the landscape is unredeemed by any "snug villa, farmhouse or cottage by the roadside," and describes the "palazzi" of the rural gentry.<sup>129</sup> Among the characteristic features of buildings he described were "projecting stone balconies from the upper windows," perhaps an inspiration for the artist's earliest villa concept, with its prominent second-story balcony that made the western elevation look rather unbalanced. (Fig. 118) He describes the distant view of many a town, in which "the eye of the traveler will almost surely be attracted by a capacious and solid building, surmounted by a belfry-tower, and commanding the most charming prospect in the vicinity. It is surrounded with orange groves and cypress-trees, and looks like a place fitted for the enjoyment of a contemplative life."<sup>130</sup> That these buildings would reveal themselves to be monasteries does not detract from their resemblance to Cedar Grove; indeed, one need only substitute "cedar" for "orange and cypress" and this could be a description of his country house concept. His particular attention to the practices of country life he encountered is evident both from his Sicilian essays and from two images the artist made in the vicinity of the villa at Formia, on the coast between Rome and Naples, that was believed to have belonged to Marcus Tullius Cicero, traces of a pilgrimage to a famous site where the formation of country life ideals took place.<sup>131</sup> The Italian months were among the most productive of Cole's career; the artist lamented after returning to New York from his first encounter with Italy "O that I was there again, and in the same spirit!"<sup>132</sup> This inspiration was much in Cole's mind when it came time to design a villa for his family in Catskill.

While Cole's evolving concept for new construction at Cedar Grove can be traced to a general idea of the Italian villa that he retained from his travels and studies rather than any single building, it does bear a strong relationship to Italianate concepts for American country houses that were in fashion at the time. For example, Andrew Jackson Downing's *Cottage Residences* includes a design for "An irregular villa in the Italian style, Bracketted" has distinct similarities

<sup>127</sup> Another trace of this plein-air study of buildings and ruins is the sketch box from his first Italian trip, now in the collection of the Greene County Historical Society, that includes a view of an unknown temple inside the lid. See Eleanor Jones Harvey, *The Painted Sketch: American Impressions from Nature, 1830-1880* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), pp. 120-1.

<sup>128</sup> Thomas Cole, "Sicilian Scenery and Antiquities" *The Knickerbocker* 23 (Feb., 1844), pp. 103-13; "Sicilian Scenery and Antiquities: Part Two" *The Knickerbocker* 23 (Mar., 1844), pp. 236-44. Both have been reproduced in Thomas Cole, *The Collected Essays and Prose Sketches* ed. Marshall Tynn (St. Paul, MN: John Colet Press, 1980). The quote is from page 37 of that useful volume.

<sup>129</sup> Cole, *Collected Essays*, 25-27. Cole also writes about Mount Etna at length in the first essay, which is likely the reason Noble devotes so much attention to that peak in his discussion of the view from Cedar Grove.

<sup>130</sup> Cole, *Collected Essays*, 27.

<sup>131</sup> Cole's sketches of the site are accession numbers 39.565.82 and 39.565.84 at the DIA. On the so-called "Villa of Cicero" at Formia and of his contribution to the country house ideal, see Alfred Frazer, "The Roman Villa and the Pastoral Ideal," *Studies in the History of Art* 36 (1992), p. 54.

<sup>132</sup> Dunlap, *Rise and Progress*, 155.

in its three-story tower, square columns, veranda, and provides justification for the reading of the overhanging, bracketed roof of both house and tower at Cedar Grove as a legibly “Italianate” feature for his period. (Fig. 133) Another entry in that collection, “A cottage in the Italian, or Tuscan style” seems to anticipate the tracery that appeared along the eaves of the New Studio and the reading of that building, too, as Italianate by contemporary audiences. (Fig. 134) In aspiring to an Italianate villa and constructing a studio building that had characteristics associated with the Italianate, Cole proclaimed his membership in a long line of European and American artists who found inspiration in Italy’s built landscapes.

Further insight into Cole’s stylistic choices at Cedar Grove is to be found in his “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture,” discussed in the first chapter. [Appendix C] In the final section of that essay, he turns from a broad statement of principles for building to a narrower treatment of issues of style and form at the domestic scale. These comments express the values at work in his contemporary design efforts for Cedar Grove and shed light on the stark differences between Cole’s intended villa and nearby houses of starkly different style like that of Washington Irving. In contrast to the work of Andrew Jackson Downing and others to advocate for “the English Cottage Style” as a suitable option for the more northern latitudes of the United States, Cole claims “it looks like an exotic here. It does not harmonize with the American landscape and, the climate being more sunny than that of England, more shade is required.” [Appendix C] Criticism of Sunnyside seems to lurk behind his claim that “The English Cottage, picturesque & complete as it is when seen in some shady nook...looks mean & diminutive when placed on the ample hills that rise from the Hudson River.” As an alternative, he advocates for an “American Villa Architecture,” characterized by a freer play of indoor and outdoor spaces and the cultivation of shade with projecting roofs and broad verandas, which he calls “Piazzas.” In the creation of this American style of country architecture, Cole suggests that “From the Italian Villa Architecture I imagine we can adopt much...It affords simplicity with variety and a capability of being adapted to any internal & economical arrangement that may be required.” Cole’s architectural work at Cedar Grove demonstrated the truth of his words. When he felt secure after receiving the commission for *The Voyage of Life*, he could envision a palatial country house, rich in ornament and colossal in scale. As his circumstances narrowed, so did the building, shedding excess expense while maintaining its basic proportions. The New Studio was the final adaptation of these designs for an Italo-American villa, the “economical arrangement” that his finances required. This process of modification and accommodation shows the versatility of the form he envisioned and this painter-architect’s resiliency in the face of bitter professional disappointment.

\*

\*

\*

Thomas Cole died on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February, 1848, just past his forty-seventh birthday, from what a period source describes as “an attack of the pleurisy.”<sup>133</sup> One of the last canvases he produced in the newly constructed painting space before his untimely demise took advantage of the building’s generous proportions: the forty-four by sixty-six inch *Home in the Woods*. (Fig. 135) Completed in the autumn of 1847 for the American Art-Union’s annual exhibition and lottery, this image is productive to discuss in concluding an account of Cole’s architectural efforts at

---

<sup>133</sup> John Mackie Falconer. “Thomas Cole is No More: A Letter from John Falconer to Jasper Cropsey, February 24, 1848” *American Art Journal* 15.4 (Autumn, 1983), p. 75.

Cedar Grove because of its resonance with the values that shaped his plans.<sup>134</sup> The reviewer for *The Literary World* called it a “scene of exquisite repose” where “everything wears nature’s brightest apparel.”<sup>135</sup> More recent commentators have mentioned it as an example of the prevalence of images of “the log hut of the pioneer settler” in the period or to show how Cole “sought out new native versions of Arcadia” in retreat from the tumult of the Jacksonian era.<sup>136</sup> However, the context this chapter has established urges a different reading of *Home in the Woods*: as an emblem of the life in the landscape to which he aspired, and had nearly achieved, at Cedar Grove. The painting depicts a rough cabin in an imagined Northeastern wilderness, long before, or far removed from, the intrusions of trains, steamships, and other modern conveniences. A hardy family has begun the difficult work of clearing land and beginning to grow crops in this harsh but romantic setting. As the man of the house returns from a lake bearing fresh catch, a woman and child greet him from the doorway. In this vignette of family harmony, one might think of the image of a mother and child seemingly looking towards the artist himself from the porch of his proposed villa. **(Fig. 119)** Although the two houses could hardly be more different in setting and refinement, both Cole’s villa and *Home in the Woods* were products of sustained attention to the question of how best to inhabit and domesticate the landscape that was a major concern for the artist, just as it was for many painters and writers of his period.

Although Thomas Cole succeeded in building little at Cedar Grove, this country house and the paper architecture it encouraged should be understood collectively as one of this painter-architect’s most sustained and ambitious projects in the transdisciplinary medium of landscape, as it has been conceived by W.J.T. Mitchell.<sup>137</sup> In addition to granting privileged access to the artist’s favored scenery and the square footage necessary to undertake large canvases like those of *The Course of Empire* and *The Voyage of Life*, inhabiting this landscape also encouraged critical thought about the forms and ideologies of country life. In the buildings he designed and constructed on the site, he demonstrated the lessons learned from an eclectic architectural education that included his travels in the United States and Europe, his writings and designs for public buildings, and, not least, his depictions of the distinctly different modes of country life practiced by three distinctly different patrons.

---

<sup>134</sup> See Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 338-9. While Parry also devoted a whole article to the discussion of a similar, earlier composition *The Hunter’s Return*, this painting has received surprisingly little scholarly attention: Ellwood C. Parry, III “Thomas Cole’s *The Hunter’s Return*” *American Art Journal* 17.3 (Summer, 1985), pp. 2-17.

<sup>135</sup> Anon, Review of the 1847 exhibition of the American Art-Union, *The Literary World* (October 23, 1847), p. 277. Quoted in Parry, *Ambition and Imagination*, 339.

<sup>136</sup> Nicolai Cikovsky, “‘The Ravages of the Axe’: The Meaning of the Tree Stump in Nineteenth-Century American Art”, *The Art Bulletin* 61.4 (Dec., 1979), p. 622; Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 52

<sup>137</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape” in *Landscape and Power* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 5

## CONCLUSION

### The Domesticated Landscape in America

In June of 1844, four years before his untimely death, Thomas Cole made a rare exception to his usual policy of not taking students by welcoming Frederic Edwin Church for a two year residence at Cedar Grove.<sup>1</sup> This was largely due to the intervention of his old friend and patron Daniel Wadsworth. In a letter of May 8<sup>th</sup> of the same year, Wadsworth told Cole of a young man “between seventeen and eighteen years of age, who has evinced considerable talent for landscape painting & who has a strong desire to pursue the art,” asking whether Cole might be willing to take Church on as pupil and member of his household.<sup>2</sup> While the fact that Church’s father was a prominent Hartford businessman who offered to cover any fees Cole could imagine was not incidental, the promise of a disciple who, according to Wadsworth, had “considerable mechanical genius” must have been an important part of the calculation.<sup>3</sup> As Church told his first biographer, Charles Dudley Warner, Cole instructed him “to go out and paint what he pleased and how he pleased, but advised him to try simple things and do them as thoroughly and truthfully as possible.”<sup>4</sup> Given free rein to wander the surroundings, Cole’s mode of artistic country life made a strong impression on the young artist, as is documented in the drawing of Cedar Grove that Church made as tribute to Cole shortly after the latter’s death, an image that speaks to the afterlives of Thomas Cole’s architectural thought and to the role of Cole’s architectural endeavors in his posthumous reception. **(Fig. 131)** Cedar Grove proved so inspirational a model for Church that, by the time he had far exceeded his master in terms of financial success, he chose a dramatic hilltop site directly across the river from Cedar Grove, outside the town of Hudson, on which to build a country house of his own, known as “Olana.” **(Fig. 136)** The astonishing building Church constructed with assistance from Calvert Vaux was at the center of an estate that grew to encompass 250 acres during his lifetime, combining productive farms and pleasure grounds with winding carriage roads that were constructed to frame and reveal dramatic views of the surrounding scenery.<sup>5</sup> In the greater freedom and resources behind it and the far larger canvas it enjoyed, Olana makes visible certain of the desires and values that remained latent at Cedar Grove. While Church opted for a pseudo-Persian fantasy palace in place of Cole’s relatively modest “Italian looking thing,” both structures were products of the desire to apply principles of the painted landscape to the realm of mortar and earth.

Although Church’s responses to Cedar Grove are especially significant because of his period of residence there, he was far from the only follower of Cole who found Cedar Grove a compelling example of an artist’s house, built upon architectural experimentation, that offered sustained and privileged access to a particular landscape. Jasper Francis Cropsey, a rare landscape painter of this or any period who was, first and foremost, a professional architect, also made a visit to Cedar Grove after Cole’s death and made his own sketch of the New Studio as a

---

<sup>1</sup> Gerald Carr, “Master and Pupil: Drawings by Thomas Cole and Frederic Church” *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 66.1 (1990), p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> NYSL 4.3

<sup>3</sup> NYSL 4.3

<sup>4</sup> Charles Dudley Warner, Unfinished typescript for a biography of Church preserved at Olana State Historic Site, Ch. 3, p. 12. Quoted in Carr, “Master and Pupil”, 50.

<sup>5</sup> Carr, “Master and Pupil,” 58. For more on Olana, see James A. Ryan, *Frederic Church’s Olana: Architecture and Landscape as Art* (Hudson, NY: Black Dome Press, 2001).

tribute to the artist.<sup>6</sup> (**Fig. 137**) In a letter recounting that visit, Cropsey described the building as “large and comodious [sic], with a neat little porch and wide open hall before entering the painting department.”<sup>7</sup> He remained in the studio for four hours that day, looking at the paintings by Cole that were displayed there as a kind of memorial gallery, and took away lessons from this encounter with an artist’s architecture that he put to use in building a spectacular artist’s house of his own called “Aladdin,” near Warwick, New York.<sup>8</sup> (**Fig. 138**) While that building has now been destroyed, surviving sketches for it show it to have been a eclectic board and batten structure with strong links to the designs of Andrew Jackson Downing. While the style is, again, markedly different from that of Cedar Grove, the influence of Cole’s New Studio is visible in Cropsey’s own studio at the right of this drawing, with its single floor-to-ceiling window, as on the northern wall of the New Studio, and its ornamental cornice. Just as Cedar Grove permitted Cole sustained access to Catskill Creek and its surroundings for painting, so did Aladdin encourage Cropsey’s intensive study of nearby Greenwood Lake, a subject he painted on at least half a dozen occasions.<sup>9</sup> While Church can be understood as one pole of the built response to Cole’s architectural thought, with his lavish expenditure of time and money in shaping a vast landscape to his design, Cropsey represents another: a landscape painter who took an interest in architecture to an extreme of professionalism and who made especially extensive use of the immersive access to the surrounding landscape his country house provided.

Perhaps the most vivid tribute to the powerful, posthumous associations of Cedar Grove is a story Sanford Gifford told to a fellow landscape painter, Worthington Whittredge, as recounted in the latter’s autobiography:

After he left Brown University and returned to his home in Hudson, where his father was in active business, he was pressed to choose some occupation which might serve him for a livelihood. This was no easy task. Betwixt his desire to please his father and at the same time to please himself, he found himself in doubt. At length, in no happy mood, he started off one morning for the fields, and finally brought up on the top of Mount Merrino, a high hill to the south of Hudson, overlooking the river and with a clear view of the Catskill Mountains. Here he stretched himself in the shadow of a tree until, as he expressed it, he came to the conclusion that any of the pursuits which had been suggested to him were good enough for him, but that he was good for nothing for any of them. Below him on the opposite side of the river lay the village of Catskill, its roofs and windows glistening in the sun. There was one house standing in the village which was in full view, around which we may well believe there was a halo of light that morning which lighted up the path which he was to follow. This was the house and studio of Thomas Cole, the father of a long line of

---

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Bonario, “Here Today and Gone Tomorrow: Jasper F. Cropsey’s *The Backwoods of America*” *RACAR* 9.1/2 (1982), p. 10. On Cropsey’s visit to Cedar Grove, see Jasper Francis Cropsey, “The Brushes He Painted with That Last Day Are There...”: Jasper F. Cropsey’s Letter to his Wife Describing Thomas Cole’s Home and Studio, July, 1850” *American Art Journal* 16.3 (Summer, 1984), pp. 78-83.

<sup>7</sup> Cropsey, “Letter to his Wife,” 81.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Maddox of the Newington-Cropsey Foundation informs me he is currently at work on an article about Aladdin, which will be the first comprehensive account of that fascinating structure. A drawing for it is in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: accession number 52.1600

<sup>9</sup> For example, one of many views of this subject from his Aladdin years is *Greenwood Lake* (1875) in the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



American landscape painters. It was not long after this before Gifford's name began to appear in the catalogues of the old Art Union and of the Academy of Design.<sup>10</sup>

Gifford's transformative encounter represents another aspect of the afterlives of Cedar Grove: as metonym for the artist himself and for the entire profession of landscape painting. It is significant that, from these beginnings, Gifford would become a prominent practitioner of an art of landscape civilized and inscribed by the country house, as in the case of *Hunter Mountain, Twilight*. (Fig. 139) Just as a country house had carried powerful associations in his own life, so did his paintings celebrate the meanings such structures carry. Although he did not build as ambitiously as did Church and Cropsey, Gifford followed Cole's example most closely of all in building only a studio, a structure that has been compared to the "belvederes" of certain Roman villas, atop his family's house in the town of Hudson.<sup>11</sup> (Fig. 140)

The built reception of Thomas Cole by later nineteenth-century landscape painters reveals elements of the country house ideal that remained latent in his own work because his limited resources did not permit him to realize his vision as fully as some of his followers did theirs. In his paintings of houses and in his designs for Cedar Grove, the country house is a way of seeing the landscape and of inscribing with meaning and European civilization scenes that otherwise suffered from the "want of associations" that he found characteristic of the new country.<sup>12</sup> The more extensive work of artists like Frederic Edwin Church and Jasper Francis Cropsey, among others, to transform the physical landscape alongside their painting practice urges future scholarship on the ways a range of nineteenth-century American painters practiced a transdisciplinary art of landscape that was not confined to canvas. In this period, building, gardening, and painting interacted in productive ways by means of the artist's house.

The parallels between Cole's vision for Cedar Grove and the houses of Giorgio Vasari in Arezzo and Peter Paul Rubens in Antwerp were noted in the previous chapter. Another worth mentioning by way of conclusion is that all three of these houses have now been preserved as museums and major centers of scholarship on their creators. Just as the Rubenshuis museum has led the way in scholarship on that artist's work in architecture and the Casa Vasari continues to host major exhibitions that add to our understanding of that artist's work, so does the Thomas Cole National Historic Site's work at Cedar Grove to build an understanding of Cole in his physical and social environment greatly add to scholarship on the artist today.<sup>13</sup> Alas, the path to preservation was not smooth. Scholars will long lament that New York State declined the offer of Cole's great-grandniece Edith Cole Silberstein to acquire the house complete with its contents for \$175,000 in 1964.<sup>14</sup> The auction of the collections that resulted is a great loss but, fortunately, the house averted potential demolition when it came into the possession of the Catskill Center for

---

<sup>10</sup> Baur, ed. *The Autobiography of Worthington Whittredge*, 56.

<sup>11</sup> William B. Rhoads, "The Artist's House and Studio in the Nineteenth-Century Hudson Valley and Catskills" in *Charmed Places: Hudson River Artists and Their Houses, Studios, and Vistas*, eds. Sandra S. Phillips and Linda Weintraub (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), p. 81

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery" *The American Monthly Magazine* (Jan., 1836), p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> On the scholarly impact of Casa Vasari, see Rudolph Stella, "Arezzo: Giorgio Vasari" *The Burlington Magazine* 124.947 (Feb., 1982), pp. 121-2. For an example of the scholarly work of Rubenshuis, see Kristin Belkin and Fiona Healy, eds. *A House of Art: Rubens as Collector* (Antwerp: Rubenshuis, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Nancy Siegel, "Decorative Nature: The Emblematic Imagery of Thomas Cole" in *Within the Landscape: Essays on Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* eds. Phillip Earenfight and Nancy Siegel (Carlisle, PA: The Trout Gallery, 2005), p. 77.

Conservation and Development in 1979.<sup>15</sup> After the initial *Thomas Cole House Reconnaissance Study* of 1980 and a subsequent *Suitability/Feasibility Study* of 1991, Cedar Grove was finally designated the Thomas Cole National Historic Site by act of Congress in 1999, opening a happier chapter in the afterlives of the structure after decades of neglect.<sup>16</sup> As an affiliate site of the National Parks Service, managed by the Greene County Historical Society, much work has been done in the sixteen years of the National Historic Site's existence to preserve what remains from Cole's day and to explain the artist's work in the context of the surroundings. Since at least 2004, there has been a vision to include, as a key component of the interpretive program, "a new building resembling the demolished New Studio."<sup>17</sup> These efforts near completion at the time of writing and will coincide with an exhibition on the subject of Cole and architecture in summer 2016.<sup>18</sup> These are promising developments that lead one to hope that more work will be done on this still little understood aspect of the artist's career in years to come.

---

<sup>15</sup> W. Barksdale Maynard, "Thomas Cole Drawing on Stone Found at Cedar Grove" *American Art Journal* 30.1/2 (1999), p. 139; *TCNHS General Management Plan*, 8. Thankfully, New York State did not make the same mistake when Frederic Church's Olana was threatened two years later. Largely thanks to the efforts of David Huntington, that house was preserved as a State Historic Site, rather than a national one, in 1979. See David Huntington, "Must this Mansion be Destroyed?" *Life* (May 13, 1966), pp. 64-80.

<sup>16</sup> *Thomas Cole: Suitability/Feasibility Study* (Boston: National Parks Service, 1991), p. 3; Public Law 106-146; *TCNHS General Management Plan*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> *TCNHS General Management Plan*, 5

<sup>18</sup> In the interest of disclosure, I will be giving a guest lecture at the opening of this exhibition but am in no other way involved in the project.

## FIGURES

[Except in cases where another creator is credited, the artist is Thomas Cole]

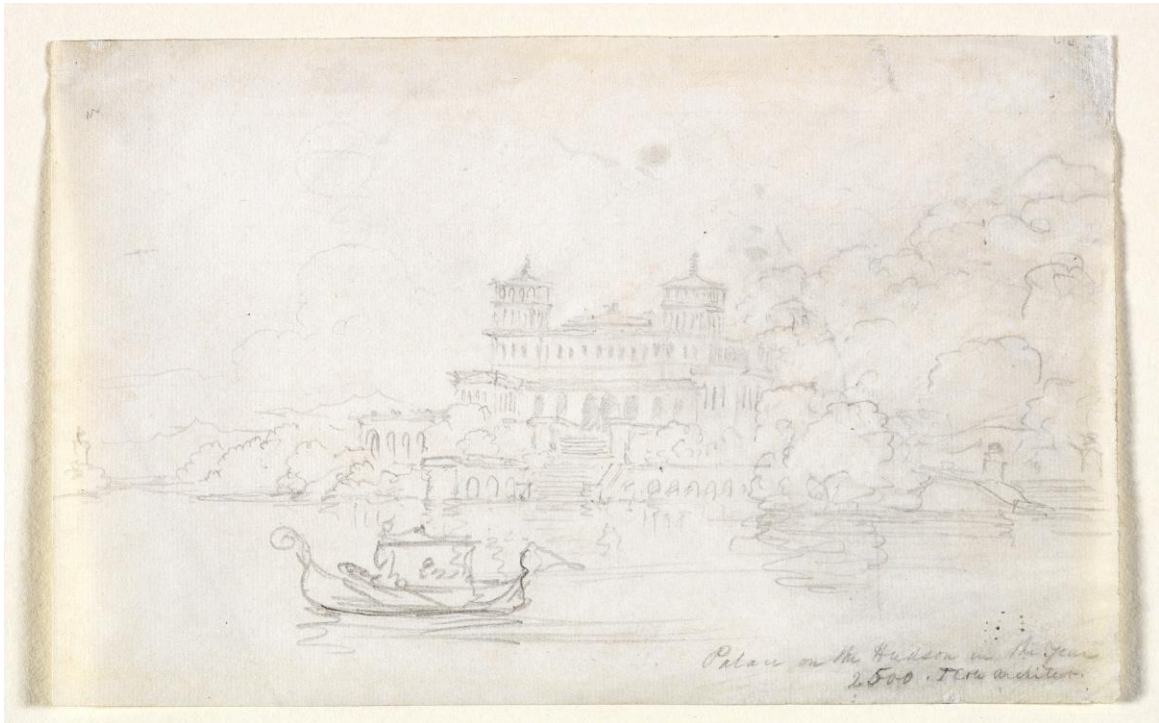


Fig. 1 *Palace on the Hudson in the Year 2500*, T. Cole Architect, late 1830s or early 1840s. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.519



Fig. 2 *The Course of Empire: Consummation*, 1836. Oil on canvas, New-York Historical Society



Fig. 3 *The Architect's Dream*, 1840. Oil on canvas, Toledo Museum of Art.



Fig. 4 Detail: *Youth* from *The Voyage of Life*, 1842. Oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art



Fig. 5 *A View of the Mountain Pass Called the Notch of the White Mountains (Crawford Notch)*, 1839. Oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington



Fig. 6 Sketch for the Ohio Statehouse, c. 1838. Chalk on panel (verso of Fig. 5) National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Fig. 7 Front Elevation for St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Catskill, NY, c. 1839-40. Ink over pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.535



Fig. 8 Detail of *The Return* (Fig. 82), 1838. Oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection, National Gallery of Art

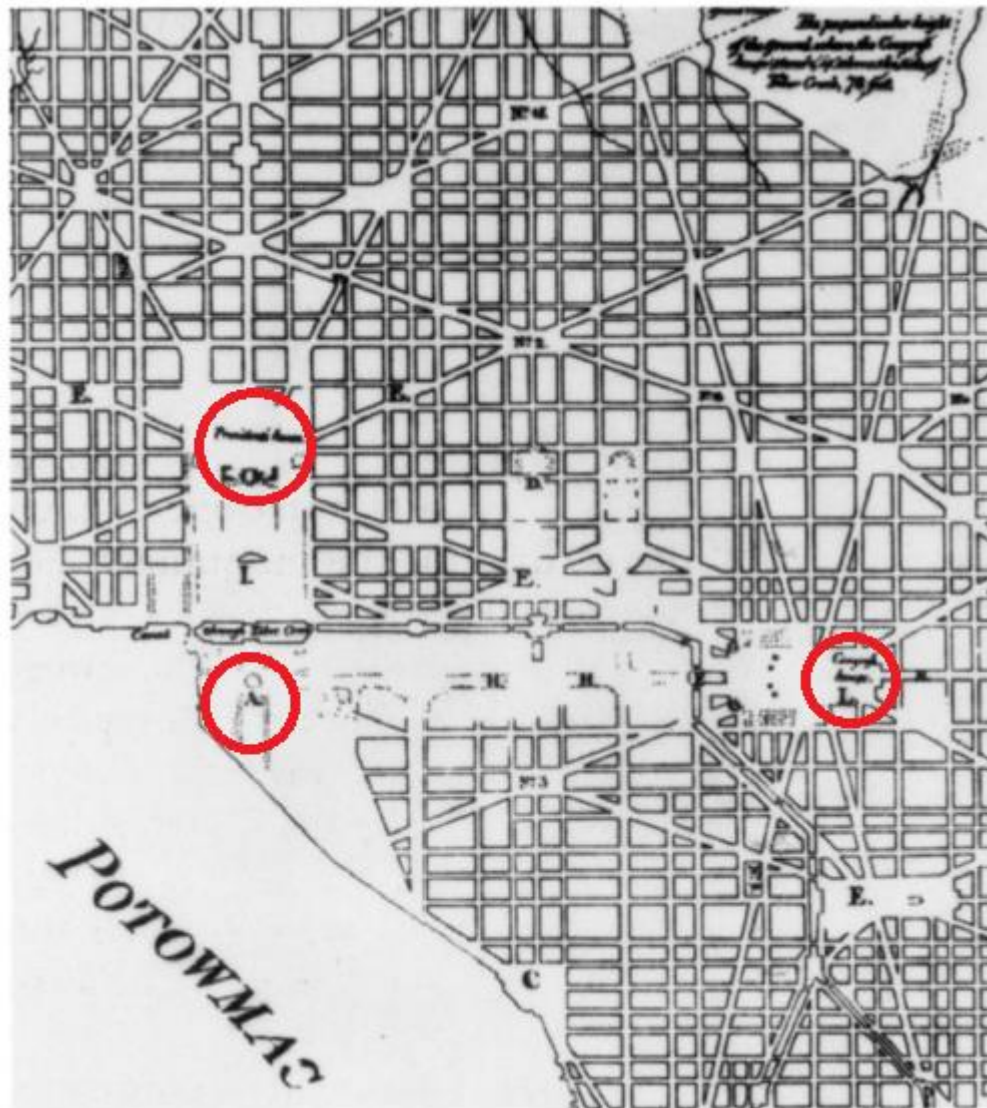


Fig. 9 Pierre Charles L'Enfant, *Plan of Washington* (detail with Point A, "President's house" and "Congress house" circled), 1887 facsimile of 1791 original. United States Coast and Geodetic Survey Office. [Reproduced in Savage, "Self-Made Monument", p. 228]



Fig. 10 Sketch for the Washington Monument, 1835. Pencil on paper, New York State Library, Cole Papers 4a.1



Fig. 11 *The Course of Empire: Destruction*, 1836. Oil on canvas, New-York Historical Society





Fig. 12 *The Course of Empire: Desolation*, 1836. Oil on canvas, New-York Historical Society



Fig. 13 Detail of Fig. 2, *The Course of Empire: Consummation*, 1836. Oil on canvas, New-York Historical Society

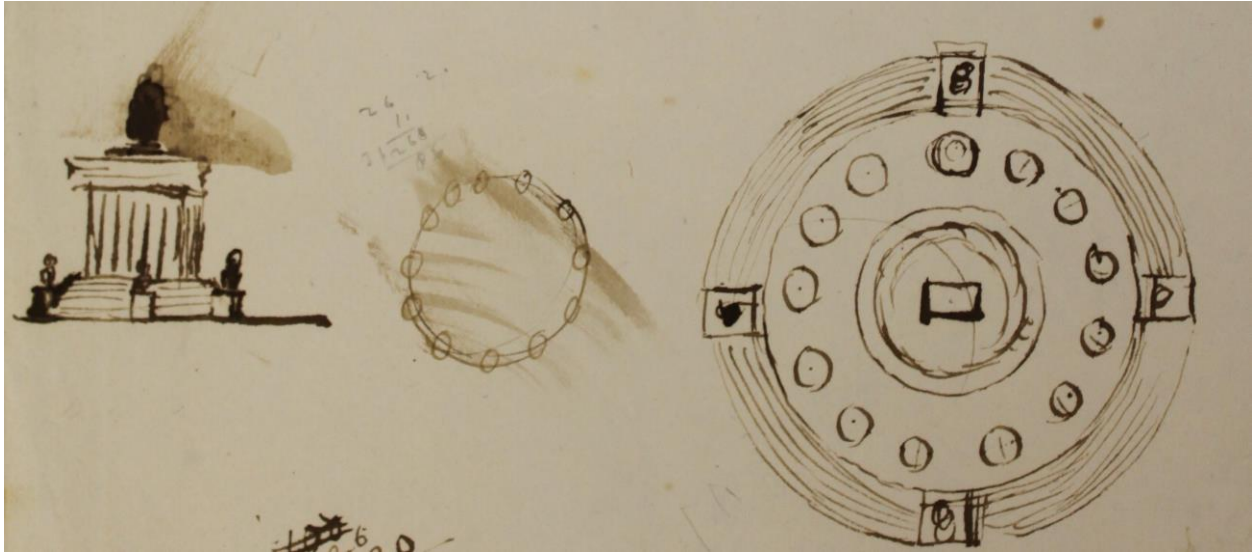


Fig. 14 Second Design for the Washington Monument, late 1835 or earlier 1836. Ink on paper, New York State Library, Cole Papers 6.5



Fig. 15 Robert Mills, *Sketch of Washington National Monument*, c. 1840. Ink and watercolor, National Archives. [Reproduced in Savage, "Self-Made Monument", 234]



Fig. 16 John Russell Pope et al. *The Jefferson Memorial*, 1938-43. Washington, D.C.

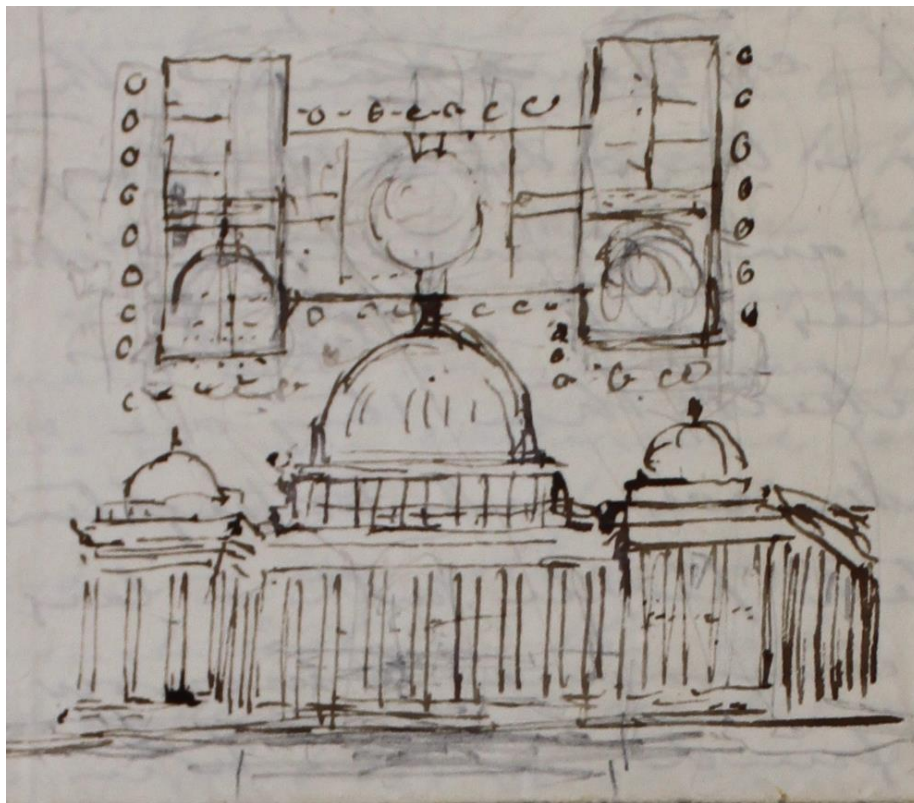


Fig. 17 First design for the Ohio Statehouse, 1838. Ink on paper, New York State Library, Cole Papers 2.8

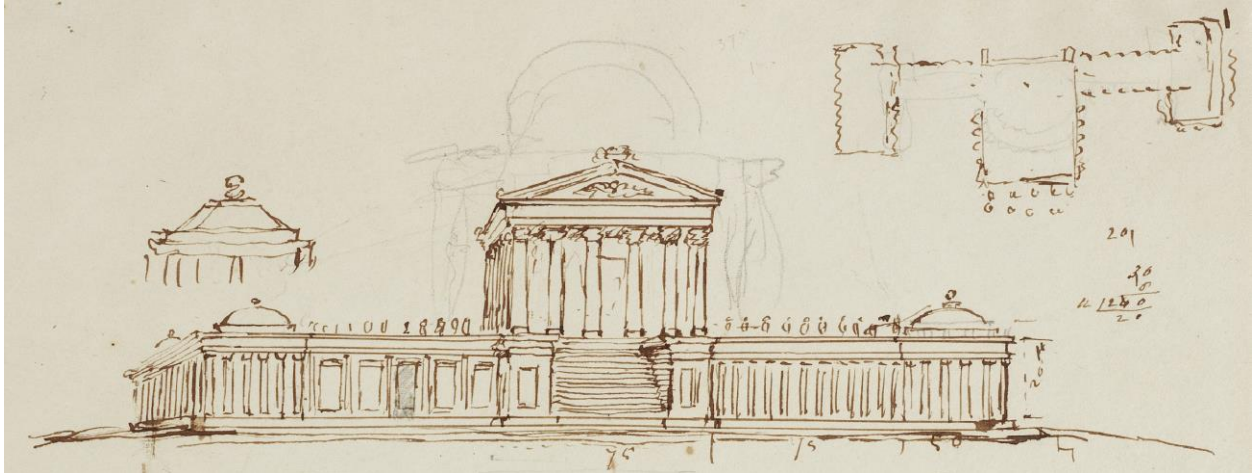


Fig. 18 Undated early plan and elevation for the Ohio Statehouse. Ink on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts, 39.508



Fig. 19 Thomas Jefferson and Charles-Louis Cl risseau, Virginia State Capitol, Richmond, 1785.



Fig. 20 Maison Carée, Nîmes, France. Circa 16 b.c.e.

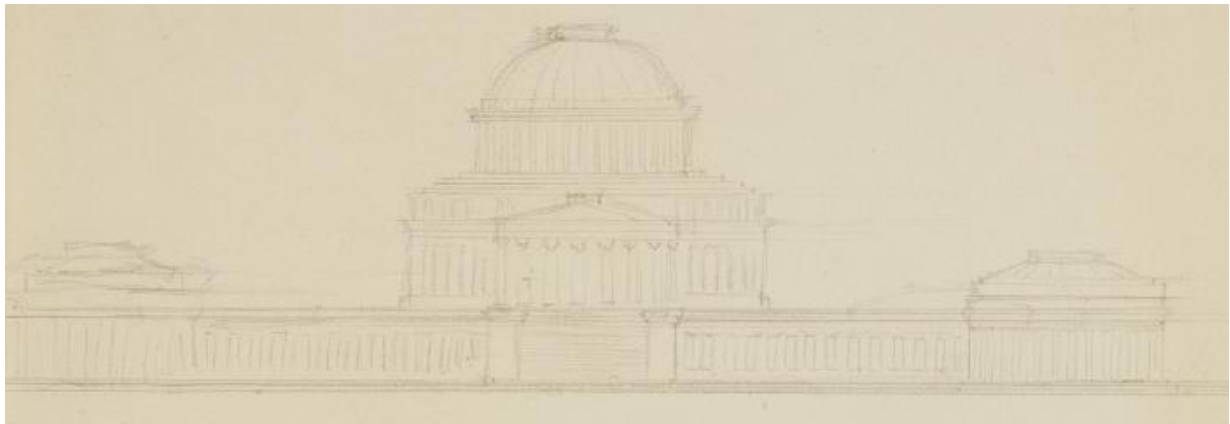


Fig. 21 Undated Statehouse elevation. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts, 39.504a

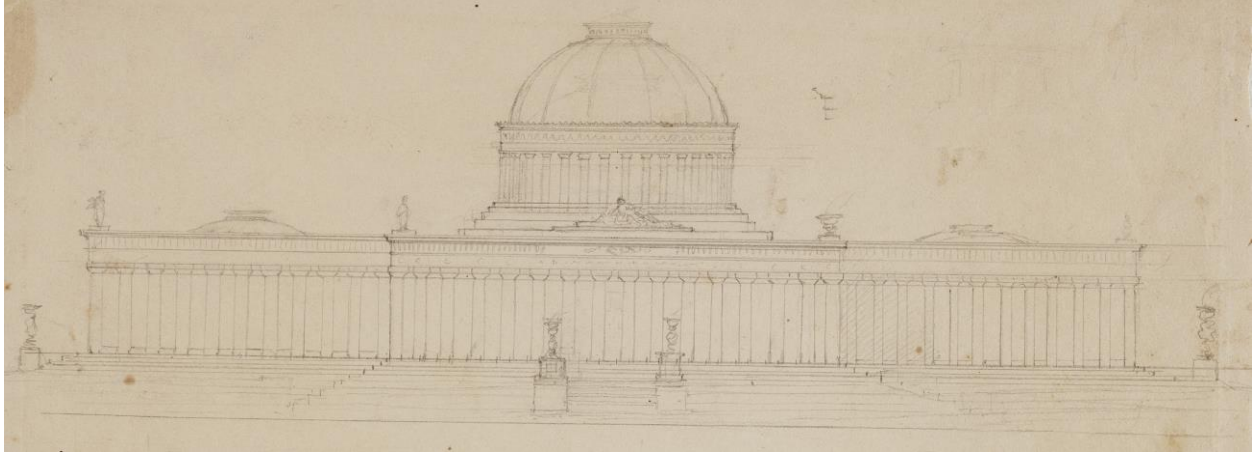


Fig. 22 Undated Statehouse elevation. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts, 39.505



Fig. 23 Undated Statehouse perspective. Pencil and gray wash on paper, New York State Library, Cole Papers 8.1



Fig. 24 Alexander Jackson Davis, *Plan by T. Cole, Esq. For the Capitol of Ohio* (redrafted from Cole's original submission, now lost), c. 1839. Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper, Metropolitan Museum of Art

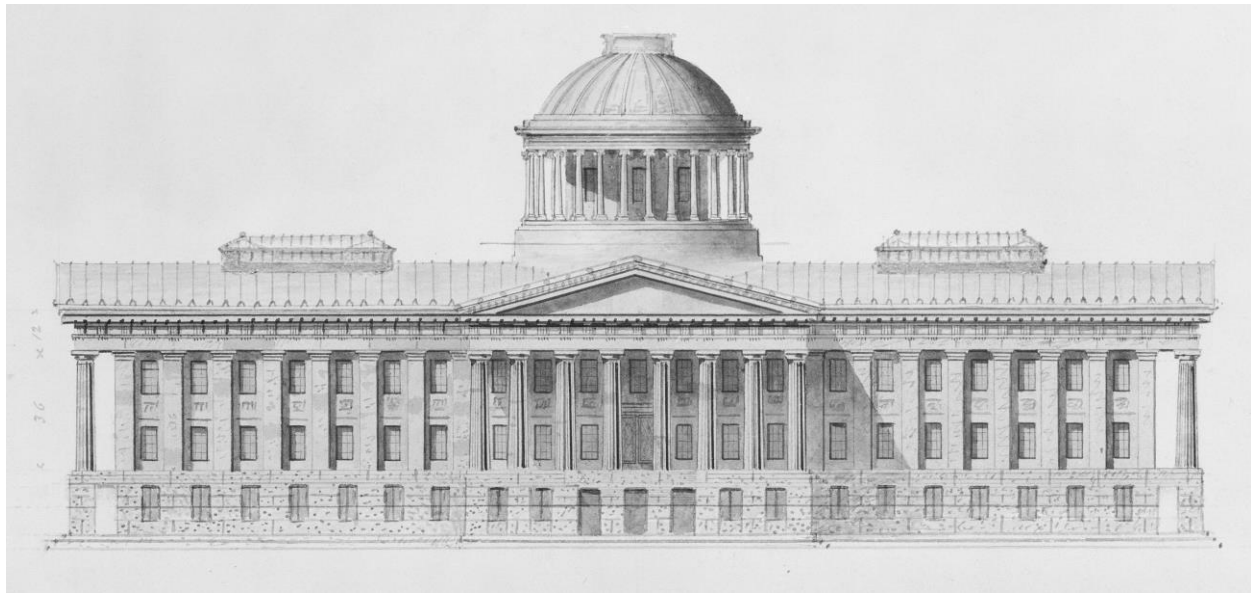


Fig. 25 Alexander Jackson Davis, *Plan by H. Walter, Esq. For the Capitol of Ohio* (redrafted from original submission, now lost), c. 1839. Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper, Metropolitan Museum of Art



Fig. 26 Ammi Young and Thomas Silloway, Vermont State House, Montpelier, 1833.

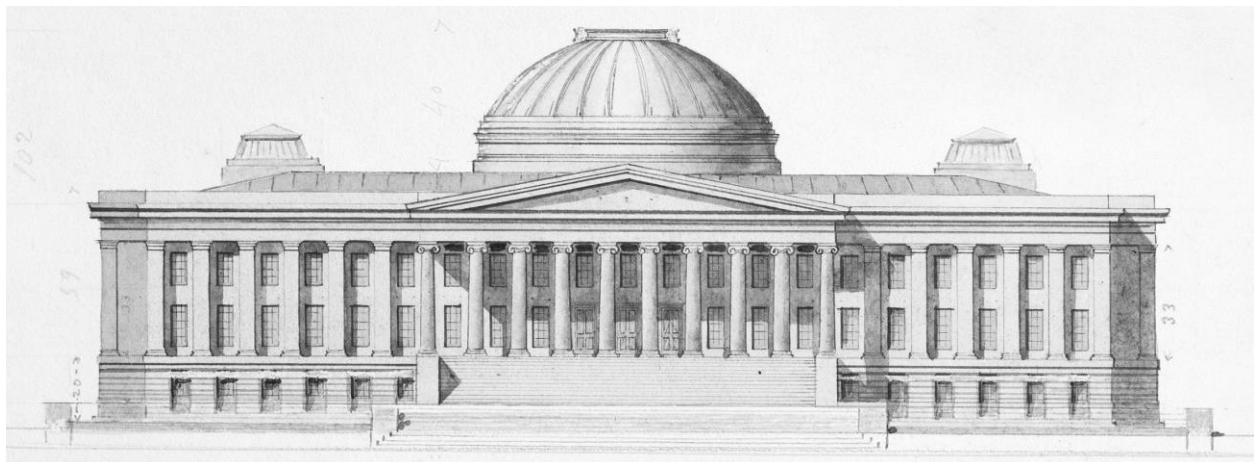


Fig. 27 Alexander Jackson Davis, *Plan by M. Thompson, Esq. For the Capitol of Ohio* (redrafted from original submission, now lost), c. 1839. Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper, Metropolitan Museum of Art



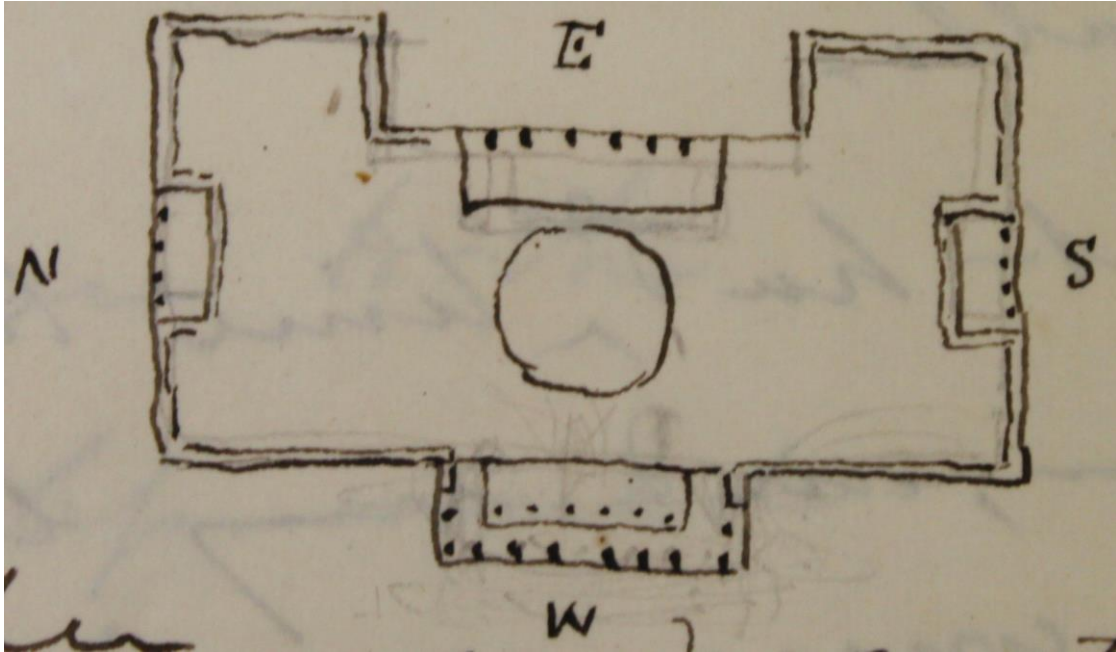


Fig. 28 William Apthorp Adams, after Thomas Cole, Plan approved by the Commissioners of the Ohio Statehouse, June 21, 1839. New York State Library, Cole Papers 2.9



Fig. 29 Thomas Cole et al., The Ohio Statehouse, Columbus. 1839-1861.



Fig. 30 *The Past* , 1838. Oil on canvas, Mead Art Museum, Amherst College



Fig. 31 *The Present*, 1838. Oil on canvas, Mead Art Museum, Amherst College.

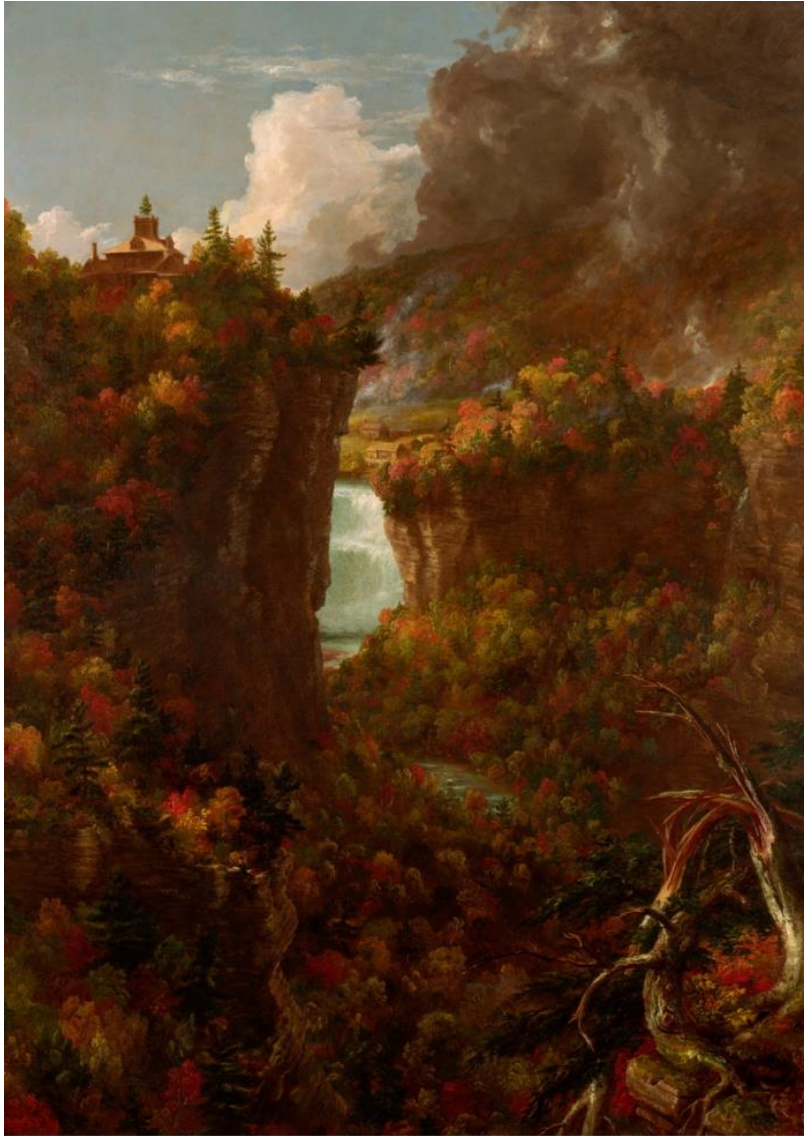


Fig. 32 *Portage Falls on the Genesee River*, 1839. Oil on canvas, Seward House Historic Museum [pending deaccession]



Fig. 33 Detail of Fig. 32: Hornby Lodge



Fig. 34 *Hornby Lodge*, 1839. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.337



Fig. 35 Peter Paul Rubens, *Autumn Landscape with a View of Het Steen in the Early Morning*, 1636. Oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, London



Fig. 36 William Birch, “Montibello, the Seat of Genl. S. Smith, Maryland” in *Country Seats of the United States of North America* (Philadelphia: William Birch, 1808).



Fig. 37 *View of the Featherstonhaugh Estate Near Duanesburg, New York, 1826.* Oil on canvas, The Featherstonhaugh Trust.



Fig. 38 *The Woodchopper, Lake Featherstonhaugh*, 1826. Oil on canvas, USC Fisher Museum of Art



Fig. 39 *Landscape, the Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance*, 1826. Oil on canvas, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

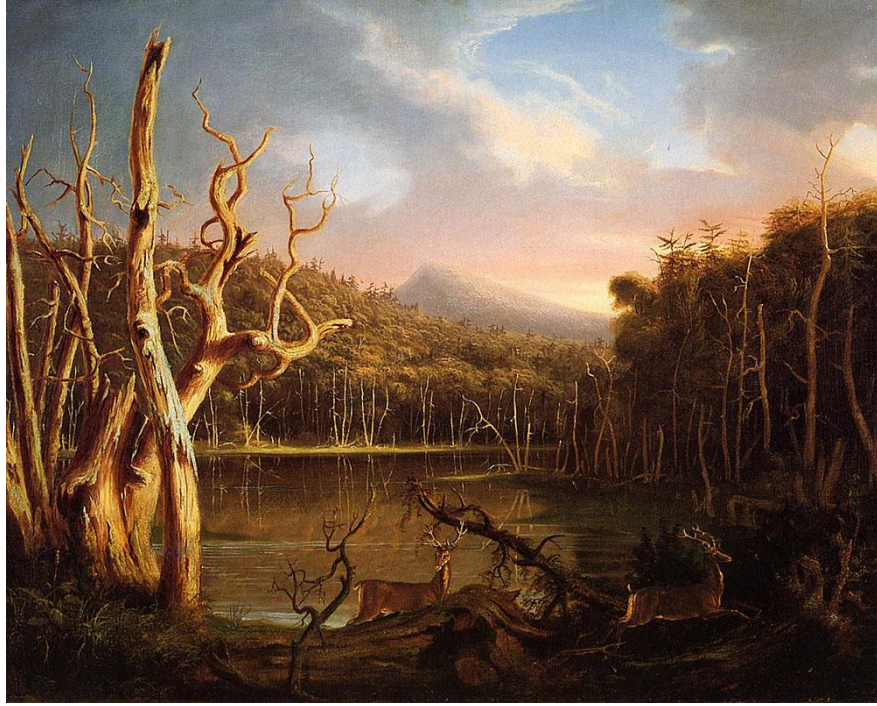


Fig. 40 *Lake with Dead Trees*, 1825. Oil on canvas, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College

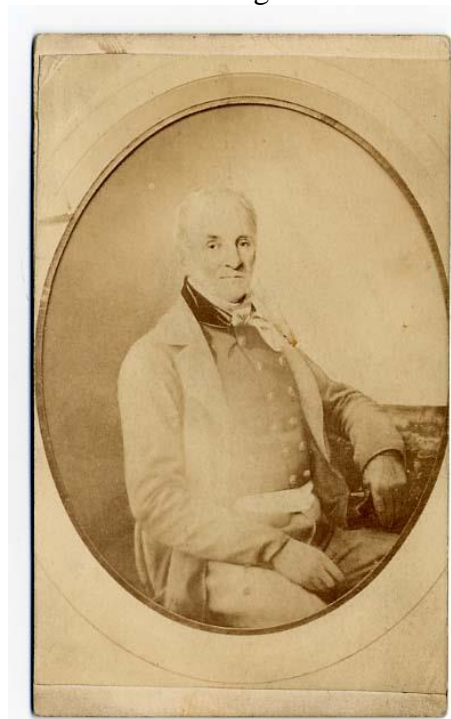


Fig. 41 Anon., Carte-de-visite of George William Featherstonhaugh, ca. 1856. Albumen print, Minnesota Historical Society



Fig. 42 Detail of *The Woodchopper, Lake Featherstonhaugh* (Fig. 38) Author photograph

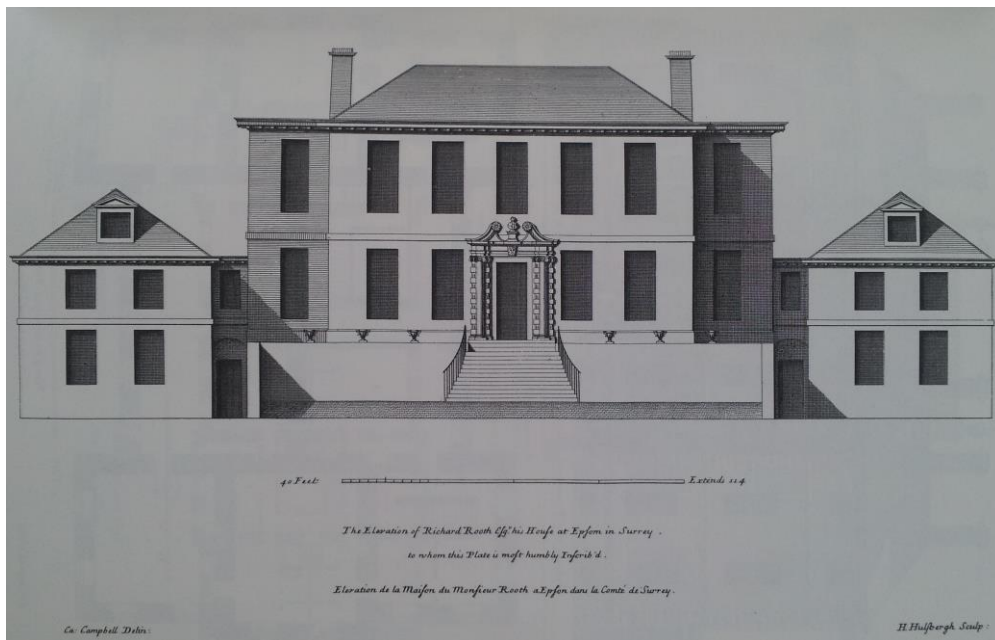


Fig. 43 Colen Campbell, “The Elevation of Richard Rooth Esqr. his House at Epsom in Surrey” from *Vitruvius Britannicus, or the British Architect* Vol. II (London: Colen Campbell, 1717), pl. 49.





Fig. 44 *The Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance* (1 of 2), 1825-6. Pen and ink over pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts, 39.252.A



Fig. 45 *The Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance* (2 of 2), 1825-6. Pen and ink over pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts, 39.252.B

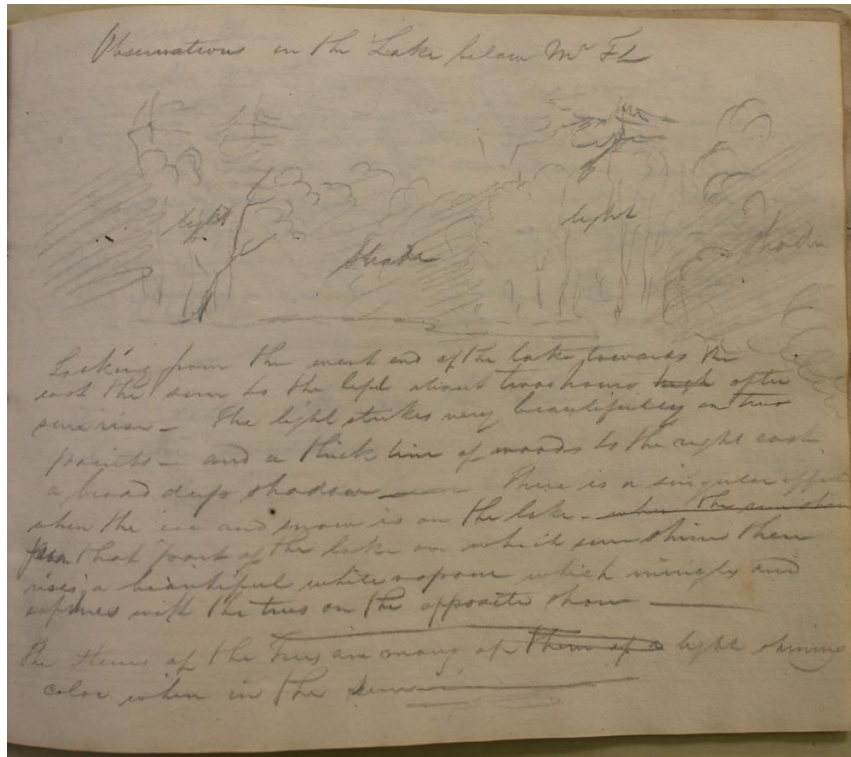


Fig. 46 "Observations on the Lake below Mr. F's" from the Duanesburg Sketchbook, 1826. Pencil on paper, New York State Library, Cole Papers 8.3

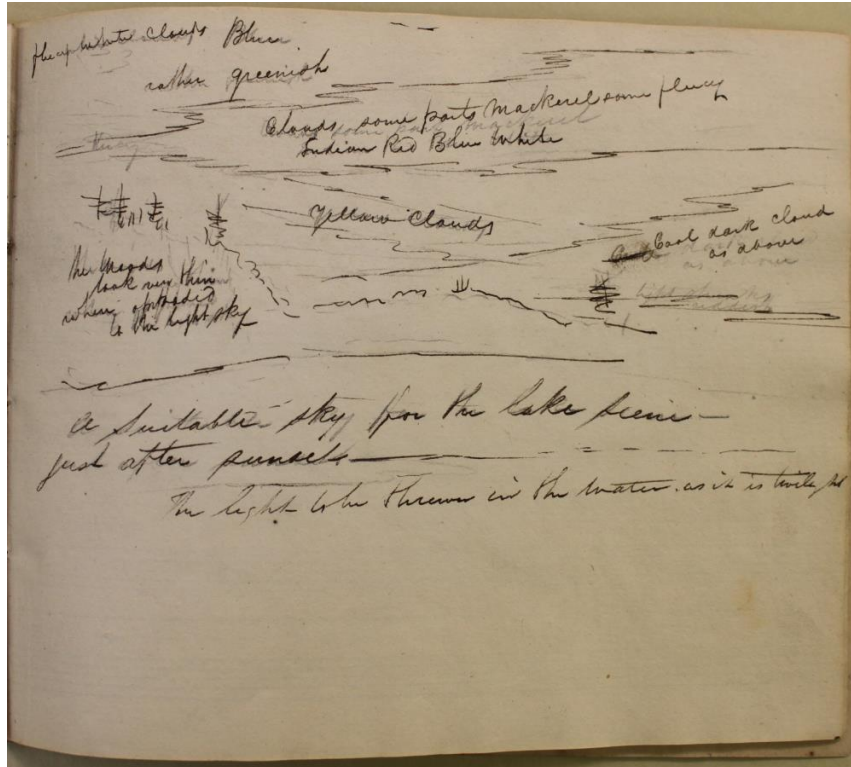


Fig. 47 "A suitable sky for the lake scene, just after sunset," from the Duanesburg Sketchbook, 1826. Ink over pencil on paper, New York State Library, Cole Papers 8.3



Fig. 48 *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*, 1836. Oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art



Fig. 49 View of Featherstonhaugh Lake near the mansion's site, 16 December 2012. Author photo



Fig. 50 *Catskill Mountain House*, 1827. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts, 39.258



Fig. 51 *A View of the Two Lakes and Mountain House, Catskill Mountains, Morning*, 1844. Oil on canvas, Brooklyn Museum



Fig. 52 John Constable, *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*, 1816. Oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.



Fig. 53 The Frost Homestead, Duaneburg, NY, 2009. Courtesy of Howard C. Ohlhous



Fig. 54 The Frost Homestead's Historical Marker, Duaneburg, NY, 2009. Courtesy of Howard C. Ohlhaus.



Fig. 55 State of New York marker at the boundary of Featherstonhaugh State Forest, Mariaville Lake, NY. December 16, 2012. Author photo



Fig. 56 Daniel Wadsworth, *Wadsworth Residence, Geneseo, New York*, c. 1825. Oil on panel, Connecticut Historical Society.

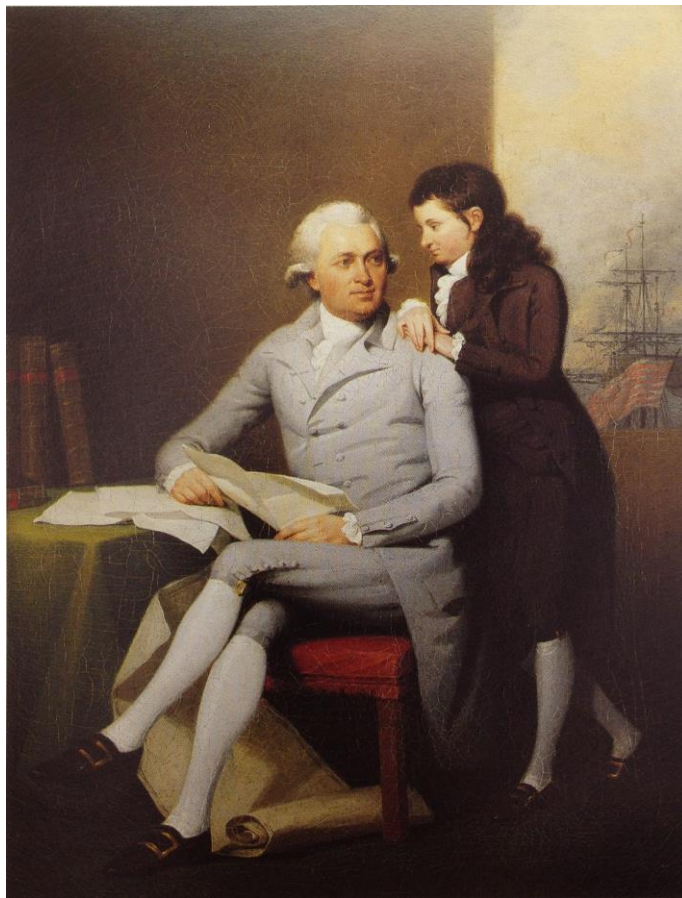


Fig. 57 John Trumbull, *Jeremiah Wadsworth and His Son Daniel Wadsworth*, 1784. Oil on canvas, Wadsworth Atheneum



Fig. 58 *Kaaterskill Falls* (Second Version), 1826. Oil on canvas, Wadsworth Atheneum.



Fig. 59 *View of l'Esperance*, 1826-8. Oil on canvas, private collection.





Fig. 60 John Trumbull, *View on the West Mountain near Hartford*, c. 1791. Oil on canvas mounted on wood, Yale University Art Gallery.

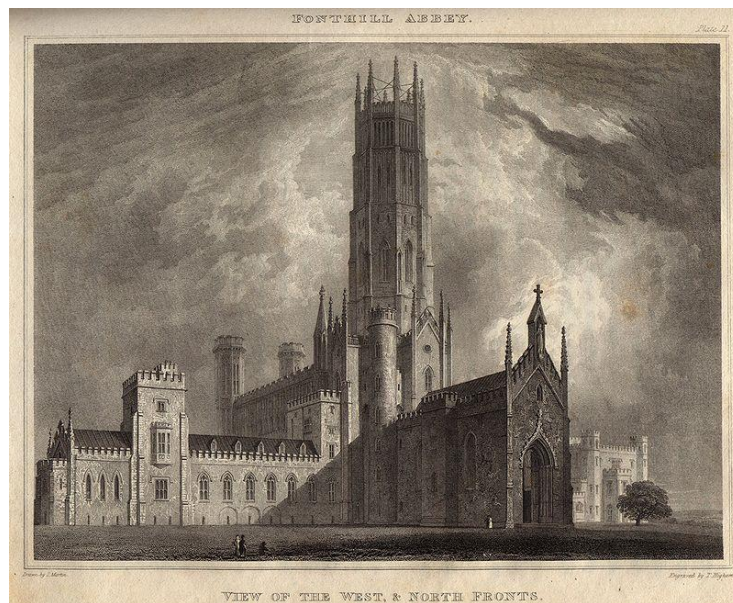


Fig. 61 J. Martin and T. Higham, *Fonthill Abbey: View of the West & North Fronts*, copperplate from John Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey* (London: Charles Knight & Co., 1823), pl. 11.



Fig. 62 Daniel Wadsworth and John Trumbull, *Monte Video*, c. 1805-1809. Photograph by Wayne Andrews c. 1949



Fig. 63 George W. Bourne, *The Wedding Cake House*, Kennebunk, ME, orig. 1826, ornament 1855.



Fig. 64 Horace Walpole, *Strawberry Hill*, Twickenham, Greater London, begun 1749.



Fig. 65 *Monte Video*, Summer Residence of Mr. H. C. Judd from J. Hammond Trumbull, *The Memorial History of Hartford County* (Boston, 1886), Vol II, p. 3 Reproduced in Saunders, *Patron of the Arts*, 17.



Fig. 66 Daniel Wadsworth, *Monte Video, near Hartford, Conn.*, n.d. Pencil on paper, Connecticut Historical Society.



Fig. 67 Daniel Wadsworth (?) Site plan and cross-section of Monte Video, n.d. Connecticut Historical Society 2012.312.240a



Fig. 68 Daniel Wadsworth (?), Site plan and cross-section of Monte Video, nd. Connecticut Historical Society 2012.312.240b



Fig. 69 Profile 1 from Fig. 67



Fig. 70 Profile 2 from Fig. 67

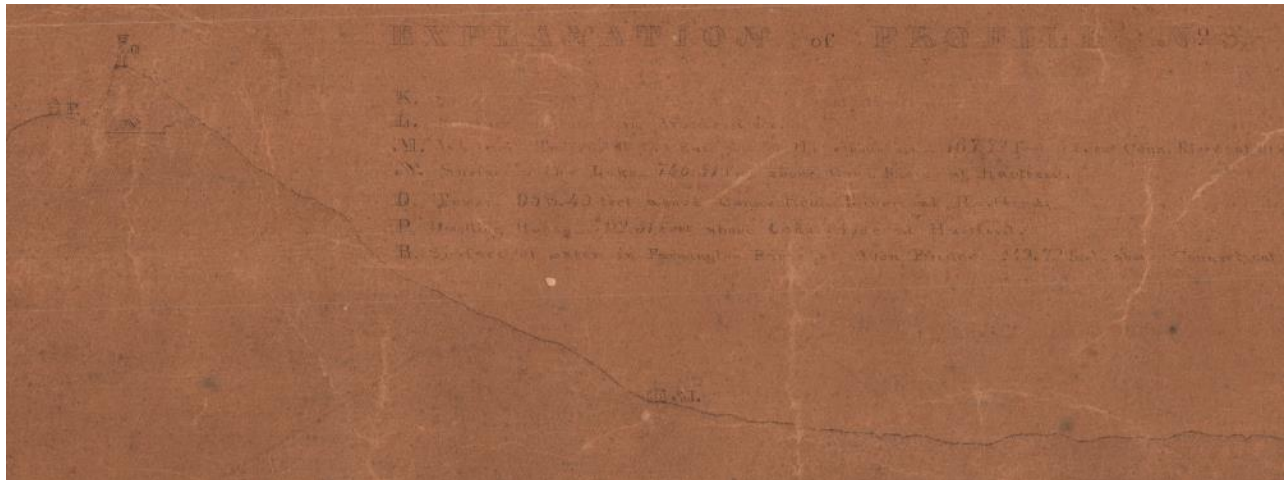


Fig. 71 Profile 3 from Fig. 68



Fig. 72 After Daniel Wadsworth, from Silliman, *Remarks on a Short Tour...*, 1824. Frontispiece

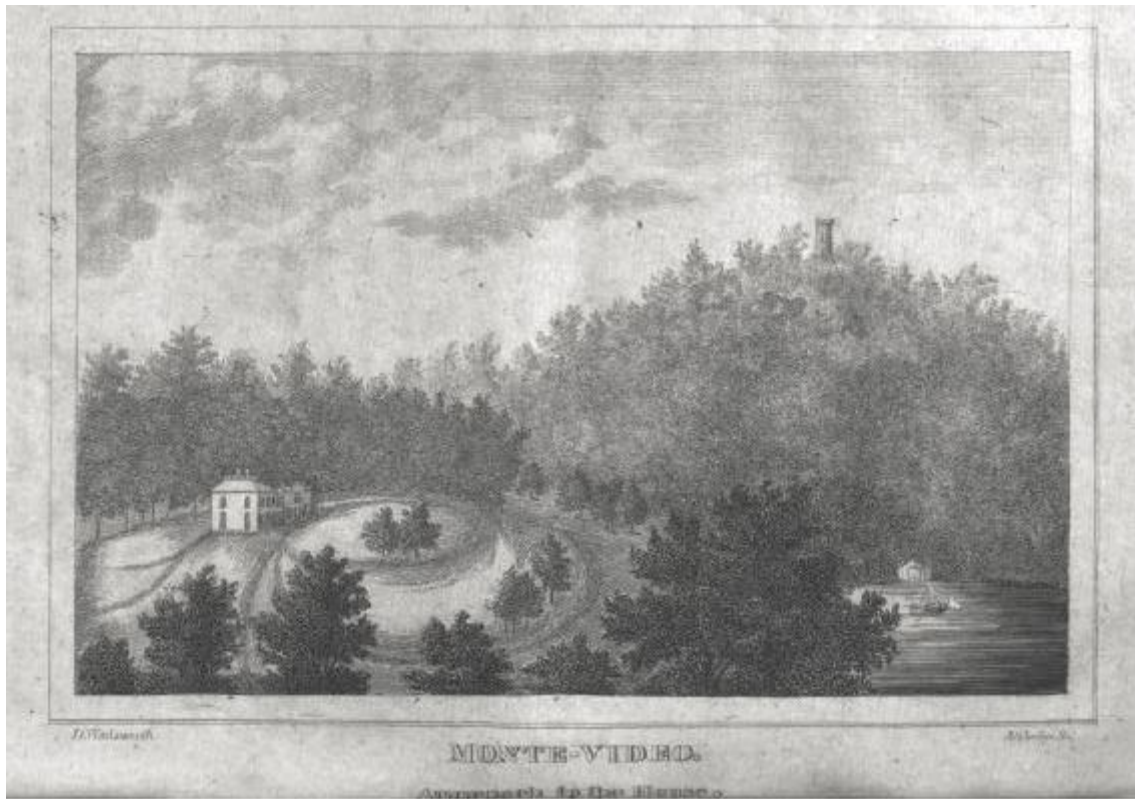


Fig. 73 After Daniel Wadsworth, from Silliman, *Remarks on a Short Tour*, 1824. Facing p. 16



Fig. 74 Daniel Wadsworth, *Monte Video*, before 1824. Watercolor, Connecticut Historical Society 1953.3.1



Fig. 75 *View of Monte Video, the Seat of Daniel Wadsworth, Esq.*, 1828. Oil on wood, Wadsworth Atheneum



Fig. 76 Detail of Fig. 75





Fig. 77 After Thomas Cole, *Monte Video*, 1830. Steel engraving in Hinton, *History and Topography*, opposite page 481

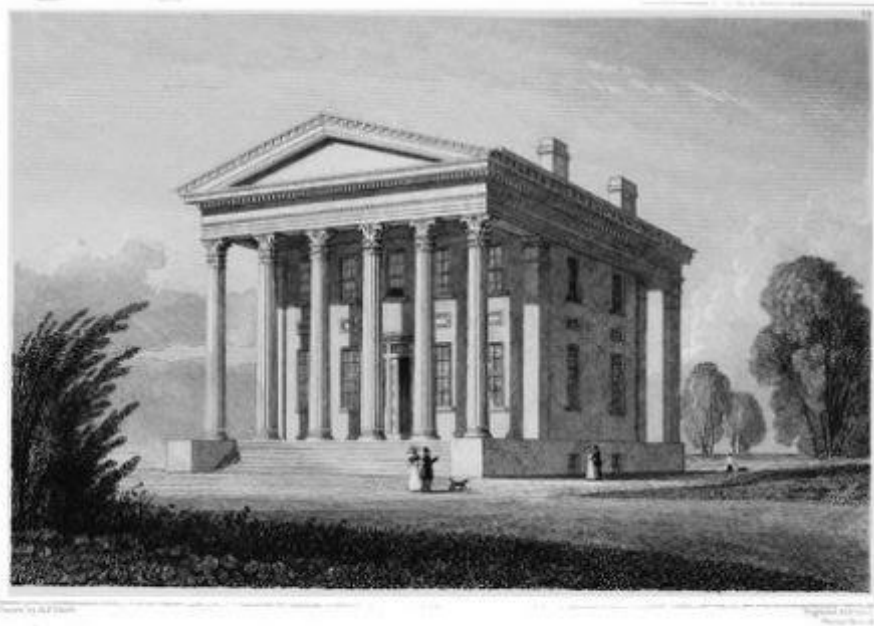


Fig. 78 After Alexander Jackson Davis, *Home of S. Russell, Middletown*, 1830. Steel engraving in Hinton, *History and Topography*, opposite page 482



Fig. 79 William Adams & Sons, Plate with Cole's View of Monte Video, c. 1835. Transferware, Connecticut Historical Society



Fig. 80 *The Gardens of the Van Rensselaer Manor House*, 1840. Oil on canvas, Albany Institute of History and Art



Fig. 81 *The Van Rensselaer Manor House*, 1841. Oil on canvas, Albany Institute of History and Art



Fig. 82 *The Departure*, 1837. Oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection, National Gallery of Art



Fig. 83 *The Return*, 1837. Oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection, National Gallery of Art

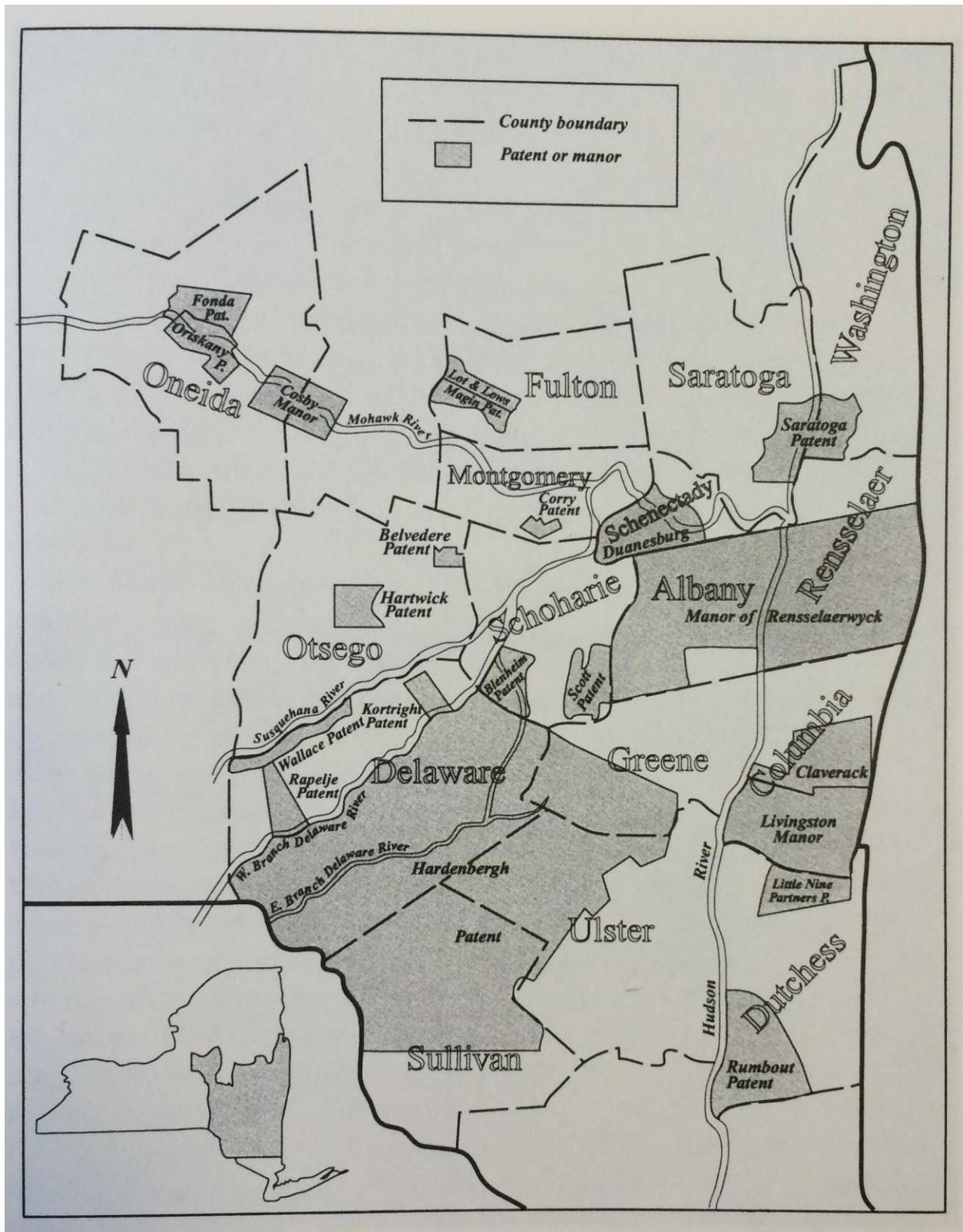


Fig. 84 Map of colonial manors and patents of the Hudson Valley with c. 1840 county boundaries. From Reeve Huston, *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 15



Fig. 85 Matthew Dripps, Map of Albany, 1852. Engraving, New York State Library

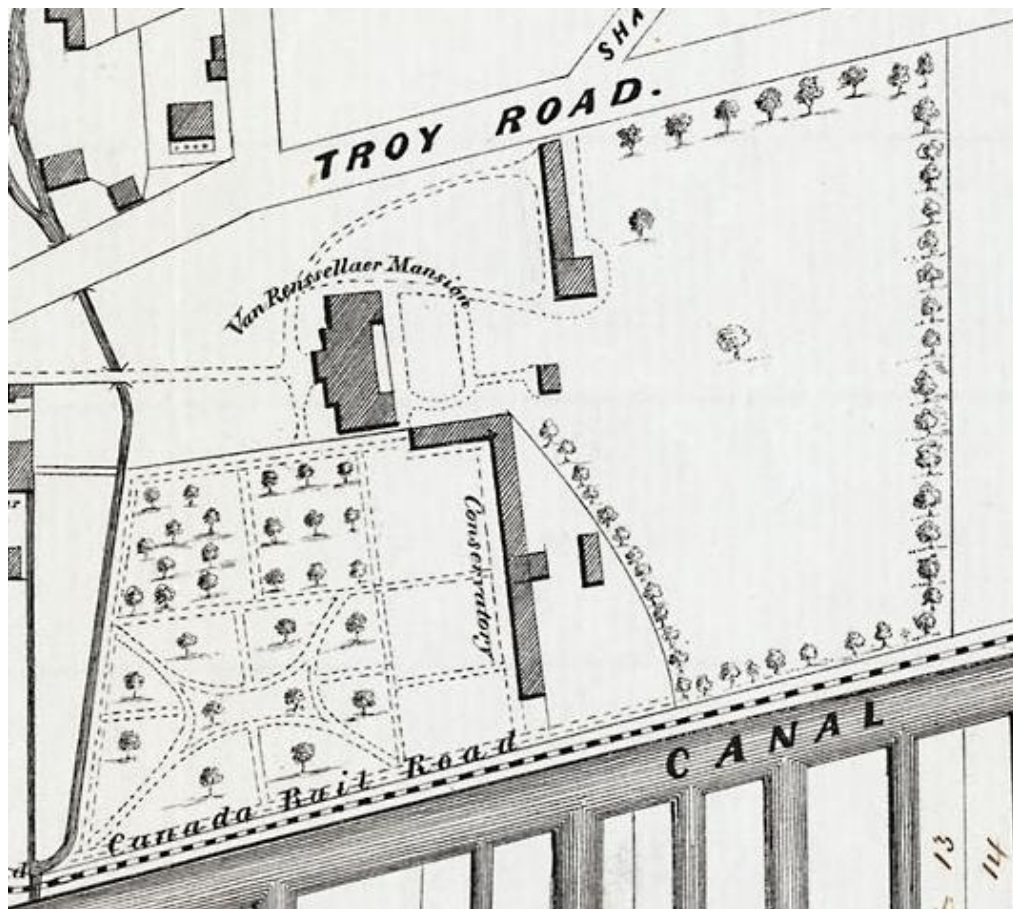


Fig. 86 Detail of Fig. 85



Fig. 87 Francis Pruyn, *The Old Van Rensselaer Manor House*, c. 1839. Lithograph of an ink on paper original in the Albany Institute of History and Art. Published in Cuyler Reynolds, ed. *Albany Chronicles: A History of the City Arranged Chronologically* (Albany: J.B. Lyon, 1906), facing p. 68



Fig. 88 Detail of Fig. 81



Fig. 89 Richard Upjohn et al., North Façade of the Van Rensselaer Manor House as redesigned and expanded, 1840-3. Albumen print by an unknown photographer, c. 1860-73. Albany Institute of History and Art.



Fig. 90 Uppark, c. 1690, restored 1989.





Fig. 91 Unknown, Wallpaper from the Van Rensselaer Manor House, c. 1768. Tempera on paper, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Author photo, February 2015.



Fig. 92 Frederic Diaper, Beverwyck Manor as St. Anthony-on-Hudson Seminary, c. 1839. Rensselaer, NY. Photo from Historic American Buildings Survey, 1936.



Fig. 93 B. Brenell, *View of the Great Pass on the Helderberg Mountains, with the Lines of March in Service, December 1839, 1840*. Oil on panel, Historic Cherry Hill. Reproduced in Huston, *Land and Freedom*, 96.



Fig. 94 Preparatory sketch for *The Gardens of the Van Rensselaer Manor House*, c. 1839. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.188a



Fig. 95 Preparatory sketch for *The Van Rensselaer Manor House*, c. 1839. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.187a



Fig. 96 Detail of Fig. 80. Author photo.



Fig. 97 Detail of Fig. 81. Author photo.



Fig. 98 William Birch, *The View From Springland* (Frontispiece to *Country Seats*), 1808. Hand-colored engraving, Collection of Lea Carson Sherk



Fig. 99 William Birch, *View from the Elysian Bower, Springland* (from *Country Seats*), 1808. Hand-colored engraving, Collection of Lea Carson Sherk.



Fig. 100 William Birch, Site Plan for Springland, c. 1800. Ink and wash on paper, Collection of Lea Carson Sherk.



Fig. 101 William Birch, *Springland*, c. 1800. Watercolor, Collection of L. Alan Talley

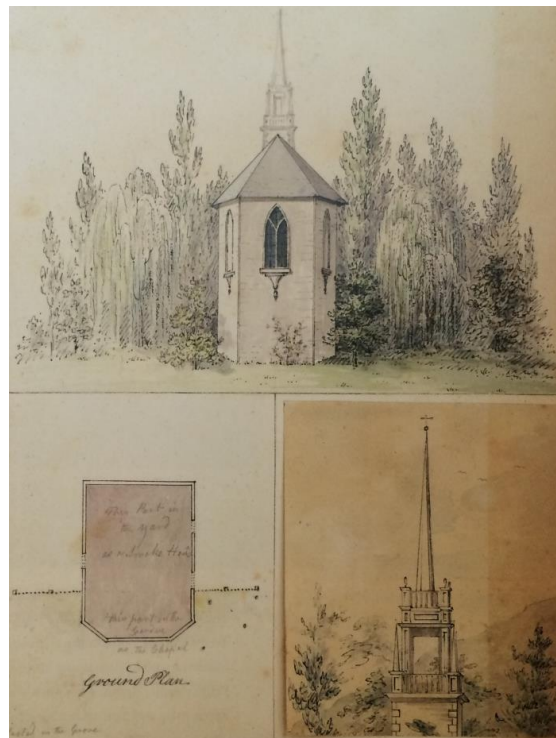


Fig. 102 William Birch, *The Chapel and Smokehouse for Springland*, c. 1800. Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper, Collection of Lea Carson Sherk.



Fig. 103 Charles Willson Peale, *Cabbage Patch, the Gardens at Belfield*, c. 1815-16. Oil on canvas, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.



Fig. 104 Charles Willson Peale, *View of the Garden at Belfield*, c. 1815-16. Oil on canvas, Private Collection.





Fig. 105 John W. Hill, *Otsego Hall*, before 1860. Watercolor, Fenimore Art Museum.



Fig. 106 Currier and Ives, *Sunnyside on the Hudson*, c. 1857-71. Hand-colored lithograph, Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Fig. 107 Cedar Grove, Catskill, NY. 1815. Author photo, August 2013

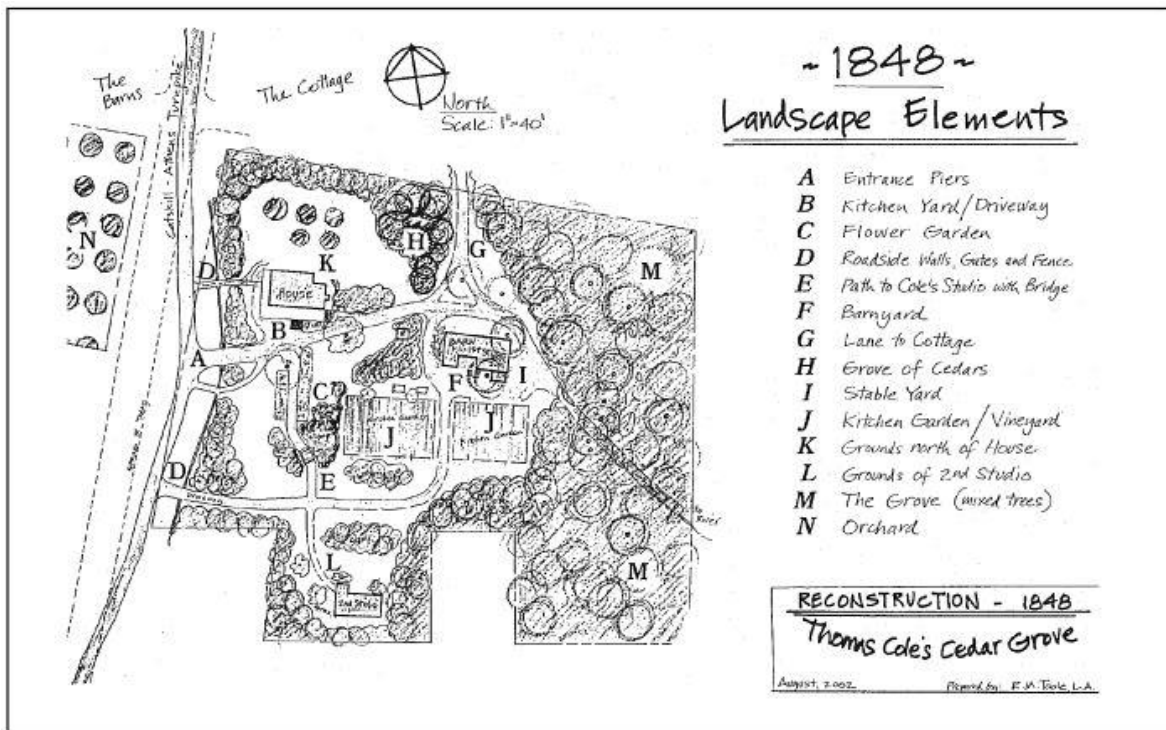


Fig. 108 Plan of Cedar Grove landscape c. 1848, from *Thomas Cole National Historic Site: Draft General Management Plan/ Environmental Assessment* (Boston: National Parks Service, Northeast Region, 2004), p. 13



Fig. 109 Charles Herbert Moore, *Cedar Grove*, 1868. Oil on canvas, Thomas Cole National Historic Site



Fig. 110 *View on the Catskill—Early Autumn*, 1837. Oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art



Fig. 111 *Maria Bartow Cole*, c. 1838. Pencil on paper, Albany Institute of History and Art



Fig. 112 The storehouse at Cedar Grove, a.k.a. The Old Studio, 1839. Author photo, August 2013.



Fig. 113 John Mackie Falconer, *Thomas Cole's First Studio*, 1881. Oil on canvas, New-York Historical Society



Fig. 114 Attributed to Thomas Cole but possibly Alexander Jackson Davis, Perspective of an unknown house, Date unknown. Ink on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.540a

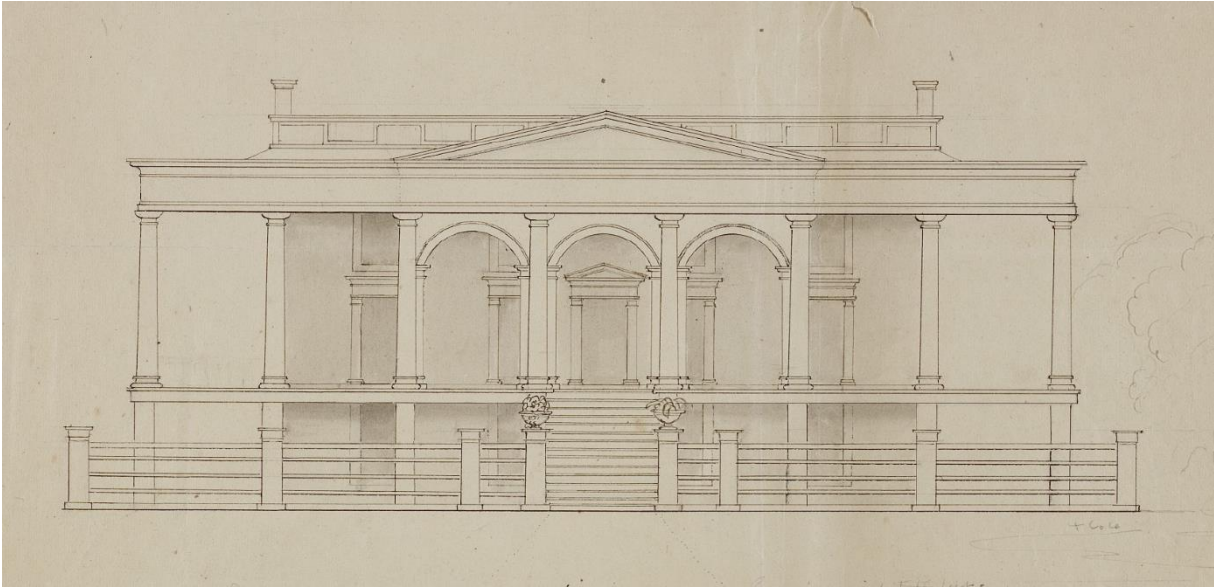


Fig. 115 Early elevation for Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Ink on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.532.

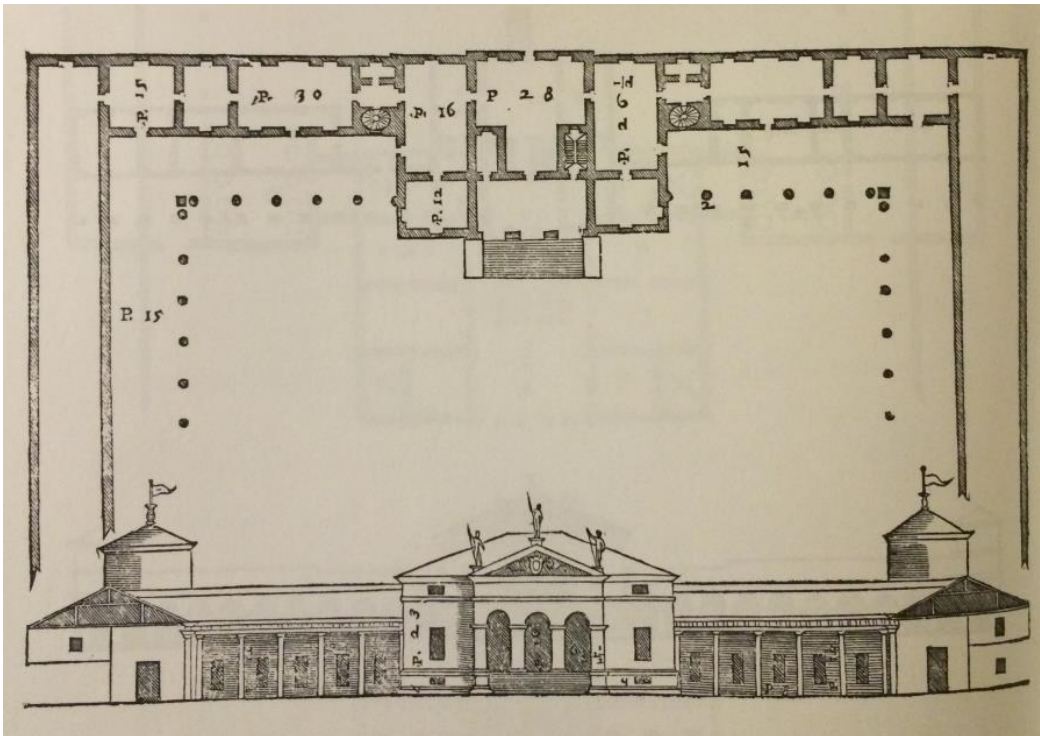


Fig. 116 Andrea Palladio, Villa Saraceno at Finale, 1540s. Image from Andrea Palladio, *The Four Books on Architecture* eds. and trans. Robert Tavernor and Richard Schofield (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p. 134.

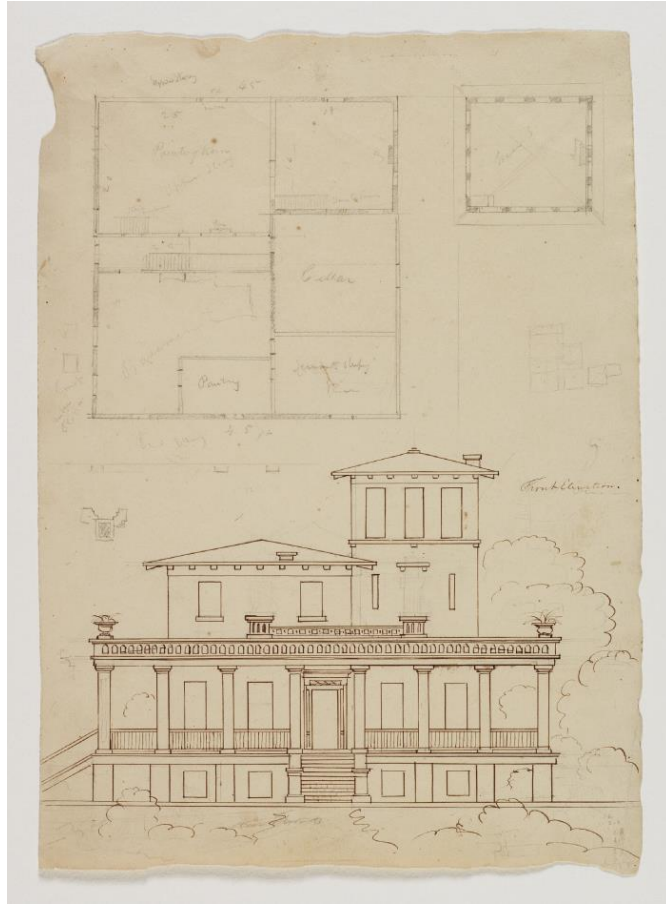


Fig. 117 Elevation and plan for Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Ink on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.510



Fig. 118 Side elevation for Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.511



Fig. 119 Detail of Fig. 118

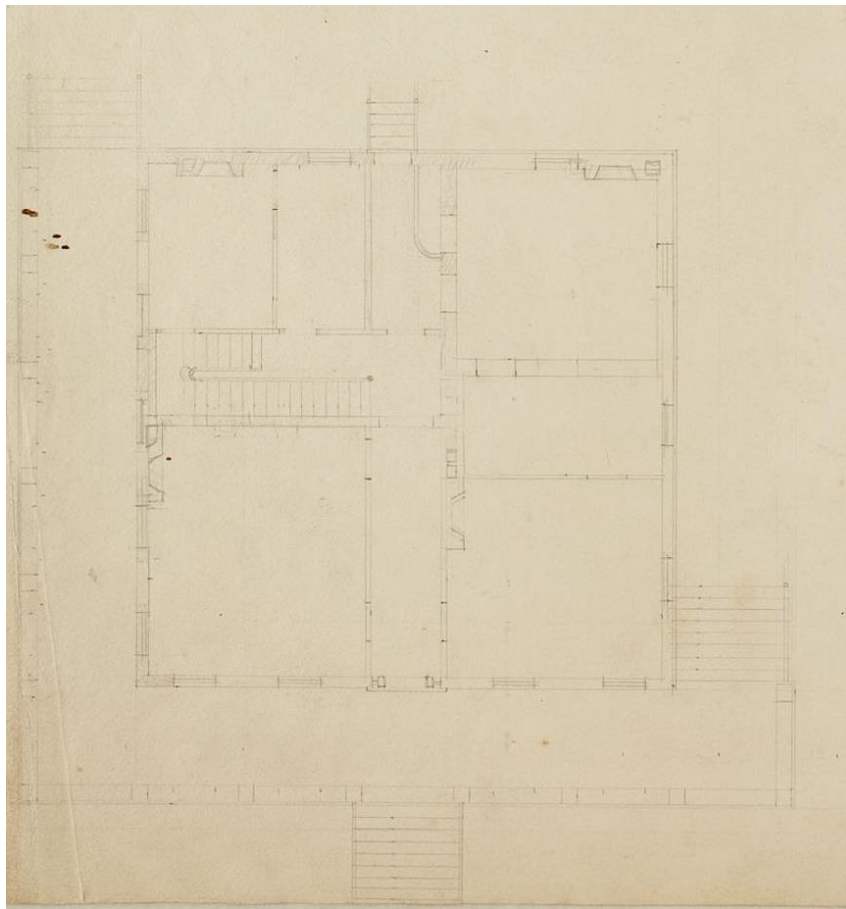


Fig. 120 Detail from a sheet of plans for the initial five-bay front of Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9, pencil on paper. Detroit Institute of Arts 39.557b



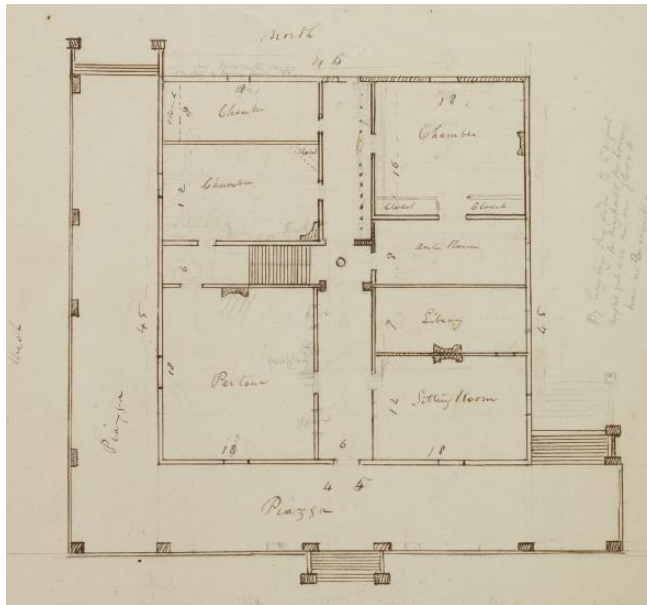


Fig. 121 Plan for the three-bay, forty-five foot format of Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Ink on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.512a

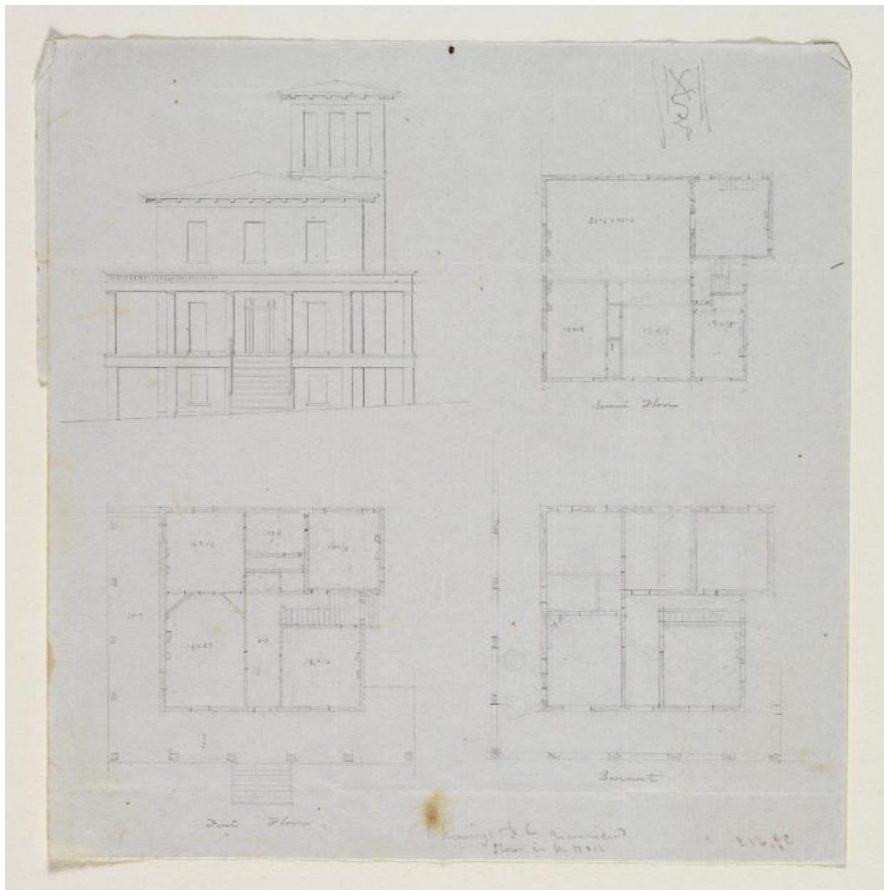


Fig. 122 Elevation and Plans for Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.513a

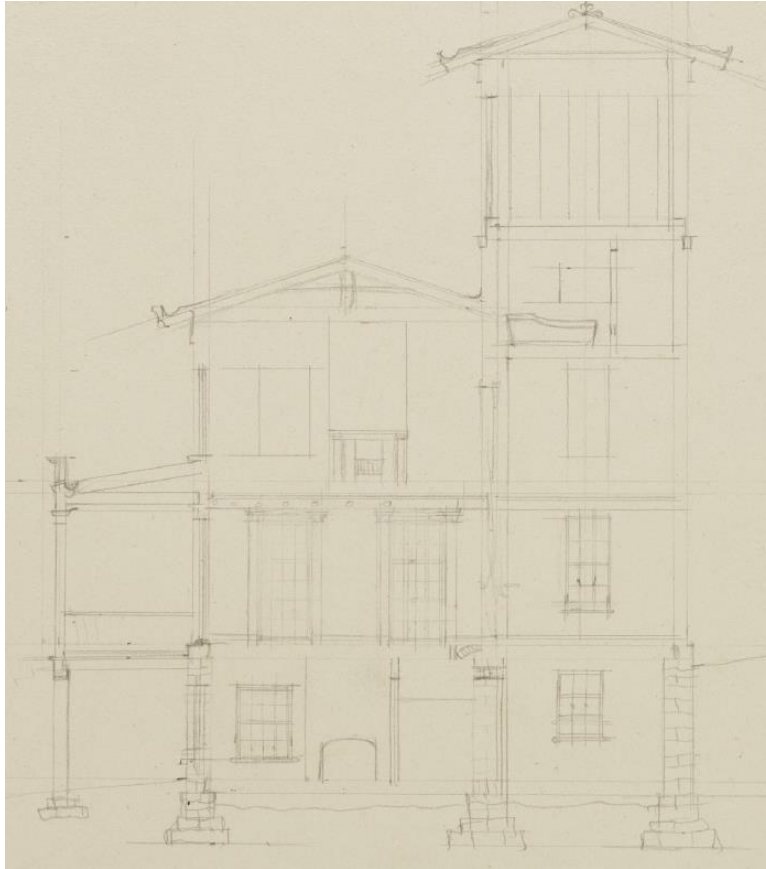


Fig. 123 Section of the eastern façade of Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Pencil on paper, DIA 39.509

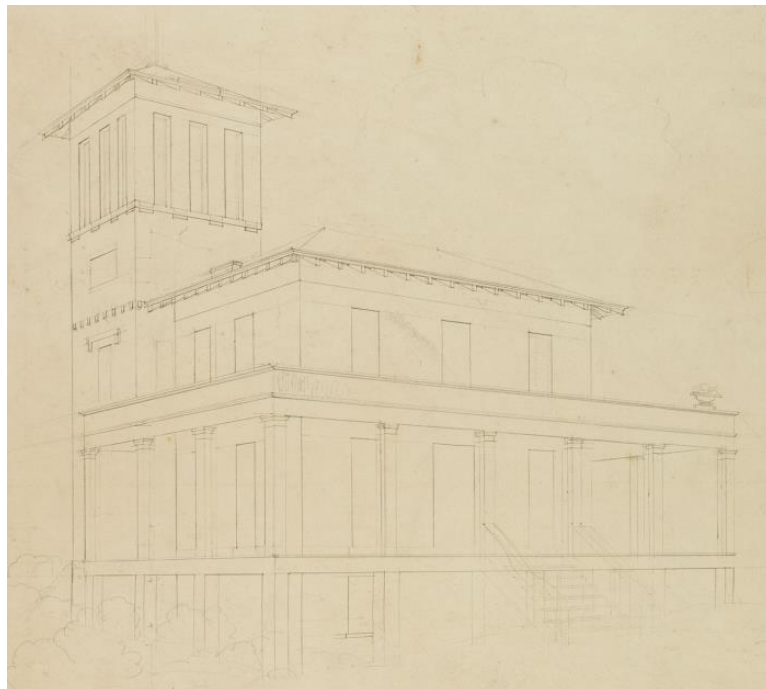


Fig. 124 Perspective of Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Pencil on paper, DIA 39.557a

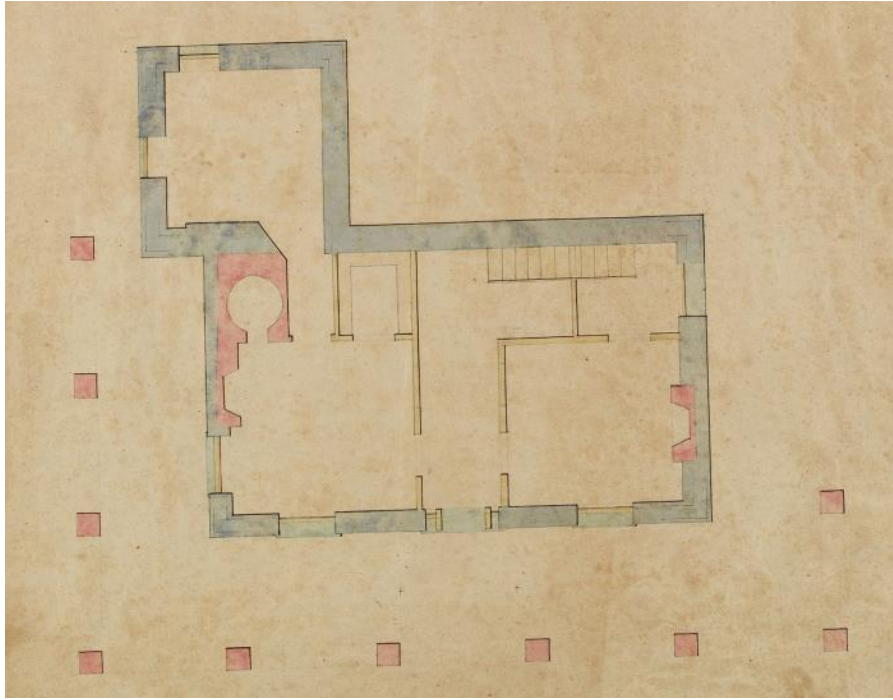


Fig. 125 Basement plan of the final state of Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Ink and watercolor on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.549

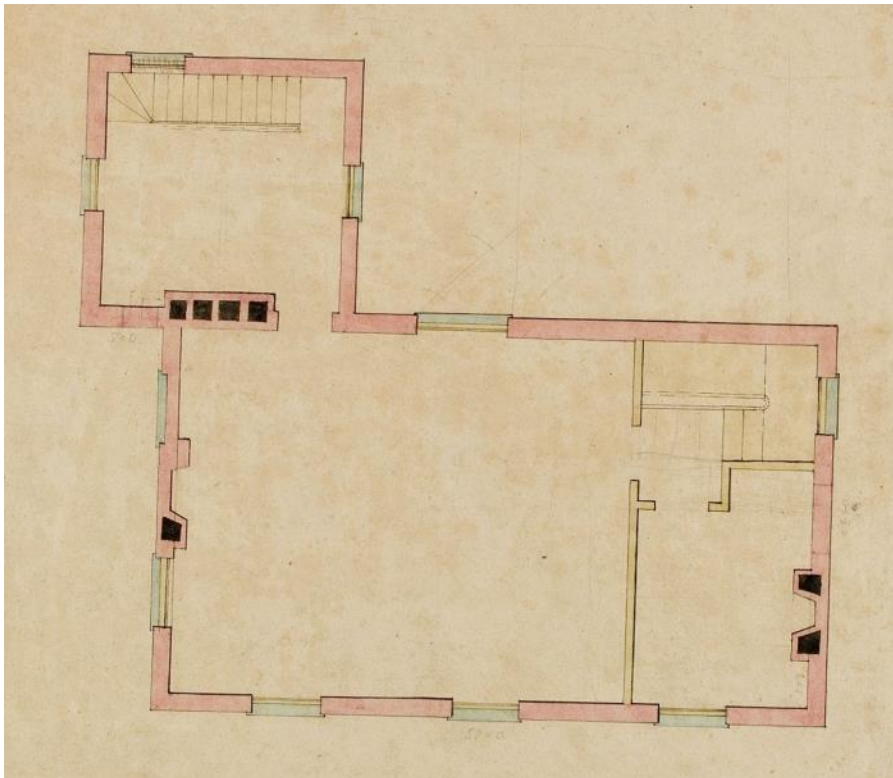


Fig. 126 Second floor plan of the final state of Cole's villa at Cedar Grove, c. 1838-9. Ink and watercolor on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.553

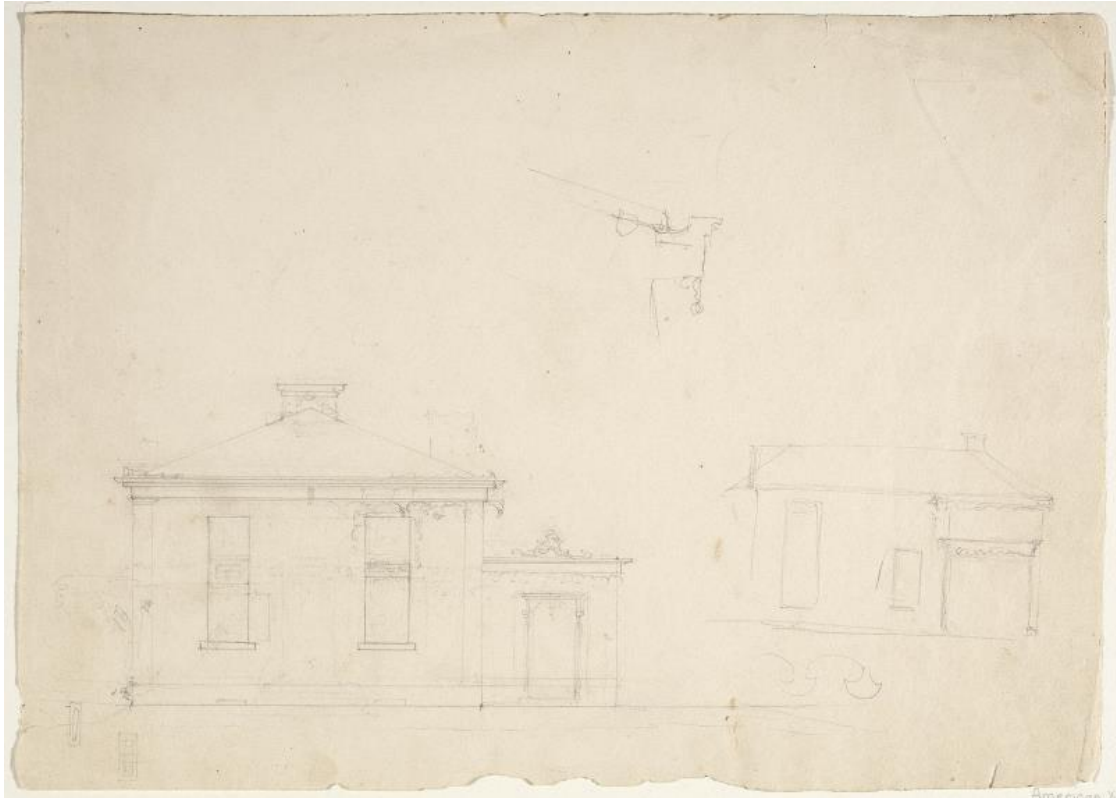


Fig. 127 Elevations for the New Studio, c. 1846. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts, 39.515a



Fig. 128 Elevation for the New Studio, c. 1846. Pencil on paper, Detroit Institute of Arts 39.515b

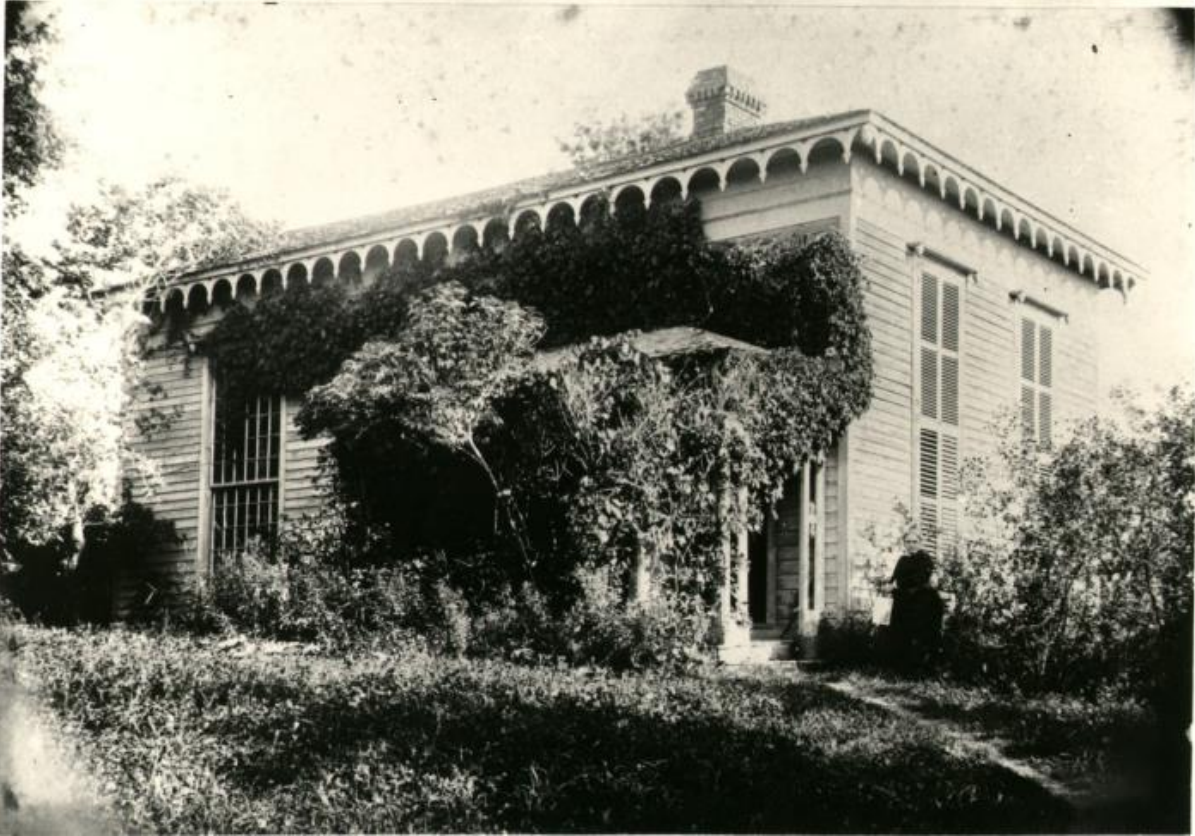


Fig. 129 Anon. The New Studio from the North with Emily Cole, c. 1900. Photograph, Greene County Historical Society.



Fig. 130 Anon, Interior of the New Studio with Emily Cole, c. 1900. Photograph, Greene County Historical Society.



Fig. 131 Frederic Church, *Cedar Grove*, 1848. Pencil on paper, Olana State Historic Site.



Fig. 132 *The Temple of Segesta with the Artist Sketching*, c. 1842. Oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Fig. 133 Andrew Jackson Downing, *An irregular villa in the Italian style, Bracketted*, engraving in Andrew Jackson Downing, *Cottage Residences...* (New York and London: Wiley and Putnam, 1842), opposite p. 124

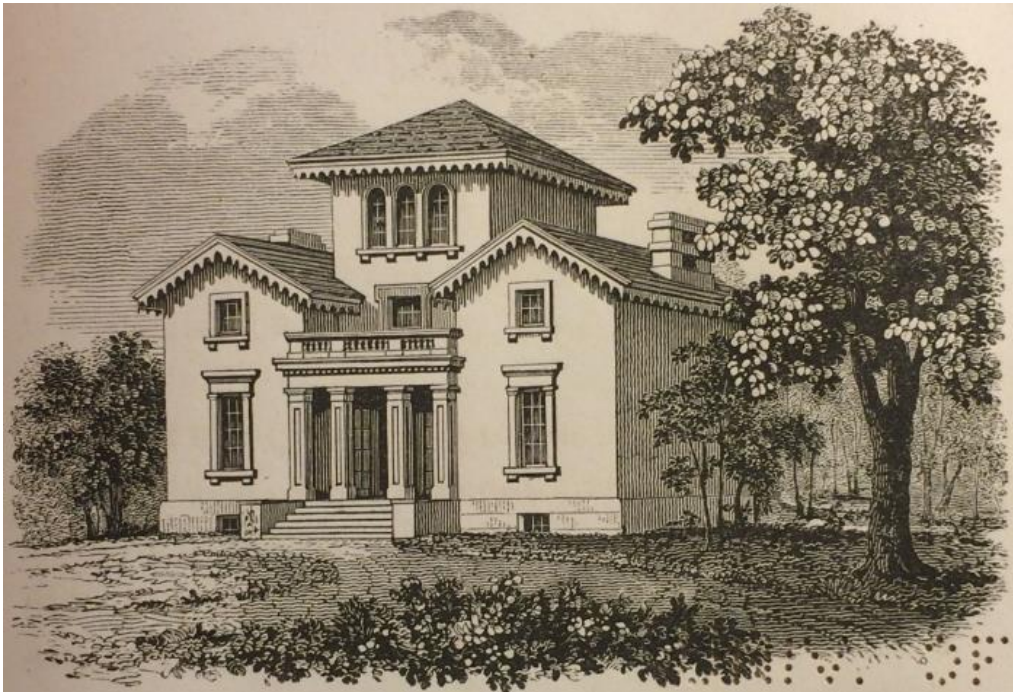


Fig. 134 John Notman, *A Cottage in the Italian, or Tuscan Style*, engraving in Andrew Jackson Downing, *Cottage Residences...* (New York and London: Wiley and Putnam, 1842), opposite p. 164



Fig. 135 *Home in the Woods*, 1847. Oil on canvas, Reynolda House Museum of American Art



Fig. 136 Frederic Church with Calvert Vaux, Olana, Hudson, N.Y.





Fig. 137 Jasper Francis Cropsey, *Cole's Studio*, 1850. Charcoal, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art



Fig. 138 Jasper Francis Cropsey, *Summer Cottage, Front Elevation II*, 1867. Watercolor over graphite, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Fig. 139 Sanford Gifford, *Hunter Mountain, Twilight*, 1866. Oil on canvas, Terra Foundation for American Art



Fig. 140 Anon, The Gifford Home in Hudson, N.Y. showing Sanford Gifford's c. 1870 Rooftop Studio built, n.d. Albumen silver photograph, Albany Institute of History and Art

## WORKS CITED

### MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS:

Alexander Jackson Davis Papers, Metropolitan Museum of Art  
Daniel Wadsworth Papers, Connecticut Historical Society  
Daniel Wadsworth Papers, Wadsworth Atheneum  
First Church of Christ Records, Connecticut State Library  
George William Featherstonhaugh Papers, American Philosophical Society  
Horatio Nelson Rust Papers, The Huntington Library  
James Frost Papers, Schenectady County Historical Society  
Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts & Printed Ephemera, The Winterthur Library  
Ken Jones Collection, Esperance, NY  
Quaker & Special Collections, Haverford College Library  
Richard Upjohn Papers, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University  
The Featherstonhaugh Trust, Albany, NY  
Thomas Cole Papers, Detroit Institute of Arts  
Thomas Cole Papers, New York State Library  
Trumbull Papers, Yale University Library  
William P. Van Rensselaer Papers, Albany Institute of History and Art

### PRIMARY SOURCES:

*Acts of a General Nature, passed at the First Session of the Thirty-Sixth General Assembly of the State of Ohio*, (Columbus: Samuel Medary, 1838).

Barnard, Daniel. *A Discourse of the Life, Services, and Character of Stephen Van Rensselaer* (Albany: Hoffman and White, 1839).

Birch, William Russell. *The Country Seats of the United States of North America*, ed. Emily T. Cooperman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

Bryant, William Cullen. *A Funeral Oration, occasioned by the Death of Thomas Cole, delivered before the National Academy of Design, New-York, May 4, 1848* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1848).

\_\_\_\_\_. "Another Chapter on English Fashions", *New York Evening Post*, (July 16, 1844), p. 2.

\_\_\_\_\_. "More about America", *New York Evening Post*, (June 21, 1844), p. 2.

\_\_\_\_\_. "To Cole The Painter On His Departure For Europe" in William Cullen Bryant, Robert Sands, and Gulian Verplanck, eds. *The Talisman for 1830* (New York: Elam Bliss, 1830), p. 336.

Cole, Thomas. "Essay on American Scenery" *The American Monthly Magazine* I (January 1836), pp. 1-12.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Sicilian Scenery and Antiquities" *The Knickerbocker* 23 (Feb., 1844), pp. 103-13.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Sicilian Scenery and Antiquities: Number Two" *The Knickerbocker* 23 (Mar., 1844), pp. 236-44.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Collected Essays and Prose Sketches*, ed. Marshall Tymn (St. Paul, MN: John Colet Press, 1980).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Thomas Cole's Poetry*, ed. Marshall Tymn (York, PA: Liberty Cap Books, 1972).
- Cooper, James Fenimore. *The Chronicles of Cooperstown* (Cooperstown: H. & E. Phinney, 1838).
- Cropsey, Jasper Francis. "'The Brushes He Painted with That Last Day Are There...': Jasper F. Cropsey's Letter to his Wife Describing Thomas Cole's Home and Studio, July, 1850" *American Art Journal* 16.3 (Summer, 1984), pp. 78-83.
- Day, Thomas. *A Historical Discourse Delivered before the Connecticut Historical Society and the Citizens of Hartford, 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1843* (Hartford: Case, Tiffany and Burnham, 1844).
- Downing, Andrew Jackson. *Cottage Residences...* (New York and London: Wiley and Putnam, 1842),
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Architecture of Country Houses*, (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1850).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening...* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1841).
- Dunlap, William. *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* [orig. 1834] eds. Frank Bayley and Charles Goodspeed (Boston: C. E. Goodspeed & Co., 1918).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Letter to the Editor, *New-York Evening Post* (November 22, 1825), p. 2
- Editorial, *New-York Evening Post*, December 6, 1832. p. 2.
- Exhibition of the Paintings of the Late Thomas Cole* (New York: Snowden & Prall, 1848).
- Falconer, John Mackie. "Thomas Cole is No More: A Letter from John Falconer to Jasper Cropsey, February 24, 1848" *American Art Journal* 15.4 (Autumn, 1983), pp. 74-77.
- Featherstonhaugh, George William. *Excursion through the Slave States, from Washington on the Potomac to the Frontier of Mexico; with Sketches of Popular Manners and Geological Notices* (London: John Murray, 1844).

- Godwin, Parke. *A Biography of William Cullen Bryant, with Extracts from His Private Correspondence*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1883).
- Hinton, John Howard. *The History and Topography of the United States of North America*, 2 vols. (London: Fenner, Sears & Co., 1830)
- Hone, Philip. *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851*, ed. Bayard Tuckerman (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1889).
- Irving, Washington. *Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey* (London: John Murray, 1835).
- Jonson, Ben. "To Penshurst," (c. 1616).
- Knight, Richard Payne. *The Landscape: A Didactic Poem* (London: W. Bulmer, 1795).
- Leslie, Charles Robert. *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable, composed Chiefly of his Letters* (London: J. Carpenter, 1843).
- Longworth's American Almanack, New-York Register, and City Directory* (New York: David Longworth, 1834-5).
- McNulty, J. Bard, ed. *The Correspondence of Thomas Cole and Daniel Wadsworth* (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1983).
- Miller, Lillian, ed. *The Collected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and his Family*, microfiche (Millwood, NY: Kraus Thompson, 1980).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and his Family* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).
- Miller's New York As It Is, or Stranger's Guide to the Cities of New York, Brooklyn, and Adjacent Places...* (New York: J. Miller, 1866).
- "Mr. Cole's Last Pictures," *New-York Mirror* (December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1837), p. 203.
- Noble, Louis Legrand. *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, ed. Elliott Vessell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).
- O'Callaghan, E. B. *Documentary History of the State of New York IV* (Albany: Charles Van Benthuyzen, 1851).
- Pickering, Henry. *The Buckwheat Cake: A Poem* (Boston: Carter, Hendee & Babcock, 1831).
- Pinckney, James D. *Reminiscences of Catskill: Local Sketches* (Catskill, NY: J.B. Hall, 1868).

Review: *A Geological and Agricultural Survey of Rensselaer County in the State of New York. Taken under the Direction of the Honorable Stephen Van Rensselaer* (Albany, 1822), 70pp. in *The North American Review* 14.35 (April, 1822), pp. 378-81.

Review: The 1847 exhibition of the American Art-Union, *The Literary World* (October 23, 1847), p. 277.

Rooses, M. and Ruelens, C. *Correspondance de Rubens et documents épistolaires concernant sa vie et ses œuvres*, 6 vols. (Antwerp : Veuve de Backer, 1887-1909).

Silliman, Benjamin. *Remarks Made, on a Short Tour, Between Hartford and Quebec* (New Haven: S. Converse, 1820).

Spafford, Horatio Gates. *A Gazeteer of the State of New York*, (Albany: H.C. Southwick, 1813).

Thackeray, William M. *The Letters of William Makepeace Thackeray*, ed. Gordon N. Roy, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946).

*The Cultivator* (Albany: Luther Tucker, 1844).

Trumbull, John. *Autobiography, Reminiscences and Letters by John Trumbull from 1756 to 1841* (New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1841).

Vasari, Giorgio. *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors & Architects*, Gaston DuC. De Vere, trans., 10 vols. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1912-14).

Whittredge, Worthington. *The Autobiography of Worthington Whittredge*, ed. John I.H. Baur (New York: Arno Press, 1969).

## SECONDARY SOURCES:

Alpers, Svetlana. *The Art of Describing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

Aslet, Clive. *The American Country House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

Avery, Kevin J. *American Drawings and Watercolors in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Volume I* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002)

Balty, Jean-Charles. *Etudes sur la Maison Carrée de Nimes* (Brussels: Latomus, 1960).

Barrell, John. *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Barrett, Ross. "Violent Prophecies: Thomas Cole, Republican Aesthetics, and the Political Jeremiad" *American Art* 27.1 (Spring, 2013), pp. 24-49.

- Beecher, Raymond. "Cedar Grove—The Thomas Cole Residence" *The Crayon: Olana State Historic Site Newsletter* XII.1 (Spring, 1980), pp. 1, 5-7.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "John Alexander Thomson (1778-1846), Catskill Merchant" *Greene County Historical Journal* 7.2 (Summer 1983), pp. 11-14.
- Beddell, Rebecca. "Thomas Cole and the Fashionable Science" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 59, no. 2/3 (1996), pp. 348-378.
- Belkin, Kristin and Healy, Fiona, eds. *A House of Art: Rubens as Collector* (Antwerp: Rubenshuis, 2003).
- Berkeley, Edmund and Dorothy Smith. *George William Featherstonhaugh: First U.S. Government Geologist* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1988).
- Bjelajac, David. "Thomas Cole's *Oxbow* and the American Zion Divided" *American Art* 20.1 (Spring 2006), pp. 60-83.
- Boime, Albert. *The Magisterial Gaze: Manifest Destiny and American Landscape Painting, c. 1830-1865* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).
- Bonario, Bernard. "Here Today and Gone Tomorrow: Jasper F. Cropsey's *The Backwoods of America*" *RACAR* 9.1/2 (1982), pp. 9-20.
- Brandon, Craig. "St. Anthony-on-Hudson to close as seminary" *Albany Times Union* (May 7, 1988), D1.
- Brown, Chandos Michael. *Benjamin Silliman: A Life in the Young Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
- Brown, Christopher. *Rubens's Landscapes: Making and Meaning* (London: National Gallery Publications, 1996).
- Brown, David and Owen, Felicity. *Collector of Genius: A Life of Sir George Beaumont* (New Haven, CT, 1988).
- Brown, Iain G., ed. *Abbotsford and Sir Walter Scott: The Image and the Influence* (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2000).
- Burns, Sarah. *Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
- Burrows, Edwin G. *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

- Bushman, Richard. *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992).
- Callow, James T. *Kindred Spirits: Knickerbocker Writers and American Artists, 1807-1855* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1967).
- Carr, Gerald. "Master and Pupil: Drawings by Thomas Cole and Frederic Church" *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 66.1 (1990), pp. 46-60.
- Carso, Kerry Dean. *American Gothic Art and Architecture in the Age of Romantic Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014).
- Cikovsky, Nicolai. "'The Ravages of the Axe': The Meaning of the Tree Stump in Nineteenth-Century American Art", *The Art Bulletin* 61.4 (Dec., 1979), pp. 611-26.
- Cheney, Liana. *The Homes of Giorgio Vasari*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).
- Conn, Steven and Page, Max, eds. *Building the Nation: Americans Write about Their Architecture, Their Cities, and Their Landscape* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.)
- Cook, Tom and Breslin, Tom. "A Glimpse of Hornby Park" in *Glimpses of the Past: People, Places, and Things in Letchworth Park History*, Online: <http://www.letchworthparkhistory.com/hornby.html> [Accessed 30 March 2015]
- Cooper, Helen A., ed. *John Trumbull: The Hand and Spirit of a Painter* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982)
- Cooperman, Emily T. "Belfield, Springland, and Early American Picturesque: The Artist's Garden in the American Early Republic" *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes* 26.2 (April-June, 2006), pp. 118-31.
- Cooperman, Emily and Sherk, Lea Carson. *William Birch: Picturing the American Scene* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).
- Cosgrove, Denis and Stephen Daniels, eds. *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- Cowdrey, Mary Bartlett. *American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union: Introduction, 1816-1852* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1953).
- Crook, J. Mordaunt. *The Dilemma of Style: Architectural Ideas from the Picturesque to the Post-Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- Cummings, Abbott Lowell. "Ohio's Capitols at Columbus, 1810-1861" (Typescript, Ohio Historical Society, 1948).



- de Jong, Erik. *Nature and Art: Dutch Garden and Landscape Architecture, 1650-1740*, Ann Langenakens, trans. (Philadelphia, 2001).
- Downs, Arthur Channing, Jr. "America's First 'Medieval' Churches" *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 45.2 (June, 1976), pp. 166-176.
- Earenfight, Philip and Siegel, Nancy, eds. *Within the Landscape: Essays on Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Carlisle, PA: The Trout Gallery, 2005).
- Faherty, Duncan. *Remodeling the Nation: The Architecture of American Identity, 1776-1858* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, 2007).
- Felker, Tracie. "First Impressions: Thomas Cole's Drawings of his 1825 Trip Up the Hudson River" *American Art Journal* 24.1/2 (1992), pp. 60-93.
- Finley, Gerald *Landscapes of Memory: Turner as Illustrator to Scott* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
- Foshay, Ella M. ed. *Mr. Luman Reed's Picture Gallery: A Pioneer Collection of American Art* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1990).
- Fox, Dixon. *The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York, 1801-1840*, ed. Robert Remini (New York: Harper, 1964).
- Frazer, Alfred. "The Roman Villa and the Pastoral Ideal," *Studies in the History of Art* 36 (1992), pp. 48-61.
- Fulford, Tim. *Landscape, Liberty, and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics From Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- Gardner, Albert Ten Eyck. "Beckford's Gothic Wests" *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 13.2 (Oct., 1954), pp. 41-9.
- Giaconi, Giovanni. *The Villas of Palladio* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003).
- Goodsell, Charles T. "Political Meanings of the American State Capitol" *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 10.4 (Winter, 1993), pp. 294-307.
- Green, William Elton. "'A Question of Great Delicacy': The Texas Capitol Competition, 1881" *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 92.2 (Oct., 1988), pp. 247-270.
- Greenwood, Richard. "National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form: Sunnyside," (U.S. Department of the Interior, 1975).
- Groft, Tammi K. and MacKay, Mary Alice, eds. *Albany Institute of History & Art: 200 Years of Collecting* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1998).

- Harbison, Robert. *The Built, the Unbuilt, and the Unbuildable: In Pursuit of Architectural Meaning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).
- Harris, John. *The Artist and the Country House: A History of Country House and Garden View Painting in Britain, 1540-1870* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1979).
- Harris, Neil. *The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years, 1790-1860* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982).
- Harvey, Eleanor Jones. *The Painted Sketch: American Impressions from Nature, 1830-1880* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998).
- Hatch, Alden. *The Wadsworths of the Genesee* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1959).
- Heinen, Ulrich. "Rubens' Garten und die Gesundheit des Künstlers" *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 65 (2004), pp. 71-82.
- History of Franklin & Pickaway Counties, Ohio*, (Philadelphia: Williams Brothers, 1880).
- Hitchcock, Henry Russell and Seale, William. *Temples of Democracy: The State Capitols of the U.S.A.* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976).
- Huntington, David. "Must this Mansion be Destroyed?" *Life* (May 13, 1966), pp. 64-80.
- Huston, Reeve. *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- Ikemoto, Wendy. "A 'higher style' of looking: Thomas Cole and popular media" *The Burlington Magazine* CLVI (June, 2014), pp. 385-390.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Space Between: Paired Paintings in Antebellum America" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2009).
- Ivins, William. *Prints and Visual Communication* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1953).
- Jeffers, Matthew. "Van Rensselaer House (1895-1973)" Williams College Archives and Special Collections webpage, <http://archives.williams.edu/williamshistory/sawyerlibrary/rensselaerindex.php> [access date: 13 April 2015]
- Kelsall, Malcolm. *The Great Good Place: The Country House and English Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
- Koja, Stephan, ed. *America: The New World in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Painting* (Munich: Prestel, 1999).

- Kornhauser, Elizabeth Mankin. *American Paintings before 1945 in the Wadsworth Atheneum*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).
- Lamb, Martha J. "The Van Rensselaer Manor" *Magazine of American History* XI.1 (Jan., 1884), pp. 1-32.
- Larkin, Oliver. "Two Yankee Painters in Italy: Thomas Cole and Samuel Morse" *American Quarterly* 5.3 (Autumn 1953), pp. 195-200.
- Larsen, Timothy. *Friends of Religious Equality: Nonconformist Politics in Mid-Victorian England* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 1999).
- Lepler, Jessica M. *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- Levy, Walter. "Thomas Cole and James Fenimore Cooper: A Study of Contrasting Attitudes toward the Use of American History in Literature and Art" (Fordham University Ph.D. Dissertation, 1978).
- Lombaerde, Piet, ed. *The Notion of the Painter-Architect in Italy and the Southern Low Countries* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).
- Loth Calder and Sadler, Julius Trousdale, Jr. *The Only Proper Style: Gothic Architecture in America* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975).
- Lovell, Margaretta. *Art in a Season of Revolution: Painters, Artisans, and Patrons in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).
- Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).
- Maynard, W. Barksdale. *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Thomas Cole Drawing on Stone Found at Cedar Grove" *American Art Journal* 30.1/2 (1999), pp. 133-9.
- McDaniel, Amy Ellis. "Works on Paper by Thomas Cole in the Detroit Institute of Arts" *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 80.1/2 (2006), pp. 16-27.
- Mignani, Daniela. *The Medicean Villas by Giusto Utens* (Florence: Arnaud, 1991).
- Miller, Angela. *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

- Mills, W. Jay. "Highwood, Weehawken" in *Historic Houses of New Jersey* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1902), pp. 52-60.
- Mitchell, W.J.T., ed. *Landscape and Power* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
- Morrone, Francis. "Thomas Cole the Architect and the New Studio" *Thomas Cole National Historic Site Newsletter* (Fall 2013), pp. 4-6.
- Muller, Gilbert H. *William Cullen Bryant: Author of America* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010).
- National Parks Service, *Thomas Cole National Historic Site: Draft General Management Plan/ Environmental Assessment* (Boston: National Parks Service, 2004).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Thomas Cole: Suitability/Feasibility Study* (Boston: National Parks Service, 1991).
- Newton, Roger. *Town & Davis, Architects: Pioneers in American Revivalist Architecture, 1812-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).
- New York State Library: One Hundred and Eighteenth Annual Report* (Albany: The University of the State of New York, 1936).
- Nocentini, Serena. "Nuovi studi sulla casa di Giorgio Vasari ad Arezzo" *Artibus et Historiae* 32.64 (2011), pp. 81-103.
- Nygren, Edward J. and Robertson, Bruce eds. *Views and Visions: American Landscape Before 1830* (Washington: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1986).
- O'Gorman, James F. *Isaiah Rogers: Architectural Practice in Antebellum America* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015).
- Olson, Roberta J. M. "George Harvey's Anglo-American Atmospheric Landscapes" *The Magazine Antiques* 174.4 (Oct., 2008), pp. 112-21.
- O'Malley, Therese. "'Your Garden Must be a Museum to You': Early American Botanic Gardens" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 59.2/3 (1996), pp. 207-31.
- Parry, III, Ellwood C. *The Art of Thomas Cole: Ambition and Imagination* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1988).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Thomas Cole's Imagination at Work in *The Architect's Dream*", *American Art Journal* 12.1 (Winter, 1980), pp. 41-59.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Thomas Cole's *The Hunter's Return*" *American Art Journal* 17.3 (Summer, 1985), pp. 2-17.

- Payne, Alina. "The Sculptor-Architect's Drawing and Exchanges Between the Arts" in Michael Cole, ed. *Donatello, Michelangelo, Cellini: Sculptor's Drawings from Renaissance Italy* (exh. cat.) (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2014), pp. 57-73.
- Phillips, Sandra S. and Weintraub, Linda, eds. *Charmed Places: Hudson River Artists and Their Houses, Studios, and Vistas* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988).
- Pierson, William H. *American Buildings and their Architects* 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1970-8).
- Pogrebin, Robin. "Painting's Removal Stirs Outcry" *New York Times* (March 17, 2013), C1.
- Powell, Earl A., III. *Thomas Cole* (New York: H. Abrams, 1999).
- Rathburn, Richard. "The Columbian Institution for the Promotion of Arts and Sciences," *United States National Museum Bulletin* 101 (1971), pp. 37-9.
- Reiff, Daniel D. *Houses from Books: Treatises, Pattern Books, and Catalogs in American Architecture, 1738-1950: A History and Guide* (State College, PA: Penn State Press, 2000).
- Reynolds, Marcus T. "The Colonial Buildings of Rensselaerwyck" [sic] *The Architectural Record* IV (July 1894-July 1895), pp. 415-38.
- Robinson, John Martin. *Temples of Delight: Stowe Landscape Gardens* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Pitkin Publishing, 1994).
- Romero, Lora. *Home Fronts: Domesticity and its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).
- Ronnes, Hanneke. *Architecture and Elite Culture in in the United Provinces, England and Ireland, 1500-1700* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press/ Pallas Publications, 2006).
- Ryan, James A. *Frederic Church's Olana: Architecture and Landscape as Art* (Hudson, NY: Black Dome Press, 2001).
- Saunders, Richard H. and Raye, Helen. *Daniel Wadsworth: Patron of the Arts* (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1981).
- Savage, Kirk. *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Self-Made Monument: George Washington and the Fight to Erect a National Memorial" *Winterthur Portfolio* 22.4 (Winter, 1987), pp. 225-242.

- Schuyler, David. "Pencil and Pen in Defense of Nature: Thomas Cole and the American Landscape" *The Hudson River Valley Review* (Autumn, 2014), pp. 16-38.
- Seale, William. *Michigan's Capitol: Construction and Restoration* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).
- Seamon, David. Exhibition Texts from "Thomas Cole and Cedar Grove" (TCNHS, opened June 2000), p. 15. Archived online at [http://www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon/Thomas\\_Cole.htm](http://www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon/Thomas_Cole.htm) [Access date: 28 March 2015].
- Siegel, Nancy, *Along the Juniata: Thomas Cole and the Dissemination of American Landscape Imagery* (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College Museum of Art, 2003).
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *The Cultured Canvas: New Perspectives on American Landscape Painting* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2011).
- Sizer, Theodore. "William Beckford and his American Property" *The Yale University Library Gazette* 39.1 (1964), 42-5.
- Snyder, Martin. "William Birch: His *Country Seats of the United States*" *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 81 (July, 1957), pp. 225-54.
- Stella, Rudolph. "Arezzo: Giorgio Vasari" *The Burlington Magazine* 124.947 (Feb., 1982), pp. 121-2.
- Stutchbury, Howard. *The Architecture of Colen Campbell*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).
- Sweeney, J. Gray. "'Endued with Rare Genius': Frederic Edwin Church's *To the Memory of Cole*" *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 2.1 (Winter, 1988), pp. 44-71.
- Sweeting, Adam W. "'A Very Pleasant Patriarchal Life': Professional Authors and Amateur Architects in the Hudson Valley, 1835-1870" *Journal of American Studies* 29.1 (Apr., 1995), pp. 33-53.
- Toole, R. M. and Jacks, Elizabeth B. *The New Studio* [Campaign Brochure] (Catskill, NY: Thomas Cole National Historic Site, 2013).
- Trumbull, Jonathan. "Joseph Trumbull, The First Commissary-General of the Continental Army" *Records and Papers of the New London County Historical Society*, Vol. II, Part III, (1897), 321-47.
- Truettner, William H. and Wallach, Alan, eds. *Thomas Cole: Landscape into History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

- Van Rensselaer, Florence. *The Van Rensselaers in Holland and America* (New York: Published privately, 1956).
- Van Zandt, Roland. *Catskill Mountain House: America's Grandest Hotel* (Delmar, NY: Black Dome Press, 1997).
- Vlach, John Michael. *The Planter's Prospect: Privilege and Slavery in Plantation Paintings* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001).
- Wainwright, Nicholas Biddle. "Andalusia, Countryseat of the Craig Family and of Nicholas Biddle and His Descendants" *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 101.1 (Jan., 1977), pp. 3-69.
- Waite, Diana S. ed. *Albany Architecture* (Albany, NY: Mount Ida Press, 1993).
- Wallach, Alan. "Thomas Cole and the Aristocracy", *Arts Magazine* 56.3 (Nov., 1981), pp. 94-106.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Thomas Cole's *River in the Catskills* as Antipastoral" *Art Bulletin* 84.2 (Jun., 2002), pp. 334-350.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Wadsworth's Tower: An Episode in the History of American Landscape Vision" *American Art* 10.3 (Autumn, 1996), pp. 8-27.
- Warner, Charles Dudley. Unfinished typescript for a biography of Frederic Edwin Church (Olana State Historic Site, 1899-1900).
- Weber, Hanns. "Beverwyck: Wm Paterson Van Rensselaer House, Rensselaer, New York" *Historic American Buildings Survey Report* 5-A-10 (1936).
- Wenger, Mark. "Thomas Jefferson and the Virginia State Capitol" *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 101.1 (Jan., 1993), pp. 77-102.
- Wilton-Ely, John. "The Genesis and Evolution of Fonthill Abbey" *Architectural History* 23 (1908), pp. 40-51, 172-180.
- Wittmann, Otto, Jr. "The Italian Experience: American Artists in Italy, 1830-1875" *American Quarterly* 4.1 (Spring 1952), pp. 2-15.
- Woods, Mary. *From Craft to Profession: The Practice of Architecture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- Writers Program of the Works Progress Administration, *New York: A Guide to the Empire State* (Cooperstown: New York State Historical Association, 1940).

**APPENDIX A:**  
**Cole and the Washington Monument**

*The following documents and drawings show Thomas Cole's thinking about the principles and possibilities that should guide this project for a major public monument. They are also significant as evidence of a self-conception as an architect sufficiently strong to cause him to put some advice in writing to those in charge of the project. While no reply to Cole's letter to the commissioners survives, nor can we be certain that he ever posted it, the below journal entry with initial concept sketch, subsequent more developed plan that shows how his thinking developed over the winter and early spring of 1835-6, and the final letter they produced the following May are eloquent about Cole's values for public building projects in general.*

**1. Excerpt relating to matters of design from the Notice of the Washington National Monument Society<sup>1</sup>**

*The below transcription from the nationally published text that inspired Cole's thinking about the project omits the list of officers and managers of the society and information on the appointment of collectors to oversee the solicitation of contributions in every state. The information that follows is positioned in the notice as a kind of script for collectors and deputies to use when trying to convince potential donors. This helps explain the exhortations at the end of the section.*

It can be stated that it is the design of the society to erect a monument in the Metropolis of the Nation, by the voluntary contributions of the people of that nation, and that the whole amount of the collections, whatever they may be, will be expended on its construction. From a feeling of pride, and of patriotism, it is believed, that no American can revise his mite, or hesitate to lend his assistance toward the completion of an object, which is to redound to the glory of the republic, and to do credit to the munificence and taste of the present age. It is an object in which all are interested who regard their own reputation, and that of their country. It is proposed that the contemplated monument shall be, like him in whose honor it is to be constructed, unparalleled in the world, and commensurate with the gratitude, liberality, and patriotism of the people by whom it is to be erected. A premium will be offered for the society, for the best design by an American architect, and therefore no definite idea can as yet be given of the plan which may be adopted but it is the wish of the society, that it should blend stupendousness with elegance, and be of such magnitude and beauty as to be an object of pride to the American people, and of admiration to all who see it. Its material is intended to be wholly American, and to be of marble or granite brought from each state, that each state may participate in the glory of contributing in material, as well as in funds to its construction. Let each contributor consider it as a privilege and honor, and not as a favor bestowed on the society, to have such an opportunity, perhaps the last that will ever occur, of displaying his gratitude and veneration for the memory of Washington. Press upon him the importance of this great and noble effort; of the deep disgrace that would attend its failure, and of the necessity of showing to the world and future ages, that the American people felt as they ought to feel on so interesting a subject, and that they justly

---

<sup>1</sup> This notice is transcribed from the *Albany Daily Argus* of December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1835 (page 2, column 5) and is identical to the version Cole would have read in the *New-York American*. I thank Joseph Ditta of the New-York Historical Society for his assistance in locating this elusive text.



estimated the value of the great services of the Father of their liberty and independence. [Lines on the safe depositing of contributions omitted] It is the wish of the society that it should be commenced within eight months, and completed within five or six years.

GEO. WATTERSTON

*Secretary W.N.M.S.*

## **2. Entry of October 10, 1835 in a journal titled “Notes and Occurrences”<sup>2</sup>**

There is an article in the ‘American’ addressed to the American people, on the subject of erecting a monument to Washington. And trust it will have the effect of awakening the public to an honourable sense of what is due to the memory of the greatest of men and rouse them to a noble effort to erase the disgraceful stain of ingratitude that has so long darkened the character of the people by erecting a splendid Monument which shall be (if it is possible) as stupendous & enduring as the fame of him to whose memory it is erected.

As to the design of such a monument, I would not have a statue, for however great in size, its many parts and projections would render it less durable than a more simple monument and the original beauty of the sculpture would be lost in a few centuries. I would not have a column because being merely an architectural member, and not a complete whole, it appears in bad taste, even if there was a statue on the top. A pyramid would answer in durability of structure but is unmeaning. I think that a monument in the form of a colossal altar would be the most appropriate, and the most capable of uniting beauty of form with durability. It ought to be several hundred feet high and have a fire continually burning upon it, which should never expire as long the nation recognized Washington as the Pater Patriae. If the subscription is anything like it ought to be in amount, there would be ample means of constructing such a monument and appropriating funds for maintaining the Fire. There may be some who would object to this kind of monument on the ground of an Altar having been used by the ancients in offering sacrifices to False Gods but we are not likely to turn pagan because we erect a monument in the form of an Altar, more than we shall for worshipping the true god in churches built after the model of Heathan [sic] Temples. Besides the flames which shall ascend from its summit are not as incense to the immortal spirit of Washington but shall rise in memory of him & shall hold him in our perpetual remembrance as a Pharos which shall light his children for ages & ages to come.

The dimensions of this monument should be so great as to allow of a spacious passage to the summit on an inclined plane so that the materials for its construction (which ought to be massive) could be raised without the ordinary means and drawn up in carriages by Horse power or steam. [Fig. 1.4 follows here]

## **3. Undated “Plan for Monument of Washington”<sup>3</sup>**

A circular Temple building – having 13 Columns of 100ft high of the humble [“best” struck through] doric. The Metopes ornamented with [“Sculptured” struck through] the arms of the 13 states Sculptured in relievo, the designs the most simple possible. [“in the simplest manner” struck through] This building to be placed on a base 50 ft high. This base composed of a circular flight of steps with four pedestals of 30ft high. 30 ft front for Colossal Statue of

---

<sup>2</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 4a.1

<sup>3</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 6.5

Justice Fortune or Truth & Piety, all qualities [?] of Washington's mind. for inscriptions also. The Top of the building to be surmounted by a Statue of Washington or another or a Tripod or altar on which a fire shall be kept burning continually. Within the Columns or cellar a Sarcophagus. An inclined spiral plane to ascend to the summit of the building with niches for Statues of the great men of each State in the Union if each State can furnish such. [Fig. 1.8 appears immediately after this text]

#### 4. Cole's letter on the design of the Washington Monument<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Geo. Watterson

Catskill May 27 1836

Sec. of the Washington Monument Society

Sir,

Feeling a warm interest in the effort your society is making to erect a monument to Washington & being unacquainted with any other means of acquiring the information I desired, I have ventured to trouble you.

I would inquire whether it is intended to place the remains of Washington within the Monument and what plan you propose for the selection of an appropriate design. Perhaps these enquiries are altogether premature & it is your intention to make known these things through the medium of the Public Journals. As the monument is to be erected to the memory of the most illustrious of men by a great nation, it ought to surpass all others either of antient and modern times & be a noble monument of the taste as well as love and reverence of the people who erect it. The principles of the design ought to be simplicity and beauty. It ought if possible to combine the durability of the Egyptian pyramid with the elegance of the pure Doric Temple. I trust that designs in which there is a multiplicity of parts and ornament will be rejected as inconsistent with the object and incompatible with durability. I should also hope that no notion of new orders of Architecture or mixtures of orders may be admitted, for such are assuredly the results of ignorance of the true principles of Architecture. I should think it would not be advisable to offer a premium for the design—surely it will be a sufficient reward to the Artist that his name shall go down to posterity as that of the Architect of the Tomb of Washington. Will you excuse these remarks which may be as superfluous as they are hasty. As an Artist, I am anxious that the monument should be worthy [of] the admiration of the world. I feel that it ought to call forth the highest taste and genius of the people, and I sincerely & confidently hope that it shall not be a perpetual example of our bad taste.

Yours very respectfully,  
Thomas Cole

---

<sup>4</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 5.3

**APPENDIX B:**  
**The Correspondence of Thomas Cole and William Apthorp Adams on the Ohio Statehouse**

*The following letters constitute Cole's most extensive set of architectural writings and a valuable source of insight into the artist's architectural thought. While selections from these letters have been quoted on rare occasions in past scholarship, they have never been reproduced in their entirety. All spelling and capitalization is original but some punctuation has been standardized for clarity. For example, Cole rarely uses periods, preferring instead dashes so a whole letter can appear to be a single sentence. On other occasions, he used dashes in their modern context, in place of a comma, or simply to save paper when indicating a new paragraph. Only from context are the breaks clear. I have indicated where drawings occur in brackets and important examples have been reproduced in the figures to Chapter One.*

**1. Cole to Adams, May 26, 1838<sup>5</sup>**

My dear Sir,

I received your very kind & obliging letter, your mark & Picture Gallery which last contains some exceedingly spirited Heads.<sup>6</sup> I was much grieved to learn that your health was so miserable but I hope the change to more active life will speedily restore you. That I cannot soon expect to see you & that you did not send a picture are both sources of regret to me.<sup>7</sup> How vividly your letter & sketches recall to mind Days of Auld Lang Syne. I cannot say the reminiscence would be agreeable were it not accompanied by the recollection of your friendship to the poverty-stricken wanderer that shines like a solitary star amid the darkness of the time. Those days were indeed gloomy & overcast. Inexperienced, ignorant of the profession I presumed to practice & constrained by outrageous fortune to assume an appearance of the knowledge & skill I did not possess, I was next to miserable and nothing but a hope that could not be quashed sustained me.

Our exhibition is now open. The thin-skinned artist in the field to be hunted & torn & worried by the mongrel Pack of Critics who break forth "ravenous & keen" after their year's fast. My dear sir I am sick, disgusted at the ignorance, the flippancy, the slang, the falsehood that is daily vomited by the press, to feast the sickly & diseased appetite of the multitude. I do not allude to what is connected with Fine Arts merely but to all, to every subject. You may be led to suspect from what I have said that I have been recently irritated by some unfavourable criticism on my own work. This is not the case, though there are such, but I grieve to find criticism so low as it is. Fulsome praise, stupid presumption, & interested distraction make up the amount of newspaper criticism on the Fine Arts. But enough of this. I will only add this: if in any of the papers you see my works extravagantly praised, do not believe the Critic & if you see them censured extravagantly, do not believe the Critic. I am glad you have seen Mr Marchant & that you are pleased with his pictures. I think very highly of them.

---

<sup>5</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 1.3

<sup>6</sup> While Cole rarely reciprocates, to our regret, Adams's letters to Cole are peppered with caricatures and other sketches that testify to the intimacy the two men enjoyed by this period. The previous letter from Adams of 13 May 1838 described the toll his sedentary lifestyle had taken on his health and concluded with sketches of a dog, two birds, and the variously posed heads of six men in archaic dress.

<sup>7</sup> Cole is referring to his hope that Adams would submit an image to the annual exhibition of the National Academy. He later did so in 1842 and was made an honorary academician the same year.

I was much pleased to receive the paper containing the Advertisement to Architects and still more pleased to find your name on the list of Commissioners. I commend the choice and truly hope that the building to be erected will be an honour to the State and to yourselves. Do you know I am something of an Architect? My nephew<sup>8</sup>, I believe you were informed when here, was studying under Mr. Town<sup>9</sup>, he is now with Mr. Rogers who is erecting our great exchange.<sup>10</sup> He is the first American Architect who has had an education expressly for the purpose and my hopes are great.<sup>11</sup> I state this that you may not be surprised if we send you a Design. If we do and it should happen to be worthy it perhaps will not be the less prized for having been made by one who almost considers Ohio his own state and by one who is actually a native of Steubenville Ohio. Of course this is to my friend WA Adams and not to the Commissioner. The design is all with him. Will you favour us as soon as convenient with answers to the following items of enquiry: The Form of the Ground & Situation of it; The Dimensions, Number & Purpose of the Rooms; The materials of which the Building is to be constructed; The expense of the principle materials as delivered on the spot; The Situation of the place with regard to the Transportation of materials; the Quality of the Earth with regard to Foundations; The Sum appropriated. We suppose the Labour & many of the Materials will not differ much from N York prices. I would ask too how the Drawings etc. should be sent. I hope these enquiries will not be vain ones & that the Design we may send if not successful, may be worthy of your individual approbation.

Do not suppose that this Architectural business is my only inducement in writing now. Without it, though pressed by rather an extended correspondence, I should have written if it had only been to thank you for your attention to the Fossils & your congratulations [this section torn away with the wax seal that was once attached] changes & in from Single to Double Blessedness & [section lost] last not least, because it gives me pleasure both to write & to hear from you.

In the hope that your health is restored

I remain, Yours truly

Thomas Cole

---

<sup>8</sup> William Henry Bayless (c. 1820-?) Little is known of Bayless beyond what is contained in these letters: that he apprenticed with two of the major architects of the day and was Cole's key collaborator in the Statehouse submission. Correspondence in the New York State Library includes references to abortive real estate venture between the two in the 1840s that seems to have ended badly for both, but more research is needed on this episode.

<sup>9</sup> Ithiel Town (1784-1844) Town was the patron whose open-ended commission produced *The Architect's Dream*, for which Cole was paid in part in architectural books. Notoriously, he rejected the picture that has come to be recognized as one of Cole's masterpieces.

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah Rogers (1800-1869) Cole refers to one of his best known projects, the Merchant Exchange on Wall Street, begun in 1836.

<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to find evidence in support of this bold claim. On the professionalization of architecture in the nineteenth century, see Mary Woods, *From Craft to Profession: The Practice of Architecture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

## 2. Adams to Cole, June 7, 1838<sup>12</sup>

[The letter that follows is written on the verso of the official advertisement for Statehouse plans reproduced below.]

Columbus, Ohio, April 10th, 1838.

SIR:

The STATE HOUSE to be erected in this city, will contain the following apartments:

- A Hall for the House of Representatives, to accommodate about one hundred members; containing an area of 4,800 superficial feet.
- A Senate Chamber, to accommodate fifty members; containing an area of 2,400 feet.
- Thirty-six Committee Rooms; one to contain an area of 2,200 feet, the others to contain an area of 288 feet each.
- Two Library Rooms, containing each an area of 2,400 feet.
- A Court Room for the Court in Bank, containing an area of 2,100 feet.
- Four Rooms for the Clerks and Sergeant-at-arms of the two Houses, of the same size with the small Committee rooms.
- A Common Hall or Rotunda, containing an area of from 2,500 to 4,800 feet.

The following apartments are to be fire proof:

- Five Rooms for the Auditor of State, each containing an area of 600 feet.
- Two Rooms for the Treasurer, each containing an area of 500 feet; one of which will contain a vault for the safe keeping of money and books.
- Three Rooms for the Secretary of State; two of which will contain an area of 500 feet; the other to contain an area of 1000 feet, for Stationary, &c.
- Two Rooms for Executive Offices, containing each an area of 500 feet.
- Six Rooms of the same size, for the Canal Commissioners, Adjutant General, and Quarter Master General.

The material to be employed in the construction of the contemplated building, is secondary limestone. It will cost, in large blocks, \$4,00 per perch of 25 cubic feet; smaller blocks will cost \$3,00 per perch. The cutting of the stone will cost 30 cents per superficial foot. Blocks 4 feet thick can be had.

- Brick laid in the wall, will cost from \$6,00 to \$8,00 per thousand.
- Oak and other hard lumber, (sawed,) \$10,00 per thousand, board measure.
- White and yellow pine, (clear stuff,) \$20,00 per thousand.
- Hewed timber, 6 to 8 cents per foot, lineal measure.
- Fine free-stone, for capitals, &c., in large blocks, will cost from \$6,00 to \$9,00 per perch.

The site of the building is an exact square of six hundred and sixty feet; and, when graded, the eastern side will be ten or eleven feet lower than the west front of the building; and, as the building will present four fronts, the square being bounded on all sides by streets, the plan must be so arranged as to include all offices, deposits for fuel, &c. The whole to be drained by a sewer to the river, 1200 feet distant, and 60 feet below the level of the building.

It is not intended to confine the Architect to the *exact* dimensions above specified. A slight variation in the size, of any of the apartments, may be made to accommodate the various parts of the building.

Limestone will be used for the foundation, and probably for the whole exterior, excepting for the entablature, &c., which will be of fine free stone, easily wrought.

The Portico floors will be, either of lime or free stone, in large slabs. Other floors may be of the same material if necessary. There may be a sub-basement for fuel, &c., as the ground is perfectly dry. Interior wall and arches will be of brick. The foundation will be upon compact gravel.

The fire-proof Offices may be in the basement story, and yet be above the natural surface of the ground; as the building will probably be raised by an artificial terrace, to give it a proper elevation.

The site for the building is in the centre of the city, and occupies the most elevated position in the immediate vicinity. The ground gently slopes each way from the building, the descent being greatest to the west and north. The building will be conspicuous several miles from the west and north; from the east about two miles, and from the south but a short distance.

Most of the work will be done by the State convicts, at less than half the annexed prices of free labor:

|                              |                           |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Ordinary wages of Mechanics, | \$1,25 to \$1,75 per day. |
| “ “ “ Laborers,              | 75 cents.                 |

The Superintendent will not be appointed until after the plan is adopted.

There has been no sum fixed for the cost of the State House; but we believe that in the general style, convenience, and durability of her Capitol, Ohio does not wish to be second to any State in the Union.

The Grecian Doric Order is suggested; but not with a view of governing exclusively in the choice.

To insure perfect impartiality in adopting the plans proposed, we have determined that the plans shall be forwarded to the Governor, at Columbus, on or before the first of October next,—each plan to be accompanied by a communication, containing the name of the Architect, and a private mark, by which the plan will be identified. The communication, containing the name of the Architect, will not be opened until after the plan is adopted, and the premium awarded.

W. A. ADAMS,  
J. RIDGWAY, JR.,  
WM. B. VAN HOOK, } Commissioners.

30  
41  
12/16

<sup>12</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 2.8.

My dear Sir

I recd. yours of 26 ult. a few days ago. I should have replied forthwith but our Court was in session and I was so much engaged that I had not time to add anything to the within, as I wished to do and now, I have only time to say that I have high hopes of the plan you promise, but you will observe that we have provided against the influence of all personal prejudices, which I am sure would operate with me in your favour from my great confidence in your cultivated taste, and the knowledge which I know you, and those associated with you, possess in matters of this kind. My colleagues in this business though not men of much taste in the arts agree with me in the purpose of endeavouring to erect an Structure [sic] for posterity, one that the next generation will not be ashamed of. We have all the means and the material, and at present I see no influence that threatens to defeat our views. The measure is now popular and if we can keep alive the interest that now prevails till after the adjournment of our next Legislature all will be safe. I did intend to state to you my notions of what the building ought to be, but a second thought satisfies me that this would be presumptuous; but it seems to me that the great defect in modern architecture is the want of unity in the designs, the simple majesty of the Greek Temples it is true must in some measure be sacrificed to attain the purpose for which our public buildings are erected, but we surely can avoid the deformity of two or three stories of windows,<sup>13</sup> of columns supporting nothing, and arches performing no office. I dislike exterior arches, but a dome (not a pepper box) may be shown to great advantage in our State House, and a room something like the rotunda at Washington is desirable, but no other rooms of any shape but square or oblong, but above all we wish to avoid the compleated, Labyrinth interior of the capitol. Our building will be a large one. The site is ample, and all its beauties or defects will be exposed. I fear I have already committed the error I intended to avoid, the presumption of giving you a lecture on architecture. You must pardon me for I have done.

We have made no provision for forwarding the plans, but if you will write to me when your plan is finished stating where it will be delivered I will undertake to have it brought here by some private conveyance. In making the estimates let them be as low as possible; we must avoid the charge of extravagance. This is all I fear, saving money is the order of the day, especially among the democrats and demagogues. They will spare none of the State's cash unless it is destined to line their own pockets. Then they are wonderfully liberal. We must take care not to frighten these honest and disinterested people with a large sum of money. I will commence tomorrow collecting the fossils for your friend, and in hopes of again hearing from you I make my mark and bid you good bye.<sup>14</sup>

[Six caricatures follow and the outside of the envelope bears a plan and elevation of a State House resembling St. Paul's, London. See figure 1.11]

---

<sup>13</sup> This may be a reference to Thomas Jefferson's Virginia State Capitol. Suggestion of Margaretta Lovell.

<sup>14</sup> The friend referred to here is Benjamin Silliman (1779-1864), professor of natural history at Yale, who makes regular cameos in these letters for his fossil collecting activities. This intriguing aspect of Cole's career has not received adequate study.

### 3. Cole to Adams, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1838<sup>15</sup>

My Dear Sir,

I received yours of the 7<sup>th</sup> last & am much obliged for your attention to my request & for your remarks on the subject of the architecture of the State House. They are in accordance with my views & I believe with True Taste. As there are some particulars that may be of some importance in the Design of such a building not mentioned in your circular I again take the liberty of troubling you & unwillingly, for I fear that I have already trespassed too much on your time & kindness. Although the building will present four fronts it may be of consequence in point of Economy, Convenience and perhaps Beauty that one should be of most importance. If so which side ought it to be? The colour of the Free Stone & the Limestone as the effect of projections may depend on this. If you have time you will perhaps favour one with information on these particulars.

I am sorry to perceive that the Exterior of the Building is likely to be of two different kinds of Stone. I hope this will be avoided if possible as it will destroy all unity & Harmony of parts. If the publick taste was sufficiently advanced to admit of the Polychromick Embellishment of the Greek Temples the difference of material would be of little importance, but I believe that is not the case. You know that the Grecian Buildings even those constructed of white marble were painted on the exterior, a few members only excepted. The discovery is somewhat modern & at first view Polychrome Embellishment is extremely offensive to Modern notions of Taste, but as a knowledge of the principles on which it was conducted by the Greeks is increased I have no doubt it will be found in perfect conformity with the exquisite Taste of that wonderful people. Indeed the living Architects of Europe are becoming reconciled & several successful examples are already executed in Germany. I believe I have been able to discover the principles on which the Grecians worked, but I may be mistaken as I often am where I am most confident. I hope you will pardon me for imposing so much Trouble on you & for spinning out a letter with matter about which you know perhaps as much or more than I do.

I remain

Yours sincerely

Thomas Cole

### 4. Adams to Cole, June 26, 1838<sup>16</sup>

My dear Sir,

I was absent last week and did not receive yours of 18<sup>th</sup> till this morning. I omitted to mention in my last, that if either of the four fronts of the State House is to be the principal one, it should be the west, as that faces the most important street and will overlook a great extent of level country. We mean by four fronts, that each side will be equally exposed to view and we wish to avoid the deformity of back [illeg.] The square is already surrounded by buildings but the principal street, that thro. which the National road passes, is on the west side. There is a large natural spring which we propose to conduct into the square for the use of the building and the grounds and we hope to have ornamental fountains, but this does not enter into our present calculations. The exterior of the building will be of two Kinds of stone, but the colour of the two kinds is the same, or so nearly the same as perfectly to preserve the unity and harmony of the parts, in fact the two kinds cannot be distinguished by the colour, but the texture must be

---

<sup>15</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 1.3

<sup>16</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 2.8

examined to determine the difference. The colour is a light grey or greyish white, a few shades lighter than the stone of the Statues of Tam O'Shanter and his grey mare Meg which you have seen. The free stone like that, but much finer in its grain and capable of being wrought in the finest tracery, and for this purpose, much superior to the lime-stone which is uniformly hard, but unequal in its texture. I agree with you that the public taste is not sufficiently advanced to admit of the Polychromick embellishments of the Greek temples. This discovery has given such a shock to modern taste, as almost to induce a belief that the eulogies on Greek art have been misplaced; and that the world has been gulled for ages; in fact when I was first convinced that the Greeks painted their Temples with various colours (by an article in the Foreign Quarterly Review about eighteen months since)<sup>17</sup> it made me melancholy for a month. Those divine forms on the metopes of the Parthenon painted blue, and red, and green, and gilt like Dutch toys. This was too horrid. I have reflected some on this subject, but I am not yet reconciled. I fear it will take a long time to induce the modern world to identify painted sculpture with the true principles of taste. The learned world has so long admired the forms and proportion of Grecian Art, apart from all colour, and so often pronounced them perfect that the Polychromick discovery will settle the health of the doctrine that all our notions of beauty are conventional.

If you do not send on your plan to use to reach Columbus by 1<sup>st</sup> Oct. you must inform me in time, of the place where I can obtain it in New York so that I may direct some of our citizens (some of whom are almost always in New York) to bring to me here. It is now about ten days since I sent by the canal the box of fossils, addressed as you directed. Some of the specimens do not strictly belong to fossil plants but they served to fill up the box. There are one or two or more varieties extant here which I could not obtain. I hope nevertheless this collection may prove interesting, if it should arrive safe at its destination.

I am yours

Truly

WAAdams

[Faint pencil notations by Cole, follow: "The forms on the metopes were not painted. Only the ground on which the sculptures is. The shafts of the Columns were not painted & several other members. I believe the principal object of painting the architecture was to give volume to form. The remaining vestiges of colour on the Temples at Athens confirm this opinion.]

### 5. Cole to Adams, September 10, 1838<sup>18</sup>

My dear Sir,

If I had followed my inclination I should have answered yours of the 26 June much before this time, but as it would have been the gratification of myself, perhaps at your expense I have deferred it until not thinking it better, as I generally write to ask favours, to let those demands on your kindness be as far between as possible.

For the information you gave me concerning the State House I was & am much obliged & although my time has been very much engaged in my regular profession I have been able to design a plan, the drawings of which are nearly executed, though not by my hand for my other

---

<sup>17</sup> John George Cochrane, ed. Article VIII: "Athenian Architecture and Polychrome Embellishment", Review of *Mittheilungen über Alt un Neu Athen*. by Alexander Ferdinand von Quast (Berlin, 1834), *Foreign Quarterly Review*, v. 35 (October 1836), pp. 159-179.

<sup>18</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 1.3



avocations would not permit. Of course I shall not give any description of what I have done as I should be unwilling to believe that your friendship for me would prejudice you in my favour in a matter of such great & general importance. One object of my letter is to speak of the means of forwarding the drawings in time. As I know of no other means I must avail myself of your offer to get one of your citizens to call for it in N York and I am almost afraid there are few persons willing to be encumbered with a Tin Tube nearly three feet long & more than two inches in diameter. [sic] If you think with one [?] and can devise another plan I wish you would favour me by writing immediately. I may be mistaken, some man with a long trunk may come from your neighborhood. I should be sorry not to send the plan.

Mr Ingram to whom the Fossils were directed has been out of the City some time, but when last I saw him, in July, they had not arrived. Most probably that is not the case now. I expect to see or hear from him every day & to learn of their arrival. I am very desirous to see them & shall inform you when I have seen them.

Polychrome embellishment does not seem to have affected you very favourably & certainly it does knock some of our old notions in the head. But there are very slight grounds in this polychromick discovery that our notions of beauty are conventional. But the Greeks were not quite such Barbarians as you seem to suppose. The sculpture of the Metopes were not painted. The ground was painted blue. The sculptures might have been tinted as the best modern sculptures are, to take away the cold effect of the marble. The shafts of the Columns were not painted such as was the case with several other members. I believe their object in painting architecture was to give value to form, colour was subordinate. IT was used to aid & not to usurp the place of Form. The vestiges of Colour discovered on the Temple at Athens by their arrangement confirm me in this opinion. And unwilling as I was to believe that the virgin marble could be improved by paint I am still more unwilling to believe that Phidias & Ictinus were barbarous in taste. But enough you say of Polychrome, "you are a painter & must speak well of paint, 'nothing like paint.'"

I sincerely hope your health has been improved and that you have enjoyed the summer. I am sure you would have enjoyed a few hours if you could have seen some of our fine Mountain sunsets. I sat down fatigued with a hard days work & have scribbled & scribbled until I find myself near the end of the sheet. That it is so near is perhaps a fortunate thing for you, for thinking of you & talking by pen to you seems to refresh me. For fear I should put you to sleep

I will say that I remain

Yours very truly

Thomas Cole

The drawings may be enquired for of Mr Henry Bayless at Dr Ackerley's, No 1 Laight St Corner of Canal St N York. If Mr B is not in, the drawings may be had by enquiring for them

## 6. Adams to Cole, September 10, 1838<sup>19</sup>

Dear Sir

Mr Hall, a merchant of this place, leaves here about 12<sup>th</sup> [next] for N. York. He will remain a few days at Philadelphia and will probably be in New York on 22d [next]. I have requested him to write to you from Phild. stating when he will be in N. York that you may send by him your plan for the State House. He stops at the Franklin House Broadway I believe.

---

<sup>19</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 2.8

There are now in the City many merchants from this Town & Columbus by whom the plan might be forwarded if you could find them out which might be done by referring to the registers at the Hotels. I mention this because it is possible that Mr Hall may not arrive here as soon as the 1<sup>st</sup> Oct. but if you send the plan by any other merchant be particular in your directions that it must not be packed with his goods, but be conveyed in his trunk or accompanying his person to Ohio. Otherwise it would be several weeks on the way. If your plan should be delayed beyond the limited time the Comsrs. will not decide upon the matter till it arrives provided you will write me stating by whom it is sent so that we may know when to expect it.

I have observed in one of the N.Y. newspapers a notice of a plan for our State House made by Mr Webb. It may be questionable whether this plan will not be precluded in consequence of the publication, as it was the intention of the Commissioners to look upon the designs without any knowledge of the authors.

I have been tantalized repeatedly during the summer by reading notices of your recent works. Nothing would give me so much pleasure as to see them, but I am "...not destined such delights to share"

I have never heard of the arrival of the box of fossils. Did it reach its destination? If so how does your friend like them? Please inform me and if the box is lost, as often happens onj the Canal, I will send another collection.

Yours truly,  
WA Adams

[Here follows a half-page sketch of a bearded, windblown man with headband]

### 7. Cole to Adams, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1838<sup>20</sup>

My dear Sir

I received yours of the 10<sup>th</sup> Sept & have since seen Mr Hall who will have the politeness to convey the Drawings to Zanesville but he will not arrive there until the 8<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> of October. I hope this will not be too late as the Design has cost me more labour than I anticipated & although it is very probably it may be cast among the Rejected addresses yet I would like to have it read. The Design is now completed & only now for several of the drawings did not satisfy me & I have executed others in their stead but even these are not very satisfactory. In order to execute it more speedily one of them I have done in oil & Turpentine, which vehicles are not very favourable for the precision of line desirable in architectural drawings. There they are & I hope if there is any architectural good in them it may seem through all their imperfect pictural representation. I have perhaps sent more drawings than was necessary but after the Exterior was finished in one order I felt that another would be better & so forth. But I believ you are not to know by whom the drawings are executed until the appointed time. My finger ends itch to tell you which are mine & though they may not be guilty of such offence I have a strong Guess that you cannot but recognize them. I understand you are likely to have plenty of designs to choose from. Tom Dick & Harry all send & all feel fully competent. You will most likely too have designs good on paper but utterly impossible of execution, others poor on paper & good in execution. Among these latter ours may class. We certainly have offered nothing that cannot be executed with facility & nothing that we did not consider necessary & fit. We have really studied

---

<sup>20</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 1.3

our design. But hold! How apt I am to recur to oneself. You must excuse me for “out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh.”

I learn that several persons are on their way to Columbus with the intent of getting the Superintendence of the Building. I hope you may be able to select some person who is really capable. I know it is difficult for there are few Builders in the Country who understand anything of Mathematics & consequently are incapable of calculating the thrust of arches etc. I trust too you may be able to get an artist or a man with an artist’s mind to superintend the Architectural & Decoration parts of the Work. I mean that which belongs to Architecture as a Fine Art. I feel confident that without such a person, however excellent the Design may be the Builder will cut it up & destroy it by his own notions. I have seen so many instances of this that I have great fears for your State House.

Michigan I understand is about to erect a State House & they sent for Mr Davis, one of our best Architects. There will perhaps be some rivalry between you. Whoever may furnish the design or superintend its execution, I sincerely hope your State House may be an honour to the State & a monument of good taste. And I shall rejoice to find a good thing carried through the whirlpool of politics & Utilitarianism without wreck.

After the design of the Commissioners, I hope you will inform me (my design rejected of course) what you have chosen & say truly what you think of mine. I ought not to forget to inform you that the Box of Fossils is arrived and Mr Ingram and myself are both obliged and delighted. Some of the specimens are truly valuable. Mr I desires me to express how much he is indebted to you. The fillers up are interesting. The sketch of the Eagle etc. I have not yet seen as Mr. I had mislaid it but I shall. I have written very hastily which you will excuse; but I am afraid you will not be equally indulgent for my frequent demands on your time & kindness. Yet do write to me and direct as usual to

Yours as ever

Thomas Cole

### 8. Adams to Cole, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1838<sup>21</sup>

My dear Sir

This morning I recd yours of 25<sup>th</sup> ult. and was pleased to learn that your design was delivered to Mr Hall. It will reach its destination in time to be looked upon by the commissioners with the others, for we have postponed our meeting till 18 Oct. We will probably be in session many days, perhaps two weeks. After we have determined which of the plans are the three best and entitled to the premiums, we will make a report to the Legislature. The report must be concurred in by a committee from both Houses and the report of that committee adopted. The Legislature meets on 2d Monday of Dec. and it will probably take till after 1 Jany. to obtain a final decision of the whole matter. I apprehend that we will have some difficulty in adopting the plan for I already foresee such various influences about [to] be exerted upon our decision, both before and after it is made, that I fear the object I have in view may be entirely defeated. I aim at the erection of a structure which as a work of art, shall excite the admiration of posterity. To accomplish this we must steer clear of the whirlpool of politics, & the rock of utilitarianism, to do which in these times will require a skillful pilot. For we have hosts of economical politicians who are wholly ignorant of art, consequently no feelings to gratify but the glory of saving a few dollars to the State.

---

<sup>21</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 2.8

I will write to you as soon as our session is over, and communicate the result, which I hope sincerely will not disappoint you, but let me say that if I should give the preference to your plan, I am but one in three, and the joint opinion of the commissioners may be guided to the causes I have stated, but this will not be done without a struggle.

If an “artist, or someone with the mind of an artist” can be obtained in the Union to superintend the architectural and decorative parts, we will have him, for I am convinced that without such aid the “builders will build in vain” no matter how excellent the design.<sup>22</sup> I thank you for your suggestions on this matter.

I am glad you have recd. the fossils and that you and your friend were pleased with them, but I have no recollection of the sketch of the Eagle you mention. Your letters are always agreeable to me but you must omit the usual apology about “demands upon my time & kindness” etc. for in these matters I feel as if I was greatly your debtor.

Yours truly

WA Adams

[A half-page sketch of a bespectacled man in a hat reading with a dog looking on follows]

### 9. Adams to Cole, October 25, 1838<sup>23</sup>

Dear Sir

I have been here since 19<sup>th</sup> last but I have been so very ill that I was confined to my room till the morning of 22d, during that time my colleagues in the State-House business, had provided a room and prepared the plans for inspection. As yet we have made no determination as to premiums. There are over fifty plans submitted and among them of course, a great deal of taste, but there are upwards of twenty designs of great merit and many of the drawings most beautifully executed. We have been engaged for the last two days in reducing the number from which we intend to select those entitled to the premiums. We have reduced the number today to eight and your design is one of the eight and is the only one in the whole collection whose author is known to me. I should have recognized it even if I had been ignorant of your intention to submit a design. The hand writing and the style of the oil perspective were not to be mistaken.<sup>24</sup> I think very highly of it but I fear that the Style is too chaste and rigid for the taste of the region. My fellow Comsrs. object to the recess porticos but my own opinion is that with the exception of the dome we have no design that would so well endure the test of criticism. There is a degree of dignity and repose in the composition seldom seen. The Statues by which it is surmounted add to this effect and if the design is adopted we will have them executed, but you must tell us who the heros are. The porticos of all the other designs are projecting pediments and one of them (the design) is a very imposing thing. It is said to be the production of an Ohio artist. This seems to be at present the favourite design of my colleagues, and of those gentlemen we have invited to look at our gallery for we have all the elevations attached to frames, and hanging on the walls. It would be difficult for one to tell what are the defects of your dome. There is something in all the domes we have, which is objectionable: in your design there is also want of harmony between the body of the building and the dome. Our designs are from all quarters of the Union, we have a fine Gothic plan from Boston, which I should much like to see executed but it is too expensive, costing over a million.

---

<sup>22</sup> Psalm 127.1: In the King James Version, “Except the lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it...”

<sup>23</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 2.8

<sup>24</sup> Alas, this oil sketch has been lost. A watercolor does survive in the New York State Library, see Fig. 1.15.

We will be some days engaged before we decide the matter. It is very possible that we may adjourn to meet again in latter part of Nov. to conclude the matter. But you shall hear from me as soon as the decision is made. [personal matters omitted]

I bid you good night.

WAAdams

#### 10. Cole to Adams, October 31, 1838<sup>25</sup>

My Dear Sir

I have just received yours of the 25<sup>th</sup> last and am grieved to learn that your health has been so bad. I trust it will be restored before this reaches you.

I am not surprised to learn that there are many designs among those forwarded to you extremely beautiful both in design & execution and it will by no means be an unexpected disappointment if mine is found among the rejected and I shall be pleased to know that a worthier one has been adopted. As the decision is not yet made I would make a few remarks on the subject of my design although I must make them in extreme haste. You are afraid the style of the design is 'too rigid for this region.' It is indeed rather too much so for my own taste, but I was under the impression that Economy was one of the greatest considerations with you. But my plan as I have stated is capable of much greater richness and loftiness by substituting the Ionic or the Corinthian in place of the Doric and making half Columns in place of the [illeg.] I have given an Ionic elevation which though hastily executed will give you some idea of the difference produced in changing the order. The Dome does not appear to you to harmonize with rest of the building although better than some of the others. There is as I have before intimated a difficulty almost insuperable in making a Dome harmonize with a building of regular & compact form but with the best possible design I do not think a Dome can be represented in a drawing in an adequate manner: it must be viewed from every side. The view chosen in my perspective is the one in which the dome appears worst & I could not make another view without rending the Design of principal part of the Building imperfect. The fact is the models & not Drawings should be made. The great Architects seldom offered drawings. St. Peter's & St. Paul's were models and Michel Angelo it is said would never look at a drawing of a Building Elevation. Considering it, as in truth it is, dependant on skill of the Draftsman more than that of the Architect, I could if my intention had been to make a picture have made a design much more beautiful, but I should have neglected the necessities of Construction. You will excuse me if I suggest what most probably may offend you that in executing the design you would endeavor to see them as models, that the whole together be considered not only as to its beauty in elevation but its connection with interior arrangements & structure. You do not say a word about the Ground Plans. I had much more faith in our Ground Plan than in the Exterior. I am inclined to believe that for compactness & convenience I do not know how it can be greatly improved. I speak more confidently of this as my nephew (an Ohio native) has had the greatest share in the designs. I am glad to hear that you propose adjourning for a time before you decide; considering that you have so many designs to examine much time is necessary. At first you will dwell on the Exterior of the Designs & will be inclined to accept those that appear most beautiful, but on further examination you may find the necessary connection between the exterior & interior arrangements may not have been observed, that what is beautiful in elevation may be incongruous or impossible in connection with the Ground Plans. But I am saying what is unnecessary to you but I know you will excuse me when I

---

<sup>25</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 1.3

say that what I have suggested is not written from a want of confidence in your taste & judgment but from a fear that you may be hurried to a decision before the Designs have been examined in all the bearings & capabilities, exterior & interior. I would say too that in execution I could make the Dome harmonize more completely than as now designed and that by choosing the Dome order the [illeg.] loftiness & harmony of the whole would be wonderfully improved. I regret much that my Desperate [?] Design was not executed in that style as the Ground plan is suitable for any order. [illeg.] With respect to the recessed porticos I am at variance with your colleagues: in execution they will produce great breath of light & shade. You say that one of the Designs is said to be by an Ohio Architect. If such a fact has any influence as it is probable it may have there can be no impropriety in letting it be known that my design is in fact made by a native of Ohio. And perhaps you will be surprised but I am inclined to think that my nephew executed the drawings and Design you alluded to for W. Rogers of N York, Mr R having sent it in under a fictitious name. If it is so & I may be mistaken I should be grieved at its adoption for it really appears to me to be a great heap without harmony of parts or fitness of purpose. I should not have expressed myself so freely if I had not felt confident that you will not attribute any illiberal[ity?] as inducing these remarks. I may be quite mistaken in the Ohio Artist Design. The one I allude to is a very large perspective drawing. If so look at the interior arrangements as well as the exterior. The building has one of those low pudding shaped Domes so fashionable now.

But I have written a long letter for one in such haste and fear it is scarcely intelligible. With respect to the awarding of premiums I am prepared. And my best hope is that my Design has found some favour in your sight and that you will write to me truly on the subject whether favourably or unfavourably.

I remain yours truly

Thomas Cole

### 11. Adams to Cole, November 14, 1838<sup>26</sup>

Dear Sir

I recd. your last letter a few days ago. I regret the anxiety you manifest about the fate of your design for our State House, for I fear you will be disappointed. I left Columbus on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. We did not decide, but reserved a few designs, yours among them. When I wrote my hasty letter from Columbus, we had only examined the elevations, views, and plans, of those retained, my own opinion inclining strongly in favour of your design, but my fellow commissioners greatly preferring the one I mentioned (the enclosed sketch of which will give you some idea of what it is, and will show that you are mistaken in its origin, for it proves to be from Mr Walter an architect of Cincinnati) [The sketch described has been lost] When referring to the written descriptions, estimates, and manner of finishing, we were surprised to find that you proposed to finish the interior of your plan in so cheap and unsubstantial a manner. I thot. I saw at once that I had misled you in my statement of the fear I entertained about expence, but I did not mean to be misunderstood as wishing the House to be meanly finished. On the contrary, if I remember right, I said in one of my letters that we wished to erect an edifice to be admired hereafter, or some such expression, and our printed circular states our desire to build a House equal to any in the Union. I wished the estimate to be made low, for I have always feared and yet fear a great clamour about extravagance, but I cannot agree to stud partitions, 1 1/2 inch pine doors, inch pine Stairs, and carved wooden posts, for stone columns in the rotunda &c. We all agreed that we

---

<sup>26</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 2.8

could not present a plan to be finished in this manner. I then proposed to withdraw the estimated &c. and permit "Pictor" to present others in a style suited to the beauty of his design. To this it was objected, that others whose designs had been rejected ought to have the same favour extended to them &c. &c. There was some force in their remarks and when we adjourned the question was left open. Yours is the lowest estimate except three or four made by mechanics. All the others which have any merit range from \$300,000 to \$500,000 and two or three approach a million: this result, if result it may be called was exceedingly mortifying to me because of the interest I felt in your behalf, the confidence I have in your acknowledged fine taste, and because independent of these motives I liked the exterior of your design better than any we have. Your interior disposition of the apartments is good, but excellent as it is, and notwithstanding you think it could not well be improved, yet I am confident that you would agree with me if you could see all our designs that we have some superior to it in this particular. Our visitor whose taste is to be relied on placed yours among the last but the one of which I have attempted to give you a sketch was the favourite.<sup>27</sup> It is across 310 and 250 feet, the porticos 100 feet wide, rotunda 80 feet diameter. It stands upon a base of three steps (about two feet each in height) and the whole elevated on a terrace of seven feet, and fifteen wide. I state these measurements from memory but am sure I am right as to the greatest length and width of the porticos. I mentioned "Ohio artist." This would not weigh a feather with us. We would take a design from New Zealand as soon as from Columbus, if it suited us. We have rejected a design from Mr Kelly a very respected architect of Columbus, who furnished a plan of great beauty & merit. He is personally known to us, is a very amiable, intelligent, and respectable young man.

The commissioners will meet on 22d. and we expect to present our report to the Legislature before 10 Dec. One of the designs we have retained is by Mr Thompson of New York. I suppose you may see it if you are acquainted with him. We may give him one of the premiums. His interior disposition of rooms is excellent, the exterior plain, the building has a high basement story, a large portico on each side with broad flight of steps to the portico. The dome is a squat pudding affair. One of the other plans is something like except in the dome, which is better. I am telling you secrets which have not transferred here.

If you have time please write to me, tell me what you think of the design enclosed, and what you have done the last summer in the way of pictures. It is possible I may see you this winter, or early in the spring. At all events you will hear from me as soon as the Legislature act upon our report. In the mean time do not place your hopes of everlasting fame upon frail stone & mortar, but look rather to imperishable paint. With this sage advice, I bid you for the present farewell.

Yours truly  
WAAdams

---

<sup>27</sup> The visitor referred to here is New York architect Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892), who was brought in to assist the commissioners in selecting a design.

## 12. Cole to Adams, November 27, 1838<sup>28</sup>

My Dear Sir,

I received yours of the 14<sup>th</sup> Nov with the enclosed sketch of the State House. You have rather overrated my anxiety on the Subject. I wrote in too much haste and I was afterwards sorry that I had done so, for (as is too often the case with me) I expressed myself with too great confidence if not with asperity. I am not disappointed because I anticipated disappointment and if I had not done so, the chagrin occasioned by the rejection of my Design would have been very transient as I certainly I do not place my hope on “frail Brick and Mortar.” The truth is that I am more affected by your disappointment and mortification than I am for being considered by your fellow commissioners as one of no likelihood in Architecture. In my letters on the subject of the State House and in the Description & Estimate I am aware of being Egotistic and over confident; but this, I hope, has arisen not from extravagant notions of my own Capacity but from anxiety for the advancement of the interest of my Nephew, who had a share in the design & of whose talents I have a high opinion. The interior arrangement was almost entirely his & in speaking of it, I felt myself to be speaking of the work of another. I was indeed misled on the subject of expense, or rather I was mistaken, and the mistake was made partly through the expression of “low-estimate” and partly through my Nephew’s strong presentiment that cheapness (as is too frequently the case here) would be of paramount importance. I acknowledge my error & that there is scarcely any excuse for it & regret it because from the first to the last it cramped me. Willing as I am to submit with deference & respect to your decision as to the architectural merit of my Design, I cannot but feel surprised that the lowness of the Estimate should operate so much to the disadvantage of the Design when that lowness is in great measure the consequence of the Choice of Material (wood instead of stone) the selection & adoption of which is entirely in the power of the Commissioners. It is generally allowed by architects themselves that Estimates for great Buildings are random things, little better than guess-work. The grand object in view in offering Premiums is to get the best Design; the choice of material by the Designer can be of no importance whatever so that his Design is adapted to the material the Commissioners may choose. Speaking of the material I am somewhat afraid that your stone being in such small “Blocks” is very inadequate to the construction of a building of the magnitude you propose. Your Columns will have to be made of many pieces and the projections of the Entablature be very difficult of execution. I fear too that the differences of Color will break up the masses in a greater degree than you might imagine from comparing the two kinds together in small pieces. Could not Brick moulded into the necessary forms and well made have more durability and fitness than small stones? There is nothing new in its application to such works. In Rome and its vicinity are several antient [sic] buildings (temples etc) that are entirely constructed of Bricks, Columns, Entablature, even elaborate ornament, and I find too in Schinkel’s work they have been used with great elegance and propriety. You wish me to give my opinion of the design of which you have sent me a sketch. I will give you my impressions with candour, although I perhaps ought to hesitate as my opinion may possibly be affected by the predilection I have for my own Design. If there is such (& I am unconscious of its influence) you will know what allowance to make. I admire its simplicity and loftiness of effect, but fine as it certainly appears in the drawing, I fear it will disappoint you when executed. The loftiness it presents is produced by the high Terrace on which the Building is lifted. The Site of the Building as I understand it is a Natural Terrace: the ground falls on every side. Now the use of Terraces is found on plains or in valleys where

---

<sup>28</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 1.3 An undated draft for this letter is also included in the folder with minor differences of tone and phrasing.



surrounding buildings would overtop and degrade an edifice, or on the side of precipitous hills where that natural disadvantage is to be overcome. But to raise a high Terrace on the top of a hill seems like painting the lily, a very needless appurtenance. But your Terrace is even worse than that: its masses will be extremely large which will degrade the effect of the principal Building & in most points of view will appear like a great wall hiding from sight the more important Edifice. The expense too will be enormous which expense applied to the main building would contribute wonderfully to its magnificence and grandeur. There is a want of principal mass in the Building, the parts being too equal; in the language of a very intellectual friend of mine “it will look like four buildings backed up to each another”. The Dome, if Dome it can be called which Dome is not, is as poor and meagre as can well be, & if executed will appear to have no more Connexion with the rest of the Building than a Bird Cage would if hung out of one of the windows, with this difference that the Bird Cage is put out for an agreeable object and cannot appear likely to break down the Building. The Dome on the other hand will appear to crush or be crushing in the roof where it has been placed by some Wicked Genius. I am persuaded that no Dome can spring with good effect from a peaked roof or roofs—it is in fact at variance with all laws of Composition. A Dome or any other Mass must be continuous down to a horizontal Base. That Base may be on the ground or higher but there must be a Horizontal Base to spring from or the whole will indeed appear a “baseless fabric.” But you will think I am writing an elaborate essay instead of giving you my simple opinion, which is that the Design wants unity, that the Terrace is worse than unnecessary, & that the Dome is incongruous.

It gives me great pleasure to learn that I may have the pleasure of seeing you before long. I could wish you here now as there is a very fine Exhibition open. I think it probable that I shall spend my winter in the City where I wish you to address me at No. 1 Laight St and the sooner you do it the more agreeable it will be to me. When you have done with my Design, I would wish it returned to me if there is a suitable opportunity. It will probably be more useful to me than anybody else, if it only reminds that a Design for a State House requires more study & opportunity than a Modern Painter can well have. With the hope of hearing from you soon,

I remain,

Yours Truly,

Thomas Cole

### 13. Adams to Cole, December 2, 1838<sup>29</sup>

Dear Sir

I am almost ashamed to tell you what we have done with the designs for our State House. We have awarded the first premium to Mr Walter, Cincinnati, the second to Mr Thompson of New York, and the third to yourself. I sent you in my last letter a sketch of Mr Walter’s design.

The estimates of your design are withdrawn, and we wish you to supply us with estimates of the cost of your design to be finished in a more substantial manner in the interior. Finish it in such a way as to make the cost between \$350,000 and \$500,000. If you have not data from which the new estimate can be made, please so inform me and we may get the estimate made here.

I am now, and shall be for some days to come full of business and have no time to say more.

Yours Truly,

WAAdams

---

<sup>29</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 2.8

IN MARGIN: We submit the three plans to the Legislature as soon as we receive the new estimate from you. And notwithstanding we have awarded the first premium to Mr Walters it is not certain that his plan will be approved by that body. They may direct one of the others to be built.

#### 14. Cole to Adams, March 11, 1839<sup>30</sup>

My dear Sir,

[Section omitted requesting fossil specimens for Benjamin Silliman] Pray what is become of the State House? I have been expecting to hear from you week after week. Is the design chosen, the premiums awarded? I have positively heard nothing about the matter since you wrote with the exception of an article in the N York American in which the designs are spoken of & mine in perhaps too flattering a manner. You may have seen the article. I am really desirous to hear from you about yourself. I have been almost expecting you here in propria persona. I have spent the winter in the City & it has been a broken one with me. I have literally done nothing & am waiting for the breaking up of the North River that I may be in sight of the Catskills & pursue my art without interruption.

I write in great haste and conclude in the hope to see you or hear from you in a very short time. You may address me No 1 Laight, N York.

I remain

Yours as ever sincerely  
Thomas Cole

#### 15. Adams to Cole, March 20, 1839<sup>31</sup>

Dear Sir

[Section on Silliman fossils omitted] The Legislature adjourned on Monday but no action was had upon the subject of the State House till a very few days before the adjournment. An appropriation was then made of \$25,000 in money and authority to employ the state convicts in cutting stone &c. which we consider equivalent to an appropriation of \$40,000. This will enable us to make a good beginning this season. The Legislature have authorised us to build after either of the plans reported with such modifications as the Commissioners may deem proper. This is more than we expected.

We have not yet decided whether we will adopt the design of Mr Walters or your design. The decision would have been made many months since but for my determination not to abandon your design while a hope remained of having it adopted. This has been my opinion from the first week after the designs were opened in October last.

It was not without difficulty that I obtained the consent of my brother Commissioners that your design should be one of the three, to be reported to the Legislature, and I was on the eve of coming out with a "minority report" when they consented to award to your plan the third premium. I shall use all my skill & influence to have the House built after your plan but I may fail; if I do fail, it will be owing to the pride of opinion of the other Commissioners. They will not like to acknowledge an error in which they have persisted with some warmth for so long a

---

<sup>30</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 1.4

<sup>31</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 2.9

time. Notwithstanding the great weight of authority against them for my opinion is sustained by that of every individual who has seen the designs, whose opinion in such matters is worth regarding besides some newspaper writers. I saw the article in the *American*. It was re-published in our papers in Ohio. I fully concur in the views of the writer. I would have said the “heads of Washington & Newton” rather than “Shakespeare & Newton” for surely there is more of that calm, heroic virtue in Stewart’s head of Washington than in the conventional head of what we call Shakespeare. The premium due you \$200 will be remitted you from Columbus by Mr Ridgway immediately. I wrote him a few days ago requesting him to remit the premiums, which I suppose he will do forthwith.

The commissioners will meet in two or three weeks when I hope to make a favourable report to you but it is only a hope. My belief is that I cannot induce my colleagues to adopt your plan.

[Personal remarks omitted; concluding caricature of a seated man with bottle and glass held aloft]

### 16. Adams to Cole, April 12, 1839<sup>32</sup>

Dear Sir

I feel so much interested in the business of our State House, that I am induced again to trouble you. The Commissioners had a meeting on the 1<sup>st</sup> [illeg] with the view of determining finally the plan to be executed, and to make some arrangements to begin work. I believe my associates are now convinced that if your design is not the best it is better than the one to which we gave the first premium, and that it is equal to any of the others and for the purpose of consulting men of taste, as to the merits of the several plans, and men of science as to the mode of construction. Mr Ridgway & myself will visit New York as soon as we can dispose of our private affairs to make the journey convenient we will be in the city about 1<sup>st</sup> May when I will report to you. If I should not see you in the city I will be at your favourite Catskill on my return home by the canal.

We will consult Mr Strickland and Mr Walters [sic] of Philad. Mr Walters is the architect of the Girard College if I am not mistaken.

If you can prepossess these gentlemen in favour of your design (and Mr Town if we should see him) all will go well. I feel warranted in practicing [?] a pious friend to accomplish, what cannot be accomplished without good taste or some such means. We will pay the premium to you and Mr Thompson when we arrive in New York.

I anticipate some pleasure in seeing some of your pictures but my health is so bad that I do not expect much enjoyment otherwise.

Yours in haste

WAAdams

P.S. We will take with us the same plans you sent.

---

<sup>32</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 2.9

### 17. Cole to Adams, "June 1839"<sup>33</sup>

My dear Sir,

I was sorry that I had not an opportunity of conversing more at length with you on the subject of Mr D [Andrew Jackson Davis] & the designs. I have a few moments to spare before I leave the City & will venture to make a few remarks. When you told me that you thought of making Mr D the Judge I felt pretty sure that he would be jury also & pass a verdict of guilty on all the plans, and prepare to offer you one of his own, which as he has the result of the labours of three or four men as materials to work from he ought to be superior to any of the premium designs & in his own estimation will naturally be so. When you see him again you will find that the premium plans will be treated with contempt as childish & impracticable works. He will talk about violation of first principles in erudite phraseology and will offer you some drawings one of whose excellencies will certainly be beautiful execution. It is not my place to object to your plan of showing the plans to Architects & men of Taste; but I cannot but think that the result will be very unsatisfactory. It reminds me of the Painter who exposed his work in the Market Place for each passer to make a chalk mark on the part that did not please him. The whole picture was chalked. Our designs will be treated in like manner & I feel confident that the only way by which you can expect to obtain a fine plan is to give it to one man. Let him have the premium designs before him, let him study & combine the advantages of each & he will have a fair chance to produce a noble work; but I really think that the Artist should be one of those who have obtained premiums. In leaving the designs with Mr Davis for so great a length of time you have done him a great favour. You have given him the conceptions of men of four minds & he will certainly endeavor to make use of them, Whatever deficiencies there may be in my design (& I know there are such) it possesses originality simplicity & facility of execution & I will be bound that if you could look into his Port Folio a few weeks from this you would see the result in sundry drawings after the same principle. I cannot but think that it will be somewhat unfair to accept even his modifications. It may be said that your object is to obtain a fine plan & it matters not who the designers are or how many. But after all it must be subjected to one man & surely one of those whose designs have been considered best should be that Artist. I shall be far from blaming Mr Davis if he tries to put his own design on you. It is his business to do so if he can. I will say no more now for fear that I may appear more anxious than I really am on the subject. But as your friend & as one who has a sincere desire to see a noble work produced when ther eappears an ample opportunity I have ventured to speak.

I hope to see you in Catskill in a few days

I remain

Yours truly

Thomas Cole

### 18. Adams to Cole, June 21, 1839<sup>34</sup>

My dear Sir

I returned yesterday from Columbus. We have finally and definitely determined upon the plan of the State-House. We retain three of the fronts of your original design and in place of the recess in the west front we have made that front with a projecting portico of eight columns after the Parthenon, thus [Here Adams has sketched a basic ground plan indicating cardinal directions,

---

<sup>33</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 1.4

<sup>34</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 2.9

Fig. 1.19] The interior is somewhat changed by changing the exterior lines. We have made the main [illeg] wider, and continued up thro. the whole height as in Mr Davis' huge design &c. We have formally announced that the corner stone will be laid on the 4<sup>th</sup> July with the usual ceremonies. Workmen are now employed in excavating; but this corner stone business will be a mere ceremony. We could not "come together as a unit" (as Jackson elegantly expressed it) on the subject of a superintendent but this matter will be determined in a few days when we will begin in good earnest, after which I will inform you whether we will require the services of your nephew. In the mean time it is advisable that he should procure the recommendation of Mr Town expressed in the strong terms used in his behalf by Mr Town to Mr Ridgway and myself in New York. If he will obtain such a paper, which Mr Town told me he would cheerfully give him, I think it more than probable we will employ him. Let the letter be addressed to "The State House Commissioners, Columbus Ohio" and sent as soon as convenient.

Do not infer from what I have said that it is certain that we will require the services of Mr Bayless. My own opinion is that we shall want him soon. The other Commsrs. may think otherwise: and events may happen which will wholly supersede the necessity.

[personal matters omitted]

Yours Truly,

WAAdams

P.S. Mr Davis' signature to the recommendation of Mr Bayless would be of some advantage. He concured [sic] with Mr Town in his opinion of the character of Mr Bayless and Mr T informed me that Mr D would sign the paper. I requested Mr Town to send us the written recommendation, which he promised to do upon the application of Mr Bayless or yourself at any time.

### 19. Cole to Adams, July 29, 1839<sup>35</sup>

My Dear Sir,

I owe you a thousand apologies for not having replied to your letter of the 21<sup>st</sup> June, but I will only offer one, which is that I have been absent from home several weeks on a tour to the White Mts of N Hampshire.

On the subject of the State House I have little to say. I find that my plan is the one adopted with slight modifications. The plan of advancing a central portico from the main Building you know is mine, though that that portico should be a copy of part of the Parthenon never entered my thoughts. You know my opinions with respect to the Pediment and I believe you are agreed with me on that point, but I suppose your fellow labourers were determined to have one. I cannot but think that as the first premium was given to one whose Design is not adopted that I ought to have some pecuniary compensation for what my plans have done since, and I do not know but I shall send you on a Bill, but I will hear what you say. You must not think me mercenary or greedy in speaking of pecuniary compensation for my labour but consider that I am speaking to you as Commissioner not as my friend. I think in justice I ought to have a first Premium. I am obliged to you for your endeavours to get my nephew in as Superintendent, but I have not taken the measures you advised with respect to Mr Town & Mr Davis. The fact is on reconsidering the matter I believe my nephew's interest will be more advanced by residing here in N York. He is now doing well and with the prospect of doing better and should he go to Ohio he would be in great measure cut off from the advantages he now possesses & the salary that he

---

<sup>35</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 1.4

would get would most probably not be a sufficient inducement for the sacrifice he would have to make [Various personal notes on health, mutual friends omitted]

I remain

Yours very truly  
Thomas Cole

## 20. Adams to Cole, October 17, 1839<sup>36</sup>

Dear Sir

[Section on Silliman fossils omitted] In reply to that part of your last letter relative to further remuneration, on account of the adoption of your design for our State House I must address you, as you did me, not as my friend Thos Cole but as an architect should be addressed by a Commissioner. In this capacity I must say your claim cannot be allowed. The Commissioners have no power to make any compensation to those whose plans obtained the premiums other than that provided by the law, under which we act. We are specifically authorised to pay the premiums and we have authority to remunerate such architects and assistants as we may employ in modifying and maturing a plan, but to make remuneration beyond the premium because the plan has been adopted, which obtained the lowest premium, although such remuneration may be fully deserved, would be exceeding our powers, and such an item in the account of our expenditures would certainly meet the censure of those whose duty it will be to review and pass upon our acts and doings, more especially, in these times of pecuniary distress, when the most rigid economy is required, as well from motives of policy as necessity. I regret that it is out of our power to comply with your wishes, for I assure you it would afford me great pleasure to meet your desires in this, as in all other things. You know me well enough to believe this. We may hereafter recommend to the Legislature to authorize as to make a further compensation but at present it is out of the question.

The building is progressing finely; we have nearly all the foundation laid in a manner superior to anything of the kind I have ever seen. We depend upon annual appropriations for money to carry on the work and if we get a good one, next winter, we will have nothing to fear hereafter: but the recent news about cash affairs renders this doubtful. I fear that all things connected with trade, and public works in the country are about to stand still, and that private credit will suffer to a ruinous extent with many.

I was pleased to learn that your nephew finds employment in New York. It is entirely advisable for him to remain in the City, rather than remove so far from the center of business, and so remote from artists and works of art as Ohio. I had urged his claims upon the Commissioners and we should probably have sent for him, but since the rest of your letter the place I had proposed for him has been filled. [Personal matters omitted.]

Yours

WAAdams

---

<sup>36</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 2.9

## 21. Cole to Adams, October 30, 1839<sup>37</sup>

My Dear Sir,

Your letter of the 17<sup>th</sup> last was very acceptable for I began to fear that you had either forgotten me or were sick. I will make enquiry of Mr Silliman about the fossils I feel confident that he will find them valuable; for myself I feel very much indebted to you.

Your reply to my letter relative to further remuneration was such as I anticipated, taken on the ground that my plan was the adopted one, but you allow that you have authority to remunerate such architects & assistants as you may employ in modifying & maturing a plan. My dear Commissioner did not I assist in modifying and maturing the plan?

I am much pleased to learn that you are going on so bravely with the work. I hope appropriations will be liberal so that you may see the building rise rapidly. If it would not be troubling you too much I should like to have a little plan, such as could be sent on a letter sheet, of the building as it is intended to be; showing the alterations to my last plan, giving the proportions, number of Columns in the portico. A mere dotting with pencil will do. At the same time I would learn the number of Columns in the last design I made for the Portico for I have forgotten. (IN MARGIN: I would ask you also to make a very slight sketch of the last Dome I made, do nothing except it is perfectly convenient.) It is my intention to send set [sic] of drawings of the Design to our next Exhibition. I wish to do this as it is probable that an arrangement will be made between Mr Bayless & myself by which we shall be connected as Architects, he as the practical man, I more to aid him with my little influence than for anything else. I assure you I am not going to abandon my first love for all the blandishments of an Architectural mistress. If the arrangement of which I speak is made it will be well for me to make publick the little I have done and as the State House is the most important thing I have attempted I must make the most of it. It would be agreeable to have a some acknowledgement [sic] from the commissioners or through the press that the Design adopted is mine: for I find that it is a matter of dispute here, Mr Thomson for one I understand claims the design adopted as his.

I have been thinking of making a proposition to the Commissioners (or suggesting the thing) that they get a model of the building constructed under my superintendence. It may be either of plaster or wood the first mentioned material is the cheapest & perhaps the best. A model is almost indispensable in the construction of a great building like your State House. And if it were not of such importance for architectural purposes & I believe it is, it is a matter of policy for the Commissioners to have a good model made. It would give a more perfect idea to your Legislators of what the building will be when finished than a thousand drawings could. I would propose that it be constructed on a large scale (say five or six feet long) so large that the details should be executed with such exactness that they might be measured from, and it ought to be sectional. The mere making of the model would not cost more than a few hundred dollars 2 or 3. Of course if I had the labour of superintending & designing all the column Capitals, ornaments for interior &c. I should expect to be reasonably compensated. Write to me and let me know your views & whether you think it well for me to address the commissioners on the subject. Perhaps your suggestion will be sufficient. But I will now cease to trouble you about architectural matters except it is to tell you that I am about building a house. It will be a sort of Italian looking thing. If times are favourable I expect to finish it next summer. There is a room in it that Mrs Cole & I have set apart (in our minds for you) so I hope that you will pray that the house be finished soon!

---

<sup>37</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 1.4

but I trust that you will not defer visiting us until that room is ready for we can find one at any time for you that will be a thousand times better than any imaginary apartment can be.

[Miscellaneous personal matters and health omitted here]

And as ever yours truly

Thomas Cole

## 22. Cole to Adams, December 2, 1839<sup>38</sup>

My Dear Sir,

[Passage on procuring fossils for Benjamin Silliman omitted]

I am a little surprised to learn that the plan of your State House is not yet determined; from your previous letters I inferred that all was decided. I am much afraid that the building when finished will be like most of the buildings erected in this country, a monument of Bad Taste & architectural ignorance. My only hope is in you. My dear friend do not yield, do not I beg you give your consent to the absurdities that will be attempted nor let your name be coupled with those whose only knowledge is conceit, whose only taste caprice. The work you are engaged in be it unmeaning & deformed as possible, will endure & be your monument through ages to come as certainly as if its proportions were as beautiful as ever the mind of man conceived. As it respects my share of the design, if you cut off the nose & ears & in their place put a proboscis or a plug I shall not acknowledge the likeness.

Regarding the alteration that your fellow Commissioners & Architect insist upon, I merely advise that when finished a painted cross should be made in each recess by the western portico (as is common in such like plans in Italy) with the words “Rispetti la Croce” in large letters over it, or the more obvious sentence “Non si urina qui” though in plain English for the temptation will be very strong to all passersby. The alteration suggested for the East Front is not very objectionable but certainly a far different arrangement of forms will be required in order to obtain light & I do not think that pilasters instead of Columns for the Dome is an improvement as lightness is required in such a superstructure.

I may appear to you more tenacious of my plan than I really am. I assure you that no one would be more ready to acknowledge the fitness & beauty of any alteration more readily than myself; but as yet I must say that the alterations proposed by your coadjutors are unmeaning whims & capricious experiments. The fact is there is so much conceited ignorance amongst us & overweening ambition that the good is seldom acknowledged. Every man thinks himself capable of producing better however excellent a thing may be although he is entirely unprepared by study for the thing proposed. You can scarcely meet one man in fifty who does not presume to be universal, capable of doing anything under the sun.

Respecting the model I have nothing to say since your architect is engaged in it & I suppose it will be as well for me give up [sic] all further interest in the matter, except that as my design is likely to be mutilated in a “shocking manner” as the accident-mongers say I may bring in an action for damages in the way of a Bill for “altering with intend to improve the Plan for State House.” But enough of this. [Personal matters omitted]

Yours very truly

Thomas Cole

[Postscript] Write Soon. Let me have the plans at your convenience.

---

<sup>38</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 1.4



### 23. Adams to Cole, January 21, 1840<sup>39</sup>

[No salutation] I have been here [Columbus] more than a month fighting with the Goths and Vandals and other hosts of barbarians. I am sorry to say that I have not yet conquered them, nor have they vanquished me. They show some symptoms of giving way, and I believe I shall eventually triumph. I shall not give up the contest until all hope is lost of making the exterior of our building after your design. The matter now in dispute is, whether the two main fronts shall be after your design, or whether they shall be cut up and deformed by projecting a portico within the recess. I'm debating this matter. I have said so much about you, and your plan that I am suspected of being influenced by strong personal preferences. I wished it to be stated in our report that your design was adopted. In writing the report I avoided such a statement to prevent of the suspicion of partiality. We have agreed to settle the dispute among ourselves, for should we inform the Legislature that we have not yet agreed upon the plan they would find means to dictate to us, which of course would make things ten times worse. We have therefore reported that we have adopted a plan. IF I am finally overruled in my opinion I will abandon the business for I will not couple my name with those whose only knowledge is conceit, and whose only taste is caprice. I feel degraded when I think of the means I have been compelled to resort to in accomplishing as much as I have in this State House concern. Nothing can be done directly, an honest straight-forward course must be avoided. Upright and enlightened notions, openly expressed must give place to concealment and low electioneering. A few months will now determine what is to be done. I engaged in this business in the ardent hope of accomplishing something grand in the department of the arts, but the obstacles are truly discouraging and they seem to be multiplying as we advance. For besides the combined powers of conceit and ignorance, intent and knowing, we have now to meet the formidable foe of poverty. Our State is in a bad condition as to money matters, so much so that it is doubtful whether we can get money to continue this work. But enough of this matter, for I feel as if I was talking to you on a subject you must be tired of. My excuse is we have talked about it before and I have felt some interest in it, which is not yet entirely abated. [Personal matters omitted, concludes with a drawing of an eagle pierced by an arrow as a crouched bear watches from a nearby crag.]

And believe me yours

WAAdams

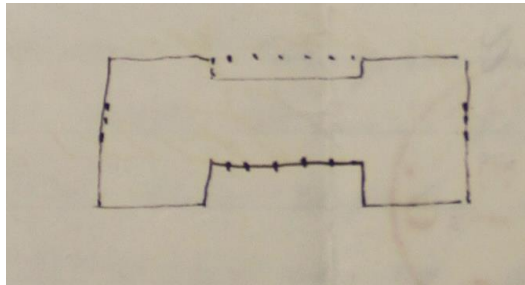
---

<sup>39</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 3.1

#### 24. Adams to Cole, April 12, 1846<sup>40</sup>

*After a series of legislative setbacks amidst the political intrigues of Columbus, a breakthrough finally came in the postscript to a letter on other subjects*

P.S. The Legislature last winter ordered the building of the State House. I was appointed one of the commissioners. We have already begun the work but our means are small (about \$20,000 per annum) and if our new revenue law meets the expectations of its friends we hope to complete the building in five or six years. The exterior will be your design excluding one of the recesses, in place of which, the front will be a continuous like with columns [sic] occupying the space of the recess. [Adams includes the sketch of the plan below]



---

<sup>40</sup> NYSL 3.6

**APPENDIX C:**  
**“Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture”<sup>41</sup>**

To the Publick

It may perhaps be considered as somewhat presumptuous for an individual whose profession is not that of Architecture to address you on such a subject, but impressed with the conviction that a few remarks on the principles of Architecture & criticisms on some of the building works lately erected or in the course of erection may conduce to the improvement of taste I venture to address you. It is possible, even probable, that some of the views & opinions I shall offer may not appear correct or suit the notions of many, but even so if by giving them I stimulate to a more general study of the principles of Architecture I shall have accomplished my desire.

My first thought was to address myself to Architects, but as that would have required me to address myself more technically & argued a greater degree of self-confidence than I possess & my object would only have been partially obtained I have taken this course. A Poet has said that ‘A thing of beauty is a joy forever’ & as truly may it be said that an ugly thing is a curse forever & most emphatically when that thing is wrought in stone. A costly church or any other publick building destitute of grandeur or beauty, brands Bad Taste on the brow of the community in characters that centuries will not erase. Thousands yet unborn will turn away with disgust from those piles of masonry whose architects have been destitute alike of the sense of the truly beautiful and the Knowledge of those principles of Art & Nature from which emanates all that is excellent in Art. And with us how frequently Alas! The eye of taste when it seeks to be delighted is met by some strange embodiment of Caprice or exhibition of Architectural imbecility. On the other hand what a full & lasting source of pleasure is a fine piece of Architecture that is a benefaction to society, a human triumph. Art has subjected the laws of gravitation to its own ends, adapted the most obdurate materials to man’s wants & given them expression – the sublime – the beautiful – the picturesque – so the grand & beautiful & the mind by their contemplation & the humblest citizen as he walks beneath the shadow of some noble structure feels his soul expand, his thoughts take a loftier flight. The patriot views it with pride & the traveller when meandering in foreign lands calls it to mind & loves his country more than ever. It is my intention to take a cursory view of the principles of Architecture, but I will not trouble you with speculation as to the origin & earliest modes of its development. Those modes varied according to the circumstances under which they were produced. The philosophical history of all Art is substantially the same as Grecian Architecture that it might aptly be termed Lithic Philosophy. For Architecture to arrive at the perfections which are seen in the best examples of Greece, ages of experience & thought must have been necessary & the human mind have travelled by slow degrees from the rude column of unknown stone such as formed the druidical structures through the stupendous portals of Egyptian Art to unsurpassed beauty of the Grecian Architecture. Symmetrical & complete the mind dwells on this monument of human skill with satisfied delight in the completions etc.

Roman Architecture is but depraved Greek. The form was honoured but the spirit was lost & it became more & more rude until it sank in the uncouth incongruities of (7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> centuries) what are called the ‘dark ages’. But from this ruin springs a style of Architecture in which the combined elements of more Ancient Art mingled together to produce effects hitherto unknown & to satisfy desires to which Christianity seems to have given birth in the human mind.

---

<sup>41</sup> NYSL Cole Papers 5.3

That is the Gothick. In it Architecture aspires to something beyond finite perfection[:] it leaves the philosophic completion of Grecian Art when all is finished to the eye & Touch & appeals to the imagination. Partaking of the genius of Christianity it opens a world beyond the visible in which we dwell. The characteristic expression of this style is not to be looked for in the details as in Grecian art so much as in its aggregation, the why and the wherefore of its parts are not always indicated. No longer confined like the Grecian Temple to the simple parralelogram [sic] in the Gothick Cathedral the labored stone is piled into forms that sometimes appear almost fantastic. In its seemingly interminable aisles columns some in clustered bands with everlasting play of light & shade some single & slender as a wand rear aloft lifting arches that span the twilight void as though in defiance to the laws of gravitation. All is lofty aspiring & mysterious. Its towers & pinnacles climb towards the clouds like airy fabricks. Ever hovering on the verge of the impossible on it the mind does not dwell with satisfied delight but takes wing & soars into an imaginary world. The longings, the imaginings, the lofty aspirations of Christianity have formed expressions in stone.

I have said that the Grecian orders of Architecture are founded on invarying principles of nature & are consequently not capricious inventions & would add that there cannot be any order invented that will not be a combination or modification of them. But it must not be inferred that the modern Architect has no resource but the mere inclusion of what has already been done & that Architecture has reached the bounds of perfection. No! if we may not invent new orders we may arrange, combine & adapt these primitive orders to our particular purposes & climate. There may be a Doric building that is not quadrangular[,] an Ionic or Corinthian one of many sides & parts. The Gothick is a composite & what a glorious one it is. And other styles may spring forth from the peculiar demands of climate & society. Hitherto Modern Architects and American ones in particular have in general been contented with being mere copyists. They have taken the Grecian Temple for every kind of purpose: Churches Banks Statehouses Warehouses and other houses have been cut to this pattern & generally to the Doric order. The material matters not, whether the ponderous Granite, the commercial brick or the light wood all was wrought into the same form[,] all went to the ‘Dorian Measure’. The country is bespattered with Grecian absurdities. Had there been complete specimens of any order there would have been some satisfaction for the eye of Taste, but scarcely without exception the order attempted is mutilated & distorted or denuded of its fitting ornaments that it may be accommodated to the multifarious demands [above has written “wants” seemingly rethinking word choice. Illegible pencil below] of modern life. In the many buildings there is seldom more than a Grecian Portico & that is generally attached to a square structure of no order perforated with windows of every shape & size – even the Portico is incomplete the pediment and metopes entirely destitute of sculpture with bald unmeaning spaces where there ought to be richness of effect. Villas of this mode may be called classic but they suggest anything but classic ideas. They are more apt to remind one of the boxes we see in front of the Tallow Chandler’s Shop with a row of candles suspended in front by way of sign or sample. Such Porticos, Piazzas as they are called afford neither shelter nor shade, being too high & too shallow for either the one or the other, of no use whatever except to support a huge pediment whose bald triangle seems spread out as temptation to the painter to write thereon ‘Poverty of Taste’ in large letters.

Nothing can be more absurd than the Grecian orders, as they are commonly rendered, in wood. Stone or some composition resembling it is essential to them – had there been no such material, nothing but wood, the skill & taste that developed those beautiful orders in the mode we have them would have wrought out something far different. Stone on account of its

ponderosity & friability requires mass and that mass is a source of grandeur. Wood on the contrary has great strength[,] tenacity & is extremely light compared with stone. A wooden rod of ten feet long or more an inch in diameter may be extended without breaking but it would be next to impossible to make a rod of half that length of stone & if made it would either break on lifting up or by application of the slightest blow. It is evident therefore that a building of wood ought to be constructed in a much lighter manner than one of stone. If there are columns they may be very slender & the intercolumnations wider. The ornaments may be more varied & projecting. There is an incongruity in a massive wooden building, for mass & durability have an internal connection in the mind – no one expects a wooden building to endure for centuries. And to use more material than is necessary in a work of architecture is to deviate from one of the fundamental principles of the Art which is fitness and certainly from the Utilitarian idea of economy.

The English Cottage Style for country houses has of late made its appearance among us – it is picturesque and well suited to the Climate of England, but my impression is that it looks like an exotic here. It does not harmonize with the American Landscape and the climate being more sunny than that of England more shade is required than is to be found in the English Cottage Style. Large Piazzas, deep recesses[,] projecting Roofs, greater breadth of style is demanded by the American Landscape & climate. And there cannot be a doubt that such features, when taste has wrought its way & cast off the trammels of mere imitations, will be found characteristic of American Villa Architecture. American Landscape is generally broad & grand & its Architecture ought to harmonize with it. The English Cottage picturesque & complete as it is when seen in some shady nook hidden like a birds-nest & only to be found on searching looks mean & diminutive when placed on the ample hills that rise from the Hudson River. From the Italian Villa Architecture I imagine we can adopt much – its bold & varied outline, simple in its parts but varied in its aggregate. It affords simplicity with variety and a capability of being adapted to any internal & economical arrangement that may be required – and regularity of form not entering into its elements additions at any time may by judicious management be made to contribute to its effect. ~~But it must be of brick and stone – a wooden town is a preposterous thing.~~