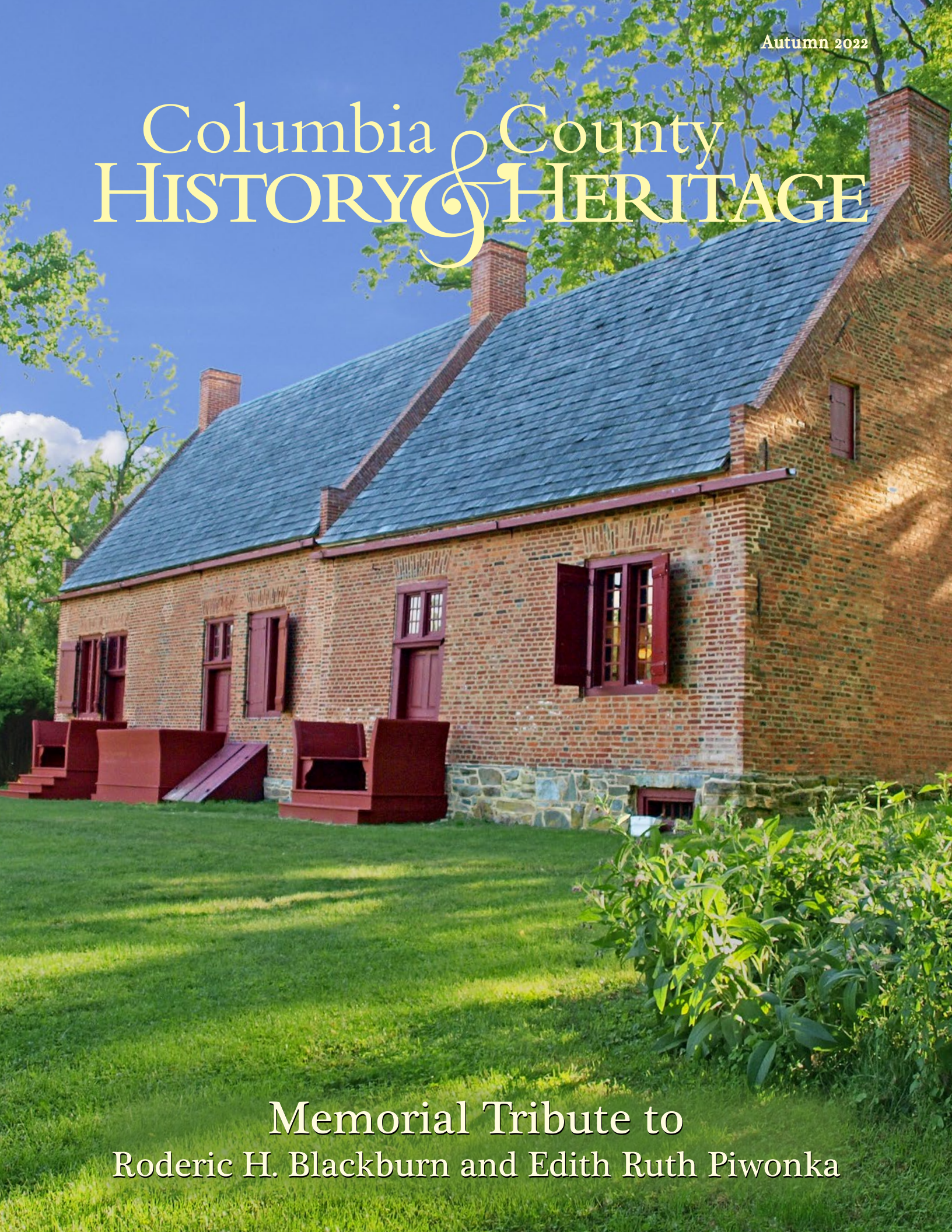
Autumn 2022

Columbia County History & Heritage



Memorial Tribute to
Roderic H. Blackburn and Edith Ruth Piwonka


QUADRILLE

Columbia County History & Heritage

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FEATURES

ON THE COVER: Luykas Van Alen house, built in 1737

This inaugural digital issue of *Columbia County History & Heritage* is published by the Columbia County Historical Society and will be distributed electronically to all members of record at the time of publication. Copies of past print issues may be obtained, as available, at the Columbia County Historical Society Museum & Library, 5 Albany Avenue, PO Box 311, Kinderhook NY 12106, at the Museum Shop located within the James Vanderpoel House in Kinderhook, and online at cchsny.org/history--heritage-magazine.

LETTER FROM THE SOCIETY

Dear Members and Readers,

This issue of *History & Heritage* Magazine is dedicated to the recently departed and highly esteemed historians, Ruth Piwonka and Roderick Blackburn. Both Ruth and Rod contributed greatly to the preservation and dissemination of Columbia County's rich history and legacy, from publishing books on various topics to assisting with securing National Register listings for some of our beloved historic Dutch buildings. And of course, we'll be eternally grateful for their contributions to *History & Heritage*.

Ruth and Rod wrote many articles for our award-winning magazine from its inception in 2002, and we have curated and present to you here eleven of our favorites. This anthology of their writings illuminates the scope of their expertise and their passion for regional Dutch culture and its legacy in Columbia County.

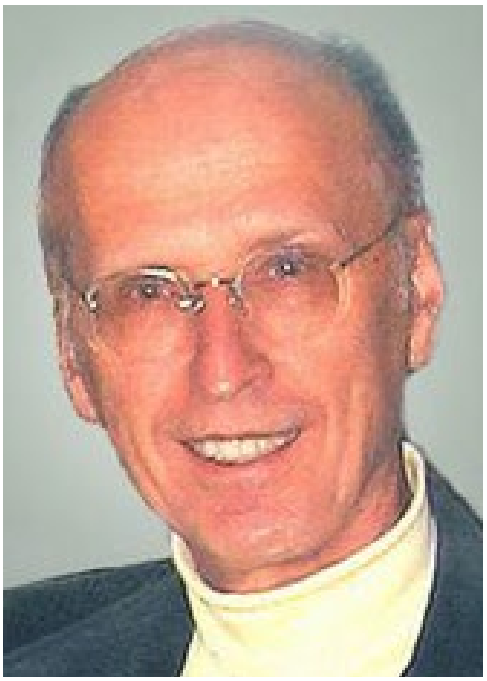
This Autumn edition of *History & Heritage* is unlike anything else we have published. As our society moves away from more traditional forms of communication, we have been presented the opportunity to create more sustainable practices within our small institution. Publishing digital content is also more affordable, but even better than a more affordable price point is the ability to provide our members and general readers with more content than just our historically annual publication. We now have the potential to welcome new readership to our community, to broaden our audience and further our mission of encouraging understanding, knowledge, and preservation of Columbia County's culture and heritage. And while our goal will be to publish one digital issue each year, we will continue to publish our traditional hard copies, as well.

We celebrate this inaugural digital format with a retrospection of some of the most innovative and regarded *History & Heritage* articles. We hope you enjoy this very special issue, dedicated to Ruth and Rod. We will cherish our friendships with them always and will be eternally grateful for their unparalleled contributions to the preservation of Columbia County's rich heritage.

Alexandra Anderson, Board of Trustees President
Lisa Weilbacker, Executive Director

Lisa Weilbacker, Executive Director and Alexandra Anderson, Board President at the 2022 CCHS Annual Meeting

In Memoriam



Roderic H. Blackburn
(1941 — 2021)

This special digital issue of *Columbia County History & Heritage* is a compendium of articles by Rod Blackburn and Ruth Piwonka, which they wrote for our CCHS magazine over the last 16 years. The issue is especially significant to those of us in the CCHS community lucky enough to have known Ruth and Rod. Both historians, so recently departed, have made invaluable contributions to Columbia County, but their accolades extend further than our county borders.

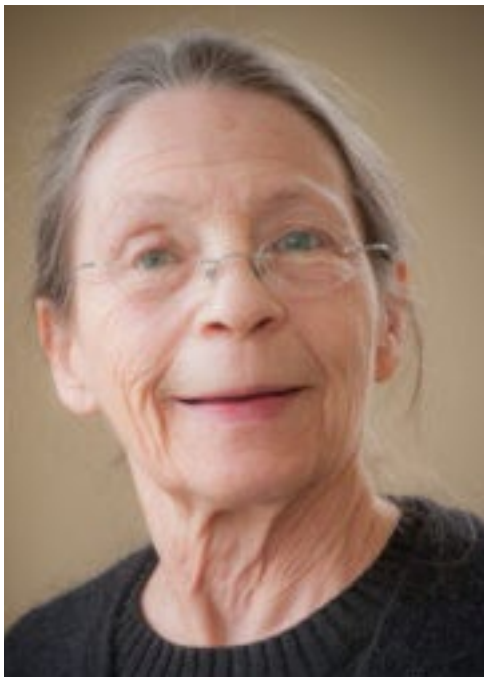
In 1967, Rod Blackburn and his wife DeGuerre bought the oldest surviving house in the Village of Kinderhook. Soon after, they both set out for Africa where they would spend two years in Kenya's highlands doing field research on the Okiek hunter-gatherer tribe. Rod published extensively on the Okiek and is still widely acclaimed for his anthropological work; he received a PhD in Anthropology from Michigan State University in 1971. After returning from Africa in 1972, the Blackburns began restoring their early-18th century Schermerhorn-Pruyn House, igniting Rod's immersion in Dutch architecture and culture. As Rod wrote for *Early Homes* magazine in 2006, while he knew little about early Dutch-American houses at the time, investigation into the house and its major restoration project led him to a lifelong scholarly focus on the period.

A dedicated historian ever focused on preserving disappearing knowledge, Rod held many professional appointments, including membership on the CCHS Board of Trustees (1971-1996); he was Board President from 1972-1974, and he continued to hold an Emeritus appointment until the time of his death. He also served on the boards of many other prominent historical organizations: Shaker Museum Foundation, Historic Cherry Hill, the Hand Hollow Foundation, and the Federation for Historical Services, and he worked as the Assistant Director at the Albany Institute of History and Art for thirteen years (1973-1986). He contributed groundbreaking research on Dutch culture, art, and architecture and lectured on various topics at museums, historical societies, and conferences.

His expertise also assisted in securing National Register of Historic Places listings. According to Alexandra Anderson, current CCHS Board of Trustees President, Rod "was instrumental in gaining the 1974 listing for the Vanderpoel House and sections of the Village of Kinderhook on the National Register of Historic Places. Rod's pioneering knowledge of and advocacy for history was essential in preserving our historic properties, including the Van Alen House." Ruth also worked on various National Register nominations, and as longtime residents of Kinderhook, fellow historians, and trusted colleagues serving on many of the same not-for-profit boards, it seems only natural for Ruth and Rod to have collaborated professionally.

Rod's pioneering knowledge of and advocacy for history was essential in preserving our historic properties, including the Van Alen House.

In Memoriam



Edith Ruth Piwonka
(1940 – 2021)

Ruth was an expert in local and regional history, having earned her master's degree in 1964 from Indiana University. She moved to Kinderhook in 1969, and very quickly dedicated her intellectual pursuits to exploring the history of Dutch settlements and culture in New York State. She was the Kinderhook historian for both town and village, a position she held officially and unofficially for many years, and she was an Emeritus member of the Jacob Leisler Institute Board of Trustees. Ruth's dedication to the study and preservation of regional history is summed up well by Dr. David William Voorhees, Director of the Jacob Leisler Institute: "Ruth, a very close friend and colleague in colonial research projects, was a guiding light in establishing the Jacob Leisler Institute as a founding trustee and its first treasurer. The Institute's rapid growth is due much to her credit."

Ruth was also a member on the boards of many other not-for-profit organizations, including the Columbia Land Conservancy, Friends of Lindenwald, and Historic Cherry Hill. She was formerly the Executive Director of both CCHS (1976–1983) and the Columbia Land Conservancy, and she served on various municipal boards in both the Town and Village of Kinderhook. Her active and invaluable role in historical preservation earned Ruth various prestigious awards and honors. Most recently, Ruth was named the 2020 Martha Washington Woman of History, an award given annually to a woman who has contributed to the history of the Hudson Valley through education, promotion, or preservation. The honor was well-deserved, considering Ruth's expertise in regional Hudson Valley history, art, and architecture.

Both Ruth and Rod will be missed greatly, not only for their invaluable contributions to Columbia County's cultural heritage, but as friends to the many people in our community who continue to grieve their loss, including us here at CCHS. We'd like to thank them both for their contributions, specifically, to *Columbia County History & Heritage* over the years, and we hope our readers enjoy this retrospective tribute.

Jessica Gavitt, CCHS Editorial Director

Ruth, a very close friend and colleague in colonial research projects, was a guiding light in establishing the Jacob Leisler Institute as a founding trustee and its first treasurer. The Institute's rapid growth is due much to her credit.

Hudson River STEAMBOATS in Prints and Paintings

By Roderic H. Blackburn & William P. Palmer

Rod Blackburn lives in Kinderhook and has art and antiques galleries in Kinderhook and Hudson. He has written several books on regional art, architecture, and history. He also is principal of R. H. Blackburn & Associates, Inc.—Real Estate. Mr. Palmer, a resident of Kinderhook, is a restoration architect and collects historical prints and paintings related to the Hudson valley.

As the Hudson River Valley was the inspiration and focal point of the Hudson River School of landscape painting (see the article by Will Swift on page 20), it was also, and at the same period, the genesis of an American marine art tradition, specifically portraits of steamboats (and some sailboats) on the river and of adjacent coastal and ocean vessels. New York harbor was the biggest and busiest in the nation when steamboating got its start in this country (see Don Eberle's article on page 13). Like European ports before and after, New York became a center of "port painters," talented aficionados of beautiful steamboats who found they could make a modest living painting ship portraits for captains, owners, crew members, and ship builders. They, and others, participated in having prints made from the paintings for the masses.

But how did this affect the upper river area and Columbia County you will ask? Most of the steamboats passed by our county, discharged and picked up passengers at several docks, loaded farm produce and in the winter, ice for New York City, and brought the world's goods to the county. Steamboats were the heavy haulers of their day, the freighters of commerce, which economically tied the county to the nation. Of that vibrant era we recognize little today but for the stirring paintings and prints that are all but what survives.

When it came to commerce, man's creation could be as beautiful as Hudson River landscapes, especially if they combined the two. Unlike landscape paintings of distant unfamiliar scenes, steamboat painters were following a more ancient portrait tradition of producing exact likenesses for very exacting clients who knew their own boats intimately. As a result, draftsmanship and realism (although often stylized in colorful ways) were characteristic of all the professional painters. But our story begins earlier with the print tradition of Hudson River landscapes.

Steamboats in Prints

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, prints were an immensely popular medium for the commercialization of art. Not only did prints convey to a wide audience the spectacular natural scenery of the Hudson River landscape itself, they also celebrated the many recreational activities and important advances in transportation that were associated with the proud, young nation and its foremost river — the railroads, sloops, iceboats, yachts, and the mighty steamboats.

The earliest prints containing steamboats in their scenic views were based upon works by talented landscape artists and were used primarily for decorative purposes. Most notable of these early prints is the *Hudson River Portfolio* that is still considered to be the finest set of prints depicting Hudson River views ever produced. Published in the 1820s, this print series consisted of 20 large-size, hand-colored aquatints that were skillfully engraved by John Hill from watercolors by William G. Wall. The aquatint process of printmaking, which had recently been introduced from England, rendered fine tones and delicate shading on finished prints from carefully etched copper plates.

The *Hudson River Portfolio* traces the entire course of the river in a series of scenic views that begin in the Adirondacks, passing

Steamboats were the heavy haulers of their day, the freighters of commerce, which economically tied the county to the nation.

Figure 1. Palisades, Hudson River Portfolio No. 19. *Publisher: Henry J. Megary, 1821–1825. Artist: William Wall. Engraver: John Hill. Image size: 14" x 21" (Private Collection). A passenger steamboat provides scale for the massive rock backdrop of the Palisades in this colored aquatint from the important series of prints, the* Hudson River Portfolio, *published in the early 1820s.*

the thriving river ports of Troy, Hudson, and Newburgh, then through the scenic Highlands to finally arrive in the bustling harbor of New York. Images of sailing and steam-powered vessels complement the Hudson's natural beauty in most of the series' lower river views by providing scale, composition, and a sense of human activity to the scenes. But most important, these man-made elements symbolically convey a national pride of accomplishment and progress (**Fig.1**).

By the mid-nineteenth century, steamboat commerce was flourishing on the Hudson River. This period was notably marked by technical improvements to the powerful vertical beam steam engine, with its characteristic "walking beam," that permitted the construction of larger, faster, and more luxurious steam vessels. Competition was intense not only among the steamboat companies but the boats themselves.

Concurrent with this growth in steamboat commerce was the expansion of the printmaking industry, especially in New York City. Perfecting the new printing process of lithography made this possible. Lithographs were produced by hand-drawn images on polished slabs of limestone, in contrast to the laborious process of engraving images on copper or steel plates. In fact, lithography revolutionized the printmaking industry by enabling large numbers of prints to be produced at very low cost, which translated into low prices for the general public. Perhaps it was inevitable that these two fast-growing industries — steamboating and lithographic printing — would converge with the mass printing of steamboat portraits.

America's leading pioneer in commercial lithography was Nathaniel Currier, who launched his own printmaking business in New York in the 1840s. Among the most

The Market

To speak of steamboat art works begs comment on their appeal to collectors and museums, their availability, and their cost. Bard paintings come to market frequently and the best sell for over $150,000. Jacobsens are also frequently found at $8,000-25,000. Pansing paintings rarely come to market but his excellent lithographs can bring $2,000 or more. Only one Joseph Smith has sold at auction, at a whopping $200,500. Large Parson lithographs by either father or son (Endicott or Currier & Ives) sell for $2,500 to $7,000, depending upon condition.

Where do you find these works of art? The major auction houses have them from time to time, Bards and Jacobsens frequently. Certain art and print dealers also specialize in marine pictures. Yard sale discoveries? A Bard was found in a Hudson garage some years ago. One Smith that sold at auction came out of a Columbia County house (a rare case of a family who owned the boat, commissioned the portrait and kept the painting for150 years). Smith's portrait of the *Drew* came out of a house north of Schenectady (still in the boat builder's family). Another Smith was found in an Old Chatham home, collected years before by a Wall Street trader. Years ago, Bards were found in most Hudson River port towns. A hundred years ago some were almost thrown out. Today they are hot commodities in the art market and extremely valuable. Yet some will still be discovered.

Figure 2. Loss of the Steamboat Swallow. *Publisher: N. Currier, 1845. Image size: 8" x 12" (Private Collection). Nineteenth-century print makers were quick to sensationalize and capitalize on Hudson River steamboat disasters. This small folio Currier & Ives lithograph graphically captures the panic and tragic loss of life aboard the popular and fast steamboat* Swallow *after she struck a rock near Athens (opposite Hudson) on the snowy evening of April 7, 1845. The* Swallow *had been racing two other steamers, the* Express *and the* Rochester, *a common but unsafe practice, when the disaster occurred. Several other printing firms published similar depictions of this tragic event.*

Figure 3. American Steamboats on the Hudson. *Lithographer-Publisher: Currier & Ives, 1874. Artist: Parsons & Atwater. Image size: 19" x 32". (Private Collection). Two of the river's largest steamers, the* Drew *and the* St. John, *passing in the Hudson Highlands are shown in this large lithograph. This composition achieves a dramatic effect through its illustration of the river's crowded steamer traffic.*

popular of Currier's early print subjects were sensationalized views of marine disasters, such as the *Loss of the Swallow,* published in 1843 (**Fig.2**) (see Swallow House article on page 38). Currier also capitalized on portrait prints of what had become the most powerful and yet romantic symbols of America's industrial might — steamboats of the Hudson river. Currier's "small folio," hand colored prints (generally 8" x 12 ") featured such popular boats as: the *Empire* (1847), the *Isaac Newton* (1848), and the *Knickerbocker* (undated).

After changing its name to Currier & Ives in 1857, the firm grew to become the most popular and prolific printmaker in America. With the adoption of chromolithography in the 1860s, the firm was able to produce large-size prints at competitive prices. While traditional single-stone lithography required hand coloring after printing, chromolithography efficiently produced finished colored prints by utilizing a series of separate stones for each color. An especially impressive example of the firm's work is the large folio print entitled, *American Steamboats on the Hudson,* depicting two huge steamboats — the *Drew* and the *St. John* — drawn by the talented marine artist, Charles R. Parsons (**Fig.3**). Currier and Ives' equally dramatic nighttime view of the steamers *Francis Skiddy* and *Isaac Newton* entitled, *A Night on the Hudson* (**Fig.4**), was drawn by Frances (Fanny) F. B. Palmer, the most talented female lithographic artist of the nineteenth century. It is considered the premier Hudson River steamboat lithograph produced by Currier & Ives.

Although Currier & Ives was America's largest and most well known printmaker in the nineteenth century, they certainly did not dominate the market for printed portraits of marine vessels and Hudson River steamboats in particular. The Endicott family of printmakers in New York produced many impressive printed portraits of steam-powered vessels. During the late 1850s-1870s, Endicott & Company's large chromolithographic portraits of Hudson River steamboats and other marine vessels marked the zenith of this genre in terms of quantity and overall quality. Most of these portraits were probably commissioned by boat owners for souvenirs and advertising purposes (similar to modern travel posters) and were revised and reprinted as the boats were rebuilt and modernized over the years. The high quality of Endicott's prints is primarily due to the work of their extremely talented marine artists, Charles Parsons and his son, Charles R. Parsons. These artist/lithographers, both individually and as a team, crafted many large-size portrait prints of Hudson River steamers that were impressively colored and featured precise, draftsman-like details. These visually appealing portraits of America's symbols of progress — the Hudson River steamboats — not only contributed to the popularity and commercial success of this advertising medium itself but to the steamboat industry as well.

A stunning example of a large advertising portrait by the Endicott firm is the *Steamer Mary Powell* (c.1862), which is attributed to Charles Parsons (**Fig.5**). Another large and visually appealing advertising lithograph, drawn by his son, Charles R. Parsons c.1865, is a moonlit scene of the famous night boat *Cornelius Vanderbilt* shown passing through the Highlands (**Fig.6**).

Production of lithographic portraits of Hudson River steamers was by no means limited to the two firms of Currier and Ives and the Endicotts, but they certainly contributed most to this genre in terms of overall quality, technical innovation, and output. Other

Figure 4. A Night on the Hudson. *Lithographer-Publisher: Currier & Ives, 1864. Artist: Frances F. Palmer. Image size: 17"x 27". (Private Collection) Frances Palmer was especially great at dramatic steamboat prints, both of the Hudson and the Mississippi. Look at her use of light at night: a moon illuminating the sails of a schooner from behind, and interior lighting of the* Isaac Newton *with its searchlight also shining on the* Francis Skiddy.

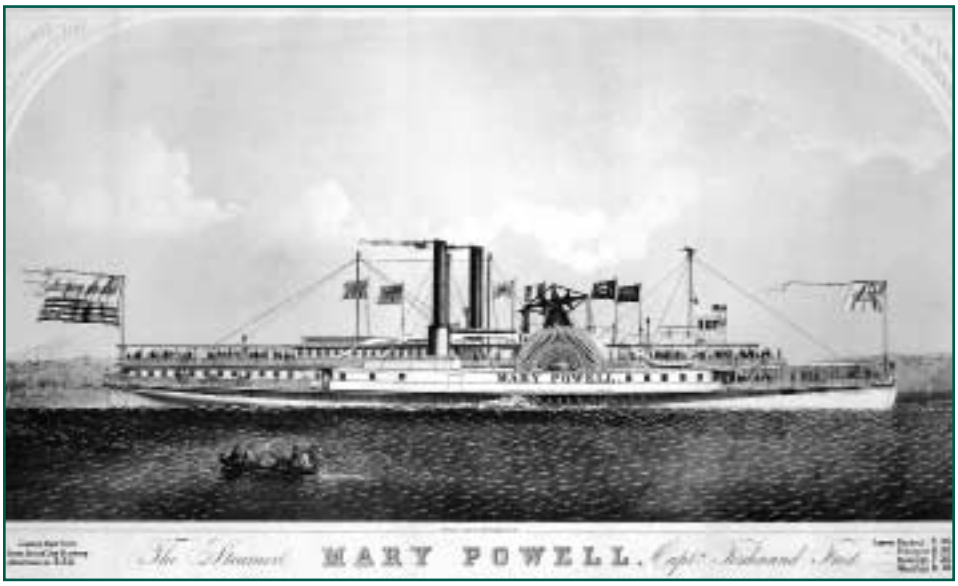


Figure 5. *The Steamer* Mary Powell. *Lithographer-Publisher: Endicott & Co., c1862. Artist: probably C. Parsons. Image size: 17" x 33" (Private Collection). Endicott & Company published this large advertising lithograph of the famous day boat,* Mary Powell, *for the owners after she was lengthened and updated in 1862 A full display of her flags and pennants contrasting with her sleek hull and calm water convey a sense of speed for which she was well known.*

lesser-known firms producing steamboat portraits follow below, but for the most part they are obscure and require further research.

Gray Lithographic Co., NYC,
The Adirondack (c.1890)
Chas. Hart, NYC, *The City of Troy*
for the New York Troy Line (nightboat)
(undated)
Knapp Lithograph Co.,
Hudson River Day Line (undated)
Sackett & Wilhelms Litho. and Ptg. Co.,
C.W. Morse for the People's Evening Line
(1904)

Steamboat Painters and their Print Makers

James and John Bard were twin brothers born in 1815 on Manhattan just as the first steamboats were being built for Hudson River transport. By age twelve they produced their first joint effort, a steamboat broadside portrait in watercolors. The approach was a little naive, but the elements of draftsmanship and coloration that would characterize all later, more proficient portraits were there at the beginning. Until about 1850 they worked together on numerous commissions when John dropped his painterly activity, dying destitute in 1856. James, however, carried on, painting mostly in oils, sometimes in gouache (opaque watercolors). He was productive for another 41 years.

Like other ship painters, Bard's commissions were primarily from those with a close tie to each vessel: owner, builder, engine maker, or captain, all of whom cared the most for accuracy. His share of the New York port painter's trade were the Hudson River and Long Island Sound steamboats, although he did some ocean-going vessels and a number of Hudson River sloops and schooners. His method was to do a careful, detailed, broadside drawing of the boat at dock, review it with the patron, then take a week to complete the painting, often more than four feet wide. In his late career he charged up to $50 per painting. As most Hudson River steamers made their way to New York City regularly or occasionally, there was plenty of opportunity to fill commissions of up-river patrons. Many of his boats have names like *Albany, Troy, City of Catskill, Saratoga, Rip Van Winkle, Kaaterskill, City of Hudson,* even *Nupa of Hudson.* His painting of the towboat *Syracuse* was typical in composition, detail, and history of the commission (**Fig.7**).

Antonio Jacobsen (1850–1921) was born in Denmark and developed an early passion for sketching ships. By 1873 he was in New York City — painting decorative ornaments on safes. A chance request for a ship portrait by its shipping line launched his career. And what a career! New York City was the largest ship-filled port in America and Antonio must have painted most of them. Over 45 years he may have painted 6000 ship portraits (sometimes several of the same ship) of which about 3000 survive. His method was simple: dockside measurements and small notebook sketches. Yet he quickly produced fully detailed, exact images in oil on canvas for five dollars each, some finished within one day. Throughout his long career, there was little change in his meticulous style. Only a few were of Hudson River steamboats, like the Day Line's *Albany* (**Fig.8**). His elder contemporary James Bard seemed to have those river-born commissions mostly to himself.

Fred Pansing (1844–1912) was born in Germany and became a sailor before coming to New York City in 1865, where his brother Franz kept a grocery store and home at 162 and 163 Perry Street. Also residing at 162 Perry Street was artist James Bard, who provided inspiration for the young Pansing. At first he had a more mundane apprentice-

Figure 6. Cornelius Vanderbilt *(no title printed, probably proof before letters.) Lithographer-Publisher: Endicott & Co., c1865. Artist: Parsons & Atwater. Image size: 18 ⅛" x 34". (Private Collection). In sharp contrast to the lively views of day boats, this large advertising lithograph of the steamer* Cornelius Vanderbilt *assures passengers a night of tranquil, comfortable, and romantic travel. Visual elements, which make this view especially appealing, are the lights reflecting on the water's surface and the moonlight illuminating the surrounding land.*

Museums with Steamboat Paintings and Prints

- Albany Institute of History & Art, Albany, NY: steamboat advertsing, lithographs and paintings
- Hudson River Maritime Museum, Kingston, NY: Steamboat advertising lithographs
- Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY: steamboat paintings
- Mariner's Museum, Newport News, VA: Bard steamboat paintings, advertising lithographs, and steamboat models
- Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC: Hudson River Portfolio prints
- Museum of the City of New York, NYC: Bard steamboat paintings
- New-York Historical Society, NYC: Bard steamboat paintings, Hudson River Portfolio prints
- New York Public Library, NYC: Hudson River Portfolio prints
- Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, VT: Bard steamboat paintings, preserved steamboat Ticonderoga

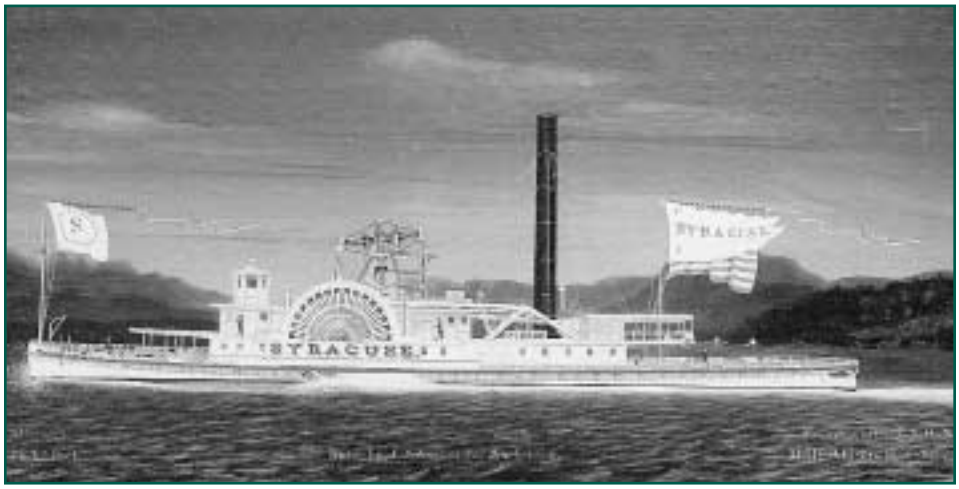


Figure 7. Syracuse. *Signed: Drawn & Painted by James Bard, 163 Perry St., NY. Oil on canvas (Private Collection). The* Syracuse *was built by J. J. Austin for the Albany & Canal Line, the painting commissioned of Bard by Austin, and — a rarity today — still owned by the family. It is hard to conceive that a boat of utilitarian function — a towboat — would be built with aesthetic quality comparable to the fine passenger liners, but they were and Bard made sure his paintings demonstrated that quality. George Murdock, a chronicler of Hudson River steamboat history stated the* Syracuse *was "the most handsome and most powerful of any of the fleet of towboats on the river." Just to make sure its engineering qualities were equally known Austin had the painting boldly inscribed: Diam. of cyl. 70"; Length of stroke, 12 feet. Built by J. J. Austin for A & C Line. Engine: Birbeck H [for Birbeck and Hodes]. Hull: Allison, Hoboken. For boat builders, a Bard was not just a painting but an advertisement designed for ego-enrichment.*

ship: painting wagons and signs, and lettering names on steamboat paddle boxes. He married in 1872 and moved to nearby Hoboken on the Hudson River, where marine artists Antonio Jacobsen and James Buttersworth lived. He made a more successful career than most marine artists, no doubt because he willingly capitalized on his talent to produce post cards, signs, illustrations, photographs, lithographs, as well as oil and gouache paintings. Not just a broadside ship portrait painter, he skillfully angled his boats for dramatic effect (most maritime artists could only handle the simple perspective of broadside views) and placed them in true-to-life settings (**Fig.9**). Unlike Bard and Jacobsen, his paintings are not to be confused with folk art. His paintings are relatively scarce compared to the canvases of the peripatetic Bard and Jacobsen.

Joseph B. Smith (1798–1876) and his son William S. Smith (1821– after 1865) of New York City became partners in marine painting. We know nothing of how the elder acquired

Figure 8. Albany. *Signed Antonio Jacobsen. Oil on canvas, Albany Institute of History and Art. The Hudson River Day Line commissioned a new boat, the* Albany, *in 1880. It was new in design, having an iron hull and three boilers. Jacobsen, preoccupied almost exclusively with painting anything but Hudson River steamboats got more than one commission to paint the new* Albany, *for at least two versions survive. Like many steamboats, as competition and innovations progressed, improvements to the structure were made, altering the appearance of the boats. That was the case of the* Albany *when the artist captured her about 1880 as a maiden vessel. Jacobsen's technique was as literal in detail as Bard's, but less flashy in coloration, flags and streamers, background, sky, and depiction of passengers and crew, as compared to Bard's marvelously concocted figures peopling his decks.*

Figure 9. New York. *A chromolithograph of an oil painting by Fred Pansing. (Private Collection). Like so many boat portrait prints, this was commissioned by the Day Line to advertise their new addition to the fleet, the* New York, *launched in 1887 to run in tandem with the* Albany *between those two cities, each leaving the other city in the morning and arriving in the evening. While a print, it accurately reflects the talent of Pansing to give realism and motion to his subjects. His* New York *is really moving right along. Good reason, she was like the* Albany *but had larger boilers, longer length, and two innovations: a steel hull and feathering paddle wheels — more strength and a faster and smoother ride.*

his talent and patronage. His earliest painting is 1849. Shortly thereafter ship paintings appeared with both names on them, either signed on the front or a business card pasted on the reverse. In 1855 and 1856 lithographs of five ships appeared inscribed "Sketched by J. B. Smith & Son, Brooklyn" and were lithographed by Charles Parsons. Of their paintings, hardly more than two dozen are known today, all very well painted with a remarkable realism combined with naturalism **(Fig 10).**

If Jacobsen and Bard are the best folk art marine artists, the Smiths are among the best academic artists. That did not absolve them of an error, however. Their sailing ships — they did a number of the famous clipper ships — always have the American flag flowing to aft no matter from where the sails were receiving the breeze. If not an indicator of wind, the flag was an indicator of authorship, for they are all nearly identical and distinctive, so much so they are the artists' "signature," in the absence of the usual inscription.

The partnership ended when William joined Brooklyn's 14th Regiment (age 41, 1862). He survived the Civil War but his later whereabouts and work are unknown. His father moved to the Camden/ Philadelphia area in 1864 but after 1865 no artistic record exists. It is unfortunate that we have so little to show for their talent. They were commissioned to do what was in New York harbor: ferries, sailing ships, inland steamboats, ocean steamers, and yachts.

The Lithographers

Frances Palmer (1812–1876) was well born, raised, and married in England. Then the family came to New York to recoup financial losses. She and her husband tried a lithographic business, F. Palmer & Co., but failed, although not without producing a fine steamboat image of the *Reindeer.* He ran a tavern but fell down the stairs and died; she raised the children (one died) and cared for siblings. Despite all she excelled at painting and continued lithography for others, starting with prints based on Bard paintings. Perhaps her earliest was done in 1848, the last in 1872. Many of the best Currier & Ives lithographs in several subjects were based on her designs. In an art form dominated by men she was second to none, one of the finest woman artists of the period. Little survives of her original work. She died of tuberculosis, stooped with age and travail, at her home on Coney Island in 1876.

Charles Parsons was born in England in 1821 and arrived with his family in New York where he was apprenticed with lithographer George Endicott. By 1853–1862 he was producing elegant large ship lithographs for Endicott and also for Currier & Ives, considered among the finest of all subjects produced by those two leading lithographic companies. He then started a new career at *Harper's Weekly Magazine* as art director where he came to influence a wide range of American artists whose talents he commissioned. Yet he continued to do lithographs from others' paintings, both marine and other subjects.

He had a son, Charles R. Parsons, born in 1844 who followed in his trade, becoming an

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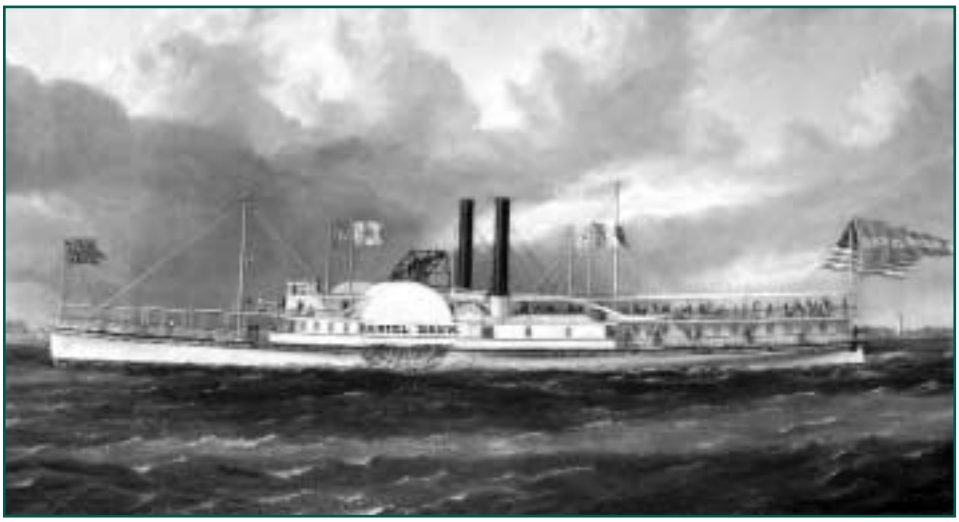

Figure 10. Daniel Drew. *Attributed to Joseph and William R. Smith. Oil on canvas, Albany Institute of History and Art. Daniel Drew was a transportation entrepreneur, owner of a steamboat company who named his new boat after himself. Actually he had a minority owner, the boat's builder Thomas Collyer, who commissioned this portrait about the year of launch, 1860. It remained in the family until recent years. By 1863 the Daniel Drew was acquired by what was to become shortly the Hudson River Day Line, setting in motion a succession of Albany — New York day boats, which would dominate river traffic well into the twentieth century. There is a Bard portrait of this boat too, making an interesting contrast between the colorful but static Bard version and the life-like and animated Smith painting.*

The James and Anna VANDERPOEL HOUSE: *Architecture and Preservation*

By Roderic Blackburn

Roderic H. Blackburn is a past director, trustee, and president of the Society. He lives in Kinderhook. He delightfully blames his old Dutch house for getting him involved in architectural history. Now he is a specialist real estate broker in period houses.

A community's sense of itself — its identity and basis for directing its future — comes from past experience carried in the minds of residents, received through lifetime experience, learned from others or from history books, and from seeing the results of history in the built environment around them. The latter, our use of the land and buildings thereon, is the one element of experience which is repeated in our view and memory every day. Thus familiar places become embedded in our minds and taken for granted. Separation from favorite places — especially one's home — has a similar emotional affect as separation or loss of loved ones. Thus pride of place becomes important to residents of a community who have become used to surroundings they find attractive and historically meaningful.

The loss of important historic houses by fire, neglect, or development becomes a shared community loss carried in the hearts and minds of residents for many years, often inciting increased public outbursts at community meetings if other threats arise. Planning board, zoning board of appeals, and municipal board meetings are often the arena of public argument over this kind of issue, pitting those with a well-developed visual sense of historic and aesthetic preservation against those whose values favor more functional criteria: what works best and what creates or saves money.

This is the context in which we can understand how historic buildings, like the Vanderpoel House, have become such a focus of community pride and concern — pride in its monumental qualities (buildings are our largest "monuments" if you think of it) and concern for its preservation (for our own mind's sake as well as for generations hereafter). To put it more graphically, the loss of a house on an historic street is as unsightly as a lost tooth in a smile.

Not that the Vanderpoel House is under threat. It is not, thanks to the leadership of a talented and dedicated committee who are following a cycle of neglect/renewal which has been visited upon this house in the past. To begin with, the house was built for James Vanderpoel and his wife Anna and their children about 1820. Which housewright or architect was responsible for its design and construction has yet to be proven. Hudson's Barnabus Waterman has often been assumed but no documentation exists for his work on this or any other extant house (so far). His qualifications to do, and to have done, such work, however, are hinted at in the sparse records. Its quality of design and materials has always been admired as among the best of the region's Federal-style houses. A comparison to several other such houses in Columbia and Greene counties is an informative subject for another article.

The earliest known photograph of the Vanderpoel house is this albumen print which dates to the 1860s. It shows the flanking carpenter gothic outbuildings, another barn, garden features, and the fence which is similar in design to one in Asher Benjamin's 1798 Country Builder's Assistant.

Nearly every house of a period of design is singular. Hardly any duplicate others exactly (excepting row houses). They are, like the human face and body, subject to everyone's judgment of proportion, symmetry, and beauty. People are remarkably able to make such aesthetic judgments intuitively, however difficult it is to articulate the reasons for their conclusions. That is normal; few housewrights, architects, or architectural historians can describe in words understandable to layman how and why one house is beautiful. Yet most people would agree it is. That is the nature of art and architecture. It is largely a visual/mental experience not a verbal experience. Thus to my eye the Vanderpoel is more successful aesthetically than similar houses in our region. Its nearly identical front and rear facades are probably unique; other house designers give prominence to the front. One reason for this may be the fact that the house is situated on a wide (and very deep) lot, allowing the drive to go to the rear where, likely, carriage-born guests entered at the "rear" entrance. It is that sort of melding of functional opportunity or requirement with aesthetic complement which reflects a superior designer (and a willing and able owner). Entering from the rear also exposed guests to a delightful vista which no other village residence had — a half mile of Vanderpoel's manicured land. Houses are shelters first, engines for living second. For many they are also public statements of position, aspiration, and entertainment for the benefit of guests and the world. Vanderpoel was evidently very conscious of the latter as the interior arrangement and detailing reveals.

Nearly every house of a period of design is singular.... They are, like the human face and body, subject to everyone's judgment of proportion, symmetry, and beauty.

The house, like many in its vicinity, is set on a high basement, in part to provided more light to the basement rooms (including the kitchen of the house), but assuredly to get above the high water table which has plagued this part of the village forever. Vanderpoel was lucky or wise; his basement is dry where adjacent structures regularly put out sump pump hoses in wet weather. Entering the central hall from the front one is taken by its height, width, gracefully winding stairway, and the silhouette of the leaded tracery of the opposite doorway windows. The doorways to adjacent rooms are capped by entablatures of elaborate carved decoration just like reduced versions of the mantle of the parlor fireplace (which actually was carved in the 1930s so to match, rather like gilding the lily). The stroke of design innovation in the hall is the acanthus leaf decorated archway which rises on delicate colonettes to a semi-circle with carved keystone. This archway, in combination with the adjacent sinuously curved stairway, introduces a powerful visual rhythm rarely seen elsewhere. The eye is drawn up and down and around the elements of the hall (nearly 12 feet high) as if a work of art. Visual rhythm, how the eye is naturally led by exciting design, is a mark of great design in art and architecture. Notice that it hits the visitor immediately on opening the front door, where it should — that is drama. Drawn into the hall, the eye circles up the stairway and around the curved bannister on the next floor, arrested by the star- studded oval ceiling medallion, then is suddenly brought down to the first floor by the chandelier on a long chain — more drama.

Now we get to explore the first movement (floor) at a different pace. The parlor to the left is nearly twenty foot square, a proportion and size especially suited to the comfort of group use. The high ceiling terminates in an ornamental plaster molding with stars and rosettes. High quality features abound in this, the most important of the public rooms in the house: there are fashionable large-paned windows with rosette ornament surrounds and recessed aprons extending to the floor. On either side are interior folding shutters, the better to limit the glare of summer sun on fine fabric curtains, upholstery, and floor covering (the floors were originally covered wall to wall with ornate carpeting). The fireplace and mantle are the central feature of the room both in design and in function.

Across the hall is the dining room of similar size; it has slightly more modest decoration as it is the second room in pubic importance. The moldings and mantle are simpler. The back wall now has a large double door opening into the small room behind. This is a later alteration. Originally this opening was a recessed alcove for a sideboard, an essential serving piece for dining. To one side of the alcove, hidden by the main wall, is a doorway to the back room. This gave private access for servants who could appear to serve and clear and disappear through this room, then through a pantry have access down the back stairs to the basement kitchen. Again, a plan well thought out functionally as well as visually.

Returning to the hall, the dramatic archway is a symbolic division of the front or public part of the house from the family and more private part of the house. Beyond the archway is the stairway to family bed chambers. Beyond the stairway are doors on either side leading to smaller rooms. To left is a much plainer room than the front rooms, which once had a separate door to a back porch, suggesting a possible use as an office. To right one enters a similar room, although originally the first part on entering was a pantry passageway. Servants then passed through the small room with fireplace into the sideboard alcove of the dinning room.

Back in the hall, there is a small door under the stairway which leads down to the basement where there is a hall, kitchen, family dining room, and storerooms, much altered in the 1930s for public use.

Ascending the main stairway to the second floor one is struck by the upper hall's echo of the first floor hall with its modified "Venetian" windows patterned after the door surrounds below. They are large to let in lots of light and, with a lower ceiling, placed closer to the floor. The curved railing of the stair continues in its sinuous way all around the stair opening, extending the visual rhythm of the stairway into the next floor. The floor's layout of rooms and hall are identical to that below. There are two large bedrooms to the front, and two smaller to the rear, appropriate for a family with children. The rear right room was, perhaps originally, divided into two smaller rooms. From this area an enclosed stairway reaches the attic which is and has been unfinished. If not here evidently servants lived either in the basement or elsewhere in the village.

Returning to the outside, the apparent similarity of the front and back façades I have remarked on. The opposite gable walls also show this symmetry, even to creating on the east gable a first-floor false window with closed blinds (where the dining room alcove wall would intersects where a window should be) to match a window on the west. Did not builder or owner compromise his bent for classical symmetry somewhere like others? Yes, looking closely one finds differences from

facade to facade: the front facade has special treatment in these ways: foundations stone are more regular in size and shape (elsewhere more irregular especially on the back); on it the water table is of marble (elsewhere two courses of brick), the brick is laid in fashionable Flemish band pattern on the front and left side gable (elsewhere in common or American bond in slightly larger brick. That asymmetry is surprising; and the front Venentian window and doorway are flanked by reeded colonettes (on the rear flat pilasters are substituted).

The gable elevations have their own quirks. I have mentioned the false window and different brick bonding. In the gable triangle (enclosed by the raking and horizontal soffits ornamented with acanthus leaf lead modillions — the dentils, called the tympanum) is found an elliptical fanlight attic window with leaded muntins, and keystone marble relieving arch. These are actually 1931 replacements for wooden half round windows (stored in the attic) which were likely original but so unlike the sophisticated detailing of the house that they were replaced. Had Vanderpoel become frugal as the project neared completion? However at the end he did add a stylish flourish, a reticulated wood balustrade along the edge of the roof (we do not know if it was extended to the rear roof) and an elaborate tall front fence with urn mounted posts and pointed thin balusters. Like the Federal period stoop at front and back, these exposed wooden features deteriorated. The fence lasted into the late nineteenth century and was not replaced. Stoops are necessities and those on the Vanderpoel house have been replicated from time to time, retaining their original form of double built-in benches and wide stairs. Like its name, the stoop is a Dutch idea, useful in places with high water table issues like the Netherlands — and Kinderhook village.

The finishing touch on this house as well as other Dutch, Georgian, and Federal brick houses was to strike each mortar joint with a narrow tool to create a straight indented line. This creates visual uniformity but it also has a function, to help press the wet mortar more tightly against the brick above and below. When all is dry, all the brick walls are covered with a pigmented red stain, again creating greater uniformity to the whole. Then every striker line is hand painted in white, more clearly defining each brick and the absolute regularity of the mason's craft — impressive but laborious. Like most aspects of contemporary building, it will never match that of the best period buildings of the past.

The preservation of that past, however, has a long legacy which should be acknowledged lest it slip the printed page and all future memory. When I first became involved with the society in 1971 I met Mary and Francis Masters. A generation earlier, his mother, Mrs. Francis R. Masters Sr. had been instrumental in saving and restoring the house and he and his wife picked up the responsibility after her. In those days we had a board of directors for operations and a board of trustees for handling the modest endowment and for fund raising, Mary and Bob were on both. Bob (Francis was for addresses) saw to it that we always had the funds for necessary repairs, even if he had to make up the difference personally, which he did regularly. He and his wife loved the house as his mother had and would do whatever was necessary to preserve it. One day he noticed a small bulge in the front facade and become alarmed, thinking all the books and files in the upstairs office were too much weight on the wall. The upshot was that he pledged a major gift toward another building for an office, library, and storage. That is where the present museum building came from. The bronze plaque in the dining room is dedicated to the Masters for over 60 years of remarkable support.

We are now engaged in a major fund drive for the preservation of the house. Chaired by Henry (Jim) Eyre, our remarkable founder and editor of this publication, this campaign reaches out to the membership and the public and is headed for its goal which will insure the completed restoration of the house and its long-term preservation.

Source:

Throughout this paper I have relied extensively on the excellent historic structures report The James Vanderpoel House produced in 1989 by the firm Mesick, Cohen, Waite, Architects (now succeeded for purposes of the Vanderpoel House by John G. Waite Architects, Albany).

The James Vanderpoel House, c. 1820. Photo taken by Lisa Weilbacker, CCHS Executive Director, after exterior restoration work completed during summer 2021.

Separation from favorite places – especially one's home – has a similar emotional affect as separation or loss of loved ones. Thus pride of place becomes important to residents of a community who have become used to surroundings they find attractive and historically meaningful.

The 1909 Hudson-Fulton Celebration

The Clermont *replica anchored at Hudson 1909. William Wait photo.*

By Roderic H. Blackburn

Rod Blackburn lives in Kinderhook and has art and antique galleries in Kinderhook and Hudson. He has written several books on regional art, architecture, and history. He also is principal of R.H. Blackburn & Associates, Inc., Real Estate.

Inspired by the monumental preparations for the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the Rev. J. H. Suydam of Rhinebeck wrote a modest letter to the *New York Tribune* in 1893 asking why should not New York celebrate its own first explorer — Henry Hudson — on the 300 anniversary of his discovery of the river which later took his name. He tossed the ball to the Holland Society which appointed a committee. Others formed the Hudson Tri-centennial Association with the practical idea of a memorial bridge. The Hon. Robert Roosevelt, uncle of the President, cast a wider net by inviting several organizations to form the Hudson Tercentenary Joint Committee under the auspices of the State and City. Now there was traction but no agreement on what to do. Then the committee found out that the New York mayor had appointed the Fulton Centennial Celebration Committee. A discreet inquiry between the committees convinced both that Fulton's successful introduction of a steamboat on the Hudson River in 1807 was close enough in purpose and time to the Hudson commemoration that they should join forces. In 1906 it was official: the legislature authorized the Hudson-Fulton Celebration Commission. Like mushrooms, however, another committee cropped up. The Robert Fulton Monument Association, headed by Cornelius Vanderbilt (Samuel L. Clemens — Mark Twain — was first vice-president) did have a plan, a "watergate and monument [read tomb] to Robert Fulton" on the Hudson River at 116th Street. They declined to consolidate with the joint committee. To no avail, Fulton's remains have never been moved from the Livingston vault at Trinity Church (his wife Harriet was a cousin of Fulton's steamboat partner Robert Livingston).

With but three years to organize a million dollar celebration, the press of time did wonders to concentrate the mind, in this case many divergent minds. The common theme of the dual achievements of Hudson and Fulton, however, logically focused everyone on the river and two boats. These became the lietmotifs of the celebration now planned as a series of events all along the river coinciding with the days Hudson sailed by each three hundred years before. The flotilla of ships was led by replicas of *The Half Moon* (properly *de Halve Maen*) and *The Clermont* (originally *The North River Steamboat* but forever after known as *The Clermont* from benefactor Robert Livingston's estate on the river in lower Columbia County). The ships anchored at each town where municipal parades, speeches, banquets, and church services drew huge crowds from the hinterland. The concept was convincingly popular everywhere; fixed bridges and monuments were forgotten. The commission touted its plan as educational, not commercial (no exposition, no advertising); historically awakening (New York felt slighted in the history sweepstakes by Washington Irving's whimsical satire of

Knickerbocker history); conducive to assimilation amongst New York's polyglot population (59% were foreign born or children thereof), and promotional of international friendship (Fulton was of Irish descent, Hudson was English but sailed for the Dutch, Verrazzano, an Italian, had received his commission from the French and Columbus, another Italian, sailed for Spain.)

Special gratitude was shown the Dutch who were giving the replica of the *Half Moon* and crew to boot. It was all good politics; the legislature footed most of the bill. With such wide-ranging events spread out from New York to Troy, those running for office knew they had a happy-time event that all would love — a unique, no-controversy, vote getter. What really drew the crowds were not the prayers, speeches and banquets — those happened regularly — but what was unique: the flotilla of navy ships, especially the two boats none had seen anything like before.

The Clermont at Hudson, October 7, 1909. A tug is tied near her stern, likely taking passengers on and off.

Sail and Steam

The original *Half Moon* and *Clermont* were curious contrasts in form and purpose. The *Half Moon* was but 80 feet long yet sailed oceans; The Clermont was 150 feet long and pencil thin (just 13 feet as first built, quickly widened to 18 feet for stability). The one was designed for exploration to China but inadvertently found a great harbor to become the largest city in the world; the other was invented for speed.

With but three years to organize a million dollar celebration, the press of time did wonders to concentrate the mind, in this case many divergent minds.

The replica ship Half Moon *today, constructed in the late 1980s.*

It reached only five miles-per-hour, less than sail boats, yet it inaugurated a revolution in transportation and commerce world wide.

The quest for a quicker route to the rich orient was not a new idea in 1609. The Dutch East India Company in Amsterdam picked up where others had failed. In fact they hired an English captain who had failed twice for the Moscovy Company and been discharged. Valuing his experience, the Dutch company hired Henry Hudson, supplying him with a new-built yacht, a flat-bottomed, shallow-drafted ship perfect for coastal exploration. Hudson set sail on March 25 for the northeast, the over Russia route he had tried before. That did not work so he turned around and headed west for the first time, approaching America. He sailed past Newfoundland, landed on the Maine coast, continued southwest past Long Island, New Jersey into Chesapeake Bay, and up into Delaware Bay. Seeing no way to China via the "South" River, he returned to the ocean and headed north until on he came to a great natural harbor. Here he entered what he called the "North" River, sailing its tidal length until shoals halted his progress in the vicinity of what is now Columbia County. Sending a small boat a day further convinced Hudson this was no route to the orient either so the *Half Moon* returned to the ocean and to Europe.

Although disappointed in his initial quest, he had met with the natives and realized there was commercial opportunity in the fur trade. What he did not know was that Samuel de Champlain was also exploring — and claiming for France — the same territory at the same time. Champlain had fought a pitched battle with the Iroquois near Ticonderoga in July. Imagine the reaction of natives when they realized they were being invested with palefaces from north and south at once. Consummate diplomats as well as warriors, the Iroquois spent the next 175 years playing off the competing interests of the French, the Dutch, and later the English, selling them furs and expanding their empire (as far as Chicago). Before any Europeans

had settled north of Virginia, all these parties and their interests had begun to crystalize in 1609, issues soon to dominate colonial affairs for nearly two centuries. That is the legacy of Hudson and Champlain, both to be commemorated in the Quadricentennial this year.

Fulton's legacy was different. It had to do with power, not place. He was not the first with a steamboat; the first patented steam engine dates back to 1698; James Watt patented a better engine in 1769 inaugurating the Industrial Revolution. By 1803, when Fulton was experimenting with steamboats in Paris, he was one of several in Europe and America who were racing to be the first to operate a commercially successful steamboat. His luck was to team up with Chancellor Robert Livingston (then Minister to France) who already had the foresight to obtain a monopoly from the New York Legislature for steam transport on the Hudson River. Returning to New York Fulton built his first boat in 1807 (he had demonstrated one successfully in Paris but Napoleon was not interested) and then steamed it without mishap to Albany from New York in 32 hours. A regularly scheduled packet service for freight and passengers followed. The partners soon added more boats to their Hudson fleet and then began a boat on the Ohio River. The commercially profitable use of steam power on water began with Fulton and Livingston. Neither would have succeeded without the other, so we could argue for the 2009 Hudson-Champlain-Fulton-and Livingston Celebration. For the 1909 celebration the replica was built at Mariners Harbor, Staten Island, following Fulton's patent, registry, and enrollment documents.

The Celebration

The Celebration began in New York City with a large Naval Parade expressing the nation's naval supremacy in the Western Hemisphere; a Military Parade (25,000 strong), the Historical Parade emphasizing all periods of New York's history; the Children's Festival with dances, patriotic displays, and history lessons; the Carnival Parade with floats expressing the music, art, and literature of the Old World; and dozens of museum exhibitions on various themes. The naval parade was the largest ever held in the hemisphere, 75 naval ships (25 foreign) plus hundreds of merchant and other types of ships.

From Manhattan a small flotilla progressed up the river stopping at each town and city for a day to participate in on-shore events. When it reached Hudson the ships anchored off Promenade Hill. The dignitaries and crew then came ashore to join a parade of many divisions which progressed all morning along Warren Street. Led by Grand Marshall Malcolm Gifford, it included bands, the West Point Saluting Squad, U.S. sailors from the torpedo boats and destroyers, New York National Guard units, historical floats from Indians to Modern Times, fire departments, the Governor, other guests of honor, and Celebration officials on the reviewing stand at Washington Park. Lunch for the latter was at the Hendrick Hudson Chapter of the D. A. R. after which a dedication ceremony took place at the Park for the new Hudson-Fulton Memorial Fountain given by the D. A. R. Chapter (with help from the Columbia County Association of the City of New York and others). Over ten feet high with granite basins — "one for the use of the public and the other for small animals" — it was the first

The Naval Parade at Manhattan. From US battleships to canoes, hundreds of vessels took part in the parade on the Hudson River.

public "permanent" memorial erected in the city (remnants of it were still visible thirty years ago).

By this time one observer reported "we are witnessing the greatest endurance test of the country, including another demonstration of the wonderful staying qualities of our distinguished Governor." Charles Evans Hughes had been parading and speechifying for two weeks. Now nearly exhausted he allowed "if this Celebration continues much longer, and if the hospitality of Hudson finds further illustration, I am sure that my staying qualities will be severely tested and I may share the fate of Martin Van Buren and be buried in Columbia County." The handsomely distinguished Hughes had turned down nomination as Taft's vice presidential running mate the year before, later served as Secretary of State, and then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

That evening the Hudson Theatre hosted "the finest banquet ever given in Hudson." There were 300 celebrants there. Charles Esselstyn, toastmaster, asked all to rise and drink to the Queen of the Netherlands, then to The Empire State, and finally to the Governor who managed to quip "and by God's grace I shall be home to-night.... If Henry Hudson had witnessed such a spectacle as this I do not think Albany would ever have been discovered." The evening closed, the city went to sleep, and in the morning the flotilla drew anchor and slipped away for Albany. Columbia County had had its greatest celebration.

A close call. The Half Moon *and* Clermont *"joined" in the melee of ships on parade.*

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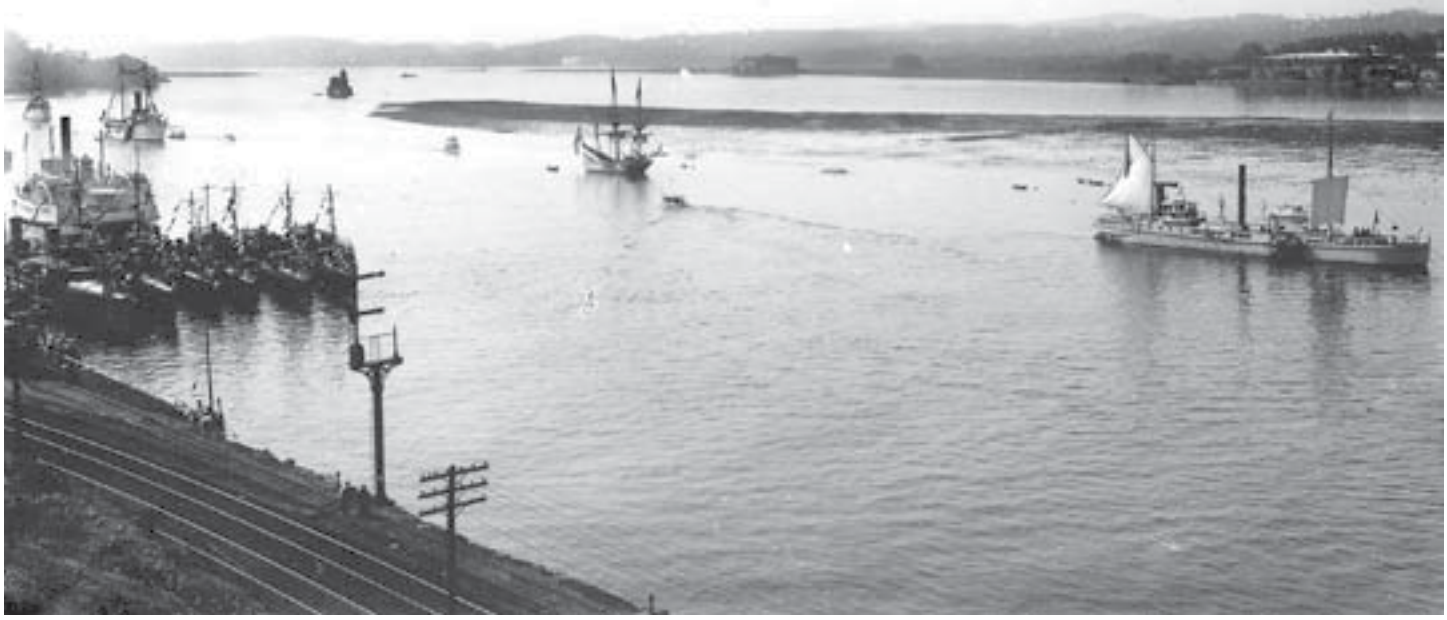
Below: The Flotilla at Hudson, Thursday October 7, 1909. Climax day of a week of Hudson activities. From the top of Promenade Hill we see at least five torpedo boats (Fulton had developed a torpedo) and what appears to be a destroyer tied up at the dock. Behind is the steamboat Jacob Tremper *getting underway. Anchored beyond are two white-painted revenue cutters.* The Half Moon *and the* Clermont *(with a tug) are anchored out in the channel in front of the "Middle ground" separating the east and west channels of the river. Ice houses and Athens are in the background. William Wait photograph.*



From Hudson to Van Alen
WHY SO LONG?
A Time of Discovery, Exploration, and Settlement

By Ruth Piwonka

Ruth Piwonka has written extensively on Columbia County history.

At 272 years, the Van Alen House is now an old and revered landmark. It is a wonderful Dutch house, closely following the style followed in the Netherlands. Its brick walls enclose main rooms where jambless hearths, large windows, and exposed heavy framing dominate. Its steep roof forms a spacious garret. But it was built 128 years after Hudson first sailed on the great river and 73 years after the English took New Netherland. Why so long?

When news of Hudson' discovery of the River Mauritius reached the Netherlands, almost immediately several entrepreneurs financed further voyages of exploitation and exploration. These included the several trips made by Adrian Block between 1610 and 1616. Lesser known are the voyages of Hendrick Christiaens of Cleves, Cornelis Rijser of Amsterdam, and Thijs Volckertz.

In the 1840s, New York scholars traveled to the Netherlands in search of whatever documentation they could find. This resulted in the discovery of some early documents and two maps that reveal the extent of exploration in this period. Three *bosch-lopers* who apparently started out from the Fort Nassau neighborhood, the trading outpost the Dutch established by 1615 on Castle Island at modern Albany, managed to be captured by Indians who took them from the upper reaches of the Susquehanna to the Delaware River (called the South River by the Dutch) and ultimately to its mouth at Delaware Bay. From these Indians they learned the names of the tribes of Indians living west of the Susquehanna and Delaware valleys as well as the locations of Indian castles and villages. When they finally met up with Dutch comrades in Delaware Bay, the Dutch were obliged to pay for the release of the three.[1] Although not much detail about the episode survives, it was an occasion heralded even by Champlain's *couriers de bois*.

In 1959, Simon Hart, Amsterdam Archivist, published yet another fascinating tale of some of the first traders' mis-adventures. Unregulated early trade caused Dutchmen and Indians to scrap with each other and to fight among themselves, a situation quickly addressed by the States General and Dutch East India Company as they established regulated prices for peltry and set a tone in which personality and character in trade were rewarded rather than paying the best price.[2] The Dutch left men at Fort Nassau and Captain Cornelis Hendricksen was evidently in charge. The time was right for Captain Adriaen Block to sail the New England shore, resulting in a respectably detailed map that marked not only land and harbor features along the shore line, it also indicated that they explored the Fresh River (Connecticut River).

It is, however, the brief report and map left by Cornelis Hendricksen that he presented to the States General on August 18, 1616 that compels our attention. The map published by Brodhead and O'Callaghan [see Note 1] in facsimile is believed to be the map presented by Hendricksen. It contains the western explorations of the South River by the three captive Dutchmen and also shows the North River with a number of features recognizable to Columbia County residents. South of Fort Nassau, the familiar place names of Kinderhook and Claverack are jotted down along with Hartsrack, Hinnehoeck, Oosterhoeck, Bouthoek, and on the west side of the river at Catskill, Jan Plasiers rack. The "hooks" refer to landings and the "racks" to the navigational reaches along the river. Joannes deLaet's New World gave a fuller description of the river and its reaches, as named by the early Dutch explorers — twelve in all.[3]

Although no creeks or kills are depicted, it is likely that the Dutchmen who named these places saw something of them as well. The area so detailed was the same part of the river where Hudson and his crew met the upriver Indians who Robert Juet, Hudson's mate, described as a "loving people." Since Hudson and his crew had belligerent encounters with Indians in the lower reaches of the North River, it is not surprising the first explorers seemed to spend their time along the upper parts of the river; and further it

The Luykas Van Alen House, in Kinderhook, NY, photo c.2000. Photo by Bret Morgan.

permitted them to be closer to the source of what would become for a while the enormously profitable fur trade. Nonetheless, the maps show they discovered that Manhattan was an island with a narrow "river" at its east side (Hudson did not seem to realize this); But its name was not marked on either of these maps.

Thus began nascent Columbia County's association with European people. Though it would be about sixty years and longer before there was any significant European settlement, it seems most likely that Dutch from Fort Nassau and its subsequent manifestations — in 1624, Fort Orange; and later in 1653, Beverwyck — sojourned here during hunting and trading seasons, accumulating pelts of beaver and other furs. In 1649, Shlechtenhorst, as agent for the van Rensselaer family, purchased from Mohicans five flats along the Claverack creek in the modern towns of Greenport and Claverack, establishing their initial interest in the region outside the official boundaries of their patroonship. In 1654 Abram Staats purchased from Mohicans a tract evidently at the Oosterhoeck (mouth of Stockport creek) from Indians. About the same time, Jan Reyersz purchased another substantial tract along the river extending from the south side of Stockport creek to the Clavers, the once-steep clay banks on the river shore at the Hudson Greenport boundary. About 1664 Indians attacked and killed tenants at both the Staats and Ryersz properties effectively delaying further settlement for several years.[4]

Then, beginning in 1669, the native Mohican people began to sell tracts of land along the Kinderhook creek to Dutchmen — primarily farmers — who were dissatisfied with town life at Albany and who wanted to farm. A few made extensive harvests from local timber, used local water power to mill it, and shipped the product to Albany and New York city for use there. In 1680, Jasper Danckaerts stopped at both Kinderhook and Claverack — at the landings where the sloop he traveled on had docked to pick up wheat to take to New York. At Kinderhook he visited with a miller; and at Claverack, where he was invited by the local farmers to travel four miles inland to their homes. At Claverack he had a day to linger and observe the tillable land, low and flat, along the side of the creek; and nearby "large clear fountains flowing out of cliffs or hills, the first real fountains which we have met with in this country" — the same "Fountains" that flow out of Becraft Mountain and have formed the basis of the city of Hudson's water supply.

By 1686, at Kinderhook, farms and mill sites were owned by thirty-one individuals (not all were residents). That was the threshold number for chartering local government and so the Town of Kinderhook was formed. This differed from most places in old Albany County, where farmers were usually tenants of the patroon. Albany itself had been chartered as a city just the year before; and while it retained the appearance of a quaint Dutch town into the early nineteenth century, its role as the center of diplomacy with American Indians gave it a prominence that exceeded its rustic look. By contrast a significant general commerce and a large mix of cultures at urban New York conspired to dilute the Dutch presence.

The Great New England Path between Albany and Boston joined the King's highway between Albany and Manhattan at the Kinderhook settlement, making it a distinctive crossroad of commerce and government. Opportunities opened for those willing to lodge travelers and perhaps offer some relief from rural isolation. Along the river a landing that would prove increasingly important had already developed at present Stuyvesant Landing (a part of the town of Kinderhook before 1823). From there commodity shipments of wheat and timber moved to distant markets in New York, Boston, and the West Indies. By the 1690s, about 23 families lived at Kinderhook.

And by 1714 that number had more than doubled. Moreover, the decade of intermittent warfare between the British and French had ceased. Kinderhook's population was now made up of mostly younger second-generation Dutch — men, women, and lots of children. An influx of German people from the Palatinate enriched the European character and an increasing population of slaves facilitated agricultural growth in the town. With the landscape at last rendered into orderly fields and meadows, these people would simply farm, harvest wheat and timber, operate mills, run taverns — in short, prosper. It became a period of significant construction at Kinderhook and also in other areas of old Albany County.

Like a spoken language, architecture has its own vocabularies, and building with the style and techniques of a distant place and of another time drew on such foreign vocabularies. While Kinderhook farmers and millers and traders had associations with New Englanders and with some English, they were not enough to inspire change from old, traditional forms — whether verbal or architectural — of their European forbearers. In 1678–79, an English clergyman at New York, Charles Wooley, once marveled at that Dutch language, calling it "lofty, majestic, and emphatical."[5] As a Cambridge graduate, Wooley likely had acquaintance with Dutch architectural styles transplanted to southeastern England and so found little new in New York to report on, save for the fact that the buildings he saw were of brick or stone.

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Like a spoken language, architecture has its own vocabularies, and building with the style and techniques of a distant place and of another time drew on such foreign vocabularies.

The van Alen House, built in 1737 and belonging to a second generation of rural domestic architecture, is no pretty cottage nor any gorgeous Georgian manse. But it can cast a spell. Some proportions of the house relate closely to the classical Golden Ratio (1:1.618033988…), making the footprint of the first constructed two rooms (the south parlor and kitchen) the so-called Golden Rectangle. This was not a coincidence but a building practice in the Netherlands that dated from the Middle Ages. The width of both the South Room and Kitchen is 18.3 feet and yields close to a 2:1 ratio in proportion to the ceiling height. While the addition of the hallway and parlor at the north end of the house introduces an intriguing asymmetry to the building, it also introduces a new and perhaps discomforting proportion of 1.21:1 mean in

A map presented by Cornelis Hendricksen to the New Netherland States General on August 18, 1616. Facsimile reproduction in Brodhead and O'Callaghan, Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, vol. 1, 1856.*

Detail showing Columbia County area, from a map presented by Cornelis Hendricksen to the New Netherland States General on August 18, 1616. Brodhead and O'Callaghan, Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, vol. 1, 1856.*

the footprint; and as viewed when entered from the hallway unwieldy 3.11:1 ratio of room depth to ceiling height. Once in the room and viewing it from its front or back walls, the room width to ceiling height ratio shifts to a more engaging 2.25:1 proportion. Although the north room has the same ceiling level as the other rooms, its lower overall height results from its floor being raised, evidently to accommodate the rocky terrain in the cellar below. The hallway, however, even though built over the same rocky terrain retained the same nine-foot-plus height as the original two rooms. While resulting in a head-crunching experience in the cellar, it has yielded a open, airy passage-way between the classically balanced harmony of the first two south rooms and the distracting proportions of the north room. Through this passageway runs a molded, dramatic, indeed emphatical, baseboard, with a ratio of ceiling height to baseboard height of 6.2:1, a baseboard to melt your heart. Spatially it was a very human ratio.

Since Wooley lifted his language assessment from the literary jargon of his day, it is not too audacious to recycle his still apt words. Besides the baseboard, jambless hearths, their chimneys with bold cornices are also emphatical components punctuating each room. Each framing member of the house is exposed, many of them set against whitewashed plaster, all underscoring proportion, ratio, and loft. Loftiness is experienced in the garrets that rise to the ridgeline of the roof; in the rooms with the gracefully proportioned cubes; and loftiness is perversely experienced in the room where it is absent. With loftiness comes Wooley's majestical, too. It comes through the high windows, especially in the morning or late afternoon, when light rakes across the rooms highlighting moldings, earthenware, ironware, pewter, brass, and grainy whitewash.

Neither pretty nor gorgeous, the old Dutch house on 9H, outside of Kinderhook village, is an imposing brick structure. It does not overlook farmland but faces what was the old King's Highway, then running between Albany and New York. Built almost 130 years, after Henry Hudson and the early Dutch explorers first surfaced in the great river valley, it expressed, as it still does, values that have been all but lost from most American history books. Undeniably emphatical, lofty, and even majestical, the van Alen house remains an echo of what the people who built it recalled from their past and also an echo of what we recall from our own. It links us to an ancient time. ❧

Endnotes

1. John Romeyn Brodhead and Edmund B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (Albany, 1856), Holland Documents, vol. 1 and 2, particularly vol. 1, p. 10 for the Hendrickson map and pp. 3-16 for other text related to this early period.

2. Simon Hart, *The Prehistory of the New Netherland Company. Amsterdam Notarial Records of the First Dutch Voyages to the Hudson.* (Amsterdam: City of Amsterdam Press, 1959)

3. Joannes deLaet, "New World", 1625. Reprinted in J. Franklin Jameson, *Narrative of New Netherland 1609–1664,* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 46.

4. Franklin Ellis, *History of Columbia County, New York* (Philadelphia, Ensign & Everts, 1878), p. 15. Deposition of Jan Thymensz of Schenectady, November 22, 1675. New York State Archive, Andros Papers 25: 44a and 44b.

5. Charles Wooley, *A Two Years Journal in New York, and Part of its Territories in America.* London, 1701, p. 56. Reprinted in Cornell Jaray, *Historic Chronicles of New Amsterdam, Colonial New York and Early Long Island.* (Port Washington, NY: Ira J. Friedman, Inc., 1968)

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The Van Alen Portraits and Scripture Paintings

By Ruth Piwonka

Many Dutch who settled in seventeenth century America took delight in graphic arts — painted ones and probably more frequently works printed on paper — as much as their countrymen in the Netherlands did. It is not unexpected that their progeny would continue to enjoy the same artistic expression and eventually to produce it on their own. A significant body of colonial era New York paintings survives, including a generous number from old Albany County, which included present day Columbia County. The work of four or five painters active in the Albany region between c1718 and 1750, all unsigned works, consist of portraits and scripture history paintings. While today portraiture is by far the predominant survivor, the scripture history paintings adorned enough Albany houses that they drew notice from travelers who mentioned them in their travel journals.

Portraits

Taken together the portraits are an unexpectedly democratic assemblage of Albany county's municipal officials, merchants, fur-traders, interpreters, most prominent persons, farmers, and above all its children and young people. The portrait subjects were well-settled second and third generation colonists who had acquired a degree of financial security and personal gravitas.

The qualities of the paintings vary. Though some observers see this as representing a painter's experimentation with different techniques, in greater likelihood they show the painter deliberately accommodating to the moment's economy: for the patron who could afford it, a portrait in which the process was long and detailed and generous in its use of pigments; or the patrons who preferred to pay a smaller amount would have portraits that were sparing in their use of colors and generous in their speedily executed brush strokes. A rapid, flat, broad stroke of white paint only hints at silken highlights, while finely detailed brushwork shows brocade patterning. Either way, all their faces are drawn with a forthright or convincing reality that set them apart from the idealism of engraved English mezzotints that the portraits drew inspiration from. The assorted heads and bodies show a diverse people — lean, stout, fair-, medium-, or dark-complected, high-cheek-boned or round-faced; stern or easy-going, sweet- or sour-faced. They were effective likenesses,

ones that gave assurance that these people would be remembered. [if not all admired]

The limner to whom Albany county portraits of the period c1718 through c1723 are attributed is Nehemiah Partridge (1683–c.1737). The New-England-born Partridge had long been known as a limner in New York City because of an indenture that referenced an apprenticeship with "Nehemiah Partridge, Limner," that had begun in January 1717. Then in April 1718, Partridge, again styled as "Limner," was registered as a freeman of New York City.[1] Despite the publication of his name and profession in 1885 and 1909, no portraits or other paintings had been associated with him until Mary Black discovered Jacob Wendell's record of payment to Partridge in Wendell's account ledger. Wendell and his wife are the subjects of a well-known pair of Albany County portraits, whose portraits had simply been credited to the "Ætatis Sue Limner".[2] With this identification, more than forty portraits originating in old Albany County, and an additional ten or so in New England and Virginia could be attributed to a named painter. The find was a significant development in the study of colonial New York painting.

Portraits of Stephanus and Maria van Alen are loaned to the Luykas Van Alen House by descendants. Stephanus and Luykas were brothers. Though unsigned, the portraits are inscribed respectively "Ætatis Sue 45 1721" and "Ætatis Sue 43 1721". Meaning "state of myself", the Latin phrase, used in court and increasingly in provincial portraiture since the fifteenth century, gave the age of portraits subjects in the year the portraits were made.

1721 was a banner year for painting at rural Kinderhook. Six dated portraits of Kinderhook subjects are known to survive. Being strong assertions of self, the portraits

The very old original stretchers for the van Alen portraits have been preserved and reveal a bit of early eighteenth-century technology. At first glance, it appears that the canvas was attached to the stretcher by small wooden pegs, a good choice because rusting metal, damaging to the textile canvas, was avoided. However, some of these "pegs" have loosened enough to be removed (indeed, some seem prone to popping out), revealing that they were evidently made of thorns. Honey locust thorns seem a likely candidate for these tacks.

They seem to have been worked slightly to a roughly uniform size — less than an inch in length. They took advantage of the natural structure of the thorn and would not be prone to splitting or breaking as a small cut peg would have been.

Very sturdy thorns range between 1 and 3 ½ inches; some grow as large as 7 inches in length. They grow on trunks and lower branches of the honey locust tree, deterring marauding wild life. Photo credit: Greg Hume, April 2009.

Rose-head nails were use to secure the lapped corners of the stretchers. The stretcher's top side was planed, making a smooth surface for the linen canvas, while its back side shows rough pit-sawn wood. The nail [thorn tack?] inserted near the top of the corner was probably intended to spread the depth of the stretcher and better fit the painting's frame.

Opposite top: Maria Muldor Van Alen Attributed to Nehemiah Partridge (1683–c.1737), oil on canvas, 1721 Private Collection. Opposite page bottom: Stephanus Van Alen (born c.1680 — died between 1738 and 1743). Attributed to Nehemiah Partridge (1683–c.1737), oil on canvas, 1721 Private Collection. Photo credit: Michael Fredericks

provided a personal legitimacy within the community's social hierarchy. The subjects portrayed were Stephanus and Maria (Muldor) van Alen, Leendert Philipse and Jannetje (van Alen) Conyn, and Thomas and Maria (van Alen) van Alstyne. Jannetje was Stephanus' sister, and Maria van Alen his Albany-born cousin.

Given the number of Van Alen progeny — eight married children in the first generation and fifty-nine in the second generation — there was no lack of potential portrait subjects. Since Luykas van Alen was not yet married nor head of his own family, it is less than certain that he would have had a portrait of himself taken at this time. A decade later, in the early 1730s,two Van Alen daughters were portrayed by Pieter Vanderlyn. And Sara Dingman, Johannes van Alen's widow, wrote in her November 1745 will of "family portraits", portraits that are today unknown.

Further van Alen's neighbor Thomas van Alstyne bequeathed now unlocated portraits of his sons, while not mentioning in his will any word at all of the surviving portraits of himself, his wife (a Van Alen kinswoman), and his young daughter. Other Van Alen family members and still other Kinderhook townsmen assuredly took advantage of the opportunity when one of the limners was available.[3]

As Stephanus and Maria van Alen's great-grandson told his own grandchild,

> … [you] must not be afraid of them because they [are your] own ancestors, who had had these portraits painted so that after they were dead their descendants could know how they looked.[4]

Stephanus and Maria van Alen's portraits hung in the house [The Gables in Kinderhook village] where they had first been placed the year they were made until the 1840s when the last Van Alen owner of that house died. After that they remained with descendants living variously in Kinderhook, Amenia, Brooklyn, and Chappaqua, New York.

Scripture History Paintings

Paintings illustrating scenes taken from Bible history enjoyed a popularity in Albany County during the second quarter of the eighteenth century. Travelers remarked about them and a number of them survive to the present. They were an important component of the Protestant tradition and had begun in northern Europe and the Netherlands with works engraved in the seventeenth century, often published in book form. By the early eighteenth century, they were adapted for use in illustrating the formidable Dutch States Bibles.

When Protestantism — especially Calvinism — removed decoration and iconography from churches, such decorative images found their way to a new environment, the houses of private individual citizens. Especially in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century, such paintings became important to householders at all levels of society. A few such works — printed or painted — are indicated in a few early colonial New York estate inventories. Moreover, by the early eighteenth century, such paintings were made in the colony by Duyckinck family members at New York. Subsequently, between about 1730 and 1745, scripture histories were painted in Albany County. The physician, Dr. Alexander Hamilton of Annapolis, noted them in his travel journal, "They affect pictures much, particularly scripture history, with which they adorn their rooms."[5] and Mrs. Anne Grant recalled their importance in the household of the Schuylers.

Further between about 1730 and 1750, the Dutch Reformed congregations and indeed the entire church in America were often embroiled in one of several bitter controversies. The proliferation of scripture histories demonstrates a religious stability at home that was lacking in the congregations and churches themselves.

The paintings' purpose was not so much devotional as it was instructional. Scenes drawn from the Bible were often family-centered subjects, such as the Nativity, Moses found in the bulrushes, Isaac, Jacob, and the unfortunate Esau. Some illustrating political themes, such as governmental overthrow, subjugation, and arrogant leaders, might be reconsidered as observations on colonial government. Most had a redemptive theme as well: in sixteenth-century Europe the Dutch had endured prolonged subjugation under the Spanish which eventually drove their formation of a republican government and sense of religious freedom. For the Dutch, the larger point was self-verification of their own experience paralleling those found in the Bible.

Two scripture history paintings, *Daniel Interpreting the Dreams of Nebuchadnezzar* and *Esther and Ahasuerus,* are owned by the Columbia County Historical Society.

The anonymously painted *Daniel Interpreting the Dreams of Nebuchadnezzar* shows in the foreground Daniel telling the king of Babylon the meaning of his alarming dream. Nebuchadnezzar had grown in power and arrogance like a giant, like the tree in his dream; but his unkind cruelties and hubris would be his undoing. Unless he reformed his behaviors, it would be his fate to lose his kingdom and his mind; he would live with animals, grazing on grasses in the field like hoofed animals, a prophecy rendered in the landscape detail over the king's right shoulder.

Esther and Ahasuerus illustrates one of the great Old Testament stories in which Esther, a young Jewish orphan, gains the Persian king's favor, leading to the freeing of the Jewish people. The painting follows elements of printed sources and is attributed to Gerardus Duyckinck (1695–1745), one of several Duyckinck family painters active primarily in New York City. From his New York City shop, he sold printed images, mirrors, frames, Japan work, and art supplies; and once he wrote to his

Daniel Interpreting the Dreams of Nebuchadnezzar *by an unidentified artist, oil on canvas, c.1730. Columbia County Historical Society Purchase, 1974.125*

Esther and Ahasuerus, *attributed to Gerardus Duyckinck, I (1695-1746), early 18th century, oil on panel. Columbia County Historical Society, Gift of the Kent Lucas Foundation, 1974.286*

brother-in-law, Hendrick van Rensselaer of Claverack, requesting a matched pair of black horses to turn his mill, the one in which he ground pigments for his colors. Associating with his wife's Van Rensselaer relatives, Gerardus also sojourned at Schenectady, Claverack, and Kingston.

Endnotes

1 *Collections for the Year 1909. Ledger No. 1, Chamberlain's Office Corporation of the City of New York May 11, 1691 to November 12, 1699 and Indentures of Apprentices October 21, 1718, to August 7, 1727* (New York: The New-York Historical Society, 1910), p 122; and Collections for the Year 1885. *The Burgers of New Amsterdam and the Freemen of New York 1675-1866* (New York: The New-York Historical Society, 1886), p 97.

2 Mary Black, "Contributions toward a History of Early Eighteenth-century New York Portraiture: Identification of the Aetatis Suae and Wendell Limners", T*he American Art Journal,* Autumn 1980.

3 Owners of the portraits are: Leendert Philipse and Jannetje Conyn, Rensselaer County Historical Society; Thomas and Maria van Alstyne, The New-York Historical Society; one Van Alen daughter is in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection at Williamsburg VA; and the other daughter, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian collections; and Catharina van Alstyne, Thomas and Maria's little girl, Albany Institute of History and Art.

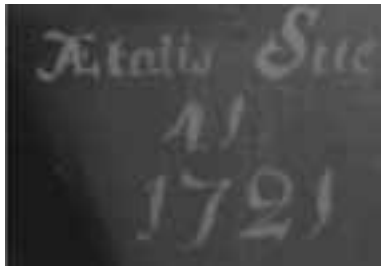
4 Julia van D Thomason memoir to Laurence van Dyck, undated, but c1925. (CCHS Loan File)

5 Alexander Hamilton, Itinerarium being a narrative of a journey from Annapolis, Maryland through Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New Hampshire from May to September, 1744. (1907, reprinted Arno Press, New York, 1971.), p 87.

A gold clasp worn at the front of the necklace typified a style popular among old Albany county Dutch women. Maria's are likely gold beads; however, in portraits of young women and girls such clasps are secured with a ribbon.

Lace on her bodice and sleeve is convincingly delicate, convincingly airy. Her earring is at once quite sketchily rendered and fully rich, awash in light. On portraits "Aetat Sue", Latin for "state of myself", was a convention signifying the age of the subject in the year the portrait was made.

In his portrait of Maria Muldor van Alen, Nehemiah Partridge blended relatively flat broad work with a surprising level of personal detail. Facial modeling was given some special attention, although in spots the darker ground surface has crept through. He lavished some attention on details of Maria's lace and jewelry.



Van Alen House Finish and Furnishings

By Roderic H. Blackburn

Walking into the Van Alen House is a time warp experience. If it feels like viewing the interior paintings of Dutch masters, it does, as the house has the features and finish of houses built in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century: casement windows, two-part exterior doors, deep ceiling beams, wide board floors, Dutch open fireplaces, whitewashed walls and red trim. Even the furnishings identify with those of the fatherland; some imported and cherished for centuries, others made here in New York and New Jersey in the manner of the old country.

Like its structure, the Society has been restoring the furnishings to its early period as means have allowed and leadership has inspired. Today the house holds most of the furniture, utensils, fabrics and pictures of its period or style. This has been extensively documented by Ruth Piwonka in her *Van Alen House Furnishing Plan* (2002), complete with extensive research on Dutch settlements of the area and of the Van Alen family. As she points out, there are still a few objects which deservedly should be in the house to complete its full interpretation as a significant Dutch house build by a well-off Dutchman, Luykas Van Alen (born c.1682–died between 1744 and 1758).

The most important object in the house is the Dutch *kas* or cupboard, for a number of reasons. It was the most Netherlandish of American Dutch-made furniture, a true remembrance of patria by descendants now subject to the constraints of an English-controlled colony. This kas was acquired from Van Alen descendants who had owned the Van Alen house; it has now come home. And when the Metropolitan Museum of Art held its seminal exhibition on the American kas, this kas was featured on the cover, an endorsement of its preserved state including its original stained finish (lost off of so many other kases). If this kas sets the tone and standard for furnishing this house, then exploring what is authentic to the house is worth the effort.

Alas no inventory of Luykas Van Alen's estate has been found. However other inventories of the period and quality of the house do survive as well as remembrances in travel accounts, family diaries and documents, and surviving furnishings in museums and private collections. These have been extensively cited and illustrated in *Remembrance of Patria, Dutch Art and Culture in Colonial America, 1609–1776*, (Albany Institute of History and Art, 1986, by R. H. Blackburn and Ruth Piwonka) and in the latter's Van Alen Furnishing Plan.

Kas, *probably from Kings County, New York, 1710–1740. Red gum, mahogany and yellow poplar. Columbia County Historical Society, 1968.4. Photo credit: Michael Fredericks*

Of the other prominent objects in the house, Ruth Piwonka has discussed paintings in the previous article. Here I will mention some distinctively Dutch furnishings. The New York Dutch continued to import many objects, mostly small in size but not easy to make here, such as tin-glazed decorative pottery (Delftware), many forms of utilitarian earthenware for the kitchen, and brassware and ironware for candlesticks, tobacco boxes and kitchen utensils. Prints of persons, landscapes and maps were also imported. Paintings were also imported, but over the centuries their provenance or even existence has been mostly lost. Colony-made paintings do survive in considerable numbers, including portraits of Van Alens (Luykas's brother Stephanus and his wife), scenes from scripture history (two belong to the Society). Of the big tester beds mentioned in inventories, hardly a one exists intact so reproductions with full hangings were made for the house. Inventories mention *pottebanke*, the Dutch word for a pottery shelf cupboard, of which a dozen or so are known, one of which was acquired by the Society a few years ago and a miniature version too (on loan from the Brooklyn Museum). On the floor of the kitchen can be seen a *loopwagen*, that quintessentially Dutch baby-

walker-on-wheels seen in some early Dutch paintings. In the North Room is a small table of a form dating to the medieval period, what I have called a medial-stretcher table. A handful have been found in the Hudson Valley and the Netherlands. It is a carpenter-built structure, simpler to make than mortice and tenon tables by cabinetmakers. It is such an early form that it appears in illuminated manuscript illustrations from the 13th century.

Baby Walker or Loopwagen. *Unidentified maker in New York, 18th century Maple, pine, oak. Columbia County Historical Society, Gift of Dr. & Mrs. Roderic Blackburn 1976.24. Photo credit: Michael Fredericks.*

There is another type of table distinct to the Dutch of which a small number survive. Instead of gatelegs supporting leaves, it has draw bars which pull out to do the same. Some have baluster turned legs, a few with spiral-turned legs, a challenge for any cabinetmaker here or abroad. Either would be a desired addition to the house. Another distinctive Dutch form is a desk on frame, the desk part slanted, a convenient perch for the large Dutch Bible read to the family each evening. Still surviving in numbers are Dutch spoonracks, usually a richly carved and shaped board with three narrow shelves with holes for twelve spoons. Each family member had his spoon and it is interesting to note that the lower holes are worn more than the upper ones, from many little children just reaching that level. A gift of one of these will be a great addition. Up in the garret is a true Dutch loom, just like those in early engravings. This was acquired in the 1970s at the dispersal of likely the finest collection of early furnishings sold from an old family collection in Columbia County in memory. And finally, one of the most common features of inventories, though rare today, are whole sets of chairs, as many as a dozen or eighteen. Now there is a challenge to members and friends of the Van Alen house — to find that!

Of course there are a few other items which are more easily found, even at home, which will fill the Van Alen house to its full restored glory. These include: South chamber: small oval or square table, looking glass, clothing, window curtains, small boxes, shovel & tongs, andirons (2 pair), small paintings, small prints under glass, candlesticks, earthenware, money scale andweights, Dutch Bible and psalm book, silver spoons and holloware, pewter plates, dishes, chargers, clothes (reproductions are fine), baskets, wine glasses and case, warming pan, walking cane, settle bed. Kitchen: pewter plates and dishes, pewter basins, porringers, spoons, quart and pint pots, tankard, earthenware and delft plates, basins, platters, pots, jug, teapot, salt. Wooden bowls, tin pans, pots and funnel. Candlesticks, lantern, candle box. ❧

Van Alen House kitchen. Photo credit: Michael Fredericks.

The Luykas Van Alen House Restoration: An Update

By Roderic H. Blackburn

This is a brief update on Luykas Van Alen House of 1737 (and ca. 1750 addition), a house museum owned by the Columbia County Historical Society since 1964. The Luykas Van Alen house is among the rarest of surviving Dutch houses in America. It is architecturally a distinctive type: pure Dutch features being entirely of brick but with a full wood frame, brick parapet gable ends, Dutch bond brick pattern, iron wall anchors (including its date 1737), Dutch type open fireplaces, H-bent framing with large smooth ceiling beams, distinctive iron hardware, moldings, doors, windows, etc. You can travel through the Netherlands today and see thousands of this type, well preserved; you can travel in New York and New Jersey and see only a handful left. Of these, the Van Alen house is the least altered by modernization. In fact, when last lived in (by Van Alen descendants) in the 1930s it had no central plumbing, electric or heating. For its rarity and preservation it earned the highest distinction, it is a National Historic Landmark.

The Luykas Van Alen house is among the rarest of surviving Dutch houses in America.

The house was saved from deterioration when purchased by William Van Alen of Philadelphia, an architect and collateral relation, and offered as a gift to the Columbia County Historical Society at the time, 1962, but turned down as too much responsibility for the Society's means. With the help of local contractor Paul Schaltegger (and later his son Datus), William Van Alen secured the house until the Society accepted it in 1964, undertaking a campaign for its restoration.

The architectural significance of the house had long been recognized by knowledgeable persons. In addition to William Van Alen, reports on the structure had been made by Robert Wheeler of Kinderhook, historian and museum administrator, 1958, and Gerald Watland and Daniel Hopping, historical architects, 1958. The initial restoration was planned by Terry Hallock, architect, 1963, and carried out by contractor Datus Schaltegger. For economy, however, the Society relied on the contractor for some decisions and that of a creative designer for some finishes which resulted in some features not justified by existing structural evidence.

By 1972 the Board of Directors decided to restudy their rare Dutch structure with an eye to removing the inappropriate and restoring original features where justified. A committee of Ruth Piwonka (executive director of the Society), myself (then president) and architectural historian Donald Carpentier of Nassau (creator of Eastfield Village of many period structures) undertook a re-examination of the structure and prior reports to write an Historic Structures Report on the house, at least in terms of existing and former conditions, with recommendations for further work. Ruth Piwonka also researched and wrote a report on the history of the family and property. Within a modest budget, much was accomplished, as follows:

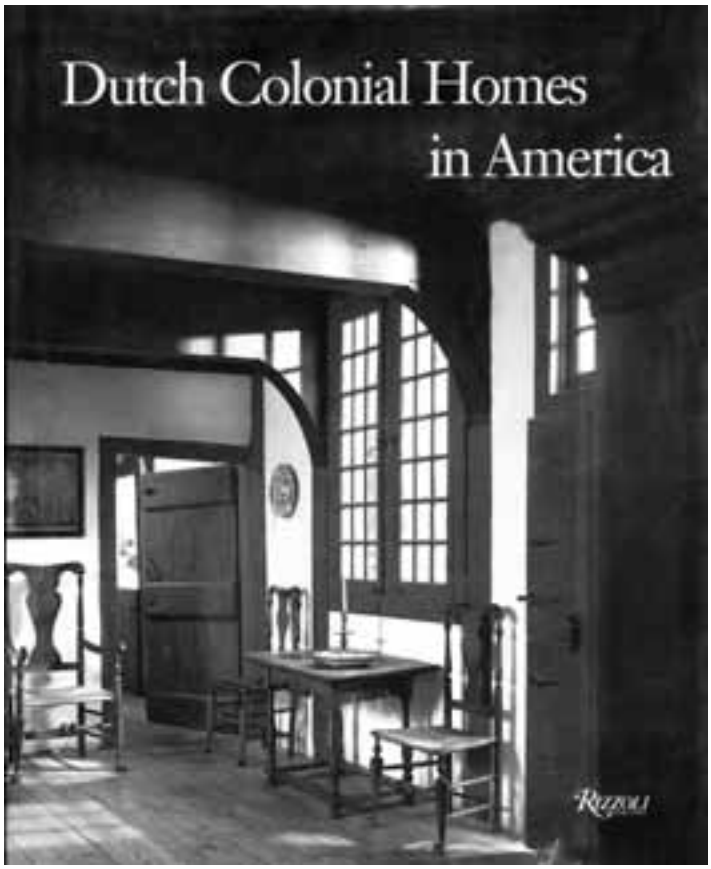
1. Evidence for original Dutch style fireplaces (no jambs) were found and the 1960s English style jambed fireplaces were removed, and replaced with the Dutch style, copying the massive moldings from two such fireplaces elsewhere.
2. Paint analysis uncovered the original finishes: whitewashed walls, venetian red trim paint on doors, windows, mantles, frames and wall posts; and unpainted floors. This was accomplished with a "house painting bee" of volunteer members of the Society. A tub of whitewash was made and red powdered pigment was mixed in buttermilk.
3. The low walls in the garret (attic) were plastered, following evidence of this original finish.
4. A later dormer window on the back side of the roof was removed.
5. Iron gutter hangers were installed where missing and wood box gutters made.
6. A winding stairway in the south room, from the 1960s, was removed as no evidence for its early existence was found.
7. Wood wall and ceiling sheathing from the 1960s was removed from the north garret. Again, no evidence for its early existence.
8. A wide red-painted molded baseboard was found on the garret floor and restored it its original location in the ca. 1750 hallways.
9. The steps to two front doors were changed to Dutch

stoops based on earlier graphic images of this feature. No original stoops anywhere survive as they are so exposed and likely had rotted out in a generation or two.

10. A number of other discoveries were made and some restored.

However, funds were not adequate to complete the restoration. Here are things yet to do, based on what we had found were early or original features:

1. The transom windows over the three front doors have their original wood framing on which evidence exists for the characteristic glazing of Dutch houses of the period: small glass panes set in leaded cames, inset into the wood frame and supported by horizontal bars. The wood washes now there should be replaced with the early style glazing.
2. All the present casement window sashes are, like the transom windows, made of panes set in wood cames instead of lead. There are surviving leaded windows from two other Dutch houses which can be copied.
3. The 1960s batten shutters of a 19th century type. 18th century Dutch shutters do exist and should be reproduced for all windows. Examples of early wrought iron hardware for shutters and casement windows are available to reproduce.
4. The ca. 1750s north addition has a casement window on the rear or west side. Originally this was a door with transom windows, which can be reproduced accurately, as good photos of it exist from the 1960s before it was removed.
5. The existing staircase was rescued from the 1720s Bries house near Castleton by William Van Alen, who knew it was likely similar to what had originally been in the hallway of the Van Alen House. In the 1960s, it was installed with a landing and turn; in 1972, staircase parts were reversed and re-positioned as a straight run of stairs, based on evidence of the original stairway in the Van Alen House.



Since the 1970s there have been two major projects undertaken on the Van Alen House. It was found that some rafters, collar beams and wall posts had partially deteriorated in some locations. As a result some parts of posts were replaced, and all the original rafters and collar beams, where needed, were consolidated and restored to place. The house also received a new roof in 2006. It was a major undertaking to save the structure, supported by generous grants, a reflection of the importance of this structure in the context of New York architectural history. With the restoration changes outlined above, the Luykas Van Alen House will finally be as close to its original configuration as in the 18th century. A fifty year project will have been accomplished. This and many other Dutch houses can now be conveniently viewed in color in Rizzoli's *Dutch Colonial Homes in America* (2002, R. H. Blackburn author, Geoffrey Gross photographer) at your library.

With the restoration changes outlined above, the Luykas Van Alen House will finally be as close to its original configuration as in the 18th century. A fifty year project will have been accomplished.

Meeting of the Daughters of Columbia County Historical Society at the home of Mr. and Mrs. C. D. Wadsworth in Spencertown, Collection of Columbia County Historical Society.

The First 100 Years
(in 6 parts)

BY RUTH PIWONKA

1. Mobility
2. Three Harriets
3. Silent Benefactor
4. Legendary
5. James Leath's Death
6. Van Alen,
   another legend

"Ruth Piwonka is uniquely positioned to tell us what has happened, and what could happen. Now the Town Historian of Kinderhook, she previously worked within the CCHS for eleven years including four years as a Trustee, and seven years as Executive Director."

—Lori Yarotsky

Mobility

The group of women who first formed the Daughters of Columbia County set in motion an organization with national and perhaps international consequences. Their first act was to raise funds to send two motorized ambulances to France, even before the United States had entered the Great War.

Under the initial twenty-year presidency of Mrs. Carrie Come, the women met most months, seemingly alternating between the county and the city. Within two years, the "sons of Columbia County" wanted to join such an energetic group; and by April 1919, they were formally accepted as a men's auxiliary group. Some of these men were spouses to women who were already involved with the organization. A similar group of men impassioned by county history had previously established The Columbia County Association in the City of New York in 1901, and by July 1919, many of their wives joined the Historical Society as well. By 1941, more than 3000 people had become members of Columbia County Historical Society.

Tracing the political and social actions of these people is to witness anew the minuet, the contra dance rehearsed and executed as though their lives depended on it. And for decades afterward their correspondence and record keeping was filled with the gracious, studied, and reasoned language well-known to club members across the country.

Over time, a certain sedentariness came to characterize the Historical Society. After all, its historic buildings and, the collections they house belong to a place. Day-liners, trains, and automobiles changed the agenda for the twentieth century. That sedentariness has reinforced the importance of mobility for the organization from its inception to the present. At the beginning, the new ease of joining and regularly meeting afforded by the automobile and the remarkable goal of motorized ambulances hints at how mobility would be an organizational undercurrent—socially who was most qualified to join; fine loan exhibitions made possibility by physical mobility; historical and genealogical researchers travel from distant places to use the archive and library; and always art- and heritage-minded tourists come to visit the museums.

Three Harriets

The names of three Harriets recur with some frequency in various early historical society files. They were early historical society members, memorable for their major contributions to the organization and to county history.

Mrs. Edward Frisbee, Mrs. Edward O. Dorman, and Miss Margaret Hathaway decorating Vanderpoel House for the holiday Greens show which later became the current Gallery of Wreaths, 1969. Collection of Columbia County Historical Society.

First is Harriet C. Waite Van Buren Peckham, MD, was born 1861 in New Lebanon; in 1902 she married Stephen Farnum (1839-1918), a chemist native to Providence, Rhode Island.

Following in the footsteps of her father, she educated at Claverack College and became a physician. She finished at Claverack with an A.B. degree in 1885. She next served as a teacher for children of the United States Quarantine General at Havana, Cuba. Returning to New York she entered the New York Medical College and Hospital for Women, graduating with an MD in April 1890. In Philadelphia she studied and specialized in homeopathy. After living in Chatham for six years, she moved to Brooklyn.[1]

She began writing her behemoth Van Buren family genealogy in 1903. It became the *History of Cornelis Maessen Van Buren: Who Came from Holland to the New Netherlands*. At an early date the family was large and began to increase proportionately. Tackling the history of such a family was a daunting task. Her volume on the Van Buren family became an important standard reference, setting a new standard for genealogists. The work was finished just in time for her to devote attention to the newly forming Daughters of Columbia County. She died in 1942 and is buried in the Cemetery of Evergreens, New Lebanon, NY.

Second is Harriet H. Kellogg van Alstyne (1875-1951). Married to William B. Van Alstyne just after 1900. She joined the society in October 1919 at the Hotel McAlpin meeting (#366) in New York.

In 1930, the first of October to be precise, Harriet Kellogg van Alstyne gave her report as "Retiring Treasurer". She managed to arrange it in a way that is clear enough even today. It is astonishing to see: for a small, rural county, quite a lot of financial stimulus had been put together, creating a strong financial backing for restoration of House of History. Even so, October 1930, must have been financially a very challenging time. On the first of October they depended upon pledges, sales, interest for their balance of $2,302.80. By the time bills were paid, their remaining balance was $1,112.81. Small wonder that Harriet Kellogg van Alstyne was ready to retire. In the late 1930s she again held this office, finally retiring about 1940.

Harriet K. van Alstyne contributed a number of transcriptions of gravestones found in burial grounds. She especially worked to thoroughly record the words and numbers on each and every stone she could find for a number of smaller cemeteries, those on farms or other private properties. The historical society library is to this day enriched by these transcriptions. Additional articles by her on historical topics or society activities appear from time to time in The Bulletin.

Third, Harriet van Alstyne Frisbee (1875-1956) was the youngest daughter of Peter Edward Van Alstyne (1830-1876), and his young third wife Margaret Pruyn (1847-1897). Young Harriet lived in Kinderhook village with aunts and cousins; she rode the electric train to Albany several time a week to go to school and particularly to study painting with Helen Goodwin, an outstanding Albany artist.[2] In 1903 she married Charles P Frisbee (1879-1967). They would eventually settle in a large old house, the Van Alen-Frisbee home which housed the mill-owner for a century or more, and where their two boys, Charles (b. 1910) and Edward (b. 1916), grew up in Stuyvesant Falls.[3] With young children, it would be a few years before Harriet would become active in the nascent historical society; she joined it in September 1919 (#349) at the Hudson meeting where J. Rider Cady gave his address appealing for a House of History. Cady must have inspired her.

Harriet's avid interest in material culture led to her documenting both those pieces in her own family's household, and also items she collected. More importantly she would take this skill to the historical society, keeping records of objects that were added to the historical society collections beginning about 1936, when she served as curator and her reports were regularly published in the historical society Bulletin. CCHS president, James Leath came to rely on her.

FOOTNOTES

1 Harriet VB Peckham, History of Cornelis Maessen Van Buren, New York, Tobias A. Wright (1913), pp. 190, 208, and 295.

2 Edward and Priscilla Frisbee, personal communication to the author.

3 Stuyvesant Falls mill building, National Register nomination; "1899 Deed Trumps 2014 Facts".

Silent Benefactor

By 1975 James Leath, long-time CCHS president and historical society advocate seemed distant and remote. His partner, Clement March, was an even more mysterious personage. His surname was pronounced "Marsh" even though it was spelled to rhyme with "larch". The refurbished cellar kitchen in the Vanderpoel House, March Memorial Room, was named in his honor. No one seemed to remember why for the Historical Society time and activities had moved forward.

His surname was pronounced "Marsh" even though it was spelled to rhyme with "larch".

The chance discovery of a nineteenth century March family photo album in the CCHS library clearly tied Clement March to a prominent Hudson Valley family living in Dutchess County.

In summer 1975, Avery Claflin and his son John visited the House of History with a mission: to determine our interest in a family piece—a table inherited by them which they hoped to donate to the House of History. Avery, a retired businessman and music composer extraordinaire, was most noted for his madrigal Lament for April 15, which took as its text the instructions for an IRS tax form. His wife's mother, Marion Dorothea Langdon (1864-1949), was Clement March's first cousin. Avery and John were acquainted with at least some of the images in that album, and could expand on their family history.

Clement March's origins are auspicious and unexpected. His great-great grandfather was Judge Robert Livingston of Clermont; his great grandmother was Gertrude Livingston, wife of General Morgan Lewis; his grandmother was the Lewis' only daughter Margaret, who married a cousin Maturin Livingston; their daughter Gertrude Laura married Major Rawlins Lowndes. In turn, it was this couple's second daughter, Mary Livingston Lowndes who married in January 1855 John Pyne March. Their first son Charles was born in September 1856 (he died about 1886); six years later in November 1862, Clement entered the world.[1]

In 1870 the family lived with Mary's sister Harriet who was the recently widowed Mrs. E. Langdon (38 y) and her two daughters, Marion and Anne, in their house, No. 26, at the corner of University Place and Washington Square in New York. John Pyne March was 45 years and had "no business"; his wife was 38; and the two boys were listed as 9 and 7 years respectively. There were ten servants in the household.

The boys' parents were not happily wed, and Mary L. Lowndes returned to her parents' home for the rest of their lives as well as her own. This would be the same house occupied by Harriet E. Langdon in 1870 and also a handsome house on the Hudson River at Hyde Park - Staatsburgh; designed by Calvert Vaux it was called Hopland or sometimes Hopeland.[2]

In 1880 Gertrude Lowndes, now 74 years old, headed a household consisting of her brother in law William Lowndes 72 years; one son-law; four grandchildren; and two daughters—one of them Mary L. March. Her sons, Charles 25 years and a college student, and Clement 18 years and in school. Nine servants lived in the Hyde Park house.

Clement lived at 25 North Washington Square for most of his life except for summers at Staatsburgh, where he stayed with his grandparents. His father died about 1873, his brother Charles in 1888, and finally his mother in 1893. The will of Mary L. March, Clement's mother, was filed in the Dutchess County Surrogate's office. Estimated at the time to be $1,000,000, Clement had the use of her estate during his lifetime, after which, according to the will, it reverted to several Manhattan charities.

In March 1924, Clement March of 25 North Washington Square, New York, purchased property outside of Kinderhook village. The house and farm of Datus and Marion Smith, by then of Pasadena, California, consisted of a large brick house and farm on Route 9H. Maintained by the Snyder family between 1835 and about 1910 as a fruit farm, and increasingly as an important nursery

supplying fruit stock across New York and beyond. By the time Clement March and James Leath arrived, its orchards were diminished, though not altogether so. March wrote his will in May 1934 leaving several charitable bequests with the remainder of his estate to his adopted son, James Edward Leath, for his lifetime.

March died on March 23, 1937, at his home. He had moved to Kinderhook twelve years before after a life active "in travel and study"; he had been ill for the last year of his life. His service was held on March 25 at St. Paul's Church, Kinderhook and burial was in St. James' churchyard, Hyde Park. According to his obituary, as the great-great grandson of General Morgan Lewis, aide to General Washington, it was appropriate for March to serve in the World War, and he did so as one of the "famous $1 a year men". It was also noted that he was survived by his adopted son James E. Leath of Kinderhook and three cousins.[3]

In 1939, Leath donated to Gibbes Museum in Charleston, North Carolina a pair of miniatures of Rawlins and Gertrude Laura L. Lowndes, given in memory of Clement March.

The balance of the inheritance Leath evidently put to use in various ways. In 1943, he sold the rural brick house and farm and moved into the village, living across the street from the House of History.

While few records document his relationship with the historical society, it is clear now that he had a significant role in the organization from the time arrived in Kinderhook until his death. Leath also asked for approval of a motion to create the March Memorial Room in the House of History's cellar. Consent for the undertaking was immediate and work began. Soon after March died, James Leath set forth the plan to establish the Memorial Room, saying to the assembled meeting, "Everyone knows how generous he has been …"[4] Almost four decades later, Avery Claflin and his son John spoke of the fact, well-known among their family members, that Clement March was one of the principal founders of the House of History.

Legendary

In the 1920s, James Leath had begun to establish himself in the museum world. He served on the House of History Restoration Committee, and in 1935 was the Historical Society's curator. In January 1936 he followed Mrs. Carrie Come as the Historical Society's president following her resignation.

Leath must have had input into the loan exhibitions of the early 1930s. Assuredly he did in the ones that followed. At an early date he mounted exhibitions emphasizing the place of historic New York craftsmen. In these exhibitions, Leath emphasized then-current craftsmanship, promoting regional crafts practiced in Columbia County.

His goal was to furnish the House of History with the beautiful work of artists like Duncan Phyfe. This passion to educate with respect to æsthetics of handcrafted furniture coincided with the development of a Columbia County Crafts Society that was active in the 1930s. He joined the board of the Columbia County League of Arts and Handicrafts, which had adopted organizational documents by December 1938. The House of History afforded space for exhibition and sale of the newly-made craft articles.[5]

Leath brought distinctive ideas to the interpretation of historic material culture. He venerated hand-made artifacts that served for years and even over several generations, believing they embodied the history of their users. He found architecture to be the most of expressive of all historic artifacts, and believed that introducing children to these artifacts and ideas at an early age would lead to life-long understanding and enrichment. Interestingly, he also deplored his own era's waste and questioned the economy that depended upon wanton consumption for its success.[6]

Leath followed more than one element of *The Decoration of Houses* by Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman. Though published in 1897, *Decoration* has had an enduring influence. Furthermore, Wharton had been a youthful friend of Clement March's and appears in the March family photograph album. It is not so much this relationship, however, that ties Leath and March to Wharton's work; rather it hinges on two intriguing interpretive details.

Wharton told about a room and its use that reached back to 1865 when Robert Kerr defined it in his book, *The English Gentleman's House*, as "the drawing-room in ordinary." Wharton explained that

Many English houses, especially in the country, contain a useful room called the "morning-room," kind of undressed drawing-room, where the family may gather informally at all hours of the day. The out-of-door life led in England makes it specially necessary to provide a sitting-room which people are not afraid to enter in muddy boots and wet clothes. Even if the drawing-room be not, as Mr. Kerr quaintly puts it, "preserved"—that is, used exclusively for company—it is still likely to contain the best furniture in the house; and though that "best" is not too fine for every day use, yet in a large family an informal, wet-weather room of this kind is almost indispensable.

No matter how elaborately the rest of the house is furnished, the appointments of the morning-room should be plain, comfortable, and capable of resisting hard usage. It is a good plan to cover the floor with a straw matting, and common sense at once suggests the furniture best suited to such a room: two or three good-sized tables with lamps, a comfortable sofa, and chairs covered with chintz, leather, or one of the bright-colored horsehairs now manufactured in France.[7]

The House of History has had a "morning room" since the 1930s. This curiously named room has puzzled curators, guides, and visitors alike. Another detail that reveals the continuing influence of Decoration are the curtains used in rooms as they were photographed for exhibitions in the 1930s. Wharton and Codman were strong advocates of curtains and plain walls. Dust could easily be shaken from curtains and plain walls a better background for paintings than floral papers common in many decorating schemes.[8] In Chapter V "Windows", more detail is brought to bear on their preference for curtains.[9]

In the 1940s and 1950s, the curtains of the main formal rooms vanished with the historical research and recommendations of another period interior designer, Nancy McLelland.

FOOTNOTES

1 "The Lowndes Family of South Carolina", The New England Historical and Genealogical Register, vol. 30 (1876), p. 164.

2 Final Master Plan/ Final Environmental Impact Statement for Ogden and Ruth Livingston Mills State Park, [for] Margaret Lewis Norrie State Park, and [for] Staatsburgh State Historic Site, April 17, 2013, Appendix F pertaining to Morgan Lewis' daughter Margarent. Gertrude and Rawlins Lowndes house is illustrated in the 1864 edition Calvert Vaux's Villas and Cottages, p. 265. For social history pertaining to Hopeland, see for example NYT, May 1, 1914, "Vincent Astor weds Helen Huntington at Hopeland, Staatsburg

3 Albany Times Union, March 24, 1937, p. 13.

4 CCHS Bulletin 1937.

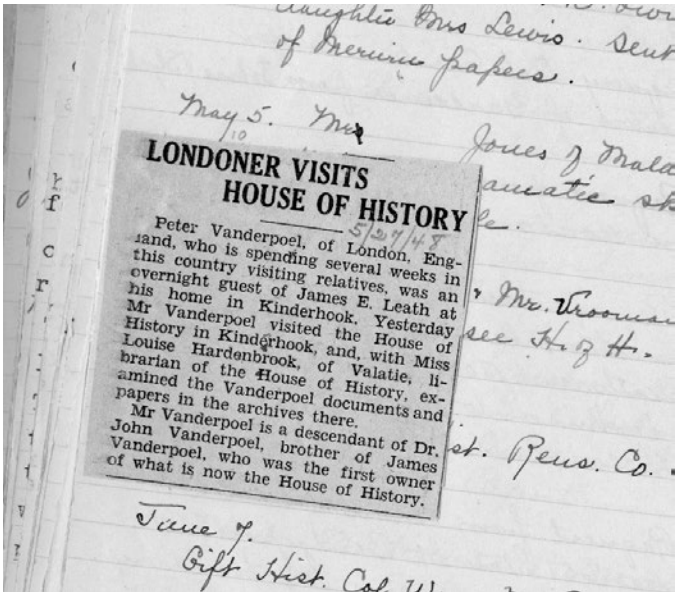
5 The [Chatham] Courier, December 22, 1938.

6 James Leath, "The Value of an Historical Museum for Children," The Brooklyn Museum Quarterly, April 1935, pp. 63 - 64.

7 Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, The Decoration of Houses. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, (1897), pp. 132-133.

8 Wharton and Codman, p. 45.

9 Wharton and Codman, pp. 64-73.



LONDONER VISITS HOUSE OF HISTORY

5/24/48

Peter Vanderpoel, of London, England, who is spending several weeks in this country visiting relatives, was an overnight guest of James E. Leath at his home in Kinderhook. Yesterday Mr Vanderpoel visited the House of History in Kinderhook, and, with Miss Louise Hardenbrook, of Valatie, librarian of the House of History, examined the Vanderpoel documents and papers in the archives there.

Mr Vanderpoel is a descendant of Dr. John Vanderpoel, brother of James Vanderpoel, who was the first owner of what is now the House of History.

Londoner, Peter Vanderpoel visits the Vanderpoel House, 1948. Collection of Columbia County Historical Society.

James Leath (CCHS) and John Watson (Lindenwald).

In the 1930's under Leath's leadership, acquisition of MVB home, Lindenwald, was strongly championed.

James Leath's death

James Leath's death in January 1955[1] appears to have been unexpected. He had been society president for twenty years. At 63 years, he died in an Albany hospital. However, the more subdued range of activities and administration at the Historical Society suggests he may have been ill for several years or more. Notice in another paper mentions his residence in Charleston, SC, as well as Kinderhook. In addition to the Historical Society leadership, he was a board member of Columbia Memorial Hospital.

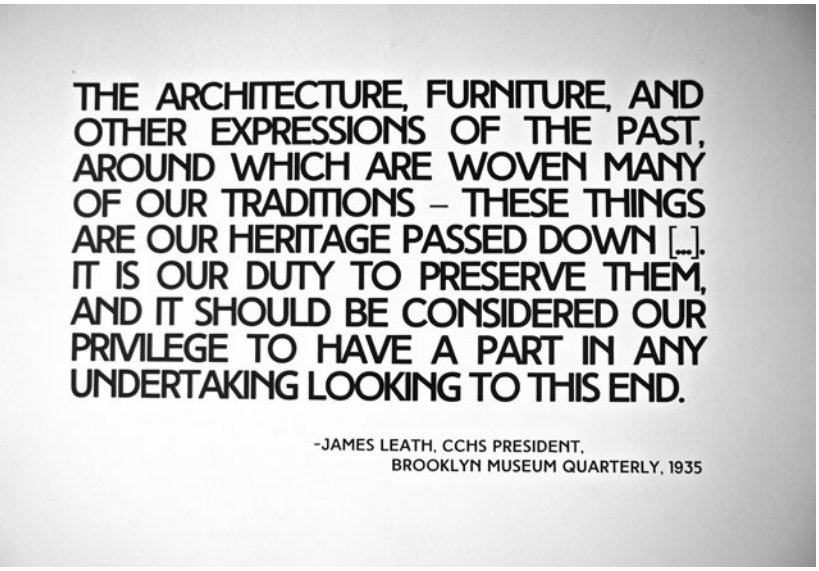
Leath had no family here and fellow board members were curators of his estate, handling his business and household affairs in Kinderhook and Charleston. After debts were paid, property from his estate was to go to the Historical Society. After a detailed estate appraisal, the sale of his household furnishings—all antique goods—was held and proceeds went to the Historical Society.

After Leath's death, a strong Historical Society board of directors moved forward and brought new life to the organization during the mid-1950s through 1960s. With Leath gone, the CCHS board suddenly had a lot on its plate; in February it elected the following board:

Mary Morsman Masters—Mrs. Francis R. Masters whose term expired in 1958—became society President. She was part of a remarkable family. At the Masters' property, High Valley Farm, the new Taconic State Park Commission formed in 1924; Governor Al Smith appointed Franklin D. Roosevelt, the first Francis R. Masters, and others to the commission. Francis R. Masters Jr. (1897-1986) joined the commission on occasion of his father's death. The first Mrs. Masters served on CCHS board. Far more recently, in 2012 the New York state Senate has confirmed Governor Cuomo's appointment of Copake Falls resident Edgar M. Masters to the Taconic State Park, Recreation and Historic Preservation Commission. He is the third generation of his family serving as a Commissioner.[2]

In addition to Mary Masters, vice presidents were first Peter Van Buren Hoes, second Craig Thorn Jr., and John S. Williams. Priscilla Frisbee became the recording secretary, Mrs Wendover Neefus, the corresponding secretary; Paul Patchin became treasurer; Al Callan Jr., was historian; Harriet V. A. Frisbee, curator; and Louise Hardenbrook, librarian. Peter V. B. Hoes was named to arrange an exhibition for the coming season.

In June 1955 board member Peter Hoes brought together an astonishing painting exhibition at the House of History: it was all "modern art", a brilliant exhibition that drew on the population of prominent artists in the county—"big frogs in a small pond"—as well as the indigenous "Sunday painters" who revealed a considerable talent. Robert M. Coates, an art critic for The New Yorker magazine, and a 'Sunday resident' wrote an elegant review—"all in all... an extremely well-balanced collection with a 'kind of up-to-the-minute' (one might almost say, up-to-anything) air about it that speaks well for the artistic enterprise and sophistication of the region".[3]



Coates made enormously important observations. First, he admired the house, he loved it! "The House itself, of course, is a true gem of early nineteenth century Hudson River architecture, from the softly rose-colored brick of the walls to the almost spiderly delicate half-spiral central staircase and the intricately patterned interior trim." And then he described the phenomenon that seemingly each generation must rediscover all over again: "Perhaps the best proof of its timelessness is how well this collection of contemporary art fits in with its ancient design."

After Harriet Frisbee's death in 1957, Mrs. Dorman began her role as curator as the first registrar of the written record with respect to collections. She depended on the old "Bulletins" publication for information about artifacts received by CCHS. She made a written list, of each object, and assigned it a number. Each number was then carefully put on the object, usually in white or black ink. It was an immensely important step in organizing the collections; it also led to much better interpretation and understanding of the objects. She worked, following the advice of outsiders, New York State Education Department advisors. It is not too much to say that her work was brilliant. But it was also naïve. Nonetheless we owe almost everything to Mrs. Dorman, who established modern cataloguing order.

However, Mrs. Dorman and Ms. Louise Hardenbrook in the library upstairs were not friends at all. This resulted in a clerical disconnect in the management of object collections, and manuscript, and book collections. At one level this was very simple: theoretically there are two databases and any researcher must consult each of them. At other levels, there were enormous complexities—printed materials that did not know whether it was a flat archival piece for the library or a glorious printed image to be framed and counted as an object.

Further a number of important pieces entered the historical society collections over several decades, that were mostly "library-type items" or research reference. One of these was an early, very rare view of the Hudson iron-works photographed c.1851 by Victor Provost. Two others were maps, one depicting on parchment the 1763 division of the Kinderhook patent and the other on paper showing fine detail of van Rensselaer's Claverack holding and broad characterizations of land beyond it. None of these, and other significant works like them, were wholly recognized in either the library or in the objects records; yet they are among the Historical Society's most important properties.

Indeed the entire historical society operations were not regularly open to "the public". Ms. Hardenbrook tried to provide access in a limited way, though often deferring to the superior knowledge of Leath or March. She did in fact do splendid genealogical family reconstitutions.

It would remain for Mary Thomas to open the "library collections" to the public. Mary had an extraordinary passion for Columbia County families and their histories. She sorted materials into town files, into topic/subject files, and majorly into family files. She developed an obvious yet under-appreciated system for organizing genealogical data: Mary compiled birth, marriage, and baptismal witness data for each person and/or family name. These data sheets grew over time, accumulating more facts about each family. The publication of transcriptions of church records for most of Hudson and the Mohawk Valley expanded possibilities by documenting how often individuals or entire families moved from place to place, sometimes settling in a new place, in early America. Town historians Kay Burgess of Chatham, and Lauretta Harris of Schodack, worked closely with Mary on geneological queries, which exploded in the decade following the national Bicentennial. Mary Thomas retired from the library when it moved to the Masonic temple building at 5 Albany Avenue.

With the advent of copy machines, it became easy to xerox a data sheet and send in reply to the query that had arrived in her mail box. However, until the late 1980s, the Historical Society did not have a copy machine. Carbon copies were used for most correspondence, but for the family data sheets and other library materials, photocopying worked best. Friends and family members were recruited to get copy needs fulfilled at other workplaces around Kinderhook village and beyond.

Since 1984, Vieve Gay, a retired librarian, has worked to bring the cataloguing of books up to date. She has also upgraded the obituary files and now works on the vertical files which are filled with significant records of county history and genealogy. Her volunteer work at the Historical Society began in 1974 when she started with the new volunteer docent study group, a role she filled until 2012.

FOOTNOTES

1 New York Times obit 20 January 1955. An January 19 Albany death notice, published by the associated press told "James Edward Leath of Kinderhook, and Charleston S C, president of the Columbia County Historical Society and a trustee of the Columbia Memorial Hospital in Hudson, died late yesterday in Albany Hospital. He age was 63."

2 Hudson Register Star, June 27, 2012.

3 Chatham Courier, June 8, 1955.

Van Alen House Stoops, c.2013

Van Alen, another legend

William L. Van Alen was a resident of Philadelphia and Newport, RI, where his family resided. It is a fascinating coincidence that his mother inherited from her uncle Frederick Vanderbilt, the Vanderbilt Mansion, a National Historic Site at Hyde Park. The property was adjacent to the Mills Mansion and Lowndes' Hopeland property at Staatsburgh. (ed note: See: Silent Benefactor)

In 1938 William purchased the Luykas Van Alen house at a tax auction. He was drawn to it because of its rarity as an architectural example. During this period, Mr. Van Alen wrote that unfortunately the timing was off for restoration work as the House of History was recently finished and its fund-raising and other effort had left the Historical Society unwilling to undertake any more restoration projects.

He hired the contractor Paul Schaltegger, the same man who had played such a large role in restoration of the House of History, to keep an eye on the house and board-up all openings. The Second World War interrupted any further activity; and not long after that Paul Schaltegger died leaving the responsibility of caring for the house to his son, Datus Schaltegger.

In 1964, Van Alen was able to persuade the CCHS to accept the historic site. Working with the state historian, several preservationist, and architect Terrence Hallock to develop restoration plans and he contacted State Historian Corey, he was able to provide the Historical Society with some plans for restoring the Dutch house. His mother, Mrs. Louis Bruguiere, made a significant donation to initiate fund-raising for the work at hand.

Raising the balance of needed funds was indeed a challenge, and work on the house proceeded slowly. In order to save funds, the Historical Society dispensed with the architect and engaged Datus Schaltegger to execute the work in his spare time.

Limited funds were available to purchase furnishings; however, and outfitting the house was a second, very slow process. The house opened to the public in May 1968!

Rod Blackburn, an anthropologist, and his wife DeGuerre, returned to Kinderhook from Africa and his research term there about 1970. Quickly it became apparent that the culture and material culture of the Hudson Valley's colonial Dutch population would benefit from close examination, and the CCHS board appreciated his intelligent and professional approach.

By 1972 Blackburn was ready to become president of the CCHS. Under his guidance, the Historical Society adopted for the first time a mission statement and a collections policy. He brought about changes in the restoration of the Luykas Van Alen House that brought it far closer to its early 18th century appearance. He was able to furnish the house with Hudson Valley colonial Dutch furniture loaned from museums in Albany and New York City.

By the 1970's, the approach to furnishing a historic house had changed greatly from the era of Leath's colonial revival interpretation. Using locally relevant estate inventories the type and quantities of furniture and utensils could be determined. Curators and historians could draw substantive conclusions as to exactly what such pieces might be. Paintings and engravings provided further details as to appearance and arrangement of artifacts inside the home. This approach allowed the Historical Society to present well-researched local and county history in the form of a house tour.

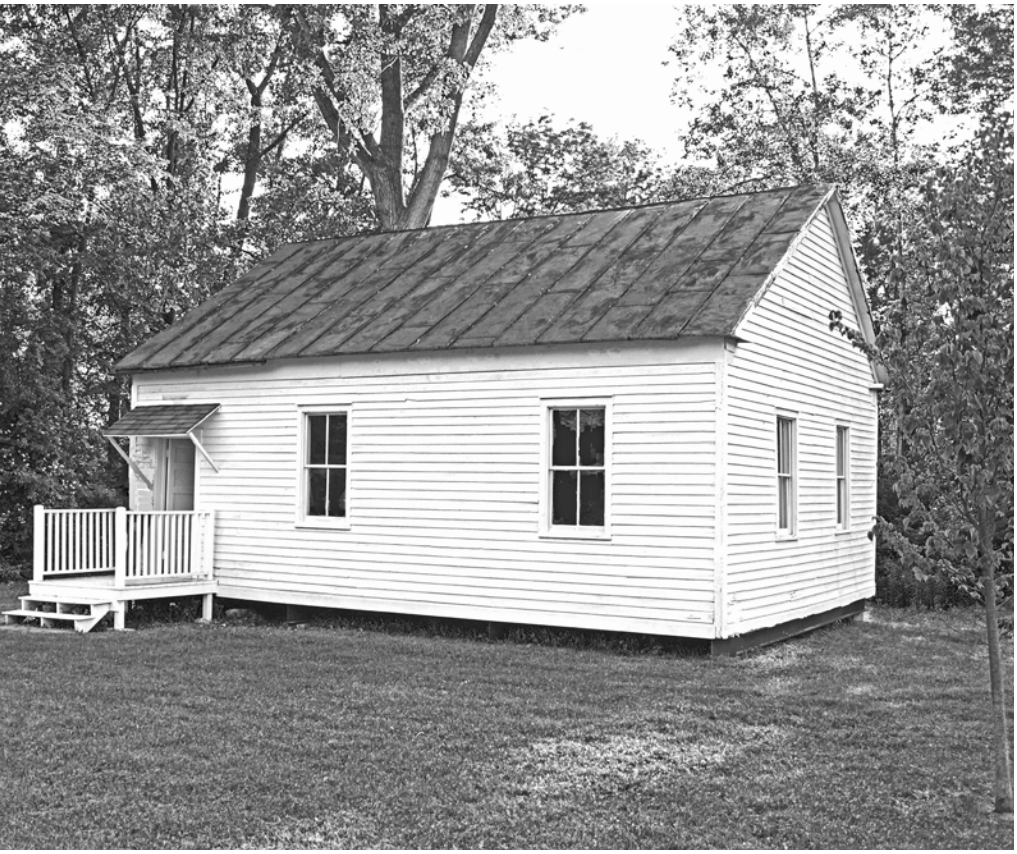
In anticipation of the national Bicentennial, the 1970s was a decade of enriched activities for many historical societies and properties. Renewed and continuing interest in the historic art and culture of Columbia County blossomed. Visitation to the historic properties was high and the schoolhouse was high and was visitation to the society's research library. Then as now historians and genealogical researchers swarmed the resources there.

1 Letter of William L. Van Alen to Ormonde de Kay Jr., January 27, 1976.

Van Alen House Doorway, c. 1968. Collection of Columbia County Historical Society.

The Historical Society's Properties

BY ROD BLACKBURN



With the Historical Society's Centennial it is appropriate to comment on its major assets: four historic buildings, their origins, and current use and condition. I have been involved with CCHS for almost half that time, little wonder that it was I who was asked to write this short piece.

Actually there are six buildings, two are privies.

1. The James and Ann Vanderpoel house was completed on Broad Street, Kinderhook in 1819. James was an attorney and commissioned the house from a talented housewright/architect whose identity has not yet been established, though Barnabus Waterman of Hudson is most likely. The house has a level of Federal-style elegance surpassing nearly all such houses in the region. Alas the Vanderpoels got to enjoy it for just eleven years, moving to Albany when James Vanderpoel was appointed circuit judge of the State Supreme Court. Subsequent owners carefully maintained its features.

In 1924 the newly-formed Columbia County Historical Society acquired the house for its headquarters, maintaining nearly all its features as built. In recent years the house has undergone some restoration as needed: a new roof, roof balustrade, renewed shutters and stoops, ceiling plaster repair, and painting. It is always breathtaking to step inside the front door, one's eye moved by the visual sweep of the hall archway, the curved stairway, the overdoor fanlights, all based on the demi-oval ellipse. Mantles and door lintels are carved within ovals, a stylistic theme both inside and out. Acanthus-leaf "carved" decoration of cast lead lends classical symmetry and durability to these delicacies. It is hard to envision how one could improve on this house. Past owners had been awed by it so much as to do little, though early on the Society did upgrade elliptical attic wood windows with leaded glass ones to match the over-door fanlights. Then there is the privy, the best-preserved brick one in the County.

Today the house needs regular maintenance, the vulnerable stoops, shutters, and roof shingles need yearly attention. For those who love this house, contribute to the Vanderpoel House Fund, inspired by generous Vanderpoel family fundraising, so nothing is neglected.

2. It would be four decades before CCHS felt it could take on another historic house, but the offer in 1964 of the Luykas Van Alen House (1737) from William and Elizabeth Van Alen, along with a gift of restoration money, was too important to let go. Important because of the neglected state of the house (uninhabited since the 1930s) and its rarity - there are only a handful of true-Dutch brick parapet-gabled houses left in America and this was the most original. Restoration and further fund-raising

The Columbia County Museum & Library building was built in classic style according to a bronze plaque...finally there was space for exhibition galleries, offices, collections storage, a library, meetings and lectures.

began and the work completed for a public opening in 1968. Further restoration (and some re-restoration) and furnishing was done in the 1970s. A major renovation of wall posts, roof rafters and collar ties was done in the early 2000's primarily with a grant from the Getty Foundations - a testament to the importance of this National Historic Landmark, the highest designation the Federal government gives to historic properties. Even still yearly inspection and maintenance is required. Recently, the 30-year-old Dutch stoops have been replaced, and cracks in the gable wall have been diagnosed and their cause by our architects and will be repaired this year. And issue of rising dampness in the cellar is being addressed though one cellar beam, long subject to rot, must be replaced. Despite these issues, the property was ready and welcoming to all for this year's First Columbians festivities on June 10th. The house lit up in faux candlelight, the grounds with a huge tent, tables and chairs for the evening fun and victuals. The Van Alan House Fund awaits your encouragement. There is a replica privy but you won't have to rely on that for your comfort.

3. Historical societies are often the saviors of last resort for buildings beyond the maintenance or means of their community. In 1974 the District 6 one-room schoolhouse within sight of the Van Alen House was not in use, indeed it had not had classes since 1944. Fixed in 1952 as a community house (Eleanor Roosevelt attended its opening, offering a statement on radio from inside) it was again in need of repair and purpose. The Ichabod Crane Central School offered it to the Historical Society and it was accepted, then moved on a flatbed truck for $1,000 up and across Route 9H onto the land of the Van Alen House. Historic preservation had its best bargain. With the enthusiasm of former students the school was refurnished with appropriate maple desks, chalkboards, maps and books to give school groups a feel for how it used to be, before they toured the Van Alen House to see how much more challenging it was way back. With the school came one of the two privies.

Sentiment for this schoolhouse was only partly based on nostalgia. Its real fame comes from The Legend of Sleepy Hollow by America's then most successful author, Washington Irving (1783-1859). He was raised in Manhattan, began publishing in 1802, and was engaged to a young lady by 1809, but her unexpected death caused him to take up the sympathetic invitation of a friend, William Van Ness, whose father had build a mansion south of the Van Alen House in 1794, to reside there for a while.

PREVIOUS: *Ichabod Crane Schoolhouse, ca. 1850.*

TOP: *c.1737 Luykas Van Alen House.*

There, Irving worked on his next publication Knickerbocker's History of New York and, reportedly, tutored a couple of Van Ness's nieces. Just up the road he met the schoolmaster of a one-room log schoolhouse, Jesse Merwin (1784-1852). They hit it off nicely and became life-long friends. Merwin introduced him to his students, members of the nearby Van Alen family and others of the Kinderhook community. They fished together and swapped stories. Irving returned to New York and then in 1815 went to London, the first of seventeen-years in Europe. By 1819 he had written a number of short prose pieces, including Rip Van Winkle and The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, which he wanted published as The Sketch Book. Published in installments in London and New York, the stories were a great success. Irving cited "Sleepy Hollow" at Tarrytown, but the stories' characters were taken from his experience at Kinderhook. The eccentric schoolmaster in The Legend of Sleepy Hollow named Ichabod Crane, was based on Jesse Merwin and so acknowledged by Irving and, later, Martin Van Buren. Katrina Van Tassel was ascribed to a Van Alen daughter and her house the site of the party. Brom Bones was inspired by another local, Abraham Van Alsytne. The story has long since become the leading ghostly myth of Kinderhook, a town renowned for its ghost stories.

Merwin's log schoolhouse eventually proved too small or decrepit and was in 1850 replaced by the current one. Irving heard of this and wrote Merwin of his regret that the old school did not survive. That's nostalgia! And the Kinderhookers have kept that up ever since.

4. The Columbia County Museum (& Library building) was built in classic style according to a bronze plaque within reading "This Building Presented to the Kinderhook Chapter No. 264 R.A.M. [Royal Arch Masons] by Companion Robert T. Van Deusen for the use of the Masonic Fraternity within its jurisdiction and EDA Chapter No. 459 O.E.S. [Order of the Eastern Star] Erected A. D. 1915 | 5915 A. L." In addition to the Masonic order, the building once housed a nursery school, and in 1927 the first Kinderhook Library. After the Masons decided to sell the building in 1977, it was acquired by the Elks Club who, in 1985, seeking larger quarters, sold it to the Columbia County Historical Society who also needed larger quarters for their library and collection. Barbara Rielly was then president and

Five-armed Chandelier; ca. 1740-1760; Brass. Gift of Jan Viewig, 1971.026

PREVIOUS: *James Vanderpoel 'House of History', c.1819*

TOP LEFT: *CCHS Museum & Library, formerly Royal Arch Masonic Temple, 1915.*

spearheaded the drive for acquisition, assisted by the Board of Trustees who were concerned that the load of collections was weighing down the Vanderpoel House so that its front wall began to bulge. A cable solved the latter, and a fund drive gained the purchase and renovation of the Museum. More recent repairs have been funded by a generous "Smart bequest", from the late Jane Bennett Smart. The Historical Society welcomes Smart bequests for the Museum Fund.

Finally there was space for exhibition galleries, offices, collections storage, a library, meetings and lectures. The building allowed CCHS to fulfill its mission to: collect, interpret, present, and publish the history of Columbia County, to maintain their historic structures and advocate throughout the County for the preservation of historic buildings, objects, documents, and their exhibition and publication.

"Steamboats," continued from page 12

equally accomplished lithographer of marine and other subjects just when his father moved to *Harper's*. In fact the works of both are of nearly indistinguishable high quality (except for the middle initial R). The father retired in 1890 to pursue his watercolor hobby. Son's last known lithograph dates from 1885, just about the time that new printing techniques and photography spelled the end of the great era of exquisite hand-colored prints taken from stone. Undoubtedly the most dramatic of the son's Currier & Ives lithographs was that of the Hudson River steamboats *Drew* and S*t. John* passing each other in the Highlands (1878) (**Fig. 3**).

Acknowledgements

Our special thanks to Anthony Peluso of Yonkers, dean of marine art historians in America, whose countless articles (and a future book) on marine painters, lithographers, photographers and the like has immeasurably enriched our appreciation of this genre of American art.

William P. Palmer and Roderic H. Blackburn

Figure 11. Mary Powell. *By Albert R. Nemethy. Oil on canvas 26" x 44" (Private Collection). This 1998 painting was based on the c. 1862 lithograph published by Endicott & Co, and Bard paintings (Fig.5). Typical of Nemethy family boat portraits, it is exact in detail as if Bard himself had painted it. The* Mary Powell *was probably the most famous Hudson River steamboat of all based on appealing lines but also long life and a sterling reputation as a "family boat." Large and fast, she made daily round trips from Rondout (Kingston) to New York City.*

Painted Portraits: Faces of Our Heritage

BY RUTH PIWONKA

For most of Western history, portraiture has been regarded as most noble, and after religious painting and history painting, perhaps the next most important class of painted imagery. For much of the twentieth century, it fell somewhat in disfavor; but now renewed interest in portraiture is rising in Western painted arts.

Moreover, portraiture has special significance for history institutions because they literally put a face on diverse aspects of history. Columbia County's painted portraiture spans more than three centuries of both historically and/or aesthetically significant works by a variety of painters, including some of the earliest works in America. Compared with other locations in New York state and across the nation, the county's historic portraiture is impressive, rich, and varied. While a number of these works are privately owned—by descendants of the portrait subjects and occasionally by antiquarian collectors—Columbia County Historical Society is a repository for a vital and representative collection of works that exemplify American painters seeking a style and American subjects yearning for personal perpetuity. This makes a winning exemplification.

Monsieur Robert (c.1760s-c1800s), a French gentleman evidently escaping from horrors of the French Revolution landed at Clermont in 1795, producing portraits for the Livingston family and kindred. A work in the collection attributed to the artist portrays Margaret Livingston Livingston (1738–1809) and exhibits Robert's exquisite painting; he was a superb colorist.

Ammi Phillips (1788-1865), a naïve portrait painter (New York/Connecticut, 1788-1865) whose path crossed the county time and again over a forty-five year span, recorded faces, costumes, and bodies of area residents with a distinctive grace never more eloquently deployed than in his rendering of Samuel ten Broeck in the CCHS collection.

Portrait of Robert Livingston of Northwood, ca. 1900; by Raimundo De Madrazo y Garreta; Oil on canvas. Gift of Lisa Shoemaker, 2014

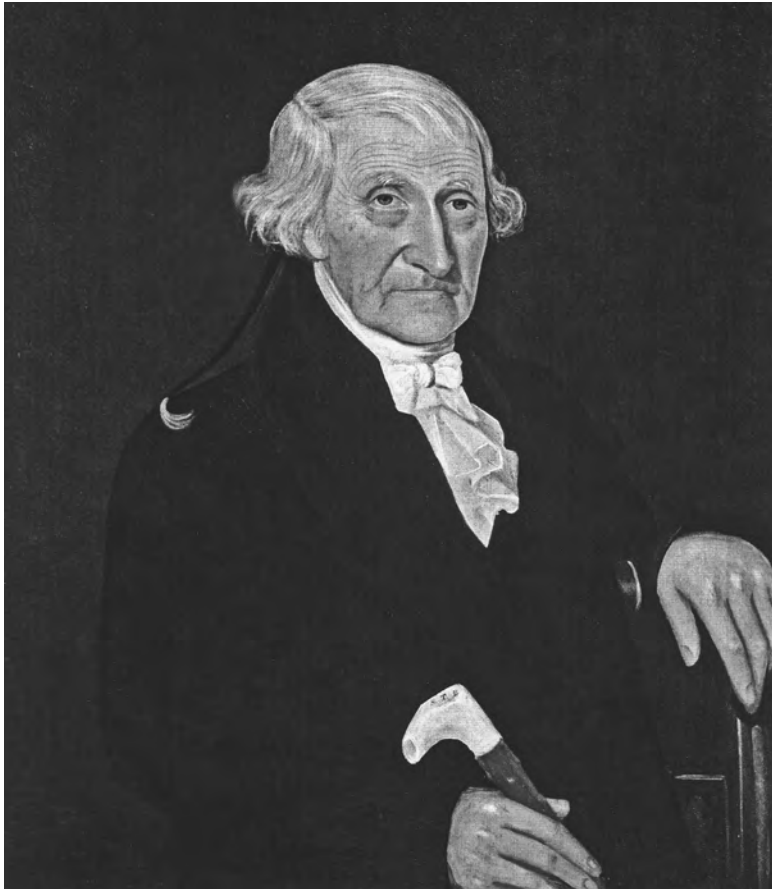
NEXT PAGE
RIGHT TOP: *Portrait of Samuel Ten Broeck by Ammi Phillips, ca. 1832; oil on canvas. Gift of Helen L. Mynderse, 1991.028.0002*

RIGHT BOTTOM: *Portrait of Mariah Utley, ca. 1840; attrib. Henry F. Prime; Oil on panel. Bequest of Robert Huntington Terry, 1938.53*

Henry Prime (c.1811-1841) lived and worked in Hudson for a relatively short time. His portraits, less stylized than Phillips, have their own spritely style that enhanced the faces of portrait sitters.

Artist Ira Chaffee Goodell (New York, 1800-1875) lived in Hudson for a while, moved on to New York City, and eventually returned to his native Belchertown. Occasionally he dabbled with photography. Working in various county towns—Stuyvesant, Spencertown, Hillsdale, Ghent, Hudson, Kinderhook, Chatham—his homely, provincial likenesses addressed individuals' needs for images that would serve their posterity.

Compared with other locations in New York state and across the nation, the county's historic portraiture is impressive, rich and varied.



James E. Johnson (New York, 1810-1858) painted works at Spencertown and Kinderhook (his wife's home and also that of many subjects). His painting style was heavily influenced by academic portraits. Despite being classed as a folk painter, his portraits of Sherman and Lydia Dean Griswold (Salting Sheep, c,1837) and of a variety of local subjects shimmer with a joyful esprit that lightens his mid-nineteenth century environs.

Barely a toddler in his portrait, Charles Frisbee was one of several family members portrayed in the late 1850s by a skilled artist—works attributed to second-generation portraitist, Charles Wesley Jarvis (New York, 1812-1868). The children and their attendant parental family portraits are remarkable in that never again would this family be portrayed on canvas.

Beginning in the 1840s, the camera emerged, democratically usurping the place of painted portraits in a changing world. The disinterest wasn't a matter of affordability; rather by the early twentieth century the passion for painted portraits withered in the photographic face of expedient documents.

Clara, Dakotah, and Milton Barton on the Chatham Center Bridge, ca. 1890; Unknown Photographer; Silver and Glass Negative. Gift of Michael Fredericks, 2016.

NEXT PAGE: *Portrait of Sherman and Lydia Dean Griswold ca. 1835-1840; James E. Johnson; Oil on Canvas. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles L. Rundell, in memory of Mrs. Frank P. Rundell, Sr. 1976.022*

Portrait of Charles Frisbee and His Cat, ca.1850; attrib. Charles Wesley Jarvis; Oil on canvas. Bequest of Priscilla B. Frisbee,

Van Alen-Northrup Papers:
A NEW REVEAL FOR AN OLD FAMILY

BY RUTH PIWONKA

The surname Van Alen is well-known in Kinderhook's history, even though who and what they have done is not always apparent. Their presence at Kinderhook goes back to the earliest times of European settlement, when Lourens and Pieter Van Alen made their first land purchases in 1661.

These papers are the only true family collection in the Columbia County Historical Society library that follows the trajectory of a local family from the seventeenth century through the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

A gift to the Columbia County Historical Society made last year by Van Alen descendant Diana Dunbar Northrup, Ventura, California, calls out for consideration. The Van Alen family artifacts she gave consist of a large family Bible, various manuscript materials (1771-1865), a manganese tile, and a deerskin covered chest; and they afford an in-depth view of their life and experience. Mrs. Northrup is a descendant of Luykas Van Alen of the Society's Luykas Van Alen House through his second son Johannes L. Van Alen, then Johannes' son Lucas I. Van Alen. Lucas' second eldest daughter Maria Van Alen, who married 1845 David Bigelow, inherited the trove of Bible, papers, photographs, et al. These were later passed along to her nephew, Lucas Oakley (the son of her oldest sister Christina Van Alen Oakley) who in turn gave them to their grandson Edward Hopkins Brill. Thereafter, all went to his granddaughter, Mrs. Northrup.

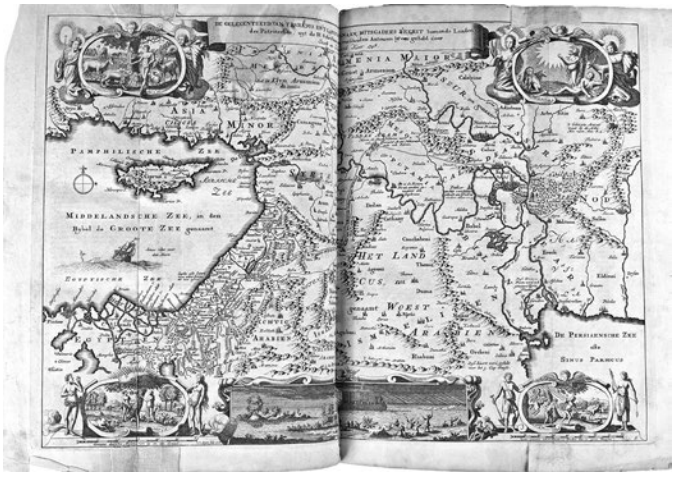
A studied view of this branch of the family over the course of the seventeenth through the early nineteenth centuries shows growth and tenacity. The nine children of Lourens Van Alen and his wife Emmetje proved very successful as farmers, merchants, and traders. The first Van Alens were in partnership with Evert Luykasse and Jan Hendricksz de Bruyn. In 1661, these four purchased a substantial tract of land on the east side of Kinderhook Creek. As it happened, Pieter Van Alen died in 1674. Lourens Van Alen served as executor and business manager for Pieter's widow, selling the property so she and her sons would benefit from that sale; and they did. His widow with her two young sons settled in Albany and, for the most part, little more of Pieter's family or his heirs are heard of at Kinderhook. After some debate, Pieter's share of that land on the east side of

Top: Van Alen Family Bible title page, in Dutch. Gift of Diana Dunbar Northrup, 2019.
Bottom: Van Alen Family keepsake box originally covered in beaver fur. Gift of Diana Dunbar Northrup, 2019.022

Kinderhook Creek was sold to Lambert Jansz Van Alstyne. Lambert's son Thomas and subsequently several grandchildren occupied and owned this substantial farm until the Revolution and after. Seemingly some of them may have been involved with Loyalists, resulting in a loss of property. But it was Peter Van Ness's perfect opportunity: he was a merchant who prospered mightily during the Revolution and found the situation to be ideal for a country gentleman. He built the mansion called Kline Rood, the same brick mansion, renamed by a subsequent owner U.S. President Martin Van Buren, Lindenwald.

Lourens' partnerships with Evert Luykasse and Jan Hendricksz de Bruyn yielded considerable benefit for his own yet-to-be-born family. He married Emmetje, the only child of Evert Luykasse. Evert Luykasse and Jan Hendricksz engaged in some additional transactions with local Mahicans and among several purchased an enormous tract of land that came to be called the de Bruyn Patent. When Evert Luykasse died, he left the entire tract in Jan Hendricksz's hands. De Bruyn, who seems as though he should be designated a Kinderhook founding father, left the upper Hudson region to live in New York City, where he flourished. However, a few years before his death, he returned to Albany to settle up his property interests in Kinderhook. He still had interests in the 1661 land purchase, and he sold that to Lourens Van Alen. Then he sold all his interest in the de Bruyn Patent to the grandchildren of his old partner Evert Luykasse. These were the nine children of Lourens and Emmetje Van Alen. The sale price was remarkably low, suggesting that the sale was more a gift than sale or profit-making transaction.

All of Lourens' children would wait until 1712, the year the youngest reached 21, before they could divide the property among themselves. This occurred several years after the death of Jan Hendricksz de Bruyn. Most of the initial land transfers in the de Bruyn Patent occurred in 1714 just before their father Lourens died. The de Bruyn Patent is located in the northern half of the modern towns of Stuyvesant and Kinderhook, about three and a half miles along the river and about five miles east-west from the river to Kinderhook Lake and Valatie Kill, totaling nearly nineteen or twenty square miles. In 1712, there was virtually no population pressure to develop this land. Much of it was good farmland and most of it was used in that way. However, by the mid-eighteenth century, population pressure, partly from "natural increase" and partly from New England people, changed the situation.



Van Alen Family Bible map of the Holy Land and Eastern Mediterranean. Gift of Diana Dunbar Northrup, 2019.

One of Lourens and Emmetje's children did not marry. This was Evert. As an adult he apparently had some health issues, for in his will he mentions care that his brother Luykas had always given him; and for that reason, he bequeathed his undivided ninth part of the de Bruyn Patent to Luykas. Evert lived with Luykas and his family, probably in the Van Alen House, until his death which occurred at a date before 1744.

The De Bruyn Patent is located in the northern half of the modern towns of Stuyvesant and Kinderhook, about three and a half miles along the river and about five miles east-west from the river to Kinderhook Lake and Valatie Kill, totaling nearly nineteen or twenty square miles.

Only two of Luykas and Elizabeth's children grew to adulthood. Their eldest son, Lourens L. inherited the Luykas Van Alen House in 1727. He married Margarita van Schaack, a sister of the prominent attorney Peter, the entrepreneur Henry, David owner of a great house, and Cornelis, farmer, merchant, and father of Maria (1773-1845) who married Jacobus Roosevelt (1759-1840); Maria and Jacobus were the great grandparents of President Theodore Roosevelt.

Luykas and Elizabeth's second son Johannes L. (1730-1804) inherited a substantial tract in the de Bruyn Patent, and here he chose to build his house. According to a penciled note on the back of an old photograph of Lucas I. Van Alen, he did this using clay from property to make the bricks in 1760, a year before his marriage to Christina Van Dyck (1734-1810). The entire property house lot and farm came to be called The Ridge.

The family collections given by Diana Dunbar Northrup document Johannes L. Van Alen and two generations of his family who lived at the farm in the de Bruyn Patent. It includes a Dutch Bible, thirty-four manuscripts from

1795 receipt for payment to Kinderhook physicians H.L. van Dyck and William Barthrop. Gift of Diana Dunbar Northrup, 2019.

1771 through 1865, and photographs of Lucas I. Van Alen (1776-1858) and daughter Elizabeth (1823-1876).

The Bible is an oversized Keurs volume, this one printed in 1741. Bibles published by several generations of the Keurs family were the official Bible adopted at the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-1619. By the late seventeenth century, illustrations depicting events and stories began to be included in the publication. The ones found in this Bible are based on illustrations first engraved and published by Matthew Merian in 1627. These illustrations often enough drew readers into the narratives with violence and mystery as well as more serene images of beloved Bible stories, such as the occupants of Noah's Ark disembarking and the shepherds' adoration of the new-born Christ. Additionally, like many other Dutch examples, this Bible includes a center-fold world map emphasizing Europe and New World, an apt geographical lesson especially for those of Netherlands heritage yet for two or three generations far from their European homeland. In the four corners are images emblematic of man's life upon and uses of the earth.

In the Bible, Johannes recorded his and his wife's birth dates, their marriage date and that of each of their children's births, naming the godparents and often mentioning the time of day or night.

The Northrop collection includes a will, a number of documents concerning the lease, purchase, or sale of property and more general land concerns, providing remarkable insight into how the de Bruyn Patent was managed by its multiple owners in the early years of the Republic. For example, in 1771, the proprietors conveyed or confirmed to Johannes L. Van Alen his 10-acres house lot. In 1790 another document renews an interpretation of prior agreements.

A distinctive receipt dated 2 December 1795 acknowledges a lump sum payment of £13:6:4 to Kinderhook physicians H. L. van Dyck and William Barthrop for making twenty-five visits providing medical care during the preceding year. Perhaps it was a late payment (though that is not stated). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Dutch residents in Albany County paid to a physician a yearly fee for medical care: this ensured an income for the practitioner since most everyone in the community participated, and it also ensured care for those in need of such care when necessary.

A studied view of this branch of the family over the course of the seventeenth through the early nineteenth centuries shows growth and tenacity.

When Aaron Van Alen (1830-1891) married in 1861 Elizabeth Van Dyck, his older brother John L. and sisters Elizabeth and Lydia went to live in Kinderhook Village at what is now Broad Street, where they three resided for more than a decade until a pneumonia epidemic took their lives within two weeks of one another.

Aaron and Elizabeth started a new family and lived in the brick house at The Ridge. Elizabeth died relatively early in life in 1876. Perhaps she had the same pneumonia that also killed Aaron's older brother John and sisters Elizabeth and Lydia in the summer of 1876. Aaron is no longer readily found in censuses. His personal family losses were large and if he chose to leave the community it would be understandable. An online family history notes his death in 1891 at Saugerties, Ulster County, New York. He did have nieces and nephews who lived in Ulster County, but seemingly in other localities.

These papers are the only true family collection in the Columbia County Historical Society library that follows the trajectory of a local family from the seventeenth century through the closing decades of the nineteenth century. In this article, federal and state censuses from 1790 to 1900, as well as Columbia County Surrogate Will volumes have been used to verify and enhance facts pertaining to the Van Alen farm household; however, except for two or three explanatory digressions, the article contents is based entirely upon the Northrup-Van Alen Collection.

NOTES:

Family history for this article has been based on the *Van Alen Genealogy* by The Reverend Harry E. Van Alen, a manuscript deposited at the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society and at the New York State Library, as well as the abbreviated version of it prepared for publication in the *NYG&B Record* by Innes Getty.

The collection itself also has been a source of new information about this Van Alen farm in the Town of Stuyvesant.

In his *History of Old Kinderhook* (pages 371-372), Edward Collier writes with affection for the siblings John, Elizabeth, and Lydia who first gave six months or so room and board to Dr. Collier and his wife when they first arrived in 1864 to serve the Reform church at Kinderhook.

Ruth Piwonka is the Municipal Historian for the Village and Town of Kinderhook and sits on the Village of Kinderhook Historic Preservation Commission. For over 50 years she has been an independent curator and researcher regarding Dutch heritage and material culture in the Hudson Valley. She was named the 2020 Martha Washington Woman of History by Washington's Headquarters State Historic Site.

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